"Yeah, My Mom is Milk and My Dad is Granola:
The Depiction of Interracial Relationships and Racial Hybridity in U.S. Visual Culture

Andrew M. Ojeda
College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/473

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
"Yeah, My Mom is Milk and My Dad is Granola:" The Depiction of Interracial Relationships and Racial Hybridity in U.S. Visual Culture

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the American Studies Department from The College of William and Mary

by

Andrew M. Ojeda

Accepted for Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

[Signature]

Elizabeth Schlabach, Director

[Signature]

Jody L. Allen

[Signature]

Elizabeth Neidenbach

Williamsburg, VA
April 24, 2012
This thesis is dedicated to Cheryl and Manny, my mother and father respectively.

Their constant love and support epitomizes the beauty of interracial relationships.

Also this essay is dedicated to Illeana and Jillian, my two sisters, but also racial hybrids that signify the future of American society.
“Yeah, My Mom is Milk and My Dad is Granola:” The Depiction of Interracial Relationships and Racial Hybridity in U.S. Visual Culture

U.S. visual culture depicting interracial relationships\(^1\) gained prevalence beginning in 1967. Visual culture functioned as a mirror reacting to the evolving racially tolerant views of the U.S. citizenry. Between 1967 and 2006 Hollywood studios produced films that, at times, portrayed the complexities of interracial romances. Hollywood cinema accurately reflected a society that strived to promote racial equality, yet struggled to. Although commercial movies communicated narratives regarding interracial couples and Americans’ opinions of them, currently racially hybrid\(^2\) Americans lack representation in mainstream U.S. cinema. Racially hybrid individuals are an emerging demographic in the U.S. Therefore similar to the arising presence of interracial couples within American society and thus Hollywood cinema, racial hybrids deserve equal representation. The portrayal of racially hybrid Americans in other mediums, within U.S. visual culture, demonstrated that Hollywood studios blatantly avoided depicting films concerning racial hybrid U.S. citizens. This was not due to Hollywood studios’ lack of interest in these specific stories, but rather their absence of knowledge in how to articulate a narrative regarding racial hybridity. However television programs\(^3\) and commercials\(^4\) in

---

\(^1\) Throughout the thesis this term or others similar in nature will only pertain to African-American and non-African-American couples, unless noted otherwise.  
\(^2\) Also in the thesis the terms racial hybridity, racial hybrid, or racially hybrid will always be within an American context.  
\(^3\) Refers to only shows produced by U.S. television companies.  
\(^4\) Refers to commercials created by U.S. marketing agencies and only airing within the U.S.
particular provided Hollywood film companies with a blueprint to accomplish this endeavor.

Prior to 1967 certain laws were present that prevented African-Americans from attaining equality. These social regulations established boundaries that subjugated black Americans, restricting them from expressing a sense of autonomy. This included the inability to freely choose a spouse, as certain states in the U.S. prohibited interracial marriages. The most notorious of these anti-miscegenation laws was Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act, which classified all citizens of non-European descent as colored and prohibited interracial marriages. Regardless of the anti-miscegenation statues in place, both African-American and Caucasian communities viewed interracial relationships as taboo. This derived from the belief, maintained by the majority of whites, that blacks were inferior. Furthermore Caucasians were under the assumption if they permitted intermixing; it would damage the white race. However throughout the Civil Rights Movement white U.S. citizens’ racial attitudes towards blacks began to evolve. Therefore, their opinions regarding interracial romances also somewhat altered. This was most evident in 1967. Within this year two primary events displayed American citizens’ growing, yet precarious acceptance of interracial relationships. First, the *Loving v. Virginia (1967)* ruling that deemed anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional, represented a profound development in racial views. Second, the interracial marriage of Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s daughter and her African-American husband symbolized the progress of racial tolerance in the U.S. Peggy Rusk and her husband’s appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine, only re-emphasized society’s growing acceptance. Hollywood
studios, acting as a mirror, responded to these developing racial beliefs present at this time within American society and continued to do so beyond 1967.

Hollywood films between 1967 and 2006 reflected U.S. citizens’ progressing tolerance of not only African-Americans, but also interracial relationships. More importantly, these movies attempted to illustrate the difficulties of interracial relationships that often are present in American society. Initially with the release of *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* in 1967, Columbia Pictures aimed to provide audiences with a plot concerning racial acceptance. The film was revolutionary, in the sense that it was one of the first Hollywood pictures to offer a positive representation of an interracial romance. However the film was too sentimental and failed to depict the harsh realities of these relationships.

Three years later, 20th Century Fox released the movie *The Great White Hope* and established a different narrative with regard to interracial relationships. In stark contrast to *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, the motion picture *The Great White Hope* portrayed the various pressures interracial couples encountered from American society and their inability to overcome them. This was also prevalent in *Mississippi Masala*, a 1991 film. Although the male protagonist was black and the female protagonist Indian, the narrative remained similar to other movies pertaining to interracial romances. Both characters experienced hostility from their respective communities regarding their relationship. In the same year, Spike Lee produced a motion picture that detailed the realism of interracial relationships in U.S. society. Similar to previous films concerning interracial romances, *Jungle Fever* incorporated themes of racism and intolerance. However, the blunt manner in
which Lee illustrated these topics reflected America’s developing acceptance of African-Americans. Finally, the 2006 romantic drama *Something New*, demonstrated the progress of interracial relationships in both African-American and Caucasian communities. Over the course of the film the female lead overcame the strain that resulted from her love affair with a white male. Her anxiety derived from the opinions of friends and family regarding her relationship. All of these films, spanning from 1967 to 2006, represented Hollywood studios’ response to American society’s views towards interracial relationships. Currently racially hybrid Americans are developing a presence and garnering acknowledgment from U.S. society, however Hollywood refuses to portray them in cinema.

Although Hollywood serves as a mirror that reacts to the attitudes of Americans, there is a large absence of narratives concerning racial hybrids in films. Hollywood is unable to articulate stories regarding racial hybridity in the U.S., mainly due to their utter lack of understanding of this term. However, Hollywood also partially avoids constructing narratives concerning racial hybrids due to the significance of these individuals. A racial hybrid assaults the social hierarchal structure that is present within the U.S. This social system, which is heavily dependent on racial division, designates whites as superior and blacks or other minorities as inferior. A racial hybrid complicates this social structure and therefore challenges it due to his or her multiple racial identities. They complicate the structure by occupying both spaces within the black and white binary, thus causing these terms to become interchangeable. If the words black and white connote a similar meaning then the structure fails to operate in the manner whites’ wish for it
to because black no longer equates solely to inferior and white the opposite.

However, racial hybrids for the majority of U.S. history failed to challenge usher change and challenge racial binaries. This failure stems from mainly a single issue; racial hybrids were forced to remain silent by dominant white society. Those that attempted to express themselves as racial hybrids, an individual that refuses to identify with only one of their ethnicities, encountered extreme pressures from society to select a single racial demarcation. This included laws such as the Racial Integrity Act of 1924. The act assigned Virginians a mandatory color status, colored or white, thus preventing them from expressing their individuality as racial hybrid. However with elimination of laws such as the Racial Integrity and racial hybrids recent ability to act or speak freely regarding their identities, racial hybrids challenge the social hierarchal structure of the U.S. Therefore Hollywood attempts to avoid articulating tales pertaining to racial hybrids in order to maintain this social system to which Americans are accustomed. Major film studios also stray away from this topic to ease the fears of white U.S. citizens, individuals that contribute to the financial success of the movie industry, who hold the most influence within this social arrangement dependent upon race, and thus have the most to lose.

Post-colonial scholars further elaborate upon the term hybrid. According to postcolonial theorist Robert J.C. Young, “A hybrid is technically a cross between two different species, so that it evokes both the botanical notion of inter-species grafting and colonial notions of regarding different races as different species.”5 Furthermore, scholar Ankie M. M. Hoogvelt stated that in postcolonial discourse, “Hybridity is

celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweeness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference.”6 These concepts of hybrid and hybridity articulated by Young and Hoogvelt are concrete, thus demonstrating academics’ ability to somewhat easily define both terms. However once the adjective racial or its derivatives are attached to either noun, the neologism becomes difficult to explain. This is due to its multiple meanings, in which the term connotes a mentality or a lifestyle. In addition, since race is fluid the terms racial hybridity, racial hybrid, or racially hybrid constantly change. Therefore it is tough to pinpoint a definition to any of these words. Also racially hybrid individuals do not necessarily maintain a superior cultural intelligence, as stated by Hoogvelt, as some possess little cultural ties to either of their ethnicities. Although racial hybridity and its associated concepts emerged within the past few years, W.E.B. Du Bois initially described them to a certain extent during the early 1900s.

