



ROMANCE, POWER AND POLITICS: A QUEER ANALYSIS OF RED, WHITE & ROYAL BLUE

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

This paper examines the significance of queer representation in contemporary media through an analysis of the 2023 film *Red, White & Royal Blue*, highlighting the film's sociopolitical and cultural relevance. Grounded in queer theory, the analysis illustrates how this film subverts hegemonic heteronormative narratives while offering nuanced portrayals of LGBT+ characters. Focusing on the development of its protagonists – Alex Claremont-Diaz and Prince Henry of England – the study explores themes of identity formation, power dynamics, and the interplay between public and private life. It argues that *Red, White & Royal Blue* helps normalize LGBT+ representation in mainstream cinema and challenges traditional notions of masculinity and national identity. By interweaving media spectacle and politics with what might be called “queer diplomacy,” the film demonstrates the power of popular culture to shift public perceptions of queer lives. Ultimately, *Red, White & Royal Blue* emerges as a significant medium in the ongoing struggle for inclusion, visibility, and equality.

Keywords: *Queer Representation; LGBT+ Visibility; Cinema and Media; Intersectionality; Sociopolitical Commentary*

Introduction

Queer representation in the media remains crucial because it shapes societal perceptions of the LGBT+ community. Historically, mainstream media offered only limited or stereotypical portrayals of queer individuals, often relegating them to subtext or token roles. In recent decades, however, there has been a decisive shift toward more authentic and varied depictions of LGBT+ lives. This positive trend challenges entrenched heteronormative norms and promotes greater visibility for marginalized groups. Such progress is not without complexities, but it has allowed many queer viewers to feel included as a “normal” part of popular culture – an effect noted by media scholars in discussions of LGBT+ visibility and normalization (Griffin 2018).

Red, White & Royal Blue, directed by Matthew López and based on Casey McQuiston's novel, exemplifies this cultural shift. The film centers on a same-sex romance that unfolds under the glare of international politics – a setting traditionally reserved for heterosexual storylines. By focusing on the relationship between Alex Claremont-Diaz, the Mexican-American First Son of the United States, and Prince Henry, the narrative boldly intertwines personal identity with political symbolism. The very premise – queer love at the highest levels of government and royalty – poses incisive questions. How does the film challenge heteronormative narratives by placing a gay/bisexual romance at the center of a high-profile political and royal storyline? And what sociopolitical messages emerge from its portrayal of LGBT+ identities under the spotlight of national media and international diplomacy? To address these questions, this study combines close reading of the film's narrative and characters with a queer theoretical framework, particularly the concept of heteronormativity and the notion of queer counterpublics (Warner 2002). Rather than provide a standalone theoretical exposition, this framework is woven into the analysis of *Red, White & Royal Blue*'s plot and personas to illuminate how the film constructs – and at times subverts – norms of gender, sexuality, and power. In examining Alex's and Henry's journeys, the paper considers how the film undermines a hegemonic heterosexual, patriarchal order while presenting a more inclusive vision of leadership and love.

Plot Overview

Red, White & Royal Blue follows Alex Claremont-Diaz, the charismatic and ambitious son of Ellen Claremont, the first female President of the United States (a Democrat), and Prince Henry, the reserved and dutiful grandson of the British monarch. An international incident at a royal wedding sets the plot in motion: initially rivals, Alex and Henry have a heated argument that leads to them accidentally toppling a towering wedding cake, sparking a minor diplomatic scandal. To smooth over the fallout,

the two are forced to feign a public friendship. What begins as a reluctantly staged camaraderie soon deepens into a genuine bond and, eventually, a secret romance.

As Alex and Henry navigate their growing feelings, they confront intense external pressures tied to their public roles. Alex – who, prior to meeting Henry, had some same-sex experimentation but never openly identified as queer – has not yet fully come to terms with being bisexual. He struggles with the implications of coming out during his mother’s re-election campaign in a socially divided America, and he worries how his sexuality might affect the political calculus. Henry, meanwhile, has long known that he is gay but faces the rigid expectations of the British royal family, which demand that he remain closeted and uphold a traditional, “proper” royal image. Their relationship is thus fraught with challenges from both sides of the Atlantic. Ultimately, a breach of their privacy forces the issue: a political rival leaks Alex and Henry’s personal emails, effectively outing their relationship to the world. Confronted with this crisis, the two young men choose to take control of the narrative rather than deny the truth. They publicly acknowledge their love in a coordinated, courageous announcement. This climactic decision to embrace authenticity over duty – personal happiness over convention – not only solidifies their bond but also transforms them into symbols of change. In the aftermath, the film shows crowds in both the U.S. and the U.K. celebrating the couple (for example, well-wishers gathering with rainbow flags outside Buckingham Palace), suggesting that their openness has a unifying and positive impact on the public in both nations.

