

CHAPTER III

EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Moving to the extrinsic approach, this approach examines aspects outside the literary text. Referring to Wellek & Warren (1984), extrinsic studies examine the relationship between literary works and external conditions, such as author biography, society, and cultural values. In this section of the study, extrinsic elements draw on the relevant theoretical concepts and social context related to these *The American Society of Magical Negroes*, with the aim of understanding the film's broader implications for society.

3.1 The History of Slavery and Racism in United States

One of the most deeply rooted social issues in the history of the United States is racism. It originated in colonial times and persists to this day. Patterns of domination, discrimination, and resistance continue to be shown in relations between Black and White groups. These actions are in response to the country's economic, political, and social developments.

The origins of slavery in the United States did not emerge suddenly, rather, it has a history that evolved from practices already existing in other parts of the world. Slavery in the United States began with the European colonization of the Americas. European colonies in the Americas began to depend on commodities such as cotton, sugar, and tobacco, which increased in demand. From this state of dependence, the forced migration of millions of Africans to the Americas, known as the Transatlantic Slave Trade, occurred (Squicciarini et al., 2024). However, what

distinguished American slavery from previous forms was the direct association of slave status with race. As Morgan (2005) states, in America, being 'Black' equated to being a slave, while being 'White' meant being free and powerful. From this occurrence, the idea that Africans were "inferior" or "less human" began to emerge, and elements of racism in this area began to be considered normal and justified. These ideas, which were not biological facts, then became a form of social construction deliberately created with the aim of justifying economic exploitation (Morgan, 2005).

Slavery was officially abolished through the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) and the 13th Amendment (1865), but this did not mean the disappearance of racism and the attainment of freedom for Black people. Jim Crow laws were enacted in Southern states after Reconstruction. This segregated public life based on race. Stern (2021) reinforces this by stating that Jim Crow laws then spread rapidly after the Supreme Court upheld these laws, established their constitutional basis, resulting in American society becoming even more segregated than before.

In the mid-20th century, resistance against this oppressive system began to emerge through the Civil Rights Movement. This post-World War II civil rights movement was strengthened by the emergence of figures whose names we often hear when discussing racism, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X. This movement successfully pushed for the approval of landmark laws such as the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), which forbidden bias based on race (Mawarni et al., 2023). But in reality, social prejudice

and structures of racial inequality persist, even though Black people have achieved success in their efforts to change the law.

Racism remains rooted in slavery and segregation in American society. Despite significant legal and social reforms, racial hierarchies did not disappear simply with the abolition of slavery and the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Rather, racism has permeated social, economic, and cultural dimensions. According to Winant (2006), race no longer served as a means of determining life opportunities, moreover society became “colorblind” after World War II. The dynamics of racism have not disappeared, but continue to transform and operate at the micro level of everyday interactions, as well as the macro level, engaging broader political and economic institutions. This made racism increasingly entrenched in the structures and practices of American life.

In today's modern era, racism remains a real threat to Black people in various aspects of life. In education, a report by Scott-Clayton & Li (2016) found that Black students are underrepresented in higher education. Black students also carry more debt, which is also difficult to repay even after graduation (Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016). Economically, Brookings reports that since the 1960s, there has been a significant, and largely unchanged, gap between the average wealth of Black and White families. The average wealth of a White family is around \$188,200, compared to the average wealth of a Black family of \$24,100 (Brookings, 2024). In the justice system, according to the Washington Post Fatal Force Database, Black people are more than twice as likely as white people to be fatally shot by police (Washington Post, 2022). A 2024 FBI report added that there were

11,679 hate crime incidents, 53% of which were racially motivated, and the largest category was anti-Black incidents with 3,004 cases (Aai, 2025). Although the overall crime rate in the US declined in 2024, violent crimes fell by 4.5% and homicides by nearly 15%, the number of hate crimes remained high (AP News, 2025; Reuters, 2025).

Furthermore, experiences of discrimination remain a part of everyday life. Data from the Pew Research Survey (2024) explains that in terms of experiences of racial discrimination, 13% of Black people reported that they "often" experienced racial discrimination and 62% said they "sometimes" experienced racial discrimination. Therefore, this data reports that 75% of Black people still report experiencing racial discrimination. Furthermore, data from Gallup (2025), 83% of Black people believe that racism against them is still widespread, in contrast, only 61% of white people think so. This gap in perceptions between the white majority and Black people who experience racism directly highlights the differences in understanding between different racial groups regarding the extent to which racism is still perceived by them in contemporary society.

Therefore, despite important legal and social progress since the old era, racism remains a deeply rooted reality in modern American society. This phenomenon is why racial hierarchy has emerged as an important analytical framework for examining racial issues relevant to the topic of this study.

3.2 Systemic Racism

In contemporary studies of racism, one of the most influential theoretical frameworks is the concept of systemic racism, developed by Joe R. Feagin. Feagin (2006:2) states that racism is more than just individual bigotry and scattered episodes of discrimination. We often encounter this racism in society because it already embedded in social practices, everyday actions, and key institutions, making it systemic.

