

We've all know the story of Tarzan: a classic tale of a boy who was raised by gorillas in the African jungle. However, if you look closer at this sweet story, you'll find traits anything but sweet. The history of *Tarzan* is rather dark, filled with warped racial injustices and dialogue. *The Legend of Tarzan* decided to remove itself from the racial issues of it's past 200 films and make something for a more contemporary time period. With added detail and a major tweak to the story line, *The Legend of Tarzan*--released in 2016--is yet another movie that tries to incorporate a more modern twist on a colonial story. When looking at the bigger picture, their attempts ultimately fail. *The Legend of Tarzan* is just another White Savior film on the list of contemporary movies that "try" not to be. When viewing *The Legend of Tarzan* through the White Savior lens, you can clearly see the characteristics are not only there, but are completely transparent.

A great example of the effort put forth by TLOT (*The Legend of Tarzan*) to make the movie more diverse comes in the character of George Washington Williams--played by Samuel L. Jackson. Jackson's character plays an African American diplomat whose goal is to try and expose the Congolese Slave Trade. Jackson's character is ultimately there to act as Tarzan's partner and is caught saving him more than once during the film. The character of George Washington Williams is based off the real-life George Washington Williams who was an American Civil War soldier and politician. Jackson's character was a brilliant man with a genuine concern for the wellbeing of the Congo people. He was the one to convince Tarzan to go to Congo with him, however the movie portrayed him as more of a "sidekick" than an equal to Tarzan. This portrayal ultimately gave Tarzan indirect power--and Williams wasn't the only one. By the end of the movie, the people of Congo and the Mangani apes all look at Tarzan as a

leader. Tarzan has been away from Africa for over eight years, yet shortly after stepping foot on land he retakes his place as a “leader” among many.

Another key characteristic that TLOT encompasses is that Tarzan’s goals are self-serving. From the beginning it is clear what each character’s main goal is. George Washington Williams’ goal is to exploit the Congo Slave Trade, Leon Rom is a Belgium Soldier who--by order of King Leopold II of Belgium--is to secure the diamonds of Opar, and Tarzan’s goal is to rescue Jane. While these goals intertwine throughout the movie, it is apparent that Williams and Rom’s goals are to ultimately benefit someone else, while Tarzan’s goal is definitely more personal and selfish. The film tries to add depth by having Tarzan spend the majority of the movie helping Williams achieve his goal and making sure Rom doesn’t. However, at the end of the day Tarzan cares for one thing and one thing only: rescuing Jane. Throughout the film, he proves that he will stop at nothing until his goal is achieved. While Tarzan does consider Williams’ goal extremely important, it is ranked second compared to his goal.

Finally, while the film finds itself a happy ending, when you take a deeper look Tarzan ultimately takes credit away from the people of Congo. What started as a situation between Belgium and the people of Congo, ultimately morphed into including Tarzan--who wasn’t supposed to be included in the first place. Tarzan left Africa eight years ago and had no intentions going back, however once he was informed of the state of Congo he felt obligated to go. Tarzan’s presence on the island ultimately caused more harm than good and led to the death of many people due to Rom’s persistent tracking of Tarzan. The death of these people as well as the slave trade taking place ultimately came second to the love between Tarzan and Jane and their quest to get back home to England. While Tarzan was raised in Africa, there is still a

disconnect between him and the people of Congo. He will never truly understand what they have pain, suffering, and injustices they have to face under Belgium's rule. To think that after eight years he can simply come back and "step into their shoes" and defeat the bad guy is silly and takes serious credit away from those people.

After looking at *The Legend of Tarzan* through the White Savior lens it is clear that Tarzan fits this narrative very well. While the film tried it's hardest to modernize this classic tale the story itself is doomed to follow ancient customs and beliefs. *The Legend of Tarzan* is filled with racial inequality, but at a lower volume which doesn't automatically stand out. It is important to use rhetorical lenses such as the White Savior lens to accurately analyze these contemporary films and see if change is actually being made as we progress through the future of movies. While *The Legend of Tarzan* tries to give this film a desperate contemporary makeover, it ultimately fails in producing something completely revolutionary.