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POCAHONTAS RECLAIMED:  
THE POWHATANS THEATRICAL REBUTTAL TO DISNEY'S REVISIONIST  
MYTH

by  
Barbara E. Gardner

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
July 14, 2003

Approved by.

Professor

Date Approved July 16, 2003

## ABSTRACT

Barbara E. Gardner

Pocahontas Reclaimed: The  
Powhatan's Theatrical Rebuttal  
To Disney's Revisionist Myth  
2002  
Dr. Elisabeth Hostetter  
Theatre

This study compares the content of play *The One Called Pocahontas* to the Walt Disney film *Pocahontas*. The author examined the accepted history of the Powhatan woman known as Pocahontas in relation to the “infotainment” provided by both the play and the movie. The study examines the objections to the Walt Disney movie *Pocahontas* and poses them as motivating factors for the Powhatan tribe's decision to use theatre to respond to the inaccuracies they perceived in the movie. The primary research methods of the study include an analysis of existing literature and internet sites about Pocahontas, an interview with the playwright, and reviews of the play and the movie. The study concludes that the play *The One Called Pocahontas* as an effective tool for presenting a version of history more authentic than the Disney film *Pocahontas*. While theatre, by nature an ephemeral art, could not generate an audience of the magnitude of the Disney movie, the success of the play, measured by the interpersonal connections between the actor and the audience, proves noteworthy.

Mini-Abstract

Barbara E. Gardner

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Powhatan's Theatrical Rebuttal  
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This study compares the content of the play *The One Called Pocahontas* to the Walt Disney film *Pocahontas*. The study finds that the play *The One Called Pocahontas* presented a more authentic version of history than the film *Pocahontas*.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author wishes to thank Chief Roy Crazy Horse, Tony Howarth, Kim T. Hunter and the Powhatan Confederacy for their cooperation and friendship, as well as their heroic efforts to teach history in the face of corporate insensitivity. Heartfelt gratitude is expressed to Dr. Elisabeth Hostetter, Bart Healy, Carmella Conn, Anthony Fusco and Philip Graneto for their unwavering support, guidance and encouragement. To my parents William and Anita Crielly, I appreciate all you have sacrificed for me throughout my life. And finally to Joe, Alexa and Marlowe, your patience, love, understanding and support made my dream attainable.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

On August 2, 1996 the play *The One Called Pocahontas* opened at the Powhatan Renape Nation's reservation. This production offered an authentic and educational story about the Powhatan woman named Pocahontas. *The One Called Pocahontas* directly challenged the fabricated story offered in Walt Disney's animated film *Pocahontas* released in 1995. The tribe commissioned the play because they believed the Walt Disney Studio's movie presented a revisionist mischaracterization of Native Americans in popular culture for profit and entertainment. The Powhatan tribe chose theatre as their educational, political and social platform to refute the movie.

The study evaluates Disney's movie and the Powhatan play in terms of how successfully each presented historically accurate, pro-female, pro-multicultural, pro-environment and pro-Native American entertainment. Disney claims to service this criterion in their film. In final analysis, Disney's product proves insufficient in meeting these objectives and their attempt invalidates the groups it purports to celebrate. This insult provided the impetus for the creation of the play *The One Called Pocahontas*. The study proposes that the Powhatans succeeded where Disney failed. The study focuses on the accepted history of the Powhatan woman Pocahontas and compares that history to the myths portrayed in both the movie and the play. It

also outlines the numerous critical objections to the movie and the importance of the play in rekindling the pride of the Powhatans.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Financial profit presents the fundamental motivation behind the Disney Studio's making of the animated movie based on the life of Pocahontas. However, by treating historic facts with dramatic license to reach a homogenized mass audience, the film presents gross inaccuracies, which falsely educates a generation of film viewers. Furthermore, this creates a need to re-educate the public on the actual history of the Powhatan people so that audiences can appreciate the complete history and the different cultures that comprise America. This study evaluates the effectiveness of the action taken by the Powhatan tribe to combat the sweeping effects of the film through the medium of theatre.

This thesis describes a bias towards the Powhatan people and their effort to use the theatre to recover their silenced voice. The tribe's communal response recounted history, even though the history unfavorably depicts a large part of the play's audience (the Euro-Americans). Traditional American history favors the viewpoint of the Euro-Americans. National pride extols the belief that America, created as a haven of equality, offers equality to all. The display of more accuracy in the play *The One Called Pocahontas* exposes the faults of Euro-American history: faults often sanitized or blatantly omitted from history lessons. Popular entertainment such as the Disney Studio's film, *Pocahontas*, released on the brink of the twenty-first century, advances stereotypes, which ridicule and degenerate Native cultures and traditions.



In contrast the play offers a deeper understanding of the struggle of the Powhatan people and other Native Americans during the last four hundred years of the occupation of their lands. Nevertheless, the play does not alienate the audience by including the entire history of the Native Americans/Euro-American relations. This larger history includes decimation of tribes from war and illnesses, rape and kidnappings of the innocent and seizure, redistributing and desecration of their land.

### **Significance of the Study**

Through a case study of *The One Called Pocahontas* this study investigates the use of theatre as an effective medium for re-framing social and political attitudes. The tribe successfully used theatre to re-educate an audience through an interpersonal relationship between the historical characters in the play and live actors. The relationship between the actors and the audience allowed for the uncomfortable subject matter (treatment of the Native Americans by the Euro-Americans) to become both personal and non-threatening to the audience. An audience member experiences theatre both collectively and individually, so on that personal level, the theatre introduced a palatable and influential view of a story.

This study also offers a comprehensive history of the life of Pocahontas from the Powhatan perspective, as well as documentation of the objections surrounding the popular film *Pocahontas*. The author endorsed the idea of Disney Studio's responsibility to provide factual accuracy when making biographical films. While outlining where the film fails, the study illuminates the success of *The One Called Pocahontas* in fulfilling Disney Studio intentions. In contrast to the film, the play

presents a story universally appealing while reinforcing positive ideas about women, Native Americans, multi-culturalism and the environment.

### **Limitations**

This study does not offer statistical analysis of audience numbers, demographics, production costs or lasting impact of the effects of the Walt Disney Studio movie *Pocahontas* or the Powhatan play *The One Called Pocahontas*. It accepts the fundamental differences between film and theatre and does not seek to evaluate the quantitative effect, but rather compares the film and the play in terms of historical and cultural accuracy and sensitivity. The term “accepted history” relies on the history of people; in this case one traditionally oral. The study traces a production not especially well documented during the process or critically evaluated after it opened thus limiting the resources.

### **Methodology**

Resources for the study included written documentation from Rowan University’s library, books, internet sites and archives of the Powhatan Renape Tribe. The author also conducted interviews with Chief Roy Crazy Horse, members of the Tribe, members of the audience and the playwright of *The One Called Pocahontas*. The Powhatan Renape Reservation’s museum and the Native American Festival offered supplemental historical and cultural information. Additionally, the author

analyzed the script of the play *The One Called Pocahontas* and viewed the Walt Disney Studio movie *Pocahontas* on VHS.

## Survey of Literature

Research on the life of Pocahontas and the Powhatan people came from several sources. Since most existing research offers history based on accounts of the conquering people, in this case the English settlers, as opposed to the conquered people, bias in history inevitable favors the settlers.

The primary research about the Powhatan tribe and Pocahontas comes from books and articles by Helen C. Rountree. A leading expert in the field of Native Americans, she researched this topic since the early 1970's. Chief Roy Crazy Horse, current chief of the Powhatan Renape Nation, recommended this source material. Rountree's work provides historically accurate reading for scholars making serious inquiries into the history of the Algonquian-speaking Indians. Rountree contends that writing about the Powhatans made her responsible to future generations. As she states in her preface to Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries (1990)

I knew that my writing would affect the reputations of living people. I would serve them best and myself as well, if I trod carefully and stated clearly what was and was not recorded about the Indians in eastern Virginia. Once a trustworthy set of data is published—and I believe both these volumes are fully that—then we scholars can play cross-cultural, interdisciplinary “theory games” with it. I plan to join some of the games myself. But establishing the basic data comes first (ix, Rountree).

She spent two decades researching her extensive books.

The internet and other books about Native Americans provide additional information on the Powhatans and Pocahontas. For example books by Dr. Colin Taylor, a Senior Lecturer at Hastings College of Arts and Technologies and considered an expert on all aspects of Plains Indian culture, proved useful. He wrote several books, which include pictures and offer a more anthropological view.

The book Powhatan's Daughter by John Clarke Bowman offers a fictional account of Pocahontas. The book presents a highly romanticized retelling of her love for John Smith and the way this love lasted throughout her life. It also recounts the positive effect of the other Englishmen on the Indian Princess. First published in 1973, before our society became gripped by political correctness, the book presents the antithesis to the actual history of Pocahontas. Interestingly it depicts many of the Native American stereotypes and further undermines history by diffusing mischaracterizations under the guise of love.

Many books cover the stereotyping of Native Americans in film. From the first movie portraying Native American characters during the silent era, the characterizations of Native Americans contained racist undertones. Books influential to this study include Jacquelyn Kilpatrick's Celluloid Indian: Native Americans and Film (1999) and Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film (1998), edited by Peter C. Rolling and John E. O'Connor.

Specifically in Celluloid Indian: Native Americans and Film the author Jacquelyn Kilpatrick outlines that:

A complete analysis of each film is not the purpose of this book, the films have been chosen because they are examples of stereotype, or because they markedly reflect mainstream American society's perception at a specific point in history. Plot lines have been included only as far as is necessary to ensure understanding for

viewers who may not have seen the film lately or at all. Some films are dealt with in depth others have been mentioned only for a particular element that implicates the depiction of American Indians in film (xviii, Kilpatrick).

Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film contains a collection of essays that "attempt to examine Hollywood's image, what we call 'Hollywood's Indian'—its construction, its aesthetics, its major productions, its impact, and its future" (2, Rolling, O'Connor). Both books discuss the general stereotyping in Hollywood films and address Disney Studio's *Pocahontas* in particular.

Supplemental books rendering information about the negative imaging of Native Americans in fiction offered additional connection of racism in literature and film. Three books in particular Shape-Shifting: Images of Native Americans in Recent Popular Fiction (2000) by Andrew Macdonald, Gina Macdonald, and Mary Ann Sheridan, The Noble Savage in the New World Garden: Notes Toward a Syntactics of Place (1988) by Gaile McGregor, and The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism 1790-1890 (1975) by Louise K. Barnett provided poignant examples.

Shape-Shifting: Images of Native Americans in Recent Popular Fiction emphasizes the cultural foundation of the imagined Indian, which defines Native Americans in fiction. The authors pointed out:

Thus, our focus will be on key popular fiction genres that make broad use of Native American characters, cultures, and settings, transforming their reality for a variety of purposes including their genre conventions (xv, Macdonald, Macdonald, Sheridan)

This book discusses the way in which fiction leads to a representational idea of the way people view themselves and conversely viewed by others.

Gaile McGregor describes her book The Noble Savage in the New World Garden: Notes Toward a Syntactics of Place as “a literary history of the Noble Savage in the New World and a metamorphology of the American Mind” (11, McGregor). This book looks at the stereotyping of the “good Indian” and the loss of the Eden-like world he possessed.

The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790-1890, grants an in-depth look at the use of the Native Americans in literary plots. This book clearly outlines and supports the racism in popular literature between 1790-1890. Furthermore, the book contrasts the literature with the reality of the lives of the Native American.

The discussion of racism in fiction in these three books directly applies to this study because it parallels stereotyping evident in popular literature and the characters in Disney Studio’s film *Pocahontas*.

Research specifically dealing with film-making included Graeme Turner’s Film as Social Practice (1988) and Brian Neve’s Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition (1992). Film as Social Practice gives a broad view of the film industry’s influence on culture and ideology. Most importantly the books discuss film audience, the film experience and how audiences relate to film. The books outline the relationship between audience and film thus bolstering the opinion that Disney Studio’s acted irresponsibly toward its audience. Brian Neve’s Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition explains the history of film used for propaganda in America. This relates to the study because the book demonstrates the power of the film medium.

