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Relationships in 1960s America**

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**Source:** *Midlands Historical Review*, Vol. 1 (2017)

**Published:** 26/10/2017

**URL:** <http://www.midlandshistoricalreview.com/guess-whos-coming-to-dinner-and-hollywoods-misrepresentation-of-the-politics-of-interracial-relationships-in-1960s-america/>

## Guess Who's Coming to Dinner and Hollywood's Misrepresentation of the Politics of Interracial Relationships in 1960s America

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*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) is a Hollywood film, starring Sidney Poitier as an African-American man who is engaged to Joanna Drayton, a white woman with liberal parents. The film, directed by Stanley Kramer, depicts the reactions of the couple's parents to their prospective union, ultimately emphasising an acceptance of interracial marriage and limited African-American integration into white society. The film was released when the 'subject of interracial marriage excited a great deal of public discussion' due to the historic *Loving v. Virginia* verdict.<sup>1</sup> *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* provides a cinematic depiction of an interracial relationship only twelve years after the murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen year old black boy who was killed in Mississippi 'for whistling at a white woman.'<sup>2</sup> This incident demonstrates 'the severity of the taboo' historically surrounding interracial relationships in American society.<sup>3</sup> Interracial relationships can be defined more broadly than the romantic, as the film focuses much of its attention on John Prentice's interactions with Matt Drayton, Joanna's father. However, as this essay will argue, several elements of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, such as the unrealistic characterisation of John Prentice, its liberal ideologies and affluent setting, and its failure to acknowledge social movements such as Black Power, prevent the film from fully depicting the struggles many African-Americans and prospective interracial marriages encountered in the late 1960s.

Interracial marriage was still a politically and socially contentious subject when *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was released in 1967. This was illustrated by the impact of the verdict in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), a case which involved 'a black woman and a white man who had been sweethearts since childhood.'<sup>4</sup> The verdict removed laws banning interracial marriages in the United States under the Fourteenth Amendment 'only 6 months before the release'

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<sup>1</sup> G. A. Harris & R.B Toplin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations Regarding Stanley Kramer's Film on the Subject of Interracial Marriage', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 40/4 (2007), p. 708.

<sup>2</sup> K. Anderson, 'Film as a Reflection of Society: Interracial Marriage and Stanley Kramer's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* in Late 1960s America', *Studies By Undergraduate Researchers at Guelph*, 4/1 (2010), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, 'Film as a Reflection of Society', p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Harris & Toplin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations', p. 708.

of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*.<sup>5</sup> Prior to this judgement, anti-miscegenation laws still existed in sixteen states, mostly in the South. Justice Earl Warren's judgement ended laws 'which prohibit[ed] and punish[ed] marriages on the basis of racial classifications.'<sup>6</sup> However, a legal ruling does not instantly catalyse a change in public opinion. In 1968, one year after the *Loving v. Virginia* verdict, and the release of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, only '20% of Americans approved of marriage between blacks and whites.'<sup>7</sup> As Anne Perrin notes, it is 'not merely an irony that miscegenation laws were struck down after the rest of Jim Crow.'<sup>8</sup> This was due to the fact that 'the idea of intermixing was a major fear of the white power structure' in American society.<sup>9</sup> The social importance of interracial marriage as a topic in 1967 is also demonstrated by the public reaction to the marriage of Secretary of State Dean Rusk's daughter, Peggy, to African-American Guy Smith. 'The newlywed couple even appeared on the cover of Time magazine in September of 1967', which demonstrates that a high profile interracial marriage was considered newsworthy in this period.<sup>10</sup> The Time article reported that 'Democrat Washington insiders were apprehensive about the nuptials, but 'the marriage did not unleash the kind of storm that it would have stirred only a few years ago.'<sup>11</sup> This indicates that although opinions were moving towards favouring interracial marriage, progress was slow. Like the characters of Joanna Drayton and John Prentice in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, Peggy Rusk and Guy Smith's union involved a white woman and a black man. This racial combination was a more taboo pairing than the couple involved in *Loving v. Virginia*, as Southern ideology regarded the 'preservation of white womanhood [as] fundamental' and that it would be damaged by interracial marriage.<sup>12</sup> However, despite raising the important issue of acceptance of interracial marriage during a period of tumultuous social change in American society, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* missed an opportunity to make a true impact on conservative viewers relating to interracial relationship; probably because the film is a light-hearted comedy,

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<sup>5</sup> A. G. Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class, and Gender Constructions in late 1960s America', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45/4 (2012), p. 847.

