

## **Bringing Down the House**

Rated PG-13

*“Bringing Down the House”* is a film that stars veteran actor Steve Martin as Peter Sanderson: a divorced, workaholic lawyer who tries online dating and discovers that everything is not as it appears. Peter believes he is instant messaging with a beautiful attorney named Charlene only to discover she is actually a sassy African American woman. Played by Queen Latifah, Charlene is a fast talking woman who brings major headaches to Peter’s life. An escaped convict, she will do anything to get Peter to take her case and prove her innocence.

The hilarity begins when Charlene refuses to leave Peter’s house... not a good situation when your next door neighbor is your law partner’s mother. Betty White does a fine job as the nosey neighbor and reminded us of Gladys Kravitz from the old *Bewitched* television series.

Charlene is constantly surrounded by Peter’s “white” acquaintances. She follows him everywhere, even entering his country club and other places known for being “whites only.” To pull this off, she pretends to be the family nanny, or as she puts it, “playing slave.” Although Charlene accepts what she must do in order to enlist Peter’s help, she is disappointed and dejected by the racism surrounding her. Rather than resorting to aggression, Charlene attempts to use humor to seek revenge.

Charlene brings new light to a forgotten subject in Peter’s life... that of his children. In one scene, his teenage daughter is experimenting with dating and lies to her father about her activities only to make a frantic call to Charlene when her boyfriend goes too far. Charlene comes to the girl’s rescue and helps Peter learn how to encourage a trusting, loving relationship with her. Peter also neglected his young son by not realizing that his sense of self-esteem is fallen because he can not read. Charlene teaches the lad to read, how to have a good time, and be happy. Through her example Peter learns he must slow his life down, and concentrate on the little things.

Although this movie is certainly frivolous and even silly, there are plenty of feel-good moments and issues to chew on. As the movie points out, prejudice exists in our country despite dramatic changes in our society’s view of differences. Another important lesson from the film is how out of balance work can become in our lives, and the serious damage it causes to parenting and marriage. This includes the overuse of cell phones and how continual communication with the office can leave loved ones feeling ignored and left out. Cell phones need not be answered every time they ring!

Overall, this was an enjoyable movie filled with hilarious moments and more than a few important messages about life in contemporary society.

By *Curt and Natalie Levang*