Eugene H. Jones' Native Americans as Shown on the Stage 1753-1916 (1988) not only gives a detailed history of the topic, but specifically contrasts different versions of the Pocahontas story made into plays. These plays dramatize a romantic view of the life of the Indian Princess, however each play presents its own spin on her story. Again these plays contrast drama with authenticity, whereas the tribe-sanctioned version by Tony Howarth, *The One Called Pocahontas* intended to serve history.

Several articles about ritualistic theatre within cultures other than the Powhatan tribe gave an overview of this performance tradition. These articles include "Mardi Gras Indians and Others" by Joseph Roach published in the December 1992 Theatre Journal and Frederick Lamp's "An Opera of the West African Bongo" published in The Drama Review, Summer 1988. The essay "Performance Theory, Hmong Shamans, and Cultural Politics" by Dwight Conquergood published in the book Critical Theory and Performance edited by Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach contains additional information.

Shaking the Pumpkin edited by Jerome Rothenberg and The Magic World edited by William Brandon describe Native American songs and poetry influential in understanding the performance aspect of storytelling. Both books contain poetry, songs and stories, usually performed in a theatrical setting. These books provide a useful insight of the cultural aesthetic of the Powhatan people.

## Organization of the Study

This study includes six chapters. The first chapter introduces the thesis. Chapter Two discusses the accepted history of the life of Pocahontas. Chapter Three outlines Walt Disney Studio's *Pocahontas* and themes and concepts of the film. The Fourth Chapter cites the controversy surrounding the Walt Disney Studio's film *Pocahontas* and the criticisms and historical discrepancies that gave rise to the need for a public rebuttal by the Powhatan people. Chapter Five outlines the Powhatan Renape play, *The One Called Pocahontas*, and the results of the interviews with the playwright, Tony Howarth and musical director, Kim T. Hunter. Chapter Six assesses the data and the implications for further study.



## The Life of Pocahontas



Historic portrait of the real Pocahontas in London, age 20, dressed for the court of King James. This portrait hangs in the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian, in Washington, D.C. This painting is a later copy of an engraving made during her London visit of 1616.

## Chapter Two

### The Life of Pocahontas

In Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film, Shirley Little Dove

Custalow-McGowan stated “History is history. You’re not honoring a nation of people when you change their history” (158, Kilpatrick). Shirley, a Powhatan, travels throughout Virginia teaching the history and culture of her people and served as a consultant on Disney Studio’s film *Pocahontas*.

The research of the Powhatan people and Pocahontas came from several sources. The documentation of the English settlers generated the primary history. Oral history accepted and integrated in some of the sources, poses difficulty to historical scholars because of the elusive nature of oral tradition.

The Algonquian-speaking Indians of Virginia, later known as the Powhatan Indians, formed a nation numbering fourteen thousand people in 1607. The boundaries of the tribe’s land stretched approximately one hundred miles from east to west and one hundred miles from north to south corresponding to the modern day coastal plain of Virginia (3, Rountree). The Powhatan Confederacy united at least twenty-eight tribes and occupied over one hundred and sixty villages (91, Taylor).

The people lived under a system of government headed by a paramount chief. The chief called Powhatan by the settlers (also known as Wahunsunacock) remained in power until his death in April 1616. He possessed considerable authority, however he did not command absolute obedience. Powhatan incorporated new tribes into his

confederacy through friendship or by force. When he integrated a new tribe he allowed the native ruler to remain in power. Under Powhatan's chiefdom, district chiefs, often one of his relatives, served as an intermediary overseeing the native ruler of the acquired tribes. Powhatan received his position because of his maternal lineage, therefore his siblings succeed him by order of age, followed by the children of his sisters (509, Rountree).

The Powhatan tribe utilized the rivers and Atlantic Coast within the territory as watercourses. These waterways centralized the districts in terms of food and transportation. Instead of using the river as a boundary, as the Europeans generally did, a tribe built on both sides of a river to maximize the river's usage. The *weroance* (chief) lived in the town center. The outskirts of the established Native American town often featured temples (6, Rountree). The people designed the settlements for the most efficient use. The women, assisted by the children, farmed small plots of land and practiced intercropping (growing maize, beans and squash together) adjacent to their homes. The Powhatan men hunted and fished the lands near or within the village. The people lived in semi-permanent wigwams and the entire village moved together to a new settlement every few years in order to allow the lands to lie fallow (91, Taylor). No individual or tribe "owned" land; instead the chiefs acted as stewards over tribal lands and individuals claimed land temporarily for farming (512, Rountree).

In the winter both sexes wore buckskin mantels, women also wore buckskin aprons, leggings and moccasins. Young girls did not wear clothing for the most of the year. Both sexes decorated themselves in several kinds of jewelry. Popular

adornments consisted of freshwater pearls or beads strung together. Beads of peak, a smooth edged, white, tubular bead obtained from the inner column of a whelk's shell, made jewelry necklaces. The most coveted jewelry came from the purple (blue) beads contained in the quahog clam's shell. Native Americans crafted other jewelry pieces by cold hammering metal, such as copper. Another popular body decoration came from a mixing antimony ore in the body paints, this created a glittering effect (8, Rountree).

Women controlled not only the family food supply and raised the children but also maintained sexual authority of their own bodies both before and after marriage. The Powhatan bride gave approval for her marriage. Powhatan women insisted on men who provided both economic security and protection. A man could marry several wives if women thought him worthy. These polygamous homes also allowed the women the benefit of extra-marital romance if approved by the husband (8-9, Rountree).

Social structure of the Powhatan people seemed most evident during rituals and feasts. People considered better off wore more elaborate clothing and expected deferential treatment. While everyone in the community worked, the ruling class used servitors to cook, serve food, to help them dress and act as chaperones for their children (8, Rountree).

By 1607 Powhatan married approximately one hundred wives. According to custom, he married temporarily, kept a wife until she gave birth, then returned both the child and wife to her people. At a later time the children joined their father at

Powhatan's capital city of Werowocomoco. This world welcomed Pocahontas, born *circa*. 1596.

Matoaka (Pocahontas) spent her early years with her mother until her father summoned her to live with him. She went by the nickname Pocahontas translated as "Little Wanton," or a closer translation of the name in modern English "the Playful One" or "Mischievous One." Although willful and stubborn, her father favored her over many of her siblings.

Captain John Smith and the other white settlers established Jamestown, Virginia in May 1607. She, a girl of ten to twelve years old, appeared prepubescent, she wore her hair cropped around her head with one long braid in the back and wore no clothes. She first met John Smith when he lived in her father's home. Reports differ as to why John Smith lived with the Native Americans, perhaps as some claim, Native Americans captured Smith. Other documentation purport he lived with the Powhatans as a guest, rescued from the elements. Nevertheless, in his writings he documented positive treatment and ample opportunity to interact with the Chief's young daughter. The Native Americans liked John Smith and they viewed him as a "real man" (44, Rountree). He cultivated the qualities of bravery and pride that Powhatans admired.

Meanwhile Pocahontas often visited the settlement of Jamestown. Her social visits included playing with the boys (44, Rountree) and "turning cartwheels in the nude" (490, Fausz). As she grew older she became an intermediary between the settlers and her people. Although trusted with messages, gifts and food, an advisor to her father named Rahemt did the real negotiating on these trips. Her status as the

Chief's daughter held importance as a figurehead to the settlers while her gender negated her as a threat. (44, Rountree).

From 1608 to 1610 Pocahontas assisted in negotiations with the colonists. She bargained on behalf of her people for the release of Powhatan prisoners. She also acted as a mediator when the English settlers negotiated for lenient treatment from her father. This helped sustain relations between the two groups and preserve the peace until the first Anglo-Powhatan War in 1610.

John Smith returned to England in 1609. The settlers informed Pocahontas that he died. She continued visiting Jamestown even though the tensions continued to escalate between the Powhatans and the English. By the following year, Pocahontas took a warrior named Kocoum as her husband. Little documentation exists about Kocoum and their marriage but, with the coming of war, Pocahontas' visits to Jamestown ceased.

In December of 1612 peace again existed between the two cultures and Pocahontas went to Patawomeck (a Native American city in Virginia). There she traded commodities and visited friends, staying for three months. The English captured her when the Patawomecks and, in particular, the *weroance* (district chief) Iopassus made her whereabouts known.

The Powhatans and Pocahontas both trusted her uncle, Iopassus. Pocahontas boarded Captain Samuel Argall's ship with Iopassus' wife as her chaperone. Pocahontas stayed in her own quarters in the ship's gunroom. The following morning Captain Argall prevented her from disembarking when the rest of her party left. Pocahontas faced imprisonment rather than an undignified escape of jumping

overboard and swimming ashore to safety. Thus she became a captive of the English. Captain Argall immediately made ransom demands and negotiations began when Powhatan offered to fill the terms partly up front and in totality with the safe return of his daughter. The English distrusted Powhatan, and Pocahontas remained at Jamestown for a year (58-59, Rountree).

The English reported treating her well during this time (491, Fausz). She learned about English manners and religion (59, Rountree). She converted to Anglicanism and then received baptism and the name Rebecca. As J. Frederick Fausz points out:

The Christian name chosen for Pocahontas seemed prescient: 'And the Lord said to her (Rebecca): two nations are in thy wombe,...the one people shall be mightier than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger.' Genesis 25:23, Geneva Bible (491, Fausz).

During her captivity Pocahontas met a twenty-eight year old widower named John Rolfe. The two became close and Rolfe, amidst the battling of the Native Americans and the English, attempted to contact Powhatan seeking permission to marry the newly christened Rebecca. He could not to gain an audience with Powhatan but did manage to speak with Opchancanough, Pocahontas's uncle and trusted advisor to her father. In this meeting both promised to make peace among their people. Pocahontas's brothers bore witness to Powhatan of the earnest nature of Pocahontas's feelings and her father granted consent for the marriage (59, Rountree).

One report described this union as a convenient diplomatic arrangement for peace, as only two other Powhatan-English marriages existed in documentation from the seventeenth century in Virginia (60, Rountree). However, a Powhatan bride customarily made the ultimate decision to wed.

Pocahontas' uncle and two of her brothers attended the Rolfe wedding at Jamestown in April of 1614. Pocahontas's decision, whether out of love, a sense of duty to her people, pressure from her family, or her new found religion brought an end to the wars. Powhatan, though glad for his daughter's apparent happiness, missed the Christian ceremony. Later that spring, when an Englishman pursued marriage to Pocahontas' half sister, the chief denied permission for another alliance through marriage (60, Rountree).

Historians consider the next few years as the golden age of Powhatan-English relations. During this time Rebecca Rolfe lived with her husband at Jamestown. The English viewed her as a "right thinking savage" (491-492, Fausz). Rebecca, after giving up her heathen religion in favor of Christianity, assimilated to the English culture by becoming a proper English lady. The Virginia Company of London arranged a tour of England for the growing Rolfe family, which now included their infant son, Thomas. The Virginia Company designed the trip to display Rebecca to England as the epitome of a successful missionary endeavor and to generate financial support.

English society welcomed her as "*la belle savage*" in June of 1616 (492, Fausz). Ten to twelve Native Americans, including Uttamatonakkin, a priestly advisor to Powhatan, accompanied her. Powhatan charged Uttamatomakkin with four tasks: to find John Smith, count the number of men and trees he encountered so Powhatan could understand the English's strength, meet with the English King and see the English God. Uttamatomakkin did find John Smith and meet with King James,



however he did not to see the English God. Very early in his trip he abandoned his task of counting the number of Englishmen and trees he encountered (62, Rountree).

