How Hollywood Stole My Identity

African American Representation in the films Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner and Get Out

Rincome til B.A.-prófs

Rebekka Mateke
Kt.: 121092-3369

Leiðbeinandi: Björn Þór Vilhjálmsson

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Abstract

This thesis gives a thorough analysis of the two films, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out* to explore whether these films show any positive representation of an African American identity. The films will be framed within the history of Hollywood, and then more broadly the social history of race and identity in the United States.

The thesis is broken down into three chapters. The first chapter concerns the concept of identity; the way in which African American identity has often been framed in opposition to whiteness and the white experience in America is also interrogated. The works of James Baldwin, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer provide the theoretical background to this discussion of race as an element of identity, as well as within the framework of a cultural industry. The second chapter explores the transition from Old Hollywood to New Hollywood, embodied in the emergence of Sidney Poitier as a major star in the film acting world. Poitier’s character in the film *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967) was both sexless and non-threatening to appeal to white audiences. W.E.B. DuBois’s theory of double consciousness articulates the frustration of this conflict in identity. Chapter three addresses the film *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017) and the continuation of racial tension in the United States. White liberalism ostensibly supports the elimination of racial inequality, yet as *Get Out* highlights, where white dominance is challenged, the promotion of equality falters. DuBois’ theory is an applicable analytical tool for the protagonist’s lack of agency throughout the film. A comparison of *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out* closes the chapter. The struggle for identity and acceptance persists, as shown through the historical and social contexts of both films.
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Introduction: Commemorate the Statue of American Racism

This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed -- why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent Mall, and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.

Speaking at his inauguration as the president of the United States, Barack Obama tried to articulate the historical importance of his election, and the way that it pointed to a future less rife with racial intolerance and prejudice. Only a generation ago, his own father, in a time of segregation, could have been turned away from being served at a restaurant. Now, the son holds the highest office in the land. The significance of the moment was not lost on the nation as a whole. Obama’s election marked a point where it was, for the first time, conceivable to speak of a “post-racial” America. At last, perhaps, the racial inequality and prejudice which lay behind the dark past of the nation could be laid to rest and now an era of ‘color-blindness’ could arise.

However, during Barack Obama’s two terms, there was little evidence of improved social conditions for people of color in America. Indeed, if utopian racial equality had been achieved, there would seem to be no need for movements such as Black Lives Matter and Antifa. That there was, however, is beyond question. In 2015, FBI crime data showed African American “victims accounted for nearly two-thirds of the year-over-year increase, which translates to 944 additional black people murdered out of just under 1,500 additional victims nationwide”.

In other words, evidence seems to be lacking for the contention that the United States is to be considered a “post-racial” country. Furthermore, in 2016, the country elected Donald J. Trump as president, an individual infamous for his outspoken refusal

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to believe that Barack Obama was born on American soil. Trump’s contention is especially toxic because it undermines the accomplishment of having an African American president and his legitimacy as the leader of the United States.\(^3\)

President Trump’s remarks have not grown less toxic since his championing of the “birther” conspiracy. On the contrary, his public stance on a variety of issues has only enhanced a feeling of racial resentment. As his presidency continues, the waking nightmare faced by African Americans and people of color continues to bubble to the surface. The most recent controversy came from the Charlottesville protest in which neo-Nazis and white supremacists were protesting the removal of a statue of Confederate General, Robert E. Lee. This escalated into a man driving over and killing one individual and injuring nineteen other counter-protestors with his car.\(^4\) Not only is it disturbing for white supremacy to be re-emerging as a narrative within the nation, it is also a disturbing idea to have the President falter in his condemnation of white race superiority, by putting blame on “both sides”.\(^5\) This depicts the dark reality that African Americans must yet endure in order to, perhaps, one day live up to the fantasy of the American dream.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time this has appeared in the American zeitgeist. African American slaves were not considered citizens in the United States and therefore were counted as three fifths of the whole number of white citizens of that state. This defined them as a subservient race to be subjugated under the white race.\(^6\) Furthermore, it was a way for the white English to maintain their own race as the only one worthy of citizenry and thereby diminishing any societal development for African Americans. Importantly, almost a century before the birth of the US, laws were enacted which had the effect of white English women being bound in slavery, were they to marry an African American slave, in order to protect the white race who clearly saw a threat in


\(^5\) Shear and Haberman.

\(^6\) Baltzell, George W. "Constitution of the United States - We the People." Constitution for the United States - We the People. Accessed October 29, 2017. http://constitutionus.com/. “Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years…three fifths of all other Persons.”
miscegenation. The laws however did not pertain to the sexual relationships between white men and black slaves; that was deemed of no particular note. Indeed, the rape of slaves was accepted practice. The danger, on the other hand, lay in white women having sexual relations with African American men. This fear would reverberate throughout American culture for the next two centuries. One reflection of such a fear can be found in American cinema.

American films, no matter how fantastical or outrageous, always function as indicators of social reality. One recent example is Get Out (2017), written and directed by Jordan Peele, which has been praised for capturing the discomfort of the African American experience in the current moment. Chris Washington, the protagonist of the film, is an African American, who is meeting his white in-laws alongside his girlfriend in a private estate in the countryside for the first time. In this setting, he is surrounded by white faces, unlike multicultural New York, and isolated in a homogenous white culture and enclosed environment, with very few other African Americans. Those he meets appear to have been “whitewashed,” speaking and behaving in terms and patterns associated with white blueblood stereotypes. The audience is quick to confront the uneasiness that an African American can feel as he is meeting a white, liberal family. While Chris is made to feel welcome, something still feels wrong. There is a constant reminder of the color of his skin and how accepting his prospective in-laws are of him and his culture. This illustrates a horror genre point-of-view for the African American experience through the modern ideology of what white people believe color-blindness is in America. In other words, and in connection to the picture sketched above of racial relations in the contemporary moment, and, especially, under Trump, the experience of

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7 Thomas Harris Jr., and John M. Henry. Marilyn Reports. Vol. 1. (NY: I. Riley, 1809), p. 372, accessed October 28, 2017. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=tRZEAAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR1. “September 1770, Butler v. Boarman. Sect. 2. And forasmuch, as diverse free-born English, or white women, sometimes by the instigation, procurement or connivance, or their masters, mistresses, or dames, and always to the satisfaction of their lascivious, and lustful desires, and to the disgrace not only of the English, but also of many other Christian nations.” Ibid, p. 371.; and if she would decide to engage and marry a ‘negro’ “shall serve the, master of such slave, during the life of her husband...”


9 “More and more people are using 'whitewashing' to describe the practice of casting white actors as non-white characters”. Also, often taken as a general devaluing of non-white contributors in history by mainstream media sources. In the case of Get Out, the African American characters are being ‘washed’ away from any black identity and instead be left with the ideals of the dominant white race. “Whitewashing.” Merriam-Webster. Accessed January 05, 2018. https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/whitewashing-words-were-watching.
African Americans, it may be suggested, is best captured by the point of view of the horror film.\(^\text{10}\)

As an African-American and White mixed-race relationship is central to the film, a look into the sexual undercurrents of the movie is necessary. The tension of the sexual nature of their relationship is rarely touched upon as the film takes place, but is instead played out against the background of American society.

*Get Out* is not, of course, the first instance where we see a director take on the reality and subject of the sexual undercurrents lying beneath racial tensions in the United States. In *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967), directed by Stanley Kramer, a similar premise is examined but the plot is more comedic in tone. John Prentice, a successful African American (played by Sidney Poitier) is introduced to a white liberal upper-class family as their daughter’s fiancé.\(^\text{11}\) The focus of the film centers on a liberal family’s reaction to an interracial marriage. Their progressive image of themselves is challenged by their internalized prejudices which they do not acknowledge and have not overcome.

While *Get Out* also focuses on a mixed-race relationship, the time period allows for it to be more direct. The sexual relationship between Rose and Chris is present, but the focus is shifted from that of a fear of losing white women to African-American males to a mirror where the white liberal family is the predatory antagonist. These two films show layers of racial hostility in America, the sensitive and dangerous subject of miscegenation, namely white liberal families that are challenged by their white daughter engaging with a black man. What is more, they offer a snapshot of how the issue addressed in social circumstances separated by almost five decades.

The two films represent, each in their own way, how the subject of interracial relationships is a toxic one, a subject in which the American people have an almost pathological desire to avoid. Whether it is a comedy made in the late sixties by a white director to soften the controversy, or an African American writing and directing the uncanny that illustrates the horrors of the African American experience with the conflict in a secluded and distant area where he is the only black man around. Moreover, it is evident throughout history that the implication, or even the suggestion that any sexual conduct between an African American man and a white woman, is a deeply rooted white

\(^{10}\) It should be noted however that *Get Out* was produced and finished for all major purposes before Trump’s election, which, until it happened, was considered by all to be a very unlikely event.

