White Royalty: Whitewashing from

Prince of Persia to *Sofia the First*

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Abstract

Walt Disney's *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (released May 28, 2010) and *Sophia The First: Once Upon a Princess* (released November 18, 2012) are two entertainment pieces marketed as fantasies for mass audience consumption that use White actors/representations to tell the story of a non-White character. After historically placing race in film, defining whitewashing and its relation to Eurocentrism, and revealing the scarcity of leading roles for minorities, analysis of both *The Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* and *Sofia the First: Once Upon a Princess* utilizes John Fiske's Three Levels of Coding with insight through Stuart Hall's interpretation of Antonio Gramsci's hegemony. Eurocentrism is therefore identified within whitewashing and revealed as a continuation of White favortism in modern entertainment media.

Introduction

Prince of Persia: the Sands of Time (Prince of Persia) and Disney's *Sofia the First: Once Upon a Princess (Sofia the First)* offer audiences a world of fantasy and magic involving a royal emerging from humble beginnings. The first, *Prince of Persia,* features a glistening, and white, Jake Gyllenhaal playing the title character. Based on a video game noted for refraining from terroristic racial stereotypes of Middle Easterners, the film puzzled some who scoffed at the casting of "Swedish-Jewish-American prince Jake Gyllenhaal" as well as the lack of casting *any* actors of authentic Middle Eastern descent in substantial roles (Lee, 2010). While a few film critics noted questions regarding Gyllenhaal's race in their reviews of the film, several reviews showed enthusiasm for Gyllenhaal as an action hero with no mention made regarding his lack of Persian ethnicity. In the role, he was described as having a "hearty good-naturedness" that did well for the film (Rainer, 2010). *The Wall Street Journal* acknowledged general audiences' desire to see the actor "prevail as a romantic hunk" and that, in this case, those hoping for such

success will find that "the news is pretty good" (Morgenstern, 2010). Though *The New York Times* critiqued "the resurrection of a sexpot Middle Eastern Hero"—especially with a non-Persian actor—as a move that "might not seem like progress," the reviewer conceded that the flaunting of Gyllenhaal's stunt-like antics and good looks "has its dumb-fun appeal" (Dargis, 2010). One reviewer limited comments about the lead actor's ethnicity to a light-hearted jab at the spray-tan qualities of his skin tone (Schwarzbaum, 2010). Audiences appeared unmoved by the casting decision as well; at the time of its release, *Prince of Persia* was described as a "$150 million blockbuster …" and earned back its financial efforts as it grossed hundreds of millions in combined foreign and domestic ticket sales (Allen, 2010; Box Office Mojo).

In the second piece, Disney has marketed its "first Latina princess" in the made for TV film *Sofia the First*. Though there has been more of an outcry with this particular royal than with Gyllenhaal's role, Disney has offered various defenses that also merit examination. Intended as the starting point for a television series aimed at children, executive producer Jamie Mitchell proclaimed the main character Sofia to be a Latina princess—Disney's first (Strochlic, 2012). NBC Latino published about the new film and series in October 2012, proclaiming Sofia to be joining the ranks of Jasmine, Mulan, and Pocahontas (Carrasquillo, 2012). However, upon viewing the first images of Sofia and her mother Miranda, Latino groups responded with a mixture of applause—after all, many Latina women have pale skin—and dismay due to the obvious contrast of Miranda's skin (Daily Mail Reporter, 2012). Disney first attempted to clarify by pointing to Sofia's parental heritage: her father hailed from a country inspired by Scandinavia and her mother's origins are from the Spanish-inspired country of Galdiz (Rome, 2012). However, Sofia's Latina-inspired descent is seemingly surpassed by her Scandinavian-inspired descent with blue eyes and fair features. Another explanatory approach taken by vice president

of Disney Junior original programming Joe D'Ambrosia was to say that, while she is Hispanic, "We never actually call it out" (Carrasquillo, 2012). Perhaps the most in-depth (and confusing) explanation came from senior vice president of Disney Junior original programming and general manager of Disney Junior Worldwide Nancy Kanter when she first clarified that Sofia was in fact *not* a Latina princess and that *Sofia the First's* producer "misspoke" (Rome, 2012). Yet, Kanter also posted on *Sofia the First's* facebook page, addressing the controversy by stating, "What's important to know is that Sofia is a fairytale girl in a fairytale world" in the very same statement that she explains Miranda's Spanish heritage inspiration (Rome, 2012). Holding to the fairytale explanation, she further explained, "Most importantly, Sofia's world reflects the ethnically diverse world we live in but it is not OUR world, it is a fairytale and storybook world that we hope will spur a child's imagination" (Daily Mail Reporter, 2012). She even went as far as to say that none of the Disney princesses "are meant to specifically represent those real world cultures" (Strochlic, 2012). Adding further to the ambiguous explanations of Sofia's ethnicity, co-producer Craig Gerber also posted on the Sofia facebook page that Sofia's current homeland Enchancia exists as "a make-believe 'melting pot' kingdom patterned on the British isles" (Rome, 2012). Essentially, Disney is claiming inspiration rather than representation. Thus far the series has been met with success as a top-ranked cable television series in its demographic (TV News Desk, 2013). In addition, the show has garnered potential earnings for Disney: it will have a second season as well as extensive product line including dolls and clothing, already available in the Disney Stores and online (Getzler, 2013).

Whether as an attempt at a groundbreaking portrayal of equality or an attempt to confirm the ethnocentric status quo, cinema has long been part of the discussion of race. Race and ethnicity continue to take a prominent seat in many controversial issues permeating American

debate throughout media (for the purpose of this discussion and simplicity, a note will be taken from Coates (2004) and when the term "race" or "ethnicity" is utilized, the other will also be implied). A mere two years after Gyllenhaal stepped into the role of a Persian protagonist, Disney manifested an original creation with vague references to a Latina protagonist in its initial promotional language, all while choosing to draw the character as white. Not only does Disney's interpretation of Sofia's look illustrate the continuation of such artistic casting decisions in media post-*Prince of Persia*, but it also reveals how the decisions permeate throughout media aimed at mass audiences—both film and televison. This research examines the practice of "whitewashing"—casting ethnic roles to fit a Eurocentric, Caucasian ideal—in two entertainment pieces: primarily *The Prince of Persia* and then *Sofia the First*.

Prior academic research in film and cultural studies examining the film industry suggests a lack of minority representation. With so few leading roles available to minorities, this research examines the practice of casting White actors to fill these rare opportunities, and scrutinizes the ideology behind such casting or creative decisions as a nuanced continuation of White favoritism in the entertainment culture. What fuels the practice of whitewashing film roles in the entertainment industry? What are the potential meanings of these images and what do those meanings communicate about the current culture?

To answer these questions, this research first provides a review of previous work that historically situates how ethnicity has been represented in film. Then, considering the audience and filmmakers through Stuart Hall's Reading of Gramsci's *hegemony* and utilizing John Fiske's Three Levels of Coding with an emphasis on *Ideology,* this research will discuss how *The Prince of Persia* and *Sofia the First* continues historical representations, revealing White favoritism. With big budgets available and the marketing power of Disney to make them globally visible,

both *Prince of Persia* and *Sofia the First* had many options available, yet to tell their stories the filmmakers chose White leads. The White appearance of both the Prince of Persia and the Latina Princess Sofia, their potential for reaching large audiences through the marketing prowess of Disney, their appeals to adventure and fantasy in the audience mind, and their recent releases (May 28, 2010 and November 18, 2012, respectively) make them ideal for examination. Their differences likewise present them as ideal for analysis: the live-action theatrically-released *Prince of Persia* and the animated and televised *Sofia the First* illustrate whitewashing's presence in multiple media with appeal to multiple age groups to cover a large portion of the Western population and culture.

