

## *Black-White Couples and Internal Decolonization*

Any claim that Western filmmakers wished to challenge the miscegenation taboo in these years meets its stiffest test with black-white relationships. Attesting to the particular sensitivity of this issue for Americans was the Production Code's specific ban on miscegenation between "the black and white races," and images of both romantic black-white relationships and relations between masters and slaves remained missing from movie screens while depictions of other forms of miscegenation were fairly common. Nor were things much different in Europe, for aside from a few interwar French films pairing Josephine Baker with white men, neither French nor British filmmakers explored that topic before the late 1950s. There were, of course, far fewer black people in Britain or France than in the United States, but those two countries ruled over large black populations in Africa and the Caribbean. Cross-racial relationships were not part of the formula in African jungle and safari films in the 1940s and 1950s, and overtly political films set in the present featured black-white friendships, not miscegenation. Two 1950s films set in Africa that did depict miscegenation—*Saadia* (1953) and Britain's *The Black Tent* (1956)—featured Arab or Berber women played by white actresses.

Many white Americans were not—and are not—accustomed to seeing black-white relations as part of the history of colonialism. While the belief that colonialism only existed overseas helped to produce this blind spot, in the decolonization era that misconception drew growing criticism from African Americans. As post-war filmmakers began to explore black-white miscegenation, they faced a choice between setting tales in the past or present, with each option having certain didactic advantages and disadvantages. Those set in the past were likeliest to illuminate the colonial dimensions of American race relations, but viewers might consider them remote and irrelevant. Stories set in the present, while more evidently topical, were less likely to indicate a historically colonial relationship. And

whether set in the past or present, no films illuminated connections between slavery and current problems.

The box-office success of two 1947 films on anti-Semitism—Edward Dmytryk's *Crossfire*, made for RKO, and Elia Kazan's *Gentleman's Agreement*, made for Darryl F. Zanuck at Fox—inspired Hollywood to examine other forms of prejudice. A handful of films about African Americans released between 1949 and 1951 included three about black-white miscegenation, eluding the Production Code by focusing mainly on the mixed-race offspring of previous relationships not depicted. The first to arrive was *Lost Boundaries* (1949), a low-budget, independent production that B-film specialist Alfred L. Werker directed for producer Louis De Rochemont, known for the *March of Time* documentaries. Based on journalist William L. White's *Reader's Digest* story and his subsequent 1948 book about a real African American physician who passed for white in a New Hampshire town, the film starred the half-Cuban New Jersey native Mel Ferrer in his first credited role, as Dr. Scott Carter.

The film opens with Scott's graduation from medical school in Chicago in 1922 and his wedding with Marcia Mitchell (Beatrice Pearson), also a "Negro" who looks white. Rejected for an internship at a black hospital in Georgia because he looks white, and unable to find work in white hospitals because he is open about his ethnicity, Scott gets nowhere, and a montage sequence shows a slew of rejection letters. Like a medical school classmate who spoke of working as a Pullman porter, Scott contemplates working for a railroad in Boston, musing that "if a passenger faints, my medical training will be invaluable"; he turns instead to making shoes. The film thus resurrects the tragic-mulatto convention while clearly blaming racism for it. He reluctantly accepts his black friends' advice to get started in medicine by temporarily passing for white, and he accepts a position in the fictional New Hampshire town of Keenham. He gradually overcomes the all-white town's wariness toward outsiders, and he and Marcia happily raise two children, telling them nothing of their ethnic heritage. Years pass, and with the arrival of World War II both Scott and his son Howie (Richard Hylton) enlist in the navy, but background investigators discover the truth, and the navy's racial policies force Scott to resign his commission. When he informs Howie of their dark secret, the lad suffers an identity crisis as he stands before the mirror in disbelief, has nightmares about white friends morphing into blacks, and runs away to Harlem. After Howie's mistaken arrest in a minor incident involving a gang fight, a wise, sympathetic black police officer, Lieutenant Thompson (Canada Lee, shortly before his blacklisting), helps him come to terms with his situation and understand his parents' actions. Although the town's discovery of the

Carters' secret leads old acquaintances to shun them, at the end the pastor reminds his flock that "we are all God's children," and a narrator closes the film on a positive note by stating that Scott is still the town doctor.

Despite retaining a sober, semidocumentary feel, *Lost Boundaries* reveals its colors, so to speak, in denouncing racism and in affirming people's common humanity. Scott, for example, answers a navy investigator's routine question about having Negro blood by saying, "We all have the same blood in our veins." A denunciation of racism informs the film's indulgence of passing: Marcia's father urges the newlyweds to pass, telling Scott that when he and his family were living as Negroes in the South, they "had nothing, absolutely nothing," and now, living as a white man in the North, he has "a good job—a white man's job." Lieutenant Thompson reminds Howie of the poverty and crime he had just seen in Harlem and asks him, "Can you honestly blame anyone for trying to cross the boundary into the white man's world?" Indeed, the film dramatizes the privileges white Americans enjoy because of past and present racial discrimination.<sup>1</sup> It even shows how white-dominated society harms itself through discrimination, as medical school graduates working as railroad porters and shoemakers indicate a waste of talents and educational resources. In wartime, racism in the military was responsible for the turning away of doctors like Scott and the loss of potential fighting men like Howie's black friend "Coop" (William Greaves), who tells Howie he will not join the navy because "serving meals to officers just isn't my idea of war."

The costs of racism also emerge when a nurse deliberately drops a bottle of blood donated by "somebody's chauffeur," leading an angry Scott to snap that "some fighting man may lose his life because of this." That nurse is but one of the racists presented for condemnation. When Howie brings Coop home from college to a party at his parents' home, a white neighbor sneers to a friend that "no one with any background invites darkies to their home," and even the Carters' daughter Shelly (Susan Douglas) objects to Coop's presence, complaining to her parents, "With all the boys at college, my brother's got to bring home a coon." Her crisis upon learning of her own ancestry again recalls the tragic-mulatto convention, and in the final church scene an anguished Shelly walks out during the antiracist sermon. Screenwriter Charles Palmer explained that he used this device to avert "any peaches-and-cream feeling of a completely happy ending on a problem which is still unsolved generally."<sup>2</sup> In the church, a white man shakes Scott's hand, Shelly's boyfriend gives Howie a wink and a smile, and the pastor pats Howie on the shoulder and smiles, but it remains unstated whether this means that the whole town or simply a few individuals have rejected prejudice.

So although the film denounces racism and offers hope of progress, it suggests that change may take time.

Like other films about racism, *Lost Boundaries* has incurred criticism for timidity and false progressivism. The charges include the claim that the film makes black people the villains, but the argument fits only the black doctor and nurses who turn Scott away for being too light-skinned.<sup>3</sup> The positive black characters include Scott's mentor, Dr. Charles Howard, Howie's friend Coop, and the police Lieutenant, and the film primarily indicts white characters and institutions (including the Navy). Claims that the film pities the Carters for having Negro blood and blames them for fooling people might be more compelling if the film did not highlight the discrimination that compelled the Carters to pass—though it does fault them for deceiving their children.<sup>4</sup> Another source of criticism, reflecting resentment over Hollywood's history of racist hiring practices, is the casting of white actors to play the Carters; in this film, however, using actors who looked at all African American would have undermined the story, which requires everyone to believe the Carters are white.

The attention the film gave to the problems of "white Negroes" has also provoked charges that it avoided issues relevant to most African Americans, while defending passing—a choice unavailable to most African Americans.<sup>5</sup> Yet if it defends the Carters' passing, it is hardly sanguine about it, and they chose this path only in reaction to racist injustice. The film's main point is to critique racism, not to recommend passing. It also underlines a crucial drawback even for those who can pass: the need to live in fear of discovery. The film, it is true, does little to emphasize other drawbacks to passing, such as the difficulty of taking pride in one's ethnicity or fighting to change a nefarious system rather than simply surviving it individually. On the other hand, Scott speaks out against prejudice when possible, and he travels to Boston regularly to treat patients of all races; he could not have done much more to combat racism without arousing suspicions and sacrificing his career. So although this film might have been even bolder, there are limits to what one movie can accomplish, and this pioneering work, by leading viewers to put themselves in the Carters' place, offered a persuasive critique of racism.

A certain measure of historical empathy is in order in assessing this film, which was made before the victories of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s and was one of the very first films to criticize racism toward blacks. The concept of cinematic empathy also applies in light of complaints of timidity.<sup>6</sup> Although a more radical film might be more pleasing to viewers today, it bears recalling the challenges of making such a film in 1949, of securing distribution, and of getting audiences to watch and embrace it. Several writers struggled to

fashion a script that was neither too inflammatory nor too timid, and MGM, which had originally accepted the script, got cold feet and dropped the project after testing audience reactions to the story.<sup>7</sup> De Rochemont had to invest his own money, and with no studio willing to make or distribute the film, he and others took considerable risks. Moreover, a box-office failure would have discouraged further films on racial issues, so there was more than his own money and future in the film industry at stake. The need to draw audiences also helps explain the casting of white actors and the restraint of its criticism of racists.<sup>8</sup> While the film did disappoint some black intellectuals and leftist film critics at the time, a film that pleased them would likely have died at the box office. If the point was to get people to rethink their prejudices, it made little sense to cater to people already staunchly opposed to racism. Perhaps it was pandering to whites' prejudices to evoke their sympathies for characters who looked like them, but given the film's political aims, the strategy made sense.

That strategy was vindicated when this low-budget, independent film reached the number forty-eight slot for 1949, despite a meager promotion budget, exclusion from the studios' distribution system, and what *Variety* called "the pic's virtually guaranteed tabus in large sectors of the south."<sup>9</sup> Censors in the South did indeed ban it, and de Rochemont even tried to buy television time to air it in Atlanta and Memphis.<sup>10</sup> Many newspapers ran only tiny ads, and larger ones used a sensationalist tone out of keeping with its sober approach. Despite claims that it received "mixed reviews," it did extremely well with American critics: twenty-one of twenty-two reviews examined here were positive.<sup>11</sup> Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* found it a film of "extraordinary courage, understanding, and dramatic power," while Archer Winsten of the *New York Post* described it as "a profoundly stirring emotional experience" that "could also move the hearts of men to historic change." Nor was such praise limited to national magazines and New York critics. In the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Myles Standish described it as "an intelligent, dramatically sound, engrossing, and touching work," and the *Detroit News*'s John Finlayson claimed that "few motion pictures have tackled the problem of racial intolerance with such forthrightness and compassion." Critics in New England raved: the *Hartford Courant* felt it showed "what the movies might be," while the *Boston Herald* called it "a film to make you think and feel, as well as be proud of the men and women who produced it." Calling it "a great and important picture," the *Boston Globe* noted the town's acceptance of the Carters and added, "Praise to New England, the place where the abolitionists preached the equality of all races." One paper after another lauded the film's restraint and lack of preaching while attesting to its emotional power.

Some critics did express reservations. Lillian Scott of the African American *Chicago Defender* contended that “the reaction of most Negroes to ‘passing’ is one of disapproval,” and she charged that Scott’s rejection at the black hospital in Georgia “didn’t ring true” in a region filled with “light skinned southern Negroes.” Though Scott admitted “we went to ‘Lost Boundaries’ prejudiced against its casting of white actors and actresses,” she gave it “credit for courage and imagination” and concluded that it “will never be forgotten by white or black.” At a rare southern booking in Dallas, the *Morning News* praised it as entertainment but complained that “there are many bits of subtle propaganda worked into the screen play which is heavily overlaid with the crusading spirit” and warned that “neither films like this one nor legislation will bring the solution.” The *Post*’s Winsten suspected that “Negroes might well object to the picture’s graphic sequence of the son’s nightmare horror as he realizes his new condition.” Regarding the focus on passing, Crowther wrote, “To be sure, this film is not a picture of the whole complex problem of race and racial discrimination,” and *Commonweal* said that while it did not “tackle all the problems connected with Negroes in the United States” it remained “a tremendous step forward in the fight against prejudice.”

As for charges that the film faulted the Carters’ deceptions rather than the racism that provoked it, it bears noting that no critic blamed the Carters, while many defended their passing. *Film Daily* wrote that “circumstances and prejudices force them to do so,” and *Commonweal* pointed out that though they deceive people, “the preceding scenes make very clear the difficulty that a Negro doctor has in getting a position.” The problem, the *Boston Globe* concluded, is “the fault of society,” and *Time* called Carter “a decent man caught in an indecent dilemma.” Indeed, the indictment of racism resonated strongly with American critics. Winsten called the Carters’ plight “a near crucifixion on the cross of America’s color psychosis,” which was “the shame of our nation,” and *America* said the film revealed “the weakest link in American democracy.” Noting the spotlight on institutional racism, the *New York Daily News* observed that “the hospitals and the U.S. Navy are the villains of the piece.” St. Louis’s Standish liked the focus on the North, where “racial injustice is too smugly thought of as an offense only of the South.” Nor did the happy ending engender complacency. To Standish, “the recording of one small victory for humanity emphasizes, by its very minuteness, the vastness of the problem,” and the *Detroit News* lamented “the meagerness of tolerance among well-intentioned white people.” Declaring that *Lost Boundaries* had paved the way for more such films, *Variety* said it “shows that the U.S. film industry, having once decided to tackle the most explosive issue in the U.S., is capable of extraordinary courage, intelligence, and human sympathy.”