Meanwhile the propaganda machine orchestrated Rebecca's life, however she maintained the status of an Indian Princess and received all of the courtesies of visiting royalty. The Virginia Company dictated her entire schedule. In order to raise funds for the missionary and colonial expansion in the New World, Rebecca became the icon of the ultimate accomplishment of conversion in America. She attended the King's Twelfth Night masque, the Bishop of London feted in her honor and reportedly enjoyed herself thoroughly while in London (63, Rountree). She managed to capture the imagination of Ben Jonson. She made such an impression on the popular playwright he wrote her into his play *The Staple of News*.

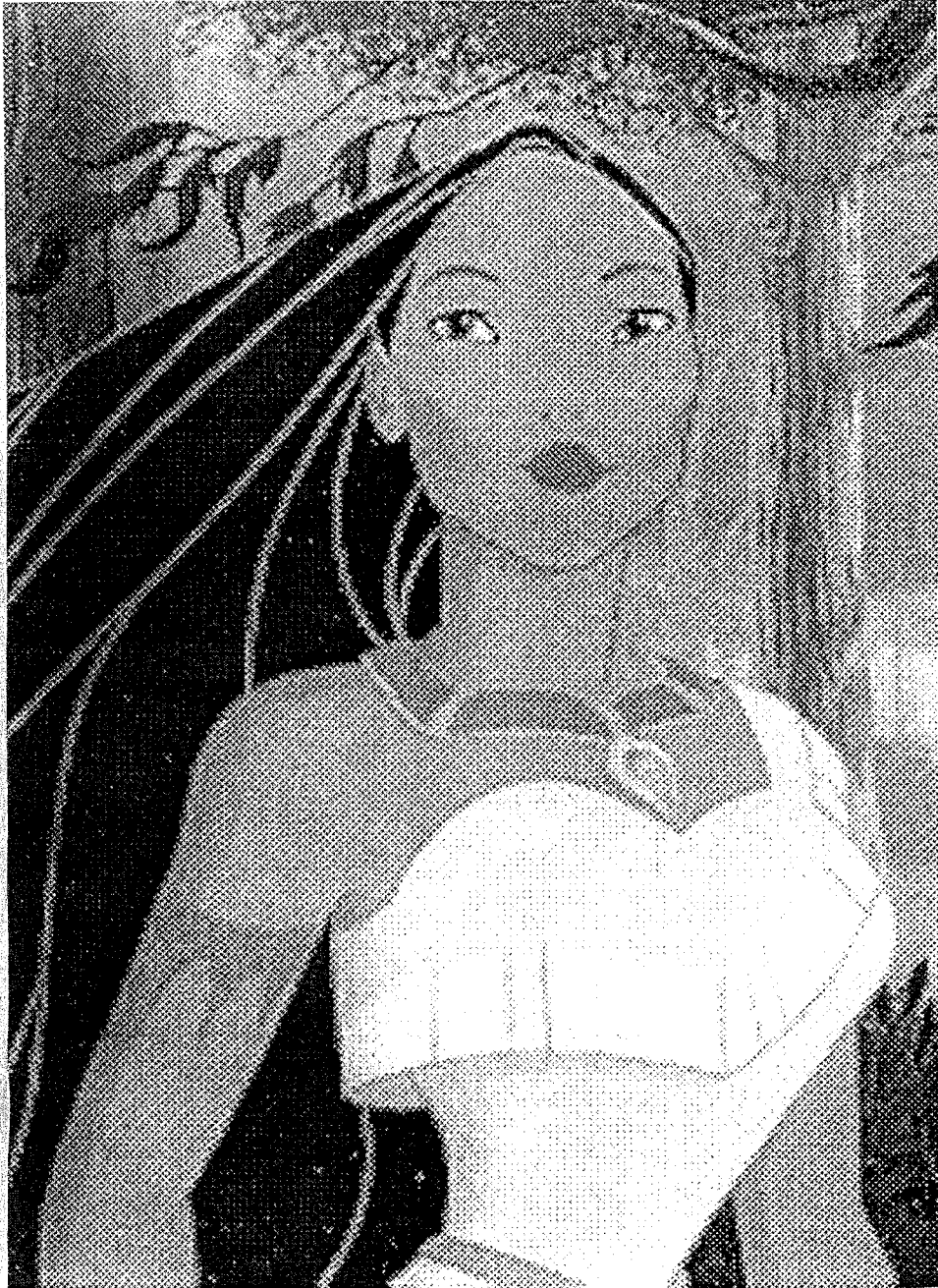
She could not return home as planned because she became ill, most likely from contact with the English (63, Rountree). She then left London and journeyed to the country for recovery. During this time John Smith deigned to visit her. John Smith recorded the only surviving record of this visit but even he could not hide her fury in his writings "without any word, she turned about, obscured her face, as not seeming well contented" (62, Rountree). Several different interpretations surfaced about her reaction to Smith. They include her anger with him about lies regarding his death, her feeling spurned by her former lover and even Smith theorized, incorrectly, she could not speak English. Whatever her reason she ignored John Smith and sat alone for several hours after he left.

Pocahontas looked forward to returning to her beloved Virginia in March 1617 when her ship left port. However, she needed to disembark in Gravesend, Kent.

There she died, most likely from an illness she contracted through interaction with the English. Her family buried the remains on March 21 along the Thames at the Church of Saint George, at Gravesend, Kent (492, Fausz). Unfortunately, destruction of Pocahontas' grave happened during a rebuilding of the Church (62, Rountree).

Young Thomas did not return home at that time. He too fell victim to disease and stayed in Plymouth under the care of an English Uncle. He, raised in England, never saw his father again (64, Rountree). In 1635 he did return to Virginia and followed his father's example, growing tobacco on the conquered lands of his mother's people. He eventually led a military campaign against the Powhatans in his own quest for land. He did pass on his mother's blood and his line of descendants became known as the Red Rolfes.

## Pocahontas Goes Disney



Walt Disney Studio's Pocahontas from the film released in 1995.

## Chapter Three

### Disney Studio's *Pocahontas*

This chapter outlines the film *Pocahontas*, and offers a brief biography of John Smith and the themes and contents intended by the film's creators. While preparing for the release of *Pocahontas*, the Disney Studio anticipated the film as their next modern classic. Disney Studio touted the vision, message, and spirit of both the movie and the heroine. The Disney Studio's executives maintained the film supported feminist ideals, politically correct multicultural relationships, environmental concerns and Native American thought and practices. Disney's description of the film in their press packet promised;

this exciting and ambitious musical adventure combines historical fact with popular folklore and legend to present the compelling tale of a brave, compassionate and dynamic young woman who 'listens with her heart' to help choose which path to follow. (1, Movieweb)

The story offered a romantic and entertaining outlook of an Indian Princess' encounter with the adventurous English sea captain John Smith by blending fantasy, comedy and music. The release of the film corresponded with the four hundred-year anniversary of Pocahontas's estimated birth (1, Movieweb).

The film begins in London, England in 1607 with the Virginia Company preparing to disembark for the New World. The men sing boldly of the riches that await them and, as the lyric states, they work "for glory, god and gold." The greedy Governor John Ratcliffe leads the explorers. However, the brave and charismatic Captain John Smith retains the loyalties and respect of the men of the Virginia

Company. These men respect Smith for his reputation in battling savages. In the film John Smith demonstrates his courage and furthers his esteem amongst his fellow travelers by selflessly diving overboard during a storm to save the young and naive Thomas from drowning.

Next the film transports the audience to the New World to discover the Native Americans practicing the ancient ways of farming, hunting and fishing. The voluptuous Pocahontas makes her debut by courageously swan-diving from the top of a waterfall to her waiting friend below. Her swan dive symbolizes her brave, athletic and capricious spirit. She returns to her village to find her father, Chief Powhatan, home from a successful war campaign. Her father talks with Pocahontas about his pride in her and awards her with her mother's necklace, a symbol that she must take her mother's place among their people. The conversation continues as Pocahontas and her father discuss the possibility of her marrying the warrior Kocoum. Powhatan sings "Steady as the River" to describe Kocoum's best qualities. Pocahontas, put off by the serious suitor, canoes away to contemplate her future. She emphatically sings that "just around the river bend" her adventurous future awaits.

Pocahontas and her forest friends Meeko, a raccoon, and Flit, a hummingbird, visit with Grandmother Willow, a wise and mythical spirit residing in an ancient tree, for insight into Pocahontas' future. Sparked by the sight of the necklace worn by Pocahontas, Grandmother Willow likens Pocahontas' spirit to her mother's spirit. Grandmother Willow encourages Pocahontas to listen with her heart to the spirits all around. Pocahontas then trusts the spirits to guide her future. The spirits speak to Pocahontas of strange clouds. Her curiosity piqued, she climbs a tree and sees the

sails of the English ships blowing across the sky like clouds bringing strange visitors to the Virginia shore.

When the British arrive in the New World they immediately begin their frenzied quest for gold. John Smith occupies his time with protecting the colony and sets out to explore. He encounters Meeko and Flit. The kindness he shows to Pocahontas' animal friends impresses the young woman hiding nearby.

Back at the Powhatan village the Native Americans see the spirit of the settlers in the smoke of the lodge. The Native Americans see the English as ravenous wolves that devour the natural resources of the Earth. The Natives fear the images of these newcomers. The Chief decides to investigate the new arrivals although Kocoum prefers to fight.

While John Smith remains absent from the colony exploring the area, the English begin to plunder the land in search of gold as Ratcliffe sings of his financial ambitions. Pocahontas manages to follow John Smith undetected until the moment they meet. Glen Kean, the supervising animator in the Disney Studio's press release, best describes this moment.

The scene was originally written with dialogue but never seemed to play right. What should they be saying to each other? In thinking about it, I remembered meeting my wife in line at a movie and knowing it was love at first sight and that I was destined for her and she for me. We needed that same kind of electric moment for Pocahontas and Smith. With the sights and sound of a powerful waterfall as a backdrop to this moment, nothing is happening except their eyes are looking at each other. This allows the audience the freedom to go into their minds and feel how they're feeling. Her hair also adds an important dimension as it blows because it emphasizes that nothing is moving. It's a moment for me that is perhaps the most challenging and most satisfying. (8, Movieweb)

The intensity of the moment breaks when Pocahontas flees. John Smith catches her and wins her trust with his gentle nature.

Native Americans concealed by the wilderness watch the colonists dig for gold at the Jamestown settlement. Once the English colonists discover the Native Americans gunfire begins. The Native Americans quickly retreat to the village with one Native man wounded. The medicine man attempts to heal the unfamiliar gunshot injury. Treatment of the wound by traditional methods proves ineffective. The Chief, now understands the deadly power of the new men on his shores, decides to solicit reinforcements from other tribes. In an effort to protect his people, he forbids further contact with the English.

Meanwhile, Pocahontas and John Smith discover how to communicate with each other. John Smith explains that the English intend to civilize the New World, similarly to England, with roads, housing and education. Pocahontas refutes the necessity of civilization by the English in singing "Colors of the Wind." This song not only reiterates the Native American ecology friendly philosophy but also the idea of tolerance for different cultures. The lyrics state "You think the only people who are people, are the people that look and think like you, but if you walk the footsteps of a stranger, you learn things you never knew you never knew." By the end of her lesson through music, John Smith begins to understand and appreciate the Native American way of life. This brings the realization of the benefits of understanding different cultures for both characters. Pocahontas then hears the drums that warn of trouble. So she and John Smith part, each returning to their people.

Within the newly erected walls of the fort, Governor Ratcliffe panics as the mountains of gold elude him. Ratcliffe resolves to take the gold by force from the Savages. John Smith sneaks away from Jamestown to find Pocahontas.

Powhatan discovers Pocahontas and her confidant gathering corn for the warriors. Fearing for her safety, Powhatan sends Kocoum to watch over the girls. However, before Kocoum arrives John Smith and Pocahontas reunite. The two escape to seek advice from Grandmother Willow. John Smith encounters the spirit of the tree with apprehension. Once she frightens off the Englishmen looking for John Smith, Smith understands the value of her wisdom.

