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Black Normativity and Burdened Individualism: Grasping *Disney's The Princess and the Frog* at the Roots

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Abstract: The Walt Disney Company has a tarnished past. The media that powered its explosive growth to an entertainment conglomerate depicted grossly racist stereotypes. Seeking to wash its hands of this controversial history, Disney released *The Princess and the Frog*, its first film featuring a Black protagonist. The 2009 feature deserves recognition for its efforts to represent Black Americans; yet lurking in Disney's redemption project is a noticeably revisionist whitewashing of American history. The film is set in a post-racial depiction of Jim Crow America. Its plot begins when Tiana, short on money and seeking to rescue her dream to open a restaurant, accepts a prince-transmuted-frog's offer to reward her for kissing him. When she compromises her unyielding adherence to "hard work," she transforms into a frog. The film's narrative structure and context reflect what Saidiya Hartman labels "burdened individuality," a term for the post-Emancipation discourse that demands Black Americans relentlessly pursue market ascendancy while stripping them of the tools to do so. This essay will apply Hartman's historical concept to critique Disney's depiction of the free market as a race-neutral meritocracy, locating it within a broader legacy of economic exclusion and whitewashing calibrated to protect and legitimize anti-Black institutions.

The Princess and the Frog (2009), directed by John Musker and Ron Clements and released by the Walt Disney Company, was heralded by audiences and critics as a watershed moment for Black representation in mainstream media upon its announcement. As the first Disney film to feature a Black princess, *The Princess and the Frog* (TPF) was significant both for Black media consumers lacking representation and for Disney itself; the corporation's history of racial stereotyping and almost monoracial cast of characters was tarnishing its public image. In featuring Tiana, a Black protagonist, corporate planners likely hoped TPF would push this legacy of racism out of the public consciousness.

As it revealed more details about the movie, controversy "plagued Disney almost immediately."¹ Audiences learned, upon the release of the trailer, that Disney's first Black

¹ Neal A. Lester, "Disney's *The Princess and the Frog*: The Pride, the Pressure, and the Politics of Being a First," *The Journal of American Culture* 33, no. 4 (2010): 296, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734x.2010.00753.x>.

princess would spend a large majority of her time on the big screen as a frog. This detail was somewhat disheartening to those who desired comprehensive representation, as Tiana was supposed to be an equally prestigious Disney princess. If *The Princess and the Frog* was produced to advance Black representation, audiences pondered, why would her Blackness be invisible for most of the movie? The movie's release brought mostly positive reviews but strengthened these criticisms and fomented new controversies. Its villain was one source of these critiques. Dr. Facilier, also known as "Shadow Man," wielded a sensationalized depiction of voodoo magic—a spirituality unique to Black communities in Southern Louisiana—that he attempted to use to control the city of New Orleans. His effeminate figure and flamboyant outfit suggest he was queer-coded, a common criticism of Disney productions. These and other criticisms grew upon release.² Yet some of the film's more subtle characteristics—its neglect of racism, its peculiar, out-of-place dialogue extolling "hard work," its profoundly neoliberal undertones—have largely escaped public scrutiny.

Existing literature has astutely problematized several of *The Princess and the Frog*'s characteristics from a feminist and critical perspective.³ Ajay Gehlawat's essay "The Strange Case of The Princess and the Frog: Passing and the Elision of Race" centers on criticizing Disney's choice to depict the first Black princess as a frog, a decision that obfuscates her racial identity and "seems to literally conflate her with animality."⁴ This essay notes Tiana's dedication to economic betterment but does not center on analyzing it. Sarita McCoy Gregory's "Disney's Second Line: New Orleans, Racial Masquerade, and the Reproduction of Whiteness in *The Princess and the Frog*" exposes the film's depiction of New Orleans as a post-racial utopia and criticizes its attempt to situate Tiana in the terrain of rugged capitalism.⁵ This critique addresses Tiana's linkage to stereotypes, but its notes on economic meritocracy deserve further consideration and analysis. Neal A. Lester's "Disney's 'The Princess and the Frog': The Pride, the Pressure, and the Politics of Being a First" summarizes the ambivalence over Tiana and her misrepresentation; it does not, however, synthesize these perspectives into a criticism of its commitment to market capitalism.⁶ Kimberly R. Moffitt's "Scripting the Way for the 21st-Century Disney Princess in *The Princess and the Frog*" forms a brilliant account of the normative scripts and demands for respectability

² Ibid.

