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**Reflection Paper: Disney within Media**

Growing up, Disney movies were the epitome of my existence. I watched the films religiously and learned most of my mannerisms, picked up my romantic preferences, and became emotionally attached to these movies. The movies that I watched as a child influenced me, especially in my ideologies, and made me who I am now. A lot of Disney’s movies are self-proclaimed “classics” and parents all over the world show their children these films. Never once did I think of the influence or the power that Disney had until I realized that Walt Disney Corporation owned just about every major media producing platform. This much power given to one company/corporation has the potential to be extremely dangerous if we, the audience and public, are not constantly checking and analyzing the media that is produced by this mega-institution. A lot of Disney films, especially the ones made for children, are extremely inappropriate and are alarmingly problematic. Not only does Disney produce sexist films/characters/situations, but it also produces extraordinarily racist ideologies. Media is very influential and the fact that Disney has been influencing so many generations of people in such a subtle way is something worth looking into. The Walt Disney Corporation is extremely powerful and has been influencing people, starting at very young ages, in racist and sexist ways. A lot of the “family favorites” and “classics”, when closely analyzed, are extremely racist if not problematic. Race, Representation, and Stereotype are all keywords in recognizing the deeply rooted racism in classic Disney movies. Representations of Native Americans, African Americans, and Asians found in Disney films are all stereotypical portrayals of these groups and are inherently racist. The Walt Disney Company exercises immense power and influence within media and elicits negative portrayals of people in the development of changing social climates.

I considered using the keywords “Power” and “Ideology” while analyzing Disney films solely because those were the underlying aspects of Race, Representation, and Stereotype. The intro of my final cut was focused around the power that the Walt Disney Corporation holds, especially in owning so many different and popular media outlets. Ideology was also another keyword that I contemplated using because of the influence and lasting impact/impression that the classic Disney films have. The presentation of these peoples and the racist angle in which they are portrayed allows the public to witness a clear reflection of the Walt Disney Corporation’s ideology. I chose the keywords Race, Representation, and Stereotype because they all work in unison to emphasize the problematic depictions of these different groups of people. All three words wrap up the approach that I’m taking; Walt Disney has historically been a racist and controversial media platform that requires a further analysis if not attention. I was extremely purposeful in the films and pieces of media that I used in the final cut. I focused on some of the most popular Disney films that appeal to a wide range of viewers. Each of the clips that I chose are from classic Disney films that are not commonly remembered as racist or contentious. Looking back at those clips and highlighting specific words, actions, and songs create a narrative that has easily been overlooked by millions of people for all these years.

I applied the keyword “Race” because of the obvious racism that is portrayed through these Disney clips. “Race” is defined as, “a legal, social, and cultural invention… its deployment is exercises of power expressed in the encounter among groups for control over resources”[[1]](#footnote-0). “Race” is a term that has historically been linked to biology, and Disney does an extremely artful job of incorporating subtle scenes accentuating the idea of race. Disney is exceptionally skillful at integrating inferential racism into films. This style of racism takes shape as, “naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race, whether “factual” or “fictional,” which have racists premisses and propositions inscribed in them as a set of *unquestioned assumptions*”[[2]](#footnote-1). The techniques that are used by Disney when introducing concepts of race is innately regarded as ‘inferential racism’ and work to subconsciously influence its viewers. The keyword “Representation” is defined as, “a way of communicating; a way in which words and images stand in for other things”[[3]](#footnote-2). The approach that Disney takes in displaying different races can be defined as representation. The mannerisms, songs, ideologies, etc. that all the characters of minority possess and perform are all representations that Disney incorporates into its media. The process by which Disney portrays different groups of people can all be labeled under representation. Classic movies utilize images to perpetuate both positive and negative renderings of the subjects. These representations and, “images in popular culture are the precursor of racist stereotypes in later mass media”[[4]](#footnote-3). The representation of specific individuals, groups of people, or a whole culture in media as powerful as Disney determines the way in which the public receives the message. “Stereotype” is defined as, “systematic representations, repeated in a variety of forms from jokes and cartoons to news broadcasts, feature films, and television series”[[5]](#footnote-4). The most effective technique that is used by Disney to influence its viewers is through creating stereotypes. Stereotypes are manipulated, “through racist and imperialist appropriation,” in order to make a statement on one’s ideology[[6]](#footnote-5). All stereotypes are negative in that there is no truth to generalizations about people before you get to know them.

Media, culture, and identity are all keywords that apply to the application of Race, Representation, and Stereotype. Pocahontas, Peter Pan, Aladdin, The Little Mermaid, Dumbo, Aristocats, and Lady and the Tramp are all pieces of media that are utilized to emphasize the inferential racism that is abundant in classic Disney movies. The culture that is created around Disney movies closely reflects American ideology in that race plays a significant role in determining a character’s status, situation, or treatment. The stereotypes that appear in this culture within this specific media outlet is dangerous because of the millions of children watching the films and becoming influenced by the representations of people. The identity of children is being shaped by these films and it’s time that Disney recognizes their abusive power and change.

**Works Cited**

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