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Who Is That Masked Man? (Homo)sexual Dynamics in Interracial Buddy Television Series

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The "buddy" subgenre has always enjoyed immense popularity with American moviegoers and television viewers, in part because it well serves so many major genres in the national pop culture. Westerns, war movies, gangster movies, cop movies, prison movies, odyssey movies, all frequently employ this simplistic notion of two men—and sometimes, though rarely, women—in pursuit of their own version (or perversion) of the American dream. The unexamined romance of the buddy genre celebrates the likes of Butch and Sundance in the movies, and television gave us such iconic duos as Starsky and Hutch, or Bo and Luke Duke. Myriads of other buddies in every medium perform an idyllic, eternally youthful boyhood to persuade both men and women that there actually did exist an age of innocence long since gone.[1] As with all successful formulae, the buddy plan was adapted to speak to audiences at various cultural and/or historical moments in the national life. The single most important permutation of the formula occurred with the break from racial homogeneity to permit racially mixed buddies to challenge the boundaries of the convention. This essay will look at four interracial buddy series that appeared on American television from the 1950s to the present day. I will explore how race reanimates the inevitable sexual tensions of the buddy formula and contributes to a fracturing of the myth of heterosexual hegemony, especially in American macho mythology.

Inherent in twentieth-century buddy narratives is a recombinant, if not mutant, strain of rugged individualism mated with frontier camaraderie.[2] These two myths of American machismo are firmly rooted in the national psyche, and together constitute a somewhat schizophrenic notion of American masculine identity. While the buddy format tempers the hyper-individualism espoused by the "rugged individual" myth of American masculinity, it produces challenges of its own by exploring the fraught landscape of intimate relationships between two males. As sociologist Michael Messner observes: "Men's friendships […] tend to be destructively competitive, homophobic and emotionally impoverished."[3] Yet buddy fictions like team sports project an alternate reality of cooperation and at times self-sacrifice that countervail the inculcated belief in self-reliance that American mythmakers from James Fenimore Cooper to Ronald Reagan elevated to a kind of state religion. The jocundity of buddies, even at times of strife, masks the internal friction that exists in strong male pairs. Thus while audiences get to relive the paradise lost of boyhood they also must negotiate the minefield of masculine angst and competitiveness. If fact, the buddy genre tends to celebrate not the equality of a duo but the lone Alpha male assisted by the every-present, every-submissive Beta. Someone always had to hold the reins while the other "rode shotgun" to the hero's errantry. No matter how elegantly the Alpha male finesses his superior status; the art of the subterfuge only reifies his eminence.

Acknowledging the sociology of buddy narratives may initially appear to violate the enchantment such fictions pretend to endorse, positing as they do a world of masculine bonhomie free of the destructive undercurrents of status anxiety, tension, trial, and performance that accompany male bonding, but any interrogation of such couples reveals the impossibility of escaping the competitiveness that is inseparable from the pairing. But ironically it is precisely that sociology that the buddy subgenre hopes to exploit by reminding audiences that there is something inherently unnatural and *remarkable* about the intimacy of the male-male relationship and that just below the surface lies a powder keg of danger.

More volatile than the uninflected buddy fiction is the one that pairs race with the inherent conflicts of macho querying. Given the sociology of race in America, one expects racially inflected buddy fictions to reflect the dynamic nature of racial stereotyping as well as racial perceptions in a culture obsessed with self-mythologizing such as America. The erasure of black humanity from most of American popular media in the days of Jim Crow, of course, reflects the racist nature of American society. African American characters could not be developed into multidimensional "people" because their roles were fixed within the boundaries established by the society.[4] There were, of course, always some exceptions, but for the most part African Americans fulfilled a fantasy that continued to reflect the limits of white imagination and consciousness about their black compatriots. Native Americans suffered a similar fate in their representation in American popular culture. While they could be romanticized in different ways from African Americans, Native Americans still provided the white imagination with an exotic other against whom white Americans could judge themselves and find confirmation of their own supposed superiority. Historian Thomas Cripps goes so far as to suggest that Native Americans, in the 1950s and 60s could serve as stand-ins for African Americans: "In an age of indirection, to what did audiences turn for meatier politics? One classic periphrastic ploy was to elect a stand-in for African Americans, mainly Indians."[5]