De Rochemont had far less success getting distribution overseas. Despite winning the prize for the best screenplay at the 1949 Cannes Film Festival, it received scant coverage and few bookings in France. In Britain, it had a brief run in London and got few reviews. Two papers on the left praised it: the *Manchester Guardian* wrote that “Hollywood is building up a good reputation in its exploitation of the colour bar theme, and human stories like this will have a much wider influence than reformist preaching,” and the *Daily Worker* found it “a sincere and moving film.”<sup>12</sup> But the *London Times* yawned at “yet another in the cycle of American films on the question of racial discrimination,” calling it “very slow.” The *Times* also misread the film, claiming it said “everything would be all right if only black were not really black.”<sup>13</sup> Dilys Powell of the *Sunday Times* also found the subject uninteresting and the film “well-meaning, slow, and dull,” admitting that she preferred a good musical.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps because Britain’s colonialism took place overseas, and because most immigration from the Caribbean and Africa was still in the future, few British critics showed interest in films about racism.

### ***Pinky* (1949)**

Three months after *Lost Boundaries* came out, Twentieth Century-Fox released a much higher-budget tale of miscegenation and passing in *Pinky* (1949). After director John Ford quit the picture early on, Zanuck replaced him with Elia Kazan, director of *Gentleman’s Agreement*; Philip Dunne, Dudley Nichols, and others based the script on Mississippi novelist Cid Ricketts Sumner’s 1946 book, *Quality*.<sup>15</sup> Rising young star Jeanne Crain played Patricia “Pinky” Johnson, who looks white but whose grandmother Dicey (Ethel Waters) is black. As the film opens in a small southern town, it shows Pinky arriving, and because it does not reveal her ethnicity at first, it leaves viewers to wonder what a white woman is doing in a black neighborhood. Her Granny does not recognize her at first, as she has been away at nursing school in Boston. She has returned, we learn later, because of misgivings about her engagement to a white man, Dr. Thomas Adams (William Lundigan), who is unaware of her ancestry. Accustomed to the privileges of whiteness up North, Pinky enjoys respect only until people discover her race, and she also struggles to cope with her Granny’s poverty.

When Pinky goes to see Jake (Frederick O’Neal), a black man who owes Dicey money, she ends up in an argument in the street with Jake’s ill-tempered girlfriend Rozelia (Nina Mae McKinney), who is also of mixed race but visibly so. When two white policemen break up the argument, they address Pinky as “Ma’am” until Rozelia tells them, “She’s nothing but a low-down colored gal,” at which point the officers manhandle and arrest her along with Rozelia and Jake. After

the kindly Judge Walker (Basil Ruysdael) releases her, she is walking home at night when two drunken white men offer her a ride, telling her, "We can't let no white girl walk by herself in this nigger section." When she tells them she lives there, their attitude changes, and after their headlights reveal her body through a translucent dress, she barely escapes a rape attempt. That trauma leads her to ponder her own ancestry and the probability that it involved a similar incident.

Pinky's travails continue when Dicey pressures her to serve as nurse to Miss Em (Ethel Barrymore), a crotchety, dying white woman who lives alone in the big house of the old plantation. The house and all it represents horrify Pinky, who resents Dicey's devotion to Miss Em and does not wish to work for her. "I've known another kind of life," she explains. "I've been treated like a human being." Pressured by her grandmother, she takes the unpaid job, putting up with the imperious Miss Em, who comes to respect her when she stands up for herself. When Pinky's former fiancé Tom arrives unexpectedly, she informs him of her Negro ancestry. Despite his shock, Tom wishes to resume their engagement on the condition that they live in the North with Pinky passing for white; Pinky is skeptical but undecided. (The film, by the way, shows Tom and Pinky kissing, in clear violation of the Production Code.) Meanwhile, Miss Em is visited by her annoying cousin, Melba Wooley (Evelyn Varden), who keeps insulting Pinky and accusing her of pilferage. Mrs. Wooley expects to inherit the house and property, but when Miss Em dies, a will she had just written bequeaths the house and land to Pinky. When Mrs. Wooley contests the will on the grounds that Pinky drugged Miss Em and made her rewrite her will, Pinky rejects everyone's advice to abandon a case against whites in a southern court, and she finally persuades Judge Walker to be her lawyer. Although the case goes badly, it is not a jury trial, and the judge implausibly rules in Pinky's favor. Facing a choice between marrying Tom and passing for white up North or staying and putting the house and property to some use, she decides to stay, bidding Tom farewell. After struggling to figure out what Miss Em meant when her will expressed "confidence in the use to which she will put this property," Pinky finally turns the house into a clinic and nursing school for blacks. At the end, Pinky busily oversees her creation, and for the first time her mood has finally brightened.

Scholars, citing Pinky's decision to reject Tom and stay in the South, have called the film conservative, reactionary, and segregationist, and they have argued that it sought to criticize blackness and passing and to keep blacks in their place.<sup>16</sup> Other criticisms concern the casting of a white actress to play Pinky and, as with *Lost Boundaries*, a distracting focus on the atypical problems of "white Negroes."<sup>17</sup> To evaluate these claims, it helps to consider the filmmakers' intentions, as well



as the pressures facing them in a country overwhelmingly opposed to miscegenation and an industry forbidding images of black-white miscegenation.

In 1948, as Zanuck was overseeing rewrites, South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond was running for president from a Dixiecrat splinter party opposed to President Truman's civil rights agenda. Films were just beginning to examine bigotry, and though *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement* had drawn well, it was unclear how a film on bigotry against African Americans would do. Moreover, *Pinky* was bolder than *Home of the Brave* (1949) and *Lost Boundaries* in scrutinizing racism in the South. In a business in which even moguls lacked job security, Zanuck feared boycotts and censorship. "There is a grave danger," he told a colleague in October 1948, "that a large part of the southern market may be lost," making the film "a doubtful venture."<sup>18</sup> Zanuck pressed on, hoping that northern and foreign markets would compensate, and believing it might even play in the South.<sup>19</sup> The Production Code Administration also feared losing the southern markets, and it warned that the film might spur the creation of new state and local censorship boards, fuel recruitment for the Ku Klux Klan, and create perceptions that Hollywood was siding with Truman on civil rights.<sup>20</sup> There were also fears that a backlash against *Pinky* could damage current efforts to get the Supreme Court to grant films First Amendment rights.

Zanuck's motives were political as well as commercial, though he disingenuously claimed otherwise.<sup>21</sup> His antiracist agenda is visible in a note to the NAACP's Walter White—who himself could pass for white, and who wanted a bolder film; Zanuck wrote that "if the picture is not shown and seen in those regions where injustice and racial prejudice are strongest, no good can be accomplished."<sup>22</sup> In order to persuade those who needed it, Zanuck wanted a film they would actually go see, so the picture "must be above all things non-propagandist."<sup>23</sup> This reluctance to alienate white viewers led Zanuck and his writers to remove the character of Arch Naughton—in the novel, an abrasive, light-skinned civil rights activist from New York—but the film added various racial incidents that help to awaken Pinky's racial consciousness and defiance.

As for casting Crain, Zanuck called her "the biggest box-office attraction on the lot today," and with so much at stake, his choice is understandable. Although the decision cost a black actress a starring role, the production did provide work for numerous black actors and extras.<sup>24</sup> Kazan's wish for Dorothy Dandridge to play Pinky foundered when the studio's New York office, relaying pressure from distributors, vetoed the idea.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, any actress who looked at all black, including Dandridge and Nina Mae McKinney, would have been problematic for a character everyone assumes is white.<sup>26</sup> Although the casting of a white actress has

drawn charges that the film pandered to racists, the decision made sense given Zanuck's goal of altering the attitudes of prejudiced whites.<sup>27</sup> As Zanuck told White, he sought "to make the white majority experience emotionally the injustice and daily hurts suffered by colored people."<sup>28</sup> As for the film's intentions regarding interracial marriage, Kazan told *Ebony*, "I'm worried because people might think we're saying Negroes and whites shouldn't marry," when in fact it was only that "this particular boy and girl shouldn't get married."<sup>29</sup> In earlier versions, the two did marry, but a Zanuck associate recommended "something that will jolt and outrage the racists," and they settled on a Negro woman snubbing a white man.<sup>30</sup>

The film does contain some dated imagery and stereotypes of blacks.<sup>31</sup> Benevolent whites such as Judge Walker and Miss Em also bear out complaints about the film's paternalism, and it takes a woman who looks white to provide leadership for the black community.<sup>32</sup> As for the treatment of passing, it is true that we see no discrimination before Pinky's decision to pass, so the picture does less than *Lost Boundaries* had done to justify passing as a rational act.<sup>33</sup> But it does allude to a less-than-perfect racial situation up North, where Tom insists Pinky must resume passing if they are to marry. And although it is true that Pinky's invisible blackness horrifies white characters—Mrs. Wooley declares that it "just gives me the creeps"—this does not warrant confusing the film's viewpoint with that of its most unsympathetic character.<sup>34</sup>

Whether the film endorses segregation hinges on concepts of racial identity and on interpretations of Pinky's choices. While it may appear that the film chides Pinky for passing, insists on her blackness, and urges her to know her place, her decision to stay in the South is highly circumscribed by social pressures, constructs, customs, and taboos. It was neither Pinky nor the film's producers who invented the "one-drop rule"; it was instead whites who opposed miscegenation and wished to protect their privileges from mulatto infiltration.<sup>35</sup> Even African Americans have long accepted the one-drop rule, viewing people with almost any degree of African ancestry as African American and resenting passing.<sup>36</sup> Zanuck himself criticized the idea "that having Negro blood somehow sets one apart, that it makes one *internally* as well as *externally* different, that the possession of a trace of Negro blood makes one feel a mystic identity with the race."<sup>37</sup> The film makes that point when Pinky tells Miss Em, "You're the ones who set the standards, you whites."

What realistic alternatives did Pinky have? Only very recently have Americans begun to affirm mixed-race identities, and in 1949, a person such as Pinky had but two options: try to pass for white, or identify with blacks.<sup>38</sup> Criticism of her

decision thus implies that moving North with Tom was a better option. But was it? Tom informs her that because of publicity in Boston about her court case, “too many people in Boston know, or they might find out.” Through Tom the film probes the superficiality of northern liberalism; despite denouncing “the mythology of superior and inferior races,” he admits that “you never know what exists deep down inside yourself,” and he insists that Pinky resume passing. His proposal to abandon Boston for Denver does not sway her: “You and me running away from it, Tom, this time to Denver, running away for the rest of our lives.” What she was rejecting, then, was not really integration; it was dissimulation (the *Lost Boundaries* scenario) and marriage to a man uncomfortable with her ethnicity. Moreover, subsequent history has borne out the film’s implied questioning of the reality of integration in the North, where schools and neighborhoods remain heavily, if informally, segregated.

Accusing the film of segregationism without recognizing Pinky’s limited options brings to mind later charges that black separatists favored segregation. “Segregation,” explained Malcolm X, “is that which is forced upon inferiors by superiors. But separation is that which is done voluntarily, by two equals—for the good of both.”<sup>39</sup> Pinky and the whites who ran the town—and the country—were hardly equals; nor was her decision truly voluntary. Segregation was certainly something superiors forced upon inferiors, so having a character try to make the best of a bad situation is hardly endorsing segregation. Indeed, the belief that African Americans should stop expecting whites to help them or to offer full integration and should instead look to themselves to improve their situation within their own institutions such as the black colleges has a long history in the United States. In the interwar years, Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association exemplified the self-help mentality, and after the film’s release, figures from Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X to Spike Lee continued to pursue variants of this philosophy, while multiculturalist conceptions of society increasingly displaced doctrines of assimilation and integration.<sup>40</sup> In that light, Pinky’s decision to decline the sort of marriage and life Tom offered and to use her newly acquired resources to found an institution to help southern blacks improve their own lives is, especially for its time, more progressive than reactionary. With its call for black pride, property ownership, and education, the film raises topics that would receive far more attention in the future.

