

Adam Shankman's *Hairspray*: The Promise of a World without Discrimination

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Racism has been a major issue in the United States of America since its inception and is at the heart of Adam Shankman's *Hairspray* (2007), an American musical film based on the 2002 Broadway musical of the same name. *Hairspray* takes place in 1962 Baltimore, Maryland and features Tracy Turnblad, an optimistic, chubby teenager who loves dancing and singing and is fascinated with African American pop music and culture. Tracy, along with her best friend Penny, and to the dismay of her mother Edna, dreams of being on the Corny Collins Show, a popular local TV show featuring dance contests and pretty boys. Her dream comes true when Corny Collins holds auditions after one of the dancers has to leave the show. Once on the show, Tracy proves to be more than a gifted dancer as she is also a civil rights activist. Against the racist culture that dominates the show, Tracy decides that the black youth, so far featured on the show only once a month on the so-called Negro Day, should become regular participants on the Corny Collins Show. She then embarks on a campaign of racial tolerance and finally succeeds in integrating the show. The purpose of this thesis is twofold: it demonstrates how deep-rooted racial discrimination can be, but it also shows that people can act to change and make their world better. Through the life experience of Tracy, the first part of this essay explores lingering racial segregation in the middle of the civil rights movement era, showing how whites are dominant in all aspects of social life, including the school system and the media. Furthermore, it exposes people's prejudices against those outside the norm, such as overweight people like Tracy and her mother. But the story, as the last part makes clear, suggests that things are changing as Tracy and her friends, through their attitude of tolerance, are pushing toward a new world exempt of discrimination.

Part 1: The Deep Roots of Racial Discrimination

Three areas of social life in the 1960s must be discussed in order to understand how deep-rooted racial discrimination can be. Indeed, education, the media, and people all have prejudices against those outside the norm. In this film, one of the main themes is school life. While it presents the setting of the film, the opening scene shows an extreme close up of a newspaper whose headline reads, "Barnett Defies U.S., Bars Negro From University," in reference to Ross Barnett, the notorious segregationist Governor of Alabama who had prevented James Meredith, an African American student, from entering the University of Mississippi in 1962. In the twentieth century, coeducation of white and black people has been a major issue. From the school scenes in this film, we can see the difficulties of changing people's mind even when the law has changed. At the school Tracy attends, black and white students are enrolled and take classes together. However, when Tracy goes to class detention due to her rude attitude to her teacher, all the students except her are African American. Furthermore, all teachers are white. This situation shows the difficulty of stopping discrimination completely although school segregation had been abolished in 1954 in the famous Brown Judgment. Earl Warren, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of America, ruled that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Following this judgment, the mass media, some politicians, and some whites started to question segregation, and they started a movement for the abolition of racial discrimination. This judgment was a major victory of the civil rights movement. According to the summary of the Brown Judgment, the Federal Court declared: "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities

are inherently unequal. We have now announced that such segregation is a denial of the equal protection of the law. It is so ordered.”

So, every student, whether white or black, should be equal. However, the judgment stipulated that segregationist states should enforce the new law “with all deliberate speed,” for the Supreme Court judges were well aware that enforcing racial unity in the South would not go without opposition. It was not easy to change people’s biases against blacks soon after the judgment. The history of discrimination against African Americans is long, and one of its crucial moments is *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the landmark case of 1896. After the abolition of slavery, black people were still discriminated against by whites under the law. This *de jure* discrimination was exposed when an affluent Creole of color from New Orleans, Homer Plessy, decided to seat in the white-only first-class car of a train. Plessy was accused of breaking the law and decided to sue the state of Louisiana. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court of America ruled that segregation under the law was not illegal. That decision made the infamous doctrine of “separate but equal” legal and spurred the official implementation of Jim Crow laws all over the South. And this legal system of segregation went on for over fifty years. Before school segregation was abolished in 1954, the idea that whites are superior to colored people had been accepted as a fact by a majority of Americans, especially in the South. Thus, under the influence of segregationist teachers, both black and white students had embraced these ideas. This is why, in the film, there were only black people in the class detention at school because white teachers and administrators make them the prime target of punishment.

