

RACE ON THE ROAD: FROM THE PERIPHERY TO THE CENTRE IN JONATHAN KAPLAN'S *LOVE FIELD*

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Following a general cinematic trend, the road movie genre in its beginnings relegated the representation of non-whites to the periphery. After analysing the general state of affairs of racial representation in the genre, we witness in the 1990s a timid but remarkable trend to produce “racial” road movies which vindicate the rights of central representation of racial minorities. This paper analyses a representative racial road film, Jonathan Kaplan’s *Love Field* (1992), in an attempt to show that the road movie’s generic conventions and traditional liberal pedigree may provide a context where the depiction of racial minorities and race relations may finally reach a central status.

In the road movie we have an ideogram of human desire and the last ditch search for self, and who is more plagued for hunger and lostness than the socially disenfranchised? (Atkinson 1994:14).

1. RACE ON THE ROAD: A PERIPHERAL PRESENCE

While it reminds us of the inner search, a basic trait of the road movie genre, this quotation by Michael Atkinson also makes the significant point that the socially marginalised are liable to experience an even greater need for this personal quest. As members of this underprivileged group together with women, non-whites can feel more intensely the “call to adventure”, to flee from an emotionally retarded society which has failed to integrate them satisfactorily. Thus, given their unfavourable condition in society which has traditionally allotted them a peripheral position as mere accessories to the white male, African Americans, Hispanics or Native

American Indians have started to find a central space of cinematic representation in the road genre.

However, American cinema presents a central white hero whose existence relegates the representation of race and ethnicity, like that of women, to the periphery. This has traditionally been the case in the western, whose prevailing maleness has been accompanied by a recurrent white supremacy and “blatant racist trappings” (Neale 2000:224). Westerns like *The Searchers* may promote the values of home and family but also of miscegenation and loathing of otherness, in this case of Native Americans. Following the western’s racist legacy, people of colour have been conspicuously absent¹ from the road movie, an absence that reproduces their lack of power in real life, even in a genre where protagonists do not hold positions of power but of uncertainty, illegality and suffering. Thus, as Sharon Willis argues, the standard protagonist of the road genre is the white male frontiersman-adventurer (1997:287), which indicates that this genre has inherited the latent racism present in its two main influences, the western and Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. As Mark Williams claims, not only racism but also “hostility to outsiders of the human variety is commonly depicted in both oater and road movie” (1982:10). The foundational road feature – Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* – already shows an overinvested white male point of view (Laderman 1996:48), that is, the beginning of a broad racist trend in the genre whereby non-white communities are peripherally represented.

As far as the representation of race before the 1990s is concerned, we find a white hegemonic panorama that is only disrupted by the odd presence of some Latino or black characters in some road films mainly dating back to the 1970s. The fact that the Mexican border is the final destination for many a road journey accounts for the presence of this ethnic group in the genre in films such as Sam Peckinpah’s *The Getaway* or *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo García* or Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider*. In these examples we find what Laderman understands as the presence of “blacks, Mexicans and Native Americans romanticised as repositories of authenticity, antidotes to white urban angst” (1996:43). This is what happens in the road movies from the 1970s, whose representation of racial difference ends up emptying these cultures of their ethnic heritages.

In addition, like other film genres, the road movie has shown a special predilection for the buddy pair, a formula that also included protagonists of different races. This was the case of road films made before the 1990s ranging from *The Defiant Ones* (1958), *Backroads* (1977) and *48 HRS* (1982), to *Coast to Coast* (1986). Despite its surviving limitations, if we compare the racial presence in road movies in the 1970s to that in the 1990s we witness a remarkable improvement in

¹ Ed Guerrero cleverly denominates this absence “the trope of invisibility” (1998:330), a state of racial denial that passes for the social norm.

the depiction of racial difference. Though timidly, in the 1990s the road genre is starting to depict and give central protagonism to minority groups for other reasons apart from sex, mainly race and sexual orientation. In this sense David Laderman argues that, "as women and gays take the 1990s road movie for a socially critical drive, so too do various non-white ethnic drivers who give the genre a refreshing, repoliticized spin" (2002:217-8). Thus, as regards the filmic representation of race, the new presence of road movies made and starred by African Americans, Native American Indians and Chicanos has gradually changed the racist panorama of the road genre in the 1990s.² Some illustrations of this new trend, which indeed constitutes the exception to the general white rule, are such road movies as *One False Move* (1992), *Poetic Justice* (1993), *Get on the Bus* (1996), or *Ride* (1999), which represent African Americans, and *Powwow Highway* (1989) and *Smoke Signals* (1998), depicting Native Indians. The rise of some Latin American filmmakers like Peter Bratt (*Follow Me Home*, 1997) and Robert Rodríguez (*From Dusk till Dawn*, 1996) and stars such as Salma Hayek, Antonio Banderas or Benicio del Toro, has also contributed to the Latino presence in the road genre in films from the 90s like *From Dusk till Dawn* and *Follow Me Home* (Hayek), *Play It to the Bone* (Banderas) to *Excess Baggage* (del Toro). The appearance of some U.S.-Mexican co-productions like *Highway Patrolman* (1992), *Perdita Durango* (1998) or more recent ones like *The Mexican* (2001) have also contributed to reinforcing the representation of Latinos in the genre. A selection of these "racial" road movies, each with its own peculiar characteristics, is discussed below.

