Lester Critical Summary

In Disney’s *The Princess and the Frog*: The Pride, the Pressure, and the Politics of Being a First, Neal Lester brings to our awareness that Disney has only made one movie with an African American princess being the lead role. When he asked children in his African American literature course to close their eyes and describe what Cinderella looked like, almost everyone described her as white with blonde hair. This brief exercise reveals that images and ideas are automatically ingrained in our minds. Because of this stereotyping, people were excited to see how Disney would handle the first African American princess’s language, culture, and her physical appearance. Lester then goes on to talk about the critical, political, and social interrogations of *The Princess and the Frog*, and the cultural tensions of the first African American Disney princess movie.

Lester explains the differences between the first and only African American princess and the other Disney princesses. Tiana was not a princess by birth, but she becomes a princess by marrying a prince, which they compare to Michelle Obama because she became a princess though the result of an election. Another characteristic that Tiana and Michelle Obama have in common is having straightened or processed hair, because it is still to persons of color and to whites the ideal image of beauty. Some African Americans even complained that Tiana’s skin was not dark enough and that her skin tone is too light. She was neither black nor white, which upset many African Americans. Others seemed to appreciate how Tiana was portrayed as curvy and not like the typical Barbie doll. Lester brought to our attention that Disney gives Tiana a little extra does of attitude and confidence, which supports societies stereotype about African American women being sassy and finger snapping. Disney even had to change the name of the first African American princess from Maddy to Tiana because Maddy sounded too much like Mammy. African Americans wondered why Tiana didn’t end up marrying someone of her own race, but rather married interracially. Disney is basically portraying that African American men are not worthy of being princes. Even though Tiana was beautiful, we only got to see her for about ten percent of the movie. The other 90 percent she was a slimy green frog. Disney couldn’t even allow us to appreciate the beauty of their first African American princess.

Neal Lester’s points were valid because he always backed them up with an example from the movie, and he also had the audience’s point of view on many of the controversial topics. He came up with many new ideas that I would have never thought to be controversial, but I realized that from an African American’s point of view, many ideas portrayed in *The Princess and the Frog* illustrated African American princesses different from the white princesses we have seen in the past. Lester supports his claim, because he gives numerous examples of the cultural tensions this movie has brought to our attention, and some of the political, social, and critical interrogations. I feel that this essay was easy to understand and was set up in a way that was easy to follow compared to the last two that we had to read. I really enjoyed reading this piece, because it keeps encouraging me to dig deeper in the movies and pay more attention to the little details.