
Black Artists-White Audience

By: Arnaldo Musa / Cubasi
07/09/2024



Racism taken to the core of white people in the United States has persisted for centuries in the self-proclaimed number one democracy in the world.

Land of dozens of supremacist groups that hanged and burned black people left and right, for trivial reasons and even without them, had in the Ku Klux Klan its most striking leading element, which left no loopholes to publicize and undertake violence against racial minorities, mainly African Americans.

Great films, really well made, are always cited to expose such trauma of the white mentality, but I'd like to stop at a short film of just 25 minutes by the brilliant Charles Chaplin, when he was not yet pointed out as the great figure he was and will be forever.

A NIGHT IN THE SHOW

A Night in the Show features Chaplin in two leading roles - one posh, the other clownish, both drunk, but regardless of the anecdotes and memorable moments it displays (like those of Chaplin dealing with each of the musicians), it's striking that among the thousands of extras employed there's not a single black person, so, to "democratize" them, a French actor with a shoe polish face was included in the modest audience of the gathering.

In short, Ku Klux Klan, white actors with shoe polish and 'whitewashed' black stars: the most racist side of Hollywood in its movies.

The Los Angeles film industry has been responsible for constructing a national identity, of white supremacy, which the 'race movies', the films made by and for African Americans, were meant to reinforce.

Thus we can see a promotional poster for the screenings in cinemas of 'The Birth of a Nation', a historical fable with praises for the Ku Klux Klan, together with 'Stormy Weather', with Lena Horne, nicknamed the Dark Venus, one of the African-American stars that Hollywood wanted to 'whitewash'.

The history of black artists in white-only theatres is a reflection of the racial segregation that existed in many places, especially in the United States. For much of the 20th century, black artists faced significant barriers to presenting their work in spaces dominated by whites.

In the field of cinema, for example, "race movies" were films made by and for African-Americans, shown in segregated theatres. These films sought to promote the integration of the African-American community into American society, although they avoided controversial topics such as poverty and social injustice.

In theatre and music, there were also efforts to break down degrading stereotypes and make the talent of black artists known. Plays and musicals began to present richer and more ambitious content, challenging negative perceptions and showing the valuable contribution of black artists.

SAM COOKE

Sam Cooke's life was short-lived, and he was gunned down at the age of 33, in an incident that was attempted to be attributed to womanizing problems, but he was already threatened for being a defender of civil rights and racial equality, while the police quickly closed the case and avoided making inquiries.

In two different films, when mentioning his favorite singers, Robert De Niro placed the budding Cooke alongside Frank Sinatra.

He performed to a room full of whites, with many young students who offered him a warm welcome.

Thus he premiered one of his great national successes, *You Send Me*, but he was very dedicated to musical scores that showed him as an important defender of human rights.

WITH CASSIUS CLAY

It was one of those nights that tend to grow in pop culture mythology. On February 25, 1964, at the Miami Convention Center, young Cassius Clay (later Muhammed Ali) entered the ring to challenge Sonny Liston for the world heavyweight title. The press expected the champion to triumph. But after seven rounds, Liston retired. Euphoric, Clay raised his fists to the sky and danced with short steps to celebrate his victory.

"I told you so! I told you so!" he told the journalists surrounding him. But instead of commenting on the fight with the reporters, the boxer, true to himself, walked up to the front row and looked for a face. "Sam Cooke! This is Sam, a rock & roll star, let him up!"

Up in the arena sweating, the world's greatest boxer - with an ego almost as monumental as his skill with his fists - paid his respects to one of the pop stars of the moment. Because in those days, Sam Cooke was much more than a successful soul singer who had scored twenty songs in the Top 10 of the Billboard R&B charts. He was unabashedly committed to the fight for civil rights for African Americans.

SULLIVAN, HONEST

One of the most famous and charismatic presenters on American television was Ed Sullivan, white, striking for the immobility of part of his face, who earned strong racist attacks for inviting black artists to his show; then, for talking to them in a friendly and respectful way and, most famously, for kissing an African-American singer.

One of his favorite guests was Louis Armstrong: This legendary trumpeter and jazz singer broke many racial barriers with his music and became a beloved figure for audiences of all races. He dedicated much of his fortune to helping the victims of Hurricane Katrina, in addition to denouncing that many black lives were lost due to the apathy of white authorities.

New Orleans International Airport is deservedly named after Louis Armstrong.

Other black artists of undeniable quality vilified by racist whites:

Billie Holiday: Known for her unique and emotive voice, Billie Holiday also had a great impact on white audiences,

Black Artists-White Audience

Published on Cuba Si (<http://cubasi.cu>)

despite facing racial discrimination throughout her career.

Ella Fitzgerald: Nicknamed “The First Lady of Song,” Ella Fitzgerald won 13 Grammy Awards and was one of the first black artists to perform in prestigious venues frequented by white audiences.

Nat King Cole: He was one of the first black artists to have his own television show in the United States, “The Nat King Cole Show,” and his music was very popular with white audiences.

These artists not only challenged the social norms of their time, but also helped open doors for future generations of African-American musicians.

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff
