

# An analysis of the representation of ethnic minorities in training day and se7en

[Business](#)



Representation of ethnic minorities is a controversial issue. This study explores the representation of Denzel Washington in *Training Day* (2001) and Morgan Freeman in *Se7en* (1995). Although there have been many social developments and shifts in cultural hegemony, ethnic minorities are no longer restricted to the number of roles they play and ethnic minorities are not so explicitly stereotyped. The movie *Birth of a Nation* represented black people as 'savages' and in one scene a black man sexually assaults a white woman thus representing black people as if they are possessed by lust.

The movie glorifies white people and in this case the Klu Klux Klan. The movie stereotypically represents black politicians and shows them devouring chicken and ogling white women once the inter-racial law was passed. Black characters didn't seem to be allowed to deliver a self fulfilling performance and were instead placed into one of five preset characters. These characters were the 'House Nigger' who is a black person who does their best to please white people even if that means disowning their own racial identity or 'the Coon' who is someone who stereotypically represents black people i. e.

conforms to generalisations of black people. Furthermore, other preset characters include 'The Mammie' which is a black woman who is from the southern United States who worked as a nanny for a white family she is generally trusted and held in a higher regard compared to other black people. 'The Tragic Mulatto' is a preset mixed race character that is sad because they do not fit in to the 'white world' or the 'black world' and finally, there is 'Brutal Buck' who is an angry black man out to wreak havoc.

Examples of 'The House Nigger' can be seen in *Django Unchained* were <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-the-representation-of-ethnic-minorities-in-training-day-and-se7en/>

Samuel L Jackson plays ' Stephen' also it could be argued ' Jamie Foxx's' portrayal of ' Django' could be an example of a ' Brutal Buck' where he wants to seek revenge for his wife. An example of the ' Tragic Mulatto' could be Will Smith although he isn't mixed race he has a light skin tone.

Will Smith is a black actor who has been in to the ' White World' as well as the ' Black World'. Will Smith's character ' Steve Hiller' in the movie Independence Day was originally supposed to be a white male however Will Smith representation caused him to become popular among black people as well as white people. Blaxploitation emerged in the 1970s Rahner (2004) despite it's incendiary name, Blaxploitation genre was about empowerment'. One of the first films commonly identified, as Blaxploitation is Shaft where Richard Roundtree plays ' John Shaft'. The Blaxploitation genre generally consists of African American actors, urban settings, sex and action. Shaft was a movie where ' John Shaft' who is a private detective who has a series of run-ins with Harlem gangs and the mafia.

It can be argued movies such as Django Unchained are examples of Blaxploitation where there are similar characteristics. These characteristics include action, a black actor and the prevailing black character in the end. The ' Old Hollywood' days were around the 19th-20th century where racial tension was high and Hollywood avoided using black actors and would use white characters. The series ' Blackface' employed a white man ' Al Jolson' to portray a black character. The series was aimed to mock African people, however, over a period of time, the series began to decline because it was linked with racism as well as bigotry. Despite this, in 1964 the first black

actor Sidney Poitier won an Oscar for his performance in 'Lilies of the fields' and was not portrayed as one of the five preset characters.

He is a 'Jack of all trades' and helps a group of nuns. This was the beginning of the revolution for Africans within cinema. Although in the 'Old Hollywood,' black people were restricted to the roles they play e. g. 'Brutal Buck and the Coon' etc. In the middle of the twentieth century, the portrayal of black people in cinema shifted nonetheless there are still certain archetypes that remain in contemporary movies and television examples of this are Denzel Washington in Training Day.

Denzel Washington's performance in the film Training Day is the story of a rookie cop working with an unorthodox detective. One of the main narrative devices in Training Day is where the generic and stereotypical black drug dealer is being pursued by a white police officer Jake Hoyt. The introduction of Denzel Washington's character Alonzo Harris adds new themes to the text. The unorthodox character of Alonzo means he has been able to be a detective narcotics officer as well as maintaining relationships with drug dealers. It could be argued Denzel Washington was chosen for his stereotypical performance in the movie 'He Got Game' where he is a basketball player who has to go to college to get a shorter sentence because of his race Pedden (2011) "it is partly due to this anaerobic efficiency that gives the black athlete a slight edge.

The West African athlete also has a higher concentration of fast twitch muscles". However, Denzel Washington has been in critically acclaimed movies such as 'The Hurricane' and 'Glory' where he received an Academy

Award for ' Best Supporting Actor' for his portrayal of ' Private Trip.'When the audience are first introduced to Alonzo, he is wearing a bandana, multiple chains and a gun strap. It could therefore be argued Alonzo is dressed stereotypically as an African-American from an impoverished background. Denzin (2002) suggests " that the conventional narrative in the interracial buddy films, where two men of different races develop trust and friendship, can be read as an imaginary utopia in which racial differences do not matter and comedy inverts stereotypes to generate humour". Alonzo is initially presented as a ' coon' or a ' brutal buck'.

