



MAKING MAGIC: 100 YEARS OF DISNEY

Pocahontas

Lava

Director: James Ford Murphy
USA 2014
7 mins

Pocahontas

Directors: Mike Gabriel, Eric Goldberg
©/Production Company: Walt Disney Pictures
Producer: James Pentecost
Associate Producer: Baker Bloodworth
Production Manager: Traci Tolman Mars
Senior Manager Production: Dana Axelrod
Post-production Supervisor:
Deborah Edell Underwood
Post-production Coordinators: Jeanie Lynd
Sorenson, Heather Jane MacDonald-Smith
Post production Manager: Sara Duran
Casting: Brian Chavanne, Ruth Lambert,
Karen Margiotta
ADR Voice Casting: Barbara Harris, LA MadDogs
Screenplay: Carl Binder, Susannah Grant,
Philip Lazebnik
Story: Glen Keane, Joe Grant, Ralph Zondag,
Burny Mattinson, Ed Gombert, Kaan Kalyon,
Francis Glebas, Robert Gibbs, Bruce Morris,
Todd Kurosawa, Duncan Marjoribanks, Chris Buck
Based on an idea by: Mike Gabriel
Digitizing Camera Supervisor: Robyn L Roberts
Film Camera Manager: Joe Giuliano
Digitizing Mark-up: Gina Wootten
Digitizing Camera Operators: David Braden,
Lynette E. Cullen, Val D'Arcy, Gareth Fishbaugh,
Corey Dean Fredrickson, Michael A. McFerren,
David J. Rowe
Animation Camera Operators: John Aardal
Visual Effects Supervisors: Don Paul
Visual Development/Character Design:
Vance Gerry, Mike Gabriel, Bruce Zick,
Darek Gogol, Jean Gillmore, Duncan Marjoribanks,
Will Finn, Joe Grant, Michael Gaiamo, Guy Deel,
Ian Gooding, Glen Keane, Chris Buck,
Kathy Zielinski
Digital Film Printing/Optical Supervisor:
Christopher W. Gee
Computer Graphics Imagery: Steve Goldberg
Artistic Supervisors: Layout: Rasoul Azadani;
Background: Cristy Maltese; Story: Tom Sito;
Clean-up: Renee Holt-Bird, Nancy Kniep
Supervising Animators: Pocahontas: Glen Keane;
John Smith: John Pomeroy; Governor Ratcliffe:
Duncan Marjoribanks; Meeko: Nik Ranieri;
Powhatan: Ruben A. Aquino; Thomas: Ken Duncan;
Percy/Grandmother Willow/Wiggins: Chris Buck;
Ben/Lon: T. Daniel Hofstedt; Flit/Forest Animals:
Dave Pruiksma; Nakoma: Anthony DeRosa;
Kocoum: Michael Cedeno
Effects Animators: Dorse Lanpher, Ed Coffey,
Garrett Wren, Ted C. Kierscey, Tom Hush,
Stephen B. Moore, Kathleen Quaipe Hodge,
Marlon West, James De V. Mansfield, Allen Blyth,
Troy A. Gustafson, Jazno Francoeur
3-D Effects: David A. Bossert, Stephen B. Moore,
Daniel E. Wanket, Ed Coffey, Dan Chaika
Pre-production Effects Development:
David A. Bossert, Chris Jenkins
Scene Planning Supervisor: Ann Tucker
Animation Check Supervision: Janet Bruce
Colour Models Supervisor: Karen Comella
Ink and Paint Senior Manager: Gretchen
Maschmeyer Albrecht
Ink and Paint Supervisor: Frances Kirsten
Paint/Final Check Supervisor:
Hortensia M. Casagran

Upon reaching the 'new world', a group of settlers begin to seize gold and land belonging to its indigenous peoples. Captain John Smith and Pocahontas, the daughter of Chief Powhatan, find themselves drawn to each other, but the relationship is fraught with danger as their very different worlds collide.

