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GREEN BOOK, WHITE FISTS, BLACK PLIGHT: A NEW TAKE ON THE DEEP SOUTH[2]

Green Book (2018) is a recent race-themed film that continues the long tradition of the social problem film, initiated after World War II, and featuring the position of the minorities across US society. The plot presents a rough white bouncer turned driver and his temporary employer, a world-class African American piano player, through a number of unpleasant situations around the Midwest and the South in 1962, with racism as the main motive at their core. The paper relies on postulates by Frantz Fanon about the internalised inferiority complex coupled with the pianist's homosexual guilt, and also draws on Kemal Malik's view of the subjugated race being forced into the infantile position of entertainers to whites. The pianist Don finds it even harder to endure institutional segregation, due to which he asserts his dignity and breaks the obedience circle at the climax of the storyline. Significantly, even his driver Tony discards race and class differences and embraces Don as a bosom friend in an idyllic Christmas atmosphere on their return to New York City.

Keywords: social problem film, road movie, Civil Rights era, class issues, systemic racism, internalised racism, sundown towns, discrimination, homosexuality, role reversal

1. Introduction

Far from any simplistic "comedy/musical" designation that can be found on the first cursory internet database searches,[3] Peter Farrelly's 2018 film *Green Book* showcases numerous societal ramifications which reach as far back into American history as the colonial age, and certainly touch upon a number of unwritten codes from the postbellum United States. The viewers should never disregard the fact that despite this general-consumption label, the film probes under the surface of the seemingly well-ordered society in the early-1960s United States, at the height of the struggle for civil rights, and depicts

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3 This description occurs at the Google query Green Book movie (without quotes), the IMDB is more inclusive with Docudrama, Period Drama, Road Trip, Biography, Comedy, Drama, Music (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6966692/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1), while the Rotten Tomatoes Critics Consensus declares: "*Green Book* takes audiences on an excessively smooth ride through bumpy subject matter, although Mahershala Ali and Viggo Mortensen's performances add necessary depth" (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/green_book). The film vividly presents a number of examples that point to a strikingly divided society, with an irrational hierarchy at play, a point which few blurb-sized reviews manage to make.

a number of topics that cast a dubious light on American society as a whole. It didn't take a long time for this work to garner over 50 awards at various reputable events since it had its triumphant première at the Toronto International Film Festival in September of that year – the most relevant include accolades conferred by the American Film Institute, Golden Globe Awards, Producers Guild of America Awards, Screen Actors Guild Awards and Hollywood Film Awards. The huge worldwide gross of $321 million against the production budget of only $23 million is another indicator that the film found a resonance with large audiences in North America and overseas alike, but as further analysis aims to demonstrate, it was quite removed from AP's assessment of a "crowd-pleasing Deep South road trip movie" (COYLE 2018: par. 1), or a "feel-good drama, which tells the true story of a black musician and his white driver on a tour of America's Deep South" (*BBC NEWS* 2018: par. 2). The BBC news item issued a correct forecast, however, in listing several previous Toronto winners that "went on to win best film at the Oscars," like *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The King's Speech* and *12 Years a Slave* (*BBC NEWS* 2018: par. 3–4).

Seen in historical cinematic perspective, this film treats topics first foregrounded in Hollywood immediately after World War II, in a new genre named social problem films: the experience of war veterans in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), the dangers of drug abuse and alcoholism, as in *The Lost Weekend* (1945) and *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), anti-Semitism in *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947), or workers' rights in *The Salt of the Earth* (1954). More specifically, *Green Book* continues the conversation on the African American social issues, initiated by such works as *Home of the Brave* (1949), treating segregation in the US military, *Lost Boundaries* (1949), about an African American physician passing off as white in 1930s New England, *Pinky* (1949), about a light-skinned African nurse who finally embraces her own racial identity, *The Defiant Ones* (1958), centred around two escaped convicts – one white, one black – chained together and escaping the search party, and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), a milestone in the discussion on interracial marriage (WILLIAMS et al. 2017: 1086–1088). We may stop the list here since *Green Book* is diegetically set in late 1962, when the Civil Rights Act was still just a distant possibility, its enforcement and observance in the Deep South even more so, having in mind the ingrained multigenerational racism among the more bigoted whites. The titular object is actually a travel guide first published in 1936 under the title *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, by the author Victor Hugo Green, who as a New York City postman intended the volume for better ease of African American motorists when they faced open harassment and even arbitrary arrests in many US states.

