EXPLORING OUR COMMON HUMANITY

No Way Out (1950), A Raisin in the Sun (1961) and
Remember the Titans (2000)

Adapted from Shining Light on Our Common Humanity ©2020
and Radical Choices in the Crossroads of Life ©2020
Available on Amazon authored by Dr. Onalee McGraw

A Special 3 Film Study Guide Designed by the Educational Guidance Institute
OVERVIEW

We all have very different life experiences and, yet - we share the same human nature! A truly great classic film shines the light of truth on our lives and illuminates our common world. Classic films are remembered and viewed again and again because they help us discover who we are and how to live together in the human family.

The films included in the Educational Guidance Institute Study Guides have been chosen according to the highest aesthetic standards for screenplay, direction, acting, casting, and artistic integrity. The clear and consistent moral content of these films serves to elevate the human spirit and inspire the moral imagination for the good, the true and the beautiful.

Together we can restore our diminished treasury of social and moral capital. We can deepen our understanding of our shared human condition and rebuild civic friendship!

April 2014 was Turner Classic Movies’ 20th anniversary as a leading authority in classic film. Turner Classic Movies invited EGI’s Onalee McGraw and 19 other film fans to introduce their favorite movies with TCM’s Host, Robert Osborne. Introducing 12 Angry Men, Robert Osborne and Onalee discussed the universal theme of justice portrayed in the film.
“Moral communities are fragile things, hard to build and easy to destroy.”

- Jonathan Haidt

Our job must be to rebuild the moral and social capital that sustains us living together in community and society. Jonathan Haidt, moral psychologist and best-selling author of *The Happiness Hypothesis* and *The Righteous Mind*, defines moral capital as “the resources that sustain a moral community.” As Haidt puts it,

“Moral capital refers to the degree to which a community possesses interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, and technologies that mesh well with evolved psychological mechanisms and thereby enable the community to suppress or regulate selfishness and make cooperation possible.”

In a mysterious way, the visual art of classic film supplies essential moral vision in a fractured society. Sharing this vision, we can revitalize our core institutions and restore dangerously depleted moral and social capital. A classic film transports its viewers into a world where the meanings of truth, goodness and beauty are not in dispute.
No Way Out (1950)

Directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz

Justice and the Examined Life
No Way Out

Made in 1950, a decade before the civil rights movement began, this film unearths fear and hatred as the emotional roots of racism. Darryl Zanuck, production head of 20th Century Fox, and Joseph Mankiewicz, one of the most respected directors and screenwriters at the studio, collaborated on the project. *No Way Out* was the first screenplay out of Hollywood that squarely took on racism as a social issue.

**Storyline**

*No Way Out* is the story of conflict between a near-psychotic white man, Ray Biddle (Richard Widmark), and a young black doctor, Luther Brooks (Sidney Poitier). Ray and his brother Johnny, shot while caught in a robbery, are brought to the prison ward where Dr. Brooks is an intern. After examining Johnny, Brooks suspects a brain tumor and performs a spinal tap to confirm his diagnosis.

When Johnny dies Ray claims Brooks has deliberately murdered his brother. The hospital supervisor, Dr. Wharton (Stephen McNally), knows Brooks to be innocent, but Biddle will not allow an autopsy to prove it. The two doctors seek the help of Edie Johnson Biddle, Johnny’s widow (Linda Darnell) to get the autopsy. Biddle’s manipulation of Edie results in a race riot over Johnny’s death.

Edie seeks refuge in Dr. Wharton’s home, becoming friends with the doctor’s housekeeper, Gladys (Amanda Randolph). Through her friendship with Gladys, Edie overcomes her prejudice against blacks. Brooks sees the only way he can get the autopsy is to turn himself in to the police. After Brooks is cleared, Biddle is determined to kill him.

Biddle forces Edie to lure Brooks to Wharton’s home where he tries to kill him. In the final scene, as Ray Biddle’s wound starts to bleed, he finds himself dependent on the man he hates to save his life. Edie says that Ray doesn’t deserve to live, but Luther Brooks says to her, *I can’t kill a man just because he hates me.*
Film Facts: No Way Out

**Year:** 1950

**Starring** Sidney Poitier, Richard Widmark, Linda Darnell

**Director** Joseph L. Mankiewicz

**Screenwriter** Joseph L. Mankiewicz

**Viewing Time:** 106 Minutes

---

*No Way Out* in Film History: A Case Study in Institutional Racism

This landmark film brought together two men who became lifelong friends, Richard Widmark and Sidney Poitier. Widmark was the seasoned professional who had started his film career in 1947 playing an evil villain who pushes a helpless old lady down the stairs in *Kiss of Dark*.

Richard Widmark’s co-star, Sidney Poitier, was just twenty-three and appearing in his first film. Widmark had been asked by Zanuck and Mankiewicz to play a character starkly opposed to his own deep convictions about human dignity and racial justice. Widmark did not want to play a bad guy again but he did it for the greater good that could come from a film showing the evils of racism and featuring black actors in portrayals of whole persons instead of stereotypes.