Challenging Heteronormativity

At its core, *Red, White & Royal Blue* disrupts heteronormative frameworks by centering a queer romance within two of society’s most conservative institutions – high-level politics and royalty. Both the White House and the British monarchy are traditionally imbued with values reinforcing heteronormativity, where power, legacy, and duty are tied to heterosexual marriage, procreation, and the continuation of family lineage. By positioning Alex and Henry’s same-sex relationship at the heart of these arenas, the film makes a radical departure from expectation, presenting queer love as both valid and vitally important to the narrative’s emotional and political stakes.

In many royal or political dramas, a heterosexual pairing (often through marriage) serves to reinforce national unity or social order. *Red, White & Royal Blue*, in contrast, posits that a queer love story can carry equal weight in shaping national narratives and personal integrity. Henry’s love for Alex becomes an act of resistance against the oppressive traditions of the monarchy, which seek to control his personal life for the sake of public image. By eventually coming out and prioritizing his relationship over royal expectations, Henry openly defies heteronormative constraints – his queerness becomes a source of personal liberation rather than a threat to social stability. Similarly, Alex’s bisexuality is portrayed as an intrinsic part of his identity that both enriches and complicates his political ambitions. Rather than concealing his sexuality to preserve public approval, Alex ultimately embraces his love for Henry, rejecting the unspoken mandate that the First Son must be (or at least appear) heterosexual. Their love story thus becomes a narrative of empowerment in which queer desire is not sidelined but celebrated, offering a vision of a future in which queer individuals can occupy positions of power without sacrificing their identities.

The film also comments on the performative nature of heteronormativity. In the beginning, both protagonists *perform* the roles expected of them: Alex projects a hyper-competent, womanizing persona fitting the mold of a young political star, and Henry maintains the image of the dutiful, impeccably proper prince. These public performances align with the idea that gender and sexuality are sustained through repetitive, socially prescribed acts (Butler 2004). Alex’s early portrayal as a confident ladies’ man and consummate political insider, for instance, adheres to traditional performances of masculinity and heteronormativity. Henry, for his part, conforms to a stoic, reserved demeanor – avoiding vulnerability and hiding any aspect of his life that might disrupt the image of a straight royal heir. However, as queer theorists note, such binary categories (gay/straight, masculine/feminine, public/private) are inherently unstable social constructions (Sedgwick 2008). The film illustrates this instability by allowing Alex’s and Henry’s performative façades to crack under the force of their genuine connection. Alex’s journey of self-discovery – realizing he is bisexual and admitting his feelings for Henry – marks a break from the “script” he thought he had to follow. Henry’s private struggle and eventual public coming-out similarly dismantle the false binary between what a prince must appear to be and who he truly is. In essence, *Red, White & Royal Blue* shows how queer authenticity can disrupt and redefine normative categories. By blurring and ultimately breaking down the oppositions between public and private, political and personal, and heterosexual and queer, the film challenges viewers to rethink the supposed immutability of those boundaries.

Cinematic Techniques and the Queer Gaze

The subversion of heteronormativity in *Red, White & Royal Blue* is further reinforced through the film’s cinematic techniques. The visual and narrative style – its mise-en-scène, dialogue, and cinematography – creates an intimate, empathetic portrayal of Alex and Henry’s relationship while also underscoring the broader political implications of their romance. In other words, the filmmaking itself invites the audience to take the couple’s love seriously on both a personal and symbolic level.

From a film-theory perspective, *Red, White & Royal Blue* engages with the concept of the gaze, especially as articulated by Laura Mulvey’s theory of the “male gaze” (Mulvey 1975). In classical Hollywood cinema, as Mulvey describes, the camera often objectifies women for a presumed male viewer’s pleasure. Here, however, the camera’s gaze is thoughtfully queered. The cinematography frequently lingers on Alex and Henry – on their glances, touches, and silent expressions – in a way that centers

their mutual desire and emotional resonance rather than objectifying them for an outside viewer. In the film's romantic scenes, the camera frames both men with equal tenderness, suggesting a gaze of reciprocity. We as the audience are encouraged to empathize with both characters simultaneously rather than to inhabit the perspective of one desiring subject and the other as object. This effectively subverts the traditional heteronormative gaze: neither Alex nor Henry is reduced to an object; both are presented as whole subjects experiencing and returning love. The result is a portrayal of queer desire that is respectful and normalized—intimate desire between two men is treated with the same cinematic reverence typically reserved for heterosexual romance. This reconfiguration of the gaze exemplifies how a film can implicitly challenge viewer biases, training the audience to see queer love not as a sensationalized spectacle or an “other” to be gawked at, but as simply love.

