"IF YOU DO NOT LIKE THE PAST, CHANGE IT": THE REEL CIVIL RIGHTS REVOLUTION, HISTORICAL MEMORY, AND THE MAKING OF UTOPIAN PASTS

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of History

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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By

Andrew Joseph Pegoda

December, 2016

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Andrew Joseph Pegoda

APPROVED:

_____
Linda Reed, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

_____
Nancy Beck Young, Ph.D.

_____
Richard Mizelle, Ph.D.

_____
Barbara Hales, Ph.D.
University of Houston-Clear Lake

_____
Steven G. Craig, Ph.D.
Interim Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
Department of Economics

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ABSTRACT

Historians have continued to expand the available literature on the Civil Rights Revolution, an unprecedented social movement during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s that aimed to codify basic human and civil rights for individuals racialized as Black, by further developing its cast of characters, challenging its geographical and temporal boundaries, and by comparing it to other social movements both inside and outside of the United States. Thus far, they have barely scratched the surface when it comes to either historical memory or filmic texts. This dissertation, then, provides an in-depth examination of both how Hollywood films from the 1990s to the present represent the Civil Rights Revolution and how individuals evaluate these films. Given that movies mirror a society's hopes and fears and tell more about the time in which they were made than the time portrayed, they prove to be important cultural and social barometers of society at large. Selected films, along with almost 3,500 reviews from *Amazon*, are the focus of this examination. This dissertation argues that Hollywood manifests and perpetuates the on-going struggle of coming to terms with the past. Films ignore evidence and consistently minimize and delete the activism of Black people, while maximizing the generosity, forethought, and understanding of White people. Additionally, everyday people accept filmic representations of the past as epitomizing undisputed, utopian truths. Studying historical memory reminds academics that there is always a gap, sometimes quite large, between the past, how the past is documented, how trained historians study the past, and how society understands the past.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

What a wonderful journey graduate school has been, especially the three years working on this dissertation. I have learned an incredible amount and have drastically changed for the better. The past eight years at the University of Houston have been academically challenging and rewarding. The past eight years have also been medically challenging, undergoing major surgery in 2009 and another somewhat less major surgery in 2015, starting many new medications, and facing new medical challenges. I have been unable to keep track of all of those who deserve my many thanks yous, but I will try. My apologies if I forgot to mention you here.

As my doctoral advisor, Dr. Linda Reed deserves special and numerous thank yous. Since I first met her in 2008, she has always been incredibly generous and supportive with both her knowledge and time. I will be forever grateful. Thank yous also go to Dr. Nancy Beck Young for her on-going support and enthusiasm and for serving on my doctoral committee. I am also grateful for Dr. Richard Mizelle's service as a reader and for providing suggestions to make this work better. Special thank you also go to Dr. Barbara Hales, who has inspired and shaped my researching and teaching since I first met her in 2007 as an undergraduate student at the University of Houston-Clear Lake in "History of Feminism: European Film and Feminist Critique." I am the historian I am today largely because of how she teaches her students to study culture and the past. I am most grateful to have her on my doctoral committee.

I am also grateful to the Department of History at the University of Houston for the financial support I received in the form of Lectureship positions, the Murray Miller

Dissertation Fellowship, Doctoral Student Tuition Fellowships, and Graduate Student Tuition Fellowships. More importantly, the Department of History has provided an environment that encourages rigorous and creative thinking, one example being that this dissertation on film and historical memory has been welcomed so warmly. In addition to those already named, I am especially thankful for Dr. Steven Deyle, Dr. Frank Holt, Dr. Kelly Hopkins, Dr. James Kirby Martin, and Dr. Matt Tribbe and for all of their time and support. More recently, I am appreciative of a Lectureship position from the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Houston.

Both the University of Houston's M.D. Anderson Library and the University of Houston Clear Lake's Alfred R. Neumann Library deserve special acknowledgment for ordering books from libraries across the nation that I needed for my research and for copying and emailing so many articles and book chapters that benefited both my teaching and research.

The Texas Neurofibromatosis Foundation and University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center provided very generous funding throughout my graduate education, funding that has enabled me to pay for everything and to graduate with zero debt to my name. Dr. John M. Slopis and the others who manage my complicated set of health challenges also deserve infinite acknowledgement. I am forever grateful.

I am especially grateful for the friendship of Dr. Samuel Brower, Dr. Trevor Boffone (who has read and critiqued parts of this dissertation), Dr. Tracy Butler, (almost Dr.) Sandra Davidson, Dr. Brittany Handcock, (almost Dr.) Bruce Martin, (almost Dr.) Sheryl R. Saeed, and many others I met during graduate studies before we all became

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Many thanks to professors, not already named, with whom I studied as a student at Brazosport College, University of Houston-Clear Lake, and the University of Houston. You have taught me more than you will ever know.

Thanks also go to the thousands of students I have taught at Alvin Community College, Brazosport College, the University of Houston, and the University of Houston-Clear Lake over the last decade. You have also taught me more than you will ever know.

I am also grateful to the thousands of people who have read my publications. As of November 2016, my blog *Without Ritual, Autonomous Negotiations*, which started in May 2013, includes four hundred articles (all written by me) and has received just under 300,000 hits. Additionally, I am grateful to have numerous publications in *Inside Higher Ed*, a book chapter in *100 Entertainers Who Changed America: An Encyclopedia of Pop Culture Luminaries*, a journal article in *Houston History Magazine*, numerous articles in *Reforming America: A Thematic Encyclopedia and Document Collection of the Progressive Era*, *Disasters and Tragic Events: An Encyclopedia of Catastrophes in American History*, and *Encyclopedia of American Environmental History*, and book reviews in *The Journal of African American History* and *Pennsylvania History*. I am glad for the opportunities I had to guest speak about my research at Alvin Community

College, Alvin Junior High, Incarnate Word Academy, Lone Star College, Rice University, San Jacinto College, the University of Houston, and the University of Houston-Clear Lake. This dissertation took longer to write, in part, because I took full advantage of these opportunities to further refine my thinking and writing.

Finally, I have the best, most supportive family imaginable. My parents, Denise Lamb Pegoda and Professor Gary Pegoda, are beyond incredible. My grandparents, Lieutenant Colonel Huie Lamb, Jr. and Doris Lamb, are through-and-through generous and loving. My other grandparents, Professor Rae Longest and Professor Prentice Longest, are incredibly kind and loving. Family members Brian Lamb (now deceased) and Karen Bates deserve special thanks and recognition, too, for their support and love. My four-legged furry friends, Dr. Trevor Lovejoy Pegoda, Maggie-Mae Pegoda, Emma-Lou Pegoda, and Bella Pegoda, keep life fun and always provide unconditional love and vital secretarial support, as well as plenty of distractions!

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For those fearless people who welcome and encourage fellow souls to be an individual and one who lives, protests, thinks, and writes in ways that resist popular mores.

Obviously these films are not about *Negroes at all; they are about what whites think and feel about Negroes*.

Ralph Ellison, "The Shadow and the Act," 1949

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 1952

INTRODUCTION:
CINEMA, HISTORICAL MEMORY, AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS REVOLUTION

History is a tale told about the past in the present for present purposes.

-Paul Ricoeur, 1979

It's the movies that have really been running things in America ever since they were invented. They show you what to do, when to do it, how to feel about it, and how to look *how you feel about it. Everybody has their own America, and then they have the pieces of fantasy America that they think is out there but they can't see*.

-Andy Warhol, 1985

Without a historical perspective, such connoisseurship prepares the way for a curiously absentminded acceptance of propaganda for all sorts of destructive feelings--feelings whose implications people are refusing to take seriously.

-Susan Sontag, 2002

If you do not like the past, change it.

-William L. Burton, 1982[1]

[1] William L. Burton, "The Use and Abuse of History," *American Historical Association Newsletter* 20, no. 2 (1982): 14-15; Paul Ricoeur, "The Narrative Function" (1979), quoted in Mark S. Micale and Roy Porter, eds., *Discovering the History of Psychiatry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3; Andy Warhol, *America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1985), 11; and Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," in *Under the Sign of Saturn: Essays* (New York: Picador, 2002), 97.

"It's just a movie!" This four word expression and its close relatives--"It's entertainment!," "Lighten up! Can't you enjoy yourself!," and "You think too hard!"--frequently follow criticism of *contemporary* fictional film and its representations where racialized, genderized, and/or historicized issues are concerned. Individuals and historians frequently miss rich opportunities to examine societies under a microscope by dismissing Hollywood productions as entertainment, productions that are not meant to be taken seriously. We live in an era in a culture that is vastly anti-intellectual--one that celebrates leisure activities and utopian pasts. Thinking is discouraged and feared. Creativity is condemned. Ignorance is celebrated. Yet, by stepping back and recognizing, for example, that D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) was *just a movie* to the vast majority of (White) people during its long reign and was tremendously influential in shaping conceptions of the past and conceptions of people racialized as Black, we can begin recognizing how contemporary filmic texts are also always much more than *just a movie*. Movies have distorted representations of the past and shaped history, both reflected and changed society. *"If you do not like the past, change it": The Reel Civil Rights Revolution, Historical Memory, and the Making of Utopian Pasts* takes Hollywood film seriously. This dissertation provides a multidisciplinary examination of how recent Hollywood blockbusters have represented the Civil Rights Revolution and how everyday people have responded to such movies.[2]

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[2] The literature on the anti-intellectualism in the United States is vast. For publications that have had particular influence on this dissertation, see Chris Hedges, *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (New York: Nation Books, 2009); Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Barry Glassner, *Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of*

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In the United States, individuals racialized as Black have faced unremitting discrimination, and simultaneously, they have demonstrated unrelenting demands for recognition, equality, and fairness. Yet, as popularly conceived in historical memory and Hollywood film, the "Civil Rights Movement" refers to a movement in the South that began in either 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education* or in 1955 with the grassroots boycott following the arrest of Rosa Parks and ended in the late 1960s with the rise of Black Power and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. By providing strict chronological and geopolitical boundaries, by suggesting it spontaneously began from

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Things (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Rivka Maizlish, "Reading Too Much Into This," *Society for U.S. Intellectual History* (accessed March 3, 2014) http://s-usih.org/2013/03/reading-too-much-into-this.html; Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Quill, 1978); Dick Meyer, *Why We Hate Us: American Discontent in the New Millennium* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York,: Penguin Books, 2006); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), especially 1-30, 216-246; and Peter Watson, *The Modern Mind: An Intellectual History of the 20th Century* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

Following what has increasingly become the convention, this study capitalizes racialized terms. As Yaba Blay, an activist, ethnographer, and professor who specializes in African American Studies, says, "lowercase 'black' and 'white' refer to the colors found in box of crayons. Uppercase 'Black' and 'White' instead speak to lived, racialized, and politicized identities." Additionally, by capitalizing "White" and "Black" we can further recognize the socially constructed nature of such constructs, ideologies, and associated terms, and we are constantly reminded of this important factor, see American Anthropological Association, "Statement on 'Race,'" *Statements and Referenda of the American Anthropological Association* (accessed March 19, 2013) http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/ racepp.htm; Blay, *(1)ne Drop: Shifting the Lens on Race* (Philadelphia: BLACKprint Press, 2014); Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1-47; Robert Miles, *Racism* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Rodolfo D. Torres, et al., eds., *Race, Identity, and Citizenship*: *A Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999); and Yehudi O. Webster, *The Racialization of America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

nowhere and ended similarly, and by limiting the movement to less than two decades, this narrative is neither adequate, nor accurate. Additionally, society and its films generally do not recognize any kind of activism by Black people outside of these artificially asserted placemarks.[3]

In contrast to movies and even many historians, Vincent Harding takes a broader approach that merits recognition. His *There Is a River* first established notions of a long Civil Rights Movement, which says that the 1950s and 1960s movement was a continuation of a long, grassroots tradition of fighting for freedom. This fighting spirit originated on the shores of the African continent with the beginnings of chattel enslavement when "individuals" were first enslaved, thereby becoming "Africans" and "property." As Harding explains, the early Civil Rights Movement was characterized by a firm will to live and survive in the face of overwhelming obstacles, through such activities as subtle protests and uprisings, such as the Stono Rebellion in 1739, Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831, and hundreds of smaller-scale rebellions. This movement continued after the Civil War and Reconstruction eras because promises of equality ultimately failed when White individuals en masse ignored these promises. During what Rayford Whittingham Logan termed the "nadir of American race relations," Black people faced conditions that were considered worse than slavery. New roadblocks to freedom

[3] For example, see bell hooks and Melissa Harris-Perry, "Black Female Voices: Who is Listening – A Public Dialogue," *The New School* (accessed July 5, 2014) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OmgqXao1ng&list=FLXYunCSxPvkLulEQMJrxiNA&index=2; hooks, *Feminism if for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000); hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2009); and hooks, *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-Esteem* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004).

included convict leasing, lynching, voting restrictions, and rules that closely governed where Black people could be and what they could do. Nonetheless, just as during enslavement, Black people actively worked to change circumstances. Black individuals such as Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey proposed visions that they hoped would bring civil and human rights. Ida B. Wells-Barnett became the leading activist against lynching. Organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) formed with the goal of challenging the legality of the culture of segregation. This spirit of protest and persistence resulted in the Harlem Renaissance, and artists such as Louis Armstrong (e.g., "Saint Louis Blues"), Billie Holiday (e.g., "Strange Fruit"), and Langston Hughes (e.g., "The Weary Blues" and "Kids Who Die") emerged.[4]

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[4] John Beck, et al., *Southern Culture: An Introduction* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 146-162; Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008); John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era 1900-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of The Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes To Woodrow Wilson* (New York: De Capo Press, 1997); Negro Nurse, "More Slavery at the South," *Independent* (accessed January 5, 2014) http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/80; David M. Oshinsky, *"Worse Than Slavery": Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1996); Andrew Joseph Pegoda, "1650-1865: Slavery" and "1920: Duluth, Minnesota, Lynchings," in *Disasters and Tragic Events: An Encyclopedia of Catastrophes in American History*, ed., Mitchell Newton-Matza (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2014): 1-5, 268-271; and *Plessy v. Ferguson,* 163 U.S. 537 (1896). For a historiographical overview, see James Beeby and Donald G. Nieman, "The Rise of Jim Crow, 1880-1920," in *A Companion to the American South*, ed., John B. Boles (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 336-347.

Although the notion of a "long Civil Rights Movement" was first articulated by Vincent Harding, this idea first entered serious historiographical discussion following Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's 2005 article, and except for Gary B. Nash, scholars have generally giver her credit for the idea. Hall, while focusing specifically on the roots of activism in the 1950s and 1960s, traces the origins to the 1930s. Hall also has received credit for popularizing the importance of recognizing that the civil rights activism existed outside of the geopolitical are called the South. Hall's work has resulted in important and interesting studies that have expanded the chronological and geopolitical boundaries of the Civil Rights Revolution. Her work also inspired "The Long Civil Rights Movement Initiative," an oral history project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Center for the Study of the American South. The notion of a "long movement" is

Following Harding, then, this study recognizes that a large-scale social movement began in the sixteenth century and continues in the 2010s. In this work, this movement will be called the Civil Rights Movement. To provide a distinction, this study will follow terminology used by a growing number of historians and will refer to the exceptional era that occurred throughout a period of roughly thirty years from the mid 1940s to the late 1960s and early 1970s as the Civil Rights Revolution. Due to a combination of ever-building activism and racism, as well as a variety of national and international events, an unprecedented movement by Black people emerged that sought to produce systemic change for individuals across the United States. By fully recognizing Harding's conception, we specifically acknowledge that dynamics were much more complicated than the *Brown* to Memphis or the Montgomery to Memphis paradigm allows. Indeed, *Brown* was by no means the first ruling from the Supreme Court that supported the dismantling of the culture of segregation. And Parks was far from the first person to resist segregation. Hollywood films about the Civil Rights Revolution do not

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not without controversy. For more information, see Eric Arnesen, "Reconsidering the Long Civil Rights Movement," *Historically Speaking* 10, no. 2 (2009): 31-34; Center for the Study of the American South, "The Long Civil Rights Movement Initiative," *Southern Oral History Program* (accessed July 11, 2014) http://sohp.org/research/the-long-civil-rights-movement-initiative/; Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (2007): 265-288; David L. Chappell, "The Lost Decade of Civil Rights," *Historically Speaking* 10, no. 2 (2009): 37-41; Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233-1263; Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Freedom Struggle in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981); Lucas Johnson, "We are Creating a New River: Fellowship Interviews with Vincent Harding," *Fellowship* (accessed May 20, 2014) http://archives.forusa.org/fellowship/ 2010/fall/we-are-creating-new-river/11611; and Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1, 165.

acknowledge that racism and activism are deeply rooted in the United States.[5]

A few additional notes are necessary regarding this work's use of "Civil Rights Revolution." On the use of "revolution," Brian Becker says:

> This remarkable chapter in U.S. history should really be known as the Civil Rights revolution, rather than the Civil Rights movement. It was not a revolution in the sense of a seizure of power. The apartheid police state that existed in the South was dismantled by the U.S. capitalist political establishment through the use of legislation and court decisions. The concessions were a way of preventing an increasingly militant and conscious movement from passing over to outright revolution. Nevertheless, the outcome of the Civil Rights movement is comparable in magnitude to a political revolution. It was an uprising from below, lasting over a decade, which led to a profound restructuring of the political superstructure in the United States.

Calling this movement a "revolution" might pose some problems when we acknowledge on-going, pervasive and structural racism and discrimination in the 2010s in the United States directed toward People of Color, as discussed later in this chapter. However, this

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[5] Use of "Civil Rights Revolution" in place of "Civil Rights Movement" has prior precedents. Authors have used this "revolution" rhetoric in books, see Bruce Ackerman, *We the People, Volume 3: The Civil Rights Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014); Serena Mayeri, *Reasoning from Race: Feminism, Law, and the Civil Rights Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climatic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013); and Frederic O. Sargent and Bill Maxwell, *The Civil Rights Revolution: Events and Leaders, 1955-1968* (Jefferson: Mcfarland & Company Inc., Publishers, 2004). Authors have also used this rhetoric in the titles of articles and speeches, see, Brian Becker, "Civil Rights and the U.S. Revolution," *Party for Socialism and Liberation* (accessed February 5, 2014) http://www2.pslweb.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=10953; "Civil Rights Revolution Helped Everyone, Especially South," *The Florida Times-Union* (accessed February 5, 2014) http://members.jacksonville.com/opinion/premium-opinion/2013-08-23/story/civil-rights-revolution-helped-everyone-especially-south; L. Patrick Hughes, "The Second American Civil Rights Revolution," *Austin Community College* (accessed February 5, 2014) http://www.austincc.edu/lpatrick/his1302/second.html; and Randall Kennedy, "The Achievements of the Civil Rights Revolution--Browder v. Gayle: Challenging de jure Segregation" (paper presented at Robert R. Wilson Fund at Duke University Lecture Series in Durham, North Carolina, February 14, 2013, accessed February 5, 2014) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= TOT4Uq6QEpw.

Most scholars, however, continue to call this movement the "Civil Rights Revolution." Occasionally, historians use "Black Freedom Struggle" or "Modern Civil Rights Movement." Some scholars object to the use of the word "revolution" since this movement did not result in a new government.

does not mean the period from the mid 1940s to the late 1960s and early 1970s was un-revolutionary. We call the "American Revolution" a "revolution," even though it did not result in anything close to fairness and opportunity except for wealthy White men. "Revolution," for purposes here, refers to significant efforts toward change. The Civil Rights Revolution certainly did not eradicate racism, but it brought people together unlike anything before or since and changed the geography of everyday life, as well as the nature of acceptable and unacceptable racism.[6]

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Historians have studied the Civil Rights Revolution in a variety of ways. Collectively, having the broadest perspective possible is important because everyone and every social institution is part of a movement, whether by participation, nonparticipation, or outright opposition. Articles and monographs continue to grapple with questions involving what role governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and everyday individuals played in promoting or resisting change and when and where this specific movement occurred. Countless books examine the *Brown* decision or examine the events leading up to it and following it. The role of women receives a steady amount of attention. Scholars have looked at the role of indigenous, grassroots organizations started by Black individuals and the collection of organizations

[6] Becker, "Civil Rights and the U.S. Revolution."

by liberal Whites of the era. More recently, scholars have been interested in intersecting various historiographies, such as Mary Dudziak's study looking at the interconnections between the Cold War and the Civil Rights Revolution or Robert O. Self's study that combines civil rights and urban studies, as well as including Black Power into the same narrative as the Civil Rights Revolution. While the historiography has evolved substantially since its beginnings when a top-down approach that focused exclusively on leading men reigned, there remain plenty of avenues for further exploration. For example, save for a few small articles published in the last few years, none of the existing accounts examine movies as the rich primary source that they are.[7]

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[7] For some particularly important, field-defining books, see Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); William Henry Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); James C. Cobb*, The Brown Decision, Jim Crow, and Southern Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*: *The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010); Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Linda Reed, *Simple Decency & Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938-1963* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Jo Ann Gibson Robinson and David J. Garrow, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).

For historiographical essays about the Civil Rights Revolution, see Charles W. Eagles, "The Civil Rights Movement," in *A Companion to the American South*, ed., Boles (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 461-473; Fairclough, "State of the Art: Historians and the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of*

Similarly, scholars have analyzed historical memory in conjunction with enslavement, the Civil War, World War I and II, the Holocaust, and Texas, for example, but the historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution--except parenthetically when looking at how the public has transformed King, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Parks, and Malcolm X into both understated and larger-than-life individuals--remains almost completely untouched. One collection of thirteen articles, some of which are by historians, published as *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (2006) makes important steps toward having a historiography on the Civil Rights Revolution and historical memory. These essays look at the controversy surrounding civil rights memorials and museums, the naming of streets, and the battles over how the movement's overall legacies should be defined. A book by Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, which grew out of these essays, primarily consists of seventy-eight annotated photographs of various locations that are civil rights-themed. Their work also includes three chapters that provide an overview of debates surrounding streets, museums, and monuments.[8]

American Studies 24, no. 3 (1990): 387-398; Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (1991): 456-471; Joe W. Trotter, "African-American History: Origins Development, and Current State of the Field, *OAH Magazine of History* 7, no 4 (1993): 12-18; and Kevern Verney, *The Debate on Black Civil Rights in America* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

[8] Joseph Crespino, "The Civil Rights Movement, C'est Nous," *Reviews in American History* 34, no. 4 (December 2006): 537-543; Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory* (Chicago: The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2008); Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, eds., *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006); and Hayden White, "Historiography and Historiophoty," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (December 1988): 1193-1199. For more information, see Alderman, "Martin Luther King Jr. Streets in the South: A New Landscape of Memory," *Southern Cultures* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 88-105; Alderman, "A Street fit for King?" (accessed June 19, 2015) http://web.utk.edu/%7Edalderma/

This dissertation will fill aforementioned gaps in the literature by examining how

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mlkstreet/default.html; Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Place, Memory, and Conflict," *Professional Geographer* 52, no. 4 (November 2000): 660-671; Jerry T. Mitchell and Alderman, "A Street Named for King: The Politics of Place-Naming," *Social Education* 78, no. 3 (May/June 2014): 123-128; and Peter Murray, "Murray on Romano and Raiford, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*," *H-net* (accessed July 14, 2014) https://networks.hnet.org/node/512/reviews/816/murray-romano-and-raiford-civil-rights-movement-american-memory.

For select historical monographs that look at various aspects of historical memory, see Michael C. C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner, ed., *Lone Star Pasts: Memory and History in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007); Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History Is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Allen Douglas, *War, Memory, and the Politics of Humor: The Canard Enchaîné and World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, eds., *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York: New Press, 2006); Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Mike Wallace, ed., *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

Full-length studies do exist that explore individual memory. These works are helpful with their use of oral history to explain specific dynamics lived prior to the Civil Rights Revolution, but they do not address historical memory, only the personal experiences of those selected, see Kenneth J. Bindas, "Re-Remembering a Segregated Past: Race in American Memory," *History & Memory* 22, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2010): 113-134; Chafe, et al., eds., *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South* (New York: The New Press, 2011); Kristen Maria Lavelle, "'Our Generation Had Nothing To Do with Discrimination': White Southern Memory of Jim Crow and Civil Rights (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2011); Kristal Tatianna Joann Moore, "'She who Learns, Teaches': Black Women Teachers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools" (Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009); Susan Tucker, ed., *Telling Memories among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); and Katherine van Wormer, et al. eds., *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestics and White Families in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012)

Another set of books uses the theme of memory loosely to refer to texts created in response to an event, particularly individuals who became martyrs. For example, Harriet Pollack and Christopher Metress's edited collection looks at how memoirs, poems, and music struggle with Emmett Till's murder in 1955. These authors primarily use texts made as a direct response shortly after Till's murder and focus on what the authors meant and how they grappled with corresponding issues of racism. Literary scholar, Minrose Gwin, uses a similar methodology but focuses on Medgar Evers, another martyr in 1963, of the struggle for civil rights. Journalist Adam Nossiter's work, more in the style of a memoir than a monograph, roughly uses the theme of memory to discuss Evers; however, he uses "memory" to be a synonym for events that have some kind of connection between the past and present. Nossiter is specifically concerned with events before and after Bryon de la Beckwith's original trial and retrial, see Gwin, *Remembering Medgar Evers: Writing the Long Civil Rights Movement* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2013); Philip C. Kolin, "Haunting America: Emmett Till in Music and Song," *Southern Cultures* 15, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 115-138; Nossiter, *Of Long Memory: Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002); and Pollack and Metress, eds., *Emmett Till in Literary Memory and Imagination* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

popular Hollywood productions represent the Civil Rights Revolution. The first full-length, single-author examination of the historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution, this study is also new in that it examines the interconnection between historical memory and specific understandings about the past by specific people. With the use of almost 3,500 user reviews from *Amazon*, this will be a much more exact and in-depth examination of historical memory than has ever been done or than was possible prior to the Internet. This dissertation specifically began as an exploration of several questions. How does mainstream Hollywood fictional film represent the Civil Rights Revolution compared to what "really" happened as historically documented, and what are the consequences and reactions to these representations? How have such representations and reactions changed over time and place? What are the full consequences of such films about the Civil Rights Revolution? How do films differ when compared to historical memories embodied in other memorials, such as monuments, streets, music, and the naming of places? Where does responsibility rest when it comes to the general populous having "accurate," usable pasts, and understandings of the past? Why does society have such a labyrinthine relationship with History? Does it matter that most of what the public thinks happened in the past did not actually happen at all? As this project continued, another question emerged: Why does Hollywood tell the same basic story again and again, and why are representations of White and non-White characters generally the same regardless of the film's setting or genre?

This dissertation primarily examines *Heart of Dixie* (1989), *The Long Walk Home* (1990), *The Sandlot* (1993), *Corrina*, *Corrina* (1994), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *The*

Shawshank Redemption (1994), *There Goes My Baby* (1994), *The War* (1994), *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996), *Crazy in Alabama* (1999), *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), *Hairspray* (2007), *Secret Life of Bees* (2008), *The Help* (2011), *Men in Black 3* (2012), and *The Butler* (2013), and it examines public responses to these texts. Except for biopics and made-for-television movies, all fictional films about the Civil Rights Revolution beginning with *Mississippi Burning* (1988) receive at least some comment. Films that have been excessively influential and popular are the focus. Additionally, a number of films are examined because they completely delete the Civil Rights Revolution when the narrative calls for its inclusion.

Specifically, chapter one focuses on *The Long Walk Home* and comments extensively on representations of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, of domestic work, and of the Black and White family. Chapter two looks at *The Help* with some additional comments about domestic work but with more attention given to representations of Whiteness and patriarchy. Chapter three analyzes *The Butler* with comments partly focused on its representations of authority, massive resistance, and the White House. Chapter three also looks at the complications associated with films "based on true stories." Chapter two and three are both concerned with aspects of gender and sexuality. Chapter four looks at a variety of films that in some way or another delete or greatly minimize racism and civil rights-activism. Each chapter, as well as sometimes new sections, include epigraphs that in some way speak to important themes elaborated upon within that chapter or section. The conclusion provides an overall

assignment and addresses questions such as, how closely do these films show the past accurately, and where do movies really fall off and really distort the past?

Considered collectively, these films, or public memorials, are ahistorical. Films about the Civil Rights Revolution utopianize the past at the promotion of those racialized as White, and at the expense of those racialized as Black or non-White. Film after film, in almost perfect neoliberal fashion, emphasizes one or a small handful of well-to-do White people who are uniquely positioned to help Black people and emphasizes narratives of exceptionalism, as articulated by Craig Harshaw in a slightly different context. By rewriting the past to make it appear as if racism was not that bad and was typically an individual--not an institutional--problem these films prevent audiences from having any kind of accurate understanding of either the struggles or accomplishments that were vital to what we call the Civil Rights Revolution, especially since the vast majority of people look at these films and say "that's how it really was." People also refuse to see tragedy or films that challenge their worldview. All of this prevents any kind of dialogue that might work toward legitimate reconciliation from possibly emerging. Moreover, almost without exception, audiences internalize and fully accept the historical memories represented in these films. Movies and responses also speak to what is called *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in German, which refers to the intense struggles people have with coming to terms with the past.[9]

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[9] Craig Harshaw, "Abraham Lincoln, Slave Narratives, and Hollywood's Neoliberal Agenda," *Political Research Associates* (accessed November 3, 2014) http://www.politicalresearch.org/2014/10/31/lincoln-slave-narratives-and-hollywoods-neoliberal-agenda/#; and Matthew W. Hughey, *The White Savior Film*: *Content, Critics, and Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 76-81.

While this dissertation examines Hollywood's distortions of the past, this dissertation also shows how these films accurately depict some aspects of social and political dynamics related to the Civil Rights Revolution, namely that segregation was not about separation, per se, but about maintaining status. Historians, legal scholars, and other social scientists have well established that "separate but equal" was almost never actually equal. Accommodations for Blacks, whether in schools, restaurants, or hospitals, for example, were generally purposely less than and different compared to accommodations provided for whites. What scholars have yet to establish, however, is that "separate but equal" was also never completely separate per se. The segregation was not at all about separation. Indeed, regular contact, *togetherness*, between Whites and Blacks (and other non-Whites) was required to maintain segregation. Whereas segregation was not about separation, segregation was, however, about maintaining and perpetuating antiquated prejudices, hierarchies, and the status quo. Segregation

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For a study on the public's engagement with the past (but not the academic study of the past, per se), see Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). See also Bruce David Baum, "Hollywood on Race and Racism in the Age of Obama," in *The Post-Liberal Imagination*: *Political Scenes from the American Cultural Landscape* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 125-146

The public's general refusal to see historical tragedy is especially apparent when thinking about films that look at enslavement. Such films as in the case of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) or *Gone with the Wind* (1939), at once both utopianize the past and suggest White people should fear Black people or as in the case of *Django Unchained* (2012), fictionalize enslavement and the agency of Blacks to such a degree as to render historical fantasy. Films such as *Beloved* (1998) experienced commercial failure because of its attempts to actually reconcile the past. *12 Years a Slave* (2013) was the first film to receive wide-acclaim and the first to look honestly at White and Black people and their roles in the institution of enslavement. For more information, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Adolph Reed, Jr., "*Django Unchained*, or, *The Help*: How "Cultural Politics" Is Worse Than No Politics at All, and Why," *Nonsite.org: Emory College of Arts and Sciences* (accessed June 20, 2016) http://nonsite.org/feature/django-unchained-or-the-help-how-cultural-politics-is-worse-than-no-politics-at-all-and-why.

was about status. By including the additional interpretative layer that "separate but equal" was also never truly completely separate to existing interpretations, historians will find a different kind of struggle that involves more historical actors and a more nuanced interpretation of conflicts. Mores that required Blacks to step off the sidewalk for Whites and that prohibited Black men from even looking at White women were in no way logical and in no way separate but racist in every way. Historians and society have erred when saying that segregation *was* about separation. In a nutshell, again, the culture of segregation was not about separation but was about perpetuating inequality; it was about many degrees of closeness. Such accurate portrayals, as shown, function to perpetrate stereotypes and maintain the status quo.[10]

Filmic texts will be interpreted largely from a tradition of poststructuralism and hermeneutics. In particular, the biographies and stated intents of screenwriters, producers, directors, and performers are not considered, and in most cases, they have not been researched so to not bias the analysis. This is because only the released product affects society. (Although, biographical information is occasionally referenced.) Possible criticisms of this work will most certainly be directed toward the analysis of the primary sources used, especially readings of filmic texts. Cultural studies are subjective by nature. However, more traditional primary sources are also equally subject to vastly different, subjective, and "accurate" interpretations. Consider the dichotomous

[10] Pegoda, "Never Equal, Never Separate: Rethinking 'Separate but Equal' and the Culture of Segregation" (paper presented at the Phi Alpha Theta Colloquium, University of Houston, Houston, March 29, 2012).

differences between Ulrich Bonnell Phillips's *American Negro Slavery* (1918) and Kenneth M. Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (1956) based on essentially the same evidence. While specific methodologies used to analyze filmic texts vary occasionally, analysis found in this dissertation focuses on films and their representations of Blackness, Whiteness, agency, authority, and segregation.[11]

A few comments about this study's use of user reviews from *Amazon* are in order. Several thousand reviews left on *Amazon*'s pages about the movies examined for this study were read and analyzed in much the same way historians analyze any primary source. Reviews were analyzed for what they said, did not say, and why they were important, for example. Naturally, using reviews from *Amazon* are far from comprising a comprehensive sample, but they provide a sample that is arguably better than what was

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[11] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image / Music / Text.*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-147; and Michel Foucault, "What is an Author," in *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard, et al. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-138.

Ulrich Bonnell Phillips discusses the institution of enslavement as being paternalistic and one essentially says that Blacks were better off under enslavement. Stampp argues that enslavement was anything but a paternalistic social institution: It was a profitable system of labor, not restricted to agriculture, deliberately chosen by southerners and reinforced by law, religion, and custom, see Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966); and Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

On the note of a performer's intent: Meryl Streep says, "I think that giving voice to characters who have no other voice is the great worth of what we do….the *real* thing that makes me feel so good [about acting] is when I know I've said something for a soul, when I've presented a soul." Her statement is usual in terms of speaking to the power actors and actresses do have when it comes to having opportunities to representing diverse characters. But, it also embodies arrogance. Obviously, said person has some kind of historical voice or it would be completely impossible to represent them or even know about them. All people, as has been well established for over at least a half century now, leave records of some kind or another. Rather than having wealthy White people represent minorities, society should work to develop ways to give minorities broader social and political voices, see Jim Cullen, *Sensing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119.

possible prior to the Internet. There is no way to know for certain whether or not a reviewer actually watched the movie, but it does not matter in that their comments still speak to their feelings and knowledge of the subject. Since people who left reviews were not solicited to do so and did so at their leisure on their own devices, reviews might also provide a "truer" sample than if they were gathered in a room and asked to answer a series of questions. From the perspective of Carlo Ginzburg, we can also surmise that the opinions spoken in the reviews are held by most across society, especially since there is such a narrow range of opinions voiced in the reviews and all reviews came from the same society. Even if we do not accept this reasoning, we have what amounts to an unprecedented reservoir of public opinion speaking to how accurate they believe films about the Civil Rights Revolution to be. Thousands of people took the time to share their thoughts about these films. These reviews, while limited to those with Internet access and money to watch these films, speak to how everyday people are using and expressing their voices as historical actors and how everyday people are invested in various uses of the past. History is most definitely not something people are disengaged with, and their thoughts need to be taken seriously, as they provide a rare insight into people's mind. All of this alone is substantial enough to warrant academic attention. Given the nature of the Internet and the shifts it brings in how language and punctuation are used, such as using the ellipses not to indicate the omission of words but to indicate the next thought or a brief pause, sometimes some of the quotations from *Amazon* reviews found in the following chapters have been slightly

"translated" to avoid confusion for the reader; these changes do not in any way impact the original intent of authors.[12]

As an interdisciplinary dissertation, this work speaks to a variety of academic discourses. In addition to readily apparent ones (United States History, African American History, Public History), this study (and its expanded version as a future monograph) engages with work in American Studies, critical theory, critical race theory, cultural studies, digital humanities, public pedagogy, psychology, rhetoric, and sociology. The following sections offer detailed comments about the various theories, methodologies, and perspectives that inform this research. Additionally, the proceeding pages detail why this study is significant and explain the usage of important terms, not already mentioned.

Specifically, this dissertation makes several important contributions to the field of History. With this work, the filed now has a detailed assessment of how society understands the Civil Rights Revolution. In ways seldom done by historians, this study does close readings of fictional filmic texts--movies that have received little attention to-date--and uses these to make several overarching and new arguments. This dissertation

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[12] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*: *The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi et al. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xv; and Ilan Stavans, "Ellipses and I," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (accessed July 1, 2016) http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2016/06/26/ellipses-and-i/.

Additionally, following the guidelines found in section 25.3.1.1 in *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Eighth Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* obvious typos that do not impact the meaning of the review have been corrected without comment and without cluttering every sentence with "[sic]." While some quotations have been paraphrased and most have been synthesized, regularly quoting directly from the *Amazon* reviews is important given the revolutionary insight they provide. Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Eighth Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 351.

also makes use of reviews left by everyday people on the popular website/marketplace *Amazon* to get an even fuller of how the historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution takes shape. Such reviews are typically not considered valuable resources, and they were first used in 2009 for research that ultimately resulted in this dissertation.[13]

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As established by French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, *historical memory* simply refers to institutionalized ways in which a society or culture in a given historical moment represents the past, including who and what is and is not embraced in narratives and including any surrounding debates that might exist, as well as corresponding intertextuality. The concept of "historical *memory*" is accordingly a misnomer to the degree that it does not refer to actual memories. A society cannot collectively possibly know (or "remember") everything that has ever happened. Too many different, potentially important things happen all the time such that it is not possible for a society to remember everything or for historians to process and record everything. No one and no society *remembers* the Civil Rights Revolution. The Civil Rights Revolution is a culturally constructed narrative that includes an entire range of

[13] I am only aware of one other author who makes use of *Amazon* reviews, see Suzanne W. Jones, "The Divided Reception of *The Help*," *Southern Cultures* 20, no. 1 (2014): 7-25. Footnote 11 discusses my handling of "typos" in *Amazon* reviews. Jones also follows the same methodology followed here for "correcting" such where they occur. I first used *Amazon* reviews in a major research paper in 2009.

events, peoples, and movements that society and historians somewhat arbitrarily group together. While people who participated in boycotts, protests, and various acts of civil disobedience, for example, can certainly have personal, specific, quasi-unmediated individual memories, most people learn exclusively learn about such events second-hand and can only ever know a fraction of what happened, according to what was recorded and what survived.[14]

We should not take it for granted that the Civil Rights Revolution even lives within current historical memory in the imagined community called the United States. Even more noteworthy is that the Civil Rights Revolution lives in Hollywood film at all. Only over time is any given event deemed "important," and what is and is not deemed worthy of remembering can change and frequently occurs by accident. Change occurs through processes much more than events; nonetheless, a few iconic events and peoples typically constitute the historical memory of a given narrative. Parks, King, the Little Rock Nine, Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Malcolm X typical constitute the key cast of characters, and the Bus Boycott, the March on Washington, Sit-in Movement, and voter registration form its cast key of events. Given prejudices, historical amnesia, and limitations on the past that is accessible, it is important to specifically acknowledge what is and is not *remembered*. For example, only recently (even within the academic community) with increasingly acceptance of Queer individuals has Bayard Rustin, a Black

[14] Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

gay man, started to receive his rightful place as a close advisor to King and organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. Likewise, information about social movements by Chican@s and Queers has only recently entered public discourse as scholars and society have increasingly moved to recognize diversity and recover lost voices, for example.[15]

In addition to providing scholars with a window on how the general public understands the past, historical memory and "Hollywood History" are important to study because while they exist in sharp contrast with the work of academic historians, they closely align with how History has been done. Modern, professional, university-trained historians in the West first emerged in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the context of rapid industrialism. "History" became a professional, academic discipline. For the first time, so-called professional historians emerged and strived for objective, accurate, and evidence-based accounts, accounts that would be free of mythology. For most of time, on the other hand, conceptions of the past were not necessarily intended to be accurate per se. This holds true for historians and non-

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[15] Following the lead of Cole's *Selling the Holocaust* it might be more accurate to call the "Civil Rights Revolution" the "Myth of the Civil Rights Revolution." Cole uses "myth of the Holocaust," not at all to deny or undermine the murder of ten million individuals and all of the other associated horrors but to constantly remind readers that an account of any event is based on available and selective evidence and is not and never can be complete or fully accurate, see Cole, *Selling the Holocaust,* x. For a discussion on the nature of memory, the past, and constructions of the past, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1995), especially, 14-17.

In informal surveys with several hundred students now, I have asked, "How many of you have heard of Bayard Rustin?" No one has ever heard of him thus far, until we talk about him. This is significant.

As a side note, the Boston Tea Party and Boston Massacre, for example, are known in part because of a surge in historical interests in the 1830s, Benjamin Bussey Thatcher's interview of George Robert Twelve Hewes, and misunderstandings about Hewes's age resulted in him being deemed a celebrity because of his participation in fighting for independence, see Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).

historians. In much the way films do today, accounts about the past were intended to provide hope, guidance, and establish authority, not to provide accurate, evidence-based accounts. They were narratives about where people and societies had been, where they were, and where they hoped to go with an emphasis on those deemed to be brave and right--or myths. As Richard T. Hughes says in *Myths Americans Live By*, "Contrary to colloquial usage, a myth is not a story that is patently untrue. Rather, a myth is a story that speaks of meaning and purpose, and for that reason it speaks truth to those who take it seriously." Before the professionalization of History, there was no concept of it being wrong to make up, exaggerate, or delete as necessary to fit larger goals. For most of humanity, therefore, historical accounts were not supposed to be accurate per se. Perhaps with the exception of Cold War-era consensus scholarship, there has been an increasing gap between how professional historians and "everyday historians" see the past. Indeed, everyday conceptions of the past created, held, and perpetuated by most people and organizations remain focused on myth rather than evidence or any rigorous examination of the past, as revealed by examining historical memory.[16]

Easily dismissing popular, filmic, non-academic conceptions of the Civil Rights Revolution as inaccurate, as not influential, or as mere entertainment undermines how society has understood and practiced History for most of time. Contemporary cultural movies that make use of the past, therefore, are not deviations from the norm, rather

[16] Hughes, *Myths Americans Live By*, x.

only professional histories are. In addition, if we reject such popular uses of the past as being gaps between "what really happened" and "fiction" or between "academic History" and "non-academic History," we miss opportunities to be professional historians and to study not just historical memory but life as it actually exists to the vast majority, too. While not "real," movies are very "real" to audiences, on both conscious and unconscious levels. For example, movies create and perpetuate widespread beliefs that racism is no longer significant, was never that bad, and that the United States is a utopian society. Such filmic worlds deserve criticism and historians have a responsibility to advocate for` change where warranted. Yet, there is also a responsibility to reject that movies are continuing an important human tradition.

Before moving forward, a few notes on the term "history" are necessary, too. "History" is a catchall word that refers to a variety of very different things, including *all* of the past, an institutionalized academic discipline, and understandings of the past. Unlike German, the English language, does not have the necessary words to allow easy distinction between the various meanings of "history." Nonetheless, Charles A. Beard's distinctions between "history as past actuality," "history as record," and "history as thought" are useful. To Beard, "history as past actuality" (*Geschichte* in German) encompasses "all that has been done, said, felt, and thought by human beings on this planet since humanity began its long career." "History as record" refers to all the sources used that provide knowledge about the past. And "history as thought" (*Geschichtsschreibung* in German) refers to construed understandings of the past or History, historiography, and historical memory. Following Beard, then, this study defines

history with a little "h" as everything and anything, anywhere from less than half a microsecond ago (there is no "present"), and *History* with a capital "H" as constructed narratives and understandings about the past.[17]

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Films are important primary texts that require rigorous examination, given their extreme popularity and influence. Films, at first a matter of a few minutes or even seconds, originally began in the 1880s as scientific tools. Middle- and upper-class individuals looked down on movies as being immoral, a waste of time, and an activity exclusively for people of low economic standing. This changed with the astounding success of *The Birth of a Nation*. Since then, cinema has grown to be enormously popular. Today, according to Joe R. Feagin, "the average citizen spends thirteen hours a year at the movie theaters, and half of all adults go the movies at least once a month." This statistic does not include movies watched through traditional cable or satellite television services or newer services such as *Amazon*, *Hulu*, *Netflix*, or *YouTube* that live stream movies. Marc Ferro says that television has become a "parallel school" given that

[17] Charles A. Beard, "Written History as an Act of Faith," *The American Historical Review* 39, no. 2 (1934): 219-220; Martin Bunzl, *Real History: Reflections on Historical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 4-5; W. Bryan Rommel Ruiz, *American History Goes to the Movies: Hollywood and the American Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3; Nick Sacco, "On De-Mythologizing History," *Exploring the Past: Reading, Thinking, and Blogging about History* (accessed March 6, 2014) https://pastexplore.wordpress.com/2014/03/06/on-de-mythologizing-history/; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 2-6, 26-27, 45, 48; William Twinin, *Rethinking Evidence: Exploratory Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 99-109; and Daniel Woolf, *A Global History of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

the average individual, regardless of education, watches four hours of television every day and seldom reads; given the power and popularity of cinema, movies have also become a parallel school. Furthermore, Hollywood cinema has dominated the movie industry in the United States and around the world since the Great Depression.[18]

While films, highly-rehearsed productions, are much more than "mere entertainment," people almost always go to the movies to be entertained or to escape. People are always processing information and learning both consciously and unconsciously, and such "knowledge" that comes through entertainment comes when people are most susceptible to believing and internalizing messages that might otherwise meet questions or outright opposition. Informed by semiotics where *every thing* is a text, we can also make use of my concept of the "historical stand-in" and the psychological concept of the "confirmation bias" in studying film and its connections

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[18] Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffn, *American on Film*: *Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009); Mihaly Kubey Csikszentmihalyi, *Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience* (Hillsdale: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1990). See also, Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1985); Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); J. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History*, trans. by Naomi Greene (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988); John Hill, et al., eds., *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Gerald Mast, et al., eds., *Film Theory and Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); John E. O'Connor, *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television* (Malabar: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1990); Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Sontag*, Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 21, 133; Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing), 2000; Herman Vera, ed., "Forward: A Nation of Sheep by Joe R. Feagin," *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003); and Warhole, *America*.

For detailed historical examinations of the movie industry as a social institution and its interactions with the public, see *The American Film Industry* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin, eds., *Looking Past the Screen: Case Studies in American Film History and Method* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

with historical memory. In one infamous scene in *The Birth of a Nation* Gus (who is Black) tries to rape Flora (who is White). From a perspective of dominate historical memory in the early twentieth century, when Gus tries to rape Flora, he *confirms* the popular bias that all Black men are dangerous and that all White women need the protection of all White men. Gus is also a *historical stand-in* for all Black men, for example. Throughout movies about the Civil Rights Revolution, characters who are both Black and submissive and who rely on White people are the historical stand-ins for actual people who were anything but submissive or dependent on White people. Dark, crowded theaters, with big screens and loud theaters only compound the susceptibility of the human state of mind for these and other messages.[19]

In addition to their fictional nature (as partially discussed in the previous section), historians and other academics sometimes dismiss movies because they are not located in an archive and are not a traditional written source. Scholars with disciplinary backgrounds in history, literature, philosophy, psychology, sociology, or a combination of these have indeed studied movies from almost the beginning of movies. Early critics include Michael Foucault and Siegfried Kracauer. Film studies have taken a

[19] Andrew, *The Major Film Theories*, 1-74; Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-5, 11-18; Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012): 91-95, 103-108; Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed., Stuart Hall (Los Angeles: Sage, 1997), 13-74; Mark Moss, *Toward the Visualization of History: The Past as Image* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008); Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 175-220; and Sharlene Sayegh and Eric Altice, "Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction" in *History and Theory* (Boston: Pearson, 2014), 95-111.

variety of forms. Historians have studied the history of technology involved, such as the shift from silent films to talkies and from black-and-white films to color films, that creates films. Others study how the economics and business sides of Hollywood have changed over time. Historians have also followed the careers of specific directors, actors, and actresses. Other historians provide the kind of critiques found in this study that analyze the implications of film and consider how film compares to other sources. Susan Sontag and Andy Warhol have written about how film functions as a metaphoric mirror of a society's hopes and fears. Additionally, as Robert Sklar explains in his *Movie-Made America*, dominant cinema reflects and shapes audiences' minds: reflects in that it uses stereotypes and mores familiar to audiences and shapes by subtly or not so subtly providing alternative narratives.[20]

On the point of films being inaccurate: every source without exception is "trustworthy" and important for revealing the hopes and fears of said human reflection and expression, if nothing else. Every source is important, as this study shows by looking at Hollywood film about the Civil Rights Revolution in close detail, as well as reviews about these films. Every source has meaning. Every source speaks to accuracies. Robert Brent Toplin and W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, for example, say scholars are too hard on movies, hold movies to impossible standards, and need to recognize that Hollywood

[20] Benshoff and Griffn, *American on Film*; Csikszentmihalyi, *Television and the Quality of Life*; Allen and Gomery, *Film History*; Andrew, *Concepts in Film History*; Andrew, *The Major Film Theories*; Ferro, *Cinema and History*; Hill, *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*; Mast, *Film Theory and Criticism*; O'Connor, *Image as Artifact*; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*; Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*; Stam, *Film Theory*; Vera, *Screen Saviors*; and Warhole, *America*.

does a great service by delivering concepts of the past to people en masse. On the other hand, bell hooks (née Gloria Watkins) has lambasted films throughout her books and lectures, saying films are fantasy and serve to perpetuate racism, sexism, and everything else that holds back progress. Regardless of whether movies are "accurate" or not, people see movies about the past and think they have learned important and "true" historical lessons and can speak with authority about said acquired information.[21] The "accuracy" of a film also does not matter when we consider additional theories, as this study does, that historical films are actually about the present. As Mark Golub puts it in, "'History Died for Our Sins': Guilt and Responsibility in Hollywood Redemption Histories":

> Framing the question solely as one of historical accuracy or authenticity mistakenly assumes that the film is primarily about the historical period depicted on the screen rather than about the contemporary audience. As Thomas Cripps puts it: movies teach us about "the culture of the time in which they were released rather than of the era they were about."

Golub, Kracauer, and those who work in the branch of critical theory called "new historicism," argue that films tell us more about the time in which it was made than the time portrayed. Indeed, by utilizing hermeneutics we know there is always a very strong

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[21] hooks, *Reel to Real*; and Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002). Additionally, in her essay, "The Sites of Memory," Tony Morrison says in part, "I consider that my single gravest responsibility (in spite of magic) is not to lie. When I hear someone say, 'The truth is stranger than fiction,' I think that old chestnut is truer than we know, because it doesn't say that the truth is truer than fiction; just that it's stranger, meaning that it's odd. It may be excessive, it may be more interesting, but the important thing is that it's random--and fiction is not random. Therefore, the crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot. So I'm looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it (which doesn't mean they didn't have it)," see Morrison, "The Sites of Memory," in *Inventing the Truth*: *The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 83-102.

reciprocal relationship between any artifact's, culture's, person's representations and understandings of previous times.[22]

On the note of archives: here it is important to remember that archives too are a form of historical memory. Archives are deliberately constructed to only maintain specific documents and memories. These texts are subjectively organized and catalogued. As Foucault has written, the archive, therefore, does not provide unmediated access to the voice of others. Even more, archives and written sources privilege those events, peoples, and perspectives that are recorded in ink on paper and that have survived. While we certainly need these sources to work toward understandings of the past, we also need information provided by looking at everyday objects, oral histories, movies, and other non-traditional sources.[23]

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Occasionally, someone will say something along the lines of, "Scholars can't be activists! They must be disinterested reporters!" While everyone should strive for wide

[22] Mark Golub, "'History Died for Our Sins': Guilt and Responsibility in Hollywood Redemption Histories," *Journal of American Culture* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 23.

[23] Additionally, Raphael Samuel says, "History, in the hands of professional historians, is apt to present itself as an esoteric form of knowledge. It fetishizes archival-based research, as it has done ever since the Rankean revolution – or counter revolution – in scholarship," see Paula Amad, *Counter-Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahan's Archives de la Planéte* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 8; Philip Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3, 15; and Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26-27, 45, 48, 51-53.

understandings and deep appreciations, no one can be truly "objective." Work by historians will be better if we *are* indeed activists. Additionally, minority history and cultural studies, two major focuses of this dissertation, have activism automatically built into the field as they grew out of movements to give voice to people previously neglected. This indicates a commitment to the field; to the people, topics, or places being covered; and a personal commitment. Sara Goldrick-Rab's essay, "On Scholarly Activism" addresses some of these points. She encourages professionals to be a scholar-activist. Goldrick-Rab also explains that being an "activist," is not the same as being an "advocate." She says, an advocate begins with a core and guiding goal--not a theory--and pushes for changes to achieve that goal. In contrast, a scholar-activist begins with a set of testable assumptions, subjects these to rigorous research, and once in possession of research findings, seeks to translate those findings into action.[24]

Likewise, all academics are biased, biased by the historical moments and historical memories in which they were born, lived, went to college; biased by their personal interests; and biased by all of the "accidents" of history. These biases should be considered and even be embraced--with acknowledgment and caution. As Philip Gardner puts it, "In the hermeneutical circle, by contrast, our preconceptions as historians are not to be overcome, even if this were possible, for they constitute a

[24] Sara Goldrick-Rab, "On Scholarly Activism," *Contexts* (accessed May 19, 2015) http://contexts.org/blog/on-scholarly-activism/; and Miguel A. De La Torre, "Philosophy of Pedagogy," *Rev. Dr. Miguel A. De La Torre* (accessed March 6, 2016) http://www.drmigueldelatorre.com/Philosophy_of_Pedagogy.html.

fundamental element in that relation by which understanding becomes possible at all." As a result of the inherent activist and bias brought to this study by its author, a discussion of assumptions and personal experience navigating the world of racialized (and other) identities follows. History, at its core, is the ability to question, understand, and remember.[25]

This study operates under several assumptions that are important to mention, as they form a backdrop that guides this study. First, both individual and especially, institutionalized racialized discrimination, more than any other form of oppression that has existed in the United States, has been and remains the most important and prevalent example of how White people assert *its* power over non-Whites, especially those racialized as Black. The other side of this racism directed toward Blacks is White Privilege and other manifestations of Whiteness. As Chris Barker puts it, "Racism is a matter not simply of individual psychology or pathology, but of patterns of cultural representation deeply ingrained within practices, discourses, and subjectivities of Western societies." Class-based, sex-based, gender-based, sexual orientation-based, and country-of-origin-based discrimination, for example, are equally wrong and all-too-common. From even before its official founding, the United States, however, specifically codified mores both in writing and in the oral rhetoric of the era that affirmed its belief in the perpetual superiority of Whites and inferiority of Blacks. As Critical Race Theorists explain, the White/Black binary is also an important force in the United States. This

[25] Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory*, 49.

theory asserts that any minority group only receives relief when it can parallel its suffering with that of Blacks. On another note, even the most cursory examination of the nation's past and its dealings with various conflict groups (e.g., **White**/Black, **high class**/low class, **men**/women, when conceptualized in the tradition of structuralism) reveal the ways in which racialized discrimination and mores have infiltrated *everything*. This quotation of unknown origin from a blog called "mansplained marxist" helps summarize these thoughts:

> If you're an Americanist historian, you better also consider yourself a historian of race. There's nothing in this country's history that doesn't lead back to racism. To paraphrase a now-famous metaphor, racism is the sugar in the American cake. Sure, the cake has other ingredients, but once the thing is mixed and baked, you're never going to be able to take a bite that is sugar-free. Nods to racism (or any sort of oppression) don't count. We need a profession-wide, systemic understanding of what racism is, where it comes from, and how it morphs and changes to stay alive. That's the only way we're going to learn to win the fight against it.[26]

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[26] Chris Barker, "Ethnicity, Race and Nation" in *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: SAGE publications, 2008), 206; mansplained marxist, "If you're an Americanist, you better," *Tumblr* (accessed June 20, 2013) http://mansplainedmarxist.tumblr.com/post/ 53297259108/if-youre-an-americanist-historian-you-better. I contacted mansplained marxist in December 2013 to inquire where they found this quotation, but as of July 2014, I have not received a reply. Nonetheless, the quotation is useful and its sugar/cake metaphor for racism is powerful and appropriate.

W. E. B. Du Bois first developed what came to be called White privilege with his notion that White people received an additional psychological wage because of their racialization. Since Peggy McIntosh's groundbreaking 1988 article, studies on White privilege (and other types of privilege) and Whiteness have provided many valuable insights into the nature of racialization, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies," no. 189, *Center for Research on Women, Working Paper Series* (1988), 1-19; and Paula S. Rothenberg, *White Privilege* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2011).

Following Stuart Hall's call, the person who controls the relationship is bolded to adequately capture the dynamics on the binary throughout this dissertation. Structuralist-based binaries are, of course, limited but remain useful conceptual tools, see Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other,'" in *Representation*, 234-238.

Second, as initially first brought to prominence by Franz Boas, everything is a social and cultural construction subject to constant fluctuations. By analyzing everything as a construction, we are able to recognize and begin to understand the extreme change and diversity that occurs across time and place. For instance, the environments in which people are born have profound impacts on who they become. People who are racist, for example, are at least partly products of a society far more racist than they could ever be. Such recognition also helps one avoid being ethnocentric, and it helps to embrace cultural relativism and be more comfortable with change and difference. Anything and everything around us could easily be different, as well.

Finally, similar to the role of racialized mores, contemporary culture is another force that affects everything. As certain branches of Neo-Marxism say, "people [beginning in the 1920s] were more and more likely to be controlled by the culture rather than the economy." Indeed, as this study shows, Hollywood cultural productions about the Civil Rights Revolution work to give cultural currency to racism, and from the perspective of the psychological notion of the "conformation bias," *confirm* the narrative told in movies. People can (and maybe even should) enjoy being entertained, but they must also be highly on-guard. It is one thing to be entertained, but another when this entertainment rewrites the past and perpetuates racism. Popular culture provides a tremendous reservoir of information about the hopes, fears, and mores of a society. These seemingly innocent spectacles have profound consequences for how people and subcultures do and do not understand the world they inhabit. Nonetheless, scholars critical of everyday entertainment regularly face criticism, even occasionally

from other scholars, along the line of "can't you enjoy anything, it's just supposed to be entertainment," "that's ridiculous, that movie's not racist," to "don't care if it's real or not, racist, or what, let me enjoy zoning out." Such blind acceptance makes a study such as this one all the more needed and urgent.[27]

While potentially not conventional in every sense, the following paragraphs will shift tones slightly to allow *me*, the author, to provide some comments about my own personal "racial awakening" in first person. Peter Kolchin's landmark historiographical essay, ""Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," explains that it is now important and common place for scholars writing about Whiteness and similar issues to discuss their own personal interactions with racialized experiences and realities. My personal racial awakening happened in a series of what are now quasi-flashbulb memories. I grew up in a small very southern community in Texas, one with a small Black population and until recently, a small Hispanic population. My first memory of there being White and Black people dates back to daycare, around 1990. There was *one* Black teacher and *one* Black child at this daycare. For the other children, at least from my observation, it was completely a non-issue.[28]

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[27] "Full IGN Interview with Anita Sarkeesian," *Feminist Frequency* (accessed October 21, 2013) http://www.feministfrequency.com/2013/06/full-ign-interview-with-anita-sarkeesian/; and George Ritzer, *Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classical Roots* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2003), 115-122. For additional information related to how I study History in ways beyond the scope of this dissertation, see Pegoda, "13 Tenets to Seeing and Understanding the World as a Scholar" (accessed October 9, 2013) http://andrewpegoda.com/2013/10/09/13-tenets-to-seeing-and-understanding-the-world-as-a-scholar/, for example.

[28] Peter Kolchin, "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 166.

Growing up as a child, I remember receiving magazines and letters in Spanish occasionally because some deemed “Pegoda” to be Hispanic. One day I asked my mom, “Are we Hispanic?” The name “Pegoda,” as best we know, was essentially made up when the man who first came to the United States from somewhere around present-day Eastern Europe or Russia in 1851 and did not know how to spell his last name.

The elementary school I attended similarly had a tiny Black enrollment. This elementary school had a tradition of having the first and second grade students in the Year Around Program participate in a massive Fourth of July performance. One of the components of this play was a square dance number. One of these years, around 1993, my square dancing partner was a Black child. I distinctly remember thinking and knowing, although no one ever said anything and I did not yet have the vocabulary to articulate such complex thoughts, that to some people a White boy and a Black girl dancing would be strictly forbidden and seen as something morally wrong.

Years later, I learned another lesson about racism and discrimination. This was in 1998 or 1999, my parents and I were in Houston seeing all kinds of different specialists in an effort to find some solution as to why my legs were constantly hurting so bad. We were leaving one of these apportionments, and I wanted to eat at the McDonalds down the street near the Astrodome. My dad tried to explain that given the location of that McDonalds we might be the only Whites in there and that *some* Black people were prejudiced against White people.

