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When the Truth Isn't Enough: Anti-Racist-White Hero Framework, Tokenism, and Postracism

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Abstract

By applying Madison's "anti-racist-white-hero" (ARWH) framework developed in 1999, I seek to discuss how ambiguous, and yet, obvious views of race, racism, and success are threaded throughout the 2000 film *Men of Honor*, and so, create a false sense of post-racism, which includes a rhetoric of tokenism. Through the application of this framework, I am then able to conclude that the film does, in fact, "sustain systemic racism even though it appears to expose and condemn it" (McFarlane p. 82). By taking an in-depth look at the film, I am able to expose the *myth of white superiority* and assert that post-racism and white heroism are at the crux of media as it applies to the film industry. I analyze the film against the backdrop of Tokenism according to Cloud, as explained by Bineham in his article, *How the Blind Side Blinds Us*, and find that the responsibility of failure is removed from the systems of power and privilege that are largely creating the obstacles in Navy Diver Carl Brashear's life in the first place, and positions that responsibility solely on Brashear himself. Through examining the facts of Carl Brashear's real-life events and comparing them to the larger than life events that Hollywood created, I reframe the narrative of the film to find the ugly truth...*racism sells*.

Keywords

Men of Honor, Carl Brashear, feminism, anti-racist-white hero framework, tokenism, postracism, race(ism), race, media

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Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Emily Plec**

By applying Madison's "anti-racist-white-hero" (ARWH) framework developed in 1999, I seek to discuss how ambiguous, and yet, obvious views of race, racism, and success are threaded throughout the 2000 film *Men of Honor*, and so, create a false sense of post-racism, which includes a rhetoric of tokenism. Through the application of this framework, I am then able to conclude that the film does, in fact, "sustain systemic racism even though it appears to expose and condemn it" (McFarlane p. 82). By taking an in-depth look at the film, I am able to expose the *myth of white superiority* and assert that post-racism and white heroism are at the crux of media as it applies to the film industry. I analyze the film against the backdrop of Tokenism according to Cloud, as explained by Bineham in his article, *How the Blind Side Blinds Us*, and find that the responsibility of failure is removed from the systems of power and privilege that are largely creating the obstacles in Navy Diver Carl Brashear's life in the first place, and positions that responsibility solely on Brashear himself. Through examining the facts of Carl Brashear's real-life events and comparing them to the larger than life events that Hollywood created, I reframe the narrative of the film to find the ugly truth...*racism sells*.

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The Film, *Men of Honor*, released in 2000, is based on the life and career of Navy diver, Carl Brashear. Brashear became the Navy's first black Master Diver, the Navy's highest-ranking diver status. Brashear catches the negative attention of Master Chief Billy Sunday, a white racist who eventually acknowledges Brashear's fierce determination and dedication to his goal and becomes Brashear's biggest advocate.

Based on true events, the protagonist of this film, Carl Brashear, resonates strongly with me, from the first time I watched the trailer to the film's stunning conclusion. From the early scenes of the movie to the very end, Brashear's grit, perseverance, and self-determination are constantly displayed as he is challenged with one obstacle after another while desperately trying to reach his ultimate goal of becoming a Navy Master Diver. By the end of the film, I was in awe of both Brashear and Sunday, and happily went on with my day, never once pausing to reflect on my emotions or question which events in the movie were actually "true" and what was artistic license used by Hollywood. I, like many other moviegoers, took the movie at face value.

That is, until I took a Criticism of Public Discourse class. For my final paper I chose to do a rhetorical criticism of the trailer of *Men of Honor*, with the film as a reference.

Expecting the outcome of my analysis to be centered on the racism that Brashear experienced during his time in the military and viewing racism as a thing of the past, I could have never prepared myself for the journey that I was about to embark on and the eye-opening revelations that I was about to encounter. The common tactics used to frame things to look as though they are something that they are not became clear the more I researched the film, compared the actual events of Brashear's life to Hollywood's larger-than-life version, and analyzed the film with Madison's anti-racist-white-hero (ARWH) framework. The analysis of this trailer, supported by the film, will demonstrate how Hollywood's framing of racism serves to perpetuate the ideologies of white heroism, tokenism, and post-racism.