In his collection of essays entitled *The Souls of Black Folks*, Du Bois discussed difficulties African-Americans encountered within U.S. society due to racism and more importantly the “double consciousness”7 they possessed. As Du Bois stated within his monograph, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness...One ever feels his twoness-an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn

---

Through his comments regarding the double consciousness, Du Bois reiterated the struggles of a racial hybrid. As a result of containing a dual racial identity, a racial hybrid persistently experiences frustration as he or she attempts to balance their two selves. Also in describing the double consciousness, Du Bois experienced trouble fully detailing this theory. This reflects the strain scholars and other individuals encounter when attempting to explain racial hybridity or its synonyms. Due to the intricacies that exist within racial hybridity, Hollywood is unable to construct and articulate narratives regarding the matter. Nevertheless, currently racially hybrid Americans are present within both television programs and commercials.

Presently television companies and ad agencies depict racial hybridity within both their programs and commercials. These shows include, *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* and *Parenthood*. Although each is a sitcom and drama respectively, they possess racially hybrid characters. These figures symbolize racially hybrid Americans that were once considered unnatural and therefore marginalized by society. Their representation within these shows accurately represents the undeniable existence of racial hybrids and their increasing acceptance by American society. In a similar fashion, commercials concerning cosmetic and food products portray racial hybridity within their ads in an attempt to encourage consumerism. Television shows and marketing agencies creating commercials regarding racial hybridity supply Hollywood with a blueprint that, if they wish to use, will guide them to a new era of American cinema. However, due to the elusiveness of racial

---

hybridity, Hollywood will only be able to communicate a single narrative among several in their films. Still, as result of its multiple meanings, a wealth of untapped creativity exists for Hollywood to explore. Although racial hybrids signify a new era, they stem from a past. Without interracial relationships, racial hybrids within America would cease to exist. One of the first forms of interracial romances to occur within the U.S. was between Africans and Europeans. Although they interacted prior, within the context of American history they encountered each other originally during the Atlantic slave trade.

The relationships blacks and whites initially maintained during the early portions of U.S. history stemmed from slavery. As Randall Kennedy stated in his monograph *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption,* “Slavery constituted the principal backdrop against which whites and blacks encountered one another within America for over two hundred years, from the 1660s to the 1860s.” Although slavery first operated as a labor system, towards the 18th century this structure altered significantly. This shift was most apparent in the South, as communities transformed into slave societies. In establishing a new social hierarchal system, elite southern whites created additional racial divisions with society. Furthermore this permitted Caucasian southerners to declare racial superiority over blacks. One of the manners in which southern whites exerted their dominance was through sexual coercion against black females. Comprehending that they possessed “unlimited access to Black women’s bodies,” slave owners sexually assaulted bondswomen for the purpose of fulfilling their sexual desires and

---

demonstrating their racial superiority. Although slave masters constantly engaged in sexual relations with black females, sexual relationships between enslaved black males and white females were rare. In order to maintain their dominance within southern society, whites not only denied black men the ability to protect black women, but also the opportunity to intermix with white women. If southern whites permitted black males to develop sexual relationships with Caucasian females, their social structure would crumble. Therefore to ensure this did not occur, male slave owning whites continually sexually abused females and simultaneously prohibited blacks from pursuing romantic relations with Caucasian females. However, this was one among several methods utilized by whites to protect their social system. White Americans also silenced mulatto individuals that stemmed from interracial relationships in order to preserve white supremacy. Since the majority of mulattos were the offspring of sexual relations between a white male planter and black female slave, mulattos remained enslaved due to the mother's slave lineage. As chattel mulattos did not possess the ability to openly challenge the social hierarchal system since they lacked personal rights. Whites marginalized them, limiting their ability to openly express their racial identities. More importantly by subjecting mulattos, whites retained influence by subjugating those that could possibly dispute the social system they derived power from. As Americans progressed into the mid-nineteenth century, intermixing still remained a significant concern for white Americans.

After the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, alarmed white southerners feared newly freed African-Americans would attempt to participate in
romantic relationships with white women. White supremacy in the South relied upon the subjugation of black males. Once the federal government granted African-American men their freedom and civil liberties, the southern Caucasian citizenry panicked. The white community became hysterical due to the realization that black males now possessed access to similar opportunities as southern Caucasians. This included voting rights, labor options, and the possibility of attaining social mobility. Among these newly acquired privileges, southern whites were most unnerved about the potential fusion of whites and blacks. If white Americans permitted marriages specifically between black males and Caucasian females, this would signify that African-American men were socially and racially equal to white males. In a society heavily dependent upon racial distinctions, whites viewed intermixing as the ultimate blow to their social arrangement. Restrictions on “interracial marriages were the foundation of white supremacy during the Reconstruction era and eventually beyond.”\(^\text{10}\) Therefore white males within the South attempted to prohibit African-Americans from fully utilizing their personal liberties, particularly their attempts to partake in interracial romances. This was evident in the invention of the term “miscegenation”\(^\text{11}\) to define the mixing of races. By introducing the word into public discourse, whites attracted attention to the issue and gained support in opposition of it. As the Reconstruction period ended, blacks once again encountered strict legislation that marginalized them. These harsh guidelines were referred to as Jim Crow laws.


\(^{11}\) Ibid.
Although Jim Crow statutes varied from state to state throughout the South, they served to preserve white dominance within Southern communities. These state regulations ranged from “segregation within transportation to separate public schooling.” However, the Jim Crow decrees white Americans strongly enforced and promoted were anti-miscegenation laws. Although these state rules existed in a few areas prior to the Jim Crow era, during the late nineteenth century “23 states maintained anti-miscegenation acts.” These regulations not only forbade interracial marriages, but also outlawed interracial sex. White Americans’ concern regarding interracial relationships reflected their desperate attempts to ensure white supremacy. White supporters of anti-miscegenation statutes persistently employed evidence from the religious, scientific, and social arena to argue in favor of these laws. However, these arguments only masked white Americans’ anxiety regarding their dominance in society. As the white citizenry progressed into the twentieth century, anti-miscegenation laws still maintained a significant presence in American society as the amount of states enforcing these statues increased to “26.”

One of the most notorious anti-miscegenation laws to emerge during the early 1900s stemmed from Virginia. Concerned that Virginians with “less than one-sixteenth negro blood could claim whiteness” and thus racially mix with other Caucasians, Virginia legislators passed an updated bill in 1924. Entitled the Racial

---

14 Ibid., 63.
Integrity Act, the first half of the two-part bill possessed several guidelines concerning race. First, interracial marriages were prohibited. Only Virginians considered “100 percent white”\(^{16}\) were suitable to marry one another. Second, the act divided Virginians into two distinct categories, white and colored. The state government classified all citizens of non-European descent as colored. Those that could prove lineage to Pocahontas were exempt from this demarcation. These racial descriptions appeared on citizens' birth records and remained on file throughout their lives. Government officials through their enactment of this piece of legislation demonstrated their efforts to preserve the purity of the white race. This bill also represented the white citizenry's attempts to retain racial and social order.

Interracial relationships signified the potential breakdown of Southern society. This collapse would not derive from blacks mongrelizing the white race, as claimed by Caucasian Virginians, but rather as a result of blacks challenging their social structure. If blacks intermixed with Caucasians unimpeded, the racial boundaries constructed by whites would cease to exist. This fear motivated whites to continually subjugate blacks, denying them the ability to acquire any form of equality within society. Although the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 revealed that whites viewed interracial relationships as detrimental to the Caucasian race, as the decades advanced racial attitudes developed.

