

The Phantom Menace of “Specieist” Characterization

Star Wars Studies Part 2

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Introduction

In the *Star Wars* movies we can find various kinds of aliens, androids, and human beings who display unique, original characteristics. Yet we may experience a sense of “déjà vu” with these characters who somehow seem to display the same stereotypical traits associated with minorities seen in old movies. The purpose of this series of papers is to analyze how the representation of aliens, androids, and human racial minorities has been developed in the *Star Wars* movies.

The three films that make up the original *Star Wars* trilogy: *Star Wars* (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and *Return of the Jedi* (1983) have twice been revised: in 1997 each was released as a “special edition” with additional scenes and enhanced computer graphics¹. Later, in 2004, new DVD versions of the trilogy — also computer enhanced and containing additional scenes — were released.

In the first paper of the series, I discussed the resemblance of images of female aliens in the special edition of *Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi* to those of traditional stereotypes of African American women in American novels and Hollywood movies. In that paper I argued that the most of the application of traditional stereotypes of racial inferiority to alien characters do not appear in the original versions but were added to the revised version released in 1997².

This paper examines images of male aliens and black men in the *Star Wars* films, in order to demonstrate how George Lucas, the films' director and/or producer, has developed a sophisticated way of “species” -oriented characterization. Interestingly, from the first film of the series, *New Hope*, to the latest, *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (2002)³, stereotypical and controversial images of aliens increasingly appear, while the characters portrayed by black male and other non-white actors are depicted non-stereotypically.

Section I of this paper discusses how black human characters and aliens are portrayed in the *Star Wars* trilogy. Section II shifts the focus to the portrayal of black characters and aliens in *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999)⁴, the first of the three prequels. My analysis of these characters will examine three aspects of their portrayal: their visual appearance and costume, their language, and their behavior.

In addition to the films, I will also examine the official *Star Wars* web site and the first two books of the *Visual Dictionary* series on *Star Wars* movies: *Star Wars: The Visual Dictionary* (1998); *Star Wars Episode I: The Visual Dictionary* (1999). I do so because the web site, especially its “databank” section offers a rich selection of profiles and background stories on each character, and the visual dictionaries, published by Lucas Books under Lucas' editorial supervision, are keys to understanding both Lucas' intention with the films and the extensive *Star Wars* galaxy.

Section I: The Characterization of Black Men and Aliens in the *Star Wars* Trilogy

In this section, I examine the *Star Wars* trilogy, focusing on Lando, the only lead character played by an African American actor in the second and third film of the original trilogy, and an alien character, the Wookiee Chewbacca who appears in each film of the trilogy as the first lead alien character. Then I will compare their portrayals to those on the web site and in *Star Wars: The Visual Dictionary*.

In particular, I focus on: the differences between the characterization of Lando and Chewbacca; the differences between the images of Lando and Chewbacca in the movies and their portrayals on the official web site and in the *Visual Dictionary*, both of which were produced approximately twenty years later the trilogy was released. What do these differences mean?

(1) Lando: The Smoothy

According to *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* by Dale Pollock, Lucas and his staff made a conscious attempt to avoid the appearance of racism in their casting of the films, especially when it came to black characters (213). This is natural given the fact that filmmakers in the United States in the Civil Rights era of the 1970s had grown more conscious of the need to be politically and racially correct

in their depiction of blacks in motion pictures.

In *Empire*, Lando, the original trilogy's sole black lead character is portrayed by Billy Dee Williams, a handsome African American actor in his thirties. Lucas demonstrated considerable care in his casting and characterization of the black character. According to Pollock, “The most sensitive part to cast in *Empire* was Lando. Still smarting from criticism that *Star Wars* [*New Hope*] was racist, George conceived of Lando as ‘a suave, dashing black man in his thirties’ (213). However, initially Williams “was reluctant to play what he thought was a token black” (213). In the end, according to Pollock, Williams accepted the role because he realized Lando could be portrayed either by a black or white actor.