Through decolonization, defined as "breaking with the ways our reality is defined and shaped by the dominant culture and asserting our understanding of that reality, of our own experiences" (Foss, p. 144), we can go beyond the surface meanings portrayed in this film and look to the root of the messages in order to decode the ambiguity that lies within. These tools will be examined in conjunction with Madison's ARWH framework, the impact of these findings on the viewers of the film, and the implications as they pertain to our culture as a whole. The research will discuss how the film fits within the

ARWH genre that features a rhetoric of Tokenism, the larger-than-life aspect of the film, and why this is necessary to the marketing of the film, which will lead to discussing race(ism) in the media. Finally, the conclusion will briefly summarize why this research is important to our culture, and future implications of a continued denial of post-racism and white heroism.

BRASHEAR'S LIFE ACCORDING TO HOLLYWOOD

Carl Brashear is first introduced to the audience as a young boy, approximately 12 years old, who is a talented swimmer. Born to sharecroppers, he was raised on a farm in Kentucky in the 1930s. Unlike most children who grow up in sharecropping families, Brashear was sent to school every day rather than being kept at home to work on the farm. However, Brashear's family receives word that the farm owner is replacing them and bringing in another family where the kids work too. In an effort to stop this from happening and keep their farm, Brashear's first act of heroism comes when he stands firm with his father and tells him that he is not going to school and stays home to help plow the field. As the years pass, Brashear becomes a young man and decides to enlist in the Navy. While waiting to get on the bus that would take him away from his family and to the naval base, Brashear's father says to him "You get in there and fight, Carl...Don't quit on me...ever." Just as Brashear is boarding the bus, his father hands him a hand-made radio to take with him that has the letters A.S.N.F. (A Son Never Forgets) inscribed on the side of it.

While in the Navy, Brashear serves as a cook on the ship, U.S.S. Hoist, with Master Chief Billy Sunday who becomes Brashear's inspiration for becoming a diver when he observes Sunday do a "bounce dive" to save an officer who is drowning despite orders from the ranking officer, Lieutenant Hanks, for Sunday to stand down. Hanks warns Sunday that if he "even touches the water" he will take his "Captain's mask" and have him demoted. Ever the rebel, Sunday salutes Hanks and jumps into the water anyways. While on this bounce dive, Sunday suffers an inoperable embolism on both lobes of his lungs and is told that he can never dive again. Upon hearing this news and having a minor breakdown, Sunday is taken off the ship and reassigned to a training position at a diving school in Bayonne, New Jersey.

During his time on the U.S.S. Hoist, Brashear challenges the rules and decides to take a swim on Friday, the day reserved for the white people to swim, instead of on

Tuesday when the "colored people" can swim. Once he makes his point and has a swimming race with one of his white fellow officers whom he beats, he is sent to the brig. Captain Pullman, the ship's white commanding officer, confronts Brashear in the brig and tells him that he is one of the fastest swimmers on the ship, and so Pullman is transferring him to the search and rescue unit. Eager to jump into his new position, Brashear states that he will gather his belongings and report to the unit's living quarters immediately, but he is stopped by Pullman and told to stay with the cooks, he is only there to swim, nothing else. Meanwhile, Carl begins writing letters to get into dive school. After multiple letters and a personal recommendation from Captain Pullman, Brashear is finally accepted to dive school where he will be the school's first black diver trainee.

As soon as Brashear arrives at diving school in Bayonne, New Jersey, he is immediately met with hostility and racism, beginning with the school's director, Mr. Pappy, an older white racist traditionalist, who tells the guard not to let Brashear enter the base. Shortly thereafter, Brashear has his first of many encounters with Master Chief Billy Sunday, whom he had previously served with on the U.S.S. Hoist. Sunday recalls Brashear as a cook on the ship and calls him "Cookie" from that point on. Sunday drives off and comes back hours later only to find an overheated and dehydrated Brashear still standing outside the base gates. Sunday offers to buy him a beer and a bus ticket so he can "go back to whatever burrow he sprang from," but Brashear refuses. Upon noticing scars on Sunday's hands from the reigns of driving mules, Brashear makes a comment that infers he and Sunday have something in common when he says, "And no self-respecting navy man makes a living driving mules, Sir." As a foreshadowing of the racist mistreatment Brashear will soon face, Sunday responds, "You know what the Chinese say, Cookie? Be careful what you wish for." Then, Sunday tells the guard to let Brashear in. Outraged by Brashear's reference to them having anything in common, Sunday immediately begins wielding his authority over Brashear and creating obstacles to hold Brashear back from advancing in the program.

