REGGIE YATES SPEAKS AT THE CAMBRIDGE UNION

The Cambridge Union Society welcomed actor, television presenter and radio DJ Reggie Yates. Reggie was first probed to state something we don’t know about him. He told the chamber that his route to becoming a documentary maker ‘wasn’t planned’, instead it ‘happened organically’. Which meant that he was ‘learning and growing with his audience in a way not’ other presenters have done.

Reggie stated that as he a child he was one of the kids who had ‘far too much to say’. So his mum wanted ‘to find him something to do outside of the house’. He lived near the Arsenal football grounds so his mum attempted to get him enrolled in the junior gunners programme but he was ‘crap at football’. They next tried the Scouts but Reggie refused to wear their uniform. So he ended up going to a drama club. The minute he arrived ‘he was so excited’. It was something he knew he could do. There were other people like him that had always ‘wanted to answer back but never had the appropriate forum to do so’. Improvisation in drama club was the perfect opportunity for him to ‘answer back’. Reggie had always been into art and culture because of the environment he grew up in. His dad was the kind of musician that ‘could play any instrument’.

Reggie then began talking about the documentary films he has coming up. He had been filming in Australia recently and created two films, one about the treatment of the aborigine community and another about the affect of a drug called ice on Melbourne. The aborigine community do not normally let journalists into their community as they ‘have been stitched up in the past’ but after his production company sent over a DVD of a film he made in South Africa they let him into the community. His films have allowed him Reggie to see areas of Australia that he would never have seen if he was just travelling. His recognised this was a great ‘privilege’.

The documentaries that Reggie makes are ‘not about’ him. He wants to ‘start interesting conversation’, such as the conversation he sparked about mental health, which he believes ‘affects more of us than we think’. He believes that ‘we have all experienced something that will be on the mental health spectrum at some point’. Reggie was asked about how he stayed in control when he came up against strong views that he disagreed with in filming. He corrected the question stated that he had ‘not always remained in control’. He used to get frustrated, such as when he had to do a stint in a slum in Kenya. But he realised that getting angry ‘cannot change the situation’. Reggie developed his ability to ‘put the issue first’ and push his emotions ‘way down the totem pole’.
Asked about the definition of masculinity, Reggie replied stating that he believed it was a flexible concept. Men are now ‘far more emotionally aware’ and care much ‘more about their appearance’. Gender roles have transformed over the years so that men now encourage rather than are intimidated by feminism. In African culture especially Reggie noted that ‘to admit an issue with mental health is to admit defeat’. Mental health issues are unfortunately ‘swept under the carpet’. As an example, when Reggie sought to seek therapy, his mum thought this was because she had been a bad parent. But he felt this was a generational issue that will be increasingly corrected with generations to come. Reggie recognised that his filming ‘takes a lot out of’ himself. His team have started thinking of starting sessions after every film to work through the things that they have experienced.

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For footage of the event go to https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc
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