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Blackface Makeup and Mickey Mouse Character in the Context of Racism and Discrimination

İrkçilik ve Ayrımcılık Bağlamında *Blackface* Makyajı ve *Mickey Fare* Karakteri

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Abstract

Degrading stereotypes of black people showed themselves in popular cartoons published until the 1990s. One of the biggest contributions to those stereotypes was blackface makeup which was created in 19th-century minstrel shows. This study investigates the historical origins of slavery and discrimination against black people in the USA and claims that the design of Mickey Mouse was based on these minstrel shows. The subject was carried out with secondary data analysis and the use of existing sources. Animated cartoon films and the character designs in our discussion are analyzed by iconological methodology. The findings obtained through these comparative studies were evaluated together and innovative results were obtained. Slavery and discrimination applied to black people for centuries in US history. This research aims to contribute to understanding the USA's collective unconscious on this subject and the reasons for various racist sensitivities. The study also aims to contribute to other art genres and related branches of social sciences, as well as the art of animation.

Keywords: Slavery, Blackface, Jim Crow, cartoon, Mickey Mouse.

Academical Disciplines/fields: Cartoon and Animation, Film Design.

Özet

Siyahi insanları aşağılayıcı klişeler 1990'lara kadar yayınlanan popüler çizgi filmlerde kendini göstermiştir. 19. yüzyıl minstrel gösterilerinde oluşturulan blackface makyajı bu stereotiplerin oluşmasına büyük katkı sağlamıştır. Çalışma ABD'de siyahlara yönelik kölelik ve ayrımcılık süreçlerinin tarihsel kökenlerini ve Mickey Mouse'un tasarımının bu minstrel şovlara dayandığı iddialarını araştırmıştır. Konu ikincil veri analizi ve mevcut kaynakların kullanımı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Tartışmamızı konu olan çizgi film ve içerisinde rol alan karakterlerin tasarımları ikonolojik metodoloji ile analiz edilmiştir. Bu karşılaştırmalı incelemeler ile elde edilmiş bulgular birlikte değerlendirilerek yenilikçi çıkarımlara ulaşılmıştır. Kölelik ve ayrımcılık AB tarihinde siyahlara yüzlerce yıl boyunca uygulanmıştır. Araştırmamız ABD kolektif bilinçdışının anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmayı ve çeşitli ırkçı hassasiyetlerin anlaşılmasını amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma canlandırma sanatı ve diğer sanat türleri ile sosyal bilimlerin ilgili dallarına katkı sağlamayı da amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kölelik, Blackface, Jim Crow, çizgi film, Miki Fare.

Akademik Disiplin(ler)/alan(lar): Çizgi Film ve Animasyon, Film Tasarımı.

1. Introduction

Black people were enslaved for 246 years and discriminated against for another 104 years, in the USA. They were finally granted their citizenship rights in a completely egalitarian manner in 1968. As a result of this unfortunate history, any situation that may show black people in a negative light creates great sensitivity in the public. Until the 1960's many humiliating exaggerations about the racial characteristics of black people were considered normal and funny. Later on, these humiliating representations became condemned. For this reason, various animated works were censored and even some fictional characters were removed from ongoing broadcasts and even from the archives.

Blackface makeup, as it appears in the USA is examined in this study especially together with the minstrel shows, which are a kind of racist vaudeville entertainment shows. In those shows, various negative character types that we later see in cartoons have been created. These characters are performed by white people with black makeup called Blackface. In addition to many sources written about the representation of blackface makeup in cinema and television, the literature discusses the examples in the art of animation related to the subject. During the research, more comprehensive sources on the history of slavery and discrimination in the USA also contributed to a broader understanding of the subject. Although Blackface makeup is a popular concept discussed in the USA, historically much older examples are used in other cultures in different geographies for various reasons. The usage of black makeup in different cultures has been excluded from the scope of this research to be discussed in other studies. The subject is discussed through Mickey Mouse, one of the most prominent examples of cartoon characters produced in the USA.

