



EP57 - The Orientalist History (and Future) of *Aladdin*

Before we start today, a little warning. No, it's not content per say, but I have a little cold. Hopefully it doesn't bother your ears too much. Here we go.

You may have seen it: for months there was back and forth in news articles and Twitter threads. When it came to Disney's 2019 live action remake of *Aladdin*, who should be playing Aladdin and who should be playing Jasmine? The movie had a worldwide casting call: from India and Abu Dhabi to Egypt and London, the film was looking for two leads with Middle Eastern or Indian descent in their 20s who could sing, act, and dance. But the studio kept saying they couldn't find anyone.¹

Then the arguments started. One side would suggest Bollywood celebrities. The other side would say that it would be wrong to cast an Indian actor for a Middle Eastern role. And then there was the argument that the casting call was insinuating that all Brown people - whether from India or the Middle East - are interchangeable. And then you have to add another element to all of this: if you read the original *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, then you'll know that the original text of *Aladdin* itself actually takes place in China.²

And here's where everything gets, yes, confusing, but it also leads to an important point: *Aladdin* is a story that may have its origins in China, but look through its adaptations from books to stage to screen, *Aladdin* - as we understand it today - is a hodgepodge of countries and cultures, and as such it has always been centered around orientalism and racism.

I'm Morgan Jaffe and this is Burst your Bubble

Now today, we're going to really focus on the 1992 *Aladdin* from Disney, and not the 2019 remake. And to look at the 1992 cartoon, you really need to start with *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*.

¹ Oppenheim, M. (2017, September 6). *Disney accused of whitewashing after creating role for white actor out of thin air*. The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/disney-aladdin-white-actor-billy-magnuss-en-whitewashing-racism-backlash-response-a7933201.html>. (Web. May 9, 2019).

² Razzaque, A. (2017, August 10). *Who was the "real" Aladdin? From Chinese to Arab in 300 Years*. Ajam Media Collective. <https://ajammc.com/2017/08/10/who-was-the-real-aladdin/>. (Web. May 10, 2019).

The stories in *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* were made up of Arabic texts taken from Persian, Indian, Pakistani, and Iranian folklore³ that evolved out of a strong oral tradition of storytelling.⁴

When you think of *A Thousand and One Nights*, Ali Baba, Sinbad, and Aladdin tend to be the most famous ones - but none of them were in the original Arabic collection.⁵ All of those examples, *Aladdin* included, were added later by Antoine Galland, a French translator, in the 18th century.^{6 7} In fact, "Aladdin hasn't been found in any authentic Arabic manuscripts predating [Galland]."⁸ See - *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* didn't have a thousand and one stories. In fact, there were fewer than 300. That's quite the difference. So Galland added his own and others.⁹

Galland said he heard the story of *Aladdin* from a Syrian man named Hanna Diyab,¹⁰ but it's hard to tell how much of the tale came from Diyab and how much was made up by Galland himself.¹¹ So, in the most simple of terms, the original *Aladdin* first made popular by Galland, tells the story of a poor Chinese tailor's son, a Muslim¹² who, when approached by an evil sorcerer¹³ pretending to be his uncle,¹⁴ is tricked into retrieving an oil lamp from a vault, only to find a jinni in the lamp and end up marrying a princess.

¹⁵

But we're also talking about jinni as in j-i-n-n-i. And the jinni is taken from *Arabic Tales of a Jinn*, which is an Islamic term. The jinn aren't really genies as we think of them now. They're more of a combination of both good and evil, a mix between angels and humans. A jinn is really a slave, forced to do whatever its master bids it.

³ Assaf, L. (2017, October 5). *Aladdin: Racism for children*. 7iber | حبر. <https://www.7iber.com/culture/aladdin-racism-for-children-2/>. (Web. May 9, 2019).

⁴ Gardner, L. (2003, July 16). *Pure genies*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/jul/16/theatre.artsfeatures>. (Web. May 9, 2019.)