Pocahontas returns to her village to plead with her father to establish peace between the English and her people. Similarly, at Jamestown, John Smith tries to convince his men that the Natives can help their survival in the New World. However, the colonists decide to fight. Smith then leaves to alert Pocahontas of the war campaign against her people and Thomas follows him. Pocahontas secretly meets with Smith at Grandmother Willow's after disobeying her father and running away from the village. Pocahontas convinces Smith to meet with her father so they can find a way for the two groups to live in harmony. They share a kiss, which Kocoum and Thomas witness. Kocoum reacts by attacking Smith. As a result Thomas shoots Kocoum. As Kocoum dies he breaks the necklace that Pocahontas wears that once belonged to her mother. The Native Americans who come to collect the dead Kocoum capture John Smith. John Smith assumes Thomas' guilt.

Chief Powhatan announces John Smith's execution at sunrise followed by the tribe attacking Jamestown. Powhatan also places blame on his daughter, telling



Pocahontas she shames her people and that her actions killed Kocoum. Later that night Pocahontas meets with the imprisoned Smith. Smith tells her he chooses death to not knowing her and his love remains with her always.

Thomas returns to the fort and reports John Smith's capture which incites the English. Thus, Ratcliffe rallies the men to attack. Both the Powhatan and the English sing about their enemies as they prepare for war. This song illustrates the way both groups of men legitimize killing by dehumanizing their enemies.

Pocahontas, with the guidance of Grandmother Willow, decides she must save John Smith. At sunrise with the English observing from below and ready to attack the Native Americans, Chief Powhatan prepares to club John Smith to death. The Native Americans watch, as the Chief prepares to end John Smith's life high on a bluff. Pocahontas bravely throws her body over John Smith to protect him from her father's execution. She pleads for John Smith's life and Powhatan, realizing his daughter's wisdom, frees Smith.

Governor Ratcliffe seizes this opportunity to shoot Chief Powhatan but John Smith jumps in front of Powhatan. Ratcliffe accidentally shoots Smith. The settlers turn against Ratcliffe, tie and gag him, then return to Jamestown with the wounded John Smith. Pocahontas and her people bring gifts to say goodbye to the injured Smith who must return to England for treatment. Chief Powhatan proclaims John Smith "Brother." Smith, now respected by Pocahontas' father, requests permission for her to travel with him. Pocahontas chooses to stay with her people knowing she and John Smith share an everlasting bond. Her animal friends present her with the repaired necklace. This token she proudly wears as she accepts the responsibility of

her role within the tribe and waves goodbye to John Smith's ship. The credits roll with the song "If I Never Knew You" playing once again; reinforcing the idea that racial and cultural differences can not supersede love.

The story that Walt Disney Studio used followed the legend of Pocahontas chronicled by John Smith. Born in 1580 in Willoughby, England, he claimed involvement in many international adventures. He fought for the Holy Roman Empire against the Turks as a soldier of fortune, until taken prisoner in Istanbul. He bravely escaped his captors and fled to Russia. There the Russians captured him and once again he escaped. By the time he arrived in Virginia in 1607, at the age of 27, his writings described him as a soldier, sailor and explorer, extolling his bold exploits in Europe and Africa. His admirers credit him with writing America's early Euro-centric history and of preserving the Virginian colony of Jamestown through his relationship with the Native Americans. His critics regard him as a braggart and, as George Percy, a contemporary of John Smith and his successor as chief executive in Jamestown once wrote, "an Ambityous [sic] unworthy and vayneglorious fellowe [sic]" (2, Montgomery). Many popular legends surround John Smith's adventures, the most notorious involves Powhatan's daughter Pocahontas.

In 1608 and 1612 John Smith wrote of his captivity in 1607 by the Powhatan tribe in a favorable light. Neither of these writings mentioned Pocahontas saving his life or the Native Americans presenting a mortal threat. Granted, Smith covered quite a few chronological events in these writings but why choose to ignore an impressive story about his heroism in the face of death? Later in 1622 and 1624, John Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia* paints a new picture of his courage in the face of the

savages' cruelty and, in this account, he includes their attempt to execute him by clubbing his head. In Smith's later account, while a prisoner of Chief Powhatan, he feared for his life. Smith writes:

At his entrance before the King, all the people gave a great shout...[A] long consultation was held, but the conclusion was, two great stones were brought before Powhatan: then as many as could laid hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs to beat out his brains, Pocahontas the King's dearest daughter, when no entreaty would prevail, got his head in her arms, and laid her own upon his to save him from death. (5, Montgomery)

Pocahontas died by the time Smith wrote and published this version or account of their history. Smith's critics point out no one could refute or confirm his story, and note that specific details of his early writings do not coincide with accounts in his later writings. This indicated exaggerations and half-truths perpetuated by John Smith. Significantly, even his contemporaries discredited John Smith's writings. These critics surmised that Smith linked himself to Pocahontas in the later writings to enhance his status. She won popularity during her English trip with the Virginia Company tour and London society regarded her with respect as an Indian Princess. In 1616, Smith wrote to Queen Anne of England, telling the story of how Pocahontas' actions saved his life and the lives of the settlers in Jamestown.

The second possibility exists that, although this event did happen, John Smith grossly misinterpreted the incident. Native American naturalization or adoption rite in the Powhatan tribe possibly included Smith. Chief Powhatan, impressed with Smith, performed a ceremony where a symbolic killing, rescue and rebirth of John Smith as a "son" of Powhatan took place (39, Rountree). This ceremony granted status to Smith as an honorary district chief. Then, with this respect bestowed upon him, John Smith

could trade with the Powhatans and continue his relationship with the Native Americans, which by all historic accounts he did. Pocahontas' status as the chief's daughter explains her presence in the ritual. John Smith describes her in *The Generall Historie of Virginia* merely as "A child of tenne yeares old, which not only for feature, countenance, and proportion much exceedeth and of the rest of his [Powhatan's] people but for wit and spirit [is] the only non-pariel of his cuntry [sic]. (1, Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities)

After the alleged event Smith's life in Jamestown continued with election to political prominence. However, his enemies forced him to leave fearing his attempts to make himself King of the New World. He returned to England in disgrace as a prisoner. (12, Montgomery) He made one more trip to the New World of America landing in Maine in 1614. Then, after his return to England, the Queen denied him permission to cross the ocean to the New World again. He used this opportunity to write prolifically about his adventures until his death in 1631 at the age of fifty-one.

The rescue of John Smith by Pocahontas, despite the specious origins transformed from story to an American Legend. Books, plays and operas romanticize this mythical love story. In the rotunda at the nation's Capitol in Washington D.C., John Smith's words remain carved in stone from his *Generall Historie of Virginia*. They read: "Pocahontas the King's dearest daughter, when no entreaty would prevail, got his head in her arms, and laid her own upon his to save him from death" (5, Montgomery). These words embodied the life of Pocahontas for four hundred years and inspired the Disney Studio movie.

An essential tool utilized by the studios to promote films includes a focused marketing campaign. The marketing of *Pocahontas* took the form of direct advertising in commercials, print and interviews. This depicted a film that supported feminist ideas, Native American thought and cultural practices, as well as the need for racial harmony and environmental awareness. John Pomeroy, a senior vice president of Feature Animation at Disney Studio made this statement to describe the intentions of the movie. His statement shows a clear didactic goal of *Pocahontas* as

...much more than just a love story or an entertainment. It is a story that is fundamentally about racism and intolerance and we hope that people will gain a greater understanding of themselves and of the world around them. It's also about having respect for each other's cultures. (4, Movieweb)

Many different artists collaborated on Disney's animated movie *Pocahontas*. The project originated when Mike Gabriel, a Disney director, began thinking about his next film project. He envisioned a large-scale film with epic scope, heart and humor. Gabriel recalls:

It was Thanksgiving weekend and I was trying to figure out what to do next. I knew that I wanted it to be a love story and I was thinking that a western might be something a little different. I thought about Pecos Bill and a bunch of other titles but it seemed like they'd all been done before. And then somehow the name Pocahontas came into my mind and I got very excited about it. Everyone knew the tale about her saving John Smith's life and it seemed like a natural for telling a story about two separate clashing worlds trying to understand each other. (4-5, Movieweb)

Meanwhile a development team at Disney headed by Peter Schneider brainstormed the potential for an animated film based on Romeo and Juliet. So when Mike Gabriel pitched his story idea, Schneider recalls:

We were particularly interested in exploring the theme of 'If we don't learn to live with one another, we will destroy ourselves.' It is an important message to a generation to stop fighting, stop killing each other because you feel

differently about religion. The challenge was to do a movie with such a theme and make it interesting, romantic, fun. We never wanted to do a docu-drama, but something that was inspired by a legend. We never wavered from the idea of how important it would be to make a film about the clash of two worlds (5 Movieweb).

When creating John Smith as an animated character, John Pomeroy, the supervising animator wanted the appeal of Errol Flynn with the boyish charm and roguishness enhanced by the masculine voice of Mel Gibson. Pomeroy recalls

John Smith is the kind of man who is looking for the next adventure in order to sidestep or avoid any real personal issues in his own unexamined life...Something is missing inside of him until he arrives in Virginia. Like two magnets, Pocahontas and Smith are drawn together. Their meeting is so powerful that they just stand there and gaze at each other. Now he has found something that he really cares about in his life. He doesn't have to escape anymore. She represents the missing component in his life. (8, Movieweb)

This story, as the Disney Studio's purports, carries an important message: the spirit of racial harmony and tolerance as the centralizing theme. Roy Disney, vice chairman of The Walt Disney Company and head of the Feature Animation department, states:

'Pocahontas' is a story that appealed to us because it was basically a story about people getting along together in this world. Even though their cultures are very, very different, they have to live on the same land and that seemed like an enormously appropriate kind of story to tell and one which is particularly applicable to lots of places in the world today. (3, Movieweb)

They aimed to create a film encouraging young girls to view themselves as able to affect change in the world around them by identifying with the power of the spirit of Pocahontas. When producing *Pocahontas* James Pentecost described her as

The strongest heroine ever to appear in a Disney film. She is open, athletic, dynamic, intelligent and quite beautiful. One historian described her as sort of the first diplomat. We also tried to tap into her spirituality and the spirituality of the Native Americans, especially in the way they relate to nature. The film is a love story, but it is also a father-daughter story. At the beginning of the movie, the father tries to teach the daughter something and by the end the

daughter is teaching the father. In terms of relationships between parents and children, this is a very powerful and universal message. I think another great thing about Pocahontas is the notion that one person can make a difference, by her action of saving John Smith's life, she caused her father to take a different course of action. I think that's a great thing to hear, especially for kids, because it empowers them to make a difference. (3, Movieweb)

Disney promoted this story as pro-female, pro-Native American, pro-environmental and pro-multiculturalism. Pocahontas fulfills the role of "good" Indian in the movie. All races take pride in her and identify her as the ideal American daughter. Joe Grant, a concept artist and storyman for the company, stated

I saw Pocahontas as a child of nature. She is one with nature as are the animals, streams, trees, leaves. It was impossible for me not to think of her as part of that world. Her relationship with the animals is also part of a Disney tradition for deriving humor and comedic support from animals. (5, Movieweb)

However, this film met with serious external criticism. Criticism abounded not only from the Powhatan Confederacy but also from scholars who quickly pointed out the Disney Studio's film *Pocahontas* failed to accurately depict the historic life of Pocahontas. Disney attempted to capture the story of an actual historic person who made outstanding contributions to Colonial-Native American relations. And while the Disney Studio insists they did not intend this film as a docu-drama, they do contend that they did research the Native Americans and that they hired Native Americans as actors to do the voices. This illuminates the fact that they realized their responsibility to their audience.

