

7 What happened to the *Green Book*?

The disappearing act of black agency and other white framings in *Green Book*

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Introduction

The months following the murder of George Floyd were filled with large-scale, national responses: Black Lives Matter, Police Reform, and Defund the Police movements all gained new momentum. White people were being called out like never before for their privileged and “righteous” enactments of entitlement—white women in particular gained the moniker “Karen” for their outlandish displays of racism, white privilege, and unwillingness to follow protocols, such as wearing face masks in public places, limiting purchases of high demand items in stores, and waiting in lines amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to calling people out for their distasteful behavior, the US population was offered numerous opportunities for the public to participate in race-centered, virtual learning. For instance, Ivy League universities, including Yale, Columbia, Stanford, and Harvard, offered free online classes to the public that focused on racial injustice (Ward, 2020). Some public figures addressed institutional racism in formal talks, debates, and town halls, while other public figures supported such efforts through monetary donations (Alexander, 2020; Garvey, 2020). Also, film outlets offered free viewings of race-centered films that shed light on the racialized Black experience in the United States. Streaming platforms, such as AppleTV, FandangoNow, Google Play, Amazon Prime Video, Redbox, and YouTube, offered free streaming access to such film titles as *Just Mercy*, *Selma*, *13th*, *Malcolm X*, *Moonlight*, *Fruitvale Station*, *The Hate U Give*, and *I Am Not Your Negro* (Ali, 2020; Chan, 2020).

No doubt, videos and films have the power to tell stories, represent experiences, reveal injustices, and mobilize action and transformation. Whether it be the video of George Floyd’s murder or the carefully curated list of films that were offered for free viewing, people tuned in and were deeply impacted by the various visual narratives. Among the amazing film titles that were offered for free viewing that focused on race and racism, the 2018 film *Green Book* was notably absent. While *Green Book*—the subject of this chapter—was widely popular at the box office and the film awards circuit, we believe that this movie was excluded from the films that were made available for free viewing because it failed to provide a just representation of the black

experience in the United States. In our arguments, we apply a Critical Media Literacy (CML) framework and methodology to examine race representation in *Green Book*. CML refers to an educational framework and pedagogy in which students learn to become “discerning readers, interpreters, and producers of media texts and social communication” (p. 13) in an effort to both deconstruct the oppressive ideologies communicated through media and to counter such messages through the process of creating alternative representations that question hierarchies of power, social norms, and injustices (Kellner and Share, 2019). As Kellner and Share, 2019 explain, “CML is a pedagogy that guides teachers and students to think critically about the world around them; it empowers them to act as responsible citizens, with the skills and social consciousness to challenge injustice” (p. 14).

In this chapter we analyze *Green Book* in an effort to make evident how a specific media text can ideologically reinforce the racial status quo in our society. As a means to perform this analysis, we examine various narrative conventions in the film, including perspective, character development, narrative omissions and distortions, and specific racial tropes, including white savior, black exceptionalism, magical negro, and humor as a vehicle for Black acceptance. Because *Green Book* prioritized the white perspective and experience, we argue that the film communicates ideologies of white supremacy, whereby the narrative positions the white perspective and experience as more worthy, insightful, authentic, and compelling. In our discussions about white supremacy throughout this chapter, we are referring to any practice or ideology that perpetuates the myth that white people are superior to People of Color. As Solórzano and Pérez Huber (2020) explain, “white supremacy is an insidious disease that upholds the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy where People of Color are consistently placed in a subordinate position to whites” (p. 53).

Green Book

The 2018 film *Green Book* was a big hit. Winning the hearts of audiences across the globe, *Green Book* earned more than \$300 million at the Worldwide Box Office and has earned the highest post-Oscar box office revenue of any film in the last decade (McNary, 2019). *Green Book* also fared amazingly well in the film award circuit, garnering 122 nominations and winning 58 film awards (IMDb, n.d.). Most notably, *Green Book* won three Oscars at the 2019 Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Actor in a Supporting Role for Mahershala Ali’s performance as Dr. Donald Shirley—a renowned jazz and classical pianist in the 1950s and 1960s.

Based on a true story, *Green Book* is set in 1962 when Dr. Donald Shirley, accompanied by his white chauffeur and body guard, Tony “Lip” Vallelonga, goes on tour, performing at upscale white venues across the Jim Crow, Southern United States. In many ways, *Green Book* can be interpreted as a counternarrative to the stereotypical racial depictions that saturate media. Indeed, *Green Book* counters the Black/White racial binary that depicts

Black people in deficit terms and White people as the epitome of all that is good. There are numerous white savior films, for example, that serve as great examples of this racial dichotomy in which People of Color are portrayed as being inferior and/or victims who are in need of being rescued by the more abled, knowledgeable, enlightened, and powerful white people (Cammarota, 2011). Among the many contemporary films that embody the white savior genre are: *The Blind Side*, *The Help*, *The Soloist*, *Freedom Writers*, *Dangerous Minds*, *Hardball*, *The Ron Clark Story*, *The Principal*, *Avatar*, *Radio*, *Finding Forrester*, *Gran Torino*, *Glory*, *Django Unchained*, *The Last Samurai*, *Mississippi Burning*, *Dances with Wolves*, *McFarland USA*, *Million Dollar Arm*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In contrast to the insidious portrayals of Black men in particular as impoverished, undereducated, unemployed and otherwise criminals and thugs, Dr. Shirley's character defies each of these negative depictions. Dr. Shirley is a refined and renowned classical pianist who lives above Carnegie Hall. He speaks eight languages and holds doctoral degrees in Music, Psychology, and Liturgical Arts. In sharp contrast, Tony contradicts the positive character portrayal of Dr. Shirley. Tony is an unsophisticated and crude hustler who lies, cheats, and otherwise manipulates people to make a buck. Regardless of these antithetical character projections, *Green Book* mishandles the treatment of race and racism in the film narrative, which, as we reveal in our analysis, reifies ideologies of white supremacy. To be clear, the projection of white supremacist ideologies in film is as old as film itself (hooks, 1992). White supremacy in film simply points to the fact that white people and their character portrayals are positioned more prominently and favorably in film. This is done in a variety of ways in which white people are given more screen time, are more likely to be cast in leading roles, and are more likely to have scripts that represent their diverse lived experiences. In many ways, whiteness becomes the unspoken norm in film—a positionality from which all racial others diverge. In our analysis, we hope to uncover how white supremacist ideologies emerge in *Green Book* as the film narrative prioritizes white perspectives, sensibilities, and experiences.

