

Let's Boogie Woogie in Museums! Episode 5: Racism and Museums

[Music & Title...] BOOGIE-WOOGIE IN MUSEUMS. MUSEUM BOOGIE-WOOGIE.

Hosts: Have you ever been racist?
The way they behave, it's not right.
Boogie-woogie in museums. A sonic and transatlantic crossing.
Against racism. Against racism. Against racism.

This is episode 5

Hosts: Hi, I'm Isaac. I'm Sofiane. I'm Jade. I'm Havrunnisa. I'm Marine. I'm Yousseffa.
I'm Sofia.

Are you facing racism? Several times a day, a year, a month?

Students: No. No.

We never had that in college.

People of our generation, they're not racist. Like, we're normal, we've always lived with the black people and everything.

Yes, that's true, man.

But it exists in the world, just not here in France. Not too much in Strasbourg.

Why did you say "OK" like that? Does it shock you? What kind of racism is there?

Students Discuss: Yes, sometimes they show me that/act like that, girls.

There's a girl, not even three days like that, she showed me this.

It's been a long time. Even sometimes in the classrooms, there are girls who speak badly to us. It was not long ago, there was a girl who spoke badly to me. I threw a pen over there because she said it in class, "...you black bastards. You see, you stink." She has no right to say that. There are many things we have seen. Sometimes I can't even get up to go to school. Because sometimes it hurts.

Because they are young people their behavior is not so good. Because I'm not saying it's them, but it's their parents. That's all. Even before, I had a friend, all the time, I walked with him. But he told me that his parents told him he shouldn't go with black people.

Host: Nine out of ten Black people in metropolitan France say they are victims of racial discrimination in their daily lives, according to the latest barometer from the representative council of Black associations.

Students Discuss: Some of them are doing micro-aggressions and they make racist jokes. For example, if two people of color are arrested and then there are racist jokes.

Someone makes a joke and there's a black person next to him, but he laughs too. But if he takes it badly then that's different. But if he also laughs...

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I wanted to say something. There are the videos of racist jokes, as we talked before, but that was more in the context of humor. There are the real racist things; the racist videos where people are really being insulted, etc. and it's not the same thing. So, you have to know... How do I say? You have to know which joke goes in which box. In humor or in seriousness.

The problem can be that not everyone puts things in the same boxes, and then that can cause problems.

When you watch the video, you're not going to say it's not funny, it's embarrassing; but when you say that joke to somebody, you have to know the person you're telling; you're not going to do it to just anybody.

Yeah, you have to have the context. Because there are some, they have the wrong context.

Me, if I do this to a friend of mine, a real friend of mine, he won't take it badly. But if I do it to a guy I've known for two days, it's normal that he would take it badly.

It depends. For example, I don't know, at recess, you can laugh with a friend of ours if he is willing to laugh too. Me, I've seen it before, for example, we've already made jokes, we'll say something racist, but *bof*. It was funny.

What I meant was that maybe there is, as he said, between friends, that people don't take it seriously. They will not repeat that in front of people because they know very well that it is something they do not take seriously. So, it doesn't stay in their minds to think about why they said that, why I didn't react to it.

We know almost everyone. There are many different origins, many of the same origins. I'm not going to say that there is racism but there are jokes. As before in the joke category, not in the serious category to insult each other, etc. But then, sometimes when there is an exception, they don't agree. Then they tell us it doesn't make them laugh.

Then we stop and we talk to those who want to blame us. For example, I am talking to him, he will start to talk to me, he will tell us, etc... and so on. And that's how we're going to laugh.

Host: How can I be sure that I will not hurt anyone? How can I be sure that the person who hears me while he does nothing doesn't feel deeply humiliated, assaulted, victim of a burden that she doesn't want to carry every moment of her life?

Student: Some people associate you with your origin or skin color. Others don't, it's not racism. But like, I don't know how to say this but when they talk to you, they want to make you understand something about race. I don't know how to explain it, but it's happened to me a lot of times.

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Something like this has happened to me before. I was sitting in the tram. There's an old lady who came in. They wanted me to let her sit, so I stood up. And I let her sit down and she said, "Yeah, it's always people like you who take the place on the tram..." things like that. And I didn't go to any trouble asking her why she said that. I didn't calculate it. I left.

Host: Just because you don't say anything doesn't mean you agree with a situation.

Assaults are a daily occurrence.

We are judged on our appearance.

We are categorized.

We're thought of as inferior.

And we end up thinking different.

I ask you, is that the world in which you want to live?

A world where you always have to prove that you are legitimate to be there.

[Piano music continues...]

Joyce: Racism is usually a power relationship. If you don't respect the other, it's already a first form of distance. And that can be enough. It can be enough to create problems, already.