In fact, prior to filming *New Hope*, Lucas had considered casting a black actor as Han Solo, a supporting character who falls in love with the white heroine, Princess Leia Organa. However, he later decided to cast Harrison Ford in the role, fearing that an interracial love affair would prove too controversial for American audiences (151). As a result, *New Hope* was made without any non-white actors cast in starring roles.

A gambler and scoundrel, Lando appears in *Empire* as the shadowy but charming “Baron Administrator” of Cloud City on the remote gas planet Bespin, where he and his men export a rare gas to various off-world clients. The databank of the official *Star Wars* web site describes Lando as follows:

Cardplayer. Scoundrel. You'll like him. That was Han Solo's hurried precis on his old pal, Lando Calrissian. While the description is accurate, it barely scratches the surface of this complicated rogue. Calrissian is at home in the shadowy reaches of the fringe, the underworld culture that permeates the galaxy. . . . Lando has style and class; some would say in excess. He is a man of sophisticated tastes, and settles for nothing short of the best in his surroundings, his belongings, his look, and his female companionship (databank).

From this description we are left with the impression that Lando is something of a dandy and “sidekick.” The description of Lando in *Star Wars: The Visual Dictionary* is basically the same. Neither mentions characteristics that specifically suggest African American stereotypes. The image of Lando in the movie, however, is darker

than his description on the web site and in the *Visual Dictionary*.

Nonetheless, as depicted in the trilogy, one can observe in Lando's behavior some aspects similar to the traditional black stereotypes of “buck” and “cunning mulatto.” The “buck” is a strong, sexy anti-hero played by an African American actor such as Richard Roundtree in *Shaft* (1971), Ron O'Neal in *Super Fly* (1972) and other actors popular in black action movies in the 1970s (Bogle 231-245). The “cunning mulatto” is presented as a promiscuous, light-skinned, relatively good-looking, and sophisticated—especially verbally—black male. A prime example is Syllas Lynch in the movie, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Lynch is a man who serves but later betrays a good-natured white politician in the days preceding the Civil War. An agitator, he incites the Southern slaves to fight in the war, while trying to persuade the daughter of the white politician to marry him and become the queen of a new empire he seeks to create. Lynch is arrested and destroyed by the film's white hero who is wary of Lynch's leering interest in the heroine.

In *Empire*, Lando appears as a tough, assertive but somewhat shadowy figure who is willing to help Leia and his old friend Han. However, he betrays Han to the villainous Darth Vader in order to preserve Cloud City and, perhaps more precisely, his own power. In the film Lando shows a sexual interest in Leia and continuously tries to attract her. Yet Leia is leery of him from the beginning and warns Han to be careful. Han is also suspicious of him: When they encounter Lando, Leia asks Han, “Can you trust him?” Han quickly answers, “No.” Then he asks Chewbacca to keep an eye on Lando. Like Lynch, Lando is shunned by the white heroine as a threat, while he views himself as a “lady's man.”

In this way Lando is initially portrayed as a mixture of traditional villain, “buck,” and “cunning mulatto.” However, his image changes quickly and he turns out to be a good guy. At the climax of *Empire*, he plots a rescue of Han who has been taken captive by the bounty hunter Boba Fett. In *Jedi*, he successfully frees Han and becomes an honorable general in the rebel army.

Significantly, not only does Lando's character change, but so does his appearance. In *Empire*, he wears black pants with cummerbund and a dark cape with a big black collar which suggest an aura of villainy, while in *Jedi* he dons an “Alliance general's uniform” (*Visual Dictionary* 23) of light brown and light blue which makes him look more heroic and honorable.

In sum, as the first non-white character in the *Star Wars* movies, Lando was carefully cast and described by Lucas, and although he initially bears a subtle resemblance to the stereotypes of the “buck” and the “cunning mulatto,” we cannot say his characterization is racist. In fact, none of his lines or behaviors are stereotypical. His sexual attraction to Leia is only slightly suggested. Furthermore, the official web site and the *Visual Dictionary* emphasize his heroic traits. That the databank and *Visual Dictionary* do not contain any racist portrayals is natural since they were created in the 1990s, the era of political correctness.

