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Paper #2

“Show Me The Money”

In the movie Bamboozled directed by Spike Lee, the main character Pierre Delacroix, a black scriptwriter, creates “Mantan, The New Millennium Minstrel Show” that is incredibly offensive and degrading to black people, but ends up becoming a national hit. He begins collecting artifacts and one of them is a Jolly Nigger Bank. This artifact is used to help remind him of the painful history of his people. The Nigger Bank, made in the early 1900’s, shows the upper half of a black person’s body. It has a large head, which is so dark you would see its large gleaming white eyes staring eerily at you. The Nigger Bank is equipped with gigantic red colored lips almost looking like a big black clown caricature. It has a huge nose with large nostrils. The bank is also wearing a button up bright red shirt and bowtie telling of the time and era it was made in. One of the Nigger Bank’s arms is out with the palm facing up, as a beggar would do. Once the coin is placed on its hand, you click down on the lever and the arm goes up to the mouth where the coin is swallowed. Simultaneously, the bank’s eyes roll back to only the white until the hand comes back down empty where the pupils are now visible and the coin has been eaten.

This tiny object signifies Black Americans’ experience dealing with money in today’s society. America is run off the capitalist notion that money and material possessions are the most important and sought after things. Americans buy into the idea of capitalism and advancing by trying to be better than those that are next to you. The United States has blinded the African American community into believing that if you

work hard and make money that you will become equal. When the bank swallows the change, his eyes roll back seeing nothing as if it were oblivious to everything, and for a split second, only concerned with the money it has just gained. This is the same way many black youth deal with money in America. It is the idea that money can make you complacent and accepted. That if you own the nice house, and the new car you will be admitted into the wonderful world of rich white society. But the truth is that your neighbors will still act cautiously around you whether you dress in J Crew or FUBU. Money cannot change what you represent as a black person in America. The idea that money can fix all of that is a myth that America has implanted in the black person. America Culture pretends that money can dissolve all the problems of race, class, sexual orientation and any other kind of diversity, but in today's reality that is not possible. Yet, since money is the most prized possession, black people, among other races, see it as their ticket to acceptance.

This needs to be accepted sets up a tense relationship between minorities vying for the token spot. This idea set by America that not all minorities but only one minority can be on the top at any one time breaks down the black community, and makes them viciously competitive, forcing them to stand alone and therefore become dominated by White America. Unlike white Americans, black people do not have the privilege to focus solely on gaining economical status. When white people gain status they are looked at as everyday people and human beings. When black people gain status they are looked at as the exceptional black person who has gained status. When black people only focus on money they end up losing their integrity. The loss of integrity allows the black person to forget about their past struggles and disillusion themselves into believing that they are

equal to white people. They sell out for this unattainable American dream. Our color cannot leave us, and that is why we must always remember our history when we are trying to make a name for ourselves in a white society.

This unattainable dream is what makes black youth find alternative and easier, but ultimately failing, ways to try and achieve that dream. One of the major themes of American culture is that having money is important but how you make it does not matter. Whether it is through studying, winning the lottery or getting involved in illegal business, it all equals the same thing. The latter seems to be winning out over the hard working honest way of gaining economical prowess. In today's of society fast cash and instant winning, the hard working trend seems to be dwindling. In the movie, the main character beings to lose his sanity and the Jolly Nigger Banks being to work on its own, moving its arm towards its mouth faster and faster trying to insert as much change as possible. This is the kind of run away train we are seeing in America, especially in areas with quickly depleting resources.

The media flaunts this fast and easy lifestyle. Black people have not had many recent icons that implore them to be more conscious and active citizens. Most black stars are seen flashing jewelry and using money in a very superficial ways. Many of the minority actors or musicians are portrayed as having a weak educational background and made their money from pure talent. The media, instead of flaunting Toni Morrison or Maya Angelo for their academic achievements and life struggles focuses on rappers who seem to fit the America stereotype of black person. Minority youth see them and assume that they can do the same thing trying to get quick money and hoping to get lucky. The focus on education is not as strong in minority communities because it is a long road that

it harder to travel on. Hence that new generations of Black America is getting instantly inserted into the role of the Nigger Bank, trying to consume as much as possible at the moment while being spit at by the white society who holds the lever.

The decision between the easy or hard economic road is represented in “The lesson” by Toni Bambara. In the story an educated black women named Miss Moore tries to teach her neighbors’ children a life lesson. The children are living in impoverished Harlem; they got uptown to a toy store and realize that what could feed their family for a year is the cost of a gem paperweight. At the end of the story, one of the children becomes aware of the financial situation in American and makes a conscious decision to strive for more. The other child neglects what she saw and learned and, instead becomes bitter and wants to separated herself form what she considers selling out. What the second child does in a theme proliferating through urban and black areas. Children are become the Nigger Banks wanting and needing instant gratification. Not seeing far ahead, and becoming bitter over the lack of material things they own, the black youth find a way to get instant cash while in the process losing their integrity and ownership over their lives.

America says education is the key to the better future, but they only support that notion in white communities and allow for the infiltration of a short-lived wild life to engross black minds through media and everyday life. When a black person succeeds he/she is seen as a sellout in his or her own community, which is, another idea implanted by white supremacy. Black people in search of the American dream become stuck between a rock and a hard place. White America separated them from their communities by brainwashing them to believe that they are special and different from the “normal”

black person. This achievement is based off of the 20's era idea of the America life where every family should have a house, lawn, town car garage, washer and dryer, 2.5 kids with a dog. Today that idea is still pressed into our mindset and is synonymous with the American dream.

In the “Banking Concept of Education” written by Paulo Freire the idea of how students are taught is analyzed. The system of banking is based off of the idea that information is just stated by the teacher and memorized by the student with no analysis. This form of teaching, for the most part, is what is going on in urban schools. While the problem-posing method, which teaches facts and incorporates analysis along with an understanding of your surroundings, is more often found in suburban schools. This type of banking learning, which is not helping them, is instantly shafting black students from succeeding and over time is forcing them in a situation where they will struggle because of their lack of analytical thought. Without logical ability students cannot make any kind of decision based on their own personal knowledge. This makes them drones that just absorb what is given to them. The Banking Concept is making urban, especially, minority youth into drones a.k.a the Jolly Nigger Banks. If they cannot succeed academically why wouldn't they turn to the fast and so-called easy method of money making?

The Nigger Bank idea that is shown throughout the movie plays an integral and applicable role in today's society. Sometimes when you want to succeed so badly you forget everything you are and try to become what you want to be. The way for African Americans to do that is through the illusion of money. The only problem with that is even though you have the money and success and feel like you have achieved you can never cross the color line. But money does not replace your skin color and if anything it puts

you under suspicion and people see you as a threat. The bank also represents indulgence the idea of fast money is one that engrosses the black inner city communities. It is like an insidious growth that takes over everything that it sees. Black people see the struggle ahead and they see what society deems as bad but yet glorified next door to them. White America keeps black people focused on the instant money to defer them from the most important and influential roles in society. They set up the Nigger Banks and feed it when they need to try and keep Black people docile. The only way to break this trend is to not lose sight of what values and morals are important in the black community and taking those with you no matter how much money you make.