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## Race and Racism in Austen Spaces: Notes On A Scandal: Sanditon Fandom's Ongoing Racism And The Danger Of Ignoring Austen Discourse On Social Media

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## Race and Racism in Austen Spaces: Notes On A Scandal: Sanditon Fandom's Ongoing Racism And The Danger Of Ignoring Austen Discourse On Social Media

### Abstract

*Sanditon* fans have used social media more than many other past Jane Austen adaptations to discuss the series and to share news developments about the series. This was partially due to the COVID-19 pandemic preventing in-person marketing and fandom gatherings, but also due to some traditional Austen discussion platforms ignoring or banning pro-Sanditon discussions. White women from the UK and Europe dominated these online communities and set the tone for discussions of the plot as well as news about the series. BIPOC fans repeatedly clashed with white fans because the promises of an "inclusive" community were frequently dashed as soon as they disagreed with the predominant views of white fans.

ITV's decision to reverse the cancelation of the series did not diminish these clashes, in fact, they have continued to increase. The second season is expected to premiere in 2022 in a different media climate than the first season. Not only has the long delay in production for the second season resulted in recasting several roles, but *Bridgerton* has also far eclipsed *Sanditon* in international popularity.

*Bridgerton* has not only embraced contrasting and even anti-Austen aesthetics, but has also cast Black lead actors in their first season and South Asian lead actors in the upcoming Season 2. In light of these developments, BIPOC fans have pushed for *Sanditon* to expand Crystal Clarke's role as Georgiana and diversify the cast and crew. The white fans who are interested in maintaining *Sanditon* as the anti-*Bridgerton* are pushing back in more subtle but still racist ways.

Jane Austen scholars, academics, and professionals are facing a four-fold danger: the undermining of existing DEIA efforts within traditional Austen spaces by white fans with no interest in doing this work; the risk of alienating the next generation of Austen professionals by ignoring social media as a platform for Austen and Austen-adjacent discussions; the exclusion of BIPOC Austen fans from online and traditional spaces; and the inability to influence or participate in discussions of pop culture adaptations of Austen works.

### Keywords

sanditon, jane austen, pineapplegate, bridgerton, fandom racism

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The miniseries adaptation of *Sanditon* premiered on the UK network ITV in July 2019. Shortly thereafter, fans of the series flocked to Twitter, Facebook, and other social media sites to discuss the show. From the beginning, it was clear that there would be continuing tension in the fandom between white viewers who wanted an escapist adaptation and continuation of one of Jane Austen's unfinished novels and BIPOC viewers who saw *Sanditon* as groundbreaking for featuring Georgiana Lambe, a Black West Indian heiress, who is Austen's only canonical woman of color. This tension escalated into numerous conflicts between individuals and the wider fandom: nearly every time a BIPOC fan would call out something a white fan said or did that was racist or problematic, the white fans would respond with targeted online harassment.

My primary motivation for continuing to point out the problematic and racist behavior of *Sanditon* fans throughout these developments is simple. I want Austen and Austen-adjacent fandom spaces to truly be antiracist spaces. I am a second-generation American as my grandparents emigrated from the former British colony of Trinidad and Tobago. Someone like Georgiana could have easily been the story of someone hundreds of years earlier in my ancestry. While I love UK period dramas, Jane Austen, and historical costuming, I must also acknowledge the histories of colonialism and slavery and their effect on society today. I want white fans to consider the same things. Although some may think I am the only one who feels this way, my articles are designed to represent the BIPOC Austen fans who are not journalists and academics.

### **Speaking truth to pineapple emoji power**

Pinpointing who was the first user of the pineapple emoji is difficult, but it started in Summer 2019 during the UK airing of Season 1. White and non-Black UK, EU, and international fans of the series began to use the pineapple emoji as a symbol of fandom support in Twitter display names and inside comments. The significance of the pineapple is important: in a scene in the series, Lady Denham, a wealthy patron invites the Black West Indian heiress, Georgiana Lambe to a dinner party. She brings an "exotic" pineapple to the table. The pineapple was native to areas the British controlled as colonies before people experimented with growing pineapples in British greenhouses (Dawson and Mitchell). Upper-class British people during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century did indeed use the fruit to "welcome visitors with sliced pineapple, and those hosts who did not possess the means to acquire the fruit instead presented their guests with delectable foods served in pineapple wares or vessels resembling the fruit" (Gohmann). However, historians who study material culture observe that the

pineapple “as a fruit and art object boldly declared its exoticism and thus testified to imperialist desires” (Gohmann).

This interpretation of the pineapple as a symbol of Regency Era colonialism and racism was made very clear in the context of *Sanditon*. In the novel, Georgiana is described as “half-mulatto” (202). This is among several changes between Austen’s words and the miniseries noted previously by scholars (Troost and Greenfield). Lambe is played by Crystal Clarke, who identifies as Black and of Caribbean heritage. It is clear that the *Sanditon* producers wanted to bring to Austen culture a person of color who was not simply “racebent” or originally white in the novels but is now played by a non-white actor.

Georgiana in the series faces the racism we would expect to be on display in Regency England and it is made clear that it is her vast wealth that protects her to any degree. Lady Denham’s toast of Georgiana is defined by psychologists as containing microaggressions or unconscious racial bias (DeAngelis). Lady Denham claims she brought the pineapple as an homage to Georgiana’s roots, but her interrogation of Georgiana during the dinner is very disrespectful: she explicitly says that Georgiana’s mother was a “slave.” Georgiana defiantly answers “yes.” To diffuse the tension another guest seizes the pineapple to cut it open only to find that it is rotten and infested with maggots. The shock at the table when the precious pineapple was cut open to reveal the rotten fruit symbolized Regency England’s aggressive imperialism and participation in the slave trade (Dawson and Mitchell). In many ways, this scene can be read as a critique of white supremacy and of its rotten core even at the seemingly idyllic seaside resort of Sanditon.

