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Reel racism, real consequences : a multiple case analysis of savior films as racial projects.

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REEL RACISM, REAL CONSEQUENCES: A MULTIPLE CASE ANALYSIS OF

SAVIOR FILMS AS RACIAL PROJECTS

By

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes how four blockbuster movies released in the years 2000-2014 represent racial projects. Racial projects encompass anything that helps people understand race. Films are racial projects because of their racist portrayal of characters. Films can be used to train audiences to view race in various ways that may contribute to problematic colorblindness. Specifically, the "White Savior" and "Magical Negro" tropes are ways through which films tell the viewers what to expect from White characters and characters of color. Viewers walk away from these films having constructed a racialized schema about White and Black characters, which further supports the notion that films are racial projects that inform people's views of certain races. Not only are films racial projects, but White Saviors are more obvious, while "Black Saviors" are far less obvious. This privileges Whiteness while subverting Blackness, perpetuating a slave-master narrative that has been common throughout America's racial history.

Keywords: White Savior, Magical Negro, racial project, racism, film

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INTRODUCTION

Movies reflect our society. Through their narratives, tropes, and character archetypes, films create and transform how we view gender, class, and race. "Savior films" – films in which there is at least one redemptive or messianic character – reveal the zeitgeist of contemporary America, with each film taking the form of another internalized social narrative. These films, no matter the narrative, have real consequences on how we navigate the waters of social justice. Savior films are subtle, yet powerful, agents of socialization, and the real-time effects of savior films can be largely attributed to the massive reach they have, which makes them an important way to examine and understand the popular constructions of race relations in the United States. Given their historical connection to our ideas of race, and racial narratives, a range of savior films can be identified as racial projects. With this study, I propose that savior films are examples of racial projects, and I intend on showing *how* specific films with savior narratives represent these racial projects as theorized by Omi and Winant.

Racial projects are the building blocks of the racial formation process. Michael Omi and Howard Winant championed the theory of racial formation, and race scholars have used their work to analyze the racial milieu from its layers to its core. Racial formation theories have been applied to the various facets of our racial society, revealing race, and the resulting racism, to be an inconvenient social fact that has come to define the mutations within race relations, racial politics, and the racial state as a whole. When we speak of racial projects, we are speaking of the mechanisms from which our ideas of

race, racism, and race relations, manifest in their myriad and chaotic forms. To wit, we speak of racial formation when we speak about racial projects. Thus, the history of racial formation theories is requisite for a better understanding of the concept of racial projects, especially as they pertain to savior narratives in film.

Previous researchers have investigated "White Savior films." They have argued that White Savior films helped maintain White privilege and hegemony through subtle White supremacist narratives. However, in this study I emphasize *savior* narratives, not exclusively White Savior narratives, because there are a number of films that have a Black protagonist working in similar ways as the White Savior – working within the community to help urban youth out of their desperation and into the mainstream. I define these films as *Black Savior* narratives that play out in film on rare occasion that needs to be examined in order to get a broader understanding of the savior narrative in Hollywood cinema.

This study intends to explain how Black Saviors manifest in films, since this character archetype is hardly mentioned or analyzed in studies involving the savior narrative because most studies on the savior narrative analyze the "Magical Negro" trope in film instead. Ultimately, this study will attempt to answer two critical questions: how are films with savior narratives racial projects? And, how do the themes and representations of the White Savior and Black Savior differ from each other in film? Answers to these questions could provide insight into the nature of race relations that play out in film, and why viewers should not ignore those relations when they are presented. Furthermore, knowing the answers to these questions will provide researchers with the tools to spot racist messages in film, and provide researchers the opportunity to

then challenge that racism so that society does not continue to fall victim to conventional racism and other ideologies of dominance or oppression that continue to play a part in the minimization and destruction of people's lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Race, and racial identity, has been theorized for several decades since before the 1940s. Recent scholars have divided racial formation into three different eras: the pre-1940s era of biologistic racial theories, the 1960s era of cultural pluralistic and assimilationist racial theories, and finally the post-1960s era of sociopolitical racial theories. Key among these three eras, is Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation and racial projects formulated in the 1980s. Their theory of racial formation was developed as a way to map the socio-historic genome of the racial stratum and how it changes over time via social forces and movements. These forces and movements are referred to as "racial projects," the most important concept in Omi and Winant's social theory.

Racial Formation Theory: Omi and Winant

Racial formation is defined as, "the process of race making, and its reverberations throughout the social order" (Omi and Winant 2015:109). Essentially, they define racial formation as a socio-historical process in which race and racial identities are (trans)formed. "Race" in this definition of their theory is a concept that "signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interactions by referring to different types of human bodies" (Omi and Winant 2015:111). The "different types of human bodies" are determined to be different based off of their phenotypic differences. They say, "race is a way of making people" or "othering" (Omi and Winant 2015:105). This making up of people helps us navigate our social world, and plays an important role in racial formation.

One way race impacts racial formation is through "racialization," the extension of

racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group (Omi and Winant:112). The act of racialization can occur in large- or small-scale ways, at the micro- or macro-level in society. This extension of meaning is highly dependent on the socially constructed meanings and associations we use to distinguish people based on their physical traits. Racialization helps us unravel the ideas behind what racial formation requires: social construction of meaning and socially constructed interactions based off of those prescribed meanings – a symbolic interactionist approach. If we are to understand racial formation and how it occurs, we must make sure to view race relations as manufactured and mass-produced by centuries of socially constructed mechanisms of racial interactions. The interactions are recreated within and between all of our social institutions. Omi and Winant formally define these institutionalized racial interactions as "racial projects."

Racial Projects: An Introduction and Typology

Racial projects are simultaneously interpretations, representations, and explanations of racial identities and meanings (Omi and Winant:125). These projects are also an effort to organize and distribute economic, political, and cultural resources. Under these definitions, racial projects help us "connect the meanings of race and the ways in which social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon their meaning" (Omi and Winant:125). In this way, racial projects shape and define the ways in which social structures are racially signified, and how racial meanings are stealthily embedded into the heart of our most familiar social structures. Omi and Winant emphasize that racial projects can be: policies, activities of the state, collective actions, our everyday experiences, personal interactions, or institutional actions. At their core,

racial projects reflect and respond to broader patterns of race in the overall social system. Every project, no matter its subject or intent, reproduces, extends, subverts, or directly challenges the established system, creating an important typology of racial projects.

Racial projects can be *racist*, reflecting the ideologies of the far right, or *anti-racist*, reflecting the ideologies of the far left (Winant 1997). Racist racial projects "create or reproduce structures of domination based on racial significations and identities," whereas anti-racist projects "undo or resist structures of domination based on racial significations and identities" (Omi and Winant:129). Winant, in his discussion of Whiteness, developed a typology of five White racial projects and their various facets. His work deals with a White-Black racial binary when describing these projects. While racial projects shape the narrative of race in general, and are applied in various ways at various times, Winant's work deals with how Whiteness is shaped through the use of the projects and how Blackness is shaped thereafter. For the purposes of this study, racial projects will only be considered either "racist" or "anti-racist" for clarity, efficiency, and analytic consistency, but understanding how Winant's extrapolated typology manifests is integral to the discussion on racial projects as a concept and their application to films.

Racial Project Typology: Racist Racial Projects Extrapolated

The core tenet of *racist* projects is to establish and maintain White privilege and White supremacy in any way possible. There are three categories of "racist" racial projects. The first is the *far right* racial project. Winant describes this project as grounded in the "ineluctable, unalterable racialized difference between whites and nonwhites" (Winant 1997:75). Winant recognizes that there are fascist features in this project such as the belief in the superiority of whites and an insurrectionary posture toward the state.

Explicitly fascist groups on the far right admire the ideals of the Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and their work is indicative of the far right racial project (Winant 1997:75).

The second type of White racial project is the *new right*. The new right is based on White racial nationalism. This project has its origins "in resistance to the Black movement of the 1950s and 60s..." (Winant 1997:76). The new right presents itself as the "tribune" of the disenfranchised White populace. It would rather present racism and White supremacy using subtext in an attempt to avoid overt racism; it uses "coded" rhetoric and racism to exploit White supremacy without consequence. It embraces mainstream political activity, and it accepts a measure of "nonwhite" social and political participation and membership – as long as this is pursued on a "color-blind" basis.

"De facto," says Winant, "it recognizes the persistence of racial difference in United States society. The new right understands perfectly well that its mass base is White, and that its political success depends on its ability to interpret White identity in positive political terms" (Winant 1997:77). This project uses racial fears and demagoguery to achieve its aims. People who subscribe to this type of project may use terms such as "thug" or "crack baby" to describe African-Americans and Latino(a)s, for example, and may be opposed to helping or acknowledging members of these groups. These words that can be used to describe anyone, but when they are used, they are usually codewords for urban Blacks and Latino(a)s.

Third on Winant's list is the *neoconservative* racial project. Neoconservative discourse seeks to preserve White advantages through denial of racial difference. Racial difference is something to overcome, but neoconservative speakers tend to point out unjust values without directly tying these values to race. Winant says, "the

neoconservative project has cast doubt on the tractability of issues of racial equality, tending to argue that the state cannot ameliorate poverty through social policy, but in fact only exacerbates it" (Winant 1997:78). The positions demonstrate how far from "liberal statism" it actually is.

Neoconservative projects appeal to universalism – in terms of policy, critical educational, and literary standards – in very subtle and coded ways, similar to the new right racial project, that appeal to White racial fears because of its representation of race in egalitarian and democratic terms. "The very hallmark of the neoconservative argument," according to Winant, "has been that, beyond the proscription of explicit racial discrimination, every invocation of racial significance manifests 'race-thinking,' and is thus suspicious." This refusal to enter into "race-thinking" is equivalent to defending the status quo in which racial inequality is "omnipotent" (Winant 1997:78). This way of thinking is not as inclusive as it tries to seem, and seeks, despite its claims otherwise, to maintain White advantage under the guise of racial equality. This type of project attempts to be color-blind and post-racial, acknowledging the existence of systemic inequalities, while ignoring institutional racism and its effects on people of color – this project lacks, and avoids, an intersectional analysis of inequalities.

Racial Project Typology: Anti-Racist Racial Projects Extrapolated

In contrast to the racist racial projects, there are only two *anti-racist* projects. The first is the *neoliberal* racial project seeks to limit White advantages through the denial of racial difference. This project does tend to overlap with the neoconservative project, which can make this racial project a "gray" area in racial discourse; this is not accidental according to Winant. Neoliberalism seeks to systematically narrow the differences that

divide the working from the middle-classes as a strategy to help improve poor minorities' life chances. It appeals to White people's argument "about the medium-and long-term consequences upon their living standards of downward mobility and greater impoverishment of nonwhites" (Winant 1997: 80).

The neoliberal project is social democratic, and is focused on social structure and is class reductionist in its approach to race. According to Winant, what is left out of the neoliberal project is the "cultural and moral dimensions of White supremacy" (Winant 1997:80). This project does not challenge whites and their willingness to receive a "psychological wage," as Winant describes it, which is ultimately a tangible benefit acquired at the expense of nonwhites; essentially, this project does not willingly acknowledge White privileges and how they are evoked at the expense of people of color (Winant 1997:80). Neoliberal projects do undertake "the construction of a transracial political agenda, and the articulation of White and minority interests in a viable strategic perspective," something that Winant claims has been missing since the beginning of the civil rights era (Winant 1997:81).

The second anti-racist White racial project is the *abolitionist* racial project. This project advocates a process of "historical reinterpretation which aims to set race...at the center of US politics and culture." Abolitionist thinkers such as W.E.B DuBois and James Baldwin have focused on a series of relevant historical events and processes: the precedent of British colonial treatment of the Irish; the early, multiracial resistance to indentured servitude and quasi-slavery; and the construction of a "White republic" in the late 19th century (Winant 1997:82). These historical studies have all revealed just how crucial the construction of whiteness was at different times in the U.S. Simultaneously,

the studies also show how the meaning of whiteness has adapted and changed over time, much like race, to the shifts in the capitalist division of labor. The core of anti-racist projects is the absolutely necessary repudiation of whiteness and White privilege, requiring that "the lie of whiteness" be exposed (Winant 1997:84).

The multiple faces of Whiteness – visible whiteness, resurgent whiteness, whiteness as color, whiteness as difference – are relatively new, and problematic, in the United States, according to Winant. Racial projects found on the right delineate efforts to resist the necessary challenges to White supremacy posed during the civil rights era. In contrast, the racial projects on the left seek to push the challenges of the civil rights era even further in an attempt to reduce the impact race has on the distinction between the haves and have-nots (Winant 1997). But, ultimately, both neoliberals and abolitionists:

> seek to rupture the barrier between whites and racially-defined minorities, the obstacle which prevents joint political action. They both seek to associate whites and nonwhites, to reinterpret the meaning of whiteness in such a way that it no longer has the power to impede class alliances. (Winant 1997:84)

In our postmodern society, racial identities are more-or-less, "hybridized," as Winant (1997) explains, not "sutured," but they can still be redefined, and need to be; racial projects help with that re-definition process (p.85). Given the importance of Winant's typology in the discourse on racial projects, one of the assumptions of this study is that these savior films will more closely resemble racist racial projects on the right given the history of racism in the United States, especially during the 60's.

Racial Projects: Discussion and Relevance

At its heart, Omi and Winant's racial formation theory focuses primarily on the 1960's and how the events, and racial projects, of the time period created a new paradigm in how we now perceive "Blackness," "Whiteness," and race relations in modern

America. Their racial formation model historicizes racial meanings, and suggests that racial meanings are contingent, not a priori. Because the meanings are not predetermined, the race relations must be placed within a socio-historical context, and scholars must use their sociological imaginations to make sense of that context. Omi and Winant also place heavy emphasis on the legal construction and legitimation of the socially constructed meanings, and thus they highlight the role of the state in racial formation and racial politics, essentially claiming that state policy are racial projects that do have implications on the distribution of resources.

Omi and Winant's work remains the most influential in the study of racial formation, and is constantly cited in studies of the same ilk. Their theory dominates racial formation discourse on racial projects and their presence in our society. Racial projects have been explored and discussed across multiple disciplines, and this fact alone legitimates the focus on racial projects in racial formation analyses over competing theories that have criticized Omi and Winant's approach and exclude the concept of the racial project.

Racial projects have been studied across a myriad of disciplines within the natural and social sciences. Scholars have attempted to apply the racial project to important fields such as: education, the media, religion, and cultural studies (Staiger 2004; Alumkal 2004; Mingus and Zopf 2010; Brooms 2014). All of these fields play a role in our daily lived experiences, and all of them represent a racial project in some way. The importance of the racial project cannot be emphasized enough when we wish to study the larger master narrative of our constructed culture because they demonstrate the importance of racial projects and the depth of their implications on the collective consciousness.

The common trend in racial projects, according to the aforementioned studies, is that they perpetuate White privilege at the expense of minority privileges and reception. This ties back into Winant's discussion on White racial projects, as these projects have influenced social and political discourse that ultimately has a negative effect on people of color who are exploited by White racial projects. There are a variety of social phenomena that allow whiteness to eschew responsibility for certain policies and ideologies that it had a hand in creating over time.

In contrast to this, racial projects that do not perpetuate White supremacy serve to undo the White racial hegemony that exists within various institutions, and anneal the cultural identity people of color share. Racial projects, whether for whites or people of color, have an interdisciplinary aspect to them, and these projects can be generalized to almost any facet of our society. However, there are fields in which the racial project concept has not been rigorously applied where it could be in order to help us understand how those fields tie into race relations in this country. One of those fields is film studies.

Race in Film

Most of the research about race and cultural studies, both past and burgeoning, revolves around the concept of identity, an approach that recognizes "that where we come from, how we see ourselves, and how we express ourselves are essential elements in the construction of race" (Bernardi 1996:3). Identities are real and intersect with categories like gender, class, and ethnicity, and these identities are constantly undergoing change. Racial formation, like identities, evolves over time. During the rise of cinema, social Darwinian and eugenics paradigms dominated the meaning of race, promoting the idea of human hierarchy in terms of culture and history (Bernardi 1996). White people have been

at the top of that hierarchy, and that idea was perpetuated in U.S. culture. Following this logic, culture is one of the main areas where White domination and hegemony is supported and challenged. Culture is the precondition of humanness (Schudson 1989).

