

Stereotypes and Cinema

How Filmmakers Shape Your Views of Others

SECTION ONE

By [Nadra Kareem Nittle](#)

AFRICAN AMERICANS

African Americans may be scoring more substantial parts in film and television, but many continue to play roles that fuel [stereotypes](#), such as thugs and maids. The prevalence of these parts reveals the importance of #OscarsSoWhite and how African Americans continue to struggle for quality roles on both the small and big screens, despite having won [Academy Awards](#) in acting, screenwriting, music production and other categories.

The Magical Negro

"Magical Negro" characters have long played key roles in films and television programs. These characters tend to be African American men with special powers who make appearances solely to help white characters out of jams, seemingly unconcerned about their own lives.

The late Michael Clarke Duncan famously played such a character in "[The Green Mile](#)." [Moviefone](#) wrote of Duncan's character, John Coffey, "He's more an allegorical symbol than a person, his initials are J.C., he has miraculous [healing](#) powers, and he voluntarily submits to execution by the state as a way of doing penance for the sins of others. A 'Magical Negro' character is often the sign of lazy writing at best, or of patronizing cynicism at worst."

Magical Negroes are also problematic because they have no inner lives or desires of their own. Instead, they exist solely as a support system to the white characters, reinforcing the idea that African Americans aren't as valuable or as human as their white counterparts. They don't require unique storylines of their own because their lives just don't matter as much.

In addition to Duncan, Morgan Freeman has played in some such roles, and Will Smith played a Magical Negro in "[The Legend of Bagger Vance](#)."

The Black Best Friend

Black best friends typically don't have special powers like Magical Negroes do, but they mainly function in films and television shows to guide white characters out of a crisis. Usually, female,

the black [best friend](#) functions "to support the heroine, often with sass, attitude and a keen insight into relationships and life," critic Greg Braxton noted in the [Los Angeles Times](#).

Like Magical Negroes, black best friends appear not to have much going on in their own lives but turn up at exactly the right moment to coach white characters through life. In the film "[The Devil Wears Prada](#)," for example, actress Tracie Thoms plays friend to star [Anne Hathaway](#), reminding Hathaway's character that she's losing touch with her values. Also, actress Aisha Tyler played

17 black stereotypes I'm never surprised to see on screen

By [Samantha Antrum](#)

I'm never surprised when I see stereotypes pop up in television and movies. Though they are disturbing representations that affect how our race is perceived, I'm usually not shocked when they show up. For someone like myself, [who's obsessed with screen media and the impact it has on our beliefs and attitudes](#), understanding the historical presence of stereotypes often explains the modern stereotypes that continue to appear in movies and television.

Here are the historical and modern stereotypes and images I'm often disappointed, but never *shocked*, to see:

The tom: The 'acceptable' black man. Always faithful, submissive and obedient to the white master. Examples include James B. Lowe's character Uncle Tom of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or the token black friend in every show and movie ever.

The coon: The generally ridiculous black man. Considered to be foolish or a buffoon with no sexual appeal. Examples include Buckwheat of *The Little Rascals*.

The mulatto: Also known as the tragic Mulatto, this woman or girl is biracial — black and white. She's often portrayed as hyper-sexual and meets a very dramatic downfall because her life is ruined by her black blood. Examples include Fredi Washington's character Peola in *Imitation of Life* or Lena Home's character in *Cabin in the Sky*.

The mammy: Typically big, black and fat, the mammy is considered to be the female version of the coon. She is completely non-sexual. She often appears wearing dowdy clothing and looking generally unattractive. Examples include Hattie McDaniel's character in *Gone With the Wind* or Tyler Perry as Madea. Photo: TheWrap Photo: TheWrap

The buck: The big, scary black man who is so sexual he cannot contain himself. Examples include the black character in *The Birth of a Nation* who rapes the white woman.

The nerd: This type is awkward and silly but has a big heart. They are always chasing after girls who won't give them the time of day. Examples include [Carlton in The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air](#), Urkel in *Family Matters* or more recently, [Junior in Black-ish](#).

The sassy black friend: They keep it real for their white friends and they are often presented as being strong and independent, so much so that they don't need love. Examples include Amber Riley's character Mercedes in *Glee* or [Titus in Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt](#).

The angry black woman: This stereotype plagues all black women no matter where they go. This character is mad all the time and no one seems to know why — despite all the racism, misogyny and oppression that exist as perfectly good reasons for being mad. Examples include Bailey in *Grey's Anatomy* and the entirety of *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*.

The thug: The black guy who's doing drugs, selling drugs or is in a gang. He's extremely violent and has no problem killing anyone who gets in his way. Examples include Priest in *Superfly* or Doughboy from *Boyz n the Hood*.

The ghetto black woman: Loud and brash, this character has sass for days. Don't mistake her for the sassy black friend! Though they are similar, the ghetto black woman is not considered to be acceptable where the sassy black friend is. People are often afraid of the ghetto black woman. Examples include Tasha from *The Game*.

The black horror movie token: They're in the movie for about five minutes before they're killed off. Think of any horror movie ever for an example.

The drug addict: All you see is that character doing drugs or trying to get drugs. Think of Samuel L. Jackson's characters in *Jungle Fever* or *School Daze*.

The white wife: She's shown up so often that she's become her own type. She's supportive and faithful to her husband, so much so that it becomes her character flaw. She's also extremely sexual. Examples include Kelly in *The Game* or Rhonda Lyon in *Empire*.

The bummy black dude: This guy is always mooching off of someone. He's living in his mama or his baby mama's house. He won't get a job, but thinks he deserves to be treated like a king. Think of Jody and Jody's friend in the movie *Baby Boy*.

The church woman: She's always talking about Jesus, even when Jesus might not be all that relevant. Think of Jenifer Lewis' character Ruby in *Black-ish*.