2. Slavery and Discrimination of Black People in the USA

The slavery of black people in the USA go back to the beginning of the 17th century. In 1619, a British-flagged ship bartered about 20 black Angolan people in Virginia. Undoubtedly, in the 17th century, the slavery system was practiced in various forms all over the world. The first example of lifelong slavery in the USA took place in 1640. Then, a law was enacted in 1662 stating that the child born from a slave belongs to the mother's owner. Thus, slavery in its worst form, as we know it today, began to be practiced in the USA. The slavery of black people continued until the American Civil War. After the conclusion of the American Civil War (1861-1865), slavery was officially banned in 1865 (Halpern & Lago, 2008). However, the official prohibition of slavery did not bring an end to violence and discrimination against black people. The KKK (Ku Klux klan) was founded in 1877 and killed around 3960 people by lynching during its active period (Craven, 2015). In addition to this illegal organization, local governments continued to discriminate against black people with the local laws. Local regulations separate black citizens and white citizen use of public spaces (toilets, vehicles, waiting rooms, pools, etc.). In some towns, they were prevented from acquiring real estate and living in those regions. By not being accepted to the same school, it was ensured that they could not form school-age friendships and receive an equal education. Interracial marriage was also prohibited by local law. Black people were prevented from voting with voter exams. These discrimination laws, which were implemented between 1881 and 1964 through the laws made by local governments, were referred to as Jim Crow laws among the people. Blacks in the US were exposed to discrimination and ill-treatment due to the Jim Crow laws. The "Voting Rights Act" of 1965, included the elimination of practices such as taking a written test for the right to vote. The "Fair Housing Act" of 1968, was the last act that end discrimination (Tischauer, 2012). In the USA, racism, slavery and discrimination covered a very wide historical process that totals 349 years.

Slavery and discrimination in the US have continued until a recent period compared to other developed countries. These practices have been applied to millions of black people. These two main reasons enable us to see why racism is a current problem in the US compared to other nations that have made similar practices.

3. The Jim Crow Character

The enslavement of black people and the discrimination that followed have also affected other perspectives of daily life such as culture and art. One of the prominent examples in this regard is the Minstrel shows and the Jim Crow character. Minstrel shows are stage performances in the comedy genre, which became very popular, especially in the south of the USA between 1830-1840, which combined racist jokes with musicals, and are accepted by some as the first authentic American art form (Hussey, 2015, p.

10). Jim Crow, for whom the Jim Crow discrimination laws are named, is not a real historical person. Discrimination laws get their general name from the song and dance minstrel showpiece *Jump Jim Crow*. Created by writer and performance artist Thomas Dartmouth Rice, the character is a famous fictional character performed with blackface makeup. The character became famous over time and turned into an independent show. It is played by a white man who almost always wears blackface makeup. Characters personality portrait as a somewhat silly and cheerful farm worker by nature. Undoubtedly, this character's jumping dance and dress resemble a clown. His acts were clumsy or stupid and for these reasons, his personality was considered funny. Thomas Dartmouth Rice performed the Jump Jim Crow routine many times in various parts of the US. He imitated the appearance, speech, and dance of a black disabled person from Louisville, Kentucky. By observing and caricaturing a black person he became famous throughout the country and was imitated by different artists in the following decades (Leonard & Robbins, 2021, p. 67). Through this fictional character, black people were humiliated throughout the country. This kind of humiliation also contributes to the marginalization of black people (consciously or unconsciously) by alienating them. In a sense, it also justifies the treatment and usurpation of rights by positioning black people in a lower place than the other races. The fact that black people continued to deal with slavery and various discrimination practices, while exposed to humiliating demonstrations explains the great sensitivity and reaction against any structure that may evoke these shows in the slightest. As we will explain by expanding later in the article, Minstrel shows or scenes created by these shows were transmitted to large audiences in the following years through cinema and TV broadcasts. The fact that the applied discrimination laws are also called by the name of this fictional character proves in a way that this character feeds racism and formed a negative image of black people in the minds of the general public.

