

FTS 095: Walt Disney World and American Culture Winter 2020

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Class Time: Online/Travel
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Description:

The Walt Disney Company is the world's biggest media corporation. In 2014, its revenues were \$48.8 billion with its 11 theme parks providing almost half of its revenue and 20.7% of its \$10.7 billion in operating profits. This course will examine the centrality of Walt Disney Company to the development and expansion of American media culture into the global marketplace. The Walt Disney World Resort will form the basis for our exploration of how the Disney brand became the centerpiece of the American way of life and how this Doctrine has been maintained, altered and/or expanded following the death of Walt Disney. A particular focus of this seminar will be on the Disney theme parks that remain a centerpiece of the Disney brand. This class includes a trip to the Walt Disney World Resort with behind the scene tours of several of the theme parks. Students will be provided with the opportunity to develop an independent research project that through the analysis of a specific attraction in the park they will learn the methodological tools necessary for cultural analysis.

Course Objectives:

- Provide an introduction to the field of Disney studies and become conversant in the major discursive debates surrounding the production and reception of Disney products.
- Present an overview of the history of Walt Disney and his impact on film history and more broadly American cultural habits.
- Study the history of the architecture and design of the Disney theme parks.
- Understand the major questions and methodologies employed in the study of popular culture.
- Critical consideration of the cultural practice of tourism and its interconnection with other forms of mass culture.
- Develop the critical skills that can be employed to analyze the aesthetic, cultural and industrial relationships between the varied and multiple Disney media products.

Expectations:

This is a hybrid class that includes one week of online course work and a week at Walt Disney World. We will spend the first week of the class studying the history of Walt Disney and Walt Disney World. Our analysis will be shaped by a variety of methodological approaches, including cultural studies, media studies, anthropology and sociology, that will introduce students to the major questions and debates concerning the impact of Walt Disney on American society.

For the travel portion of our class, we will spend three full days studying and touring the Walt Disney World theme parks. Our trip will include a variety of special programs and tours that will immerse us fully into the Disney World experience.

Walt Disney World Group Tour Schedule:

Thursday, January 2: Students arrive at Orlando International Airport, Florida

- Take Disney's Magical Express buses to the Art of Animation Resort
- Students check in—welcome dinner and miniature golf

Friday, January 3: Magic Kingdom

8:30 to 1 pm (4.5 hrs): *Keys to the Kingdom* Tour

Saturday, January 4: EPCOT

7:45 to 12:00: Disney's *Leadership Strategies* seminar

Sunday, January 5: Animal Kingdom Tour

Hippo Tour and Avatar visit
Backstage of La Nouba (Disney Springs)

Monday, January 6: Students depart Orlando International Airport, Florida

Reserve Readings:

Reserve articles and chapters are available via the class Blackboard site. (RR)

Work: All work should follow the standards of academic integrity as explained in the University of Vermont Code of Academic Integrity: <http://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/acadintegrity.pdf>. Any incidents of plagiarism will result in an F for the class. Make sure that all sources are properly cited. You are also expected to hand in all work on their due date. Any late work will be marked down a half grade for every day after the due date.

Requirements and Grading:

- 1) Reading Journals (4 journals for 20 points total):** Each day questions will be posted in the Course Materials section of our Blackboard site for you to respond to in journal form. Your responses should draw heavily on the assigned readings and postings for the day and should include direct citations from the material. You are expected to post 4 total journal entries by **midnight** on the day the question was posted. Late journal entries will be marked down a half point for every day after the due date.
- 2) Research Project:** This project will involve the analysis of a single attraction at Disney World that each student will select at the start of the class. The research project will consist of the following components:
 - a) History of the attraction and its design and development (15 points)**
Due: December 27 by midnight
 - b) Analysis of the film that the attraction is based on (10 points)** **Due:** December 29 by midnight

- c) **Analysis of Youtube videos of the attraction and discussion of visitor reactions/responses (10 points) Due:** December 31 by midnight
- d) **Field observations of the attraction while at Walt Disney World (15 points) Due:** January 13 by midnight
- e) **Description of ancillary markets for your attraction including games, toys, costumes, websites, etc. (10 points) Due:** January 14 by midnight
- f) **Creation of your own attraction based on the original source material (20 points) Due:** January 15 by midnight

Detailed instructions and deadlines for each portion of your research project will be posted in the Course Materials section of our class Blackboard site. Late work will be marked down a half point for every day after the due date.

Class Schedule

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| <u>Day 1:</u> | 12/26 | Read: Gabler, "Slouching Toward Utopia" (pp. 562-601) (RR) |
| <u>Day 2:</u> | 12/27 | Read: Gabler, "Slouching Toward Utopia" (pp. 601-633) (RR) Due: History of the attraction and its design and development |
| <u>Day 3:</u> | 12/28 | Read: Wasko, "Dissecting Disney's Worlds" (RR) Wasko, "Disney and the World" (RR) |
| <u>Day 4:</u> | 12/29 | Read: Walt Disney Imagineering, "Theory" (RR) Due: Analysis of the film that the attraction is based on |
| <u>Day 5:</u> | 12/30 | Read: Walt Disney Imagineering, "Tools" (RR) |
| <u>Day 6:</u> | 12/31 | Read: Sperb, "Take a Frown, Turn it Upside Down" (RR) Due: Analysis of Youtube videos of the attraction |
| <u>Day 7:</u> | 1/2 | Arrival: Walt Disney World, Orlando |
| <u>Day 8:</u> | 1/3 | Magic Kingdom |
| <u>Day 9:</u> | 1/4 | EPCOT |
| <u>Day 10:</u> | 1/5 | Animal Kingdom |
| <u>Day 11:</u> | 1/6 | Departure: Walt Disney World, Orlando |
| <u>Day 12:</u> | 1/13 | Due: Field observations of the attraction while at Walt |

Disney World

Day 13: 1/14

Due: Description of ancillary markets for your attraction

Day 14: 1/15

Due: Final Projects