

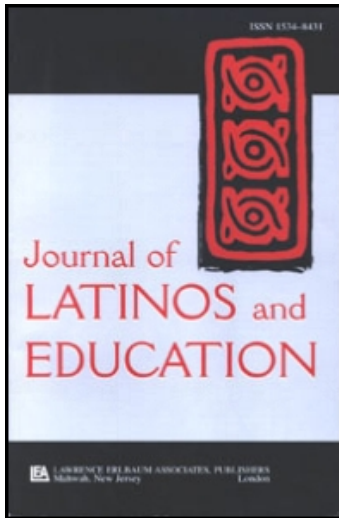
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Shrek 2: An Appraisal of Mainstream Animation's Influence on Identity

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This article examines the discursive practices presented in *Shrek 2*. We apply a critical discourse analysis lens while focusing on the way animated versions of Latinos and African Americans are portrayed. In particular, the essay focuses on Shrek, Donkey, and Puss-in-Boots and the various stereotypical language discourses they reproduce. The essay then makes a comparison between the animated film and the current reproduction of racist ideologies that mirror the positions of minoritized people in U.S. society.

Key words: identity, race, racism, critical discourse analysis, Mexican American, African American

Over the course of the past 75 years, the genre of American animation (cartoons) has emerged as a significant contributor to the national discourses of race, language, identity, and general social commentary. It is characters such as Bugs Bunny, Donald Duck, and, more recently, Nemo, Simba, and Shrek that contribute to and invariably affect identity construction (social, linguistic, and cultural) among people. Acknowledging the power of these animation companies, it can be argued that mainstream industry giants and multinational corporations such as Sony DreamWorks, Disney, and Pixar are the purveyors/disseminators of culture and language for many different individuals. Modes of speech, power relations, class dichotomies, gender roles, sociocultural/sociolinguistic stereotypes, and

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moral/value judgments are created, digitized, formatted (usually into multiple languages), and presented as 2-hr comedic fantasies to attentive and impressionable audiences. In hopes of understanding the messages being sent through these animated films, we analyze language and the way it is used in the 2004 Sony DreamWorks animated film *Shrek 2* (Adamson, Asbury, & Vernon, 2004). In so doing, we use Huckin's (1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA) to help show how language is often used within films as a manipulative tool to reproduce negative discourses on Latinos and African Americans. After analyzing the racist discourses in *Shrek 2*, we then analyze how these messages are reproduced in society and what schools can do to facilitate the production of more positive images of Latinos, African Americans, and other minoritized groups.

Animated films have been producing racist discourse for more than 75 years ("My Thoughts," 2001). In the "golden age of animation," thousands of cartoons showed blunt acts of racism against Latinos, African Americans, Indians, homosexuals, and so on. During this time, the cartoon animators were very content to produce negative discourses against various oppressed groups that would help reproduce the negative discourses against them. Although there are many different examples of racist cartoons during this time, one of the most blunt cartoons was Bugs Bunny ("My Thoughts," 2001). In 1944, Bugs Bunny starred in a cartoon episode titled "Nips the Nips" ("My Thoughts," 2001) that attacked the Japanese community. In one scene, Bugs Bunny disguises himself as an ice cream vendor and gives grenade-filled ice cream to a group of Japanese soldiers. As Bugs Bunny distributes the ice cream, he says, "Here ya go, bowl-legs. Here's one for you, monkey face. Here y'are, slanty-eyes. Everybody gets one." As can be seen, this language reproduces the negative discourse on Japanese people. In another Bugs Bunny episode called "All This and Rabbit Stew" (1941), a dark brown character is shown speaking in a stereotypical Ebonics dialect, has huge lips, and refuses to shoot Bugs Bunny when he rattles a pair of dice ("Banned Cartoons," 2006). Here again, Warner Brothers reproduces discourses that perceive African Americans in stereotypical and racist ways. With examples as these, it is easy to recognize that American animation reveals a pervasive pattern of irresponsible cultural and linguistic representations (caricatures), usually at the expense of people on the margins of society. The writers and animators of such films perpetuate stereotypes, often depositing them into the subconscious, or marginalize culture and language into racist metaphors that attempt to connect or equate race and voice to an animal counterpart.

Cartoon characters are allowed to play racist roles such as these because they are building on the racist rhetoric that exists in the United States but is rarely spoken about. Instead, it is well hidden and only comes out behind closed doors, when people feel they are in safe quarters and protected by people who think like them. This is crucial to understand because it should make U.S. society realize that the only reason that we commonly laugh at racist cartoon characters is because as

Americans, we have already accepted these racist characteristics and therefore it is now funny when animated characters portray them.