Sidney Poitier went on to become *the* leading man who paved the way and set the standard for the many black actors who followed him. He is most remembered for his roles as Mr. Tibbs in *In the Heat of the Night*, his Broadway and film performance as Walter Lee Younger in *A Raisin in the Sun*, and his Oscar winning performance in *Lilies of The Field* in 1964.
Film Critic’s Corner

The Elevation of Human Dignity Depicted in No Way Out.

Joseph Mankiewicz and Darryl Zanuck were known in Hollywood for boldness in tackling controversial themes. They needed an exceptional actor to play the psychopathic racist, Ray Biddle. Widmark had gained stardom by playing psychotic villains but did not want to be typecast as a villain. As a strong supporter of civil rights, Widmark did not relish playing the part of Ray Biddle. Zanuck and Mankiewicz were able to convince him that the role only he could play would serve the cause of social justice.

The Brilliance of Motion Picture Art: Dialogue, Direction and Performance

Joseph Mankiewicz had begun his career as a screenwriter and continued in that craft for many years. The story of his talent as both screenwriter and director is told in Oscar nominations and awards he won at the peak of his career. In 1950, Mankiewicz won both Best Director and Best Original Screenplay Awards for A Letter to Three Wives. In 1951 he won Best Director and Best Original Screenplay for All About Eve. In that same year his script for No Way Out was also nominated.

Film critics and fans often speak of the high literary quality and wit in the writing of Joseph Mankiewicz. In a May 1991 interview, Mankiewicz reflected on the marked decline in creativity he was seeing in the contemporary films of the day with this comment:

“I’m just a little bit sad about the kinds of movies they’re making now... Today’s films don’t seem to exist without the destruction of property, the destruction of human beings, the actual stripping of any kind of mystery or individuality, really, from sex, by putting as much as possible on the screen...”
Acting for the Good as an Antidote to Racism

The corrosive effect of racial animosity on individuals, institutions and society is the central theme in *No Way Out*. The story teaches the lesson that the only effective counterforce to racial hatred is personal virtue and friendship. We see this enduring truth about human nature in the growth of virtue and friendship in its lead characters. The story flows without the kind of preachy over-simplification of complex social problems that sometimes diminishes other films with racial themes. The pioneering nature of this film is remarkable because in the time it was made *race was not a subject of civil discourse in the nation.*

Luther Brooks has an authentic friendship of equals with Dr. Wharton who is his supervisor at the hospital. The moral support Luther Brooks receives from his family strengthens his will to persevere in the face of daunting challenges. Luther must summon all his inner strength to gain the solution to the murder charge against him. He decides to turn himself into the police so the autopsy can be done.

Edie has grown up in oppressed circumstances, a life filled with bitterness, hardship, and racism. Gladys teaches her how to see blacks as human beings and the two women become friends.

Edie learns that righteous anger can never justify revenge. She learns this lesson from Luther in the final scene. She tells Luther that Ray Biddle is not worth saving and that he should just let him die. Luther gives to Edie, and to the audience, the timeless lesson on the universality of human dignity saying, *I can’t kill a man just because he hates me.*
Post-Viewing Discussion: *No Way Out*

In the beginning Edie allows her upbringing in Beaver Canal to define who she is. Seeing herself as a victim unable to control her own life, she is easily manipulated by Ray Biddle. She delivers the messages from Ray to his friends in Beaver Canal that put the race riot in motion.

Discuss how Edie’s interactions with Gladys, Dr. Wharton, and Dr. Brooks and his wife allow her to push beyond her upbringing and become her own person.

Moral Intuition that Evil Has Happened

Edie experiences deep feelings of disgust and horror when she witnesses the harm and destruction, she has caused by bringing Ray Biddle’s messages of hate to Beaver Canal. She begins to realize Ray Biddle has manipulated her and she wants no part of Beaver Canal.

Understanding through Friendship

Through her conversation with Gladys, Edie gains a deeper understanding of the common ground that she and Gladys share. They talk about what they do and do not understand about men and why men do the things they do. Edie feels genuine gratitude towards Gladys for taking care of her and wants to know more about her.
Post-Viewing Discussion (Continued)

We do not grow in self-knowledge and virtue all at once. We learn to do the good through the example and compassion and friendship of others.

Growing in Empathy

Dr. Wharton takes Edie with him to the coroner’s office. She is there when Luther is exonerated and, in front of Ray, she says to Luther and his wife:

*I’m glad it turned out alright... I’m glad for both of you.*

Recognizing Human Dignity as a Universal Good

Having been hurt so many times by Ray, Edie is at first reluctant to help Luther save Ray’s life. She says *Let it bleed.* But Luther shows her that even though Ray is crazy and horrible, *he is still a human being and deserves to be treated as such.* Luther says:

*I can’t kill a man just because he hates me.*
The Filmmaker and his story...