⁵ Razzaque, A. (2017, September 14). *Who "wrote" Aladdin? The forgotten Syrian storyteller*. Ajam Media Collective. <https://ajamc.com/2017/09/14/who-wrote-aladdin/>. (Web. May 10, 2019.)

⁶ Khan, A. (2017, November). *Disney's "Aladdin" controversy: Inherent racism and whitewashing*. Brown Girl Magazine. <https://browngirlmagazine.com/2017/11/aladdin/> (Web. May 9, 2019.)

⁷ Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*

⁸ Horta, P. L., & Seale, Y. (2018). *Aladdin: A new translation*. Liveright. Page IX.

⁹ Gardner, *Pure genies*.

¹⁰ Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*

¹¹ Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*

¹² Mansky, J. (2019, February 21). *Why Is the genie in 'Aladdin' blue?* Smithsonian Magazine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/why-genie-aladdin-blue-180971536/>. (Web. May 10, 2019.)

¹³ Khan, *Disney's "Aladdin" controversy: Inherent racism and whitewashing*.

¹⁴ Horta & Seale, *Aladdin: A new translation*.

¹⁵ Gardner, *Pure genies*.



Now we think of genies as being housed in lamps, and that's because Arabain magicians would connect a jinn to either a lamp or a magical ring. But jinn didn't have to grant wishes, and certainly not three wishes to whoever rubbed a magic lamp. In fact, granting wishes came from gratitude.¹⁶ There's also some bits that stand out to me in particular, like how the jinni gives unlimited wishes to *whoever* rubs the lamp, or how Aladdin's mother is alive, or how Aladdin is "cruel, stubborn, and rebellious,"¹⁷ or a weird part where a random Jewish merchant swindles Aladdin and then is angry at himself for not swindling him more.¹⁸

And for Galland's version, I couldn't tell if we're actually supposed to like Aladdin or not. He's not the greatest towards his mother, and he's very possessive over the princess. For example, the story's plot is different than the 1992 adaptation, and the princess marries a different man. But, angry because the princess had been promised to him, Aladdin has his jinni take the princess and her groom - and on their wedding night before they can consummate the marriage. Aladdin does this multiple nights in a row, taking the princesses' actual husband out of their wedding bed and then he sleeps naked next to her instead - though with a sword between them to prove he had no intentions of "offending her honor," as the translation reads.¹⁹

Now I'm going to argue that any person would be terrified to be magically taken to a completely different location, their partner vanished till the next morning, and a stranger naked in bed with a sword to prove they're not going to hurt me. But hey, that's just my opinion. The stress of all of this ends the original marriage, but the princess still agrees to marry Aladdin later, and it seems like they're both happy about it. And the original sorcerer who tricked Aladdin, telling him he was his uncle - he does come back into the story, trying to take the lamp. He fails. Then his brother tries- he also fails. And Aladdin and the princes live helpfully ever after. So that's it - that's our famous story.

Within a couple of years Galland's texts were published in English.²⁰ Since *Aladdin* was first set not in an Arabic country or India, but in China, illustrations from the Victorian period show Aladdin with a Manchurian hairstyle - a shaved head with a long, braided queue.²¹

¹⁶ Gardner, *Pure genies*.

¹⁷ Horta & Seale, *Aladdin: A new translation*, p IX

¹⁸ Horta & Seale, *Aladdin: A new translation*, p 33.

¹⁹ Horta & Seale, *Aladdin: A new translation*, p 56.

²⁰ Gardner, *Pure genies*.

²¹ Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*

People seem confused that not only was the original *Aladdin* set in China, but that Aladdin was also a Chinese Muslim. But even today, 10 of the 56 recognized ethnic groups in the People's Republic of China are predominantly Muslim, mostly in the Western region.²² We also see Northern Africa come up in Galland's version - the evil sorcerer pretending to be Aladdin's uncle is from Northern Africa and the Maghreb.²³ But I think it's also important to point out that the Maghreb is in the northwestern part of Africa, covering present day countries like Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and more. So yes, closer to China than Galland's birthplace of France, but let's not try and pretend like China is a short travelling distance to any of those countries I just listed in Northwestern Africa. But I suppose that's the magic of having a jinni in *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*.

