**Film Reviews on *Power of One***

***Power of One* Film Review by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat (Excerpt)**

(<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/6214/the-power-of-one>)

P.K., an English orphan, is tormented at boarding school by Afrikaners who hate the English as much as they hate blacks. His nanny takes him to a Zulu medicine man who helps the boy develop courage. Later, he learns about justice, wonder, and sensitivity from Doc, a German pianist who is a friend of his grandfather. A black man in prison teaches P.K. how to box and to act with his head and his heart.

Empowered by these three older men, P.K. grows up to be a bridge between the black tribes and the races in South Africa. He becomes an activist in the mission to bring literacy to the poor blacks living in the townships. One person can make a difference this film shows, especially when fortified in body, mind, and soul by the wisdom of spiritual elders

***Power of One* Film Review by** [**Roger Ebert**](https://www.rogerebert.com/contributors/roger-ebert)**(Excerpts)**

(<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-power-of-one-1992>)

[The original book] tried to give some sense of what it was like to grow up as an English-speaking liberal in a country where apartheid and aspects of the police state were combined in an unholy marriage with parliamentary democracy. In a sense, the story of *The Power of One* could continue right down to the March 17 referendum in which a majority of South Africa's white voters ratified de Klerk's decision to move toward black majority rule. That would be the happy ending.

But *The Power of One* wants to be more than the story of a young man whose life reflects the times of his country. It also wants to be a box office hit, and in playing the notes of mass entertainment, it loses its purpose. You can almost feel the film slipping out of the hands of its director, [John. G. Avildsen](https://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/john-g-avildsen), as the South African reality is upstaged by the standard cliches of a fight picture.

[It] is pretty shaky politically. And it continues the tendency of so many recent films about South Africa, … to embody the anti-apartheid struggle in an heroic white man, presumably so white Western audiences will have an easier time identifying.

The film, shot in Zimbabwe, begins with a clear sense of the land and the attachment of all Southern Africans to it. It shows the symbiotic, if paternalistic, relationship of blacks and whites in rural areas. It gives some sense of the beginnings of apartheid. But then it turns into another movie about a bad bully, and by the end, when the hero and the neo-Nazi are mano-a-mano, and riots are sweeping Alexandria township, I was in despair. South Africa is too complex to be reduced to a formula in which everything depends on who shoots who.

***Power of One* Film Review by Kenneth Turan (Excerpt)**

(<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-03-27-ca-4550-story.html>)

Set in South Africa, it is not only yet another film that thinks the best way to tell the story of apartheid is through white eyes, it also puts forward a paleface as the saviour of downtrodden natives. Its black people are brave and hopeful victims, its whites either kindly saints or brutal, sadistic monsters. And you know which is which in a matter of seconds.

***Power of One* Film Review by Rob Ferguson**

(<https://www.cinema.com/articles/799/power-of-one-the-movie-review.phtml>)

The three segregated groups gathered at a distance from each other within the dusty, sombre compounds of the Johannesburg cemetery, as the unbearable African sun beat upon them. Despite being brought together to mourn the death of a young lady whom all the groups loved, a wide shot of the cemetery reveals the continuing separation of the Zulus, Afrikaans and the English driven by the evil forces of hatred and prejudice.

John G. Avildsen's *The Power of One* comments on the struggle endured by many in the 19th and 20th centuries in South Africa against the ignorance of racism, named by the white-German [actually mainly Dutch] colonials (Afrikaners) as the apartheid. Avildsen's intention is to illustrate that the discourse of racism is not only driven by hatred and prejudice, but also by ignorance. He asserts this superbly through the relationships of Peter Philip Kenneth Keith 'PK' (Stephen Dorff) the accepting English schoolboy, Maria Marias (Fay Masterson) the rich Afrikaans schoolgirl who has been sheltered from the horrid truths of society, and Gideon Duma (Alois Moyo), who is desperate to save his people from white oppression.

The telling moment which reveals the ignorance of racism as the dominant discourse occurs when Marias, startled by a confrontation with the two kaffirs and two Afrikaans policemen in the dark street, asks PK, “Why were they scared of us? They have no reason to be scared, we should be scared of them”. PK, amazed by her ignorance replies sharply, “Do you know any black people?” Marias has not witnessed the abuse that is suffered by the Zulus, due to her constricted experience with the harsh society outside boarding school. It is also during this confrontation that for the first time, people of the three separate groups become acquainted and share their vision of a united front.