Film is one of the most popular, and profitable, forms of culture (Bernardi 1996). Racist practices have dominated the film industry for over one-hundred years. U.S. cinema has consistently constructed Whiteness, the representational and narrative form of Eurocentrism, as the norm that "others" should strive to follow. People of color in film are generally represented either as deviants or threats to the White rule – and thus in need a salvation or punishment – or fetishized as exotic objects (Bernardi 1996). Films tend to use tropes to convey these messages. Tropes are recurring cinematic themes that convey a specific symbolic meaning (Hughey 2014). Films are driven by these tropes that have come to define certain genres, especially films utilizing a White Savior. In *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness*, Hernan Vera and Andrew Gordon (2003) claim that the White Savior is, "the great leader who saves Blacks from slavery or oppression, rescues people of color from poverty and disease, or leads Indians in battle for their dignity and survival" (p.33). White Savior films are recognizable through the presence of a White leader who follows Vera's and Gordon's definition. Terms such as "noble savage," "manifest destiny," "White man's burden," and "great White hope" refer to the complex relationship between the White Savior and the dark-skinned "other" in need of saving, and demonstrate the use of such tropes (Hughey 2014). The former representation of "nonwhites" as the oppressed, despairing, and needy ethnic group is a common trope in films within White Savior narratives, narratives that feature White messianic characters who save lower-or working class, usually urban isolated, characters

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of color from a sad fate (Hughey 2014). These narratives are perpetuated in the widespread genre of White Savior films.

Characteristics of the White Savior in Film

An example of these "White Savior films" include blockbuster hits such as *The Blind Side,* the story of Leigh Anne Tuohy, played by Sandra Bullock, who is the matriarch of a Republican family in the Deep South that adopts a homeless African-American teenager, Michael Oher (Hughey 2014). Because of the Touhy's help and life-lessons, Oher excels at playing football and earns a scholarship from the University of Mississippi and an NFL career. Another example is *Dangerous Minds* or its contemporary counterpart, *Freedom Writers,* films about White female teachers who teach at underprivileged, ghettoized, and disenfranchised schools full of disadvantaged, urban-isolated Black and Latino(a) students. As a result of their tutelage, and the life lessons the students learned from the White teachers, the students find more "positive" ways of dealing with their dysfunctional lives without having to resort to crime or gang violence to get by. Some students go on to take advanced classes and eventually matriculate to college, all the while attributing their success to the compassion their White teachers showed them.

White Savior films tend to be highly successful, earning blockbuster profits at the box office, to the tune of $225 million in *The Blind Side*'s case, and netting their lead – White – actors various awards. *The Blind Side* gained world-wide critical acclaim and attention from viewers, critics, and prize committees. Sandra Bullock's role in the film was considered her best at the time, earning her the Golden Globe Award for Best Actress and Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor

in a Leading Role (Hughey 2014). The White Savior trope is so widespread that "varied intercultural and interracial relations are often guided by a logic that racializes and separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption (nonwhites)" (Hughey 2014:2).

These images of Whites in film allow for interpretations of characters of color and their cultures as broken, marginal, pathological, deviant, and threatening entities, while Whites ascend to the role of cultural messiahs who can easily fix "nonwhite" pathology with their superior intellect, wisdom, culture, and righteousness. These messages create a type of racism that could be interpreted as conservative, post-colonial rhetoric that rationalizes and justifies right-wing paternalism. But, these projects can cross political boundaries, and can be used by the left to perpetuate the same White Savior narrative (Hughey 2014). Essentially, White Saviors in the White Savior trope use their intelligence and hard work to bring people of color out of their defunct communities so that they can assimilate into White culture. This narrative contrasts with the Magical Negro narrative trope in film, a trope that has been extensively studied by several culture, race, and film critics.

Characteristics of the Magical Negro in Film

The narrative of the "Magical Negro" is a very common trope in film. Kwame Appiah (1993) defined the Magical Negro as "the noble, good-hearted Black man or woman" whose good sense helps White characters get through a crisis. Appiah labeled these Black characters as saints, adding that saintly Black characters are the moral equivalent to their "normal" White counterparts. This offsets the usual stereotypes attributed to Blacks, and draws from the superior moral nature that is often associated

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with the oppressed (Glenn 2009). Continuing with Appiah's analysis, Entman and

Rojecki (2001) claimed that the Magical Negro served three key purposes in relation to

White characters in film: 1.) to assist the character, 2.) to help him or her realize and

make use of his or her spirituality, and 3.) to offer "folk wisdom" used to resolve a

character's problems. The White person's personal problems serve as the focus of these

film; the Black character's gifts, talents, goals, and spirituality are never the focus.

Ultimately, according to Denzin (2002), savior films have a common theme: interracial

friendships in movies arise from the need for Blacks to get what they need from Whites

and for Whites to get what they need from Blacks, usually "soul" (p.61).

Movies featuring the famous African-American actor, Morgan Freeman, are often

some of the most exemplary forms of this trope. Movies like *Bruce Almighty* (2003) and

Evan Almighty (2007), both portray Freeman as God, a concept that was once a laughable

idea. Black characters are often wise, morally upright, and live as the moral conscience of

White characters (Kempley 2003). According to Glenn (2009):

> Whoopi Goldberg's role in *Ghost* (1990) the spiritual assistant with powers used
> to assist the lead White character, helped transcend the characterization of
> Blacks in popular film. The film industry views Blacks through the Magical
> Negro lens more often, leading to the growing popularity of these movies in
> recent years. (P. 137)

With the advent of powerful African-American characteristics in films, it seems like

these characters are being accepted into the mainstream cultural milieu as strong instead

of subservient. Freeman, and many other legendary African-American actors, play

powerful and charismatic Black characters who have found themselves in several films –

and the majority of White viewers welcome them, but at a cost.

African-American characters have come a long way from the racist stereotypes of

Jim Crow and slavery. Now, they play: lawyers, doctors, superheroes, scientists, tycoons,

saints, gods, and other strong roles. But, they can only do so under mainstream limiters. Hughey (2009) exclaims that, "when previously ignored groups or perspectives do gain visibility, the manner of their representation will reflect the biases and interests of those powerful people who define the public agenda" (p.3). Being visible and accepted is not a guarantee that the visible groups will be legitimized; visibility and acceptance is a "precondition of regimes of surveillance" (p.3). With this in mind, the Magical Negro is a positive, progressive, yet racist Hollywood trope. However, most commentary about the Magical Negro usually describe the character but do not analyze how the archetype is a racist stereotype.

The Magical Negro trope highlights dominant society's interest in perpetuating racist stereotypes and controlling images (Glenn 2009). Controlling images, according to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), are essentially stereotypes that guide society's perception and presentation of Black people, and they are "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (p.69). The Magical Negro is a stock character who often appears to be impoverished, lower class and uneducated, who also possesses some supernatural magical abilities or otherworldly folkloric wisdom. This brand of power and wisdom is exclusively used to save and uplift broken, uncultured, and lost Whites (Hughey 2009).

Placing Magical Negroes in the most impoverished of lower classes creates, according to Stuart Hall (1997) and Hughey (2009), a "labor of representation" for the "White populist imagination" (Hall 1997; Hughey 2009:556). This representation creates an assumption that "most Blacks are poor, uneducated, and occupying the lower rungs of society..." (Hughey 2009:556). Furthermore, this assumption lends authenticity to the

placement of Magical Negroes in these savior films (Hughey 2009). Hughey continues,

"By making Magical Negroes resemble welfare queens, uneducated voodoo priestesses,

the mentally challenged, impoverished janitors, prisoners, and the homeless, the films

both produce and solidify a marginalizing discourse" (Hughey 2009:556). Magical Negro

films have to draw upon the notion that Blacks are simple-minded and uneducated people

who desire an uncomplicated life of helpfulness, convenience, and service to Whites; this

where we see some of the first vestiges of racism in savior film (Hughey 2009).

Scholars find the roots of the Magical Negro in the traditional racist stereotypes of

the *mammy*, *Jezebel*, and *Uncle Tom*, which are all common Black characterizations in

media and literature. Each of these tropes demonstrate that the main function of Blacks is

to empower, assist, or please White characters (Glenn 2009). The White character is then

transformed into a competent, successful, and content person within the American

narrative of salvation and redemption (Hughey 2009). Examples of the Magical Negro

are found in *The Green Mile* (Darabont 1999), *The Family Man* (Ratner 2000), *The*

Matrix trilogy (Wachowski and Wachowski 1999; 2003; 2003), *Bruce Almighty* (Shadyac

2003) and *Evan Almighty* (Shadyac 2007).

The Magical Negro archetype represents "cinethetic racism" according to Hughey

(2009), a type of racism that describes "Black friendly" and racially "progressive" films

such as the aforementioned ones. Cinethetic racism can fall within the category of "new

racism" that "supports the social order while seemingly challenging the racial inequality

constitutive of that order" (p.3). New racism reinforces the positive images of White

characters as moral and pure while simultaneously describing how powerful, divine, or

magical Black characters may interact with Whites and mainstream White culture.

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Continuing with the idea of racial projects, racism is said to be a racial project, especially in film. Racism is a project that wants to preserve the privileges attached to being White in a democratic society (Vera and Gordon 2003). Linking back to Omi and Winant's typologies of White racial projects, several films, both contemporary and vintage, can fall within the scope of one or more of those typologies just by analyzing their portrayal of Black characters within them. By analyzing the popular White Savior and Magical Negro tropes in cinema, we can begin to see that these films are subtly racist and may have an adverse racist effect on audiences.

The Effects of Mass Media Images of Whites and Blacks in Film

In order to understand the potential negative side-effects of the White Savior and Magical Negro racial project, we have to understand that American films have an increasingly domestic and international reach. According to a study conducted by the Media Campaign (2002), the average American citizen spends approximately thirteen hours a year at movie theaters. Half of all adults watch movies at least once a month, and sixty percent of people ages 9 to 17 watch at least one movie a week. In 2006, 81.2 percent of households reported owning at least one DVD player, 79.2 percent owned at least one VCR, and 73.4 percent owned at least one computer (Nielsen Media Research 2006). More movies are available online and by mail through popular services such as Netflix, Movielink, and CinemaNow (Hughey 2009). In addition, the number of legal and illegal internet movie downloads are growing exponentially (Hughey 2009). Movies, as a popular source of entertainment and cultural expression, have a longer social reach than many other forms of expression (hooks 1992; Entman and Rojecki 2001).

Many of the most popular films about race and racism provide people, Whites

especially, "narratives for experiences they may not have in real life" (Hughey

2009:547). In the absence of lived experience, film narratives become synonymous with

reality. "Millions of people," says Glenn (2009), "flock to the theaters to view the fantasy

world Hollywood has created, all the while processing a large amount of information that

guides their formations and expectations in actual reality" (p.135). In other words, r*eel*

life becomes real life. Films about race relations, according to George Lipsitz (1998),

may actually "frame memory for the greatest number of people" (p.219). Daniel Bernardi

(2007) adds:

> Cinema is everywhere a fact of our lives, saturating our leisure time, our
> conversation, and our perceptions of each other and of self. Because of this, race
> in cinema is neither fictional nor illusion. It is real because it is meaningful and
> consequential; because it impacts real people's lives. (p. xvi)

Even though audiences may go to the movies to be entertained, the relationships between

the White and Black characters influence the ways audience members perceive

themselves as members of their respective race. According to Kellner (1995), "media

images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good

or bad, positive, or negative, moral or evil" (p.5).

Mass-mediated images are founded on social realities, such as race relations and

racial stereotypes, that influence social existence and treatment. We need to understand

the media images by discussing the nature of race relations between Blacks and Whites

throughout United States history (Glenn 2009:136). Rocchio (2000) stated, "The

contemporary status of race in mainstream American culture is intimately bound by the

process of representations within and through mass media." (p.4) The mediated

representations impact the way Whites perceive Blacks and may even impact the ways

Whites view themselves in relation to Blacks. Glenn (2009) states, "As Blacks move

closer to the realm of acceptability with Whites, the images in movies can be critical to the extent of this acceptance" (p.136). These images are significant because Whites have not fully accepted Blacks as equals and thus, Blacks remain subjugated under attitudes that "confer superiority" to whites (Mazama 2002:13). It is because of Black subjugation under White attitudes of superiority that Blacks are routinely situated between acceptance and rejection by Whites in the modern zeitgeist, a term Entman and Rojecki (2001) referred to as "liminality."

Liminality is defined as the "unsettled status of Blacks in the eyes of those who produce dominant culture (Whites) and of those who consume it (Whites)" (Entman and Rojecki 2001:53). The relationship between Blacks and Whites is made more difficult because people use mass-mediated imagery to draw conclusions about these relationships (Glenn 2009). Cultural critic, and author, bell hooks (1995) asserted that Whites who have no actual experience with Blacks actually come to think they know and understand Blacks, and their status, because of how racialized roles play out on film; several of these roles demonstrate "utopian" relationships between Whites and Blacks (Glenn 2009). Because of these utopian representation of race relations, Whites may believe that these idealized and peaceful relationships depict the current racial milieu, and they may assume that racism is no longer an issue – they may assume we are post-racial (Glenn 2009). Thus, racism becomes a specter that haunts Black people only in their minds; racism is viewed as an illusion born not from real institutions, but from individual, not structural, issues. The Hollywood film industry often produces films that reinforce Black people's liminal status, and thus reinforces the belief that we are living in a post-racial era.

The emergence of the Magical Negro trope can be attributed to Blacks' liminal

status. The Magical Negro is a modern version of a traditional racial stereotype and continues to be used in cinema because most White screenwriters do not know much about Blacks other than what they see or hear in the media (Glenn 2009). Hollywood writers take what they see and hear and incorporate images in film that comforts, and appeals to, White viewers. This leads to the "mythification" of Blacks in which Black roles are debased and White roles are glorified and heroized. The Black and White roles are used as entertainment, symbolically, in ways that allow Whites to avoid having to consider the moral implications, validity, or reality of these roles (Snead 1994; Glenn 2009). This realization supports the notion that films are racial projects that can be powerful agents of socialization. By analyzing films using Omi and Winant's racial formation theoretical perspective, we begin to understand the power of the media and the need to study media sources as racial projects in an effort to understand and combat cinethetic racism.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to determine how films are racial projects, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's racial formation theory is the most salient theory to use. As discussed, Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation suggests that our conception of race is a socio-historical process in which racial identities are created, lived out, and transformed (Omi and Winant 2015). This occurs in four steps: *racialization*, "how the phenomic, the corporeal dimension of human bodies, acquires meaning in social life"; *racial projects*, "capturing simultaneous and co-constitutive ways that racial meanings are translated into social structures and become racially signified;" *racism*, and under what conditions a racial project can be considered racist; *racial politics*, the way society is "racially organized and ruled via racial despotism, racial democracy, and racial hegemony" (Omi and Winant 2015:109).

Scholars who study the intersection of race and media have not fully applied this model to the study of film, opting to use the "production of culture perspective" instead. This perspective "focuses on how symbolic elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved" (Hughey 2009:6). White Savior films, in this sense, are cultural objects, and are thus content analyzed for recurrent themes and messages that theoretically resonate with audience's understanding of race and "reflects back to them racialized aspects of the 'American character and experience'" (Hughey 2009:7). This theoretical perspective raises critical, and relevant, questions about the savior narrative in film, and will help deconstruct the

layered messages and meanings within the selected films.

METHODS

The choice of subject for this study was prompted by observations of popular Hollywood films made over a 14-year span: the year 2000 through 2014. Because I analyzed films as case studies, it was best to use content analysis in order to gather data – it is for this same reason that I do not intend for this study to be generalizable to all savior films. Through the use of the case study method, this study aimed to be transferable, thus adhering to the conventions of qualitative *transferability.* In other words, the study aims for its inferences and analyses to be sufficiently detailed enough so that the reader can decide whether the analyses are similar to other scenarios the reader is familiar with and whether the findings can, justifiably, be applied to other concepts so that comparisons can be made across conceptual domains (Marshall and Rossman 1989; Davis 1992; Gomm, Hammersley and Foster 2000; Shenton 2004; Hughey 2009). This study did not aim for rigid data or findings, but it did aim to be systematic in its discovery of nuances in the coding and analysis of the culturally significant themes, ideologies, racial representations, and racial mythologies in these films.

To structure the methodology, I developed a study population from the total population of Hollywood produced, mainstream, feature films over the 14-year span. A "feature film" is a term used in the film industry to refer to a film made for initial distribution in theaters. These films all have a running time of at least 90 minutes to, at most, 210 minutes (Hughey 2009). First, I used the Internet Movie Database's (IMDb) lists of "Most Popular Feature Films" released in the years 2000 – 2014. I only analyzed

the most popular films because I assumed that these popular films would be the most widely recognizable to the general public, due to their blockbuster success, mainstream notoriety, social reach compared to lesser known films. These films also tend to make the most money, receive the most Academy awards, and are often considered to be top-tier films by critics and audiences. Popular films highlight the mass appeal of racist representations and their propagation throughout mainstream culture. The propagated representations in these well-known films may help researchers understand how racism is perpetuated through popular film due to their social reach, and how to reduce instances of racism in these films.

I could not use films from 2015 or 2016 since IMDb only releases full and complete lists after a year has finished, and this study started in early 2015. I narrowed the original population of 87, 297 to a much smaller population of approximately 100 films. To get to the 100 films, I used the following restrictions.