As the Civil Rights Movement continued to grow during the mid 20\(^{th}\) century, a portion of white Americans partially altered their opinions regarding African-Americans. The year 1967 in particular, signified the positive progress of race

relations in U.S. society as a series of landmark events occurred. Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter were similar to others couples. They displayed affection towards each other and enjoyed their moments together. However, U.S. society disapproved of their relationship mainly because Richard was white and Mildred black. In despite of Virginia law and societal pressures they escaped to Washington D.C. in order to legally marry, but returned to Virginia after their wedding. Following their marriage though, “the local Sheriff within their town arrested them in violation of Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act.”17 Through the judicial system the Loving’s attempted to assert their civil rights and combat this unjust law. After numerous appeals, the case arrived to the Supreme Court. On June 12, 1967, the Supreme Court delivered an opinion regarding the Loving v. Virginia (1967) case that ruled in favor of the Lovings. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren declared that the “Racial Integrity Act of 1924 was in violation of the 14th amendment and therefore unconstitutional.”18 The Supreme Court’s positive ruling reflected white U.S. citizens developing views not only towards blacks, but also interracial relationships. The case assisted in publicizing a positive image of interracial relationships through the devoted pair Richard and Mildred Loving, two individuals that simply wished to live peacefully as a married couple. Although the Lovings were successful in their quest for equality, their efforts to combat the law demonstrated the complexities of interracial relationships.

18 Ibid.
Within the same year a wedding garnered similar national attention as the *Loving v. Virginia (1967)* case due to the individuals involved. Once the public obtained information that Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s daughter was engaged to an African-American male, a media-frenzy occurred. Rusk received heavy criticism from various members of society, in which at one point Rusk offered to resign from his cabinet position. Lyndon B. Johnson rejected his resignation. Despite the backlash, Peggy Rusk and Guy Smith married on September of 1967. Furthermore in a surprising decision, *Time* magazine promoted the wedding by featuring the couple on their cover. The magazine praised “their union as a marriage of enlightenment.”

Support from one of the most foremost magazines in the U.S. revealed American society’s progress of racial acceptance. However, similar to the reaction by Americans regarding the Lovings’ relationship, several American citizens expressed their displeasure regarding the marriage. The year 1967 marked a period of change with regard to interracial relationships, yet it also revealed the amount of disapproval that still remained. White Americans initially barred interracial relationships due to their desire to preserve white supremacy and the belief that blacks were inferior. Nevertheless, throughout the Civil Rights era a portion of whites realized their behavior was incorrect and morally unacceptable. In comprehending this, members of the white U.S. citizenry developed a sense of tolerance towards blacks and therefore towards interracial relationships. Still, white Americans opposed interracial romances. They prolonged the belief that blacks possessed subhuman characteristics, thus intermixing with whites would damage

---

19 Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption*, 105.
the Caucasian race. Due to interracial relationships presence within public discourse, Hollywood studios attempted to depict interracial couples through a groundbreaking film.

Released in December 1967, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* provided audiences with one of the first positive representations of interracial relationships in U.S. films. The movie centered on Dr. John Prentice and Joanna Drayton, an interracial couple that wished to marry. After arriving to San Francisco to reveal this news to Joanna’s white parents, Dr. Prentice requested Mr. Drayton’s permission to wed his daughter. Without his approval, Dr. Prentice stated he would not marry Joanna. Throughout the course of the film Mr. Drayton was conflicted, at first refusing to permit his daughter to marry a black man. However, he eventually relented and offered Dr. Prentice his blessing. Although the film *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* preached racial tolerance, as Mr. Drayton altered his views over the course of the picture, the movie proved too sentimental and unrealistic to be an objective portrayal of interracial relationships.

The manner in which *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* depicted interracial relationships was in stark contrast to the adversity interracial partners encountered during the late 1960s. Essentially *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* lacked a certain sense of realism, ignoring the hardships interracial couples such as Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving contended with throughout their lives. In addition, the characters in the film, specifically Dr. Prentice, were not representative of individuals typically engaging in interracial romances. *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* portrayed Sidney Poitier’s character as a flawless African-American male. Not only
was Dr. Prentice a world-renowned doctor, but he also exhibited “intelligence, charm, honesty, fidelity, and respectfulness.” He personified these characteristics. Although the African-American community was pleased Hollywood provided a positive representation of a black male, the male’s depiction was excessive and unrealistic. The film essentially implied that only elite black males freely choose their romantic partners. A male similar to Dr. Prentice was non-existent in American society. In constructing him, Hollywood studios articulated a partially impractical narrative regarding interracial relationships. However, issues of impracticality regarding the film were not solely limited to Sidney Poitier’s character.

Though *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* offered a positive rendition of interracial relationships, the film utterly lacked the harsh realities interracial couples experienced in America. The only conflict Dr. Prentice and Joanna faced was with regard to both of their fathers’ disapproval, a problem the former mostly grappled with. As demonstrated in the *Loving v. Virginia (1967)* case and Peggy Rusk’s marriage to Guy Smith, interracial couples combated racism due to their relationships. The only white villain in the film, a character who briefly appeared, was Hilary. She was a co-worker of Mrs. Drayton that strongly opposed Dr. Prentice and Joanna’s relationship, viewing their plans to marry as a tragedy. The limited screen time of Hilary and the absence of similar characters re-confirmed the intentions of the filmmaker to provide audiences with a sentimental tale, rather than a narrative that illustrated conflicts that interracial couples constantly addressed. Although the film depicted the positive aspects of interracial marriages,

---

such as racial acceptance, it failed to detail the complexities of interracial relationships. In setting the majority of the film within the safe confines of Mr. Drayton’s home, Hollywood studios encased Dr. Prentice and Joanna within a bubble, protecting them from negative external forces. The audience rarely viewed the pair outside of this realm and therefore not fully understanding the difficulties interracial couples encountered within reality.

Within the film Mr. Drayton briefly commented on the subject of racial hybrids. Mr. Drayton in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* suggested that Dr. Prentice and Joanna’s children would experience difficulties throughout their lives due to their mixed racial identities. Although during the late 1960s Hollywood responded to the growing attitudes of Americans towards interracial relationships by providing the public with this tale, Hollywood refused to address the topic of racial hybridity. In referring indirectly to racial hybrids and portraying them negatively, this enabled Hollywood to maneuver around a topic indelibly linked to interracial relationships. Hollywood avoided conversations regarding racial hybridity due to America’s wariness towards them during the late 1960s. Racial hybrids signify a collapse of the black and white binary and America’s social hierarchal structure, a social system heavily dependent upon race. Hence, white Americans feel threatened by racial hybrids. Hollywood serves as a mirror reflecting American society. Therefore if white U.S. citizens demonstrate opposition in regards to an issue, a group that possesses significant capital, commercial movie studios stray away from constructing films depicting these controversial subjects. Although *Guess Who’s*
Coming to Dinner steered away from discussing racial hybridity, a significant aspect of interracial relationships, the film was still groundbreaking for the late 1960s. Guess Who's Coming to Dinner was revolutionary since it was one of the first films that offered a favorable representation of interracial couples. As a result, it established the standard in which other films concerning interracial relationships would measure themselves. Therefore as the years and decades progressed, Hollywood studios articulated interracial narratives that were somewhat similar and distinct from Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. Although white Americans were developing racial tolerance, as was depicted in Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, a portion of them still strongly disapproved of interracial relationships. Comprehending this, Hollywood studios aimed to illustrate these feelings and the intricacies of interracial relationships in the film The Great White Hope. However in attempting to produce a film that deviated from the excessive sentimentality present in Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, Hollywood instead constructed an overtly pessimistic movie regarding interracial relationships.

Although the film The Great White Hope portrayed interracial relationships realistically to an extent, Hollywood created a film that failed in a similar manner as Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. The movie The Great White Hope was a tragic tale of an interracial couple unable to elude the social pressures of white society. As the film tagline simply stated, “He could beat any man in the world. He just couldn't beat all of them.”21 Released in 1970, the picture was a departure from the sentimental

---

narrative present in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. The story centered on Jack Jefferson, a black boxer modeled after Jack Johnson, and his white girlfriend Eleanor Bachman. Throughout the film countless individuals attacked their romance. This was partially correlated to Jack Jefferson’s success as a boxer. His ability to defeat numerous white opponents within the ring heightened the animosity towards him, specifically those within the Caucasian community. By maintaining dominance within his respective sport and courting a white female, a portion of infuriated Americans strived to subjugate him. One of these groups was the U.S. government, as officials attempted to terminate his relationship with Bachman through the Mann Act. After traveling from Illinois to a Wisconsin lake house with Bachman, federal agents arrested Jefferson. They accused him of violating the Mann Act, which prohibited the interstate transport of white females for immoral purposes. As Jefferson and Bachman constantly faced scrutiny from various facets of American society, the film illustrated the harsh realities that resulted from interracial dating.

