

## RACISM IN THE LAST DECADE OF HOLLYWOOD COMEDY MOVIES

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### ABSTRACT

The United States is considered to have entered the post-racial era in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where racial preference, discrimination, and prejudice towards minorities, such as African Americans, are supposed to no longer exist. As one of the media that reflected American society, Hollywood movies tried to eliminate the discussion on race and racism. It can be seen in Hollywood movies that begin to eliminate the negative images and stereotypes of African Americans. However, it does not mean that racism vanished from the Hollywood movie industry, especially in comedy movies. Comedy movies are one of the genres that often involve African-American actors and actresses. Their stereotypes are also commonly used to make humor in the narrative. Therefore, this genre is closely related to racism. However, comedy movies in the last decade, such as *Evan Almighty* (2007), *Wild Hogs* (2007), *Meet Dave* (2008), *The Maiden Heist* (2009), *Last Vegas* (2013), *Someone Marry Barry* (2014), and *Going in Style* (2017), are not showing any racism on the surface. By using Interdisciplinary as the approach, this research attempts to see how Hollywood presents racism in comedy movies, especially in the last decade. The representation theory is employed to interpret the images, scenes, and dialogues from seven selected comedy movies concerning racism. Meanwhile, the theory of humor is used to find out how racism makes humor occur through African-American characters. The finding of this research indicates that negative images and stereotypes of African Americans are still sustained in Hollywood movies. These depictions are shown covertly. Meanwhile, overt racism indicates that the African American characters are used to make humor occur in comedy movies.

**Keywords:** *African American; comedy; Hollywood; humor; racism; representation*

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## INTRODUCTION

Action or adventure and comedy movie are two top genres that most often feature the African American actors. There were only 25.9 % underrepresented racial/ ethnic groups' characters in action or adventure genre and 26.4 % in comedy genre across the 100 top movies of 2007, 2010, 2014 and 2016 (Smith et al., 2017, p. 25). Although the number remains small, comedy is one of the genres that involve many underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, one of which is African American. The number of African American within the comedic sphere is much larger than in any other genre (Mitchell, 2005, p. 5). African American involvement in comedy has started from minstrel show through the Blackface characters. The aspect of African American life such as their physical appearance, the way they dress, their vernacular language or even their culture is displayed as a joke for White audiences. Around the 1970s and 1980s, many African American characters appeared on the American primetime television which dominantly on comedy program (Ford, 1997, pp. 266-267). Situation comedy program booming at that time which makes the image of African American attached to the comedy. African American stereotype become the important part of comedy because it does not only help to establish instantly recognizable character types, but such character traits and stereotype-based jokes also constitute a source of humor (Park, Gabbadon, Chernin, 2006, p. 158). Thus, it can be said that comedy is one of the genres that is closely related to racism.

However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which is a post-racial era in the United States, racism becomes irrelevant to appear in Hollywood

movies. Therefore, Hollywood has rarely displayed the elements of racism such as racialization, prejudice, and discrimination in its movies including in comedy genre. This can be seen from seven Hollywood comedy films released last ten years which are *Evan Almighty* (2007), *Wild Hogs* (2007), *Meet Dave* (2008), *The Maiden Heist* (2009), *Last Vegas* (2013), *Someone Marry Barry* (2014), and *Going in Style* (2017). The colorblind actors exist in those movies which makes there are no significant differences of the characters based on race. African American actors also get the role as the main characters and supporting characters that also have an important role in those movies, not just the cameo appearance. On the surface, no racism is visible. However, that does not mean these movies do not contain any racism. Therefore, these seven movies are chosen to be the main sources of data in this research to examine the racism in Hollywood comedy movies. This research focuses on examining how Hollywood comedy movies represent racism and analyzing how humor represents racism through the characters of African American.

This is inductive qualitative research which mainly focuses on library research. John W. Creswell explains in his book *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mix Method Approaches* (2009):

Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. (p. 4)

The purpose of this study is to find out how Hollywood represents racism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century comedy movies. Since movie is a part of popular culture which encompasses the everyday life of people and society, thus inductive qualitative research is appropriate to be applied because it will provide a deep analysis seeing how Hollywood represents racism.