\(^{11}\) *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.
man’s fear that, in return, becomes spiteful and vengeful action towards the African American as represented in films, an enmity that draws on distinctions reaching as far back as conceptions of citizenry itself, as the nation was being constituted – as was discussed above. This thesis will attempt to approach the delicate subject of miscegenation and the American position in their ideals of post-racial society.

The first point of comparison for these films is that they hinge on the same scenario; a white family is introduced to a prospective new family member that is black. In both cases, it is the daughter of the house who has met a black man. Both families are met with a challenge to their morality, however in the case of Get Out, it is a challenge to appear more liberal and accepting. On the other hand, Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner confronts a mainstream white liberal family with their own prejudice. Whereas the former approaches the issue of white privilege from the perspective of horror and fear, the latter fails to come to grips with the real issue of race in America. Both films, however, deal with a racially “progressive” position that falls short of the goal the country feels it has reached.

It is key to consider each film with its historical release date; what is happening in US society at the time these films have been released, and what is the social and political position the African American inhabits in these times? Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that there are two ways of approaching these histories; that of the white perspective and the African American perspective. Therefore, the social history of the time will be reflected in the corresponding film trends. The difference in the white narrative and the African American narrative serves a vital comparative criterion to shed light on racial inequality and the different perspective that the two groups have on racial experience. While it may be that a white person believes post-racial society has been achieved, the experience of an African American would give a different account.

This thesis will be structured in the following manner: The first chapter will be split in two sections, examining the contribution of socio-historical factors of the racial divide that came to be, as well as the importance of psycho-sexual allusions aimed at denigrating African Americans as a whole. It will then highlight how film history reflects upon the social contexts of the United States. The second chapter will analyze the film Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner, the social significance of its production, and the film’s perceived failure to bring forth a positive message of interracial relationships and their acceptance in the country. The result is that of a complicated position for Sidney Poitier who ended up representing an African American who seemed to have little connection
to the real lives of black people in America. For that reason, he received harsh negative reactions from those the movie sought to give this voice. The third and final chapter will be an analytical approach to the film *Get Out*, which takes a modern look at the progress that has been made in respect towards civil rights, and what is still lacking for the African American community to reach social parity.
Chapter One: The Strange Fruit in America’s History

To fully grasp the representational strategies of race in Hollywood films, it is necessary to engage with the history of racism in America. Race relations between white and black people have, since the time of slavery, been infused with a strange combination of cruelty, dominance, and fear on behalf of the white population, while tactics of survival, the struggle for freedom and civil rights, equal opportunities, and the lessening of institutional prejudice have characterized this history on the side of African–Americans. Several distinct periods can be discerned when surveying American history with respect to race relations. There is the period of slavery, its abolishment and the ensuing era of Jim Crow and social apartheid. Once these violent and directly oppressive tactics became untenable, a more insidious form of domination came into being, at times hidden behind slogans such as “the war on drugs” or upheld by private enterprise, in the form of the prison industrial complex. Lurking behind this history are tensions concerning sexual relations between the races, encoded early on in slave codes.

1.1. Slave Away from Home

During the American Revolution of 1783, Americans fought for the cause of gaining their own freedom and independence from Great Britain. Following after the conflict, the founding fathers stated the importance of their freedom in the Declaration of Independence, declaring that “all men are created equal” and the rights to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”.  

The fight for freedom during the American Revolution was for individual freedom, and fighting against tyranny and oppression. Yet there is hypocrisy with this statement in the Declaration of Independence as not all men in America at the time were equal, free, or had access to the same opportunities. African Americans were owned as slaves, and slavery was justified through claims of their inferiority compared to the white race and as such, were forcibly detained and sold from their homelands in Africa.

African Americans have struggled to understand their identity within their own country. “We didn't land on Plymouth Rock; the rock was landed on us”.  With these words, Malcolm X illustrated how the black man in America was taken away from his home and forced to live in a country where the intention was not to make him integrate into American society but rather

to force him to enrich a culture that was not his to be a part of in the first place.\textsuperscript{14} This speech was given in 1964 but prior to that, there have been numerous accounts throughout American history of struggle for African Americans to gain rights equal to that of the white man.

During the 17th century, there was a development in the classification of a race in American society. Not until there was systematic slavery did Slave Codes come into existence.\textsuperscript{15} Up until that point, there was no “negro” distinction that needed to be addressed and the important distinction between the two races was classified by class relations, religion, which was exclusively Christianity, and the privileges of being an Anglo-Saxon.\textsuperscript{16}

The African American’s conversion to Christianity was an essential distinctive identity between them and the Anglo-Saxons. Alongside rebellious act of the lower classes, this became one of the reasons that sparked fear towards the elitists’ society with the threat that one day, the lower classes of white alongside black people could overthrow the ideas of white superiority in America.\textsuperscript{17} The classification of “negro” was thus born and it became clear for white Americans that the necessity in strengthening slavery by stating new slave codes that embedded the forces of white supremacy was an essential one.\textsuperscript{18}

The Slave Codes were embedded to secure that the African American would serve the white populous with no hope of gaining any individual rights of no kind. As slavery in Virginia became the central economic force, laws were needed to protect and separate the two races, white and black, from each other.

What is noteworthy is the Virginia Slave Law 1691, it states:

\begin{verbatim}
For the prevention of that abominable mixture and suprious issue which hereafter may encrease in this dominion, as well by negroes, mulattoes, and Indians intermarrying with English, or other white women, as by their unlawfull accompying with one another, Be it enacted by the authoritie aforesaid, and it is hereby enacted, that for the time to come,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{17} The rebellious acts that is being refered to are the \textit{Bacon's Rebellion} in which resulted to “the spectre of a civil war among whites greatly frightened Virginia’s ruling elite, who took dramatic steps to consolidate their power and improve their image.” Therefore, having the authorities in Virginia to “accelerated the shift to slaves (who would never become free) on the tobacco plantations”. Eric Foner, \textit{Give Me Liberty!: An American History}. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011, p. 107.
whatsoever English or other white man or woman being free shall intermarry with a negro, mulatto, or Indian man or woman bond or free shall within three months after such marriage be banished and removed from this dominion forever, and that the justices of each respective countie within this dominion make it their particular care that this act be put in effectuall execution.19

By this statement, the threat is clear for white people, especially aimed towards white women; white women were held responsible for conserving the whiteness and hierarchy towards the African Americans and if they failed in doing so, were met with great consequences. But, of course, slavery was eventually abolished, and, as it is not the intention of this essay to trace the history of slavery, but the filmic representation of racial tensions, especially sexual ones, we will now jump forward in time, or up until the post–slavery Jim Crow era.

1.2 Are you Coming to the Tree?

The Jim Crow era was a stark time to be an African American citizen in the United States. Finally, being freed from the chains of enslavement, bleak racism, segregation, and lynching all became a daily threat for black people in the South. When African Americans received their citizenship, and were recognized as citizens, the three amendments; the 13th, 14th, and 15th were specifically used to protect them from becoming slaves again, ensure their right to citizenship, and their right to vote.20 Yet this did not change white American’s acceptance towards the African American but further demonstrated hateful acts to drive a wedge between the two races and the government was not there to help.

To illustrate the hidden racism that is found in governmental principles in the 14th Amendment, it states: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States [...] are citizens of the United States”,21 which surely guarantees that African Americans are being given the same rights as the white population while lacking the clarification of what rights as citizens they have. This was later put to the test as a result in a court case which then became a doctrine in 1896. In the court case Plessy v. Ferguson, the “Separate but equal” which approved that

19 Furthermore, there were other laws similar to the 1691 Virginia Law, from various states, were later put in place, see also: “September 1770, Butler v. Boarman. Sect. 2. Thomas Harris, Jr., and John M. Henry. Marilyn Reports. Vol. 1. (NY: I. Riley, 1809), 372, accessed October 28, 2017. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=tRZEAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR1.
21 Ibid.
lawfully segregated public facilities for black and white people. Here it was possible to discriminate against African Americans by legislation that protected white superiority and continued to oppress African Americans.

In the early 20th century, the Jim Crow era was a repercussion of the Southerners’ shame for having lost the American Civil War, the aftermath of which made it hard to coexist with African Americans. Even with southern white people and African Americans sharing similar elements and affinities such as Christianity, they were never able to form a coalition. With political and legal power dominated by white people, African Americans were in constant danger of being lynched if they were to come across, and cross, a white Southerner. Maintaining white supremacy became a justification that allowed Southerners to condemn African Americans to the heinous act of lynching. A common method was to be hanged but more noteworthy was when:

Rapid execution did not satisfy the emotional hunger of whites who insisted on prolonging and intensifying the taking of a life, not only to inflict a harsher penalty but also to send a more forceful message to the black community.

The white Southerners put themselves in a situation where their own civilization was on trial every time they tested their thirst for obtaining the guilty “negro” while simultaneously making themselves fear that their actions would be used against them.