Critical media literacy

Films and other forms of media can be used as tools for educating masses of people about social injustices and can serve as the impetus for societal change. However, it is also the case that media can powerfully, and often quietly, reinforce the racial status quo by producing dangerous racial ideologies that give life to and normalize the cultural racism that defines our society (Tatum, 2017). Given the ideological power of media, and the pedagogical utility of Critical Media Literacy in K-12 classrooms, it is important to consider media usage, especially among youth. Recent data show that children are more connected to media than ever before. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (2020) reports that children in the United States ages 8–12 experience an average of 4–6 hours of daily screen time and teenagers experience up to 9 hours of screen time a day, including

their use of smartphones, tablets, gaming consoles, TVs, and computers. No doubt, children are impacted by the massive amounts of media they consume on a daily basis. In their discussion about Critical Media Literacy (CML), Kellner and Share (2019) liken media to pedagogy, stating that media technologies are:

a profound and often misperceived source of cultural pedagogy that educate and socialize us about how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire. These complex systems of communication, representation, production, distribution, and consumption are forms of pedagogy that teach us about ourselves and the world around us.

(p. xi)

Given the power of media in knowledge formation, CML is a framework, methodology, and pedagogical approach to deconstructing the ideological messages that are communicated through various forms of media texts. Media texts include, but are not limited to: print- and web-based news articles, news broadcasts, textbooks, literature, films, print advertising, commercials, video games, social media, visual and performing art, music, music videos, pictures, graphic images, and television shows. Instead of being passive consumers of said media texts, CML is a pedagogical approach that positions analysts as active agents who examine the politics of representation, posing such questions as: Who is portrayed?; How are they portrayed?; What are the potential effects of this portrayal?; and, Who and what is being left out of this portrayal? (Choudhury & Share, 2012; Gainer, 2010; Share, 2015; Todorova, 2015).

CML is an extension of Freire's (2000) concept of critical literacy—an active, analytical approach in which literacy involves not only one's ability to read the word, but also the world—as part of a larger effort to realize and transform the asymmetrical power relations that define our social contexts. As such, CML challenges traditional forms of literacy that are situated in a positivist psychological model that emphasize a standard national language, phonetic decoding, and discrete cognitive skills that attempt to discover a fixed external reality (Funk et al., 2016). In contrast to apolitical forms of literacy education, such as banking education (Freire, 2000), wherein students are simply perceived of as receptacles of information, CML has students scrutinize how racism, homophobia, classism, sexism, xenophobia, and linguicism are communicated through everyday media texts. An example of this type of analysis is Kohl's (2016) critique of the typical Rosa Parks story that appears in children's literature, in which black agency, including that of Rosa Parks as well as those involved in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, is undermined on numerous fronts.

In his analysis, Kohl encourages students not only to question narratives for the ways in which they reinforce inequitable power relations, but also to reconceptualize and rewrite narratives that counter dominant ideologies. As such, the goals of conducting a CML analysis is to uncover and make evident

the dominant ideologies that are communicated through media texts so that they can be scrutinized and transformed. In our analysis of *Green Book*, we specifically examine how the film narrative is problematic in regard to race representation. By utilizing *Green Book* as a research site and the film narrative as research data, we conduct a CML analysis that highlights how even though *Green Book* is a seemingly positive and uplifting film, it is ripe with cultural productions of racism. In our attempt to identify the various ways *Green Book* communicates white supremacist ideologies, our guiding research question is as follows: In what specific ways does the *Green Book* narrative produce racial ideologies that position white people as superior to People of Color (POC)?

But first, Tony

As mentioned before, the setting in *Green Book* is the Southern United States in 1962, the year after the Freedom Riders first boarded public interstate buses and rode into the South to protest bus segregation laws. The buses Freedom Riders rode were bombed, set on fire, and riders were violently attacked by white protestors.¹ In this setting, racism is rampant and enforced through Jim Crow laws that legalize racial segregation and the blatant mistreatment of Black people as well as other People of Color. In 1963, the year following the events portrayed in *Green Book*, The March on Washington took place: 250,000 people gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial to demand the passage of civil rights legislation. Needless to say, the *Green Book* setting of the Jim Crow Southern United States was a dangerous, life-threatening place for Black people. It is within this particular setting that Dr. Don Shirley, a Black musician from New York, is about to embark on a music tour. The storyline of Dr. Shirley's music career, including his fears and apprehensions about touring and performing in the South (which were only alleviated through the hiring of a bodyguard), is both compelling and deserving. But before audience members get to know anything at all about Dr. Shirley, screenwriters and producers insist that we must first begin with the story of Dr. Shirley's white driver and bodyguard, Tony "The Lip" Vallelonga, played by actor Viggo Mortensen. While the film producers have not publicly commented on the perspective of the film and the designation of Tony as the lead character, it is important to note that the movie is produced by Tony Vallelonga's son Nick. It stands to reason that Nick Vallelonga has an insider perspective about his father's life, including his job with Dr. Shirley. However, the film producers have been critiqued for not including Dr. Shirley's perspective, for producing falsehoods about Dr. Shirley, and for not consulting Dr. Shirley's family in the making of the film (Bruney, 2019).

Consistent with the privileging of white characters in film, and white savior films in particular, Tony is given the protagonist role in the storyline. As such, Tony's character, including his personality traits, profession, sociocultural environment, and relationships, are fully realized throughout the film's 130-minute running time. The intimacy in which audience members

get to know Tony casts a shadow over much of Dr. Don Shirley's personal life, exalting Tony while incrementally diminishing the story's focal Black character. Little is known or shown about Dr. Don Shirley's character and background, and he is ever only observed from a "White gaze" (Hall, 2014; Pimentel & Santillanes, 2014) throughout the film. White gaze refers to the white perspective from which audiences get to know characters of color. As an example, Hall (2014) discusses historical narratives, including textbooks, which are traditionally told from the winner's [white] perspective. Hall refers to the white framing of historical documents, including photographs, as the "white eye," and is careful to point out in his arguments that even when white people are not in the physical frame of a picture, the white perspective is still seeing and positioning everything within the frame.