Furthermore, qualitative research is also known as an interpretive study which means that this research requires an interpretative activity in order to help the researcher gain a better understanding of the object that being studied. Creswell (2009) explains that:

Qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand. Their interpretations cannot be separated from their own backgrounds, history, contexts, and prior understandings. (p. 176)

From the explanation above, the researcher makes an interpretation from the data. The data is divided into two categories: primary data and secondary data. The main source of data in the research are taken from the last decade Hollywood comedy movies: *Evan Almighty* (2007), *Wild Hogs* (2007), *Meet Dave* (2008), *The Maiden Heist* (2009), *Last Vegas* (2013), *Someone Marry Barry* (2014) and *Going in Style* (2017). These selected movies are chosen to examine how Hollywood represents racism in comedy movies. The secondary data consist of written materials which include any books, journals, articles, research papers, e-books, e-journals and other movies that can support the analysis in this research. These secondary data complete the information about racism in Hollywood comedy movies. These primary and secondary data are watched and read

closely to build a deep understanding of the topic in this research.

This research uses Interdisciplinary as the approach to analyze the data. Theory of Representation will be used to gain a deep analysis of the representation of racism in Hollywood comedy movies. The main data in this research are the dialogues, scenes and images from the Hollywood comedy movies in the last decade which are: *Evan Almighty* (2007), *Wild Hogs* (2007), *Meet Dave* (2008), *The Maiden Heist* (2009), *Last Vegas* (2013), *Someone Marry Barry* (2014), and *Going in Style* (2017). These movies are used as a medium to interpret racism through dialogues, scenes, and images which serve as the language. Furthermore, humor is considered as a device that has the potential to strengthen racism. Thus, the Violation theory of Humor will be used to reveal racism in humor towards the role of African Americans from these selected comedy movies.

## **DISCUSSION**

The representation African American in 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood comedy movies began to vary. They are not only becoming the antagonist or supporting characters, but also the main characters even with the positive images. However, it does not mean there is no any racism, especially in comedy movies. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Hollywood comedy movies tend to deliver racism covertly. Meanwhile, racism that overtly represented tends to make humor occur. It will be explained in the points below.

### **The Logic of Humor**

Comedy is a genre of movie which is designed to produce the laugh of the

audiences. It means through the comedy they can enjoy the humor, feeling amused and entertained. Sen in her journal *Humor Analysis and Qualitative Research* (2012) states that humor primarily consists of jokes (spoken or written words) and action (describable through words) which elicit laughter or generate merriment (p. 1). Filmsite (n.d.) explains that in order to create humor, comedy movie usually exaggerates the situation, the language, action, and characters which created from the observation of the deficiencies, foibles, and frustrations of life, providing merriment and a momentary escape from day-to-day life. Thus, it can be said that humor in comedy created from the things that experienced in the daily life. As Neale and Krutnik state in his book *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (1990) that:

...comedy was for centuries the most appropriate genre for representing the lives, not of the ruling classes, of those with extensive power, but of the 'middle' and 'lower' orders of society, those whose power was limited and local, and whose manners, behavior, and values were considered by their 'betters' to be either trivial, or vulgar, or both. (p. 12)

It can be said that comedy genre usually presents a lighthearted story about the everyday life of common people and humor in the narrative comes from the uncommon things that should not happened in certain situation.

Most of the comedy movies can be enjoyed by all ages. The narratives also usually give a certain message such as the value of family and friendship, love, and so on. However, sometime comedy movies use the controversial things as the material to create humor such as the sexual orientation and race. Since this research focuses on racism, thus the discussion will focus on

racial representation, in this case African Americans, in Hollywood comedy movies.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, those stereotypical characters of African Americans slowly disappear. Johnson in his thesis *Race and Representation in Friday Night Lights* (2012) states that the representation of race in the contemporary setting is handled more suggestively, indirectly, and implicitly which reflects the new ways of thinking about race that is prevalent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (p. 100). It means that Hollywood tends to not present racial differences between the characterizations of white people and the other minority society such as African American. It also means that the old stereotypes of African American are no longer displayed in the Hollywood movies since it is not relevant with the current condition in the society. Stereotypes, however, is something important in the comedy movies. Park, Gabbadon, and Chernin in their journal *Naturalizing Racial Differences Through Comedy* (2006) state that stereotype help to establish instantly recognizable character types and such character traits and stereotype-based jokes also constitute a source of humor. Comedy movies also sometimes invert the stereotypes to generate humor (pp. 158-159).