Review of Literature

Eurocentrism and Race in Film

Historically, American schools have focused on European history, art and culture—starting with Greek and Roman culture and then shifting towards the countries touching the Atlantic during the "discoveries" of the New World (Ginneken, 2007). With such conquests and imperial rule came heroes and folklore pitting a perpetual "us" against an evil and barbaric "them" (Ginneken, 2007). This preference for European style in clothing, architecture, behavior and physical appearance is *Eurocentrism,* defined as "the procrustean forcing of cultural heterogeneity into a single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as the world's center of gravity as ontological 'reality' to the rest of the world's shadow" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 1-2). Such post-colonialist, Eurocentric thought is evident in the United States and "Western" film. For example, in the film *The King and I* the audience is shown subtle colonialism set to music as Anna is appalled by the king's ways and the

beacon of hope at the film's end manifests itself through the king's son who has been heavily influenced by the British woman's proper thinking (Oishi, 2006).

Examining the meaning of these decisions is important to combat what Linda Holtzman (2000) describes as being "so thoroughly immersed in popular culture that its messages and values seem 'normal' to us as well" (p. 212). The ability to step back and critically consider cultural norms is vital for a society to function at its highest capacity. The topic of race in film has been and remains crucial when considering film historically and academically (Williams, 2001).

This is not to say that filmmakers are racist. On the contrary, as Ginneken (2007) observes, these trends can be part of a well-intentioned but naive Hollywood,

> The makers of those blockbusters largely come from the middle class but become multimillionaires, … Most come from … major Anglophone settler states, or from their former colonial heartland, Great Britain. To a lesser extent they also come from the four larger countries on the European continent, with just a few exceptions. Most are also white. They consider themselves to be broad-minded and open to change, albeit often in a very specific manner. They are full of good intentions but often show little insight in the limitations of their apparently cosmopolitan worldviews, which means that many of the aforementioned clichés and stereotypes remain unchallenged (p. 231).

Although "sympathetic" films such as Kevin Costner's *Dances With Wolves* is noted for casting actual Native Americans to portray emotionally complex characters vital to the story, it is still considered to display narrative focus on the White man's adventures and misfortunes (Churchill, 1998). In another attempt at well-intentioned authenticity, filmmakers willingly cast actors with "a few drops of 'foreign blood'" into their films and pass them off as that particular ethnicity (such as the Chinese actresses in *Memoirs of a Geisha* as well as Puerto Rican and Mongolian-Swiss-Russian descended actors in *The King and I)* (Oishi, 2006; Ginneken, 2007, p. 227).

Along with intermixing minority actors in various racial roles, using Caucasian actors to play the part of a completely different race when there are many actors and actresses available of the race in question suggests an alarming continuation of Eurocentric preference. Most recently, and perhaps all the more concerning, is the Best Picture-winning film *Argo,* based on actual events. Though the film was met with critical acclaim for director Ben Affleck, the character Mr. Affleck played is Mexican in reality showing that even recent, Oscar-winning works made by reputable filmmakers can be guilty of whitewashing (Esparza, 2012). Aside from *Argo,* another nominated film with high accolades was Spielberg's *Lincoln,* a portrayal of President Lincoln ending slavery. Pointing out the absence of any storytelling in the film depicting Africans acting on their own behalf, Sirota (2013) demonstrates, " … in the last quarter-century, 10 White Savior Films have received major Hollywood award nominations, with fully half of those coming in just the last five years."

With this in mind, and with the idea that "culture becomes the object of knowledge only when man constitutes himself as a subject of history" (Castro-Gómez, 2000, p. 504), it is important to give a brief overview of African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans, and the often overlooked Middle Easterners and their portrayal in the film industry to illustrate the pervasiveness of White favortism and aversion to non-White races. Such knowledge can certainly reveal the key building blocks of modern whitewashing and garner discussion as to what these practices project about contemporary American culture.

African-Americans in Film

Perhaps the most prominent of considerations of race in film, African-American representations "were and continue to be used as an exemplary paradigm for ethnicity in America" (Davies & Smith, 1997, p. 52). A common film mentioned regarding African-

American portrayals is D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation.* Not only does the film involve a plot

glorifying the creation of the Ku Klux Klan and alliances with "loyal" slaves, but substantial

slave roles are played by white actors in dark makeup (Snead, 1994). This makeup tactic became

known as *blackface* and had its beginnings "in the days of slavery, when Negroes were not

permitted to appear on stage" giving rise to White actors who "blackened themselves with burnt

cork better to mock and caricature the plantation slaves they imitated" (Bogle, 2001, p. 25). This

practice played a strong role in *Birth of a Nation.* A villain in the film, played by Walter Long in

blackface, was a rogue slave bent on murder and the raping of white women (Downing &

Saxton, 2010). In film history, *Birth of a Nation* is noted for innovative cinematic techniques

such as camera work, despite the fact that these techniques were utilized to increase nostalgia

about Whites as masters of America in the most compelling manner possible (Taylor, 1996).

When blacks were not portrayed as a menace to the white-dominant society, they were

caricatured as "happiest when dancing or working, and unable to cope with the responsibilities of

citizenship" (Davies & Smith, 1997, p. 53). Indeed, without the leadership of whites, blacks were

shown as incompetent and increasingly animalistic (Taylor, 1996). Even in modern film, some

movies are criticized for casting aside what should be main black characters from the central

focus of the film—even if the film's central story centers on non-fictional African-Americans in

a historical context (Hoerl, 2009). For example, the film *Glory* is noted for giving Matthew

Broderick top billing and placing emphasis on his struggles as leader of a black regiment in the

Civil War; in fact, Broderick's character is the only non-fictional main character in the film,

making him the most poignant focus (Davies & Smith, 1997). As far as films set in more recent

times, "visual codes" denoting blacks in movies include portrayals engaging in illegal behavior

such as drug dealing and prostitution as well as the culturally stigmatized role of the unmarried

mother (Harris, 2008, p. 51). Some stereotypes of the African-American have also been encountered by Asian ethnicities.

Asians in Film

Asians also face discrimination and mass generalizations of their characteristics. One film scholar points to actor Sessue Hayakawa's work in the early 1900s and how even though he played the romantic lead opposite white women in some films, "In all of these films he is clearly marked as a foreigner, although in many that foreignness is seen as the basis not of the character's inferiority, but of his dilemma" (Kirihara, 1996, p. 81). In early films, characters representing Chinese were only prominent in storylines when serving whites, even sacrificing their livelihood and culture to do so (and, in another offering of D.W. Griffith, *That Chink at Golden Gulch,* is played by a white actor in yellowface) (Bernardi, 1996b).

Most films portraying Japanese culture have revolved around star-crossed romances often involving betrayal (Browne, 1996). In such betrayals, whether interracial or solely Japanese, it was always the Japanese character who was betrayed, always a woman who died, and always a Japanese male who carried out the inevitable murderous revenge (Browne, 1996). Strict culture especially as it pertains to women is emphasized, even going as far as to champion American's liberality (however limited at the time) when it comes to women and their rights to choose their life's paths and romances (Marchetti, 1996). Often in yellowface, white actors executed Eurocentrism in movies by portraying Chinese and Japanese males through "feminized or desexualized" performances to emphasize the more positive and masculine features of the West (Higashi, 1996, p. 331). Asian women on the other hand became the subject of male fantasies as delicate Geisha personifications ran rampant in the American psyche (Ginneken, 2007).