2. Racial Friction

The film opens with a plastic presentation of New York bouncer Frank "Tony Lip" Vallelonga (Viggo Mortensen), whose aggressive attitude and a practical joke in the Copa Club cause a temporary layoff for him and most of the staff; back at home in the Bronx, he displays a crude style of behaviour within his equally uncultivated Italian American family (except his tolerant wife Dolores), who keep offending two African American repairmen in Italian, and he replies: "I didn't know they were going to send eggplants..." (*GREEN BOOK* 07:47–07:50, Fig. 1). He does not even bother to look at or greet them, but focuses on the two glasses they "sullied," only to throw them into the dustbin (Fig. 2):

Fig. 1. *Green Book* 07:55

Fig. 2. *Green Book* 08:49

Coupled with his rough taste in dressing, his streetwise, but limited vocabulary, even a hot dog eating contest for a quick-fix money prize, it is not strange at all that Tony will take an awkward stance in his failed job interview with Dr. Donald Shirley, classical and jazz pianist and composer. He lies blatantly (and unconvincingly) that he has nothing against black people, and he impatiently gives the job up when he hears that he would have to act both as chauffeur and valet: "Good luck, Doc" (*GREEN BOOK* 17:14–17:15). In the time when the plot is set, there were many more unemployed or underpaid workers of African American descent, who predominantly worked for about half of a white worker's wages. It is not strange that Tony's class expectations were turned upside down when he saw a black man living in the lap of luxury at a palatial address he could only dream of, but being steeped in this unnatural hierarchy, Tony will have to redefine his world view. This encounter reverses Tony's idea of white privilege at different levels: class, because he can barely make his way around Carnegie Hall and Shirley's suite; manners, as he is just an uncouth ruffian with a tank top visible under his unbuttoned shirt facing an African incomparably superior to him (even sitting in royal garments on a sort of throne), and education, so conspicuous in a part of their conversation:

> **Doc:** I had my record label ask around town to find me the right man. Your name came up more than once. You've impressed several people with your... innate ability to handle trouble. And that is why I called and inquired about your availability.
> **Tony:** OK, here is the deal. I got no problem being on a road with you. But I ain't no butler. I ain't ironing no shirts, and I'm not polishing nobody's shoes. You need someone to get you from point A to point B? You need someone to make sure there's no prob-

> lems along the way... And believe me you in the deep South there's gonna be problems. (*GREEN BOOK* 17:25–18:02)

