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NICK FURY, WILL SMITH, AND OTHER BLACK AUTHORITY FIGURES

BREAKING THE RACIAL CONTRACT IN POPULAR FILMS OF 2000-2015

by

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ABSTRACT

NICK FURY, WILL SMITH, AND OTHER BLACK AUTHORITY FIGURES

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by Solai N. Wyman

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Film is arguably a model of reflection and reinforcement of cultural, social, and political values of audience members. Therefore, the images and messages displayed in films are of importance. In this study, film is analyzed in order to determine if Charles Mills' racial contract is depicted in popular films of 2000-2015. *The Racial Contract* (1997) suggests that only some people, specifically white people, agree to form a state in which their absolute privileges in the political, economic, and social arenas are guaranteed by virtue of being white. This theory was used to understand the role of black people in American society and, as this study explored, in film. Films which earned the highest box office sales in each year were analyzed, and the roles of black characters and the attitudes towards them were coded. The main question posed is whether black characters are portrayed as authority figures in popular film or are they are restrained by sub-personhood, as the racial contract would suggest. Furthermore, is the racial contract reinforced by this portrayal in a modern age? It was concluded that black authority figures were portrayed actively and successfully in popular film, with a general attitude of support from other characters. Thus, the racial contract was not reflected.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

To my superhero, my grandmother. I hope I make you proud.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAF   Black Authority Figure

MCU   Marvel Cinematic Universe

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Pentecost: Gentlemen, your orders are to hold the Miracle Mile off Anchorage.

Copy?

Raleigh: Copy that, sir.

Yancy: Sir, there's still a civilian vessel in the Gulf.

Pentecost: You're protecting a city of two million people. You will not risk those

lives for a boat that holds ten. Am I clear?

Yancy: Yes sir.

Raleigh (to Yancy): You know what I'm thinking.

Yancy: I'm in your brain.

Raleigh: I know.

Yancy: Then let's go fishing.

(Del Toro, Tull, Jashni, Parent, & Del Toro, 2013)

In the popular 2013 film, *Pacific Rim*[1], Marshal Stacker Pentecost serves as one

of the highest ranking officers in the Pan Pacific Defense Corps, an organization founded

by the U.N. to combat a destructive race of giant creatures called Kaijus. Pentecost is a

black man, and throughout the film, his authority is often challenged or disregarded.

Yancy and Raleigh, brother pilots of one of the defense robots called Jaegers, are white

and blatantly disobey his direct orders, as the scene above demonstrates. Instead of

following Pentecost's command and guarding the border built to keep Kaijus away from

the city, they diverge from his plan and risk their own lives and the lives of countless

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[1] While this film is not included in the sample of this project because it is not a Top 10 film, it was the film that inspired this study.

civilians. This disobedience quickly led to tragic consequences for the brothers. Instances like this one suggest that when a black character is portrayed as an authority figure, their authority may not be supported by white characters, rendering their role pointless. The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether or not the treatment of Stacker Pentecost falls in line with a trend seen in the most popular films released between 2000 and 2015.

According to many scholars, films are more than just an entertaining art form (Christensen & Haas, 2005; Combs, 1993; Guerrero, 1993; Shae, 1999; Snead, 1994). Wood (2012) goes so far as to call film a type of "institution" in which a financial enterprise and a cultural determinate are combined into one (p. 6). While the socialization ability of film to shape the behavior of mass audiences may be limited, film is arguably a viable model of reflection and reinforcement of social attitudes and political beliefs of audience members. Therefore, the impact of film should be studied, specifically in relation to politics and cultural values.

Popular culture as a reflection of societal values can be studied in popular film. Those films that are viewed by the most Americans arguably illustrate what stories, characters, and images viewers place value in, but it may also influence which of those things that will be valuable in the future. Thus, film is an extension of culture which reflects the values of a society. This project seeks to understand the value, or lack thereof, placed in blackness in film and subsequently real life society. *The Racial Contract* (1997) is used to understand the role of black people in American society, and popular film is analyzed in order to determine if that is reflected in popular culture.

In *The Racial Contract* (1997), Charles Mills describes the circumstances in which an oppressive, exploitative, and immoral society can exist in which domination of

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a few is accepted without question. He theorizes the type of agreement that would have to be made and between whom in order to generate such an arrangement like the one that founded the United States. The racial contract is the answer to these questions, and it suggests that only some people, in this case, white people, agree to form a state in which their absolute privileges in the political, economic, and social arenas are guaranteed by virtue of being white. In this arrangement, black people are deemed sub-persons or irrational and noxious wild animals who have no capacity to take part in a contract system nor should they exercise authority.

Mills argues that the repressive and unjust hierarchical design of the racial contract, which was set into place hundreds of years ago for the sole benefit of whites, still persists today. White superiority has been at the "core" of the racial contract since its enactment, and even though steps have been made to improve the status of non-whites around the world, the binding prescriptions of the contract still hold many in chains (Titani-Smith & Hill, 2016, p. 2). "Shocking racial disparities," for example, still plague blacks in the United States even though an African American served two terms as president (Lopez, 2010, p. 1025). This first world nation shows evidence that the racial contract was not terminated with the ratification of the 13th Amendment or the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the election of Barack Obama. It is a nation home to a dominant race which is generally blind to the engrained racism and inequality in their political system and to inferior races who have no ability to reform a system that does not recognize them as equal beings.

This paper seeks to determine whether or not the racial contract is represented in popular film of the 2000s by analyzing the roles of black characters and the attitudes

towards them from other characters. A coding system was used to analyze the type of roles prescribed to black characters and the manner in which they behave in films, specifically in relation to authority. Authority is defined as the ability to make justified demands on another person by getting the person to follow an authority figure's judgment (Loschke, 2015). The authority figure is successful when the demands are met with willful action and support from the person on which the authority was wielded. As the racial contract would imply, genuine authoritative roles in society would be reserved only for whites, not blacks.

Thus, the main question posed is whether or not black characters are portrayed as authority figures in popular film. Furthermore, is the racial contract depicted and/or reinforced by this portrayal? If black authority figures (BAFs) are not portrayed, or if they are and do not wield their power, or they do wield their power and it is not supported, then the racial contract is arguably represented in film. Due to the rise of new symbolic form of racism, it is expected that popular film will covertly reinforce some aspects of the racial contract by keeping black characters in supporting roles or authoritative roles in which no true agency is granted. The quantitative results will conclude if the racial contract, in which black characters have little to no authority and racism is accepted as a norm, is represented in film and what that means for the American society and its culture and values.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between film and culture is arguably circular in nature. As Combs (1993), Franklin (2016), and others would suggest, established cultural values determine what stories and characters are presented on cinema screens. In turn, those values are then reflected back to viewers and are constantly reinforced by popular trends. When new ideas are introduced, there is even a possibility for film to shape future attitudes and behavior (Shae, 1994). Therefore, the culture and values being promoted in popular films are of special consideration.

In regards to the representation and treatment of certain characters, such as characters of a certain race, films have much to say, whether explicitly or not. Black characters, for example, have historically been portrayed in service and supporting roles where they are usually powerless. This suggests that black people in the real world are also viewed as such: powerless and only worthy of serving others (Cartier, 2014; Nama, 2011; Rogin, 1996). However, if popular films begin to show blacks in authority roles where they make use of free agency, then the implication is that blacks are capable of doing so in reality and that they should. The goal of this paper is to conclude whether or not that is the case.

Movies Matter!

In *Movies and Politics: A Dynamic Relationship* (1993), James Combs defines film as "mentors and metaphors" of life and politics (p. 3). Furthermore, film is a major contributing source to national, social, and political discourse. Movies, in other words, act as guides to the public, providing images and information that influence their understanding of the world. Movies as political metaphors, or a reflection of politics and

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life in general, also suggest that film can represent how the world operates in terms of social and political organization.

Combs (1993) presents the idea that film can have overt or covert meanings in regards to politics. Sometimes a film's message will be obvious to audience members. Other times, they merely see a movie as entertainment and fail to see the political implications that were displayed before them. Regardless of the extent of political overtness, movies provide viewers with cues on how to act as a "normative medium" (p. 17). They showcase social roles of characters based on gender, age, and, most important to this thesis, race. If a "cluster" of films repeatedly depict the same roles and relays the same messages, then the influence is much greater (p. 8). In other words, when a mass of people are exposed to the same visuals for many different films, there is the potential for a heavy impacts on society as a whole.

Snead (1994) supports Combs' argument in regards to the significance of clustering. Films, he writes, are "public events" in which there are vast "social and political statements about the nature of things" (p. 133). Thus, films describe the social and political system in which they are created. When the images portrayed are understood by a majority of viewers, then the messages have much more power and impact. Snead's calls this "group understanding" (p. 133). When this is present, there is greater possibility for like-minded films to have an effect on large audiences. If there is a cluster of popular films with the same political and social statements, then that is especially worthy of investigation.

According to Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas in *Projecting Politics* (2005), politics and film "inform" each other and that every film has political significance and

meaning (p. 4). Films and politics mirror the society in which they are placed and perhaps

reinforce values. Shae (1999) agrees, writing that popular culture, specifically film,

shapes political attitudes and perceptions over the long run. He argues that while

producers and directors often aim only to entertain and make a profit, people are most

affected by television and film when they think they are merely being entertained. Shae

points to research that suggests that violence in cartoons and video games have

undoubtedly influenced children and young people, and when violence became more

prevalent in television and film, the rate of teen suicide increased.

The most concerning question surrounding film and media, in general, is the

direction of the causality. Do film and other informational and entertainment mediums

influence viewers and their values, or are media forms just mirrors of society? Franklin

(2016) argues that the answer is both. It is a type of circular process in which films can

reflect societal values while they can also reinforce or shape values. It works like this:

Filmmakers must create a product that viewers will want to see in order to make a profit.

Therefore, films have to present stories and images that promote the values and beliefs

that a society already accepts as normal. The effect occurs when certain values are

repeatedly reinforced by cinema or new ones are introduced. Like advertisements, films

can show viewers the products that they already want, but they can also be presented with

things they may want in the future.

Franklin (2016) states that commercial films are a significant part of American

culture. If films represent what a society believes to be acceptable and normal, then the

types of stories and characters portrayed in them reveal political and social things about

consumers. For example, if negative stereotypes of blacks are a staple in popular film or

women are always shown in subordinate roles and violence is a steady trend, then a society in which those films are popular is one that accepts racism, sexism, and violence as normal. Popular films, thus, indicate a society's level of tolerance and to what.

So the films that are popular in a society are of importance. Popular films (those with the highest box office sales, winners of industry awards, and receivers of critical acclaim) potentially reflect the most of a society's values. In extension, these films constantly reinforce those ideas and behaviors. Reinforcement is the key. If racism and negative images of black characters, for example, are continually portrayed in popular film, then attitudes and actions towards black people in real life are likely to endure as well.

What's Race Got to do with it?

Cartier (2014) writes that there is "ideological power inherent" in the representation of blacks in film (p. 152). In other words, cinematic portrayals of blacks have implications in regards to attitudes and potentially behaviors of viewers. If films limit blacks to secondary and supportive roles where they have no agency nor authority, then blacks may also face that limitation in the real world. Cartier goes further than that and suggests that blacks are never shown as equal or fully human. This has the possibility of shaping the views of both blacks and whites. Blacks can accept apathy and believe that they lack the ability to fulfill authoritative roles, and whites learn that this is okay. However, when films do place people of color in powerful and heroic roles, blacks start to believe that there is hope and that they can free themselves from the harsh and racist binds of reality. Whites, in return, may begin to see these images as normal and will be more accepting of blacks in authoritative roles outside of film.

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The evolution of black characters as active and authoritative heroes and leaders would indicate a stark change from the early 20th century; racist attitudes will have been "relegated to the dustbin of history" (Baker & Jane, 2016, n.p.). In *Blackface, White Noise* (1996), Rogin describes how the film industry capitalized by stressing the differences between blacks and whites in the past. Blacks were kept in "mammy" type roles where they served as caregivers to white characters (Rogin, 1996, p. 267). White characters were nurtured at the expense of blacks and their own agency and ambition. Black male characters were especially kept in emasculated roles where they were not allowed to exhibit strength and work ethic. The practice of blackface, where white actors masqueraded as black through the use of face paint or masks, was also used to further the subordination of black characters by giving them a parodic and offensive voice. Rogin argues that mammy characters, weak males, and blackface prevailed in films because they were the foundations of the industry. A white dominated industry had control over how black characters appeared in film if they appeared at all. Keep blacks in roles of servers and nurturers, and the idea is that they may not try to escape those roles. Keep the male emasculated and he may not threaten the social structure that prevails outside of film. Transcending this and showing blacks in positive and powerful roles would suggest that the reality has changed or that it will soon change.

Miller (1998) argues that the filmmaking "system" operates in a way to continue the subversion of the black race (p. 19). He goes on to argue that it is not just the rules of producers, the storytelling writers, and the guidance of directors that aid the system in perpetuating its "hereditary political agenda" of white superiority (p. 23). The agenda is also fulfilled through marketing and distribution which determines who gets to view films

and where. It is a subtle yet active system that promotes negative images of blacks that reaffirm the interests of whites and maintains the status quo. This is done by consistently portraying black males as criminals and drug dealers in contemporary film. Black families are often portrayed as poor and an antithesis of the nuclear family in order to keep the image of blackness broken, deprived, and inferior. These characters are often "politically sterile" which means they have no active role in building or altering the society around them (p. 20).