Memoirs of a Geisha, a 2005 film critically hailed in the United States and highly visible during awards season, was actually,

> disparaged in Japan because the main actresses were foreigners who had received only a six-week training course in the subtleties of Japanese culture. It was also disparaged in China because all three main actresses were Chinese. The authorities in China even forbade the showing of the movie, as it risked opening an old wound—namely, the controversy over the thousands of Chinese "comfort women" who had been abused as sexual slaves by the Japanese imperial army during the war (Ginneken, 2007, p. 118).

In a continued racial "us" versus "them" scenario, Asians provided a formidable enough "yellow peril" to justify blacks and whites working together as true Americans especially during the World War II era in some films (Locke, 2009, p. 16). The fact that much observation and study revolves around with whom Caucasians choose to "side" in conflicts involving multiple races is even more indicative of the White dominant fantasy. This was not limited to Asians, but also to Hispanics.

Hispanics in Film

Similar to African-Americans and Asians, Hispanics in the beginning were portrayed as either loyal to the White man or a lustful beast out to get White women in films now known as "greaser" movies (Bernardi, 1996b). In the shadows of colonialism and Eurocentric capitalism respectively, Mexicans in early Westerns displayed a dependence on the White's money-based economic system as saloon girls and bandits (Wright Wexman, 1996). Sometimes, Mexican identity was glossed over in favor of terms more European-friendly such as "Spanish" (Noriega, 1996). The type of colonialism here shows itself in the United State's expansion westward through the ideal of Manifest Destiny—an ideal that furthered the concept of Caucasians taming a wild land and anyone inhabiting it (Ramírez Berg, 2008).

With Hispanic or Latina women, their bodies become the focal point with special attention paid to dancing and curves (Peña Orvalle, 2008). The skin color of Latinos and Latinas

reveals an interesting view in Hollywood: that it is "not too light or too dark" and can give an entertainer an advantage especially if their skin is lighter in tone than their ethnic peers (Peña Orvalle, 2008, p. 169). In depth study of gender and the Latina identity in contemporary cinema is pointed out as an area in great need of further inspection (Báez, 2007).

The lean towards Eurocentrism continues with some Hispanic actors and actresses taking on Italian roles, an ethnicity seemingly closer to "whiteness" than Latino (Peña Orvalle, 2008, p. 173). The very term "Latin American" can be problematic because of the many differences between the countries and cultures characterized as Latino or Latina such as Argentina or Chile, for example (Marambio & Tew, 2006). This is a concept along with Manifest Destiny that also had (and still has) a profound effect on the next topic of discussion: Native Americans.

Native Americans in Film

American cinema in its beginnings had a definition of a true American—and it had nothing to do with whether or not one was an original inhabitant. In early silent films displays of United States patriotism often preceded or followed a tribal attack on unsuspecting Whites and accentuated a "this is our land" mentality (Wright Wexman, 1996). Such patriotism continued during the expansion Westward as part of Manifest Destiny; taking land from Mexicans and Native Americans was nothing more than a continuation of the Revolutionary War and an expansion of American (the "true" American) freedom (Ramírez Berg, 2008). As a result, people of tribal traditions were often viewed as hostile. Griffith, the man behind *Birth of a Nation,* also applied fears of white female rape from renegade, drunken tribesmen (Bernardi, 1996b). If they were not a potentially lethal presence, Native Americans had minor roles as sidekicks with rare presence as a well-rounded character. As far as playing them, "redface" was also utilized and

"few Indian roles were played by Indian actors, and few actors playing Indian roles made a name for themselves, as actors playing cowboy roles did" (Ginneken, 2007, p. 93).

Other than being perceived as a domestic threat or minor sidekick, Native Americans have also been identified through sweeping stereotypes, having the same traits, habits and customs across all tribes when there are in fact vast differences from tribe to tribe. Assumptions that all rode horses across plains, shooting arrows and guns and donning feathers in their long, flowing hair run rampant (Churchill, 1998). Absent is the fact that this is a people-group with thousands of years of history without such tools of warfare and that there are thousands of diverse traditions—even vast differences among the tribes known as the Plains Indians (Ginneken, 2007). Yet, this seems to be the area of greatest interest for filmmakers: the territorial battles between settlers and "Indians" on the plains and valleys of the Western Frontier. However, "There is no 'before' to the story, and there is no 'after.' Cinematic Indians have no history before Euroamerians come along, and then, mysteriously, they seem to pass out of existence altogether" (Churchill, 1998, p. 168). The phenomenon of the "disappearing Indian" is noted in several Westerns that—though historically Native Americans would be plentiful in the geographical areas and chronological times in which the stories are framed—were devoid of Native presence and focused on the White protagonists of sheriffs, cowboys, gamblers and outlaws (Churchill, 1998, p. 169). Another ethnicity that is often ignored but plays a vital role in American and global policy is that of the Middle East.

Middle Eastern Ethnicities in Film

Much like the "disappearing Indian," Arabs historically have been ignored in discussions of civil rights movements, though they too have fallen prey to the Ku Klux Klan and have been the subject of political discrimination since at least the 1920s (Saloom, 2005). But following the

Munich Olympic games killings in the 1970s, seen as an attack on the symbolism that the Olympics represented, a shift in film regarding people of the Middle East also took place (MacAlister, 2002). Beginning in the 1970s and growing in popularity in the 1980s, a highly popular theme in action thrillers became the thwarting of terroristic plots that often displayed sweeping and highly exaggerated characterizations of Middle Easterners that "were awash in cartoonish portrayals" (MacAlister, 2002, p. 450). Post-Gulf War these generalizations with Arab/Muslims as violent killers continued in films such as *True Lies* and *The Siege,* considered "patriotic blockbusters" (Edwards, 2001, p. 14).

This has served to fuel and exacerbate the fear and distrust many Americans have of Arabs as Islamic militants, conflating religion with ethnicity to label an enemy (Asali, 2002). *The Siege* is cited for actually relating Islam to terrorism (Saloom, 2005). Islam became the replacement for any kind of "Arab nationalism or political radicalism … as the dominant producer of terrorism" (MacAlister, 2002, p. 449). This along with other stereotypes are problematic in the same sense as categorizing all Native Americans into one large Plains tribe; the ethnicity of "Arab" is indicative of *geographic location*, and there are Christian Arabs as well as Arabs who identify themselves with their countries of origin rather than their religion (Wittenborn, 2007).

Arab women, like their Asian and Latina counterparts, have been "humiliated, demonized and eroticized" as a byproduct of 18th and 19th Century European "preexisting Arab stereotypes" in art and fiction (Shaheen, 2007, p. 27). Given less attention than Asians and Latinas in study, Arab women have been left out of feminist movements and stereotyped as exotic harem girls dancing in scarves and erotic fantasies (Saloom, 2005). As far as Islam is concerned, women under its influence are "in a pathetic state" according to some movies (Shaheen, 2007, p. 29).

Overall, several commonalities are found between these races and their treatment in film production and storylines.

