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# **The representation of African Americans In Hollywood Cinema**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master in Language and Culture**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to Allah Almighty, who created me, blessed me with everything I have, and gave me the will and the power to finish this work, the Bestower of Mercy who showed me the light at the darkest moments and gave me strength at the hardest.

To my beloved family, my mother my sunshine and my father my hero, to my brothers Adib and Wessim, my A team since day one, who supported me and loved me enough to get me where I am today, who believed in me and inspired me to be the amazing woman I am and were my safe heaven in hardest of times.

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**Rayen**

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to Allah Almighty, who created me, blessed me with everything I have, and gave me the will and the power to finish this work, the Bestower of Mercy who showed me the light at the darkest moments and gave me strength at the hardest.

To whom I prefer it over myself, and why not, she sacrificed for me and spared no effort in order to make me happy all the time, “my beloved mother.”

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**Abstract**

This study aims to uncover the reality behind the racial discrimination and stereotypes in the classical Hollywood cinema and highlight the changes made in the modern American cinema if there was any, this study also provides a historical preview of Hollywood, African American actors and actresses in particular, how they were presented in the classical movies and how they are presented in modern movies. Although Hollywood celebrates its cultural diversity and claims to support talents regardless of their cultural and racial background, we aim to determine whether it has always been like this and has things been change for the best or for the worst as well as investigating the sources of many stereotypes are and how they affected and still effects the American society and especially the African Americans. the study opts for content analysis so and film analysis methodology to analyse several American films are with African American actors and actresses, the movies analysed are from two different cinematic eras are picked deliberately to explore how they were represented in different time periods and compare between those all those films to conclude the changes made during those time periods. Finally, by the end of the study, it shows that African Americans may seem like they are being represented better now than they were presented in the past but they are in fact still surrounded by many obstacles and stereotypes that may come between them and achieving social equality and end discrimination even after years of over fighting it.

**Keywords:** African Americans, stereotypes, Hollywood, films, representation.

## ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الواقع الكامن وراء التمييز العنصري والقوالب النمطية في سينما هوليوود الكلاسيكية وتسليط الضوء على التغييرات التي طرأت على السينما الأمريكية الحديثة إن وجدت، كما تقدم هذه الدراسة معاينة تاريخية لهوليوود والممثلين والممثلات الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي على وجه الخصوص، وكيف تم تقديمهم في الأفلام الكلاسيكية وكيف يتم تقديمهم في الأفلام الحديثة. على الرغم من أن هوليوود تحتفل بتنوعها الثقافي وتدعي مواهب الدعم بغض النظر عن خلفيتها الثقافية والعرقية، نهدف إلى تحديد ما إذا كان الأمر دائماً على هذا النحو وهل تغيرت الأمور للأفضل أو للأسوأ بالإضافة إلى التحقيق في مصادر العديد من الصور النمطية وكيف أثرت وما زالت تؤثر على المجتمع الأمريكي وخاصة الأمريكيين الأفارقة. تختار الدراسة تحليل المحتوى لذلك ومنهجية تحليل الأفلام لتحليل العديد من الأفلام الأمريكية مع ممثلين وممثلات أمريكيين من أصل أفريقي، الأفلام التي تم تحليلها من عشرين سينمائيين مختلفين يتم اختيارهم عمدا لاستكشاف كيفية تمثيلهم في فترات زمنية مختلفة والمقارنة بين كل تلك الأفلام لإبرام التغييرات التي تم إجراؤها خلال تلك الفترات الزمنية. أخيراً، بنهاية الدراسة، تظهر أن الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي قد يبدو أنهم يتم تمثيلهم الآن بشكل أفضل مما تم تقديمه في الماضي، لكنهم في الواقع لا يزالون محاطين بالعديد من العقبات والقوالب النمطية التي قد تأتي بينهم وبين تحقيق المساواة الاجتماعية وإنهاء التمييز حتى بعد سنوات من محاربتهم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأمريكيون الأفارقة، الصور النمطية، هوليوود، أفلام، التقديم.

**List of Abbreviations**

**TV** Tele Vision

**ET** Entertainment Tonight

**KKK** Ku Klux Klan

**ASU** Arizona State University

**LA** Los Angeles

**PhD** doctor of philosophy

**US** United States

**PBS** Public Broadcasting Service

**WB** Warner Bros

**HBO** Home Box Office

**CEO** Chief Executive Officer

**IMDb** Internet Movie Database

**BAFTA** British Academy of Film and Television Arts

**AAFCA** African-American Film Critics Association

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## **Introduction**

Hollywood is one of the worldwide successful movie industries, with nearly 700 movies produced and released a year according to the statistics, with thousands of talented actors, producers, filmmakers and scriptwriters that made the American cinema the focal point of movie fans around the world. With a number like this you can only imagine the global effect Hollywood has on millions of people, America has succeeded to spread and expand its culture through films and while that is a good thing for the American society, they are not exactly the greatest role model the world should look after, by spreading their culture it also made the world a harder place to live in for people of colour and especially black people by promoting negative ideas and images about them, some stereotypes are still hunting them to this day, Always seeing them as thieves and drug dealers, as bad parents, as bad students, bad neighbours, always loud and violent. So naturally seeing a black person walking down the streets may scare you without even knowing that person and that implies on people around the world and not just America.

Although Hollywood celebrates its diversity by including actors from different cultural backgrounds, and people of colour are now present on the big screen playing many major and minor roles, the situation was not always like that. In the classical movie era, people with white skin were dominating the big screen while people with darker skin were only allowed to be presented through stereotypical if not humiliating roles. And before that they weren't allowed on screen but the colour of their skin was the main focus of shows and filmmakers and was a very entertaining subject in the worst possible way. The dark skin, the big lips, the huge ears and the goofy moves were the only image presented on people of colours in old Hollywood.

America has always been racist, and the African Americans took the biggest share in that, not only in real life but also in the fictional world and on the screens, always treated as less, as inferiors, between being presented as loyal servants and followers to the white people and not being presented at all and being replaced with white people who paint their faces in black and put on their funniest moves and attitudes to dehumanize the black people and show them as pure entertainment to the whites and nothing else. This did nothing but worsen the African American existence in Hollywood back then. but there was nothing to do since the producing companies, the filmmakers and the audience targeted where only white people. Black people where too poor to go to the cinema as they were newly freemen, but sadly the only jobs they were allowed to work in are the ones who worked in as slaves so most of them came back willingly to slavery, both on and off the screen.

What you see on screen repeatedly can set the way you think and treat your surroundings, and in this case, presenting black people as show animals and inferiors made the whole of America treat them as so, even they acted as so. They settled for whatever they could get, in fact even that disgraceful existence in a movie or a show has being the greatest of joy for several actors even some went to say that acting as a servant and being paid for it is better than being a servant in real life. The idea of being more or wanting more was not even on the table, not until a braver generation said enough is enough we worth more than being in the background and that was the generation that started the LA rebellion.

The civil rights movement may have given the black people their freedom but did not secure them social equality nor artistic equality; therefore, they fought for it nonstop, on and off the screen, in every possible way, in media, on the streets, on the stages and on the big and the small screens. Recently, you may notice that their fighting paid off as we see a major shift in presenting African Americans on the big screen. They seem to be presented

now in a more positive presentation with the hope of getting that full equal treatment and presence in society. Now you can see that the African Americans are not just the thieves but also the policemen, not only the drug addict but also the doctor, not only the loud woman but also the supportive mom and not only the father who always leaves but also the father who would sacrifice their life to save their kids and not only the villains but also the hero. Even Disney jumped on the wave and is now making princesses with darker skin shades even they made a dark skin Ariel. That's great isn't it? Hollywood seems to finally come to its sense and admitted the valuable African American existence in the American society. Or is it just a big front to attract the African American audience that now seems to grow by the day and make more profits in the name of achieving equality and fighting racism

This study mainly focuses on the American cinema from the African American's point of view to explore the stages of how Hollywood portrayed African Americans and if there is a big difference throughout those stages and is it for the best or worst, by analysing and comparing several scenes from different movies released in different time periods.

Furthermore, the study reveals the different stereotypes implanted in the American society that were directly taken from those movies and how they affected and still affect the existence of the African Americans in this society.

The study also reveals the hidden messages implanted in each scene that you may not notice at first but a deeper look with just a little bit of African American historical background that we will provide you with, will help you uncover those messages on your own. Each chapter will help you get a little closer to decide for yourself.

## **Chapter One: Black Americans in The American Cinema**

### **Introduction**

The American film industry also known as Hollywood (referring to its place of birth) is considered one of the biggest artistic revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It started about 115 years ago. Hollywood went through two main phases: the classical movies era that was itself divided into two stages starting with the silent era from 1890s to 1920s to end with the sound era from 1920's to 1960's after that the modern film making stage started and it's ongoing to this very day.

It is no secret that during the two mentioned phases, black actors and actresses took a huge step in the role-playing game, they went from being presented as slaves, maids, nannies, servants and criminals into attaining major roles such as playing doctors, lawyers, police officers and even superheroes. This was not a smooth nor did not an easy shift and it certainly happen overnight.

We started this research to learn and discover more about all the WHYs, WHENs, WHEREs and WHOs related to our topic and dive more into the dark side of Hollywood, to also uncover many realities and hidden messages behind every movie we grew up watching innocently and every time we laughed about the goofy black man and felt proud about the sacrifices made by the loyal black maid who puts her master's kids needs before hers and sacrifices her life to save those who enslaved her and many other stereotyped characters that is still vested in our minds until this day.

Before we start our research have you noticed that all the characters played by a black person share some characteristic, they dressed a certain way, spoke a certain way, laughed certain way, how they share certain lifestyle starting with their clothes, how their houses are like and how are the neighborhoods they live in are like, how are they a little bit louder,

a little bit angrier and a little more violent than a white person is presented in almost every movie we watched with black people in it. We can't help it but to wonder if these characters reflect the reality of black people in America or if they are represented this way to serve a purpose and if it does, did the way black people were represented in movies reflect on their reality? So which one came first the representation or the reality and which affected which?

“Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence, absence means symbolic annihilation” (Anda). Here Gerbner claims that the American individual is socially affected by what he/she sees on the screen of their TVs, when a white child grows up watching people on the screen that share some physical characteristics with him/her whether it's the colour of their skin, hair or eyes and so on, it confirms and acknowledges their existence in that society and if those people are playing the character of doctors, landowners, wealthy men and slave masters\ owners it gives that child a sense of belonging to the highest class of the society which also drives them to look down to others that don't look like the characters on screen so it implicitly creates a racist individual in the society and vice versa, if a black child is to see a screen character that he could physically relate to him/her plays the character of a slave, a maid or a servant, it only limits the child's vision about his/her future to those mentioned fields of work and normalizes the cruel mistreatment for the white individual since it is now expected, generalized and generalised. We can all agree that this is a valid point and a very important message delivered by the movies industry as it can not only infect but also destroys the individual's self-image.

In an interview with the assistant professor in the film and media studies program in the college of liberal arts and sciences AvivaDove Viebahanshe was asked why it is that representation in the film and TV is so important. Responded:” ... the more you show the experiences of people of colour, I should add women and other marginalized groups in

terms of sexuality, or even class and disability. The more normalized they become and the more you are going to see those stories. Therefore, it creates a snowball effect. It will not feel so other-sized every time there is a sitcom about a Black family, for example. Two, it is also about being able to see yourself on a screen. I think most viewers are happy to watch stories that are not immediately reflective of their lives. Most of the things I watch on television do not have characters that are exactly like me. However, at the same time, it is good for us emotionally and mentally to be able to identify with characters. There must be some sort of representation of people from different racial groups so people can see themselves in the characters and not always feel like they have to transposition this in their head, imagining that they could be in this role.” (Dove-Viebahn). In this interview Dr Aviva continued to explain and support Dr’s Gerbner’s claims and ourselves as well.

In 2015, Dylan Marron started a series of videos called “every single word” that in each video there is number of collected scenes from a famous American movie in which it shows every single word spoken by a black person in that movie and it really showed how black people were nearly invisible in those movies. For example, in the famous movie E.T the only scene said by a black person was “hey who are you? Open the door son” by Michael Darren as the van man. In the famous movie Harry Potter, the total time of a black people speaking scenes is 6 minutes in the entire movies series (8 movies that equals 16 hours of playing) while it showed that some other famous movies did not have a single word spoken by a black person (Libraries). Bottom line misrepresentation does matter in the film industry and its absence also matters especially for black people who were not allowed to show on the screen until early stages of filmmaking where white people used what is called “blackface” to take over. Black people are straight and full of lace on the screen.

### 1.1. The Blackface Era

Before Hollywood started hiring black people, it has been using the black face. Black face used to refer to the practice of wearing make-up to imitate the appearance of a black person. The use of such make-up was associated with minstrel shows in the United States from the 1830s until the mid-20th century; it is now regarded as highly offensive (club) in other words it is painting a white actor's face in black to play a black character. It has been 200 years since white performers first started painting their faces black to mock enslaved Africans in minstrel shows across the United States. It was racist and offensive then, and it is still racist and offensive today (Kaur)

Harmeet Kaur also mentioned in the report that: "Blackface isn't just about painting one's skin darker or putting on a costume. It invokes a racist and painful history" (Kaur) and explained that the black face wasn't offensive just because of the paint on the actor's face, but it was (still is) offensive because of the set of behaviours that came with it, like the exaggerating of features to look stereotypically "black" and because of the tattered clothes they used to wear when wearing blackface. "The performances were intended to be funny to white audience. However, the black community they were demeaning and hurtful" (Kaur). We have nothing but to agree that this humiliating action not only denied black people of many opportunities to shine on the big screen, it also stereotyped and ruined the image of black people in America by showing them as goofy stupid womanizers and loyal slaves with funky clothes a big pink lips and huge creepy smile.

David Leonard a professor of comparative ethnic studies and American at Washington State said: "blackface is an assertion of power and control, it allows a society to routinely and historically imagine African Americans as not fully human. It serves to rationalize and violence and Jim Crow segregation". (Clark). What Dr David said proved to be true,

showing black Americans as less than human, more of a comedian character who is there to entertain privileged white people decreased any sympathy toward black people, and in that case mistreating they became a completely acceptable behavior.

“The current consensus of black face minstrelsy probably is summed up best by Frederick Douglass righteous response in *The North Star*. Black face imitators, he said were “the filthy scum of White society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens “- a denunciation that nicely captures minstrelsy further commodification of an already enslaved, non-citizens people from a contemporary vantage point. The minstrel show does seem a transparently racist curiosity, a form of leisure that – in inventing and ridiculing the slow witted but irrepressible “plantation darky” and the foppish “Northern dandy Negro”- conventionally rationalized racial oppression.

The culture that embraced it, one would assume either wholly enchanted by racial travesty or so benighted”. (Lott)there is no denying that the blackface error was one of the darkest periods in the American cinematic history and even though it doesn't occur now often in the new modern American movies but it did left an impact on the American street because until this day blackface is considered a “ funny” entertaining move to do on Halloween and other occasions even though they are aware outfit's dark history and the fact that it is very racist and very humiliating for the black people and the worst part is even celebrities who are considered role models of the society still pulling this act and go unpunished for it because in the last day there is no law to band or incriminate this act.

## **1.2. The Jim Crow Laws**

Jim Crow laws were a collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation. Named after a Black minstrel show character, the laws—which existed for about 100

years, from the post-Civil War era until 1968—were meant to marginalize African Americans by denying them the right to vote, hold jobs, get an education or other opportunities. Those who attempted to defy Jim Crow laws often faced arrest, fines, jail sentences, violence and death. (editors) This period has affected the black American cinema heavily and black Americans found themselves taking three steps back after they took one-step forward thanks to the civil rights war.

Segregation meant that the physical space of movie theatres was separated by race, but it also meant that the types of movies shown were different. Black-designated theatres—those “placed in segregated Black neighbourhoods in the North and South,” Ellen C. Scott explains— were the most common place for Black people to see films. Nevertheless, because they were for Black patrons, they faced difficulties in getting first-run movies from distributors. This delay, Scott writes, “Lead to a gap in film knowledge between Black and white communities,” and meant, “Very different film fare gained prominence on the screens of the Black movie houses nationwide.” However, there were theatre owners who fought back against their “second run” status. Some argued that because they were not actually competing against whites-only theatres that should qualify them as first-run theatres. However, the most common way that this inequity was handled was to make “an empowering, dignified—often indignant—vision of Black people derived from the community itself.” (Jackson). As miss Jackson said the Jim Crow law left a huge impact not only on the actors but also on the audience when it came to both black people's movies and white people's movies.

After *The Birth of Nation* was first played in 1915, it became the most controversial film in the American cinema because of its clear racist content. Ellen Scott, author of the just published cinema civil rights said: “the film is one of the racist films ever made. Maybe the racist film ever made. This film depicts lynching as a positive thing, the politics of the film

was essentially to say certain black people are worthy of being lynched. In that sense, it is racist. (Brook)

In the movie, white people were wearing a blackface and act like savages, violent and rapists and other stereotypical behaviours. Mc Ewan the English novelist and screen writer said that:” the film argues that giving black people rights was a terrible, terrible error that they did all sorts of horrible things that actually they did not do and that noble Ku Klux Klan was this wonderful saviour that saved America. It couldn’t be any more wrong “ (Brook).even though the movie was a box-office success and its cinematic techniques where way ahead of their time, the movie screamed “racism” in every possible way starting with the blackface to painting the black people as violent, savages, rapists and out for the kill, it was a pure 3 hours of racism and America surprisingly loved it. some historians defended the major success of the movie by claiming that the cinematic techniques outshined the racial aggression displayed in the movie. “I don’t think we would remember this film as we do had it not been for the way Griffith uses parallel editing and shows us the KKK [rushing] in to save [the heroine], on horseback no less,” Ellen Scott says. “And he crosscuts that image with the image of [a] black man attacking various people. Therefore, we have these two images cut together and in some sense, the suspense that creates is the main impact of the film. I think that the film’s techniques were woven in with the film’s racist power.” (Brook)In addition, that was another way to say, “Yes the movie was racist but the audience (white people) loved it so we do not care”.

### **1.3. The Age of the Negro Servant**

After years of marginalizing black actors, they started hiring black people to do the roles white people used to do in blackfaces, but they were only given small and stereotyped roles. Uncle Tomas one of the stereotyped roles, which is an offensive term, used to refer

to a black man who is thought to be too willing to serve or please white people the term came from a character in the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. (press)

In her book *Uncle Tom from martyr to traitor*, Dena Spingarn the author and scholar of American cultural history talked about the Uncle Tom's character and how it changed from a heroic character to a traitor of his own race to just to gain white people's approval. Uncle Tom's character was largely played in the old American cinema and was very loved by the white audience while been loathed by the black audience. (Spingarn)The female equivalent to Uncle Tom was the mammy which is an offensive term used in the past in the southern states for a black woman who cared for a white family's children (press).

In *The Birth of a Nation*, "Mammy" is part of the lexicon of antebellum mythology that continues to have a provocative and tenacious hold on the American psycho. Her large dark body and her round smiling face tower over our imaginations, causing more accurate representations of African American women to whiter in her shadow. The mammy's stereotype attributes – her deeply sonorous and effortlessly soothing voice, her infinite patience, her raucous laugh, herself – deprecating wit understanding and acceptance of her inferiority and her devotion to whites all point to a long-lasting and troubled marriage of racial and gender essentialism, mythology and southern nostalgia. (Blight)

Beside those two major stereotypes, there were many others, like the Coon character, who is acting goofy and stupid; we also have the tragic mulatto, who is a person mixed of the two races and fails to "fit in "into both words, so it tends to be depressed and suicidal; and last but not least, we have the black buck, who is seen as a threat to the white community because of its rebellious behaviour and its sexual attraction to white women. These mentioned stereotypes helped spreading racism in both the artistic and real word and it still shows in the modern filmmaking.

#### 1.4. Modern “non- racists” Hollywood

In the new Hollywood, black actors are present on the big screen and the roles they are playing are more diverse. “Recent studies show that black actors comprise 12.9% of leading roles in cable scripted shows (proportionally reflecting the overall black population of 13.4%). The numbers behind the scenes are not as encouraging, though. Only 6% of the writers, directors and producers of U.S – produced films are black. (news)These numbers – even tough- they are small but they are still promising, maybe not as equal as it should be in this modern educate antiracist word but it is an acknowledged improvement.

