
Film Review: *Blood Quantum* by Jeff Barnaby

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Jeff Barnaby's film titled *Blood Quantum* (2019) entices the viewer to explore sociological dimensions of race, ethnicity, power dynamics, colonialism, and oppression. Along with an academic perspective, the addition of zombies, gore, and character regression/growth creates a thrilling journey to watch and enjoy. The film takes place on the fictional Red Crow reserve of isolated Mi'kmaq in Canada. Traylor is a policeman on the reservation and begins to encounter animals that should be dead but come back to life. The first human encounter he experiences is when he must bail his son, Joseph, and his estranged son, Lysol, from a police station off the reservation. A man sharing the cell with them suddenly attacks and they have to subdue him, but he doesn't back down due to being a zombie. Soon after, things begin to get more intense on and off the reservation for those who are not Indigenous. The film then jumps six months later to where the journey fully begins, and it is explained that the Indigenous individuals are immune to the virus while white people are not.

MODES OF IDENTIFICATION

Presently, society relies highly on self-identification of race and ethnicity. If an individual seeks assistance from a social service institution, they could receive help by simply self-identifying. Native American tribes that are federally recognized have requirements such as the past, and some present, utilization of blood quantum. Blood quantum was a form of identification white settlers imposed on Indigenous populations in the 18th century to limit rights and land access. Through this form of identification white settlers were able to create boundaries for this population to limit every form of capital they had prior to settler arrival and for the future. Blood quantum is archaic and has ties to scientific racism (Snipp 2010) but in the film, it is exactly what determines someone's chances of living or being turned into a zombie. Due to Native blood being a key aspect of survival, a sense of superiority was boiling amongst some members of the tribe which

created a silent but deadly divide. This is noticeable when Joseph's pregnant girlfriend Charlie began bringing white survivors to the reservation. To Lysol and James (female native), Charlie bringing her people (white survivors) was a burden and pointless. Just as self-identification can lead to some individuals receiving services meant for specific ethnic minorities, some survivors lied about being bitten to receive shelter and protection which ultimately pushed Lysol over the edge.

GROUP POSITION THEORY

Blumer's (1958) theory of group position can be seen in four basic feelings: “. . . (1) a feeling of superiority, (2) a feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien, (3) a feeling of proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, and (4) a fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant race” (1958:4). This was seen throughout U.S history and present day. In *Blood Quantum*, the Indigenous populations group position changes due to their immunity. Racial boundaries are evident when it comes to Charlie due to her being pregnant with Joseph's child. Racial boundaries are social constructs that racial groups or others outside of the racial group create to form distinct lines between groups and individuals. Since society is constantly changing, racial boundaries are no different. Each racial and ethnic group has boundaries that can either include or exclude others, especially if they are multiracial. Types of racial boundaries include physical appearance and culture. If someone does not act the stereotypical way outsiders may not view them in the way they self-identify. This can work the other way around; the group may see an individual as not like them due to their lack of connection to their culture or physical appearance. This is not something new or random but has been a part of society as it was being built, colonized, and destroyed in a constant cycle. This was evident during the colonization of California, “. . . Indians resided at the very lowest levels of hierarchy of humankind. Not only were California Indians filthy, ugly, dark, and animal-like, but they were also ‘uncivilized’ in their mode of economic livelihood” (Almaguer2009:114). Native tribes were seen as uncivilized and heathens because their lifestyles didn't consist of needing more

than necessary and maintained different beliefs than their white counterparts.

This film explored a multitude of social processes that could be explored through many sociological perspectives. History tends to repeat itself, but the group positions can be switched in the process. Some lingering questions remain, such as how would things have been different if Traylor utilized exclusion of white survivors completely from their haven and would things have turned out differently if Lysol had been in charge. Writer/director Barnaby brought forth issues that echo from the past and are still relevant today. The way he artistically portrayed the consequences of the zombie virus shows a resemblance of the way the Europeans treated Indigenous populations when colonizing. This film makes your mind think about our history from a different perspective and connects it to current issues we face in society today. Colonialism took a toll on a whole population by trying to strip them of their power, language, resources, culture, and so much more. This film may not be for some viewers but is a film full of social phenomena worth taking a chance on.

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