At the same time, the rotten fruit can also be interpreted as a symbol of Georgiana’s status as a dependent ward, seen as an exotic creature, who is also the product of exploitative dynamics in the Caribbean. Her father, while this is never made clear in the series, is obviously a planter and her mother, enslaved. Even if Georgiana is later accepted as a resident of Sanditon, she would remain the ward of Sidney Parker and therefore could not spend her £100,000 fortune. She also cannot leave Sanditon without his permission and must withstand rude comments, stares, and all manner of mistreatment. She remains, like Austen’s other heroines, imprisoned by white male patriarchy.

Despite the subtleties of this scene and how the pineapple symbolism was used in the adaptation, in the social media spaces, the pineapple emoji was then taken up by white fans as an icon of supporting the show. The link of the pineapple to Lady Denham’s racism, to colonial power, was ignored and wielded to forge white

social media community in ways that ignored its meanings to non-white fans. These fans established hierarchies that clearly excluded BIPOC fans who were against the pineapple emoji from joining. African-American writers reflecting on the controversy pointed out “The real issue not perceived by *Sanditon* fandom when their seeming politeness (i.e., their support of the show through the pineapple emoji) was called out for its undertones of racism was similar to Lady Denham’s faux outrage at the “effrontery” of Miss Lambe’s response to “her” pineapple. In other words, the story of the pineapple is not theirs to tell, to own, or to be offended by.” (Scott)

Many of these pro-pineapple emoji users were the moderators of Facebook groups or created *Sanditon* fan accounts across various social media platforms which gained a large following. Once these self-appointed big-name fans decided to stake their claim on the pineapple emoji as the most important rallying symbol, the controversy colloquially known as PineappleGate began. The “gate” in the name refers not only to the original Watergate scandal but also the Gamergate controversy in 2014 when white male misogynists launched coordinated online attacks against women and BIPOC in the video games industry who were advocating for more inclusion (Dewey). Although many people since the controversy removed the pineapple emoji from their Twitter display names, there are still some traces left in the original tweets. They have been preserved in the Web Archive to prevent deletion after publishing. The goal of archiving these statements is not to hash out revenge on any one individual or to demand apologies from the unrepentant or remorseful. This archive is designed to show how online organized harassment applies to Austen fandom spaces. Far too many of the previous examples are from spaces with different demographics and cultural contexts. One white woman tweeted regarding the pineapple emoji as a symbol: “There was plenty of centre pieces in history and in other Austen books should we all just stop breathing because one person found a piece of fruit insulting I believe in diversity and equality but I love literature.” (@Kerrie60329849).

Instead of white *Sanditon* fans realizing that their behavior was a problem, they used a wide variety of insults and other problematic responses. Tone policing, gaslighting “reverse racism” accusations, derailing, strawman arguments, and more were evident throughout all the replies and thread. Some even weaponized their race/ethnicity to attack myself and other pineapple emoji critics: “Accusing of white privilege people you don’t know anything about is racism! Hating white people is also racism. And it seems to me that you do. I am black too by the way, and your tweets and behaviour is unacceptable” (@Save\_Sanditon).

Although some did stop using the pineapple emoji, it was clear many only did this to stop the complaints or to make BIPOC conform to their rules of engagement: “Read this tweet - you don’t even know my feelings regarding the pineapple. You are making assumptions. Also, there was a previous tweet that spoke of willingness to work together and in good faith I did. I did” (@Angelastemming). The author continued, “To be fair it wasn’t really about the pineapple (as Amanda knows) it was about how the matter was raised by her. Calling fans racists when they weren’t was always going to get their backs up. Not just UK/EU either Plenty have rejected this statement and they are from US (inc POC)” (@Angelastemming). They had no intention in being actively antiracist because that would mean the BNF’s of *Sanditon* fandom would no longer be able control the narrative. One person even went as far as to say: “This is what that Amanda person was set out to do, destroy and divide this group.” (@8Blue\_bells).

The point about this situation is that social media spaces for Austen fandom are important discursive spaces where white supremacy and racism are dictating the tone and content of who can talk about Austen adaptations. The deployment of the pineapple in Austen fandoms returns the pineapple to a racist, colonial significance that, even if unknowingly, excludes non-white people. It is a grave error to consider racist sentiment only in terms of slurs, and violent actions. In the *Sanditon* fandom, as well as the wider Austen fandom, racism is more about shutting down meaningful discussions of Black diaspora history, the history of colonialism, and how this history influences Austen and Austen-adjacent adaptations. It is also a mistake to consider this controversy is due to a few rogue individuals as fandom often involves a coordinated effort to disseminate information.

The goal of this considerable expenditure of energy was clearly to maintain fandom spaces where only white people feel comfortable participating and leading discussions. The goal of all of these comments was threefold: a) to control how *Sanditon* fandom was perceived by others b) to vilify and silence BIPOC pineapple emoji critics and c) to control how viewers discussed the show.

### **The second scandal: *Bridgerton*’s premiere and *Sanditon*’s renewal**

PBS confirmed *Sanditon*’s initial cancellation in late February 2021, dashing the hopes that the network would magically come up with millions of dollars for production after the UK pulled out (@MasterpiecePBS). The main players in the PineappleGate controversy ramped up recruiting new people to apply pressure to studios, networks, and streamers to pick up the series. They maintained a steady

barrage of social media posts demanding closure to the Sidney and Charlotte storyline.

A preview of what was to come occurred when *Bridgerton* premiered during the worldwide protests for George Floyd's murder in June 2021. *Sanditon* BNF's and their followers once again attacked BIPOC fans. African-American across fandom genres were using the Black Lives Matter movement to talk about racism in fandom "because fandom communities are insular and twist themselves in circles to avoid engaging meaningfully with things that disturb the peace that they've surrounded themselves in –The racism that folks have as baggage lugged around offline? Gets stuffed full of *more* racism and carted around to *other* fandoms" (Stitch, "Why Write About Fandom Racism"). White *Sanditon* fans used another classic maneuver to evade the discussion, the false claim that fandom has no bearing on the real world: "Excuse me? I find it poor timing when there are actual injustices going on in the world and they're making a whole drama over an emoji. It's ridiculous. You may want to spend all day arguing about it but I don't. If you don't like me, block me. Have a nice day" (@\_Sarahahaha). Fewer people agreed with the BNF's this time around due to increased awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement.