Not only do negative and subordinate portrayals of blacks in film define the industry and society they are produced in, but the absence of blacks all together has implications as well. Snead (1994) and Nama (2011) both write that omission of blacks in movies further supports white superiority. When black characters are excluded from stories and are not shown in important locations, the idea that blacks should remain obscure and unrepresented is promoted (Snead, 1994). This can have a heavy impact on black people in the real world, Nama argues. When black characters are not represented, low self-esteem and confidence issues are likely to plague black communities.

Omission is not the only concern. "Chronic marginalization" is also a matter of discussion and has cultural and socio-political implications (Nama, 2011, p. 9). When blacks are marginalized into inferior roles or "the man standing next to the man", the idea that they are second class characters and citizens is normalized (p. 69). Snead (1994) echoes this line of thought, by suggesting that interrelationship identification is established by this racial distinction. Whites are the stars of the stories and films. They are written as the I, while blacks become the other. Blacks are generally the other man, the sidekicks, the maids, or other serviceman who have far less power and authority. A

trend is developed when these caricatures are recycled over and over again. When this happens, the belief that blacks should be secondary and servant people becomes popular as well.

In *Superblack* (2011), Nama argues that the negative trend of secondary black characters can be combated with the victories of black superheroes. The focus of Nama's research is on comic books, but the same conclusion can also be drawn to films based on these comics, which have been both prominent and successful in the past decade. Film, comics, and television all express powerful images and narratives about racial and cultural ideas and beliefs. When a black person is introduced as a hero in any of those mediums, there are positive cultural effects. The black hero compels attention and respect from fellow characters as well as the viewers or readers. It is through these heroic characters that black consumers can see "shifting political ethos and racial landscape" (p. 2). This means that with more and more black protectors and saviors, real world politics and society are more likely to see them as beings not defined by their race, one which is inherently seen as inferior.

The depiction of heroes in film and other forms of media is of significance because heroes "embody the dominant ideology" of a society (Fiske, 2000, p. 226). This means that the characters who are portrayed as resolving conflict are the ones who represent the ideological and social values that a society holds. For example, in a sample of popular films released in 2000-2009, it was found that 20% of conflict resolution was done so by formal authority figures or superheroes such as Iron Man and Batman who typically acted individually (McBride & Wyman, 2015). This suggests that viewers find it acceptable when authority figures act on their own judgment to resolve conflicts in

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society. In relation to race, if a black character is portrayed in the same heroic and authoritative status as someone like Tony Stark, then it would indicate a society which supports their actions and position as well.

However, issues would arise when and if those heroes are locked into supportive roles, never reaching a position of leadership. The goal would be to break this predictable mold of the supportive black character in all genres of film, not just those about superheroes. If blacks are habitually shown as the sidekick and second-in-command, the idea that they are intellectually and physically inferior is promoted. Nama (2011) points to Sam Wilson, Falcon, as a character who shattered that trend by questioning his role of standing next to Captain America. Falcon constantly rejected the idea that he was just to follow someone else's lead and he set forth ambitions that eventually led him to taking up the shield and becoming Captain America himself. This is a perfect example of progress for black characters in at least one entertainment medium. This progress holds political implications especially now that superhero films are so popular in the U.S. The hope would be that the characters portrayed in film will follow the examples of the superheroes on which they are based.

Heroes do not always have to be super, Reed adds (2015). Superhuman powers and abilities are not necessary for having an impact on the public. Blacks just need to show heroic actions and make use of their own free agency in order to resolve personal or communal conflicts. Their stories should end in celebration sometimes, not always in misery. They should not always be fated to death, which is an unfortunate common trope in horror films. Their point of view must also be shared. Their stories must be told through their own eyes so that the messages were true and clear, not blurred by white

images and voices as was the case with the 1988's *Mississippi Burning*, a film that took place during the struggle of Civil Rights Movement, and yet, no black characters were featured in the trailer. Instead, two white male leads told the story of this historic period for black Americans. Changing this and giving voice to the rightful owners will further support both black characters and black audience members.

While the American film industry historically encouraged the white delusions and racial dysfunction in the U.S. by perpetuating black political quietism and criminality of blacks on screen, Combs (1993) and Guerrero (1993) argue that change has occurred. Combs suggests that in the 1970s and 1980s, the number of black characters in authority figures increased from previous decades. Blacks were presented as parents in comedies, doctors and lawyers in soap operas, and heroes in crime dramas, roles which were previously reserved for white characters (Combs, 1993). Guerrero adds that blacks went from one dimensional, supporting, buddy roles to starring in more significant and leading roles in the 1990s.

The authoritative roles have to be more than just filled, however. They must be active roles as well, Combs (1993) argues. Placing black characters in the roles of leaders and professionals does nothing if they are not active in their duty of those roles. For example, Combs points to 1986's *Top Gun*, a film about elite naval fighter pilots. On the surface, it is progressive that black pilots are portrayed in the film. However, one such pilot is the only one of his crew not to be given a legal name, his commands are ignored by the main character, and he subsequently becomes victim to the main character's only show of violence. This suggests that even when black characters fill roles of authority,

they are not respected and treated as their white counterparts. Instead, they are still kept in positions of subordination under the guise of authority.

Films are "hieroglyphics of [the] time" (Franklin, 2016, p. 16) and "windows into the past" (p. 36). This suggests that films represent the time in which they are created and the people who live during that time. Like the paintings on cave walls told archaeologists about ancient Egyptians, films arguably serve as illustrations of the stories that people found attractive and the values and beliefs that those stories promoted. If black characters are consistently shown as inferior characters in these stories, then that suggests something about the values of the people who hold films with esteem. The implication is that blacks are not wanted in those roles and that their being authority figures is not normal. Through a cycle of reinforcement, such values will be hard to change unless the source of reinforcement changes as well.

How to be Racist and have a BAF as President.

The American state, Omi, and Winant (1994) suggest, is inherently racial. Racism has been coded into the law, organized through policy making, and enforced by repressive agents of authority including the police (p. 84). Therefore, racism has been engrained in every aspect of American politics and justice. The system of racial inequality has persisted due to the collective ignorance and unwillingness of whites to engage in social discourse about the issues and facilitate reconciliation between the races, thereby, rejecting the opportunity to change (McPhail, 2004). Over hundreds years of silence and lack of acknowledgment, racism has become an entrenched norm. Whites have habitually remained "aloof and unresponsive" to black inequality in all aspects of

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the political and social world (p. 397). Therefore, racism has arguably been accepted and completely ignored.

Racial attitudes are among the first attitudes developed by individuals, approximately around the age of five or six (McConahay & Hough, 1976). These views are often relatively stable throughout childhood and last well into adulthood. When these attitudes are negative towards people of a certain race, it is considered racism. Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1996) define racism as the ideology of racial domination or exploitation that incorporates beliefs of race inferiority. Those beliefs are then used to justify and implement unfair treatment against the inferior race. This would include separate schools of lesser quality, voting restrictions, and fewer job opportunities, for example. Racism, therefore, has heavy influence on social outcomes such as wealth, housing, education, and the everyday interactions between people of different races.

McConahay and Hough (1976) suggest that there are two forms in which racism can manifest: 1) in the public (schools) and private (housing, jobs) sectors and 2) in the belief of stereotypes (blacks as lazy and dumb) (p. 24). This means that there are the physical and material effects of racism that are to the detriment of non-whites, while there is also the mental aspect of it in which people have certain preconceived notions about others based on their race. It is a type of "psychic segregation" in which the white race distinguishes itself from other races, particularly blacks, and upholds itself as the supreme race due to superior capabilities (Kinder & Sears, 1981, p. 429). Even if schools are desegregated, for example, whites will still see themselves as different from blacks and racism will persist in one form or another.

Before the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the prevalent form of racism was overt and old-fashioned. This type of racism was centered on the belief that laws should be put into place to support the segregation of the races due to the lack of intelligence in blacks (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). Therefore, the law itself supported the political, social, and economic differences between the races. It became known as Jim Crow racism, and it dominated many aspects of American life (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1996). Every area of American society became segregated based on race. Areas were designated as either white or colored, including schools, diners, and water fountains. It was "old red neck racism", as McConahay and Hough call it, in which certain rights and freedoms were denied to blacks simply because they were of a different and inferior race (1976, p. 40). In the second half of the 20th century, this type of old-fashioned, red neck, Jim Crow racism had arguably declined. However, racism has not disappeared entirely. Rather, it has taken on a new form.

McConahay and Hough (1976), Kinder and Sears (1981), and Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1996) all argue that while earlier manifestations of lawful racism declined in the second half of the 20th century, new racism has become the dominate form of highlighting the differences between the races. Anti-black attitudes, they argue, have not been eradicated with changes to the law. Instead, these negative attitudes have become more subtle and symbolic. New or symbolic racism is the expression of ideological belief that blacks violate American values and make illegitimate demands on the racial status quo (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). So while blatant bigotry, laws that segregate the races, and government issued discrimination have declined, white Americans may still hold beliefs that blacks are not American enough. They may also maintain the view that

modern day blacks are not playing by the same rules that applied to earlier generations as they try to disrupt the system (McConahay & Hough, 1976). Even without the support of laws, the white race is still held as the superior race.

Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1996) pen new symbolic racism as Laissez Faire racism. While racial attitudes of many whites have improved as has the influence of blacks in American politics, they argue, many whites resist affirmative action and deliberate action to improve the status of blacks. The belief is that blacks lack values which would put them on par with whites politically and economically. Therefore, it is blacks' own fault that they have accumulated less wealth and have lower socioeconomic status than whites, and it is their own responsibility to get themselves out of such disadvantaged status. As a result of this understanding, Jim Crow laws and institutionalized inequality are no longer needed. Instead, new laissez-faire racism supports the ideals once set in place by slavery and Jim Crow and condones the unequal treatment of the races in a modern free market fueled by racist ideology. Thus, the argument is that whites can now remain hands-off when it comes to maintaining blacks' inferiority as a race. A history of lawful racism and discrimination has allowed for unfair treatment of blacks even without the intervention of the law.

Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1996) suggest that instead of state enforcement, it is strongly held racial biases that perpetuate racism and the unequal status of blacks in America. Old-fashioned and institutionalized racism has transitioned into symbolic and structuralized racism because the laws themselves are no longer needed. Racial disparities now seem to be a natural phenomenon in American society, meaning that political and economic inequalities between the races are accepted. Blacks, for example,

are twice as likely to be on unemployment benefits due to lack of job opportunities and unfair treatment in the job market, and they are less likely to obtain higher education. As Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith support with their research, the decline of old-fashioned racism has not equated to the total embracing of an understanding of shared humanity, worth, dignity, and place in the polity for all races. Therefore, even with political changes that gave blacks some freedom and means of economic mobility, new and symbolic or laissez-faire racism continues to provide whites with the absolute racial privilege and to experience greater benefits in the political and economic arenas.

Stereotyping, as an aspect of new racism, is one reason the differential treatment of the races is able to persist. Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman (1997) write that race continues to be a "divisive issue in American politics" during a time when the constitution and government are supposed to view everyone as equal (p. 30). This paradox is driven by stereotyping. They define stereotypes as cognitive structures that are built upon the beliefs and expectations about humans based on certain characteristics. Samson and Bobo (2015) add to this definition, writing that stereotypes are "cognitive shortcuts" (p. 530). The problem with stereotypes, these academics agree, is that overgeneralization and resistance to new information is prone to occur. Individuals will often look for information that supports their belief while they ignore that which contradicts it. It is "perseverant judgment," which blinds people to the fact that stereotypes are not often true for entire groups of people and that their beliefs need to be updated (Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997, p. 32). Stereotypes, therefore, only act to enforce racism and blind whites to their racist views.

These stereotypical beliefs regarding race are used to develop expectations about the behavior of those races which are seen as inferior (Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997; Samson & Bobo, 2014). Many white Americans hold the stereotype that blacks are highly associated with crime and welfare. Whites believe that blacks are unlawful people who have low work ethics. Therefore, blacks are prone to violence as well as laziness. These types of stereotypes have political implications, Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman suggest. If whites believe that blacks are lazy and do not try to help themselves out of poverty, they are more likely to support policies which restrict welfare programs to poor blacks. If blacks are seen as a violent, crime-ridden race, then whites may be proponents of a justice system which targets and profiles blacks. It is these stereotypes about blacks, Samson and Bobo conclude, which lead to ethno-racial inequalities in labor markets, housing markets, wealth distribution, education settings, mass incarceration, and health care (p. 540). Therefore, stereotypes do nothing to alleviate racism in American society.

In their research, Kinder and Winter (2001) analyzed data from the 1992 American National Election Studies (ANES) and concluded that symbolic racism and stereotypes still persist in the American public. They found that there is a racial divide between the attitudes of whites and blacks when it comes to supporting the status of blacks in American society. On variables that measured attitudes of government support to blacks, federal assistance programs, unemployment benefits, and job security, blacks showed far more favor than their white counterparts. For example, 69% of blacks favored federal spending for programs to assist black Americans, while only 18% of white respondents did. Furthermore, 81.4% of blacks support the government giving money to the poor, which is a cause only 50.8% of whites supported. In comparison, 68.3% of

blacks agreed with 34.6% of whites that unemployment benefits should be secured for people without jobs. As whites associate black with laziness, unemployment, and lower socioeconomic status, these statistics are not surprising.

What is surprising is that there seems to be a paradox at play within the attitudes of whites towards blacks and racial discrimination. Feldman and Huddy (2005) and Federico (2006) call it racial ambivalence in which whites have the tendency to have a combination of contradictory positive and negative opinions about the status of blacks in society. Positive attitudes, Federico suggests, are those supported by the ideals of humanitarianism and liberalism (egalitarianism) which are swayed by sympathy for the disadvantaged. In contrast, negative attitudes are those guided by individualism, conservatism, and the idea that blacks should not receive special treatment. Many white Americans adhere to a bipolarity or mix of these positive and negative attitudes. This means that while whites may support more equality for blacks in politics, they may not favor government policies which provide blacks with special assistance to bring about economic equality as well.

