

Racial Dominance in America: An Argumentative Essay  
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Hollywood is a multi-billion dollar industry in the United States, and is virtually an unavoidable aspect of American culture. An issue concerning it has been gaining more and more publicity lately: whitewashing. Whitewashing is quite simply the replacing of characters who are of a certain ethnicity, background, or culture, with white actors. Many will deny the existence of white-washing, with arguments such as the actor being cast for talent, or even argue the opposite, that having to cast an actor that exactly fits the profile of the character is 'forced diversity.' Ultimately, the casting of white actors as non-white characters, is a product of the history of racial dominance in America.

Whitewashing has been present in Hollywood since its beginning of its existence, and although there is much more attention given to controversial casting decisions today, what we are familiar with now is tame compared to what it was in the early 1900's. Then, it was normal for films to only feature white actors, often playing nonwhite characters. The practice involved the actors wearing blackface or yellowface, reducing the character to the color of their skin and perpetuating their stereotypes. As time passed, the white majority began to use less and less what has been called their "privilege to ignore less powerful people" (McIntosh 4), allowing minorities, racial, sexual, or otherwise, to be represented more and more in media. This was not easy, with many even dying for their right to be represented.

Finding examples of whitewashing today is certainly no problem; one needs to look no farther than the soon-to-premiere movie *Dr. Strange*. In this movie, the British actress Tilda Swinton, of Celtic heritage, was cast to play The Ancient One, an immortal Tibetan sorcerer. Unsurprisingly, this was followed by many questions to the casting directors. Marvel's responses were quite complicated, citing among other things, China's poor relationships with Tibet and risk of losing a large audience from the country. This is putting profit above ethics, and is an injustice. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (King). If this was the only case of something like this happening, it would be quite easy to let it pass as an unfortunate mistake, yet incidents like these are a regular occurrence in the film industry.

One may, however, argue saying that the reverse is true, and they would be right. A-list celebrities like Will Smith and Denzel Washington are frequently cast because of their talent and popularity as characters who were originally intended to be white. In Marvel's Cinematic Universe, Samuel L. Jackson is iconic in his portrayal of Nick Fury, who in the original comics was white. Also in the Marvel franchise is Idris Elba, who plays the Norse god Heimdall. These, however, are few and far between, and virtually never happen to lesser-known actors.

With all the evidence there is supporting it, it is impossible to deny that whitewashing exists. There is, however, a place where the line must be drawn. Sometimes, it is too impractical to find an actor who has the same background of a Persian-Indian character who grew up in Poland. While this does sound over-the-top, there was even a minor controversy around Benedict Cumberbatch voicing the dragon Smaug in the film adaptation of *The Hobbit* (Could they not have just cast a real dragon?). With all the causes of the continuation of whitewashing pointing to the past racism in America, the only questions that remain is of when

and how we will stop this destructive trend. Like everything, it will not be easy, but as said by Fredrick Douglass, “without a struggle, there can be no progress” (Douglass 407).