(2) Chewbacca: The Fiercely Loyal Alien

Lucas and his creative team created several aliens for the trilogy and its prequels. Among them, Chewbacca the Wookiee has been a main supporting character in Lucas' script from the beginning. According to Pollock, Lucas had great affection for this character and constructed a detailed culture for the Wookiees:

Amalgams of cat, dog, and gorilla, Wookiees dwell in tribes on a damp jungle planet, occupying inflatable houses set atop giant trees. They live to be three hundred fifty years old, eat meat and vegetables, and are mammals. . . . [They are] a primitive patriarchy with a complicated lineage structure, initiation rites, and a religion that rejects materialism. Wookiees have . . . a natural empathy with plant life and their planet's ecology (166).

In some ways Wookiees resemble anthropoid apes and primitive tribal humans who lead a self-sufficient, non-materialistic life in the jungle. According to the *Visual Dictionary* and the official web site, Wookiees are as tall as 2.5m; they have sensitive noses and their bodies are covered with shaggy brown fur (*Visual Dictionary* 16-17). There is no mention of their language in the dictionary or databank; however, in the movie, Chewbacca speaks a language of bestial roars that seems to be comprehensible to only Han and the “protocol droid” C-3PO.

Lucas revised his conception of Chewbacca and the Wookiees several times, finally envisioning them as an enslaved species:

Despite their proven intelligence, Wookiees were enslaved by the Empire and exploited for their brute strength. Their homeworld was blockaded, and a free Wookiee was a rare sight in the galaxy (databank).

After an Imperial invasion, the Wookiees are rounded up by slave traders and sold throughout the Empire. Han Solo rescues a group of prisoners that includes Chewbacca, who becomes his lifelong bodyguard and companion (Pollock 166).

As can be seen from the above description, there are certain points of similarity between the tragic fate of the Wookiees and that of Africans who were thought to be savages, enslaved, and exported to New World and beyond.

Meanwhile, the *Visual Dictionary* describes Chewie (Chewbacca's nickname) as Han's companion of doglike loyalty and skillful pilot.

[Chewie] serves as both a fierce loyal copilot and trusty fellow adventurer. Chewie enjoys a good fight and likes the action that Solo gets them into, but sometimes acts as his partner's conscience when Han gets a bit too mercenary.

Han's ego may get them into trouble or Chewie's temper may start fights . . . Chewie usually flies the ship while Han mans a gun turret during pursuit space combat (16).

These portrayals allow us to connect the image of Chewbacca to a combination of three traditional stereotypes of African American men: the “noble savage” in early European/American Literature, the “Tom” or “Uncle Tom,” a well-known image of an obedient servant, and the image of the faithful “black chauffeur” which is repeatedly presented in Hollywood movies and American novels.

As we have seen, the *Visual Dictionary* and databank profiles of Chewbacca and the Wookiees describe them in some detail. In the movies, however, little concrete, background information about them is introduced. Instead, what is problematic about Chewbacca in the movies is the way he is characterized. First, in *New Hope*, there is a scene where he is defeated by C-3PO in a “strategic game.” Chewbacca, angry that

he has lost the game, destroys C-3PO's holographic battle figures. C-3PO expresses his astonishment to Han, who replies:

Let him have it. It's not wise to upset a Wookiee.

C-3PO: But, sir, nobody worries about upsetting a droid.

Han: That's 'cause a droid don't [sic] pull people's arms out of their sockets when they lose. Wookiees are known to do that.

(Chewbacca roars.)

C-3PO: I see your point, sir! (*New Hope*)

This sequence is designed to reveal to viewers exactly how fierce Wookiees are.

In a scene from *Empire*, Chewbacca loses his temper at Lando, who is astonished by the outburst. Witnessing the confrontation, C-3PO apologizes to the object of Chewie's wrath: “I am terribly sorry about all this. After all, he is only a Wookiee.” From this we understand that C-3PO views the Wookiees as simple and is somewhat contemptuous of them. This might as well be true of the viewers of the movie, who are left with the impression that Wookiees are simple from the aforementioned strategy game scene.