Film Criteria

First, the films had to deal specifically with White-Black race relations involving a White or Black "savior" and a Black or White person or group of Black or White people who are being saved. These films also had to be either blockbuster Hollywood films – grossing over 100 million dollars – and/or successful in terms of winning Academy awards or general critical acclaim from film critics. The success of the film was assessed using a summary of the films' reception by critics, as well as by looking at the box office data for the films on websites and film databases such as IMDb and Box Office Mojo. I avoided science-fiction and animated films, even though many of them have savior narratives. Science fiction and animated films often deal with White Saviors

and racially ambiguous alien races or cartoon and computer-generated imagery (CGI) creatures that may not be totally analogous to the White-Black racial relationship I am studying. I used synopses, plot summaries, and character summaries (available through IMDb and wiki pages) to determine whether the films had a White or Black Savior narrative. From this list of 100 films, only 20 films met the requirements of the study (See Table 1 in Appendix A).

From this list of 20 films, I randomly assigned each film a number, ranging from 1 to 20, using a random number generator. From there, I used the same random number generator to randomly select which films I would be potentially viewing for analysis. In other words, if the second random number generation selected number 17, the film that was randomly assigned number 17 with the first random number generation was chosen for the next list, which was made up of nine films (See Table 2 in Appendix B). I only used nine films because I had to throw out two films from the study reducing the list to 18, as I explain below. I believed that looking at half of the list of 18 would be sufficient for analysis, since the study did not aim for generalizability, and I made a randomized list of nine films from this list. From this randomized list of nine, I randomly assigned each film a new number, using a random number generator, and randomly choose the films I would be studying.

Selected Films

For this study, I watched the nine films for general themes of the savior trope, and only focused on four films as a part of multiple cases analysis. After watching the nine films, I then randomly chose four (n = 4) films to closely analyze for this project. The four chosen films were: *Django Unchained* (2012), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *Hitch*

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(2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008). I also studied *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) in order to get a complete idea of the Magical Negro role in these films and its development across the trilogy. In order to select each film, I created two separate lists from the nine films, one for White Savior films, and one for Black Savior films, and listed all the films that corresponded to a type of savior film in their respective list. There were five (n = 5) White Savior films and four (n = 4) Black Savior films. Each film in each list was randomly assigned a number using a random number generator, ranging from 1-5 for White Savior films, and 1-4 for Black Savior films. Each film was randomly selected from its respective list, using a random number generator, so that I had an even number of White and Black Savior films (White Savior films, n = 2; Black Savior films, n = 2).

Procedure

These four films were closely analyzed as *multiple case studies* of films as racial projects after having watched all nine films in order to get an understanding of how the savior narratives are told in general. I watched four films for the sake of manageability and in an effort to cover new material and avoid over-saturation since many of the films on this list have been studied in other similar studies in which White Savior films have been content analyzed. Films such as *The Blind Side* and *Freedom Writers* have both been analyzed or referenced in at least 30, 000 academic sources. A search on Google Scholar revealed that these films have been studied quite extensively, with *The Blind Side* having n = 38,100 and *Freedom Writers* having n = 55,800 citations. These two films were thus excluded from the study, reducing the original list from 20 to 18. A randomized list of nine films was created from this list of 18 films, as I previously

explained.

As I watched these films, I analyzed them for recurrent themes such as: who is doing the saving? Who is being saved? What are the motives behind the saving? I compared these findings both within and between narratives and genres in order to see what patterns I could detect. To do this, I developed a systematic coding sheet (See Appendix C and Appendix D). In order to develop this sheet, I watched all nine films for general themes, and based the codes and questions off of what I saw in these initial viewings of each film. Once I developed the first version of the coding sheet, I re-watched the nine films, this time making sure to code what I saw in these films. From these initial codes, I revised the coding sheets to incorporate more specific questions that asked critical questions about the savior narrative and how it was specifically presented in the films; I based my analysis of the final four films off of these finalized coding sheets (See Appendix E). I watched each film at least twice, once for each new iteration of the coding sheets, in order to gather any new data. Data from the finalized coding sheets were recorded in tables corresponding to each question on the coding sheet (See Appendix F). I used the most salient codes, themes, and observations from these tables in the final analysis of the four films.

As part of the methodology, I had to view each of my nine films in order to get a sense of the plot and characterization. The genres that these nine films come from varied from horror to superhero. This study does not attempt to isolate analysis based on genre nor does it attempt to make generalizations about specific film genres. The point of viewing each of the nine films, first for first impressions, and then second for the sake of preliminary analysis of themes, served to inform my analyses of the White Savior and

Magical Negro or, if applicable, "Black Savior" in order to inform how I would frame questions and data analysis for my final analysis of my final four films. The next section will provide brief synopses of each of the nine films, in order to provide context, and will then synthesize the thematic elements from these films into a cohesive narrative framework which informed my final data analysis.

Film Synopses

The period drama *The Help* (2011) tells the story of Aibaleen Clark, a Black maid, who spends her life raising White children after her son's death. Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan, a recent graduate from the University of Missisippi, aspires to be a successful writer and she asks Aibaleen to help her write answers to letters for her job with the local paper. Skeeter becomes increasingly more uncomfortable with how her female friends treat their "help" and how her friends want the maids to have segregated bathrooms due to the racist assumptions about Blacks and their hygiene. Skeeter decides to write about the relationships between Whites and their Black help.

Django Unchained (2013) is a Western about Christophe Schultz, a German dentist-turned-bounty hunter, and Django, a slave who Waltz purchases because of Django's knowledge of Waltz's targets. Schultz offers Django his freedom under the condition that Django works with him to find and kill his bounties. Schultz realizes that Django is a good shooter and offers to train Django to become a bounty hunter and offers to help him find and rescue his wife, Broomhilda, whom they discover is a slave on Calvin Candie's plantation, "Candieland," and they travel to the plantation to rescue her.

The historical drama, *Lincoln* (2012), follows the story of President Abraham Lincoln, America's president during the Civil War, who struggles with the raising body

count on the battlefield while he has to navigate division within his own cabinet on the decision to emancipate slaves.

12 Years a Slave (2013) chronicles the story of Solomon "Platt" Northup as he is kidnapped as a free man, forced into slavery, and finds himself having to adapt to the norms of slave life in order to survive and keep from being killed by his slave masters.

Bruce Almighty (2003) centers on the life of a TV news reporter who experiences long strings of bad luck. He blames God for his misfortune and is bestowed with God's powers and responsibilities, and he learns how to find meaning in life beyond his own wealth, fame, and popularity.

Hitch (2005) is about Alex "Hitch" Hitchens, a successful matchmaker, who assists a client in finding love. Through helping his client, Hitch learns how to find love for himself, something he struggled with after being cheated on by his college sweetheart.

Sex and the City (2008) is about Carrie Bradshaw, a New York writer on sex, love, and relationships. She is getting married to Mr. Big, but he leaves her at the altar, causing a string of personal problems in Carrie's life. Carrie hires an assistant, Louise, to help her deal with her personal life. Through the trials and tribulations of Carrie and her friends dealing with their respective love lives, they offer each other emotional support.

Batman Begins (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2013) are films in Chris Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy of films. All of these movies focus on billionaire Bruce Wayne and his efforts to be the vigilante superhero Batman, and how he manages his personal and professional life while fighting crime, corruption, and terrorism in Gotham city with the help of Lucius Fox, Bruce's friend and personal gadgeteer.

General Film Themes

After watching these films for some initial themes of the savior trope, I noticed a few explicit themes. One of which was that almost all of these films showed a gendered aspect to saving. In other words, men tended to save men and women tended to save women, regardless of race. Along with this, White female saviors behaved in ways that were similar to White male saviors, and Black female saviors exhibited the same qualities as a Magical Negro or a potential Black Savior. The difference between White and Black Saviors is discussed in more depth in the Data Analysis section of the study. This is an important racial and gender project that suggests gendered division between different groups of people being rescued or saved from their situations. However, this study does not analyze gender, and thus this observation was not useful in the final analysis of the four films nor was this theme expanded upon due to the fact that only films with male saviors were chosen for the final four analysis. In addition to the previous statement, similar studies about women in the media, such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Lara Croft, have already been done.

Also noticeable was how in White Savior films, White characters such as Abraham Lincoln in *Lincoln* and Samuel Bass in *12 Years a Slave* saved Black characters who were all treated as subhuman – Whites always seemed to be saving Blacks from some form of oppression. This would seem obvious since both *Lincoln* and *12 Years a Slave* are slave narratives, but this was apparent in films that did not have an overt slave narrative such as in *Batman Begins* in which Bruce Wayne "saves" Lucius Fox from being fired from his job after being systematically oppressed at Wayne Enterprises. This contrasts with White characters who were being assisted by Black characters in films

such as *Bruce Almighty* and *Sex in the City* in which White characters were suffering from personal misfortunes such as a long streak of bad luck or problems with romantic relationships; neither of which would be qualified as "oppressive." This dichotomy between Blacks being portrayed as constantly oppressed and Whites as merely struggling with personal issues was critical to note because that portrayal of different races contributes to a racial project that views Blacks as inferior to Whites and in need of White help. Whites, in contrast, were never in any "serious" need of assistance. Black assistance was helpful but not entirely necessary as the White characters seemed to have the resources to ultimately help themselves. That distinction between Whites and Blacks in savior film was something I paid closer attention to in the final analysis of my four final films presented in the Data Analysis section of this study.

The final theme I noticed was that Whites tended to only help Blacks if it was beneficial to them in some way. For example, in *Django Unchained*, Schultz only bought Django and offered him freedom if Django was willing to help him first. William Ford in *12 Years a Slave* only rescued Platt from harm because he needed to keep Platt alive in order to settle a debt he owed. However, Blacks helped Whites because they were told or asked to help. In *The Dark Knight* trilogy, Lucius Fox only assists Bruce Wayne because he felt like he had to due to his connection to the Wayne family. In *Hitch*, Hitch literally claimed that he felt obligated to help men get into relationships. Louise in *Sex in the City* was hired as Carrie's assistant, and so was compelled to help Carrie as an employee. I noted this difference between White and Black Saviors and paid attention to this theme in the final analysis of the four films.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of the plot and characters in the films *12 Years a Slave*, *Django Unchained*, *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight*, *The Dark Knight Rises*, and *Hitch*, reveals at least four critical themes present within various savior narratives that make them strong racial projects. The first theme is the explicit White Savior, in which the White characters are undoubtedly the heroes for Black characters based on their lines and characterization. The second theme, which contrasts with the first, is the subversion of Black Saviors and their ethos in films, which, when compared to White Saviors, reveals an important, and potentially racist, distinction between the way White and Black Savior character arcs are presented. The third and fourth themes deal with the differences in agency between White and Black Saviors. Between the two savior categories, White characters demonstrate a moral altruism that is not only expected of a White Savior, but it is normalized for White characters, whereas Black characters help because they are likely to feel obligated to do so.

These themes hint at a subtle narrative underpinning Black Savior narratives that may reflect White supremacist expectations of Black characters and Black people, by extension. One of those expectations is reflected in how explicit and maximized White Saviors are in film, and how implicit and minimized Black Saviors are by contrast. White characters are allowed to indulge in their Whiteness as they save characters of color, but Black characters are supposed to help Whites and fade away afterward, corresponding with the conventions inherent in Magical Negro tropes. Not only is this distinction

critical, but it serves as one of the basic set-ups necessary for films to become racist racial projects. In order to better understand this, the aforementioned films need to be analyzed in-depth with the four themes in mind, starting with the explicit White Savior.

Explicit White Savior

The White Savior trope reflects the ways in which the media represents race relations by attempting to racialize concepts, like morality, and connect them to Whiteness (Hughey 2014). Movies that demonstrate the White Savior and/or Magical Negro trope demonstrate a strong preference for prioritizing White Saviors and agency. These White characters are obvious, overt, and blatantly portrayed as the hero for characters of color. White Savior films such as *12 Years a Slave* and *Django Unchained* are both headed by White males, of the plantation or working class, who seek to protect Black characters. It is at this intersection of White interactions with Black characters that White privilege reveals itself as part of a blockbuster film's healthy diet. The aforementioned films demonstrate White "saviorism" – "saviorism" in this study means instances and acts that are reminiscent of a savior – as not only obvious, but selfishly tethered to, and rooted in, interest convergence at the expense of Black characters. *12 Years a Slave* and *Django Unchained* are racial projects that show the complex dialectical antagonism between White privilege and Black power, revealing a racial narrative arc that bends toward White supremacy.

In *12 Years a Slave*, William Ford, a White slaver, purchases Solomon "Platt" Northup along with Eliza, a woman who is left bereaved after being torn from her children at her point of purchase. Throughout the film, Ford brandishes the whip while preaching about compassion with the Bible, establishing himself as both the moral and

physical authority over his slaves. Even though he is a slave master, Ford demonstrates a subtle compassion for his slaves from the time he purchases them to the time he brings them to his home. Ford shows a lot of respect for Platt, more than his other slaves, because of Platt's high intelligence and professional skills, making Platt "exceptional" and appealing to him, a faux pas that becomes a point of contention between Ford and his assistant, John Tibeats.

Ford, the "compassionate" slaver, is juxtaposed with Tibeats, a prejudiced man who abuses and terrorizes all of Ford's slaves. Tibeats despises Ford's compassion toward his slaves, and Tibeats especially hates that Platt is on good terms with Ford and demonstrating higher, more sophisticated intelligence than slaves are allowed to have. Tibeats uses trivial matters about the slaves and their duties to try and whip them; Platt fights back. As revenge, Tibeats hangs Platt from a noose for several hours with his feet just barely touching the ground. Hours later, Ford arrives to save him by cutting him from the tree, brings him back to his home, and protects him from Tibeats in the foyer with a shotgun; this is where the viewer can see the first vestiges of a White Savior in the film. In addition to literally saving Platt's life, Ford later explains his motives in a tense conversation with his slave:

> Ford: I believe Tibeats is skulkin' about the premises somewhere. He wants you
>
>   dead, and he will attempt to have you so. It's no longer safe for you here.
>
>   And I don't believe you will remain passive if Tibeats attacks. I have
>
>   transferred my debt to Edwin Epps. He will take charge of you.
>
> Solomon: Master Ford, you must know; I am not a slave.
>
> Ford: I cannot hear that.

Solomon: Before I came to you I was a freeman.

Ford: I am trying to save your life!

Ford directly and openly states that he is trying to save Platt's life from Tibeats; Ford's saviorism is explicit and direct. This makes Ford an obvious White Savior who saves a Black character from something he cannot save himself from: violence. This theme continues on in the film with other White characters such as Samuel Bass and Platt's friend, Mr. Parker.

After Ford sells Platt to Edwin Epps's plantation to protect Platt from further harm, Platt befriends Epps's carpenter, Samuel Bass. Bass is established early on as a potential ally for slaves; he demonstrates compassion for slaves and criticizes the institution of slavery in an argument he has with Epps about how he treats his slaves. Bass begins his criticism by discussing the immorality of slavery:

Bass: It is horrid. It's all wrong. All wrong, sir.

Epps: They ain't hired help. They're my slaves.

Bass: You say that with pride.

Epps: I say it as fact.

Bass: ...what right have you to your niggers when you come down to the point?

Here, Bass is quickly, and explicitly, established as righteous and morally opposed to slavery, giving him a White Savior ethos upon his introduction. Again, this connection between Whiteness and morality is a hallmark of the White Savior narrative. Bass is established as a fledgling White Savior and Platt seeks Bass's help:

Solomon: Do you believe, sir, in justice as you have said?

Bass: I do.

Solomon: That slavery is an evil that should befall none?

Bass: I believe so.

Solomon: If you truly do, I would ask...I would beg that you write my friends in

the north, acquainting them with my situation and beseeching them to

forward free papers...to secure my release.

Bass: I will write your letter sir, for if I could bring freedom to you, it will be

more than a pleasure. It will be a duty.

Bass agrees to write Platt's letters because he wants to save Platt from his situation. Bass disagrees with slavery and he has sympathy for Platt, a free man forced into the racist institution. Helping Platt is what Bass believes is his moral responsibility and an act of resistance against the plantation class that he openly despises. Bass's character is thus set up to be a White Savior from this point forward.

Bass's assistance ultimately leads to Platt's direct salvation from slavery by Mr. Parker and the local sheriff. Parker arrives at the plantation, after several months of not responding to Platt's free letters, recognizes Platt, and sets him free from Edwin Epps with the help of legal, White, authority. Mr. Parker is one of Platt's friends in the north who has come to help Platt because Platt is a close friend of his. From what can be inferred from the film, saving Platt is a moral deed for Mr. Parker because he cannot allow his friend, a free resident from the north, to be treated like a commodity by another person as he mentions in his brief conversation with Epps:

Parker: He is Solomon Northup.

Epps: You say...

Parker: He belongs to no man.

Epps: You say! You come here, unfamiliar to me, and make claims.

