

**The
BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

July 2, 2009 - Issue 331

[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

**On Transformers 2:
Why Hollywood Movies Are Racist
The Substance of Truth
By Tolu Olorunda
BlackCommentator.com Columnist**

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

"Hollywood threw acid in both your eyes before you were seven years old. You're blind, that's the first thing you realize is that you're blind. Later on, you begin to see - something. And, then, you begin to see why you couldn't see."

- Baldwin, James. [Just Above My Head](#). New York: Dell Publishing, 1978, p. 529.

Hollywood movies are as racist as they come. The recently released *Transformers* sequel (*Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*) is no different. In the last week or so, as many have approached theaters where it was being shown, the consensus has been unifying - historical Black stereotypes are evoked in this blockbuster action thriller.

Last week, on his site, "Media Assassin" Harry Allen [served up an anatomy](#) of the film's racist features:

That Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen... is a narrative and conceptual mess is neither surprising nor the greatest of its blames....

That it endorses crude racism, however, serving up, not one, but two near-buckdancing, shiftless Black stereotypes - the sambots, as one reviewer adeptly punned, Skids... and his twin (get this), Mudflap - reveals not only how clearly insulated the white people who work at Paramount and for director Michael Bay appear to be in their racial supremacy...

The only thing they [Skids and Mudflap] don't do is shoot craps and eat chicken with watermelon. At one moment, even, LaBeouf's character asks the two if they can read a robotic script that will reveal crucial information. "Uh, we don't do too much readin'," one drawls. Nail. Coffin.

And all this - compliments of a White voice-over actor.

That Transformers 2 diligently reinforces stereotypes about Black people as lazy, barbaric, inarticulate, and anti-intellectual should be unsurprising, given the forum in which it is being presented - Hollywood.

Hollywood's relationship with Black people has hardly changed over the years. Black folks have always been looked upon with disparagement by White movie directors, producers, and even actors. Never has the Black Community been dealt the respect it deserves from the movie industry.

When it was time to unfold the lie that Black people were unfit for mainstream society, Hollywood was turned to for the one-two punch. Blacks were ridiculed through Minstrel shows, objectified like primates, and depicted as untamable scavengers. They were to be considered nothing but slaves - slaves without the mental capacity to adjust to a society where cotton-picking wasn't the order of the day. That was the 19th century.

The 20th was much worse. It was Hollywood which helped perpetuate the *Black Man = White-Woman-Rapist* equation that enforced the rope line as a worthy measure of vigilante justice against any Black perceived as threatening to White sexual superiority. It helped fuel the flames that roasted the backs of many Black men in the decades when miscegenation was a crime not to be committed.

The latter half of the 20th century was Hollywood's *moment* to redeem itself - ostensibly. Black actors / actresses were given roles in TV movies and sitcoms, and serenaded by the wine of prosperity; but a chain of command was in effect. Almost all those movies included the same stereotypes the Transformers series bears witness to in its latest installment.

Black actors, especially, felt trapped in one-dimensional roles. They were either smart and anti-social, or unintelligent and gregarious.

Most of the sitcoms, however, reflected the same theme - poverty as an acceptable condition for Blackness. "Moving on up," for the Black Community, came to represent a volatile couple whose livelihood was as unpredictable as their marriage. "Moving on up" entailed living in a Queens apartment which lacked basic amenities. "Moving on up" was to live a life that, at the end of 10 years, could hardly be accounted for. Black families were also taught that "Good Times" suggested the *privileges* of single-parenthood, domestic troubles, and purse-emptying poverty.

Hollywood contributed illimitably to the re-definition of the socio-economic conditions in which Blacks remained entrenched. By selling the narrative that Negroes would settle for anything, policies could be constructed which brushed aside the need for an urban Marshall Plan because, as had been established through TV scripts, *ghetto life* was like paradise on earth to Black folks.

Thus, it came as no surprise when a former First Lady said, in 2005, that Superdome-bound, Katrina-struck families were in fact living high on life, and their plight was "working well for them," for they were "underprivileged anyway."

Even when Hollywood, responding to protests organized by the likes of Rev. Jesse Jackson and the NAACP, grudgingly hired more Black actors / actresses in productions, it successfully maintained a color code that sustained the narrative of White domination over Blacks. The lightest actors and actresses were always sought after. That way, concessions could be made over Race, but not appearance.

That Black actors / actresses were never - and still aren't - paid as equitably as their White counterparts needs no mention. It's a given.

In a 2002 PBS documentary series, "Beyond the Color Line with Henry Louis Gates Jr.," accomplished actress Nia Long [spoke](#) to Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. about the color-centered biases in Hollywood. Light-skinned Black actors / actresses are "less threatening," she said. They are more "identifiable." Asked to explain what part *identifiability* plays, she explained: "I think White people can say in their minds: 'Oh, one of her parents is White; and so, you're one of us, too'. ... You're just a tad bit less threatening."

The *threat* factor posed by dark-skinned Black actors / actresses has never escaped the awareness of Hollywood's shot callers. This decision, to limit that count to a bare minimum, has rendered epic consequences on the psyche of many dark-skinned Black children, who hardly see accurate reflections of themselves on TV screens. If at all, the dark-skinned actors / actresses are mostly foot soldiers for, or subordinates of, their fairer counterparts, thereby confirming the obvious - whiteness exudes intelligence; Blackness doesn't.

Hollywood is no friend of the Black Community. Never has been. In this new era when a Black family has taken prominence on the world stage, the hostility level is only guaranteed to increase. The Obamas' rise is a direct refutation of historically advanced conceptions about Black genetic inferiority. For this reason, the *blowback* Hollywood must muster is only logical. The movie industry's power brokers very well understand that **suggestions** matter. The power of suggestion can destroy and rebuild.

The suggestions Obama's victory last November brought to bear are of limitless proportions. His win over Republican Presidential Nominee, John McCain, signaled the first time a Black man has ever been publicly triumphant in that fight. It opened up visual avenues Black children had been blinded to for so long.

Hollywood isn't unaware of this reality. As such, Transformers 2 came right on cue. Many Hollywood directors are unprepared to concede that Black Men and Women are capable of intellectual sophistication or oratorical competence. Transformers 2 is simply that - blowback. It wouldn't be the last, and it certainly isn't the first of its kind.

What we can do is fight with the one weapon legally deployable - our Dollars. We can resist these vile stereotypes which have been used to debase and demoralize us for centuries. We can say "NO," once and for all, to misrepresentations about our culture and heritage. We can draw a final line in the sand, refusing to patronize this industry which has so ruthlessly attacked every sense of dignity and integrity we hold dearly.

We must, then, begin building structures that speak accurately and reflectively of *who we be*. We must also inform Black actors / actresses that the *era of cooning* is over. We must stand firm in our demands for dignified Black artistry on the movie screen. Anything less would be shortchanging.


Hollywood has swept clean its Walk of Fame with our pride and humanity. The fight to reclaim lost grounds must forge on, with a renewed sense of courage, conviction, and confidence.


[Click here to comment on any article
in this issue or see what others are saying in the](#)
The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Columnist, Tolu Olorunda, is an activist / writer and a Nigerian immigrant. Click [here](#) to reach Mr. Olorunda.

[Contents of Issue](#)
[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

Click Here To
CONTRIBUTE TO  NOW

Click Here To
CONTACT 

Your comments are always welcome.

e-Mail re-print notice

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002-2009
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved