

## RACISM, GENDER, AND MILITARY REPRESENTATION IN THE SIX TRIPLE EIGHT (2024): A CRITICAL RACE AND BARTHESIAN SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 20-04-2026

Revised: 19-05-2026

Accepted: 25-05-2026

Published: 30-05-2026

Volume: 10

Issue: 2

DOI: [10.33019/lire.v10i1.618](https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v10i1.618)

### KEYWORDS

*The Six Triple Eight, Critical Race, Semiotic, Racism*

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of racism in the film *The Six Triple Eight* within the broader context of cultural, media, and representation studies, where racism is understood as a socially constructed and historically embedded phenomenon. Studies that have already been conducted on racism in movies typically use semiotic analysis or Critical Race Theory (CRT) independently, which leads to disjointed methods that are unable to explain how audiovisual signs function as mechanisms for creating and reproducing racial ideology. This study addresses this research gap by integrating CRT and Roland Barthes' semiotics into a unified analytical framework. This study aims to identify the types of racism depicted in *The Six Triple Eight* and examine the ways in which these depictions carry ideological meanings. Purposive sampling is used in this study's descriptive qualitative methodology to select settings that both overtly and covertly represent racism. Repeatedly watching the movie, taking methodical notes, and documenting screenshots as visual evidence are some methods for gathering data. Three steps comprise the analytical process: first, identifying pertinent visual, verbal, and symbolic signs; second, using Barthesian semiotics to interpret their meanings at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth; and third, contextualizing these meanings using CRT to reveal systemic racial structures and underlying power relations embedded in the narrative and its visual construction. The results show that racism appears throughout the movie in a number of interrelated ways, such as institutional racism, racialized gender discrimination, microaggressions, and cultural racism. These forms are created using subtle cinematic elements, including body language, spatial arrangements, and symbolic references, in addition to overt events and conversation. These symbols serve to legitimize the marginalization of African-American women in the military institution and to normalize white supremacy at the mythological level. This study concludes by showing how racism in movies functions as an ideological framework ingrained in audiovisual representation. By connecting visual signification with structural critique, the merger of CRT and Barthesian semiotics allows for a more thorough analysis, making theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions to the study of racism in film.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Racism, as a social and historical construct, remains a significant topic within cultural, media, and representation studies, particularly in films that depict social realities (Malik et al., 2022). Visual media that portray racial injustice not only reflect reality but also perpetuate prejudices and reinforce unequal power structures (Fernandez et al., 2022). Analyzing how media, including films, construct narratives about the experiences of Black minority groups in Western history is essential for contemporary cultural studies, especially within military institutions historically dominated by white individuals (Maharani & Aisyah, 2023). The representation of racism in film is not neutral; it is ideologically constructed through audiovisual signs that influence audience perceptions of racial relations. Consequently, film analysis is vital for revealing how meanings of racism are produced, normalized, and legitimized through intricate systems of signs and symbols embedded in visual texts.

*The Six Triple Eight* (2024) is a historical film that recounts the story of the Six Triple Eight Central Postal Directory Battalion, an African-American women's battalion in the United States Army that served in Europe during World War II and was responsible for clearing millions of backlogged military mail (Tano & Simanjuntak, 2024). Directed by Tyler Perry, the film highlights the significant contributions of Black women to military operations and troop morale, while also providing a platform for critical reflection on the racial and gender discrimination they faced within a predominantly white military institution (Sihombing & Sekartaji, 2026). Through its historical narrative, the film illustrates how the courage, perseverance, and solidarity of these women served as resistance to racial stereotypes and entrenched social biases. Thus, the film functions both as a representation of an often-overlooked history and as a medium of social critique, elucidating the complexities of African-American women's struggle for recognition, equality, and identity within dominant military and cultural structures.

The film portrays not only the heroic aspects of African-American women's military service but also the social challenges they faced, including racial discrimination and systemic bias (Jefferson, 2021). This provides an opportunity to analyze issues such as racism, racial segregation, and inequality in the representation of Black women within the historical context of war through scenes, dialogues, and cultural symbols (Arntson, 2020).

Previous studies on racism in film have commonly analyzed either symbolic representation through semiotics or structural racism through Critical Race Theory. However, few studies explain how cinematic signs operate as ideological mechanisms that normalize racial hierarchy. This study addresses that gap by integrating Barthes' semiotics with CRT to examine racism in *The Six Triple Eight*. The research questions are as follows: (1) How does *The Six Triple Eight* depict various forms of racism? and (2) What meanings of racism are conveyed when analyzed through a semiotic lens? This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, using Barthes' semiotic analysis to interpret signs within the film (Nurhayati et al., 2023), combined with Critical Race Theory as a critical framework to reveal the ideological meanings underlying the representation of racism (Ramanathan, 2023). This study aims to identify the types of racism depicted in *The Six Triple Eight* and examine the ways in which these depictions carry ideological meanings. Purposive sampling is used in this study's descriptive qualitative methodology to choose settings that both overtly and covertly represent racism. This study



contributes in three significant ways. First, theoretically, it advances the integration of semiotic and Critical Race Theory in analyzing the representation of racism in film. Second, methodologically, it proposes an integrated analytical model that connects visual sign analysis with ideological critique, offering a more comprehensive approach to media studies. Third, empirically, it provides one of the earliest in-depth analyses of the six triple eight (2024), revealing how racism against African-American women in the military context is represented, constructed, and normalized through cinematic techniques.

The scope of this study is limited to selected scenes and dialogue that explicitly represent racism, focusing on visual signs, dialogue, and cultural symbols relevant to racial issues. This limitation is intended to maintain analytical focus and ensure an in-depth and coherent examination aligned with the research objectives, ultimately providing a comprehensive understanding of how racism is constructed and interpreted in the film.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a critical framework for examining how racism operates as a systemic and normalized phenomenon within social, cultural, and institutional structures. According to Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic (2017), racism is not an aberration but an ordinary and deeply embedded feature of society, shaping laws, policies, and everyday interactions. This concept, often referred to as the *normality of racism*, suggests that discriminatory practices are frequently perceived as natural or invisible within dominant social systems.

Another key concept within CRT is intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), which emphasizes that individuals experience overlapping forms of oppression based on race, gender, class, and other identities. In the context of Black women, racism cannot be separated from gender discrimination, as both intersect to produce unique forms of marginalization. This framework is particularly relevant in analyzing films that depict African-American women in historically male and white-dominated institutions, such as the military. By applying CRT, this study seeks to uncover how racial hierarchies and systemic inequalities are represented and reinforced in film narratives. CRT enables a critical reading of how power relations are constructed and maintained, particularly in media texts that appear to present historical events but are embedded with ideological meanings (Bell, 1992)

### 2.2 Barthes' Semiotics

Semiotics, as developed by Roland Barthes (1977), offers a methodological approach to analyzing how meaning is constructed through signs. Barthes distinguishes between three levels of meaning: *denotation*, *connotation*, and *myth*. Denotation refers to the literal or surface meaning of a sign, while connotation involves the cultural and emotional associations attached to that sign. At a deeper level, myth represents the ideological meaning that naturalizes particular values and beliefs within society.

Barthes (1972) argues that myths function to transform historically constructed meanings into something that appears natural and unquestionable. In film, visual elements such as costumes, settings, camera angles, and dialogue serve as signs that convey not only explicit meanings but also implicit ideological messages. Through this framework, semiotic analysis allows researchers to decode how racism is subtly embedded in cinematic representation, beyond



overt narratives. In this study, Barthes' semiotics is used to analyze how audiovisual signs in film construct layered meanings of racism. This approach is essential for identifying how seemingly neutral or realistic depictions can carry deeper ideological implications that reinforce racial stereotypes and power structures.

### 2.3 Previous Studies on Racism in Film

Several previous studies have discussed racism toward Black people in military or war films. Dixon and Johnson (2024) examined the representation of African-American soldiers in Korean War films, particularly *The Steel Helmet* and *Pork Chop Hill*. Their study shows that Hollywood war films not only portray military conflict but also reflect racial issues related to Black soldiers' position within the United States military. The study is relevant because it explains how Black soldiers are represented in relation to racial integration, military service, and the struggle for recognition in a white-dominated institution. Similarly, Renatawati and Munjid (2025) analyzed Spike Lee's *Da 5 Bloods* by focusing on Black Vietnam veterans, trauma, and identity. Their research shows that Black veterans are represented as individuals who experience historical trauma, racial inequality, and emotional conflict after serving a country that did not fully recognize their dignity and sacrifice. These studies indicate that racism in military films is not only shown through direct discrimination, but also through institutional exclusion, unequal recognition, and psychological trauma experienced by Black soldiers.

In relation to intersectionality in film, Puspita and Ramdhani (2022) analyzed *Hidden Figures* by using Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminism theory. Their study shows that the African-American female characters experience discrimination based on gender, race, and class. This research is relevant because it demonstrates that Black women's oppression in film cannot be understood only through gender or race separately, but must be seen as a layered experience shaped by multiple identities. Similarly, Perkasa et al. (2024) examined *Hidden Figures* through the concept of gender equality and intersectional feminism. Their study explains that the film portrays the struggles of African-American women in STEM fields who face racial and gender disparities in a white and male-dominated workplace. Therefore, both studies show that intersectionality in film reveals how race, gender, and class work together to create complex forms of discrimination, while also highlighting resistance, empowerment, and solidarity among Black women (Asrita et al., 2023).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to describe, interpret, and analyze the representation of racism in the film *The Six Triple Eight* through the analysis of racial signs and discourse. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because it focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of social phenomena and the symbolic meanings constructed through film media, rather than relying on numerical data (Afifulloh et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this approach aligns with John W. Creswell (2018), who states that qualitative research explores complex social issues by examining how individuals or groups assign meaning to observed phenomena. In the context of *The Six Triple Eight*, issues such as institutional racism, microaggressions, and the lived experiences of Black women in the military can only be examined through a comprehensive interpretation of scenes, dialogues, gestures,



symbols, and visual narratives. This design enables the researcher to explore the contextual meanings behind the representation of racism in specific film scenes.

### 3.2 Research Site and Sample Selection

The data were collected from both visual scenes and dialogue transcripts in *The Six Triple Eight*. Four scenes were selected because they were the most representative and analytically rich in illustrating different forms of racism portrayed in the film. Semiotic analysis prioritizes depth of interpretation rather than the quantity of data. These scenes represent various forms of racial discrimination, including segregation, verbal discrimination, unequal treatment, and institutional racism. Each selected scene was documented through screenshots and coded according to categories of racism derived deductively from Critical Race Theory. The researcher watched the film repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and visual details. The analysis was conducted manually by interpreting the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings of each scene. To enhance the validity of the findings, this study employed theoretical triangulation, repeated observation, and comparison with historical and scholarly sources related to racism experienced by African-American women during World War II.

### 3.3 Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques in this study were conducted through several systematic stages to ensure the relevance and depth of the data:

1. Watching the film repeatedly to identify scenes containing racial signs.
2. Selecting scenes based on verbal, visual, spatial, and symbolic indicators of racism.
3. Classifying the scenes into institutional racism, racialized gender discrimination, microaggression, and cultural racism.
4. Interpreting each scene using Barthes' denotation, connotation, and myth.
5. Connecting the mythological meaning to CRT concepts such as systemic racism, intersectionality, white supremacy, and counter-storytelling.

### 3.4 Data Sources

The data sources in this study are divided into primary and secondary data.

(1) Primary data are obtained directly from the film *The Six Triple Eight* and consist of selected scenes, dialogues, screenshots, and audiovisual elements that are relevant to the representation of racism. These elements function as the main units of analysis in interpreting racial signs and discourse.

(2) Secondary data consist of scholarly sources that support the analysis, including books, journal articles, and academic publications related to semiotics, Critical Race Theory, racial representation in film, and media studies. These sources are used to strengthen the theoretical foundation and provide contextual support for the interpretation of findings.

### 3.5 Analytical Framework

This study employs an analytical framework that integrates Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Barthes' semiotics is used to interpret three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth, which allow the researcher to decode the explicit and implicit meanings embedded in visual, verbal, and cultural signs within the film (Arum et al., 2025).

At the same time, CRT is applied as a critical framework to examine how these meanings relate to broader issues of racial ideology, power structures, and systemic inequality (Hani &



Azzahra, 2024). Through CRT, the analysis moves beyond symbolic interpretation to uncover how racism is constructed, normalized, and reproduced within cinematic representation.

The data analysis process is conducted in three stages. First, data reduction is performed by selecting relevant scenes and signs based on the research focus. Second, data presentation involves organizing and displaying the selected data in the form of narrative descriptions or analytical tables. Third, interpretation and conclusion drawing are carried out by applying Barthes' semiotic analysis in conjunction with CRT to reveal denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings, as well as the underlying racial ideologies embedded in the film.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Type of Racism Contained in the Film *The Six Triple Eight*

#### 1.1. Institutional Racism



Picture 1: scene, Separation of train carriages between white and black women by white male soldiers.

The scene at 19:56–20:20 in *The Six Triple Eight* depicts institutional racism through the separation of white and Black women in train carriages. This separation is not presented as an individual act of prejudice, but as a reflection of institutionalized segregation embedded in American public life and military practices during World War II. The separation of train cars shows that racism operates through formal systems, regulations, and social practices that appear normal within the institution. This is in line with Delgado & Stefancic's view that racism is not an abnormal or isolated act, but an ordinary and deeply rooted part of social structures. According to Delgado & Stefancic (2017), Critical Race Theory argues that racism is embedded in institutions, laws, and everyday practices, making racial inequality appear natural and acceptable. Therefore, the scene does not merely function as a dramatic representation but also illustrates how racial segregation was normalized through institutional authority.

From the perspective of Critical Race Theory, the train segregation scene reinforces the idea that racism is structural rather than merely personal. Delgado & Stefancic (2017) explain that racism is often maintained through systems that seem neutral or reasonable, but in practice produce unequal treatment for racial minorities. In this scene, the separation between white and Black women is carried out under the authority of the military structure, showing that racial hierarchy is legitimized by the institution itself. The Black women soldiers are not separated because of personal conflict with white soldiers, but because the institution has already positioned them as racially inferior. This reflects the CRT concept that racism is ordinary, meaning that racial discrimination is often embedded in daily routines, official procedures, and



institutional arrangements. The mention of the Mason-Dixon line in the scene further strengthens this historical and ideological context. The line symbolically represents the long legacy of racial division in the United States, particularly between territories associated with slavery and anti-slavery positions. The Mason-Dixon line in this movie can be interpreted as both a physical boundary and an intellectual one that perpetuates racial inequity even after slavery was abolished. This relates to the claim made by Delgado & Stefancic that racism endures because racial hierarchies and meanings are maintained by social institutions. Despite the legal abolition of slavery, racial segregation persisted in public areas, military installations, and transportation. Additionally, this scene demonstrates how Black women in the military's social and psychological experiences are shaped by institutional racism. Their presence in the military is not treated as equivalent to that of white women, and being assigned to subpar rail cars makes them feel alienated. Delgado & Stefancic's CRT framework helps explain that such inequality is not accidental, but is produced by systems that distribute power, space, and recognition unequally. The Black women in the scene have limited agency because their mobility, comfort, and dignity are controlled by the military institution. They cannot freely refuse or negotiate the segregation because the system itself has already determined their position.

Thus, the scene at 19:56–20:20 clearly represents institutional racism as understood in Critical Race Theory. The separation of white and Black women in train carriages shows that racism is not simply caused by individual hatred, but is maintained through institutional rules, historical legacies, and normalized practices. By using Delgado & Stefancic's theory, this scene can be interpreted as evidence that racial inequality in the military is systemic, ordinary, and deeply connected to broader structures of power. It reveals how Black women soldiers were positioned as inferior within the military system and how institutional authority legitimized racial segregation in their daily experience.

## 1.2. Racialized Gender Discrimination



Picture 2: Miss Adams (a black female officer) sat in the front row of the cinema. Lower-ranking white soldiers forbade Miss Adams from sitting there.