One of the most common crimes that African Americans were lynched for was a black man would be accused of raping a white woman which “evoked the most vocal and violent response in the white South, conflating as it did racial and sexual fears and tensions.” This action caused such a stir within the white public that one white leader was quoted saying: “No crime, strikes at the integrity of the race or insults its purity as the crime against women.”

This notion of white equating with pure, shows the lengths that white Southerners went to in order to safeguard their superiority. This drove the two races further from each other and meant that African Americans never fully reached as white people had, the idealized American identity. The punishment for a Southern black man who was innocent of all crimes but was

22 Foner, p. 65.
23 Ibid, p. 656.
25 Litwack, p. 311, 306.
26 Ibid, p. 301
ridiculed for being “black and in the wrong place at the wrong time”.

Whites condemned African Americans as scapegoats for the benefit of white people’s false conceptions of the black race. So, having been forcefully separated from their ancestral lands, and their own language, the African American is then restricted from attaining the pure “whiteness,” they would require to become a true American. Centuries of subordination that have systematically been repressing African Americans’ ability to fully gain access to the notion that “all men are created equal” and the Jim Crow era only placed them further away from reaching such conclusion.

1.3. 13th and the Imagery of ‘Thug’

As the years passed, America began to see progress for African Americans. There were instances as Brown v. Board of Education (1954), in which the Supreme court declared it unconstitutional for public education to be racially segregated. A year later, Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her seat on a bus for a white passenger. This action sparked a host of sit-ins and other forms of protest and civil disobedience by African Americans in the South. This evolved into the Civil Rights Movement which was most famously led by Martin Luther King Jr.. In his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, he reminds the nation the American right as a civilian “that all men are created equal” and the demand for freedom from all oppression for people of color. Seeing these strong steps for the African American gave hope to the nation for them to be “free at last” and to have a place, identity, in their own society.

However, in the 1970s, former president, Richard Nixon, declared a new policy, which came to be known as the “War on Drugs”, which branded many illegal drugs as the primary enemy of the public, with the subsequent fight against heroin and marijuana leading to African American communities being a disproportionately targeted. Now African Americans were becoming the central target of the ever-growing drug problem in America. When Ronald Regan

30 Foner, A-56, Glossary.
31 Foner, A-30, Glossary.
32 Ibid.
became president in 1981, his prohibition laws in the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, and his wife Nancy’s “Just Say No” anti-drug campaign, came down hard in cracking down on all drug abuse with the media using words such as “predator” and “crackheads” to describe drug users. In particular, there were a lack of news media stories and images portraying white Americans using drugs. Instead there was a dominant image in news media that portrayed African American communities as the dangerous drug abusers.34

The result of such policies resulted in a disproportionately high population of the US prison population consisting of African Americans, which was resulted in said people being effectively removed “from the competitive labor force and upon release they are disenfranchised in the political system”.35 Therefore, white men were given more opportunities to engage in the society as a positive force, whereas African Americans, were seen as felons with criminal records in which their rights as citizens are being stricken away; “voting, traveling abroad, the rights to bear arms, jury service, employment in certain fields, public social benefits and housing, and parental benefits”.36

When civil rights have been taken from these individuals, it is difficult to not conclude this to be an act of reducing African Americans’ chance at a life of opportunity, and equal rights for all men, just as the founding fathers of the United States believed the country to be. Instead, African Americans are taken back to their forefathers on the plantation fields with no chance of a life without serving the white American.

These descriptions of how African Americans, throughout their time in America, have been doomed to fall into a categorization that negatively effects black communities. These illustrations of racial discrimination come in all shapes and forms within US society; commercials, laws, cultural appropriation, and literature. However, what can be the strongest affiliation towards in keeping the tradition alive in the modern age, is on the silver screen.


1.4 Uncle Tom’s ‘Birth’

The art of film, as young it may be, was quick to evolve and explore new ways of telling a narrative. Georges Méliès film, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) played with the spectator’s eyes with its quick and witty editing. Films were becoming a well-known art medium in which artists illustrated a tale for the audience to develop emotions through the spectacle of the silver screen.37

D.W. Griffith’s cinematic masterpiece, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) brought forth new advances to the cinematic art medium.38 A three-hour film that depicts the life of two families, Stoneman’s pro-Union and Cameron’s pro-Confederacy, during the Civil War and its aftermath during the Reconstruction era.39 Even though the film displays a romanticized vision of the South, it is difficult to shy away from the appalling racial stereotypes presented. As a response, the film sparked heated controversies with “many editorials in white - and black owned newspapers alike denounced its racism”.40 Furthermore, “the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people (NAACP), as well as numerous other social and political organizations, called for protests and boycotts”.41 However, as much as organizations fought back, it was apparent that the Klan “used the classical film as a recruiting tool” and “screened the film in 1920s to build membership in the millions”.42

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39 *The Birth of a Nation*. Directed by David Wark Griffith. USA: Epoch Producing Co., 1915. DVD.
Even though the film is highly controversial, D.W. Griffith is considered to be “the father of American Cinema”. In the aforementioned film he was inspired by Reverend Thomas Dixon’s novel, The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan (1905) in which the rise of white supremacy was hailed as “a sign of southern white society’s recovery from the humiliation and suffering to which the federal government and the northern “carpetbaggers” had subjected it after its defeat in the Civil War”. In The Birth of a Nation, the African Americans are depicted as lazy, sex-craved, primitive and above all, inferior to the white race. Moreover, the actors are not themselves African American, but white people painted in black face, giving the idea of how white people perceive people of color.

What was prominent in Griffith’s depiction of African Americans was idea of a black man endangering the white race with his sexual conduct. In the Birth of a Nation, a white woman is being chased by an African American (played again by a white man in black face), who is characterized as a sexual predator who wants to taint the purity of the white woman with his dirty hands. This highlights the “much-incited white fear of interracial sex”, by having the black man chase her that inevitably leads to her “jumping off a cliff to preserve her purity, rather than submit to the amorous advances of Gus”.

Furthermore, the former president, Woodrow Wilson, who highly praised the cinematic piece as it was the “first film to be screened at the White House” in which Wilson was said to have applauded it as “like writing history with lightning and my only regret that it is all true”, encouraging the film to be presented across the nation. Having the president in support of the cruel illustrations of African Americans reflects the United States’ standpoint on race during this period. Even though the film illustrates a strong message in favor of the white race, other films would later reflect similar tones and fears that white people of America hold to be a true danger in their society.

43 Bernardi, p.59
45 The Birth of a Nation. Directed by David Wark Griffith. USA: Epoch Producing Co., 1915. DVD.
46 The Birth of a Nation. Directed by David Wark Griffith. USA: Epoch Producing Co., 1915. DVD.
As Hollywood and the cinematic spectacle increased in power and influence, so it became a necessity for “various social groups to increase censorship”, in which the public were beginning to see Hollywood as a place of excess and perversion. For the sake of maintaining and cleaning the image of the film industry in Hollywood, the main studios “banded together to form a trade organization, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA)”.

The president of the MPPDA organization, Will Hays, censored and restricted films in line with the imagery and morals that he and the board members of MPPDA deemed suitable for the American public. The Production Code, passed in 1934, (also known by the name Hays Code) “was an outline of moral standards governing the depiction of crime, sex, violence, and other controversial subjects”. One of the moral codes, under the sixth clause in the second section states: “Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races) is forbidden”. Having interracial relationships be considered immoral and unsafe imagery for audiences, the American people did not have to confront their own fear and prejudices towards African Americans. As such, the US film industry was vital in ensuring that no positive representations of the black community’s experience were being portrayed in the film medium.

Even in the run up to the Hays code, there is a consistent negative or patronizing portrayal of African Americans in cinema during this period. This seen in The Jazz Singer, (Alan Crosland, 1927,) the first talkie film, which had a white actor portray a man of color in blackface. Films, such as, King Kong (Merian C. Cooper, 1933) that illustrates the wondrous ape, Kong, as the dangerous yet exotic spectacle that attempts to take over and destroy western buildings while stealing the white beauty from the white lover. This being a year before the Hays Code, King Kong illustrates that enforcing racial divisions was not dependent on legal precedent, but were already pervasive in society.

Later Gone with the Wind (Victor Fleming, 1939) includes actual African American actors, but they serve to glorify the Southern plantation era, being shown

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50 Thompson and Bordwell, p. 198.
53 King Kong. Directed by Merian C. Cooper.
enjoying their lives as slaves, as well as depicting a stereotype of the black woman as, ‘mammy’. Conversely, however, the code specifically stated, “white slavery shall not be treated,” meaning the depiction of a white slave was forbidden.

