

Student Podcast Transcript

Los Angeles: On Film and On Record digital exhibit

Host: Celia Velazquez

Podcast conducted on December 8, 2020 at an unspecified location

Transcribed by: Celia Velazquez

Edited by: Celia Velazquez

Time: 00:23:03

Biographical Note: Celia Velazquez, California State University at Northridge graduate student

Podcast Transcription: Internalized Racism in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*

There is silence the first 26 seconds of this podcast. The audio starts at 00:00:27.

CV: Hello my name is Celia Velazquez and today I will be discussing the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. In Robert Zemeckis' movie *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, the humans mistreat and belittle the living, breathing, animated characters called the Toons. In this movie, the Toons represent a marginalized group, and how people in these groups develop a negative self image because of their own internalized racism. Internalized racism can be defined as "the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves" (Speight 129). Jessica Rabbit, Roger Rabbit, and Judge Doom have internalized the prejudices they have heard about Toons, and they now believe they don't have value. For Jessica Rabbit, she believes she is evil because of how her toon body is drawn. Roger Rabbit allows himself to be abused by directors and by the private detective, Eddie Valiant. Judge Doom has changed his entire appearance and wants to kill all the other Toons because he believes Toons lives are not worthy of living. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* exposes the true effects of discrimination where people who received this treatment then start to believe they are inferior to the dominant culture. The settings of Los Angeles and Hollywood in this movie have stereotypically been seen as a sunny and perfect place, but this movie utilizes these settings to portray how marginalized groups are oppressed by large industries, specifically the film industry.

The article, “What is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don’t We Study It: Acknowledging Racism’s Hidden Injuries” contains a definition for internalized racism. Karen Pyke states, “ internalized racism is ‘the ‘subjection’ of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them’” (552). While Pyke is discussing racism, this definition can be applied to the Toons as they can be viewed as a different species and are challenged with discrimination. For the purposes of this podcast, I will be using the term internalized oppression because the Toons are not part of the human race. Pyke also notes that this internalized feelings of oppression are not a result of a weakness of the oppressed group. The characters in this movie have started to believe in the oppressive ideology of the humans that Toons are inferior to humans. Roger Rabbit, Jessica Rabbit and Judge Doom’s low self-worth does not indicate that they are weak, but portrays how powerful oppressive systems are to its subjects.

The beginning of the movie sets up how Roger will be continually disrespected throughout the film. When Roger films a scene wrong, the director verbally degrades Roger by saying, “ I’m not worried about you, I’m worried about the refrigerator” (*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*). The director’s words devalue Roger’s life in this instance. The director is angry that Roger spoiled the scene and says that Roger is worth less than a refrigerator. Roger then tries to get the director’s approval by hitting himself. This early scene demonstrates how Roger has a low self-worth as he takes the verbal abuse of the director and physically abuses himself. Roger has internalized the idea that Toons are only worthy if they are serving the purpose of humans. Since Roger made a mistake, he feels unworthy at this moment.

While Roger is mistreated at work, his bosses also want to control his life outside of work by getting involved in his marriage. R.K. Maroon hires Eddie Valiant to find out if Roger’s wife

is cheating on him with Martin Acme. The audience later finds out that Jessica was forced to pretend that she had an affair. This demonstrates how both Jessica and Roger don't have agency over their own lives. The humans believe they know what best is for Toons, and decide to make decisions for the Toons. This is also seen with Acme as he is the human owner of Toontown. The humans believe the Toons are not capable of caring for themselves, which is why Acme is in control of Toontown. The discrimination that the Toons face prevent them from having any type of freedom in their careers and in their social lives.

The prejudices against Toons are also exhibited when Roger is charged with the murder of Acme without evidence. While there was paint found at the crime scene, there was no indication that this paint was from Roger's gloves. Since Roger is a Toon, he isn't taken seriously by the police who have already deemed him the murderer. This movie exposes how police are not helpful towards marginalized communities. The Toons are challenged with a sort of "racial" profiling from the police as the police are not fair towards Toons. Judge Doom, the true murderer and a toon disguising himself as a human, uses this Toon bias to prevent anyone from suspecting him. Doom is aware of the negative attitudes towards Toons and uses this to get Roger unfairly charged with murder. This depicts the true reality that Black Americans and other people of color face in the United States as they are oftentimes met with hostility when dealing with the police system. With the police against Roger, he has to find justice elsewhere and turns to Eddie Valiant. When Roger goes to Eddie, Roger states that it was Valiant Detective Agency that had helped lots of Toons, indicating that Toons don't have many options when seeking help. No one believes in Toons, which is why Roger needed to go to a white male, Eddie, for people to believe him.