The spectre of racism is first introduced to the film through the setting of the boarding school which PK attends as a child. He is the only Englishman in the Afrikaans boarding school, and consequently is blamed for the treatment of their people by the English military. The Afrikaans are marginalised by their setting, with their dwellings being dully lighted, casting shadows of evil, that is racism, over their faces. The dormitories are open, cold and surrounded by hard floorboards and walls, which are covered with the Nazi swastikas. PK is uncomfortable with his surroundings, being subjected to racism by the elder students, and subsequently becomes a habitual bed-wetter.

The swastikas which are widely recognised as symbols of evil, are cleverly utilised by Avildsen, to portray the evil of the racism occurring in South Africa. Hitler's racism had the over-awing power to destroy countries, livelihoods and whole races. Therefore the use of the swastika in *The Power of One* clearly demonstrates the wickedness and power of apartheid, which had the power to segregate a nation and the hopes of many people.

The setting in which the Afrikaans students live positions the viewer to identify the Afrikaans as the root of the racist attitudes in South Africa. The dark lighting, military style uniform, and the German accent, which in that period of history (WW2) was closely related to the racism of the Nazi regime, creates the image of heartless, racist students in the mind of the viewer. Furthermore the pessimistic attitude held by Marias' father about her being courted by an English boy, marginalises the Afrikaans as racist, and continues to position the viewer to distinguish them as the root of racism and racial segregation.

Black men, women and children move about in their township under a star spangled African night sky. Weaving their way through the rubble and junk that is their homes, guided only by the light conjured from the flames of the fire burning from the discarded forty-gallon drums. This is the setting of the ominous climatic scene which is constructed by Avildsen to ooze racism. The Afrikaans police, in search of PK who is violating the laws regarding race mixing, disturb the otherwise content Zulus of the village, along with PK. The Afrikaans are again marginalised by the viewers, as Avildsen creates them to be the founder of the discourse of racism, trying to prevent the racial segregation barriers from being dismantled by those who are feuding against the ignorance of racism. A swastika tattooed Afrikaner officer, intertextually linked with the evil power of Hitler through his tattoo, states their attitude towards those in search of racial harmony through his statement to PK, “You're destroying our country, you kaffir lover”.

The military uniformed Afrikaans, as they are slaughtering the innocent Zulus, are surrounded by raging tongues of flames. Avildsen once again creates an intertextual link, linking the setting of the cold-blooded slaughter, with the evil depths of hell. It is as the massacre begins that the tragic orchestral music accompanied by the solemn vocals of African tribal music is introduced. The African voices foreground the Zulus' innocence and helplessness as images of Afrikaans shooting and bashing men, women and children are projected.

The camera's focus during the climatic scene foregrounds the racist attitudes of the Afrikaans officers. The focus is primarily on two officers, the head officer elevated in the tray of a utility, toting a pistol and shooting any black moving target, and Jaapie Botha, the swastika tattooed officer. Jaapie is displayed bashing helpless, smaller in stature Zulus, and bullying them for information as to the whereabouts of PK. The marginalisation of the Afrikaans, from the viewer's position, the viewer's attitude towards the Zulus and PK are the reciprocal to what they feel about the Afrikaans. The people fighting for racial harmony are privileged in the scene, as they are seen fighting for their rights, and for each other, rather than out of hate and prejudice.

The Power of One is an inspiring, emotional film which employs an array of filmic techniques to portray its dominant attitudes and discourse. Consequently, the film engrosses the viewer through its construction of characters and emotions, which engages the viewer's morals and feelings. John G Avildsen has created a film which has a timeless quality which will still be relevant for years to come with racism continuing to thrive.

**Questions**

1. What themes and ideas from *The* *Power of One* are commented on in these reviews?
2. What positive features of the film are pointed out?
3. What negative features of the film are pointed out?
4. Do you agree with any of the criticisms made and why?
5. What do the colours indicate in the last review?

Blue =

Green = the first green is also an example of proxemics. Explain how.

Yellow =

Purple =

Grey =

Teal =

Red =