*The Great White Hope* offered a vivid visual representation of the suffering Jefferson and Bachman endured, something other interracial couples constantly underwent. This illustration of torment and misery was absent in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. The irrational behavior they eventually exhibited and the decline in their physical appearances over the course of the film signified the pain each individual endured. Also similar to *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, the mention of a racial hybrid child was indirect. In addition, the film depicted the child negatively as something that only served to provide further strife for a couple that yearned to live happily. Hollywood, by momentarily mentioning a racial hybrid child, slyly
maneuvered around an issue that was undeniably linked to interracial romances. This reflected American society’s refusal to address racial hybridity and furthermore their uneasiness to discuss racial hybrids. America’s uneasiness stems from a racial hybrid’s significance regarding the black and white binary, as this individual essentially operates in both spaces. Therefore racial hybrids assault the U.S.’s social system that is heavily dependent upon race and designates power to white Americans. The U.S. citizenry’s refusal to permit Jefferson and Bachman’s to bear children within the film, along with American citizens’ constant harassment, contributed to the couple’s physical and mental utter exhaustion towards the conclusion of the movie. The film offered a portrayal of interracial relationships that mirrored the difficulties Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter encountered. Similar to the Lovings, Jefferson and Bachman desired to live peacefully together. However American society was unable to permit this due to their views toward interracial romances.

Downtrodden and defeated by white society, Jefferson ended his relationship with Bachman. Surprised and heartbroken, Bachman ultimately committed suicide. *The Great White Hope* was riddled with trauma and tragedy. Through the film, Hollywood studios aimed to fully display the racial injustices blacks confronted and the excessive concern whites exhibited regarding interracial couples. *The Great White Hope* was the anti-thesis of *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. Instead of a sentimental tale *The Great White Hope* was an American tragedy and illustrated the daily struggles of interracial couples. Although Hollywood depicted the pain interracial couples endured, details audience members should be aware of in order
to understand the injustices of racism, the narrative lacked any positive aspect of
interracial relationships. As evidenced with Peggy Rusk and her black husband in
their cheerful wedding photo, happiness was prevalent among interracial couples.
Interracial romantic partners experienced countless pleasures within their daily
lives similar to other couples. *The Great White Hope* however offered a gritty
portrayal of interracial romances, ignoring positive aspects of these relationships.
Thus the film failed in a similar manner as *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. Similar to
*Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner, The Great White Hope* refused to display both the
negative and joyful episodes that occur within interracial relationships in a balanced
manner. In reality interracial couples enjoyed their partners, but also faced
overwhelming pressures by society to terminate their relationship. *The Great White
Hope* was unsuccessful in maintaining this balance, as the film was too gloomy.
Nevertheless, as Hollywood studios produced more motion pictures relating to
interracial couples they became more balanced.

Progressing into the early 1970s, Hollywood developed films concerning
interracial relationships that depicted both positive and negative aspects of
interracial romances. Within these specific movies a theme emerged: interracial
relationships were multi-layered. U.S. society, specifically white citizens, possess
varying views regarding interracial couples that are either positive or negative.
During the early 1970s only “25 percent of Caucasian Americans approved of
interracial marriages.”22 More importantly, each individual within interracial
relations maintain certain opinions regarding their relationship that affects both

parties in the romance. Whether this stems from societal pressures or another force, it exists. Hollywood through their renditions of interracial couples attempted to incorporate these vast complications into their films. As interracial relationships developed a presence in U.S. society during the 1990s, Hollywood strived to create movies that portrayed a balanced and realistic view of interracial romances.

Due to the presence of “1.2 million interracial couples in the U.S. during the early 1990s” Hollywood, reacting to American society, produced films such as *Mississippi Masala* that offered both positive and negative aspects of interracial romances. Released in 1991, the movie concerned a black male and Indian female participating in an interracial relationship. Due to their romantic involvement both Demetrius and Mina received criticism from all members of their Mississippi community. African-Americans condemned Demetrius for dating a female of the opposite race. Mina’s parents and immediate family maintained a similar view, claiming African-Americans were inferior to Indians. White citizens also regarded the relationship as problematic and unnatural. Although the film contained issues interracial couples encountered within reality, the movie chronicled the relationship process between Mina and Demetrius.

Mina and Demetrius’ relationship blossomed slowly, as the film depicted the course of their relationship. They were mutually attracted to each other not merely due to their physical characteristics, but also because of their mutual personal difficulties. Demetrius through his small business attempted to acquire social mobility, something denied to both his father and other African-Americans in

---

Mississippi. Mina searched for a sense of place within American society, as she grappled with her identity since her forced removal from Uganda. As a result of their race related personal problems, they developed a bond that transcended physical attraction. In presenting this theme, Hollywood studios attempted to articulate a specific message to white audiences. Interracial relationships, similar those between members of the identical race, were not merely based upon bodily appeal. Rather interracial romances occurred for a plethora of reasons. Therefore interracial relationships were no different than sexual relations between Americans of similar races. In depicting both the external pressures Mina and Demetrius experienced from society and the romantic bond that developed between them, *Mississippi Masala* provided a balanced and lifelike portrayal of interracial relationships. Both *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *The Great White Hope* were either overtly sentimental or excessively pessimistic in their representations of interracial couples. However, *Mississippi Masala* located the middle ground between these two films and provided audiences with a practical illustration of interracial romances. This rendition was more similar to reality than *The Great White Hope* or *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. Even though *Mississippi Masala* addressed issues of interracial relationships, *Jungle Fever* elaborated upon this topic and offered one of the most realistic presentations of interracial relationships within U.S. cinema.

The film *Jungle Fever* was innovative due to Spike Lee’s lifelike and balanced rendition of interracial relationships in American society. Though the film was not necessarily visually explicit, Lee supplied audiences with a truthful representation of Americans’ growing racial feelings towards interracial couples. Furthermore, the
further complicated racial matters within society. Even though *Jungle Fever* explicitly detailed problems interracial couples experienced from their respective communities, Lee also illustrated the positive aspects.

Although Angie and Flip both encountered difficulties from society, they both attempted to develop a bond. Throughout their relationship, Angie and Flip revealed personal details regarding their life histories. They engaged in conversations regarding personal hobbies, such as cooking, and the death of Angie’s mother resulting in her new maternal responsibilities. Similar to *Mississippi Masala*, Spike Lee attempted to illustrate positive aspects of interracial relationships, rather than simply the strain interracial couples constantly endure. Lee further portrayed positivity through Denise’s support of Angie engaging in an interracial relationship. Denise, a close friend of Angie, stated within the film, “This is the 90’s, there’s nothing wrong with that.”

Angie epitomized a racially accepting American, an individual that was appearing more frequently within society during the 1990s and thus encouraging Hollywood to create films regarding interracial relationships such as *Jungle Fever*. Lee, by presenting these various perspectives within the film, displayed a realistic and balanced portrayal of interracial relationships. Combining negative responses from society that Angie and Flip encountered, the depiction of their relationship process, support from Angie’s friends, and Angie and Flip’s ultimate separation at the end, Lee constructed a practical movie pertaining to interracial romances in American society. *Jungle Fever*, similar to *Mississippi Masala*, attempted to locate the middle ground between *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* and

---

*The Great White Hope* in terms of its portrayal of interracial relationships. However, due to the blunt nature in which society attacked Angie and Flip’s relationships, *Jungle Fever* provided a better representation of interracial relationships than *Mississippi Masala*. This demonstrated Hollywood’s improvement in constructing narratives concerning interracial couples.

After the release of *Jungle Fever*, Hollywood continued to produce stories related to interracial romances. This was evident in the motion picture *Something New*. As the twenty-first century dawned, interracial relationships permeated American Society and thus Hollywood studios produced films such as *Something New*. According to Stanford sociologist Michael Rosenfeld, as of “2005 7% of the marriages in the U.S. were interracial compared to less than 2% in 1970.”

Cognizant of this and the public’s developing racial views, Hollywood studios continued to produce films that centered on interracial couples. In 2006, Focus Features released the film *Something New*. Differing from other previous films concerning interracial romances, *Something New* depicted a relationship between the black female protagonist Kenya and the white male protagonist Brian. At first hesitant to date a white man, Kenya eventually relented. Throughout their relationship Brian demonstrated patience and attended to her needs. Although Kenya briefly ended her relationship with Brian due to social pressures, after receiving support from her parents and confidants she eventually married him. In depicting the strain Kenya suffered from society as a result of her relationship, the

---

film exhibited a sense of realism. Although the amount of interracial couples swelled in the twenty-first century, these types of lovers still encountered criticism from members of society. This was inescapable as forms of racism still permeated American communities. However society's growing racial views were also present in *Something New*. Since the inception of slavery whites were concerned of intermixing, however as the centuries advanced racial attitudes proceeded to develop.