The thot: Also known as the hoe or the side chick. No one respects her, but everyone runs through her. She might want to be the main b*tch, but it will never happen. She actually has feelings, but you wouldn't know it because nobody ever cares about her feelings. She doesn't get a backstory — she often doesn't even get a name! Examples include Mary Jane at the beginning of *Being Mary Jane* and all the female characters in the movie *Blame It on the Streets*.

The unfriendly black hottie: Also known simply as "the b*tch," the term was coined by the movie *Mean Girls* but has been a type for a while. She's mean, selfish and maybe a little angry. Examples include Toni from *Girlfriends* or Robin Givens in basically every role she's done. Photo: BET Photo: BET Stereotypes in media are a special form of ignorance and bigotry. But the images are often so subtle, people don't even realize they're stereotypes. As we see more black folks become big players in the entertainment industry, we're sure to have more complex, engaging and non-stereotypical characters...and I think we're all pretty dam excited to see that happen.

SOURCE: <https://blavity.com/17-black-stereotypes-im-never-surprised-to-see-on-screen>

friend to Jennifer Love Hewitt on "The Ghost Whisperer," and Lisa Nicole Carson played friend to Calista Flockhart on "Ally McBeal."

Television executive Rose Catherine Pinkney told the Times that there is a long tradition of black best friends in Hollywood. "Historically, people of color have had to play nurturing, rational caretakers of the white lead characters. And studios are just not willing to reverse that role."

The Thug

There's no shortage of black male actors playing drug dealers, pimps, con-artists and other forms of criminals in television shows and films such as "[The Wire](#)" and "[Training Day](#)." The disproportionate amount of African Americans playing criminals in Hollywood fuels the racial stereotype that black men are dangerous and drawn to illicit activities. Often these films and television shows provide little social context for why more black men than others are likely to end up in the criminal justice system.

They overlook how racial and economic injustice makes it more difficult for young black men to evade a prison term or how policies such as stop-and-frisk and [racial profiling](#) make black men targets of the authorities. They fail to ask whether black men are inherently more likely to be criminals than anyone else or if society plays a role in creating the cradle-to-prison pipeline for African American men.

The Brash Woman

Black women are routinely portrayed in television and film as sassy, neck-rolling harpies with major attitude problems. The popularity of reality television shows adds fuel to the fire of this stereotype. To ensure that programs such as "Basketball Wives" maintain plenty of drama, often the loudest and most aggressive black women are featured on these shows.

Black women say these depictions have real-world consequences in their love lives and careers. When Bravo debuted the reality show "Married to Medicine" in 2013, black female physicians unsuccessfully [petitioned](#) the network to pull the plug on the program.

"For the sake of integrity and character of black female physicians, we must ask that Bravo immediately remove and cancel 'Married to Medicine' from its channel, website, and any other media," the physicians demanded. "Black female physicians only compose 1 percent of the American workforce of physicians. Due to our small numbers, the depiction of black female doctors in media, on any scale, highly affects the public's view of the character of all future and current African American female doctors."

The show ultimately aired and black women continue to complain that depictions of African American womanhood in the media fail to live up to reality.

The Domestic

Because blacks were forced into servitude for hundreds of years in the United States, it's no surprise that one of the earliest stereotypes about African Americans to emerge in television and film is that of the domestic worker or mammy. Television shows and movies such as "[Beulah](#)" and "[Gone With The Wind](#)" capitalized on the mammy stereotype in the early 20th century. But more recently, movies such as "[Driving Miss Daisy](#)" and "[The Help](#)" featured African Americans as domestics as well.

While [Latinos](#) are arguably the group most likely to be typecast as domestic workers nowadays, the controversy over the portrayal of black domestics in Hollywood hasn't gone away. The 2011 film "The Help" faced intense criticism because the black maids helped catapult the white protagonist to a new stage in life while their lives remained static. Like the Magical Negro and the black best friend, black domestics in film function mostly to nurture and guide white characters.

SOURCE: <https://www.thoughtco.com/common-black-stereotypes-in-tv-film-2834653>

NATIVE AMERICANS

The remake of "The Lone Ranger," featuring Native American sidekick Tonto (Johnny Depp), [renewed concerns](#) about whether the media promotes stereotypical images of Native Americans. In film and television, [American Indians](#) have long been portrayed as people of few words with magical powers.

Often the [Indians in Hollywood](#) are dressed as "warriors," which perpetuates the notion that Natives are savages. On the other hand, Native American women are depicted as beautiful maidens sexually available to white men. Collectively, the [stereotypical images](#) of American Indians in Hollywood continue to influence public perception about this racial group.

Beautiful Maidens

While the media often portrays Native American men as warriors and medicine men, their female counterparts are typically portrayed as beautiful Indian maidens. There is the maiden on the cover of Land O' Lakes butter products, Hollywood's various representations of "[Pocahontas](#)" and Gwen Stefani's controversial portrayal of an Indian princess for No Doubt's 2012 music video for "[Looking Hot](#)."

Native American author [Sherman Alexie tweeted](#) that with the video No Doubt turned "500 years of colonialism into a silly dance song and fashion show."

Representations of Native American women as “easy squaws” have real-world consequences. American Indian women suffer from high rates of sexual assaults, often perpetrated by non-Native men.

According to the book [Feminisms and Womanisms: A Women's Studies Reader](#), American Indian girls are also often subjected to derogatory sexual comments.

“Whether princess or squaw, Native femininity is sexualized,” writes Kim Anderson in the book. “This understanding finds its way into our lives and our communities. Sometimes, it means constantly having to fend off the advances of people with an appetite for the ‘Other.’ It may involve a continual struggle to resist crass, sexualized interpretations of one’s being...”

Stoic Indians

Unsmiling Indians who speak few words can be found in classical cinema as well as in cinema of the 21st century. This representation of Native Americans paints them as a one-dimensional people who lack the full range of emotions that other groups display.

