

Comment



Your Comments on Film: Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Question The Levine article s " the film does not really want to be about racial conflict but, instead, about the irrelevance of racial difference." (Levine 374) A film about interracial relationships does not require racial conflict to be genuine, as opposed to phony. Ironically, each character in a film is a personification or " type" incorporating generalities of a larger pool of people. John was too perfect; Tillie represented the maternal nature of the black culture; Joey was all heart and emotion, but scattered; the two fathers wanted to maintain control over their children and feared the future problems of a mixed race marriage; both mothers wanted their children's happiness (emotional). The film was revealing both racially and regarding gender roles. The film considered not only how a liberal white couple would potentially judge a black son-in law; but how his family might react, how other whites and blacks might react. The question did not concern conflict, it concerned the future problems a mixed race couple might face in 1967. It is reasonable to review this potential problem today, much less 40 years ago. The women in the movie influenced the men, perhaps manipulated them, as a diplomatic back channel. Although the men tried to rationalize their positions, they argued emotionally, including name calling. Although the women felt the hearts should decide, they discussed the situation calmly. These scenarios reveal the real power structure in these homes. Tillie's outburst assumed John was making a black power statement by marrying a white girl. She was protecting Joey, and commenting generally on the black male persona. The parents concerns symbolized the " special problems" the couple would face. If the parents could not accept the relationship, how would the rest of the world? These moments and questions were revealing, not phony. Question 2

The historical context of the film must not be ignored. Just four years earlier, Martin Luther King, Jr. dreamt that his four children would be “ judged by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin”. (King, 1963) A year after the movie was released, Dr. King was murdered. This movie was made in turbulent racially charged times. The movie reflected Dr. King’s dream, and John was at first judged by the content of his character. In a quick phone call, Mr. Drayton received a sterling background check praising John. Known to be a good man, the relationship was now judged by the soundness of the decision to marry after such a short romance and considering the racial differences and ensuing issues. Levine writes the movie ended with a directive by Mr. Drayton to Tillie to get dinner on the table, so the household was not affected by this news. The future Levine predicts is more of the same. The point of the movie, though, regards changes of heart, not mind. Logically, John was a good, successful, important man; probably a good son-in-law by most qualitative measures. He was judged by the content of his character, but also by the color of his skin. Forty years later, a black man is elected President, just as dizzy, all heart Joey had predicted. John jokes about settling for a Secretary of State, Powell then Rice, with the Bush administration. The movie suggested the mental part of the equation would settle first, followed by the heart. So, the end monologue was about showing how this relationship can work, rather than waiting for braver people to try. Question 3 Joey ultimately reached her goal and married John. She initiated the decision, manipulated through the familial politics and allowed both families to become comfortable with the decision. One of the subtle subplots in this movie is the women’s movement lagging behind racial equality. Historically, women have received rights after black males, property and

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voting rights to name two; and now a black President prior to a woman President. The suggestion that Joey is irrelevant in this decision process is incorrect; she uses the power she does have. The men accede to her wishes, they do not rewrite the decision. Men may be the forefront of the debate, but the women actually decide and implement the plan to achieve the goal.

Items Cited King, Martin Luther Jr. "I Have a Dream". 1963. Speech in Washington DC. Web. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbUtl_0vAjk
Levine, Andrea. "Sydney 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*, Vol 73, No 2, June 2001. Duke University. Print