4. Blackface Applications in the USA

It is important to examine the stylistic and contextual features of the Jim Crow performance to understand its historical and ongoing impact. This examination will also help to understand the reason for criticism of racism in contemporary examples. The defining and most prominent feature of the Jim Crow performance is undoubtedly the black-colored face makeup called *blackface*. Although every black-colored face makeup can be described as blackface, classic blackface makeup has a unique style. The classic look of blackface makeup can be observed in the Jim Crow performance. More recent studies on the topic, which include the characteristics of blackface makeup, cause current controversies. Classical blackface makeup is created by painting the entire face black and the lip part is painted red in a style reminiscent of a clown in an exaggerated manner. Thus, besides pointing to the skin color of black people, the size and vivid color of their lips are also emphasized. In some examples of blackface applications, a wig is used or a hairline is covered up with plastic makeup to simulate the common hair loss line in black people. Although black color makeup was also used in the theater of medieval Europe, it became popular in America and gained its known racist negative meaning in 1828 through the Jim Crow performance. The dance, which consists of exaggerated movements, turns into a humiliating black character with the help of this makeup. Films using black color makeup in live-action cinema include *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), *A Plantation Act* (1926), *Mammy* (1930), *King for a Day* (1934), *Show Boat* (1936), *Swing Time* (1936), *Honolulu* (1939), *Babes on Broadway* (1941), *Holiday Inn* (1942), *Dixie* (1943), *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1944), *Here Come The Waves* (1944), *Minstrel Man* (1944), *My Wild Irish Rose* (1947), *Hollywood Varieties* (1950), *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* (1951), *I Dream of Jeanie* (1952), *Torch Song* (1953), *White Christmas* (1954). In these examples, which take place in the first 50 years of USA cinema, some examples of minstrel show routines are used in the films to create a comedy element. In some examples, blackface makeup is used on a white actor to portray a black character. In the examples that we believe do not have the purpose of humiliation, *black* makeup is used relatively simply without exaggeration; while in applications for comedy and humiliation, black makeup is used in an exaggerated way. In exaggerated examples, black makeup is performed with large red lips and the darkest shade of black. These application differences between makeups also show us whether or not the person who uses the application has a humiliating purpose. Just as the characterization of black people or dark skin in a text does not necessarily indicate that the text is racist, the portrayal of a black character with makeup should not necessarily qualify him as a racist. Just like the portrayal of other minority groups, whether with costume, makeup, or dialect, is not perceived as a malicious act. In the end, what actors do is act like someone that they aren't. This indicates that the situation stems from the historical context rather than logic.

Although the Jim Crow character was mostly applied by whites, it was also applied by black performance artists in the following years and during these applications, black artists remained faithful to the classic application of this character and painted their faces black even though they already had black skin color

by nature. In addition to these performances, in which black people paint their faces black, black stereotype roles that are considered humiliating in entertainment sectors such as cinema and television were also played by black actors (Sampson, 2013). Various sources state that black people had no choice but to accept and be a part of these humiliating stereotypes to get a place on television (Patinkin & Patinkin, 2008, p. 36). The fact that the productions were created with these negative stereotypes and that these typologies were very popular, and that they continued to be influential in various cartoon and entertainment sectors until the 1950s, led to the development of an increased reaction against blackface makeup and everything that had an association with these performances, especially in the post-2000 period.

5. Blackface and Mickey Mouse

Another claim is that exaggerated movement aesthetics, especially those used in US cartoons starting from the 1920s, are inherited movement styles from Jim Crow dancers (Sammond, 2015). To evaluate this claim, it will be sufficient to look at how the aesthetics of movement in comedy was designed in other media such as cinema and theater with white actors acting as white characters. The Three Stooges, Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, and Charlie Chaplin films can be good examples for this comparison. In these examples, exaggerated movements are used to create an element of comedy, just like in Jim Crow performances. Exaggerated movements and the element of humor arising from clumsiness are also found in the performances of the jester, which have a long tradition. In the 17th century, in Shakespeare's plays *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*, we encounter clumsy buffoon stereotypes. Some sources also state that the character of the jester dates back to ancient Egypt, China, and India, or the fool characters in ancient Greek plays (Hugill, 1980, p. 19). The use of exaggerated movements in various humorous performances in different locations and periods of time shows that creating a comedy element with the exaggerated movement is not directly and solely based on the Jim Crow performance. Rather than assuming that the movement aesthetic in US animation developed in this way due to the minstrel shows, it would be more accurate to consider that the clumsy and exaggerated movement forms of minstrel shows contributed to the more widespread use of comedy-themed movement aesthetics.

When exaggerated movement aesthetics are mentioned, Disney Studios and the brand's mascot character Mickey Mouse come to mind. Considering the exaggerated movement structure of the Mickey Mouse character, it can be claimed that it has similarities with minstrel shows. However, as previously stated, this kind of movement was not limited to minstrel shows. So, it would be wrong to make such an accusation that neither the Mickey Mouse character nor the other animated characters exaggerated movements have taken roots from minstrel shows.

