



The Dichotomous Assessment of the Historical Inaccuracies, the “White Savior” Trope and the Traces of Black Female Stereotypes in the Flagship Black Feminist Movie *Hidden Figures*

Regina Zsófia Sztranyan

Pázmány Péter Catholic University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

A történelmi pontatlanságok, a “fehér megváltó” trópus és a fekete női sztereotípiák lenyomatainak kettős megítélése *A számolás joga* című fekete feminista filmben.

Absztrakt: *A számolás joga* ezen elemzése azt kívánja megvitatni, hogy ez a fekete feminista film valóban segíthet-e a fekete feminista törekvéseknek azáltal, hogy történelmi pontossággal, valamint sztereotípiák nélkül jellemzi az eseményeket és a szereplőket. A tanulmány bemutatja, hogy a filmben megjelenített fehér megváltó trópusa hogyan tudja aláásni a fekete nők NASA-nál elért sikereit, miközben továbbra is pozitív összetevője a filmnek. Az is kiderül, hogy közelebbről megvizsgálva a főszereplőket, a fekete női sztereotípiák még ebben a látszólag előítéletmentes és nagy népszerűségnek örvendő fekete feminista filmben is fellelhetőek. Ezen elmélet igazolása érdekében kiemeljük az életrajzi film és az alapjául szolgáló, valós eseményeket ismertető kötet eltéréseit. A film három főszereplőjének cselekedeteit, nyelvezetét és testbeszédét, melyek a hagyományos fekete női sztereotípiákat és/vagy azok későbbi formáit idézik, szintén elemezzük. Végül arra a következtetésre jutunk, hogy bár a filmmel kapcsolatban megfogalmazott kritikák a mai, már túlzó PC-kultúra és/vagy a Cancel-kultúra körébe eshetnek – hiszen az említett sztereotíp vonások a narratíva kontextusában igazolhatóak –, mégis fontos az, hogy a filmesek, sőt a színésznők is tisztában legyenek ezeknek a sztereotípiáknak mindmáig meglévő nyomaival, hogy ne állandósítsák azokat, még öntudatlanul és akaratlanul sem.

Abstract

The analysis of *Hidden Figures* aims to discuss whether this flagship black feminist movie can really help the black feminist attempts by characterizing the events and characters with historical accuracy and without stereotypes. It will be showcased how the white savior trope presented in the film can undermine the successes achieved by black women at NASA while still being a somewhat positive component to the film. It will also be revealed that upon closer examination, the black female stereotypes persist even in this seemingly unprejudiced and flagship black feminist film. To corroborate this theory, the discrepancies of the biographical drama film adaptation and the nonfiction volume it is based on will be highlighted. The actions, diction, and body language of the movie's three protagonists will also be analyzed to demonstrate that they sometimes evoke the conventional black female stereotypes and/or their later variants. It will be concluded that although the criticism made in relation to the film may fall within today's exaggerated PC culture and/or Cancel culture – as the stereotypical traits can be justified in the narrative's context –, it is still important for filmmakers and even actresses to be aware of these stereotypical traces so that they do not perpetuate them, even unconsciously and unintentionally.

Introduction

Contemporary films are not only testimonies of the current cinematic representation of black women but given their reflective nature, they also allow society to inspect the

contemporary socio-political conditions in the United States. Moreover, movies are capable of shaping public perception of certain historical situations and ethnic groups by conveying certain messages. Even though “media audiences, specifically television viewers, are aware that entertainment programming is fiction, viewers adopt a ‘TV answer’ in which content becomes the social reality” (Coleman et al., 1970, 3). Given that movies have the power to both entertain and teach society, it indeed matters what sort of message they convey to spectators.

African American women have a long history of discrimination by the film industry due to their race and gender. For a long time, they were not represented at all cinematically and later were reduced to stereotypes, lacking complexity. Collins states that in an effort to overcome oppression, black feminism confronts pervasive black female stereotypes that are designed to make social injustice seem “natural, normal, and inevitable” (Collins, 2000, 5). Therefore, movies can function as effective tools for supporting feminism’s attempts if they aim for demolishing stereotypes.

