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THE POWER OF THE FORCE:
RACE, GENDER, AND COLONIALISM
IN THE *STAR WARS* UNIVERSE

By

John Paul Pianka

Faculty Advisor: Professor Robert Steele

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Introduction

The *Star Wars* name is synonymous with American culture. Phrases such as "May the Force be with you," or "Luke, I am your father," are familiar even to those who have never seen the films, and call to mind the ever-present influence of this storied series. Younger fans play with trading cards, action figures, and video games, while fans who grew up with the Original Trilogy invest hundreds, sometimes thousands, of dollars in replicas of lightsabers, weapons, and even clothing from the films. Children (and adults) dress in the costumes of their favorite characters, not just for Halloween, but also when attending enormous conventions in which they can share their passion with fans from around the world. Dozens of video games, hundreds of books, and thousands of comics have expanded the universe seen in the six films into one of the deepest, richest, and most easily accessible universes in the history of fiction.

What began as an upstart young director's passion project, a western space-opera predicted to fail at the box office, has become the most commercially successful franchise of all time; and while other franchises have performed better in theaters, *Star Wars* outpaces them all by a huge margin in total revenue due to its incredible merchandise potential. According to *24/7 Wall St*, the *Star Wars* films have raked in $4.27 billion in worldwide box office totals, $20 billion in licensing sales such as toys, books and costumes, $3 billion in video game sales, $2.5 billion in DVD sales, and $800 million in DVD rentals for a staggering total of over thirty billion

dollars (Ogg, 2012). Whether or not you are a fan yourself, it is easy to see the cultural significance of *Star Wars*, whether you see it on the lunchbox of a young child or on the t-shirt of a grown man or woman, on your doorstep on Halloween, or at your local bookstore.

Something about *Star Wars* appeals to the adults who grew up with it as well as the children experiencing the universe for the first time, a fact that seems strange considering that, for all intents and purposes, the tale of *Star Wars* is nothing new. The struggle between good and evil, the princess in need of rescue, the heroic main character, the rebellious and reluctant comrade, and the comedic "jester" character have been used in epic fiction since its inception. In fact, these themes are not even unique in the world of science fiction. One needs to look no further than Disney's recent adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *John Carter* series to see that *Star Wars* owes much of its imagery to previously-written works. Yet, where *John Carter* failed to make a significant impact on the box office and has essentially been written off as a flop, *Star Wars* went on to become one of the most successful film franchises of all time. The secret could perhaps lie in their presentation. The *Star Wars* films, especially the Original Trilogy, stand to this day as some of the most visually stunning (a difficult feat given the special-effects driven spectacles of today) and emotionally resonant films ever made. The incredible scores of John Williams immerse us even further into the narratives, leading us to forget that we may have seen this story before; more important becomes the fact that we have never seen it presented to us with such depth and beauty. Whether it's the romance, the robust

action sequences, or simply the underdog story, *Star Wars* truly does have something for everyone.

As such, it is important to understand the cultural impact a franchise of this caliber has, and what its positive and negative effects may be on its fan base. The characters, stories and locations of *Star Wars* have a profound effect on their fans, especially the younger ones. Every child who has seen *Star Wars* has wanted to be a Jedi at one point or another; or to be as daring as Han Solo, as brave as Princess Leia. Children emulate their heroes, disparage the villains, and laugh with the comic relief. What is the effect, then, when the heroes are predominately white males, the government is outwardly colonialist, and the comic relief comes at the expense of extremely racist stereotypes? How much of this is assimilated by the viewership and reflected in our own culture? *Star Wars* can be an extremely positive force for its fans; we can put on a movie, sit down with a book, or play a game and instantly be transported into a world far from the problems of our own; we can escape for a while and simply enjoy a good adventure. However, when we return we may inadvertently bring something harmful back with us; for despite all the good it can do, the *Star Wars* universe is fraught with problems, ranging from the aforementioned racial stereotypes and colonialist messages, to gender inequality, to its portrayal of slavery. Needless to say, these types of messages can be extremely harmful to its viewers which emulate the culture portrayed in the media; a culture in which men dominate women, whites dominate minorities, and acts of war are justifiable by calling them "liberation." *Star Wars* is not alone in these portrayals. Indeed, all of popular culture

reflects these social norms, from music to television to virtually every other popular film. Yet, with such an enormous fan base and so many stories to tell, the *Star Wars* films had an incredible opportunity to buck this trend; to present its audience with new ideas and bring about some positive change. However, despite (or perhaps as a result of) their popularity, series creator George Lucas played it safe, allowing his films to conform to the social norms people expect to see in films.

That the majority of *Star Wars* fans are young, white males, while at some point accurate, is now a misconception. With an ever-expanding universe such as this one, fans are constantly gravitating towards it, and this fan base has grown more and more diverse. I was lucky enough to attend *Star Wars: Celebration VI*, a massive *Star Wars* convention in Orlando, in August of 2012. While white males were still the largest demographic in attendance, they were no longer the majority. While no concrete statistics are available, I noticed a huge number of African-American, Asian, and Hispanic fans, many of whom had flown from other countries to be there. Furthermore, the split between genders seemed fairly even, a fact I had verified by *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* actress Ashley Eckstein, who stated that *Star Wars* fans are now nearly fifty percent female. In addition, during the *Clone Wars* panel, series show-runner Dave Filoni stated that thirty-seven percent of the *Clone Wars* viewership was female, and expressed his intention to increase the number of female characters on the show as a result of its popularity with that demographic. With an increasingly diverse fan base, it is clear that *Star Wars* should have an equally diverse cast of characters; and while progress has been made in this area through *The Clone*

Wars and other forms of the "Expanded Universe", the films as they stand have very little to offer in the way of role models for its female fans and its fans of color.

This thesis will examine the portrayals of race, gender, and colonialism within the context of the six *Star Wars* films, as well as in the popular *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* animated series. The first chapter will deal with race, and will examine how various alien characters are portrayed as well as how they compare to our predominately white, male protagonists. It becomes obvious that when creating these various alien species, Lucas took previously-established racial stereotypes from our culture and superimposed them onto entire races in his series. The result is a number of characters who, especially when presented to the impressionable children that make up a sizeable percentage of *Star Wars'* fan base, bring to mind these stereotypes which, if they were ignored as they should be, would have faded from society long ago. Instead, they are front and center in one of the most popular film series of all time.

The second chapter will examine gender roles, especially with regard to women. The *Star Wars* universe is home to an ever-growing number of female characters *The Clone Wars* added them essentially on a weekly basis to accommodate an expanding female fan base. While many of them, as we will see, are actually quite strong and serve as excellent role models for young girls, there are still a number of serious flaws with their portrayals. Even a character as strong as Leia eventually falls into the norm that the movie-going population is comfortable with: that of a damsel in distress. Couple this fact with the over-masculinized male characters and the lack of even one

homosexual character over six films and four seasons, and we have a gender landscape in dire need of improvement.

The third chapter will examine the colonialist aspects of the films and *The Clone Wars*, though the majority will focus on the latter. This animated series takes place directly after *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* and bridges the gap between it and *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*. It follows a number of characters, including those from the movies, fighting for the Galactic Republic against the Separatist Army. If, as author Kevin Wetmore Jr. argues, the Original Trilogy serves as a Cold War allegory, then *The Clone Wars* derives its influence from the War on Terror. A number of episodes focus on the consequences of this war with regard to planets whose inhabitants are pacifists or choose to remain neutral. Often the negative consequences of colonialism are explored, but the series is nevertheless based entirely on a war in a way that glorifies the invading force trying desperately to secure "freedom" for the inhabitants of each planet it brings the war to. In addition, the series tackles such issues as slavery and the ethics of war, especially one fought by human beings cloned specifically to be soldiers, without ever having a say in the matter.

With a subject matter as popular as *Star Wars*, it should come as no surprise that work of a similar kind has already been done in this area. A number of authors have written on the *Star Wars* universe with a particular emphasis on race portrayals and the ethics of war. I hope to expand on their points in the context of the films by going more in-depth with specific characters and demonstrating how each conforms

to or conflicts with societal norms. In addition, no analysis of this kind has been performed with regard to *The Clone Wars*, as it is a relatively new entry into the *Star Wars* canon; and its wealth of new characters and morally ambiguous storylines lend themselves well to analysis.

Throughout the thesis, I will reference certain specific scenes from the films and series, and as such, I will include a flash drive with these clips so that the reader may experience my points for themselves.

Race

Due to the ever-expanding nature of the *Star Wars* universe, race portrayals have evolved over the years since the first film. This chapter will examine race over the course of the six films and the five seasons of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, and will examine both human characters as well as a number of alien characters who exhibit a number of incredibly offensive characteristics.

Racial stereotypes are nothing new in the world of film. In many ways, they make movies easier to digest by the audience; we expect a certain type of person to act a certain way. When they do, we are satisfied; when they do not, we are confused. Similarly, the lack of any non-white protagonists in *Star Wars* should not come as a surprise. One only needs to look at the blockbusters of today to notice that, with the exception of Will Smith and, perhaps, Denzel Washington, there are no leading men of color with the marketability to headline a blockbuster action film. Lucas had originally considered making Han Solo black and Obi-wan Kenobi Asian, but later reconsidered, deciding he did not want a multi-racial romance at the center of his saga. "I didn't want to make *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* at that point, so I sort of backed off," Lucas stated when asked why he chose an entirely white cast of main characters (Wetmore Jr, 2005). As a result, the series remained devoid of any non-white main characters (a huge disservice to its obviously enormous multi-racial audience) until about halfway through *The Empire Strikes Back*, and the introduction

of Lando Calrissian, the first black *Star Wars* character; unless, of course, we count the Dark Lord of the Sith himself, Darth Vader.

YES, MASTER

When I first watched *Star Wars*, I was around six or seven years old, but unfortunately already knew the truth about who Darth Vader really was. I therefore can't imagine what it was like watching *A New Hope* in theaters and first setting eyes upon the trilogy's primary antagonist: a hulking, seven-foot tall behemoth, clad head to toe in black and speaking with the unmistakable voice of James Earl Jones. Despite my prior knowledge of the truth, I can certainly forgive audiences for assuming the man behind the mask was black. Vader is an intimidating presence; he towers over our heroes, lifts grown men up with ease and is capable of tossing them across the room like rag dolls. He is brooding, menacing, and completely and utterly evil. What better way to portray such a character than to dress him entirely in black and give him the voice of a prominent black actor? An argument can always be made that he isn't truly a black character because he is ultimately revealed to be Luke Skywalker's father. However, George Lucas did not decide Vader should be Luke's father until he started work on *The Empire Strikes Back*; so for all intents and purposes, Vader *is* black, at least for *Episode IV*.

As if having the most fearsome villain in the *Star Wars* universe be the only black character in the first film wasn't harmful enough, Lucas portrayed Vader in a number of unflattering and downright offensive lights. In his book "The Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion and Rebellion in the *Star Wars* Films," Kevin Wetmore Jr. details the many ways Vader fulfills the stereotype of the intimidating black man:

> "Vader is not only evil, he is dangerous and emasculating to white men. He chokes the Rebel Blockade Runner Captain and Admiral Motti. He "kills" Ben. In *Empire* he then cuts off Luke's hand. He is sexually threatening to Leia when he enters her cell… He is followed by what the screenplay calls, "a black torture robot"… The camera focuses in on the large hypodermic needle coming off the side of the device. The implied threat to Leia is that she, who is dressed in virginal white and is a princess, is left alone in a cell with the large black figure of Vader and the penetrating "black torture robot.""

Wetmore goes on to say that this type of scene is a particular favorite in films since their earliest days, with D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* being the classic example of an innocent white woman in danger of assault from a large, black man. The parallels to Vader's interrogation scene with Leia are obvious (Clip #1).

Even more depressing than the realization that the only black man in a movie is the arch-villain is the realization in *The Empire Strikes Back* that he is not even in charge of his own actions. Vader turns out to be the lap dog of Emperor Palpatine, because naturally the highest position of power in the Empire must go to a white man. "Vader," as it turns out, is not even his real name; rather it was given to him by the Emperor when he became his servant; a slave name of sorts. Thus, Vader shows that in addition to being intimidating and villainous, black people are also obedient. Of course, Vader ends his own life in the ultimate act of rebellion, killing his master to

save his son. His mask is then removed to reveal… a white face. Wetmore states that once the evil is gone from Vader's soul, so is his black-ness. A newly white Anakin Skywalker joins Obi-wan and Yoda at the Rebellion's victory celebration; Vader is no more.

TOKENS

Each *Star Wars* trilogy has one peripheral black protagonist; The Original Trilogy has Lando Calrissian, and The Prequel Trilogy has Mace Windu. There is not much to say about them other than the fact that they were obviously shoehorned into the films to make up for an otherwise glaringly apparent lack of non-white characters. What makes this fact even more depressing is that even though their only purpose in the films is to provide role models for *Star Wars* fans of color, they fail even to fulfill this purpose. When we first meet Lando in *The Empire Strikes Back*, he is a shady businessman in charge of a gas mine on the planet Bespin. We learn from Han Solo that Lando had a checkered history with the law; in fact, Han seems genuinely surprised to learn that Lando's new enterprise was legitimate (Clip #2). It seems clear that Lando has a history as a thief and a swindler; however, so does Han, and we still love him as a protagonist. What sets Lando apart is his betrayal of Han and his companions. Therefore, not only is Lando a former thief and swindler; he is also a traitor. Lando later redeems himself, helps rescue Han, and even becomes a prominent leader in the Rebellion, which is admittedly a step in the right direction.

However, there is nevertheless something distressing about the fact that over three films, only one character ever betrays our main cast, and it is the only black man in the galaxy.

The peripheral black character in the Prequel Trilogy has a less blatantly stereotypical origin story, but proves to be just as useless a role model as Lando. Mace Windu, played by Samuel L. Jackson, is a Jedi master on the Council, the highest position to which a Jedi can ascend. Unfortunately, that is virtually all that can be said about Mace. His role in all three films was simply to spout some empty words of wisdom in the Council chamber (where he always played second-fiddle to Master Yoda) and to spice up certain action sequences. He is never flushed out as a character and his words and actions do nothing except drive the plot forward. Even *The Clone Wars*, which normally does an excellent job building on peripheral characters barely seen in the films, does not use Mace as a main character. In spite of this, he does have a large number of fans in the *Star Wars* community, perhaps as the result of the star power Samuel L. Jackson brings to the role. This is particularly interesting because a common complaint among the fans with regard to Mace's characterization is that Jackson played the character very straightforwardly and seriously, a change of pace given the actor's rather vivid acting style. Thus, the one black character in the Prequel Trilogy is essentially a non-character; and one that is criticized by his own fans for not acting "black" enough.

