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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Race in Recent American Films

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Čestné prohlášení

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Podpis:

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Annotation

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Název práce:	Race in Recent American Films
Název v angličtině:	Race in Recent American Films
Zvolený typ práce:	Bakalářská
Anotace práce:	Bakalářská práce se zabývá afroamerickou a původní americkou rasou v rámci jejich historie a filmového ztvárnění. V práci jsou uvedeny dva filmy, jejichž analýza se zabývá diskriminací, stereotypy a také jejich životními situacemi. Tato práce také posuzuje, zda má historie obou ras vliv na jejich filmové ztvárnění, a jestli je toto ztvárnění realistické.
Klíčová slova:	Rasa, Afroameričané, Původní Američané, černoši, indiáni, film
Anotace v angličtině:	The bachelor thesis focuses on African American and Native American races in terms of their history and their film representation. There are two selected films in the thesis which describe racism, stereotypes or living situations. This work also decides whether the history of each race has an impact on their film representation and whether this representation is accurate or not.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Race, African American, Native American, Black, Indigenous, Film
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Introduction

There are over eight billion people all over the world. It would definitely be a very uninteresting world if we all looked the same. Thankfully, that is not the case because human skin colour ranges from white to yellow, brown, and black. Our hair is different, our bodies are built differently and our features such as eye or nose shapes for example, can also look differently. Nonetheless, that is the beauty of each person's uniqueness.

Since some groups share certain physical characteristics, they belong to a certain race or even multiple races if they come from a mixed heritage. Throughout our history the division of races has been joined by discrimination, injustices, and stereotypes which may or may not be positive. This maltreatment of others based on their skin colour resulted in racism which is not uncommon even these days.

The aim of this thesis is to show how African American and Native American races are perceived and treated in America through the means of selected films. And especially, whether their history of racial oppression film representation continue to occur in contemporary films. The reason for which I have chosen this topic is that the question of racial issues has always been interesting to me. Not only historically, but also the persisting animosity that people hold against each other which does not belong to the modern world, or at least that is in my opinion. In terms of the choice of races, this was also influenced by personal preference and their importance in American history.

Initially, the thesis describes history of African American and Native American races from their first appearances in the American history up to the present. At the same time, it describes the racial discrimination, injustice or even stereotypes that they face, and which may or may not be portrayed in the chosen films in the practical part of this thesis. The history of their representation on film is described subsequently, with focus on misrepresentation, discrimination, or stereotype as well.

Finally, two selected films are analysed, each focusing on one of the chosen races. And as mentioned above, the analyses focus on the racial issues and stereotypes in context with the films.

1 History of African American race

According to the results of the US Census of 2020 (2023), The African American race is with its 40 million people, the third largest racial or ethnic group in the US. Their history which will be described in the following sub-chapter, is filled with slavery, oppression, and racial injustices; however, they also managed to take the worst from it and transformed it into good things.

In the American South, the African American culture can be seen the most. The enslaved Africans implemented their sub-Saharan diet into what is now known as “soul food”, which as Alexander & Rucker (2010) describe is as a combination of fried chicken, fried catfish, baked beans, corn bread, sweet potato pie, peach cobbler, jambalaya (a rice-based dish) or for example gumbo (Creole stew). Another notable example of the African American culture is music. The musical genre blues came to life in the Roaring 20s when African Americans needed a way to express their frustration related to the daily injustices which they faced. Along with blues, African Americans gave the world jazz, ragtime, or bebop, without which the famous musicians like Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, or Ray Charles would be unknown (Alexander & Rucker, 2010). To conclude, simply mentioning the so-called Birthplace of Jazz, Louisiana’s city New Orleans, should be enough of an example of some of the greatest things which the African American race gave the world. Because in New Orleans, where many slaves were first brought, we can find the mixture of African cuisine, music, and culture alongside the French, Spanish or Caribbean (Mallia, 2021).

1.1 Important historical events

Due to its complexity, only some of the key historical events of the African American history are mentioned in this sub-chapter to give us an outlook on the discrimination and racism the African Americans faced up until the second half of the 20th century. Thus, the events mentioned deal with the colonial era, the Abolition and Civil War era, the Jim Crow and Segregation era, and the era of the Civil Rights Movement.

1.1.1 Colonial era

The maltreatment of African Americans dates to the colonial times where slavery was not unheard of. Many Africans were brought to the rising colonies in the 18th century through slave trade (Kidd, 2019). While Kidd (2019) states that the number of Africans which came to

the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth century was around 11 million, Zinn (2015) mentions that it was only about four million by 1860. All in all, in the southern states, the slaves were widely exploited on tobacco or cotton plantations, and as Kidd (2019) says the master was legally allowed to not only scar or harm unruly slaves, but brand them or cut off their body part if they tried to run away.

The inferior status of the slaves was deepened by passing of various laws which e.g. made slavery hereditary, regarded slaves as property, allowed them to be easily separated from their family or discouraged intermarriages between with white women and African slaves (Brawley, 1919). Brawley (1919) says that if a white woman married an African slave, she would become a slave of her husband's master as well, which on the contrary was something that some masters encouraged only because it would ensure the woman's servitude as well. However, we should also note that the marriages between slave men and women were found to be very stable (Zinn, 2015). Perhaps the love and family gave the slaves hope for better days which was why such marriages lasted against all odds.

It is important to remember that there were free slaves, or rather free African Americans, present in this period. However, as Brawley (1919) mentions, they possessed no civil rights basically - they could not vote or testify in court against white males, they could not purchase white servants or intermarry with white people. What they could do however, was pay taxes. Overall, there was not much that an African American of the colonial period could do. Whether he was enslaved or a free man, he still faced discrimination and racism on every step.

1.1.2 Abolition and the Civil War

The Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge University Press, 2024) defines *abolition* as the official ending of an activity or custom, but also in relation to American history, it states that it also means the official end to slavery in the US, in 1863. In this section we will focus on the second meaning, thus in relation to the US history, and some of the main events leading up to the abolition and the Civil War will be mentioned.

As Brawley (1919) mentions, the early steps towards abolition were already taken between 1760 to 1787 when with articles against slave-trade or slave import from Africa. However, while Northern states went down this route, the South whose plantations relied heavily on the slave-trade, did not want to lose their slave income. To reach a compromise, a

Slave Trade Clause (Article I, Section 9, Clause 1 of the US Constitution) was passed in 1787 stating that Congress was prohibited from banning the slave trade until 1808, which they in fact did on the very first possible day. (Alexander & Rucker, 2010). This clause thus allowed slavery to thrive for another 20 years.

African American participation in the army or the navy was needed and so in 1814, an act authorising two army regiments made up of voluntarily enlisted free men of colour to fight in the War of 1812 was passed (Williams, 2021). In the navy, Williams (2021) points out through letters of navy officers, that they did not care about skin colour of their men and one officer even states that the coloured men were in fact among his best. In the end, in terms of war, one's skin colour should really make no difference in terms of his participation because the participation itself is what could make a difference in the war's outcome.

As both Alexander & Rucker (2010) and Kidd (2019) mention, we should also bear in mind that there were setbacks on the road to abolition, such as the *Dred Scott* case of 1857. The decision made by the Supreme Court judges proved that many still regarded slavery to be legal and constitutional as well as denied the free Black people to have entitlement to equal rights of citizenship. Another sort of setback was the failed Harpers Ferry Raid led by abolitionist John Brown (Alexander & Rucker, 2010). Although unsuccessful, Brown was deemed a martyr by some and a murderer by others, it still fuelled the opinions held on slavery and abolition, and thus helped the Civil War to happen. (Kidd, 2019).

The Civil War (1861-1865) is perhaps the most important event in this and as mentioned earlier, it happened because of the different views that North and South held towards racism. The Harpers Ferry was one of the events that preceded it, as well as the 1860 election in which Lincoln won only by taking all the free states with exception of New Jersey (Kidd, 2019). Upon his election, he seceded from the Union and formed the Confederacy which marks the beginning of the war (Zinn, 2015). However, as Zinn states (2015), we should also take in account that in the pro-abolition North, there was racism present, such as not being able to vote unless you owned 250\$ which applied only to the coloured.

The Emancipation Proclamation issued by Lincoln in 1863 was a turning point in the war because it declared slaves free in the areas fighting against the Union (e.g. in the Confederacy) (Zinn, 2015). But, as Kidd (2019) points out, it did not address slavery in the border states, so Lincoln proclaimed slaves free only in areas where he had no authority.

Regardless, following the urging of famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass, many African American men joined the army forming the first Black regiment in the Union Army (Alexander & Rucker, 2010).

The presence of African American men, or ex-slaves proved crucial in the war. As the war continued, Zinn (2015) explains that while most slaves in the South neither submitted nor rebelled, if presented the opportunity they deserted their owners and often joined the Union army which helped the North win the war. Because without their help, they would not succeed. The Confederacy only started to think about using the slaves when they realized that they will not win without them. Nonetheless, Zinn (2015) mentions that not even the so-called “Negro Soldier Law” issued by President Davis (Confederacy) in March 1865 could alter the outcome of the war which ended with the surrender of General Lee in April 1865 (Alexander & Rucker, 2010).

The abolition of slavery throughout the entire nation was finally ratified in 1865, and it is now known as the 13th Amendment. While Lincoln worked extremely hard for its ratification, he did not live to see it, because he was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth. Only because of that President Andrew Johnson instead ratified it (Alexander & Rucker, 2010).

