

Racial violence refigured on idea of reverse racism

By Clarence Spigner

If the commentary in the Sept. 29 edition of the *Emerald* entitled "Violence on TV, in movies reflects reverse racism" was written to explore ideas, as the self-defined conservative writers Peter Collier and David Horowitz claim, then that does not reflect the content of the piece.

The "diatribe about Hollywood racism," as Collier and Horowitz describe it, seemed likely based on their own paranoia as "political correct" watchers than any objective analysis.

The logic of the piece is shaky to begin with. "Whoopie Goldberg, Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey, Eddie Murphy, Arsenio Hall, Danny Glover and Spike Lee" named as African-American representatives by the authors cannot "call their own tunes on today's Hollywood" as suggested. Moreover, they are no more representative of African-American diversity than Connie Chung and Maury Povich are of Chinese-Americans and American Jews.

Interesting that most are comedians, reinforcing the racist tradition of unidimensional images media historian Donald Bogle described as, "Toms, coons, tragic mullatos, and bucks." Such limited representation of hardly the diversity Collier and Horowitz seem to fear.

Moreover, African-Americans, along with, Latinos, Asian-Pacific Islanders and Native Americans all together make up a fraction of the power elite who enforce an ethnocentric image in TV and movies. Spike Lee, for instance, comes under constant criticism for whatever he puts on the screen even before he does it (and that's fine, but are white filmmakers comparatively under the same scrutiny?).

White Hollywood as the authors describe it, may or not be "conspiring" to portray African-Americans as violent.

However, with the proliferation of macho-vigilante policemen like, Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* from a series of films; Gene Hackman's Popeye Doyle from *The French Connection*; Nick Nolte's Jack Cates from *48 Hours* and *Another 48 Hours*; Mickey Rourke's Stanley White from *Year of the Dragon*; and Michael Douglas' Nick Conklin from *Black Rain*, I'm sure the Los Angeles policemen Lawrence Powell and Stacy Coon did not lack any role models to justify beating up Rodney King.

Such sexist, bigoted film hero cops, rooted in the law and order rhetoric of the Nixon-Reagan-Bush era, are presented as consistently trampling over people's constitutional rights, yet none were mentioned by Collier and Horowitz.

The authors went on to point out that "in real life, African-Americans commit more than 50 percent of the violent crimes, including 55 percent of the homicides in America." But in the interest of accuracy, that is reported crime. And even if we accept Collier and Horowitz' figures, I think even they will agree that the majority of that violence is black-on-black.

Thus, we should be getting more stories of African-Americans addressing their own problems instead of looking at white people. Even Shelby Steel and Clarence Thomas would agree with that.

Such was the message in *Boyz 'N the Hood*, a point Collier and Horowitz didn't get. In fact, the most vicious character in *Boyz 'N the Hood* was the black policemen, representing internalized racism, a depiction Collier and Horowitz are probably still trying to figure out.

Hollywood instead gives us a plethora of gallant white male protagonists shooting and kicking the kung fu out of socially disruptive people of color. Such depictions seem purposefully designed to reinforce the status quo by representing the infantry mentality of men in power as

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appropriate.

It will be interesting to see how the right-wing media watchers address the real-life police corruption depicted in *Serpico* and the current Mollen Commission. Or perhaps watching last year's *Cop Rock*, where people were singing, dancing and killing each other all in the same frame was more to their liking.

The statistics of real-life, black-violent crime vis-a-vis its lack of depiction on television were highlighted in the article. Well, here is another statistic to think about: More than 47 percent of the prison population is made up of African-Americans, yet Hollywood gives us films like *Lock Up*, and *Innocent Man* and *The Fugitive*, where it is white men who are unjustly accused by the criminal justice system.

Why is that? And never mind that, writer Stephen Carter said, there has never been a single execution of a white per-

son for raping a black person.

It is obvious, as the writers of the "reverse racism" diatribe admit, that they don't know what would inflame passion in Los Angeles, or any place else. Therefore, both could benefit from a course on multiculturalism.

Perhaps Collier and Horowitz, and people like them, understand the social, political and economic dynamics that produce a popular character like Rocky, who beats up a series of black men in the boxing ring; pimps who are lovable when white (*Dr. Detroit*, *Night Shift* and *Risky Business*) and vicious when black (*Street Smart*, *The Last Innocent Man*); movies that reconstruct the Vietnam War in order to win it (*Rambo*, *Uncommon Valor*, *Brasscock*); science fiction where women or minorities are not to be trusted in the future (*Outland*, *Total Recall*, *Robocop II*); interracial romance where Asians are sexually passive (*China Girl*, *Year of the Dragon*, *Tai Pai*, *Shogun*); and so-called politically correct westerners where Native Americans need white men to lead them (*Dances with Wolves*).

It is not "unfashionable to discuss socially sanctioned forms of racism" unless you are part of some academic backwater. That reminds me; why not invite Peter Collier and David Horowitz to the University and have them sit on some of our courses? Who knows, even they might learn something.

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