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TRANSCRIPT



Challenging media

MICKEY MOUSE MONOPOLY

DISNEY, CHILDHOOD & CORPORATE POWER

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Disney, Childhood & Corporate Power

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Nicole Gagerges College Student
Melody Zagami College Student
Melina, age 9
Abigail, age 9
Naomi, age 7
Alexander, age 8

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INTRODUCTION

[Young girl] I think Disney makes movies because people like their movies.

[Movie: *Beauty and the Beast*] Sudden as the sun, rising in the east. Tale as old as time, song as old as rhyme, beauty and the beast.

ELIZABETH HADLEY: Disney is dangerous because it is sublime kind of education. It is absorbed by our young people's minds as entertainment.

[Movie: *The Little Mermaid*] You have your looks, your pretty face. And don't underestimate the importance of body language.

NICOLE GAGERGES: You can read into a movie too much, something that's mainly for mere entertainment value, as I see Disney to be.

[Movie: *Lady and the Tramp*] Hey, check it out man. Beep beep – Hey, let's take this baby to Atlantic City.

MELODY ZAGAMI: It takes an adult, it takes someone who has been around a while to notice sort of the underlying meaning. I don't think it harms children at all.

[Movie: *The Lion King*] Long live the King.

MARISA PERALTA: I just remember a comment my daughter made once. And she said, 'Mommy, I don't want to be racist,' so she knows this word, 'but why is it that dark people always doing bad things?'

HENRY GIROUX: I wrote a book about Disney, called *The Mouse that Roared - Disney and the End of Innocence*, and one of the things that I wanted to do in this book, was I wanted to in some way talk about how Disney represented the merger of corporate power, entertainment, and what I call public pedagogy.

And all of a sudden I was getting tons of radio interviews and I guess its fair to say for the most part that 80% of those interviews were really quite hostile. Especially the talk radio interviews in which the public would call in, and the basic comment would be, "how could you possibly, *possibly* believe that Disney is political?" Or, "how can you possibly think that there isn't something entirely innocent in the world of Disney?" Or "Who the hell, who the hell are you? Don't you have anything better to do than to write about Disney?"

NARRATOR: The Walt Disney Company has been a powerful force in creating childhood culture all over the world. Disney's massive success is based on images of innocence, magic, and fun. Its animated films in particular are praised as wholesome family entertainment, endorsed by teachers and parents and are immensely popular with children.

ALVIN POUSSAINT: Well, I think that Disney is really a very, very important part of American culture in terms of its identity. If you can imagine for a moment that children in fact have been raised on Disney for many generations now. That they've seen Mickey Mouse, all of these icons of Walt Disney have been part of their lives since they were children.

[College student singing the French chef song from The Little Mermaid]

MEAGHAN: I think of very, like, fond memories, of very good things because I remember going to the movies with my best friends when I was seven, and my grandmother, watching it with my mom. It has a lot to do with family, and like, who I love. I guess, I don't know, a very salient aspect of my childhood.

NICOLE: The first time I probably saw a Disney movie was probably before I could talk. Because my mother has a huge love of Disney as well.

MELODY: It's entertainment. And it's enjoyable to watch and for some reason, people love to buy T Shirts and stuffed animals. You know. It's magic.

[TV ad: Disney] When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are. Anything...

HENRY GIROUX: I think that one of the things that's so interesting about Disney as compared to other corporations is that Disney has made a spectacle of innocence. I mean it hides behind innocence in way that allows it to separate corporate culture from corporate power. It has a kind of romance about it that allows us, in some way, to treat Disney as the ultimate form of fantasy. A fantasy that never needs to be questioned.

NARRATOR: Disney is a transnational media conglomerate, owning TV and radio networks, Cable systems, Internet sites, music studios, media production companies, magazines, sports teams, theaters, and theme parks. As a result, Disney exerts a tremendous influence on national and international popular culture.

JUSTIN LEWIS: The Disney corporation a few years ago bought ABC, one of the biggest networks in the US. ABC itself had already been affiliated with Capitol Cities, another big media conglomerate. So Disney, buying ABC also bought Capitol Cities became at that time the second biggest media corporation in the world. So Disney are one of now six or seven media corporations that really own most of the media that we consume.