Diane Albisser: When we look at Western painting, we have a representation, either it can be the fantasized wild, both feminine, so very erotic, or masculine with a form of power, but almost approaching the beast, finally. Or we have the representation of the slave, the servant, the disabled person.

Laurent Védrine: Racist images, caricatural images of black people, they really come out after abolition. We are the heirs of that story. Today, if there is very strong racial discrimination against black people, the origin comes from there and from that story before and after the abolitions.

Roger Somé: What is the education we give our children? I am edified when I talk about Africa in my classes with students at the university. I am humbled because they have no knowledge at all. Everything is to be done. When you enter a class, well, you have to be able to make the children know that they are in a diverse world, that they are in a now diverse country. This is the reality of France today, which we do not look at. What is the model of society that we show to children? We must show young audiences that there are forms of artistic expression that these forms of artistic expression have come from elsewhere. So that from that point on, the representation of society by children will be a diverse representation. Today, we have the Quai Branly museum, right? Why do we have the Quai Branly museum? Why? Why are not all these objects in the Louvre? I call it maintaining the distinction. Why? Well, Oceania, the Native Americans and Africa are not civilized enough to

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enter the Louvre. That is the unspoken word. We considered that all these populations, which were taken under the leadership of colonization, Well, all these populations are culturally represented through the objects that are kept in French institutions, even European. All these populations are represented. Therefore, if you want to build national unity, It is necessary to make sure that the people who come from these populations and who are now members of this French society, even European, that these people-may feel that they are also represented at a national level.

If these objects are on the side, how do you want to produce unity? You see people who are white, people who are white, we use this expression purposely to make ourselves understood and well, people who are white and French are not outside of these objects, from a heritage point of view. They are not outside these objects. As if the history of this country should be written in only one way or in only one direction. Is this the story we want to build; is this the unity we want to build? How do you decolonize if we don't have the courage to present what was the historical fact?

Host: Frantz Fanon said, "Racism disfigures culture". He also said, "A nation, a people, cannot be unconsciously racist. Racism is not an accidental discovery. It is not a hidden, concealed element. It is not required of superhuman forces to bring this to light. Racism is a matter of course.

How can we change the representations, the stories that feed us? Like cinema, for example.

DA: For example, Django, for most people, Tarantino, with a black cowboy, I think it was seen as a wink. People thought it was funny or cool, but actually, no, it was the reality. And that, nobody... well, now, maybe slowly, thanks to documentaries or other things, we will realize it. About one in four cowboys, by the end of 1800, was black, yet America built an image of the western, the American West and the cowboy, almost exclusively white. There were even black cowboys who were famous and were represented in the movies by a white man. John Wayne - that is it. So, this is to say how much we can transform history by the image.

And in France, even today, I think there is progress, there is openness, there is a willingness to give other roles, but... black people often have the same roles, finally we will clarify, we will say, for this character, we take a Black because it is a Black. We're not going to say just, he's a man. Well, it's rare, I think. And that's what needs to change. I think it's happening today.

Host: What do we do with street names that bear the names of slave owners?
Racist representations in squares?

Students: My point is that we can put him in a museum and explain what he did wrong.

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You could put up signs that he's there, the statue is there with his story and everything.

Aude-Marie Fritz: The elements must always be taken back to the historical era in which they were created, and that it is not because we look at them, study or present them that we necessarily endorse what they represent, but it does bring a reflection on other eras of history and other ways of looking at things.

LV: In the public space, Modeste Testas is a statue that was erected in 2019 to show also in this public space the fact that this very beautiful city of Bordeaux which overlooks the banks of the Garonne, what we call the *Ville de Pierre*, It also became very rich thanks to colonial trade and especially slave labor. So, this can also be a way of giving visibility back to those people who have been enslaved.

Host : In Boston, USA, they destroyed the statue of Abraham Lincoln.

Isn't he the one who ended slavery?

You think it's just him? The Blacks, they didn't fight?

RS: There is a book by Louis Sala-Molins. He has a chapter in this book called "Condorcet en gémissant". Condorcet en gémissant.

Yes, why? Condorcet fought for the liberation of slaves. But this same Condorcet, defends Louis Sala-Molins, lived on the subsidies of the slave trade.

Diderot, same! Diderot, same! Voltaire, same! Montesquieu, same! Montesquieu...

He was even a member of a slave company in Bordeaux, Montesquieu.

But you saw everything he wrote, Montesquieu? See? So, I will simply say that there is also what I can call the human paradox. And somewhere, as a man, we are not perfect. So, I'm just going to say, yes, history is written by the dominant, but let's keep fighting, let's keep talking about it, and there are things that change.

