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Professor Kozek
Math 5 – Fall 2013
Pleasantville Discussion
13 November 2013

Gary Ross' *Pleasantville* (1998) Discussion

The film begins with David in class in the 1990's, where the teachers are all speaking pessimistically about current events and talking about modern things that are worse now than they were in the past (the environment, etc.). Everything seems worse in the present and David wants to live in the past, spending more time reciting *Pleasantville* lines than talking to other people. However, once he gets his wish, he begins to wish Pleasantville of the 1950's would change progressively after the mayor of Pleasantville sets a Code of Conduct that closes the town library, bans "colored" people in public places, and orders teachers to "emphasize continuity over alteration" in class teachings.

Does Pleasantville offer a societal critique of a world unwilling to listen to change, similar to the one we saw in *Flatland*?

Is this a critique of societal norms and values of the 1950's versus contemporary suburban values (re: female sexuality, racial issues, the role of women in society)?

The mayor states in the Code of Conduct that the town must "separate the pleasant from the unpleasant," banning "colored" people in public places.

Does *Pleasantville* serve as satire critiquing race issues of the 1950's and segregation?

Is Pleasantville anti-nostalgia?

Why does Jenny stay in Pleasantville instead of returning to the real world with David? Does she prefer the 1950's Pleasantville life style after recognizing the value of reading/education (after books are burned and education is threatened)? Or is it that she is proud of the changes she has helped make for Pleasantville and wants to stay to further enlighten the citizens?

David tells everyone in Pleasantville that there are places outside of Pleasantville, alluding to the real world. As he reads the stories of blank books, the words of the books fill in; he enlightens the citizens of Pleasantville to things outside the world of the intersection of Elm Street & Main Street, where the streets run in a loop.

Comparison of A Square from *Flatland* to David in *Pleasantville*?

Spontaneous combustion of tree

Inverse roles daughter talking to mom about sex, David helping firefighters

Bud & Mary Sue's mom is enlightened and turns "colored," but covers it up with black, white, and gray makeup.

Similarity of the Color Wars in *Flatland* and *Pleasantville*?

Mr. Johnson discovers art after David gives him a modern art book – allowing Pleasantville to experience color and art, which is rejected by the more old-

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fashioned townspeople. A mural painted by Johnson, depicting his new-found world of color and modern art, sparks a riot in which books are burned, “colored” citizens of Pleasantville are harassed, and David and Mr. Johnson are arrested.

What is the role of art in *Pleasantville* to incite progressivity?

What does *Pleasantville* demonstrate about repression and fear of change?