

American history x and racism

[History](#), [American History](#)



American History X is a film with racism as its overarching theme. Specifically, the subject of the film focuses not on the phenomenon of racism as we know it, slavery and the Malcolm X period, but on its current trends namely the neo-Nazi, white supremacist movement of the 90's. This paper is determined to present the overt connections between American History X and Racism, after which the discussion will present some pertinent scenes in the movie. These scenes are analyzed from a racial discrimination standpoint. Lastly, a personal reflection on the movie concludes the argumentations.

The film's treatment is like a stereo—going back and forth from the present and the flashbacks. In the same way, the major scenes will be presented here in a non-linear fashion. One of the most important scenes in this film is when the film explains why Derek is mad with minorities. The underlying reason for this hatred is when Derek's dad is shot by a Black drug dealer. Having felt this injustice and being helpless in expressing his anger, Derek was approached by Cameron. This scene is important in presenting racism as not existing in a vacuum.

There are always reasons behind actions, that even the most bizarre or illogical of behaviors can be explained by specific past experiences. Racism is rooted in intolerance and hatred towards others. Hatred is a sowed seed and here we begin to understand that a racist perpetrator has his own reasons why he is behaving in such a way. The abuses of the Nazism in Germany—killing Jews, concentration camps, widespread hunting of people with Jewish descent—will not take place without an idea, or a good reason, that the majority of people would buy into. People would be foolish to just wake up one day and decide to decimate 6 million people.

Ideas are powerful, because ideas turn into acceptance and acceptance turns into actions, actions become behavior and behavior changes into a cultural norm in the long run. Ideas, moreover, are only powerful because people buy into them. This is why the scene at the grocery store with Koreans is important. The scene portrays the power of ideas and its ability to change people. Moreover, the speech of Derek at the store presents surprising parallelisms with the ideas that people bought into during the Nazi movement. In Derek's speech, he said that Koreans are stealing the opportunities that are supposed to be for Americans.

The illegal immigrants that work in America creates the joblessness of the Whites. In the same way, the Nazis of Germany argued that the Jewish refugees from a devastated nation came to Germany carrying nothing but they thrived there—owning businesses, banks, etc—and became powerful while a bulk of the German population are poor and unemployed. The grocery store scene shows just how potent a dangerous idea is. People want to follow a passionate leader. Racism became accepted because people tolerate the act and follow the dangerous norm. Similarly, people with strong moral convictions are also heard. The scene of Dr.

Sweeney and Danny is significant because it shows how racism can be challenged, not through hostility, but with reason. Dialogue fosters understanding, or at least, it presents a different way of looking at things. Sweeney's assignment makes Danny think outside the box—outside his personal stereotypes and values on racism. Sweeney challenges his ideas and in a way, becomes a counter-force to Danny's predisposition towards racism. The anti-racism movement is laden with Sweeney types of people

such as Luther King Jr. who took the non-violent path of reasoning in pointing to the evils of racism itself.

Sweeney is the personification of the challenge against the neo-Nazi trend. His moral courage and convictions made people think and listen. Another important scene in the film is the presentation of Derek and his change of heart. This took place in prison, where racism is also a strong force that binds and separates inmates. In prison, Derek is still resolved in his racist convictions and he bonded with fellow racists, until he was befriended by a Black guy. His previous stereotypes regarding Blacks was challenged by the good-natured behavior of the black guy.

It is essentially a realization that people of different colors are still people sharing a common humanity. When fellow racist inmates raped Derek for befriending a Black guy, he came to understand that goodness and evil are not just seen by the color of the skin. There is blackness of the heart even in the whitest of white, and a whiteness of the soul in the pitch black-colored person. Every act of kindness and every act of violence has its ripple effects beyond what a person can control. This is seen in the scenes following Derek's return. Derek's little brother Danny had taken where he left off.

Now Danny took the same convictions as Derek by being adamantly intolerant of minorities. The small anti-Black movement that Derek started became a great massive force, and now that he had a deeper realization of the evil of racism, he sees that he is responsible for this. Undoing things are more difficult than doing them, especially when we do things mindlessly such as when we resort to hatred and violence. It is easy to sow seeds of violence because it spreads like wildfire, but sowing peace is like planting a seed that

needs to be nurtured. Danny also had his turning point. His brother made him realize that racism is a useless thing.

Blaming others for the death of one's father does not solve the problem, it just makes it worse. He understood that violence will only be met with violence. The symbolic image of the brothers' turning point is the cleaning up of their Nazi-decorated rooms. Writing the American History X paper also supports Danny's non-violence approach towards the hostilities of the world. He writes "analyze and interpret" on the computer. Racism is phenomenal because not many people analyze and interpret before acting on something. In many cases, irrational and false interpretations create chaos.

When there is no room for analysis, there is no opportunity for people to try and understand each other before rendering biased interpretations and actions. Racism presents to us that it is a very strong force, one that is rooted in hostility and intolerance. American History X depicts that degree of hostility and intolerance in the different cascading scenes of the past. When our small monsters of hostility become gigantic titans of racism, we are confronted by something intimidating. Derek's solution is to run, leave the giant. Running from the problem of racism does not solve the fundamental personal and social issues.

While running seems tempting, the reality of racism is still with us and it will never go away unless it is collectively confronted in modern-day America and everywhere else. Running is a temporary solution to a long-term problem. Derek runs with Danny, but eventually the giant catches on them—Danny is shot by the same guy he had a violent (although subtle) argument with the day before. What does the death of Danny imply? It tells us that <https://assignbuster.com/american-history-x-and-racism/>

violence, in all its forms and degrees, is foolishness, it is never a means to an end—thereby rendering racism not as a virtue, but as a moral evil.

Racism is only one form of violence, just as making another human being bite the pavement is another. Unknowingly, many of us do not realize that violence exists both within us and also in our world. Violence does not just mean killing people, it also exists in intolerance over other people's beliefs and skin color, it is harsh language spoken, it is a thought unspoken. Racism is not only seen but felt... while America boasts of equality and human rights; racism is still seen and felt in its other subtle forms of violence. The path of non-violence is a beautiful but difficult journey that we must all decide to take.

I now end with the echoing words of Abraham Lincoln quoted during Danny's death scene, his final words in the American History X paper... "" We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature. " Works Cited American History X. Dir. Tony Kaye. Perf. Edward Norton. New Line Cinema. 1998.