When put in historical perspective, Tony's words are a statement of the fact which persisted in the Southern regions of the US for over half a century by the time in which the film's action is set. Although the category of towns hostile to African Americans did not come up in official parlance, those communities were known in oral history as "sundown towns," where blacks could face harassment, expulsion, deliberate denial of gas station, mechanic and hospitality services, and were actively discouraged from taking up residence well into the 1960s and 1970s. One of the rare scholars who studied this matter thoroughly, James Loewen, calculated that "Illinois, for example, had 671 towns and cities with more than 1,000 people in 1970, of which 475 – 71% – were all-white in census after census" (LOEWEN 2006: 18). The traditional South did not feature any comparable figure of towns void of African population, but a large majority of such towns were situated in the Midwest, Appalachia, the Ozarks, and the West. This paradox is due to the racist reaction of many white counties and settlements in the non-Southern states after the Civil War and the massive black settlement over those territories all up to the foundering of the Reconstruction ideas around 1890. According to Loewen, this is what happened between 1890 and the 1930s: "Across the country, city neighborhoods grew more and more segregated. Most astonishing, from California to Minnesota to Long Island to Florida, whites mounted little race riots against African Americans, expelling entire black communities or intimidating and keeping out would-be newcomers" (LOEWEN 2006: 25). The very term derives from a standard rough warning sign that the authorities put up on many city limits or county lines: "Nigger, Don't Let the Sun Go Down on You in _____." To Don and Tony's deep regret, they experienced this racist policy on their backs, when a Mississippi patrolman told them explicitly: "He can't be out here at night. This is a sundown town" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:25:56–1:25:59). With another racist (anti-Italian) slur from the police officer: "Oh, now I get it. That's why you driving this boy around... you half a nigger yourself" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:26:30–1:26:38), Tony loses his temper and punches him in the face, which lands both the boss and the chauffeur in police custody in the town of Mayersville. Only after Don telephones Attorney General Robert Kennedy, and the latter calls the Mississippi Governor, do they get released from the police station in perhaps the most anti-African town they visit (Fig. 3). To Don this act looks like stoopping too low, since he honestly believes the Kennedy brothers are trying to change their country for the better. By the time this happens in the Deep South, both business partners seem to have forgotten the importance of the so-called *Green Book* (Fig. 4), intended for the ease of African American motorists around the racism-laden towns throughout the country:

Fig. 3. Sign WHITES ONLY TOWN, 1:30:41

Fig. 4. Tony holding the *Green Book*, 24:22

The film demonstrates authentic African American – and to a degree, Italian American – experience of a monitored and oppressed minority, with much more emphasis laid on the black subject position, as European Americans predominantly took away land from Native and Mexican Americans, but they enforced slave labour only upon the African population. Harassment did not stop after World War II; on the contrary, it became official. In many communities police followed and stopped African Americans and searched their cars when they drove in or out, making it hard for African Americans to work, shop, or live there. Ironically, the police in many communities only discharged their duty, because in sundown towns African Americans by definition "should not be there," hence they are suspicious (LOEWEN 2006: 354–355). When a jubilant Tony exclaims that Robert Kennedy is paid to bail them out of jail, Don retorts angrily that "only garbage" would call him in the middle of the night to attenuate assault charges, which provokes Tony into a lame excuse that he did not like the policeman's treatment of Don in the rain. Don replies that Tony reacted because of the Italian ethnic slur, and a heated conversation ensues on the topic of which of the two is the more oppressed. The racial and ethnic identities become so entangled over a brief altercation that several points have to be singled out: 1) Tony emphasises his street-savvy character of lower-class Italians (and others) in the Bronx, as opposed to the wealthy pianist he is chauffeuring around; 2) Don retorts with an honest admission of his status of a high-category entertainer of the white people; 3) he adds that he suffers the rejection from his African Americans in return, and 4) he also admits his deeper disadvantage of being homosexual on top of the previous predicaments.

