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Reproduction of Racial Inequality in *Sinners (2025)*

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines how Sinners (2025) dramatizes racial domination through the vampire genre by organizing inequality as a structural condition rather than an isolated act of prejudice. While current Black horror scholarship extensively analyzes metaphors of historical trauma, few studies examine the micro-sociological mechanics of capital extraction within these films. Addressing this gap, the film is selected because it places Black cultural space, especially music, communal gathering, and tradition at the center of conflict, allowing racial power to appear through both admiration and coercion. Using a qualitative film-text analysis, this research interprets key scenes through Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field. The findings show that racial inequality in Sinners operates through three interlocking mechanisms: (1) habitus as bodily recalibration and anticipatory restraint during intrusion, (2) capital as the capture and conversion of Black cultural gifts (especially musical talent) into resources for domination, and (3) field as spatial expansion and forced rule-change that collapses Black autonomy from within. Together, these mechanisms reveal racial reproduction as a repeated process sustained through symbolic legitimacy, highlighting how horror cinema can expose the everyday workings of racial hierarchy beneath the surface of inclusion.

Keywords: *Sinners, Pierre Bourdieu, Racial Reproduction, Habitus, Capital, Field*

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INTRODUCTION

Set in Jim Crow-era Mississippi, the movie is about Black communities whose small areas of joy and creativity are taken over by three white vampires. These vampires don't just act like monsters; they also represent racial control and cultural theft. They connect supernatural horror to the long history of white supremacy feasting on Black life and creativity. In the current trend of Black horror that employs genre cinema to question racism, memory, and resistance, *Sinners* stands out for how directly it links bloodlust to the taking and selling of Black culture. In line with what coleman describe as the political function of Black horror, Coogler's film uses supernatural motifs to reveal the racial terror embedded in American history (Coleman, 2023). The vampires' hunger, much like the "horrifying whiteness" discussed by Cramer & Zimmer, becomes a metaphor for the consuming nature of white supremacy. (Cramer & Zimmer, 2023)

In Twilight, vampires are primarily represented as romantic and existential figures. The conflict centres on forbidden love, self-control, immortality, and personal choices between humanity and immortality. Power structures do exist (e.g., the Volturi clan), but they do not function as allegories for real social systems such as structural racism. The main tensions are interpersonal and moral, not historical or political. Race is not the axis of conflict; even when 'group' identities emerge (vampires vs. humans vs. werewolves), they are not mediated through a history of racial oppression or structural inequalities in the real social world.

Instead, *Sinners* uses vampires not as the centre of romance, but as a metaphor for racial power and cultural extraction. Here, vampires not only prey on bodies, but also appropriate culture—music, style, expression—that originates from Black communities. Thus, vampires are not merely supernatural beings, but symbols of a system of domination that both exploits

and admires oppressed cultures. Where Twilight places vampires within a framework of desire and self-control, *Sinners* places vampires within a framework of history, power, and the reproduction of racial inequality.

The uniqueness of *Sinners* lies in the way it shifts the vampire genre from the realm of romantic melodrama to that of social criticism. A genre that serves as escapism in Twilight becomes a tool for dismantling structures in *Sinners*. This is where its oddity emerges: the film appears to be a vampire horror, but in essence it works as an allegory about segregation, cultural appropriation, and the reproduction of racial domination.

The juke joint at the heart of the film is not just a setting; it is a place where Black culture is expressed through blues music, embodied style, vernacular language, and group rituals. When white vampires come into this space, they don't only hunt Black people; they steal their voice, style, and performance while seeming to admire and entertain them. This dynamic reflects current discussions surrounding cultural appropriation, "blackfishing," and the commercialization of Blackness in popular culture, where dominant groups selectively embrace Black aesthetics while perpetuating structural racism (Cherid, 2021). In this context, *Sinners* might be interpreted as a metaphor illustrating the continual appropriation, repackaging, and disconnection of Black music and style from their historical contexts of oppression and resistance.

This study employs Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework, particularly his notions of habitus, cultural capital, field, and racial reproduction, to analyze these dynamics. Recent analyses of Bourdieu underscore how these notions elucidate the reproduction of inequality through quotidian practices, preferences, and classifications, rather than solely through explicit coercion (Bultmann, 2024).