³ I take liberalism to be the "political doctrine that takes protecting and enhancing the freedom of the individual to be the central problem of politics," with a particular focus on formal rights recognition, economic autonomy and personal responsibility, and individualism. From: Richard Dagger et al., "Liberalism," *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., February 5, 2020), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberalism>.

⁴ Ajay Gehlawat, "The Strange Case of The Princess and the Frog: Passing and the Elision of Race," *Journal of African American Studies* 14, no. 4 (July 2010): 418, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-010-9126-1>.

⁵ Sarita McCoy Gregory, "Disney's Second Line: New Orleans, Racial Masquerade, and the Reproduction of Whiteness in *The Princess and the Frog*," *Journal of African American Studies* 14, no. 4 (2010): 432-449, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-010-9138-x>.

⁶ Lester, "Disney's *The Princess and the Frog*," 294-308.

that underscored Tiana's character.⁷ Jennifer L. Barker's article, "Hollywood, Black Animation, and the Problem of Representation in *Little Ol' Bosko* and *The Princess and the Frog*," argues Tiana's depiction, despite the film's sanitized context, can "outmaneuver" and transgress dominant scripts.⁸ The scholarship on *The Princess and the Frog* largely focuses on its post-racialism or linkage to stereotypes, not radical economic critique. The literature has yet to apply Saidiya Hartman's historical analysis of anti-Black racism to popular media depictions of the post-Emancipation context, an unfilled interval that merits recognition.

This essay will review Black feminist critiques of liberal inclusion and normativity and apply them to *TPF*.⁹ The film was an important move toward Black inclusion in entertainment – a worthy goal – but remains located in a set of tropes, assumptions, and omissions that undermine Black liberation.¹⁰ In expunging all depictions of racism during the Jim Crow era, Disney's historical revisions trivialize and erase the importance of racial barriers to economic success. This discourse strengthens a process Saidiya Hartman calls "burdened individuality": the process in which, following Emancipation, American society incorporated Black people into the terrain of rugged capitalism while stripping them of the tools to succeed.¹¹ Black communities had the responsibilities entailed by membership in a liberal economic system—economic self-sufficiency, productivity, and ascension from poverty—thrust upon them without receiving the privileges that accompany citizenship. The regimes of racial discrimination, wage suppression, and coerced labor that remain embedded into the existing American economy continue to systemically deny Black citizens access to economic benefits. The erasure, elision, and unknowing of the racially differential status quo are instrumental in extending this process.

Popular media representations and broad socioeconomic phenomena are often connected in enigmatic, ambiguous ways. Attention to films and their linkage to anti-Blackness is warranted because it can attune scholars to forms of subjection that may otherwise go undetected. Grounded in the historical and ontological analysis of Black feminists, this essay will investigate the movie's characterization and world-building, uncovering the correspondence between Disney's

⁷ Kimberly R. Moffitt, "Scripting the Way for the 21st-Century Disney Princess in *The Princess and the Frog*," *Women's Studies in Communication* 42, no. 4 (February 2019): 471-489, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2019.1669757>.

⁸ Jennifer L. Barker, "Hollywood, Black Animation, and the Problem of Representation in *Little Ol' Bosko* and *The Princess and the Frog*," *Journal of African American Studies* 14, no. 4 (2010): 483, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-010-9136-z>.

⁹ I take liberalism to be the "political doctrine that takes protecting and enhancing the freedom of the individual to be the central problem of politics," with a particular focus on formal rights recognition, economic autonomy and personal responsibility, and individualism. From: Richard Dagger et al., "Liberalism," *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., February 5, 2020), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberalism>.

¹⁰ Liberation from the oppression originating from slavery, specifically.

