

# American history x and crash movies

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



Movies, like any creative effort, reflect the time and the place in which they are created. Both American History X and Crash clearly address the concept of the American Dream and the way that people choose to live their lives. While they share this concept, however, American History X is a much darker film that explores the many and varied forms of hate. Stereotypes, prejudices, and racism are so much a part of everyday life that children are literally taught these things at the dinner table. Crash, on the other hand, shows a diverse collection of Americans trying to live their lives.

Some of them are good and some are bad, but all are capable of change. The viewer ultimately takes away two things from these films. First, the viewer learns that the American Dream, as it is popularly perceived, is unachievable to most. Second, the viewer takes away the message that things are rarely what they seem. In the end, while neither film was a fun or "nice" film, both leave the viewer perhaps thinking a bit more about the American experience and how it is experienced by members of different races. American History X, Crash, and Racism American History X is a film about prejudices and racism.

According to Coury Turczyn, American History X is "the visceral meditation on American bigotry" (par. 6). Although this family seems to be a nice, "normal" suburban family, the children are being indoctrinated into the culture of hate by their father, who constantly denigrates members of other races. The film goes on to trace the actions of the members of this family in general, as well as the events that affect them. In particular, this film addresses the son who attempts to prevent his younger brother from becoming a neo-Nazi, just as he had been in the past.

In contrast, *Crash* is not necessarily a film about racism. Rather, it is a film that uses racism as a backdrop as it examines how actions have a ripple effect that go beyond race relations. The movie brings together groups of seemingly unrelated individuals who, through their racially motivated actions, become associated through crimes of passion and violence. Unlike the individuals in the movie *American History X*, however, the movie *Crash* permits the characters to find redemption through their actions. *American History X*

At the beginning of this film, Derek, Danny, and the rest of their family seem to be living the American Dream. They live in a nice house in the suburbs, with a beautiful mom, a firefighter dad, and two other siblings. In the evenings, they sit down together at the dinner table to eat and talk. However, it is in the middle of this apparent domestic bliss that problems lurk. The dinner conversation is really the pivotal place where the viewer can see the kind of intolerance that Derek and Danny are taught by their father, Dennis, by all counts is a ' nice guy.

Dennis, the father, is a racist, as he demonstrates in his little spiel, and it becomes apparent to the viewer that being open-minded is not a plus in this family. During one of these dinner conversations, Derek and his father discuss affirmative action and Derek's teacher Sweeney. Dennis complains about " affirmative action shit [driving him] up the fucking wall," complaining that " rappers" who score lower than other fighters who have nearly perfect scores " walk away with the job" (*American History X*). Dennis also complains about all of the classic books that have been replaced by " black" books.

Even though Derek is very enthused by his teacher, his father warns him not to fall for the “ nigger bullshit. ” When dad is then killed in the line of duty and by a black man, this clears the way for Derek to become recruited by the vulture named Cameron. Cameron preys on weak kids, like Derek, so that he can bring them into the white power movement. From that time forward, the family begins to deteriorate and continues until Derek is released from prison. Their living arrangement has become dismal. Mom is sickly. However, Derek has seen the light in prison so to speak and begins to turn his life around.

Director David McKenna explains clearly in an interview what he was trying to do with the movie. He explains that as a child he was aware of bigotry in his community, which influenced him to later write about people who possessed such beliefs. He comments that, the point he was trying to make with this movie “ is that a person is not born a racist. It is learned through environment and the people that surround you” (Virtual Pew Daily). According to The Virtual Pew Daily, McKenna was intrigued by the question of why people hate. His theory that hate begins at home (Virtual Pew Daily) is tested in this film.

McKenna brings this theory to American History X by showing that the family that appears to have the American Dream by the tail before their father Dennis dies, in fact, does not. Things progressively worsen after his death. Eventually, Derek goes on to make speeches that seem to echo his father, to recruit new members to white supremacy. In one of these speeches, Derek talks about the famous inscription on the Statue of Liberty, which begins “

Give me your tired, your hungry, your poor. " Derek explains to his listeners that it's Americans who are tired and hungry and poor.

And I say, until you take care of that, close the fucking book. 'Cause we're losing. We're losing our rights to pursue our destiny. We're losing our freedom. So that a bunch of fucking foreigners can come in here and exploit our country. It's happening right here, right in our neighborhood, right in that building behind you" (American History X). This speech clearly shows how Derek's view of his fellow Americans has been shaped by his father, in that his words nearly echo those spoken by his father at the dinner table. While Derek believes in the American Dream, he believes in it only for certain people, not for all people.