As new fans discovered *Sanditon* after repeat broadcasts, streaming services or social media, the main players in PineappleGate relied on the lack of experience new fans had to shield themselves from further criticism of racism in the fandom. Whenever someone would bring up the unresolved racism issues or how *Sanditon* fans were guilty of spamming Twitter with renewal tweets, many of the new fans denied that there were any problems or racial hostility.

*Bridgerton*'s premiere on Netflix on Christmas Day 2020 changed the media environment and also revealed new divisions in Austen and Austen-adjacent spaces. The promo photos of Regé-Jean Page as Simon, Golda Roushevel as Queen Charlotte, and the other Black supporting actors quickly resulted in the "historical accuracy means no BIPOC actors in traditionally white roles" racists rushing to trash the series. Others could not forgive the costume designer Ellen Mirochnick for committing the unbelievable sin of basing costume designs from later eras and character descriptions from the book. *Bridgerton*'s depictions of sex and the rejection of key aesthetics of previous Austen adaptations also made the show a target for white period drama traditionalists. *Bridgerton* fans in Austen and Austen-adjacent spaces were forced to either make separate spaces for discussion of the series or join existing *Bridgerton* fandom spaces. For *Sanditon* fans, the success of *Bridgerton* was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, renewed pop culture attention to the Regency era and Hollywood's penchant for

copycatting success meant *Sanditon*'s renewal could be possible. On the other hand, there was simmering resentment and jealousy over *Bridgerton*'s success. Netflix's marketing campaign had ten times the budget of even PBS's best efforts. Millions of Americans and many more around the world watched every episode of *Bridgerton* and never heard of *Sanditon*. In addition, Simon and Daphne have their happy ever after, adding to already brewing resentment that Andrew Davies chose to break up Sidney and Charlotte at the end of *Sanditon*.

These reasons are obvious but if you look past the surface, it is clear simmering racist sentiment in *Sanditon* fandom also contributed to negative opinions of *Bridgerton*. First of all, Shonda Rimes's production company had many Black and POC actors in front of the camera and behind the scenes (Jacobs). Netflix's marketing team engaged international fans on social media in ways UK networks never did before. Many of the most active *Bridgerton* fans on Twitter are Brazilian, and many other BIPOC fans joined the fandom as well. The promotional lead-up to the series premiere, including author Julia Quinn publicly supporting diverse casting, led to racist book-readers leaving the fandom. New white viewers who never read the books easily embraced the diverse casting and were ready to accept, listen to, and appreciate BIPOC *Bridgerton* fans. Most importantly, BIPOC *Sanditon* fans readily embraced *Bridgerton* as "... the Black figures in this world are not in the series in the empty service of diversity or to serve the white characters in the novels. They are peers" (Matthew).

*Sanditon* was officially renewed by BritBox UK, taking over production from mainline ITV (ITV co-owns BritBox with the BBC) on May 16, 2021. (PBS, "Sanditon Renewed for Seasons 2 and 3."). While there were rumors the series was already coming back, these were not officially confirmed until this date. The renewal announcement reignited the controversy of unaddressed racism in fandom as well as exposed a new layer of toxicity in *Sanditon* fandom spaces. Bianca Hernandez-Knight asked "Hey @masterpiecepbs, I've already had aforementioned toxic Sanditon fans in my replies today. What are you doing to protect BIPOC fans of this show?" (@Bookhoarding). Once again, BIPOC were on their own having to defend themselves.

A few days later, *Sanditon* announced that Theo James would not be returning to his role (@MasterpiecePBS). It was previously reported in other outlets that he joined the cast of HBO/BBC's *The Time Traveler's Wife* (Otterson). There was a startling degree of angry and disappointed comments on social media PBS from white fans who were invested in seeing Sidney and Charlotte get together: "What an epic mistake on the part of Theo James. He's missing a great opportunity here to complete his best role as Sidney Parker. It's called finishing what you



started.... (crying face and broken heart emojis) #Sanditon (gif of Henry Cavill as a possible replacement actor) (@Valerie8632).

One fan said the quietly racist part out loud about James' departure which was recorded in a screenshot which concealed the poster's identity: "... I am terrified they cast Theo out to give us either an actor that costs less or a coloured hero. An insult to historical reality. #SanditonPBS #Sanditon" (qtd in @SpoonfulOfSpicy). That comment is incredibly useful towards highlighting why some white *Sanditon* fans hated *Bridgerton*. BIPOC *Sanditon* viewers realized James' departure meant that Georgiana would be able to chart her own course and have more screen time. Despite the risk of renewed harassment, I decided to write about my feelings on this news. The first round of that was a blog post where I not only called out the ongoing racist attitudes in fandom but also made clear the links between the show and the movement for more racial diversity in period dramas. I wrote, "They [fandom] should have seen the writing on the wall that *Sanditon*'s potential for mass appeal beyond dedicated Austen fans was Georgiana" (Prescott, "Sanditon's Renewal"). GBH editors refined the post adding the news of James' departure and that editorial was published a few days later. One of the additions to the editorial was a note about Masterpiece's official stance on more inclusion in period dramas: "Suzanne Simpson, the Executive Producer of Masterpiece, alluded to this in the Masterpiece Studio podcast episode previewing the future of the series, which will include more Black British history. When this interview was recorded, the Sanditon renewal was not yet public, but it is clear now that the series was revived because it naturally fits this mission" (Prescott, "What 'Sanditon' Season 2 Can Learn").