The third example is in the scene in *Jedi*, where Han, Chewbacca, and others are probing a forest on the moon of Endor. Chewbacca reaches for a dead fowl-like creature that is apparently being used as bait, and he and his companions are caught in a trap. Freeing themselves, Han turns to Chewbacca and says, “Always thinking with your stomach.” Chewbacca roars sorrowfully. Here, the fact that Chewbacca instinctively tries to catch the creature recalls stereotypes of the chicken-stealing proclivities of blacks. Han's simple, striking comment tells us just how primitive Chewbacca is.

Compared to the *Visual Dictionary* and the official web site, the movies contain less information on Chewbacca and the Wookiees. However, scenes and dialogue in the film assist the viewers in giving an instant, easy definition of what kind of species Wookiees are. While Lando and the other human characters are not defined according to their race, gender, and other characteristics, the Wookiees tend to be categorized based on species-specific characteristics.

Section II: Twenty Years Later – The Characterization of Black Men and Aliens in *The Phantom Menace*

In this section I will analyze *Phantom*, focusing on how the characterizations of blacks and aliens are constructed. First, I will focus on the two lead characters played by black actors: Mace Windu and Captain Panaka. Then I will analyze one of the lead alien characters, Jar Jar Binks and his species, the Gungans.

In *Phantom* there are other disparaging depictions of aliens, such as those of Watto the Toydarian and the Neimoidian Viceroy, Nute Gunray. The former reminds us of an insulting stereotype of greedy Arab or Jewish merchant, the latter, a traditional oriental villain. These characters were discussed frequently in newspaper and magazine articles and on the internet, where questions were raised about whether they were based on traditional racial stereotypes⁵. In fact, *Phantom* is richly filled with species-oriented characterizations of aliens. In this paper, however, I will focus on Jar Jar Binks. I will do this because another stereotype, the black male “coon,” seems to be applied to him⁶.

(1) Mace Windu: Man of Wisdom and Self-sacrifice

In *Phantom*, only two main characters are portrayed by black actors. One is Mace Windu, a human Jedi master played by an African American actor, Samuel L. Jackson. Windu is described in the databank of the official web site as follows:

A respected Jedi on par with the venerable Yoda [another master of Jedi knight], Mace Windu was a senior member of the Jedi High Council. His wisdom and experience were legendary, and his words carried great weight.

In the later years of the Republic [which had ruled the galaxy], Windu spent most of his time in the Jedi Temple of [the planet called] Coruscant. He regularly conferred with Yoda and the ten other members of the Council, contemplating the very nature of the Force [a special power a Jedi has] and the affairs of the Jedi Knights. . . . Windu was well schooled in Jedi philosophy and history. . . . As the Clone Wars erupted on [the planet] Geonosis, Windu led a special squad of commando clone troopers into the thick of battle. He would be one of the few Jedi to return unscathed from that first engagement (databank).

From this and a similar profile in *The Phantom Menace: The Visual Dictionary*, we get the impression that Windu is a perfect leader, diplomat, and commander. In fact, neither the dictionary nor databank contains descriptions of him that suggest racial stereotyping.

The movie depicts Windu as a virtually flawless individual. Together with another excellent Jedi master, Yoda, he assumes a leadership on the Jedi High Council, which is composed of both human and alien members⁷. Windu is always impeccably attired in his Jedi uniform and speaks standard “Galactic Basic” (i.e., English). His lines are philosophical and straightforward; his performance in a battle is brave and precise.

(2) Captain Panaka: The Experienced Bodyguard

Another *Phantom* character played by a black actor (Ghanaian, Hugh Quarshie) is Captain Panaka. Panaka is Queen Amidala's loyal protector during the Trade Federation invasion crisis on Amidala's planet, Naboo. According to the databank, Panaka is often referred to as “the quickest eyes on Naboo” for his attention to detail and selfless dedication to the safety of the queen. The databank goes on to describe Panaka as follows:

A powerfully built man, Panaka was a forceful leader, commanding a team of Royal Palace Guards and Security Troopers stationed throughout Theed [the capital of Naboo]. . . . His loyalty was such that he would openly question the strategy of Jedi Knights if he thought it would somehow endanger Amidala (databank).

