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ARTH 1204

Film Assignment

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Escape to acceptance

It was New York city 1987, when the ballroom scene was becoming mainstream. In Paris is burning we are invited into the gay culture which is ballroom and all aspect of it. Ballroom is a place where legendary houses compete for trophies in various categories. The ballroom is a place to escape reality and with winning a category is a high honor from your peers. Fashion plays a great influence on ballroom. Ballroom is majority of black and Latino LGBTQ male. It's their chance to dress as the man they want to be in society that they can't normally do because society at the time for white men and women of the middle and upper class. Ballroom is a home for queer kids that family, have disowned them for who they are becoming.

House are gay gangs, and the gang will battle by walking in a category at the balls. The house is legendary because of who is the house mother and how many trophies, more like grand prize trophies. The mother of the house is the one that works the hardest. The mother's job is just the same as mine and your mother at home. They make sure there is a roof over our heads, food in our bellies and clothing on our backs. Speaking about clothing. clothing is very important to a house especially if they want to win runway categories. Their style of dress differs from house to house. The more legendary the house is the more high fashion they dress like haute couture to make a bold statement.

Many of the contestants at the ball demonstrated different ways of being able to express themselves through feminine gowns and clothing that they wore. One cast member that truly stood out amongst all was Pepper LaBeija. Pepper LaBeija was an American drag queen and fashion designer from the Bronx. When Pepper was not onstage she was William Jackson, who sometimes dressed as a man. However, Miss LaBeija was known for breaking traditional gender norms by wearing feminine clothing that she designed herself.

She was known as the last remaining queen of the “Harlem drag balls”. Miss LaBeija was also well known for her Egyptian runway performances. At this one ball performance Pepper wore, an extravagant all gold, embellished dress that she designed herself. The gown that she created embraced drag ball culture, and gave her the ability to be able to express her true femininity. Pepper appeared to be the most prominent performer at the ball. Due to the fact that the audience cheered her name as she strut the runway in her golden shimmering extravagant gown. Pepper LaBeija also became known as “The Mother” and the house's younger members were her children. Miss LaBeija took part in numerous drags balls, and won approximately two hundred and fifty trophies.

Within the film, the outfits worn spoke loudly for these characters, in an emotional strong way, such as the fact that they know they won't get the recognition they want in their society. But it also demonstrated that fashion was their tool to open up to the world and among themselves. Not only a way to “escape” the expectations but to express and blossom their confidence. Reason for the development and structure of the Drag culture becoming to be during this time. The characters mentioned that they have big dreams of being wealthy, famous and to fully afford luxury and desired clothing. They have also brought up that they have admiration from their idols. The film personally showed us that these characters are filled with passion, love and are

dedicated to do whatever it is to continue to follow their dreams and respond to society in making a change. No matter how you dress, your sexuality, status, race etc, there needs to be acceptance, not hide and not have shame in who we are. Fashion helped boost and symbolize the confidence among these characters.

Overall, the film was mainly the rise of the Drag culture within the LGBTQ community. Movement of empowerment, acceptance and the loud confidence that the drag balls accomplished. "Paris is Burning" touched upon several big themes such as race, class, gender and sexual orientation. Setting in New York City during the late 1980s, drag balls were established by lower class drag queens for groups by each house culture to compete. Voguing, dancing and presenting a fashionable performance. Capturing the main significance of not being afraid of who they are even with carrying differences. Fashion in the film is like a form of their voice to stand out. A beautiful and admirable way to pass on an influence and inspire society to keep building up on dreams and desires without any shame of one's self.