Disney's historical drama may have significantly re-written historical events in order to appeal to the widest audience, but it also took its empowered heroine out of the fairy tale and into the real world.

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There is something about the sheer scale of the success of Disney's animated films, breaking box-office records with the nonchalant regularity of a butcher snapping the necks of chickens, that raises the hackles of critics. Ever since the publication of Dorfman and Mattelart's 1971 Marxist critique *How to Read Donald Duck*, the Disney company has been constructed as an exemplar of capitalist cultural imperialism, permeating every nation on the earth with its seductive, easily translatable pop propaganda.

Dorfman and Mattelart were mainly concerned with the more disposable Donald Duck comic books, rather than the films. Yet, as the latter have grown in popularity and success and as 'The Mouse' – as *Variety* likes to refer to the voracious rodent which is the Walt Disney Company proper – has grown to its global status, it has seemed ever more urgent to be vigilant of what subtextual messages might be contained within the cartoon texts. The Disney Version of stories is put under as much scrutiny as the testimony of policemen in Los Angeles courts. Thus, there were accusations of racism concerning *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*, and critics and academics have questioned the images of women portrayed in *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Little Mermaid*. It is as if we are holding the films responsible for much more than just entertaining children on a wet afternoon.

Pocahontas is fascinating because it bears witness to the company's attempt to grapple with these criticisms as well as to produce another record-breaking blockbuster that will soak up receipts as well in the midwest of America as that of Africa. Inevitably, it is fraught with contradictions and ironies. It is large and contains multitudes, as Walt Whitman said of himself; and like Whitman's poetry, it is baggy, drawing on a distinctly American vernacular (both verbal and visual), and full of moments of real poetry, sharp pathos and patronising kitsch.

Pocahontas is as politically correct as oatmeal cookies. Its heroine is tall, muscular and graceful, can steer rapids as well as Meryl Streep in *The River Wild*, and has a face so scrupulously uncaricatured she lacks cheekbones and any more nose than a pair of nostrils lest she be confused with her hook-nosed ancestors in cartoon history. All her expression resides in her eyes, as dewy and doe-eyed as Bambi's mother before she gets shot. The rest of the tribe are equally circumspectly drawn, while the white settlers range from exaggerated grotesques (baddies like Ratcliffe) to more realistic figures depending on how likeable they are. The film's world view constructs a great chain of being in which the Native Americans are poised at the pinnacle, neatly inverting Renaissance concepts of hierarchy.

Key Layout/Workbook: Daniel Hu, Allen Tam,
 Doug Walker, Mac George, Karen Keller,
 William H. Frake III, Tom Humber, Peter Bielicki
Director of Technology: Paul Yanover
Editors: H. Lee Peterson
Animation Editor: James Melton
Associate Editor: Mark Hester
Art Director: Michael Giaimo
Artistic Coordinator: Dan Hansen
Scene Planning: Thomas Baker, Annamarie Costa,
 Mark Henley, Sara Bleick, Cindy Goode,
 Ron Jackson
Title Design: Susan Bradley
Titles/Opticals: Buena Vista Imaging Supervisor:
 Mark Dornfeld
Music: Alan Menken
Lyrics: Stephen Schwartz
Traditional Native American Music: Hawk Pope
Music Conductors: Score: Danny Troob; Songs:
 David Friedman
Music Arrangements: Songs: Danny Troob, Martin
 Erskine; Vocals: David Friedman; *Orchestrations:*
 Danny Troob
Executive Music Producer: Chris Montan
Music Producers: Alan Menken, Stephen Schwartz
Unit Producer: Jim 'Great Elk' Waters
Supervising Music Editor: Kathleen Fogarty-Bennett
Music Production Supervisor: Tod Cooper
Choreography: D. J. Giagni
Supervising Sound Editors: Larry Kemp,
 Lon E. Bender
Dialogue Editors: Dan Rich, Chris Hogan
ADR Supervisor: Curt Schulkey
Foley Editors: Neal J. Anderson, Patrick N. Sellers
Sound Recordists: Doc Kane
Dubbing: Jeanete Browning
Music Recordist/Mixer: John Richards
Sound Re-recording Mixers: Terry Porter,
 Mel Metcalfe, Dean A. Zupancic
Sound Effects Editors: Scott Martin Gershin,
 Rick Morris, Alan Rankin, Joseph Phillips,
 Peter J. Lehman, Brian McPherson,
 Anthony J. Miceli
Foley Artists: John Roesch, Hilda Hodges
Native American Consultants: Shirley 'Little Dove',
 Custalow McGowan
Voice Cast:
 Irene Bedard (*Pocahontas*)
 Judy Kuhn (*Pocahontas' singing voice*)
 Mel Gibson (*John Smith*)
 David Ogden Stiers (*Governor Ratcliffe/Wiggins*)
 John Kassir (*Meeko*)
 Russell Means (*Powhatan*)
 Christian Bale (*Thomas*)
 Linda Hunt (*Grandmother Willow*)
 Danny Mann (*Percy*)
 Billy Connolly (*Ben*)
 Joe Baker (*Lon*)
 Frank Welker (*Flit*)
 Michelle St John (*Nakoma*)
 James Apaumut Fall (*Kocoum*)
 Gordon Tootoosis (*Kekata*)
 USA 1995©
 81 minutes