Another cause of deep-rooted racial discrimination would be parental education. In the film, some white parents won’t let their children hang out with African Americans or watch a TV show featuring black people. When Seaweed, a black boy, invites Tracy and her friends to a party on North Avenue where black people live, Penny Pingleton, Lucy’s best friend, says with apprehension, “I’ve never been to North Avenue before.” And Link Larkin, another friend of Lucy’s, asks, “Is it safe for us?” It shows that white youth has been conditioned to fear African American neighborhoods; also, it shows that segregation is normal to them; and finally, it shows that they comply with their parents’ authority and never think of questioning the latter’s biased views. This film is set in Baltimore, Maryland, and Maryland was one of the slave states that maintained the institution of slavery after becoming an independent colony. Not surprisingly, segregation continued and has remained deep-rooted in post-bellum Baltimore. And in the 1960s, at the time the story takes place, the doctrine of “separate but equal” whereby blacks and whites live apart in every aspect of their life, is still very strong in Baltimore. Historically, the one fact that shows how white parents tended to foster racial discrimination is the so-called “White flight,”¹ a phenomenon that the *Merriam Webster* dictionary describes as, “the departure of whites from places (as urban neighborhoods or schools) increasingly or predominantly populated by minorities.” White flight became particularly strong in the 1960s and 1970s when white parents throughout the nation were reluctant to send their children to integrated schools, an attitude that made stereotypes of black people worse while also reinforcing white children’s feeling of superiority over their African American schoolmates. Thus, parental education is one of the reasons discrimination is carried over from one generation to the next.

In addition, we can imagine the mindset of African Americans, especially of teenagers, who are discriminated against. It is obvious in the detention class scene in this film. There are two ways of interpreting their response to discrimination. On the one hand, the film shows that the more important thing for black people is how they manage to remain cheerful in a segregated society. In this film, black students look very happy even though they are in detention. They dance, sing and chat freely. When Tracy goes to the detention class and shows interest in Seaweed’s dance, he says, “The man dine me on a diet of

detention so long as he don't starve me of my tunes, baby." then his friends tells Tracy, "You can't do that dance," but when Tracy reproduces Seaweed's dance step to perfection, he must admit: "Not bad for a white chick." The attitude of black students toward Tracy is even, and they seem to have confidence in their dance. The reason is that the sexy dance black people do is a way of affirming their difference and identity even though white people at the time view such a hip-swaying dance as indecent. Supposedly, the dance is one of the things black people can do, whereas whites cannot. So, the detention class is the place where they can show their identity freely and reconfirm that differences are not a bad thing. Since the 1920s and the Harlem Renaissance movement, Black people have learned to cherish their own identity and be proud of their own distinctive culture. Embracing literary, musical, theatrical, and visual arts, participants sought to conceptualize "the Negro" apart from the white stereotypes that had influenced black people's relationship to their heritage and to each other. From this movement, people would subvert the racist doctrine of "separate but equal" claiming that they are "different but equal," and may have already started the civil rights movement though the movement is usually understood as spanning the fifties and the sixties.

This film is set in 1962: it is right in the middle of the civil rights movement. What has changes between the 1920s and 1960s is that African Americans' capacity for freedom has become bigger. They can go to school, talk with white people normally (at least in major northern urban cities) and their living standards have somewhat improved. Also, African Americans' power has been growing thanks to a lot of movements during the sixties. Many anti-segregation organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) emerged, and many black people started to voice their opinion. However, what has not changed enough is social segregation. In the 1920s, at the time of the Harlem Renaissance, black people and even white people worked hard to familiarize themselves with black culture. Yet, still in the 1960s, black and white people live their life separately instead of sharing their cultures and ideas. As a result, black people would tend to accept living in a segregated society and undergoing unequal treatment; however, the film suggests that young African Americans are not depressed by racial discrimination. Indeed, the detention class is a comfortable place for black students because they cherish their own identity and their pride as black. In other words, they see their society objectively, and embrace difference as a way of showing their own identity. In other words, segregation may be seen as positive if it helps promote black culture and respect black people in their difference. Indeed, a lot of African Americans were in favor of social equality but not necessarily in favor of a color-blind society in which the specificity of African American culture would be lost.