The white gaze is critical to our analysis of *Green Book*, because even when white people, including Tony, are not within the physical frame of a movie shot, the white perspective is nonetheless informing everything within the shot. In film shots that focus on Dr. Shirley by himself, for example, the shot does not break from the distant, unfamiliar, and decontextualized framing that occurs when Tony is included in the shot. A shot of Dr. Shirley sitting on his outside balcony at a hotel during his tour, for example, is from the line of sight of Tony's hotel room. Consistent with the camera shots that focus on Tony, this shot of Dr. Shirley is from a large distance, involves a setting in which Tony could actually observe Dr. Shirley (on his outside balcony), as opposed to inside his hotel room where no one could observe him, and only includes props that can be interpreted from Tony's vantage point. This shot of Dr. Shirley shows Dr. Shirley drinking an alcoholic beverage as he sits and looks out from the balcony in his bathrobe, yet none of these details about Dr. Shirley are developed beyond this distant shot. Essentially, the details audience members learn from the film shots of Dr. Shirley are limited to the viewpoint of Tony, even in cases when Tony is not included in the physical frame.

Huckin's (1995) conceptualization of textual foregrounding focuses on a writer's emphasis on certain concepts and/or characters by giving them textual prominence. A primary way to give textual prominence through foregrounding is the "top-down orientation" (p. 99), in which the text that appears first is given more precedence over that which follows. In this case, Huckin identifies lead sentences in news articles as the most impactful to readers because they appear first. While Huckin politicizes the positioning of information in a written text, and specifically scrutinizes the impact of the first sentence of news articles, it is imperative to consider the preponderance of power that manifests in the foregrounding of Tony's character in *Green Book*. In a typical "top-down orientation," the first 15 minutes of *Green Book* are relinquished to the development of Tony's character. In these first 15 minutes, viewers are introduced to Tony's world with a detailed look into his workplace, colleagues, neighborhood, friends, and family in a working-class section of the Bronx in the early 1960s. His is a world filled with Italian immigrants and their offspring, people who know each other

and each other's business, along with gangsters and socialites whom Tony studies to gain their trust and earn their favor. From his glorified tough-guy behavior and moral compass that keeps him just on the periphery of a mafia lifestyle, to his unconventional gambling and pawning habits, Tony's personality is established in great detail. And in many scenes throughout the film, the details about Tony get intimate. To illustrate—we see Tony in his bedroom, in bed with his wife, kissing his kids goodnight, and scratching his belly as he walks around the house in his underwear.

Viewers also get a sense of Tony and his community's feelings toward People of Color and non-Italian ethnic groups from scenes of their home life, where racism rings out in conversations that include a wide range of racial slurs—"sacks of coal," "kraut," "eggplant," "coons," "jungle bunnies," "negro," "brillo pad," the n-word, and so forth. In one scene, two Black construction workers are replacing Tony's kitchen floor when Dolores, Tony's wife, offers the two workers some lemonade. When they are finished, the camera serves as an eyepiece to reflect Tony's feelings on the actions that occurred and homes in on the cups as if they were dangerous contagions. Tony throws the cups away, using a dish towel to protect his exposed hands, suggesting a hard line about coming into contact with Black people. This detail of Tony throwing away the cups can be viewed within the larger frame of his entire cadre of Italian American male relatives watching a baseball game at his house in order to "protect" his wife from the Black men. Whether it is in jostling moments with family, providing "muscle" at The Copacabana Club, or pulling a con over gangster Joe Loscudo to curry his favor and gain work contracts, Tony's environment and the actions he takes demonstrate his cultural repertoire and street smarts, establishing him as the central character. The entirety of the *Green Book* narrative is not only told from Tony's perspective but is also truly a story *about* him: a rough around the edges, middle-aged Italian American man whose talent for "bullshit" has taken him so far.

The portrayal of Tony as an Italian American man living in the Bronx, New York in the 1960s is not without its own limitations and implications. Tony undoubtedly represents several stereotypes about working-class Italian American males, including his language use, mannerisms, dress, street smarts, and his trickster, mob-like mentality. These stereotypical portrayals of Italian American men have been cemented in films such as *The Godfather*, *Goodfellas*, *Casino*, and *Donnie Brasco*, as well as television series including *The Sopranos*, *Growing up Gotti*, and *Mob Wives*. Stereotypes are dangerous because they produce flat, monolithic, and distorted portrayals of people that misrepresent the great diversity in experiences and perspectives within any ethnic identity group. When stereotypes are continually produced in media, they impact audience's perceptions about people as it becomes difficult to look past these dominant conceptions to realize the diverse, authentic people who make up a particular ethnic group. *Green Book* fails to provide a representation of Italian Americans beyond the tired stereotypes that saturate media.

Without question, *Green Book* offers contrived character portrayals of Italian Americans by reinforcing numerous stereotypes in the portrayal of Tony and other Italian Americans in the script. Our use of a Critical Media Literacy framework pushes us to consider the ideological weight of such representations in a racialized society. That is, we must understand that media representations have the power to tip the scales of racial justice by reinscribing or possibly opposing the white supremacist ideologies that define our society. In our larger pursuit of social justice in racial representations in media, we find it unfortunate that Italian American ethnic stereotypes are portrayed in *Green Book*, but find these portrayals do little to interrupt the prevailing white supremacy that defines the film industry due to the overrepresentation of white film screenwriters, producers, and actors that, despite some stereotypic portrayals of white characters, otherwise represent great depth and breadth of what it means to be white in the United States. In an effort to address our research question—In what specific ways does the *Green Book* narrative produce racial ideologies that position white people as superior to People of Color (POC)?—our primary concern in *Green Book* is a storyline that is ostensibly about the musical career and tour of a Black musician in the American South during the Jim Crow era, yet is highjacked to center on a white man. This cinematic move mirrors the continuous underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Black people in media at the same time it positions the white perspective, as stereotypical as it may be in this case, as more worthy. As Baker-Bell, Stanbrough, and Everett (2017) argue, the historical and ongoing limited representations of Black people in meaningful roles in media dehumanizes Black people and contributes to a “historical lineage that continues to support a white supremacist agenda that leads to antiblackness” (p. 136).

It is also important to consider the ideological impact of positioning Tony’s character as the leading role in the film and his depiction of a White, racist man. If Tony were not a prominent character in the film, his character development would be shallow and we would not likely learn much more about Tony than him being racist. However, due to Tony’s prominent role in the film, we learn that there is so much more to Tony than being a racist. From his extensive screen time, we learn that Tony is an endearing, hard-working, committed, family man. As such, audience members see the humanity and complexity in Tony’s character, and, as such, can easily overlook his racist behaviors or rationalize them as being a reflection of the time period. Thus, the power of numerous plot devices, including perspective, character development, and cinematography, humanizes Tony, making it possible for audiences to minimize his racism. Even though he has his flaws, including being a racist, audience members establish an emotional connection with Tony, so much so, they can identify with the complexity of his character, his plight as a racist, and, in the end, can champion his transformation. To be clear, through the use of persuasive narrative conventions, audience members champion an outright, explicitly documented, racist.