The GBH editorial resulted in many tweets demanding that my opinion be corrected and threatened my status as a freelance writer. Some went straight to the personal insults: "You are a venomous, pot stirring troll. Your blanket statements are just as dangerous as those who harbor nefarious racist thoughts. How dare you assume that all of Sanditon's fandom is what you depict them to be. We're not perfect but we're trying! Shame on WGBH" (@In2puck32). Others decided to attack my argument as meaningless: "They have every opportunity to create their own version of Austen, but will they take it? NO. Gurinder Chadha DID with *Bride & Prejudice*. They complain but take no action. We took action. Action brings results. (orange heart emoji, rainbow arc emoji, bonnet emoji) #SanditonIsSaved" (@4Eva\_optimist). The strawman argument about BIPOC making their own media is frequently used by racists to deny the role institutional racism plays in UK TV production. Earlier this year, hundreds of UK BIPOC signed a petition demanding change (Kanter).

Throughout the controversies in *Sanditon* fandom, BIPOC critics of the show scripts and fandom behavior were always portrayed as “haters” of the show, which for many people was not true. Constructive criticism and thinking critically about the impact of the media we watch is always anathema to white fans who want to maintain society’s status quo. As late as September 2021, *Sanditon* fans were targeting reposts of my articles to dispute the connection to *Bridgerton* “Thanks for the heads up @ardently.space! We are familiar with the interesting article of @amandapoldark [my Instagram name]. However, *Sanditon* was green lit 2 days before *Bridgerton* launched ...” (@Sanditonsisterhood). Not only does this “response” ignore that industry insiders already have access to upcoming TV series and promotional materials, but the use of the word “we” confirms coordination between multiple people to push an agenda.

The first guest star announcement for *Sanditon* Season 2 featured all white actors (PBS, “*Sanditon* Season 2 Casting News”). Fans who wanted real changes quickly pointed this out on social media: “Thanks for this @masterpiecepbs and welcome to all the new cast members, but I thought you were bringing on more BIPOC cast? This is one white lineup!!!” (@EllenKSTL). Many *Sanditon* fans took these legit concerns as the time to air out the grievances that too many original cast members would not be returning: “What happened to the true love story of Sidney and Charlotte? The story we were encouraged to fight for? Thank for making it so easy for me to walk away as have many fans you lied to! Look at all this diverse cast @Sanditon @RedPlanetTV @BritBox\_UK (gif of Sidney and Charlotte dancing)” (@Agelta09).

As of the time of writing this essay, there was no other trailers or preview clips that could indicate whether this announcement purposely withheld information to prevent fans from guessing the plotline, the PR was styled in a traditional fashion ignoring the conversation around diversifying the series, or a purposeful move to make *Sanditon* Season 2 appear to be “the anti-*Bridgerton*.” In addition, Masterpiece PBS does not directly control day-to-day hiring decisions on the UK series they co-produce. Either way, the reception to these announcements from the vast majority of fandom largely ignored the concerns of BIPOC viewers.

One example of this reputation laundering was an interview of some *Sanditon* BNF’s published by the UK television news site *RadioTimes*. The interview focused on fandoms who managed to petition networks to reverse TV cancellations. One source identified “... as KdK, who is Dutch, is a self-confessed Anglophile...” has clear ties to pro-pineapple emoji tweets (Carr). KdK on Twitter said “As a 🍍 [pineapple emoji] user... The lunch is so much more than Lady D! The attenders were well aware of her behavior. It showed Georgiana as an

intelligent, independent woman, who could stand up for herself. And it was the kick off for the bond between Charlotte and Georgiana. #SanditonPBS” ([@Outlanderfan\\_nl](#)). She has yet to apologize or take responsibility for her role in perpetuating racism and toxicity in the fandom. Although BIPOC *Sanditon* viewers chose not to respond to the interview online due to previous harassment, it was clear the article was designed to cover up past sins. The petition organizers were simply the passionate fans who saved their favorite show from cancellation.

### **A call to action**

This archive of past racist comments cannot fix the harm that has occurred. At the heart of all of these incidents described above was a massive lack of empathy for BIPOC fans in spaces set up by white fans to maintain white supremacist interests. These fans had to fight sustained and targeted online harassment alone while white allies stood on the sidelines or were nowhere to be found. Not everyone has the emotional energy or the time to be able to take on racist fans online. However, suggestions to “ignore the trolls” or “don’t engage” mask the issues and enable bad actors to keep on attacking BIPOC Austen fans. The studios and networks cannot be relied upon to have the staff or the ability to moderate comments, especially if these comments are made on individual accounts or in fan groups they have no control over. While the discussion over how networks and studios handle press announcements and marketing on social media is valuable, it is also one few people outside of the industry have the ability to address directly.

Listening to objections raised over racist comments and behavior, followed by meaningful steps to change course and prevent a future offense, effectively prevents the next round of racist controversy in *Sanditon* and other Austen fandoms. This strategy is effective whether online or in-person. Sociologists have termed reactions to tense racial situations as “white fragility”, and elements of this concept are evident in the angry reactions from pro-pineapple emoji users (DiAngelo). The doubling and tripling down after making offensive comments made these controversies worse and proved to BIPOC fans that the fandom was prioritizing whiteness and majority white fandom spaces (Stitch, “What Fandom Racism Looks Like”). Fans who apologized but then proceeded to keep on offending others also exacerbated the situation. Addressing wrongdoing before it becomes targeted harassment against BIPOC who speak out is of the utmost priority.

These tensions between BIPOC *Sanditon* viewers and white *Sanditon* fans and BNF’s have been exacerbated by the near silence of Jane Austen academics,

professionals, and authors whose primary interactions with fandom are via JASNA or other academic organizations. Many of these people do not have active social media accounts or only use them for professional networking. A lack of awareness and avoiding conversations within fandom is detrimental on several levels. A search on Twitter or Google will faster turn up someone's poorly researched blog on *Sanditon's* implications than any academic's essay linking the pineapple scene to Caribbean slavery. Period drama adaptations of Austen or Austen-adjacent works remain an important gateway for new fans to dive into reading historical or literary scholarship, historical fashion studies, museum studies, and more. It is possible for Austen experts to talk to fans online without violating institutional social media standards or individual privacy. Sharing research informally or past articles written will help stem the tide of BNF's spreading white supremacist or inaccurate historical and literary information around. The only "conflict of interest" that exists for fandom participating is if someone has signed a contract with UK or US production companies or networks that bars individuals representing the company publicly.