While there are perhaps one or two other characters of color that can be found in the *Star Wars* films, Lando and Mace are the only black characters with any

significant screen time. Instead of casting a larger number of actors of color in his films, Lucas explores race in a vastly different way: through his aliens. The *Star Wars* universe is famous for its exciting and otherworldly characters. The now-infamous Cantina scene from *A New Hope* introduces the audience to dozens of wildly creative creatures, both beautiful and terrifying. It is the first time we learn that this galaxy is home to a host of non-human beings of every shape and size; and due to the obsessive nature of *Star Wars* fans, nearly all of them have been given a proper backstory in the Expanded Universe. Yet, all the genius of Lucas' creative team responsible for these creature designs is undermined by his decision to use aliens in place of non-white characters and to have them behave like incredibly unsubtle racial stereotypes. Perhaps because aliens that looked, sounded, and acted too white wouldn't be "alien" enough, Lucas over-emphasizes the "alien-ness" of these characters, drawing attention to the ways in which they differ from the main cast. He accomplishes this by using archetypes already established in society with the purpose of denoting "other-ness." The following will examine a few alien characters in detail, showing that, whether it is obvious or not, many of them reinforce (or in the case of young audience members, introduce) harmful racial stereotypes.

NUTE GUNRAY

One thing the Prequel Trilogy is known for, even by the casual audience, is its use of a number of racially stereotyped alien characters. One such character is the

villainous Nute Gunray, leader of the Galactic Trade Federation. Much like Darth Vader, we meet this character within the first few minutes of the first film in the trilogy, and, also like Darth Vader, his evil is emphasized by his “other-ness.” Jedi Master Qui-gon Jinn and his apprentice Obi-wan Kenobi are dispatched to the world of Naboo, where the Trade Federation has set up an illegal blockade. This blockade is orchestrated by Nute Gunray, a member of the Neimoidian race. It takes no time whatsoever to recognize that his character is a blatant and offensive stereotype of East Asians. Gunray’s character wears ornate clothing and headdresses, similar to those of Chinese emperors (Figure 1). While a common stereotype is that East Asians have flat noses, Gunray has no nose at all. While his eyes are not slanted, close inspection reveals that his pupils, in fact, are. He speaks English with difficulty and mispronounces his “R’s” and “L’s.” The only way the stereotype could be more blatant would be if he sported a pair of buck teeth (Clip #3).

Figure 1. A comparison of Nute Gunray’s character to a picture of a Chinese Emperor.

This Asian stereotype is nothing new to American culture. Stereotypes often emerge when the dominant race feels endangered by the minority, and with the influx Asian immigrants to America in the early twentieth century, referred to at the time as the "Yellow Peril" (Rupert, 1911), Asian stereotypes began to dominate the mindset of American citizens. Often seen as a hardworking and industrious race (a stereotype of its own), Asian people were feared by Americans, who worried that their jobs, and eventually their country, would be taken over. Thus, as in every other case, a stereotype was born out of paranoia and hatred.

Nute Gunray's conformity to the East Asian stereotype does not end with his physical appearance. Gunray is very much a passive villain, allowing other people to handle problems for him, being too cowardly to do so himself. In this way, he falls into the stereotype that Asian men are less masculine and more timid than men of other races. When Gunray learns that the ambassadors sent by the Galactic Republic to negotiate with him are Jedi, he immediately attempts to poison them, which is the most common method of murder used by women (Watson, 2004)) and, in fact, by other dastardly Asian villains George Lucas has had a hand in creating (Clip #4, from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*). Gunray is far too cowardly to confront the Jedi personally, and instead attempts to have them killed.

In addition to his early emasculation, Gunray later on displays yet another stereotype; namely that Asian men are chauvinistic and oppressive to women. After the occupation of Naboo is complete, Gunray confronts Queen Amidala (when political figures are women, he feels no need to poison them) and indicates his

intention to force her to sign a treaty legalizing their occupation. He threatens her, indicating that her people will suffer unless she signs (Clip #5). This animosity carries over into *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. In one particular episode, Gunray convinces the planet Rodia to join the Separatist Alliance, of which he is now a leader. When Padme arrives to intervene, she is taken into custody by the Rodians and is imprisoned, allowing Gunray to do with her as he sees fit upon his arrival. While earlier in the episode, he expressed his intention to make Padme a prisoner of war, Gunray, in classic villain fashion, changes the deal at the last minute, indicating his plans to execute Padme, while at the same time denying the Rodians the supplies they needed desperately enough to join the Separatists (Clip #6). While betrayal is not necessarily an exclusively stereotypical trait of Asians, it is nevertheless harmful to make this association, especially when Gunray is such an obvious representation of the stereotype. Furthermore, the *Star Wars* universe is even more devoid of Asian characters than it is black characters, which makes Gunray and the other Neimoidians the audience's only exposure to that culture; and that kind of exposure is offensive and harmful.

WATTO

Another colorful character we meet in *The Phantom Menace* is the Toydarian junk merchant, Watto. He is a conniving slave owner whom our heroes approach for help when their ship's hyperdrive fails and they are stranded on Tatooine. Watto is

short and pot-bellied. He has a long, hooked nose and speaks with an unmistakable Middle-Eastern, even Yiddish accent. Most importantly, he is obsessed with money. Along with Jar-Jar Binks (who will be discussed later in this chapter), Watto is one of the most talked about racially stereotyped aliens in either *Star Wars* trilogy, due to his overwhelmingly obvious anti-Semitic portrayal. In her article, “Racial Ventriloquism,” Patricia Williams writes, “Watto sports a "three-day stubble," has a hooked nose that curves to his chin, cheats at games and doesn't give credit. He speaks in a gravelly Middle Eastern accent. Although a number of groups have protested that Watto is an insulting Arab stereotype, he struck me as more comprehensively anti-Semitic--both anti-Arab and anti-Jew,” (Williams, 1999).

We meet Watto in his shop, as Qui-gon Jinn, Padme, Jar-Jar, and R2-D2 enter to try to find a part to fix their ship. Watto, with the sleaze of a used-car salesman, calls Qui-gon to the back of the shop to talk business. When the time comes to talk money, Watto reveals that Republic credits are no good on Tatooine. Qui-gon attempts to trick him into taking his credits, to which Watto responds, “I’m a Toydarian! Mind tricks don’t work on me. Only money,” (Clip #7). In this scene, Watto plays directly into a Jewish stereotype of being greedy and covetous. His refusal to pay his debt to Qui-gon after a bet gone wrong later on in the film reinforces this as well. Furthermore, Watto generalizes about his own race with this line, implying that *all* Toydarians are obsessed with money. This is particularly harmful because Watto’s (and by extension Lucas’) implication is that such a generalization can accurately be made about an entire race. This, of course, is untrue

in real life, but in Lucas' universe, such generalizations tend to be accurate, giving the audience (and particularly younger members) the impression that they are acceptable, especially when the stereotype so easily fits with one that already exists in society.

Watto's greed does not end with this scene. He encourages Anakin to cheat during an upcoming podrace in order to win him the prize money, he is unable to resist making a bet with Qui-gon when it has the potential to make him rich, and he later attempts to weasel out of that same bet when he loses. Most distressing of all, however, is the fact that he owns slaves. Anakin and his mother Shmi are Watto's property, until the aforementioned bet sets Anakin free. In having Watto own slaves, Lucas is effectively taking a race of people with a history of horrific pain and suffering under slavery, and stating that they are not only unaffected by, but are actually encouraging the slave trade.

Watto makes a reappearance in *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* when Anakin returns to Tatooine to rescue his mother from slavery. It seems as though rather than address the criticism of his character in *Episode I*, Lucas opted instead to make Watto even more offensive. This time, Watto appears wearing a wide-brimmed hat with a rounded top and also sports a scraggly beard, making him look like a perverse caricature of Hasidic Jews, whose men wear similar hats and have facial hair. Watto is also now covered in flies. Upon realizing that the man standing before him is Anakin, his former slave, he immediately tries to convince Anakin to scare some people into paying him a substantial amount of money (Clip #8). Even in his current position, as a low-life junk dealer who is even worse off than he was when we met

him in the last film, Watto is still so obsessed with money that within one minute of their reunion, he tries to convince a former slave of his to collect his debts. His depravity knows no bounds, and neither does his potential for propagating a dangerous sterotype.

JAR JAR BINKS

Perhaps the most infamous character to come out of *The Phantom Menace* is Jar Jar Binks. He is a character everyone loves to hate, not just as a racial stereotype but also simply as an incredibly annoying character. In fact, after *The Phantom Menace*, fans of the series demanded George Lucas kill the character off; the thought of another film with him as a main character was too much to bear for some. In response, Jar Jar's presence was limited to a few scenes for the next two movies, though he remains one of the few *Star Wars* characters who is known to have lived comfortably for the rest of his life following the films.

What makes Jar Jar so repulsive to the viewer? Is it his high-pitched voice and difficult-to-understand accent? Is it his shambling gait, his long, floppy ears, or his incredible stupidity and clumsiness? In fact, all the things the audience hates about Jar Jar are traits that make him yet another of Lucas' racial stereotypes. Jar Jar, along with Watto, were the two characters most disparaged by the audience and critics alike. While Watto represents a caricature of Jewish men, Jar Jar is an odd medley of a slow-witted Rastafarian and a classic blackface buffoon character found in minstrel

shows (*Figure 2*). His eyes are wide and his teeth are big and white. He has thick lips and a flat nose. He comes from a race called Gungans; a primitive people whose technology is far less advanced than the white humans of Naboo. He is dumb, he constantly relies on the other protagonists for leadership, and makes increasingly bad decisions throughout the trilogy.

(Figure 2: A comparison picture between Jar Jar and a white actor in blackface)

In addition to his obviously offensive physical characteristics, Jar Jar's personality and mannerisms are also cause for concern. When we first meet Jar Jar, he is running away from an oncoming Trade Federation tank. Naturally too dim-witted to save himself, he is rescued by Qui-gon Jinn. Immediately upon his rescue he informs Qui-gon that he is forever indebted to him and pledges to be Qui-gon's faithful servant for the rest of his life. Qui-gon, who (much like the audience) wants as little to do with this character as possible, tries to dismiss this gesture, but Jar Jar insists. "It is demanded by the Gods, it is!" exclaims Jar Jar (Clip #9). Thus Jar Jar, in a way similar to how Blacks were portrayed in entertainment during slavery and

segregation, is more than happy to serve a white master. Servitude is built into the foundations of his culture and he will carry out any task assigned him with a smile on his face. This kind of willing slavery is not unique to Jar Jar. It can be seen in the house elves in the *Harry Potter* series and even in the *Star Wars* Original Trilogy in Chewbacca. In these fictions, certain races or people are happy being slaves, an argument used by defenders of slavery in nineteenth-century America. Such a belief when used in a real life context can immediately be seen as incorrect and downright horrendous. Why then, do such series as *Star Wars* get a pass simply because they are fictional?

In spite of his lack of enthusiasm at having a bumbling new manservant, Qui-gon does ask one thing from Jar Jar: to be led to his native people. It is here that we encounter the race of Gungans, a species who, with rare exceptions, are just as offensive as Jar Jar himself. They are a primitive, amphibious race, who use spears instead of blasters, mounted animals instead of mechanical transports, and seem to lack the ability of interstellar travel (a technology which, at this point in the history of the *Star Wars* universe, had existed for thousands of years). Their leader, a fat Gungan named Boss Nass, speaks with an even stronger accent than Jar Jar and drools all over himself when he speaks. He displays an obvious dislike of the Naboo (the planet's native humans), claiming that they think they are smarter than the Gungans (which of course, as white people, they are). In *The Phantom Menace*'s climactic battle, the Trade Federation's army of battle droids faces the Gungan army, which fights the droids using shields, spears, and bombs, rather than with the blasters

and starships common to nearly every other race in *Star Wars*. Prior to this scene, Jar Jar is inexplicably promoted to General and, due to his obvious lack of expertise or any useful skill whatsoever, the Gungans do in fact lose the battle, and are only rescued thanks to Anakin's accidental destruction of the Droid Control Ship.

As though the audience needed another reason to dislike Jar Jar, we are given one in *Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. When the galaxy is on the brink of war, Jar Jar, now a representative in the senate for the Gungans, proposes that for the duration of the war, Supreme Chancellor Palpatine should be given full power over the senate. In doing so, Jar Jar essentially makes the Republic a dictatorship and gives full power to the man who would soon become the Emperor. In essence, the downfall of the Republic begins with this scene, and Lucas places the blame directly on a character stereotyped as non-white.

Jar Jar's buffoonery does not end with *The Phantom Menace*. His minstrel-like character is found in many episodes of *The Clone Wars*, and while the show is for the most part critically acclaimed, the episodes featuring Jar Jar often receive the worst reviews. One particular episode, namely Season One's *Bombad Jedi* involves Padme getting captured by Nute Gunray, and Jar Jar is the only one who is able to save her. While the premise sounds as though this will be a heroic turning point for Jar Jar, the episode instead involves him committing a series of incredible blunders, from destroying Padme's ship, to being mistaken as a Jedi, to a series of failed rescue attempts, each worse than the last. The other main characters even acknowledge his ineptitude (Clip #10), which begs the question of why on earth they would give him

enough power in the Senate to speak, much less motion to give the Chancellor emergency power. The show rarely places him in any heroic light whatsoever, resorting instead to giving him the same role he has in the films: that of a lovable fool; and while the word "lovable" may seem like a stretch to many viewers, the fact of the matter is that, as George Lucas himself often says, "The kids love him." Jar Jar is an immensely popular character with *Star Wars'* younger audience, a fact that is disturbing given that children will likely not notice that he is a baseless racial stereotype, and will instead begin to make the same generalizations in real life that Lucas makes with his alien creations.