During an interview with ASU NEWS, Aviva Dove Viebhan an assistant professor in the film and media studies program in the college of liberal arts and sciences was asked where does the film and TV industry stand in terms of black representation, Aviva answered:”I think things are getting better. This is something we are seeing really in the last couple of years. At least in terms of representation on screen, we’re seeing a lot more networks and production companies and studios really thinking about actually wanting to have not just more diversity but meaningful diversity. Time is going to tell whether this is actually change that is going to hold fast or whether it’s change just because there’s been recognition in Hollywood over the last few years that it’s doing poorly and now it’s scrambling to try to make sure it doesn’t look so bad anymore. (Dove-Viebahn)if we looked back to how black people were treated on-screen and the way they are treated now we’ll see a huge difference but that didn’t happen just because white people woke up one day and choose to be less racist or better people. Before the black actors and actor got to where they are today in the American cinema there were many artistic movements like the LA rebellion and the Blaxploitation who helped improve the circumstances and created a less hostile environment for the young black actors to shine in Hollywood sky.

### 1.5. The LA rebellion

Between 1967 and 1989 many filmmakers who graduated from the University Of California (UCLA) participated in this movement through making their own movies that targeted the black audience, the Africans and African Americans filmmakers portrayed the black people culture through their film from a realistic point of view to oppose the stereotypical images that were demonstrated by the classical movies

The LA rebellion came as the third cinema started to flourish which is “a type of film and film theory prevalent in Africa, Latin America, and Asia that aims to transform society by educating and radicalizing the film audience through “subversive” cinema; also called Third World cinema.” (teachers).

Peter Catapanoin his review on L.A rebellion: creating a new black cinema book said:” ...: The L.A. Rebellion in Retrospect and in Motion,” Chuck Kleinhans argues that by the 1990s, Hollywood showed a greater willingness to hire black directors and move beyond the formulaic genre convention of Blaxploitation. A new generation of black filmmakers, many of whom were products of film schools themselves, were able to find mainstream distribution. (Catapano) During this period, black Americans had decided to take the matter into their own hands. After years of asking to be a part of white people’s movies, they decided to have an all-black movie to tell their own story from their own perspective.

Moving a few years forward, some film companies started producing with an "all-colour cast" in what was called the race movie genre that only showed the positive aspects of black people, according to Duck University Press. However, those companies seemed to fail because of the lack of commercial appeal that failed to attract the white audience, which left the black actors and actors in square one.

## 1.6. The White saviour complex

Or so-called "Oscar bait, where every movie starring a black actor or telling the story of a black character has to have a white person or a white character that is there to save the day, Savala Nolan is the author of *Don't Let It Get You Down: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Body* and the director of the Iton E. Henderson Centre for Social Justice at the UC Berkeley School of Law. Said : “[They think] they are somehow in the position that should enable them to have more power in terms of solving the problem than the people who are impacted [by the problem],” (Murphy) "I think it's been a fundamental underpinning of Western imperialism, and it's been evident in the global empire-building enterprise," Danielle Taana Smith, PhD, a professor in the Department of African American Studies at Syracuse University, told Health. (Murphy). This trope is highly presented in the modern American cinema, as a constant reminder that the white race is more important and always needed no matter how the black race did well it always needs a white person to support that deed.

Many famous movies in the modern cinema making used this white saviour trope, and as usual, the white audience took the bait. These a few movies used to use the white complex trope:

- *The help* (2011)
- *Top five* (2014)
- *Hidden figures* (2016)
- *The blind side* (2009)
- *Freedom writers* (2007)
- *Amistad* (1997)
- *A time to kill* (1996)

- *To kill a mockingbird* (1962)
- *Glory road* (2006)

In addition, the list goes on and on with movies that used that trope to gain the attention of the white audience next to a number of tropes that stereotyped the African Americans in the modern movie making like the black best friend trope and the nerdy black person trope and the strong black women trope.

### **1.7. #oscarsowhite**

In 2015, the hash tag Oscar so white was tweeted by the activist April Reign after 20 nominations for the Oscar were exclusively white actors. It cast light on the lack of diversity in academy awards ceremonies for years. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was founded in 1927, and since then, only 20 black actors have won the Oscar. Hattie McDaniel was the first African American to win the Oscar award for her role “mammy” in the movie *gone with the wind* for best supporting actress but was still treated as an outsider in the ceremony and was not accepted in the “only whites” after party.

In 2016, the academy announced that it would make some improvements to include more African American actors and filmmakers. In 2018, two black actors won the Oscar: Mahershala Ali for *Green book* for best supporting actor and Regina King for *If Beale Street Could Talk* for best supporting actor as well. Later in 2021, two more actors won: Will Smith in *King Richard* for best actor and Ariana DeBose for *West Side Story* for best supporting actor.

**Table 1**

## Best Actor in a Leading Role

<b><u>Best Actor in a Leading Role</u></b>					
<b>Year</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Film</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Milestone / Notes</b>
<u>1958</u>		<i><u>The Defiant Ones</u></i>	Noah Cullen	Nominated	First Black actor to be nominated for Best Actor.
<u>1963</u>	<u>Sidney Poitier</u>	<i><u>Lilies of the Field</u></i>	Homer Smith	Won	First Black man to win a competitive Oscar. First Bahamian to win Best Actor. First Black actor to receive two acting nominations (Best Actor). Youngest Black actor to win Best Actor (age 37).
<u>1970</u>	<u>James Earl Jones</u>	<i><u>The Great White Hope</u></i>	Jack Jefferson	Nominated	
<u>1972</u>	<u>Paul Winfield</u>	<i><u>Souder</u></i>	Nathan Lee Morgan	Nominated	First film to feature African-American nominees for both Best Actor and Best Actress.
<u>1986</u>	<u>Dexter Gordon</u>	<i><u>Round Midnight</u></i>	Dale Turner	Nominated	First jazz musician to be nominated for Best Actor.
<u>1989</u>	<u>Morgan Freeman</u>	<i><u>Driving Miss Daisy</u></i>	Hoke Colburn	Nominated	
<u>1992</u>	<u>Denzel Washington</u>	<i><u>Malcolm X</u></i>	<u>Malcolm X</u>	Nominated	
<u>1993</u>	<u>Laurence Fishburne</u>	<i><u>What's Love Got to Do with It</u></i>	<u>Ike Turner</u>	Nominated	Second film to feature African-American nominees for both Best Actor and Best Actress.
<u>1994</u>	Morgan Freeman	<i><u>The Shawshank Redemption</u></i>	Ellis Boyd 'Red' Redding	Nominated	
<u>1999</u>	Denzel Washington	<i><u>The Hurricane</u></i>	<u>Rubin Carter</u>	Nominated	
<u>2001</u>		<i><u>Training</u></i>	Alonzo	Won	Second African-American actor to receive the award for Best Actor.

		<u>Day</u>	Harris		First time two African-American performers won Oscars in the same year (Halle Berry, <u>Monster's Ball</u> ). First African-American actor to win multiple competitive Academy Awards. First and only African-American actor to win Academy Awards in both acting categories (lead and supporting).
	<u>Will Smith</u>	<u>Ali</u>	<u>Muhammad Ali</u>	Nominated	First time multiple African-American actors nominated for Best Actor in the same year.
<u>2004</u>	<u>Jamie Foxx</u>	<u>Ray</u>	<u>Ray Charles</u>	Won	First African-American to receive two acting nominations in the same year.
	<u>Don Cheadle</u>	<u>Hotel Rwanda</u>	<u>Paul Rusesabagina</u>	Nominated	
<u>2005</u>	<u>Terrence Howard</u>	<u>Hustle &amp; Flow</u>	DJay	Nominated	
<u>2006</u>	<u>Forest Whitaker</u>	<u>The Last King of Scotland</u>	<u>Idi Amin</u>	Won	
	Will Smith	<u>The Pursuit of Happiness</u>	<u>Chris Gardner</u>	Nominated	
<u>2009</u>	Morgan Freeman	<u>Invictus</u>	<u>Nelson Mandela</u>	Nominated	
<u>2012</u>	Denzel Washington	<u>Flight</u>	William "Whip" Whitaker	Nominated	
<u>2013</u>	<u>Chiwetel Ejiofor</u>	<u>12 Years a Slave</u>	<u>Solomon Northup</u>	Nominated	First Black British actor to be nominated for Best Actor.
<u>2016</u>	Denzel Washington	<u>Fences</u>	Troy Maxson	Nominated	First Black actor to be nominated for both acting and producing (Best Picture) in the same year.
<u>2017</u>		<u>Roman J. Israel, Esq.</u>	Roman J. Israel	Nominated	Denzel Washington is the first African-American actor to be nominated two years in a row.
	<u>Daniel Kaluuya</u>	<u>Get Out</u>	Chris Washington	Nominated	Second Black British actor to be nominated for Best Actor.

<u>2020</u>	<u>Chadwick Boseman</u>	<u>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</u>	Levee Green	Nominated	First African-American actor to receive a <u>posthumous nomination</u> . Third film to feature African-American nominees for both Best Actor and Best Actress.
	Will Smith	<u>King Richard</u>	<u>Richard Williams</u>	Won	Second Black actor, and ninth overall, to be nominated for both acting and producing (Best Picture) in the same year.
<u>2021</u>	Denzel Washington	<u>The Tragedy of Macbeth</u>	<u>Lord Macbeth</u>	Nominated	Denzel Washington has the most nominations for an African-American actor: Best Actor (7 nominations) and Best Supporting Actor (2 nominations). First African-American actor to receive a nomination for their performance in a <u>Shakespeare</u> adaptation.

## Conclusion

Black actors and actresses as well as black characters had come a long way in the American cinema it may seem that racism in Hollywood have stopped by the increasing number of black people appearing on the big screen and the diverse roles they are playing and the many cinematic festivals and events they participate in. But the deeper we dive in Hollywood glam the worst it gets for African American talented actors and actresses, in a word that defends human rights and claims to fight for what is right and good, black actors and people are still struggling to prove they deserve the spotlight, that they have the talent and they are fit for the leading role and could do justice by it as many actors proved to do in many great roles in very successful movies.

