

Films on Race and Sexuality/Gender

Presented by Rita and Bill Hadden

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8-week Outline (key film excerpts shown in class)

- 1. The Wedding Banquet (1993)
- 2. Gran Torino (2008)
- 3. The Crying Game (1992)
- 4. The Hate U Give (2018)
- 5. American Beauty (1999)
- 6. Passing (2021)
- 7. The Danish Girl (2015)
- 6. Green Book (2018)
- QUESTIONS?

Passing (2021)

Awards / recognition:

- Premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival in 2021.
- Received acclaim from critics, who praised Hall's screenplay and direction, and performances of Thompson and Negga.
- The film was named one of the top ten films of 2021 by the African American Film Critics Association.
- For her performance, Negga was nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the Golden Globe Award, BAFTA and Screen Actors Guild Award.

Passing (2)

- **Director and writer: Rebecca Hall (British)**
 - Directorial debut.
 - Won Outstanding Screenplay and Outstanding Emerging Director, 2022, Black Reel Awards.
 - Won Breakthrough British Filmmaker, 2022, London Film Critics' Circle.
 - Won Best debut Director, 2021, NY Film Critics Online.
 - Hall is also acclaimed actress:
 - Best known films include: Please Give; The Town; Christine.

Background & Meaning of “Passing”

Racial passing occurs when a person who is classified as a member of a racial group is accepted or perceived ("passes") as a member of another racial group.

Although black Americans who adopted white identities reaped benefits of expanded opportunity and mobility, there was grief, loneliness, and isolation that accompanied these rewards. By the civil rights era, more racially mixed Americans felt the loss of kin and community was too much to bear, that it was time to “pass out” and embrace a black identity. Although recent decades have witnessed an increasingly multiracial society and a growing acceptance of hybridity, the problem of race and identity remains at the center of public debate and emotionally fraught personal

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decisions. Harvard U Press, Obama and the ParadigmShift

Passing (4)

Synopsis:

In 1920s New York City, a black woman finds her world up-ended when her life becomes intertwined with a former childhood friend who's passing as white.

Passing (5)

SETTING: New York City.

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- Irene/Reenie Redfield: black woman living in Harlem;
- Brian Redfield: black doctor married to Irene;
- Clare Bellew: Irene's light-skinned childhood friend who "passes" as white;
- John Bellew: Clare's wealthy, white racist husband from Chicago;
- Hugh Wentworth: novel writer, friend of Irene, to whom Irene reveals Clare's secret.

DISCUSSION: what would you say PASSING is about and WHY?

- Inter-racial tensions?
- Story that hinges on appearances?
- Fear of discovery?
- Jealousy and Resentment?
- Loneliness?
- Anguished story of identity and belonging?
- Making life easier for oneself?
- Fantasy with illusions easy to destroy?

Passing (7)

Questions for discussion:

- Groups are defined by their boundaries. How are Reenie and Clare able to pass as whites in the tearoom? Are they comfortable there? How do Reenie and Clare feel about the boundary?
- How do Brian Redfield and John Bellew feel about the boundary?
- Reenie asks, “Are you happy?” Clare answers, “Of course. I have everything I ever wanted.” Really?

Passing (8)

Questions for discussion:

- In THE CRYING GAME we saw that the boundary between male and female could be fuzzed. Is there a parallel here?
- Passing is something like migration. To cross a boundary is to leave something behind. How does Clare feel about it?
- Why did Irene tell the Police that Clare's fall was an accident?

Passing (9)


Questions for discussion:

- What are the challenges of “passing” during Jim Crow America?
- Why is Irene unhappy with Brian? How does Brian feel?
- Is Irene attracted to Clare? Why or Why not?
- Why does Brian want to move to Europe or South America?
- What is PASSING about If you had to pick 1 main theme? Why?

Passing (9)

Questions for discussion:

- What was the relationship between Clare and Irene when they were adolescents?
- Brian says, “They always come back.” Irene says, “Why...? They worked so hard getting there.” Brian says, “If I knew that, I’d know what race is.” Irene says, “You’d think they would be satisfied being White.” Brian says, “Rot. Who’s satisfied being anything.” What is this all about?
- Why was it so hard for Irene to welcome Clare back into her life?



***For questions and information,
contact:***

Rita Hadden
rhadden@gmail.com
202-244-3268

Bill Hadden
wchadden@gmail.com
202-250-1942