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# WE LEARN TOGETHER:

— Asians and Whitewashing in the Media —

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# What is Whitewashing?

*Whitewashing is a casting practice where white actors are cast in non-white roles.*

## Main Ideas:

- ❖ Hollywood has created a normacy where white actors are transformed with makeup to play non-white roles
- ❖ “Media influences not only the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of other people about AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders), but about how AAPI define themselves” (Yang, 4)

## Learning Objectives:

- ❖ Understand that whitewashing is an issue that has caused cultural misrepresentation
- ❖ Understand the history of whitewashing
- ❖ Realize the solution begins with our own perceptions and education of the these rarely spoken entertainment racial prejudices



## Why does it Matter?

Whitewashing not only causes a lot of Underrepresentation in the entertainment industry.

This underrepresentation could cause great harm among the younger generations as they will end up developing their own warped conceptions of racial equality.

A stat from a five year span from 2007-2012 showed that 75.8% of all roles in the top 500 grossed films were filmed with white actors.

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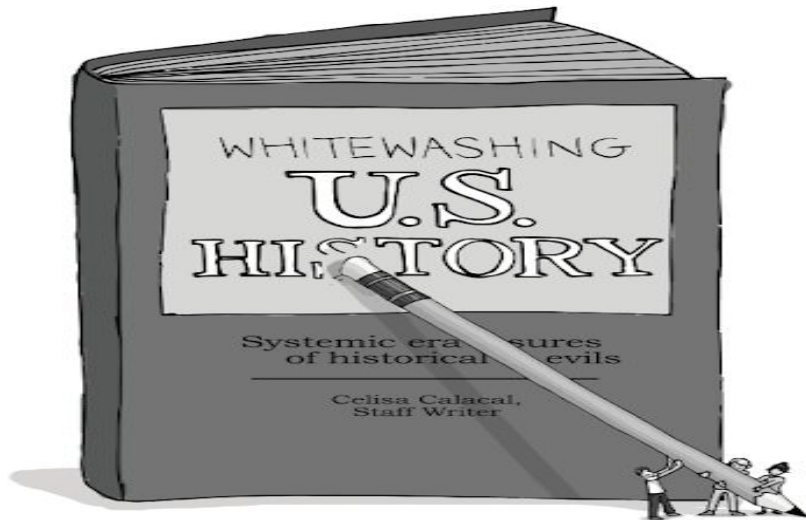
# Why it's a problem?

Popular media has the ability to shape the way people think and view certain topics.

With this understanding in mind, Hollywood has largely misrepresented Asians in the film industry and oftentimes created false stereotypes as a result.

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# History of Whitewashing



The first actual instance of Whitewashing occurred all the way back in 1916, for the movie “Intolerance.” During that film an English actor by the name of Alfred Paget played Prince Belshazzar of Babylon.

While German actor George Siegmann played the Persian King Cyrus the Great.

# Real-World Example:

*Warner Orland - white man who was casted to play a Chinese detective, Charlie Chan, in a series of movies*

- While some felt that it was a win for a Chinese detective to be portrayed in Hollywood, others felt frustrated that a white actor was cast for the role.
- It was reported that Orland would have “a few drinks to make his speech more halting and to put a grin on his face” to play the role (Scherker).



# Real-World Example:

Avatar the Last Airbender was heavily influenced by East Asian Culture and was inspired by Japanese Anime, but a majority of the cast was white actors with the only asian in a main role being Prince Zuko who was played by Dave Patel.



# Real World Example:

*Mickey Rooney as Mr. Yunioshi in "Breakfast at Tiffany's"*

- Cast as Mr. Yunioshi, Rooney played the role with "taped eyelids, buck teeth, sibilant accent and all" (Young)
- Even Paramount recognizes the "toxic caricature" that Mr. Yunioshi represented and created a documentary called *Mr. Yunioshi: An Asian Perspective*
- Rooney even claimed that if he had known the hurt and offense the character brought, he would not have done it.





# Real World Example:

In the movie Doctor Strange, the Ancient One was originally depicted in the comics as an elderly Asian Male.

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# So...what's the solution?

- Though media has the capability to shape stereotypes and influence perspectives, increased awareness of whitewashing, and ultimately its harm, can change those viewpoints.
- Rather than receiving what the media says and automatically accepting, we can educate ourselves with Asian culture and do so from the Asian population itself.
- Learning together means listening together and being open to new concepts.

# Links for more Information:

- White Washed Out: Asian American Representation in Media by Helen Yang:

[https://sites.duke.edu/bakerscholars/files/2017/02/Yang\\_AsianAmericanMediaRepresentation.pdf](https://sites.duke.edu/bakerscholars/files/2017/02/Yang_AsianAmericanMediaRepresentation.pdf)

- Hollywood's Whitewashing Habits:

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hollywood-whitewashing\\_n\\_5515919](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hollywood-whitewashing_n_5515919)

- Wall Street Journal Mickey Rooney Article:

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-SEB-80668>

# **A Service Learning Project from:**

The APSU Department of Communication and  
COMM 4050 Values, Ethics, and Diversity in  
American Popular Culture