Essays

Deconstructing Disney: Chicano/a Children and Critical Race Theory

Gabriel Gutiérrez

Abstract: *This essay examines the shift of the Walt Disney Company's ideological program from conservatism (1930s-1970s) to present-day liberal multiculturalism. This ideological shift is contextualized within a brief business history, a synopsis of Disney's hegemonic dealings with Spanish-speaking communities in Latin America and the southwestern United States, and a brief discussion of Disney's role as a cultural producer and facilitator of late twentieth-century liberal multiculturalism. Disney's role in the reconciliation among conservatives and liberals as a strategic and ideological response to Civil Rights policies and its contribution to conformist nation-building agendas and a new politics of exclusion is examined through a narrative analysis of* The Lion King/El Rey León. *Finally, this paper proposes responses to Disney's hegemonic discourse by discussing childhood agency through cultural consumption, and the role of Critical Race Theory in deconstructing Disney animation.*

> "WARNING: In order to accurately portray the Disney Company we have had to include material that is unsuitable for children and that some adult readers may find offensive."
>
> —Peter and Rochelle Schweizer, *Disney: The Mouse Betrayed*

The advisory that greets readers of Peter and Rochelle Schweizer's *Disney: The Mouse Betrayed* (1998) gives fair warning that their book, as one of the subtitles suggests, is about "greed, corruption,

and children at risk" in the Walt Disney Corporation. Aside from discussing its theft of ideas, questionable theme park logistics, and apparent manipulation of historical memory in some productions, the Schweizers assert that Disney is aggravated by other more pressing problems—namely pedophilia and "peeping toms." Nevertheless, the Schweizers' believe that Disney's misdeeds should not be exposed to children, whose "innocent" worldview should be protected. Naming pedophilia and voyeurs as "unsuitable" issues for discussion with children dangerously suggests that adults should refrain from discussing sexuality with children even when the child's well-being is concerned. The Schweizer's separation of adult and child "spheres" in discussing the Walt Disney Company is counterproductive, especially when children are major consumers of its products. In this paper, I propose to break down the wall between these spheres and examine the negative consequences for children of Disney's cultural productions.

When I first considered writing this paper, I felt as though I would have to violate "childhood fantasy" with "adult realism." My own misconceptions that alternative realities existed for children and adults occurred for two reasons. First, I worried that raising questions of children's cultural productions in the presence of children would politicize children's otherwise "innocent," sanitized, and politically neutral experience. Yet, Henry Jenkins reminds us that childhood is rarely "innocent." He writes:

> Too often, our culture imagines childhood as a utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries, free from sexuality, outside social divisions, closer to nature and the primitive world, more fluid in its identity and its access to the realms of imagination, beyond historical change, more just, and innocent, and in the end, waiting to be corrupted or protected by adults. (1998, 3–4)

Indeed, various scholars have examined the active agency of children in consuming and negotiating culture, politics, sexuality, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other categories of social positioning, resistance, and negotiation (Jenkins 1998; Odom Pecora 1998; Bazalgette and Buckingham 1995; Seiter 1993; and Kinder 1991). These scholars have concluded that children are more aware of their milieu than policy makers, educators, and other adults believe.

Second, I worried that taking a critical approach to Walt Disney's animation productions would infringe upon the "genuine" and "thorough" enjoyment of the "happiest place on earth" in my own household. I would have to face up to privilege, domination, oppression, subjugation, and inequality as these issues presented themselves to my children in Disney's discourse—productions that otherwise seemed one of the few escapes from harsh realities. As this paper developed, I came to realize that the idealized "genuine" and "thorough" enjoyment required me to passively consume dominant discourse. My role as a co-conspirator in facilitating Disney's message needed to be re-examined. I needed to redefine enjoyment to include pointed critical assessments of children's entertainment and the fostering of a critical consciousness in children.