Although the old stereotypes of African American are rarely depicted explicitly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood movies, it does not mean that African American characters are portrayed as a more positive character. The representation of African American, in fact, is still related to the negative characterizations. Besides the characterizations of African American, humor in Hollywood comedy movies also takes part in representing racism. To examine the representation of racism in

the 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood comedy movies which related to the humor, Veatch's Violation theory is employed. He explains that there are three necessary and jointly conditions for humor perception. First, Violation (V) which is the condition where the perceiver has in mind a view of the situation as constituting a violation of a subjective moral principle. Second, Normal (N) which is the condition where the perceiver has in mind a predominating view of the situation as being normal. The last one is Simultaneity which is the condition where

the N and V understanding is present in the mind of the perceiver at the same instant in time (Veatch, 1998, pp. 163-164). Necessary means that if one of the conditions above is absent, then humor perception will also absent. Jointly sufficient means that if all of the conditions above are present, then humor perception will also be present.

Furthermore, Veatch proposes the three-level scale of how strong perceiver can perceive humor which can be seen in the table below:

Level	Logic	Commitment	Perceiver		
			Gets it	Is offended	Sees humor
Level 1	Not-V	None	No	No	No
Level 2	V and N	Weak	Yes	No	Yes
Level 3	V and not-N	Strong	Yes	Yes	No

Table 1. The three scale of how strong perceiver can perceive humor as proposed by Veatch

The table above shows the level of the strength of the perceiver's affective to the violation and normal condition in humor. The amount of 'normal' information in a joke is important and can have a strong and profound influence on how the perceiver will experience the violation (Mulder & Nijholt, 2002, p. 6). Level 1 shows that if a person feels lack of the attachment to the violation, thus there is no reaction to the joke. It is indicating a normal condition. Level 2 shows that when a person can see the presence of violation but at the same time the violation sees as it is normal, it makes humor occur in that situation. Then, Level 3 shows that when violation predominates and the normality is

absent, thus this situation is pure a violation, not a humor. It can be said that the interpretation of violation needs to be matched by the interpretation of normality in order to make humor occur. Even something that quite offensive or threatening can be made into funny if the joke is told well enough by someone who feels safe which makes the other also feel that it is normal (Veatch, 1998, p. 178). In other words, according Violation theory humor occurs when a person can see the presence of violation and at the same time the violation sees as it is normal. Thus, in order to understand the humor, the Violation theory suggest to discovering the principle which

being violated or a situation that might seem normal in order to get the interpretation why a certain condition is considered being funny which make humor occur.

### **A Sign of White Supremacy**

Gillborn states in his journal *Rethinking White Supremacy* (2006) that white supremacy is conceived as a comprehensive condition whereby the interests and perceptions of white subjects are continually placed center stage and assumed as 'normal' (p. 318). Ansley in *White Supremacy (And What We Should Do about It)* (1997) states that:

By "white supremacy"... I refer instead to a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings (p. 592).

In the other words, white supremacy emphasizes the superiority of white people which make them dominate other races. White people enjoy the privilege of being White without any racial hatred.

White supremacy also related to the concept of the chosen people; a term proposed by John Winthrop. He uses this term to express a concept of belief that Puritans are the chosen people of God. They were chosen to fulfill the task of being an ideal Christian community for the world. Therefore, God will provide protection for His chosen people. In his sermon in *A Model of Christian Charity* which delivered in the Arbella ship on the way to the New World,

Winthrop (1989) says that "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us" (p. 41). The words "city upon a hill" illustrate that Puritans are in the highest position from the others which indicates that white people are the chosen one who is better, stronger and higher. This concept is still attached to white people until today which makes them always have a privilege as being Whites in the United States.