Queer Desire in the Public Sphere

One of the most compelling aspects of *Red, White & Royal Blue* is how it explores queer desire within the public sphere and under the unforgiving eye of the media. The film portrays Alex and Henry's secret romance as a form of queer counterpublicity, invoking Michael Warner's concept of “counterpublics.” A counterpublic, in Warner's terms, is a subaltern public sphere where members of marginalized groups can cultivate their own discourse and identity in resistance to the norms of the dominant public sphere (Warner 2002). In the narrative, the intimate world that Alex and Henry create for themselves – through private emails, clandestine meetings, and whispered phone calls – functions as a counterpublic space carved out within (and against) the highly regulated arenas of state and monarchy. This private bubble is an “alternate world” of personal truth operating in parallel to their official duties and public personae.

Crucially, Alex and Henry ultimately decide to bring this counterpublic into the open by coming out publicly as a couple. In doing so, they force the dominant public spheres of American politics and British royalty to contend with a queer presence in their midst. Their very public declaration of love – splashed across headlines and news broadcasts – disrupts the heteronormative order of these institutions. It asserts that queer people exist even at the highest levels of power and will no longer be kept invisible. In this sense, *Red, White & Royal Blue* dramatizes, in real time, the creation of a queer-inclusive public narrative. Over the course of the story, Alex and Henry transform from passive subjects of the Crown and the Presidency into active agents who redefine what (and who) is represented in the public image of their nations.

The media plays an ambivalent but ultimately pivotal role in this process. Throughout much of the film, news outlets and paparazzi function as a double-edged sword: they are antagonists that heighten the conflict, but they also become tools that the protagonists cleverly repurpose for empowerment. Early on, tabloids and gossip websites eagerly fuel rumors about Alex and Henry's supposed rivalry and later their friendship, illustrating how media pressure pushes public figures to conform to expected narratives. This relentless scrutiny reinforces the idea that any divergence from the norm – for instance, even a hint of queerness – will be sensationalized. Indeed, the fear of exposure by the press initially keeps Henry from acting on his feelings and leads Alex to deny his own, creating an atmosphere of anxiety. However, as Alex and Henry grow more confident in their relationship, they decide to step into the spotlight and use the media's attention to their advantage. By choosing to openly confirm their romance (on their own terms rather than via leak), they seize control of the story. In the film's triumphant turning point, the press becomes a conduit for queer visibility rather than for scandal. The sight of the First Son of the U.S. and the Prince of England openly in love carries profound symbolic power – images of them as a proud couple are broadcast worldwide, contributing to what one might call a broader cultural softening of attitudes toward queer relationships. Their visibility as a high-profile queer couple feeds into the broader cultural shift toward recognizing and validating same-sex relationships in the public eye.

It is worth noting that this storyline resonates with real-world patterns of queer visibility in media and public life. In an era when openly LGBT+ celebrities and public figures are increasingly common, such representations in mass media can have tangible sociopolitical impact. High-profile coming-out moments have, in many cases, shifted public opinion and challenged lingering prejudices. Of course, increased visibility does not erase the need to navigate backlash; the film itself shows that Alex and Henry must carefully manage their public image, underscoring that queer visibility remains a negotiated space – one that can invite both enthusiastic support and harsh criticism. Ultimately, *Red, White & Royal Blue* presents a hopeful vision: that through courage and savvy use of the media, queer individuals can claim their place in the mainstream public sphere rather than exist solely in the margins of counterpublics. The film imagines a world in which a love story like Alex and Henry's not only survives public scrutiny but also thrives in it, thereby pushing the culture toward greater acceptance.