Habitus refers to the ingrained tendencies shaped by an individual's social history; cultural capital signifies esteemed forms of knowledge, style, and skill; field denotes the structured social arena in which individuals and groups compete for power, legitimacy, and resources according to specific rules; and racial reproduction delineates the mechanisms through which institutions and cultural domains perpetually renew existing power dynamics.

This inquiry addresses a critical issue: although representations of race in film have attracted significant scholarly focus, there is a lack of studies that clarify the dynamics of cultural, symbolic, social, and economic capital in aesthetic-cultural domains that maintain racial inequality. The film industry itself remains structured by racialised logics: (Erigha, 2021) demonstrates that cultural gatekeepers evaluate films featuring actors of color as "higher risk," thereby favoring white performers and maintaining racial inequality within the film industry. Simultaneously, extensive media-industry research reveals that the under-representation of individuals of color is not merely an issue of visibility, but is rooted in unequal access to creative positions, distribution resources, and profit-sharing mechanisms (Sheldon Lyn, Jonathan Dunn, Nony Onyeador, 2021) These findings suggest that racial inequality in film is not only a matter of portrayal, but of structural reproduction.

Pierre Bourdieu's social theory provides the backbone for this investigation. His theory of 'field' posits that agents compete within structured arenas for the accumulation of capital of different species, and habitus describes the internalised dispositions shaped by past and present social conditions (Schirone, 2022). The concept of 'symbolic violence' names the misrecognised domination that operates through symbolic means rather than overt coercion (Passeron, 1977). Loyal & Quilley argue that Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power is central to understanding how classification and naming systems produce the "taken-for-granted" order of domination (Loyal & Quilley, 2017). In the realm of cultural industries, Yoga Sudarisman argues that although film can contain narrative and figurative elements similar to written literature, it communicates through visual-verbal expression and relies on specifically cinematic components that require a different mode of reading. Building on this view, the present analysis pays close attention to the formal structures through which racial domination is organized in the film, including mise-en-scène, character positioning, lighting contrast, camera framing, sound design, and the choreography of confrontation. These formal choices are not merely aesthetic; they shape how space is experienced, how authority is signaled, and

how vulnerability is distributed across bodies in the scene (Sudarisman, 2016). Erigha demonstrates how racial valuations by film-industry gatekeepers reproduce unequal outcomes (Erigha, 2021). Further, the recent work of the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative reveals that racial under-representation and behind-the-camera inequalities in film remain stubbornly persistent ("Race/Ethnicity – On-screen in Film, TV, and Episodic Content Inequality in 1,800 Popular Films.," 2025). On film as a mirror of society, the Hilaris Publisher analysis underscores how cinema engages social issues such as inequality, discrimination, and cultural transformation (Bujgoi, 2025). Yet the literature rarely uses a Bourdieusian lens to examine aesthetic-capital conversions in film narratives themselves. Moreover, metaphors of cultural extraction in film have begun to attract attention (Dima Kagan, Mor Levy, Michael Fire, 2022). Analyse ethnic bias in film posters, and a recent article on Nope (2023) uncovers how extractive capitalism is represented through metaphoric imagery (Turcios, 2023). These studies hint at the symbolic-economic dimension of cultural production and racial inequality, but do not fully articulate the mechanics of capital conversion or habitus in the narrative.

The vampire genre has historically served as a powerful symbol for systemic exploitation, transforming from its initial cinematic representation of aristocratic parasitism into a contemporary medium for exposing racial and colonial extraction. Academics like Stephen D. Arata (2002) saw the vampire as the quintessential representation of colonial fear, with the creature's blood consumption reflecting the incessant exploitation of resources and cultural essence from the oppressed. In the context of Black horror cinema, Robin R. Means Coleman (2013) contends that monstrous figures often symbolize the genuine historical and structural traumas experienced by Black communities. In this setting, the vampire surpasses conventional gothic motifs to symbolize the parasitic characteristics of white supremacy, gentrification, and cultural assimilation. By portraying the vampire as not only a physical menace but also as a catalyst for systemic exploitation, the genre offers a critical perspective to analyze how racial subjugation is perpetuated through the ongoing appropriation of Black bodies, environments, and cultural expressions.