¹¹ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Oxford University Press, 1997), 115-124.

messaging and the racial regimes of carcerality, violence, and dispossession which invigorate the “afterlife of slavery.”¹²

The *Princess and the Frog* is set in 1920s New Orleans. The film’s protagonist is Tiana, a Black woman who aspires to start her own restaurant. She begins the movie as a waitress saving money to finance the opening of the business of her dreams. Tiana is tenacious, independent, and fixed almost singularly on this entrepreneurial goal. She frequently rebuffs the opportunity for leisure or recreation, proclaiming she “[does not] have time for dancing” or “messaging around.”¹³ This singular conviction spans her characterization almost universally; no matter the circumstances, Tiana retains and privileges her business-focused telos. Although later in the movie her values broaden to include a love interest, she never loses sight of her ceaseless desire for financial independence. When Tiana fantasizes about her restaurant, she envisions its services as lavish and elegant. The diners depicted in her imagination wear fine suits and elaborate dresses, while its staff serves champagne in elegant glasses. This degree of luxury suggests her aspired establishment would cater to the wealthy aristocracy. Tiana’s character exemplifies the liberal subject of the American Dream: she is hard-working, resilient, and surmounts the obstacles to her success. She wants to climb the economic ladder and mingle with America’s elite. Tiana’s economic tenacity and eventual success evinces the movie’s faith that the American Dream, including the presumption that economic success is universally accessible, is an essentially accurate premise.

Disney associates Tiana’s tireless economic work ethic with virtue and its compromise with trickery and suffering. *TPF*’s conflict begins when Tiana attempts to, in essence, take a shortcut to economic success. In the movie’s rising action, Tiana’s attempt to buy the building for her new restaurant is thwarted when another client outbids her. After the two monocle-donning real estate tycoons inform Tiana that they will not sell her the property unless she quickly scrapes together a large sum of money, she soon coincidentally stumbles upon Prince Naveen, who has been transmuted into an anthropomorphic frog. Naveen, under the impression that romantic contact will transform him back into a human, attempts to persuade her to kiss him. Tiana, revolted by the prospect of smooching a frog, initially refuses; that is, until he tempts her with the promise of economic gain. Naveen, frantically attempting to prevent his froghood from becoming permanent, claims to come “from a fabulously wealthy family” that “can offer [Tiana] some type of reward.”¹⁴ Fearing her restaurant may never open without this reward, Tiana reluctantly agrees

¹² Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 6.

¹³ *The Princess and the Frog*, directed by John Musker and Ron Clements, (2009; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions), 13:36-13:48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28:53-28:55.

to kiss him. Rather than turning *him* into a human, their kiss turns *her* into a frog, turning them into the slimy amphibian forms that they retain for most of the movie's screen time.

Disney's narrative arc, which diverges from the original tale, retaliates against Tiana's brief, desperate attempt to take a shortcut through meritocratic capitalism. Tiana's transmutation into a frog originates from her momentary aberration from labor, making it a source of distress, anxiety, and suffering. Regretting this lapse in her otherwise uninhibited worth ethic, Tiana proclaims that the current situation "serves [her] right for wishing on stars."¹⁵ Notably, Tiana then declares a renewed faith in her unabated work ethic by declaring "the only way to get what you want in this world is through hard work."¹⁶ Disney harshly penalizes Tiana's effort to give herself a leg up and gives her dialogue that openly cautions against similar efforts. Avoiding the grueling requirements of constant, unfettered labor is *cheating*, Disney implies, and those who take these opportunities will be magically doomed to frog-hood or another unfavorable condition. This messaging reveals *TPF's* alignment with the broader distaste for "handouts," liberalism's imperious label for any unearned reception of goods. Racial capitalism instills the claim that attempting to acquire something without first "earning" it through self-sacrifice is unethical and risks ricocheting into disaster.¹⁷ Tiana's deviation from this principle causes her to quite literally transform into an animal, implying the alarmingly harsh message that economic transgression diminishes one's very humanity.