The scene at 46:59–48:32 in *The Six Triple Eight* depicts the intersection of racism and sexism through the treatment experienced by Miss Adams, a Black female officer, when she attempts to sit in the front row of a movie screening. Two lower-ranking white male soldiers immediately block her and order her to move, even though, within the formal military hierarchy, they do not hold authority over her. This moment reflects how racial and gender hierarchies



operate more powerfully than official institutional structures. The discrimination experienced by Miss Adams is not simply an individual act of disrespect, but a representation of racialized gender oppression that positions Black women as socially inferior despite their professional status and achievements.

This scene strongly relates to the theory of intersectionality proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). Black women are oppressed through the intersection of race and gender. According to Crenshaw, it is impossible to comprehend their experiences by examining racism and sexism alone. Miss Adams experiences discrimination in this scene not only because she is Black or a woman, but also because she concurrently represents both identities. Due to sociocultural norms that prioritize white masculinity over Black women, white male soldiers disregard the military institution's official recognition of her authority as an officer. This supports Crenshaw's claim that because systems of power are structured on overlapping racial and gender inequality, institutions frequently fail to safeguard Black women. Thus, the scene demonstrates how Black women suffer discrimination in institutions that are supposedly based on equality and hierarchy. From the perspective of Critical Race Theory, the scene also reflects the ideas developed by Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic (2017), especially their argument that racism is commonplace and pervasive in social structures. The white troops' acts are portrayed as socially acceptable in the movie's setting, demonstrating how racism functions not only through overt animosity but also through accepted forms of dominance and exclusion. Delgado & Stefancic contend that social structures and organizations that justify unfair treatment of racial minorities sustain racism. Theoretically, the military hierarchy in this situation should uphold Miss Adams' authority, but institutional norms are subordinated to racial ideology. Because white men were viewed as socially superior in the larger American culture at the time, the white troops felt entitled to confront and subjugate her. As a result, the scene illustrates how racism operates through regular interactions that uphold racial power relations and are systemic rather than merely personal.

The scene can also be connected to Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) concept of controlling images. Collins argues that Black women have historically been represented through stereotypes that portray them as inferior, disrespectful, and unworthy of occupying positions of authority or dignity. Black women are subjected to discriminatory treatment, which is justified by these dominating images. The attempt to take Miss Adams out of the front row in the incident represents how Black women's status in public places is socially regulated. It is implied by the troops that she has no place in a position of power, comfort, or prominence. Despite Miss Adams's success as a professional military commander, her gender identity and race still influence how people view and interact with her. Instead of using overt racist remarks, the discrimination takes the form of acts meant to restrict her movement and decide where she "belongs." This reflects Collins' argument that controlling images operate subtly through institutional behavior and social expectations that normalize the subordination of Black women.

The scene also emphasizes how institutional prejudice has negative social and psychological effects. According to Delgado & Stefancic, marginalized people's self-awareness, confidence, and sense of belonging are shaped by their recurrent encounters with racism. Miss Adams believes that her accomplishments and military position are not as important as her gender identity and race, and this is reinforced by lower-ranking white men publicly challenging



and displacing her. This incident serves as an example of how Black women frequently lose their agency in establishments that purport to maintain discipline and fairness. Despite having formal authority, Miss Adams's freedom to use it is restricted by the sexist and racist societal structure. The scene, therefore, demonstrates that institutional spaces such as the military are not free from racialized gender oppression but instead reproduce broader systems of inequality present in society. Therefore, the scene at 46:59–48:32 exemplifies how racism and sexism intertwine in institutional settings for Black women. The movie demonstrates how discrimination against Black women is systemic, normalized, and sustained by customs and societal expectations using the theories of Crenshaw, Delgado & Stefancic, and Collins. The scene demonstrates how Black women in the military are not only excluded due to their gender and race independently, but also because both identities intersect to place them as subservient within hierarchies of power that are controlled by white masculinity.

### 1.3. Microaggressions

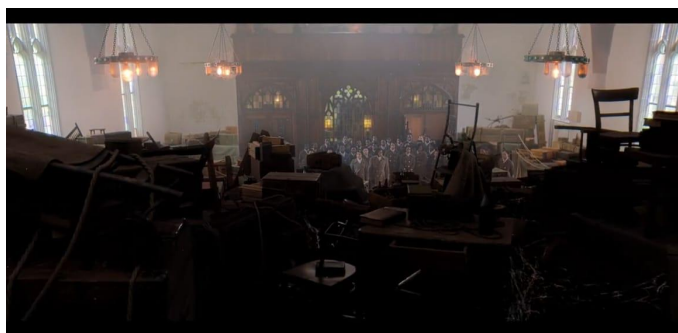


Figure 3: The black woman's room is not suitable for working.