3. Internalisation of Racism

Their discussion illustrates graphically the long-standing process of subjugation of the African mind at the hands of the white-controlled institutions of society: school, college, military, business, healthcare, art and a number of other spheres of human activity had been stratified and geared in whites' favour since the establishment of slavery, and later on, chattel servitude in all colonial territories, America being no exception. Psychiatrist Frantz Fanon's findings in the study *Black Skin, White Masks*, about the Africans oppressed by the French empire go hand in hand with Don Shirley's US experience and, despite being first published in France in 1952, can be seen almost as a blueprint of automatised behaviour towards this racial group in early-1960s America: "The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question" (FANON 2008: 8). Don's internalisation of racist attitudes can be seen clearly in his conciliatory attitude towards his inferior position: "I've had to listen to that kind of talk my entire life, you should be able to take it for one night" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:31:28–1:31:33). Fanon also talks on this matter when addressing the constant cultivation of hate among the Negrophobes: "Hate demands existence, and he who hates has to show his hate in appropriate actions and behavior; in a sense, he has to become hate. That is why the Americans have substituted discrimination for lynching. Each to his own side of the street" (FANON 2008: 37). In a rash fit, Tony utters a sentence to counter Don along class lines which he misinterprets as a more fundamental path to the understanding of the minorities' harsh existence: "What, I can't get mad when he says that stuff 'cause I'm not black? Christ, I'm blacker than you" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:31:33–1:31:37). Further on, he tries to assert his subordinate "superiority" by stating how tough life is for a Bronx Italian: "I'm the asshole who's gotta hustle every goddamn day to put food on my table. You? Mr. Big Shot? You travel around the world and live on top of a castle and do concerts for rich people! I live on the streets, you sit on a throne – so yeah, my world is way more blacker than yours!" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:32:04–1:32:20) The offended Don leaves the car in the rainy night, and Tony barely persuades him to get back in; the pianist then gives voice to perhaps the sincerest confession in the whole film: "Yes, I live in a castle! *Alone*. And rich white folks let me play piano for them, because it makes them feel *cultured*. But when I walk off that stage I go right back to being another nigger to them – because *that* is their *true culture*" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:32:43–1:32:58, Fig. 5). This howl from the heart resonates with Fanon, and even with German anthropologist Diedrich Westermann, whose 1934 work *The African Today and Tomorrow* reflects the discourse of the troublesome interwar period: "Professor D. Westermann, in *The African Today* (p. 331), says that the Negroes' inferiority complex is particularly intensified among the most educated, who must struggle with it unceasingly" (FANON 2008: 14). Don has to put up with the weight of the ambivalence of his music virtuosity united with his racial status permanently riveted to the lowest rung of the social ladder, unlike most of his fellow-African Americans, who were not blessed with his talent or determination. He finishes off his monologue in a frightening ontological crescendo: "And I suffer that slight alone, because I'm not accepted by my own people, because I'm

not like them either! So if I'm not black enough, and I'm not white enough, and I'm not man enough, *what am I*?!" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:32:59–1:33:11)

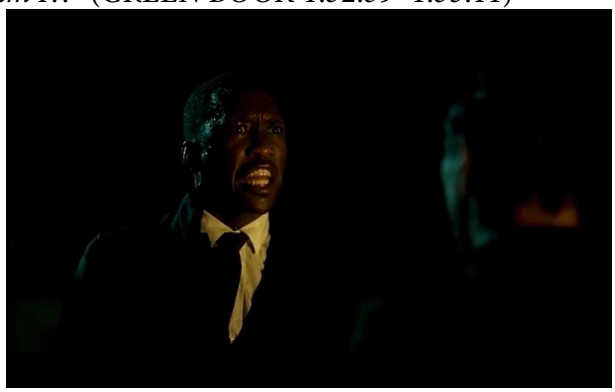

Fig. 5. "…another nigger" (1:32:55)

Fig. 6. Homosexual transgression (1:14:03)

Moreover, Don has harboured another issue for a long time, probably since his adolescence, and earlier in the film he is shown in police custody after being caught in a YMCA locker room with another man (Fig. 6). In the quoted passage, he asks several essential anthropological questions regarding his "inferior" colour, his "excessively highbrow" education, and ultimately, his deviation from heteronormative masculinity, all of which has by now accumulated to an unbearable level of stress, alienation and dejection. In a way resembling Fanon's own research, he has been forced to construct a mask that approaches whiteness as closely as possible, while symbolically concealing the physical features of his biological determinism in a process doomed to failure – to a common white racist, he is just another black face from a perpetually low stratum of society. Regardless of Don's extraordinary success in music on the global stage and the class mobility which he achieved through momentous efforts, he is still seen through the most superficial of lenses. Fortunately, by this moment in the film, at least Tony begins to realise the extent of his companion's suffering.

