

Analysis on American Current Racial Discrimination Reflected from *Zootopia**

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Abstract—Racial problems have attracted great attention in the current United States. With its high quality and popularity, the motion picture “Zootopia” reflected American racial conflicts from many perspectives. This article is aimed at demonstrating various explicit discrimination, implicit discrimination and reverse discrimination existing in present America by analyzing different characters and their experiences in the film.

Keywords—*Zootopia*; explicit discrimination; implicit discrimination; reverse discrimination

I. INTRODUCTION

As an immigrant country, the economic prosperity and affluence of the United States is jointly created by all sorts of immigrants from all over the world. Although the United States has always been proud of the country’s freedom and equality, racial conflict has become a serious problem in the current United States.

The existing of numerous ethnic minorities in the United States entitle the country “melting pot” — more and more scholars and experts prefer to name it as “salad bowl” at present. However, the conflicts between the white and the black have always been the most concern and also the most eye-catching racial problems. The Famous scholar Lin Da once gave the following reasons about this question in his book of *Deep Concern for Historical Issues of America*: firstly, in the process of the development of American history, the black is the only group of race which was forced to come to this country against their wills. Besides, the black had been the largest minority group in America before the 21st century (overtaken by Latinos now). Second, any minority in the United States always takes the white as a general reference object to make a comparison. On the one hand, the white is of large quantities (accounts for seventy-four percent of the proportion of the whole population) and enjoys dominance in almost every field of the society. On the other hand, the black and white in the United States once had a master–and–slave feud. Furthermore, according to Lin Da,

there could be another possible reason— their strong contrast in their skin colors.

Due to the reasons mentioned above, racial discrimination in the United States embodied mainly by the white’s prides, prejudice, unequal treatment and even persecution against other minorities, especially against the black. Generally speaking, there are three types of discrimination in the present America, namely, *explicit discrimination, implicit discrimination and reverse discrimination*. All these different kinds of discrimination have been wholly and vividly reflected from the major and minor characters in *Zootopia*.

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE ZOOTOPIA

This movie is set in a harmonious animal city named *Zootopia* and tells a story about Judy who finally achieves her dream of being a police officer through her perservance and optimism. This film shows the characteristic of the current “melting pot” America, that is, on the surface, all the races—symbolized by different animals of carnivores or herbivores in the film—live in harmony and regard America as “a perfect place”, but in fact they “don’t all get along.”

III. EXPLICIT DISCRIMINATION

After the Civil Rights movements of 1960s in the United States, American government formulated and implemented a series of acts to make up the damage and loss they have done to the minorities, especially to the black. These measures and bills have greatly increased the opportunities of education and employment for African-Americans and other minorities and to some extent ease the racial tensions. When Barack Obama won the presidential election in 2008, countless African-American burst into tears because of their rise of social status and numerous white people well up tears for being proud of the greatness of America and the disappearance of racial discrimination. However, has racial discrimination eliminated completely in the present USA?

The aftershock of “Los Angeles riots” happened in the last century has not disappeared, American racial conflict incidents occurred again after entering the 21st century. For example, on August 9, 2014, a white police officer shot an unarmed black youth Michael Brown Wilson Ferguson. Similar events also occurred in other states. The successive

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conflicts aroused the public's attention and racial discrimination once again became a hot topic in America.

First of all, in *Zootopia*, the different sizes (big and small) and different types (carnivore and herbivore) of different animals symbolize different races in the American reality. For example, the major character Judy and another small-sized animal Assistant Mayor Bellwether represent the minorities while Mayor Lionheart and Chief Bogo are on behalf of the mainstream white people. In this film, the big-sized carnivore controls the city just like the white people, especially the WASP (stand for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), governs the United States and dominates American political, economic and cultural field of the society. As the protagonist, Judy's personal development promotes the plot development of the film. At the beginning of the film, Judy's dreams of being a police officer and "making the world better" are not only laughed at by predators ("Bunny cop? That is the most stupid thing I ever heard." fox Gideon Grey said) but also shocked and questioned by her own parents ("It gonna be difficult, impossible even for you to become a police officer." "Right, there's never been a bunny cop."). This deeply reflects the American reality that the majority's pride and prejudice upon the minorities and the minorities' lack of confidence in achieving dreams which may partly due to long-lasting discrimination in history. According to the statistics from *On American Current Racial Problems* written by Lin Huaiyi and Zhang Jinjun, with the same qualities, the chance for the American black to be hired is only 1/3 of the white people. Among the 500 biggest American companies, there is no black president and chief executive officer. Besides, the black senior officers in Wall Street companies are rare. The African-Americans who have access to medical science, law and media are even less compared with the white. And for most African Americans, they have to pay more efforts to reach their achievements compared with the white. This social phenomenon is reflected from the experience of Judy who goes through many ups and downs even contempt in order to fulfill her dream. After suffering more difficulties and hardships compared with the large-sized animals, Judy finally is entitled to join in the policemen system. The proportion of herbivore and the mistrust of chief of police shows to Judy in the police office also reflect the predicament of the minorities especially the Africa-Americans are facing. In the film, when Judy expresses her thought of wanting to be a real cop instead of a meter maid, the Chief Bogo replies: "Do you think the mayor asked what I wanted when he assigned you to me? Life isn't some cartoon musical where you sing a little song, and your insipid dreams magically come true! So let it go." His words obviously show his distrust and contempt upon the small-sized animal Judy. In addition, when Judy comes across a robber and on the way of catching him, she was warned with "waiting for a real cop", which is the obvious prejudice and discrimination against small-sized animal in the film while against minorities in the real life.

