

**Crash** (Best Picture – Best Original Screenplay 2005)

Written and Directed by **Paul Haggis** (wrote *Million Dollar Baby* 2004 Best Picture)

### Cast of characters

Crash features an ensemble cast:

\* **Rick Cabot** (Brendan Fraser) is the white district attorney of Los Angeles. He and his wife Jean are carjacked by Anthony and Peter (both of whom are black). Subsequently, the Brentwood resident tries to save his political career by reassuring voters that he is racially sensitive (as he is a Democrat and African Americans and Hispanics are his key demographics). His character is never depicted as a bigot, which makes his racial stance ambiguous. The use of ambiguity by the filmmakers likely asks whether people who take such actions are racially positive or just discriminatory in pursuit of goals.

\* **Jean Cabot** (Sandra Bullock) is Rick's white wife, whose racial prejudices escalate after the carjacking. At the end of the film, following an accident in her home, she realizes that the person who is the nicest and most helpful to her is Maria, her Hispanic maid, while her snobby friends are too busy with shallow pursuits (such as getting a massage) to help her out.

\* **Anthony** (Chris "Ludacris" Bridges) is an African-American inner-city car thief. He believes that society is unfairly biased against blacks. At one point in the film he justifies his actions by saying he would never hurt another black person. Yet, after he and Peter mistakenly try to carjack a car driven by a black man, Cameron, and when Cameron attacks Anthony during the carjacking, Anthony's response is to call on Peter to shoot Cameron.

\* **Peter Waters** (Larenz Tate) is Anthony's friend and partner in crime. Like Anthony, he is black, but he scoffs at Anthony's paranoia over racism. The only character killed throughout all of the film's near-tragedies, Peter is shot to death by Officer Hansen, who picks him up in the valley hours after their failed carjacking and mistakenly shoots him after assuming he is drawing a gun, when in reality he was reaching into his pocket to show the cop a figure of Saint Christopher.

\* **Graham Waters** (Don Cheadle) is a detective in the Los Angeles Police Department. He is disconnected from his poor family. He promises his mother that he will find his younger brother, but is preoccupied with a case concerning a racist white cop who shot a possibly corrupt black cop. Flanagan offers him the chance to further his career and clear his brother's record in exchange for leaving out what is controversial evidence. Graham, offended and opposed at first, is convinced with some arguments for affirmative action in a private conversation with Flanagan. In the end he makes a very difficult personal decision to withhold evidence and possibly corrupt a case in order to clear his brother's name. Ironically, that brother is eventually revealed to be Peter, the carjacker who is killed by Officer Hansen.

\* **Ria** (Jennifer Esposito) is a Latina detective, as well as Graham's partner and girlfriend. The two have an intimate, but conflicted, relationship. When a phone call from Graham's mother interrupts his sexual romp with Ria, Ria becomes upset that Graham 1) stopped having sex to answer the phone, 2) was disrespectful to his mother on the phone, and 3) called Ria "white" and later "Mexican." According to Ria, she is not Mexican: because her mother is from El Salvador and her father is from Puerto Rico. Later in the day, she and Graham are rear-ended by an Asian driver, and Ria exhibits some racist remarks toward the Asian woman.

\* **Officer John Ryan** (Matt Dillon) is a white police officer who molests Christine, a black woman, during a traffic stop. This causes his partner, Officer Hansen, to believe his partner has racist tendencies. Meanwhile, Ryan is trying to get help for his father, who may have prostate cancer but seems to have been misdiagnosed with a bladder infection. Ryan's racist remarks to a black insurance representative makes her assure him she will not help his father get the treatment he needs. His racial prejudices seem to stem in part from the negative impact that local affirmative action-style policies that favored minority businesses had on his father's business, family, and life. Ryan later relieves the viewers of his racist tendencies when he is seen working with a newly-assigned, Hispanic-American partner toward whom he seems to show no signs of prejudice — especially when he puts his own life on the line to save Christine from certain death in a fiery car wreck.

\* **Officer Tom Hansen** (Ryan Phillippe) is Officer Ryan's partner who is disgusted by his partner's racism and the city's inaction. When he fails to get another partner, Hansen accepts a solo patrol vehicle. Hansen saves Cameron during his confrontation with the police. However, he later picks up a hitchhiker who turns out to be Peter. When Peter reaches for what Hansen suspects is a weapon, Hansen overreacts, draws his gun, and shoots Peter. Hansen hastily dumps the body and burns his car in an attempt to hide evidence. One of the most surprising developments in the film occurs because Officer Hansen, despite his initial integrity and resistance to racist ideas, takes to heart Officer Ryan's last words to him (telling him he too will develop racist instincts with more experience on the force).

