CINEJ CINEMA JOURNAL
ISSN 2159-2411 (PRINT) ISSN 2158-8724 (ONLINE)

The Representation of Racism in American Cinema: Critical Discourse Analysis of the Films *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out*

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Volume 14.1 (2026) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2026.886 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

Abstract

Cinema functions not merely as a medium that reflects social reality, but as a representational practice that reconstructs it within specific ideological frameworks. This study employs a critical discourse analysis to compare the films *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967) and *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017), with the aim of analysing the discursive forms of racism in American cinema. The analysis evaluates the transformation of racism from overt forms of discrimination to a discourse of liberal tolerance through narrative structure, character representations, and cinematic form. The findings reveal that in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, the acceptance of the Black subject is constructed through conformity to white norms, thereby reproducing the discourse of liberal whiteness; whereas *Get Out* subverts this form of acceptance, rendering more covert and controlling forms of racism visible. This study demonstrates that cinema is not merely a medium that reflects social ideologies; rather, it plays an active role in the circulation, reinforcement, and reinterpretation of these ideologies.

Keywords: Racism; Representation; American Cinema; Critical Discourse Analysis; Racial Othering

The Representation of Racism in American Cinema: Critical Discourse Analysis of the Films *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out*

Gülizar Öztürk Şahin

Introduction

Racism emerges as a system of thought that has persisted across various levels of the social structure throughout history and has positioned human communities hierarchically. As emphasised by Şenel (1993, p. 9), this approach rejects the ethical equality of human beings and subjects societies to evaluation within a hierarchy of values. However, the persistence of racism cannot be explained solely by claims of biological superiority; the ideological instrumentalisation of elements such as cultural difference, identity and belonging also plays a decisive role in the reproduction of this structure. Indeed, in today's world, racism manifests itself in more covert forms through language, representation and cultural production practices, rather than through overt and direct hate speech. This situation necessitates that racism be approached as a dynamic discourse that is constantly being reconstructed within social relations and media narratives.

At this point, the role of cultural production spheres in the production and circulation of social discourses becomes significant. Cinema stands out as one of the most visible and influential media within these spheres. Stuart Hall (1997) argues that representation is not

Volume 14.1 (2026) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2026.886 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

merely a reflection of reality. Instead, it is a process of reconstructing meaning within specific social and ideological contexts. In this framework, cinema functions as a practice of meaning-making. It shapes social reality through its visual narrative structure, character representations, mise-en-scène, and dialogue. Richard Dyer (1997) notes that racial representations in cinema often redefine the boundaries between 'normality' and 'otherness' in largely invisible ways. Consequently, cinema offers a powerful analytical field. It allows for examination of how racism is represented across ideological, cultural, and historical dimensions.

Building on this theoretical framework, the central problem of this research is how racism is represented on the social and ideological planes in American cinema. The study also examines what kinds of transformations these representational forms have undergone over time. To answer this question, the study selects two films with similar plots but from different historical periods. These films are chosen using a purposive sampling method.

Within this framework, this study adopts a comparative approach to the films *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967) and *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017). Whilst both films construct the theme of interracial relations through a similar narrative structure, they reflect distinct ideological atmospheres in line with their historical contexts and genre choices. The rationale for selecting these films is that they allow us to observe how the discourse of

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racism has been reshaped in cinema over a period of approximately half a century and make visible the transformation in the representation of African Americans. Whilst *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* addresses the issue of interracial marriage within the context of the 1960s civil rights movement, producing a liberal discourse of reconciliation; *Get Out* offers a more critical perspective, examining racism in 2010s America through the prism of liberal whiteness, everyday discourse and unconscious mechanisms of control. In this respect, the two films provide an important basis for comparison in analysing the evolution of the discourse on racism in American cinema from overt forms of discrimination towards more covert and indirect representations.

When examining studies in the literature that analyse the films *Get Out* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* together, the research by Powell (2022) and Matcke (2018) stands out. Powell (2022) evaluates the two films within a psychoanalytic framework, discussing how racism persists in implicit forms, particularly within white liberalism, and the psychological tensions experienced by the Black subject. Matcke (2018), on the other hand, focuses on the representation of African-American identity in cinema within the context of Hollywood history and the cultural industry. However, these studies are largely limited to the interpretation of identity, representation and ideological structures; they do not examine in detail how racism is

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constructed in the films at both the discursive and formal levels. This study, however, aims to reveal how racism is represented in cinema at both the discursive and formal levels, and what transformations it has undergone over time, by conducting a comparative analysis of both films using the method of critical discourse analysis.

Race and the Concept of Racism

Although historically defined as an indicator of biological differences, the concept of 'race' is now debated in terms of both its origins and underlying framework. Julien Huxley (1936, p. 9) points out that 'race', denoting 'ırk' in Western languages, may have Hebrew or Arabic roots, and was originally used for animal species of common lineage. This etymology shows the term's initial association with a naturalistic, hierarchical classification.

The concept of racism, however, has not been confined merely to the emphasis on biological differences throughout history; it has evolved into an ideological framework that legitimizes social, economic, and political inequalities. In the report published as part of UNESCO's (1969, pp. 20-51) Paris conference, racism is defined as "an antisocial belief and pattern of behaviour based on the illusion that discriminatory relations between groups can be explained by biological foundations"; and it is emphasised that this approach is rooted in a historical ideology aimed at justifying the practices of slavery and colonialism. Within this

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framework, the concept of 'race' is assessed as a tool that legitimizes political power relations by naturalizing the social order.