Hidden Figures is a blockbuster biographical drama film released in 2016, directed by Theodore Melfi, written by Allison Schroeder, and based on Margot Lee Shetterly’s 2016 nonfiction volume called *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*. This movie is set in the period of the Civil Rights Movement, reflecting on the relationships between race, power, and social justice and showcasing the difficulties faced by black female characters as they struggle to find their voice and agency in a society that is deeply segregated and unequal, to eventually take on pivotal roles in some of the most important missions of the Space Age. Set in the early 1960s in Hampton, Virginia, *Hidden Figures* tells the true story of Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), Dorothy Vaughan (Octavia Spencer), and Mary Jackson (Janelle Monáe), who were African American women working as mathematicians at NASA during the Space Race.

Since this movie was intentionally directed to draw attention to the long-lasting sexist, racist, and classist oppression that black women had to endure throughout history, it is worth analysing in order to reveal whether the cinematic representation of American women still operates on racial and sexist stereotypes, distorting historical facts, or presents these aspects with racial, gender, and historical accuracy by utilizing an adequate black feminist approach.

As for the reception of *Hidden Figures*, it was praised by both the general public and movie critics, and it also garnered numerous nominations and awards. There are, however, controversial elements to the film because it features the white savior cliché and, upon closer inspection, traces of black female stereotypes as well. To showcase these issues, it will be discussed why it is debatable that the reality-based book by Shetterly differs in certain aspects from the movie adaptation. Also, the actions, diction, and body language of the three heroines of the movie will be analyzed, which evoke the conventional black female stereotypes and/or their descendants.

The “Mammy”, “Jezebel” and “Sapphire” stereotypes and their descendants

To be able to spot the imprints of the conventional black female stereotypes of *Hidden Figures*, it is essential to present the “Mammy”, “Jezebel” and “Sapphire” stereotypes. Therefore, they will be briefly discussed, drawing attention only to their characteristics that are relevant for the analysis of the movie.

The “Mammy” signifies “mother” and was frequently used in the past to refer to a Black woman taking care of white children (“Mammy”). She is either represented as nurturing, caring, protective, and faithful, or authoritative, domineering, violent, and criminalized (McKoy, 2012, 137). She usually has darker skin, a larger body type and is desexualized (Glenn et al., 2009, 139).

The “Jezebel” character is depicted as a hypersexualized person (Glenn et al., 2009, 139). As for her physical appearance, she has fair skin, a slender body type, wears short, tight, or evening clothes and so is sexually enticing (McKoy, 2012, 137). Her deviant behavior also suggests that she gladly engages in any sexual intercourse to satiate her unquenchable sexual desire (Glenn et al., 2009, 139).

The “Sapphire” archetype – that the “Jezebel” seems to merge into (McKoy, 2012, 144) – is characterized as inherently sassy and angry. She is sarcastic, rude, and sharp-tongued, often seen as swearing while having her hands on her hips and rolling her eyes and neck (McKoy, 2012, 137). She usually goes through an inner conflict and so estranges others, which results in loneliness and self-destruction (McKoy, 2012, 137). Her relationship with men is also bitter (McKoy, 2012, 132). The “Sapphire” character is someone who longs for professional fulfillment in the field of her work. However, despite her assertiveness, her attempts to achieve this goal are presented as comical and futile, suggesting that she is incapable of achieving equality (Kretsedemas, 2010, 52) and that she should rather accept being inferior. To keep African American women socially immobile, the film industry tends to depict them as not only angry but also threatening, suggesting that they should not enter the world of professional work, as they do not belong there.

In contemporary entertainment media, perhaps the “Sapphire” trope is the most perpetuated regarding the representation of black women. Its prevalence is realized in two ways. One of its offspring is the Strong Black Woman stereotype, which promotes the idea that since black women are strong and resilient, they can easily endure and handle situations in which they are aggrieved (McTaggart, 2021, 2). The problem with this assumption, however, is that their sufferings are belittled and brushed away. The other descendant is the Angry Black Woman stereotype, which reinforces the misconception that the anger of African American women is excessive and illegitimate and so any expression of it is unreasonable and overblown (McTaggart, 2021, 2). As a fallout of this, black women who dare to speak up against institutionalized discrimination and injustice risk being subjected to the Angry Black Woman cliché.