Recognizing Human Dignity as a Universal Good
as Portrayed in No Way Out: The Ideas are in the Images

“It is nonsense to imagine that a free political community can survive without citizens who pursue lives of virtue.”
- James Madison

Joseph Mankiewicz had the talent to express through dialogue and image deep concepts in the human condition. The Oscar winning screenwriter and director grew up in a home in which serious and literate conversations took place on a daily basis. Mankiewicz’s father was a professor at a university. His brother, Herman Mankiewicz, is famous in Hollywood history for writing the screenplay for Orson Wells’ Citizen Kane.

The central narrative in No Way Out speaks directly to the civil divides and tribal conflicts we are experiencing in our society today. Many of the characters in this story, both black and white, are seen as nursing tribal hatreds and driven by the desire for violent revenge. Other characters, and in particular the character of Edie, are able to overcome their narrow view of tribal identity. As we see in No Way Out, the deeply philosophical concept of universal human dignity is made concrete in the natural give and take conversation between Edie and Gladys in the scenes at Dr. Warton’s home. The concept of human dignity as a universal good is portrayed in the final scene when Sidney Poitier’s character follows not only his training as a doctor but his moral instincts as a human being.
The stage version of *A Raisin in the Sun* made history on Broadway. As the reviewers noted, the largely white audience rose to its feet in a spontaneous standing ovation on the opening night. This depiction of a 1950s family facing racism and discrimination in Chicago presents its characters who come together to teach the audience what it means to be a family.

**Film Facts**

**Year:** 1961

**Starring:** Sidney Poitier, Claudia McNeil, Ruby Dee, Diana Sands

**Director:** Daniel Petrie

**Screenwriter:** Lorraine Hansberry (play and screenplay)

**Viewing Time:** 128 minutes

**Setting:** Chicago, Illinois
The great dramatic power of *A Raisin In The Sun* is generated in the way the entire cast works together as an ensemble. In contrast to other films about family life which focus primarily on the individuals within the family unit, this film realistically depicts family life itself. *A Raisin in the Sun* clearly points to the family as the teaching ground for learning *how human beings behave in community and society*. The images of the struggle for unity within the Younger family express for everyone the human need for solidarity, acceptance, and self-worth that the family unit is uniquely designed to fulfill.

*A Raisin in the Sun* in Film History

Lorraine Hansberry grew up on the South Side of Chicago where her father was a successful real estate broker and her mother was a schoolteacher. In 1938, when Lorraine was eight, her father moved the family to a white neighborhood, knowing that there were “restrictive covenants” used at the time to keep minorities out of certain neighborhoods.

Even though they were subjected to attacks, the family refused to move until a court ordered them to do so. The case of *Hansberry v. Lee* reached the Supreme Court, ruling restrictive covenants illegal. Lorraine Hansberry’s play made it to Broadway in 1959, and she became the youngest person and the first African American playwright to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award.
Ruby Bridges and Dr. Robert Coles

Robert Coles, Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard psychiatrist and author, wrote about his use of films like *A Raisin in the Sun* and *To Kill A Mockingbird* in his landmark study of *The Moral Life of Children*. Coles interviewed black and white children on their reactions to the films and the psychological issues the films raised. One of the children, a black child named Ruby Bridges, was among the first to be involved in the integration of an all-white school in New Orleans. She had to be escorted to school by federal marshals due to the hostility of the white people, who verbally abused her as she made her way into the school. Ruby told Dr. Coles that she had seen *A Raisin in the Sun*, and she believed that if white people could see it, “they might stop coming out to bother us... The people in the movies would work on them, and maybe they’d listen.”

The Brilliance of Motion Picture Art: Dialogue, Direction and Performance

*A Raisin in the Sun* debuted in film in 1961, following its successful run on Broadway. Lorraine Hansberry adapted her play into the screenplay for the movie. The film portrays the Younger family in their cramped ghetto apartment, just as the audience watched them on stage.

Since the cast of the film had already played together for many nights on Broadway, they were able to deepen their characters in the film while still keeping their performances fresh. Ruby Dee (Ruth) has to juggle her role as wife, mother, daughter-in-law and all-around hostess in a small apartment. She exemplifies the virtue of hope in a confused world.

Sidney Poitier’s performance is considered his absolute best. He takes his character through many different moods and situations, from euphoria to the depths of despair and ultimately, moral transformation.
After he knows the money is lost, he poignantly cries out: “That money is made out of my father’s flesh!” Walter’s passion is real because Poitier’s is.

Walter is prepared to accept the buy-out from the “Neighborhood Welcoming Committee” at the expense of his family’s honor. He claims that he will “feel fine.” Finally, in one of the most compelling scenes ever seen on the screen, Walter Lee is deeply moved by his mother’s love and forgiveness even though he has lost the family’s money. With a great interior change of heart he tells the man who represents the white neighborhood that, “We have all thought about your offer and we have decided to move into our house because my father—He earned it for us brick by brick.”