Pioneering the territory of interracial buddy television was "The Lone Ranger." In September 1949 "The Lone Ranger" moved from radio to premiere on American television. While there were fewer than 100 TV stations in the US in 1949, "The Lone Ranger" was a watershed moment in American pop culture because Americans finally got to see the faithful Indian minister to his "kemo sabe." Racially marked as unquestionably inferior, Tonto never challenges his official status, and in his acceptance of his "natural" place, the Indian achieves an unprecedented level of acceptance. "But let's face it—Tonto's a fink," write Ralph and Natasha Friar in *The Only Good Indian. . . The Hollywood Gospel.* They continue:

> He is like those faithful family retainers who remained loyal to their masters in those after-the-Cival-War pictures. At best, Tonto was an Indian Stepin Fetchit who went around saying "Me […] White man friend," instead of "Yozzur, boss."[6]

The Native American's role in the all-pervasive American racial and racist psychomachia reveals the stability of the terms of that drama even though the dark or threatening side has interchangeable parts. Whites recognized the same threat regardless of who played the wicked, the uncivilized, the untamed and untamable. Not until the 1960s was Tonto's subservience questioned and turned famously into subversiveness in the joke whose punch line is "What do you mean, 'we' white man?"[7] But even the joke reaffirms the stereotypical untrustworthiness of the Native; the lesson to be learned, then, is that *they* cannot now, or ever, be trusted. The punch line might well have been: "look out whitey!"[8]

In the 1950s, few read Tonto's submissiveness as erotically charged but those with knowledge of the berdache tradition in Native American culture could easily associate Tonto with that tradition: "In their erotic behavior berdaches also generally (but not always) take a non-masculine role, either being asexual or becoming the passive partner in sex with men. In some cultures the berdache might become a wife to a man."[9] The very name the subaltern uses for his master emphasizes the possibility of Tonto's berdache status, and "kemo sabe" articulates both a longing for and a pledge to the Texan. According to Tonto, "kemo sabe" translates as "faithful friend," and the term reinscribes the erotics of the relationship because it identifies ambiguously both master and servant.[10] Although many believe the term means "trusty scout," in the twentieth anniversary of the radio show Tonto tells the Lone Ranger: "That right, and you still kemo sabe. It mean, 'faithful friend.'" "Trusty scout" lacks a bit of the erotic connotations of "faithful friend" and has a bit more of a western patina, but nevertheless it too celebrates the subservience of Tonto because Tonto, like a berdache, pledges to follow wherever the Ranger leads. This, in fact, reiterates Tonto's suppression of his own will to that of the master, making their relationship much like an ideal patriarchal marriage

with the Indian vowing with every naming to follow blindly the lead of the husband. With either meaning, "faithful friend" or "trusty scout," it should be noted that the servant emphasizes his faithfulness and his faith in the Texan by using the exotic term. With his projection of his own faithfulness to the Ranger, the Indian challenges the master to meet the sublime expectations of that pledge "kemo sabe" with a vow of fealty of his own. Could the Ranger ever say to his Indian: "Till death do us part, kemo sabe?"

Intersections of race and power always refract erotically. As with the history of American slavery, the history of the encounter of the British first and Americans later with the oppressed aboriginals of the North American continent, emphasizes this fact. Every school child in America knows the somewhat mythical narrative of Pocahontas and Captain Smith. Her indefatigable knack for preventing disaster for John Smith and the Jamestown settlers and her later marriage to John Rolfe helped create the myth of the (somewhat) good Indian gleefully subservient to whites even to the point of death.[11] The fact that she was female helped reinforce the notion of sexual dominance of whites over Indians, and her marriage underscored the sexual desirability of whites, at least in their own imaginations. Tonto's ministrations to his Lone Ranger bear uncomfortable resemblance to those performed by Pocahontas. Throughout the long run of the Lone Ranger, Tonto never aspires to a life of his own, to a life unmarked by dutiful service or devotion to his kemo sabe. Between these two, Ranger and Indian, as in those "after-the-Cival-War pictures," every encounter between them, between master and slave reinscribed on the psyche of both the absolute power the former had over the body of the latter, including his sex life. Every dominant male needs, demands, and when truly potent, engineers passive males to erotize, if not fetishize, the dominant male's power and self-constructed identity. One cannot be Alpha without surrounding Betas and Omegas. The dominant Europeans created an oppressive political, economic and social system to remind its victims of the power of the master, and, of course, the obsession with miscegenation in slave narratives by blacks, captivity and ransom narratives by and about aboriginals, and "moonlight and magnolia" fictions of the previous two centuries confirm the sexual dynamic that informed and propelled continental conquest.[12]