But since Eddie's brother, Teddy, died because of a Toon, Eddie is now prejudiced against Toons. In the beginning of the movie, Eddie did not want to help Maroon with following Roger's wife because she is a Toon. Eddie only agrees for the money. Eddie had one bad experience with a Toon, and now stereotypes all Toons as reckless and dangerous. Although Eddie didn't want to help Roger, he eventually agrees to uncover the truth. But while Eddie helps Roger, he repeatedly yells at Roger, calls him an idiot, throws him and pulls Roger's ears. Since Eddie has a negative view of Toons, he has no problem with abusing Roger. Eddie still views Roger as less than human. When Eddie sees that Doom is a toon, Eddie insults him by saying, "That lamebrain freeway idea could only be cooked up by a toon." Eddie sees himself as superior to Toons, which is why he degrades every Toon he comes in contact with.

Roger does not stop Eddie's abuse because of his internalized oppression. And after Roger hears about Eddie's brother dying from a Toon, his internalized oppression grows more. Roger tells Eddie, "No wonder you hate me. If a toon killed my brother, I'd hate me too." Teddy's death is not Roger's responsibility, but Roger still feels guilty about what happened. This interaction between Roger and Eddie indicates the power structure between humans and Toons as Eddie is able to lower Roger's self worth. Eddie is a human and has power over Roger since he is a Toon. Throughout the film, there are never any Toons in positions of power. The Toons only work as entertainers or waiters. This has subconsciously led toons, like Roger, to believe that their only purpose is to serve humans. In this instance, Roger serves Eddie by taking the blame of Teddy's death.

With Judge Doom, the movie explains that Toontown is under his jurisdiction and he wants to "reign in the insanity." Doom's words describe how he has no respect for Toons. Doom is also a corrupt judge as he bought the election that made him a judge. With Doom's

introduction for the film, he murders a Toon with his creation of “dip.” Doom has no remorse when he kills a Toon and he is the one who created this dip that was specifically made for killing Toons. This demonstrates how he has completely distanced himself from Toons. He has changed his appearance of a Toon and believes that no toon should exist. This also portrays how a marginalized individual may assimilate into the dominant culture and then start to have derogatory feelings towards members of their own community. Doom’s internalized oppression has led him to fully believe all the lies humans have said about Toons, which has caused him to do everything in his power to stop all Toons.

As Doom pretends to be human, he uses this newfound power to control other Toons, such as the weasels. Previously, Doom had no authority over others, but once he is human, he uses this power to hurt other Toons. The weasels are mistreated by Doom as he hits them and yells at them. This in turn leads to the weasel to become violent towards other Toons. This portrays the cycle of violence that happens within a marginalized community. The effects of oppression have negative consequences where members of the same community may hurt each other because they seek the kind of dominance that is held over them.

Doom’s double identity as a human and a Toon could be viewed through DuBois’s concept of double consciousness. The article, “Fanon and DuBosian Double Consciousness” provides a definition of double consciousness. The text states, “ Having two antagonistic identities means that a lot of time and energy is spent negotiating and enduring the conflicts between who one is as a person and how one struggles to live with the misrepresentations of the outside world” (Black 393). Once Doom started to pretend to be human, he had to change his entire personality, such as never laughing. The stereotype of Toons is that they are foolish and irresponsible. Doom looked at Toons through the eyes of the humans and changed himself to

become a serious person. But Doom still struggles with his identity because at the end of the movie, he reveals to Eddie and the other characters that he is a Toon. Doom is flattened by a machine, but he is not injured by this. This indicates that Toons have more physical strength than humans. Although Toons are viewed as a lower social class than humans, Doom's true Toon identity is what helps him survive. Doom's plan to kill all the Toons is horrible, but his elaborate plan destroys the stereotype that Toons are less intelligent than humans.

Doom's desire to become human is a reason that leads him to his plan to destroy Toontown. Doom's vision includes destroying Toontown to create a freeway that would lead to motels and fastfood. This would all be to serve humans. Both Roger and Doom feel the need to provide a service for humans, but to do this they have to diminish themselves. For Roger, he has to take the verbal abuse of his bosses. For Doom, he has to change his Toon appearance. The internalized oppression of Roger and Doom causes them to place the feeling of humans above their own needs. This exhibits how marginalized people in real life have to change themselves to make the dominant culture comfortable.