On the other hand, there is a disturbing point in that detention class scene for one may wonder why black students are so obedient in spite of the obvious segregation they have to put up with. This film, despite its good intentions, perpetuates the stereotype of the happy-go-lucky black individual who doesn't seem to be mature enough to take his destiny into his/her own hands. As argued earlier, black students look very happy even though they are in detention class, and Tracy and her friends are also interested in the class and enjoy dancing with black students. Generally speaking, detention class has a negative image. It is for people who do not follow the rules, and the decision makers are white teachers in this film. In the United States at that time, adult black males were much more likely to be sent to jail than whites for the same crime. Some of them, it is well known, were also falsely accused and imprisoned without any tangible proofs. So the detention class at school is a watered-down version of this sad story. In addition, blacks seem to create a color distinction with their own hands when they claim, for instance, that whites cannot dance as well as they do. When Tracy mimics Seaweed's dance, the art of which is supposed to be inherited from

some African ancestry, the film overturns the bias. The idea that all blacks are great dancers is a myth, and by showing that Tracy, a pudgy white girl, can dance as well as her African American schoolmates, the film explodes that myth. Thus, the detention class scene tells us that people end up embracing segregation because it has become the “norm.” Finally, the scene suggests that black people have decided to privilege individual over social happiness—a personal initiative that sets them apart from whites.

The media also plays an important role in maintaining racial prejudices. Public institutions like the media might often be used to justify racial discrimination—especially the infamous doctrine of “separate but equal.” There is a monthly “Negro Day” in the Corny Collins show. This is the only day that broadcasts black instead of white dancers. When white dancers tell the audience about the black day, they are all smile, never questioning their participation in an obvious act of segregation. In addition, when Tracy goes to a party held by Corny, there are black and white dancers. The dancing space, however, remains separated by a rope, and when Tracy wants to step over that very tangible color line in order to dance with Seaweed, Seaweed tells Tracy: “Are you crazy? You gotta dance with your crowd and I gotta dance with mine. It’s just the way it is.” It shows that even African American people have internalized the concept of “separate but equal.”

In addition, a scene shows that some whites try to justify racial discrimination. There is one scene in which Velma Von Tussle, the director of the Corny Collins show, and Corny, the host of the show, have an argument about the structure of the TV show. To the mention of the so-called “Detroit Sound,” Velma quips: “Detroit sound? What’s that, the cries of people being mugged?” And Corny replies: “Aw, Velma, the kids dig the rhythm and blues.” But Velma holds a very different view: “Yeah, they’re kids, Corny. That’s why we have to steer them in the white direction.” Velma’s pun (“White” direction for “Right” direction) shows that white people control minds. From this scene, we can see that the justification of segregation was created by a part of white people who have complete power of all institutions in the nation. Historically, racial discrimination has been used for politics. In 1876, Rutherford Birchard Hayes, a Republican, was elected president of the United States in one of the most contentious and confused elections in national history, which is called the Compromise of 1877.² He used racial discrimination in order to win the election; it was an advantageous policy for whites. During this time, Jim Crow laws were created, and a bit later, from 1896 on, the concept of “separate but equal” legalized and rooted. Therefore, some leaders took advantage of segregation for maintaining their status because there were still a lot of people who did not want blacks to have equal opportunities even after the Civil War, and those people were the most influential group in society at that time. So, justification for segregation was important to control society. In *Hairspray*, Velma needs the support of racist commercial backers in order to keep high ratings, which shows that the media often helped perpetrate discrimination. In other words, not all people think white and black should be separated, but people in power control society and maintain segregation because it is to their advantage.

Prejudices against those outside the norm must also be accounted for. Along racial discrimination, this film also features prejudices against physical appearance. Tracy Turnblad is overweight and her mother, Edna, is obese. As a consequence, Velma criticizes them. For example, when Tracy auditions for the Corny Collins Show, Velma tells her: “so my dear, so short and stout, you will never be in, so we’re kicking you out.” Thus, Tracy fails the audition not because of her ability to dance but because of her appearance. Velma thinks that slim is better than overweight. Slender is beautiful, and others are “ugly”—a prejudice that is yet another form of discrimination. Compared to that situation, the discrimination of black people seems to be similar. Blacks have curly hair, high cheekbones, small forehead, flat noses and thick lips. They were often called “Negro” so as to emphasize

their ethnic origins, or even “Nigger,” which is a racist term meant to disparage people of African descent. White people, especially but not only in the South, had been treating black people like germs. So, they were separated almost in every place such as restaurants, buses and bathrooms. It seems to be the same as discrimination based on appearance but of course, it is not for while the shape of the body is changeable, the color of the skin is not. In this film, Edna sometimes uses the word, “diet.” Plump people often diet to be healthy. Most of the causes of overweight are unhealthy lifestyle: actually Edna is always eating candies or chocolates. Because of that, people tend to think that those people are lazy. But skin color is not related to such things.