Prominent Themes

Throughout film's history, the ideology of Eurocentrism has surfaced in forms both subtle and overt. Upon review of film's historical treatment of non-Whites, five dominant themes relevant to understanding whitewashing practices, while not necessarily exhaustive, emerged from this overview as the most common portrayals mentioned: 1) people of ethnicity in a perceived subservient or threatening position towards Whites, 2) Eurocentric colonialism and patriotism as justification for oppression, 3) fear of sexual pursuit of White women by minorities, 4) sexual exoticism of ethnic women, 5) an overall lack of ethnic representation, which all show a relationship to the practice of cinematic whitewashing.

Whitewashing

Media often refer to whitewashing as the practice of selecting "white actors to fill the main hero roles instead of the people of color they say the source material requires" (Hajela, 2010). For Gabriel (1998), however, it takes on a far more complicated nature, as it "refers to both the process and works within a loose problematic of racialization" (p.4). Within this process the focal point manifests "on the construction of *white* racialized identities" (1998, p. 4).

Careful review of the predominant themes reveals their relationship to the practice of cinematic whitewashing. It is not uncommon for a white man to be placed as a hero in a foreign land, romancing a native woman and emerging the victor. Peoples of ethnicity are there to help this hero (subservient) because perhaps the idea of a black male protagonist romancing a White female would be deemed too risky at the box office (threatening towards Whites). Seeing a White lead a legion of Samurai into battle and winning the Japanese beauty's heart would be a

huge fantasy (sexual exoticism), especially if that character is American (patriotism). The historic themes shed light on whitewashing as yet another, though perhaps more subtle, form of racism in cinema.

Whitewashing has been examined in the workplace, in education, and in film (Brown et al., 2003; Moore & Coleman, forthcoming; Reitman, 2006). Not limited to academic work, sufficient outrage over casting decisions has fueled the creation of websites documenting and critiquing the bent towards Eurocentrism (for example, racebending.com collects articles, interviews various industry people and experts and chronologically organizes different instances of what it calls whitewashing). Another example is the work of Lori Kido Lopez's (2012) piece on *The Last Airbender*, which focused primarily on the activism of fans and race groups in response to casting decisions. Here whitewashing will fall under scrutiny as it relates to film and culture.

Research Questions

RQ1: In what ways does whitewashing still persist in media texts?

RQ2: What are the potential meanings of these images and what do those meanings communicate about the current culture?

Contemporary Whitewashing, Eurocentrism and White Fantasies

In the minds of many in American culture, "blackface," "yellowface" and "redface" are no longer practiced (at least not in the traditional sense of heavy makeup and exaggerated gesture). Yet, observation of the marketing and release of films such as *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Love Guru*, *The Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, *The Social Network* and *The Last Airbender* (just to name a few) show mass-marketed films possessing lead and supporting characters meant to be ethnic, yet played by someone of European decent. This raises

questions as to where such films fit when assessing racial portrayals in film. Is this a subtle form of blackface to sell tickets? Jake Gyllenhaal's face may not have been painted dark, but he filled the role of a Persian hero and was "passed" as though he was indeed a Persian. A couple of years later, the ideals of whiteness also continue to permeate into television, showing its pervasiveness in both mediums historically and recently. Little Sofia was introduced as Latina, but purposefully drawn with light skin and pale, blue eyes.

Though it is highly unlikely that a film as overtly hostile to minorities as D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* would be released on a large scale now or in the future, scholars have noted the continuing lack of representation and the continuation of portrayed stereotypes of minorities in modern entertainment (Eschholz, Bufkin & Long, 2002). Modern Eurocentrism presents itself in newer, more nuanced and less recognizable forms often undetected by audiences. In addition to stereotypes, black characters may take on an "assimilationist" persona as a point from which the White protagonist can succeed—pushing aside any deep conversation regarding racism in favor of a "post race" ideology not necessarily reminiscent of reality (Thornton, 2011, p. 424). Whites indeed find success without racial barriers—sometimes at the expense of the other races sharing the screen (Tierney, 2006).

Critics of film and culture see such Hollywood characteristics as detrimental, a cinematic continuation of Eurocentric colonialism, and believe that "the implication of perspectival and other cinematic codes in colonialism's altericidal vision needs to be exposed and thoroughly problematized" (Downing & Saxton, 2010, p. 60). The reasons for this are the qualities inherent in racial assumptions. When it comes to the cultural implications race can have, "… even if race is merely a fiction, it is a powerful fiction in that it systematically affects how we see the world, how we present ourselves to the world, who we associated with, and how we are conversely

treated by people and by institutions" (Bernardi, 1996, p. 2). Though *Prince of Persia* and *Sofia the First* are a far cry from the blatant racism of Griffith's work that openly vilified and mocked minorities, it is important to analyze their place in the evolution of White racial ideologies portrayed in film, and how the film industry is portraying them today.

For such analysis, Havens, Lotz and Tinic (2009) suggest a critical framework acknowledging the media as "both economic and cultural institutions … both a site of artistic and social expression as well as a business concerned with the maximization of markets and profits" and to further develop "understandings of how these contradictions work within actual practice; and, more importantly, what implications these practices—and the texts they generate—hold in terms of larger social and cultural processes of representation and power" (p. 249). Possessing historical perspective regarding cinema's overall racial practices and its roots in colonialism, problematizing white actors in ethnic roles as a continuation of Eurocentric sentiments for profit will begin here with a look at the availability of ethnic leading roles, the role of fantasy in filmmaking decisions, and then follow with critical examination of *Prince of Persia* and *Sofia the First* to counter a continuing culture of Eurocentrism in which rights and opportunity are far from equal.

Availability of Ethnic Leading Roles in Oscar-Nominated and Top Grossing Films

In order to gauge the availability of ethnic roles to highlight the scarce opportunities for minority actors, review of Best Picture nominees for the Oscar (cinematic works deemed worthwhile by the film industry itself) and top grossing films of the year (representing audience preferences) for two representative decades, or "Eras" was conducted. The first decade represented is 1940-1950 and for this purpose is called *Early Era*. The *Early Era* was chosen due to significance in America's racial history to provide a comparison with the *Contemporary Era*

of the present. In the *Early Era,* the development and influence of the Civil Rights Movement set new ideals of race in America. The years 2000 through 2011 Best Picture nominees and box office champions comprised the list called *Contemporary Era.*

For each film nominated or listed on the top grossing list, three top-billed actors were chosen (according to the AFI film catalogue) and their ethnicity as well as that of their character was assessed through names, biographies provided by the Gale Biography Database as well as the Internet Movie Database and headshots showing their overall appearance. Overall, these were the approximate findings (rounded to nearest decimal place when possible):

Early Era

Oscar Best Picture Nominees-   99% Whites Portraying Whites
                                    0.4% Minorities Portraying Minorities
                                    0.4% Whites Portraying Minorities

Top Grossing Films-   98% Whites Portraying Whites
                                    1% Minorities Portraying Minorities
                                    0.6% Whites Portraying Minorities

Contemporary Era

Oscar Best Picture Nominees-   84% Whites Portraying Whites
                                    15% Minorities Portraying Minorities
                                    0.5% Whites Portraying Minorities

Top Grossing Films-   91% Whites Portraying Whites
                                    9% Minorities Portraying Minorities

The exploratory content analysis of Oscar-nominated and Top Grossing films revealed an overall lack of minority representation. As shown, after over sixty years of racial progress, minority representation in Oscar Best Picture leading roles has only risen 15%. In the *Contemporary Era,* minority leading roles with substance remain a rarity among Oscar Best

Picture Nominees and Top Grossing Films. If substantial roles of ethnicity are a rarity even in our seemingly "Post-racial" environment, then it is questionable when films surface on the market with a Hollywood Caucasian actor or actress filling this rare ethnic role. While this is not to say that no ethnic leading roles exist, or that they are *always* filled with White actors, it is concerning that such films are a rarity in high-profile media such as the Oscars or the top grossing films.

