

WS 325: Disney: Gender, Race, and Empire



Women Studies
Oregon State University
Fall 2012
Thurs., 2:00-3:20
WLKN 231
(3 credits)

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CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

Introduces key themes and critical frameworks in feminist film theories and criticism, focused on recent animated Disney films. Explores constructions of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nation in these representations. (H) (Bacc Core Course)
PREREQUISITES: None, but a previous WS course is helpful.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this discussion-oriented course, students will explore constructions of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nation in the recent animated films of Walt Disney. By examining the content of several Disney films created within particular historical and cultural contexts, we will develop and expand our understanding of the cultural productions, meanings, and

intersections of racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, and imperialism. We will explore these issues in relation to Disney's representations of concepts such as love, sex, family, violence, money, individualism, and freedom. Also, students will be introduced to concepts in feminist film theory and criticism, and will develop analyses of the politics of representation.

Hybrid Course

This is a hybrid course, where approximately 50% of the course will take place in a traditional face-to-face classroom and 50% will be delivered via Blackboard, your online learning community, where you will interact with your classmates and with the instructor. Within the course Blackboard site you will access the learning materials and syllabus; discuss issues; submit assignments; take quizzes; email other students and the instructor; participate in online activities including small groups; and display your projects.

Difference, Power, and Discrimination Courses **Baccalaureate Core Requirement**

WS 325 fulfills the Difference, Power, and Discrimination (DPD) requirement in the Baccalaureate Core. The DPD requirement engages students in the intellectual examination of the complexity of the structures, systems, and ideologies that sustain discrimination and the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. The unequal distribution of social, economic, and political power in the United States and in other countries is sustained through a variety of individual beliefs and institutional practices. These beliefs and practices have tended to obscure the origins and operations of social discrimination such that this unequal power distribution is often viewed as the natural order. Examination of DPD course material will enhance meaningful democratic participation in our diverse university community and our increasingly multicultural U.S. society. As part of the DPD program, students who take this course will be able to 1) Explain how difference is socially constructed; 2) Using historical and contemporary examples, describe how perceived differences, combined with unequal distribution of power across economic, social, and political institutions, result in discrimination; and 3) Analyze ways in which the interactions of social categories, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age, are related to difference, power, and discrimination in the United States.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of having taken this course, students will be able to:

- discuss and explain general concepts and themes in feminist film and media studies.
- analyze the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nation.
- demonstrate the necessary skills to historically and socially contextualize media images and representations, using a feminist framework.
- demonstrate a theoretical framework for critical analysis of Disney representations in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nation.
- analyze power, particularly in terms of structural and institutionalized forms of oppression.
- recognize other, related themes in relation to the Disney canon, including colonialism, conquest, militarism, globalization, war, and genocide.
- recognize the distinctions between Disney's animated representations and the experiences of actual people and communities in various parts of the world.
- demonstrate writing skills in feminist critical analysis on the politics of representation.
- demonstrate skills to be able to talk with others, including children viewers, about the power and social meanings of Disney (and other) images.

These objectives will be assessed through each student's participation in classroom and online discussions, completion of the short critical essays, collaborative development of a "learning guide," and final essay exam.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, eds., *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture* (MM in course schedule)

Henry Giroux, *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (MR in course schedule)

Please note that the films for this course should be screened on your own each week. With the exception of *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* (Week 2), all films are widely available through Netflix and/or most video stores. Additional required readings for this class will be posted to our Blackboard site (marked [B] in the course schedule).



EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

1. Attendance and Participation (20%)

Students are expected to attend all scheduled class meetings for this course, and to actively participate in both online and in-class discussions. This is a discussion-oriented class, so you should be prepared to discuss all films and reading assignments. Films and reading assignments are listed in the week during which they will be discussed, and they should be screened, read, and analyzed by the beginning of that week. For the purposes of this course, each week begins on Monday morning, and ends the following Sunday. All students are expected to post to our online discussion board at least twice each week. At the beginning of each week, the instructor will post a set of reading questions, and these may form the basis of your discussion board postings. Please note that a “satisfactory” comment is one that is thoughtful, well-written, and has substance in its ability to stimulate dialogue. A comment like “Yes, I agree with you” is not a satisfactory comment. “Yes, I agree with you because . . . etc.” is satisfactory.

During Week One, each member of the class is required to post an introduction on the online discussion board and to respond to at least two other students’ introductions.