Despite their vindication of the rights of representation of a racial minority, racial road movies abide by the genre's conservative masculinist bias, presenting men of colour rather than people of colour (Laderman 2002:218). Road films like *Get on the Bus*, *Powwow Highway* and *Smoke Signals* paradoxically exclude women, which undermines their subversive potential. This is why the presence of a black female lead in John Singleton's *Poetic Justice*, makes it a remarkable exception within its kind.

Although *Get on the Bus*³ is far more politically compromised than *Ride*, both road movies share an uncommon element in the genre which is the presence of a travelling community. In both cases black citizens travel by coach, a special means of transport for the underprivileged which symbolises the mobility of the black collective identity. In fact, as Eyerman and Löfgren argue, in real-life U.S. culture mobility for African Americans was different then for the white citizens since rather

² Despite the relevant presence of Asian immigrants in the population of the U.S.A. the Asian race constitutes the most conspicuous absence in U.S. American road movies (Lucy Liu's brief appearance in *Play It to the Bone* and some Eskimos in *Leaving Normal* are rare exceptions).

³ For further information on Spike Lee's road movie and The Million Man March see Paul Gilroy's article (2001:60-64).

than a westward journey it marked a movement away from rural southern poverty towards a new start in the North.⁴ Moreover, in those days it was the train, not the car, that symbolised hope of a new life and escape from present pain and restrictions (1995:55). Here the train has been replaced by the coach, another means of transport symbolising both marginalisation and community.

Powwow Highway and *Smoke Signals* are two Native American road movies starred by a male buddy couple which share many elements such as Native American spiritualism and mysticism, uncommon for the genre, the opposition between old tradition and modernism, the need for political activism or the encounter with the landscape to rediscover one's racial roots.

Finally, Peter Bratt's *Follow Me Home* is the most multiracial of the group since it stars an African American, an American Indian and two Chicanos heading cross-country on a van. They are graffiti mural artists who plan to paint the White House with their images, that is, with the colours that have been marginalised in the history of the U.S.A. The film's variety of characters ranging from the intellectual to the alcoholic, the feminist, the sexist or the racist does not provide this open-ended film with a clear message but it succeeds in raising a powerful question on racial attitudes and challenges the audience to position itself accordingly.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned films featuring central non-white themes and protagonists still constitute the exception to the general peripheral trend in the history of the road movie. On average, African Americans, Asians, Native Indians and, to a lesser extent, Latin Americans, have constituted a minor presence depicted in various ways and to different degrees. As a general rule the depiction of race in the road movie of the 1990s presents non-whites in secondary roles. In some films like Antonio Banderas's *Crazy in Alabama*, non-whites appear in subplots. In this road movie for example, the heroine's main story is paralleled by a sub-plot placing the protagonist's nephew coming face-to-face with racism and the black civil rights movement in the mid-1960s American South. Moreover, non-white protagonists may also work as the aforementioned "token negro", which Cameron Bailey points to as an illustration of progressive racism, or the grossly stereotyped appearance of black faces across the background of a film, which provides a literal local colour that adds to the film's hip credibility (1988:32). As an illustration of this, Bailey points to the black rap players in *Something Wild* (1986), and David Laderman mentions the black rasta cyclist in *Thelma & Louise* (1991) (1996:56). To these we could add the old Indian of *Natural Born Killers* (1994), and the Native American cop in *My Own Private Idaho* (1991). These characters constitute mere racial decorators for political

⁴ As Nick James remarks, some black road movies like *One False Move* "reverse the direction of the great black migration from the rural South to the industrial North, tracing American race conflict back to its seed bed" (2001:232).

correctness or as Ella Shohat puts it, mere “guests in the narrative, placed there simply to give presence to American Otherness rather than to serve the need of the diegesis” (1991:240).

Another option for non-white riders in the 90s is being cast as sidekicks of a white protagonist. Many American narratives like Mark Twain's classic *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *The Last of the Mohicans* or *Moby Dick*, allow white men to bond in significant ways with men of colour. This trend has survived to our day when, “continuing to be cinema's most standard and profitable strategy for representing African Americans on the commercial screen” (Guerrero 1998:332). This biracial buddy formula was popularised in the 1990s by box-office hits like *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Die Hard with a Vengeance* and *Se7en*, both made in 1995, or other films placing black actors like Samuel L. Jackson, Wesley Snipes, Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman or Will Smith alongside a white star. The presence of non-whites as sidekicks also comes from a marketing strategy claiming that multiracial combinations result in a broader crossover audience appeal and therefore in greater box-office profits. Moreover, this mixed-race buddy duo which prolongs the life of the male buddy pair, may also result from the general belief that racial difference may work as a homosexual anxiety reliever for the audience, as Yvonne Tasker explains, deflecting attention from homoeroticism (1998:85). Under these circumstances Guerrero's forecast claiming that the biracial buddy formula in all of its variations is destined for a long run in Hollywood makes full sense (1998:333). As could be expected, the road movie genre recovered the biracial buddy pair from the 70s and reinvented it for the 1990s, in films such as *The Sunchaser* or *Fled* (both 1996).