Both *Prince of Persia* and *Sofia the First* have seen domestic monetary success with their White leading characters, showing that the Eurocentrism displayed in the exploratory content analysis not only continues, but it also spans across different media powered by a promotional powerhouse of a production company such as Disney. Such pieces would be highly visible, and therefore influential, as they reach global audiences and appeal to the fantasies of both adult and youth age groups.

Fantasy

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time is an adventure film based on a videogame of the same name. Interestingly, this film is based on a type of media in which the consumer *is* the main character. *Sofia the First* is a coming-of-age story involving a princess in training. Both of these entertainment pieces are labeled as fantasies by the Internet Movie Database and as a magical adventure by Disney's online store. Visiting the Disney main website and looking at their movie database shows *Prince of Persia* appearing prominently on the list of fantasy films. According to Paul Bowman (2010) in his analysis of Bruce Lee's influence, participation is part of the charm of fantasy on audiences because, "fantasies are both social and psychic, and this frustrates the possibility of a simple or sharp distinction between objective and subjective, and indeed between the inside and the outside of the subject" (p. 121). As he observed Lee's appeal, Bowman saw

that the *possibility* of participation by the audience, and the fantasy of it, proved very powerful. In the latter entertainment piece, Sofia fits nicely into Disney's "Princess" marketing strategy, appealing to a young female fanbase. Regarding fantasy and how we relate to such films, Cowie (1997) writes, "Projection is primarily considered as involving part-objects, bits of the self, implying a partial and particular role in identification" (p. 113). This suggests that in fantasy, we find pieces of ourselves in the interpretation. In essence, "spectatorship involves entering into the fantasy scenarios provided by the visual text" (Introduction, 2003, p. 2). This interpretation of fantasy also touches upon race relations. Could it be that the audience is not only projecting fantasies of adventure and royalty, but also of subtle White dominance? Fantasizing about White dominance is noted in St. John's (2001) examination of the Mammy stereotype:

> I have suggested that psychic multiraciality poses a threat to the construction of white self-sufficiency, the illusion of whiteness that owes nothing to blackness. At the painful site if exclusive racial identification of the dominant culture subject-to-be, a pleasurable unconscious fantasy of interracial mother-child union is installed. This fantasy sustains the dominant cultural subject in his unconscious experience of multiraciality at the same time that it answers the generic demand for immediate and uninterrupted gratification. (p. 155).

On top of the complex relationships between fantasy, culture and the individual, fantastical entertainment pieces offer lucrative opportunities for studios looking to draw an audience and turn a profit due to fantasy's appeal to target age groups and the potential for merchandizing and sequels (Thompson, 2003). If industries profit from such fantasies, it is important to examine what is for sale. As Gunning (2003) writes, "The visual register of moving images is constantly shadowed by a zone where vision cannot penetrate; from the margins of invisibility a new awareness of both the powers and the danger of cinema in relation to race arises" (p. 67). Scholars have written of race portrayals in an attempt to see the unseen and explain cultural norms.

Interpreting the White Royal: Analytical Frameworks

   To discuss the implications of the *Prince of Persia* and *Sofia the First* portrayal

decisions, Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony as interpreted by Stuart Hall will serve as the

theoretical lens while John Fiske's Three Levels of Coding serves as the analytical tool. This

begins with a look at how Hall interprets hegemony and its proper application. While in prison,

Gramsci developed his theories regarding ruling classes and their counterparts (Scott, 2007).

These "'Prison Notebooks' were incomplete, unedited, and unpublished when Gramsci died in

his prison clinic" and because of their post-humus publication, "his ideas began to have a

significant influence only after others had established the framework of Marxist humanism"

(Scott, 2007, p. 28). Stuart Hall interpreted and developed Gramsci's hegemony into a concept

taking into account both individual and group ideologies as they develop into an economic and

political consensus (Hall, 1988; Kellner, 2007). Hall (1980) interprets Gramsci's *hegemony* as,

> all those processes whereby a fundamental social group (Gramsci speaks of alliances of
> class strata, not of a unitary and unproblematic 'ruling class'), which has achieved
> direction over the 'decisive economic nucleus,' is able to expand this into a moment of
> social, political and cultural leadership and authority throughout civil society and the
> state, attempting to unify and reconstruct the social formation around an organic tendency
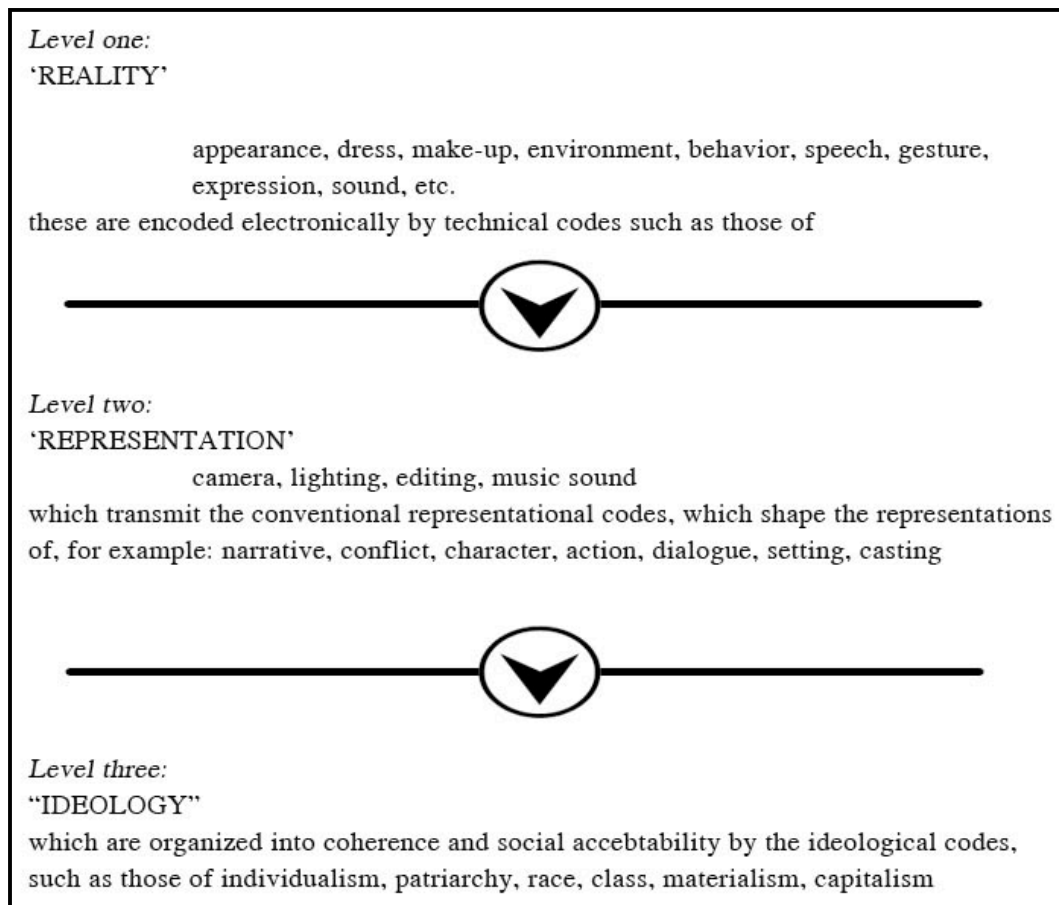> through a series of 'national tasks' (p.35).

