

The Case of the Missing Interracial Romance: An Ideological Critique of *Kiss the Girls*

by William B. Hart

The Birth of a Nation may be the earliest and certainly is one of the most famous films adapted from a novel set in North Carolina. The 1915 film directed by D.W. Griffith is based on novels by North Carolina author Thomas Dixon, Jr., in which Ku Klux Klan members are depicted as heroes. But North Carolinians can also perhaps lay claim to the more progressive *In the Heat of the Night* (1965), the novel by John Ball, which is set in “the heat of the Carolinas in August,” although the 1967 film adaptation is moved to Sparta, Mississippi.¹ In both novel and film, *In the Heat of the Night* is a story of a big-city, black police detective trying to solve a murder in a small, closed, racist, Southern community. *The Birth of a Nation*, *In the Heat of the Night*, and a more recent novel, James Patterson’s *Kiss the Girls* all explore, in different times and ways, the Old North State’s complex racial history.

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ABOVE James Patterson

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¹ John Ball, *In the Heat of the Night* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 1; *In the Heat of the Night*, adapt. of novel by John Ball, Dir. Norman Jewison, Perf. Sidney Poitier and Rod Steiger (Mirisch, 1967). The 1988–94 television series adaptation also retained the Mississippi setting, instead of the novel’s “Carolina” setting. *The Birth of a Nation*, adapt. of novels by Thomas Dixon, Dir. W.D. Griffith, Prod. David W. Griffith Corp., Perf. Lillian Gish, Mae Marsh, and Henry B. Walthall (Epoch Producing Corporation, 1915).