Doom's change of appearance also portrays how he wants to be accepted by humans. Doom has seen the discrimination that Toons have faced and chooses to change himself entirely as a way to prevent this discrimination. Doom's behavior also exposes how it is only humans who have the power in this society. As a Toon, Doom never would have been able to become a judge, but as a human, Doom became a Judge very quickly. Doom has come to hate his Toon self, and destroys what is left of his Toon life. We never learn what Doom's real name was, which indicates how Doom has effectively erased his past life. And when Doom dies at the end of the movie, none of the other Toons want to accept him or claim him as a Toon. Doom cares for no Toon, including himself, which allows him to abuse other Toons. Since Doom is a Toon,

he knows the weaknesses of Toons and uses this to his advantage. To find Roger, Doom uses a song to lure Roger out of hiding. Doom states, “No Toon can resist the old shave-and-a-haircut trick.” Doom is able to betray his community using knowledge he learned from himself as a Toon. Doom’s actions are a betrayal to himself and all other Toons.

While the Toons can represent people of color, Doom’s decision to change his appearance can display how people of color use plastic surgery, whitening creams or other methods to become accepted by the dominant white culture. The article, “Skin Bleaching, Self-Hate, and Black Identity in Jamaica” discusses how skin bleaching is a result of the history of slavery. The text states, “Skin bleaching is the contemporary evidence of the deep-rooted and lingering psychological scars of slavery in particular and colonization in general” (Charles 712). Charles expands on how the effects of slavery and colonization have continued and has led to the mentality of people with darker skin in Jamaica to desire a lighter skin color. Charles also illuminates how it is people who are white and have lighter skin who are seen as successful in Jamaica. This relates to Doom as he is aware that it is humans who have all the success in his society, while Toons are underpaid and work at lower positions. Doom’s desire to change his appearance indicates discrimination has a mental affect on oppressed communities.

Doom only values what the humans value, which is money. Doom believes the lies from humans that money is the most important thing, which is why he also kills humans, such as Acme, Maroon, and Valiant’s brother. This movie is also a critique of capitalism, where profits are valued over the lives of others. Doom wants to make money by destroying Toontown to create motels and fast food restaurants. While Doom has no use for the Toons, the film industry sees Toons as a commodity. Maroon states that the Toons provide cheap labor since the Toons are paid with peanuts. The Toons are only valued by humans when they serve a purpose, when

Toons aren't helpful, they are kept in boxes. This explains why Roger is worried when he films a scene wrong, he doesn't want to be deemed worthless by the humans. The humans don't view the Toons as people, but instead as objects that help make them money.

Doom's plan to destroy all the Toons and Towntown can be a symbolic representation of how people of color are erased from history. One example of this is the horrible treatment of indigenous people is erased in the history of the United States. The book *Bad Indians* narrates how the brutality that indigenous groups faced in California is never mentioned in classrooms when discussing history. The text states, "Fourth graders, their parents, their teachers, tourists to the missions, even historians, often learn and perpetuate only one story about California Indians: conquest, subjugation, defeat, disappearance. Somehow, this story manages to get told without any real mention of the violence and violations that accompanied colonization" (Miranda 193). Miranda is critical of the mission assignments that are given to children in California. This assignment doesn't describe how indigenous people were beaten by the Spanish colonizers in the missions. In Miranda's book, she also mentions how her tribe, the Ohlone Esselen Costanoan Nation, is erased because the government does not recognize them as a living tribe. This can be related to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* because Doom's plan is to abolish all traces of the Toons. Doom works as a judge, and this means that he represents the government. His role in trying to eradicate Toons and their home can demonstrate how the government is culpable in the erasure of people of color in history.

For Jessica Rabbit, the internalized oppression relates to her appearance. Jessica has come to believe that the shape of her body is wrong. She tells Eddie, "You don't know how hard it is being a woman looking the way I do." Everyone who encounters Jessica, believes she is devious because of her looks. Eddie is surprised that Jessica is married to Roger, and Eddie



assumes that she must be unfaithful to Roger. But it was Maroon who forced Jessica to fake an affair. Jessica did this to protect Roger. Jessica wants to do everything she can to help her husband, which portrays how everyone else is wrong that Jessica is promiscuous. Jessica faces discrimination as a Toon and as a woman. Betty Boop also faces similar discrimination. For Betty, she is no longer able to make money as a performer because she has gotten older. This demonstrates how women are treated in Hollywood, specifically the film industry. As women get older, they have no value for directors. This exposes the high standards that are placed onto women. For Betty and Jessica, their appearance is what allows them to work as entertainers, but their appearances also leads to discrimination for them as Toons and as women.