NARRATOR: Media conglomeration raises fundamental concerns about its impact on democracy. Because enormous conglomerates like Disney own so much of the media, they exercise unprecedented control over the images and messages we're exposed to. The result is that we're presented with a very limited worldview, skewed and dominated by corporate interests.

HENRY GIROUX: The thing I found very, very interesting is that almost everybody who interviewed me would often begin by saying, “Aren’t you afraid, of writing about Disney critically?” And I was stunned and I thought, “Where am I living? Am I living in a police state?” I mean I thought I lived in a country that described itself as the apogee of democracy. Where descent was fundamental to what it meant to be an American Citizen.

This image of Mickey Mouse in a mousetrap was the image that we decided was going to be on the cover of my book and all of a sudden and at the last moment, the publisher rejected using the image because they we’re afraid they were going to be sued by Disney.

In this culture, publishers are absolutely petrified about using Disney images. Writers who used Disney archives have to give their manuscripts to, I don't know who they are, the Disney imagineers, to go through those manuscripts and to make sure that those materials in some way are consistent with what Disney wants to represent about itself. I have appeared in books where people have actually written in the introductions that they couldn't use certain titles that included Disney names because the publisher, in this case Indiana University press, was fearful of being sued by Disney. You know, you can't take a picture of Disney World and use it in a book. You have to get permission. One author had an image in his book in which he talked about Disney World and it was just space, and his point was he couldn't use the image. I mean Disney had monopolized the market on how it represents itself. Disney is very concerned about policing its image, or policing its representations.

JUSTIN LEWIS: Because Disney are such a large media corporation and their products are so ubiquitous and so wide spread globally, Disney's stories, the stories that Disney tell, will be the stories that will form and help form a child's imaginary world, all over the world, and that's an incredible amount of power, enormous amount of power. And when you have that kind of power, when you are essentially becoming a dominant story teller for children globally, yeah, we have to begin to ask very serious questions about what kind of stories are being told here, are these the stories we really want our children to hear? Would we like our children to hear other kinds of stories? And if we don't ask those kinds of questions then essentially we are allowing Disney to shape our children's imaginations in certain kinds of ways.

I think it's a mistake for us to imagine that the only way that media affect us is through an immediate impact on the way we think. The way the media influences the way we think is much less immediate and much less a sort of straight forward impact on the way we think, and is much more a question of creating a certain environment of images that we grow up in and that we become used to and after a while those images will begin to shape what we know and what we understand about the world. And that's not an immediate wiz-bang effect. That's a slow and accumulative effect and much more subtle.

[Young school girl singing Vanessa Williams' song "Colors of the Wind"]

GAIL DINES: Encoded in media images are ideologies, about how we think about the world, belief systems, constructions of reality. And we develop our notions of reality from the cultural mechanisms around us. One of the most important cultural institutions that we have today is, indeed, the media. It gives us a whole array of images, of stereotypes, of beliefs systems about race, about class, about gender. And we now live in a media based system, where most of our leisure time is spent consuming media. And so it is really important to analyze the institution of media in order to understand how we, as consumers and citizens, understand the media and the role the media plays in socializing us into certain belief systems.

[Young school girl] Of course you know we are so beautiful. We are the prettiest ones...

HOW TO BE A GIRL? HOW TO BE A BOY? – (Gender Representations)

GAIL DINES: What's amazing when you look at Disney and Disney movies over the years is how little the image of females really changed. You still have the same highly sexualized female body with the big breasts, the tiny waist, the fluttering eyelashes, the coy expressions, and the seductress. These images seemed very similar over the years, and even when they are in animal forms, you know you've got this very seductive little female animal.

[Movie: *Bambi*] (Flirting, singing rabbit)

GAIL DINES: What we find is that this presents people with a kind of notion of what femininity is about. This is not a mirror on society. This is not reflecting, who women really are, or what females really are, it is basically constructing notions of what femininity is. And these are not notions that necessarily Disney invented, but what they do with these notions is they caricature them, they wrap them up in this magic kingdom wrapper and then sell them to children. And that's really the power of Disney.

