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Subverting the Disney Legacy

How Michael Eisner Has Transformed the 'Magic Kingdom'

By Mark Weber

For more than 40 years, the company founded and built by Walt Disney offered popular, well-crafted entertainment that upheld American values and traditions. Its films and television programming — even if sometimes sugary — epitomized, to use the much-mocked phrase, wholesome family entertainment.

It was the work largely of one man, Walter Elias Disney (1901-1966), a gifted illustrator, brilliant filmmaker and genial entrepreneur who left a lasting mark on American popular culture. His cartoon characters, animated films, and amusement parks, are recognized around the world.



In 1928 he launched the beloved Mickey Mouse character in an animated film, "Steamboat Willie," that became an immediate hit. In the decades that followed, Disney dominated animation art with such innovative and hugely popular films as "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1937), "Pinocchio" (1940), "Fantasia" (1940), and "Bambi" (1942). He also oversaw the production of such enduring feature films as "Treasure Island" (1950), "Robin Hood" (1952), "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" (1954), "The Swiss Family Robinson" (1960), "The Absent-Minded Professor" (1960), and "Mary Poppins" (1964).

Politically conservative and ardently anti-Communist, the hard-working Disney was habitually involved in every stage of production and management. He and his

work were honored with 39 Academy Awards, and hundreds of other awards and tributes.

Under New Management

A period of stagnation that followed the founder's death came to an end in September 1984 when Michael Eisner became the Disney company's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. Eisner moved quickly to install fellow Jews in top positions throughout the Disney operation, and soon Hollywood's last gentile-run studio passed into Jewish hands.

As media critic Michael Medved has pointed out, "The famous Disney organization, which was founded by Walt Disney, a gentile Midwesterner who allegedly harbored anti-Semitic attitudes, now features Jewish personnel in nearly all its most powerful positions." ("Jews Run Hollywood. So What?," Moment magazine, August 1996.) Under the new management, Disney company sales and profits soared, and the revitalized company reclaimed a leading place in the entertainment world.

A Mighty Media Empire

With its acquisition in 1995 of Capital Cities/ABC, Disney became the world's largest entertainment company. The Walt Disney Company today is a sprawling and highly profitable international business empire. (Revenue for fiscal year 1998 was \$23 billion, and net income \$1.9 billion.) With major holdings in film, television, radio and publishing, the company has a tremendous impact on the mindset and behavior of hundreds of millions around the globe.

Through Walt Disney Pictures (headed by Joe Roth), Touchstone Pictures, Hollywood Pictures, Miramax (run by the Weinstein brothers), and Caravan Pictures, it is one of the world's largest film producers and distributors.

Through the 1995 merger, Disney acquired the ABC Television network, which owns ten television stations outright. It also has 225 affiliated TV stations in the United States, and is part owner of several European television companies. Among its other TV holdings are Walt Disney Television, Touchstone Television, and Buena Vista Television. Disney also controls three major cable television networks with more than 100 million subscribers: ESPN (headed by Steven Bornstein), Lifetime Television, and Arts & Entertainment (A&E and the History Channel).

Through its 1995 ABC acquisition, Disney owns 26 AM and FM radio stations, and has more than 3,300 ABC radio affiliates. The company also owns daily newspapers and glossy consumer magazines (including Discover), and Hyperion Press book publishers.

In addition to Disneyland — the "Magic Kingdom" amusement park in southern California opened by Walt Disney in 1955 — the company today owns Disney World (Florida), Epcot Center, Tokyo Disneyland, and Euro Disney (France), as well as the "Mighty Ducks" hockey team and the "Anaheim Angels" baseball team. Each year

Disney also sells well over a billion dollars worth of consumer products — toys, books and clothing — through more than 500 Disney stores.

Wealthy and Machiavellian

Michael D. Eisner, born in 1942 into a well-to-do Jewish family, was raised on Manhattan's Upper East Side and educated in private schools. His father was a Harvard lawyer who served as a high-ranking official in President Eisenhower's administration.

