
Bachelor’s Diploma Thesis

Supervisor: doc. PhDr. Tomáš Pospíšil, Dr.

2013
I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author’s signature
Acknowledgement:

I would like to thank my supervisor, doc. PhDr. Tomáš Pospíšil, Dr., for being helpful and supportive throughout the process of compilation of this thesis.
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Introduction

From the very beginning of the motion picture industry, black actresses were often presented in film roles which were based upon stereotypes. The motion picture industry has shown images of black women born out of racial stereotypes and tensions and has depicted them as “mammies”, “Aunt Jemimas”, “tragic mulattos”, “coons” and “jezebels”. This tendency to type-cast the actresses is still in existence. These stereotypes have appeared again and again throughout the entire history of the picture industry at some time in many forms of American film, from the film Birth of a Nation (1915) to The Help (2011). In the first example, D.W. Griffith’s film Birth of a Nation, several African-American stereotypes were illustrated which gave a damaging perception of black actors and actresses, as he delineated them as submissive and selfless servants or untrustworthy, savage, dumb and, worst of all, rapists of white women. Contrary to Birth of a Nation, the film The Help does not portray African-Americans as savage and bestial humans although it is still remarkable that a story about African-American maid working in white households in Jackson, Mississippi, during the early 1960s deserved an Oscar. Even in the twentieth century the stereotypes and limitations still persist.

This thesis attempts to exemplify filmmakers’ intentions of creating the roles which are originated in stereotypes. The sources I have chosen are based upon information taken from literature written by authors who have taken an interest in the on-screen portrayal of African-Americans. Another perspective is shown in the analysis of Whoopi Goldberg’s three comedies, which exemplify the type-casting that has persisted to this day. The first part of the thesis considers the defining of stereotypes,
which are the collections of qualities assigned to groups of people related to their race, nationality and sexual orientation, to name a few, and their impact on the public at large. The second chapter concerns the basic typologies of African-American actors and actresses and, as the thesis examines the African American actress Whoopi Goldberg, it is more devoted to those stereotypes which are typically attributed towards women. The third chapter researches the filmic opportunities of African-American actresses in the motion picture industry from the very beginning through to the 1990s. Further, this chapter explores the changes in film imagery used in the motion picture industry from 1990-2000 which had already been initiated in the 1980s. The films attempted to show that social tension and racism had ceased to exist and many black performers such as Bill Cosby, Eddie Murphy and Whoopi Goldberg, had become superstars. The final part of this third chapter presents Goldberg’s personae in relation to her filmic roles.

The last chapter of the thesis provides an alternative view as represented by three of Goldberg’s comedies *Sister Act* (1992), *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit* (1993) and *Corrina, Corrina* (1994) which were among the most significant films she played a part in. This view is supported both by information taken from books written on the subject and from my own research. The beginning of the chapter is devoted to a general introduction concerning the film selection. The specific criteria for this thesis will illustrate how Goldberg is one of the most prolific African-American actresses in Hollywood film and I will consider the extraordinary box office successes here. The consistency between stereotypes and heroines’s character will be the final criterion for these selected comedies. Finally, the conclusion of the thesis is based on an evaluation of the comedies in relation to literary sources.
CHAPTER I

1 Definition of Stereotype and Its Effect

To derive the stereotypes from Whoopi Goldberg’s comedies, one must first define what stereotypes are. According to *New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* “a stereotype is a generalization, usually exaggerated or oversimplified and often offensive, that is used to describe or distinguish a group” (Hirsch, 445). To facilitate the perception of a social world, stereotypes are used in a major way. The consequences are drawn from the awareness that a person who has a whole range of characteristics and abilities is assumed to be a member of a specific group. “Stereotypes leading to social categorization offer one of the reasons of prejudicing attitudes” (McLeod, 2008, [online]). A few stereotypes are related to positive meaning, such as the statement that “Polish people are religious bigots” or “the Mediterranean diet is one of the healthiest diets”. However, most stereotypes probably tend to express a negative impression, for instance: “all Muslims are considered to be terrorists” or “African Americans are seen as lazy, ignorant and musical”. And as far as black women are concerned, Mask presents Herbert Charles Stember´s statement as he explains the stereotype of the image of the ideal woman such as “a young woman with a hairless body”. Stember affirms that the ideal woman`s face must not indicate the taboo lower parts of the body”. Not only that a black woman’s hairstyle is much like pubic hair, also her thick lips and wide nostrils carry the association with the taboo lower part of the body. The black woman reflects in her face and hair the lower body parts, which is why she is considered to be “ugly” (Mask, 127). This can be one of the reasons why so many contemporary African-American actresses such as Halle Berry, Regina King and Jada Pinkett-Smith, to name a few, straighten their hair.
2 The Basic Typologies of African-Americans

From the very beginning of the American motion picture industry, African-Americans were depicted on the basis of adopted theatrical stereotypes. According to Ken Padgett,

The stock characters of blackface minstrelsy have played a significant role in disseminating racist images, attitudes and perceptions worldwide. Every immigrant group was stereotyped on the music hall stage during the 19th Century, but the history of prejudice, hostility, and ignorance towards black people has insured a unique longevity to the stereotypes. White America's conceptions of Black entertainers were shaped by minstrelsy's mocking caricatures and for over one hundred years the belief that Blacks were racially and socially inferior was fostered by legions of both white and black performers in blackface (2013, [online]).