The reason the erotic nature of the relationship between Indian and Ranger can and did elude viewers more that half a century ago is because the inferior other does not enjoy full humanity in the consciousness of the culture that others him. The other requires qualification, "the Indian," "the savage," "the negro," "the slave." "Man" could only apply to the person who requires no qualifiers because his humanity is neither questioned nor questionable. Every episode of "The Lone Ranger" ended with some gratefully rescued pioneer inquiring: "Who is that masked man?" No one ever asked: "Who is that devoted Indian?" His identity is as irrelevant as his history or his personal life. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison discusses what she calls the "Africanist presence" in American Literature. She writes of black male characters in Hemingway's fiction:

> Cooperative or sullen, [these black males] are Tontos all, whose role is to do everything possible to serve the Lone Ranger without disturbing his indulgent delusion that he is indeed alone. […] From the African bearers who tote the white man's burden in the hunting grounds of Africa, to the bait cutters aboard fishing boats, to loyal companions of decaying boxers, to ministering bartenders–the array of enabling black nursemen is impressive.[13]

Morrison recognizes a feminized role for these nonwhite men in American culture, and this non-threatening feminized role seems to be their only way of establishing their own limited subjectivity. If not faithful servant, nurse to the real man's needs, the black man doesn't exist as agent. This is radically true in two other important interracial buddy series that shaped American views of race and masculinity in the last half of the twentieth century: *I Spy* from 1965 to 1968, and *Miami Vice* from 1984-1990.

I Spy is viewed nostalgically as a turning point in American television because a black male was allowed a staring role in a weekly TV series, and thereby he seemed to predict an end to the previous century of racial struggle in the US. Writes television and film historian Donald Bogle:

> Seeing Cosby and Culp (the male leads of the show) together at work and play, linking arms and psyches to pull through difficult times and situations, audiences could get lost in a wish-fulfillment dream that assured them that

> everything remained fine and dandy between the races, that indeed the turbulent history of race relations might not really have happened at all. (242)

But, of course, the white protagonist, regardless of his benevolence, was the Alpha male. Moreover the cover of the spies, pro tennis star and black trainer reified the social and political dynamics of the racial relationship and teased ever so slightly at a kind of furtive physical intimacy. In other words, the very premise of the show made visible an unthinkable world of interracial sexual possibilities, and situations and banter between the two seemed to confirm that relationship for a willing cognoscenti. In an episode entitled "Bet Me a Dollar" which originally aired on February 16, 1966 the two spies enjoy a bit of friendly banter after viewing mummified remains of Aztecs in a Mexican cemetery. Culp asks Cosby if he'll be able to sleep after viewing the grotesquerie. When Cosby says he will have no trouble, Culp promises to keep him up all night. Since the two frequently share a hotel room, the comment suggests some other possibilities beyond boyish roughhousing. Later in the episode when Cosby wakes to find Culp not in the bed next to his, his face reveals some consternation.

