

The Message Hidden Behind Walt Disney's *Song of the South* (1946)

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Why has the Disney film *Song of the South* (1946) been censored for more than 50 years? *Song of the South* is based on Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* (1881), a collection of African folktales. This essay will show how the harsh reality of African American life as depicted in *Uncle Remus* is watered down once filtered through the life of the fictional characters in *Song of The South*, the Walt Disney film adaptation of Harris's stories. The film has been mostly unavailable around the world since Walter Francis White, the secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), claimed that the film consists of racism and leads to a misunderstanding of the master-slave relationship. In Part I, the historical background of the setting of this film are mentioned, and there will be comparison of the film and the actual life that African American people lived at the same time period. The scenes in the film will be pointed out and the reasons why the scenes should be of argumentation will be mentioned as well. In Part II, both works will be compared focusing, in particular, on "The Wonderful Tar Baby" story. The discussion of whether Walt Disney and Joel Chandler Harris are racist is performed with reasons. However, the film is based on the folklore, so the viewers should think separately about the reality of African American life and the life of characters that appear in the film. The film should not be censored, but to be watched by children around the world to learn life lessons from it.

Part I. Historical Background, Contextualization, and Social Hierarchies

Before going ahead into the main topic, one should have a clear understanding of both American history and the setting of the film. The story takes place in rural Georgia.

Historically, Georgia and other southern states were slave states. Slave owners, and the majority of white people in the South thought of black people as inferior to them and did not believe that black and whites were equal. Slavery started out in Virginia and quickly spread to the so-called Deep South, which includes such states as Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and South Carolina. The economy of these states was based on slavery and thus, these states would have done anything to preserve and justify the “peculiar institution.” Senator Albert Gallatin Brown of Mississippi once said that slavery was “a great moral, social, and political blessing; a blessing to the master, and a blessing to the slave” (Harriet, 97). Slavery lasted for several centuries and was finally abolished at the end of the Civil War (1861-1865) between the secessionist South (the Confederates) and the North (the Federalists). Among the many causes given for the Civil War are the gap of social structures, economies, customs and political values of the North and South. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the northern states were going through industrialization whereas the southern states clung to agriculture and depended on slave labor. The manufacturing North was opening up to the outside world whereas the agrarian South remained closed on itself. These political and economic chasms brought about the war and the victory of the North.

President Abraham Lincoln approached the Congress to pass the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution on December 6, 1865. That amendment stated that there would be no more slavery in the United States of America. Slavery was thus abolished but ex-slaves had no jobs, education, voting rights or any other rights. Then, after Lincoln’s assassination, the fourteenth Amendment was passed and stated:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (14th

Amendment)

Although the Constitution stated that all slaves were free, their freedom was relative and people of African extraction, especially in the South, were the victims of segregation long after the end of the Civil War.

The setting of the film is the Deep South state of Georgia around the Reconstruction period (1865-1877), which means that the African American characters in the film are “servants,” but not “slaves.” The film starts with the young boy Johnny and his mother, Ms. Sally, moving to the family plantation in Georgia to live with Johnny’s grandmother. Johnny’s father leaves them with the grandmother in order to go back to Atlanta for work. All the house chores in the grandmother’s house are done by African American servants, including a black child, Toby, whose role is to take care of Johnny. The grandmother’s house is stately and surrounded by fields taken care of by black sharecroppers. The controversial point is that the film mixes the reality of African American servants’ life back then, and the fictional, sugarcoated Disney version of their life. In real history, African Americans were treated harshly by the whites, even during the Reconstruction period. The southern states passed laws called “black codes,” which made black people practically slaves again. Had the film intended to be historically accurate, Toby would probably not have had so much free time to hang around doing nothing, or to be treated as the equal of Johnny by the grandmother. The affection and respect the grandmother shows her young servant when she introduces him to his new playmate Johnny is hard to imagine. Furthermore, Toby takes care of Johnny and plays around with Johnny as if they were very close friends and as if there were no difference between them.

The same claim also applies to the title character of the book, Uncle Remus.

Uncle Remus reminds of the Uncle Tom stereotype. Uncle Tom is a derogatory term that is used to describe a black person whose behavior towards whites is obsequious and submissive. In the film, Uncle Remus is just like Uncle Tom in the way that he always smiles at everyone and seems to be happy to take care of whites. The black maid, Tempy, is like the typical Mammy type. The Mammy stereotype is an overweight, good-natured female servant eager to take care of whites. She cooks, does chores, sings... She always smiles and looks like she is willing to do everything for the family. There are other black stereotypes back at the slavery time, but the film only included these two types, which were rather thought well by the whites.