In his synthetic study *The Meaning of Race* (1996), Kenan Malik analyses the most influential slave-owning empires of early modernity, and touches upon a label pinned to African Americans across the board: "Slavery [...] had created a unique personality type among American blacks. The force of oppression had disintegrated the black personality

and through a process of mass infantilisation had created the black individual as 'a perpetual child incapable of maturity'." Taking his cue from the Spanish original *zambo*, he claims that African Americans had been transformed into 'Sambos', incapable of independent thought or action because slavery had forced them simply to please their masters (MALIK 1996: 203). Figure 6 vividly displays the position a homosexual act had in the then law enforcement, especially in the South (the event in the film takes place in Macon, Georgia), and we can see the two men stark naked (Don only got a towel from an angry Tony), the camera showing them from a superior, upper angle, sitting on the cold tile floor of the steam room. Although both are bowing their heads in an act of humiliating arrest, Don is the one worse off, since the policemen have handcuffed him to a radiator, in a probable instance of exceeded authority which preternaturally appears like the chaining of a runaway slave in the antebellum South. There is an extreme contrast between Don's artistic and international achievement, so foregrounded in the opening New York scenes, when he is even sitting on an improvised throne, and this later degradation, where he is brought to the lowest degree of physical suffering in the film's plotline.

This is not the end of Don's struggle with the racist system, given the fact how perceptive and sensitive he is – the more complex battles will rage in his mind, to which he eloquently gives vent on more occasions than one. Somewhere halfway through the film, we find out a few details related to his family – tentatively speaking – as he has an estranged brother and was also married: "I didn't have the constitution to do a husband act as well as a concert pianist act. I couldn't balance both worlds" (*GREEN BOOK* 50:41–50:50). His specific sensibility does not seem to go well in accordance with the American world strictly divided in halves: racially, socially, educationally and politically, and he has to undergo a bout of teasing from his own Africans at the coloured-only motel in Louisville, when they try to win him over for a game of horseshoes. Even the *Green Book* advertised it a bit pompously: "Cozy as your own home...," which was another drawback of avoiding Jim Crow laws, because African Americans could be often directed to run-down lodgings (BAY 2021: 139). One of the men addresses him as "fancy-pants," and when he declines the offer, the proletaire coaxes him: "What, you too high and mighty?" (*GREEN BOOK* 55:35–55:48). Apart from the vernacular comic relief and attempt at small talk, this question also cuts across the class lines, all too evident in the pianist's clothes and demeanour; perhaps the musician does not understand that he offended the proletaires through this act of seclusion. Don will realise that the crucial difference between the black and white grassroots lies in their respective innate acceptance and non-acceptance of him as a community member; whereas his Africans may pull his leg for fun, the whites are sometimes overly aggressive – in the same town, Tony rescues him from a group of white racists who are molesting an already intoxicated Don in a bar, a day before his scheduled performance at the concert hall.

4. Resistance to Segregation

The following event unfolds at an all-white party in Raleigh, North Carolina, where Southern hospitality shines through every step of the way, including the reception, lunch and the concert in the evening. Unfortunately, the restroom is prohibited to Don, who is directed by his artificially polite host to use the outhouse in the garden, but he refuses to comply. In a tense standoff of wills, Don prevails and Tony takes him to the

motel in a thirty-minute ride, during which Don dignifiedly declares that only animals go in the woods (*GREEN BOOK* 1:04:55–1:06:18). Unpleasant as it looks, denial of service to Africans was commonplace in the age of civil rights struggle, and even high-ranking black diplomats experienced similar setbacks: in 1961, Dr. William Fitzjohn, chargé d'affaires of Sierra Leone, and his African American driver, pulled up to a Howard Johnson's restaurant in Hagerstown, Maryland, northwest of Washington, D.C.; Fitzjohn — a PhD from Columbia University — intentionally selected that restaurant because of its reputation for serving black customers. Regrettably, a hostile and unfriendly white waitress refused to serve them, even after Fitzjohn displayed his diplomatic credentials (RUSSEK 2015: 181). Rather than manifest aggression, it seems that to Don the straw that broke the camel's back is the capillary segregation and the social masks sanctioned by white members of society, most dominantly of Anglo-Saxon stock. As a sensitive artist who has seen many tours around the world, he must have noticed the closeted hierarchy of the petrified postbellum Southern structures, and he voices his concerns at the key points in the film: when he is rescued by Tony in a bar, when he refuses to use the garden latrine, after his release from police custody, and on the final night of the tour in Birmingham, Alabama. Although he is the star of that night's show, Don is not allowed to eat in the dining hall, with the maître d'hôtel's explanation that is "the policy of the restaurant"; by this time in the plot, Tony has come to know Don sufficiently well that he pleads for the musician with the manager: "You're tellin' me the bozos in his band, and the shlubs that came to see him play can eat here, but the star can't?" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:41:04–1:41:13). This remark scrutinises the arbitrary character of social position, and the petrified snobbery of the idle patrons; although in a musical and educational class of his own, Don remains just a regular objective correlative of an entertainer for the dull rich white people.