To conclude, the road towards the abolition of slavery was not an easy one. The events described in this section were only some of those which happened in that period. Nonetheless, every road has its ups and downs, so here we had a look at the “downs” such as the *Dred Scott case* or the Harpers Ferry raid, which while not being successful in what they tried to accomplish, they still were successful in paving the road towards the abolishment as shown by the ratification of the 13th Amendment.

1.1.3 Jim Crow era and segregation

As we move on towards the events of the Jim Crow Era, between the late 1870s to the mid-1960s, we should first explain why this era is called “Jim Crow”. Kidd (2019) explains, that “Jim Crow” was as a slang term of a Black man and as such it came to represent their segregated life. Thus, when the abolition introduced new forms of legal and informal segregation which meant that mingling of the races was prohibited in places such as restaurants, hotels, streetcars, trains, parks, and other public spaces, the meaning “Jim Crow” came to represent this entire period (Kidd, 2019). In this section, we will however look only at

events up until the Civil Rights Movement, which will be dealt with in the following sub-chapter.

The newly introduced forms of legal and informal segregation caused that many African Americans felt let down by the promises of “equality” which were mentioned in the passings of the 13th and 14th Amendments and which unfortunately many, especially southern, states decided not to follow properly (Kidd, 2019). As Zinn (2015) states, the issue was that not even the Supreme Court followed the 14th Amendment in the manner that it was written and instead stated that it was aimed at state action only, and that it does not refer to the individual invasion of individual rights. The 14th Amendment, however, in its wording, gave citizenship to all people born in the USA while guaranteeing them “equal protection” of the laws (National Archives, n.d.).

Not even the 15th Amendment which was passed by the Congress in 1869 and which gave African American men voting rights, changed much regarding their equality (National Archives, n.d.). The state leaders were nonetheless very inventive in terms of finding ways to prevent the African Americans implement their right to vote. They implemented what is known as the “grandfather clauses” which, as Kidd (2019) explains, meant that states required payment of poll taxes or literacy tests to vote. In some cases, you were not allowed to vote unless your own ancestor was allowed to do so as well and hence the name, “grandfather clauses.”

Right after the end of the Civil War, a terrorist group led by white supremacists called Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was established in 1866 (Zinn, 2015). The Klan, known for their costumes with masks and pointed hats to hide their identities and to be intimidating, fought to take back the control over African Americans by controlling black labour force or restoring their subordination in all spheres of Southern society (Foner, 2015). Up until the early 1870s, the Klan along with groups of similar type tried to do that by organizing raids, lynchings, beatings, or burnings (Zinn, 2015). So, because of all the ongoing violence, the Congress passed anti-Klan legislation in form of the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871 and went to investigate their activities in the South (Kidd, 2019). However, as Kidd (2019) adds, majority of the members were never sentenced for their crimes, and later the Klan’s existence was even revived, although its activities did not last long.

Perhaps the most important court case of the Jim Crow era up until the 20th century was *Plessy vs Ferguson* in 1896 which proved the racist principle of “separate but equal”. The case presented to the US Supreme Court was caused due to Louisiana’s interpretation of the 14th Amendment when they passed a law in 1890 which required railway companies to provide separate seatings for white and Black passengers (Kidd, 2019). One day, as Kidd (2019) explains, Homer Plessy, a man of light-skin but of mixed origin, was sent to the white section and refused to leave the section which resulted in his arrest. At court, Plessy lost the 13th and 14th Amendments against judge Ferguson who was even backed by the Supreme Court and thus the “separate but equal” principle which allowed the states to legally segregate the African Americans was born (Bynum, 2022). However, as the National Archives (n.d.) mention, one sole member who voted for Plessy already at that time predicted that this “colour blind” decision would have a bad outcome as did the *Dred Scott* before that. As such, the court’s decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* caused millions of African Americans to leave south for more liberal north and west (Bynum, 2022). This became later known as the “Great Migration.”

At the beginning of the 20th century, African Americans established their first Black fraternities and sororities, some even at predominantly White institutions. This led to the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, which is known under the abbreviation the NAACP (Bynum, 2022). As Bynum (2022) adds, the organization, along with the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), became remarkably successful in the race against racism by winning legal battles and voicing their opinion on the actions against African Americans in the south.

The racial conflicts nonetheless grew immensely and became increasingly violent. In 1919 when an African American boy unintentionally crossed the “color barrier” while swimming, he was stoned to death by a group of white men, yet the police officer refused to arrest the white men even though there were many witnesses present (Darity & Mullen, 2022). This resulted in a week of rioting called Chicago Race Riot during which both races fought against each other and in the end there were 38 dead people, 537 injured and over 1 000 African Americans were left homeless after their homes were burned down to the ground by white rioters (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). However, the violence of the Chicago Race Riot finally opened the eyes of the nation to see the issues of the

racial conflict and even President Woodrow Wilson deemed “the white” to be “the aggressor” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

Although the government tried to improve the relationships between both races following the Chicago Race Riot, it was not successful. Many other riots occurred, including the Tulsa Race Massacre (or Tulsa Race Riot) of 1921 during which at least 300 African Americans were murdered by a white mob during only two days (Darity & Mullen, 2022). As Darity & Mullen (2022) continue to add, this riot was among the worst because whites resorted to the use of World War I aircrafts and attacked African Americans from air as well. However, the Tulsa Riot was long unheard of because official documents disappeared shortly after the event, it was only in 1997 when a Tulsa Race Riot Commission was formed to thoroughly investigate and document the incident (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

The country had to deal with the Great Depression between 1929 and 1939, and during this period millions lost their jobs and as such the unemployment rate exceeded 20 percent which is the highest up to date (Romer, & Pells, 2024). President Hoover lost the presidential race against Franklin D. Roosevelt who already in his presidential campaign introduced program called “New Deal” to promote economic recovery. As such, following his election, new agencies were created to control agricultural production, stabilize price rates, or create work programs for the unemployed (National Archives, n.d.). Zinn (2015) mentions that the New Deal’s success was only in reducing the unemployment from the original 13 million to 9 million. As for the African Americans, the New Deal did not aid many because they did not qualify for unemployment insurance, minimum wages, or social security (Zinn, 2015). So, it is not surprising, that family patterns like poor education, family instability, illegitimacy, unemployment, crime, drug addiction or alcoholism often appeared among the Black communities (Alexander & Rucker, 2010).

To conclude this subchapter on Jim Crow and Segregation, it is obvious that not even 13th Amendment which abolished slavery, or the 14th or 15th Amendments which followed, changed much in reality. The lives of African Americans were still very much not equal to those of white Americans. The white elite tried hard to oppress them and used various manners to do so, such as the grandfather clauses. African Americans during the Jim Crow era also had to fight for their lives against the terrorist groups like Ku Klux Klan and so it is not surprising that the violent rate grew exceedingly high especially when African Americans

fought the white back and events like the Chicago Race Riot or Tulsa Riot occurred. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that lives of African Americans also partly improved with the start of their own organization such as the NAACP or NACW, even though the Great Depression disrupted it once again.

1.1.4 The Civil Rights movement

The Civil Rights Movement occurred during the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, many African Americans voiced their opinions, their discontent with the segregation they faced on the daily basis. In this subchapter we will look at some of the major events or personalities which paved the road to the Voting Rights act of 1965 which ended the Civil Rights Movement.

One of the first major events was the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. The case which discussed the harmful effect on the psychology of African American children who faced segregation at elementary school was brought, along with four similar cases, to the Supreme Court with the help of NAACP (National Archives, n.d.). The Supreme Court in this case concluded that the segregation generated an unchangeable feeling of inferiority and as such the “separate but equal” held no place in public education (Zinn, 2015). While it was an important ruling, because the court did not set a time frame to remove segregation from public schools, even ten years later, there were about 75 percent of schools where segregation remained (Zinn, 2015).

In 1955, a year later after the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, Rosa Parks refused to leave her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus to let a white passenger sit down (Alexander & Rucker, 2010). As a result of this defiance against Jim Crow segregation, Alexander & Rucker (2010) explain that the Black community orchestrated Montgomery Bus Boycott, a nonviolent boycott of the city’s bus system which successfully ended the racial segregation on the city’s public transit. This event is oftentimes mentioned as the event which started the civil rights movement.

Due to the result of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregation illegal at schools, in 1957, nine African American volunteered to desegregate an all-white school in Little Rock, Arkansas by enrolling (Bynum, 2022). The students, known as the Little Rock Nine, on their first days of class faced mobs of white segregationists and National Guard, ordered by the governor of Arkansas himself, who prevented them from entering the school

(Alexander & Rucker, 2010). They were finally able to safely attend classes only after President Eisenhower ordered troops to protect the nine students and escort them to classes (Bynum, 2022). Nonetheless, Alexander & Rucker (2010) mention that the students still face harassment and abuse after the troop's departure, yet their actions ensured that Little Rock schools would integrate despite their resistance.

Alexander & Rucker (2010) mention other notable events in the Civil Rights Movement such as the Sit-In Movement of 1960 or Freedom Rides of 1961. During the Sit-In Movement African Americans used nonviolent methods to effectively end segregation at lunch counter. The authors further explain that despite being denied service, the students remained at the counter till the end of the day, only to return the following day with more people, and eventually with white students by their side. These sit-ins proved immensely powerful because the businesses rethought their policies and desegregated their lunch counter in short time.