DIANE LEVIN: When they are young, they are trying to figure out what does it mean to be a woman, what do I look like if I am a girl? What should I look like? And they'll focus on the most salient dramatic images they can see. They don't necessarily think about "well that doesn't look like the women I know in real life." They don't make those kinds of comparisons because that's kind of like making a movie, putting a whole story together, doing logical comparisons. They think about one slide at a time, 'This is how it looks here. Gee that's interesting, maybe I want to look like that.' So it shapes kid's images about how they're going to look.

[Movie: *Beauty and the Beast*]

Well, there's no one as burly and brawny.

-- As you see I've got biceps to spare.

-- Not a bit of him scraggly or scrawny.

-- That's right. And every last inch of me's covered with hair!

CAROLYN NEWBERGER: In *Beauty & the Beast*, you have Lumiere, the candlestick, and the broom, the feminine broom, acting out these male/female themes, where he's the aggressive, and she's saying 'oh, no, no, no' and then by golly, he sweeps her off of her feet after she said no, no, no, no.

[Movie: *Beauty and the Beast*]

Oh no

-- Oh yes

Oh no

-- Oh yes, yes, yes.

I've been burned by you before.

CAROLYN NEWBERGER: So it's a replication of the woman as holding back, woman as being coquettish, or even woman as saying no, I don't want this but what she really means is yes I do.

ELIZABETH HADLEY: Jasmine in the Aladdin film, in which there is a scene where she becomes a seductress to distract the person who is after Aladdin.

[Movie: Aladdin]

I never realized how incredibly handsome you are.

-- Hmm. That's better. Now, pussycat, tell me more about myself.

You're beard is so twisted...

ELIZABETH HADLEY: This I find very dangerous. Because you have, again it gives the young girls the idea that's the way that you get what you want. You use your body to manipulate people, into, specifically men, into to get what it is that you want.

NARRATOR: One of the themes seen repeatedly in Disney' movies, is that however strong or powerful a female character may be, she still needs to be rescued by a male. In the world of Disney, females not only get into trouble easily, they also lack the ability to save their own lives. This is true even of Disney's films of the 80s and 90s.

ALISON WILSON: The princess/mermaid one is a really big theme with girls. When I just walked into the room, two of the girls were playing, one girl was laying dying and the other ones was crying, "Help." One of the girls was there was playing at the playground up against the fence like this and the boys were coming to her rescue. And how it happened so early, that amazes me. They grab on to that.

GAIL DINES: When you look at the images of Snow White today, with the feminist sensibility, you realize how ridiculous the image is. Here you've got this young female completely isolated at home, enjoying cooking, cleaning, and her friends are the animals and she is happy. I mean it just makes no sense today given that feminism and feminist discourses have seeped down into everyday life.

[Movie: Snow White] *Now you wash the dishes, you tidy up the room. You feed the fireplace, and I'll use the broom.*

GAIL DINES: So what Disney has to do in order to keep up with the themes of the society is that they have to keep changing. In *Little Mermaid*, you know, she does defy her father, there is a sense of a more powerful female here.

[Movie: The Little Mermaid]

I set certain rules, and I expect those rules to be obeyed.

-- You don't even know him.

Know him? I don't have to know him – they're all the same.

-- Daddy, I love him!

GAIL DINES: Of course, ultimately, she is willing to give up her voice to get the man. And once she has given up her voice, the only thing she has left to get him is the body.

Now a more interesting complex reality is *Mulan*. Where, this is a very powerful strong character who almost single-handedly wins the war. And so we do have a real independent female. However after the war, when she goes home, then the expectations of femininity are exactly the same, as if it has never happened.

[Movie: *Mulan*]

*Great, she brings home a sword. If you as me, she should have brought home a man.
-- Excuse me, does Fa Mulan live here?*

GAIL DINES: We have examples like *Beauty and the Beast*, where the argument was that this is a strong and powerful woman, and why is she strong and powerful? Because she is reading a book.

[Movie: *Beauty & the Beast*]

*Ah, Belle.
-- Good morning. I've come to return the book I borrowed.
Finished already?
-- Oh I couldn't put it down. Have you got anything new?*

GAIL DINES: Well then reality is just a pseudo feminism because ultimately in *Beauty and the Beast*, is that she marries a batterer.

CAROLYN NEWBERGER: A great deal of my work and my professional life has to do with family violence. And when you look at that movie with that eye, the abuse is horrific.