*Sanditon* discourse online has already directly affected one in-person Austen group. In December 2020, members of the UK historical costuming group The Jane Austen Pineapple Society were accused of supporting the *Sanditon* racists because they openly adopted the pineapple as a logo. This accusation arose after members of the group spoke to the UK press journalist about the Netflix series *Bridgerton* re-igniting popular interest in Regency-era costuming (Woodside). The group responded on Instagram with a statement of condemnation and distancing from *Sanditon* fandom's use of the pineapple (@JAPS). They also clarified that their group existed long before the series aired, and their primary purpose was informal gatherings in Regency costumes.

This incident highlights the unfortunate reality that in-person Jane Austen fandom groups are affected by social media controversies and trends, even if a majority of their members do not engage in social media or if their group has a presence on some sites and not others. UK Jane Austen organizations discussed *Sanditon* online, but they did not weigh in on PineappleGate. JASNA did not officially comment on the controversy, although *The Daily Beast* did interview several people who were affiliated with the organization at the time of publishing (Chua). An official condemnation from JASNA or other organizations may not have convinced the most ardent pro-pineapple emoji users to cease, but at the same time BIPOC fans would not have felt so isolated in regard to combatting the onslaught of online harassment. Social media is also global and does not care if your group is composed only of fans from one specific country. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the importance of social media in fandom as

in-person gatherings are restricted. What happens on the social media side of fandom will affect marketing for groups that will hold in-person gatherings post-pandemic. People will assume a group's silence on a certain topic online equals approval. If racism in social media fandom groups is not rooted out, it will spill over offline Jane Austen and Austen-adjacent spaces. Members who are invested in preserving whiteness will use online spaces to organize in-person pushback against diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility professionals and BIPOC members. New members who are also not interested in diversity efforts can also easily join groups where only self-declared interest in the topic is the criteria for entry. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has also heightened the importance of in-person groups operating Facebook groups, Twitter accounts, and other online media spaces to supplement meetings. Group leaders and members assigned to be moderators or administrators of group social media accounts must be prepared not only for the use of racial slurs but also to look for some of the more subtle forms of racist treatment such as tone policing and promoting distorted historical narratives. Leaders of in-person groups should be on the lookout for microaggressions, BIPOC event attendees receiving unequal treatment or conversations where white members are using racially hostile terminology such as "politically correct." Racism in fandom spaces whether online or in-person tends to thrive where there are unenforced or poorly written rules and group goals. "Be nice" is not an adequate response to a white person attempting to tone police BIPOC. Rules banning members from discussing "politics and off topic content" must be backed up with rules firmly banning racism, and other forms of discriminatory speech. Leaders must be ready to hold members of online or in-person groups accountable if they persist in expressing racist sentiment, mistreating BIPOC members, and do not listen to education efforts (@bookhoarding).

Why rehash online feuds from months or even a year ago? Racist rhetoric in the fandom still continues after this specific incident. *Sanditon's* upcoming second season may inspire a new round of racist comments as Georgiana Lambe is still a part of the series. Online fandom spaces, especially on Facebook, still allow white Jane Austen fans to write racist comments containing dog-whistles, coded racial condescension, and more. Diversity, equity, and inclusion advocates still struggle to stop those who wish to derail meaningful discussions about BIPOC history intersecting with Austen stories and adaptations. Recall this article the next time someone in your group complains about a new Austen-adjacent adaptation being too "woke." Keep in mind this article when you see a BIPOC Austen fan telling their story of mistreatment by white fandom leaders or members. Remember the pineapple emojis when you see hostile comments about actors of color joining

future Austen adaptations. BIPOC Austen fans deserve a “safe space” just as much as white fans expect and demand from fandom spaces.

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### Social Media Posts

- @4evaoptimist (Vasanth). “They have every opportunity to create their own version of Austen, but will they take it? NO. Gurinder Chadha DID with *Bride & Prejudice*. They complain but take no action. We took action. Action brings results. (orange heart emoji, rainbow arc emoji, bonnet

emoji) #SanditonIsSaved” *Twitter*, 11 May 2021, 11:54 a.m.,  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20210511221127/https://twitter.com/4eva\\_op  
timist/status/1392191491888529408?s=21](https://web.archive.org/web/20210511221127/https://twitter.com/4eva_op<br/>timist/status/1392191491888529408?s=21).

@Agelta09 (Agelta) “What happened to the true love story of Sidney and Charlotte? The story we were encouraged to fight for? Thank for making it so easy for me to walk away as have many fans you lied to! Look at all this diverse cast @Sanditon @RedPlanetTV @BritBox\_UK (gif of Sidney and Charlotte dancing)” *Twitter*, 22 July 2021, 7:55 a.m.,  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20210924022142/https://twitter.com/agelta09  
/status/1418223096780058638](https://web.archive.org/web/20210924022142/https://twitter.com/agelta09<br/>/status/1418223096780058638).

@angelastemming (Angela Stenning) “Read this tweet - you don’t even know my feelings regarding the pineapple. You are making assumptions. Also, there was a previous tweet that spoke of willingness to work together and in good faith I did. I did. To be fair it wasn’t really about the pineapple (as Amanda knows) it was about how the matter was raised by her. Calling fans racists when they weren’t was always going to get their backs up. Not just UK/EU either Plenty have rejected this statement and they are from US (inc POC).” *Twitter*, 3 Feb. 2020, 7:35 a.m.,  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20210227223616/https://twitter.com/angelast  
emming/status/1224355703416115200](https://web.archive.org/web/20210227223616/https://twitter.com/angelast<br/>emming/status/1224355703416115200).

