BOOK REVIEW

Recasting the Disney Princess

Roberts, S. (Ed.). (2020). *Recasting the Disney Princess in an Era of New Media and Social Movements*. Lexington Books. ISBN: 9781793604019. 348 pp.

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In seeking to "critique the works created during Disney's second revival" and "[examine] the political economy of a major global company and brand (p. 5)", this collection of analyses takes the reader on a journey from the personal impact of representation to the in-depth critique of what they say about the communities depicted. Not everything the authors have to say is positive, with one of the first essays in the prologue noting, "… as much as we loved [The Princess and the Frog], we also started to challenge the cultural storytelling of the movie (p. xiv)." Though Disney is a beloved brand, the company has a history of neglecting or othering persons of color and indigenous peoples. Even their portrayals of white princesses can be problematic, as these princesses are traditionally damsels in distress. Recently, however, the company has realized that leaning into the greater societal discussion of equity, diversity, and inclusion is a good decision for both their image and their wallets.

The book has four sections: Rebranding the Disney Princess, Diversifying the Disney Princess, Deconstructing Princess Narratives, and Embedding Social Discourse around the Disney Heroine. The first section begins with an analysis of Disney's corporate social responsibility (CSR), specifically the way Disney brands itself on social media. This is accompanied by more nuanced analyses of specific branding efforts, such as marketing the princesses to younger viewers, the acquisition of Marvel and Lucasfilm, and the

production of *Hamilton*. These chapters provide a solid foundation from which to explore Disney's "new brand," and reflect its diversification through acquisitions and new projects. Specific examples of how Disney "does" diversity follow, starting with *Elena of Avalor* and *Coco*. The authors are quick to show mistakes as well, including a chapter on the problematic initial script for the live-action remake of *Mulan* and the mixed results of the remake of *Aladdin*. Author Krystal Ghisyawan notes, "[Disney] barely addressed issues of 'othering' regarding Arab masculinity, but made greater effort to revamp Jasmine and brown femininity (p.186)." The volume discusses the work Disney has done to transform the defining characteristics of "princess" and includes chapters on *Beauty and the Beast*, *Frozen*, and *The Black Panther*. Interestingly, the last chapter in this section is about *Maleficent*, a character and movie that does not fit neatly into the typical Disney image. This is perhaps the clearest indication that Disney's brand is more complex and nuanced than ever before, and worth another analysis. The concluding section returns the reader to Disney's CSR and social consciousness, with critiques of how Disney has tackled racism, crime, work-life balance, representation, and sexual orientation within their media.

While these nuanced topics are all carefully articulated, the true strength of this volume is that the editor made a concerted effort to center the voices of women scholars and scholars of color. The backgrounds of the authors vary wildly, from tenured professors to undergraduate degree seekers, but all authors have an equal opportunity to inject their voices into the discussion. The book is organized in a logical, consistent manner that helps the disparate chapters build on each other. However, the sheer scope of the book can be a burden, so it is best processed in sections or chapters.

The collection provides necessary analysis, previously missing from the literature, about Disney's rebranding efforts using both new and old media. Material already available on the same topic is neither this recent (and thus neglects the impact of Disney titles such as *Sophia the First* and *Moana*) nor this comprehensive. The text acknowledges a recent predecessor, Johnson Cheu's *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability* (2015), which analyzes Disney material up to 2009's *Up*. Readers of that work are sure to appreciate this new one. It should be noted that most popular social networks were nonexistent or in their infancy at the time *Up* was released, and their impact on Disney was likely negligible.

This volume is for the serious researcher who specializes in the impact of media on social movements and the role that media plays in shaping identity. It can also assist researchers who interrogate issues of technology and communication from the business perspective, as many of the chapters focus on the economic aspect of Disney's brand and professed values. It would make a good addition to the shelves of any library that supports a robust program in communication, women's and gender studies, or sociology writ large. *Recasting the Disney Princess in an Era of New Media and Social Movements* is an excellent example of a work that seeks to welcome new voices into the scholarly discussion.