

Film Critique Paper

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In the film “Something the Lord Made,” we are brought back to a turbulent era of racial segregation, where the unlikely collaboration between Dr. Alfred Blalock, a renowned surgeon, and Vivien Thomas, an African-American lab technician, defied the norms of their time. This cinematic work not only tells a remarkable story of surgical innovation but also delves into the profound growth and transformation of its characters. To understand the intricacies of their journeys, we turn to Brian Hall's theory of human development, as expounded in *Values shift: A guide to personal & organizational transformation* (1994). Hall's theory, with its seven cycles, serves as a compelling framework for analyzing how Dr. Blalock and Vivien navigate the intricate interplay of biology, environment, and personal determination throughout the film.

The initial two cycles of Hall's theory shed light on a leadership style characterized by an authoritarian and benevolent approach, reflecting a hierarchical structure with stringent rules and a top-down leadership dynamic. This leadership paradigm often leaves followers feeling subjugated, primarily motivated by a desire to secure their family and maintain a sense of security. Horsman (2018) gives us insight into autocratic leadership and its meaning by stating, “When leadership is autocratic in a physically non-threatening environment, it becomes oppressive and demeaning to the membership and is an unhealthy style of leadership for followers and the leader. An autocratic style would then be perceived as over-controlling, placing unrealistic expectations on others, and the leaders’ primary loyalty is to self.” (p. 45)

In the film, Dr. Blalock establishes a clear hierarchy within the medical institution. He expects Vivien, an African-American lab technician, to adhere strictly to this hierarchy, addressing him as “Dr. Blalock” to underscore his authority and superiority within the hospital's structure. Dr. Blalock defines Vivien's role in very specific terms, emphasizing his job as a lab technician and, at times, belittling him with tasks that might seem menial, such as cleaning the

kennels used for laboratory animals. From Vivian's perspective, when he first accepts the job with Dr. Blalock in "Something the Lord Made," he faces a profound mix of hope and trepidation. Eager to secure stable employment and provide for his family, he takes on the role despite its initial demeaning aspects, recognizing the opportunity it offers to break into the world of medicine.

Hall's (1994) third cycle of leadership development pertains to an individual assuming the role of an efficient manager within a larger organizational framework. This management structure is meticulously designed, with clearly defined roles and qualifications for each tier within the organization. From the perspective of followers, it represents a carefully orchestrated system characterized by, in Hall's words, "rules that need to be followed and rewards that can be anticipated for selective performance." (p. 160). This third cycle in Hall's breakdown can also be tied back into what is known as Stage II and Horsman (2018) claims, "In Stage II, we value work as productive labor because it provides us with the conviction that we are useful and have earned the right to belong." (p. 47)

In the context of the film, Vivien exhibits remarkable surgical skills that quickly catch Dr. Blalock's attention. Vivien's early exposure to medical environments and his curiosity emphasize the significant influence of his surroundings on his intellectual development. While Dr. Blalock maintains his managerial role, he begins to scrutinize Vivien more closely, as evidenced by his request for Vivien to handle beakers with tongs in the laboratory setting. Both characters remain aware of the existing rules, but at this juncture, they start to question and challenge them.

In Hall's delineation of the seven cycles of leadership and organizational development, the transition to cycle four marks a pivotal juncture in human development. Hall (1994) astutely

characterizes cycle four by stating, “It is the bridge to a new paradigm, with values that reflect an inner authority and vision, rather than an externally driven one as was the case in the first three cycles.” (p. 161). He aptly refers to cycle four as the “transitional cycle,” where leaders evolve into mentors, and followers embark on an exploration of interpersonal growth while searching for their individual trajectories. Furthermore, Hall underscores the significance of group dynamics and values, noting that, “Beginning at cycle four the group and its values become the central reinforcing factor for the exceptional growth of an individual or leader in the last four cycles of development.” (p. 159).

