The Princess and the Frog: The Media's Attempt to Portray a Post-race Worth to the Twenty-first Century Youth

Brianna Moreno

Texas Tech University
This paper will display how Disney’s, *The Princess and The Frog*, took a different approach to an old classic film to turn it into a more post-race modern film. One article conducted a study group to see the reaction of African American mothers regarding the first animated African American princess. The other two articles examined more specifically what was unrealized and could be discovered by going into more detail throughout the scenes considering the setting, communication, and more. It’s important to view all races, cultures, and ethnicities equally as a child in the twenty-first century especially during representation in animated films. Disney portrayed negative and positive perceptions of a post-race world.

The objective in a 2010 study was to study the channel of communication within two films, *Little Ol’ Bosko* and *The Princess and the Frog*, and how these two films beat the establishment of representation that triggers racial stereotyping (Barker 2010). The film *The Princess and The Frog* really hyped up conversation and mixed feelings on which way this film would stand. “The controversy over racial representation in Disney’s latest release, *The Princess and The Frog* (2009), has made headlines and stirred anticipation because it is the first Hollywood animated feature film to include a Black woman as its lead” (Barker, 2010, p.1). For more than a century, there has been many altercations about race and representation with African Americans involved in media. Barker argues that Princess Tiana and Bosko both excel the racial stereotype established in the media. In the film, the settings were built as a fairy tale, but involved a background of racial representation in the 1920s. It was set in the South as Tiana and Bosko rose to be their own heroes (Barker, 2010). During the early start of animation, stereotypes about African Americans were so regularly branded and established that there was only a few visual illustrations or certain names would help identify to who was being referred to (Barker, 2010).
With the use of animated characters, it leaves room for transcoding racial character that is nourished by the visionary and vague space of animation. Challenged with basic stereotypes, Bosko was able to reverse and set another standard for African American presentation and achieve his goals. On the other hand, Tiana’s Disneyfied fantasy displays a more appreciated presence of African Americans and a different perspective on the Harlem Renaissance. Both their journeys propose the rich potential for hinted investigations of the doubts and possibilities of modern racial distinctiveness within the genre of animated fairy tales (Barker, 2010).

A 2010 study observed the discussions of race in The Princess and the Frog within the two situations of the setting and statement (Gehlawat 2010). With Disney tiptoeing around racial problems to fulfill “movie for everyone”, they twisted an animated film that omits race, even as it sends multiple mixed signals and creates stereotypes. Disney finally produced a film with a lead of an African American princess but, the princess is absent most of the film as she is morphed into frog through most of it. The film takes place in New Orleans in the 1920s, which is during segregation. In creating the first African American princess and turning her into a frog throughout the movie had a bigger picture in mind that it portrayed to people. The princess Tiana had dreams of opening a restaurant but was short of intelligence and purpose, having to overcome her obstacles like the frog she was and hops around them. Just like back in the twentieth century, African American actors had to “don blackface and hop around like dogs” (Gehlawat, 2010, p. 418).

This films’ inescapability of the first African American princess became most problematic with the carefully adjusted and deeply devoted choices of its design. With Disney trying to be so careful of feasibly being racially insensitive, they ended up coming off racially hypersensitive by appealing a predominantly disturbing environment in which to place the film in its racial dialog which it has all
together attempted to ignore. “The film seems to be of a post-racial era, in which African Americans are present yet absent and race is implicit yet unaddressed” (Gehlawat, 2010, p. 429).

In (Moffitt and Harris, 2014) there was a conducted focus group of African American mothers who watched the film *The Princess and the Frog* with their daughters, and what their reaction to the film was. There has not been research of audience reception on this specific topic before but tons of studies before this one expose tension between satisfaction and critique. The mothers from the focus group had plenty to say about the movie and “Four themes emerged from their discussions: (a) film as negation; (b) princess as unattainable; (c) beauty as internal; and (d) work as virtuous” (Moffitt and Harris, 2014, p. 56). Distinguished from many marginalized clusters in America, they continue to be critical of misleading representations of their individual appearance. Animated films are a big impact on children and how they perceive the world and especially the people in it.

Based on the findings, African American communities willfully question the imageries used to symbolize them in the media and counter the persistent demeaning images (Moffitt and Harris, 2014). The discussion of how representations of African American women in media impact views that women have of themselves associated to the four themes revealed in the article, that the women felt contradicted due to the poor job of reproducing their daughters and their bodies because of the nonexistence of the African American princess throughout the movie (Moffitt and Harris, 2014).

It’s important to view all races, cultures, and ethnicities equally as a child in the twenty-first century especially during representation in animated films. Disney portrayed negative and positive perceptions of a post-race world. There has been a clear progress of depictions of minorities since the 1920s, the world is becoming a more diverse and complex actuality and films should start demonstrating
that to teach the new generations, because obviously films, especially animated films, teach children the
good, bad, the ugly, and the pretty of life and the people that are in it.
References