In Intermediate School, 1999 to 2002, I became fully aware of another dimension of racialized realities. At this school, right down the street from the elementary school I

attended, children who spoke Spanish as their native or at-home language were in the majority. Teachers would yell, “ENGLISH!!” when these children would speak Spanish to each other. This was the first time I was constantly around individuals who did not “look like me” or “sound like me,” so to speak. I realized some then but fully now that a significant number of the children I went to elementary school with had parents who transferred them to the *other* intermediate school in the next town--a school that had virtually zero Black or Hispanic students.

The next awakening of sorts came during my two-and-a-half-year tenure working in “the real world.” For my first job, I worked at Chick-fil-A while finishing high school (I homeschooled myself for high school) and starting college. I quickly became one of the fastest employees and would wait on hundreds of customers each shift. This ended up being hundreds of very diverse customers I served and talked with on a regular basis. I had customers who only spoke Spanish or American Sign Language, customers who were lawyers or mothers, and customers who were transgender, for example. Likewise, I worked with a very diverse group of people. Although there were certainly rude customers (including the one who threw her order at me with full force and the ones who cussed me out), the vast, vast majority of these extremely diverse individuals were simply most kind. This is where I learned and fully internalized that people are friendly and all the same in a way not possible without actually being around so many diverse people. (Now, for instance, I think about these individuals and realize they are inevitably among those who accept the inaccurate and harmful images in *The Help*, *Hairspray*, and other such texts.)

My experiences as a student in institutions of higher education since 2005 and as a college professor since 2007 have also played a tremendous role in my racial awakening and have gradually transformed and "radicalized" me. Naturally, I have worked closely with countless colleagues, professors, and students. I have also studied and learned in great detail the role of forces such as institutionalized racism and White Privilege and Male Privilege. In my everyday life, research, and teaching, I pay close attention to the inevitable racialized (and genderized and classized) nature of clothing, hairstyles, products at stores and restaurants, coverage and rhetoric of life in media outlets. I recognize that not being in poverty and being White and cis-Male also makes it "easier" to study and talk about racism because, for example, when Black scholars speak about racism they are occasionally accused of being "angry" or "excessively biased." In one instance, in late 2013, Shannon Gibney, a Black professor of English and African Diaspora Studies, was reprimanded after a few White students complained, saying that her lecture on structural discrimination alienated then. Additionally, women who speak of sexism are more likely to face similar accusations. Further by acknowledging the role of Whiteness, I recognize the ways in which individuals, including myself, unavoidably benefit from racism by virtue of being White. The best thing to do in the face of such institutionalized dynamics is to be a scholar-activist through teaching, speaking, researching, and writing, for example, about racism and helping others, especially non-White individuals, have access to cultural, economic, educational, and political institutions. Whiteness Studies also helps us realize that the mores associated with White people are not automatic in any way; like everything else, they are a social

construction. Whiteness studies looks at the White Southern racist, for instance, and examines how society also racializes him/her, and the ways in which people have "race" creates various societal expectations that are beyond a person's full control or understanding.[29]

Additionally, there is a certain urgency to this study. Education is increasingly under attack, as funding decreases and textbooks downright rewrite the past to fit Conservative/Tea Party agendas and classify enslaved people as "workers." Since the election and reelection of Barack Obama to the office of President of the United States and since Donald Trump has become President Elect, racism has gotten more extreme and overt. Congress has seemingly made it its goal to oppose everything Obama aims to accomplish. This research, thinking, and writing for this dissertation have occurred in the context of Sandra Bland's, Eric Garner's, Freddie Gray's, and Trayvon Martin's deaths, to name just a few, and in the context of Donald Trump's vicious campaign to become the next president of the United States. My research has also happened during a time when Hollywood has released an avalanche of films dealing with various aspects of racism, most often in ways that are problematic. As an example of the on-going, long Civil Rights Movement, participants and their allies have used hashtags on Twitter and other social networks to promote freedom. Hashtags have included

[29] For example, see Tressie McMillan Cottom, "The Discomfort Zone: Want to Teach Your Students About Structural Racism? Prepare for a Formal Reprimand," *Slate* (accessed December 3, 2013) http://www.slate.com/articles/life/counter_narrative/2013/12/minneapolis_professor_shannon_gibney_reprimanded_for_talking_about_racism.html.

#doilooklikeacriminal, #justiceforfreddiegray, #ifidieinpolicecustody, #icantbreathe, #nevertrump, and #blacklivesmatter. syreeta mcfadden's tweet in response to Martin's death left a strong impression on me: "Only in America can a dead black boy go on trial for his own murder."[30]

In addition to my professional interests in Black History and civil and human rights, this study is also personal. While I *am* an English-speaking, racialized as White, cisgendered man, I am also somewhat disabled, a survivor of numerous tumors and medical problems, and face a variety of on-going medical challenges. Two of my four surgeries have occurred during graduate school. Although I by no means *know* the ways in which Black individuals personally see and feel racism and discrimination on a day-to-day basis and the ways in which this undeniably hurts to the core, I have personally experienced hearing and dealing with the frustrating microaggressions that speak to the pervasiveness of Able-bodied Privilege, as well as Heteronormative Privilege. As a result, I have long been even further committed to causes that support equity and fairness.

[30] syreeta mcfadden, Twitter post, July 12, 2013, 8:53 am, https://twitter.com/reetamac.

CHAPTER ONE:
"WE JUST, WE JUST DIDN'T KNOW ANY BETTER": THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT, HISTORICAL FICTION, AND *THE LONG WALK HOME* (1990)

The dining room in Mrs. Burke's house had come to mean many things to me. It symbolized hatred, love, and fear in many variations. The hatred, love, and fear in many variations. The hatred and the love caused me much anxiety and fear. But courage was growing in me too. Little by little it was getting harder and harder for me not to speak out.

-Anne Moody, 1968

People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.

-Rosa Parks, 1992

Whoopi Goldberg consistently flipped the script on Hollywood by bringing artistry and quiet dignity to the screen….Whoopi gave these women--ordinary working women, the likes of whom I have known all my life--grace, a heart, and a face.

-Melanie Antoinette Mariella Hinds, 1997

A thoughtful and accurate look at the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56, the effects on two families, one Black and the other White, and the treatment of maids and household workers during this era. You can't compare it with The Help. The Long Walk Home *deals with real choices, social mores and restrictions, and emotional and physical scarring by the dominant class.* The Help*, on the other hand, is a saccharin fairy tale.*[1]

-N. Raphael, 2015

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[1] "Customer Reviews for *The Long Walk Home*," *Amazon* (accessed August 6, 2016) https://smile.amazon.com/Long-Walk-Home-Sissy-Spacek/product-reviews/B00AURAQKM/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_summary?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints; Melanie Antoinette Mariella Hinds, "Letters to the Editor: More Whoopi," *New York Magazine* (accessed July 12, 2015) https://books.google.com/books?id=VegCAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA8&dq=%22the+long+walk+home%22+whoopi&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CFUQ6AEwCGoVChMI7uD6qKulxwIVCdWACh0hyQo8#v=onepage&q=%22the%20long%20walk%20home%22%20whoopi&f=false; Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 2004), 163; and Rosa Parks, "'Tired of Giving In': The Launching of the Montgomery Bus Boycott," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 61.

Widely remembered as the Mother of the Civil Rights Revolution, Rosa Parks's place in dominant historical memory does not mirror such an honorary distinction. Rather than recognize her as the militant, life-long activist that she was--who advocated for the nine Scottsboro Men's freedom, who investigated when Black women were raped, who helped Black people register to vote, who worked with others to lead Montgomery's chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and who, for over two decades, worked as Congressman John Conyers's assistant--society has been content with its decision to fully delete Parks except to say that she was tired, old, and spontaneously decided to remain seated when ordered to move and, subsequently, started a city-wide and nation-wide movement. These popular myths and stories are, of course, woefully misguided and miss the rich complexity of how the Montgomery Bus Boycott functioned from December 1955 to December 1956 and its resulting revolutionary, precedent-setting nature. Cultural artifacts, especially children's books (which number almost one hundred in total), reinforce such images. For example, Brad Meltzer and Christopher Eliopoulos's *I am Rosa Parks*, which has children in kindergarten through the third grade as its targeted audience, turns people into caricatures, both in terms of the images used and the way people are described. They create a Parks who as a child thought rainbows came out of the "Colored" water fountain. Rosa Parks is depicted as sickly, small, and weak her entire life. As an adult, she is depicted as being no more than two feet tall; whereas, White adults are always drawn to scale. Meltzer and Eliopoulos say that Parks alone sparked an entire nation-wide movement that suddenly and successfully changed

everything for the better. David A. Adler and Robert Casilla's *A Picture Book of Rosa Parks* and Faith Ringgold's *If a Bus Could Talk*: *The Story of Rosa Parks* aim for similar audiences and do notably better at providing richer contextualization and fairer depictions but still focus on Parks as a singularly transformative figure who from the time of her birth was destined to transform the United States. Hollywood productions, including John Cork and Richard Pearce's production of *The Long Walk Home* (1990), targeted at adults, further perpetuate a historical memory of Rosa Parks that is in sharp contrast with the evidence but challenges viewers with its atypical depictions of everyday life in the 1950s for Whites and Blacks.[2]

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[2] David A. Adler and Robert Casilla, *A Picture Book of Rosa Parks* (New York: Holiday House, 1993); "John Conyers On Rosa Parks: 'She Earned the Title as Mother of the Civil Rights Movement,'" *Democracy Now!* (accessed August 1, 2016) http://www.democracynow.org/2005/10/25/ john_conyers_on_rosa_parks_she; Brad Meltzer and Christopher Eliopoulos, *I am Rosa Parks* (New York: Dial Books, 2014); and Faith Ringgold, *If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2003). See also, "Civil Rights Literature," *Negro Artist* (accessed February 29, 2012) http://www.negroartist.com/Civil%20Rights%20Literature/Civil%20Rights%20Literature.htm; and Herbert R. Kohl, *She Would Not Be Moved: How We Tell the Story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycot*t (New York: New Press, 2005), especially 59-78.

For more information about the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Rosa Parks, and other important figures in this movement, see Brooks Barns, "From Footnote to Fame in Civil Rights History," *The New York Times* (accessed July 14, 2014) http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/books/26colvin.html?_r=0; Taylor Branch, "The Montgomery Bus Boycott," in *Parting The Waters: American in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1988), 143-205; Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005); Mary Fair Burks, "Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941–1965*, eds. Vicki L. Crawford, et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 71-84; Charles Duhigg, "Saddleback Church and the Montgomery Bus Boycott: How Movements Happen," in *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (New York: Random House, 2012), 215-244; Phillip Hoose, *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* (New York: Melanie Kroupa Books, 2009); Danielle L. McGguire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), especially 48-134; Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984), especially 40-76; Parks, "'Tired of Giving In': The Launching of the Montgomery Bus Boycott," 61-74; Jeremy W. Peters and Julie Bosman, "Rosa Parks Won a Fight, but Left a Licensing Rift," *The New York Times* (accessed July 14, 2014) http://www.nytimes.com/ 2006/10/08/business/yourmoney/08rosa.html; Jo Ann Robinson and David J. Garrow, *Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); E.R. Shipp, "Rosa

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The Long Walk Home has never been widely popular. Initially released on December 21, 1990, Miramax pulled the film two weeks later after it only grossed $212,300 in theater sales at the four cinemas that picked it up. Competition in the 1990 Christmas season included *Home Alone*, *Kindergarten Cop*, *The Godfather Part III*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Dances with the Wolves*, *Look Who's Talking Too*, and *The Russia House*, which collectively grossed just over $370,000,000 in the same timeframe. Upon its re-release in late March 1991, *The Long Walk Home* only grossed $8,225,000 at 272 theaters, which sharply contrasts with *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II* and its $140,000,000 gross at 2,868 theaters the same week. Its competitors, clearly, had very different historical memories to offer.[3]

Parks, 92, Founding Symbol of Civil Rights Movement, Dies," *The New York Times* (accessed July 14, 2014) http://www.nytimes.com/ 2005/10/25/us/25parks.html; and Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), especially 46-165.

For more information on children's literature and historical memory, see Sarah Park, "Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Racism and Sexism," *Readings Park* (accessed January 2, 2014) https://readingspark.wordpress.com/adoption-childrens-literature/ten-quick-ways-to-analyze-childrens-books-for-racism-and-sexism/; and Sara Lynn Schwebel, "History, Memory, and Myth: Children's Literature and Classroom Conceptions of the Past (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2006).

[3] Data for earnings only include domestic sales since this study focuses on historical memory in the United States. Additionally, all numbers have been converted to account for inflation through 2013. *Box Office Mojo* (accessed August 3, 2014) http://boxofficemojo.com; *IMDBPro* (accessed July 26, 2014) https://pro-labs.imdb.com; *The Numbers* (accessed July 26, 2014) http://www.the-numbers.com; and Samuel H. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to present," *MeasuringWorth* (accessed August 3, 2014) http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/.

The Long Walk Home received a "third life" after the premier of *The Help* (2011). In January 2012, Miramax re-released a DVD version of the out-of-print film. As of August 2016, Amazon has 171 reviews for *The Long Walk Home* left by users since 1999; 119 or almost 70 percent have been since the release of *The Help*. Additionally, articles such as "Long Before *The Help* there was *The Long Walk Home*" suggest that *The Long Walk Home* provides a more honest and rigorous examination of civil rights struggles and that it "may be too earnest for its own good." Comments on this article confirm that people had forgotten about *The Long Walk Home* and consider it to simply be the first "*The Help*" and a much better made version. One commenter longs for the era that produced *The Long Walk Home*: "Hollywood was willing to at least take a chance with showing a splinter of true black and white racism."[4]

The Long Walk Home takes place in December 1955 and January 1956 against the backdrop of the beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The Thompsons are the focal of this work of historical fiction. Mrs. Thompson (Sissy Spacek) and Mr. Thompson (Dwight Schultz) are members of the White middle-class and have two children: Mary Catherine (Lexi Randall) and Sara (Crystal Robbins). Odessa Cotter (Whoopi Goldberg) and Claudia (Cherene Snow) are both Black and work as maids for the Thompsons. They

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[4] Sean Chavel, "*The Long Walk Home* and *The Help*," *Flick Minute: Reinventing The Language Of Film Emotion* (accessed May 5, 2013) http://flickminute.com/long-walk-home-and-help/; "Customer Reviews for *The Long Walk Home*"; Peter Drier, "Will *The Help*'s Oscar Revive Interest in *The Long Walk Home*?," *The Huffington Post* (accessed March 16, 2014) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/oscars-2012-the-help_b_1303171.html; and Sergio, "Long Before *The Help* There Was *The Long Walk Home*, *Shadow and Act On Cinema Of The African Diaspora* (accessed March 16, 2014) http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/long_before_the_help_ there_was_the_long_walk_home.

are responsible for the household's cleaning, cooking, and mothering, even on holidays. Odessa's family plays an important part in this movie too and includes three children--Theodore (Richard Habersham), Franklin (Jason Weaver), and in a clear reference to the historical march in Selma, Selma (Erika Alexander)--and a husband, Herbert (Ving Rhames).[5]

While *The Long Walk Home* depicts Mr. Thompson's transformation from one who never questions the status quo to one who is constantly suspicious of Odessa and to one who is an avid member of the White Citizen's Council, depicts Odessa taking care of Mary Catherine, and depicts the Cotters (with the exception of when Selma briefly breaks the boycott) united in their solidarity with other Blacks of Montgomery during the Boycott, for example, this film is much more about Mrs. Thompson--in what scholars have come to call the "anti-racist narrative" or the "racial conversion narrative." Mrs. Thompson is the only character who is truly well-rounded, and it is clearly expected that (White) audiences will identity with her in some way: Mrs. Thompson is primarily a historical stand-in for the person "they were" in the 1950s or the person "they would have been." Mrs. Thompson gives White people "permission" to be easy on themselves

[5] For more summary and commentary, see Peter Bates, "Review: *The Long Walk Home*," *Cinéaste* 18, no. 3 (1991), 51-53; Robert Ebert, "*The Long Walk Home*, Movie Review," *Robert Ebert* (accessed March 16, 2014) http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-long-walk-home-1991; "*The Long Walk Home* – Movie Sheds New Light on Montgomery Bus Boycott," *Jet* 79, no. 23 (March 1991): 50-56; Janet Maslin, "*The Long Walk Home* - Review/Film; A Personalized View of the Civil Rights Struggle," *New York Times* (accessed March 16, 2014) http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res= 9c0ceed8173cf932a15751c1a966958260; David Mills, "FILM: *The Long Walk Home*," *The Crisis* 97, no. 10 (December 1990): 6; and James Monaco, "*The Long Walk Home*," in *The Movie Guide* (New York: Perigee Trade, 1995), 490.

and to rewrite History. For further illustration, political scientist Mark Golub finds that *The Long Walk Home* is one of many anti-racist narratives, a new style of fiction that emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s (with *Mississippi Burning* and *Ghosts of Mississippi* being the only two examples he cites), where the film is at least somewhat about non-Whites but, ironically, where the crux is centered around the salvation and transformation of White characters. Similarly, Fred Hobson considers *The Long Walk Home* one of many racial conversion narratives because it traces Mrs. Thompson's gradual transformation from being blind to racism, to being content with an imperfect world, to being sympathetic toward Black people, to finally being an avid supporter and participant in the Bus Boycott. Working from a slightly different point-of-view, Sau-ling C. Wong analyzes *The Long Walk Home* in the context of a whole slate of films where People of Color are "mothering" White people. To Wong, *The Long Walk Home* is not about the 1950s but a mirror of the fear White people increasingly had in the face of increased diversity and economic struggle in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Odessa, then, not only comforts and converts Mrs. Thompson's conformity to safe activism, but also comforts fearful audiences in the early 1990s. (The maids in *The Help* serve similar purposes for audiences and their employers.) Additionally, Ana S. Q. Liberato and John D. Foster have appropriately classified *The Long Walk Home* as a "consensus narrative." Similar to Cold War-era consensus history, the consensus narrative emphasizes harmony and de-emphasizes discord. It recasts the demands and activists of the Civil Rights Revolution in a "less politically threatening and revolutionary form." *The Long Walk Home* repeatedly suggests the Bus Boycott was the first such act of its kind and focuses

on the unity between Odessa and Mrs. Thompson throughout, and as has already been mentioned, mostly on Mrs. Thompson's comparatively quick conversion to not just an ally but an activist herself.[6]

While scholars have just about exhausted possibilities for further analysis where Mrs. Thompson's dramatic transformation is concerned, important work remains to be done on all other aspects of *The Long Walk Home*. This chapter will proceed to grapple with representations of Black maids and how they are treated and with representations

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[6] Mark Golub, "History Died for Our Sins: Guilt and Responsibility in Hollywood Redemption Histories," *Journal of American Cultures* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 23-45; Fred Hobson, *But Now I See: The White Southern Racial Conversion Narrative* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Hobson, "The Southern Racial Conversion Narrative: Larry L. King and Pat Watters," *VQR: A National Journal of Literature & Discussion* (accessed July 16, 2013) http://www.vqronline.org/ essay/southern-racial-conversion-narrative-larry-l-king-and-pat-watters; Sharon Monteith, "The Movie-Made Movement: Civil Rites of Passage," in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. Paul Grainger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 125-130; Ana S. Q. Liberato and John D. Foster, "Representations and Remembrance: Tracing Civil Rights Meanings in the Narratives of Civil Rights Activists and Hollywood Filmmakers," *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 3 (September 2011): 367-384; and Sau-ling C. Wong, "Diverted Mothering: Representations of Caregivers of Color in the Age of 'Multiculturalism,'" in *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, eds. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, et al. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 67-91.

Additionally, Yvonne Davis Frear and Jennifer Fuller briefly discuss *The Long Walk Home* in the context of other cultural texts that emerged in the 1990s and provide a broad, general overview of historical memory as concerns the Civil Rights Revolution; Carol M. Ward briefly touches on *The Long Walk Home* in her article which overviews dozens of films and argues that Mr. Thompson treats his wife similarly to how Black enslaved people were treated; Sharon Willis also examines *The Long Walk Home* (and the 1992 film, *Love Field*) and does so exclusively by analyzing cinematic techniques and reading different lines and shots as metaphors for social issues; and Hernán Vera and Andrew M. Gordon discuss *The Long Walk Home* and how it is compares and contrasts to a variety of other films, see Fuller, "Debating the Present through the Past: Representations of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1990s," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, eds. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Rainford (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 167-196; Frear, "Generation Versus Generation: African Americans in Texas Remember the Civil Rights Movement," in *Lone Star Pasts: Memory and History in Texas*, eds. Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 203-219; Ward, "The Southern Landscape in Contemporary films" in *Beyond the Stars: Locales in American Popular Film*, eds. Paul Loukides and Linda K. Fuller (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 103-117; Vera and Gordon, "Scarlett and Mammy Revisited," in *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 108-111; and Willis, "Race as Spectacle, Feminism as Alibi: Representing the Civil Rights Era in the 1990s," eds. Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo, in *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 98-114.

of the Black family and White family. A discussion of massive resistance in *The Long Walk Home* will follow. Manifestations of historical literacy and illiteracy, where the Civil Rights Revolution and where advertising associated with the film are concerned, will be analyzed next. Finally, this chapter will examine reviews left by everyday people on *Amazon*.

Scholars have missed that while *The Long Walk Home* certainly promotes consensus and loyalty to the United States and focuses too much on the experiences of Mrs. Thompson, conversely, it provides positive representations of the Black women and men, fair representations of massive resistance, and in a sharp contrast to most other civil rights-themed films, ends tragically. In contrast to the other films in this study, *The Long Walk Home* is by no means "entertaining": There are not any lines or scenes designed to provoke laughter or happiness (except for perhaps one very brief scene where Odessa spits out a bite of supper Selma made because it tastes so bad), and the concluding scene is so intense as to distantiate audiences. Nonetheless, *The Long Walk Home* exemplifies that people struggle to come to terms with the past from the film's lack of economic success (because of its occasional references to more tragic aspects of the Civil Rights Revolution) and to its extreme divergences from documented history vis-á-vis its representations.

Before specifically analyzing Odessa, some background on both domestic work and on the "Mammy" stereotype is necessary. Prevailing gender mores have long considered cooking, cleaning, and rearing children as belonging to the female domain of life. White middle and upper class families in United States History have long relied on

non-White women to assist with domestic duties. In the case of southern Antebellum society, enslaved Black women were forced to toil in such ways. The following statistics help provide some contextualization of the continued reliance on Black women and a clearer picture of how limited opportunities generally were. In 1920, 82 percent of maids in the South were Black women. During the 1940s and 1950s, approximately 60 percent of employed Black women throughout the United States had an occupation broadly classified as a domestic worker. Additionally, approximately 15 percent worked in the agricultural sector. Angela Y. Davis says that 90 percent of Black women in the mid-twentieth century labored in ways that were essentially exactly the same as during enslavement, and these women continued to face the constant threat of sexual abuse in these forced occupations. By contrast, in 1960, the number of Black women throughout the United States working as domestics dropped to under 40 percent, as they steadily found a greater variety of employment opportunities, but the number remained at approximately 90 percent in the South.[7]

Black women (and other women of Color) during the era of the Civil Rights Revolution certainly found a variety of conditions depending on a whole assortment of variabilities, but a few important generalizations about domestic work can be made.

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[7] Trena Easley Armstrong, "The Hidden Help: Domestic Workers in the Civil Rights Movement" (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Louisville, December 2012), 17, 20; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, & Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 91, 98; Glenn, "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class Oppression," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17, no. 3 (1985): 86-105; Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domestics and their Employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 48-59; Robert E. Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 71-72; and Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999).

(Some additional information as relates to specific experiences known because of oral history and the 2011 film *The Help* is in Chapter 2.) Although it should go without saying, domestic work was certainly not something Black women innately desired to do. However, economic circumstances and the pressures of capitalism often forced them to sell their time and labor starting as children. Anne Moody, for example, started working as a maid when she was nine years old. Domestic work neither provided any kind of job security, nor adequate, reliable pay but did demand long hours. Although, where more than one Black domestic worked together, they found some solidarity and helped look after each other. Given the private nature of such labor, it generally existed outside of the law, per se. Once enacted, minimum wage and Social Security laws were deliberately overlooked by employers and those charged with oversight. Such lack of protections and societal concerns, along with the roots of domestic work in enslavement, furthered the pervasiveness of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. White families often viewed the Black women they employed as property and as indicators of their economic success. One Black woman in 1912 said: "I am the slave, body and soul, of this family." While Black women were given overwhelming duties and had regular physical contact with White people, they were also deeply feared. White families saw no contradiction between sometimes fearing the "corrupting morals" and "sickening germs" of Black women and sometimes prohibiting them from using White bathrooms and typically requiring Black women to enter and exit through a backdoor, while also relying on them to cook family dinners and breastfeed their children. Such paradoxes, or cognitive dissonance, extended to both the supposedly essential nature of

Black women being uniquely fit for taking care of White people and the contrasting remarkable degree of exhaustive scrutiny they faced. Domestic work was further cruel in that it was a system built on invisiblizing Black women. Whites would regularly talk harshly about Black people in front of them, for instance, as if they were not in the room. This system was also built on forced love: White children, born unaware of racialization, grew to love the Black woman/women who cared for them, only to gradually learn that such affection was taboo and that society expected them to adopt feelings of superiority over Blacks. Similarly, Black women were forced to love White children they could never sincerely, perpetually love. Collectively, the relationships between Black women and White people are one of the strongest indicators that the culture of segregation was not at all about separation, as are exceptions to the restrictive covenants that provided an exemption to whites-only clauses for Black maids. Throughout everyday life, deeply-entrenched and unseen mores, mores that were arbitrarily and unevenly held and enforced, bonded Black women to a double oppression based on both how society racialized and genderized them and to complicated and dangerous situations all the time. In her award-winning monograph, Melissa V. Harris-Perry describes the life of Black women throughout all of United States History, including the 2010s, as always being confined to the "crooked room." Harris-Perry suggests that Black women are eternally forced to inhabit a world that is always

disorienting, turning against them, and prohibiting them from even attempting to live without oppression.[8]

Originating during Antebellum enslavement and sealed as a mainstay of everyday culture during the "nadir of American race relations" with the birth of modern

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[8] For more information about the life and work of Black women, see Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domestics in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1994); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 51-75; Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Quill, 1984); Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*: *Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 28-50; Sharon Harley, et al., eds., *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1981), especially 77, 132-140, 154-155; Tera W. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America*: *A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), especially 227-287; Vanessa H. May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*; A Negro Nurse, "More Slavery in the South," *Independent* (accessed August 15, 2016) http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/80; Rollins, *Between Women: Domestics and their Employers*; Mary Romero, *Maid in the U.S.A.* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens*: *Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

As a brief side note: Judy Brady's 1971 classic feminist satire "I Want a Wife" gave an additional and important voice to Second Wave Feminism and identity politics of the 1970s but possibly has a new meaning available from the eyes of the 2010s, as it also shows somewhat invisible aspect of the culture of segregation, per se. In this essay, Brady's narrator says, she wants a wife who will keep track of appointments, take care of all the cleaning and washing, make good and nutritious meals, devote special attention to the well-being of the children, satisfy sexual needs, and who will do all of this without complaining and with the understanding that she might be replaced if someone better comes along, for example. The essay concludes, "My God, who wouldn't want a wife?" "I Want a Wife" speaks to the immensely real experiences of middle- and upper-class White women being legally, psychologically, physically, and socially confined in a sexist private sphere by the Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy. From another perspective, however, considering that Black women employed as domestics, did all (or most) of the cooking, cleaning, child care, certainly were not allowed to complain, and at least for the men, satisfied sexual needs at times, many families during the Civil Rights Revolution actually *did* have what could be considered a second wife for both the wife and husband. Brady may not have internalized, may not have truly "seen" the world as it was and that members of her audience, generally wealthy White women, actually did have more than one "wife" if they employed a full time maid. To read this essay, see Brady, "I Want a Wife," *Ms. Magazine* (accessed July 21, 2014) http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/ everythingsanargument4e/content/cat_020/Brady_I_Want_a_Wife.pdf

mass media and the culture of segregation, “Mammy” is arguably the most iconic, memorable, and recognizable character of all time, even though she is entirely fictional. Culturally dating from both Western Europe’s obsession during the early nineteenth century with Saartjie Baartman, who was kidnapped from South Africa and renamed Hottentot Venus by Europeans, and from the reliance on enslaved Black women and cinematically dating from at least *Coon Town Suffragettes* (1914) and *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), audiences recognize “Mammy” with ease because of her uniform, dark skin, size, voice, de-sexed demeanor, personality, wisdom, and devotion to White people, especially the White children she is charged with raising. “Mammy” has easily been in more films than any other character, films with a whole host of geographical and chronological settings and plots for over a century now. While the actresses playing “Mammy” have *sometimes* differed, the character they play has remained essentially identical one hundred years later. For example, differences are absent between Mammy (Jennie Lee, in blackface) in *The Birth of a Nation*, Mammy (Hattie McDaniel) in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), Annie Johnson (Louise Beavers) in *Imitation of Life* (1934), Lottie (Butterfly McQueen) in *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and then between Odessa (Whoopi Goldberg) in *The Long Walk Home*, Corrina Washington (also, Goldberg) in *Corrina, Corrina* (1994) and Sybil (Viola Davis) in *Far From Heaven* (2002), as far as how they are represented and what they do. “Mammy,” then, almost exists outside of history, as she never changes, regardless of time period represented, and further indicates that people struggle to come to terms with the past. Additionally, McDaniel, Beavers, McQueen,

Figure 1.1. Film still from *The Long Walk Home* showing Mr. Thompson interrogating Odessa and Claudia.

Goldberg, and Davis have all played "Mammy" numerous times. McDaniel controversially and famously said, "Why should I complain about making seven thousand dollars a week playing a maid? If I didn't, I'd be making seven dollars a week actually being one!" Her words help remind us that we can celebrate the talents and achievements of Black women and simultaneously criticize Hollywood and its audiences for often confining Black women to "Mammy." Given that Black women in Hollywood film, except for *The Butler* (2013), are constantly shown as "Mammy," this has important implications for how society, especially filmic texts, shapes the historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution. Black women were never actually "Mammy" and existed far beyond their jobs as a domestic workers or otherwise as mothers, daughters, wives, and especially, as activists, even if in subtle ways.[9]

[9] For additional information on the "Mammy" stereotype and its place in the United States's contemporary culture, see Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive*

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In what amounts to fundamentally accurate representations of the past, the writer and director create White characters in *The Long Walk Home* who rely on Black women; these White characters invisiblize and verbally abuse "Mammied" characters, Odessa and Claudia. Beth Kowaleski-Wallace even suggests that the slavery metaphor applies to the relationship between Odessa and Mrs. Thompson. These dynamics are important to examine even though they are not directly about civil rights because they *are* about racialized dynamics and because they inform the body of knowledge people have of what Blacks were up against. Claudia is made much more invisible than Odessa. Only a few scenes include her working in the Thompsons's house, and except for two of these, Claudia is shown working in another room in isolation. One of the opening scenes occurs early in the morning when Odessa has just arrived. She says hello to Mary Catherine, but no one returns such pleasantries, verbally or otherwise. All four of the Thompsons are running around getting ready for a busy day of work, meetings,

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History of Blacks in American Film, 4th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2001), 57-100; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 76-106; Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*, especially 69-86; K. Sue Jewell, *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy* (New York: Routledge, 1993), especially 35-54; Allan Lazar et al., *The 101 Most Influential People who Never Lived* (New York: Harper, 2006), 88-91; M. M. Manring, *Slave in A Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); James McBride, "Being a Maid," *Care2* (accessed February 6, 2012) http://www.care2.com/causes/being-a-maid.html; Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

recreation, school, and other activities. They hurriedly move around the kitchen with hardly a word to Odessa other than barking a few orders and one statement from Mr. Thompson, "Excuse me, Odessa. I didn't mean to run you down." Otherwise, they act as if she is not in the room. This section ends when everyone, except Mrs. Thompson, goes his or her separate way until the evening. Mrs. Thompson is sitting at a small kitchen table slowly sipping coffee and reading the newspaper. Odessa is washing dishes and clearing the kitchen. While only a few feet away from one another, in those moments in what could almost be a scene inspired by Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), they both absolutely avoid looking at or speaking to one another. While Odessa labors, Mrs. Thompson lesiures. They are essentially each alone. Segregation is not about primarily separation: Status, not physical space, separates them.[10]

A multipart scene shows Odessa at the center of being made invisible and at the center of the ironies of the culture of segregation. Mrs. Thompson sends Odessa, Mary Catherine, and two of Mary Catherine's friends to the park to play and have a picnic lunch. After they have only been there a few minutes, a young (White) male police officer sees Odessa and yells, "Hey! Hey! What you doin' here? Can't you hear me, nigger? What are you doin' in this park?" Odessa slowly responds, "just takin' care of Mrs. Thompson's" before he interrupts her and squalls, "Don't give me any of that mealy mouthed crap! Now, this park is whites only, and that means niggers like you best

[10] Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, "Slavery as Metaphor," *The Women's Review of Books* 9, no. 10/11 (1992): 43.

answer with ‘yes, sir’ when spoken to. I don't care who you're takin' care of! You don't understand nothin', do you? Go on. Get your stuff together and get on out of here!” Upon learning what happened and exclaiming, “I never heard such nonsense in all my life," Mrs. Thompson calls Commissioner Sellers’s office and leaves a message for him: “Well, would you tell Clyde Sellers that one of his policeman threw my nine-year-old daughter out of Oak Park? He knows who I am.” Initially, the camera focuses very closely on Mrs. Thompson’s face and deliberately blurs the background, but as she finishes saying “my nine-year-old daughter,” the camera blurs her face and focuses on

Figure 1.2 Film still from *the Long Walk Home* showing the camera’s critique of Mrs. Thompson’s words during her call to her friend in the police department.

Odessa, who is listening and cleaning dishes. When later discussing this episode with her critical husband and even more critical brother-in-law, Mrs. Thompson defends herself by loudly saying, “It's not like she [Odessa] was parading her own children around the park, for heaven's sakes! And you know, I did grow up with a maid, and I've had them all my life, and I know what's right and I know what's wrong.” Mrs. Thompson only

processes that her daughter is thrown out of the park (a notion critiqued by the camera) and assumes her ethical worldview is beyond question. Odessa is completely forgotten. Odessa's children are belittled. Additionally, this scene carefully shows one of many all-too-true ironies of segregation. When caring for White children, "Mammied" Black women could enter otherwise forbidden spaces--they could enter White homes, White playgrounds and eating spaces, and White seats on busses, for instance, because their humanity and Blackness was effectively erased. Additionally, while interracial friendships were often feared and such relationships remained officially illegal until *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), Black women, including Odessa, could nurse, kiss, and hold the hands of White children, as happens throughout *The Long Walk Home*.[11]

Although comparatively minor, another example of Odessa and Claudia being invisibilized occurs on Christmas Eve when Mr. Thompson takes his wife and daughters to see a suburb of Montgomery he is helping build. He takes a flashlight and points to different street markers, revealing that he has named streets after each of them. He says, "So now all the women in my life have something named after them. And years and years from now, you can look back and know that people lived their lives on your street, and whenever they said where they lived, they used your names. Merry Christmas." Although, Odessa and Claudia identify as women and are in his everyday life in a very intimate way, as they cook his food, wash his clothes, and raise his children (toward the end Mrs. Thompson admits to Odessa, "Oh. You do the motherin'. I saw the

[11] *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967).

way you held Mary Catherine when she had the chicken pox, and you hadn't even had it.”), yet Mr. Thompson does not consider them. Additionally, Peter Bates’s film review describes this scene as being “both touching and frightening.” It shows a softer side of Mr. Thompson than the overt racism he expresses more and more often but “implies that Whites plan to own the suburbs and will defend them with the furor of a colonial power”[12]

While Odessa and Claudia are made to be invisible, that is largely the extent of how the film mirrors historical sources and represents them as being mistreated. Mr. Thompson does not trust Odessa, but ironically “trusts” her enough to have her at his house working fulltime and “overtime.” But, *The Long Walk Home* never implies or shows Odessa and Claudia being physically abused. Unquestionably, not all Black women faced such abuse, but recognizing the entirety of the film’s rhetoric on these points remains important. Additionally, the film does not even begin to approach the true day-to-day rigor and exhaustion of being a maid.

While *The Long Walk Home* only has the character Claudia mention her husband once, Odessa’s husband and three children are important characters at humanizing Odessa and adding to the story’s development. Except for *The Butler*, *The Long Walk Home* departs from other Hollywood films about the Civil Rights Revolution by showing a Black family together. (The 2008 production of *The Secret Life of Bees* almost qualifies, given that we see the Black women working and eating together, but they do so in the

[12] Bates, “Review: *The Long Walk Home*.”

presence of a White child, who the story is about.) For example, the Cotters eat breakfast and dinner together and attend church together, including several meetings specifically designed to share information about the Bus Boycott. These scenes get more than just passing attention but are by no means the focus.

Figure 1.3 Film still from *The Long Walk Home* showing the Cotter family together.

Figure 1.4 Film still from *The Long Walk Home* showing the Cotter family together.

In contrast to most Hollywood fictions that include an adult Black man, Herbert treats his wife and children with great affection, and the writer and director never use the Herbert character to manifest mere stereotypes. The film paints clear the stark dichotomy between the Cotter's and Thompson's economic conditions. Whereas Odessa gives her children each one small Christmas present, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson give their two daughters so many presents that the presents take up most of their large living room. Put another way and in an example of *The Long Walk Home*'s ability to make audiences uncomfortable in historically relevant ways, "Santa Claus" came to visit the Thompsons but not the Cotters. The film also makes clear that the bonds holding the Cotters together are the strongest. When Selma briefly breaks the boycott, her family listens to and understands her frustrations, and they get closer. Mr. Thompson, in contrast, becomes angrier and angrier as he gradually learns about his wife's generally supporting civil rights, giving Odessa a ride, and becoming a driver in the carpool. He stops talking to her and moves into another room in their house.

Considered individually or collectively, fictional representations of massive resistance are more dramatic in *The Long Walk Home* than in any other film about the Civil Rights Revolution. It shows White people who absolutely hate Black people, any thought of racial equality, and "outside agitators." It also shows Whites as being deeply afraid of any kind of change to the world and the status quo as it has "always been." In one scene, hundreds (if not thousands) of White businessmen gather together in a large

stadium for a White Citizens' Council meeting and to join this organization because "things have gotten out of hand." In another mirror of how conditions were in the

Figure 1.5 Film still from *The Long Walk Home* showing people gathering together for the White Citizens' Council Meeting.

1950s, this fictional world shows Whites who are also afraid of the Supreme Court and do not feel that they are represented. Numerous scenes show the Thompsons and their extended family, as well as others, proselytizing about how "lazy" Black people are. Mr. Thompson's brother, who is aggressively against civil rights and pressures those around him to be more and more hostile toward Blacks, explains that Black people are moving and that there will not be any Black people around to work for Whites soon because "they hear there ain't no work in Philadelphia." At the Thompson's Christmas dinner, a dinner made and served by Odessa and Claudia alone, a member of the extended family says, "These niggers just want too much, and they're not willing to work for it." Odessa offers her a roll when she finishes her polemical outburst. In contrast to anything *The*

Help or other films do, for example, *The Long Walk Home* includes a powerful scene where Odessa and Claudia talk to each other while leaving the Thompson residence. This conversation includes:

> **Claudia**: Lord, spare that woman's soul. Mmm. I know you got to work here, but if she said that to me, I'd have thrown those rolls down and given her my apron, told her the next time I serve her is the day after she walks to my house and cooks my Christmas dinner.
>
> **Odessa**: Go ahead, girl. But I tell you, see, I sit up there and let her call me a lazy nigger, and I'll walk. I'd walk until I got no legs left if I thought it was gonna give my children a better shot in the world. You work so hard, have some woman say what that woman said, and make you wonder who gonna be sittin' in the backseat in heaven. And on Christmas Day.

Claudia's and Odessa's words humanize Black women working for White families and is a clear counter to stereotypes.[13]

Two scenes representing massive resistance contain characters who resort to

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[13] The term "massive resistance" emerged in 1956, see George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006). Lewis argues that massive resistance was a complex movement and philosophy that, while varying greatly, stood opposed to Black people and the Civil Rights Revolution.

During the Civil Rights Revolution those opposed to changes to the prevailing status quo often accused activists, whether White or Black, of being "outside agitators." Historians have regularly found that while some people did travel from the outside to participate in Freedom Rides, Freedom Summer, or Wednesdays in Mississippi, for instance, the vast majority of activists were local and more than being local, had long been deeply involved in promoting civil rights. For information on home-grown activists, see David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). For information on people who traveled to the South to briefly participate in a specific event or group, see Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, abridged ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Debbie Z. Harwell, *Wednesdays in Mississippi*: *Proper Ladies Working for Radical Change, Freedom Summer 1964* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014); Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Bruce Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

outright physical violence. When Selma decides to ride the bus to go see her boyfriend, three White teenaged men board the bus. Upon seeing her, they surround her and begin verbally harassing her. In a move less reflective of the prevailing historical mood in the 1950s in the South, the White bus driver repeatedly reprimands the three White teenagers and kicks them off the bus. Fearful, Selma runs out another door. Unbeknownst to Selma, these men have decided to chase her. Selma is drinking water from the Colored water fountain and unaware of her surroundings. They tell her to drink out of the ditch. One of the juveniles, steps on her foot, while one continues to press the water, and the third one holds Selma's head down in an attempt to choke or drown her. Selma briefly escapes their hold. Then, they chase her around the open field and then surround her. At this time, Selma's oldest brother arrives in a taxi as he figured out what Selma was up to. The White men punch him in the face a few times before, in another instance where the reel and real do not match, being chased off by the Black taxi driver's verbal threats.

While Rosa Parks said no such thing ever happened in Montgomery and deemed it "very Hollywood," the last scene is nine minutes and is undoubtedly the hardest scene for audiences to watch of all scenes in the genre of films about the Civil Rights Revolution. The last scene begins when Mr. Thompson's brother shows him that his wife has been actively participating in the carpool system for the Bus Boycott. While Mrs. Thompson is receiving directions from a Black man in the car lot, Mr. Thompson's brother threatens her and says that she and Mary Catherine should leave because "in a few minutes, 150 men are gonna shut this lot down any way they can." When Mrs.

Thompson tries to leave with her daughter and maid, the growing mob of angry White men will not let her. Mrs. Thompson (who they are now calling “Mrs. Martin Luther King”) tells her brother-in-law, “Go to hell, Tunker. Just go to hell, you ignorant son of a bitch.” He slaps her. Mr. Thompson starts fighting his brother, causing other fights to start. The mob now surrounds the Black women and Black men. In almost perfect unison, the mob shouts, “Walk, nigger, walk!” fifty-six times. Mrs. Thompson and Mary Catherine are crying, clearly afraid, and held back by the mob. After several minutes of

Figure 1.6 Film still from *The Long Walk Home* showing part of the angry mob in the last scene.

Figure 1.7 Film still from *The Long Walk Home* showing the outstretched arm that invites Mrs. Thompson and her daughter to join the Black women.

the chanting, one Black woman begins singing and the others join her. Another Black woman reaches her hand out toward Mrs. Thompson and her daughter. They join in the line of Black women, effectively making a cross class alliance that does mirror the spirit of some occurrences. Slowly, in a cinematic move Rosa Parks is especially critical of, the mob disperses. The camera shows Mr. Thompson looking in disbelief from a distance at his wife, daughter, and the other women. Save for a voiceover about the Bus Boycott's ultimate success, *The Long Walk Home* concludes somewhat tragically, both in terms of story and in terms of what it departs to audiences. The ending dramatizes that the Thompson family is forever shattered, and Mrs. Thompson is its martyr, as well as a martyr for the Civil Rights Revolution. It also says that while Black people are united and exemplify generosity, they can rely on Mrs. Thompson and can easily defend against mobs by singing alone. For example, Parks said, "People adamant about harassing Blacks wouldn't have been affected by someone stepping forward to sing a song. They just

weren't Christian enough to fall silent." Singing, however, was important in inspiring and unifying activists.[14]

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While *The Long Walk Home* provides some critique of the treatment of Black domestic workers and provides positive representations of Black life, as well as accurate looks at massive resistance, it lacks the same historical literacy when it comes to the larger, institutional dynamics of the Civil Rights Revolution. While this lack of historical literacy and understanding spoken (and *not* spoken) by White characters is potentially at least somewhat to be expected and accurate, that spoken (and *not* spoken) by Black characters, however, is more problematic and inaccurate. Most problematic, however, is how this lack of historical literacy elevates Mrs. Thompson and consequently other White women into agents of change. Nowhere in the film is there any acknowledgment, directly or indirectly, of civil rights-activism prior to Rosa Parks's "unexpected" stand (save one brief reference to the two Black women arrested in Montgomery before Parks) and the resulting city-wide boycott by Blacks. Moreover, any possible prior roots are specifically denounced through White and Black characters. As she is thinking about becoming a driver for the carpool, Mrs. Thompson says, "This whole mess is just about

[14] Elaine Dutka, "Driving Miss Odessa: Civil Rights: Rosa Parks Calls the Film Important because the United States has Neglected the Subject for too Long," *Los Angeles Times* (accessed August 8, 2015) http://articles.latimes.com/1990-12-20/entertainment/ca-9576_1_rosa-parks.

ridin' the bus anyway." Odessa replies, "That's what it is now. But we gonna win this thing, Mrs. Thompson. When it's all said and done, people are gonna look at you, Mrs. Thompson, and they're gonna say that you were part of this." Odessa also says:

> And what about when it isn't just the busses? When it's the parks and the restaurants? When it's Colored teachers in White schools? What about when we start votin', Mrs. Thompson? 'Cause we are. And when we do, we are gonna put Negroes in office. What about when the first colored family moves into your neighborhood? You know, Mrs. Thompson, ain't nobody gonna think any less of you if we just turn around and go back to the house.

By denying prior roots to this Bus Boycott, the film leads audiences to not realize how bad conditions were and how much was at stake. If the Bus Boycott suddenly sprang up, the film's logic suggests, conditions were not that bad for Black people in the United States and certainly not as bad as "communist" and "outside agitators" make it seem. This results in undermining the legitimacy of the actual Bus Boycott. Indeed, Parks's arrest becomes the sole factor in opening Pandora's Box and subsequently transforming the town from an antiracist utopia to a racist dystopia.

While the Black community and its churches developed and ran the carpooling system, a highly-organized and very efficient system, *The Long Walk Home* only discusses and shows wealthy White women driving. In reality, the Black community did not need Mrs. Thompson or other such White savior figures. Rosa Parks, who attended a special premier screening of *The Long Walk Home*, denounced aspects of how it presents the past. She says in part, it does better than *Mississippi Burning* and tells a good story but, in a concern also spoken elsewhere by Jacqueline Jones, White

Figure 1.8 Film still from *The Long Walk Home* showing Mrs. Thompson driving Black women around

women did not actually drive for the carpool system. (White women often did drive their own maid when needed.) According to the film, White women drivers were essential to the momentum of the movement and transportation being possible. According to the film, Black men and Black women were not at its center. Mrs. Thompson drives Odessa and other Black women, as well as Black men around town. There is no recognition that deeply engrained mores and *de facto* laws generally prohibited a Black man and a married White woman from being in such close physical quarters, especially when they shared a space as virtual equals. Even if a White woman lost to History specifically drove for the carpool, this system relied on Black men and Black women and vehicles owned by Black individuals. *The Long Walk Home* deletes documented Black activism and agency in this regard and inserts undocumented White activism and agency. It could have easily taken at least a few seconds occasionally to show Blacks driving, for example. Additionally, it is worth specifically pointing out that

this movie makes no mention of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, Bayard Rustin, or any other actual historical figures, except Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It does not include anything about the Women's Political Council, the organization which had been planning such a boycott and took the initiative to launch it, or the Montgomery Improvement Association.[15]

The ways in which *The Long Walk Home* have been advertised and summarized further elongate historical amnesia and suggest it contains events and worldviews that are nonexistent. As movie covers constitute one of the first contacts a person has with a film, the rhetoric for those of *The Long Walk Home* deserve discussion since they perpetuate inaccurate History and misrepresent the film. There are a variety of covers that have been used and all are variations of each other. The two currently used are directly below.

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[15] Dutka, "Driving Miss Odessa"; and Jones, "*The Long Walk Home*," in *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed., Mark C. Carnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1995), 262-265.

As a side note: interestingly, in her 1974 article, Judge Constance Baker Motley blamed at least part of *Brown v. Board of Education*'s failure and massive backlash on Rosa Parks. Motley says that Parks started a movement too soon, decided to take things in her own hands, and not only diverted attention away from the *Brown* decision but also increased racial tensions. In contrast, James C. Cobb argues that NAACP lawyers wanted individuals, such as Parks, to start protests. The "legal chambers" path versus the "public protest" route was a key debate during the Civil Rights Revolution, and it continues to intrigue scholars. For more information, see Cobb, *The Brown Decision, Jim Crow, & Southern Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005); and Motley, "Twenty Years Later," in *Continuing Challenge: The Past and the Future of Brown v. Board of Education*, eds. Howard A. Glickstein and the University of Notre Dame Center for Civil Rights (Evanston: Integrated Education Associates, 1974), 11-24; and Andrew Joseph Pegoda, "Debating the Second Reconstruction and its Aftermath: *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954-present" (Unpublished Term Paper, University of Houston Clear Lake, 2008).

Figure 1.9 and 1.10 Film covers for *The Long Walk Home*

Both of these covers and the others that have been used show Odessa and Mrs. Thompson as absolute equals with no sign of racialized mores: both are centered, illuminated by equal light, and given equivalent space. Both characters have serious, yet dignified expressions. Looking at the images on the left cover alone: there is little-to-no direct indicator of any time, place, or theme. The text does not provide much indication either. Looking at the cover on the left, the text at the top rights say: "At a time in America when everyone else did what was expected, they had the courage to do what was right." At the bottom left: "A story of an incredible friendship." The cover on the right changes the background from black to yellow. The yellow gets brighter toward the middle, further illuminating the two women with haloes. The bottom is also illustrated with a foregrounded 1950s-style bus with a line of Black people and another much

smaller depiction of Odessa with a frustrated and tired expression. In addition to the "Powerful" and "Moving" caption, this one also has the line "a story of an incredible friendship" in the lower middle section.

In *The Long Walk Home*, Odessa and Mrs. Thompson are never friends and Mrs. Thompson never treats Odessa as an equal, with the possible exception of the final scene. Indeed, *The Long Walk Home* creates a world where Black maids talk very little and always with an extremely high degree of respect when it comes to White people. The writer creates Claudia such that she has no last name and speaks to Whites only once in the film. This instance occurs while the Thompsons are finishing Christmas lunch, and Mr. Thompson comes in with a Christmas bonus. Claudia's one line and two words are "thank you." In contrast, there are 75 lines assigned to Odessa, 48 of these (totaling 622 words) are spoken by Odessa to the White family. A third of these lines are four words or less and consist largely of "yes, ma'am," "yes, sir," "Mr. Thompson," or "Mrs. Thompson." In other words, in all of her lines to the adults except six, Odessa is constantly saying their name or "yes, ma'am" or "yes, sir." White people never use such formalities with talking with Odessa or other Blacks. Altogether, 65 percent or 5782 words spoken in *The Long Walk Home* are by White characters.

Additionally, these covers, even the one with the bus, completely downplay the power of civil rights demands and massive resistance in the film and historically. The line, "At a time in America when everyone else did what was expected, they had the courage to do what was right" is also problematic. What was deemed morally "right" to White people was different than what was morally "right" to Black people. Additionally,

what was morally “right” to women and Queer folk was different than what was morally “right” to mores of mainstream patriarchal and heteronormative mores, for instance. Worse, this statement homogenizes all White and all Black people--except for the trailblazing Odessa and Mrs. Thompson--as being bad, robotic, and on the wrong side of History, which only further erases horrors and triumphs of the past and further makes Mrs. Thompson into a White savior figure. Such a statement also fails to recognize Mrs. Thompson’s racial conversion with Odessa’s nudging guidance.

On *Amazon*, *The Long Walk Home* is advertised with the following two-sentence summary:

> Academy Award winner Whoopi Goldberg is Odessa Carter, a quietly dignified woman, who works as a housekeeper for Miriam Thompson (Academy Award winner Sissy Spacek). When Odessa honors the 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott by walking an exhausting nine miles to and from work, Miriam offers her a ride.

Such advertising has several problems. Immediately, it obscures Odessa’s humanity. It reduces her (and consequently, other Black women) to her allegedly quiet nature and her labor alone. Odessa was anything but “a quietly dignified woman” when it came to her children and absolute alignment with civil rights activism. Even Odessa’s outwardly “quietly” moments, such as when she is verbally abused while serving the Thompsons their Christmas lunch, are boiling with determination and maturity when her entire character is acknowledged. Additionally, “housekeeper” is not the most precise word to use here. It carries much more modern-day connotations. Plus, it erases that Odessa did much more than keep house. Black women’s work as domestic workers was an institutionalized profession thoroughly interwoven with notions of class, sex and

gender, and Whiteness, Blackness, and other racialized mores. On the note of how far Odessa walks: although a minor point, only this advertisement on *Amazon* says it was nine miles. The film never makes any reference to how many miles. Viewers only know it is a "mighty long" walk that initially left Odessa's feet bleeding. Walking eighteen miles multiple times in a week is also not realistic, especially given all of the information provided in the story. In ideal conditions, it would take Odessa around seven-to-nine hours to walk to and from work if the distance was actually nine miles. On another note, by saying, "when Odessa honors," *Amazon*'s summary deletes her family and their agency. Her husband and children decide to participate together. Furthermore, by saying, "Miriam offers her a ride" the film deletes all of Mrs. Thompson's initial stipulations. She offered Odessa a ride not out of kindness but because she wanted to maintain the status that accompanies employing Odessa and because she especially did not want to do the cooking and cleaning that was waiting for Odessa. Finally, the *Amazon* advertisement misses what the film is actually about. In terms of historical memory, this write-up completely misses the mark and perpetuates historical illiteracy.[16]

In contrast, *Internet Movie DataBase* (IMDB) says, "Two women…in 1955 Montgomery Alabama, must decide what they are going to do in response to the

[16] "*The Long Walk Home*," *Amazon* (accessed August 1, 2015) https://smile.amazon.com/Long-Walk-Home-Sissy Spacek/dp/B00B7FWGLS/ref=sr_1_2/ref=sr_1_2?_encoding=UTF8&keywords=long%20walk%20home&qid=1439267528&sr=8-2; and Gretchen Reynolds, "Why a Brisk Walk is Better," *New York Times* (accessed August 6, 2016) http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/04/why-a-brisk-walk-is-better/?_r=0.

famous bus boycott lead by Martin Luther King." IMDB does somewhat better but still leaves much to be desired. Again in this advertisement summary, Odessa's family is deleted, along with Mrs. Thompson's family. Odessa knows exactly what she is going to do from the time her children bring home the leaflet announcing the Boycott and she and her family discuss. There was no "decision" to it. The film does, however, show Mrs. Thompson's changing decisions as she gradually converts to promoting anti-racism and becomes a White savior figure. Finally, INDB promotes a form of "Great Men" history by continuing the belief that it was singularly and simply led by King, effectively deleting the Women's Political Council, actual drivers for the carpool, other local ministers, and all of the individuals, White (e.g., Virginia Foster Durr and her husband, Clifford Durr) and Black (e.g., Parks, Robinson, and Rustin), who built cross-class, cross-racial alliances and who were actively involved in supporting the boycott in powerful efforts to bring about basic human dignity and to reject the everyday humiliation of segregation and racism. Such individuals and groups are those people should be aware of that the film omits.[17]

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As already mentioned above, *The Long Walk Home* has received 171 reviews on

[17] "*The Long Walk Home* (1990)," *Internet Movie Database* (accessed August 1, 2015) http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0100046/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

Amazon. People overwhelmingly report loving this movie and its intense nature; one person believes this film is "required viewing for every child in America." Further, 91 percent of reviewers give it either four or five stars (out of a possible five stars). Those who spoke of the film unfavorably, with two exceptions, complain about some technical problem not related to the actual film or some problem related to their order. In addition to adamant statements of approval for the actresses' performances, for the movie's moral lessons, and other general statements of praise, people regularly report learning information about the past they previously did not know. One reviewer is disappointed the film has not been much more widely popular and says given its accuracy and significance, it should be an epic. An unusual number of students and teachers talk about their experiences with this film and do so with great enthusiasm. Such individuals speak to how people deliberately look to and rely on Hollywood fictions to learn about the past. A few reviews also reference other films about the Civil Rights Revolution. These themes, as well as themes not addressed in the reviews, will be discussed below.[18]

While some of the reviews remain basic and vague, such as saying, "What an excellent movie," those reviews that talk about aspects of history, interestingly and invariably, also include statements attesting to its innate truths. For example, one reviewer says *The Long Walk Home* is "very educational" and informs them of a world of civil rights-activism they "barely knew." Other reviewers discuss ordering the DVD

[18] "Customer Reviews for *The Long Walk Home*."

version after having seen it elsewhere because of the "good subject matter that allows you to think" and because "it portrays the struggle of a class of people in America fighting for equal rights in a troubled era. I would recommend everyone see this movie. We all need to remember the past and try never to repeat past mistakes." One reviewer says that the film is excellent and adds, "I didn't live in those days, and it's hard to imagine that this kind of stuff even went on," while another says of *The Long Walk Home*, "Story line reflects the real burdens inflicted on men and women of Color….I am old enough to remember Rosa Parks." Some reviewers spoke to being embarrassed or outraged after seeing the movie and one says, "This movie fills a gap in my understanding of just how much the people themselves were experiencing the discrimination." One additional reviewer, for instance, says the movie is important because it "bears repeating to remind us of the slow, painful, costly evolution of civil rights progress." None of *The Long Walk Home*'s reviewers express any skepticism or criticism about the film's use of History or about what it does and does not emphasize. Again and again they find it unquestionably informative.[19]

Numerous students report watching the film for various school assignments. In a revelation about this student's general experiences and expectations when it comes to History, one reports, "I actually really enjoyed it and it was really informative." A number of students watched *The Long Walk Home* for high school classes in religion and ethics. Like other reviewers, these students found the film to be, for example,

[19] Ibid.

"interesting and informative…accurate and tasteful." One apparently fully accepting the film more than any other reviewer and unaware of fairly basic historical information announces that *The Long Walk Home* is a "brilliant movie which sheds new light on" life in Montgomery in the 1950s. Another says, "My daughter is in a play about Rosa Parks. At the age of 10, she hasn't a clue about this time…We watched this movie for a better understanding of how Whites and Blacks in Mississippi [sic, presumably this reviewer meant Alabama] interacted during this period. She also was introduced to peaceful protests….Great movie. Rosa Parks is one of my heroes."[20]

Those charged with teaching students praise the film, too. One high school History and Political Science teacher uses the film to teach his students about "the events and attitudes" in Montgomery, Alabama, in the 1950s. Another History teacher says that this movie teaches viewers with such a degree of accuracy and power and makes the past come alive that they will never forget what it says. One teacher says, "I will definitely show it to the teenagers I teach" and explains that it recreates the past so effectively. Another teacher includes this film with an entire collection of DVDs for Black History Month. One other teacher proclaims, "*The Long Walk Home* is a stunning tribute to the individual women and men who contributed to the struggle for human rights in 1950s." As with the reviews discussed above, even among people who teach History, there is no sense of even a degree of healthy skepticism or worse, no interest in discovering the difference between the film and documented accounts. Additionally,

[20] Ibid.

The Long Walk Home is clearly not really "Black History," given its main focus on Mrs. Thompson. One teacher's review includes a clearly misguided discussion about how Rosa Parks started the Civil Rights Revolution. Other reviewers encourage teachers to use it. "I would recommend this film to teachers who are looking for a film to enhance their teaching about the Bus Boycott," says one of them. Another commenter says, *The Long Walk Home* "is perfect for the classroom" because its main characters are everyday people, not actual people who lived or movement leaders.[21]

Comments left that speak to the various "morals" or life lessons embodied in the film also speak to the individual's historical literacy. A number of reviews praised the bond that developed between Odessa and Mrs. Thompson--a bond that never actually exists in the film, not least because Mrs. Thompson remains Odessa's boss. One arguably overly optimistic commenter says the film shows "that even one person who believes in their heart that something is wrong with their society can change it." Two different individuals write comments that effectively erase all of everyone's intersectionalities and individual differences. One says, the "movie was really about everyone." The other one says, "It helped you realize that no one is truly different but all the same." Such rhetoric, while a demonstration of their open-mindedness,

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[21] Ibid.