The reading of *Pinky* as a conservative film that seeks to keep blacks in their place cannot account for many of its scenes. The attempted rape, the abuse by white police, the humiliation Pinky endures in the general store (where she arrived first but is forced to step aside and then pay double after Mrs. Wooley informs the

owner she is a Negro), and the hostile stares of the white crowd at the courtroom all indict racism powerfully and invite viewers to experience it through a sympathetic character. The rape scene in particular breaks Hollywood's taboo against depicting southern white men's sexual exploitation of African American women. Far from urging blacks to accept their place humbly, the film favors defiance of racism through a character who is hardly passive. Under Kazan's direction, Crain's restrained performance conveys a smoldering anger as she defies injustice. Pinky challenges the police who arrest her, asking what charges they have against her, and she defies Miss Em, telling her, "I'm a trained nurse and I won't be spoken to like that"; later, she asks rhetorically, "What should I do? Dye my face, grovel and shuffle, say yas'm and no'm?" Above all, she defies the entire town and its racist power structure when she defends what is rightfully hers. That decision put the film in line with current civil rights strategies that focused on legal battles, as did her decision to confront racism in the South instead of simply fleeing North.<sup>41</sup>

In a 1949 essay on films in this cycle, Ralph Ellison derided *Pinky* for losing its focus on interracial marriage. He also objected that "Pinky decides that to marry [Tom] would 'violate the race' and that she had better remain a Negro."<sup>42</sup> But Ellison misread Pinky's motives for rejecting this marriage, and despite the presence of the interracial couple in this film, *Pinky* is not primarily about interracial marriage, any more than it is primarily about passing. The film, after all, never shows her trying to deceive anyone about her ethnicity (as she had in Boston), and it largely ignores social reactions to the interracial relationship. It is, instead, a film about racial identity, pride, and rebellion in the face of prejudice and injustice. It is true that Miss Em advises Pinky to take pride in her race—though so does her black grandmother—and there is certainly an air of paternalism in white filmmakers crafting a film with this message.<sup>43</sup>

If the assistance Pinky gets from a few benevolent white southerners gives the film paternalist overtones, it also underlines the colonialist nature of American race relations, and understanding the film requires viewing it in the historical context of decolonization. Whites such as Miss Em are, in effect, like those colonialist powers that took eleventh-hour steps to prepare colonized peoples for independence. Pinky's indecision reflects her mental colonization, most strongly indicated by Miss Em's influence over her, so her resolution to take pride in her ethnicity, to defy her oppressors, and to create her own educational institution amount to steps toward decolonization. Perhaps the film's compromises make it, like its protagonist, something of a hybrid, as it blends undeniably progressive ideas with elements that are less so, but that is no reason to apply a kind of one-

drop rule to it and judge it reactionary or segregationist because it made certain compromises. Although dated in some ways, *Pinky*, if viewed with historical empathy, hardly expresses the political outlook of real segregationists such as Strom Thurmond.<sup>44</sup> It was, for its time, a significant critique of racial injustice.

Zanuck's strategizing, collaboration, and consultation paid off, as the film secured Oscar nominations for Crain, Waters, and Barrymore and reached *Variety*'s number two slot for 1949.<sup>45</sup> (That it came in behind the ode to the blackface musical *Jolson Sings Again* says something about its era.) The film did secure a few southern bookings, and newspapers reported long lines of both black and white patrons in Atlanta, where the Roxy Theater suspended its whites-only policy and opened its balcony to blacks.<sup>46</sup> Atlanta censor Christine Smith approved *Pinky* just after rejecting *Lost Boundaries*, though she cut a total of thirty-four seconds.<sup>47</sup> "I know this picture is going to be painful to a great many Southerners," Smith admitted. "It will make them squirm, but at the same time it will make them realize how unlovely their attitudes are."<sup>48</sup> Smith's comments, and reports that when *Pinky* won her case, a cheer went up in both the white and black sections of the Roxy, indicate that not all white southerners thought alike.<sup>49</sup> The most racist southerners (and northerners) undoubtedly skipped the film, but in an era when many Americans still went to the movies habitually, some probably wandered into theaters knowing little about it. Unlike ads in the North, which referred to her passing for white, one in the *Atlanta Constitution* gave little clue of the film's racial themes (aside from a photo of Ethel Waters in the background). Its text read cryptically, "Does he know?" and "Pinky knew that her whole life of deception had brought her to this."<sup>50</sup> Other southern markets banned it, and in Marshall, Texas, an exhibitor was jailed for showing it despite a local ban.<sup>51</sup> In Macon, Georgia, a cross was burned at a drive-in theater that screened it.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the usual scholarly claims that the film received mixed reviews, American critics overwhelmingly applauded, with twenty-six of twenty-seven film critics (96 percent) in this sample praising it, often effusively.<sup>53</sup> Robert Hatch of the *New Republic* panned the film for its "standard soap romance" and its "Jim Crow stereotype" of Dicey, and he derided *Pinky*'s decision to stay in the South, but he misunderstood why she made it. The film attracted an unusual amount of press coverage, including criticism from several black intellectuals, activists, and celebrities. The NAACP's Walter White, who was battling for integration, resented Zanuck's ignoring his advice and criticized the film in the *Chicago Defender*. He contended that it "accepts without visible objection the philosophy that the Negro has his 'place,' that he accepts that place, and that all white people are united in agreement that colored people must forever stay in a position of inferiority," and

he concluded, "I seriously doubt it will do much good."<sup>54</sup> Ralph Ellison disliked the situation *Pinky*'s writers had concocted: "Should Negro girls marry white men or—wonderful *non sequitur*—should they help their race?" Nevertheless, in appraising this and other new films, he wrote that "despite the absurdities with which these films are laden, they are all worth seeing, and if seen, capable of involving us emotionally," and he concluded that "the thinking of white Americans is undergoing a process of change."<sup>55</sup> Bandleader Cab Calloway wrote about *Pinky* and *Lost Boundaries* in the *Chicago Defender*, where he complained that "neither picture treats the Negro problem as such"—only "a very specialized problem" irrelevant to most Negroes. Although he called the films "steps in the right direction," he felt that "all to [sic] few white people will realize the purpose, understand it, or sympathize with it."<sup>56</sup>

If American critics' reactions are any indication, Calloway was worrying unnecessarily. The *Detroit News* described it as a "poignant, moving drama"; the *Hartford Courant*'s labeled it "a great film" and "deeply moving"; and the *New York Herald Tribune* called it a "courageous and powerful screen drama" that "attacks the racial question directly and with tremendous impact." Numerous reviews spoke of the film's impact on viewers; the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that "it holds its audience under a singular spell," while the *Hollywood Reporter* said it "draws the spectator in, rooting for the good people and scorning the evil." Several trade papers praised Zanuck's courage in making the film, which, in *Variety*'s words, "meets the problem head-on" and "truly moves the American film medium a desirable notch forward." Warning of "almost impossible sledding" down South, *Variety* predicted that a few "courageous theater owners will play it, . . . [but] undoubtedly a majority will choose to skip the picture." In the *Times*, Crowther noted that the filmmakers "have barged right into that area of most conspicuous racism, the Deep South," and the *San Francisco Chronicle* said it "boldly sets its locale in the place where the evil of race prejudice flourishes most."

No review treated blackness as horrifying, and none thought the film sought to criticize passing. It was, instead, racism and injustice that drew most critical comment. The *Boston Globe*'s Marjory Adams called the film "a revealing, pitiless denunciation of the racial prejudices that exist in this democracy," adding that *Pinky* "learns what it means to be a Negro, to live in a broken-down and dirty neighborhood, to be fair game for the white youths who are liquored up and ready for deviltry, to be treated as a menial by the white people." The *San Francisco Chronicle*'s John Hobart wrote that *Pinky* "finds herself subjected to all the degradations and humiliations that are implicit in the Jim Crow system," and the *New York Post*'s Winsten praised "several beautifully drawn portraits of degrees

of prejudices." The *Boston Herald* also remarked on the "poor housing, slurring remarks, police insults, and Jim Crowism in its meanest and nastiest form," while *Time* concluded that the film "leaves a strong impression that racial discrimination is not only unreasonable but evil."

Some critics, especially in New York, did register complaints. The *New York Daily News's* Kate Cameron felt that "it doesn't attempt to go very deeply into the problem," but she called it "a stirring dramatic film" and "a moving human document of one of our most poignant social problems." Winsten said it was "not a perfect picture," with its "falsely, prettily, happy ending that must be ignored," though he considered it "a picture of major proportions" on "our peculiarly American ground of race prejudice." Suspecting that some would think the film opposed interracial marriage, he noted "the reason why the girl made the decision," namely, "the slow realization of what is vital to self-respect" and "an affirmation of Negro pride." Crowther derided the "'old mammy' sentiment" and "passion for paternalism," but he praised its "vivid exposure of certain cruelties and injustices" rendered "with moving and disturbing force." To Mildred Martin of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "if the ending is slightly on the side of compromise, the picture as a whole is never less than completely absorbing, painfully and disturbingly honest, emotionally affecting."

While some objected mildly to the film's concessions, many others lauded its restraint. *Commonweal's* Philip Hartung believed "Zanuck deserves credit for not attempting to cover the entire racial question" and he judged it "all the more effective because the movie has gone out of its way to avoid melodrama." Though he hoped future films would "go the whole way in blasting the false notions of white supremacy," he found the current films "an encouraging start along the right lines in condemning anti-Negro prejudice." *Time* was pleased that it "puts entertainment above soap-boxing," and the *Hollywood Reporter* was impressed that its "devastating indictment of bigotry and prejudice" is "accomplished without preachment and without sacrifice of entertainment." Others welcomed the absence of "propagandizing," "sensationalism," and "melodramatics," and the *Washington Post* was pleased "that neither race is pictured as either all virtuous or all evil."<sup>57</sup>

As for the African American press, Lena Brown of the *New York Amsterdam News* felt "the picture doesn't go far enough" as it "treats the race problem most delicately," but she admitted it "will not be to the liking of bigots anywhere," and she pronounced it "worth an evening and a fee." She also understood why the role went to a white actress, given the "great deal of kissing and hugging, which simply could not have been permitted under present Hollywood codes if the

principals had been of different races.” The *Pittsburgh Courier* defended the casting on the grounds that it helped whites experience what blacks routinely endured. The *Atlanta Daily World* called the film “a moving drama, packed with emotions and superb acting,” while the *Chicago Defender*, despite running critical statements from Walter White and Cab Calloway, called the film “excellent and ‘meaty’ entertainment.” That paper also wondered if this “unusual picture” would play “in certain sections where it might do most good.”

Among critics in the South’s mass-circulation dailies, Paul Jones of the *Atlanta Constitution*, in an article titled “‘Pinky’ Recommended Despite ‘Social’ Theme,” found it “an outstanding movie, both dramatically and otherwise,” which does not “antagonize the majority,” and “builds sympathy and understanding for the minority.” Cautioning that “I do not recommend that social topics be continued on the screen,” he recommended this film as “an editorial—and a good one—on intolerance.” John Rosenfield of the *Dallas Morning News* praised the film, calling it “one of screenedom’s honest dramatic jobs,” though he sounded sarcastic in calling Pinky “a victim of the careless, brutish master race,” and he also averred that “the world is not ready for intermarriage.” The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* termed it “a heart-warming story” in which Pinky “encounters prejudice at its worst,” and it pronounced it the best of the new films about racial prejudice “because it is more easily understood from the Southern standpoint.”

To some, this southern praise may seem to confirm its reactionary, segregationist politics, but more likely, these reactions indicate that changes in America’s racial attitudes extended beyond the North, and that not all white southerners thought alike. Even if these urban critics were in the minority among southern whites, the publishing of such views in southern papers remains significant. This praise also suggests that Zanuck calculated fairly accurately what he could get away with, crafting a film that criticized racism powerfully while still securing bookings and drawing crowds and warm reviews in the South. The African American *Atlanta Daily World* observed that “possibly the greatest feature about the entire performance is that it has been allowed to be shown this far South of the Mason-Dixon line without any signs of disturbance,” which suggests “that prejudice and hate among us is a rapidly fading evil,” and the *Pittsburgh Courier* argued that “reception in the South is the biggest headliner of all, with so little friction caused that one would begin to think traditional attitudes must be changing.”<sup>58</sup> Prejudice, of course, also existed in the North, as the film suggested. In Boston, the *Globe* called it “almost incredible” that *Pinky* was breaking attendance records, for ten years earlier such a film “would never have been made, let alone



shown to huge audiences in metropolitan movie palaces,” and it called this “a commentary both on the quality of the film and on the attitude of its audience.”<sup>59</sup>

The film had far less impact in Britain. Critical response was heavily positive—eighteen of twenty-one reviews were positive (86 percent), none negative, and three mixed—but positive reviews often expressed reservations.<sup>60</sup> The conservative *Time and Tide* found the film “mercifully free of overstatement” and judged it “one of the two or three great films of the year,” even if “to expose the unjust lot of the Negro is, of necessity, to imply the guilt, or at least the indifference, of white people.” The *Daily Worker* disliked the film’s paternalism and sentimentality while finding it implausible that Pinky wins her case, but it applauded the depiction of racist incidents and declared it “a valuable and often moving film.” The socialist *Tribune* also objected that “white supremacy is left undisturbed” as Miss Em directs Pinky’s actions, but it wrote that “in spite of its phoney patches, *Pinky* remains a film with some moving and disturbing moments.” It also welcomed the film, asking, “Where are the equivalent English films which try to discuss a social problem or which contain even moments of genuine social documentation?” The *Monthly Film Bulletin* was pleased that “the film never assumes that the colour question can be smoothed over with a few easy platitudes,” and “for this, and for the absence of sensation—the undercurrent of feeling is more impressive than a lynching would have been—the film deserves great praise.” C. A. Lejeune of the left-leaning *Observer* found it “an adroit attempt to treat a highly controversial subject in a discreetly uncontroversial way,” but she wished for something stronger and complained it “has about as much daring as a cheese mite.” Her contention that it “is careful to affront no particular section of the public” revealed a certain ignorance about the depth of American racism, and her suggestion that it should have cast a “coloured girl” and had her marry the white doctor overlooked the Production Code as well as American attitudes.