My dream, which I sincerely dream of today, well, it would be that tomorrow we could talk about African art in France, as we do about Picasso in France.

Host: Museums were created with a Universalist desire to open access to works of art to everyone. They have evolved as wars and political and colonial issues have developed. However, it is really in the 21st century that museums are beginning to question their social commitments and the role they must play in society.

MD: Museums, both in the United States and in France, have begun to work on this notion of a memory of slavery, of making invisible things visible, of having a dimension of studying their own collections. That is, Bordeaux, it is 700 m2 which allows us to question this memory of slavery and colonies. In the contemporary museums that have just opened, there is the Immigration Museum in Paris. So, it's a real reflection. It is a reflection and then it is this

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idea that we cannot make blackouts, if I dare say, on parts of the story. That story took some time to get looked at. There's work, but it's work that is, I would say, at the level of society, actually. That's it, yes. Museums, in fact, are a reflection of a society at one point, and then we actually try to open up what society is today.

Hélène Fourneaux: The museum is a reflection of its time. It is clear that it really is there, since the 2010s, for example at the Musée d'art modern [of Strasbourg], we are interested in the issue of gender, and we want women artists to be as present as male artists. The issues of representation of black people in collections that too is something that is important. It is also choices that are made by professionals to say to themselves here - now we will do this because there are debates in society, because there is still discrimination and we have said museums, they have nevertheless for a long time perpetuated forms of social representation, which made it possible to feel completely, excluded.

So now we say, here it is time to question ourselves in our own professional practices and precisely allow these spaces of debate, even if they are much shaken, even if they have questions that are actually sometimes disturbing, but to say, there it is, let's go.

It is time to rethink the way we see the world and the equality of beings.

We are equal.

We are equal.

Students: Do you feel comfortable in a museum?

I only go with the college, that's all. Because it's not really my thing to look at what dates from... back then and that. Bah yeah.

Then, it depends, if it is museums where there are bare statues, I'm not comfortable, but...well, that's fine, I only go with the college, otherwise... It's not just that, I have other things to do.

Students: My ideal museum is a museum where everyone goes.

A museum with the best manga's.

A museum about food. I don't know the best dishes in the world from certain cultures.

HF: An ideal museum would be a place where you can enjoy being there, where you can actually think, ask questions about society, but also simply enjoy beautiful works of art. Also to laugh, to have completely free living spaces.

Host: Structures, representations are slowly changing. People change too. A thought, a word, a gesture, a drawing, a music, it can contribute to go towards the other. It can contribute to respect for others, to listening. Today, here, they are museums, schools, individuals who work there and are plural. This is also the case in this podcast. Behind the words, there are individuals... who sometimes have very different opinions on the same issue. Here too, we

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are in a form of biased representation of society, which is not reality, but consists of different realities, diverse worlds, accords and disagreements that together create a kind of music. Listen to it together?

Joyce: And I think if people were more proud of who they are, they would be less afraid of being erased by someone else. When you're proud of who you are, it's very pathos to say that, but I like to take this metaphor. Usually when you look at a cloud, you see the shape it takes. It's me, I see this shape. Another one next to will have another shape, I would be very interested to see what he sees. And this is one of the few situations where we put ourselves in that position, I would like to know how you see things. In life, it's very rare. You are closed, you stay by yourself. And I would like to bring that aspect. Finally, me, in dance, every time, the people I met, who made me evolve, that was it. You have the right to exist. Your opinion has the right to exist. Take it on. Go all the way. Carry it. Make it evolve, etc. In any case, you must feel legitimate towards yourself, and then you can express what you feel, what you are, and coexist with the other.

Then even evolve, change your mind, improve yourself, or improve others. Acceptance is not a campaign plan sometimes; it's just a way to get to the next day. That's it, it's not easy.

MD: As I've been able to tell the youth, there's this quote "I hate hatred" [Tomi Ungerer]. "I hate hatred" is a phrase that says it all to me."

Host/s: Creolization is a mixture of art or language that produces the unexpected. It is a way to transform so as to continue without getting lost. "It is a space where dispersion allows to come together, where culture shocks, disharmony, disorder, interference become creative." Édouard Glissant.

[Outro music plays...]

All: Why is there racism? Just because I'm black, they've hated me all these years.

This was the 5th episode of Boogie Woogie des musées.

With students from Collège Solignac in Strasbourg.

Joyce; and Diane Albisser, Hélène Fourneaux, and Laurent Védrine, Roger Sommé, Martine Debaene, Caroline Flauss.

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Conceived by Marine Angé and Sébastien Troendlé, Martine Debaene and Hélène Fourneaux.

Storytelling: piano Sébastien Troendlé.

Storytelling: sound production, Marine Angé.

Mixing: Sébastien Pierre-Jean.