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological paradigm, originally designed to examine class reproduction in tangible society, has been progressively appropriated by media and film scholars to interpret the spatial and corporeal dynamics of power depicted on screen through his concepts of habitus, capital, and field. Rodney Benson (1999) asserts that field theory offers a comprehensive framework for media studies by revealing the underlying structural principles that regulate cultural environments and social interactions. In qualitative film analysis, researchers employ Bourdieu's triad to transcend superficial textual representation, examining how characters physically manifest their social positioning (habitus) and how they navigate power through the accumulation, conversion, or denial of symbolic resources (capital) (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). This approach enables a thorough micro-sociological analysis of cinema by conceptualizing the cinematic environment, such as a localized community or a culturally specific venue, as a contested "field." Bourdieu's perspective, when applied to horror narratives of invasion, redirects the analytical emphasis from the spectacle of the monster to the structural dynamics of spatial dominance, border regulation, and cultural dispossession.

METHOD

The research utilizes a qualitative approach; its primary aim is to interpret and understand how *Sinners* represents racial inequality, cultural appropriation, and domination through narrative, character, and visual symbolism. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate when the researcher seeks to explore the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem and to develop a rich, contextualised understanding of complex phenomena (Creswell, 2014). An approach for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Research will concerns how power, inequality, and cultural processes are symbolically represented. A qualitative design is therefore appropriate because it allows the researcher to engage deeply with meanings, symbols, and interpretations embedded in the object of study.

Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research typically involves studying an issue in a natural or contextual setting, building a complex and holistic picture, analysing words or visual materials, and reporting detailed, rich descriptions. In line with this, the present study treats the film *Sinners* as a cultural text to be interpreted rather than as data to be quantified. The focus is on how social concepts such as habitus, capital, symbolic violence, and racial reproduction can be read and understood through the film, and how these concepts help reveal structures of domination and inequality. A qualitative design enables the researcher to relate theoretical constructs to the film in a flexible and interpretive way, without being limited by predetermined categories or numerical indicators.

Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdel argue that qualitative research is most appropriate when the researcher seeks to understand how people construct meaning in a particular context, emphasising depth, interpretation, and the connection between data and theoretical perspectives (Tisdell et al., 2025). In this study, meaning is explored through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts habitus, capital, symbolic violence, and racial reproduction, and how these are reflected and articulated in the film *Sinners*. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to move interpretively between theory and the filmic text, using Bourdieu's framework to guide the reading of the film while allowing the film to provide concrete material for illustrating, nuancing, and critically engaging with the theory. In this way, the research design aims not at statistical generalisation but at a rich, theoretically informed understanding of how social realities and structures of domination are symbolically constructed in the object of study.

The core data gathering entailed methodical and repeated viewings of Sinners to transcend superficial narrative summaries. This repeated observation technique facilitated the isolation and micro-analysis of distinct cinematic elements, including mise-en-scène, character placement, lighting contrast, sound design, and confrontation choreography. The study rigorously correlates abstract theoretical assertions with tangible, verifiable visual and audio data from the film through repeated examination of these scenes. The analysis utilizes Pierre Bourdieu's triad of habitus, capital, and field as the foundational theoretical framework, while concurrently integrating complementary critical ideas for a comprehensive interpretation. Bourdieu's concept of habitus is analyzed in conjunction with Simone Browne's historical framework about the surveillance of Black life and Elijah Anderson's sociological notion of "the white space". The examination of cultural capital is further substantiated by Tara J. Yosso's critical race theory framework of "community cultural wealth". The triangulation of sociological, geographical, and critical racial theories precludes a unilateral interpretation of the text, hence substantiating the conclusions through various recognized academic frameworks.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In *Sinners*, racial inequality is not shown as random bias or personal animosity, but as a fundamental idea that shapes the universe of the movie. The cinematic form is inherently structured for domination: mise-en-scène, spatial distance, blocking, lighting contrasts, and sound design consistently delineate who is granted ease, visibility, and authority, so conveying power as much through frame and rhythm as through discourse. In this way, the movie shows how representation works as a "system of meaning" that makes social relationships seem regular and understandable, not just stated (Hall, 1997). Black cultural expression, especially singing and assembling as a group, may be both good and bad. They can be places of life and tradition, but they can also be places where recognition and extraction meet, and where appreciation can be used to dominate people.