Another similarity between minstrel shows and early animated cartoons is the white gloves. Some indicate that these white gloves used in animated characters are a reference to the gloves of Jim Crow performers, and therefore they are contributing to a racist characterization (Sammond, 2015). White gloves were used by Jim Crow performers, one of the common uses that come to mind is the costumes of people who serve as butlers or maids, this is mainly because white gloves are part of the black tuxedo set.

Moreover, white gloves were not used for the first time in Jim Crow performances in comedy performances. The white gloves used in pantomime performances, which date back to 16th century Italy, are still widely used all over the world in the 21st century (Lust, 2002, p.49). White gloves are preferred by pantomime artists for better reading of their movements and to make their hands more visible by creating contrast. Just like Mickey Mouse, who was created in the black-and-white film era, or other early animated cartoon characters that only had a black-and-white two-tone value.

In the early period of cartoons, it was a necessity to design the characters in black and white, since color films had not yet been invented. Like Émile Cohl (1857-1938) and Winsor McCay (1869-1964), the pioneers of animation started their first cartoon experiments by using only black ink and white paper. Winsor McCay made the short film *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914), the first cartoon character, made with black ink on white paper, which was the common material for printed cartoons. The following early animated cartoon characters were also produced with ink and plain paper in two tones without shades of gray. The reason for this is that the backgrounds and the character are reproduced one by one with the same tonal values in each frame. (Crafton, 2015, p. 304) Although it is possible to obtain intermediate tones by adding water to ink, working in two clear tones, black and white, creates an easier production in terms of ensuring tonal continuity.

As a result of limited technique and materials, the early animated characters were designed in sharply defined black outline which enhanced their visibility. Despite early animated characters being anthropomorphic characters, various critics question the usage of black bodies in these characters and asked if it is referring to minstrel shows. Although this type of criticism seems forced when viewed from a contemporary perspective, many humorous structures that marginalized blacks in the US had been used throughout history. In the 1920s when early animations were produced, it was considered normal to use black people as joke material and marginalize them in souvenirs, advertisement posters, and caricatures. Exaggerations that imply the anatomical differences of black people's bodies, patchy clothes to show black people's poverty, and many other racial biases have been used in those everyday examples.



Figure 1. *Felix the Cat* (1919)

When it comes to the early period of animation, one of the most famous characters is *Felix The Cat* (1919). Felix was designed as a black cat so that in scenes, that were designed with clear black lines on white background, he became more visible. His design with a black body also contributes to the dark balance of the scenes. Like a black dot on a white page, a character with a black body on a white background easily becomes the focus of attention. A white spot framed the mouth and eyes so they weren't lost in the black body (Figure-1). Just like *Felix The Cat*, almost all the animated characters designed in that era have black bodies and white faces for the same reason. At this point, some critics claimed that painting around the mouth and eyes look similar to blackface makeup, which was very popular in the same era. But using makeup was never exclusive to Jim Crow performances. It has been used for hundreds of years on characters in many different performing arts. Theater and operas had buffoons and clowns with similar exaggerated face makeup long before minstrels. Painting around the eyes especially is a very common technique used in various branches of art. In films with real actors of the same era, actors were painting their faces completely white so they can be seen easily in contrast with their dark costumes. They also used dark eyeliner to clarify and highlight their facial expressions. Some examples of this use can be observed in the Charles Chaplin films.

To clarify those claims it would be enough to observe the pioneer characters who affected Mickey Mouse's design. One of the first characters whose design aesthetics are similar to Mickey Mouse is Felix the Cat. When we look at the early designs of Felix we see that the white frame at the mouth of the character was formed as an extruded piece. This mouth structure of Felix can be observed in the 1919 short film *Feline Follies*. With this extruded mouthpiece the character looks less like blackface makeup. *Felix's* design has been reconstructed with a round head shape over time to make it easier to draw and to turn it into a more graphical, simple form. It is obvious that the character is nothing more than a black cat cartoon with the mouth part left white for a clear visual reading and has nothing to do with blackface makeup. It is difficult to think that the character was deliberately edited over time to increase its visual resemblance to blackface makeup. Especially considering that the character is perceived both sympathetically and positively, such an interpretation would be unjustified.