In his autobiography, *The Measure of a Man*, Sidney Poitier explains why Walter Lee’s character development is the dramatic focus in the movie. "In my opinion," he says, "it was the son who carried the theatrical obligation as the force between the audience and the play. The eyes of those watching were on the son to see if the tragedy would destroy him, would blow him apart beyond recovery. And it was also my opinion that there was no such feeling between the audience and the mother. The audience witnessed the sadness that was visited on her. They saw that her family was in disarray, but also saw her as a force beyond that kind of vulnerability. If they were to vote, they would say, 'Oh, but she's going to be okay.'"

Poitier is confirming it is Walter who must successfully rise above his very real fragility: the mother, like a force of nature, will endure no matter what is decided, but Walter makes a decision which will definitively form him—and he makes the right one.
Family, Community, and the Common Good in a Free Society:

Lorraine Hansberry’s Vision for *A Raisin in the Sun*

American culture from the late 1950s and into the early 1960s was in a time of transition. *A Raisin in the Sun* appeared on Broadway in 1959 and became a film in 1961. It was a time when many writers in the mainstream white culture were offering the idea that the major goal in life for all young persons was to become personally autonomous and successful by their own efforts. *A Raisin in the Sun* dramatized a worldview that was very different from this viewpoint. Hansberry’s creative vision celebrated the family and showed its beauty in spite of the struggles and divisions within it.

Writing to her mother in January of 1959, just before the opening of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry wrote the following:

“The actors are very good and the director is a very talented man—so if it is a poor show, - I won’t be able to blame a soul but your youngest daughter. Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negros, and life and I think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are- and just and mixed up- but above all, that we have among our miserable and downtrodden ranks- people who are the very essence of human dignity. That is what, after all the laughter and tears, the play is supposed to say. I hope it will make you very proud. See you soon. Love to all.”

In the 1988 edition of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry’s husband comments on how the story will always be relevant across the generations:

“It is not a specific situation but the human condition, human aspiration and human relationship—the persistence of dreams, of the bonds and conflicts between men and women, parents and children, old ways and new and the endless struggle against human oppression.”
Post-Viewing Discussion: The Challenges a Family Faces in *A Raisin in the Sun*

Trials and difficulties cause Walter Lee Younger to lose perspective on what is truly valuable in life. How does Walter Lee gain a proper perspective and hope for the future?

**Trust**

When Lena uses part of the money as a down payment on a house, Walter is distraught. He believes that his “train has passed” and that he’ll never get another chance. Seeing how Walter is hurt and dying for a chance to prove himself, Lena trusts him with the rest of the money, saying:

*Lena:* And I'm telling you, son...that from now on, you be the head of this family...the way you supposed to be.

*Lena:*  Do you trust me like that?

*Lena:* I ain't never stopped trusting you...just like I ain't never stopped loving you.

**Unconditional Love**

Heartbroken after he learns the money he invested had been stolen, Walter overhears the conversation between his mother and sister that will change his life. Beneatha describes him as “nothing but a toothless rat” saying that there is “nothing left to love” about him. Lena’s reply is:

“There's always something left to love. Have you cried for that boy today? Not for yourself and the family because we lost the money, I mean for him. And what he’s gone through. And God help him. God help him, what it's done to him. Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most? When he's done good and made things easy for everybody? That ain't the time at all. It's when he's at his lowest... and he can’t believe in hisself ‘cause the world’s done whipped him so! When you start measuring somebody, measure him right, child, measure him right. You make sure that you done taken into account the hills and the valleys he’s come through to get to wherever he is.”

Lena’s unconditional love helps Walter to have a change of heart. We see this when he refuses the buyout from the white neighborhood’s “Improvement Association” representative. Walter upholds the family’s honor. Lena proudly says to her daughter-in-law, Ruth: “He come into his manhood today, didn’t he? Kinda like the rainbow after the rain.”
Remember the Titans (2000)

Directed by Boaz Yakin
True Friendship Upholds Community: Remember the Titans

Remember the Titans was made for a broad and inclusive audience and yet its themes address deep[complexities in the human condition. The film has authenticity that transcends both the year in which it was made, 2000, and the year the story takes place, 1971. The film is a true story of friendship, community, family ties, and civic responsibility. Challenges in life will come and they must be met with courage and perseverance. As the Titans football captain Gerry Bertier tells his girlfriend in a moment of celebration: “Listen, when something unexpected comes, you’ve just got to pick it up and run with it.”

Story Line

Remember the Titans portrays the true story of the T.C. Williams high school football team, of Alexandria, Virginia. The story follows Coach Herman Boone (Denzel Washington) and Coach Bill Yoast (Will Patton) as they bring the Titans together as a winning team and overcome the racial tensions that accompanied the integration of the city in 1971.

Although Coaches Boone and Yoast have different temperaments and coaching styles, the two men discover they have much in common: integrity, honor, and a strong work ethic. The hard work of turning the Titans into a winning team begins at the football training camp in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Coach Boone realizes that the Titans will never be a winning team unless the young men learn to work together and overcome their racial divides. He tells them that they will be rooming with a person of the opposite race and that they will spend their time getting to know one another. In a crucial scene, Coach Boone calls for unity near the graves of the soldiers in the Civil War who died at Gettysburg.