Particularly relevant is the scene where Uncle Remus keeps Johnny late at night in his cabin, without having permission from Ms. Sally or Grandmother. Johnny has been staying at Uncle Remus's house because Uncle Remus finds him crying in the bushes. Johnny has run away from the house because he cannot handle the fact that his dad has left him and his mother at the plantation. Johnny feels as if he is not wanted in the family, and this is why Uncle Remus has taken Johnny to his cabin in order to console him with his famous stories. He keeps Johnny late without any permission, telling him stories from the African American folklore, especially the story of Brer Rabbit. Johnny has been planning to leave the plantation, so Uncle Remus tells him that he is willing to go with him, but before going, Uncle Remus says he needs to pack up his stuff. While he is packing up his stuff, he talks about the story of Brer Rabbit, makes Johnny interested in the story and eager to hear more about it. While Uncle Remus is telling the story to Johnny, Toby comes by and tells him that Johnny is missing. Toby says that he was ordered to take care of Johnny. He finds Johnny in the cabin and Johnny says he is willing to go back to the house, so Uncle Remus takes Johnny and Toby back to the house. When they arrive to the house, neither Ms. Sally nor Grandmother remonstrates

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with Uncle Remus for keeping Johnny up so late at night. He has some words from Ms. Sally, but that is it. It looks like Grandmother and Uncle Remus are close friends so that they understand each other well and Grandmother does not have to admonish him. The film does not show any part where the black characters are scolded by the white characters. Had the film wanted to reproduce the exact racial equation of the time, the consequences for the black character would have been completely different. Most likely, a black servant in the South during the Reconstruction era would have got some kind of punishment.

The points discussed above are the main reasons why the NAACP did not want the film to be watched by people around the world, especially little children. Walter Francis White telegraphed major newspapers around the country arguing:

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People recognizes in *Song of the South* remarkable artistic merit in the music and in the combination of living actors and the cartoon techniques. It regrets, however, that in an effort neither to offend audiences in the north or south, the production helps to perpetuate a dangerously glorified picture of slavery. Making use of the beautiful Uncle Remus folklore, *Song of the South* unfortunately gives the impression of an idyllic master-slave relationship, which is a distortion of the facts. (Qtd. in Korkis)

The claim is understandable, but the NAACP should think about the positive impact that this film could have on the viewers. *Song of the South* could be an easy way of learning about the Reconstruction period, and besides, letting the children watch *Song of the South* can teach them moral lessons. The film combines live action and animation; actors and actresses sing a lot through the story, so it catches the audience's attention. The contextualization of the Reconstruction period in the film clearly shows that there were three distinct social classes in the Deep South back then. Johnny's family belongs to the top class: the rich, happy, and educated white people. Grandmother's house is a big plantation house and the furniture in the house look gorgeous. Johnny's family members

always change their clothes as scenes change, and Grandmother has more than three house servants. Another social class consists of the black servants. They work for the white family, wear the same clothes (over-all for men and apron for women) and live in the cabins behind the big house in the former slave quarters. At the beginning, when Johnny is missing from the house, the film shows African American people gathered outside in the bushes exchanging information, singing, and listening to Uncle Remus's stories. This kind of evening gathering was also typical of slave life in the Antebellum South. At the time, the slaves would hold that kind of gathering either early in the morning or very late at night so that the masters would not know of it. The last class that should be mentioned is the one represented by the Favers family. They live in a house that looks like a barn, far from the rich white family's house, and like the African American people around them, they dress in the same clothes (ripped and dirty shirts) and their faces are always dirty. When Johnny meets Joe and Jake Favers for the first time, Toby tells him that he should not hang out with the Favers brothers because his mother said so. At the scene near the end, Ms. Sally tells Johnny that she is having a birthday party for him, and Johnny tells her that he wants to invite Ginny, the Favers's younger sister, to come over. Ms. Sally hesitates and tells Johnny that all of his other friends are coming, so they do not need Ginny to come over. Knowing that Johnny is a close friend with Ginny, Grandmother says that she can come over as well, so Ms. Sally promises him that she will send a letter to her. This scene assume that she is simply stalling and does not really intend to have Ginny over for in her mind, Johnny ought to stay away from poor whites like the Favers.

