

The Impact of Exploiting Black Trauma on Black-Focused Filmmaking and Cultural Representation

BA (HONS) FILM AND MOVING IMAGE PRODUCTION
NORWICH UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS NOVEMBER
2024

EXTENDED ESSAY

THOMAS WILKINSON

Abstract

The talk about the abuse of black trauma in the film industry is significant not exclusively within black films, but also in changing black perception in the broader cultural realm. This dissertation makes research on how the commercialization of black suffering in the movies contributes to the spreading of harmful stereotypes that in turn, reinforce a narrow image of black lives clearly seen through pain and victimhood. The research discusses complex manifestations of black trauma as an often onlooker rather than a realist narrative device in films such as *12 Years a Slave*, *Queen & Slim*, and *The Hate U Give* that challenge the voyeuristic gaze of the audience. This study inspects the film blackness trope of Michael B. Gillespie and highlights the same stereotypes and limited portrayals such as the “Magical Negro” and black hypermasculine figures that are often representative of and perpetuate racial bias in the systemic way. These films, which are crucial in recognizing the historical and contemporary tribulations black people encounter, however, become the same vehicle that restricts black narratives to trauma's singular depiction thereby, doing disservice to both black people who aspire for a wide range of authentic depictions and black film makers. The dissertation finally proposes the need to move towards a more varied approach to black narrating which would be beyond trauma as the exclusive use of lens and set instead, for it to be an account of the full range of the black culture.

Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	1
<i>Introduction</i>	3
Chapter 1: Conceptualizing Black Trauma in Film	4
Chapter 2: Case Studies of Black Trauma and its Marketability in Film	6
Chapter 3: Stereotypes, Tropes, and Cultural Representations of Blackness in Film.....	7
Chapter 4: Real-Life Exploitation and the Commercialization of Black Trauma.....	9
Conclusion	10
Bibliography	12

Introduction

Modern film has made black trauma the centre of attention in representing the black experiences more often than not in the style that pleases the majority with suffering and hardship. This event is the phenomenon of the black uprising against the oppression, violence, and marginalization that most people face, and it is very often brought to the fore by historical events such as slavery and contemporary issues such as police brutality. Even if the imagery, in this way, is evidence of actual social injustice, the depiction of black people through these images is seen as a simplified and stereotypical approach that emphasizes black people as mainly traumatic beings. Consequently, "black trauma" in movies is a theme that embodies cultural stereotypes and therefore redefines the audience's understanding of the black community. Even though they serve to educate the public about issues concerning these communities, the narratives have the effect of reducing complex lives to a single story about pain and victimization. Such a development results in films that deal with, "black trauma only" which end up contributing to one-dimensional views of black identity. Long-cycle stereotypes of black people as perpetual victims or in connection to pain and suffering are sustained through this. The correlation of black trauma with cultural representation also affects the narrative of the black community and the consequent effect on the black filmmakers. Many of the film producers face the pressure of the industry to make a film "marketable", which means that they need to create the type of movies that the public will like, commonly enduring trauma, which then limits the range of the stories about black people and their experiences thus making it less diverse. It is then that a circle of the same kind of direction can be created, where, black people are always seen as suffering individuals instead of being portrayed living their lives, having happiness, being strong.

The purpose of this thesis is to critically review these tendencies, the way film studies use black trauma, how these portrayals affect the social stereotypes, and what are the far-reaching effects on the black-centred film contact. The visual cultural history of black trauma is closely linked with the black identity construction and perception routes in American society. Traditionally, black cinema has been associated with a heavy dependence on stereotypical images which frequently derive from the traumatic stories of slavery, poverty, and systemic oppression. By doing this, the films not only fortify social divisions but also shape the audience's view of blackness as mostly related to victimization and not so much to actions and agency. In several respects, the representation of black trauma has operated as a narrative device emphasizing suffering and resilience, typically at the expense of the presentation of the full range of black experiences and identities.