Such subtle queerings, which abound throughout the run of the series, reveal the subversive possibilities of television and are facilitated by the instability of race in the equation. What should seem impossible, a white man sexually involved with a black man, of course, acquires certain credibility from its very implausibility. In the realm of social opprobrium and interdiction, one understands that the strictures exist to prevent what is feared but all too imaginable. The fact that they could share the same bedroom was violation enough to many given the fact that blacks and whites could not legally have spent the night together in the same hotel, let alone the same hotel room, in many US states not quite two years before the episode aired.[14] But every effort to disarm the racial complexities of the moment produced a kind of sexual blowback that heightened sexual tension. Thus when in an episode from Season Three Culp leads Cosby riding a mule carrying a Mexican baby in a camp redaction of the Flight to Egypt of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the show's invocation of this Christian topos rather than unequivocally

emphasizing the brotherhood of man or some such high-minded piety queers Cosby and undermines its message while suggesting a comic sodomitical perversion of family.[15] Creating a subtext to the acknowledged social message of the show provides *I Spy* with a multi-textured narrative that lifts the characters from the cardboard representations of racial types living in racial harmony to characters with titillating secret lives that enriched the series.

No couple on American TV was cooler than *Miami Vice*'s Crockett and Tubbs; the boys in espadrilles in fact may have been America's first metrosexuals. *Miami Vice* represented a challenge to American television audiences by its unorthodox narrative style. Set in the ambiguously American city of Miami which was known for its Latin culture, Spanish language, and decidedly un-American—read un-Anglo-American—ethos, *Miami Vice* provided viewers with a microscope into a society that evolved so quickly that little seemed permanent. The previously (un)comfortable American racial dialectic of black and white was inflected with the presence of brown. And unlike Tonto who in the 1950s may have been a stand in for African Americans, the brown people in 1980s Miami seemed more clearly un-American than the Native American at the Texas Ranger's side. Instability in the bedrock American experience of race suggested faults throughout the America landscape, and a redefinition of American masculinity seemed to be imperative because in this environment, traditional masculine roles could not avoid the challenge. Thus the once rugged individual who only needed a stiff upper lip and backbone, found himself in a world that gazed back at his no longer absolutely controlling gaze. In the most conspicuous way, appearance in *Miami Vice* became part of one's machismo, and being without style diminished a man. Writes television theorist John Fiske:

> It may be that the masculine becomes both the object and the subject of the look, and the feminine is totally exscribed from the narrative. The excessive sartorial stylishness of Crockett and Tubbs, their inexhaustible wardrobe of pastel designer clothes, could equally well be argued to be a masculine appropriation of a feminine language and pleasure. Or it may be the reverse.

> It may setup contradictions between the excessively macho behavior and speech of the pair and the feminized style of their clothes.[16]

In the world of television it is, of course, no surprise that the visual would exert significant power, but what *Miami Vice* did was create a new look for men and for ways of acting out that manliness. The non-narrative style of the show, much of that style borrowed from the new medium of the music video, seemed to celebrate disruption rather than continuity. Masculinity could be found in quick cuts because those cuts could incorporate traditional masculine accoutrements such as cars, booze, guns and women into the visual continuum. But the disruption of the narrative furthered the sense that Crockett and Tubbs portrayed new men who created new paradigms of masculinity that ruptured the traditional narrative of American masculinity. The fact that this new paradigm was so rife with sexual ambiguity makes obvious the inherent queer potential, if not inevitability of this new masculinity.

While the homosocial world of buddies Crockett and Tubbs constantly provided evidence of deep emotional cathexis between the two, no episode did more to suggest that something else was possible between the two than did episode 21. Entitled "Evan," this episode which originally aired in May, 1985 deals with the death of an ex-cop buddy of Sonny. As the show unfolds we discover that the dead man was gay and died a suicide after some intolerable homophobic harassment from another buddy, Evan. Sonny's hostility to Evan reveals a nuanced emotional side to Sonny that horrified some viewers and titillated others. Suddenly the couple who added pastels to the male dress pallet could be perceived as lovers even to those repulsed by such apostasy. Tubbs's tender solicitations of his friend's well being, and his bitterness at being spurned only reinforced such speculation. Slash fiction writers, even without the Internet to assist their promulgation, explored a new world of man-man love in Miami.[17] To the show's credit, *Miami Vice* never retreated from its fresh and daring exploration of late twentieth-century masculinity. While the show never enjoyed the same popularity it did in its second season (1985-86), *Miami Vice* continued to experiment with style, both directorial and sartorial. Yet, for all of its edginess, the primary racial delineations of boss and

sidekick remained inviolable in *Miami Vice*. As Bogle observes in writing about *I Spy*: "it's obvious that Culp's [character] was usually in command, just as Don Johnson would be some 20 years later when working on *Miami Vice* with black actor Philip Michael Thomas"(241). Blow dryers were not powerful enough to disperse the mystique that American macho can go it alone, and that the sidekick must necessarily be subaltern regardless of the intimacy of the camaraderie. The slash regardless of which way it leans always places something or someone on top.