Furthermore, movies specifically outlining actual racial tensions were often censored. A key example is the film In This Our Life (John Huston, 1942), which was famously censored for portraying scenes containing discussion of racism, stating it “insulted Southern whites everywhere,” for suggesting that race relations in the South were not firmly under control. As late as 1964, in a post-code Hollywood, even the noble African American stereotype was unable to overcome the racial division entrenched in American society. The film, One Potato, Two Potato (Larry Peerce, 1964), portrays an interracial relationship, between a white single mother, Julie Cullen (Barbara Barrie) and African American man, Frank Richards (Bernie Hamilton), in their custody battle against the white biological father, Joe (Richard Mulligan). Joe himself has consistently shown himself to be an unworthy father and husband, but is awarded custody by virtue of his whiteness. A sympathetic white authority figure, the judge, sees Frank’s value as a father, but ultimately awards custody away from him, because of the racism of people at large in America.

These portraits of African Americans cannot truly be approach without looking upon it at a first-hand experience. Therefore, it is a necessity to look at a primary African American source present in America at the time, only by doing so, can it be understood the experience on how black people are being characterized in films.

1.5 “Stranger in a” Hollywood

African American writer and activist, James Baldwin was born August 2, 1924 in Harlem New York. At a young age, Baldwin began to see how the class and race problem in
America, with such experiences of white people as “utterably menacing” and reaching to the extent of wickedness.59 However, by being introduced at an early age to a white woman, Bill Miller, in which she experienced being “treated like a nigger”, he began questioning not their actions due to being white, but rather from some other form of reason.60

During a debate in Cambridge against William Buckley, he illustrates the black struggle for an identity in their own country:

From the moment you are born, every stick and stone, every face, is white. Since you have not yet seen a mirror, you suppose you are too. It comes as a great shock around the age of 5,6 or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledge allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to see Gary Cooper killing off the Indians and, although you are rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians are you.61

The white people of America give out the subsequent message, in reality and in film, in which the African American never was a part of the narrative. Much like the Native Americans, they had to be wiped clean from whiteness or stricken of any form of characterization that could give them a positive reflection of themselves.

In his non–fiction book The Devil Finds Work (1976), Baldwin describes himself beginning to read and watch films at an early stage in his life, there he wonders what role he has within the representation of reality in film, drawing parallels to his own life.

It is said that the camera cannot lie, but rarely do we allow it to do anything else, since the camera sees what you point it at: the camera sees what you want it to see. The language of the camera is the language of our dreams.62

African America was not given the same representations in films as white people had been given; when people of color were being depicted, it was not from the world he

60 Ibid.
knew. From this he discusses characters from various films that each stirred different emotions within him. One of the characters he contemplates is Uncle Tom, in the novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe which is often a stereotypical figure portrayed as a black “who is overeager to win the approval of whites (as by obsequious behavior or uncritical acceptance of white values and goals)”.

In Baldwin’s mind, Tom could not be considered a ‘hero’ when he sacrifices himself and dies. For Baldwin, the so-called heroes he saw being presented, where white and had the power to take vengeance into their own hands.

African Americans were put into roles that degraded their own horrific experience. James Baldwin recalls a small role from the film, *They Won’t Forget* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1937), where a white girl has been raped and killed and the black janitor, terrified, has been accused for the crime. This can be referenced to the real fear of lynching in which African Americans were killed and wrongfully accused for crimes they did not commit, “an icy brutality both scared me and strengthen me”.

Side lined to subservient, comedic, or threatening roles, black people did not have a fulfilling role or life within a cinema that represented African Americans and their role within the country. However, as the civil rights began to break new ground, so did Hollywood attempt to bring in characters alike that aligned closer to the reality of America.

James Baldwin thus examines the role Sidney Poitier was given in films such as *The Defiant Ones* (Stanley Kramer, 1958). The story follows two escaped convicts, one white and one black, who grow a sense of friendship towards the end of the film. This film is symbolic in the way it illustrates the black and white relationship for everyday America. However, even though in the end they reconcile with each other, having Sidney Poitier jumping off the train to be with his white friend its main thematic

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63Ibid, p. 35.
action is catharsis for the white liberal audience over their so called “white-guilt”.\textsuperscript{68} However, it was taken this way by the white liberal audience who rather took it at face value and were thus placated by it.

James Baldwin did not merely see this representation of black people in films as a form from white people but a part of a larger scale. “All of the Western nations have been caught in a lie, the lie of their pretended humanism; this means that their history has no moral justification, and that the West has no moral authority.”\textsuperscript{69} This can easily be reflected within the film industry at how powerful the imagery that Hollywood and places alike, can have such deep meaning for the spectator and consumer. This is somewhat underlined by the present of various films in which a liberal white family or figure, is confronted with their own prejudice. Significantly, films illustrate awakened white figures supporting the status quo, even against their better judgement. Baldwin points to the culture to demonstrate a pattern he sees in his life. As he perceives it, the culture of the industry merely reflects the mechanics of a malevolent social order. This corresponds with the findings of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

Adorno and Horkheimer were two German philosophers and sociologists from the Frankfurt School who went to the United States in order to escape the horror that was being unfolded in Europe during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{70} When they lived in America, they began to speculate how Western culture was instrumental in bringing about totalitarianism and fascism.

\textsuperscript{68}James Baldwin, \textit{The Devil Finds Work}. NY: Vintage Books, 1976, p.95. “It is this which black audiences resented about \textit{The Defiant Ones}: that Sidney was in company far beneath him, and that the unmistakable truth of his performance was being placed at the mercy of a lie. Liberal white audiences applauded when Sidney, at the end of the film, jumped off the train in order not to abandon his white buddy.”


Their concept of the ‘culture industry’ describes how mediums within culture, such as films, radio, magazines and programs find themselves being entangled within a large capitalistic machinery, in which each consumer of said mediums were being manipulated into passivity. They state “Films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce”, which then transfers onto the consumer and they begin to justify and accept their entrapment within the mass machinery, “[A]ny need which might escape the central control is repressed by that of individual consciousness. The step from telephone to radio has clearly distinguished the roles”.

Furthermore, the culture industry, in this case Hollywood, cannot exclusively rely on its own source of power. Large companies such as electric, oil, and steel corporations, are independent sources that have made the culture industry become dependent on the more powerful monopolies much like film industry on the banks, such that it “characterizes the whole sphere, the individual sectors of which are themselves economically intertwined”.

Therefore, what the audience is consuming from the cinema screen is what has been manufactured for them to see and know from industries that run, govern, and manipulate their society to their own agenda. The purpose of film, in the minds of Adorno and Horkheimer, is to deny its audience “any dimension in which they might roam freely in imagination” therefore the spectator begins to “identity film directly with reality”.

Even though their book, The Dialectic Enlightenment, was published in 1944, its message still holds resonance today about the growing power of Hollywood and the near-totalitarian hold they have on their audience. In many ways, James Baldwin’s thinking about the state of racial relations in America, and the role played by Hollywood in shaping the conceptual framework within which the social dimensions of the colored experience are understood, is akin to the positions put forward in Dialectic of Enlightenment. He can see that this is not merely an act of white people, but rather, from within large corporate monopolies that construct and control the audience and overall civilians to be subjugated toward their ideology. Only with this, is it possible for negative

72 Ibid p. 96.
73 Ibid, p.100.
or lack of representation for African Americans to have continuation within the industrial reproduction that is Hollywood.
Chapter Two: The Elephant at Dinner

During the 1960s, Hollywood had long since established itself as the largest entertainment businesses in the country. From the Golden Age of Hollywood, whether it was stylized spectacles such as Busby Berkley’s eye-catching musicals, to Warner Brothers gangster and film noir movies, each genre and production company had instituted for American audiences what to expect when going to the theatre, and made “going to the theatre” the nation’s favorite pastime. However, as any medium that competes with growing and deepening the art and industry of filmmaking, changes are inevitable.

The Hays Production Code from the 1930s to the 1960’s had strict control over the content of films, but due to various developments in the entertainment industry, domestic viewing audiences began to decline. Television arrived to people’s homes and began to replace cinematic leisure time. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court ruled films were protected by the first Amendment. As the Hays Code was increasingly being challenged, filmmakers were emboldened to portray more explicit subjects, most commonly sex and violence. This meant that the miscegenation law prohibiting filmmakers for depicting interracial relationships became less forceful.

During the mid-'60s, The American New Wave in cinema was a movement in which films began to test the boundaries of cinema and attempted to take on the reality of everyday life. The Civil Rights Movement was a popular and heated discussion in America, and

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75 Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell. Film History: An Introduction. 3rd ed. NY: McGraw Hill, 2010, p. 301; p. 307. Later court decisions made it clear that films could be censored only on the grounds of obscenity, and even that was narrowly and vaguely defined. Many local censorship boards were dissolved, and few films were banned.”

76 Thompson and Bordwell, p. 301; p. 308. See also; Mark Harris. Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of New Hollywood. NY: Penguin Press, 2008, p. 320. “The Pawnbroker became the first movie with bare breasts to receive Code approval, with the Code announcing that it was “to be viewed as a special and unique case.” Notwithstanding Shurlock’s insistence that the decision was, as The New York Times dryly put it, “an unprecedented move that will not, however, set a precedent,” the reversal was the first of a series of injuries to the Production Code that would prove fatal within three years.”

therefore it was inevitable that white liberal Hollywood would seize the opportunity to make a film that would confront the racial issues in America.  

*Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967), directed by Stanley Kramer, revolves around a wealthy white liberal family that is confronted with the ultimate test of their morals when they are asked to accept their daughter’s marriage to an African American. The film came onto the screen during a historic period in Hollywood. During the sixties, the old studio system of Hollywood was challenged by the new wave innovations occurring within Hollywood that questioned the grounds on what American cinema was. New Hollywood was typified by a less formalized studio filming style, and an increased emphasis on realism. *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* straddled these worlds by bringing a real life contemporary issue, that of US race relations, to an Old Hollywood studio set up. Some scenes were filmed on location, but a great deal of the film was filmed in a studio. Established Hollywood stars Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracey play in the film alongside a new actor who would go on to change the rules of Hollywood, Sidney Poitier. By having film star icons such as Hepburn and Tracey, it would be possible to make a film about them welcoming a black man as part of their family, and therefore give the same message towards the American audience.

Although there were African American actors that came before Poitier, such as Butterfly McQueen, Hattie McDaniel, Lincoln Theodore Monroe, and Andrew Perry, they were only given roles that portrayed stereotypes of African Americans. Sidney Poitier was...
given the opportunity to change the course for African Americans in cinema and break free from the ideology that they had been under ever since films in the US began to be produced. Now that the Civil Rights Movement was in high gear, white liberal Hollywood was ready to take on the impossible subject of miscegenation that was a deep-rooted terror for the white citizens.

2.1 The Failed Revolution

When Stanley Kramer approached Sidney Poitier with the script, his reaction was thus: “I was very impressed. Stanley knew that the country wasn’t ready for this one, but his attitude was – well, we’re going to do it anyway”. The task seemed impossible right from the beginning, as Kramer and scriptwriter William Rose) were known for their disagreements throughout their collaborations, and their partnership was considered a “love-hate-relationship”.

While writing the film, Rose was in his fifties and it was noticeable that his knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement had been described as “twenty years behind the news”, which resulted in him creating questionable characterization for the black actors in the film:

…describes one minor character as “a sexy little colored girl” and Tillie the housekeeper as a “tough but lukewarmhearted darkie”; later, he took pains to write Tillie’s dialogue in dialect, having her say “sumpin,” “jest,” “sposed,” and “lissen.”

film, *Hearts in Dixie* (1929, Paul Sloane) he is characterized as a gullible, “overtly slothful” black man whose sole purpose was to be casted to “represent a lazy roustabout lying along a fence, whose duty in one scene was to rise regretfully and yawn”. Mel Watkins, *Stepin Fetchit: The Life and Times of Lincoln Perry* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), p. 66, 128, 130, 149. Additionally, see his portrayal of Stepin Fetchit in; *Hearts in Dixie*. Directed by Paul Sloane. USA: Fox Film Corporation, 1929.

Sidney Poitier. *Measure of a Man: A Spiritual Autobiography*. NY: Harper Collins e-books, 2007, p. 84. In his autobiography, he experiences of being an outsider in the film industry stating that “Hollywood let me know my place from the beginning”. As he was working on set, with a cast and crew making the total close to the hundreds, he found himself in a situation where he was carrying the weight of all his black brothers and sister, “I qualified hands down as the only black person on the set. I qualified hands down as the quintessential outsider. Accordingly, I felt very much as if I were representing fifteen, eighteen million people with every move I made”; See also *Vanity Fair*’s article that celebrates the beloved actor of the late sixties during hard times in the civil rights movement.; L Jacobs. (2017). “Sidney Poitier, 1967, and One of the Most Remarkable Runs in Hollywood History.” *Vanity Fair*. Retrieved January 10, 2018, from https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/02/sidney-poitier-remarkable-run-in-hollywood-history


Ibid.
And the beginnings of Afrocentrism and discussions of cultural identity among black Americans were huffily dismissed by him in a few lines.\textsuperscript{89}

Even though some of the vocal localizations above were taken out of the final draft, it is easy to see that two white men were attempting to approach an African American representation in which negative stereotypes were once again being displayed, or at least, not navigated with sufficient care.

Nevertheless, Stanley Kramer was determined to have his black protagonist be a perfect exemplary modern black American. Miss Tillie (played by Isabel Sanford) still holds the role of “mammy” with her stern looks towards John Prentice but loving towards the family she has known for decades. Her dialect has been cleaned from any stereotype characterization but she is given the task of disapproving of the interracial relationship, noting in one scene “Civil rights is one thing. This here is something else”.\textsuperscript{90} This illustrates, to the audience that there are prejudices and disagreements on their marriage from both sides of the race divide. Furthermore, her ‘mammy’ illustration is subjugated and characterizes that African Americans are inferior to the white race, especially in one scene where she says, “I don’t care to see a member of my own race getting above himself”.\textsuperscript{91}

It was important in Kramer’s mind that Sidney Poitier’s character had to be ridden of any flaws so that any prejudice from the audience would be counterintuitive towards the argument as to why they could get married.\textsuperscript{92} Therefore, in \textit{Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner}, John Princeton is a doctor, an ivy-league graduate, and an all-round an ideal man. In one scene, when he and his fiancé Joey Drayton (played by Katherine Houghton) arrive at her parent’s house, he politely asks to use the phone. After the phone call, he shows his gratitude by leaving some change that will pay for his use.\textsuperscript{93} These little illustrations of kindness and respect towards his soon-to-be in-laws make it harder for the spectator to think anything but kind thoughts towards Prentice. In addition, he goes so far as to tell her parents, “Unless you two approve –

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner}. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.
\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner}. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner}. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.
and without any reservations at all – there won’t be any marriage”.\(^{94}\) John Prentice is indeed a remarkable man and he leaves no room to doubt that he is a great man for Joey to marry. Indeed, he is a perfect man by any standards.

However, as good as the filmmaker’s intentions were, they created yet another negative representation for the African American in the way that “the return of the exceptional Negro, a character type that had by then become so familiar that even white critics had begun to react against its persistence”.\(^{95}\) Therefore, there still was no evidence of any real identity for an African American to relate to just as white people could in Hollywood films.

Moreover, what Sidney Poitier’s roles also lacked during this period was any evidence of a sexual drive. In *Lilies of the Field* (Ralph Nelson, 1963) Poitier’s character, Homer, is a handyman who is able to take on all sorts of miscellaneous work that is available. When he stumbles upon a group of nuns, he is persuaded to assist them in a roof repair that leads to him to stay and help them build a chapel.\(^{96}\) Poitier’s character is illustrated in this a noble and gentle character much like his role in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*). Furthermore, by having Poitier’s character feel less threatening as a black man, he is surrounded with nuns who have given their celibacy to their Lord, therefore making Poitier able to be portrayed as an innocent sexless person that has refrained from any indications of sexual nature.

*A Patch of Blue* (Guy Green, 1965) attributes a similar role to Poitier as Gordon Ralfe, a sweet soft looking man who befriends a white blind girl, Rose-Ann D’Arcey (Shelly Winters).\(^{97}\) Gordon shows his immense kindness in adding opportunity to her life by getting her into a school for the blind and taking her away from her toxic life with her prostitute mother.\(^{98}\) As their relationship grows, Rose-Ann beings to fall in love with him as, due to her blindness, pays no mind to the color of his skin. Meanwhile, Poitier is shown, out of the goodness of his heart, to sacrifice the love they have by doing the noble thing of having her go on the bus that will take her to the new school. Here, once again, Poitier is to be depicted as

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\(^{94}\) *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.


the “well-adjusted Negro with no desires, no passions, no weakness.” 99 This is not a new role for Sidney Poitier, rather, he is given a recurrent, safe, sexless, and white pleasing portrayal that further diminishes the African American identity.

2.2 Between Prentice and Poitier

This obscure identity dilemma for African Americans was not exclusively experienced in cinema. W.E.B. DuBois was an African American who in 1903 wrote the essay, “The Souls of Black Folk”, in which he illustrates the struggle for black identity in America with the question, “why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?” 100 The meaning of his question is borne from the outcry of the repression that African Americans have experienced, making it harder for them not to feel as if they were a stranger in the societies that they live in.

Along with the thought of being an outcast, DuBois notes that African American’s sense of self has been disrupted: “One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”. 101

The ‘double consciousness’ makes sure that the black man in America is never fully able to unify the idealization of an African identity along with an American identity. Therefore, he is bound to be in constant conflict with himself over his sense of belonging, while being split apart by two worlds, one of being a black man and the other of being an American. Feeling himself further entrapped and only able to see himself through the eyes of the perspective of white people, which DuBois calls ‘the veil’. 102

By using the term, ‘double consciousness’, Sidney Poitier, with his character in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, experienced said tensions between these two identities. For Poitier, he received a backlash from the black community for portraying an image of a character that lacked any kind of relatable black recognition.

