

Julia Condotti
Dr. Parker
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Lester Critical Summary

In “Disney’s *The Princess and the Frog*: the Pride, the Pressure, and the Politics of Being a First,” Neal Lester discusses how Disney portrays African Americans in the recent film, *Princess and the Frog*. He talks about how Disney has created an image of what a princess should look like through characters like Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and many more. Disney has an influence on almost every child so it is almost impossible to escape this well-known image. Dorothy L. Hurley says, “the problem of pervasive, internalized privileging of whiteness (by whites and non-whites) has been intensified by the Disney representation of fairy tale princesses which consistently reinforces and ideology of white supremacy” (295). But the recent film *The Princess and the Frog* is “a new chapter in Disney’s history...invites critical, political, and social interrogation” (296). Lester quotes Michael D. Baran who says, “because of Disney’s history of stereotyping, people are really excited to see how Disney will handle (the first African-American princess’s) language, her culture, her physical attributes” (296). Just this one statement alone puts a lot of pressure on Disney to try and create the perfect image of a black princess and her culture. Lester touches on a lot of negative feedback that the movie received even before it was released to the public. It’s difficult because everyone is going to have their own opinion about the movie’s portrayal of an African American girl so it’s pretty much impossible to please everyone. Lester also mentions President Obama and The First Lady and how little children look up to such powerful figures in our world. An African American mother stated, “When Barack Obama was inaugurated, we stayed up to watch the festivities, and when Michelle came out in the white dress, (daughter) Simone said, “Oh, she’s a princess!” I thought that was so fantastic. The Obama family is American royalty, and it’s wonderful to have them on the global stage” (298). I personally feel that this positive feedback from a child who has seen the movie is way more important than any critic’s opinion. Disney movies are meant for children and they clearly aren’t critical about the little details that Disney may have forgotten.

Lester quotes many people in his article who clearly were very tough critics of this new, controversial Disney movie. I don’t really agree with all of the criticism that is brought up in this article. He says, “some African American complain that Tiana’s skin is not dark enough as an African-American character, that her skin tone is “too light”” (299). They also argue that Tiana should have married a black man, but I don’t think that is very fair to mention. People are more accepting of interracial marriages today and that fact that they says “Disney is reinforcing the age-old message that a hero has to be a white man,” isn’t really a great argument, in my opinion. I think this article has a negative connotation towards white people because they mention how white girls value Barbie doll looks and black girls value personality/attitude. This comes across as suggesting that white people superficial and black people aren’t. I think the article is very contradicting of itself because some argue that “Disney predominantly ignores rather than

addresses the racial elements of (this) story” (302) while others argue that she is too ethnic. Overall, I think that critics were almost too critical about whether the movie portrayed Tiana well enough or not, because it was clear from Lester’s examples that children really enjoyed the film and now “little African American girls for generations to come will have a “real” princess, a brown-skinned beauty, to which they can compare themselves for years to come” (304).

Work Cited

Lester, Neal A. “Disney’s *The Princess and the Frog*: the Pride, the Pressure, and the Politics of Being a First.” *Journal of American Culture*. 33. 4 (Dec 2010): 294-308. Print.