But I don't see the merging of all these "faraway" lands and travelling back and forth as magical. I see it as a Frenchman lumping together all of what lay past the Western world. At the heart of it all, *Aladdin* and its many adaptations are nothing more than the epitome of orientalism. From Galland to Disney, *Aladdin* is a Western creation, combining China, India, and all of the Middle East, like no single Middle Eastern country is indistinguishable from the next. All of this is because Galland - the Western man who brought *Aladdin* to the Western world - was French. What he created was a fantastical idea of what he thought made up "The Orient."

"The Orient," referring, well really to anything west of Western Europe: the near East, the Middle East, and the Far East.²⁴ Orientalism generalized a whole part of the world, acting as if numerous countries and cultures and even religions were all the same because they were different than the white, Christian, Western world. Even worse, it marked the entire Eastern world as barbaric and backward. And that orientalism didn't stop with Galland - it continued all the way through to Disney.

The 1992 *Aladdin* is something to watch. Where are these characters? Are they Indian? Are they Arab? From the architecture to the snake charmers and skin tones everything blends together. For example, it looks like the royal palace is based off of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India.²⁵ It's said that background scenes were based on Persian miniatures and Victorian-era orientalist illustrations, as well as photos of Isfahan, Iran, taken by the film's layout supervisor Rasoul Azdani, an Iranian animator at Disney and namesake of

²² Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*

²³ Horta & Seale, *Aladdin: A new translation*.

²⁴ Mansky, *Why Is the genie in 'Aladdin' blue?*

²⁵ Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*



Razoul, Agrabah's captain of the guards.²⁶ And as such, the film becomes a one giant orientalist - and racist - hybrid, combining South Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. It's all incredibly ignorant.

["Arabian Nights" starts to play.]

The opening song, "Arabian Nights," starts off the whole film. But while the lyrics now read:

Audio Clip:

Oh I come from a land/ from a faraway place /
Where the caravan camels roam. /
Where it's flat and immense /
And the heat is intense. /
It's barbaric but hey it's home.

They originally went:

Audio Clip:

Ooh I come from a land /
From a faraway place /
Where the caravan camels roam. /
Where they cut off your ear /
If they don't like your face. /
It's barbaric but hey it's home."²⁷

So yeah, if you didn't catch that, there was originally a line that said: "Where they cut off your ear / If they don't like your face. / It's barbaric but hey it's home."²⁸ So the line "It's barbaric but hey it's home" stayed.

²⁶ Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*

²⁷ Fox, D. J. (1993, July 10). *Disney will alter song in 'Aladdin': Movies: Changes were agreed upon after Arab-Americans complained that some lyrics were racist. Some Arab groups are not satisfied.* Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-07-10-ca-11747-story.html>. (Web. May 12, 2019.)

²⁸ Fox, D. J. (1993, July 10). *Disney will alter song in 'Aladdin': Movies: Changes were agreed upon after Arab-Americans complained that some lyrics were racist. Some Arab groups are not satisfied.* Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-07-10-ca-11747-story.html>. (Web. May 12, 2019.)



As Jack G. Shaheen, a writer and scholar who focused on ethnic and Arabic stereotypes wrote in an article for *The L.A. Times* in 1992, "To say a distinct culture is 'barbaric' is to show prejudice and accept stereotypes. The song slanders an entire people, setting the tone of the movie. The lyrics and successive scenes inform viewers that Arabs are not like us: they are uncouth. It's acceptable for a songwriter to single out a villain, but the moral obligation is to represent an individual, not his race. Such is not the case with 'Aladdin,' which, like hundreds of Hollywood features, bombards audiences with repulsive depictions."²⁹

And I have to agree with Shaheen. As *Aladdin* starts, we see that multiple characters within the city of Agrabah have missing teeth, that merchants will lie and tell you anything to sell you a product, and that if you steal bread like our hero Aladdin, you'll get to have ten or so guards spending their day chasing you, threatening to either cut off your hands or cut off your head, or both. We also see snake charmers, sword swallows, and people walking on hot coals. They're all there to entertain the children in the audience and build this fantasy world, but it also stereotypes multiple populations of people while also feeling like a freak show of sorts.

