Black Girls Talk Podcast Transcript

**Part One**

00:00:06.899 –> 00:00:16.949

Ayisi: Hello, and welcome. On today's podcast we will be discussing Black women and their portrayal in Hollywood films, more specifically, the lack of range and the roles Black women are given.

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We will question and converse about the stereotypes driving this issue and the effects they have on young Black women throughout their lifetime.

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To help facilitate this conversation I will be interviewing two young Black women today Rebecca Anane and Kaya Willingham.

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Rebecca and Kaya are both 18-year-old women who grew up in a predominantly white town and school system. Rebecca currently attends Howard University, while Kaya studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston, welcome ladies.

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Kaya: Thank you for having us.

Rebecca: Yeah, thank you so much for having us,

Ayisi: Of course, um my first question I'm going to start off with is

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what was your favorite movie as a child? I'd just like you to keep that in the back of your head and we're going to circle back to it at the end – just think about it, as we go through this interview.

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So, the first thing I'm going to start off with is explaining some basic stereotypes that a lot of Black roles have come from, so the first one is the mammy figure.

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The mammy figure is depicted as a dark skin overweight woman with big pink lips, but typically wears

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an apron or bonnet of some type and her job is to cook, clean, and typically care for white children. This archetype was created in order to strip Black women of their femininity.

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She was perceived and portrayed as almost an asexual being whose sole purpose was to be a matriarch and we continue to see modern day examples of the mammy figure.

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The other figure I'd like to talk about is Jezabel. Jezabel is quite the opposite and she's portrayed as a light skinned slender woman who is

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over sexualized, to the point where any type of responsibility for sexual misconduct towards her falls only on her and not the perpetrator – because she's portrayed as a seductive, deviant woman.

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We also see modern manifestations of the Jezebel archetype today. So, my question to you two is, do you think there is – or do you see a general theme in which Black women are portrayed in films, and can you kind of elaborate on that?

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Kaya: I'd say yeah definitely, –  in films there's usually like the Black woman isn't usually like the main character, but if they are a prominent character it's usually

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their character is attributed to their race – it's not because of like – their interests and their goals or their achievements. It's usually like – that being the Black character is their role in the movie or the show.

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And it's usually backed up by some of those stereotypes so it's like the sassy Black friend, or like the umm, you know something like that.

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Rebecca: Yeah, I agree with what Kaya said, like we don't ever get to be the main character and then on top of that, like what I've seen from like films and TV shows, especially is

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just like we're just portrayed in like the same way – like just loud, ghetto, over sexualized – like that, and so we're just like assisting. Like –

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we don't get to be like dynamic characters or complex – like we don't get to be like actual humans in like roles, so we just come off as just – like one thing which then like pushes into real life and like people think that.

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Ayisi: Yeah, that really leads into my next question, is very similar, was just that growing up, would you say you saw a lot of people who looked like you occupying a multitude of roles, rather than just the same roll over and over again?

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Kaya: I'd say that I'm as like a biracial person I definitely see more representation in the media, like –

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for example, Zendeya. Like is it like everything. And a lot of people are like yeah well there's a Black girl in this, but then it's Zendeya, you know.

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And it's like well yeah like she is a Black girl, but like that's only representation for like biracial white skin people. It's the same in

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like modeling. Like they'll use a lot of light skinned women um and if they are using like dark skinned women like that's also a big focal point of it. Like they never just let somebody be a model, it's like you're a dark skinned model, you know.

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?: No, I definitely agree and I think like at one point, there was some representation like, especially if you look at like 90s and TV shows – like we had stuff coming – like we had a lot like –

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Moisha and, like the Proud Family. Like we had stuff and then like over time, they just like went away, and so I think like –

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you – it's like sucks because then you like don't see yourself at all and it's like seeing yourself is like how kids grow up to think they can do stuff in a sense.

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So, if people are not like seeing themselves represented. Or like you only are represented so like this company can fulfill their diversity quotas and stuff like that – then it's just like you don't feel like you're like actually part of society – if that makes sense.

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Ayisi: Yeah, and um I was also going to ask you guys, if you could maybe share a personal experience on how you feel like the perpetuation of stereotypes in these films and TV shows affected how you perceived yourself either growing up or even now?