The earliest minstrel shows were staged by white male traveling musicians. The black characters were portrayed by these actors with blackened faces with exaggerated red lips which were painted around their mouth. In later years the lips were usually painted white. The costumes combined formal wear, striped trousers and top hats as well (Britannica, 2013, [online]). The actors parodied the singing and dancing of African-American slaves. The image of caricatures were so impressive that audiences expected any black person to correspond to the stereotype called “Jim Crow” which originated from the singing and dancing minstrel performer or “Zip Coon” who presented an arrogant man using malapropism (Padgett, 2013, [online]). The program opened with a chorus followed by a series of jokes and comic songs. The final part consisted of a hoedown or walk-around and every member did a special number while the others sang and clapped (Britannica, 2013, [online]).
2.1 The “Mammy” and her offshoot “Aunt Jemima”

One of the female stereotypes is the Mammy and her offshoot Aunt Jemima. The Mammy pictured female household slaves as fat, middle-aged, dark-skinned women who were given enough power to run the household. The Mammy is closely related to comic Coon. Contrary to the Mammy, Aunt Jemima is more polite and good-tempered (Bogle, 9). Mammy was the main stereotype until the 1950s.

To name a few actresses who appeared most often as this type-casting, I would mention such names as Hattie McDaniel, Louise Beaver and Ruby Dandridge. Hattie McDaniel was the first Black performer who received an Oscar for her “Mammy” in Gone with the Wind (1939). Louise Beaver’s most famous role was as a housekeeper Delilah Johnson (Imitation of Life, 1934). Delilah Johnson prepares special pancakes made from a family recipe. Later her master decides to open a pancake restaurant where Delilah cooks. To have more successful restaurant, the master transforms Delilah’s person into an Aunt Jemima character for an advertising campaign. Ruby Dandridge used her very expressive voice in “mammy” roles.

Ruby's trademark was her high-pitched voice which rose even higher when she was excited. That voice later served her well as an actress in movies……Usually playing comic, befuddled maids, all Ruby had to do was open her mouth and audiences would break into hysterics (Padgett, 2013, [online]).
2.2 The tragic mulatto

Another female character, the tragic mulatto, was a fair-skinned moviemaker darling. This child is born from the relationship between a white man and his black mistress. By virtue of her white blood, the mulatto is made a likeable and engaging person. The audience is persuaded of the reality and perspective of the girl’s life and that she has not been “a victim of divided racial inheritance” (Bogle, 9). This type-casting started to dominate during the post-war years.

One of the most characteristic leading roles of that era is portrayed by a fair-skinned young woman, Pinky, originating from the eponymous film Pinky (1949). Patricia “Pinky” Johnson, an African-American nursing student, who had fallen in love with white doctor Thomas Adams, returns to her grandmother in the South. The film deals with themes such as love between a white man and a woman of mixed race and racial intolerance. Much like the tragic mulatto, Pinky is depicted as a sympathetic woman who has to muster the courage to fight against injustice and the white audience is inclined to support her final decision.

2.3 Uncle Tom

“The first male black American character Uncle Tom, was portrayed as a harassed, enslaved and insulted servant who never turns against his white master faces” (Bogle, 4). He always remains submissive and selfless. It was unacceptable at the time to let a black actor play this role in the first theatrical performances and films, the black characters were portrayed by white actors with blackened skin.
As Gabriel Dexter states,

In the silent films *Confederate Spy* (1910) and *For Massa’s Sake* (1911), faithful Ucles spy for the Confederacy, sell themselves back into slavery and sacrifice their lives, literally, “for massa’s sake.” ………. In the film, slaves work, dance and sing happily for their masters-untill emancipation. Spoiled with freedom, they turn haughty, violent and, worse still, oversexed. Only Mammy and Uncle remain loyal, fighting in defense of their former masters. In the film’s climax, the gallant Ku Klux Klan rides in to put the unruly blacks back in their place (2013,[online]).

Selling himself to help the master, symbolizes one of the Uncle Tom’s significant features - the willingness to remain hearty and selfless in whatever circumstance. Therefore, they were held as heroes and accepted as a good black character by white audience.

### 2.4 The Coon

Contrary to the Uncle Tom, the Coon appeared in films in order to perform the black buffoon. There were two variations of this type: the Pickaninny and the Uncle Remus. The first type was played by a black child actor who was a harmless, crazy creation. The second one presented a congenial and naive comedian (Bogle,7). The Coon actes childish, even he was an adult. He seemed not to be happy with his status as a servant but because of his laziness and cynical attitude he did not attempt to change his low position. Dr. David Pilgrim mentions:

The prototypical film coon was Stepin Fetchit, the slow-talking, slow-walking, self-demeaning nitwit….The first cinematic coon appeared in *Wooing and Wedding of a Coon* (1905), a stupendously racist portrayal of two dimwitted and stuttering buffoons, *How Rastus Got His Turkey* (1910) and *Chicken Thief* (1911) which followed the coon character (2012, [online]).
2.5 Black Buck

The final character is Black Buck who was shown as a violent, savage man, longing for a white woman. This character first appeared in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and the director D. W. Griffith wanted to convince the audience that the Coon’s high-powered sexuality compelled him to long for white women and take them by force. When the Black Buck/ black former slave Gus attempts to rape a white woman, the audience panicked (Bogle, 10-14). The other film where the Black Buck appeared was Melvin Van Peebles’s *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), which is an action film known as “blaxploitation” (Britannica, [online]).

The aforementioned stereotypes fulfill the task while they generalized and oversimplified the personality of African-Americans. As Dr. David Pilgrim states,

At the beginning of the 1900s many whites supported the implementation of Jim Crow laws and etiquette. They believed that blacks were genetically, therefore permanently, inferior to whites. Blacks were, they argued, hedonistic children, irresponsible, and left to their own plans, destined for idleness -- or worse. It was not uncommon for whites to distinguish between Niggers (Coons and Bucks) and Negroes (Toms, Sambos, and Mammies), and they preferred the latter (2012, [online]).
CHAPTER II

3 African-American Actresses in Motion Picture Industry

In the early 1920s, African-American actresses such as Hattie McDaniel, Louise Beavers and Ethel Waters were limited to character roles, most often playing a mammy, an African-American maid or a cook. Their characters were extremely cheerful, loyal, and asexual. A classic example is Hattie McDaniel as Mammy in Selznick's 1939 Gone with the Wind. She's the big-hearted, big-bodied and big-mouthed black woman. She only speaks truths and at the same time she is able to be a reliable devoted servant. Hattie McDaniel was the first African-American performer to be nominated for an Academy Award and also the first to win one.