But the moment this biracial formula replaces one of these two men with a woman, the ghost of miscegenation takes hold of the film, providing a significant source of information for the understanding of racial and sexual relations in contemporary U.S. American society. In 1915 D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* controversially presented the cavalry saving whiter-than-white Lillian Gish from blackness, placing the Ku Klux Klan in a heroic role and blacks and mulattos as dangerous men obsessed with seducing white women. Later on came films dealing with the same polemic issue, like *Band of Angels* (1957), *Guess Who's Coming for Dinner* (1967), and especially movies made around the 1990s like *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Love Field*, *One False Move*, *Made in America* (1993), *Strange Days* (1995), *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995), *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996) or *One Night Stand* (1997). All of them presented a biracial couple this time including members of both sexes instead of male buddies.

Under these circumstances, the appearance of a road movie like Jonathan Kaplan's *Love Field*, which presents a complex look into both race and sexual relations and the thorny issue of miscegenation seems particularly worthy of analysis. The aim of the second section of this paper is to examine how *Love Field*, a representative road film from the 1990s, shows that the road movie's generic

conventions and traditional liberal pedigree provide a context where the central depiction of a mixed-race relationship in particular, and of race relations in general, serves at last the interests of these two socially marginalised communities represented in the film.

2. LOVE FIELD OR THE ROAD TOWARDS THE CENTRE

First of all, it is worth mentioning that Jonathan Kaplan's trajectory as a filmmaker shows a commitment to marginalised groups, especially blacks, women, or both, as happens in *Love Field* and in *Night Call Nurses* (1972), where three nurses help a black prisoner escape from hospital. He is also generically daring and attracted to controversial themes, as his black exploitation *Truck Turner* (1974), his Oscar-award-winning and rape-theme-based *The Accused* (1988) and his female western *Bad Girls* (1994) show. Moreover, Kaplan belonged to the Corman school, which capitalised on straightforward exploitative road movies in the 1970s (Williams 1982:19). This may account for Kaplan's special attraction towards the road. He has made both a trucking movie entitled *White Line Fever* and a racing movie called *Heart Like a Wheel* (1983), before dealing with racial relations on the road in *Love Field*.

From the very beginning of the film we learn that, like many U.S. citizens in the 60s, its female protagonist, Lurene Hallet (Michelle Pfeiffer), a white Dallas beautician approaching thirty, worships the Kennedys. The film opens with two female hands browsing the black and white photographs of a homemade scrapbook of the Kennedy family. Such is Lurene's obsession with the Kennedys that her life seems to depend on theirs. She behaves like an excited schoolgirl at the famous couple's fateful 1963 visit to her hometown. She takes the U.S. flag out, hangs it by the front door and angrily tears away an anti-Kennedy pamphlet. She has offered to take her neighbour, a wheelchair-bound elderly lady, to Dallas airport, in an attempt to watch the presidential couple from a privileged first row. Back from the airport and at the beauty parlour where she works, Lurene learns about the terrorist attack against the president. When she gets home Lurene is totally devastated. She tells her thoughtless husband, Ray (Brian Kerwin), that they must go to the funeral because he was "her" president, the only one she ever voted for. But Ray shows total lack of understanding mixed with violence, which makes Lurene decide to desert him and travel halfway across the country to Washington to attend the president's funeral.

On the long-distance coach she meets Paul Cater (Dennis Haysbert), a southern black man in his thirties returning home to Philadelphia after recovering his

estranged six-year-old daughter, Jonell (Stephanie McFadden). Lurene starts to socialise on the bus and soon befriends the quiet and frightened little girl. After they have an accident Lurene starts to be suspicious of Paul when she discovers that he has given her a false name and that the little girl has been beaten up. She calls the F.B.I. in Texas because she thinks that he has kidnapped Jonell. Lurene bravely confronts Paul and tells him he cannot take the child with him but Paul demonstrates his identity as father. Lurene apologises for her mistake and warns him that the F.B.I. is on their way. As Paul is the natural but not yet legal father of the child, he decides to steal a car to run away from the police. Guilty Lurene insists on continuing the journey with them, and this is how this mismatched couple with child finally get to intimate.

The film's title, *Love Field*, also the name of Dallas airport, elicits on the one hand the admiration that Lurene shows for Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy, illustrated by her eager attempt to see them at that airport. But on the other hand, this title also points to the biracial romance on the road that starts to grow between Lurene and Paul. Thus, the first third of the film is rather static since it concentrates on Lurene's life framed mainly within the Kennedy assassination while the rest of the movie presents a transformative journey on the road including an interracial love relationship with the backdrop of racial intolerance in 60s U.S.A.

As Sharon Willis states, the film explores "the nuances of the relationship between an interracial pair on the road together in 1963 and the complex brutalities of the social context around them" (1997:246). Despite Pfeiffer's casting as the protagonist, the racial content of the film did not seem to make for box-office appeal, which suggests a case of "guilty by association". The representation on the screen of a fictional story recalling the thorny issue of racism in real life, especially in 1992, one year after the Rodney King case and Los Angeles riots, destroyed the film's box-office appeal. The aim of this section is to explore the road movie characteristics of the film and to examine how the road affects the interracial relationship of the leading couple.