White U.S. citizens during the early portions of American history initially maintained negative feelings towards interracial relationships, however these views developed as Hollywood studios mirrored these sentiments through films concerning interracial couples beginning in 1967. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whites constructed a social system centered on slavery. They depended upon forced servitude to create racial distinctions and therefore divisions of power. They viewed interracial relationships as potentially threatening to this social hierarchal structure. As slavery officially ended with the ratification of the 13th amendment, whites grew alarmed at the possibility of blacks intermixing with white females due to their new freedom. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whites established laws that stripped blacks of their liberties. This included forbidding interracial marriages. Through anti-miscegenation legislation, it was apparent racism was rampant throughout large portions of white communities. However during the Civil Rights era and beginning in 1967, the white U.S. citizenry displayed forms of racial tolerance. In the favorable ruling of *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) and the marriage of Peggy Rusk and Guy Smith, some white U.S.
citizens demonstrated their racial acceptance of African-Americans. Since Hollywood functions as a mirror, U.S. movie studios reacted to this growing racial tolerance and released the film *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. This trend continued as Hollywood constructed films that demonstrated the complexities of interracial relationships. After combating hardships, interracial couples eventually reproduced. These mixed-raced individuals are an emerging demographic within America; however they lack representation within U.S. films.

Presently there is a lack of films concerning racially hybrid children from interracial couples or the portrayal of racial hybrid Americans in general. As scholar Naomi Angel stated in her article “The Missing Bi-racial Child in Hollywood,” “Characters of mixed-race are seldom seen or heard in mainstream films...furthermore these individuals lack a voice.”27 Throughout American history racial attitudes of whites towards blacks evolved, a process that is continuous. This growing racial acceptance of African-Americans by members of the white U.S. citizenry was evident in Hollywood movies. In constructing narratives centered on interracial relationships, commercial movie production companies simply reflected a majority of white citizens’ views of African-Americans. However if Hollywood serves as a mirror depicting Americans’ opinions within U.S. cinema, they are not fulfilling their role with regard to featuring racially hybrid characters in their movies. Racially hybrid Americans are an emerging demographic in American society, as “racially hybrid children are the fastest growing youth group in the

---

country and have increased almost 50%, to 4.2 million, since 2000.” Furthermore, their presence is undeniable within the U.S., as individuals such as Barack Obama, Tiger Woods, and Halle Berry dominate the media landscape. Nevertheless, Hollywood continues to ignore this population of U.S. citizens thus failing to perform its supposed function. Though major movie studios struggle communicating narratives regarding racially hybrid characters, these individuals are present within several American television programs across various channels.

Television shows such as *Parenthood* and *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* currently depict racially hybrid Americans, providing a realistic portrayal of American society. Most importantly racial hybrid characters within *Parenthood, I Hate My Teenage Daughter*, and other similarly themed television productions, are “not invisible or inaudible. In addition to this, they do not maintain an indirect presence as seen in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner, The Great White Hope, and Jungle Fever.*” Rather, racially hybrid figures in *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* and *Parenthood* are visible, as both narratives acknowledge their existence. In a similar manner, marketing agencies constructed commercials depicting racial hybridity in the hopes of selling their products. Although television companies and marketing agencies succeed in constructing stories concerning racially hybrid Americans, Hollywood’s failure continues. Therefore commercial movie studios should apply the template that television programs and marketing firms utilize to articulate these specific tales. However, Hollywood film companies’ inability to construct narratives


that accurately represent racially hybrid Americans is only partially their fault. This inability stems from Hollywood executives’, the individuals that possess the power to authorize the production of such films, utter lack of knowledge concerning racial hybridity within America. Racial hybridity assaults the black and white binary constructed by society that Hollywood is accustomed to. Thus due to Hollywood’s frustration to easily define racially hybridity, a term that is fluid, Hollywood refuses to develop films that possess racially hybrid figures or address this emerging theory within U.S. discourse. Also Hollywood refused to address racial hybridity in films partially due to their significance in regard to the social arrangement present within the U.S.

Since racial hybrids attack America’s social hierarchal structure, a social system heavily contingent on racial division and that grants white Americans power, Hollywood attempts to avoid constructing narratives centered on racial hybrids. White Americans, a group possessing significant capital, feel threatened by racial hybrids. Therefore if white U.S. citizens demonstrate opposition to this issue, commercial movie studios will stray away from constructing films depicting racial hybridity. However white Americans feelings towards racial hybrids are growing in a positive direction, allowing Hollywood to construct stories pertaining to racial hybridity. In order for Hollywood to successfully create tales concerning racially hybrid Americans, they must possess an understanding of what exactly this term denotes. Once Hollywood studios grasp this concept, there is unlimited potential and creativity in constructing these specific stories. The neologisms racial hybridity,
racial hybrid, and racially hybrid are difficult to comprehend partially due to their fluidity, unlike the terms hybridity and hybrid.

Although both the words hybridity and hybrid possess several connotations, scholars, intellectuals, and other individuals explain these terms without severe difficulties. Academics and other people who attempt to describe racial hybridity and its synonyms encounter trouble, as they are unable to offer a concrete definition. According to scholar Monika Fludernik, hybridity “is connected to creolization and syncretism. Furthermore hybridization marks a process by which formations remain intact in a new synthesized arrangement both within an individual and wider society.”

Marian H. Feldman, within a study regarding ancient art, defined hybridity as the “active adoption and intermixing of particular elements from various culturally defined...traditions.” Noted professor Paul Gilroy explained hybridity as an “intellectual and political cross-fertilization and shows how, in the process, diasporic cultures generate new...identities.” In addition, cultural theorist Stuart Hall described it as a “cut-and-mix process.” These definitions are only a portion of the meanings associated with hybridity; however this term appears most frequently within discussions regarding post-colonialism and culture since hybridity challenges colonialism. Colonizers employ hybridity to force the subject to embody their ideologies, cultural traditions, and lifestyles.

32 Yatta Kanu, Curriculum as Cultural Practice: Postcolonial Imaginations (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 43.
33 Kanu, Curriculum as a Cultural Practice: Postcolonial Imaginations, 43.
mixing the colonizer’s beliefs and cultural practices with the subject’s, the colonized becomes ingrained in the colonizer’s methods and ways of life. Therefore the colonizer’s dominant traditions are embedded within the colonized, permitting the colonist to rule over them. However the process of hybridity often times produces unexpected results, creating new forms of culture, ideologies, or individuals due to the mixing of two or more things. This includes an individual that is a mix of both the dominant and inferior race, which complicates the power dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized. This is apparent within American society as racial hybrids currently assault a U.S. social system dependent on racial division, in which a portion of whites maintain the majority of power and therefore signify the colonizer. Racial hybrids blur racial lines and therefore challenge the colonial power structure that exists within the U.S. Post-Colonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Robert J.C. Young, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall, employ hybridity to criticize colonialism.

Post-Colonial scholars utilize the term hybridity to attack “both the predominant strategic function and objective of colonial discourse.”34 Homi Bhabha argued its primary purpose is “to create of a space for a subject people.”35 He also declared “the prime objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.”36 Colonial discourse partially assists in constructing a social structure that distributes power

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
to certain populations within a community. Bhabha and other scholars within his field though, proclaim that hybridity and its process complicate colonial discourse. By explaining exactly how hybridity re-configures theories of colonialism, exposing its faults as an oppressive force, Bhabha and his scholarly peers provide a concrete meaning of hybridity. Although academics within their respective fields offer various explanations regarding hybridity, for the most part the term connotes a process of intermixing. This includes the mixing of individuals and cultures among other things. As a result of this, individuals possess the capability to define or identify hybridity with a higher degree of ease than racial hybridity and its equivalents. Therefore due to hybridity’s definitive meanings, Hollywood grasped the term and produced narratives in which hybridity was present.

The film Selena, depicting the life of the famous Mexican-American vocalist Selena, provides evidence of Hollywood’s ability to create stories that possess elements of hybridity. Though the film mostly pertained to Selena’s life story, the music she performs and becomes famous for is Tejano. This music is a mixture of Mexican, European, and American musical styles. She begins singing this style of music at an early age after her father, Abraham, attempted to expose her to Mexican culture. Selena lacked a certain amount of awareness regarding her culture since her mother and father raised her within the U.S. Therefore her father insisted she sing in Spanish, while still incorporating various American musical forms within her songs. This represented a fusion or hybridization of U.S. and Mexican culture in the film, reflecting instances of hybridity that occurred throughout the span of American history. Films such as Selena that discussed hybridity were present in U.S. cinema
due to Hollywood’s understanding of this term. This comprehension though stemmed from hybridity's definitive meaning, in which the term generally refers to the process of intermixing between two individuals, multiple cultures, or several elements ultimately producing something. The end result of this blend or mixture is a hybrid.