Character Development and Identity

Alex Claremont-Diaz: Embracing a Bisexual Identity in Politics

At the film's outset, Alex Claremont-Diaz is presented as the golden boy of American politics. Groomed from a young age by virtue of being the First Son, he embodies the hopes of a progressive, media-conscious White House. Alex is intelligent, outspoken, and exceedingly charismatic. He has also been raised with the expectation that he will follow his mother into public service, and in many ways he represents a modern American ideal – young, gifted, and civically minded, with a biracial heritage that symbolizes a more inclusive American identity. (Alex's mother is White American and his father is Mexican, making Alex distinctly biracial in a political arena still largely dominated by white figures.) Yet for all the apparent inclusivity of his background, Alex's public persona at the start of the story is firmly rooted in heteronormativity. He has a long-time girlfriend as the film begins, is frequent fodder for gossip columns linking him to various women, and generally projects a confident, straight

masculine charm in his public appearances. In short, he is performing the role of “ideal First Son” as conventionally defined: attractive, affable, and (seemingly) heterosexual.

The film uses Alex’s character arc to explore what happens when an individual’s authentic self diverges from the role society has scripted for him. As Alex develops feelings for Henry, he is compelled to question aspects of his identity that he had previously taken for granted. His bisexuality initially comes as a surprise even to himself – portrayed in the film as a dawning realization after an unexpectedly charged encounter with Henry. This realization forces Alex into a period of intense self-reflection, as he must reconcile the image of who he thought he was (and who others expect him to be) with who he actually is. He finds himself grappling with the dissonance between being the perfect First Son – an image that implicitly demanded heterosexuality – and being true to his newly acknowledged sexual orientation. The stakes of this internal conflict are heightened by the external context of his life: Alex knows that coming out would not be a purely personal decision, but a public one with political ramifications. With his mother in a heated re-election campaign, every aspect of Alex’s behavior could influence public opinion. This pressure adds a layer of “role confusion” for Alex, as he weighs his personal need for honesty against the potential impact on his mother’s career and his own future in politics.

Alex’s experiences also bring a subtle but meaningful exploration of intersectionality into the narrative. In addition to being bisexual, Alex is the son of a powerful female politician and is of mixed race. These facets of his identity intersect and shape both his worldview and how others perceive him. The traditional image of an American political leader is predominantly white, male, and straight; even before his bisexuality is revealed, Alex’s very existence challenges two of those three characteristics. His Mexican American heritage is a point of pride for him and his family, but it also subjects him (and his mother’s administration) to racist undertones in political opposition. When his sexuality enters the equation, Alex must contend with multiple layers of potential prejudice – homophobia stacked on top of racism. The film explicitly acknowledges this intersectional challenge. His character exemplifies Kimberlé Crenshaw’s insight that individuals can experience overlapping systems of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw 1991). Alex benefits from certain privileges (wealth, education, proximity to power) even as he faces bias due to his ethnicity and sexual orientation. By ultimately coming out and leveraging his public platform to advocate acceptance, Alex symbolically breaks the mold of what an American political figure can look like. His arc suggests that embracing one’s full self – racial, sexual, and otherwise – can redefine public notions of leadership and representation in a more inclusive direction.

Importantly, Alex’s character journey is not framed as a purely personal or private fulfillment; it is depicted as politically and culturally consequential. His eventual public coming-out scene in the film doubles as a speech for equality and honesty in public life. In this climactic moment, we see Alex standing before a crowd (and cameras), pointedly rejecting the advice of campaign handlers who told him to “deny, deny, deny.” Instead, he speaks openly and unapologetically about who he is. In doing so, Alex transforms from a young man carefully managing his image to fit America’s expectations into a leader challenging America to expand its expectations. By telling the world the truth about himself, Alex reframes the political capital he has accumulated – his popularity, charm, and connections – and spends it in service of LGBT+ visibility. Effectively, his message is: *This is who I am. If you embrace me as a public figure and a leader, you must also embrace this part of me.* Far from ruining his prospects, Alex’s honesty ends up enhancing his authenticity and appeal. The film implies that his bold stand energizes young voters and LGBT+ supporters and gains him new allies. Alex’s fear that coming out would cost him public goodwill is proven wrong; instead, he emerges as a trailblazer for a more inclusive kind of politics. His personal victory thus intertwines with a broader narrative about changing hearts and minds. The hopeful note on which his story ends suggests that the electorate (and the public at large), as represented by numerous supportive characters in the film, is ready to follow the lead of someone who exemplifies integrity and inclusivity. In Alex, we see a character who not only finds personal wholeness but also uses that authenticity to advocate for social change.