As his training continues, Brashear finds himself faced with the possibility of flunking out of the program due to low test scores. He is encouraged by his instructor to seek help "outside the controls of the camp." Upon turning to the local library for tutoring, he meets Jo, the library aide, who is working toward her nursing degree.

After a relentless, yet flattering, pursuit and proving to her that he is willing to put in the effort, Jo agrees to tutor him, but warns that if he wastes her time, she will quit. Their relationship soon grows beyond tutoring as they begin dating, and eventually marry.

One day during a training exercise, trainee Petty Officer Isert's air hose becomes "fouled" and has to be changed out while he is under water in a sunken ship that has rolled over. His training partner, Machinist Mate Rourke gets scared and abandons ship. Sunday begins to prepare to dive in himself to help Isert, but Brashear, aware of Sunday's lung condition, challenges Sunday's spontaneous decision and convinces Sunday to let him go instead. Sunday reluctantly consents, and Brashear successfully changes out the air hose, saving Isert's life. However, under the watchful eye of Mr. Pappy, Rourke is later credited with saving Isert's life and awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal of Honor in front of his entire platoon.

Other challenges that Brashear faces while he is in training include, but are not limited to, death threats via notes left on his bunk, and being challenged by Sunday in front of many of his fellow trainees at a bar to engage in a competition with Sunday to hold his breath for five minutes while wearing a divers hat filled with water. The conditions were that if Sunday won, Brashear would quit and leave the base that night. This challenge came on the eve of the same day that Brashear found out, in a telephone conversation with his mother, that his father had fallen ill and passed away. Both Brashear and Sunday suited up and trainee Rourke timed them. However, around the four-minute mark, Sunday begins to waver and almost passes out as blood starts to appear from his nose due to the pressure building up from him holding his breath. The onlooking sailors stop the challenge and remove the helmet from Sunday so he can breathe. Thus, forcing Sunday to forfeit, and lose the challenge.

The final test of Brashear's grit in dive school came on his last day of training when he had to complete assembly of a flange under water in order to qualify as a diver. There was no time limit, just the requirement that he completed the assembly accurately and fully. Upon reaching the bottom of the river, Brashear calls up to have his tool bag sent down to him, but when Sunday instructs his assistant to send down the tool bag, he cuts a long slit in the tool bag and throws it into the water causing Brashear's tools to scatter on the riverbed. This

is the turning point where Sunday finally acknowledges Brashear's fierce determination and strong work ethic. Concerned that Brashear could go into hypothermia if he stays in the water any longer, Sunday decides to make Brashear stop his project, but Mr. Pappy orders Sunday not to bring Brashear up until he stops moving. Realizing that Brashear's life is in danger, rebellious Sunday radios Brashear telling him that "this isn't worth dying for," but Brashear refuses to surface. Just as Sunday gives the command for Brashear to be brought out of the water, Brashear signals that he is ready to surface. After nine hours and thirty-one minutes, a shivering and semi-hypothermic Brashear ascends from the riverbed having successfully completed the flange assembly and achieving the right to graduate with his class.

Brashear receives his first diving assignment at the Brooklyn Naval Yard as a standby diver but turns it down because he can't make Master Diver as a standby diver. Upon hearing this of Brashear's decision, Jo informs him that she is pregnant with their first child. Eventually, Brashear ends up back on the U.S.S. Hoist where he has been tasked with diving to the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea to search for a missing hydrogen bomb that was dropped by a bomber plane. While looking for the bomb Brashear's air hose gets caught on the flap of a Russian submarine that is directly in his path, which causes him to be carried through the ocean on his back for some distance. Barely missing the propeller of the submarine, his air hose finally slides off the flap. Once the sand settles, and Brashear regains his wits, he spots the bomb on the ocean floor and alerts the ship's captain. The ship's crew quickly get him back on deck, and after he has had the chance to recover from his run-in with the submarine, Brashear returns to the ship's deck to watch the seamen raise the bomb from the bottom of the ocean. During the recovery, the bomb becomes unbalanced and one of the cables breaks, causing a piece of pipe to break off, ripping through Brashear's lower left leg, which he would eventually decide to have amputated. Even with half of his leg gone, Brashear refused to accept the diagnosis that he would never dive again.