The notion of "film blackness" presented by Michael B. Gillespie (2016) is a critical lens through which we can view this issue, highlighting that black films cannot simply be seen as the literal transcriptions of black suffering or as the "truthful" pictures of black people. Alternatively, Gillespie contends for the acknowledgment of black cinema as a multi-perspective arts form which is not

limited to the trauma genre. He counters the viewpoint that black filmmakers are only obliged to be socially authentic, while he claims that black visual culture is a form of art exploring the concept of blackness in both creative and interpretative ways. The comprehension of the point of view is necessary for the understanding of how black trauma has been used in cinema. This understanding illuminates the fact that such communication is not an absolute revelation of black identity but that it is often articulated by cultural and commercial forces that constrain black storytelling solely to tales of trauma. When we are capable of identifying those factors, we can start to solve the problem of examining black trauma in films and how it introduces stereotypes as well as conditioning public perception thus the framing of this issue in a context of representation and art expression.

Chapter 1: Conceptualizing Black Trauma in Film

The presentation of black trauma in movies has been a major emphasis across discussions both in academia and outside, especially with regard to how these portrayals influence the public's perception of black identity and black ordeal. Black trauma involves the representation in images and stories black experiences of tension, which are frequently imbued with historical and systemic violence like slavery, racial discrimination, and police brutality. Such images often give emphasis to the development of different types of suffering in black communities, which causes the association of black pain with the legacy of black identity. Michael B. Gillespie's *Film Blackness* brings out the key concepts of the representation of black trauma, and it also has the effect of challenging simplistic categorization while advocating for a more assertive way of looking at black films that do not dwell only on the trauma. Gillespie suggests the idea of "film blackness" that reflects the plurality of black experiences and articulates the notion that black filmmakers are capable of going beyond the frameworks that are solely oriented on the themes of suffering and victimhood.

On the other side, the recurrent focus on trauma in the black-centred movies by non-black directors is often reinforced by the guilt of white people thus, this becomes a factor often deterministic for the narrative course and tone of such films. White guilt in film signifies the inner urge among predominantly white viewers and moviemakers to face black suffering, which mostly happens in a compensatory way reaffirming black victimhood. Jennifer C. Mueller has examined this incident in her work *Consumption of Black Pain: Reading Racial Ideology in Cultural Appetite for '12 Years a Slave'* and has stated that black suffering is present in the stark commodification of art, especially in entertainment that elicits an emotional response from the viewer either along aspects of sympathy or voyeurism. Therefore, it is her assertion that this "trauma porn" style of vision leads to the belief of black people as eternally victimized individuals who merely observe the discrimination of their race rather than confronting it in a constructive manner. Displaying black problems, although *12 Years a Slave* judges strict historical injustices, can somewhat unintentionally replicate this process by providing white viewers a convenient, yet really limited avenue to engage with an abyss of black sufferings, which again metaphorically chips away the shelf life of serious and transformative media experience making them mere entertainment.

The interface between black trauma and white guilt creates a tricky condition in the sector of black-centered productions, where rather than the true depiction of black people stories, black people are often pressured to narrate their experiences of pain and suffering as per the expectations of others. This case can be found among black filmmakers who sometimes have to frame their stories around trauma to achieve popularity or get a wider audience. Gillespie's and Mueller's books joined together proxy the request to investigate your own cultural hegemony regarding these perspectives in the narratives and also include the thought of white guilt being a factor in defining black-focused films of your own. This is the point whereby, they broadly propose the possibility for black filmmaking to be

different, be it through the telling of the intricacies of the lives of the people, or the flourishing of the genre beyond the domain of trauma only.