Critics and social historians held the Disney Studio to a high standard. The book Film as Social Practice contends cinematic images cause greater audience reaction than does reality. This imagery mesmerizes the audiences' senses navigating the emotions through the story. The cinema replicates our perceptions then amplifies

them (110, Turner). The images observed in film profoundly effect the audience, especially when the primary audience consists of children.

Popular culture not only includes powerful images from Disney, but the bombardment of merchandise that accompanies the films. Disney Studio shows their marketing prowess on every home video. Coming attractions on a video include upcoming new releases in theaters, a release of a Disney Studio classic film to video, the companion CD-ROM for a movie and the prospect of Disney theme vacation (to the theme parks or on the cruise ship). Retail stores quickly carry any merchandise with the image of the current Disney film cast members.

Disney specifically marketed *Pocahontas* as their first animated film based on a real person. Directing their aggressive marketing technique towards children proved successful because in the summer of 1995, 100,000 winners of a national lottery gathered in the rain at Central Park in New York for the premiere of *Pocahontas* (22, Kim). *Pocahontas*, which followed Disney Studio's *The Lion King*, did become a box office success. The merchandizing alone added millions of dollars to the Disney Corporation's bottom-line.

However, the Disney Studio fell under serious criticism for the movie because of the liberal use of artistic license in creating both the look of Pocahontas and the story of Pocahontas' life. Disney intended to create a female hero, whose actions prevented war and promoted racial harmony. They conceived this heroine as a way to honor the traditions of the Native American. Her character promoted environmentalism through her words and actions. However the redesigning of the story of Pocahontas meant the film failed to reach these goals. This failure motivated



Chief Roy Crazy Horse and the Powhatan-Renape Nation to take action in the form of their play *The One Called Pocahontas*. The movie *Pocahontas* reinforces many Native American stereotypes predominate in American made movies. The themes and plot of this movie directly relate to the insult felt by the Powhatan-Renape Nation. The film outraged the very people that Disney claimed to celebrate.

## Chapter Four

### The Controversy

Disney claimed they presented *Pocahontas* as “authentic,” and “respectful” of Native Americans and Pocahontas thus beginning the controversy with the Powhatan-Renape Nation. Disney Studios did not adhere to the guideline of truth in presenting the story but rather wanted to present a theme of tolerance among people. The supporters of the film *Pocahontas* cite the talking animals and animation in the movie as two examples that exonerate Disney Studio’s need to adhere to a strictly realistic portrayal of Pocahontas’ life. However as Jacquelyn Kilpatrick notes in her book Celluloid Indians “the visual tends to be more immediately, emotionally compelling than the written word, as well as more accessible...this film’s pseudo-history will exist as fact in the minds of generations of American children” (150-150, Kilpatrick).

The primary audience impacted by the film consists of children. The targeted audience received misinformation about all of the characters in the film, but most importantly the title character Pocahontas. This revisionist history not only distorts the facts, but also reinforces negative stereotypes of women and Native Americans. Disney Studio recycled many of the damaging stereotypes about Native Americans already prevalent in popular culture and in other Hollywood movies and books. The politically correct intention of the film encouraged a positive message about the environment, feminism, Native Americans and multiculturalism. The film’s critics agreed the movie does not adequately support these themes.

In this biographical film the filmmakers radically change the surrounding facts of the character's life including her age, motivations, physical appearance and life history (150, Kilpatrick). The changes in the appearance of Pocahontas follow the Hollywood aesthetic of beauty. Disney claims to support a pro-female subtext, yet the most powerful and lasting image remains the enhanced appearance of Pocahontas. With the initial glimpse of the Native girl the audience saw the ideal specimen of a mature girl. The portraits of Pocahontas did not inspire the animated version of her likeness. Instead the illustrators made adjustments more consistent with other Disney Studio heroines. "Besides her beautiful 'more Asian' eyes, he [Glen Keane, the supervising animator on the film] gave her a body with a waspish waist, sexy hips and legs, and breasts that are truly impressive" this according to Jacquelyn Kilpatrick author of Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film (153, Kilpatrick). This resulted with the exotic, tribal Eve, a woman appealing for her spiritual connection to the earth, for her status in the community and for her overt sexuality. The animation did not represent the ten or eleven year old prepubescent girl John Smith encountered, but rather the sexy savage in an off the shoulder mini dress who represented an ideal, fully mature, sensual woman.

These changes in her appearance offer but one example of Disney Studio failing to support to a feminist motif. By changing the age of Pocahontas from prepubescent to post adolescent, her motivation for saving the life of John Smith changes. She saved his life inspired by romantic passion, not out of human compassion. Furthermore John Smith's actions then overshadow her heroic deed. Smith places his life in jeopardy to save Chief Powhatan. Thus the plot eclipses

Pocahontas's defining moment by diluting her actions with the heroic actions of John Smith.

The racial bias towards the Native Americans in *Pocahontas* although subtle continued a tradition of negative stereotypes of non-whites in movies. The character of Pocahontas refused to marry the stoic warrior Kocoum because she waits for something more, as she sings "Just around the river bend." The young hero John Smith clearly fit as the something. Smith embodied the tradition of a classic Caucasian hero, an ideal specimen of physical beauty, moral worth and sensitivity. This instantaneous relationship between the native woman and white man followed a theme that reinforces the value of white men over non-white men, despite the true fact that Pocahontas apparently did not love John Smith. The film depicts the white man as sexually superior to the native man (110, Barnett). Disney promotes an interracial relationship. However the plot accomplished this at the expense of Kocoum, Pocahontas' first husband.

Another idea present in the movie demonstrated the civil and understanding white man. John Smith empathized with the Native Americans due to his contact with Pocahontas. Smith goes so far as to disobey Governor Ratcliffe and warn Pocahontas of the impending attack against her people. John Smith proved his good character.

Then the Native Americans treated Smith unjustly. This allowed the audience the plot option to deplore the Native Americans. The "bad Indians" do not recognize Smith as a friend when they attack during his innocent meeting with Pocahontas. Then the heroic John Smith accepted the blame and punishment for Kocoum's death.

The film manipulated the audience to admire and sympathize with John Smith instead of mourning the murdered Kocoum who's "native life" apparently holds less value than his white rival for Pocahontas's affection (113, Barnett).

The settlers, incensed by Smith's capture, prepared for war. Revenge then justified the retaliatory war against the Native Americans (132-135, Barnett). Used in many stories about colonist/native relations, this plot mechanism allowed the oppressors justification when slaughtering the Natives.

As discussed by Louise K. Barnett in The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism 1790-1890.

Among the white characters, there is a weak reflection of good-bad schematization for Indians: good whites, particularly the hero and heroine are sympathetic to the situation of the Indian and may acquire good Indian friends; at the same time by virtue of the plot mechanism. They often have reason to deplore the actions of bad Indians. Frontiersmen, who are presented as ignorant and bigoted, but not actually villainous, regard Indians as unsalvageable varmints akin to other wilderness beasts of prey. (111, Barnett)

Within the film the native lives hold less value, shown through the continued violence committed against the natives. The film portrayed these attacks as the natural and correct response of the white man. The Jamestown settlers needed to protect their lives against the "savages." The white settlers fear of the Indians seemed justified because the Indians spy on the settlers during their initial encounter. This Euro-centric outlook helped to exonerate the English settlers from blame in the upcoming battles. Once again this represents a one-sided view of the situation, in favor of the English.

Glorification of technology in comparison to the primitive lifestyle of the native subtly bolsters the white man's superiority (130, Barnett). This not only suggests the white man as intellectually superior but also reiterates the idea that white

“civilization” supersedes an environmentally conscious lifestyle. The film displays a visual comparison between the civilized city of London and the primitive native villages in the wilds of Virginia. The English use guns and tools while the natives use rudimentary implements. John Smith introduces Pocahontas to the compass. The film differentiated between the sophistication level of the pets of the colonists and the indigenous Native American’s pets. For comic effect a colonist’s pet dog plays with complicated toys, whereas food fascinates the indigenous Native American’s pets. After the English shoot a warrior, the medicine man of the Powhatans does not know how to treat the wound. Meanwhile, the movie devalues the Native American’s skill of living on the Frontier, skills essential for survival. John Smith and his fellow travelers easily and quickly master these difficult skills prized by Native Americans. The movie ignored the suffering and starvation that took place in Jamestown settlement when the colonist first arrived in Virginia.

The greed that motivates Governor Ratcliffe does balance the scales somewhat and show the inherent “evil” of one white man. However, the exaggerated behavior of the character through his actions and songs diluted the evil to a comic or farcical level. Therefore, the film presented the fortune hunt as so grandiose it becomes outlandish, and therefore an unrealistic and laughable goal. Yet, the seventeenth century settlers wanted to accumulate riches and this motivated their journey to the New World of America. The film does not portray the villainy of the White Man’s greed with the seriousness and exploitative nature of the reality of the day.

In promoting the film as pro-environmental, the Disney Studio points to the fact that they extol the virtues of respecting the earth in the Academy Award winning song "Colors of the Wind." The words of Chief Seattle's speech to Congress when he said "What will you do when the rivers are gone?" and "No one can own the sky" inspired songwriting team Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz (12, Movieweb). However, the film presented the progress of civilization as both inevitable and legitimate. The film endorsed the acclimation of the Native Americans while the white men never learned to live in harmony with the earth. Smith left America at the end of the film for medical treatment in England. Thus the film reinforced technology as the path for life. Disney's lesson shows that different people live differently with the result of unavoidable assimilation to the white culture. This assimilation remained one historical fact that Disney managed to capture in the film.

The love story between Pocahontas and John Smith supported the idea of multicultural harmony however the theme did not carry to the making of the film. The Disney Studio did not support multicultural harmony when they enraged the Powhatan tribe with the subtle racism, which shows the Native Americans as inferior both sexually and intellectually to the whites and for the seemingly innocuous revision of the life of the woman called Pocahontas. The Powhatans viewed the refusal to present a story with some accuracy as arrogance on the part of the Disney Studio.

Prior to the making of *Pocahontas* the tribe contacted Disney Studio and offered to help with the story. The Disney Studio rebuffed the tribe in correspondence and remarked they knew the story they wanted to tell (1-4, Powhatan Renape

Nation's Website). This led to public complaints by the tribe about the liberties Disney took with the Pocahontas story. Once released; the movie confirmed their suspicions, it did not tell the tale of Pocahontas' life. As Jacqueline Kilpatrick states in Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Films "The Disney People were making an animated film about a fictional character. They knew she was fictional because they created her" (153, Kilpatrick).

Chief Roy Crazy Horse gave a brief history on the Powhatan Renape Nation website of the real story of Pocahontas. He concludes

It is unfortunate that this sad story, which Euro-Americans should find embarrassing, Disney makes "entertainment" and perpetuates a dishonest and self-serving myth at the expense of the Powhatan Nation. (3, Chief Roy Crazy Horse)

Chief Roy's outrage inspired him to sanction a more authentic version of the Pocahontas myth made for the general public. The Powhatan Nation fought against the misleading effects of the film by commissioning a play about the life of Pocahontas. He wanted to use theatre to retell a more authentic and historically accurate story. Chief Roy envisioned the play performed on a continual basis, with the eventual goal of performing for it the Disney Studio executives. Although the tribe recognized that the use of theatre as an educational and political platform limited the number of people that could encounter the play, the medium of live performance became a powerful, cost effective and viable way to answer art with art.



*The One Called Pocahontas*



Chief Roy Crazy Horse and Nicole Brown who played Pocahontas in *The One Called Pocahontas*.

Photograph from the Newsweekly.

## Chapter Five

### *The One Called Pocahontas*

This chapter focuses on *The One Called Pocahontas* as a collaborative effort to use theatre in a response to the defamation the Powhatan people perceived in Disney Studio's film *Pocahontas*. This chapter discusses the legacy of ritual theatre in the Native American culture within the play. Additionally the chapter describes the quality of the production, outlines the play and assesses the subjective results of the effort.

