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3. After reading “What are you Laughing at? Answer the question is comedy universal or cultural? Explain your position on either side. Have you experienced a situation where you were uncomfortable discussing Black or ethnic humor around people that were not Black or members of an ethnic group? Explain this experience. Does Black and/or ethnic humor perpetuate stereotypes? Explain your position on either side and give examples. Make references to the article in your entry.

Comedy, itself, as a genre is universal. Smiling and laughing are universal gestures that mean the same thing in any culture, society and group--happiness. However, the content of comedy is generally cultural. Actually, this theory was put to test on twitter in the Fall of 2015. Hashtags like #ThanksgivingWithBlackFamilies, #ThanksgivingWithWhiteFamilies, #AfricanTwitterIsTheBestTwitter, #CaribbeanTwitterIsTheBestTwitter and many others went viral and exposed the world to the idea that what is funny to one cultural group may be completely lost on another. A black female in America with no ties to Jamaican heritage or social relationships could not possibly understand a Jamaican joke. Any person that debunks this idea must examine themselves and the source of their laughter--Is it a result of actually understanding the joke or rather a reaction to “the way it was said” or how the person who said it looks as Don Cheadle and Dave Chappelle expressed on page 138 of “What Are You Laughing At?”. (Banjo, 2011)

Actually, this phenomenon would explain why, to this day, I avoid any of Tyler Perry's movies with my non-black friends back home in New York, especially when Madea is a recurring character, or perhaps why I refuse to discuss BET with them. I find it exhausting to explain the history behind why something was funny. It takes away from the joke when someone doesn't immediately understand it. I remember particularly one English class in high school when I was joking with my friends that I couldn't burn in the sun because I was Black and my teacher jumped in with biological facts about why that wasn't true and what kind of SPF I should be investing in. The results of the study in the article stated that white people tended not to be as into the disparity of blacks as was originally expected. (Banjo, 2011) My teacher's attitude toward my joke would confirm that. If she did understand that I was joking, she didn't find my racial inclusion humorous. In my personal experiences, I can attest that it is very uncomfortable and awkward when making cultural or racial jokes with people of differing backgrounds than your own because you tend to run into issues where either the person doesn't understand the joke and takes it the wrong way, or ends of laughing at you instead of with you.

This raises the question of whether or not black or ethnic jokes can perpetuate stereotypes and the answer is absolutely. When taken the wrong way, something that was meant to be a joke can easily be mistaken for fact and thus transformed into a stereotype. That is why to this day, most people believe the ignorant stereotype that black people can't swim, survive in freezing climates, don't have fathers, are bitter, amongst many other outlandish ideas.

References

Banjo, O. (2011). What are You Laughing at? Examining White Identity and Enjoyment of Black Entertainment. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 55(2), 137-159.