Prince Henry: Duty, Tradition, and Authenticity

Prince Henry’s character offers a contrasting, yet complementary, journey to Alex’s. Unlike Alex (for whom embracing a queer identity is a recent development), Henry has been certain of his sexuality for years – he knows that he is gay well before the story begins – but he lives in an environment that forces him to suppress that truth. As a prince in the British royal family, Henry occupies a station defined by centuries of tradition, duty, and public service. The monarchy, as depicted in the film, places a premium on discretion and the appearance of propriety above all else; any deviation from the narrow norm is treated as a potential threat to institutional stability. Thus, Henry’s personal desires conflict directly with the role scripted for him by birth. The unwritten rules for a prince like Henry are clear: he is expected to eventually marry a woman of appropriate background, produce heirs, avoid any whiff of scandal, and generally present an image of dignified (heterosexual) decorum.

Throughout much of the film, Henry is caught in a painful dilemma between staying true to himself and fulfilling what is expected of him as a royal. Out of a sense of duty and fear of consequences, he initially chooses to conform. We see that for years Henry has dutifully played the part of the perfect prince, outwardly adhering to the life path dictated by his family and station. The cost of this compliance is an internalized loneliness and sadness; Henry has essentially resigned himself to a life where he “can never truly be himself” in public. His agency is limited to carefully guarded private rebellions – fleeting romances kept secret and emotions he can only express behind closed doors. These private moments bring him solace but do not actually challenge the status quo that constrains him. This dynamic vividly illustrates the power of social structures over individual lives: Henry is

endowed with immense social privilege (wealth, fame, institutional honor) yet is simultaneously powerless in key aspects of his personal life because of the rigid structural expectations of monarchy. Even with all his advantages, he cannot be free while he remains in the closet.

Henry's relationship with Alex catalyzes a profound change in this situation. Falling in love gives Henry a new source of strength and a glimpse of what a life lived authentically might look like. With Alex's love and support bolstering him, Henry gradually finds the courage to confront the institutional forces that have kept him in silence. The film carefully builds Henry's resolve across several scenes – from tentative discussions about “what if” with Alex, to moments of defiance against his handlers, and ultimately to a showdown with his royal family. Henry realizes that he *does* have agency and that his choices can, in fact, reshape the narrative of what a British prince can be. When Henry decides to come out publicly alongside Alex, it is portrayed as both a personal liberation and a daring act of institutional reform. In that defining moment, Henry effectively forces the monarchy to adapt or risk public ire and irrelevance. He demonstrates that the traditions of the Crown are not immutable natural laws but practices maintained by people – and that those same people (himself included) can choose to change them. The story hints strongly that the British public rallies to Henry's side: the outpouring of support he receives suggests that the monarchy's attempt to maintain an outdated image has less public backing than does Henry's honesty. By taking this leap of faith, Henry upends the long-standing exclusion of queer identity from Britain's national image. His courage compels the royal institution to bend, acknowledging that even someone of Henry's stature can be gay and still fulfill the role of prince. In the optimistic universe of the film, Henry's actions transform the royal family's relationship to queerness and usher the monarchy (symbolically at least) into modernity.

Henry's arc also invites reflection on class privilege and its limits. As an aristocrat and a member of the most famous family in Britain, Henry enjoys privileges that few can imagine. He has security, wealth, and a platform that comes with historic significance. Yet *those very privileges become his chains* in the context of his sexual orientation. The film's nuanced message is that social privilege does not guarantee personal freedom – especially under the weight of tradition and heteronormativity. Henry may be a prince, but without the freedom to love whom he loves, his status brings him little happiness. When he finally stands before the world, hand in hand with Alex, we see an immense weight lifted from his shoulders. Nicholas Galitzine's performance (as Henry) in that moment radiates relief and joy, conveying how suffocating the closet had been for Henry all those years. The narrative “rewards” Henry's bravery by depicting a groundswell of public acceptance. Viewers witness young Britons cheering for him and supportive messages flooding social media, as if to say that Henry's authenticity has inspired not only himself but also the nation. Rather than the kingdom falling into disarray, we see a hopeful scenario in which the UK – especially its younger generation – embraces their prince for who he is. This optimistic depiction suggests that Henry's openness has a unifying effect: it bridges the gap between a historically conservative institution and an increasingly progressive public. In sum, Henry's journey illustrates that even at the top of established hierarchies, living one's truth can be a revolutionary act. His story argues that authenticity can inspire change within institutions, and that personal acts of courage can reverberate outward, liberating not just the individual but also those who witness and rally behind him.

