
Pocahontas As A Representative Of Stereotype About The Savage Native Americans

American culture, almost since from the beginning, is rather prone to ethnic, gender and racial stereotyping. From the moment English settlers put their foot on North American shores and contacted with the native population and later with the developing colonization process these stereotypes have founded their basis in the society and still most of them exist in present lives of the Americans. Many different minority groups have been exposed to stereotyping in American culture throughout the time.

Native Americans, for example, is one of the groups that have been exposed many different positive and negative stereotypes. Native Americans can be seen as stereotyped as “noble savages” in movies, they are seen as content people, in contact with nature and internally peaceful and at times wise (Costner, 1990). They are also can be stereotyped as primitive, wild and uncivilized. Pocahontas, a 1995 animation by Disney, is one of the most known movies about Native Americans. However, the movie is full off historical distortions. Even though, Pocahontas and John Smith is portrayed as a romantic couple in the movie, in reality Pocahontas was only around 11 years old, whereas John Smith was 28 at the time (National Museum of the American Indian, 2007). Also, there is no clear evidence about Pocahontas saving the life of John Smith. In spite of being a woman with a very adventurous life, Pocahontas in the movie was depicted as her only importance was rescuing the white man. Native women also portrayed and blamed with being promiscuous which led to many violent acts by non-Native men against them (Marubbio, 2009). Other common stereotypes about Natives includes pipe smoking, sending signals with smoke, dancing around fire, wearing big head pieces with feathers, etc.

African Americans can be, and probably is, the group that has been exposed to the worst side of the history of stereotypes in American culture. Dating back to the colonial period, African Americans faced with many negative stereotypes and racial slurs. The famous persona named Jim Crow is one of the most important examples of these stereotypes. Jim Crow originally was a theatre character performed by Thomas Dartmouth Rice, portraying the white men’s notion of African Americans. Jim Crow was an insult used against black people in 19th century. The portrayal depicted black people as inferior, lazy and stupid. Later this persona gave name to the laws establishing racial segregation in the South of U.S. Intelligence stereotype is one of the most disturbing stereotypes about black people. From the colonial era and onwards black people were seen as intelligently inferior to whites and depicted as closer to animals.

Another stereotype about black people in 19th century is “mammy”. Mammy signifies a trustworthy, strong black female slave that devotes herself to the children of her master and household (White, 1999). Hattie McDaniel’s role in *Gone with the Wind* is the perfect example of mammy stereotype. The opposite of mammy stereotype is the Jezebel stereotype. Jezebel stereotype signifies the notion that black women are promiscuous in nature. This stereotype is mostly dates back to the first encounter of Africans with Europeans. Partial nudity and polygamous relationship in African tribes observed by Europeans laid the basis of this stereotype. The stereotype also interpreted as black women can’t be sexually abused or raped because they are always lusting sex. This paved the road for legitimizing sexual abuse of black

female slaves by their white owners (West, 2018).

Another common stereotype is that African Americans love fried chicken, which was first put forward by Claire Schmidt, a professor working on race and folklore, who says fried chicken was a part of Southern life but especially for slaves because it's cheap and easy. She also mentions one of the scenes on *Birth of a Nation* (1915), a controversial movie about founding of Ku Klux Klan, where a black man is portrayed while eating fried chicken. Schmidt believes that scene reinforced the image of black people on white people's eyes. Like fried chicken, watermelon is also a food which is often related with African Americans. These foods are eaten with hands which creates a "dirty" image, which determines who is "worthy of respect" or not (Demby, 2013). *Birth of a Nation* also uses intelligence stereotype and questions the mental capacities of black people and their rights to vote and elected for governmental institutions. The criminal stereotype about African American people is another common negative stereotype. African Americans are more likely to be shown as under arrest or as the suspects of violent or drug related crimes and depicted as dangerous criminals on press (Rome, 2004).

Hispanic and Latino Americans another group that is affected by common stereotypes. For example, cholo, chola and cholita are terms that are used for criminal stereotypes about Hispanic and Latino Americans. Usually bears a negative meaning. Another negative stereotype about Hispanics and Latinos is the "illegal" stereotype. Even though many of the Latino descendants are legal citizens, they can be seen as immigrants or "illegal aliens" who are "stealing" the jobs and wealth from real American citizens. With this immigrant people are represented as criminals who steals opportunities and jobs (Warner, 2005). Another common misconception, although at this point it seems like a conscious choice rather than a mistake, is that the all Hispanics and Latinos share a homogenous origin and they are unified culturally (Menendez Alarcon, 2014). For example, in middle and south parts of the west America Latin Americans are commonly referred as Mexicans. The knowledge Americans base their assumptions about Latin Americans usually rely on the commonly known Latino American countries and nations. Also stereotypes about low mental capacity and laziness are effect Hispanics and Latin Americans, too (Weber, 2015).

19th century was the time when catholic Irish people got their share of stereotypes. Irish Catholics were portrayed by the press as violent people with alcoholic tendencies. Irish people were often subjected to attacks in cartoons with political contexts. Especially illustrations from *Puck* magazine portrayed Irish as problematic people. The drinking and anger problems stereotype of Irish were continued after 19th century ended. U.S. President Richard Nixon is known for talking about anger problems of Irish when they drink alcohol with his advisor (Nagourney, 2010).