At the turning point of the film plot, and also of his developmental arc, Don adamantly refuses to have dinner in the storage room while his orchestra mates are dining in the hall, and he communicates his demands clearly to the manager and the maître d'hotel: "No. Not this time. Either I eat in this room or I'm not performing tonight" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:42:11–1:42:21). In face of all the financial and legal risks, with a fuming manager at their heels, they do leave the hotel and stand up against the day-to-day segregation of the blacks, the way "things are done down here." The resistance to the ingrained racist ways in public was one of the methods whereby the African Americans could draw the attention of the white majority across the United States, which was also noted by sociologist Bart Landry: "As the civil rights movement gained momentum in the early 1960s and there developed for the first time hope of eliminating these insults from their lives, many middle-class blacks were willing to brave cattle prods and snapping dogs in Selma, Birmingham, and elsewhere in the South" (LANDRY 2020: 82). The higher-class Don demonstrates human dignity and offers staunch resistance along the lines of such civil rights protesters as Rosa Parks, although he could have complied with the age-old Southern discrimination; after this point, the two men head to an Orange Bird roadside restaurant, another vivid graphic contrast between white and black social levels. This act of editing can also play a role in depicting interracial and intraracial differences that crystallise in Don's character: around the middle of the storyline, their car has a radiator trouble in North Carolina, and Don is carefully scrutinised by a dozen African field workers from

across the road – this time the audience can sense a transparent wall of class differences among one ethnic group, which is another source of Don's unease.

Their vehicle is an indispensable part of life on the road, the ingredient essential to fulfilling the dream of "driving while black" – this particular car is a Cadillac, which illustrates the increased purchasing power of African Americans, and acts as "both commodity and symbol" (SEILER 2012: 86). The Cold War efforts of the US to represent itself as a more successful form of government also laid emphasis on the declarations of immense possibilities, equality, and colour-blindness, mostly developed in the middlebrow press and state propaganda, in short: a Cadillac was a certain sign of the African American's high status, his claim to citizenship in the republic of drivers, which famously included Chuck Berry's "motorvatin'" rock songs, expressions of their strong faith in mobility, freedom and equal opportunity (SEILER 2012: 85–86). The car, as a clear mark of the owner's emancipation, draws almost everybody's attention when it appears in the small towns of relatively rural, homely America, but also in the Bronx, where they depart from. The record company actually rented it, but the car category corresponds accurately with the historical context of well-to-do African Americans as drivers of such prized vehicles. Moreover, the inversion of employer-employee roles further intensifies the wonder of many social groups on seeing Don and Tony on the road and in the parking lot; they are a marvel to the onlookers at the Louisville motel, to Tony's New York acquaintances in front of a Memphis hotel, and most conspicuously, to a young white couple at an unidentified crossing in the South. By this point in the plot (close to the third act), Tony has acquired resistance to the ogling of the curious whites and he simply tells them off with a pointed middle finger.