Castoriadis's definition of racism as "simply the idea of hating the other" (cited in Sumbas, 2009, pp. 265-266) suggests that this phenomenon is linked to a self-centered structure in which the individual can only construct their own identity by excluding the "other". In this respect, racism functions not merely as a distinction based on biological or cultural differences, but also as an ideological mechanism that defines the boundaries of identity. Consequently, racism transcends individual practices of hatred to become a form of power relationship that ensures the continuity of the social structure through othering discourses.

According to Balibar and Wallerstein (2007, p. 54), racism is not a singular or static phenomenon; in every historical period, it is reshaped by the social conditions of the time and the evolving dynamics of modernity. This approach makes it possible to conceptualize racism as a multi-layered phenomenon linked both to individual-level prejudices and to economic and ideological structures at the societal level.

The Historical Transformation of Racism

The concept of 'race' has played a central ideological role in defining social differences and legitimising political and social hierarchies in the modern era. In particular, the so-called

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scientific classifications developed in the post-Enlightenment era categorised human communities on the basis of biological characteristics, positioning some groups as 'superior' and others as 'inferior'; in this way, colonialism, slavery and structural inequalities were sought to be grounded on a rational basis (Boas, 1940; Banton, 2001). In this process, racism has functioned not merely as a prejudicial attitude, but as a structural mechanism organising political, economic and cultural relations of domination. As Fontette (1991, p. 11) emphasises, the understanding within modern Western thought that biological differences determine social destiny has long shaped institutional and cultural practices.

However, from the mid-twentieth century onward, the rise of critical approaches, particularly in anthropology and the social sciences, seriously undermined the scientific validity of biological determinism. The recognition that racial differences cannot be explained through hereditary superiority or inferiority (Fenton, 2001, p. 111) significantly weakened the legitimacy of classical biological racism. Nevertheless, the decline of biologically based racism did not signal the end of domination; rather, racism reconstituted itself through new discursive and ideological forms centered on cultural difference, national identity, migration, religion, and lifestyle. In this transformed context, the "other" came to be defined less by biological distinction than by communities perceived as threats to cultural norms, national identity, or dominant social values (Sumbas, 2009, p. 267).

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Pierre-André Taguieff's (1999) conceptualisation of 'differential racism' provides an important framework for explaining this transformation. According to Taguieff, contemporary racism operates not so much through claims of biological superiority as through the incompatibility of cultures and the discourse of "preserving cultural purity" (pp. 209–210). In this approach, exclusion represents certain communities as a cultural threat, an integration problem or a risk to national unity, rather than targeting skin colour directly. Similarly, Balibar's (2007) concept of "racism without race" reveals that discrimination in modern societies persists through the naturalisation of cultural identities, moving away from explicit biological references (pp. 32–34). According to Balibar, new racism often operates through seemingly legitimate discourses such as "the preservation of differences," "social harmony," or "the defence of national values"; this transforms it into a more covert yet more flexible hegemonic mechanism.

Frantz Fanon's analyses, however, bring the psychological and cultural dimensions of this structure into even sharper relief. Fanon notes that modern racism no longer operates merely as an overt system of oppression targeting the body, but as a structural mechanism that determines the individual's cultural existence, processes of subjectification, and social position (Fanon, cited in Miles, 2000, p. 90). In this context, contemporary racism is reproduced not so

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much through overt hostility or discriminatory legal practices, but rather within mechanisms of liberal tolerance, symbolic inclusion and controlled acceptance. In particular, 'post-racial' or 'colour-blind' discourses can render structural power relations invisible whilst producing a promise of equality; thus, racial domination can be perpetuated in more sophisticated forms.

This historical transformation provides a critical theoretical framework for the study of Black representations in American cinema. This is because cinema is a cultural sphere in which social ideologies are not merely reflected but also reproduced. The structure of racism, which has evolved from biological exclusion to cultural and liberal codes, can be clearly traced in cinematic representation strategies. In this regard, the transformation from overtly discriminatory forms of representation in classical-era narratives to liberal integration and relationships that appear inclusive yet are in fact controlling becomes decisive in understanding the positioning of Black characters in American cinema.

The Representation of Black People in American Cinema

Hollywood has functioned as one of the most influential ideological apparatuses through which racial hierarchies within American society are reproduced on a cultural level. For many years, mainstream narrative cinema has positioned the white subject as the normative centre, whilst constructing Black characters outside this centre, largely as functional figures reinforcing

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the moral, emotional or social superiority of white identity. Within this regime of representation, the Black body has often been defined not by its own subjectivity but in accordance with the needs of the white narrative, reduced to a secondary position serving the development of the white hero (Küngeri and Uluç, 2017, p.232).

From the early days of cinema, Black characters have either been directly excluded or, when depicted, have been cast in roles that reinforce the ideology of white supremacy. In particular, the tradition of blackface has constructed Blackness not as a genuine social subject, but as an object of entertainment for the white audience; Black identity has been represented through caricatured gestures and comic excesses (Pines, 2008, p.564). In this context, D.W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) holds significance as one of the foundational texts of racial representation in American cinema. The film frames Black emancipation as social chaos and a threat to white civilisation, whilst legitimising the Ku Klux Klan as the guardian of order; thus, the technical innovations of cinema were placed at the service of an overtly white supremacist ideology (Balcı, 2006, p.152; Ilgaz, 2012, pp.25-26). This demonstrates that, from its earliest days, Hollywood has framed the issue of race not as a neutral social reality, but within the context of safeguarding the white national imagination.