Feldman and Huddy (2005) write that while much of white America has begun to question this inequality and dominance of racial discrimination in their country, blacks still continue to experience inferior treatment from law enforcement, sales clerks, and employers (p. 1). There are also disproportionately fewer BAFs in the U.S. compared to the black population. The 115th Congress, for example, is still underrepresented by racial minorities, with just 19% in Congress compared to the 38% in the population (Bialik & Krogstad, 2017, para. 2). Furthermore, Schwartz and Cooper (2013) wrote that blacks make up 12% of the population in 2013, but only 1% of the nation's Fortune 500

companies had a black chief executive and just 3.2% of senior executive positions in the

nation's biggest companies were held by blacks (para. 5-6). They stated that black

lawyers also saw a decline in the 2000s as blacks were "disproportionately hurt" by the

recession (para. 7). Blacks also only account for 5% of all physicians and dentists, and

approximately 3% of architects (para. 7). Each of these statistics suggests that there is an

underrepresentation of black Americans in governmental and professional authoritative

roles.

This underrepresentation is arguably due to the fact that while some whites

question racial inequality, others' opinions are based on the notions of new racism and

the twisted denial that there is no active discrimination at all. Schwartz and Cooper

(2013) also cite a decline in employment affirmative action programs as a reason

inequality remains in the U.S., and that it is because Americans hold a belief that there is

no longer a need for those types of programs. Thus, overt racism may have declined,

Feldman and Huddy (2005) argue, but the structural denial of it allows what is left to

continue to support the inequality and unfair treatment of blacks.

This continuation is ironically illustrated by the election of the first black

American to the highest office of authority in the U.S. Barack Obama's election as

President should have demonstrated that racism and racial constraints have weakened in

the U.S. and that the racial contract has broken. However, that may not be the case. There

is much research which suggests that Obama was elected only because he defied his own

blackness and proved to whites that he was one of them (Wise, 2009; Edge, 2010; Enck-

Wanzer, 2011; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). Consequently, his election has arguably

helped to strengthen the racial contract by masking new forms of racism that have developed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Enck-Wanzer (2011) echoes the ideas of Sniderman and Tedlock (1986) and Bobo et al. (1996) on racism in America by defining what he calls racial neoliberalism or born-again racism. This racism occurs with the suppression of race as a legitimate topic of public discourse. Race issues and inequalities among the races are neglected and ignored, which breeds a type of racism without race. This allows for unjust prejudice to prevail on the sly, for remedies of racism such as affirmative action and social services to people of color to be condemned, and for the true social and economic impacts of racism to be disregarded. Enck-Wanzer argues that this born-again racism surrounded Obama's campaign and followed him into his administration. The Tea Party and conservative populists on the far right were especially keen on pushing an agenda that targeted the future president's otherness. They continuously framed issues on the idea that Obama was "foreign" and that he was morally inferior (p. 27). Race, as racial neoliberalism would suggest, was not presented as the concern.

Enck-Wanzer goes on to write that the strength of born-again racism (and by extension, the racial contract) over Obama's presidency was further illustrated by Obama's own failure to address issues of race. The president was arguably blind to the racist discourse of staunch conservatives. Edge (2010) echoes the idea that Obama's ignorance or avoidance of discussing race helped gain him his position, which he continued throughout his presidency. Even while the far right repeatedly called him unpatriotic and questioned his citizenship, Obama's campaign and administration seemingly "put the politics of race behind" them and the nation (p. 436). Obama was

prone to deflecting questions about race and denied the prevalence of racism in the U.S. Edge points to "A More Perfect Union" speech which he gave during his campaign in March 2008 as an example. In this speech, Obama claimed that reciting the history of racial injustice in America was unnecessary, and then he went on to urge blacks to take personal responsibility for their status in society.

Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011) also agree that Obama made a point not to address racism or focus on his race. Instead of being held back by his blackness, he transcended it. Instead of a being a violent, lazy, and government leaching black, Obama was an "articulate, bright, clean, and nice-looking guy" (p. 198). Obama was able to fit into the "white narrow space" of politics and America society because he did "not shake the boat" (p. 202) unlike like figures like Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton. In other words, Obama was accepted as a leader who was not defined by his race and would not disrupt the subtle race relations which still plagued the U.S.

With the election of Obama, unfortunately, "post-racial" America is better able to ignore that truth of racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2011, p. 191). The U.S. has become color-blind (or has always been according to Mills' racial contract). Whites are convinced that all Americans have equal opportunities and that blacks fail to take full advantage of them. As a result, whites do not believe that it is discrimination and institutional racism which keeps blacks and other minority races inferior and in a state of perpetual inequality. This new color-blind racism is effective victim blaming and the fault is placed with blacks who supposedly lack effort and strong values, which keeps them impoverished and uneducated.

Furthermore, Boilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011) write, by being color blind, whites are able to perpetuate several measures of racism (and the racial contract). Whites often deny that white privilege exists. They have a lack of awareness when it comes to the realities of institutional racism such as incarceration rates and the education system. Again, they reject affirmative action, and finally, they deny that discrimination exists altogether. When this happens, it is easy to see how an African American may somehow reach the highest level of office in America. However, it only masks what is really going on behind the scenes.

No matter what it is called or defined as racism (and the racial contract) still exists in the U.S. Blacks are still seen as inferior due to stereotypes and the feeling that they lack traditional American values. New racism has become the subtle norm in American society even after the election of a black President, and it is silent yet powerful extension of the racial contract, which continues to support the superiority of whites in the United States.

CHAPTER III - THEORY

A contract is simply defined as an "agreement between two or more people to do something" (Mills, 1997, p. 3). The social contract elaborates on this and is written as the agreement between people to establish a civil society and government. When a contract is established, political society originates from the consent of willing individuals who are understood as equal beings and gain mutual benefits from the agreed upon government. However, by design of the racial contract, society is a system of blatant inequality. Freedom and equality, as Mills suggests, are political rights restricted to the white race, while the other races, "subject races," are left in roles of subordination (p. 17). Non-whites are viewed as non-people or sub-persons who have no rights and are biologically, morally, and politically inferior to whites (p. 28). Therefore, white is the only race which is seen as truly human. This racial hierarchy not only gives whites "material advantage" over other races, but it provides whites with greater political and cultural influence (p. 33). Whites are the only individuals who can claim rationality, and they alone can take part in the development of knowledge, invention, and innovation. The racial contract, thus, puts non-whites in a perpetual state of inequality, vulnerable to the whims of the superior white race.

Mills asks how this type of arrangement could be organized and inevitably accepted. This question is answered by way of understanding the racial contract as having three distinct contractual implications: political, moral, and epistemological (p. 10). The contract is political because it proposes the origins of the state and government as well as society's obligations to that state. The contract also has moral implications in that it establishes a moral code within society which regulates behavior. In the sense that it is

epistemological, the contract requires the cognitive blindness or ignorance to the true meaning of the racial contract. It is "structured blindness" to the harsh realities of non-white inferiority which allows the contract not only to be accepted but preserved from one generation to the next (p. 18). Mills describes in more detail the process of how such blind acceptance and ignorance comes to be throughout the first two sections of *The Racial Contract*.

The state of nature, he writes, must first be defined in order to understand how the racial contract was initially authorized and how it continues to persist hundreds of years later. To do this, Mills critiques the famous and renowned social contract theorists: Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Each of these classical liberals present contradictory theories about the formation of society as they simultaneously proclaim ideals of equality, autonomy, and freedom for all, though denying non-whites their personhood and glossing over the condemnation of these people to slavery. To begin with Hobbes, Mills suggests that the theorist distinguishes the nature of whites and non-whites by placing them in two different states. For Hobbes, the general state of nature is one in which every man is the enemy of every man and life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short," as he describes in the *Leviathan* (1651, p. 78). Life is a perpetual state of war of every man against every man in places with no sense of right and wrong, no justice, and no law.

According to Mills (1997), however, this harsh state of nature is reserved for non-whites. They are savages trapped in a literal state of war from which they cannot escape. It is a wild and radicalized place, seen as the "unholy land" (p. 46). For whites, the state of nature is hypothetical because they are already in and have always been in a

sociopolitical state. It is a "tamer affair, a kind of garden gone to seed, which may need some clipping but is really already partially domesticated" (p. 46). Therefore for Hobbes' theory of nature to be true, there must be two separate states of nature: one for non-whites, a true and real place, and one for whites, a place that does not actually exist. The figurative white state of nature is not as nasty and brutish as Hobbes would describe that of the wild and savage non-whites. Rather, it is just a garden that needs a little trimming. The non-white state of nature, in contrast, is a wild jungle that cannot be tamed.

Nonetheless, in order to escape the state of nature, according to Hobbes, a contract is drawn among individuals, an agreement to transfer some rights to a government in order to gain protection and end perpetual war. This agreement is built upon "mutual transfer" (Hobbes, 1651, p. 82) and "mutual trust" (p. 88) between parties. However, the only parties truly considered having the capacity to partake in this transfer, thereby signing the contract, are whites. Non-white savages and "brute beasts" are incapable of understanding the language of the contract (p. 86). Therefore, they are written out of the arrangement altogether and their interests are not represented. Through this type of social contract, the actual racial contract, non-whites are involuntarily condemned to a state of subjugation and subordination.

In John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1980), individuals are described as having "perfect freedom" and are not dependent upon the will of any other man (p. 8). It is a state of equality where no one has more power or jurisdiction than another. The state of nature is governed by laws of nature, Locke theorizes. These laws oblige individuals to reason and to accept that all men are equal and independent. Doing so will persuade people not to harm another's life, health, liberty, or property and they will be

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convinced that the same protection will be returned to them in kind. Therefore, this state of nature is far more civil than the one described by Hobbes, and it is a state where whites can actually dwell because there are already some sociopolitical limitations in place.

So why would individuals leave this law of nature and sign a social contract, Locke asks in his *Second Treatise*. A social contract would be penned in the face of a threat, such as the threat of noxious creatures who are not bound by the common law of nature and have no reason. These creatures will not respect the right to body and property. In result, a rational individual will "divest himself of natural liberty" and "put on the bond of society" in order to live in a comfortable, safe, and peaceful community of united people and secure the enjoyment of property (p. 52). Mills argues that Locke saw a distinction between whites and non-whites which inadvertently or purposely limits who can partake in the social contract. Non-whites are seen as "not fully human" by Locke (Mills, 1997, p. 68). Instead, they are more associated with the status of noxious creatures who lack the reason, morals, and a sense of common law required to sign the social contract. Therefore, they are not protected by the social contract and do not share in the comforts, safety, and peace experienced by whites.

Rousseau's *On the Social Contract* (1987) presents an illustration of the state of nature that is similar and different than that of Hobbes and Locke. In the state of nature, Rousseau agrees with Hobbes and Locke, in that men are born free and equal and as their own masters. The goal of designing a state is for men to be as free as they were in the state of nature while limiting the amount of inequality. The idea is to replace any physical inequality imposed upon men by nature with a moral and legitimate equality. Rousseau defines equality in two parts. First, in terms of power, he states that all authoritative use

of violence should be exercised against an individual only by virtue of rank and laws. This means that no one should succumb to violence unless it is accordance with the law. Regarding the second definition of equality, that of wealth, Rousseau writes that no man should have enough wealth to buy another and no one should be so poor that they need to sell themselves to another. This is not how the social contract is applied in reality.

As with Hobbes and Locke's theories, "mutual obligations" must be fulfilled between individuals in an effort to develop a state and sign a social contract (Rousseau, 1987, p. 69). Rousseau argues in *A Discourse on Inequality* (1755) that those obligations are not met. This is due to the argument that any equal and fair benefits procured by a social contract would be offset by despotism and the wealth and greed of the strongest masters. For these masters, the reason for a contract to be drawn would be to protect their wealth and property and to control those servants without. Inequality, then, is not eradicated within a social contract. Instead, it is the basis of the contract, drawing distinctions along lines of wealth and cementing those distinctions by placing those with the most in the highest positions of authority.

Where Hobbes and Locke do not attempt to reconcile their theories in regards to non-whites, Rousseau does make the attempt. In *On the Social Contract* (1987), he equates non-whites to "savage men" who do not feel any sense of enlightenment or desire beyond physical needs (p. 46). However, he gives these savages the ability to upgrade themselves to become noble or healthy animals. No matter what they do to correct themselves and become a part of civil society, they will always be savages. This echoes much of liberal theory of social contract, Mills argues, continuing "racial dichotomization and hierarchy of civil and savages" that damns non-whites (1997, p. 69).

In each of these classical social contract theories, the status of non-whites is defined as inferior, and they are viewed as less capable of making rational decisions that would lead them to partake in a civil society bound by a contract. As Mills suggests in *The Racial Contract* (1997), the very basis of European and white government is supported by ideals of racial inequality and white superiority. The social contract is synonymous with the racial contract as far as Mills is concerned, and it constructs the world in terms of those who are sociopolitical, moral, noble, and white as opposed to those who are wild, noxious, savage, and non-white. Non-whites are demoted to a state of sub-personhood unto which things can be done that one would not do to an actual person. They are put into dark spaces of society, and everything is defined as ours and theirs. Therefore, they are put in a separate place from whites to differentiate them and cement their inferior status.