The “White Savior” Trope in *Hidden Figures*

As in the case of most movie adaptations, there were obviously certain embellishments made while adapting the original text of *Hidden Figures*. The liberties taken in the depiction of the historical aspects of this movie can be justified if it is taken into consideration that the movie aims to present the story and importance of the protagonists while still entertaining the audience. However, one fabricated element, the “white savior” trope generated a lot of criticism (Jones, 2022, 488). This fictional male character is embodied by Al Harrison and is largely based on a real person (Loff, 2017). However, the acts he performs to help the black female characters are made up. Despite *Hidden Figures* deserving the praise it received for bringing attention to the accomplishments of trailblazing black women in STEM fields, it is important to recognize and critically engage with how the “white savior” trope can undermine and overshadow these achievements. Therefore, it is essential to pinpoint the elements of the narrative in which the reality-based book and the film diverge. According to Thompson (2020):

viewing the film without considering the history that it attempts to dramatize reinforces a deafening silence about the limitations of democracy in the United States and the critical social justice work that remains to be done if a more inclusive and comprehensive brand of democracy is to be realized. (867-868)

The movie’s climatic scene is when Harrison looks for Katherine in the office but cannot find her. When she finally returns, he gets angry with her because she disappears daily from the office for forty minutes. She confronts him and explains:

There’s no bathroom for me here. [...] There are no colored bathrooms in this building or any building outside the West Campus, which is half a mile away. Did you know that? I have to walk to Timbuktu just to relieve myself. And I can’t use one of the handy bikes. Picture that Mr. Harrison. [...] So, excuse me if I have to go to the restroom a few times a day. (1:01:44-1:02:47 HF)

This information and the discrimination that Katherine has to endure astonishes Harrison. Therefore, he tears off the “colored” label from the coffee pot, which his colleagues stuck there, and heroically destroys the “Colored ladies’ room” sign with a crowbar. To the accompaniment of dramatic background music, he says the following words: “No more colored restrooms. No more white restrooms. [...] Here at NASA, we all pee the same color” (1:04:04-1:04:26 HF).

In the movie, Katherine is repeatedly shown running to the colored restroom, where she brings her documents and works on them. However, in the book, this situation is described differently, and Katherine also handles the inconvenience in an entirely different way. In fact, while the restrooms explicitly designated for the black staff were marked, those for the white employees were oftentimes not, so it took Katherine many years to realize that the restrooms were segregated at NASA (Shetterly, 2016, 206-207). By the time she was confronted that she was not using the bathrooms designated for her, she was so used to her habit that she had no intention of changing it,

and no one had any problems with it afterward (Shetterly, 2016, 207). She simply refused to submit to the absurd rules of the Jim Crow system and decided to use the white women’s bathrooms. This fact was confirmed even by the 98-year-old Katherine Johnson herself in an interview with Dexter Thomas in her home in Virginia. He asked her whether she used the colored restrooms and she said: “I just went on in the white one” (2:17- 2:29 VICE News, 2017). Accordingly, her own agency is accurately described in the book since it is she who takes an executive decision and thereby prevents herself from inconvenience.

There is another touching scene by the end of the movie that did not happen in real life and promotes the “white savior” trope. Some problems occur with Glenn’s landing coordinates due to IBM’s miscalculation and he is only willing to take off if the correct data are confirmed by Katherine. In the movie, Katherine hastily takes her calculations to Mission Control so that the historic launch can proceed. However, as she is a black woman, she is not allowed to enter the room until Harrison benevolently welcomes her in to watch the historic flight. In reality, nevertheless, this situation unfolded differently as Katherine was not allowed into Mission Control but had to watch the flight from her office on television (Shetterly, 2016, 357). Accordingly, this scene is also a fabricated one aimed to support the gracious white hero’s image.

Nevertheless, if these scenes depicted reality, they may leave spectators feeling disappointed since they might also be negatively impacted by Katherine and the other black women not receiving what they deserve. It is also possible that white American viewers would rate the film less pleasurable since they would not have a positive character with whom they can identify through racial affiliation. They might also find it hard to process the unfabricated truth about the space program’s racist past. In short, these cinematic modifications are partly due to the economics of filmmaking as they are created so that the film can appeal to a larger audience.