[Movie: *Beauty & the Beast*]

*No, Belle, listen to me. I'm old, I've lived my life.
-- Wait! (Beast grabs her father)
Belle!
-- Wait!*

CAROLYN NEWBERGER: He screams at her, he imprisons her, he throws her father out the door and rips her family away from her. His behavior is, without question, frankly and horrifically abusive.

[Movie: *Beauty & the Beast*]

*(beast) Where is she?
-- She's not coming.
What?! I thought I told you to come down to dinner.
-- (Belle) I'm not hungry.
You'll come out or I'll...break down the door!
-- Gently, gently.
Will you come down to dinner, please?*

-- No thank you.

You can't stay in there forever.

-- Yes I can.

Fine. Then go ahead and starve! If she doesn't eat with me, she doesn't eat at all!

CAROLYN NEWBERGER: And yet, the whole thrust of the story is that she *returns* to him, that she *socializes* him, that she *excuses* him. That she reinterprets his rage and his abuse as temper, that she reinterprets his personality as tender and vulnerable, and then that she falls in love with him.

[Movie: *Beauty & the Beast*]

There's something sweet, and almost kind. But he was mean, and he was course, and unrefined. And now he's dear, and so unsure, I wonder why I didn't see it there before.

CAROLYN NEWBERGER: And this is a movie that is saying to our children, “overlook the abuse, overlook the violence, there is a tender prince lurking within, and it's your job to kiss that prince and bring it out, or to kiss that beast and bring the prince out.” That's a dangerous message.

ABIGAIL, age 9: If Belle was my friend and I saw what happened to her, yelling and romantic, I'd be happy for her because she found someone who she liked, and I'd be happy for her that she liked the beast, and that she would stay with him. But I would also feel bad for her because she gets yelled a lot.

MELINA, age 9: If Belle was my friend and I'd seen her go through this whole thing, I probably would say, keep being nice and sweet as you are, and that probably will change him and in the movie he does.

“INDIANS,” CHIHUAHUAS AND HYENAS – (Representations of the “Other”)

[Movie: Peter Pan] *Indians! Quite savage, you know.*

ALVIN POUSSAINT: I worked in media and often I was surprised. Sometimes very intelligent, mostly white writers, college graduates, held stereotypes about a lot of people. When they wrote them into stories they would write it in a stereotypic point of view. It's like they didn't know any other way to write it. Because frequently they were not involved in a social personal way with Blacks, Latinos or Asian-Americans. And so when they had to write something about them, they had to draw on what they knew and frequently what they knew was what they picked up from the media and frequently that was stereotypical.

GAIL DINES: When I start to decode Disney's images in class, one of the first thing students say to me is, “is this intentional – this racism, this sexism?” And of course, the answer to that has to be, well first of all, we do know the vast majority of people in Hollywood, who are in power and who have creative power, and ownership power, basically the vast majority of them are white men, we know that. But the real answer to that is, it doesn't really matter if they are intentional or unintentional because the effect is ultimately the same. And also, what's the most important thing is that Mickey Mouse doesn't write these scripts, these scripts are written by real people, who themselves have been socialized in this society. And they are going to internalize those norms and those values and so when they produce work, it's bound to come out in some way, unless of course, they make a really conscious decision to operate within an alternative ideology.

MARISA PERALTA: Latino characters in Disney movies? Oh, well, one comes to mind, the Chihuahua--and that's about it.

[Movie: Lady and the Tramp] *Even tramp has his Achilles heel.
-- Pardon me, amigo, but what is this “chili heel”?*

MARISA PERALTA: It's almost expected. The character that's playing the Latino will end up doing things that they shouldn't do. In this case, Alonzo is stealing a car.

[Movie: Lady and the Tramp] *Hey, check it out man. Beep, beep. Hey, let's take this baby to Atlantic City.*

MARISA PERALTA: At this point in my life, I can look at one of these movies and if it wasn't so tragic it would be comical.

[Movie: Lady and the Tramp]
*Allow me to introduce myself, I am Ignacio Alonzo Julio Federico de Tito.
-- Get away from me you little bug-eyed creep.*

MARISA PERALTA: She insults him, she tells him that he is like the bottom, the least thing she would ever get near. He still sticks his tongue out in “the more you insult me, the more I want you” attitude.