Although various animated movies exemplify this, the Sony DreamWorks film *Shrek 2* (2004) distinguishes itself because of the masquerade of messages reproduced in this animated film for children. Joel Siegel of *Good Morning America* described it as “a piece of genius ... you’ll love it” (Siegel, 2004). *USA Today* proclaimed, “... there are so many jokes and jests, not even a jelly-bellied ogre could consume them all in one sitting” (Wloszczyna, 2004).” When one critically examines the “genius” of the “jokes and jests” through a cultural and linguistic lens, what is revealed? Are language and voice presented through a series of coded racial stereotypes, and, if so, are the writers, animators, editors, and producers disseminating messages of exclusion, cultural/ linguistic inferiority, and ultimately racism? Like most art, films emerge from cultural and societal realities, and usually construct responses to such realities, to inform, persuade, or dissuade particular beliefs among certain groups. Therefore, films are written, produced, and viewed/interpreted “not in isolation but in some real-world context with all of its complexity” (Huckin, 1995, p. 95). As such, it is crucial to understand that films, animated or not, shadow certain political views and ideologies that are represented in the producers’ and/or the production company’s perspective, which is bridged to society’s ideologies.

Shrek 2’s audience is not a homogenous group, and, therefore, the film plays to a diverse range of ages, socioeconomic levels, and ethnicities. Animated feature films are one of the most popular and accessible forms of entertainment for youth and find themselves in a position of power and influence, often serving as the introductory liaison to the English language and popular American culture for the Spanish-speaking Latino community. As such, animated films have used their influence to perpetuate negative (often damaging) cultural and linguistic stereotypes detrimental to children of color, particularly Latinas/os, who are negotiating two cultures and languages in both school and home environments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To unmask the various camouflaged discourses presented in *Shrek 2*, we use CDA to analyze the film. This analysis provides a lens that allows us to critically identify the discursive practices being reproduced in this movie and their effect on the depiction of minoritized people.

It is important to understand that words and actions are politicized. Even if individuals are not purposely participating in a discourse that they believe reproduces racist ideologies, they are still active agents in reproducing racist discourses; that is, individuals are simply messengers of dominant-culture discourse. Discourses, when sanctioned by people in power, are often referred to as “self-evident truths” and are more commonly known as dominant discourses. It is important to recog-

nize that dominant discourses always represent conditions and issues in favor of the elite.

CDA focuses on analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced, and transformed within specific socioeconomic, political, and historical contexts (Huckin, 1995). CDA helps one understand the problems mediated by mainstream ideology and power relations. The goal of CDA is to analyze the assumptions hidden in text and oral speech in order to refute various forms of power. CDA aims to systematically explore the relationships between discursive practices, texts, and events and wider social and cultural practices. In short, CDA tries to uncover the relationship between (a) the actual text, (b) the discursive practices, and (c) the larger societal structure.

Thomas Huckin (1995) stated that CDA is a form of an ethical stance that analyzes different real-world issues regarding society. He explained, "The primary activity of critical discourse analysis is the close analysis of written or oral texts that are deemed to be politically – or culturally influential to a given society" (p. 96). As suggested by Huckin, CDA gives researchers a lens to analyze various discourses and to reflect on the impact of the dominant culture.

OVERVIEW OF *SHREK 2*

The basic story plot of *Shrek 2* revolves around Shrek and his wife Fiona's trip to Far Far Away (a parody of modern-day Hollywood, Beverly Hills, and greater Los Angeles) to visit Fiona's mother and father, who are the king and queen of this glamorous and affluent kingdom. Fiona's family and the kingdom of Far Far Away are not aware that she has become an ogre as a result of kissing and marrying Shrek in the preceding film. Along for the voyage to Far Far Away is Shrek's "faithful steed" (Adamson et al., 2004) Donkey, who provides the majority of what Joel Siegel and other critics deemed the source of the film's "comedic genius." In his quest to please his in-laws and recapture the heart of Fiona, Shrek encounters a Fairy Godmother who is determined to use her magical powers to sabotage his marriage and in the process unite her son Prince Charming with Fiona. Amid all of the action, Shrek finds help from an improbable source, Puss-in-Boots, "the famed ogre killer" who is initially hired by the king to "take care" of Shrek. Before finding marital happiness Shrek must undergo a succession of demoralizing events such as discrimination, expulsion, unnecessary physical transformation, betrayal, and self-doubt. As this animated romantic comedy unfolds, the viewer is exposed to a variety of messages that form a disturbingly negative perception of Latinas/os, African Americans, and those on the margins of society.