Similar to hybridity the term hybrid possesses various connotations, in which the word refers to an individual of multiple races or sexual orientations among other things. Several scholars and other individuals within society view a hybrid, in general and within a social context, as something or someone compromised of two or more elements that resulted due to hybridization. In addition, currently intellectuals such as Martin Schoenhals and Joseph E. Behar “use the term hybrid to refer to people who are transgendered.” Due to scholars’ abilities to provide precise definitions regarding the word hybrid that the general public comprehends, Hollywood constructs narratives concerning hybrids. Hybrid individuals were central characters within several films, including *Boys Don’t Cry*, *Transamerica*, and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*. Each of these movies either entirely or briefly centered on a transgender or bi-sexual individual. Hollywood produced these stories as a result of their understanding and familiarity with the term hybrid, specifically in regards to individuals of bisexual and intersexual orientation. Also in contrast to articulating tales regarding hybridity within movies, the term hybrid offers Hollywood the opportunity to construct characters that reflect them. The word hybrid often indicates a person composed of two or more elements. Due to

---

this, Hollywood studios develop plots and characters based upon hybrids more easily since there is already an established individual in place from which to draw material from. Although Hollywood creates movies regarding both hybridity and hybrids because of their understanding of both terms, once the adjective racial or racially attaches itself to either words a problem usually arises. Racial hybridity, racially hybrid, and racial hybrid are neologisms that baffle Hollywood. Hollywood refuses to provide audiences with movies pertaining to racial hybridity or racially hybrid characters simply because they lack a basic grasp of these terms.

Commercial movie studios possess a deficient understanding of racial hybridity and its synonyms due to the terms’ elusiveness with regard to defining them. Not only does racial hybridity signify a plethora of meanings, but also the term is fluid. This fluidity derives from the ever-changing concepts of race within American society. Therefore definitions of racial hybridity are adjustable. However often times racial hybridity refers to the intermixing of races, in which one of the races is non-European, while a racial hybrid indicates the product of racial hybridization. Still, it is incorrect to only articulate and deploy these definitions of racial hybridity, racial hybrid, or racially hybrid. The terms bi, multiracial, multicultural, and mixed-race and their interpretations are closely associated with racial hybridity. Essentially the connotations of these terms are one of racial hybridity’s several meanings. Thus an individual that identifies as bi-racial, multiracial, or mixed-raced is also considered a racial hybrid or racially hybrid and vice versa. Racial hybridity assaults established concepts of race, in particular the black and white binary within the U.S. European colonizers initially constructed this
binary system. Racial hybridity signifies the refusal to identify within a racial classification, the rejection of racial categories, and the celebration of uniqueness. Homi Bhabha, in his works regarding post-colonialism, detailed the significance of racial hybridity and added upon its concepts, “The process of...hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. It’s the third space that emerges from the two.”

Furthermore, racial hybridity eliminates racial restrictions and therefore is boundless. In developing concepts of racial hybridity that stem from post-colonist theorists such as Homi Bhabha, racial hybridity signifies the rejection of a colonial power. Currently white Americans that possess political and financial influence represent a colonial power. They continue to promote a social system that is dependent upon race, in which a large percentage of minority groups are inferior to economically and politically powerful white Americans. Racial hybridity combats the black and white binary perpetuated by white power brokers within the U.S., through its refusal to identify within either space. Therefore a racial hybrid represents the breakdown of a social structure contingent upon racial division. If an individual rejects identifying as a single race, then influential white Americans are unable to derive power from their social hierarchal arrangement. In this structure black designates a second-class status and white the opposite. In complicating this classification of a U.S. citizen’s social position, colonialism within America ceases to exist. Though a racial hybrid rejects a binary system and is regarded at times as a borderland figure, it also creates a new space outside of this dual structure. Racial

hybrids denote, as Gloria Anzaldúa proclaimed within her book *Borderlands*, “*la raza cósmica,* a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world. It opposes racial purity and embraces inclusivity. An alien consciousness is presently in the making—a new mestiza or hybrid consciousness.” The consciousness present within racial hybrids enables them to view past borders that American society enforces to restrict citizens racially. Multiple racial identities also at times permit an individual to empathize with other minority populations and their painful pasts.

As a racial hybrid the empathy I express towards Native Americans, due to difficulties they encountered in their trauma-ridden history, derives from the parallels I realized between American Indians, African, and Mexican-Americans. In stemming from Mexican and African ancestors that continuously confronted matters pertaining to their race, I grasp the obstacles American Indians contended with during the post-Columbian era. Racial hybridity is not simply a process and a racial hybrid is not just the result, rather these terms contain an abundance of meanings. Critics argue that racial hybridity only operates in theory. However, individuals within the U.S., including myself, constantly battle society’s forced identification. By declaring ourselves as racial hybrids rather than a single race, black, Asian, white, or Hispanic among others, we ignore the racial distinctions society attempts to burden us with inciting a revolution. Between the colonial period and the landmark civil rights Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia (1967)* dominant white Americans banned interracial marriages and intercourse for various reasons. However this

---

prohibition of interracial mixing stemmed from an immense fear regarding the potential child created by interracial couples.

White Americans, citizens that maintain the majority of power within society, comprehend that a racially hybrid child would strip them of their authority. This influence derives from a hierarchal structure, constructed by white authoritative figures in the U.S., based upon racial distinctions. A racial hybrid challenges these concepts, due to society's struggle to fully define them. Although laws restricting interracial marriages and intercourse were abolished, this fear regarding racial hybrids still exists. Therefore American society forces racial hybrids to choose a single race. Due to complexities regarding racial hybridity in terms of its multiple meanings and interpretations, Hollywood struggles to articulate narratives that depict them in a positive manner. Furthermore executives within Hollywood studios fail to understand the significance of racial hybrids. Instead as mentioned within Naomi Angel’s article, “The Missing Bi-racial Child,” Hollywood silences racially hybrid Americans by “limiting their appearance within movie productions concerning race or discussing racially hybrid characters in a negative light.”

Due to the multiple notions and explanations connected to racial hybridity or racial hybrids, there is an unlimited amount of creativity for Hollywood to explore within stories pertaining to these individuals. However, Hollywood lacks direction in regard to narratives concerning racial hybridity. As Hollywood attempts to grasp racial hybridity in the hopes of producing films relating to it, a select few of television programs contain racial hybrids. Therefore television offers Hollywood a

---

template regarding how to construct narratives pertaining to racial hybrids and racial hybridity.

Television shows such as *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* and *Parenthood* contain racially hybrid characters, specifically children, essentially providing Hollywood a blueprint in how to develop stories centered on racial hybridity. The sitcom *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* centers on two single mothers attempting to raise their spoiled, manipulative, and often mean-spirited daughters. One of the single mothers, Nikki, recently divorced her husband and throughout the show she attempts to develop a positive relationship with her daughter Mackenzie. Mackenzie is a racial hybrid, descending from African-American and Caucasian lineage. Although the characters within the show discuss race, as Nikki’s ex-husband remarks that his “white golfing companions always refer to him as Tiger Woods,” there is rarely a discussion regarding Mackenzie’s racial identity. The show is progressive for allowing Mackenzie to simply exist and racially identify in manner she is comfortable with, rather than forcing her to select a racial distinction. In providing a positive representation of a racial hybrid, *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* reflects the current landscape of American society. Individuals similar to Mackenzie continue to emerge and develop a presence presently. Furthermore, the sitcom provides Hollywood studios a model for narratives in regards to racially hybrid Americans. As Hollywood continues to grasp meanings associated with racial hybridity, shows similar to *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* supply them with a base to build upon. Although *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* depicts racial hybrids, something

---

uncommon within the television industry prior to the twenty-first century, the
sitcom fails to address issues regarding identity related to racial hybrids.