Adrienne Keene of the Native Appropriations blog says that portrayals of indigenous peoples as stoic can largely be traced to the pictures of Edward Curtis, who photographed American Indians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

“The common theme throughout Edward Curtis’s portraits is stoicism,” [Keene explains](#). “None of his subjects smile. Ever. ...To anyone who has spent any time with Indians, you know that the ‘stoic Indian’ stereotype couldn’t be further from the truth. Natives joke, tease, and laugh more than anyone I know—I often leave Native events with my sides hurting from laughing so much.”

Magical Medicine Men

Like the [“Magical Negro,”](#) Native American males are often portrayed as wise men with magical powers in film and television shows. Usually medicine men of some sort, these characters have little function other than to guide white characters in the right direction.



Oliver Stone's 1991 film "The Doors" is a case in point. In this film about the famed rock group, a medicine man appears at key moments in Jim Morrison's life to shape the singer's consciousness.

The real Jim Morrison may have really felt that he connected with a medicine man, but his thinking was likely influenced by Hollywood depictions of American Indians. In all cultures, there have traditionally been individuals with impressive knowledge of the healing qualities of plants and herbs. Yet, Native Americans have been portrayed in [film and television](#) time and time again as medicine men who have no other purpose but to rescue hapless white people from harm.

Bloodthirsty Warriors

In films such as "The Last of The Mohicans," based on James Fenimore Cooper's book of the same name, there is no shortage of Indian warriors. Hollywood has traditionally portrayed Native Americans as tomahawk-wielding savages thirsty for the white man's blood. These brutes engage in barbaric practices such as scalping and sexually violate white women. The Anti-Defamation League has attempted to set this stereotype straight, however.

"While warfare and conflict did exist among Native Americans, the majority of tribes were peaceful and only attacked in self-defense," the ADL reports. "Just like European nations, American Indian tribes had complex histories and relationships with one another that sometimes involved combat, but also included alliances, trade, intermarriage and the full spectrum of human ventures."

As the character Thomas-Builds-the Fire notes in the film "Smoke Signals," many First Nations peoples have no history of being warriors. Thomas points out that he came from a tribe of fishermen. The warrior stereotype is a "shallow" one the ADL asserts, as it "obscures family and community life, spirituality, and the intricacies inherent in every human society."

In the Wild and on the Rez

In Hollywood films, Native Americans are typically found living in the wilderness and on reservations. In reality, considerable numbers of First Nations peoples live off the reservation and in major U.S. cities. [According to Washington University in St. Louis](#), 60 percent of the [Native American](#) population lives in cities. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that New York, Los Angeles, and Phoenix boast the largest populations of Native Americans. In Hollywood, however, it's rare to see an aboriginal character living in a metropolitan area.

SOURCE: <https://www.thoughtco.com/native-american-stereotypes-in-film-television-2834655>

ASIAN AMERICANS

Geishas and geeks make this list

[Asian Americans](#) are the fastest-growing racial group in the United States, but in Hollywood, they're often invisible or subject to old, tired [stereotypes](#).

Stereotypes in the media are especially harmful given that the Asian American community is woefully underrepresented on the large and small screen alike.

"Only 3.8 percent of all television and theatrical roles were portrayed by Asian Pacific Islander actors in 2008, compared to 6.4 percent portrayed by Latino actors, 13.3 percent portrayed by African Americans and 72.5 percent portrayed by Caucasian actors," according to the Screen Actors Guild.

Because of this imbalance, Asian American actors have few opportunities to counteract sweeping generalizations about their racial group. In reality, Asian Americans are far more than the geeks and geishas Hollywood would have you believe.

Dragon Ladies

Since the days of early Hollywood, Asian American women have played "dragon ladies." These female characters tend to be physically attractive but domineering and underhanded. Ultimately, they can't be trusted. Chinese-American actress Anna May Wong played a series of these roles in the 1920s and contemporary actress Lucy Liu has more recently been accused of popularizing the stereotype.

Wong temporarily left the United States to act in European films where she could escape being typecast as a dragon lady in Hollywood films.

"I was so tired of the parts I had to play," Wong explained in a 1933 interview quoted by the *Los Angeles Times*. "Why is it that the screen Chinese is nearly always the villain of the piece, and so cruel a villain—murderous, treacherous, a snake in the grass? We are not like that. ... We have our own virtues. We have our rigid code of behavior, of honor. Why do they never show these on the screen? Why should we always scheme, rob, kill?"

Kung Fu Fighters

When Bruce Lee became a superstar in the U.S. after the success of his 1973 film "Enter the Dragon," the Asian American community largely took pride in his fame. In the film, Lee wasn't portrayed as a buck-toothed imbecile, as Asian Americans had been portrayed in films such as "Breakfast at Tiffany's." Instead, he was strong and dignified. But before long, Hollywood began to portray all Asian Americans as martial arts experts.

“So now the flipside of stereotyping is that every Asian American actor is expected to know some form of martial arts,” Tisa Chang, director of the Pan Asian Repertory Theatre in New York, told ABC News. “Any casting person will say, ‘Well, do you do some martial arts?’”

Since Bruce Lee's death, Asian performers such as Jackie Chan and Jet Li have become stars in the U.S. due to their martial arts backgrounds.

Geeks

Asian Americans are often portrayed as geeks and technical whizzes. Not only does this stereotype surface in television shows and films but also in commercials. The Washington Post has pointed out that Asian Americans are often portrayed as technologically savvy people in ads for corporations such as Verizon, Staples, and IBM.

“When Asian Americans appear in advertising, they typically are presented as the technological experts—knowledgeable, savvy, perhaps mathematically adept or intellectually gifted,” the Post reported. “They're most often shown in ads for business-oriented or technical products—smartphones, computers, pharmaceuticals, electronic gear of all kinds.”

These commercials play on existing stereotypes about Asians being intellectually and technologically superior to Westerners.