Although Hollywood movies no longer discuss race and racism due to the social condition of American society today, there is a possibility that Hollywood comedy movies tend to portray White as a more positive character than African American. The roles of African American in Hollywood comedy movies can be considered as the representation of equality between white people and African Americans. African American often depicted in the interracial friendship with Whites. This depiction is common in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood comedy movies. It is considered as one of the best ways to involve African American characters in comedy movies because the depiction of interracial friendship will eliminate stereotype and racial differences between Whites and African American characters. This interracial friendship between Whites and African Americans can be seen in *Wild Hogs*, *The Maiden Heist*, *Last Vegas*, *Someone Marry Barry* and *Going in Style*. All of these movies tell the story about the friendship of four or three men who became the main characters.

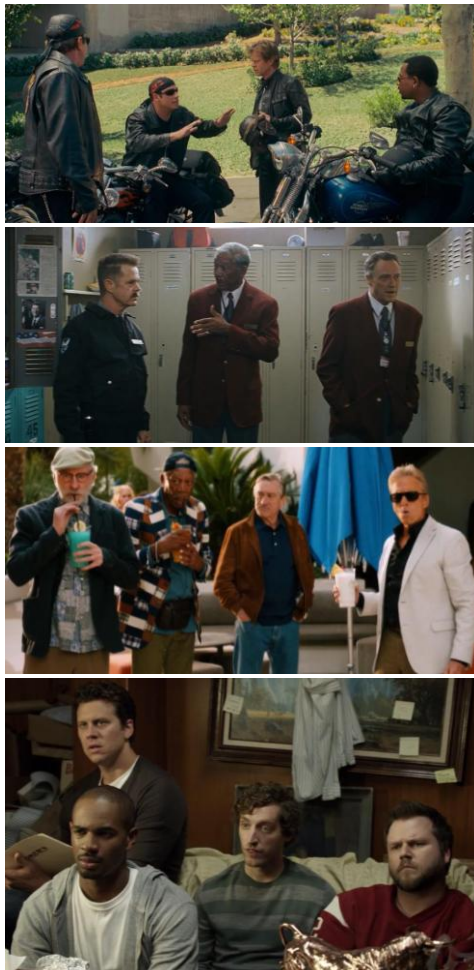
Among that friendship, there is only one African American. Two or three White characters are not equal to an African American character. Nittle in his article *Why*

*Interracial Friendships are Rare among Both Children and Adults* (2017) states that in reality, most Whites do not have African American friends. Interracial friendship relatively uncommon in the United States because the society remains racially stratified which make difficult for the public to form cross-race relationships. Furthermore, Park, Gabbadon and Chernin in their journal *Naturalizing Racial Differences Through Comedy* (2006) state that the conventional narrative that shows the interracial friends, where the characters of different races develop trust and friendship, can be seen as an imaginary utopia in which racial differences do not matter (p. 159).



Figure 1. Interracial friendship in *Wild Hogs*, *The Maiden Heist*, *Last Vegas*, *Someone Marry Barry* and *Going in Style*

The character of African American also presented in the interracial marriage which can be seen in *Someone Marry Barry*. Interracial marriage between African American and White indicates that there is a shifting of attitude and behaviors toward the minority people in the United States. The presence of African American is eventually accepted by Whites which show that there is no more racial preference among them. Hollywood tends to present it in a love affair between African American and White. As Troy states in *Are Interracial Relationships Over Represented in Film?* (2012) that there are far more interracial couples in movies than there are African American couples and further the interracial couples most often depicted as African American with White. However, the number of African Americans who married White in the United States is the fewest. Kellogg in his article *The Changing Face of Seeing Race* (2011) states that according to the government survey, the marriages between African American and Whites are slowly growing and remain relatively rare. In 2010, just 0.3 % of White men in marriages were married to African American women and just 0.8 % of White women in marriages were married to African American men. By contrast, 2.1 % of White men in marriages were married to Asian or Native American women and 1.4 % of married White women had an Asian or Native American spouse. Both of these depiction



shows that African American characters in comedy movies are used to represent the equality among the society which in fact, it turns the opposite.



