

WALT DISNEY: Imagining America in the 20th Century

HON329-01 / Fall 2025

Instructor: Dawn Fratini
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Office Hour: Monday 12-1PM via Zoom
(in-person by appointment)

Meets: Tues/Thurs 10:00-11:15 AM
Room: Doti Hall Room 105

Course Overview:

Political historian Benedict Anderson defined “nation” as an imagined community, an image that lives in the mind of each of its members. Following his definition, this course will examine the career of Walt Disney and the relationship of his work to the image of the U.S.A. and what it means to be “American.” Above all, Walt Disney was a storyteller who drew inspiration from a myriad of sources including, but not limited to, folk tales and history, the natural world, and science and technology. Although he is considered quintessentially American, he also traveled and was particularly interested in European art forms. This course will inquire into these many influences, sample Disney’s own storytelling, and explore his contributions to definitions of Americanism.

The coursework will include selected readings, online discussions, screenings, and a final research project. Class meetings will include lectures, guest speakers, screenings, and discussion.

Course Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, students should be able to...

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the evolution the Walt Disney and his studio within its historical context
2. Identify various current methodological approaches to film and media studies
3. Demonstrate a strong understanding of the interrelationship between film content and aesthetics and historical and cultural contexts

Honors Program Learning Outcomes:

- Obtain a starting point for integrative exploration of the development of cultures and intellectual achievements through a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives;
- Sharpen the ability to critically analyze and synthesize a broad range of knowledge through the study of primary texts and through engagement in active learning with fellow students, faculty, and texts (broadly understood);

- Understand how to apply more integrative and interdisciplinary forms of understanding in the advancement of knowledge and in addressing complex challenges shaping the world;
- Develop effective communication skills, specifically in the areas of written and oral exposition and analysis.

Required Course Texts:

Sammond, Nicholas. *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960*. New York: Duke University Press, 2005.

Additional readings will be provided as PDFs via Canvas.

Attendance

Attendance is required for all portions of the class time (lecture, speaker, screening) and will be factored toward your final grade at ten (10) points per class meeting.

Quizzes

There will be four (4) multiple choice online quizzes, thirty (30) points each, via Canvas. These quizzes cover your reading and are untimed. You will have several days to complete them.

Midterm

Your midterm will also be administered via Canvas and untimed. This will include both short and long essay questions.

Discussion Posts

There will be three (3) online discussion board posts thirty (50) points each via Canvas, prompts provided. These will allow us to delve a little deeper into topic discussions than class time allows.

Final Research Project

We will work toward your final research project in stages. You can turn in a formal research paper or you may choose a different format, such as video or interactive presentation, so long as it is informed by university-level research. We'll begin with a Project Proposal, followed by a Bibliography, then two Research Reports, and culminate in your Final Paper.

Academic Integrity Policy:

Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their

Grading Breakdown

CATEGORY	Points Each	#	CATEGORY POINTS
Attendance (per meeting)	10	28	280
Quizzes	30	4	120
Midterm	60	1	60
Discussion Board Posts	50	3	150
Project Proposal	60	1	60
Bibliography	50	1	50
Research Reports	65	2	130
Final Paper	150	1	150
Total Possible Points:			1000

own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the University's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions up to and including expulsion.

The university defines plagiarism as the “use of another’s ideas or words as if they were one’s own” (this includes A.I.). You must properly cite all your sources and acknowledge all quoted words or ideas. I am forced to report any suspected cases of plagiarism and/or cheating to the Dean’s Office of Students, and disciplinary action may include failing the assignment, failing the course, and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is never worth it.

Chapman University’s Students with Disabilities Policy

In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services. If you will need to utilize your approved accommodations in this class, please follow the proper notification procedure for informing your professor(s). This notification process must occur more than a week before any accommodation can be utilized. Please contact Disability Services at (714) 516-4520 if you have questions regarding this procedure, or for information and to make an appointment to discuss and/or request potential accommodations based on documentation of your disability.

Harassment and Discrimination Policy

Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in Chapman’s Harassment and Discrimination Policy. Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the Dean of Students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.

Fostering a community of care that supports the success of students is essential to the values of Chapman University. Occasionally, you may come across a student whose personal behavior concerns or worries you, either for the student's well-being or yours. In these instances, you are encouraged to contact the Chapman University Student Outreach and Support team who can respond to these concerns and offer assistance: </students/health-and-safety/student-concern/>.

While it is preferred that you include your contact information so this team can follow up with you, you can submit a report anonymously. 24-hour emergency help is also available through Public Safety at 714-997-6763

Student Support at Chapman University

Over the course of the semester, you may experience a range of challenges that interfere with your learning, such as problems with friend, family, and or significant other relationships; substance use; concerns about personal adequacy; feeling overwhelmed; or feeling sad or anxious without knowing why. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. You can learn more about the resources available through Chapman University's Student Psychological Counseling Services here: </students/health-and-safety/psychological-counseling/>.