The three principal characters in the film are Shrek (voiced by Mike Myers), Donkey (voiced by Eddie Murphy), and Puss-in-Boots (voiced by Antonio Ban-

deras). Although positioned as the leader of the group, Shrek is framed as a figure on the margins of society, an outsider who is physically different (skin color), speaks English with an accent, and practices cultural customs different from those around him. He is portrayed as ill mannered and temperamental, guilty of demonstrating a forceful persona, when in actuality his frustration and subsequent anger only emerge as a direct result of discriminatory practices. It should come as no surprise that these characters were not portrayed like this accidentally. Instead, this was an intentional move from the creators, and from the actors who provided the voices for these characters, to make these characters funny by emphasizing various stereotypical characteristics, both physical and verbal, that build upon dominant discourse ideologies that commonly view members of nondominant cultures as deficient and inferior. In *Shrek: From the Swamp to the Screen*, Mike Myers wrote the following on developing Shrek's voice:

At first, I did Shrek as a Canadian, and everybody was happy with how it turned out, but I knew could give it more. I finally made a connection. I had good friends growing up in Canada who had Scottish fathers. What always struck me about their fathers was that they were incredibly passionate and could go from "I love you" to "Get out of my house!" in a matter of seconds. Of course, none of them were, in fact, ogres, but the fit was undeniable. I put the voice to the test, and everyone agreed that I had found Shrek. (Hopkins, 2004, p. 16)

What is important to understand is that both Myers and the creators purposely gave Shrek a Canadian accent that shows signs of Scottish ancestry. Because of this, it is expected that this voice sounds like a mixed version of Canadian and Scottish English, therefore giving Shrek an accent that builds upon the stereotypical belief that people who speak with an accent are unintelligent and therefore sound funny. This practice is what Huckin (1995) referred to as "foregrounding," a production feature that aims to "emphas[ize] certain concepts and de-emphas[ize] others" (p. 99).

There is an obvious effort by the film to emphasize Shrek as culturally and linguistically different from the inhabitants of *Far Far Away* and to establish that this difference is precisely what makes him an unwelcome guest on several socio-linguistic levels. Shrek's temper is also emphasized, whereas his love, compassion, and commitment to Fiona are deemphasized to keep a perceived social hierarchy intact.

During a formal introductory dinner at the castle with his in-laws, Shrek is referred to by the king as a "problem" and is directed to go back to where he "belongs." The king's comments function under features Huckin (1995) called "modality" and "insinuations" (pp. 101–102). Huckin defined "modality as the tone of statements as regards to their degree of certitude and authority" (p. 102), whereas "insinuations are comments that are slyly suggestive" (p. 101). The king's tone is

authoritative and filled with elitist and xenophobic rhetorical leanings. Beneath the king's tone resides a number of cultural and political insinuations. His particular use of the label "problem" and his insistence on Shrek returning to where he "belongs" confirms a racist ideology that can be traced directly back to the film's creators. The film's creators clearly set up what Huckin referred to as an "agent-patient" relationship, where "[C]ertain persons are consistently depicted as initiating actions (and thus exerting power) while others are depicted as being (often passive) recipients of those actions" (p. 100). In the film, the king, the kingdom of Far Far Away, and its white residents exert their "power" and privilege upon Shrek and his two friends to enforce and ensure an asymmetrical power structure that excludes and penalizes persons of color (in the film, animals essentially represent people of color in our current society).

The king has yet to fully engage in conversation with Shrek but has already formulated an opinion of him loosely based on an assortment of superficial criteria. The king's transparent assessment of Shrek is an example of what Huckin (1995) called "presupposition" (p. 101), an action in which the king "appears to take certain ideas for granted." The king, for example, dismisses the possibility that Shrek is a good husband, companion, and someone whom his daughter has willingly chosen to be with. As an outsider, one who is not originally from the kingdom of Far Far Away, Shrek's language both in form and delivery is perceived as deficient, uneducated, and unfit for a society predicated on wealth and external appearances. The king, within hours of meeting Shrek, wants to enforce his will upon him, demanding either complete change (assimilation) or expulsion. Shrek, as an outsider with few options, must surrender himself to a power structure that does not acknowledge his identity or his cultural background. Tolerance and understanding do not exist in Far Far Away.

Framing Shrek as an outsider (potentially an immigrant), the writers of the film presuppose that all new arrivals to Far Far Away (Los Angeles) are uneducated, volatile, and "problems" that must return to where they "belong." By setting the plot in a fictional current Los Angeles and subjecting Shrek—and later his companions, an African American and a Latino—to exclusionary and discriminatory practices, the film quietly exudes the rhetoric of Los Angeles's anti-immigration and English-only movements. Just as the king singles Shrek out, so have many wealthy Angelinos who propose that Latino immigrants are the cause of the city's "problems" and who vehemently lobby for expulsion (deportation) or radical forms of assimilation that strip away culture and language, primarily executed through the public school systems, failed to recognize, accept, and adapt to the needs of the city's diverse student populations. Education researchers Julie Maxwell-Jolly and Patricia Gándara (2002), in the essay "A Quest for Quality: Providing Qualified Teachers for California's English Learners," listed the many ways the State of California has failed its English learners such as by hiring "underqualified teachers ... who have neither state credentials nor relevant experience specific

to the educational needs of English learners” (p. 43); housing English language learners in “overcrowded” (p. 43) and poorly maintained school/class environments; teaching a “less rigorous curriculum” (p. 43); and, lastly, providing limited, if any, “special services designed for those who are learning English” (p. 43). Couple these poor pedagogical practices with an array of legislative propositions aimed directly at English learners and it is quite clear that California’s educational/political agenda is neither student centered nor democratic.