This grass roots endeavor to reclaim a heritage used art to correct mainstream cultural propaganda. The tribe created the play as a public rebuttal because they considered the Disney Studio movie *Pocahontas*, with its negative stereotypes, distortion of history and its featured product-merchandising offensive. The tribe chose theatre for protest because their culture understands that theatre effectively reframes perceptions. As theatre scholar Walter Meserve summarizes in An Emerging Entertainment: The Drama Of The American People To 1828 "one people in America who did not object to theatre but incorporated it into their daily ritual were the American Indians" (5-6, Meserve).

*The One Called Pocahontas* uniquely infused entertainment with education. Chief Roy Crazy Horse summed up the intention of the play for the Burlington County Times by stating "My argument is, tell the truth whether we like it or not. And we're going to tell the truth in our play" (A1, Martin). Theatre scholar Joseph

Roach specifically advocated the use of oral tradition (theatre) as a historical model.

In his article "Mardi Gras Indians and Others: Genealogies of American

Performance" Roach states:

I believe that an alternative historical model of intercultural encounter would provoke an alternative historical narrative of American theatre and drama, one centered on performance as much as on writing, one resistant to polarizing reductions of manifest destiny. Such a model would emphasize the truly astonishing multiplicity of cultural encounters in North America, the adaptive creativity produced by the interactions of many peoples (466, Roach).

The Powhatan's use of theatre as a means for social change and education intertwined with the history of their culture. They used the platform of theatre for spiritual rituals. The characteristics for ritual theatre include affirming the current belief or attitude, a genuine religious experience and melding the performer and the spectator so that both live in the current action. The platform of ritual theatre allows the supernatural and spiritual figures to exist in the present; the ritual fulfills the needs of the community and bases the action on a sacred history (4-5, Kuritz). The dramatic form differs from some of these characteristics, however the use of the theatre by the Powhatan people relies on the many of these conventions.

The characteristics of ritual theatre in *The One Called Pocahontas* included affirming a current belief or attitude, melding the performer and the spectator and reacting to the needs of the community. Instilling a new belief or attitude to the audience previously misinformed while affirming the perspective of history that the Powhatans believe remained a goal of the production. The Powhatans reinforced the authentic version of Pocahontas' life. In the beginning of the play the performers entered from locations in the audience and interacted with the audience. The dynamic

style gave the impression that the play unfolded in response to the interests of curious children rather than the traditional dimming of house lights and raising of the curtain. This connects the ritual concept of melding the performer and spectator to this production. Finally the proactive attempt to refuse the Disney film filled the needs of the community. While making a unified statement this public outcry did not alienate the audience.

The traditional dramatic form of theatre co-existed with the characteristics of ritual theatre. The Powhatans used this play as an opportunity to combine drama and history, to make the history more poignant and exciting. The dramatic form does not involve a genuine religious experience. As with most performances in the dramatic form, *The One Called Pocahontas* did not inspire a religious experience, but rather created an aesthetic experience. In the play the spiritual figure of the Oak Tree Spirit did not return to the present as in ritual theatre. Instead the Oak Tree Spirit character utilizes a dramatic mechanism of the narrator as in traditional theatre. Other actors realistically portrayed dramatic characters. The play began with the spectator and performer melded, but after the first scene the actors drove the action of the play. For these reasons the play includes both the ritual and dramatic forms (11, Kuritz).

The collaboration for *The One Called Pocahontas* combined the skills of theatre professionals such as playwright Tony Howarth, musical director Kim T. Hunter, director Jhon Velasco and musical consultant David Amram with the talents of Native American cast members. *The One Called Pocahontas* also contained music and dance unique to the Native Americans and specifically formatted for the

production. This required the expertise of choreographer/drummer Christopher Pegram and soloists Keara Hailey and Debbie Riveria.

The Powhatan Nation commissioned Tony Howarth, an English playwright based in New York to create a vehicle to tell the story of Pocahontas. Howarth started as a newspaperman, beginning as a copy boy at the Cleveland Press, right out of high school. His career progressed to working at the Indianapolis Times as a world news editor, and working as a editorial writer and features editor in New York at the World Telegram and The Sun.

When the newspaper folded he entered the teaching profession. He worked as a high school teacher in West Chester County. At the collegiate level he worked at Manhattanville, SUNY Purchase and Mercy Colleges.

In order to pursue playwrighting he received grants from Death in America Foundation and The Drama League. In 1989 he won the John Gassner Award for his play *Borrowed Plumes*. From 1991-1995 he served as the playwright-in-residence for the Mint Theatre in New York. His successes include the Off-Broadway produced *Dream City Twosome* in 1999. And *Thorwood*, a play performed in the U.S., Europe and Africa and later made into an independent film called *Slings and Arrows*.

Howarth worked with the Circle East Theatre, The Harbor Theatre and holds membership in the Dramatist Guild. He currently works as a full-time playwright. Additionally he holds weekly writing workshops at the Westbeth Theatre Center in New York and an intensive workshop in the summer affectionately known as “play in the country” (1-4, Howarth Website).

His relationship with the Powhatan people began when he initiated research for his play *We Are The King*, a play about a Powhatan Indian, Namontack, who went to England. Within the play Namontack travels to the royal court to become the center of the amorous attention of King James I.

Howarth became interested in the Jamestown settlement and this period in American history. After reading many books he wanted to write a piece about people transplanted to a strange land. The story of a Powhatan man named Namontack intrigued Howarth. Namontack acted as an interpreter for the English. Namontack, famous for the quip the Englishmen numbered "like grains of sand across the beach," eventually traveled to England and then on to the West Indies where he died.

Howarth's play dealt with King James' homosexual interest in Namontack and the differences to Namontack in lifestyles once so far from home. While at an Indian Museum, Howarth asked for books to research the real subjects of his play. He then contacted Chief Roy Crazy Horse who came to see the show in New York (Personal Interview, Howarth).

The men talked after the show and the conversation evolved into a discussion about the historical story of Pocahontas and the Disney Studio film version of *Pocahontas*. Tony became incensed about the Disney Studio's version and the Chief asked him to formulate a play that more accurately served history.

Howarth understood Chief Roy's vision of the impact the show should make. Chief Roy wanted a piece of theatre that they could continuously perform year after year with professional actors under a professional director. He genuinely wanted the authentic story and a production of professional quality (Personal Interview,

Howarth). Chief Roy also wanted to publicly demonstrate Disney Studio's insensitivity to the descendants of Pocahontas. The NEWSWeekly quoted Chief Roy's writing:

The issue that Disney Productions has chosen to make a feature length film about one of the most devastated Native American nations on the continent without even bothering to consult them. An executive states there were numerous visits to Jamestown and extensive research was done. What is unstated is that in all of these efforts, there was no interest in travelling a few more hours to talk with the Powhatan Nation, the people closest to the Pocahontas reality (3, Shepard).

As the playwright Howarth researched the history of the woman known as Pocahontas, and relied heavily on the scholarship of Helen Rountree. He did not want to reiterate and reinforce the white culture's version of the story about an Indian Princess converting to the English way of life. This tale resonated of servitude hidden in a love story and Howarth wanted a play that served the Powhatan's perspective of their history and legendary heroes.

Howarth traveled to Roanoke Isle in Virginia to view a celebration of the colonization. The pageantry of the English costuming and white man's view struck him. Howarth wanted to capture the idea of the historical pageant within his play rather create a simple drama, limited to specific moment.

He did not focus on the political message of the play. Howarth focused mainly on theatre's primary force of the actor/audience relationship to enable the audience to become part of the play. The journey of the audience through the real story prevailed as the goal of the playwright; the secondary thread of the political message did not interest Howarth. Nor did Howarth think about his target audience. Fundamentally he hoped to use his craftsmanship to service the ideas of Chief Roy.

Chief Roy envisioned a larger outcome of the play and intended an impact on Disney Studio and a small percentage of their audience (Personal Interview, Howarth).

The Chief wanted David Amram, a world-renowned composer and musician to write the music, an integral part of this production. Amram previously worked with and accompanied many Native American performers in the past. The Chief felt Amram could bring a respectful and authentic perspective to the music. Throughout his career, Amram created music learned from native peoples from Alaska to Brazil (Personal Interview, Howarth). Amram works such as: *Trail of Beauty* (commissioned and premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra) and *Honor Song for Sitting Bull* captured the sound and spirit of traditional native songs and chants. His contribution to *The One Called Pocahontas* as musical consultant included the use of his of *Taos*, first movement from *Travels for Trumpet and Orchestra* and *Introduction* from *Honor Song for Sitting Bull*.

Kim Hunter, the musical director, not only incorporated the music of David Amram, but also worked with the soloist within the play *The One Called Pocahontas*, and coached the vocalists for the pre-show musical entertainment. She felt the music assisted with the telling of the story and made the whole event more entertaining (Personal Interview, Hunter). Hunter, a member of the Powhatan Renape Nation, obtained a Master's Degree from Temple University in Music Performance and freelanced as a vocal artist. For ten years she worked in the New Jersey public school system. Qualified with her background in education and music and dedicated to the production, she found herself acting as the stage manager as well. She found the



process of educating the general public exciting. For she believed the truth interested most people (Personal Interview, Hunter).

Howarth did not intentionally write propaganda from a Native American point of view, his aim remained to dramatically recreate authentic history. He used very straightforward dramatic techniques. He did not consciously create a play with ritualistic theatre in mind, however after reflecting, he admits more ritualistic than realistic attributes in his play. Howarth's wanted to show the struggle, not necessarily make an impact on the audience. To him the interest of the play lies in the human condition (Personal Interview, Howarth).

The play performed on August 2, 3 and 4, 1996 at the Powhatan Renape Nation's reservation in Rancocas, New Jersey. The Powhatan Renape Nation's website describes the production as:

Presented by the members of the Powhatan Renape Nation, this original production presented the accurate version of the events of Pocahontas's life, unlike Disney's gross misrepresentation of historical facts. This play provided insight and information which is not widely available and at times, very distorted. (1, Powhatan Renape Nation's Website)

The audience sat around the traditional performance mound on the grounds of the Powhatan Renape Nation's reservation. As the central performance mound on the reservation, visiting Native Americans from Canada to South America performed there, as well as the Renape-Powhatan Nation. Performances in this space include competitions, demonstrations and rituals in the form of traditional dance (such as hoop and shawl dancing), music (including drums and flute) and theatre (the vocal form of storytelling). However, at the end of the ritual blessing ceremony that begins

every performance on the performance mound, the small hill under the sky on these performance days hosted the production of *The One Called Pocahontas*.

Chief Roy Crazy Horse welcomed the audience and stated the ritual and historic importance of the play, thus setting a sanctified and authentic spirit and tone of the event. Next a member of the tribe canted the traditional blessing showing reverence for the spirits for allowing this event. Then the excited tribe members in the audience became the actors and the play commenced. The actors performed in the round using simple props and period costuming for both the English and Native American characters as they changed from the people of this generation to historical characters. Set pieces revealed mood and tone. The action of the play required many transitions through time and space so a permanent set did not inhibit these transitions. The actors used microphones to combat the open-air venue. The play incorporated traditional Native American music and dance. This production provided the nine hundred-audience members (during the course of the weekend) a performance, which combined music, dance and theatre creating a compelling, educational and dramatic event.

The inclusion of a chorus incorporated children into the production. The young spectators easily identified with the children in the show. Seeing children their own age connected the children in the audience to the action. With the exception of the Oak Tree Spirit, the play used realistic characters, instead of allegorical ones, providing examples of people with reasonable motivations for their actions. The play incorporated characters based on historically real people such as Matoaka, Iopassus, Captain Samuel Argall, Chief Powhatan, John Rolfe, Opechancanough, King James I

and Thomas Rolfe. To portray the characters accurately the actors and directors researched the actual people; the goal of authenticity emphasized over artistic creativity.