The same is true for *Oswald The Lucky Rabbit*, which is claimed to have been designed based on *Felix The Cat* (Sandler, 1998, p. 72). The prominent differences of the character, which is designed with a black body, arms, legs, hands, and feet, as well as similar body proportions, are the white shorts and long ears that divide the body and add the rhythm element to the design. A similar situation was repeated, and the

most well-known mascot character of Walt Disney studios was formed. The character of *Mickey Mouse* was created based on the character of *Oswald The Lucky Rabbit* (Heide & Gilman, 1979, p.59). Considering that Mickey Mouse's design was transferred and developed originally from Felix The Cat, it is clear that Mickey's design has nothing to do with the minstrel shows.



Figure 2. *Steamboat Willie* (1928)

Mickey Mouse was the first cartoon character to use white gloves as part of his costume in animation. But he was not designed with those gloves in the beginning. In his first four cartoons Mickey Mouse is gloveless (*Plane Crazy*, 1928), (*The Gallopin' Gaucho*, 1928), (*Steamboat Willie*, 1928), (*The Barn Dance*, 1928), and in some frames of those shorts, the problems caused by the gloveless design are clearly visible. Mickey Mouse's hand completely disappears in his black body when his hand collides with his torso (Figure- 2). But during these first four films, the design of the character has been improved, the proportion has changed and the general shape has gained extra rhythmic elements. While the anatomical features of the character have developed and gained an aesthetically compatible rhythm value, the costume design has also developed accordingly. First, the character with bare black feet was dressed in white shoes. In his fifth short film, white gloves were added to the character's costume design (*The Opry House*, 1929). With the recognition of the contribution of white gloves to the production of animation, these gloves were used in various following Disney characters. In a sense, thanks to the character of Mickey Mouse, there has been a tradition of using white gloves in character design, which will last for many years in the art of animation. The ease of production and aesthetic contribution of white gloves caused other animation companies to use this design element in the following years. Different characters from rival animation companies, such as Warner Bros-Bugs Bunny or Universal Studios-Woody Woodpecker, have used white gloves as part of their designs. It would be more reasonable to conclude that the white gloves used by these characters were created to prevent their hands from getting lost in their bodies and were created for pragmatic production reasons rather than an effort to make a racist characterization.



Figure 3. *The Opry House* (1929)

In the short film *The Opry House* (1929), Mickey Mouse first appears as he sweeps in front of a showhouse, at this stage the character does not have gloves. Then we start watching the shows inside the showhouse. An orchestra takes the stage first for a performance. The first character with the glove is the one leading the orchestra, most likely the anthropomorphic form of a donkey. It is an interesting detail that the character sitting in the front row from the audience also has gloves. Then the snake dancer who takes the stage also has gloves. Finally, Mickey Mouse appears on stage to play the piano, Mickey Mouse plays the piano with gloves (Figure-3). And thus, the character of Mickey Mouse appears before the audience for the first time with his gloves. At this point, the story seems to have been built to present the gloved Mickey Mouse character to the audience. Another more remote possibility is that the appearance of the character wearing gloves, as per the story is more aesthetically pleasing and facilitates animation, which may have made this situation permanent. However, this possibility is less likely considering the development of the entire story.

Walt Disney in his biography book called *The Disney Version*, regarding the reason for the gloves worn by the character of Mickey Mouse made the following statement;

His body was like a pear and he had a long tail. His legs were pipestems and we stuck them in big shoes (also circular in appearance) to give him the look of a kid wearing his father's shoes. We didn't want him to have mouse hands, because he was supposed to be more human. So we gave him gloves. Five fingers looked like too much on such a little figure, so we took one away. That was just one less finger to animate. (Schickel, 2019, p. 129)

In addition to increasing the visibility of the character's hands, the gloves also help Mickey Mouse's character gain a more human-like quality, along with his shoes and shorts. Different professionals on the topic also claim that using white gloves helps Mickey Mouse become more humane (Overdeep, 2019).



Figure 4. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988)

Another benefit of white gloves is that the front and back of the hands are visually separated from each other more easily compared to paint in total black. White gloves with three lines on the outside and a single arc-shaped line inside representing the separation of the thumb from the palm were small but effective details. In addition to revealing the front and back with the help of the lines on the glove, the round part on the wrist of the glove adds volume to the arm and helps the audience to understand the arm shape better. Those gloves are kept in use even in the color era due to those benefits as much as their iconic place in animation history (Figure 4).