The first road movie element present in *Love Field* is the journey, the structuring axis of the narrative. Lurene and Paul are mobile characters who happen to get to know each other on a trip by coach, like the leading couple in *It Happened One Night*. The journey works as both a fortuitous meeting place for two mismatched people and an occasion for them to undergo a process of metamorphosis, another essential convention in this genre which is directly linked to the journey. As many road movies did before, the journey in *Love Field* joins together two mismatched characters whose differences decrease as the travelling experience progresses. Skin colour and other factors marked by race such as background and personality separate Lurene and Paul. They come from different communities in Dallas and Philadelphia, and from different social classes and civil status: she is a married hairdresser while he is a single

pharmacist. Their political ideology also differs: Lurene is pro-Kennedy while Paul is not. She naïvely believes Kennedy did a lot for black people until a black mechanic suggests to her a different view:

Look around ma'am. Look like he done much here?

This scene succeeds in suggesting that Lurene's position probably illustrates how society's fascination with the good aspects of the Kennedy administration may have blinded them to the problems which still existed. Moreover, it presents both sides of the U.S. American condition in the 1960s.

Furthermore, along the journey we learn that Paul and Lurene's personalities are also antagonistic. Lurene is a naïve, talkative, simplistic but good-natured woman who hides behind empty talk her anxiety and sadness at having lost a child and at being unable to communicate with her insensitive husband. Worst of all, she does not really have a life of her own but survives with the vicarious pleasure that observing the Kennedys' life provides her. Her marriage is falling apart and she is thinking of getting divorced. As regards her attitude towards black people, although she seems unprejudiced because she is very friendly and sociable with them, Lurene is the kind of white woman who gets scared when woken up by a black person like Paul on the coach and shouts:

You scared me! Just like the Boogey man!

As a contrast, Paul is a wary, introverted, serious man who was not prepared for a marriage or fatherhood when his girlfriend got pregnant with his child. Although he proposed to her, she knew his mind so she left him and now, after her death, he has decided to keep his daughter. In addition, he is the kind of black man who, as he says, just doesn't "expect much from white folks". Indeed, he is aware of the racism and danger that innocent Lurene does not seem to notice. This is why he is reluctant to socialise with the white race that she represents. Their dissimilar character traits are emphasised by their different physical features. Paul is very tall, broad-shouldered and strongly-built while Lurene is petite and fragile-looking, which enhances the contrast between them. On top of that, Lurene is whiter than average, with a milky complexion, white movie-star teeth, peroxide hair and light-coloured eyes whereas Paul's skin is deep black, a contrast which is highlighted visually in the film's night shots and especially in the love scene.

As Manohla Dargis claims when she explains a similar mixed-race sex scene between Geena Davis and Samuel Jackson in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, "of course colour does matter, especially when white skin and black work such a chromatic and vivid contrast and both are undressed to show off their lustre" (1996:8). This view also applies to other films like *Jungle Fever*, and especially to *Love Field*, as we will see below.

In spite of all these differences dealing with race, background and personality, this road film constructs the couple's relationship as feasible and believable by means of several factors. First of all, despite their differences the two protagonists also show some points in common, mainly their condition as runaway victims, their loneliness and their willingness to become parents. Unlike the stereotypical road movie protagonist, Paul and Lurene are serious, non-violent, hardworking people who do not get to the road to experience life's excesses. But they are both mobile and they want their lives to change because they are victims of a sexist and racist system. As Lurene tells Paul in a significant scene in the film:

We are both running, aren't we? And we both want something more.

To this, Paul angrily replies that unlike her, his daughter Jonell may never have "the freedom to ride up North without having to hide in somebody else's skirt". But he will later on realise that he is wrong to think that Lurene's journey is a stupid whim. It is Lurene's misery and lack of freedom that has forced her to go to Washington and escape from her husband. Like the heroines in road movies such as *Paris, Texas*, *Thelma & Louise*, *Leaving Normal*, or *Tumbleweeds*, Lurene is running from an aggressive, unsympathetic husband with whom she cannot communicate or share anything.

Moreover, Ray represents the static character tied to the home who contrasts with Lurene's inner mobility and activity. It is remarkable that the film shows Lurene driving on many occasions but Ray, who is obsessed with the car, is never seen at the wheel. Unlike her, he hates travelling and he thinks his sitting room is the centre of the universe. No wonder that, as she tells Ray, she feels that their marriage is like being in prison: "how would I know the difference between jail and what we have?" – she tells him. This miserable marriage makes her yearn for this "something more" which is illustrated by her escapist obsession with the Kennedys.

The fact that they both travel by coach instead of a car, marks both characters as victimised. As some black road movies do, *Love Field* uses the coach as a sign of lack of privilege for both coloured people and women. Lurene has to travel by coach because her husband does not let her take the car and, as she complains, he would not let her buy one either. Indeed, the film presents the car as *his* priced possession, something that we understand as absurd and selfish in a man who does not like travelling.