The entire topic seemed remote to several British critics. With a tinge of pity for the Americans, the *Times* remarked that “the problem of racial discrimination is one that would appear to weigh heavily on their conscience,” and the *Evening Standard* called it a “magnificent film whose message must needs sound only an echo in British hearts.” Jympson Harman of the *Evening News* admitted, “I am not much moved by the [color] problem, . . . but I was deeply affected by this picture.” The *Daily Herald* urged people to see the film “even if the subject and treatment do not attract you,” and Dilys Powell of the *Sunday Times*, who had yawned at *Lost Boundaries* and wished for a good musical, found *Pinky* an “extremely moving” film “not because it has a praiseworthy subject,” but because it

examines “the courageous human figure.” Virginia Graham of the conservative *Spectator* also considered the issue of racial discrimination “mainly an American one,” but added, “It is not wholly so” as “no white peoples living can truthfully deny their insistence on the superiority of their colouring.”

In France, *Pinky* sold a paltry 244,619 tickets, and many papers ignored it.<sup>61</sup> Of eight reviews located, four were positive, three negative, and one mixed.<sup>62</sup> Claude Garson of the conservative *L'Aurore* observed that “obviously for us this film seems less relevant” than for Americans, for “in France blacks are not on our minds,” and he found the film “slow and uneventful.” On the far left, Georges Sadoul of *Les Lettres Françaises* penned a scathing review that called *Pinky* propaganda for “southern slave-owners” and a film conveying the views of “racists, colonialists, slave-owners, Hitlerites, and American southerners.” He also likened the black characters, who “fit the worst conventions of racism,” to those in *The Birth of a Nation* and described Jake as “one of the most odious caricatures of a black that the screen has ever given us.” Sadoul’s memory of *The Birth of a Nation* may have been a bit hazy, and his plot summary contained several mistakes, but he offered an interesting theory for the inclusion of depictions of white racism. In his view, the film “contains 90 percent lies, and it tries to disguise them as true by mixing in 10 percent truth,” a technique of crafty propagandists. Though less apoplectic, Georges Charensol of the *Nouvelles Littéraires* also panned the film and complained that “the southern blacks leave the task of defending their cause to whites or half-whites.” *Libération* felt that *Pinky* should have been black, and to the objection that a black woman inheriting property would have led “the general public in America, less enlightened than the French public, to leap in horror,” it replied, “So, too bad!”

Others were more sensitive to the difficulties of making such films in the United States. “One cannot doubt the audacity” of the filmmakers, wrote Guy Marester in *Combat*, as the film shows “the stupidity, cruelty, and hypocrisy of the whites,” even if blacks must “decline to cross the line and accept racial divisions.” While admitting that “to us Europeans the film will seem timid,” *Ce Soir* called the United States “a country where the problem it evokes still unleashes passions,” and it praised the “intelligent, broad-minded film” for “putting its finger on one of America’s most hideous wounds.” J. G. Pierret of *Radio Cinéma Télévision* alluded to “prejudices that we in Europe probably cannot fully appreciate” and thought the film must have been made for export only, “as one finds it hard to imagine it succeeding in the United States outside of southern theaters reserved for people of color!” Pierret understood *Pinky*’s decision not to flee north, writing that “she comes to realize that such an ‘escape’ would be the greatest of betrayals,”

and in *Franc-Tireur*, Jean Néry agreed, writing that it would bring only “a happiness based on lies.” Néry also expected “someone in France to declare that such a problem is irrelevant” here, but he recalled “the outbursts of joyful anti-Semitic sadism that attracted quite a few enlightened Europeans when laws and public opinion made them safe.” He concluded that “we will never see too many films like this one.”

American reactions to *Pinky* showed considerable receptiveness to films about racism, and although the critics’ support for the film’s antiracist aims obscured the private opinions of countless white Americans, the film’s remarkable ticket sales and the domination of the public sphere by antiracist opinions nonetheless made this a significant moment. American critics did not, however, draw parallels between this topic and colonialism elsewhere. Some Europeans, meanwhile, showed how little they understood the American situation, and they generally considered these issues irrelevant to them. This lack of interest reflects the smaller number of people of color in Britain or France, but if Americans failed to see colonialism on their own soil, the British and the French seemed to forget racism in their colonies. And if Americans showed little historical awareness of how colonialism and the slave trade had produced the current racial situation, the British, in viewing these issues as irrelevant to them, seemed to have forgotten who had founded a society based on African slavery in North America. Despite British and French involvement in transatlantic slavery, and despite their ongoing rule over the descendants of slaves in Africa and the Caribbean, the Europeans seemed relieved to be free of racial problems.

This cycle of films about black-white miscegenation came to a close with two 1951 releases. One was British: *Pool of London* (1951), from producer Michael Balcon of Ealing Studios and director Basil Dearden. A heist picture set among the docks of London—a historically appropriate setting for an exploration of British racism and attitudes toward black-white miscegenation—the film features a subplot in which a black Jamaican seaman, Johnny Lambert (Earl Cameron), meets a blonde woman named Pat (Susan Shaw) and spends a few hours on the town with her. The extent of the film’s interest in racism consists of Johnny’s encountering a few bits of mild rudeness, and though Johnny and Pat exchange a couple of lengthy looks, the two never touch. The film drops that subplot entirely midway through.

The second release was a new version of *Show Boat*, based on Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein’s 1927 Broadway hit, which had been derived from Edna Ferber’s 1926 novel. Ava Gardner played Julie LaVerne, an African American member of a floating theater troupe who passes for white, and she has a white

boyfriend. When a spurned suitor informs authorities of a miscegenation case on board, Julie avoids arrest but loses her job, and she later turns up as a single, depressed alcoholic in Chicago—the tragic mulatto. Because the film purveys dated images—notably the happy blacks who greet the showboat’s arrival—one can overlook the ways in which it was progressive for its time. As in *Pinky*, the film got away with violating the Production Code by casting a white actress to play a woman of mixed race. William Warfield’s rendition of “Ol’ Man River” certainly gave a gloomier picture of blacks’ lives than the scene of their greeting the boat had, and if the notion that poor Southern blacks’ lives were difficult was hardly news, it was still rare for Hollywood to make that point. The film played widely in the South, where reviews ignored the miscegenation issue.<sup>63</sup>

### The Second Cycle, 1957–1959

After *Show Boat*, Hollywood stopped making films about black-white miscegenation for several years, and even films on “the Negro question” became rare. Although the Supreme Court finally granted films First Amendment rights in 1952, the Production Code Administration’s black-white miscegenation ban remained. Hollywood had evaded the ban in *Pinky* and *Show Boat* by casting white actresses as light-skinned Negroes, but by 1951 it had exhausted that subject and device. Also discouraging films on black-white miscegenation was the intensification of the Cold War, spurred by the Communist victory in China (1949), the Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons (1949), the outbreak of the Korean War (1950), the Alger Hiss verdict (1950), the start of Senator Joseph McCarthy’s communist witch hunt (1950), and the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (1951). The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) also returned to Hollywood in 1951 for a second round of investigations, and historians depict the early 1950s as a period of even greater political timidity than normal in American film.<sup>64</sup> This point should not be overstated, as racial liberalism could serve Cold War aims, and skilled screenwriters (including blacklisted ones using pseudonyms) crafted liberal films about miscegenation in these years, including *Across the Wide Missouri* (1951), *Japanese War Bride* (1952), *Return to Paradise* (1953), and *King of the Khyber Rifles* (1953).

If Hollywood’s interest in the “Negro question” seemed to flag after 1951, it revived with new developments in the civil rights struggle such as the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling on school segregation, the 1955 arrest of Rosa Parks, and the ensuing Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. In 1956, rising American impatience with movie censorship led to a revision of the Production Code that removed the black-white miscegenation ban. Hollywood’s skittishness about po-

litical and racial controversy endured, and most whites still opposed miscegenation, but a new cluster of films on black-white miscegenation soon appeared.

The first, *Island in the Sun* (1957), was Zanuck's first for his own Paris-based company, though Fox distributed it. Directing this high-budget film was Robert Rossen, an ex-Communist who had cooperated with HUAC. An Anglo-American "runaway" production—both screenwriter Alfred Hayes and novelist Alec Waugh were British, as was much of the cast, and interiors were shot in Britain—it used the fictitious British Crown Colony of Santa Marta to comment indirectly on the U.S. South.<sup>65</sup> This timely tale of impending decolonization probed fears that the advent of political and racial equality would bring a flood of miscegenation.

As an American journalist arrives to examine Santa Marta's transfer of power to the black majority, a complicated soap opera unfolds about four couples, each raising the miscegenation question. In the first, a happy romance between Margot Seaton (Dorothy Dandridge) and Denis Archer (John Justin) proceeds at lightning pace. The PCA's miscegenation ban was still in place when Columbia Pictures first submitted the story in 1955, but even after the 1956 revision, the film remained terribly skittish in showing cross-racial affection. In a scene in a summerhouse, Denis confesses his love for Margot, and although the two are alone and sharing a moment of passion, they embrace without kissing, as Margot turns her mouth away at the last moment. Margot and Denis fear the locals will oppose their marriage, so they leave for the more enlightened terrain of England.

Another romance pairs black union leader and politician David Boyeur (Harry Belafonte) with Mavis Norman (Joan Fontaine), whose ancestors had owned a plantation. This subplot was daring in featuring a black man and a white woman—and a blonde at that—and Belafonte's character also broke with the deferential, grinning, emasculated image Hollywood had long given black men. Although the politically radical Belafonte later denounced the film, the fire he brought to the role of a black man who challenges and intimidates the white rulers and reminds them bluntly about slavery gave the film a much-needed edge. By today's standards, shots of his taking Mavis to see where he grew up look timid, but at the time, images of a black man putting his hands on a white woman to help her off a bus and drinking out of the same coconut with her were quite bold, and this was the first Hollywood film to show a black man dating a white woman. The image of Mavis among dozens of blacks and a later scene with the two alone by the sea discard old anxieties about the black rapist. The romance ends when David tells Mavis his people would never understand it and would "feel I'd betrayed them." Although it was politically timid to avoid an interracial marriage—while blaming black people's prejudices—David's decision, like Pinky's

snubbing of a white suitor, expresses his belief in black independence and solidarity. Once again, an unhappy end to an interracial romance took on a new meaning.

With the third and fourth couples, the film approaches miscegenation very differently. When the American journalist prints a report that Julian Fleury (Basil Sydney), head of a rich and powerful family, had a mixed-race mother, the two grown Fleury children must suddenly rethink their identity. Maxwell (James Mason), whose combination of arrogance, racism, and insecurity illustrates the situation of the colonizer facing decolonization, mistakenly believes his wife is cheating on him. The news of his African ancestry sends the already unbalanced Maxwell over the edge, and when he goes to see the man he suspects of sleeping with his wife, he ends up murdering him out of rage over a taunt about the "tar brush."

His sister Jocelyn (Joan Collins) is also traumatized by the news. Engaged to the governor's son, she breaks the engagement, asking her father, "Can you picture a black man sitting in the House of Lords if we had a son?" Her mother then informs her that she is not of mixed race, as her father was a white man with whom she had an affair. The film thus presented one couple that turned out to be interracial and another that turned out not to be, and in both cases it made people's racial anxieties seem overwrought. Expressing the film's disdain for these racial anxieties is the journalist, whose exposé of the Fleurys' ancestry states, "For 300 years there's been marriage and intermarriage with nobody sure of their precise ancestry. But a veil of secrecy, whispers, and innuendo has been drawn across this problem." Although Boyeur's rejection of Mavis seems to suggest limits to the film's belief in interracial marriage, it is really people's anguished reactions to it, not miscegenation itself, the film criticizes.