As Disney chairman, Eisner has been fabulously — some might say obscenely — compensated. His annual base salary of \$750,000 is only a small portion of his Disney income, which is mostly from stock option profits. In 1993, for example, Eisner's total compensation was a staggering \$203 million, while in 1997 he exercised options on 21.9 million shares for a profit of \$550 million.

Since 1984, chairman Eisner has received nearly \$1 billion from Disney, including base salary, bonuses, and stock options (Los Angeles Times, Dec. 4, 1997). In January 1997 he signed a ten-year extension contract with the company valued at some \$200 million.

Eisner has cultivated a public image of himself as friendly, trustworthy, and even boyish. But those who know him well regard him as treacherous and Machiavellian. David Geffen, a fellow Hollywood mogul who has known Eisner well for years, said of him in a 1995 interview: "Michael is a liar. And anyone who has dealt with him, genuinely dealt with him, knows he's a liar."

Cultural Revolution

Since 1984, Michael Eisner and his colleagues have refashioned Hollywood's most culturally conservative and family-oriented studio into one of its most culturally seditious and anti-traditional. In doing so, they betrayed the founder's legacy, degraded his values, and demeaned the company's defining spirit.

Under Eisner's direction, the Disney company has turned out motion pictures packed with graphic violence and killing (such as "Pulp Fiction"), as well as rock music albums loaded with gross obscenities (such as "Insane Clown Posse" by "The Great Malenko" "hip hop" band).

Even Commentary, the magazine of the American Jewish Committee (March 1998), was moved to lament: "If the old Disney tells us something inspiring about who we were not so very long ago, the new and even more hugely lucrative Disney is just another signpost marking our long, steep cultural descent."

'Pink Triangle' Disney

While support for homosexuals has been widespread in Hollywood for years, under Eisner the Disney company — in the words of the American Family Association — has become “one of the leading promoters of the homosexual lifestyle, as well as the homosexual political and social agenda in America today.” Eisner himself is a board member of “Hollywood Supporters,” an influential and aggressive homosexual advocacy organization. The Disney company advertises in homosexual publications such as Out magazine, and has given financial support to at least one benefit for the “National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.”

In 1996, actress Ellen DeGeneres “came out” as openly homosexual, both personally and as the lead character on the “Ellen” sitcom series, broadcast on the Eisner-controlled ABC television network. Eisner introduced insurance benefits for same-gender partners of Disney’s homosexual employees. For some years now, he has sanctioned “Gay Day” at Disney World, an event that each year draws throngs of boisterous “in your face” homosexuals.

“In the interest of full disclosure,” quipped Boston Herald columnist Don Feder, “Disney should change its corporate logo to show a pink triangle flying over Cinderella’s castle.” He went on to refer to Disneyland as “The Magic Kink-dom.”

Assault Against Christianity

Under Eisner, the Disney company has waged a “cultural war” against Christianity, scorning the religious sensibilities of the vast majority of Americans.

In a 1995 statement, the American Catholic Lawyers Association indignantly declared

We all remember the Disney Company from the days when it produced films your children could actually watch without losing their innocence — films which showed a decent respect for Christianity and Christian values. But that was before Mr. Michael Eisner took the helm of the Disney conglomerate. Now the Disney Company has joined the rest of Hollywood in obsessively attacking the Catholic Church and pumping R-rated filth into our culture — under cover of its subsidiary, Miramax Films, whose co-chairmen are Bob and Harvey Weinstein.

A particularly offensive example of the Eisner/Disney assault is “Priest,” a 1995 motion picture released by the company’s Miramax subsidiary. It tells the story of four Roman Catholic clergymen: one is homosexual, another is alcoholic, a third has a mistress, and the fourth is insane.

One of the strongest voices protesting this movie, and Disney’s anti-Christian productions generally, has been that of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, a New York-based civil rights organization. “Priest,” said League president William Donahue, “displays the most profound hostility to the Catholic Church that I

have seen in the last 15 years of reviewing movies." Eisner, Donahue added, would never approve a film that similarly portrays depraved Jewish rabbis or morally bankrupt homosexuals, or which contains cruel caricatures of African-Americans.