2. Online Homework (20%)

Each week you will complete a brief homework assignment on Blackboard. These assignments will be posted each Monday and are due Friday by 5:00 pm. The format will include a variety of short answer and multiple

choice questions pertaining to the readings assigned each week. Use this assignment to demonstrate that you have completed the required readings for the course each week. All homework should be completed on our course Blackboard site.

3. Critical Response Essays (30%)

Each student is expected to submit two critical response essays during the term. Each paper should be approximately 2-3 pages in length (700-1000 words). For each assignment, you will compare and contrast the films that we are studying, according to the schedule below. In doing so, you will connect your arguments, observations, and analyses to the assigned course readings for those related weeks. These short discussion papers should reflect your critical observations and ideas about the films screened for class, and they should each include discussion and analysis of at least three (3) course readings from the corresponding weeks. Please remember to fully cite the readings and films. Each writing assignment is due on Friday by 5:00 pm on our Blackboard site. *No late response essays will be accepted.*

Due: Friday of Week 4

Select either: *Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty* OR *The Little Mermaid and Beauty and the Beast*

Due: Friday of Week 8

Select either: *Aladdin and The Lion King* OR *Pocahontas and Mulan*

Grading criteria for these essays is as follows:

10 points – This paper is well organized, with a clear and focused thesis. It meets the length requirement (approximately 2-3 pages, or 700-1000 words). It is well written, with virtually no grammatical or spelling errors. The argument is original, analytical, concise, and well supported by textual examples from at least two of our required readings, which are actively engaged and properly contextualized and cited. It clearly demonstrates that the author has read and thought carefully about the themes of the film and readings. Finally, this essay reflects the complexity of the issues under consideration, clearly connecting the film to the readings and themes of the course.

9 points – This paper has a clearly focused thesis, and is well written. It clearly demonstrates that the author has read the assigned materials, and is actively engaged with the ideas of the class, film, and readings. It has an original and well-structured argument, which is well supported by examples from the film and at least two course readings. Any quotations are adequately contextualized and interpreted.

8 points – This essay has a clearly focused thesis, and is generally well written. It has an interesting argument that is well supported with materials from the class (including at least two readings), and it goes beyond mere summary of the film and/or readings, but it does not go beyond class discussions. Also, it may contain some spelling or grammatical errors.

6-7 points – This essay has no thesis, or its thesis is unclear and confusing. The argument is unfocused or absent. It may contain substantial grammatical, spelling, and documentation errors, which further obscure the argument. And it either fails to make use of sources, or they are simply inserted into the body of the text without contextualization, interpretation, or analysis. Finally, it may be too brief, generalized, vague, or obscured by grammatical problems to address the material in any depth.

5 points or less – This paper has no thesis, and does not make any sort of argument (or, its argument is seriously obscured by grammatical, spelling, and typing errors). It fails to adequately make use of required sources, and it is clear from reading this essay that the writer has not read assigned materials for class.

0 points – Any paper that is plagiarized earns no points.

4. Final Project (“Learning Guide”) (30%)

The final will take the shape of a collaborative project and is worth 30% of your grade for this course. All aspects of this final should demonstrate your understanding and mastery of the reading materials, films, concepts, and overall context of this course. For your project, you are asked to work collaboratively in small groups to develop a “learning guide” for children. On our Blackboard site, you will be divided into groups of 3-4 students, where you will have the opportunity to collaborate in wikis focusing on specific themes or films related to the course. You may organize your learning guide around a specific film, developing content to help you “teach” this film to a group of children and discuss relevant issues with them (for example, you might choose to focus on *Pocahontas*, and create a format to allow you to discuss key themes in the film with children viewers, including the history of colonialism in the U.S., Native American women’s experiences, stereotypes about indigenous peoples, etc.). Or, you might choose to structure your learning guide around a theme or set of themes, such as violence against women or interracial relationships or “love at first sight” (for example, you might select scenes from several films to enable you to share ideas and have discussions with young viewers about how love and romance are culturally constructed, and specifically how they are depicted in these Disney films). As you design your learning guide, you should decide what age group you want to focus on and then create curricular materials appropriate to that age group. Your guide will address course objectives by demonstrating your ability to talk with others, especially children viewers, about the power and social meanings of Disney films and images. Design this learning guide as if you were responsible for showing educators and parents techniques and approaches to talk with children about the problematic aspects of Disney films, so as to encourage children’s media literacy and critical thinking skills. You are encouraged to be creative and unique in crafting your “learning guide.” The parameters and suggestions are as follows:

Your learning guide should be at least two pages, but no more than 5, addressing the following:

- Disney films, images, or themes selected for project and used for analysis in your guide.
- Objectives of your learning guide.
- Intended age(s) of students or children (up to 8th grade).
- Main points the teacher/parent needs to convey.
- What you want to discuss or to disclose about the film/theme specifically (characters, songs, issue, question, etc.)
- Any anticipated responses from the children about the themes being discussed and what you want the educator to do about it.
- How you would measure the effectiveness of your learning guide.