“This is Gettysburg. This is where they fought the Battle of Gettysburg. Men died right here on this field, fightin' the same fight that we're still fightin' amongst ourselves... today. This green field right here was painted red. Bubbling with the blood of young boys. Smoke... and hot lead pouring right through their bodies. Listen to their souls, men. 'I killed my brother with malice in my heart.' 'Hatred destroyed my family.' You listen... and you take a lesson from the dead. If we don't come together... right now, on this hallowed ground... then we, too, will be destroyed, just like they were. I don't care if you like each other or not, but you will respect each other, and maybe... I don't know, maybe we'll... learn to play this game like men.”
Film Facts: Remember the Titans

*Year:* 2000

*Starring:* Denzel Washington and Will Patton

*Director:* Boaz Yakin

*Screenwriter:* Gregory Allen Howard

*Viewing Time:* 113 min.

*Setting:* Alexandria, Virginia (Filmed in Covington, Georgia)

*Production Company:* Jerry Bruckheimer Films, Walt Disney Pictures

Film writer Gregory Allen Howard lived in Los Angeles for several years before moving back home to Virginia. During his first year back, living just outside the D.C. beltway, he noticed that the city of Alexandria was uncommonly well-integrated. Howard recalls,

“I started asking around and I kept hearing about this high school football team. I think it was my barber who first told me about the Titans and these two coaches. I couldn’t imagine that a high school team could so affect an entire town. Some say they saved the city.”

A genuinely classic film is one that the viewer will always want to watch again because it dramatizes profound truths that inspire our moral imagination. The heart of this true story is the character of two men, Coach Boone and Coach Yoast, against the backdrop of a city torn by racial strife. Another artistic standard that makes a film a classic is whether the story demonstrates growth in virtue and change on the part of the major characters. Still another consideration is whether a film transcends racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries and divisions, ultimately revealing genuine unity in the human condition. One reason this film fulfills all these three classic film standards is that it is based on a true story. The city of Alexandria, along with the rest of the country, was confronting the challenge of racial integration in the year 1971. Coaches Boone and Yoast recall on the DVD commentary that “the town followed the team” in coming together in a spirit of racial harmony. Unlike classic films of Hollywood’s Golden Age, this classic film has the benefit of the recollections of the two men whose story the movie dramatizes.
Film Critic’s Corner

*Remember the Titans* in Film History

Many feel good sports films based on actual events have been made. But this film teaches timeless lessons in civic friendship that take the story to a higher level. We learn transcendent lessons about the meaning of friendship and the virtues that build unity among people. Coach Boone tells the players at Gettysburg, “If we don't come together... right now, on this hallowed ground... then we, too, will be destroyed.” The lesson in human dignity he gives the players is that even if they do not like one another, they must respect one another.

*Remember the Titans* screenwriter, Gregory Allen Howard, relates how the town of Alexandria appeared more socially and racially integrated than any other place he had been. He discovered the real people behind the civic unity of Alexandria: Herman Boone and Bill Yoast.

**Remembering the History of ‘Titans’**

*A screenwriter who moved to Virginia to escape L.A.’s tensions retraces his discovery of Alexandria’s racial healing.***

Los Angeles Times - September 30, 2000 - Gregory Allen Howard

Thirty years ago, Alexandria was a segregated town. Whites lived on Seminary Ridge. Blacks lived in "the Berg" near the waterfront. They did not "mix," a common term used then. According to Herman, "If you were black you didn't go up on the Ridge, particularly at night." During the summer of 1971 a black teenager was killed by a convenience store owner who said, "He looked dangerous." Intense protests followed and many felt the town was on the verge of exploding, like Watts or Detroit.

And in a state where high school football coaches are community leaders, every head coach in the Alexandria system was white. To calm the black community, Alexandria hired Boone as head football coach of the new high school, T.C. Williams--consolidated from three segregated schools, one white and two black. In hiring Boone the school board passed over the senior coach in the system, Yoast, a white coach who was a regional championship winner. The first integrating that had to be done was Yoast accepting the assistant head coach job under Boone. That 1971 T.C. Titans Football team turned this town around, integrated it by winning football games and showing this city that race mixing could work.
The Brilliance of Motion Picture Art: Dialogue, Direction and Performance

Dialogue, direction, and characterizations all needed to work together to capture a story that happened in real time with real people. The tension that drives the film comes from the reality that Coach Boone simply could not lose a single game, or he would be fired. Each game the team played would have dramatic repercussions for all of them. Under the leadership of Coach Boone, the players learn to interact and communicate with one another. The screenplay dialogue is natural and does not appear to be forced; it captures the manner of speaking among youth of the period. The characters of the ensemble cast: Blue, Rev, Sunshine, Petey, Louie and the rest stay in the audience’s memory.