Figure 2. Interracial marriage in *Someone Marry Barry*

Since all of these movies are directed by White directors, there is a tendency for them to represent African Americans as the lower-class characters. This representation can be seen from the differences occupations in the roles of African Americans and white people. According to Boundless in *The Lower Class* (2016), the lower class basically refers to the society at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy. That society is generally had low education, low income, and low status jobs. Based on that explanation, the lower-class characterization of African American in Hollywood comedy movies can be considered as the character that plays as the lower-class workers. It can be seen in *Wild Hogs* (2007) through the character of Bobby, starred by Martin Lawrence, who works as plumber.



Figure 3. Bobby works as a plumber in *Wild Hogs*

Furthermore, Gates (2016) states that there are two nations within African America based on the problem of income inequality. It is not between African American and white

people, but between African American haves and have-nots. Lower class and middle-class African Americans are differentiated by their economic and social status. Middle class African Americans are those who more educated and have better jobs. It can be seen in *Last Vegas* and *Someone Marry Barry* where the African American characters are depicted as the working men. However, in the United States, both lower- and middle-class African Americans are still considered as the lower-class society due to the fact that their economic prospects are worse than Whites.



Figure 4. Middle class African American in *Last Vegas* and *Someone Marry Barry*

The lower-class character of African American also can be seen in *The Maiden Heist* and *Going in Style*. Both of these movies are feature African American characters as the thief. In the United States, the image of African Americans is still associated with the crime. Revise Sociologystates in *Social Class and Crime* (2016) that crime is committed by the lower social class, those with an unskilled background. This act can happen because they had fewer opportunities to achieve material success through legitimate means. Thus, the criminal characters of African



American can be considered that they are depicted as the lower-class society.

Charles: You know, we don't have to let them leave. I mean, if we're serious, we can just make them ours.

Roger: What are you saying?

Charles: What do you think I'm saying?

Roger: I'm not sure. For a second, I thought you were suggesting that we steal the paintings.

Charles: And if I am?

Roger: We're security guards. We're supposed to stop crime.

Charles: You don't think this is a crime? Do you know how far Denmark is?

Roger: I don't know, Charlie. We're not thieves. And besides, you and me...I don't see how we could do it (*The Maiden Heist* 00:12:12).

Furthermore, a happy ending story is the important formula in the comedy genre. As Neale and Krutnik explain in their book *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (1990) that "A comedy is not just 'light' and 'amusing', it is marked also by a 'happy ending' and by its concern with the representation of 'everyday life'. This has always been considered an important aspect of comedy" (p. 11). It shows that besides the funny element, which is the main core of the comedy genre, the happy ending is also important. The happy ending is created as the result of the conflict in the narrative that appears at the end of the story.

There is a tendency that happy ending mostly experienced by Whites characters in the comedy movies. It can be seen in *Evan Almighty*, *Meet Dave*, *The Maiden Heist*, and *Someone Marry Barry*. These movies somehow give a depiction that white people are the one who deserves the happiness. The privilege of being Whites that makes the White characters becomes the one who

considered worth having the happy ending. Although the characters of African American cannot get the happy ending exactly like the characters of White, nobody will question about that. This is further reinforcing by the fact that these movies directed by White directors, which make Whites' privileges are more obvious.

All of the explanation above can be considered as the covert racism. The characters of African American also used to represent the equality among the American society in the form of interracial friendship and interracial marriage. In fact, the number of interracial friendship and interracial marriage between African Americans and Whites in the United States are remaining low. This depiction is considered as the pure violation. Since the normal situation is absent, thus there is no humor that can occur. African American also tends to be represented as the lower-class characters such as plumber, office workers and criminals. Meanwhile, the characters of White are depicted get their privileged as being Whites by own the happy ending. These depictions considered as the normal condition since the American society does look that way. The violation is absent which makes there is no humor that can occur.