One example of the life lessons that Johnny learns is that "keeping a promise is important." Johnny learns this with Ginny Favers. Her two older brothers, Joe and Jake,

always pick on the puppy Teenchy. Ginny has been keeping Teenchy as a pet, but he is always ill-treated by the brothers, and since they were planning to kill him, Ginny decides to put Teenchy under the care of Johnny. Johnny takes the puppy home and shows the puppy to his mother, but she tells him to take Teenchy back to the Favers, no matter how much he like the pet. Johnny wants to keep the dog as his, so he decides not to follow his mother's order, and secretly keep Teenchy at Uncle Remus's house.

Unaware of Ms. Sally's order, and wanting to help Johnny, Uncle Remus promises Johnny that he will take care of Teenchy. As the story goes on, the Favers brothers tell Ms. Sally that Johnny has been keeping their puppy at Uncle Remus's house, and Johnny gets in a trouble. Ms. Sally scolds Johnny and tells him to take Teenchy back to the Favers; she also tells Uncle Remus not to spend time with Johnny, telling him stories. This scene shows Ms. Sally not scolding Johnny, and instead, she gives a serious warning to Uncle Remus. It was a common thing for black men to get into trouble, or take responsibility for white men.

As the scene goes on, Ms. Sally figures out that Uncle Remus has been telling the stories to Johnny once again, so Uncle Remus decides to leave the plantation without telling anyone. Wanting to stop Uncle Remus from leaving the plantation, Johnny follows Uncle Remus's carriage. Johnny forgets that he has been told by Toby that he should not cross through the farm where the bull is, but he is in such a rush that he does. He is attacked by the bull, and faints. Uncle Remus comes back for this bad news and so does Johnny's father. Johnny has a nightmare and talks in his sleep that he does not want Uncle Remus to leave. By not keeping the promise that one has made, they can get into trouble and may lose something important, in this case, spending time with Uncle Remus. It is not only Johnny who learned a life lesson from this scene. Ms. Sally also learned that what she thinks is right is not always right. The viewers of the film could

also learn that everyone makes mistakes.

Had the Disney film not been mixing the reality of black servants' life and a fictional, sugarcoated version of it, it wouldn't have been censored for such a long time. The NAACP does not want the viewers to think that slavery was a glorious time of the American past. But it may be argued that Disney created this movie with the intention to emphasize the difference between plantation workers before and after the Civil War. In the scene above, had Uncle Remus been a slave, the part where Uncle Remus packs and tries to leave the plantation would make him a runaway and runaways were severely punished by their masters. On the other hand, Disney did not make it clear for the viewer that the African American characters are not slaves but servants and sharecroppers. They hang together in the bushes, sing spirituals, and dress in overalls. They are also denied entrance in the big house when Johnny is in danger after the attack from the bull. Indeed, even Tempy and Toby, who take care of the house through the film, have to wait outside, and thus, it'd be easy to believe that the story takes place during slavery.

While such a misinterpretation on the part of the viewers is understandable, one should keep in mind that Walt Disney did not create this film to be telling about the real history of America. Jim Korkis, the author of *Who's Afraid of the Song of the South And Other Forbidden Disney Stories*, argues that, "it is important to remember that *Song of the South* was never intended to be an accurate historical documentary of a troubled time in America's timeline. It was meant to be a light, fantasy entertainment, similar to other films produced during the 1930s and 1940s" (67). The one thing that everyone has to remember is that African Americans underwent inhuman and cruel acts during and after slavery.

Part II: Elements of Comparison Between the Film and the Book

Two important questions should be asked: Why did the Disney production make changes in the story of Uncle Remus when making the film? And did the changes make this film racially prejudiced? The story “The wonderful Tar-Baby” in Harris’s collection of stories *Uncle Remus* (1881) is also included in the film, but once again, Disney significantly watered down the story. Before going further into the main argumentation, one should know the meaning of the term “Tar-Baby.” “Tar-Baby” is a negative connotation revolving around African Americans. It is a derogatory term for black or dark-skin people, and it was used along other derogatory terms such as nigger, pickaninny, and sambo. In order to show whether or not the film and the original book contain racial biases, one should compare the two, and show what both have and do not have in common. Both chief executive officer Walt Disney and author Joel Chandler Harris should be examined along the film and the original stories.