As with *Pinky*, Zanuck faced various pressures, and in launching his new company he was determined to avoid a flop.<sup>66</sup> Fox, which provided financing and distribution, became alarmed when news of the impending film provoked protests and boycott threats of *all* Fox pictures, and it pressured Zanuck to make changes.<sup>67</sup> Earlier, Geoffrey Shurlock of the PCA had expressed doubts about "whether or not this story constitutes an unfair portrayal of the Negro race," and when Fox bought the rights, Zanuck consulted with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., a Chicago attorney who had advised the Roosevelt administration on racial issues.<sup>68</sup> Noting that he could not speak for all Negroes, Gibson told Fox, "The development of Boyeur as a cynical exploiter of his people diverts attention from some of the basic reasons why people in that area now are actively and rapidly pushing towards dominion status; and also why the Caribbean world has so radically changed in the last few years." Gibson felt that Fox "is due tremendous credit for

courage,” and he found the story “not objectionable from a racial point of view,” as it was “not used for the purpose of portraying all natives as being stupid, singing Calypso-dancing dwellers of a beautiful semi-tropic paradise.”<sup>69</sup> Viewers today might disagree, as Freddie Young’s cinematography includes postcard shots, scenes of carnival, limbo dancing, and blacks contentedly cutting cane and harvesting bananas. But if the shots of blacks working recall happy-slaves images, they appear mostly in the scene in which Boyeur gives Mavis a tour of his home region. As the workers greet Boyeur warmly, the film gives an optimistic vision of life after decolonization, suggesting that social and political harmony will prevail under black leadership and the economy will function properly. In a memo on an early treatment, Zanuck specified that “Boyeur, despite the role he plays in this story, is not a heavy; it would be unfortunate if the story should emerge with a West Indian as the drama’s villain,” and although white characters call Boyeur a demagogue, he is an intelligent, principled, and determined advocate for his people.<sup>70</sup>

During production, Zanuck expressed doubts about the film’s direction. “I can’t figure out what we are trying to say in this story,” he complained in October 1955, and he called it “foolish to get into a so-called controversial story and then try to white-wash it or avoid the controversy.” The film’s emphasis on personal relationships, he feared, was overshadowing the political issues, and he reminded his team, “I thought we would tell our personal stories in the foreground, while in the background would be this seething mass of black people straining against the domination of these few whites.”<sup>71</sup> Several rewrites later, he wondered, “What is our theme? What do we advocate? . . . Are we saying that we do or do not advocate marriage between blacks and whites?” Further discussion yielded the trite conclusion that “what is good for one person or one couple may not be good for another one.”<sup>72</sup> Zanuck later avowed that he disliked the film because “they made me compromise the book,” but the diffuse narrative was also part of the problem.<sup>73</sup>

While Belafonte made his dissatisfaction clear to the press, Dandridge expressed hers more discreetly.<sup>74</sup> She complained of Denis and Margot’s not being allowed to kiss, which she found silly given how common interracial relationships were in the West Indies.<sup>75</sup> Zanuck, however, was less concerned with West Indian than with American realities, fearing trouble in the South and elsewhere for a film that, despite its timidities, went well beyond any previous film in depicting black-white romances. Those fears proved real enough: the film secured bookings in some areas of the South and was banned or simply not shown in others, despite the Supreme Court’s having undermined local censorship. The South Carolina legislature considered a bill to fine theaters for showing it; a cross

was burned at a North Carolina drive-in; a man with a shotgun prevented patrons from entering a drive-in in Alabama; protesters picketed outside theaters and launched petition drives and boycott campaigns in many locations—including Minneapolis.<sup>76</sup> Joan Fontaine received hate mail for her role, and a sample of letters written to Virginia's censorship authorities suggest the virulence that those written to Fontaine must have contained.<sup>77</sup> C. C. Stockton of Richmond wrote to complain to Virginia's censors that Belafonte and Dandridge "are cast opposite Joan Fontaine and John Justin, who call themselves white people." Claiming that "Communists, the NAACP, radicals, hoodlums, foreigners and various subversive elements in this country and thruout [*sic*] the world are out to destroy the white race," he urged banning "this disgraceful picture anywhere in the Commonwealth of Virginia."<sup>78</sup> Landon B. Lane of Altavista called the film "an insult to any and all members of the white and negro races who retain any semblance of racial self-respect." He felt it would please only "would-be racial perverts" serving "the Communist Party's avowed determination to destroy racial integrity in the United States generally, and in the South particularly."<sup>79</sup> A representative of the Dixiecrats called it "pernicious propaganda and an attempt to foster integration on [*sic*] the minds of young Americans," while the American Nationalists warned that "if successful at the box office, it will open the floodgates for a deluge of similar interracial filth."<sup>80</sup> Perhaps unaware that Zanuck was a gentile, Randolph McPherson of Norfolk claimed that "this picture was sent out by Hollywood Jews, who are members of NAACP, and doing everything in their power to break down racial barriers in the South."<sup>81</sup>

The Virginia authorities replied that they no longer had the legal right to ban the film. The state's attorney general tried to console one citizen by writing that the authorities found it "much less objectionable and not nearly as favorable propaganda for integration as most critics and national magazines had portrayed it as being."<sup>82</sup> Another Virginia official averred that "the conclusion reached in the story is that where integration has been tried, it does not work."<sup>83</sup> This dubious reading overlooks the happy ending for Margot and Denis, and it also shows that if a film depicted the problems interracial couples encountered, segregationists could cite them to confirm their views. Also illustrating some whites' ability to tune out the film's viewpoint, a Memphis critic who saw the banned film in a private showing reassured readers that he was "unoffended by the film's interracial romances because I was perfectly aware that they were taking place, not in our own South, but in the British West Indies."<sup>84</sup> As students of propaganda have argued, people may be impervious to messages that fall too far outside their cone of visibility. Southern whites' anxieties also illustrated the "third-person effect,"



in which a person is not swayed by a message but fears others will be.<sup>85</sup> One can imagine how these letter writers felt upon learning that the Supreme Court had undercut state censors, and the film likely contributed to the embittering and demoralizing of segregationists.

Their discontent likely grew with news of long lines and extended runs all around the country—the South included. The film finished at number nine on the 1957 box-office charts, not far behind *Giant* and *Teahouse of the August Moon*, which also featured interracial couples.<sup>86</sup> That success came despite rough handling from American critics: in a sample of thirty-five reviews, twelve were positive (34 percent), seventeen negative, and six mixed or neutral.<sup>87</sup> Among the positive reviews, the *Detroit News* judged it “powerful, provocative drama of inter-racial passions and hates,” and the *Miami Herald* considered it an “exciting treatise on integration and-or the mixing of the races” though “its entertaining value will depend in some measure on the depth of the individual’s attitude toward the Negro-white situation.” Many reviews praised the filmmakers’ courage. *Variety* quipped that in the South, “blood vessels will pop like popcorn” as “racist taboos are trod upon heavily,” and it called it “a milestone in courageous picture-making.”<sup>88</sup>

Some who praised the film’s courage questioned its execution. Robert Hatch of the *Nation* wrote that “it is always gratifying when the movies whack away at a taboo,” as Hollywood is “so crabbed by prohibitions that mere iconoclasm is a positive virtue,” but he added that “iconoclasm is about all this picture has to offer.” Like others, *Time* criticized a “disjointed welter of plots,” and the *New Yorker* wrote that it “sprawls all over the place.” Many also disliked the film’s timidity about interracial romance. While judging the film “a step in the right direction,” the African American *Chicago Defender* found it “incredible” that it presents “a pair [of] love romances without a single kiss.” *Cue* wrote that “in an attempt to depict interracial prejudices and passions without stirring up too much resentment, the over-edited, disconcertingly truncated film too often douses its dramatic fire before it has been fully kindled.” *Newsweek* added that “the problems of mixed marriages and mixed love affairs are neither debated with anything resembling authoritative wisdom nor resolved with any sort of conviction.”

The film’s racial politics provoked conflicting assessments. The *Post*’s Archer Winsten felt it “attacks the evil of color prejudice,” and the *Hartford Courant* perceived a disdain for racists’ anxieties, writing that Jocelyn Fleury is “beating her brains out with worry over her mixed parentage.” In *Commentary*—not yet a conservative magazine—Henry Popkin quoted a moviegoer in North Carolina who found it “a pro-segregation picture,” but Popkin judged its view of miscegenation “inconsistent, haphazard, and aimless.” Showing how a film with antiracist in-

tentions might leave segregationists feeling vindicated, the conservative *Chicago Tribune* said it dealt with “murder and miscegenation and the problems created by both.”

Ten reviews pointed out that Boyeur spurned Mavis’s romantic interest.<sup>89</sup> To Kay Proctor of the conservative *Los Angeles Examiner*, the film “says times and mores are changing and like it or not we are going to live with what’s coming,” and she warned that “it will make you violently angry, uncomfortable, or sad,” but “it will make you ponder—which I am sure was Zanuck’s purpose.” In Hollywood, the *Citizen News* declared that “intelligent, thinking people will not accept the breaking down of accepted conventions,” and it also objected that “the white residents of the island are made the aggressors, guilty of terrible crimes and mistreatment, while the black people are shown as fine and upright.” Not wishing to provide the film publicity, several papers that reviewed most major releases skipped this one, including *America* (whose Moira Walsh would soon denounce *Sayonara* for glorifying miscegenation). Despite an extended run in New Orleans, the *Times-Picayune* did not review it. It did report hostility to it and quoted the American Legion’s statement that director Rossen “has admitted being a one-time member of the Communist party.” In these reviews, the miscegenation issue almost completely obscured the colonialism issue. American critics’ references to blacks in the Caribbean as “the natives” also showed little historical awareness—blacks were no more native to the region than were the whites who brought them there—and despite news of Puerto Rican nationalism in these years, decolonization in the Caribbean did not seem to interest Americans in 1957.

British critics were even harder on the film, as two of eighteen reviews were positive (11 percent), fifteen were negative, and one neutral.<sup>90</sup> The *Monthly Film Bulletin* found the script “muddled and confusing” and “the motives and actions of the characters . . . bewildering.” The film’s intentions divided critics; in the *Daily Express*, Leonard Mosley said it “sets out, with the sincerest and most decent intentions, to show up the colour bar for the hateful thing it is,” but Reg Whitley of the *Daily Mirror* wrote, “I do NOT see this film as a profound contribution to a controversial subject. And I don’t think it was intended to be.” The *Daily Herald* believed it “sets out to shock” and “to sell tickets at the box office by exploiting the sad problem of the colour bar,” and the *Daily Worker* charged that it “has tried to commercialise the box office properties of the colour bar.” The *Observer* lamented that it “toys nervously with problems of miscegenation and politics,” and the *Evening Standard* wrote that it “buries its brightly coloured head in the sand whenever the problem looks like becoming at all unruly.” Milton Shulman of the *Sunday Express* contended that it “bangs on the colour bar with

the abandon of a mad xylophonist in a Negro band” but “strikes every note of the problem but the authentic one.” Denis’s romance with Margot bothered no one, though the *Star* referred to “that lovely piece of chocolate Dorothy Dandridge.” The *Daily Telegraph*’s Campbell Dixon found the British governor “a pleasant change from Leftist caricatures,” but he disliked the image of other whites, “an ineffectual lot” who sit “nursing cool drinks on terraces, watching the rising tide of Colour.”

In France, where the film sold just over a million tickets, four of sixteen reviews were positive (25 percent), seven negative, and five mixed.<sup>91</sup> Despite faulting this “superproduction” for its sprawling narrative and superficiality, French critics showed more interest than the British had in the treatment of colonialism and race relations. Two reviews insisted that films about race had little relevance to France: *France Soir* wrote that “the sentimental relations between blacks and whites . . . do not have for us the explosiveness they may have elsewhere,” and *Le Parisien Libéré* added that “for us the film is far from shocking.” Others, while not disagreeing, found the film interesting, given events in America, including the Little Rock crisis unfolding as the film played in France. *Le Parisien Libéré* called it “an insanely audacious work on this burning subject in the U.S.,” and *La Croix* applauded “the courage of its intentions” if not the clarity of its exposition. “The Ku Klux Klan,” declared *Les Lettres Françaises*, “was not wrong to mobilize its troops, its banners, its crosses, and its clubs to get the film banned in the old South,” as it is “a blow struck against racism, this affirmation that love is possible between beings of different colors.” *L’Humanité Dimanche* saluted “its courage and its novelty, which is almost revolutionary for American cinema in the era of MacCarthy [*sic*] and the Ku Klux Klan,” while in that paper’s daily edition Samuel Lachize wrote that “the hotheads of the Ku Klux Klan must have blanched under their hoods when this film was shown.” Lachize regretted “a certain confusion and some serious flaws” but found it “one of the most courageous and appealing American films of the last few years” and “one of the best films on view in Paris.”

Among those interested in the decolonization theme, Marie Perrot of the Communist *France Nouvelle* explained that “it implicitly raises the question of the independence of black peoples,” and “one senses the memory of Bandung passing over the work.” She also enjoyed the electoral rally, where “one feels the force of the crowd of blacks” who help Boyeur thwart “the reign of the planters.” Lachize also liked the “black leader of the plantation workers’ union” who “fights for the total liberation of his brothers of color,” while *La Croix* added that Boyeur “proves to the white candidate that he has the population firmly in his grip, and that the English have no more business here.” *Franc-Tireur* saw a bitter lesson for

all colonists: "Those who do not wish to return home can only resign themselves" to a new order in which "now, at the eleventh hour, it is no more possible to change camps than to change the color of their skin." Those embracing the film's anticolonialism also understood Boyeur's rejection of Mavis. *La Croix* said such a marriage would be "a betrayal of his racial brothers," and *L'Humanité Dimanche* saw Boyeur "totally devoting himself—and sacrificing his love—in the cause of his brothers of color and their struggle for liberation." On the far right, *Rivarol* used the epithet *nègres* and dismissed the film as a plea for "universal intermarriage." But in a country where left-wing publications far outnumbered those of the right, *Rivarol* was in the minority.

Despite its flaws, *Island in the Sun* spurred discussion of miscegenation, and it broke new ground by casting black actors in interracial romances. The film's shortcomings certainly distracted from the issues raised, and its treatment of interracial relationships was too cautious to say anything definitive. Although Boyeur's snubbing of Mavis suggested an intriguing anticolonialist case against intermarriage, the hasty exposition of his motives suggested blind ambition more than a clear ideology of black separatism. Given that integration was then the civil rights movement's dominant concern, there was little reason to expect a clear exposition of black separatism from Hollywood films. That the film went too far for some and not far enough for others reflected the difficulties of making movies on such controversial topics at that time, so the film and its reception afford useful insights into American and European opinions on miscegenation and decolonization in 1957.