Ndounou (2014) claims that the process of adapting books into movies has the potential to result in an “economically viable cinematic translation” (104). However, she also explains that this cinematic practice can also be controversial because “alterations made during the adaptation process, especially in the case of black women’s literature, too often rely on appealing to white audiences for economic purposes rather than intersectional appeal, which could achieve a similar economic outcome” (Ndounou, 2014, 104). In this sense, the discrepancy between *Hidden Figures* and the book it is based on promotes hegemonic notions around whiteness and maleness through the fabricated “white savior” figure. In this respect, the stories of black women are modified and commodified in this revolutionary film that aims to draw attention to their sufferings and importance in society.

In an interview, Dexter Thomas asked the director of *Hidden Figures*, Theodore Melfi, why he had chosen to include the restroom-sign-demolishing scene that had not happened in reality and whether he thought that including a gracious white male undermined the accomplishments that Katherine achieved in real life. For Melfi, the scenes about Harrison

helping the black women employees have nothing to do with the “white savior” stereotype as he believes that “there need to be white people that do the right thing and black people do the right thing and [it does not matter] who does the right thing as long as the right thing is achieved” (3:08-3:29 VICE News, 2017). Thompson (2020), however, has a different view on this issue; according to her, the inconsistencies between the film and the book are products of the different “racial and gender standpoints” that Margot Lee Shetterly, Theodore Melfi, and Allison Schroeder hold (869). Thompson also elaborates that these divergent viewpoints have an impact on how the lives of Dorothy, Mary, and Katherine are interpreted, and consequently, how their stories are recounted (869). She claims that since in “US culture, whiteness and maleness are deemed superior” and are normalized in the social hierarchy, the standpoints of the white male Melfi and white female Schroeder dominate over that of the black female Shetterly in the process of adapting *Hidden Figures* (Thompson, 2020, 869). Accordingly, in Thompson's opinion, Shetterly's racial subordination in society is the reason why the events of the lives of the three protagonists are not accurately depicted because the perspectives of the two other creators dominated over that of Shetterley's during the production of the movie adaptation.

Hidden Figures is a Hollywood dramatization and not a documentary, so it is evident that the daily life of black women working at NASA is not described in an absolutely accurate way. While the film accurately captures these remarkable women's contributions to American scientific history, its reliance on the “white savior” cliché diminishes their achievements and feeds the stereotype that black people need to be saved by white people. Also, it is an idealized idea that the decisions and actions of a single white man can end institutionalized racism within a U.S. government agency. It undermines the amount of effort and suffering it took, especially on the part of the black community, to eradicate institutionalized discrimination in real life.

Knowing the cliché of the white savior, I also immediately noticed how trite the implementation of this in the film is. However, I think that there are two ways to approach this cinematic embellishment. By comparing the book based on reality with the film adaptation, one can indeed conclude that the latter lacks historical authenticity and that Al Harrison's acts presented in the film undermine the fact that, in reality, Katherine did not need a white savior in order to make her way in the workplace. At the same time, I still must agree with Melfi on some level: one may see Al Harrison's aid for Katherine in the movie as a recognition of her achievements and a desire to advance social equality within the workplace. I believe that both white people and black people indeed must conduct themselves appropriately in order to pursue social equality.

Traces of Black Female Stereotypes in the Portrayal of *Hidden Figures*' Protagonists

There is no doubt that *Hidden Figures* depicts previously marginalized black women as resourceful, competent, diligent, and talented role models and not as plain stereotypes. Nonetheless, traces of the conventional black female stereotypes can still be found in the portrayal of the main characters upon closer examination.

As for Katherine, even though she stands up for herself several times, her tendency to be submissive and her meek disposition can be mostly perceived through her body language and so it is possible to suggest that her portrayal carries traces of the submissive “Mammy” archetype in subtle ways.