Once the wild state of nature of non-whites is established and they are defined as sub-persons who have their own inferior space of being, then the ideological conditioning can begin in order to convince non-whites to agree with the contract which designates them as less than human. Mills (1997) quotes Fredrick Douglass, saying that in order to "break the slave" and make them accept sub-personhood, one needs to "darken [the] moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason" of the slave (p. 88). "He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery, he must be made to feel that slavery is right, and he can brought to that only when he ceases to be a man" (p. 88). This means that non-whites are led to believe that their role in society is legitimate and that there is no way out.

Mills argues that without conditioning, non-whites would never consent to an exploitative state. Therefore, weapons of coercion have to be used against them. They are forbidden education, religion, and values of their own. Through conditioning, they are not allowed to think for themselves, and they are expected to accept their fate as slaves and inferiors. Furthermore, they are taught to accept that only whites have the capacity to procure power and authority. If conditioning fails, violence and force is the alternative. Once conditioning and coercion is complete, Mills suggests, the next stage of the racial contract can begin.

As mentioned before, "structured blindness" (Mills, 1997, p. 18) or "historical amnesia" (p. 69) of whites is necessary to the perpetuation of the racial contract. Mills argues that whites are required to have a lack of affect and empathy towards non-white suffering in order for the racial contract to fulfill its promises. For example, when whites act in racist ways, they believe themselves to be acting in a moral way. Therefore, they do not recognize their behavior as wrong and unjust towards a population based on their race. As Mills suggests, recognition from whites would indicate the agreement that blacks are equal but are being treated in an immoral way. It is a serious form of self-deception. So while whites will not recognize the genocide and apartheid of Africans throughout history, Mills points out as an example, they can demonize anyone involved in the Jewish Holocaust. The difference between the two is that Hitler's Third Reich was "doing at home what Europe had long been doing abroad" (p. 106). It was an attack against Europeans, whites, so it is distinguished from other dark stains in global history. The fact that it is understood as The Holocaust is Mills' evidence of the continuation of the racial contract.

This ignorance and amnesia is what generates the repeated consent to the racial contract from whites. It is a choice from whites, Mills argues, to "go along with things" by accepting the privileges of whiteness with total complicity (1997, p. 107). They do not question the legitimacy of the contract which gives them every political, economic, and social benefit over non-whites. It is the very design of the racial contract that whites have "racial deference" and do not think about the validity of their system (p. 89). Even if a few white abolitionists and civil rights activists speak out against white superiority, they automatically benefit from the system because of their skin color. Therefore, no real change is actually made in improving the status of non-whites in society and in challenging the corrupt system which condemns them to servitude, slavery, and inferiority.

Mills (1997) spends some time addressing how the racial contract limits the challengers to its racially hierarchical design and those who attempt to question and break free from its prescriptions, which is where the focus of this paper lies. Besides ignorant whites who choose not to address the unjust system, there are other enforcers of the racial contract. The police and the penal system are examples of contract enforcers. According to Mills, police keep peace and prevent crime against white people, and thereby, they maintain racial order and destroy challengers to the contract. Therefore, in the eyes of the law, whites and non-whites are given different types of treatment and even punishment, with non-whites experiencing harsher treatment and longer sentences. The status of non-whites in the eyes of the law is below that of their white counterparts. This has been the case since the days before the Civil War in the U.S., but it may be changing after the recent murders of black men such as Oscar Grant and Freddie Gray by police officers.

While Fredrick Douglass writes that the vision of blacks has been darkened, in the past couple hundred years that vision has arguably brightened and cleared. With increased police brutality against blacks and mass incarceration on non-whites, many people are beginning to recognize the unfair treatment of blacks and other minorities, and they have begun to challenge the blatant racism that plagues the U.S. as a direct result of this type of social contract. Unfortunately, the blind ignorance of whites has arguably only gotten more pronounced which may continue to reaffirm the racial contact.

This blind arrangement could potentially be reflected in popular film, which is the main hypothesis of this study. If white directors and writers are not aware of the racial bias that shapes their view of themselves in relation to others, they may not even be enlightened to the fact that black people in reality and in film are treated differently by design. The absence of blacks and their inferior, non-authoritative positions may not be entirely intentional in this day and age, but subconscious motivations themselves are worth investigating. If the American public and the government are still bound by the restrictions of the racial contract, the American film industry and its productions are likely to be as well.

CHAPTER IV – HYPOTHESIS

If the academic understanding of film is a reflection of societal values, then what is portrayed on screen is a view of the real world. Furthermore, if Mills' racial contract is an accurate description of the foundations and current social order of the United States, then it is hypothesized that popular American films will reflect that order and show black characters insubordinate and second-class positions instead of authoritative roles. Being that Mills' racial contract is arguably still intact at the turn of the 21st century, it is expected that the contract will be evident in popular films of the 2000s which reflect and reaffirm the society which creates them. Four hypotheses will be tested to see if this is true:

(1) Active and successful BAFs will not be portrayed in popular film of 2000-2015.

(2) BAFs will be portrayed, but they will not be significantly active or supported. For example, a black government official may be portrayed in a popular film, but his or her authoritative actions may not be substantial or successful and will be met with indifference from other (white) characters in the film.

(3) BAFs will not be portrayed as society's heroes.

(4) Overt racism may be hard to come by in popular films of the 21st century. However, new and symbolic racism is expected as are negative of stereotypes. Therefore, the racial contract will be illustrated, but not so explicitly.

If the argument about the relationship between film and that racial contract is correct, BAFs will not be portrayed, or they will be portrayed but found to be inactive

and unsuccessful as authority figures. Furthermore, new racism and stereotypes will be

portrayed to subtly strengthen the racial contract in contemporary American film.

CHAPTER V – METHOD

This study is a content analysis of a sample of popular films released from 2000-2015. The sample of films included was determined by box office sales as indicated by the *Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*. The top ten grossing films from each year between 2000 and 2015 were considered (150 films). That sample of consideration was narrowed down to those with black characters billed in the main cast lists on *IMDb*. From that list of 83 films, five films were eliminated due to the black characters not being represented visually. Instead, they were portrayed as an evil Orc (*The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001), apes (*Planet of the Apes,* 2001), a wise-cracking shrunken head (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, 2004), or a green space criminal alien (*Guardians of the Galaxy*, 2014). These characters were black voices, not black faces, which is an issue to be commented upon later. The film with the second largest overall box office sales, 2009's *Avatar*, was also eliminated for this reason, for it only depicts black characters as the blue native race to the planet Pandora. Animated films, which had much success in the 2000s, were also not considered unless the voice character portrayed was human, such as Wasabi in *Big Hero 6* (Reed, Conli, Hall, & Williams, 2014).

Of the limited sample of 78 films, 55 films in total were viewed on DVD or through the online streaming services of Netflix, Hulu, and Dish Anywhere. A count of all BAFs portrayed in the films was kept, yet only the billed characters or any significant black characters that may not have appeared on the main cast list were analyzed and coded for their use of authority or lack thereof. For example, in *The Matrix Revolutions* (Silver & Wachowski, 2003), 10 BAFs were portrayed. However, the characters that were coded were Morpheus, The Oracle, and Zee. Two other characters, Niobe and

Locke, were also coded because they had significant roles in the film even though they were not listed on IMDb's main list. Four of those characters were coded as BAFs. Therefore, the other six BAFs in the film had no significant role to properly code.

Quantitative coding measures were used to collect data about black characters in the sample of films. A coding sheet[2] was used to analyze each film and the characters portrayed. The questions included: Is the black character an authority figure? Does the character wield authority? What is the attitude towards the authority from white/black characters? Was the authority successful? Is the authority challenged or disobeyed by white/black characters? Is the character involved in the conflict/resolution of the film?

A second coding sheet was used to measure depictions of traditional and new racism. Traditional racism is the explicit form including such acts as bigotry, segregation, government sanctioned discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, and the use of racial slurs. Depictions of new racism or symbolic racism is characterized by racial stereotyping that present blacks in negative ways or the denial of social discrimination and institutional inequalities. The forms in which the black stereotypes take was also recorded, such as connections to violence, criminality, service jobs, drugs, poverty, uneducated, and laziness.

The coding sheets were used to determine if the racial contract is depicted in popular films. It was concluded whether or not black characters were portrayed as having authority in film and if that authority is supported by other characters. If there are numerous black characters in roles of authority and their authority is not challenged or

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[2] This coding sheet was created by Allan McBride (1998) for his study of *Cultural Theory* and authority figures in television programs. It was adjusted to better fit this project. The coding sheet is included in Appendix A along with charts listing the sample of films and the results of key variables.

disrespected, then that would imply a lack of the racial contract displayed in film. It would suggest that blacks are not a second-class race that lacks all power and is not suited for having and wielding authority. Furthermore, if the attitude towards that authority is supportive instead of antagonistic or indifferent, then again the racial contract would not be reflected. If black characters are given positions of authority such as respected teachers, government officials, and police officers, it would illustrate that black characters are not seen as inferior or subordinate to whites; rather, that they are equal and capable of fulfilling important roles in society. Consequently, if a low percentage of BAFs are found in the films, this absence would suggest the racial contract is keeping black characters out of positions of authority on screen.

BAFs' involvement in conflict resolution in film would also illustrate the presence or absence of the racial contract. When black characters are portrayed having an active role in resolving conflict in a film, they become the heroes. If they are shown resolving society's problems and not individual conflicts, it is even more significant. Whether due to superhuman powers or basic human willingness, heroic black characters would further illustrate a breaking of the racial contract.

The second coding sheet will conclude whether explicit or symbolic racism was depicted in popular films and how the two main forms of racism reinforce the racial contract. If images of segregation and discrimination, for example, are included in the films with the highest box office sales, then the implication is that the racial contract is still binding. Furthermore, when impoverished, lazy, and uneducated blacks are portrayed, new racism and stereotyping are used as tools to strengthen the racial contract in film and potentially in reality as well.

CHAPTER VI – RESULTS

Of the 55 films viewed, 46 were rated PG-13 including the highest box office getter, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Kennedy, Abrams, Burk, & Abrams, 2015). Five films were rated PG, such as *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Heyman, Barron, & Yates, 2009), and four were rated R, including Oscar winner *American Sniper* (Eastwood, Lorenz, Lazar, Cooper, Morgan, & Eastwood, 2014). The most common genre was action films, which made up 74% (41 out of 55). Therefore, the most common type of popular film was a PG-13 action film[3]. Films that had the highest box office sales of their year of release including *Spider-Man* (Ziskin, Bryce, & Raimi, 2002), *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (Bruckheimer & Verbinski, 2006), and *The Avengers* (Feige & Whedon, 2012) fell into this category. The less represented genres included adventure, an example being *Night at the Museum* (Levy, Columbus, Barnathan, & Levy, 2006), which only had four films; six were comedies such as *Bruce Almighty* (Shadyac, Carrey, Brubaker, Bostick, Koren, O'Keefe, & Shadyac, 2003), and two were dramas including *I Am Legend* (Goldsman, Heyman, Moritz, & Lawrence, 2007). Ninety-three percent of the films (51) were directed by white directors. The other four were directed by Asian directors.

The overall count of BAFs portrayed in the sample of films in some form or another was 441 (an average of 8.2 BAFs per film). However, many of the characters were insignificant and had little or no speaking role. The vast majority walked in and out

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[3] This is not surprising as the goal of PG-13 films is to reach the widest audience possible, from thirteen year olds to mature adults (Schager 2014). Prospective blockbusters especially seek the rating/genre combination of PG-13 action in order to balance large budgets with even greater box office sales (Mendelson 2015).

of a scene in a matter of seconds, stood amongst a crowd or in the background, or rushed around in a scene of heightened action with no time to spare words. Eight films portrayed between 16-23 BAFs. *American Sniper* (Eastwood et al., 2014) featured the most with approximately 23 BAFs, most of which were soldiers. *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (Murphy, DeSanto, di Bonaventura, Bryce, & Bay, 2011) also portrayed many black soldiers, while *Iron Man 3* (Feige & Black, 2013) and *Captain America: Winter Soldier* (Feige, Russo, & Russo, 2014) featured many black secret or special agents. *Hancock* (Goldsman, Lassiter, Mann, Smith, & Berg, 2008) and *The Dark Knight* (Thomas, Nolan, Roven, & Nolan, 2012) also portrayed notable numbers of police officers, while *Jurassic World* (Marshall, Crowley, & Trevorrow, 2015) featured several black scientists, who were coded as professional. While the incredibly brief appearances of these characters is something to consider in this project, their overall inactivity when it comes to wielding authority and having zero impact on the plot is the more concerning.

From the 55 films viewed in this project, 108 characters were coded. These were the characters credited on the main cast list on IMDb or characters with significant roles that were not credited. The characters had an average of 11.72 minutes of screen time. From that sample of characters, 77 were coded as BAFs. Therefore, of the 441 BAFs mentioned previously, only 77 were IMDb credited or had a significant role (17%). Only six of those BAFs starred in a leading role. The other 71 had a supporting role or played a bit part (less than five lines of dialogue), a total of 92%.

The most common type of BAF represented was professionals and armed service men/women with 14 portrayals each. These professionals ranged from a historian in *National Treasure 2: The Book of Secrets* (Turteltaub, Bruckheimer, & Turteltaub, 2007),

a pilot in *Jurassic Park III* (Kennedy, Franco, & Johnston, 2001), an engineer in *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Jacobson, Kilik, & Lawrence, 2013), and an astronomic scientist in *The Martian* (Kinberg, Scott, Sood, Schaefer, Huffam, & Scott, 2015). The servicemen include Navy Seal Instructor Rolle in *American Sniper* (Eastwood et al., 2014), soldier Mike in *I Am Legend* (Goldsman et al., 2007) and Sergeant Epps of the Air Force in the *Transformers* franchise.