<sup>6</sup> E. Warren, 'Opinion: *Loving v. Virginia*', 388 U.S. 1, June 12, 1967, *Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School*, <[www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/388/1#writing-USSC\\_CR\\_0388\\_0001\\_ZO](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/388/1#writing-USSC_CR_0388_0001_ZO)> (Accessed: 26/02/15).

<sup>7</sup> Harris & Toplin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations', p. 712.

<sup>8</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 847.

<sup>9</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 847.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, 'Film as a Reflection of Society', p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 848.

<sup>12</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 855.

fuelled by the liberal ideology of director Stanley Kramer and writer William Rose, which does not fully explore the impact of racism on American politics and society in this period.

The message of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* is firmly entrenched in liberal ideology. The film adopts Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s spirit of interracial co-operation and integration as the means by which racial difficulties can best be solved. The film's 'unambiguous morality [...] reflects the idealism of the 1960s movements' led by Dr. King while also depicting the 'problem of racial integration and equality as a moral issue.'<sup>13</sup> However, in adopting this approach, the film becomes mainly focused on the interaction between the white and black men. This is best represented by 'the conflict between John Prentice and Matt Drayton [which] is a sort of personification of the integrationist Martin Luther King, Jr. faction of the Civil Rights Movement.'<sup>14</sup> This is a similar approach to movies such as *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), also starring Sidney Poitier as Detective Virgil Tibbs, an experienced Philadelphia police officer, who helps the white Police Chief Bill Gillespie solve a murder in the racist town of Sparta, Mississippi. Tibbs and Gillespie's interactions in this film showed 'nostalgia for the interracial cooperation of the early Civil Rights movement' namely between black and white men.<sup>15</sup> By 1967, the message of racial dialogue between white and black men had become an outdated method for gaining racial progress and equality. Previously, the Civil Rights Movement, which had promoted interracial organising through groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), had lobbied in the South, resulting in legislative progress such as The Civil Rights Act (1964) and The Voting Rights Act (1965). However, by the time *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was released, the political emphasis had changed significantly. In 1966, SNCC ordered an 'expulsion of whites' from its membership, and Black Power had replaced the language of interracial cooperation as a means to achieving interracial progress.<sup>16</sup> Even Martin Luther King Jr. acknowledged that 'social racism remained' and went north to fight against housing segregation and white flight in his Chicago Movement.<sup>17</sup> In 1967, the Black Panther Party, led by Stokely Carmichael of the SNCC, had located its headquarters in Oakland, California, in close proximity to where *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* is set, in San Francisco. However, by failing to have the film's characters recognise, or even reference, the 'prevailing radicalism of black

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<sup>13</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 847.

<sup>14</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 849.

<sup>15</sup> A. Levine, 'Sidney Poitier's Civil Rights: Rewriting the Mystique of White Womanhood in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *In the Heat of the Night*', *American Literature*, 73/2 (2001), p. 377.

<sup>16</sup> W. Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (Oxford, 2007), p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 851.

America at the time, including the radicalism of blacks close to San Francisco', *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* does not acknowledge the validity of Black Power as a means of dismantling racism in American society.<sup>18</sup> Tillie, the Drayton's maid, is the only character who mentions Black Power in the film, when she tells John that he is 'just out for all you can get, with your Black Power and all that other trouble-making nonsense.'<sup>19</sup> In accusing John of representing the Black Power movement she misappropriates its meaning completely, leaving the contemporary white viewer in ignorance of Black Power's goals and political significance in the African-American struggle for racial equality.