Foreigners

Although people of Asian descent have lived in the United States since the 1800s, Asian Americans are often portrayed as perpetual foreigners. Like [Latinos](#), Asians in television and film often speak accented English, suggesting that they're [recent immigrants](#) to the country.

These portrayals ignore that the United States is home to generation after generation of Asian Americans. They also [set up Asian Americans to be stereotyped](#) in real life. Asian Americans often complain about how often they get asked, “Where are you from—originally?” or complimented for speaking good English when they've spent their entire lives in the United States.

Prostitutes

Asian women have routinely been featured as prostitutes and sex workers in Hollywood. The line “Me love you long time,” spoken by a Vietnamese sex worker to U.S. soldiers in the 1987 film “[Full Metal Jacket](#),” is arguably the most famous cinematic example of an Asian woman willing to sexually debase herself for white men.

“There we have the promiscuous API woman stereotype: The one in which the Asian woman wants to have sex, willing to do anything, with the white man,” wrote Tony Le in *Pacific Ties* magazine. “The stereotype has taken many forms, from Lotus Blossom to Miss Saigon.” Le said that 25 years of “me love you long time” jokes endure.

According to the TV Tropes website, the Asian prostitute stereotype dates back to the 1960s and '70s, when U.S. military involvement in Asia heightened. In addition to "Full Metal Jacket," films such as "The World of Suzie Wong" notoriously featured an Asian prostitute whose love for a white man is unrequited. "Law & Order: SVU" also routinely depicts Asian women as prostitutes and mail-order brides.

SOURCE: <https://www.thoughtco.com/asian-american-stereotypes-in-t-film-2834652>

LATIN-X

Latinos may now be the largest racial minority in the United States, but their rise in numbers hasn't necessarily made it easier for them to challenge stereotypes. Racial [stereotypes](#) about Latinos abound in television and film. This overview of the most common Hispanic stereotypes portrayed in the media—from maids to gangbangers—reveals why sweeping generalizations about Latinos are harmful.

All Maids All the Time

In the earlier days of television and film, African Americans were the [racial group](#) most likely to portray domestic workers. Black housekeepers played key roles in television sitcoms such as 1950's "Beulah" and films such as 1939's "Gone With The Wind." By the 1980s, however, Latinos increasingly replaced blacks as Hollywood's domestics. The 1987 TV show "I Married Dora" was even about a man who married his Latina housekeeper to prevent her from being deported. Even megastar Jennifer Lopez played a housekeeper in 2002's "Maid in Manhattan," a romantic comedy reminiscent of the [Cinderella](#) fairytale. The late actress Lupe Ontiveros estimated that she played a maid as many as 150 times on screen. In 2009, Ontoveros told National Public Radio, "I long to play a judge. I long to play a lesbian woman. I long to play a councilman, someone with some chutzpah."

Latin Lovers

Hollywood has a long history of portraying Hispanics and Spaniards as Latin Lovers. Men such as Antonio Banderas, Fernando Lamas, and Ricardo Montalban all starred in a number of roles that perpetuated the idea that Hispanic men are incredibly suave, sexy and skilled in the sheets. The stereotype became so popular that a film called "Latin Lovers" debuted in 1958. Ricardo Montalban and Lana Turner starred. Tired of being typecast as a Latin Lover, Fernando Lamas, father of actor Lorenzo Lamas, told the *Free Lance-Star* in 1958 that he wanted to redefine the term. "A

Latin lover shouldn't be a greasy character," he said. "He doesn't even have to be Latin. But he must be a guy who loves life, and since life includes women, his loves include women. Sometimes he gets a girl and sometimes he gets his face slapped. The most important thing is that he be a real man with problems to solve."

Sexpots

While Hispanic men are often reduced to Latin Lovers in television and film, Hispanic women are commonly typecast as sexpots. [Rita Hayworth](#), Raquel Welch, and Carmen Miranda are some of the Latinas in early Hollywood who capitalized on their sexy image. More recently, Eva Longoria played a conniving Latina homemaker who used her looks to advance her agenda in "Desperate Housewives," and Sofia Vergara continues to play the role of Gloria Delgado-Pritchett on "Modern Family," which many prominent Latinas argue not only fuels the stereotype that Hispanic women are sexy but also loud, crazy and spicy. "The problem here is that this idea of the curvy, sexy and sultry Latina denies many Latinas their cultural identification based on their physical appearances and sexual attractiveness, alone," explained Tanisha Ramirez in the Huffington Post. "In essence, this sort of thinking traps our culture within our bodies, ignoring the values, ethics, and traditions that contribute to our sense of culture and community."

Thug Life

There has been no shortage of Latinos playing thugs, drug dealers and gangbangers in U.S. films and television shows, especially police dramas. Popular films such as 1992's "American Me" and 1993's "Mi Vida Loca" chronicled the lives of fictional Hispanic drug kingpins and gangsters. Even the 1961 classic "[West Side Story](#)" centered on the rivalry between a Caucasian gang and a Puerto Rican one. The gangster stereotype aimed at Latinos is particularly harmful, as it gives the public the idea that Hispanics aren't law-abiding citizens but cholos. Accordingly, they should be feared, shunned and certainly not treated as equals. While some Latinos, just as some whites, find themselves entangled in the criminal justice system, the majority of Hispanics aren't criminals. They work as lawyers, teachers, pastors, police officers and in a host of other areas.

Immigrants

Television programs such as "The George Lopez Show," "Desperate Housewives" and "Ugly Betty" were unique in that they portrayed Latinos as Americans rather than as [recent immigrants](#) to the United States. Not only have many Hispanics lived in the United States for several generations but some Hispanics also descend from families that predate the establishment of the present day U.S.-Mexico border. For far too long Hollywood has featured Hispanics speaking heavily accented English in television and in cinema. Lupe Ontiveros told NPR that during auditions casting directors made it clear that they prefer her to play immigrant types. Before auditioning, she'd ask them, "You want an accent?" And they'd say, 'Yes, we prefer for you to have an accent.' And the thicker and more waddly it is, the more they like it. This is what I'm against, really, truly."