## **Chapter Two: the change in Hollywood cinema with the entry of African Americans.**

### **Introduction**

The topic of study at hand is how minorities are portrayed in cinema, and how that picture impacts our perception of those minorities. It's a fascinating question. Films are a mirror of our society, or, more precisely, of the opinions of those in power, who have been and continue to be largely white people.

However, cinema can also present an idealized version of culture as it should be. Films are extremely significant cultural texts that may shape how we treat people, our social and political consciousness, who we choose to love or admire, and who we select to reject. As once said on the big screen, "with great power comes great responsibility." This is not something Hollywood should take lightly, but only recently have industry started taken notice.

From minstrel shows which are a type of stage entertainment featuring songs, dances, and formulaic comic routines based on stereotyped depictions of African Americans and typically performed by white actors with blackened faces. It developed in the US in the early and mid 19th century and was widely performed until the mid 20th century but is now regarded as highly offensive (Languages) to the vaudeville which came later on as a type of entertainment popular chiefly in the US in the early 20th century, featuring a mixture of special acts such as burlesque comedy and song and dance (Languages), black people had always been a laughing stock in the American cinema. Schaden freude and oh did the white audience took that word quite seriously, they enjoyed the black people's misery, their humiliation and despair. As a black person you stand no chance of taking the stage unless you will entertain the white audience. Therefore, black actors and actresses

settled for roles that are far beneath and it finally was about time someone does something about it.

### **2.1. The African American revolution in Hollywood**

Historically, Hollywood has typically done a poor job of not only adequately depicting minority groups, but also of featuring them at all. We've seen quite a development in the depictions of various groups over time, and today we're going to concentrate on the portrayal of Black people in American cinema.

Let us commence in the beginning: the first feature films appeared in the early twentieth century, including filmmaker D.W. Griffith's 'controversial' picture "*Birth of a Nation*." This early picture is a fantastic illustration of cinema's power over the general population, if it chooses to apply it. The three-hour film from 1915 symbolizes Abraham Lincoln's assassination, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. African Americans were represented as intellectually inferior and sexually aggressive toward white women in this film, and were performed by white performers dressed in blackface. In contrast, the Ku Klux Klan was portrayed as a noble movement that would safeguard white America from Black people. The film fuelled the KKK's revival.

Of course, this is only one side of the story. While "*Birth of a Nation*" is always mentioned as a "landmark" film in film history, "*Within Our Gates*," directed by African American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux, is rarely mentioned. The film, which is sometimes regarded as a reaction to "*Birth of a Nation*," shows Micheaux's perspective of the American race condition and stars Black actors playing Black people.

Indeed, even in the early days, filmmakers sought to cast Black actors and tell Black stories. Norman Studios was one such production firm that wished to contrast the

demeaning portrayals that African Americans were frequently given. According to Richard Norman, he chose to include Black performers "splendidly assuming different roles."

But let's skip ahead a little: The 1967 film "*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*" portrayed interracial marriage positively, and it was released six months after interracial marriage was ruled legal in all 50 states as a result of the *Loving v. Virginia* decision.

At that moment, we had come a long way from blackface - the Civil Rights Movement had brought about real legal change in America, such as the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. However, many Americans' hearts and minds had yet to be changed in terms of their attitudes toward Black people. This film had a tremendous cultural influence - actor Sidney Poitier was nominated for an Academy Award for his performance - but it was also criticized for not going far enough and appealing to white American viewers.

A generation later, in 1990, John Singleton, a freshly graduated film student, sold his script to Columbia Pictures. "*Boyz N the Hood*" (1991) was groundbreaking because a Black artist was able to present a Black narrative truthfully and from his own standpoint of view. The film was a coming-of-age story about an adolescent Black kid growing up in a projects-style area in South Central Los Angeles. It showed American audiences the police violence and the culture of gangs that many young Black people experience. Singleton was the youngest and first African American to be nominated for Best Director at the Academy Awards, and his picture influenced how Black citizens were depicted on cinema.

In this century, Hollywood has made sluggish but steady progress toward diversity and inclusion. Of course, Black filmmakers have been presenting Black tales for a long time; it's just that the film industry as a whole (which, once again, is predominantly dominated by white people) hasn't paid attention or recognized their creativity. However, as

Hollywood becomes more creative and greater numbers of Black filmmakers make a path to the industry's frontlines, Black stories and creative are beginning to receive the attention they deserve.

In recent decade, films like "*12 Years a Slave*" (2013) and "*Selma*" (2014) have acknowledged America's troubling past in its treatment of Black people, as have movies like "*Moonlight*" (2016), which follows a young Black man as he explores his identity and sexuality.

In 2018, filmmaker Ryan Coogler released "*Black Panther*," a Marvel picture based on Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's comics. Marvel's first Black superhero film was a huge success, both critically and financially. It was the first superhero picture to be nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards, and it also took home awards for Best Costumes, Best Original Score, and Best Production Design.

From blackface to Black Panther, the representation of African-Americans in movies has evolved tremendously and for the better. But, as Queen Latifah said (or sang) in "*Hairspray*," "I know we've come so far, but we still have a long way to go." (Barnes)

## **2.2. Hollywood: not only racist but also sexist**

In recent years, there has been a greater focus on racism and sexism in Hollywood films, which can be seen in who appears in front of the camera, who directs behind the camera, and how individuals are portrayed on-screen – and frequently all three. To demonstrate how Hollywood clichés have evolved. (Schacht)

In the early days of Hollywood, black actors were not always cast as black roles. In truth, they were only seen as caricatures portrayed by white performers in blackface. This

technique evolved from the American theatrical tradition of minstrelsy, which featured racist caricatures of black people.

After a long period of criticism, blackface is now much less common: in *Dear White People*, for example, college fraternity members throw a blackface-themed party, which the film, as well as the Netflix series of the same name, uses as the basis for a discussion of racism at colleges across the United States.

However, as more black characters and actors have been cast in Hollywood, other stereotypes have been emphasized. Till present day, black men are frequently represented as intimidating or hostile, while black women are stereotyped as foul mouthed and arrogant. If a film has a single symbolic black character, it is most likely to be the black best friend. Furthermore, if people die in a movie, the black character is still more likely to die first. Even as public awareness of racial stereotypes grows, Hollywood continues to use them. If Africa is featured, it is dangerous and undeveloped.

The stereotyped images of black people in Hollywood usually pertain to black Americans. African-themed tropes are fewer, mainly because African characters appear in few Hollywood films. The most popular cliché concerning Africa, however, is what TV tropes users refer to as "Darkest Africa": films that depict the continent as a strange and deadly isolated region with very minimal links to "modern" society. That representation is becoming less common. (Languages)

### **2.2.1. The Emasculation of the Black Male Image**

The Black male's picture has been marginalized and emasculated to the extent that his effect is minimal at best. This would not have been possible without his assistance on some

level, but the goal has been clear: to fully cripple his authority to move, lead, and defend his people.

There are several machinations at work to paralyze the intrinsic power of Black masculinity by presenting an emasculated picture that represents a feminine state of existence that will be accepted by Black women but not appreciated in terms of genuine manhood.

Hollywood movie representations of the greatest Black actors in makeup and feminine clothes have proven to be incredibly effective in presenting an emasculated and feminized picture of Black manhood. With a few exceptions, all of Hollywood's major Black males have been cast in drag or in a feminine character.

While some of Hollywood's top White men are also portrayed in drag, consider the percentage of these White males placed in drag in relation to the overall number of White men in Hollywood, and then do the identical thing for Black men. For those ready to examine the facts in the light of truth, the goal becomes readily clear.

Our guys, who would ordinarily look macho, have been lowered in masculinity and offered to the public, from Martin Lawrence, Eddie Murphy, and Arsenio Hall to Taye Diggs and Wesley Snipes, as well as Ving Rhames. We have now seen an increase in feminine conduct among young African American guys, as well as a wholesale feminization of current Rap culture.

While the expression "feminized" is used here, the more important point is the emasculation of the Black masculine representation. Feminization of the Black male appearance is only one way that the Black guy is being emasculated and Black advancement is being stifled. (Tart)

### **2.2.2. The mockery of African American women**

Since the Jim Crow era, American culture has used a number of means to demean Black women, whether through the 'Aunt Jemima' myth, the 'Jezebel' story, or equating Black women to monkeys.

Sadly, these ancient portrayals have persisted to influence Black womanhood. In her piece "Black Women Are Besieged on Social Media, and White Apathy Damns Us All," Janet Burns illustrates how these technologies have empowered "legions of dedicated and 'everyday' racists" who attack Black women with "all the fresh hell and tired tropes they can muster." We can observe an adoption of this defeminization of the group in short form videos that reimagining the humiliation of Black women.

These movies rehash cheap jokes to suit the predominantly white people by adopting historical notions of Black women. "For these jokes to still be... recycled for [new] generations... demonstrates the true desire to disrespect and embarrass Black women in the name of comedy," says Tee Noir in her YouTube video headlined "The Market of Humiliating Black Women."

Following that, all of these instances know that degrading Black women is a cheap and effective approach to generate controversy and attract a new audience. (Mabelle)

The problem with this is that when a recurrent 'joke' against Black women is passed down, society eventually comes to believe that the jokes are real. When Black females are assessed on their supposed attributes before they get an opportunity to display their true characteristics, they are set up for failure. They are unable to autonomously and calmly develop their femininity or hobbies. They are instead required to fit into demeaning tales. This follows them into adulthood, where their attractiveness becomes a source of disdain and derision.

This is why guy's bloggers Walter Weekes and Myron Gaines were compelled to address the concept of attractiveness for Black women in their show *Fresh and Fit*. "Me and Fresh aren't down with the browns like that," Gaines declared. "Neither me nor Fresh dabble in the dark, if you know what I mean."

It would be simple to dismiss this foolish remark. But it's difficult to love your skin and figure when you're constantly confronted with the normalcy of demeaning Black women.

### **2.3. Modern Hollywood Cinema and Representations of Blackness**

So, like early Black Movies, the Hollywood entertainment business co-opted blaxploitation, subsuming it under the mainstream cultural hegemony and stripping it of its strength as a counter narrative. As the 1970s gave way to the 1980s, the same cultural machine that battled Second Wave Feminism with male-dominated action heroes, gender role reversal sketches, and slashes films created cinema that rejected actual cultural change in terms of racial justice by highlighting an anti-reactionary, assimilations narrative.

