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Hopeless Hyperbole: The Internet Debate Over Disney's Frozen

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Sooooo, I don't know if you know this but Disney made a movie a while back based on Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen*. Here's a link to the original 1845 text. This tale was written in Denmark, but does not necessarily take place there.

Because, you know, it's a fairy tale. Fiction.

Frozen is a film written and produced in the US for presumably American audiences, but Disney is loved by many all over the world, and shown/seen by people in a measurably global scale. Disney created a fictional story based on a work of fiction. They used *The Snow Queen* as source material, but the created films bears little resemblance to Anderson's original tale, as is par for the course with most Disney productions.

They chose to depict all characters who speak and have names as what Americans would immediately recognize and categorize as white people. This was disappointing to many Disney fans of color--yet another film made in which no one looks like them. A few fans made some artwork depicting some of these characters with brown skin.

And the internet exploded in outrage.

"But it's a story from Denmark!" "That's not historically accurate!!!" "You already have enough movies!!!" "How DARE you!!" Even worse, a group of indigenous Scandinavian people called the Saami were also dragged into this debate, and photographs of them were slung all over the internet by people NOT Saami, and their appearance and their race poked over with a fine-toothed comb, being lobbed as "proof" their race on either side, all because Disney chose character costume designs and certain other elements of Saami culture to show in their film, without any mention of their origin. Words from actual Saami people were drowned out in the uproar, for the most part.

The outrage over anyone suggesting the cast of the film could have been more diverse reached shockingly violent levels. Before anyone could blink, death threats were being lobbed at artists and just about anyone making cultural commentary involving the film.

In fact, there's an entire page at knowyourmeme.com dedicated to dissecting anyone criticizing the film, its casting, character creation, or depictions of race therein. Almost every pop culture blog remotely related to any of the topics have covered this "debate".

And I have received over 200 asks on this topic. Once again, I have received over 200 asks on this topic. Asks for commentary, requests that I "become involved" in some thread or another, messages begging me to "prove to my mom Elsa could have been a person of color", asks for my opinion on specific bloggers or their Facebook friends' statements.

But the problem is, I know that no matter what I write, the "debate" will rage on. No "proof" can possibly compete with emotional investment in keeping these films white, and besides, in history, "proof" doesn't work that way.

This is an Art History and Historiography blog, and while in factual reality, the debate over *Frozen* has almost nothing to do with the topics covered by this blog, in people's perceptions, it has everything to do with it.

Because the response to people who would like to just make art of a Disney character with their skin color, is literally, "you aren't allowed. It's not historically accurate."

This claim has nothing to do with the actual history of Denmark. People of color in Denmark have about the same amount of history as most Scandinavian nations do. There were some people of color of varying origin in most walks of life at any given time in Denmark. People of Color arrived in Denmark the same way white people did with boats. But what on earth does that have to do with a Fantasy Film made in the United States, in the 21st Century? A film loosely based on a Danish story that is pure fantasy-it doesn't even take place in Denmark?