When Katherine gets transferred into her new office, she first walks around with her head held high, but after her interaction with Harrison, she acts much less confidently. The frequent straining of her neck and facial muscles, as well as the crumpling of her fingers reveal her anxiety. On their way home, she reveals her insecurity and laments to her fellow protagonists: “I don’t even know if I can keep up in that room. I’ll be back with the computers in a week. Or out of a job entirely” (27:52-28:00 *HF*). Overall, it can be concluded that she often walks stiffly at work while clasping her hands in front of her, scrunching her fingers and that she often lowers her head and avoids eye contact. In addition, she chooses her words markedly carefully and, for example, speaks to Stafford with surprising respect even after he has treated her very condescendingly and unfairly. These types of behavior reveal her lack of self-confidence and feelings of inferiority compared to her white male colleagues. On the contrary, Shetterly (2016) claims that:

Whatever personal insecurities Katherine Goble might have had about being a woman working with men, or about being one of the few blacks in a white workplace, she managed to cast them aside when she came to work in the morning. The racism stuff, the woman stuff: she managed to tuck all that way in a place far from her core, where it would not damage her steely confidence. (288)

It is important to note that as the film's narrative progresses, Katherine becomes more emboldened at her workplace. For example, when she calculates Glenn's landing coordinates, she stretches herself more, walks with her head up, and does not avoid eye contact as much, although she still does not really know what to do with her hands. Furthermore, when she explains something to her colleagues at the greenboard, she does so with much more confidence, and after Glenn takes off, she shakes Harrison's hand with persistent eye contact.

Considering that Katherine described in the novel is self-assured and is shown as insecure in the movie adaptation, I think it's reasonable to assume that her portrayal in the movie is reminiscent of the submissive “Mammy” stereotype. At the same time, had she come across as confident right away, she would not have had the powerful, positive character development that is an important component of the movie.

Traces of conventional black female stereotypes are perhaps most noticeable in the case of Mary's portrayal. She is depicted as a careerist, confrontational, sharp-tongued, and sassy young black woman, which evokes the "Sapphire" archetype and its descendants, the Angry and Strong Black Woman stereotypes. She too exhibits imprints of this stereotypical depiction mostly through her body language. In most cases, she walks with her head held high and behaves confidently, and this in itself is not a problem. At the same time, she very often raises her head and makes a complacent, condescending, slightly bored face while holding her nose high and pursing her lips. In these cases, she often has her hands on her hips and rolls her eyes or raises her eyebrows. Each of these behaviors conforms to the "Sapphire" archetype's characteristics. Even her girlfriends often reprimand her for her sassy and audacious behavior. For example, when the three women are on their way home from work, Dorothy scolds Mary: "And you, have some respect. Get your damn feet off my dashboard. This isn't your living room" (28:07-28:13 *HF*).

Furthermore, there are various scenes in which Mary is sarcastic, which is also a substantial attribute of the "Sapphire" character. For example, when the ladies' car breaks down, Mary casually leans against the car, applying lipstick and taunting Katherine. She does not do her share in repairing the car but refuses to go to work on foot or by bus. Instead, she audaciously claims she would rather hitchhike, and mimics that action. Before the police officer arrives, Katherine reprimands Mary and tells her to keep silent because "nobody wants to go to jail behind [her] mouth" (4:12-4:16 *HF*). The police officer tells the ladies that the location they are at is a rather bad place for them to have "car trouble"; and Mary responds to this with a sarcastic remark: "We didn't pick the place, Officer. It picked us" (4:32-4:37 *HF*). Also, when Mr. Zielinski asks her whether she would wish to be an engineer if she were a white male, she replies: "I wouldn't have to. I'd already be one" (15:40-15:47 *HF*). Later when she starts night school, her teacher tells her that "the curriculum is not designed for teaching a woman" to which she replies that he should "imagine it's the same as teaching a man" (1:31:18-1:31:24 *HF*). Succinctly, her response to unfair or insulting treatment or comments is mostly sarcasm.

