



Notions of Race, Gender and Culture in Cooper's and Jackson's "King Kong"

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Essay from the year 2015 in the subject American Studies - Culture and Applied Geography, grade: 1,3, University of Cologne, language: English, abstract: This paper deals with the socio-cultural parameters of representation in movies, focussing on a comparative reading of Cooper's (1933) and Jackson's (2005) "King Kong"-movies.

The academic consideration of movies and their significance regarding the creation and shaping of discourse is a relatively new, yet fruitful approach to socio-cultural studies (c.f. Erb 1998: 13f. a. Benshoff & Griffin 2004: 3). Like other cultural items, movies reflect the norms and realities of the environment they are produced in and, thus, feature statements about what their respective culture of origin considers to be 'normal' – on both overt and covert, or, conscious and unconscious levels (c.f. Vogler 1978: 109). The presentation of these notions in Hollywood films offers "keen insights into the ways that different groups of American people have been treated (and continue to be treated)" (Benshoff & Griffin 2004: 3). It is therefore important to note that the, albeit fictive, representations of people on screen are also capable of influencing their perception in real life (c.f. *ibid.*).

The analysis of genre movies appears to be especially suited for socio-cultural considerations, as these movies not only provide comparable narrative structures, but also feature recurring tropes (c.f. Stymeist 2009: 395f. a. Benshoff & Griffin 2004: 30f). Furthermore, the extent of their success and endurance mirrors their respective capability of representing and mediating discourse, as well as contextualizing it with regard to current social realities (c.f. *ibid.*).

Taking these parameters into account, it can be argued that the horror genre is particularly promising in this respect, as it usually features a monster which counters social norms concerning notions such as race, class and gender (c.f. *ibid.*). In that, the monster embodies a society's fears and is sometimes even regarded as a perversion threatening the status quo which, "in classic Hollywood horror films [...], is conventionally represented by middle-to-upper-class, white, heterosexual couples and patriarchal institutions" (Benshoff & Griffin 2004: 31).

Merian Cooper's King Kong (1933, c.f. Internet Movie Database, IMDb) might arguably be the most striking example that comes to mind when evaluating the socio-cultural impact of horror movies, especially when focusing on the representation of race, gender and culture (c.f. Cowlshaw 2006: 1714, Stymeist 2009: 396f. a. Erb 1998: 13-15). [...]

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