Alexander & Rucker (2010) state that the Freedom Rides during which white riders sat in "black only" seats and black riders in "white only" seats, tested firstly the decision of Supreme Court which banned segregated interstate travel and secondly, President Kennedy's public stand against segregation. Therefore, after the riders faced bombings, arrests, beatings by white separatist mobs as well as members of KKK, the Interstate Commerce Commission prohibits transportation segregation in the whole country (Bynum, 2022). These two events, the Sit-In Movements and Freedom Rides show the power that young people, students, and their resilience had to further desegregate the nation.

In terms of influential figures during the Civil Rights Movement, we will have a look at Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. While both activists, their difference was that Martin Luther King Jr believed in racial equality and Malcom X believed in black supremacy.

Malcolm X became a leader of the Nation of Islam, an American version of the Muslim religion which emerged during the Great Depression (Kidd, 2019). Malcolm believed that African Americans were superior to the white and that whites were devils, and he was not afraid to voice this opinion out loud which proved dangerous after hic comment on President Kennedy's assassination to the media cost him his position in the Nation of Islam (Alexander & Rucker, 2010). Nonetheless, Alexander & Rucker (2010) add that his impact became greater only after his assassination in 1965 due to his posthumous autobiography

which became a best seller and his opinions gained impact on other Black activist groups such as the Black Panthers.

On the other hand, as Alexander & Rucker (2010) admit, Martin Luther King Jr. became the human symbol of the search for racial integration because his actions paralleled those of the Civil Rights movement itself. Throughout his fight against the segregation, despite multiple arrests and a bombing of his house, he still urged nonviolent protest such as sit-ins, marches, or mass meetings (Alexander & Rucker, 2010). In 1963, during the March on Washington he gave his most famous speech “I Have a Dream” which earned him the Nobel Peace Prize the following year. Kidd (2019) also adds that his influence and the political abilities of President Lyndon Johnson allowed the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. AS National Archives (n.d.) explain, this act prohibited discrimination in public places, provided for the integration of schools and other public facilities and made employment discrimination illegal.

King’s undying quest for integration finally came to end in 1965 when President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act which was “to enforce the 15th Amendment to the Constitution” and thus it outlaws the practices such as the grandfather clauses which were commonly used in many southern states (National Archives, n.d.). This was the result of a protest march against voting rights which was organized by King from Selma to Montgomery (Kidd, 2019). Around 70 marchers were at first violently beaten by the police on “Bloody Sunday”, and only two weeks after that were they allowed to march under federal protection while singing “We Shall Overcome” (Kidd, 2019). Following that, the Voting Rights Act was signed.

As can be seen by only some of the Civil Rights Movement events which are listed above, African Americans fought bravely and for a long time to finally ensure their voting rights. While facing harassment and beatings, they continued with their peaceful sit-ins or walk-ins, they continued with their freedom marches. And eventually, their effort paid off and they finally accessed their rights which were guaranteed by the Constitution.

1.1.5 Summary

This sub-chapter about the important historical events of African American race towards the Voting Rights Act of 1965 shows how the stance towards this race evolved and how important African Americans were throughout American history even if the “white” did

not realize it. Even though they were treated as a hereditary property in the colonial times, they were crucial for the North's win of the Civil War which in turn gave them the 13th Amendment – the abolition of slavery. After that however, they still had to fight their way through the Jim Crow segregation era during which the “separate but equal” principle was heavily applied, and they had to fight for their rights and lives against the KKK members or during riots like that in Chicago or Tulsa. However, they also managed to establish important organization to do so as the NAACP or the NACW. And lastly, during the years of Civil Rights Movement, under the support of these organizations and thanks to the personality of Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X, they fought for their equality by participating in sit-in movements, freedom rides, or freedom marches. And their hard work finally paid off by the passing of the Voting Rights Act.

1.2 Issues following the 1965 Voting Rights Act

In this sub-chapter, the events of the late 20th century and the events up until the current day are described to show that although the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are supposed to guarantee the fair treatment of African Americans, it is fair to say that it is not always as fair as it supposed to be. That is why this sub-chapter mentions events which include unfair treatment which oftentimes involves police brutality.

1.2.1 Late 20th century

Although the Voting Rights Act was passed, the race for equality was not over. The African American community still encountered racial discrimination and violence on the daily basis.

Both Kidd (2019) and Zinn (2015) explain that shortly after the 1965 Voting Rights Act, riots across America like in Watts (community in Los Angeles) or Detroit continued, however not for political but for social reasons such as housing or employment inequalities or police brutality. Because of court case *Miranda v. Arizona* in 1966, the police from then on while arresting a criminal had to say what is called a “Miranda warning” (Kidd, 2019). This, as Kidd (2019) explains, involves informing alleged criminals of their rights to remain silent and to have an attorney, and that whatever they say can be used against them in court.

Around this period, the idea of “Black Power” which was notable for a pride in race, need for black independence or even separation, was born (Zinn, 2015). Malcolm X, who was

mentioned in the previous subchapter, became a sort of spokesman for this movement and his assassination in 1965 brought even more importance to his separatist because they resonated with the ideas of a group named Black Panthers (Zinn, 2015). Perhaps because of all the ongoing racial violence, the Black Power resonated more with black activists than the nonviolence and integration preached by Martin Luther King Jr. (Alexander & Rucker, 2010).

As for Martin Luther King Jr., Alexander & Rucker (2010) state that he almost predicted his death because a day before his assassination he told his followers he might not arrive at the “Promise Land” with everyone. Although his death in 1968 caused more outbreaks of racial violence, his spirit and ideals are what inspire the nation even nowadays, over 50 years after his assassination (Alexander & Rucker, 2010). President Ronald Reagan marked King’s importances by turning his birthday into a national holiday in 1968 (Kidd, 2019).

In the 1970s, African American activism mainly focused on school busing to create more mixed schools and on affirmative action which urged employers to create more equal working environments by employing minorities as well (Kidd, 2019). As for school busing, even though the thought behind busing black children to white schools and vice versa was good, it also created a wave of white violence, and the children were often bullied for attending a school of different ethnicity (Zinn, 2015). In terms of the affirmative action, businesses and schools received taxpayer support to hire minorities which unsurprisingly caused issues as well. As Kidd (2019) and Bynum (2022) explain, in the case of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* in 1978, the university was sued because they did not admit an applicant because of their “racial quotas”. The Supreme Court ruled the racial quotas to be unconstitutional, however it also concluded that affirmative action to accept more minority applicants was possible nonetheless (Kidd, 2019; Bynum, 2022). In the end, even if the affirmative action or school busing sparked some racial incidents, it still helped with the integration of races and still meant a lot.

However, while it seemed that the races were finally beginning to be equal, technology with broadcast TV or video recorders showed that it was far from it (Kidd, 2019). As Bynum (2022) points out, police violence against African Americans was not unheard of before, however there was never physical evidence to prove it until a video of brutal beating of Rodney King was played in the broadcasting in 1991. While it might seem enough to convict the officers, a jury with no African American members failed to do so in 1992 (Kidd, 2019).

As Kidd (2019) adds, this only resulted in riots all over Los Angeles which were deemed the most brutal and damaging since the Civil War.

Besides the continued racial tension which was widely visible by the reactions over the O. J. Simpson murder trial, the African American influence grew in the 1980s and 1990s with the help of pop icon Michael Jackson or the basketball star Michael Jordan who became one of the wealthiest African Americans due to his NBA championships and deals with Nike (Kidd, 2019).

1.2.2 21st century

The 21st century is marked by rapid evolution of technology which allowed people to share videos easily with the entire world via YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, or other social networks and thus it became extremely easy to shine a light on any subject possible.

The beginning of the 21st century, more precisely the year 2008, marks an important event in the African American history because it commemorates the year when Barack Obama, the first African American president, was elected (Kidd, 2019). His presidency is linked to Affordable Care Act, or rather so-called Obamacare, a law that expanded health insurance to millions of Americans (Kidd, 2019). During his second term as a president, the unemployment of African Americans declines, initiatives such as “My Brother’s Keeper” or “Advancing Equity for Women and Girls of Color” were started, and the rates of high school graduation of African American students become the highest in history (Bynum, 2022).

As Obama’s second term came to end in 2016, and billionaire Donald Trump and his promise to “Make America Great Again” and build a wall on the border with Mexico to keep immigrants from coming in, took over and only widened cultural (Bobadilla et al., 2018). In 2020, Donald Trump however loses his second term to Obama’s former Vice President, Joe Biden who appoints Kamala Harris, to become a first female African American Vice President (VP) in the American history.

In terms of African American lives, the 21st century is linked to a movement called *Black Lives Matter* which was formed in 2013 as a response to reoccurring racism and violence, especially due to the police brutality which occurred during the events which will be mentioned shortly (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). As Bynum (2022) explains the Black Lives Matter movement was started as a response to a case of fatal

shooting of an unarmed Black teenager after which the charges against the officer were completely dropped. In 2014, two other cases of police killings against unarmed African American men, Eric Garner and Michael Brown, increased the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). In terms of Eric Garner, similarly to the death of Rodney King in 1991, a video where Garner repeats multiple times “I can’t breathe” while an officer has an illegal choking hold over him was streamed all over the media, and yet even the video evidence was not enough to convict the police officer who even received pay rise after that incident (Bynum, 2022).