A coon being a stereotypically represented black man and brutal buck being a rebellious black man. As the film progresses, we see Alonzo's superiority and dominance over Jake. Alonzo may be a strong willed character however; it can be argued that he cannot escape the concept of ' White Hollywood'. We learn throughout the movie that Alonzo has four children but we only see one of those children and one mistress. With the child, it is evident Alonzo seems to have very little proximity in the relationship with his son. Other than a few lines of dialogue, this could be to do with the fact Alonzo is black he cannot enforce the ' father figure' role Jackson (2012) A number of black men don't have appropriate role models to look up to, speak to, and/or imitate.

Within a few minutes of being in Alonzo's house, his son is found sleeping next to Jake. This could suggest superiority of the white race where white people have the ability to father any child and thus, are more empathetic and have more emotion. This connotes the notion that a black man cannot

care for his child due to his priorities being money and power. In the final few scenes of the movie, Jake takes Alonzo's money and his badge stripping him of his place in society. Alonzo can no longer rule over people as he is now dethroned, the Russians then murder Alonzo and this symbolizes the triumph of the white man and the death of another 'nigger' maintaining the status quo that white people are the dominant race in society.

This complies with Yeagley's (2009) statement that the white race became the most powerful, dominant, ruling race may be attributed to cultural values more than anything else". The events of Jake Hoyt's day have destroyed the charismatic and dominating Detective Alonzo Harris by listening to his final speech. In the final speech of Alonzo Harris, we see a hybrid personality between the 'coon' and the 'brutal buck'. The 'coon' who is dim witted and the 'buck' who is irrational and out to cause havoc. These personalities are literally portrayed on Alonzo's face where he has 'blood, sweat and tears' on his face and acts like a 'cornered animal' he attempts to reclaim his 'alpha male' personality by roaring the famous quote 'King Kong ain't got shit on me". This links to Wade's (2014) idea that "Black people are perceived as animals with a backwards culture".

Morgan Freeman's portrayal of 'Somerset' in 'Se7en' is not of a stereotypical black male that is generally seen in movies throughout cinema. In the first scene of the movie we see 'Somerset' getting ready however he is dressed smartly and appropriately. As the scene continues we see that 'Somerset' is not the stereotypical black male as he is organised and independent. This is shown as 'Somerset' approaches his desk there is his

badge; knife, gun, pen and handkerchief are all in order. The introduction of 'Somerset' is not in any way stereotypical however in contrast Denzel Washington does conform to the stereotypical image of a 'ghetto' black man as he is dressed in a bandana, multiple chains and a gun strap which resembles a 'Gangster' appearance which has been adopted by working class black culture.

In addition to this Morgan Freeman does not conform to any of the five archetypes set out in early movies, which included black characters, whereas 'Alonzo' in 'Training Day' is initially represented as a 'Coon' or a 'Brutal Buck' Morgan Freeman's character 'Somerset' has no affiliation with such labels. The first scene we see 'Somerset' driving a car he is accompanied by Brad Pitt who plays the role of 'Mills' who is accompanying him to the autopsy room where they are going to do a post mortem on a recently deceased victim. The car 'Somerset' is driving is a stock, simple and basic Ford which we assume is his own personal vehicle this is a popular car within the working class community however in 'Training Day' detective 'Alonzo' drives a 1979 Chevrolet Monte Carlo Low-rider which is generally associated with black culture additionally in 'Se7en' Somerset sits silently in his car and only converses with Mills if Mills speaks whereas 'Alonzo' is more flamboyant in that he is hypersexual and he conforms to many typical stereotypes of black people such as listening to rap music (Dr Dre-Still Dre) and driving a 'Low-Rider' which is also commonly associated with gang culture and has been glamourized by many black music artists. Although 'Alonzo' is a narcotics officer and his duty is to uphold the law and remove illegal drugs from the 'streets' however he constantly breaks laws

throughout the movie such as speeding, smoking illegal drugs and attempted murder. This can be used as an example of working class black males being rebellious and deviant whereas 'Somerset' in 'Se7en' upholds the law and is reluctant to break any laws, this is represented in the final scene where he attempts to talk 'Mills' down and prevent him from killing 'John Doe'.

Conforming to rules and social laws is something which in black culture is negated and is not followed however Morgan Freemans character 'Somerset' is an example of a famous black actor who is not stereotypically represented in movies. Finally I conclude ethnic minorities are not fairly represented throughout Hollywood as the majority of films including ethnic minorities such as the Afro-Caribbean background are stereotypically represented. To justify this we just need to look at the large amount of black highly decorated artists playing stereotypical black characters, an example of this is Wesley Snipes in 'White men can't jump' where he is from Crenshaw, Los Angeles a poverty stricken area and loves to play basketball which is also a black stereotype. Stereotypes of the Afro-Caribbean community can be seen in an array of movies such as 'The Longest Yard' where Chris Rock plays the role of 'Caretaker' and 'Norbit' where Terry Crews plays 'Big Jack Latimore'.