The king’s intolerance is later revealed as hypocritical, as he was once the outsider in the form of a frog until he kissed a princess and became a king. Likewise, many wealthy White Angelinos are guilty of hypocrisy as well, eagerly employing the Latino community (knowing that many are “undocumented workers”) to clean, care for, and maintain both their homes and their children. Whites are also hypocritical to the extent that many Whites (e.g., Irish) were once outcasts in the United States for many years until the indoctrination of Indian and African American slaves, which can be interpreted as their kissing of the frog and their turning into royalty. Takaki (1993) elaborated on the negative discourse that existed against the Irish during this time and how they were commonly classified as inferior like Mexicans and Negroes. Takaki supported this by quoting the Reverend Theodore Parker’s sermon on “The Dangerous Classes.” In this talk, Reverend Parker spoke of the inferiority of all ethnic groups in comparison to Whites. During his sermon, he mentioned that the Irish should be classified as inferior as well. Reverend Theodore writes, “[The] inferior peoples in the world ... some perhaps only being us in development’ in a lower form in the great school of Providence—negroes, Indians, Mexicans, Irish and the like” (p. 149). It is evident that the Irish were classified as second-class citizens, and thus their opportunities were limited. Noting the many problems that this caused, it is surprising that people are still racialized and treated like second-class citizens.

The contradictory stance of wealthy Whites in California extends into other facets of life, such as food, where a booming organic fruit and vegetable industry has made health-conscious grocery store chains, such as Whole Foods, the fashionable places to shop for produce. Organic avocados sell for two to three times their market value, signaling huge profits for the grocery industry, while farm workers (predominantly “undocumented” Latinas/os) continue to struggle for a living wage, health benefits, cleaner/safer working conditions, and quality educations for their sons and daughters. The film’s underlying message remains, in spite of this plot tactic, that those of different skin hues are not welcome in Far Far Away or modern-day Los Angeles. We implicate the mainstream society, the film industry, the animation community, and the creators of *Shrek 2* as full participants in disseminating racist propaganda. The writers of *Shrek 2* wrote the film with an awareness (even if limited) of immigration issues in the State of California and the language issues associated with the Oakland “Ebonics debate in 1996” and with an understanding of the influence mainstream animation has on school-age children’s iden-

tity construction (Delpit, 2002, p. 35). Despite the presence of these and other cultural and linguistic issues, the creators of the film choose to be a part of the “dominant forces in a society construct[ing] versions of reality [a skewed reality] that favor the interests of those same forces” (Huckin, 2005, p. 96). By doing this, it is apparent that the producers of *Shrek 2* wanted to capitalize financially at the expense of Latinos and African Americans.

The most notable scenes in *Shrek 2* involve the characters Donkey and Puss-in-Boots. These two characters are highly stylized and constructed essentially of cultural stereotypes that depict African Americans and Latinos as inhabiting limited social, educational, and linguistic spaces within society. Donkey, whose voice is supplied by comedian/actor Eddie Murphy, is portrayed through specific voice and language qualities such as inflection, delivery, and syntax to form an expressive, brash, sarcastic, but vulnerable sidekick. Shrek often attempts to pacify and mute Donkey’s charismatic personality. As the film progresses, it becomes apparent that Donkey desires Shrek’s attention, adoration, and acceptance. Donkey serves to emphasize the absurd and motivate laughter, however; in the process, he also forwards a precariously narrow representation of African American culture. Throughout the film, when Donkey displays happiness or pride he sings and dances to songs such as *Ain’t No Mountain High Enough*. There is a singularity to Donkey’s character, one where he is little more than an entertainer and sidekick and, as such, is happy in his limited role.

The scenarios appearing in *Shrek 2* are not random and instead are a mirror reflection of social reality for African Americans and Whites. For example, African Americans are commonly portrayed as uneducated and not well spoken. Individuals such as Spike Lee have addressed these issues and have commented on how African Americans are commonly bamboozled into taking roles that amplify White middle-class society’s negative depiction of African Americans. He best showed this in his 2000 film *Bamboozled* (Lee, 2000). In this film, “Lee demonstrates how we all play a role in the continued denigration of African-American people through the visual medium” (Butters, 2005).