The process of cultural hegemony as described by Antonio Gramsci, serves as an interpretative lens for the entire subject, thereby acquiring a specific angle to the real issue of black trauma being seen and enforced in mainstream media. As stated by Gramsci, the ruling powers due to the cultural institutions, not only maintain the control through force but through the values and norms that these institutions proliferate being internalized by subordinate groups (Gramsci, 2024). This hegemonic influence conditions the public in a way as if the ideologies of the ruling group are presented as universally valid that makes it difficult for the marginalized groups to not accept those that are against their interests. In black trauma, cultural hegemony is a direct result of how the media persistently relates the narratives of suffering to, the black people being positioned as null within this power structure due to which the white dominance is reinstated. This is clearly illustrated by both historical and current media where the prevalence of the images of black pain that are used again and again to reinforce black people as natural victims and also as people who are dependants.

Gayatri Spivak's theory of the subaltern, elaborated in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, is a continuation of Gramsci's ideas and extends them by focusing on the ways through which oppressed groups, especially those in colonized nations, are either prohibited or misinterpreted in dominant narrations. Spivak refers to the subaltern as the community that stands outside of the power mechanism and is without the possibility of representation, which then results in the incapacity of these groups to assert their conditions in the hegemonic speech (Spivak, 1988, p. 28). She claims that "the subaltern cannot speak" in a scenario where the dominant power restates factual events according to its interpretations of these stories and in that process, sometimes, the views of the original authors are erased. The very same dynamic is displayed in the transactional relationships of black trauma created by media, where the narratives of black suffering are drawn up by outsiders though mainly white-controlled agencies that set the rules for the representation of these stories and for how they are received by the general public. One of the critiques by Spivak is the lack of presence of black communities in their own representation, indicating that even if the representations are made well-meaning, still they can deepen the silencing mechanisms by showing trauma through ways that people find as fitting their cultural values first and then the oppressed's.

The portrayal of black trauma through the cultural hegemony process is a form of both denying the real voice of black people and the sustainment of the stereotype that becomes standardized and self-propelling. As per Spivak, the incapability of the subaltern to "speak" is increased by the issue that whenever there are efforts made to show these communities, they are usually seen through an elite or dominant point of view, thus not being able to reveal the true lives of the marginalized people (Spivak, 1988, p. 34). This is often the case with the media where black trauma is nothing but a form of a show- a way of being emotionally affected by a traumatic event not in the same way it was for the ones who have lived their lives through it. Here, the dislocation of the trauma representation is caused by the neglect of the persons who have gone through it, and this damage results into the further embedding of the hegemonic thought (Spivak, 1988).

In general, the model of Gramsci on cultural hegemony and Spivak's subaltern study both notably expose the power relations in the image formations of black trauma. The two paradigms illustrate how the dominant groups through the cultural means furthering the narratives of black pain that correspond with the hegemonic values while the real black voices are concealed or minor. The lenses of the black trauma help open our eyes to the far broader problem of cultural power and the inherent need to clear the line of authority over telling stories of the marginalized and to promote the self-presentation of the oppressed.

Chapter 2: Case Studies of Black Trauma and its Marketability in Film

The films that commodify the black trauma in the cinema frequently put great emphasis on the narration of pain that meets the emotional requirements of mainly white audiences, and movies like *12 Years a Slave*, *Queen & Slim*, *The Hate U Give*, and *American Fiction* showcase different aspects of this tension. Although differing in terms of plot and design, they all deal with black torment through the prism of the dialectics of empathy, exploitation, and resistance to media.

12 Years a Slave, for example, introduces viewers to brutal depictions of both physical and mental abuse. By painstakingly displaying the descent of Solomon Northrup into forced bondage, the film creates a bodily response to the real existing cruelties of slavery. Despite this, as Jennifer C. Mueller argues, such strong concentrating on the scenes of suffering makes black agony turn to “trauma porn,” where it is like black pain is something the white audience observes as a show for their self-cure of guilt of their past (Mueller, 2016, p. 43). This phenomenon is more interesting when seen beside other instances of black trauma that aim to contextualize the pain within a bigger systemic scope of endurance. Nevertheless, *12 Years a Slave* primarily constructs black identity in the sphere of victimization making the black people indirectly weak according to the context of the systemic violence coming from white people.