Just as Lurene flees her husband, Paul is running from the law because he took away his little daughter from an orphanage where she was beaten. Throughout the film, Paul's experience illustrates the victimisation of blacks, which suggests the "something more" any coloured person would hope for. As the film shows, coloured people are made to stumble on the bus because the coach driver does not wait for them to sit down, they are segregated in different toilets which are always out of order, nobody wants to give them a lift (not even after the coach accident or the car

breakdown) and the police are rather nasty to them. But worst of all is Paul's being beaten up by three redneck bigots just because he was hanging around in a car with a white woman. This incident, which visually recalls Wyatt and Billy's dramatic ending in *Easy Rider*, illustrates the fact that violence, a generic convention of the road movie, is also present in this film and marks the three protagonists as victims of physical abuse.

But violence also appears in the form of verbal aggression. Kaplan's use of language reinforces the depiction of the suffering of both characters. In this sense and from the beginning of the film we see how Lurene is victimised by her husband in different ways. First of all, she suffers from lack of communication, which may account for her need to talk so much. As she herself explains, with a man like Ray and after losing a child, they have nothing to talk about the rest of their lives. For Lurene, living with Ray makes her feel the same lack of communication as one feels in a country whose language one cannot speak, as happened in their honeymoon in Mexico. Secondly, bad language is one of Ray's tools of aggression towards Lurene. Finally, Ray uses language to harass Lurene psychologically, telling her repeatedly that she is crazy and "needs a doctor for her head", until Paul reassures her by telling her that he does not think she is crazy.

Similarly, language marks Paul's victimisation, this time related to race. Throughout the journey those characters presented as racist are signalled by their use of words such as "nigger". This is the case with Ray,⁵ who uses this kind of racist language when he finally meets Lurene at the motel. She is forced to utter the same kind of offensive words for him to believe her and thus, to protect Paul. In an earlier scene at Mrs. Enright's, the mother of Lurene's colleague at the beauty parlour, Lurene also had to use these contemptuous words in an attempt to avoid suspicion from a policeman who was looking for a "nigger who kidnapped a little girl and a white woman". This is something she will have to explain and apologise for to Paul later on, so that he does not misunderstand her.

Apart from their condition as runaway victims, there is a further linking element that facilitates Paul and Lurene's first meeting and also their final reunion: Jonell. The presence of this child makes an interracial encounter on a public coach less threatening to travelling companions and more credible for the 1960s. Although children are not very common protagonists in the road genre, Jonell's presence links Lurene more deeply with Paul along the journey. As she has just lost her child she is delighted to get to know Jonell, something Paul also needs to do since he has just recovered his daughter and they do not really know each other. Different moments in the film –their singing a children's song together in the car, Lurene's worrying about the child's bruises, her reading comics to her on the bus first, and later on Paul's

⁵ At a brief but significant moment in the film we see how Ray looks lasciviously at a mixed-race female passer-by, a sexual attraction he later on abhors in his wife.

letters from prison— all show how the distance between Paul and Lurene is gradually bridged through their relationship with the child. Furthermore, the two leads also have some points in common. As Lurene cleverly guesses, Paul is as lonely as she feels herself to be, and this is why she sees through him. Despite the visual contrast of their skin colours and build we also perceive a certain noticeable similarity of formal look and costume style in the protagonists, both at the beginning and at the end of the film. They are both neat-looking in their formal clothes, and so is Jonell, probably following the fashion marked by the Kennedys. Lurene wears a light blue homemade suit and is very neatly made up and combed. He is dressed in a white shirt, dark formal trousers and shoes and a classical raincoat. As a contrast, Ray wears casual clothes, which make him stand apart as someone who does not belong with his wife. But what is most important is that Paul and Lurene share the same condition of fugitive victims of their time. Both protagonists are trapped, he in a racist society, she in an unhappy marriage.

In addition, the journey and its ingredients – road encounters and events – and especially two common conventions in the road genre like the means of transport and the setting, help articulate the construction of this mixed-race couple. Regarding the means of transport, after the journey by coach the runaways are forced to steal a faulty car that is later on replaced by another car Mrs. Enright lends them. It must be mentioned here that the greater intimacy and communication that the car provides helps reinforce the couple's union.

It is inside a car that we see Paul and his ex-girlfriend together in an old black and white picture, which forecasts the future romance on the road between Paul and Lurene. Moreover, the car they drive is rather symbolic, first of all because it is beautiful and two-coloured, exactly white and brown, which hints at the combination of the protagonists' skin colours. Although Lurene is told to give the car back to Hazel, her colleague, she keeps it till the last scene in the film, which optimistically suggests that this mixed-colour match may last for a long time.

Apart from the car, the union of the couple is also constructed by means of the setting and the characters' communion with nature. The whole film has a clear rural flavour within which the landscape acts as a "love field" and is therefore very meaningful. Lurene and Paul get to know each other in this rural environment surrounded by beautiful, fertile green fields rather than the stereotypical rocky and desert landscape, which hints at the fertility of the couple's relationship. The film shows the two protagonists taking turns to do the driving and to sit at the back of the car with Jonell. While the camera shots move from the front to the back of the car we see the protagonists' faces alternatively framed within green pastures, a wonderful landscape which is described aurally by the children's song they sing in unison, whose lyrics talk about birds, trees and green grass.

Moreover, during the first part of the film, Kaplan shows us the U.S. landscape reflected on the window pane of the coach and superimposed first on Paul's face and then on Lurene's.