As far as Tony's racial attitude is concerned, this motif goes from an extreme position of white supremacy to a gradual understanding of Don Shirley's (and by extension, any African American's) unenviable label of inferiority, then to the acceptance of Don's cultural and educational superiority, so that it should end in a harmonious balance after they render a number of services to each other in the course of the story. In the first act of the film, Tony is demonstrably portrayed as a ruffian with uncouth habits of speaking, eating and ethnic disparaging, but Don tackles the issues resolutely whenever he finds the time between performances. Fine manners begin to rub off on Tony, and he accepts Don's suggestions while writing letters to his wife in New York – in turn, Tony exposes Don to forms of lowbrow etiquette, like rock music and plain food, becoming genuinely more helpful with managerial tasks and inevitably, protecting his boss's physical safety at all times. The two men's class backgrounds fade away as they form a sincere friendship, strengthened by increasing mutual assistance in troublesome moments, and the affective bond grows when the material status is set aside. After several blatant examples of displayed systemic segregation, he realises why Don does not want to be just a fancy concert clown for the rich whites – the shackles in the South are too obvious and pervade the whole fabric of society, like the clothing stores, motels, villas, upscale restaurants, white-patron bars, and especially the police stations with aggressive and backward, but institutionally protected personnel. As a catharctic antithesis to the whites-only dining room in the luxury Birmingham hotel (Fig. 7), Don and Tony head to the Orange Bird joint, where they again draw much attention, this time from the low-income black ma-

jority. The guests look intently at them in a way similar to a Western saloon crowd when strangers appear at the doorstep, but nobody is xenophobic either to Tony or Don. The friendly barmaid inquires with Don why he is so dressed up, and he modestly replies that she shouldn't judge a man by his clothes, a lesson that he learned in a painful process in the segregated social groups in America. Tony praises him as the greatest piano player in the world, and the barmaid dares him to show that; in another suspenseful shot, he walks to the stage with all eyes on him, tests the piano and dashes off one of the most difficult piano solos ever composed – Chopin's Étude Opus 25, No. 11, to the delighted applause of all the astonished listeners. To make the impression even more sweeping, Tony is also left speechless although he has by now accustomed to Don's bravuras from the lengthy concert tour. The band members nod to Don and join him, starting a lively rocking blues track, which he unhesitatingly takes up, and gets in the spirit of this grassroots music; everybody sways to the rhythm and melody, and Don is experiencing his happiest moments in the entire film, playing ecstatically until closing time (Fig. 8).

Fig. 7. Exiting the hotel (1:44:20)

Fig. 8. Orange Bird show (1:50:16)

After that moment of personal fulfilment, Don behaves in a visibly unconstrained manner, as if he had thrown a sizeable weight off his mind – having asserted his dignified status outside the official, closed system of hierarchical entertainment of a wealthy white clientele, he takes more satisfied breaths of the wider world and smiles more contentedly than ever before. Their itinerary comes full circle, although the journey back home is

long, arduous and troubled with snow drifts, and also shows a metaphorical connection with Don's new-found civil rights liberation. At the outset of their journey, he was an uptight, but essentially insecure classical maestro playing for the white-owned company before all-white audiences in Jim Crow country, but now he is a free man who has overcome the major barrier in his personal development, indissolubly related to the elimination of racial determinism as a relevant factor in his self-esteem. Even the police stop on Christmas Eve redresses the injustice done to Don by the policemen in the Mississippi sundown town – at the close of the film, the friendly police officer even helps them change a flat tyre and wishes them happy holidays. It seems that the sincerest form of society is brought about when the interacting characters throw away the unpleasant screens of racial, class and regional affiliation.