After hearing about the accident, Sunday decides to pay Brashear a visit while he is in physical therapy. Sunday informs Brashear that Lieutenant Hanks, who is also a white man and Sunday's nemesis, intends to form a medical review board to have a hearing and retire Brashear due to his injuries by claiming that he is unfit to dive. Sunday convinces Brashear that he can help him

train, beat Hanks, and return to full active diving duty. Sunday meets with Hanks who agrees to give Sunday four weeks to train Brashear before holding the medical review hearing, and that if Brashear fails, Sunday will retire. Sunday puts Brashear through a series of exercises and pushes him to go beyond his limits over the next four weeks.

Finally, the time comes for Brashear to appear in front of the medical review board. Chief Sunday is not allowed in the courtroom during Brashear's hearing, but when Hanks orders a full diving suit to be brought into the courtroom, and Brashear insists upon walking twelve steps right then and there to prove that he is fit for duty, Sunday forces his way into the courtroom and tries to stop Brashear from walking the twelve steps. However, Brashear will not relent in his demands to walk the twelve steps, so with the consent of the Board, Sunday counts out twelve steps from Brashear and commands Brashear to begin walking towards him. With each step that Brashear takes Sunday counts it out loud, but suddenly at step eight, Brashear's prosthesis begins to buckle under the weight of the diving suit, and Hanks orders him to end his attempt, but a heroic Sunday tells Brashear to disregard Hanks' order and complete his steps. With each step, Sunday recites a cadence, encouraging and pushing Brashear to complete all twelve steps. Upon completion of the twelfth step, Brashear is seated, and Hanks is forced to reinstate him to full active duty. As Sunday begins to leave the courtroom, he turns and salutes Brashear, who is seated in a chair in the middle of the courtroom. As Sunday leaves the courtroom a hero, he is surrounded by many people. However, Brashear, the true hero, is surrounded only by his wife and son.

ARWH GENRE & TOKENISM

Madison's framework argues that "an ARWH film genre exists, which simultaneously sustains systemic racism while it appears to expose and condemn it" (McFarlane, p. 82). Thus, fitting perfectly with the story told by *Men of Honor*, and supporting "Madison's main arguments about the ARWH framework that white supremacist ideologies are advanced by 'defining white supremacy in a particularly distant, extreme, blatant, and therefore, superficial way'" (McFarlane, p.85). In this context, "the audience is able to cognitively separate the situation in the film from that of the present, allowing themselves to get lost in what often ends as a 'feel-good' film about problems that seemingly no longer exist" (McFarlane, p.85). Madison also notes that "ARWH films are told

through the eyes of a white protagonist" (McFarlane, p.85).

We can see these observations play out in the film *Men of Honor*. For example, the story is based on the life and career of Carl Brashear, the U.S. Navy's first black diver to attain the rank of Master Diver, who is also an amputee. However, the story is primarily told from the perspective of Master Chief Billy Sunday, who from the moment he is introduced is immediately characterized as a "God-like" figure, representing authority and superiority over everyone, but even more so, over Brashear. The film is set primarily in the 1960s and 70s as Brashear overcomes increasingly insurmountable odds to reach his goal of becoming the first black Master Chief Navy Diver, which supports the ideology of post-racism and creates a safe cognitive distance between the events and the audience, ultimately leading to the "feel-good" experience in the end, which "works to relieve a primarily white audience of any legitimization crises they may experience while watching a film about white racism" (McFarlane, p. 85).

Due to the emotional connection that takes place between the audience and the characters as camaraderie develops out of the tumultuous relationship between Sunday and Brashear, a primarily white audience is able to dismiss the extremely racist comments and actions of Sunday and other white characters throughout the film as occurring only in the past, which serves to relieve them of any shame or guilt they may experience. For example, at the end of the film in the courtroom scene, as Brashear and Sunday are walking down the hallway towards the courtroom, they are walking shoulder to shoulder, their steps are in line with each other, and the father-son relationship that has developed between the two men is obvious. In this moment, all the racist actions and remarks of Sunday towards Brashear can be conveniently overlooked, as the audience becomes enamored by how much Sunday has assisted Brashear and the sacrifices he has made to ensure Brashear's success. Given the final unity of Brashear and Sunday across racial lines, there is an opportunity to presume that all the racism that Brashear faced is in the past, and that he never faced any other acts of racism thereafter, or that similar acts of racism do not exist today. Due to this post-racism ideology, the audience is relieved of any responsibility or call to action once the movie has ended and is why one can walk away from the film feeling that the kind of racism they just witnessed no longer exists.