It is different when racism is overtly represented which tend to make humor occur in comedy movies. White supremacy makes the character of white people become the superior. Thus, in order to make humor occur, the characters of African American are positioned as the inferior. It is related to the Superiority theory of humor. According to Veatch, Superiority is understood as the humorous condition that happens when someone is responsible for a moral violation

and the perceiver is not. Then, this condition meets for having the feeling of superiority (Veatch, 1998, p. 188). Scheel in her article *Definitions, Theories, and Measurement of Humor* (2017) summed up several definitions of Superiority theory in humor from some expert. She concludes that superiority in humor is the result of disparagement, blunders, and foolishness of another person. People will feel fun, which tends to ridicule, of someone's misfortune or someone who deviates from a given norm (p. 14). Those acts mentioned before can be considered as the violation from a normal condition which makes humor occurs (V) but it does not involve the perceiver (N) which makes the perceiver safe from being violated and feels superior. This kind of humor can be seen in *Wild Hogs* (2007), *Last Vegas* (2013), and *Someone Marry Barry* (2014).

In order to understand the humor, Violation theory suggests to discovering the principle which being violated or a situation that might seem normal from a certain condition. The second option is considered appropriate to be applied in understanding the humor in *Wild Hogs*, *Last Vegas* and *Someone Marry Barry* relating to superiority. All of these movies are mainly focus on the friendship between four people, only one of them is African American. The characters of African American in these movies tend to be depicted as the inferior characters. In fact, it is a general depiction of how African Americans are treated in the society.

Bobby was ridiculed as being a plumber and he also admitted that it was the worst job in *Wild Hogs*. Meanwhile, Desmond became the unemployment because of the fault of Barry in *Someone Marry Barry*. Archie was suspected cheating by the floor manager

named Alan when he actually won in fair and square when playing Blackjack in *Last Vegas*. Their misfortune and foolishness can be regarded as the violation (V). In the other side, the audiences are not involved in this situation and they do not feel any adverse effects from the misfortune and foolishness of the characters of African American in these movies which can be regarded as normal condition (N). Since the general idea of superiority theory is that people will laugh about the shortcomings of the others, thus the misfortunes and foolishness of the characters of African American are meant to create humor that can entertain the audiences. The audiences who enjoy these humors have the feeling of being superior.



Figure 5. Bobby was ridiculed for being a plumber in *Wild Hogs*

### Absurdity and Incongruity of Humor in Hollywood Comedy Movies

According to Veatch, Absurdity and Incongruity is understood as a condition where normality and violation of the accepted order of things are simultaneously juxtaposed to generate humor, absurdity and incongruity are certainly present, since "It's okay", and "It's not okay" are incongruous, and believing them both to hold true of one situation is at least apparently absurd (Veatch, 1998, p. 185). This kind of humor can be seen in *Evan Almighty* (2007) and *Meet Dave* (2008). Both of these two comedy movies mainly focus on the miraculous character, God and alien. Absurd and incongruous humor also can be seen in *The Maiden Heist* (2009) and *Going in Style* (2017). Both of these two comedy movies mainly focus on the thievery act. The characters of African American in these movies are taking part in making humor in the narrative.

God in the form African American man in *Evan Almighty* is considered as the violation (V) of the common depiction of God which mostly depicted as male and White (N). The conventional portrayal of God, which is male and White, is considered as the pious God that cannot do such the weird things. As Freedman in his article *Mr. Freeman, You Look Divine* (2003) explains the goal of Steve Oedekerck, the screenwriter, and Tom Shadyac, the director, to cast Freeman is to present God as more personal, less generic and pious. Thus, it can be said that the violation portrayal of God in this movie, in this case African American actor plays as the character of God, is meant to entertain the audiences.