During the period between the World Wars was the production of “race movies”. Northern Blacks responded to Birth of a Nation (the film which primarily showed African-American stereotypes by blacked-up white actors) by producing their own movies. “Race movies” were all-black affairs that were made for black audiences (Padgett, [online]). These films reflected black morality and social ethics of the time. Throughout the 1930s and the 1940s a dark black actress was considered for no role but that of a Mammy, Aunt Jemima or the tragic mulatto (Smith, 22-47).

The post-war period was epitomized by films such as Pinky (1949), where two women’s stereotypes are shown, the Mammy and tragic Mulatto. Pinky, a prototype of the tragic Mulatto, is a light skinned black woman, who has fallen in love with a young white doctor, Dr. Thomas Adams. Her grandmother played by Ethel Waters as “mammy” is of African heritage. Both Pinky and the tragic Mullato are emotionally unstable and destined to fit in neither black society nor white society.
In the 1970s, blaxploitation films with African American women as heroines appeared. Blaxploitation films were created at the turn of the 1960s & 1970s for an African American audience portraying the heroic and comic actions of black heroes. The heroines were beautiful and desirable. As Sherrie A. Inness states: “On the other hand, the film’s potential for being truly radical is limited because it does not ultimately upset the sexist and racist white patriarchal iconography of the black female” (71). The films depict black actresses as superwomen who fight against evil. I would mention one of the films with this theme called Foxy Brown (1974) in which Pam Grier/Foxy Brown’s boyfriend is shot down and she seeks for a revenge. As a prostitute she infiltrates the company, and tries to save a fellow black woman from a life of drugs and sexual exploitation.

The 1980s were an interesting time in terms of increased opportunity for black actresses in Hollywood. At the same time, however, there were still limits that black women faced in the movie industry. As opposed to the 1990s and the 2000s, only a few black actresses consistently headlined major films in Hollywood, with a lot more finding themselves in TV shows (Wallace, 2011[online]).

The most significant actresses of that era were: Alfre Woodard best known as the mother Carolyn in Spike Lee's Crooklyn (1994); Lynn Whitfield, who played Josephine Baker in 1991's The Josephine Baker story (1991); Lonette McKee, who had made her career portraying the struggles of African-American women of mixed heritage and appeared in four feature films – one of them, for instance, 1982’s The Cotton Club; and last but not least, the actress Whoopi Goldberg who was the most commercially successful black actress of the 1980s with three blockbuster hits during that decade: The Color Purple (1985), Jumpin' Jack Flash (1986) and Clara's Heart (1988).
“The 1990s were a great time for black actors and black moviegoers looking for portrayals of black figures on screen and were a decade of a thriving Black Hollywood” (Wallace, 2011[online]). As I noted above, the top black actress of that decade was Whoopi Goldberg who dominated Hollywood during the 1990s and she was one of the highest paid actresses in the motion picture industry in that time. After the success of *Ghost* (1990), Whoopi emerged dramatic roles such as Odessa Carter in *The Long Walk Home* (1990), Mary Masembuko in *Sarafina!* (1992), Corrina Washington in *Corrina, Corrina* (1994) and depicted Myrlie Evers in *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996) for which she was nominated for an NAACP Image Award. She also starred in acclaimed comedies including: *Soap Dish* (1991) and the box-office-busting mega-hits *Sister Act* (1992) and *Sister Act II: Back in the Habit* (1993), two of the highest grossing films of the decade.

Other stars of that decade include names such as Angela Bassett, who began her first notable role as the concerned mother, Reva Devereaux in John Singleton's *Boyz in the Hood* (1991). Later she stamped her name into cinema history with her portrayal of the Civil Rights icon Betty Shabazz in Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992) and won an Oscar nomination for her depiction of Tina Turner in 1993’s *What's Love Got to Do With It*. Angela Bassett’s further film roles covered the character Bernadine in 1995's *Waiting to Exhale* and her performance as Stella in 1998's *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, charting the life of a black woman.

Halle Berry has appeared on screen ever since her first notable as the crack-head Vivian in Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991). Through into the 1990s, Halle played Angela in *Boomerang* (1992) and her career culminated in her winning an Emmy Award for the HBO film *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* (1999), the story of Dorothy Dandridge, who was the first Black actress to be nominated for the Academy Award as
Best Actress. Halle is one of the highest paid stars in the world, and the first Black actress to win the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Motion Picture (Wallace, 2011, [online]).

During the twentieth century there have been only a few African-American actresses nominated for or awarded an Oscar. When Octavia Spencer won the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role in 2011 for her portrayal of Minny Jackson in The Help, she became the sixth African-American woman to win an Oscar. It is significant that through many film roles where African-American actresses have acted, this role was awarded an Oscar. A maid’s role. Hattie McDaniel was the first African American ever, to win an Academy Award. In 1939, she won for playing the character “Mammy”, in the pre-Civil War film Gone with the Wind. McDaniel won an Oscar for playing Mammy in 1939, and seventy-three years later, Spencer won an Oscar for playing a maid. Not much has changed. It seems that Hollywood is still the most satisfied to depict black women as servants. This imagery of black women as mammies, who are loyal to white masters, are common in American society (Karp, 2007, [online]).