In his article, “How The Blind Side Blinds Us,” Bineham explains tokenism as defined by Cloud, “tokenist narratives feature a central character whose situation in the beginning is characterized by dramatic hardship and depression.” Brashear’s story begins on a field in Kentucky, where he and his family are faced with the hardships that come with being a sharecropping family. Hardships accompany Brashear throughout his life as he enlists in the Navy and experiences a plethora of racial discrimination and barriers which are constructed to ensure his failure. While it is not blatantly stated, one can deduct that Brashear would face bouts of depression during such dramatic events such as the loss of his father, the daily insults hurled his way with constant pressure from white officers to quit and give up, and the loss of his leg.

Cloud goes on to say, “The character overcomes that hardship and depression primarily through his or her own ‘faith, work, and determination. Tokenist narratives thus, interpret success and failure as a matter of individual responsibility regardless of one’s structural location in systems of power and privilege.” Brashear overcomes all these hardships through his hard work, dedication, and determination. He never gives up or quits. He allows the barriers and ridicule to fuel his passion, and push him forward, regardless of his structural location in the systems of power and privilege which stand between him and his goal of becoming a Navy diver.

“Tokenist narratives are thus post-racial: While they admit the existence of racism, they deny its power to determine the success or failure of its victims. Tokenism ‘glorifies the exception in order to obscure the rules of the game of success in a capitalistic society. Racism, in this view, erects not barriers that prohibit success but obstacles that one must overcome to achieve success” (Bineham, p. 233). This tokenist film admits through characters like Chief Sunday, Mr. Pappy, and Lt. Hanks, that racism exists, but denies that Brashear, if not for his determination, his drive, and his persistence, would have failed due to the barriers that were constructed for the sole purpose of prohibiting him from becoming a Master Diver, or even completing dive school. Thus, shifting responsibility for Brashear’s success, and/or failure, squarely onto his shoulders and completely removing it from the white tokens who are primarily responsible for the barriers in the first place.

For example, the tokenist narrative presents the scene where Brashear’s tool bag is sliced open and his tools

scattered on the river bottom as an obstacle that he must overcome in order to graduate rather than a barrier to his success. Therefore, if he had failed at assembling it, the responsibility for the failure would fall completely on his shoulders, rather than being seen as a direct result of the men who sabotaged him in the first place. Another example lies in Brashear’s courageous fight to return to full active duty against Lieutenant Hanks and the powers that existed after the loss of his leg. The tokenist narrative in this situation would mandate that Hanks and the system that existed were mere obstacles for Brashear to overcome and were completely independent from his success or failure. Thus, any failure on Brashear’s part to return to full active duty would have strictly been a result of his inability to recover from the injury, regardless of the human and systemic barriers that existed and were formed specifically to keep him from succeeding.

LARGER THAN LIFE – WHY THE TRUTH IS NOT ENOUGH

As I conducted my analysis and research on *Men of Honor*, I was amazed to find out just how loosely (emphasis mine) this film depicts actual events. According to Stillwell, in his article *Looking Back*, he recalls how he was “struck by the fact that the version on the big screen is larger than life. It is intriguing to compare his [Brashear’s] actual life with the exaggerated version that Hollywood and actor Cuba Gooding, Jr. created. In the hands of the screenwriter, Brashear became a mythic character.” Examples of these ‘larger than life’ perceptions from Stillwell’s article include the fact that Master Chief Billy Sunday’s character is entirely fabricated and is a “composite of a number of men that Brashear encountered throughout his career.” Although Brashear did receive death threats via notes tucked in his bunk, “he was not subjected to the kind of well-beyond-reason test the film shows him performing to qualify as a diver. When Brashear was so discouraged that he wanted to drop out, a boatswain’s mate named Rutherford said to him, ‘I can’t whip you, but I’ll fight you every day if you quit. Those notes are not hurting you. Show them you’re a better man than they are.’” Another example from Stillwell is that no one coached Brashear and helped him recover after the loss of his leg. “As soon as he could, he got an artificial leg and put himself through a punishing regimen of calisthenics and running to get back into shape. And he sneaked away from hospitals to prove that he could still dive effectively” (Stillwell). Lastly, the scene where Brashear is attempting

to out-run a submarine and gets caught by his diving hoses and drug through the water never happened.