On the note of Black History Month, a growing number of scholars, who are absolutely committed to equity, have been increasingly been expressing reservations about Black History month because it tends to segregate Black History to one month, the shortest month at that. Additionally, given current conditions, people are seldom given the opportunity to learn Black History beyond a few of the big names or in an integrated, comprehensive fashion. For more information, see Pegoda, "Is Black History Month Good or Bad?," *Without Ritual, Autonomous Negotiations* (accessed February 5, 2014) https://andrewpegoda.com/2014/02/05/is-black-history-month-good-or-bad/.

effectively de-Blacks and de-humanizes Black people and their struggles during the Civil Rights Revolution. If every person was truly the same and included in everything, there would have been no need for a Civil Rights Revolution, as everyone would have been treated justly.[22]

On another topic, while a few watch *The Long Walk Home* and write that "we still have a way to go," most see the world today as unmistakably better. Comments include, "It really shows how far race relations has come today" and it "serves as a reminder to students like myself that we are very fortunate for the amount of tolerance we have today." Such views exemplify a historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution that suggest it was simple and truly a revolution with long-term positive results. While any kind of comparative history--in this case comparing the treatment of Black people during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s and during the 2010s--is deeply problematic, according to Micol Seigel, it is important to consider various perspectives on racism today. Public intellectuals such as Michelle Alexander, Derrick Bell, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and bell hooks, for example, work from a variety of starting points, but they all effectively argue that the Civil Rights Revolution was not so effective, per se. Studying institutionalized across-the-board discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Alexander explains that discrimination and racism has remained constant in the United

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[22] "Customer Reviews for *The Long Walk Home*."

The idea about "de-Blacks" derives from Facebook and Twitter conversations with Wendell Lokomaika'i Ricketts who--in the aftermath of the June 2016 attack in Florida at Pulse, a gay nightclub--said, "Saying that the #Orlando dead & injured were 'first and foremost human beings' is ironically the first step in de-gaying & de-browning them." For more information, see Ricketts, Twitter Post, June 14, 2016, 6:02 p.m., https://twitter.com/VitaVagabonda/status/742839562389446656?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw.

States with shifting manifestations. Bell argues that *Brown v. Board of Education* has caused far more harm than good given how various arenas of the government have not enforced it and argues that except for a brief period during the Cold War, the Federal government has never actually been concerned about the lives of Black people. Coates writes regularly about his and others' encounters with everyday racism. hooks regularly lectures and writes about the constant pressure the Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy places on each person, especially People of Color. Additionally, Critical Race Theory remains, an active field of scholarly inquiry, provides methodologies for examining racism.[23]

In the case of *The Long Walk Home*, discussing what these reviews do not say is just as important as discussing what they do say. None of the reviews direct any criticism toward the film's uses of the past. Rather, viewers fully accept the world created by the writer and director. No one really points out that the film is much less about Odessa and much more about Mrs. Thompson's racial conversion. Additionally,

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[23] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010); Jack Balkin, ed., *What Brown v. Board of Education Should Have Said: The Nation's Top Legal Experts Rewrite America's Landmark Civil Rights Decision* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Karen Grigsby Bates, "Nostalgia for What's Been Lost Since *Brown v. Board*," *NPR: Code Switch* (accessed May 18, 2014) http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/05/14/312555307/nostalgia-for-whats-been-lost-since-brown-v-board; Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); "Customer Reviews for *The Long Walk Home*"; Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015); Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic* (accessed June 23, 2014) http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/; Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2012); hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*; hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992); hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2006); hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2009); and Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transitional Turn," *Radical History Review* no. 91 (Winger 2005): 62-90.

the reviews completely erase Claudia and Herbert. Only one review discusses the park scene that made Mrs. Thompson so mad at how they mistreated her daughter, and only one review discusses the racism the Thompsons manifest at Christmas lunch. No reviews discuss the film's representation of the White Citizens' Council. Viewers watch this movie and walk away saying they have watched a feel-good, informative story about racism and the Bus Boycott; although, unlike the reviews examined for other movies in this dissertation, no one discusses *The Long Walk Home* in terms of forgone times or recalls memories it provokes in vivid detail. People discuss *The Long Walk Home* as if the Montgomery Bus Boycott happened in the distant, distant past.[24]

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Like other films in this study, the writer and director change History when they (and their targeted White audience), presumably, do not like it. Aspects of the past people resist show how they struggle to come to terms with the past and what factors are involved in shaping historical memory. *The Long Walk Home* indeed seems to ultimately endorse civil rights, but it delivers this message through its neoliberal focus on Mrs. Thompson's experiences, perspectives, and struggles and though Mary Catherine's self-centered memories told through voiceover narration (e.g., "It would be years before I understood what standin' in that line meant to my mother. And as I grew

[24] "Customer Reviews for *The Long Walk Home*."

older, to me.”). Plot techniques and dialogue choices throughout the movie greatly minimize and occasionally fully erase the hopes and fears of Odessa and her family, Claudia, and other Black people. Other than a few scenes about the Cotters, representations of Black women are limited to when they are “Mammied.” As Kelly J. Madison says, “We do not experience through her [Odessa’s] pain, anger, and complexity of coming to consciousness of one’s oppression and human equality, or the trepidation, self-doubt, and exhilaration at asserting a long suppressed agency. One moment she is riding a segregated bus, and the next, she is simply walking in protest.” While *The Long Walk Home*’s representations of Black women are mostly historically fair, they serve to continue notions that Black women were generally not only inactive when it came to civil rights but also played vital roles in comforting White people. Additionally, other than appropriating the trajectory of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Civil Rights Revolution as it exists in *The Long Walk Home* is fictional and instead of emphasizing Black activism, the focus is White conversion and White massive resistance. Such a focus, of course, is not inherently problematic (chapter 3 spends time discussing how fiction can allow access to better historical “truths”), but it becomes problematic when we consider that the vast majority of films about the Civil Rights Revolution focus on White people and usually make them into White savior figures. For instance, a film from Odessa’s, Herbert’s, or Claudia’s perspective alone would be interesting and important, but to appease its audiences, Hollywood seldom tells stories from a Black point-of-view because White audiences are protected by White Privilege, White Blindness, and generally do not want to know about what Melissa V. Harris-Perry calls

the "crooked room." Ironically, audiences are more comfortable seeing representations of White racism than Black activism. Or, not so ironically, as representations of massive resistance, for instance, can subtly justify racism (similar to how bell hooks is critical of all representations, even accurate ones, of violence against Black women because they are so common, as she has said many times when asked about the 2013 film *12 Years a Slave*). Additionally, distributors and sellers also misrepresent *The Long Walk Home* and provide false "suggestions" as to what it is actually about. And except for film critics and writers with interests in History, fairness, and representations, few people write about why this matters. Worse, as established by analyzing reviews people left on *Amazon*, people fully celebrate and embrace such reel versions of the past. As Mrs. Thompson begins making her full turnaround, she tells Odessa about a time when she was a little girl. She and a bunch of her friends were on vacation in Portland, Oregon, and went for a swim, and as she describes: "Then these two colored boys came and got in the water. And let me tell ya, you've never seen twenty girls get out of a pool so fast in all your life. We just, we just didn't know any better." Similar to the words spoken through the Mrs. Thompson character, then, audiences do not know any better than to accept the historical memory provided in Hollywood fictions, such as *The Long Walk Home*.[25]

[25] hooks and Harris-Perry, "Black Female Voices: Who is Listening" (accessed March 5, 2014) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OmgqXao1ng; and Kelly J. Madison, "Legitimation Crisis and Containment: The 'Anti-Racist-White-Hero' Film," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16, no. 4 (1999): 399-416.

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A quarter of a century after *The Long Walk Home*'s premier and a century after her birth, Rosa Parks continues to be marginalized and misremembered in everyday life. Outside of being enshrined in the names of twenty-eight schools, over one hundred streets and highways, and numerous parks, postage stamps, medical centers, and senior centers, for example, one could posit that she has been almost all-but-been forgotten by society. Following the 2008 election cycle, Amy Dixon-Kolar's *Rosa Set* and Jay Z's *My President*, for example, celebrate the election of Barack Obama to the Office of President of the United States and further enshrined the popular poem of unknown origins that reduces Parks's life to one word:

> Rosa sat, so Martin could walk
> Martin walked, so Barack could run
> Barack ran, he ran and he won
> So that all our children could fly

In 2014, Obama and other leaders spoke at the United States Capitol to introduce the statue of Parks, the first Black woman to receive such a distinction. Obama's and other's remarks generally reinforced stereotypes and inaccuracies. Obama said:

> This morning, we celebrate a seamstress, slight in stature but mighty in courage. She defied the odds, and she defied injustice. She lived a life of activism, but also a life of dignity and grace. And in a single moment, with the simplest of gestures, she helped change America--and change the world.

Obama included a few specific comments (three sentences) about her accomplishments as a life-long activist but generally emphasized "her quiet leadership," that she

"possessed no fortune; lived her life far from the formal seats of power" and reminded people that Parks alone "launched a movement."[26]

Unfortunately, some people have less than noble intentions when it comes to Parks and the historical memory associated with her. For example, Phil Robertson, the anti-gay right-wing television star of *Duck Dynasty* has been labeled the "Rosa Parks of our generation" by politician Ian Bayne. Bayne explains both Parks and Robertson took strong stands in December, fifty-eight years a part: Parks for the poor treatment of Blacks; Robertson for the poor treatment of Christians. On another note, from the time of her death in 2005 until 2014, many of Parks's papers and other personal belongings were the subject of family disputes and lawsuits. From 2007 until they sold in 2014 for an estimated ten million dollars to Howard Buffett, the Parks archive remained locked, unavailable, and unseen to the public or scholars while being held hostage at Guernsey's Auctioneers in New York.[27]

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[26] "Civil Rights Pioneer Rosa Parks Dies at 92; Local Highway was Named in Honor," *The Blade* (accessed August 1, 2016) http://www.toledoblade.com/Deaths/2005/10/25/Civil-rights-pioneer-Rosa-Parks-dies-at-92-local-highway-was-named-in-honor.html; Amy Dixon-Kolar, "Rosa Set Lyrics," *Amy Dixon-Kolar* (accessed August 2, 2016) http://amydixonkolar.com/store---click-on-the-album/rosa-sat-lyrics.html; Kohl, *She Would Not Be Moved*; Delphine Letort, "The Rosa Parks Story: The Making of a Civil Rights Icon," *Black Camera* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 31-50; Danielle McGuire, "It's time to free Rosa Parks from the bus," *CNN* (accessed December 1, 2012) http://inamerica.blogs.cnn.com/ 2012/12/01/opinion-its-time-to-free-rosa-parks-from-the-bus/; *Melissa Data* (accessed August 1, 2016) https://www.melissadata.com/lookups/zipstreet.asp; "My President (Remix)," *Genius* (accessed August 2, 2016) http://genius.com/Jay-z-my-president-remix-lyrics; *National Center for Education Statistics* (accessed July 30, 2016) http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/index.asp; Barack Obama, "President Obama Dedicates a Statue Honoring Rosa Parks," *The White House* (accessed February 27, 2013) https://www.whitehouse.gov/ photos-and-video/video/2013/02/27/president-obama-dedicates-statue-honoring-rosa-parks#transcript; and Ashley Southall, "Statue of Rosa Parks Is Unveiled at the Capitol," *The New York Times* (accessed July 14, 2014) http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/ 28/us/politics/statue-of-rosa-parks-is-unveiled-at-the-capitol.html.

[27] Julian Bond and Theoharis, "Why Don't Scholars Have Access to Rosa Parks's Archives?," *The Washington Post* (accessed December 2, 2012) https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-dont-

Scholars are not without some blame for these problems. Until the 2005 publication of *Rosa Parks: A Life*, the 2010 publication of *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, and the 2015 publication of *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, there were essentially no academic examinations of Parks's life and activism. Jeanne Theoharis's 2015 monograph has earned the status as the first comprehensive academic Parks biography from historians. Consequently, researchers are only now just beginning to fully appreciate how important and unique Parks really was.[28]

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scholars-have-access-to-rosa-parkss-archives/2011/08/29/gIQAKezHoJ_story.html ?utm_term=.201385a06b80; Leada Gore, "Rosa Parks Archives Sold to Foundation Operated by Warren Buffett's Son," *AL.com* (accessed August 15, 2016) http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2014/08/ rosa_parks_archives_sold_to_gr.html; and Scott Kaufman, "GOP Congressional Candidate: '*Duck Dynasty* Star is Rosa Parks of our Generation,'" *The Raw Story* (accessed December 21, 2013) http://www. rawstory.com/rs/2013/12/20/gop-congressional-candidate-duck-dynasty-star-is-rosa-parks-of-our-generation/

[28] David Brinkley, *Rosa Parks: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005); McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*; McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance- a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (accessed August 7, 2016) http://atthedarkendofthestreet.com; and Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*.

CHAPTER TWO:
"GO FIND YOUR LIFE, MISS SKEETER": NOSTALGIC FANTASIES AND *THE HELP* (2011)

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963

All of this is on account of we want to register, to become first-class citizens. And if the [Mississippi] Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off of the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?

-Fannie Lou Hamer, 1964

Just try to do your very best
Stand up be counted with all the rest
For everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

-Nina Simone, 1964

Wasn't that the point of the book? For women to realize: We are just two people. Not that much separates us. Not nearly as much as I'd thought.

-Kathryn Stockett, 2009

We just wanted to tell the truth, tell the real story, and get it right. So many times as southerners our stories have been handled, have been taken into hands that were outside the South, and it's not always as we know it to be, so we just really wanted the truth. The good and the bad.

-Tate Taylor, 2011

The Help *is an inspirational, courageous and empowering story about very different, extraordinary women in the 1960s South who build an unlikely friendship around a secret writing project--one that breaks society's rules and puts them all at risk. Filled with poignancy, humor and hope--and complete with compelling, never-before-seen bonus features--The Help is a timeless, universal and triumphant story about the ability to create change*

-Publisher Summary of *The Help*, 2011[1]

My analysis of Tate Taylor's *The Help* began immediately after first watching it at the cinema in the summer of 2011 and has further developed through over two dozen screenings, and the first draft of this chapter was completed in 2013, well before what is now a growing body of literature on *The Help* became available. As a result, a few comments are in order. While Kwakiutl L. Dreher argues in the 2015 publication of *Movies in the Age of Obama: The Era of Post-Racial and Neo-Racist Cinema* that "*The Help* is a textbook chapter on how *white women* came of age in the South" (emphasis in original), she uses

Award-winning professor and journalist Melissa Harris-Perry argues that *The Help* (2011) is "much closer to a horror film than a lighthearted drama." Considered a "closed society," the real Mississippi of the 1960s was a vicious place where violence and threats of violence were everyday occurrences that activists such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Nina Simone, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The two-and-one-half-hour reel Mississippi created by screenwriter and director Tate Taylor, however, is wholly different. Taylor's stated commitment to "the real story" and "the truth….good and bad," when compared to the released product and to reviews of it, shows the pervasiveness of his (and viewers') historical amnesia and White blindness. Stripped of its loose historical tapestry--which is limited to mostly period-appropriate extradiegetic songs and mise-en-scenes, along with a few passing mentions of then-contemporary

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some of the same examples to make similar points as found in this chapter. This is coincidence. This same collection has an essay by Blake G. Hobby who does an intertextual analysis looking at *The Help*, Gwendolyn Brooks's "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, A Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon" (1960), and the impact of Barack Obama's presidency on the United States. For more information, see Dreher, "'I Really Need a Maid!': White Womanhood in *The Help*," in *Movies in the Age of Obama*, ed. David Garrett Izzo (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 3-14; and Hobby, "Gwendolyn Brooks's Bronzeville and Tate Taylor's Jackson: 'Art Hurts. Art Urges Voyages—and it is Easier to Stay at Home,'" in *Movies in the Age of Obama*, ed. Izzo (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 15-29.

However, most of the scholarship on *The Help* phenomena focuses on the novel, which is a completely different text. The novel and film adaptation essentially only share characters who happen to have the same names, see Claire Oberon Garcia, et al., eds., *From* Uncle Tom's Cabin *to* The Help: *Critical Perspectives on White-Authored Narratives of Black Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Additionally, the University of North Carolina Press's the Center for the Study of the American South's academic journal, *Southern Cultures*, devoted its spring 2014 issue to a series of nine essays about *The Help*. These essays have only limited comments about the film and more than talking about *The Help*, novel or film, use it as a launching point to discuss related historical issues, see *Southern Cultures* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2014). For the table of contents for this issue, see "Vol. 20, No. 1: *The Help*," *Southern Cultures* (accessed September 3, 2016) http://www.southerncultures.org/issues/vol-20-no-1-help/.

[1] Tatiana Carrier, "Director Tate Taylor & Writer Kathryn Stockett Talk *The Help*," *Clevver Movies* (accessed July 6, 2015) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUI_MsqCpgk; and Kathryn Stockett, *The Help* (New York: Berkley Books, 2009), 492, 530.

events and peoples--*The Help* is something much different from the civil rights (or unifying) narrative it purports to be and is widely believed to be among non-specialized audiences. *The Help* gives only scant attention to the everyday agency of Blacks and the ubiquitous racism and segregation from Whites that governed the South, especially Mississippi. Rather than focusing on Whites as perpetrators of wrongdoings and giving Black women legitimate and supposedly revolutionary voice, as it boasts of doing, *The Help*, instead, makes full use of White savior figures and Mammy stereotypes. This film *is* a "horror film" because it presents a fictional, utopian world, a world where predominantly White audiences are in no way asked to grapple with actual horrors committed by Whites en masse. Due to its representations of the 1960s, historical illiteracy, and insanely popular reception, *The Help* has the potential to become the next *"Gone with the Wind*" (or perhaps even a *"The Birth a Nation*").[2]

The Help has arguably been more successful than any other film about the Civil Rights Revolution. Having grossed approximately $176 million in 3,014 theaters domestically (and another $45 million outside the United States), over $100 million in DVD and Blu-ray sales, and an unknown amount from rentals against a budget of $26

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[2] "Harris-Perry: *The Help* Doesn't Help Domestic Workers," *Melissa Harris-Perry* (accessed February 29, 2012) http://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry/watch/harris-perry-the-help-doesnt-help-domestic-workers-44146755519; and "Melissa Harris-Perry On *The Help*: 'Appalled At The Gross Historical Inaccuracies' (VIDEO)" *Huffington Post* (accessed January 1, 2016).

Others, including Micki McElya, have also reached this conclusion. In her appearance on *Melissa Harris-Perry* on February 24, 2012, McElya said in part, "Primarily what this film [*The Help*] does, and what this book does, is present us with a Mammy narrative for the twenty-first century. It refits the mammy iconography, the mammy story, that a woman, a Black woman working in a White household, loves the people she works for."

million, *The Help* has indeed been tremendously profitable and popular. Measuring its full influence is impossible. Comparatively, for example, other films in this genre grossed the following in domestic theater sales: *Remember the Titans* (2000), $156 million; *Hairspray* (2007), $134 million; *The Butler* (2013), $116 million; *Mississippi Burning* (1988), $68 million; *Men of Honor* (2000), $66 million; *Hairspray* (1988), $13 million; *The Long Walk Home* (1990), $9 million; and *Blood Done Sign My Name* (2010) $117,000. In addition to winning an Oscar, *The Help* has received at least sixty-one other awards and honors, including high recognition from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), seventy-eight additional nominations, and, importantly, has received 2,988 user reviews on *Amazon* as of December 28, 2015, 92 percent of which are positive (i.e., four stars) or extremely positive (i.e., five stars). In comparison, there are more reviews of *The Help* than the total number of reviews for *Remember the Titans* (999), *Hairspray* (775), *Men of Honor* (386), *Mississippi Burning* (267), *The Long Walk Home* (157), and *Blood Done Sign My Name* combined. There are 2,335 for *The Butler*.[3]

Loosely based on Kathryn Stockett's 2009 best-selling novel of the same name, Taylor's *The Help* takes place in Jackson, Mississippi, from June 1963 to August 1964. It

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[3] "Customer Reviews for *The Help*," *Amazon* (accessed June 28, 2014) https://smile.amazon.com/Help-Emma-Stone/productreviews/B004A8ZWVK/ref=cm_cr_dp_qt_see_all_top?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints; *Box Office Mojo*, http://boxofficemojo.com (accessed August 3, 2014); *IMDBPro*, https://pro-labs.imdb.com (accessed July 26, 2014); *The Numbers* (accessed July 26, 2014) http://www.the-numbers.com; and Samuel H. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to Present," *MeasuringWorth* (accessed August 3, 2014) http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/.

Data for earnings only include domestic sales since this dissertation focuses on historical memory in the United States. Additionally, all numbers have been converted to account for inflation through 2013.

primarily revolves around Skeeter Phelan (Emma Stone), who has just graduated from Ole Miss with a degree in journalism, and her efforts to win independence and a prestigious job with Miss Stein (Mary Steenburgen) at Harper & Row in New York, New York. After Skeeter recalls a memory where her childhood maid, Constantine (Cicely Tyson), comforts her for being rejected by boys and tells her she is going to do something big, Skeeter has the idea to interview Black women about their experiences working for White families. Skeeter initially interviews Aibileen (Viola Davis) and Aibileen's friend, Minny (Octavia Spencer). *The Help* also explores the social life of rich, White women, including Skeeter's childhood friends, Elizabeth (Ahna O'Reilly) and Hilly (Bryce Dallas Howard).

While producers carefully advertised *The Help* to have the appearance of an accurate historical narrative favoring basic civil rights for Black women, especially domestic workers, *The Help* on the contrary, is really much more about maintaining the status quo and rejecting the voice of Blacks than about being a legitimate representation of the Civil Rights Revolution. Indeed, in addition to scholarly analysis, the following graphs of the number of lines (Figure 2.1) and words (Figure 2.2) Taylor assigns to White and Black characters make it abundantly clear that *The Help* is far more concerned about White characters and White people and White views of History.

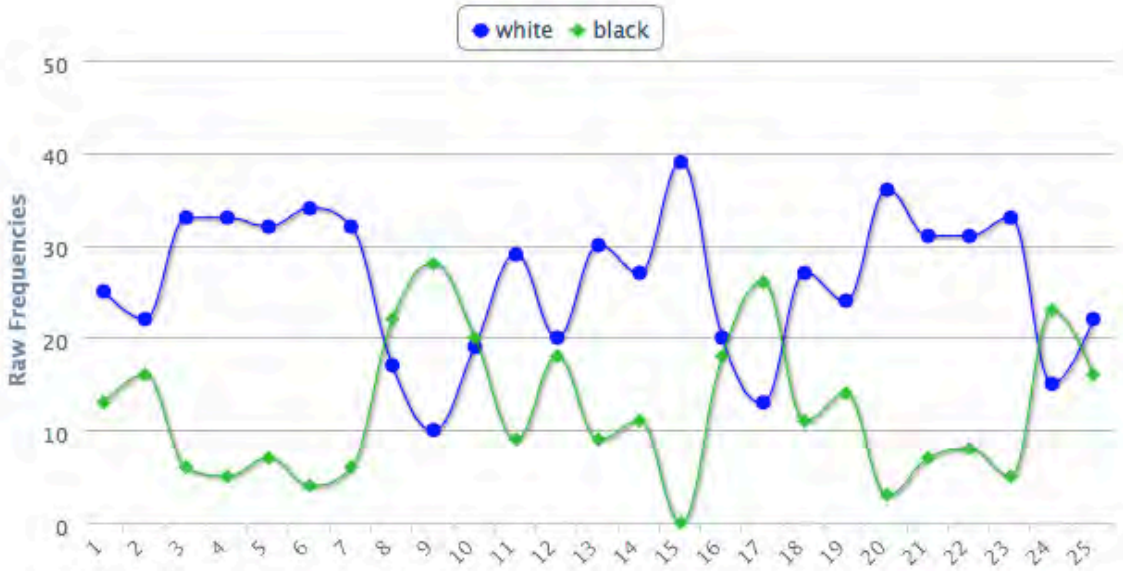

Figure 2.1 Graph showing lines spoken in *The Help* divided by racialization.
In *The Help* there are a total of 958 lines: 304 (32 percent) of these are spoken by Black characters and 654 (68 percent) of these are spoken by White characters. This chart shows this visually with the film script divided into twenty-five sections. For example, divided into twenty-five parts, the twelfth segment includes an almost equal number of lines by White and Black characters. This graph was constructed by creating a transcript of the film, coding the lines, and imputing the data into Voyant Tools.

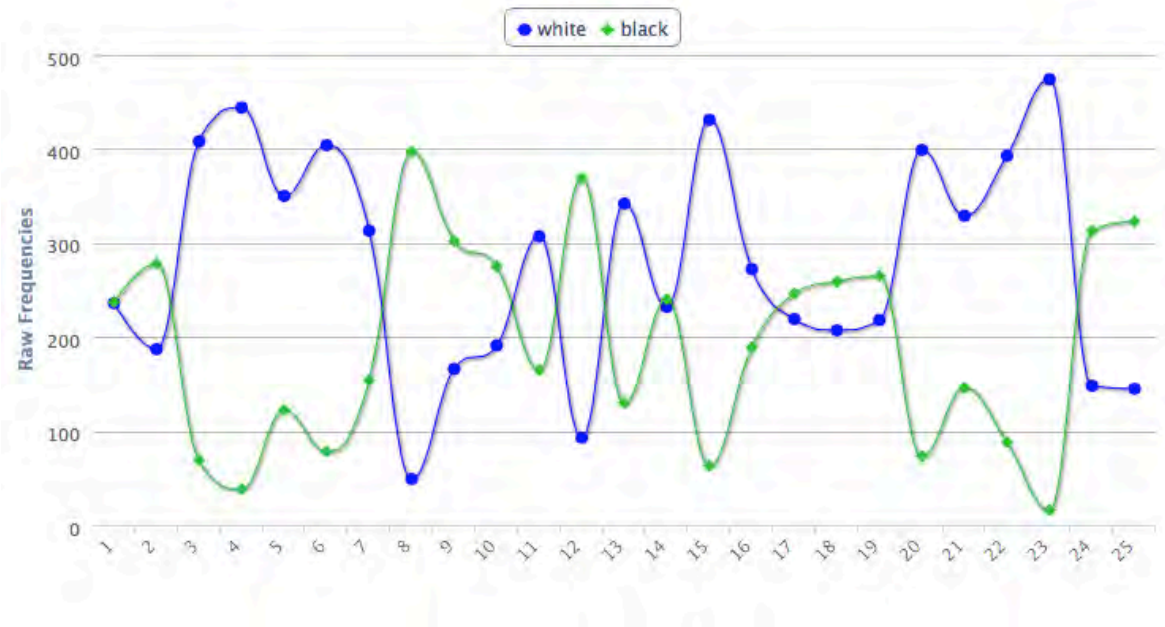

Figure 2.2 Graph showing words spoken in *The Help* divided by racialization. In *The Help* there are a total of 11,792 words spoken: 4,835 (41 percent) of these are spoken by Black characters and 6,957 (59 percent) of these are spoken by White characters. This chart shows this visually with the film script divided into twenty-five sections. Worthy of note too is that many of the words spoken by Black characters are "Miss," "yes ma'am," "no ma'am," and almost none occur in Black spaces. This graph was constructed by creating a transcript of the film, coding the words spoken, and imputing the data into Voyant Tools.

Figure 2.3: Word cloud of words spoken in *The Help*.
This word cloud shows the 150 most spoken works (less "essential words," e.g., "you," "the," "to," "and," "a," "that," etc) in *The Help*. After common words are removed, "Miss" is the most common word, spoken sixty-six times. This word cloud was constructed using Wordle.

In this process, the reel minimizes the real everyday violence and agency of all historical actors, good and bad, but especially the violence and lack of agency as they relate to Black women and Black men. That society in the United States denies what could seemingly be so basic is one further indication of the on-going struggle to come to terms with that past. This chapter will first discuss Skeeter's book (the project encouraged by Constantine's words) and then will explain how the entire film revolves around an untenable premise. The chapter will then move to analyze character constructions in terms of Black women, "the nadir of American race relations," and the two-century-old Mammy stereotype. The chapter will then move to a briefer discussion of *The Help*'s missing Black men. The next section will bring the chapter full circle by analyzing White

women, marriage, and *The Help*'s actual agenda. Finally, the chapter will look at the film's popular reception as recorded in the user reviews on *Amazon*. Collectively, the events and peoples, as presented in *The Help*, overestimate the success and minimize the struggles of the Civil Rights Revolution and does not leave readers with what Virginia Woolf would refer to as nuggets of truth.

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> *Margaret Mitchell glorified the mammy figure who dedicates her whole life to a White family but nobody ever asked mammy how she felt about it.*
>
> **-Skeeter of *The Help*, 2011**

While this chapter points out that *The Help* is at least partly a remake of *Gone with the Wind* with different settings and different specific situations in the same way that *Imitation of Life* (1934) and *Imitation of Life* (1959) are considered remakes despite their many differences, the *Sunday Times* deems *The Help,* "The other side of *Gone with the Wind* -- and just as unputdownable."[4] The writer carefully created *The Help* as being something supposedly better and different than *Gone with the Wind* when it comes to issues of racialization, fairness, history, and representation. Such is not the case. *The Help* tricks viewers into thinking it does more than it does. In what could be considered partly breaking-the-fourth-wall comments, *Gone with the Wind* is directly and indirectly

[4] Elizabeth Buchan, "Saints and sinners: Powerful women, from an astute abbess to a plucky explorer, feature strongly in Elizabeth Buchan's choice of new novels," *Sunday Times* (London, UK) August 9, 2009, 40.

mentioned numerous times throughout *The Help* and the implication is that the movie *The Help* is a major improvement. Such positive references to *Gone with the Wind* give it further credence as a good, important book and film that celebrates a time of bygone innocence--all of which enhances *The Help*.

The Help, just like *Gone with the Wind*, practices bad History. *The Help* opens with Aibileen answering Skeeter's naïve questions about where she began life and if she ever dreamed of being something other than a maid. After having a flashback to her own childhood caretaker, Constantine, Skeeter calls Miss Stein in New York, who previously turned her down for a job until she gained more experience, with word of her revolutionary idea:

> **Skeeter:** I'd like to write something from the point of view of the help. These colored women raise white children, and in 20 years, those children become the boss. We love them and they love us, but they can't even use the toilets in our houses. Don't you find that ironic, Miss Stein?
>
> **Miss Stein:** I'm listening.
>
> **Skeeter:** Margaret Mitchell glorified the mammy figure who dedicates her whole life to a white family but nobody ever asked Mammy how she felt about it.
>
> **Miss Stein:** So, a side to this never before heard.

When Skeeter first tries to convince Aibileen to be interviewed, Skeeter says, "A book like this has never been written," to which Aibileen responds with fear, "Cause there's a reason. I do this with you, I might as well burn my own house down." Aibileen's

comment about her house in an example of a rare, quick, passing reference to violence in this text.[5]

One of the most problematic and obvious examples of historical literacy in *The Help* directly relates to how Skeeter, Miss Stein, and the Black women interviewed say such an exposé detailing the experience of Black women working in White homes is necessary: that such an account will be the first-of-its-kind since "nobody ever asked Mammy how she felt." The historical record, however, reveals a very different story. Black women (and men) independently expressed frustration and actively sought change when it came to both domestic work specifically and to everyday racism, knowingly risking arrest or their lives. The dissatisfaction of Mammied Black women has been known since the origins of enslavement in the geopolitical areas that became the United States. In the late nineteenth century, Lucy Maynard Salmon conducted the first scholarly study of what she termed "the servant problem" because both employee and employer constantly complained about each other. Salmon found that wages were low and mistrust on all sides ran rampant. White women would accuse their servants of corrupting their middle class values. "More Slavery at the South" published in *Independent* on January 25, 1912, expresses how little had changed since the Thirteenth Amendment and expresses a desire for basic independence and respect. Dallas, Texas, blues singer Hattie Burleson's "Sadie's Servant Room Blues" (1928) uses the narrative of a Black woman and expresses frustration because she receives little pay, little privacy,

[5] The full name of Skeeter's book is *The Help*. To avoid confusion with Stockett's *The Help* and Taylor's *The Help*, I have elected to just use various pronouns for Skeeter's book project.

and little respect for working long hours, sometimes into the night. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), for instance, also explores the exploitation Black women faced from White men and the complete lack of other employment options because of an extremely low glass ceiling. Organizations too--such as the New York Domestic Workers Union, Phyllis Wheatley Clubs (first formed in Tennessee in 1896), and special branches of the Young Women's Christian Association--made it clear that Black women sought much more and were expressing the ugly realities of working for White families. All of these came far before the setting of *The Help*.[6]

Most often, as during enslavement, Black women expressed their voices through small acts of rebellion or resistance, such as working slowly, accidentally breaking something, or pretending to be ignorant. The cumulative total of these "hidden transcripts" resulted in powerful examples of agency that had important impacts. Katherine van Wormer, David W. Jackson III, and Charletta Sudduth's collection of edited oral histories contains numerous examples of such acts. For example, Vinella Byrd of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, worked for a family who did not have a sink. When asked about rules she had to follow she said, "the man didn't want me to wash my hands in the wash pan….After that, I didn't wash my hands at all. I would just go in and start cooking. He didn't want me to use the same one that he was using." Hazel Rankins of Taylor, Arkansas, recalled a story where her sister, also a domestic worker, who was "of course" forbidden from using the bathtub she was expected to clean but would take a

[6] Vanessa H. May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1-2, 29.

bath in it while no one else was home. Annie Victoria Johnson of Ripley, Mississippi, had a sister who was not paid in full by the White woman for whom she worked. In response, Johnson's sister used one of the family's toothbrushes to clean the toilet and used her socks to butter a turkey.[7]

More broadly, Black women and men in the long Civil Rights Movement, the movement read as dating from the beginnings of enslavement forward to the present, have always voiced their frustrations. Publications such as *The Baltimore Afro-American*, *Jet*, and *Ebony* were important and well-known platforms for Black communities. *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and *Song of the South* (1946), for example, encountered protests from the NAACP for portrayals of history that use derogatory and stereotypical Black characters, and in the case of *Birth of a Nation*, the additional element of White characters in blackface.

By examining evidence in actual cultural artifacts, therefore, it becomes clear that in the early 1960s there had already been a myriad of successful efforts, many of which, such as the Harlem Renaissance, were initiated by Blacks and show not just "how Mammy felt" but how the larger dynamics of racism in general and how the "civil rights

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[7] Katherine van Wormer, et al., eds., *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestics and White Families in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 75, 102, 158-159.

James C. Scott, an anthropologist, developed the notion of "hidden transcripts" as a way to recognize the hidden or not-so-obvious political power of oppressed social and political minority groups in South Asia. Robin D. G. Kelley extends this conceptualization to the Black working class in *Race Rebels*, see Kelly, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 8. See also, Chris Cameron, "20 Year Anniversary Roundtable On Robin D. G. Kelley, Race Rebels: Author Interview," *African American Intellectual Society* (accessed December 20, 2014) http://www.aaihs.org/20-year-anniversary-roundtable-on-robin-d-g-kelley-race-rebels-author-interview/.

thing," as Miss Stein calls it, was much deeper and was largely grassroots. These Black women did not need a "Skeeter" to ask them if they were oppressed. They did not need a "Skeeter" to give them permission to express frustration. In reality, many "Skeeters" tried to keep Black women from talking or having basic rights, activities far from liberating. As an extremely literate--she talks about reading and writing for hours daily--Black woman living in the South and an active church member, a real-life "Aibileen" would have most certainly known about deeply-rooted, on-going activism, document and undocumented, acts of agency by Black communities. An "Aibileen" would have also known about all of the grassroots campaigns in Mississippi, such as the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In the movie, these flaws make Skeeter's book seem that much more important, revolutionary, even dangerous, but ultimately these omissions, undermine Black people in the United States and their life-risking efforts and accomplishments. These criticisms are not to omit the very real allies, including wealthy White women, who supported Black women. The group called, "Wednesdays in Mississippi," for example, provided safe ways for White women in and out of Mississippi to build alliances of understanding, alliances wherein some of Mississippi's wealthy White women worked to support civil rights for Black women. But, larger implications of *The Help*'s approach are important. On the one hand, perhaps Skeeter and Miss Stein (and thus actually the screenwriter-director) are simply not able to recognize that Black people in the United States had been fighting for civil rights for centuries and really thought privileged White women were singularly vital. On the other hand, as educated women working in the publishing industry (or striving to, in the case of Skeeter), they

would undoubtedly know that such narratives of Black women toiling in the South were not new. Indeed, if Skeeter's idea was as revolutionary as she and Miss Stein hold, it may seem obvious, but such a project would have been impossible and deadly, yet audiences completely accept the storyline. That none of the characters in *The Help* know any of this History is important to specifically recognize. This engenders several questions: Why did Stockett and Taylor prefer to have only ignorant characters? What does this rhetoric say about larger agendas, conscious and unconscious, imbedded in *The Help*? This choice has a number of consequences all of which suggest the possible was impossible and the impossible, possible--all of which undermine the struggles and successes for both Black and White women in their on-going struggles for basic civil rights. Additionally, we must remember that the White and Black characters are created by a White screenwriter-director. Skeeter, Aibileen, and the others do not exist as independent, autonomous beings. Kimberely Wallace-Sanders's "Every Child Left Behind: The Many Invisible Children of *The Help*" specifically focuses on the calculated exclusion of Black children in Tate Taylor's work. Minny's five children are ignored, and the Black women only count the White children they are paid to care for as their own. Wallace-Sanders also makes the interesting point that Minny has the many children Celica wishes she had to fill her all-too-empty house.[8]

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[8] Debbie Z. Harwell, *Wednesdays in Mississippi: Proper Ladies Working for Radical Change, Freedom Summer 1964* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014); and Kimberley Wallace-Sanders, "Every Child Left Behind: The Many Invisible Children in The Help," *Southern Cultures* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 65-76.

That women are the focus and that none of these women know about such important aspects of history also tends to create a sexist (and racist) element in *The Help* and to the educated viewer, a perpetuation of harmful stereotypes that suggest women are less capable and less informed than men. Even more problematic than characters in *The Help* not knowing about the deep roots of Black agency and activism, is that the entire text relies on premises that are either false or impossible when compared to basic historical scrutiny. While these falsehoods and impossibilities do not create a plot hole, audiences will walk away from the film with society's general (and false) historical memory confirmed--that the Civil Rights Revolution suddenly started and suddenly ended--instead of having an opportunity to understand how involved Black people were during, before, and after the Civil Rights Revolution when we consider the long Civil Rights Movement. Audiences will likewise leave unaware of any deeper, more meaningful history, and they will presumably walk away with new "knowledge," misguided knowledge that suggests how important White people were not just as allies but as absolutely essential in order for Blacks to be heard by other Whites.

All of this brings forward another point: Skeeter is much more interested in personal advancement and personal success. Undeniably, her adventures resemble a so-named "poverty tour" (and a very mild poverty tour at that) far more than a sincere investment as an ally of the Civil Rights Revolution. As the writers created her, Skeeter only has the idea to collect narratives from Black women working as domestics because Miss Stein says Skeeter needs experience before working in New York. After reading two

sample chapters, Miss Stein tells Skeeter, “Eugenia, Martin Luther King just invited the entire country to march with him in D.C. this August. This many Negroes and Whites haven't worked together since *Gone with the Wind*…My advice is to write it and write it fast before this civil rights thing blows over.” Miss Stein’s comments emphasize that Skeeter has a special opportunity for personal economic and social benefit, that Whites and Blacks actually did work *together* in the production of *Gone with the Wind*, and that Miss Stein believes the Civil Rights Revolution will be very brief. Miss Stein’s urgent tone and words also speak to somewhat self-interests in overseeing the publication of Skeeter’s “revolutionary” book. Skeeter and her superior never discuss implications for the Black women it is supposedly intended to benefit.

While viewers are told that the act of Black women telling their stories is empowering and liberating, their attributions suggest otherwise. (Additionally, given various social, political, economic, and racialized power dynamics and corresponding mores, none of the women could give true, unmediated consent to be interviewed.) In the field of psychology, *attributions* are the whos and whats to which people explain behaviors. Attributions are internal or external/situational, controllable or not controllable, and changeable or not changeable. According to psychologists, attributions are best when they are internal, controllable, and changeable. The boldest expressions of agency by Black women in *The Help* are so unrealistic that it has the consequence of minimizing agency where it did exist, historically. The director assigns Black women attributions that are external, not controllable, and not changeable, all of which are psychologically detrimental and take away the agency of the Black women. For example,

after initially refusing participation because it would be too dangerous and saying, “I do this with you, I might as well burn my own house down,” Aibileen agrees to talk to Skeeter. Skeeter inquires as to what changed, and Aibileen replies, “God” and after a brief pause adds, “and Miss Hilly Holbrook.” Aibileen’s explanation involves forces other than herself: She has no agency, control, or freedom. The director even has Aibileen define her total existence with her comment, “Looking after White babies, that’s what I do.” Consider how different an explanation such as, “I’m tired of being mistreated. I want to make change.” would have been. Would such an internal, controllable, and changeable attribution come across to spectators as too aggressive and as nothing more than the stereotype that labels the speaker of such confidence an “angry Black woman”? *The Help* even goes as far as to suggest that Black women should not be so bold. When discussing Skeeter’s in-progress-manuscript, one of Miss Stein’s few comments is, “I like this ‘Sarah Ross.’ She testifies without complaining too much.” This regarding Skeeter’s book that purportedly depicts what really happens and the true experiences of Sarah Ross (née Aibileen) and the seventeen (White) kids she has raised. Additionally, the film strongly suggests that part of why Skeeter’s book is so important is the potential to make change and shock readers. It does shock and anger Hilly and Elizabeth but only because they are embarrassed and afraid people will figure out who is who. Given the high prevalence of employing Black women as maids, on-going newspaper and television coverage of atrocities in the South, and everyday culture, in a

real-life situation, White readers would not have been overly shocked about anything except possibly seeing *their* stories in print.[9]

Black women are also presented as weak at times and as purposely not taking ownership of their stories because they "need" and even ask for a White savior. When Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter are trying to figure out how to persuade more maids to participate, Aibileen says to Skeeter, "You stop this." After the murder of Medgar Evers, ten other maids agree to contribute to Skeeter's book because they want her help. Various unnamed women say, "I'm going to help with your stories." "I'm going to help, too." "We all are." Once again, reasons for them contributing have nothing to do with their personal frustration or dissatisfaction with how they are treated and reasons ignore historical activism initiated by Black women after Evers's death. Worst of all, *The Help* more than just implies that Black women relied on White women when it came to having a voice during the Civil Rights Revolution.

None of the Black women in *The Help* express any dislike toward being domestic workers, with two exceptions. In the first few minutes of the film, Aibileen nods yes to Skeeter's (naïve) question, "Do you ever dream of being something else?" This is in sharp contrast to Sofia (Oprah Winfrey) in *The Color Purple* (1985), for example. When

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[9] A growing body of literature examines the role of television during the Civil Rights Revolution, see Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race During the Civil Rights Struggle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Dustin Rowles, "The Quiet Civil Rights Movement of Television and Film," *PAJIBA* (accessed May 14, 2013) http://www.pajiba.com/think_pieces/the-quiet-civil-rights-movement-of-television-and-film-how-mlk-jr-gave-way-to-steve-urkel.php; and Sasha Torres, *Black, White, and in Color: Television and Black Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), for example.

Miss Millie (Gracie Higginbotham) asks Sofia, “Do you want to be my maid?” She replies with boldness, “HELL NO!,” “HELL NO!,” “HELL…” The other exception in *The Help* is when Minny catches Skeeter and Aibileen and says to Skeeter in an attitude and with sarcasm that evokes laughter, “What makes you think Colored people need your help?” Minny, in her tone that almost evokes laughter, goes on to comment about domestic work: “It’s a real Fourth of July picnic. It’s what we dream of doing all weekend long. Get back into they house, polish the silver. And we just love not making minimum wage or getting Social Security. And how we love they children when they little. And then they turn out just like they mamas.” If the director was truly sincere about Skeeter’s project (and if viewers could handle it), *The Help* would have had many more adamant expressions of dissatisfaction resembling and exceeding Minny’s. Nonetheless, Minny does ask for Skeeter’s aid.

Figure 2.4 Film still from *The Help* showing Aibileen laughing while telling Skeeter the story about the child who wondered why she was so black.

The stories domestic workers tell Skeeter are happy and involve almost no complaint about the institution. Aibileen, laughing, tells of a child who kept wondering why she was so Black and of one day explaining that it was because she drank too much coffee. Minny shares how she became known as the best cook in Mississippi and shares funny stories about irrational (and harmless) White women. Callie (Millicent Bolton), although nameless in the film, tells a nice story that shows no prejudices at all about when her boss bought some land so she would not have to walk so far to work. Cora (Carol Sutton) briefly talks about working for the French family and knowing Mrs. French's daughters, Ms. Nancy and Ms. Jolene (Anna Camp). Upon the death of Mrs. French, Ms. Nancy wanted Cora to work for her. Cora accepted but ultimately had to work for Ms. Jolene, who Cora said was mean, because of a clause in the mother's will. In the one instance of pain, Cora says, "the French family owned me." The full interviews occur completely off screen. On-screen sound bites from the interviews account for less than thirteen minutes (i.e., approximately 8 percent) of the entire film. None, not one, of the twelve domestic workers interviewed in *The Help* for Skeeter's book discuss being overworked, not paid, beaten, raped, or other tragic realties faced by the 90 percent of Black women in the South who worked as domestics. And consequently, these acts of violence do not exist in the world created by *The Help*. From one perspective, the implication of Taylor's structure is that Black women do not have a strong sense of the past, family, or community. On this note, recent scientific studies related to epigenetics have confirmed that trauma and related memories are transmitted through deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Therefore, from such perspectives,

these Black women should automatically have some sense of the past, but their White creators deny them humanity and ancestry. Additionally, no Black men are interviewed, and this deserves specific recognition, especially given that they also worked as domestics and also struggled in the South. Essentially, the White screenwriter-director leaves everything potentially negative or critical of the past out of the text and only potentially to the imagination, creates unrealistic characters, never asks audiences to truly encounter even the most basic tragedies associated with the Civil Rights Revolution, and creates a near utopian world in the process. On the other hand, the most extreme example of crudity in Skeeter's book is what is always referred to as Minny's "terrible awful." As revenge for firing her, Minny gives Hilly a pie laced with Minny's human feces. This one example of violence, therefore, tends to confirm the fears of White women and makes Minny seem nasty. (This is discussed more below.)[10]

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[10] For information on scientific studies that discuss how traumatic memories are transmitted across generations, see Brian G. Dias and Kerry J. Ressler, "Parental Olfactory Experience Influences Behavior and Neural Structure in Subsequent Generations," *Nature Neuroscience* 17 (November 2013): 89-96; Richard Gray, "Phobias May be Memories Passed Down in Genes from Ancestors," *The Telegraph* (accessed June 29, 2016) http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/10486479/Phobias-may-be-memories-passed-down-in-genes-from-ancestors.html; Alison Mackey, "Grandma's Experiences Leave a Mark on Your Genes," *Discover Magazine* (accessed January 19, 2015) http://discovermagazine.com/2013/may/13-grandmas-experiences-leave-epigenetic-mark-on-your-genes; and Jean West, "Holocaust Survivors' Grandchildren Call for Action Over Inherited Trauma," *The Guardian* (accessed June 29, 2016) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/03/holocaust-survivors-grandchildren-inherited-trauma; and Rachel Yehuda, et al., "Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects on FKBP5 Methylation," *Biological Psychiatry* (accessed July 29, 2016) http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006322315006526.

Historians, such as Stanley Elkins and Nell Irvin Painter, have also explored how, for example, the legacies of enslavement extend across multiple generations, see Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual* Life, 3rd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Jeanette Keith, "H-Net Reviews: Jeanette Keith on Nell Irvin Painter, Southern History Across the Color Line," *Nell Irvin Painter* (accessed August 2, 2016) http://www.nellpainter.com/ caches/review_jeanettekeith.html; "Nell Irvin Painter on Soul Murder and Slavery," *Africans in America* (accessed August 2, 2016) http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4i3084.html; and Painter, *Soul Murder and Slavery* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 1993).

Even though *The Help* is fictional, arguments in this section are fair criticisms precisely because it is fiction and yet situates itself within the context of real events and people. Viewers think it is a true story or resembles one, as shown in *Amazon* reviews, which are discussed later in this chapter. As shown in this section, *The Help* presents a world where both White and Black women have *never* learned about how the dynamics of segregation affected Black women, and while filmmakers have vast opportunities and artistic freedom, of course, this is simply not realistic but it is insulting. Furthermore, *The Help* presents a world where Skeeter, a young, rich White woman, and the White savior figure, is the very first person to challenge discrimination, and she not only survives the experience but gets her dream job, too. All of this becomes exponentially more problematic when we consider Skeeter and the maids as historical stand-ins, stand-ins who do not come anywhere near representing real experiences. Skeeter, Minny, Aibileen, and other characters created by Tate Taylor do not come close to honestly representing anyone who actually existed and had hopes and fears, in contrast to statements by him and other members of his team, some of which are quoted in epigraphs throughout this chapter.

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For historical accounts on Black men and the Black family, see Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); and Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), for example.

You gots plenty more to be grateful for than me. And look, now I ain't messing around no more. Now Mr. Johnny gonna catch me here, and shoot me dead right here on this no wax floor. You gots to tell him. Ain't he wondering how the cooking so good?

-**Minny of *The Help*, 2011**

While *The Help* does not have characters talk about the real and sometimes life-endangering hardships of being a Black woman (or Black man) who is a domestic worker, the movie does show their struggles in a few isolated cases. That is, *The Help* accurately shows that while relationships Black women and White families had potentially loving and powerful relationships that were simultaneously wholly forced and ripe with fear and exploitation--relationships that could change course for the worse at any moment and correctly shows that segregation was not about separation but instead about together and unequal. This does not, however, result in a fuller commitment from Tate Taylor to give anywhere near even an accurate sketch of the everyday realities of violence--the psychologically degrading and physically taxing or abusive--Black women faced while working as domestics during the decades of the Civil Rights Revolution. With its use of humor, toilets, and unrealistic representations, the overall film effectively argues that domestic work was not dangerous, was frequently entertaining, and was sometimes the only place of solace for Black women.

Figure 2.5 Film still from *The Help* showing the maids laughing and having a good time.

Figure 2.6 Film still from *The Help* showing the maids laughing and having a good time.

Director Tate Taylor makes constant use of the Mammy stereotype. Minny loves fried chicken, is overweight, and has an attitude. Minny is the best cook, and Aibileen is the best at raising children. In a recalling of *Imitation of Life* (1959) where Lora (Lana Turner) is shocked to learn that her maid, Annie (Juanita Moore), has friends, White women in *The Help* assume that neither Minny, nor Aibileen have lives. For instance, Skeeter is amazed to learn that Aibileen and Constantine are friends, which is realistic,

given how ignorant White women normally chose to be when it came to the lives of Black women.

Taylor also makes use of what I have termed Mammied Relationships. Mammied Relationships are by design not "separate but equal" but are instead, together and unequal. The signs and symbols of segregation, indeed, depended on such togetherness to perpetuate inequality. In *The Help*'s 61 scenes, Mammied Black women are in 38, amounting to right at 1 hour and 45 minutes. Most of the time, however, as partially indicated by the graphs that help open this chapter, the writer and director created and treated these women as silent, invisible characters. This silence and invisibility is not emphasized such that audiences could notice and internalize it as representing historical dynamics and is not countered by representations of Black women (and men) in private spaces outside the culture of segregation's public boundaries. In each of these Mammied scenes, Black women occupy the same space as White women, men, and children, only feet or inches apart, if even that much when we consider that Black women prepare food and take care of children without assistance from Whites. Opening scenes, for example, show Aibileen preparing lunch for a group of White women and helping Mae Mobley use the commode. **Mae Mobley**/Aibileen, **Elizabeth**/Aibileen, **Hilly/**Aibileen, **Skeeter**/Aibileen, **Skeeter**/Constantine, **Mrs. Phelan**/Constantine, **Hilly**/Minny, **Celia**/Minny, **Skeeter**/Minny, and **Hilly**/Yule Mae are only the most important examples of Mammied relationships specifically detailed.

Although charged with raising White children and preparing food for White families, Black women face the jealousy and contradictory paranoia of the White

biological mothers, especially when it comes to the bonds that Mammied characters--forced mothers--developed with White children and to the fear of germs. For example, both Mae Mobley and Skeeter refer to the Black women who raised them as being their mother, literally and figuratively, respectively. Mae Mobley says, "You're my real mama, Aibee." At two different points, when Skeeter is talking with her mother about why Constantine was fired, Skeeter says, "She Raised me!" and "She did you the biggest favor of your life. She taught me everything." When Hilly and Elizabeth fire Aibileen, Aibileen tells them, "You give my sweet girl a chance." At the same time, this closeness resulted in conflicting and confusing situations, including trust and suspicion at the same instance. In one scene, Hilly hands over her son to Yule Mae for his nap after having just interrogated her for talking with Skeeter and mentioning her children were fixing to start college. Affection existed historically, as noted by Anne Moody, and the director fairly represents this in *The Help*, but this was not consensual affection and was not without hostility.

Contradictory emotions and practices reach a climax with the film's focus on bathrooms. *The Help*'s storyline which revolves around toilets is both interesting and problematic and is one of the most interesting presented throughout Civil Rights Revolution cinema. These scenes very clearly and accurately show that segregation was not mainly about separation and provide the only realistic representations of the everyday humiliation that domestic workers faced. However, while toilets are important sites of powerful conflict, they are also a near constant source of humor for audiences and utilize both White Gaze and Male Gaze. bell hooks has written in particular about

The Help's use of "toilet humor." She says, "it deploys comedy and farce to shift attention away from the brutal cruelty White supremacist segregation generated in the lives of southern White and Black folk." hooks also dedicates an entire paragraph to criticizing that the film uses a Black woman who puts "fecal matter in the food they served." hooks says, "Surely this is the stuff of perverse racist fantasy," and she explains that there is no documentation suggesting any such thing actually ever happened.[11]

In an unusually darkly lit scene toward the beginning that foreshadows how contentious restrooms will be, Aibileen is kneeling in front of Mae Mobley who is on the commode and in the process of being potty trained. Mae Mobley refuses until bribed with two cookies. As Mae Mobley begins to urinate, Aibileen pats Mae Mobley's legs and with a big smile enthusiastically cries, "Mae Mobley! You're going!" At this instant, Mae Mobley's mother, Elizabeth, barges in and with intense frustration spits out, "Aibileen, the girls are pulling up, and the table isn't set!" As Mae Mobley tries to tell Elizabeth that Mae Mobley has just used the bathroom, Elizabeth grabs her from the commode without allowing Mae Mobley to finish using the restroom or to pull her pants up and orders Aibileen to finish preparing for the bridge club meeting. While Aibileen can fully assist Mae Mobley (and is certainly expected to keep that restroom polished,

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[11] bell hooks, "Help Wanted: Re-Imagining the Past," in *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 58-70. hooks also says that *The Help* is anything but new and can "only be seen as backlash, both against the movement to end racism and the feminist movement." She discusses how First Lady Michelle Obama's rhetoric matches the rhetoric espoused by *The Help*. hooks also discusses how thoroughly *The Help* demeans women, White and Black, and uses Skeeter to promote "false sisterhood." To hooks, *The Help* "suggests it is the innate perverse nature of females to compete with one another; race just adds a spicier component."

while also cooking the food for Elizabeth's weekly bridge club meetings), she is limited to the guest restroom and then after Hilly's Home Health Sanitation Initiative, a custom-made outdoor restroom. Although bathrooms are never discussed between Celia and Minny, one emotionally-charged scene has Minny breaking into Celia's bathroom upon hearing her cry and discovers she has had a miscarriage. Black people in *The Help* are only permitted in White spaces when assisting them and are frequently expected to be in two places at once. After Elizabeth and Raleigh, her husband, briefly discuss the bathroom issue in front of Aibileen, Raleigh demands Aibileen make him a sandwich and Elizabeth demands she go check on Mae Mobley. This is the Civil Rights Revolution, according to *The Help*.

Hilly first introduces her initiative at a bridge club meeting. While invisibilizing Aibileen, Hilly explains that she will not use Elizabeth's restroom since Aibileen is allowed to use the guest bathroom and suspects she uses the others, too. Elizabeth angrily counters, "She does not!" Hilly tells Elizabeth, Skeeter, and the others about her recently-drafted, White Citizens Council-endorsed, Home Health Sanitation Initiative. An increasingly exasperated and motivated Hilly explains, in a reflection of fears White people actually had of Black people, that it is "just plain dangerous" for Blacks and Whites to use the same commode because Black people "carry different diseases than we do." Hilly, however, still expects her hired help to clean her bathroom before and after she uses it. Skeeter comments that they should just build a separate restroom for Hilly, moving the scene from historically representing White blindness, racism, and fear that existed historically to comedy. Skeeter, who is in charge of the bridge club's

newsletter, also provides comic relief when she changes Hilly's submission from "drop off old coats" to "drop off old commodes." After the scene where there are over four dozen toilets in Hilly's yard, the second most humorous scene is about Minny's "terrible awful." Hilly's comment about the White Citizens Council is the only such comment in the movie about real-life terrorist organizations. The Klu Klux Klan is never mentioned or included. *The Help* never shows either group. As a result, viewers will likely not even process "White Citizens Council" and will not know how horrific its members made life for Blacks. This is one of many points where *The Help* differs sharply from *The Long Walk Home* and where it shows a fantasy.[12]

Figure 2.7 Film still from *The Help* showing Hilly's front yard with old commodes.

One of the most powerful restroom scenes shows even more that segregation was not about *real* separation, reasonable representations of hardships, yet does so

[12] Tera W. Hunter, "Tuberculosis as the 'Negro Servants' Disease,'" in *To Joy My Freedom*: *Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 187-218. For additional information, see John Ettling, *The Germ of Laziness: Rockefeller Philanthropy and Public Health in the New South* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2000).

using White Gaze and Male Gaze. The camera cuts to a new scene, focusing on two shoes, long white pantyhose, while slowly panning up. Then the camera focuses on Aibileen's face, who is visibly sweating and miserable while sitting on a commode in a wooden shack. The camera focuses on Aibileen's face for eight full seconds before quickly cutting to Elizabeth saying, "Hurry, Aibileen! Mae Mobley is up, and I'm off to the doctor!" Outside of the restroom, a large, very visible thermometer shows that it is slightly warmer than 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Switching again to Aibileen, who is now pulling her pants up, and then again back to Elizabeth and Aibileen, Mae Mobley says, "That's Aibee's bathroom, Mama. Hey, Aibee!" Elizabeth responds, "No, no, no, honey. Promise me you won't go in there, OK?," while the camera switches to Aibileen who is still pulling her pants up and is now flushing the toilet. Aibileen opens the door, says, "I'm right here, baby girl," and picks Mae Mobley up, without having washed her hands, as there is no sink.

Figure 2.8 Film still from *The Help* after Aibileen has used her new outdoor bathroom.

In passing, Elizabeth says, “Isn’t it nice to have your own, Aibileen?” As Elizabeth gets in her car and drives off, Aibileen is still holding Mae Mobley. Mae Mobley says, “You’re my real mama, Aibee.” Aibileen smiles, gives Mae Mobley a kiss on the check, and Mae Mobley squeezes Aibileen tighter and gives her a kiss on the cheek, too. They both rest their heads on each other for a second, and the scene ends. This scene, more than others, shows the irrational ironies associated with segregation. Aibileen and Mae Mobley could not use the same toilet because of how society racializes them, but they could touch and hold each other beside the toilet—without washing their hands—without breaking deeply-embedded mores. Elizabeth also clearly “trusts” Aibileen more than she is afraid of her and her “germs.” (And “trusts” is not exactly the correct word because it is not that rational, as it involves social forces.) Audiences, however, are unlikely to notice such contradictions on a casual viewing. This might be different if Mae Mobley had said something to the effect of, “We can hug now!” Whether or not such a line would be “realistic” for Mae Mobley is irrelevant since we are working with fiction.