[Movie: *Lady and the Tramp*]

Alonzo, darling, could I see you for a moment, privately?

-- Privately? Oooh...

Coming, Alonzo?

-- Yeah, yeah, yeah. You guys beat it. My baby and I, we gotta talk.

MARISA PERALTA: Taco Bell, Disney, why can't they *not* represent us as Chihuahua? What's this thing with Latinos being dogs?

JACQUELINE MALONEY: The crows, I mean it's either the crows, the monkeys, the orangutans. They're always the ones that are sort of doing the jive dancing, or the hip-hop dancing, or the break dancing, or have this kind of slow, slurred speech patterns.

[Movie: *Dumbo*] *Well this is most irregular.*

-- Well, I just can't believe my eyes. He's dead isn't he?

-- No...dead people don't snore.

JACQUELINE MALONEY: In *Jungle Book*, it's that same, you know--the jive, the hustle, the dance, you know, these gorillas and orangutans that sound like black people that want to be like men, but will never be men. The baboons.

[Movie: *The Jungle Book*] *(Gorilla) I want to be a man, man cub, and stroll right into town and be just like the other man – I'm tired of walking around. I want to be like you. I want to talk like you, walk like you.*

ELIZABETH HADLEY: We have dealt with decades of Tarzan movies, where the white man comes in to the jungle and he tames the animals and he also tames the natives. And he knows the jungle better than the native people do.

[clips from "*Tarzan the Ape Man*"]

HENRY GIROUX: If somebody is going to show a film that in its original version was enormously racist, I guess the first question would be, why would you want to show that anyway? I guess the second question was, if you appropriate it, do you have a responsibility, particularly if it's a children's film, to take those constructions and make them problematic so that kids have an opportunity to hold them up against some kind of critical vocabulary?

[TV: *Disney prpogram*] *Disney animator Glenn Keane was given a difficult task of coming up with a new take on Tarzan.*

-- I've been watching my son do his skateboarding and snowboarding and started thinking about Tarzan as kind of having this attitude of a surfer kind of guy.

ELIZABETH HADLEY: And then you have the film, that Walt Disney comes along in this day and time produces a Tarzan film ...without black people at all. So not only that they eliminated the black people in Africa but they also eliminated black people's presence.

ALVIN POUSSAINT: Kids in Africa see it. They see a white man in African who is superior, swinging from trees to trees, they see no Africans. They see gorillas being the ones they relate to. What does it mean to an African child? Is it promoting white supremacy to these Black African children who watch Tarzan in a movie theater in Africa? Of course it will, and it might be promoting it around the world.

NAOMI, age 7: I've never seen any black people in Disney's movies.

ABIGAIL, age 9: I can't think of any Disney movies that have black people that are good or bad.

HENRY GIROUX: When you produce a discourse as public as that, and you have *that* kind of power, the kind of power that allows you to distribute those messages to thousands, if not millions, of children then you have a responsibility.

ALVIN POUSSAINT: The Lion King, the hyenas, clearly spoke in kind of street, inner city, African American dialect and they were considered the bad guys.

[Movie: The Lion King]

I thought things were better with Mufasa.

-- What did you say?

I said – I said, que pasa?

ALVIN POUSSAINT: They made an identification with them with inner-city minority people, particularly blacks. And so they were sending a message to the audience, to kids watching the film that was not so subtle.

[Movie: The Lion King]

(Hyenas) Hey – there he goes. There he goes.

-- So go get him.

There ain't no way I'm going in there. What – you want me to come out looking like you, cactus-butt?

JACQUELINE MALONEY: I have a girlfriend who, she's a white woman and her son is about three, and she came to me one day really disturbed and said that she had been coming back from shopping and that her son said, "Mommy, Mommy, the hyenas, the hyenas," and she looked up and she said there was a group of black children on the carousel and playing. And she said but when you had your back turned to them, they did, they sounded just like, the sound, the voicing, the laughing of the hyenas. And she could not move her son away from the attachment of the sound to the image of hyenas in *The Lion King*. And she said, and *further*, he had made the association that they were bad.