The scene at 1:01:17–1:05:20 in *The Six Triple Eight* portrays the harsh working conditions faced by the 6888th Battalion when they are assigned to process 17 million undelivered pieces of mail in a filthy, dusty, dark, and freezing warehouse. The environment is clearly unsuitable for human work and demonstrates how Black women soldiers were placed in conditions far below acceptable military standards. The inadequate facilities provided to the battalion represent a form of structural microaggression because the discrimination is carried out not through direct verbal attacks, but through institutional practices that subtly communicate that Black women are less valuable and less deserving of proper treatment. The assignment of Black women to such an inhumane workspace implies that their comfort, health, and dignity are not considered important by the military institution. Through the perspective of Critical Race Theory, this scene reflects the argument developed by Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic that racism is embedded within institutional structures and organizational practices, where discriminatory treatment often appears normal and administrative rather than openly hostile (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

In this scene, the military establishment lets years' worth of undelivered mail build up before giving a battalion made up exclusively of Black women the impossible assignment. This choice is an example of a structural pattern wherein dominant groups escape burdens while marginalized groups are obliged to bear them. Therefore, the unfavorable working conditions



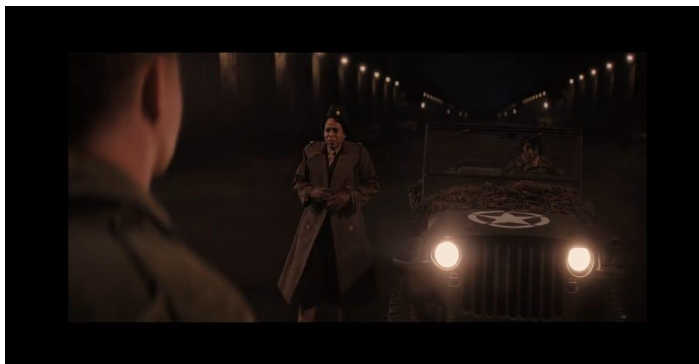
signify more than just carelessness; they are a representation of how institutional racism functions through organizational choices and policies that place Black people in exploitative and devalued roles. Additionally, the action uses institutional behavior to illustrate the idea of microaggression. Because it subtly conveys the idea that Black women soldiers are not entitled to the same resources, care, or respect as white military units, the subpar workspace serves as a kind of microinsult and microinvalidation. Their assignment to a cold and unhealthy environment implies that their labor is expendable and their well-being is insignificant. This condition supports the CRT argument that racism is reproduced through everyday institutional practices that normalize inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Furthermore, several white military officers openly doubt the battalion's ability to complete the mission, reflecting microinvalidation by dismissing the competence and professionalism of Black women soldiers. Even though the Six Triple Eight Battalion had military training and discipline equal to other units, their racial and gender identity caused their abilities to be underestimated. This treatment aligns with Delgado & Stefancic's argument that racism is maintained not only through explicit discrimination, but also through normalized institutional practices that continuously devalue minority groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The battalion is acknowledged as being essential to resolving the mail issue, but they are not given enough supplies or compassionate treatment. This demonstrates Bell's theory that racial hierarchies may exist beneath the surface of institutions that seem inclusive. Black women soldiers' effort and dedication are valued by the military, but they are not given the same respect, comfort, or institutional support. This scene also demonstrates Bell's theory of interest convergence. Bell argues that racial advancement for Black people only happens when it serves the interests of dominating white people (Bell, 1992). The Six Triple Eight Battalion is ultimately assigned a significant mission because the military urgently needs to fix the mail situation in order to sustain soldier morale during the war, not because the organization regards Black women equally. Thus, the battalion's assignment prioritizes institutional goals over the well-being of Black women. This illustrates how racial inclusion is frequently contingent on advantages for the dominant group rather than true equality.

The sequence also emphasizes the psychological and emotional effects of microaggressions and systemic racism. The battalion soldiers experience stress, frustration, and tiredness as a result of the heavy task, challenging environment, and ongoing underestimation. But instead of giving up, the women build discipline, unity, and group resilience to successfully finish the goal. Their tenacity illustrates how, in biased systems, minority groups are frequently compelled to put in more effort than dominant groups in order to demonstrate their humanity and competency. As a result, the 6888th Battalion's success becomes a kind of resistance against institutional prejudice as well as a professional accomplishment. Therefore, the incident from 1:01:17 to 1:05:20 amply illustrates how microaggression and institutional racism function within military systems. Through the theories of Delgado & Stefancic and Derrick Bell, the film reveals that discrimination is maintained not only through direct insults, but also through organizational decisions, unequal working conditions, and institutional attitudes that normalize the devaluation of Black women.



#### 1.4. Cultural Racism



Picture 4: The white army guards did not salute Miss Adams.

The scene at 57:01–57:24 in *The Six Triple Eight* depicts a form of cultural racism when two lower-ranking white male warehouse guards refuse to salute Miss Adams, a Black female officer. In military institutions, saluting is not a personal preference but a formal rule that symbolizes recognition of rank, authority, and professional respect. Therefore, the guards' refusal to salute Miss Adams is not merely an act of personal disrespect or a violation of military ethics, but a reflection of deeper racialized cultural values operating within the institution. Their behavior demonstrates how white identity is culturally positioned as superior to Black identity, even when official military hierarchy clearly places Miss Adams above them. Through the perspective of Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, this scene reflects how racism functions through normalized social values and everyday institutional behavior rather than only through explicit discriminatory policies. Delgado & Stefancic (2017) argue that racism often appears ordinary and culturally accepted because dominant white norms are treated as natural standards within institutions. Because racial cultural norms are more ingrained than the official regulations of the military institution, the two white guards in this incident feel justified in disobeying Miss Adams' command. According to Critical Race Theory (CRT), the scene shows how racism in the military is ingrained in daily encounters and organizational culture in addition to official laws.

According to Delgado & Stefancic (2017), racism is widespread and well ingrained in institutional frameworks, enduring through recurring social behaviors that legitimate racial hierarchy. The failure to salute Miss Adams illustrates how, regardless of formal rank, military culture at the time was influenced by presumptions that white troops should have more power and respect than Black soldiers. This means that even in organizations that purport to function on the basis of merit, discipline, and hierarchy, racial identification nonetheless determines social rank. Thus, the incident demonstrates how racially presumptions about legitimacy and authority can be reinforced by institutional culture, undermining formal equality. The actions of the white guards demonstrate that, in reality, institutional rules are subordinated to cultural racism, despite military laws requiring all officers to be treated equally.