Sheriff: Not claims. I have no doubts. This is Solomon Northup, a resident of

Saratoga Springs, New York.

At this point, Platt, whose free identity as Solomon Northup has been restored, is saved

from what would have been a sad fate: dying on a plantation as a slave. Platt's salvation

comes as a result of blatantly obvious White Saviors who, through the film's dialogue and

stage directions, are quickly established as saviors upon their introduction. This

reinforces White characters as explicit saviors in film, creating an instant connection

between Whiteness, agency, benevolence, authority and power over Black people. This

strengthens White privilege, allowing whites to be viewed as superior to their Black

counterparts in film and it subverts Black agency and self-determination, perpetuating the

motif of Black dependence on White people. This is evident in other White Savior

narratives like *Django Unchained.*

The opening scene in *Django Unchained* shows Django being led across the

desert, as a slave in a chain gang, by the Speck brothers. Christophe Schultz, a dentist-

turned-bounty hunter, approaches the Speck brothers, looking for a slave who would be

able to help him find the Brittle brothers. Django knows who, and where, the Brittle

brothers are, and Schultz seeks to purchase Django after fatally injuring the Speck

brothers. After "paying" the Specks, Schultz finds the keys to the chain gang's leg irons

and he sets Django free and, after some deliberation, sets the other slaves free and gives

them advice on how to get to the north by following the North Star. Much like Ford,

Bass, and Mr. Parker, Schultz is introduced as an ally, evidenced by his multiple

instances of saving in the first few scenes of the film, once again connecting a White

character to benevolence and agency, and connecting Black characters to dependence on White characters for their fate.

Similar to Platt, Django has to appeal to a White character in order to be helped. Django has to convince Schultz that he knows information on the Brittle Brothers in order to be saved from his conditions as a slave. This prompts Schultz to save him. Likewise, Platt asks Bass to write a letter to his friends in the north, but Platt has to convince Bass that he really is a free man who was forced into slavery. This prompts Bass to help save him. There seems to be a theme in these films. The films show how Platt and Django have to rely on Whites to "escape" oppression, seemingly suggesting that the only way for Blacks to make progress is to go to White people, which may be another form of slavery in itself. Once Django appeals to Schultz by displaying his knowledge, the two of them ride into the distance on horseback. A couple of scenes later, Schultz displays a moral disdain for the institution of slavery, much like Samuel Bass in *12 Years a Slave*:

> Dr. Schultz: ...On one hand, I despise slavery. On the other hand, I need your help, and if you're not in a position to refuse, all the better. So for the time being, I'm going to make this slave malarkey work to my benefit. Still...having said that,...I feel guilty.

From here, Schultz promises to give Django his freedom as long as Django helps Schultz find the Brittle brothers. Schultz and Django also discuss Django's wife, Broomhilda, who was also sold into slavery. Schultz offers to help Django find his wife. In this conversation, Schultz makes reference to the immorality of slavery again saying, "The bad part about slavery being a business, is it's immoral..." The film links a moral core to a

prominent White character and then links that awareness of the immorality of racism to the act of saving Black characters. This saving is presented as an act of resistance against the system, and it is very explicit in its delivery. However, Django's motivations to help Schultz are not linked to morality, but rather to desperation as a slave. He is subjugated under a White character, and does what Schultz tells him to in order to survive.

White characters, and their saving, are often highlighted in film and are cued with very overt lines of dialogue that position White characters as the only moral characters who can help Black characters escape oppression. Magical Negroes, and potential Black Saviors, do not receive the same treatment or exposure in these films as their White counterparts. Where White characters are obviously saviors, Black characters are subverted and understated, revealing a discrepancy in how saviors are presented in film, based on race.

Subverted Black Savior

The Black Savior is an odd occurrence in film. These characters seem like they fit more into the Magical Negro trope, and all of its hallmarks, but the characters are hardly ever magical in their presentation or execution. Black characters tend to be much more scientific and professional, and they use their scientific knowledge in service of bettering White characters. This would make these modern "Magical Negroes" seem like saviors, but the explicitness of saving expected from White Saviors is blunted for Black characters who attempt to save. "Black Saviors" are hard to find, hidden among plot lines and shifting camera angles, left invisible on the backdrop of White excellence.

When a Black Savior is to be given credit for his work, the credit is immediately given back to White characters for their role in their *own* salvation, creating a racial

project that produces Black "savior*ism*" rather than elevating the Black character as a "savior." This is critical because White characters who are being saved are portrayed as competent from their introduction, but they just need a little extra assistance in integrating into their desired ways of living. Black characters who are being saved by Whites, in contrast, are often portrayed as incapable of solving their own problems, almost completely incompetent, and in need of serious assistance. This creates a racial project that reinforces stereotypes about Black pathology and White competency, which continues to strengthen White power and the propaganda surrounding it. Films like *Hitch* and the films in Chris Nolan's *Dark Knight* Trilogy demonstrate this peculiar trend of introducing a potential Black Savior just to have his effectiveness reduced while increasing the effectiveness of his corresponding White character. Specifically, in *Hitch*, the main character is portrayed as more competent than the person he is trying to help, but loses a lot of his established credibility when he admits that he does not do what people think he does to help people throughout the film.

Will Smith plays Alex "Hitch" Hitchens in the film *Hitch*, a film about a professional, and legendary, matchmaker and his efforts to help his clients find love using the "basic principles" of relationships. He helps his client, Albert Brenneman, a highly intelligent accountant for the Allegra Foundation, get into a relationship with Allegra Cole, a local celebrity. Albert is clumsy, overweight, and socially inept. He helps Albert because he believes Albert is a good guy who is "out of his mind" in regards to his goal to be in a relationship with someone of Allegra's caliber. However, Hitch admires Albert's idealism. Thus, Hitch agrees to help Albert with his relationship goals.

Hitch views Albert's desire to be placed in a relationship with Allegra as a unique

challenge and the chance to turn Albert into his "Sistine Chapel," hinting at interest convergence being a motivating factor in Hitch's work. Hitch, with interest convergence in mind, demonstrates some characteristics of the White Saviors in both *12 Years a Slave* and *Django Unchained.* He is sought out, appealed to, and decides whether or not he wants to help based on his morals and interests. If these traits are taken to be hallmarks of at least some saviors in film, then Hitch is immediately established as a savior, especially based on what he does for Albert throughout the film.

Hitch proceeds to give Albert a broad swathe of advice about: being himself, how to dress, what to say, how to dance, and how and when to kiss a woman. He also helps by citing statistics about relationships, relationship occurrences, women's opinions on men, and sex, providing Albert with the tools he needs to be confident in himself and his dating skills. When they first meet, Albert describes himself as "desperate" for Hitch's help to get into the relationship he wants to be in since he has not had any success in previous relationships.

> Albert: I'm desperate, basically. I mean, not in general, you understand? You
>
> know, not just for anybody. But, man, for her...Yeah.

Albert's desperation is what prompts him to seek out Hitch's help that Hitch provides in the most professional way he can, considering his help is part of his brand and business. Throughout the film, Hitch slowly helps Albert become the person he wants to be, which is what Magical Negroes tend to do for White characters. However, there is a point in the film in which Hitch literally states that, despite his efforts to help his clientele find love, he *did not* actually help (in this case, "save") Albert as this conversation with Allegra states:

Allegra: ...having him dance like a buffoon, knowing I can't dance, either? Then

telling him to drop mustard on his shirt so I'd feel like less of a dork?

That was all you, right?

Hitch: Uh, no. Hell, no.

Allegra: That was him?

Hitch: That's got Albert written all over it.

Allegra: Did you put him up to the inhaler?

Hitch: Stop it. He did not show you that.

Allegra: He chucked it right before he kissed me.

Hitch: So, wait... that stuff worked for you?

Allegra: It was adorable. What *did* you do?

Hitch: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Hitch, a character who more-or-less starts off as a "Black Savior," reduces his own ethos as a savior, and volleys the credit for the "saving" back to his White client. His efforts throughout the film become instances of saving, or "saviorism," but Hitch himself is not a "savior" since he, by his own admission, did not really do anything for Albert. Any "saving" Hitch was responsible for was subverted and credit was deferred to Albert, a White character. This makes it difficult to discern whether Albert was actually "saved" at all since the film portrays him as ultimately having the skills to help himself. This is evident in the relationship between Lucius Fox and Bruce Wayne in the *Dark Knight* film trilogy.

Lucius Fox, played by Morgan Freeman, is the only prominent Black character in the entire *Dark Knight* trilogy. Fox is the head of the Research and Development (R&D)

and Applied Sciences department of Wayne Enterprises, a highly profitable company in the heart of Gotham City. Bruce returns to Gotham and finds the city overrun with crime, crime that Bruce wants to reduce. Bruce, in his endeavor to "become a symbol for criminals" to fear, seeks Fox's help in trying to become this "symbol." Fox is located in the company's warehouse where he's kept away from the rest of the company. Bruce goes to Wayne Enterprises, in an attempt to regain control of the company, and consults with Mr. Earle, the company's CEO, about his plans to strengthen the company:

> Earle: Well, perhaps you'll tell us your plans. Are you back to finish college?

> Wayne: Actually, I thought I'd get to grips with what we actually do around here. From the ground up – one division at a time.

> Earle: Any idea where you'd like to start?

> Wayne: Applied sciences caught my eye.

> Earle: Mr. Fox's department. I'll make a call. You can start today.

The film introduces Fox with this conversation in which Earle assumes that Fox will be willing to help Bruce Wayne, albeit because Fox is head of the department. But it is convenient that the very department Bruce wants to start working on, in an effort to strengthen Wayne Enterprises, is also the department headed by the only Black character in the film and the only character who helps Bruce with his goals. This is a setup for Fox being a Magical Negro, especially when Bruce and Fox meet for the first time in Applied Sciences. Fox is hidden and thus must be found; being hidden is one of the hallmarks of a Magical Negro. Fox alludes to in a conversation in Wayne Enterprise's warehouse:

> Fox: What did they tell you this place was?

Wayne: They didn't tell me anything.

Fox: They told me e*xactly* what it was when they sent me here…a dead end where
I couldn't cause any more trouble for the rest of the board.

Fox states that he was "sent" to the warehouse as if he were exiled from the company to languish in solitude as a form of punishment. This solitude and hiddenness is similar to Hitch's elusive and discrete business that's shrouded in a lot of mystery and, much like Hitch, Fox is full of wisdom and has impressive expertise in his field of military and applied science, but this expertise is clearly not for mass-consumption, evidenced by its secretive nature, similar to Hitch's expertise. Here lies a critical discrepancy between White and Black Saviors. White Saviors show up and make themselves known, *normalizing* whiteness. Black Saviors have to be found, *rarifying* Blackness especially when we consider that these Black characters tend to be the only prominent Black characters in their cinematic universes. These Black characters are sought out by White characters and the audience is clued into the Black character's experience with helping whites either through scenes of exposition or direct dialogue.

Fox explains his history with helping White people achieve goals as a board member of Wayne Enterprises when Bruce's father, a White man, was in charge, as he explains to Bruce about how he had a positive relationship with Bruce's father:

Wayne: You knew my father?

Fox: Sure. Helped him build his train. Beautiful project – routed right into Wayne
Tower, along with the water and power utilities. Made Wayne Tower the
unofficial heart of Gotham.

Fox has a history with helping whites with their personal projects. Again, this is similar to Hitch's character in which we get an opening scene showing him helping a host of White clients. This trend in these films to showcase Black characters helping multiple White people may be a tactic to show the credibility and trustworthiness of the Black Saviors in question, which is what happens with Fox's character. What is also critical about Fox's character is that he takes no credit for the final product he helped create which is something Magical Negroes tend to do; he describes the train as "his train," referring to Bruce's father. Fox gives most of the credit for the Gotham train to his White business partner, which appeals to Bruce Wayne and creates a relationship between the two of them, prompting Fox to want to help Bruce, as long as Bruce is honest about what he's doing.

Fox's stipulation hints at the existence of Fox's morality. He wants to make sure Bruce isn't misusing technology he is allowed to use. The presence of a moral code is a recurring theme among saviors in *12 Years a Slave*, *Django Unchained*, *Hitch*, and *The Dark Knight Trilogy,* setting Fox up to be even more of a Black Savior. Fox offers Bruce the Bat-suit, the vehicle Batman uses, all of the most useful and efficient gadgets, and an effective cover for their activity. Essentially, Fox creates Batman while Bruce plays the character, and it is hard to imagine Batman existing as he does in the films without Fox's help. Even though Fox played an integral role in Bruce Wayne's transformation into the hero he wanted to be, Batman gets thanked openly by Commissioner Gordon for his work:

Gordon: I never said thank you.

Batman: And you'll never have to.

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Gordon has the desire to thank Batman for his work, but Batman views the implied "thank you" as unnecessary; Batman's heroism is thankless work. Batman receives credit earlier in the film as well when Rachel, Bruce's love interest, presents Gordon with antidotes for the hallucinogen Fox was asked to create; Rachel gives Batman the credit for saving her life with the antidotes and there is an implicit accreditation when she gives Gordon the antidotes Batman gave her:

Gordon: How are you?

Rachel: Better. Thank you.

Gordon: Thank the Batman.

Rachel: I already did. He sent me with doses of the antidote for you.

Fox, however, is not recognized for his work, except by Bruce Wayne in an indirect way. Bruce Wayne's form of thanks is to restore Lucius Fox's position as the head of Wayne Enterprises, a position Fox lost once Mr. Earle, Wayne Enterprise's previous CEO, took over. Saving is tossed around between characters in this film. Despite Fox being set up as a Black Savior, the film positions Bruce Wayne as the film's primary and ultimate White Savior. This empowers whiteness and subjugates Fox's ethos as an influential character under the typical umbrella of Black characters's fate being determined by White characters, demonstrating that powerful Black characters undergo a sort of regression in film from influential to dependent once they have fulfilled their role.

It can be inferred that without Bruce "pulling some strings," Fox would have been fired from the company with no say in the matter since Mr. Earle systematically discriminated against Fox by constantly demoting him to lower and lower positions,

ultimately culminating in Fox being placed on the "early retirement" list. The source of Fox's oppression is also the source of his salvation: White privilege. Bruce Wayne and Mr. Earle, in a brief dinner party scene, passive-aggressively fight over Fox's value in Wayne Enterprises, demonstrating a tug-of-war between pro-Black allies and anti-Black enemies that shows how White characters control Black character's fates in film, even though the Black character is a savior:

> Wayne: Fox is showing me the ropes down at Applied Sciences...he's a great untapped resource at our company, aren't you, Mr. Fox?
>
> Fox: He's a good kid.
>
> Earle: Fox, forget about kissing Wayne's ass to get back in – I'm merging Applied Sciences with central archiving and you're top of the early retirement list...Didn't you get the memo?

Throughout the film, Earle demonstrates disdain for Fox and uses his executive powers to make sure Fox is not represented in the company in any way other than working in a division that Fox seems to work in by himself. Bruce Wayne comes back to Gotham city to reclaim his company and change Gotham; he tries to reintegrate back into the company and directly challenges Earle's authority, especially when it comes to how Fox is treated within the company. At the end of the film, Bruce rehires Fox and makes Fox head of the company, a form of "saving," evidenced by this bit of dialogue between Fox and Earle:

> Earle: What are you doing here, Fox? I seem to remember firing you.
>
> Fox: Might be something to do with my new job as head of Wayne Industries.

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Didn't you get the memo?

Earle: Whose authority?

Bruce gives Fox his new job after buying most of Wayne Enterprise's shares. Fox credits Bruce Wayne with restoring not only his employment status, but his social class standing as well, considering Wayne Enterprises is a billion-dollar company. Again, we see a Black character defer to a White character, even though the Black character has a lot more knowledge and expertise than the White character. Fox is rarely credited for his role in creating Batman's gadgetry, but Bruce Wayne's role in restoring Fox's job is given explicit credit. Fox as a "Black Savior" is subverted in favor of Bruce Wayne's heroism, which becomes the central focus of the film, turning Fox's work into acts of "saviorism" but not allowing for Fox to be seen as a true "savior" at the end of the film. However, in *The Dark Knight Rises*, Fox plays a much more obvious Black Savior role, but he still does not receive any credit for it; Batman does.

The Dark Knight Rises shows Fox to be more than just an assistant – Fox's help is desperately *needed.* Bruce Wayne returns to Gotham City, which the super-villain, Bane, has been turned into a total institution. Out of desperation to save Gotham, Bruce asks Selina Kyle to take him to Fox:

Selina: Start fresh? I can't even get off this island.

Wayne: I can give you a way off. Once you've gotten me to Lucius Fox. I need
 you to find out where they're holding him. Then take me in.

Selina: Why do you need Fox?

Wayne: To save this city.

Selina: Get your powerful friend on the case.

Wayne: I'm trying. But I need Fox.

Bruce's "powerful friend" is Batman. In order for Batman to save Gotham, Fox has to assist Bruce. In a later scene, Bruce speaks with Fox:

Wayne: Tonight I need you.