Historically speaking, the reason for discriminating against black people is to assert white identity. After the Civil War, black slaves became free, and they got civil rights. Some black people were even elected to Parliament or other political positions in order to work along whites. As black people advanced in society, white resentment and prejudices grew, especially among poor white southerners who did not accept the end of slavery for slavery made former slaves their equal since they could now compete with poor whites for the same jobs. Thus, the end of slavery corresponded to a loss of power for both plantation owners and poor whites, and this contributed to heighten racial discrimination. They seemed to seek their identities for a visible advantage by segregating: because of those circumstances, Jim Crow laws³ were established. Governments in Southern states adopted segregation laws, which forced people to be separated in every part of daily life. But there is a similarity between the two: people justify their status or belief by looking down on people at the margins. Moreover, this film put two kinds of discrimination on a par, a changeable form of discrimination (overweightness) and an unchangeable one (race), which may be a way of suggesting that whites can change their life, but blacks cannot.

These points (education, media, and prejudices against those outside the norm) show that people who discriminate are not necessarily ideologically motivated as they have accepted discrimination without ever questioning it. In their mind, discrimination is normal because school, media and society have made it part of their daily life, and they cannot imagine that things could be otherwise. Also discrimination is a tool powerful whites have used to control society so as to reinforce their status. This is why racial discrimination has been so deeply rooted in the culture.

Part 2: Changing and Making One’s World Better

The sixties is important time not only to know the long histories about deep-rooted of discrimination but also to know the changing time from persisted thoughts to new ones. In order to understand the crucial shift that occurred during the 1960s, four themes should be explored. Those themes are respect for individuals, the idea that new things are exciting, the fact that black comes close to white, and the shared hopes of black and white people. At first, the important point that shows respect for individual in this film is Tracy’s attitude to everything around her. In the opening scene, Tracy goes to school singing a song, “Good Morning Baltimore.” She gives a piece of bread to the rat on the street, greets to the flasher who lives next door and the bum on his barroom stool, and she waves a garbage truck driver to let her bring to her school because she missed school bus during that song. The series of actions shows her open mind as she takes care of everyone without any discrimination. In addition, the word that Tracy says, “I’m all for integration. It’s the New Frontier!” when she was discriminated against by Velma for her weight problems, clearly shows a thought which is respect for individual. Tracy’s remark, of course, echoes the values of the New Frontier⁴ and its effect on people in the sixties. There is a famous speech that John Fitzgerald Kennedy gave when he became the 35th President of the United States. In that speech, Kennedy says, “Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.” and “My fellow

Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.” These words tell Americans about freedom of speech, responsibility as a citizen, and the importance of solidarity. Kennedy’s policy⁵ gives citizens new values according to which differences should be accepted and individuality respected, and in this film Tracy, through her character and way of thinking, embodies that New Frontier generation.

