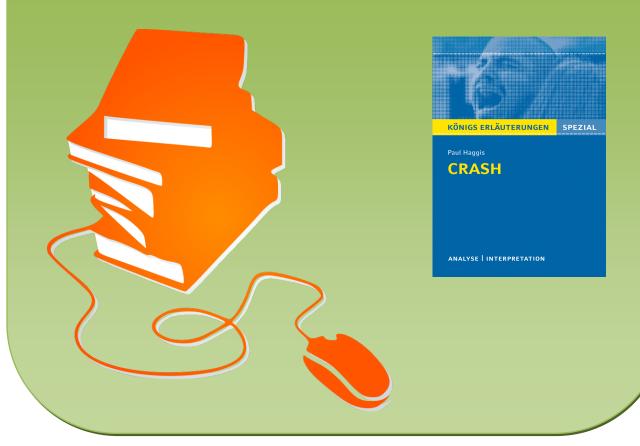# SCHOOL-SCOUT.DE

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Auszug aus:

Paul Haggis: Crash (Filmanalyse)

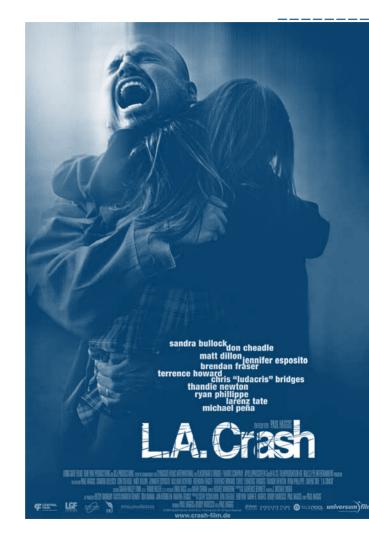**Das komplette Material finden Sie hier:**

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KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN | SPEZIAL

Paul Haggis

CRASH

ANALYSE | INTERPRETATION

The German DVD cover for *Crash*
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FOREWORD

British and American cinema produced a number of ensemble films during the 1990s and early 2000s, including *Love Actually* (2003), *Magnolia* (1999), *Grand Canyon* (1991) and *Crash* (2004). Whatever their individual genres, these were films which used apparently unconnected characters and storylines to explore shared themes. In the case of Paul Haggis' *Crash*, these themes were urban isolation and race in modern day Los Angeles.

The advantage of an ensemble approach to storytelling is that the filmmaker can approach his or her subject from several different perspectives. In the case of *Crash*, with its interest in the chaos and turmoil of modern urban life, this format also allowed Haggis to follow his characters and storylines through the film like fish in a fast-moving river: they are forced along by the rush of events and their situation, crash into one another and are thrust apart again, constantly moving. The themes of the film are reflected in the structure, with its organisation of coincidence, chaos and conflict in a multi-narrative, multi-character format.

The film was released three years after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and cannot help but reflect the increased paranoia and awareness of danger and violence in American society. The still-unresolved black-white racial tension at the heart of the history and identity of the USA, and the continued discrimination and criminalisation of the rapidly growing Latino population, were joined by an explosion in anti-Arab sentiment. But, as Paul Haggis points out in the commentary to the DVD of *Crash*, Americans tend not to differentiate: olive skin and dark hair makes you an Arab, and all Asians are Chinese. Farhad is Iranian (Persian); Choi is Korean; Ria is Puerto Rican-El Salvadoran, but to other characters they are Arab, Chinese, Mexican – the laziest and most obvious term is ap-

plied in each case. While every character would see themselves as being primarily 'American', the lack of communication and contact within society, specifically urban society, which the director addresses in *Crash*, leads people to seek identification in a closer, more personal context. This will often be ethnicity. The comfort and reassurance of traditional codes and customs for first-generation immigrants is understandable for individuals. This can however lead to problems for the wider community, as it can lead to the formation of closed mini-societies with little contact with the larger host society. It is not improbable that a man like Farhad, subjected to constant racist hostility, would be more likely to retreat even further into frustrated hostility. His counterpart in the film is Daniel Ruiz, similar on many levels (poor working class immigrant father), but whose response to the hostility and racism of the world around him is peaceful and patient. No matter what conflicts are forced on him, he never resorts to violence or anger.