The narrative of black suffering in *Queen & Slim* also addresses the themes of police brutality and racial insecurity, but it cleverly moves away from the historical interpretations by putting its main characters in a modern situation where the forms of systemic oppression have changed. The movie initiates with stark traffic stop that quickly turns into a life-threatening situation, putting Queen and Slim in a literally political struggle that doubles as survival and a protest. However, the film ends with a tragic death of its characters, *Queen & Slim*, which reflects, in Cecilia Innis' words, a form of “sacrificial defiance” (Innis, 2021, p. 42). Through this lens, the handling of black trauma commodities comes in by means of the symbolic martyrdom of Queen and Slim, whose lives embody the rebellion against systemic oppression, yet their narrative is ultimately consumed as a sorrowful one. The film's picture choice further constructs this scene and Viewer sympathy is thus activated, while the characters demonstrate a particular kind of resistance which is both suffering and loss reliant.

Even if all these movies have a theme of black trauma, *American Fiction* takes a different approach as it evaluates the industry which claims to need such narratives in the first place. By concentrating on Monk, a black writer frustrated by the literature world's fixation on “the authentic” tales rooted in black suffering, *American Fiction* mockingly emphasizes the intrinsic problems within the markets of oppression relativity with the exploitation of black pain, turning it into a sellable product. Tyler Austin Harper indicates that the film manifests “the hidden rubric that curates what forms of black experience are desirable and marketable,” thus displaying how the publishing and entertainment sectors monetize black trauma in disguise of being really sincere (Harper, 2024). Differently from *12 Years a Slave* or *Queen & Slim*, which mainstream black trauma is the center of their stories, *American Fiction* goes as far as to disprove the need for such narrative through satire using entertainment to unpack constitutive elements that make pain often a prerequisite for legitimacy in markets.

Together, these movies portray the intricate relationship between black pain and the commodification of media. Even if they do it through different ways, they appear to be against the black pain in the media, however, the way this is done - be it through a historical picture, a contemporary comedy, soft critique, or resistance satire, to mention a few - is rooted in the ubiquitous expectation that black stories must be trauma-oriented. This is the very expectation, as Mueller observes, that maneuvered a

part of the audience (mainly white) into a posture where they can view black pain from a distance comfortably, and, so, while they empathize with this narrative, they are not likely to be challenged or pushed to act against the real systemic forces behind these realities (Mueller, 2016, p. 47).

In this manner, the cinematic enterprises and the black trauma, which is served as a spectacle, observe a predictable wider trend that asserts black trauma as an artifact that neither cannot simply be re-narrated nor dispels the structures of oppression. Whether through *12 Years a Slave*'s slavery in the map of history, *Queen & Slim*'s present-day martyrs, *The Hate U Give*'s softened brainwash, or *American Fiction*'s sharp satire of industry standards, together they picture how the media commodifies black suffering through challenging yet exploitative representational boundaries. The films, therefore, invite us to reflect on who gains from the retelling of these kinds of narratives and whether or not it is morally right to consume black trauma as a traditional "genuine" black storytelling tool.

Chapter 3: Stereotypes, Tropes, and Cultural Representations of Blackness in Film

The quintessential representation of black masculinity on camera is generally limited to a disheartened number of stereotypes, which in turn strengthens the embedding of tropes that correspond blackness to hypermasculinity, criminality, and mental disorders. These representations dominate the public understanding, particularly via what Jean Baudrillard calls "hyperreality"—the case when the representations are so prevalent they lose their distinction and are either merged with or replace the perception of reality itself (Baudrillard, 1994). With this idea, the portrayal of black men in film and media offers and gives rise to certain "hyperreality" images, which lead the audience to think that they are the true images of the black personality.