In addition, she often expresses her feelings too visibly and loudly in situations she should not or makes saucy remarks thereby evoking the "Jezebel" stereotype. Her friends also often reprimand her for this kind of behavior. For example, when she receives a permanent assignment at NASA, she expresses her feelings very visibly, which is why Dorothy tells her to "[k]eep it inside" (11:06-11:13 *HF*). She also makes saucy comments about Johnson and so Katherine asks her to stop it and "have some shame", but Mary refuses to do so (35:10-35:15 *HF*). Later, when the navy pilots and others arrive at NASA, Mary looks at them keenly. Katherine scolds her because of it, but Mary replies that "[i]t's equal rights [and that she has] the right to see fine in every color" (38:23-38:29 *HF*). Later, she also tells Glenn: "I'm proud as the devil to be working with you" (39:04-39:07 *HF*).

Mary is frequently preoccupied with work in her personal life, and her career-

focused attitude causes her husband to resent her for a long time. At the outdoor meal after Sunday mass, he expresses his disapproval about Mary being rarely home and neglecting their children. Even in this situation, Mary shows dominance over her husband and replies: “You better settle down, Levi Jackson. Unless you want this female’s mind, right here, in front of everybody” (34:14-34:21 *HF*). This kind of relationship with her husband and family, as well as her attitude towards her career, evokes the “Sapphire” stereotype, with the difference that in this film Mary’s attempts to professionally fulfill herself are neither rendered futile nor do they pose a threat to her colleagues or society.

Although Mary is indeed reminiscent of the Angry Black Woman stereotype, given the historical context of the time and place in which she lives, her anger can be justified. She merely expresses her legitimate disapproval of the pre-established social norms of the day when she criticizes the system to Mitchell, her girlfriends, or anyone else, even if she does so by using sharp language or even sarcasm. Her assertiveness is also understandable in the narrative context, even though it is a mainstream attribute of the Strong Black Woman stereotype. Given that neither society nor her own husband believed in her for long, she had to stay strong, believe in herself, and push herself to attain her goal. Succinctly, her behavior and attitude indeed evoke traces of the “Sapphire” stereotype and its descendants, but they are justifiable and sometimes even necessary in the narrative’s context. Moreover, since her sufferings are also shown in the film, viewers do not get the false assumption that it is more than easy for black women to handle and tolerate situations in which they are aggrieved.

As for Dorothy, her portrayal evokes traces of the sassy “Mammy” caricature. Despite being portrayed as a talented and competent mathematician, she subtly fits the “Mammy” stereotype in her role as a supportive mother figure to her colleagues. Additionally, she is characterized as a sassy person who frequently employs slang, swears, and violates regulations, which perpetuates the stereotype of black women as loud, confrontational, and difficult to manage.

In the film, Dorothy has two morally questionable actions. One is when she steals a book from the library. The other is when she enters the IBM room without authorization and obtains information so that she can teach it to her computer colleagues. At the same time though, these actions were necessary for her and for NASA as well to accomplish their goals.

It is important to note that the movie’s narrative seems to revolve mainly around the story of Katherine and Mary. In the scenes where Dorothy is shown, her contributions to NASA’s projects are acknowledged, but still, she is represented as a character whose main role is to support others. In most scenes, she is seen teaching, encouraging, or disciplining her colleagues and friends. Once on their way home, she laments to Katherine and Mary that it is hard for her to see how their careers advance while hers does not. She says: “Any upward movement is movement for us all. Just isn’t

movement for me" (27:44-27:51 *HF*). Nonetheless, the controversial issue around Dorothy's portrayal as a supporter can be justified given that a key component of feminism is the empowerment of other women and that Dorothy's role as a supervisor requires her to assist and also discipline others.

Conclusion

The article discussed how the "white savior" trope embodied by Al Harrison can overshadow the achievements of the trailblazing black female protagonist of the movie when performing acts that did not happen in real life. It was concluded that the notion that a single white man's decisions and deeds can eradicate institutionalized racism within a U.S. government agency is idealized. Also, it diminishes the efforts and sufferings it took for the black community to end institutionalized discrimination in real life by conveying the misconception that the pursuit of equal treatment is mainly the merit of whites.