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The filmmakers here seem acutely aware that they are dealing for the first time in a major way with 'true story', albeit one clouded in myth and predictably revised here. No matter how ersatz, the viewer is constantly aware of how historical details are being mobilised for verisimilitude. When Smith describes Pocahontas' people as 'savages' in his accurately 17th-century way, her offence is assuaged by his explaining that it is 'just a word'. Indeed, a curious concern with language permeates the film, with the natives speaking an authentic North American dialect which quickly morphs into American-accented English. Much magical play is made of Smith and Pocahontas' immediate grasp of one another's languages, literalised in a kiss. One would almost imagine that the story-people had been brushing up on the linguist-philosopher Tzvetan Todorov's *The Conquest of America*, which posited that the Native Americans' apparent inability to understand Western language became the cornerstone of a whole discourse which explained their 'savagery'.

The anxiety of accuracy muddles much throughout the film. It showcases how much animation's motion-control and background-generating technology has advanced. Character movements, especially Pocahontas' hair (tricky stuff to animate), are perfectly done, and some of the shots 'underwater' are nothing less than exquisite. However, the palette feels all wrong. The British scenes and characters are rendered in drab sepia colours so that the Native American setting, all bright and brutally blue skies, will seem all the nicer and friendlier. It would seem to me that a more muted natural palette would have been more appropriate to the latter culture, but I suppose the merchandisers, who favour a more garish, child-luring range of hues, had to be appeased.

The art direction alone belies the forces that threaten to tug *Pocahontas* apart: on the one hand, the natural world must be stylised, with faint native symbols accenting the wind sweeping the leaves to suggest the harmony of their culture with the environment; but on the other hand the film's commitment to corrective historicising and verisimilitude reigns in the exaggeration which is animation's stock-and-trade. As a solution the film resorts to the gestures of the epic – huge landscapes, swelling choruses, even split-screen effects at the climax which recall Abel Gance's *Napoléon*.

In the end, the film does get to you. It's Disney's darkest and most tragic animated film, even though it pulls back from telling the true historical ending – the real Pocahontas came back to England with Smith, died shortly after arriving and was buried in Gravesend. And though most children probably won't yet know it, they'll soon learn that this story with its 'happy' ending depicting a final concord between natives and settlers only begins a more chilling history concerning a genocide that would span centuries of horror. It's this 'front-story' which truly brings tears to the eyes when the credits roll, and by suggesting it, perhaps in a cloudy but well-meaning way, this film tries to expiate a little of the guilt that might be felt by one of the West's most successful capitalist organisations.

Leslie Felperin, *Sight and Sound*, October 1995