Sociopolitical Commentary: Nation, Power, and Media

Beyond its intimate romance, *Red, White & Royal Blue* functions as a sociopolitical commentary on how personal identities intersect with nationhood, diplomacy, and media in the 21st century. By placing a queer love story at the very nexus of U.S.–U.K. relations, the film invites viewers to consider how cultural narratives and “soft power” might be reshaped by the inclusion of queer identities at high levels of visibility.

Transatlantic Romance and National Identity

The romance between Alex and Henry is laden with national symbolism: each man, in effect, serves as a stand-in for his country's image. Alex is frequently described (within the story's dialogue and media) as American political royalty, and Henry is literally a British prince. Thus, their union is not seen by those around them as a purely personal matter; it is also interpreted as an alliance between nations. This facet of the story cleverly plays on the long-standing cultural fascination with the “special relationship” between the United States and the United Kingdom. Historically, as Barbara Brickman and colleagues note, love affairs and marriages between Americans and British aristocracy have often been used in fiction to symbolize or reinforce the political and cultural bonds across the Atlantic (Brickman, Jermyn, and Trost 2020). From royal-commoner marriages to diplomat romances, transatlantic pairings have been a mainstay of popular narratives for generations, reflecting and sometimes idealizing the close ties between the two nations.

What *Red, White & Royal Blue* does is take this familiar trope and update it for a modern, progressive era: here the transatlantic romance is queer, and it pointedly challenges the notion that national unity or international cooperation must hinge on heteronormative frameworks. In the film, the United States and Great Britain – represented by Alex and Henry – forge a deeper bond not through an arranged royal wedding or a traditional state visit, but through two individuals falling in love. It's a people-to-people connection that bypasses the usual diplomatic channels. The implication is that the authenticity of their relationship does more for the mutual understanding of their countries than any trade deal or treaty ever could. Their love story, as one character in the film suggests, goes beyond the personal realm and comes to represent the relations between the two world powers, the U.S. and the U.K. In essence, the film playfully subverts the old fairy-tale concept of “a prince marrying a princess to unite kingdoms.” Instead, we have a prince loving another man – and arguably uniting people more broadly around shared

ideals of love and equality. This reversal serves as a symbolic reframing: love (in this case queer love) itself becomes a diplomatic act.

This narrative choice resonates with political theory as well. It brings to mind Benedict Anderson's concept of nations as *imagined communities* (Anderson 1983). Anderson argued that nations are socially constructed through shared stories, symbols, and collective imagination rather than through any one individual's actions. In *Red, White & Royal Blue*, Alex and Henry become powerful symbols in just such an imagined community – each man comes to stand for his nation in the public imagination. When they publicly unite as a couple, it symbolically imagines a new kind of national community, one that explicitly includes queer people at the very highest level of society. The film contrasts this vision with what might be called the “canonical” national narrative (the traditional script in which the president's son courts a suitable young woman, or the prince marries a princess or at least a noblewoman). By deviating from that script, the film suggests that the fabric of the nation can stretch to include new threads – for example, a First Son with a boyfriend, a prince with a husband – without the nation's integrity tearing. In fact, the story implies that embracing diversity and truth strengthens the national fabric. The international public reaction in the movie's climax is telling: it appears largely positive, especially among younger generations. We see crowds outside Buckingham Palace waving rainbow flags and holding supportive signs, indicating a celebratory mood in the wake of Alex and Henry's announcement. This optimistic portrayal serves both as wish-fulfillment and as commentary. It is wish-fulfillment in that it imagines a world more ideal than our own sometimes is – a world where even conservative institutions readily accept change – but it's also commentary in highlighting how far public sentiment has shifted toward acceptance of LGBT+ figures. The scenario aligns with real-world trends of increasing queer visibility in politics and even in royal families (for instance, a few members of European royalty have come out publicly in recent years, and politicians like Pete Buttigieg in the U.S. have campaigned for high office as openly gay men). The film essentially dramatizes a possible next step: *What if* someone at the very core of a nation's identity (the child of a president, or a prince in line to the throne) were queer? Could that change the narrative of the nation? *Red, White & Royal Blue* posits that it not only could, but that it would change it for the better – making the nation's imagined community more inclusive and honest about who its members are.