One of the primary difficulties racial hybrids experience pertains to their
racial identity. In possessing multiple racial backgrounds, racial hybrids struggle
with their racial selfhood. Even though a mixed-race individual identifies as a racial
hybrid, therefore rejecting society’s demands to select a single racial classification,
at times they continuously grapple with their multiple selves. Generally a racial
hybrid signifies positivity and progress; however a hybrid also occasionally
represents a fractured individual. Essentially a racial hybrid is unsure of his or her
social or racial position within American society. A racial hybrid’s conflict with his
or her racial identity is significant since it denotes the pressures these individuals
constantly encounter from American society to settle upon a single racial
classification. *I Hate My Teenager Daughter* grants Mackenzie the ability to escape
these racial demarcations by refusing to discuss her racial identity within the show.
However in refusing to address this issue, the sitcom fails to fulfill its potential in
terms of a communicating a narrative concerning racial hybridity. In depicting the
problems a racial hybrid encounters from American society, specifically the
harassment to decide upon a sole racial group, *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* would
provide audiences a more realistic account of racial hybridity within the U.S.
Nevertheless due to the restrictions of storytelling, it is difficult to offer multiple
interpretations of racial hybridity or racial hybrids within various mediums. Still, *I
Hate My Teenage Daughter* provides Hollywood with a blueprint in how to construct
narratives pertaining to racial hybridity or racial hybrids. Similar to this show, the television program *Parenthood* depicts a racially hybrid child.

The family drama *Parenthood*, identical to *I Hate My Teenage Daughter*, both depicts racial hybrids and offers Hollywood a road map concerning the development of stories regarding racial hybridity. Jabbar, a racial hybrid of black and white descent, is the son of Crosby and Jasmine. Throughout the series Crosby and Jasmine attempt to raise Jabbar. A child born out of wedlock, he was the result of brief sexual encounter between Crosby and Jasmine, Crosby initially was unaware that he was the father of Jabbar. A few years after his birth, Jasmine revealed to Crosby that Jabbar was his son. From this point forward within the show Jasmine and Crosby strived to mend their relationship, while simultaneously caring for Jabbar. Akin to Mackenzie in *I Hate My Teenage Daughter*, Jabbar’s mixed ethnicity is visible, but never discussed. Individuals involved with the show that participated in the creation of his character, permit him to exist largely without the concern of external forces questioning his racial identity. Only a few incidents occur within the TV drama in which characters fully discuss or acknowledge Jabbar’s racial background.

One of these moments transpired as Crosby’s father, Zeke, appears surprised after Crosby introduced Jabbar to Zeke. Although Crosby mentioned to Zeke that he had son after learning this information from Jasmine, he neglected to disclose the detail that his son was half-black. Therefore Zeke, "a baby-boomer stemming from a period in which interracial marriage and intercourse was banned," attempts to comprehend the idea of racial hybridity after viewing his grandson. This scene, “in

which Zeke encountered Jabbar, signified the generational differences between Zeke and Crosby.”43 As Crosby was supportive and aware of racial hybridity, his father was unfamiliar with racial hybrids. Although his father was ecstatic to have another grandchild, this generational difference between Zeke and Crosby regarding an awareness of racial hybridity was reflective of American society. Currently Americans still maintain difficulty understanding or accepting racial hybridity, as a portion of Americans advocate that individuals should participate in relationships within their races. These Americans reflect attitudes from previous generations as they encourage their younger peers to maintain romantic relationships within their respective races, in which their grounds for this behavior stem from racist views among other reasons. Also Americans confused about and opposing racial hybridity, view racial hybrids as deviant often forcing them to identify with a single race. By developing this scene, the creative individuals involved in the show addressed racial hybridity. They explicitly stated the problem, a generational difference pertaining to racial hybridity, rather than ignoring issues associated with racial hybridity. However the scene between Zeke and Jabbar is one of a few instances in which Parenthood discussed or depicted problems relating to racial hybridity. The drama never fully discusses Jabbar’s racial identity, specifically how he views himself, or displays the external forces present within reality that coerce racial hybrids into selecting a single racial category. In addition, Parenthood avoided depicting Jabbar’s struggle with his multiple selves, a conflict that a portion of racial hybrids contend with. Nonetheless both Parenthood and I Hate My Teenage Daughter provided

Hollywood with a possible guide for designing stories pertaining to racial hybridity and racial hybrids. Both *Parenthood* and *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* only represent one perspective or manner in which to portray racial hybridity or racial hybrids. Since racial hybridity and racial hybrids possess an abundance of meanings, there is an endless amount of material to draw from for the purpose of constructing films depicting them. Although specific television programs offer Hollywood material to draw from, in terms of racial hybridity and racial hybrids, commercials within the past year articulated racial hybridity in a manner distinct from *Parenthood* and *I Hate My Teenage Daughter*.

Recently commercials, such as an L’Oréal ad featuring Beyoncé Knowles, portrayed the identity aspect of racial hybridity and racial hybrids, something the aforementioned television shows failed to develop. In creating this commercial, the marketing agency responsible for the ad realistically illustrated racial hybridity and what the term signifies. The L’Oréal commercial advertisement centered on a cosmetic product entitled True Match Super-Bendable Makeup. According to the voice-over within the ad, “True Match has the technology to match your skins unique tone and undertone.” The commercial viewer also hears Beyoncé remark, “There is a story behind my skin. It’s a mosaic of all the faces before.” While Beyoncé proclaims this, as only her face is visible, her various racial heritages appeared on the side of the screen in text. The ethnicities African-American, Native-American, and European emerge on screen. This commercial confronts the issues of identity in regards to racial hybridity.

---

44 L’Oréal, “Find your True Match with Beyoncé,” *YouTube* (13 January 2012) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jc50e02zDt8> (30 March 2012).
In explicitly stating Beyoncé’s multiple ethnicities, an individual regarded as a racial hybrid, this advertisement articulated that individuals possess numerous racial backgrounds. Therefore they are not restricted to a single racial category. Instead of the commercial implying that Beyoncé is solely black, they constructed a narrative emphasizing Beyoncé’s racial hybridity. Hollywood, if they wish to produce films regarding racially hybridity, should employ the strategies within this commercial. This L’Oréal advertisement provides a realistic portrayal of racial hybrids mainly due to its illustration of numerous racial identities. Racial hybrids grapple with their multiple selves at times, combating U.S. society’s eagerness to categorize them. Instead the L’Oréal commercial promotes a racial hybrid’s uniqueness and their refusal to limit themselves to a single racial classification. The commercial serves as a metaphor for racial hybridity. The advertisement suggests that an individual should not struggle in locating makeup that matches their distinct skin color, but rather cosmetic companies should create products that suit their consumers’ specific needs. In other words racial hybrids should self-identify as they choose, instead of succumbing to the pressures of society to associate with a single racial group. This could serve as a potential Hollywood plot for a film pertaining to racial hybrids. However constructing a narrative centered on race and self-identification is difficult. Hollywood and a large portion of American society are unaware of the struggles racial hybrids encounter regarding identity. The problem is tough to articulate for individuals that are oblivious to the problem. Nevertheless the L’Oréal True Match commercial is a starting point. The commercial communicates racial hybridity in a positive manner, criticizing U.S. society’s
behavior towards racial hybrids. This commercial along with television shows concerning racial hybridity, provides Hollywood with a model in which to approach racial hybridity within films. However, the L’Oréal commercial is not the only advertisement employing racial hybridity to encourage consumerism for their product. Recently Kraft Foods launched an ad campaign for their new food item, MilkBite, centered on a living MilkBite named Mel. The character Mel, constructed by a marketing agency, is essentially a depiction of a racial hybrid.

The Kraft Foods Corporation features Mel in various advertisements regarding their MilkBite product, in which three commercials in particular portray concepts of racial hybridity in a precise and realistic manner. Furthermore, these three commercials provide the template and foundation for Hollywood in creating narratives regarding racial hybridity. Although *I Hate My Teenage Daughter*, *Parenthood*, and the L’Oréal True Match commercial each offer Hollywood a model for articulating stories pertaining to racial hybridity, these commercials if utilized by major movie studios, could usher in a new era of storytelling within U.S. cinema. The three commercials starring Mel, entitled “Parents”, “Blind Date” and “Book Club” respectively, depict Mel’s struggles with his selfhood. Each advertisement also illustrates notions of racial hybridity within their brief narratives.