In this play, Jeff, a young modern boy play-acted with his friends then becomes interested in the story of the Indian Princess. Soon he becomes part of the story as he stepped from the chorus to fill minor roles. The wise Oak Tree Spirit acts as narrator and teacher of the myth.

The story centered on the young Powhatan woman Matoaka, the one called Pocahontas. One Paramount Chief named Iopassus attempted to appease the English and avoid war but ultimately betrays Matoaka and Powhatan. Captain Samuel Argall represented the intentions of the English in dominating and oppressing the Native Americans. Matoaka's father, named Powhatan, held the position of Paramount Chief of the Powhatans. John Rolfe, a sympathetic English tobacco farmer, fell in love with Pocahontas and gave her the advice to appease the English. Openchancaough, Powhatan's brother, advocated war to reclaim the land from the English. King James I of England played a small role in the story by meeting with Matoaka in London. The King needed assurances from Matoaka about her son's intentions of claiming land in the New World of America. Matoaka's son, named Young Thomas Rolfe, completed the list of historical characters in the play.

*The One Called Pocahontas* begins with children on a picnic purchasing "Pocahontas Popsicles" from an ice cream vendor. The children become inspired to reenact the story of Pocahontas saving John Smith's life. The Oak Tree Spirit emerges and tells the children about the true Matoaka, the child known as

Pocahontas. Matoaka enters and leads them in a dance. She becomes one of them and then slips away leaving the children to dance on their own. Then the Oak Tree Spirit begins to clear up the confusion about the life of Matoaka, the one called Pocahontas. The Oak Tree Spirit tells the story of Matoaka's historic capture.

Captain Samuel Argall enters and forms an arrangement with Iopassus, the chief of the Patomac, to kidnap Matoaka. Captain Argall outlines the injustices he perceives Powhatan committed against the English. Iopassus tries to explain to Argall the relationship between a chief and his people. Argall remains convinced that Chief Powhatan wields tyrannical power over his people. Argall extorts Iopassus with the threat of the English wrath verses the friendship of the English to manipulate the Patomac Chief. Iopassus agrees to help Argall and accepts a copper kettle to seal the arrangement.

Matoaka enters and boards Captain Argall's ship unaware of the danger. She, curious about the vessel, asks many questions, thus inspiring a dialogue with Captain Samuel Argall. Argall sends one of the children to Powhatan to make his ransom demands for the release of his daughter, Matoaka. Meanwhile Matoaka's fear swells. She experiences mounting anxiety that eventually causes her to collapse petrified on the floor.

The Oak Tree Spirit tells the chorus of children about Powhatan, the Paramount Chief. The Oak Tree Spirit recalls how the Chief initially pitied the English and sent food to the starving settlement. The Chief wanted friendship with the English and to learn to use their gunpowder to fight the Monacans and

Massawomencks. The Oak Tree Spirits tells how the Chief ignored the prophecies warning him of the warriors from the east.

Matoaka sits hunched over in her prison when John Rolfe and Captain Samuel Argall enter arguing. John Rolfe points out that the tribe fulfilled the ransom demands and begs for Matoaka's release. Captain Argall ignores Rolfe's pleas for Matoaka and meets with Openchancanough, the brother of Powhatan.

Samuel Argall makes more demands on the Powhatan people and does not discuss the release of Matoaka. Tension between the men elevates when Powhatan demands the same respect that the English bestowed on a King. Then Argall retreats and the Matoaka screams from inside her prison.

Matoaka argues with John Rolfe about the preparation of her food. She finds the food inedible and Rolfe shows genuine concern and insists she must eat. Captain Argall enters and states her father, Chief Powhatan, turned his back on the negotiations, in retaliation Argall withholds her food.

Argall then announces she must serve another purpose if he can not manipulate Powhatan with Matoaka's life. He then plans to convert her to his religion. Part of Argall's mission includes saving the savage soul with Christianity. Captain Argall decides to transform Matoaka into a proper woman by English standards. Argall agrees to let John Rolfe teach her. Rolfe pities the young girl and attempts to reach her with kindness.

They begin to bond as Matoaka teaches Rolfe about traditions of the Native American way. She explains her lineage and how her people do not consider her a Princess because the "Royal" line passes through the mother, not the father.

Therefore, her status equals all others in the tribe even though her father acts as Chief. They discuss the differences in their religions. Even though he displays tolerance for her ideology he continues her conversion to Christianity.

Meanwhile, Opechancanough, weary of the small raids his people make against the English, plans to unite all of the Native Americans to fight and conquer the English settlers. Opechancanough can not fathom another way to drive the English back to the sea that brought them.

In the next scene John Rolfe confesses his deep feelings for Matoaka. He explains his wealthy financial status as a tobacco farmer. He draws a parallel between his wealth and the security provided to a woman married to a great hunter. Matoaka comprehends his status in English society. Rolfe shows compassion for Matoaka's present situation and explains to her that if she consents to marry him, they could live together at his home, not in this prison. Discerning that marriage as an escape from captivity, Matoaka agrees to marry John Rolfe.

The upcoming nuptials between John Rolfe and Matoaka leave Argall unimpressed. He demands a baptism for Rolfe's intended bride. Captain Argall successfully started his missionary work in the New World. Matoaka, with a conversion, Christian name and Christian wedding, demonstrates Argall's impressive work. The Oak Tree Spirit explains Matoaka, baptized as Rebecca, then married Rolfe. The chorus represents a reception by performing a wedding dance, which Matoaka joins, happily reunited with her people. As the dance ends John Rolfe steps forward amidst the Powhatan people to claim his new bride.

Captain Argall faces Opechacanough and informs him that the Natives must change to assimilate to the world the English create in America. Argall demands the Native American respect the morals and authority of the English. He intends for the Natives to learn the English skills in traditional school.

Opechacanough quickly realizes the Natives' fate as mere servants to the English within this new system. In his answer to Argall, Opechacanough states he intends to talk to his people but can not guarantee their compliance to send their children away for school. Sending children away for education contradicts the Native way and might meet with resistance, Opechacanough warns.

Captain Argall, realizing that the schools need better funding, decides to take Matoaka to London for the purpose of displaying her as the reformed savage. This shows the potential accomplishments once properly funded by the Church and Crown. Matoaka does not want to leave her home and argues with John Rolfe, begging him to allow her to stay home. Rolfe soothes her and talks of sharing his homeland with her. Rolfe wants his new wife to meet his family and see the extraordinary things in England. And foremost, Rolfe promises a speedy return to Virginia. With that promise from her husband Matoaka agrees to the trip.

Matoaka meets with King James in English garb. A confusing conversation ensues as the King expresses his concern that Matoaka's child expects to inherit the land in Virginia, as a son of a Princess. Matoaka explains that her people hold no interest in owning land. She further assures the King that her child thinks as she does. Only then does King James proclaim the match between Rolfe and Matoaka worthwhile.

With all of the excitement about Matoaka in England, John Smith attempts to visit her. She refuses to see him and recalls her childhood memories of John Smith. He bullied her people and she found him quite unattractive. Matoaka, frustrated by the crowds making a spectacle of her, tears at her Anglicized clothing until she wears her native dress.

At this point the Oak Tree Spirit reveals to the children in the chorus that Matoaka never saved John Smith's life, and did not fall in love with him. The Spirit continues by explaining Smith made up the story to brag back in London. The children argue that they saw it in movies and in books, inferring they represent the truth. The Oak Tree Spirit simply asks, "Who wrote those books? Who made those movies?" (26, Howarth).

The moment changes with Opechancanough yelling a war cry. He announces that with the death of Powhatan, he succeeds as the paramount chief. Opechancanough plots to combine the power of all the tribes to defeat the English. He talks of the injustices by the English to the Chickahominy and states unification as the only way to freedom from oppression. Iopassus does not want war with the English and refuses to join with Opechancanough. Opechancanough then warns Iopassus the English intend to swallow up his people.

Back in England Matoaka wears only her Native clothing and refuses more meetings. This infuriates Argall. He needs her co-operation for a meeting with the bishops in London. This meeting insures more funding for the "reprogramming" of the Native Americans. Matoaka shows signs of physical ailments and begs to return



home. Rolfe assures her they plan to travel home soon. She sits and grows weaker and weaker.

Iopassus decides to join with Opechancanough. Chief Iopassus resigns to fight the English after an incident with a messenger from his tribe. Iopassus sent the messenger to the English without the corn that the soldiers demanded from his people. The English, upset at not receiving the corn, returned the messenger to his home mutilated.

Opechacanough lets out a cry of pleasure and the drums play as the chorus chants the names of the tribes who join the fight against the English. A war dance begins and continues during the following scene between Matoaka and John Rolfe.

Rolfe and Matoaka attempt to sail home. Matoaka falls desperately ill. Rolfe begs her to disembark so that she can recover before they continue the long and difficult journey across the Atlantic. Matoaka insists she needs to return home to heal from her illness. She fears dying away from home and does not want burial in the ground in England. Rolfe carries her off of the ship and the dance of war changes to a dance of lament.

The Oak Tree Spirit sums up the death of Matoaka. She died in England and her remains lie buried there. Next came the uprising of Opechancanough and all of the Indians of the Powhatan Confederacy against the English settlers. The English outnumbered the Indians "like grains of sand across the beach" (31, Howarth). And the lament continues and the lights fade.

One of the goals of Chief Crazy Horse remains to force the Disney Studios to recognize their responsibility to history. The noted absence of the invited Disney

Studio executives meant that the play did not attain this goal. Nevertheless, the tribe, in attempting to take on the mass marketed powerhouse of Disney, attained valuable and perhaps unexpected results. The play answered art with art and drew attention to the distortion of Disney's story of Pocahontas in their efforts to make the film profitable and mainstream. The poignant use of the invented product of "Pocahontas Popsicles" which sparks the children's interest in her life at the beginning of the play illuminates how Disney transformed this noble woman into a cheap marketing device.

The play also provided the pro-feminist, pro-Native American, pro-Environmental and pro-multicultural message where Disney failed. Instead of projecting a sexy Hollywood ideal of a woman motivated to please a western man as in the film, Nicole Brown a young member of the tribe play Matoaka. Her physical appearance and age seemed both authentic and realistic for the character she portrayed. Matoaka took charge of her life, even as a prisoner, her strength as a woman endured.

To uphold the pro-Environmental theme the tribe set the play outside so that the audience could enjoy nature rather than artificially recreate it for the stage. This sacred outdoor environment added an essential and historic quality to the work and connected the audience to the same earth revered by the Powhatan forefathers.

The multicultural message came through the inner racial marriage of Matoaka and John Rolfe. That union showed the amount of compromise and tolerance necessary to understand people of different backgrounds. The intolerance and uncompromising people of the play faced war and destruction. The Native American characters held to their culture, showing that pro-multiculturalism means pride in

one's people as well as a tolerance for others. The motivations of the characters included both positive and negative traits in people from the different cultures. This showed that all groups of people consist of good and bad individuals promoting the differences in the cultures and the similarities in the men.

The play showed the perspective of the Native American's. This includes living under siege with the first landing of the Europeans. This comprises some of the American history sanitized and rewritten for the sake of America's nationalism. The atrocities committed against the Native American's remain ignored or white washed and this play showed the beginnings of the disgraceful treatment of the Indians. Furthermore this perspective also outlined the fundamental communal spirit of the tribes. The play exposed more of the spiritual and ideological beliefs of the Native Americans.

While the Chief envisioned the play performed on a year round schedule, he took on something bold and unfamiliar. The Powhatan-Renape Nation did not anticipate the large amount of interest in the play. The task of booking the show for travel and the logistics of a long running season proved an overwhelming task and one that the small, inexperienced staff remained unequipped to handle. The tribe's extensive calendar includes hosting festivals for the public, private ceremonies, youth activities and adult education. This marketing failure underlines the irony of the Disney Studio's making millions while the purely artistic endeavor failed commercially. However, Howarth generously forfeited all copyright claims to the play so it now belongs to the Powhatan Nation and future productions may fulfil its larger purpose.

