

"Crash" Causes Pain

By B.B. Robinson

Recent box office receipts indicate a significant number of people are taking notice of "Crash," a recent movie that attempts to explain why each of us may hold certain notions about other ethnic groups.

Douglas Young, on the Internet Movie Database web site, wrote this about "Crash": "People are born with good hearts, but they grow up and learn prejudices... The [movie] begins when several people are involved in a multi-car accident. From that point, we are taken back to the day before the crash, seeing the lives of several characters and the problems each encounters during that day... 'Crash' forces the viewer to confront racism in the real world."

The movie performs this task very well, but a few other things should be kept in mind.

First, we need to remember that the perspectives presented in "Crash" are the writers' and shouldn't be accepted as gospel for our nation. Second, America is still a melting-pot experiment. In my mind, the only countries in the world with similar diversity are China, India and maybe Brazil. Compared to these, I think the United States is the hands-down winner on quality of life for all people. Third, black Americans - especially males - must be very careful about "Crash."

I made a strenuous effort to keep my paranoia at bay while watching the movie, but I came away with the following interpretation of scenes and characters that left me with a deep sense of anxiety:

- Employed black men appeared to be over the age of 35, and black youth were unemployed. Official statistics reflect this setting.
- The employed black men were powerless. The detective succumbed to a high-level politician who had incriminating evidence on a family member. The television director bowed to a producer who hinted that it was important for a black actor to sound less intelligent in a dramatic program. A police sergeant was unwilling to call out a racist - even when he had evidence at his disposal - because his livelihood was at stake.
- While no man should ever have to witness his wife being sexually assaulted by a police officer under the guise of a body search, one would expect a man to sacrifice himself for his spouse should such a horrendous event occur. It was very painful to see the television director stand cowardly by while his wife was assaulted, even though the cop may have shot him had he defended her. Such an outcome wouldn't be unexpected, given media reports of law enforcement officials' misdeeds against blacks under these circumstances.
- The movie hints at poetic justice when the cop who committed the sexual assault later rescues his victim from a burning vehicle. The woman cries on his shoulders, glancing longingly at him as she's carried away. One can link the accident to an earlier scene where the woman's husband rejects her, but it remains unclear who she'll be beholden to in the future. Will it be the husband who was powerless to help her or the cop who violated her but saved her life? This thought emerges when we see the wife and the husband together later.
- The only fisticuffs in the movie involve black men fighting each other.
- The only fatalities in the movie are black men.

The movie also presents a great social question of our day: How does one respond to other ethnic groups in our country? In real life, you have no choice but to answer the question because, like it or not, America's heterogeneity forces us to deal with other ethnic groups.

Unfortunately, the movie doesn't answer the question.

Because "Crash" poses this great social question, yet leaves it unanswered, it is reduced to another case of elitist Hollywood finger-pointing, and it represents the entertainment world's failure to admit its role in helping create a problem. It's the media's continued abdication of its self-professed responsibility to use its power to help solve the problem.

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