The MilkBite commercial “Parents” details the frustration of Mel regarding his fractured identity. In the commercial “Parents” Mel confronts his parents, a glass of milk and a bowl of cereal, regarding his multiple selves and questioning their decision to engage in a relationship that eventually bore a mixed child. The
commercial opens with the words “You didn’t think did you,”\textsuperscript{45} with Mel sitting on a couch facing his parents. He continues, “You didn’t think what life was going to be like for me, Mom, Dad, for your son,”\textsuperscript{46} before sighing. The commercial then concludes, similar to the other two MilkBite advertisements, with Mel urging consumers to “find him in the dairy aisle, please.”\textsuperscript{47} Throughout the commercial Mel is visibly frustrated and exhausted, berating his parents for engaging in a sexual relationship that resulted in him. This stems from his inability to successfully self-identify either as milk, granola, or both in American society. Society disallows him to express his individuality as a mixed individual, restricting Mel to a metaphorical borderland in which he is constantly conflicted. This Kraft MilkBite commercial perfectly encapsulates the difficulties racial hybrids encounter within American society.

Mel signifies a racial hybrid, offering a realistic portrayal of the personal battles a portion of racially hybrid individuals undergo daily. They continuously question their social and racial standing within American society, as individuals force racial hybrids to associate with a single racial identity. Still, several sense their misplacement within whatever race they identify as. The fractured identity is one of the most important concepts of racial hybridity. In grasping this term, individuals thus comprehend the mindset of a racial hybrid and their actions. The public must develop an awareness of it for the purpose of fully understanding racial hybrids, a rapidly increasing population within the U.S. Therefore this Kraft MilkBite

\textsuperscript{45} Kraft Milk Bite, “Parents,” YouTube (8 February 2012) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gK6yayjgi0s> (30 March 2012).
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
commercial offers Hollywood a unique opportunity to utilize their template to both entertain and educate a mass audience with narratives pertaining to racial hybridity. The Kraft MilkBite commercial entitled “Blind Date” offers Hollywood another guide in how to construct stories regarding racial hybridity. The Kraft MilkBite commercial “Blind Date”, similar to “Parents”, demonstrates the difficulties of choosing an identity without external forces questioning it.

In the commercial “Blind Date” Mel attends a bar and grill with a female, in which his confused date inquires about Mel’s racial background and self-identification causing him frustration. Initially within the commercial Mel and his blind date engage in a brief and awkward conversation, before Mel attempts to proceed to another topic. However his companion for the night interjects with a question regarding his online dating profile. She hesitantly asked, “Your profile said you were milk?” In which Mel politely responds with an affirmative “yes.” However she continues, “It’s just you look like granola,” with Mel finally replying, “Granola, yeah I know. I get that a lot.” Irritated and upset, Mel ultimately abandons his date leaving her at the bar. This commercial epitomizes racial hybrids’ struggles with their identities. Even though they comply with society’s pressures to select a single racial classification, individuals disallow them from fully identifying or integrating within that ethnic community by questioning their second or other racial background. Therefore racial hybrids, at times, never entirely resolve their

49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
identity issues. The Kraft MilkBite commercial “Blind Date” supplies Hollywood with another template concerning racial hybridity, detailing the contradictions racial hybrids encounter due to social constructions of race. “The Blind Date” commercial also depicts the relationship between physical appearance and self-identification in regard to racial hybrids.

Due to certain bodily characteristics, in particular racial complexion, racial hybrids encounter complications if they select a racial categorization. Although Mel was the most comfortable identifying as Milk, his blind date viewed him as granola. Physical attributes only provide racial hybrids more difficulties as they attempt to establish themselves within society. The Kraft MilkBite commercial “Blind Date” is one of several narratives concerning racial hybridity that Hollywood possesses at their disposal, if they wish to produce films regarding racial hybrids. Finally, the Kraft MilkBite commercial “Book Club” represents a complete lack of understanding regarding racial hybrids and their suffering.

Within the commercial “Book Club” Mel attempts to equate his personal struggles to a character within a novel to his friends, in the hopes enlightening them to his situation. However they are oblivious to the connection. In the beginning of the commercial, while discussing a novel, a member of Mel’s book club remarks, “When Nicoli is staring at the broken image in the glass; it’s like he doesn’t know who he is.” Mel then interjected explaining why he empathized with Nicoli, “You know, I know exactly how he feels. You know because I’m part milk and part

---

granola.” In which the racially diverse group of people respond by unanimously disagreeing with his comment. However, Mel insists his and Nicoli’s experiences are similar since “he was born in this prison,” as he points to himself. The prison refers to Mel’s complexion and other burdens in his life due to his mixed lineage. In response the group collectively groans. Although racial hybrids are an emerging demographic within society, the general public to a certain degree lacks an understanding of them.

American society’s deficient knowledge concerning racial hybrids was evident within the Kraft MilkBite “Book Club” commercial. The characters within the book club were oblivious to the personal suffering of Mel. Most disturbing, the group consists of various ethnicities including African-American, Indian, and Hispanic. Still, they managed to overlook a connection between racial hybridity and the struggle to identify. Commercials similar to films reflect American society, particularly their general beliefs, since their attempting to sell a product to the public. The book club members’ failure to grasp basic concepts of racial hybridity signifies American society’s inability to escape the black and white binary. They are unable to comprehend an individual with multiple selves or rather an individual that rejects notions of selecting a single racial identity. Americans still remain fixed in a social structure in which citizens are either white or colored. This commercial provides Hollywood with a narrative that permits them to criticize social constructions of race, educate the public regarding racial hybridity, and entertain

54 Ibid.
audiences. All three Kraft MilkBite commercials provide Hollywood with templates instructing them how to construct stories pertaining to racial hybrids. Hollywood possesses the materials to develop tales regarding racial hybrids, enabling studios to continue fulfilling their roles as mirrors that reflect American society and their views. Other forms of U.S. visual culture continue to serve a similar purpose.

Blossoming in 1967, U.S. visual culture depicted interracial relationships, functioning as a mirror and reacting to the evolving racially tolerant views of the U.S. citizenry. Between 1967 and 2006 Hollywood studios produced films that, at times, portrayed the intricacies of interracial romances. Hollywood cinema reflected a society possessing a variety of opinions regarding interracial relationships. Although commercial motion picture studios communicated narratives regarding interracial couples and Americans’ feelings towards them, currently racial hybrids are absent in U.S. cinema. Racially hybrid individuals are an emerging demographic in the U.S., therefore similar to the arising presence of interracial couples within American society and thus Hollywood cinema, racial hybrids deserve equal representation. The positive portrayal of racially hybrid Americans in other mediums within U.S. visual culture, demonstrated that Hollywood studios blatantly avoided developing films concerning these U.S. citizens. This was not due to Hollywood studios’ lack of interest in these specific stories, but rather the inability to pinpoint definitions or meanings of racial hybridity, racial hybrids, or racially hybrid. Also Hollywood’s refusal to create films regarding racial hybridity partially stems from white Americans, a group that contains significant capital, fears of and somewhat opposition to racial hybrids. Thus Hollywood avoids addressing the topic
within movies. However television programs and commercials, in particular, provide Hollywood film companies with the template to help accomplish this endeavor. After movie studios enhance their knowledge of racial hybridity and incorporate models from other forms of visual culture, the possibilities are endless.

Although there is endless creativity in terms of narratives concerning racial hybridity, ultimately Hollywood executives and other power brokers within the industry possess the influence to produce movies concerning racial hybrids. However, Hollywood is in current state that may never alter. High-level employees within major movie studios presently refuse to produce films unless there is certain level of familiarity to the public regarding the source material. This is evident with the high number of comic books, novels, past and present TV shows, toys, plays, and musicals adapted into screenplays and thus motion pictures. Unless Americans are somewhat acquainted with the product, Hollywood refuses to invest into it. Sadly, original ideas for films are disregarded for blockbuster movies. Motion pictures that possess the potential to become franchises and instantly recuperate the studios investments are highly regarded. Therefore movies concerning racial hybridity or racial hybrids may never come to fruition due to the current state of Hollywood.

However, television still offers the opportunity to construct and communicate narratives concerning these individuals. Television programs such as *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* and *Parenthood* are the forerunners in shows depicting racial hybrids. Although both television productions ignore particular concepts of racial hybridity, they established a base for future shows to build upon. Marketing agencies and companies will continue to frame their advertisements to appeal to
consumers. Therefore as American society proceeds to promote and accept racial hybrids, commercials will persistently cater to them. Racial hybridity is the future of American society and a new era has commenced.
Bibliography


L’Oréal. “Find your True Match with Beyoncé.” YouTube (13 January 2012) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jc50e02zDt8> (30 March 2012).