In the 1930s and 1940s, this overtly exclusionary portrayal persisted, albeit in a different

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form, within more paternalistic frameworks. In productions such as *Gone With the Wind* (1939), Black characters were portrayed as 'loyal servants' who remained steadfastly loyal to the white family structure and did not question historical inequality (Ilgaz, 2012, pp. 34-35). Unlike the rhetoric of direct threat, this representational strategy positioned Black presence within the white social order as acceptable yet hierarchically subordinate. In the years that followed, the shift of Black characters from domestic service to entertainment did not fundamentally alter this structural logic; whilst visibility increased in musical and performative spheres, this visibility was largely shaped according to the needs of the white audience (cited from Bogle by Ilgaz, 2012, pp. 35-41). Thus, Black representation has evolved from reductive, caricatured stereotypes into an object of cultural consumption; however, autonomous subjectification remains limited.

In the 1950s, and particularly with the Civil Rights Movement, this structure underwent a significant transformation. Under the influence of social struggles, Hollywood began to portray Black characters as more respectable, educated and successful individuals. The most visible figure of this transformation is Sidney Poitier. Whilst Poitier's star persona represents a clear break from the caricatured Black images of earlier periods, this break is not entirely liberating. In most films, Poitier is constructed as a Black man who minimises the white community's perception of threat; he is well-educated, controlled, morally flawless, and

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integrable into the system (cited from Bogle by Ilgaz, 2012, p.42). Whilst this mode of representation increased Black visibility, it defined the conditions of acceptability through conformity to white liberal norms. For this reason, the Poitier era can be regarded as the cinematic expression of the transition from overt exclusion to liberal integration. Set precisely at this historical juncture, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) discusses the crisis of interracial relations on a seemingly progressive ground, whilst simultaneously revealing the liberal limits that tie the acceptance of the Black subject to an exceptionally 'flawless' profile.

The 1960s marked a critical historical turning point during which the African American civil rights movement directly transformed American public life through boycotts, acts of civil disobedience and increasingly intense political conflicts. This social rupture also significantly altered the structure of Black representation in cinema; issues such as poverty, interracial relations and structural discrimination became more visible (Ilgaz, 2012, p.43). However, this visibility has often been shaped within the limits acceptable to white liberalism, rather than producing a fully emancipatory representation. Consequently, this period points to a regime of representation that, whilst Black characters have gained a greater presence on screen, also prompts us to question the ideological conditions under which this visibility is made possible. Films such as *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* are significant examples in this context, as they

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ostensibly support the discourse of racial progress whilst revealing that acceptance is, in most cases, conditional upon conformity to white norms.

During the same period, independent and alternative cinema opened up a more critical space in opposition to the controlled inclusivity of the mainstream. Films such as *Shadows* (1959), *One Potato Two Potatoes* (1964) and *Nothing But a Man* (1964) took the Black experience beyond the realm of individual tolerance, addressing it within the context of social inequality and everyday discrimination. This approach revealed that the representation of Black people is not merely a question of visibility, but also one of narrative framework and the regime of gaze. Thus, the 1960s marked a period in American cinema when Blackness began to shift away from white-centred representation and transform into a more political arena of struggle.

In the 1970s, however, influenced by Black liberation struggles, the mode of representation underwent a more radical and contradictory shift. Blaxploitation cinema, by placing Black characters at the centre, produced stronger, more aggressive and autonomous figures in contrast to previous passive stereotypes (Ilgaz, 2012, pp. 47-48). However, this transformation was quickly commodified by the market; Black resistance was often repackaged within the frameworks of ghetto aesthetics, crime and hyper-masculinity (Pines, 2008, pp. 571-574). Thus, whilst a rupture occurred in the realm of representation, Hollywood's commercial

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structure has continued to reduce Black identity to different forms.

Since the 1980s, mainstream cinema has developed new forms of Black representation that appear more inclusive but are often depoliticised. Whilst Black characters have gained visibility in commercial productions aimed at a wider audience, these films have often pushed structural racism into the background, shifting the issue of representation onto the plane of individual success or comedy (Ilgaz, 2012, p.54). In contrast, independent Black cinema, strengthened by directors such as Spike Lee, has created a significant breakthrough in terms of enabling the Black experience to be narrated from its own perspective by transforming control over the tools of representation.

Although Hollywood appeared to have moved away from overtly racist rhetoric in the 1990s and 2000s, it produced more subtle ideological constructs through new narrative tropes such as the 'magical Black person' and the 'white saviour' (Hughey, 2012). In these films, Black characters often function as instruments of white moral transformation or as catalysts for conscience; thus, racial inequality is stripped of its status as a structural issue and reduced to an individual ethical framework. Whilst the increased visibility of themes such as slavery, historical trauma and racial injustice in cinema during the Obama era represents a significant development, these productions have frequently focused on the overt violence of the past,

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relegating the more subtle forms of contemporary liberal racism to the background.

Consequently, the historical trajectory of Black representation in American cinema is not merely a matter of increased visibility; this process should be viewed as a field of ideological transformation, spanning from overtly exclusionary stereotypes to discourses of liberal inclusivity and new forms of representation that operate through more subtle cultural codes. Although regimes of representation have changed over time, the question of how Black characters are situated within a particular social, political and cultural framework has remained a fundamental determinant of the issue of race in American cinema. This historical and theoretical background provides an important foundation for evaluating the distinct representational logics of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out* within this transformation.

Methodology

This study employs a critical discourse analysis approach to examine the discursive and formal strategies through which racism is produced in cinematic narratives and to unpack the ideological underpinnings of this production. Critical discourse analysis treats discourse not merely as a linguistic structure, but as a practice operating within social relations, ideological processes, and power dynamics (Van Dijk, 2003).