SOURCE: <https://www.thoughtco.com/latino-stereotypes-in-television-and-film-2834654>

MUSLIMS AND ARABS

Middle Easterners are often portrayed as villainous and barbaric

Even before the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, [Arab-Americans](#), Middle Easterners, and Muslims faced sweeping cultural and religious stereotypes. Hollywood films and television shows frequently depicted [Arabs](#) as villains, if not outright terrorists, and misogynistic brutes with backward and mysterious customs.

Hollywood has largely portrayed Arabs as Muslims, overlooking the significant number of Christian Arabs in the United States and the Middle East. The media's racial stereotyping of Middle Eastern people has allegedly produced unfortunate consequences, including hate crimes, [racial profiling](#), discrimination, and bullying.

Arabs in the Desert

When Coca-Cola debuted a [commercial](#) during Super Bowl 2013 featuring Arabs riding camels in the desert, Arab-American groups weren't pleased. This representation is largely outdated, much like Hollywood's common portrayal of [Native Americans](#) as people in loincloths and war paint running through the plains.

Camels and the desert can be found in the [Middle East](#), but this portrayal has become stereotypical. In the Coca-Cola commercial, Arabs appear backward as they compete with Vegas showgirls and cowboys using more convenient forms of transportation to reach a giant bottle of Coke in the desert.

"Why is it that Arabs are always shown as either oil-rich sheiks, terrorists, or belly dancers?" asked Warren David, president of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, during a Reuters interview about the commercial.

Arabs as Villains and Terrorists

There is no shortage of Arab villains and terrorists in Hollywood films and television programs. When the blockbuster "True Lies" debuted in 1994, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as a spy for a secret government agency, Arab-American advocacy groups staged protests in major cities, including New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, because the film featured a fictional terrorist group called the "Crimson Jihad," whose members, Arab-Americans complained, were portrayed as one-dimensionally sinister and anti-American.

Ibrahim Hooper, then a spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, told [The New York Times](#):

"There is no clear motivation for their planting nuclear weapons. They are irrational, have an intense hatred for everything American, and that's the stereotype you have for Muslims."

Arabs as Barbaric

When Disney released its 1992 film "Aladdin," Arab-American groups voiced outrage over the depiction of Arab characters. In the first minute, for example, the theme song declared that Aladdin hailed "from a faraway place, where the caravan camels roam, where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face. It's barbaric, but hey, it's home."

Disney changed the lyrics in the home video release after Arab-American groups blasted the original as stereotypical. But the song wasn't the only problem advocacy groups had with the film. There was also a scene in which an Arab merchant intended to hack off the hand of a woman for stealing food for her starving child.

Arab-American groups also took issue with the rendering of Middle Easterners in the film; many were drawn "with huge noses and sinister eyes," [The Seattle Times](#) noted in 1993.

Charles E. Butterworth, then a visiting professor of Middle East politics at Harvard University, told *The Times* that Westerners have stereotyped Arabs as barbaric since the Crusades. "These are the terrible people who captured Jerusalem and who had to be thrown out of the Holy City," he said, adding that the stereotype seeped into Western culture over centuries and is found in Shakespeare's works.

Arab Women: Veils, Hijabs, and Belly Dancers

Hollywood also has represented Arab women narrowly. For decades, women of Middle Eastern descent have been portrayed as scantily clad belly dancers and harem girls or as silent women shrouded in veils, similar to how Hollywood has portrayed Native American women as [Indian princesses or squaws](#). The belly dancer and veiled female sexualize Arab women, according to the website [Arab Stereotypes](#):

"Veiled women and belly dancers are two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, belly dancers code Arab culture as exotic and sexually available...On the other hand, the veil has figured both as a site of intrigue and as the ultimate symbol of oppression."

Films such as "Aladdin," "Arabian Nights" (1942), and "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" (1944) are among a host of movies featuring Arab women as veiled dancers.

Arabs as Muslims and Foreigners

The media nearly always portray Arabs and Arab-Americans as Muslims, although most Arab-Americans identify as Christian and just 12 percent of the world's Muslims are Arabs, according to

PBS. In addition to being sweepingly identified as Muslims in film and television, Arabs are often presented as foreigners.

The 2000 census (the latest for which data on the Arab-American population is available) found that nearly half of [Arab-Americans](#) were born in the U.S. and 75 percent speak English well, but Hollywood repeatedly portrays Arabs as heavily accented foreigners with strange customs.

When not terrorists, Arab characters in films and television often are oil sheiks. Portrayals of Arabs born in the United States and working in mainstream professions, such as banking or teaching, remain rare.

SOURCE: <https://www.thoughtco.com/tv-film-stereotypes-arabs-middle-easterners-2834648>

ITALIAN AMERICANS

Why Italians Are Too Often Viewed as Mobsters, Peasants, and Thugs

Italian Americans may be European in ancestry, but they were not always treated as "white" in the United States, as the pervasive stereotypes about them demonstrate. Not only did Italian immigrants to America face employment discrimination in their adopted homeland, they also faced violence by whites who viewed them as "different." Because of their once marginalized status in this country, ethnic stereotypes of Italians persist in film and television.

On the big and small screen, alike, Italian Americans are all too often portrayed as mobsters, thugs and peasants hawking spaghetti sauce. While Italian Americans have made great strides in U.S. society, their characterization in popular culture remains stereotypical and troublesome.

Mobsters

Fewer than .0025 percent of Italian Americans are involved in organized crime, [according to the Italian American News website](#). But one would be hard-pressed to know that from watching Hollywood television shows and movies, where just about every Italian family has mob ties. In addition to films such as "The Godfather," "Goodfellas," "Casino" and "Donnie Brasco," television shows such as "[The Sopranos](#)," "Growing Up Gotti" and "Mob Wives" have perpetuated the idea that Italian Americans and organized crime go hand-in-hand. While many of these films and shows have won critical praise, they do little to complicate the image Italian Americans have in popular culture.