In addition to vilifying circumvention of liberalism's demand for perpetual hard work, another curious characteristic of *TPF* is its omission of racism. Despite its setting in the 1920s, *TPF* is almost entirely devoid of any mention of the candid racism that characterized America during Jim Crow, except for a snide comment made by property developers. After informing her that she was outbid by another client, two white real estate tycoons tell Tiana that "[a] little woman of your background woulda had her hands full, trying to run a big business like that."¹⁸ This is the movie's only obvious representation of racism or patriarchy, and it is a side comment with no consequence on the story. After her adventures as a frog with Naveen and facing only trivial, rhetorical barriers to her success, Tiana succeeds in starting her business by the end of the movie. She tolerates and overcomes the smidgeon of racism the scriptwriters place in her way with little effort. For a Black woman to open a business during this time in the manner *TPF* describes would be almost impossible. Even if a Southern, white developer wanted to sell

¹⁵ Ibid., 33:01-33:03.

¹⁶ Ibid., 33:03-33:05.

¹⁷ I use racial capitalism to refer to the thesis that capitalism accentuates racism to corroborate and legitimize social divisions and economic repression. Racism and capitalism's co-constitutive nature means racial hierarchy should be expected to "inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism." From: Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill and London, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁸ Musker and Clements, *The Princess and the Frog*, 24:38-24:45.

property to a Black woman, it likely would have been illegal, and her restaurant would have been harshly segregated if it were opened.¹⁹

The very coherence of Tiana's arc therefore depends on the factually inaccurate omission of racism and the distorted history it produces. Such a revisionist account of the American experience excises the prominent instances of racial discrimination, Jim Crow, or extrajudicial killings from its setting. For a predominantly white media corporation to tacitly imply that racism was not a historical barrier to Black entrepreneurship erases the continuity of the free market's disparate access. Of course, not all narratives with Black protagonists need to center on or even feature racial discrimination, but for a film scripted by a wealthy corporation with a history of benefiting from white supremacy *and* set in a grossly racist historical context, such neglect becomes suspect. It hints at a willful act of forgetting. Both Tiana's market-centric characterization and the film's very premise and resolution require holding the erroneous assumption that economic success, ascendance, and autonomy are assured race-neutral avenues to liberation.

Understanding the significance of *TPF*'s messaging requires discussing the broader context of racial liberalism. In her exaggerated fixation on independence and entrepreneurship, Tiana's narrative is situated in what Hartman calls the complex of "burdened individuality": a discourse that foists the liberal obligation to work and provide onto Black persons while denying them the mobility needed to navigate market capitalism.²⁰ Hartman coined the term to describe the post-Emancipation economic context. When slavery was quasi-abolished, formerly enslaved people were quickly thrust into the expectations and responsibilities of market individualism. The dominant system still denied Black Americans access to the US "meritocracy": Black communities were redlined, grossly underpaid, suppressed from voting, dispossessed of their land, segregated, and denied loans.²¹

The machinery of the American economy and government proclaimed formal equality while it hollowed out the promise of emancipation. While the post-slavery national order demanded that Black citizens compete on a neutral economic playing field, it erected a regime of racial subordination undergirded by segregation, mass incarceration, and "expanding machinations of finance capital from predatory lending to the privatization of vital public

¹⁹ Steven J. Gold, "A Critical Race Theory Approach to Black American Entrepreneurship," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 9 (2016): 1706, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2016.1159708>.

²⁰ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 117.

²¹ Redlining refers to the "illegal discriminatory practice in which a mortgage lender denies loans or an insurance provider restricts services to certain areas of a community, often because of the racial characteristics of the applicant's neighbourhood." From: Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Redlining," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., September 11, 2014), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/redlining>.

services.”²² Following the abolition of slavery, many southern states enacted poll taxes and literacy tests that suppressed vast swathes of African American voters. Challenging these rules required litigating them in court, “a costly and time-consuming procedure that was a practical impossibility for the vast majority of those who had claims.”²³ After the limited abolition of Jim Crow segregation, New Deal housing programs bifurcated racially diverse neighborhoods by planting segregated public housing “in mixed neighborhoods it deemed ‘white’ and blacks-only projects in those it deemed ‘colored.’”²⁴ The federal government orchestrated an effort that both reversed nascent desegregation trends or actively proliferated segregation in areas to which it had not taken root.²⁵ Richard Rothstein notes that, with careful analysis, one can look at almost any large residential area and uncover “ample evidence of how the federal, state, and local governments unconstitutionally used housing policy to create or reinforce segregation in ways that still survive.”²⁶