Disney's message is polysemic and political. Because the multiple meanings in Disney discourse are consumed and negotiated by diverse audiences and result in multiple interpretations, we are sometimes led to believe that the master narrative exists in a "neutral" and "objective" space. Lest we forget that the constructions of "neutrality" and "objectivity" are themselves political, we must not allow ourselves to passively consume a dominant cultural hegemonic discourse (Acuña 1998; Spring 1992; Darder 1991; and Freire 1970). Scholars who engage in critical pedagogy provide a context for deconstructing the productions that target child consumers as part of a historical process (Acuña 1998; Kelley 1997; Delgado 1995a; hooks 1994, 1984; Freire 1970; Bell 1987). For instance, Henry Giroux reminds us that "pedagogy in Disney's texts functions as a history lesson that excludes the subversive elements of memory. . . . it signifies how the terrain of popular culture has become central to commodifying memory and rewriting narratives of national identity and global expansion" (1994a, 31).[1] Moreover, the multiple meanings invoked by such productions problematize the process of building a national American character, while simultaneously constructing marginal identities in the domestic and international realms.

Joel Spring argues that re-examination of the "ideological management" of knowledge producers and the content of their production are in order (1992). Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, through the use of their propaganda model, discuss how different media espouse the ideals of the status

quo and "manufacture consent" that helps fortify inequality and the maldistribution of wealth (1988). Disney has played a substantial role in reaffirming, even constructing, an uneven social hierarchy that privileges the status quo and subjugates marginal populations. This is particularly true of Disney productions that target child consumers.

My reintroduction to Disney animation came several years ago when I noticed that my young niece had watched the *Little Mermaid* in its entirety several times. Each time, she was riveted at the conclusion, watching the little mermaid transform herself—with encouragement from all her sea habitat-sharing creatures—into a young woman in order to follow her human love interest. The mermaid, in an act of self-mutilation, sheds her scales for human legs, an act that makes her happy. The message my niece and other young girls received was that life partners can only be secured by making painful concessions. The male in Disney's discourse was positioned in privilege and held power in this heterosexual relationship. Thus, young boys are taught to expect women to adapt to them.[2]

The obvious messages portrayed in this movie are also apparent in other Disney animation productions. Once I became a parent, I found it difficult to keep my children from the powerful tentacles of the Walt Disney Company's market forces. Attaining cultural capital required viewing the movies about which all other children were talking. To deny them the opportunity to engage in such conversations might exclude them and further deny them a cultural currency in negotiating their own social positionality. Thus, my newly found exposure to Disney animation and my interest in this project originated in me, not as an academic, but as a parent and consumer.

Conversely, as counter-hegemonic consumers, we have been active in what James C. Scott refers to as the "fairly extensive social existence outside the immediate control of the dominant" (1990). By engaging, negotiating, and resisting dominant discourse, we later realized that we were in fact constructing a critical race theory for children. Yet, concentrating on the tangible factors of race does not suffice in instilling critical thinking skills. For internalized racism, sexism, classism, cultural chauvinism, and homophobia is sometimes perpetrated by individuals from U.S. marginal populations upon members of their "own group." This has become a complex question due to post-affirmative action upward mobility

and the lateral movement of historically marginalized people to the center.[3]

This essay will examine the shift of Disney's ideological program from conservatism to liberal multiculturalism and the consequences of this ideological shift on subaltern populations. By providing a brief summary of Disney's corporate history, its concentration on Spanish-speaking markets dating to the 1940s, and Disney's neo-liberal production agenda in the 1990s, this essay will contextualize cultural pluralism within the reaffirmation of whiteness, gender, (middle-) class, and (middle-) age as constructs of privilege. Thus, this period mimics Reconstruction, which reconciled southern and northern white male elites and reaffirmed their privilege, while reconstructing oppression of blacks and poor whites in more subtle forms (DuBois 1967; Roediger 1991). Today's conservatives and liberals are also pressed to incorporate segments of society that have been historically subject to legal, historical, cultural, economic, and political exclusion, leading to what can be called a politics of "repressive inclusion." However, unlike their predecessors, they are engaged in recruiting middle-class people of color, the white working-class, and women into the halls of power, albeit selectively, in order to address concerns of an ambiguously defined "diverse" society.

