

## Chapter 9 - Race and ethnicity in film

### Hierarchy, prejudice, and the social imaginary

- Individuals see themselves not only as individuals but also as **members of different groups**
- Sense of **belonging** solidifies a sense of **identity**
- Individuals want to identify with **representations** of the groups they belong to
- Arts and cinema portray a rich array of:
  - Nationalities
  - Ethnicities
  - Subcultures
  - Communities
- Representations can be highly affirmative
  - Can also be divisive if they demean one group or subordinate it to another
- **Institutional racism** – prejudice in which an institution (eg. Government or laws) discriminate against a particular race
- **Individual racism** – prejudice in which individuals discriminate or regard others as inferior to themselves
- **White skin privilege** – in terms of race in the US and other predominantly white countries, white skin privilege is the assumption of rights or privileges for oneself because of the colour of one's skin
  - Elsewhere, other skin colours may be privileged
- **Social problem genre** – genre of film that draws public attention to a serious public issue

### Stereotypes

- **Greaser**
  - Stereotype of Mexicans as scheming, deceptive, and murderous
  - Dates back from early days of cinema when films first portrayed Mexican characters as thieves, drunks, or killers
- **Mammy**
  - Bad tempered, argumentative
  - Speaks her mind but is basically ineffectual
  - Speaking truths but with a comic manner that makes her more laughable than forbidding
- **Coon**
  - Comic stereotype of black males
  - Butt of the joke or the joke itself
- **Uncle Tom**
  - Stereotype of black males that comes from the 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
  - Benign, innocent, trusting, compliant, obedient, faithful
  - Remains loyal to the end even when subjected to physical threat or violence
- **Tragic Mulatto**
  - Light-skinned black who often tries to pass for white
  - Dramatic warning of the perils of miscegenation (interbreeding of people of different races)
- **Buck**
  - Black variation on the Greaser
  - Sometimes brutal, often ruthless, almost always oversexed

- Hyper-masculine image of the African American as a powerful, magnetic physical force
- Lustful, rapacious figure
- Almost every minority suffers from stereotyping
- Chinese-American characters may be typed as:
  - Mysterious, clannish, unwilling to assimilate, passive, extremely tight-lipped
  - 1920s and 30s, frequently associated with opium dens and crime

#### Boundaries between groups and the rise of Otherness

- the **Other** (with a capital O)
  - often used to signify an abstract other that is the product of hegemonic processes
  - it is what becomes of others when they are subordinated, demeaned, and reduced to a stereotype
  - a hierarchy comes into existence
  - one group dominates another by making another group subordinate
- **taboos** – prohibitions that carry a strong emotional charge
- **binary oppositions** – either/or categories such as us/them, black/white, good/evil, etc
- **social imaginary** – collection of prejudicial images assigned to different groups within the social dynamics related to power and hierarchy
  - members of one group picture members of another group in terms of stereotypes and clichés