   In this struggle, ideologies conflict with one another economically, politically,

intellectually and morally as it creates a "hegemony of a fundamental group over a series of

subordinate groups" (Hall 1980, p. 35). Hegemony is more than domination by military force,

and it does not denote a purely submissive population; hegemony, negotiating between

individual knowledge and dominating ideologies, is the struggle for "consent" (Edgar &

Sedgwick, 2002, p. 164). Hall agreed with this assessment of dominance when he wrote his

influential piece "Encoding/Decoding," acknowledging the dominant ideological codes placed

into texts by their producers to attract audiences, yet with an open door for individual

interpretation of meaning (Hall, 2000; Lewis, 2002). In light of individual interpretation, Hall favored Gramsci's hegemony for its granting the population the capacity for cultural resistance and for its ability to find "the contradictions in the capitalist power bloc" (Rojek, 2007, p. 72). Through this interpretation, Hall sees knowledge as the key for such resistance, or a form of "counter-hegemony" (Kellner, 2007, p. 60). Hall sees Gramsci's hegemony as relevant to a given time-frame, that is, "It is always made specific to a particular historical phase in specific national societies … in which the institutions of state and civil society have reached a stage of great complexity" (Hall, 1980, p. 36). Such complexities can be seen in a modern, capitalist society with representative government because popular consent of large amounts of the populace is required for both acceptance or transformation through resistance (Hall, 1980). According to hegemony, culture itself is the field of battle (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002).

John Fiske (1994) notes the subtlety racism possesses, and that it manifests itself through inferential methods called "nonracist racism" as well as blatant denial (p. 37). Entertainment—in his analyses of television specifically—is seen in its cultural economic form, one in which producers must change to match an ever-changing atmosphere of audience choice (Fiske, 2000b). Therefore, the changes seen in entertainment reflect not only originality of production, but also "larger movements in the political and social system" (Fiske, 2000b, p. 542). Regarding the audience itself, they become a "family audience," that is "aware both of his individuality and of his membership of a large group" (Fiske, 1978, p. 109). This illustrates the existence of a meaningful relationship between an industry of both profit and culture and the "family audience" to whom it attempts to cater. Like Eurocentrism and the sentiments it entails, Fiske sees Whiteness as the starting point for racism (Fiske, 1994). Discourse, he argues, is crucial because it "makes power visible and the visibility makes resistance possible" (Fiske, 1994, p. 37).

Inspiring discourse regarding entertainment requires decoding what is presented. For this purpose, Fiske illustrates three levels in coding television (which are applied to cinema as well as a made for television movie released on DVD here). Code is defined as "a rule-governed system of signs, whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture, and which is used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture" (Fiske, 2000, p. 221). Level One focuses on the basic first impressions that an audience would receive from watching a piece such as dress, makeup, behavior, speech, etc. Level Two discusses how the technical decisions portray and direct how the story is represented like character, dialogue, casting, etc. Level Three dives into the overall ideology portrayed in the piece (Fiske, 2000, p. 222).

An event to be televised is already encoded by social codes and is simplified as Fiske as those of:

Level one:
'REALITY'

                       appearance, dress, make-up, environment, behavior, speech, gesture, expression, sound, etc.
these are encoded electronically by technical codes such as those of

▼

Level two:
'REPRESENTATION'
                   camera, lighting, editing, music sound
which transmit the conventional representational codes, which shape the representations of, for example: narrative, conflict, character, action, dialogue, setting, casting

▼

Level three:
"IDEOLOGY"
which are organized into coherence and social accebtability by the ideological codes, such as those of individualism, patriarchy, race, class, materialism, capitalism

(Fiske, 2000, p. 222)

While level one and two encapsulate codes built into the text through technical conventions and codes of conventional representation such as story and dialogue respectively, level three presents a crucial focal point, especially as it relates to culture and Hall's Gramsci reading. Hall (2003) describes *Ideology* as, "those images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence" (p.89). To Hall, ideologies exist before an individual is born, but unconsciously becomes the norm and is expressed as if the individual is the original author (2003). Relating this definition of ideology to race and racism in film, D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* has been described as a "masterpiece of … racist ideology" (Gunning, 2003 p. 51). In the context of ideology through media, Fiske (2000) refers to a piece and how its scenes cohesively create a "coherent set of meanings that constitute the *common sense* of a society" (p. 223). Common sense in the context of culture is precisely the plane on which Gramsci saw competing ideologies intervening in hegemony (Hall, 1980).

These planes of hegemonic negotiation will come under examination with *Prince of Persia* and *Sofia the First.* For the analysis Fiske's codes and descriptions were separated and notes taken for each aspect within the codes. These codes were then considered within the overall concept of the stories and applied with a focus on Ideology and hegemony. Taking into account the differences between live-action and animation and the stronger propensity for racial caricature that cartoons entail, the pieces were treated as a single, separate entity free from the others' influence during the analysis after which notes were then compared. The analysis begins with Disney's action film *Prince of Persia.*

The Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time is centered on the character Dastan, an orphaned boy who, after impressing the king of Persia with his acrobatic feats in the marketplace, is adopted as the king's third son. Years later, Persia invades neighboring country Alamut, and through this invasion Dastan comes to possess a strange dagger that has the ability to turn back time for one minute. The Persians' triumphant return home is met with palace intrigue after the king is murdered and Dastan is falsely accused of regicide. Fleeing Persia with Alamut's defeated princess Tamina and the mystical dagger, Dastan uncovers the secret of the Sands of Time, learns his father's true murderer and the reason behind the Alamut invasion, and is able to set things right through the dagger and ultimately brotherly compassion.

Level One: REALITY

Filmed within scenic desert landscapes, the filmmakers' efforts to tell a Persian tale also rely heavily on the dress and makeup applied to the actors. Though several of the actors (notably Alfred Molina, who plays a shady dessert sheik) seemed to have been cosmetically bronzed to fit their roles, Gyllenhaal's Dastan's makeup seems to have been done with a lighter hand. Though a few shades darker than the actor's normal skin tone, he is nevertheless much lighter than several of the peoples whose paths he crosses. His brothers show an inconsistency in skin tone as well. Middle brother Garsiv seems to have been darkened much more than eldest brother Tus, and wears headpieces more stereotypical of Middle Eastern races than Tus. Tus' appearance could very well have been plucked from any film depicting a British or French king, an interesting touch because he is set up as the heir-apparent to the throne. Other characters show a strong British bent, as well. The main Hansassan (a secret assassin society used by the villain in the film) is clearly a Caucasian with pale blue eyes. Gyllenhaal's blue eyes also stand out in

several scenes as he surveys different dilemmas. The one female character, Princess Tamina, also appears to be Caucasian. Though most definitely set in Persia, nearly every single character speaks with a pronounced British accent.

The opening and Dastan's first scenes set the stage for an epic, action-packed fantasy. Opening narrative states "Long ago, in a land far away …" inviting the viewer to enter into a story world as the Persian-inspired instrumental plays. Dastan's first scene as an adult places him in a friendly street spar rather than in royal surroundings. He is gritty, shirtless, sweating, and displaying every muscle as he fights to pin his opponent. When his brothers summon him for a war counsel, he clothes himself, but not without leaving the shirt unbuttoned and counseling his brother with bare chest. This behavior and the screen time devoted to displaying it play into how Dastan is represented in the film.