The other four black women who have won Oscars include Whoopi Goldberg as Oda Mae Brown in Ghost (1990), Halle Berry as Leticia Musgrove in Monster’s Ball (2001), Jennifer Hudson as Effie White in Dreamgirls (2006) and Mo’Nique as Mary Lee Johnston in Precious (2009). All the above mentioned actresses were awarded an Oscar for the Best Actress in A Supporting Role, except Halle Berry who won the Academy Award for Best Actress, in which her role resurrects the Jezebel stereotype (Britannica, 2013, [online]). This role manifests the Jezebel stereotype. According to Vernellia R. Randall: “Jezebel "is the promiscuous female with an insatiable sexual
appetite." In Biblical history, Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab of Israel. Jezebel's actions came to exemplify lust” (2013, [online]).

3.1 U.S. Motion Picture Industry during the Years 1990-2000

Film studios try to attract the audience to watch blockbusters, films which “have to be seen”. Due to the invention of the Digital Video Disc people commenced to buy films and watch them on computers and DVD players. But blockbusters were enormously expensive and the costs of production, marketing and film distribution have risen every year, partly because of the premiere date, partly because of huge leading actors’ payments and last also due to the cost of TV commercials. As a consequence of overpriced blockbusters, film studios were looking for other ways of increasing their revenues by other means such as advance payments of fees by cinema owners and selling licences to fast-food chains, allowing them to use the title characters and film scenes to sell their products. Other stratagems such as filming out of Hollywood, for instance in Toronto or Vancouver and later in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have been deployed to reduce the expenses (Thompson, 709-712).

The motion-picture industry has put more emphasis on pleasing audiences with special effects-laden blockbusters and genre works such as teen-oriented horror films and comedies. Another significant development in late 20th-century American cinema was the emergence of a self-designated independent film movement. Among independent films oriented towards mainstream audiences, films were made by African-American, Native American, and Chicano & Chicane filmmakers. Some films represented feminist, gay and lesbian cultural viewpoints and experience as well (Sklar, 39).
In addition to blockbusters, the 1990s belonged to African-American directors such as John Singleton (Boyz N the Hood, 1991), Forest Whitaker (Waiting to Exhale, 1995), Darnell Martin (I Like It Like That, 1994), Spike Lee (Crooklyn, 1994) and Black superstar actors. I would mention names such as Eddie Murphy, Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, Whoopi Goldberg and Angela Bassett. But, I would argue, Hollywood exploited these actors, when they played in buddy action films. The black and white buddy film formula depicts a black and white duo, which bickers and argues at the same time defeating the bad guys. This film formula seems to have been very successful because both black and white audiences could identify with their heroes.

The African-American films that find wide audiences are the films that Hollywood itself allows to be produced and distributed. Some black independent films were hits but failed to cross over to a wider audience, most likely because they were about African-American identity and the politics of gender and sexuality. The most successful African-American films were genre films, and especially violent gangster films. To appease the critics of these violent macho films Hollywood released films marketed at African-American women, including Waiting to Exhale (1995), Soul Food (1997) and How Stella Got Her Groove Back (1998) as well. Films of this genre suggest that the most important thing for black woman is to find a good black man to marry. The characters are limited by traditional white patriarchy and by the fact that Hollywood does not accept interracial relationships (Benshoff and Griffin, 94-95).
3.2 Whoopi Goldberg

This thesis concerns the Whoopi Goldberg’s comedies Sister Act (1992), Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit (1993) and Corrina, Corrina (1994), all made during the 1990s. I have chosen Whoopi Goldberg because she is one of the most significant Black actresses with appearances in almost 70 films. In the early 1980s Whoopi Goldberg started her career as a stand-up comedian. She developed a one-woman stage production, The Spook Show. After touring the United States, she brought her show to Broadway. Steven Spielberg, who saw her performance, later asked Goldberg to star in his film adaptation of the Alice Walker novel, The Color Purple (1985). This earned her an Oscar nomination, and launched her cinematographic career. Her early films include the spy comedy Jumpin' Jack Flash (1986), directed by Penny Marshall; Fatal Beauty (1987), co-starring Sam Elliott; Clara's Heart (1988); Homer & Eddie (1989), co-starring James Belushi; and the civil rights period drama, The Long Walk Home (1990) (Britannica, 2013, [online]).

In 1992 she produced her own television talk show entitled The Whoopi Goldberg Show. The show featured interviews with politicians and Hollywood celebrities, running for 200 episodes until 1993 when it was cancelled due to low ratings. It is significant that in 1994, 1996, and 1999 she hosted the Academy Awards which makes her the only African-American woman to ever do so (biography, 2013, [online]).

Goldberg has performed in comedies, dramas and even in science-fiction films but still she is the best-known for her comedic roles. As Haggins states: “Since her landmark one-woman show in 1985, Whoopi Goldberg has been somewhat of an
entertainment anomaly: a black comic diva” (132). Although she was nominated for her role in Steven Spielberg’s *The Colour Purple* playing a drama role, she was awarded an Oscar for her comedic role of Oda Mae in *Ghost* (1990). Additionally, the two blockbusters *Sister Act* and *Sister Act 2: Back in Habit* portray Goldberg in a comedic light.

Mia Mask shares Haggins’ opinion and develops it more: “As a black woman, she’s been excluded from conventional romantic comedies….. She’s one of the few female stars whose entertainment persona is not predicated on traditional notions of feminity, nubile sexuality, and happy-ever-after endings of heterosexual union” (106).
CHAPTER III

4 Analysis of the Selected Comedies

For the analytical part of my thesis I have chosen three films in which Goldberg is depicted in comedic roles. These are *Sister Act* (1992), *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit* (1993) and *Corrina, Corrina* (1994). In these films, Goldberg plays the lead role and all three films are centered on Goldberg’s character as a nurturer. My purpose will be to examine the characters with respect to African-American film stereotypes, particularly the Mammy and the Coon. Even though these type-castings are not depicted in a straightforward manner, thoroughgoing and careful research of these films demonstrates the concealed use of these stereotypes. The analytical part of this thesis will try to give evidence of the modernizing images of the Mammy/Coon in the films *Sister Act* and its sequel and of mammy type-casting in *Corrina, Corrina*.