Oh Yeah and Dr. Shirley, the foil

Whereas audience members are presented colorful scenes that paint Tony's family and friends together eating meals, watching television, and exchanging jokes and laughs, Dr. Shirley's character is presented as an object of public, mostly White, consumption—he's always in the public eye. When we are finally introduced to Dr. Shirley 15 minutes into the film, it is not on his own terms. Rather, Dr. Shirley's introduction emerges out of Tony's need. Tony needs a job, so he goes to a job interview with what he assumes is a medical doctor, only to find out during the interview that he is being interviewed by jazz musician Dr. Don Shirley. It is also within this introduction that Dr. Shirley's character is established as Tony's foil. Dr. Shirley is presented in sharp contrast to Tony, which serves to highlight Tony's characteristics even further. During the interview scene, only Tony's interactions with Dr. Shirley are given screen time. While it is clear Dr. Shirley conducted multiple interviews for the position, as is evidenced by the presence of several men waiting in the hallway to be interviewed, audience members do not gain any insight into what exactly Dr. Shirley is looking for, how the other candidates measured up to his expectations, or why Dr. Shirley ultimately decides to hire Tony. After Tony's interview, Dr. Shirley does not appear again until 28 minutes into the film, when Tony picks him up to begin his driving duty. Leading up to their departure, the film is careful to detail the strain the road trip will pose on Tony and his family. They will be separated for eight weeks, Dolores will be left alone to care for their two young sons, and spending Christmas together as a family is in jeopardy. The last tour date is December 23; the concerned Dolores delivers an ultimatum to Tony: "You better be home for Christmas or don't come home at all!"

At the same time that audience members are made to sympathize with the predicament Tony and his family are facing and can certainly sympathize with the sacrifices he and his family will have to make, they are denied the same connections to Dr. Shirley's character. Does Dr. Shirley have any reservations about the trip? Is he having to make certain sacrifices as a result of this trip? Is he leaving any family members behind? We simply do not know because Dr. Shirley is completely eliminated from these early scenes in the film. As CML has it, whether intentional or not, writers produce texts from their own biases. Since the producers of this film did not have insider knowledge about Dr. Shirley, the script is limited in its representation of Dr. Shirley. According to CML, however, there are social implications that go beyond an individual bias, which reflects the writer's perspective. According to Kellner and Share (2019) biases, or individual perspectives, do not compete on a level playing field, and, as such, we must situate biases in the realm of social and environmental justice to ask the larger social question, "whom does this text advantage and/or disadvantage?" (p. 8). From this question, we are able to understand that texts are ideological—they have the power to reify and/or counter the inequitable power relations in a given society. In this sense, the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Dr. Shirley

is much more than a reflection on the producer's limited experiences with Dr. Shirley. The social dimensions of *Green Book* has deep roots as it mirrors and propels forward the already established racial order of our society that gives prominence to the Eurocentric perspective at the expense of people of color. The prominence and wide dissemination of texts that give priority to white characters, whether that be in textbooks, literature, plays, advertisements, television shows, or films, create what are called master narratives—narratives that normalize white supremacy as common sense.

As the *Green Book* narrative continues, and Dr. Shirley's and Tony's friendship develops, audience members only gain three underdeveloped details about Dr. Shirley's personal life: 1) His mother taught him how to play piano "on an old spinet" and they would "travel around the Florida panhandle and ... put on little shows in parishes and halls;" 2) He has "a brother somewhere" whom he used "to get together once in a while" with; and, 3) He was married, but playing music on the road so much took a toll and they've since separated. What little we do learn about Dr. Shirley is often from the voices and perspectives of white characters in the film. During the introduction of his first performance on the tour, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the white Master of Ceremonies announces to the white audience,

He gave his first public performance at the age of three. At age 18 at Arthur Fiedler's invitation, our guest made his concert debut with the Boston Pops. He holds doctorates in Psychology, in Music, and in the Liturgical Arts. And he has performed at the White House twice in the past 14 months. He is a true virtuoso...

In continuation of this third-person, white voice, we gain even further insight into Dr. Shirley's world through the letters Tony writes on the road to Dolores. In one particular letter, Tony writes from his meager knowledge about Dr. Shirley,

I saw Dr. Shirley play the piano tonight. He don't play like a colored guy. He plays like Liberace but better. He's like a genius, I think. When I look at him in the rearview mirror, I can tell he's always thinking about stuff in his head. I guess that's what geniuses do. But it don't look fun to be that smart.

In another letter, Tony offers Dolores, and of course the viewing audience of *Green Book*, some more potential insight into Dr. Shirley's world: "Sometimes he [Dr. Shirley] gets sad and that's why he drinks too much." In this example, as well as throughout the film, Dr. Shirley's emotional world is merely exposed through Tony's perspective and interpretation.

The audience's emotional distance from Dr. Shirley is equally maintained through the film's physical distancing from Dr. Shirley through cinematographic affects, whereby the camera follows Tony up close as he observes the physically distanced and isolated Dr. Shirley: through the

rear-view mirror, sitting alone on the balcony of his motel, and playing at the piano. Similar to Mulvey's (2010) theories on film's male gaze, which fixes on sexual objects for the pleasure of a heterosexual male audience, Dr. Shirley playing his piano similarly fixes him in a white gaze for the pleasure of a white audience (Yancy, 2017). His intimate moments of performing are never recorded close-up, never reveal his connection to the music he is playing, and do not portray what he sees, feels, and thinks about his work and time on the road. As such, Dr. Shirley is merely a blank sheet onto which white people can project their feelings and beliefs. Unabashedly, filmmaker Peter Farrelly admits that "the story came from Tony Lip's side," and that he does not want people to believe that every word is true. But "the big things, like Shirley calling Robert F. Kennedy, are true. The YMCA scene: True. All the letters: True. Carnegie Hall: True. The chicken scene: True—or at least it's Tony Lip's telling of the story" (Menta, 2018). The film, made by a white man and told entirely from a white person's perspective, minimizes the black protagonist's story. This practice, of white people telling the stories of black people in popular media texts, is nothing new; however, its effects have consequences. In perpetuating the white gaze in other films about black/white relations,² black people are unable to experience their lives outside of the dominant white gaze that comfortably determines who they are, what they should do, and how they should feel about their position in society.

