

"We learn most about ourselves when the text is informed by events and people in our contemporary world."

To what extent do you agree with this statement? Respond to this question with close reference to one or more text(s) you have studied.

Racism and prejudice are evident in our society. In theory, we are all aware of the despicable ways in which man treats man through discriminating against others' in everyday life. Despite the fact we are told to treat others the way we want to be treated, again and again we fail to do so. In our society racial prejudice is a sensitive subject that, in our society, we try to ignore. However, the director of "Crash", Paul Haggis, has "seen the many ways we discriminate against each other in everyday life [...] how we rationalise and excuse it, how we organise our lives so that we don't have to deal with it, and how we deny that racial problems exist." Haggis uses this film to parallel events and people in our everyday world, forcing us to see what we find easier to ignore. Therefore causing us to learn more about ourselves and the people of the society we live in.

Haggis is informed and aware of the different types of people in our contemporary world and uses this knowledge to teach us about ourselves through the film. Because we all come from different backgrounds, generally we are not opened to a wide range of cultures. Haggis uses the character of Farhad who is Persian but has become a citizen of America to display the victim's point of view resulting from racism. After walking into a gun shop (to buy a gun to protect his family), Farhad is immediately met with racist remarks by the gun shop owner who says, "Yo Osama, I plan a jihad in your own time." While Haggis's signature use of the close up camera now displays the immediate hurt on Farhad's face, it is not until later on in the film that we see the full extent of the gun shop owner's actions. Farhad is not only a fictional character, but rather a representation of all the victims of Middle Eastern directed hatred resulting from 9/11. Although this is not such an extensive problem in New Zealand, our society has its own prejudices against other cultures.

"Crash" deals with the unspeakable. One of the reasons racism is such a big problem is because it is kept hidden. While racism can be openly expressed by a few, most people have racial prejudices within them. Haggis's character Jean Cabot yells to her husband, "I'm telling you. Your amigo in there is gonna sell our keys to one of his homies." Proceeding this we are confronted with a shot of Daniel the 'amigo' framed by the white staircase. Haggis compels us to come to the realisation that, although unlike Jean we did not verbalise it, we too subconsciously prejudged Daniel on his "shaved head", "prison tattoos" and "pants around his ass". Haggis wanted to "play with stereotypes, with the assumptions we make about others." In this scene, through using an exaggerated version of the typical Caucasian, the audience has been forced to realise that we are no better than the character we hate for expressing the feelings we feel. Props, including the expensive house and smart clothes as well as the ability to express feelings of Jean are contrasted with the "gang" clothes, career of fixing door handles and inability to express personal views of Daniel. Haggis's purpose through this is to develop two characters derived from real people in our society to teach us more about where we stand and how we would judge ourselves if we had the chance.

The most important thing we learn from this film is what can happen as a consequence of our actions. Haggis gives us insight into the personal lives of both Daniel and Farhad, which is something we do not get to see. Both characters have families they care about and are doing everything they can to protect them from also being victimised. Unfortunately, their paths meet under arguably the worst circumstances of the film. Given all Farhad has experienced, everything he has bottled inside