A little-known (and surprising) fact about Jar Jar's character is that he was voiced by an African American voice actor. Ahmed Best, a fairly well-known voice actor and musician provided the voice for Jar Jar, apparently unaware or simply refusing to see the offensiveness of the character. However, if that were the case, then surely the critical backlash surrounding Jar Jar would have persuaded him to never touch the character again. Yet, Best returned to the role of Jar Jar on *The Clone Wars* in its third season, and voiced him on a regular basis. This means that Best, after hearing all the criticism, made an active choice to return to the role to portray a stereotype he likely knew was damaging to his own race and to society at large. This is no different from a number of black entertainers, from movie and television stars to recording artists, who, perhaps unwittingly or perhaps for a paycheck, portray their race in such a way as to illustrate a fundamental difference between their own race and others; when in real life, no such difference exists. Black people can be portrayed

as more dangerous, a stereotype many rappers seem happy to endorse; or, as in Best's case, black people can be portrayed as less intelligent than white people. The resulting danger is obvious: like all stereotypes, if these are presented to malleable minds such as children, they will be interpreted as truth. Not only will white children see a fundamental difference between themselves and their black peers, but black children face a serious stereotype threat, as all their role models are telling them that they are less intelligent and more violent than other children.

This is a difficult association to overcome. A stereotype threat can be established instantly. One study showed black students performing poorer on a test than white students simply because the proctor mentioned that black students typically do not perform as well. In the control group, when this comment was not made, students performed equally well (Schmader et al, 2008). If a stereotype threat can be established with so little motivation, what then is the effect when the media bombards our youth with negative associations about one race or another? Jar Jar, and *Star Wars* as a whole, is not solely to blame for this problem. However, given its widespread appeal and young target audience, Lucas had a unique opportunity to perhaps change this trend. Instead, he opted to fill his films to the brim with stereotypes that have existed for years, and now thanks to him have been refreshed and reintroduced to our children.

CHEWBACCA

When one thinks of the offensive portrayals of aliens in the *Star Wars* universe, Chewbacca is likely far from most peoples' minds. Han Solo's loveable co-pilot is a fan favorite character, beloved by millions. His bond with Han makes him an emotionally resonant character, and his comedic timing makes for some of the best laughs of the Original Trilogy. However, while Chewbacca does not necessarily come across as a racial stereotype, his portrayal as an alien is still offensive for several reasons.

While his backstory is never fully developed in the films, Chewbacca has a history that is well-known to many *Star Wars* fans. According to Expanded Universe novels, comics, and video games, Chewbacca came from the planet Kashyyyk, a heavily wooded world on which the primitive race of Wookiees made their homes in trees. With the dawn of the Empire following *Revenge of the Sith*, the planet fell under Imperial control. The Empire saw the Wookiees as a physically strong but intellectually limited people; perfect for slave labor. Chewbacca and his people were shipped across the galaxy and sold into slavery. At some point, Han Solo, at the time a reluctant Imperial conscript, came across the transport carrying Chewbacca and, realizing this was an evil he could not live with, helped Chewbacca and the rest of the Wookiees on the transport get free. He thereafter abandoned the Imperial Navy and became a smuggler with Chewbacca at his side.

To the casual fan, this story serves as a heartwarming backstory to one of science-fiction's most famous friendships. However, close inspection reveals a number of problems. For one, while the Empire's enslavement of the Wookiees is clearly frowned upon, the portrayal of the Wookiees as helpless, tree-dwelling simpletons is problematic. This aspect of Chewbacca's backstory is a clear allegory to the nineteenth-century slave trade. In both instances, native people were outmatched by their invaders in both numbers and technology. They were wrenched from their families and friends and sold to slave-owners who were worlds away. In fact, the similarities are so clear that when the audience learns that the Wookiees are primitive tree-dwellers, it can become difficult to separate this trait from the African slaves they are paralleling. The story's condemnation of slavery is a step in the right direction; but the portrayal of the native people as tree-dwelling and even monkey-like is detestable.

Furthermore, once Chewbacca escapes slavery he, much like Jar Jar, trades one life of servitude for another in the form of a life-debt to Han Solo. In the Wookiees, George Lucas gives us a race that, under the right circumstances, is happy to serve a master (a precursor to the Gungans of the Prequel Trilogy). That an entire race would not only allow the enslavement of their own people but encourage it through their customs is a horrible thought. Granted, in this context, Han and Chewbacca have more of a friendly relationship than a master-servant relationship. However, the fact remains that were Han to give Chewbacca a command, he would be bound by the laws of his own people to obey. More troubling than all of this is the fact that, again,

none of this is addressed in the films. Many people (myself included) were left to assume that Han and Chewbacca were simply good friends and partners. It is a safe assumption to make given how their relationship is portrayed in the films. Why, then, is this backstory involving slavery and life-debts even necessary? It almost seems that Lucas, and the writers of Expanded Universe fiction, refuse to acknowledge that two people of differing races could become friends without some event forcing them together and giving one power over the other. Han and Chewbacca's relationship is one of the best friendships ever captured on film. To taint it with an unnecessary and offensive backstory is tantamount to destroying the one cross-race friendship in the series.

The one even remotely good aspect about this backstory is that thankfully, not many people know about it. For the most part, fans are able to enjoy Han and Chewbacca's friendship without having to scrutinize their every interaction for signs of a master-servant relationship. However, even outside of this context Chewbacca, much like every other alien character in the series, is treated like a second-class citizen, even by the protagonists. When Princess Leia first meets him during her rescue from the Death Star, she refers to him as a "walking carpet," a fairly insulting, if not overtly racist comment. Overt racism comes later, but thankfully this time at the hands of the Empire (Clip #11). However, the most striking instance of this comes at the end of *A New Hope*, when the Rebellion is celebrating their victory over the Empire and the destruction of the Death Star. A ceremony is held in which Han, Luke, and Chewbacca (the heroes of the battle) walk down an isle toward Princess

Leia who presents Han and Luke with medals. Chewbacca receives nothing (Clip #12). The one alien character, one who had just as much a hand in the Rebellion's victory as Han and Luke, receives nothing for his valor. The Rebellion, much like the audience, sees Chewbacca as an obedient sidekick; more like Han's pet than his friend.

A NEW HOPE

This chapter thus far has presented a number of crucial problems regarding race portrayals in the *Star Wars* universe. Thankfully, not all portrayals are, in fact, negative. The films and especially *The Clone Wars* series have a number of redeeming qualities, with the latter having made strides to correct many of the wrongs of the films. These positives do not make up for the already-discussed negatives, but they are certainly a step in the right direction. *The Clone Wars* has delivered over forty hours of new *Star Wars* stories. With a potential new television series in the works and with new films on the way, there are plenty of opportunities for the positives to someday outweigh the negatives. Until then, the following examples should give the reader some assurance that not all hope is lost.

While aliens for the most part are treated as second-class citizens by both the heroes and the villains of the series, there are some notable differences. One such difference is that, the Rebellion has considerably less overt racism than the villainous Empire. The Rebellion employs many aliens, while the Empire employs none, and

many of them achieve a high status within the organization. Admiral Ackbar, for example, is an alien from Mon Calamari. He is one of the least human-looking characters in the entire series, and yet he commands the Rebels in their climactic battle at the end of *Return of the Jedi*. The Empire employs only humans, and for that matter only white, human males. On that topic, while Lando Calrissian comes from a bad background he nevertheless spends the entirety of *Return of the Jedi* as a hero. Much like Ackbar, he beats the odds by becoming a general in the Rebel army. Furthermore, he leads the assault on the second Death Star and in fact, with the help of his alien co-pilot Nien Nunb, ends up single-handedly destroying it, a task that only two films ago was reserved for the blonde, white protagonist.

Perhaps the greatest hope for *Star Wars* fans at this point comes from *The Clone Wars*, a series which, in many peoples' opinion, made tremendous strides in correcting the wrongs made by George Lucas in the Prequel Trilogy. Throughout its five-seasons, the series introduced its audience to a number of alien and non-white human characters, nearly all of which are presented in a positive light. While Chewbacca was the closest thing to an alien main character as the films got, *The Clone Wars* introduces us almost immediately to Ahsoka Tano, Anakin Skywalker's Padawan. She is an alien (a Togruta, specifically) and is not only one of the central three characters (the others being Anakin and Obi-wan Kenobi), but has quickly become a fan-favorite, especially with the series' female demographic. Best of all, she in no way represents a racial stereotype.

In addition, *The Clone Wars* writers have made progress in reducing or even eliminating the racial stereotypes that already exist in the universe. A few episodes feature characters traveling to the planet Toydaria, the home planet of Watto. As previously mentioned, Watto at one point makes the claim that his entire species loves money. Yet, in the Season Three episode *Supply Lines*, we see a very different picture. In the episode, Senator Bail Organa travels to Toydaria in order to ask the king for permission to launch a humanitarian mission to the planet Ryloth, using Toydaria as a staging ground. We learn shortly thereafter that not only are Toydarians not a money-grubbing race of slave-owners. Rather, they are among the most charitable and hospitable races in the galaxy (Clip #13).

The show also goes out of its way to demonstrate that Jar Jar is not representative of the Gungans as a people. While the show unfortunately does little to show Jar Jar in any sort of heroic light himself, the Gungans, while not often used, are portrayed as courageous and intelligent. A Season Four story arc sees the planet Calamari under attack, and the inhabitants must rely on the Gungans, a technologically inferior race, for help. Showing none of Jar Jar's weaknesses, both as a character and as a stereotype, the Gungans arrive and turn the tide of the battle. Another episode sees Gungan Captain Tarpals (seen briefly in *The Phantom Menace*) sacrifice himself in order for the Gungans to capture Separatist General Grievous, a feat that even the Jedi were unable to accomplish thus far (Clip #14).

In essence, what the show accomplishes that the films never did is to present characters of various races, whether they are aliens or simply not white, working

together. In the *Star Wars* films, non-white characters took a back seat to the heroics of our main cast. In *The Clone Wars*, main characters such as Obi-wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker share screen time equally with characters like Ahsoka Tano, Plo Koon, Kit Fisto, Luminara Unduli, Ki Adi Mundi, Mace Windu, and countless other characters, each of whom have their own chance for heroics. *The Clone Wars* paints a picture of a world where races are united by their similarities, rather than divided by their differences.

Gender

When one considers the fan base of a film series such as *Star Wars*, it is easy to imagine that it is predominately male, because with virtually every big-budget action blockbuster, this is the studio's target demographic. Ever since Twentieth Century Fox (in what had to be one of the poorest decisions in the studio's history) allowed George Lucas to retain merchandising rights on his film, stores around the world have rolled out hundreds of thousands of *Star Wars* items ranging from clothing to lunchboxes to action figures, and almost all of it is intended directly for male consumption. Indeed, the fact that there is only one female main character in either trilogy is evidence enough that the *Star Wars* franchise made little, if any, attempt to capture a female audience

What may surprise many is that despite all this, *Star Wars* has a massive female fan base. What once started out as a male-oriented, cult sci-fi film has evolved into a cultural phenomenon, with rabid fans of all races and genders; and over the years, the number of female fans has grown exponentially. This is likely due to the increasing social acceptance of science fiction and comic book culture, interests which even ten years ago would have been considered too "nerdy" for most, especially women. Currently, however, with films such as *Marvel's: The Avengers* and *The Dark Knight Rises* easily surpassing the highest-grossing non-science fiction film, it is easy to see that there is not only an increased interest in such films from

women, but a widespread appreciation for a genre that in past years was championed only by socially awkward males.

The rapid increase of female *Star Wars* fans is aided in particular by the strides the franchise has made outside of the films. As stated in the introduction, Ashley Eckstein, the voice of Ahsoka Tano on *The Clone Wars* recently said that the *Star Wars* fan base is roughly fifty percent female, and *Clone Wars* supervising director Dave Filoni stated that thirty-seven percent of the show's viewers are female. This is undoubtedly due to the popularity of Ahsoka Tano in particular, but also because of the screen time a number of other female characters get, many of whom were completely overlooked or very poorly used in the films. Such a sizeable demographic cannot be overlooked, and while certain aspects of the *Star Wars* franchise are becoming more female-friendly, the fact remains that the films are still incredibly male-centric; a problem when considering the large number of female fans.

Much like the lack of non-white protagonists in contemporary film, there is also a noticeable lack of heroic female characters. Virtually every major blockbuster features a male protagonist, and female characters are relegated to the sidelines. In addition, when a female actually does take front and center in a film, it is a film such as the *Twilight* series, in which women are deemed incapable of accomplishing anything without the presence of a man. When a female character shows some actual strength or skill that the male protagonist does not possess (take Black Widow from *The Avengers* and Catwoman from *The Dark Knight Rises*), they are always second or third-tier characters, nowhere near as important as the male characters, and they are

nearly always over-sexualized to make up for their non-traditionally feminine traits (for example, the matching skintight suits of Black Widow and Catwoman). And while *The Hunger Games* is being praised for its strong, female protagonist, the truth is that the film suffers in the same way the *Harry Potter* series suffered in its attempt to bring its female protagonist to life. Both Katniss and Hermione have been made more attractive than they are described in the books, and much of Katniss' attitude is lost in translation as well, making her fulfill traditional gender roles in many of her scenes. Indeed, the current landscape of female protagonists is in dire need of change; change which a series such as *Star Wars* is capable of bringing about. Unfortunately, until very recently, the female characters in *Star Wars* have been quite weak.

There is only one important female character per *Star Wars* trilogy: Princess Leia and Padme Amidala, both of whom will be discussed below. Aside from them, the universe is virtually devoid of female characters, and it is surprising when another woman makes an appearance, much less utters a line of dialogue. Much like our own society, the *Star Wars* universe is predominately patriarchal, with even main characters such as Leia and Padme taking a back seat to characters such as Obi-wan Kenobi and Luke Skywalker. With such a large number of female fans, the universe should be more populated with women; but sadly it is not and the women who are present often fall short of being role models. When young boys watch the *Star Wars* films, they can idolize Obi-wan and Luke, figures of bravery, loyalty, and integrity. Girls on the other hand are expected to sympathize more with Leia and Padme, who for the most part are submissive to the male characters and have few or no chances to

be heroic themselves. While *The Clone Wars* in fact made great progress in giving young female fans the role models they deserve, as a whole the series is massively male-dominated.