Racial ventriloquism (Garcia et al., 2014)—the act of white people authoring narratives about Black people—is quite popular and often results in constructing "blackness" in service of white hegemonic interests. Although the film held the potential to be a compelling biopic on Dr. Shirley's experiences as a musician dealing with racism in the American South, Tony's character, his capabilities, and his perspectives overtake the *Green Book* narrative, and specifically the voice, perspective, and experience of the film's focal Black character. Nearly everything we know about Dr. Shirley and the racism that ensues on his tour in the South is revealed through Tony's character development and perspective. Through this white telling, a transformation takes place, catalyzed by Dr. Shirley but ultimately taking place in Tony.

In the following section, we analyze how Tony's character evolves from a racist, uncouth tough guy, to white savior—that is, one whose innate abilities and street smarts enable him "power to help less-privileged people" in ways that suggest they're "unable to help themselves," (Straubhaar, 2015)—through his interactions with Dr. Shirley.

Project white transformation: from racist to white savior

Tony carries in him deep-seated racism and prejudice; however, *Green Book's* depiction of his path to self-discovery and transformation characterizes his development as a white savior more than a true wokeness (Romano, 2020). Instead of reckoning and reconciling with societal barriers, structures, and actions that foster extreme inequities between Black and white people, and being critically aware of his own place within those imbalances, Tony's white

savior complex undermines Dr. Shirley's own agency while allowing the former to maintain his imprudent dignity. The status quo of white masculine norms, and the racial power dynamics in a racist society remain unchecked.

As is evidenced early on in the film, Tony and his family members are explicitly racist. Various scenes suggest that this racism stems not from external structures of power that suppress Black people while elevating white people, but instead from the characters' personal ignorance. This ignorance does not require the heavy lifting of truly examining the discrimination, unfair policies, and inequitable opportunities that impact Black people's experiences. Instead, racism, according to the film, can be reconciled by simply encountering Others distinct from oneself and finding common ground. Racism, in this light, is easily conquered by having the proverbial "Black friend" (Parry, 2018). Audience members first witness this racism in Tony's home when Black handymen are in his kitchen, and it is further established that Tony's racism will affect his ability to work for Dr. Shirley, as made apparent in his wife's comment, "He's colored? You wouldn't last a week with him." Indeed, Tony shows this to be true when, despite the fact that he wants something that Dr. Shirley has to offer, he initially walks away from their job interview, insisting he won't be subservient to him (a Black man) or do "butler things" despite having experience in similar lines of work with mafia bosses. After much contemplation, Tony is able to appease his ego and take the job, but only with certain stipulations: He refuses to wear a chauffeur uniform, put bags in the trunk—insisting Dr. Shirley's "little Chink" Indian butler do the task instead, carry things into hotels, or follow through on various parts of his contract, for which he is paid to do.

When Tony begins driving for Dr. Shirley, it is clear that he is far from transforming these long-held feelings towards Black people. As they set off on their journey, Tony drives the Cadillac off the shoulder of the road next to some trees, so he can relieve himself. He gets out, takes a few steps, and realizes he left his wallet in the car with a Black man. He goes back, opens the driver's side door, and grabs it off the dashboard before heading back towards the woods. Even though Dr. Shirley clearly does not need Tony's money, Tony's actions reveal that he cannot believe that a Black man, regardless of need, would not steal from him. Tony's behaviors would typically position him as the film's antagonist, but because the film script is dedicated to painting an endearing portrayal of Tony as funny, dynamic, and brusquely honest, viewers are meant to accept his whole person and champion him as he overcomes the more negative aspects of his personality. This has led film critics like *Vulture's* Mark Harris (2018) to call the film a *both sides* move, one that sells the story of racism in the US to the faction of white Americans who see themselves as cultural "mediators" like Tony. They are the "non-racist people poised halfway between unrepentant, ineducable racists on one side and, on the other, black people who ... almost always have something to learn themselves." This *we can all learn from each other* approach—Tony can learn to stop calling Black people "jungle bunnies" and Shirley can learn how "to stop saying highfalutin' things"—has appealed to white movie-goers

and Oscar boards for over half a century. It worked in acclaimed films like 1967's *Heat of the Night*, in 1988's *Mississippi's Burning*, in 2016's *Hell or High Water*, and in 2018's Oscar Best *Green Book* (Harris, 2018). It worked because these *both sides* films lift the burden of blame off white shoulders by shifting it back to Black people.

Continuing to unpack the foregrounding of Tony's character in the script, we see that his character, unlike Dr. Shirley's, evolves over the progression of the film. Audience members witness Tony's unapologetic racism transformed by the film's end when he not only befriends his Black employer, but also plays the role of white savior by mediating numerous racist incidents that occur during the tour. Through his transformation, Tony's morality evolves from a man who is interested in nothing more than a paycheck from Dr. Shirley to a man motivated to preserve Dr. Shirley's dignity and protect him from the numerous racist attacks they encounter on his tour. Tony's initial moment of transformation comes unexpectedly and without any sort of reckoning with his long-held beliefs about Black people in a scene at the YMCA when Tony bails Dr. Shirley out of a predicament involving a public sexual encounter with another man. Tony's prowess at talking his way out of anything, including altercations with the police, showcases not only his street savvies but also his newly found awareness of Dr. Shirley's humanity—by requesting the arresting officers “get a guy a towel, for Christ's sake.” Tony goes on to explain to the police officers, “Okay, look, we're out of here tomorrow morning. You'll never see us again. There's gotta be something we can do to work this out,” and finagles them to accept a bribe and let them go free.

