I saw *Crash* on a DVD, which I recommend, especially for the extended commentary by the writer-director, Paul Haggis, who wrote *Million Dollar Baby* and the co-writer Bobby Moresco, and Don Cheadle, who starred in *Hotel Rwanda*, and plays an L.A. Detective who is investigating an accident in the film. Cheadle said he was struggling not to laugh at some of dialogue which is definitely not PC but real. The dialogue between Larenz Tate and Chris “Ludacris” Bridge is like a running commentary of two hip-hop stand up comics. Humor is the great equalizer providing some relief to this very edgy production. *Crash* is a complicated film about power and race relations in L.A.

The opening scenes are hypnotic. It is pitch black and the car headlights are white and yellow, dramatizing the color contrasts with the stunning cinematography of J. Michael Muro and creating an atmosphere where anything can happen. The use of filters, shooting into the sun, using slow motion to accentuate the terror of racism and exploitation is superb.

The urban sprawl of car-dependant Los Angelinos, with drivers secluded in their own socio-economic sphere, does have its irony, sometimes comical and other times terrifying. “In L.A. no one touches you. We missed that so much that we crash into each other,” says Cheadle’s character.

The script confronts the prejudice and nastiness of racism in all of its forms. Everyone is racist. Far from being a polemic, the film is not your ordinary action picture. It is hard to pin it down to a genre. There are various labels that could apply; it is a morality play, fable, nightmare, and tragic comedy. To me the key element in this film is that it defies stereotyping which is at the heart of prejudice. Via interlocking stories it highlights the soul searching and spiritual wasteland of Los Angeles with its mixture of cultural and racial diversity. There are cops and robbers, blacks, whites, Latinos, Koreans, Chinese, Persians and Hispanics all exploiting one another without sensing what they are doing. The Koreans are mistaken for Chinese, the Persians for Arabs by the color of their skin, or their inability to pronounce certain words, or simply by their own anger which blinds them to the
truth... The Other is within. The repressed fear turns to rage projected onto the outsider. We witness the ignorance and the lack of communication, the slurs, mistaken identity, and power plays of those wounded by the same kind of shadow activity that they perpetuate themselves.

From the L.A. District Attorney, (played by Brendan Fraser) and his angry, frightened, bitchy wife (Sandra Bullock)—are carjacked by two black men (Larenz Tate and Chris “Ludacris” Bridge), to a Persian small business owner (Shaun Toub) who seeks violent vengeance against the Hispanic locksmith (Michael Peña), he believes has trashed his store, Haggis lays bare a metropolitan web of corrosive, divisive hatred and self-loathing.

This story is alive and unpredictable. Everything is connected. We understand how it is possible to be a victim and in another moment a hero. We see the shadow side of the victim redeeming through acts of heroism. We witness an idealistic rookie cop being heroic and then a murderer. A racist cop (Matt Dillon) who sexually harasses the tipsy wife (Thandie Newton) of a well-off television director (Terrence Howard) only later to rescue her from a car crash.

This is the dark side of the American Dream. These horrific events take place during Christmas season when it rarely snows in L.A., but what appears to be snow is actually ash from a burning car. There are Christian crosses in several of the scenes which reflect the shadow side of Christianity which is a leitmotif during this film. It reminded me of a young idealistic therapist from Texas who earnestly asked me, post 9/11, “Why do they hate us?”

“They hate us because we have become bullies,” I told him.

Collective American Culture is at odds with the world’s global goals. During my lifetime I have witnessed the formation of an American Empire. As a teenager, living in Athens after the Second World War, I went to an Anglo-American high school. My school bus was run by American Mission Aid to Greece (AMAG). There were children from 17 countries in my class, but no Greek citizens. The Americans lived in the best neighborhoods. They had all the comforts of home where they could buy American groceries from the Postal Exchange (PX). They had their American Clubs and Snack bars where they prohibited Greeks from entering. Such an exclusive environment was duplicated around the world. Such a them and us mentality does not foster good relations with the natives.

America is a melting pot. I was brought up believing that all people are created equal. Obviously this not true and was never true in practical terms. During my lifetime I have seen collective liberation movements among blacks, and people of color, women, and gays and lesbians. During my New England and Cape Cod childhood I naively thought I was prejudice free. There were no blacks in our school so I was shocked when in the early 60’s my Louisiana girl friend said at breakfast in her Shreveport mansion being waited on by a Black mammy, “Jessie is a good niggra. Aren’t you, Jessie?” “Yes, m’am,” she replied dutifully. She looked like Aunt Jemima on the pancake box only much blacker. Rationally, I knew her black hands were as clean as my white ones but when I saw her handle my toast, I felt queasy. That was prejudice deep in the pit of my gut. My hypocrisy embarrassed me and it was a very humbling experience.

Now, as a Jungian analyst, I was intrigued by the genesis of this film which came to Paul Haggis as a dream, a decade ago.

It reminded me of the nightmare that Robert Louis Stephenson had when he woke up screaming. “Write it down!” said his wife. The result was The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a classic depiction of the alter ego or Shadow in Jungian language. We all have a Shadow side. Shadow is everything that we do not know or have forgotten. It is our unlived
life. Everything that is unconscious is projected. This is true for individuals as it is for entire cultures.

*Crash* is an American nightmare. It will get under your skin no matter what color it is.

**Reference**
