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ENGL 333

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With racial tensions and prejudices coming out of the shadows the short story, “Everything That Rises Must Converge” really personifies how some can teeter the line between being a flat out racist and being an ally. Reading this story now, where racism is publicly unacceptable (in most contexts), it may be tempting after reading the story to side with the son against the mother. After all, the son strongly disapproves of his mother’s racism. Yet a close reading suggests that of the story’s many ironies, quite a few actually are directed toward the son. In a broader scope these ironies are some that a lot of people that consider themselves to not be racist ascribe to.

In my opinion, the story follows a racist mother and her racist sons journey to get her to the Y for an exercise class. As she's getting ready and they're driving to the bus stop the reader is enthralled more into the racist depths of both mother and son. The beginning of the story while Julian was waiting for his mother to get ready he is extremely uncomfortable and numb and pretty much bracing himself for what is going to be an adventure he doesn't want to have. Going forward, the story the source of his uncomfortability rears its ironic head but for right now the reader is being lead to believe its solely because of his mothers racism.

Although Julian professes to have liberated, intellectual views about race, he is in many ways just as petty and small-minded as he perceives his mother to be. Because of his college

education, he has acquired a new set of enlightened perspectives regarding race and social equality. Julian attempts to distinguish himself from his mother's dated beliefs by publicly demonstrating his liberal views on integration and racial relations. Which leads us to our first problem, throughout the entire story Julian only uses black people or the idea of black people as a prop or a ploy to bother his mother. This is made evident on page 277 "When he got on a bus by himself, he made it a point to sit down beside a Negro, in reparation as it were for his mother's sins". This was a red ironic flag because a third of the way through the story and he's yet to view black people as human, only props for his own self-righteousness. Julian seems to have no more understanding of African Americans than his bigoted mother. It becomes increasingly clear as the story progresses that he speaks of racial equality only to annoy his mother, not out of any compassion for black Americans.

I was also led to question his "liberal stance" by his excitement when he and his mother were on the bus and a black person got on. On page 281 the reader found out "It gave him a certain satisfaction to see injustice in daily operation." Why would such a liberal mind find satisfaction with injustice? He makes note of how the man is dressed and also pointed out that the man carried a briefcase, which ascribes to respectability politics as it refers to black people. We are allowed more grace if we are your "respectable negros." Julian would now days be referred to as an #AllLivesMatter type of person, the white person that finds out a black man was shot and killed by police and questions what the man did to justify the shooting. Julian is the kind of liberal that wont call you a "Nigger" per se but will comment on how well spoken you are and also notes how a certain type of black person (probably professional) isn't like "regular black people."

The entire irony with Julian is that his views though not as outspoken as his mothers are still as damaging and inhumane and those of his mother. As Julian is daydreaming about ways to “teach his mother a lesson” he dreams “He might make friends with some distinguished Negro professor or lawyer and bring him home to spend the evening.” Further perpetuating the theory of respectability politics. I am led to question had the man not been dressed “well” and carried a briefcase would Julian had tried to start a conversation with him? If the black man was dressed like what his mother considered a “thug” deep down would Julian think the same thing? It is stated in the story that Julian “tried to strike up an acquaintance on the bus with some of the better types that looked like professors ministers or lawyers.” That is just as racist as his mother, the irony is he thinks she’s stagnant in her thinking when his is just as dated.

Throughout the story, he makes failed attempts to connect to black people and repeatedly discovers that the people with whom he converses do not live up to his idealized expectations of them. When he tries to strike up conversation with the black man in the suit on the bus, for example, he comes across as awkward and intrusive. Julian desperately wants to demonstrate that he can communicate and connect to black people, but he finds himself unable to. Julian fantasizes about bringing one or two of “them” home, not as individuals but as trophies of his education and liberalism to be paraded in front of his mother. I believe because his desire to connect isn't genuine, and is motivated by proving to his mother how “progressive” he is, he truly frustrates himself not being able to connect with African Americans the way he thinks he should be able to. His actions, which to his ignorance aren't so far off from his mothers further takes agency, identity and humanity away from the black people in the story.