5. Conclusion

When they finally arrive in New York, it is Don who is driving and Tony who is sleeping in the back seat, in another role reversal, evidently motivated by their human bonding rather than employment status. There are noticeable contrasts in this sequence, all connected with Frank Sinatra's track "Have Yourself a Merry Litle Christmas": the men are braving the harsh road, the Vallelonga family are busy setting up their dining and living rooms, seven-course dinner is all but served, and Don and Tony are parting ways after Don opens the back door for Tony. The romantic spell of community is broken when without a soundtrack in the background Don politely rejects Tony's invitation to his flat: "Merry Christmas, Tony" (*GREEN BOOK* 1:56:20–1:56:22). There follows another marvellous parallel editing part, depicting the merry clamour and chaos of Tony's warm household, and the silent emptiness of Don's residence, his meaningless throne and the vast space that swallows him up together with the objects; when he touches an azure stone Tony had tried to steal in an Ohio shop early into the journey, the camera cuts to a pensive Tony, who is disappointed at the absence of his friend. The change in Tony's attitude is well seen when he objects to his cousin Louie's racist question: "So how was he, the *tootsune*?[4] He get on your nerves?" To everybody's surprise, he replies: "Don't call him that" (*GREEN BOOK* 2:00:00–2:00:09). This unexpected monumental transformation prefigures the new social union which begins to take shape the same minute, after a knock at the door – the man from the nearby pawn shop and his wife come to visit the Vallelongas, which functions anticlimactically to Tony and the audience, but just behind them there is Don standing at the doorstep with a bottle of champagne, with an unsure air. He reaches out to Tony's family and he is reciprocally accepted, in a refiguration of the Orange Bird scene, this time at the starting point of the adventure, which comes full circle. This shot-countershot (Figs. 9 and 10) sublimates the mutual feelings of the two men whose world views widened for life in the course of several weeks on the road, under harsh and questionable social rules, with a genuine feeling of shared candour, friendship and trust:

4 A corrupt pronunciation of Italian *tizzone*, literally: *ember* or *burned*.

Fig. 9. *Green Book* 2:01:26

Fig. 10. *Green Book* 2:01:31

Tony proudly introduces his comrade as Dr. Donald Shirley, and the reverse angle shows all the usual guests at the table virtually petrified for an instant, like in a genre painting, but they soon overcome this cultural shock and welcome Don to their community as a full member. The film ends reassuringly with an embrace of Dolores and Don, the two broadest-minded characters in the storyline, Don thanking her for letting him share her husband on the road, and Dolores thanking Don for the help with Tony's improved and heartfelt letters. The community of noble minds is finally formed, and officially sealed on the most joyous evening of the year, exuding both spiritual and physical warmth, without the hindrances that emerged at several levels – race. class, education, ethnicity – but were overcome by two resilient men in a life-changing US road trip.

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Sergej L. Macura

ZELENA KNJIGA, BIJELE PESNICE, CRNA PATNJA: NOVI POGLED NA DUBOKI JUG

Rezime

Rasno pitanje Afroamerikanaca prije ostvarenja građanskih prava godine 1964. predmet je mnogih filmova, do tolike mjere da spada u tzv. filmove socijalne problematike (social problem films). *Zelena knjiga* (2018) ovu temu dodatno usložnjava tako što obrće tradicionalni odnos poslodavac-zaposleni i stavlja Italoamerikanca Tonija Valelongu u ulogu vozača, a Afroamerikanca Dona (vrhunskog pijanistu) u funkciju klijenta; njihova turneja po Srednjem zapadu i Jugu krajem 1962. godine dovodi ih u mnoge neprijatne situacije, posebno po Dona. Rad se koristi postavkama Franca Fanona o internalizovanoj inferiornosti crne populacije, posebno u slučaju inteligentnog Dona, a i tezom Kemala Malika da su crnci zbog sistemske represije sagledavani kao infantilni zabavljači bez mogućnosti napretka. U analizirane momente spadaju rasno motivisani fizički nasrtaji na Dona, kao i nehuman tretman pri hapšenju. Na vrhuncu radnje filma Don odbija da se povinuje segregaciji u elitnom južnjačkom hotelu i time razbija začarani krug ponižavanja, a s vremenom se i Toni od rasiste pretvara u tolerantnog građanina i obojica zatvaraju krug po povratku u Njujork, kada Valelonge na Badnje veče posjećuje Don i pada Toniju u iskren zagrljaj.

Ključne riječi: film socijalne problematike, drumski film, doba borbe za građanska prava, klasni problemi, čisto bjelački gradovi, diskriminacija, homoseksualnost, zamjena uloga