This transformative shift is notably exemplified in Dr. Blalock's character as he embraces a mentorship role and imparts knowledge to Vivien. Early in their collaboration, Dr. Blalock recognizes Vivien's exceptional skills and innate aptitude for surgical techniques. This recognition is a crucial starting point for their mentor-mentee relationship. As the partnership progresses, Dr. Blalock begins to actively share his medical expertise with Vivien. He imparts knowledge about surgical procedures, medical research, and the complexities of the heart surgery they are pioneering. This sharing of knowledge is a fundamental aspect of mentorship.

Cycle five, according to Hall (1994), is where “the leadership style is collaborator, and the leader is in a process of discovering his or her special qualities and gifts.” (p. 164) During this crucial stage of leadership and organizational development, the follower undergoes a profound transformation, emerging as a significantly more creative and independent contributor within the leader-follower dynamic. This evolution is characterized by a shift towards a more participative and collaborative partnership between the two individuals. As the follower matures in their role, they not only gain a deeper understanding of their responsibilities and the organizational context but also develop a heightened sense of self-assuredness and autonomy.

This newfound confidence empowers them to actively engage in problem-solving, decision-making, and the generation of innovative ideas. Rather than simply adhering to directives, they become valuable co-creators of solutions and initiatives. Horsman (2018) refers to this as Stage III when “We begin to honor our own knowledge and judgment rather than trusting the correctness of the rules and regulations that govern our environment.” (p. 50)

In “Something the Lord Made,” we encounter several instances of this pivotal stage in leadership and organizational development. Most notably, one can observe this transformation when Dr. Blalock and Vivien collaborate to devise innovative solutions aimed at addressing critical issues, particularly those about the challenging condition known as the blue baby syndrome. In these instances, Dr. Blalock draws upon Vivien's insights, creating a nurturing and intellectually stimulating environment that fosters his creative thinking in response to the intricate medical challenges presented by the infant's congenital heart defect.

The last two cycles of Hall's human development start to take shape when the leader becomes both servant and visionary and the follower becomes wise, interdependent, and prophetic. These last two cycles are when Hall describes more of a global impact on the relationship between both leader and follower. Referring to these last two stages, Horsman (2018) states, “The interdependent *We* respond to the common call to work for global harmony, to care for and renew the earth (servant–stewardship). Actualization of the *independence-interdependence* dynamic affirms that we assume responsibility and at times take the initiative to act independently for the benefit of the team (meso), the community (macro), or the world (mundo).” (p. 52)


Dr. Blalock and Vivien ultimately became a formidable team that made a profound global impact on the world of medicine. Both characters break through societal constraints with their

shared dedication to solving the complex problem of the blue baby's heart defect. As their collaboration deepens, Dr. Blalock, with his surgical expertise, and Vivien, with his innate technical prowess and research acumen, use their skills and knowledge to pioneer groundbreaking surgical techniques. Their partnership becomes a symbol of resilience and innovation, as they challenge conventional medical wisdom and successfully perform the first-ever blue baby heart surgery, saving countless lives and forever changing the landscape of pediatric cardiology. Together, they demonstrate the immense potential of collaboration and mentorship in overcoming adversity and leaving an indelible mark on the global medical community.

Brian Hall's theory of human development offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the characters and themes in "Something the Lord Made." Dr. Blalock and Vivien's story serves as a powerful testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the potential for transformative development in both leaders and followers. When contemplating the dispositions and capacities of servant-leader consciousness, it is essential to recognize the parallel between our personal growth and development and our progression through the stages of servant-leadership. As we embark on this journey, we start by examining and defining our fundamental assumptions about leadership, service, and the greater good. This introspective process enables us to gain clarity about our own values and beliefs, which form the foundation for our leadership philosophy.

Moreover, as we delve deeper into the principles of servant-leadership, we expand our knowledge and understanding of this leadership style's core tenets. This learning journey equips us with the tools and insights necessary to lead with empathy, humility, and a commitment to serving others. By identifying where we are in our personal life journeys, we can better align our

growth and development with the principles of servant-leadership, enabling us to cultivate a more profound and authentic approach to leadership that positively impacts both our own lives and the lives of those we serve.



References:

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