In further consideration of the scene at the YMCA, the film seeks to establish Tony's nascent savior complex, glossing over deeper understandings of Dr. Shirley, his sexuality, and the intersectional oppressions he would have experienced in this era. Dr. Shirley's encounter with the man and the hint of his sexuality are truncated to a single scene that lasts only one minute and in which neither Dr. Shirley, nor the man he is with, speak. The two men are positioned in the background of the scene, sitting naked on the tile floor where they are handcuffed to a faucet. Restrained as they are by the handcuffs, the two men simply look on as they are at the mercy of Tony's ability to convince the police officers to let them go. For a brief moment, this scene provides potential insight into Dr. Shirley's identity and experience, yet falls flat as it neglects to put Dr. Shirley in the foreground; instead, viewers are recalibrated to Tony's development as a white savior. To be specific, audience members witness the transformation of a white man who at one point was bulldozed by the idea of Black men drinking from his personal drinkware in his home to someone who is enlightened enough to recognize the cruel actions of the homophobic and racist police officers. In this scene, Tony displays an unearned, comprehensive understanding of the world around him, while Dr. Shirley and his experience of being beaten and ridiculed by the police for his sexuality, and presumably race, is overlooked. The film implies that Tony's street smarts have made him tolerant of homosexuality

(he has seen it all at the Copa Club, after all), yet he remains suspicious of Black people. This inconsistency is overlooked and instead audiences are meant to believe Tony's racism, like his homophobia, is easily conquerable by befriending Others. The film never unearths the root cause of racism and homophobia and, while hinting at their implications in the lives of Others who experience their horrors, suggests that all can be made well with a little love and understanding over real institutional change.

Tony's transformation throughout the film arguably embodies the white savior syndrome (Cammarota, 2011); Tony intervenes in several scenes to protect Dr. Shirley from conflict, but Tony is never seen confronting his own internal racism or that which is engrained in the social systems that rationalize and legalize the racial order of the day. As Cammarota (2011) argues, the problem of the white savior syndrome is its reliance on what Freire (2000) refers to as false generosity. That is, the white savior syndrome amounts to a white person who engages in a helping/saving action for a single individual or group. Cammarota explains, "The focus on 'saving' instead of 'transforming' fails to address oppressive structures and thus the privileges that maintain white supremacy" (p. 244). The outcome of false generosity is that the saving action may make a difference to an individual or even a handful of people, but there is no attempt to build solidarity that can lead to large-scale, long-lasting changes to institutional oppression. As evidenced in the various examples of Tony's false generosity in *Green Book*, Tony only cements his status as a white savior and protector through muscle and street smarts, guarding Dr. Shirley from racist attackers at a bar, highway cops, and concert hosts who disregard his contract details by providing him dirty pianos, serving him fried chicken, and denying him use of their bathrooms. Tony clearly does not understand the bigger implications of what Dr. Shirley faces, repeatedly expressing to the other members of the Don Shirley Trio, "I don't understand why he puts up with this shit." Tony's incredulity at Dr. Shirley's stoicism in the face of racism, and his emerging violence toward those who uphold racist beliefs, leave the latter appearing passive and subservient in the film's narrative arc of resolving tensions around race.

Farrelly noted in a *Newsweek* (2018) interview,

We were aware of the certain tropes, like the white savior trope—the white guy saves the black guy—as well as the black savior trope—the black guy saves the white guy. We were careful not to make this film either of those. Yes, Tony Lip saves Dr. Shirley from some earthly perils, but Dr. Shirley saves Tony Lip's soul by making him a better person.

This hints at a serious problem in the film and, as this quotation suggests, is driven by the filmmaker's desire to maintain Dr. Shirley as a dignified individual who has transcended racism through talent and education.

Tony finally crests the learning curve of *how to be a good white savior* during an encounter with a supper club manager in Birmingham, Alabama. Tony and the Don Shirley Trio are sitting down to a meal in the concert hall's

dining room filled with all White, well-dressed customers who are attendees of Dr. Shirley's performance. Tony notices Dr. Shirley from across the room in a heated discussion with the *maitre d'*. Tony approaches and demands to know what the problem is and why his boss is prohibited from entering and eating with him and the all-white band at their table. Dr. Shirley replies, "This gentleman's saying I can't dine here," because of Jim Crow Laws and the overt racism of the restaurant owners and its patrons. The manager attempts to settle the altercation and Tony questions him, "You're tellin' me the bozos in his band, and the shlubs that came to see him play can eat here, but the star can't?" The manager suggests Dr. Shirley eat in his dressing room (a broom closet) or at a Black establishment down the road called The Orange Bird, because they'll "be happy to feed you." Tony initially suggests that Dr. Shirley concede to the management's suggestion by having his dinner separately at The Orange Bird instead of the dining area, reasoning, "It's the last show. Let's just get through this and we can go home and get away from all these assholes."

In what would normally be a big moment in the film for Dr. Shirley and serve as an example of his agency—his ability to act in the face of adversity—instead becomes a spotlight on Tony. Dr. Shirley responds to the manager, "Not this time. I'm eating in this room or I'm not playing." In this case, as in others, agency is transferred to Tony. The manager unsuccessfully attempts to bribe Tony to persuade Dr. Shirley to play; "I have 400 guests out there who expect to be entertained tonight ... Now let's cut the bullshit. Tell me what it's gonna take ... Say one hundred dollars and you get your boy to play?" Even though viewers know bribes are not outside of Tony's moral compass, and he has used them to get Dr. Shirley out of predicaments himself, he takes offense. The manager replies, "All due respect, sir, but you wouldn't be doing a job like this," working for a Black man, "if you couldn't be bought." This has indeed been proven true in earlier scenes, and in Tony's own demonstrable stand against doing "butler things," yet in this moment, the audience is shown that Tony's character has evolved, as he now understands the Black experience, and in spite of the opportunity to double down on his earnings by accepting the bribe, he takes a stand. That stand, more than Dr. Shirley's, ultimately means that Tony—the hero—has transformed. Consistent with Dr. Shirley's nominal treatment throughout the film, the topics of Dr. Shirley's agency and the deeply entrenched racial ideologies Tony and other white people benefit from are secondary to the treatment of Tony's progression.

Black exceptionalism and the magical negro trope

Black exceptionalism encompasses the ideology that Black people who are educated, talented, eloquent, or self-possessed, like Dr. Shirley, are few and far between. In effect, black exceptionalism holds black stereotypes firmly in place while carving out a single exception to the otherwise undesirable qualities of all other Black people (Johnson, 2014). Of course, this is not reality,

but because biased and unflattering depictions of Black people have been perpetuated as fact in US media and throughout its history, these views take on an ideological value. In *Green Book*, viewers witness Tony exhibiting personal feelings that paint Black people in an antagonistic light and is frequently surprised by Dr. Shirley seeming so different from his presumptions about Black people. Through Tony, the film reinforces the othering of ordinary Black people through Dr. Shirley's Black exceptionalism, specifically of a type that Spike Lee has called the "magical negro" trope (Zavallos, 2012), whereby extraordinary, magical Black characters transform rough-around-the-edges, uncultured, broken white characters into capable, better people. Hughey (2009) describes the projection of Black characters in "magical negro" films as being strong, progressive, and magic-wielding characters who ultimately function to redeem broken and down-on-their-luck white characters. The Black/white relationship in magical negro films, as Hughey explains,

reinforces a normative climate of white supremacy within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation whereby whiteness is always worthy of being saved, and strong depictions of blackness are acceptable in so long as they serve white identities .