The remainder of this chapter is examines many of the characters from the films and television series. I will begin with an overview of some of the male characters, but the majority of the chapter will consist of an analysis of the role of female characters within the universe, whether or not they represent positive role models or negative stereotypes, and what can be done to improve the franchise for fans to come.

IT'S A MAN'S GALAXY

Star Wars is undoubtedly a male-dominated landscape. With the exception of Leia and Padme, there are no main female characters in either trilogy. Instead, the audience is left to follow the adventures of Luke Skywalker and Han Solo in the Original Trilogy, and Anakin Skywalker and Obi-wan Kenobi in the Prequel Trilogy. All of these characters to some degree fulfill the role of the archetypal male hero the audience is accustomed to seeing, though naturally they are not all the same. Han Solo, for example, while not the first hero of his kind, can essentially be considered a blueprint for a standard movie hero of today. He is handsome, roguish, and adventurous – and most importantly, irresistible to women. Luke Skywalker, on the other hand, while still adventurous, is almost unique as a protagonist in that at the end

of the films, he does not win the girl. This is of course because the girl in question is his sister, but nevertheless, Luke foregoes the ladies' man stereotype in favor of a more solemn, serious hero, akin to the samurai found in a Kurosawa film (a director who had a tremendous influence on Lucas' work). Obi-wan and the rest of the Jedi of the Prequel trilogy follow the same archetype, and while some female Jedi are present in the series, they are always featured in the background and not one gets a speaking line. In fact, the only Jedi who speak in the series are Luke, Obi-wan, Yoda, Qui-gon Jinn, Anakin, and Mace Windu, all of them heroic figures. Clearly, this is a galaxy in which there is no room for a female hero.

Also noticeably absent from the galaxy are any female villains. While this doesn't seem like a problem at first glance, the fact is that *Star Wars* villains are some of the best and most iconic in the history of film. These are characters the audience loves to hate, and occasionally just plain loves. Characters such as Darth Vader, Darth Maul, and Boba Fett can captivate an audience, sometimes even without needing to speak, as is the case of the latter two characters. In addition, these villains have the all-important job of running the galaxy. The galaxy is run by Emperor Palpatine and Darth Vader. The Empire itself, is devoid of any and all women, in addition to the noticeable lack of aliens. Perhaps Lucas believed no one would accept a woman as a legitimate villain, or perhaps he doesn't believe they can actually be a threat to a man. Regardless of the reason, the *Star Wars* universe remains devoid of not only female heroes, but villains as well. Even more troubling is the fact that the females with

which the audience *is* presented do little to actually further the cause of the heroes, often get in the way, and even more often require rescuing.

PRINCESS LEIA

Princess Leia, many would argue, is the exception to this observation. Easily the most influential female character *Star Wars* has ever seen, Princess Leia was introduced to audiences in 1977, and almost immediately sparked a rare upswing in the number of strong female leads in films. 1979 saw the emergence of arguably the most heroic female character ever, Ellen Ripley of the *Alien* series. A few years later, Linda Hamilton made the character of Sarah Connor famous with a commanding performance in 1984's *The Terminator*. It is difficult to argue that their predecessor in Carrie Fisher's Princess Leia had no influence on these characters. She is headstrong, brazen, and shoots more stormtroopers in the first film than the entire male cast combined. When we first meet Leia, she is introduced as a Senator from Alderaan, wearing a gown that exposes no skin whatsoever, and sporting a high-and-tight hairstyle. In other words, she is immediately perceived by the audience as an authority figure, and is in no way over-sexualized. Leia almost immediately is captured by the Empire, but when confronted by her captors, she shows an incredible fearlessness, a very uncharacteristic trait of your typical damsel-in-distress (Clip #15).

At its core, the first *Star Wars* film is a classic tale about a hero rescuing a princess from an evildoer's "castle." In that sense, the film immediately portrays

women on a lower plane than men; they require rescuing since they cannot rescue themselves. Leia does indeed require rescuing from the death star by our two male protagonists, Luke Skywalker and Han Solo. However, almost immediately after her liberation from her cell, Leia takes the lead, telling Luke and Han what to do, arguing incessantly with Han rather than following his lead, and even rescuing them. When backed into a corner, Leia actually takes Luke's gun from him, shoots the grate off of a garbage chute, and dives in (Clip #16). When our heroes escape the Death Star, Leia is the only one to realize that their escape was too easy; that they were released intentionally so that the Empire can track them to the secret Rebel Base.

Leia is also recognized by the Rebellion itself as an authority figure. She issues instructions to the (all male) Rebel pilots before the Battle of Yavin in *Episode IV* and the Battle of Hoth in *Episode V*. Even her backstory in the Expanded Universe shows her tenacity, her bravery, and her importance to the Rebellion. In *The Force Unleashed*, a series of video games, novels, and comic books, Leia is shown as one of the founding members of the Rebel Alliance. She, her stepfather Bail Organa, and Mon Mothma (another woman, in fact) gather in secret to begin the fight against the Empire. Thus, even though the Rebellion is populated almost entirely by white men in the films, it was in fact founded by two women and a man of color (Organa is played by Hispanic actor Jimmy Smits).

Leia is often seen as one of the most important and influential examples of what a strong female protagonist should entail. In her article, "Princess Leia: Feminist Icon?" feminist blogger Gwendolyn Glover writes, "I know that for many, Princess

Leia is a sex symbol. The unattainable and perfect woman. For me, Princess Leia is my feminist icon. She was my first (and pretty much only) female role model for feminism…. In a male-dominated universe, she stood out as a force to be reckoned with. Tough, smart, and outspoken, she typified everything that I wanted to be," (Glover, 2009). This is an opinion held by most, if not all female *Star Wars* fans. With the ever-increasing number of female *Star Wars* characters, women have more options than ever to emulate their favorite heroes, sometimes not simply by using their deeds as an example, but even by dressing as them. When I attended *Star Wars: Celebration VI* in Orlando, Florida in the summer of 2012, I was shocked at the number of female fans in attendance, and the number of those fans who had elected to come in costume. While the costumes were incredibly diverse, it was no question that Leia was the most popular one by far among women (but not limited to them!), showing that female fans do have a special place in their hearts for our heroic princess. Even more interesting was that Leia's slave costume, seen by many as representative of her lowest point in the series, was an incredibly popular costume. When asked why they would willingly wear a costume so exemplary of male fantasy, the common response was that Leia's strength, even when wearing this costume, inspired them to reach outside their comfort zone; to have the confidence to wear such a revealing outfit, when they would otherwise be unable to. Leia has served as an inspiration to female fans for over thirty-five years now, and for that, she should be commended.

Leia, in *Episode IV* especially, does a great deal for female protagonists in film. However, as is often the case, popularity led to some drastic changes in her character. When *Episode IV* premiered in 1977, no one expected much of George Lucas' passion project. It therefore makes sense why such a revolutionary female character would go unnoticed and un-objected to. When the film turned out to be a runaway success, pressure from the studio and likely from society itself forced Lucas and the writers of *The Empire Strikes Back* to make some changes. *A New Hope* saw a feisty young princess stare unwaveringly into the face of pure evil, saw her effectively emasculate one of the lead male characters and affect her own rescue, and saw the figurehead of a galaxy-wide rebellion in a woman. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Leia conforms much more with traditional female film roles. Her complete disinterest in Luke and Han in the first film is replaced with a growing romance between herself and Han, but not before kissing Luke as well (in one of the more cringe-worthy scenes to longtime *Star Wars* fans).

Han's courtship of Leia stands in drastic contrast to her character from the previous film. Whether because of pressure from the studio, or simply because Lucas realized he had inadvertently given women a valuable role model, Leia becomes essentially useless for the majority of the film. She requires rescuing within the first twenty minutes, as Han needs to fearlessly run back into a crumbling ice cave to evacuate her. She, as is stereotypical of most women, is afraid of vermin and requires a man to kill them for her (Clip #17). Worse still is the fact that a character who wanted nothing to do with men in the first film spends the majority of the second film

falling for one. In one of the more unsettling scenes in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Han confronts Leia, backing her into a corner and questioning her about her true feelings. He takes hold of her hands, essentially preventing her escape. The scene concludes with Leia succumbing to her feelings, and a passionate kiss ensues (Clip #18). The implications of this scene are incredibly disturbing. For one, it teaches men that intimidation is a viable way into a woman's heart. For another, it teaches women that men who act this way must truly be in love with them, and that this love justifies borderline violent behavior.

Leia's downward spiral continues in *Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*. After an admittedly daring attempt to rescue Han from Jabba the Hutt, Leia is unsurprisingly captured. She is forced into a gold bikini and is required to lie seductively at the foot of Jabba's throne, awaiting rescue from a man. Regardless of how the aforementioned costumers interpret the slave outfit today, this scene is a perfect example of how a film's popularity can get in the way of its original message. Our first image of Leia was a woman clad head-to-toe in white. Two movies later, she is all but naked, and one of the most iconic images of male fantasy in the history of film.

Figure 3: The character evolution of Princess Leia: Feminist Icon

Luke eventually comes to her aid, and to Leia's credit, she uses her own instruments of submission (her chain) to kill her captor, Jabba, a creature, I might add, who is essentially a giant, living phallus. Small instances of heroics aside, the next major action sequence featuring Leia is a speeder bike chase that exemplifies yet another stereotype about women: they can't drive.

In a scene where, moments earlier, Luke kills two stormtroopers by showcasing his extraordinary piloting skills, Leia ends up in trouble once again when she proves unable to finish off even one (Clip #19). This is same woman who, once again, killed more stormtroopers in *A New Hope* than any of the male main characters. Although her character underwent massive changes from film to film, Leia still manages to end *Return of the Jedi* on a high note, saving Han's life by shooting an approaching stormtrooper. Thus, while Leia continued to conform to traditional gender roles, she nevertheless exhibits some positive traits once in a while. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of her mother.

PADME AMIDALA

With Padme Amidala, the *Star Wars* writers had a unique opportunity to do two things: they could establish a strong, Leia-like character for a new trilogy, and they could correct all the mistakes the previous trilogy made with this character. Instead, we were presented with a character with virtually none of Leia's admirable

aspects; a character whose only purpose is to give our protagonist, Anakin Skywalker, a love story. Any hopes of a Leia for a new generation of young *Star Wars* fans, someone young girls could look up to, proved to be futile. Padme is a plot device for Anakin; a character whose entire reason to live is literally tied to her relationship with a man.

Much like Leia, Padme spends the first movie of her trilogy essentially uninterested in men, likely because her future love interest is at this time a nine-year-old boy. Also like Leia, she has a few admirable scenes. She proves to be a decent politician: she is able to foster a peace between her people and the Gungans, when many others had failed. She leads the Naboo's assault on Theed Palace to capture Nute Gunray, and even uses some clever subterfuge to avoid capture by deceiving Gunray into believing she is her own decoy. Unfortunately, while I had pages to write about Leia's admirable characteristics, this is all there is to say about Padme.

Like Leia, Padme is introduced just as she is about to be captured, and like Leia, two men (in this case Qui-gon Jinn and Obi-wan Kenobi) come to her aid. Unlike Leia, Padme does not participate in her own rescue, and essentially acts as a burden on our other protagonists for the rest of the film. However, it is not until *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* that her character's downward spiral accelerates, as she succumbs to Anakin through a series of advances so awkward and aggressive that they border on sexual harassment and make Han Solo look like a perfect gentleman (Clip #20). This, much like Han's advances on Leia did, give males watching the film the impression that this is the proper way to court women, and likewise give women

the impression that men who act this way truly care for them. This is taken one step further in the scene where Anakin professes his love for Padme.

In this scene, Anakin admits that he has thought about Padme every day of his life since they met. He states that his soul is tormented by the thought of not being with her. In essence, he states that he is in pain when he is not with her, thereby placing the guilt of making him suffer squarely on Padme. If she were a decent human being, then surely she would strive to end his pain, Anakin seems to argue. He states, "I'm haunted by the kiss that you never should have given me," referring to the kiss seen in Clip #20, where we clearly see Anakin using what he thinks is charm to coax a kiss from Padme. Yet now that he is in pain, he places the blame of the kiss on her, accusing her of toying with his emotions. This scene illustrates a very common belief in our society, made even more common by the widespread popularity of *Star Wars*: men feel as though they are owed the woman of their dreams, and women should have little, if any, say in the matter. Padme sees Anakin in pain over her, and just as expected, she ends up in his arms at the end of the film. Her own happiness (and moral compass, as she is initially adamantly against their union) takes a back seat to Anakin's needs. Furthermore, throughout this scene Padme is wearing possibly her most seductive outfit yet, seemingly with the sole purpose of tormenting Anakin further (Clip #21). Thus, Anakin is made to look like the tragic hero, a hopeless romantic who simply wants to find the love of his life, while Padme is the villain; a sultry temptress who toys with his emotions by kissing him in one scene and rebuffing his advances in the next. The audience is made to sympathize with a

character who in reality is far more manipulative and emotionally destructive than the woman who is painted in this light. Of course in the end, “true love” triumphs and the two get married in secret, teaching males around the world that manipulation and playing the victim are the true ways to win over women.

While *The Clone Wars* has done much to correct the problems with the films, unfortunately, it has not done so with Padme. Instead, she is portrayed in much the same way as she is in the films. While her relationship with Anakin is made somewhat less disturbing, mostly due to the fact that Anakin is a much better-written character and is actually likeable for a change, she nevertheless serves little purpose except as a plot device to make the male protagonists look more heroic. In the entirety of the first season, Padme is captured and rescued a total of four times (or roughly once every five episodes). In another episode she is infected with a deadly virus, and only Anakin and Obi-wan can find the antidote that can save her life. Of course in each instance she is rescued by male characters (even Jar Jar proves to be more capable than her and saves her life in one episode), and she is always extremely grateful for the rescue (Clip #22).

From her wedding on, Padme becomes a slave to her emotions, letting her entire fate depend on her relationship with Anakin. In *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, Padme does little but worry about Anakin and the decisions he is making. Any small instances of heroics from the previous films are gone. Padme does not participate in any battles, and she talks almost exclusively about Anakin. Worst of all,

the end of the film makes it very apparent that the entire purpose of her life is to be in a relationship with a man.