While the determinism of race, gender, and class are addressed in these demonstrations of social mobility, the intangible factors of cultural behavior and ideology are not. Assuming that simply replacing white males with people of color or women does not lead to a more understanding or democratic society, as we have seen in California. In fact, Latino legislators played crucial roles in efforts to build an unwanted prison in a poor, predominantly Latino neighborhood and have been central to legislation that further criminalizes undocumented people.[4]

A critique of *The Lion King/El Rey León* will forward a critical analysis for children, who consume these and other productions. *The Lion King/El Rey León* offers a suitable narrative discourse that allows adults and children to examine issues of internalized colonialism. I argue that, given Disney's history of invoking cultural production as a means of hegemonic indoctrination, the incorporation of cultural diversity into its late-twentieth-century programming is having negative consequences on marginal U.S. children and Latinos/as particularly, which are not unequal to the consequences of its cultural

imperialist agenda throughout Latin America since the 1940s. Specifically, the liberal multiculturalism espoused by Disney in the Michael Eisner era reflects a larger sociopolitical phenomenon that reclaims privilege for conservatives and liberals, who seek to "win back" what they assume was lost during the Civil Rights era.[5]

This liberal multiculturalism has resulted in an effort to reconstruct a national American identity that reasserts racial, gender, and class hierarchies. However, its transgressions of race, class, and gender are misleading and preempt discussions of cultural conformity. Particularly, the liberal slant of postmodernism privileges individuality through the guise of "subjectivity" and in the process reorients discussions of power away from structural forms of domination. The confusion that results from attempts to gauge "collective subjectivity" and community agency, then, requires that individuals contest and negotiate power with themselves prior to resistance and negotiation with others. Thus, a review of *The Lion King/El Rey León,* a discussion of childhood cultural capital, and reflections on a critical consciousness for children and adults in a shared environment attempts to begin a dialogue based on critical race theory for utilizing hegemonic media as a potential forum for addressing capitalist, racist, and (hetero)sexist ideals. Lastly, while the messages in Disney productions are universal and apply to all child consumers regardless of language and racial and ethnic background, my intent is to focus on the historical developments in Disney's strategies toward Spanish-speaking markets in general and toward Chicano(a)/Latino(a) children in particular. I argue that Disney productions teach acquiescence and conformity, disguising these in celebrations of liberal democratic principles by conscripting conformity.

Disney: A Brief Corporate History

Scholars have addressed Disney's corporate history in chronological fashion (Bell, Haas, and Sells 1994; and Grover 1991). For the purpose of this paper, I will emphasize chronological and thematic developments, including economic policy, technological innovation, and marketing tactics directed at child consumers. Disney's economic diversity has resulted from a combination of business sense, technological developments, luck, and circumstance.

In his essay "The Mickey in Macy's Window: Childhood, Consumerism, and Disney Animation," Richard deCordova writes that as early as 1930 a campaign booklet published by the Disney Company instructed exhibitors to:

> arrange a series of Saturday matinees for children, organizing . . . a club built around the character of Mickey Mouse. Each matinee or "meeting" of the club would consist of a Mickey Mouse cartoon, followed by the introduction of the club's officers, the recitation of the Mickey Mouse Club creed, the singing of "America," a stage show and/or contest, the Mickey Mouse Club Yell, the Mickey Mouse Club song and then, finally, the films featured for the day. (1994, 205)

In short, a corporate pep rally spewed with loyalist fervor and American nationalism targeting child consumers was held prior to the feature film.

By 1932, Disney was concentrating on primary markets (domestic theatrical exhibition such as films) and complimentary markets (licensed merchandise, such as toys and clothing, that display characters from a given film or production). Children's merchandise with the Mickey Mouse image on it included "underwear, pajamas, neckties, handkerchiefs, jewelry, toothbrushes, hot water bottles, bathroom accessories, silverware, china, toys, games, and [even] school supplies" (205). Still, other capital was forthcoming. In 1941, the U.S. federal government underwrote Disney's production of "military training films, educational projects, and blatant propagandistic 'cartoons' for popular indoctrination" (Bell, Haas, and Sells 1995, 5). That year alone, government subsidies brought in $2.6 million for the Disney studio (5).