Fox: What for?

Wayne: To get me back in the game.

Bruce acknowledges that Fox is the only person who can help turn him back into Batman. Without Fox there's no Batman, without Batman Gotham gets destroyed. Despite Fox's extensive amount of help, he is not credited for any of it, not even directly by Bruce Wayne/Batman. Instead, Batman is given all the credit for his heroism, and Commissioner Gordon unveils a statue of Batman's likeness in honor of Batman's heroic deeds after his "death."

Based on these observations, White Saviors are much more obvious and explicit in film. These saviors make themselves, and their intentions, known. This ultimately means that we are more likely to see and recognize White Saviors, creating a racial project that privileges whiteness, allowing for White characters to be connected to virtues of altruism and morality. Black characters are much less likely to be portrayed as Black Saviors. Black Saviors are harder to find and recognize, often because their efforts are reduced in meaning in favor of what their White clients can do, or have done, for themselves. This continues to connect whiteness with themes of self-reliance and individuality, while connecting Blackness to the use of knowledge and wisdom to

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primarily to assist White people instead of themselves.

In these films, White Saviors are given explicit and open credit for their work from the people who have been saved. Black characters are not given this same open acknowledgement, but are instead given a sort of silent acknowledgement as if there is an inability for the White characters to give obvious credit to Black characters for their achievement. This may be because of a racist minimization of Black capability, which is standard fare, or because the Black characters are *expected* to be high-achievers in films. Without this high achievement, these Black characters' services and expertise wouldn't be sought out in the first place. This may *normalize* Black excellence so long as it is harnessed for White use. This "use" manifests as demands for, and expectation of, help from Black characters, demonstrating a difference in agency between White and Black characters in these films; a character's volition and willingness to help and save other characters is racialized. However, White characters help people because they choose to while Black characters help characters because they feel like they have to, which leads to the next topic.

Savior Agency: Black Obligation

White Saviors save characters because they want to; they save because they *care* and they want to extend that altruism to an oppressed group. Black Saviors save characters because they feel obligated to do so. This difference between saviors is important because it positions Black Saviors as subordinate to White characters, regardless of the Black character's status. For a Black character, saving becomes serving, and that serving is expected, normalized, and often unrewarded.

In *Hitch*, Hitch openly acknowledges that he feels a certain obligation to help men

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in need. He describes his skills as an education that he feels obliged to pass on to his fellow men. Throughout the film Hitch is hired by several White male clients. His clients claim to be desperate for his help and Hitch uses his skills to help them because of his sense of duty to help men. This is similar to Lucius Fox's character. Fox also mentions that he has a sort of responsibility or obligation to help Bruce Wayne in his goals. Bruce, after meeting Fox, continued to return to Applied Sciences to request new equipment in an effort to begin his transformation into Batman. Fox always obliged, with few questions. Bruce tells Fox that he doesn't want Earle to discover how they have been communicating with each other, but Fox says, "Mr. Wayne, the way I see it...All of this stuff is yours, anyway." Fox is essentially stating that he gives Bruce the equipment he needs because it all belongs to him regardless so helping Bruce is really the only option, especially considering the relationship Fox had with Bruce's father. From these points forward, Hitch and Fox become servile, providing their White clients with everything they ask for. Hitch provides Albert with dating advice whenever he's called for it, and Fox provides Bruce with gadgetry whenever Bruce asks for it.

Helping White characters unconditionally whenever they ask for it is a key feature of Magical Negroes. However, these "Magical Negroes" in modern films are not "magical" in any sense. They do not use magic to help their White clients; they use science (Hitch) and technology (Fox) as their resources, and these resources are used in ways that help White clients achieve certain goals. This is an indication that these Black characters are also saviors. So, this could be an indication that our "Magical Negroes" in modern film are actually a combination of Magical Negro and Black Savior: these characters show up when it's convenient, help clients unconditionally, and help White

characters whenever they are asked without the explicit use of magic or mysticism to do so.

This convenience creates a subordinate role for Black characters even when they can be viewed as "saviors." For example, Lucius Fox in *Batman Begins* engineers an antidote for a hallucinogenic neurotoxin to which Batman falls victim. Alfred, Batman's butler, takes a blood sample and asks whether he should send it to Wayne Pharmaceutical, Wayne Enterprises' medical department. Bruce refuses and says that he has a "better idea." Bruce sends the blood sample to Lucius Fox for no other reason than because he knows Fox will help him in the way he desires:

Wayne: Could you synthesize an antidote?

Fox: Well, the hallucinatory compounds can be balanced...but this receptor's a compound I've never seen before.

Wayne: So you can't.

Fox: Did I say that? I just want you to know how hard it's gonna be.

Despite the obvious difficulty of creating this antidote for Bruce Wayne, Fox helps him anyway, without challenging the request. Within this same conversation, Bruce requests more assistance from Fox. He asks him to find out about the use of a microwave emitter:

Wayne: Do you know what a Wayne Industries N-Emit42B is?

Fox: No. But she will...

Fox starts typing on his computer.

Fox: Oh.

Wayne: What?

Fox: It won't tell us...It must be a defense prototype.

Wayne: Could you find out?

Fox: I'll make a couple calls...I still have a couple of friends in defense.

The scene ends with Fox explicitly stating what he's going to do to help. This highlights not only how Fox begins to play a servile role in Bruce's life, being the only prominent Black character in the film, but it also highlights how almost all of Fox's scenes are ones in which he is approached, usually in an isolated laboratory setting; asked for help, and then he either disappears or the scene ends. This continues throughout the film, such as Bruce Wayne's party scene in which Fox is asked for even more help on the microwave emitter weapon.

Wayne: Any word on that...item.

Fox: A contact in heavy weapons tipped me off – it's a microwave emitter. It vaporizes water.

Wayne: Could you use it to put a biological agent into the air?

Fox: Sure, if the water supply were poisoned before you vaporize it.

This scene comes to a swift close, and Fox disappears, after he is shown being threatened, privately, by Mr. Earle. The next time Fox is seen in the film is towards the end when Bruce makes Fox the head of the company after Batman saves the city. Fox, at least in the context of this film, has moments of saviorism in which he helps Batman in ways that Batman could not have helped himself achieve his goals, and Fox even creates an antidote to the aerosol hallucinogenic toxin used against Gotham City but all of his acts

of saving are *asked for* as if he were Bruce's helper instead of Bruce's intellectual superior. This continues throughout the rest of the *Dark Knight* trilogy in both *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* in which Fox manages all of Wayne Enterprise's daily needs and attends to Bruce's needs as a superhero upon request. In *The Dark Knight*, Bruce Wayne goes to Fox for more assistance, but this time, instead of asking for the help, Bruce demands it.

Unlike in *Batman Begins*, Fox has more roles to play in Bruce's life in *The Dark Knight*. Fox's new responsibilities include: balancing Bruce's private and business finances, overseeing several ambitious projects both private and public, overseeing employee activity and day-to-day business affairs, dictating business policies affecting Wayne Enterprises and its shareholders, and advising Bruce when necessary. One of the earliest scenes in *The Dark Knight* depicts Fox speaking on behalf of Bruce Wayne during a board meeting; Bruce was asleep at the time. Afterward, Fox tends to Bruce's needs, which leads into another conversation about crime-fighting:

Fox: Anything else you can trouble me for?

Wayne: I need a new suit.

Fox: Three buttons *is* a little nineties.

Wayne: I'm not talking about fashion, Mr. Fox, so much as *function*.

Fox: You want to be able to turn your head?

Wayne: Sure make backing out of the driveway easier.

Fox: I'll see what I can do.

Bruce makes a short statement that he needs a new (bat) suit, and he expects Fox to

oblige. Fox goes on to say that he will "see what he can do," and the scene ends. Fox is

willingly subservient and does not challenge Bruce's attempt at directly commanding

him. Without Fox's help, Batman would not be able to fight crime as effectively since

there was a noticeable weakness in the original suit that almost cost Batman his life. All

Bruce has to do to get new weaponry is make a wish and it is granted, courtesy of Lucius

Fox. Furthermore, Bruce got his idea to go to Fox for more help from Alfred, another

White character, in an earlier scene:

> Wayne: My armor...I'm carrying too much weight – I need to be faster.

> Alfred: I'm sure Mr. Fox can oblige.

The use of the word "oblige" is critical here because it highlights Fox's actions as not

necessarily chosen, but suggested and requested throughout the entire film. Another

example of Fox's obligatory role is when he suspects a Chinese businessman, Mr. Lau, of

running an illegal business. He is indirectly *told* to go to Hong Kong to infiltrate Lau's

business for Bruce so that Batman can take down Lau's business from the inside, even

though Fox does not seem to want to do, which can be inferred from his conversation

with Bruce:

> Fox: Our Chinese friend left town before I could tell him the deal is off.

> Wayne: I'm sure you've always wanted to go to Hong Kong.

> Fox: What's wrong with a phone call?

> Wayne: I think Mr. Lau deserves a more personal touch.

From here, Fox provides Bruce with more technology that will allow him to accomplish

his goal of destabilizing Lau's illegal business. Fox flies to Hong Kong, meets with Lau

for lunch, calls off Wayne Enterprise's business deal with Lau, and plants a SONAR device in Lau's office for Batman, actions Batman would not have been able to do as well without Fox's help.

The need to constantly assist Bruce is a running theme for Fox's character throughout the film, and the assistance almost always seems like it comes from Fox's sense of obligation to help Bruce. It continues in one of the final scenes of the film in which Fox helps Batman (illegally and unethically) track down, and fight against, Joker using the same SONAR technology Fox created to infiltrate Lau's business. Batman amplified the SONAR technology so it could be used across the city to invade privacy in order to find Joker's location:

> Batman: This is the audio sample. If he talks within range of any phone in the city, you'll be able to triangulate his position. When you've finished, type your name to switch it off.

> Fox: I'll help you this one time...But consider this my resignation. As long as this machine is at Wayne Industries, I won't be.

Despite Fox's moral and ethical objection to Batman's tactics, Fox helps Batman anyway basically upon request. Batman assures Fox that Batman needs to find the Joker in order to save lives, and Fox is really the only other person who can help since Batman coded the encryption key for the SONAR technology in Fox's first and last name; Fox had no choice but to help Batman because of this. Even Fox himself recognizes that every time Bruce speaks with Batman, the conversation usually ends with a request.

In *The Dark Knight Rises*, Bruce has a conversation with Fox seven years after

Bruce's retirement from being a superhero. Bruce meets with Fox in order to inquire about why Wayne Enterprises' funds have run low, since Fox was supposed to keep the company running efficiently, and how to prevent another business man from acquiring Wayne Enterprise's shares. After their conversation, Fox asks:

Fox: Anything else?

Wayne: No, why?

Fox: These conversations always used to end with some...unusual requests.

Wayne: I retired.

The obligatory nature of Fox's help is recognized and normalized within the script. Even though Bruce is retired in this film, he seeks Lucius out again to "become" Batman again, this time, over the phone:

Fox: This is Fox.

Wayne: Remember those "unusual requests" I used to make?

Fox: I knew it!

From this point, the relationship between Bruce as the White character in need of help, and Fox as the Black character who can provide it is restored, placing Fox in a subordinate position yet again based on the following conversation between Bruce and Alfred:

Wayne: Ra's al Ghul was the League of Shadows. And I beat him. Bane's just a mercenary, and we have to find out what he's up to. Trades of some kind. Coded...

Alfred: Is that – ?

Wayne: Mine. Courtesy of Selina Kyle. Get this to Fox – he can crack the code

and tell us what trades they were executing.

Fox is immediately expected to help Bruce in his endeavors as Batman. This expectation of help is evident in the film *Hitch* as well. Hitch, much like Fox, is expected to help his clients, creating this sense of obligation that Black characters seem to have when they go out of their way to help White characters.

Hitch blatantly states, early on in the film, "And it's an education I feel obliged to pass on to my fellow men. Because with no guile and no game, there's no girl. If ever a man born was without game... it was Albert Brennaman." This obligation is what drives a lot of Hitch's selfless actions through his film. He helps simply because he believes socially inept men need to be helped and he is the only man to do the job – it just so happens, the majority of Hitch's clientele in the film is white. While the movie does not explicitly state that Hitch only helps White clients, the focus of the film is on Hitch helping and defending Albert in front of women who shame or otherwise persecute Albert for his laughable clumsiness and ineptitude. During a dinner scene, Hitch defends Albert in an argument with Sara:

Sara: You're a scam artist. You trick women into –

Hitch: Into getting out of their own way so great guys like Albert Brennaman

have a fighting chance.

Hitch, in the heat of this argument, frames his job and life's purpose around guys like his primary client, Albert. A lot of Hitch's "saving" is motivated by this need to give men a

fighting chance with beautiful women, believing that he can transform guys like Albert into something greater than they would have been otherwise; Hitch help his clients actualize themselves, "saving" them from everlasting disappointment. Hitch goes out of his way to help save Albert's relationship with Allegra even as it starts to fall apart:

Hitch: Ms. Cole, thank you very much for seeing me.

Allegra: You said it was a matter of life and death.

Hitch: That man would've sold his soul to make you happy.

Allegra: So what does that make you, the devil?

Hitch: My job is not to deceive, Ms. Cole. It's to create opportunities.

Allegra: Like the boardroom.

Hitch: Would you have noticed him otherwise?

Hitch goes out of his way in this scene to catch a taxi and follow Allegra all over the city in order to keep her relationship with Albert strong. He does all of this because Albert basically tells him to do so. In an earlier scene, Albert meets with Hitch to discuss how he feels about Allegra now that she hasn't spoken to Albert in a while. Albert sees this as a sign that their relationship is about to end and this makes Albert obsessive and miserable:

Hitch: She hasn't called back? You want some coffee?

Albert: I want you to fix it.

Hitch: I've got nothing, Albert.

Albert: I get it. Let me get this straight. You're selling this stuff, but you don't
    believe in your own product.

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Hitch: Love is my life.

Albert: No. Love is your job...This isn't about love for you at all, is it? This whole time, I thought I was the coward.

After an extended conversation, Albert tells Hitch directly that he wants Hitch to fix his relationship with Allegra. When Hitch refuses and says he doesn't have any more ideas for Albert, Albert insults Hitch and his job. This prompts Hitch to rush out to get a taxi to find Allegra and fix the relationship, his actions driven by his admitted obligation to help men.

In these films, Black characters are asked to and/or told what to do in order to be of assistance. However, in White Savior films, White characters rarely need to be told or asked for their assistance. While numinous helping is common with both White saviors and Magical Negroes/Black Saviors, Black characters are driven by their *obligation* to help White characters while White characters are driven by their *altruism* – White characters help Black characters, not because they are told to, but because it would be kind to do so which, yet again, connects whiteness to benevolent virtues and empowers White characters at the expense of Black characters.

Savior Agency: White Altruism and Interest

White characters such as William Ford in *12 Years a Slave,* and Christophe Schultz in *Django Unchained* are mostly intrinsically motivated to help oppressed Black characters. This motivation is, however, motivated by interest convergence, a common occurrence in White Savior films in which White characters only help Black characters if the help benefits the White Savior in some way. Ford helps Platt because he believes Platt

is special, and he respects his abilities. But, Ford also helps because he has a debt to settle as he says to Platt:

> Ford: I am trying to save your life! And...I have a debt to be mindful of. That, now, is to Edwin Epps. He is a hard man. Prides himself on being a 'nigger breaker.' But truthfully I could find no others who would have you. You've made a reputation of yourself. Whatever your circumstances, you are an exceptional nigger, Platt. I fear no good will come of it.

Before this line, Platt tries to convince Ford that he is indeed a free man, not a slave. However, Ford denied Platt's claims and continues to treat Platt as a slave because doing so justifies selling Platt to another slave owner for financial reasons. Schultz in *Django Unchained* has his own reasons for helping Django out of his situation.

Schultz frees Django only because Django knows information Schultz needed in order to collect his next bounty, the Brittle Brothers. Schultz explains this to Django in a saloon:

> Django: I know what they look like, all right.
>
> Dr. Schultz: Good. So, here's my agreement. You travel with me until we find them –
>
> Django: Where we goin'?
>
> Dr. Schultz: I hear at least two of them are overseeing up in Gatlinburg, but I don't know where. That means we visit every plantation in Gatlinburg till we find them. And when we find them, you point them out, and I kill them. You do that, I agree to give you your freedom...twenty-five

dollars per Brittle brother – that's seventy-five dollars...