This plot appears in buddy comedies such as *Silver Streak* (1976) and *Stir Crazy* (1980), action comedies such as *48 Hrs* (1982), and *the Lethal Weapon franchise*, which debuted in 1992. Each of the films features two protagonists, one black and one white, who must overcome their differences and collaborate. However, it frequently neglected the two characters' vast inequalities in power and ability. Or, if they were paying attention, they made light of the situation.

This is similar to the picture of Blackness depicted in early film in certain aspects. Those stale, old caricatures were disgusting, but their ultimate goal was to encourage integration (which is actually simply another word for surrender). The characters of Uncle Tom and Mammy, as well as Stepin Fetchit, were held up as excellent representations of acceptable behaviour for African Americans. The sad mulatto and hazardous Black male were

warning signs. But this was a component of a story of assimilation, of acquiescence to white rule. And, as we get into the present day, we may see some new stereotypes promoting a similar objective.

The known as Magical Negro is one of many discussed new stereotypes. This is a recurrent figure, generally male and endowed with strange, magical abilities, whose sole purpose is to assist the white protagonist in achieving their goal and/or avoiding some awful scenario. Michael Clarke Duncan in *The Green Mile* (1999); Will Smith in *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000); Djimon Hounsou in *In America* (2002); Morgan Freeman in *Bruce Almighty* (2003); and Samuel L. Jackson in *The Unicorn Store* (2019) are just a few examples. These characters seldom have a soul of their own, and their motives are limited to assisting the white characters.

A different well-known current stereotype is the "Thug" persona, which is just a modernized version of the old "dangerous Black man" image from early movies. The violent stereotype is likely the most widespread of the new/old clichés, appearing in far too many films and television shows to count. There are others as well. The Local Mad Black Woman, characterised by her inexplicable anger and nothing else.

There's also a related stereotype for white heroes pushed into circumstances where they individually might rescue the [insert impoverished, underprivileged, wrongfully accused, non-white student, domestic servant, criminal, etc. here], known as the White Savior. Sandra Bullock in the 2009 film *The Blind Side* is a perfect example. However, instances may be seen in *The Help* (2011), *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), and so on.

Generally those current stereotypes have one thing in shared: they all play a role in constructing a common cultural paradigm about ethnicity in America. A story that

repeatedly emphasizes whiteness as normative as well as the implicit worth of any non-white "other" surrendering (or "assimilating") to that standard. And, while African American presence in mainstream film has increased, number does not always correspond to value if the portrayal decreases to a fresh collection of stereotypes.

This is one of the causes for a growing outspoken criticism of the Academy prizes and its continued absence of African American performers from suggestions and prizes. Starting in 2015, the #OscarsSoWhite movement urged the Motion Picture Academy to address this discrepancy after all 20 acting awards that year (and the year following) went to white performers. And once African American performers win significant prizes, it is frequently for parts that validate white superiority. Denzel Washington became only the second African American to be awarded an Oscar for Best Actor in 2002. He won neither it neither for his roles as political leader Malcolm X in *Malcolm X* (1992) nor boxing sensation Rubin Carter in *Hurricane* (1999), yet for his portrayal of an unjust, "Thug" officer in *Training Day* (2001). In that same year, Halle Berry became the first African American to be named Best Actress at the Oscars. It was for the 2001 film *Monster's Ball*, in which she portrayed the widow of a death row convict who has had a relationship with her late husband's white prison officer.

#### **2.4. Modern Black Cinema And The Politics Of Representation**

Thankfully, the tale of African American presence in film isn't over there. Just beginning in Black Cinema's "race films" provided an opposing perspective to the offensive presumptions of the golden era of Hollywood, and the blaxploitation movement provided a counter narrative to Hollywood's passive, assimilations message in the 1960s and 1970s, a new counter narrative is arising in a new trendy Black Cinema. Or perhaps it's the same

Black Cinema that's continually been there, receding to the background for a time then roaring back when we require it most.

This newest version began with the free cinema wave of the 1980s, when more and more directors were able to take charge of their own productions beyond the Hollywood system thanks to less and cheaper technology. Producers like Spike Lee, whose debut feature film, *She's Needs It* (1986), was shot in 12 days for \$175,000, are examples of this. Or Robert Townsend, his 1987 film *Hollywood Shuffle* was paid for with his personal credit cards. Julie Dash, who made *Daughters of the Dust* (1991).with PBS financing after struggling for nearly 15 years.

All of those first movies provided a stunning contrast to Hollywood preconceptions, but it was the work of Spike Lee in particular who opened the path for future African American directors. *Do the Right Thing* (1989), his third artwork, openly takes on the political culture of race and directly addresses the issues of representation, racial inequity, a rise in and police brutality. In fact, the film's challenge to white hegemony was so timely that reviewers speculated that it may spark racial riots, as if just drawing attention to inequalities would result in bloodshed. Early viewing was even attended by police.

The protests never took place. However, many young African American producers were inspired. *Boyz n the Hood*, a visceral, subtle picture of teenagers in South Central Los Angeles, was directed by John Singleton in 1991. In 1993, the Hughes brothers released *Menace II Society*. *Friday* was created by F. Gary Gray in 1995, while *Set it off* was created in 1996. *Eve's Bayou* was created by Kasi Lemmons in 1997. Spike Lee would go on to make ten more films in the 1990s. There were others as well. They were all doing work that reflected the alternatives of Oscar Micheaux and Melvin Van Peebles, a new Black Cinema that reminded African American viewers that they, too, existed. They also

informed prospective filmmakers that they may participate in the discussion. The importance of depiction behind the scenes is equal to that of portrayal in front of the screen.

As a consequence of this golden decade in Black Cinema, an emerging class of African American producers emerged who began outside of the Hollywood structure and then rushed the gates to direct some of the most praised films of the last decade and a few of the biggest studio productions ever. Producers such as Barry Jenkins, whose debut feature *Medicine for Melancholy* (2008) was a modest, personal love drama. *Moonlight* (2016), his second movie, received the Academy Award for Best Picture. Or Ryan Coogler, whose debut film was *Fruitvale Station* in 2013, a devastating picture of Oscar Grant, a youthful, innocent Black man shot dead by police in Oakland in 2009. *Creed* (2015), a \$40 million re-boot of the Rocky series starring an African American, was his follow-up feature. His third big movie. It was the 2018 film *Black Panther*. Coogler handled a budget of more than \$200 million for the Marvel franchise picture, which made \$1.3 billion worldwide (it also featured a Black superhero figure and pushed a not-so-subtle critique of white power).

All of these directors, and numerous others, are not only providing an essential counter narrative to today's viewers, but they are also influencing genuine change in the mainstream narrative. And, perhaps, shifting the tale will lead to the gradual but steady demise of hegemony. At the very least, it must remind spectators that African Americans exist beyond the roles that were intended for them.

## **2.5. The Black Role Models in the American cinema**

"Whether it's a friend, family member or celebrity, we can learn a lot from our role models our continued greatness along with those following in our footsteps."While inspiring others. That is what I feel helps most in our community, paving the way for " (Johnson).

Picking a role model is a very selective process so it could set the course of someone's life and their prescriptive about themselves and their surroundings, when being a person of color on the big screen every word, move, gesture can inspire an entire generation of young black people to be more and do more, these are few of the biggest inspirational black characters throughout time:

### **Oprah Winfrey (1954 –)**

Oprah Winfrey is an Emmy Award-winning talk show presenter media executive, Oscar nominee, and philanthropist. She is best known as the moderator of the immensely successful *The Oprah Winfrey Show* that broadcast for 25 seasons from 1986 to 2011. Because of its success, she became the world's first Black woman billionaire in 2003. Winfrey's media empire now includes a television network, the Oprah Winfrey Network, as well as a lifestyle journal brand. She was elected into the Television Academy Hall of Fame in 1994, and in 2018, she became the first Black woman to win the Cecil B. DeMille Award for her extraordinary achievements to entertainment at the Golden Globes.

### **Steve Harvey (1957- )**

Steve Harvey began his career as a stand-up comedian. He next landed a Showtime at the Apollo hosting role, his own WB sitcom, and was one of four comedians included in Spike Lee's *The Original Kings of Comedy*. In 2000, Harvey established a long-running radio show, the material of which was adapted into the best-selling relationship book *Act like a Lady, Think like a Man*. He later had two daytime chat shows and is presently the presenter of the long-running game show *Family Feud*.

### **Michael B. Jordan (1987- )**

Michael B. Jordan started his professional life as a model and actor, and his first major break came in 1999 with a spot on *The Sopranos*. Later, he secured important parts in iconic television programs such as *The Wire* and *Friday Night Lights*. Jordan received critical recognition for his roles in the 2013 film *Fruitvale Station* and as a boxer protégé in 2015's *Creed*. In early 2018, he returned to the big screen in the hugely popular Marvel superhero film *Black Panther*. Jordan was selected *People* magazine's Sexiest Man Alive in 2020.

### **Kerry Washington (1977- )**

Kerry Washington, who was born on January 31, 1977 in New York City, began performing in high school. She graduated from George Washington University with a bachelor's degree in performance studies. After earning her cinematic premiere in *Our Song* in 2000, Washington went on to act in films such as *Save the Last Dance* and *Bad Company*. She eventually received widespread recognition for her performances in *Ray* and *The Last King of Scotland*. She began her stint on the TV show *Scandal* in 2012, and she received Emmy nominations for her depiction of lead character Olivia Pope. In the 2016 HBO film *Confirmation*, she plays lawyer/academic Anita Hill.

### **Conclusion**

The black American cinema has come a long way and black talented people started to flourish into the art scene, new stars started to shine in Hollywood's sky and even though there is still a fierce battle awaits for black people to reach complete equality but what they have achieved so far is remarkably good. If one is to follow the roles been played by black people throughout history, one will notice a major shift in black characters representation from servants to masters and from maids to CEOs but is that in all the cases?