Then she started to shift in her assessment of what I was saying to her, but also what kinds of images she was allowing her son to see without having conversation.

[Movie: *Lady and the Tramp*] We are Siamese if you please

CHYNG FENG SUN: Disney has very, very few Asian or Asian American characters in their children's films. And that's probably why the Siamese Cats really stand out for me. If you look at those cats very carefully, they clearly have those stereotypical Asian features: they have slanted eyes, buckteeth and very heavy accents. They are also depicted as sinister, cunning and manipulative.

[Movie: *Lady and the Tramp*]

Are you seeing that thing swimming around and around?

-- Yes.

Maybe we be reaching in and make it drown.

CHYNG FENG SUN: If we compared the Siamese cats with Mulan, I must say that Disney has made very significant improvement in the visual portrayal of Chinese. However, in order to create this model feminist figure, China is portrayed as probably the most sexist and oppressive society in all Disney's children's films.

We see a little boy bully a little girl. We hear people saying that women have no value at all if they don't get married. And, the interesting thing is, this match-making interviews in the movie actually did not really exist in China.

[Movie: *Mulan*]

Too skinny. Not good for bearing sons.

CHYNG FENG SUN: And it has been made very clear that women should just follow men's orders instead of speaking up their minds in that society.

[Movie: *Mulan*]

You will do well to teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a man's presence.

-- Mulan, you dishonor me.

-- So you'll die for honor?

-- I will die doing what's right.

-- But if...

-- I know my place. It is time you learned yours.

CHYNG FENG SUN: The issue for me, is not really about whether Disney should or should not appropriate other cultures' stories or whether ancient China was less or more oppressive than Disney's portrayal. The question is: what type of stories get invented, circulated, perpetuated in public imagination and why?

[Movie: *Aladdin*]

Oh I come from a land, from a far away place, where the caravan camels roam...

NARRATOR: The lyrics of Aladdin's opening song "Arabian Nights" were written by Howard Ashman. He actually submitted two versions of the lyrics and Disney chose the version which was considered racist by members of the Arab American community.

JACK SHAHEEN: The song, it goes, *"I come from a land from a very far 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."* That song sets up the kind of people that live in Agrabah.

[Movie: Aladdin]

Oh, you must be hungry. Here you go.

-- You'd better be able to pay for that.

Pay?

-- No one steals from my cart.

I'm sorry sir, I don't have any money.

-- Thief!

Please, if you let me go to the palace, I can get some from the Sultan.

-- Do you know what the penalty is for stealing?

No, no, please!

JACK SHAHEEN: The merchants are unfriendly, they're mischievous and brutal. One merchant tries to chop the hand of the princess because she takes an apple. Which goes against Islam. In Islam, you are obliged to feed someone when they are hungry, over and over again. And that's what devout Muslims do. And that's what devout good merchants do. And only in Saudi Arabia, if you are a thief, a real thief, and after 3 warnings and 3 convictions, if you steal something, is the hand removed. In one country, with a population of a few million. And yet they opted to use that scene. It took us six months to get a meeting, just to talk about the film.

NARRATOR: When Arab Americans protested against the derogatory stereotypes in *Aladdin*, their concerns were first met with silence. Disney responded after the issue had received widespread negative press coverage.

JACK SHAHEEN: So we go to the corporate office in Burbank. And we sit there and maybe fifteen minutes into the meeting, I won't mention the gentleman's name, but he accused us, the three of us, of drumming up negative publicity against the film. And it was only months after that meeting that they changed part of the lyrics.

NARRATOR: But Disney still kept the line "It's barbaric but hey it's home" which prompted the *New York Times* to write an op-ed piece saying, "It's Racist but Hey, it's Disney."

NANCY ELDREDGE: A lot of children come to Plimouth Plantation and visit our Wampanog home site. And the children think that all Indian people hit their faces and go "Woo, Woo, Woo." The other is that all Indian people ride on a horse, and have head dresses on with a lot of feathers, and that they all live in Teepees. Also there's the sitting

crossed legged with your arms folded and you have to look like this and very often, Native people are portrayed as saying 'UGH!'

[Peter Pan clips]

NANCY ELDREDGE: And when young children prepare to dance and sing the way they see Native people do, they'll jump all around and kick their feet and flail their arms and have no idea what they are doing. What they are doing, without realizing it, is making fun of us.