It was also demonstrated that upon closer examination, the three protagonists of *Hidden Figures* subtly exhibit traces of the pervasive black female stereotypes through their actions, speech, and body language. It was discussed that Katherine's portrayal evokes the submissive "Mammy" stereotype due to her subordinate behavior and initial lack of self-confidence. Mary's relationship with her family, attitude towards her career, and sassy and sarcastic demeanor is reminiscent of the "Sapphire" stereotype. As for Dorothy, she subtly embodies the sassy "Mammy" stereotype by serving as a mother figure to her friends and coworkers and by frequently using slang, swearing, and breaking rules.

Overall, it can be concluded that traces of the pervasive black female stereotypes can be found in the portrayal of all three main characters of the movie. The extent and significance of this subtle stereotypical depiction are nonetheless debatable. For example, many, including Thompson (2020, 880) and Siebler (2021, 5) are of the opinion that the representation of the protagonists in *Hidden Figures* dispels stereotypes of black women. For this reason, it is worth considering whether one may associate the portrayal of the main characters with conventional black female stereotypes only because that is how African American women have been portrayed for so long. This may be the most relevant in the case of Mary since perhaps the most widespread and preserved stereotype in today's Hustle Culture is that of the "Sapphire".

Besides, it can be generally stated that different people with different backgrounds, ways of thinking, experience, and knowledge may form different opinions regarding the representation of the main characters of *Hidden Figures*. Thus, while some, after carefully examining the speech, actions, and body language of the protagonists, may claim that their characterization is not completely free of stereotypes, others may counter that this criticism falls within today's exaggerated PC culture and/or Cancel culture.

As for my insight into the issues discussed, when I saw the movie after learning about black female stereotypes, the representation of the three protagonists undoubtedly evoked these archetypes in me. However, I also believe that these characterizations may be justified in the narrative's context. Nevertheless, it is important for filmmakers and even actresses to be aware of the pervasive black female stereotypes so that they do not perpetuate them, even unconsciously and unintentionally.

Bibliography

- Coleman, R. R. M., & A. Chivers Yochim, E. (1970). *The Symbolic Annihilation of Race: A Review of the ‘Blackness’ Literature*. Deep Blue Repositories. African American Research Perspectives.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Glenn, C. L., & Cunningham, L. J. (2009). The Power of Black Magic: The Magical Negro and White Salvation in Film. *Journal of Black Studies*, 40(2), 135–152.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40282626>.
- Hidden Figures*. (2016). Directed by Theodore Melfi, written by Allison Schroeder, performances by Aldis Hodge, Glen Powell, Janelle Monáe, Jim Parsons, Kevin Costner, Kirsten Dunst, Mahershala Ali, Octavia Spencer, and Taraji P. Henson. 20th Century Fox
- Jones, C. G., et al. (2022). *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Science since 1660*. (1st ed. 2022. ed.). Springer Nature Switzerland AG, Cham
- Kretsedemas, P. (2010). ‘But She’s Not Black!': Viewer Interpretations of ‘Angry Black Women’ on Prime Time TV. *Journal of African American Studies*, 14(2), 149–70.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819243>.
- Loff, S. (2017). *Modern Figures: Frequently Asked Questions*. NASA,
<https://www.nasa.gov/modernfigures/faq>.
- “Mammy.” Cambridge Dictionary.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mammy>.
- McKoy, B. (2012). Tyler Perry and The Weight of Misrepresentation, *McNair Scholars Research Journal*, 5, Article 10. DigitalCommons@EMU.
<https://commons.emich.edu/mcnair/vol5/iss1/10/>
- McTaggart, N., et al. (2021). *Representations of Black Women in Hollywood*. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media.
<https://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/representations-of-black-women-in-hollywood/>

Ndounou, M. W. (2014). *Shaping the Future of African American Film: Color-Coded Economics and the Story Behind the Numbers*. Rutgers University Press.

Shetterly, M. L. (2016). *Hidden Figures: the American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*. First Harper Luxe large print edition ed., Harper Luxe

Siebler, K. (2021). *Black Women Shattering Stereotypes: A Streaming Revolution*. Lexington Books, Lanham, MD.

Thompson, C. L. (2020). 'See What She Becomes': Black Women's Resistance in Hidden Figures. *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(4), 866–882.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1836012>

VICE News. (2017). We Met Katherine Johnson – One Of The Real 'Hidden Figures'. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHL23SRDIvI>