While slavery metaphors pervaded Cold War depictions of life behind the Iron Curtain, Western filmmakers rarely addressed the slavery in their own countries' past.<sup>92</sup> *Show Boat* alluded to it, as did dialogue in *Pinky* and *Island in the Sun*, but Hollywood still generally steered clear of the subject. One significant exception was the Warner Bros. release *Band of Angels* (1957), which examined both slavery and sex between masters and slaves. A few older films had depicted slavery or the slave trade, with some emphasizing the happiness and loyalty of the slaves (*Birth of a Nation*, *Gone with the Wind*), while others underlined the miseries of slavery (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Slave Ship*), and still others managed to do both (*Way Down South*). The first major production on slavery in many years, *Band of Angels* illustrates the difficulties Hollywood faced in rethinking the subject, and if it ultimately failed, its flaws and the reactions it produced remain instructive.

Raoul Walsh directed *Band of Angels* from a script based on Kentuckian Robert Penn Warren's 1955 novel. In a film emulating *Gone with the Wind*, Yvonne De

Carlo played Amantha “Manty” Starr, a Scarlett O’Hara knock-off. The pampered daughter of a liberal Kentucky planter, this Southern belle rushes back home from finishing school upon learning of her father’s grave illness. Arriving at the Starrwood plantation just in time for his funeral, she protests when a slave-dealer, Mr. Calloway (Ray Teal), to whom her father owed a fortune, announces to the white and black mourners that he will sell off the plantation’s slaves. Manty declares that her father never sold or abused his slaves, but her plan to save the plantation collapses when Calloway delivers the shocking news—punctuated by an orchestra chord—that Manty’s mother was a slave, and that as a Negress, she will be sold, too.

Calloway imprisons Manty in his room on a boat to New Orleans, and after she attempts both escape and suicide, she manages to fend off his rape attempt only because the slaver does not wish to damage his merchandise. At a New Orleans slave auction, a humiliated Manty waits helplessly as the wealthy and dashing Hamish Bond (Clark Gable) strides in, bids \$5,000, and takes her away to his mansion in town. The rest of the film relates their evolving relationship against the backdrop of the Civil War and the Yankee invasion of Louisiana.

At first a surly and bitter Manty shuns Hamish, whom she expects to rape her, but he instead showers her with privileges and treats her respectfully as he seeks to win her heart. During a thunderstorm, Hamish visits Manty’s bedroom, and a code-placating ellipsis leaves the audience to deduce that they slept together. Revealing to Manty his guilt over his past as a slave trader in Africa—for which he insists the Negro part of her will always hate him—Hamish decides they have no future, so he plans to free her and send her to Cincinnati. When Hamish gets off the northbound riverboat at his Louisiana plantation, Pointe du Loup, and bids her farewell, she chooses love over freedom and disembarks to join him. Hamish curiously allows an arrogant neighbor, Charles de Marigny, to romance Manty against her will, and when Charles tries to force himself on her, Hamish’s black overseer, Rau-Ru (Sidney Poitier), bursts into the room and strikes Charles—an unpardonable act for which he must flee. Rau-Ru escapes justice when Union troops invade, and he enlists in a black regiment. Like Manty, who feels a mixture of love and disdain for Hamish, Rau-Ru, whom Hamish has educated and given extraordinary privileges, deeply resents his master. Rau-Ru, seeking a Union reward for Hamish’s capture, finds him on his plantation, but when Hamish reveals to Rau-Ru that he rescued him as a baby during a slaving raid in Africa, the adoptive son relents and helps Hamish escape with Manty.

The difficulties of discerning this film’s point originate with the novel, which reflects Robert Penn Warren’s own evolving outlook as he distanced himself from

his segregationist past.<sup>93</sup> The film follows the first half of the novel closely, though it condenses a passage in which Hamish describes Africans as brutal savages. While the film contains certain progressive elements, it also follows some cinematic conventions regarding slavery, and the result is a half-hearted updating of the genre. Given the film's obvious debt to *Gone with the Wind*—with its casting of Clark Gable as a rich adventurer who scoffs at the Confederacy's grand illusions and tries to tame a strong-willed woman in the South just before and during the Civil War—it is not surprising that *Band of Angels* fails to effect any real transformation of the genre.

The film's regressive elements include a rosy image of slavery conveyed by two kindly, benevolent slave owners: Manty's father and Hamish. Acknowledgment of the cruelties of other plantation owners appears only in the dialogue, and the film never shows any planter mistreating his slaves. A sequence in which happy, loyal slaves gather on the riverbank to greet Hamish with joyous song and dance is even more regressive than the similar scene in *Show Boat* in that they are greeting their master, not a boat full of entertainers. Hamish regrets his slave trading and mentions its horrors, but the attention he calls to Africans' complicity in that trade weakens the plea for white atonement. The film also invokes old fears of the black rapist; on the riverboat, Calloway threatens Manty by telling her, "I'm gonna chain you to a post down there with those hot-natured blacks and I ain't gonna care what happens to ya." Offensive images of blacks include two female slaves who taunt Manty about what white masters will do to her. Taking a Confederate viewpoint, the film depicts Union troops as a cruel, greedy, racist "band of angels" who intend to re-enslave blacks, as Manty learns when boorish soldiers harass her in the street.

The casting of a white actress to play a woman of mixed race—nearly a decade after *Pinky* and in the same year in which *Island in the Sun* cast black actors in interracial relationships—also seems regressive, but once again, it makes sense in that Manty had to look completely white: even she had no idea of her mixed ethnicity, her father having lied about her deceased mother. Although the code's miscegenation ban had just been rescinded, Warner Bros. engaged in a lengthy exchange with the PCA, which objected to Manty's romance with Hamish not just because they are unmarried, but also because "they are master and slave."<sup>94</sup> Given the diminished powers of the PCA and state and local censors, persistent social hostility to interracial romance was the main reason for the studio's timidity, and it likely went ahead with the film only because the story allowed for a white actress to play opposite Gable.

More objectionable than the casting is Manty's decision to get off the boat at

Pointe du Loup, abandoning her resistance to Hamish and giving up freedom in the North. Her decision differs in several ways from Pinky's decision to remain in the South: Manty chooses to stay in a slaveholding society; she expresses no concerns about "living a lie" in the North; she shows no interest in racial pride; she does not stay to deny white racists a victory; and she does not stay in order to own an institution providing her professional and personal fulfillment. She stays, instead, because she has fallen for her master. So whereas the film breaks an old taboo by highlighting sex between masters and slaves, it weakens the critique by presenting this relationship as consensual. On the other hand, Calloway's attempted rape of Manty gave audiences a very different picture, even if the film allows her to preserve her virtue. Once again, telling the story of a woman who looks white panders to white audiences' ethnocentrism, but it also likely induced white viewers to imagine the experience of slavery more effectively than if the actress and character had been black. The narrative structure also had a certain shrewdness, first inviting white viewers to identify with what they believe is a white woman then shocks them with her sudden sale into slavery, followed by the traumas of the attempted rape and the slave auction. Although it was hardly news that it was undesirable to be a slave, the film conveys it effectively and deserves credit for breaking Hollywood's long silence about the miseries of slavery.

Another important difference from films such as *Gone with the Wind* was the character Rau-Ru. A decade later, black radicals would assail Poitier as a black man whom white liberals could love, but his performance gives Rau-Ru an angrier, more powerful edge than he had in the novel, and he breaks with the old cinematic tradition of the smiling, obsequious black man. Whereas Manty learns to love Hamish, Rau-Ru hates him despite his privileges. "This kindness," he warns Manty, "it's a trap that can hold you in bondage forever," and his hatred for Hamish foreshadows 1960s black radicals' disdain for white liberals. Given that white audiences tended to focus on the ethnicity of the actors rather than the characters, it must have shocked many viewers when Rau-Ru slapped Manty for wanting to pass for white, perhaps even more than when he struck Charles. Nevertheless, the dialogue barely explains Rau-Ru's disdain for Hamish, and he finally relents and helps Hamish escape. The film also hints at Rau-Ru's romantic interest in Manty, but neither the book nor the film developed it.

In the heated racial atmosphere of 1957, the film predictably stirred up controversy. "Negro Market Specialist" Charles Williams sent Jack Warner a telegram on July 11, warning that "recent developments indicate possible national Negro boycott," though none materialized.<sup>95</sup> Warner also heard from a dean at Southern University, a black college in Baton Rouge, complaining that students who had

been extras in the film could not see it at the city's whites-only theater.<sup>96</sup> The film played in the South, even in Memphis, where censors barely approved it, despite the contact between Poitier and De Carlo, because Manty was not purely white.<sup>97</sup> Once again, angry southerners protested; in Virginia, one wrote to chide the censors for approving "this picture of racial propaganda that is intended to popularize miscegenation and interracial love-making in the eyes of the nation's youth"; the writer was especially upset that "Sidney Poitier is shown slapping a white woman across the room in a tantrum of rage."<sup>98</sup>

Despite this controversy and its major stars, the film did mediocre business in the United States, finishing at number thirty-three for 1957, a result that probably owed something to its flogging by critics.<sup>99</sup> In a sample of twenty-nine reviews, three were positive (10 percent), eighteen negative, and eight mixed or neutral.<sup>100</sup> For once, lurid ads reflected a film's true content, proclaiming: "And then they told her . . . 'your mother was a negro!'" and "He bought her . . . she was his!"<sup>101</sup> Despite panning the film, *Cue* was pleased that it gave "a somewhat more unvarnished version of slave days than is usually exhibited via the magnolia approach to the Old South," but more critics questioned the film's politics. Like others, Henry Popkin of *Commentary* complained of the slaves "jumping for joy" and "burst[ing] into song when they see old massa." The film seemed so pro-southern to the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* Mildred Martin that she wrote, "It wouldn't have been surprising to find the South winning the war." These Confederate sympathies won the film few friends among southern critics, as some ignored it altogether while others gave only bland plot summaries.<sup>102</sup> One exception was the *Miami Herald*, which predicted southerners would enjoy the film's skewering of northern "bleeding hearts who yelled for 'equal rights' and then exploited the victims of their so-called emancipation," even if the romance amid slavery "may sound corny in this day of civil rights fights." The African American papers showed less interest in the film than in censorship efforts, but the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, while charging that it "comes no nearer being an 'airtight' picture on the racial issue than others we have seen," nevertheless added: "We must admit progress is being made," and "Hollywood is on the job and one day it will come up with the whole loaf."

Among those discussing miscegenation, the *Milwaukee Journal* noted it was the summer's second film on the "delicate movie subject" of "Negro-white love affairs," even if "neither movie really comes to grips with the problem." James Powers of the *Hollywood Reporter* found the treatment of the Poitier-De Carlo relationship timid. "Whether or not such romances should be explored on the



screen is not the point," he wrote, but "once you start to tell such a story you have to go all the way with it," and here "the result is a half-told and vitiated story." In the *Los Angeles Examiner*, Ruth Waterbury wrote that this film on "one of the most important problems in American life . . . comes out namby-pamby and frequently foolish," while predicting that "someday someone is going to do the theme of miscegenation with courage and dignity." Voicing a common view, *Commonweal* called it "such a cheesy melodrama that one cannot consider it seriously at all," so once again a film that ventured into dangerous terrain provoked more discussion of its faults than of the issues it raised.

The British censors, like the Virginians, cut the line about the "hot-natured blacks" and also removed Rau-Ru's slap of Manty.<sup>103</sup> British critics were hard on the film—three of nineteen praised it (16 percent), ten panned it, and six gave split judgments—and the comments echoed American ones.<sup>104</sup> In France, *L'esclave libre* sold 1,279,129 tickets, and though many critics ignored the film, it received four positive, four negative, and two mixed reviews in a sample of ten.<sup>105</sup> *Combat*, observing that race "continues to obsess American souls and filmmakers," complained that "all the slave owners are good and generous," while the liberators are "racist, hypocritical, and crude." *Les Lettres Françaises* wrote that "such a pile of nonsense makes us forget that in sum, the film's purpose is not so bad," for "in the time of Governor Faubus and Little Rock, it is no small thing that a film tells us that a white man could marry a mulatto woman." Though claiming it would "make the Ku Klux Klan jeer," *L'Humanité* said it lacked the power of *Giant* and "drowns laudable sentiments in romantic hodgepodge."