By the mid-1960s, 'the emergence of the Black Power movement, and the uprisings in the cities all across America' such as in Watts in 1965, 'had challenged the viability of integration as a political solution to segregation and racism.'<sup>20</sup> Yet, the main African-American character in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, John Prentice, fails to represent this ideological shift. Black Power advocates 'believed inclusion into the white middle-class institutions was impossible' and leaders such as Stokely Carmichael encouraged 'the formation of separate, black establishments.'<sup>21</sup> An affluent and successful doctor, John graduated '*magna cum laude* from Johns Hopkins, taught at Yale, and the London School of Tropical Medicine' and therefore integrated himself into elite white educational institutions, which acted in direct contrast to the ideals of Black Power.<sup>22</sup> His feat is considered so unusual, presumably to white moviegoers, for an African-American man, that Matt Drayton states that if John listed his accomplishments, that 'no one would believe him.'<sup>23</sup> John Prentice, while not representing Black Power, also does not resemble the typical African-American male of the 1960s. 'Few African Americans were privileged enough to have climbed the ladder of economic and professional success by 1967', as John Prentice has done, his affluence indicated by his generous tip to the taxi driver at the start of the film.<sup>24</sup> In 1965, the controversial document, *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action*, known as the Moynihan Report, outlined the extent to which many African-American families lived in a 'cycle of poverty and deprivation' and suffered from broken family structures.<sup>25</sup> John Prentice does not represent or acknowledge this scenario. His parents remain married, despite the

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<sup>18</sup> Harris & Toplin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations', p. 704.

<sup>19</sup> *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Dir: Stanley Kramer, 1967).

<sup>20</sup> T. Wartenberg, *Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism* (Colorado, 1999), p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 850.

<sup>22</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 853.

<sup>23</sup> *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Dir: Stanley Kramer, 1967).

<sup>24</sup> Harris & Toplin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations', p. 703.

<sup>25</sup> D.P. Moynihan, 'The Negro Family: The Case for National Action' (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 30.

fact that African-Americans had a 'higher frequency of broken homes' than any other race.<sup>26</sup> John and his father are both employed, contrary to the high unemployment rate of the African-American male, which reached 29.2 percent in the 'prosperous year' of 1963.<sup>27</sup> African-Americans were grossly underpaid in relation to their white counterparts and often denied welfare benefits, yet in the world of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, money is no object. Joanna orders extra steaks and requests they be delivered in a taxi, while Mr and Mrs Prentice buy expensive plane tickets to visit San Francisco for one evening.

The characters in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* are distinctly upper-class, alienating many African-American audience members, who 'were interested in developing race consciousness, expressing group pride, and pushing for community control', yet were faced with a successful film that did not share, or even acknowledge, their values.<sup>28</sup> Instead, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* ultimately argues that integration was the best means to achieve racial equality, but only 'if white people integrate with upper-class black people.'<sup>29</sup> This sentiment, which ignored Black Power and the political climate of the late 1960s, coupled with the highly idealised nature of Sidney Poitier's character, prevented the film from delivering a realistic and relatable representation of interracial relationships in this period.

John Prentice was viewed as an inauthentic member of African-American society in the 1960s. As previously discussed, Dr. Prentice's class status and profession meant that he did not represent 'the diverse economic, social, and cultural attributes of American blacks in the sixties.'<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that it was impossible for an African-American man to reach a position of financial and career success similar to that of John Prentice in 1960s America. Rather, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner's* characterisation of John Prentice is troubling to its audience in that it suggests that acquiring wealth and status is the best way to gain acceptance in white society and become 'worthy', in the eyes of white patriarchal figures like Matt Drayton, of interracial marriage. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner's* white audience gained little understanding of the majority of African-American experiences from watching this film. Black audiences would, once again, not see themselves truly represented in another Hollywood film. Minor African-American characters, such as Dorothy and Mr. and

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<sup>26</sup> Moynihan, 'The Negro Family: The Case for National Action', p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> Moynihan, 'The Negro Family: The Case for National Action', p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Harris & Toplin, '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations*', p. 704.

<sup>29</sup> Perrin, '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions*', p. 851.

<sup>30</sup> Harris & Toplin, '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations*', p. 709.