Moreover, when another protagonist Nick appeared in the ice cream shop, large animal elephants refused to provide service for Nick, and claimed that they "reserve the right to refuse service to anyone" and told Nick to buy ice cream in

the shop of their own race—"There aren't any fox ice cream joints in your parts of town?" People should be familiar with this scene because the notorious racial segregation policy in American history which generally occurred in some states of southern American. According to the segregation policy, the black and the white should apply to activities separately, for example, eating in different restaurant, drinking from different water fountains, using different public washing rooms, attending different schools, staying in different places of a same bus, and so on. In addition, this scene can be related to "Reservation" policy American government once implemented on native Indians.

IV. IMPLICIT DISCRIMINATION

Racial problem is very sensitive at present in America. There is a Chinese American writer who once named the United States as a "self-mockery country" in the article because the deepest impression Americans leave on other immigrants is that the overall atmosphere is particularly easy, sometimes even shallow. But the author also soon finds that there are exceptions for the minorities. American comedians can and only dare to make fun of the white, because once they accidentally mock at the African Americans, Latinos or Asian Americans, they have to face the music. This means less and less people, especially the white, dare to publicly express their opinions on other minorities' problems. However, has racial discrimination eliminated completely in the present USA?

In fact, more and more racial discriminations do not reflect from words but from actions, which is regarded as one form of implicit discrimination. For example, in a fancy community of America, if the black reaches a certain proportion of the whole population, instead of protesting publicly, the white will move away successively from the community which will result in the decline of economy. Subsequently, the unemployment rate of the black will increase and the taxes will decrease. Consequently, the funds used for public services and utilities, especially for security management and education, will be cut down. Eventually and naturally, the community will become a place full of poverty and crime.

In addition, in the 88th annual Academy Awards ceremony in 2016, the black host Chris Rock once hit the problem to the point. When mentioning the reasons why most blacks protested the 88th Academy Awards, he defined the racism in Hollywood as "Sorority Racism", that is, the white will show their likeness to the black but never want to work together with the black. His description vividly demonstrates the essence of implicit discrimination of current America.

In the film of *Zootopia*, after overcoming many hardships and difficulties, with her perseverance and strong willpower, Judy finally achieved her dream of becoming a police officer. When small-sized Judy got to the work place only to find she was ignorant by the large-sized colleagues and being left alone to engage in some unimportant work—being a meter maid. There is another scene in this film which also shows the implicit discrimination. When Judy needed help and went

to the City Hall to ask help from the assistant mayor, she felt so excited because she “never get to do anything so important”, although being in the important position, she is just “more of a glorified secretary” and a means used by the Mayor Lionheart to gain the sheep vote. Obviously, the Mayor Lionheart is not fond of his secretary and works with her just for politically correct.

V. REVERSE DISCRIMINATION

The implementation of Affirmative Action policy in America protected the minorities, especially African Americans, for the discrimination they have previously suffered in the history. This action uses a quota system to guarantee a certain minorities in having access to government jobs, school vacancies and political positions. In the United States, affirmative action in employment and education field has been the subject of legal and political controversy. As time goes by, the negative effect of the action become more obvious because with the similar ability, the white has less chance of winning compared with the minority which means the white is discriminated for their colors. due to the preferential policies in the field of employment and college admissions, this unequal treatment to the members of the majority—namely the white in America—is named as reverse discrimination.

In *Zootopia*, as a predator, the young Nick is kind-hearted and tries his best to involve in the friendship with herbivore like he says in the film that “all I wanted to do was join in the Junior Ranger Scouts” When he happily believes that he is “gonna fit in” even if he “was the only predator in the troop, the only fox,” he is “gonna be part of a pack.”, it turns out that he is treated unequally and discriminated by the herbivore for nothing but his identity of being a fox who is supposed to be “shifty” and “trustworthy”, this scene in the film sharply reflects the phenomenon of reverse discrimination mentioned above in current American society.

Furthermore, some minorities also face the reverse discrimination. For example, Chinese Americans once has the history of employing child labors, but most contemporary Chinese Americans do outstanding job in studying, especially in studying math. Due to their high value in education, most Chinese Americans have the opportunities to work in Silicon Valley. Even the Silicon Valley executives once humorously announced that Silicon Valley produced IC (Indians and Chinese) rather than PC (personal computers). Consequently, if a Chinese American is not good at math, he will be despised by others. In the 2016 Oscar Award ceremony, the host Rocks introduced the three Chinese American boys who were in suits with a briefcase in hand as the accountant of statistical Oscar votes. And further, he mentioned that if someone who was not satisfied with this joke could twitter with their mobile phones produced also by Chinese Americans which implied Chinese Americans history of hiring child labors. Chinese Americans who watched the ceremony were dissatisfied with the ironic and stereotyped impression and expressed their discontent and regarded it as a form of reverse discrimination. The famous director Ang Lee and other 25 celebrities of the Academy of

Motion Picture Arts and Sciences united together to express their dissatisfaction and protest.

VI. CONCLUSION

With its high quality and popularity, the motion picture “*Zootopia*” makes a thought-provoking and unattainable exploration and reflects American racial conflicts from many perspectives. As one of the most developed country, American racial conflicts are still so serious like being mentioned by Nick in the film that “we don’t all get along.” With these simple words, we can get the summary about the complexity of American racial problems like Judy said in the film that “real life is a little bit more complicated”. Although nowadays, Martin Luther King’s many dreams have fulfilled on the surface like *Zootopia* has showed to us, it is far from achieving the real harmony among different races. Understanding and respect among different ethnics need many Judy-like people to try hard to “make the world better”. In short, hopefully the United States can transit from a society that follows the rules of the jungle to a country that everyone lives in harmony as soon as possible just like the end of the movie demonstrates to us—“try to make the world better”.

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