Hearing Coach Boone and Coach Yoast on the DVD commentary is the best reply to critics who questioned when the film came out whether it portrayed the real life events in Alexandria in 1971 authentically enough. We hear two friends remembering the great events of that time and their recollections of the young men that they coached. What we can believe is that Gregory Allen Howard put in the effort to research and interview the real people of this story so that when the viewer watches Denzel Wahington as Coach Boone rallying his players, he or she is not watching him play just another role, but is experiencing the real man, Coach Herman Boone, in his leadership role.

“I’m not going to talk to you tonight about winning and losing. You’re already winners because you didn’t kill each other up at camp. Tonight, we’ve got Hayfield. Like all the other schools in this conference, they’re all white. They don’t have to worry about race. We do. But we’re better for it, men. Let me tell you something: you don’t let anything come between us. Nothing tears us apart.”
Building Civic Friendship in Community

Without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods.

- Aristotle

The image of the funeral gathering brings a visual presentation of unity in community at the beginning and the end of the film. The story that unfolds reveals the essential events rooted in friendship that brought the Titans football team to a state championship. We see the mother of Gerry Bertier, who at the beginning of the story is shown as prejudiced against blacks; at the funeral she is holding hands with Julius Campbell, her late son’s best friend. We see the deepening of true friendship between Coach Boone and Coach Yoast and among the players.

The real Coaches, Herman Boone and Bill Yoast with actors

Denzel Washington and Will Patton
Post-Viewing Discussion for *Remember the Titans*

*Titans* dramatizes the truth that conflict in a community can be overcome if people can get to know one another as human beings. Another essential factor in healing division is willingness of people in the community to make some sacrifice for the sake of unity, whether it is great or small.

Discuss how the characters in the film sacrifice and grow in virtue for the good of the team. Discuss the ways in which their newfound unity heals their racially divided community.

**Self-Sacrifice for the Common Good**

Coach Yoast makes a big sacrifice when he is demoted to assistant coach under Coach Boone. He stands up to the people who are plotting against Coach Boone. Yoast refuses to go along with the fixed game, even though he knows this refusal will ruin his chances for the Hall of Fame.

“You call this game fair, or I’ll go to the papers. I don’t care if I go down with you.”

**Fraternal Correction for the Greater Good of the Team**

Friendship requires integrity. Gerry Bertier requests permission from Coach Boone to cut his friend Ray from the team.

Gerry knows that Ray missed a block on purpose; leading to the injury of teammate, Rev. Coach Boone guides him in the fraternal correction that he must make.

“I want Ray off the team, Coach ... I know that Ray missed that block on purpose. Sometimes you just gotta cut a man lose.”

“Well, you’re the captain. You make a decision, but you support your decision.”
Restoring Social and Moral Capital to Our Fractured Culture with *Remember the Titans*

Jonathan Haidt’s Moral Foundations Theory applied to *Remember the Titans* is the perfect educational tool for sharing a sense of solidarity and overcoming tribal divisions.

Overcoming the *us versus them* mentality that divides us is a goal that people in all places along the political spectrum want to achieve. In our human nature we are grounded as social beings, not autonomous selves. Public intellectuals, Yuval Levin in *A Time to Build*, and Jonathan Haidt in *The Righteous Mind*, have made a compelling case for reforming our society’s institutions and rebuilding social unity - for the sustaining of our nation and for the rising generation. *Remember the Titans* gives us this opportunity for several reasons:

1. It is a true story at the intersection of culture and history. The film itself represents a unique transition point into our postmodern world of deep interpersonal and communal division and fragmentation.
2. The story gives us a lesson in what it means to reclaim our common humanity and defend our shared human dignity.
3. *Remember the Titans* gives us a vision of what true friendship looks like as the film’s characters help each other to grow in virtue.

Using the Moral Foundations Theory developed by Jonathan Haidt, we can explore together how human innate moral intuition put to work can rebuild solidarity in our communities and in our country.
Moral Foundations Theory and *Remember the Titans* - Restoring Our Depleted Social and Moral Capital

“Righteous Minds” and the Struggle for Solidarity in a Free Society

“To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affection. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind.”

- Edmund Burke

“To understand the miracle of moral communities that grow beyond the bounds of kinship we must look not just at people, and not just at the relationships among people, but at the complete environment within which those relationships are embedded, and which makes those people more virtuous (however they themselves define that term). It takes a great deal of outside - the -mind stuff to support a moral community “

- Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*

In *The Righteous Mind* (2012) psychologist Jonathan Haidt calls for a national renewal of moral capital to rebuild civility in a divided nation. Haidt defines moral capital as “the resources that sustain a moral community.” Looking at the violence and cultural divisions we experience today, we realize, as Haidt reminds us, moral communities are “fragile things, hard to build and easy to destroy.” As he says:

“Moral communities are fragile things, hard to build and easy to destroy. When we think about very large communities such as nations, the challenge is extraordinary and the threat of moral entropy is intense.....if you don’t value moral capital, then you won’t foster values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, and technologies that increase it.”