Walt Disney began to envision another complimentary market scheme by the late 1940s: he began plans to build a theme park. When Walt Disney developed the idea of constructing "Disneyland," his finance campaign took him to the ABC television network. ABC agreed to invest $500,000 in Disneyland and guaranteed a loan in the amount of $4.5 million. In return, ABC gained over a third of Disneyland stock. Perhaps more significant was the agreement reached by Disney and ABC to air a weekly television show called *Disneyland.* Television exposure not only promoted Disneyland (and later Disneyworld and other theme parks throughout

the world) but also resulted in the increased sales of such Disney merchandise as Mickey Mouse dolls, Donald Duck watches, and Davy Crockett coonskin caps (Gomery 1994, 76). With this show's success, the Disney-ABC team launched another successful show, *The Mouseketeers,* in 1955.

The Mouseketeers presented a caucasian child culture in happy settings with catchy songs. These children, with white names emblazoned across their shirts and mouse ears, were identifiable as mainstream America, while children of color were excluded from such exposure. The overt display of happiness hid real problems. For instance, in a 1991 television interview, former-*Mouseketeer* Annette Funicello revealed that every time a Mouseketeer lost a pair of ears, "Disney took $50 out of the kid's next paycheck" (Smoodin 1994, 1). Evidently, Disney instituted a punitive charge for additional ears.

Disney continued its aggressive push in child merchandising, particularly, marketing for the entire family. Plans for a second theme park, the "Environmental Prototype Community of Tomorrow" [EPCOT], were in the works at the time of Walt Disney's death. According to business journalist Ron Grover, because "Disneyland had attracted a clutter of sleazy motels and fast food joints in Anaheim," Disney had plans for "a complete and self-containing city with its own schools, apartments, and shopping facilities"(1991, 9–10). Another author writes that Disney's original plan in Florida was to "establish a sovereign state within a state" (Haasen, 1998, 6). Thus, a new high-tech company town, complete with its own knowledge manufacturing mechanisms, was set to emerge but the world never saw its fruition. Disney's successors completed the project but not in the manner Walt Disney had envisioned it. EPCOT became a resort.

After the deaths of Walt and Roy, two factions emerged in the Disney Company that carried out the two brothers' occasional feuds. Disney company profits consequently began to slide. This slide continued through the 1980s. Profits fell from $135 million in 1980 to $93 million in 1983 (1). Roughly around this time, outgoing Disney executive Ron Miller presented a five-year plan intended to revive the company that included putting many of the older Disney movies on videocassettes for the first time (20). Shortly after Miller was fired, Michael Eisner and Frank Wells took over the company and found the home video industry a worthwhile venture.

The consensus among scholars is that the Disney Corporation has enjoyed unprecedented power for forming cultural ideals through its pervasive primary, ancillary, and complimentary markets worldwide.[6] Its mastery of technological and market advances is seen in its concentration on children's animation and the home video industry. Ancillary markets—syndication and home video productions—grew with technological innovation in the decades following the Disney television shows. According to one entertainment industry scholar, over a nine-year period from 1980–1989, the jump in total theatrical revenues that came from videocassettes went from 1 percent to 50.2 percent. Also, from 1980 to 1993, VCR sales soared from 2 percent to 77 percent in U.S. households. From 1980 to 1994, home video revenues grew from $25 million to $7.9 billion (Steinbock 1995, 112).