Despite Black people’s *de jure* integration into the American economy, such prohibitively discriminatory barriers kept them *de facto* excluded. American society, denying or overlooking the continuity of racism, “conscripted” Black populations into capitalism’s demand for “hardship, travails, and a burdened and encumbered existence.”²⁷ The result of this conditional, qualified quasi-freedom was burdened individualism, a term that “designates the double bind of emancipation,” which distributed “the onerous responsibilities of freedom with the enjoyment of few of its entitlements.”²⁸ White society expected the emancipated Black population to provide for themselves, start businesses, take out loans, be entrepreneurial, and function as autonomous self-sufficient subjects while denying them the wherewithal to do so. Following the formal inclusion of Black persons into American capitalism, liberal elites declared the system sanitary, neutral, and free of bias. These erroneous declarations of equality, which proclaim that the American system has “gotten over” slavery and its accompanying racism, offload responsibility for contemporary inequality and racial disparities onto Black populations. Entertaining the image of a race-neutral, meritocratic economic system requires a “fastidious unknowing of racism.”²⁹ The astonishingly large contemporary gaps in generational wealth, wage earnings, callback rates, and a variety of other indicators demonstrate that the free market has not expunged itself of anti-

²² Jared Sexton, “The Resentment of (Black) Politics,” *Alienocene, Dis-Junction* (2019): 12.

²³ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: New Press, 2010), 30.

²⁴ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 36.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 121.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Naomi Murakawa, “Racial Innocence: Law, Social Science, and the Unknowing of Racism in the US Carceral State,” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 15, no. 1 (2019): 473-493, doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-101518-042649.

Black racism.³⁰ All the while, colorblind narratives of business ownership redirect Black communities toward focus on the “minutia of business plans, loan packaging, marketing techniques and bootstrapping, rather than investigating and challenging the structural and ideological bases of racism.”³¹ Burdened individuality describes these contemporary attempts to dispel, gloss over, or unknow the pervasiveness of anti-Black discrimination as part of an epistemic cover-up of the continuity of oppression. Narrativizing the free market as free, accessible, and universal therefore saddles Black people with the responsibilities associated with economic inclusion while denying them access to the requisites for market success.

This narrative is particularly significant in light of the US economy’s origins. Slavery was the foundation of the American economy. Black labor and exploitation vouchsafed the mass agricultural production and explosive territorial expansion that underpinned US economic growth. Almost everything produced in the US’s nascency could be traced to involve the subjugation of Black persons; it is extremely difficult to envision the shape of American culture, economic arrangements, or politics without it.³² Given its foundational importance, the narrative that this foundational exclusion has been overcome and resolved is profoundly myopic. Chattel slavery is no more, but the principle of anti-Black economic exclusion persists through gross wage differentials, which on average pay Black women 38% less than white men, mass involuntary or coerced labor in prisons, which formed from the War on Drugs’ racist dragnet, the legacy of housing redlining, and pervasive educational segregation, to name only a few examples.³³ Although many individual Black people have found immense economic success, the existence of an enduring, systemic denial of upward economic mobility to Black communities is undeniable.³⁴ *The Princess and the Frog*’s flippant messaging that Black entrepreneurs during the era of Jim Crow faced basically no racially-differentiated barriers should be placed in this broader context. Depicting the market economy as neutral and freed of racial bias is not just erroneous; it is packaged in an active project to deny the reality of oppression and consequently make addressing it more difficult.

This theorization is essential to understand the significance of *TPF*’s representations. The film’s characterization, setting, and omissions advance a larger societal effort to legitimize the myth of universal economic accessibility. The film valorizes Tiana’s impossibly persistent work

³⁰ Gold, “Black American Entrepreneurship,” 1711-1713.

³¹ Gold, “Black American Entrepreneurship,” 1703.

³² See: Walter Johnson and Robin D. G. Kelley, eds. *Race Capitalism Justice*, Forum 1. Spec. issue of Boston Review (Winter 2017), <http://bostonreview.net/forum-i-winter-2017>.