In Harris’s original story, “The Wonderful Tar Baby”, the main character, little boy, asks Uncle Remus if there was a time when Brer Fox ever succeeds in capturing Brer Rabbit. Uncle Remus tells him that Brer Fox came very close to capturing Brer Rabbit. Brer Fox uses a doll that he made out of tar to capture Brer Rabbit. He called this doll, Tar Baby. The story goes on with Uncle Remus describing how the clever Brer Fox managed to capture Brer Rabbit, and what Brer Rabbit said to the Tar Baby. Brer Rabbit greets Tar Baby, but does not get a greeting back, so he gets very angry. To show his anger, he punches Tar Baby, but the doll is made out of tar and is so sticky that Brer Rabbit gets more and more tangled as he tries to escape from the doll. Uncle Remus tells the little boy that Brer Rabbit was captured, but he does not tell him whether or not Brer Rabbit has been eaten by Brer Fox. In the book, Uncle Remus says, “He mount, an den again he moutent. Some say Judge B’ar come ‘long en loosed ‘im- some say he didn’t”¹.

The story about Tar Baby start out the same way in the film, but the contents of

the story and the ending are different from the original story. In the film, Brer Rabbit has managed to escape from Brer Fox and Brer Bear. He managed to do so by tricking and leading Brer Fox and Brer Bear to throw him down to the patch of briar where he has grown up for his whole life. Instead of focusing on the existence of Brer Rabbit, Disney production had chosen to focus on teaching a life lesson to its young viewers. Had the Disney production decided to focus on the fight of the three characters and show whether Brer Rabbit is eaten or not, then the viewers would get the impact on the result of the fight. In this case, the viewers wouldn't get the message that Disney actually wants them to get. One of the life lessons that can be learned from this story is that one should not be too nosy.

In the original story, Brer Rabbit talks with more vehemence to the Tar-Baby. When he greets the Tar-Baby and the Tar Baby does not greet him back, Brer Rabbit tells Tar-Baby, "You er stuck up, dat's w'at you is, 'en I'm gwine ter kyoure you, dat's w'at I'm a gwin ter do."² And, Brer Rabbit goes on: "Is you deaf?"³ "I'm gwine ter bus' you wide open" to the Tar-Baby. The question is, why did Harris make Brer Rabbit to say such violent words to Tar-Baby? As a hypothesis, it could be said that Harris made the Tar-Baby represent African American slaves, thus showing the real treatment of African Americans at the time. To back up the hypothesis of the Tar Baby representing a slave, it could be said that Brer Fox using Tar-Baby as a tool to capture Brer Rabbit shows the master and slave relationship. The trickster figure, Brer Rabbit, has its roots in the African American folklore. In "The Trickster in African American Literature," Trudier Harris argues:

Tricksters dominate the folk tradition that peoples of African descent developed in the United States, especially those tales that were influenced by African folk tradition, landscape, and wildlife. By definition, tricksters are animals or characters who, while wills, power, and/or resources, succeed in getting the best of their larger, more powerful adversaries. (Harris)

The Tar-Baby is a doll, so it is normal for the Tar Baby not to say a word back to Brer Rabbit, but so were the slaves in the Antebellum South. Slaves had to obey their master's orders no matter what. The same thing could be said of the Brer Rabbit and Tar-Baby's relationship. Cursing Tar-Baby just because Tar-Baby did not greet him back suggests to the reader that Brer Rabbit is just like the slave owner. After cursing Tar-Baby, Brer Rabbit punches and tries to beat up Tar-Baby. There again, the reference to slavery is obvious for as it is well-known, white people did not hesitate to beat up the slaves either because the latter did not comply with their demands or sometimes for no other good reason that they felt like it. Another hypothesis could be made here that there is a hidden message from Harris. Harris started on writing the first version of *Uncle Remus* in 1876, during the Reconstruction Era. Although slavery was banned in every state in America, the Deep South was determined to maintain slavery and passed the notorious Jim Crow Laws (1876-1964), which kept the African American community under the yoke of racist authorities. Racism was rampant and by the end of the nineteenth century, the doctrine of "separate but equal" had made racial segregation legal. These ideas had become the norm for the people of the Deep South and so, it could be said that Harris wanted the readers to notice that nothing had changed, even after slavery had been abolished.