Derek makes false and broad generalizations about our country and people, which a lot of people believe even today. It is for this reason that these arguments work so well. McKenna uses his film to criticize this kind of hate. The symbol that he uses for hatred is the swastika, which becomes a twisted sort of cross once Derek gets out of prison. This film also shows how people tend to look at things in black and white, in what Siddens calls " role rigidity". Derek's worldview is rigidly black and white during everything leading up to prison; he is rigidly locked into a role that " permeates [his] life" .

In a not terribly subtle bit of symbolism, the film is done in black and white during this time. After Derek undergoes his transformation in prison, changing his role sufficiently to see people as individuals, the film becomes color as Derek's world becomes color. His world becomes, in many ways, a lot less clear, a lot messier but better. Because McKenna both directed and

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filmed this movie, it cannot help but reflect his vision of the world. However, McKenna uses this film to make a good argument for his theses: that racism is prevalent in Middle America and that racism begins at home.

Crash The movie Crash, on the other hand, has a broader focus than American History X. Instead of focusing on a single set of related protagonists, Crash is a series of short vignettes that all intersect at some crucial point in order to make the viewer question his or her beliefs. Rather than being “merely” about racism, the movie Crash is also about the lack of human love that human beings show to each other. The director is apparently stating that his lack of human love springs from a lack of connectedness with each other.

As one of the characters, Graham, states at the beginning of the film: It's the sense of touch. In any real city, you walk, you know? You brush past people, people bump into you. In L. A. , nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something” (Crash). The plot of the movie Crash seems to be that people are not always what they appear to be on their surface. In America, through various racist acts, Americans are more likely to do harm to others than to do good.

Just as the viewer may be shocked by the portrayal of a firefighter in American History X, the viewer is also shocked by the characters in Crash. However, Crash is more about the understanding that develops between people and the redemption that can come from it. In American History X, Derek finally comes to understand true nature of a world that is neither all black nor all white. Unfortunately, by the time he does and begins to make

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amends, his brother Danny has to die. Some acts we simply cannot take back. Unlike this dismal fate, however, the characters of Crash show the viewer that we can all change our ways and find redemption.

Even when the viewer hates the character, the film takes us closer to help us understand why the character might have done what he or she did. The film provides us a glimpse in order to achieve empathy. Empathy and redemption are the main themes of the film. In some cases, the viewer's stereotypes are proven true as in the case of this dialogue. At one point in the film, two young black men discuss their theory as to the people of the neighborhood fear them, coming to the conclusion that it is because they are "the only two black faces surrounded by a sea of over-caffeinated white people, patrolled by the triggerhappy LAPD".

According to the movie, Crash, everyone has prejudice. This prejudice is demonstrated in a conversation between Graham, a black man, and Ria, his Puerto Rican girlfriend. In this conversation, Ria angrily suggests that she will give Graham a "geography lesson," stating that her father is from Puerto Rico and her mother is from El Salvador, neither of which is Mexico. Graham replies that he guesses that "the big mystery is, who gathered all those remarkably different cultures together and taught them all how to park their cars on their lawns" (Crash)

Steve Wessler, founder of the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence notes that even stereotypes that are usually inside a person can eventually be aired. He is quoted as saying that: Even though such attitudes reside beneath the surface, they have the potential to bubble up--and progress from there. Stereotypes are not static. If you're stereotyping a person of

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color in negative ways and not thinking of him or her as an individual, it makes it much easier to treat that person poorly.

I don't think that I investigated a hate crime at a school that did not begin with the lower level of slurs and stereotypes and then escalated" (U. S. News) In its series of vignettes, Crash displays a cross-section of the American public, showing characters that range from rich and miserable to those who are family-oriented and poor. Not a single character in this movie remains unaffected by prejudice, either in his or her own behavior or in the events that are put into motion by the prejudice of others. Conclusion

Both American History X and Crash use racial prejudice as the motivating force for the actions of the plot. The manner in which they make use of this motivating force, however, is quite different. While American History X is a bleak film that speaks of the inevitability of the fate of prejudice reaching across the generations, Crash expresses the idea that human beings are capable of both empathy and redemption, no matter who the individual is or how flawed he or she might be. If anything, these films make the viewer question what the American dream really is and who is living it.

Both of them explore the issues of race, ethnicity and gender very well. Neither of these films shows much distinction between good and evil: everyone does good, and everyone does bad. Each one of us has both qualities inside of us and displays them at various points of our lives. Every person, no matter what he or she has done, is capable of love and redemption. This capability is what makes us human. The willingness to share this love and redemption, despite the race or ethnicity of those around us, is what it should mean to be American.

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