(p. 548)

As such, magical negro films reinforce racial power dynamics in that they "function to marginalize black agency, empower normalized and hegemonic forms of whiteness, and glorify powerful black characters in so long as they are placed in racially subservient positions" (Hughey, 2009, p. 543).

Dr. Shirley's character projection of Black exceptionalism and the magical negro is a plot device used to transform Tony, as he negotiates his prejudices and racism. Hints that the film will utilize the magical negro trope are established in the film's transitional music in the opening scenes at the Copa Club when Bobby Rydell croons "that old Black magic has me in its spell" and "witchcraft," implying Black people are tied to voodoo, dark magic, and that their perceived differences from white people make them a source of entertainment. This idea appears again during Tony's first encounter with Dr. Shirley at his initial job interview in the doctor's apartment above Carnegie Hall, where the film not only establishes dramatic cultural and class differences between them, but also revels in racist humor and Dr. Shirley's exceptionalism.

In Dr. Shirley's apartment, the camera takes on Tony's perspective once again. Viewers are shown the striking differences between the two characters. Tony, heavy and wearing a wrinkled suit, speaks with uncouth language and a lack of sophistication compared to the well-dressed Dr. Shirley. The camera not only accentuates Tony's embodied working-class roots, but also equally others Dr. Shirley by establishing him as wealthy. Unlike the entirety of the rest of the film, the setting at Dr. Shirley's apartment establishes him as Afrocentric. His apartment is furnished with numerous African artifacts, including topless statues, ivory elephant tusks, and a throne; moreover,

Dr. Shirley wears a silk embroidered dashiki, gold medallions, and what Tony believes is a “shark tooth.” In this encounter, viewers are left to marvel at Dr. Shirley’s exceptionalism. This perception is later confirmed when Tony quips to his wife about his appearing like “king of the jungle bunnies”—an out-of-the-ordinary Black man whose exceptionalism baffles him.

Dr. Shirley’s character grows out of this problematic and hyperbolic insistence upon the ways in which he is not an ordinary Black person. His exceptionalism is on display in his desire to play classical European composers, his mocking of “colored entertainers” who put whisky tumblers on their piano and “then get mad when [they’re] not respected,” his displays of elegance in dress, and in his discomfort around other Black people. The film also makes a case of how exceptional Dr. Shirley is at not only being better than ordinary Black people, but that he can perform white acceptability even better than his white companion. This is introduced when Dr. Shirley berates Tony’s vulgarity, speech, and even his name, pressuring him to mainstream Vallelonga to “Valley,” out of concern that well-to-do concert attendees will not be able to pronounce his name. He shames Tony for gambling with Black chauffeurs and household staff at one of his performances, bringing to Tony’s attention that he should not socialize with them when he has the “choice” to be inside and watch the concert, while others do not. Dr. Shirley even corrects Tony’s morals on multiple occasions, chastising him for stealing a jade stone at a gas station sidewalk sale and later for throwing a KFC cup out of the car window. When Tony uses violence to solve problems the two encounter on the road—hitting a stage manager at a concert stop in Indiana or threatening hooligans at a Kentucky bar with a gun—Dr. Shirley expresses his aversion. This comes to a head when Tony punches a cop who pulls them over at night for violating the Black curfew in a sundown town, and then goes on to calling him a “half-nigger” when Tony reveals his Italian last name. In this moment, it is unclear to the audience whether Tony is defending Dr. Shirley’s honor or his own, by lashing out at someone who called him something he so deeply does not want to be. Dr. Shirley calls out his use of violence as self-serving, citing that his aggression and violence are due to his own unresolved issues about racial discrimination and masculinity.

It is important to note here that while Dr. Shirley is probably right that Tony’s motives for punching a police officer have more to do with his own issues with race and social class, Dr. Shirley’s exceptionalism also comes with its own set of unresolved issues with intersectional oppressions. In sharp contrast to the Afrocentric apartment where audience members first met Dr. Shirley, the film makes it a point to carefully detail Dr. Shirley’s lack of awareness of popular Black culture and relationships with Black people. This is initially played for laughs and allows Tony the opportunity to demonstrate his white savior complex by contributing to Dr. Shirley’s “Black education.” For instance, in moments when Dr. Shirley gives Tony lessons on performing whiteness through speech and dress, Tony then gives Dr. Shirley lessons on Black food and music. Tony lectures Dr. Shirley: “Your people love the fried chicken, collard greens,” and listening to Black music. “How could you not

know this music? Chubby Checker, Lil' Richard, Sam Cooke, Aretha—these are your people!” Classical music versus Motown and jazz are referenced repeatedly as vectors for class and racial authenticity. In a scene set in a hotel lounge, Dr. Shirley ruefully tells Tony about his record company’s insistence that he play classical-music-infused jazz, instead of traditional classical music, as he had been trained to and aspired to perform professionally. The importance of noting this here is not only to bring attention, again, to Tony’s savior complex in teaching Dr. Shirley how to be better at being Black, but also to reveal the struggle Dr. Shirley’s character has with his own very real exceptionalism and how it crosses uneasily with class and racial expectations.

What happened to the Green book in *Green Book*?

Ironically, the title of the movie, which should provide keen insight into the subject matter of the film, is completely misleading. To be clear, there is a notable absence of the Green Book—officially known as *The Negro Motorist Green Book*—in the film narrative. While the Green Book is the supposed guiding post of the film narrative, it only surfaces a few times in the film. *The Negro Motorist Green Book* was an annually published travel guide from 1936 to 1966 that identified “safe” hotels, guest houses, gas stations, drug stores, bars, barber shops, and restaurants for Black motorists (Andrews, 2019). The film makes no mention of its creator, Victor Hugo Green—a Black postal worker— or the book’s larger purpose. Instead, in its brief appearances, the book is only ever seen in white hands, particularly Tony’s, whose job relies on using the book to safely maneuver in Jim Crow sundown towns where Dr. Shirley is traveling.