To maximize its potential profits, Disney by-passed local mom and pop stores by employing mass merchandising giants like Toys "R" Us, Wal-Mart, and Target. During the latter phase of this period, Disney also began to dub its animated films into Spanish, attempting to capture the domestic and foreign Spanish-speaking markets. Price differentials were common in the English- and Spanish-language versions of the same film. In a random survey of Wal-Mart and Target, average retail prices for Spanish versions of Disney-produced animation films were four–five dollars higher than they were for the English language version.[7] Disney's inflated prices for Spanish-language videocassettes are not surprising when understood in the context of Disney's historical relationship with Spanish-speaking communities throughout the western hemisphere. Indeed, as is addressed below, Disney's relationship with the Spanish-speaking community has always been questionable at best.

The resurrection of the Walt Disney Company in the last decade under the direction of Michael Eisner has generated large profits for stockholders through diversification and innovation. In the last decade of this millennium, the Walt Disney Company has ventured into professional sports, diversified its film production capacities to expand its consumer base, expanded its theme parks overseas, and forged partnerships with fast food restaurants to sell its merchandise.[8] In 1992, Disney's Filmed Entertainments segment became the first studio to earn over $500 million in a single year. On July 31, 1995, Disney announced plans to acquire Capital

Cities/ABC for a reported $19 billion. By 1996, Disney had reached an agreement with McDonald's 18,700 restaurants in a multinational ten-year marketing campaign that would promote Disney theatrical releases, theme parks, and home video releases. From 1995 to 1998, Disney reported record revenues of $12.1 billion to upwards of $23 billion.[9]

Disney has always enjoyed great successes in U.S. domestic markets across various demographics, as well as in international markets. Still, the attention given to Disney's expansion and success overseas in the last two decades preempts discussion of the corporation's expansion across borders in earlier years. Specifically, Disney's role in correlating cultural production and hegemonic proliferation in an increasingly transnational world is best seen in Disney's contribution to what Louis Althusser calls "ideological state apparatuses" (1993, 50–58). The following section discusses the interactive role of the U.S. government, its corporate interests, and Disney in establishing an empirical domain in the western hemisphere. Particular attention is given to these experiences in Spanish-speaking Latin America.

Disney En Español

Disney's concentration on Spanish-speaking markets began when the U.S. State Department solicited Walt Disney and his animated characters to serve as "goodwill" ambassadors in Latin America in the 1940s. It continues to this day through its dubbing of English-animated films into Spanish for domestic and foreign markets. Disney's exposure to Spanish-speaking audiences coincided with U.S. economic interests abroad. Beginning with Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy," which in effect served to ensure and protect the penetration of U.S.-owned multinational corporations into Latin America, Disney began to produce a series of films (twenty-four between 1941–1943 alone) that promoted U.S. economic, political, and cultural interests. These films were produced through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) within the motion picture section of the U.S. State Department and were disguised as popular, educational, and health instructional films (Piedra 1994, 148).

Nelson A. Rockefeller—"head of the foreign department of the Chase Manhattan Bank, which held major business

interests in Latin American-based corporations such as the Creole Petroleum Company"—became the head of the new federal office of the CIAA (Cartwright and Goldfarb 1994, 171). Rockefeller's involvement reflected his interests as an art collector, prompting Lisa Cartwright and Brian Goldfarb to write, "The intersection of corporate, government, and cultural interests in Rockefeller's office alone indicates the degree to which empire building takes place through a dense network of overlapping and seemingly contradictory affiliations and agendas" (172). Rockefeller and U.S. interests in hemispheric economic and political domination were pressed forward through an "Americanization" campaign that utilized cultural production as one of its main weapons, sometimes disguising these in the form of presumably innocent animation characters.

By the early 1940s, Nazi Germany owned telephone systems in Northern Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay, Southern Chile, and Mexico. Seeing this Nazi ownership of communications systems as a threat, the CIAA concentrated on "moving pictures" that, according to one top official, "constituted one of the best mediums to foster understanding and more friendly relations between peoples" (173). Indeed, Disney's public health and education films attempted to provide models of Americanization for domestic life among Latin Americans who worked for U.S. owned multinational corporations (175). How these workers responded is subject to further study. However, these health and education films combined and politicized issues, such as hygiene and economic worldviews, and assumed an inherent deficiency in Latin American workers that could be remedied by their assimilation of American standards. Ridding Latin American workers of these alleged inferiorities meant that Disney animation films attempted to instill a particular hygienic comportment and a work ethic that moved workers from a primarily subsistence economic production mode to one that served the surplus demands of the global market.