The issue boiled down to why I wasn’t more angry and confrontational. New Voices were speaking for African Americans, in new ways. […] According to a certain taste that was coming into ascendency at the time, I was an “Uncle Tom,”

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101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.
even a “house Negro,” for playing roles that were nonthreatening to white audiences, for playing the “noble Negro” who fulfils white liberal fantasies.103

Poitier was caught between the two races in attempting to portray John Prentice as an impeccable human that no other could reach or doubt his humility and kindness. Nevertheless, this was turned on its head by illustrating a new modern version of a subservient African American that white people could be non-threatening even to the Southern white men. The African American community dismissed Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner upon its release for its lack of portrayal of the inner identity struggle faced by African Americans. A particular scene with Prentice and his father demonstrates this lack of identity towards the African American where Prentice says to his father, “But you think of yourself as a colored man. I think of myself … as a man”, further establishing that he does not associate himself with his African identity, denying and subjugating it with respect to his white American identity.104

Moreover, to please and keep the film’s white audience in a safeguard, Prentice has no indications of having an active sexuality, even though he is with a woman. There is a scene where a light-colored woman appears and catches Prentice’s eye asking, “Who’s that?” to which Joey replies “Oh, that is Dorothy, isn’t she a knock out? She helps Tillie during the week”. Prentice replies with “which days?” with a smirk on his face. This characterizes the “sexy little colored girl” as a male spectacle and attempts a rigid belonging for Prentice, however, it would be far more dangerous if the gaze would focus on a white woman.105

Throughout the film, there is no evidence to show that the couple are intimate in any fashion other than that they kiss in the taxi cab. That kiss only is for a few seconds and is shot from the point of view for the cab driver looking from rear view mirror and therefore it is barely visible to the audience.106 This film is attempting to show a true love that is found in a relationship but lacks all warmth and affection due to the dangerous subject of miscegenation.

This point is further demonstrated in a scene where the Joey and her mother discuss in private her relationship with Prentice, Mrs. Drayton asks her daughter if she and Prentice have

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104 Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.
105 Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.
106 Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.
been “intimate in bed together”. Joey replies: “We haven’t. He wouldn’t. I don’t think he could’ve been in much doubt about my feelings, but he just wouldn’t”.\(^\text{107}\) For the white audience, it is shown that John Prentice is an honorable man that does not stir any discomfort with the idea of sex between two interracial people, but for African Americans he been prevented from having his own autonomous sexuality.

This issue is furthermore examined by James Baldwin as he distinguishes *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* and Sidney Poitier’s portrayal within it. What made both black men and women to be reminded of an intense resentment was that men such as Sidney Poitier were “still used, in the popular culture, as though they had no sexual equipment at all”.\(^\text{108}\)

Even though Poitier was regarded as a sex symbol, “no one dares to admit that, still less to use them as any of the Hollywood he-men are used”.\(^\text{109}\) This is illustrated in a scene where Prentice is changing his clothes as Ms. Tillie barges in and accuses him of manipulating the family with his charm. As she is scolding him, he is quick to cover his chest with a shirt much like a woman would do if she would be caught in a similar situation. Then, right before Ms. Tillie slams the door on her way out, she ends her rant with, “you ain’t that all that good lookin’!” while the camera shows him bewildered.\(^\text{110}\)

This scene underlines the opportunity that could be given to depict Poitier as the handsome figure he is, but instead the director has it so that his body be covered up and given abrupt comical scene where his body is even established by Ms. Tillie as nothing special. This illustrates that in order to ease the mind of white audiences, if it is established that he is not a sex symbol, he is seen as less of a threat for white men.

For Sidney Poitier’s character to be shown as a potential candidate to marry a white woman, he must be above human imperfection, show no signs of sexual desires, and above all, lack any portrayal that bares a resemblance of an African American identity or how it is to be a black person in America. Even though the film achieved critical acclaim, with both Poitier and the film being nominated for an Oscar that year, the attempt to reach African American audiences and their identity, was at best partially successful. As New Hollywood continued to rise in stature, it had yet to make a positive impact on black audiences.

\(^{107}\) *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.


\(^{109}\) Ibid.

\(^{110}\) *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.
Chapter Three: The Dangers of Having *Jungle Fever*

In the early 1990s, a new prominent director, Spike Lee, was attempting to demonstrate the racial discrimination and tensions that still were relevant with his perspective of being an African American at that time. His 1991 film *Jungle Fever* revolves around Flipper Purify and Vera, a young African American couple living in Harlem, as they go through a strain in their relationship when Flipper begins an affair with his white co-worker, Angie.\(^{111}\)

The film begins with a Stevie Wonder song with the same title as the film, with lyrics giving a suggestion as to what will unfold in the film; “I’ve got jungle fever, she’s got jungle fever/ We’ve got jungle fever, we’re in love/ She’s gone black-boy crazy, I’ve gone white-girl hazy”.\(^ {112}\) The title itself depicts the premise of the film where she, the white Italian American woman, is having the so-called fever for the African American and the film portrays their relationship as a “sexual animalistic attraction likened to a disease that can be caught and cured”.\(^{113}\) This is illustrated in a scene when Flipper says, “you were curious about black ... and I was curious about white” making their relationship appear to be on the basis of established stereotypes and finding out if they are true.\(^ {114}\)

Furthermore, since their relationship is an affair, it depicts their desires for each other as a form of taboo, something that needs to be hidden. When their relationship is put out in the open, they both are forced to deal with the social fallout from their social circles coming to terms with interracial relationship. For the black community, interracial relationships are seen a betrayal, “and what makes the betrayal more painful is that the black individual is betraying the race with the “enemy” who is member of the group that has oppressed them for centuries”.\(^ {115}\) In the scene where Flipper (Wesley Snipes) and Angie (Annabella Sciorra) are having dinner with his parents, the Good Reverend Doctor Purify (Ossie Davis), interprets and condemns their relationship as unfit in his eyes:

> There was a lot of lynchings in Willicoochee, Georgia where I come from when I was a boy. White man say to his woman: “Baby, you are the flower of white


Southern womanhood, too holy and pure to be touched by any man, including me. I’m going to put you up on a pedestal so the whole world will fall down and worship you. And if any nigger so much as look at you, I’ll lynch his ass.” She believed him, thought she really was holy and pure, like the Virgin Mary. She let him put her on that pedestal. Meanwhile, the husband, no sooner than the sun went down, down to the slave quarters grabbin’ up every piece of black poontang he could lay his hands on, then running to the gin mill to brag about it. And that’s how our blood got diluted...mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons. I’m sure that most of those high and mighty white ladies felt abandoned. But they were so proud to be white, and therefore superior, they kept their mouths shut and their legs locked tight. But in the midnight hour, layin’ there, alone, on the hot bed of lust, I’m sure they must’ve thought what it would be like... To have one of them big, black bucks... their husbands were so desperately afraid of. I feel sorry for you. Here it is the nineties, still tryin’ to make up for what you missed out on. But I don’t blame you. As for the black man... Like my own son, Flipper, who ought to know better... Got a loving wife and daughter... still got to fish in the white man’s cesspool, I have nothing but contempt.116

His speech demonstrates the deep-rooted history of racial struggle for black people in America, in which the difficulty and danger of an interracial relationships can still be present in the last decade of the 20th century. In the end, Flipper and Angie’s relationship is does not last and they go their separate ways.117 Even if the times were changing and there was more acceptance of relations between the races at the time of the film, the sexual component lingers as an inflammmable topic that many filmmakers considered too daring to tackle. Despite having an African American point of view, Spike Lee outlines in Jungle Fever that the country was still in the early stages of any approval for interracial relationships. Nevertheless, it is essential to look at the works of African American filmmakers depicting their experiences and representing the dangers that they faced attempting to be in an interracial relationship. As white liberals in the United States believed themselves to understand the racial tensions, they were not able to characterize the struggle that had seeped into the country’s narrative.

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3.1 Black Identity and Tea Time

Now in the 21st century, racial tensions between White and African Americans are still present. These difficulties were evidenced in Stanley Kramer’s film in the somewhat misguided attempt to show white liberals welcoming a black man into their home, but concomitant with that, the black man needed to be perfect in order to be accepted. In the new millennium, the United States is still dealing with race tensions that has long dug its roots into the nation’s cultural narrative. With new modern communications technologies such as smart phones, footage of police killings and brutality against African Americans in recent year has led to the spreading of awareness for the heinous actions of the corrupt system of US law enforcement.118

In 2017, Jordan Peele, an African American, wrote and directed Get Out, a film that looked at black people’s current experiences, more specifically, he ventured into the area, still a delicate subject – as evidenced by Spike Lee’s film– of an interracial relationship. Peele’s film is also comparable into the plot of Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner in the depiction of a confrontation between a white liberal family and an African American, as well as portraying said film in terms of a light-hearted comedy. Get Out shows the interaction between the white, liberal in-laws and an African American man, Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), with the film containing an uncanny atmosphere within their secluded family estate where horrors are just around the corner.119

In the beginning of Get Out, we are shown a dimly lit, clean suburb. As the camera slowly pans back, a black man on the phone walks into the center of the frame.120 He walks slowly towards the camera, expressing how uncomfortable and nervous he is at being in such a “white” area, making him “stick out like a sore thumb”, and soon after he is assaulted and kidnapped.121 This scene offers parallels with what will unfold and be experienced by our protagonist, Chris, as he goes into unknown territory to meet Rose’s (Allison Williams) white liberal family in the country side.