And truly, whether it's Jafar or Aladdin, we have what Shaheen would call the scheming Arab. It doesn't matter that Aladdin's our good guy - he's a street rat who steals from the market and lies to Jasmine so that he can marry her. Is he really all that better than Jafar?

I also never understood both when I was a kid and even now if Jafar's clothing covered his neck or not. Hear me out. Because of the coloring, I can't tell if it's just another piece of tan colored cloth or just his neck skin. Like the color is a skin color option, but it's also different from Jafar's face. It's like when someone puts makeup on for the first time, and they just don't know what they're doing. And I just want to yell at the TV, "blend, Jafar! Blend! Eyeliner is easy for you, but this isn't?" So if you're listening and you know if it's in fact his neck, or a piece of cloth, or what - let me know. It's haunted me for decades.

Anyway, whether it's the people in the market, or my issues with Jafar, clearly Shaheen wasn't the only one who took issue with Disney's depictions. Though the next example is a lot more credible than I am.

²⁹ Shaheen, J. G. (1992, November 21). *Arab caricatures deface disney's "Aladdin."* Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-12-21-ca-1707-story.html>. (Web. May 12, 2019.)

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee met with Disney representatives shortly after the film was released in theatres.³⁰ The committee asked that the lyrics in “Arabian Nights” be changed, but they also asked for a different accent for a merchant who threatens to - and almost cuts off princess Jasmine’s hand - before Aladdin saves her.³¹

Audio Clip:

Merchant: You better be able to pay for that.

Jasmine: Pay?

Merchant: No one steals from my cart.

Jasmine: Well I’m sorry sir. I don’t have any money.

Merchant: Thief!

Jasmine: Please! If you let me go to the palace I can get some from the sultan.

Merchant: Do you know what the penalty is for stealing?

Jasmine: No! No, please!

Aladdin: Thank you, kind sir. I’m so glad you found her. I’ve been looking all over for you.

Jasmine (whispering): What are you doing?

Aladdin (whispering): Just play along.

Merchant: You know this girl?

Aladdin: Sadly yes. She is my sister. She’s a little crazy.

Merchant: She said she knew the sultan.

Aladdin (laughs): She thinks the monkey is the sultan.

Abu: *Chatters.*

Jasmine: Oh, wise sultan. How may I serve you?

Abu: *Chatters.*

Disney offered a deal: it would change the “Arabian Nights” lyrics if the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee would not share its objections to the press before the *Aladdin* homevideo release.³² See, it was about money. The VHS release for *Aladdin* - that went on to make them millions of dollars. If the Committee had said something before it went out that might not have been the case. But while the lyrics were

³⁰ Gaillot, A. (2017, July 13). *Disney’s biggest problem isn’t casting, it’s racism*. The Outline. <https://theoutline.com/post/1909/disney-aladdin-remake-casting-racism?zd=1&zi=foioct4g>. (Web. May 9, 2019.)

³¹ Frook, J. E. (1993, July 12). *‘Aladdin’ lyrics altered*. Variety. <https://variety.com/1993/film/news/aladdin-lyrics-altered-108628/>. (Web. May 9, 2019.)

³² Frook, *‘Aladdin’ lyrics altered*.

changed, it's worth noting that the change only came in the VHS release^{33 34} and the worldwide movie release, but it was too late for the screenings of *Aladdin* in the U.S.³⁵ The lyrics also weren't originally changed for the CD release.³⁶ In fact, growing up my siblings and I had that CD, unchanged terrible lines and all.

Don Bustany, the president of the Los Angeles chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee said the change was "...nowhere near adequate, considering the racism depicted in *Aladdin*."³⁷ Yes, *Aladdin*, a film where children need to steal to survive. Where the villains have notably darker skin and exaggerated ethnic features while the heroes have lighter skin, western features, and speak with American accents. *Aladdin*, where everyone - from a common man selling apples at the market to royalty, like the suitor prince Achmed on his way to court Jasmine, is nothing but heartless and short tempered and cruel.