The third most common BAFs were bosses such as the Assistant Director of Enforcement for the NCAAP in *The Blind Side* (Johnson, Kosove, Netter, & Hancock, 2009) and Vincent Kapoor, the director of the Mars Mission in *The Martian* (Kinberg et al., 2015). Table 1 shows the total number of each authority type.

Table 1

BAFs by Type

Type	Total
Boss	12 (.15)
Parent	4 (.05)
Teacher	4 (.05)
Police officer	11 (.14)
Government official	11 (.14)
Armed service man/woman	14 (.18)
Professional	14 (.18)
Superhero	4 (.05)
God/Fate	3 (.04)
Total	77

Of those 77 BAFs, 53 wielded their authority at least once during the duration of the films. Cumulatively, those characters wielded their authority in 165 instances (an average of approximately 2.17 per all coded BAFs or 3.11 per BAFs who actually

wielded their authority). Of those 165 instances of wielded authority 127 were done so successfully, giving BAFs a success rate of 77%.

The most active type of BAF was armed servicemen/women. Twenty-five percent of the instances in which BAFs wielded authority were done so by someone in the armed services. These BAFs were also the most successful, with 29% of the successful instances in which a BAF wielded his/her authority belonging to them. They also had one of the highest success rate with 80%. Government officials, bosses, and police officers were also significantly active and successful. Table 2 shows how active and successful each authority type was.

Table 2

Activity and Success of BAFs by Type

Authority Type	Activity (# of wield)	Success (# of success)	Success Rate
Boss	28 (.17)	22 (.17)	.78
Parent	3 (.02)	3 (.02)	1.00
Teacher	8 (.05)	7 (.05)	.87
Police	25 (.15)	16 (.12)	.64
Armed Serviceman/woman	41 (.25)	37 (.29)	.90
Government Official	36 (.22)	26 (.20)	.72
Professional	20 (.12)	16 (.12)	.80
Superhero	2 (.01)	0 (.00)	.00
God/Fate	2 (.01)	0 (.00)	.00
Total	165	127	

Thinking in terms of private and public authority, public authority figures outnumbered private authority figures. There were 30 private BAFs (bosses, parents, professionals) portrayed compared to 40 public BAFs. Overall, public BAFs were more

active than private ones. A total of 66.67% of all instances in which a BAF wielded

authority were done so by either a teacher, police officer, armed servicemen/women, or

government official. These public BAFs also accounted for more of the successful

authority, 67.7%. These percentages suggest a slight preferences towards public BAFs.

Because black government officials and armed service men/women are more prevalent

and active in popular films than black boss and professionals, then they are slightly

preferred in storytelling which reflects real world society.

Films that were released from 2012-2015 were found to portray the most active

and successful BAFs. The 17 films in this category accounted for 46% of all instances in

which a BAF wielded his or her authority. Of all these instances which were successful,

these films accounted for 40%. A success rate of 88% was also calculated, which is the

highest amongst the different years of release. There was no pattern found, however, to

suggest that the most recent years were the most positive in their portrayal of BAFs.

BAFs in films released from 2000-2003 were more successful than BAFs with a success

rate of 76% compared to films from 2004-2007, which had a success rate of 60%. Table 3

lists the total percentages of each year category.

A similar conclusion was found concerning box office sales. The most popular

films, as evident be the higher the box office sales, did not equate to BAFs wielding more

authority. Films with a 200-299.9 million dollar box office sale portrayed the most active

(37%) and successful BAFs (43%). The films with the highest success rate, however,

were those with 400 million dollar box office sales or higher. So while the most active

and successful BAFs were not portrayed in the most popular films, the ones who were

portrayed in those exceptionally popular films experienced more success than BAFs in

lower grossing films. Table 4 lists the total percentages for each category of box office

sales.

Table 3

Activity and Success of BAFs by Year

Year	Activity- # of instances (%)	Success (%)	Success rate (Success/Activity)
2000-2003	39 (.22)	28 (.22)	.76
2004-2007	40 (.24)	24 (.19)	.60
2008-2011	22 (.13)	17 (.13)	.77
2012-2015	66 (.40)	58 (.46)	.88
Total	165	127	

Table 4

Activity and Success of BAFs by Box Office Sales

Box Office ($ millions)	Activity- # of instances (%)	Success (%)	Success rate (Success/Activity)
100-199.99	30 (.18)	20 (.16)	.67
200-299.99	62 (.37)	55 (.43)	.89
300-399.99	41 (.25)	32 (.25)	.78
400 or more	31 (.19)	29 (.23)	.93
Total	165	127	

The success rate of BAFs is further illustrated by the attitudes of other characters

in the films towards them and their authority. The general attitude towards authority of

BAFs was supportive. Seventy-four percent of white characters were supportive when

they were on the receiving end of a BAFs wielded authority, or they bore witness to the

act. Eighty-four percent of black characters were supportive of BAFs, and 64% of other

races of characters (mostly Asian) were as well. The attitude with the second highest

percentage of portrayal, still much lower than supportive, was indifference. Table 5

shows all attitudes and the percentages of portrayal.

Table 5

Attitude Towards by BAFs

Attitude	White (%)	Black (%)	Other (%)
Supportive	105 (.74)	46 (.84)	11 (.64)
Antagonistic	8 (.06)	0 (.00)	0 (.00)
Subservient	0 (.00)	1 (.02)	2 (.12)
Aggressive	1 (.007)	1 (.02)	0 (.00)
Indifferent	26 (.18)	7 (.13)	3 (.18)
Sarcastic	2 (.01)	0 (.00)	1 (.06)
Total	142	55	17

In 165 instances in which they wielded authority, BAFs were challenged on 39

occasions and blatantly disobeyed 33 times. A challenge implies that there is some level

of argument between a BAF and another character, be it a verbal or physical challenge.

Disobedience is characterized by the authority of the BAF being completely ignored by

another character. Indifferent and antagonistic whites were found to be the most

challenging and disobedient. Whites challenged BAFs in 29 of the 142 instances in which

they were present. That is a rate of 20%. Whites also disobeyed BAFs 27 times, a rate of

19%. Table 6 shows how blacks and other races compared in how often they challenged

or disobeyed authority of BAFs.

Table 6

Challenge and Disobedience toward BAFs by Race

By whom:	Challenged (%)	Disobeyed (%)
White	29 (.20)	27 (.19)
Black	6 (.11)	8 (.14)
Other	5 (.29)	4 (.23)

This table consists of the total number of instances in which a BAF was challenged/disobeyed divided by total numbers of wield instances where each race was present. White=142, Black=55, Other=17.

Of the 77 BAFs coded, only 17 were women (22%). These women, including a doctor in *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, Gordon, & Emmerich, 2004), a police officer in *The Hangover* (Goldberg, Phillips, & Phillips, 2009), a mother in *I Am Legend* (Goldsman et al., 2007), and a grandmother in *I, Robot* (Mark, Davis, Dow, Godfrey, & Proyas, 2004), wielded their authority a total of 22 times, which is less than one instance per female BAF (0.77). Of those 22 occasions where a female BAF wielded her authority, the success rate was 82% (18 out of 22). This is a satisfactory number which is higher than that of males whose success rate was 76%. However, of 127 instances of success, women account for only 14%, while men claim the other 86%.

Compared to women, male BAFs wielded their authority 143 times, which breaks down to 2.38 times per character; this is much more frequently than the value found in females. So while women experience more success, men wield more authority. Males also experienced more support from white characters, a rate of support at 66% compared to the 50% of females in their 22 instances. In contrast, females experienced more support from black characters and characters of other races. This suggests that white characters are more willing to follow the authority of men, while minority races are more persuaded by women.

Of the 108 coded black characters, 29 of them (27%) were portrayed as rebels or villains who challenge the structure of society or disregarded societal laws. These characters included rebels fighting against an unjust government which set children into an arena to battle to the death for entertainment in the *Hunger Games* series, criminals in *Chicago* (Richards & Marshall, 2002) and the *Fast and Furious* series, a thief in *Mission Impossible II* (Cruise, Wagner, & Woo, 2000), and pirates in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series. These characters are significant because each represents the idea that blacks are not capable of following societal norms, find ways to challenge or ignore the system, and are those wild, noxious creatures the ancient social contract suggested they would be.

Eight characters (7%) were portrayed as outsiders. This means that they were portrayed to be outside of the society which governed the film that they did not fit into the norms of society as opposed to disobeying them as a rebel would. These characters included a homeless man in *The Day After Tomorrow* Emmerich, Gordon, & Emmerich, 2004), an enslaved Stormtrooper in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Kennedy et al., 2015), and a nomadic vampire (who was also coded as a rebel) in *Twilight* (Godfrey, Mooradian, Morgan, & Hardwicke, 2008). The outsiders are significant for similar reasons as the rebels if not more. These characters are possibly not welcome into society, which can be seen as worse than being welcome and choosing to disobey the laws and norms of a society.

Thirteen BAFS (as well as one coded black character who was not an authority figure, Lock-Nah in *The Mummy Returns* (Jacks, Daniel, & Sommers, 2001)) were killed or died on screen, a percentage of 13%. This is also a noteworthy number because it shows that although some blacks were portrayed as authority figures, their deaths were

made a point of the plot. Therefore, at some point in these films, their authority ceased to exist. It was only temporary.

Combating this negative portrayal of BAFs, however, it was found that many BAFs were involved in the resolution of conflicts in the films. Of 89 black characters that were involved in conflict (BAF or not), 77 were also involved in the resolution. This is a total of 74%, which means that more than half of the black characters were portrayed as heroes. Thus, the rate of heroes far outnumbers the portrayal of rebels and outsiders or dead characters, which is an interesting and positive comparison. The majority of these characters were involved in two types of conflict: to secure benefit for self/another individual (35 or 39%) or to secure benefit for society (48 or 54%). Furthermore, the nature of the benefits were most commonly psychological (relating to power, freedom, status) (31 or 35%) or physical welfare (45 or 50%).

The portrayal of new racism, stereotypes, and overt or traditional racism were found to be quite minimal for this sample. The stereotypes coded were the presence or role of unnecessary violence, criminality, service jobs, drug abuse or distribution, absent father, angry black female, poor, uneducated, and lazy. The overt racist acts that were coded were bigotry, segregation, slavery, lack of economic opportunities, government issued discrimination, and racial slurs. Twenty-nine films displayed some type of stereotype (52%). The majority of these stereotypes were criminality, that is the portrayal of black characters as criminals or prisoners. These criminals include Hancock's adversaries who escape prison to seek vengeance for the title character's public humiliation of them, murderous females in *Chicago* (Richards & Marshall, 2002), and

prisoners standing in several shots throughout *The Dark Knight Rises* (Thomas et al.,

2012). Table 7 includes the percentages of each type of stereotype that was coded.

Table 7

Stereotypes Portrayed in Films of 2000-2015

Stereotype	# of films (%)
Violence	7 (.24)
Crime	13 (.45)
Service	4 (.14)
Drug	1 (.03)
Absent	1 (.03)
Angry	1 (.03)
Poor	2 (.07)
Total	29

Overt racism was relatively rare in this sample. Only three instances of bigotry

were coded. This included a pretentious coordinator of a flashy car show telling two

supporting black characters in *Fast and Furious 6* (Moritz, Diesel, Townsend, & Lin,

2013) that, "Kitchen help entrance is towards the back" and that they "couldn't possibly

afford the cars in this auction." Another example was coded in *The Blind Side* (Johnson et

al., 2009) when Elaine, a friend of main character Leigh Anne Tuohy, compares the

young black boy Leigh Anne took into King Kong and then questions whether she is

worried about having a "large, black boy" living under the same roof as her daughter.

The Blind Side (Johnson et al, 2009) is a difficult case to code since it tells the

true story of a young football player named Michael Ohre, and it is centered on the class

differences between Ohre and the well-to-do white family that saves him from poverty

and crime. However, the comments by Leigh Anne's friend were coded as bigotry

because they were unnecessary. In a previous scene, it was already established that Elaine

thought Michael was a charity case and that Leigh Anne was out of her mind for keeping

him. Her subsequent racist comments were not necessary to the plot and only served as

an opportunity to showcase a bigot.

Other portrayals of overt racism included segregation in *The Hunger Games:*

Catching Fire (Jacobson et al., 2013) as it appeared that one district was predominately

populated by black people. Slavery was coded into *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*

(Kennedy et al., 2015) when Finn explained that he had been taken away from his home

and forced to join the First Order, and one racial slur was also coded in *The Hangover*

Part 2 (Goldberg, Phillips, & Phillips, 2011). Thus, out of 55 films, 10% displayed some

form of overt racism. Table 8 includes the total number and percentages of each type of

overt racism that was portrayed in the sample.

Table 8

Overt Racism Portrayed in Films of 2000-2015

Overt Racism	# of films (#)
Bigotry	3 (.50)
Segregation	1 (.16)
Slavery	1 (.16)
Racial slur	1 (.16)
Total	6

It cannot go unmentioned that 5 of the 55 films (9.1%) included in this study did not portray any BAFs: *Mission Impossible II* (Cruise, Wagner, & Woo, 2000)*, Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* (Bruckheimer & Verbinski, 2003)*, Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (Bruckheimer & Verbinski, 2006)*, The Hangover Part 2* (Goldberg et al., 2011)*,* and *Twilight* (Godfrey et al., 2008). No commonality was found among these films that could conclude why they were so BAF-free. *Mission Impossible II* (Cruise, Wagner, & Woo, 2000) and *The Hangover Part 2* (Goldberg et al., 2011) can arguably rely on location as an excuse for lack of BAFs since they are not set in the U.S. (but rather *Australia and Thailand, respectively*), while the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series can possibly justify a lack of BAFs with timeline being that it is set in the 18th century. *MI:II* did portray a former BAF in a significant role, former IMF agent, Luther Stickell, but his history as a BAF in the first *Mission Impossible* was not coded into the data.