Social institutions have been infused with racial stereotypes, ideas, images, emotions, tendencies, and practices whose true aim is to maintain and legitimize the framework that Whites remain dominant over Blacks, even since the founding of the United States (Feagin, 2006). In other words, this system is the result of a conscious plan by the white ruling class since the 17th and 18th centuries, which has been maintained to the present day. This explains why racial inequality in America cannot be separated from the historical foundations and social institutions that support it.

3.2.1 Racial Hierarchy

Feagin describes the racial hierarchy in the United States as a highly asymmetrical power relationship. Whites then used the structural capacities possessed by them to control, dominate, and exploit the lives of non-Europeans, particularly Black people. Thus, there was a clear power gap between White dominance and Black people. This domination by Whites enabled them to gain advantages for themselves, such as appropriating land, labor, and even the lives of non-Europeans (Feagin, 2006:21). Within this context, the operation of systemic

racism is seen in the repeated and coercive practices of power. Whites also continually assert their collective interests over Black people both individually and collectively. This is explained by Feagin (2006), who emphasizes that systemic racism involves the repeated coercive treatment of Black Americans by Whites. This racial inequality is then considered as a condition which continually reproduced structurally by the society, not just a normal and natural occurrence.

Feagin emphasizes that social alienation is one of the most primary impacts of racial hierarchy. Oppressed groups are not only materially exploited but also separated and distanced from their oppressors and from control over their own lives. In Feagin's words, systemic racism "at its core involves separating, distancing, and alienating social relationships." As a result, Black people and other racial groups can lose their substantial control over their lives and livelihoods, including control over their bodies, their labor, and their ability to make important life decisions (Feagin, 2006: 21). This hierarchical relationship results in a situation where marginalized groups are forced to go against their own collective interests in order to conform to the interests and convenience of the dominant group.

Racial hierarchy is maintained through what Du Bois and Feagin reiterate, called the public and psychological wages of whiteness, namely the non-material privileges of superiority, social status, and symbolic recognition that place white people as the dominant group. This privilege stabilizes the racial hierarchy because even working-class whites continue to benefit from the socially invented racial privilege reserved for white Americans (Feagin, 2006:22). The system remains

exists regardless of the economic and moral shortcomings it brings to some of them.

Ultimately, according to Feagin, racism in the United States can be understood as a complex relational system, where the groups of races are in a position where the structure is not merely the same and contrasting between each other. This system actively separates and alienates those defined as the group of people with the 'superior race' from those described as the 'inferior race', while simultaneously limiting the ability of oppressed groups to develop their full human potential (Feagin, 2006:23). Thus, racial hierarchy is not simply an individual stance, but an established social order that continues to recreate inequalities of power, privilege, and alienation in everyday life.

3.2.2 The White Racial Frame

In the relation of racial hierarchy, Joe R. Feagin asserts that unequal positions between racial groups do not arise naturally, but are instead produced and maintained through a dominant ideological framework he calls the white racial frame. Feagin (2006:25) defines the white racial frame as an organized set of racist ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and an inclination to discriminate. As Feagin emphasizes, this white racial framework is embedded in a pre-established social structure and is thus consumed in a way that makes it a collective interpretive framework. Additionally, this framework is not just an individual's way of thinking about racial framework, but is expressed through repeated practices of discrimination, both consciously and unconsciously.

The framework is the ideological basis of racial hierarchy. Understood as a broad conceptual framework that functions both to interpret social reality and actively shapes what is considered legitimate and normal in everyday judgements and actions. According to Feagin (206:26), individuals usually prefer to ignore the reality that occurs rather than challenge the ideas formed from this framework, especially when there is a contradiction between social reality and this white racial framework.

In the concept of the White Racial Frame, Feagin explains that it consists of interrelated elements, including racial stereotypes, specific visual representations, emotional responses such as fear and suspicion, and tendencies to engage in discriminatory acts. These elements work together to maintain the dominance of white groups within the racial hierarchy. According to Feagin, the White Racial Frame still operates today by normalizing racial inequality and presenting structural injustice as normal or as a result of the weaknesses of groups in lower social positions. This framework also creates a positive image of white groups as moral and as upholding justice, making their dominance seem legitimate and appropriate. Conversely, experiences of discrimination and injustice experienced by Black people are often ignored or inadequately acknowledged.

3.3 Magical Negroes Trope in American Film

In popular American films, one racial stereotype that often comes under scrutiny is the “Magical Negro”. According to Hughey (2009:544), this character

is depicted as an uneducated, lower-class Black person possessing special magic or spiritual powers. This magic is used specifically to rescue failed or lost White characters. This representation influences the symbolic experience of racial issues, particularly about authentic White people, even if they don't directly experience them. Thus, rather than merely serving as entertainment or as a story complement, this trope actually plays a role in perpetuating societal views of racial relations in society.

Hughey (2009:567) also argues that although "Magic Negro" characters often depicted with noble qualities such as wisdom and self-sacrifice, they are still placed in subordinate positions. This depiction implicitly supports structures of white supremacy by portraying white people as entities always deserving of protection or salvation. At the same time, positive depictions of Black people are only acceptable if they serve White interests. This suggests that the Magical Negro trope ultimately reproduces an ideology that places Black people in a subordinate position, thus maintaining the racial hierarchy in American popular culture.