Donkey’s voice and use of language are of central importance to the film, as he is the only character in *Far Far Away* that is a native English speaker but sounds like no other English-speaking character in the kingdom. He maintains his own unique pitch, tone, and vernacular in what has been referred to as “African American English,” “Black English,” or “Ebonics” (Smith, 2002, pp. 16–17). As linguist Lisa Delpit (2002) has noted, Ebonics or African American English is a highly complex, “rule-based” dialect that is neither “deficient” nor “defective.” Rather, it involves using “metalinguistic facilit[ies]” (p. 39) that require the brain to construct, process, and interpret two dialects simultaneously. It is difficult to associate and understand the linguistic complexity inherent in African American English when it is flowing from the mouth of an animated donkey. The filmmakers’ intentional use of a donkey, its pairing with Eddie Murphy’s voice, and specific use of

language serve to marginalize, even trivialize, the reality of language acquisition and its significance in education and public perception.

Further connections associated with a donkey make the choice appear tasteless, offensive, and racist. Donkeys have been traditionally used for centuries as agricultural tools and forms of transportation, work animals, valued for their durability and reliability, not for their aesthetic value or intellectual prowess. Donkey serves as a “visual aid” or a visual “embellishment” of ideas that are embedded in culturally insensitive presuppositions “as if there were no alternative” representations available (Huckin, 1995, pp. 99–100). Simply by using a donkey as a vessel for lines such as “This fool,” “Say what,” and “I know you ain’t talkin’ ‘bout the swamp” implies an alternative agenda that goes beyond fairytales and happy endings. The physical appearances and voices attached to and projected through the characters reveal a lack of cultural sensitivity and/or a concerted effort to make a statement regarding race and language.

Shrek’s second companion is Puss-in-Boots (voice provided by Antonio Banderas), a notorious “ogre killer” who is really a small cat with a big reputation. He is introduced to the plot when the king ventures to the outskirts of town to find a solution to his “problem.” The king, disguised in a cloak, enters The Poison Apple, a smoky bar active with fistfights, and asks the bartender for the person who can “help him with an ogre problem.” The bartender solemnly points to a back door and says, “He’s the man to see when you need to have someone taken care of.” Behind the door lives Puss-in-Boots in total darkness; he speaks with a heavy accent and emanates an air of mystery. Puss-in-Boots does not reveal himself to the king; only his yellow eyes glow in the darkness. After the king makes his offer and provides a monetary incentive, Puss-in-Boots says, “Jus tell me where I can fine dis ogre.”

Every aspect of this scene is an attempt to denigrate and compartmentalize Latina/o culture into an exotic archetype that fills White America’s fascinations and fears. This mode of cultural deconstruction is predicated on historically racist notions that have served to stigmatize and repress Latina/o culture and the Spanish language. Puss-in-Boots as a Latino archetype must inhabit the fringes of society and play its most evil role—killer. He is sought out to perform the unrighteous wishes of others while veiled in a cloud of mystery and intrigue. He speaks in an accented and phonetic English only to express his desire to kill. Essentially, Puss-in-Boots is foregrounded in a manner that emphasizes cultural and linguistic stereotypes while simultaneously framing him as a collective representation of Hollywood’s misguided perception of Latina/o culture. The character of Puss-in-Boots prompts several questions: Do all Latinas/os speak English with an accent? Are Latinos criminals who reside in the outskirts of town? In addition, are all Latinas/os mysterious and exotic? The writers of *Shrek 2* present a blatantly formulaic construction of Latino culture that is damaging to the minds of young Latina/o children who are attempting to navigate an already repressive cultural climate inside and outside of U.S. schools.

In the subsequent scene, Puss-in-Boots encounters Shrek for the first time and makes his attempt at killing the ogre. As Puss-in-Boots enters the camera frame he is introduced with the sounds of a slow traditional Spanish guitar and begins a futile attempt to take down his larger opponent. Puss-in-Boots is feisty, fiery, and relentless in his attack, but it is to no avail as Shrek dominates him easily. Once he is defeated, Puss-in-Boots becomes cowardly and begs for mercy. He says to Shrek, "It's nothing personal señor, oh no, *por favor*. I wuz dooing iet only for my familiee, my muther's she's seeck and my father leeves under garbage." Puss-in-Boots then asks Shrek if he can "serve" him, for he would view it as an "honor," and then he begins to refer to Shrek for the duration of the movie as "boss" and "señor." Puss-in-Boots transforms from a fiery killer to a passive follower and servant within 10 min of screen time. His dialogue is fragmented and apologetic, and he uses his family as the reason for committing crimes. The audience is offered two portrayals of Latinos through the actions and language of Puss-in-Boots: that of a mysterious killer and that of a submissive follower. Portraying Latinas/os in such a slanted manner allows the dominant groups of the United States to legitimize colonialist practices of domination and prejudice. As Hopkins (2004) elaborated, the development of Puss-in-Boots into a character whose characteristics mimic those of an established actor like Antonio Banderas (commonly identified as the Latino actor) was intentional. Hopkins wrote, "We studied the way he [Banderas] looks at the camera, the way he plays with the camera, cocking an eye to the audience, the shadow under the brim of his hat, that type of thing." In other words, "the charming Zorro. We tried to put that in the cat" (p. 78). This information shows that the creators were attempting to stereotype Puss-in-Boots into the Latino character Zorro by equipping him with Antonio Banderas's facial gestures, thus emphasizing Latino stereotypes.