A notable example is the "Magical Negro," a stereotype that is very solid and is criticized by Sydney Cusic as a narrative apparatus that deprives blacks of self-control by framing identifiably black characters as benign forces of magic for the white protagonist. Cusic remarks that this trope puts black characters in "servant roles, usually with magical powers to help troubled white characters grow" (Cusic, 2009). In narratives like *The Green Mile* or *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, the black characters are given some visibility and a false sense of empowerment only in the context that they are allowed to serve the white riddle. These roles can be interpretative as empowering for blacks, yet they insidiously stress a hierarchy based only on race and accordingly, they put the black identity as a kind of background overshadowed by the white centric one. This situation restricts the ability of characters to be complex and shows that being black has a dual aspect, sometimes strong and sometimes benign yet always being subordinate to whiteness.

In an analogous manner, hypermasculine stereotypes spring out in pictures focused on black crime, for example *Paid in Full*. The black male characters are depicted as inherently associated with violence, brutality, and crime. This emphasizes the idea of black men as hypermasculine figures who are both feared and admired for their physical power and toughness. LaGarrett King points out that the media's portrayal of black masculinity continues the spiral of implying "criminality and instability," where the black male figures are reflected either as the potential harm-doers or as the resilient victims formed by difficulties (King, 2017). Through dramatizations and reiterations, a specific side of public vision is directed toward black men as criminals, a fact that only enhances narratives full of prejudice in which whiteness is identified with violence and aggression. Putting it another way, according to King's vision, these portrayals are the function of the "racial contract" of

the media, a notion where blackness is both defined and limited by white people's influence, thus relegating black identity only to that of the "other" (King, 2017, p. 33).

The hyperreal representations of black trauma have an entry in these challenges. Baudrillard's hyperreality, or lack of reality, is the prevalent in sitcoms where instead of actual representations of black life being real, the characters contribute to the fake depiction, erasing the line between reality and simulation. In hyperreality, the representation of black life as violent, tragic, or mystical becomes more important than the actual black experiences, thus creating a situation where the general public believes in these stereotypes as being real (Baudrillard, 1994). For example, the constant reinforcement of the image of black men being gangsters, violent figures, or wise men in mainstream cinema and media ultimately "replaces the real" by laying down rules on how the black identity is comprehended and consumed (Baudrillard, 1994).

The black male characters not only are impacted by such stereotypes in how they are seen but also by how they actually see themselves, thus they form a very individual image that is in line with the media portrayal. When black characters are persistently depicted as hypermasculine, mentally unstable, or criminally inclined, then it is no wonder audiences begin to consider these restricted representations as the only truth about black identity. As King points out, the media's representation of black masculinity empowers a "racial mechanism" that both sets limits on and produces images of black men, where the artists' representations control the reality in social politics (King, 2017, p. 34).

The style tropes that show hypermasculinity, criminality, and the Magical Negro are reminders of the power of film and media in the creation of public consciousness and the struggle to keep a narrow perspective on black identity going. By presenting black trauma and black masculinity as items for consumption and hyperreal, these portrayals reinforce the racial hierarchy where blackness is eternally linked with suffering, aggression, and being a slave. This situation not only distorts the image of reality but also cuts off the chance for the creation of a wider range of real, diverse, and positive stories that comprise the full range of black experiences.

Kobena Mercer ponders the "burden of representation." The term denotes the excessive weight of the obligation imposed on black artists and filmmakers to depict black people truthfully and accurately. This burden emerges from the historical under-representation of the black subject in the media and the startling absence of black creators in the mainstream media, which in turn results in enhanced hopes that each new piece of black art will unequivocally reflect the black experience. As Mercer observes, "When black artists become visible only one-at-a-time, their work is burdened with a whole range of extra-artistic concerns precisely because, in their relatively isolated position...they are seen as 'representatives' who are accountable to, and speak on behalf of, their communities" (Mercer, 1990, p. 64).