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In this vein, the study examines the films *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) and *Get Out* (2017) in a comparative analysis, evaluating discursive patterns in conjunction with the social contexts in which they were produced. Proceeding from the premise that othering is established not only at the level of content but also through various narrative components such as dialogue, visual arrangements, the manner in which characters are presented, and language use (Beyazyüz, 2021, p.507), the analysis has been expanded to encompass both discursive and cinematic formal elements.

The analysis has been structured according to Norman Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model within the framework of critical discourse analysis. This approach aims to reveal the interaction between language and the relationships between ideology and power by examining discourse simultaneously at the levels of textual structure, discursive practice, and social context. The categories of analysis have been designed such that these levels are not separated from one another, but are addressed simultaneously within each category. Within this framework, each category has been analyzed to reveal the relationships among textual indicators (dialogue, framing, visual editing, etc.), discursive production processes (narrative structure, genre, etc.), and social context (ideological structure, historical conditions, etc.).

The selection of these two films as case studies was determined by the innovations they

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introduced within their respective eras and their contributions to cinematic representation. Both films follow a similar plot structure, beginning with a white woman introducing her Black partner to her family; this encounter establishes a narrative framework in which racial tensions surface through family relationships and everyday interactions. This shared narrative structure allows for a comparative examination of the narrative strategies within their respective historical contexts and of how they address the theme of racism.

Within this framework, the identified themes of "Liberal Whiteness and the Discourse of Tolerance", "Power, Body and Discourse", "Racial Representation and the Black Subject", "Allegorical Objects and Spatial Symbols" and "Historical Transformation and the Continuity of Racism", have been established to elucidate the discourse of racism in the films across its various dimensions. These categories, whilst focusing on the cinematic representation of the Black subject and the visual-discursive construction of this representation, also enable an analysis of how liberal discursive forms, power relations and historical continuities are reproduced.

Comparative Critical Discourse Analysis: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) and *Get Out*

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(2017)

Directed by Stanley Kramer, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* is regarded as one of the key examples of African-American representation in cinema. By bringing to the fore a social issue long overlooked in American history, the film places the themes of racial discrimination and interracial marriage at its center, set against the backdrop of the racial tensions, prejudices, and social conflict of the 1960s. In this respect, it stands out as a historically significant production that reflects the era's ideological and social atmosphere.

Directed by Jordan Peele, *Get Out* explores racism through the horror and thriller genres. Given that this theme has predominantly been explored in cinema history through drama, biography, or historical narratives, the film's genre choice presents a distinct departure. Rather than relying entirely on the established conventions of horror cinema, *Get Out* transforms the genre's narrative possibilities to construct a more flexible structure, thereby drawing attention as an example that addresses racism on a different narrative plane.

1. Liberal Whiteness and the Discourse of Tolerance

The scenes in Gu*ess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out* where the Black male character first finds himself in the same space as white family members allow for a comparative analysis of how the discourse of whiteness is constructed. In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*,

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the symmetrical seating arrangement around the table and mid-shot framing create a balanced and open space for communication between the characters (Image 1). This arrangement reinforces the impression that tension can be resolved through rational dialogue.

In *Get Out,* however, a similar encounter is constructed in a more fragile structure through spatial and framing choices (Image 2). Chris is slightly shifted to the left of the frame's centre and becomes the focal point of the gaze. This creates a position of being observed and judged rather than one of equal interaction. Although the dialogue appears positive on the surface, the arrangement of bodies and gazes creates a tension within the scene. In the first encounter with the Armitage family, the fact that Chris is frequently positioned off-centre within the frame and surrounded by white characters transforms the seemingly hospitable setting into a visual space of confinement. This framing strategy reveals, at an early stage, the logic of surveillance operating beneath the surface of liberal inclusivity.

Figure 1. Symmetrical framing and

Figure 2. Chris's displacement from

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*balanced relational order in the family introduction scene (*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, 1967).*

*the center as an observed subject in the family introduction scene (*Get Out*, 2017).*

Both films highlight the contradictory relationship that 'liberal white' characters have with racism. In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, although the Draytons describe themselves as tolerant and progressive individuals, the limits of this rhetoric are exposed when faced with their daughter's decision to marry a black man. This situation demonstrates that, whilst the white middle class in 1960s America accepted racial equality at a rhetorical level, this acceptance was conditional. The fact that John's character is presented with an excessively "flawless" profile reveals that acceptance is reduced to individual qualities, thereby rendering structural inequality invisible.

In the film *Get Out*, however, liberal whiteness is portrayed in a more subtle and implicit manner. The Armitage family and their circle's remarks to Chris -such as "I'd vote for Obama a third time", "your skin colour is so beautiful", or "experiencing another culture is a privilege"- can be explained by Étienne Balibar's (2007) concept of the "naturalisation of cultural identities". According to Balibar, contemporary racism constructs cultural differences as fixed, unchanging and essential qualities, rather than relying on claims of biological superiority. In

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the film, Chris's body and identity are reduced not to an individual subject but to an aesthetic and cultural category defined through 'blackness'. In particular, the comments made by white guests at the garden party regarding Chris's physical features, physical strength and 'style' make this process of naturalisation explicitly visible. What is significant here is that these remarks do not contain overt hostility; on the contrary, they appear in the guise of compliments, curiosity and admiration. However, this positive language is directed not towards recognising Chris as a person, but towards fixing him as a bearer of racial characteristics. Consequently, the dialogues established in the scene serve to produce racial categories rather than foster individual connection.