The play did not reverse the effect of the Disney Studio's movie on the masses of people who saw *Pocahontas*. Nonetheless, for the nine hundred people who did attend the play, *The One Called Pocahontas*, did show the true story of her life and bring the history of an oppressed people to the forefront through a combination the arts of theatre, music and Native American dance. One eight-year-old audience member considered the play *The One Called Pocahontas* sadder than the movie and said that, because she felt very close to all of the actors; she could better understand the hardships felt by the Indians. The greatest impact she felt from the play remains the impression of what really happened to Pocahontas (Personal Interview, Kim Vargas). Therefore the potent empathy derived from the immediate connection between the human thought and action through the performer's reality and the audience's prevailed. This comes from the sensory experience that affects the internal reality of the individual (2, Gardner). The play communicated the history and spirit of Pocahontas even to young members of the audience.

The process for Howarth began with a desire to deliver a well-crafted product. This resulted in a historically accurate play, which bolstered the pride of the Native Americans, involved with the production. This bolstered pride illuminates another success that came out of *The One Called Pocahontas*. The collaborative process of theatre became a communal celebration where the Tribe and Caucasian participants expressed and explored the feeling of exploitation. The play became a non-threatening, public and artistic rebuttal generated and performed by oppressed voices. The result of taking this action proved cathartic for the tribe. Hunter points out that "the community people [of the tribe] were proud and the overall experience

was exciting” (Personal Interview, Hunter). Everyone involved owned a sense of the community and pride in their shared heroic history. They reclaimed their daughter and their humanity. This harkens back to the Native American ritual theatre, which reenacts myths as a positive force to reunify the tribe. This Native theatre fortifies a sense of community.

## Chapter Six

### The Conclusion

“One people in America who did not object to theatre but incorporated it into their daily ritual were the American Indians” (464, Roach). Therefore the theatre becomes an innate part of a culture and a natural form of communal expression. The play *The One Called Pocahontas* successfully taught the authentic story of the life of Pocahontas and presenting the view of the oppressed Native Americans. This view of the glorious progress of the white settlers and American “utopia” often overshadows the expense of human suffering paid by the Native Americans.

The medium of theatre reframes perceptions. Specific to this case study, the play used the medium to reshape the pro-Native American, pro-multicultural, pro-environmental and pro-feminist motif where Disney failed. Theatre offers a sensory experience that encourages an audience to evaluate a perceived reality. Theatre creates a fantasy. This fantasy world allows an audience to prepare for their own life experience.

Human beings relate and communicate using sensory qualities. These sensory qualities, referred to as submodalities include visual (sights, images, pictures), audio (music, noise, sounds and tones), kinesthetic (physical feelings of the body, sensations and emotions), olfactory (smells) and gustatory (tastes). Human experience of the submodalities creates mental patterns of the external world. Then humans create and limit individual internal logic through these experiences. From

this comes the use of language that creates human reality. Furthermore, with more experiences individuals link an external event (person, action or behavior) with an internal representation (or thought). These links continue over the course of a lifetime and, while they may support unreasonable, irrational, unproductive or invalid ideas, these links shape the internal environment. Therefore any reframe must provide novel, new information based on a different or unknown perception of the experience (2, Gardner).

Accordingly, *The One Called Pocahontas* provided an external sensory experience. The play targeted the sensory experiences of the visual (sets, actors, costume pieces and performance mound), the audio (music and language) and kinesthetic (stage movement, dancing and catharsis). This action directly affected the submodalities and the audience collectively experienced the phenomenon of sound, sight and sensations within the fantasy of the play. The theatre provides these immediate and three-dimensional sensory experiences by which the audience members shape (or in this case reshape) individual internal environments. The play provided a sensory experience more overwhelming than other traditional forms of studying the history of Pocahontas. The play granted the audience the immediate tools to challenge their preconceived ideas of Pocahontas stimulated by the film. Although an ephemeral art, theatre affects the ability to witness external behavior and create internal logic.

Even though *The One Called Pocahontas* did not counteract the massive effect of the movie on generations of children, this task proves simply impossible. The very nature of theatre (even as popular culture such as *Cats*, *Les Miserables*, or

*The Lion King*) prohibits it from reaching the mass audiences film reaches. However the collaboration required amongst artists and then integrating the audience into that collaboration makes theatre a viable option for interpersonal communication.

The live stage experience of *The One Called Pocahontas* achieved a more important success. The theatre used the raw material of life and history to overcome oppression and promote the Powhatan tribe's pride and power. The theatre's most effective force remains the personal involvement of the audience.

This identification process between live performers and audience continues to impact every audience member at every performance. Thus theatre empowers communities, inspires change and educates. The Powhatan people implored people to think for themselves and look at the history; they chose theatre as a means to affect social change.

The Disney movie used the lyrics "You think the only people who are people, are the people who look and think like you, but if you walk the footsteps of a stranger you learn things you never knew you never knew" in the song *Colors of the Wind*. However, the film did not bother to teach the things we never knew we never knew, such as the true history of Pocahontas. Instead, the movie audiences received the same stereotypical themes and gross historical inaccuracies about Native Americans Hollywood perpetuated for decades. These themes include either the unremitting and vindictive barbarism of the "savage," or the notion of the wise and just Indian, living in innocent harmony with nature but doomed by the advance of Civilization (464-465, Roach).



Chief Roy Crazy Horse delivered the following speech on opening night of

*The One Called Pocahontas* cited on the Powhatan Renape Nation website.

The Powhatan Renape Nation welcomes all of you to this event of sharing. We do so in the same spirit which our people felt when visitors came from other lands almost 400 years ago.

Everywhere we look amongst us today and see family and friends. Because we are confident in our friendship with each other, we are able to talk about the truth without fear that our friendship will be damaged.

Sharing, friendship and truth are powerful qualities which make a strong foundation on which we can build our future together.

This play started to take shape when we heard that the Disney Studios were to make a movie about us, a movie entitled *Pocahontas*. We immediately wrote Mr. Roy Disney to offer our assistance.

We had already been subjected to 400 years of lies and distortions and we thought this was a good chance to cooperate. Disney wrote us back that our assistance was not needed—they had already decided just what they were going to do.

We are very disappointed, amazed, and angry that Disney would be so insensitive to the feelings, circumstances and history of the living members of the Powhatan Nation—one of the most devastated nations on this continent. We had quite an exchange of correspondence: Disney said he had artistic license allowing him to entertain, uplift, and inspire without regard to the truth.

And so it was that another generation was spoon-fed one of America's fondest myths—at our expense. That was when we decided to do this play, our own modest effort to use our artistic license without damage to the truth. Disney can have his destructive myths, and we can have our truth and friendship.

Again, our nation welcomes you to the Rankokus Indian Reservation and to this event.

Today we simply set out the truth as we know it so that we might use the past as a foundation for understanding the present, and from that foundation, to move on as partners into the future.

## **Implications**

The results of the paper imply that theatre serves as a viable teaching medium. Carefully crafted agenda in the form of political theatre reach an audience and can countermand the effects of popular culture, albeit on a small but meaningful scale.

The Native American use of story-telling and ritual theatre in their lives demonstrates the original American Theatre. The Native Americans use dance, costuming and music in combination to communicate myths of their heritage. Hoop Dancing illustrates one example of the combinations of the arts; this incorporates several colored hoops as symbolic sets and costume accessories for the single dancer telling the story.

This affinity for theatre made the production of a play, namely *The One Called Pocahontas*, a natural platform for the tribe's protest to the Disney Studio. The Powhatan Renape tribe did not originate the idea of using theatre to further political and social agendas. However in the case such of the play *The One Called Pocahontas*, the collaborative process included the added effect of uniting and activating a wounded community. Communal strength, which grows from the experience of publicly reclaiming history through performance and multi-sensory means, as the Powhatan tribe discovered.

## **Future Applications**

Future applications of the study could include a statistical analysis of the effects for both the audience and the performers for the film and the play. A future collaborative effort to revive and restage the play giving more results, especially if a

dramaturg could work with the production. This also allows the Powhatan tribe documentation of the process.

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**Appendix**  
**Interview Questions and Glossary**

## Questions for Musical Director

### *The One Called Pocahontas*

Approximately how many people saw the play?

Nine hundred people.

What were the production values (simple description) of the sets, costumes and lights?

Performed outside on the mound (in the round). Simple props, limited costumes, interchangeable microphones.

Did the play connect with the audience? Did it change opinions about the life of Pocahontas?

Yes, we hope so.

N/A

How did the play succeed? How did it fail?

It told the true story.

The shortcomings were we did not anticipate the large amount of interest in the play—more extensive marketing.

What inspired you to work on this play to educate people about Pocahontas? What about the medium of Theatre made it an attractive option for a political message?

The Disney movie.

Giving true information in a non-threatening manner to all ages.

Was this effective? Why?

Yes. People told other people.

Describe the way in which music was used.

More entertaining—to assist with telling the story.

Who was your primary viewing audience?

Families.

What aspects of traditional storytelling were used? What aspects of modern theatre were used?

Native instruments, music and dance were used.

Flashbacks—present-past-present.

What effect do you feel the play had on the audience?



Positive. Most people are interested in knowing the truth.

What effect did the process have on you?

It was exciting to educate the general audience.

What was the effect on those involved? How would you define the experience for those people?

The community people were proud. Excited.

What is the future of the play? Why/Why not?

Some day it may be a traveling show.

## Questions for the Audience

### *The One Called Pocahontas*

Describe the play, the plot, the characters, etc.

Describe the play in terms of theatre: Did a blessing ceremony occur?

I don't remember.

Was it performed on the performance mound, inside or outside?

Outside

Was it performed in a theatre?

No.

Were there sets?

Yes.

What were the costumes like?

Indians-Leather, brown Indian garb

English-Period Costuming

Is there anything else that made an impression?

Had you seen the Disney movie Pocahontas?

Yes.

How was the movie similar to the play, if at all?

Some of the same characters were mentioned.

How did the movie differ from the play?

Pocahontas was captured and she did not love John Smith.

Did the play change your mind about what you saw in the movie? Why or why not?

Well the English people were definitely not as nice as in the movie.

Was the play effective in teaching you about Pocahontas? Why or why not?

Yes, because it told the true story.

Did you feel a connection to the actors in the play? Why or why not?

Yes, because you were very close to all the actors and could feel how they felt.

Which story did you prefer the movie or the play? Why?  
Movie, it's happier.

Which had a greater impact on you, the play or the movie? Why?  
The play because it was true and it shows the hardships that really happened.

Why do you think the Powhatan's did the play?  
To inform people of what really happened.

Would you have done a play for the same reason or would you have done something else? Why?  
Yes because the public should know what really happened.

What did you enjoy most about the play? The movie? Why?  
The costumes.

How old were you when you saw the play? The movie?  
Eight years old.

What made the greatest impact on you from play? Why?  
How different it was from the movie.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Glossary of Terms

**Hoop Dance:** A story telling aesthetic which combines dance, music and the use of large hoops as props to relay images and symbols to the audience.

**Iopassus:** A district chief and an uncle of Pocahontas.

**Opechancanough:** The brother to Chief Powhatan, who later became his successor.

**Pocahontas (Matoaka):** The daughter of Chief Powhatan.

**Powhatan:** The nation of Algonquian-speaking Native Americans.

**Powhatan (Wahunsunacock):** Chief of the Powhatan tribe and the father of Pocahontas.

**Ritual Theatre:** "Theatre-in-life" events that combine ceremonies (weddings, snake dances, and initiations) with theatricality (costuming, dramatic text, music).

**Uttamatonkkin:** A priestly advisor to Chief Powhatan.

**Weroance:** Another name for the position of Chief.