This conflict corresponds with Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, wherein domination is most efficacious when perceived as legitimate and natural rather than overtly coercive (Pierre Bourdieu, 1990). The video also highlights the everyday systems that keep racial control in place, like being vigilant, holding back, and the fact that "safe" locations are

not always safe. This is similar to Browne's point that modern power is based on lengthy histories of watching and controlling Black existence (Browne, 2015). By using repetition, recurring boundaries, bodily tightening, and new incursions. *Sinners* shows how racial hierarchy reproduces itself over time. It shows that inequality is not only depicted but also made to look normal, showing how domination continues to exist beneath the surface of cultural admiration and symbolic inclusion.

The racial domination staged in *Sinners* is not expressed through a single mechanism but unfolds through several interlocking forms that operate at once. Some moments emphasize what characters carry in their bodies and instincts, others highlight what is treated as valuable and worth seizing, and others reveal how the space itself is structured to reward certain presences while constraining others. Taken together, these forms make the film's inequality feel both immediate and systemic, as if it is produced by the way people move, the way value circulates, and the way the world is arranged. This framework provides a clear bridge into the three analytical subchapters that follow.

Habitus

Picture 1. The first time vampires came to the juke joint

The first entrance of the white vampires into the juke joint can be read as an instance where habitus becomes visible at the level of the body, because domination begins to operate 'before' any explicit violence occurs. The juke joint initially functions as a culturally coded Black space, an arena where speech, music, rhythm, and social warmth express belonging and relative safety. Yet once the vampires arrive, the scene frames their presence as an immediate 'reordering of comfort': bodies tense, conversations stall, and the "normal" ease of movement narrows into restraint. This sudden bodily recalibration fits Pierre Bourdieu's definition of habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" and "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures." (Passeron, 1977). In other words, the space does not need to be physically attacked for danger to be felt; the social history of racial power is already stored in practical bodily tendencies, learned readiness, caution, and self-monitoring.

The film underlines this shift through what the vampires say' and how others respond. When Smoke challenges their presence implicitly, reading them as a threat, Remmick performs innocence through liberal language: "We believe in equality. And music. … We just came to play… and have a good time." (Ryan Coogler, 2025, 01:02:57). This matters sociologically because it is a classic opening for symbolic violence: domination enters as friendliness, artistry, and reasonableness, making resistance look "irrational" or "unwelcoming." Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as a "gentle" form of power that works through misrecognition

through atmosphere, posture, and what feels socially "appropriate" rather than through immediate force (Pierre Bourdieu, 2001). The juke joint scene matches that logic: power is exercised first as a redistribution of ease and unease, not as open assault.

The sequence becomes even clearer when the vampires use performance to negotiate entry. Remmick proposes, "Let me show ya!" (Ryan Coogler, 2025, 01:03:07). And the trio begins "Pick Poor Robin Clean" at the door. The lyrics (delivered jauntily) operate like a social wedge: the vampires turn music into a credential, a way to appear harmless and entertaining while testing the room's boundaries. This is precisely how domination can begin to operate 'before' violence: the invaders do not force the field to change by attacking it; they coax the field into changing itself by pushing the hosts into small, prudent adjustments that watching, pausing, evaluating, managing risk.

Picture 2. Stack is enjoying the performance but not smoke

This is where a comparison between Smoke's and Stack's dispositions sharpens the point about habitus. From the scene above (01:03:10), the screenplay explicitly separates their responses in the moment: 'Stack smiling and vibing the music, Smoke Stand still and defensive. Smoke reads the situation with protective suspicion; his body and judgment align with a 'defensive orientation' toward threat. Stack, by contrast, is portrayed as more socially receptive in the doorway exchange, willing to entertain the possibility that the performance is simply "a good time." And making the others caught up in music too. Right before Smoke interrupts, put in Bourdieusian terms, Smoke's habitus appears as a trained readiness to anticipate domination and to block entry into the space; Stack's appears as a more accommodating disposition that temporarily suspends that defensive posture, even enjoying the vampires' performance as if cultural exchange could remain neutral.