Like Windu, Panaka is depicted favorably. That he openly questions the strategy of the prestigious Jedi suggests his self-confidence. His depiction is quite the opposite of traditional stereotypes of blacks as always obedient to white authority.

Both Panaka and Windu are depicted as leaders who lead multi-racial and multi-species groups, speak standard “Galactic Basic,” are good-looking, wear uniforms, and are always serious and even-tempered — traits quite at odds with traditional black stereotypes. They are not depicted as “cunning, seductive mulattoes.”

That both Windu and Panaka are described as a men of self-sacrifice indeed reminds us of the image of good, old “Uncle Tom,” but only slightly. They also

resemble the type of characters Sidney Poitier used to portray in Hollywood movies: although they are physiognomically black, all other traits of blackness and sexuality are carefully erased. For today's moviemakers this "Poitier-type" black character has become something of a trend perhaps because it offers an easy and safe way of portraying blacks⁸.

(3) Jar Jar Binks: The Frog-Faced "Coon"

In *Phantom* there are several supporting alien characters. Among them, Jar Jar Binks, a Gungan who lives in the remote area of Naboo, is the most problematic in the film if not the whole *Star Wars* series.

The Gungans are "the amphibious beings [who] live in the underwater cities hidden in deep lakes" (*Visual Dictionary* 38). The *Visual Dictionary* describes them as follows:

Gungans trade with the Naboo [urbanized humans] for certain items of technology, but manufacture everything else they need from the resources of their underwater habitat. Although Gungans use mechanized vehicles, they have a close affinity with the natural world and still prefer to utilize living mounts and beasts of burden. . . . A fair but stubborn ruler, Boss Nass resents the arrogance of the Naboo, who regard Gungans as primitive simply because they do not embrace a technological lifestyle. He finds it best all around to minimize contact with humans (38-39).

Like the Wookiees, the portrayal of the Gungans' simple lifestyle is similar to that associated with remote African nations.

In the movie, the depiction of toad-like Boss Nass reinforces this association. Nass wears a robe with noble swirl designs and a crown, both reminiscent of traditional West African fashions. The "pidgin Gungan dialect of Galactic Basic" (*Visual Dictionary* 37) Nass and other Gungans speak resembles a mixture of African, Caribbean and African American linguistic styles.

Compared to the high-caste Gungans who live in the underwater capital, Otoh Gunga, the Gungan exile Jar Jar Binks who hides in a swamp is a pathetic figure. In the movie, Jar Jar's black buffoonish characteristics are apparent at a glance. When

he appears, the viewers notice that he shuffles in “cakewalk” style, has floppy ears which swing like dreadlocks, wears leather bell-bottom pants and a ragged vest, and speaks pidgin English in a high-pitched voice — all of which evoke images of real human beings such as Jamaican reggae musicians and Rastafarians. Although Jar Jar looks like a frog-faced humanoid, the characteristics Lucas gives him are decidedly black⁹.

Jar Jar Binks is described in the *Visual Dictionary* as follows:

Jar Jar is reticent about the reason for his exile from Otoh Gunga, glossing over the fact that he accidentally flooded most of Boss Nass's mansion and several adjoining bubbles [underwater complex] while working as a waiter at a high-class party. . . . Jar Jar is well known to the city patrol of Otoh Gunga, which has extricated him from all kinds of trouble in the past—from petty squabbles over food theft to the commotion Jar Jar caused when he inadvertently opened half of the Otoh Gunga Zoo bubbles. . . . Jar Jar's character, like his body, is resilient and able to bend to changes of fortune without letting his spirit break. . . . Jar Jar blunders through life with light-hearted good humor in spite of his occasional panic attacks (36).