Schultz admits that he's only helping Django because doing so is mostly beneficial to him. He offers Django money and freedom in exchange for the assistance, and Django accepts the deal. Schultz makes another deal with Django after the two of them succeed in killing the Brittle Brothers:

> Dr. Schultz: Yes, on that occasion, you were a tad overzealous. But normally, that's a good thing. How'd you like to partner up for the winter?
>
> Django: What'd you mean partner up?
>
> Dr. Schultz: You be my deputy, for real this time. A lot of the big money is in the outlaw gangs. Some of these fellas are worth fifteen hundred or three thousand a piece. With one man, anything over three men is a risk. But with a partner? Creating cross fire? It's fish in a barrel. A lot of these gangs hold up in the hills for the winter.
>
> Django: You makin' another agreement?
>
> Dr. Schultz: Yes. You work with me through the winter, till the snow melts. I give you a third of my bounties. And while we're together, I'll teach you a few things you're going to need to know.

This is the second time Schultz approaches Django with a deal for help in exchange for Django's full cooperation with Schultz's plans to make money. In exchange for Django's partnership, Schultz agreed to take Django to Greenville to help Django find the files that have information about which plantation Django's wife, Broomhilda, is located. Despite this kindness, Django is suspicious of Schultz:

> Django: Why do you care what happens to me? Why you care if I find my wife?

Schultz: Well, frankly, I've never given anybody their freedom before. And now

that I have, I feel vaguely responsible for you...I'm obliged to help you

on your quest to rescue your beloved Broomhilda.

Schultz says he feels "vaguely responsible" for Django's life. Similarly to Ford, Schultz helps Django for a couple of reasons. 1.) He needs Django's help to make money, 2.) He likes Django as a person and cares about Django's well-being. Ford helps Platt for the same reasons: self-motivated altruism and interest convergence. However, White Saviors *can* be asked for assistance, but only after they have been established as allies and have already been tied to anti-racist sentiment.

Platt seeks Bass' help in writing a letter to Platt's friends in the north. Platt approaches Bass cautiously in order to avoid being harshly punished for trying to escape the plantation. Platt asks:

Solomon: Do you believe, sir, in justice as you have said?

Bass: I do.

Solomon: That slavery is an evil that should befall none?

Bass: I believe so.

When Platt seeks help from Samuel Bass, there is a hint of interest convergence in Bass' reason to help Platt:

Bass: I will write your letter sir, for if I could bring freedom to you, it will be

more than a pleasure. It will be a duty.

Bass agrees to help Platt primarily because it would make him feel good to do so, and because he feels like it is his duty to do so. Again a White Savior feels responsible for

helping a Black character because of the personal benefits helping would have for him, and because of a sense of altruism.

Conclusion

These aforementioned master-slave narratives playing out in these films further connect to the concept of racial projects. White privilege, authority, morality, and interests are all prioritized in these films in which whiteness is superimposed over Black characters and their needs in order to create a narcissistic story arc that supports White people as righteous and competent. Black characters, in contrast, are stereotyped as pathological when they are being helped by whites, or as extremely qualified only when working in the service of redeeming whites. Again, both of these diverging plot devices eventually converge into a singular point of contention: whiteness, its maintenance, and its empowerment, are the focal points of these films even when a Black character is shown to be "superior" to the White characters These films can be viewed as racial projects that enhance the White ethos – whiteness triumphs *over* Blackness in White Savior films, and it triumphs *because* of Blackness in Black Savior films. Either way, Blackness is the sacrificial lamb.

DISCUSSION

The White and Black Savior racial projects differ from each other in critical ways. Those differences highlight the ways in which racism flows through the pipes and drainage of the United States culture to create a pool of racist filmography and storytelling. This supported my initial assumption that these films would be racist projects since the literature on the White Savior trope hints at an undercurrent of racism wafting through these types of films involving White interactions with Blacks. The facet of the analyses that was unprecedented was the Black Savior and his tendency to volley his agency to whites, turning some of these Black Savior films into pseudo White Savior films that adhered to White Savior conventions.

White Savior films, and all of the racial projections within them, present opportunities for Whites to feel good about themselves for having enough sympathy and empathy for poor, pathetic Black characters to want to help them. However, these films do not tend to make people more tolerant or understanding evidenced by the aforementioned colorblindness and liminal interactions inherent in these White racial projects. These movies appeal to, and strengthen, the sinews of Whiteness. This White bias is also the case in films in which there are potential Black Saviors who work in the interest of whites and whites only. These films continue to associate salvation with Whiteness, even if the savior is Black. The next two sections will attempt to theorize these savior projects in order to make sense of what may be driving the problematic trend

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to steel and muscle White supremacy in film.

Theorizing the White Savior Project

White Saviors, despite their altruistic ways, are problematic not necessarily because of their help, but because of how the films present whites in relation to Blacks who "need" the help. Vera and Gordon claim that White Savior narratives are fantasies that "are essentially grandiose, exhibitionistic, and narcissistic" (Vera and Gordon 2003:32 – 33). Black characters in White Savior films are presented as being unable to solve their own problems, whereas White characters seeking Black assistance are presented as at least minimally capable of helping themselves. White Savior narratives recapitulate a singular narrative that Black people are "oppressed by bad White people" and that Black people can achieve freedom "through the offices of good White people" (Berlatsky 2014). In these films, Black characters have very little agency or upward social mobility, and they are usually Black stereotypes: slaves, uneducated, lower-class, mentally ill, criminal, or poor. In the context of *12 Years a Slave* and *Django Unchained*, both Platt and Django are portrayed as hopeless slaves who are redeemed only in the presence of a White Savior. This symbolically privileges White characters and could symbolically annihilate Black characters by trivializing and/or condemning Black people.

According to Gerbner and Ross (1976), "Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation" (p.182). Symbolic annihilation is the absence of representation or underrepresentation of a group of people in the media; this includes any minority group. Gaye Tuchman (1978) expanded on the idea of symbolic annihilation and added that there are three tiers to the symbolic annihilation process: omission, leaving out a minority group; trivialization, stereotyping

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or otherwise marginalizing the experiences of a minority group; and condemnation, highlighting the negative aspects of a minority group. Symbolic annihilation vilifies group identities and attempts to make them invisible through explicit underrepresentation or misrepresentation in all forms of media (Tuchman 1978).

Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, comments on symbolic annihilation, claiming that it is a form of subtle annihilation that disregards the legitimacy of an identity (Venzo and Hess 2014). Because society is susceptible to any and all media it produces and consumes, and the social norms presented within them, people learn how they should behave in the presence of minority groups (Venzo and Hess 2014). Invisibility or negative portrayals of minorities results in a lack of familiarity and "appropriate" behaviors are not established – interaction becomes characterized by group differences (Venzo and Hess 2014).

The White Savior narratives, in which Black characters are constantly represented as hopeless, pathological, and incompetent, could serve to symbolically annihilate the Black ethos – through trivialization and condemnation – while elevating White privilege. For example, Platt could only be set free from slavery by negotiating with a White person; Platt was the subordinate in his interactions with his various White Saviors. Django's saving was mitigated through slavery, and he had to constantly pretend to agree with the institution of slavery in order achieve his goals of saving his wife and becoming a free man. Again, Django had to be subordinate to Schultz in order to succeed, generating the parts of a racial project that serves to differentiate whites from Blacks, through the White Savior trope, and subtly subjugate Blacks under whiteness. However, White Savior films could serve a reconciliatory purpose. These films could be trying to

unite the races through showcasing interracial interactions, which is what Magical Negro and Black Savior films may be doing as well.

Theorizing the Black Savior Project

The Magical Negro trope is most commonly used when studying Black representation in films. These characters are often noble, mentor-like, wise, and spiritually elevated. These "magical" characters seem to have nothing better to do than help White protagonists. They disappear, die, or sacrifice something of value while helping the White protagonist, and they tend to be uneducated or lower-class, wise, patient, and spiritual,"closer to the earth," and may literally have magical powers (Okorafor-Mbachu 2004). This is what director Spike Lee termed the "Super-Duper Magical Negro."

In Lee's discussion, examples of the "Super-Duper Magical Negro" are Michael Clarke Duncan's character, John Coffey, in *The Green Mile* (Darabont 1999), and Will Smith's character, Bagger, in *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (Redford 2000). Both of these films are about White characters whose moral, ethical, and emotional growth are made possible by the sudden appearance, and mysterious disappearance, of a Black man who is only important because of his spiritual relationship with the White protagonist However, through my analyses of the films *12 Years a Slave, Django Unchained, Hitch*, and *The Dark Knight* trilogy, I have found that none of the Black characters in these blockbuster films are "magical." That is, they do not resort to the use of folklore, mysticism, or any sort of occult rituals or incantations to serve their intended purpose as confidants for White vagabonds in need. Despite the characters's lack of magical skills, they are still "angelic," convenient for White characters, and morally superior to their White

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counterparts, demonstrating all of the characteristics of a "Super-Duper Magical Negro" sans magic. What these characters do use is their extensive, often scientific, knowledge of their field to help White characters in need.

This "super-duper" image of Black characters, particularly of the Black man, is more akin to Richard Brookhiser's conception of the "Numinous Negro, " a "Negro" of a different genus. According to Brookhiser, "numinous" refers to "the presiding divinity...of a place" (Brookhiser 2001). Basically, "numinous" means spiritually enlightened, like a saint. "The Numinous Negro," says Brookhiser, "is a presiding divinity. The place he presides over is America, and contact with him elevates us spiritually" (Brookhiser 2001).

The Numinous Negro draws power from the evanescence of religion. Morgan Freeman is often the face of these Numinous Negroes, playing characters like Red in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)*, the President of the United States in *Deep Impact* (1998), God in *Bruce Almighty* (2003)*, and many other characters he's played in film. These Numinous Negroes do not always have to be male or fictional, after all Toni Morrison can be considered a "seer" and Oprah Winfrey can be considered a "sage" (Brookhiser 2001). But, the majority of Numinous Negroes are Black males who merely provide moral support and mentorship for White characters, standard issue Hollywood hokum and cliché that move in lock-step with the multicultural ideology that continues to elevate Blacks as counselor, coach, and minister to our needs in the American imagination. Brookhiser explains:

> To their White counterparts, the Numinous Negro symbolized and expressed the travails of American Blacks; the Blacks who best incarnated the role were ministers who ventured beyond their pulpits...To their White admirers, they offered the possibility of redemption...They offered to resolve America's

blundering over a race brought here as subjects...Maybe by touching the Numinous Negro, America could finally put this problem behind it. (Brookhiser 2001)

So, characters such as Lucius Fox, a character elevated to the pinnacle of technological sophistication, and Hitch, a character elevated to be the infallible expert in matchmaking, are examples of the Numinous Negroes who selflessly redeem young White characters, and these Black characters are sought out for their redemptive capability. Both Fox and Hitch could be parts of a racial project that seeks to show how Blacks will receive respect once they are exceptional, standing out above other Blacks by serving White characters, allowing them to get as close to whiteness as possible.

These two characters could represent an aspect of *positive discrimination* in which both Fox and Hitch, being the only two prominent Black characters in their movies, are presented as having skills way above what's expected of them. They are superior in knowledge and wisdom compared to their White clients, and they have to be in order to be recognized. However, despite their acumen and skills, these characters are still pigeonholed in subordinate roles, acquiescing to the whims of their White clients despite their intellectual and moral gigantism. Regardless of their portrayal, the films in which they are presented are racial projects that show them as working only in the favor of whites, following a master-slave narrative that is allowed to play out in cinema under the guise of entertainment.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze savior films as racial projects. This is relevant because the media is a powerful agent of socialization that can have a strong effect on the way people perceive and make sense of race, racism, and race relations in the real world. Analysis of films as racial projects is critical if cultural researchers are going to develop a better understanding of how racism is perpetuated and sustained in an era in which many people claim to be color-blind. The study sought to answer two key questions:

1. How are contemporary blockbuster savior films representative of racial projects?

2. How do the themes and representations of White and Black Savior racial projects differ from each other in film?

The study also sought out to find ways to redefine the racist conception of the Magical Negro into the concept of the Black Savior in order to stymie the debilitating racist presentation of Blacks in film as mere servants to Whites; a narrative trope that reinforces Black subordination under White dominion. The general theoretical literature and analysis on these subjects suggests that films with a savior narrative are racial projects and that they can have an adverse effect on people's perceptions of our racial realities.

Empirical Findings

The empirical findings from the films *12 Years a Slave*, *Django Unchained*, *Hitch*, and *The Dark Knight* trilogy suggest that savior films consistently enhance White

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power and supremacy at the expense of Black characters, even when Black characters are saviors themselves. The consequence of this is the maintenance of classic racism disguised as post-racial, colorblind relationships between the films' main characters. The main empirical findings are chapter specific and were summarized within the respective empirical sections: *Explicit White Savior*, *Subverted Black Savior*, *Savior Agency: Black Obligation*, and *Savior Agency: White Altruism and Interest*. This section will focus more on synthesizing the empirical findings to answer the study's two main research questions and the implications of those findings on future discourse in race and media studies.

Savior films as racial projects

The concept of the racial project comes from Omi and Winant's racial formation theory (2015), in which they claim that racial projects are integral parts of the racial formation process. Racial projects are anything that helps us understand ourselves and others as racialized beings. Racial projects may be racist or anti-racist in their approach to helping us understand race issues. Films are racial projects because of how they reflect racist norms that have remained prevalent throughout American history. The films analyzed in this study are primarily racist racial projects that continue to champion the idea of Whites as superior, moral, and competent, while Black characters are portrayed as servile to Whites, if they are saviors, or as dependent if they are being saved.

U.S. films have a history of constructing Whiteness as the norm through the strategic use of mass-mediated imagery and narrative. In contrast, people of color are presented as deviant threats to White people, and are in need of reformation, punishment, or salvation for or from their deviant ways – all of which is provided by White characters The constant portrayal of White characters as normal and Black characters as abnormal is

indicative of a White racial project that seeks to subtly empower the White ethos and provide road maps to understanding race and race relations. This is especially evident in the use of film tropes such as the "White Savior" and the "Magical Negro."

The White Savior and Magical Negro represent two opposing extremes on the racial project spectrum. White Saviors are characterized by saintly White characters who show up in Black characters' lives and attempt to help or "reform" them in some way in order to keep them from meeting unfortunate consequences. This is evident in films such as *The Blind Side* and *Freedom Writers* in which White women rush in to help disadvantaged Black characters. These films present the White characters as possessing outstanding morals and values that their Black counterparts do not possess, and the White characters bestow their morals upon the Black characters in an effort to help them.

Opposite White Saviors are the "Magical Negroes." Magical Negroes are stock characters who are almost always Black stereotypes: uneducated, lower class, and otherworldly. These characters exist solely to help "broken" White characters achieve whatever goals they have and then disappear afterward. The Magical Negro serves three key purposes in film and that's to: help White characters, connect White characters to their spirituality, and to offer folk wisdom to resolve White character's problems.

Once the Magical Negro has accomplished these goals, the character vanishes or dies having served his or her servile purpose. The end result of this servitude is the White character's transformation into successful people. The use of this trope creates a racial project that supports the notion that Black characters are meant to live their lives to serve White characters; Blackness is meant to be harnessed to strengthen whiteness. This trope is an example of cinethetic racism that reinforces the positive images and stereotypes

associated with White characters while providing guidelines for how Black characters may interact with White characters in mainstream culture, further perpetuating covert racism; racism is itself a racial project.

The racist images these savior films display are based on real, and often unspoken, racial realities. The use of the Magical Negro trope in film can be attributed to the liminal status Black people have. Black people are often simultaneously accepted and rejected by Whites at the same time; Black characters are portrayed in savior film as both redemptive and destructive, creating myths surrounding Black characters. These myths minimize Black roles and glorify White ones, allowing films to act as agents of socialization for viewers who may not have any lived experience with Black people. Savior films can be analyzed as racial projects because of how they frame and present race and race issues. These portrayals of characters of color are typically racist and need to be openly challenged as potentially harmful sources of information about the realities of race relations.

The differences between themes and representations of White Saviors and Black Saviors in film

White Saviors differ from Black Saviors. One of the primary differences is that the White Saviors are presented more explicitly than Black Saviors. In the films *12 Years a Slave* and *Django Unchained*, the primary White Savior characters, William Ford and Samuel Bass in *12 Years a Slave* and Christophe Schultz in *Django Unchained,* are all presented in ways that make their purpose obvious to the viewers. These characters are portrayed as having really high moral standards and are shown openly criticizing racism as well as a blatant desire to help characters of color. Savior films highlight that these

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White characters are the only people who can help Black characters often because of their superior moral character that Black characters do not possess. Not only is the White Savior trope a racial project that attempts to define the superiority of White privilege, the White Savior's obvious purpose and intent is also a key theme in the establishment of that project. White characters are maximized and they are allowed to indulge in and use their whiteness in order to help people of color, and that theme is critical in understanding how films are both racial projects and components in the racial formation process.