Queer Diplomacy and Soft Power

In exploring the political dimensions of Alex and Henry's relationship, the film introduces the idea of *queer diplomacy* – the notion that personal relationships and identities can have diplomatic significance. To frame this idea in political theory, the film invokes Joseph Nye's concept of *soft power*. Soft power refers to the ability to influence others not through coercion or payment, but through attraction, persuasion, and cultural influence (Nye 2017). Traditionally, a country's soft power might be exercised via its ideals, its vibrant popular culture, or policies that inspire admiration abroad. In *Red, White & Royal Blue*, however, Alex and Henry's very public romance becomes a novel conduit of soft power. Their love story humanizes the institutions they represent and projects an image of progress and inclusivity to the world.

The film suggests that this queer romance has the potential to change hearts and minds internationally. In narrative terms, Alex and Henry's relationship is shown to influence public opinion in both countries – and even beyond – regarding what is acceptable or possible at the highest levels of society. By being high-profile and unapologetically in love, they exert a kind of *soft power of authenticity*. Through their conduct, they model values of courage, honesty, and equality – values that can inspire people across national boundaries perhaps more effectively than speeches or policies. In essence, their personal story does diplomatic work: it makes the idea of American and British leadership more relatable and admirable to those who value inclusion.

Crucially, the film does not shy away from acknowledging that such soft power would come with controversy. We are shown advisers and political strategists fretting about potential fallout: Will conservative allies be alienated? How will this play in more traditional constituencies? What if certain anti-LGBT+ foreign leaders use this development to strain diplomatic relations? These concerns mirror real-world diplomatic calculations. Indeed, in reality, nations do consider how issues of LGBT+ rights affect international ties. However, *Red, White & Royal Blue* leans into an optimistic resolution: in the end, the benefits of Alex and Henry's openness outweigh the costs. The narrative posits that America and Britain's affirming stance – embodied in their First Son and Prince – could bolster their image as leaders of liberal democracy in the global arena. It might strengthen alliances with like-minded, progressive countries and non-governmental organizations. Likewise, simply the sheer visibility of two prominent public figures who are queer and celebrated could spark important conversations in societies that are less accepting. In the film's rosy outlook, Alex and Henry become inadvertent ambassadors of queer visibility, turning their romance into a statement on the world stage that love and truth are part of their nations' values. This is “queer diplomacy” at work: a form of international influence rooted not in official policy but in personal example and cultural impact.

Media, Surveillance, and Power

A significant thread running through *Red, White & Royal Blue* is its critique of how media operates as a force of surveillance and control, especially over the lives of public figures. The film's portrayal of the media ranges from intrusive tabloids to respectable news outlets, all of which collectively form an almost panoptic presence around Alex and Henry. This dynamic clearly evokes Michel Foucault's notion of the *panopticon* – the idea of an all-seeing surveillance that individuals internalize, leading them to regulate their own behavior (Foucault 1982).

Throughout the narrative, Alex and Henry are acutely aware that they are being watched. Paparazzi lurk at the edges of their private encounters; their emails and phone communications carry the risk of being hacked or leaked; political rivals stand ready to exploit any personal misstep by feeding information to the press. This constant scrutiny creates a pressure-cooker environment in which the two men feel compelled to self-censor and maintain a façade. It vividly illustrates Foucault's point that surveillance can discipline individuals even when no authority is actively intervening – the mere *anticipation* of the media's gaze is enough to enforce certain behavior. In the film, the media collectively functions as an ever-watchful eye of society, implicitly enforcing heteronormativity through the threat of scandal. For example, early in the story, the fear of media exposure keeps Henry from acting on his feelings for Alex, and it leads Alex to initially suppress or deny his attraction to Henry. The specter of "*What will people say if this gets out?*" looms large over their most intimate moments, generating anxiety and shaping their choices.

The film's critical stance is that media coverage can both reflect and reinforce societal prejudices. Initially, the coverage of Alex and Henry's interactions is framed in a way that fits heteronormative expectations or trivializes any alternative. Their close friendship is publicly spun as rivalry or as harmless youthful mischief (for instance, to explain away the wedding cake incident). When rumors begin to circulate that there might be something more between them, the media's tone shifts toward the salacious and condemnatory, as if daring the two to confirm a "taboo" relationship. In this sense, the media is depicted as an instrument of the status quo, ready to cast any deviation from heterosexual norms in a scandalous light. A pivotal plot point underscores this dynamic: a political adversary weaponizes the press by leaking Alex and Henry's private email correspondence, counting on a sensationalist media environment to create a public uproar. The leak is indeed a gross invasion of privacy, but it achieves its intended effect precisely because the media ecosystem is primed to exploit such a story. The film thereby indicts not just the individual "villain" who orchestrates the leak, but the larger system that rewards and amplifies such personal invasions. It asks the audience to consider how our media practices often punish public figures who don't fit conventional molds, effectively policing norms by sensationalizing their divergence.