A criticism I have of this movie is that this movie condemns the discrimination that the Toon face, but at the same time there are no people of color in this movie. I think this movie could have included scenes showing how people of color have been discriminated and how these people of color come to the defense of the Toons. The only human that seems to care about Toons is Acme. But a question I have is why was Acme in possession of Toontown? It seems like Acme also had prejudices against the Toons. He didn't believe the Toons were capable of taking care of their own land, which is why he decided to hold possession of the land. The Toons also seem to question Acme's actions. At the end of the movie, the Toon Baby Herman asks, "If Acme was such a genius why didn't he leave his will where we could find it?" Acme tried to be an ally to the Toons, but he still harmed this community. This exposes how allies to marginalized communities make mistakes when they do what they think is best instead of listening to the people who are oppressed.

With Acme and Eddie, they could be described through the trope of the white savior. The article, "Troubling White Benevolence: Four Takes on a Scene from 'Giant'" discusses how

white benevolence can be damaging towards people of color. Bebout states, "...the cultural trope of white benevolence treats the problem of racial injustice solely as the territory of white people, stripping away the agency of people of color" (15). Bebout describes how white benevolence creates racial paternalism. These ideas can be connected to Acme as he was the owner of Toontown. Acme may have been aware of the discrimination Toons faced, but by taking ownership of their property, he prevents the Toons from having agency. The Toons are at the mercy of Acme and his decision to give the Toon's their land in his will.

I did like the ending with the Toons getting possession of their land, although this seems like an unlikely scenario in real life. The Toons could be viewed as colonized people who get the land back from the colonizer. But this isn't something that we see happening in real life. Indigenous groups all over the world have been colonized and they don't get their land back. And they still face discrimination. If this movie is arguing for indigenous people in America to get their land back, I'm all for it. But it doesn't seem like this movie is that radical. While the ending is unrealistically hopeful, I'm glad that the Toons got possession of Toontown. The Toons have worked in lower positions as entertainers and waiters with no power of their own, but now they have the freedom to live freely on their own soil in Toontown without the interference of humans, hopefully.

With Eddie, he is the white hero that comes and saves the marginalized community of the Toons. This is a trope that happens in many movies including: *Gran Torino*, *The Blind Side*, *Green Book*, and *The Help*. Bebout ends his article by stating, "While these texts promote affirmative messages about racial equality, they simultaneously subordinate people of color and their struggles to fashion the protagonist as the Great White Hope" (33). While there seems to be a better understanding between the humans and the Toons by the end of the movie, it was Eddie

who saved everyone. The Toons are still subordinate to the humans. This is also exhibited as Eddie puts his hands around Roger's neck at the end of the movie. Although this is done in a playful manner, Roger was still scared, which portrays that it is the humans who still yield power over the Toons.

The internalized oppression of the Toons in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* damages the mentality of the Toons. Roger, Jessica, and Doom all have a negative view of themselves. The discrimination they have faced has led them to discriminate against themselves. From the beginning of the movie until the end, Roger suffers violence from the humans and does not do anything to stop them. He has come to believe that Toons are second-class citizens, who can be mistreated by humans. Jessica is manipulated by humans in this film and has been brainwashed to believe that her body is dangerous. With Doom, he has decided to become human because he desires power and does not want to be subjected to the discrimination that Toons face. This movie portrays how oppression leaves psychological scars on the oppressed. While this is a fictional movie, it demonstrates the reality of racism in Los Angeles and Hollywood where people of color are underpaid in their jobs, discriminated against by the police and how this all leads to their internalized oppression. Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

Works Cited

- Bebout, Lee. "Troubling White Benevolence: Four Takes on a Scene from 'Giant.'" *Melus*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2011, pp. 13–36.
- Black, Marc. "Fanon and DuBoisian Double Consciousness." *Human Architecture*, vol. 5, no. Special Issue, 2007, pp. 393–404.
- Charles, Christopher A. "Skin Bleaching, Self-Hate, and Black Identity in Jamaica." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 33, no. 6, 2003, pp. 711–728.
- Miranda, Deborah. *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*. Heyday, 2013.
- Pyke, Karen D. "What Is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don't We Study It? Acknowledging Racism's Hidden Injuries." *Sociological Perspectives*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2010, pp. 551–572.
- Speight, Suzette L. "Internalized Racism." *The Counseling Psychologist*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2007, pp. 126–134.
- Zemeckis, Robert, director. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. Buena Vista Pictures, 1988.