Food-Making Peasants

Italian cuisine is among the most popular in the United States. Accordingly, a number of television commercials depict Italians and Italian Americans flipping pizzas, stirring tomato sauce and

squashing grapes. In many of these commercials, Italian Americans are portrayed as heavily accented, robust peasants.

The Italian American News website describes how a Ragu commercial features “several elderly, overweight Italian American women in housedresses [who] are so delighted with Ragu’s meat sauce that they turn somersaults and play leapfrog in a meadow.” An undue amount of food ads portray Italian women as “elderly, overweight housewives and grandmothers wearing black dresses, housecoats or aprons,” the site reports.

“Jersey Shore”

When MTV reality series “Jersey Shore” debuted, it became a pop culture sensation. Viewers of all ages and ethnic backgrounds faithfully tuned in to watch the group of mostly Italian American friends hit the bar scene, work out at the gym, tan and do laundry. But [prominent Italian-Americans protested](#) that the bouffant-haired stars of the show—self-described Guidos and Guidettes—were spreading negative stereotypes about Italians.

Joy Behar, co-host of ABC’s “The View,” said that “Jersey Shore” did not represent her culture. “I do have a master’s degree, so a person like me is rather annoyed with a show like that because I went to college, you know, to better myself, and then these idiots come out and make Italians look bad,” she said. “It’s awful. They should go to Firenze and Rome and Milano and see what Italians really did in this world. It’s irritating.”

Bigoted Thugs

Anyone familiar with Spike Lee’s films knows that he has persistently depicted Italian Americans as dangerous, racist thugs from New York City’s working class. Italian Americans such as these can be found in a number of Spike Lee films, most notably “Jungle Fever,” “Do The Right Thing” and “Summer of Sam.” When Lee criticized “Django Unchained” director Quentin Tarantino for turning slavery into a spaghetti Western, [Italian groups called him a hypocrite](#) because of the thread of anti-Italian bias that runs through his films, they said.

“When it comes to Italian Americans, Spike Lee has never done the right thing,” said Andre DiMino, president of the Italian American One Voice Coalition. “One wonders if Spike Lee is indeed a racist who hates Italians and why he harbors a grudge.”

One Voice voted Lee into its Hall of Shame because of his portrayals of Italian Americans. In particular, the group criticized “Summer of Sam” because the movie “descends into a panoply of negative character portrayals, with Italian Americans as mobsters, drug dealers, drug addicts, racists, deviants, buffoons, bimbos, and sex-crazed fiends.”

SOURCE: <https://www.thoughtco.com/stereotypes-of-italian-americans-film-television-2834703>

SECTION TWO

By [Ken Padgett](#)

JEWS

Introduction

Jewface refers to the creation and propagation of racist Jewish stereotypes and caricatures. After being forced from their homeland in the Middle East over 2,000 years ago, Jews became a nomadic people who eventually spread throughout Europe. As outsiders they were often viewed with suspicion by the locals and many myths were created about them. Jewish people have been stereotyped throughout the centuries and have often been used as scapegoats for a multitude of societal problems.

Racist Jewish Stereotypes

Jews have been stereotyped as greedy, nit-picky, misers and they have often been depicted counting money or collecting gold and jewels. Anti-Semitism flourished for centuries and reached a climax in Nazi Germany during World War II with the Holocaust, when Hitler tried to exterminate all of the Jews in Europe. Though anti-Semitism is less overt now in polite society than it has been in the past, the underlying stereotypes and attitudes about what it means to be Jewish are still quite prevalent. The following are some common stereotypes:

Jewish Mother

The Jewish mother stereotype generally involves a nagging, overprotective, manipulative, controlling, smothering, and overbearing mother or wife, one who persists in interfering in her children's lives long after they have become adults. This opinionated, pushy matriarch keeps a meticulously tidy home and insists that anyone who enters her home is undernourished and needs to consume more food than is humanly possible. The life of a Jewish mother consists of endless caretaking and boundless self-sacrifice by a mother who demonstrates her love by constant overfeeding and unremitting solicitude about every aspect of her children's and her husband's welfare.

The Moneylender/Moneychanger

During the Middle Ages, Christians were not allowed to lend money because the Church believed that collecting interest from loaned money was a sin. At the same time Jews were not allowed to do many of the jobs that Christians did. Since the Jews were able to collect interest from the

Christians, many became money lenders and tax collectors. The money-changer stereotype originated in the days when Jews converted the coins of the Roman Empire into the currency accepted by the Jerusalem Temple. Because of their involvement with money and banking, Jews got the reputation of being greedy and it was said that Jews would do anything for money, which led to the idea that Jews have no loyalty to any group other than their own.

Jewish Princess

The Jewish-American Princess stereotype is materialistic and selfish, and comes from a pampered or wealthy background. JAPs enjoy lives of privilege and are often neurotic. The Jewish Princess is bossy, spoiled, whiny, inconsiderate, self-centered, and only minimally interested in sex. In recent years the label has been adopted by some Jewish females who take pride in being a living personification of the stereotype.

Self-hating Jew

Self-hating Jew is a term used to describe a Jewish person who holds anti-Semitic beliefs or engages in anti-Semitic actions. The term is a bit of a misnomer because the self-hating Jew doesn't hate himself as much as he hates other Jews who are not like him. The concept originated during the mid-nineteenth century feuding between Orthodox Jews and Reform Jews where each side accused the other of betraying Jewish identity. It is most often used today in attempts to silence Jews from criticizing the actions of Israel.