More recently, in 2020, an unarmed African American man named George Floyd was killed by a white police officer Derek Chauvin who kept his knee on Floyd’s neck for nine minutes during which Floyd repeatedly cried that “I can’t breathe”, similarly to Garner in 2014 (BBC News, 2021). Because a video of this incident spread throughout the Internet rapidly it shocked the whole nation and perhaps even the entire world (Evelyn, 2020). Following that Black Lives Matters’ largest protests with over 25 million Americans participating despite the restrictions and lockdowns of Covid-19 happened (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). Unlike the police officers from the cases mentioned earlier, Chauvin was charged with murder and sentenced for 22 years in 2021, with additional sentencing of 20 years in 2022 for depriving Floyd and a 14-year-old child of their constitutional rights (Office of Public Affairs, 2022).

1.2.3 Summary

This subchapter about the current treatment of African Americans informs about the events following the Voting Rights Act up until the present day. During the late 20th century, the riots continued, however, this time a lot of them was as a response to the police brutality against African Americans which was surprisingly not sentenced at court accordingly even with the rise of video evidence. On the bright side, these acts “helped” with the usage of Miranda warning, which is oftentimes featured in cinematography. The integration of African American citizens continued in forms of school busing, affirmative actions or more equal working conditions, as well as with racial quotas at universities which were ruled out as unconstitutional. Of course, not every African American agreed with the integration and this period gave the rise of more separatist groups like Black Panthers which promoted *Black Power*. And while the 21st century is still marked with racial issues and police brutality due to which the *Black Lives Matter* movement was established, it still brought important firsts in the

lives of African American people – the first African American President in the US history, Barack Obama (who was in office from 2009 to 2017), and the first African American female Vice President in the US history, Kamala Harris (who is currently in office since 2021).

2 Film representation of African Americans

The following subchapters deal with the history of film representation of African Americans from its early start during the 19th century up until the present day. First, the issues of blackface and race movies is described, followed by African American experience, blaxploitation, and the need for “colour-blind” films as well as the growth of African American actors in terms of their fame and popularity. Last but not least, there are contemporary representation of African Americans.

2.1 Late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century

As Dimare (2011) and the National Museum of African American History and Culture (2018) explain, the first time that Black culture met mass culture was thanks to blackface, and while the image of white actors performing with faces coloured black is shocking for contemporary viewers, its importance as a form of mass entertainment in American history dates to 1830s and 1840s when blackface performers combined dancing, singing and comedy routines on stage. Nonetheless, while these shows which caricatured, stereotyped, misrepresented, and mocked African Americans were racist, they still found its audience until the end of 19th century when vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley gradually replaced it (Dimare, 2011).

At the beginning of the 20th century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel, was the most expensive blackface film produced up until that day (DiMare, 2011). Nonetheless, the most influential yet controversial early perspective on slavery during the silent era was D. W. Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* based on a novel *The Clansman* (Rollins, 2004). As Rollins (2004) further explains, the film with a biased look on slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction era, featured blackface as well as stereotyped Black characters who portrayed sexual aggressors, fools, and carpetbaggers, and who seemed more than happy with their lives as slaves on plantations. As DiMare (2011) adds, the film is also an ode to the Ku Klux Klan who came to rescue the southern democracy in the plot.

During the first half of the 20th century, so called “race movies” were produced by white writers, thanks to the Jim Crow era which was ongoing at that time (DiMare, 2011). The importance of these film as DiMare (2011) notes, lay in the fact that Black actors spoke in their real African American vernacular. It was only in 1934 film *Imitation of Life* that the issue of race was dealt with in a serious manner, because up until that the early Hollywood treatment which African American actors received was much degrading similarly to the savages with exaggerated accents which they often portrayed (DiMare, 2011).

2.2 Second half of the 20th century

After World War II, the most offensive black stereotypes vanished from Hollywood films with the arise of the trend of “social problem” films helped to raise the awareness of racial equality (Rollins, 2004). Thus, films with racial themes like *Home of the Brave* (1949), *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) or *No Way Out* (1950) were made. However, while Black actors Poitier, Harry Belafonte or Dorothy Dandridge gained some level of fandom, DiMare (2011) adds that films featuring African Americans which dealt with blacks passing as white still appeared.

The 1960s films featuring African Americans reflected the society and its political rivalry between Dr Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, and thus many radical films about the Black experience were filmed (DiMare, 2011). Also, both DiMare (2011) and Rollins (2004) find that films in the 1960s finally showed some level of sympathy towards African Americans who were now cast for the lead roles, which allowed films like 1961 *A Raisin in the Sun* or 1967 film *In the Heat of the Night* (both with Poitier in the lead roles) deal with racial issues. Another important film focusing on the civil rights era of the 1930s is the 1962 version of *To Kill a Mockingbird* which is based on the novel by Harper Lee (Rollins, 2004). Similarly, DiMare (2011) mentions that in 1977 a TV adaptation of a novel *Roots*, became the first to portray the experience of African Americans from slavery to the Civil Rights era in eight episodes. And as Rollins (2004) continues, the series, which shocked many white citizens because of its accurate depiction of events, challenged viewers to rethink their thoughts on slavery.

The 1970s introduced blaxploitation, which Cambridge Dictionary (2024) defines as a style of cheaply made films with no high value which featured African American actors, and which were made to attract Black audiences. However, Rollins (2004) explains that these

films stressed the brutal aspects of slavery while showing the horrors related to slave breeding. Perhaps the first movie which initiated this style of films was *Shaft* in 1971 which opened the doors for films with black action heroes (DiMare, 2011). On the other hand, the 1970s also featured films which showed African Americans in a positive and sympathetic manner, and which often dealt with the black perspective, black endurance, and dignity (DiMare 2011).

The need for more diverse casting allowed Hollywood to introduce “colour-blind” parts for Black actors, in which the race of the character was irrelevant to the plot (Rollins, 2004). Thus, in the 1980s, while African Americans in general encountered setbacks in their everyday lives, Eddie Murphy, an African American comedy actor, achieved remarkable success in Hollywood thanks to films such as *48 Hours* (1982) or *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984) (Rollins, 2004). DiMare (2011) also mentions, that the 1980s mark the rise of the first major African American director Spike Lee, whose directorial breakout came in 1989 with the film *Do the Right Thing* which featured racial tensions in New York. Lee also directed many successful films like *Malcolm X* (1992) or *Mo’ Better Blues* (1990), the latter starring Denzel Washington (DiMare, 2011)

Similarly to Murphy, another African American performer who rose to fame in the 1980s and the 1990s was Whoopi Goldberg known for films like *Ghost* (1990) or *Sister Act* (1992) (Rollins, 2004). And by the end of the 20th century, many other African American actors like Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, Samuel L. Jackson, Will Smith, or Halle Berry solidified their position in the film industry and became highly casted in the Hollywood films (DiMare, 2011).

In the 1990s, films like *Separate but Equal* (1991), *Simple Justice* (1993) or *The Vernon Johns Story: The Road to Freedom* (1994) were made to accurately describe some events of the Civil Rights Movement (Rollins, 2004). Similarly, Rollins (2004) mentions that the events of for example Montgomery bus boycott were described in documentary dramas *Boycott* (2001) and *The Rosa Parks* (2002). Steven Spielberg’s 1997 *Amistad* received much praise for its powerful statement about the horrors of African slave trade

2.3 21st century

In the 21st century, considering political changes (Obama, Trump), the 9/11 attacks, the War on Terror, and the technological development, the film industry continued to unite the

audience (Bingham, 2021). As Bingham (2021) continues, films like Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019) allowed the white audience to experience the horrors from the point of view of an African American satirist.

Beginning with *Iron Man* in 2008, The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) has released more than 30 superhero films (Ray, 2024). And as Bingham (2021) explains, the most successful has been *Black Panther*, which is the only MCU film with an Oscar nomination for Best Picture, and with Oscar wins for Best Costume Design, Best Production Design, and Best Music Score, but perhaps more importantly, it became the most commercially successful film by an African American director, and the most successful film with an almost all-Black cast. The film also featured awarded African American actors such as Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong'o, Daniel Kaluuya, Angela Bassett, and the late Chadwick Boseman in the lead role (Bingham, 2021).

Bingham (2021) however points out, that the cinematic entertainment of the 21st century is linked with the #MeToo movement which as Brittain (2024) explains rose to higher importance in 2017 in response to sexual abuse and harassment by film producer Harvey Weinstein. On the other hand, in 2014 and 2015 the Academy Awards were marked with the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite which defined the inequality of racial diversity of nominees (Bingham, 2021). The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) thus subsequently launched an initiative to double the number of female and minority members, and as a result nominations for Best Picture (*Moonlight*, 2016), Supporting Actor (Mahershala Ali for *Moonlight*, 2016) or Actress (Viola Davis for *Fences*, 2016), Director (Jordan Peele for *Get Out*, 2017), Original Screenplay (Jordan Peele for *Get Out*, 2017), Costume Design or Production Design featured African Americans, many of them resulting in an Oscar win (Bingham, 2021).

2.4 Summary

African American representation on film is closely connected to the historical development which this race went through. They were first played by white minstrels who used blackface which itself was highly offensive, yet perhaps the most influential film of that period *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) which praised KKK, and which was later discredited for its racism, did involve blackface as well. Thus, it was during the second half of the 20th century that the racial issue was properly addressed on film and by the end of the century,

owing to colour-blind parts, many African American actors rose to fame. This paved the road for the contemporary cinematographic appearance of African Americans, with many winning Oscars and other awards for their art.

3 History of Native Americans

The US Census of 2020 (2021) categorizes Native Americans as *American Indian and Alaska Native*, and based on the data from 2020, there were only about 3,7 million citizens with only Indigenous ancestry which make about 1,1% of the total US population. The majority of Native Americans can be found in Alaska, New Mexico, Montana, South Dakota, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Arizona, and Wyoming.