This tendency links to the next theme, which is the idea that “new things are exciting.” Accepting of differences is emphasized at the situation of Tracy’s family. In this film, there are some different points from our sense of value that we think usual. For instance, Tracy is fat: this is different point from majority. However she never says, “I want to be slim and beautiful.” She is very free from a stereotype that slim is better than overweight. In addition, there is a scene in which Velma tries to seduce Wilbur, Tracy’s father. Generally, people would tend to think Velma is more beautiful than Edna because Velma is slimmer and looks younger. However, Wilbur never feels attracted to Velma. Moreover, the director of this film appointed John Travolta as Tracy’s mother even though he is a man. Divine, the previous actor who played Edna in John Waters’s version of *Hairspray* (1988), was a drag queen, and Harvey Fierstein, who played Edna in the Broadway musical based on Waters’s *Hairspray*, was a homosexual. These three points show that sense of value for everything or everyone is different, and gender does not matter for bonds of human relationship. Tracy’s family is enjoying those differences. From such family, we can see that white people gradually tend to accept black cultures and enjoy them as cross-cultural understanding. For example, there is a scene that black make-up artists change Edna’s renting character to active one. Tracy appointed Edna as her agent and takes her out. Edna refuses it because she has negative complex to her big body. Tracy says her “Ma, it's changing out there! You'll like it. People who are different, their time is coming!” Then Edna follows Tracy’s words, and becomes a reliable agent and her dancing talent blossoms by new make-up and dress-up. In addition, this film shows that hanging out with black people is “so hip” for white students. Practically, black culture became popular in the twentieth century. One example is *Soul Train*. This is a musical television program, which broadcasted from 1971 until 2006. The origins of it is 1965 when WCIU-TV, an upstart UHF station in Chicago. This program hit in the United States, and it became one of the longest programs. The show primarily features performances by R&B, soul and hip hop artists, then funk, jazz and gospel artists became popular. The highlight of this program is not only black music and dance but also dancers’ fashion and hairstyle. Many people both black and white were attracted by this program, especially young people, and created many trends in the United States. According to this fact, black culture is brand new things for white people, and it gives strong stimulation to them. Furthermore, new way of thinking that accepts new or different things purely appears in white’s minds, and they start making a new world by having relationship with black people.

Related to the circumstances that previous section mentioned, black thoughts also have been changing. It means blacks come closer to whites. The most clearly scene to show the evidence is a demonstration for objection to the abolition of Negro Day. Black dancers gather in front of church, and they have placard, written “Black and White Unite,” “Integration, Not Segregation” and “Do the Checker Board.” Maybelle decides to demonstrate from 4 o’clock, expecting the demonstration is broadcasted at news programs at 11 o’clock, which is the same time as the *Corny Collins Show*. Tracy also takes part in the movement just because she thinks the abolition of Negro Day is wrong. This demonstration is just walk as singing, and a lot of media broadcasted as a piece of news. The important points of this scene are non-violence and audience rating. There is a similar demonstration in

the real world, which is the Montgomery Bus Boycott.⁶ During the bus boycott, Martin Luther King Jr., the young 26-year old spokesperson for and organizer of, the boycott, told people about the important reason of the movement. He said at Holt Street Baptist Church on 5 December, 1955:

We are here, we are here this evening because we're tired now. Now let us say that we are not here advocating violence. We have overcome that. I want it to be known throughout Montgomery and throughout this nation that we are Christian people. We believe in the Christian religion. We believe in the teachings of Jesus. The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest. And secondly, this is the glory of America, with all of its faults. This is the glory of our democracy. If we were incarcerated behind the iron curtains of a Communistic nation we couldn't do this. If we were trapped in the dungeon of a totalitarian regime we couldn't do this. But the great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right. (Spartacus-educational.com)

He told people of importance of nonviolence to live together without any segregation and everyone is equal. Following his teach, black people united, and they did carpooling or used donated cars instead of using bus and violent. But then, government regarded that movement of illegal, and many black people were arrested. In addition, King's house was burned by white extremists. For all the counterattack by racists, he told people,

If you have weapons, take them home; if you do not have them, please do not seek to get them. We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence. We must violence with nonviolence. Remember the words of Jesus: "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword". We must love our white brothers, no matter what they do to us. We must make them know that we love them. Jesus still cries out in words that echo across the centuries; "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you". This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love. Remember, if I am stopped, this movement will not stop, because God is with the movement. Go home with this glowing faith and this radiant assurance. (Belgau)

His eager appeal like these had black's energy and courage, and spread of television from the beginning of 1950s had people's sympathy including whites because a lot of television stations broadcasted the movement. As a result, they gain a victory. This result became one of the big triggers for abolishing racial discrimination. In addition, this movement would not be able to success if the leader was not King, Jr. At that time, he was twenty six year old, and he has no history with the town leaders, other ministers, including Ralph Abernathy and Fred Shuttlesworth. In other words, he was young, candid, and unaffected by old thoughts. Such person gives new minds to people, and it related new style movement. Furthermore, the scene of demonstration in this film shows the changing the way of telling their thoughts or appeal to public, and new thought for the new world was made by people who do not have any stereotype such as Tracy.