[TV ad: Disney/Pocahontas CD-Rom] *By the age of six, she's already canoed a wild river, searched for gold, discovered a new world, explored a Native American village, learned new words, hunted for stowaways, stopped a war, and never even had to leave her room.*

HENRY GIROUX: What you often find in Disney texts, is not only a rewriting of history in ways that eliminate some of its most controversial political moments and free it of particular conflicts, or eliminate particular kinds of conflicts, or in many ways make it appear as if certain social events have nothing to do with power. For instance I mean when you look at a film like *Pocahontas*, which is really about colonialism, it's about Native Americans being killed in terms that can be adequately described as genocide. That isn't what is shown in Disney films.

[Movie: Pocahontas] *Alright, let's go talk to your father.*

NARRATOR: Disney has been criticized for trivializing Pocahontas's important political and diplomatic role in history. When Pocahontas first met John Smith, she was still a young girl. In reality, there was never a romance between them. Pocahontas did eventually marry an Englishman years later, but it wasn't John Smith.

DEIRDRE ALMEIDA: I could see the romance between John Smith and Pocahontas serving mainstream America because it's similar to Thanksgiving, okay, we want to deny our history of genocide. You know, we want to deny that, you know, Europeans came to North America and practically eliminated a race of people. We committed our own American holocaust. So we better find points in history where we can show Europeans, and later European-Americans, getting along with the Indians, where we were all one happy family sitting down together having a dinner and then we have people falling in love, a native woman and a European man to bring two communities together in peace. So I could see it serving a political purpose from propaganda standpoint.

Disney is putting forth this attitude of, "We can change your history, we can portray you look any way we want. We can put little plastic figurines of your historical figures in your child's Happy Meal or Kids' Meal at Burger King. We can put you on the sheets, on the lunch boxes. We can have your little non-native kids dressing up as you at Halloween. You can't do anything about it."

[Movie: Pocahontas] *Savages! Savages! Barely even human! Savages! Savages! Drive them from our shore! They're not like you and me, which means they must be evil. We must sound the drums of war!*

GAIL DINES: Savages? This is what's all about? Whites thinking that Native Americans were savages? Native Americans thinking whites are savages? And that the problem was there were these two groups who couldn't understand each other?

[Movie: Pocahontas] *Different from us, which means they can't be trusted, we must sound the drums of war! They're savages, savages, first we deal with this one, then we sound the drums of war!*

GAIL DINES: Where are children going to get any sense of the history of this culture, and this country and what happened, in terms of whose blood was spilled, whose resources was stolen, whose lives were taken?

ALEXANDER, age 8: I like *Pocahontas* kind of because the person who made the movie made a real story about Pocahontas. Pocahontas is true, Pocahontas was real. John Smith is real. Plymouth is real and the Indians are real.

MELINA, age 9: Pocahontas tries to save the day because she ran up on a ledge and she covered John Smith from being killed and then she made this big speech, and then everyone was like "Oh, Yeah" and everybody felt really bad so they just became friends.

ABIGAIL, age 9: I think that at the end the Pilgrims traveled back to England because they understand that it's their land and they shouldn't be taking it over.

COMMERCIALIZING CHILDREN'S CULTURE

MARGARET MOODY: I think that commercialization is probably the most appalling thing about the Disney movies. Some of the movies even if I don't like the whole show, very often I think the show is overly produced, at least it is interesting and there's something I like children to learn from the movie. But I see no reason why I have to go to Toys-R-Us and buy t-shirts that have the movies advertised on it, why they have to have a back-pack that says Lion King. It offends me that I am doing Disney's advertisement and paying for the privilege.

DIANE LEVIN: Disney and Disney products and movies, this having a big influence on children's play. It's part of the whole move in media, to market toys to children through movies, TV shows, video games. The problem with marketing to children, and having toys that are highly realistic replicas of what children have seen on the screen, is that in many ways it affects how they play.

MARISA PERALTA: Play is natural for children, comes natural. And through play, children get to know themselves, get to know the world around them, it's their chance to explore, to create their own means of exploring the world. They develop imagination, language, skills, social skills. If you tell the child how to play, you are depriving the child of what's maybe necessary for that child's development.