\* **Lieutenant Dixon** (Keith David) is Officer Ryan and Hansen's shift Lieutenant who is African American. When Hansen requests to change partners, Dixon states that doing so for reasons of Officer Ryan's racism will reflect poorly upon their unit, Dixon in particular for commanding him. Furthermore, Dixon explains that all the work he did to get a ranking

position in an environment as racist as the LAPD will backfire on him personally for filing such a reason for changing partners. He suggests Hansen ride in a solo car for reasons of "uncontrollable flatulence" as a means of getting away from Officer Ryan and not making Dixon look bad for supervising Ryan.

\* **Cameron Thayer** (Terrence Howard) is a black television director who becomes distraught after witnessing Officer Ryan molest his wife and realizing that the very show he produces is propagating racist stereotypes about black people. In an emotional moment, he fights off Anthony and Peter when they try to steal his car, takes away Anthony's gun, and gets himself into a harsh argument with armed white police officers. Just when it is very likely that he will be shot to death, Officer Hansen intervenes on his behalf and prevents any outbreak of violence.

\* **Christine Thayer** (Thandie Newton) is Cameron's wife. She is molested by Officer Ryan after she and Cameron are pulled over. She becomes furious with her husband because he does not act to defend her. The two argue insult each other over their upbringings as both Cameron and Christine have grown up in a more privileged environment than other African Americans (Cameron insults her for being on her high school's exclusively white and privileged equestrian team). The next day she is trapped in an overturned car due to a highway accident and, by an exquisite twist of fate, Officer Ryan is the man who willingly endangers himself to save her life.

\* **Daniel** (Michael Peña) is a Mexican-American locksmith who faces discrimination from Jean and others because he looks like a "gangbanger" (has tattoos, shaved head, baggy jeans) to them, when he is actually a devoted family man. He is seeking a safe environment for his young daughter, Lara, who had a bullet go through her window in their previous home. That is why he moved to a safe neighborhood and enrolled her in a private school. He and his daughter are shot at by Farhad but are not harmed due to a surprising twist of fate.

\* **Farhad** (Shaun Toub) is a Persian store owner who is afraid for his safety. He is depicted as a man frustrated by the racial harassment he experiences in the United States, as well as deterred by difficulties with speaking English (despite being an American citizen). To protect his store — the only thing his family has — he goes to a gun shop and attempts to buy a gun. The gun store owner quickly becomes frustrated with Farhad's conversation with his daughter in Persian, leading to racist remarks and his refusal to sell Farhad a gun. He sells the gun to Farhad's daughter after being cryptic and lecherous about which bullets she needs. Farhad's suspicion of others is compounded by his difficulty speaking English: he does not heed Daniel's warning that his shop door needs replacing, believing Daniel intends to "cheat" him, and as a result suffers a break-in. Blaming Daniel for the invasion and racially-motivated destruction of his store, he confronts him at his house and is about to fire the gun at him. Daniel's daughter Lara rushes to her father's aid; she believes herself to be wearing a "special" cloak that, her father has told her, is impenetrable and thus will protect them both. Farhad fires at Daniel but accidentally shoots his daughter, to the horror of both Daniel and Farhad. However, unknown to Farhad and Daniel, the gun is loaded with blanks. The fact that the daughter is not hurt is a great relief to Farhad, who believes an angel intervened, and he leaves without further incident.

\* **Dorri** (Bahar Soomekh) is Farhad's daughter, and is more acclimated than her father to American culture. She is constantly trying to calm her father down during his emotional temper outbursts. She is also a doctor at the morgue; she escorts Graham and his mother to Peter's body after it is discovered in a field.

\* **Jake Flanagan** (William Fichtner) is an aide to Rick who talks Graham into accepting a corrupt deal, by arguing in strong favor of affirmative action. The corrupt deal outlined to Graham by Flanagan was that of furthering his career, and clearing his brother's charges. Although the deal is corrupt, Flanagan plays a small but incredibly important role in the discussion on positive discrimination, and takes a moral highground to justify his actions. In the end he leaves the decision up to Graham by suggesting that "you're the closest to all of this, you tell us (what needs to be done)." (paraphrased), to suggest that maybe enough substantive inequality in a systematically equal society, is justification for the actions taken.