

**Sanitization of Englishmen within Pocahontas**

**Written Task #2**

**How and why is a social group represented in a particular way?**

**Language and Mass Media**

**ENG3U9**

Disney's 1995 film *Pocahontas* is based on Native American woman Pocahontas, and her fictionalized encounter with Englishman John Smith, who end up falling in love (Webb). The film serves as entertainment and its goal is to appeal to as many people as possible for Disney's monetary and popularity purposes. *Pocahontas* sanitizes Englishmen to make itself more appealing to the audience.

Firstly, within the film, John Smith is portrayed as a decent man. He is selfless, and this is demonstrated through his actions. He saves his colleague Thomas and takes blame for Kokoum's murder. His admiration is represented by how the colonists describe him. They declare to Ratcliffe, their superior: "Smith was right all along. We never shoulda listened to you" (*Gabriel, Pocahontas*), illustrating that they regard Smith with even greater esteem, emphasizing his powerful reputation. In reality, however, fellow colonists described him as insensitive. Smith stated "He who shall not work, shall not eat" (Montgomery). His cruel attitude established dominance, and he expressed his opinion that the other colonists were worthless. He was regarded as a challenge to their deserved respect, and some even plotted to kill him. This demonstrates that Smith was not compassionate and revered. Within the film, he also treats the Natives with kindness. He risks his life to save Chief Powhatan, and gains respect from them: "You are always welcome among our people. Thank you, my brother" (*Gabriel, Pocahontas*). He also acquires a love for the land and nature, so powerful that he gives up on his original intention: to help the settlers become prosperous. "This place is incredible, and to think we came all this way just to dig it up for gold" (*Gabriel, Pocahontas*), he says. However, in reality, Smith was a man fervent for the colonization of the New World. He noted: "Here every man may be master and owner of his owne labour and land ... he may ... by industrie quickly grow rich"

(Weiser). The New World was nothing more to Smith than land which could provide fortune. He did not care about or respect the Natives, the land, and nature. Clearly, *Pocahontas* greatly sanitizes Smith, portraying his character differently from reality.

Disney uses *Pocahontas* to appeal, mainly for popularity and monetary purposes. By enhancing Smith's personality, they are able to set a foundation for a love story. If Smith is represented as the harsh man he was in reality, it would be unreasonable for Pocahontas to fall for him, since his personality would not appeal to her or match her own, for she is kind and respectful. Moreover, kind protagonists for an animated romance film captivate the audience more than cold ones, as they are more appealing for a film of such genre. As a result, the film is able to entice more of the audience, increasing both the film and Disney's popularity and revenue.

Furthermore, the other Englishmen are also sanitized in *Pocahontas*. They are understanding and peaceful, consenting to Chief Powhatan's request for peace. When Ratcliffe, a megalomaniac, encourages fighting to continue, the colonists refuse, although he is a superior. "No! They let him go! They don't want to fight!" (Gabriel, *Pocahontas*). This shows their moral values overpowering their desire for wealth. Additionally, they become respectful and considerate of the Natives, and recognize the New World as the Natives' land. In reality, the English did not positively see the Natives. Within *The Generall Historie*, Smith wrote that the colonists hated the Natives. Chief Powhatan was compared to the devil, and the other Natives were referred to as "barbarians" (Wertley). Also, the Englishmen were not considerate, and were regarded as oppressive and zealous. When negotiations did not go their way, they took what they

wanted by force, such as executing raids on Native settlements and burning villages and crops. The English chopped down forests, destroyed nature, and killed Natives. They did not respect the Natives' resources and land, and their actions were fuelled by their overwhelming desire for fortune and territory. Their hostile actions caused resentment from the Natives, showing they were not the ethical beings portrayed within the film. This clearly demonstrates that the Englishmen are sanitized within *Pocahontas*, because their moral values are greatly exaggerated, depicting them differently from reality.

The Englishmen's portrayal within *Pocahontas* helps to allure. As a love story, the film must play out in a way which satisfies viewers. Because of the Englishmen's exaggerated morals, both the Natives and the English are able to live "happily ever after", a classic ending to a fairy tale. People generally enjoy happy endings which make them content and satisfy their emotional desires. If the Englishmen are represented as historically accurate, a happy ending would not be realistic or reasonable, because in reality, the Englishmen's desire for prosperity harmed the Natives. Such a tragic ending is not desirable by the audience and would ruin the appeal of the film, since it is not emotionally pleasing.

Additionally, by sanitizing Smith and his fellow Englishmen, *Pocahontas* communicates the importance of powerful morals. This makes the film more appealing, especially to parents, who want the best for their children. Much of the time, parents decide what to show their children. They want their children to be exposed to things which benefit and positively shape their character, including texts which educate the importance of good morals. In *Pocahontas*, the Englishmen's positive treatment towards the Natives demonstrates that respect can lead to joyful

relationships and happiness. This emphasizes the importance of compassion and equality, discouraging discrimination and racism. Additionally, their thoughtfulness and understanding helped avoid unnecessary conflict. Therefore, *Pocahontas* clearly displays the importance of moral values, which parents wish for their children to learn. Clearly, Disney uses *Pocahontas* to appeal to more of the audience by conveying the value of good morals through their sanitization of the English.

In conclusion, by sanitizing Englishmen, *Pocahontas* makes itself more appealing to the audience. The decency of Smith and his fellow Englishmen are greatly exaggerated, displaying them differently from reality, helping the film allure more of the audience and increase Disney's revenue and fame.

Word Count: 997

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