@8blue\_bells. “Please dont go. This is what that Amanda person was set out to do, destroy and divide this group. But we are much better and mature than that.” *Twitter*, 30 May 2020, 12:53 a.m.,  
[https://web.archive.org//web/20210228013257/https://twitter.com/8blue\\_b  
ells/status/1266774786295955456](https://web.archive.org//web/20210228013257/https://twitter.com/8blue_b<br/>ells/status/1266774786295955456).

@bookhoarding (Bianca Hernandez-Knight) “Hey @masterpiecepbs, I’ve already had aforementioned toxic Sanditon fans in my replies today. What are you doing to protect BIPOC fans of this show?” *Twitter*, 11 Jul. 2020, 10:58 a.m.,  
<https://twitter.com/bookhoarding/status/1390319966776266755?s=20>.

@bookhoarding (Bianca Hernandez-Knight) “I thought I’d share some basics for how to start confronting racism in the #JaneAusten community. This is just a start. If you’re in charge of a club, group or org, I have tips for you too, stay tuned. (And feel free to share your own tips and DM me with questions/comments.)” *Twitter*, 11 Jul. 2020, 5:48 p.m.,  
<https://twitter.com/bookhoarding/status/1354661484232462338>.

- @EllenKSTL (Ellen Kunkelmann) “Thanks for this @masterpiecepbs and welcome to all the new cast members, but I thought you were bringing on more BIPOC cast? This is one white lineup!!!” *Twitter*, 22 Jul. 2021, 7:38 a.m.,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210722192037/https://twitter.com/EllenKSTL/status/1418218784645550091>.
- @JAPAS (@janeaustenpineapples). “A discussion and an explanation of our use of the Pineapple in our name, its history and what it means to us now. [pineapple emoji]. This discussion started months ago when reading an article from The Daily Beast called, ‘The battle over Jane Austen’s Whiteness’. Do check it out! *Instagram*, Day month year posted,  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CJWWCi0Atk-/>.
- @Kerrie60329849. “There was plenty of centre pieces in history and in other Austen books should we all just stop breathing because one person found a piece of fruit insulting I believe in diversity and equality but I love literature.” *Twitter*, 21 Feb. 2020, 7:10 p.m.,  
[/web/20210228004825/https://twitter.com/Kerrie60329849/status/1231374977104072709](https://web.archive.org/web/20210228004825/https://twitter.com/Kerrie60329849/status/1231374977104072709).
- @in2puck32. “You are a venomous, pot stirring troll. Your blanket statements are just as dangerous as those who harbor nefarious racist thoughts. How dare you assume that all of Sanditon's fandom is what you depict them to be. We're not perfect but we're trying! Shame on WGBH” *Twitter*, 11 May 2021, 1:15 p.m.,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210512035359/https://twitter.com/in2puck32/status/1392211892819562498>.
- @masterpiecepbs. “Dear #SanditonPBS fans: We want to thank you sincerely for your support during our broadcast. We love the series and wish it could go on; however, at this time there are no plans for another season. You’ll be the first to know if that changes!” *Twitter*, 25 Feb. 2020, 9:59 a.m.,  
[/web/20210227232726/https://twitter.com/masterpiecepbs/status/1232319274368192512](https://web.archive.org/web/20210227232726/https://twitter.com/masterpiecepbs/status/1232319274368192512).
- @masterpiecepbs. “#SanditonPBS will return w/ seasons 2 & 3 and continue Charlotte’s journey through life & love. While Sidney Parker will not return, rest assured that an abundance of romance & adventure lies ahead

for the Sanditon heroine. We can't wait for you to see what we have in store... (two pink hearts emoji) 7 May. 2021, 10:00 a.m.,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210924021735/https://twitter.com/masterpicecepbs/status/1418209275772612608?s=20>.

@outlanderfan\_nl. "As a [pineapple emoji] user... The lunch is so much more than Lady D! The attenders were well aware of her behavior. It showed Georgiana as an intelligent, independent woman, who could stand up for herself. And it was the kick off for the bond between Charlotte and Georgiana. #SanditonPBS" *Twitter*, 28 Jan. 2020, 2:40 p.m.,  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20210227223445/https://twitter.com/outlanderfan\\_nl/status/1222288247788834816](https://web.archive.org/web/20210227223445/https://twitter.com/outlanderfan_nl/status/1222288247788834816).

@\_sarahahaha. "Excuse me? I find it poor timing when there are actual injustices going on in the world and they're making a whole drama over an emoji. It's ridiculous. You may want to spend all day arguing about it but I don't. If you don't like me, block me. Have a nice day." *Twitter*, 30 May 2020, 9:00 a.m.,  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20210228013844/https://twitter.com/\\_sarahahaha/status/1266716149510782976](https://web.archive.org/web/20210228013844/https://twitter.com/_sarahahaha/status/1266716149510782976).

@sanditonsisterhood. "...heads up @ardently.space! We are familiar with the interesting article of @amandapoldark [my Instagram name]. However, Sanditon was green lit 2 days before Bridgerton launched Source/The Telegraph article: Jane Austen Drama Returns: How the Sanditon Sisterhood saved their show.  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/05/15/jane-austen-drama-returns-sanditon-sisterhood-saved-show/>." *Instagram*, 20 Aug. 2021,  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CSyHKV0F6ck/c/17843598641642910/>.

@Save\_Sanditon. "Accusing of white privilege people you don't know anything about is racism! Hating white people is also racism. And it seems to me that you do. I am black too by the way, and your tweets and behaviour is unacceptable." *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2020, 06:02 p.m.,  
[/web/20210227223806/https://twitter.com/SaveSanditon/status/1223381019023368193](https://web/20210227223806/https://twitter.com/SaveSanditon/status/1223381019023368193).

