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ENG 101-015

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11/20/2016

“Immersed in a World of Stereotypes”

As I entered into viewing the curated exhibit by Sophie Frostbaum, I was not quite sure what to expect. Upon viewing, my eyes were immediately drawn to the warm colors in the background. This invoked a greater sense of feelings within me, because naturally, warm colors such as orange, red, and yellow create strong sensations such as excitement, or even anger. They can also instill emotions ranging from optimism to anger. The mere color palette used gave me a sense of excitement to see what would be next. Moving from the outside of the page to the middle, my eyes wandered to the bold white writing of the title, “The Real World Meets the Stage: Bullins’ Captivation of the Real World Through Writing”. This title created several questions for me. I wondered to myself, who is Bullins? I could assume from the title that he was a playwright, but what I really wanted to know was how his plays had a deeper meaning that could literally be connected to the outside world.

Continuing onto the introduction, I was given a greater understanding of what I was about to get myself into. This exhibit which was inspired by Ed Bullins’ play, *How Do You Do*, would go into depth on the absurdities of different stereotypes, as well as the catalysts for them. Soon enough I would be immersed into an exhibit full of different songs, photographs, and other artistic mediums that would clarify this issue overtime; works inspired by the Civil Rights era, all the way until the present day Black Lives Matter movement. Feeling eager to come out of this a more knowledgeable individual, I was ready to begin looking at the different pieces.

As I could have predicted, the first work in the exhibit was Ed Bullins play, *How Do You Do*. Structurally, it made sense to see this as the initial artifact, because it was the inspiration for the exhibit, and would give me a better understanding of what would come to follow it. The object ID at the bottom of the page informed me that the play was written in 1965, toward the end of the civil rights era. I could assume from this that many of Bullins' writings were a product of inspiration due to such a thriving period in history. Photographs of the actual play itself showed only African American individuals. The play looked relatively old and worn, as if it had a great sense of history to it. What had this play been through that made it age so quickly? After examining these historical photos, I went ahead and clicked on the link to the play, just to take a quick skim of it. Immediately, I noticed several abstract lines, but what really caught my attention was the obscure things that these African American characters said about whites. One line said "Let's just all turn white" (Bullins, n.p.), and another one read, "All the white chicks will look at me" (Bullins n.p.). After thinking about this for a minute, it was clear to me that Bullins was attempting to use sarcasm in order to praise whites who thought they were superior to African Americans during this time period. Continuing onto the caption of the play, which provided me with some additional information, I received clarification that throughout the play there are several examples of absurd stereotypes, which are used to provoke a shocked response from the reader. I found this play to be a fascinating inspiration for the exhibit, and was looking forward to what was next to come.

Turning onto the next slide, I saw an old favorite song of mine, not known to many people in the younger generations, "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday. I noticed from the bottom of the page that the song had been written in 1939, which was prior to the Civil Rights Era. I clicked on the link to the song, and listened as I read the lyrics closely. The line, "Black bodies

swinging in the southern breeze” made my heart drop. It was clear at this point that there was a much deeper meaning to the song that I had never before realized. I clicked onto the next slide in order to read up on the curator’s explanation on this. I then learned that this song was written by Billie Holiday as a stand against the lynching of African Americans. I was curious as to why an artifact dated from 1939 was included in this, but it sets a clear foundation for how far back the segregation of African Americans reaches, as well as how early on individuals began to take a stand against this. The presence of this song being put directly after the play that inspired this exhibit truly put into perspective the deep-rooted history of segregation and the atrocities that occurred to blacks.