4.1 Sister Act

*Sister Act* is widely regarded as one of the most critically acclaimed and most financially successful comedies of the 1990s, having grossed $231,605,150. Golberg plays a lounge singer Deloris Van Cartier working in a casino owned by her boyfriend and gangster Vince LaRocca. As Deloris witnesses Vince executing a chauffeur, she flees to a local police station and denounces her lover. Detective Eddie Souther offers to put her into a witness protection program if she agrees to testify against LaRocca. Although Deloris resists, she is forced to agree and is taken to St. Katherine's Roman Catholic convent, where she is disguised as a nun. The Mother Superior allows Deloris to lead the Convent Choir in order to help improve their musical skills.
Once, at the Sunday Mass, the choir sings perfectly before going into a gospel and rock and roll performance of “Hail Holy Queen”. The singing and dancing nuns step out of choir formation to dance along with their solo. The Mother Superior is shocked and accuses Deloris of desecrating the convent, rebuffing this remake and the pantomime of dance, which (according to her) threatens the moral virtue of the nuns. However Deloris tries to persuade Mother Superior about her confidence that the choral songs will attract more people to come to the convent if it is approached “Las Vegas style”. Mother Superior argues that the convent is not a casino and censures her for desecrating the choir. Almost at the same moment Monsignor O'Hara enters Mother Superior’s office and cannot hide his enthusiasm for the innovative music. Deloris uses the opportunity to lie and claims that the Mother Superior is so humble she even envisages the nuns helping in the stress, even if it is really just Deloris’s idea.

Not long afterward the choir becomes famous not only because of their innovative music but also because of their offering help to local people in the neighbourhood of the convent. After a few weeks O'Hara announces that Pope John Paul II intends to visit the convent to see the choir for himself. Mother Superior proposes that they return to approved songs, especially for this occasion. However, the nuns believe the Pope has decided to come in person to the convent, mainly because of the new style of music. Subsequently, Mother Superior proposes a vote and the nuns, in association with Monsignor O’Hara, outvote her. Mother Superior expresses concern about the changes involving new music and helping poor people outside the convent, and contemplates resignation. Mary Clarence disagrees that Mother Superior’s authority has been unintentionally undermined.
In the final film scenes of the film Detective Tate, who is on Vince’s payroll, is working with Lieutenant Eddie Souther, finds out where Deloris occurs and contacts LaRocca. He sends his minions Joey and Willy to apprehend her. Souther realizes Tate's betrayal and hurries to San Francisco to warn Mary Clarence, but she has been kidnapped by Vince's men. The nuns, led by Mother Superior decide to go to Reno and save Mary Clarence. Meanwhile, she escapes Vince and his men, Deloris hides in the casino and tries to run away from the reach of the mobsters. They are successful though and find Deloris. LaRoccs gives orders to kill her, but the two mobsters are unable to shoot Deloris due to her wearing a nun's habit and behaving like a nun. The crucial moment is depicted in the scene when LaRocca points his gun at Deloris and almost at the same time Southers shoots LaRocca in his arm. The film ends with the choir, led by Deloris, singing “I Will Follow Him”, winning applause. At the very end Deloris' bogus identity as a nun is revealed, sold to the media and becomes a sensational event.

In *Sister Act* Goldberg's character does what the mammy has always traditionally done, giving their whole selves to their white family. “As the most famous mammy played by Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), who is proud of mutal affection between master and servant. The character almost solely out of concern for the master family….” (Bogle,88). Provided that the convent and other nuns substitute the master family, Goldberg is proud of her success improving the nuns’ musical skills. Not only does she agrees with being nominated the choir’s lead singer, but she is also interested in helping poor people in the convent neighbourhood. Deloris’s self-sacrifice is a hidden message to demonstrate that African-American actresses should serve without praise.
Another features of the Mamies presents African-American actresses as desexualized women. “Goldberg/Sister Mary Clarence’s monastic habit serves even better than a frumpy housedress to establish the character as fundamentally asexual” (Haggins, 33). According to Stember, the image of the ideal woman is presented as a young woman with hairless body, whose face does not reflect the lower part of the body. Not only is the hair of the black woman rather like pubic hair, also her thick lips and wide nostrils carry associations with the taboo lower part of the body. The black woman reflects in her face and hair the lower part of her body, which is why she is considered to be “ugly” (Mask, 127-129). Deloris’s glittery golden dress and, subsequently Sister Mary Clarence’s habit, are not supposed to be sexually desirable pieces of clothes. Because of Goldberg’s asexuality presented in most of her films such as having dreadlocks in Clara’s Hart, or behaving like a man in Jumpin’ Jack Flash, to name a few, and because of the success of these films, one presumes that mainstream audience are comfortable with her portrayals.

One of the further aspects of the Mammy is her spirituality. An impressive part of the plot is set in the convent, centred around the nuns’ musical abilities, with Deloris deciding to transform the choruses into gospel music. In the film Sister Act, the traditional black gospel is presented as primitive, animal and hybrid music. In the course of the nuns’ performance the choir sings perfectly before going into a gospel and rock and roll performance of “Hail Holy Queen”. The Mother Superior refuses this development and the pantomime of dance, which threatens the moral virtue of the nuns. The continuity between the plot, music and the background of the convent, where a lounge singer Deloris is partly transformed into a real nun, portrays the spirituality of the Mammy.
Furthermore this scene also epitomizes the mammy’s offshoot, the Aunt Jemima. “Generally they are sweet, jolly, good-tempered and often wedge themselves into the dominant white culture” (Bogle, 9). One can observe this behaviour from her intervention in the issues of the convent. Deloris tries to persuade Mother Superior about her faith that the choral songs will attract more people to visit the convent if it is approached “Las Vegas style“. Mother Superior argues that the convent is not a casino. Deloris is not afraid to confront Mother Superior and does not hesitate to lie and claims that the Mother Superior is so humble she even envisages the nuns’ help in the streets even if it is really just Deloris’s idea. Deloris with her energetic behavior overshadows the Mother Superior and, in a particular way, she assumes the responsibility for the running of the monastery. “She replaces Mother Superior as the most authoritative, she breaks curfew rules by which they organize their daily routine. Goldberg’s Deloris presents herself as the dominant person in a white culture (as the Aunt Jemima), gains control over the internal machination of convent life and earns admiration of the nuns” (Mask, 126).

