

"I sincerely hope I shall always be a credit to my race and to the motion picture industry."

This document is a quote of Hattie McDaniel who was the first African-American who succeeded in winning the Academy Award for the best supporting actress in 1939 for the role of Mammy in "Gone with the Wind". This sentence indeed was pronounced on February the 29th of 1940 at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles where the 12th Academy Awards ceremony was held.



Hattie's Life

Hattie was born on the 10th, 1895, in Kansas but she was raised with her 12 elder siblings in Denver, Colorado where she discovered her musical and dramatic talent and where she became the first black woman to be broadcasted over American radio. With the onset of the Great Depression, however, she worked as a bathroom attendant in a Wisconsin's club that usually hired only white performers but after understanding her priceless talent the owner decided to make an exception. Hattie performed at the club for more than a year until she left for Los Angeles where in 1932 she debuted in the motion picture industry in which, since then, she acted mainly in the role of the servant. This made her a controversial figure in the liberal black community, which sought to end Hollywood's stereotyping. But when criticized for taking such roles, McDaniel responded that she would rather play a maid in the movies than be one in real life. However, at the end of World War II, the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and other liberal black groups lobbied Hollywood for an end to the stereotyped roles in which McDaniel had become typecast, and consequently her Hollywood opportunities declined. She died in 1952 after a heart attack due to a breast cancer.

The Quote

It was the first time ever a black woman won an Academy Award and this quote is the result of the speech Hattie held in front of an almost completely white audience with the voice broken by emotion. Thanks to these precious words we can understand some interesting things. The first one that catches our eye is the fact that still in 1940 she had to talk about the "race" when expressing herself about her beloveds so the mentality, that traced a deep division between Blacks and Whites, of the Americans in the early 40s, appears perfectly clear. But there is something more and a bit hidden, when claiming that she wanted to be a "credit [...] to the motion picture industry" she also makes her position in the Hollywood company explicit. She really

feels she belongs to this reality, that she deserves to be there exactly as a white man does. She is not ashamed to be part of something that sometimes discriminate “her people” because she is fighting it from the inside destroying piece by piece the stereotypes of which she was a victim just exorcising them by playing as well as she could. What it’s familiar can’t defeat you.

Consideration

As far as I concern this quote has something particular because between the words it is possible to find the concepts that characterize a lot of the African-American History. The need of cataloguing humanity in opposite races and the necessity of being the pride of the own. But the value of this sentence is not limited to this because in addition it was pronounced by a visionary woman who had already understood that equality is only possible when you are the first to treat yourself as equal and for that she was able to overcome the racist barriers the discrimination imposed.



Sitography

<https://youtu.be/e7t4pTNZshA> “Hattie McDaniel winning best supporting actress”

<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1939> “Oscars.org”

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hattie-McDaniel> “Encyclopeadia Britannica”

<http://www.quotabelle.com/author/hattie-mcdaniel> “Hattie McDaniel”