This analysis becomes stronger when connected to Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) concept of controlling norms and controlling images. Collins argues that Black women have historically been constructed through stereotypes that portray them as naturally subordinate, lacking



authority, and unworthy of professional respect. These cultural stereotypes influence how society responds to Black women in positions of leadership. In this scene, the white guards ignore Miss Adams' rank because cultural expectations have conditioned them to view Black women as inferior regardless of achievement or authority. Their refusal to salute is not simply individual prejudice, but a reflection of social norms that position Black women outside the category of legitimate leadership. The guards rely on racialized cultural rules that are socially stronger than formal military rules. This demonstrates how cultural racism works through social legitimization, making discriminatory actions appear reasonable, acceptable, and even invisible within everyday institutional life. Therefore, the scene demonstrates how racism functions through deeply ingrained cultural beliefs that influence behavior and social interaction in addition to laws or policies. The episode also emphasizes how cultural racism affects Black women in institutional settings on a psychological and professional level. Black women's leadership is viewed as illegitimate, their accomplishments are not completely acknowledged, and their competence is questioned when they are not respected, despite occupying positions of responsibility. According to Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic (2017), racism frequently operates by subtly undermining minority groups in professional settings through delegitimization. Because the institutional culture in this instance does not fully recognize Miss Adams' authority as an officer, she suffers structural delegitimization. Her rank is supported by written military regulations, but the racial culture in the area continues to undermine it. Because Black women must continually demonstrate that they are deserving of the respect that official structures already provide, this leads to psychological strain, identity conflict, and emotional tiredness. Thus, the movie shows that cultural racism is not just symbolic but has a direct impact on leadership, power dynamics, professional legitimacy, and self-worth in institutional contexts.

Additionally, rather than being isolated or unintentional, the movie depicts cultural racism as systemic and persistent. In *The Six Triple Eight*, black women are under pressure to hide parts of their racial and cultural identities in order to fit in with the white-dominated military culture, in addition to being required to show competence. The claim made by Delgado & Stefancic in *Critical Race Theory* that racism is maintained by normalized cultural ideals that elevate whiteness as the benchmark for professionalism, authority, and respectability is reflected in this state. Because cultural racism occurs covertly through encounters, expectations, and institutional conduct rather than through overtly racist legislation, it becomes more challenging to identify. However, the film also depicts Black women soldiers' collective resiliency, discipline, and unity as forms of resistance. Their solidarity serves as a kind of counter-storytelling that refutes prevailing narratives that depict Black women as unable or inferior. As a result, the sequence from 57:01 to 57:24 amply illustrates how racism in the military functions both institutionally and culturally by normalizing white cultural ideals that stifle and undermine Black identity. The movie demonstrates how cultural racism acts as a covert but potent basis for upholding racial inequity in institutional life through the theories of Delgado & Stefancic, and Patricia Hill Collins.

## 2. Semiotic Analysis of Racism in the Film *The Six Triple Eight*

### 2.1. Institutional Racism

The scene at 19:56-20:20 in *The Six Triple Eight* initially shows white and black women seated in the same train carriage. However, upon the arrival of a male soldier, the white women are



instructed to relocate to the main carriage. Then one of the black women in the carriage makes a remark about the Mason-Dixon Line.



Picture 5: Separation of train carriages between white women and black women by white male soldiers.

Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
The two groups were placed in different carriages.	the military system followed segregation standards black women were considered “second class”	The ideology of white people as a superior group entitled to better facilities



Picture 6: the scene mentioning the Maxon-Dixon line.

Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
The mention of US geographical boundaries	A verbal symbol that discrimination is socially and historically accepted	racism is considered part of a “tradition” that must be accepted



## Representation Patterns of Institutional Racism

In the scene at 19:56–20:20, institutional racism is represented through the separation of train carriages between white women and Black women, which can be analyzed using the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes. According to Barthes (1972), meaning is produced through three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the image merely depicts two groups of female troops in different train compartments and makes reference to the "Mason-Dixon Line," a historical border connected to segregation and slavery in the United States. On the surface, this seems like a typical military protocol or travel arrangement.

At the connotative level, however, the separation represents racial inequity and shows how the military institution perpetuates the racist systems of American society by placing Black women in subpar circumstances despite their equal military standing. Black women are given narrower, less comfortable train cars, which serve as indicators of social marginalization and unfair treatment. This connotative meaning then develops into myth, which Barthes describes as a broader cultural ideology that naturalizes dominant social values and makes them appear normal and unquestionable (Barthes, 1972). In this scene, segregation turns into a narrative that upholds white supremacy as a valid and long-standing societal structure. By bringing up the lengthy history of racial division in America, the "Mason-Dixon Line" serves as a cultural code that makes segregation seem entrenched and natural rather than discriminatory. Therefore, the incident shows that racism in *The Six Triple Eight* is a systemic and institutional practice upheld by laws, social customs, and cultural norms that seem commonplace but actually uphold racial hierarchy rather than just being an isolated act of prejudice.