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Kaya: I'd say like kinda like the Jezabel stereotype you're talking about like light skinned women are supposed or like –

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supposed to be like curvy and like – like have like an ideal body type and like I grew up like really thin, I don't have curves, but like –

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I wouldn't get like picked on for that, and my growing up like that was something that really bothered me. I'm like I don't care as much now.

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But that's definitely something that like I would notice – is like oh like you're a Black girl, but you don't have any curves. Like stuff like that, it's like it's usually from like white people who would say that.

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So you just – it's like you know yeah

Ayisi: Yeah, and Rebecca how about you?

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Rebecca: know I definitely agree. Like, if you like, it's like you have to fit in like a perfect box like if you don't have certain things that are supposed to make you Black then it's like you're not Black enough.

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But at the same time, they like take things like, for example, I – just assuming that we're always angry and like they just look at you and assume you're angry.

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Or like you're loud, or like you like, to fight and stuff like that, like that a lot of that. Like I have people be like – oh like I know she can fight – like no I like to sit down and mind my business.

Ayisi: Yeah.

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Rebecca: It's like those types of things – like people just make those assumptions and like it's like irritating. I think it gets to a point where they forget, you have feelings, other than just like –

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anger. We're not always angry or anything like that. And then again like Kaya said, like they have this idea of like what a Black women is supposed to be. So, if you're not those things they make it seem like –

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you are not Black in a way – which is like weird for like someone who's not even Black to like tell you that, like oh you don't like stereotypical Black things like

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oh – like you listen to like that, like we don't all just listen to hip hop and rap and like we don't all look the same like.

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We have a variety of looks – like it's not just we look like what you see on TV.

Kaya: Yeah, especially like us. Like we all grew up in the same environment in the same town, but we're expected to act different behave different like different things

Ayisi: exactly

Rebecca: Like we grew up together, yes.

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Ayisi: And I was just gonna say – we're maybe like the three – of four or five Black girls in our entire graduating class so

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how do you think that the lack of diversity on the screen and the direct translation into the lack of diversity in your lives has affected, how you feel about yourself and how

00:07:54.810 –> 00:08:07.470

you think – things you think you may be able to accomplish or maybe not now, but maybe more as a kid – if you felt kind of deterred in anyway, because you didn't see that kind of representation in real life or on TV?

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[Both Rebecca and Kaya start to speak at once]

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Rebecca: Sorry um I was gonna say – like I think I don't know about you guys, but like I noticed a shift like growing up in like a mostly white neighborhood like.

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Between like middle schoolish kind of, that's when like Black culture became more like popular like white kids started liking it type of thing.

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So, you saw a shift between like people picking on you, for certain things to suddenly like liking that about you, and that was the only thing they liked about you.

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And so, it was like it was irritating on both sides because it's like okay like as a young kid you grew up like people are talking about your hair and like.

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they just expect that you're dumb for some reason yeah like

Ayisi: yes, yes

Rebecca: you're poor, you don't have a dad like all of those things – and then

00:08:57.810 –> 00:09:04.560

slowly this shift and like people are just suddenly in tune with Black culture, now they like –

they like the way you dress they like –

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oh, like where did you – like just a lot of questions. I like your hair – suddenly – like you do

mind? Like I think it's just like there's a lot of pressures regardless like whether people

00:09:14.820 –> 00:09:25.470

accept it or not, because they don't accept it in the way that they're supposed to like – okay you

different – I'm gonna leave it at that. It's just like infiltrating in like who you are and it's like

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I just come to school here – like that's it.

Ayisi: Yeah

Kaya: It's also like a part of like your success like – like we're all applying to college and stuff

like that, like we're all getting good grades, or like whatever and

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I've had people I talked about like affirmative action as like being attributed to like

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getting into a school that I got into. Or like – oh like you got that because you're Black. Or like –

oh, they doing that because they don't want to seem racist – and stuff like that. It's like – why

can't I just be successful

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because I'm successful? Like I'm not talking about your race – like when you're telling me that

you've got a good grade on your test. Like all – that like it's just

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people like either want to acknowledge how race affects you – but – or they don't acknowledge it at all. It's usually not in a positive way.