When Latinas/os are labeled as criminals, racist practices are perceived as legitimate, and thus racial profiling, mass Immigration and Naturalization Service raids, denial of social services, and inferior education go unchallenged by the majority of Americans in the name of "security and democracy." Because films like *Shrek 2* and countless others postulate and perpetuate inaccurate cultural depictions, mass America continues to view Latinas/os as members of a Puss-in-Boots-like culture, fluidly inhabiting submissive roles and participating in unprovoked violent acts.

Several scenes later Puss-in-Boots and Donkey help Shrek steal a magical potion from the Fairy Godmother, who then quickly alerts the authorities. As the three characters are running away, the theme song from the reality show *COPS* blares in the background and a helicopter with high-beam searchlights hovers above them. This parody is the producer's obvious intention to imitate a serious event, in this case the television show *COPS*, which shows the pursuit of criminals and eventual arrest, for a comic effect. In this situation, the *COPS* parody is called *KNIGHTS*, and it tapes, as in *COPS*, the pursuit and eventual arrest of Shrek, Don-

key, and Puss-in-Boots. As Puss-in-Boots is being searched, a knight finds a plastic bag full of catnip in his pocket. The plastic bag is filled with a green matter that closely resembles marijuana. Puss-in-Boots, without being asked, quickly says, "Dat's not mine." Shortly afterward, Donkey yells, "Police brutality." Once again the scene is framed in such a way that suggests normality; in other words, the audience has been conditioned to view this scenario as a legitimate portrayal. Throughout the film, Puss-in-Boots is implicated in anything crime-related, and so a cause-and-effect dynamic has him guilty without question. So, in effect, when he states, "Dat's not mine," it is to no avail, because the writers of the film by means of damaging character presuppositions and manipulations have locked Puss-in-Boots into a single label—criminal. Unsurprisingly, the film omits a trial scene, leaving the audience to assume that the two are guilty, no questions asked. This omission of a trial is crucial because it builds on the belief that Donkey (African American) and Puss-in-Boots (Latino) are considered guilty until proved innocent. Furthermore, the absence of such a scene masks the racism that is reproduced. This is an example of "omission," a deceptive way to reproduce racist discourse, because, as Huckin explained, "it is difficult to raise questions about something that is not even there" (p. 99).

The setting of *Shrek 2* is crucial to the stereotypes postulated throughout the film because they clearly reflect the sentiments of certain groups in Los Angeles in terms of race, culture, language, and the roles each of these play in the city's daily activities. The scene mentioned above is a reflection of a transparent and persistent media portrayal of the complex social fabric of Los Angeles. It is easy to satirize real issues such as police brutality and racial profiling rather than to address them from a constructive viewpoint. This film is intended for children, and yet it chooses to address complex social and cultural issues in a very flippant manner. This scene makes critical inferences that are detrimental to all children, specifically Latinas/os and African Americans, as they are the targets of a racist platform embedded in what should be entertainment free of bias.

What value does this scene hold? What can children of color take away from these images? Are these types of scenes necessary for "comedic genius," and, if so, who finds these cultural misrepresentations appropriate for children? Is the audience (school-age children) leaving the film believing that all Latinos possess marijuana and that all African Americans are subject to police brutality? Ultimately, can their minds filter and process the real issues addressed in the film? The answers to these questions can be found by studying children as they engage in social activities at school. Kirch (2005) and Silvern and Williamson (1987), whose research focuses on elementary school-age children, have found children often engage in the practices used in the cartoons they watch. Silvern and Williamson elaborate that preschool children who watch these violent cartoons often tend to show signs of aggressive behaviors and less signs of prosocial behavior (1987). This research indicates that children who are exposed to violent cartoons tend to be vio-

lent themselves because they are mimicking the acceptable behaviors that are presented in the cartoon. Following the same behavior pattern, it is also plausible that children who see *Shrek 2* may also reproduce the racist behaviors shown in this film against elementary school-age children of color. It is difficult for young students of color to acknowledge, maintain, and take pride in their culture when the majority of what they receive is negative visual and oral representations of themselves via mass media. As the film begins to wind down, these questions begin to take on real importance as cultural gaps are widened by continued use of stereotypes.

The final scene of the film reunites Shrek with Fiona and moves toward the conventional happy ending synonymous with animated films. Within seconds of Shrek and Fiona's celebratory embrace, Puss-in-Boots asks, "Hey, isn't we suppose to be having a fiesta?" Upon this inquiry, in come horns, confetti, dancers, and a stage. Donkey gives a hip-hop intro to the performance with the line "Puss and Donkey y'all," and then both characters perform the late 1990s Ricky Martin hit *Living the Vida Loca*. During the performance, Puss-in-Boots tells Donkey, "Hey, Donkey that's Spaneesh." The performance culminates into one final cultural stereotype that reinforces Donkey's position as entertainer and Puss-in-Boots's as the exotic Latino.

