

# Tracing the Evolving Nexus of Race, Species, and Otherness in the Star Wars Film Franchise.

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## Tracing the Evolving Nexus of Race, Species, and "Otherness" in the Star Wars Film Franchise



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### Abstract:

The Star Wars film franchise, due to its financial success, longevity, and prominence in popular culture, serves as an excellent media artifact for examining which ideas are popular and considered socially acceptable over a course of time. With Star Wars gaining its newest addition recently with the

release of Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens, and with more films scheduled to be added to the series over the next several years, the question must be raised: how have ideals on race and “otherness” manifested themselves throughout the seven canonical films of the Star Wars series, and how have changing social attitudes on those issues been reflected over the progression of the films of the Star Wars saga?

To answer this question, this thesis will examine both the main and ancillary characters in the seven canonical Star Wars films as well as the narratives in those films that carry statements or implications regarding the “other.” It will focus on characters, plot devices and cinematographic techniques which categorize people or things into the dichotomies of good or evil, beautiful or ugly, and familiar or “other,” and how those fall in line with dominant cultural ideals around the release of each film. The primary lenses through which these ideals are examined are those of race and racial stereotyping, with resulting statements on gender, sexuality or geopolitics also being examined.

This thesis will show an evolution and discernable trajectory for how issues of race, ethnicity, and other forms of “otherness” are treated throughout the Star Wars series. It will show that quintessential elements of the Star Wars universe that have to do with race or “otherness” change over time based on critical reception of films or contemporary social movements, with some films being more problematic and some, such as The Force Awakens, being more progressive than others in this regard, and it will show how such a long-enduring film series must keep a delicate balance in the complex process of maintaining faithfulness to essential foundations of the Star Wars universe while simultaneously building upon it, especially when those narratives and foundations are rooted in paradigms that are biased.

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