Mrs. Prentice are given minimal development, while Tillie and John are depictions of African-American stock characters. Tillie represents the 'wise black mammy' figure that African-American women were often confined to playing on the silver screen.<sup>31</sup> John is reminiscent of an Uncle Tom, being perfectly compliant with white society. Critics have noted that 'John Prentice demonstrates the opposite values of *Black Pride* because he defers to Matt Drayton's judgment and disregards his father's opinion' on his impending nuptials.<sup>32</sup> John tells his father that 'you don't own me', yet voluntarily places total control of his relationship with Joanna in the hands of her white father.<sup>33</sup> John is seen as a wholly virtuous character, not responding to everyday racism from the taxi driver and Hilary, while also maintaining composure when Tillie repeatedly questions his motives, and accuses him of being 'above himself'.<sup>34</sup> John possesses so many virtuous characteristics that he is effectively a perfect 'white man in black skin'.<sup>35</sup>

Kramer made John Prentice a 'paragon of virtue' in order to remove 'potential objections to marriage on economic, social, and cultural bases' and to 'require audiences to face the issue of colour prejudice directly'.<sup>36</sup> However, this artistic decision, which made the film 'more palatable [to] hesitant white audiences', deprived it of the opportunity to authentically represent the racism and ostracism that 'lower class, interracial couples' faced from both black and white society in 1960s America.<sup>37</sup> In 2016, Hollywood made an attempt to rectify this class disparity, with the historical drama, *Loving*. This film focused on the true story of Mildred and Richard Loving, a black woman and a white man who were ordered to vacate Virginia for twenty-five years as a result of their marriage violating the state's anti-miscegenation law. Ultimately, the Supreme Court case based on their plight, *Loving v. Virginia*, ended anti-miscegenation laws in a number of states in 1967. Unlike *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Loving* quietly assumes that its modern audience already agrees that Richard and Mildred's marriage is valid, and knows that justice will prevail. As a result, while artistically beautiful, the film is heavily visual and understated, muting the violence of the Civil Rights era South. Similarly, the frequent narrative focus on lawyers Bernard Cohen and Phil Hirschkop deprives Mildred and Richard of agency in verbalising their experiences and emotions. Despite this, the critically acclaimed *Loving* shows a distinct effort to tell the story

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<sup>31</sup> S.M. Lyman, 'Race, Sex, and Servitude: Images of Blacks in American Cinema', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 4/1 (1990), p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 859

<sup>33</sup> *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Dir: Stanley Kramer, 1967).

<sup>34</sup> *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Dir: Stanley Kramer, 1967).

<sup>35</sup> Harris & Toplin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations', p. 709

<sup>36</sup> Harris & Toplin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations', p. 703, 709.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, 'Film as a Reflection of Society', p. 26; Perrin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 850.

of the couple authentically, providing a sense of hope that future cinema, unlike *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, will endeavour to represent the reality of historical and political climates for mainstream audiences.

*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was enormously popular with white audiences, receiving ten Academy Award nominations. This was partially due to Sidney Poitier, who in 1967 was 'the year's biggest box office star', playing notable roles in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *In the Heat of the Night*.<sup>38</sup> Poitier's stardom is widely attributed by critics 'to the consistent nobility, altruism, and pacifism of the characters he played.'<sup>39</sup> Both John Prentice and Virgil Tibbs were virtuous heroes who, according to contemporary journalist Clifford Mason, only existed in the 'white world...helping the white man solve the white man's problem.'<sup>40</sup> These characters failed to authentically represent African-American culture and the growing Black Power movement, leading to an 'inundation of negative comments' regarding Poitier's depictions of Prentice and Tibbs.<sup>41</sup> These criticisms demonstrated 'how out of step [Poitier's] movies were with the needs and frustrations of his own people.'<sup>42</sup> Some critics rejected the notion that Poitier needed to 'employ language of the inner city, reveal talent in basketball, or express distrust of whites in order to present a more authentic characterization of African Americans' in cinema, but despite their claims having some merit, they were in the minority.<sup>43</sup> The majority of African-Americans did not feel Poitier represented their community, and would have to wait until the rise of Blaxploitation films such as *Shaft* (1971) and *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) to see more authentic African-American characters in popular cinema.