CHAPTER VII – DISCUSSION

The data presented above suggests that there is not an absence of BAFs in popular films of the 2000s. While five films do not portray any BAFs, the other 50 showed significant numbers of BAFs inactive, supported, and heroic roles. This does not reinforce the racial contract. As positive as the numbers are, however, it is not merely enough to look at the characters and say that they are successful at some point in a film or that they helped solve a societal conflict. There are other contextual and qualitative details that the coding may have missed. Thus, each film can be further analyzed and critiqued in its portrayal of black characters, whether they wield authority or not. In the discussion, comparisons are drawn between the films and the portrayals of the characters.

Marvel or DC?

Thirteen of the films included in this study were of the superhero genre, including *The Avengers* (Feige & Whedon, 2012), *Batman Begins* (Roven, Thomas, Franco, & Nolan, 2005), and *X-Men* (Donner, Winter, & Singer, 2000). The success of films about superheroes has dominated the box office over the past decade and a half. Leading the trend is Marvel Studios. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) would possibly praise itself on representation of BAFs such as the director of SHIELD, Nick Fury. Though upon further analysis, that praise may not be incredibly deserving. In just over 52 minutes of screen time spread over four films, Nick Fury wielded his authority 14 times and does so successfully 11 of those times. He is constantly shown giving orders to his agents, Phil Coulson and Maria Hill, who receive his authority respectfully.

In his two most prominent roles, *The Avengers* (Feige & Whedon, 2012) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Feige, Russo, & Russo, 2014), however, his

authority is eventually revoked in two notable scenes. A council of world leaders revokes his power as the director of SHIELD when he refuses to support a nuclear strike on New York City as a way to combat alien attackers in *The Avengers* (Feige & Whedon, 2012), and Captain America challenges Fury's authority in *The Winter Soldier* (Feige, Russo, & Russo, 2014) to the point where Fury says, "Looks like you're giving the orders now, Captain." Being that Nick Fury is currently one of the most powerful and active BAFs in the MCU, it is important to recognize that his authority is too often revoked or challenged.

The other two mentionable BAFs in the MCU are the sidekicks. The first is Sam "Falcon" Wilson who was the very first black superhero to debut in Marvel Comics in 1969. So far, Sam Wilson has been portrayed in four films, two of which were analyzed in this project (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*). As it stands, his character has yet to be portrayed questioning his subordinate role to Steve Rogers. He has even been vocal about his doing everything Captain can, "just slower," as he announces in *The Winter Soldier* (Feige, Russo, & Russo, 2014). He seems content with that, and the film ends with Falcon literally standing at Captain's flank and asking him for instructions on their next mission. He then appears in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (Feige & Whedon, 2015) for just over a minute of screen time, only to give Captain an update on the mission he was sent on.

Wilson does not question it when Captain calls for him to help. He simply falls in line like an obedient soldier, even though in the films he is retired from the armed forces and has no allegiance to Steve Rogers other than a brief meeting while running around D.C. in the beginning scene of *The Winter Soldier* (Feige, Russo, & Russo, 2014). The

presence of Sam Wilson as a BAF is not questioned or critiqued, nor is his respect for authority higher than his own. However, his current and comfortable role as second-in-command stands out when there are too few black leads in the superhero genre. Of the 13 superhero films coded, 22 BAFs were portrayed. Every one of them was a supporting character. In these types of films, Sam Wilson is the normal. Wilson's role as a secondary BAF is also critiqued because he only wielded his authority once in two film appearances. The question is whether or not black BAFs like Sam Wilson will have a more leading role in the future of the MCU.

James "Rhodey" Rhodes is another sidekick who frequents the MCU. A colonel in the military and best friend to Iron Man/Tony Stark, Rhodey is a significant BAF. In three films (*Iron Man 2, Iron Man 3,* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*) and approximately 36 minutes of screen time, he wielded his authority in 9 instances, 7 of which were successful. He is most active in *Iron Man 2* (Feige & Favreau, 2010). Like Sam Wilson, however, he is portrayed in a supporting role, his actions only to further the story of another character. It will not be until 2018 when the MCU, which began in 2008 with the first *Iron Man* film, has its first black title character with *Black Panther*.

The fact that these characters are portrayed as superheroes on the big screen is undoubtedly positive. Sam Wilson as Falcon is doing for young, black people who enjoy the MCU what he did for them when he debuted on the pages of *Captain America*. He represents the idea that black people can be strong, active, and can have upward mobility (literally, Sam Wilson can fly). However, there can be consequences if the height of their success is always second and not first, like the MCU's Falcon and War Machine and the

X-Men franchise's Storm, who will be discussed in a later section. So there is still progress to be made even in the genre of superhero films.

Other noteworthy BAFs who appeared in Marvel films were Robbie Robertson of the *Spider-Man* trilogy and Secretary Trask in *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Donner, Winter, Arad, & Ratner, 2006). Robertson is a lead editor of the Daily Bugle, the newspaper where Peter Parker finds work selling his photos. In three film appearances, Robertson has approximately four minutes of screen time. He never wielded his authority. Instead, he serves as second-in-command and yes-man to John Jonah Jameson, the chief of the newspaper. He suffers the same portrayal as Sam Wilson and Rhodey, that in which he is locked in a supporting and secondary role.

There is another BAF who appears in *Spider-Man* (Ziskin et al., 2002) who had less screen time than Roberson, logging in just over a minute of time. However, he is far more active. Credited as "teacher" on IMDb, the nameless BAF wielded his authority over his talkative students during a field trip four times successfully. The contrast between these two characters in the *Spider-Man* universe is interesting and sheds some light on the role of BAFs in the series. They are Robertson, named and present, but not wielding any authority, or they do wield authority successfully but are not personally identified and made a true character. Neither of these characters ever had any impact on the overall plot of the series, which emphasizes their roles as supporting characters.

DC films do not fare any better than many of the films in the MCU. In *Batman Begins* (Roven, Thomas, Franco, & Nolan, 2005) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (Thomas et al., 2012), only three significant BAFs are portrayed. Lucius Fox serves as the head of Applied Sciences department of Wayne Enterprises who eventually has his security

clearance revoked by the board. In a scene of particular interest of *Batman Begins* (Roven et al., 2005), he describes to Bruce Wayne why he was demoted to the department by the current CEO of the company, William Earle, a white man.

> Lucius: What did they tell you this place was?
>
> Bruce: They didn't tell me anything.
>
> Lucius: Earle told me exactly what it was when he sent me down here... Dead end. Place to keep me from causing the board any more trouble.
>
> (Roven et al., 2005)

It is important to note the implications of this scene. Being one of only two BAFs in that film, his role as a demoted department head who is put in a place where he cannot cause any trouble (nor wield any authority or agency) arguably reinforces ideas that black characters should be kept in a separate place because they are not capable of making rational decisions; they can only cause trouble. Fox does have the last laugh, however. By the end of the film, Bruce Wayne promotes him to the head of his company and Earle is fired. However, the scene is still significant being there are so few black characters and active BAFs in the film.

The other BAF in *Batman Begins* (Roven et al., 2005) is Commander Leob who has less than two minutes of screen time and wielded his authority one time. He makes a great speech in that time, standing up against the vigilante work of the Batman. It would be a successful example of wielding authority if not for Commissioner James Gordon who raises his hand to challenge Leob's words.

> Leob: Now I don't care if it's rival gangs, guardian angels, or the goddamn Salvation Army, get them off the street and off the front page.

Gordon: This guy did deliver us one of the city's biggest crime lords.

Leob: No one takes the law into their own hands in my city. Understand?

(Roven et al., 2005)

The third and final BAF appears in *The Dark Knight Rises* (Thomas et al., 2012), and he suffers an even worse fate than Fox and Leob. Captain Jones enters the film after an hour and forty-nine minutes, and he is killed in a graphic scene by the evil villain Bane barely three minutes later. In his time on screen, he does wield his authority successfully twice, at one point telling inferior officer John Blake to "dial it back" when he questions his decision on how to handle Bane and his gang of criminals taking control of Gotham. His short time on screen and graphic death arguably counteract his role as an authority figure.

Marvel and DC both produce incredibly successful films about superheroes. While Marvel may portray more black superheroes than DC, including Sam Wilson and Rhodey, DC is more prone to portray black high ranking police officers and professionals. Both, however, are guilty of allotting these characters very limited screen time, such as Spider-Man's teacher or Commander Leob, and/or they have few to no instances of successfully wielding their authority, such as *Spider-Man*'s Robbie Robertson and Secretary Trask in *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Donner et al., 2006). Furthermore, if the BAFs do successfully wield their authority often, they are at risk of having their authority revoked, as in the case of Nick Fury in two different movies.

Must be Super to be a Hero?

As mentioned previously, 66 coded black characters were involved in the resolution of each film in some way in another. Unlike Falcon and War Machine of the

MCU, these heroes were not equipped with advanced mechanical wings that allow them to fly or an immaculate and loaded suit of armor. Instead, they were equipped with their own intellect, will power, and judgment which led to their heroic actions. For example, Brian, a black, genius high school student in *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, Gordon, & Emmerich, 2004), volunteers for a dangerous mission to retrieve life-saving medicine, dodges hungry wolves, beats the steadily dropping temperatures outside, and successfully delivers the medicine to his friend. While Brian is not an authority figure, he is a hero. Characters who were portrayed as both BAFs and heroes included Rich Purnell and Vincent Kapoor in *The Martian* (Kinberg et al., 2015). Purnell, the astronomic scientist, and Kapoor, the Director of the Mars Mission, both helped to bring main character Mark Whatney home from a failed mission which left him stranded on Mars.

Black heroic characters were not just shown resolving personal conflicts or minimal problems for other individuals. They were also and more commonly depicted resolving societal conflicts. Examples include Sergeant Epps successfully leading defenses against the Decepticons in the *Transformers* films or Finn facing off against the villainous Kylo Ren in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Kennedy et al., 2015) in order to stop the First Order from space domination. The implication of these active heroes is that black characters are not only a part of society, but they are an integral part of resolving problems that may arise in society. This is not aligned with the racial contract. So while superheroes are portrayed in supportive roles only, black heroes, in general, are frequently shown in some of the most popular films of 2000-2015. These characters may not wield authority very often or do not have any authority at all, but they have the ability to resolve conflict, and that can be just as positive.

Head Blacks in Charge?

Several films starred black characters and/or BAFs in the main role. This section could be renamed as *Characters Played by Will Smith*, as four out of the six main BAFs were portrayed by the actor. These characters gained their own section because they have the advantage of having far more screen time than supporting or bit characters. It would make sense that each of these characters will have more active and effective roles since they are the highest billed characters who establish the plot and move it to the conclusion of the film. Will Smith portrayed four characters who do this: secret agent Jay in *Men in Black II* (Parkes, MacDonald, & Sonnenfield, 2002), officer Del Spooner in *I, Robot* (Mark et al, 2004), multi-BAF Robert Neville in *I Am Legend* (Goldsman & Lawrence, 2007) and anti-hero John Hancock in *Hancock* (Goldsman et al., 2008). The most active BAF portrayed by Smith was Jay in *Men in Black II*. Jay wielded his authority as a secret government agent of a special alien division ten times, seven of which were successful. This film, however, is a buddy film in which a white lead character, Kay, portrayed by Tommy Lee Jones, is equally active. Kay's role as a senior partner potentially weakens Jay's role as a BAF. For example, two of the instances in which Jay is not successful in wielding his authority, it is because Kay trumps his authority and makes a decision for the both of them.

A less active but no less prominent character was is Del Spooner. In *I, Robot* (Mark et al., 2004), a new generation of artificially intelligent (AI) robots becomes corrupt and decides that in order to save humanity from itself, the AIs must take control and destroy any who do not obey their commands. As a police officer, Spooner wielded his authority successfully two out of four times and helped to stop the AIs from

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destroying humanity. In *I Am Legend* (Goldsman et al., 2007), Robert Neville is the last

human left alive in New York City, which has been overtaken by a virus that turned the

rest of the population into zombies. As mentioned previously, Neville is a multi-BAF.

This means that he served in more than one of the authority figure categories: as a parent,

an armed serviceman (lieutenant colonel), and a professional (scientist). Being that he is

alone for the majority of the film, Neville only wields his authority in each of those roles

once. However, his self-sacrifice and the cure he developed in his lab save the few

survivors of the outbreak. Both he and Del are portrayed as heroes, solving society's

problems.

The last character portrayed by Will Smith was Hancock who is currently one of

the few black superhero leads in cinema. Hancock is an anti-hero, though. In the first half

of the film, he has no respect for the law or his fellow man. He has a tendency towards

unnecessary roughness and vulgarity, and he generally causes more damage than good.

Sexual harassment of a woman, threatening and harming a child, and homophobia are

also some of the damning actions of Hancock. It is not until a white savior named Ray

comes along that Hancock was taught how to be rational and work within the law, not

against it. It is important to note that Ray did not help Hancock out of solidarity; he did

so to improve his own brand and business by using Hancock and his ability as a

spokesperson. Still, with the help of a white man, Hancock got rid of his wild and

destructive nature.