CAN WE BEGIN REBUILDING MORAL COMMUNITY WITH FILM CLASSICS LIKE *REMEMBER THE TITANS* AS OUR STARTING POINT?

Based on a true story, *Remember the Titans* is a twenty-first century tribute to the ability of diverse members of community groups to overcome even deep differences of racial conflict. Several threads of the film’s narrative are interwoven into the overall theme of solidarity. At the beginning of the film, Coach Boone, played by Denzel Washington, dramatically drives home the self-sacrifice and loss of life of the young soldiers buried on the hollowed grounds of Gettysburg where the team is practicing in camp.
INTEGRATING *REMEMBER THE TITANS* WITH MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY

The research in neuroscience and moral psychology presented in *The Righteous Mind* provides compelling evidence for the innate moral dispositions human beings display across highly diverse cultural groups. These moral intuitions are recognizable by observation and experience. All of us recognize them in our daily lives whether we affirm a biological, philosophical, or theological anthropology and worldview. Moral Foundations Theory and its supporting evidence validate the concept of a common human nature shared by all human beings. As Haidt reminds us, surveying our torn cultural fabric, the challenge is to rebuild our nation’s moral capital by fostering, “values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, and technologies that increase it.”

If we want to do more to increase our nation’s moral capital, a winning strategy may be to combine the basic moral intuitions Haidt has presented in Moral Foundations Theory with great films like *Remember the Titans*. Consider the three basic assumptions about our human nature summarized in *The Righteous Mind*: (1) “Intuitions Come First, Strategic Reasoning Second,” (2) “There’s More to Morality than Harm and Fairness,” and (3) “Morality Binds and Blinds.”

These three assumptions are memorably present in *Remember the Titans*. In the beginning of the film, the character of Louie breaking into song breaks through racial tensions and releases the natural social inclinations in the other young men. They begin bonding together to cure the blindness of racial prejudice.

**THE SIX PILLARS OF MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY; CARE, FAIRNESS, LIBERTY, LOYALTY, AUTHORITY AND SANCTITY AS SEEN IN *REMEMBER THE TITANS***

These six innate pillars of moral intuition described in *The Righteous Mind* are groundbreaking in our postmodern world - a world where the question of whether there is a human nature is up for grabs. Each pillar of the theory has been validated by scientific inquiry. Liberals and conservatives alike can intuitively and reasonably assume there are no hidden political or religious agendas lurking beneath the surface of Moral Foundations Theory. Compelling images of “Care,” “Fairness,” “Liberty,” “Loyalty,” “Authority” and “Sanctity” are all dramatically present in *Remember the Titans*, serving to unite us across the generations and across our present political divisions.
“THE HIVE SWITCH” – OVERCOMING TRIBAL BLINDNESS TO BECOME “PART OF THE WHOLE” WITH DENZEL WASHINGTON AND AN ENSEMBLE CAST

Discussing the film’s themes and characters gives us, across the generations, a way of finding deeper meaning and purpose in the phrase that opens the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” Many skeptics and cynics may have grave doubts that recovery of greater civility across political tribal lines is really possible in our time. Can we overcome the radical individualism of our present era and rediscover our essential nature as social beings? Using the metaphor of the bee hive, Haidt argues that among political tribes cooperation and work for the common good is possible and that we can undertake significant rebuilding of our dwindling moral, social and cultural capital:

“…human beings are conditional hive creatures. We have the ability…to transcend self-interest and lose ourselves... in something larger than ourselves. I called this ability the hive switch. The hive switch is another way of stating Durkheim’s idea that we are Homo duplex, we live most of our lives in the ordinary (profane) world, but we achieve our greatest joys in those brief moments of transit to the sacred world, in which we become ‘simply a part of the whole.’”

*Remember the Titans* - , through its deeply human themes of unity and solidarity - captures the spiritual and emotional feel of the classic films of Hollywood’s Golden Age. What marks films like this is a mysterious power to *elevate* our hearts and minds, making us feel - if only for a brief time - that we are *part of something great and larger than ourselves*. Screen legend Edward G. Robinson, who played both gangsters and good guys in Hollywood’s Golden Age, expressed Haidt’s (and Durkheim’s) concept of “brief moments of transit to the sacred world.” In his autobiography, *All My Yesterdays*, Robinson says the truly great moments in dramatic art *only* take place when the audience and the performers “play together.” Decades later, “in a brief moment of transit to the scared world,” we experience a moment of “playing together” with the Titans football team as they win every game of the season and take the state championship.