Before proceeding further, *The Help*’s attention to restrooms warrants some comments. In one of many realms of illogical that have existed historically, White families did fear the waste (i.e., the germs) of Blacks but not their “germs” when it came to waiting on them. One maid in *The Maid Narratives* reported having to learn to not use the restroom all day, while another would call her brother, who would pick her up, drive her home, and take her back to work when she needed to use the restroom, for example. Potential historical problems emerge in *The Help* with the very late arrival of

Hilly's proposal, one that had been already been a wide-spread *de jure* practice. Additionally, Tate Taylor effectively makes a false appeal to authority with Hilly's comment that the surgeon general has passed her bill on to Governor Ross Barnet. The surgeon general at that time was Dr. Luther L. Terry, a liberal John F. Kennedy appointee, who served from 1961 to 1965. Based on communications with the archive in charge of his papers, Terry never talked about racialized issues publically or while in office. (Terry's major achievement was implementing mandatory warning labels on cigarette packages.) On the other hand, following the perspectives argued in *In Defense of Hollywood*, the focus on restrooms is a legitimate way to help audiences gain some further historical literacy on actual conditions during the culture of segregation, while not alienating sensitive audiences and recognizing that movies exist to make money and entertain. Historical memory and representations can never exactly mirror what "really" happened because the past can never be fully known, recreated, or fully grasped.[13]

The Help's legitimate, historically accurate critique of domestic work and White women is limited but does exist through facial expressions and deliberate camera work. As with bathroom scenes, these representations are closer to the precise and useful spectrum but do so at the cost of perpetuating stereotypes without meaningful historical context and without giving said Mammied characters voice beyond quick facial expressions. In a number of cases, White women knowingly make derogatory or

[13] Stephen Greenberg (History of Medicine Division, National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services), e-mail message to author, October 24, 2014.

insensitive comments in front of, but not directly to, the Black women working for them. Similar to times during enslavement when White enslavers would openly discuss important business in front of their "ignorant" Black enslaved property, in the era of the Civil Rights Revolution, Whites generally maintained that non-White individuals could not understand or *hear* their conversations, even when directly in front of them. Mammied women are invisibilized. In addition to the above, such scenes show another aspect of segregation not being about separation, segregation was about sustaining irrational and even impossible situations.[14]

Two examples occur in the opening scenes. After excitedly telling her three closest (White) friends about her new job answering Miss Myrna letters for *The Jackson Journal*, Skeeter asks, "Elizabeth, can I talk to Aibileen? Just to help me with some of the letters." Elizabeth responds with puzzlement and frustration, "*My Aibileen?* What can't you just get Constantine to help you?" Skeeter follows, "Constantine. Quit us." After a series of gasps and words of shock, she consents "as long as it doesn't interfere with her work, I don't see why not." Shortly later, Skeeter does ask Aibileen if she would be willing to help. The character Aibileen enthusiastically consents, saying, "Miss Myrna get it wrong a lot of times. Be good to get it right." Nonetheless, Skeeter gets credit for the writing, Skeeter alone gets compensated for the labor, and Skeeter does not mind.

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[14] John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1972); Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); and Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

Because Skeeter has to ask Elizabeth first, conversations such as this show that Aibileen *belongs* to Elizabeth, her husband, and daughter Mae Mobley. Black women in *The Help*, in another accurate mirror of documented pasts, do not even have control over their own time or bodies even when they are not at work. Regardless, Aibileen did not really have a choice, and Skeeter exploits her knowledge, just as she exploits her experiences for her book in order to achieve personal gain. In the same scene where Skeeter invisibilizes Aibileen, Hilly does so when discussing her Home Health Sanitation Initiative.

While Skeeter is trying to find out why Constantine is no longer her family's maid, her mother dismisses her questions, shifting from a very serious demeanor to light laugher, saying, "It's just a job to them. With them it's all about money. You'll understand one day when you hire help of your own," directly in front of Pascagoula,

Figure 2.9 Film still from *The Help* showing Pascagoula's reaction as Mrs. Phelan finishes criticizing her and Constantine.

their new maid. (Of course, it was much more than a job and was not actually about the money.) Skeeter and her family also see their maids as something akin to property. In Skeeter's mind, there would never be any reason for Constantine to leave. Skeeter sees her beloved maid as a mother figure. When Skeeter finally learns the full story of why Constantine is gone--she was fired for being slow and old and because her daughter burst into the house while Mrs. Phelan was entertaining and receiving an award--Skeeter's mother tells her, "We sent your brother up to Chicago to bring Constantine home. (long pause) When he got there (long pause), she had died." That the Phelan family went to "reclaim" their "property" and bring *it* (i.e., Constantine) back to the South further resembles enslavement, Dred Scott, and speaks to the degree to which Constantine's potential consent or lack of consent had no standing. Such representations are clearly much more authentic of how Whites behaved than those in *Hairspray* (2007), for example, but do not provide any voice to Black characters.

This theme of invisible property even extends to the relationship between Celia and Minny, an otherwise unusually positive and equal relationship, as presented in *The Help*.

> **Minny**: What your husband say you can pay?
> **Celia**: Johnny doesn't know I'm bringing in help.
> **Minny**: And what Mr. Johnny gonna do when he come home and find a Colored woman in his house?
> **Celia**: It's not like I'd be fibbing. I just want him to think I can do this on my own. I really need a maid.

When Celia is worried he might find out she has hired help, she is suggesting maybe burning supper a bit. Minny's comments are humorous. These White women see Black

women as something like an extension of themselves, similar to how many White men *en masse* saw their wives.

These conversations happen as if these Mammied characters cannot hear, see, or have feelings. As a result, these White women are created as racist, irrational, and insensitive characters. In all such cases, the director uses various cuts and character's facial expressions to critique the conversation, making it clear that the Black women *do* hear and do have feelings. Why is this one particular element of the film so critical of segregation and its rituals? Why does this rare instance of humanizing Black women exist in this way? Even with these camera-created critiques, the women don't speak out or respond. Why are all of comments (in)directly heard by "invisible" Black women, ones that put them down? Why were their facial reactions ones of hurt or fear instead of anger or determination? Because they degrade Blacks, focus on Whites, and reinforce persisting stereotypes.

The Help provides an odd and very limited critique, and where it does provide critique, said critique is situated such that it is greatly deemphasized. In addition to Minny's comments above about not receiving adequate wages and having children change from loving to hating as they grow up, which was said in Minny's usual loud, bold way that evokes laughter from viewers, domestic workers were subject to psychological and physical abuse, including rape by White men, and a variety of dangerous situations. *The Help* creates a utopian version of the 1960s where domestic work is simply not that dangerous for Black women. While the White employers are depicted as mean and generally irrational at times, none are physically abusive. White

men never rape or never physically attack Black women. In the case of Johnny and Celia, they are unequivocally friendly to Minny--bell hooks says that the relationship between Celia and Minny is the closest thing to legitimate sisterhood provided in *The Help*.[15]

Realities of domestic work are also minimized in other ways, too. An emotionally charged scene occurs when Yule Mae asks Hilly and William, her husband, for a $75 loan so that she can send both of her children to college, instead of just one. William dismisses himself in the middle of the conversation. Hilly replies, "As a Christian, I'm doing you a favor. See, God don't give charity to those who are well and able. You need to come up with this money on your own. Ok?. You'll thank me one day." In addition to Hilly's less than charitable response, such a scene does not shed light on how inhumane domestic work really was. Yule Mae's request suggests that she has been treated (and paid) fairly well and has little fear of White people. While cleaning Hilly and William's house, Yule Mae finds a ring, slips it in her apron, and is eventually arrested for turning it in for cash at a pawn shop. While arrests were certainly common during the era of the Civil Rights Revolution--for example twenty thousand children, women, and women were arrested for participation in protests related to demands for civil rights from the Fall 1961 to the Spring 1963; and one thousand were arrested in Mississippi in 1965--*The Help* creates Yule Mae as a character who is arrested for stealing, an actual crime, not civil rights activism. Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow* which traces how the United States developed into the country with more people on probation or

[15] hooks, "Help Wanted: Re-Imagining the Past."

parole or in jail or prison and with one out of every four Black men victims, would likely argue that *The Help*'s inclusion of a Black character who steals is an unconscious attempt to further confirm the stereotype that Black people are criminals and belong behind bars.[16]

Two readings of Celia are possible. One reading of Celia would be that she is entirely unrealistic and unrealistic on a different level than the other characters. According to a worried Minny, Celia breaks mores by insisting on hugging her and by eating at the same table, for example. Given Celia's background as growing up in extreme poverty, as a historical stand-in she does not represent any "real" person or emotion. However, another close reading could argue that *The Help* shows how segregation has consequences for every person, non-White or White. Because Celia is different and is kind to Black people--and hired Minny--she is completely ignored and even ridiculed by the other characters.

Overall, *The Help* does not provide any lasting, substantial critique or statement about domestic work during the era of the Civil Rights Revolution, an era where restrictive covenants permitted Black people in White houses, even to live fulltime, only if hired as a domestic servant. Minny still loves Celia and Johnny, and Aibileen still loves Mae Mobley. Nothing changes over the course of the narrative. As presented, too,

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[16] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010); Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 24, 30, 32-33, 51, 87; Colley, e-mail message to author, February 8, 2016; and Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: *The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 67.

conditions were never that bad, Skeeter did not even need to "save" them from that much. The film's concluding scenes even make Celia not just an exceptional friendly White person but also a White savior who has prepared a surprise meal and has officially hired Minny for life. Additionally, Aibileen says in voiceover, "That table of food gave Minny the strength she needed, she took her babies out from under Leroy and never went back." In effect, the film is saying that a surprise meal Celia, was the one event that transformed Minny's life, an event completely outside of Minny's control, Minny who is otherwise the boldest, strongest, and most independent character in the film. And yet, in the world created by *The Help*, Minny is more deadly than Hilly.

Figure 2.10 Film still from *The Help* when Celia presents Minny with a feast.

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See, courage isn't just about being brave. Amen. Courage is daring to do what is right in spite of the weakness of our flesh. That's right. And God tells us, commands us, compels us, to love? Amen. Amen. See, love, as exemplified by our Lord Jesus Christ, is to be prepared to put yourself in harms way for you fellow man. And by

your fellow man, I mean your brother, your sister, your neighbor, your friend, and your enemy. If you can love your enemy, you already have the victory. Let's stand. All right. Victory is mine. Victory is mine today. Victory today is mine.

-Preacher Green of *The Help*, 2011

Whereas Donald Bogle writes that all Black filmic characters fit into five broad categorical stereotypes--"toms," "coon," "bucks," "mammies," and "mulattos"--when it comes to Black men, *The Help* makes clear a sixth type: the invisibilized and silenced character. In *The Help*'s reel version of the Civil Rights Revolution, fictional and nonfictional Black men in the scope of the narrative either play insignificant or near insignificant roles and are shown in non-threatening, submissive roles (none are even interviewed for Skeeter's project, as already mentioned). Even the film's brief mentions of Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King are completely insignificant in the actual story told. Additionally, these invisibilized and silenced men have limited existences, little-to-no speaking lines, one-sided and undeveloped characters, and could easily be deleted without directly affecting the plot, at least on the surface. Of course, this film primarily focuses on women and because Black men are not the focus, existing representations are all the more important. Ultimately, Black men in *The Help*, serve the purpose of making it "safe" for audiences, perpetuating stereotypes, undermining Black agency, and perpetuating White savior figures.[17]

[17] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film*, 4th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2001).

Fictional Black men in *The Help* are primarily shown serving or entertaining Whites. Jameso (Henry Lee Carpenter) works for Skeeter's family and is an older Black gentleman with white hair. He is in four scenes, only one of which has a speaking role, and he is referred to one additional time. In the first, Jameso is bent over, hoeing weeds as Skeeter drives up to her large house, which is located outside of town on several acres, and gets out of the car. Skeeter walks toward the front door past Jameso, then turns her head for a split second while still walking, and abruptly says, "Hi Jameso." Jameso, for the first time looks up and responds, "How you, Miss Eugenia?," to which Skeeter does not reply either in word or expression, as she continues walking.

Jameso's next scene has him silently sweeping the porch as Skeeter's mother calls her downstairs to fix her hair in preparation for her arranged date (this while Pascagoula cooks in the background). In the third scene, Skeeter is sitting on the couch with Jameso and Pascagoula quietly standing behind her, as they listen to Medgar Evers talking about a boycott of the stores in downtown Jackson on television. Skeeter's mother abruptly storms down flights of stairs and turns off the television. Jameso and Pascagoula run out of the room, and Skeeter's mother commands Skeeter: "Don't encourage them like that!" In Jameso's fourth and last scene, Skeeter and her family are gathered together watching the funeral of JFK. Jameso and Pascagoula are in the room behind them standing still on the staircase. While they are standing, in uniform, and in one room behind the Phelans, they are all essentially mourning together.

Writer and director Tate Taylor goes out of his way to ensure Jameso is invisiblized and silenced and to insure White audiences will relate to *The Help.* If the film

gave him some specific voice somewhere, an argument could be made that he represents how Black men were treated and seen--invisiblized and seen as ignorant. *The Help* would have been almost identical without Jameso. Why is he even included? Given Jameso's tiny role and the construction of his character, Jameso is not needed to carry the narrative forward, unless we consider messages relayed precisely because of his silence. For audiences, scenes with Jameso strongly emphasize not only the wealth of Skeeter's family, including the size of their house and land and the multiple domestic workers they can afford and how they treat their employees, scenes with Jameso also suggest and reinforce the alleged benevolence and liberalism of wealthy Whites,

Figure 2.11 Film still from *The Help* as the Phelans and their staff watch breaking news.

including JFK, in ways not supported by evidence. Taylor's Jameso also appeases audience fear of Black men. Jameso is a safe and submissive character. He almost never talks: Out of almost twelve thousand words, he speaks four. Additionally, throughout all

of these scenes, Jameso is consistently without expression. His face is always perfectly still, showing no sign of any emotion. In a few brief instances, especially in Jameso's fourth and last scene, the lighting and camera design are such that his eyes, nose, mouth are not even visible: His face appears as one smooth round object.

In addition to Jameso, *The Help* gives limited attention to Henry (Nelsan Ellis) and Pastor Green (David Oyelowo). Henry serves White and Black customers at Brent's Drugs in two of his three scenes. His character is more vital. All of these scenes show that segregation, even in public spaces, was not about segregation but about status. Henry, who is Black, makes and serves food and drinks to Black customers standing and White customers sitting on stools or in comfortable booths. In both scenes at Brent's Drugs, Henry and Skeeter exchange a few words. There is also one scene with both Aibileen and Henry. They are riding the bus home, sitting in the back while White patrons are riding in the front, when a police car stops the bus. The conversation goes as follows:

> **Henry** (calmly and standing up): What's going on out there, mister?
> **Driver**: Colored people off. The rest of you, let me know where you're going. I'll get you as close as I can."
> **White Passenger**: What's going on?
> **Driver**: I don't know. Some nigger got shot. Where you headed?

The Help has several Black characters who are not just invisiblized but who only exist off screen. Treelore (Aibileen's murdered son) and Yule Mae's two sons and husband are important but are never seen, heard, or discussed beyond scant mentions at all in the film--the full extent of being invisiblized. Leroy, Minny's abusive husband, is

in one scene but is never directly shown on screen and mentioned many more times. Except for Johnny's grandmother and mother, White characters discussed are in multiple scenes.

Altogether, *The Help* has four named and around five-dozen unnamed fictional Black men. Except for Leroy, these characters are deliberately shown to be safe. Whereas *The Help* hardly shows any Black women extras, Black men extras are common place and include two tend to Skeeter's car at the gas station; two tend to the garden at Hilly's house; two tend to the garden at the Junior League of Jackson building; one (we only see his part of his hand) waits on Skeeter during her date; two taking up the commodes at Hilly's house; five work in the fields on Skeeter's family's plantation; five play in the band and two are waiters at the town banquet; one cleans at Brent's Drugs; and two men work in a near-by garden when Yule Mae is arrested. In addition to misrepresenting the difficulties with which Black men were able to secure employment (due to strong prejudices Black men in the United States have frequently been near unemployable), these scenes show Black men as being "safe"—both not violent or not fighting for civil rights.

Figure 2.12 Film still from *The Help* during Jackson's African Children's Benefit Ball. Black people entertain and serve wealthy White people.

Deep-rooted camera technology and lighting practices, as described in Richard Dyer's study *White*, turn the vast majority of these Black men into something of a homogenized invisible man. Unable to see these nameless individual's expressions, a sense of their humanity is taken away. Compared to other films about the Civil Rights Revolution, *The Help* is unique in its depiction but general exclusion of Black men. Even *The Long Walk Home*, which primarily focuses on a White woman and a Black woman includes two significant non-stereotyped Black men.

Black men are also used to reinforce the "inappropriateness" of both miscegenation and homosexuality. When Skeeter says in protest, "Would it really be so bad if I never met a husband?," her mother panics. After a brief conversation where Skeeter's mom says there is a special "root tea" that can cure homosexuality, Skeeter angrily and firmly says, "Mother, I wanna be with girls as much as you wanna be with Jameso!" and then storms down the stairs.

***

> *Eugenia, your eggs are dying. Would it kill you to go on a date? Just show a little gumption. Careful now, careful. Oh, now look at this. This dress is just precious on you. Just take it in a little here. Little there. Get your hair fixed….Great. You can write my obituary! "Charlotte Phelan, dead. Her daughter, still single."*
>
> **-Charlotte of *The Help*, 2011**

> *And you ain't never gona get another man in this town. Everybody knows that. So don't walk your white butt to New York, run it. Looky here, Miss Skeeter. I'm gonna take care of Aibileen. And she's gonna take care of me.*
>
> **-Minny of *The Help*, 2011**

Tate Taylor devotes special attention to making sure audiences know that all of the primary White characters are married and that White women--except Skeeter who is constantly pressured to conform to her socially prescribed role--are married to affluent White men, have children, and do not have jobs. Specifically, *The Help* does far more than just represent the 1960s as popular depicted. It goes out of its way to bombard audiences with the supposed normalcy and importance of traditional, heterosexual, patriarchal marriage and procreation between a wealthy White man and a White woman in what is popularly understood to be a civil rights narrative and in a clear statement against LGBT rights. Indeed, married White men only exit in *The Help* as at least semi-benevolent, paternalistic patriarchs to Whites *and Blacks*. In contrast, to the numerous groups of a White men and a White woman, the film does not show any Black couples.

The Help gives special attention to five married White couples: William and Hilly; Raleigh and Elizabeth; Celia and Johnny; Mr. and Mrs. Walters; Mr. and Mrs. Phelan. The

camera shows these husbands having breakfast and dinner with their families, asleep with their wives, attending formal social functions with their wives, leaving for or returning from work but never with their young children and seldom if ever around Black women or Black men, and the camera shows these wives reminiscing and marveling at the influence of their husbands. Although while these white men have very few speaking lines and are in a small number of scenes, their actual power cannot be underestimated, considering the large amount of time they are on screen and considering that Skeeter is constantly juxtaposed with the behavior of married individuals. As with Black men, none of these White male characters are needed per se for the stated, overt story told.

Figure 2.13 Film still from *The Help* showing William and Hilly meeting the governor and his wife.

Given that all of the main White characters, except Skeeter, are married and have children and a significant amount of time is devoted to marriage and the "appropriate place" for women, we must really consider *The Help*'s true agenda. All of

these scenes related to marriage do not add anything that informs viewer's understanding of the Civil Rights Revolution. Marriage and children are used to establish place and hierarchy.

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> *We respect the stellar performances of the African American actresses in this film. Indeed, this statement is in no way a criticism of their talent. It is, however, an attempt to provide context for this popular rendition of black life in the Jim Crow South. In the end, The Help is not a story about the millions of hardworking and dignified black women who labored in white homes to support their families and communities. Rather, it is the coming-of-age story of a white protagonist, who uses myths about the lives of black women to make sense of her own. The Association of Black Women Historians finds it unacceptable for either this book or this film to strip black women's lives of historical accuracy for the sake of entertainment.*
>
> **-Association of Black Women Historians**[18]

Tate Taylor's *The Help* has also been received successfully and fondly among the general public, as revealed in part by an analysis of reviews left by people on the popular website *Amazon*. Reviews for *The Help* were compiled Saturday, June 28, 2014. At this time there were 1,890 reviews, all of which have been carefully analyzed: 1,496

[18] Association of Black Women Historians, "An Open Statement to the Fans of *The Help*" (Accessed August 10, 2011) http://www.abwh.org/images/pdf/TheHelp-Statement.pdf. While praising the Black actresses, this statement criticizes *The Help* because it ignores sexual harassment and grassroots movements and has Black characters speak in dialect. The "Open Statement" also provides a list of important novels and secondary works that details conditions Black women faced during the Civil Rights Revolution. See also, Ellen C. Bush, "Historians on 'The Help': Vanessa May and Rebecca Sharpless Respond," *UNC Press Blog* (accessed May 27, 2014) http://uncpressblog.com/2011/08/24/historians-on-the-help-vanessa-may-and-rebecca-sharpless-respond/.

(79.1 percent) of these were 5-star reviews; 231 (12.2 percent) 4-star reviews; 74 (3.9 percent) 3-star reviews; 43 (2.2 percent) 2-star reviews; and 46 (2.4 percent) 1-star reviews. Of all of the reviews left, 1,536 (81.2 percent) were left by users who are fully registered with Amazon and who bought their copy of *The Help* from Amazon. A few reviews, 105 (5.5 percent), only commented on the condition of the DVD, streaming service while watching the film, and similar comments that are not about the movie. The overwhelming majority (approximately 91.1 percent) exceedingly enjoyed *The Help* and only have words of praise. Reviews discuss watching the film repeatedly. Comments focus on the talent of Viola Davis, Bryce Dallas Howard, Octavia Spencer, and Emma Stone. Even those who disliked the film had no complaints about the acting or direction, except there are a few complaints about some of the language in *The Help*. The vast majority of comments focused on History in some way or another.[19]

The majority of users commented on the movie with comparisons to conceptions of History. With a few exceptions, reviewers praised the film for its wonderful performances that depicted "how it really was." These comments indicate that people really do believe and remember what they see on the big screen, as suggested by the following examples. These examples are important because they show how powerful and problematic films can be, especially when they purport to depict History accurately, as revealed in statements by those involved with *The Help* that are quoted throughout this chapter, along with statements made by the film itself. People

[19] "Customer Reviews for *The Help*."

believe it and do not give it a second thought; thus, furthering historical amnesia. “This was a great movie. I love how it tells the whole truth about house maids during the time of segregation.” “This movie shows a true depiction of life during the times of segregation. It’s funny, witty, serious...I told all of my family members to watch it and they loved it.” “Another classic piece of work. How completely taken back to the fifties and sixties I felt. Another political controversy revealed and shown so truly. I loved the acting.” Another reviewer says that the movie shows all sides of life in Mississippi during the 1960s, from the “nature of racism” to “the real love.” They cried and laughed and recommend everyone go see the movie because “everything seemed very accurate (according to my mother), including the racism in the south.” “Wonderful and tragic story. I am amazed that I lived in these time and had no idea of what was happening in the South.” Others frame the film as “a great glimpse into the lives of those who lived during this time.” “It is hard for me to even comprehend living in a time where we had people treated like this.” “One of the best movies, very thought provoking movie. Makes you wonder how it would have been to live in that era.”[20]

A few reviews discussed the History they learned from the film and primarily focused on women, especially those who were Black. For example, “I knew about the barbaric way black women were treated in the South, but nothing about the white

[20] Ibid.

women who abused them." A few also praised the film for telling the struggle "through the help's eyes" when the film does not do this.[21]

Some of the reviews say that *The Help* is based on history but acknowledge it is not fully accurate, such as this is a "pretty tame version of the truth." One reviewer suggested the movie is an appropriate fictional introduction to the period. In a more critical voice, another commenter says, the film is appealing and safe, but adds, "at least Stockett included suggestions of the real horror blacks faced in the segregationist South." Only two reviewers specifically note the ease with which Skeeter and the maids wrote indictments of working for White families. "Skeeter and the Black women of Jackson Mississippi were taking a much greater risk of being murdered than the film depicts." "They show the clip of Medgar Evers being killed…but you never get a sense that the Black women were really in danger of being lynched or murdered."[22]

Some of those who left comments are glad that the film does not fully explore racism because it makes History approachable, such as the ones who say something along the lines of, "good thing it wasn't too serious." Another said, "Having lived through the 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s to date, I can say the movie was well done in a very limited manner depicting the realism of the racism of the south. I believe the point was delivered and left room for the imagination to run wild." This person probably did not

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

realize that most people will use their imagination to justify their belief (or hope?) that conditions were not that bad.[23]

Numerous reviews focus on History by recounting personal stories and memories. “Southern culture was so backwards. It’s no wonder my parents were prejudiced.” “Excellent casting and story. Brought back many special memories of my childhood and the love of special people. Highly recommended.” Another person received a copy of *The Help* from her son with a note saying, “Mom. This book could have been written by you. All of the stories you told me growing up, are in this book. Enjoy. Love, your son, Rad.” The reviewer went on to recount life growing up with the homemade cooking and shelter of her Nanny. She concludes by saying, “Kathryn Stockett’s rendition of the South in the 40s, 50s, and 60s, in Jackson, Mississippi, could not have [been] more accurate.” Another person, who grew up in Tennessee, said it reminded her and her sister of racism they grew up with and that the characters in the film were so familiar that they both came up with the same real-life people they mirrored. Someone else reported that he loved the book so much that he read it twice back-to-back and watched the movie. He said it brought back many fond memories of the Black woman who he considered a mother that raised him the first six years of his life such that he went to visit her grave. He said, “I was in the company of this wonderful lady, her husband and her friends. I would be in her church on Wednesday Prayer Meetings, Sunday night Services and often would play with the children of the adult

[23] Ibid.

friends of [t]his lady, me being the ONLY white child among them." He goes on to say, without explanation, that his biological mother was "instrumental in making the transition from segregation to integration in 1954-1955 in our local school as smooth as possible." One man says, "I'm a 59-year-old white man, and this movie made me cry my eyes out…It surprises me to hear that the book is a work of fiction. These stories seem so real."[24]

Other reviewers tell about grandparents who worked as domestics, such as the person who tells about how her grandmother who worked for White families from the 1910s to the 1940s. Her grandmother was seen as having "diseased hands," yet cooked, cleaned, and rocked babies to sleep. This reviewer further believes that *The Help* "is the first time I can say the truth is being told...yes it may have taken someone from the other race to help 'put it out there,' but that was the instrument."[25]

Three reviewers specifically discuss memories of having crossed "separate but equal" mores as children during the Civil Rights Revolution. One reviewer recounts this experience:

> I remember as a child of seven or eight (in the late 50s-though the movie is set in the 60s), beaming with compassionate pride as I handed a mentally challenged, elderly, black man who did lawn work for my grandparents a pair of long johns. My aunt had purchased them for him and they often gave him hand me downs or small items. That day he was poorly dressed and the weather bitterly cold for the South. I remember that his calloused hand felt as cold as stone when he took the clothing from me. Looking back I never questioned that I was told to let him into my grandfathers freezing shed and turn on a tiny space heater so he could

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

> undress and put on his new "warm" clothes. Giving him the clothes was saintly, letting him into my grandfather's special domain kindly, letting him into the warm house to dress simply wasn't done. I never knew where he lived but it was as if this cold world was his comfort zone and we were not required to change that.[26]

Another person explains a story about calling a taxi for a Black women because she was not allowed to use it without paying extra when Whites were not required to pay. Someone else tells about how a "confusing and bizarre" experience using the "'wrong' water fountain" taught her about race. And says, "this movie gives me a glimpse into the mindset of those who were in charge at the time that thought separate facilities were warranted."[27]

Opposite of the utopian past, a few reviewers devote time to describing how things have improved since the era of the Civil Rights Revolution. One phrases it, "A real tearjerker but important movie for all to see. We have come so far away from stupid segregation and prejudice." A number also show assumptions about where discrimination was and how it was solved. For example, "Great movie! Makes you see how things were in the South years ago and how far we have come in the years since then." "The movie is superb. It makes you laugh, but still touches the heart strings in remembering the cultural biases in the deep South prior to civil rights legislation." Only

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

one reviewer specifically spoke of *The Help* as being an "engaging, nostalgic drama that kept you watching and feeling."[28]

Two of the reviews speak to the divide between Academic History and History as known among the general public. They comment that *The Help* is extremely rare and important in that it gives attention to women generally and the role of domestics specifically. For example, "The film reminded me of the voices that never told their stories about the 60s. Although, the film is based on fiction, it gives a vivid picture of the interactions between women of race during that time period."[29]

A small handful of commenters specifically discussed Hollywood as an institution in their reviews. Only two of these were favorable toward Hollywood. In his review, Robert, says he is worried *The Help* "would be a Hollywood morality tale that has not historically plausible. This was not the case. This was a very good, believable story with superb acting. The casting was outstanding. Viola Davis did an especially good job." The other reviews thought it was this exactly. One enjoyed the acting but says, "it's yet ANOTHER story about how a White person saved the day for a group of oppressed Black people. I appreciate the context of the times, etc., but I hate that the story had the maids empowered by a white teenager….For the plot, I say "Hollywood, do more black success stories, with those successes due to the efforts of the people themselves." Another person adds:

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

> This film is primarily a feel-good white liberal take on racial segregation, the worn-out formula of painting all whites with traditional values as slave-owning racists who deserve whatever they get, long-suffering blacks who can do no wrong, and the one "good" white person who saves the blacks from the other, evil whites. Hollywood has been making variations of the same tired movie for half a century now….It's both insulting to whites, the vast majority of whom have nothing to answer for, and insulting to blacks, because it paints them as being unable to succeed without liberal whites to save them.[30]

A small handful of reviews suggest that the film paints Whites, particularly those of the South, in a negative way. Jamie says, "I was born in Michigan, but my entire family is from the South. I get aggravated at movies that demonize my family and ancestry. The film is good, but it's at the expense of my family." One reviewer believes that *The Help* aims to say, "Black people should hate Whites even more, and Whites should feel guilty for ever having been born….I think this movie shows how fractured race relations are today, not of yesteryear." And another says, "I was raised in the South, and nobody I knew had maids. I'm sure this film expresses some truth, but there just might be some exaggeration here. We never treated anyone the way this film assumes that all whites treated blacks in those days. You cannot lump everybody into a mold and say that everybody is the same." "I am glad for equal rights, but this movie revisits a hurtful era & stirs up hurtful feeling that need to be put to rest."[31]

Only a handful of people comment on strongly disliking the movie. A number of comments express preferring the book to the movie. A few say the characters in the film

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

are "flat—there was no dimension to them." Most people, though, dislike its sanitization of History, particularly that Skeeter is the leading character. One reviewer, Ahleenda, with rare insight and perspective says:

> This movie is terribly awful. In essence, this movie says that Dr. Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, Rosa Parks, Nat Turner, Malcolm X, and all other pioneers and catalysts for freedom of Black and civil rights movement are liars and never did existed. As always blacks are being portrayed as not being able to help themselves and require the assistance of whites to do for them. This movie is the WHITE LIE and it is only popular and praised to the heavens because it makes whites look good and feel better about themselves. It is completely unrealistic. This movie is an insult to the black race….. And it is because documentaries and movies tell the truth are not liked by white mainstream.[32]

Some of the reviews discuss *The Help* in reference to another film. Five reviews compare *The Help* to *Gone with the Wind*. These reviews praise the film for continuing southern traditions and describe the film as, "It is sort of like being behind the scenes filming GONE WITH THE WIND. I loved it!" Two reviews say *The Help* is the best film since *Gone with the Wind* and another praises the Black women who played maids. One person compares what they call an Oscar-worthy role to Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*. Nine of the reviews make a comparison between *The Help* and *The Long Walk Home*. Seven of these speak of both being great films that address struggle and history with great acting. Two recommended *The Long Walk Home* as a more honest and accurate look at history unlike *The Help* which is "white washed." Finally, five people make a reference to *Mississippi Burning*. Only one of these individuals reported really disliking *The Help*. They said, "Gee. This show makes it look like Negroes love fried chicken!

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[32] Ibid.

Outrageous stereotyping! How is it that reverse racism beats straight out racism?! Race bashing. Revenge? Wow. There is the token "cool" white person though. Honestly, '*Mississippi Burning*' is a viable movie about racism in the past. Strong, unlike *The Help*, which is so repulsive and weak. Liberal Hypocrites enticing one another into self-righteous indignation." The other four suggest that *The Help* and *Gone with the Wind* be viewed together and that *Mississippi Burning* looks at more overt racism.[33]

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> *An aspiring author during the civil rights movement of the 1960s decides to write a book detailing the African-American maids' point of view on the white families for which they work, and the hardships they go through on a daily basis.*
>
> **-IMDB DVD Summary of *The Help*, 2011**

> *It made me realize I have nothing to complain about. These women, even though they are fiction, represent scores of real people, who worked hard and made a way for myself and subsequent generations, so I have nothing to complain about.*
>
> **-Octavia Spencer, 2012[34]**

In a variety of ways, *The Help* is an account of the Civil Rights Revolution that almost completely excludes Black people, their voice and agency, and their struggles, only further making Melissa Harris-Perry's declaration that *The Help* is a horror film understandable and appropriate. Actually History is inconvenient to Tate Taylor. Would

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[33] Ibid.

[34] *Tribute Movies*, "Octavia Spencer & Jessica Chastain - *The Help* Interview" (accessed January 13, 2012) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1ysIUZ8JRo.

The Help represent "scores of real people" (referring back to this section's epigraph that goes full on into hagiography) to Fannie Lou Hamer, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, James Meredith, or the "scores" of other people whose name is lost to historical memory and their grassroots struggles? Does *The Help* represent everyday life as it existed historically in the South generally or in Jackson, Mississippi, specifically to those who were victim to lynch mobs? Does it represent life for the 90 percent of Black women who worked as domestics and the 83 percent of White families in Jackson, Mississippi, who paid at least one Black domestic worker? Does *The Help* reflect the Jackson, Mississippi, Anne Moody grew up with and encountered on May 28, 1963, when she participated in the sit-in at Woolworth's? Does *The Help* take audiences in a time machine to a world where "White's only" signs and similar iconography was so everyday it was unnoticed? No. Considered among the most racist and violent places in the United States by activists during the Civil Rights Revolution and by historians now, the historical Mississippi of the 1960s differs sharply from the mythological, and yet simultaneously, all-too-real nightmare Mississippi of *The Help* when it comes to the actual hopes and fears of real people.[35]

[35] Trena Easley Armstrong, "The Hidden Help: Domestic Workers in the Civil Rights Movement" (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Louisville, December 2012), 17, 20; and Linda Reed, "Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977)": A New Voice in American Democracy," in *Mississippi Women: Their Histories, Their Lives*, eds. Martha H. Swain, et al. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 249-267.

Figure 2.14 The iconic image of Anne Moody and her friends being attacked by a mob during their sit-in.

The Help presents a world where White men and women are not dangerous, are not actively fighting against basic human rights for Blacks, and are essential for progress toward civil rights. The closest *The Help* gets to showing any of the deadly, physical violence that plagued Blacks is a scene that gives more than passing attention to the assassination of Medgar Evers and the resulting uncertainty. Conversely, Tate Taylor uses Evers's death exclusively as a catalyst for how scared Black people are and how much they want (and need) Skeeter's help, fully ignoring the agency of Blacks before and especially after Evers's real-life death. Brief second-long scenes show Yule Mae being hit with a baton by the police, a newspaper headline "Freedom Bus Bombed on Way to Montgomery" and "Negro Boy Emmett Till's Body Found"

While there are subtle accuracies in representation, for example Aibileen mentions her cousin's car was set on fire just for going to register to vote, the cumulative total of the film perpetuates a utopian past at the expense of Blacks. *The*

Help gives off a "good ole days" vibe. In other words, where *The Help* gets history correct it does so only where it shows Black women and men in subordinate and impossibly inaccurate positions. Most of what is supposed to be historically accurate occurs fully off screen (and thus, does not actually happen): the stories Black women tell Skeeter about working for White families and the resulting violence in Jackson, Mississippi, following the publication of Skeeter's book. All of this is even more important when we specifically remember that these are all fictional characters created by White authors, and the world created in *The Help* does not exist outside of what we are specifically told or shown on screen.

People, including the actresses involved, generally hold that *The Help* is a fun, accurate drama showing what it was really like to live in the 1960s racism-laced society. Although there are certainly accuracies amidst the many inaccuracies and legitimate variations in possible interpretations, a few aspects of the film indicate beyond a doubt that *The Help* is harmful for all audiences and anti-civil rights for Blacks. The meanest and most hateful character, Hilly, is built as a generally mean person, not purely a racist, and she is far less violent, abusive, and disruptive of Minny's life than Minny's potentially deadly husband. Additionally, *The Help* presents a world where Black people need Skeeter's and Celia's help, and where Skeeter and Celia are completely blind to their own racism and never have moments of awakening; although, as discussed in chapter one, *The Long Walk Home* is also problematic in that it focuses too much on the racial conversation of the main White character, Mrs. Thompson. We seldom see Black characters in their own space.

The Help is actually much more about a young and very privileged White woman's quest for independence, success, and desire to make a "difference" (which is never really made) at the expense and lack of consent of others. By the end of the film, only Skeeter benefits. Only Skeeter escapes Jackson, Mississippi. Only Skeeter gets a better job. Skeeter has the "happy ever after" promise of a heterosexual, patriarchal marriage. And at no point in the film does Skeeter make any statements about the exploitative, dangerous nature of domestic work; although, she (and Miss Stein) benefits tremendously by appropriating the poverty and suffering of Black women--women who are *"the other side of Gone with the Wind*." Minny is left working as a maid for Celia and Johnny for the rest of her life. Aibileen is unemployable for participation in Skeeter's book and vows to try becoming a fulltime writer, which is, of course, very unlikely. Reading *The Help* against documentation of the past and the characters as historical stand-ins, it creates a 1960s where Black women and men had virtually zero history as a people, zero knowledge of the world, and zero agency, and where Skeeter and Celia are all-knowing, powerful, active agents in support of the Civil Rights Revolution. Yet, collectively, *The Help* insists characters stay in their "proper place."

Read collectively and as historical stand-ins, none of the characters or situations in *The Help* represent realities of the 1960s, the good, bad, or everyday, to use trifurcated diction for a minute. Humor, in addition to the extreme minimization of Black characters and the extreme maximization of Skeeter (and Celia), and the lack of direct confrontation with racism, almost fully minimize selective points where Tate Taylor plants seeds of accuracy. Struggles coming to terms with the past in the United

States continue to necessitate en masse “white washing” as a prerequisite for history to be even somewhat approachable to sensitive audiences, fragile audiences.

On the other hand, *The Help* does “splendidly” when it comes to getting audiences right and when it comes to mirroring the hopes and fears of everyday society in the 2000s and surrounding decades. Stereotypical-created Black men and Black women make the film “safe” for White audiences. Leroy, the only physically violent character, reinforces societal fear of Black men. Aibileen and Minny reinforce the timeless existence of “Mammy.” Skeeter’s character appeases neoliberal focuses on economics and one significant person. *The Help* perpetuates racism and sexism by embracing today’s misguided “color bind” philosophy and discounting true racism and grassroots civil rights and struggles of the Civil Rights Revolution. Octavia Spencer’s comments about playing Minny suggest that Black women, men, and children today should not “complain” about the racism in the 2010s, racism that propelled the #BlackLivesMatter movement, for example. In an odd way, then, *The Help* as battleground does accurately represent legitimate historical struggles; although, something much closer to the massive resistance side. Or, on the other hand, maybe Tate Taylor simply exploits White women, Black women, and audiences and promotes anti-education agendas in order to help maintain the status quo and promote loyalty toward the United States.

Nonetheless, *The Help* is important to examine and needs further examination by others. The popularity and success of *The Help*, along with its selective uses of the past alone make it imperative to be examined from a historical and cultural perspective.

For audiences, the sheer on-camera presence of Black men and Black women in the past equate it with being a (pro) civil rights and historically accurate film. *The Help*, as indicated by Amazon reviews and film theory, not only comments on History and more contemporary events, it actively shapes the hopes, fears, and knowledge en masse and shows how White people understand, see, and *remember* the Civil Rights Revolution. Tate Taylor may honestly believe his presentation is accurate. His presentation, though, shows how one-sided his understanding is and that of most White people. Scholars still have plenty of room to dissect the world of *The Help*. Scholars need to extensively explore the trailers versus the released film, music in the film and the released music CD, various symbolism and rhetoric involved in various covers used for DVD packages, symbolism embodied in how characters such as Constantine and Minny are named, the countless social media pages devoted to celebrating the film, and specific demographic breakdowns on those who are fascinated by *The Help*. More comparisons of the novel and film, such as Valerie Smith's memory-focused article, are needed, too, perhaps with a focus on adaptation theory. Queer, Feminist, and Crip Theory would also provide interesting and important readings of this text. As thought experiments at least, it would be interesting to explore the specific chronological and spatial settings.[36]

While *Gone with the Wind* (1939) represents the Civil War and Reconstruction

[36] The Fannie Lou Hamer Institute, "The Jackson Movement," *Jackson State University* (accessed July 19, 2014) http://www.jsums.edu/hamerinstitute/resources/hamer-inistitute-suggested-reading-list/; and Valerie Smith, "Black Women's Memories and The Help," *Southern Cultures* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 26-37. See also, Pearl McHaney, "Kathryn Stockett's Postmodern First Novel," *Southern Cultures* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 77-92.

era in the context of an ever-intensifying culture of segregation, world wars, and economic depressions, *The Help* represents the Civil Rights Revolution in the context of the United States's first Black president, the New Jim Crow, continued economic crises, and ever-intensifying-racism directed at Blacks, Hispanics, and other non-White individuals. Despite context and the eras supposedly represented, the films have more similarities than differences. Both have been consistently and passionately praised and welcomed by most as heart-warming, historically accurate manifestos. Both create "utopian" worlds where White characters are not racist, worlds very different from other fiction, such as Alice Childress's *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life*, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and Ann Petry's *The Street*, that focus on Black women and call attention to the racism of White people.[37]

Upon winning an award for her inarguable excellent portrayal of Minny Jackson, Octavia Spencer said, *The Help:*

> gave a voice to so many women who made it possible for me to be standing here tonight. These women represented our mothers, our grandmothers and it was their courage and them facing the challenges that they faced every day and living their lives in dignity and grace. And I thank you. By honoring me, you honor them.

Such a testament only underscores and justifies wide spread, internalized "truths" people hold when it comes to *The Help*. Spencer's statement also speaks to widespread

[37] Wallace-Sanders and Jennifer Williams, "Why I'm Not Looking Forward To The Help," *Ms. Magazine Blog* (accessed November 9, 2014) http://msmagazine.com/blog/2011/08/10/why-im-not-looking-forward-to-the-help/.

historical illiteracy and intense difficulties of dealing with History in any kind of meaningful way. While the motivations of artists and the actual characters they play must be distinguished, these actors and actresses do hold some responsibility, especially when saying they specifically represent people who are not actually represented. Overall, though, as with the other films examined in this dissertation, dismissing *The Help* as inaccurate and unworthy of further comment beyond detailed listings of said inaccuracies would be easy but would be a disservice to a fuller examination of historical memory.[38]

[38] Alan Silverman, "*The Help* Wins Top SAG Awards, Oscar Victory May be Next," *Voice of America* (accessed July 25, 2014) http://www.voanews.com/content/the-help-wins-top-sag-awards-oscar-victory-may-be-next--138866199/165134.html.

CHAPTER THREE:
RUNNING FROM "RUN, FORREST RUN!": FICTION AS HISTORY IN *THE BUTLER* (2013)

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil…a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. 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.

-W.E.B. Du Bois, 1903

I think anyone who has seen this movie that is taking a scorecard on what exactly happened and what didn't is completely missing the spirit of the film. We're not trying to set out a word-for-word retelling of historical events. We're trying to tell the story of the Civil Rights movement through a prototypical American family and how they experienced those turbulent times — through the mother whose son was getting arrested, whose husband was gone for many hours working at the White House, through the eyes of a father who didn't want his son to be in the movement. These people existed. These were incredibly common. When you read memoirs of people that fought in the Civil Rights movement, they talk about how their parents didn't like what they were doing, they didn't want them there. So we were much more concerned about a universal truth than we were about people criticizing if Eugene Allen did X, Y, or Z.

-Danny Strong, 2013

I realize this was based on a "true story," but for the love of God we don't need to get the blacks riled up about something that happened so many years ago. They are free to live a productive life as Americans. Stop throwing this in our faces - I don't mean to sweep it under the rug as some will accuse me of suggesting - just let it alone and let us all get on with our lives.

-Anonymous Amazon Review, 2014[1]

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[1] "Customer Reviews for *The Butler*," *Amazon* (accessed July 28, 2014) https://smile.amazon.com /Lee-Daniels-Butler-Forest-Whitaker/productreviews/B00EV4EUT8/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_summary?ie= UTF8&showViewpoints; W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Stilwell: Digireads.com Book, 2005), 7; and Jay A. Fernandez, "Fact, Fiction, and 'The Butler': A Q&A with Danny Strong," *Word and* Film (accessed January 12, 2016) http://www.wordandfilm.com/2013/08/fact-fiction-the-butler-qa-danny-strong/.

Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump* (1994) is a *tour de force* of (White) Hollywood's instructional manual for the proper way to remember the past, to experience everyday life, and to have healthy relationships with time, space, and people. When Jenny (Hanna Hall and Robin Wright) repeatedly yells "RUN, FORREST, RUN!" she is giving this order to Forrest (Michael Conner Humphreys and Tom Hanks) *and* to audiences. Jenny orders Forrest and subtextually, audiences: "Listen, you promise me something, OK? Just if you're ever in trouble, don't be brave. You just run, OK? Just run away." Forrest follows his mother's (Sally Fields) advice too: "My Momma always said you got to put the past behind you before you can move on." *We*, as the audience, are also supposed to run from any kind of change, conflict, reconciliation, or candid examination of the past or future, just as Forrest does. Forrest's disability serves as a metaphor for the historical amnesia society has when it comes to understanding or even acknowledging broader complexities. *Forrest Gump* drops Forrest into pivotal historical moments involving popular culture and civil rights with appearances by Elvis Presley, President John F. Kennedy (JFK), John Lennon, and George Wallace, for example, but Forrest never understands these historical moments defined by historical memory as important. The movie suggests that if *we* behave like Forrest—have an involuntary ambivalent, distant, and ahistorical understanding of the world—*we*, too, can be happy and live unburdened by the past, thinking everything is okay. Moreover, *we*, too, can all achieve the (nebulous) American Dream. Forrest is celebrated as a football player, as a heroic Vietnam veteran, and as an economically successful investor and businessman. That

Forrest never understands any of these things is the caveat.[2]

Jenny does not follow her own advice, and as a result, faces prolonged disappointment and untimely death from AIDS. Unlike Forrest, she is directly and consciously involved in the radical liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s: counterculture movements and Black Power. Jenny's early death, which leaves her young son and disabled husband behind, suggests that she not only neglected her own advice, but also that she became too involved in the counterculture, independence, and non-conformity. The implications are that such involvement, consciousness, and bravery--not running away from trouble and memory--are dangerous and will lead to unnecessary suffering and destruction for oneself and others. *Forrest Gump* illustrates that embracing historical amnesia and cyclical philosophies of history (where nothing really ever changes outside a given narrow set of predetermined variables) is the voucher to happiness.[3]

Whereas *The Help* (2011) is by no means the commonly-thought, popularly-acclaimed other side of *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Lee Daniels' The Butler* (2013) can safely be deemed another side of the admired and problematic *Forrest Gump*. In the

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[2] Lawrence Samuel, *The American Dream: A Cultural History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012).

[3] For more on *Forrest Gump* and historical memory, see Robert Burgoyne, "Prosthetic Memory/National Memory: *Forrest Gump*," in *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 104-119; and Jennifer Hyland Wang, "'A Struggle of Contending Stories': Race, Gender, and Political Memory in Forrest Gump," *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 92-115. My ideas about *Forrest Gump* are somewhat inspired by reading Burgoyne's work. His perspective is partially summed up by this quotation: "Only Gump's ignorance, or feebelmindness, the film appears to suggest, protects him from the scarifications of history and the resulting distortions of character that plague most of the other figures who populate the film."

same way that Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates* (1920) provides a response from the Black community to D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and its horrifically racist presentations of history that amplify the Dunning School of History, *The Butler* showcases, equally, a range of trials and triumphs experienced by Black people in the United States, with an emphasis on the pivotal epochs of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s from a Black perspective. Additionally, *The Butler* challenges popular depictions of Blacks and suggests people should run *toward* history, in contrast to Forrest who runs away. It insists that running toward history helps unite families, achieve personal fulfillment (or self-actualization), and advance causes in support of civil rights. On the other hand and in isolated ways, *The Butler* takes a "Forrest Gump" approach to History because just like Forrest, either Cecil, Louis, or Charlie are always "at" iconic events and around iconic peoples.

The Butler tells the story of Cecil Gaines's (Aml Ameen, Michael Rainey Jr., and Forest Whitaker) life, with a focus on his thirty-four years of service as a butler at the White House alongside colleagues Carter Wilson (Cuba Gooding, Jr.), Freddie Fallows (Colman Domingo), and James Holloway (Lenny Kravitz). *The Butler* also focuses on Cecil's complex, always-changing relationships with his family, especially his wife, Gloria (Oprah Winfrey), and his sons, Louis (David Oyelowo) and Charlie (Isaac White and Elijah Kelley). The director's selection of which iconic events to present, as well as the rhetoric and construction of these events, serves as an appropriate measurement of how people (including the director) in the United States struggle to come to terms with the past. User reviews left on *Amazon* also speak to how people relate (and do not relate) to the

past and its complexities. However, departing from typical, mainstream cinema specifically or media generally, Black characters have the majority of speaking lines and have the majority of words spoken in the film. Compared to other films, *The Butler* is much more about the Black experience than White experience.

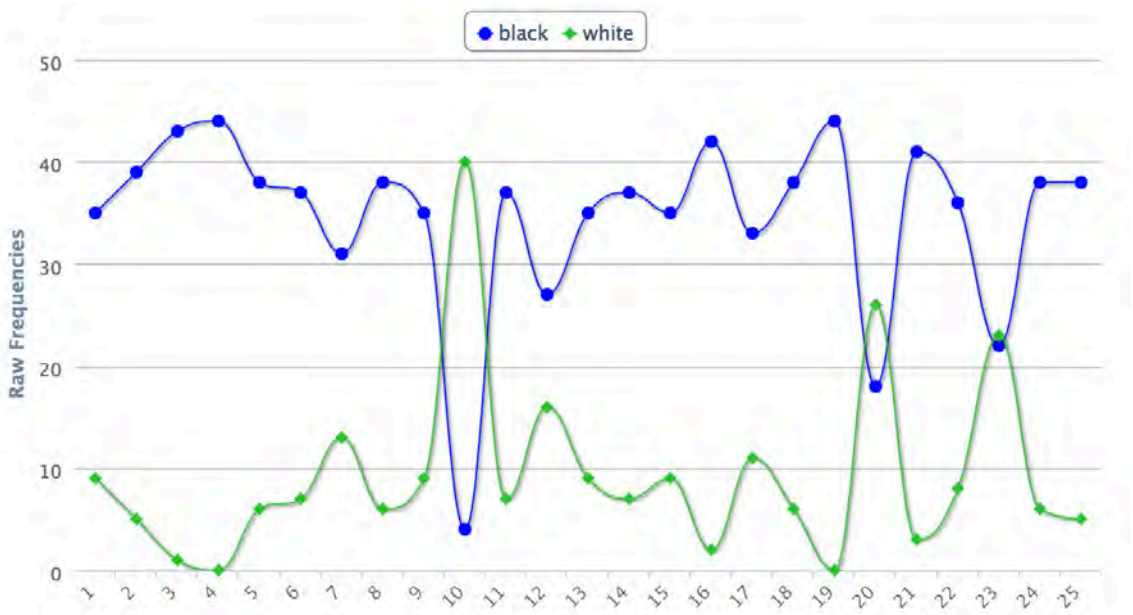

Figure 3.1 Visualization of speaking lines by race in *The Butler*. The x-axis represents time in the film with the movie's script divided into twenty-five sections, and the y-axis shows how many lines Black characters have compared to White characters. Collectively, *The Butler* has 1099 lines, 865 (79 percent) of these by Black characters. This chart was made using Voyant Tools.

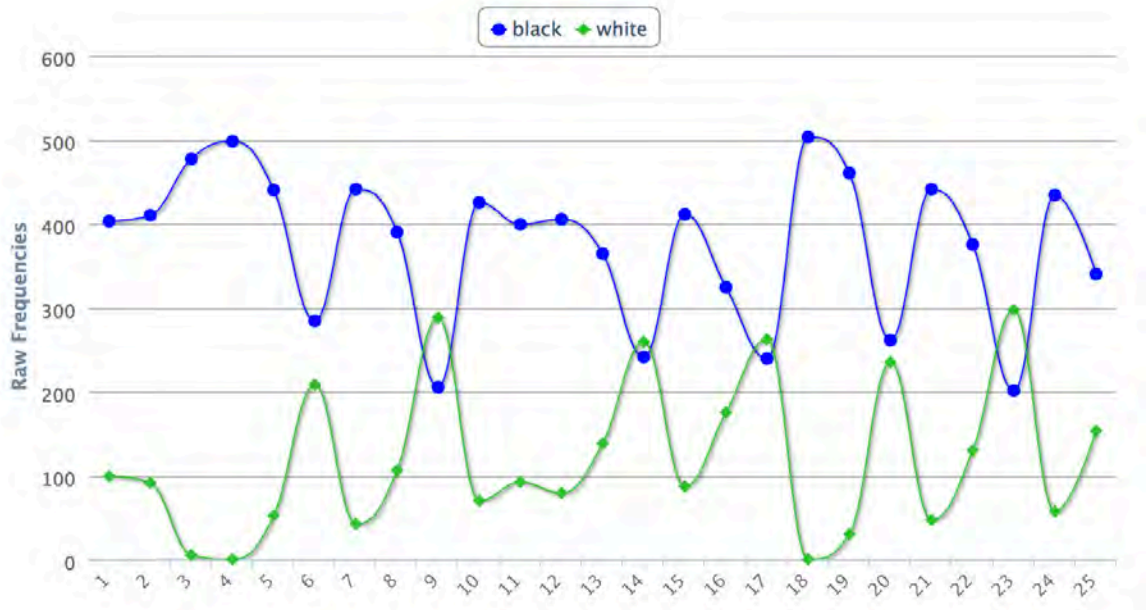

Figure 3.2 Visualization of works spoken by race in *The Butler*. The x-axis represents time in the film with the script divided into twenty-five sections, and the y-axis shows how many words Black characters speak compared to White characters. Collectively, *The Butler* has 12,373 words, 9371 (76 percent) of these by Black characters. This chart was made using Voyant Tools.

Set against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Revolution, *The Butler* explores how (White) presidents of the United States grapple with and respond to protests and displays of massive resistance, while juxtaposing these against both the invisiblized and prohibited existence of Cecil and the resulting familial conflicts. *The Butler* both overstates the liberalism (or open-mindedness) of past presidents, largely because it truncates civil rights organizations, their protests, and their efforts to persuade and ultimately make presidents support them, and *The Butler* overstates the importance of civil religion. However, this movie directly forces audiences to see manifestations of the psychological wages of Whiteness and the double consciousness of Blackness, does not hesitate to depict violence (although not as intense as in *The Long Walk Home* [1990]), and even

with its focus on domestic work, an occupation for 15 percent of Black men in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, *The Butler* does not overly rely on stereotypes. *The Butler* shows people who run toward History and asks its viewers to do the same.[4]

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Producers advertised and the director framed *The Butler* as being inspired by Eugene Allen and a brief 2008 biographical piece, "A Butler Well Served by This Election," in *The Washington Post* three days after Senator Barack Obama became President-elect. People have internalized "inspired by" to mean "about." When comparing known details about Allen, his family, and career with that of Cecil's reel family and career, there are almost no similarities. Known differences include place of birth, number of children and their related biographies, how and when *he* got hired at the White House, and how often *his* Wife visited the White House. The primary

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[4] Robert E. Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 71-72. Most Black men, 20-24 percent during this time period, were unskilled laborers.

For information on *Within Our Gates* as a response to *Birth of a Nation*, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Masters at the Movies: Why I'll Watch Oscar Micheaux's Within Our Gates until I Wear It Out," *Perspectives on History* 48, no. 6 (September 2010), https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2010/why-ill-watch-oscar-micheauxs-within-our-gates-until-i-wear-it-out; Gerald R. Butters, Jr., "From Homestead to Lynch Mob: Portrayals of Black Masculinity in Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates*," *The Journal for MultiMedia History*, no. 3 (2000), http://www.albany.edu/jmmh/vol3/micheaux/micheaux.html; Andrew Joseph Pegoda, "D. W. Griffith," in *100 Entertainers Who Changed America: An Encyclopedia of Pop Culture Luminaries*, ed. Robert Sickels (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2013): 230-237; Richard C. Salter, "*The Birth of a Nation* as American Myth," *The Journal of Religion and Film* 8, no 2. (October 2004), https://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol8No2/SalterBirth.htm; and Anna Siomopoulos, "The Birth of a Black Cinema: Race, Reception, and Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates*," *The Moving Image* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 111-118.

similarities are that both Allen and Gaines were Black and grew up on a post-Antebellum plantation. They both married a Black woman who had children, who attended a state dinner as guests upon Nancy Reagan's invitation, who supported Obama, and who died right before the 2008 presidential election. Both men also worked in the White House and had regular contact with presidents, their families, and guests five or six days a week for thirty-four transformative years.[5]

Dismayed professional critics and audiences, apparently expecting hagiography, have taken the makers of *The Butler* to task for the released product; although, *The Butler* would have faced significantly less criticism if it had been advertised as being inspired by "the life of many White House butlers," especially since Eugene Allen's extensive experience or tenure was hardly unique. Allen is known in much the same way George Robert Twelves Hewes and the Boston Tea Party are known--by accidents and coincidences of time, place, and memory. Countless articles criticize the screenwriter, director, and performers involved for distorting History. The diction of such article titles are revealing: "*The Butler* True Story vs. Movie," "The True Story of *The Butler*," "How True Is *The Butler*," "*The Butler* is More Fiction than Fact," "*The Butler* Filled with Historical Inaccuracies, Finished #1." One reviewer on Amazon put it: "This was a good movie until I heard that his wife was not an alcoholic and they had only one son not two, as in the movie the second son was killed in the war." Another passionately wrote:

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[5] Wil Haygood, "A Butler Well Served by This Election," *Washington Post* (accessed November, 10, 2015) http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2008/11/06/AR2008110603948_pf.html.

> OMG!!!! This was mostly made up and it makes me mad!!!! He was NOT from Georgia. His Mother was not raped by a land owner. He had one son. None went to war. He was from Virginia and on and on! Shame on you Oprah. I thought you had more integrity than to get involved with such a SHAM!!!

Where was this outcry over *The Help* and its inaccurate representations of domestic workers?[6]

Such criticisms of *The Butler*, however, miss larger truths that are accessible through fiction when the reader moves cautiously and such criticisms suggest that

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[6] "Customer Reviews for *The Butler*."

For a sampling of articles concerned with "accuracy," see Brad Brevet, "How Much of *The Butler* is Actually True and Does it Hurt or Help the Movie?," *Coming Soon (*accessed January 7, 2015) http://www.comingsoon.net/movies/news/582307-how-much-of-the-butler-is-actually-true-and-does-it-hurt-or-help-the-movie#ZhsUUsSo7cHvMCWY.99; "The Butler's Wife Wasn't an Alcoholic and his Son Didn't Die – A lot of Scenes were Made Up," *Black Blue Dog* (accessed January 7, 2015) http://blackbluedog.com/2013/08/news/the-butlers-wife-wasnt-an-alcoholic-and-his-son-didnt-die-a-lot-of-scenes-were-made-up/; "*The Butler* True Story vs. Movie," *History vs. Hollywood* (accessed January 7, 2015) http://www.historyvshollywood.com/reelfaces/the-butler.php; Eliana Dockterman, "The True Story of *The Butler*," *Time* (accessed January 7, 2015) http://time.com/2219/what-the-butler-really-saw/; Fernandez, "Fact, Fiction, and 'The Butler'; Vicky Gan, "Hear From the Real Butler of the White House, Eugene Allen," *Smithsonian* (accessed January 7, 2015) http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/hear-from-the-real-butler-of-the-white-house-eugene-allen-623118/?no-ist; Aisha Harris, "How True Is *The Butler*," *Slate* (accessed August 19, 2013) http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/ 2013/08/15/the_ butler_movie_true_story_eugene_allen_vs _cecil_gaines_lee_daniels_fictional.html; Loretta A. Ragsdell, "*The Butler* is more fiction than fact," *Austin Weekly News* (accessed January 7, 2015) http://www. austinweeklynews.com/News/Articles/9-3-2013/'The-Butler'-is-more-fiction-than-fact/; Ben Shapiro, "*The Butler* Filled with Historical Inaccuracies, Finished #1," *Breitbart* (accessed January 7, 2015) http://www.breitbart.com /big-hollywood/2013/08/18/the-butler-inaccurate-42-the-help/; and Gary Susman, "Fact-Checking *Lee Daniels' The Butler*," *Movie Fone* (accessed January 7, 2015) http://www.moviefone.com/2013/08/12/fact-checking-lee-daniels-the-butler/.

For a sampling of existing literature, scholarly and otherwise, on Black workers in the White House, see Kate Andersen Brower, *The Residence: Inside the Private World of The White House* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015); Alonzo Fields, *My 21 Years at the White House* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1960); Gan, "Hear From the Real Butler of the White House, Eugene Allen,"; Wil Haygood, *The Butler: Whiteness to History* (New York: Atria, 2013); Clarence Lusane, *The Black History of the White House* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2011); and Smithsonian Folkways, *White House Workers: Traditions and Memories (DVD)*" (accessed January 12, 2016) http://www.folkways.si.edu/white-house-workers-traditions-and-memories-dvd/american-history/video/smithsonian.