The limitation of the material, combined with the high repetitive drawing requirement of the animation production method, led to the emergence of characters with similar design features in that era (1920-1930). Animated cartoon characters started to form a common style with their black bodies. Cartoon characters of this era that were designed with black bodies are called *inkblot*-style characters. Another name given to such designs is the *rubber hose* character design, owing to the similarity of the arms and legs to black plastic garden hoses. Jointless arms and legs created with a thick line allow the characters to

be produced faster during animation (White, 2006, p. 31). In addition, these arm and leg structures provided a more appropriate form for the surreal and clumsy movements of the characters. Early *inkblot* character designs include *Felix The Cat* (1919), *Oswald The Lucky Rabbit* (1927), *Mickey Mouse* (1928), *Bosko the Talk-Ink Kid* (1929), *Foxy The Fox* (1931), *Bimbo The Dog* (1930), *Flip The Frog* (1930), *Pooch The Pup* (1932). Those characters in their shorts and the designs of the second and extra characters can be shown as an example. This style of character stylization, which was common in the 20s and 30s, is still in use as a reference to this early period, especially when it is desired to create a nostalgic atmosphere in the animations.

6. Conclusion

Inkblot style character design method is a character stylization developed to separate the characters from a background on relatively small-sized papers. In this process, the designers try to increase the visibility of the character by painting their bodies completely black. Whether the characters were an anthropomorphic dog, a cow, a pig, or a mouse they were sharing similar proportion and tone values. In one of the first animated short films *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914), the main character is designed with only contour lines and therefore it does not stand out as much as inkblot characters do. Even this basic comparison points out the design-based reason for black-bodied characters.

Although similar aesthetic paradigms of the minstrel show can be seen in inkblot characters, those aesthetic choices were not made for the first time in minstrels. High contrast is a simple solution that improves the visual readability of characters. It is reasonable to think that inkblot character types are closer to a kind of theatrical makeup, which can also be observed in black-and-white films of that era. It is customary to use exaggerated facial makeup in many forms of stage shows so that the audience can easily perceive the facial expressions of the actors. In this sense, minstrel shows should not be accepted as a starting point for exaggerated face makeup. Therefore, the facial features of Mickey Mouse, should not be directly associated with the minstrel's makeup.

In addition to the design similarities with blackface and inkblot characters, jazz music and comedy structures were similar in both minstrels and early animations. That is also because of the *geist* of that era. Both were using the popular genre of music of their time and because both of them aimed to create a product in the comedic genre they share many features in common. Both relied on slapstick humor, basic child-like dialog, exaggerated accent, and weird exaggerated movements. But it is important to remember those kinds of traits were used in different kinds of humorous arts (such as theater or caricatures) long before minstrel shows. So, it is fair to say that minstrel shows did not invent them but rather just use them. And therefore, those traits should not be directly associated with minstrels shows and racism.

Productions intended to be directly offensive or referring to black people and blackface makeup was already considered normal in the 1930s US. It was not taboo in those times to mock racial features. The cartoon character designers of the period did not need to use an indirect method to produce work that insults black people. When they intended, they could have done so directly as in minstrel shows. Mickey Mouse already has an animated short which directly refers to minstrel shows. In the 1933 cartoon *Mickey's Mellerdrammer*, Mickey Mouse explodes a dynamite he puts in his mouth. With the soot of the explosive, he does the blackface makeup for himself to perform a minstrel show-like act. Mickey Mouse's role in this animated short is a direct reference to blackface makeup and minstrel shows.

In the modern US, humiliating jokes about any individual except black people do not attract as much reaction as insulting jokes against black people. Comedic exaggerated acts against other minorities are also considered racist but never attract any big reaction. Furthermore, it is not considered a racist joke if a black person makes a joke about blacks being poor, violent, dumb, etc. When a black person makes a joke about slavery or calls names in the media or performs a standup comedy about it no one sees a problem with it. Those differences in reaction show us the US public is still thinking about concepts due to the performer's skin color and reacting accordingly. The ill-treatment in US history that was made by generally upper-class whites against blacks is the main reason that turns these exaggerated black caricatures and humiliating jokes into a taboo.

