

King Kong: A Cultural Snapshot Essay

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Classic stories remain a classic because they convey a message which appeals to people of multiple generations despite changes in society. King Kong was released in print in 1932, a year prior to its release in Hollywood, as a part of the film's advance marketing. The public of this generation easily accepted the story's racist, colonialist, and sexist themes. Today, literary critics such as Cynthia Erb view the novel and film as representation of the early 30s and thus a resource to understand the cultural context of the times. In particular, King Kong provides a window through which a modern audience can understand and interpret racism of the 1930s. The main stereotypes presented in the story, King Kong, were those of African Americans. A main message conveyed was the hyper-sexuality of African Americans, with the message revolving around the stereotype that African American males have an exaggerated sexual energy and an unquenchable desire for beautiful white women. The story of King Kong is, in short, about an enormous ape pursuing a beautiful blonde with the movie ending on the top of the Empire State Building. With this hyper-sexuality stereotype in mind, this ape is a representation of the black man. This being has animal-like instincts, which are "lower" instincts, and has a constant desire to be with Anne, "the golden woman", as described by a native. The plot proceeds to show Kong climbing to the top of the Empire State Building with Anne in tow. The Empire State building can be interpreted as a phallic symbol and is "conquered" by

Kong when he reaches the top of the building with Anne (Figure 1) . Cynthia Erb describes this use of sexuality and raciness in King Kong as a, “type of commodification that was feat..... middle of paper Not only does this provide an example of the ambient racism in this story, but it also relates to the previous statement of how the filmmakers exaggerated the sexual energy of black people. Racist characteristics in films and stories are something that can be perceived in this generation, but was something that was normal and expected in the 1930’s. Sexuality and raciness were items that made films a commodity in the 30’s and King Kong uses both of these to attract a wide audience. These qualities are also a factor as to why King Kong remains a classic throughout the generations. Works Cited Cynthia, Erb. Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture - Ch. 1: A Showman’s Dream: The Production and Release of King Kong. Wayne State Univ Pr, 1998. King Kong. Merian C Cooper, 1933. Wallace, Edgar, and Merian C. Cooper. King Kong. Modern Library, 1932.

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