Why all this dramatic effect? Were the actual events of Brashear's career and life not dramatic enough for the big screen? Brashear recounts the accident that nearly ended his career,

"So there I was on the ship with my leg torn up – no doctor, no morphine, six and a half miles from the cruiser Albany (CG-10). While we steamed toward the Albany, I was telling the guys about what I had rigged on the ship, and how to rig it. I thought I was going to the sick bay on the Albany, but they put me in a helicopter toward Torrejon Air Force Base in Spain. They didn't fuel the helicopter and couldn't make it, so they set me down a dilapidated runway, wanting for a two-engine small plane to come and get me. I lost so much blood that I went into shock and passed out. When I was rolled into the emergency room, I didn't have a pulse. The doctor decided to feel on me one more time. He found a faint heartbeat. Right away, he started making arrangements to get some blood. They pumped 18 pints into me, and I came to." (Brashear)

When we take away the Hollywood dramatics and are left with the unadulterated facts of Brashear's story, our view is reframed, and we are able to see the ugly truth... racism sells. By inventing events that are primarily focused on the white token doing everything they can to save or help the black token, the white hero narrative is reiterated, and viewers are reminded that "black people cannot succeed absent the charitable acts of benevolent white people" (Bineham, p. 233).

From Hollywood's perspective, Brashear would have never become a search and rescue diver if Captain Pullman had not promoted him. Brashear would not have gotten into dive school without Captain Pullman's personal recommendation. Brashear would not have graduated from dive school if Sunday had not directly disobeyed Mr. Pappy's orders to leave him in the water until he stopped moving. Finally, Brashear would have never recovered from his leg injury and returned to full active duty if Sunday had not stepped in to train him, and ultimately, save him. This false white hero ideology is what an audience is subjected to, and unquestionably, buys into every time one of these ARWH genre films is created and released.

By humanizing a false white hero (Sunday) and mythicizing the true hero (Brashear), media is able to simultaneously promote and criticize racism through the guise of heroism. As human beings, we see Sunday go through a life changing event and an emotional breakdown after being told that he will never dive again due to sustaining an inoperable embolism on both his lungs. Most of us can relate to having something that we are passionate about stripped away, maybe not to that extent, but to a certain degree, nonetheless. Many of us can relate to personal struggles like alcoholism or addiction of some kind, anger issues, or marital problems. There is a human connection that exists between the audience and Sunday, because, in some way, we can all relate to his struggles on a personal level. We can also relate to his plight of wanting to help Brashear, and his willingness to go against the authorities that be and fight for what he believes in. We become captivated by Sunday's efforts and personal sacrifice to help Brashear succeed. Thus, accrediting this false white hero with the heroism that truly belongs to Brashear. We forget that if the white hero is Hollywood's artistic license and a composite character, then so is his (or her) heroism.

Brashear is mythicized to the point of being supernatural or superhuman, thus, creating a disconnect between he and the audience. How many of us can say that we have survived being drug through the water by a submarine, spent nine and a half hours under water to complete a flange assembly, or had enough grit and emotional stamina to withstand the amount of racism and barriers to our success that Brashear faces in the film without ever faltering or having any kind of depression or mental breakdown?

With the exception of Brashear crying over the loss of his father, and a slight emotional breakdown during his physical therapy, where, none other than, Sunday just happens to walk in and heroically offer his help and support, the film never shows Brashear getting depressed, angry, outraged, wanting to quit, or any other kind of emotional unsettledness. He is always strong, brave, tough, pushing through, overcoming, facing his challenges head on. He never gives up or becomes defeated, which, in part, makes him mythical. Brashear is emotionally segregated from everyone else, and thus, distance is created between the audience and the mythical man.

One aspect of Sunday's fabricated heroism is his impeccable timing of always being there to save Brashear just at the right time. Sunday is there to take the fall when Brashear graduates from dive school and Mr. Pappy would rather see him die of hypothermia. Sunday is there to offer his assistance and support just when Brashear seems to begin to give up while in physical therapy and falls to the floor in pain and frustration. Sunday is front and center of the courtroom when the 290lb dive suit becomes too heavy and Brashear's wooden leg begins to give way underneath him. It is Sunday who walks out of the courtroom a hero followed by many people, including his wife and other military personnel, while Brashear is seated in the middle of the courtroom surrounded by only his wife and son.