For more information on George Robert Twelves Hewes and historical memory, see Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

trained professionals and ordinary people have curious definitions of "accuracy" (in selective scenarios) and have limited knowledge of History. Psychologist Jean Piaget would say such viewers are stuck in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development since they only see the film as all right ("truthful") or all wrong ("lies").

Given that the script changes almost all of the specific details and names, comments that *The Butler* does not perfectly mirror Allen's life trajectory border on slander. Only one review examined, tilted "The difference between 'BASED' and 'INSPIRED,'" called attention to this problem. One *Amazon* review reminds people that movie advertisements all say "inspired" and that "Hollywood morphs these kinds of things considerably…It's entertainment." By not focusing on only Allen and his biography per se, artistic freedom is possible, freedom that allows incorporating more experiences, memories, perspectives, and *truths* than otherwise possible. In this case, artistic freedom and so-called fiction results in better History. For example, one important change from "the real butler" involves their wives: Allen's wife visited the White House several times each year to participate in holiday festivities designed. Cecil's wife first visits the White House in the 1980s at the State Dinner where they are both guests--something she had wanted to do for decades (e.g., "Honey, when you gonna take me to the White House?" and "He take you to the White House yet?").

Composite and fictional characters in *The Butler* are what enable it to explore so many strands of life that were important to Black people in the United States and result in a surprisingly informed, informative Hollywood production. If the screenwriter and director had focused just on Allen or "true events," a biopic would have resulted, if

History and extant sources record enough of his life. Such a product would be subject to even more criticism where writers and directors simply cannot depict everyday life on the silver screen and would have potentially harmful implications if it had depicted his wife as a regular White House-visitor--implications being that mores allowed Black women in general (more on this point below). Everyday life is typically not material for entertainment. Additionally, given the number of mini-documentaries, autobiographies, and biographies about Black domestic workers at the White House, *The Butler* could have been advertised as being inspired by other deserving individuals. Although, we should for sure take pause to recognize the male privilege at work, given the focus on men. Regardless, *The Butler* covers over eighty years in 2 hours and 12 minutes, representing less than 0.000003 percent of years covered. Even if it had mirrored evidence, the "accurate" and "inaccurate" become irrelevant given the extraordinarily infinitesimal amount that can be represented. What are viewers shown? This alone matters.

Indeed, *The Butler* runs into the most trouble in its depiction of actual people who served as president because it selectively and without context attributes problematic statements and actions to them. And interestingly, those voicing concern because the butler is not "accurately" depicted do not voice the same concern when it comes to White presidents, except for occasionally with representations of Ronald Reagan (Alan Rickman). For purposes of recreating the past on film, biography is

confining and leads to more problems. Overall, it makes for strong History in *The Butler*.[7]

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> *I got out of there so we could have us a better life. Right now, I'm working for the White man, make things better for us. And not just any white man, either.*
>
> **-Cecil Gains of *The Butler*, 2013**

> *The transformation in the household from one Administration to another is as sudden as death. By that I mean it leaves you with a mysterious emptiness. In the morning you serve breakfast to a family with whom you have spent years. At noon that family is gone out of your life and here are new faces, new dispositions, and new likes and dislikes.*
>
> **-Alonzo Fields, 1960**

> *And the federal government, starting with the White House that has been so negligent in the past in these matters, must be prodded into making it possible for the Negro to exercise this one right—the right to vote.*
>
> **-*Chicago Defender*, 1955**[8]

The Butler spends approximately half of its time focusing on scenes with Cecil at the White House. Consequences of this and related symbolism are potentially problematic because the White House--first officially named such in 1901 the day after an outraged nation expressed dismay that Theodore Roosevelt dined with Booker T. Washington--is presented exclusively as a safe, enlightened, progressive, and static place. With the exception of Lyndon Baines Johnson's (Liev Schreiber) use of the word

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[7] "Customer Reviews for *The Butler*."

[8] Cited in Brower, *The Residence*, 29; and Clayborne Carson, eds., et al., "Articles on the Emmett Till Case," in *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 36.

"nigger," presidents, vice presidents, other leaders, and guests treat the Black men and Black women doing all of the cooking and cleaning with utmost respect. No one is ever overtly mistreated. Even when Cecil distributes cookies to visitors, the director includes deliberately and audible thank yous from the group of all-White visitors, for example.[9]

Butlers laugh around with each other and occasionally have intimate conversations with White leaders, who are all focused on and sensitive to civil rights. Dwight D. Eisenhower (Robin Williams) inquiries about whether Cecil and his children went "to a Colored school." A Vice President Richard Nixon (John Cusack) interrupts Cecil and his two closest colleagues joking around and asks them about what most concerns them as Black people, to which they only speak of inequalities related to pay and promotion. JFK (James Marsden) consoles Cecil about his son's frequent arrests following civil disobedience, and LBJ asks, "How's your boy, Cecil?" Ronald Reagan enlists Cecil to assist with secret charitable work and upon Cecil's retirement tells him, "But you're the best butler here. You're like family, Cecil….I'm sure I speak for all the presidents when I say that you've served your country well." *The Butler* includes Eisenhower's call for troops in Little Rock, Arkansas, and JFK's and LBJ's call for civil rights legislation without fully touching on the complicated feelings involved that focused on keeping White voters happy beyond Eisenhower's "What is wrong with him [Faubus]? Why is he forcing me to do this?" and JFK's "My brother says these kids have changed his heart. They've changed mine, too." Such rhetoric suggests these were the

[9] Lusane, *The Black History of the White House*, 219-233, 249, 270, 279-281, 299-300, 302, 308.

exclusive deeds of presidents.

Figure 3.3 Film still from *The Butler* showing a very concerned JFK and an equally cautious Cecil having a heart-felt conversation about life and civil rights.

The Black reactions to presidents are almost exclusively positive. These include Cecil's, "I told Louis that the President [Eisenhower] was gonna make things better for us" and "it was the first time I ever seen a White man stick his neck out for us" and Carter's, "Since when did he [LBJ] start calling us Negroes?" *The Butler*'s design specifically goes out of its way to have (fictional) Black staff members of the White House speak high praise of the for-all-practical-purposes equally fictional White presidents. Using Black voices to vocalize unreserved support for foreword-thinking, civil-rights-minded White presidents does a disservice to legitimate historical representations and is insensitive to the true frustration experienced by Blacks in the United States because their representatives, including presidents during the Civil Rights

Revolution, were not singularly committed to causes of equality.[10]

Moreover, given this and the ease with which Cecil escaped from the planation he grew up on and then worked two different jobs before the White House hired him (e.g., "You know he got that job hisself. The White House called him. He didn't call the White House."), the film tends to imply that it was not only possible but also easy for a Black man to have a (good) job, to advance, and to survive during the dangerous decades of the culture of segregation and the Civil Rights Revolution. A number of Amazon reviews suggest people are engaging with the History but are also focused on exceptions versus general historical experiences for Black people en masse: "Very interesting movie. It made me think of how difficult living during that period was on the Black race. It was also inspiring to see a Black man come from the cotton fields and work most of his life in the White House."[11]

A very different White House is recorded in evidence than in the historical memories embodied in *The Butler*. Leaders and participants of the Civil Rights Revolution (and at other times) made 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue their destination, invited or not. Protesters also came with a variety of other demands that captured the nation's (and world's) attention in the "Long Sixties," for a variety causes including gay

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[10] In his *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*, Derrick Bell discusses his interests-convergence thesis whereby the federal government (and general society) only supports civil rights for Blacks when the immediate hopes and fears of the federal government (and Whites) aligns with those of Blacks, see Bell, *Silent Covenants* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[11] Lusane, *The Black History of the White House*, 219-233, 249, 270, 279-281, 299-300, 302, 308.

rights, women's rights, and anti-war movements. Professional Black entertainers were also regular guests for presidents and their company. Such people and their cultural agency receive no attention in *The Butler* except for a two split-second instances where unseen protestors in opposition to the Vietnam War are yelling, "Hey, hey LBJ. How many kids did you kill today?" and occasional seconds of edited archival footage. Additionally, from the time when enslaved peoples built it, the White House has specifically had a long, entangled past of racialized conflict. Presidents hesitated to support Blacks or meet with Black leaders, fearing backlash, and used decisions such as *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) as a facade for inaction. FDR was the first president to push for laws against lynching after mobs lynched two White people in California.

Details about the exact treatments and perspectives from actual Black maids and Black butlers are extremely limited, due to prohibitions on them talking about work ever, anywhere. One example is when First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy made her staff sign legal documents promising never to write about working in the White House. And, naturally, presidents did not spend all of their time having friendly conversations with the Black staff--as essentially suggested in *The Butler*--presidents who had to be forced before they would pressure Congress to create legislation to once more codify basic Constitutional rights for minorities.[12]

In a real world where Black men and women faced racism and death or jail on an

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[12] Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Lusane, *The Black History of the White House*, 219-233, 249, 270, 279-281, 299-300, 302, 308.

everyday basis and in a nation that treated them as second class citizens at best, in the reel world of *The Butler*, Black men and women are in constant close proximity to the symbolic safety, wisdom, and forethought of the Executive. While watching protesters being attacked, one of JFK's few lines in the entire movie includes, "I don't know what country I'm looking at." Whereas in *The Butler*, presidents and other White leaders never voice opposition to civil rights in the United States, presidents actually corroborated with southern governments to circumvent new laws and Supreme Court cases and to arrest Black and White civil rights protestors, Robert Kennedy sought to find links between the Communist Party and Black activists, the Secret Service harassed Black leaders of what we now recognize as the Civil Rights Revolution, and the Black community saw Richard Nixon as the most "anti-Negro" Executive since Woodrow Wilson's term from 1913 to 1921 with his Southern Strategy and emphasis on the silent majority and "law and order," for example. The only voice of opposition ("I wish they'd shut up") directed at protestors in the reel White House comes from a Black maid cleaning a window while protestors are outside the White House during LBJ's term. And yet, in both reel and real versions of the White House during the Civil Rights Revolution, Blacks and Whites had degrees of constant, regular contact, thus, showing that segregation was not about separation, per se.[13]

Given their exclusivity, such progressive and light-hearted moments become consequential historical stand-ins, suggesting that the sum of all possible interactions

[13] Lusane, *The Black History of the White House*, 219-233, 249, 270, 279-281, 299-300, 302, 308.

between Whites and Blacks at the White House were most positive, according to *The Butler*. *The Butler*'s version of the White House also exists outside of time in that nothing ever really changes. While it would simply be too much for the movie to even attempt to grapple with shifts in world views and ideologies as different presidents and their teams inhabit the White House, physically and politically, there are not even mentions of political parties until Reagan. Shifts between what Godfrey Hodgson's work names the Liberal Consensus (c. 1933-1970) and what we could likewise call the Conservative Consensus (c. 1970-present) are also ignored. On a broader level, that the decades portrayed were especially tumultuous for the nation receives no attention.[14]

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> *You got to look through their eyes. See what it is they want. See what it is they need.*
>
> **-Maynard of *The Butler*, 2013**

> *You hear nothing. You see nothing. You only serve.*
>
> **-Freddie of *The Butler*, 2013**

While *The Butler* might suggest that daily working conditions for Black workers in the White House, opportunities for an acknowledged and welcomed voice, and

[14] Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 67-98; and Pegoda, "A Century and Two Great Ages of Consensus: Politics and History Repeating," *Without Ritual, Autonomous Negotiations* (accessed May 16, 2015) https://andrewpegoda. com/2015/05/16/a-century-and-two-great-ages-of-consensus-politics-and-history-repeating/. See also, Gary Gerstle, "Race and the Myth of the Liberal Consensus," *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995): 579-586.

institutional racism were better than they actually were, in ways outlined above, it largely mitigates this with in-depth attention to the psychological wages of Whiteness and Cecil's (and the other Black workers') double consciousness in something of the spirit of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1947). Illustrations of such power dynamics, impossible expectations, and survival mechanisms go beyond instructions on properly serving White people and, with careful camera work, constitute something of an indictment of White people with a keen awareness of the world. Additionally, Director Daniels shows Cecil learning about double consciousness, using it and mastering it, and ultimately rejecting it: "I had always loved serving. But just felt different now. I didn't know that an old man could feel so lost. That's how I felt. That's how I felt."

Prior to their "discovery" and subsequent popularity by contemporary and often White scholars starting in the 1980s and 1990s, noted Black twentieth-century intellectual, historian, and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about these concepts almost a century earlier, as quoted in the epigraph of this chapter. The psychological wages of Whiteness, a concept more frequently referred to as White Privilege, labels the peculiar phenomenon whereby people in the United States with skin racialized as White constitute an exclusive "imagined community" and have unearned, discriminatory advantages over people subjectively racialized as non-White. Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege and Male Privilege" (1988) complies forty-nine insightful examples. For example, she lists:

> 14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them….15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily protection….21. I am never asked to speak

for all of the people in my racial group….34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.

Lee Daniels grapples with all of these in multiple ways.[15]

Near the beginning of *The Butler*, just before Cecil's dad is shot in the head by the White grandson in charge of the plantation his dad tells him, "Look at me, boy. Don't you lose your temper with that [White] man. This his world. We just living in it. You hear me?" Reflecting on his life from the perspective of 2009 in voiceover, Cecil says, "Any White man could kill any of us at any time and not be punished for it. The law *wasn't* on our side. The law *was* against us." (Emphasis added because the writer's choice of past tense is important, more on this further into the chapter). Before answering the phone with the call inviting him to work at the White House, Cecil also says, "When the White man call, I always assume the worst." This awareness passes to Cecil's children, especially Louis, who becomes very active in the grassroots movements of the Civil Rights Revolution, as discussed below.

In various ways, *The Butler* addresses these and other elements of White privilege, while also addressing the double consciousness of Blackness. Similar to code switching or the sociological concept of dramaturgy, double consciousness provides ways to understand an aspect of the era of segregation wherein Whites demanded that

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[15] Eric Avila, "Why is Studying 'Whiteness' Controversial?," *History News Network* (accessed February 8, 2016) http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/161893; Jonathan Harrison, "Double Consciousness in *Lee Daniels' The Butler*," *Sociological Images - The Society Pages* (accessed January 10, 2016) https://thesocietypages.org/ socimages/2013/09/14/double-consciousness-in-lee-daniels-the-butler/; and Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" *Working Papers Series* no. 189 (1988): 1-19.

Blacks *exist* to serve them but *not exist* otherwise. In contrast to *code switching*, which examines humans and their constant, everyday stream of voluntarily and involuntary shifts in body language, spoken language, etc. depending on time and place and in contrast to *dramaturgy*, which examines the difference between "public" performances and "private" preparations, *double consciousness* specifically acknowledges the disjuncture in which Blacks had to live as a way of persevering and preserving as a person amid rampant forces pressing for the contrary. Whereas in *The Long Walk Home* and in *The Help*, Whites invisiblize Black women by openly making disparaging remarks, *The Butler* takes similar situations and explains exactly what is happening over the course of the narrative, thereby making such dynamics explicit.

The Butler ultimately deconstructs White expectations of Black domestic workers. Miss Annabeth (Vanessa Redgrave) teaches a very young Cecil how to work in the house after her grandson raped his mother and killed his dad. She teaches him how to use the veil for his safety: "And quiet when you're serving. I don't even want to hear you breathe. The room should feel empty when you're in it." Maynard (Clarence Williams III), who is Black, adds to Cecil's survival-training years later by suggesting ways to survive psychologically and physically: "Cecil, we got two faces: ours, and the ones that we got to show the White folks. Now, to get up in the world, you have to make them feel non-threatened." This training--this double consciousness--is once more reemphasized when Cecil begins working at the White House and is given the impossible and inherent contradictions of his full duties. These scenes are careful to use camera work to emphasize the body language and eye movement at work.

Figure 3.4 Film still from *The Butler* showing Cecil first learning how to serve White people and make them happy without being "in" the room.

Figure 3.5 Film still from *The Butler* showing a teenaged Cecil standing perfectly still, serving White people who are enjoying a hot summer day swimming.

Figure 3.6 Film still from *The Butler* showing Cecil's early days at the White House, a time when he has long fully mastered the art of being invisible around White people.

Figure 3.7 Film still from *The Butler* when Cecil has fully rejected a future life of double consciousness.

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> *This requires time, commitment, dedication, discipline and focus. And we are measuring our accomplishments in waves, right? This is not a fly by night affair. This doesn't happen over a week. This requires a fierce discipline, which is what we've been discussing. How do you measure these things? We go back, and we look at somebody like Gandhi. Together, we are gonna study and examine Gandhi's techniques. What has been so effective in South Africa, so effective in India, for his own people and others, and we're gonna employ it right here, in Nashville. So we're gonna form an army. You and I. This army has one weapon. That weapon is love.*
>
> **-James Morris Lawson of *The Butler*, 2013**

Invisiblized White House staff in *The Butler* are juxtaposed against a younger generation of Blacks who refuse to be invisible and who take their activism to the streets in order to both test various Supreme Court decisions and to force meaningful change. As a result, Lee Daniels depicts the everyday psychological and physical violence of the culture of segregation, along with various phases and responses to struggles associated with the Civil Rights Revolution. While the film largely focuses on Cecil's involvement in the Civil Rights Revolution as one of survival and patience (although he always has a vastly under recognized undercurrent of cynicism toward the world, as discussed in the next section), Louis's involvement morphs from general childhood frustrations, to grassroots participation in nonviolent demonstrations and repeated arrests with other White and Black students at Fisk University, to involvement with the Black Panthers and flirtations with using violence to secure civil rights, and to his becoming a national politician. This section will specifically examine *The Butler*'s coverage of public events outside of the White House, including the Sit-In Movement

and the Freedom Riders and the resulting White backlash in the form of massive resistance. Throughout all of these scenes, audiences are given accurate depictions of violence and fear without morphing the film's presentation into White Gaze, of how segregation was not about separation, and of how the movement actually played out. In *The Butler*, there are no White savior figures, unlike most other films in this study.[16]

Similar to the White House-scenes, depictions of Civil Rights Revolution-leaders use a mixture of actual, historical people and fictional characters. These scenes also show the thoughtful and careful planning used by leaders and organizations. According to the Internet Movie Database, the preeminent resources for all factoids about movies, *The Butler* is the first movie to represent Dr. James Morris Lawson (Jesse Williams); although, the film does not explicitly acknowledge him except for one reference to his "Lawson Workshop." He helped lead the grassroots Nashville, Tennessee, Student Movement by teaching Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent philosophies to students at Fisk University. Scenes focusing on Lawson show him advising interested White and Black students, as he tells them what they will likely encounter at a Woolworth's protest. He tells budding activists they should prepare for the possibility of death. Scenes also focus on preparation for the sit-in demonstration. In an extended and intense scene, Lawson has an interracial group of students rehearse. He insists that they take turns harassing,

[16] George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Pegoda "'Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement' – Book Review Series #2" (accessed April 12, 2016) https://andrewpegoda.com/2013/12/02/massive-resistance-the-white-response-to-the-civil-rights-movement-book-review-series-2/.

pushing, and name-calling each other for the purpose of psychologically preparing them for angry mobs.[17]

Figure 3.8 Film still from *The Butler* showing White and Black activists preparing, emotionally and physically, for their sit-in demonstration.

Dr. Martin Luther King (Nelsan Ellis)--famous for heading the Montgomery Improvement Association and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and to most people, becoming the face of the movement until his assassination in 1968--has a few important scenes, too. Cinema about the Civil Rights Revolution regularly includes representations of King. Typically, except for biopics such as the recently-released *Selma* (2014), these films such with *Driving Ms. Daisy* (1989) and *The Long Walk Home* only include King with the use of archival audio and video footage or as in *Crazy in Alabama* (1999) the uncredited actor playing King is blurred out by bright sunlight and when up

[17] "James Lawson," *IMDb* (accessed March 10, 2016) http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0395459/?ref=ttfc_fc_cl_t29; and "Interview: Rev. James Lawson," *PBS* (accessed March 16, 2016) https://web.archive.org/web/20041209111131/http://www.pbs.org/weta/forcemorepowerful/nashville/interview.html

close only his arms and hands are visible. Such cinematic techniques tend to add to King's mystic, saint-like stature, as deemed by general historical memory. Additionally, as argued above, films move into risky areas when they include historical people and events because accurate, comprehensive coverage is impossible. In contrast, *The Butler* has a few seconds of actual archival footage but also scenes where Louis and other activists are talking with King in a hotel room and another where King is smoking on the balcony moments before he is murdered and the resulting riots. *The Butler*'s King voices opposition to the United States's involvement in Vietnam War, speaks support for the Vietcong, and gives the following words of wisdom to Louis when he speaks of his father with embarrassment:

> Young brother, the black domestic defy racial stereotypes by being hardworking and trustworthy. He slowly tears down racial hatred with his example of a strong work ethic and dignified character. Now, while we perceive the butler or the maid to be subservient, in many ways, they are subversive, without even knowing it.

While the inclusion of the historical King's opposition toward the Vietnam War is well documented, such words about domestic workers present more problems. Popular blogger Julian Abagond criticizes Lee Daniels for putting fictional words in King's mouth, for presenting racism and history as "cartoonish," and for playing into Hollywood's long history of showing and further justifying countless images of Black men in domestic positions. When discussing this film with me by email, historian Clayborne Carson said, "I'm perplexed about how to respond to the quote, except that I don't recognize it as King's," and historian David J. Garrow in part said:

> It's of course a 100% faux quote, but it's very much in the spirit of Doc's "Advice

> for Living" columns in Ebony in the late 50s as well as a stock line from those years about how essential the "ground crew" is for airplanes to fly. There's also a line or two from multiple sermons about whatever you do, be 'the best' at what you do, so I have *no* criticism of the "political message" contained in the fake quote.

In addition to these thoughts, such fictional words attributed to King perpetuate notions that also suggest Black people enjoyed enslavement and benefited from it. Historians such as Vincent Harding would respond with reminders of the long, continually flowing river of freedom. Robin D.G. Kelly would use countless examples of everyday resistance and consciousness, or "hidden transcripts" as he calls them. Indeed, Lee Daniels uses King to inaccurately recast the agency of Black men and women--men and women who were actually anything but unaware and passive. Further, by grouping subjective notions of "hard work" and "trust" with basic human rights, Daniels plays into the politics of respectability, practices that in the twenty-first century suggest that if women or Black people, for instance, "dressed appropriately," they would not face violence or discrimination. Finally, these false words attributed to King place the burden of fixing the nation on the passive, hard work on Black people and ignore that Black people worked hard and without pay or basic respect for over two centuries. The "true" Martin Luther King who called for radical changes to the political and economic landscape in the United States remains almost completely hidden from everyday life and society.[18]

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[18] Julian Abagond, "The Butler," *Abagond* (accessed September 2, 2014) https://abagond.wordpress.com/2014/09/02/the-butler/; Taylor Branch, e-mail message to author, April 7, 2016; Clayborne Carson, e-mail message to author, March 28, 2016; David J. Garow, e-mail message to author, March 29, 2016; Robin D. G. Kelly, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

Additionally, Paul Webb and Ava DuVernay's *Selma* (2014) focuses on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s (David Oyelowo) leadership in the mid-1960s and his efforts when it came to pushing President Lyndon

Whereas real-life student leaders, such as Diane Nash of Nashville, are not represented at all, Louis emerges filmically as the student voice of the Civil Rights Revolution. The omission of Nash or any other female voice adds to the male-centric bias in *The Butler*, as discussed further in the next section of this chapter. Women such as Ella Baker, Septima P. Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and other activists receive zero mentions. Adding also to the "Forrest Gump" effect, Louis leads every event and has direct connections to a whole host of political and cultural events of the mid-twentieth century. For example, at Woolworths, he is the one who asks to be served at the beginning of the sit-in. Louis's guiding philosophy during this effort is: "If I can't sit at any lunch counter I want, then I might as well be dead. We're fighting for our rights." While on the freedom bus, he is the one who notices the Klan in front of them and their crosses and brings attention to it. He notices before the driver or the dozens of people in front of him, which simply does not make sense and also contributes to the over emphasis of patriarchy in *The Butler*.[19]

On the other hand, for purposes of retelling stories that people need to hear in

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Johnson (Tom Wilkinson) toward overt pro-civil rights positions. This film is not examined in this work since other biopics are not examined and since it was released when this work was well underway. For starting points on this biopic, see Amy Davidson, "Why *Selma* is More than Fair to LBJ," *The New Yorker* (accessed January 23, 2015) http://www.newyorker.com/news/amy-davidson/selma-fair-l-b-j; Elizabeth Drew, "*Selma* vs. History," *The New York Review of Books* (accessed January 19, 2015) http:// www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2015/jan/08/selma-vs-history/; Robert Green, II., "*Selma*: A Review," *Society for U.S. Intellectual History* (accessed January 18, 2015) http://s-usih.org/2015/01/selma-a-review.html; and "*Selma Movie*," *LBJ Presidential Library* (accessed January 18, 2015) http://www.lbjlibrary.org/press/selma-movie.

[19] According to Internet Movie Database, Kay Smith plays Diane Nash but in an unnamed, uncredited, unacknowledged role. I do not count this since viewers or scholars would not know this or even have the slightest hint by watching the movie.

order to have informed historical understandings, Lee Daniels does not hesitate to include historically-relevant grassroots activism, as already discussed, as well as violence and grassroots massive resistance. Images of two Black men who have been lynched in front of a United States flag and Cecil's mom being raped and his dad being murdered by the White grandson in charge of a sharecropping plantation open the film. Discussions between an adult Cecil and his family about Emmett Till follow.

Other intense moments of violence occur when college students encounter White mobs opposed to civil rights. While these scenes do come across as something more of a reenactment, these scenes are important because they actually show violence and do so in respectful, relevant ways. In the sit-in scene, a mob enters and while yelling derogatory, often racially-charged words, they throw hot coffee, pepper, ketchup, and milk on these peaceful activists fully engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience. Still other White protestors spit in the faces of those sitting and asking to be served. Others push, shove, kick, and punch Black and White students. In the bus scene, Klu Klux Klan members yell, drawl, growl, swing bats and torches, shake the Greyhound bus, and ultimately cause the bus to explode. Other moments with violence include when Louis and Carol run and hide after a gun is fired. These scenes, along with the concluding scene in *The Long Walk Home* and a few scenes in *Crazy in Alabama*, are the only such scenes that even begin to approach historically accurate violence, while not being so "accurate" as to make the associated historical lessons unapproachable. Additionally, in *The Butler*, the Black body is never subject to the White Gaze or Male Gaze as it is in *The Help*, *12 Years a Slave* (2013), and so many other films depicting the Black experience.

Protest scenes are also important because they cut back and forth to juxtapose the peaceful harmonious moments at the White House.

In addition to showing the physical violence faced by activists, Daniels shows the reality of being arrested for participation in civil disobedience--such a focus mirrors historical evidence. At one point, *The Butler* mentions that Louis has been arrested sixteen times in two years and at numerous points mentions the stress this causes his parents. Although as of 2016, there are no comprehensive statistics on the number of Blacks and Whites arrested vis-à-vis civil rights activism, available arrest data provides useful impressions: 328 freedom riders in Mississippi; over 1,000 in Freedom Summer; 15,000 in 1963 alone; and over 20,000 children, women, and men from late 1961 to early 1963. Frequently, despite disapproval from their families, protests would include the goal of being arrested, as to bring as much attention to their cause as possible. The *Afro-American* said "now it is a nice thing to go to jail," and as Zoe A. Colley explains in her book *Ain't Scared of Your Jail*, being arrested was "a positive and liberating experience." In these instances, too, it is Louis's voice and experience exclusively that audiences are given a glimpse of, even while he and his peers serves multiple jail sentences together.[20]

While the White House is depicted as almost the ultimate actualization of

[20] Thomas R. Cole, *The Strange Demise of Jim Crow* (Lancaster: California Newsreel, 1998) DVD; Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 24, 30, 32-33, 51, 87; Colley, e-mail message to author, February 8, 2016; and Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: *The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 67.

Thomas More's island Utopia, viewers of *The Butler* are left with strong and productive impressions of the violence and divisions that were present outside of the White House--divisions that caused presidents to fear another Civil War and prompted individuals, especially those in college, to launch planned protests in hopes of forcing change and ultimately rejecting nonviolence in cases. Shortly before breaking up with her, Louis's girlfriend says she is prepared to kill two White people for every one Black person murdered by Whites and to put a White person in the cemetery if they touch her. Discrimination, protests, and arrest, then, as depicted in *The Butler*, divided families and friends. Unlike so many films about the Civil Rights Revolution, *The Butler* makes abundantly clear that the Civil Rights Revolution was not one, unchanging, homogenous movement. Diverse Black individuals with different hopes, fears, and immediate strategies created it. There is no overarching White savior in *The Butler*. *The Butler* does show interracial alliances and scores of Whites who are disinterested allies of the Civil Rights Revolution. When *The Butler* includes violence, it goes far beyond just showing violence. The purpose is explained. Susan Sontag says the camera is akin to a dictator: We are never forced to simply gaze at people in suffering, either. Additionally, all of these scenes related to protests and consequences show the many ironies of "separate but equal" mores. Segregation was not about separation per se as evident by the sit-in scene when Black people can be served but only in a few seats at the end of the long counter, when a Black woman behind the counter can serve Black and White customers, and when the White mob attacks Blacks. This same basic pattern of events occurred throughout the long era of the culture of segregation. White and Black people, whether

allied or not, were in constant degrees of physical closeness. Finally, when thinking about *The Butler*'s specific coverage of civil rights activities, we must specifically pause and analyze the rhetoric of what it includes and does not include. Given that *The Butler* starts well before and ends well after the Civil Rights Revolution, why are specific snapshots of overt civil rights issues limited to the inclusion of Emmett Till's murder, *Brown vs*. *Board of Education* and Little Rock, the Nashville Student Movement, Freedom Rides, and the radical side of Black Power? Explanations are likely related to the director's not wanting to overly challenge the worldview held dearly by most White people and/or his own lack of knowledge on these topics.

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Whereas in *The Help* and other films the faces of Black men are often so blurred as to be invisible and we only "see" them as domestic workers, in *The Butler* we see much more than their faces or labor. In addition to focusing on Cecil's work at the White House and his son's challenges to the White status quo, *The Butler* gives far more than sheer passing attention to his family--a wealthy Black family that owns a vehicle and a large two-story home in Washington, D.C. This emphasis on his and his family's private life helps further show the degree to which he perfected maneuvering everyday life with a double consciousness and lived as a "regular" person when and where allowed. At no point does Lee Daniels depict the Black family as singularly tragic, victim, or otherwise categorically different than White families. Additionally, conversations between Black

characters are frequently not about White people or racism (e.g., “he’s going to Fisk,” “he gonna be late to his own funeral”). As a result, this movie creates a complicated and

Figure 3.9 Film still from *The Butler* showing Louis’s mother and father grieve.

overall plausible portrait of Black family life before, during, and after the Civil Rights Revolution. We see the Black family in Black spaces eating, talking, laughing, arguing, and crying together. White people never invade Black space. Lee Daniels’s choice of scenes and dialogue humanizes these reel characters, shows them changing overtime. Despite these positive aspects, *The Butler* has numerous sexist tendencies, too.

Gloria, Cecil’s wife, is a complicated character with various historical connections. She is never Mammied--a rare occurrence for a Black woman in Hollywood cinema, especially movies set in prior decades. She is the stay-at-home wife and mom who sometimes feels abandoned and taken for granted, and she turns to alcohol and a brief psychological affair to compensate. She is the mom who loses a son to the Vietnam

War. She is the articulate, under-estimated, under-recognized, high school graduate, literate, and informed Black woman whom History typically, deliberately deletes. After Gloria comments that she loves John Lewis, for example, Cecil interrupts and wonders how she knows who he is. With confidence and authority, she says, "Cause, honey, I read *Jet* magazine. I'm not just sitting up there sewing for you all day."

Gloria is also the mom who tries to meditate between a son fighting for immediate change and a dad who just needs to survive. Indeed, there is fair amount of familial conflict in *The Butler*, but the conflict mostly relates to differences in ideas about how to fight for civil rights and general tension between children and parents. The film creates two exceptionally strong characters--Louis and Cecil--who both are convinced that only their position is correct. While their behaviors and actions may seem at odds, *The Butler* shows how civil rights divided families but even more shows how they both seek better opportunities for others, just in very different ways. Some reviewers unfairly characterize Cecil as a pacifist when he was actually bold and determined in his own way. He essentially denies that Blacks are treated better in Washington D.C. than in the deep South where he grew up. His wife says, "At least we got it a little better in D.C., huh," to which he responds, "Still treating us bad, too." At the risk of losing his job, Cecil requests fair raises and opportunities for promotion. And as the film shows, Cecil and Louis completely reconcile and become close.[21]

[21] Ron Briley, "The Civil Rights Movement as We'd Like to Remember It," *History News Network* (accessed September 9, 2013) http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/153221.

Gloria, Cecil, and their children regularly entertain for their friends or go over to a friend's house to eat and socialize. Conversations relate to politics and racism, such as when Howard expresses legitimate fear that Louis's activism might get all of them murdered--just as in *Coming of Age in Mississippi* when Anne Moody's family worries that her activism might get them killed. Their time also focuses on issues of everyday life and family tragedy, such as at Charlie's funeral following his death in Vietnam. This group has a powerful bond, akin to fictive kin relationships that formed one part of the resistance used by enslaved people.

The Butler is decidedly cisgendered, heteronormative, and patriarchal. Similar to the other films examined in this dissertation, *The Butler* takes extensive time to develop and portray heterosexual relationships between major and minor characters. Except for the relationship between Cecil and Gloria and Cecil's parents, none of the relationships are essential to telling the story told, especially the relationship between Louis and Carol. Carol is even introduced in the film as a character who needs to get married. Her friend asks, "What do you mean, you don't want to date nobody? After all these guys that come after you?" In the next scene, Carol and Louis speak and immediately bond over mutual interest in civil disobedience. During a scene with Freedom Bus riders, an unnamed White man (Danny Strong, the screenwriter) and an unnamed Black woman have the following conversation, which not only suggests that women and men should be in relationships with each other but that men have power over women:

> **man**: Ever been on a freedom bus before?
> **woman**: No, it's my first time.
> **man**: No? How's your boyfriend feel about that?

woman: My boyfriend?
man: Yeah. I mean, this must upset him, right? You being on this bus down here.
woman: I don't have a boyfriend.
man: You don't have a boyfriend? How do you not have a boyfriend?

This is not the only such instance of patriarchal accretion. In one scene, several butlers from the White House and their respective wives and a couple next door are having a get-together. One of the wives makes an informed political comment about the LBJ and recent events, which prompts the men to makes comments, such as "She talking too damned much," "You deal with your woman, I'll deal with mine" and "Can't be a king in your own castle. You hit the strip joint, that's what I say." Such comments reach a high point in another scene with this puzzling and unexplained comment intended as a joke: "I dated a girl once. Every time I hit her, she shit herself." Additionally, except for Nancy Reagan and Jackie Kennedy (whose one of two scenes shows her wearing a blood-soaked outfit and crying hysterically after JFK's murder), First Ladies are curiously absent.

According to screenwriter Danny Strong, Lee Daniels cites the scene where Louis's parents send him off to college as a first in cinema. "Never in the history of cinema has there been a scene of a Black family sending their kid off to college." Speaking of *The Butler*, writer Terence Johnson says, "I don't recall a mainstream film in recent memory handling familial relationships like [this]….Ever[y] scene with the Gaines family just felt like it was pulled from everyday life….The best scenes come from the struggles of Cecil and Louis relating to each other." Such depictions, along with the emphasis on the family throughout *The Butler*, stand in stark opposition to Daniel

Patrick Moynihan's seemingly well-intended but controversial and consequential 1965 "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" (more popularly known as the "Moynihan Report") with its negative depictions of the Black family. It said, in part, "At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time."[22]

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> *Down with the debunking biographer. It now seems to be quite a thing to pull down the mighty from their seats and roll them in the mire. This practice deserves pronounced condemnation. Hero worship is a tremendous force in uplifting and strengthening. Humanity, let us have our heroes. Let us continue to believe that some have been truly great*.
>
> **-LBJ, 1929**

> *Secrecy, loyalty, discretion applies to the humblest, not so much personal loyalty to the incumbent as loyalty to the office. The atmosphere of the house would be intolerable if the President had to look on all hands as eaves-droppers; he must take their loyalty for granted. State and personal secrets aren't shouted, but in a house so uttered daily with confidences, some must reach the ears of the least employee.*
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> **-Ike Hoover, 1934**

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[22] Jane Caffrey, "10 Secrets of *The Butler*," *CNN* (accessed January 10, 2016) http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/16/showbiz/10-secrets-of-the-butler/; Daniel Geary, "The Moynihan Report: An Annotated Edition," *The Atlantic* (accessed February 4, 2016) http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/the-moynihan-report-an-annotated-edition/404632/#Chapter%20II; Terence Johnson, "Double Consciousness and Intergenerational Relationships in *Lee Daniels' The Butler*," *Le Noir Auteur: Movies, TV, and Pop Culture with a Side of Shade* (accessed January 10, 2016) http://lenoirauteur.com/2013/08/17/double-consciousness-and-intergenerational-relationships-in-lee-daniels-the-butler; and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Moynihan Report" (accessed April 4, 2016) http://www.blackpast.org/primary/moynihan-report-1965

Living in the White House is like being on the stage, where tragedies and comedies play alternately. And we, the servants of the White House, are the supporting cast. Like actors after a première, we too always watched for the critics' reviews in the newspaper.[23]

-Lillian Rogers Parks, 1961

Notions of "civil religion," a sociological concept first developed by Robert N. Bellah in its contemporary manifestation, conceptually parallels religions and loyalties--including associated iconography, sacred texts, leaders, God(s), and devotees--with loyalty toward "imagined communities" or modern nation states, like the United States. Above all, *The Butler* undeniably promotes love and devotion toward the United States--patriotism of the highest order--and enshrines civil religion in celluloid for the masses. *The Butler* does this by creating a teleological narrative surrounded by the mystique of the White House (and *all* of its past occupants). As discussed in sections above, *The Butler* does show darker moments in the nation's past, unlike most other films; however, even in these moments, the promotion of supreme devotion applies because "sacred" individuals are historicized as fulfilling providence, as they are defenders and promoters of the highest equality and opportunity.[24]

Opening and concluding moments in *The Butler* are important for a few reasons.

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[23] Cited in Brower, *The Residence*, 79; Parks and Leighton, *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House*, 27; and Geoffrey C. Ward, "The Full Johnson," *American Heritage* (accessed February 21, 2016) http://www.americanheritage.com/content/full-johnson.

[24] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Robert Bellah* (accessed March 15, 2016) http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm; and William H. Swatos, Jr., ed., "Civil Religion," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (accessed March 15, 2016) http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/civilrel.htm.

Although not apparent until the end, *The Butler* begins and ends in 2009 with Cecil waiting to meet President Obama as a way to celebrate the first Black president. Given that *The Butler* is a flashback, the entire narrative, from one perspective, occurs in the White House. Consequently, this suggest that Cecil's memory is funneled through and controlled, not simply by "White space" but by the executive branch of the federal government, by the nation, and is told for the greater good: The White House, in *The Butler*, holds and "owns" all memories. In addition, sudden god-like voiceovers from three former presidents conclude *The Butler*. JFK says, "The heart of the question is, whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities." LBJ says, "It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life." And Obama says, "We will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can."[25]

[25] For information on the implications of the flashback from a theoretical perspective, see Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory & History* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Figure 3.10 Film still from *The Butler*'s opening and closing moment while Cecil is waiting to meet President Barack Obama. As shown throughout the movie, the interior of the White House never changes and the people are dwarfed by the size, literal and metaphorical, of the mystic government.

Camera shoots, mise-en-scènes, and extra diegetic music help establish important layers in how this film builds a narrative centered around promoting civil religion. People are dwarfed by magnificent, larger-than-life ceilings, doors, pillars, and windows throughout White House-scenes. Such framing establishes an important rhetoric of the film and suggests that present-day individuals are temporary and not nearly as significant as the collective nation and its collective destiny. Carpets, chair covers, and window curtains are blood red with only an occasional exception. In almost every White House scene, there are multiple portraits and busts of President George

Figure 3.11 Film still from *The Butler* showing one example of a careful emphasis on President George Washington. Such emphasizes occur throughout White House-scenes.

Washington, President Abraham Lincoln, and other past presidents. These men are immortalized and keep their eyes on butlers, maids, and presidents, for example, in the shrine of the United States, the White House. Additionally, the camera does not simply pan by these "great men" of civil religion in the United States--the camera gazes at them until viewers are certain to recognize and internalize such iconography. Finally, throughout *The Butler*, various tracks of constant extra diegetic classical music make viewers feel as if they are in a sacred place.

Just as loyalty toward the corresponding deity is part of the cultural ritual in religions, ritual and loyalty toward the nation is important in civil religions. *The Butler* also includes some of the ritual associated with the White House. Historically, the President and his wife, the First Lady, are the closest thing in the United States to a king and queen. While there are not any inaugural scenes, JFK and his wife have a grand

appearance when they meet all of the maids and butlers, who are standing in a long straight line, in the way soldiers might. Cecil and his wife attend a grand State Dinner with the Reagans and other world leaders. Throughout all of the White House-scenes, extreme order and respect are prioritized above everything else. Lee Daniels also tends to create a narrative where everyone can and does "serve" the nation in some way. Even when people are at odds, in an odd reel brand of consensus-like world views, *The Butler* reminds viewers that both are working toward the same goal of the betterment of the United States. Cecil's sons disagree about the Vietnam War: Louis is against it, and Charlie is in such favor that he gives up his life. Additionally, Reagan frames Cecil's years at the White House in the way the service of veterans is typically framed. As a result, *The Butler* uses civil religion to create a healing narrative.

As already discussed, *The Butler* does an exceptionally respectable job of showing darker moments in the nation's history as related to racism (although, it never overtly looks at intersectional discrimination). However, in these moments, those grassroots individuals standing up (rather often "sitting down") for equality are unequivocally painted as heroes and heroines helping realize the nation's missions engraved in founding texts. Those allied and concerned with equality include Black *and White* individuals of all ages, including presidents of the United States. Given the various emphasizes in *The Butler*, it ultimately says that racists are isolated in the South, and racism is an individual, not institutional problem. Scenes carefully avoid implicating the federal government to any degree whatsoever, and in every scene with Cecil and a president, the president is talking about something related favorably toward civil rights.

Until considering the role of civil religion in *The Butler*, the most unusual and unexplained aspect is the sudden shift from Cecil's retirement (and first arrest for civil disobedience) in the 1980s to a neighborhood campaign party for then Senator Barack Obama in the summer of 2008. Viewers regularly complain that this scene and subsequent ones ruin the film. Hosted by Cecil and Gloria, some three dozen White and Black people of all ages are gathered in their front lawn eating, talking, and waving United States flags. Seven large "CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE IN" signs announce their

Figure 3.12 Film still from *The Butler* showing the Gaines and their friends throwing a party celebrating the upcoming 2008 election.

excitement, along with other signs, tee shirts, and extra diegetic lyrics. Cecil and Louis watch CNN's Wolf Blitzer cover the election in 2008. And then President-elect Barack Obama says, "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer." While unpopular, given the inspiration for *The Butler* and the unprecedented nature of

Obama's election, *The Butler* simply had to include him in some way or another. Politicians and, naturally, others of all political persuasions regularly recast the writing and trajectory of the Declaration of Independence (called "American scripture" by historian Pauline Maier in her book of the same name) and the Constitution as fully having been intended intending upon their creation as meaning for all people--regardless of the ways in which people are raced, gendered, and classed--to have full and equal opportunities of citizenship. Such rewriting of history is anything but new, but such inclusion in *The Butler* is important. It tends to stamp teleological perspectives of the past on the world view promoted by Lee Daniels. From this perspective, Barack Obama becoming president was "predicted" and a natural and major next step, a turning point in the forever grander democratic conditions in the United States. Such revisioning of the past, as already touched on, erases that the United States was founded on enslavement and a variety of other inequalities--the foundations of the United States are anything but ones that promoted universal basic citizenship and civil rights. Additionally, it promotes patriotism of the highest order because such utopian views of the past change History in order to make it safe, comfortable, and patriotic. In the spirit of Cold War-era consensus scholarship, *The Butler* creates and legitimizes a world where basically everyone got (and gets) along. Where there were--brief--gaps between the ideal and the real, the government and the majority of citizens work together to continue the climb toward freedom. Individuals, not sacred ideas and institutions, discriminated. Except for the Vietnam War, *The Butler* all but completely omits other issues that divided or worried the nation and ignores that starting with LBJ

and Nixon, a growing number of people in the United States reported not trusting the President or the government.

Such emphasis on supreme allegiance toward the United States, especially the White House, clearly mirrors the late 2000s and early 2010s, the Obamian Era. The eight-year Bush presidency left individuals frustrated, in economic woes, and in increasingly polarized states of existence. People in the United States "needed" a narrative promoting trust and unity. This unity is such a significant part of *The Butler* that there are almost no "individuals" per se. Past presidents exist as something like one person, as also exists with butlers and maids in the film. In place of individuals, Lee Daniels has historical stand-ins who are are not just loyal but believe in, have faith in the United States. In *The Butler*, while the specific people change, the functioning of the White House and civil religion never changes. The curtains, chairs, and other arrangements never change either, except for in the Oval Office. Such stability and such loyalty toward the United States, along with gradual, "safe" change (Cecil explains he never imagined that a Black man would have such a real chance and then actually become president of the United States) make the past approachable for audiences.

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> The Butler *is a brilliantly done film. In fact, for those of us who lived through the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s during which time racism and apartheid were in full bloom, The Butler is like touching a painful memory and then letting the pain efface in the evolution of human rights, which the movie depicts incredibly well. Possibly for someone born decades after which this racial period existed, they might not*

appreciate the depth to which it inculcated our culture and our lives and possibly even, they will pay more attention to the acting quality or some other irrelevancy, but I can say that this film should be a requirement of all students, all schools, as both a reminder of how we have evolved in the humanities, and how recently this very issue existed and at what cost to the many lives of those brave souls who fought for civil rights. Whitaker deserves an Oscar - his performance was heart wrenching. Oprah was amazing, as were all the others cast as Presidents and significant figures. A must see.

-Amazon Review, 2014

If these liberals could just stick to the story! But NOOOO...they have to make everything political!! Geez get over it already!! I really liked the movie until the end where they made Obama out to be some sort of hero instead of the Marxist that he is!! So, don't waste your money like I did.

-Amazon Review, 2014[26]

One thousand six hundred and eighty-four reviews posted by everyday people on Amazon were compiled on July 28, 2014. Of these reviews 877 gave *The Butler* five stars (52 percent); 356 four stars (21 percent); 201 three stars (12 percent); and 250 two or one stars (15 percent). Positive and negative reviews focused extensively on historical and political aspects of the film including how "accurate" or "inaccurate" the movie is, as well as memories it evoked up--all relate to the on-going, human struggle of coming to terms with the past as it actually happened according to the best evidence available. Another common thread throughout all of the reviews is high expectations, given the extensive resumes of its actors and actresses and its basic story line. Numerous comments also expressed that the film "was too long" or "too short," "had horrible acting" or "wonderful acting," and other binaried opinions. Compared to *The Help*,

[26] "Customer Reviews for *The Butler*."

Sandlot, and other films, opinions of *The Butler* are unusually bifurcated. The following section provides an analysis and overview of all 1,684 reviews.[27]

People love and hate *The Butler* for a variety of overarching, hard-to-define, opinionated reasons. In addition to expressing gratitude toward protesters depicted, reviewers regularly comment on what they deem Oscar-worthy performances. For example, one review titled "Brilliant, Inspiring, sad & educational" elaborates "Excellent movie. Should have been nominated by the academy. Best Picture, best actor (Whitaker). Best supporting actor (son). One of the best movies of the year!!!!!!" Another review said, "the all star cast is phenomenal." Positive review after positive read labels *The Butler* a "must see." Some reviews add that it is "captivating," "fantastic," and "one of histories best." One reviewer discusses his/her appreciation for a look at both the violence and blood represented in *The Butler* where it existed and plausible looks at family life, which sharply contrast with commenters who even find representations of historical racism to be racist.[28]

While the majority of viewers enjoy *The Butler,* label it as "relevant," and say "what's not to like," plenty disagreed with equal passion, confidence, and certainty, a large number even say that *The Butler* is an "Obama propaganda movie." Common complaints say the film tries to do too much, is boring, has poor sound and image quality, and/or weak acting and directorial leadership. Oprah Winfrey and the casting of

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[27] "Customer Reviews for *The Butler*."

[28] Ibid.

Jane Fonda as Nancy Reagan receive the most specific complaints by far. By the title and advertising iconography, a number of reviewers (including some ultimately positive ones) also expected a movie centered around the White House alone. Reviewers regularly express frustration with comments such as "expected this movie to be about the main characters time in the White House and not focused mainly on the Civil Rights movement" and "we were really disappointed that this movie was more about civil rights than the butler." A number of people said they were unable to finish watching the film and that the movie is "in the running for the worst movie ever!," as is often expressed in various ways. One review says, "I found this movie to be shallow and pedantic. It would have been slightly better in cartoon form. I still do not think it would be good at all." The only particularly insightful review found the film simply has noble aims yet only attempts to do too much in too small of a time frame: "It ends up coming off as 'the top ten greatest hits of racial politics' more than it does a personal story because it tries to cover so much historical ground that the characters relationships and their personal evolutions get lost a bit in the shuffle."[29]

Comments by viewers and reviewers, overall, focus on various understandings of the past and associated world views embodied in *The Butler*. One common thread revolves around the urgency and originality, or lack thereof. A self-identified conservative labels Lee Daniels's movie as "perhaps one of the most relevant movies of our times" because it provides careful accounts of those who made the democracy we

[29] Ibid.

experience now possible. In a sentiment similar to bell hooks's and Arthur Jafa's comments in a talk at the New School in New York, one reviewer says, "the story of the 20th century struggle for Civil Rights is a story that needs - nay, DEMANDS - to be told" but uses too many clichéd images of violence. In contrast, one child of the movement who is clearly well-versed in the teachings and writings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. expresses a desire that *The Butler*, which caused him/her to cry, will "start/re-ignite a conversation of the American History Civil Rights Foot Soldiers; and the work we still have to do to bring Equity and Solidarity with Compassion and Love to Our Hearts." A common point of contention for reviewers is with their belief that *The Butler* is "nothing new." Another reviewer elaborates on this basic point by saying "for the love of God we don't need to get the blacks riled up about something that happened so many years ago. They are free to live a productive life as Americans. Stop throwing this in our faces - I don't mean to sweep it under the rug as some will accuse me of suggesting - just let it alone and let us all get on with our lives."[30]

Civil rights-related memories awakened by *The Butler* represent another common thread found in Amazon reviews. Only one review, a disabled veteran, mentions that the film awakened memories of Vietnam and found it extraordinarily difficult. Some reviewers were "sad to relive" the trauma involved. One White person discusses a memory from her childhood during the civil rights era of sitting at "the back

[30] "Customer Reviews for *The Butler*;" and bell hooks and Arthur Jafa, "Transgression," *The New School* (accessed November 1, 2014) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fe-7ILSKSog.

of a bus down south and having the driver pull it over until I and the others with me moved to the front of the bus, 'where we belonged'. Hard to watch because it was so up close and personal."[31]

Others more specifically appreciate and welcome the once-dormant memories that found new life after watching *The Butler*. "This movie was a great reminder to me and should be to anyone who has gone through the struggle of prejudice, hatred and racism." Another person says, *The Butler* "evokes all emotions" and says "those of us who were growing up during the decades of change…cannot help but remember the headlines and perhaps our own experiences."[32]

While recalling personal memories from their childhood, a few reviewers make connections to concerns of the 2010s. For instance, "What a shame that we have not been able to change our own repression of our fellow man, but instead cling to outdated, ineffective, inhuman 'traditions.'" As one indication for how audiences too frequently process moves as real, legitimate history without reservation, some found *The Butler* as a clarification to struggles they, for example, "witnessed in confusion as a young boy" and "truly did not understand." Others recall childhood innocence of asking his/her mom about segregation and the "Colored" signs. Another reviewer says, "I wish I had been more aware of all of the problems in the south. It really upsets me that the country was so awful." Another says, "What a wonderful story to share. So true to what

[31] "Customer Reviews for *The Butler*."

[32] Ibid.

people in my community experiences. My Mother was a housekeeper and a lot of the things she shared seemed to match up with this story. Of course back then I could have cared less. I just wanted to go out and play." One review explicitly, although likely unknowingly, challenges the White-Black Binary and the typical use of the "Civil Rights Movement" historical trajectory: "Having grown up in the only Hispanic family in our small town in Tennessee during the 1960s...much of this story stirred my memory and made a direct hit on my heart. Beautifully written, beautifully acted, a story that you need to watch."[33]

In addition, a popular praise of *The Butler* includes how much about the past it "accurately" teaches viewers. Reviewer after reviewer recommends *The Butler* as an introduction to racism and history of the Civil Rights Revolution, with one adding that the film is creative in execution, several others "this movie is so true," another advising history buffs to see it, and another labeling *The Butler* the best of its kind. A number of viewers even compare it to a documentary. Reviewers also talk, although with few if any specifics and showing the power of film first-hand, about how much they learned about violence and racism. For instance:

> Confirmation of all we knew but had forgotten or chose to forget. This is one of those movies that puts a human face, an identity, onto the cause of man's injustice toward man, with a broad, sweeping brush! Acting was phenomenal; bringing their characters to life with the realism and dignity they deserved. Highly recommended viewing! Should be required in High School American History courses.

[33] Ibid.

One person uncritically comments that the movie taught her more about the Nashville Student Movement than she knew growing up in Nashville.[34]

In a few cases, some of the historical information viewers reported enjoying, however, is not so readily supported by evidence. For example, one loves "the dignified manner of the presidents, and the way they treated the staff." Others use *The Butler* as a measuring stick to comment, for example: "Nice movie to sit back and relax. Reminder of how bad things were in the past, how far we have come and still have to go."[35]

People find the movie so accurate and moving that many reported crying and watching it over and over. Commenters labeled it a "sad heart wrenching story," reported collapsing psychologically and metaphorically, and enjoying it but finding the story "very hard to watch." One person describes being flooded with emotions in a crowded theater wishing to be alone. Such reactions, along with the others, are vital glimpses into the everyday souls of people and how close to the surface everything related to the past and racism remains.[36]

Along this same line of reasoning, those who give *The Butler* less than four stars often specifically stated the film is full of historical inaccuracies. Some comments revolved around the larger-than-life controversy, addressed at the beginning of this chapter, whereby Lee Daniels created a film "inspired by" not "based on the life of" a

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

real-life individual. One reviewer uses this to dismiss the entire film because "it's basically just a platform to tell a rewritten version of history that has no bearing on the actual true events." In general, however, accusations of inaccuracy were wholly vague, like those of accuracy. For example, "It would have been nice to see the true story, rather that the half truths and fabrications that were depicted in this movie." Two reviewers justify their assessment on having grown up in the 1950s and never seeing the "kind of Black hatred the movie shows." Characterizations of President Ronald Regan receive the most comments by far. Viewers took task with what they saw as the film labeling him a racist.[37]

While from a historical perspective, I have often asserted that all good history is revisionist history, "revisionist" has developed a negative connotation and is typically used by non-scholars to describe "liberal," "left-wing," and "right-wing" histories that "rewrite" the past and perpetuate racism by talking about racism, for example. A sizable number of the negative reviews fall into this category because they see *The Butler* as "revisionist history" and "too political." For example, without legitimate concern for the actual revolutionary nature of this film, one finds *The Butler* "just another crappy left-wing inspired propaganda piece to stir up racial hatred" and another with the same core message elaborates by explaining, also without an internalized understanding of everyday life, "today's black race endured nothing and today's white race did nothing." Curiously, for a film about the White House and the Civil Rights Revolution, one person

[37] Ibid.

says, “Was really surprised this movie was really political! I did not care for it!, and another person says, “the story was too political. It seemed like a two-hour commercial for the Democratic Party.” The preceding reviews likely speak more to the unprecedented partisanship of the 2010s than actual opinions about the film and everything associated with it. In addition to rhetoric voicing opposition to liberals, this review (and many others) show a lack of critical thinking and historical literacy:

> This was going to be a great movie...until the liberals all crawled out of the dark places and went overboard on the big political show at the end. They made Reagan look like a raging bigot and finished with a praise Obama puke-fest. Ruined what would have been a really great move. Thanks Hollywood, you can't let it be neutral, you just have to spin it your way.

In addition, numerous people are very adamant in their disproval of the civil rights focus in *The Butler*. For example, “This film turned out to be the history of the civil rights movement in the 60s, not at ALL what I expected...Unfortunately I purchased this thinking I would watch it again. NEVER!....the subject matter of this film is NOT about life in the White House during these presidencies.....FAR FROM IT...What a waste of time.” People with such extreme reactions to the film as discussed in this and the previous paragraph seem to feel that Lee Daniels attacks “them” personally for being White. One particularly loud voice of opposition provides a good example of how (White) people in the United States are often unable to have productive conversations about racialized events or the past in an objective way with an eye to systemic issues:

> This movie should have been called *The Ode to Current President*. First of all, historically, it’s not accurate, even though they say it’s based on true story. It’s long and boring throughout, Oprah acting sucks to say the least, and after finally finishing watching it, I came to a conclusion that this movie has a message and

> it's this: you ready? There is a problem in America and its White! All White peoples are bad, villains and haters! Make them go away and everything will be fine and dandy! Forget about real American history and all our achievements. Forget about how we got where we at in world now. Forget about USA being land of opportunities and all. Instead let's concentrate on how bad Whites are! What a waste of my time and my money.

Another difficult-to-understand 855-word review (most reviews are 100-200 words) titled "Hollywood Unleashes Another "Hate-Whitey" Flick" also clearly feels victimized and does not recognize that the vast majority of films are anything but "hate-whitey" as we know, in part, through an analysis of the White savior figure. One reviewer calls out fellow Internet colleagues by saying, "Some people don't like to be reminded that we have a long way to go."[38]

Additionally, some comments specifically speak to the degree with which the general public does not practice the same complex methodologies with it comes to notions of the past and historiography. For instance, one suggests people who teach history have it easy when it comes to civil rights because all they have to do is cue *The Butler* and hit "play." Similarly, another person praises this production and accepting the common belief that "one" event happens at a time, suggest that it fully covers major events one-by-one across forty years. In other instances, commenters belief that the people acting are expressing personal opinions and experiences. For instance, "Do not miss this film if you want to understand the past 70 years…from the point of view of the

[38] Ibid.

people who suffered from our institutional and cultural racism" in a review titled "Learn your history from the inside."[39]

An indicator of the degree to which *Forrest Gump*, *The Help*, *12 Years a Slave*, and even *Django* have entered and penetrated public consciousness is the degree to which reviewers reference them to varying degrees. Unique mentions include 58 for *Forrest Gump*, 20 for *12 Years a Slave*, 13 for *The Help*, and 4 for *Django*. Reviewers either spoke with great approval or great disproval of what is widely recognized as the "Forrest Gump" approach to the past. One particularly favorable one says this is "*Forrest Gump* with soul!" Likewise, comments for *12 Years a Slave* were fairly evenly divided among those who hate it and *The Butler*, love it and *The Butler*, or see one or the other as better. Three of four commenters see *Django*, *The Butler*, and similar films as only perpetuating everything bad in Hollywood and society. In a vast oversimplification, one reviewer sees *The Butler* as "very historical and important" but "kinda like a male version" of *The Help*." In contrast, complaints regularly voiced concern because *The Butler* was either too different from *The Help* or not as powerful and accurate as *The Help*. One says, "Thought this would compare to the help. Instead received a white presidential bashing flick. Hard pressed to spend five dollars to buy. Wish I could take it back."[40]

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

Collectively, the 1,684 reviews left on Amazon very clearly speak to the degree with which people, whether they found it welcome or unwelcome, paid attention to and remembered the world view embodied in *The Butler*. Comment after comment connections present-day issues with filmic representations of the past. Unlike *The Help* with its focus on White people and White savior, *The Butler*'s emphasis on Black people was not as welcomed. While some responded with tears of painful memories and understanding, others found *The Butler* vile, saying it is "Absolutely terrible rag sheet propaganda video of its time. Enough of these videos, this is ridiculous to say the least."[41]

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> *I had always loved serving. But just felt different now. I didn't know that an old man could feel so lost. That's how I felt. That's how I felt. Americans always turned a blind eye to what we'd done to our own. We look out to the world and judge. We hear about the concentration camps, but these camps went on for 200 years right here in America.*
>
> **-Cecil Gains of *The Butler*, 2013**

> *Boys, remember that we are helping to make history. We have a small part, perhaps a menial part, but they can't do much here without us. They've got to eat, you know.*
>
> **-Alonzo Fields, 1960**[42]

The Butler's notable and unique accomplishments are multifold. It has a

[41] Ibid.