### 2.2 Racialized Gender Discrimination

The scene at 46:59-48:32 in *The Six Triple Eight*, Miss Adams, a black female major, is depicted watching a movie in a cinema with other soldiers while seated in the front row. However, a male soldier suddenly approaches her and reprimands her for sitting in the front row, despite the fact that he holds a lower rank than Miss Adams. When Miss Adams attempts to defend herself and the other black soldier seated in the front, the white male soldier refers to her as a "troublemaker" and belittles her with a slight laugh. As Miss Adams continues to defend, the soldier responds, "We don't need to listen to the likes of you..." and then calls her a "nigger" a highly offensive racial slur.



Picture 7 The white male soldier forbade Miss Adams from sitting in the front row of the cinema.



Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
A black officer sat in the front row of the military cinema.	Miss Adams' act of occupying a prestigious space was considered a violation of the "invisible boundary" controlled by white men.	The myth that the front row, the seats of honor, and strategic positions were only suitable for white people
Subordinates reprimanded their superiors and removed them from the front seats.	The formal military hierarchy was replaced by a racial hierarchy, with white soldiers feeling more entitled to command than black officers.	The ideology of white supremacy placed racial authority above the official institutional structure.



Picture 8: The white male soldier said Miss Adams was a troublemaker.

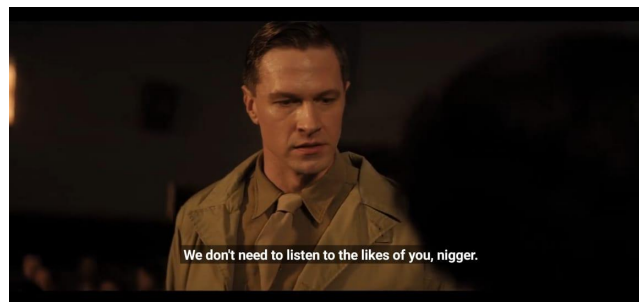
Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
Soldiers laugh or mock when hurling insults.	This laughter indicates that insults against black women are considered normal, funny, and not offensive.	The myth that racism against black people is not morally wrong, but rather part of the dominant culture.





Picture 9: The dismissive expression of the white male soldier.

Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
Soldiers laugh or mock when hurling insults.	This laughter indicates that insults against black women are considered normal, funny, and not offensive.	The myth that racism against black people is not morally wrong, but rather part of the dominant culture.



Picture 10: Mrs. Adams was considered unworthy of respect despite her high rank, and her identity was considered inferior to theirs.

Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
The white soldiers' refusal to listen to Miss Adams' orders.	This shows that Miss Adams was considered unworthy of respect despite her high rank her identity was considered inferior to theirs.	The racial ideology that black authority is invalid "social class" is determined by race, not rank.
A racist slur directed at Miss Adams.	Verbal abuse intended to demean and deny Miss Adams's dignity and racial legitimacy as a	The myth of white supremacy, black people are positioned as "inferior," uncivilized, and unworthy



	human being and an officer.	of respect.
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### Representation Patterns of Racialized Gender Discrimination

The scene in which Miss Adams sits in the front row of the military cinema can be analyzed through Roland Barthes's semiotic theory, which explains that meaning operates at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1972). At the denotative level, the scene simply shows Miss Adams, a Black female officer, sitting in the front row of a cinema before being confronted by lower-ranking white soldiers who order her to move. On the surface, the interaction appears to be an ordinary disagreement between military personnel. However, at the connotative level, the scene reflects deeper racial power relations within the military institution. Miss Adams' decision to sit in the front row symbolizes her presence within a prestigious space culturally associated with white male dominance, while the refusal of the white soldiers to allow her to remain there suggests that racial hierarchy is considered more important than formal military hierarchy. As a cultural tool to undermine Black female leadership, Miss Adams' designation as a "troublemaker" upholds historical stereotypes that depict Black women as disruptive, violent, and undeserving of power.

Furthermore, the white troops' contemptuous laughing and derisive facial gestures indicate that dehumanizing Black women is accepted as enjoyable in the institutional culture. The statement "We don't need to listen to the likes of you" further conveys that, despite Miss Adams' official title, her authority is illegitimate because of her race. This discriminatory treatment reaches its most explicit form through the use of the racist slur "nigger," which functions not only as a direct insult but also as a symbolic sign carrying the historical legacy of slavery, dehumanization, and white supremacy. According to Barthes, myth transforms cultural ideologies into something that appears natural and unquestionable (Barthes, 1972). The entire scenario, on a mythical level, creates the concept that Black women should not occupy prestigious areas, that Black authority is invalid even in official institutions, and that racial humiliation is acceptable in settings controlled by white people. The scene illustrates how racism in *The Six Triple Eight* is not only manifested through individual acts of hatred but also through language, expressions, stereotypes, and regular institutional interactions that perpetuate and legitimize racial hierarchy, according to Barthes' semiotic framework.

#### 2.3 Microaggression

The scene at 1:05:20-1:07:17 in *The Six Triple Eight* portrays the arrival of black women soldiers, who are tasked with sorting approximately 17 million letters. The facilities provided to them are highly inadequate, as evidenced by the building's dilapidated, dusty, and disorganized condition.





Picture 11: The picture shows 17 million stacks of letters behind Mrs. Adams.

Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
Letters piled up for years	An impossible workload a form of symbolic punishment for black employees	punishment for black employees The myth that black women's work is "low-class" work that can be discarded without consideration.



Picture 12: The building that will become the headquarters of Battalion Six Triple Eight.

Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
The room was unfit for work.	Poor room placement a form of degrading black soldiers' dignity.	The ideology that black women deserve the lowest facilities in the institution..