Later on in the film we see the same reflection of nature on Mrs. Enright's face, the only sympathetic character towards the couple, who offers them food, lodging and a car, and even lies to the policeman to help them. Thus, the liberatory landscape representative of America and its people is reflected in *Love Field* on both black and white faces, and significantly, only of those characters who accept mixed-race relationships.

However, if, as Jude Davies and Carol Smith argue, we understand landscape as an "extrasocial figure symbolic of American identity and nationhood" (1997:66), we must also remark that the dark side of U.S. identity is also framed within this green landscape. It is in the middle of the countryside that Paul suffers a bloody attack from three racist bigots. Thus, the rural setting has a double meaning, as both a liberatory, metamorphical "locus amoenus", "Love Field" or love-promoting environment, but at the same time, a background that may become as hostile and xenophobic as the urban one. Some city locations like the motel where Ray meets Lurene and beats her up and the street where the police finally hunt down the three runaways, catch them and separate them are examples of the hostile environment of the city.

Therefore, the road journey, especially the intimacy of the car and a travelling experience along rural America affect this interracial relationship and contribute to its birth as well as its development, operating Paul and Lurene's gradual transformation. Moreover, the trip presents what other people think of this relationship. It shows the biased reactions to a mixed-race couple which constitute a realistic depiction of racist America. Both black and white people who see them together on their journey – an elderly couple on the bus, a car mechanic, etc. – look at them with reproachful disapproval because they understand that they are doing something forbidden. An old black woman on the bus is the first one to give them away to the F.B.I., and the car mechanic tells Paul that he must be crazy to have a white woman ride in his car in that area. Referring to Lurene he warns him that "there's bad luck that you run away from and bad luck that you bring along with you". So he finally advises him to drive her in the back seat, which he does. Even Mrs. Enright, a white woman who is not really racially prejudiced, asks Lurene after her love encounter with Paul if she knows what she is heading for. Thus, all these different reactions illustrate and prove right Yvonne Tasker's argument that "any male/female variant of the biracial buddy formula will be troubled by anxieties to do with the recurrent taboo on miscegenation" (1998:85).⁶

⁶ As Manohla Dargis remarks, miscegenation also informs a road movie like *Wild at Heart* (1991:16).

The travelling experience facilitates a process of metamorphosis which is based mainly upon the approximation and assimilation between two protagonists who seemed totally opposed at first sight. Their differences fade as they get to know each other during the journey. As Lurene tells Paul, he is rather prejudiced and pessimistic about whites. When she tells him they can try and get help from the Enrights, he asks her: "why would they help us?", to which she replies: "assassination or not, this country is full of good-hearted people", and Mrs. Enright certainly proves to be one of them. We also learn about Paul's prejudice at another moment in the film when Mrs. Enright mentions the news on television and asks: "how did we start killing people to solve things?" to which Paul bitterly replies "I did not know we stopped". Indeed, Paul is a biased man. At the beginning of the film he is reluctant to socialise with Lurene because she treats black people as if they were white and he knows that she is potential trouble. His prejudice against whites makes him think that Lurene, like all white women in his opinion, is bored and stupid. On the coach he offers a magazine to her because "it has got lots of pictures", which shows that he believes her to be vacuous and simplistic. He thinks Lurene lives "in a Dreamworld where the First Lady does not give a damn about her". And, as he cruelly tells her during a row, "being bored and being black is not the same". He says he felt sorry for her when he first met her and he also thought she spoke too much. This is why he tells the mechanic that Lurene's name should be Niagara Falls. But despite his initial prejudice, Paul grows aware of his misconception of Lurene, that even with her mistakes she only wants what is best for Jonell and for him. He gradually appreciates her faithfulness and willingness to help them. She returns to the road for them after the car breaks down and she lies to the police to protect them. She also finds night shelter at Mrs. Enright's and convinces her to lend them her car. Lurene also shows her strong affection and loyalty to Jonell by visiting her regularly at the orphanage where she is kept for a year while her father is sent to prison, a time lapse the film cuts through. She acts as a link between father and child, as Jonell did between Lurene and her father before. She prepares the child psychologically for her reunion with her father. She sews her a beautiful dress for that red-letter day and gives her a heart-shaped pendant with their picture on it which she also carries herself, so that they never forget each other. In the end, it seems that Paul can expect something good from whites.

Similarly, within her limitations, Lurene grows and changes during these few days of journeying and will never be the same again. After all, she does not achieve the goal of her personal pilgrimage to Kennedy's funeral. She cannot pay her respects to the dead president but manages to see Jackie from the car window, a moment in which Lurene is suffering as much as her because the police have taken the Caters away from her. At the end of the film we see her with a different hairstyle, an outer sign of her new life now that she finally is a divorcée, although she hates this word. It