Admittedly, the buddy genre intends to ameliorate male competitiveness by substituting less meaningful competitions between buddies because each respects the other's strengths and weaknesses. But rivalry is constituent in men, so even "best buds" celebrate some supposed superiority over each other. *I Spy* and *Miami Vice* both were popular at a cultural moment in America in which black men were forcing the entire culture to reassess black masculinity. Always under threat, black masculinity found ways to assert itself in slang, personal style and hyper masculine behavior. The most common greeting black men used for each other in casual and formal encounters, "man," underscores the profound significance of the oppressed male to exert an uncompromised and uncompromising masculinity. Pairing a black with a white man created an ambiguous and at the same time, highly charged environment in which the black man was compelled not to upset four hundred years of political hegemony and social convention by vying with his companion for Alpha status. The relationship was successful in the mass media only when it assuaged white guilt or anxiety about the volatile racial climate in America. The gift for black viewers was visibility and perhaps authenticity, neither of which are especially masculine characteristics. Challenge of white male hegemony was unthinkable not just to the viewing public but to the television networks and the businesses which bought advertisements. Regardless of superficial changes the paradigm of interracial buddy series continued to ratify two truths: white men are superior, and black men are comfortable with their Beta status.

Let us be clear, acceptance of Beta status is *ipso facto* queer. And this is why hyper-masculine behavior frequently replaces resistance to racial oppression in popular

culture. One need only consider rap music, gang affiliations and "homeboy" movies to understand the truth of that reality. Style trumps substance in a situation where challenging the political, social and economic status quo is doomed. Sociologist Clyde Franklin asserts that black males survive in a culture that is reluctant to recognize that they can be potential occupants of masculine roles, that society blocks black males' efforts to assume hegemonic masculine roles and to recognize black male sex roles as "masculine" (201).[18] Given this reality the black buddy in return for recognition of his humanity gives his white buddy something invaluable: unqualified masculine status, regardless of his peccadilloes, sexual or otherwise. As Toni Morrison points out with regard to the Lone Ranger, white buddies in this context have their "indulgent delusion" regardless of the reality of their situation because the males against whom they are judged are not accredited as men. The black male may score style points, but he is fated to lose the race.

Similarly, in *Epistemology of the Closet* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick confounds the construction of the "homosexual" to identify men who serve as criterion by those who are not "homosexual." She writes: "the nominative category of 'the homosexual' has robustly failed to disintegrate under the pressure of decade after decade, battery after battery of deconstructive exposure—evidently not in the first place because of its meaningfulness to those whom it defines but because of its indispensableness to those who define themselves as against it" (83). This is the situation of the situation comedy *Scrubs*, first aired in 2001. Hailed by many as the gayest show now on American television, *Scrubs* follows the antics of two straight medical interns, later residents named JD and Turk. These two guys are in love with each other, and nor do they hide it from anyone. In fact, they sing of their love, and there is a frisson of excitement and fear at every hint of sexual intimacy.[19] But their openness about their feelings they believe frees them from the taint of suspicion of being gay. They are out about their love, and friendly teasing and acceptance of that teasing work apotropaically for the two. They seem to say "call us gay and we won't be." This is palpable in JD's pet name for his pal; "Chocolate

Bear" is so gay, so outré that they endow the name with the power to protect rather than to indict.