One of the reasons Sidney Poitier was so popular with white audiences stemmed from the non-threatening nature of the roles he played. John Prentice is 'virtuously sexless.'<sup>44</sup> He and Joanna only kiss once in the entire film, the first major interracial kiss in Hollywood. The kiss is reflected through the taxi cab's window and accompanied by the driver's disapproving glare, emphasising the film's promotion of 'vague interracial tolerance.'<sup>45</sup> John's brief interest in Dorothy when she first appears is only included to prove that he is not solely interested in white women. Kramer and Rose were making a decided effort to distance Poitier's character

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<sup>38</sup> Levine, 'Sidney Poitier's Civil Rights', p. 381.

<sup>39</sup> Levine, 'Sidney Poitier's Civil Rights', p. 381.

<sup>40</sup> Levine, 'Sidney Poitier's Civil Rights', p. 382.

<sup>41</sup> Perrin, '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 858.

<sup>42</sup> Perrin, '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. The Web of Racial, Class and Gender Constructions', p. 858.

<sup>43</sup> Harris & Toplin, '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? A Clash of Interpretations*', p. 710.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, 'Film as a Reflection of Society', p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> Levine, 'Sidney Poitier's Civil Rights', p. 371.

from the black rapist archetype that had been popularised by *Birth of a Nation* in 1915. They did not want 1967 audiences to 'identify John Prentice with the demonic sexuality of Griffith's blackface villains.'<sup>46</sup> The fear that Poitier's character should be associated with this stereotype led the filmmakers to create a 'distinguished, race-neutral black man' who was 'greatly distanced from the social realities of the times.'<sup>47</sup> Many Americans were ready to discuss African-American sexuality in 1967. This was demonstrated by the popularity of Black Panther Elridge Cleaver's memoir *Soul on Ice* (1968). It was a work that openly discussed black male sexuality and interracial relationships. It sold one million copies initially, and 'The New York Times labelled *Soul on Ice* as 'Book of the Year' in 1968.'<sup>48</sup> Although the work must be condemned for its unapologetic descriptions of the rape of both black and white women, its popularity proved that black male sexuality and interracial relationships were a point of interest for many unenlightened Americans in this period. Therefore, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* missed an opportunity to present a positive, but more importantly realistic, depiction of black male sexuality onscreen.

John's poignant discussion with his father towards the end of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* is particularly notable for his accusation that 'you think of yourself as a coloured man. I think of myself as a man.'<sup>49</sup> The ideal John is describing here is akin to a colour-blind society. Such a society contradicted Black Power's ideal of celebrating black identities, but would have seemed impossible to many African-Americans who encountered institutional racism on a daily basis. Yet, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* depicts racism as individual prejudice that is linked to generational difference. The prominence of a 'colour-blind youth culture' in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, allows the audience to interpret 'racism as a generational phenomenon, doomed to pass away as naturally' as the next generation assumes political control.<sup>50</sup> Joanna is 'the embodiment of the colour-blind ideal with which the Draytons had raised her' as she does not attribute significance to the colour of her fiancé's skin.<sup>51</sup> The carefree dancing of Dorothy and the white delivery boy to rock and roll music is meant to symbolise the next generation's approach to interracial interaction. In this way, John Prentice's ideal of a colour-blind society is presented as inevitability, rather than a dream. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* is set in 1967, which is when the 'Summer of Love' occurred in the Haight-Ashbury neighbourhood of San Francisco. The image of Dorothy and the delivery boy dancing, as well as the image of groups of teenagers enjoying ice cream

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<sup>46</sup> Wartenberg, *Unlikely Couples*, p. 126.

<sup>47</sup> Harris & Toplin, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations', pp. 702-703.

<sup>48</sup> Anderson, 'Film as a Reflection of Society', p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Dir: Stanley Kramer, 1967).

<sup>50</sup> Wartenberg, *Unlikely Couples*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>51</sup> Wartenberg, *Unlikely Couples*, p. 117.

and one another's company at the drive-through, is an idealised representation of the youth culture of the 1960s, glossing over the 'celebration of sex, drugs, and rock'n roll' as well as the homelessness that was rampant during this period.<sup>52</sup> Also, by situating the film in San Francisco, John and Joanna's interracial relationship is established in 'the most liberal metropolitan area' in the United States.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the couple's planned move to Geneva for their nuptials ensures that their relationship won't be tested in the more racially hostile climate of the United States. As Glen Harris noted in his critique of the film: 'if Hollywood's story had shown Prentice and Joanna falling in love in Baltimore and planning to move to Georgia, it would have dealt more honestly and truthfully with the power of social resistance to mixed-colour marriages in 1960s America.'<sup>54</sup> Therefore, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner's* liberal setting creates an idealised image of serious social issues and fails to truly acknowledge the problems created for personal relationships by racism in American society.

