
Racism In The "Help" Movie

According to Robert Blauner, racism is a tendency to categorize who are culturally different in terms of their physical traits, such as skin color, hair color, texture, and eye shape (source). There are a range of films portraying racism. It is an inspiration for directors to create great and heart touching movies and one of them is The Help.

The Help was based on the novel of the same name by Kathryn Stokett. In 1960s Mississippi, white families employed African American women to help them take care of children, do housework, and so on. These women called "the help". Three main characters of the movie are a young white women Miss Skeeter and two maids, Aibileen and Minny. Because Sketter are making an effort to become a writer, she decides to write about black maids in her town and the relationship between them and their employers. Thanks to assistance of Aibileen and Minny, she finished the book. Through views of the help and their stories, racial discrimination in the context is clearly revealed.

There are 2 levels of racism appearing in the movie. The first type is individual level. At the level, racism involves beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of a given person toward people of a different racial group(source). The movie gives many examples of the individual racism. Take the following dialogue when Hilly come to Leefolt's house (Hilly and Leefolt are Skeeter's friends) to play bridge game as an example:

Ms. Leefolt : Hilly, I wish you'd just go use the bathroom.

Ms. Hilly : I'm fine.

Ms Walters : Oh, she's just upset because the nigra uses the guest bath and so do we.

Ms Leefolt : Aibileen, go check on Mae Mobley.

Aibileen : Yes, ma'am

Ms Leefolt : Just go use mine and Raleigh's.

Ms Hilly : If Aibileen uses the guest bath, I'm sure she uses yours, too.

Ms. Leefolt : She does not.

The language which white women use expresses their racist attitudes. In the conversation, when Abileen refers to white women, she must use courtesy titles and address whites as Madam, Miss. In contrast, white women just call her first name, Aibileen. This proves that class and social status is divided clearly. To white people, black maids belong to a lower class. They are not deserved to respect or address as Miss, Mrs or Ma'am.

Moreover, the above dialogue also reflects prejudice of Hilly to Aibileen when Hilly denies using Leefolt's bathroom. She thinks that if Aibileen uses indoor bathrooms, the maid will use Ms. Leefolt. Hilly always considers black people as diseases. In the next conversation, she says that African Americans carry dangerous diseases which are different from white people, so she builds separate bathrooms for the maids to segregate them from white families. By building separate bathrooms, Hilly's prejudice turns into racial discrimination.

Besides individual racism, the movie depicts another level of racism, which is institutional level. At the institutional level, racism is the exclusion of certain people from equal participation in the society's institutions solely because of their race. Institutional racism is built into such social structures as the government, schools, the media, and industry practices (source). The institutional level can be seen throughout the movie. For example, when describing rules which were promulgated in Jackson at that time, she says: "No person shall require any white female to nurse in wards or rooms in which Negro men are placed. Books shall not be interchangeable between the white and colored schools, but shall continue to be used by the race first using them. No colored barber shall serve as a barber to white women or girls. - Any person printing, publishing or circulating written matter urging for public acceptance or social equality between whites and Negroes is subject to imprisonment"

What she says reflects faithfully how black people are treated in the society. Laws bias whites and deny the right of blacks. The government, who is expected to treat everyone equally, applies segregated laws instead. Not only rules but also education, healthcare and other sectors are separate.

Besides, racial segregation in public places appears in some scenes. Take the following picture as an example.