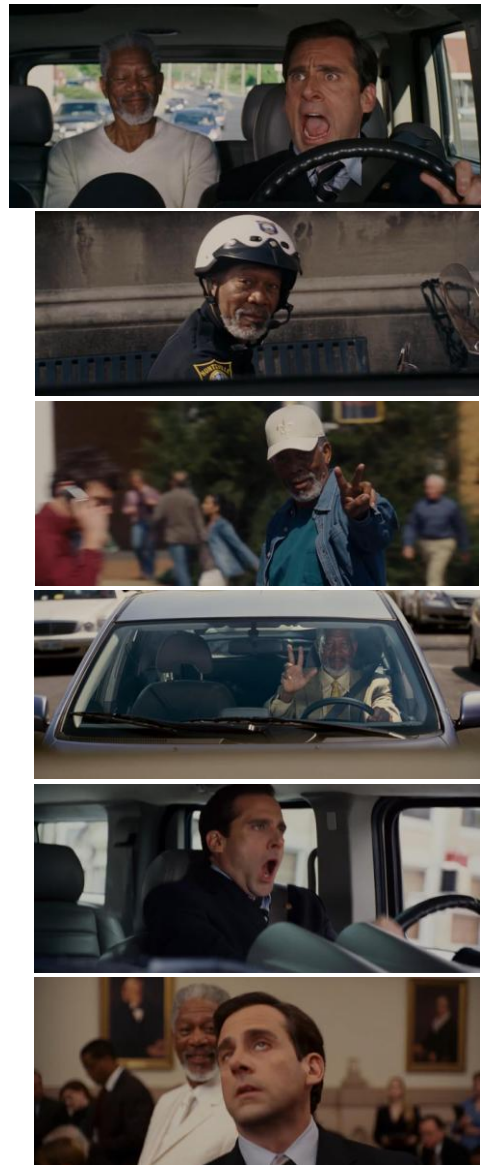


Figure 6. Evan frightened by the presence of God in *Evan Almighty*

Meanwhile humanoid alien in the form of African American man in *Meet Dave* is considered as the violation (V) of common depiction of humanoid alien which often depicted as white people or African Americans in costume or different skin color (N). This character of alien is represented physically as African Americans. However, his behavior is not like the normal humans in general, he has Chinese name, speaks with the standard of American English and he also shows the reversal of stereotypical of the

African Americans and White people. None of those things are emphasizing his identity as the African Americans. Therefore, a mismatch between the physical appearance with the names, attitudes, and behavior of African American character with his cultural identity as African Americans makes the alien characters which played by African American actor in this film can create humor.



Figure 7. The way Dave walk, smile, shake hands and eat ketchup as an alien in *Meet Dave*

Afterwards, the criminal characters of African American in *The Maiden Heist* and *Going in Style* which holding a cotton candy, bring cat, jump into the basket of electric bicycle and using the mummy costume during the thievery act are considered as the violation (V) of the common depiction of the

criminal characters of African American which mostly depicted as the offensive, violent, and considered as the threat characters to others. Stereotypes help to establish instant recognizable characters types. In order to create comedy, sometimes stereotypes need to be inverted (Park, Gabbadon, and Chernin, 2006, pp. 158-159). It can also happen when the features of a certain stereotype are exchanged in reverse. Therefore, the depiction of the criminal characters of African American as explained above can create such humor. It can be said that the violation portrayal of the criminal character of African American is meant to create humor that can entertain the audiences.



Figure 8. Charlie and Willie's appearance as the criminal character in *The Maiden Heist* and *Going in Style*

Meanwhile, covert racism that represented through the miraculous characters of African American tends to not make humor occur. In comedy movies, Hollywood begins to bring the new characterizations of African American. One of them is Magical Negro, a character that has magical powers. With this power, Magical Negro served as the helper for the White characters. This character can be seen in *Evan Almighty* through the character of God. God in this movie is starring by Morgan Freeman, an

African American actor. His role as the character of God begins in *Bruce Almighty* which continues in this spin-off movie. The character of God in this movie is an old man with divine power in the neat white clothes.