Unlike minstrel shows, animations using inkblot characters do not specifically aim to humiliate and make fun of black people, there may be a few examples in those animations that may seem dehumanizing from today's perspective. But it is not right to think that inkblot characters are specifically designed with a purpose. In the cartoon universe of inkblot characters, acting ridiculously in a stupid manner in general is the norm. The main reason for this situation is that the essence of the slapstick comedy genre is violence

and clumsiness. The characters easily have violent accidents and we can see the same kind of comedic properties also in other humorous shows such as clown acts. Most clown characters are male midlife middle-aged white characters but we never think those clowns imply all midlife white males are stupid. There are many representations of this kind of characteristic in cartoons as well. Homer Simpson, Peter Griffin, and Elmer Fudd are famous examples of many clumsy or child-like, white male midlife cartoon characters. But no one is offended by them because they don't have a historical reason as black people do. That is the exact point that differentiates the matter from dehumanizing black characters from dehumanizing white characters.

Back in the early 20th century, there were not any positive representations of blacks in the general media. This situation was also the outcome of the reality of that era. As much as "life imitates art" as in Oscar Wilde's famous quote, art also imitates life as we all well know. In that era, black people in the US were still struggling with racism and segregation on a daily basis. In general, black people were less educated with lower incomes. They were the disadvantaged group of the US public and so they were represented in animations accordingly.

The caricature was always an exaggeration, as in the sketches of Leonardo Da Vinci, which can be considered as one of the first cartoon examples, the anatomical differences of the people are exaggerated and they are drawn in a dispositional way. In *Felix the Cat* cartoons, black people are caricatured with exaggerated bulging eyes and big lips, but the same is true for the white-skinned characters in the same Felix cartoons. Black people were at a financial disadvantage after 200 years of slavery and 100 years of discrimination at the time these films were made.

Laughing at the misfortunes of someone other than himself (Schadenfreude) is a method used in fiction to create a comedy element. Various sources explain the reason why the tragedy that happened to someone else is funny, is the feeling of relief that the tragedy did not happen to oneself. Just like laughing at someone who slipped and fell, the oppression of black people is a tragedy and for this reason, it was produced and used as comedy material during the marginalization of black people. As black people gain their rights, this kind of humor toward black people started to be condemned.

Regardless of which community group they belong to, religion, language, race, gender, etc. each fictional character who originates from a certain group is created by highlighting one of the characteristics of that group by methodology. It is the characteristic features of a particular group that distinguishes it from the other groups of society. In some cases, as in Jim Crow performances, it could feed a hostile environment towards this group. Even if it is made without this kind of hostile goal, making the public laugh at a minority group and their misfortune could feed hostile views in society.

In the US, a production with the slightest bias that could be associated with minstrel shows is becoming a target. The purpose of targeting these shows is to target the heritage of minstrel shows. Black people are still experiencing the consequences of slavery and discrimination. Targeting various fictional characters and animations, allegedly related to minstrel shows, is nothing but a symbolic move to point out the discrimination. Income inequality through history caused inherited poverty in the black community and wealth among a white elite group that profited from slavery. In the US, which does not have equality of opportunity in education due to the paid universities, it does not seem that black people will mix easily with the rest of the society equally in culture and economic fields. It seems that the debates on fictional constructs that target or allegedly target black people will continue until they reach an equal position in society. Although political correctness (PC) tries to draw attention to the issue and transform the social unconscious at the theoretical level, the black community can change its role in the US society only if the educational and economical conditions become equal.

Degrading images of the past should be embraced as a part of history. Trying to hide or even delete the racist history only buries the problem rather than facing and solving it. Hiding or altering the past also reduces the gains of wrongdoings and causes history to repeat itself. All those years of slavery and segregation ought to be embraced by the US public instead of trying to cut its connection with its past. Maybe one of the best examples of this attitude is the discrimination note from Warner Bros that appears before some of their old cartoons. "The cartoons you are about to see are products of their time. They may depict some of the ethnic and racial prejudices that were commonplace in American society. These depictions were wrong then and are wrong today. While these cartoons do not represent today's society, they are being presented as they were created, because to do otherwise would be the same as claiming these prejudices never existed." Disney also used the same kind of discrimination note before some of its old cartoons. "This program is presented as originally created. It may contain outdated cultural

depictions." The new image and the understanding of the US should be shaped with the acceptance that the US was not always as it is in the 21st century.

Despite its racist history, the US should reshape black people's image in the media as it already changed in society. If there are still unbalanced roles between races as some may argue, the government and common people need to make an effort to change black people's role in society. Slavery and segregation are an important part of US history, everything that is produced in the modern US somehow has connections to it in some way. Neither denying this fact nor trying to forget it will change it. People and the government need to face and solve economic and educational unbalance in society, fix past mistakes, and only then can the US build a truly harmonized culture and normalized daily life.

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