[42] Lusane, *Black History of the White House*, 268.

predominantly Black cast and a Black narrative that sincerely centers around the hopes and fears of (fictional) individuals racialized as Black through the turbulent 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s with an emphasis on the decades of the Civil Rights Revolution. It touches on how intensely regimented, scary, and unpredictable life could be for Blacks and represents the "stubborn" will to live that Vincent Harding traces back hundreds of years. Such agency, attributions, articulation, awareness, and voice in *The Butler* could hardly be more supported by evidence and in sharper contrast with the stereotypical and dehumanized historical depictions of Black men and women in *The Help* and in many other films, for example. Far too many films simply marginalize or ignore Black voices and instead privilege White voices, even in films about the Civil Rights Revolution, as has been discussed in this dissertation. Unlike *The Help*, *The Butler* has not received endless accolades, much to the dismay of its many fans, as in part noted on review after review on Amazon. While it surely lacks in the humor, fine-tuned acting (e.g., after seeing activist beaten, JFK shoves some plates), costumes and makeup, and feel-good spirt of *The Help* and has a few clichéd lines (e.g., "I brought you into this world, I can take you out of it!" and "Every gray hair I have is cause of that boy."), along with a number of weak lines that do not contribute anything to the story let alone civil rights issues (e.g., "All graduations are long. She was so nosy. I'm gonna make some potato salad.," "Where shall we start? I'm not sure. This end, maybe over there?," and "You want some peanuts? No, thank you. You like peanuts or…I don't like peanuts. I'm too hot to eat. Hey, can I have some of those? Long bus ride."), for example, *The Butler* tells a story that even with its imperfections is human and basically

gets History on the mark. It shows that segregation was about together and unequal, not separation. It shows physical violence where it existed historically. It explains how butlers and maids survived by developing two not-so-metaphorical selves. Illustrations of double consciousness as activism and challenges to the psychological wages of Whiteness go beyond instructions on properly serving White people and constitute an indictment of White people, with a keen awareness of underlying power dynamics. It somewhat indicts White people and empowers Black people without painting Whites as only perpetrators and Blacks as only victims. *The Butler* does this without being racist in its representation or relying on White savior figures. *The Butler* at least touches on the unique and different roles grassroots activists and the federal government played in the Civil Rights Revolution. And, finally, *The Butler* runs toward History.[43]

Because of its timing and inspiration, *The Butler* is inevitably also a celebration of how much things have changed in the United States, especially changes since November 2008--even if more symbolic than tangible or real--and captures the air of hope that existed for unique historical moments, however brief. Enslavement constituted the very fibers of the hopes and fears of those White individuals who established the United States. The Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the Naturalization Act of 1790, for example, all further codified early visions of a United

[43] The emphasis on decades in this paragraph is for effect; otherwise, I follow Susan Sontag's thinking that decades are generally meaningless social constructions: "I feel that there's something terrible about making the fifties and sixties and seventies into major constructs. They're myths," see Jonathan Cott, *Susan Sontag: The Complete Rolling Stone Interview* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 30.

States--a slave society--where Blacks were almost exclusively enslaved and ineligible for recognition as human beings. By analyzing what I call the "rhetoric of implied exclusion," we can more readily understand how declarations that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" and promises of full equality and opportunity enshrined in the Constitution, for example, were not seen as immoral and contradictory to newly created laws. Inequality between Whites and Blacks, Indians, and other non-Whites was so fully and thoroughly assumed that the "all" in "all men are created equal" did not actually mean "all." Visions of an all-White utopian-like society where continually confirmed and codified.

Excitement ran so high when Barack Obama first became President-Elect that people of all political persuasions wondered if racism was over or if a revolution of some kind would ensue. People were energized. While institutional and individual racism is far from over and scholars such as Michelle Alexander argue that discrimination has not decreased since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, only changed faces again and again, having a Black president in a nation that previously enslaved and used science to deem Black men and women less than or other than human is a significant step forward or, at least, a significant change. To use the cliché, the so-called Founding Fathers are definitely "in dismay, rolling in their graves." Whereas not too long ago Barack Obama could have only worked in a domestic capacity, President Barack Obama

serves as the Commander-in-Chief of the United States.[44]

Another important measure of change or comparison emerges when we think about the controversial 1988 film, *Mississippi Burning*, which was the first Hollywood film to tackle representations of the Civil Rights Revolution. Directed by Alan Parker, this film dramatizes the murders of James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in the summer of 1964 by the Klu Klux Klan and the resulting Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) enquiry. Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner had planned to participate in the voter registration of Mississippi Blacks. In contrast to the arguments of historians, such as John Dittmer with his *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* and Charles M. Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, who focus on the grassroots agency of Black people and their struggles against all of the multitudinous layers of local, state, and national governments, *Mississippi Burning* depicts Blacks as afraid, helpless, and uneducated and the FBI specifically and the entire government generally as a White savior more committed to equality and righting wrongs than anyone else. As William H. Chafe puts it, in *Mississippi Burning*, Blacks "tremble in fear of Whites" and FBI agents are "sent to the rescue of submissive, illiterate, quaking Black people unable and unwilling to stand up for themselves." Such depictions, of course, stand in sharp contrast to Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer, Anne Moody, and the 85,000

[44] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010).

Mississippians who participated in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's freedom vote, a grassroots effort to explicitly show their power, to give only a few examples from Mississippi alone. *Mississippi Burning* does give important insights into the everyday terror that existed in Mississippi but overemphasizes the racism of Whites in Mississippi, as well as the commitment to human decency on the part of governments across the nation, and completely omits that Black people had feelings and fought for their own rights of their own initiative. In sharp contrast to reality, the FBI did far more damage than positive good when it came to civil rights because of its counter intelligence program or COINTELPRO. Specifically, the FBI targeted activists and major leaders, including King and Malcom X, and it neglected to truly get involved when White people murdered or attacked Black people.[45]

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[45] William Chafe, "*Mississippi Burning*," in *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1995), 274-277; Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 148-154; and Robert Brent Toplin, *History By Hollywood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 25-44.

For more information on *Mississippi Burning*, see Kelly J. Madison, "Legitimation Crisis and Containment: The 'Anti-Racist-White-Hero' Film," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16, no. 4 (1999): 405-413; Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper, "From Civil Rights to Black Nationalism: Hollywood v. Black America?" in *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 160-186; Sharon Monteith, "The Move-Made Movement: Civil Rites of Passage," in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. Paul Grainger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 130-133; Cortney L. Smith, "*Mississippi Burning*: The Perceived Reality of Docudrama vs. a Documentary" (Unpublished MA Thesis: The University of Arkansas, 2008); Melvyn Stokes, "Remembering the 1960s: *Mississippi Burning* and *JFK*," in *American History: Through Hollywood Film, From the Revolution to the 1960s* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 209-230; Toplin, "*Mississippi Burning*: 'A Standard to Which We Couldn't Live Up,'" in *History by Hollywood* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 25-44; and Carol M. Ward, "The Southern Landscape in Contemporary films" in *Beyond the Stars: Locales in American Popular Film*, eds. Paul Loukides and Linda K. Fuller (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 103-117.

For more information on COINTELPRO, see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Dissent in the United States* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2011); David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (New York: Open Road, 2015); and "FBI Records: The Vault – Black Extremist," *The FBI: Federal Bureau of*

In *The Butler* the Executive Branch is not a White savior but is still painted in a highly-favorable light. Only Governor Orval Faubus is discussed in somewhat negative terms. Additionally, *The Butler* shows violence but does not make Blacks singularly into victims. So while the overall representation of the government did not change from *Mississippi Burning* to *The Butler*, Blacks are shown as active agents of change in the latter film.

Men of Honor (2000) is also useful for examining change when compared with *The Butler*. This film revolves around real-life Carol Brashear's (Cuba Gooding, Jr.) early career in a racist United States Navy. George Tillman's *Men of Honor* is the only Civil Rights Revolution film to legitimately indict any aspect of the government for its part in perpetuating racism and massive resistance.

As one indication of how interested society can be in the past, *The Butler* has awakened and created widespread popular interest in the stories of the actual men and women who have worked in the White House, besides presidents, first ladies, and their children. These individuals include William Bowen and William Bowen, Jr. and many other fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and brothers, for example. Bill Hamilton recently retired after working for each president beginning with Eisenhower and ending with Obama. Hamilton stood up to LBJ and, speaking for the Black staff, said that unless they received a raise they would refuse to work at the next State dinner. In an indication

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Investigations (accessed November 6, 2016) https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists.

of how quickly things can occur with a bit of pressure, LBJ approved and implemented raises two days later. Renewed attention has been given to the memoirs of Black maids and butlers, such as Alonzo Fields's 1960 *My 21 Years in the White House* and Lillian Rogers Parks and Frances Spatz Leighton's 1961 *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House*. NBC's miniseries from 1979, *Backstairs at the White House*, inspired by Parks and Leighton's is now available on DVD. People are finally fiving Clarence Lusane's, Professor of Political Science at American University, very interesting *The Black History of the White House* the full attention it deserves. New books too have resulted because of Obama's election and the success of *The Butler*. These include Kate Andersen Brower's *The Residence: Inside the Private World of The White House*, which covers the early 1960s to the present day, Jesse Holland's *The Invisibles: The Untold Story of African American Slaves in the White House*, and Wil Haygood's *The Butler: A Witness to History*, which provides the most comprehensive biography of Eugene Allen, the "real" butler, currently available.[46]

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[46] "Blacks in the White House: Slavery and Service," *NBC News* (accessed January 10, 2016) http://www.nbcnews.com/id/28109794/ns/politics-white_house/t/blacks-white-house-slavery-service/#.VwrBAse505d; Anja Crowder, "'This Week' Sunday Spotlight: Bill Hamilton's 55 Years in the White House," *ABC News* (accessed January 10, 2016) http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/08/this-week-sunday-spotlight-bill-hamiltons-55-years-in-the-white-house/; Will Higgins, "The Real 'Butler': Alonzo Fields Served 4 Presidents," *USA Today* (accessed January 7, 2015) http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/19/butler-alonzo-fields/2666199/; Jamilah King, "*Lee Daniels' The Butler* and the History of Black Work at the White House," *ColorLines* (accessed January 10, 2016) http://www.colorlines.com/articles/lee-daniels-butler-and-history-black-work-white-house; Lusane, *Black History of the White House*, 270; Dominique Mann, "In Wake of New Film *The Butler*, Black Ex-White House Staffers Reflect," *Melissa Harris-Perry* (accessed January 10, 2016) http://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry/wake-new-film-the-butler-black-ex; Jackie Mansky, "The Slaves of the White House Finally Get to Have Their Stories Told," *Smithsoniain.com* (accessed January 21, 2016) http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/The-Slaves-of-the-White-House-Finally-Get-to-Have-Their-Stories-Told-180957917/?no-ist; and Daphne Muse, "What It Was Really Like to Be a Black Butler in Mid-Century Washington," *The Atlantic* (accessed January 7, 2015) http://www.theatlantic.com/national/

And yet, like the other films examined in this dissertation, even *The Butler* changes history where history is not convenient in terms of telling a "good" patriotic story, keeping history approachable and compacted in approximately two hours, and having sufficient opportunities to make substantial profits. While *The Butler* does give hits at how dangerous and unpredictable life could be for Black people in the United States, overall it paints an overly optimistic and positive portrait of everyday conditions during the Civil Rights Revolution. And by focusing on an exceptionally economically successful Black family where the father works at the White House and has daily contact with the President and one of the sons attends colleges, earns a Masters degree, and is elected to Congress, *The Butler* does not tell a story that would resonate with most Black people who lived during the time represented. Looking at these characters and events as historical stand-ins, Lee Daniels inaccurately suggests such opportunities, including regular and safe employment, were not just possibilities but realities for Black men. He also omits institutional racism where the White House and presidents of the United States are concerned. Except for a brief line from *The Butler*'s fictional Reagan where he expresses worry that he may be wrong about racism and his responses, the film paints a utopian view of presidents and their actions. It inaccurately suggests they were wholeheartedly in support, without reservation, of the Civil Rights Revolution. Worse, it erases actions by presidents and the federal government to actively halt the

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archive/2013/09/what-it-was-really-like-to-be-a-black-butler-in-mid-century-washington/279417.

evolution of basic human rights for minorities. The film also strongly implies that before Obama's election, Black men and women had only been butlers and maids at the White House. Historically, however, in 1955 E. Frederic Morrow became the first Black man to work in an executive position following Eisenhower's appointment, and there were many others who held important executive offices before Obama. By ignoring gradual change, *The Butler* overlooks that history is about processes, not events, and somewhat overstates the significance of the 2008 election. On the same line of thought, *The Butler* ends very optimistically, too much so, but then this helps audiences process the historical narrative. It leaves viewers with the problematic impression that racism is over and the ideals of the United States have been fully realized, achieved, and implemented. Whereas far too many recent events show, power and opportunity are so close, yet so far away, too.[47]

While Lee Daniels's work, too, is distinctively victim to the great human struggle of coming to terms with the past, *The Butler*, nonetheless, overall, advocates for a commendable, very different kind of relationship with History compared to most films about the past. It wants people to be conscious and patriotic, to have a reason for what they do or do not do, and to reflect. It does not pretend at any point that the past was singularly utopian. It directs its viewers to run toward History in the way its characters do and to cure themselves of historical amnesia. The stories we need, the stories that are important, at least in the case of *The Butler* are the same ones we condemn too

[47] Lusane, *Black History of the White House*, 272, 281.

often as a society, as evident by many voices in the *Amazon* reviews. We think we want and need the kind of running from History portrayed in *Forrest Gump*.

CHAPTER FOUR:
"EVERY KID SHOULD HAVE A NANNY LIKE WHOOPI": HOLLYWOOD FILM AND PUSHING THE CIVIL RIGHTS REVOLUTION TO THE SIDELINES

We've seen Martin Luther King and those kinds of stories, but the Watts riots, the Black Panthers, and more militant elements have been repressed in popular culture….These are stories that deal not with moving, charismatic, heartwarming sermons. They deal with issues that can't easily be dismissed.

-Professor Todd Boyd, 2015

Corrina, Corrina *also wavers in its depiction of the racial tensions underlying the story….Fortunately,* Corrina, Corrina *is bolstered by its two main actresses and some well-drawn secondary characters in Corrina's family…It's also helped by hugely evocative period decor.* Corrina, Corrina *is loaded with nostalgic props, costumes, television shows, ice cream vendors, you name it. Hula-Hoops, Zorro outfits, chicken with cherries and pineapple: the characters regard these things as so ordinary that they don't even get a second look. These artifacts don't become overbearing, and they convey the repressed, fastidious cultural atmosphere in which the story takes place.*

-Janet Maslin, 1994

In fact, just about everything in this heartfelt plodder is predictable. First-time writer-director Jessie Nelson serves up vintage clichés in a '50s setting--the dullness seems to be part of the period decor…..Even though the '50s period flavor is constantly reinforced, Corrina is more like a figure from the '90s.

-Peter Rainer, 1994

Representation isn't just about the pictures the media uses to tell stories, but about which stories they choose to tell.[1]

-Patricia Phalen, 2013

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[1] Janet Maslin, "A Wise Housekeeper Tries to Tidy Up a Bereft Family," *The New York Times* (accessed July 17, 2016) http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res= 9D00EFD81530F931A2575BC0A962958260; Peter Rainer, "'90s Love Story Locked in the '50s: Movie Review: *Corrina, Corrina* with Whoopi Goldberg and Ray Liotta, is Well-meaning, but its Portrait of the Races Keeps Them Apart Rather Than Together," *Los Angeles Times* (accessed July 17, 2016) http://articles.latimes.com/1994-08-12/entertainment/ca-26227_1_ray-liotta; The Sociological Cinema's *Facebook* page (accessed December 20, 2013) https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid= 600438913356736&id=126283397438959; and Cited in Steven Zeitchik, "Watts Riots Still Mostly off Hollywood's Radar after 50 Years," *Los Angeles Times* (accessed July 18, 2016) http://www.latimes.com/ entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-watts-movies-20150810-story.html.

Commenting on Jessie Nelson's *Corrina, Corrina* (1994), Stephanie L. Miller writes, "Every kid should have a nanny like Whoopi. This is an AWESOME movie. Whoopi plays the part of Corrina with such heart and such fun, that every kid who sees her will want her for a nanny." Miller's review on *Amazon* clearly not only accepts but celebrates *Corrina, Corrina*'s version of History, a version that not only erases the pain and hard-won accomplishments associated with the Civil Rights Revolution but also a version that typifies most contemporary Hollywood films and reviews about this important era.[2]

Similar films are regularly set in whole or in part in the equally revolutionary and turbulent 1950s and 1960s, eras during which Baby Boomers started life and entered adulthood. These are also eras that thrive in (White) historical memory as harbingers of long-abandoned ideal times. There is a persistent problem in that films such as *Corrina, Corrina*, as well as *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), *Men in Black 3* (2012), *The Sandlot* (1993), *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008), *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), and *There Goes My Baby* (also known as *The Last Days of Paradise*, 1994) have plots that unfold during these and surrounding eras yet either completely or almost completely ignore racism and civil rights-issues where they existed historically and when they are relevant to the story told. Such complete re-writing of History presents utopian versions of the past where no racialized conflicts existed, inaccurate versions that audiences internalize as

[2] "Customer Reviews for *Corrina, Corrina*," *Amazon* (accessed November 8, 2013) https://smile.amazon.com/Corrina-Whoopi-Goldberg/dp/B00002SSKH/ref=cm_cr_arp_d_bdcrb_top?ie=UTF8

true. Additionally, while films such as *Crazy in Alabama* (1999), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996), *Hairspray* (2007), and *Heart of Dixie* (1989) include at least some intense civil rights-struggles, they do so as either something of a side story or with the use of White savior figures at the expense of meaningful representations of Black people. This chapter will provide a brief overview of how these films erase, obscure, and minimize important History, with detailed discussions of *The Sandlot* and *Crazy in Alabama*, along with smaller discussions of other films mentioned. These films, just as filmic texts discussed throughout this work, greatly change and misrepresent the past to promote utopian visions and to encourage loyalty and patriotism toward the United States, both of which are manifestations of how society has continued to struggle with the past, at least as it concerns the Civil Rights Revolution.[3]

Before moving forward, an interlude is necessary: Of course, by no means does a setting in the 1950s or 1960s automatically require (direct) inclusions of racialized tensions or civil rights-activism. *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *The Hours* (2002), *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003), *October Sky* (1999), *Pleasantville* (1998), *Secondhand Lions* (2003), and *Stand by Me* (1986) are only a few instances of important films that are at least partially set during these decades and are narratives exclusively about White people in

[3] As a socially constructed concept, decades are notoriously limiting and problematic. While arbitrary measuring sticks, decades are powerful in the historical imagination. As cultural critic Susan Sontag says, "I feel that there's something terrible about making the fifties and sixties and seventies into major constructs. They're myths," see Jonathan Cott, *Susan Sontag*: *The Complete Rolling Stone Interview* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); and Andrew Joseph Pegoda, "World War I Occurred in the 19th Century!," *Without Ritual, Autonomous Negotiations* (accessed April 13, 2016) https://andrewpegoda.com/2016/04/13/world-war-i-occurred-in-the-19th-century/.

White spaces who struggle with issues related to education and independence, family, and/or gender and sexuality. Given the limitations of film as a medium, any given story can only tell so much, and any story can only have a certain amount of contextualization. Although, as racialized issues are intimately connected to everything in United States History--as the "sugar metaphor" voices so well, as discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation--and since every one was involved in the Civil Rights Revolution whether by participation, opposition, or non-participation, all of these films could certainly be analyzed against a backdrop of the Civil Rights Revolution using Critical Race Theory. For instance, although never specifically addressed, the school is still all-White in *Mona Lisa Smile*, and in *The Hours*, the Browns live in a newly-created all-White suburb prompted by World War II, the early Civil Rights Revolution, and White flight (one manifestation of what has been termed "massive resistance").[4]

Similarly, the inclusion of both White and non-White characters in fiction certainly does not automatically necessitate the presence of inequality, at least between two characters. For example, Dr. Samuel Proctor (Gregory Alan Williams), who is a Black preacher, and Reverend Vernon Tyson (Ricky Schroder), who is a White preacher, in *Blood Done Sign My Name* (2010) treat each other with authentic acceptance and trust. Screenwriters and film directors should, of course, not automatically be criticized for the

[4] One relevant line from *Secondhand Lions* is: "Sometimes, the things that may or may not be true are the things that a man needs to believe in the most: that people are basically good; that honor, courage, and virtue mean everything; that power and money, money and power, mean nothing; that good always triumphs over evil; and I want you to remember this, that love, true love, never dies. You remember that, boy. Doesn't matter if they are true or not. A man should believe in those things because those are the things worth believing in."

celluloid stories they choose to tell. Nonetheless, the proliferation of such "White" films contributes to the on-going marginalization of peoples and histories associated with the Civil Rights Revolution and *not* associated with it. Such White films deserve comment because they contribute to the formation of most vivid historical memories about the 1950s and 1960s.[5]

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Jessie Nelson's *Corrina, Corrina* takes place in Los Angeles, California, during the fall of 1959 and depicts the evolving relationships between Molly Singer (Tina Majorino) and Corrina Washington (Whoopi Goldberg) and between Molly's father, Manny Singer (Ray Liotta), and Corrina. Molly's mother has suddenly died, and Manny is in search of someone to look after the young Molly and assist with household chores. Manny interviews a dozen applicants, men and women of a variety of racializations, except none are Black. Manny ends up hiring and quickly firing one White woman for behaving improperly. Everything seems fundamentally hopeless, as the movie says, until Corrina, who is Black, becomes a maid for the Singers, who are White. Corrina cures Molly's depression and starts a romantic relationship with Manny well before the movie ends.

[5] For excellent and up-to-date information on both White flight and massive resistance, see Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and George Lewis*, Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Equally important to acknowledge is that while Corrina is not fully "Mammied" (Corrina is a bad cook, says she does not like being a maid, is in contact with publishers in hopes of having her article published, discusses her extensive knowledge about music with Manny and her family, and often spends time with her own family), *Corrina, Corrina* also goes to great lengths to portray in extensive detail the notion that Black women are uniquely suited to cooking, cleaning, and taking care of White children, as Manny interviews a dozen applicants who are shown to be not just less-than-preferred but completely outlandish and complexly unacceptable. In this regard, Corrina is "Mammied." She is also "Mammied" in that she is funny and loving; she even lies to protect Molly and breaks laws and rules without thought for herself.

Given that Nelson chose to situate this story during the chronological heart of the Civil Rights Revolution, this movie makes urgent a number of comments. The culture of segregation does not explicitly exist in the world of *Corrina, Corrina* in any shape or form. Like the majority of films in some way about or situated around the Civil Rights Revolution, *Corrina, Corrina* is much more about White people than anything else. Specifically, *Corrina, Corrina* is, first, a story about Molly's recovery and transformation from deep depression with the attention of Corrina and, second, about how Manny slowly falls in love with Corrina.

The film undermines the only voice--Corrina's sister, Jevina (Jenifer Lewis)--that almost directly speaks to racism by always portraying Jevina as someone who is simply always mad and upset, sneaking and lying, and unreasonable about something, similar to Hilly in *The Help* (2011). Jevina provides what was an overprotective, uninformed

warning to Corrina, who was already sincerely loving the Singers: “Ooh, Sistah Child. You need to stop kiddin’ yo’self. Now you know these White folks are gonna pretend you’re part of the family so they can work you all hours and not pay you for your time. Corrina, you're working too hard to be givin’ it away for free.” Such words could have had significantly more weight if Jevina were a more serious and developed character. In another scene, in what also could have been a powerful moment if it had been handled seriously and in more than just passing, Jevina opens and in her own sarcastic words interprets the letter she has been hiding from Corrina: “Dear Miss Washington. *High Hat* magazine would like to thank you for your article. Unfortunately, we are not interested in publishing articles by unknown Colored women. No matter how talented they are. Sincerely. Best regards. Yours truly. Whitey.”

The film approaches addressing some of the relevant racialized issues. When interviewed by Manny, Corrina explains that she is a graduate of Fisk University and is looking for work. *Corrina, Corrina* never goes any further, never explains that even highly-educated non-Whites in 1959 found few employment opportunities outside of being domestic workers or sharecroppers and encountered extremely low glass ceilings. Naturally, too, there is no acknowledgment that only a small percentage of Blacks had the opportunity to attend college at this time. “Prohibitions” on interracial relationships, such as the one between Manny and Corrina, in the 1959 created by this movie, take the form of one derogatory comment at a restaurant, one brief concern from Manny’s mother about how her son and Corrina could probably never build a home together, one nosey neighbor, and one of Corrina’s relatives, Jevina, who ultimately comes

around at the end. Consequently, *Corrina, Corrina* suggests there was nothing deemed unusual or wrong about a Black woman and a White man falling in love in 1959. The dangerous realities of such mutual relationships are deleted from the History presented by this film.[6]

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[6] Although beyond the scope for this study, Manny is vocally an atheist but has Jewish ancestry, as discussed in the film. This somewhat complicates the films overall presentation of Whiteness, Blackness, and other racialized realities.

Two films, otherwise not a focus in this dissertation, deserve some comment at this point. Both Don Roos and Jonathan Kaplan's *Love Field* (1992) and Todd Haynes's *Far From Heaven* (2002) depict a White woman and a Black Man who fall in love with each other but cannot be together because of society's prejudice around interracial friendships and relationships. Both films, especially *Love Field*, are focused on the White woman much more than the Black man. Interestingly, Dennis Haysbert plays the Black man, Paul and Raymond, in both of these films. Michelle Pfeiffer (who would later star in the 2007 version of *Hairspray*) and Julianne Moore play the White women, Lurene and Cathy, respectively.

Love Field is not examined here due to its focus on a woman's obsession with the Kennedys, which only increases following the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy, due to its extreme lack of popularity and thus influence on historical memory, and due to the scholarly attention it has already received. For how one article uses *Crazy in Alabama* and *Pleasantville* as a framework with which to briefly examine *Love Field* and *The Long Walk Home*, see Sharon Willis, "Race as Spectacle, Feminism as Alibi: Representing the Civil Rights Era in the 1990s," in *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies*, eds. Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo (New York: Routledge, 2001), 98-114.

Far From Heaven, although far from being popular or an influence on the historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution, is an important artistic, experimental, intellectual film and is made in the aesthetic style of Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959). *Far From Heaven* uses cinematic techniques more extensively and more effectively than any other film in this dissertation. The careful staging, framing, lighting, and coloring help illustrate this text's culturally, psychologically, and sociologically complexness. This film deals with class, race, gender, sex, sexual orientation in such an intersectional degree that these cannot be teased apart, per se. As a result, *Far From Heaven* is not examined in any substantial depth here because to do it correctly would take substantially more space than available here and require a completely different research framework. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that in *Far From Heaven* in terms of representations of the Civil Rights Revolution, there are no protests or interaction with any governmental authorities where racialized issues are concerned. Racism in the North was more silent and covert, than in in the South, and *Far From Heaven* shows this. The setting is fully fictional except for the name of the city and state. Each of six total scenes with Cathy and Raymond do, however, follow the reactions of other White and Black characters, as well as Cathy's and Raymond's feelings about racism, society at large, and each other. White and Black individuals of all ages react negatively to any discussion of anti-racism, especially the closeness between Cathy and Raymond, even when they are clearly only good friends. Cathy and Raymond discuss art and notions of Whiteness and Blackness together. As such, it risks overstating possibilities for Black men and the generosity and open-mindedness of White women with its focus on Cathy. But, Cathy never becomes a White savior figure and the movie is about her and Raymond's experiences and continued "education" about how rigid mores really are. *Far From Heaven* provides extensive positive representations of the Black male body. Raymond is a well-developed character, more so than any other Black male character examined in this dissertation. He is a dad and a businessman. At various times he is strictly professional, sad and crying, happy and laughing, and

In addition to her 1960s role as a domestic worker in *The Long Walk Home* (1990) and *Corrina, Corrina*, Whoopi Goldberg plays a nurse, Miss Valerie Owens, in *Girl, Interrupted*, a film inspired by Susanna Kaysen's 1993 memoir of the same name. Lisa Loomer, Anna Hamilton Phelan, David E. Tolchinsky, Jonathan Kahn, and James Mangold's film recounts Susanna's (Winona Ryder) experiences in a 1960s psychiatric hospital. In contrast to the memoir, Miss Valerie is racialized as Black. In the film, there is no acknowledgement that one Black nurse caring for an entire group of all-White patients would be highly unusual, if such a situation ever existed in the mid-twentieth century. And except for this one angry rant from Susanna addressed to Miss Valerie (because Miss Valerie scolds her, saying her only "sickness" is being rich and spoiled, which undermines that Susanna is actually confined to the hospital because of her nonconformity), historically relevant, real racism is completely absent in *Girl, Interrupted*:

> Is that your "professional" opinion? Is that what you've learned in your advanced studies at night school for Negro welfare mothers? I mean, Melvin doesn't have a clue, Wick is a "psycho" and you, you "pretend" to be a doctor. You review the

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occasionally frustrated and mad. His character is allowed to be smart, wise, conversational, and mad. *Far From Heaven* ends much more tragically than other films in this dissertation, too. Whereas *The Help, The Long Walk Home*, and *The Butler*, for example, end with the White and Black world symbolically united with the "outstretched arm," Cathy and Raymond are forever taken away from each other. *Far From Heaven* ends with the White and Black worlds and possibilities for interracial friendships shattered.

For existing scholarship on *Far From Heaven,* see Michael Bronski, "From *The Celluloid Closet* to *Brokeback Mountain*: The Changing Nature of Queer Film Criticism," *Cinéaste* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 22-26; Robert Sklar, "Review of *Far From Heaven*," *Cinéaste* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 38-39; and Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky, "The Price of Heaven: Remaking Politics in *All That Heaven Allows, Ali*: *Fear Eats the Soul*, *and Far From Heaven*," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 90-121.

charts and dole out meds. But you's ain't no doctor, Miss Valerie. You's just a little Black nursemaid.

Casting Miss Valerie as a Black nurse simultaneously suggests that White people en masse treated Black people markedly better than actually occurred and, consequently, that Black people had a variety of career choices during *and before* the 1960s, an especially important era during the Civil Rights Revolution. In contrast to the suggestion that any Black woman could be a nurse and face little discrimination in the film version of *Girl, Interrupted*, historically, while 98 percent of nurses were women, only 3 percent were Black in the 1940s and 1950s and only 5 percent in the 1960s.

Of course, Goldberg--with her status as something of an actor auteur--being the actress in the role of Miss Valerie deserves specific acknowledgment and inevitably contributes to her having been cast and to her effect. Goldberg makes erasing prejudice easier. Additionally, Goldberg's real-life extraordinary fame and success deserve praise and yet inevitably factors into how audiences very easily process and accept Odessa Cotter (*Long Walk Home*), Corrina, and Miss Valerie and the surrounding utopianized pasts Goldberg, and thus the characters she plays, manifest. Goldberg's fame, then, like that of other famous Black performers, almost inherently limits the degree with which she can possibly represent the horrors of the past. People see "Whoopi," not the historical people and events involved.[7]

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[7] Patricia D'Antonio and Jean C. Whelan, "Counting Nurses: The Power of Historical Census Data," *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 18, no. 19 (October 2009): 2717-2724. For more information about Goldberg's career, see Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, 4th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2001); Lisa Pertillar Brevard, *Whoopi Goldberg on Stage and Screen* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2013), especially 142-165; Katie Hogan, "Creating the Lesbian Mammy: *Boys on the Side* and the Politics of AIDS," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 2002):

A similar occurrence exists in *The Shawshank Redemption*. This Stephen King-based fictional movie is about the struggles and lives of various inmates, primarily Red (Morgan Freeman) and Andy (Tim Robbins), and the guards who watch them at the Shawshank State Penitentiary during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. At the expense of any commitment to historically accurate representations and because of his fame, distinguished accomplishments, and talents as an actor, including his "authoritative presence, demeanor, and deep voice," as stated by screenwriter-director Frank Darabont, Freeman--who is Black--plays Red--who is a middle-aged White Irish man. Going by phenotype, there are about ten Black men, a few hundred White men, and a few dozen White officers at the Shawshank State Penitentiary. As with many of the other films scrutinized in this chapter, not only are various issues related to Whiteness, Blackness, and the Civil Rights Revolution not factored into the story, but also racism never exists between any White and Black prisoners or between governmental institutions and Black prisoners. Consequently, *The Shawshank Redemption* presents a past frequented often in the 1990s that reexamines and recasts the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s as unique epochs primarily of racial harmony.[8]

88-102; and James Robert Parrish, *Whoopi Goldberg: Her Journey from Poverty to Megastardom* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1997).

[8] While Hollywood occasionally has Black actors and actresses play White characters, far more pervasive and problematic, of course, is Hollywood's prevalent use of White people to play non-White characters. During cinema's first several decades (continuing practices made popular with the minstrel show, a popular form of entertainment during the nineteenth-century), mainstream, big-name (White) directors used Blackface (White performers with their skin painted Black) instead of an actual Black person in most cases. Additionally, Hollywood has also always frequently elected to have a White person, without Blackface, play roles designed for non-White people. Such casting choices contribute to the further marginalization of Black performers and of Black pasts. Another common phenomenon in Hollywood film specifically and popular culture generally is the appropriation by Whites of non-White

cultural traditions, as in Katy Perry's donning of a Japanese kimono and makeup in an act of extensive cultural appropriation. For more information on these topics, see Tre'vell Anderson, "Twitter Says a White British Actor Playing a Mexican American is Exactly What's Wrong with Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times* (accessed January 7, 2016) http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-charlie-hunnam-edgar-valdez-villarreal-diversity-20160124-story.html; Agent Bedhead, "It's Not a Question of How: It's a Question of What," *PAJIBA* (accessed July 12, 2016) http://www.pajiba.com/career_assessments/morgan-freeman-career-assessment-its-not-a-question-of-how-its-a-question-of-what.php; Kathy Benjamin, "10 Notable Examples from Hollywood's Checkered History with Racebending," *PAJIBA* (accessed July 12, 2016) http://www.pajiba.com/think_pieces/10-notable-examples-from-hollywoods-checkered-history-with-racebending.php; *Internet Movie Database,* "*The Shawshank Redemption*: Trivia," *IMDb* (accessed July 25, 2016) http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111161/trivia; Carolina Moreno and Riley Arthur, "25 Times White Actors Played People Of Color And No One Really Gave A S**t," *Latino Voices: The Huffington Post* (accessed July 25, 2016) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/26-times-white-actors-played-people-of-color-and-no-one-really-gave-a-sht_us_56cf57e2e4b0bf0dab313ffc; Pegoda, "Katy Perry and Neo-Blackface," *Without Ritual, Autonomous Negotiations* (accessed November 25, 2013) https://andrewpegoda.com/2013/11/25/katy-perry-and-neo-blackface/; and Meredith Simons, "100 Times a White Actor Played Someone who Wasn't White," *The Washington Post* (accessed July 25, 2016) https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016 /01/28/100-times-a-white-actor-played-someone-who-wasnt-white/.

In a slightly different example, recent controversies surround Cynthia Mort's *Nina* (2016) which casts Zoe Saldana, a light-skinned Black Latina, as Nina Simone, the controversial and iconic musician of the Civil Rights Revolution. Public intellectual and author, including of the bestselling memoir *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates concludes that Simone "would have a hard time being cast in her own biopic." Coates explains that people are still deeply afraid of Black women and that it is "particularly hard for Black women, and even harder for Black women who share the dark skin, broad nose, and full lips of Nina Simone." Coates also criticizes those involved with the production of *Nina* for using makeup (Blackface) to darken Saldana's skin, especially when other Black performers could have played the role and given how important Simone's deep dark skin was in connection how society treated her. For more information on *Nina*, see Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Nina Simone's Face: The Upcoming Biopic about the Singer Proves that the World Still Isn't Ready to Tell her Story," *The Atlantic* (accessed March 20, 2016) http://www. theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/03/nina-simone-face/472107/; Leah Donnella, "Ta-Nehisi Coates On The Fight Over 'Nina Simone's Face,'" *National Public Radio* (accessed July 26, 2016) http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/03/19/470721842/ta-nehisi-coates-on-the-fight-over-nina-simones-face; and Rebecca Sun, "India Arie: Why Zoe Saldana as Nina Simone Is 'Tone-Deaf' Casting (Q&A)," *The Hollywood Reporter* (accessed July 26, 2016) http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/ india-arie-why-zoe-saldana-872960.

So-called "colorblind casting" is both contentious and popular and refers to the process of selecting performers without regard to racialization. Beyond a few brief comments, this debate is entirely beyond the scope of this dissertation. With exceptions for performances such as Lin-Manuel Miranda's experimental *Hamilton* (2015) which deliberately cast White historical figures as non-White characters and following Alvaro Saar Rios's argument, with exceptions for low-stakes high school and college productions where actors and actresses are getting experience, color-blind casting should not be used at the expense of historical authenticity. For contemporary stories, this can be positive if it brings more opportunities for People of Color, and it can be negative if it results in less racialized diversity. Depending on the specific time and place and plot portrayed in the movie or play to get the story correct, color-blind casting might necessitate changes in the dialogue to correctly account for the realities of Whiteness, Blackness, Browness, and so on. All of these issues and questions, though, bring up very important questions about racialization. For more information, see Alvaro Saar Rios, "Yes! Non-Latina/o Actors Can be Cast in Latina/o Roles," *HowLRound* (accessed March 5, 2016) http://howlround.com/yes-non-latinao-actors-can-be-cast-in-latinao-roles; and Howard Sherman, "What Does "Hamilton" Tell Us About Race In

Once more, similarly, mirroring *Corrina, Corrina*, Gina Prince-Bythewood's *The Secret Life of Bees* has a plot that unfolds in South Carolina in 1964 and tells how a group of Black women--Rosaleen (Jennifer Hudson), August (Queen Latifah), May (Sophie Okonedo), and June (Alicia Keys)--essentially adopt Lily Owens (Dakota Fanning), who is White and who has long been in depression because of her mother's death and her father's constant abuse. These women spend their time eating and laughing together, while also preparing homegrown honey, known as the best available, to be sold for profit. These Black women help Lily become a mature, independent, and budding young woman. Except for a television clip at the beginning about the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and except for Rosaleen expressing interest in trying to register to vote and her later announcing that she is a registered a voter, there is no hint even that a Black-led Civil Rights Revolution is occurring or that anything else is happening in the world. Representations of racism exist but are limited to when three White men attack Rosaleen and nearly kill her and when a mob beats and kidnaps Lily's Black boyfriend, Zach (Tristan Wilds), while they are both in the movie theater's "Colored Section." These may seem like dramatic illustrations of racism, but in the context of the entire film and when considering how the director structures them, they do not leave any lasting impression on viewers. While *The Secret Life of Bees* is unquestionably a beautiful story featuring a group of women with a strong feminist message and with positive, diverse

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Casting?," *Howard Sherman* (accessed July 26, 2016) http://www.hesherman.com/2015/12/03/ what-does-hamilton-tell-us-about-race-in-casting/

representations of Black women, only Lily changes and the events only happen because of Lily.

Floyd Mutrux's out-of-print movie *There Goes My Baby* takes place over the course of a few days in Los Angeles, California, during August 1965. While the setting might suggest the now-famous Watts riots are the centerpiece (or at least a focus) of this story, they amount to less than ten minutes of this ninety-nine-minute production. Instead of focusing on Watts and the associated civil rights struggles, the film almost exclusively follows a group of White students (with an occasional inclusion of their one Black friend), as they prepare to go in separate directions after high school and voice opposition to Vietnam, much to the dismay of the adults in their life. Instead of focusing on how dangerous society was in 1960s for those racialized as Black, *There Goes My Baby* is self-consciously nostalgic for the food, music, opportunity, and freedom (supposedly) only available in this bygone era. White characters essentially go about their lives as if the Watts riots are not happening and then never happened. Representations of Watts lack contextualization and are limited to Blacks rioting in the streets, setting businesses on fire, and taking televisions and other products from stores, as well as police suddenly arresting a group of Black men and accidentally murdering a Black family. Consequently, the screenwriter-director says the Watts riots came out of nowhere, were carried out by an unsubstantial and disruptive group, and were unimportant historically. However, as Steven Zeitchik articulates, systemic inequality caused the Watts riots, riots that resulted in real and numerous arrests, deaths, destruction of public and private property, and increased fear for both Whites

and Blacks. Zeitchik ponders the near complete absence of cultural references or cultural representations of the riots for over five decades. He suggests that fragile, White audiences would feel excessive danger and fear. Additionally, such representations would force audiences to actually grapple with what it means to live in an integrated world. Additionally, as Zeitchik says:

> Movies that focus on clear victimhood and heroism--that can reassure audiences with reasonably happy endings and few negative present-day ramifications--have been gaining in popularity. Those films (they include *The Butler*, *Selma* and *The Help*) chronicle important chapters in American history, and they certainly mark progress from a previous era that saw few movies of their kind. But the trend also masks a lack of stories with sharper dimensions and less comfortable realities.[9]

Men in Black 3 is a work science fiction on the surface but also ignores racism in ways seldom acknowledged. This extremely popular story mostly takes place in New York and Florida in 1969 because Men in Black--the secret agency charged with protecting the Earth from extraterrestrial activity--sends Agent J (Will Smith), who is Black, on a mission to kill Boris the Animal (Jemaine Clement) in order to save the world in 2012. Allowing for the willing suspension of disbelief innate to such science fiction, this film still creates a 1969 where, except for two passing exceptions, Black people are treated as absolute equals and are welcomed everywhere. Jeffrey Price (Michael Chernus), who is White and coordinates the time travel, provides what proves to be an

[9] Zeitchik, "Watts Riots Still Mostly off Hollywood's Radar after 50 Years." For a detailed historical account of the Watts Riot, see Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1997); and Guelda Voien, "Never Before Seen Photos Released for 50th Anniversary of LA Riots," *Observer Culture* (accessed July 18, 2016) http://observer.com/2015/08/never-before-seen-photos-released-for-50th-anniversary-of-la-riots/.

unnecessary warning to Agent J: "Do not lose that time device or you will be stuck in 1969! It wasn't the best time for your people." Agent J's only racialized difficulty is when two racists White police officers pull him over as soon as he arrives in 1969. Before Agent J erases their memory of the encounter he says, "That was a standard grade neuralyzer, but you're not going to remember that. Keep in mind, just because you see a Black man driving a car, does not mean he stole it! [pause] OK, I did steal this one--but not because I'm Black." (And given contemporary stereotypes about Black men being criminals, this is also one of the ways in which the film as a text perpetuates racism.) Otherwise, Agent J confidently and safely enters a whole variety of public spaces from New York to Florida without comment or notice vis-à-vis his Blackness. The film includes many other Black characters in 1969, all in not just desegregated but fully integrated spaces. People treat all of these people with absolute fairness and equality by people and institutions. Also worthy of note is the film's use of the fictional character Colonel James Darrell Edwards II (sometimes listed as Colonel James Darrell Edwards, Jr.), a Black man who is in charge of coordinating the 1969 Moon launch, including the necessary security, and who turns out to be Agent J's father.[10]

[10] Scholars generally do not make a distinction between "desegregation" and "integration." For purposes of civil rights studies, simply put, desegregation is best thought of the first part in a long process that ultimately results in integration. *Desegregation* occurs when segregation has started crumbling. *Integration* has been achieved when those formally prohibited are more meaningful and sincerely welcomed and when individuals of various groupings have the opportunity to and actually do interact on a relatively equal playing field, at least as equal as possible, see Thomas A. Parham, "Desegregation Not Same as Diversity and Inclusion," *Diverse*: *Issues in Higher Education* (accessed January 31, 2016) http://diverseeducation.com/article/79610/; and Pegoda, "Watchful Eyes: An Examination of the Struggle for African-Americans to Receive Admission and Equality at the University of Houston, 1927-1969" (M.A. thesis, University of Houston, 2010), 14.

In the process, *Men in Black 3* rewrites a whole variety of History because racialization has no tangible, if any, consequences that result in discriminatory differences for anyone. The closest discrimination comes to being a factor in this 1969 is when police stop Agent J. Representations of civil rights-activism do not necessarily have a place in this story, and criticism for such absence is not necessary. However, given the story the screenwriter, Etan Cohen, and the director, Barry Sonnenfeld, choose to tell, what amounts to a complete absence of representations relating to racism that existed, requires criticism. Progress had certainly been made in 1969 but clearly not across-the-board progress that would allow for *Men in Black 3*'s representations to be deemed fair to the associated History--the hopes and fears associated with the era of the Civil Rights Revolution--especially when viewing Agent J and his dad as historical stand-ins. As presented in this movie, people in the United States *even* in 1969 lived in a racial utopia and did not notice a person's phenotype at all. If discrimination ever existed, *Men in Black 3* proclaims, it remains in the distant, distant past, and all vestiges have been gone for a long time.[11]

Leslie Dixon and Adam Shankman's musical *Hairspray* (2007), in contrast, regularly directly deals with issues of the Civil Rights Revolution but does so by relying on a White savior figure. It takes place in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1962 and is the story

[11] An alternative, semiotic reading of Boris the Animal could interpret him as serving as a historical stand-in for all Black people or for racism. Thus, when Agent J "rewrites" history by killing Boris the Animal, *Men in Black 3* could suggest that racism and Blackness are also killed and isolated in the distant past. Working from how people interpret films and considering the historical unconscious, this could serve to reassure White people that their Whiteness is secure.

of how Tracy Turnblad's (Nikki Blonsky) confidence, generosity, leadership, and selflessness result in the transformation of those, White and Black, around her, including the complete integration of the wildly popular, *The Corny Collins Show* and the final elimination of Negro Day, which had occurred once a month and allowed Black people to dance on television with other Black people.

The writer creates Tracy, who is White, as a high school student with a sense of morality and equality greater than that of *all* others. When asked during her audition for a role on *The Corny Collins Show*, "Would you swim in an integrated pool?," she exclaims, "I sure would! I'm all for integration! It's the new frontier!" When Tracy is sent to detention ("detention" is simply a separate room those who have presumably misbehaved go to during regular school hours), the other students present are all Black and are having an unsupervised party while dancing. As she dances with them and learns new moves, she excitedly cries, "Negro Day's the best. I wish everyday was Negro day!" Having failed her first audition because of her pro-equality answer about swimming pools, Tracy goes to a dance competition hosted by *The Corny Collins Shows*. White and Black high school students are dancing together, separated by usher ropes. Tracy sees Seaweed (Elijah Kelley), and they have this conversation:

> **Tracy:** Hey, Seaweed! Wanna do Peyton Place for Corny?
> **Seaweed:** Are you crazy? You gotta dance with your crowd, and I gotta dance with mine.
> **Tracy:** Why?
> **Seaweed:** It's just the way it is, Tracy.
> **Tracy:** But it's your dance.
> **Seaweed:** Well, how 'bout you go borrow it for a second.
> **Tracy:** Really?
> **Seaweed:** Go get it, girl.

Seaweed's "gift" parallels the "gift" Black women give Skeeter (Emma Stone) in *The Help* (2011) in the form of their personal stories and the "gift" Delilah (Louise Beavers) gives Bea (Claudette Colbert) in the form of her special pancake recipe in *Imitation of Life* (1934). In all of these cases, "gifts" from Black people brought White people alone happiness, newfound recognition, and capitalism-based economic success at the expense of the basic humanity of Blacks, as existed in an even more extreme and brutal form during over two hundred years of enslavement in the United States. In *Hairspray,* in perfect neoliberal fashion, Seaweed's present secures Tracy a permanent place on *The Corny Collins Show* and results in an explosion of business for her dad's business and for the brand of hairspray that sponsors *The Corny Collins Show*, for example. When Motormouth Maybelle (Queen Latifah) announces that the station management has canceled Negro Day, Tracy suggests a march to protest the decision and to draw media attention. Motormouth and others who have watched or participated in Negro Day respond with unanimous admiration for and agreement with Tracy's revolutionary and surprising plan. At the march, which extends for hours and well into the late night, Tracy is the only White person, and along with Motormouth, she leads a group of a few hundred Black people.

Hairspray's representation of issues that are genuinely germane to the Civil Rights Revolution are miniscule. These are best represented by three examples. The signs protestors carry during Tracy's march include "BLACK AND WHITE UNITE," "INTEGRATION NOT SEGREGATION," "DO THE CHECKER BOARD," and "LET THE

CHILDREN DANCE" and speak to issues for which Blacks and Whites fought. When Tracy announces on live television that she will make every day Negro Day when she becomes President of the United States, the station owner says, "I want that chubby communist girl off the show" but quickly changes his mind when he begins making more money with her on the show, in a reflection of the numerous businessmen who changed their mind when they felt economic impacts, something most of the movies ignore. *Hairspray* is also commendable for its portrayal of segregation not being about physical separation but about many ironies: Whites and Blacks in the world of *Hairspray* are close friends, are in school together, and are employed together, but cannot publically or privately dance together unless divided by usher ropes--until Tracy comes along.

Other representations exist in the extremely racist but even more conniving Velma Von Tussle (Michelle Pfeiffer), manager of the station that distributes *The Corny Collins Show*. She cares about her daughter getting extensive camera attention more than anything else. In another case, Tracy's best friend, Penny Lou Pingleton (Amanda Bynes) begins to fall in love with Seaweed causing Penny's eccentric mother, Prudence Pingleton (Allison Janney), to react with anger and disgust about this interracial relationship. Occasional comments include Motormouth's response to Tracy's fear about being in a mostly-Black neighborhood in a mostly-Black music store, "Oh, now, honey. We got more reason to be scared on your street" and Tracy's mom's, Edna Turnblad (John Travolta) response to her desire to march for civil rights, "Tracy, you can't protest, hon. I mean, these are lovely people, but if you protest, you'll be on lists. You'll be on files. J. Edgar Hoover'll be still wiretappin' your cold, dead body in the

grave." also give some insight into the actual, historically documented cultural climate of the time represented. In all of these cases, except for Motormouth's comment, however, the given character's constructed personality and overall behavior detracts substantially from their remarks and shows their panic is not based in opposition to civil rights, per se, but in Velma's vain nature and fear of not being beautiful, in Prudence's ultra-cautious and overprotective parenting style, and in Edna's recent recovery from agoraphobia.

That musical numbers occur in the streets with spontaneous participation from everyone around, that John Travolta is cast in drag as Tracy's mother, that the names "Motormouth" and "Seaweed" are given to Black characters, and that internal Black agency and desire for change is dismissed further add to *Hairspray*'s unrealistic nature beyond that already mentioned. As the march nears a conclusion, Tracy assaults a police officer by hitting him with the sign she has been carrying. When they try to arrest her, she runs away, resulting in a massive manhunt by the police, while others help her hide. Tracy makes her "reappearance" back into society in the film's final scene by being lowered from the air in a rocket after sneaking into the building in a gigantic can of hairspray. The final moments in *Hairspray* include White and Black people dancing together on television; an announcement that "*The Corny Collins Show* is now and forever officially integrated!"; the crowning of Inez (Taylor Parks), Motormouth's Black daughter, as winner of the pageant; and scenes of an ecstatic mostly White audience and crowd outside.

Such a dramatic historical breakthrough in a matter of minutes resulting in excitement alone is ahistorical and understated. Additionally, Motormouth's attitude entirely transforms from saying the struggle for equality amounted to "one toe at a time" to saying in the film's conclusion, "Child, yesterday is history…And it's never comin' back." Historically, change does not occur instantly but "one toe at a time," if at all. Change can be both "good" and "bad," and whether it is "good" or "bad" depends on the group(s) in question. Additionally, as discussed elsewhere in places throughout this dissertation, racism persists. Activists, a half century ago now, working toward equality during the Civil Rights Revolution fought to end racism and made some successes, some temporary, but we must remember History is not a linear march exclusively toward enlightenment. *Hairspray*'s teleological presentation of the past and future further reinforces its historical illiteracy and rejection of a world that is racist.

Hairspray's reel History and its connection with real History merit a few additional comments. According to Lee Sartain's *Borders of Equality: The NAACP and the Baltimore Civil Rights Struggle, 1914-1970*, Baltimore, Maryland, was unique and important. As a border state, Maryland did not have *de jure* policies that thoroughly institutionalized discrimination, as the Deep South did. This means that Black people in Maryland never completely lost the right to vote and had earlier opportunities to challenge cultural, social, and political structures. Violence; housing, school, and retail segregation; and limited opportunities had existed at times but were very different in nature. Civil rights-activism and massive resistance occurred at least two decades earlier in Baltimore than elsewhere and with the active guidance of the National Association for

the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Baltimore proved to be a training ground, Sartain argues, for the NAACP and upcoming activism and resistance across the nation. In "*Hairspray* in Context: Race, Rock 'n Roll and Baltimore," Taunya Banks discusses Baltimore's *The Buddy Deane Show*, on which *The Corny Collins Show* is roughly based, and explains that *Hairspray* ignores controversies surrounding the cultural events it depicts, namely that music was a vehicle that drove integration and greatly worried parents, especially as rock and roll came to dominate, and further, that *The Buddy Deane Show* was always limited to White people.[12]

On another note, *Hairspray*'s setting and chronology present a few concerns. While the historical Baltimore had made significant progress in achieving significant desegregation and even integration, aspects of the culture of segregation continued to exist, as did civil rights-activism, including prohibition on interracial relationships. *Hairspray*'s creation of a Baltimore nearly free of racism, then, does not warrant the kind of criticism it would if the film had been set in Jackson, Mississippi, for example. Nonetheless, given that the film is not tied to a specific city, except for one song, interpreted as a historical stand-in "Baltimore" could just as easily have been "Jackson" or any other city. Given that Baltimore is such an outlier compared to other areas deeply-embedded in the Civil Rights Revolution, and Baltimore's status as an anomaly is

[12] Taunya Banks, "*Hairspray* in Context: Race, Rock 'n Roll and Baltimore," *Thurgood Marshall Law Library* (accessed August 4, 2014) http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/specialcollections/hairspray/; Pegoda, "Review of *Borders of Equality: The NAACP and the Baltimore Civil Rights Struggle, 1914-1970*," *The Journal of African American History* 100, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 331-333; and Lee Sartain, *Borders of Equality: The NAACP and the Baltimore Civil Rights Struggle, 1914-1970* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).

not explained, *Hairspray* reads as suggesting, like films throughout this dissertation, that civil rights throughout the nation was not the urgent, sincere issue it actually was. Additionally, *Hairspray*'s specific use of Baltimore and its peculiar nature amounts to an underhanded way of "legitimately" dismissing hopes and fears of the Civil Rights Revolution. Finally, the film ends before it can possibly represent how people actually respond to integrated dancing.[13]

Ghosts of Mississippi takes a similar approach to *Hairspray* by having White savior figures. *Ghosts of Mississippi*, as has been previously articulated by scholars such as George Lipsitz, almost completely deletes Black people from History (Whoopi Goldberg has a small role as Myrile Evers), focusing not on Medgar Evers but on his White murderer and on the White lawyer determined to bring justice three decades later, even if it means he and his family might be murdered. Similarly, *Forrest Gump* very briefly depicts part of George Wallace's stand in the "Schoolhouse Door" at the University of Alabama. Forrest asks a man next to him what is happening and is surprised to learn that Black people want to attend school with White people. As the Black students are entering the university, one ("conveniently") drops her notebook. Consequently, Forrest ("conveniently") runs to get the notebook, repeatedly yells, "Ma'am you dropped your book," returns the notebook, and enters the building with

[13] For an additional criticism of *Hairspray*, see Matt, "*Hairspray* 2007," *Ruthless Review* (accessed August 12, 2016) http://www.ruthlessreviews.com/872/hairspray-2007/. For the only peer-reviewed article about this film, see Suzanne Woodward, "Taming Transgression: Gender-Bending in *Hairspray* (John Waters, 1988) and its Remake," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 10, no. 2/3 (2012): 115-126.

the small group of Black students. Given that this and a small scene about the Black Panthers represent the entirety of the Civil Rights Revolution in *Forrest Gump*, such ahistorical recreations only serve to indoctrinate audiences into believing that White people were all "Forrest Gumps," helpful and selfless.[14]

Based on Anne Rivers Siddons's novel *Heartbreak Hotel* (1976), Siddons, Tom McCown, and Martin Davidson's *Heart of Dixie* provides another representation of university-based civil rights. It traces the differing experiences of three White sorority women at Alabama's Randolph University in 1957 against a backdrop of rampant racism and ultimate desegregation. The movie especially emphasizes Maggie DeLoach (Ally Sheedy) and her transformation to a culturally, socially enlightened person determined to be a trailblazer for racial equality. Overall, *Heart of Dixie* is about the Civil Rights Revolution but has almost no Black characters. In addition to its neglect of Black agency and use of a White savior figure, this movie has never been popular. *Washington Post* critic Rita Kempley puts it as, "The sins of *Heart of Dixie* are inestimable." She is thoroughly critical of Sheedy and says the plot is "remarkably dumb."[15]

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[14] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Rev. and expanded ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), xiv, 222.

For an historical account of events at the University of Alabama, see E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007).

[15] Vincent Canby, "Graduating to Adulthood Just Before the South Erupts," *The New York Times* (accessed July 25, 2016) http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res= 950DEEDA1330F935A2575AC0A96F948260; Rita Kempley, "Heart of Dixie," *Washington Post* (accessed July 25, 2016) http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/style/longterm/movies/videos/ heartofdixiepg13kempley_a09fdc.htm; and Jim Woodrick, "McAlister's Deli: Sweet Tea in the *Heart of Dixie*," *And Speaking of Which* (accessed July 25, 2016) http://andspeakingofwhich.blogspot.com/2013/08/ sweet-tea-in-heart-of-dixie.html.

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> *I can't describe in words how much I love this movie. I watched it when I was a kid but I didn't really appreciate the awesomeness of it till I got older. It's an intelligent comedy instead of one of those "stupid funny" films. It's got something that lacks in most kids films because it doesn't have talking dogs and flying people, it's realistic enough that there's no "come on now that's completely ridiculous" This is definitely a film my kids will see. I know every word to this film I've seen it so many times and I am absolutely not tired of it. My friends make fun of me because I am a little old for this film but they do admit they liked it when they were younger. It's more of a teenage movie because it talks about sex, drugs, and baseball. As much as I hate the sport I love the movie. This movie is ageless and deserves to be accredited as one of the best films forever, forever*. [16]
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> **-Anonymous, *Amazon* Customer Reviews, 2001**

Set in a newly-created suburb of Los Angeles, California, during the summer of 1962, *The Sandlot* (1993) follows nine children as they play baseball and get into (basically) harmless trouble. This children's-film-turned-cult-classic is problematic for purposes of this dissertation because it creates a world where the Civil Rights Revolution essentially either did not happen, was unnecessary, was unimportant, or was suddenly resolved when the Supreme Court of the United States delivered its unanimous *Brown*

While Randolph University is fictional it is used by the authors of *Heart of Dixie* as a specific stand-in for Auburn University, which desegregated in 1964. For an examination of desegregation as it actually happened from the perspective of Harold Franklin, Auburn's first Black student, see Ed Enoch, "Auburn University's First Black Student: 'Happened to be at the Right Place at the Right Time,'" *AL.com* (accessed July 16, 2016) http://blog.al.com/wire/2013/06/i_just_happened_to_be_one_of_t.html. Dwayne Cox's institutional history of Auburn provides some information about desegregation in its broader contextualization; although, he does so in two oddly-named chapters, "Delicate Balance, 1947-1965" and "Balance Threatened, 1965-1980," and only has two brief, somewhat condensing, mentions of Franklin, see Cox, *The Village on the Plain: Auburn University, 1856–2006* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016).

[16] "Customer Reviews for *The Sandlot*," *Amazon* (accessed November 4, 2013) https://www.amazon.com/ Sandlot-TomGuiry/productreviews/B00028HBES/ref=cm_cr_dp_qt_see_all_top?ie=UTF8& showViewpoints=1&sortBy=helpful

vs. Board of Education opinion in 1954. More specifically, *The Sandlot* ignores racialized tensions where they would have certainly existed, as seven White, one Hispanic, and one Black adolescent receive equal treatment from each other and from others around then, even adults. These children, who just finished fifth grade, are a close-knit group who all live next door to each other and do everything side-by-side, from attending the same public school and playing baseball in a community field to running around town, eating, and swimming together.