Brashear, on the other hand, is never portrayed as the lone hero. His heroism is always assisted by or dependent on that of Chief Sunday or Captain Pullman. Even when he is the hero, his heroism is taken away, both blatantly and subtly. For example, when Brashear saves Petty Officer Isert, whose air hose has become tangled during an underwater training exercise, he is not awarded the medal of honor for his act of heroism. Machinist Mate Rourke is given the award instead, and all Brashear gets is a distant "thank you" from Isert as he exits the barracks and manages to catch Brashear's eye while this event is unfolding.

The more subtle observation to be made here, is how the film portrays Sunday during the unfolding of these events, which requires us to go back to the beginning of the scene where Isert initially gets into this precarious situation. When it becomes obvious that someone is going to have to dive in and save Isert, Sunday is the first to begin unbuttoning his shirt and preparing to dive. However, Brashear, who is already fully suited up in his dive gear with the exception of his helmet, reminds Sunday that he can't dive due to the embolism on his lungs. Sunday responds, "You better not be talking to me like that, I won't have your familiar tone!" Brashear responds, "I'm ready. Let me go." After a brief pause, Sunday finally concedes, and Brashear is allowed [emphasis mine] to make the dive.

When reframed, the scene begs the question, "Why was there a need for Sunday to attempt to be the hero before allowing Brashear to make the dive?" The answer is simple, the white audience needed to see Sunday at least attempt to be the hero, so that Brashear's heroism could be viewed as dependent upon Sunday's physical

limitations that exclude him from being the hero. Meaning, the white audience would not be comfortable with Brashear being the hero unless Sunday, through his own innocence, could not be the hero.

"To avoid this potential discomfort among 'white' America and ensure box office sales, 'anti-racist-white-hero' narratives are performances of white innocence, of a 'diversely human' whiteness that diffuses guilt, and, in benevolently superior relation to blackness, reaffirms the legitimacy of white domination and identity" (Madison as quoted in McFarlane p. 84).

Therefore, although the film outwardly criticizes racism, it can be clearly seen that inwardly, the film condones racism through the act of mythicizing Brashear, the black token, and humanizing Sunday, the fabricated white token. By removing the heroism of the black token who portrays a real person, and giving that heroism to a white token who portrays the fabricated persona of a white superior who dominates the underprivileged black token, it is evident that racism is not only condoned, but is also active within the making of the film as well.

RACISM IN THE MEDIA

"Racial representations in the media have been recognized as problematic for quite some time. From television programs and advertisements, film, and video games, there is widespread acknowledgement among scholars that media representations are biased" (McFarlane, p. 82). McFarlane outlines Madison's elements for "most films that depict black struggles for equality in the U.S. and in South Africa. "Each movie either principally follows or contains the same general narrative structure: 1) White hero experiences some extreme form of racism vicariously through some black contact." Mr. Pappy, the dive school's Commanding Officer, and an arrogant Lt. Hanks, both directly and passively, threaten Sunday's career on several occasions for his role in assisting and defending Brashear. Some of the sailors even heckle Chief Sunday and call him names when they notice his reaction to seeing Brashear on T.V. while he is on a dive mission to recover a hydrogen bomb that has been lost at sea.

2) "White hero develops a relatively racial anti-racist consciousness." As time passes, Brashear and Sunday develop a very "father-son" relationship. Sunday goes from being Brashear's biggest nemesis and racial enemy, to be his biggest advocate and ally. Sunday's anti-racial

change of heart truly begins when Brashear stays in the water for nine hours and thirty-one minutes to complete his flange assembly for graduation. The change continues and comes full circle in the final courthouse scene when Sunday helps Brashear to complete his twelve steps in a 290 lb dive suit, and both Sunday and Brashear salute each other as Sunday leaves the courtroom a hero.

3) “White hero sacrifices a great deal at the hands of white racists to further the cause of the black people’s struggle (usually in some type of leadership capacity).” Sunday puts his career and reputation on the line multiple times in order to assist and protect Brashear. For example, Sunday is demoted and shipped out of the dive school for his direct disobedience of Mr. Pappy’s order to leave Brashear in the water until he stops moving. Sunday also risks his career when he takes a stance against Lt. Hanks by refusing to reveal Brashear’s whereabouts after he has gone into hiding in order to prepare for his appearance in front of the medical review board.

