Religion and DISNEY:  
Not Just Another Mickey Mouse Course 
(Religious Studies 3812)

Slot:  32 (Wednesday 7-9:30 pm)  
Room: A1045  
Office Hours:  Tues/Thurs 10:30-11:30; Wed 6-7 pm

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Porter  
Office: A5009  
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Course Description:

This course provides an in-depth examination of the religious themes and issues arising from and within the Disney franchise, including Disney Animated feature films, other Disney films and cartoons, and the Disney theme parks. The course will explore the impact of Walt Disney's philosophies on the Disney franchise, as well as the impact those who succeeded Disney in leadership of the Walt Disney Company. Theoretical models drawn from the field Religion and Popular Culture will provide the lens through which the religious themes present within Disney films, the reaction of the religious right to Disney via a study of the Disney Boycott, and the religious dimensions of Disney fandom will be explored.

Method of evaluation:

Participation/Assignments  20%  
1 Major Research Paper or Website Project  40%  
1 Final Take-home Exam  40%

Participation/Assignments (20% of final grade): You are asked to come prepared to class having done the assigned readings for the week, and with a two-page, two-part assignment to be handed in based on the assigned readings. In these assignments, identify what you consider to be the key points of dispute in the assigned readings (point form is okay – must NOT exceed one page), and what questions, comments, responses you have to the issues under debate (again, must NOT exceed one page.) These assignments will provide the basis for in-class discussion of the film or Disney theme being studied for the week – discussion will focus on questions such as: What religious dimensions do you see in the film? How does the film compare to its “source material” – what changes has Disney made from the original source, what might this say about a “Disney worldview,” what implications does it have for understanding religion (and race, sex, and consumerism) in Disney? Based on our viewing of the film, what arguments from the assigned readings do you find most applicable? What arguments do you find least applicable? Why? Note: you are required to hand in 8 assignments over the course of the semester. This gives you 2 weeks where you may, if you choose, not hand in an assignment. Use this power wisely!
**Alternate Assignments:** You may, if you wish, replace one weekly assignment (maximum of two throughout the term) with the creation of a fan video relevant to the course material. See examples on our course page.

**Major Research Paper or Website Project (40%):** You are asked to write a major research paper or design a research website on a topic relating to religion and Disney. For those choosing the research paper option, papers should be approximately 4000 words in length. For those selecting the website option, website projects should consist of a homepage identifying your topic, subsequent pages with relevant sub-topics presented and analyzed, multi-media as relevant, and a list of sources. Text content should be aimed at your peers - 3rd year university students - so no “dumbing down” of your analysis, but don’t go overboard on academic jargon either. (For those familiar with Religious Studies 2812 (Religion and Popular Culture), the Website project will mirror the assignment required in that class - however, depth of research and analysis expected should meet the academic expectations for a 3rd year course.) Topics for both projects might include: analysis of religious themes and/or implications of a specific Disney film not covered in class; analysis of a specific religious theme or themes across a number of Disney films; analysis of religious themes/implications in Disney television entertainment; analysis of religious themes/implications in other Disney entertainment (music; theme park productions; broadway plays; toys; etc.); analysis/critique of scholarly literature on Disney - specific authors, specific themes, specific approaches, etc. Other topics as relevant. All topics must be approved by me before research begins. Due: March 24th.

**Take-home Exam (40%):** This course will have a final take-home exam. This exam will be essay-style, with multiple questions, and with some choice of questions. The exam is designed to encourage you to show your understanding of the details and implications of the material we have been studying. You may draw upon outside sources to answer the questions on the exam; however, you are not required to do so. This exam is due on whatever date during the exam period that is assigned to us by the Registrar's Office. It will be handed out on the last day of classes (or possibly earlier.)

**Topics and Assigned Readings:**

**Jan. 13 - Introduction to the course - Religious Studies, Film Studies, Pop Culture Studies, and Disney.**

Read: No readings.

**Jan. 20 Disney history/history of animation**

Read: No readings.

Watch: *Walt: The Man Behind the Myth*
Jan. 27    Scholarly criticisms of Disney: religion/ race/ gender/ colonialism/ corporate power


Watch: Mickey Mouse Monopoly

Feb. 3    Scholarly criticisms of Disney: fairytales/myth


Grimm Brother’s fairy tales:

Little Snow White
Cinderella
Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)
The Singing, Soaring Lark (Beauty and the Beast)

Watch: Snow White/Sleeping Beauty/Cinderella/The Little Mermaid/Beauty and the Beast – Class pick

Feb. 10 Disney boycott

Feb. 17 Exploring religion in Disney: race, sex, religion, and consumer culture: The Lion King (1994)


Watch: The Lion King

Midterm break Feb. 24th.

March 3 Pocahonatas (1995)


Watch: Pocahontas

Mar. 10 The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1996)


Watch:  The Hunchback of Notre Dame


Watch:  Mulan

Mar. 24 Wicca/Paganism? Bedknobs and Broomsticks / Mary Poppins / Three Lives of Thomasina


Watch:  Mary Poppins / Bedknobs and Broomsticks / The Three Lives of Thomasina - class pick

Essays/Research Websites due Tuesday March 24th!

Mar. 31 Animism/pantheism?


Watch: *Brother Bear*

**April 7  - Disney as religion**