African American civil rights activists enjoyed many other victories between 1955, the year of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and 1962, the time of Maybelle's demonstration. Among these landmark victories are the enrolment of the Little rock Nine in Little Rock Central High School (1957),⁷ many Sit-ins (1960)⁸, and Freedom Rides (1961).⁹ The main point of these movements is nonviolence, and those brought good effect on the movement of abolition of discrimination more or less. Maybelle's demonstration is also nonviolence, and they gain good result at last. What we can learn from this movement is black people realized

that nonviolent appeals have big power to change their situation, and they knew that not all white people have discrimination minds and they can understand each other. However, in the real world, it could not get such good result without black's tremendous pain and preparation because racists tried to interrupt those movements whenever black people take action. For instance, it is lynching by Ku Klux Klan; the member of racists included government and police. They tried to stop black's action with any way. So, blacks needed to never give up, and they risked death for themselves and their families. Compared to the circumstances in the real world, the demonstration in this film is not so serious. It is not easy to understand their serious feeling like fear of violence from racists, and police officers are not violently. What we can also see from this film from different viewpoint is this film evades the shocking reality that racists did to blacks in the South, and make us look the discrimination society more peaceful.

In the end, this film shows that the same hopes of people both black and white. There were a lot of movements appeal anti-segregation societies such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Sit Ins and Freedom Rides till 1962, the year the *Hairspray* story takes place. These movements had a strong impact on people as they encourage them to change the world. In this film, there are two main white men who hope non-discriminate society, and became a trigger of making people take action. One person is Wilbur, Tracy's father. He says Tracy that "we don't see too far past out front door. But you see all the way need stand up for, don't ya listen to old dogs like us. We need to learn some new tricks from you," before Tracy takes action for demonstration. From this scene, it shows that he hopes non-discrimination society, but he doesn't know how to change or cannot change because he has lived in the discriminated society for long time. The only thing he could do was that paying bail bond to help twenty black people who were arrested due to the demonstration. So he entrusts his hope to his daughter, Tracy. The other is Corny. He also hopes for a society free of discrimination. He tried to change the construction of his show to non-discrimination TV program, but he had to follow his boss, Velma, so he just had passed off Velma's injustice and her segregated thoughts. However, in the audition of Ms. Hairspray, when Tracy and black dancers made a plan to invest the audition, Corny admits their participation, and he is aroused people to enthusiasm by his master of ceremony although Velma said him stop it. Then people dance freely mixed up black and white. According to this scene, Corny would have had frustration to the segregated society, and he wanted to do something. Ms. Hairspray was a good timing for him because only that day was live broadcast, a lot of people were watching.

Also the last scene people dance mixed up black and white may be seen as a reference to Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech "I Have a Dream," which he gave at the Lincoln memorial on the occasion of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963.¹⁰ King Jr. said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not judge by the color of their skin but the content of their character. One day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brother." These dreams are the exactly the same hopes that *Hairspray* characters are aiming for. In addition, the number of participants in the march was approximately 250,000; it included 60,000 white people. According to this fact, we can say that not only black people but also white people hope the non-segregated society, and in 1963, those people took actions. As we can see at the last scene of this film, the result of the audition of Ms. Hairspray was Little Inez, a black girl. She was chosen that by audience including white people. In addition, there is a scene that Velma goes into a panic because everyone dances freely and do not follow her, and she tells Corny, "Do something! The show is turning to gumbo!" —a racist remark to which Corny replies, "This is the future." This very last scene of this film shows finally they gain a trigger

to change the world for non-segregated society, and this changing time by new generation with new thoughts cannot stop by anyone. All in all, in the 1960s, black and white people took action for making something “change,” and tried to get rid of deep-rooted racial discrimination. From those points, respect for individual, the idea that new things are exciting, black comes close to white and the same hopes of people both black and white, we can say that people are getting know each other by repeating conflicts, and the old spirits is getting fade away; and the sixties is important time people take action to bring something “change” to their world.

All in all, this essay analyzes racial discrimination from different viewpoints through the story of *Hairspray*, and it makes two important points: it demonstrates how deep-rooted racial discrimination can be, but it also shows that people can act to change and make their world better. Through the first part of this thesis, we can see that the influence from others or one’s surroundings make people, especially young people, become biased; and people who have a lot of power had been taking advantage of our readiness to discrimination to control society and mold people’s identities according to their race. So, race hatred is fabricated rather than inbred. Some people, in order to reinforce their status or power in society do not hesitate to spread stereotypes. But Shankman’s *Hairspray*, as the end of the story makes clear, suggests that things can change as Tracy and her friends, through their attitude of tolerance, are pushing toward a new world exempt of discrimination. From this point, we can say that whites and blacks are getting closer by repeating conflicts, and new generation bring new thoughts, accepting differences and living together, instead of embracing the old value of racial separation. And the sixties were the best time for people to take action and try to “change” their world.

