

The color purple an analysis from a black female perspective



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This essay covers the potential political and social implications of filmic adaptations using Spielberg's adaptation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* as a way to interpret it based on its political economy, textual analysis, and audience reception. Besides enjoying a strong popular response at the box office, suggesting powerful resonance with viewers, the film *The Color Purple* touched on two issues salient in American society: sexism and racism. We explore the relationships among Spielberg's film as text and the American viewing public.

Adapting Kenneth Burke's language, we argue that Spielberg's film selects certain points and reflects certain elements in that work, but it also deflects our attention from other themes and aspects. While Walker's story is that of a woman's empowerment and liberation through her own self-discovery, Spielberg's adaptation reframes her story through the lens of comforting American mythologies. One might call this, turning the purple into pink. Throughout society and in life, the evidence to support this viewpoint is pervasive.

It is important to analyze the political economy in context with *The Color Purple* within its system of production and distribution. Inserting texts into the system of culture within which they are made and given out can help elucidate features and effects of the texts that textual analysis alone might miss or downplay. Rather than being antithetical approaches to culture, knowledge of political economy can actually contribute to textual analysis and critique (Kellner 9). Looking at this particular film from the perspective of black women, one can understand that this film was made and directed by a white male and that greatly affects how the story is told. Many harsh matters

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in the novel were smoothed over or somewhat downplayed in the film. Also, unlike the novel in which it was written to spread a message, the Hollywood film is also used as a moneymaker. In society today, Civil Rights and equality is a colossal subject and problem, in which Blacks are considerably racialized and oppressed. This connects with Celie's story as her and the women around her are dealing with the problems society has implicated upon them. Placing the plot in context with the world's issues brings to light the way the story was possibly told wrongly and inadequately, causing different textual analysis and audience reception.

Textual analysis can be critically interpreted, approached, and understood as one sees the film from the perspective of a black woman. The Color Purple deals with the gender imbalance transcendence of black women gaining their voice. Womanism is rooted in black and colored women's experiences of the everyday life and aims to eradicate oppression and to unify all people. Walker gave life to a new way for women to talk about their relationships, social changes, and their struggle against oppression from all sides of society. Walker wanted women to quest their rights for their integration within full humanity (Phillips, 2006: xx). The Color Purple contains a lot of hidden symbolism throughout the film. For example, pants are a major symbol. Throughout the film, Celie never wears pants, because pants are seen as a masculine entity. Also, one can think of the phrase wearing the pants in the relationship. Celie ends up starting a pants making business and at the end is seen wearing pants as she transforms from an oppressed woman into a liberated woman. She not only is going against sexism, but also the patriarchy. Another symbol is the color purple itself. Celie is lacking

her color purple at the beginning of the film, because she has a terrible life and is just surviving day to day while not enjoying the little things. However, Shug teaches Celie that God wants people to enjoy and love life, and throughout the plot of the film, Celie ends up finding her color purple as she learns to love her life. Seeing symbols such as these as a black woman in society, it can be really uplifting to watch an oppressed black woman's growth and strength in times of turmoil. One can only realize that Celie is a minority within a minority. Not only is she black, but she is also a woman. This film highlights and emphasizes the struggle as a black woman in society. The Color Purple portrayed Blacks in the same savage-like way, but black women were able to find a worthwhile and progressive meaning and theme from the film (Bobo 13).

Audience reception is always going to be different as there is a wide range of opinions for all texts and media since feedback is simply based on positions and the perspectives of the reader/viewer. It is important to remember, however, that audiences form their own opinions and views on the subject, but keep in mind that media culture has colossal manipulative effects. For example, media could have been distorted as a money maker, and the movie was directed by a white male. The audience reception to The Color Purple was a myriad of contrasting opinions, as many people had many different viewpoints on the film. Opinions most likely correlated with individual backgrounds, such as race and gender. Specifically, from the perspective of black women, they tended to really like and approve of the film, although there were exceptions. According to the article Black women's responses to The Color Purple, by Jacqueline Bobo, Michele Wallace, an Afro-

American literature and creative writing professor at the University of Oklahoma, stated that the film had had some positive feminist influences and some positive import for Black audiences in this country. Other women liked it as they related to the film, either going through those experiences themselves or being around those that had. For example, according to the same article, a Black woman who had once seen the film was mentioned in the New York Times and said she was familiar with many Celie type characters as she, her mother and her aunts had all been beaten and brutalized by their husbands and that the movie for her just lifted a burden. Going along with this, another woman that read the book and saw the movie (and liked both), said that she knew many senior citizens and people her grandma's age that said the film told their story as they were forcefully involved in terrible, incestual relationships as well. However, there were many black women as well who did not like the film, with many reasons for thinking so. For example, many women believed that the film was loose and infiltrated with many cliches and stereotypes that deemed black feminism a joke. They also thought that the implications in the movie weren't taken very seriously, the matters were always a little ridiculous, and singing and dancing was always essentially involved. Another reason they had for not liking the film was that the film does not facilitate in changing ideal beauty standards in the black community, and that when looking at the somewhat lesbian relationship between Shug and Celie, black women will start turning to other women and not men in times of need. I am a white female, and when looking at this film strictly as a woman without any involvement of race, I like the movie. It makes masculine violence against women an important subject to analyze and consider, because it is a real entity in even <https://assignbuster.com/the-color-purple-an-analysis-from-a-black-female-perspective/>

today's society. All in all, *The Color Purple* mostly received an overwhelming positive response from Black female viewers. Although the male stereotypes can be considered to be bad, from the perspective of black women this film is seen to be a breakthrough and a benefit to them in the media.

All in all, *The Color Purple*, when seen through the lens of black women has a completely different effect when seeing it as a person possessing other identifying depictions. As shown throughout the film, Celie undergoes such a development from being 'nobody' and to become 'someone'. This improvement can only take place because of the increased recognition she gains from her surroundings. The given environments and surroundings play a crucial role in relation to one's position and recognition offered by others. Having recognition and oppression as the central theme one can see the connection from Walker to womanism. Through Walker's work she emphasizes class issues, racism and oppression which she has been struggling with throughout her life. She is a strong supporter of womanhood and has developed the philosophy further into the concept of womanism. Through womanism she raises the consciousness of identity. In addition, these themes are enlightened as well and it adds the notion of recognition. Thereby this film opens up the possibilities for black women and other cultures to be recognized. Recognition enables people to change the imposed image of themselves.