Level Two: REPRESENTATION

Gyllenhaal's casting is a point at which Fiske (2000) states merits examination because actors are "real people whose appearance is already encoded by our social codes" (p. 225). His previous description as a "Swedish-Jewish-American prince" and the comments made in critics' reviews about his race show that the audience is fully aware that he is a Caucasian actor in a Persian role. This is more important than the casting of the villain, according to Fiske (2000). His pale blue eyes and contrast with other characters around him frame him as the handsome, dashing and White American hero placed in Persia who happily breaks the mold of his more traditional brothers.

The action is nearly non-stop; there is rarely a moment when Dastan is not leaping from one location to another and escaping many perils. The filmmakers were even able to fit gun-like weapons (in the form of arrow darts shot from the wrists) and an explosion (after Dastan lights

pouring oil onto his enemies) into the mix of choppy, action-packed camera shots. Slow motion

is used with rigor to showcase Dastan's jumping and Gyllenhaal's rugged good looks. As the

hero, he has by far the most time on screen, and therefore the most sympathy as the audience gets

to know him, and primarily him.

Dastan's street sparring and dress are not the only non-typical royal behavior he displays.

He blatantly defies his brother's orders and sneaks into Alamut, successfully opening the city to

invasion by the Persians. He seems uninterested but cooperative with several palace traditions

such as escorting Tamina to the royal court to display the spoils of the conquest to the princes'

father. It is made clear throughout that he is not nor would he ever be interested in becoming

king; he was far more grateful for the love of his adopted father than for his palace life. He

shows morality throughout with his honesty, patience and lack of greed. In the end it is this fair-

skinned, blue-eyed British character portrayed by Gyllenhaal who saves Persia and the entire

world from the destruction of the Sands of Time.

Level Three: IDEOLOGY

Through these appearances and the dialogue there appear to be several Western

ideologies displayed. The basic plot at the beginning is a direct nod to newsworthy events in the

United States. Persia's premise for invading Alamut was the mistaken belief that Alamut was

selling weapons to Persia's enemies, a belief that ultimately proves false. This points to the

invasion of Iraq and anxieties regarding weapons of mass destruction. Molina's sheik, clearly

intended for comic relief, could very well have been plucked from a Tea Party rally (see also:

Mendoza, 2010). More than once he is heard railing against taxes and secret government

operations. He runs his illegal ostrich races like a typical American sporting event, complete with

pretty girls holding trays of food who he orders to work the crowd. He even threatens Tamina that it will come out of her pay if she drops her tray.

American ideals like due process also come into play. Newly crowned king Tus is hesitant to order the death of his brother (whom he believes is guilty of killing their father). He argues strongly, and ultimately prevails upon his counselor uncle, that it is just and right to let Dastan stand trial rather than be executed beforehand. Norms of patriarchy also abound. Tamina is the only female character of substance (the only other females being in harem-like surroundings and appearance) and the princes' mother is never shown or mentioned. Though Tus apparently has multiple wives, they never see camera time. Tus even wanted to marry Tamina in the beginning, happily adding her to his several wives.

Race, class and religion are discussed among the characters of *Prince of Persia* mostly to highlight their differences. Tamina insults her conquerors, calling them "camel-riding illiterates" and mocks Dastan's Persian walk. He retorts that he was not born in a palace like her, and goes on to call her spoiled when she complains of not having sufficient water during their desert trek. She is more spiritual than Dastan, and when she attempts to explain why they needed to return the mystical dagger to appease the gods, he replies, "*Your* gods, not mine." Peppered throughout these contrasts is an American-style rugged individualism, as Dastan proclaims to Tamina that the two must make their own destiny.

The negotiation here is essentially an American story with Eurocentric characterizations with a setting that *happens* to be Persia. Here, the filmmakers have placed the story in a context comfortable to American audiences with themes familiar and repetitive (capitalism, patriarchy, etc.). The allusion to Iraq War themes and Tea Party undertones coupled with its recent release date of 2010 make it specific to the current time frame as it also shows the film's attempt to

entertain their audience by paying homage to American politics and culture. Disney's appeal to audience fantasies of adventure is apparent on the DVD case cover, promoting the film as coming from the producer of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise. The film's lack of attempt to turn Gyllenhaal's eyes to a more accurate brown shows an acceptance of his Whiteness as the camera lovingly showcases him—lovingly showcases a White, American protagonist. As previously discussed, though film critics from reputable journalistic sources often questioned his casting in both humorous and critical ways, they nevertheless showed capacity for acceptance. Even the most critical review (regarding Gyllenhaal's casting) noted the "dumb fun appeal" of his placement in the role. That is not to say that objections do not exist when websites and activism illustrate that some audience members have rejected whitewashed casting. However, monetarily the film grossed over ninety millions dollars domestically and over two hundred million at foreign theaters (Box Office Mojo). This illustrates that upon this hegemonic plane of film consumption, *Prince of Persia* and its whitewashed story and lead actor gained consent in the audience negotiation. Such American themes (a child plucked from obscurity to become a favored royal, etc.) is also seen in *Sofia The First.*

Sofia the First: Once Upon a Princess

Sofia the First is ultimately the tale of Sofia's rags to riches journey to becoming a princess, and becoming comfortable with the idea. To reach this goal, she must contend with new siblings, behavioral expectations, and a very public ball intended to serve as her royal debut. With a magical amulet that grants her new powers based on good or bad deeds, she eventually (and unknowingly) thwarts palace magician Cedric's plot to steal the amulet, wins over her hostile stepsister, and accepts her new role as royalty—even bestowing upon herself the title *Sofia the First*. Along the way there is of course magic, talking animals, and original songs.

Level One: REALITY

The film opens in typical fairy tale fashion: with a storybook and the statement "Once Upon a Time." Familiar faces Flora, Fauna and Merryweather of *Sleeping Beauty* fame introduce the premise and lead character Sofia. As the daughter of shoemaker Miranda, Sofia's fatherless life is unexplained, but she quickly becomes stepdaughter to King Roland II when her mother is commissioned to make shoes for the king and they subsequently fall in love and marry. Sofia's appearance is as media observers have noted: she possesses pale, porcelain-like skin with bright pink cheeks and sky blue eyes. Her mother Miranda has noticeably darker skin and hair, but neither Sofia nor Miranda possess an accent. The world of Enchancia is decidedly European in structure with cobblestone streets, close-knit shops, carriages and a castle with magnificent spires. The styles of clothing also reflect Europe; Sofia's new princess dress displays a ball gown appearance reminiscent of every European Disney princess.

After her arrival at her new royal home, Sofia is met with a pleasant, welcoming demeanor from new stepbrother James, but with skepticism and jealousy from stepsister Amber. Stereotypical girl "catfight" behavior abounds from Amber as she attempts acts of hostility ranging from passive aggression to outright cruel pranks. Sofia displays a moral purity throughout; she good-naturedly laughs along with James' first-day-of-school hazing (an act for which he was coerced by Amber and for which he showed deep remorse). Her consternation at Amber's bullying does not amount to revenge, tattling or verbal or physical violence but instead was limited to body language, facial expressions and silence. In the end, it is Sofia who approaches Amber with the olive branch and repairs their broken relationship.