This discourse is also linked to Pierre-André Taguieff's (2001) concept of 'cultural purity'. According to Taguieff, modern racism, rather than eliminating differences, constructs them as separate and closed spheres that must be protected. The film's constant positioning of Chris as a "different" cultural subject, and the fact that this difference is both celebrated and restricted, reflects this approach. The Armitage family's apparent acceptance of Chris reveals that it occurs not on the basis of equality, but within a framework in which difference is kept under control. The staging of the garden party scene, in particular, visually reinforces this framework: Chris is often seen surrounded by white characters; this visual encirclement suggests that the supposed acceptance actually creates a space of control (Image 3). This

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economy of the gaze at the garden party reduces Chris from an individual to mere physical capital to be valued. The silent auction sequence, meanwhile, functions as a contemporary, sterile and liberalised reimagining of the classic slave market.

Figure 3. The scene in which Chris is presented within a visual siege, surrounded by white characters Get Out, 2017).

In this context, whilst the micro-discourses in the film (compliments, cultural references, the emphasis on Obama) may appear inclusive on the surface, they strip Chris of his individuality and reduce him to a representation of a specific racial identity. Thus, *Get Out* reveals that racism now operates not through overt exclusion, but through a discourse that aestheticises and fixes difference; whilst liberal tolerance can become a tool that renders this process invisible. In this respect, the film demonstrates that tolerance does not always equate to equality; in certain circumstances, it can function as a more refined and more acceptable form of domination.

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2. Power, the Body and Discours

The issue of race is represented in both films through body politics. In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, the contact between the black male body and the white woman is constructed as a cinematic boundary. The scene in which John and Joey kiss is shown only as a reflection in a mirror (Image 4). This visual choice implies that the Black body cannot be fully visible within the white space, and that physical contact can only be represented indirectly. In this respect, the film employs a form of 'visual censorship' to mitigate the discomfort of the white audience. Consequently, in the film, the body becomes not merely an element of the narrative, but an ideological threshold determining which forms of contact can be visible and to what extent. The fact that the relationship between the Black male body and desire is presented not directly but in a reflected and indirect manner demonstrates that the film keeps racial tension under control at a formal level as well. This choice establishes a certain distance between the viewer and the scene by preventing the bodies from being centralized within the frame, thereby bringing the visual representation of the relationship to a controlled level. Considering the social and cultural context of the 1960s, this indirect narrative form can be interpreted as a cinematic strategy that avoids depicting Black-White relations through explicit physical contact. In contrast, in the film *Get Out,* a relationship of the same nature is initially made visible through direct and physical intimacy, using close-ups and physical contact (Image 5). However, as the

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film progresses, this visual intimacy is disrupted, particularly through the gaze and behaviour of the character Rose, the relationship shifts from a reassuring bond to an unsettling dynamic. Thus, the black-white intimacy, which is represented indirectly and distantly in the first film, is first made visible in the second film, and then unravelled visually and narratively to reveal the underlying relationship of control and manipulation.

Figure 4. The scene in which John and Joey's kiss is presented indirectly through mirror reflection (Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, 1967).

Figure 5. The scene in which Chris and Rose's relationship is rendered visible through close-up shots and physical intimacy (Get Out, 2017).

In the film *Get Out*, the Black body is entirely an object of power. The Armitage family literally "takes possession" of Black bodies, colonizing them through brain transplants. In the scene where Chris is hypnotized, the pushing of his consciousness into the "sunken place"

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symbolizes the suppression of the Black individual's will and the takeover of their body by white consciousness. This illustrates how racism operates on the bodily and biopolitical planes. The Armitages' discourse aligns with Foucault's (2006, p. 51) thesis that "power operates in the body": a discourse that ostensibly embodies love and curiosity is, in reality, a modern form of racial domination.

In this context, while *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* positions the Black body within a limited, controlled visibility*, Get Out* radicalizes this visibility, opening up a representational space in which the body is constituted through direct relations of intervention and control. In both films, the Black body is organized in different ways within its relationship to white power structures; in the former, this organization operates through moral approval and conformity, while in the latter, it materializes in forms of bodily appropriation and intervention. In the film *Get Out*, the Black body is entirely an object of power. The Armitage family literally "takes possession" of Black bodies, colonizing them through brain transplants. In the scene where Chris is hypnotized, the pushing of his consciousness into the "sunken place" symbolizes the suppression of the Black individual's will and the takeover of their body by white consciousness. This situation, this power dynamic is more concretely observed through the film's servant characters. In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner,* the Black servant is confined to a position largely limited to the kitchen and service areas and is kept in the background of the

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frame; this positions her as a figure who contributes to the functioning of the domestic order but remains non-subjectified. Rather than bringing this character to the center, the camera positions her as an element that supports the continuity of white family life. The Drayton family's Black housekeeper, Tillie, emerges as a representative figure of internalized racism. The character of Tillie reflects an understanding that social hierarchies are natural and unchangeable, embodying a mindset that insists individuals must "know their place." In this context, the discomfort stemming from the Black subject's transcendence of his social position becomes clearly evident in the character's speech. Indeed, Tillie's reaction during John's first visit to Joey's home is embodied in the statement, "I didn't like it one bit that someone of my race overstepped their bounds"; thus, the character not only offers a personal reaction but also represents a discourse that contributes to the reproduction of internalized racial boundaries (Image 6).

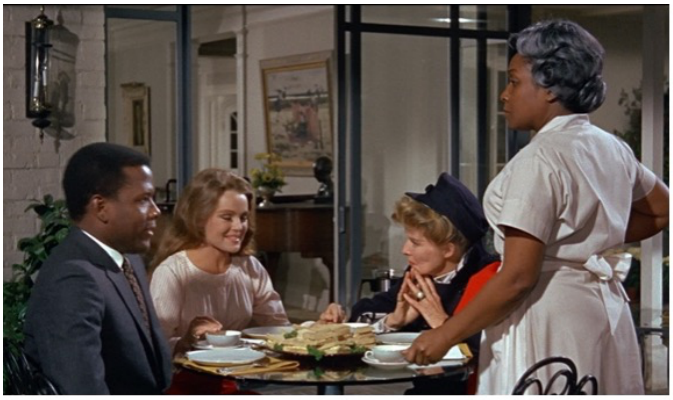

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Figure 6. The scene in which Tillie reproduces internalized racial boundaries through her reaction to John's arrival (Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, 1967).