Through Rose’s family, the audience gets to experience the perspective of black people and what the true reflection of ‘post-racial’ America really is. As the couple arrive, Chris is met with open arms and with the acceptance of his skin color. However, as the camera tracks

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out, the African American groundskeeper, Walter (Marcus Henderson) is seen standing and staring at them greeting each other, emphasizing the uncanny nature of the environment they have arrived into. Furthermore, this uneasy feeling only escalates as the film progresses with conversations that depict the micro-aggressions that an African American experiences from white liberal people, with such remarks as, “Such a privilege to experience someone else’s culture”, “how long has this ‘thang’ been going on?” , “if I could, I would have voted for Obama for the third term” and “black is in fashion”. These minor comments are continuous throughout the film, which creates a level of anxiety for our protagonist, due to the fact that he is in an all-white surrounding. Chris knows this before he goes with Rose, and this experience of micro-aggressions from white liberals he is familiar with, even expressing this when Rose is surprised by the way her family interacts with him as he replies, “I told you so”.

By staying in a remote estate, Chris finds himself isolated from his identity as an African American, and even the few black people around for him to connect with, act in a “white-washed” and subjugated manner.

When Chris talks to Walter and Georgina (Betty Gabriel), they show no signs of knowledge of African American culture, with Walter not reciprocating Chris’ “black power” fist, Georgina’s crisp vocabulary lacking any recognition of African American slang (“I didn’t want to rat you out ... snitch”); she shows confusion on her face, until she realizes what he means and replies with a more formal phrase with a stiff smile in her face, “tattletale”.

Furthermore, this an illustration of lacking agency is presented in a scene with Rose’s mother, Missy Armitage (Catherine Keener), where she takes Chris under hypnosis by slowly stirring her tea in a constant methodical sound, leading him to the ‘sunken place’. Jordan Peele has discussed in interviews what symbolic significance it is for Chris or any black person to be forced into the ‘sunken place’:

You know when you’re going to sleep and it feels like you’re about to fall, so you wake up? What if you never woke up? Where would you fall? And that was kind

123 Microaggression. (n.d.). Merriam Webster. Retrieved December 09, 2017, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/microaggression. “a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority)”. See also the term in interactive moments between Chris and white people in Get Out. Directed by Jordan Peele. USA: Universal Pictures, 2017. DVD.
of the most harrowing idea to me. And as I’m writing it becomes clear that the
sunken place is this metaphor for the system that is suppressing the freedom of
black people, of many outsiders, many minorities. There’s lots of different sunken
places. But this one specifically became a metaphor for the prison-industrial
complex, the lack of representation of black people in film, in genre. The reason
Chris in the film is falling into this place, being forced to watch this screen, that no
matter how hard he screams at the screen he can’t get agency across. He’s not
represented. And that, to me, was this metaphor for the black horror audience, a
very loyal fan base who comes to these movies, and we’re the ones that are going
to die first. So, the movie for me became almost about representation within the
genre, within itself, in a weird way.127

Peele has given the audience, and especially white people, a glimpse at the modern white liberal
reasoning as to how ‘post-racial’ mentality is presented in the twenty first century America.
The unmistakably cruel and systematic oppression that African Americans continuously face
is swept under the rug with false understandings by white Americans. Furthermore, this lack
of agency correlates to DuBois’s “double consciousness” in which Chris and the other black
characters in Get Out can only present what the majority white people accepts of them.128

In return, this creates an inner conflict for African Americans where the societal
representation of themselves is only given validation through the white dominant forces, and
his own African identity is not accepted by the white majority. Chris therefore is constantly
judged through Rose and her family on their white desire of him, making him feel DuBois’s
‘two-ness’, a subjugated spectator in his own life.129

This is interpreted as we learn that the hypnosis from Missy is being used to entrap Chris
and others into their own subjugation within themselves as the Armitage family and their
friends use their bodies for their own needs and desires, even going so far to show a silent
auction, reflecting the historical way of how slave trade was done.130 White liberals in Get Out,

127 Zack Sharf. “‘Get Out’: Jordan Peele Reveals the Real Meaning Behind the Sunken Place.” Indie
jordan-peele-explains-sunken-place-meaning-1201902567/.
also video that dives into the film Get Out in depth. Robert Tiemstra, and Michael Burns. "The
2017.
illustrate the stark reality of what people of color experience, where they show a lip-service acknowledgement of the African American struggle, but only to the point where it threatens their own dominant ideals:

It lampoons the easy listening racism that so often lies behind the liberal smile in the “post racial” United States. And it probes the systematic devaluation of black like that killed people like Trayvon Martin, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice and Eric Garner.\(^{131}\)

In the end, in an ironic symbol for the African American struggle, Chris has to pick cotton in order for him to avoid being subjugated to a form of slavery. When he frees himself by murdering the Armitage family, he kneels on top of Rose, attempting to end her life, and we see lights blinking, coming from a cop car in which the audience has a moment of trepidation, knowing that things usually do not end well with black people in these situations.\(^{132}\) As Chris’s friend steps out of the vehicle, we reminded once more that the horror of the film is not embodied in a person, but in a system that partakes in the oppressions of African Americans.

3.2 *Guess Who’s ‘Getting’ Out*

With fifty years’ difference between the making of *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out*, it seems to be that the struggle for African Americans have not progressed as far as one would hope. Stanley Kramer knew that the country was not ready for an open discourse where the American white people were required to face the uncomfortable tensions between themselves and people of color. However, in the way he placed Sidney Poitier upon an unreachable height of perfection, he highlighted a lack of positive, realistic representation for African Americans in film.

Similarly, Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* illustrates that African Americans are still being placed as “a stranger in their own home”.\(^{133}\) Furthermore, the concerns over miscegenation, especially that of a black man and a white woman, is still a flammable discussion topic in the country. Kramer’s approach to understanding the African American experience failed to meet


with positive representations, while Jordan Peele criticizes the films that came before *Get Out* in the way that mainstream US filmmaking lacked any African American voices to speak of their encounters that represented their daily struggles.

In *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* Sidney Poitier is presented as a man without any sexual desires with Joey as a partner that downplays the anxiety he goes through as he meets her parents. However, in *Get Out*, we see that Chris and Rose do have intimacy in their relationship. Unlike Joey, Rose fully comprehends the racial struggle that Chris undergoes, in particular scenes, when she argues and defends him against a cop that unnecessarily asks for his I.D, or when he is distressed over interactions with Rose’s parents, she is swift in comforting him.

There still lies, in both films, the dangerous minefield African Americans face being placed dead center within white society. *Get Out* underlines such anxieties more directly than Sidney Poitier’s subservient behavior towards the Drayton family, where he dismisses his identity as a “negro man.” However, in *Get Out*, the true dangers are not of the Southern white man much like during Poitier’s time, but that of white liberals that portray themselves as allies towards civil rights, although only to the point that they do not lose their own superiority.

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134 *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.


136 *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1967. DVD.
Conclusion

When Obama won the US presidential election in 2008, making him the first African American president in the United States, it was believed to be a milestone for civil rights. Although some achievements have been made throughout the 20th and 21st century, racial equality is still a long way from being achieved, with high murder rates towards people of color, Donald Trump’s open bigotry, and the return of the Ku Klux Klan onto the mainstream, to name just a few emblematic cultural moments.

The United States, before it became the independent nation that it is, placed laws in the 17th century that had the intentions of protecting the superiority of whites against the miscegenation between a white woman and that of an African American slave. Therefore, a firm embedding is placed onto US society, creating a barrier to racial integration between the Caucasian and African Americans.

Furthermore, African American slaves were, from the beginning, not considered to be citizens of the country that held them against their will and made them subservient to the white race. Moreover, there was no race distinction, but with rebellious acts on both sides of the racial divide coming together (along with slaves converting to Christianity in great numbers), the term “negro” was devised. This made it essential for the white populous to keep intact slave codes that inserted the power of white supremacy in the country. This led to the African American to experience as if they are inferior and dismissed from all understanding of their purpose and identity within the country they did not ask to partake in.

After the abolishment of slavery, making the once slaved African Americans became citizens led to an ever-growing terror and danger for them at the hands of Southern white men. The three constitutional amendments that were given to protect them, were twisted and found loopholes that pushed them even further from the true American ideals of liberty and justice for all citizens.