³³ Ariane Hegewisch and Adiam Tesfaselassie, “The Gender Wage Gap: 2018; Earnings Differences by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity,” IWPR 2020, November 2, 2020, <https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/employment-and-earnings/the-gender-wage-gap-2018-earnings-differences-by-gender-race-and-ethnicity/>; Rothstein, *The Color of Law*; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

³⁴ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 21

ethic and suggests that failure to live up to this standard will provoke frog-related supernatural catastrophe; after all, Tiana was roped into her amphibian adventures because she accepted a "handout." The following string of near-death experiences with crocodiles as an undignified anthropomorphic frog occurred only because she wavered in her strict adherence to hard work. The following dialogue in which she lambasts foolishly "wishing on stars" and extols the importance of labor suggests that Disney's producers went out of their way to emphasize this message.

In addition to demonizing Tiana's effort to achieve her goals without the "hard work" required, the film flattens the American economy's history of white supremacy to a single dismissive comment. Tiana's entrepreneurship, the conviction on which the story's progression relies, would be almost impossible under an accurate account of the setting. White governments, businesses, and clients "resented blacks' entrepreneurial achievements and sought their elimination."³⁵ Whites frequently boycotted Black businesses, damaged their storefronts, or outright attacked their owners, making long-term firm growth extremely difficult.³⁶ The barriers to Black economic success, particularly in the American South during the age of Jim Crow, may have blocked Tiana's property acquisition, certainly demanded segregated facilities, and likely paid her so little that she would never have been able to accumulate enough funds to buy and refurbish a large building. *TPF* therefore derives its narrative coherence from a conscious unknowing of racism and its contemporary persistence. Ascertaining Disney's intent from its messaging is impossible—but the effect is relatively clear. The writers' surgical removal of anti-Blackness from their depiction of Southern society creates an erroneous impression of the world and subtly shifts responsibility for the exclusion of Black people to Black communities themselves. White society's tired universalist command for integration into the free market "merely dissimulates the stigmatic injuries constitutive of Blackness with abstract assertions of equality, sovereignty, and individuality."³⁷ The decision to unknow and remove racism, to trivialize its frequency and deny its significance, forms a distorted account of anti-Blackness that occludes an accurate understanding of American society. Analysts interested in fundamental change—whether through reparations, revolution, or reform—must name and combat attempts to characterize the economic system as innocent.

This essay has contextualized the Black feminist critique of liberal universality to *The Princess and the Frog's* characters, world-building, and narrative structure. Despite making strides for Black inclusion in popular media, Disney's venture uncritically repeats a narrative and accompanying set of assumptions that erase anti-Black oppression and obstruct critique. The

³⁵ Gold, "Black American Entrepreneurship."

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 123.

film's arc surgically removes any semblance of discrimination, lending legitimacy to the attempt by racist elites to burden Black people with responsibility for their own oppression. It embeds the theme that Black communities can achieve liberation and autonomy—if only they work hard enough—through the film's story and characterization, a historically erroneous message that attempts to disavow racism by denying its existence. Disney's ascendancy and Golden Age involved the production of racist caricatures, a profoundly distasteful history that from which the corporation would like to distance itself. The result of this attempt at distancing from racism was, in essence, denial; Disney did not just omit the issue of racial discrimination, they actively attempted to eradicate it from their depiction of the Jim Crow era. This finds parallels in the broader economic, governmental, and carceral system; Disney ostensibly elected to pretend racism does not exist instead of grappling directly with its contemporary manifestations. *TPF*'s expressed faith in the American Dream's universal validity is therefore not surprising. It is the natural result of a colorblind approach to political economy. Tiana's inclusion likely helped Disney enlarge its profits and deflect from its racist origins without forcing the corporation to confront its own complicity. In this light, Disney reaped the profitable benefits of denouncing racism while repeating the myopic tropes and concepts that sustain it.

It seems unlikely that the capitalist market in which *TPF* invests faith will correct its own enthusiasm for discrimination. The sheer continuity of the economic exploitation of Black labor suggests that racial hierarchy is a more profound problem, lodged perhaps so deeply in America's foundations that it will not be resolved by technical or superficial fixes. Calling for a far more foundational and systemic reckoning may seem radical but, as Angela Davis reminds us, "radical simply means grasping things at the root."³⁸

³⁸ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Culture & Politics*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

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