is the journey and especially her relationship with Paul that have changed her. Her dreamlike conception of the U.S.A., Kennedys included, has been put to question and she has finally gathered courage to leave her husband and to clarify her priorities when choosing a male partner. Through a process of binary opposition she has finally understood that Paul has all the values and qualities she missed in Ray. On the road Lurene has learnt that Paul is a sensitive man who can communicate, feel sympathy and love and become a good father. He has even committed a crime to keep his daughter, he worries about her and does not want her to see how some rednecks beat him. She realises how Paul, a man who hardly speaks, makes an effort to show her his sympathy towards her sadness at John Fitzgerald Kennedy's death. While they are watching his funeral at Mrs. Enright's house, Paul caresses her arm tenderly to soothe her pain. A contrast between Paul and Ray, Lurene's husband, inevitably comes to the fore since this sign of sympathy is something Ray was incapable of showing. He even refused to go with her to the funeral, to lend her "his" car or to let her go on her own in the first place (which recalls Thelma's husband in Ridley Scott's road film). On top of that, the film builds Paul's character as peaceful, which contrasts with Ray's aggressiveness, since we see him as a wife batterer prone to drinking alcohol who thinks it is necessary to take a gun to meet his wife in Washington. When Paul finally takes Lurene to meet Ray at a motel, the married couple have a big row and he starts beating her until Paul comes to defend and rescue her, which proves that he really cares for her, whereas Ray does not.

The culmination of this process of approximation on the road between Lurene and Paul is reflected in their passionate embrace, kiss and lovemaking at Mrs. Enright's barn. The love inherent in this sex scene is ratified by both protagonists in their final reunion which open-endedly hints at the potential formation of the couple. One year after their journey violently ends when the police catch them, Lurene visits Jonell at the orphanage and later on meets Paul at the entrance. He has just been released from prison after a year's sentence. Although they coldly address each other as Mr. Cater and Mrs. Hallet, Lurene soon tells him she was forced to lie, she had to deny that they ever made love but she asserts that she did it only to protect him, not because she regretted it. After Paul tells her he does not regret it either, they embrace tenderly and they part. Lurene drives away in her car (still Mrs. Enright's!) only to return and run back into the building to meet Paul and Jonell, something the viewer does not see because the film ends here. This turning back is a significant parallel scene to that in which Paul reverses the car and refuses to leave Lurene behind at Mrs. Enright's house. These scenes of love and sex, together with the hopeful ending, suggest free choice and independence for both women and coloured people and, therefore, the potential feasibility of love between different races. This ending is as optimistic as the lyrics of the opening song:

Our day will come, and we'll have everything,
 We'll share the joy falling in love can bring
 Our day will come, if we just wait a while,
 No tears for us, thinking in love and with a smile
 Our dreams are magic because we'll always stay in love this way
 Our day will come...

Although it cannot be described as a road movie convention, another strategy that Kaplan resorts to in order to establish the potential of this mixed-race family is the use of parallelisms. One of these establishes the union between Lurene and Jonell, holding hands and running away from the police, as similar to the mother-daughter relationship of Jacqueline and Caroline Kennedy (approximately the same age as Jonell), who also hold hands to say their last goodbye to the murdered president. Similarly, Lurene's parallel identification with Jackie had helped her overcome her baby's death and she claims that she would have died if it had not been for her.⁷ Somehow, imagining that they were soul mates going through the same ordeal gave her the strength to carry on. Moreover, in one of the final scenes of the film in which Lurene has been caught by the police and separated from Jonell and Paul, we see her watching Jackie drive past her inside an official car. Just like Jackie, Lurene remains alone grieving inside a car, since both of them have been violently deprived of their dear ones. These parallelisms present Lurene as both a good mother and a sorrowful lover missing her lost partner, which points to the potential feasibility of a family reunion. Another parallel scene which points at biracial harmony is the one in which right after witnessing Paul and Lurene's love scene in the barn we see Mrs. Enright playing the role of surrogate grandmother, taking care of Jonell, giving her an old doll⁸ and having dinner together. By showing them sitting next to each other at the kitchen table, this shot visually emphasises the contrast between Mrs. Enright's white face and Jonell's black face, in the same way that the lovers' different skin colours are also highlighted in a parallel shot. Thus, this scene seems to suggest that if the biracial relationship between an old woman and a child is a match that works perfectly well, why should not Paul and Lurene's? Or, in broader terms, why should the U.S. anxiety of miscegenation last forever?

One more road characteristic that *Love Field* presents is its generic realism. This is a road movie convention that Kaplan's film includes not only by means of real-life black and white newsreel coverage but also by means of its mixture of true facts and characters with fictional ones. *Love Field* indeed succeeds in depicting racial conflict in 60s America. For instance, the violent scene where Paul is beaten

⁷ There is a scene in the film in which Lurene hides her true identity from the police and tells them her name is Jackie.