The imposition of this expectation overcomes the exercise of creative freedom as black filmmakers, on one hand, are forced to tackle societal issues, especially the trauma of the black community, to validate their pieces and, on the other hand, to fulfill the duties they feel they have toward their communities. To this point, Mercer articulates that this creates "a sense of urgency to say it all," signifying that the black filmmakers, cognizant of the limited opportunities for black-centered stories in the industry, feel pressured to tell the very essence of the black life in every story they make (Mercer, 1990, p. 62). Thus, at the end of the day, the films narrated may veer towards them severely, fortitude, so to speak, stating noble, strength, and fortitude, which is often hailed by audiences and judiciary critics as "representative" of their black experience. Nevertheless, these external demands, which are primarily set by society, not only partition the black actors from appearing in a comprehensive variety of roles but also punctuate the fact that being black means only pain or hardship, rather than the richness of diversified and complicated experiences.

This pressure overlaps with the audience's market forces, where black trauma has been commercialized as an accepted form of reality, a reality that transmits a sense of empathy and awareness without necessarily interrupting the structural biases. The implication of these extra-artistic pressures is basically the issue highlighted by Mercer, where the duty to “speak for” an entire community brings about a representation that is "naturalized" and may be reading or not reading the diversity within black identity correctly (Mercer, 1990, p. 65). Consequently, this cycle will result in narratives that frequently revert to traumas, as they will be classified as more relatable or saleable, leaving black filmmakers with an inadequate possibility of depicting black individuals as complex beings outside of suffering and struggle.

By and large, the phrase, “the representation burden” as introduced by Mercer, is a finger that is pointed at the relationship of the structural conditions that darken the artists’ autonomy leading to trauma-centered, repetitive narratives bound by the weight of community responsibility and the commands of the industry. This burden, in turn, permeates the creative attitudes of black filmmakers and also bends the perception of the public reinforcing the black stereotype, which is narrow-minded and does not encompass the full spectrum of the richness of blackness.

Chapter 4: Real-Life Exploitation and the Commercialization of Black Trauma

The movie *The Blind Side* has been attacked for the commodification of black trauma, which in turn depicts the gap between Hollywood narratives and reality, particularly, it is based on the life of Michael Oher who was adopted by a white couple and later became a professional football player. For Ella Riccio-Durocher, *The Blind Side* is a classic example of an Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck's concept called a "damage-centered" approach, which is a narrative framework that confines black experiences to stories of agony and the reliance on white intervention. Riccio-Durocher makes the point that the film describes Oher as a "docile, dim-witted 'stick figure'" whose life is depicted as unavoidably lacking until the wealthy white Tuohy family rescues and leads him (Riccio-Durocher, 2024, p. 3).

This representation entangles a problematic moral implication in which blackness is constructed as a starting condition of difficulty that needs redemption via whiteness. Riccio-Durocher argues that throughout the film Oher is “infantilized” in a way where he is lost and helpless without white support and therefore it reinforces a harmful narrative that black individuals are in need of help from their own communities and backgrounds (Riccio-Durocher, 2024, p. 5). This view diminishes the strength of black characters and transforms Oher into a "project" for the Tuohys, whose intervention is seen as charitable rather than a reflection of systemic racial issues.

The dispute regarding *The Blind Side* rose to a new level when Oher reproached the movie for the incorrect information featured in it, especially its depiction of him as an intellectually limited and dependent character. This unlikeness between what Oher went through and his portrayed character in the movie is the heart of Riccio-Durocher's criticism of the "damage-centered lens" since it shows how black narratives are usually manipulated to fit the expectations of white people's comfort rather than the accurate portrayal of the complexities of the black people's life (Riccio-Durocher, 2024, p. 7). Through the romanticization of the Tuohys' "rescue" of Oher, the movie offers a feel-good story for white people, thus, it reinforces the "White Savior" mentality and neglects the investigation of the structural factors that are affecting black communities.