In the aftermath of the Production Code revision, Western filmmakers' fascination with black-white romances and their mixed-race progeny reached a peak with the appearance of seven films between June 1958 and November 1959. The films are too numerous to examine in detail here, but a brief survey will indicate some patterns. Delmer Daves's *Kings Go Forth* (1958), set in World War II–France, starred Natalie Wood and Frank Sinatra in a romance between the mixed-race daughter of Americans who fled racism in the United States and a racist GI whose love for her initiates his transformation. Despite its progressive intentions, it had yet another white actress playing a mixed-race character who can "pass," and it showed typical evasiveness and timidity in its vague ending, its lack of interracial kissing, and its total lack of black characters or actors.<sup>106</sup>

*Night of the Quarter Moon* (1959) also featured a white actress (Julie London) as Ginny, a mixed-race woman who looks white, telling the story of her troubled

marriage to the white scion of a rich San Francisco family. The story highlights both plebeian racism, in the form of hostile neighbors, and the racism of the upper crust, as Ginny's mother-in-law sues to annul the marriage. The film encourages defiance of racism and defends interracial marriage, granting the couple a happy ending after a traumatic court case.<sup>107</sup>

On its surface, Douglas Sirk's 1959 remake of *Imitation of Life* appears surprisingly regressive. This ultramelodramatic remake of the 1934 film retains its antiquated racial outlook, as Sarah Jane, the mixed-race daughter of a black maid, is the usual tragic mulatto, breaking her poor mother's heart by trying to pass for white. When a white boyfriend, irate to learn her dark secret, beats up Sarah Jane, the film shifts attention—and blame—from the racist lad to Sarah Jane and her dissimulation. The images of the miserable girl warn against miscegenation as well as passing, and the film treats racism as immutable. Film scholars have argued that Sirk's melodramas intended a sardonic critique of American ways and attitudes, but if it aimed to criticize America's racial situation, it did so unfairly, as it simply ignored the changing racial situation and the struggles of both blacks and whites to combat racism.<sup>108</sup> Although the film reached the number five slot, the reviews were brutal, and critics saw it as dated and racially offensive.<sup>109</sup>

An unconventional look at black-white miscegenation appeared in Randal MacDougall's *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1959), a racially inverted Robinson Crusoe tale set in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust. A black man, Ralph (Harry Belafonte), who thinks he is the lone survivor, meets a young blonde woman, and when romance stalls because of Ralph's internalized misgivings—"people might talk," he warns her in a totally deserted New York City—the film highlights both the absurdity of racism and the difficulty of eradicating its effects from the deep recesses of people's psyches. Belafonte later complained that nervous MGM executives bowdlerized the film, whose opaque ending was typically evasive.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, its treatment of race, like its stance on nuclear war, insists that people must wake up and learn from their mistakes, by overcoming the burdens of memory and ingrained habit.

Also in 1959, actor John Cassavetes made his directorial debut in the low-budget *Shadows*, which also dealt with interracial romance. This largely improvised black-and-white film about bohemians in New York cast a white actress as an African American who passes for white and enters into a failed interracial relationship. Cassavetes denied any interest in racial issues, but his explanation of how they chose the topic indicates the intensity of interest in black-white relationships at the time: while experimenting with skits, he explained, "one particular improvisation exploded with life. It was about a black girl who passes for white."<sup>111</sup>

### Europe and Black-White Miscegenation

By 1958, Europeans began making their own films on race and black-white miscegenation. The first was *Tamango* (1958), adapted from an 1829 short story by Prosper Mérimée, and starring Curt Jurgens as the captain of a slave ship and Dorothy Dandridge as his mulatto mistress, Aiché.<sup>112</sup> Technically a Franco-Italian production, its director and cowriter was New York-native John Berry, who ran afoul of HUAC in 1951 and fled to Paris.<sup>113</sup> Although made in Nice, safely outside the PCA's jurisdiction, hopes of an American release constrained the film, as did French censorship. A French version opened with an explanation that "it is the honor of France to have been one of the first nations to pass laws against slavery" in 1794, a self-congratulatory statement that passed over France's long involvement in the slave trade and its reinstatement of slavery in 1802. Both versions showed the slave ship pursued by a French ship enforcing the ban on slave trading, even though it was mainly the British who policed that ban.<sup>114</sup> Mérimée's story about a revolt on a slave ship was hardly an abolitionist tract, despite a few digs at Europeans and the slave trade.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, it was quite insulting to Africans, as the revolt's leader, Tamango, was himself a slave trader hoodwinked into captivity, and the successful rebels ended up in a drunken stupor, fighting among themselves, and unable to figure out even the most basic principles of sailing.

The 1958 film altered the story considerably, making *Tamango* (France's Alex Cressan) a heroic figure and altering Mérimée's unflattering ending. After the ironically named *Esperanza* (Hope) loads its human cargo and eludes a French warship, the film focuses on the slaves' mistreatment and a revolt that ends with the Captain massacring them. Aiché enjoys her privileges and advises Tamango not to rebel, but when she learns that the Captain intends to marry a white woman and abandon her, she turns against him. When he frees her, hoping she will stay with him, she declares her true feelings. "I've always hated you," she says, "hated your hands on me, hated that bed," and she insists she is "telling the truth to a white man for the first time in my life." Taken hostage by Tamango, who had told her, "Your place is with us," she eventually declines his offer to rejoin the Captain and chooses to die with the rebels. The film thus updates Mérimée's tale for the decolonization era by siding with the colonized.

Although *Tamango* went beyond any Hollywood film of the 1950s in its frank depiction of a white man in a sexual relationship with a black woman—played by an African American actress—Dandridge called the script "a shipboard sex drama, tawdry and exploitive" and pushed Berry to make her role more confrontational.<sup>116</sup> It sought neither to defend miscegenation nor to promote integration,

instead opposing colonialism's sexual exploitation. Unlike Manty in *Band of Angels*, who stays with Hamish out of love, Aiché spurns the Captain, having slept with him only reluctantly. It also sounded the important theme of the solidarity of the colonized through her defection to the rebels. Tamango, whom Cressan played with strength and dignity, continued the new cinematic type of the angry, defiant black man, going beyond David Boyeur in *Island in the Sun* by using violence, and beyond Rau-Ru in *Band of Angels* by pursuing resistance to the bitter end. A happy ending would have weakened the film's angry denunciation of slavery, so it endorsed even futile revolt—two years before *Spartacus* did so. Although hardly a masterpiece, *Tamango* remains a historically significant, bold statement for its time.

The film had limited distribution in the United States, though claims that it was banned until 1962 are incorrect.<sup>117</sup> The obscure Hal Roach Distribution Corporation released it in late 1959, nearly two years after it opened in France, with minimal advertising (of the usual sensationalist sort); it did not play in many southern markets or make the box-office charts. Quite a few critics reviewed it, however, and eight of twenty reviews located were positive (40 percent), eight negative, and four mixed or neutral.<sup>118</sup> The dubbing annoyed critics, and *Film Daily* wrote that the film had “an art house quality to it” while *Variety* warned of poor prospects in the South. The *Los Angeles Times* dismissed it as a “low-grade new race melodrama” and mocked it, writing that Tamango is punished by being “tied down on the deck in the sunshine, which is something most tourists do voluntarily.” The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* also panned it as “a trashy and rather lurid melodrama” using miscegenation “for box-office sensationalism.”

The African American papers showed less interest in its treatment of slavery than in the interracial romance; the *Chicago Defender* mistakenly wrote that the French government had banned it in most of France (it was only banned in the colonies) and that the interracial romance was the reason. (The real reason was its depiction of a violent uprising of blacks at a time of pressures for decolonization.) The *Pittsburgh Courier*'s Darcy DeMille argued that it “presents a good and wonderful argument AGAINST racial discrimination” but “should never have been filmed” because it would fail at the box office. She warned that whites would shun the film “because what they see in their brother-whites will make them squirm” and that “Negroes from the South and from the North will intensely dislike” it as well, as “they too go to the theatre to be entertained.”<sup>119</sup> Several white critics questioned examining slavery at all. Marjory Adams of the *Boston Herald* suggested that the tale “seems out-of-date in these days when the Negro problem has ramifications having nothing to do with stolen Africans and men thrown to the

sharks,” while Wanda Hale of the *New York Daily News* declared that “the significance is considerably weakened by a story that goes back to the early 19th century.”

Not everyone considered slavery irrelevant history. Although he panned the film, *Commonweal*’s Philip Hartung called it “an effective reminder of a period which saw the origins of many of today’s woes,” and in the *Los Angeles Examiner*, Ruth Waterbury maintained that “for all those who feel superior because of the tint of their skin, it’s a good corrective to remember our own national guilt.” The *Dallas Morning News* added that “present social undertones naturally update this age-old controversy,” and it welcomed a film that “will help us remember” slavery’s harm “to both slave and master.” The *Chicago Tribune* also applauded the making of a film on slavery and suggested that someone make a film about the *Amistad* revolt.

The film did far better in France, where it sold 2,174,246 tickets despite heavily negative reviews; five of twenty reviews located were positive (25 percent), eleven negative, and four mixed or neutral.<sup>120</sup> Many criticized the directing and acting, praising only Cressan while giving Dandridge rough treatment. François Truffaut called it a stupid and “racist film,” explaining that charge only by saying that the ending placated American viewers. Despite panning the film, critics on the left praised its courage and relevance; *La Croix*’s Jean Rochereau noted it had “multiple resonances” for current issues, and *Libération* called it “a cry to which one must pay heed.” *L’Humanité* praised the revision of Mérimée’s insulting image of Tamango, making him “free and proud, aware of his dignity,” and pronounced it “a courageous film that evokes, for the French viewer, several burning relevant problems.” *France Observateur* specified its relevance to “a France officially engaged in the war in Algeria,” writing that it “portrays different attitudes toward the colonial problem,” including collaboration and resistance. *Témoignage Chrétien* found it rare “that a French film shows such courage.”

On the right, Jean Dutourd of the Gaullist *Carrefour*, insisted, “I am neither pro-slavery nor hostile to the emancipation of peoples of color,” but he sneered at “a rather inept story of black patriots” who spoke like graduates of the University of Dakar and concluded, “I felt as if I was at the Bandung Conference.” The far-right *Aspects de la France* lamented that Africa was now filled with “all the ferment of hatred against the civilizing nation, stirred up by our own democratic errors” and “the resurgence of age-old tribal rivalries that a wise colonial administration thought it had abolished.” Objecting to the alteration of Mérimée’s tale, *Rivarol*’s Gilles Martain complained that “all the people on the bridge, the whites, are ignoble and degenerate,” while “all below, the blacks, show a moving nobility, purity, and moral beauty.”

In May 1959, Rank released Basil Dearden's *Sapphire*. The impetus for the film came from race riots in London's Notting Hill neighborhood in August 1958 and growing racial tensions as whites beheld an influx of immigrants from current and former colonies.<sup>121</sup> This color film shot in London opens with the discovery of a young blonde murder victim, Sapphire Robbins, leading Police Superintendent Bob Hazard (Nigel Patrick) and his assistant, Inspector Phil Learoyd (Michael Craig) to begin investigating. Learning that Sapphire was a student at the Royal College of Music, they visit her rented room, where they discover garish, sexy lingerie in a locked drawer; their next surprise comes when they meet her brother, Dr. Robbins (Earl Cameron), and the sight of a black man entering—punctuated by a jazz-orchestra chord—leaves the Superintendent momentarily stunned. The police learn that Sapphire had been seeking to rise socially by passing for white, having abandoned her black circle of friends; she had also become engaged to—and pregnant by—a young white student, David Harris (Paul Massie).

The investigation yields an interesting look at London's ethnic neighborhoods and racial attitudes in 1959. It shows white working-class racism: a group of "Teddy Boys," street toughs notorious for their anti-immigrant racism, beat up a fleeing black suspect, Johnnie Fiddle. It also shows middle-class racism through the respectable Harris family and landladies who reject colored tenants—Sapphire's landlady slams the door in her brother's face. Even more boldly, it shows racist policemen, as Phil tells his boss, "These spades are a load of trouble. I reckon we should send them back where they came from." The wise Superintendent redeems the image of the police as he gently chides his partner for his ignorant views, and he represents the film's viewpoint, along with an enlightened doctor who also challenges Phil's racist views. Additionally criticizing racism is Sapphire's brother, who tells the Superintendent, "I see all kind of sickness in my practice, Superintendent. I've never yet seen the kind you can cure in a day."

While exposing racism, the film purveys some racist stereotypes of its own. Although there are positive black characters, including Sapphire's brother and two West Indians who tell the fleeing Johnnie Fiddle it is "your kind that gets us respectable folk a bad name," other black characters live in dirty slums, dance wildly in seedy nightclubs, and live by crime. When Phil visits Horace Big Cigar, a room full of idle, grinning, wisecracking black lowlifes make Phil's urge to deport all West Indians understandable. The film also insists on blacks' primal attraction to drumming and rhythm. A black bartender in a seedy dive (Orlando Martins) tells the Superintendent "you can always tell" if someone who looks white is really colored "once they hear the beat of the bongo." The camera then zooms in on the feet of a woman who looks white but cannot resist a jazzy dance

beat. The film also assuages white guilt about racism by insisting that blacks are just as racist, and a young black barrister who drives a flashy Jaguar convertible—an image liable to elicit white resentment—tells the Superintendent that his father would not let him marry the partly white Sapphire. Finally, the murdered Sapphire is the usual tragic mulatto, unwilling to live in the black world but unwelcome among whites.

