

Hughey, Matthew. 2009. "Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films." *Social Problems* 56:543-577.

Primary Argument: The article argues that Magical Negro films reinforce racial hierarchies by portraying Black characters as mystical helpers whose sole purpose is to aid white protagonists' moral or personal growth.

Important Defined Concepts:

- "Magical Negro": This is a trope that films adopt which position Black characters solely as helpers and healers of white people, subtly reinforcing the notion of white centrality and moral authority, while marginalizing and stereotyping Black experiences.
- Cinethetic Racism: is a concept used to describe a form of racism in film that combines visual aesthetics (cinematic techniques) and sentimentalized racial stereotypes to create the illusion of racial harmony while maintaining white dominance.
- White Redemption Narrative: is a common storytelling pattern in which a flawed or morally compromised white character achieves personal growth or redemption through a relationship with a marginalized person, often a Black character.

Primary Findings:

1. Black characters with extraordinary abilities or insights are deployed to help white characters overcome challenges, achieve redemption, or experience personal growth. Their primary function is to facilitate the white character's journey.
2. These portrayals often rely on simplistic and stereotypical depictions of Black individuals. The "Magical Negro" tends to lack depth, complexity, and a significant backstory of their own. Their defining characteristics are often centered around their wisdom, patience, and selfless dedication to assisting white people.
3. The focus on the white protagonist's redemption is often at the expense of exploring the Black character's own experiences and struggles. The narratives tend to prioritize the white character's development while marginalizing the Black character's individuality and internal life.
4. The emotional satisfaction of seeing the white character succeed, often due to the Black character's help, masks the underlying racist structure that positions Black people as helpers to white centrality.

Key Quote: "When Black actors are constantly cast as angels, spirits, gods, and other incarnate supernatural forces, they displace the realities of history into more viewer-friendly narratives. That is, the various filmmakers create scenes of trouble-free and uncomplicated Black/White reconciliation. When racial, social, and cultural formations remain unmentioned and unquestioned, these reconciliation scenes are most effective" (550).

Question: Do we see a trope like the Magical Negro trope regarding other races and any underlying stereotypes they may face?