However, *Red, White & Royal Blue* pointedly does not treat "the media" as a monolith or as an unchangeable villain. It shows that media narratives can be challenged and changed. Once Alex and Henry seize control of their own story – by coming out on their own terms and subsequently granting a thoughtful interview – we witness a shift in parts of the media's portrayal. Some outlets begin to cover them more sympathetically, emphasizing themes of love and bravery rather than shock and scandal. By the film's end, the previously pernicious surveillance has been somewhat neutralized: because Alex and Henry are no longer hiding, the power that being watched held over them diminishes considerably. They have, in effect, flipped the script. Any continued media attention (and surely the press will continue to follow them) now also carries *their* message of pride and love, rather than just prurient speculation. In a telling scene, a montage of news reports moves from breathless gossip to more respectful commentary and even open support for the couple, indicating a reframing of the public narrative.

In a broader, more abstract sense, the film suggests that the media's role in identity construction is profound. Public figures like Alex and Henry partly *become* who they are in the public eye via the way the media represents them. As the communications theorist Marshall McLuhan famously said, "the medium is the message," meaning that the form of media communication deeply influences how content is perceived. We see a version of that idea at play here: the manner in which Alex and Henry's story is told ends up shaping the public's understanding of their relationship. Initially, the medium (tabloid gossip and scandal-driven reporting) makes their love story appear transgressive or outrageous; later, the medium (a frank public announcement followed by earnest, supportive coverage) frames their relationship as inspirational. In other words, the public perception of their romance is determined less by the fact of their love and more by how that love is portrayed in the press. By drawing attention to this shift, *Red, White & Royal Blue* becomes a kind of meta-commentary on storytelling and media responsibility. It highlights how queer stories can be either sensationalized or normalized depending on the media lens, and it implies that those telling the stories (journalists, editors, filmmakers like itself) have a role to play in either perpetuating stigma or fostering acceptance. In the end, the film's own happy resolution models the kind of narrative it advocates: a story about a queer relationship that is not only accepted but celebrated in the public sphere. In doing so, *Red, White & Royal Blue* invites viewers to imagine what might happen if our real-world media treated queer love with the same respect and dignity that this film does.

Conclusion

Red, White & Royal Blue presents itself as more than just a modern fairy-tale romance – it is a deliberate act of representation that challenges viewers to envision a world where queer love is not only normal but celebrated at the highest levels of society. By weaving together elements of romantic comedy and political drama, the film insists that matters of the heart are also matters of state and culture. In doing so, it directly confronts heteronormative hegemony through its detailed and empathetic portrayal of LGBT+ characters, showing how love, identity, and politics can intertwine. Alex and Henry's journey from secrecy to pride underlines the idea that queer love can confront and overcome societal taboos, reshaping public consciousness along the way. The film functions effectively as a cultural artifact in the ongoing struggle for recognition of LGBT+ communities, using the accessible format of a rom-com to deliver a potent message about equality and visibility. Notably, the story's success – first as a bestselling novel and then as a popular, well-received film – sets a benchmark: it proves that audiences are ready to embrace authentic portrayals of diverse sexualities, and that such portrayals can indeed achieve both commercial success and critical acclaim. In the broader context of media history, *Red, White & Royal Blue*'s prominence contributes to the ever-increasing mainstream visibility of queer narratives, pushing the envelope of what kinds of love stories are told on big platforms.

Ultimately, *Red, White & Royal Blue* exemplifies how media representation can serve as both a mirror and a catalyst for social change. The film balances intimacy and breadth by exploring deeply personal struggles alongside expansive cultural implications. The love story of a Mexican American bisexual protagonist and a British gay prince becomes a vehicle for commentary on representation, power, and acceptance. By the film's end, the message is clear: visibility and representation matter profoundly. When queer individuals see themselves in stories – falling in love, overcoming challenges, and finding happiness – it affirms their place in society. And when the wider public witnesses these stories, it challenges outdated prejudices and expands the collective imagination of who counts as a hero and whose love matters. *Red, White & Royal Blue* argues, with heart and humor, that queer love can change the world – or at least, it can change how we perceive the world and each other. At a time when images of LGBT+ lives in popular media are more abundant than ever yet still evolving in depth and diversity, this film stands as a spirited and hopeful milestone on the journey toward full equality in representation.

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