That difference is not just personality; it shows how habitus can vary within a shared environment. Both brothers inhabit the same racial field, but they do not embody it identically. Smoke's stance suggests a habitus structured by repeated exposure to danger (a body trained to scan, doubt, and control access). Stack's stance, in contrast, leans toward entrepreneurship, sociability, and the hope that skillful performance can be taken at face value at least for a moment. The tragedy is that the vampires exploit exactly this opening: their "welcome" is produced not by overt force, but by the room's own micro-adjustments and by one brother's greater willingness to treat the encounter as entertainment rather than intrusion.

Simone Browne's account of the long history of surveilling and regulating Black life helps explain why the juke joint's "safety" is so fragile: what looks like a neutral entrance is already loaded with historical memories of being watched, judged, and punished, so bodies respond even when no threat is spoken aloud (Browne, 2015). Elijah Anderson's idea of "the

white space" also clarifies why whiteness can carry unspoken authority over what counts as normal and who belongs; the scene visualizes that authority as an atmospheric takeover; jokes stop midair, posture stiffens, and movement becomes careful (Anderson, 2015). Importantly, this is also how racial reproduction begins to operate: domination is anticipated and managed through embodied dispositions, so inequality is maintained not only by what dominators do, but also by what the dominated are compelled to pre-emptively regulate in themselves. This aligns with work showing how domination is reproduced through everyday interactions rather than only through spectacular brutality(Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016).

In some, the juke joint entrance visualizes habitus as racially trained bodily readiness; the automatic, historically conditioned adjustment that quietly grants symbolic control to the intruders. The Smoke/Stack contrast makes that mechanism even more legible: Smoke's defensive interruption and Stack's momentary welcoming enjoyment show how domination can slip in through performance, politeness, and internal differences in disposition, well before the narrative turns to open violence.

Capital

Picture 3. Annie narrates at the opening of the film

Sammie's "gift" is one of the clearest illustrations of capital in *Sinners* since the movie shows that his musical aptitude is not simply a personal talent, but also a rare, socially important resource that moves around in and out of the Black community. Sammie's gift is what Bourdieu calls "embodied cultural capital." This means that it is a skill that is "in the body," cultivated over time, inseparable from the individual who possesses it, and recognized via performance rather than credentials (Pierre Bourdieu, 1986). The opening narration already calls this ability a "community power", Annie: "There are legends of the people born with the gift of making music so true. It can pierce the veil between life and death. Conjuring the spirits from the past and the future. In ancient Ireland, they were called Fili. In Choctaw land, they call them firekeepers. And in West Africa… they're called griots. This gift can bring healing to their communities… but it also attracts evil." (Ryan Coogler, 2025, 00:00:36).

This suggests that the gift is not just for fun but also for cultural authority that is connected to memory, spirituality, and survival as a group. The juke joint is important as a field because it is where Black people turn shared traditions into social warmth, belonging, and temporary freedom. It is also where Sammie's performance becomes a source of symbolic capital (prestige, recognition, emotional legitimacy) for the whole space. Symbolic capital is never solely individual; it necessitates recognition by others. The screenplay underscores the crowd pushing forward, "hanging on every note," illustrating how Sammie's talent accrues value through collective acknowledgment (Pierre Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990).

According to critical race theory, Sammie's gift is similar to what Yosso terms "community cultural wealth": knowledge and skills that are developed in Communities of Color and help people live meaningful lives, but are often not appreciated by mainstream institutions (Yosso, 2005). *Sinners* shows that this form of capital is desirable since it is powerful and unique. This is where the vampires come in as symbols of racial control. The vampires do not immediately approach as open conquerors; they offer themselves as courteous musicians and consumers, seeking access through performance and moral discourse, which highlights how domination frequently begins as misrecognition appropriation disguised as exchange (Rogers, 2006).

Once inside the orbit of Sammie's music, the film makes their interest clear: "it also attracts evil" is not just supernatural foreshadowing but a sociological claim that the extraction of valuable Black cultural production becomes a target for those positioned to seize and convert it.

