

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

By Todd Kreidler

Directed by Marti Lyons



Summary

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner is based on a 1967 film of the same name, directed by Stanley Kramer, and starring Spencer Tracy, Sidney Poitier, and Katharine Hepburn. The film was one of the few films of the time to depict an interracial marriage in a positive light, as interracial marriage historically had been illegal in most states of the United States, and still was illegal in 17 states until June 12, 1967.



Guess Who's Coming to Dinner tells the story of the Draytons, a white family who lives a modern, upper-class life in San Francisco. Their comfortable life becomes complicated, however, when Matt and Christina's daughter Joey returns from an internship in Hawaii. Along with her, Joey brings John Prentice, a widowed black doctor, and Joey's new fiancé.

Matt and Christina—a newspaper publisher and art gallery owner, respectively—are self-defined liberals who have instilled in Joey many progressive values, including that of racial equality. Even so, they are taken aback by Joey's selection of a fiancé. They find themselves facing difficult personal questions about the future of their daughter and

their family. And unfortunately for the Draytons, Joey and John aren't their only surprise guests coming to dinner.

Setting

The play is set in the spring of 1967 in the home of the Draytons, a house on a hill in San Francisco.



A model of Scott Davis' scenic design for Court Theatre's production of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*

San Francisco in the 1960s had a population of around 725,000. The shipping industry was moving to nearby Oakland, the city began to lose industrial jobs, and tourism emerged as the city's most important economic factor. As large segments of the white population left the city, the suburbs experienced rapid growth, and San Francisco experienced an increasing wave of immigration from Asia and Latin America. At the same time, San Francisco became a magnet for America's counterculture, and during the summer of 1967, thousands of hippies traveled to the city to promote the values of free love, anti-consumerism, and peace.

Characters

- **Matilda “Tillie” Binks:** the Drayton’s black housekeeper, who has been a part of the family for twenty-seven years, and who helped raise Joey from when she was a baby.
- **Christina Drayton:** Joey’s mother, who owns a small art gallery, and who has also been a supporter of civil rights all of her life.
- **Matt Drayton:** Joey’s father, who is a wealthy and very liberal San Francisco newspaper publisher, and who has spoken out for racial equality and civil rights all of his adult life.
- **Joanna Drayton:** the daughter of Christina and Matt, who meets and falls in love with John while interning in Hawaii.
- **Hilary St. George:** an assistant to Christina who works in her art gallery.
- **Dr. John Prentice:** an accomplished black doctor and Joanna’s fiance.
- **John Prentice, Sr.:** a schoolteacher and the father of John Prentice.
- **Mary Prentice:** a department store clerk and the mother of John Prentice.
- **Monsignor Ryan:** a Catholic priest and a longtime family friend of the Draytons.

Race Relations in the United States

“The data shows we’re becoming more of an integrated, multi-racial society.”

- demographer, William H. Frey, the Brookings Institution

Year	Total U.S. Married Couples	Total Interracial Couples
1960	40,491,000	51,000 (.13%)
1970	44,597,000	65,000 (.14%)
1980	49,514,000	167,000 (.33%)
2000	56,497,000	363,000 (.64%)
2010	60,384,000	558,000 (.92%)

The number of interracial marriages in the U.S. has increased dramatically since the 1960s. Source: U.S. Census, Fertility and Family Statistics Branch. Interracially Married Couples: 1960 to 2010.

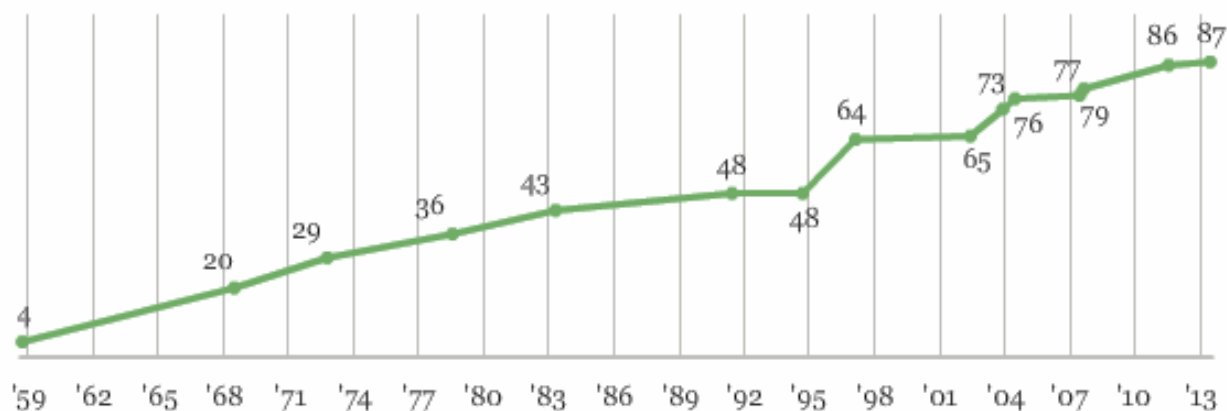
Approval of Interracial Marriage

In July 2013, Gallup conducted its *Minority Rights and Relations* poll, which shows a dramatic change in approval for interracial marriage in America over the last 55 years. Today, 87 percent of people polled approve of black-white marriage versus 4 percent in 1958. See the data in the chart below and the full report at

<http://news.gallup.com/poll/163697/approve-marriage-blacks-whites.aspx>.

