

Study questions for American History X

Opening scene

- 1) Why is there a black and white beach scene (coupled with orchestral and choral music) at the start of this movie? What could this symbolise?
- 2) What does the black and white visual during the opening few minutes of the movie symbolise (think about the plot and racially)?
- 3) How does the movie build up tension during the scene of the black men stealing the car and Derek shooting them?
- 4) What tattoos that you can see on Derek's body? What is significant about the tattoo on his chest and its placement?

Dr. Sweeney's office and the LAPD

- 5) Dr. Sweeney is African-American and Murray is Jewish. How are their racial backgrounds (and their personal backgrounds, of what we know of them so far) influenced their treatment of Danny and his paper on Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf?
- 6) Dr. Sweeney says "*This racist propaganda, this Mein Kampf psychobabble; he learned this nonsense, Murray, and he can unlearn it too*". How does this frame the movie?
- 7) There is underlying tension as Danny takes the American flag from the African-American secretary's pen-holder. How is this tension relayed? What is significant about Danny's actions here (given his background that we know of so far)?
- 8) Danny says: "*What happened to him [Derek] has nothing to do with me*". Dr. Sweeney responds: "*Everything you do right now has something to do with Derek*". What does he mean from this?
- 9) Dr. Sweeney titles Danny's new history class as 'American History X'. Why is the name significant and relating to Malcolm X? What agenda is Dr. Sweeney leaning towards here and why?
- 10) Why was there a close-up on Dr. Sweeney's face when he was outlining the directions of the assignment?
- 11) What is the film-maker's point of showing a group of African-American males beating up a white student?
- 12) Danny blows smoke on the African-American bully's face. What does this symbolise?
- 13) What does the scene Los Angeles Police Department establish about:
 - a. Dr. Sweeney's role in the community
 - b. The characters of:
 - i. Derek Vinyard – his family life, and how he got involved