I continued on to the next artifact and was pleased to see something familiar; “Blackbird” by The Beatles, an old favorite of mine. “Why would this old pop song be relevant to the exhibit?” I wondered to myself. I listened to the song once, embracing the harmonious melody, while admiring the abstract piece of art, showing a bird with the lyrics coming out of its mouth. I then continued on to read the lyrics of the song, paying close attention to the words. “Blackbird singing in the dead of night. Take these broken wings and learn to fly”. What exactly did it mean? All of a sudden, I realized there was a deeper meaning to the song. The Beatles were singing about the need to turn something broken, or corrupt, and keep pushing until it is just as capable as anyone or anything else. I realized how truly relevant this was with regard to the Black Power Movement, because African Americans during the 1960s were viewed as inferior; therefore, musicians such as The Beatles took a stand to try and be an inspiration for getting people to take a stand and fight for their rights. I continued on to read about it and I had hit the jackpot. It is all about breaking away from the norms of society, and steering your own path. I really enjoyed this interpretation on breaking away from racial stereotypes.

Continuing onto the next artifact, I was glad to see such a classic piece of history, Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I have a Dream* speech. Having this come after "Blackbird" by The Beatles was helpful in that my mind was thinking abstractly at this point, so the inclusion of a more straightforward piece of history was just what I wanted to see. The image of the old speech, copyrighted from 1963 made me feel a sense of nostalgia. What would it have been like to be present during such a monumental moment? I was not alive during this time; however, looking at this old artifact made me feel a deeper connection to the issues of segregation that were being fought in the 1960s. This speech was a great turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. I continued on to read a little bit more about King's words. This speech was all about having equality amongst races, and being one community coexisting in the world together. I really enjoyed the point made that we can use King's speech as a measure of the progress made throughout history with regards to segregation. King lists several "dreams" he has, some of which have been accomplished in this day in age, and others that we must keep fighting for, in order to one day achieve.

The next artifact I see is a relatively old looking black and white photograph. I am quite curious as to when it is from, but there is no date on it. I analyze what I see within it. It is clearly quite old, and consists of solely African American people leaning against a fence. I can tell by their clothing and the yellowing of the photograph that it is a relatively old image. I can assume from the absence of diversity, and the old age of the picture that it was taken prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination based on race, gender, and other discriminations based on stereotypes. I like this image because it includes so little information, that I get the opportunity to put myself into the context of this picture and try to figure out what exactly is occurring. It clearly shows the issues of segregation based on the absence of any mix

of races. After I had completed my thorough analysis of the image, I went on to read more about it. I find it interesting that it comes from the Robert Langmuir African American Photograph collection, because based off of this information, there is a time period reference; the photo was captured between 1840 and 1980. This means that there is a good chance that I am correct about the photo being taken prior to The Civil Rights Act, and it was likely taken during a time of extreme segregation, where African Americans and whites could not even live in the same period. I wonder to myself, how could the world have ever rationally functioned this way? Some of my best friends are of other races, and thinking about not having them in my life makes me feel melancholy.

The next and last image makes my heart skip a beat. It is an African American woman peacefully standing unarmed, while two officers with guns and protective padding charge toward her. She stands poised and upright; she is brave. I look underneath the image to access some information on it. I see four numbers; 2016. This image is from this past year. These issues are real. Why do we live in such a corrupt society? How can officers be allowed to accost this innocent woman? We live in a free country, but who really are the free ones? This image instills in me the realization that African Americans are still racially stereotyped. Officers will charge toward these completely innocent people, solely due to a darker pigmentation of their skin. I feel tears coming to my eyes, as I realize what a devastating world it is that we live in. Feeling such an upset, I am barely capable of reading more about this untitled image, but I continue on, as I feel a sense of duty to further educate myself. I find out that the image was captured in Baton Rouge, and the woman was peacefully protesting. She was indeed targeted solely due to her skin color. I read an interesting analysis; this image shows a huge repeat of history. The Black Power

Movement in the 1960s can be compared to the Black Lives Matter movement today, in that those who are standing up for their rights are still the ones being targeted.

This society we live in today has not changed as much as one would think compared to the 1960s. I believe this image was the perfect way to complete the curated exhibit. It left me feeling like I need to take a stand to end racial stereotypes; not for myself but to create a better society to live in. As a young adult in society, is the duty of my generation to join together as one, and become inspired to put an end to segregation once and for all.