As mentioned above, in Harris's original story, it is only Brer Fox who tries to capture Brer Rabbit, but in the film, Brer Fox teams up with Brer Bear to catch Brer Rabbit. The purpose of this change may be for the viewers to associate Brer Rabbit with Johnny, and Brer Fox and Brer Bear with the Favars brothers. The brothers' age is not mentioned, but the shorter boy, Joe, is more spiteful and devious, so he represents Brer Fox. The taller one with the big body, Jake, is more slow and always obeys Joe, so Jake is a substitute for Brer Bear. Depicting two boys, picking on a little boy, Johnny, shows

which side is unfair. The Disney production could not make one side black and the other side white because it would have forced the audience to judge who is evil and who is good according to skin color—which would have been very offensive.

Another important point is that the Tar-Baby is described as a female in the book while the gender is not mentioned in the film. The reason for this could be that Disney production did not want the film to appear to discriminate against women. Brer Rabbit is a male character, so had the Disney production made the Tar-Baby a female character, then, Disney could have been accused of sexism. A male character beating a female character may lead the viewer to think of the relationship between an African American woman and a white man. White people beating, lynching, and raping African American women was a common occurrence in slavery times. Instead of looking like a feminine character, the Tar Baby dresses like a black slave, a servant, or a poor sharecropper, like Uncle Remus, Toby, and the Favers family. This proves that the Disney did make the Tar Baby to look like a black person, and it is representing that the black character is used as a tool to get someone into trouble.

One more difference that should be pointed out is the animal cartoon character, blue bird that appears in the film. The blue bird appears in the scene where Uncle Remus is transported in the animation world. The blue bird does not appear much in the scenes, but he sings along with Uncle Remus and other animal characters, and leads Uncle Remus to the right path. The blue bird should not be ignored, and one should not forget to think about the reason why the Disney production added this cartoon character in the film, even though there was no blue bird in the original story. The blue bird talks with Uncle Remus as if they are close friends and sings along with Uncle Remus. This blue bird reminds of Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*, which is set in Germany on Christmas Eve. The two siblings, an older brother Tyltyl, and a younger

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sister, Mythyl, are the children of a woodchopper, and are not wealthy enough to celebrate Christmas like the family living next door. Then, an old witch comes to their house and asks them if they have a blue bird. There is a pigeon that Tylyl has for a pet, but the bird is not blue. The witch tells Tylyl and Mythyl that her daughter is ill, and to cure the illness, she needs a blue bird, so the two siblings go on a trip to find a blue bird. They go through adventures in faraway lands. In each story, they think that they have captured a blue bird but it changes its blue color after leaving the land. They go home, desperate, and the next morning, the witch comes over to their house asking for the blue bird. They tell her that they could not capture the blue bird, so the witch asks for Tylyl's pigeon. They notice that the pigeon that they have is actually the blue bird, and they give the blue bird to the witch. The witch's daughter becomes healthy again and the two siblings notice that the happiness is actually in their ordinary life.

It is obvious that the Disney production got the idea of including the blue bird in *Song of the South* from those stories. The message of *The Blue Bird* is that true happiness can be found right where one lives. This message applies to *Song of the South* as well. When Brer Rabbit decides to leave the house where he has been living for his entire life, Uncle Remus tells him that he should not leave the place. Uncle Remus talks as if the best place that one belongs to were the place where they are living at that time. It is this very idea that Uncle Remus had tried to impart to Johnny when he kept him late at night. It looks natural for an adult to stop a child from running away from the house by himself, but he did it by telling Johnny that there is a Laughing Place where everyone lives happily, just like what Brer Rabbit said in the story. Johnny gets curious and decides to stay on the plantation. The controversial point here is that a black person tells a white person that the best place to be is a plantation where the black person was once a slave.

Beyond the differences, the original story and the film also have something in

common. That is, the film and the original story both teach life lessons to the readers, or viewers, through Uncle Remus telling stories to a young boy. On the one hand, in the book, the stories are separated from one another so that the reader has to think and link the story to their life by themselves. On the other hand, in the film, the stories are linked to Johnny's life, and Uncle Remus explains the reasons for Brer Rabbit's actions. The film catches viewer's attentions more, and since the viewers are little children most of the time, it could be used as teaching material.