In the end, *the Blind Side* is an example of how Hollywood promotes the commodification of black trauma by reworking real-life stories into enjoyable narratives that fit the standards of white-centered frameworks, thus, making offers of redemption that uphold the racial hierarchy. The film's commercial success, in addition to the inaccuracies pointed out by Oher, demonstrates that the media often favours stories that align with the perspectives of white people rather than those that depict authentically the experiences of black people, which creates a legacy of distortion.



Figure 1. Olaolu Slawn, Three Yoruba Brothers, 2024

Another commercialization of black trauma comes from Olaolu Slawn, who made headlines after the sale of his artwork, "The three Yoruba Brothers", a painting that depicts three black men that share resemblances to Golliwogs; caricatures that were meant to portray African Americans during and after the time of slavery. It sold for £31,750 but his work has been steeped in controversy, not only because of the art's provocative themes but also because of his polarizing social media statements that reflect his awareness of and strategic pandering to a predominantly white audience. Slawn has acknowledged this openly; at one point, he even suggested he would make an app that would let "white people pay to call [him] nigger anonymously"—a shocking suggestion that critics believe trivializes racial slurs and commodifies black suffering for white consumers (The Blotted, 2024). In another

attention-grabbing remark, Slawn even called his audience "racists," which manifestly indicates his plan to provoke for profit rather than to offer better commentary or critique on black experiences (The Blotted, 2024).

The strategic way in which he treats his art illustrates Slawn's subtle dexterity when it comes to the cultural and economic implications of white guilt and curiosity in "taboo" racial themes. Instead of framing his pieces as vehicles for uplifting black voices or discussing community concerns, he regards racial provocation as a means to do business. Slawn himself confesses, "I don't know why people want this shit...I have no interest in my art. I just make it for fun" (McCord, 2021). This testimony lays bare his indifference regarding the possible impact of his works on black communities while focusing on the financial and social gains he can derive from the almost entirely white audience.

Some critics contend that the art of Slawn uses black trauma to please the white spectators who are in search of a thrilling experience with racial themes and do not have to face systemic injustices. His seeming lack of regard for the ethics behind his work is the mark of a growing trend where black trauma is treated not as a wake-up call for action or a change but as something consumable. By emphasizing racial caricatures and provocative comebacks, Slawn manages to turn white guilt into profit through manipulating the racial stories while evading the ethical complexities and responsibilities related to such representations.

Conclusion

The survival of black suffering in the art realm and the film world as a form of commodity flows to the pitch that the black pain narrative is homogenously edited to speak only to white viewers. This endeavour unwraps the process through which culture and commerce work in tandem to perpetuate these images, and in so doing, they strip the existential complexity of black individuals into mere narratives laden with suffering. Analysing the movies *12 Years a Slave*, *Queen & Slim*, *The Hate U Give*, and *American Fiction*, it becomes apparent that black trauma is frequently depicted in order to elicit pathos instead of empathy fostering real comprehension. Jennifer Mueller designates this

technique as “trauma porn,” where the black misery is turned into the show-off gesture for the sake of the viewer's comfort without confronting the systemic issues that are at the heart of it.

Kobena Mercer's idea of the “burden of representation” is the other point that my study stresses, which mentions the very special pressure that black artists face in terms of delivering the correct “authentic” black experiences that are accepted by the community. This very heavy responsibility is what contains black artists to trauma-dominated stories, which in turn make black identity primarily the one defined solely by pain a single narrative and generally limited. Mercer's thought indicates that this heavy burden is the very reason contributing to the circulation of black storytelling that is always led toward pain themes while other black experiences are left outside.

Finally, my report suggest it is mandatory to have a more comprehensive approach in black storytelling which embraces the key trauma but is not only about that. The dispersion of the whole range of black life through the strength of black artists - that covers joy, resilience, and various identities - can ultimately turn around the commodification of trauma and create a cultural landscape that flourishes thanks to black people's diverse and fullest of life experiences. This transition is crucial in terms of allowing black artists freedom in storytelling to far surpass just pain and loss and thus promote more fully authentic black self-representations.