Gaps between the possible and impossible are particularly revealing when the children vote to go swimming because it is too hot to play baseball for everyone except Benjamin "Benny" Franklin Rodriguez (Mike Vitar). Benny, who wants to continue practicing at all costs, says, "Anybody who wants to be a 'can't hack it' pantywaist who wears their mama's bra, raise your hand." His eight friends enthusiastically raise their hands and simultaneously yell they want to "SCAM POOL HONEYS!" The camera transitions to a view of the entire pool from above and then transitions to show eight of the nine children running toward the pool and jumping in. One of them walks by all of the women relaxing on towels while commenting on their appearance. The "sandlot kids" splash around and throw each other around in the water. None of the two dozen adults or other children in or around the pool make any comment or even notice that there is now one Hispanic and one Black child in the water and that all the children are playing together. The scene climaxes when Squints (Chauncey Leopardi), who cannot swim, dives in the deep end, so the older lifeguard and his long time crush, Wendy Peffercorn (Marley Shelton), will have to rescue him. Wendy performs CPR (i.e.,

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation) on Squints and ultimately Squints surprises everyone when he is suddenly fully alert, wrapping his arms around her neck and kissing her. This scene omits racism where it existed historically, and yet it also amplifies and condones sexism and patriarchy. By including such significant degrees of sexism and patriarchy--including Scotty's (Tom Guiry) controlling, distant stepfather and comments made to him about playing baseball "like a girl"--*The Sandlot* adds a degree of realism.[17]

Before providing specific analysis about the swimming pool scene in *The Sandlot*, some background is needed. According to historian Jeff Wiltse, public swimming pools dramatize the nation's struggle to adapt to a changing society and associated peoples, technologies, and mores. Swimming pools, he argues, also provide a mirror of sorts with which to measure changing notions of aesthetics (i.e., physical appearances), leisure and recreation, and cleanliness. Above all, White people and White institutions made pools important cultural battlefields and contested spaces, similar to social and political dynamics associated with trains in the 1890s.[18]

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[17] In sharp contrast to *The Sandlot*, *Far From Heaven*'s swimming pool scene mirrors documented pasts. A loud voice yelling "Martin" again and again interrupts Cathy, Frank, and other (White) people enjoying themselves in or around the large swimming pool at the hotel resort. A Black man continues yelling "Martin" over and over as he chases a very young Black boy, apparently named Martin. Martin steps into the pool for about two seconds. The water is not even above his knees. Two White women immediately jump out, and a White woman yells, "Donna! Donna! Time to Get out!" The man who had repeatedly yelled for Martin scolds him, saying, "You know you're not supposed to go in there! Now what did I tell you about going in that pool?" Martin begins crying. In a matter of seconds, the pool went from being busy to not just being empty but closed.

[18] Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); "Plunging into Public Pools' Contentious Past," *National Public Radio* (accessed April 5, 2016) http://www.npr.org/templates/story/ story.php?storyId=10407533; "Public Swimming Pools' Divisive Past," *National Public Radio* (accessed April 5, 2016) http://www.npr.org/templates/story/ story.php?storyId=10495199; "Racial History of American Swimming Pools," *National Public Radio* (accessed April 5, 2016) http://www.npr.org/templates

Until the 1920s, White municipal swimming pools rules commonly segregated patrons by class and sex. For the next thirty or more years, depending on the exact pool and city, Black swimmers were limited to specific Blacks-only pools, one day of the week (following which the water would typically be drained from the swimming pool and refilled with clean, fresh water for White children and adults), specific sections in the pool with either built-in or adjustable boundaries, or sometimes barred from swimming altogether. During these decades, there was also an explosion of public, city-funded pools built, maintained with great attention, and in continuous operation. Between 1920 and 1940, cities built 2,000 public pools, 750 of these were New Deal-funded projects, and cities remodeled hundreds of other swimming pools. Swimming pools in the South desegregated long after pools elsewhere in the United States (if ever).[19]

Starting in the 1940s and 1950s, cities desegregated pools in the North and West as necessary in response to protesters who participated in planned and unplanned

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/story/story.php?storyId=90213675; "Segregation in Public Places," *American Public Radio* (accessed April 5, 2016) http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/remembering/public.html#21; "Water Rights," *The Kansas City Public Library* (accessed April 5, 2016) http://www.kclibrary.org/blog/week-kansas-city-history/water-rights; Jeff Wiltse, "The Black-White Swimming Disparity in America: A Deadly Legacy of Swimming Pool Discrimination," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 38, no. 4 (2014): 366-389; Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 2, 3, 18, 90-95, 102, 108, 123, 126, 146, 170-172, 186; and Witse, "Swimming in the Long Shadows of Segregation," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (accessed April 5, 2016) http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/swimming-in-the-long-shadows-ofsegregation/ article_89dec8a8-83a4-57ca-8991-6c79b288fc54.html.

[19] Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*; "Plunging into Public Pools' Contentious Past"; "Public Swimming Pools' Divisive Past"; "Racial History of American Swimming Pools"; "Segregation in Public Places"; "Water Rights"; Wiltse, "The Black-White Swimming Disparity in America"; Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 2, 3, 18, 90-95, 102, 108, 123, 126, 146, 170-172, 186; and Witse, "Swimming in the Long Shadows of Segregation."

protests, swim-ins, and in other demonstrations that purposely violated some aspect of segregation when it came to swimming. Black protesters regularly faced crowds of White people yelling, arrests, physical violence, and pools suddenly requiring memberships. And in at least one case, authorities poured acid into the water while a group of Black people were swimming. Wiltse writes that visits to city public pools immediately and vastly decreased when and where desegregation came. Additionally, the number of private swimming pools immensely increased after World War II as White people sought to circumvent desegregated public spaces (although, in another example of segregation not being about separation per se, this did not change the degree to which White people relied on non-White people to fulfill certain labor fuctions). For example, in 1950 there were 2,500 private in-ground pools in the United States but by 1999 there were 4,000,000. Additionally, desegregated pools frequently ended up closing because of low attendance, inadequate city funding for repairs, and generalized fears about sharing intimate spaces with diverse and unknown groups. In sum, then, Wiltse shows that there were deep tensions associated with swimming pools, especially desegregated pools, when it came to the feelings of White people.[20]

Consequently, then, given the mores of the "nadir of American race relations" and the resulting consequences, not only would these nine children essentially be an

[20] Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*; "Plunging into Public Pools' Contentious Past"; "Public Swimming Pools' Divisive Past"; "Racial History of American Swimming Pools"; "Segregation in Public Places"; "Water Rights"; Wiltse, "The Black-White Swimming Disparity in America"; Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 2, 3, 18, 90-95, 102, 108, 123, 126, 146, 170-172, 186; and Witse, "Swimming in the Long Shadows of Segregation."

impossible grouping, but also, *de facto* and *de jure* practices would dictate that the Black and Hispanic children and their families would live in different neighborhoods, the children would attend different schools, and society would treat them very differently. At the very least, the Black and Hispanic children would encounter some kind of negative reaction from White parents who had moved to "suburbia" for its implicit promise of an all-White society. *The Sandlot* ignores mores of the culture of segregation. California--while popularly held as a bastion of liberalism and care-free attitudes--has a past just as entangled with discrimination and White privilege as other geopolitical areas in the United States. As the United States federal government encouraged White people to migrate to the West, White people murdered, involuntary moved, and enslaved peoples of Native American and Mexican ancestry. During the 1960s, Los Angeles County and its neighbor, Orange County, were hotbeds of grassroots conservatism largely in response to civil rights activism by both Blacks and Hispanics. Moreover, *The Sandlot* takes place less than fifty miles from where tensions long in the making exploded in Watts, Los Angeles, three years later (and miles away from the 1992 Los Angeles/Rodney King Riots).[21]

The swimming pool scene and the entire movie take place against the backdrops named above. Given what available evidence says about the culture of segregation and

[21] For more information on the political conditions in California at this time, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*: *Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

what happened at swimming pools, *The Sandlot* presents scenes that are more than improbable. Given that people faced extreme heartache, ridicule, and violence for just trying to swim, this film's rewriting of history can be read as insulting. Because of their differing racializations, the children in *The Sandlot*, in reality, would most certainly have been prohibited from being close friends or attending the same school and because of restrictive covenants, they could not have even lived next door to each other. Speaking hypothetically, even if they did know each other, people in southern California would have likely prohibited the Black and Hispanic child from swimming, especially with "their" White children, would have watched them with all eyes, or would have left the pool. In contrast, *The Long Walk Home* (1990), discussed in detail elsewhere in this dissertation, has a realistic discussion of swimming pools: Recalling her childhood, Miriam tells her maid Odessa, "We went swimmin'. Then these two Colored boys came and got in the water. And let me tell ya, you've never seen twenty girls get out of a pool so fast in all your life. We just. We just didn't know any better."

In any case, exceptions do not make the rule; when exceptions are used as historical representations for an entire period, society's historical literacy decreases. Although not as important, since studies of historical memory focus on representations, given the unprecedented prevalence of private swimming pools in California in the 1960s, the public pool in *The Sandlot* should likely not even exist. Much more importantly, though, the specific setting of *The Sandlot* does not matter. Aside from the writer and director giving children and adults watching *The Sandlot* essentially zero clues that the film occurs in California, people and places are historical stand-ins. Additionally,

The Sandlot does not rely on a specific setting or time for its story. *The Sandlot* could be transposed to a whole array of different places and eras with no changes necessary. If the director wanted to avoid including racism, the setting could have easily been different. Given that a period of the 1960s in California is not necessary to tell the story and that young, impressionable children are the target audience, concerns about why the writer selected this period and why its history is so completely rewritten and ignored are all the more important. Its "Anywhere, USA" setting makes it even more harmful to the historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution. *The Sandlot* creates a utopian world where every one is equal and where there are no problems.

One other scene in *The Sandlot* is important to discuss in some detail. As if to further put a stamp of false authenticity on the swimming pool scene, the following scene celebrates the 4th of July and is highly unrealistic. Late in the evening, Benny gets Scottie for the annual night game of baseball. The camera pans to show the street crowded with grills and picnic tables filled with White people and food. Sparklers and other decorations are everywhere, too. The children play baseball while hundreds of fireworks--enough to provide more than enough light to play baseball--brighten the sky with red, white, blue, green, orange, and other colors. Throughout this scene, Ray Charles's version of *American the Beautiful* plays in the background for added audience effect.

The name "Benjamin Franklin Rodriguez" also deserves comment. Certainly, someone could have been given such a historically significant name, but *The Sandlot* is fiction. The writer deliberately assigned each character a name, making it necessary to

consider what the rhetoric of such a grand name suggests. “Benjamin Franklin Rodriguez” naturally conjures up images and historical memories of *the* Benjamin Franklin--the White man known as a Founding Father, thinker, and scientist. Given the racism of the 1960s, a Hispanic “Benjamin Franklin” would face various forms of racism but would not benefit from White privilege. Assigning a Hispanic character such a name resembles situations wherein enslavers deliberately, callously assigned either derogatory or extremely famous names to enslaved Blacks.

In addition to ignoring racialized tensions that existed throughout the nation in the early 1960s, including in its specific setting in southern California, *The Sandlot* deletes the lives of women and men of Color. While the film almost exclusively tells the story of the nine sandlot kids and their adventures together, what stories are consequently left out? As discussed in previous chapters, families throughout the nation hired Black, Hispanic, and other women of non-White racializations to assist with cooking, cleaning, and childcare. The only representations of family life in *The Sandlot* are brief and do not show, even in the background, a domestic worker cooking or cleaning. In the film’s near-epic 4th of July scene, White women do all of the cooking and serving. Again, certainly, this film in no way claims (or even tries) to tell the story of domestic workers, but nonetheless, it deletes and invisibilizes their existence in the same way it deletes racism that existed in swimming pools, schools, and communities. Moreover, *The Sandlot* never includes any mention or scene with the mother and father of the Black or Hispanic child, even during the community-wide 4th of July celebration.

Collectively, then, *The Sandlot*, like so many other films, promotes loyalty, patriotism, unity, and a "everything is fine" attitude toward the United States and its past. Residential segregation and racism, for example, never existed. Baseball is life. Once the children overcome their fear and meet Mr. Mertle (James Earl Jones), the town's recluse, and his dog, they all become friends and quickly discover that Mr. Mertle was close friends with their hero Babe Ruth (Art LaFleur). Thus, in yet another circumstance, *The Sandlot* suggests multiple alliances that were historically improbable, at best.

Reviews on *Amazon* testify to *The Sandlot*'s long-held and increasing popularity. Additionally, as with the other films examined in this dissertation, reviewers wholly embrace the world and the historical views created in *The Sandlot*. Somewhat surprisingly, *The Sandlot* is as popular, if not more popular, among people who grew up in the 1960s, as it is among their children and grandchildren. In other words, while designed for children of the 1990s, parents and grandparents embraced it as much if not more than the children. On November 4, 2013, 402 reviews were compiled and closely analyzed. (An additional 963 reviews have been left as of June 9, 2016.) Of the 402 reviews, 342 (85 percent) people gave *The Sandlot* the highest score of five stars. Only 19 people (or less than 5 percent) gave it three or fewer stars and did so because of technical difficulties with the film or because of what some deem to be inappropriate language used by the children.[22]

[22] "Customer Reviews for *The Sandlot*."

The vast majority of people, however, speak of the film with great nostalgia again and again, regularly label it a "classic," write fondly about childhood memories, and express their excitement about sharing the film with their children or even grandchildren, so they will how know wonderful and simple the 1960s were. Specific comments, generally and presumably washed in White Privilege, include that *The Sandlot* "captures the uniqueness of an era gone by," that it "captures perfectly what it means to be a kid and how a summer should be spent--carefree and with your friends making memories," that *The Sandlot* tells "what it was like in the 1960s," and that "if you don't like it, there's something wrong with you…it's a classic that everyone can relate to." One reviewer discusses the 4th of July scene and says it is "one of the great moments in all of filmdom….it's a cinematic moment you won't soon forget." In numerous reviews, grandparents speak of buying *The Sandlot* for their children, so they can continue family traditions associated with this movie. Grandparents regularly make comments along the lines of, *The Sandlot* is a "treasure to cherish with kids and grandkids!!!!!" One grandfather and grandson have watched the movie several times

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For more information on *The Sandlot*'s position as a cult classic and as a perpetually popular film, see Stacy Conradt, "19 Things You Might Not Know About *The Sandlot*," *Mental Floss* (accessed May 14, 2016) http://mentalfloss.com/article/60522/19-things-you-might-not-know-about-sandlot; Jed Gray, "*The Sandlot*: As it Stands Today," *Sports Glutton* (accessed April 5, 2016) http://sports-glutton.com/2011/03/30/the-sandlot-as-it-stands-today/; Alexis Jones "UT Celebrates 20th Anniversary of *The Sandlot* Film," *Daily Herald* (accessed April 5, 2016) http://www.heraldextra.com/news/state-and-regional/ut-celebrates-th-anniversary-of-the-sandlot-film/article_4cb97692-17d0-5589-b508-48d534ca61ef.html; Matt King, "*The Sandlot* 20th Anniversary: 20 Reasons It Was the Greatest Movie Ever Made," *Bleacher Report* (accessed May 14, 2016) http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1435469-the-sandlot-20th-anniversary-20-reasons-it-was-the-greatest-movie-ever-made; and Shea Serrano, "You're Killing Us, Smalls: The Only *The Sandlot* Character Rankings You'll Ever Need," *Hollywood Prospectus* (accessed May 14, 2016) http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/youre-killing-us-smalls-the-only-the-sandlot-character-rankings-youll-ever-need/.

and enjoy the movie so much that they sometimes watch it back-to-back. Only two of the 402 reviews have any critical remarks about how *The Sandlot* presents the past. One says, “The setting is a happier, more innocent, pre-Woodstock America that maybe never existed except in our memories and imaginations, but that I think we all can't help longing for.” The other says, “*The Sandlot* is an alright movie that I loved as a kid. Now days, however, I see the political motivations behind such a movie. It's not realistic in the early 1960s for there to be such a diverse group of children playing together in a suburban neighborhood.”[23]

[23] Ibid.

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It was a good story with an identity crisis, but most people will have an easy time liking this film.[24]

-Anonymous, *Amazon* Customer Reviews, 2001

Antonio Banderas's *Crazy in Alabama* (1999), adapted from Mark Childress's novel and screenplay of the same name, follows two major and very different courses. Set in the summer of 1965, Peejoe (Lucas Black) and his brother are orphans who live with their grandmother until Aunt Lucille (Melanie Griffith) suddenly comes, announcing that she has killed and beheaded her husband due to his constant abuse. While Aunt Lucille makes her way to Hollywood with stops across the West in New Orleans, Louisiana; Nowhere, New Mexico; and Las Vegas, Nevada, she has a series of unbelievably wild adventures in her quests toward freedom. During this time, her children live with her mother, and Peejoe and his brother go to live with Uncle Dove (David Morse) and his wife in Industry, Alabama, where Black people are protesting. Throughout, *Crazy in Alabama* accurately shows that segregation was not about physical separation. Scenes with White and Black fictional characters thoroughly show that the culture of segregation was only about maintaining the status quo and defending inaccurate notions of "the way things are and have always been." Further, *Crazy in Alabama* does an excellent job of showing Black people with agency and with positive

[24] "Customer Reviews for *Crazy in Alabama*," *Amazon* (accessed July 27, 2014) https://smile.amazon.com/Crazy-Alabama-Lucas-Black/dp/ 0767823354/ref=sr_1_3?ie= UTF8&qid=1468298936&sr=8-3&keywords=crazy+in+alabama;

attributions, in the sharpest contrast possible with *The Help*, for example. *Crazy in Alabama* provides audiences with historically literate, stereotype-free representations of Black men and Black women, including those younger and older. In particular, scenes both show the impetus for activism as stemming from Black agency alone and also carefully balance historical authenticity and approachability.

Although mostly about Aunt Lucille and Peejoe's hopes and fears, when *Crazy in Alabama* gives attention to the Civil Rights Revolution, it gives Black people agency. As presented in *Crazy in Alabama*, the Civil Rights Revolution is already well underway when the film begins. The first scene with Black people shows about one dozen Black men of all ages and one Black woman protesting in front of Industry's courthouse holding signs that include "I AM A MAN." (The other signs are indiscernible.)

The other scenes revolve around the suburb's public swimming pool and racial conflict there. Two young Black teens, Taylor Jackson (Louis Miller) and his brother David Jackson (Carl Le Blanc III), in the words of the White manager, "sneak" into the swimming pool. Without help or prompting from others, after other swimmers notice him, Taylor explains, "We wanna swim. That's all." After the manager angrily responds that the pool is "White only," Taylor calmly adds, "Excuse me. This is a public place. We have a right to be here." Determined to swim, Taylor and David return to the pool with eight other Black teenagers. Taylor tells the manager that they will wait until he changes his mind and allows them to swim. These activists continue to peaceful sit until Sheriff (Meat Loaf), who is the Sherriff in charge of Industry, and his colleagues arrive to disperse them. Sheriff ultimately murders Taylor.

Consequently, the Black community in Industry becomes even more involved in civil rights-activism of their own accord. *Crazy in Alabama* devotes over five minutes to Taylor's funeral, and it is arguably the most powerful--even "beautiful" in a certain sense--scene in all of cinema about the Civil Rights Revolution. His funeral includes a march through town to the swimming pool, all the while being harassed by segregationists. Taylor's dad, Nehemiah (John Beasley), and David lead the march, and they are followed by over a hundred Black adults and children, plus Peejoe, Peejoe's brother, a few White reporters, and Mr. Murphy (William Converse-Roberts) of the Justice Department. Surrounded by all of the marchers, Taylor's dad defiantly says, "I come here to finish what my boy started. This pool is a river of freedom, friends," and he proceeds to walk around in the pool. The funeral scene is concluded with a celebratory freedom song, dozens of the Black men jumping in the pool and rejoicing in their defiance and unity, but tragically, White people opposed to desegregation show up. Reporters use cameras to record their violent behavior, which, in this movie, shocks the nation and increases tensions between Whites and Blacks to their highest point ever--a response that is fully off screen and past by rhetorically. The next relevant scene shows the Black community of Industry gathered together to listen to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Dudley F. Craig II) speak about desegregation.[25]

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[25] According to *Internet Movie Database*, *Crazy in Alabama* breaks what was a strongly-held tradition for Hollywood movies by using an actor to play the role of King. Although, King's face is never visible in *Crazy in Alabama* and a "heavenly light" illuminates his body. Previous blockbusters--except for *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (1977) and *Prince Jack* (1984), neither of which were focused on civil rights per se--used actual archival footage, such as the dinner scene in *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989) where King is talking to guests but where audiences do not "see" him on stage where he is "taking" but instead hear actual audio footage. Since *Crazy in Alabama*, Hollywood regularly uses actors to play King and even

Crazy in Alabama depicts Blacks of all ages, both men and women, who are interested in change and who have agency. All of its representations are respectful and mirror what documentation says about the interest and active participation Black people have had throughout the long Civil Rights Movement in their on-going quests for justice and fairness. In the sharpest contrast to *The Help*, for instance, Black people, in the world Antonio Banderas creates, own their actions and the related attributions, are deeply interested in civil rights and justice, and are not inspired by or dependent on White people. Additionally, the story told does not need or use any stereotypes of Black people. Nehemiah's occupation is not that of a domestic/service worker or preacher (like all of the other Black men in films about the Civil Rights Revolution), but of a successful middleclass businessman. The film uses Black male characters extensively: None are comical, violent, or submissive. Moreover, none of the Black Women are made into Mammied characters.

Excluding Peejoe, for reasons that will be discussed below, reactions manifested through White characters in *Crazy in Alabama* are also on target as historical representations of the Civil Rights Revolution. In general, White people are presented as being frustrated, afraid of Black people, resistant to change, or oblivious. They are ready and eager even to abandon family, to accept bribes, and to harass and assault Black people. In sharp contrast to the reaction of the swimmers in *The Sandlot*, for example,

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shows his face clearly without hesitation, such as in *The Butler* (2013), *Selma* (2014), and a dozen other films. Made-for-tv movies do so even more often. "Martin Luther King, Jr. (Character)," *Internet Movie Database* (accessed July 1, 2016) http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0030683/?ref_=ttfc_fc_cl_t42.

in *Crazy in Alabama*, all of the (White) swimmers immediately exit the pool when they see Taylor and his brother are in the pool. As Taylor and David leave, a group of six White teenagers follow them and yell: “Pickaninny!,” “Go swim in the pond!,” “No Colored people!,” “Go swim somewhere else!,” “I’ll kick your butt!,” and “Yall know you don’t belong here!”

Afterward, in a move that does not mirror documented realities, all of White swimmers immediately jump back in. A more accurate reflection would have had everyone going home and the pool being drained, cleaned, and refilled. For example, Dorothy Dandridge could sing in hotels but could not swim in their pools--when she stuck her toe in the pool, they drained the entire swimming pool. Widespread fears, sometimes backed by science now deemed racist, said Black people had different and dangerous germs. Such “germs” caused White people to be afraid of Black people in some situations. This “fear” was selective, irrational, and an example of segregation not being about separation since White people did not mind a Black woman breastfeeding their children and making their food, for instance, but a Black and White person swimming in the same pool was an ultimate taboo. When Taylor, David, and their friends return to the pool, the camera focuses on White women quickly grabbing their children, yelling “Let’s go!” with fear and frustration, and completely leaving. In the scene that shows White people harassing Taylor’s family and friends, White people scoff

as they go buy, make terroristic threats, and wave a Confederate flag, while Sheriff and his colleagues standby and do nothing.[26]

Uncle Dove and his wife, Aunt Earlene (Cathy Moriarty), generally embody the characteristics of the White moderate that greatly concerned and frustrated King, as voiced in his 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail":

> First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection….I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in relation to the struggle for freedom. I have just received a letter from a white brother in Texas. He writes: "All Christians know that the Colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry. It has taken Christianity almost two thousand years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth."

When Uncle Dove answers Peejoe's questions about the protest in front of the courthouse, he responds with frustration and impatience and then shows some understanding but only after a long pause and contemplation:

Peejoe: What do they want?

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[26] George Johnson, "Swimming's Racist Past Makes Simone Manuel's Win an Even Bigger Deal," *Ebony* (accessed August 12, 2016) http://www.ebony.com/entertainment-culture/simone-manuel-racism#ixzz4HBBnnJ7U; and Alexandra Svokos, "People Are Outraged Over This Paper's Racist Headline About Simone Manuel," *Elite Daily* (accessed August 12, 2016) http://elitedaily.com/sports/racist-headline-simone-manuel/1581003/.

Uncle Dove: They want to register to vote. That's their latest thing.
Peejoe: Why won't they let them?
Uncle Dove: Well Negroes aren't allowed. Not in Alabama. You know that.
Peejoe: It just don't seem fair. They're just people like us.
Uncle Dove: You're right. It's not fair. It's just the way things are.

Uncle Dove goes back and forth throughout the film: He expresses the most concern, usually, when Black people are murdered and, usually, desires to help end the murders. He never advocates for Black suffrage or for desegregation. He shows up at the swimming pool moments after Sheriff has killed Taylor because Peejoe's brother went to get him when Peejoe would not leave after the sit-in started. Uncle Dove scolds Sheriff and says, "Just don't kill any more of them, okay? I am sick of cleaning up after you." When Uncle Dove realizes that Peejoe witnessed what happened, he arranges a secret meeting with Mr. Murphy of the Justice Department, but when they meet, Uncle Dove immediately begins to hesitate and resist involvement when it will mean an active, long-term, public commitment. Uncle Dove ultimately backs off completely as he accepts Sheriff's bribe that requires him to be silent about Sheriff's acts of murder in order for there to also be no charges pressed against his sister, Aunt Lucille. With anger, Uncle Dove explains the situation to Peejoe:

Peejoe: You mean we're not talking to the grand jury?
Uncle Dove: No, we're gonna start living like everybody else in this town. This is none of our business.
Peejoe: It's Aunt Lucille, ain't it? You made a deal with the sheriff. He lets her go, and we have to shut up.
Uncle Dove: She's family. She is my baby sister, and I'm not gonna let them kill her.
Peejoe: But you said we can stop him! You said we could put him in jail!
Uncle Dove: Careful, Peejoe. I was wrong. I'm sorry. We stuck our necks out too far.

Further manifestations are found in Aunt Earlene's changed behavior after *Look* magazine includes pictures of Peejoe and others who were present when Taylor's funeral was taken over by displays of massive resistance by authorities and racists in Industry. In a fit of rage, she says, "Look! Just look at this! Hugging a Negro on the cover of *Look*! You might as well start packing now! Go on Dove. I'm so ashamed." Her rage toward Peejoe, Uncle Dove, and indirectly, Black people manifests again when she begins to lose friends and have friends tell her to leave town. She yells, "We'll never get invited anywhere!....Why do you have to get involved? Let somebody else be the hero. This is none of our business." Prior to these events, Aunt Earlene was completely different. Early in the film Peejoe says of Aunt Earlene: "We liked her because she introduced us to Pop-Tarts, Kool-Aid, Chef Boyardee. And, she had a voice you could hear half a block away." Additionally, she and her husband had been friends with Nehemiah, and they occasionally had relied on his help to get by, as Nehemiah occasionally had relied on theirs. Nehemiah had also been a guest at their house.[27]

Aunt Lucille's character is a manifestation of the very real forces of White privilege and White blindness. Only her Whiteness allows her to all but escape punishment (Judge Mead ultimately overturns the jury's verdict and gives her two years of probation) for her many breaches of the law which include poisoning, killing,

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[27] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," (accessed July 1, 2016) https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf; Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Joseph E. Luders, *The Civil Rights Movement and the Logic of Social Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Stephen Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door*: *Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Lenham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999)

beheading her husband, and then preserving his head in a Tupperware container on her journey to the West and carrying it everywhere she goes; being an outlaw; firing a weapon in a bar; stealing a car and money; and when Sheriff Raymond (Noah Emmerich) finds her, resisting arrest, lying, stealing his gun, and running away. Of course, Aunt Lucille's crime spree is outlandish but remains a useful representation of the contrast between freedom, opportunity, and even, forgiveness available to White people and its opposite: The assumption of guilt and lack of opportunity forced upon Black people. Additionally, throughout the movie Aunt Lucille is completely unware of the racism that exists around her and additionally is insensitive when confronted with the issue of racism. Toward the end, after she has been captured in California and returned to Industry, Alabama, she is in the jail cell next to Nehemiah (Sheriff had arrested him for his civil disobedience during Taylor's funeral), and they the following conversation:

> **Nehemiah**: Sister? Sister Vinson?
> **Aunt Lucille:** I don't know who you are, but I'm not your sister.
> **Nehemiah**: My name is Nehemiah Jackson. Your brother and I are colleagues. I run the other funeral home.
> **Aunt Lucille:** I read about. I mean, I'm real sorry to hear about your son.
> **Nehemiah**: Thank you. (Long pause.) You know Dove is a good man. He's done me many a favor. And I just want you to know, I'm sorry for your trouble. We'll be gone free tomorrow, and if there's anything I can do for you.
> **Aunt Lucille:** No. Thank you. I mean, unless you have something to eat. I'm so hungry.
> **Aunt Lucille:** Thank you. Thank you.
> **Nehemiah**: I suppose it must be a terrible thing to kill somebody.
> **Aunt Lucille:** Yeah, I wouldn't recommend it.
> **Nehemiah**: I don't believe I could bring myself to do that though I've thought about it sometimes.
> **Aunt Lucille:** Well, it's a long story, you know? I just didn't see any other way out.
> **Nehemiah**: There's always some other way.
> **Aunt Lucille:** No, not with Chester.

Nehemiah: Yes, ma'am. But did you really have to do what you did?
Aunt Lucille: I bet that you've always been really kind to your wife haven't you, Mr. Jackson?
Nehemiah: I try to be.
Aunt Lucille: Well, then, you couldn't possibly understand.
Nehemiah: Oh, sister I know what it's like to be held down and kept down. Believe me, I know.
Aunt Lucille: [after a long pause] Yeah, I imagine you do.
Nehemiah: Well I hope you sleep well.
Aunt Lucille: Thank you. You too.

Even though such a scene is completely unrealistic, as a (Black) man and a (White) woman would not be side-by-side, it remains important. Throughout this scene, Aunt Lucille hesitates. She is blinded by her Whiteness and her dreams of wealth and fame and actual success in Hollywood.

Crazy in Alabama does remarkably well too when it comes to representing institutional, or governmental, responses to the Civil Rights Revolution. Such historical authenticity is found in numerous scenes, including when police officers tell two Black men they cannot enter the courthouse because it is for "Whites only" and when county authorities chase, beat up, and arrest Black people engaged in civil disobedience at the swimming pool. Sheriff is shown as not only murdering Taylor by pulling him off the fence, but also as being afraid and willing to lie and threaten others. He says, "Do you want me to twiddle my thumbs till this town explodes like Selma?," and during his television appearance, he boldly announces, "The people of Industry got no patience for uppity Negroes or outside agitators." Sheriff could even be said to be deliberately misleading people and escalating tensions because, as shown in *Crazy in Alabama*, participants in the Civil Rights Revolution were residents of Industry. They were all

"inside agitators." Finally, Sheriff makes Uncle Dove accept the bribe, as discussed above and constantly threatens Peejoe and his brother.

Even conflicts or differences between various aspects of government receive some noticeable attention. Too often, scholars, non-scholars, and Hollywood productions discuss "the government" as if it were a single, homogenous entity. Remembering that divisions in the government have always existed is essential, especially during the Civil Rights Revolution. The local, county, state, and federal branches and the myriad of offices, positions, and imperfect humans at each level frequently had separate and conflicting agendas. Detailed examples in *Crazy in Alabama* include the divide between Sheriff's efforts to maintain the culture of segregation, even, as he yells, "if I have to put every last nigger in jail!" and the Justice Department with its determination to do at least something to defend the civil rights of Black people and to stop Sheriff from murdering Industry's Black people. One of the last scenes shows the Justice Department arresting Sheriff.

Although subtly, *Crazy in Alabama* also addresses that part of the federal government's sudden urgency in finally giving meaning to the Reconstruction Amendments related more to its fear of media coverage and corresponding negative criticism by other people than to any sincere commitment born out of feeling ethically obliged. For example, when Uncle Dove and Peejoe meet with Mr. Murphy, he explains why it is urgent for Peejoe to speak with the grand jury: "Last thing Lyndon Johnson wants is another Selma down here. Your Judge Mead has kept a lid on so far but." In another example, Judge Mead criticizes all-White juries for often making "unbelievably

stupid" decisions, and when he orders the city swimming pool desegregated, the city circumvents the law by deciding to completely close the pool, going as far as filling it up with concrete.[28]

In addition to its individualized depictions of Black characters, by depicting these White characters--Peejoe, Peejoe's brother, Uncle Dove, Aunt Earlene, Aunt Lucille, Sheriff, Judge Mead, Mr. Murphy, and all of the White people at the swimming pool and on the sidelines during Taylor's funeral--as complex and different, *Crazy in Alabama* gets closer to the actual hopes and fears that existed during the Civil Rights Revolution than most blockbuster productions about this era.

In contrast to the discussion above, *Crazy in Alabama* is also problematic in a number of ways; although, they do not fully take away from its many strengths. Some of these points are less serious but still deserve to be noted. One of the most problematic aspects of how *Crazy in Alabama* presents the Civil Rights Revolution is the way in which it is juxtaposed with Aunt Lucille's crime spree and transformation to a Hollywood star, a part of the story that is also in no way dependent on the 1960s. Given the "craziness" of Aunt Lucille's adventures and the extensive use of magic realism, such positioning of

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[28] For information on the Cold War and how it influenced the Civil Rights Revolution, both positively and negatively, see Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

For information on real-life efforts to deliberately censor news related to civil rights-activism, namely Houston, Texas, and its "media blackout," see Howard Beeth and Cary D. Wintz, *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992); Thomas R. Cole, *No Color Is My Kind: The Life of Eldrewey Stearns and the Integration of Houston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); Pegoda, "Watchful Eyes"; and Thomas R. Cole, *The Strange Demise of Jim Crow*, (California Newsreel: 1998), DVD.

the two aspects of the film takes away from the seriousness of struggles actual women faced, and worse, it greatly minimizes Taylor's death, the Black community's response, and the response in the form of massive resistance by many of Industry's White people.

While *Crazy in Alabama* does show Blacks as active agents of change and not reliant on White people, the director provides them with very little direct voice overall. Collectively, only a few scenes, 26, are related to the Civil Rights Revolution, and even fewer actually include Black people: 16 of these have only White people (totaling 11 minutes and 24 seconds), 0 have only Black people, and 10 have White and Black people (totaling 22 minutes and 47 seconds). Put another way, White characters speak 9,391 (or 94 percent) of the words in *Crazy in Alabama*, whereas Black characters speak 583 (or 6 percent). White people speak 785 (or 94 percent) of the lines, and Black people speak 61 (or 7 percent). Put yet another way and as another strong indication that *Crazy in Alabama* is best described as two films in one, with one narrative receiving much greater emphasis, approximately 70-75 percent of the film is exclusively about Aunt Lucille, not the Black civil rights narrative. By keeping the focus on White people and their responses to the Civil Rights Revolution, even though *Crazy in Alabama* shows White people as being racist in historically relevant ways, the director keeps the typical audience member comfortable and helps perpetuates false notions of Black inferiority and complete dependence.

On a related note, Peejoe narrates the movie, and the movie revolves around his experiences, reactions, perspectives, making him a "Forrest Gump"-like character. The use of a child's perspective is, of course, common but has consequences. In what

appears to be the only published article to even touch on *Crazy in Alabama* thus far, Mary B. O'Shea describes Peejoe as a character who is among the latest and most effective manifestations of a new "Huck Finn." She describes "Huck Finns" and thus Peejoe as being young, categorically different, and uniquely "intelligent if unschooled, mischievous but not malicious, largely self-reliant, more at home in the country than in the town, unlikely to have many strong family connections, more likely to be lower than upper class, [and] fundamentally marginalized by this society." While Peejoe is not a White savior figure, as O'Shea seems to suggest, the film paints him as being uniquely enlightened, and the plot is structured such that justice for Taylor is ultimately dependent on Peejoe's testimony against Sheriff. Only Mr. Murphy of the Justice Department is more determined than Peejoe to see justice after Taylor's death. *Crazy in Alabama* does not explain why Peejoe is so different than others, even different compared to his brother who continually rebuffs Peejoe's feelings of equality toward Blacks. When Taylor first enters the pool and others are exiting, Peejoe does not understand why Blacks getting in the pool matters and is shocked adults and other children consider it wrong. In other scenes, Peejoe repeatedly stands up to authorities in support of Black people, even telling Sheriff, "You ain't nothing but a big old bully!" shortly before Taylor's death. Nonetheless, Peejoe is an important example of a filmic White ally.[29]

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[29] Mary B. O'Shea, "Crazy from the Heat: Southern Boys and Coming of Age," in *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth*, ed. Murray Pomerance and Frances Gateward (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 83-97.

The Justice Department, since the Civil Rights Division emerged from the Civil Rights Act of 1957, has certainly played an essential role in the enforcement and advancement of basic civil rights as defined most notably in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Yet, this does not erase legacies of inaction by the federal government before and after 1957. In *Crazy in Alabama*, the Justice Department is presented as a final haven of sorts. After Uncle Dove contacts them, an agent comes immediately and is most anxious to take immediate and swift action. Given that this is the only representation of the federal government, *Crazy in Alabama* implies that the federal government, like a White ally, was always ready and eager to stand for Black rights and punish White law enforcement personal who sought otherwise. Additionally, similar to *Mississippi Burning*, *Crazy in Alabama* has the effect of further deleting from history the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) anti-civil rights actions vis-à-vis COINTELPRO.

On a related note and as alluded to above, except for one reference to Selma, this film suggests the Civil Rights Revolution was small and isolated in Alabama, which is a disservice to historical memory and a significant flaw in an otherwise surprisingly strong text. Except for the one jail scene, Aunt Lucille is never around Black people. From Alabama to California and back, she is surrounded by White people. On her stops along the way, she never encounters a "Whites only" sign or any other kind of racialized reality.

Crazy in Alabama also has a problematic "rhetoric of freedom": Despite its false illusion, no one actually achieves the freedom they demand and, according to some the

United States's founding texts and all of its ideals and according the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, deserve. There are no unreserved notions in support of justice in *Crazy in Alabama*. The movie does show some of the discrimination directed toward Blacks. But, on the other hand, it never has a Black character who describes how they have been treated by society, which stands in sharp contrast to the entire last thirty minutes of this text, which is devoted to Aunt Lucille's trial and descriptions of being abused by her husband.

Peejoe's overly optimistic voiceover help conclude the film: "Taylor Jackson died for freedom. Aunt Lucille had to kill to get it. Life and death are only temporary but freedom goes on forever." Each part of this statement deserve specific comment. The proposition that Taylor receives freedom upon death assumes life exists after death, implies that freedom in "this" life is not so urgent or even required. Thus, the inequality Taylor encountered is fully excused and an opportunity for possible freedom is automatically worth dying. In a discussion of masculinity, opportunity, and war, for a contrasting example, Orlando in Sally Potter's Virginia Woolf-based *Orlando* (1992) counters societal pressures by posing, "I might think that freedom won by death is not worth having." Additionally, *Crazy in Alabama*'s proposition is no different than when White enslavers assured those enslaved that they would be rewarded in Heaven and no different than when industrialists dismissed complaints about dangerous working conditions and low pay by reminding workers of the rich rewards in heaven, as Joe Hill expresses in "Pie in the Sky" (also known as "The Preacher and the Slave" and "Long

Haired Preachers"), for example. Moreover, we must remember Sheriff murders Taylor: *Crazy in Alabama* takes from that tragedy with its concluding words.

Additionally, David, Nehemiah, and other Black citizens of Industry do not receive freedom within the narrative. When the film ends, there is no longer a swimming pool because Whites found even a small degree of court-ordered desegregation intolerable, Blacks are still disenfranchised, there are still only all-White juries, and the Justice Department says it probably cannot actually do anything to punish Sheriff, for example.

Aunt Lucille did not actually receive freedom either because, as described by Mary B. O'Shea, she did not return to Hollywood, did not escape patriarchy, and instead, Norman, her driver, assumes responsibility for taking care of her and her children when Judge Mead gives her probation, instead of death. Peejoe's words, "Life and death are only temporary but freedom goes on forever," are not fully logical. A few words prior, Peejoe informs viewers that Taylor now enjoys freedom, so is life temporary or not? Is death temporary?

More seriously, "freedom goes on forever" suggests a teleological philosophy and an unwavering recognition and celebration, across time and place and into the future for all of time, of freedom--a philosophy that erases past and future struggles by those in need of basic human rights. While "freedom" is not defined, *Crazy in Alabama* ultimately suggests that *freedom* is either being able to essentially live without interference or abuse from others or no longer being alive. "Freedom" to Taylor and "freedom" to Sheriff are very different things.

Because *Crazy in Alabama* relegates its representation of the Civil Rights Revolution to the margins, it is more important (and consequential) for how its emphasis on other themes causes people to lack strong historical memories of this landmark social movement that demanded fairness and equality for Blacks. Lacking relevant and appropriate historical memories is just as costly and dangerous as having inaccurate historical memories. As described in the epigraph for this section, *Crazy in Alabama* does not have a seamless storyline. The story about Aunt Lucile makes up approximately 70 to 75 percent of the film, with the rest of the film being mostly about Taylor's murder and the aftermath. This film, then, suggests that the movement for Black rights was not as important or as big as it actually was, which is further confounded by the film's strong implicit suggestion that racism only existed in Alabama, especially in Industry and Selma. Given Alabama's important place in the Civil Rights Revolution, it is worth noting that except for a brief mention of Selma, there are no mentions of racism or activism outside of Industry. Alabama's Rosa Parks and George Wallace, for example, existed in a completely different world than what *Crazy in Alabama* manifests.

Yet, these comments are not to dismiss how extremely powerful a number of scenes are in their note-worthy representations of the Civil Rights Revolution. Black men and Black women are not stereotyped. Rather, Black characters manifest action, bravery, confidence, determination, and efficacy, individually and as a united community. Such positive representations exist--when a Black character is involved--from the beginning until the ending. While fully acknowledging and respecting that

some manifestations of the Civil Rights Revolution and its offshoots believed the use of violence was necessary, *Crazy in Alabama* shows protesters engaged in the peaceful, nonviolent acts of civil disobediences and protests for which this Revolution is known and celebrated. The film represents some of the physical and psychological violence, or massive resistance, that did exist and does so respectfully and in a way that allows this important History to remain approachable. Swimming pools are addressed as the powerful sites of conflict that they were. Sit-ins and peaceful marches are also shown to be powerful and they were. The careful viewer will also see that *Crazy in Alabama* ends with nothing approaching equality or equity for Blacks. Additionally, this movie shows, very powerfully, the many ironies that constituted the mores of the culture of segregation: segregation was not about separation.

In addition to its placing civil rights on the sidelines, *Crazy in Alabama* has a number of other weakness that subtract from its power. The film, like other films discussed throughout this manuscript, is set up such that audiences can easily walk away believing and internalizing a happy ending for Aunt Lucille and Black people and such that the tragedies portrayed only exist in the past, isolated by the temporal and geographic. In his childhood voice, Peejoe voices innocence and optimism when he says "freedom goes on forever," (falsely) reassuring audiences that the world is much better. And the end shows Peejoe, his brother, and Taylor playing together; Taylor, when looking at the now-closed swimming pool, says to Peejoe, his brother, *and viewers*, "Now you the same as us." As a result, *Crazy in Alabama* tends to promote loyalty toward the United States and increase feelings of patriotism, especially for how it

exclaims freedom, depicts King as god-like, and suggests, without criticism, that the federal government, and even Sheriff in all of his racism, sincerely cares for citizens under their protection. And, naturally, the focus on Peejoe and his experiences and his perspectives adds an unavoidable layer of Whiteness.

Amazon reviews for *Crazy in Alabama* were collected on July 27, 2014. At that time, there were 54 reviews, and all but 12 of these (or 22 percent) are positive. The consensus among these individuals is that *Crazy in Alabama* never got the recognition it deserves because people were put off by the title, trailer, or basic premise of the movie with its focus on a "crazy woman." People say, that it is "one of the best films I've ever seen," "ads don't do it justice – very good film!," "surprisingly entertaining," and "love, love, love this movie" again and again. However, most people discuss the film, surprisingly, without specifically mentioning any of its Black characters or aspects of the story focused on the Civil Rights Revolution. Reviews primarily focused on Melanie Griffith and saw her Aunt Lucille character as manifesting entertainment, while also being "a little puzzling at times." The few reviews that did discuss the civil rights-struggles for Blacks discussed it in terms of the films approachability. One individual put it as, *Crazy in Alabama* "deals with two serious social issues, while keeping the tone light and engaging," while another says it "deals seriously and respectfully with the topic, and another describes it as a comedy that "is also poignant and politically enlightening." Above all, people throughout the reviews internalize this film as a morality tale. Commenters say the film says, "we must do the right thing" and says to "defend ourselves and also come to the defense of others." Those who rated *Crazy in Alabama*

negatively provided little to no elaboration; therefore, their dislike, beyond the film's unusual trajectory. Unlike other films examined in this dissertation, reviews for *Crazy in Alabama* did not reveal anything in particular. Specifically, this set of reviews contains virtually no comments testifying to the supposedly accurate nature of film, no elaboration about why the film is presumably unusually important, no emotionally-laden reviews either, and no articulations of idealized pasts, for example, of the kind found in reviews of *The Long Walk Home*, *Sandlot*, *The Help*, *The Butler*, and other films examined in this study. In addition to its lack of focus on the past in the way other films in this dissertation do, *Crazy in Alabama* simply has not been seen that often. For example, earning far less than $4 million against its budget of $24 million, *Crazy in Alabama* was a box-office flop and continues to rank well below most other movies. On July 25, 2016, for example, *Crazy in Alabama* had a sells rank of 11,602. *The Help*, by contrast, is ranked 708 and *Remember the Titans* (2000) is ranked 823.[30]

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> *History prefers legends to men. It prefers nobility to brutality, soaring speeches to quiet deeds. History remembers the battle and forgets the blood.*
>
> ***-Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter*, 2012**

> *Hollywood's distortions have helped reinforce the gauzy mythology of the struggles of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and others.*[31]

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[30] *Amazon* (accessed July 25, 2016) http://smile.amazon.com; *Box Office Mojo* (accessed July 11, 2016) http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id= crazyinalabama.htm; and "Customer Reviews for *Crazy in Alabama*."

[31] Godfrey Cheshire, "North Carolina as It Was, Split and Seething," *The New York Times* (accessed July 24, 2016) http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/movies/14blood.html?_r=1.

-Professor Timothy B. Tyson, 2010

Filmic text examined throughout this dissertation chapter harm historical memory and dishonor the millions of people who were committed to justice during the Civil Rights Revolution because they push this defining social movement to the sidelines. In these films, the Civil Rights Revolution is not the central, revolutionary time period it was. Rather, at best, it amounts to something akin to minor and insolated skirmishes between a few individuals, a brief movement made possibly by a White savior, White ally, or a White child in need of a "Magical Negro." Additionally, throughout these films, White characters change and evolve and are the heroes, Black characters do not change and are not the heroes. Films examined in this chapter conclude with the assurance of equality and opportunity for White people exclusively.[32]

These blockbuster films ignore the agency of Black individuals and obliterate the actual generosity, actual racism, and actual limits of White individuals by having such a small range of representations. Consequences extend beyond the specific movies and

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[32] For additional information on the "Magical Negro" filmic stereotype, a term coined by Spike Lee, see Audrey Colombe, "White Hollywood's New Black Boogeyman," *Jump Cut* (accessed July 30, 2016) http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc45.2002/colombe/; David Ehrenstein, "Obama the 'Magic Negro," *Los Angeles Times* (accessed July 30, 2016) http://www.latimes.com/la-oe-ehrenstein19mar19-story.html#; Christopher John Farley, "That Old Black Magic," *Time* (accessed July 30, 2016) http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,998604,00.html; Cerise L. Glenn and Landra J. Cunningham, "The Power of Black Magic: The Magical Negro and White Salvation in Film," *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 2 (November 2009): 135-152; Susan Gonzales, "Director Spike Lee Slams 'Same Old' Black Stereotypes in Today's Films," *Yale Bulletin & Calendar* (accessed July 30, 2016) http://www.yale.edu/opa/arc-ybc/v29.n21/story3.html; Matthew W. Hughey, "Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films," *Social Problems* 56, no. 3 (August 2009): 543-577; and Zuleyka Zevallos, "Hollywood Racism: The Magical Negro Trope," *Other Sociologist* (accessed July 30, 2016) https://othersociologist.com/2012/01/24/hollywood-racism/.

characters when we remember to acknowledge that such characters are historical stand-ins for a whole variety of broadly similar people, representations and historical stand-ins that inform the historical memory people have and accept, generally with little or no skepticism, as correct. These films are, at least in ways, actually so divorced from the cultural and political backdrops of their settings that the plots and characters could effortlessly be recast in another era. For instance, if *Corrina, Corrina*, *The Sandlot*, or *Secret Life of Bees* had been set in the 1990s (when they were made), instead of the 1960s, the objections stated in this dissertation would be null. However, we must specifically recognize that those involved in the production of these movies deliberately chose to situate their stories in the 1960s and in what amounts to an "Anywhere, USA" setting, deliberately chose to include situations that warrant representations of racism, and deliberately chose to ignore such warrants and distort perceptions of the past in the process to such a degree that completely unrealistic representations are the result. (Prior to discussing it, college History students report again and again that they never fully put the various pieces of *The Sandlot* together before and essentially just accepted that conflicts never existed at swimming pools or between young children, for example. Representations shape History and perception.) Such a cycle happens with such regularity as to indicate some kind of deep societal need of revisiting these conflict-ridden eras and trying to convince itself that conditions could not possibly have been as bad as some say. These film and their problematic relationship with History, at their core, speak to society's struggle with coming to terms with the past. Although, for sure,

the 1960s instantaneously marked the height of cultural, economic, political, and social liberalism to-date in the United States.[33]

Films that do not say anything about racism or the Civil Rights Revolution actually "say" a great deal. Movies such as *The Hours*, *Mona Lisa Smile*, and *The Sandlot* are exclusively White narratives and are arguably even more consequential than *The Help*, *Crazy in Alabama*, and films with at least some racialized acknowledgments for shaping the historical memory of what we call the Civil Rights Revolution because by not focusing on it in any way whatsoever, viewers unconsciously "learn" that the Civil Rights Revolution did not "exist" in film after film. Then, when they see movies that focus indirectly or directly on the Civil Rights Revolution, with rare exceptions, movies do so in such carefully-crated, non- controversial ways as to not significantly challenge the typical Hollywood film that says--by omission--there was not a Civil Rights Revolution.

In the sharpest of possible contrasts to the texts evaluated above, Jeb Stuart's *Blood Done Sign My Name* (2010), based on historian Timothy Tyson's memoir of the same name, pushes Black people and their agency to the forefront, along with the racism of White individuals. This film and memoir recount events that actually happened in Oxford, North Carolina, in 1970. *Blood Done Sign My Name* and *The Butler* (2013) are the only films examined for this dissertation that represent the Klu Klux Klan.

[33] Students in my Spring 2016 History of United States Since 1877 class at Alvin Community College wrote about *The Sandlot* and *Crazy in Alabama* as part of on a weekly reflection assignment. These can be found here: https://andrewpegoda.com/teaching/history-courses/sp16-acc-hist1302/weekly-reflections/reflection-11/.

Blood Done Sign My Name shows Klan members, men and women, with their children having a picnic before putting on their robes, burning a large cross, and praying for White purity. *Blood Done Sign My Name* is also distinguished by its use of a White family, a preacher, his wife, and children, that is nothing more than a minor side story. The Tysons function as minor allies but not as White savior figures. Scenes include the White parents teaching their children about racism. Additionally, they do not lead (or even participate in) the protest march lead by Golden Frinks (Afemo Omilami) and Benjamin Chavis (Nate Parker) after the murder of Henry Marrow (A.C. Sanford) and the not guilty verdict for his murders simply because they are White, the jury was all-White, and Marrow was accused of talking to a White woman. In a *New York Times* article, Godfrey Cheshire interviews Tyson and Stuart and finds they both "loathe movies like *Mississippi Burning* and *Ghosts of Mississippi*" and were committed to not remaking *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Stuart explains:

> What always happens in the way Hollywood tells these stories is that the White guy saves the day. I did not want to fall into that trap. The Tysons got run out of town. Tim's dad is one of my heroes in this movie, but he's not Gregory Peck. He's not going to make it all right for everybody.

Tyson also discusses that societal historical memory has a "sugarcoated confection" of the Civil Rights Revolution that says it was an interracial, nonviolent, successful movement that never met opposition and only met welcome arms.

The brutally honest version of History provided in the film *Blood Done Sign My Name* has never received a wide reception, as partly indicated by it having only ever received forty reviews on *Amazon*. Even Gregory Allen Howard and Boaz Yakin's popular

and sometimes controversial *Remember the Titans* (2000)--which begins in 1971 as T. C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia, is forcefully integrated--with its focus on football and the unprecedented speed with which the White and Black athletes go from hating each other to loving each other, includes numerous racially-charged scenes that involve White and/or Black characters and are relevant to the hopes and fears of the real Civil Rights Revolution, not the reel Civil Rights Revolution that is manifested or *not manifested* from *Corrina, Corrina* to *Crazy in Alabama*, *Forrest Gump*, *Ghosts of Mississippi*, to *Girl*, *Interrupted*, and to *Hairspray*, *Heart of Dixie*, *Men in Black 3*, *The Sandlot*, *The Secret Life of Bees*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, and *There Goes My Baby*.[34]

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[34] Cheshire, "North Carolina as It Was, Split and Seething"; "Customer Reviews for *Blood Done Sign My Name*," *Amazon* (accessed July 24, 2016) https://smile.amazon.com/Blood-Done-Sign-My-Name/product-reviews/B003NE8AXO/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_summary?ie= UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=helpful; and Dave McKenna, "*Remember The Titans* Is A Lie, And This Man Still Wants You To Know It," *Deadspin* (accessed July 31, 2016) http://deadspin.com/remember-the-titans-is-a-lie-and-this-man-wants-you-to-1609473834.

For more information on historical events portrayed in *Blood Done Sign My Name*, see William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); A.O. Scott, "A Town Torn Asunder by Racial Killing in '70," *The New York Times* (accessed July 24, 2016) http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/ 19/movies/19blood.html; and Timothy B. Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005).

Blood Done Sign My Name and *Remember the Titians*, certainly important texts, are not examined in depth in this dissertation since the focus is on films about the 1950s and 1960s, artificial boundaries necessary for purposes of keeping this study manageable. Additionally, in the case of *Blood Done Sign My Name* it never reached the popularity threshold to influence historical memory en masse and is mostly a docudrama, and in the case of *Remember the Titians*, to properly analyze it, an entire body of literature on the historiography of sports would need to considered, as well as more recent literature on the racist nature of football and on the unusual physical dangers it poses, for example, see William C. Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007).

These films certainly need to be examined closely, as there is a dearth of scholarship about both. As of July 2016, no academic articles, book chapters, or other material can be located for *Blood Done Sign My Name*. A few articles about *Remember the Titians* exist but do not particularly focus on the film and its relationship with History and culture, for example, see Jessica L. Collett, et al., "Using Remember the Titans to Teach Theories of Conflict Reduction," *Teaching Sociology* 38, no. 3 (July 2010): 258-266; Gregory A. Crammer and Tina M. Harris, "'White-Side, Strong-Side': A Critical Examination of Race and Leadership in *Remember the Titans*," 26, no. 2 (2015): 153-171; Cassie A. Eno and David R. Ewoldsen, "The Influence of Explicitly and Implicitly Measured Prejudice on Interpretations of and Reactions to Black

Collectively, these screenwriters and directors miss immeasurable opportunities to create cultural artifacts that tell true stories about the Civil Rights Revolution in such a way as to provide healing. Instead, these authors opt to push stories about civil rights-struggles and civil rights-successes to the sidelines, especially where Black people's agency and experience is concerned, sometimes to complete obliteration. Although, the fault also belongs to dominate audiences who, in their struggle to come to terms with the past, prefer and demand utopian, non-challenging, non-disturbing (and yet deeply disturbing) versions of the past, where Whoopi Goldberg is Mammied and serves as a nanny to every kid. As quoted in the first opening epigraph of this section, History does indeed prefer legends.

Film," *Media Psychology* 13 (2010): 1-30; Oliver Gruner, "You're Only as Good as You're Last Game: *Remember the Titans* Remembers Civil Rights," in *Southerners on Film: Essays on Hollywood Portrayals Since the 1970s*, ed. Andrew B. Leiter (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011): 32-46; Jaime Schultz, "The Truth about Historical Sports Films," *Journal of Sport History* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 29-45; and Dan Shaw, "Affirmative Action and Diversity in *Remember the Titians*," in *Morality and the Movies: Reading Ethics Through Film* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012): 177-190

CONCLUSION:
FROM WRITTEN IN TO WRITTEN OUT AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES: NEGOTIATING WHAT WE CALL THE CIVIL RIGHTS REVOLUTION

The past is dead. It is done. It is over. It is finished. It is dust. It is a new day today.
-Scott Presson, 2016

The past is never dead. It's not even the past.
-William Faulkner, 1951

But this is History. Distance yourselves. Our perspective on the past alters. Looking back, immediately in front of us is dead ground. We don't see it, and because we don't see it this means that there is no period so remote as the recent past.
-Alan Bennett, 2004

Memory is subject to a filtering process that we don't always recognize and can't always control. We remember what we can bear and we block what we cannot.
-Sue Grafton, 2016

Write a nonfiction book, and be prepared for the legion of readers who are going to doubt your facts. But write a novel, and get ready for the world to assume every word is true.
-Barbara Kingsolver, 1995

Most of what people have ever known about the past has come from deliberated aesthetic forms such as monuments, paintings, novels, and films.[1]
-Jonathan Marwil, 1998

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[1] Alan Bennett, *The History Boys: A Play* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 73; Barbara Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now or Never* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1995), 257; William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 73; Sue Grafton, *X* (New York: Penguin Group, 2016), 291; Jonathan Marwil, "LSA Course Guide" (accessed January 18, 2009) https://www.lsa.umich.edu/cg/cg_detail.aspx?content= 1720HISTORY359001&termArray=w_09_1720; and Scott Presson, "The Past is Dead," *CBN* (accessed January 15, 2013) http://www1.cbn.com/devotions /past-dead.

Since its publication as a novel in 1936 and adaptation for the silver screen in 1939, all things related to *Gone with the Wind* have been extraordinarily popular. *Gone with the Wind*, the novel, is over one-thousand pages, and the movie version is nearly four hours. While both have substantial differences, both rewrite the 1860s and 1870s with an emphasis on the heroism, suffering, and forward-thinking of people in the South who are racialized as White, while making full mockery of those racialized as Black. In *Gone with the Wind*, Blacks are more than content being enslaved, and both Whites and Blacks are victims of a government in the North that is selfish and violent. Both versions perpetuate pro-Confederate nostalgia for the so-called Lost Cause. Whereas the film is primarily a romance-adventure of Scarlett O'Hara's various love interests set against this backdrop of change and crisis, the novel is very much a story of the actual Civil War and its aftermath on the home front. The film has made more money than any other film in history.

Mary Condé argues that *Gone with the Wind*'s popularity and influence has been so substantial that all fictional accounts of enslavement by Black writers are automatically a response. By extension, especially when working from the perspective of intertextuality, it is fair to assert that all fictional texts about both History and about White and Black people can be considered either responses *or* continuations of *Gone with the Wind*. Hernán Vera and Andrew M. Gordon soundly argue that Hollywood's archetypal Mammy and Scarlet, as originally found in *Gone with the Wind* and almost always paired, can also be found virtually unchanged in movies across the spectrum of

genres, including *Imitation of Life* (1959), *The Long Walk Home* (1990), *Passion Fish* (1992), *Boys on the Side* (1994), and *The Blindside* (2009).[2]

In general, Hollywood productions about the Civil Rights Revolution do not pose any substantial challenge to the basic hopes, fears, and world views manifested in *Gone with the Wind*. *The Long Walk Home* (1990), *The Sandlot* (1993), *Corrina, Corrina* (1994), *There Goes My Baby* (1994), *Crazy in Alabama* (1999), *Hairspray* (2007), *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008), *The Help* (2011), and *The Butler* (2013), for example, all deliberately and subjectively change the past such that White people are made larger than life, and Black people are minimized, just as in *Gone with the Wind*.

Working from the perspective Erika Doss uses, movies are effectively national memorials. Films are the very embodiment of photo shopping History--"if you do not like the past, change it." Similarly, these post-1990 filmic texts share with both versions of *Gone with the Wind* their emphasis on promoting loyalty toward the United States and its history while fostering feelings of nostalgia for long-gone utopian pasts, pasts that do not actually exist. Additionally, these texts share the trait of being popular and

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[2] "All-Time USA Top 100 Box Office Films," *AMC Filmsite* (accessed January 20, 2009) http://www.filmsite.org/boxoffice.html; Mary Condé, "Responses to *Gone with the Wind*," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 26 (1996): 210; Andrew Joseph Pegoda, "Verisimilitudinous Film and Literature: An Examination of *Gone with the Wind*'s Influence, 1936-present" (Unpublished term paper: University of Houston, 2009); and Hernán Vera and Andrew M. Gordon, *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 100-114.

