Shylecia Horton

Black Fandom and Black stories

In this short essay, I will be discussing the reading *“Fandom while black: Misty Copeland, Black Panther, Tyler Perry and the contours of US black fandoms”* by Alfred L Martin Jr. In this reading, I connected with the idea of otherness that comes with being a black fan or being black in nerd culture/ areas. As a black person, specifically a black woman, I grew up feeling limited in what I could and couldn’t be a fan of. Most things resulted in me being labeled as an “Oreo” by my peers. Black on the outside and White on the inside. I became much more to myself with the things I enjoyed until adulthood, this article hits close to home for me. I grew up watching Tyler Perry movies, plays, and shows respectively, many I can quote from heart and find myself doing on a regular basis. Even with that in mind, I wouldn’t consider myself anything close to a fan, nor an anti-fan, though I have been both. Tyler Perry films are a staple in the black culture, and will always have a place there, because even though they feed heavily into stereotypical blackness, they still tell someone’s story, and Perry was one of the first to do that.

With Perry aside, Alfred L Martin Jr. also speaks about the different parts of black fandom and how there isn’t much separation between the type of fandoms, just how they’re treated and separated. One point that was made that I can connect with personally. He speaks of them being open and sharing their love of fandom with others. My experience with fandom has been largely like this, mostly in the online arena. Sharing our favorite shows and games, encouraging new commers and being their biggest fans. Martin Jr. describes this as a type of evangelism. This is especially true when it relates to media that we can see ourselves in, like an example given in the article, Black Panther was a cultural reset and brought people together in droves to see it multiple times in a row. We share what we love.

This leads me into my second point, representation and seeing ourselves on screen or in books. Black panther did that for a lot of people. I can count the number of relatable characters that looked like me on screen when I was a kid. But as I grow, I’m starting to notice that number growing. As black fans grow, they create more characters that look like us, and I love to see that happen. I know there’s a bit of controversy around this, but I enjoy seeing black artists reimagine their favorite characters, usually anime characters, as black people. We don’t get a lot of representation in these areas, so creating it can help us feel so much closer to the show and even bring more people into the show out of sheer curiosity.

The last point I found interesting is the hierarchy aspect of going to see movies or watching shows when they premiere. Multiple people who were interviewed for this article talk about going to see the Black panther movie at the midnight release just to say they went to see it first. There was also a person who said they go to see Tyler Perry movies opening weekend, not so much so because they’re a fan, but because they want him to get the box office credit. I can relate to that. I like to support black creators and help them get the accolades they deserve. I’m scared to death of most horror movies, but I will always go see a Jordan Peele movie upon release. I was among the crowds of people going to see black panther in clothing similar to traditional African attire. I rave about black made films and shows. I stream black artists as soon as I can. I like knowing I’m apart of the wave of the firsts.

In conclusion, I hope that we can continue to see exponential growth in the representation of black people in the media. We have more layers than the ones we see most prominently, and I would love to see that more expressed. I’d love to see normal, middle class black children in coming-of-age stories. I’d love to see a rise in Black lgbtq stories. I really want to see more media with black princesses that don’t have to be heroes. We need more soft black girl/boy stories, and I think that’s something to advocate for. I think black fandom can make way for a lot of new stories from different perspectives and broaden itself as a whole.