These films aside, other mediums were more overt in their attempted indoctrination. The classic text *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic,* by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart (1975), examines the imperialist overtones of Disney comic strips during the U.S. sponsored counter-revolutionary offensive in Chile in the early 1970s. This text, banned in Chile, exposed Disney's contribution to

counter-revolutionary propaganda and, thus, to the interests of U.S. multinational corporations abroad.

One strip during this period depicted Donald Duck and his nephews chasing buffoonish revolutionaries in order to "Save the King." Once the revolutionaries were captured, the king turned to the nephews and asked, "You have helped us stop the revolution . . . How can I repay you?" (91) Donald, in the foreground, concluded, "I hope they ask for a lot of money." Dorfman and Mattelart argue that

> The egoism of the little animals, the defense of their individuality, their embroilment with private interests, provides a sense of distance between the characters and their creators, who are projecting their view of the world onto the animals . . . . The reader as *consumer* of the lives of the animals reproduces the sense of distance by feeling superior to and pity for the little animals. Thus the very act of consumption gives the reader the feeling of "superiority" over the animals and provides the basis for his acceptance of their values. (91–92)

Thus individuality, private interests, materialism, and defense of the established order are constructed favorably and rewarded with monetary compensation in the end.

On the other hand, dissent and the challenge to authority are presented unfavorably and remain voiceless. This type of comic strip, combined with the ban on critical literature in Chile during this period, presents an imbalanced portrayal of ideological constructs. Perhaps more significant is the illusion of objectivity vis-à-vis subjective exclusivity.[10] That is, the non-incorporation or misrepresentations of diverse perspectives result in misleading, if not inaccurate, portrayals of reality. Critical race theorists refer to this practice as the social construction of ahistoricism, pseudo-neutrality, and pseudo-objectivity, which demarcate power imbalances that work to the disadvantage of dominated populations.

Disney's contributions to efforts by the U.S. government and multinational corporations to "reveal the truth about the American way of life" were not exclusive to Latin America. In fact, according to Henry Giroux, Walt Disney acted as a special agent and informant for the FBI, weeding out suspected communists in the Hollywood film industry. He allowed the FBI access to Disneyland facilities for official and recreational

purposes and permitted FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to censor scripts of Disney movies, such as *Moon Pilot* (1962) and *That Darn Cat* (1965), in order to portray FBI agents in a favorable light (Giroux 1994a, 32).

The modern Walt Disney Corporation treats conformity and submission to authority in a more subtle manner. The following section examines Disney's contribution to reconciling the population that feel wronged by the attempt to democratize society during the Civil Rights era. Moreover, the appropriation of liberal multiculturalism during this epoch allows this reconciliation through people of color and women who accept, promote, and defend ideas of the American status quo. As the status quo comes to include some people of color and women, it becomes more repressive and exclusive of truly diverse ideals and cultural practices.

Disney: Reconciling a New American Nationalism

The material success of the Walt Disney Company has substantial social and cultural ramifications for Chicano/a and Latino/a children and for marginalized populations in the United States as a whole.[11] The Walt Disney Company's impact on cultural production in the United States (and their inherent social constructions of ideological normalcy) have perpetuated a social fragmentation. Describing the relationship between central and marginal conditions, bell hooks writes that being marginalized is to be "part of the whole but outside the main body" (1987, preface).

