

# Analysis american history x

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American History X is a powerful movie and it was most difficult to find a scene to analyze as every little bit was brilliant. However I have chosen a particular scene which I feel contributed enormously to understanding the movie as a whole. In this scene you have Derek (Edward Norton), Danny (Edward Furlong), Davina (Jennifer Lien), Dorris (Beverly D'angelo), Stacey (Fairuza Balk) and Murray (Elliot Gould) sitting down at the dinner table. This terribly in depth conversation over different values and views quickly resulted in disagreements and lead to Davina wanting to leave the dinner table.

However, due to Derek's inability to listen and forceful character he refuses to let her leave and violently force feeds her a piece of turkey as she tries to escape resulting the family in a terrible breakdown. I believe this whole scene was used so that we were able to gain an insight into the different views, opinions and personalities of all the characters. The decision to place all the characters here sitting around the dinner table was a device used to tell the audience about the political background and a chance for us to critically analyze what each character had to say and then watch the response of the others. The message that the director is trying to portray to the audience by sitting Derek at the head of the table is the strength, forcefulness and leadership abilities that he possesses and how deep down he is possibly capable of change. This scene will also give you a strong message stating that hatred and racism will eventually destroy those closest to you and his full personality can almost be seen in this scene. The harshness and strong tone he uses help to outline him as a confidence strong individual and with his face being featured mainly in close-up's the

film maker is trying to show you that he is almost like a 'in your face' type of person.

The same rule applies here with Stacey when she is referring to 'black willy Williams' and her over exaggerated referral to 'black' is showing how much hate she really has for them. With the way Derek is so confident though it almost makes you believe what he is saying is right and you feel deeply drawn to his intelligence and wittiness and the supporting arguments, strong tone of voice and speech he has not only show you he is a bright individual but that he is not a unintelligent redneck racist as most films often portray them, all of this making the scene more interesting. A good film or scene would be one that contains intelligence, knowledge, power and reason and not just a bunch of hooligans running around kicking in the heads of non-whites. Later on in the scene you learn that Derek is more than capable of changing his ways and in the scene the film maker has added soft touch's to Derek's personality in order to accomplish this. This is shown when Dorris pleads with Derek to 'drop this Rodney King shit', and immediately he nods and agrees. Another example of this is even though the conversation fiercely continued his mother is then seen asking him to 'keep it down as Ally is sleeping', after this comment is made Derek's voice is lowered showing some respect for his mother's wishes and his baby sister.

Watching the whole scene you will see a family being torn apart by Derek's ideology however there is also an extremely strong bond between them as even though they have fought Derek's brother and sister seem to calm down and forgive him and Danny replies with 'I trust you Derr'. What is interesting is Danny's vulnerable character and almost victim like ways such as him

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being pushed from left to right, nodding constantly at Derek's statements and his soft gullible look give you an indication that he will possibly be a victim later on in the movie for example when he is shot at the very end. However if you listen to Derek's statements carefully in the scene the film maker has deliberately used Danny in a statement by making Derek quote ' If Rodney King had been driving along hopped up on shiver shigal or PCP and killed Danny, you'd be singing a very different tune'. This has already put the story in perspective. The fact that Danny does not physically speak much in this scene does not mean he does not speak through his silence. It is his silence that gives you that knowledge of his character.

The scene was set in black and white portraying Derek's world as full of hatred, anger and basically no meaning. When Derek starts to change throughout the movie though the scenes are then restored to colour, showing the audience that he has seen a new meaning to life. Another use for the black and white is that it was set in the past. I think the statement being made here is that open your eyes and that the real world is in colour and not black and white. Also, this has been carefully thought through as the whole function of it is because it is between black and whites. Through watching the movie I noticed that Derek is always wearing white for example, in a different scene when he is confronting two African Americans for stealing his car his white vest is making him stand out from them, you will also notice that the African Americans are dressed in dull and dark colours.

The same rule here is applied at the dinner table scene with Derek wearing a clean white coloured shirt and later on you will see him rip that off to a white

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vest underneath. The film maker here is not only trying to get the main character to stand out but to also give you that mental image of whiteness meaning purity, supremacy of whiteness, authority and power. By doing this, I also felt that it portrayed Derek's narrow mindedness in the sense that he is only able to see one colour and not the other. The decision to place all the Vinyard's (Derek, Danny, Davina and Dorris) behind white back drops such as the windows with white curtains and dress them all in lighter colours could also mean that they are as one, that they are all in this together, not to mention it is more important for us to see them in a clearer brighter light as they are the main characters. This is in no way reflected on Murray or Stacey as they are positioned deliberately on the inner side of the table. Murray is also seen wearing a black jacket and is dimly lit stating he is of unimportance and has little authority and is also positioned far from the head of the table.

Murray is also sitting behind a cupboard with cluttered objects however Derek is positioned under a shelf with absolutely nothing on it, this making us focus fully on his face. The cuts between each of the characters are also fast jumping back and forth between the Vinyard's, Stacy and Murray this indicating that trouble is brewing and this shows in his personality that he is impatient. I also noticed that all the main characters first names start with 'D' and since the film as a whole shows the constant struggle, breakdown and rebuild of a once normal all white American family this brings significance and shows they are in fact as one. A little further in to the scene you then see Dorris follow Murray out to his car after Derek has said 'you see this, this means not welcome' and then pulls his vest down to portray a Nazi

symbol. In the corner hanging above the Vinyard's house is an American flag flapping in the wind, at the time the film was made in 1998 there were many arousing problems occurring in America to do with racism.

I think that the American flag was a symbol to clarify how big and worrying this issue is. For example ' during the week of Adolf Hitler's birthday, in 1998, neo-Nazi groups were suspected of planting two nail bombs that exploded in predominantly ethnic minority areas of London and around a bit before then in 1997 on the anniversary of Adolph Hitler's birthday a planned killing spree at the now infamous Columbine High School in America by two children claimed the lives of many fellow school mates. They were targeting ethic minorities and were involved in Nazi activities'. A quote from Murray ' you don't know the world your children are living in' I felt also helped to signify this. Kaye (Director) wanted to make this scene as realistic as possible and the actors performance was utterly unbelievable, making the scene believable because of the emotions and anger shown in the actors faces throughout.

However to fully achieve this Derek (Norton) even spent many months with ex neo-Nazi's and worked out for many months to achieve the look the film maker wanted. After Murray enters his vehicle this then cuts to a shot of Danny looking out through the window at his mother. The long shot here was used to show how truly far away and lost she feels. The music accompanying the shot at the time really grips you in and you feel emotionally sorry for her. It is like she has still not given up hope on her boys and quotes ' he's just a boy, without a father', the close up shot here shows you her full emotion and pain but she turns her head slightly to cry.

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The fact she has done that shows us that she does not want Murray to see this indicating she is deep down troubled and alone. Other techniques that were used here to indicate this is when she drops to the curb on her hands and knees in an establishing long shot. I believe this shot was the most effective as I just wanted it to move onto another scene quickly so I could have hope for her as at that point my hope for her had been shattered. However the length of this shot is extremely long and the film maker holds onto it giving us time to really feel for Dorris. I chose this scene because coming from a white but also mixed background I find it very significant to me because I believe we are all the equal and just because my parents come from totally different backgrounds I think it is important that we mix with people from all different of walks of life and learn from one another. The scene is most probably the most emotional out of all and this really made me understand the message and the film as a whole.