Bibliography

Baudrillard, J. (n.d.). Hyperreality. [PDF]. [Accessed 2024].

Cikaj, K. (2023). Antonio Gramsci on Cultural Hegemony: What Is It and How Does It Work?. The Collector. Available at: <https://www.thecollector.com/antonio-gramsci-cultural-hegemony/> [Accessed 2024].

Dowie-Chin, T., Cowley, M.P.S., & Worlds, M. (2020). Whitewashing Through Film: How Educators Can Use Critical Race Media Literacy to Analyze Hollywood's Adaptation of Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 22(2), pp. 129-144.

Dickerson, C. (dir.) (2002). *Paid in Full*. [Film] USA: Miramax Films. [Accessed 2024].

Darabont, F. (dir.) (1999). *The Green Mile*. [Film] USA: Warner Bros. [Accessed 2024].

Gillespie, M.B. (2016). *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Harper, T.A.H. (2024). American Fiction and the 'Just Literature' Problem. *The Atlantic*. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/01/american-fiction-2024-movie/677063/> [Accessed 2024].

Hancock, J. L. (dir.) (2009). *The Blind Side*. [Film] USA: Warner Bros. [Accessed 2024].

Hughey, M.W. (2009). Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in "Magical Negro" Films. *Social Problems*, 56(3), pp. 543-577.

Innis, C. (2021). Black Trauma and Resistance in Film. [PDF]. [Accessed 2024].

Jefferson, C. (dir.) (2023). *American Fiction*. [Film] USA: Orion Pictures. [Accessed 2024].

Jones, E. (2024). American Fiction Is a Scathing Satire of Representation Discourse. *Jacobin*. Available at: <https://jacobin.com/2024/01/american-fiction-film-race-representation> [Accessed 2024].

King, L. (2017). The media and black masculinity: Looking at the media through race[d] lenses. *Critical Education*, 8(2), pp. 31-40. Available at: <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled/article/view/186224> [Accessed 2024].

Marv, T.M. (2024). Slawn's Art Is Not That Deep. *The Blotted*. Available at: <https://theblotted.com/2024/03/31/opinion-slawns-art-is-not-that-deep/> [Accessed 2024].

Maurya, A. (2022). Spivak: Making of the Subaltern. *The Philosophy Project*. Available at: <https://www.thephilosophyproject.in/post/spivak-making-of-the-subaltern> [Accessed 2024].

McCord, B. (2021). 'Welcome to the Slawn club'. *The Face*. Available at: <https://theface.com/culture/olaolu-slawn-interview-skatewear-designer-lagos-nigeria-vol4-issue9> [Accessed 2024].

- Matsoukas, M. (dir.) (2019). *Queen & Slim*. [Film] USA: Universal Pictures. [Accessed 2024].
- Mercer, K. (1990). *Black art and the Burden of Representation*. *Third Text*, 4(10). [Accessed 2024].
- McQueen, S. (dir.) (2013). *12 Years a Slave*. [Film] USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures. [Accessed 2024].
- Redford, R. (dir.) (2000). *The Legend of Bagge Vance*. [Film] USA: DreamWorks Pictures. [Accessed 2024].
- Riccio-Durocher, E. (2024). The Story of Michael O(t)her: Analyzing *The Blind Side* (2009) Through a Damage-Centered Lens. *Liberated Arts: A Journal for Undergraduate Research*, 11(1), Article 9. Available at: <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/lajur> [Accessed 2024].
- Smith, J. (2016). *Race and contention in twenty-first century U.S. media* [Preprint]. [Accessed 2024].
- Tillman Jr., G. (dir.) (2018). *The Hate U Give*. [Film] USA: 20th Century Fox. [Accessed 2024].
- Torres, J. and Watson, C. (2023). Repairing Journalism's History of Anti-Black Harm. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 707, pp. 208-224. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162231218817> [Accessed 2024].