In *Get Out,* whilst a similar position of service is maintained, this representation is distinctly distorted and becomes unsettling. The servants draw attention with their mechanical behaviour, which gives the impression that they are being kept under control (Image 7). Georgina and Walter's costume design and body choreography create an updated visual echo of post-slavery service relationships within a contemporary suburban setting. The film positions these characters not merely as unsettling supporting figures, but as a cinematic manifestation of the Black body-seemingly free, yet colonised on a subjective level. In particular, the contradiction between the blankness of Georgina's facial expression and the tears welling up in her eyes in the scene where she looks in the mirror creates a sense of control established through the acting. In the scene where she speaks to Chris, her cutting herself off by saying "No, no, no…" reveals the disconnect between body and consciousness. In these scenes, the camera frames Georgina in close-up, suggesting she is ' at the centre'; however, this centrality signifies not subjectivity but being kept under control (Image 8). In the scene where Walter, another household worker, goes for a nighttime run, the body's mechanical, aimless movement conveys

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the sense that the Black body is no longer guided by its own will but by an external force. Similarly, the moment Walter suddenly turns towards Chris and shouts, “Get out!” marks a breaking point at which the repressed consciousness briefly surfaces. Through the figures of domestic workers, the film produces contemporary visual codes of bodily domination that have taken on new forms in the post-slavery era.

Figure 7. One of the scenes in which Georgina

*Figure 8. The close-up scene in which Georgina’s inner conflict becomes visible (*Get Out*, 2017).*

When considered together, these scenes reveal a significant transformation in the figure of the servant across the two films: in the first film (Guess Who’s), the Black body is an invisible and compliant figure of labour; in the second film (Get Out), it becomes a being that is controlled, suppressed, fragmented, and at times attempts to briefly break free from this control.

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Thus, the position of the Black body within the white space is reconfigured within a representational framework that evolves from passive service to being subjected to active surveillance.

3. Racial Representation and the Black Subject

Whilst both films make visible the position of the Black subject within the white world, they construct this representation in different ways. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* by centring on interracial marriage, presents the Black character as a 'civilised', 'cultured' and 'assimilated into white values' figure. The character of John Prentice is, by the era's social standards, almost a flawless Black prototype: a doctor, educated, refined, well-mannered, and politically measured. Whilst this form of representation appears to take a stance against racism, it renders the Black subject 'acceptable' only to the extent that they can align with white norms. Consequently, the film codes the Black character not as a free subject, but as an exception who has adapted to the values of white society. This coding is not limited to characterisation alone; the fact that John is presented in most scenes with calm, controlled and measured body language, and is shown by the camera within balanced and orderly frames, further reinforces this sense of "conformity" (Images 9-10).

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*Figure 9. One of the scenes in which John Prentice is balancedly framed (*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, 1967).*

Figure 10. One of the scenes in which John Prentice and Joey are harmoniously framed (Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, 1967).

In contrast, *Get Out* presents an allegory of a world in which the Black subject is ostensibly accepted but is, in reality, exploited. The character of Chris is surrounded by a discourse of tolerance within a liberal white environment. Whilst the Armitage family appears to praise the Black body, they objectify it; the physical superiority, strength and attractiveness of Black people are transformed into biological resources that white people desire to possess. Thus, the film exposes the form of the Black subject that appears to be liberated but is, in reality, still objectified. In this respect, Peele's narrative represents the invisible captivity of the Black subject in the 21st century; Kramer's film, meanwhile, reproduces the white-centred assimilation ideology of the 1960s.

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Chris's position as the subject is frequently rendered vulnerable throughout the film; in particular, close-ups of his face (Image 11), shots that convey the weight of the white gazes surrounding him, and the image of his fall in the 'Sunken Place' scene (Image 12) demonstrate that he is besieged not only socially, but also perceptually and psychologically. Thus, the Black subject is positioned here not merely as the one being represented, but as one who is compressed within the very act of representation. In the 'Sunken Place' sequence, the vertical void, the receding body and the muffled sound design symbolise the stripping away of the Black subject's position as agent whilst their physical presence is preserved. The scene embodies the relationship between cultural appropriation and subjective erasure on an audiovisual level.

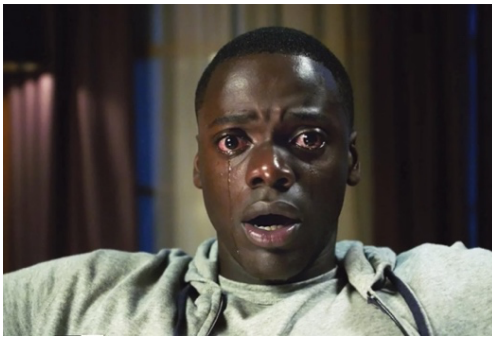

Figure 11. One of the close-up frames emphasizing Chris's emotional intensity (Get Out, 2017).

Figure 12. The falling image in the "Sunken Place" scene, representing Chris's loss of control (Get Out, 2017).