**FIRST PILLAR: CARE VS. HARM**

Haidt has found that the moral emotions of human beings are deeply sensitive in the sphere of Care vs. Harm. People naturally become deeply disturbed and sorrowful at the sight of a person suffering from harm. In *Remember the Titans*, the deep moments of love and care shine through in the winning of the state championship in spite of the tragic accident that paralyzes Gerry Bertier.
FAIRNESS VS. CHEATING

The strategic importance of The Fairness Foundation to group solidarity is seen in two sequences. Coach Yeost has been told by prominent members of the community that he will be chosen for the Hall of Fame. The price of this award is for Yeost to look elsewhere when unethical moves are made that will cost Coach Boone his job. The second sequence depicts the decision made by Gerry Bertier, with Coach Boone’s permission, to drop Ray from the team. Ray has been “cheating” by refusing to cover black players in strategic plays where their safety and the outcome of the game are at stake.

THE LIBERTY FOUNDATION

Individual characters are confronted with crucial choices between their own self-interest and the common good of the team. The Titans narrative carries several key scenes where individuals make strategic moral decisions in favor of the team. Alan Bosley makes the significant decision under the authority of Coach Yeost to put Petey Jones into the important spot that will maximize the team’s chances for victory.
Coach Boone makes the critical choice to refuse the intervention of the police when a brick is thrown into the window of his Alexandria home. He intuitively knows the importance of letting the Titans teamwork for the unity that will more effectively prevent future violence.

LOYALTY VS. BETRAYAL

Gerry’s girlfriend Emma sees the friendship between Julius and Gerry as a betrayal of their white social group. Later, Emma gains moral perspective and greets Julius warmly at the championship game.

AUTHORITY VS. SUBVERSION

In discussing the Authority Foundation, Jonathan Haidt gives good advice to people who want to live in a free society:

“If authority is in part about protecting order and fending off chaos, then everyone has a stake in supporting the existing order and in holding people accountable for fulfilling the obligations of their station.”

Coach Boone knows that he must establish his authority with the white members of the team through Gerry Bertier who is their captain. Boone takes a direct and personal approach by asking Gerry in front of the others: “Who is your Daddy?”

SANCTITY VS. DEGRADATION

“You listen... and you take a lesson from the dead. If we don't come together... right now, on this hallowed ground... then we, too, will be destroyed, just like they were. I don't care if you like each other or not, but you will respect each other, and maybe... I don't know, maybe we'll... learn to play this game like Men.”

- Coach Boone at Gettysburg
REMEMBER THE TITANS GIVES WITNESS TO THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN DIGNITY

AND OUR COMMON HUMANITY

The fundamental nature of the Sanctity Foundation is seen in the very early sequences of the film. Coach Boone has started to build solidarity with the basic decision to put black and white players together as roommates. Yet much more is needed in the realm of awakening in them an awareness of the deeper human meaning underlying a united winning team.

Watching this sequence in Remember the Titan mysteriously triggers a strong sense of Sanctity – the Sanctity of our common humanity. Somehow the reduction of our human nature down to “bodies and brains” does not make sense. The human imagination is stronger than the philosophical claims of materialism and relativism.

Jonathan Haidt explains why every American’s moral matrix must expand beyond merely the Care and Fairness foundations. Liberty, Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity must be in the mix for a nation and its people to thrive. As Haidt puts it:

“If your moral matrix rests entirely on the Care and Fairness foundations, then it’s hard to hear the sacred overtones in America’s unofficial motto: E pluribus unum (from many, one). By “sacred” I mean the concept I introduced with the Sanctity foundation .... It’s the ability to endow ideas, objects, and events with infinite value, particularly those ideas, objects, and events that bind a group together into a single entity. The process of converting pluribus (diverse people) into unum (a nation) is a miracle that occurs in every successful nation on Earth. Nations decline or divide when they stop performing this miracle.”
MAKING MORAL CAPITAL GAINS WITH CIVICS LESSONS FROM REMEMBER THE TITANS

We may spend most of our waking hours advancing our own interests, but we all have the capacity to transcend self-interest and become simply a part of a whole. It’s not just a capacity; it’s the portal to many of life’s most cherished experiences.
- Jonathan Haidt

People say that it can’t work, black and white. Here, we make it work every day. We still have our disagreements, of course, but before we reach for hate, always, always, we remember the Titans. – The character of - Sheryl Yeost

What are the Moral Capital Gains that the citizens of a free society can win by taking in and putting into practice the civics lessons from Remember the Titans?

1) A RENEWED SENSE OF SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is defined as unity and agreement of feeling and action among people with a common interest - mutual support within a group. From beginning to end, the story of Remember the Titans compellingly depicts the human struggle for solidarity within conflicting groups.

2) A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO OVERCOME POLITICAL AND CULTURAL GROUP DIFFERENCES

Remember the Titans conveys the timeless truth that we are social beings who naturally flourish in community and civil society.
For questions regarding EGI’s classic film study project, please contact:

Onalee McGraw, PhD, Director
Educational Guidance Institute
Email: egiatthemovies@gmail.com
Visit us at: www.educationalguidanceinstitute.com

To explore more Classic Film Study Guides from Educational Guidance Institute - search Dr. Onalee McGraw for her author page on Amazon.

Please share your thoughts with us!