In addition to the explicitness of the White Savior, White Saviors are also shown to be motivated to help Black characters out of a sense of altruism as well as more selfish interest convergent reasons. Movies with White Saviors portray them as caring, helping only because they really want to do so. This altruistic motive works to connect benevolence to whiteness in ways that foster the notion that "White is right" in the media. However, despite the positive stereotypes these movies associate with whiteness, White characters only seem to help Black characters when helping is beneficial to them. Interest convergence, as it is portrayed in film, is another theme in the savior film racial project that seems to suggest to people of color that we are only worth helping if whites can get something from us. Essentially, Black characters are tools to help empower White supremacy, and films reinforce this.

In contrast to the White Savior, the Black Savior is often not very easy to find in a film. The term "Black Savior" is a term used in this study to encompass and redefine the Magical Negro trope. The portrayal of Black characters as Magical Negroes instead of Black Saviors, when they demonstrate the same traits as White Saviors, is a common theme in the cinematic racial projects that we are exposed to. This study also sought to

examine whether Magical Negroes could be considered Black Saviors, and they can be because of their similarities to White Saviors in other films. Despite this, Black Saviors are often treated differently than a White Savior.

As mentioned earlier, White Saviors are explicit and magnified to the point where audiences may know that the characters are indeed saviors. However, Black Saviors are often minimized and subverted in films. Characters such as Lucius Fox, in *The Dark Knight* trilogy, and Hitch, in the movie *Hitch*, are all portrayed as saviors to their White counterparts who seek them out. Both Fox and Hitch assist White characters in ways that their White clients cannot help themselves. Fox helps Bruce Wayne become a superhero, while Hitch helps Albert Brenneman get into a relationship. Despite their obvious help, Fox and Hitch's efforts are reduced in meaning in favor of what White characters can do for themselves; this makes it hard to determine if these Black characters are really "saviors," but does make it clear that Blacks exhibit "saviorsim" in film. This connects Whiteness to self-efficacy while connecting Blackness to serving whites. These connections are what make finding and defining Black Saviors so difficult compared to White Saviors.

When a Black character is acknowledged for his work in helping whites, the credit for the work is given back to White characters, highlighting White self-determination, and weakening the Black character's role in saving. Thus, savior films, whether Black or White, are racist racial projects that privilege whiteness at the expense of Blackness, especially when Black character are made to feel obligated to help whites. This, then, creates a master-slave narrative in these films that demonstrate Blacks' liminal status in society.

Theoretical Implication

Racial formation theory suggests that the ways people form ideas about their race is a socio-historical process in which we form racial identities and that racial projects are the building blocks of this process (Omi and Winant 2015). According to Omi and Winant, any aspect of our society that involves race or race relations is a racial project. However, many theorists and sociologists who use the racial project framework do not often apply Omi and Winant's theory to the content in popular films. Theorists who study race and culture have examined racism as a racial project instead of films as racial projects (Vera and Gordon 2003; Omi and Winant 2015). Other researchers have opted to study films in society as cultural objects instead of racial projects, and cultural theorists have analyzed film as symbolic elements of culture shaped by the institutions through which they are created, but not explicitly as racial projects (Hughey 2009).

This study attempts to bridge the gap between the aforementioned modes of thought about racial projects and popular culture, and offers a different perspective to the study of cultural artifacts that involve race. This study attempts to frame aspects of popular culture as racial projects that may need to be examined in the future in an effort to understand the lesser-known ways in which racism is perpetuated. Results from this study have shown that movies are racist racial projects that strengthen White privilege and, because of that, these films are the nests in which racism is birthed and nurtured, making them key aspects of culture to examine when trying to understand the current state and evolution of the racial milieu in which we interact with each other.

Recommendation for Future Research

This study provides a theoretical view of films as building blocks in the racial

formation process. Future research would need to examine whether movies really do affect people in how they come to understand race and racism. In other words, future research would need to systematically test and examine how people symbolically interact with cinema. What does it mean if one person finds a film racist while another person does not? How do people come to their conclusions about films, and what does that do for them as they develop their racialized sense of self?

Future research could also look into how saving differs between genres. This study does not discriminate between genres in its analysis. However, different film genres operate on different character conventions and thus the genre may skew the agency, presentation, or role of characters. Because different genres make use of different character and narrative tropes, the degree to which the film is a racist or anti-racist project may shift and reveal racial patterns inherent within film categories rather than films in general as this study does.

Finally, this study only examines the relationship between White and Black characters in contemporary films. Future studies could examine other race relations in film, and they may even examine films across time periods, which would introduce a litany of new films into the discourse on racial projects and provide more information on how racism manifests in cinema, providing researchers with information as to whether these films have had an effect on race relations upon their release. By looking at more films featuring differing race relations, researchers can gain a better understanding of how films are racial projects and the implication of those films on the gravity of race and racism in various communities of color.

Limitations of the study

The primary limitation of this study is that the observations, analyses, and detected themes in the chosen films were all filtered through my own personal experiences, social identities and understandings. Another researcher, whose identities and epistemology differs from mine, may find different themes and different analytic trajectories in these films that I may not find, which confines this study's analyses and findings to my own individual and subjective perceptions of racial tropes in film. While I do not believe that this subjectivity detracts from my findings, since this study aimed for transferable data as explained in the Methods section, I do believe that findings in a study like this are, in part, dependent upon the researcher and his or her own understanding and perceptions of racism(s), microaggressions, or other forms of racial (mis)representation in the media.

Conclusion

There are several films that deal with race and racial narratives. This is fairly common with savior film, thus, these films would count as racial projects. Often, these films reinforce White privilege, regardless of whether the savior is White or Black. It is important to pay attention to, and analyze, these films with a critical eye and scrutinize the characterizations and roles within them in order to understand the ways racism seeps into the collective conscious by way of entertainment. Films are neither harmless nor innocent, and must be critiqued at every stage of plot, character, and thematic development in order to catch and eradicate potential racist propaganda. Films can influence the ways in which people come to understand themselves, and others, in terms of their racial identity, and it is in that racial formation process that people make sense of racial reality. We must remain vigilant as we consume potentially racist cinema lest we

fall into the pitfalls of cliché racial oppression and racist one-dimensional thought. Where there is reel racism there are real consequences, and we must challenge that racism if we are to make progress toward racial equality.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Original Sample of Savior Films 2000-2014[1]

Genre[2]	Film[3]
Drama	*Finding Forrester (2000)*
	The Family Man (2000)
	Remember the Titans (2000)
	The Family Man (2000)
	Blood Diamond (2006)
	The Help (2009)
	Django Unchained (2012)
	Lincoln (2012)
	12 Years a Slave (2013)
Horror	*Final Destination (2000)*
Comedy	*Bruce Almighty (2003)*
	Bringing Down the House (2003)
	Hitch (2005)
	Evan Almighty (2007)
	Sex and the City (2008)
Superhero	*Batman Begins (2005)*
	Batman: The Dark Knight (2008)
	Batman: The Dark Knight Rises (2010)

1. Sample size, n = 18.
2. Excluded genres include: animated film and science-fiction.
3. All films contain a White or Black Savior narrative . Each film is a feature film (90 – 210 minutes in length), grossed at least 100 million dollars in box office revenue and/or received prestigious awards awards or recognition.

Appendix B

Table 2. Randomly Selected Sample of of Savior Films 2000 – 2014[1]	
Genre[2]	*Film[3]*
Drama	*The Help (2009)* *Django Unchained (2012)* *Lincoln (2012)* *12 Years a Slave (2013)*
Comedy	*Bruce Almighty (2003)* *Hitch (2005)* *Sex and the City (2008)*
Superhero	*Batman Begins (2005)* *Batman: The Dark Knight (2008)*

1. Sample size, n = 9.
2. Excluded genres include: animated film and science-fiction
3. All films contain a White or Black Savior narrative . Each film is a feature film (90 – 210 minutes in length), grossed at least 100 million dollars in box office revenue and/or received prestigious awards awards or recognition.

Appendix C

WhiteSavior Films (1ˢᵗ Version)

Case #: ____ **Film Title:** _____ **Genre:** _____

N (number of characters): ____ **N White:** ____ **N Black:** ____

Savior (name): _____ **Gender: M   F** **Race: W   B**

Savior Occupation: _____

Person Being Saved (name): _____ **Gender: M   F** **Race: W   B**

Person Being Saved (name): _____ **Gender: M   F** **Race: W   B**

Person Being Saved (name): _____ **Gender: M   F** **Race: W   B**

The film examined the people being saved's status in which of the following major social institutions:

1___Housing   2___Education   3___Family   4___Work   5___H&M   6___Gov't

7___Religion

8___Media   9___Sports   10___Science&Tech   11___No social institutions examined

12___Military   13___Legal/CJ

What "social problems" were associated with the racial minorities being saved:

1___Devaluation of neighborhood/properties 2___Rising crime rates 3___Moral decline

4___Unemployment/underemployment 5___Failure of public ed. System 6___None

7 Other:_____

What general method does the savior use to help:

1___inspire 2____coaching/athletics 3___teach 4____tough love 5____finances

6____money 7___magic/powers 8____wisdom/life lessons 9_____legal 10___Other

In what way does the film address whiteness or White as a racial group?

1___Life chances/status 2___White priv/power 3___Symbolic ethnicity 4___White

ethnic inequality 5___White ethnic "assim" 6___Victimization 7___Numeric minority

8___Supremacy (hate) 9___Meaning of "whiteness" diverse society

10___"Encountering" POC 11___White intolerance 12___Becoming conscious

13___Life in a White"bubble"/world 14___No whites 15___White hero

16___conscious&meaning

In what way does the film address Blackness or Black as a racial group?

1 ____threatening 2_____deviant 3_____lost cause 4_____"ghetto" 5_____inferior

(generally)

6____uncultured 7_____exotic 8_____urban 9_____low-class 10_____Out-group

11____Victim

12_____Racist 13____Life chances/status 14 Other:_____

How is person/group being saved?

What is the motive behind the savior's intention to save?

How specifically does savior attempt to solve problems?

Black Savior Films (1st Version)

Case #: _____ **Film Title:** _____ **Genre:** _____

N (number of characters): _____ **N White:** _____ **N Black:** _____

Savior (name): _____ **Gender: M   F** **Race: W   B**

Savior Occupation: _____

Person Being Saved (name): _____ **Gender: M   F** **Race: W   B**

Person Being Saved (name): _____ **Gender: M   F** **Race: W   B**

Person Being Saved (name): _____ **Gender: M   F** **Race: W   B**

The film examined the people being saved's status in which of the following major social institutions:

1___Housing   2___Education   3___Family   4___Work   5___H&M   6___Gov't

7___Religion

8___Media   9___Sports   10___Science&Tech   11___No social institutions examined

12___Military   13___Legal/CJ

What "social problems" were associated with the characters being saved:

1___Devaluation of neighborhood/properties 2___Rising crime rates 3___Moral decline

4___Unemployment/underemployment 5___Failure of public ed. System 6___None

7 Other: _____

What general method does the savior use to help:

1___inspire 2____coaching/athletics 3___teach 4____tough love 5____finances

6____money 7___magic/powers 8____wisdom/life lessons 9_____legal 10___Other

In what way does the film address whiteness or White as a racial group?

1___Life chances/status 2___Whitepriv/power 3___Symbolic ethnicity 4___Whiteethnic

inequality 5___Whiteethnic "assim" 6___Victimization 7___Numeric minority

8___Supremacy (hate) 9___Meaning of "whiteness" diverse society

10___"Encountering" POC 11___Whiteintolerance 12___Becoming conscious

13___Life in a White"bubble"/world 14___No whites 15___Whitehero

16___conscious&meaning

In what way does the film address Blackness or Black as a racial group?

1 ____threatening 2_____deviant 3_____lost cause 4_____"ghetto" 5_____inferior

(generally)

6____uncultured 7_____exotic 8_____urban 9_____low-class 10_____Out-group

11____Victim

12_____Racist 13____Life chances/status 14 Other:_____

How is person/group being saved?

What is the motive behind the savior's intention to save?

How specifically does savior attempt to solve problems?

Appendix E

White/Black Savior Film (2nd Version)

Case #:   **Film Title:**   **Genre:**

N (number of characters):____   **N White:____**   **N Black:_____**

Savior (name):   **Gender: M   F**   **Race: W   B**

Savior Occupation:

Person Being Saved (name):   **Gender: M   F**   **Race: W   B**

Person Being Saved (name):_____ **Gender: M   F**   **Race: W   B**

Person Being Saved (name):_____ **Gender: M   F**   **Race: W   B**

The film examined the people being saved's status in which of the following major social institutions:

1___Housing   2___Education   3___Family   4___Work   5___Gov't   6___Religion

7___Media   8___Sports   9___Science&Tech   10___No social institutions examined

11___Military   12___Legal/CJ

What "social problems" were associated with the characters being saved:

1___Devaluation of neighborhood/properties 2___Rising crime rates 3___Moral decline

4___Unemployment/underemployment 5___Failure of public ed. System 6___None

7 Other: Slavery/oppression

What general method does the savior use to help:

1___inspire   2____coaching/athletics 3___teach 4____tough love 5____finances

6____money 7___magic/powers 8____wisdom/life lessons 9_____legal 10___Other

In what way does the film address whiteness or White as a racial group?

1___Life chances/status 2___White priv/power 3___Symbolic ethnicity 4___White

ethnic inequality 5___White ethnic "assim" 6___Victimization 7___Numeric minority

8___Supremacy (hate) 9___Meaning of "whiteness" diverse society

10___"Encountering" POC 11___White intolerance 12___Becoming conscious

13___Life in a White"bubble"/world 14___No whites 15____Other 16___Does not

address race

In what way does the film address Blackness or Black as a racial group?

1 ____threatening 2_____deviant 3_____lost cause 4_____"ghetto" 5_____inferior

(generally)

6____uncultured 7_____exotic 8_____urban 9_____low-class 10_____Out-group

11____Victim

12_____Racist 13____Life chances/status 14 Other:_____

15___Does not address race

1. How is person/group being saved?

2. What is the motive behind the savior's intention to save?

3. a. How is this motive presented—i.e., context, narrative, etc.?

3. b. Is this motive presented/explained in the film? If so, how is it narrated, how is it performed, and how is it received by others?

4. What points/events in the film initiate saving?

5. In what ways is saving negotiated?

6. Are there critical/significant turning points in the film that could impact (positively or negatively) saving? If so, what impact do they have?

How does savior interact with:
7 a. Other major characters across savior's own racial identity?

7 b. Other major (or minor) characters of the racial group among those being saved?

8. How are those being saved represented in the film?

9. Does this stay the same throughout the film? If so, how might we theorize (or conceptualize) this change/these changes?

10. How does the individual or group who are being saved respond to the savior?
11 a. What might these responses tell us about the savior?

11 b. What might these responses tell us about those being saved?

11 c. Are there any points in the film where "saving" is challenged—by those being

saved or by others? If so, how do these occur and how are these challenges

mitigated/what are the responses to these challenges?

11 d. What role(s) do those being saved play in the attempted resolutions (or attempts at saving)?

11 f. What does the film rely on in order to create a savior narrative (justification)?