As if this were not enough, after the film credits run, Puss-in-Boots and Donkey reemerge to reiterate the film's skewed interpretation of culture and language. After the festivities, Donkey is sad because he realizes Shrek can no longer spend as much time with him. His new friend Puss-in-Boots enters with two ladies (not cats) on his arm and says, "Amigo, we are off to the Kit Kat Club, come on." Donkey does not answer, and out of nowhere enters Lady Dragon from the preceding *Shrek* film. Donkey, in his most excited voice, says, "That's my girl, baby where you been?" Lady Dragon whispers something in his ear, and Donkey says emphatically, "What you talkin' 'bout? Are you serious?" Then six "mutant babies" enter and begin to hug and lick Donkey. The movie ends with the following line by Donkey: "I got to get a job!"

This scene again portrays the stereotypical ideas that exist against Latinos and African Americans. For example, Puss-in-Boots having two women around him builds upon the ideas of the Latino Lover, who is said to have the ability to pleasure multiple women and not just one. Furthermore, Donkey saying he needs to find a job is building on the stereotypes that African American men do not have jobs and father multiple children. In his case, he has fathered six children in an unwed relationship.

Throughout the film, the audience is given a mixture of implied (through pre-suppositions, omissions, insinuations, and visual aids) and direct (through foregrounding, labels, and modality) cultural and linguistic messages. African Americans as represented by the voice of Eddie Murphy and Donkey are presented as loud, expressive, brash, comedic, entertaining, sarcastic, criminal, and unem-

ployed negligent fathers. Latinos as represented by the voice of Antonio Banderas and Puss-in-Boots are presented as criminals, mysterious, exotic, passive, deferential, poor, uneducated, and drug users. The animators visually accentuate certain attributes and minimize others to formulate caricatures that equate animals with particular cultural backgrounds.

Donkey's facial features are enlarged and so are his teeth, which are shown directly after providing a comedic punch line. Throughout the film, he is a grayish brown color, but when he drinks the magic potion they have stolen from the Fairy Godmother he turns into a "white Stallion" and begins to feel beautiful and strong and carries a commanding posture quite the opposite of when he is just a donkey. It is inferred that when he is a donkey he is impure, dirty, working class, and not allowed in the king's court. When he morphs into a "white Stallion" for a brief time he is pure, clean, noble, and worthy of entering the king's court. More significantly, Donkey's opinion of himself alters based upon what color and animal he is. He laments having to return to his original body. There is a clear message that "white" is superior to any color and that such distinctions are true in any society. This forwards a message of cultural inferiority, one that associates skin color, particularly white skin, with success, beauty, and high self-esteem, whereas other skin hues denote failure, unattractiveness, and low self-esteem.

The majority of the film's stereotypes do not appear once but are emphasized repeatedly whenever Donkey or Puss-in-Boots is involved in any action, which is more than three fourths of the film. There is constant emphasis on Donkey as the entertainer and Puss-in-Boots as the exotic and mysterious criminal. Donkey's entire dialogue in the film consists of jokes or demonstrative language and actions that induce laughter. Puss-in-Boots is consistently implicated in criminal behavior. He is introduced to the audience as an "ogre killer," involved in stealing a magic potion, and arrested for theft and catnip (marijuana) possession. In contrast, no other resident of Far Far Away (who are all White) commits any crimes, goes to jail, or speaks English with an accent except for Puss-in-Boots.

Shrek 2 poignantly omits substantial cultural and linguistic evidence that demonstrates heterogeneity or diversity among African Americans and Latinas/os and thus once again participates in Huckin's (1995) concept of omission, deleting important information of a text and therefore not giving the audience members the opportunity to question this (p. 99). This film would have one believe that all African Americans and Latinas/os possess the attributes and characteristics exhibited by Donkey and Puss-in-Boots. For instance, not all Latinos speak English with a heavy accent, not all Latinos are criminals, not all Latinos are passive and deferential, and not all Latinos partake in marijuana use. Likewise, not all African Americans are expressive, not all African Americans are entertainers, and not all African Americans are negligent fathers.

Shrek 2 is a product of American society at large, and its deliberate negative portrayal of Latinos and African Americans exposes sentiments that lay beneath

the surface of public opinion. The types of images that are showcased in *Shrek 2* allow for White America to validate its misconceptions, maintain its disillusionment, and posit claims of linguistic superiority. The results of this yield to colonialist forms of repression such as eradication of languages other than English, dissolution of social services, and discriminatory educational practices.