After Anakin turns to the Dark Side and becomes Darth Vader, Padme confronts him on the planet Mustafar, just before his final lightsaber duel with Obi-wan. There, she makes it abundantly clear that he is the most important thing in her life by far, saying: “Anakin, all I want is your love,” and, “You’re breaking my heart!” Of course, in dramatic fashion, Anakin chokes her with the Force, believing she had betrayed him. Obi-wan checks her pulse, confirming that she is still alive. Later, Padme is rushed into emergency childbirth. After her children are delivered, Padme suddenly dies, baffling the doctors who see no medical reason why she should perish. The only explanation they can come up with is, “She’s lost the will to live.” This is a very important line as it illustrates that to Padme, the lives of her children are not reason enough to live. Without Anakin in her life, her life is forfeit. The implication, of course, is that without a relationship with a man, a woman’s life has no meaning. Even the all-important task of motherhood is too little an incentive for Padme to continue living, an incredibly selfish point of view for a mother whom Leia (obviously mistakenly) remembers as being very kind and warm.

As a role model, Padme serves to teach *Star Wars*’ female audience that men are the most important thing in a woman’s life. Conversely Anakin teaches males that manipulation and harassment are viable ways to win over women. Together, they make up one of the most dysfunctional and emotionally destructive couples ever to

grace the silver screen, and they damage the gender landscape of *Star Wars* to a seemingly irreparable degree.

AHSOKA TANO

Thankfully, the films are not all that female *Star Wars* fans are able to enjoy, and *The Clone Wars* has introduced audiences to a number of strong female characters, who are able to shoulder the burden of being a role model far better than Padme, and even better than Leia. Among these characters is Ahsoka Tano, Anakin's apprentice. Easily the most popular *Star Wars* character who has not appeared in any films, Ahsoka was a huge hit with young, female (as well as male) viewers due to her feisty, adventurous attitude. Furthermore, Ahsoka is not human; she is a Togruta, a humanoid alien with orange skin and blue-and-white striped head-tails. Thus, not only is she female, but she is also the first non-human main character in the series.

For most young viewers, Ahsoka is their entry way into this universe, a character roughly their age to whom they can relate. Without her character, the show would be about adults and a war. Ahsoka allows young viewers to see the war through her perspective, as a child thrust into a wartime scenario. Thankfully, despite a few missteps early on, Ahsoka has become the strongest female role model the *Star Wars* universe has ever had.

One might doubt this assertion when looking at the character of Ahsoka because of her outfit. Despite her headstrong attitude and other non-traditionally feminine

traits, Ahsoka, like most female characters in science fiction, is portrayed in an overly-revealing costume, a fact made even more disturbing by the fact that Ahsoka is supposed to be fourteen years old at the outset of the series. Yet she wears a short tube top and skintight pants. This, of course, simply follows the unwritten rule of Jedi apparel in *Star Wars*: males and older females wear robes, young females wear overly-revealing clothing. Luckily, halfway through the third season, all three main characters (Anakin, Obi-wan, and Ahsoka) undergo costume changes, in order to make the former two's outfits more similar to the ones they wear in *Revenge of the Sith* and thus show the passage of time. Ahsoka, now fifteen or sixteen years of age, actually begins wearing more conservative clothes which, while still considerably more suggestive than the outfits worn by male characters, improves on her original outfit, making it less revealing and therefore, less uncomfortable for the viewer (Figure 4). The costume change was praised by many fans, with Scott Thill of Wired.com stating, "In a limitless *Star Wars* universe dominated by males maneuvering for political and military primacy, it's good to see that the few females in *The Clone Wars* are serving a higher function than eye candy for salivating fanboys," (Thill, 2010).

Figure 4: Ahsoka's costume change gave her character a much-needed less revealing look.

Aside from her costume, Ahsoka had a few hurdles to overcome at the outset of the series, the most notable of which was that her character simply did not have much depth. While she (unlike Padme) participated in the same adventures as the male characters, she never truly had moments to shine until at least halfway through the first season. Until then, she was at the sidelines, uttering a witty phrase or two before the focus went back to Anakin and Obi-wan. However, this phase did not last long, as the *Clone Wars* writers must have seen the opportunity they had, and Ahsoka began her evolution into one of the most compelling characters the *Star Wars* franchise has ever created.

Ahsoka does not fit the mold of female characters we have seen in the past. She, unlike Padme or even Leia, is always in the front lines of battle, she argues and questions her male superiors, and she often saves their lives. In one episode, Ahsoka singlehandedly fends off General Grievous, a villainous character who is shown in a previous episode to be more than capable of fighting four Jedi simultaneously – and winning. Yet Ahsoka is able to hold him off long enough for Anakin and Obi-wan to help Padme (naturally) escape. In another, Anakin and Obi-wan become trapped in a cave with poisonous gas steaming up from fissures in the ground. Just as they are about to pass out, Ahsoka comes to their rescue. Anakin and Obi-wan actually seem embarrassed that Anakin's apprentice was the one to come to their aid, and Ahsoka to her credit calls them out on it, stating plainly that they would have died without her help (Clip #23). This also serves as an interesting contrast between male and female gratitude after a rescue. When Ahsoka rescues Obi-wan and Anakin, they are

embarrassed and deny the fact that they required her help. Conversely, as we saw in the clip of Anakin rescuing Padme, females who get rescued by men are quick to jump into their arms (and presumably later, their beds) in gratitude.

Also of note is the fact that Ahsoka, as a Commander in the Army of the Republic, has command of an entire battalion of Clone Troopers, to whom she can dispatch orders, and with whom she goes into battle. Women giving men instructions is something we have seen before in Princess Leia, but unlike Leia, Ahsoka accompanies her troops into battle, often putting herself in unnecessary risk for her men.

In many ways, Ahsoka is supposed to parallel Anakin; a young, reckless Jedi who often disobeys orders but nevertheless remains heroic throughout. In that way, Ahsoka once again defies traditional female roles because of her tendency to break rules. This becomes more apparent when she is paired with other female Jedi such as Luminara Unduli or Aayla Secura, who often try to teach her to be more obedient. In an episode in which Anakin is gravely injured, Ahsoka is prepared to do all she can to save his life; but she is stopped by Aayla, who states that it is not her place to put Anakin's life above the lives of others. She wants Ahsoka to embrace the traditional Jedi belief that attachments are distracting and detrimental to the life of a Jedi; she encourages Ahsoka to follow orders and leave Anakin. Of course, Ahsoka does nothing of the sort. She tends to Anakin's wounds and defends him while he is helpless against the many dangers that befall them during his recovery. In this way, Ahsoka likens herself to Luke Skywalker, who also had trouble letting go of

attachments and defied the wishes of Yoda in order to save the lives of his friends. In another episode, Ahsoka and another female apprentice named Bariss Offee are tasked with infiltrating a weapons factory and destroying a fleet of new Separatist tanks before they can be deployed. Bariss' calm, reserved demeanor serves as a stark contrast to the brazen Ahsoka. Of course, Jedi are encouraged to be calm and reserved, but in breaking from that stereotype, Ahsoka makes herself a more compelling character.

Above all else, Ahsoka stands as a strong female character because of her ability to do everything the male characters can. Leia was handy with a blaster, but she never took on a heroic role the same way that Han and Luke did. Padme almost never fought, and when she did she was at a distinct advantage, accompanied by her men and one or two Jedi. Ahsoka, on the other hand, acts just as heroic as Anakin and Obi-wan, despite her age and gender. Over five seasons, Ahsoka has had numerous moments of heroics, all of which rival the actions of the male characters. One episode saw Ahsoka protect Padme from an assassination plot, singlehandedly fending off Aurra Sing, one of the deadliest bounty hunters in the galaxy. However, Ahsoka is not limited to saving the lives of women and fighting other women. In another episode, Ahsoka comes to the aid of Lux Bonteri, a young man who joins the terrorist group Death Watch, and immediately regrets it. In one of the most awe-inspiring and brutally violent scenes in the series, Ahsoka, surrounded by four Death Watch members, leaps up and decapitates all four, before engaging in a one-on-one lightsaber battle with the terrorist leader Pre Viszla (a man who once fought Obi-wan

to a draw) (Clip #24). Thus, Ahsoka proves to be more than capable of rescuing men from danger, and of fighting dangerous men. In a galaxy in which males do nearly all the fighting (the entire Clone army is male), Ahsoka is nevertheless able to succeed, making her the best female role model in the series.

As if to cement her juxtaposition with the men in the *Star Wars* universe, Ahsoka's journey comes to a heartbreaking end in the finale of the series fifth and final season – at the hands of her male Jedi superiors. By this time, Ahsoka has participated in countless battles. She has been an integral member of both the Jedi Order and the Grand Army of the Republic. However, when she is framed for a terrorist attack on the Jedi Temple, everyone but Anakin is quick to blame her, despite her dedication to the Order. After escaping prison in order to gather evidence to clear her name, Ahsoka is eventually re-captured and brought before the Jedi Council to decide her fate. Interestingly enough, although there are several women on the council (as seen in scenes from the Prequel Trilogy), Ahsoka's accusers are all male, consisting of Mace Windu, Yoda, Plo Koon, Ki-Adi-Mundi, and Obi-wan himself. This seems to highlight Ahsoka's depiction as a feminist character, fighting for justice against a patriarchal society. The Council elects to strip Ahsoka of her status as a Jedi Padawan and banishes her from the order. She is once again imprisoned to await trial by the Republic Senate.

Eventually, Anakin exposes the real culprit to be Bariss Offee, Ahsoka's friend and fellow Padawan (a character who will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter). Ahsoka is once again brought before the male portion of the Council, who

issue a half-hearted apology before inviting her back into the order. Only Plo Koon (who has a special relationship with Ahsoka as he was the Jedi who recruited her as a young child) seems remorseful for his actions, as other Jedi such as Mace Windu attempt to cover for their mistakes, calling Ahsoka's ordeal "A great trial," and stating that it was the will of the Force that she be accused (Clip #25). This scene brings to mind the scene of Ahsoka rescuing Anakin and Obi-wan from the cave. Much like that scene, the male characters here are reluctant to admit their mistake, opting instead to blame the Force for their accusation of an innocent person. Ahsoka, much like the audience, recognizes that the Council is simply fumbling for an explanation for their actions (she actually crosses her arms as Mace Windu is talking, indicating her disapproval of their behavior). Ahsoka refuses to re-enter the Jedi Order and, after some parting words with Anakin, walks away from the Temple. With the series confirmed as ended in March of 2013 (but with a few more story arcs on the way in one form or another), it remains to be seen whether this is the end of Ahsoka's story. Yet it will be a story long remembered in the *Star Wars* canon as the one that introduced us to a female who did not play by the rules of her male superiors; who fought courageously for others, and then had the courage to leave the Jedi Order before becoming even further oppressed by its patriarchy.

Ashley Eckstein (the voice of Ahsoka) has become a role model of sorts herself. A strong believer that girls should be able to enjoy things that are stereotypically considered "boy" things, Eckstein founded a clothing line called *Her Universe*, which makes clothing based on such franchises as *Star Wars, Star Trek,*

and *Doctor Who*. When asked why she took the role of Ahsoka and why Ahsoka resonates so much with young girls, Eckstein stated, "I loved the Disney princess movies growing up, but that's not who I wanted to be. I wanted to be the Jedi. I wanted to play with the boys and use the lightsaber. There are a lot of girls who would prefer to carry around a lightsaber than wear a tiara," (*DIS Unplugged Disney Podcast,* 2011). Eckstein's goal, both through her character and through her clothing line, is to make it societally acceptable for girls to be *Star Wars* fans. Ahsoka provides girls with a perfect entry point into the *Star Wars* universe, a landscape currently still dominated by men. However, at least girls now have a character to emulate; a role model who doesn't sit at the sidelines, who doesn't define herself through her relationship with men.

Of course, just as important as having convincing, charismatic heroes is having convincing, charismatic villains. Luckily, there is now a character that rivals Darth Vader and Boba Fett as one of the greatest villains in the series, and girls finally have a female villain they can love to hate.

ASAJJ VENTRESS

Asajj Ventress, introduced in the very first episode of *The Clone Wars*, is the personal assassin for and apprentice of Count Dooku. She is a formidable opponent for any male Jedi and has fought Anakin and Obi-wan (often at the same time) to a draw. Possibly most miraculously is the fact that her character is in no way over-

sexualized, a character trait that has become commonplace in the *Star Wars* universe, especially with its female villains (Figure 5). Ventress is bald, thin, and has virtually no curves, a stark contrast with many portrayals of females in the series. One could argue that by portraying Ventress, the one female villain in the series, in such a light, it would seem as though the show's creators are stating that the Dark Side of the Force is reserved for ugly people; and that the heroic, handsome members of the Light Side must vanquish this evil.

(Figure 5: Ventress (left) is a much less sexualized female villain than others such as Darth Talon and Githany)

It could also be argued that having one of the principal villains in the series be a woman is damaging, since it paints women in a negative light. This would be a valid argument if Ventress behaved in a stereotypically female manner; if she used her looks or her "feminine wiles" to get the better of her opponents. Instead, Ventress accomplishes her goals by doing what her male counterparts do best: fighting.

Furthermore, Ventress has become one of the most compelling characters in the series, due to a slow but sure change in her character in recent seasons.

Much like Ahsoka, Ventress' character was mishandled at the outset of the series. Ventress begins her time on the show as the apprentice of Count Dooku, who himself is the apprentice of Darth Sidious (who later becomes Emperor Palpatine). As his apprentice, Ventress carries out his orders on Separatist missions across the galaxy. An argument against Ventress as a strong character can be made here, as it seems as though she is subservient to Dooku and therefore is placed into a traditional female gender role. And indeed she spends the better part of three seasons carrying out Dooku's wishes and remaining a fairly non-important character. The audience is given no reason to sympathize with her, as they are with other villains. The reason Darth Vader was so iconic, a character revered as possibly the greatest villain in the history of film, was because he was a tragically sympathetic character. Despite the horrible things he does on screen, the audience knows there is a man behind the mask; a man who has made many mistakes in his life and is apparently beyond redemption; a fact that makes his eventual redemption that more satisfying. Ventress at the outset of the series has none of these qualities.