“The narrative formula of most films is to deal with racial issues not from a black point of view, but from a white one” (Benshoff, 85). Goldberg’s Deloris is a shining example of the most painful aspect of the mammy, which is her indirect separation from other Blacks. Donald Bogle refers to this separation as a “cultural rootlessness”. Although her back-up singers and the detective who helps protect her, are black, they are clearly of a peripheral importace. Goldberg is removed from the black community. In the film there is no reference as to whether Deloris is the only black nun in the whole convent or not. The film Sister Act proves that the culture from which Goldberg characters come from, is invisible and non-existant (297-334). Bambi
Haggins shares Bogle’s opinion when she states, “…..the only line that makes even passing reference to race is when Deloris questions the origins of her new name, Sister Mary Clarence, inquiring whether “Clarence” refers to Clarence Williams III, who played Linc, the black member of television’s Mod Squad” (155).

If the comedian comic in general is frequently portrayed as crazy, irrational, childlike and disruptive, the difficulty here is the closeness of fit between these characteristics, when manifested by African-American performers. Goldberg’s character in *Sister Act* is the epitome of the disruptive comedian presence (Geoff King, 145).

Goldberg’s character Deloris/Sister Mary Clarence portrays the modern caricature of the Coon image, with the Coon representing an object of amusement as portrayed in the comedy. This fact alone puts the lounge singer disguised as Sister Mary Clarence into a range of amusing, even ridiculous sketches. Another feature of Coon characters is that they are frequently defiend as blacks who often act in a childish way. Although they are not happy with their position in society, because of their laziness they do not attempt to change their status. Deloris van Cartier is aware of being a mistress and quarrels over the status with her lover. However she is eventually appeased by LaRocca telling her he is seeking a divorce, but not intending to do it promptly. To apologise for the quarrel, he sends Deloris a mink fur coat. Even though she finds out that the mink fur coat was formerly donated to Vince LaRocca’s wife, briefly before this discovery she was willing to pardon his previous behaviour and although she was not happy with her status, she had no intention of changing it.
4.2 Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit

At the very beginning of the film, the nuns find Deloris in Las Vegas working on her own show. They have travelled there at Mother Superior’s request to compel Deloris to return to the convent, where she should again become Sister Mary Clarence. The nuns appeal to the Goldberg character to help them handle mischievous students, as they are presently teachers at St. Francis High School in San Francisco. Deloris agrees to their requests and follows them.

Sister Mary Clarence takes charge of music lessons and is faced with indifference towards her lectures. After a few lectures where the student show a complete lack of interest, she decides to tell them they have two options - either they will attend the lectures and cooperate, or she will let them fail the subject. Apart from one student, the rest of them concur, with displeasure though. Before long she wins the respect of the teenagers and does what she did in the original film, converting them into enthusiastic choir singers. Sister Mary Clarence’s intention is not only to show the beauty of music, but also to make an effort to save the school from closing, as she had heard by chance a private discussion between Father Superior and the administrator of the High School.

Except for Goldberg’s character, another main part was given to a rebellious female student Lauren Hill, who is the most talented singer in the class. Although Hill’s mother does not want her to sing, Lauren’s desire to be a professional singer prevails over her mother’s opposition and she joins latterly her classmates who are preparing for a state music competition. To make the very end of the film more suspenseful, the administrator ascertains that Sister Mary Clarence is in fact a singer and insists on
immediately stopping participation in the state music competition. But the nuns and
the monks prevent the administrator from stopping the competition, so it can continue
as before. The students are so impressive that they win the state competition and save
their school which was threatened with closure.

In contrast to *Sister Act* the sequel *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit* differs in the
casting. Most of the young people in the choir are Black or Hispanic. The other leading
role was given to a choir member, young Lauren Hill. As Bogle states: “The Goldberg
character, although still relating primarily to white characters in the convent, has a
chance to interact with other black characters. Again Goldberg is depicted as the Aunt
Jemima who dominates white culture” (334). Sister Mary Clarence not only assumes
responsibility for the teenagers, but she also persuades the Lauren Hill character to
pursue her dream. Although Lauren is the only student who Sister Mary Clarence
attempts to dissuade from being stubborn and follow her dream, there is no other link
between them. Their relationship is not fully examined. The intent of the plot is not to
portray the mutual relationship in black community; the purpose of the film is to
entertain by illustrating Goldberg as a type-casting. Moreover, even though the other
young actors and actresses are black or Hispanic, the culture background of Goldberg’s
Mary Sister Clarence is not portrayed. Goldberg’s character agrees to discipline the
disobedient students as her friends, the nuns, request. She is willing to help the whites.
She can feel obliged because her experience in the convent had enabled her to become
famous and produce her own show. There is an indicative link between the character
and the mammy stereotype. Mammy gives her whole self to a white family, which is
replaced by the nuns in the film.
As Larson states,

Not only do black characters lack a cultural identity, but they often lack the background, family, and unique characterization that would make them more developed and understandable. Black characters are usually shown in the context of their relationships with whites rather than with each other (25).

This sequel again does not resist the temptation to depict the main character as the mammy. Goldberg is successful in appearing in the role of a nurturer, servant and helper, because the mammy and Aunt Jemima, is what Hollywood wants. Deloris/Sister Mary Clarence does not hesitate to confront Father Superior, she persists in saying that the best way to save the school is to permit the teenagers to participate in the statewide singing competition. Furthermore she dares to oppose the Father Superior and accuses him of bad ideas, saying that his decision is wrong. Once again Goldberg´s character gains control over the internal machination of convent life and earns the admiration of the nuns and the monks.