Disney's appropriation of racially diverse characters in some productions and its current liberal multicultural agenda partially reflect Michael Eisner's involvement in and contributions to Democratic Party politics.[12] Examples of this multicultural agenda include Disney's successful venture into the U.S. domestic Spanish-speaking market; African American pop singer Brandi's role as Cinderella, as well as a cast of multiethnic characters in a recent made-for-TV production that aired on ABC; the use of celebrity voices, such as Whoopi Goldberg and Cheech Marin in animation films; the creation of films that centralize the stories of nonwhites, such as *Mulan*, and the "coming out" of television character Ellen on an ABC show. Moreover, Disney's

provision of health insurance for domestic partners, its Gay Day promotion at Disneyworld, and its toy "give-aways" to inner city advocacy groups for distribution at Christmastime might be interpreted as Disney's genuine concern for addressing the needs of marginalized segments of the population. Yet, as Carl Haasen writes in *Team Rodent: How Disney Devours the World,* such promotions generate enough "dough and goodwill" that it makes good business sense to retreat from its previous conservative image, which was fostered by its sanitization and purification of cultural production in its early years (1998, 13).

On the other hand, a critical reading of these practices would find them akin to the philanthropy and appeasement that resulted from "white guilt" in the 1960s and 1970s; that is, the belief that one's actions, whether genuine or superfluous, result in the cleansing of one's conscience, which absolves their institutionalized privilege at the expense of another's subjugation.[13] The notion of "white guilt" that emerged from the liberalism following the unrest of the Civil Rights era has come to include some upwardly mobile people of color and women, who embrace the principles of and who at times benefit from their appropriation of white male privilege. The inclusion of non-whites and women into post-Civil Rights era spaces of privilege problematizes race as an ideological construct as opposed to a biological or physical one.

Further, by espousing philanthropy (sometimes disguised as "activism")[14] liberals attempt to disassociate themselves from New Right extremists, such as political commentator/presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan who "openly embraces an authoritarian populism which views cultural democracy as a threat to the 'American way of life'" (Giroux 1994b, 33). Disney is not detached from mainstream identity politics in this sense. Whether it uses behind-the-scenes consultants or on-screen performers, Disney attempts to demonstrate that it is not racist, sexist, or homophobic. Still, as discussed above, Disney's appropriation of multicultural casts and themes follows the same logic of Buchananites whose interest it is to "take back" their country (33).

Somewhere in between and within the multiple meanings of Disney's corporate policies and productions, there exists an insistence that those considered "different" assimilate or acculturate themselves to particular sets of standards that define normalcy. When read critically, the liberalism in

Disney's most recent productions reflects a reconfiguration of hegemonic and contextual ideological norms to include misread representative worldviews of traditionally marginalized or "outside" groups. In true liberal form, diversity is permitted to exist only if it is subordinated to dominant ideals, whether through conformity or negotiated processes. In the former, one assumes that hegemonic, dominant ideals are superimposed and, in some instances, forced on an unwilling or otherwise passive constituency. The latter, negotiated process, suggests that that constituency is active and central to the decisions one makes in entering a social relationship. However, when particular expressions of cultural capital limit choices, then the negotiated reading runs the risk of also being confined to hegemonic principles and ideals that privilege the status quo. In short, choice does not translate into liberation.

Antonia Darder reminds us that "capitalist societies utilize forms of hegemonic control that function systematically by winning the consent of the subordinated to the authority of the dominant culture"(1991, 34). Thus, even though some might claim "subjectivity" and "agency" to demonstrate how they take ownership of their "negotiated processes," such active participation is limited by the hegemonic choices available to them. Privileging individual or collective "subjective" responses to domination limits discussion to fixed or otherwise fluid parameters (but parameters nonetheless). Almost three decades ago, Antonio Gramsci wrote that "even if one admits that other cultures have had an importance and a significance in the process of 'hierarchical' unification of world civilisation, they have had a universal value only in so far as they have become constituent elements of European culture, which is the only historically and concretely universal culture—in so far, that is, as they have contributed to the process of European thought and been assimilated by it" (1971, 416).