Also, each learning guide should include at least two learning activities. Be creative! And be sure that, somewhere in your guide, you include your sources, use citations, and make clear which articles you used to develop your ideas.

By Monday of Week 8 (November 12), please submit a one-page general idea/outline of your project, including topics/films selected, and your general objectives. Learning guides are due on the Monday of finals week (December 3), by 5:00 PM, and should be submitted on the Assignments page of our Blackboard site.

GRADING

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| A | Excellent work. An example for all to follow. Exhibits openness and unusually sharp insight into many sides of an issue. Shows considerable critical thought. Written work is virtually flawless in terms of grammar, spelling, cogency, and content. Performs far above minimum requirements. Exceptionally articulate. |
| B | Above average. Speaks and writes well. Performs above the minimum requirements. Demonstrates very good understanding of ideas. |
| C | Speaks and writes in an acceptable manner. Work is satisfactory, average. Meets minimum requirements. |
| D | Below average work. Minimally acceptable, but unacceptable if this course is required. |
| F | Unacceptable work. Does not meet minimum requirements |

A	95%	B	85%	C	75%	D	65%
A-	90%	B-	80%	C-	70%	D-	60%
B+	88%	C+	78%	D+	68%	F	below 60%

Note on Incompletes

Incomplete (I) grades are given only in documented emergency cases (usually only for a death in the family, major illness or injury, or birth of a child, etc.), **and** if the student has completed the majority of the coursework (in other words, usually everything but the final research paper). If you are having any difficulty that might prevent you completing the coursework, please do not wait until the end of the term; contact the professor immediately.

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities

Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty, and Disability Access Services (DAS). Students with accommodations approved through DAS are responsible for contacting the faculty member of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through DAS should contact DAS immediately at 737-4098.

Expectations for Student Conduct

Many students do not understand what academic dishonesty is. It is important to become familiar with its different forms and the University's definitions.

At Oregon State University academic dishonesty is defined by the Oregon Administrative Rules 576-015-0020.1.a-c as: *An intentional act of deception in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or effort of another person or uses unauthorized materials or fabricated information in any academic work.* Academic dishonesty includes:

- **CHEATING** - use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information or study aids or an act of deceit by which a student attempts to misrepresent mastery of academic effort or information. This includes unauthorized copying or collaboration on a test or assignment or using prohibited materials and texts.
- **FABRICATION** - falsification or invention of any information (including falsifying research, inventing or exaggerating data and listing incorrect or fictitious references.
- **ASSISTING** - helping another commit an act of academic dishonesty. This includes paying or bribing someone to acquire a test or assignment, changing someone's grades or academic records, or taking a test/doing an assignment for someone else (or allowing someone to do these things for you). It is a violation of Oregon state law to create and offer to sell part or all of an education assignment to another person (ORS 165.114).
- **TAMPERING** - altering or interfering with evaluation instruments and documents.
- **PLAGIARISM** - representing the word or ideas of another person as one's own OR presenting someone else's words, ideas, artistry or data as one's own. This includes copying another person's work (including unpublished material) without appropriate referencing, presenting someone else's opinions and theories as one's own, or working jointly on a project, then submitting it as one's own.

Academic dishonesty cases are handled initially by the academic units (collection of evidence and documentation of incident, meeting with student regarding the situation, determination of responsibility and academic penalty) but will also be referred to the Student Conduct Coordinator for action under the rules. For more information on student conduct, see <http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/achon.htm>.

In an academic community, students and faculty, and staff each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment, whether online or in the classroom. Students, faculty, and staff have the responsibility to treat each other with understanding, dignity and respect. Disruption of teaching, administration, research, and other institutional activities is prohibited by [Oregon Administrative Rule 576-015-0015 \(1\) and \(2\)](#) and is subject to sanctions under university policies, OSU Office of Student Conduct.