God in the form of African American man makes this character indicates that African Americans actor is given a new characterization with a positive image. In the real life, God is always in the highest position which is above the human. Then, the character of God which played by African American actors in this movie indicates that this role makes African American lies in the top position of social strata in society. Meanwhile most of African Americans are usually portrayed as being in the lower social strata below the Whites. Laybourn, Goss and Hughey in their journal *You're Either One of Us or You're Not* (2016) state that "Some scholars conceptualize the racial landscape as a multilayered racial hierarchy or racial continuum wherein other racial groups may act as honorary whites or be triangulated between whiteness and Blackness" (p. 554). The quotation above explains that in the American society, white people always at the top of the racial hierarchy and African American is often delineated at the bottom. However, the character of God in this movie put African American in the higher strata with divine power that can rule white people. This characterization is something new for African American role in the movies since they are always portrayed as the oppressed society. However, this role serves as the Magical Negro character. The main purpose for Magical Negro character is to assist the White character, to help White character discover and utilize their spirituality and to offer a type of "folk wisdom" used to resolve White's dilemma which becomes the main

focus in the movies (Glenn and Cunningham, 2009, p. 138). In *Evan Almighty*, the problem of Evan becomes the main focus in this movie and the character of God will help him to face and solve his problems.

Another role for African American in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood comedy movies is the aliens. It can be seen in *Meet Dave* (2008). The alien in this spaceship described as the tiny humanoid creature. They are led by a captain who has the responsibility to control the spaceship as well as the alien crews who operated the spaceship. The spaceship is depicted as an African American man dressed in a neat white suit. Both Captain and spaceship alien is starring by Eddie Murphy. The character of the captain of the alien spaceship is described as the supreme leader who has the power to control all of the alien crew in that spaceship. He is a firm and responsible leader. This characterization is something new for African American role in the movies since there are not many African American who becomes a leader in the United States. However, the character of Captain of the aliens implies that African Americans can be a great leader only in a small sphere. They are also still considered as the others to the white people. Both of the miraculous characters of African American are considered as the pure violation. Since the normal situation is absent, thus there is no humor that can occur.

## **CONCLUSION**

In sustaining racism in comedy movies, Hollywood presents it covertly and overtly. Covert racism in the seven selected comedy movies in this research shows that African Americans are given more positive characterization through the miraculous

characters such as the character of God and Captain of a group of aliens. However, the character of God is considered as the loyal servant for white people. The character of Captain of aliens shows that African Americans can be a great leader only in a small sphere. They are also still considered as the others to the white people. The characters of African American also used to represent the equality among the American society in the form of interracial friendship and interracial marriage. In fact, the number of interracial friendship and interracial marriage between African Americans and Whites in the United States are remaining low. Both of this depiction is considered as the pure violation. Since the normal situation is absent, thus there is no humor that can occur.

African American also tends to be represented as the lower-class characters such as plumber, office workers and criminals. Although African American characters are depicted as the lower class and middle class based on their economic status in the selected comedy movies, their class structures remain the same as the lower class in American society in general. Meanwhile, the characters of White are depicted get their privileged as being Whites by own the happy ending which can be considered as the white supremacy. This is further reinforcing by the fact that these movies directed by White directors, which make Whites' privileges are more obvious. These depictions considered as the normal condition since the American society does look that way. The violation is absent which makes there is no humor that can occur.

Overt racism in the seven selected comedy movies in this research shows that African Americans characters are used as the

violation in order to make absurd and incongruous humor occur. The character of God is presented in the form of African American old man, while the common depiction of God in Hollywood movies is in the form of White man. The character of humanoid Alien is presented in the form of African American man, while the common depiction of the humanoid alien in Hollywood is in the form of White man. The criminal characters of African American are presented as the innocent people who unfamiliar with the criminal acts, while the common depiction of the criminal characters of African American in Hollywood is portrayed as offensive, violent, and dangerous person. All of the violations in these depictions are meant to create the characterization of African American that can entertain the audiences.

The characters of African American also used as the violation in order to make humor occur that related to superiority. Bobby, who was ridiculed as being a plumber, also admitted that it was the worst job in *Wild Hogs*. Desmond became the unemployment because of Barry's fault in *Someone Marry Barry*. Archie was suspected cheating by the floor manager named Alan when he actually won in fair and square in *Last Vegas*. This misfortune and foolishness of the African American characters can be considered as the violation (V) of the normal condition that meant to create humor to entertain the audiences. The audiences who enjoy these humors from the misfortune and foolishness of African American characters have the feeling of being superior. Overt racism that can be seen in all of the depiction of African American above shows that the characters of African American are used to make humor occur in the narrative.

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