Both films also highlight the transformation of cinematic representation. Whilst *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* follows a representational policy that accepts the Black subject within

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the confines of white norms, *Get Out* breaks this framework of representation. In line with Hall's (1997) concept of 're-presentation', Peele positions the Black character not as a passive element, but as the subject who constructs the gaze. The 'photograph' metaphor at the film's conclusion -where Chris, by virtue of his profession, becomes the producer of the gaze- signifies this transformation. The Black subject is no longer merely the observed; they become a figure who sees, produces meaning, and returns the colonial gaze. At this point, Chris's camera signifies not merely a professional tool but also the reclaiming of the gaze (Image 13). In particular, the way the flash functions as a tool that briefly awakens a consciousness suppressed under white domination (Image 14) suggests that seeing and showing acquire a political function within the film.

Figure 13. The scene in which Chris directs his camera toward the Black guest at the party (Get Out, 2017).

Figure 14. The scene in which the Black guest's suppressed self briefly reappears through the camera flash (Get Out, 2017).

4. Allegorical Objects and Spatial Symbols

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The film *Get Out* is rich in symbolism, particularly in terms of allegorical objects and spatial metaphors. One of the most striking objects is the teacup and silver spoon used by Missy to hypnotize Chris (Image 15). These objects evoke a historical resonance by recalling the tradition of slave owners tapping a spoon against a cup to summon their slaves. This modernized version of the ritual serves as an allegory for the racism of liberal America, which cannot come to terms with its past. At the same time, the silver spoon symbolizes 'privileged birth'; it reproduces the racial and class superiority of the white elite. The object's ordinariness is particularly significant here; an everyday household item becomes an instrument of domination. Thus, the film implies that contemporary racism operates not only through overt violence but also through the ordinary objects and rituals of daily life. In the hypnosis scene, the rhythmic tapping of the teaspoon against the cup demonstrates that power is established not only through words but also through sound. The rhythmic tapping of a teaspoon against a cup during a hypnosis session demonstrates that power is also established through sound. This repetitive sound becomes an auditory command that imposes discipline on Chris's body. Similarly, in the scene where Chris is strapped to the chair, the narrowing of the frame and the restriction of his movement convey his physical captivity not only narratively but also visually.

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Figure 15. The scene in which Missy hypnotizes Chris through the use of a teacup and spoon (Get Out, 2017).

In the scene where Chris escapes, the cotton he scrapes from the seat with his fingernails serves as another powerful metaphor (Image 16). Cotton is a historical product synonymous with slave labour in America. Chris's use of this cotton to secure his freedom is a symbolic act that subverts the history of slavery. Here, cotton is not merely a historical reference but the material instrument of the film's dramatic resolution; thus, the traumatic symbol of the past is transformed into an instrument of escape and resistance. The cotton sequence is one of the film's most intense political rewritings, in that it transforms a symbol of historical exploitation into a vehicle for subjectification.

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Figure 16. The scene in which Chris uses the cotton taken from the chair to regain his freedom (Get Out, 2017).

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, however, is more minimalist on a symbolic level. The film's primary 'spatial allegory' is the dining table in the house. The dinner scene serves both as a cultural ritual of civilization and as a microcosm in which racial boundaries are debated. The Draytons' living room is the interior space of white liberalism; the black guest entering this space must prove, through their behavior, that they are a 'suitable' part of it. Consequently, the space operates as an ideological arena as much as a physical one. Furthermore, the house's orderly, airy and aesthetically reassuring structure helps this ideological space present itself as 'natural' and unquestionable. Thus, the space becomes not merely the setting for events, but a silent producer of norms that determines which bodies are accepted and under what conditions.

5. Historical Transformation and the Persistence of Racism

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner was filmed during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, when debates over interracial marriage were ongoing. During this period, the film conveyed a message of hope and rconciliation to society. However, this hope aims not to address the real issues faced by Black people but to soothe the white audience's conscience. The liberal optimism of 1967 treats racism not as a systematic power relationship, but at the level of

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personal prejudice. Consequently, the film relies more on the idea of individual moral transformation than on making structural racism visible. The impression that the problem can be resolved through family discussions and moral awareness reinforces the liberal discourse of reconciliation prevalent at the time.

In contrast, *Get Out* demonstrates that racism persists in 21st-century America, albeit in a different form. Following the Barack Obama era, an illusion of a 'post-racial' society had taken hold; however, police violence, discrimination and economic inequalities have debunked this claim. The film exposes this illusion through the mask of liberal whites. Characters who appear outwardly tolerant, intellectual and progressive represent the deepest forms of exploitation. Through the atmosphere he creates in the film, Peele draws attention to the structural racism of contemporary American society.

The use of the horror genre is pivotal in *Get Out*; the film makes racism feel like a constant threat that has seeped into everyday life. Even the brief tension created by the appearance of police lights in the finale serves as a reminder that the danger to the Black body stems not only from the characters within the mansion but from a broader social structure.

Consequently, the two films represent the historical evolution and discursive transformation of racism along the same axis but in different ways. Whilst Kramer's film

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constructs a liberal fantasy of a solution that idealizes interracial reconciliation, Peele's film exposes the neoliberal reality in which this fantasy collapses. Therefore, when viewed together, the two films reveal that racism has evolved from overt forms of exclusion towards more covert, refined and everyday modes of operation; yet the persistence of the unequal relationship faced by the Black subject at the levels of the body, space and representation remains intact.

When comparing the endings of the two films, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* concludes with a finale in which the marriage of two people of different races is approved, thus ending on an optimistic note regarding race relations within the context of the 1960s. With this film, Kramer addressed a cultural taboo in America and an important social issue, yet presented a perspective that did not delve into the heart of the matter. In *Get Out,* however, a highly confrontational and violent conclusion is presented, showcasing a more pessimistic perspective on racism. The film emphasizes that racism continues to persist in the 21st century, having merely changed form, and positions liberalism as a new front in the battle against racism.