Picture 4. Remmick grabs and tries to turn Sammie into a vampire

Remmick: “You will taste the sweet pain of death. We will make beautiful music together.” (Ryan Coogler, 2025, 01:53:36). In Bourdieu’s terms, this is an attempt at forced capital conversion: the vampires want to take Sammie's cultural capital and turn it into their own symbolic power (legitimacy, charisma, enchantment) in a larger social field that still favors whites. The violence is not just that they want his body; it's that they want what his body can make: music as a way to make meaning that can bring people together, change the mood, and even (in the film's mythic logic) bring back memories. This is why the takeover is intimately related to racial reproduction. Racial reproduction occurs when the social order perpetuates itself through the repetition of the same inequitable transformations: Black cultural labor creates value, yet dominant entities appropriate this value, reclassify it as universal property, and leverage it to fortify their own status while Black producers remain exposed. This process aligns with scholarly definitions of "dominance" and "exploitation" modes, wherein a dominant group appropriates cultural forms from a subordinated group within unequal power dynamics, subsequently deriving prestige or profit from such appropriation (Rogers, 2006).

The film incorporates this logic within its overarching Jim Crow context: the juke joint's prosperity and Sammie's exceptional talent do not operate in a neutral market; rather, they exist within a racially biased economy of limitation, where "real dollars" and plantation money indicate that Black progress is inherently obstructed even prior to the vampires' arrival. Throughout that way, the vampires bring to life a larger pattern throughout history: Black expressive culture serves as a living archive and a means of survival (Gilroy, 1993), yet it is

consistently subjected to surveillance, regulation, and extraction, transforming the very resources that sustain the community into conduits for reasserting domination (Anderson, 2015; Browne, 2015). *Sinners* is especially useful for a Bourdieusian analysis because it shows how this reproduction can feel consensual at the level of interaction entry through music, admiration, "good time" and then become coercive once the dominators have leverage, which is the logic of symbolic violence: power that works through everyday legitimacy and "reasonable" persuasion while hiding the unequal structure that makes refusal costly (Pierre Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990). Sammie's gift is not just a plot point; it is the clearest sign of Black cultural capital as something that can be passed down and used in the future. The vampires' pursuit of it is an allegory for how white domination reproduces itself by taking over the means of cultural production, turning Black-created meaning into dominant legitimacy, and putting the community back in a state of vulnerability just when it seems most alive.

Field

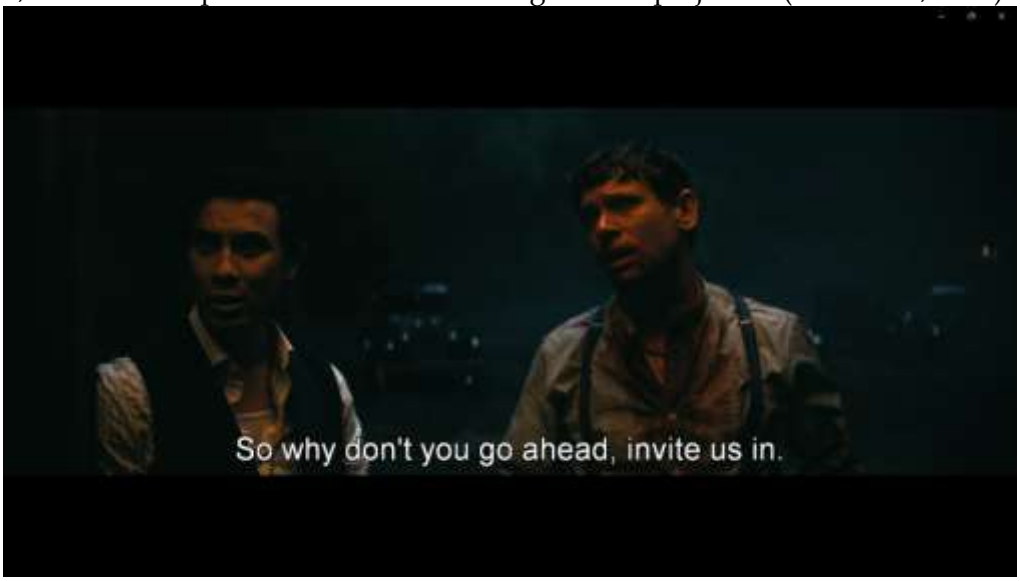
Picture 5. Remmick sings Rocky Road to Dublin

Sammie: "They playing music." Smoke: "Hey, hey… let's get back inside!." (Ryan Coogler, 2025, 01:34:07). The moment when Sammie becomes aware that music is coming from outside and Smoke immediately pulls him back into the building is important because it shows that the "outside" has already been transformed into an extension of the vampires' field: the perimeter is no longer neutral ground, but an occupied zone that reorganizes what actions are possible and what risks can be taken. The screenplay emphasizes Remmick at the center of "concentric circles" of vampiric patrons, with the group cheering while Stack, Mary, and others dance and the musicians play "The Rocky Road to Dublin," culminating in Remmick's increasingly elaborate Irish step and "Gaelic style" movement framed as a recovered tradition. The vampires no longer function as outsiders knocking at the door, but as a collective that controls the terrain beyond the juke joint and forces the Black characters to experience their own space as besieged.