Audio Clip:

Man#1: On his way to the palace, I suppose.

Man#2: Another suitor for the princess.

Kids laugh and then people scream as the suitor almost runs them down.

Suitor: Out of my way, you filthy brats!

Aladdin: Hey! If I was as rich as you, I could afford some manners!

Suitor: Oh! I'll teach you some manners!

The suitor throws Aladdin into the mud.

Aladdin takes place in all of this, created by a group of white men who directed the film and wrote the script and scored the movie. All of that adds up to a view of the world that is simply orientalist and racist.

The creators of *Aladdin* even admitted to changing the name of the city. While *Aladdin* was originally going to take place in Baghdad,³⁸ the film changed the setting, not wanting to be associated with the same Baghdad that Americans would see being in highlights of the nightly news.³⁹

³³ Gardner, *Pure genies*.

³⁴ Anonymous. (1993, July 14). *Opinion | It's racist, but hey, it's disney*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/14/opinion/it-s-racist-but-hey-it-s-disney.html?mtrref=www.google.com&mtrref=www.nytimes.com>. (Web. May 12, 2019.)

³⁵ Giroux, H. A., & Pollock, G. (2010). *The mouse that roared: Disney and the end of innocence* (Updated and Expanded ed.). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. P 105.

³⁶ Giroux & Pollock, *The mouse that roared: Disney and the end of innocence*. P 105.

³⁷ Fox, *Disney Will alter song in 'Aladdin.'*

³⁸ Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*

³⁹ Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*



*Audio Clip:*⁴⁰

Soldier: Missile away!

Bernard Shaw: This is, uh. Something is happening outside. Um...the skies over Baghdad have been illuminated. We're seeing bright flashes going off all over the sky.

John Holliman: The sky continues to be filled with tracers, as the anti aircraft weapons continue to fire. Another huge, loud burst from the ground. More tracers going up into the air, over the city. And um, there's a lot of fire going up and as I said, these bombs continue to come down occasionally on the ground here. There's no sign that uh, any of the, uh, any of the aircraft involved are from Iraq. Not from Iraq, but from the Allied forces.

The location was later changed to the fictional Agrabah because of the first Gulf War.⁴¹ According to John Musker - co writer, director, and producer - he took the letters that make up Baghdad and jumbled them up, creating an anagram for Agrabah.⁴² Sure, Agrabah doesn't have two d's like Baghdad, but that's the story that's been told.

Fictional world of Agrabah or not, Disney's *Aladdin* ignores that at one point *Aladdin* took place in an unnamed Chinese kingdom. Aladdin and Jasmine watching fireworks in China at the end of "A Whole New World" doesn't count. And the 1992 cartoon links Aladdin to the Middle East whether it means to or not because at the end of the day the film was originally supposed to be set in Baghdad.⁴³

But what makes the film orientalist is that everything from multiple countries and cultures gets combined to create Agrabah. Think of how all of the men either wear a fez - which you may see in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, or Northern Africa - or a turban - which could signify a Sikh, a Shia Muslim, or a Sufi scholar. The narrator tells the audience he sells "...the finest merchandise this side of the River Jordan."

Audio Clip:

⁴⁰ CNN. (2011, January 18). CNN: Remembering desert storm, 20 years later [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhrtL_XVv3s. (Web. May 12, 2019.)

⁴¹ Johnson, Z. (2015, October 14). *Disney myths debunked by Ron Clements and John Musker, directors of The Little Mermaid, Aladdin and Hercules*. E! Online. <https://www.eonline.com/uk/news/706239/disney-myths-debunked-by-ron-clements-and-john-musker-directors-of-the-little-mermaid-aladdin-and-hercules>. (Web. May 9, 2019.)

⁴² Johnson, Z. *Disney myths debunked by Ron Clements and John Musker, directors of The Little Mermaid, Aladdin and Hercules*.