Nice Jewish Boy

A "nice Jewish boy" is a mensch, roughly defined as a good person or nice guy. He is intellectual, nerdy, socially awkward, physically weak and slightly neurotic. He is very attached to his stereotypical Jewish mother and never outgrows the need for her support and approval. Nice Jewish boys are usually high-earning professionals like dentists, doctors, veterinarians, psychologists, lawyers, or stockbrokers.

Nice Jewish Girl

The "nice Jewish girl" embodies an old-fashioned sense of domesticity and traditionalism. She is a kind, curvy family girl who loves Judaism, her family, and homemaking. She has frizzy hair, a prominent nose, and a nasal way of talking. Well-educated but not intellectually superior, she smiles sweetly and dishes out the kugel to her beaming grandparents while she awaits fulfillment of the American Dream of marrying a nice Jewish boy and moving to a house in the suburbs.

SOURCE: <https://www.jewface.us/>

SECTION THREE

By Tiffany Antone

FEMALES

Introduction

Sure, it's 2018 and the world seems to finally be understanding that female stereotypes are offensive and not really entertaining, but not everyone in Hollywood has gotten the memo yet.

For example, take the recently released film [Superfly](#), a remake of the 1972 film of the same name. It follows the narrative of a young drug dealer, and while the cast is fantastic in their roles, the stereotypes? Not so much. Just about every female character in *Superfly* is a girlfriend of a gangster or a stripper and is sexually objectified.

And not too long ago, we were reintroduced to the ice queen in *Jurassic World*: The career-driven Claire Dearing, played by Bryce Dallas Howard, has a cold heart and a frosty demeanor.

Things are getting better, and we're seeing more and more empowered female characters in films. These are some tropes we're ready to leave behind.

Trophy Girlfriend

Movieweb's Julian Roman put it perfectly when describing the terrible stereotyping in the remake of this 1972 film: "The women in *Superfly* are sexually objectified and have no input whatsoever. They exist to be the same 'bling' that the male characters flaunt like peacocks." The film's main character, Priest, even has two girlfriends. Lex Scott Davis is one of the trophy girlfriends in *Superfly*.

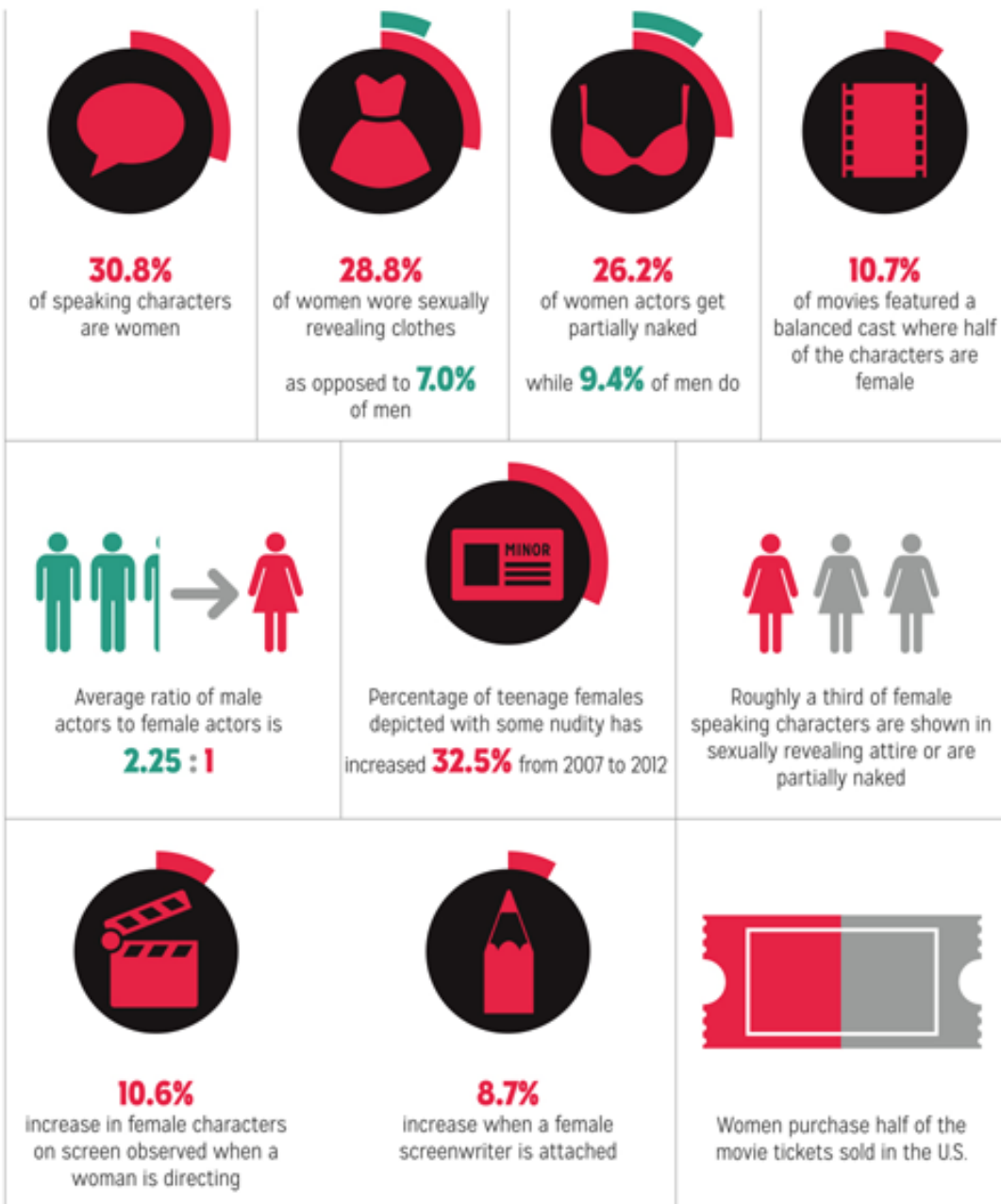
Ice Queen

The ice queen has a cold heart and a frosty demeanor. She's often career-focused because, let's face it, career women can't be focused and feel love, right? That's a favorite insult for scorned men to sling when the ice queen turns them down. Bryce Dallas Howard in *Jurassic World* is one example of the ice queen.