This description of Jar Jar and his appearance in the movie closely resemble “coon” imagery, a stereotype of a young, black trickster male who is lazy, timid, mischievous, trouble-making, and comical. The word “coon” is an abbreviation of raccoon, which emphasizes the character's sub-humanness. The episode of food theft by Jar Jar evokes the image the chicken-stealing “coon.” Food theft, especially the theft of chicken, is an infamous symbol of being a “coon”¹⁰.

According to Donald Bogle, “The pure coons emerged as no-account niggers, those unreliable, crazy, lazy, subhuman creatures good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens, shooting crap, or butchering the English language” (8). Jar Jar certainly looks subhuman. Indeed, throughout *Phantom*, he does nothing more than eat, make trouble, and talk pidgin “Galactic Basic” — in other words, butcher the English Language. Later, Jar Jar volunteers to be a navigator for Qui-gon and his fellows, but he turns out to be an incompetent one. The episode shows him to be

quite unreliable and suggests that whatever Jar Jar says cannot be trusted¹¹.

Another characteristic of Jar Jar's portrayal is that it is quickly and systematically presented. In the film Jar Jar is introduced in a brief but comprehensive three-minute sequence in the film. When the Trade Federation army invades the swamps in Naboo, Jar Jar panics and grabs Jedi Master Qui-gon Jinn, who is passing by, and begs for help, "Oh, nooooooooo! Hey, hep me! Hep me!" (Lucas 15) Rescued by Qui-gon, Jar Jar is overjoyed and offers to be his servant.

Jar Jar: Oyi, mooie-mooie! I luv yous!

Qui-gon: You almost got us killed! Are you brainless?

Jar Jar: I spake.

Qui-gon: The ability to speak does not make you intelligent. Now, get out of here!

Jar Jar: No. . . no! Mesa stay. Mesa culled Jar Jar Binks. Mesa yours humble servaunt.

Qui-gon: That won't be necessary.

Jar Jar: Oh, boot tis! Tis demunded byda guds, it is (Spelling is based on Lucas, *Illustrated Screenplay* 15-16).

From this sequence, the viewers instantly understands what Jar Jar is: he speaks English but it does not necessarily mean he is intelligent, he is easily panicked, he seems to be religious, and he is a follower.

In this way Jar Jar's characteristics closely resemble black stereotypes, even more so than Chewbacca's. Although he is quickly and briefly introduced in the scene where he first appears, the background information in the *Visual Dictionary* and on the web site reinforces his coonish image.

Phantom presents many other aliens in a similar way: Lines of "quick definition of species" are found several times. For example, Jar Jar tells Qui-gon during their visit to the Gungan's city: "My warning you, Gungans no liken outsiders, so don't spect a warm welcome." Meanwhile, when Qui-gon tries to use his mental power called "force" to purchase a spaceship part with "Republic Credit," Watto the greedy Toydarian tells him, "No. . . I'm a Toydarian. Mind tricks don'ta [sic] work on me — only money. No money, no parts!" (Lucas 45) In another sequence in which Jedi

Knights are negotiating with the viceroy of Trade Federation, Qui-gon describes to his apprentice Obi-wan Kenobi what the Neimoidian Viceroy and his fellows are like: “These Federation types are cowards.” He then predicts, “The negotiations will be short.” He says this even before he meets the viceroy. In fact, the Neimoidians are depicted as timid, and the negotiations are indeed short. They hide and send battle droids to kill Qui-gon and Obi-wan.

In sum, *Phantom* clearly shows that Lucas developed a sophisticated and systematic way of depicting aliens: their looks, language, and behavior are based on perdurable racial stereotypes. Dialogue uttered by the aliens and Qui-gon's comments about them are used to define their character, often negatively. Finally, these character stereotypes are fleshed out with the information on web site and in the *Visual Dictionary*. As a result, the viewers can quickly grasp the species-oriented characteristics of all the aliens.