⁸ Jonell's playing with both black and white dolls at the end of the film also hints at racial tolerance.

by three racist rednecks recalls the real situation of black life in U.S. history and the myth of the black man as archetypal rapist (Gaines 1986:69 and Wood 2001:195), whereby “if a Negro rebels against rule and taboo he is lynched and the reason for the lynching is usually given as rape” (Janmohamed 1992:109). This scene reminds the viewer that, as Eyerman and Löfgren say:

The road, even for relatively well-to-do African Americans was an unsafe and unwelcome environment. In his autobiography, even Chester Himes (1971) recounts how, as a successful author driving a new car, he was forced to travel straight across the country, from New York to California, without stopping. As a black man he was an unwelcome guest in the transit culture along the highway (1995:55).⁹

However, a significant point regarding the film’s realism is the fact that the action of *Love Field* does not happen in contemporary U.S. life but in pre-*Easy Rider* times, exactly in 1963, the year of Kennedy’s assassination. This strategy is also present in such films from the late 1990s dealing with racial issues as *Devil in a Blue Dress* set in 1948, *Panther* (1995) set in 1966, or even *Crazy in Alabama*, set in the early 70s. This location of the action in a past time works as a relieving mechanism since it depicts the thorny but still relevant issue of racism and racial bigotry in a context which is so far in time from the viewer as to displace him/her from potential guilt. Despite its time relocation in a faraway day which minimises the audience’s unpleasant racist identification, it is sadly significant that the issue of miscegenation, the film’s main driving theme, seems to be still up-to-date four decades later in our contemporary society, as the production of the previous films illustrates. Furthermore, the road movie’s generic realism is enhanced by this transfer to the past. By setting the action in the 60s, the film is provided with a historical framework and credibility, achieved through interspersed black and white newsreels. Thus Kaplan’s road movie uses the genre’s realism to expose American oppression and bigotry towards these two victimised groups in the 1960s. *Love Field*’s historical setting and newsreel footage enhance the film’s vindication of blacks’ and women’s civil rights and makes the protagonists’ love story more credible.

To conclude, the appearance of a film like *Love Field* in the early 1990s can be placed within a revival of the road movie genre in this decade, with films such as *Thelma & Louise*, *My Own Private Idaho*, *Leaving Normal*, *The Living End*, *Kalifornia*, and others. These films depart from the genre’s white male hegemony since they include a wider representation of gender and sexual tendencies. Moreover, the 1990s has seen a greater demand for the representation of non-whites as seen in the emergence of a black film wave. This trend also reached the road movie genre, as Kaplan’s film illustrates. In this context, *Love Field*’s originality and significance

⁹ For further information on the representation of race on the road read also Paul Gilroy’s article “Driving While Black” (2001).

lies in its broadening of the borders of white male hegemony to include and significantly intersect two oppressed groups: women and the black community. Although Jonathan Kaplan's film has been transferred to a historical past for the sake of the viewer's relief, and its open-ended resolution is not fully compromising, it certainly offers a hopeful, liberal reading of race relations. This film uses the road movie's liberal associations to present two opposing sides of the American condition in the 1960s, featuring a woman and a non-white as protagonists travelling together, not as "token characters" or sidekicks of the main white lead who only exist for political correctness. This road movie has not only brought these two marginalised minorities to visibility but it has gone beyond, presenting them as a binary opposition whose combination may work. At the same time, *Love Field* succeeds in depicting the sexual-racial tensions existing in the 1960s in the U.S.A. by focusing on the taboo theme of miscegenation.

A significant point in *Love Field* is how the road affects the interracial relationship. Indeed, this film observes most road movie characteristics. First of all, it is structured along a journey storyline which presents mobile characters undergoing a process of metamorphosis or initiation that changes their lives. Furthermore, it does so following the road movie's generic realism, by setting the action in a historical place and time and introducing, with black and white newsreel coverage, real-life characters and events in between fictional ones. The road journey provides the two mismatched protagonists with an opportunity for change mainly based on mutual contact, assimilation and approximation towards each other. Despite their differences, which stem basically from racial grounds but also deal with background, social class, prejudice and personality traits, both characters are victims of physical and verbal abuse who are forced to escape from the oppression of a racist and sexist patriarchal system. The rural setting, road encounters and intimacy of the means of transport in this film contribute to these runaway victims' growing proximity and to their subsequent romance. On the one hand, Lurene's relationship with Paul makes her grow aware not only of the falsity of an idealised view of American society and politics but also of her need to gather courage and independence to get divorced. She thus represents the naïveté and later disappointment of conservative America, together with the oppressed situation of women in a male patriarchal society. On the other hand, Paul represents the oppression of the black community whose victimisation leads to prejudice. But on the road Paul eventually learns that after all, he can not only expect something good from a white person like Lurene, but fall in love with her. Throughout the journey we see how despite their clashing skin colours and ideologies they share more things than they thought, especially their honesty, their search for "something more" from life, their eagerness to raise a family (as seen in their love for Jonell), and their mutual attraction.

Jonathan Kaplan also approaches these two allegedly mismatched characters by means of parallelisms and binary oppositions. Paul and Lurene are presented as mobile, peaceful characters in search for freedom who are totally opposite from static, racist and aggressive Ray, whose personality openly clashes with Paul's, a much better match for Lurene. Moreover, the parallelism drawn between Lurene and Jacqueline Kennedy in her role as mother and lover in the film also establishes this biracial family as potentially feasible.

In addition, this journey of initiation introduces the racist attitudes of both black and white travelling companions and raises the prickly issue of miscegenation since the characters' coming together eventually leads to the formation of the romantic couple. Like Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days*, *Love Field* ends on a powerful note of love and miscegenation between a black and a white protagonist. Moreover, this ending, unlike *Easy Rider*'s, promotes an optimistic message from road movies in the 1990s that recuperates the hopeful lyrics of the opening song: *Our day will come*.

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