Although initially Goldberg´s Deloris is dressed in attractive clothes, a significant part of the plot is that Deloris has a new costume, the nun´s habit, and becomes Sister Mary Clarence. Another feature of the mammy presents the African-American actress as a desexualized woman. Mammy´s only mission of life is to look after the household. Because it is inadmissible to show an intimate relationship between a white master and his black maid, the mammy was always typecast as a non-sensual woman. The nun´s habit unambiguously manifests this attribute. All that belongs to a nun´s appearance such as a face without make-up, hair hidden under the nun´s cap and starched dress do not arouse sexual feelings.

The Coon´s mission is to amuse the audiences. This entertainment has appeared in both these comedies. The resemblance between this typecasting and Goldberg´s
character is manifested in Deloris/ Sister Mary Clarence’s humorous comments, one-liners and responses to other remarks. To name just a few examples, Deloris’s performance interspersed with famous songs and witty notes ends in disguise as a nun, and makes the spectators laugh. And also the scene, where Sister Mary Clarence is first interviewed by Father Superior and responds with such confusion to his questions about her previous mission, this can be considered as amusing. Goldberg’s comical behaviour, answers and the Coon’s ability to amuse the audiences are reciprocally interconnected.

4.3 Corrina, Corrina

_Corrina, Corrina_, set in 1959, is partly comedy and partly drama. Whoopi Goldberg plays the part of an African-American graduate who cannot find a job. Although she would like to be a writer, because of a lack of money she is forced to accept a job as a maid. Corrina is employed by Manny Singer and apart from running the household, she looks after his daughter, a little girl called Molly. Her father Manny is worried about his daughter as she has not spoken since her mother’s death. Although Molly does not speak, Corrina persuades her to find a way for them both to communicate. Molly agrees to touch her nose if she agrees. One day when an armchair that Molly’s mother had ordered arrives, Manny is so perplexed that he lies and says his wife is having a bath. This lie raises Molly’s hopes of seeing her dead mother, but she is not in the bathroom. As time passes, a strong relationship develops between Molly and Corrina. Not long after the story with the bathroom, Molly is lying on grass and looking at the sky. Corrina is hanging the linen and on seeing Molly she tells her that her mother is looking down at her from heaven. Manny hears it by chance and asks
Corrina not to speak about religion. Corrina replies by saying that she will explain to Molly that her mother is in the bathroom, just as he did.

Later as Corrina makes the beds, Molly comes to her and starts a conversation. That night, when her father comes back home, Molly tells him about the dinner she has helped to prepare. Hearing her voice delights Manny, Corrina stays for dinner and they both discover a common interest in music. After every working shift Corrina returns to her sister’s house, where she lives with her whole family. At times Molly spends time with Corrina’s sister Jevina and her children. They also take Molly to a black church and the children become close friends. Both Jevina and Manny’s colleague attempt to encourage them to meet new partners. Urging Manny to meet an attractive divorced lady Jenny, he agrees and spends a while talking to her.

As Molly feels better, she has to go to school. Having an art lesson, the children should draw their family. Molly drew her father, Corrina and herself. Other children sneer at her that instead of portraying her mother she drew a maid. Next day a frightened Molly begs Corrina not to let her go to school and Corrina secretly agrees. As she does housework in other households too, Molly follows her. Meanwhile she spends more time with Manny and Molly. Corrina and Manny share a love of music and she even assists him with a jingle for a commercial. After successful approval of this jingle, Manny buys flowers for Molly as well as Corrina and intends to spend a nice evening with them. Just at that moment, Jenny knocks on the door and comes in and Manny does not have the courage to show her out. The next day, Manny apologizes for Jenny’s unexpected visit. He admits all he wanted to do the previous day was to spend the evening with her and his daughter. As they say farewell, they kiss on their cheeks.
After weeks of not attending class, Manny receives a call from Molly's teacher. He finds out that Corrina had been letting Molly not attend the school. He vents his anger on Corrina and fires her. Afterwards Manny learns that his father Harry has died, Jenny again tries to captivate him but he is not interested in her. After the funeral, Manny visits Corrina at her home to apologize for his behaviour. Corrina gives Manny a scrapbook which she had made by hand for Molly and he hopes she will give it to Molly in person. Corrina forgives him and brings him inside the house to formally meet her family.

_Corrina, Corrina_ is another film which depicts the mammy stereotype. Although a reviewer Mayra David advocates her belief that in this film there is not the slightest intimation of type-casting by saying that,

> She is sassy, yes, but the film goes far beyond the white household and into Corrina Washington’s own life: her education, aspirations, her family life (each member of which is a full character of their own), and her love life, her sexuality. She is the help, and she is the love interest as well. In short, she is a human being (David, 2011, [online]).

An attentive and observant study of this film produces plenty of evidence of the mammy stereotype. The main female character is an educated person who has pretensions no to be a maid for her whole life, she mentions her dream profession and a relationship between Corrina and her family is partly illustrated in the film, while the main part of the film is occupied with her relationship to her master's family including a white male character and his little daughter. One can assume that a sort of relationship comes into existence between the male character and Corrina, but there is no evidence that it will be a love-affair or a sexual relationship. Even though they both once kissed each other on their cheeks and embraced, it can mean that they just became friends. In addition, the chosen time-period, which seems to be the 1960s, can be considered to indicate the inappropriateness of a love-affair between a white man and a black woman. The very
end of the film depicts Manny and Corrina as they are standing together on a porch. The viewers can only guess at a potentially closer relationship.