In the second half of the film, Hancock illustrates why superheroes are coded as

BAFs in this coding. During a hostage situation, Hancock is granted authority by a police

officer to handle the situation in which he and his fellow officers are not equipped. In that

sense, Hancock becomes an enforcer of the law and is granted the ability to use his own judgment to make commands on other people. So while he begins the film as a heavily flawed anti-hero, he ends the film as an authority figure and hero.

While being the main character in a film would possibly create a better environment for a BAF to wield their authority, these characters did not do so excessively. However, when they did, they were generally successful. They were also portrayed as heroes, which shows that there are some benefits of being a leading BAF in a popular film.

<div align="center">Rest in Peace?</div>

While a large number of successful heroes is a positive representation of BAFs in popular film, several BAFs portrayed died or were killed on screen. Five of these characters were the most active BAFs in their films before their deaths or murders. Mr. Hayes, for example, from *King Kong* (Blenkin, Cunningham, Walsh, & Jackson, 2005) serves as the first mate on the ship that takes a film production crew to Skull Island. He is mostly shown wielding his authority over a young boy named Jimmy to whom he acts as a father figure, giving him advice and telling him to start taking his responsibilities on the ship seriously. Fifty percent of Mr. Hayes' authority is wielded successfully, which displays Jimmy having a great deal of respect for the man. However, his authority loses its effect midway through his screen time, as the crew's curiosity and Jimmy's desire to fight overpowers their willingness to support Hayes' authority. His death is arguably one that was quite avoidable. He was amongst a large group of armed men and seemed to sacrifice himself while staring down the gorilla beast. His death, paired with the sharp decline of his authority, weakened his role as a successful BAF.

Mace Windu of *Star Wars: Episode III- Revenge of the Sith* (McCallum & Lucas, 2005) suffered a similar fate as Mr. Hayes, though more tragic and graphic. Windu, who serves as a councilman of the Galactic Republic, wielded his authority successfully 50% of the time. Like Hayes, his authority lost its effect midway through his time on screen after lead character Anakin Skywalker's path begins to diverge from the master he once supported. Skywalker was notably supportive of Windu in four instances, calling him master and responding to his instructions. But once he is turned to the dark side by Chancellor Palpatine, the two combine their forces and kill Windu. The arch of Windu's character was similar to Hayes' in that they served as mentors to young white men. They begin to lose the strength of their authority, and then they are murdered. Neither of these are successful portrayal of BAFs.

Two other characters who were active before their deaths were Boggs of the *Hunger Games* series and a police officer who is only credited as Campbell on IMDb in *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, Gordon, & Emmerich, 2004). In *Mockingjay Part 1* (Jacobson, Kilik, & Lawrence, 2014) and *Part 2* (Jacobson, Kilik, & Lawrence, 2015), the final two films in the *Hunger Games* series, Boggs is successful at wielding authority 12 out of 14 times. As a soldier leading a non-combat unit through a capital undergoing a violent revolution, he frequently gives commands to the members under his authority until his death.

Like Boggs, Officer Campbell is mostly successful at wielding his authority. Three out of five instances of him using his authority were successful and supported in *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, Gordon, & Emmerich, 2004) when a large of group of New Yorkers take refuge in a public library once the second Ice Age brought on by

global warming begins outside. He too meets his death when he and many others decide that staying in the library is not a wise decision. Main character Sam, whose father is a climatologist, knows that Campbell is making a terrible decision and leading people and himself to their deaths and tries to stop him. Thus, Campbell's authority is challenged when he is depicted as being unwise or irrational. Sam and the audience know that leaving the library is an irrational decision when the temperatures outside are expected to drop below freezing. This is a significant and negative character attribute that arguably reflects the understanding of blacks in the racial contract as incapable of making rational decisions for themselves. Irrational Campbell leaves the library anyway and pays the consequences in the worst way.

The last active BAF who meets his end on film is Mose Jakande in *Furious 7* (Moritz, Diesel, Fottrell, & Wan, 2015). Jakande, the owner of a private military company, is the most active BAF in the sample, wielding his authority successfully 12 out of 13 times. However, his authority and role as the leader of a company and a gang of mercenaries who answer to him is completely counteracted by his role as the villain in the film. All of his men support his authority. It is unclear whether or not that is through coercion or willful decisions on the part of his men who do his bidding and answer his call throughout the film. He is eventually killed in an explosion.

Each of these characters was either authority figures who met their ends on screen. These BAFs were all the most active and often most prominent black characters in their respective films. Their deaths can be analyzed as a representation of a social order in which black characters, specifically those with authority, are expendable. So while the

numbers show that successful and supported BAFs are common, their deaths weaken the argument that these BAFS are a fully positive portrayal of blacks on screen.

<center>The More, the Merrier?</center>

Franchises are arguably more important than solo films. A series or cluster of films can perpetuate certain types of subtle messages about society across a decade or more, such as the *Star Wars* series even though it is set in a fictional world. Furthermore, franchises have the potential to illustrate changes of stories told and characters portrayed over time. Franchises that dominated the past fifteen years also include *Transformers*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and the *Fast and the Furious*. Three films from the *Transformers* franchise were included in this project: *Revenge of the Fallen* (Murphy, DeSanto, di Bonaventura, Bryce, & Bay, 2009), *Dark of the Moon* (Murphy et al., 2011), and *Age of Extinction* (Murphy, DeSanto, di Bonaventura, Bryce, & Bay, 2014). Within these three films, only five BAFs were portrayed, and only one of them was active at wielding authority. Epps, a sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, appears in two of the films (therefore, he is counted twice) and wields his authority successfully 100% of the time (9 instances in total) as he leads his team of soldiers through dangerous missions against a robot alien race.

Epps is not portrayed in the most recent Transformer film, *Age of Extinction* (Murphy et al., 2014), nor is any other significant or active BAF. The head of the Department of Homeland Security is portrayed by a black man for a screen time of less than a minute in which he barely utters a word. The only other BAF in the film is a soldier who is unnecessarily violent and portrayed as a villainous character for his short

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time on screen. This decline in BAF activity is noteworthy and shines negatively on the *Transformers* franchise.

   Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl (Bruckheimer & Verbinski, 2003), *Dead Man's Chest* (2006), and *At World's End* (2007) make up another popular franchise, one which does not portray many active BAFs. Only two BAFs are portrayed in the three films. Gentleman Jocard is a pirate captain who serves on a council of pirates called the Brethren Court. He has just over a minute of screen time and only wields his authority once in a scene of commotion in which his words are ignored by his subordinates. Tia Dalma, a female character who appears in the latter two films, is revealed as the goddess Calypso in *At World's End* and suffers a similar fate. Coded as god/fate, this BAF does not wield much authority outside of destroying a ship out of pure rage. In one scene, she does remind a white captain to caution crossing her and reminds him that she is the one who brought him back from the dead. He does not heed her words and authority, however. Neither Jocard nor Calypso are successful BAFs.

   As mentioned before, the *Pirates* franchise is set in 18th century when the British ruled, so it is not entirely surprising that there is a lack of BAFs. However, that is not an entirely reasonable excuse since the franchise is heavily saturated with fantastical and mythical elements that blur the lines between real history and the fictional world in which it is set. If pirate captains can come back from the dead, then it would not be any less shocking to see active and significant BAFs in the universe of *Pirates*.

   The *Fast and the Furious* franchise is a peculiar case when it comes to portraying black characters. In three films included in the sample, *Fast Five* (Moritz, Diesel, Fottrell, & Lin, 2011), *Fast and Furious 6* (Mortiz et al., 2013), and *Furious 7* (Moritz et al.,

2015), four black characters are active in the films (two of which star in all three films).

Of those four characters, however, only two are BAFs. As mentioned previously, Mose

Jakande was coded as a BAF, but his role as a head of a company conflicts with his role

as a villainous terrorist. The other BAF is Officer Fusco, who is killed in an explosion

having never wielded his authority.

The two most significant black characters in the franchise are sweet-talking

Roman Peace and technology buff Tej. While they are prominent and active in all of the

films, the two men are criminals often running from the law amongst a family of car

racing, thrill junkies. This would appear to be a negative portrayal of black characters.

However, in an interesting spin on societal expectations, the viewers of these movies are

supposed to side with and support the criminals (which could be a separate study

altogether). The rebels are the ones the audience roots for. The stories are focused on

characters who will do anything to protect their family even if it means wreaking havoc

all across the world and disregarding the law. They are seen as cool by the viewers who

want to experience the thrill ride along with them. Thus, being a part of the family is the

goal in these films.

Asian actor Sung Kang, whose character Han Seoul-Oh drives alongside Pearce

and Tej in all three films, echoed that idea. "With pop culture, you're able to change

people's perceptions of a whole ethnic group," he said in an interview with Entertainment

Weekly (Robinson 2016). "They look at me, and go, 'Dude if you're like this, other

Asians must be cool and be able to chill and be part of the family.'" The same can be said

for black characters. While they are not often portrayed as active authority figures, black

characters are included as part of the family, which is arguably more important in the context of these franchise and to the audience.

Cumulatively, these three franchises only offer one active and non-villainous BAF. This is not positive when these films account for 16% of the sample. These films and the types of portrayals they depict possibly have even more impact than the other films in the sample, being that they are continuous and habitual over time unless they change. None of the three mentioned franchises showed any noteworthy change when it comes to the active and significant portrayal of BAFs. *Transformers* seemed to revert back to a society where BAFs are uncommon or completely inactive. *Pirates'* number of BAFs depended on a single god-like character who only wielded authority one time, and *Furious* focused more on the importance of family rather than authority and obedience to the law. Regardless, dominant franchises have the most responsibility in the positive portrayal of black authority figures, for which these three cannot be praised.

<center>Girl Power?</center>

As mentioned before, only 17 female BAFs were portrayed in the sample. The most active female BAFs were Niobe in *The Matrix Revolutions* (Silver & Wachowski, 2003) and Commander Paylor in the *Hunger Games* series. Niobe was a fierce captain of a space ship who would not allow her authority to make her own decisions regarding her ship be ignored. In an establishing scene, main character Neo reveals that he must go on a solo mission in attempt to save the world and that he needs a way to get there. This leads Niobe to face off against Roland, a white, hot-tempered captain of another ship who does not find it wise for Neo to leave.

Niobe: He can take mine.

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Roland: You can't do that.

Niobe: Don't even think of trying to tell me what I can or cannot do with my ship... I'll pilot this ship, he can take mine.

(Silver & Wachowskis, 2003)

Everyone respects her command in that scene, even Roland keeping any further words to himself. Throughout the rest of the film, Niobe is shown in a few other occasions wielding her authority successfully.

Commander Paylor was fairly inactive in her first appearance in the *Hunger Games* series, in *Mockingjay Part 1* (Jacobson et al., 2014). In *Part 2* (Jacobson et al., 2015), however, she is shown wielding her authority over a pair of soldiers and even the woman who will become president once the rebellion is settled and a new government can take its place. In a surprising turn of events, when it is revealed that very woman, Coin, is just as dangerous as the previous president, a council of representatives from all of the 13 districts of Panem vote to have Paylor serve as a temporary president. While her screen time is less than many other characters in the film, the role of Paylor was undoubtedly significant to the scope of the series. She shows her authoritative ability in one memorable scene in which she addressed a crowd of her people and giving orders to them.

I'm commander Paylor of District 8. I'm a soldier, like all of you, so here's what I know. For the first time in our lifetimes, we're standing together with 13 districts. From what I see here, we've already made history. But history doesn't stop to celebrate. And we're facing an enemy that will not change and will never surrender. President Snow has pulled back peacekeepers to fortify the center of

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the city. He's evacuating residents from the outer blocks. These civilians will be confused and desperate. You are under orders not to target them. We're deploying medical brigades to help anyone in need. We'll show the capitol people who we are. (Jacobson et al., 2015)

This scene alone illustrates her ability to serve and lead. Characters like Paylor are a positive representative of female BAFs in popular films.

Aurora Monroe, also known as Storm in the *X-Men* series, is another significant female BAF. She was coded as a teacher at Professor X's school for mutant children. In three films, Monroe is shown to wield her authority four times. While that number may seem small, it is balanced with the knowledge that each student respected her command when she told them to pay attention or refrain from using their powers in public. Her role as a teacher may not be as prominent as her role as a member of the X-Men as they go on missions to protect mutants, but it is more authoritative.

The other female BAFs do not fare as well, comparatively. Many of the others have small supporting or bit roles in which they do not wield their authority more than two times. The female police officer in *The Hangover* (Goldberg et al., 2009) is only credited as Gardner in IMDb and wields her authority one time. As a prison warden-like character, Matron Mama Morton wields her authority in *Chicago* (Richards & Marshall, 2002) twice, but this is overshadowed by the fact that she is a corrupt BAF who takes advantage of her prisoners and takes their money under the table in exchange for phone calls and access to good lawyers. Zoe Neville in *I Am Legend* (Goldsman et al., 2007) wields her authority as a mother twice, and the grandmother in *I, Robot* (Mark et al.,

2004) wields hers once. Each of these BAFs were fairly insignificant to the overall plot of their films.

Two supporting female characters are portrayed in two of the *Mission Impossible* films. Nyah is portrayed as a thief in the second film in the series and is not a BAF. In the introduction of her character, she states, "I don't have a conscience; I'm a bloody thief!" Here, a female character is shown damning her own self for lack of a moral code and for a propensity to crime. It gets worse for Nyah when she is repeatedly used as bait by the male characters in the films in order to get what they need to defeat the bad guys. She eventually self-sacrifices herself in order to stop a virus from spreading to the rest of the country. Nyah suffered much in her time on film. Even though she is not a BAF, she is significant as a black female with a significant role in a popular film.