⁴³ Razzaque, *Who was the "real" Aladdin?*

Narrator: Welcome to Agrabah. City of mystery. Of enchantment. And of the finest merchandise ever sold - on sale today! Come on down.

We hear “by Allah” instead of “by God” multiple times, tying the world and its characters to Islam. Jasmine's tiger is named Rajah - the title for an Indian monarch. The narrator opens the film with -

Audio Clip: clip

Narrator: *Salaam*, and good evening to you.

- which is Arabic for *hello*. And then there's the casual mentions and depictions of things like *sultan* - an Arabic word for ruler; hummus - typically a Middle Eastern food; and how the sultan sits on a golden throne made of an elephant, which could be linked to Hinduism or Buddhism. It just leaves me with one question: where are we?

If anything, the white creators of the 1992 *Aladdin* got their inspiration from the 1924 *Thief of Baghdad*, starring Douglas Fairbanks, and its 1940 remake, especially the sultan and the evil vizier - who was also named Jaffar.⁴⁴ Both versions of the *Thief of Baghdad*, and then later *Aladdin* as well, mix real places with aspects of a fantasy world. That's how we get the cave of wonders and the genie's parade so we can make way for prince Ali and a magical carpet that can transfer you wherever you want to go in the entire world. That's what happens when you have a room full of white creators imagining a world based on Baghdad. That's what happens when you ignore that a source text has a weird orientalist history. That's what happens when even the voice actors are all white - save for Jasmine's singing voice. It's bound to become a problem fairly quickly. At the very least, it certainly doesn't create an environment for a diverse narrative. Instead it creates an orientalist vision where white men still position themselves to be the center of power - even if they're not technically in the movie.

Take for example how Aladdin was modeled after Tom Cruise^{45 46 47} and voiced by white teen Scott Weinger - aka Steve from *Full House*.

Audio Clip from Full House:

DJ: Steve, hi!

⁴⁴ Razzaque, *Who was the “real” Aladdin?*

⁴⁵ Khan, *Disney's “Aladdin” controversy: Inherent racism and whitewashing.*

⁴⁶ Giroux & Pollock, *The mouse that roared: Disney and the end of innocence.* P 105.

⁴⁷ Kini, A.N. (2017, July 17). *The problem with “Aladdin.”* Bitch Media.

<https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/problem-aladdin>. (Web. May 9, 2019.)



Steve: Hi back. You look great.

DJ: Thanks. Well, it's nice to see you. What are you doing here?

Steve: Didn't you get my note about going to the movies? I gave it to Maria to give to Kimmy to give to you in home ec.

Audio Clip from Aladdin:

Genie: Hi, what's your name?

Aladdin: Uh, uh, Aladdin.

Genie: Aladdin!

Or how instead of taking a moment to have actual Arabic writing in this - well, not entirely Arabic world, but arguably based on Arabic world - the film has nonsense scribbles in the film instead.^{48 49 50 51} Or how Arabic words, like *Allah* are mispronounced multiple times.^{52 53 54 55}

Audio Clip:

Sultan: Oooo! Allah forbid you should have any daughters!

Audio Clip:

Jaffar: You cannot just parade in here uninvited and expect to -

Sultan: By Allah, this is quite a remarkable device.

I imagine if it hadn't just been white people involved, these kinds of situations wouldn't have come up. But when you look at what was driving the creative force behind the film, again, the room was just brimming with white people.

And yet Disney loved to highlight *Aladdin* as it's first film featuring people of color, and the marketing was all aimed at Black and Latinx communities.⁵⁶ Ads featured Black and

⁴⁸ Khan, *Disney's "Aladdin" controversy: Inherent racism and whitewashing*.

⁴⁹ Shaheen, J. (1993). *Aladdin animated racism*. Cinéaste, 20(1), 49.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41687300>. (Web. May 10, 2019.)

⁵⁰ Kini, *The problem with "Aladdin."*

⁵¹ Giroux & Pollock, *The mouse that roared: Disney and the end of innocence*. P 105.