### Representation Patterns of Microaggression in the Film

The scene depicting the 6888th Battalion working in a cold, dark, dusty warehouse filled with rats and 17 million undelivered letters can be analyzed through the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes, which explains that meaning is constructed through the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1972). At the denotative level, the movie objectively depicts a very subpar



workspace and an excessive workload that other military units had previously disregarded. The stack of letters represents the battalion's immense responsibility, but the warehouse physically seems nearly unsuitable for human labor. On the connotative level, however, the workplace represents Black women's social standing in military institutions. Black women are perceived as unimportant, undervalued, and undeserving of adequate facilities or institutional care, as evidenced by the filthy and cruel surroundings. The fact that the 17 million letters were given to the Black women soldiers after being abandoned by earlier white troops implies that minority groups are expected to solve the issue while dominant groups' institutional failures are disregarded.

This uneven labor distribution is a reflection of how racism functions structurally through workplace policies and administrative choices. At the mythical level, the scene upholds the idea of white supremacy by creating the impression that Black units are obliged to endure subpar treatment as part of their social status, while white units are inherently entitled to distinguished working conditions. The myth also promotes the idea of false meritocracy, where Black women must work twice as hard under impossible conditions simply to receive recognition that is automatically granted to white groups. According to Barthes, myth functions by transforming historical and cultural ideologies into something that appears normal and unquestionable (Barthes, 1972). Therefore, racism is depicted in this setting not only through language or overt prejudice but also through institutional practices that legitimize inequality, labor allocation, and geographical arrangement. The Six Triple Eight uses Barthes' semiotic framework to show how institutional racism is ingrained in routine administrative procedures and systems that perpetuate racial hierarchy.

#### 2.4 Cultural Racism

The scene at 57:01-57:24 in *The Six Triple Eight* portrays Miss Adams arriving at the headquarters in full military uniform; however, two lower-ranking white male soldiers stationed at the entrance do not salute her.



Picture 13: Two low-ranking white male guards saw Miss Adams, but did not perform a military salute.



Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
Two low-ranking white male guards saw Miss Adams but did not perform a military salute.	This indicated a rejection of black female authority a form of deliberate insubordination.	The belief that white people always have higher status, even when they are lower in military rank.



Picture 14: A scene that shows Miss Adams wearing a full officer's uniform.

Denotation (Direct Meaning)	Connotation (Implied Meaning)	Myth (Ideological/Cultural Meaning)
Miss Adams wore an officer's uniform with official rank insignia.	The uniform is a symbol of legitimate authority that should be respected.	The military institution claims to uphold hierarchy, but reality shows that racial hierarchy is more dominant than rank hierarchy.

### Representation Patterns of Cultural Racism through Signs

The scene in which Miss Adams enters the warehouse area and is ignored by two lower-ranking white guards can be analyzed through the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes, which explains that meaning is produced through the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1972). At the denotative level, the scene merely depicts a military exchange in which two white guards appear to be in violation of regular military practice by failing to salute a higher commander. The refusal to salute, however, has a deeper connotation connected to racialized power dynamics inside the military establishment at the connotative level. The guards' contemptuous looks and body language imply that Miss Adams' officer uniform, which symbolizes authority, legality, and professional respect, loses significance when associated with a Black woman. Their actions show that racial prejudice is valued more highly than official military hierarchy and represent a symbolic rejection of Black female authority.

At the mythical level, the scene reveals a broader ideology of white supremacy embedded within institutional culture. According to Barthes, myth transforms cultural ideologies into meanings that appear natural and unquestionable in everyday life (Barthes, 1972). In this



instance, the scene creates the idea that white people are still socially superior even in establishments that formally support equality and order. In practice, racial hierarchy takes the place of institutional hierarchy, placing Black women at the bottom of both racial and gender structures, despite military regulations requiring respect based on rank. The scene illustrates how institutional racism functions through symbolic interactions, gestures, and social practices that legitimate the delegitimization of Black authority within military organizations, in addition to overt acts of discrimination, according to Barthes' semiotic framework.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that racism in *The Six Triple Eight* is not merely represented as individual prejudice but as an ideological structure embedded in institutional practices, cultural norms, visual arrangements, and narrative construction. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the film can be understood as a cultural text that reveals how racism operates through denotative signs, connotative meanings, and myths that normalize racial hierarchy. Therefore, the film not only portrays the historical struggle of African-American women during World War II, but also exposes the broader power relations that shaped their identity, dignity, and recognition.

Academically, this study contributes to semiotic and film studies by showing how Barthes' theory can be applied to examine racism beyond explicit acts of discrimination. It also expands the understanding of film as a medium that reflects and challenges ideological structures related to race, gender, and institutional power. Socially, this study encourages audiences to become more critical in recognizing both visible and subtle forms of racism, including microaggression, cultural bias, and institutional exclusion. It also highlights the importance of acknowledging the historical contributions of African-American women who have often been marginalized in dominant historical narratives. However, clearly, this statement has limitations within the fields of Critical Race Theory and semiotics in determining racism. Therefore, future studies may compare *The Six Triple Eight* with other historical or war films to provide a broader understanding of how racism and racialized gender discrimination are represented in cinema.

However, clearly, this statement has limitations within the fields of Critical Race Theory and semiotics in determining racism. Therefore, future studies may compare *The Six Triple Eight* with other historical or war films to provide a broader understanding of how racism and racialized gender discrimination are represented in cinema.

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