From *Song of the South* being censored for more than 20 years, it is natural for people to think that the author of *Uncle Remus*, Joel Chandler Harris, is a racist whose work contains racial biases. In order to dispel this misunderstanding, one should know his origins and read his other stories. Joel Chandler Harris grew up in Georgia and lived in Atlanta during slavery times. He had seen the reality of African-American life in his childhood. He denounced racism throughout his life, and he showed that through his public speaking and his works. The other story that proves that Joel Chandler Harris is not a racist is the story "Why the Negro is Black." The story, "Why the Negro is black" describes the evolution of the race. The story starts out in the one ordinary day, but the little boy notices that the palms of Uncle Remus's hands are white as his. The little boy wonders why, because other parts of Uncle Remus's skin color is black, unlike his white skin color, so he asks the reason for it. Uncle Remus states that all human beings' skin colors were black at first: "Niggers is niggers now, but de time wuz w'en we 'uz all niggers tergedder" (100). Uncle Remus tells the little boy that everyone used to have black skin color, but there is an astonishing event that changes some people's skin color. Uncle Remus goes on and tells the little boy that there were rumors going around one day that there is a special pond that gets rid of people's skin color. The supplest ones of all the black colored people went into the special water and get rid of their skin color. The

procedure to get into the water to become a new thing is similar to a Christian custom, the baptism. Christians go through baptism as a ceremony to welcome someone to the Christian Church, so if the story is based on the baptism, then it could be said that the ones that went into the water, which became white skinned, are welcomed to the world. On the opposite hand, those that did not go into the water, black skinned people, are not welcomed.

The part where the main character, little boy, was surprised that the palms of Uncle Remus' hands are as white as his explains well what the white people thought about African-Americans back at the time. They thought that the African-Americans are different type of living creatures, far from the white colored people. Uncle Remus implies that some people were chosen, and those people that are chosen becomes white colored, whereas others were not chosen, these were dark colored people. This evokes the belief, among American protestant of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, whereby some individuals are chosen at random and saved for the kingdom of Heaven. As Uncle Remus's listener is a little white boy, Uncle Remus taps into his culture to flatter, but also tells him that basically, everyone, including the little boy and Uncle Remus himself, are all the same. This story also says that the Asians were black colored at first as well. This story could be the evidence that Joel Chandler Harris was not a racist person. He did not want a racial segregation among the people he grew up with.

By including hidden racial biases in the stories, he wanted the readers to know that distinction of people by their skin colors is wrong. The Disney film did not include the message that Harris wanted the readers to have, but thinking that *Song of the South* contains racial biases just because of that is questionable. The film did not include Harris' message, but by changing the contents of the story, it completely separated the film and the book. Although it is true that if the Disney production has chosen the story

‘Why the Negro is Black’ in the film, then it would not be censored for a long time.

Readers of the Uncle Remus and the viewers of *Song of the South* should think that they are two completely different materials. They both teach life lessons, and use animal characters in the story, so the viewers and readers should read and watch this for an entrance to learn about African-American history.

The controversial question that has been going around the world for more than 50 years is whether the founder and the ex-chief executive officer of the Disney production, Walt Disney, was a racist or not. There are no accurate records that prove that Walt Disney was a racist, but from his animations and attitudes toward race and gender, it could be said that he was a racist, and had a spirit of male superiority, just like most of the people living back at his time was. For example, the leading actor of the Uncle Remus, James Baskett, who played Uncle Remus was not invited to attend the open ceremony for the premier of this film. Baskett won the Honorary Academy Award (1947), for acting heart-warming Uncle Remus. The film has received great attention in both good and bad ways when it was released, so had Walt Disney been not a racist, then it is for sure that Baskett would have been able to attend the ceremony.

Other factors that prove Walt Disney as a racist is that he often included racial lines in his animation, especially during and after the World War II. In the story of Donald Duck animation, *Der Fuehrer Face*, Disney production used the propaganda technique. The propaganda is the ideas or statements that may be false or exaggerated and that are used in order to gain support for a political leader, or party (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary). In this story, Donald Duck belongs to the Nazi army, and the Nazi army soldiers around him look malicious and evil. Germany and Japan were the enemies of America, so they are drawn with sarcasm. The man that looks like the Emperor of Japan is drawn with thin eyes with protruding teeth, and he looks like a

monkey. Donald Duck does the work that he has to do in the army, but gets dizzy and becomes crazy for working endless, and the way he is treated by the Nazi army. At the end, it ended with a happy ending, because what Donald Duck has been doing for the whole scene was a nightmare that he had. This story shows that Walt Disney used a propaganda technique to show which side is right, and makes the viewer to think that their enemies are evil while one is unconscious of it.