According to the most recent statistics compiled by the National Gang Center, black people represent 35 percent of all gang members in America. Yet in Hollywood, they represent 64 percent of all onscreen gang members. An astounding 62 percent of all actors who were credited as "gang member" are black. Related credits — "gangster" (61 percent black), "gangbanger" (60 percent), and "thug" (66 percent) — drew similar results. Interestingly, another related term we looked at, the slightly more dignified "henchman," was 81 percent white and only 4 percent black. (Crockett), So Hollywood isn't about that equality after all, yet it engaged more people of colors in its movies but at what price, black people became the new criminal face for America, they dressed, walked and talked like someone who could hurt you for fun. This new form of representing the black people not only deformed their reputation on the screens but also implanted this vision in the American streets and for some reason the streets embraced that lie even some black people celebrated it, became it. It somehow became the new "cool" for them meanwhile it became the white persons worst nightmare to be in the presence of a black person and this proves nothing but how strong the impact of the media representation of the different races can affect the social environment which they live in and what great role does the cinemas plays in building a civilized society as much as destroying one.

## **Chapter three: the Representation of African Americans in the American Cinema between now and then**

### **Introduction**

African American actors and actresses have come a long way in Hollywood, the way they were represented is not the way they are represented now or is it what Hollywood want us to believe? Historically Hollywood isn't the best example for racial equality, after committing such shameful crimes against African Americans denying them to appear on the screen while using a “blackface” to represent them instead, then to only represent them as inferiors to white people characters. But now some of the biggest some of most famous leading roles and great movies are held by African American people, so are we really to believe that Hollywood is finally above all racial discrimination.

In this chapter we will through some movies from different time periods and analyse their content with what we see relevant to our theme, and while we are at it we will analyse several scenes that would make the vision clear so we could determine whether there is a real change in representing African Americans in the American movies or is it the same state only with big fancy front of equality.

### **3.1. Methodology**

To analyse the selected movies, we are using the content analysis methodology. This, according to Columbia University, is defined as a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e., text). Using content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyse the presence, meanings, and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts. As an example, researchers can evaluate language used within a news article to search for bias or partiality.

Researchers can then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s),

the audience, and even the culture and time of surrounding the text. Our main goal is to uncover the reality behind the racial discrimination and stereotypes in the classical Hollywood cinema and highlight the changes made in the modern American cinema.

### **3.2. Coding scheme**

To help mark out our categories we watched four movies from different cinematic eras to increase the reliability of the coding, and then we coded different implements. Finally, after analysing the content of the movie we choose a number of scenes to confirm the movies relevance to the implements studied.

### **3.3. The movies:**

#### **3.3.1. *The Help* 2011: the depiction of African American women in the movie**

The movie is a 2011 drama work about the white talented writer Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan. Who was trying to write a book that tells the story of African American maids from their point of view which leads her to dig deeper into their world and uncover the horrors they experienced while being the maids of white people. Throughout the movie the all African American maids share their personal stories about slavery, humiliation, dehumanising, motherhood and more of so with miss Skeeter with the promise to keep their identity hidden from the potential readers so they could keep both their jobs and lives. The movie embodies the pre-civil rights life of black people in America, the movie is directed by Tate Taylor and based on Kathryn Stockett's novel with the same name.

#### **Film selection**

- Rating: the movie was rated 8.1/10 on IMDb by 472k person and 76% positive reviews on Rotten tomatoes

- Relevance to theme: racism, discrimination, the mummification of African American women, stereotyping black people, the white saviour trope
- Language: English
- The cast: a remarkable cast from actresses both black and white such as Emma Stone, Octavia Spencer, Jessica Chastain, Bryce Dallas Howard, Allison Janney, Ahna O'Reilly and Viola Davis
- Awards: 79 wins between Academy Awards, BAFTA Awards, Golden derby awards, people's choice awards, Golden Globes and more as well as 121 nominations
- Distributed by Walt Disney Studios and Motion Pictures

**Fig 1: the help official poster.**



Source:

IMP awards. 27 July 2011. 07 05 2023

<[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.impawards.com%2F2011%2Fhelp\\_ver2.html&psig=AOvVaw07sAYRSxbxvJQe-Ywp\\_CCL&ust=1686296222657000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CBEQjRxqFwoTCMCEuo2Vs\\_8CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.impawards.com%2F2011%2Fhelp_ver2.html&psig=AOvVaw07sAYRSxbxvJQe-Ywp_CCL&ust=1686296222657000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CBEQjRxqFwoTCMCEuo2Vs_8CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE)>.

From the first glance at the post you notice an unequal posing for the 4 main characters, the two black ladies who are clearly the maids based of their uniforms are standing next to the chair where the white ladies are sitting and it is already unfair allocation that shows the social status of the characters , we also notice the attitude presented in the poster where on one side it shows the maids are standing straight in uniforms whispering to each other's while the ladies of the other side sitting on the chair show different attitudes as well, one is carless almost arrogant and the other is somewhere in between, yes she embracing her white privilege by sitting but also showing a sign of humility and somehow confusion. The way they are sitting implements the superiority of the white women. The yellow is a bold colour for the poster it attracts attention to the simple purple writing of the simple title of the movie.

## Table 2

*The help* scenes statistics.

Number of scenes	Scenes containing Racism	Stereotyping scenes	The violent black man	The loud black woman (sapphire)	The mummification	The white saviour trope	Total misrepresentative scenes
143	1	5	3	0	6	12	5

### Mise-en-scene Analysis

a) Scene n° 1 : showing the African American as a mammy to the white children

**Fig 2: the maid Aibileen Clarck and the baby Mae Mobley**



Source:

World Press. 4 june 2011. 09 05 2023

<<https://acriticalreviewofthehelp.wordpress.com/2011/06/04/comparing-mae-mobley-to-kindra/>>.

**Fig 3: The maid Constantine and Miss Skeeter, another spiritual mother.**



Source: Morgan, David. CBSnews. 23 February 2012. 10 05 20223

<<https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/oscars-2012-the-help/>>.

In the scene the African American maid Aibileen Clark is in the house she works at wearing her uniform (which all the maids in the movies wear) with little miss Mae Mobley using a very kind and supportive phrases such as “You is Kind, You is Smart, You is Important” to show her love and appreciation to the girl and the girl is all happy and giggly, a soft sweet music sound was playing in the background to set a motherly aura around the characters. Then almost immediately they started showing how the girl's real mother doesn't care at all about her. This scene keeps repeating throughout the movie with not just this maid but with many others to continue the same old painted about how black women are such great care takers of white babies (even though sometimes they show them as not so good taking care of their own kids). In the scene the lighting is very bright, while the shot was a high angel shot and this type of shots is used to diminish the character and makes it look weak and fragile.

**B) Scene n ° 2:**

**Fig 4: the maid Minny Jackson using Mrs Hilly's home bathroom**



Source: branstetter.18. [The Ohio State University](https://u.osu.edu/scintrohmanities/2020/12/01/text-review-assignment-the-help-megan-branstetter/). 1 december 2020. 12 05 2023

<<https://u.osu.edu/scintrohmanities/2020/12/01/text-review-assignment-the-help-megan-branstetter/>>.

This was probably one of the most racist scene in the movie, the scene is set in MRs Hilly's house on what seems like a ladies party, on the table the all four white ladies are playing card when MRs Hilly starts to discuss her new idea about giving the “coloured people” their own toilets where they work where she said “Everybody knows they carry different kinds of diseases than we do...” while the African American maids where there to witness this awful racist dialogue. The scene later moves to MRs Hilly's house, on a rainy windy night the maid Minny wishes to use the bathroom and because her “personal” bathroom is outside she wishes to use the inside bathroom to face Mrs Hilly refusal which leaves her no choice but to use it without the Mrs's knowledge, but she discovers she started to lose her mind and immediately fired her and not only that but she also spread a rumour that Minny is a thief so no other home would take her as their maid. In the scene there is a clear sense of false superiority by Mrs Hilly that treats the black maids as if their

feelings don't matter and as if they are an abomination on nature and they have to be treated as such. The scene was shot with an eye level shot that helps creating a direct connection with the character to focus on its actions only; the lighting was slightly darkened to give it a dramatic effect.

### **Scene n° 3: the missing ring scene, stereotyping African American as thieves and criminals**

**Fig 5: the arrest of the maid Yule Mae for stealing Hilly's ring**



Source:

PHOTO, TIME. Time. 25 June 2015. 14 05 2023 <<https://time.com/3936231/aunjanue-ellis-roles/>>.

The scene is set in Mrs Hilly's house where the maid Yule finds a ring under the sofa that clearly belongs to Mrs Yule and she hides it instead of returning it to her, earlier in the movie the maid asks Mrs Hilly and her husband to borrow some money to send her children to college, Mrs Hilly says no so when the maid took the ring it nourished the stereotypical image about how black American servants and maids are not trust worthy and are most likely to steal your belongings if you weren't careful enough. Later the maid gets arrested for theft the scenes encourages the idea that black people lack manners and

are willing to commit a crime whenever needed which leads to dehumanise them and therefore for them to appear as a danger on the stability and safety of the white peaceful race. This scene was also shot on an eye level to help see the maid dramatic breakdown.

**Scene n°4: the maid Minny with a black eye, the violent black man and mistreated black woman.**

**Fig 6: Minny the maid after being beaten by her violent husband**



Source:

Youtube. 9 February 2012. 15 05 2023  
<<https://images.app.goo.gl/75BVGo6ziXpHhVbS7>>.

The scene is set in Mrs Celia's house where Minny the maid is doing her job while talking to Celia until Celia notices Minny's black eye and she instantly grasps the fact that she has been beaten by her husband and she helps her by putting an ice bag on the wound on her eye, when you first see the scene you are just looking at an innocent woman showing sympathy but when you really see it, now you are looking at a stereotypical image about black American's households. Domestic violence is a sensitive subject for the Americans overall but to have it in a black American household makes it a lot worse. Showing the

black man as bad family man who treats women badly and who terrors his kids and family every time he walks into the room with his undershirt and a body full of tattoos made him appear as a monster to the American audience. Throughout the movie Minny is subjected to her husband's mistreatment and beating even though they don't show the husband doing it but Minny's face says it all, the shot here is a close up shot to draw the attention to Minny's sad expressions as well as Mrs Celia's sympathetic one. The darkness in the shot was also to give a dramatic effect to the scene.