Anti-Arab

Reflecting the Zionist sentiments of its top management, the Eisner-run Disney company has produced a number of anti-Arab motion pictures in recent years. In a 1994 movie, "The Return of Jafar," for example, hook-nosed Arabs are referred to as "desert skunks." "The Father of the Bride, Part II" (1995), includes a loathsome Arab-American character named Habib (played, ironically, by Eugene Levy). "Kazaam" (1996), produced by Disney's Touchstone pictures, includes an assortment of villainous Arab characters, including a black marketer named Malik. Other recent anti-Arab Disney films include "In the Army Now" and "GI Jane."

In August 1996 the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee organized a demonstration outside the Disney studios to protest the company's pattern of anti-Arab productions.

White America Under Fire

For some years now, Hollywood and American television have churned out numerous films and television productions that distort European-American history and disparage white America's racial-cultural heritage. Under Eisner, Disney has moved to the forefront of this "politically correct" assault.

Among the recent Disney films that misrepresent and malign America's European heritage has been "Pocahontas," a 1995 animated film that portrays Indians ("native Americans") as liberated, nature-loving, wise and noble, while depicting Europeans as narrow-minded, ignorant, bigoted and greedy.

Under the "Hollywood Records" label, Eisner/Disney has issued CD albums with anti-white lyrics, including one by black "rap" singer "Prince Akeem," who blames black poverty on a "white conspiracy." In April 1996 Eisner fired New York City's most popular radio talk show host, Bob Grant, from his job at Disney-owned WABC for allegedly white racist rhetoric.

'Economic War'

Some of the millions of Americans whom Eisner and his colleagues have affronted are fighting back. Most notably, the nation's two largest Christian groups — the Roman Catholics and the Southern Baptists — have declared "economic war" against Eisner/Disney.

In 1996 the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights announced a “nationwide charge against Disney, making use of every legal means available — from boycotts to stockholder revolts,” to pressure the company into ending its hostility to Christianity and Catholicism. Roman Catholic dioceses across the country and the Catholic fraternal association Knights of Columbus sold off millions of dollars in Disney stock.

The Southern Baptists — with 16 million members, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States — voted overwhelmingly in 1996 and again in 1997 to boycott Disney films and products. The group cited the company’s trashing of traditional and family values, and in particular its support for homosexuality.

The Assemblies of God church — an evangelical Christian denomination with 2.5 million members — launched its own anti-Disney boycott campaign in 1996. It criticized the company for “abandoning the commitment to strong moral values.”

Such boycott efforts seem to have had little lasting impact, however, because Disney company products and services are so widely available, often under non-Disney labels, because pre-Eisner Disney images are still so beloved, and, more generally, because of public apathy.

Seductive and Dangerous

Because Eisner and the others who run the motion picture and television industries are able to shape the public’s barely conscious basic assumptions about life and society, thereby profoundly influencing the thinking and actions of millions, they wield greater power than even our elected lawmakers.

A lust for profits does not adequately explain the social-cultural agenda of Eisner and the others who control the American media. Rather, they seem driven by priorities that are fundamentally hostile to this nation’s most vital traditions and basic values.

Precisely because the Eisners of Hollywood and New York beguilingly pose as friends, they are more insidious, and ultimately more dangerous, than even a military threat from a foreign power.

Eisner’s transformation of Disney parallels, and contributes to, the cultural, social and political transformation of the United States as a whole. Like America’s political leaders, Eisner and his Disney colleagues reassuringly display familiar symbols and trademarks from an earlier era, exploiting reputations and good-will painstakingly built up over decades. Those who patronize Disney are reassured that such beloved symbols as Mickey Mouse and Snow White are still in place, just as millions of credulous Americans are reassured about the future of the United States because such icons as the American flag and the US Constitution are still in place. But in each case, the spirit that gave life

to these venerable symbols has been driven out by a very different one — a spirit that has not yet dared to show its real face, or speak its real name