While it is known that Native Americans were the inhabitants of the country long before the arrival of colonizers, and as Kidd (2019) explains, there were hundreds of indigenous societies each with different religion, language and governments, the question might be as to why the number of Native American people is not higher nowadays. The answers to that will be revealed in the following sections which will deal with the history of Native Americans in the USA, mainly the racial discrimination and conflicts which they faced.

3.1 Important historical events

Similarly to the previous chapter focused on African American race, the history of Native Americans and especially their lives after the arrival of colonizers is very vast because of there were over thousand tribes and as such it would be impossible to mention all the historical events. Thus, only some of the key events up until the 20th century such as the arrival of Columbus, the Indian Wars, the Indian Removal Act, or the life on reservations are mentioned in this sub-chapter.

3.1.1 Before and after Columbus (up to 16th century)

Before the arrival of Columbus in 1492, the Indigenous societies based their lives on agriculture, hunting and fishing and the societies of North, Central and South America often traded seeds (such as corn, squash, be), other goods and cultural practices among each one another (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). As Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) continues to explain, the total population in the Americas was about one hundred million at the end of 15th century and about two-fifths of that were in North America and Mexico, meanwhile, the European population at that same age was only about fifty million. Sadly, the population of the Americas was reduced by 90 percent after the colonization began and thus reduced the Native American population from a hundred million to ten million (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015).

As for the Indigenous societies, they did not deal with diseases as much as the European population, due to the practices of herbal medicine, surgery, dentistry and most importantly hygienic and ritual bathing and healthy diet (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). That is one of the reasons as to why their population was higher than the European. However, with the arrival of colonizers, many diseases which were unknown to Native Americans (like smallpox or measles) broke out and killed thousands because they did not know how to cure or protect themselves from the contagion (Zinn, 2015).

As Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) mentions, the societies mainly depended on the agriculture of corn, however other crops like squash, beans and potatoes were often cultivated as well. And as Kidd (2019) further adds that the Indigenous societies often built mounds (earthen pyramids) with temples, road systems, irrigation channels and in terms of the Mayan culture also impressive works of art and architecture. Yet, when the colonizers came, they stole the cultivated farmland, deer parks and claimed that it was their doing and that before their arrival the land in North America was a wilderness (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015).

The Arrival of Columbus in 1492 marks the beginning of the end of the flourishing Indigenous societies (Kidd, 2019). The first Indians which Columbus encountered in the Bahamas were the Arawak Indians, whom he claimed to be very naïve and thus he promised the king to bring him as much gold and as many slaves as he asked for, from his next voyage (Zinn, 2015). So, as Zinn (2015) continues, the first slave raid happened already in 1495 when they gathered fifteen hundred Arawak men, women, and children out of which they chose five hundred to be taken back to Europe, yet only three hundred of them made it there alive. However, the actions of the colonizers, such as exploiting human labour, displacing thousands, or killing those who resisted, were justifiable in their eyes, because they were done in the name of God (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015).

The French colonization of Canada was in ways better than the English or Spanish (in Central America) one, because it was slow and because it revolved around fur trade and as such it depended on Indian hunters and traders (Kidd, 2019). However, as Kidd (2019) adds, even this fur trade caused conflicts between tribes who competed for hunting land and profit. Nevertheless, the French also bought and sold thousands of Native American slaves in Canada, just like the English did (Kidd, 2019).

3.1.2 Indian Wars and the Indian Removal Act

The colonizers in need of more land, food and wealth tried to remove the Native Americans, and unsurprisingly they encountered resistance and so numerous conflicts transpired between them, many of which were also caused because of their “need” to spread religion to the uncivilized Indians. In Jamestown, for example, military leader John Smith threatened to kill Powhatan women and children if they did not provide food, clothes, and land to the settlers (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). The war with the Powhatans started in 1609 and involved gruesome killings, yet the Powhatans revenge came in 1622 when they massacred about 350 colonists of the English settlements along the James River (Zinn, 2015). Also, in their search to spread evangelism, the English captured Pocahontas, daughter of Indian chief Powhatan and made her accept Christianity (Kidd, 2019). Also, as Kidd (2019) adds in 1614 she married Englishman John Rolfe and became known as Lady Rebecca Rolfe (Kidd, 2019). However, even after 1624 when the English and Indians territories were separated, the Powhatans still faced oppression to move inwards by the growing colony (Kidd, 2019).

There were many other conflicts which turned into wars such as the Pequot War between Puritans and Pequots in 1636 (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015), but perhaps the most brutal conflict over the land possession between Native Americans and the English settlers was King Philip’s War in the 1670s (Kidd, 2019). Both Native Americans and colonists (along with their Indian allies) burned and destroyed settlements during this bloodiest conflict (which involved scalp hunting) in the American history, and the war ended only after the Wampanoag leader Metacom (known as King Philip by the English) was killed in 1676 (Warren, 2024).

In 1830, as Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) explains, President Andrew Jackson (who despised Native Americans) signed into law the Indian Removal Act which authorised him to relocate the eastern tribes to the so-called “Indian Territory” west of Mississippi River (Waldman, 2006). While some white leaders agreed with this decision with ideas that Native Americans would thrive in their own territories, others predicted that it would end in a disaster (Kidd, 2019). Unsurprisingly, many citizens (white included) protested the Indian Removal Act, and many tribes, like the Cherokees, tried to make their case before the Supreme Court in order to keep their land, however, the president still order their removal in the end (Kidd, 2019). And thus, about 15 000 out of 100 000 Native Americans, who had to move, lost their lives on

their journey west (Pauls, 2024). This, as Pauls (2024) explains, became known as *The Trail of Tears*, in memory of the Native Americans suffering along their journey west.

3.1.3 Plain Wars

During the 1850s and 1870s, a series of conflicts between the US government and the Native Americans, known as the Plain Wars, happened. One of the well-known conflicts is the Battle of the Little Bighorn. The conflict was won by the Lakota warriors who were led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, against the army led by general Custer Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). However, even though the Indigenous warriors completely decimated Custer's soldiers, after much national pressure they surrendered to the US army by 1876 (Kidd, 2019).

Following that, in the December of 1890, the deadliest massacre in the US history known as the Wounded Knee Massacre happened. The incident was indirectly caused by The Ghost Dance Religion during which meditation, praying and ritual circle dancing was performed in the hopes of restoring the Indigenous world (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). As Waldman (2006) explains, some tribal leaders modified the Ghost Dance to involve "Ghost Dance Shirts" which claimed to protect Native Americans from being shot by the US soldiers and thus their renewed militancy led to the Wounded Knee Massacre. During this incident, which started upon an accidental shot from a rifle, American soldiers slaughtered about three hundred Indigenous men, women, and children (Zinn, 2015 and Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). As brutal as it was, the Wounded Knee Massacre marks the last conflict of the Indian Wars, and it inherently caused the end of the Ghost Dance Religion as well (Waldman, 2006).

3.1.4 Life on the reservations

Naturally, most tribes resisted the reservation life forced upon them by the Indian Removal Act, some eventually adjusted to it, while others like the Apache found it very difficult to do so, because they used to be wanderers and being locked up in one area was unimaginable to them (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). The promised Indian Territory continued to be reduced numerous times after that because the US government passed the General Allotment Act in 1887 or the Curtis Act of 1898 which dissolved the tribal governments and forced upon them the land Allotment (Waldman, 2006).

The life in the reservations was far from easy and it was very unsafe, because oftentimes drunken soldiers would burn and destroy their homes, ran after their women or

killed for no reason (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015) Also, as Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) mentions, there was lack of food supply because the US government forbid them to hunt outside the reservations (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015), and perhaps because of all of that alienation from what they were used to, religious movements (like the Ghost Dance) spread among the tribes because they promised the return of the former Indigenous lands and ways of life (Waldman, 2006). Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) also mentions that off-reservation boarding schools were established and in there, the children were prohibited to use their native language or practice religion and instead Christianity was forced upon them.

3.1.5 Summary

This sub-chapter deals with key historical events of the Native American life up until the 20th century. Native American tribes were prospering up until the arrival of Columbus who arrived in the Americas instead of Asia. His arrival marks the beginning of ruthless conflicts which resulted in the deaths of millions of Indigenous people. While the white deemed them savages, they were only trying to survive or fight back the white who slaughtered them oftentimes without a valid reason. The greed of the colonizers led to the Indian Removal Act which forced the Indigenous people to move from their homes into reservations so that the white had more land to possess. This of course was not met with ease, and many conflicts between the two races happened and, after the brutal massacre of Wounded Knee, Native Americans stopped their fight. However, it is also important to note that the life in the reservations was not easy, they often felt in danger because of the US soldiers, and the promised territory kept getting smaller and smaller.

3.2 Modern era (20th century onwards)

This sub-chapter focuses on the events of the 20th and 21st centuries, such as the Indian Reorganization Act, the American Indian Movement or their fight for better conditions and equality as well as the continuous land struggles or social issues they face.

3.2.1 20th century

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 meant the end of the Assimilation and Allotment policies and introduced the Tribal Restoration and Reorganization period (Waldman, 2006). While this happened as a part of F. D. Roosevelt's New Deal, Waldman (2006) explains that the taken land by allotment was never returned to the affected tribes.

Nonetheless, it was the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) attempt to restore tribal life of the Indigenous people living in poverty (Zinn, 2015).