@SpoonfulofSpicy. "Never been racist? But this was just yesterday. Amanda has

said there's rotten eggs in their since day one." [Screencap text from unknown user: '... I am terrified they cast Theo out to give us either an actor that costs less or a coloured hero. An insult to historical reality. #SanditonPBS #Sanditon'" *Twitter*, 11 May. 2021, 5:03 a.m., <https://web.archive.org/web/20210923182448/https://twitter.com/SpoonfulofSpicy/status/1392087934732488710?s=20>.

@Valerie8632 (Valerie Michelle). "What an epic mistake on the part of Theo James. He's missing a great opportunity here to complete his best role as Sidney Parker. It's called finishing what you started.... (crying face and broken heart emojis) #Sanditon (gif of Henry Cavill as a possible replacement actor)" *Twitter*, 7 May 2021, 8:35 a.m., <https://web.archive.org/web/20210924025502/https://twitter.com/Valerie8632/status/1390691847241146369>.

## Appendix A: Social Media Posts Related to *Sanditon*

This collection of social media posts provide additional context to the issues raised in the essay. Social media posts marked “critical” are those that disagree with the original poster’s comments. In this context, the critical posts are largely protesting calls to stop using the pineapple emoji to promote *Sanditon* given its racialized and colonial connotations; some are protesting posts from people of color within Austen fandom who state they do not feel safe; others may be engaging in microaggressions toward the posters or discussions. Interactions are posted in chronological order. Archived versions of posts are used where necessary to prevent posts from disappearing. I have not used any private accounts and anonymized Facebook posts as they tend to be under people’s names as opposed to screen names.

### **Pineapple Gate**

Tweet from @amandaraeprescott posted 13 Nov. 2019 at 2:29 p.m.  
(spoilers in US tags)

Tweet from @amandaraeprescott posted 15 Nov. 2019 at 2:53 a.m. (first PineappleGate tweet)

- Threaded reply from @ScribblerHansie posted 15 Nov. 2019 at 3:40 a.m.  
(critical)

Tweet from @amandaraeprescott posted 15 Nov. 2019 at 6:50 a.m.

- Threaded reply from @jojo\_kez posted 15 Nov. 2019 at 8:37 a.m.  
(critical)

Tweet from @amandarprescott posted 28 Jan. 2020 at 8:40 a.m.

- Threaded reply from @sinmck posted 28 Jan. 2020 at 8:59 a.m.
- Threaded reply from @ErmJustAsking posted 28 Jan. 2020 at 2:08 p.m.  
(critical)
- Threaded reply from @outlanderfan\_nl posted 28 Jan. 2020 at 2:40 p.m.  
(critical)
- Threaded reply from @outlanderfan\_nl posted 28 Jan. 2020 at 2:49 p.m.  
(critical)
- Threaded reply from @outlanderfan\_nl posted 28 Jan. 2020 at 4:08 p.m.  
(critical)
- Threaded reply from @amandarprescott posted 28 Jan. 2020 at 5:29 p.m.
- Threaded reply from @mandylee2015 posted 29 Jan. 2020 at 9:50 a.m.  
(critical)
- Threaded reply from @mandylee2015 posted 29 Jan. 2020 at 2:36 p.m.  
(critical)
- Quote tweet from @fangirlJeanne posted 3 Feb 2020 at 10:56 a.m.

Tweet from @amandarprescott posted 29 Jan. 2020 at 2:51 p.m.

- Threaded reply from @angelastenning posted 3 Feb. 2020 at 7:35 a.m. (critical)
- Threaded reply from @amandarprescott posted 3 Feb. 2020 at 8:28 a.m.
- Threaded reply from @angelastenning posted 3 Feb. 2020 at 8:56 a.m. (critical)

Tweet from @amandarprescott posted 29 Jan. 2020 at 3:46 p.m.

Tweet from @amandarprescott posted 29 Jan. 2020 at 8:23 p.m.

- Threaded reply from @savesandition posted 31 Jan. 2020 at 3:02 p.m. (critical)
- Threaded reply from @savesandition posted 31 Jan. 2020 at 3:03 p.m. (critical)

Tweet from @fangirlJeanne posted 3 Feb. 2020 at 1:44 p.m.

- Quote tweet from @jasmineSW3 posted 3 Feb. 2020 at 2:38 p.m.
- Threaded reply from @fangirlJeanne posted 3 Feb. 2020 at 5:53 p.m.
- Threaded reply from @AzaleaDunn posted 3 Feb. 2020 at 7:02 p.m.
- Quote tweet from @fangirlJeanne posted 3 Feb. 2020 at 7:04 p.m.; critical reply deleted
- Threaded reply from @combo50 posted 4 Feb. 2020 at 3:48 a.m. (critical)
- Threaded reply from @HKoutThere posted 7 Feb. 2020 at 10:45 a.m. (critical)
- Threaded reply from @Klb0415 posted 29 May 2020 at 7:47 p.m. (critical)
- Quote tweet from @sinmck posted 31 May 2020 at 7:41 p.m. in a reply to a tweet from @4eva\_optimist posted 31 May 2020 at 6:16 a.m. (critical)

Crystal Clarke weighed in on PineappleGate on her public Twitter account by retweeting @FandomJeanne's mega thread on the subject but this was later deleted due to racist replies. A screencap of the original post is linked here.

Tweet from @thedailybeast posted 20 Feb. 2020 at 9:00 p.m.