Finally, students are expected to conduct themselves in the course (e.g., on discussion boards, email postings) in compliance with the [university's regulations regarding civility](#). Students will be expected to treat all others with the same respect as they would want afforded themselves. Disrespectful behavior to others (such as harassing behavior, personal insults, inappropriate language) or disruptive behaviors in the course (such as persistent and unreasonable demands for time and attention both in and out of the classroom) is unacceptable and can result in sanctions as defined by Oregon Administrative Rules [Division 015 Student Conduct Regulations](#).

Communications

Ground Rules for Online Communication & Participation:

- *Online threaded discussions* are public messages, and all writings in this area will be viewable by the entire class or assigned group members. If you prefer that only the instructor sees your communication, send it by email, and be sure to identify yourself and the class.
- Posting of personal contact information is discouraged (e.g. telephone numbers, address, personal website address).
- *Online Instructor Response Policy*: I will check email frequently and will respond to course-related questions as soon as possible.
- *Observation of "Netiquette"*: All your online communications need to be composed with fairness, honesty and tact. Spelling and grammar are very important in an online course. What you put into an online course reflects on your level of professionalism. Here is a reference that discusses netiquette: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>.
- Please check the Announcements area and the course syllabus before you ask general course "housekeeping" questions (i.e. how do I submit my essay?). If you don't see your answer there, then contact the instructor.

(Adapted from Jean Mandernach, PSY)

Guidelines for a productive and effective online classroom

- The discussion board is your space to interact with your colleagues related to current topics or responses to your colleague's statements. It is expected that each student will participate in a mature and respectful fashion.
- Participate actively in the discussions, having completed the readings and thought about the issues.
- Pay close attention to what your classmates write in their online comments. Ask clarifying questions, when appropriate. These questions are meant to probe and shed new light, not to minimize or devalue comments.
- Think through and reread your comments before you post them.
- Assume the best of others in the class and expect the best from them.
- Value the diversity of the class. Recognize and value the experiences, abilities, and knowledge each person brings to class.
- Disagree with ideas, but do not make personal attacks. Do not demean or embarrass others. Do not make sexist, racist, homophobic, or victim-blaming comments at all.
- Be open to be challenged or confronted on your ideas or prejudices.

(Adapted from a statement provided by Susan Shaw, WS)

Diversity Statement

The Women's Studies Program strives to create an affirming climate for all students, including underrepresented and marginalized individuals and groups. Diversity encompasses differences in gender, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, citizenship, religion, socioeconomic background, physical or mental ability, veteran status, and sexual identity and/or orientation.

Religious Holiday Statement

Oregon State University strives to respect all religious practices. If you have religious holidays that are in conflict with any of the requirements of this class, please see me immediately so that we can make alternative arrangements.

Technical Assistance

If you experience computer difficulties, need help downloading a browser or plug-in, assistance logging into the course, or if you experience any errors or problems while in this course, contact the OSU Help Desk for assistance. You can call (541)737-3474, email osuhelpdesk@oregonstate.edu or visit the OSU Computer Helpdesk online.



The following will be helpful to you as you completing readings and screenings for this course:

- **PAY ATTENTION**
What film did we screen this week? What creative techniques are used to attract your attention? (Consider the images, language, music, choreography, emotional appeal, common interest, etc.) Who is the intended audience? What roles do the characters play? How do the characters interact with one another? What values, lifestyles, and perspectives or points of view are represented in, or omitted from, these messages? What was your emotional response during or after viewing the film? Do you have any specific memories associated with the film? Have you now created any new memories or understandings after watching the film?
- **THINK CRITICALLY**
What do these messages communicate to you about the gender, race, and class identities of the characters represented? How could these messages affect your perceptions of people with social identities similar to those being depicted? How might different people understand these messages differently? (Consider perspectives and experiences of individuals with social locations different from your own.) How might the backgrounds or social locations of the creators and producers influence their creative decisions or the messages they construct? What role does this media/film play in your life, and how do you (or how have you) used it?