The US government in the 1953 introduced a new "termination" policy which eliminated government support for Native American tribes and terminated the trust status of all Indian-owned lands (National Archives, 2023). Following that, as National Archives (2023) explain, the BIA started a voluntary urban relocation program and thus many indigenous people moved to cities where they had issues to adjust to their new life, they battled with low-end jobs, discrimination, or unemployment and if they returned to their reservations, they found out they did not belong there anymore. So, by 1960 about half of the 800 000 Native Americans lived in cities across the country (Zinn, 2015).

Under the influence of the Civil Rights Movement, Native Americans formed organizations such as the National Indian Youth Council or the American Indian Movement (AIM) to improve their living situations and restore the lands which were taken from them (Zinn, 2015 and Luebering, 2024). Native Americans faced similar issues with police raids, discrimination and assault as the African Americans in the South did, because the state of Washington decided to ignore the Supreme Court's decision (Zinn, 2015).

In 1969, 78 Native Americans occupied the Alcatraz Island in San Francisco for 18 months to show their grievances and to fight for their rights while explaining how most reservations have no running water, bad food supply, no industry, no health care facilities, no schools, or very high unemployment for example (Zinn, 2015). They also demanded the establishment of five institutions such as a Center for Native American Studies, an Indian Center of Ecology which would do research on reversing water and air pollution, or a Great Indian Training School which would teach of Indian history among other things (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) concludes that while they were forced to evacuate under Nixon's orders, they still partially succeeded in terms of their educational demands because the university UC Davis started to offer a doctorate in Native American Studies.

In 1973, the AIM draw attention to the Wounded Knee Massacre by protesting the federal government's policy towards Native Americans for 71 days in the Wounded Knee town (Kidd, 2019). This protest also linked the massacre of Wounded Knee to the Vietnam War (and the 1968 massacre in My Lai) suggesting how American imperialism has tendency

towards counterinsurgency wars and it also shows how the legacy of settler colonialism and the wars of aggression continue even nowadays (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015).

Their hard work to improve their situation paid off in the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 which gave them control over their own social and economic development, and thus many nations tried to renegotiate their mineral leases (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). Also, Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) adds that in need of a revenue, some Native nations turned to gaming in the 1980s and in 1988 the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was passed to give them some control over gaming.

3.2.2 21st century

The 21st century shows that the Indigenous nations are still trying to reclaim their autonomy by taking over the governments or economies, as well as reclaiming their lands through the means of reparations and restitutions (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). And as Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) explains, while the government has offered them monetary compensations, they still demand the restoration of the treaty-guaranteed lands which were promised to them. Also, it is interesting to note that white Americans deemed Native Americans to be anti-science when Native people asked for the return of their ancestors' human remains, however, Americans could have studied the remains over the many years that they possessed them, but instead they chose not to (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015).

Social awareness about their issues is also growing by means of various projects and programs like the Boarding School Healing Project which was started to expose the harsh corporal punishment and sexual abuse which was frequently used in boarding schools (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) and Whittle (2017) both agree that the sexual violence, such as rape and assault which Indigenous women undergo is very frequent on reservations, with about 56% of Native women experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime which is actually twice the national average.

In general, the issues that American people carry from their past often result in high rates of illnesses, suicide, drug, alcohol and sexual abuse, homelessness, dropping out of school, or gun violence (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). However, Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) explains that while these issues are present in the whole country, they are even more common on reservations, where the results of annihilation wars and slavery are still visible. The Red Road Project which was started in 2013 to document the lives of Native Americans even states that

Indigenous people suffer from diabetes at a rate 2.5 times higher than other race in the US (SeeWalker, 2020).

Similarly, SeeWalker (2020) mentions that there are thousands of homeless people who spend years waiting for tribal housing, which has resulted in an average of about twenty people living in two-to-three-bedroom houses. And as Whittle (2017) states, 18.5% of the Indigenous population lives below the poverty level, of which 24% are in extreme poverty.

3.2.3 Summary

This sub-chapter shows how Native Americans started to restore what was theirs during the 20th and the 21st centuries. While the Indian Reorganization Act and BIA's relocation programs were supposed to help the Indigenous people, sometimes they caused even more damage. Native Americans thus established their own organizations like the AIM to help reach their goal which partly paid off in the Indian Self-Determination Act. Following that, Native Americans in the 21st century continue to bring attention to the way their ancestors were treated by the colonizers, and how bad the living situation actually is in the reservations.

4 Film representation of Native Americans

The following subchapters discuss the history of Native American film representation similarly to the African American one which was done in second chapter of this thesis. The early beginnings of their film representation are discussed first, especially their misrepresentation and stereotyping, followed by the somewhat accurate representation following the Vietnam War. Lastly, the current racial representation is discussed with the persistent stereotype problem.

4.1 The beginning of the 20th century

Similarly to African Americans, cinematic representation of Native Americans was wrong from the very beginning. DiMare (2011) explains that while Native American race contains hundreds of tribes with distinct cultures and traditions, their film version is oversimplified and merged into one. Their portrayal which comes from the wrong representation as written in the novel *The Leather-Stocking Tales* by J. F. Cooper, and which is more negative than positive, influenced how Native Americans were seen by the society (DiMare, 2011). As Rollins (2004) explains, their representation in the early movies about Wild West thus relied heavily on stereotypes which portrayed Indians as bloodthirsty savages who only wanted to kill the white, their enemy number one.

At the beginning of the 20th century, some filmmakers, such as D. W. Griffith, tried to show, these stereotypes were not firmly established in the society and so they made films with all-Native American casts to depict the Native life even if it was historically inaccurate (DiMare, 2011). However, the 1930s westerns like *Allegheny Uprising* (1939) show how deep rooted the stereotypes of Indians were in the society because they discussed how the dispossession of their land was inevitable and righteous (Rollins, 2004). Also, many westerns from the Colonial Era such as *Stagecoach* (1939) or *Drums along the Mohawk* (1939) by John Ford depict Indian tribes attacking the white because they always did so, without explaining their behaviour (DiMare, 2011). Nonetheless, there were some films such as Ford's *Fort Apache* (1948) which portrayed Indians not as villains but as obstacles whose unfortunate defeat relied on the nation's progress (DiMare, 2011). In these films, as DiMare (2011) explains, corrupt white businessmen often provoked peaceful Indians into war so that they could deal with them forcefully for because they did not have other "choice".

4.2 Second half of the 20th century

During the 1950s, sympathetic portrayal of Native Americans increased, especially because their role as the main villain was replaced by Germans and Japanese due to World War II (DiMare, 2011). Thus, progressive films like Dave's *Broken Arrow* (1950) or Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) started to examine white racism through western, while using their Indian characters to represent African Americans in order to comment on the civil rights struggle (Rollins, 2004). While *Broken Arrow* as Rollins (2004) explains portrays Apache as family-oriented and open to reasoned argument and friendship with whites, *The Searchers* on the other hand tells a story of an Indian-hating psychopath who is on the search for a niece kidnapped during a Comanches raid and who he intends to kill because after living with Indians she can no longer fit among the white.

In the 1960s and the 1970s, influenced by the events of the Vietnam War, there came a radical shift in the Hollywood representation of Native Americans, and so they now acted as stand-ins for the Vietnamese, being portrayed as victims of the racist, homicidal US army (DiMare, 2011). The Vietnam War also changed the way certain characters have been portrayed. General Custer in Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970) is portrayed as insane and the cavalry raids on Native villages which live in peace correlate with the treatment of US Army in Vietnam (Rollins, 2004). Nonetheless, in 1970, Native American actor Dan George became the first Native American to receive Academy Award nomination for a Best Supporting Actor for his role in *Little Big Man* (Dennis et al., 2022)

The impact of Vietnam War is also featured in films like *Billy Jack* or *House Made of Dawn*. The 1971 film *Billy Jack* shows a Native war veteran returning from Vietnam who reestablishes ceremonial practice under the guidance of an elder, as well as racial politics (Hearne, 2012). And as Hearne (2012) mentions, the 1972 *House Made of Dawn* marks a milestone in the Native American cinematography by exploring combat trauma from Vietnam War, isolation from a community and land, as well as racial brutality.

In the 1980s, a documentary *Broken Rainbow* (1985) by Maria Florio and Victoria Mudd won the Academy Award for best documentary because of the way it showed the forced relocation of the Navajo and the housing issues, livestock slaughter or other issues that they faced by the government (Rollins, 2004). Following that, in the 1990s Native actors and directors continued to show the real Native Americans and the issues which they encountered,

like poverty, alcoholism, or sense of displacement (DiMare, 2011). Perhaps because of the AIM or due to Kevin Costner's highly popular *Dances with Wolves* (1990), wave of awareness over the mistreatment of Indigenous people by the US government grew, because the white were shown as the destructors of the harmonious life the Sioux led (Rollins, 2004).

In 1991, Navajo writer and director Norman Patrick Brown became the first to make film in the Navajo language (Dennis et al., 2022). And as Dennis et al. (2022) continues, in 1998, film *Smoke Signals* became the first film to be written, produced, and directed by Native filmmakers. The film, which won prestigious cinematographic awards, showed the reality of the difficulties of reservation life where people face poverty, alcoholism, and dislocation. (DiMare, 2011). Similarly, over a decade later, in 2004, the documentary film *G: Methamphetamine on the Navajo Nation* explored the effect of the drug on the Navajo nation and due to the raised awareness following the film's release, the drug was banned (Dennis et al., 2022).