Her true evolution as a character comes about halfway through the third season. Palpatine, realizing how powerful Ventress has become and worried that Dooku might soon attempt to overthrow his master (the Sith adhere to a strict rule that only two Sith should live at a time; eventually, the apprentice overthrows the master) orders Dooku to kill her. Ventress escapes and returns to her home world of

Dathomir. This is where we meet the Nightsisters; a clan of Force-using witches that rule the planet. Dathomir is a matriarchal society; the Nightsisters oversee villages of males, which are completely subservient to them, performing a variety of duties including fighting their battles, harvesting their food, and it is even alluded that the Nightsisters hand-pick their mates, who have no say in the matter. Here, we do see a tremendous misstep in Ventress' buildup as a sympathetic character. The matriarchal Nightsisters are portrayed very obviously as evil characters. Somehow, the fact that women are in charge of this planet helps add to the perverse atmosphere of this dark, magical world. The Nightsisters are portrayed as something of an abomination; they do not use the Force for good, as do the Jedi, nor do they use it to further their own ambitions, as do the Sith. Rather, they use the Dark Side for witchcraft; they are capable of manipulating the things around them, including people, for whatever use they see fit. Therefore, the first (and possibly only) planet in the galaxy that is dominated by women is portrayed as a cult; it is an affront to what the audience has come to expect, and it is therefore evil.

Ventress' time on Dathomir is thankfully short, and since then she has undergone even more changes. A character that started out as the lapdog of the series' prime male antagonist goes on to seek revenge on the man who betrayed her. She has not succeeded (nor is she likely to, as Dooku is alive at the outset of *Episode III*), but along her journey she has changed from a one-dimensional, evil character to a neutral, multi-layered character. While she has not yet changed sides and joined the Jedi, she also no longer attacks the innocent. For a time, she joined a band of bounty

hunters (including a young Boba Fett), and this led her to take a job hunting the man who replaced her as Dooku's apprentice, which in turn led to her saving the life of one of her greatest enemies: Obi-wan.

The best example of Ventress' evolution to a strong female character comes in the finale of the series' fourth season. Obi-wan Kenobi has been captured by Darth Maul (thought to be long-dead after Obi-wan cut him in half in *Episode I*) and his brother, Savage Oppress (who served as Dooku's new apprentice before he himself was betrayed). As they torture and humiliate Obi-wan, Ventress comes to his aid, and together they are able to fend off the vengeful brothers long enough to escape (Clip #26). A character who has tried to kill Obi-wan countless times in the series, and who in this instance had a perfect opportunity to simply allow him to die, instead rescues one of the series main (male) heroes. Later, Ventress actually helps Ahsoka when she is on the run, agreeing to assist Ahsoka in her quest to clear her name in exchange for immunity for her previous crimes. In requesting this as her payment, it is clear that Ventress has turned her back on her past and desires to be a different person. This is the last we see of Ventress on the series, but when she makes her inevitable reappearance, whether in comics, video games, or even in an upcoming movie, she will undoubtedly do more to solidify herself as *Star Wars'* most popular female anti-hero.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems evident from the previous two examples that the *Clone Wars* writers are determined to undo the damage the films did in their portrayals of women, and for that they should be given credit. Ahsoka and Ventress are only two of the women who populate this series, and many others serve equally important purposes. The second season introduced a female doctor, who was the finest the Republic had to offer. One of the most recent episodes took an established character named Bo-Katan, a member of Death Watch, and made great strides in humanizing her and making her into yet another strong, female character. When Darth Maul takes over as the leader of Death Watch, Bo-Katan leads a rebellion against him and even rescues Obi-wan from execution in order to enlist his help (Clip #27). Interestingly, it seems as though Obi-wan has gone through some changes himself, as he does not show embarrassment at being rescued by a woman, as he has done in the past. Bo-Katan fulfills supervising director Dave Filoni's promise to introduce more and more strong female characters to account for the growing number of female fans.

However, this is not to say that all is well for women in the *Star Wars* universe. For every strong, female character, there are ten strong, male characters. It is still a universe dominated by men and when we are shown women in power (as is the case on Dathomir), they are portrayed as villains. Furthermore, portrayals of women are only one side of the coin. Equally damaging is the portrayal of men. Granted, in a universe with the word "Wars" in its title, we must expect violence to be omnipresent, but the fact of the matter is that in this universe, men are expected to behave violently, and on this front they come through in spades. In fact, in this universe men

are so much better at violence than women that the Republic creates an army of clones to aid them in the war; an all-male army of clones. While the ethics of this will be discussed in the next chapter, the overt sexism is obvious.

Also missing from the gender landscape of *Star Wars* is the presence of even one homosexual character. While many joke that the droid C-3PO is homosexual due to his effeminate voice, constant worrying, and his close relationship with R2-D2, this serves only to propagate an offensive stereotype. The online multiplayer video-game *Star Wars: The Old Republic* recently released an update which allows players to define the sexual orientation of their characters, which would allow these characters to explore same-sex romances online. Prior to this update, players were able to choose their gender, but not their sexual orientation and were able to "flirt" with computer-controlled characters of the opposite sex throughout the game. With this option now available for people of other sexual orientation, this may seem like a step in the right direction. However, the disturbing truth of the matter is that while this is now an option for players who may want to explore alternate sexual orientations in a virtual world, rather than risk coming out into a hostile real-world environment, the game will only allow same-sex flirtation on one planet in the entire galaxy, thereby effectively segregating homosexual players from other players (Hamilton, 2013). Segregating homosexual players will do more harm than good.

The Clone Wars became a stronger and stronger show with each passing episode; many (including myself) affirm that it has corrected a great deal of the mistakes the films had committed. With at least three more *Star Wars* films on the

way from Disney, many will also look to them. Our culture has changed significantly since the first *Star Wars* film debuted in 1977. Hopefully the new films will take this into account and give us a female protagonist as strong as Ahsoka; or perhaps even a gay or lesbian character. Only time will tell.

Colonialism

For a series with the word "Wars" in its very title, it should come as no surprise that themes of war and colonialism are featured prominently in both *Star Wars* trilogies and *The Clone Wars*. In fact, conflict and war are the primary sources of entertainment in the series, and while entire books can be (and have been) written about the inherent problems of the media's portrayal of war as a form of entertainment, this chapter will instead examine how the series handles the more controversial aspects of colonialism; from war itself, to the none-too-subtle allegories to the White Man's Burden, to slavery and its horrors.

Colonialism is a central aspect of this series and indeed any science fiction series that features space travel. In one way or another, these series all deal with the consequences of one race of sentient beings coming to the planet of another. A number of possible situations arise after this first contact: the invading race could be benevolent and aid the natives of the planet, it could remain neutral and simply leave upon the discovery of another sentient species, or it could be hostile and attempt to destroy or enslave the native race. In the Original Trilogy, the invading force fits into the latter category. When the Empire came into power it forced all planets under it to comply with its harsh rules; consequences of rebellion included enslavement or even the destruction of the entire planet itself. The Empire was outwardly racist; it did not elevate aliens to positions of power and oppressed thousands of alien worlds. The audience is in no way meant to sympathize with this form of colonialism, and

therefore the Rebellion becomes that much more of a heroic group in the audience's eyes. In this way, the Original Trilogy told a classic story of the oppressed rising up against their oppressors, with the goal of freedom for all. This is a positive message, but unfortunately it is one that is seen exclusively in these three films; the Prequel Trilogy and even *The Clone Wars* not only embrace colonialism, but their main characters are explicitly colonialists; aiding the Republic by traveling from planet to planet, bringing war to the doorstep of races who would otherwise not have gotten involved. All along the way, these characters and the Republic as a whole are portrayed almost exclusively in a heroic light, giving the audience an overly-positive impression of colonialism and its consequences. This is a considerable problem as the younger and easily influenced *Star Wars* fans will have difficulty separating fiction from reality and are likely to form a bias toward colonialist governments (namely our own), and will blindly accept America's questionable foreign policy as a necessary good instead of debating its morality.

REPUBLIC POLITICS

The *Star Wars* Prequel Trilogy and *The Clone Wars* deal with the rise and fall of the Galactic Republic, an organization comprised of thousands of star systems and led by a Supreme Chancellor. Prior to the start of the Clone Wars, the Republic was protected exclusively by the Jedi Order, the Council of which served as advisors to the Chancellor. When the Separatist threat became too great for the Jedi alone, the

Republic decided to implement the use of clone soldiers to aid in the war. The Republic then sent troops led by Jedi to the far corners of the galaxy, defending Republic worlds and attempting to gain the support of neutral worlds. The Republic, the Jedi, and the clone army are portrayed as the protagonists; they serve the greater good of the galaxy by combating the Separatist threat. The films never address the fact that in the course of the war, the Republic involves neutral systems in their conflict, systems that otherwise would not have been drawn into the horrors of war. In many ways, the Republic is just as damaging as the Empire; in coming to a new planet and attempting to convince its inhabitants to join the Republic, they are forcing these inhabitants into a position where the only option is to accept "aid" and in the process commit to helping fight a war with which they want nothing to do. This dilemma is never made clear in the films, and while it is addressed to a certain degree in *The Clone Wars*, the Republic as a whole is shown as a galactic force for good.

The Original Trilogy took many of its themes and inspiration from World War II. The Prequel Trilogy instead uses a more topical war as a source of inspiration: the War on Terror. When a militant group, the Separatists, accuses a benevolent government of corruption and begins launching attacks on both Republic and neutral planets alike, the Republic steps in, defending its own planets and planets that were previously uninvolved. In many instances, Republic forces remain on these planets, installing military bases and even training the planet's inhabitants to fight for themselves. The parallels to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan are clear; however, in the real world Iraq wants nothing to do with its American "liberators," yet America has

still not withdrawn all of its forces from the country. In the *Star Wars* universe, the inhabitants of liberated planets are happy to have their worlds occupied by the military, sending a message to the audience that as a world superpower, America has an obligation to defend other countries from harm, and these countries will be abundantly grateful for it. This message ignores the truth of the matter, that countries such as this end up oppressed by the American military, and that often the conflict we strive to resolve was caused by us in the first place.

The Clone Wars themselves are glossed over for the most part in the *Star Wars* films, with the beginning of the war shown at the end of *Episode II* and the end occurring in *Episode III*. Therefore the best examples of the series' glorification of colonialism come from the *Clone Wars* animated series. While nearly every episode deals with a war on a planet that is overcome by Separatist forces until the Republic arrives to save the day, the following episodes exemplify the overall positive attitude surrounding war and the involvement of superpowers in the conflicts of others. While *The Clone Wars* has done much to improve the landscape of race and gender in the *Star Wars* universe, its treatment of colonialism is, with perhaps one or two rare exceptions, equally as damaging as the films.

DEFENDERS OF PEACE

An early episode of *The Clone Wars* titled *Defenders of Peace* deals with the consequences of the war coming to a planet inhabited by a pacifistic culture. Anakin,

Ahsoka, fellow Jedi Aayla Secura, and a handful of clone troopers crash-land on this planet. Anakin is gravely injured in the crash and when Ahsoka and Aayla search for help they come upon a primitive race of intelligent aliens called Lurmen. The Lurmen are informed of the fact that a Separatist fleet is in orbit above their planet, that war will soon be upon them, and that they must help the Jedi and clones fight back. The Lurmen leader, Tee Watt Ka, refuses, stating that his people are pacifists. In fact, their aversion to violence is so great that they would rather die than become involved in a conflict. Anakin and Ahsoka do what they can to convince the Lurmen to change their minds, in the process effectively insulting the philosophy of the entire culture (Clip #28).

In this episode we see the Jedi, who are the self-proclaimed peacekeepers of the galaxy, berate a race for their aversion to violence. The Lurmen have a philosophy that, if adopted by other cultures in the galaxy, would effectively end war. This is a hugely optimistic opinion of course, but that does not mean that this type of behavior should be condemned. The Lurmen presented the audience with the first race in all of the *Star Wars* canon who did not want to fight; and they are made to look weak, selfish, and stupid.

This episode also sports the ironic title, *Defenders of Peace*, referring to the aforementioned Jedi peacekeeping philosophy. Yet throughout the majority of the episode the Jedi effectively engage in warmongering to a race that is resolutely against violence. Eventually, Tee Watt Ka is made to look like an irresponsible leader, while his son resolves to help the Jedi defend their village. The episode ends

with the Separatist army defeated at the hands of the Jedi and Lurmen, and Tee Watt Ka gives his grudging thanks. Interestingly, the last shot of the episode raises a potential point of controversy. As Tee Watt Ka offers his thanks to the Jedi, he ponders the implications of what has just happened, asking, "At what cost," as he casts his eyes to the sky and sees three Republic battleships enter the planet's atmosphere (Clip #29). It should be noted here that the purpose of the Separatist attack on the Lurmen was simply to test an experimental new weapon, a weapon Anakin destroyed in the battle. It is therefore unlikely that the Separatists would attack again anytime soon, making a Republic occupation completely unnecessary. Here, the consequences of colonialism are alluded to, leaving the door open for a more controversial episode down the line. However, no such episode was been made; and in fact, while the story of the Jedi helping unprepared people defend themselves is a theme of several more episodes of *The Clone Wars*, each and every one since this episode has portrayed the people of these planets as extremely grateful, not only for the assistance but for the occupation of their homes by the military.

It is evident that *The Clone Wars* portrays an ideal version of America's own foreign policy. The implication of the series is that the Republic is doing good work, helping people who cannot help themselves. Very rarely is any hesitation seen by the inhabitants of the planets the Jedi and clone army occupy, and in some cases they even join in on the violence. A recent storyline involved the invasion of the planet Onderon by the Separatists. Rather than simply allow the Republic to fight their battles for them, the people of Onderon request to be trained by the Jedi and the

clones so that they may defend their planet themselves. Anakin, Ahsoka, and a team of clones oblige this request and spend the next few episodes instructing a previously non-violent race in guerilla warfare, attacking Separatists in small groups, using explosives, and targeting corrupt leaders. It brings to mind one of the more controversial acts of American foreign policy, namely the fact that the United States provided weapons and training to Afghani rebels during the anti-Soviet jihad; rebels that would eventually turn on the United States as al Qaeda. In fact, the storyline is now even more topical due to the controversy surrounding the possibility that the United States is once again siding with al Qaeda, providing weapons and training to Syrian rebels with whom al Qaeda has allied itself (Marsden, 2012). It would be interesting, however unlikely, if a later *Clone Wars* storyline involved Onderon turning on the Republic. It would be a sharp criticism of the fact that teaching violence simply breeds more violence. However, this storyline would likely be too controversial, and the conclusion of the Onderon story as it stands gives America's foreign policy a much needed ego boost.