Conclusion

Racism gains visibility in cinema as a discursive field reconstituted across different forms of representation across various historical periods. In particular, black-and-white representations in American cinema offer significant insights into how race is interpreted. In

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this context, cinema should be regarded not merely as a medium that directly reflects social reality, but rather as a representational practice that produces meaning within specific ideological frameworks and circulates these meanings. In this regard, racial representations in cinema do not merely reflect the political atmosphere of the time; they also function as a process of meaning-making that contributes to the reproduction of that atmosphere.

This study provides a comparative analysis of the films *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out,* which were produced in different eras but address the same theme (racial tension arising from a white woman introducing her Black partner to her family). The two films were examined within the framework of critical discourse analysis; dialogue, narrative structure and cinematic form were evaluated collectively. In this context, the study reveals how racial representations in the analyzed films are constructed not only at the verbal level but also through framing, spatial arrangement and audiovisual choices. Thus, the study aims to demonstrate how the same theme is reproduced in different eras and how these representations are shaped within the language of film.

The findings indicate that there is not merely a historical distance between the two films, but a marked restructuring in their representational strategies. In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, the acceptance of the Black subject becomes possible only under certain conditions; at

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the heart of this acceptance lies the necessity for the subject to conform to white norms. The portrayal of the character John Prentice as excessively restrained, conflict-free and under control demonstrates that acceptability is defined through individual characteristics. This suggests that equality is established not as an unconditional right, but as a limited privilege recognized only to the extent that certain norms are adhered to. Consequently, racial equality is presented not as a structural issue but as a problem that can be resolved through individual conformity. In this context, the narrative of reconciliation established in the film serves to soften the white characters' confrontation with their own positions, rather than focusing on the Black subject's experience.

In contrast, *Get Out* renders visible a similar mechanism of acceptance by turning it on its head. In the film, the Black subject is not excluded; on the contrary, they are incorporated into the system. However, rather than strengthening the subject's autonomy, this state of incorporation paves the way for their physical and mental subjugation. The hypnosis scene, the auction sequence, and the behavioral patterns of the servant characters reveal that acceptance functions not as liberation but as a reconfigured form of control. In this context, the interest and admiration directed by the white characters towards the Black characters can be interpreted not as a form of egalitarian relationship, but rather as a more covert and contemporary form of domination.

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The fundamental difference between the two films lies in the way racism is made visible. Whilst racial tension is kept to a limited, controlled level in the first film, in the second film it is placed at the center of the narrative and brought to the fore rather than suppressed. However, this difference should be understood not as a linear progression, but as a transformation in representational strategy. *Get Out* does not suggest that racism has disappeared; rather, it demonstrates that it has transformed into a more complex and implicit structure. In this context, the approximately fifty-year gap between the two films points not to a rupture in racial representations, but to the continuity of representational patterns in which the Black subject is either assimilated and accepted or controlled in various ways within the system.

Cinematographic style also plays a decisive role in this transformation. In the film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner,* the spatial arrangement, use of a fixed camera and controlled framing support a sense of reconciliation and balance; whereas in *Get Out,* close-ups, a dark atmosphere, sudden shifts in sound and narrowing frames create a constant sense of unease in the viewer. These formal choices are also narrative tools that determine how racial relations are interpreted. In this context, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* presents the issue of race- through the conciliatory structure of its dramatic narrative -as a problem that can be resolved primarily through dialogue and rational persuasion; whereas *Get Out,* through the tension-generating

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structure of the horror genre, renders the same issue as a more unsettling, repressed and structural problem.

The findings from the comparative analysis show that the transformation of racial representation in American cinema cannot be explained by a simple increase in visibility or a narrative of linear progress. The films examined reveal that racism has evolved from overt, biologically grounded and directly exclusionary forms to more covert structures where cultural differences are presented as if they are accepted, yet this acceptance operates within frameworks of control, appropriation and restructured relations of domination. Within this framework, racial discourse in contemporary cinema must be assessed not only through explicit practices of othering, but also within the context of power mechanisms that can be reproduced through liberal inclusivity, tolerance, representation policies and discourses of diversity. Consequently, the historical distance between *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Get Out* does not signify the disappearance of racism; rather, it reveals the ideological continuity of racism as it adapts to changing social and cultural conditions.

In this context, whilst *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* constructs the acceptance of the Black subject through a model of integration characterised by conformity to white liberal norms, moderation and the absence of threat, *Get Out* exposes the new mechanisms of

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exploitation, control and cultural domination that can operate beneath this seemingly progressive and inclusive form of acceptance. Thus, whilst the first film represents the limits of liberal integration discourse, the second renders visible the possessive and controlling structures underlying post-racial discourse. This contrast is significant not only for understanding the transformation of Black representation in American cinema, from overt exclusion to strategies of cultural inclusion, but also for demonstrating that discourses of acceptance and inclusion do not always produce egalitarian outcomes.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that cinema is not merely a medium that passively reflects ideology, but rather a powerful sphere of cultural production capable of reconstructing it at narrative, visual and discursive levels. Consequently, the use of critical discourse analysis in conjunction with cinematic formal elements offers an important methodological framework for unravelling the racial, cultural and political power relations reproduced beneath seemingly inclusive narratives. Such an approach provides an expandable theoretical foundation that can be applied not only to the two films examined in this study but also to the analysis of representational forms constructed around the axes of identity, belonging and otherness in different genres such as horror, melodrama, romantic drama or science fiction.

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