Goldberg’s Corrina, like the historical mammyes, refers to a strong sense of spirituality. Some scenes depict her spiritual character, such as where Molly as a white girl goes to a black church and sings in a gospel choir, or Corrina’s magic ability to change the lights on traffic lights, or the scene where Corrina warns about Manny’s atheism and his daughter. It is significant that Molly acquaints herself about spirituality via Corrina and not via her father or extended family. Actually, there is a scene where Manny points out the atheism of the family and appeals to Corrina not to converse with his daughter about religious affairs. There is a visible link between an African-American person and the spirituality.

Moreover, Corrina should not behave as Molly’s mother and has no right to determine what is good or bad for her. As the mammy she is responsible for looking after the household, but not for educating the white children. Corrina is also type-cast as being expected only to take care of children. Goldberg’s character is brought down to servant status although she has almost performed a mother’s role. Even Molly who would like to think about Corrina as her mother, has no chance to fulfil her dream. The majority of white characters such as Manny’s parents and his friend Jenny do not assume a black woman to be the girlfriend of a white man at all. It is not certain whether Manny longs for a closer relationship with Corrina.

_Corrina, Corrina_ is one of the few Goldberg films, where there is a link between the character and African-American culture, however the shift from complete “cultural rootlessness” to illustration of the black community is still shown as being of peripheral importance. The film portrays not only Corrina’s family including her sister, brother-in-law and their children, but also the familiar environment for African-
Americans, such as listening to blues in a club or attending black church. But still the main part of the film is concerned with a white family and the relationships between the master’s family and her persona. Corrina lets Molly accompany her into a Blues club, where she introduces her to other African-American children and later sings in a gospel choir. Moreover, Molly plaits her hair. Despite the fact that few film scenes figure Corrina as an aunt who keeps an eye on her sister’s children and in conversation with her sister, most of her time she spends looking after a white girl Molly and doing housework.
5 Conclusion

African-American actresses have appeared in a number of American films since the very beginning of the American motion picture industry, but many of them have depicted modernizing images of stereotypes. Type-cast females such as the Mammy, Aunt Jemima and tragic mulattoes based on African-American figures are still found as film characters. But also Uncle Tom, the Coon and the Black Buck stereotypes are hidden in many films. The female stereotypes have appeared throughout the whole period of the motion picture industry again and again, in many variations in American films, such as in the film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) through to *The Help* (2011).

As this thesis is concerned with the African-American actress Whoopi Goldberg I have analysed her roles in the motion picture industry during the 1990s in connection with type-casting. I have chosen three films: *Sister Act*, its sequel and *Corrina, Corrina*. Goldberg’s character is portrayed in all these films as being at the white character’s service. Although the themes of these Goldberg films are different, Goldberg’s characters are a sort of revival of Mammy/Coon type casting. Furthermore, she is not primarily represented as a good-looker and a sex symbol at all. These characters do not make this possible, and also Goldberg is not seen as an archetype of a beauty. The reason could be based on her physiognomy and particularly on her hair. According to Stember, a black woman’s hair suggests the taboo relating to the lower part of a woman’s body and this could be the reason why some African-American actresses straighten their hair.

Goldberg has played a wide range of characters. Her popularity among mainstream audiences might be due, not only to her ability to play everything from a computer programmer in *Jumpin’ Jack Flash* (1986), through to the mother of a black
daughter in *Made in America* (1993) to a white man in *The Associate* (1996), but also to the fact that her characters are not closely linked with her African-American origin. Goldberg was often distanced from culture, sexuality and family, so that her characters were more acceptable for mainstream audiences at that time.

The main aim of my thesis was an analysis of Whoopi Goldberg in three comedies during the 1990s, which exemplify the type-casting that has persisted to this day. The first part of the thesis considers the defining of stereotypes, and their impact on the public at large. The second chapter concerns the basic typologies of African-American actors and actresses and it is more devoted to those stereotypes, which are typically attributed towards women. The third chapter researches the filmic opportunities of African-American actresses in the motion picture industry from the very beginning through to the 1990s and presents Goldberg’s personae in relation to her filmic roles. The last chapter of the thesis provides an alternative view as represented by three of Goldberg’s comedies *Sister Act* (1992), *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit* (1993) and *Corrina, Corrina* (1994) which were among the most significant films she played a part in in the 1990s. This view is supported both by information taken from books written on the subject and from my own research.
Bibliography


--- “Best Black Film Actresses By Decade: The 1990s.”


Jádrem práce je analýza tří komedií v hlavní roli s Whoopi Goldberg Sestra v akci, Sestra v akci 2 a Corrina, Corrina. Analýza se pokouší dokázat, že se ve všech rolích skrývá stereotypní postavy “mammy” a “Coon”. Chování a vzhled těchto postav je srovnáván s výše zmíněnými stereotypy.
Résumé (En)

The aim of the bachelor thesis was to find out, if still in the 21\textsuperscript{th} century there are characters with female stereotypical features in American films. This bachelor thesis has focused only on African-American actresses, particularly on one of the most significant actresses during the 1980s and 1990s, whose name is Whoopi Goldberg. Throughout the whole period of the motion picture industry the African-Americans were portrayed only in stereotypical roles or in their variations. One of the most frequent type-casting has been “mammy”. Throughout the whole century one could have watched many films with the variations of other female stereotypes such as the tragic Mulatto, Aunt Jemima and Jezebel. All aforementioned type-casting have been developing in the course of the motion picture industry. Towards the end of the 21\textsuperscript{th} century, African-American women were depicted in a wide range of roles, even it is still possible to discover these stereotypes in given roles. But the type-casting features are not manifested directly, predominantly they serve as a humour element.

The core of the thesis is the analysis of Whoopi Goldberg’s main roles in three comedies: \textit{Sister Act}, \textit{Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit} and \textit{Corrina, Corrina}. The analysis tries to prove that in these roles are hidden two type-casting, the “mammy” and the “Coon”. Goldberg’s characters and her behaviour is compared with these stereotypes.