Level Two: REPRESENTATION

All of the narrative and conflict are centered around Sofia as she reluctantly accepts her role as royalty. Much of Sofia's activities revolve around becoming accustomed to the royal life at the castle and at the school for young royals called Royal Prep. Race is visual rather than verbal; no mention whatsoever is made about anyone's heritage or country of origin. Visually, however, Enchancia appears to have several spectrums of skin color in its citizenry. The only obvious minority characters with lines or characterization are Sophia's friends from her former life and some students at Royal Prep, who have brief lines of dialogue. Among the student body there are turbans, kimonos, and obvious nods to different countries of the world. The studies at Royal Prep, however, reflect a European style of schooling. Dance lessons are a basic Waltz to European style stringed instruments commonly seen in orchestras. The students learn to pour from English-appearing teapots into teacups and sit on English-style thrones. Self-defense is the art of fencing, with no mention of other cultural methods such as Martial Arts.

Level Three: IDEOLOGY

Though race is not verbally mentioned, class is. Amber admonishes Sofia for curtsying to bowing servants and informs her that they only "bow to royalty." Roland II, the kind patriarch who accepts Sofia wholeheartedly, explains that she will attend Royal Prep to "learn our royal ways." Sofia is so uncomfortable with the lavish surroundings, she laments in the song "I'm Not Ready to be a Princess" that she is afraid to touch her ornate toys and has no desire to wear the sparkling jewelry. She seems eager to please her new royal counterparts but privately misses her commoner past; she hides her preferred rag doll under the massive pillows on her bed and sleeps on the cushioned windowsill her first night in the castle. She is distressed at the thought of dancing badly at her ball primarily because of what the other royals will think, and is so intent to

impress that she resorts to a spell from the villainous Cedric (whom she is unaware is intent on theft and a royal coup).

Western ideologies abound throughout *Sofia the First*. These include several aspects of ideology Fiske points out such as patriarchy, materialism, class and capitalism. As Roland II, Miranda and the children enter the castle hallways after Sofia has joined them at the castle, Amber and Sofia walk several steps behind James in what looks to be an official procession inside the castle walls. As it is suggested at their introduction that James and Amber are twins, it is unlikely that the order is due to age, suggesting a patriarchal social norm.

When Sofia settles into her bedroom, she marvels at its size and beauty as her familiar chest looks tattered when juxtaposed beside the new royal chest at the foot of her bed. The audience is invited to marvel at Sofia's good fortune and rejoice in her acquiring of such fine things—as they perhaps fantasize and project their own desires for this kind of life. As mentioned before, many contrasts are made between commoners and the different norms expected for royalty—including dress and behavior towards others. Though Enchancia is a monarchy, the idea of "something for nothing" is rejected through the animals as they stop by to help Sofia dress and clean her room. After the amulet grants her the ability to understand their speech, they sing "A Little Food," explaining to Sofia that animals have helped princesses for ages in hopes that the princess would return the favor with food. The songbirds flit around her singing, "even songbirds shouldn't sing for free." Though Disney claims inspiration rather than representation for *Sofia the First*, the inspiration here seems to lean towards a European style kingdom and pattern of looks and behavior. It is admittedly based on the British Isles, and British norms take center-stage.

Disney's explanations for Sofia's appearance, and their intentions with the themes and storyline are revealing due to Disney's admitting their attempt to inspire young girls all while vaguely referencing Spanish culture without concrete visual evidence in the main character. This is a new world they have created, a world they invite children to join and, as the back cover of the DVD states, a world that will show "every little princess in training how to sparkle—inside and out!" In this new world that Nancy Kanter described as "Not OUR world," Disney's proclaimed multicultural inspiration to form a "melting-pot" kingdom nevertheless portrays a patriarchal kingdom ruled by Whites. Though diversity exists throughout the background and side characters, it does not appear to exist in educational lesson plans at Royal Prep or in basic traditions of Enchancia. Basing the kingdom on the British Isles as Disney claims reflects an undercurrent of colonialism; the minority children at Royal Prep are going through a process of European indoctrination complete with a sort of Golden Rule in which the royals are encouraged to "rule over others as you would have them rule over you." Disney has not missed the merchandising opportunities with Sofia dolls appearing in stores and on their website. Their success in ratings shows an overall acceptance and consent among mass audience members, even as some object that, "I'm twenty-two, and I still don't have a princess that looks like me" (Strochlic, 2012). The mixed heritage of Sofia, a character created from the imaginations of storytellers, leans overwhelmingly to the European line of descent and has gained acceptance by majority audience members.

Discussion

Both *Prince of Persia* and *Sofia the First* involve a commoner defying the odds and rising up to the class level of royalty—all with a whitewashed bent in favor of European ideals. Dastan and Sofia show a contrast to their royal companions, and must overcome obstacles to

achieve their goals, both helped and hindered by magic, appealing to adventure and fantasy. A possible explanation for the acceptance of the European-capitalist ideology with White leaders in Hall's hegemony and in these pieces could be that such acceptance merely reflects a culture in which youth "are continuously exposed to recurring stereotyping and/or exclusion of people of color as they begin to understand the world and the people in it" (Moore & Coleman, forthcoming). The earlier section regarding film's historical treatment of Hispanics and Middle Eastern Ethnicities continues in these pieces. Just as Mexican is called "Spanish" to give a stronger European impression, Sofia's Latina inspiration manifests itself in European appearance and traditions. Dastan's world includes often "cartoonish" portrayals of Middle-Eastern men in heavy black eyeliner and harem-like women with no other purpose than to bare skin and entertain the men.

Disney's pieces both portrayed themes of Eurocentric ideology that rise to the top of Hall's hegemony as "institutionalized" because the readings audiences are groomed to perform on the pieces "have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of 'how things work for all practical purposes in this culture'" (Hall, 2000, p. 57). Though people of races other than White are included, they exist, as Thornton (2011) observed, to remain in the background indefinitely, supporting the Caucasian lead on his or her path to success. This sort of ideology is most effective "when it operates at a less than conscious level—that is, when our socialization has been so thorough that we do not identify our positions as ideology but rather, see them as the articulation of 'truth'" (Holtzman, 2000, p. 34). The truth, and a possible explanation for the pieces acceptance in hegemony, is that the ideology of whitewashing to place stories in a Eurocentric context has become a part of the mainstream subconscious, the order of things that

resonates with the audience as if they were the originators of the idea, even if that idea whitewashes the stories of non-White races and ethnicities.

Conclusion

The question of how whitewashing persists in media texts requires historical and contextual analysis; the hegemonic discourses of Whiteness demonstrate continued Eurocentrism and White favoritism. What it says about our culture is that this conditioning continues in young people, and therefore future filmmakers who, without awareness, will perpetuate Whiteness atop hegemony. The fact that *Prince of Persia* saw monetary success globally as well as domestically speaks volumes for the state of Eurocentrism and whitewashing as culture becomes increasingly globalized. Whitewashing grants Whiteness the manifestation of a global commodity, and with competition rising in the workplace and other realms of the public sphere, "being white, as a consequence, literally has value" (Brown et al., 2003, p. 31). Though yellowface, blackface and other racist caricatures are far from likely to see screen time, some observers believe "their legacy lives on" (Lee, 2010). This legacy and the grooming of youth it entails are evident in the whitewashing of *Prince of Persia,* and of its continuation into the television medium with *Sofia the First,* a piece aimed at a young impressionable audience and also met with financial success. The hegemonic acceptance of the audience reflects what the stories portray as movie-goers are encouraged to buy tickets, DVDs and merchandise as they relate to the heroes and heroines of the Royal White.

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