**Part Two**

00:10:13.620 –> 00:10:19.740

Ayisi: And do you think that all the people thinking automatically just assuming you're not smart or your got this because

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of your race – do you think that that ever affected what you thought about your own ability like maybe more so if you when you were younger?

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Or like maybe you were less likely to speak up because you felt because you've been told that you were not smart enough or assumed that you weren't smart enough?

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Both Rebecca and Kaya: Yeah.

Rebecca: like I I'm pretty sure like cuz like – I like – when people like find out you're smart or like you do well, like they kind of like – they're shocked.

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And then, like you, kind of feel like there were times, where I would like just play dumb – like no joke.

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Because it was just like sometimes you feel like you know what – like, let me just fall back – because it's just like okay. I'm like – certain types of kids

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are supposed to be smart and it's like kind of that comparison, like, for example, like Asian kids are expected to be smart by nature.

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And then, if you're not smart or like you don't understand something, then it's like oh like – you're Asian or something like that – so then like on the contrast you are smart and it's just like –

00:11:18.810 –> 00:11:31.950

it's not like when they find out your smart it's not like an encouraging thing. It's just very like a – oh – like how did that happen?

Ayisi: Yeah, yeah – like yeah – like you're some type of exception.

Rebecca: yeah or like – like where did you come from?

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Kaya: Yeah, especially growing up like where we grew up.

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Like I – like as a kid – like I wasn't really surrounded by like anybody that wasn't white most of the time, and so, when you're like the only kid that might be educated on like your history or like Black history. You're –

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you don't want to speak up because of this idea of being sensitive or like oh like you can't take it – like you're like it's just a joke stuff like that.

Ayisi: Yep

?: so then like

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you just feel like you're being silenced or that like even if you were to talk that you shouldn't –

um –

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I feel like that just carries over into other things. Like if you feel like you can't talk about one subject and you feel like you can't talk about a lot of subjects.

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Um, especially when it like relates to your identity

Ayisi: Yeah, I definitely get that and do you think if

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Black women in general, just had more role models to look up to like even just in movies and shows that were

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in roles that weren't so stereotypical that might have been different growing up and even not even just the way you perceive yourself, but in the way that your peers, like other people who aren't Black might have perceived you?

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Kaya: Yeah, definitely. I feel like if other people saw – like

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I feel like Disney is like one of those shows where like they take on like kind of a serious subject and you like see how it affects the character, sometimes if they did, that with like Black struggles, then maybe kids could see like –

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the emotional perspective of like how it actually affects Black kids; like maybe – maybe it's not just a joke. Like if they explain the history in the

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show this character, but also if they just show Black characters in a positive life, like being successful.

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People are less likely to be like – oh like you know, like where did you come from things like – because they're seeing that representation – they're seeing that Black people are smart like can do what they want to do all that.

Ayisi: Yeah.

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Rebecca: I agree, and I think also people would be able to approach like

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us more normally. Like there's nothing that makes us like – like in terms of like personality and like things you like. Like it's not like – we're really not all that different from like the rest of you like – it's not like –

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Oh, like you have to go search up like – what do Black people like to eat? We all like the

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same thing, and so I think if they like understood that they would be like okay like I'm just going to approach this person like any – like the same way, you would approach your white friend.

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And then it's just also understanding like historical context to certain things because I feel like because our education system doesn't really like prioritize that.

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So then, like people will like – you know – be saying sensitive stuff and stuff like that and see it as no big deal, but if they understood the whole thing they would understand why it's a big deal to like someone else.

Ayisi: Yeah.

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Um – last question is just what do you think can be done better to fix this issue, especially for young girls that are growing up idolizing movie characters who don't often look like them? What do you think could be done to combat this so they don't have to go through as much struggles?

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Kaya: I'd say, overall, more representation. Representation is never a bad thing for people, especially marginalized groups who aren't really seeing themselves in the media

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Um, etc. and just –

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even just more conversation in general, like opening up the conversation, maybe even schools like for young children.