Because Native actors were not as known as the white or Latino ones, and thus, they would not earn Hollywood the same amount of money, they continued to play only smaller parts and not leads like their fellow acting colleagues who were cast to portray Indigenous characters instead (DiMare, 2011). However, as both Rollins (2004) and DiMare (2011) agree, the impact of the *Dances with Wolves* and its popularity allowed more Native actors to play native parts, like Cherokee actor Wes Studi who played in *Dances with Wolves* and later appeared in biographical pictures *Crazy Horse* (1993) or *Geronimo* (1993) where he even played the lead role. These films launched his careers, and so it was no surprise that, he was awarded with an honorary Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2020 (Dennis et al., 2022). This allowed actors like Graham Greene (famous for 1994 *Maverick*, 1999 *Green Mile*, or 2009 *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*) to achieve the same level of praise as their fellow white actors (DiMare, 2011).

4.3 21st century

Indigenous representation on film in the 21st century has been influenced by the events of the previous century. As Mihelich (2001) states, the 1998 *Smoke Signals* was one of the last films of the 20th century which challenged the hegemonic and stereotypical representation of Native Americans through humour and satire, with portraying complex Indigenous characters as they in fact are with all their issues.

The accuracy of their representation depends on the genre of the film in which they occur. Obviously, there is a difference between Western, sci-fi, drama or documentary, and thus their representation varies accordingly, and as such they are presented most accurately in documentaries made by Indigenous people themselves (Stoddard et al., 2014). However, as Eason et al. (2018) explain, the biased and inaccurate representation of Indigenous people persists, and while other racial groups are often featured in media accordingly, Native Americans are usually overlooked. If, on the rare occasion, they make it into a film, it is in the stereotypical roles of casino Indian, drunken Indian or “Indian princess” (Eason et al., 2018). In the current TV series *Yellowstone* (2018-) which is set in Montana, Indigenous people are put in very stereotypical roles, and they appear only to shake the conflicts between white people, and yet the series belongs among the most-watched cable shows in the US (Horton, 2022).

Nonetheless, in many contemporary films, Native American culture, history, and their importance are portrayed accurately. Culture, traditions, clan identity or taboos are featured in the 2005 film *5th World* which focuses on the Navajo people in the contemporary age (Dowell, 2006). The experience of Native Americans assimilation in boarding schools with the saying “kill the Indian, save the man” is discussed in the 2009 *The Only Good Indian* (Stoddard et al., 2014). Horton (2022) mentions that the current success of *Prey* (2022) and *Reservation Dogs* (2021-2023) only shows that the accurate representation of Native Americans has its value as well.

4.4 Summary

From the very beginning, Native Americans were ill portrayed because of the misrepresentation coming from J. F. Cooper’s novel, and this misrepresentation led to stereotypes which they encounter up until the present day. While there were attempts to portray them accurately it was only during 1950s that their accurate representation increased, and especially after the Vietnam War, their post-war issues, racial inequality, or isolation which many Native Americans fought with on the everyday basis, were highlighted. The issues which arose when they were forced to relocate to reservation, such as poverty, drug, alcohol and sexual abuse, illnesses, or displacement, were and still are a part of documentaries which focus on Indigenous people. Similarly, many films produced by Indigenous people themselves are the most accurate in portraying their difficulties. Nonetheless, even though

some Native American actors achieved similar level of fame as their Hollywood co-stars, the indigenous stereotypes continue to find its way in the contemporary films.

5 Film Analysis

For the purposes of this thesis, two contemporary films were selected based on their synopsis, genre, and setting. The films were chosen to examine the racial issues or perhaps even stereotypes which might occur in them in order to determine whether the history has an impact on how African Americans and Native Americans are portrayed in the contemporary films.

5.1 *The Hate U Give* (2018)

This drama which features Amandla Stenberg in the lead role is based on the 2017 novel of the same name which was written by Angie Thomas (IMDb, n.d.). This film was chosen because it shows the experience of African Americans living in a Black neighbourhood in the contemporary America. Because of this, it is possible to find many examples of racial issues which have roots in the US history and yet they prevail in African American lives even nowadays.

5.1.1 Synopsis of *The Hate U Give*

The film follows the life of an African American teenage girl called Starr and her experience as an African American after her friend Khalil was shot to death by a white police officer while she was in the passenger seat. The plot deals with her experience in a mixed racial private school where, following the shooting, one of her closest friends begins to show signs of white privilege which destroys their friendship. Her life in the Black community after the killing is also depicted in the film, mainly the outcome of her TV interview and court testimony which is not approved by the local drug king.

5.1.2 Race in *The Hate U Give*

Police treatment (see also chapters 1.1.3, 1.1.4, 1.1.5, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3)

The film starts with a speech that Starr's father has to his children, who are revealed to be nine and ten years old at that time, about how to act if they are arrested by the police – remain calm, answer their questions, and “keep their hands where they can see ‘em” (*THUG* 01:00). He also continues that he might get arrested in front of them even if he did not do anything wrong, because that is just how it is. Later, he even says the police go by a policy “shoot first, ask questions later” (*THUG* 44:10).

As Starr and her friend Khalil are pulled over by a white police officer, she remembers to follow her father's rules, however, her Kalil is shot by the police offer because he thought he saw him with a gun, which was in fact a hairbrush. Meanwhile, as he is bleeding out, Starr is sitting handcuffed next to him unable to do anything else to help him (*THUG 25:15*). Following that, at the police station, she is being asked whether he was drunk or selling drugs, which had nothing in common with him being shot, and no one questions why the officer even did so (*THUG 30:00*).

After Starr's father gets into a fight with the local drug king over Starr's interview, the police arrive promptly and while the drug dealers get away, they start arresting her father. However as soon as the officers realize that Starr, who is recording the incident, is the witness to Khalil's murder they quickly leave with a "warning" (*THUG 01:12:30*).

Before the court trial, Starr's uncle (who himself is a police officer) explains to her the reasons as to why that police officer acted the way he did and shot Khalil, but she also makes him realize the double standard of the situation. Because thanks to the white privilege if the incident happened in a white neighbourhood to a white man, the officer would say "put your hands up" instead of shooting first (*THUG 01:35:00*).

Lastly, as the police officers arrive to the burning shop and see Starr's little brother aiming the gun at the drug king, we can see how quickly they point their guns at him and prepare to shoot. This whole situation, as Starr explains, shows what kind of effect the behaviour of both white and African American people has on their children. And unless they, the adult, start to change their thinking and actions, their children will only copy them in the future and the circle will never end (*THUG 01:59:00*).

These examples show how the police often tends to act unrighteously towards African Americans, out of unfounded fear, and how they still apply the double standard in the manner that they approach citizens based on their skin colour. All of these are reasons which allowed the rise of the movements like Black Lives Matter, because as can be seen in based on the film, the same actions as during the Civil Rights Movement era are still quite common even in the 21st century.

Black power (see also chapters 1.1.4, 1.1.5, 1.2.1, 1.2.3, 2.2)

At the very start of the film, the father is giving his “police arrest” speech and ends it by reminding them not to ever forget that being black is an honour. After that, he shows them the *Black Panther* program as their Bill of Rights (*THUG* 02:30). After Starr feels guilty of doing the TV interview, her father makes her and her brothers repeat a part of the *Black Panther* program to make them understand that if they want to speak up for themselves and their truth, they have every right to do so (*THUG* 01:15:00).

At Khalil’s funeral, all attendees are asked to join a “peaceful” march past the police station after the service to show their strength and togetherness. However, this peaceful march turns violent very quickly (*THUG* 53:00). After that, Starr agrees to speak to the media in Khalil’s defence in order to raise awareness to the issue of police brutality against African Americans (*THUG* 01:00:00), while also explaining why he was a drug dealer (*THUG* 01:08:00).

And later on, as Starr appears at court as the key witness, she recounts everything that happened that night and yet no charges are pressed against the officer, even though a car camera footage is available, which only angers the protesters who now march through the whole town chanting “Justice for Khalil”. Starr, angered by everything that happened since Khalil’s shooting, gets enough courage to speak to the protestors who are met by heavily armed police and violence erupts on the streets of the town (*THUG* 01:45:30).

These examples show the importance of the *Black Power* movement which arose in the second half of the 20th century after cases of police brutality against African Americans grew in numbers, and even if the video evidence was available, it did not change the outcome of the trials which deemed the officers not guilty. The movement thus inspired many African Americans to be proud of their origin, of their skin colour, as well as to fight the system back in order to obtain the racial equality that they truly deserve, and more importantly to make the public realize the racial violence that they face on everyday basis.

Black neighbourhood (see also chapter 1.1.3)

The family lives in predominantly Black part of the city where it is common to hear gunshots which is why neither Khalil nor Starr are surprised to hear those at the party after which they promptly leave like everybody else (*THUG* 19:00). Later, Starr and her father discuss how many people in the neighbourhood deal drugs because they need money since

there are no well-paid jobs around there, and thus dealing drugs seems to them as an effective way out of the poverty. However, her father concludes by saying that most of the dealers eventually get caught by the police and end up in prison just like he did in the past, which is not a ticket out of the poverty. (*THUG* 48:30).

Because drug dealers operate in the neighbourhood, it is no surprise that Starr's interview only angers the local drug king who previously warned her to stay quiet and so he gets into a fight with her father (*THUG* 01:11:30). Later, his dealers shoot bullets through the family's living room window to keep them quiet (*THUG* 01:30:00), her brother is beat up by them and they even set their father's store on fire with Starr and her brother locked up inside. (*THUG* 01:14:00) The neighbourhood feels safe only after the drug king's arrest.