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1	Introduction to the Class Scenes from <i>Snow White</i> (1937), <i>Cinderella</i> (1950), and <i>Sleeping Beauty</i> (1957)
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	<p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elizabeth Bell, et. al., “Introduction: Walt’s in the Movies” (MM, 1-17) Henry Giroux, “Introduction: Disney’s Troubled Utopia” (MR, 1-15)
Week 2	<p><u>Screening:</u> <i>Mickey Mouse Monopoly</i> (2002, 52 min.)</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jack Zipes, “Breaking the Disney Spell” (MM, 21-42) Henry Giroux, “Disney and the Politics of Public Culture” (MR, 17-61) Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” [B] Tiya Miles, “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall” [B]
Week 3	<p><u>Screening:</u> <i>The Little Mermaid</i> (1989, 83 min.)</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elizabeth Bell, “Somatexts at the Disney Shop: Constructing the Pentimentos of Women’s Animated Bodies” (MM, 107-124) Judith Lorber: “‘Night to His Day’: The Social Construction of Gender” [B] Laura Sells, “‘Where do the Mermaids Stand?’ Voice and Body in <i>The Little Mermaid</i>” (MM, 175-192) Pamela Colby O’Brien, “The Happiest Films on Earth: A Textual and Contextual Analysis of Walt Disney’s <i>Cinderella</i> and <i>The Little Mermaid</i>” [B]
Week 4	<p><u>Screening:</u> <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> (1991, 90 min.)</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Susan Jeffords, “The Curse of Masculinity: Disney’s <i>Beauty and the Beast</i>” (MM, 161-172) Henry Giroux, “Learning with Disney” (MR, 63-81) Greg Mantsios, “Class in America--2006” and “Media Magic: Making Class Invisible” [B] Sharon Downey, “Feminine Empowerment in Disney’s <i>Beauty and the Beast</i>” [B] Lynda Haas, “‘Eighty-Six the Mother’: Murder, Matricide, and Good Mothers” (MM, 193-211) <p><u>Assignments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical Essay I Due (by Friday, 5:00 PM)
Week 5	<p><u>Screening:</u> <i>Aladdin</i> (1992, 90 min.)</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jack Shaheen, “<i>Aladdin</i>: Animated Racism” [B] Henry Giroux, “Children’s Culture and Disney’s Animated Films” (MR, 83-121) Erin Addison, “Saving Other Women from Other Men: Disney’s <i>Aladdin</i>” [B] Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, “Spectographies: Conjuring Disney” [B] Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others” [B]
Week 6	<p><u>Screening:</u> <i>The Lion King</i> (1994, 90 min.)</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matt Roth, “<i>The Lion King</i>: A Short History of Disney-Fascism” [B] Ros Lippi-Green, “Teaching Children How to Discriminate” [B]

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annalee Ward, “<i>The Lion King’s</i> Mythic Narrative” [B] • Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, “You Can’t Lionise the Lion: Racing Disney” [B]
Week 7	<p>Screening: <i>Pocahontas</i> (1995, 84 min.)</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, “Disney’s ‘Politically Correct’ <i>Pocahontas</i>” [B] • Gail Tremblay, “Reflecting on Pocahontas” [B] • Derek Buescher & Kent Ono, “Civilized Colonialism: <i>Pocahontas</i> as Neocolonial Rhetoric” [B] • Andrea Smith, “Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide” [B] • Rosemary Weatherston, “When Sleeping Dictionaries Awaken: The Re/turn of the Native Woman Informant” [B]
Week 8	<p>Screening: <i>Mulan</i> (1998, 88 min.)</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheng-Mei Ma, “Mulan Disney, It’s Like, Re-Orients: Consuming China and Animating Teen Dreams” [B] • Lan Dong, “Writing Chinese America into Words and Images: Storytelling and Retelling of <i>The Song of Mu Lan</i>” [B] • Maxine Hong Kingston, “White Tigers” [B] <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Essay II Due (by Friday, 5:00 PM)
Week 9	<p>Screening: <i>Lilo and Stitch</i> (2002, 85 min.)</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haunani-Kay Trask, “From a Native Daughter” and “‘Lovely Hula Hands’ Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture” [B] • Dorothy Hurley, “Seeing White: Children of Color and the Disney Fairy Tale Princesses” [B]
Week 10	<p>Screening: <i>The Princess and the Frog</i> (2009) and <i>Tangled</i> (2010)</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jill Birnie Henke, et. al., “Constructions of the Female Self: Feminist Readings of the Disney Heroine” [B] • Henry Giroux, “Globalizing the Disney Empire” and “Turning America into a Toy Story” (MR, 157-220)
Finals Week	Please post your learning guides on our Blackboard site.