Do you approve or disapprove of marriage between blacks and whites?

■ % Approve



1958 wording: "... marriages between white and colored people"

1968-1978 wording: "... marriages between whites and nonwhites"

Approval of Marriage Between Blacks and Whites, by Subgroup

	% Approve
National adults	87
18- to 29-year-olds	96
30- to 49-year-olds	93
50- to 64-year-olds	84
65 years and older	70
East	86
Midwest	86
South	83
West	93

June 13-July 5, 2013

"Americans' attitudes about interracial marriage have changed dramatically over the past 55 years, moving from the point in the late 1950s when disapproval was well over 90%, to the point today when approval is approaching 90%. Census data indicate that black-white marriages in reality remain fairly rare—although they have increased from

167,000 in 1980 to 558,000 in 2010, they still represent less than 1% of all married couples. The major shift in attitudes about such unions, however, is a telling indicator of the general shift in views of racial matters on many fronts in the U.S. over the last five decades."

1960's Civil Rights Timeline

- August 28, 1963: **"I Have A Dream" Speech**
 - During the Civil Rights March on Washington, Martin Luther King Jr. delivers one of his most impassioned and memorable speeches to an audience of 250,000. Speaking in front of the Lincoln Memorial, King sets aside his prepared notes to describe his vision of a nation that will "rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'" Later this year, King is named TIME's Person of the Year.
- July 2, 1964: **Civil Rights Act**
 - Legislation outlaws discrimination on basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. However, discrimination and racism still exist all over the United States.
- October 14, 1964: **MLK Awarded Nobel Prize**
 - Martin Luther King Jr. is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
- February 21, 1965: **Malcolm X Assassinated**
 - The Nation of Islam leader is killed during while delivering a speech in Manhattan's Audubon Ballroom.
- August 6, 1965: **Voting Rights Act**
 - President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act into law, which outlaws all discriminatory voting requirements, such as requiring literacy tests before registering to vote, which was previously used by white Southerners to prevent black Southerners from voting
- June 12, 1967: **Loving v. Virginia**
 - On October 1958, two residents of Virginia, Mildred Jeter (a black woman) and Richard Loving (a white man) were charged with violating the Racial Integrity Act of 1924. This act prohibited marriage between races. This is an example of an anti-miscegenation law: a law that enforces segregation by criminalizing interracial marriages and intimate relationships. On January 6, 1959, the Lovings pled guilty to the charge, and were sentenced to one year in jail. However, the judge suspended the sentence on the condition that the Lovings leave Virginia and not return together for 25 years. On June 12, 1967, the Supreme Court ruled anti-miscegenation laws

unconstitutional, ending all race-based legal restrictions on marriage in the United States

- September 1, 1967: **Thurgood Marshall appointed to Supreme Court**
 - Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African American Justice appointed to the Supreme Court
- April 4, 1968: **MLK assassinated**
 - Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated on April 4 as he goes outside on the balcony at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.
- April 11, 1968: **Civil Rights Act of 1968**
 - President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which prohibits discrimination by renters or sellers of property.

Marriage Equality Today

Same-sex marriage has been legal since June 26, 2015, when the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that state-level bans on same-sex marriage are unconstitutional. Just prior to the Supreme Court's ruling in 2015, same-sex marriage was legal in many but not all U.S. jurisdictions.



On the 40th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Loving v. Virginia*, Mildred Loving issued a statement commenting on the comparison between interracial marriage and same-sex marriage: "I believe all Americans, no matter their race, no matter their sex, no matter their sexual orientation, should have that same freedom to marry . . . I am proud that Richard's and my name is on a court case that can

help reinforce the love, the commitment, the fairness and the family that so many people, black or white, young or old, gay or straight, seek in life. I support the freedom to marry for all. That's what Loving, and loving, are all about."

Discussion Questions

1. Though Matt Drayton claimed to not be racist, he was concerned about how difficult marriage would be for Joanna and John, given how many racist people there were in the world. Is this a legitimate concern? Why or why not?
2. Why is Tillie so upset about the situation? Were you surprised by her reaction to Joanna and John's relationship?
3. How would audiences of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* in 1967 respond differently to audiences today?
4. In your opinion, how much have things changed since 1967? In what ways do we still experience racial prejudice? What other forms of prejudice exist today?
5. What are the necessary components for a lasting marriage? In light of your answer, how do you think the marriage described in this play would have lasted?
6. Where is there diversity (race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) in your family? What challenges might these family members have faced?