In Bourdieu's sense, a field is not just a location but a structured arena of relations, positions, rules, and struggles over who gets to set the terms of what counts as legitimate presence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Read through field theory, this is domination as 'spatial and symbolic expansion': the vampires enlarge the effective boundaries of the conflict so that Black safety is compressed inward, while white/vampiric power enjoys outward mobility, celebration, and command. This is exactly what Lefebvre means by the "production of space." Space is not merely where power happens, but a medium through which power is organized and felt (Lafebvre, 1991).

Picture 6. Vampires perform an Irish cultural festivity

The choice of "The Rocky Road to Dublin" intensifies that organization because it is a historically Irish song associated with Irish cultural identity; staging it with an Irish dance signals that the vampires are not simply invading Black space, but 'overwriting its atmospheric sovereignty with a performance of white European heritage.' (Liam Clancy, 2022). That detail matters for racial reproduction because it visually normalizes the idea that whiteness can move across cultural fields, carrying its traditions as universally performable and publicly affirmed, even when those traditions function as a banner of occupation. Sara Ahmed's argument that whiteness operates as an "orientation" a way bodies are enabled to extend into space, take up room, and feel at home, helps clarify why the vampires' joyful dancing reads like a victory ritual, almost like a pack celebrating a successful hunt, while the Black characters experience the same moment as a tightening enclosure and impending capture (Ahmed, 2007). The field is thus restructured: the outside becomes a stage of white symbolic confidence and coordination, while the inside becomes a pressured refuge where Black survival requires restriction, suspicion, and self-policing. In that reversal, domination is not only violent; it is also 'world-making', because it reorganizes the environment so that white collective joy and Black collective fear appear as the "natural" emotional distribution of the night; an affective pattern that mirrors how racial hierarchy reproduces itself through repeated, embodied experience rather than a single act of prejudice (Anderson, 2015).



Picture 7. Remmick and Bo Chow persuading Grace

After the vampires establish dominance over the external field, the "invite us in" sequence shows the next step of field conquest: 'forcing a rule-change at the boundary' by manufacturing consent from those trapped inside. Boundary rules are the field's gatekeeping mechanisms; they determine who can enter, under what conditions, and with what legitimacy (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Here, Remmick's strategy is not to announce himself as conqueror, but to reframe invasion as rescue, "I am your way out… This world already left you for dead. Won't let you build. Won't let you fellowship. We will do just that. Together… forever." (Ryan Coogler, 2025, 01:39:58). At the same time, Bo Chow presses Grace to turn the boundary into an act of compliance rather than protection, "It's better this way, baby. So why don't you go ahead, invite us in." (Ryan Coogler, 2025, 01:40:16). This persuasive language is textbook symbolic domination because it presents the dominant order as the only realistic future, making refusal look irrational or self-destructive even before the explicit threat arrives (Pierre Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990). Crucially, Remmick's speech ties field control to a racialized horizon of impossibility that your world will never allow Black flourishing, so surrender can be framed as pragmatic "freedom" rather than capitulation. That is how racial reproduction works at the level of field: domination renews itself by shrinking the imaginable alternatives until incorporation into the dominant system appears as the only viable path.

When Remmick backs persuasion with terror, the coercive core becomes undeniable, "You should listen to him, Grace… or listen to me. 'Cause I know everything he knows now. And I want you to let us in there. Or we gon' go to the grocery store and pay little Lisa a visit." (Ryan Coogler, 2025, 01:40:23). At this point, the earlier outside performance (Irish song, group coordination, choreographed joy) reads as more than atmosphere; it is the spectacle of a field already won on the perimeter, now pressuring the interior to collapse from within. In cultural terms, the vampires' method also aligns with appropriation scholarship, showing that "exchange" becomes domination when unequal power decides the terms of access and makes refusal costly (Rogers, 2006). The result is a cinematic model of racial reproduction: Black space is created as a temporary zone of cultural autonomy, then surrounded, aesthetically overwritten, and finally penetrated through a blend of symbolic persuasion and credible threat, so that each stage makes the next easier and hierarchy reappears as the predictable outcome of how the field is structured.