**Scene n°5: saved by Miss Skeeter, the white saviour trope**

**Fig 7: Miss Skeeter the white knight in her shining armour**



Source:

Times, Northeast. NORTHEAST TIMES. 18 August 2011. 19 05 2023  
 <<https://northeasttimes.com/2011/08/18/the-help-elegant-story-of-wanting-to-be-equal/>>.

In the scene the maids who helped miss Skeeter write her book “the help” are showing her appreciation and gratitude for making them heard and seen by everyone, in cinema this is

called “the white saviour trope” where they put a white person who appears to be kind and thoughtful, this character always comes to the rescue you of black people. In this scene Miss Skeeter tells the maids that she is refusing a life-changing job offer in New York City just to stay and help them get through the mess her book may cause to them to enhance the brave knight in his shining armour image in the audience’s mind. The maids are not in uniforms in this scene to give this exchange between the three characters appearing natural and give a sense of equality. The shot in the scene is a medium shot to show the body language of the three characters to give it a sense of intimacy. The brightness is high to give a sense of hope and happy endings and that the day was saved.

### **3.3.2. *The Hate U Give* 2018: stereotyping African Americans as criminals and violent people.**

Based on a 2017 novel with the same name, the movie is about 16 years old Starr who is an African American teenager who lives a double life, one as her true self where she lives in the “hood” with her family among her people and the second as a well-behaved student in her fancy school among white rich kids. Starr appears to be lost between the two worlds trying to fit in both and lose none of them. Not until she witnesses her childhood’s friend Khalil getting shot and murdered by a policeman in the iconic scene of the white cop pulling over the black driver for purely racist reasons. After the traumatic event, Starr’s both worlds collapse leaving her no choice but to fight for one of them, she appears to be morally grey at first but ends up finding the courage to seek justice for her friend’s death. The movie is all about “black lives matter” movement told from someone who gets to be in both side’s point of view.

#### **Movie selection:**

- Rating: rated 7.5/10 on IMBD website by a 38k reviewer

- Relevance to theme: racism, negative representation of African Americans, stereotypes (Poverty crimes and strong language)
- Language: English
- Cast: Amandla Stenberg , Russell Hornsby,Algee Smith, Issa Rae,KJ Apa,bnTHONY Mackie,Dominique Fishback and Sabrina Carpenter are the movie cast and they are big names in the movie industry which helped the movie go worldwide.
- Awards: to movie seized around 22 awards like teen choice awards, critic choice awards, black reel awards, women’s image awards, African-American Film Critics Association (AAFCA) and more. The movie also got 38 nominations for different movie awards.
- Distributed by: 20th Century Fox.

**Fig 8: the Hate H Give official poster:**



Source:

Arizona State University. 19 october 2018. 20 05 2023 <<https://csrd.asu.edu/HateUGive>>.

The poster is showing the main character Starr's two sides, one is the hood black girl in a baggy hoodie and the other is the behaved student in her school's uniform. The two sides represent two completely opposite worlds that Starr is trying to fit in, but she feels lost in both. The slit in the middle of the picture summarises the entire movie plot where it shows the moral crisis Starr is going through, whether to stand for her people and claims justice for her friend or to keep silent and not provoke the white horror that she may unleash if she spoke up and may cost her life as she knows it.

**Table 3**

*The hate you give* scenes statistics.

Number of scenes	Scenes containing Racism	Stereotyping scenes	The violent black man	The loud black woman (sapphire)	The mummification	The white saviour trope	Total misrepresentative scenes
117	12	7	6	0	2	0	4

### Mise-en-scene Analysis

#### Scene n°1: Khalil's death scene

**Fig 9: shoot first, ask questions later.**



Source: Masukor, Sarinah. ABC news. 30 January 2019. 21 05 2023  
<<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-01-31/the-hate-u-give-review-teen-film-inspired-by-black-lives-matters/10758602>>.

The scene happened at night the main character Starr was being taken home by her childhood friend Khalil after a party that ended with a gunshot which is itself a stereotype considering the party was only for black kids, in this scene Khalil did nothing wrong but was still pulled over just because he seemed “suspicious” which is the non-racist way to say he seemed black and violent. Khalil was pulled by a white cop who shot him -twice- the moment he thought he saw a gun which was actually a hairbrush, the cop who shot Khalil appeared to be terrified after finding out it was just a hairbrush and not a gun. Later in the police station Starr is being asked questions about Khalil to justify his murder. This scene stereotypes black men to be rebellious and violent and as if possessing a gun and endangering other’s lives is the usual to them. The scene’s shot was a mix between a medium shot and a high shot to show the body language of Starr and Khalil as well as to show their weakness and vulnerability to the audience to gain their sympathy. The scene happened at night so naturally the lighting is low but it is just light enough to show the character’s expressions of anger, frustration, fear and pain to help the audience to emotionally connect with the characters.

**Scene n° 2: Starr threatens Hailey with the “weapon”**

**Fig 10: Starr and Haily's fight**



Source: Garafano, Lauren. Buzz Feed. 31 January 2021. 24 05 2023

<<https://www.buzzfeed.com/laurengarafano/best-book-to-movie-castings-add-yours-1>>.

“It is impossible to be unarmed when my Blackness is the weapon you fear.” Shamell Bell, it is exactly what this scene illustrates. The scene takes place in Starr’s school that is mostly for rich white kids where Starr gets into an argument with her friend Haily, Haily’s thoughts in the scene mirrors what all white people think for when she says that a hairbrush in Khalil’s hand could be used as a weapon but in a white kid’s hands it’s just a hairbrush. Starr storms at Haily holding a hairbrush asking if it’s a weapon in her hands too, Haily falls to the ground crying scared of Starr. The scene draws Starr as the typical loud violent black woman who has no control over her feelings and actions and tends to attack and harm when in state of rage. The shot was a close up shot to draw attention to the character's face expressions, between Starr’s rage and Haily’s fear with the dramatic non-diegetic sound playing in background gives a sense that Starr is really endangers Haily’s life with only a hairbrush. The scene also has a high shot and a low shot to give a power effect to

Starr with the low shot and show Haily as weak and fragile to Haily which helps show Starr as a real threat here.

### Scene n° 3: the white boyfriend who “doesn’t see colour”

**Fig 11: Chris the white saviour**



Source: DUPRE, ELYSE. Enews. 08 January 2019. 25 05 2023

<<https://www.eonline.com/news/1002816/kj-apa-and-amandla-stenberg-get-real-about-their-powerful-the-hate-u-give-scene>>.

Chris is Starr’s boyfriend in the movie that shows he’s support and appreciation to Starr the entire movie, Chris in the movie represents the white saviour trope. In the scene Chris is driving Starr and her sibling home and when they come across a marching crowd, Starr jumped out of the car to join them and her boyfriend followed offering his help to Starr that tells him to drive the others home and make sure they are safe which he does immediately, the scene may not be much but it means much, the white character who’s never racist, always helping and kind is the way to attract the white audience and gives them a sense of relatability to the scene and it is usually used to increase the watches, the shot was a medium shot to focus of the character’s body language, the boyfriend seems scared for Starr and his body language reflected care and nobility towered the crowd who

was deeply hurt for Khalil's faith. The lighting was dark and only focused on the main characters and the music played on the background was epic and dramatic to reflect the intensity of the scene.

### **3.3.3. *Gone with The wind* 1939: stereotyping, mummification and racism.**

The movie is a historical epic drama about civil war that was released in 1939, it tells the story of the Scarlett O'Hara and her journey with the civil war as well as her tangled love life with Mr Ashley and her husband Rhett Butler. The movie was based on a novel with the same name. In the almost 4 hours movie African Americans were allowed the shortest time on screen possible, and when they were on the screen they were only there as maids or servants or field slaves where back then those were the only roles a dark-skinned person could play.

#### **Film selection:**

- Rating: the movie was rated 8.2 on IMDb by 322k person and got 95% positive reviews on Rotten Tomatoes
- Relevance to theme: stereotyping, racism, classism, slavery, the mummification of African American women.
- Language: English
- Cast: Vivien Leigh, Hattie McDaniel, Leslie Howard, Clark Gable, Oscar Polk, Butterfly McQueen and Everett Brown.
- Awards: 22 wins among them 8 Oscars, Satellite Awards, People's Choice Awards, National Film Preservation Board, National Board of Review and more, along with 12 nominations to different awards

**Fig 12: gone with the wind official poster.**



Source:

IMDb. 1939. 27 05 2023 <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031381/>>.

No representation is itself a representation, remember? The poster indicates exactly that. the poster shows the two main characters along with some side images to show that the movie is about both love and war, the poster has no sign of African American actors or actresses because none of them really played a major role to be praised for.

**Table 4**

*Gone with the wind* scenes statistics.

Number of scenes	Scenes containing Racism	Stereotyping scenes	The violent black man	The loud black woman (sapphire)	The mummification	The white saviour trope	Total misrepresentative scenes
618	20	18	3	0	11	16	0

**Mise-en-scene:**

**Scene n°1: the mammy maid.**

**Fig 13: Mammy being “a momma bear” to Miss Scarlett.**



Source:

Rajan, Amol. BBC. 10 June 2020. 30 05 2023 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-52990714>>.

The scene is in miss Scarlett’s room where she is getting ready to go to a party, the maid Mammy is helping her dress but she is doing more than just helping, she is caring and preaching miss Scarlett as if she was her real mother, in the scene miss Scarlett refuses to eat because she is so excited to leave for the party so Mammy keeps telling her to eat

something before leaving so she won't ruin her image at the party. In a particular line, Scarlett threatens Mammy that if she told on her misbehaviour to her mother, she won't take a bite and Mammy fall for her trap and didn't tell on her. This reveals Mammy as a woman who loves the white kids as if they were her own and cares about their well-being. The shot is a medium shot to help see the body language of the characters displayed, Scarlett being stubborn, inattentive and little childish and Mammy being caring and worry for Scarlett. The music playing in the background is fun and playful to give the scene a humorous sense and make Scarlett's behaviour charming and innocent while Mammy's sound was a bit loud and aggressive to make her appear as strict and serious. The lighting was strong and the room was well lightened to go with the light happy mood presented in the scene.

**Scene n° 2: the nap scene, they are not slaves anymore but they are treated as such.**

**Fig 14: enjoy the nap I wish to have.**



Source:

Acuna, Kirsten. INSIDER. 25 June 2020. 01 June 2023 <<https://www.insider.com/gone-with-the-wind-returns-to-hbo-max-2020-6>>.