The repercussions of films such as *Shrek 2* are most evident in the education field, where English language learners and African Americans are exposed to similar messages of exclusion and discrimination. Education researcher Zeynep Beyköt (2002) noted, "Language minority students quickly discover that their home cultures and languages are viewed as deficient" (p. viii). Latinos are faced with an overwhelmingly negative perception of their culture through both the media (films, television, newspapers, and video games) and the public education system that fails to engage their cultural and linguistic identities. The U.S. educational curriculum is "designed for a homogenous, White, middle-class, native English-speaking student population" and therefore does not access Latino and African American experiences or "build on their culturally based knowledge" (Beyköt, 2002, p. viii). Recognizing this, it is important for people to understand that the current education system is working exactly as it is intended to work. Donaldo Macedo (1993) added, "I am increasingly convinced that the education system is not a failure. The failure that it generates represents its ultimate victory to the extent that large groups of people, including the so-called minorities were never intended to get educated" (p. 36). From this perspective, people can recognize that the current education system cannot be fixed, and thus any program administrated within these guidelines will continue to produce racist outcomes. Thus, a rethinking of the entire education system is what is needed.

For decades U.S. schools have functioned under the principles of what education researcher Angela Valenzuela (2005) has called "subtractive schooling" (p. 4). Subtractive schooling "rather than building on the assets that children bring with them to schools, public education [*sic*] subtracts students' linguistic, cultural, and community-based identities, to their academic and personal detriment" (p. 4). Latino students find themselves in a cultural, linguistic, and educational vacuum that subtracts valuable aspects of their identity without replacing them with anything of value. The curriculum that is designed for a "White, middle-class, native English-speaking student population" strips Latino students of their identities and then provides no replacement, leaving students to fill the void with mainstream media portrayals reminiscent of those featured in *Shrek 2*.

The results of a social and educational vacuum force Latino students to secure their language and culture to the inner spheres of home, where they can freely utilize what comes naturally to them free of judgments and consequences. However, with current trends leaning toward early immersion in English, many Latino students find that the push to English forces them to abandon Spanish at a rapid rate, leaving communication with parents and family members strained and, ultimately,

fragmented. Beykont (2002) summarized this dilemma by noting, "To succeed in school and later in society, language minority students are pressured to abandon their home cultures and adopt the mainstream culture" (p. xi). Sadly, "mainstream culture" such as *Shrek 2* proves itself to be a detriment to identity construction among Latinos and African Americans rather than an impetus for educational success.

FIGHTING AGAINST THE PRODUCTION OF RACISM

As can be seen through this analysis of *Shrek 2*, popular culture movies often help reproduce many of the various racist ideologies that negatively frame minoritized people. As this essay has shown, the reproduction of racist ideologies takes form in different ways, including language, physical appearance, and stereotypical cultural practices. Unfortunately, these racist ideologies do not stop at this level, which would be bad enough, but carry into schools, where minoritized children continue to be oppressed because of the same racist ideologies.

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, a main reason why cartoon characters are allowed or encouraged to play racist, stereotypical individuals is because U.S. society is at a point where many of the stereotypes (e.g., Latinos speaking English with an accent or African Americans being negligent fathers) are accepted. Having these racist behaviors in animated films is okay because U.S. society has accepted them.

Given the character archetypes that are reproduced in popular culture like *Shrek 2*, it is understandable that educational institutions work within the confines of these imagined characters. It is our recommendation that schools try to break away from these narrow stereotypical constructs of Latinos and African Americans and produce alternative, resourceful, and more positive images of minoritized groups.

It is important for the United States to stop the degradation of ethnic cultures through popular culture as is done in many animated films like *Shrek 2*. By unmasking the negative discourses that place ethnic groups in the margins, we can start to identify the resources ethnic people have; begin to employ alternative, more positive discourses for Latinos, African Americans, and other marginalized groups in the United States; and consequently help create opportunities for individuals who would not normally have been afforded them. In beginning this process, we need to play a much more active role in learning the importance of diversity in the United States and in creating spaces where it can emerge, including popular culture. By recognizing what each culture has to offer, we may begin to reproduce stronger images of minoritized groups. There are various ways we can do this, but one way is to produce popular culture animated films like *Shrek 2* that portray minoritized people as intelligent and hard-working individuals.

This drastic change will need the support of many different groups, including the producers of animated films, who introduce issues of diversity at an elementary level in their films. Being aware of these circumstances, perhaps educators can develop school policies that take into account what ethnic minorities experience. For example, by recognizing how racist discourses in popular culture reproduce negative images of ethnic people, we can help educators build school programs that appreciate diversity. This is something that can have a major effect on the messages being sent from the schools to the children and their families. Recognizing how dominant discourses marginalize ethnic groups in our society and in animated films like *Shrek 2*, we can also hopefully see how they operate in propositions like California Proposition 187, Proposition 209, English-only movements across the nation, and, more recently, the HR 4437 Bill, which sent a clear message to Mexicans that if you are undocumented or speak a language other than English then the school system will do everything in its power to serve as an obstacle for you. Instead of providing these borders, we need to learn how to respect different cultures, which again can be encouraged through animated films.

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