But their heterosexual bona fides find reinforcement in every episode. Turk started dating Carla in Season One, while JD has struggled to find the right woman through the 130 episodes aired thus far. But the writers of the show seem to have understood the structural problems that underlie interracial buddy shows, and reenergized them by reassign them in nontraditional ways just as it allows the characters to appear gay to avoid suspicion of being gay. The show employs race as what I call a "subjective correlative" of the characters' sexual ambivalence, anxieties and ambiguities.[20] Cynthia Fuchs argues something similarly in her essay "The Buddy Politic;" there she suggests that in a series of interracial buddy films from the 1990s "racial otherness" is recuperated to "efface homosexuality." Fuchs seems to be saying that to focus on the two buddies' differences negates the possibility of homosexual coupling. Writes Fuchs: "Mapping the formula's [interracial buddies formula's] evolution […] these films efface the intimacy and vulnerability associated with homosexuality by the 'marriage' of racial others, so that this transgressiveness displaces homosexual anxiety."[21] The difference between my notion of "subjective correlative" and Fuchs's theory, is that the characters in *Scrubs* understand what they are doing because they are very aware of their deep emotional cathexis and the possibilities of losing control. In the movies of which Fuchs speaks, the characters do not enjoy this self-awareness, and the movies descend into an already existing homosexual panic, afraid that a retreat from racial anxiety will expose undesired homoerotic possibilities.

As I have noted above, in the buddy genre the white partner always holds rank as the Alpha male, and this remains true in *Scrubs*. JD holds this position by virtue of his serving as narrator of every episode. It is through JD's eyes that the audience sees everything. JD controls the narrative, but his narrative is a sympathetic, heartfelt introspection of his own shortcoming and anxieties. His emotional life at times seems like an open wound that he inspects for scab growth. Turk, on the other hand, is the cocky young surgeon who gives JD entrance into the world of cool that JD so desires.

Cool is, after all, the manifest domain of the black character, particularly the black man.[22] Since cool is racially marked in the same way that hegemonic masculinity is, JD's desire for cool reflects a desire for status in Turk's hierarchical world, and by extension his desire for Turk himself. In the first minute and twenty seconds of the very first episode of *Scrubs*, "My First Day" which aired on October 2, 2001, JD says to Turk: "You know how I'm totally down with rape music." The viewer may mistake JD's comments for an inept attempt at striking up conversation with some stranger. Turk replies to JD: "Dude, be whiter." It seems that racial lines have been drawn and that no further conversation is possible. However JD as narrator introduces Turk to the audience. Scenes of JD and Turk from the past are shown as JD reveals that they are old college buddies who attended medical school together. As JD speaks we see in a flashback the two embrace jubilantly as they celebrate shared good news, but almost immediately they break apart embarrassed and look furtively to see if anyone else witnessed the intimacy. The scene returns to the present, and JD then continues the conversation about rap and the use of the so-called N word: "My question is this: if we're both singing along, and knowing otherwise I would never use the word, am I allowed to say—." Before he can conclude, Turk replies bluntly, "No."

Turk's reprimand to JD to "be more white" admonishes the vulnerable white guy to hold his feelings in check. In literature, it is always the stoic white man who suffers quietly life's imponderable vagaries, and Turk seems to want to force that stereotypical behavior on his effusive buddy. JD's stream of consciousness includes the embarrassing moment—embarrassing apparently for both of them—of excessive physical intimacy. Turk doesn't want to recall the awkward moment of physical contact, just as JD can't forget it. But JD can't help himself, and he raises the question of race as a plea for greater intimacy, a plea rebutted by Turk. Regardless of JD's controlling narrative, Turk has unequivocal authority over what is racist and hence offensive to him. He has power to circumscribe JD's speech, a power JD acknowledges as a term of their friendship. If JD could violate one taboo, using the N word, perhaps the other taboo, sex between the two, would be vulnerable. For Turk, the taboo does exactly what a taboo is

to do: protect him from some powerful force that might do him harm. To relax one taboo, opens Turk to untold but not unimagined dangers.