- Threaded reply from @meghanknorton posted on 20 Feb. 2020 at 9:10 p.m. (critical)
- Quote tweet from @Cool\_Ghouls posted on 21 Feb. 2020 at 10:02 a.m. (critical)
- Threaded reply from @AmandaNicole487 posted on 21 Feb. 2020 at 1:37 p.m. (critical)

- [Threaded reply](#) from @LouiseW614 posted on 21 Feb. 2020 at 2:04 p.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @angelastenning posted on 21 Feb. 2020 at 2:25 p.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @kbsquared1961 posted on 21 Feb. 2020 at 4:10 p.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @DebKS50 posted on 21 Feb. 2020 at 7:29 p.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @JSachsBeth posted on 22 Feb. 2020 at 7:06 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @snowshoehare posted on 22 Feb. 2020 at 10:10 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @ snowshoehare posted on 22 Feb. 2020 at 10:13 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @Kerrie60329849 posted on 22 Feb. 2020 at 4:27 p.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @HCCommentator1 posted on 23 Feb. 2020 at 11:05 a.m. (critical)

[Tweet](#) from @MaatMHI posted 22 Feb 2020 at 1:59 p.m.

[Tweet](#) from @amandarprescott posted 23 Feb. 2020 at 8:34 a.m.

Discussion of PineappleGate was not confined to Twitter, these names redacted screenshots from public Facebook conversations also prove people were aware of *The Daily Beast's* PineappleGate article. This conversation details how Sanditon Facebook groups run by pro-pineapple emoji fans were blocking discussions. A screencap of the original post is [linked here](#).

[Threaded reply](#) from @sinmck posted 29 May 2020 at 9:08 p.m.; original Tweet deleted

- [Threaded reply](#) from @\_sarahahaha posted 30 May 2020 at 1:16 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @\_sarahahaha posted 30 May 2020 at 5:45 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @\_sarahahaha posted 30 May 2020 at 5:50 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @\_sarahahaha posted 30 May 2020 at 6:00 a.m. (critical)

[Tweet](#) from @c\_gilroy posted 30 May 2020 at 1:41 a.m. (critical)



- [Threaded reply](#) from @8blue\_bells posted 30 May 2020 at 9:53 a.m. (critical)

[Tweet](#) from @fangirlJeanne posted 10 June 2020 at 10:37 a.m.

### ***Sanditon Renewed for Season Two***

These archived tweets further detail the harassment myself and other fans of color experienced for expressing hope that Season 2 would be written in a more racially inclusive way or for stating past racist incidents in the fandom were unresolved. Tweets marked “critical” are opposing increased racial representation advocacy or attacking fans of color for publishing their opinions.

[Tweet](#) from @masterpiecepbs posted 6 May 2021 at 7:00 a.m.

- [Threaded reply](#) from @bookhoarding posted 6 May 2021 at 7:58 a.m.

[Tweet](#) from @amanda\_prahl posted 8 May 2021 at 9:37 a.m.

- [Threaded reply](#) from @spoonfulofspicy posted 11 May 2021 at 5:03 a.m.

[Tweet](#) from @amandaprescott posted 11 May 2020 at 6:42 a.m.

- [Threaded reply](#) from @DenizAusten posted 11 May 2021 at 9:03 a.m. (critical) in a quote tweet critical of the editorial from the same author
- [Threaded reply](#) from @karebear\_austen posted 11 May 2021 at 9:52 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @in2puck32 posted 11 May 2021 at 1:15 p.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @Benben154 posted 11 May 2021 at 2:03 p.m. (critical) on thread from @ItsTwoOClockTo1 linking article
- [Threaded reply](#) from @BecksandBooks posted 11 May 2021 at 5:52 p.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @BroughtonSeries posted 16 May 2021 at 2:51 p.m. (critical)
- [Tweet](#) from @aziza20211 posted 18 May 2021 at 5:01 p.m. (critical) referring to above post from @BroughtonSeries

[Tweet](#) from @karebear8685 posted 11 May 2021 at 7:39 a.m. (critical)

- [Threaded reply](#) from @smilingDionysos posted 11 May 2021 at 7:46 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @smilingDionysos posted 11 May 2021 at 8:04 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @NehaNana posted 11 May 2021 at 9:12 a.m. (critical)

- [Threaded reply](#) from @helloabworld posted 11 May 2021 at 10:18 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @4eva\_optimist posted 11 May 2021 at 11:54 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @OHLouisa posted 11 May 2021 at 10:50 a.m. (critical)

[Tweet](#) from @LSanditon posted 11 May 2021 at 8:31 a.m. (critical)

- [Threaded reply](#) from @Allie8U posted 11 May 2021 at 9:48 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @PrytaniaGirl posted 11 May 2021 at 10:51 a.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @chanceofunicorn posted 11 May 2021 at 12:48 p.m. (critical)
- [Threaded reply](#) from @3FriendsandFork posted 11 May 2021 at 6:39 p.m. (critical)

[Tweet](#) from @OneDayTweet2 posted 11 May 2021 at 11:37 a.m. (critical)

[Tweet](#) from @Benben154 posted 11 May 2021 at 3:17 p.m. (critical)

[Tweet](#) from @GBH posted 12 May 2021 at 5:28 p.m.

[Tweet](#) from @masterpiecepbs posted 22 July 2021 at 7:00 a.m.

- [Threaded reply](#) from @EllenKSTL posted 22 July 2021 at 7:38 a.m.
- [Threaded reply](#) from @agelta09 posted 22 July 2021 at 7:55 a.m. (critical)

[Instagram post](#) from @ardently.space posted 19 Aug. 2021

### ***Sanditon* Fandom vs. Cast Members**

Rose Williams who plays Charlotte on *Sanditon* tried to connect the Black Lives Matter protests to racism in the series in a public Instagram post. However, Williams deleted the post to stop harassment from racist fans. Many of the commenters are attacking fans of color/people of color directly or indirectly. Screenscaps of the post and the comments are [located here](#).

Fans also harassed Crystal Clarke while she was filming *Sanditon* Season 2 in the UK. The critical tweet in this context attacks Clarke for refusing to have her photo taken with racial overtones.

Twitter post from @vlavla posted 29 July 2021 at 11:34 a.m.

- Quote tweet from @BeccaWrightCDG posted 29 July 2021 at 11:57 a.m.
- Threaded reply to @BeccaWrightCDG from @uniquelybeverly posted 29 July 2021 at 1:35 p.m. (critical)