Notes

1. “Starting in the 1950s, many people living in New Orleans began moving to the suburbs – mostly white people. Research suggests that the reasons for this are many, and unfortunately, they are mostly based in racism. Many whites moved after desegregation to ensure that their children would not have to go to school with African Americans. And many whites felt that moving to all-white suburbs would help them to achieve higher social status among their peers who might look down on them for staying in the city”. (The Date Center)
2. “The Compromise of 1877 refers to a purported informal, unwritten deal that settled the disputed 1876 U.S. President election, regarded as the second “corrupt bargain, “ and ended Congressional (“Radical”) Reconstruction”. (Boundless.com) Because of this result, by the 1890s, the Democratic hold on the South resulted in a complete denial of voting rights for blacks until the 1960s.
3. “Jim Crow law, in U.S. history, any of the laws that enforce racial segregation in the South between the end of the formal Reconstruction period in 1877 and the beginning of a strong civil rights movement in the 1950s”. (Encyclopedia Britannica) Some examples of Jim Crow laws were the segregation of public schools, public transportation, and the segregation of restrooms, restaurants and drinking fountains for whites and blacks.
4. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States who was assassinated in November 1963, created the New Frontier spirit in America. The New Frontier is said

that created based on New Deal. However, the difference between New Deal and New Frontier is focus points; in New Deal case, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt focus on the Great Depression and urgent related economic issues, whereas the New Frontier was a plan that predict what the world will be like ten years.

5. Kennedy aimed pragmatic government, so he gathered people from any field and area. In fact, the half of number of a high-ranking official is from public servant not from university, industrial conglomerate or financial circles. Because of that, Washington recovered vigor, and many people tried to do something to solve every problem. That is to say, frontier-spirit had spread in the political community at that time.
6. “On the evening of December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, an African American, was arrested for disobeying an Alabama law requiring black passengers to relinquish seats to white passengers when the bus was full. Blacks also were required to sit at the back of the bus. Her arrest sparked a 381-day boycott of the Montgomery bus system and led to a 1956 Supreme Court decision banning segregation on public transportation. One of the leaders of the boycott, a young pastor named Martin Luther King Jr., emerged as a prominent national leader of the American civil rights movement in the wake of the action” (The Library of Congress).
7. “Three years after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal, nine African American students—Minnijean Brown, Terrance Roberts, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Patillo, Gloria Ray, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls—attempted to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. The students, known as the Little Rock Nine, were recruited by Daisy Bates, president of the Arkansas branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, Martin Luther King wrote President Dwight D. Eisenhower requesting a swift resolution allowing the students to attend school”. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)
8. “On February 1, 1960, four African-American students of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University sat at a white-only lunch counter inside a Greensboro, North Carolina Woolworth’s store. While sit-ins had been held elsewhere in the United States, the Greensboro sit-in catalyzed a wave of nonviolent protest against private-sector segregation in the United States. The 1960 sit-ins began without the assistance of any organization, and they effected partial desegregation in less than a month without legal action. They proved one of the simplest and most efficacious protests of the civil rights movement”. (North Carolina History Project)
9. “During the spring of 1961, student activists from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) launched the Freedom Rides to challenge segregation on interstate buses and bus terminals. Traveling on buses from Washington, D.C., to Jackson, Mississippi, the riders met violent opposition in the Deep South, garnering extensive media attention and eventually forcing federal intervention from John F. Kennedy’s administration. Although the campaign succeeded in securing an Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) ban on segregation in all facilities under their jurisdiction, the Freedom Rides fueled existing tensions between student activists and Martin Luther King, Jr., who publicly supported the riders, but did not participate in the campaign”. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

10. “On 28 August 1963, more than 200,000 demonstrators took part in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in the nation’s capital. The march was successful in pressuring the administration of John F. Kennedy to initiate a strong federal civil rights bill in Congress. During this event, Martin Luther King delivered his memorable “I Have a Dream” speech”. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

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