1. How is person/group being saved?	
Protection from Harm	1. Ford cuts Platt down from tree (12) 2. Ford defends Platt's life in his home (12) 3. Platt acts like a slave (12) 4. Schultz keeps Django safe from harm so he can be used to find Brittle Bros (Django) 5. Fox creates antidote for hallucinogen (BB)
Legalese	1. Mr. Parker uses legal networks to make sure Platt walks away free (12)
Assistance	1. Bass sends Platt's letter to friends in North (12) 2. Schultz helps Django find and rescue Hilda (Django) 3. Hitch gives Albert advice on how to get Allegra (Hitch) 4. Fox runs W.E. and R&D for Bruce (DK) 5. Fox builds suits and gadgets for Bruce to use (BB; DK; DKR) 6. Fox helps Batman locate the Joker and fight his thugs (DK) 7. Fox helps Batman guide bomb around Gotham (DKR) 8. Fox creates antidote to help Bruce fight crime (BB)
Rescue	1. Mr. Parker comes to plantation to save Platt (12) 2. Schultz purchases Django from slave master (Django) 3. Django rescues wife from Candieland (Django)

2. What is the motive behind the savior's intention to save?	
Altruism	1. Ford cared about Platt's life (12) 2. Bass empathizes with slaves (12) 3. Mr. Parker is friends with Platt (12)

	4. Schultz cares about Django's life (Django) 5. Hitch sees Albert as desperate for a date (Hitch) 6. Fox wants to improve Gotham City (BB; DK; DKR)
Interest convergence	1. Ford needed to settle a debt (12) 2. Schultz saves Django to find Brittle Bros. for money (Django) 3. Hitch helps men to boost his business' reputation and make money (Hitch)
Obligation	1. Bass feels responsible for letter (12) 2. Schultz feels responsible for Django's freedom (Django) 3. Hitch feels a sense of obligation to help men get dates (Hitch) 4. Fox feels obligated to help Bruce b/c of past with Bruce's father (BB; DK; DKR)
Morals	1. Bass morally opposes slavery (12)
Love	1. Django loves Hilda (Django)
Survival	1. Platt maintains a low-profile to survive (12)

3. How is this motive presented (context, narrative, etc)?	
Explanation	1. Ford explains why he saves Platt's life in his home (12) 2. Bass explains the risk involved with helping slaves (12) 3. Platt explains to Bass that he's a free man (12) 4. Schultz explains why he saved Django in a bar (Django) 5. Django explains that he loves his wife (Django) 6. Hitch explains to Vance what kinds of people he helps (Hitch) 7. Fox explains why he's willing to help Bruce (BB; DK; DKR)
Show of Force/Authority	1. Ford uses a shotgun to protect

	Platt (12) 2. Mr. Parker rescues Platt in the presence of a sheriff (12)
Storytelling	1. Platt tells Bass his story about how he became a slave (12) 2. Schultz tells Django legend of Brumhilda and Siegfried (Django) 3. Hitch tells story about being cheated on by Cassida Baylor (Hitch)
Argument	1. Platt argues with Eliza about survival (12) 2. Ford argues with Platt about Platt being free (12) 3. Hitch argues with Sara and Casey about why helps men with women (Hitch) 4. Fox argues with Batman about his unethical use of technology (DK)

4. Is this motive presented in the film? If so, how is it narrated, performed, and received by others?	
Explanation	1. Ford explains why he saves Platt's life in his home. Platt is nervous about the situation. (12) 2. Bass explains the risk involved with helping slaves. Platt is grateful for his help. (12) 3. Platt explains to Bass that he's a free man. Bass is grateful for Platt's story. (12) 4. Schultz explains why he saved Django in a bar. Django is distrustful of Schultz (Django) 5. Django explains that he loves his wife. Schultz is willing to help him. (Django) 6. Hitch explains to Vance what kinds of people he helps. Vance is angered by this. (Hitch) 7. Fox explains why he's willing to help Bruce. Bruce is grateful. (DK)
Storytelling	1. Platt tells Bass his story about how he became a slave. Bass shows

	compassion for Platt. (12) 2. Schultz tells Django legend of Brumhilda and Siegfried. Django is inspired by this. (Django) 3. Hitch tells story about being cheated on by Cassida Baylor (Hitch)
Argument	1. Platt argues with Eliza about survival. Eliza's sadness increases (12) 2. Ford argues with Platt about Platt being free. Platt is desperate to convince Ford of his freedom (12) 3. Hitch argues with Sara and Casey about why helps men with women. Sara and Casey are angered by this. (Hitch) 4. Fox argues with Batman about his unethical use of technology. Batman is grateful for Fox's help (DK)

5. How specifically does savior attempt to save?	
Protection from Harm	1. Ford cuts Platt down from tree (12) 2. Ford defends Platt's life in his home (12) 3. Platt acts like a slave (12) 4. Schultz keeps Django safe from harm so he can be used to find Brittle Bros (Django)
Legalese	1. Mr. Parker uses legal networks to make sure Platt walks away free (12)
Assistance	1. Bass sends Platt's letter to friends in North (12) 2. Schultz helps Django find and rescue Hilda (Django) 3. Hitch gives Albert advice on how to get Allegra (Hitch) 4. Fox runs W.E. and R&D for Bruce (DK) 5. Fox builds suits and gadgets for Bruce to use (DK) 6. Fox helps Batman locate the Joker

	and fight his thugs (DK)
Rescue	1. Mr. Parker comes to plantation to save Platt (12) 2. Schultz purchases Django from slave master (Django) 3. Django rescues wife from Candieland (Django)

6. What points/events in the film initiate saving?	
Protection from Harm	1. Ford cuts Platt down from tree (12) 2. Ford defends Platt's life in his home (12) 3. Platt acts like a slave (12) 4. Schultz keeps Django safe from harm so he can be used to find Brittle Bros (Django)
Rescue	1. Mr. Parker comes to plantation to save Platt (12) 2. Schultz purchases Django from slave master (Django) 3. Django rescues wife from Candieland (Django)
Assistance	1. Bass sends Platt's letter to friends in North (12) 2. Schultz helps Django find and rescue Hilda (Django) 3. Hitch gives Albert advice on how to get Allegra (Hitch) 4. Fox runs W.E. and R&D for Bruce (DK) 5. Fox builds suits and gadgets for Bruce to use (DK) 6. Fox helps Batman locate the Joker and fight his thugs (DK)

7. In what ways is saving negotiated?	
Directly	1. Ford tells Platt directly why he is saving his life and protecting him from harm and what that means for Platt's future as a slave (12) 2. Bass tells Platt directly that he will help him and what that means

	for Platt as a slave (12) 3. The sheriff tells Platt he will only leave the plantation if he can answer questions about his life as a free man (12) 4. Schultz tells Django that he saved him only because he needs Django's help and will set him free if he helps (Django) 5. Hitch tells one of his clients that he only saves people if they respect women and want long-term relationships with women (Hitch) 6. Fox will only help Bruce if he is honest about what he is doing with the gadgets (BB)
Indirectly	1. Platt saves himself indirectly by being as "slave-like" as possible in order to survive (12)

8. Are there critical/significant turning points in the film that could impact saving? What impact do they have?	
Violence/Threats of Violence	1. Tibeats threatens and physically assaults Platt, encouraging intervention from Ford (12) 2. Platt maintains a low profile as a slave in order to live (12) 3. Fox helps Bruce become Batman once he realizes Batman may be killed saving Gotham (BB; DKR) 4. Django is forced to surrender of Hilda dies (Django)
Request for Help	1. Bass sends Platt's letter upon request, which prompts Mr. Parker's assistance (12) 2. Albert asks Hitch to help him get Allegra (Hitch) 3. Bruce asks for Fox's help (BB; DK; DKR)
Teaching	1. Schultz teaches Django how to shoot a gun, allowing Django to ultimately save his wife (Django) 2. Fox teaches Bruce how to use the gadgets he creates for him (BB; DK;

	DKR) 3. Hitch teaches his clients how to succeed on dates (Hitch)
Revealing/Threat of Revealing	1. Hitch is revealed as a chauvinist, hindering his abilities (Hitch) 2. Fox protects Bruce's ID as Batman from a Blackmail attempt (DK)
Near-Death Experience	1. Platt is almost hanged to death by Tibeats, prompting help from Ford (12) 2. Batman almost dies from poisoning from a hallucinogen prompting Fox to develop an antidote (BB)

9. How does savior interact with own racial identity?	
Disagreement	1. Ford disagrees with how Tibeats treats slaves (12) 2. Bass disagrees with Epps' on issues of slavery (12) 3. Parker dislikes Epps' treatment of his friend Platt (12) 4. Schultz disagrees with slavery and actively hunts slave masters for bounties (Django) 5. Platt disagrees with Eliza's constant crying for her children (12) 6. Platt disagrees with Patsy's plan for him to kill her because of the risk involve (12) 7. Django has to pretend to be a slaver in order to maintain his cover in Candieland, so he has to pretend to hate Black people and interacts with them with that hatred (Django)
Acquaintance/Co-Worker	1. Ford works with Tibeats despite their disagreement (12) 2. Bass still works with Epps despite their disagreement (12) 3. Schultz sets up phony business deals and partnerships with Whiteslave owners to infiltrate their

	homes (Django) 4. Platt works with other slaves as if they were his co-workers (12)
Loving	1. Django interacts with his wife with love (Django) 2. Hitch loved Cassida Baylor, but she cheated on him (Hitch)

10. How does savior interact with characters of the racial group being saved?	
As Superior	1. Ford is a slave master and is thus the superior to his slaves (12) 2. Platt believes he is too good, skilled, and educated to be a slave and does not deserve to be one especially since he was a free man once (12) 3. Schultz believes he can use Django's slave status to his benefit as a Whiteman (Django) 4. Django has to pretend to be a Black slaver, so he pretends to be superior to slaves (Django) 5. Hitch believes the guys he saves wouldn't have a chance with women without his help and expertise (Hitch)
As Inferior	1. Fox loses his lofty position in W.E. and reacts to several Whitemembers of W.E. as his superior (BB)
As Helper/Benefactor	1. Ford helps Platt by protecting him from harm (12) 2. Bass sees himself as equal to slaves since slaves are no different from Blacks. He helps Platt (12) 3. Parker helps set Platt free from slavery (12) 4. Schultz offers to help Django because he feels responsible for his life (Django) 5. Django saves his wife b/c/ he loves her (Django) 6. Hitch providing a helpful service to his clients and has positive

	relations with them (Hitch)
	7. Fox helps Bruce/Batman be an efficient and effective superhero through constant communication (BB; DK; DKR)
	8. Platt has a positive relationship with Patsy b/c she sees him as something special (12)

11. How are those being saved represented in the film?	
Desperate	1. Throughout film, Platt desperately tries to convince White people that he is a free man (12)
	2. Albert describes himself as "desperate" for Hitch's help (Hitch)
Intelligent	1. Platt is referred to as "exceptional" and is recognized for his intellect by characters (12)
	2. Django is smart enough to persuade people of his status as a Black slaver and rigs Candieland to explode (Django)
	3. Bruce Wayne demonstrates high intellect as a superhero (BB; DK; DKR)
	4. Albert is book-smart (Hitch)
Victimized/Abused	1. Platt is abused and exploited as a slave (12)
	2. Django is abused and exploited as a slave (Django)
	3. Hilda is abused and exploited as a slave (Django)
Frightened	1. Platt is constantly stressed and afraid for his life (12)
	2. Hilda is constantly stressed and afraid for her life (Django)
Professional	1. Platt is a professional musician (12)
	2. Bruce is the heir to a professional enterprise (BB; DK; DKR)
	3. Django pretends to be a professional slaver, mandingo fight expert, and Schultz's business partner (Django)

	4. Albert is a professional accountant for a company (Hitch)

12. Does this representation remain constant in the film? How might we theorize this?	
Whiteapproval	1. Yes. Platt has to seek out White privilege and approval in order to get his letter sent to Mr. Parker (12) 2. No. Django receives Schultz's approval, which leads to Django being trained to be a bounty hunter (Django) 3. No. Django has to pretend to be a Black slaver in order to get Candie's approval for a business deal for Hilda (Django)
Forced Assimilation	1. Yes. Platt is forced to be a slave and learn slave custom (12)
Acting White	1. No. Django has to pretend to be a Black slaver in order to rescue his wife; slaving is largely a White enterprise (Django)
Black Best Friend	1. No. Albert does not stay the same; he is better at wooing Allegra all because of Hitch, whom he interacts with as a friend or advisor in times of need (Hitch) 2. Yes. Bruce and Fox have a strong friendship that is created through Bruce's need for gadgetry and advice from Fox (BB; DK; DKR) 3. No. Schultz interacts with Django as a friend, which causes Schultz to want to train Django so he can help Schultz with bounty hunting (Django)

13. How does individual or group being saved respond to savior?	
Grateful	1. Platt is grateful for Ford's assistance (12) 2. Platt is really grateful for Bass' help 3. Platt is overjoyed to see Parker

	coming to rescuing him from Epps (12) 4. Albert is happy for Hitch's help, initially (Hitch)
Non-specific Response	1. Django does not give an overt response to Schultz for his help (Django) 2.Albert does not really thank Hitch, other than by inviting him to his wedding, but the response is not overt at the end of the film (Hitch) 3. Bruce does not openly thank Fox, but he does restore Fox's position as a board member of WE (BB; DK; DKR)

14. What might these responses tell us about the savior?	
Expected Assistance Savior	1. Fox (a Black man) is expected to assist Bruce Wayne without any expectation of reward (BB; DK; DKR) 2. Because Hitch was a professional, his help is expected b/c he was being paid for the help (Hitch)
Should be Grateful Savior	1. Because Ford had power over Platt, Platt was surprised that Ford helped him and was very grateful for it. Platt goes through this with every White person he approaches for help, and the White characters act as if they're doing him a favor. Platt offered them money for their help (12) 2. Parker saved Platt from the plantation but made it known that it took a long time to reach Platt (12)
Altruistic Savior	1. Ford saves Platt's life (12) 2. Bass offers to help Platt out of kindness (12) 3. Parker helped Platt b/c they were friends (12) 4. Schultz demonstrates a sense of altruism in his intentions to help Django (Django)

	5. Fox helps Bruce b/c he believes in Bruce's mission and wants to help out of friendship, obligation (BB; DK; DKR)
Determined Savior	1. Platt seeks to save himself by maintaining a low-profile long enough to find a way out of slavery (12) 2. Django is determined throughout the film to rescue his wife (Django)

15. What might those responses tell us about those being saved?	
Subordinate	1. Platt is shown to be subordinate to whites throughout the entire film (12) 2. Django has to be subordinate to Schultz in order to get closer to his goal of being free and rescuing his wife (Django) 3. Hilda is shown to be a house slave, a servant to Candie, and must maintain that role (Django) 4. Fox is kept hidden away by Earle in BB b/c he was a "problem" for the company. His agency within the company are stifled by whites (BB) 5. Albert takes orders from Hitch on how to get a date, putting him a subordinate/inferior position to Hitch, but only until he gets his date, during which Albert begins to put Hitch in a subordinate position by making Hitch's help an obligation (Hitch)
Reliant on White	1. Platt, in many ways, has to rely on White people to help him make progress for his freedom (12) 2. Django's life is in Schultz's hands, and he relies on Schultz's training to help him achieve his goals (Django)
Reliant on Self	1. Platt has to be self-determined and level-headed in order to get out of slavery alive. He relies on his intellect to help him live (12)

	2. Once Schultz dies, Django must rely on his own skills, learned from Schultz, in order to achieve his goals (Django) 3. Hitch relies on himself to develop his professional skills and get into a relationship (Hitch) 4. Bruce is largely self-reliant and achieves his goals through much of his own hard work (BB; DK; DKR) 5. Albert begins to rely on himself after he gets his date with Allegra, and he continues to want help from Hitch when his relationship falls apart, putting Hitch in a subordinate position (Hitch)

16. Are there any points in the film where saving is challenged? What are the responses to challenges?	
Institutional Challenge	1. Ford saves Platt's life and tells him that he will be sold to another slave master as form of protection and debt settlement, but Platt challenges the flaws of the institution of slavery by desperately telling Ford that he's a free man (12)
Moral/Ethical Challenge	1. Platt refuses to kill Patsy (another slave), which would be saving her from suffering, because it's unethical and potentially very dangerous (12) 2. Fox challenges Batman's attempt at saving Gotham using unethical surveillance technology (DK) 3. Albert realizes that Hitch does not practice what he preaches in terms of finding love and finds that unethical to sell a product Hitch doesn't even believe in (Hitch)
Legal Challenge	1. Epps challenges Parker and the sheriff, when they come to rescue Platt, by calling their actions illegal and trespassing (12)

17. What role do those being saved play in the attempted resolutions/attempts at saving?	
Exceptionalism	1. Ford recognizes Platt as "exceptional," gifted, and intelligent, prompting him to want to help Platt (12) 2. Schultz recognizes that Django is special, prompting Schultz to want to train him and use him as a business partner (Django) 3. Candie sees Django as "exceptional" b/c he's a slaver instead of a slave, prompting their business deal for Hilda's purchase (Django)
Theatrics	1. Django has to play only with Schultz's theatrical propositions to slave masters in order to achieve his goals; without the participation, Django would have still been enslaved (Django) 2. Albert plays along with Hitch's elaborate plans to get people in relationships, which usually involve theatrical or over-the-top behavior at social events (Hitch)
Inspiration	1. Albert uplifts Hitch by calling out his disconnection between his worldview and his mission statement, and how Hitch's emotions are hurting Hitch's ability to help the people he cares about. This inspires Hitch to want to fight for love again (Hitch) 2. Bruce's mission to protect Gotham inspires Fox to want to help him become a superhero (BB; DK; DKR)
Heroics	1. Batman is a superhero who uses his successful heroism to achieve his goals, which makes Fox want to help him even more (BB; DK; DKR)

18. What does the film rely on in order to create a savior narrative?	
Horrors of Slavery	1. 12 Years creates a savior narrative using a slave narrative; slavery is terrifying and the slaves are desperate for escape (12) 2. Django, and his wife, are abused during slavery, and they are need of help (Django)
Interest Convergence	1. Schultz only saves Django b/c Django had information Schultz needed, without that info, Django would have never been saved. In exchange for the info, Django would be offered his freedom from slavery (Django) 2. Both Bruce and Fox wanted to save Gotham, Bruce could only protect the city if Fox helped, and Fox could protect the city if Bruce was the superhero (BB; DK; DKR)
Criminal Justice	1. Both Bruce and Fox want to improve criminal justice in Gotham through the use of technology and the use of Batman as a symbol for vigilante justice (BB; DK; DKR) 2. To save his wife, Django had to punish her slavers (Django)
Social Ineptitude	1. Albert is socially inept, which prompts Hitch to want to help him and men like him by setting them up on three dates that help them make good impressions (Hitch)

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