THE COST OF NEUTRALITY

Another topic that is overlooked in the films but has been touched on in *The Clone Wars* is the issue of neutrality. Until very recently, neutrality was not a word commonly heard in the *Star Wars* universe. After all, the audience is tuning in to see action; and neutrality is simply not all that action-packed. Of course it would make

sense for there to be neutral planets in a galaxy-wide conflict; systems with enough resources to simply not allow Republic or Separatist forces to invade are lucky that they do not need to be drawn into a conflict when less advanced systems have no choice in the matter. One such planet (Watto's home planet Toydaria, in fact) is addressed in the very first episode of *The Clone Wars*, in which Yoda and a small group of clones overpower a droid battalion. This first battle is not to save the lives of innocents. It is not for strategic gain. It is simply to show the Toydarian king that the Republic and the Jedi are powerful; powerful enough that an alliance can benefit Toydaria. And once again the Jedi, who are the self-proclaimed defenders of peace, are shown fighting for virtually no reason aside from the fact that a victory will inevitably lead to more fighting, since Toydaria will become involved in the war should it join the Republic.

While it certainly seemed as though Toydaria was on the way to joining the Republic by the end of the episode, it has not done so as of yet on the show. However, Toydaria is only one of the neutral planets that become embroiled in a war that is not their own. An ongoing storyline since the second season has involved Mandalore, the home planet of Boba and Jango Fett and a once proud warrior race, remaining neutral in spite of their military prowess because, as their leader Duchess Satine states, this is a war in which they do not believe. Despite their best efforts, neither the Republic nor the Separatists are able to convince the Duchess to join their cause. Even though Mandalore was once a world of warriors, they have since lain down their weapons and have become a pacifistic culture. Such a culture should be

commended, for putting an end to violence and refusing to aid in the propagation of violence. Instead, Mandalore is made to look foolish.

A recent episode saw the newly-resurrected Darth Maul and his brother Savage Oppress (working for themselves and not the Republic or Sepearatists) organize an army of criminals and seize Mandalore for themselves. The Duchess is captured and imprisoned and a corrupt Prime Minister replaces her as leader. Whatever small army Mandalore had in order to protect its citizens is swept aside effortlessly by this overwhelming attack. During a failed escape attempt, the Duchess manages to send a transmission to the Jedi Temple, imploring Obi-wan to send help. However, her decision not to join the Republic now shows its repercussions. In spite of all the carnage and devastation on Mandalore, the Republic refuses to send help, with the Jedi stating that Mandalore's neutrality means they cannot receive help from the Republic; not without risking retaliation from the Separatists (Clip #30). Mandalore, one of the only planets brave enough to say no to the Republic, is left to burn for its refusal to participate in a war.

Obi-wan eventually lends his assistance, coming to the Duchess' aid alone. When he arrives on Mandalore he finds a world that is being torn apart by civil war. The terrorist group Death Watch has been split down the middle with half of them in league with Maul, and the other half now fighting for Mandalore's freedom. After a failed rescue attempt of the Duchess, who dies at the hands of Maul, Obi-wan escapes, leaving Mandalore to its war. His final words to Bo-Katan, a former Death Watch member turned freedom fighter, are, "I'm so sorry," before he enters his ship

and leaves Mandalore. The moral of the story is obvious: because Mandalore refused to be colonized, it was unable to receive help when it needed it the most. A world that minimized its military and opted for peace instead of participating in a galaxy-wide war, burns to the ground while the Republic watches. If only they had an enormous military budget, perhaps they could have rebuffed the attackers. If only they had forsaken their beliefs, joined the Republic, and lent its forces to the Clone Wars, they would have been spared the devastation of civil war.

Parallels to the real world are clear. If we assume the Republic represents the United States, then neutral systems represent any nations that do not give the United States aid in war. These nations are either foolish, selfish, or both. *The Clone Wars*, which has otherwise made tremendous progress in making the *Star Wars* universe a more diverse and egalitarian place, needlessly attacks neutral and pacifistic beliefs, leaving viewers with a negative bias towards these ideals and a belief that war is a just and honorable pastime.

TRESSPASS

Of course, as we have seen by examining *The Clone Wars* in previous chapters, not all portrayals of colonialism are positive, and one in particular shows just how damaging it can be. An episode called *Tresspass*, ironically airing right after *Defenders of Peace*, finds Anakin and Obi-wan accompanying a squad of clones as well as the Senator of Pantora and another diplomat named Chairman Cho to one of

Pantora's moons, where a clone security force mysteriously vanished. Assuming it was a Separatist attack, the Jedi and clones investigate, only to find that the attack was actually made by a previously-undiscovered indigenous species called the Talz. The Talz are a primitive but intelligent species, who attacked and killed the clone security force because they correctly believed that these outsiders posed a serious threat to them. The Jedi and Senator Riyo Chuchi come to terms with the Talz, agreeing to leave them alone, since this is their native world and the Republic will respect their wishes. Chairman Cho, however, insists that this moon belongs to the Republic because it orbits the Republic planet of Pantora. He orders his clones to attack the Talz. In the resultant battle, Cho is killed, and Senator Chuchi, now in command, orders a ceasefire and brokers a peace with the Talz. She agrees that she, the Jedi, and the clones will leave the moon and adds that the Republic will now recognize this moon as a sovereign and independent world (Clip #31).

While this story serves as a drastic improvement over its predecessor *Defenders of Peace*, it should be noted that this story takes place in the first season, and since then colonialism has not once been shown in a negative light. Furthermore, it can be argued that while the Republic does indeed leave the Talz and their home world alone, it may not have been for any noble reasons. The moon the Talz occupy is a frozen wasteland. It has no natural resources and no strategic value to the Republic in the war. It is a safe bet that if the moon were of more value to the Republic, it would be much more hesitant to acknowledge its sovereignty.

Since this episode, only one character has spoken out against the actions of the Republic and the Jedi during the war; and it is a villain. In the same story arc that saw Ahsoka turn her back on the Jedi Order, we see the real culprit of the attack on the Jedi Temple, Ahsoka's fellow Padawan Barriss Offee make her case to the Chancellor and the Republic High Court. She proceeds to give one of the more rousing and self-aware speeches given on the show, highlighting the Republic's penchant for needless violence as well as the Jedi's transition from peacekeepers to generals. In many ways it looks as though the series' writers are finally addressing this fact; that the series, whose primary audience is young children, is built on violence propagated by an Order that was founded on peace and harmony; and indeed the speech is meant to sew discontent and mistrust in Anakin, which will later lead to his own betrayal of the Jedi. And in many ways this speech proves effective; except for the fact that it was given by an individual who killed dozens of innocent people, attacked Ahsoka, and later fought Anakin using red-bladed lightsabers (the calling-card of the Sith Order). In spite of its controversial yet accurate description of the Jedi and the Republic as a whole, this speech falls on deaf ears because the series demonizes the speech-giver. Barriss is portrayed as an extremist; someone who is willing to destroy innocent lives in order to get her message across. In other words, anyone who has this controversial belief, that the government can be fallible with regards to its treatment of war, is a terrorist. The speech, instead of changing the audience's mind with regard to the Republic and colonialism, instead only serves as a plot device; as a way for Anakin to begin distrusting the Jedi, which will inevitably

lead to his downfall as he becomes Darth Vader. Thus the series pushes this point even further: anyone who sympathizes with this speech is following the same path as Anakin; the path to the Dark Side. In a rather stunning turnaround, the writers of *The Clone Wars* take a legitimate criticism of the Republic and colonialism and turn it into a radical standpoint; a standpoint held only by terrorists and Sith Lords.

The Original *Star Wars* Trilogy painted a striking picture of an oppressed group rising up against its oppressors; fighting imperialism so that all might be free. The Prequel Trilogy and *The Clone Wars* do the exact opposite, depicting the Republic and the Jedi as the heroic peacekeepers – despite the fact that they only serve to embroil innocent people in their war. In this way, the two halves of the *Star Wars* cinematic canon that have been produced thus far tell drastically different stories. While the Original Trilogy reflected the sentiments of its time; namely the Cold War struggle between a freedom-loving people and a superpower bent on subjugating anyone beneath it, the Prequel Trilogy and *The Clone Wars* reflect current events. In this case the Republic mirrors America as the dominant superpower; and instead of subjugation, this superpower is instead fighting for the freedom of all; yet in the process it draws countless innocents into a war they want no part in. The film trilogy itself glosses over this controversy, opting instead to show the Republic as an infallible good in the galaxy. *The Clone Wars* should be commended for attempting to portray the Republic as fallible; the series alludes to the fact that this conflict is not as black-and-white as the government would lead its

people to believe. In the end, however, the message is the same. In a misguided fight for freedom, the ends justify the means.

Of course, invasion of other lands is only one part of colonialism. What matters even more is what becomes of the inhabitants of those lands that become colonized.

SLAVERY

Despite being a series that is fundamentally geared towards a younger audience, *Star Wars* does not shy away from portraying tragic events. From the destruction of entire planets, to the fall of once-great heroes, the series often delves into dark territory, in spite of its otherwise whimsical and fantastic tone. Among these tragic topics explored by the series is the issue of slavery. Under both the Republic in the Prequel Trilogy and the Empire in the Original Trilogy, slavery was an established institution, either as a legal and commonplace event under the Empire, or as a tragic yet unavoidable problem under the Republic. Whether it is sanctioned by the Empire or fought by the Republic, slavery is always presented to the audience as an evil institution. However, portrayals of slavery vary wildly between the two trilogies and even in *The Clone Wars*. While the Original Trilogy alludes to the horrors of slavery through Chewbacca's backstory, slavery itself is conspicuously absent from the films (unless one counts Chewbacca's willing slavery to Han), and is covered in greater detail in supplemental material such as novels and video games

from the same era. The Prequel Trilogy tackles slavery in a more head-on fashion, making its primary protagonist Anakin Skywalker a former slave. The audience gets to see slavery in full force on Anakin's home planet of Tatooine, but its depiction, as we will see, leaves out much of the horror and hopelessness of slavery, leaving us with a neutered and unrealistic version. Even *The Clone Wars*, a Saturday morning cartoon on the Cartoon Network, tackles slavery with a four-part story arc from its fourth season and unsurprisingly (given what we now know about *The Clone Wars* and its efforts to right the wrongs of its predecessors) delivers the most powerful, horrific, and accurate depiction of slavery seen in the *Star Wars* canon thus far. However, the series overlooks a crucial and monumental detail; one that makes the Republic much more sympathetic to slavery than the writers would lead us to believe.

The remainder of this chapter will examine portrayals of slavery in the Original Trilogy, the Prequel Trilogy, and *The Clone Wars*. Slavery is a tragic but important part of human history, and its depiction should call this to mind. Trivialization or dismissal of this issue, especially on a scale as large as the *Star Wars* universe, can lead to a trivialization of a struggle that affects millions to this day.

As stated previously, the Original Trilogy does not overtly address slavery, and thus there is not much to say on it. Although it is a well-known fact that there is slavery under the Empire, it is not seen in the films, though its effects can certainly be felt when pondering how the Empire can build not one, but two moon-sized space stations in the span of a few years. According to Expanded Universe canon, shortly after the Empire's formation, Imperial Decree A-SL-4557.607.232 was passed, a law

which allowed slavery of non-human species in certain circumstances. Thus, stronger species such as the Wookiees and the Talz (unfortunately colonialism had caught up to them at this point) were enslaved and forced to do grueling manual labor.

Despite this backstory, slavery is barely mentioned in the Original Trilogy; the series has other consequences of colonialism to tackle, and for the most part it portrays colonialism as a problem. Instead, slavery is an issue saved until the Prequel Trilogy, though the anti-colonialist message from the original films is conspicuously absent.

The Prequel trilogy introduces us to slavery with the arrival of its main character, Anakin Skywalker. We meet Anakin after Padme's ship, accompanied by Obi-wan and Qui-gon Jinn, lands on Tatooine in need of emergency repairs. Tatooine is an Outer Rim planet; that is, it is located far from the center of the galaxy, where the Republic Capital of Coruscant resides. The Republic has outlawed slavery, but Tatooine is far away, too far for anyone to enforce this law. As a result, slavery runs rampant, and Anakin and his mother are the property of Watto.

While Padme expresses her disbelief that slavery can still exist in the galaxy, and Anakin states that he will one day return to Tatooine to free all the slaves, one nevertheless gets the impression that, according to the Prequel Trilogy, slavery really is not all that bad (Clip #32). In this clip we see a number of interesting things. Anakin is treated fairly well by Watto. His work is not labor-intensive and takes place entirely indoors, out of the harsh Tatooine suns. Watto allows Anakin to go home early after cleaning off some racks. This brings up another interesting point: Anakin

has a home – and a fairly nice one at that (even Jar Jar comments on this, saying, "This is cozy," upon entering the house). Even though Anakin and his mother are slaves, they have their own home, complete with several rooms, a kitchen (with enough food to feed not only themselves but a group of four complete strangers), and a number of personal possessions. Anakin is even able to build his own droid. Anakin's mother, Shmi, seems to have only one job as a slave, namely the upkeep of her own home. Slavery, at least under Watto, is really not all that bad by this depiction. Slaves can own things, including their own homes, they are not overworked, and they do not want for food. In depicting slavery in this fashion, Lucas undermines a very real and very horrific struggle that many have endured over the course of humanity. Audience members, especially children, may have a difficult time separating myth from reality and come to believe that slavery in the real world was not all that bad. Thankfully, *The Clone Wars* comes to the rescue once again, showing the darkest and most brutally realistic portrayal of slavery the series has seen.