There are many other scenes in which race operates as a trope for queer sex in the series. In the ninth episode, "My Day Off," originally aired on November 20, 2001, JD needs an appendectomy but rejects Turk as a surgeon. Turk is wounded by this rejection and reads it rightly or wrongly through a racial prism. When an emergency requires that Turk perform the surgery, he does so successfully. Later JD apologizes for doubting Turk's skill and professionalism, saying: "if I ever need surgery again, I want you inside of me." Turk replies, "I want to be the one inside of you." After it is spoken, JD recognizes the non-surgical significance of what they have said and freezes in quizzical alarm at their having said the one thing they are unable to speak. Love, yes. Non-prophylactic penetration, absolutely not. The scene is more racially charged than the dialogue reveals because JD imagines the response of Fat Albert and his gang–black cartoon characters made famous by Bill Cosby—to this doublespeak about anal sex. The gang, including Turk, looks confused, then disquieted, almost as if JD's longing violates a racial taboo more egregious than using the N word. By situating Turk in his imagined gang of black youths, JD emphasizes Turks racial identity and their racial difference. If they cannot overcome these racial differences, no matter how down with rap music JD might be, then the monstrous gulf between heterosexual friends and homosexual lovers cannot safely be crossed.

Turk's revelation that he wants to be the one inside JD acknowledges a covert desire to consummate their relationship at least equal to JD's. However, the sexual act described by that exchange seems to undermine my contention that by virtue of his race Turk occupies an inferior position to his white buddy. It would be unwise to assume that the desire to be penetrated by or passive to another male sexually overturns other hierarchies. I have noted that Tonto's passive behavior, his acceptance of an inferior position marks him as a berdache, but Tonto never controls the narrative. We know Tonto because we know the Lone Ranger, but in fact the Indian has no agency. The opposite is true for JD. Turk might be desired as the *exoletus*, but that does not mean that

the *exoletus* shares the social status of the man who employs him.[23] Even as JD calls himself Turk's "bi-atch," and finds thousands of ways of proclaiming his love and desire for his Chocolate Bear, JD does not surrender agency or narrative to Turk. In fact JD's fantasies of Turk identify JD as the aggressor regardless of whether he ends up on his back or his stomach were sexual consummation ever to occur. Moreover, these fantasies operate within the realm of the carnivalesque as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World.* JD's fantasies and the comedy of *Scrubs* itself promote an inversion of hierarchy so that the hierarchy undermined by the special circumstance of the fantasies or the forbidden desire is, in fact, reconfirmed:

> […] carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.[24]

It is worth noting that in *Scrubs* it is Turk who wears the mask. His surgical mask reveals his eyes, but covers his mouth. This trope reinforces JD's power as controlling narrator, but it also suggests that Turk can't speak because JD wants to hear neither "yes" nor "no." In this carnival of JD's imagination he can suspend temporarily hierarchical ranks because in the end JD has the power to restore order, and Turk's mask becomes the sign both of his rank in officialdom and his role in JD's topsy-turvy world. Turk occupies at once both worlds, and in both worlds the possibility of queer sex titillates even as JD straddles them seeking new ways to unmask his masked man's desires.

The run of *Scrubs* on television has not yet ended at the time of this writing, so with new episodes being produced it is impossible to predict whether Turk will ultimately find himself inside JD in a sexual way. However, if we look at these four television series, it is clear that *Scrubs* decisively chooses to exploit the queer sexual tensions of the buddy formula. While the other series at times allowed the tension to express itself cryptically, *Scrubs* embraces it. Rather than pretend an idyllic world of

racial harmony can exist so long as the person of color accepts his subaltern status, *Scrubs* pushes the reality of the American racial landscape. Even as it acknowledges progress, it does not wink at the impediment to the racial harmony the earlier shows naively portrayed. Perhaps JD's role as narrator, ironically, represents the ambiguity of the majority culture to surrender dominance and share power with a new multicultural society. Similarly the show evidences ambiguity toward fully accepting a queerness it at times seems so to desire. By cleverly mixing race and sex and allowing anxiety about the former to replace and displace the unease about the latter, *Scrubs* reconfirms the power of race in American life even in the so-called post Civil Rights Era. *Scrubs* has outed the buddy series, making manifest the reality that like race, homoerotic desire cannot be hidden in plot formulas or behind the mask of faithful friendships. But embracing it all may just not be that easy because carnivals must always come to an end.