Haggis has said that one of his intentions in making the film was to "bait" liberals: to provoke complacent tolerant viewpoints with a more complex look at race and racism. It's a matter for debate whether or not he was successful in achieving this goal. What he does manage is to show a wide spectrum of characters from diverse ethnic backgrounds and, equally importantly, social sections of society. The issue of class is not often acknowledged in US popular culture, where class is often directly and over-simplistically equated with one's financial worth, but it plays an important role in the many storylines in *Crash*.

The film provided the breakthrough for a few of its actors, particularly Michael Peña and Terrence Howard, as well as allowing veterans like Matt Dillon and Sandra Bullock and a newcomer like Chris 'Ludacris' Bridges (a successful rapper) to show people an entirely new side of their performing abilities. Two other actors

in the film who had also previously been considered lightweights, Brendan Fraser and Ryan Phillippe, have also been applauded for their standout performances.

Crash is an interesting and rewarding film to analyse and interpret, because it provides a well-organised variety of approaches to its main themes and an effective narrative format which further strengthens the thematic unity. It is possible to access the film from a storytelling, symbolic or visual perspective. And while the major 'action' sequences – the two scenes between Officer Ryan and Christine Thayer; Cameron Thayer's confrontation with first Anthony and then Officer Hansen; Farhad's attempted shooting of Daniel – dominate the film both emotionally and as far as excitement is concerned, there is not a single scene within the film which is not relevant to one or more of the central themes.

This study guide includes analyses and interpretations of key themes, narrative strategies and aspects of the film's visual design and soundtrack. You will also find a comprehensive scene-by-scene summary and a reference list of all the film's characters.

THE SETTING – LOS ANGELES

1. BACKGROUND

The Setting – Los Angeles

"We really wanted to shoot in LA because it was a character in the film."
[Paul Haggis, DVD commentary]

The film *Crash* is set in Los Angeles (LA), the largest city in California and the second largest in the USA. LA is a huge metropolis covering over more than 1,300 km² and divided into more than 80 districts. It has no real centre in the way that Paris or Moscow, for example, have identifiable centres. The sprawling, disconnected nature of the city provides more than a setting and a background for *Crash*: LA is itself a character in the film, influencing the action and creating conflict.

LA – character in the film

It is ethnically diverse and its population covers a broad social spectrum from the ultra-wealthy to the extremely poor. Noted areas include the troubled South Central, Compton and Watts, epicentre of the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s and the violence of both gang culture and rioting: Beverly Hills, the surreal home of the fabulously rich, and of course Hollywood, home of Disneyland in Anaheim, famous around the world as the centre of the US film industry. LA is, along with New York, generally understood to be the cultural centre of the American entertainment industry, inextricably linked to show business and the world of glamour and illusion.

But LA also has a long and troubled history of racial tension, and has seen several periods of civil unrest and outbreaks of rioting. Police officers of the LAPD (the Los Angeles Police Department) have often, and very publicly, been accused of racism, corruption and brutality. Landmark incidents include the race riots in

History of racial tension

THE SETTING – LOS ANGELES

Watts in 1965, which lasted for six days during which 34 people were killed, and the 1992 riots following the police beating of Rodney King, which was filmed and seen all around the world. The four police officers who beat Rodney King were charged with assault with a deadly weapon and the use of excessive force. The 1992 riots exploded after all four of the police officers were cleared of all charges. The unrest lasted for six days and covered a large area of the city. Fifty-three people died. The National Guard, troops from the California-based 7th Infantry Division, and even a division of US Marines, had to be called in to assist the LAPD in stopping the rioting.

Minority Officers

After the Rodney King riots, major changes were made within the LAPD. One important change was the increased hiring of minority (non-white) officers, to avoid the situation which had existed of a predominantly white police force supervising mostly black or Latino populations. A further consequence was an intense examination of the social, economic and political conditions which had contributed to the unrest – why were so many people so angry, and who were they?

The ethnic demographic of LA before *Crash* was released were recorded in a census taken in the year 2000. The total population of LA was 9,519,338. Whites made up just over 48% of the population, Hispanics/Latinos 44%, Asians just over 10% and blacks/African Americans just under 10%.

The demographic development since 2000 has seen a huge change. The 2005–2009 census discovered the following:

→ Hispanic or Latino: 47,5%
→ White (non-Hispanic): 29.4%
→ Asian: 10.7%
→ Black or African American: 9,8%.

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