By depicting the main African-American character as an affluent doctor, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* fails to address racism as an institutional problem. It does not emphasise the extent to which racism prevented African-Americans from advancing in society. Tillie is a domestic, a job that is a 'racially determined effect of the structure of American society' which deprived African-American women of educational and wider employment opportunities, based on race and gender discrimination.<sup>55</sup> Dorothy's part time job in the kitchen implies that the same fate is likely to befall her. Although the Black Power Movement, and even the Moynihan Report, advocated for more 'educational and employment opportunities' for African-Americans, these resources were mostly directed towards men.<sup>56</sup> Women in the Black Power movement were forced into traditional gender roles, and depicted as 'as the source of black men's troubles.'<sup>57</sup> Therefore, African-American women were forced to endure institutional racism, but also sexism within their own movements, a conundrum that Frances Beal referred to as 'Double Jeopardy.'<sup>58</sup> *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* does a better job of acknowledging everyday racism, but it is not heavily punished in this film. Although Christina fires Hilary for her attitude towards John, she grants her a \$5,000 dollar severance payment, which is worth roughly \$36,660 in 2017 when adjusted for inflation.<sup>59</sup> The taxi driver receives a generous tip, despite his overt racism.

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<sup>52</sup> Anderson, 'Film as a Reflection of Society', p. 27.

<sup>53</sup> Harris & Toplin, '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations*', p. 704.

<sup>54</sup> Harris & Toplin, '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations*', p. 705.

<sup>55</sup> Wartenberg, *Unlikely Couples*, p. 122.

<sup>56</sup> M. Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (London, 1979), p. 114.

<sup>57</sup> Breines, *The Trouble Between Us*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>58</sup> F. Beal, 'Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female', in T.C. Bambara (Ed.), *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, (New York, 1970), pp. 90-99.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Inflation Calculator, <<http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>>, (Accessed 06/06/2017)

Racist attitudes are not truly punished in this film, much like they were not punished in 1960s American society.

Overall, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* is undoubtedly a significant film, as it depicted an onscreen interracial relationship in a period when 'important social changes' were occurring regarding race in American society.<sup>60</sup> However, the film's impact is limited by its outdated ideology of 'an interracial liberalism [which was] increasingly irrelevant' in a political climate dominated by Black Power.<sup>61</sup> Although Sidney Poitier was a respected actor, the film must be criticised for John Prentice's overly virtuous characterisation and its unrealistic representation of the wider African-American community. By setting the film in an affluent area of the liberal city of San Francisco, and having the majority of characters eventually approve the marriage, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* 'manages to greatly subdue the harsh language of racism and avoids the oppressive history of African-American exploitation and white privilege.'<sup>62</sup> The conclusion of the film, which gives Matt Drayton 'the final and decisive word' on the marriage, and sees lower class African-Americans like Tillie remain in subservient domestic roles, does little to alter the balance of power in interracial dialogue.<sup>63</sup> The film 'presents the white elite as the ones with the power to resolve racial injustice' and does little to catalyse social change in this period. By presenting racism as a personal problem, bound to die out as a result of generational succession, the film 'encourages its audience to passively await the arrival of integration rather than actively work for its realization.'<sup>64</sup> Overall, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* does not accurately represent the obstacles and racism that interracial relationships encountered in 1960s America.

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<sup>60</sup> Harris & Toplin, '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?: A Clash of Interpretations*', p. 711

<sup>61</sup> Levine, 'Sidney Poitier's Civil Rights', p. 371.

<sup>62</sup> Anderson, 'Film as a Reflection of Society', p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> Levine, 'Sidney Poitier's Civil Rights', p. 375.

<sup>64</sup> Wartenberg, *Unlikely Couples*, p. 123.

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