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[1]Butch and Sundance are characters in the 1969 movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford. The television series *Starsky and Hutch* and *The Dukes of Hazzard* were on American television from 1975-79 and 1979-85 respectively.

[2] The phrase "rugged individualism" was introduced to the American vocabulary by Republican presidential candidate Herbert Hoover in a 1928 speech. Hoover proclaimed that in the aftermath of World War Americans "were challenged with the choice of the American system "rugged individualism" or a European system of diametrically opposed doctrines—doctrines of paternalism and state socialism."

[3]Michael A. Messner studies male behavior in team sports in "Like Family: Power, Intimacy, and Sexuality in Male Athletes' Friendships" in *Men's Friendships*, ed. Peter M. Nardi (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 216.

[4]See Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulatoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film*, Fourth Edition (New York: Continuum Press, 2003), 3-4.

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[5]Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 281.

[6] (New York: Drama Book Specialists/Publishers, 1972), 189. The title shortens the famous statement made by General Philip Sheridan in 1869. When introduced to a Comanche, the Indian said: "Me Tochoway. Me good Indian." Replied Sheridan: "The only good Indians I ever saw were dead" (Friar and Friar, *ix*).

[7] The joke goes: Tonto and the Lone Ranger are surrounded by thousands of hostile Indians about to attack the duo. The Lone Ranger in desperation looks at Tonto and says: "Tonto we are in grave danger. What should we do?" Tonto replies: "What do you mean, 'we' white man?" Of course, the provenance of a joke is very difficult to locate. I said the 1960s because that's when I became aware of it; perhaps it existed earlier.

[8]*Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama!* is the title of a 1968 racial manifesto by Julius Lester.

[9]Walter L. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 3. "Berdache" is not a word with Native American origins, it is a corruption of the French *bardache*.

[10]I am indebted to the Wikipedia entry on "The Lone Ranger" for its discussion of the meaning of the term "kemo sabe."

[11] See *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations* edited by Gretchen M. Bataille (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 2-3 and 104-07.

[12]John Rolfe requested permission to marry Pocahontas not to satisfy "the unbridled desire of carnal affection, but for the good of this plantation, for the honor of our country, for the Glory of God, for my own salvation." From Rolfe's letter to Virginia Governor Thomas Dale, quoted in the Wikipedia entry on "Pocahontas."

[13] (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 82.

[14]The Civil Rights Act of 1964 finally outlawed segregation in public accommodations in the United States.

[15]Episode 81 entitled "Carmelita is One of Us" aired on April 8, 1968.

[16]*Television Culture* (New York: Metheun, 1987), 257-58.

[17] "Slash fiction" is fan fiction that proposes a homosexual relationship between two ostensibly heterosexual characters from mainstream fiction. The earliest and perhaps the most famous body of slash fiction involves *Star Trek*'s Captain Kirk and Dr. Spock, identified in the world of slash fiction as Kirk/Spock or K/S.

[18] *Men's Friendships*, 201.

[19]In episode 123, "My Musical," originally aired January 18, 2007, Turk and JD sing a duet entitled "Guy Love." A clip was made available to YouTube.com by NBC and can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lL4L4Uv5rf0>. In this essay, however, I focus only on episodes of *Scrubs* from Season One.

[20] T.S. Eliot famously spoke of an "objective correlative." The objective correlative is something that exists outside of the character by which the audience understands the emotional state of the character. By subjective correlative, I mean some emotion or desire that exists which the character recognizes and associates with a more disturbing or troubling emotion or desire. In the case of both JD and Turk, race anxiety becomes the emotion that they focus on when their anxiety about homosexual intimacy becomes overwhelming.

[21]The essay appears in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, edited by Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (New York: Routledge, 1993), 195.

[22]Nothing seems to characterize black men so much as their cool. George Stephanopolis on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday, May 13, 2007, interviewed presidential hopeful Barak Obama. Stephanopolis asked the candidate: "You have a very cool style when you are doing those town meetings and out on the campaign trail. I wonder how much of that is tied to your race?"

[23] In *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), John Boswell identifies the *exoleti* as men who specialize in being the active male partner in homosexual relationships (79).

[24] (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1968), translated by Helene Iswolsky, 11.

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