HOW WOMEN ARE PORTRAYED

ON SCREEN IN THE TOP 500 FILMS

2007-2012



Spicy Latina

Hollywood loves Latin women... as long as they stay within Hollywood's narrow cultural parameters. The most common Latina trope is the spicy Latina, a hot-tempered, sultry temptress with emotional baggage. Examples include Salma Hayek in *Fools Rush In* and Michelle Rodriguez in the *Fast and the Furious* franchise.

Dirty Old Woman

The dirty old woman exists to prove that old women have nothing left to do with their lives except reminisce about their raunchy past and make crude jokes. Sometimes this character is played by a man in drag (think Martin Lawrence in *Big Momma's House*) because the dirty old

woman is so dried up, you don't even need a real woman to play her. She is usually willing to completely debase herself for a roll in the hay or a stiff drink. An example is Susan Sarandon in *Tammy*.

Hooker with a Heart of Gold

A sex worker with a big heart often becomes a love interest for the main character. Beneath her sexy exterior is a damaged woman who just needs a chance! Examples include Marisa Tomei in *The Wrestler* and Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*.

Awkward Virgin

If you're a nerd, as far as Hollywood is concerned, you've never gotten laid... and you will very likely do anything in your power — including compromising your very character — in order to correct that mistake later on. An example is Drew Barrymore in *Never Been Kissed*.

Disposable Woman

The disposable woman is usually the wife, girlfriend, mother or daughter of the protagonist. She only exists to be kidnapped, raped or murdered, giving the protagonist a reason to seek revenge. Goldie in *Sin City* is a disposable woman.

Crazy Cat Lady

The crazy cat lady is on the cusp of spinsterhood. She lives alone because she's usually socially awkward, and who else would want her? An example is Kathleen Turner in *Romancing the Stone*.

Psycho Ex-Girlfriend

The hero used to date her, but now he just can't even, because she's totally crazy and probably stalking him. The psycho ex-girlfriend gets turned into the villain all the time, and we're so over it. Examples include Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* and Uma Thurman in *My Super Ex-Girlfriend*.

Advice Sponge

This delicate flower is basically unable to think for herself, and after reading or hearing some outlandish piece of advice, she takes it too much to heart and sets off on some clumsy adventure that usually leads her to some kind of happily ever after. Anna Faris in *What's Your Number?* is an advice sponge.

Gorgeous Klutz

This woman is perfect on all fronts — except she's clumsy, which is supposed to make us all feel like we're just a blow-dry away from being her. Examples include Rachel Weisz in *The Mummy* and Anne Hathaway in *The Devil Wears Prada*.

Femme Fatale

The femme fatale is sexy and she knows it! She's in every film noir movie, like, ever, and she always gets her man. Of course, she's also super lethal, but she manages to manipulate and confuse the hero with her undeniable feminine wiles. Examples include Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct* and Madonna in *Dick Tracy*.

Damsel in Distress

This woman is put into immediate danger at the start of the film and is the main reason the plot goes into motion. The hero will go to hell and back to save the damsel in distress while she whimpers in captivity — as in almost every fairy tale ever written. Examples include Salma Hayek in *Wild Wild West* and Robin Wright in *The Princess Bride*.

Bitch Incognito

This character presents herself as the nice girl but is eventually revealed to be a spoiled, immature brat or outright villain. Examples include Rachel McAdams in *Mean Girls* and Sarah Michelle Gellar in *Cruel Intentions*.

Manic Pixie Dream Girl

This bubbly, shallow, free-spirited fantasy girl exists solely to help a quiet, introverted protagonist come out of his shell. She is 100 percent male fantasy. Examples include Natalie Portman in *Garden State* and Zooey Deschanel in *500 Days of Summer*.

Bodyguard Babes

These women devote their lives to protecting the villain, only to find that their sacrifice means nothing to him. Examples include Rebecca Romijn in the *X-Men* franchise and the Fembots in *Austin Powers*.

Black Widow

A black widow is almost always a cross between a con artist and a serial killer. She spends her life seducing, marrying and murdering men for their money. Examples include Madeline Kahn in *Clue* and Joan Cusack in *Addams Family Values*.

Bound & Gagged

This woman spends a portion of her screen time restrained (by rope, handcuffs, chains... you get the picture) and gagged so that she can't cry out for help. Examples include Qi Shu in *The Transporter* and almost every woman in a 1980s action movie.

Gold Digger

The gold digger spends all her energy trying to hook up with a rich dude just so she can mooch off his money and status. One example is Mrs. Quickly in *Nanny McPhee*.

Bridezilla

The bridezilla is a normally sane woman who loses her freaking mind due to the stress of wedding arrangements. She believes her impending wedding is "her day" and forgets about her fiancé



as she mows down everyone getting in the way of her perfect day. Examples include Kate Hudson and Anne Hathaway in *Bride Wars*.

Asexual Career Woman

Basically, this woman wants it all, and she sacrifices her youth and sex appeal to get it — because obviously women can't really have it all, right? Um, yes we can, so just stop it, Hollywood! Examples include Anna Kendrick in *Up in the Air* and Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*.

Sassy Black Woman

The sassy Black woman is hilarious and full of life and never misses an opportunity to land a punch line, but this is 2018 and we know Black women have a lot more to offer than some advice and a B storyline. An example is Wanda Sykes in pretty much everything she's ever done, including *Monster-in-Law*.

SOURCE: <https://www.sheknows.com/entertainment/slideshow/810/female-stereotypes-in-film-that-make-us-yawn>

NOTE: Images in this reading are not part of the original sources.