Discussion

Habitus, capital, and field do not function as separate "themes"; they operate together as a 'Racial Inequality' that keeps racial hierarchy renewing itself even when Black characters build spaces of cultural autonomy.

First, 'habitus' explains why domination takes hold so quickly and so quietly: the Black characters' bodies register intrusion through tension, caution, and self-monitoring, which shows how historical power becomes "second nature" and guides action before conscious choice (Passeron, 1977; Pierre Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990). This matters for racial reproduction because domination does not require constant open violence if the dominated are repeatedly pushed into anticipatory restraint, reducing spontaneity, narrowing movement, and making survival depend on careful self-management. That embodied adjustment resembles what Browne describes as the long historical normalization of surveillance over Black life, where being watched and regulated becomes an expected condition rather than an exceptional event (Browne, 2015). In the film, this embodied readiness makes the juke joint vulnerable: even as it is culturally vibrant, it is psychologically and physically primed for takeover, because the cost of misreading white presence as "harmless" can be fatal.

At the same time, 'capital' explains what the vampires want and why their domination is not random: they pursue what carries value in the Black community: music, reputation, spiritual authority, and the ability to generate collective feeling, because these resources can be captured and converted into the vampires' own legitimacy and control (Pierre Bourdieu, 1986). This aligns with appropriation research, arguing that what appears as cultural "exchange" becomes domination when unequal power can extract value, redefine meanings, and benefit disproportionately (Rogers, 2006). Sammie's gift, for example, reads as embodied cultural capital that sustains tradition and community, yet it becomes a target for seizure; once

that capital is captured, it no longer strengthens the community's autonomy but feeds the dominator's power. In short, habitus supplies the vulnerability (embodied readiness to constrain oneself), while capital explains the motive (what can be seized, converted, and used to control).

Finally, 'field' explains why these struggles keep repeating rather than ending with one confrontation: the juke joint is a bounded social arena with rules of belonging, but the vampires repeatedly attempt to 'expand and rewrite the rules', first by surrounding the space and controlling its perimeter, then by pressuring insiders to "invite" them in, effectively forcing a boundary rule-change that collapses Black autonomy from within (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Boundary studies emphasize that fields reproduce inequality by controlling access that who may enter, who sets norms, and whose presence is treated as legitimate (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). *Sinners* dramatizes this by showing how white power does not simply attack Black space; it pressures the space to justify itself under a dominant gaze, making refusal costly and compliance appear "reasonable." This is where racial reproduction becomes clearest: when habitus (embodied caution) fits the field's constraints (precarious boundaries) and capital flows toward the dominator (seizure and conversion of cultural value), inequality regenerates as routine. The film thus echoes structural racism arguments that racial hierarchy persists not mainly through individual bigotry but through organized systems that distribute vulnerability and legitimacy unevenly (Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Omi & Winant, 2014). In *Sinners*, the vampires symbolize that system: they turn admiration into leverage, culture into capture, and space into enclosure, so that the community's most life-giving practices, like music, gathering, and tradition, are precisely where domination re-enters and reproduces itself.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that Sinners (2025) reconstructs vampire fiction as a representation of racial reproduction through spatial control, cultural appropriation, and embodied discipline. Using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field, the analysis reveals how racial inequality is maintained through subtle practices of self-monitoring, symbolic exploitation, and territorial domination. The film illustrates that Black cultural expressions, particularly music and collective joy, are simultaneously celebrated and appropriated, transforming cultural strength into a site of re-extraction and control. Furthermore, domination operates not only through explicit violence but also through everyday mechanisms that regulate comfort, legitimacy, and belonging. This study contributes to film and cultural studies by showing how horror cinema can expose hidden structures of symbolic violence and racial hierarchy through cinematic world-building. The findings also highlight that systemic racism persists through adaptive and often invisible forms of power, emphasizing the importance of recognizing how cultural appreciation can conceal ongoing structures of oppression and inequality.

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