High school and white privilege

Starr says that the high school in their neighbourhood is a place to get jumped, high, pregnant, or killed, and so the kids attend a private school instead so that they can attend college one day (*THUG* 06:15). However, in school, Starr must defer from using slang terms like at home, because it makes her look "hood" or "ghetto," even though most of her white classmates use slang terms while speaking to her (*THUG* 07:22).

After the shooting incident, Starr has difficulties with pretending that nothing happened, but as soon as the incident gets into news and the people at school find out, they protest with signs "black lives matter" and "justice 4 Khalil" which most of them only does to skip classes which rightfully angers Starr especially after her white friend says in a slang that "we gotta protect OUR people" (*THUG* 01:04:00).

White privilege is also shown when Starr's white friend, who acted as if the protest at school were of the utmost importance, yet she showed remorse over the white police officer who "was only doing his job" and that "his life matters too" while not knowing that Starr was present at the shooting (*THUG* 01:18:00). Also, at prom, after her boyfriend tells her that nobody cares about people's skin colour, she tells him that that is not true and that although they (white people) want to act black, they still "get to keep their white privilege" (*THUG* 01:25:00).

The behaviour of the children and their usage of slang also shows the double standard or double consciousness, and perhaps more importantly the white privilege. Because, while

they seem “cool,” Starr or any other African American would be marked as “ghetto,” which has a terribly negative connotation. The same applies to the protest, and the way her friend feels sorry for the police officer without realizing that if he acted towards Khalil as to any other white person, the incident would never happen, and no one would be dead.

5.1.3 Summary of the racial issues in *The Hate U Give*

The film shows how deep rooted the actions of the past still are in the current lives of African Americans and white Americans. It shows how the white police sees African Americans as criminals like drug dealers, and so out of fear they jump to conclusions and shoot first without being completely sure that the person has a gun. It shows the double standard and the white privilege of the white, because they would not be shot at as quickly as the African Americans are. The film also shows how the knowledge of the police brutality is enrooted in African Americans who teach it to their children from a noticeably young age so that they know what to do when they are stopped by the police, which they know they will be mostly because of their skin colour. The protests which are held throughout the town show the importance of Black Power and Black Live Matter movement. And lastly, it shows the prevailing drug issue that is still a part of the African American communities where jobs are difficult to find, and dealing is thus a straightforward way to earn money.

5.2 *Winter in the Blood* (2013)

This drama starring Chaske Spencer who himself grew up on reservations in Montana was also adapted in 2013 from a novel of the same name which was written by James Welch in 1974 (IMDb, n.d.). The drama was chosen because of its plot and setting and the issues that many Native Americans living on reservations face, but also for the fact that the novel was one of the first works of the Native American literary renaissance (Turan, 2011).

5.2.1 Synopsis of *Winter in the Blood*

The film, which is set in 1970s, follows Virgil First Race who is lost in his life and has no real aim of what to do besides drinking. His wife leaves him, yet he only cares for the rifle she took. The film uses many flashbacks to show his childhood which he spent with his brother on their family ranch in Montana and through these flashbacks Virgil reveals how his brother died. However, it is only after his grandmother’s death that he seems to come to a breakthrough and perhaps he will get his life back together.

5.2.2 Race in *Winter in the Blood*

Indian identity (see also 3.1.3, 4.2, 4.3)

As the film begins, the main character says that coming home became a torture (*WITB* 02:18). This is because Virgil seems lost in his life without any clear direction of what to do. So, when he realizes that Yellow Calf is his real grandfather, he has the moment of epiphany and exclaims “I’m not a half-breed” (*WITB* 01:35:10). This piece of information might be exactly what he needed to feel as a full Native American because up until this point he was considered mixed-race which was very frowned upon among his people, and it is shown on the flashbacks when they meet kids in the town (*WITB* 17:00).

Native American typical names are featured in the film such as Lame Bull or Yellow Calf. Typical native language is also shown when Virgil’s grandmother speaks to him and his brother and lectures them on the importance of nature and life (*WITB* 35:20). And a typical belief is shown when Yellow Calf says that in their veins, they all have the blood of their enemies (*WITB* 01:35:20)

The stolen native identity, the loss of their traditions are also visible in the town, where mannequins on display are wearing traditional Indian feather headbands and clothes (*WITB* 24:45). Also, the loss of importance of their native traditions is shown when the Airplane Man, as Virgil calls him, tells him that he saw him “seeking visions or whatever it is that you people do” referring to Native Americans and their rituals (*WITB* 20:30).

Reservation life (see also 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.2.1, 4.2, 4.3)

In the flashbacks, the boys spent their days by taking care of cattle, shooting guns, and dreaming of becoming cowboys while playing Cowboys and Indians where the cowboy always win. This might represent the way Native Americans were treated by the white, and how especially in the early film representation, the Cowboy was always the one who won against an Indian.

We learn about the life at the reservation, when their grandmother explains to the boys, that her husband who was a Chief of the Black Feet clan died in a raid (*WITB* 35:40). And later, Yellow Calf, while recalling how many of their tribe died during a harsh winter to

diseases for which they did not have a medicine, as a punishment for leaving their native land (*WITB* 01:32:00).

In the present time, Virgil can be seen working on the family ranch with Lame Bull, his mother's partner. The life at the reservation thus revolves around working the farm and breeding cattle.

Alcoholism (see also 3.2.2, 3.3, 4.2, 4.3)

Virgil's alcoholism is obvious from the very beginning of the film because he often wakes up and barely remembers the events of the previous night. He often travels to town where his drinking results in him having meaningless sexual intercourse with women he barely knows.

Right as the film starts, he wakes up in a ditch and his flashbacks start. This time, he recalls his father pouring alcohol into his morning coffee (*WITB* 05:00). Later, we learn that his father was also a drunk and Virgil found him in the snow, dead, with a bottle right next to him. Virgil's drinking might also be a reason as to why his wife left him (*WITB* 05:20).

Because most of the Native Americans portrayed in the film are often shown with a drink in their hand, it is easy to assume how spread alcoholism actually is among them.

Sense of displacement (see also 3.2.1, 3.3, 4.2, 4.3)

As mentioned, when Virgil's wife leaves him, no one seems surprised, and they only ask him whether he will go after her or not (*WITB* 09:00). He decides to do so, but only to retrieve his gun. In general, he is detached to anyone, including his mother, and it feels as if he barely cares about anything. The only person he seems to care about is his grandmother because he seems devastated after she dies (*TWIB* 01:23:00).

Virgil's mother tells him that his wife belongs to town and perhaps he does as well, this shows how Native Americans who moved to towns and then returned because they did not belong there, suddenly found themselves not belonging to the reservation as well (*TWIB* 41:50). As Virgil speaks to his wife, he blames her for not trying to settle down yet, as she contradicts him by saying that she tried, he admits that he does not blame her for leaving him because he is not happy (*TWIB* 01:01:00).

This feeling of displacement is gone by the end of the film when he comes to terms with his past, yet the question remains whether he changes something in his life or not.

5.2.3 Summary of the racial issues in *Winter in the Blood*

This film is a good example of what the removal of Native Americans to reservations or their assimilation to white culture did to them. As Dunbar-Ortiz mentioned, because they carry the remnants of their pasts, many Native Americans find themselves dealing with alcoholism, or sexual abuse, as well as the sense of displacement. The life at the reservations is far from easy because they live in poor conditions and the importance of their traditions often seem to be forgotten and in there lies the issues with native identity and the search for it. And once someone leaves the reservation to find a better life in town, he often finds himself entrapped and wishes to return yet finds it impossible upon doing so.

Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis deals with African and Native American races in selected films. The aim of this thesis is to describe important historical events regarding the racial discrimination of chosen races, history of their film representation, and determine how accurate their representation is in the chosen films. This was done by consulting literary sources such as book publications or articles, both online and offline, as well as by analysing two films which were chosen due to their genre, setting and plot.

The thesis shows that there is a similarity between the historical treatment of both races. Both races were belittled, used, and killed by the colonisers to fit their needs. While Native Americans originally inhabited the Americas, the white colonisers used any means necessary to remove them from their land and relocate them to reservations where they lived, and somewhere still continue to, in poor conditions. On the other hand, African Americans fought hard to obtain their rights as equal citizens of the United States, and while sometimes it was done peacefully, oftentimes it was not. The racial discrimination which both races faced is perhaps more visible in the case of African Americans because of the police brutality and injustice which they encountered and still do even in the current days, and which is well portrayed in the film *The Hate U Give*. The film also shows that many African Americans still remember and place emphasis on the Black Power. While Native Americans encounter police injustice as well, it is not seen as such an issue due to its lack of publicity.

The film representation of the races is also similar because of its inaccuracy. Both races were inaccurately portrayed up until the second half of the 20th century, when things turned for the better, perhaps due to the ongoing Civil Rights Movement which both races profited from. And in general, the evolution of their film representation was heavily influenced by the current historical situation. So, while African Americans have been accurately portrayed in films from roughly the 1950s, Native Americans continue to be frequently misrepresented and stereotyped in many contemporary films or TV shows. Thus, to obtain an accurate representation of them on film, it is important to search for documentaries or films which were made or produced by Indigenous people as in the case of *Winter in the Blood* where the issues of alcoholism, dislocation, or search for identity which many contemporary Native Americans deal with, are shown.

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