The scene took a place during a party where ladies are enquired to take a midday nap, in Mrs Ashley's house. In the scene the ladies changed their big fancy gowns and their maids took them away leaving the little servants behind to hold the fans and wave them over the sleeping beauties. The ladies were all white for sure in elegant clothes with bright colours and puffy skirts while servants wore simple dresses and appeared to be tired and hot as well but they still waved those fans. In the scene slavery is supposed to be over and all the slaves were freed but they still came back to the same old jobs they used to do to get the same treatment they used to get. The music playing in the background is playful and funky to go with the overall happy mood in this scene that centres on the rich white women. The scene is a medium shot that helps see the body language of the characters presented on the screen.

### **3.3.4. *The Birth of a Nation* 1915.**

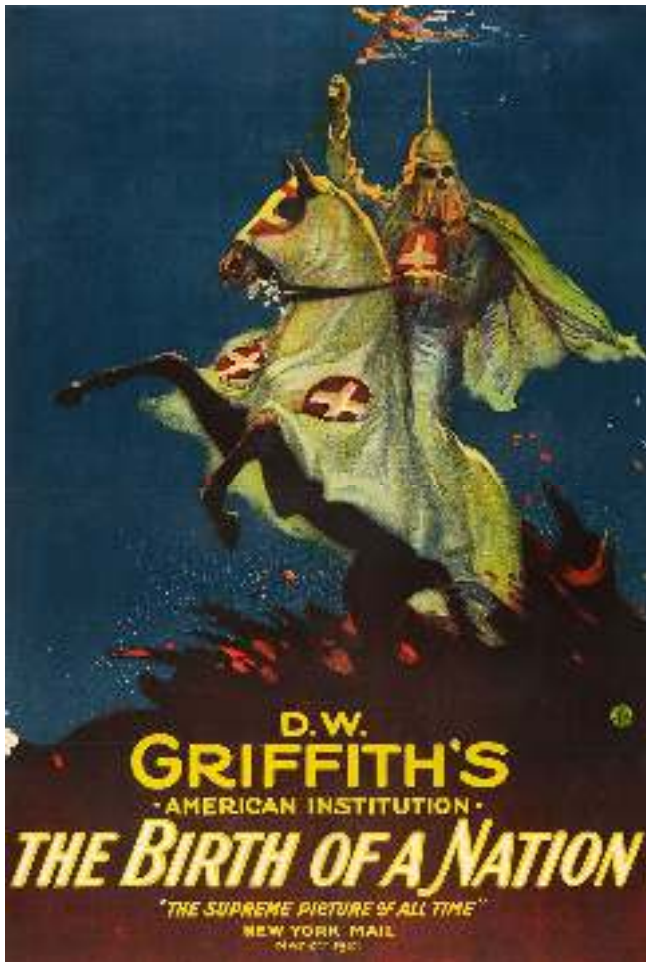
The movie is a drama and a war movie that tells a story of the two families, the Stonemans and the Camerons whose friendship got affected by the civil war and made them enemies after they were dear friends. The movie has done an incredible harm to black people by displays the Ku Klux Klan as heroes who saved the south from the savage freedmen who are obviously black people that were in fact white people in a blackface. The movie was described as the most racist movie that was ever made because of the horrible representation of African Americans in the movie that helped setting stereotypical images that America still carries around until this very day.

#### **Film selection:**

- Rating: the movie was rated 6.2/10 in IMDb by a 26k viewer
- Relevance to theme: racism, discrimination, misrepresenting African Americans, stereotypes

- Language: English

**Fig 15: the birth of a nation's poster:**



Source:

Metz, Elle. BBC. 08 february 2015. 05 06 2023 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31170282>>.

The poster shows a member of the Ku Klux Klan in a heroic stand that reflects courage, strength and victory. The KKK member is holding a torch that is usually used to burn the black people and scare them in the field of battle. The mask is also the official uniform of the KKK members it helps veil the member's identity and scare their opponent.

**Table 5**

*The birth of a nation* scenes statistics.

Number of scenes	Scenes containing Racism	Stereotyping scenes	The violent black man	The loud black woman (sapphire)	The mummification	The white saviour trope	Total misrepresentative scenes
153	50	29	32	0	0	0	0

### Mise-en-scene

#### Scene n°1: the black buck chasing the innocent white lady

#### Fig 16: the black buck



Source:

Adams, Sean. [pennlive](http://pennlive.com). 03 july 2013. 07 06 2023

<[https://www.pennlive.com/entertainment/2013/07/lone\\_ranger\\_race\\_in\\_movies.html](https://www.pennlive.com/entertainment/2013/07/lone_ranger_race_in_movies.html)>.

The scene is set in the woods, the white lady is standing there waiting for white man, suddenly a man in a black face appears from behind and stands next to her, the man's face expressions show his intentions are not pure, this scene stereotypes the black man as eager to sexually assault innocent white ladies and they are called the black bucks. The scene ends with the white woman jumping off a hill to escape the savage black man and the KKK members find him to murder him without a trial which also helped normalizing lynching against black people advocating that black people don't deserve a fair trial. The music playing in the background of this scene indicates the character is in danger and the monster running behind her is threatening her life, the music makes the audience fear for the white girl and loathe the black man and consider it as immoral, savage and dangerous.

**Scene n°2: house of representative controlled by the black people.**

**Fig 17: black people in Master's Hall**



Source:

Schreiber, Abby. ORIGINS. 25 3 2015. 08 06 2023 <[https://origins.osu.edu/connecting-history/3252015-movies-birth-nation-after-100-years?language\\_content\\_entity=en](https://origins.osu.edu/connecting-history/3252015-movies-birth-nation-after-100-years?language_content_entity=en)>.

The scene happens in the Master's Hall where 101 black person is gathered with 23 white people for the first time, the scene displays the black folks as uncivilized and immature by showing childish and barbarian behaviour, the place was a mess, black people at the Hall's first floor while noble white people are on the top floor looking down at them with disgust in their faces because of the actions of the black people between taking their shoes off, drinking alcohol in the middle of the hall, not sitting in their places and laughing and making a mess that even their leaders couldn't control. The music playing is between funny and dramatic to help make the mess look worse and justify the looks on the white people's faces. This scene represented black people as savages who don't deserve equality or a leading position and those they shall always be ruled by the civilized noble white people or there will be chaos.

### **3.3.5. Discussion**

Now that we have seen the four movies and analysed them based on their relatability to our theme, we are to see whether the representation of black Americans has changed through time or has it stayed the same.

In the movies that were released before the 2000's we have noticed that black people were only represented as slaves, maids, savages, rapists and other minor roles while big important roles were given to the white Americans, next to a very humiliating stereotypes that painted the African Americans as an abomination in America that white people have to live with. Even though the two movies were extremely racist and made African American's lives unbearable in the whole of America but they were one of the most famous movies in America's cinematic history and they are still regarded as so today.

Moving to the movies that were released after the 2000's, well, things haven't been really changed for African Americans in the modern days, the two presented movies are supposed to oppose racism and praise equality but they still presented African Americans the same way the old movies did and the same stereotypes are still appearing in a number of scenes.

But if we spoke numbers, we will notice that the number of scenes containing offensive content to African Americans in the movies after 2000 is way less than in the movies before 2000, and the roles held by African Americans are more diverse therefore we notice that African Americans now play big and important roles in the new movies unlike the old ones so now they can play cops, teachers, lawyers and more honourable roles.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter took us another step closer to the study's aim where we can now answer our main question, Did Hollywood finally embraced African Americans and is now considers them an essential part of it, or do they have a lot more fighting to do, and the answer is yes, they still have to do a lot more to reach that social and racial equality they are fighting for. Is there any kind of change? Yes, there is but the change itself formed new stereotypes that didn't exist in the classical movies but the damage is still the same. From the minstrel shows and the mortifying black face on white actors to the savage uncivilized black people who were considered too dangerous and too feral to be given any type of freedom and that enslaving them was in the best interest of the civilized white community, these stereotypes may have seem like they are long gone but from what we saw in this chapter they defiantly not gone but just disguised in a more modern images. By the end of this study it is safe to say that Hollywood is still as racist as it has always been.

## **Conclusion**

Hollywood has a huge effect on the American street, if not the entire globe, the images presented in the American cinema shapes the minds and vision of the Americans and determine the way of behaving and dealing with different matters in life and that's a two-sided sword. A good representation would mean social acceptance while a bad representation would lead to a social rejection as has been done to the African Americans for ages.

Hollywood has always drawn African Americans as Toms, Mammies, slaves, coons, bucks, Sapphires and more racial stereotypes that led to dehumanizing the African Americans and represent them as either too dangerous or too naïve to deal with. therefore the only expected ways to deal with an African American is by avoiding him and be scared of him or make a fool out of him for your personal entertainment.

Hollywood claims to support and protect human rights and criminalise racism and discrimination but there is still a clear racial, religious and cultural discrimination in almost every movie in Hollywood and that discrimination includes actors, actresses, producers and all African American film makers. Even though their numbers are increasing on the screen but it seems like it is for pure profitable reasons.

The civil war may have ended slavery and gave black people their freedom but it didn't give them an immunity against discrimination and racism and Hollywood certainly didn't help make things better for the African Americans even after years of fighting it both on and off the screen, the images planted in many generations through the racial stereotypes and negative representation of the African Americans became part of their culture and who

they are and became almost impossible to not notice it on screen even if the movie is – ironically- `fighting racism and discrimination

Furthermore, this study proved that white people had always been in control and were always the higher power in America even in the artistic fields, they enjoyed it, showed it and celebrated it in every step of the American history, even the small amount of success the African Americans got in this past few years is only approved but the white audience or every African American movie or presences in movies would have been a huge fail like it happened in the first few years of the African American cinematic rebellion.

Finally, this study's result may change in next few years as we head to a more civilised world that may one day don't care about the person's cultural and racial background and considers art a noble message that can only be delivered by people of great talent and great presence on the screen regardless on the colour of their skins. As we notice a great African Americans shine in Hollywood sky and earn their places on the big screen by doing what they meant to be doing and sever a beautiful case which is serving art.

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