Eleven years after Nyah's appearance in the series, in *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* (Cruise, Abrams, Burk, & Bird, 2011)*,* Agent Carter is introduced as a BAF. While this is progress and a step up from thieving and sacrificial Nyah, Carter only wields her authority once in the very beginning of the film. Beyond that, she falls into a position of a follower who answers to Ethan Hawke's lead and becomes a seductress, using her female prowl to get what the team needs of her. These two characters are on two opposite sides of authority, but they both fall victim to the plot which sees them more as pawns, rather than authority figures and conscientious black women.

Like Nyah, another noteworthy female character who was not a BAF is Flo in *What Women Want* (Cartsonis, Davey, Matthews, Meyes, Williams, & Meyers, 2000). This was a bizarre romantic comedy about a playboy who gains the ability to hear the thoughts of women. Flo is the only significant black character in the film, and she is

credited as "Flo the doorwoman" on IMDb. She fills that role effectively, standing in service of the male lead (Nick) a few times throughout the film. Most concerning about this character is the overuse of the word "sir" when she addresses Nick. In just one minute of screen time, Flo addresses Nick as "sir" five times. This is concerning because Flo is the only significant black character in the film, and it echoes the master-slave relationship between whites and blacks. Flo is basically a servicewoman who is only there to answer the beck and call of a white man. The contrast between characters like Flo and Commander Paylor is something that complicates the ability to draw definitive conclusions about these characters and all BAFs. One female BAF can become president while a regular black woman can stand next to a man and repeatedly address him as her superior. There are two extremes present, which are both interesting and significant.

One of the main black female characters in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Kennedy et al., 2015) was actually not black at all. Instead, the credited actor on IMDb, Lupita Nyong'o, only provided the voice to an alien character named Maz. For this reason, the character was not coded into the data. However, it is not to be ignored. Maz is not an isolated portrayal, or non-portrayal, of black characters in popular films. As mentioned before, several films were eliminated from the sample because they only used black voice, not black skin. *Avatar*, the third *Harry Potter* film, the *Lord of the Rings* series, and *Planet of the Apes* each credited at least one black actor. But on the big screen, only their voices were present. Like a low percentage of female BAFs, this trend could also be a criticism of the industry and possibly an extension of the racial contract. There is a suggestion that black people can be heard and not seen.

In every type of film represented in this sample, from the superhero genre to films starring Will Smith in the lead role, and from fast cars franchises to a galaxy far, far away, a large percentage of the black characters portrayed were authority figures. Many of these characters were successful and supported which is not compatible with the racial contract that implies that authoritative roles are left solely to whites. However, other variables such as limited screen time, few instances of wielded authority, deaths, and the imbalanced portrayal of female BAFs cannot be ignored.

CHAPTER VIII – CONCLUSION

While many of these films can be critiqued for their portrayal of black characters, such as cases of indifference towards BAFs or the inability to effectively wield their authority, the majority of BAFs were successful and supported. Many of them were also portrayed as society's heroes. Thus, the first three hypotheses (BAFs will not be portrayed; they will be portrayed but no active or supported; and they will not be portrayed as society's heroes) of this study were not supported. The fourth hypothesis, which anticipated many instances new racism and negative stereotypes, was also nullified because they were not significantly prominent. Therefore, the racial contract was not in clear evidence in popular film.

These results would potentially support the argument that film has entered a post-racial era, and this could then be argued about the U.S. in reality. The counterargument is that American film and the nation itself are not restricted by issues of race and do not keep the white race in a position of superiority. People of all races have the same rights and opportunities to become leaders of the society and obtain the right to wield authority. However, it would be a mighty jump to draw this conclusion. It could also be argued that Hollywood is no longer fulfilling a racist agenda to keep up with the status quo of minority inferiority. Instead, Hollywood has potentially become one of the most liberal industries in the U.S. Thus, the film industry and popular films could be leading the trend when it comes to the acceptance of black authority figures in the U.S. instead of following and reflecting it. But this too is a little far-reaching. The lack of black directors in a sample of most popular films of the past fifteen years would directly challenge that.

The ability to draw major comparisons regarding race in this project is limited by the sample. Primarily, the films coded were made by white directors. Future research in films directed by black filmmakers would be useful in order to compare how white directors and black directors portray BAFs. Further, more extensive research could be done on this sample of films in order to draw comparisons between BAFs and white authority figures. It would be fruitful to see how the statistics would compare if the activity and success of white authority figures in popular films were also coded and analyzed.

While it is encouraging to conclude that Charles Mills' racial contract was not adequately portrayed in popular film through the positive representation of black authority figures, it cannot be forgotten that race issues in the U.S. are not a thing of the past. Even though finding that *Pacific Rim*'s Stacker Pentecost and the indifference shown towards his authority were in the minority of BAFs in popular films of 2000-2015, it does not weaken the overall contract theory. Blacks were not involved in the development of the social contract that established American government, and they were seen as property to be owned by whites for almost one hundred years after the constitution was ratified. Thus, the shortfall is not with the contract nor with the relationship between film and culture. While the evidence examined in this thesis does not conform to Mills' theory, future researchers may develop other measures which are better able to capture the nuances of the racial contract.

APPENDIX A – CONTENT ANALYSIS TABLES AND CODING SHEET

Sample of Films with Year, Rating, Genre, Box Office Sales, etc.

Film	Year	Rating	Genre	Box Office #	Box Office (millions)
American Sniper	2014	R	Action	1	350.12
Avengers Age of Ultron	2015	PG-13	Action	3	458.99
The Avengers	2012	PG-13	Action	1	632.28
Batman Begins	2005	PG-13	Action	8	205.34
Big Hero 6	2015	PG	Animation	10	222.49
Bruce Almighty	2003	PG-13	Comedy	5	245.59
Captain America: The Winter Soldier	2014	PG-13	Action	4	259.75
The Hunger Games: Catching Fire	2013	PG-13	Action	1	424.65
Chicago	2002	PG-13	Comedy	10	170.68
The Dark Knight Rises	2012	PG-13	Action	2	448.13
The Day After Tomorrow	2004	PG-13	Action	7	186.74
Elf	2003	PG	Comedy	7	173.38
Fast and Furious 6	2013	PG-13	Action	9	238.67
Fast Five	2011	PG-13	Action	6	209.81
Furious 7	2015	PG-13	Action	5	350.03
Hancock	2008	PG-13	Action	4	227.95
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	2009	PG	Adventure	3	301.96
I Am Legend	2007	PG-13	Drama	6	256.39
I, Robot	2004	PG-13	Action	10	144.80
Iron Man 2	2010	PG-13	Action	3	312.06
Iron Man 3	2013	PG-13	Action	2	408.99
Jurassic Park III	2001	PG-13	Action	9	181.17
Jurassic World	2015	PG-13	Action	2	652.18
King Kong	2005	PG-13	Action	5	218.05
Men in Black II	2002	PG-13	Action	8	190.42
Mission Impossible Ghost Protocol (2011)	2011	PG-13	Action	7	209.36
Mission Impossible II	2000	PG-13	Action	3	215.40
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1	2014	PG-13	Adventure	2	337.10
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2	2015	PG-13	Action	7	281.67

Film	Year	Rating	Genre	Box Office #	Box Office $ (millions)
National Treasure 2	2007	PG	Action	8	219.96
Night at the Museum	2006	PG	Adventure	2	250.86
Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	2007	PG-13	Action	4	309.40
Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of Black Pearl	2003	PG-13	Action	3	305.39
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest	2006	PG-13	Action	1	423.03
Rush Hour 2	2001	PG-13	Action	5	226.14
Spectre	2015	PG-13	Action	10	200.07
Spider-Man 2	2004	PG-13	Action	2	373.38
Spider-Man 3	2007	PG-13	Action	1	336.53
Spider-Man	2002	PG-13	Action	1	403.71
Star Wars: The Force Awakens	2015	PG-13	Action	1	936.63
Star Wars Episode III	2005	PG-13	Action	1	380.26
The Blind Side	2009	PG-13	Biography	8	255.95
The Hangover	2009	R	Comedy	6	277.31
The Hangover Part 2	2011	R	Comedy	4	254.46
The Martian	2015	PG-13	Adventure	8	228.43
The Matrix Revolutions	2003	R	Action	9	281.49
The Mummy Returns	2001	PG-13	Action	6	202.01
Transformers: Age of Extinction	2014	PG-13	Action	7	245.43
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	2011	PG-13	Action	2	352.36
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	2009	PG-13	Action	2	402.08
Twilight	2008	PG-13	Drama	7	191.45
What Women Want	2000	PG-13	Comedy	5	180.81
X2	2003	PG-13	Action	6	301.96
X-Men	2000	PG-13	Action	8	157.30
X-Men Last Stand	2006	PG-13	Action	4	234.36

Sample of Films with Coding of Key Variables

Film	Total BAFs	Coded Characters	Coded BAFs	Activity (# of wield)	Success
American Sniper	23	2	2	5	5
Avengers Age of Ultron	10	4	4	1	1
The Avengers	8	1	1	10	8
Batman Begins	11	2	2	2	2
Big Hero 6	4	1	1	0	-
Bruce Almighty	14	1	1	1	0
Captain America: The Winter Soldier	22	2	2	3	2
The Hunger Games: Catching Fire	9	2	2	4	4
Chicago	2	4	2	2	2
The Dark Knight Rises	21	2	2	3	3
The Day After Tomorrow	8	5	3	6	4
Elf	3	1	1	2	-
Fast and Furious 6	3	2	0	-	-
Fast Five	4	3	1	0	-
Furious 7	5	4	1	13	12
Hancock	18	3	2	3	1
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	1	1	0	-	-
I Am Legend	6	3	3	7	6
I, Robot	22	3	3	7	4
Iron Man 2	21	2	2	6	4
Iron Man 3	16	1	1	4	4
Jurassic Park III	5	1	1	2	2
Jurassic World	16	1	0	-	-
King Kong	1	1	1	8	4
Men in Black II	12	2	1	10	7
Mission Impossible Ghost Protocol (2011)	1	1	1	1	1
Mission Impossible II	0	2	0	-	-
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1	6	3	3	4	3
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2	5	3	3	13	11
National Treasure 2	12	1	1	0	-

Film	Total BAFs	Coded Characters	Coded BAFs	Activity (# of wield)	Success
Night at the Museum	1	2	1	0	-
Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	2	2	2	2	0
Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of Black Pearl	0	1	0	-	-
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest	0	1	0	-	-
Rush Hour 2	1	2	1	7	4
Spectre	6	1	1	0	-
Spider-Man 2	14	1	1	0	-
Spider-Man 3	14	1	1	0	-
Spider-Man	8	2	2	4	4
Star Wars: The Force Awakens	1	1	1	0	-
Star Wars Episode III	1	1	1	6	3
The Blind Side	2	3	2	2	1
The Hangover	9	3	1	1	1
The Hangover Part 2	0	1	0	-	-
The Martian	6	2	2	5	4
The Matrix Revolutions	10	5	4	7	7
The Mummy Returns	1	2	1	0	-
Transformers: Age of Extinction	14	3	2	1	1
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	22	2	2	4	4
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	18	1	1	5	5
Twilight	0	2	0	-	-
What Women Want	1	1	0	-	-
X2	8	1	1	1	1
X-Men	3	1	1	1	1
X-Men Last Stand	10	2	2	2	1
Total:	441	108	77	165	127

Coding Sheet Used to Analyze the Portrayal of BAFs in Films of 2000-2015

Film:

Year:

Rating:

Genre:

Director: (white or black)

Length of film:

Total sale (Box office):

When does the African American character come on screen?

Approximately, how much screen time does the character have?

What sort of portrayal?

Main character

Supporting Character

Bit part

Does the character have a name? If so, what?

Stated in film

Listed on IMDb

Is the character an authority figure?

Yes

No

What type of authority figure?

Boss/Manager/Supervisor

Parent

Teacher

Police Officer

Armed service man/woman

Government Official

Professional

Superhero

Does the character attempt to wield authority?

Yes

No

How?

Domineering way.

Cooperatively

Actively

Passively

Other

What was attitude towards authority from white characters?

Supportive

Antagonistic

Subservient/intimidated

Aggressive

Indifferent

Sarcastic

What was the attitude towards authority from black characters, if applicable?

Supportive

Antagonistic

Subservient/intimidated

Aggressive

Indifferent

Sarcastic

How was attitude portrayed of whites?

Humorously

Dramatically

How was attitude portrayed of blacks?

Humorously

Dramatically

Was the authority successful?

Yes

No

Was the authority challenged?

Yes

No

If yes, by who?

Whites

Blacks

Both

Other

Was the authority blatantly disobeyed?

Yes

No

If so, by who?

Whites

Blacks

Both

Other

Was the figure involved in any conflict?

Yes

No

What was the center of the conflict?

To secure personal benefit for self/another individual

To secure benefit for an institution or organization

To secure benefit for society

Unable to determine.

What was the nature of the benefit being sought?

Tangible (monetary, material goods, etc.)

Emotional (love, friendship)

Psychological (power, freedom, status)

Physical welfare

Were they involved in the resolution?

Yes

No

How?

Directly involved in outcome (individual efforts at the final resolution)

Partially involved in outcome (collective efforts but not active in final resolution)

Minimally involved in outcome (barest of actions had impact on resolution)

Were they portrayed as rebel/villains? Explain.

Were they portrayed as outsiders? Explain.

Did the character die on screen?

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