The significance of the Green Book in *Green Book* is subsumed by the more prominent narratives that empower white agency and white self-discovery. The idea that the Green Book features as a guide for White people is made clear in the expository dialogue about the book between Tony and his wife Dolores. Dolores reads the full title of the book out loud in a slow, deliberate way, and later asks Tony, incredulously, “They got a special book for that?” Tony makes subtle racist jokes about the book and demonstrates his lack of understanding of its deeper significance. The movie’s problematic treatment of the Green Book is that it never moves beyond this rudimentary talk of the book, and that audience members, like Dolores, never learn more about this important historical artifact. To say the least, the film fails to bring to light the significance of the Green Book, whose purpose was to prevent ridicule, physical attacks, and, in some cases, lynchings. The lack of exposure of the Green Book in the narrative undermines the black agency it took to create, publish, and distribute the book, fails to bring to light the massive number of black lives it saved while it was in use, and downplays white terrorism. It becomes easier, then, for modern (white) audiences to sweep the white on Black oppression and violence of the film’s civil rights’ era under the rug, and leave the theater with a smug satisfaction that they are not complicit in modern racist and white supremacist thinking and practices. Is it possible that this

history of white mainstream ambivalence toward anti-racist practices paved the way for the overt and socially acceptable racism that surfaced during the Trump presidency? Maintaining a white lens in narratives, historical or current, intrinsically downplays the white terrorism and supremacy inherent in American culture. The images of white cops kneeling at BLM marches that surfaced as a response to the shocking police brutality and aggression directly aimed at Black march participants is a comparable real-world example of “rewriting the narrative.” De-emphasizing white terrorism by shifting the focus onto the “good” white cops undermines the unrelenting work of Black activists, organizers, and march participants and the violence many of them were subjected to at the hands of police officers.

The trivialization of the Green Book in contrast with its prominence in the film’s title is an apt reflection of the irony of a film that, in general, claims to be about the experiences of a Black man when really it is about that of a white man. The film is literally, like its own treatment of the Green Book within itself, a text about Black people that has been turned into a tool for the edification and empowerment of the white people who use it. In a similar vein, social media platforms were rife with “performative activism” in the summer of 2020 sparked by the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. White celebrities, influencers, and brands reposted BLM content and shared tweets and memes, much of which had been created and cultivated by Black users. At a time when Black creators and voices should have been at the forefront of discussions on these social platforms, they were suddenly silenced in a sea of black squares, shared by white users who were trying desperately to assert their anti-racism by raising their own voices and sharing their own (white) experiences. “Performative activism is really about getting the so-called glory of activism without having to pay any price,” explains Melina Abdullah, the co-founder of Black Lives Matter Los Angeles (Beckman, 2020). This social media phenomenon and the film *Green Book* present the same question of whether Black stories can be ever authentically told by white writers and highlights the lack of agency and support Black writers have historically had in mainstream America.

A continued plea for #BlackLivesMatter

The #BlackLivesMatter movement, even after gaining new traction as a result of the 2020 murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, continues to be confronted with the question: Don’t ALL lives matter? From this question, it is assumed that people from differing racial identities have similar racialized experiences and that no one life should be valued more than another. While these are ideals we can aspire to, the reality is that we live in a world that undervalues the worth of Black people as well as all other People of Color. The writer of the film, Nick Vallelonga, has insisted in interviews that he was in touch with Dr. Shirley while he was still alive and that he made the writer promise to wait until after his death to write a screenplay and to refrain from contacting his family. However, Dr. Shirley’s family members have disputed

details of the film, including what they observed as false statements regarding his estrangement and embarrassment of the Black community. Friends and family members provided testimonies, stating that the real Dr. Shirley “had three living brothers with whom he was always in contact” and that he “was active in the civil rights movement, friends with Dr. King, present for the march in Selma, and close friends with Black musicians—from Nina Simone to Duke Ellington and Sarah Vaughn” (Obie, 2018). Despite their insights into Dr. Shirley’s life, family members expressed their frustration to numerous media sources that none of them were consulted or even contacted during the writing or production of the film (Obie, 2018). Indeed, Dr. Shirley’s brother characterizes *Green Book* as a “symphony of lies!” (Bruney, 2019).

Even in its eligibility for awards, Viggo Mortensen (Tony) was nominated for the “best lead actor” award while Mahershala Ali (Shirley) was nominated for the “best supporting actor” award, cementing Shirley’s status as secondary to Tony’s in the film’s narrative. And while Ali did take home the 2019 “Best Supporting Actor” Oscar for his depiction of Dr. Don Shirley, the image of five middle-aged white men triumphantly taking to the stage to claim their Oscar for the best picture was jarring.

As a reflection of our larger society, *Green Book* devalues Black lives, and subtly iterates Black Lives Don’t Matter. While *Green Book* held the potential to: 1) elaborate on the compelling life story and career of Dr. Don Shirley; 2) heighten societal awareness surrounding the historical racist treatment of black people through the legalization of racism through Jim Crow Laws and Sundown towns; 3) bring light to Black people’s agency to confront, navigate, and survive racism; and, 4) teach about *The Negro Motorist Green Book* as an historical artifact that exemplified Black agency, *Green Book* failed in each of these potential opportunities to critically educate masses of people. In so much as *Green Book* failed to teach important racial lessons and played into the same hand of politics that continuously misrepresent and underrepresent marginalized people in media, the narrative functions as a pedagogical device. As Kellner and Share (2019) argue, media serves as a cultural pedagogy in our society, whether we realize it or not. As such, *Green Book* not only communicates Black Lives Don’t Matter, but also advances the message that White Lives Matter More, thereby reinforcing the sociohistorical reality of white supremacy.

Notes

- 1 Many white people, especially in the American South, did not support desegregation efforts. In many cases, white people showed up to specific sites to violently oppose any effort to desegregate public facilities, including schools, lunch counters, busses, pools, restrooms, waiting rooms, motels, and restaurants.
- 2 Recent films that employ the white gaze to represent Black/white relations include *Crash*, *Twelve Years a Slave*, *The Blind Side*, and *Hidden Figures*. These films are told about Black people’s experiences from a white perspective and, as demonstrated in the mostly-white acclaim they received during award season, they are easier for the dominant culture to digest than contemporary black films like *Fruitvale Station*, *Beyond the Lights*, and the *Small Axe* series.

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