4) “White hero suffers terribly for his or her efforts but manages to somehow prevail in the end” (McFarlane p. 83). Sunday suffers ridicule from white peers, superiors, and other seamen for his actions in helping Brashear to the point of demotion and multiple threats and attempts of others to force him into an early retirement and out of the Navy. These events, coupled with alcoholism and a bad temper conspired to highly disrupt, and nearly ended his marriage. After undergoing intense withdrawal symptoms and a stay in a rehabilitation facility, Sunday sobers up and manages to salvage his marriage and his career.

“These ideologies, although quite subtle to most audiences because of the degree to which they have become naturalized, play an important role in perpetuating inferential racism (and sexism) in popular media.” (McFarlane, p. 83) Through this revelation, one can obtain decolonization and break free from the hegemonic views of our culture to come to terms with the reality that race(ism) is still as rampant today as it was in the 1960s and 70s. The falsities of post-racism and white heroism are at the crux of not only the media, but American culture as well. White Americans can no longer hide behind ignorance and white innocence simply because they are not comfortable with the acts of racism and white supremacy that discount and distort the truth of the black man or black woman’s story.

Writers and publishers can no longer be allowed to hide behind the mask of, “I follow Carl’s life and career, but my goal was to be true to his spirit, not his shirt size” (Cinema.com), while simultaneously fabricating events that center around the career and goals of a white protagonist. Similar acts of racism and white supremacy are also seen in more recent films such as: 1) *Green Book* (2018) where Dr. Shirley, a black pianist and musician, and Vallelonga, Shirley’s white bodyguard, become close friends as they embark on a tour across the South in the 1960s. Based on a true story, but called “a symphony of lies” by Dr. Maurice Shirley, who is Dr. Shirley’s last living brother (Darrisaw), 2) *Hidden Figures* (2016) which is the story of three black women who work as human computers at NASA’s Langley Research Center and need the protection and help of white fictional tokens to succeed in their careers. While based on a true story, most of the white tokens are composite characters (History vs Hollywood.com), and 3) *The Blind Side* (2009) in which a black homeless teenager, Mike Oher, also known as Big Mike, is saved by the white Tuohy family when they take him in, get him into a private school where he joins the football team, and help him get into college on a full-ride scholarship. Also based on a true story, the film is fairly accurate, but there are a couple of big discrepancies that are worth analyzing. “Some things in [the movie] are the truth, some things are not. People have got to do things to sell it. But everything is good, though.” - Michael Oher (History vs Hollywood.com).

By illuminating these injustices and calling attention to systems of oppression and superiority that are prolific throughout media, it is my goal that white Americans would reject the ideologies of post-racism and acknowledge the truth...black people (and other people of color) have not achieved equality. Racism is not a thing of the past. As educated adults, we need to recognize and understand that the falsity of post-racism and white heroism are at the crux of media, American culture, and white supremacy. Therefore, we have a responsibility to research facts and ensure that we are not taking information that is fed to us through multiple means at face value. Moviegoers should not attend and support these films when it is evident that tools of manipulation and false ideologies are in use by the media. Lastly, researchers and scholars need to continue to go beyond the surface of ARWH films to expose the hidden agendas and messages contained within for the purpose of combating and revealing the ideologies of white heroism, tokenism, and post-racism.

CONCLUSION

Through the use of Kelly Madison's "anti-racist-white-hero" (ARWH) framework developed in 1999, I have discussed how ambiguous, and yet, obvious views of race, racism, and success are threaded throughout my artifact, *Men of Honor*, and so, create a false sense of post-racism, which includes a rhetoric of tokenism. I have exposed the "myth of white superiority" (Bineham), and have asserted that post-racism and white heroism are at the crux of media as it applies to the film industry. By using strategies of disruption, I was able to decolonize the ways that American culture is defined and shaped, in this case, by the media, and assert my own understanding of that reality, through Carl Brashear's real-life experiences and true story. The implications that this criticism has on rhetorical criticism are that it helps to broaden the scope of understanding of how media conceals, and yet bombards its audiences with false ideologies that both affirm and deny the existence of racism in American culture today. It is my sincere hope that more scholars will begin to go beyond the surface of the ARWH films and expose the hidden agendas and messages to those who are still blinded by the ambiguous nature of racism.

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