Conclusion

This paper argues that Lucas has been careful not to employ traditional racist stereotypes in his depiction of black characters. Instead, beginning with Chewbacca, Lucas has developed species-oriented stereotypes for his alien characters. Stated more precisely, he takes existing racist stereotypes and applies them to his fictional alien creations. In this sense, the portrayals of aliens in his films may be described as not so much racist as “specieist.”

The year Lucas released the special editions of the trilogy and *Phantom* (1997-1999) was the worst in terms “specieist” characterization of aliens. A prime example of such stereotyping is Jar Jar Binks.

The question arises: why did Lucas and his staff resort to such characterizations? In *Star Wars, Making of Episode I: The Phantom Menace* by Laurent Bouzereau, Doug Chiang, a member of Lucas' staff, offers a partial answer:

“[I]t was totally alien world. But, even so, George always emphasized that the designs, no matter how alien or outlandish, had to be based on reality. In order for the audience to relate to them, they had to have some time to our culture and history. The danger in designing an alien society — for which we were inventing a history and culture — was that it would be too

fanciful and too unreal (14).”

In the same book, Lucas himself discusses the importance of the reality of Jar Jar's language.

“Creating a language for a creature like Jar Jar was a way of developing characters as well as an ambiance.” . . . “It was something we needed to do in a film like *Episode I [Phantom]*. To me, it always seems phony when characters in science fiction movies speak English perfectly, with no accent. That's not the way the world is (141).”

From these statements, it can be observed that Lucas and Chiang think reality is the most important factor when they create alien characters.

However, after *Phantom* was released, Lucasfilm spokeswoman Lynn Hale explained in an interview: “Nothing in *Star Wars* was racially motivated. . . . *Star Wars* is a fantasy movie. I really do think to dissect this movie as if it had a direct reference to the world today is absurd” (Fleeman). As for the criticism that Jar Jar is a grating presence, she says: “It's a children's movie. Kids love him. He's so childish.”

Based on the above, I would suggest that while initially Lucas and his staff intended to create aliens based on the reality of this world, when an unexpected controversy arose over the implicit racism in their characterization of aliens, they began to deny any connection of their aliens with the real world. However, the essence of this problem lies elsewhere. The problem with Lucas' characterization of aliens in the *Star Wars* movies is that he applies traditional and insulting racial stereotypes to them. Beneath the thin disguise of alien masks, Chewbacca and Jar Jar combine certain black stereotypes.

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Notes

- ¹ When Lucas released the special editions of the trilogy, the first movie, *Star Wars*, was re-entitled *Star Wars Episode IV: The New Hope*. From now on in this paper I will refer to this film as *New Hope*. The second film, *The Empire Strikes Back*, was re-entitled *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*. In this paper I will refer to this film as *Empire*. The third film, *Return of the Jedi*, was re-entitled *Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*. In this paper I will refer to it as *Jedi*.
- ² See Akao 211-225.
- ³ Hereafter cited as *Clones*.
- ⁴ Hereafter cited as *Phantom*.
- ⁵ As for the images of the aliens in *Phantom*, see Leo 14; Williams 9; and Pilgrim.
- ⁶ This kind of characterization becomes less obvious in *Clones*. In Part 3 of this series of papers, I will discuss other disparaging depictions of aliens in *Phantom* and compare them to the less stereotypical aliens in *Clones*, such as the Kaminoans, the Besalisks and the Geonosians.
- ⁷ Mace Windu also appears in *Clones*. His portrayal is basically similar to that in *Phantom*.
- ⁸ A typical example of this is the characters portrayed by Denzel Washington.
- ⁹ A real African-American actor, Ahmed Best, provided the body movements and voice of Jar Jar Binks.
- ¹⁰ Later, in *Phantom*, Jar Jar tries to steal a dead animal hung in front of a shop on the planet Tatooine and is accused of thievery.
- ¹¹ This episode may remind some viewers of the famous character, Prissy, acted by Butterfly McQueen in the movie, *Gone with the Wind* (1939). A female slave Prissy volunteers to be a midwife, proclaiming with a wide smile, “I’se knows all ‘bout birthin’ babies!” However, at the childbirth, she claims she knows nothing about delivery.

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