⁵² Kini, *The problem with "Aladdin."*

⁵³ Khan, *Disney's "Aladdin" controversy: Inherent racism and whitewashing*.

⁵⁴ Giroux & Pollock, *The mouse that roared: Disney and the end of innocence*. P 105.

⁵⁵ Shaheen, *Aladdin animated racism*.

⁵⁶ Ascher-Walsh, R., & Daly, S. (1993, March 12). *Marketing "Aladdin."* EW.

<https://ew.com/article/1993/03/12/marketing-aladdin/>. (Web. May 9, 2019.)

Latinx performers appeared on cable, including Telemundo⁵⁷ - as if doing a story on one shade of Brown or Black could encompass all stories for all people of color.

I know I said today we were only going to focus on the 1992 film, but I need to mention that I don't think Disney learned from these mistakes. Instead, with the live-action *Aladdin* remake, the film put out a casting call across the world, stating it was looking for either an Indian or Middle Eastern actor to play Aladdin and Jasmine, as if to say that all Brown people are the same. I suppose that's where the orientalism comes in. But somehow the new live action *Aladdin* also consistently reported it was struggling to find an Aladdin who could act, sing, and dance.⁵⁸

Or how white actor Billy Magnussen was cast as "Prince Anders," Aladdin's rival as he tries to win over Jasmine's heart.⁵⁹ What, having Jafar attempting to expose Aladdin and become sultan himself isn't enough drama? I read an article in *Brown Girl Magazine* that summed it up perfectly: "Why must people of color continuously have to compete with white people in order to prove their worth both on-screen and off?...it should be noted that Hollywood and Disney still fail to recognize or accept that a story can exist with no caucasian people in it."⁶⁰

And I'm sure it will come as no surprise that the original folk story "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp" from the book of *One Thousand and One Nights* includes absolutely no white characters.⁶¹ And regardless of whether Prince Anders is objectively good or bad, I don't understand why a white actor needs to play him. If it's truly a remake after all, then why not have Aladdin's competition be Prince Achmed. Or how the new live action used white actors to fill some background roles, darkening their skin so that they would fit in with the setting and the background.⁶²

Again, I don't think Disney learned from the 1992 *Aladdin*'s mistakes, but I suppose that isn't all that shocking - Hollywood in general is still learning from - and repeating - the error of its ways: whitewashing and Black and Brownface and white savior

⁵⁷ Ascher-Walsh & Daly, *Marketing "Aladdin."*

⁵⁸ Kini, *The problem with "Aladdin."*

⁵⁹ Khan, *Disney's "Aladdin" controversy: Inherent racism and whitewashing.*

⁶⁰ Khan, *Disney's "Aladdin" controversy: Inherent racism and whitewashing.*

⁶¹ Oppenheim, *Disney accused of whitewashing after creating role for white actor out of thin air.*

⁶² Gracie, B. (2018, June 1). *Disney's live-action 'Aladdin' slammed for 'Browning up' white actors.*

Complex.

<https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2018/01/disney-aladdin-criticized-browning-up-white-actors>.

(Web. May 9, 2019.)



complexes galore. And here we are, in a time where reboots seem to be the only way studios think they can make money.

Aladdin itself - whether looking at the 1992 cartoon or the original *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* - can never let a remake escape the true problems. At the end of the day, the source material for *Aladdin* itself is orientalist and racist, and in some ways I think that no matter what any remake does, you can't escape that history. Instead it will only be carried on for a new generation.

I'm Morgan Jaffe and that was Burst Your Bubble

As always, thank you so much to Jeremy Ferris! Jeremy Ferris, who does the amazing art for each episode.

Head on over to BurstYourBubblePodcast.com, where you can see all of the art, buy it as merch and support the show, and check out today's script with all of today's footnotes and sources.

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Burst Your Bubble is released the 2nd and 4th thursday of the month. There's a pesky 5th Friday in May, so it might feel like a while. The next episode will be released June 13th.

As always, thank you so much for listening. I'll see you next time, and have a good one!