A story arc from *The Clone Wars'* fourth season begins with the Separatists conquering Ahsoka's home world of Shili and selling all the Togruta people into slavery. Anakin, Obi-wan, and Ahsoka attempt to go undercover on the slavers' home world, trying to free the captured slaves. Unfortunately, they are discovered; and rather than being killed, Anakin is forced to personally serve the planet's queen, Ahsoka is imprisoned, and Obi-wan is forced to toil away with the rest of the slaves.

They are prevented from using their Jedi abilities to escape with the threat of violence on the other slaves.

Obi-wan's time as a slave serves as a stark contrast to the young Anakin's. These slaves do not have their own homes or possessions. They are overseen by vicious slave-drivers who take every opportunity to whip their slaves into submission. There is no rest, no happiness, no hope of rescue. The scenes that portray slavery here are some of the most poignant and darkest scenes ever committed to screen by Lucasfilm (Clip #33). This is the only time in *Star Wars* visual media that slavery is depicted with some semblance of accuracy, and it serves to show the audience just how much of a tragedy it is.

This story arc is resolved as Obi-wan, Anakin, and Ahsoka ultimately devise an escape plan that, much to the satisfaction of the audience, ends with a spear through the heart of the head slave-master. With the Torgruta people liberated, the galaxy (or at least the Core Worlds, as the Outer Rim is beyond the help of the Republic) seems to once more be free from slavery. However, this is sadly not the case, as the Republic itself is guilty of the enslavement of millions, perhaps billions, of sentient individuals, and is forcing them to engage in war. These slaves comprise, of course, the clone army.

When the clone army was introduced in *Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, audiences wondered exactly what distinguished these clones from the droid armies of the Separatists. They were bred in a cloning facility, their aging process was accelerated and their brain development was manipulated, and they seemed to follow

all orders without question. It seemed as though each one was an exact copy of the other and there was no room for autonomy. *The Clone Wars* reveals that this is not the case, as it places the spotlight on a number of clone characters; and while they are genetically identical, these clones vary wildly as far as personality traits, as evidenced by their attitudes, their actions, and even by the ways they distinguish themselves from one another through personalization of their armor, their hairstyles, and their body art such as tattoos (Figure #5). Suddenly, characters that were simply meant to fill in the background in the Prequel Trilogy are placed front and center, and the fact that they are not simply mindless droids is highlighted. Captain Rex, Anakin's second-in-command reflects Anakin's own impulsiveness and desire to be right in the action, while Commander Cody, Obi-wan's second-in-command is more stoic and observant. Hard Case obsesses over rules and regulations, while Heavy simply loves to fight. We are even introduced to a clone named Boyle who, at the outset of his storyline is for all intents and purposes a racist, consistently calling the Twi'leks the Republic is aiding "tail-heads." All this is meant to establish these clones as actual characters, not simply as tools of the Republic, in an effort to make the audience care about them. They are successful in this effort, as many of the clone characters are some of the best on the series. However, this makes it all the more tragic when the audience realizes that the fate of nearly every clone is to die on the battlefield in a war in which they may not even believe.

(Figure 5: Clones Rex, Fives, Wollfe, and Cody. This picture serves to illustrate how *The Clone Wars* highlights the individuality of each clone trooper, indicating their ability to think independently)

The clones were bred on a planet called Kamino, home to a race of expert cloners. In *Episode II*, Obi-wan travels to Kamino to find that an order of clones was placed on behalf of the Republic under mysterious circumstances. While touring the facility, Obi-wan learns why clones are superior to droids and about their various genetic modifications (Clip #34). What is shocking about this clip is the fact that Obi-wan accepts these facts nonchalantly, indicating he is not bothered by the fact that these sentient human beings are being forced to obey orders and to put their lives on the line, because of their very genetic code. Obi-wan and the rest of the Jedi for that matter, the supposed keepers of peace and freedom in the galaxy, eventually choose to use this clone army to fight the Separatists. Throughout the film, there is no debate on the ethics of the creation of clones. The only debate comes from whether the Republic should have an army at all, indicating that should the Senate vote to create an army, then the use of clones is a foregone conclusion.

In this same clip, Obi-wan is told that clones can think creatively, which gives them a huge advantage over droids. However, it is this very statement that makes the use of clones so abhorrent. The implication is that although clones are forced to obey orders, they can nevertheless think independently; they are not simply

organic robots, but they are self-aware and intelligent. This statement, however, is not addressed for the duration of the film or the next, and clones essentially serve the same purpose to the Republic as battle droids do to the Separatists. However, *The Clone Wars* brings this statement to the forefront, establishing a number of clones as recurring characters, and giving each his own unique look and personality. While this serves as a stark contrast to the portrayal of clones in the films, it is a welcome contrast – one that allows the audience to realize that the war has consequences; that it is not simply a war of machines destroying machines, but a war in which real people are dying.

The Clone Wars does an excellent job of making the audience feel for these characters. We are heartbroken when Heavy must manually detonate a bomb inside a Separatist-occupied outpost, sacrificing himself so that his brothers may escape. One of the darker story arcs of the fourth season saw clones firing upon fellow clones after a corrupt Jedi general informs them that the enemy is wearing the armor of their fallen brothers. One of the most recent story arcs introduced us to Gregor, a former Republic Commando with amnesia, who once again dons his armor to fight against insurmountable odds, allowing R2-D2 to escape the Separatists with crucial information. However, despite the many emotional episodes involving clones, one fact remains true: the clones are loyal to the Republic and to the war, in spite of the fact that they had no choice but to participate.

This is not to say that the series has not explored the controversial aspects of the clone army, but it has done so with less-than-stellar results. The first time we meet

a disobedient clone is in the first season, in an episode called *The Hidden Enemy*. In this episode, a group of clones is ambushed by Separatist droids, leading Captain Rex and Commander Cody to believe that there is a traitor in their midst. Eventually it is revealed that the traitor is a fellow clone by the name of Slick. Slick explains his actions by stating that the rest of the clones blindly follow orders for nothing. He was promised something the other clones wouldn't understand: freedom (Clip #35). This scene, much like Bariss Offee's speech described earlier in the chapter, shows a character making a legitimate complaint against the Republic – and being made to look like a villain in the process. This clone desired freedom, but betrayed his fellow clones in order to attain it. The moral here is that any clone that desires freedom is clearly corrupt and dangerous. Freedom is not for clones; it is for others and they should not desire it.

This issue is raised once more in the series' second season, this time with more interesting results. The episode, titled *The Deserter* finds Captain Rex gravely injured in battle. His men take him to a nearby farm to recover. Rex awakes to find that the owner of the farm is, in fact, a clone. What follows is a series of discussions between Rex and the clone deserter, named Cut Lawquane, compiled together in the following clip (Clip #36). Lawquane brings up a number of valid points, including the fact that he did not choose to kill for a living. That choice was made for him, a point that Rex does not contest, nor does he accept it as a valid argument. Rex argues that Lawquane swore an oath to serve the Republic and insists that he is involved in the war by personal choice. It is revealed that Lawquane suffered a tremendous trauma

early on in the war, namely the murder of his entire squadron before his eyes. This trauma led him to desert the army, find a quiet life, and start a family. This leads to an interesting observation: although Rex and Lawquane are genetically identical, one fervently believes that he is making the right decision in fighting for the Republic, while the other does not see the point in fighting a war in which he does not believe. Obviously, nature and nurture are at odds here, with the trauma Lawquane endured serving as the impetus he needed to abandon the war. Perhaps if Rex, or any clone for that matter, endured a similar trauma, they too would consider leaving the army. Lawquane highlights the fact that clones are much more autonomous than the Republic or the Jedi give them credit for. Here, a clone made a decision not to fight; and yet every day thousands of clones are bred with the choice to fight already made for them. Rex decides not to turn Lawquane in to the authorities at the end of the episode, leaving him in peace with his family. This too highlights the same point: if Rex mindlessly obeyed every order given him, something the Kaminoans guaranteed Obi-wan that clones would do, then he would have followed protocol and had the deserter arrested. Lawquane's argument seems to have swayed Rex to some degree, as he makes the personal decision to keep Lawquane out of trouble. Rex's ultimate fate is something yet to be determined. His absence from *Episode III* has indicated to many that he likely dies during the war. However, the same was said of Ahsoka, but her departure from the Jedi Order leaves room open for her to have survived. Perhaps down the line, Lawquane's philosophy will affect Rex to a greater degree, leading to his abandoning the army. This would certainly spark a greater debate on the ethics of

breeding slaves to serve as soldiers. Unfortunately with the series at an end, it seems unlikely that Rex will achieve this resolution, and *The Clone Wars* as a whole fails to get their anti-slavery message across.

It seems as though the Republic and the Jedi are willfully ignorant of the fact that they are sending slaves to their almost certain deaths by the millions. They acknowledge that clones are unique and even respect them for their sacrifices. A scene from the series' fifth season even shows a war memorial dedicated to all the clones who gave their lives in the first battle of the Clone Wars. How then can they endorse the use of clones as little more than weapons? In many ways it seems as though the philosophy of the Republic with regard to clones is similar to the philosophy of the military: you have a chance to serve your country and you should be honored to give your life. And much like the soldiers in the propaganda for the military that we see every day in the media, these clones seem for the most part to be more than happy to do so. Their choice doesn't matter because they believe they are serving the greater good, blindly accepting what is handed down to them from their superiors. Lawquane showed that there is hope for clones to break out of this life of forced killing. Unfortunately that message is muted by characters such as Rex, who blindly accepts his lot in life and subsequently comes across as the most heroic clone in the series, or Slick, who chooses not to accept his life and instead becomes a villain. At the end of it all, *The Clone Wars* is a powerful series, one that corrects many of the mistakes of the films and is a tremendous influence on its audience. Unfortunately, the clone army proves to be its great weakness. Whether by choice or

because of disapproval from Lucas and other people in positions of power at Lucasfilm, the series creators abandoned a controversial storyline in favor of blatant propaganda.

Conclusion

In October of 2012, the entertainment world was rocked by the news that Disney had purchased Lucasfilm from George Lucas for over four billion dollars. They not only promised a new *Star Wars* trilogy, but made the bold claim that the first film, *Star Wars: Episode VII* would be released by 2015 under the direction of acclaimed science fiction director J.J. Abrams. In addition, Disney plans to release films in addition to this core trilogy, centering on individual characters. Films with Han Solo, Yoda, and Boba Fett as the central character have been discussed, as well as films taking place hundreds or even thousands of years before the Original Trilogy. Work has once again started on bringing the long-tabled live-action *Star Wars* television show to life, and a new animated *Star Wars* series is also in development from the creators of the acclaimed *The Clone Wars* series, which has now come to an end. In short, being a *Star Wars* fan has not been this exciting since before the release of *Episode I.*

However, unlike *Episode I*, expectations are higher this time. *Episode I* and the other two films of the Prequel Trilogy introduced us to some grotesque racial and ethnic stereotypes such as Jar Jar Binks and Watto; and rather than give us a love story we can all root for, it gave us Anakin, an emotionally abusive man, and Padme, a woman who defines herself solely through her relationship with him; to the point where the end of their relationship brings about her death. These films also introduced us to the Clone Wars, a galaxy-wide conflict that was brought to life in an animated

children's show; and while the show did in fact improve on the films by depicting women and aliens in a much more positive light, it is nevertheless a series centered on an army of genetically engineered slaves fighting for a colonialist government. In many ways it acts as propaganda for the United States government, stating that any action the government takes in other countries, whether it is the occupation of an entire region or the training of insurgents, is done with nothing but noble intentions.

The Original Trilogy is fraught with its own problems as well. A female character who is introduced by breaking from all gender stereotypes: using weapons, talking back to the men, and taking a leadership position over an all-male Rebel force, is made to look more traditionally feminine as the series wears on, becoming afraid of vermin and eventually is put in a gold bikini to become to this day one of the most iconic images of male fantasy. An alien character is living in voluntary slavery, undermining the fact that his own people were enslaved against their will by the Empire. All of this serves to show that the *Star Wars* universe, one of the most widely recognized and well-beloved franchises in the history of film, is plagued by racial insensitivity, gender inequality, and colonialist propaganda.

However, with a potential *Star Wars* Renaissance on the horizon thanks to Disney, and with the improvements already set in motion by the brilliant minds behind *The Clone Wars*, fans have reason to hope once more. Disney has an excellent track record when it comes to the films released by its subsidiary studios. Pixar continues to be on the cutting edge of animation and its most recent effort, *Brave*, has introduced audiences around the world to a fantastic feminist character in Merida, the

princess who rejects traditional female roles. Marvel's *The Avengers* gave us a man of color as the leader of the most powerful superheroes in the world, as well as two very strong female characters in Black Widow and Maria Hill. We can only hope that Disney continues this trend with the *Star Wars* franchise and introduce us to more characters like Ahsoka. Or perhaps the new films will ask the difficult questions that have been avoided or undermined in the past, such as the ethics of the clone army, or of colonialism itself. With George Lucas out of the picture and with Lucasfilm now run by a woman, Kathleen Kennedy, fans are once again allowed to hope, not only for good films, but for films that leave racism, sexism, stereotypes, and colonialism where they belong: in the past.

The purpose of this thesis was to bring to light aspects of the *Star Wars* series that many viewers overlook; however, when ignored, these aspects become harmful. A child watching *Star Wars* for the first time may not notice that Watto is a flagrantly offensive Jewish stereotype; however, stereotypes have a way of working their way into our minds, and from there into our reality. A girl watching these films may decide that adventuring is for men – that the role of women is instead simply to make men happy. Men will receive this message as well, and may get the impression that treating women the way Anakin treats Padme is acceptable behavior. These stereotypes are, of course, not unique to *Star Wars*. They pervade our culture; they are nearly inescapable. The reason I have singled out *Star Wars* is not simply because I am a fan, but because as the multimedia juggernaut that it is, it has the audience – and therefore the potential – to strike a tremendous blow for racial and gender

equality. This potential has thus far been squandered. Yet with creative minds such as those behind *The Clone Wars* and new films on the way, the potential is once again there. Lucasfilm has a responsibility to its audience. Any series with as wide a viewership has the same responsibility. As a fan, I look forward to seeing if *Star Wars* can rise above the stagnant, backward media all around us, buck the stereotypes, and once more supply us with a story of hope from a galaxy far, far away.

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