DIANE LEVIN: When children see a movie, and then try to replicate the script, and there are toys that help them do that--a whole line of toys that are exact replicas of what they've seen on the screen, the message they're getting is: kids when you play, you're supposed to play the movie and here are toys to help you do it. And because children focus on the salient, dramatic, the toy keeps them focused on that narrow plot. When I hear lot of my research has had, been teachers describing play all over the world looking exactly the same. And it can stay the same and fixated, and not evolve and change. When that happens, children learn the lessons they see in the media much more than they otherwise would when their play is just a replica of what they've seen on the screen.

MARISA PERALTA: As a teacher, I get to see the impact magnified. It is very clear when you are going to school and there's a movie about to be released. And slowly but surely, all children start coming in with all the products that are advertising this movie.

DIANE LEVIN: The marketing to children is not just done through the ads that they see, it's also the program itself, or the movie itself. The *whole* production is used to as a way to sell products, where it reached a new peak in a movie like Hercules.

The urns with Hercules symbols, and mugs, and sneakers and it's a total anachronism in that it doesn't relate to the times of Hercules at all but it's showing children shopping and getting all the products and all the excitement of getting the products so it kind of makes this kind of seamless marketing between the show and the ad, totally undistinguishable for children.

MARISA PERALTA: It's extremely powerful. And no, you can't escape it as a parent. I think that, you would have to, I can't imagine, lock your child in the house and don't let them go out? It's impossible, it's everywhere. It's everywhere.

HENRY GIROUX: You can't get away, anywhere you go, from the products that are being sold and they all overlap so that if Disney produces a bad film, it doesn't have to worry because, you see it, owns a television station, or it owns a television network in which you can run that film over and over again to massive audiences. Or, it can use its retailers to in fact transform it into a video and sell it in its video store, or it can market it abroad, or create a whole new toy line. Or, if we missed the point, it can begin to advertise it over and over in its newspapers, in its magazines, in its journals, so that eventually it will seem as if that really is such a wonderful product. How can it be in so many places? How could you miss it? I mean, so it seems to me it has the power to place that product, it has the power to turn every element of communication and information in to an advertisement.

[ABC News Channel 5] Despite below-freezing temperatures, onlookers stood four-deep for the seventy-fourth annual parade. The big news was the return of Mickey Mouse after an eighteen year absence.

GAIL DINES: But this also links to a much bigger issue. And that bigger issue is what kind of society do we want to live in? Do we want to live in a society where seven global corporations control our culture? At the moment, the only people at the table are the holders of corporate power, that's not a democracy.

NARRATOR: “We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. To make money is our only objective.” (Internal Memo, Michael Eisner, CEO, The Walt Disney Co.)

MARGARET MOODY: Are they teachers or are they entertainers? If they have so much power, I think it's time for them to feel some responsibility, to educate the world they really live in. I really believe that as an entertainer, you have the responsibility to be a teacher as well, because you have someone's attention.

[Voiceovers during credits]

You can't blame Disney. I've always been certainly opposed to people who say this like, I listen to the song and it made me kill someone. I mean, it's just ridiculous. You can't have everybody take responsibility....

When they do make their movies, they do the best job as they can because you can't please every special group out there.

We should create a cultural environment that Disney is just one of the many possible stories children can hear so that children have available to them a wide variety of imaginary world and images, so the issue of how it's affecting them becomes less important because there is simply more available.

In spite of the criticism, I still find enjoyment in Disney just because it was something I grew up with.

It's hands off Disney, you know they do good things and they bring joy into your life and that people are not looking for them as messages or plainly they don't see it that way and that may be more troublesome because that becomes a not so subtle form of actual indoctrination.

It's a fantasy so it's a place to have fun. So I'd rather do that instead of seeing what goes on behind the scene because it will lessen the magic.

I am not interested in censoring Disney. I'm interested in what Disney represents in this culture against a larger issue of what it means for this culture to survive as a democracy.

I did not want my face to appear on camera because I want to get into mass media at some point. As you know, Disney owns a lot of mass media and a lot of the entertainment industry. That's pretty much it. I'm just looking out for my future and looking out for my career goals.