While such would certainly not delete the influence of either one, recently there have been calls to place *Gone with the Wind* in the vault, along with the Confederate, see Lou Lumenick, "*Gone with the Wind* Should go the way of the Confederate Flag," *New York Post* (accessed June 27, 2015); and Joan Shipps, "'Are we living in Nazi Germany?': Nutters freak out about imaginary ban on *Gone With the Wind*," *RawStory* (accessed July 2, 2015) http://www.rawstory.com/2015/06/are-we-living-in-nazi-germany-nutters-freak-out-about-imaginary-ban-on-gone-with-the-wind/.

having significant implications for societal historical memory since they disseminate versions of the past that stand at a disjuncture with evidence. Finally, in most cases, there is so little difference between these films that one could argue they are not only responses or extensions of *Gone with the Wind* but are also practically the same film or at least perpetual remakes of each other in the same way that *Imitation of Life* (1934) and *Imitation of Life* (1959) are remakes even though the characters in each are dropped into different eras and settings. Films "about" the Civil Rights Revolution are not actually about this movement.[3]

Measurement of change overtime is one important characteristic of the academic field of History, and over three decades, Hollywood has continued to repackage the same fundamental stories and stereotypes when it comes to representations of the Civil Rights Revolution. All of these films obliterate the unusually revolutionary nature of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. There are no substantial changes in how White people are depicted. White adult men are curiously absent as major characters in these films, except in *The Butler* and *Remember the Titans*. Directors continue to depict leading White characters, women and children as uniquely foreword

[3] Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). Doss focuses on physical memorials. Her discussion of film relates to films that show memorials being destroyed. She focuses on memorials related to a variety of issues and purposes, but those for the Civil Rights Revolution are not her focus.

As a side note and in an interesting "White-washed" rewriting of the past, the popular television show, *The Brady Bunch*, which originally aired from 1969 to 1974, has all White characters, including a White maid. Alice Nelson (Ann B. Davis) is happy being a live-in maid, is treated well, and functions as a comedian in the show. The use of such a fictional character clearly serves as a response, even if unconsciously, to the then on-going Civil Rights Revolution. Such a character deletes the experience, pain, and accomplishments of Black women, for example. *The Brady Bunch*, likewise, creates a 1960s and 1970s United States that is free from problems, domestically or internationally.

thinking and even vital to the civil rights struggle, while other White characters are sporadically shown as only being hostile to the cause because their general worldview is negative and hostile toward everyone, not because they are bigoted. Massive resistance is exemplified a few times, especially in *The Long Walk Home* and in *Crazy in Alabama*, but in all such cases, these films immediately counter these images with grandiose statements about how much progress is subsequently made and how kind White people are. Presumably, because such would take away from approachability and conceptions of a utopian past, the Klu Klux Klan, for example, is never represented, except briefly in the very rarely seen biopic, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (2010).[4]

Just as representations of White characters are the same, representations of Black characters have also essentially remained constant, as also argued by Donald Bogle and Stuart Hall. With slight updates, "Mammy" is in both *Gone with the Wind*, *The Long Walk Home*, *The Secret Life of Bees*, *Hairspray*, and in countless additional works of fiction. Leading Black characters are consistently shown as either nonchalant toward the cause of civil rights activism until prompted by White people, essential in guiding a White person to the aid of Black people, or as living in a world free of racism. Black

[4] When discussing *Men of Honor* (2000), Cynthia Fuchs says, "The trick in this film--and others which take on similar historically rehabilitative projects--is to set this racism in the past and attribute it to screwed-up (drunk, self-absorbed, insane) individuals, so all viewers who don't identify with those individuals can feel reassured that they're not to blame. In this way, it repeats moves made by *Remember the Titans* and *Hurricane*, both apparently assuming that there's nothing quite so moving for mainstream (read: "mixed") audiences as an exemplary, incredibly strong and patient black man suffering for the sins and at the hands of specifically designated evil characters who don't begin to resemble anyone in those audience," see Fuchs, "*Men of Honor* (2000)," *PopMatters* (accessed April 10, 2016) http://www.popmatters.com/review/men-of-honor/.

women are consistently "Mammied" and de-humanized. Black women are always shown "Mammied" far more often than they are shown as activists, daughters, mothers, and wives. Characters who are Black men, likewise, are made to be passive and subservient and sometimes scary far more often than they are made to be fathers or activists, for example. Such depictions perpetuate the "happy slave myth," as discussed by Nell Irvin Painter and other historians, or what we could also call the "happy domestic worker myth." In effect, Black people are almost completely erased in Hollywood movies that claim to tell true stories about the Ciivl Rights Revolution.[5]

Similarly, with the possible exception of *The Butler*, Hollywood film uniformly shows a Civil Rights Revolution that either emerged unexpectedly, or, as in *Corrina*, *Corrina* and *The Sandlot*, is completely deleted. Except for *Far From Heaven* (2002) and *Hairspray*, films that deal with the Civil Rights Revolution are set in the South. By not having any Civil Rights Revolution film set in Minnesota, Washington, Maine, or states

[5] Monica White Ndounou's recent monograph discuss films such as *The Secret Life of Bees*, *The Help*, and hundreds of others that are not related to the Civil Rights Revolution but focuses on the underrepresentation and negative representation of Black women and men as related to what Hollywood thinks will and will not make substantial profits, as well as the tiny number of total Black performers used by Hollywood, as partly evident by the frequent appearance of the same actors and actresses appearing in film after film about the Civil Rights Revolution. She also has an important chapter called, "The Plantation Lives!" the focuses on White-authored fictions about the past and Black people, see Ndounou, *Shaping the Future of African American Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014). For studies focused just on roles for Black people, see Adam Howard, "*The Help* Oscar Backlash: The Roles Aren't Demeaning, Hollywood's Lack of Diversity Is," *The Giro* (accessed January 25, 2012) http://thegrio.com/2012/01/25/oscar-nominations-the-help-mamie-myth-roles-arent-demeaning-hollywoods-lack-of-diversity-is/; and Vadim Rizov, "New Study Puts Numbers to the Lack of Minority Representation in Film," *The Dissolve* (accessed January 9, 2014) http://thedissolve.com/news/847-new-study-finds-minority-representation-lacking-in/

besides those in the South, film helps perpetuate the idea that racism and activism against such discrimination only existed in few isolated places.[6]

That portrayals of events, peoples, and events, for instance, have remained the same absolutely does not suggest Hollywood is committed to accuracy, for in fact the opposite in true. Hollywood and society at large, for all practical purposes, almost have no "memory" of the Civil Rights Revolution. Indeed, from the critique of a historian, Hollywood productions about the collection of actions, events, and peoples collectively called the Civil Rights Revolution, consistently shed, and effectively rebuke, any kind of commitment to examining and presenting rigorously honest History. Historical memory does not at any point even begin to fully approach the sustained hopes and fears present in all of those thousands and thousands of individuals who fought for freedom in the face of uncertain risks that included arrest, injury, and death and who, in contrast, fought for continued oppression and second class citizenship for individuals racialized outside of the socially constructed and socially sustained "White" category in the face of changes to the status quo and their Whiteness. Executives of the dominant cinema industry in the United States are simply unwilling and unable to parallel actual hopes and fears in films about the Civil Rights Revolution.

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[6] Donald Bogle*, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, 4th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2001); Nell Painter's *Facebook* page (accessed July 27, 2016) https://www.facebook.com/nell.painter/posts/1047394028689519; and Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other,'" in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 252.

Film never discusses Blackness. Film never shows it as simply being beautiful. Except for *The Butler* and a few insufficient scenes in *The Long Walk Home*, *There Goes My Baby*, *Corrina*, *Corrina*, and *The Help*, Black people are never even depicted outside the presence of White people, and these White people are either "helping" Black people--and functioning as White savior figures or something similar--or employing these Black people. Hernán Vera and Andrew M. Gordon, in the first comprehensive examination of how White people present White characters in film, find that writers and directors use and reuse the White savior figure. White people did help Black people at times, of course, but stories of such aid are almost the only ones Hollywood tells, whether about the Civil Rights Revolution or anything else. Hollywood also unnecessarily suggests such acts (by White people) are extraordinary deeds. Additionally, Vera and Gordon find that images of White people as being superior to non-Whites and as being essential to the progress of civilization have remained unchanged and absolutely constant for over a century of film.[7]

Film about the Civil Rights Revolution is not even truly about the Civil Rights Revolution. In the same way that Susan Stewart says *Gone with the Wind* "teaches" White people how to be proper southerners, so too do films about the Civil Rights Revolution provide an instructional manual to Whites on properly creating and

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[7] Matthew W. Hughey, *The White Savior Film*: *Content, Critics, and Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014); Vera and Gordon, *Screen Saviors*; and Cited in Vera and Gordon, *Screen Saviors*, 5. See also Hughey, "The White Savior Film and Reviewers' Reception," *Symbolic Interaction* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 475-496. Hughey writes mostly about *Freedom Writers* (2007). This film uses a White savior figure who teachers struggling high school students in Los Angeles about the Freedom Riders so they can be freedom writers.

maintaining Whiteness and on controlling a false historical narrative. A film about the Holocaust or the Nazi occupation of France done in the style of *The Help* or *Hairspray*, for instance, would meet absolute outrage. As a result, writers, directors, and audiences miss important opportunities, as outlined in the following paragraphs.

Throughout these films, the activism of well-known and lesser-known individuals, both White and Black, such as Ella Baker, James Baldwin, Angela Davis, Virginia Foster Durr, Andrew Goodman, Victor Hugo Green, Fannie Lou Hamer, Barbara Johns, John Louis, James Meredith, Bayard Rustin (who received a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013), and Modjeska Monteith Simkins do not receive attention. They are never even mentioned. Likewise, there are no fictional characters who can be paralleled to real-life historical actors. All Black characters in Hollywood fictions about the Civil Rights Revolution are heterosexual. Medgar Evers's death is an important turning point in *The Help*, and Emmett Till's death receives brief mentions in *The Butler* and in *The Help*. Their actual lives, however, seemingly do not matter to Hollywood. Rosa Parks is mentioned once in *The Long Walk Home*. Otherwise, films supposedly about the Civil Rights Revolution do not reference actual activists. Adding such references and discussions would not place any unjust burden on the screenwriter.[8]

[8] "Bayard Rustin to be Posthumously Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom," *San Diego Gay & Lesbian News* (accessed August 8, 2013) http://sdgln.com/news/2013/08/08/bayard-rustin-be-posthumously-awarded-presidential-medal-freedom.

Additionally, *The Butler* depicts the importance of pro-civil rights organizations at times and *The Long Walk Home* shows the importance of the Black church as a center for planning. Otherwise, organizations such as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters are never represented. Furthermore, according to Hollywood's reel past, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Highlander Folk School, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and Wednesdays in Mississippi do not exist. Grassroots organizations, even with their many internal conflicts, were important in helping propel the Civil Rights Revolution. Anything approaching Black Power, except in *The Butler* and the poorly-received *Blood Done Sign My Name* is omitted from reel History.[9]

More consequentially for the public's historical memory, violence of any kind toward *anyone* is almost completely absent throughout the films examined for this dissertation--not counting the everyday violence and rudeness Black women working for Whites face. While the number of lynchings vastly declined after the mid-1930s, other forms of violence rapidly increased as White people en masse sought to maintain total power over Blacks. The Civil Rights Revolution cannot be understood without an equal focus on the violence emerging from White people and their fears associated with

[9] For an important account on liberal middleclass Whites and the organizations they used to help improve the economic, political, and social everyday life of Blacks, see Linda Reed, *Simple Decency & Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938-1963* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

protecting Whiteness. Save for one scene each in *The Long Walk Home*, *Remember the Titians*, *Crazy in Alabama*, and *Blood Done Sign My Name*, White backlash, for example, is not characterized. All considering, people treat each other fairly humanely throughout Hollywood civil rights fictions. The one exception to these statements relates to police: *The Long Walk Home*, *Crazy in Alabama*, *Hairspray*, *The Help*, and *The Butler* all depict police officers as racist and as forces which maintain the Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy. Otherwise, various aspects of the nation's governments are presented in unduly positive lights. Politicians who produced the Southern Manifesto and who staged an extended filibuster against the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are never represented or even hinted at.[10]

Actually, in another indicator of the struggle to come to terms with the past, tangible progress is equally absent from cinematic art where it concerns these civil rights films. *The Long Walk Home*, *Crazy in Alabama*, *Hairspray*, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, and *The Help* all end with the mores of segregation far from truly being dismantled or even changed. Only *The Butler* shows a Civil Rights Revolution that actually causes (although mostly implies) systemic change. Only *The Secret Life of Bees* discusses, although most briefly, possibilities stemming from the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Only *The Secret Life of Bees* discusses a Black woman having voted. Out of all the films

[10] Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror* (Montgomery: Equal Justice Initiative, 2015); George Lewis*, Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Clive Webb, *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

and all of the scenes, this is the most “revolutionary” (and realistic) thing done by a Black woman, and it is only discussed in passing. None of the other films discuss actions by the Federal Government, except occasionally in negative terms. None of these films show Black women or Black men engaged in the small-scale rebellions known as “hidden-transcripts.” None of these films show anyone dying because of civil rights-activism, except *Crazy in Alabama*.

Additionally, while films about the Civil Rights Revolution generally make use of music, especially orchestral extradiegetic numbers, they very seldom make use of freedom songs--songs that were vital in their power to inspire and unite and deliver Black messages with the artistic freedom available in song. A Black woman leads a group in singing part of the hymn “I’m Going Through” in *The Long Walk Home* to ward off racist White men, and a Black woman also leads a group in singing part of the gospel song “I Couldn't Keep It to Myself” in *Crazy in Alabama* as a celebration of their civil disobedience. *The Butler* uses part of The Meditation Singers’s version of “I’m Determined.” Otherwise, considering both the diegetic or extradiegetic, these are the only examples of Black people singing in film about the Civil Rights Revolution, not counting the infrequent church scene and not counting the fantasy world created in *Hairspray*. Although, *Hairspray*’s does do a service by indirectly acknowledging how music was one of the earliest forces that brought White and Black people together on essentially fair and equal grounds.

When it comes to freedom songs, the songs and words of artists such as Joan Baez, Ray Charles, Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin, Mahalia Jackson, Peter Seeger, Nina

Simone, Carlton Reese, and Hollis Watkins and groups such as The Freedom Singers, The Staple Singers, and Sweet Honey and the Rock receive no attention in these films. Movies play a variety of music organic to the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, such as *Let's Twist Again*, *Lucille*, *Sherry*, and *There Goes My Baby*, but not *Ain't A-Scared of Your Jail, Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round*, *Birmingham Sunday*, *Eyes on the Prize*, *Ninety-nine and a Half Won't Do*, *Oh Freedom*, *We Shall Overcome*, or *Why? (The King of Love is Dead)*. Such songs would mesh perfectly with representations of the student movement in *The Butler* or in countless other scenes throughout film about the Civil Rights Revolution. (The problem of "deleting" such agency-filled music from historical memory extends to what are subjectively called "oldies" and collections of music from the time. For example, *100 Huge Hits of the 60s & 70s* includes music from a variety of artist over the span of two decades, and only one of these--Bob and Marcia's version of Simon's *Young, Gifted, and Black*--can be considered a product of the Civil Rights Revolution.)

In the case of *The Butler*, the problem relates in part to copyright issues. Reportedly, The Richmond Organization and Ludlow Music holds the copyright for "We Shall Overcome." Lee Daniels wanted to use this song throughout his film but could not afford its $100,000 pricetag. Ultimately, makers of *The Butler* paid $15,000 for permission to use ten seconds of "We Shall Overcome," ten seconds that are fully inaudible in the released film. Courts are currently hearing arguments from plaintiffs who hope to free the song from copyright. If Hollywood productions made use (or could

make use, as the case may be) of freedom songs, films about the Civil Rights Revolution would project a slightly more realistic, encompassing historical memory.[11]

On another note, Hollywood seldom shows Black people acting as consumers, using money, or discussing anything related to money in films about the Civil Rights Revolution; yet, these films also exclusively focus on representations of Black people who are far from impoverished *and* far from wealthy. Historically, we know that poverty among Black families was (and remains in 2016) much greater than that among White families, and at the same time, the era during which the Civil Rights Revolution occurred saw a rise in income for Blacks. For example, from 1939 to 1960 the annual median income for Black women increased by 420 percent (e.g., $276 to $1,267), compared to 275 percent for White women. Similarly, Black men had a 570 percent increase in income during the same period, compared to 360 percent for White men. The extreme success of economic boycotts and the "don't buy where you can't work" campaign does not receive filmic attention. As another indication of the gradual increase in higher-

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[11] *All Music* (accessed May 1, 2016) http://www.allmusic.com/album/100-huge-hits-of-the-60s-70s-mw0000741117; Guy Carawin and Candie Carawan, eds., *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through its Songs* (Montgomery: NewSouth Books, 2007); Eriq Gardner, "*Lee Daniels' The Butler* Now Involved in Effort to Free *We Shall Overcome* from Copyright," *The Hollywood Reporter* (accessed August 12, 2016) http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/lee-daniels-butler-involved-effort-904041; David A. Graham, "Who Owns *We Shall Overcome*," *The Atlantic* (accessed August 12, 2016) http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/04/we-shall-overcome-lawsuit/478068/; Pete Seeger and Rob Reiser, *A History of the Civil Rights Movement in Songs and Pictures* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989); Salamishah Tillet, "The Return of the Protest Song," *The Atlantic* (accessed July 9, 2016) http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/01/the-return-of-the-protest-song/384631/; and Thomas Turino, "Music and Political Movements," in *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 210-224.

One exception of sorts is *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996) as it uses part of Nina Simone's "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free." It is not counted here because the film is almost exclusively about and set in the early 1990s.

paying jobs and thus money available to Black families during the late 1960s, while Black people were 15 percent of the general population, they accounted for 30 percent of movie-goers. (Movie theater attendance also related to White flight and the lack of such theaters in suburbia.)[12]

According to the past disseminated by Hollywood, there were no women with the economic power of Madam C. J. Walker, for example, and there were no economic struggles such as those faced by sharecroppers, such as Fannie Lou Hamer. Without exception, Hollywood productions about the Civil Rights Revolution focus on Blacks who are at least surviving economically without any form of aid, charity, or suffering. Such representations add to the neoliberal tendencies in these films and altogether delete economic struggles that drove important aspects of the movement. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously asked, "What good is having the right to sit at a lunch counter if you can't afford to buy a hamburger?"[13]

Yet, as W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz and Robert Brent Toplin persuasively argue, historians have typically been not just too hard on Hollywood but unfair. While recognizing its mistakes and institutional problems, Hollywood, they explain, makes the past approachable and interesting and at least somewhat relevant because it simplifies

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[12] "4 Ways Martin Luther King Was More Radical Than You Thought," *Think Progress* (accessed August 12, 2016) https://thinkprogress.org/4-ways-martin-luther-king-was-more-radical-than-you-thought-44347fff44ab#.gocpbkx7x; and Robert E. Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 32-33, 57, 72, 81.

[13] "4 Ways Martin Luther King Was More Radical Than You Thought,"; and Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*, 32-33, 57, 72, 81.

stories and focuses on only what is absolutely indispensable. By focusing more on impressions and historical fictions, they are able to create "usable pasts" and tell otherwise complicated History in two hours. "Accuracy" per se should not matter when discussing film. On another note, films have the potential to truly teach people, and people feel safe and comfortable when watching movies.[14]

Additionally, Hollywood has much to teach historians. For example, movies started portraying everyday people making history well before historians and continue to represent the hopes and fears of people that otherwise go without specific acknowledgement in everyday culture. Historians, Toplin especially argues, learned about such social history from Hollywood. Historical films typically also use at least some characters who desire a more just society. Academics should also be inspired by

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[14] W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, *American History Goes to the Movies: Hollywood and the American Experience* (New York: Routledge: 2011); and Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002). These authors provide interesting and important accounts, but do not discuss cinema about the Civil Rights Revolution, except for *Mississippi Burning*. They mainly focus on macro accounts informed by philosophy and historiography and use *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Glory* (1989), and *Amistad* (1997) as frequent reference points. See also, Natalie Zemon Davis, "Film as Historical Narrative" in *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Visions* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000), 1-16; Rasmus Falbe-Hansen, "The Filmmaker as Historian," *Film & Politics* no. 16 (December 2003), http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_16/section_1/artc12A.html; Nick Sacco, "Historical Fiction as a 'Gateway Drug' to the Past," *Exploring the Past: Reading, Thinking, and Blogging about History* (accessed May 6, 2015) https://pastexplore.wordpress.com/2015/05/06/historical-fiction-as-a-gateway-drug-to-the-past/; Sacco, "Public History Interpretation and the Search for a 'Useable Past,'" *Exploring the Past* (accessed January 5, 2015) https://pastexplore.wordpress.com/2015/01/04/public-history-interpretation-and-the-search-for-a-useable-past/; Toplin, ed., *Oliver Stone's USA: Film, History, and Controversy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), especially 26-39; and Paul B. Weinstein, "Movies as Gateway to History: The History and Film Project," *The History Teacher* 35, no. 1 (November 2001): 27-48.

As a side note: although presumably related to its keeping stories as "simple" as possible, Hollywood generally contributes to the widespread notion that only "one" "historical" event happened at once. For instance, in *The Help* there is no mention, not even indirectly, of the Cold War, the Vietnam War, or of new post-World War II household technologies. Likewise, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) makes no mention of the on-going Civil Rights Revolution and neither does *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987).

the experimentation, non-standard ways films make use of the past and adapt such creativity in more traditional mediums. Most of our problem stem from the different languages film makers speak as compared to that of historians, according to this line of thought. They often speak over or past each other. If historians became more media literate and strived to work with, instead of only against, movie makers, the possibilities of having a more historically literate society could be amazing. Most importantly, perhaps, History manufactured by Hollywood and its popularity serves as a constant reminder that no one "owns" the past. (These ideas are explored more below, although, in a different framework.)[15]

And no doubt, Hollywood does represent some aspects of the Civil Rights Revolution with surprising creativity and precision and without relying on stereotypes. Yet, everything that receives fair represents ultimately either reinforces the status quo or popular stereotypes. Hollywood does best when it comes to depicting how White women treated Black women, who took care of them and their families, with arrogance and ignorance. Lora in *Imitation of Life*, Mrs. Thompson in *The Long Walk Home*, and Skeeter in *The Help*, for instance, are completely ignorant of the personal life their maids have. Black women, of course, were often frustrated with how White society treated them, and save for a few lines, Hollywood only shows this frustration through the Black woman's body language. *The Butler* shows manifestations of double consciousness the best, but other films hint at it in situations where the camera shows

[15] Rommel-Ruiz, *American History Goes to the Movies*; and Toplin, *Reel History*.

the face of a Black person expressing pain at being invisiblized. Hollywood, in all of its films, accurately shows that segregation was not about separation. The culture of segregation required Whites and Blacks to have constant contact.

Given the comments above, some comments follow that specifically lists some of the best and worst examples of History found in cinema about the Civil Rights Revolution. Because none of these films are actually, sincerely about the Civil Rights Revolution, one could argue that there are no "best" examples. But, nonetheless, some thoughts are possible. *The Long Walk Home* does a solid job representing the treatment of Black women and recreating examples of (White) massive resistance. *Crazy in Alabama* does the best job showing Black agency and the power and unity of the Black community. *Hairspray* and *The Help* are indeed through-and-through the worst with their reliance on a White savior figure; on caricatured and dehumanized Black women, men, and children; on a perverse kind of comedy; and on pretend stories of civil rights successes. Throughout all of the films, the government (and all of its manifestations) is represented in strikingly inaccurate ways, Black agency is deleted, and White people are depicted is overly kind and necessary. Likewise, the best and most accurate examples that occur throughout these films are that segregation was not about separation, that the Black church was an important location, and that the status quo, ultimately, remains in charge.

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Although in the context of Sigmund Freud's studies, historian Hannah S. Decker argues that in order to reach larger and important historical meanings, historians and scholars must ultimately move beyond worrying if something is directly "accurate" or not. Likewise, when discussing the dominate anti-Semitism and superstitions of everyday people in Konitz, Poland, during the early twentieth century, Helmut Walser Smith says that "historians, however, must take such imagined tales seriously, for they open windows onto the mentality of people who otherwise leave few documentary traces." Said differently, every source speaks to "truths" and every source is "trustworthy" in reference to *something*. Likewise, myths, not "realities," guide everyday understandings of the world and its past. These myths, in odd combinations of history, present-day needs, and deliberate rewritings of the past are significant to study so that historians can both study the past and how people use, understand, and interact with the past.[16]

The lack of historical accuracy found in films about the Civil Rights Revolution, therefore, should not curtail engagement by academics. Arguably, they matter even more because of their cumulative inaccuracy and popularity. The more inaccurate a historical film is, the more popular it is among audiences, namely White audiences who have the most spending power. At its simplest, this dissertation has argued that films

[16] Hannah S. Decker, *Freud, Dora, and Vienna 1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 116; Pegoda, "Verisimilitudinous Film and Literature: An Examination of Gone with the Wind's Influence, 1936-present"; and Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 124.

matter and have important consequence for how people understand the world. And that people watch such “History written with lightning” and believe it to be undisputedly accurate. Hollywood continues to deliberately manipulate the activism and oppression associated with the Civil Rights Revolution to such an extent as to make the past unrecognizable.

Change accompanied the Civil Rights Revolution of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s throughout the United States. Throughout the South and West, the geography and iconography of everyday life changed in positive ways. Signs such as “Colored Only,” “Whites Only,” and “No: Dogs, Negros, Mexicans” gradually came down. Black people en masse began to vote with fewer systemized restrictions. Black people also rode in the front of busses. Children of various racializations increasingly attended school together. Black people were gradually elected to public offices and labored in a variety of occupations. In one of many revealing ironies of “separate but equal” mores and indicators that segregation was not about separation, Black individuals who were previously only welcomed at universities and other public institutions when they labored in service occupations were now welcomed as members of the student body, staff, and professional ranks. Other examples abound, too. However, not all of this change was positive, and none of this change happened without backlash. The culture of segregation did not diminish quickly or quietly. The Klu Klux Klan, the White Citizens’ Council, and other terrorist organizations acted with violence to maintain the status quo. Authorities completely closed some public school systems. This backlash version of

the Civil Rights Revolution simply does not exist in the reel productions that Hollywood calls the Civil Rights Revolution.

Additionally, given the complex nature of racialized discrimination, particularly against Black individuals in the United States, any comment about the Civil Rights Revolution's successes must be made with great caution and with an eye to what has happened in the decades since. Indeed, over 200 years after the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights, almost 150 years since Congress and states ratified the Reconstruction Amendments, and over 50 years since the Civil Rights Act of 1963, racism is very much alive and well in the United States, as thoroughly illustrated by Ava DuVernay's documentary *13th* (2016).

As a group, Black families continue to be confined to lower-paying jobs and often only have access to schools without fair or equitable resources. Microaggressions directed toward non-Whites are commonplace. New headlines appear every single day with yet more examples of discrimination directed toward Black people or news of another instance of law enforcement killing a Black person, which prompted the Black Lives Matter movement. Conservatives continually push rhetorics associated with notions of politics of respectability that say if-they-only-worked-hard-enough as an excuse to ignore the problem. Potentially, most significant, the number of Blacks, particularly men, confined to the Criminal Justice System has skyrocketed through a systemic process Michelle Alexander terms "the New Jim Crow." So while, "Whites only" and "No Dogs, Negros, Mexicans" signs have been taken down across the South, the

absence of these signs means little when and where only the physical sign has come down.[17]

Responsibility for these discrepancy rests with all parties: with a society that preaches how "boring" History is, with the K-12 educational system that increasingly censors the past and does not teach media literacy or healthy skepticism, with the near worship of capitalism and subsequent concentration on what will make the most money for directors, performers and others, with audiences that want only to be entertained and not be challenged (at the expense of honesty), and with politicians whose actions and words manifest that notions of the "truth" do not matter. Such anti-intellectualism not uncommonly manifests in responses from people who are angry about any criticism when it comes to comments about representations of the past, race, and sex. For example, Brian (who did not provide a last name) left the following comment on an

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[17] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010); Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015); Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007); and Robert Perkinson, *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire* (New York: Picador, 2010).

On a related note: in addition to inspiring powerful social movements for other social and political minorities, including women, Spanish-speaking, and Queer individuals, the Civil Rights Revolution also affected the academy and permissible ways in which historians study the past. Considered collectively, historiographical evolutions in the past half-century have dramatically expanded who and what falls within the historian's domain and the types of sources permissible. As a result, anything is legitimate for historical analysis. Before this evolution of History, the study of History was generally limited to those (White) individuals with artistic, financial, intellectual, or political power. Mainstream academic scholars generally limited their focus to wealthy white men and official written records, see James M. Banner, Jr. ed., *A Century of American Historiography* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010); Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005); and Melvyn Stokes, ed., *The State of U.S. History* (New York: Berg, 2002), for example.

article about the film *World War Z* (2013), which relies of racism, sexism, and a White savior figure to tell its story:

> It passed MY entertainment test. Try to dispense with preconceived ideas, ideals, and prejudices, and allow a movie to entertain you. The movie is a story, told by the writers, producers, director, and actors--nothing more. If you don't like it, you don't like it. Why do we go to movies, to watch, escape, and be entertained, or do we go to judge, and criticize because it didn't meet our social or moral standards? I knew nothing about the movie before I saw it, and don't care whether it didn't have strong woman characters or people of color in more significant roles. If it was an all black/brown/yellow skinned cast I would have enjoyed it just as well, perhaps even more so as Pitt is not a favorite of mine. The bottom line for me is I go to see a movie/story to be entertained--WWZ Accomplished that.

Guilt even rests with "history buffs" who are more concerned about "trivia" and small details than overall importance. For example, why is Skeeter's use of whiteout in *The Help* considered a "historical anachronism" but not the complete "mammification" of Black women? Both are historically and chronologically inaccurate. One only amounts to "history buff" material, but the other actually does harm and promotes inaccurate historical memories. Additionally, *The Butler*'s use of the wrong flag and wrong television in a few scenes deserves mentioning on *Internet Movie DataBase* but not *The Butler*'s incorrect suggestions about the power of Blacks and generosity of Whites.[18]

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[18] "25 Movies with Obvious Anachronisms," *This Blog Rules* (accessed July 23, 2016) http://www.thisblogrules.com/2013/04/25-movies-with-obvious-anachronisms.html; Brian, March 15, 2016, comment on Pegoda, "Brad Pitt, Not So Hidden Racism and Sexism, and "World War Z" (2013)," *Without Ritual, Autonomous Negotiations* (accessed March 15, 2016) https://andrewpegoda.com/2013/06/23/brad-pitt-not-so-hidden-racism-and-sexism-and-world-war-z-2013/#comment-11969; "*The Butler*: Goofs," *IMDb* (accessed Friday, August 12, 2016) http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1327773/trivia?tab= gf&ref_=tt_trv_gf; "*The Help*: Goofs," *IMDb* (accessed July 23, 2016) http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1454029/goofs?ref_=tttrv_sa_1; and Pegoda, "I am many things but a 'History Buff' is not one of them. – Hidden Power of Words Series, #14," *Without Ritual, Autonomous Negotiations* (accessed December 3, 2014)

Historians and writers deserve some of the blame, too. There are not enough academic examinations when it comes to film about the Civil Rights Revolution, and those that exist frequently contain an inordinate number of mistakes or focus on the film as either being simply "right" or "wrong." Too, historians in general are not involved when it comes to contemporary culture and immediate issues and do not make their work accessible to the general public. Movies continues to be looked down upon--by some--because they reside outside archives (and the filtering process that created such archives) and are fiction. Without doubt, almost all scholarly examinations are valuable. But, more studies based on a variety of non-traditional sources are needed, just as well as studies that work from the perspective of national politics, the military, and labor, for example, are needed. When it comes to film, historical memory, and the Civil Rights Revolution, specifically, as has been mentioned, this is the first such in-depth examination.[19]

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https://andrewpegoda.com/2014/12/03/i-am-many-things-but-a-history-buff-is-not-one-of-them-hidden-power-of-words-series-14/.

[19] On the note of inaccuracies: for example, when discussing *The Long Walk Home* Robert Ebert incorrectly says, "Odessa is not eager for her employer to discover she is honoring the boycott - she doesn't want to risk losing her job - but one day Miriam finds out, and decides that she will give the maid a ride in her car a couple of days a week." In the actual film, Odessa calls her employer on the first day of the boycott and directly tells her it is not safe to ride the bus. Odessa's job is never in danger. Additionally, he mixes up the two daughters. He also says that the older daughter (he means the younger daughter) "has no role of any importance in the movie and whose narration adds nothing except an unnecessary point of view." The narrator was the nine-year old daughter. While her role and narration is subject to interpretation, of course, the film would be completely different without the nine-year-old daughter, as she shows how Black women were responsible for taking care of White children. Additionally, the narration, as discussed above, is unnecessary and problematic but it solidifies *The Long Walk Home* as being about White people.

Jacqueline Jones says, "Her [Mrs. Thompson's] husband moves out of the house, and she becomes alienated from her white friends when they continue to express their deep-seated prejudices in remarkably offhanded ways." Such simply does not happen in the movie. Mr. Thompson "moves" to another room down the hall from the master bedroom. There is only one scene with Mrs. Thompson and

her friends who are also housewives. In this scene, some tensions and disagreements are expressed, but no friendships are dissolved or otherwise discussed.

Carol M. Ward says Mrs. Thompson lies to her husband about her support of Odessa. In the film, as soon as he asks her, "just how does Odessa get to work?," she tells him. She does not lie by omission either because it was never a topic of conversation, and he was always away from the house at work.

Dreier says, "On days when they miss the carpool, the maids (and other Montgomery blacks) have to walk to work. On many days, Odessa has to wake up several hours earlier and return home long after dark, to make the eight-mile walk to and from work, leaving her feet with blisters and her husband and children without her for breakfast and dinner. One day, when Odessa arrives late to the Thompson home, the family discovers that their maid is participating in the controversial boycott." Most of what Dreier says in this quotation and elsewhere in his article is inaccurate. In *The Long Walk Home*, Odessa walks when Mrs. Thompson cannot pick her up. Of the other two maids discussed in this context, one has a car and the other has a husband who drives. The film neither says, nor suggests that Odessa woke up early. The family was not left without food. Selma regularly did the cooking. In addition to being inaccurate, the false criticism that her husband and children went without, even if true, suggests cooking is the sole responsibility of the mother and that she is responsible for things beyond her control. The length of her walk is never mentioned in the film, as discussed in Chapter 1. Finally, Mrs. Thompson "discovers" Odessa is participating in the boycott from the very beginning because Odessa directly tells her. Mr. Thompson discovers later when he is sick and increasingly engaged in the White Citizens' Council.

For additional example, Frank Leon Roberts's discussion of *The Butler* says a White House dinner scene occurs at the same time as the Klu Klux Klan and Freedom Bus scene, when the White House dinner scene occurred at the same time as the sit-in scene. The difference is important for how the film unfolds. Helena Andrews, also writing about *The Butler*, says, "While Viola Davis had to defend her role as a servant, Forest Whitaker has garnered only praise." As noted earlier in Chapter 3, critics immediately attacked the film's perceived ahistorical narrative and poor acting. Moreover, for example, Melissa Harris-Perry's discussion of *The Help* incorrectly says the film has one act of violence and it is by a Black man, this being the situation been Minny and her husband. Looking at physical violence alone, Yule Mae also faces physical violence by the police. If other types of violence are considered, the examples are endless. For one final example, Mary B. Oshea incorrectly says that Sheriff in *Crazy in Alabama* is the only character made to be racist. There are numerous characters who manifest racism, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Andrews, "*The Butler* Versus *The Help*: Gender Matters," *The Root* (accessed January 15, 2015) http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2013/08/the_butler_and_the_help_gender_bias_reins_on_film ; Dreier, "Will *The Help*'s Oscar Revive Interest in *The Long Walk Home*?," *HuffPost Arts & Culture* (accessed August 12, 2015) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/oscars-2012-the-help_b_1303171.html; Ebert, "*The Long Walk Home*, Movie Review," *Robert Ebert* (accessed March 16, 2014) http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-long-walk-home-1991; Harris-Perry, "Melissa Harris Perry on why *The Help* Hurts," *A.V. Club* (accessed December 28, 2015) http://www.avclub.com/article/melissa-harris-perry-on-why-emthe-help-emhurts-61718; Jones, "The Long Walk Home," *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1995), 252-265; Oshea, "Crazy from the Heat: Southern Boys and Coming of Age," in *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth*, ed. Murray Pomerance and Frances Gateward (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 94; Roberts, "Lee Daniels' Double Consciousness," *The Huffington Post* (accessed January 15, 2015) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-leon-roberts/lee-daniels-double-consci_b_3767252.html; Ward, "The Southern Landscape in Contemporary Film," in *Beyond the Stars: Locales in American Popular Film*, 107.

There remains a great deal of work to be done, and this dissertation is just the beginning of my personal research on these topics. Further engagement with theory would add to the ever-developing discourse on the topic. Immediately, there is room in the case of *The Long Walk Home*, *Crazy in Alabama*, and *The Help*, for example, to consider adaptation theory, or how these films compare and contrast to the original medium from which they were adapted. For an additional example, scholarship on these films in the context of "who can tell the story" and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" would prove useful and important.[20]

Furthermore, working from the position that History is the study of the present and that *The Help*, for instance, provides more information about the early twenty-first century than about the 1960s, studies looking at how film about the Civil Rights Revolution provides important insights into present-day culture would be useful. A possible question would be, how does *The Help* reflect the Iraq War and the United States having its first Black president in a way that *The Long Walk Home* and *Remember the Titans* clearly do not. These questions are explored some throughout this dissertation, such as explaining the connection between the election of Barack Obama

[20] James Arnold G'Schwind, "*Eyes on the Prize*: American Historiophoty in Documentary Film" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation: Indiana University: 1999); Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Swetha Kota of *Amazon*, e-mail message to author, February 24, 2016; and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 21-80. See also, Katherine Borland, "That's Not What I Said" (accessed August 14, 2016) https://www.academia.edu/8407558/Thats_Not_What_I_Said?auto=download.

and the spate of movies giving somewhat greater attention to Black experiences, but there is much more work to be done.[21]

An examination of movie trailers compared with the actual film would be useful, too. For example, the trailer for *The Help* makes it appear to be a comedy through and through, while the trailer for *Crazy in Alabama* makes it appear to be serious, with a strong focus on Black people. Additionally, in part because *Amazon* will not share any data, there is little comprehensive sales data available, an analysis of such, if it is ever available, could prove to be very insightful, especially when compared to other texts.

In addition to James Arnold G'Schwind's dissertation examining the *Eyes on the Prize* series from the perspective of communication studies, there is also a need for a work similar to this one that examines made-for-television movies, biopics, and documentaries. In the case of documentaries, viewers frequently assume such productions are even more "accurate" given their "educational" nature. Documentaries are primary sources in the same way Hollywood movies are. Historians need to ask, for example, what is the rhetoric of Peter Gilbert's documentary, *With All Deliberate Speed* (2004), that examines school desegregation? Documentaries, like other movies, tell certain stories, while ignoring others, and select how to frame and order stories. Additionally, documentaries also provide useful opportunities for screening the past in

[21] For an example of one article that begins to scratch the surface on the influence of President Barack Obama on recent cinema, see J. Hoberman, "A New Obama Cinema?," *The New York Review of Books* (accessed August 14, 2016) http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2012/02/11/new-obama-cinema-clint-eastwood-halftime/.

more accurate ways. Documentaries such as *Eyes on the Prize*, *The Strange Demise of Jim Crow*, and *With All Deliberate Speed* are useful and based on documentation. These films are indications that History can be produced in mediums besides print and remain backed by credible evidence.[22]

In addition, there is room to examine how films about the Civil Rights Revolution also speak to the social movements by women, Mexican-Americans, and queer peoples. In *The Help*, for instance, a feminist reading helps show that Hollywood exploits Skeeter and White women just as much as Black women, and in *The Long Walk Home*, Mrs.

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[22] While the focus of this dissertation has been on fictional Hollywood works about the Civil Rights Revolution, a body of made-for-television movies deserves brief comment. These productions, or quasi-docudramas, generally center much more directly around events historical memory has deemed famous and worth of attention. Contemporary made-for-television movies that exist through 2016 include *All the Way* (2016) which follows Lyndon Baines Johnson and the Civil Rights Act of 1964; *Boycott* (2001) which directly recounts events surrounding the Montgomery, Alabama from 1955-1956; *Disney's Selma, Lord Selma* (1999) recounts Bloody Sunday; *Disney's Ruby Bridges* (1998) follows Ruby Bridges and desegregation in New Orleans, Louisiana, with a significant focus on her White teacher and White psychologist; *The Earnest Green Story* (1993) traces desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas; *Freedom Song* (2000) focuses on events in Freedom Summer; *Once Upon a Time... When We Were Colored* (1995) follows the life of Clifton Taulbert; *The Rosa Parks Story* (2002) is a biography about Rosa Parks; and *Sins of the Father* (2002) and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* (2013) trace the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. In addition to not being Hollywood productions, they are not examined in-depth because they have had limited availability, and they have had little cultural impact or implications for historical memory, as indicated by low ranking on Internet Movie Database and by the number of reviews on Amazon. For example, *The Earnest Green Story, Freedom Song*, *Once Upon a Time... When We Were Colored*, and *Sins of the Father* have collectively only received eighty-four reviews on Amazon. Most importantly for this dissertation, however, is that made-for-television movies (like Hollywood film) do not generally challenge chronological frameworks or spatial borders typically associated with society's general historical memory of a brief "Civil Rights Movement" that was isolated to the South and a few major events and important individuals.

There is also a small group of Hollywood productions made specifically as biographical sketches that are not examined in-depth, such as *42* (2013) and *Glory Road* (2006) both sports films which focus on Jackie Robinson and the Texas Miners basketball team, respectively; *The Least Among You* (2009) dramatizes the experiences of Charles Marks and traces how an all-White seminary reactions to its first Black student; *Men of Honor* (2000) traces the life of Carl Brashear with a focus on his historical achievements in the Navy, *Ray* (2004) tells the story of Ray Charles's life as a musician and addict, and *Selma* (2014) focuses on Dr. Martin Luther King's leadership during the Civil Rights Revolution and his efforts to push Lyndon Baines Johnson to supporting voting rights.

Thompson makes strong stands against patriarchy. Likewise, how do films much more specifically about these movements compare to *Hairspray* and *The Sandlot*, for example?

Substantial gaps between sources and Hollywood movies about the Civil Rights Revolution are not due to some innate problem or limitation with film as a medium or Hollywood as a cultural institution. While historical problems proliferate in movies that are concerned with the Civil Rights Revolution (and with other racialized issues), especially those with White screenwriters and directors, such is not the case with all movies. Hollywood, indeed, only changes the past when it--and its audiences--does not like it. Representations that primarily involve White people are not as problematic. For example, consider how Vietnam films such as *Coming Home* (1978) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) speak accurately to the era, especially psychological distress. *Office Space* (1999) provides an eerily correct, although exaggerated at times, depiction of the alienation increasingly found in the office after World War II and is famously articulated in Edward Hopper's award-winning *Office in a Small City* (1953). Furthermore, *The Big Short* (2015) and *Spotlight* (2015) recount the buildup to the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the *Boston Globe*'s discovery of the Catholic Church's on-going efforts to protect priests who had sexually abused children, respectively, with great attention to historical authenticity.

Additionally, *My Name is Khan* (2010), a Bollywood production, meticulously represents how mainstream society in the United States suddenly viewed Muslims (and people suspected of being Muslim) with great hostility and violence following the

terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and does so while remaining true to evidence. *My Name is Khan* is a fictional account that is largely about non-White people and mainly made for non-White people, and it does not rewrite History to include a White savior figure or a White narrator, for example. Even *The Butler*, as discussed, is an example of a film about the Civil Rights Revolution that presents History with a remarkable degree of accurate, relevant representations but relies on power White men and submissive Black men. Similarly, *12 Years a Slave* (2013) has a Black director like *The Butler*, and it is the first film about enslavement to simply present the institution's horrors.

Two additional films deserve mention: *Grand Canyon* (1991) and *Crash* (2004). Both of these productions have White directors and are targeted toward predominantly White audiences, and both of these are unusually appropriate and sensitive in their approach to the complex dynamics of racism. Few films specifically name and address racism and fear of "the Other" the way these two do. These films also interrogate the supposed protection provided by Whiteness to those who assimilate into mainstream United States culture. *Grand Canyon* and *Crash* argue that racialized differences exist and make culture richer and prove that Hollywood can do much better than the near "silliness" found in *Corrina, Corrina* and *Hairspray*, for instance.[23]

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[23] Jeff Chang and Sylvia Chan, "Can White Hollywood Get Race Right," *AlterNet* (accessed August 14, 2016) http://www.alternet.org/story/23597/can_white_hollywood_get_race_right. See also, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "The Invisible Weight of Whiteness: The Racial Grammar of everyday Life in America," *Michigan Sociological Review* 26 (Fall 2012): 1-15.

The up-coming biopic *Loving* (2016) appears to be promising based on preliminary reviews. This movie is an account of Richard and Mildred Loving and the road to the Supreme Court's 1967 decision that overturned laws banning interracial marriage.

Given the extended catalog of problems provided in this section, some words need to also be said regarding possible solutions. Public historian Nick Sacco argues that "cultural and political critiques don't need to offer workable solutions in order to be valid. The act of criticizing is valuable in and of itself." While a few suggestions have been hinted at, articulating possible solutions is beyond the scope on this work in part precisely because such would involve compromises and negotiations with various interest groups and a different set of experiences and skills. Sacco also says, "We [as historians] interrogate the meaning of anything and everything, and we formulate interpretations of past and present events in ways that can elicit heated debate between members of the profession and between historians and their many publics." Just as most historians are not fond of "future studies" because of the discipline's reliance on methodologies focused on uncovering the past, offering solutions is somewhat outside historians' qualifications. Speaking to arguments also made by Robert Brent Toplin, Sacco also reminds historians to not be overly critical--not everything requires a "solution" when we recognize the difference between academic

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Working from the question "What does it mean when White audiences are suddenly so eager to consume narratives of Black suffering?," Brit Bennett explores the sudden popularity of films about enslavement. This question could also apply to cinema about the Civil Rights Revolution. For more, see Bennett, "Ripping the Veil," *New Republic* (accessed August 13, 2016) https://newrepublic.com/article/135708/colson-whiteheads-fantastic-voyage; Nelson George, "An Essentially American Narrative," *The New York Times* (accessed October 20, 2013) http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/13/movies/a-discussion-of-steve-mcqueens-film-12-years-a-slave.html; A. O. Scott and Manohla Dargis, "Movies in the Age of Obama," *The New York Times* (accessed January 20, 2013) http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/20/movies/lincoln-django-unchained-and-an-obama-inflected-cinema.html; and Toplin, "*12 Years a Slave* Examines the Old South's Heart of Darkness," *American Historical Association* (accessed January 20, 2014) https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2014/12-years-a-slave-examines-the-old-souths-heart-of-darkness.

writing about the past and Hollywood's dramatizations. Finally, some of statements above should not be taken as criticism, per se, but as comments and observations.[24]

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Collective historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution underscores that everyday people are not interested in "History" but myth. People are often afraid of actually grappling with the past. Reminders and references to the past completely surround us, and it would be easy to have movies based on evidence, but people struggle to come to terms with their own personal pasts, the past of others, and the past of nations, especially when it comes to racialized issues. Fiction, as shown in *The Butler* and other films at times, can effectively speak to historical strands of thought. Yet, individuals and societies have and continue to celebrate idealized versions of the past where everything was at least "okay"--if not ideal. Movies--more than primary sources, scholarly secondary sources, documentaries, or even museums--(re)create the past with a focus on pleasing the hopes and easing the fears of audiences predominantly racialized as White and show that what happened in the past is actually subject to negotiation. People generally do not think the past matters, but, as shown in hundreds and hundreds of *Amazon* reviews, people also learn and fully accept what

[24] Sacco, "Historians and Cultural Criticism of Popular Media," *Exploring the Past* (accessed April 15, 2016) https://pastexplore.wordpress.com/2016/04/15/historians-and-cultural-criticism-of-popular-media/.

Hollywood--an industry that contributes billions of dollars to the economy annually and accounts for billions of dollars spent--teaches more than what trained historians teach. Additionally, for example, Cortney L. Smith's scientific study found that participants found both *Mississippi Burning* (1988) and the documentary, *Freedom Summer* (2006) to be equally believable. The psychological theory of the "confirmation bias" helps make some sense of this peculiar phenomena. Essentially, in something of a self-fulfilling prophecy or circular reasoning, people, obviously, enter the world and grow up without any specific knowledge of the Civil Rights Revolution; although, the historical unconsciousness informs their base of knowledge, especially through popular children's movies, such as *The Sandlot*. These utopian, de-historicized movies form the foundation of knowledge. Subsequently, film's, as discussed throughout this dissertation, and society's general lack of orientation toward understanding History "confirm" that the images and histories embodied (or *not* embodied) in childhood favorites are correct. Likewise, the small number of peoples, events, and places used in movies about the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s become historical stand-ins and effectively represent, to audiences, the sum of possible peoples, events, and places. Given that United States cinema has been exported to countries around the world for over a century now, historical cinema also has implications for how other countries perceive and "know" the United States. Since the birth of cinema, movies have promoted unity, nationalism, civil religion, and historical amnesia--a way to further connect millions of people across thousands of miles, an "imagined community" because of what might appropriately be called "visual capitalism." This promotion of unity, patriotism, and what amounts to

anti-intellectualism especially applies to cinema about the Civil Rights Revolution, given that it adopts neoliberal frameworks and distorts the agency of Blacks and amplifies the kindness of Whites. What society calls the Civil Rights Revolution, then, the historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution distributed by society, then, is in sharp contrast to what historians have excavated and in sharper contrast to what the men, women, girls, and boys who lived in the middle of the actual trauma and triumphs of the Civil Rights Revolution would say, hope for, and deserve.[25]

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[25] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 2006); *Motion Picture Association of America* (accessed March 24, 2013) http://www.mpaa.org/research-and-reports/; Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 175-220; "Film and Popular Memory: An Interview with Michel Foucault," *Radical Philosophy* 11 (Summer 1975): 24-29; Nell Irvin Painter, "Who Decides What is History," *The Nation* (accessed August 3, 2016) http://www.nellpainter.com/assests/pdfs/articles/A09_WhatisHistory.pdf; Andre Seewood, "Why White People Don't Like Black Movies," *IndieWire* (accessed August 6, 2013) http://www.indiewire.com/ 2014/01/why-white-people-dont-like-black-movies-162548/; and Cortney L. Smith, "Mississippi Burning: The Perceived Reality of Docudrama vs. a Documentary" (MA Thesis: The University of Arkansas, 2008).

Racialized mores and rhetoric infiltrate the actions and thoughts of every institution and person in the United States's past. This is not to undermine the importance of other powerful, culturally constructed identities involving variables such as sex, gender, sexual orientation, class, or religion because these too certainly have vertical influences across society, but given the role of enslavement and the on-going legacies of enslavement, the dichotomous relationship between both White and Black individuals is profoundly important.

Similarly, as I have written about in several places, people essentially are incapable—psychologically and physiologically--of thinking beyond their own direct experiences, leaving them generally thinking society is free of problems and has almost always been free of problems, see, Pegoda, "Personal Experience and the Failure of Understanding," *Without Ritual, Autonomous Negotiations* (accessed July 24, 2016) https://andrewpegoda.com/2016/07/24/personal-experience-and-the-failure-of-understanding/. See also, Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

EPILOGUE:
THE INTERNET, HISTORICAL MEMORY, AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS REVOLTION

We are and always will be in a situation where we have (almost) unlimited information and (almost) unlimited speed about (almost) everything from (almost) everywhere on all kinds of devices. And the "almost" is where the site, it is the site of our most important battles to come. It is the place where we'll have the battles over privacy, security, about who will have a voice and who won't have a voice, who will know, who won't know, what we'll know and what will remain unknown.

-Professor Mike Wesch

No one needs a PhD in a subject, or even a baccalaureate major, to contribute or modify Wikipedia entries….What one will find is a breadth and intellectual scope that put even the largest traditional encyclopedias to shame. Unsurprisingly, Wikipedia blows away most competitors for topics involving scientific or technical information, not only because it attracts volunteers especially knowledgeable in these areas, but because it can give such topics all the space they need and revise them literally by the minute….Perhaps most importantly, Wikipedia provides an online home for people interested in histories long marginalized by the traditional academy. The old boundary between antiquarianism and professional history collapses in an online universe where people who love a particular subject can compile and share endless historical resources for its study in ways never possible before….In the wikified world of the Web, it's no longer possible to police these boundaries of academic respectability, and we may all be the better for it if only we can embrace this new openness without losing the commitment to rigor that the best amateurs and professionals have always shared more than the professionals have generally been willing to admit.

-Professor William Cronon[1]

[1] William Cronon, "Scholarly Authority in a Wikified World," *Perspectives on History* (accessed February 18, 2012) https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2012/scholarly-authority-in-a-wikified-world; and Mike Wesch, "Learning in New Media Environments," *Tedx Talks* (accessed November 4, 2016) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwyCAtyNYHw.

Social media websites, such as *Facebook, Twitter, YouTube,* and *WordPress*, have revolutionized so much of everyday life, one could argue they have changed everything in some way or another, that it would create an abysmal hole to end this dissertation before providing some comments about what the historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution looks like (and how it functions) beyond Hollywood film and reactions to it.

While some remain skeptical of the Internet, the Internet is creating a society that is more engaged with the past and that is more "cultural" than ever before. It has even helped manifest what Eleanor Courtemanche terms, "Cultural Studies 2.0." This Associate Professor of English discusses how everyday people, especially teenagers, are the driving forces of current-day protests with popular cultural and political crises serving as their starting points. She concludes:

> Cultural studies has turned out to be, in retrospect, a weirdly thorough success that is influencing the creation and reception of culture everywhere in the world, especially outside the academy. One might even take the omnipresence of cultural studies 2.0 as a sign that research in the humanities, though obscure at the time, ended up having transformative cultural impact.[2]

People can and *do* use *YouTube* and similar websites to watch a whole host of footage from video archives, scholarly lectures, and other videos to learn more about the Civil Rights Revolution. These videos cover historical actors and events that are completely outside the world of Hollywood's interpretation of History. Additionally,

[2] Eleanor Courtemanche, "The Peculiar Success of Cultural Studies 2.0," *Personal Brand* (accessed September 3, 2016) https://eleanorcourtemanche.wordpress.com/2016/09/01/the-peculiar-success-of-cultural-studies-2-0/.

YouTube has become a "go to" place for music, and some of this music (and the accompanying music videos) invokes the iconography and vocabulary of the Civil Rights Revolution, music such as Drew Brody's *The Ballad of Mildred Loving/Loving in Virginia*, Amy Dixon-Kolar's *Rosa Set*, Jay Khan's *Nackt*, Amanda Marshall's *Shades of Gray*, U2's *Pride* (*In the Name of Love*), and Will.I.Am.'s *Yes We Can*. Some of these *YouTube* videos are professionally made, while others are not, but they generally all show that people are interested in the past more than they are given credit for, and they all have contribute to historical memory as it stands in the 2010s.

The accuracy and implications of such representations remain another issue, at least at times. On a similar note, the Internet is fostering a society where there is a disregard for facts and seemingly everyone thinks their opinion is equally valid, regardless of what evidence suggests. This creates greater hostility when discussing topics deem "controversial" and teaching histories that run counter to essentialist, ethnocentric narratives that suggest the United States is the greatest country ever. Everyday people, news organizations, and governmental organizations share History across social media that is inaccurate. All of this, of course, has important implications for how people do and do not understand civil rights-struggles across time and place.[3]

[3] For two good articles on the problem with "opinions," see Jef Rouner, "No, It's Not Your Opinion. You're Just Wrong," *Houston Press* (accessed July 23, 2015) http://www.houstonpress.com/arts/no-it-s-not-your-opinion-you-re-just-wrong-7611752; and Patrick Stokes, "No, You're Not Entitled to Your Opinion," *The Conversation* (accessed August 23, 2016) https://theconversation.com/no-youre-not-entitled-to-your-opinion-9978.

Additionally, while the public has easy access to almost every surviving Hollywood movie, it also has access to useful documentaries, as also discussed in the Conclusion. Documentaries such as *Eyes on the Prize*, *The Strange Demise of Jim Crow*, and *With All Deliberate Speed* can be bought online, and frequently, they can be viewed in a matter of minutes. Likewise, historians and documentary makers often write articles and sometimes build entire websites devoted to these documentaries.

The Internet makes information accessible to a much wider audience than ever possible before. It is now possible to search the online archives of *The New York Times* and other newspapers and magazines for anything. Additionally, archives holding more traditional historical sources are increasingly making their papers open to all on the Internet. Moreover, *Wikipedia*, the world's largest encyclopedia, offers an abundant amount of information, including primary sources. As with *YouTube* videos, *Wikipedia* covers lesser-known individuals as an everyday practice. This resource is also user-created and open source, and despite general scholarly objections, has been found to host information that is accurate.

Additionally, while newspapers such as *The Washington Post* catch attention with headlines such as "Why Highways Have become the Center of Civil Rights Protest" and "50 Years after Freedom Summer, America Needs a Year of Action," social media is a regular site for conversations about the past, including about the Civil Rights Revolution. These conversations are frequently dominated by trolls and people who are spreading inaccurate history, history filled with heterosexism, racism, and sexism, but there are always at least some individuals having genuine conversations in threads

across social media. Bloggers have also helped open new opportunities for having production conversations about the past. One popular blog is *Abagond*, which regularly includes posts about the Civil Rights Revolution.[4]

Some search data from *Google* and others websites is available to researchers. For example, we know that every month, millions and millions of people use *Google* to find information about some aspect of the Civil Rights Revolution, and we know that in January 2015 there were more searches for "Rosa Parks," than for "*Star Wars*." Similarly, we know that academic studies about the past, let alone books about the Civil Rights Revolution, are never on *Amazon*'s hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly rankings of best sellers, which speaks to how little societal interest there is when it comes to this vital and defining era. Possibilities for scholarly work in culturomics will only continue to grow exponentially for some time.[5]

In conversations about present-day issues, people regularly use memes that evoke various memories of the Civil Rights Revolution and powerful questions about present-day issues. Memes draw parallels between Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Barack Obama; between the struggle for equal marriage and desegregated public

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[4] Julian Abagond, *Abagond*, https://abagond.wordpress.com; Emily Badger, "Why highways have become the center of civil rights protest," *The Washington Post* (accessed July 16, 2016) https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/07/13/why-highways-have-become-the-center-of-civil-rights-protest/; Cronon, "Scholarly Authority in a Wikified World"; and Katrina vanden Heuvel, "50 years after Freedom Summer, America needs a year of action," *The Washington Post* (accessed July 1, 2014) https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/katrina-vanden-heuvel-after-mississippi-america-needs-a-year-of-action/2014/06/30/c713cd48-008d-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322_story.html.

[5] Abagond, *Abagond*; Emily Badger, "Why highways have become the center of civil rights protest,"; Cronon, "Scholarly Authority in a Wikified World"; and Heuvel, "50 years after Freedom Summer, America needs a year of action."

spaces; and between protests of the 2010s and protests of the 1950s and 1960s, for example. These memes are shared and retweeted thousands of times, and one thing that makes them unique is that the author is unknown in all cases. While some of these memes are less productive, and they all rely on outdated models that limit the scope of the Civil Rights Revolution, they demonstrate that people are making active connections between the past and present. They are making the past relevant and popular in a unique and revolutionary ways. Historians should take note of such uses of the past and use these as doors to help people further engage with a rich past.

The Internet will only continue to have implications and will only continue to be more and more a force that shapes the historical memory people have, especially as articles, memes, and videos are easily seen by millions and millions of people. While this dissertation has focused on movies, other sources are important, too: Music, blogs (hundreds of millions of which exist), newspaper articles, memorials, museums, and countless other sources impact the historical memory of the Civil Rights Revolution. With the Internet, opportunities exist to have a society more engaged in rigorous, evidenced-based discussions about the past. But, thus far, the Internet is proving to be a place overflowing with everyday Whig historians. With the Internet, even more than with Hollywood film, the only rule seems to be, "if you don't like the past, change it."[6]

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[6] Wesch, "From Knowledgable to Knowledge-able: Learning in New Media Environments," *The Academic Commons: For the Liberal Education Community* (accessed November 4, 2016) http://www.academiccommons.org/2014/09/09/from-knowledgable-to-knowledge-able-learning-in-new-media-environments/.

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