Segregations and lynching became a common threat to African Americans as they were slowly tortured and executed by white mobs for crimes they may or may not have committed. For the white Southerner, lynching was a way for them to maintain white supremacy and therefore justified the horrific acts of lynching. The biggest fear for the white man was when a black man was accused of raping or having sex with white women. This resulted in harsh and prolonged torture for the idea of miscegenation in which the white purity would be threatened. This experience that African Americans were placed under for centuries created a systematic
repression, and in doing so, making the African American suffer from a lack of understanding of their own self-worth and identity in their own country.

From Jim Crow onto the President Nixon years, African Americans began to experience themselves as targets not only of the Southern white supremacists but of the large governmental enforcement of incarcerating African Americans with “War on Drugs”. In the age of television, the media began to broadcast imagery of poor, majority black neighborhoods as a real and present danger to America. This led to black people to lose ground on the American dream of having an opportunity to gain a sense of self in life. Therefore, African Americans still suffered from racial discriminations that were not only from the Southern states, but had spread into the country’s cultures and norms in such mediums as films, television commercials, and literature.

These occurrences in the United States have been depicted on cinema from the early history of medium. From the father of the American cinema, D.W. Griffith’s The Birth of a Nation, in which black people are merely white actors in black-face portrayed African Americans as lazy, deviant, and sexual predators. White society’s true terror of miscegenation is evident in the film in the way a woman lunges to her death rather than to have a black man coming close to touching her white pure innocence.

Furthermore, the stereotypes of white men in black-face does not give a positive representation of African Americans and therefore the only imagery they see is that from a white man’s perceptive. Moreover, The Birth of a Nation was the first film ever to be held a private screening at the White House and being praised by former president Woodrow Wilson. This makes it clear that for African Americans in the United States, they are looked upon as inferior, even to the president himself.

When Hollywood became an ever-growing industry, restrictions and codes were put in place to censor any excessive and perverted imagery that was deemed unfit in the eyes of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America. The Hays Production Code condemned the illustrations of violence, crime and sexual conducts, and most importantly, the depictions of miscegenation were considered to be immoral and unsafe for viewing. This made it easier for the white audiences to avoid their own terror and animosity towards the African American. Thus, the black community suffered from a real lack of representation in the daily lives they experienced, and were portrayed as negative stereotypes of themselves.

By completely understanding the role of black representations and the repercussion of them, one must look inside an African American’s mind and understand the implications of what it is to be a black spectator. James Baldwin saw at an early age that films presented his community as being not only excluded from the mainstream American narrative, but also
excluded from whiteness and above all, to lack any positive portrayal of themselves as black people. The few depictions of black people were mostly as subservient to the white race, or as that of an idiotic people serving as comic relief. Most importantly, they were an easement for a white liberal audience heavy with guilt. This unfortunately has provided the ultimate effect of giving disparaging representations of the plight they experienced in the United States. Baldwin however, saw this negative representation as fault in the Western nations as an entity of large culture consumptions and not a system formed by the common Caucasian citizens.

The philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer contemplated the contribution the Western culture was towards the ideology of fascism and totalitarian. Their term, the culture industry, characterized films to be interwoven within the extensive machinery of capitalism that subjugate the consumers with products. The consumer, or in this case, the audience, accept the control and manipulation that films are filled with principles and propaganda that serve a small portion of powerful monopolies that entangle itself within the own government of the country. Therefore, it is easy to see that a community such as the African Americans are the ones that suffer from lack of positive messaging that is not given to them from a regime of totalitarian power that is known as Hollywood.

During the mid-1950s, various interest groups within production system of Hollywood that kept their own agenda afloat, were going to be hit by the fall of censorship. Shortly after the decline of the Hays Code, filmmakers began to test the boundaries of what could be produced onto the silver screen, and most importantly, if it was possible to illustrate the sensitive subject of miscegenation.

Stanley Kramer decided to put this to the ultimate test by directing the film *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, in which a young couple, John Prentice an African American, and Joey Drayton, a Caucasian, decide to get married but wish to get approval from Joey’s white liberal family. This was a promising moment for white liberal Hollywood as the Civil Rights Movement was getting the country discussing various uncomfortable confrontations over inequality and at last the inflammable subject would get the opportunity to be a part of the conversation. Stanley Kramer’s challenges was to create an African American character, so flawless that no man could ever doubt that he was suitable to be married to a white woman.

However, as promising it may have been at the thought of seeing a positive representation in mainstream American cinema, it became yet another portrayal as an African American who aims to please and subjugate himself under the eyes of white America. Furthermore, Sidney Poitier’s characterization of John Prentice was one of such perfection, no
man, white or of any color would be able to successfully reach the same success as John Prentice.

This can be better established when looking at the film with the concept of W.E.B. DuBois’ ‘double consciousness’. Through this, we can see that Sidney Poitier is entrapped, attempting to please the two worlds, one of white America and the other of his black identity in which he received praises from white audiences, but retaliation from the African American community for playing a character that showed no African American identifications. Besides, through this entanglement of two identities, James Baldwin notes that Sidney Poitier was a sex symbol and yet was not allowed to present his true self out of fear for enraging white society. John Prentice is therefore presented as a castrated man in which must show no signs of a masculine identity of its own.

Therefore, Sidney Poitier and Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner, became just another piece to follow the white perspectives of black representations. Even though the Civil Rights Movement was breaking down barriers of inequality, white Hollywood had yet to learn the true perspectives of people of color in the everyday America. The only hope that the African American could have during the late twentieth century, was for better times to come.

During the 1990s, Spike Lee attempted to show the audience in his film, Jungle Fever that America was not ready to accept African American recognition of everyday life in Harlem, and above all, a successful relationship between a black man and a white woman. By having the relationship as an affair, it illustrates that it is something that should be hidden from the public knowledge. Furthermore, the title indicates that this is not meant to be a deep and loving relationship but rather to test the waters and break the myths that have been integrated into their society of the two races. Regardless of Jungle Fever not presenting a happy ending for the two of them, it is a necessity for African Americans to be represented and be introduced onto the silver screen.

As the battle for equal rights for African Americans kept on into the twenty-first century, there was still progress to be made. However, by having the former president Obama be the first African American president in the United States, many white citizens believed they had overcome racism and bigotry, which made America become a post-racial society. Jordan Peele depicted, in his horror film, Get Out, the reality for African Americans to live in what white liberals believed to be, a unifying time between the two races with the main plot being of the ever-delicate white nightmare, miscegenation.

The film takes on similar premise to Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner, but leaves behind any stereotypes and negative representation of the average African American, and turns the
spotlight instead onto the devious white liberals, the Armitage family. The film gives an unknown perspective for the white liberal audience of how uncomfortable the interactions can be for an African American in a white dominated surrounding, that of a secluded country estate. While Chris and Rose are staying at the Armitage home, he begins to experience dialogues with his white compatriots which lays bare the undertones of microaggressions. This is all too familiar for Chris and others in his community, in which it creates anxiety and discomfort being surrounded by over enthusiastic white smiles that attempt to relate to the hardship of being an African American in their own country.

In *Get Out*, DuBois’s double consciousness is apparent and highlighted in Chris’s constant ‘two-ness’ from his own agency and to the desires and expectancy from white people. This is further established in the symbolic hypnosis of, the sunken place as Chris is forced to be subjugated bystander in his own life, making his own African identity be erased to make way for the white American desires. *Get Out* uses references form the times of slavery such as Chris’s escape by picking cotton and the silent auction for his body, depicts the thin line between stereotypical Southern racism America is fully aware of, and that of the white liberals that support equal rights, unless they must work for it. However, as much as the film analyses the actions and true intentions of white liberals, the ending reminds the audience that the true apprehension in the daily life of an African American, is the interwoven bigotry and negative imagery within a totalitarian system that continues the repression of minorities in America.

By comparing the two films, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out*, we see that equality for African Americans has still yet to reach its final goal. Even though many accomplishments have been made, *Get Out* show a new difficulty the black community deals with in such forms as microagression in an all too familiar setting with white Americans.

In *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* we see a striking difference between the two couple and their level of intimacy. John and Joey show no indications of chemistry or of strong foundation between them while Chris and Rose are a supporting couple that fully commit in each other’s life. What parallels the two films together, is the confrontation of miscegenation to the white parents and the anxiety that comes with the fear inducing idea to white people, especially men, in which the black man is going to take possession of the white women away from them and ruin the long-lasting purity of the white race.

However, with new generations of Americans, there shows promise for interracial relationship being accepted as well as more prominent diverse filmmakers and entertainers that are breaking down the outdated ideologies of the past. To at long last have representations and agency in their own life as well as in films. One can only hope, the once enslaved African
Americans who fought to stay alive as they were forced to work on land which was not their own and for many generations to be at last freed, to have them struggle with a sense of belonging in what white men deemed was not their home. To grow up in fear of the white Americans beating and killing them only because they are alive. Finally, to look up to the silver screen and see yourself as a comedic relief, subservient, or as a stranger you have never met in your own neighborhood, become an image you are defined by your own country, this is the life of an African American.
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