British critics applauded *Sapphire*, giving it seventeen positive (81 percent), two negative, and two mixed reviews.<sup>122</sup> Although some praised it simply as fine entertainment and said little or nothing about the racial theme, others shared the *Daily Cinema*'s verdict that it was a "first-rate whodunit . . . with a salutary moral of tolerance." Most reviews discussed race relations, which the *Sunday Times* called "a division comparatively new in English society." The *Guardian* wrote that "we still tend to think cosily of this as something to be read about in the news from Africa or America," so the film "came as a bit of a shock." John Waterman of the *Evening Standard* declared that "after the Notting Hill riots" and after "seeing for myself accommodation notice boards that announce: 'No Coloured,'" . . . I must conclude that the happenings in *Sapphire* can be certified as a true likeness." In an increasingly cosmopolitan London, he added, most people know prejudice exists but "have no defined attitude," and he applauded a film that "brings every member of the audience face to face with the appalling revelation."

Others were more indulgent of the racism depicted. The *Observer*'s C. A. Lejeune was pleased that the film "has fair arguments to advance on both sides," and the *Daily Mail*'s Fred Majdalany praised it for showing "the attitudes of landladies" quite "understandingly." This objectivity, however, bothered Nina Hibbin of the *Daily Worker*. "You can't fight the colour bar merely by telling people it exists," she charged. "You have to attack it, with passion and conviction." Complaining that black characters "have been put on the shady side of life," and fearing that "a colour-baiter among the audience could well find himself in complete sympathy with the racialism expressed," she had "an uneasy feeling that it will do more harm than good," for this "objective exposure" is "perilously near to becoming a justification." Curiously, the only other critic who shared the *Daily Worker*'s outlook was the conservative *Spectator*'s Isabel Quigly, who found the film "exaggerated, confusing and slightly patronising." She noted that the black barrister "is turned into the familiar spade figure by a flashy car and girl," while throughout, "coloured = tomtoms, slums, rackets, zooty suits, [and] taffeta petticoats." She also complained that "we might have been shown a coloured family as respectable as David's." Nonetheless, she concluded (speaking as if Britons were all white) that "there is room for a British film on our present . . . attitude to coloured people"

and not just those “tyrannised in Little Rock or Johannesburg.” Few others derided the film’s racial blind spots, and both the film and the reactions to it reveal a society just beginning to grapple with this aspect of decolonization.

In 1959, the French revisited black-white miscegenation in Michel Gast’s film of a 1946 Boris Vian novel, *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes* (released in New York in 1963 as *I Spit on Your Grave*). Gast cowrote the low-budget black-and-white revenge with Vian and two others. It opens with a barely explained lynching of a black man by a white southern mob angry over his dating a white woman. The victim’s brother, Joe Grant (Christian Marquand), who looks completely white, burns the body and then heads north to “Trenton,” where he takes random revenge on the white race by sleeping with racist white women unaware of his ethnicity. Taking on Stan Walker, heir to the family that dominates the town, Joe faces down Stan’s goon squad, sleeps with his sister, and gets his fiancée, Elizabeth, to fall in love with him. By the time the police track down the fugitive lovers, Joe has had his revenge in white women’s beds. The film’s depiction of America is weird and unrealistic, but at least the handful of Americans who saw it learned for once how foreigners felt watching Hollywood try to depict their societies. Its problems as a revenge began with its failure to create emotional impact in the hasty lynching scene, and despite a certain novelty in Joe’s way of taking revenge on white people, the lack of realism weakened its critique of racism. And while French filmmakers were certainly free to critique American racism, examining someone else’s racism took little courage. French censorship, of course, would have blocked any film about French racism toward North Africans, and it would be another decade before Michel Drach explored that issue in *Elise, ou la vraie vie* (1970).

The black-white miscegenation films of this period may now seem dated and timid, perhaps even conservative and hostile to racial progress, as some contend.<sup>123</sup> While some viewers at the time certainly found them timid, others found them shocking and offensive, and despite the war’s influence on racial attitudes, ample evidence indicates the depth and breadth of hostility toward black-white miscegenation, principally in the United States. The old litmus test about permitting one’s daughter to marry a Negro expressed something very real in many white people’s attitudes. In exploring romance between blacks and whites, filmmakers focused on the most sensitive of racial questions, and assessing those films requires recalling how dramatically racial attitudes have changed since then. In addition to judging the films for their time, one needs a sense of the realities of the film industry and the conflicting pressures filmmakers faced in an art form in which nearly everything seen on screen represented compromises,



in an industry in which failures could end careers, and in an era when declining ticket sales made it risky to alienate large sectors of an audience. Securing financing and distribution for such films was challenging, and as Zanuck explained in making *Pinky*, attracting the people who most needed to see such pictures demanded compromises. Keeping these caveats in mind, very few of these films are the reactionary, segregationist works some suggest.

One striking characteristic of these films is their interest in “white Negroes,” who appear in eleven of the fourteen films examined—all but *Pool of London*, *Tamango*, and *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. Filmmakers’ copying of successful formulas—in this case the surprise hits *Lost Boundaries* and *Pinky*—help account for this phenomenon, as do Hollywood’s racist hiring practices and preference for white characters (though the European films also featured “white Negroes”). Casting whites allowed the films to avoid the inflammatory sight of black and white actors kissing and touching, a key issue given audiences’ tendency to perceive the ethnicity of actors more than characters. Telling tales of white Negroes also helped white viewers empathize with racism’s victims, even if doing so pandered to their ethnocentrism and made the films less compelling to black viewers. Casting white actors made sense in that the narratives required the characters to fool everyone, and characters who looked white also ferreted out hidden racism, as others made racist comments or became involved in interracial romances in ignorance of their mixed heritage.

Despite their many compromises and blind spots, these films provoked reflection about racism and the nature of the differences whites used to justify discrimination. Calling attention to the one-drop rule did more than just demonstrate how extreme racism could be. Behind the often-decried irrationality of racism stood a quasi-rational system of discrimination that benefited white people, and the one-drop rule helped prevent infiltration of a reserved domain by the many African Americans with white ancestors. From this perspective, far from dwelling on an insignificant issue, these films scrutinized and threatened a cornerstone of segregation and discrimination. The fury with which certain white southerners protested the films and the dire warnings they issued about their consequences attest to the issue’s importance. By 1960, this cycle of films may have exhausted the subject of miscegenation between whites and “white Negroes,” but these films remain important in the history of race relations and decolonization.

Also historically significant is these films’ replacement of the obedient, grinning black characters of prewar films with new characters—proud, angry, defiant, and rebellious. In an era when the civil rights movement was gaining strength,

the films both reflected and encouraged boldness with characters such as Pinky, standing her ground against southern racists and taking pride in her ethnicity; David Boyeur, challenging the white power structure in the West Indies and shunning Mavis in the interest of the cause; Rau-Ru, detesting his liberal master for his paternalist kindness; Tamango, courageously leading a slave revolt against hopeless odds; Aiché, finally joining the revolt; Ginny, refusing to surrender her husband to a rich and powerful mother-in-law in *Night of the Quarter Moon*; and Joe Grant, in *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*, pursuing his vendetta against the white race. A few of the films also showed that one might reject miscegenation not out of colonialist concerns to preserve racial hierarchies, but rather out of anticolonialist motives of racial pride (Pinky), racial solidarity (David Boyeur), and rejection of sexual exploitation (Aiché). Films also broke an old taboo by highlighting whites' sexual exploitation of blacks, as seen in the attempted rape scene in *Pinky*, the slave dealer's attempted rape of Manty in *Band of Angels*, and the Captain's sexual imprisonment of Aiché. Finally, nearly all the films featured white racist villains, and all indicted racism in some way. Far from carrying on prewar "business as usual" or seeking to put blacks in their place, these films reflected and promoted changes in race relations and attitudes toward miscegenation.

### Film, Miscegenation, and Decolonization

Postwar films on miscegenation in the American West, in Asia, and between blacks and whites in Europe and America reveal an extraordinarily diverse array of issues, messages, concerns, and approaches. Deciding what even constitutes a film about miscegenation is nettlesome, but excluding off-screen relationships, this study has identified more than one hundred American, British, and French films from the period that deal with miscegenation, whether through rape, consensual or semiconsensual relations, or mixed-race characters. Ten of the films present rapists of color threatening white women—a strikingly low number—while white rapists threatening women of color appeared in nine films. This parity suggests an era in which new, more anticolonialist or racially liberal attitudes overlapped with persistent colonialist and racist tropes.

A similar picture emerges from examining the outcomes of these tales. The common notion that films reinforced colonialist taboos with cautionary tales of interracial lovers meeting bitter ends has some validity in that forty-six of eighty-nine consensual couples ended up separated, often by violent death. Yet thirty-five of these relationships ended happily, while eight were left unresolved, so once again new attitudes became common while old ones persisted. And while nearly

all the films with happy endings for interracial couples viewed miscegenation positively, unhappy endings did not always signify opposition, as films often made martyrs of lovers killed or separated by racist villains. Although many films were evasive or ambiguous, films frankly opposing miscegenation were now in a distinct minority.

With some films opposing miscegenation from anticolonialist perspectives, it was impossible to assume either that films opposing miscegenation favored colonialism or that films favoring miscegenation opposed colonialism. Indeed most pro-miscegenation films took a liberal-colonialist view, favoring a tolerant, racially inclusive vision of the spread of Western rule. In most of those films, either the interracial couples themselves or their offspring ended up living happily not in indigenous societies, but in Western societies whose inclusiveness helped legitimize their dominance. Also suggesting the limits of change was the persistence of the double standard that tolerated white men's relations with women of color more than the inverse: only twenty-two of the eighty-nine consensual couples featured men of color, and those relationships were less likely to end well.<sup>124</sup> Resistance remained stronger to seeing white women with men of color.

Depictions of mixed-race characters in this period did not always follow familiar patterns. The figure of the tragic mulatto does fit roughly a third of the mixed-race characters, while roughly the same number seem happy, even in the face of mistreatment by racist whites. Some of the unhappy characters suffer simply for being nonwhite as opposed to being mixed, while quite a few, such as Pinky, the Carters in *Lost Boundaries*, and Victoria Jones in *Bhowani Junction*, suffer at first but ultimately find happiness. The figure of the evil mulatto or mixed-race character nearly disappeared in this period, as only three of the sixty-five (Nita in *Arrowhead*, Armand in *Apache Woman*, and Major Cham in *China Gate*) were clearly villains. Many mixed-race characters were children, and films such as *Giant*, *China Gate*, and *Trooper Hook* invited sympathy for miscegenation by showing adorable little children, though never children of black-white couples.

Critics mostly praised messages of tolerance, with only a small minority openly opposing miscegenation, and none stated anything like the vitriol white southerners expressed to censors. Already by this time, if critics held white supremacist or segregationist views, they mostly kept them silent. There were probably big differences between private and public opinion on miscegenation, but the domination of the public sphere by voices favoring tolerance was a significant historical development in this period. Attitudes certainly varied by country; the French seemed generally more open to miscegenation, though no French film took on the

sensitive topic of relations with North Africans in France. France, in short, combined the most racially enlightened views and the strictest movie censorship.

The films might have provoked more hostility about miscegenation had they presented it more boldly. Most avoided showing actors of different colors kissing, told tales of white men rather than women in interracial relationships, dropped miscegenation subplots abruptly, and set tales in the past and/or overseas. These timidities and evasions provoked complaints, particularly in liberal or left-wing papers, but while some critics felt the films did not go far enough, many viewers likely felt they went too far. In short, this was an issue where the opinions of critics and many audience members likely diverged somewhat. Many miscegenation films proved unsatisfying as entertainment—in part because filmmakers were treading so cautiously and in part because the subject made people uncomfortable—and their shortcomings distracted critics from discussing the issues they raised.

Despite this timidity, filmmakers were mostly ahead of the general public on this issue—expressing more liberal views and calling attention to issues others preferred to ignore. Many of the films illustrate interracial love's ability to bridge the distance between colonizer and colonized, as sexual exploitation gradually led to more serious relationships and fostered familiarity and mutual understanding. Racist whites gradually lost their hatreds in *Broken Arrow*, *The Big Sky*, *Three Stripes in the Sun*, *Sayonara*, and other films, gaining insight and sympathy for another culture by falling in love. While this was an actual experience for some Westerners, films transmitted that experience to millions of others, and though watching a film about someone's transformation through a love affair means less than experiencing it personally, films' ability to capture people's emotions and remain in their memories for years suggests how influential they can be. As unfortunate as it may be that people can only begin to see others' humanity and cultural worth through finding them sexually attractive, things often worked that way. Films made this easier by casting good-looking people to play romantic parts, and viewers' tendencies to find actors and movie characters attractive—even to fall in love with them—helped them rethink their perceptions of peoples under forms of colonial rule.

Although the casting of white actors weakened the effect, many films did cast attractive actors of color in romantic roles, including Harry Belafonte, Earl Cameron, Armando Silvestre, James Shigeta, Dorothy Dandridge, Katy Jurado, Elsa Cardenas, Rita Moreno, Maria Elena Marques, France Nuyen, Li Hua Li, Miiko Taka, Shirley Yamaguchi, Machiko Kyô, Eiko Ando, and Miyoshi Umeki. If these films indeed led viewers to think more about people of color and to reconsider

their assumptions of racial difference, then cinema played a significant role in undermining one pillar of colonialism. At the very least, this avalanche of films about miscegenation accustomed Western filmgoers to the sight of interracial couples, and when people actually saw an interracial couple for the first time, they probably thought of films they had seen.