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Just like having more of this like diversity, I don't want to say diversity, training, but like something like that – you know because it actually like,

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even for like young kids, like that's where it starts. Like that's really helpful if people are feeling that they're not being represented.

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Rebecca: Yeah, I agree, and like – also like – even like in books – like if kids could like – open a book and like see themselves like in, like a normal story like –

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it would help a lot like and people it's, not just for those marginalized kids but those kids who

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they don't interact – like if you live in a mostly white town, you probably don't interact with Black people that often. So, you can see them like they're not –

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they're not like foreign. Like they're not just like wild animals you've just never seen before, like they're

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very normal. They play toys, just like you and stuff like that. And so, like Kaya said, like the representation like is important because

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you need to know that these people exist in society. Like you can think like not even just with Black people – like Native Americans. Like there are kids who like genuinely think they're extinct, which is a problem –

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there's no representation for them.

Ayisi: Yeah.

Rebecca: It's like you have to show that they exist and, like they are no different –

Ayisi: Yeah

Rebecca: and if they are different, like those differences aren't like –

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a big deal. Like you acknowledge them as a good thing, not a bad thing. Ayisi: Yeah, exactly.

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And now just going back to our very first question about your favorite movie – now that we've

kind of talked about it more do you think

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that you can tell me your favorite movie now? And do you think it has anything to do with

diversity – or if it doesn't have anything to do with like what you see in the characters – do you

think that more inclusion within the movie would have helped you as a child?

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Kaya: The movie I chose was the Polar Express, and I remember there being one Black character

in the movie.

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But I feel like there was like a lot of kids and they were like all white kids so maybe if there is

more Black kids they would have shown, like the connection between Black and white kids and

how they interact versus just like this one isolated girl in like her interactions with everybody.

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Even though that is kind of telling – of like

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the school system anyway, but I'm just showing that more interaction, I think, would make people more inclusive

Ayisi: Yeah, and it also seems kind of like –

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she was – she might have been put in the movie just as like the token Black girl. That she was portrayed in like a decent way in which they weren't –

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her race was never really mentioned, which sometimes is a good thing, just to show that, like Black little girls are just the same as anyone else just trying to have fun, so I think that was good. And how about you Rebecca?

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Rebecca: So, I think my favorite movie has to be like the Cinderella but, like the version with Brandi in it, and the reason why is cuz

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look – the dad was white and then the mom was Black and then the prince was Asian. And like as a kid you didn't question that – like you know what, I mean –

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and then you have like a Black princess finally, like you, didn't question anything at all, but like the representation was all there. And I feel like –

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for kids – like as long as they see it – like they're not going to question it – like as a kid I didn't  question like how

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an Asian Prince was created from a Black and white mom.

Ayisi: Yeah

Rebecca: and it was just really cool to see – like you know what I mean.

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And like also like Twitches – with like Tia and Tamera on Disney – like seeing Black people in like something that isn't like a drama, or like a slave movie

Ayisi: Yes

Rebecca: is like very refreshing. Because I think like –

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like a lot of kids like discouraged themselves – like especially a lot of Black girls discouraged themselves from like exploring like sci-fi.

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And, like those types of things because they're not in them so it's like – like I used to hate sci-fi until like recently. Sci-fi and horror I hated both those genres until

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recently – they've been coming up with a lot of stuff and I actually like really like them. So, like again – like put us in them.

Ayisi: Yeah, and I also think a lot of people are –

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they try to shy away from those things because they're considered inherently white because, as you said, they don't put people like us in them.

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So – they feel as if it's a really like exclusive group that they can't enjoy.

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And we have a lot to offer – like horror movies, with Black people they've – they've been doing really well and like yeah really interesting and like.

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we're able to tie a historical – like we're able to tie historical components into like a timeline like that's crazy link and I think a lot of people like of all races enjoy it so –

Kaya: Yeah, like Us and Get Out. I got so into horror when I was watching movies, because of that reason.

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Ayisi: All right, well, thank you guys for that

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and have a good day.

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Once again, I'd like to thank Kaya and Rebecca for joining me to speak on such an important topic and so graciously sharing their experiences with us.

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I hope that this podcast was able to shed some light and give a new perspective on an issue that is often overlooked yet affects so many Black women, thank you.