Another story that has been pointed out as an evidence of Walt Disney being racist is the cartoon, *Fantasia* (1940). This cartoon not only shows the racism but also the gender bias. There is a crowd of feminine centaurs in the scene, and every centaur has different skin color and hair color. They all have long hair, beautiful face, and they are all well-proportioned. As the scene goes on, they start dressing up and putting make-ups on with the angels helping them, but there is one centaur that does not start getting ready. That centaur's skin color is black, has black curly hair, has big mouth, and is short bad looking. She helps other beautiful centaurs to get ready; putting flowers on their tails and polishing their hooves. Unfortunately, this is obvious that the black colored centaur is representing a slave. The beautiful centaurs get ready to meet the male masculine centaurs, but there is no centaur to go with the poor little black centaur. The male and female centaurs get along with the centaur that has similar skin color as theirs, so this is showing the characters choosing their partner with their skin colors. Female characters getting ready to be chosen by the male character shows the idea of Disney thinking the way what women should be. There is also a black unicorn that takes care of the king. Unicorns are usually white, so it could be said that the Disney production made his skin color to easily show the readers that this unicorn is also a slave.

The hypothesis of Walt Disney making the characters to choose their partner by their skin color could go with the other Disney characters as well. Walt Disney has been

blamed for not having non-white princesses for ages. The first non-white princess character was created in *Aladdin* (1992), Princess Jasmin. The film was created more than 20 years after Walt Disney died. Princess Jasmin is the princess of Agrabah, an Arabic country, and the whole story takes place there, with mostly Arabics around her. She marries a street urchin, so their social class is different, but they are both from the same country, have same skin and hair color, and dress in the folk costumes. This hypothesis fits most of the Disney princess/prince characters: Cinderella and Prince Charming, Belle and Adam (Beast), Aurora and Phillip, and so on. The most famous character in the world, Mickey Mouse also chooses a female mouse, Minnie Mouse; and Donald Duck chooses Daisy Duck; as for Chip and Dale, they are not love partner but buddies.

Paying attention to each single Disney stories, the majority of the cartoons that are available today do not contain stories that has to do with racial and gender biases. This states that the people of the Disney nowadays are against it, but unfortunately, since the change in Disney production was made after Walt Disney's death, it proves that he was a racist and believed in the superiority of men over women. There are no official records of him saying or writings that have to do with these biases, but characters prove that he had these ideas.

Conclusion: Evaluating the Merits of the Film Against the Original Story

Overall, the film *Song of the South* should not be censored anymore and should be available around the world. Unfortunately, it is true that some works that has been created by Walt Disney proves that he was a racist and thought that men are superior then women. It would be better if the Disney production chooses the story, 'Why the Negro is Black' to show the viewers about the message that Joel Chandler Harris had. Harris hold

the idea that everyone should be equal treated, not segregated by their skin colors. He states this idea in the story, by making Uncle Remus telling the story of the birth of the skin color to the little boy. Uncle Remus tells the little boy that all human beings were colored black at the beginning of the history, so the hidden message here is that they are all created equal and should be treated equal.

The readers of the Uncle Remus should think that the film is a different thing. It is true that Disney did not give thoughtful attention to black people, but there are more merits that the viewers could learn from watching the film. The film is watering down the reality of the black servant's life back at the Reconstruction period, but one should understand that this film is fantastical, made-up story, just like other Disney stories. From watching the film, the viewers could learn that there were social classes among the whites and the servants; the rich educated white people, the black servants, and the poor non-educated whites. It shows how the plantations in the Deep South looks like and how people were dressed at that time. The film also show the true image of black people gathering around in the bushes, singing gospels as the black people used to do during and after the slavery time. The film also educates the life lessons that the viewers should learn in their childhood. Johnny not keeping his mother's order almost loses his loving friend, Uncle Remus, and Uncle Remus almost loses Johnny from not keeping Ms. Sally's order to not tell the stories to Johnny anymore. Ms. Sally also learns that what she think is right is not always right. The film should be watched by the people around the world. It should be a gateway to American history as well as a way to learn lessons from it.

Notes

- (1) "He might, and then again he mightn't. Some say Judge Bear came along and loosed him

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– some say he didn't.”

(2)

“You're stuck up, that's what you are, and I'm going to kill you, that's what I'm going to do.”

(3)

“Are you deaf?”

(4)

“I'm going to bust you wide open.”

(5)

“Niggers are niggers now, but there was a time when we were all niggers together.”

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