

Madagascar is a computer animated comedy film produced by DreamWorks. It was directed by Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath. ¹Written by Mark Burton, Billy Frolick, Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath. It is a story about zoo animals who live a relatively comfortable life at New York's Central Park Zoo.

Madagascar was released in May 2005 and was a commercial success at the box office. It grossed 556 million worldwide. ²

Madagascar has become a franchise with two more films in the series and many spin-offs, the most prominent one being: Penguins of Madagascar. *Madagascar 2: Escape to Africa* was released in 2008 and was an even bigger success than the first film grossing 603 million dollars worldwide.

³It grew in star power with the addition of Willow Smith, Sacha Baron Cohen, Cedric the Entertainer, Bernie Mac, Sherri Shepherd, Alec Baldwin and Will.i.am to name a few. *Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted* released in 2012 was the largest commercial success at 746 million dollars.⁴ Stars grew to include among others Jessica Chastain and Frances McDormand.

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar_\(2005_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar_(2005_film))

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar_\(2005_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar_(2005_film))

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar_\(2005_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar_(2005_film))

⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar_\(2005_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madagascar_(2005_film))

The four main characters of the movie are Alex the lion voiced by Ben Stiller, Marty the zebra voiced by Chris Rock, Gloria the hippopotamus, voiced by Jada Pinkett-Smith and Melman the giraffe, voiced by David Schwimmer. Supporting cast include a waddle of penguins who are always trying to escape the zoo, and later in the film, a pack of lemurs, with at their head King Julien and his entourage.

The movie starts when it's Marty's 10th birthday and he gets in a self-reflective mode about what lies beyond zoo gates. He dreams about life in the wild which he assumes should be better. He wonders if he is black with "white stripes, or white, with black stripes." After an evasion attempt by him and a series of unfortunate events, the animals find themselves on a boat in direction of a Kenyan wild-life reserve, however, they get shipwrecked and find themselves on the island of Madagascar.

From Madagascar, they learn to survive not only the wild but Alex the lion's appetite for steak targeting his best friend Marty for prey. Alex manages to scare off a pack of Fossa. Animals native to Madagascar who prey on lemurs. The lemurs on the island are grateful, their king, King Julien decides to befriend the New Yorkers.

While in the wild, the animals witness the relationship between prey and target, they understand it can be a very scary place and long to return to the relative calm of their zoo. The penguins show up with a boat and all eventually return to New York City.

Even though most of the main cast of animals are native to Africa, Madagascar racializes the animals, first by casting. Alex the lion and Melman the giraffe are racialized white. Marty the zebra and Gloria the hippopotamus are racialized black. This analysis will study the ways in which Marty is assigned blackness beyond casting.

First by appearance: When his friends sing him his birthday song: There is a line: “You look like a monkey and smell one too.” Indeed, Marty’s face looks like it could be a chimpanzee’s face on a Zebra’s body. Though other characters have pronounced noses, his is short and perpetually flared. His and Gloria’s noses have additional circles to place emphasis on their flare. His hair mimics a ‘high top’ a haircut popular in rap culture in the late eighty’s, early ninety’s. His teeth are protruding, un-aligned with gaps, bringing to mind the reality that dental health is not always financially or readily accessible to lower income black people.

By behavior: Marty is anti-establishment. He understands the gates of the zoo as barriers and wants to be free. He wants to escape to the wild. His native habitat being Africa. It’s easy to relate him as being African. His continuous longing for another reality is relatable to the reality of African Americans longing to acquaint themselves with Africa, the motherland. Chris Rock does nothing to diminish his African-American accent and freely uses African-American vernacular English throughout the movie.

If not for his friend’s Alex the lion’s will to eat him, once in the wild, Marty thrives.

He befriends dolphins in the water, whom he skies on to reach the island.

He builds a cabin on Madagascar with a retractable roof top to view the stars.

He makes cocktails with sea water.

He, unlike the other animals is never looking for ‘the people’ or authority.

Once, when Alex is under the influence of his appetite and wakes from his hunger induced trance with Marty’s thigh in his mouth, he pretends he is counting Marty’s stripes and states: “27, 28, 29 black stripes to 27 white stripes, I guess you’re black with white stripes.”

Madagascar is a comedy targeted at children between the ages of 7 and anyone above who likes a good comic animation project. Still, in study, the physical depiction of Marty can be seen as reinforcing a harmful racial stereotype.

The inter racial friendship between Alex and Marty brings to mind the article: *Psych’s Comedic Take of Black-White Friendship* (Thornton, 2011) where even though the tale is dependent on Marty’s self-interrogation and quest for freedom, it centers Alex the Lion. It even makes Marty’s quest for freedom a bad thing by prioritizing friendship over freedom.

REFERENCES TO PICTURES OF DIRECTORS AND ACTORS

(Not in order of Appearance)

- Eric Darnell

""[[File:Eric_Darnell.jpg|thumb|400px]]Eric Darnell""

- Tom McGrath

Festival de Cannes 2021

- Chris Rock

File:Chris Rock WE 2012 Shankbone.JPG Created: 9 May 2012

- David Schwimmer

<https://lookingglasstheatre.org/people/david-schwimmer/>

- JadaPinkett-Smith

<https://deadline.com/2021/08/african-queens-hybrid-docuseries-jada-pinkett-smith-netflix-cleopatra-njinga-1234822021/>

- Ben Stiller

Ben Stiller promoting Zoolander 2. Photograph: Rob Griffith/AP

- Willow Smith

Photo: Getty Images

- Sacha Baron Cohen

Creator: Jim Spellman | Credit: WireImage

Copyright: 2011 Jim Spellman

- Cedric The Entertainer

Photo: Getty Images

- Sherri Shepard

<https://motherofcolor.com/candid-crazy-cool-the-views-of-tvs-sherri-shepherd/>

- Will I Am

Photo: Charley Gallay/Getty Images for NAACP

- Alec Baldwin

By Gage Skidmore.jpg Created: 21 July 2016

- Frances McDormand

Creator: Photographer: Alison Cohen Rosa Copyright: Copyright: Alison Cohen Rosa

- Jessica Chastain

Creator: Cindy Ord | Credit: Getty Images Copyright: 2012 Getty Images