Democracy in contemporary U.S. society is not defined by tolerance of diverse perspectives and opinions. Instead, pressures of conformity by way of cultural sanitation define society.[15] This logic appears in the notion that democracy by conformity results in a homogenous, albeit racially plural, national character and eventually in nationhood—a territorial state whose inhabitants share a common belief system as expressed in political, economic, and cultural terms.[16] What "homogeneity" entails in the 1990s differs greatly from what

it entailed in the 1950s. Racial and gender plurality might be more evident now than it was then, but the new ideological homogenization that is apparent today bifurcates society, not only by how people appear but also by how they think and behave. Thus, the realignment of mainstream and marginal conditions still include race, class, and gender but has increasingly leaned toward ideological constructs that embody capitalist, cultural chauvinist, sexist, and racist principles. What occurs today among some people of color and women is similar to the experience of white ethnic groups previously considered non-white (German Americans, Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Catholics, and Jews) who became "white."[17]

To this end British historian, E. J. Hobsbawm (1992), writes that attempts at nationhood generate "invented traditions," which result from a conglomeration of pre-existing belief systems. The utilization of liberal multiculturalism by Disney in the 1990s reflects a co-optation of "pre-existing" U.S. marginal cultures. Moreover, the gentrification (in literal and figurative senses) of ideas by global powers results in what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities" (1983).

Such imagined communities are in turn characterized by a simultaneous homogenization of dominant ideals and marginalization of non-dominant ideals or what scholars refer to as the "construction of the 'other'." For instance, Indian political scientist Partha Chatterjee notes that cultural homogeneity is "the general imposition of high culture on society," which derives from "pre-existing cultures" that are generally transformed to accommodate political needs (1993, 5).[18] Yet, when marginal members of society respond to their subjugation, they generally do so in the language of their oppressors.

Disney's business ventures and cultural productions in particular have undoubtedly contributed to a contemporary conservative and liberal reconciliation, which has resulted from the quest to build a common national American character based on the redefinition of race, gender, and class privileges. This reconciliation and re-affirmation of what Rodolfo Acuña calls an "American paradigm" (1998) is perhaps best reflected in Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s, *The Disuniting of America* (1993). In this celebrated text, Schlesinger unwittingly assumes that America had a common culture in the first place. But this common culture was among privileged white men only because institutional and informal practices excluded marginal segments from full participation in that discourse. In the last thirty

years, policies brought marginal voices to the mainstream en masse for the first time in the history of the U.S. Thus, in some instances, the critical interpretations by people of color, women, gays and lesbians, and the working class bring different stories and thus different visions of America to surface.[19] Disney animation presents a thorough laboratory for those who try to explain these issues to children.

Walt Disney's "One Saturday Morning," a cartoon fest for young children, provides interesting racial representations in their various cartoons. "One Saturday Morning" is reminiscent of Disney's 1930s attempt to create clubs and project American nationalist sentiments. This modern-day version, however, replaces the theater with the living room and the overt American loyalist message with subconscious applications of diversity within an American context. While racial diversity among the various characters is mostly limited to white and black, the representations of various marginalized ethnic groups is of interest. The manner in which the characters are portrayed reaffirms concerns regarding the overbearing message of conformity. For instance, two cartoon series, "Pepper Ann" and "Recess," each have non-Anglo ethnic characters. However, physical characteristics aside, the mannerisms and phonetics of all characters arguably resemble whiteness.

This is significant because advocates for a "color-blind" society assume that theirs is an objective agenda free of "identity politics."[20] Without realizing that the "neutral" parameters they rely on are in fact socially and politically constructed, that is, that they themselves embody an identity politics, such scholars and commentators accommodate the issues and questions raised by their own lived experiences. Their experiences are constructed as normal while the experiences of others are deemed abnormal as behavior and phonetics are politicized. As Thandeka illustrates, racializing whiteness in everyday relations and experiences is discomforting for those who think only non-whites are racialized (1999, 1–19).

Thus, cultural sanitation occurs where behavior that is "too" ethnic is excluded or otherwise appropriated. This, along with institutionalized marginalization of targeted populations through legislative initiatives such as Propositions 187, 209, and 227 reflect California's and America's own practice of ethnic cleansing. The "color-blind" society advocated by conservative and liberal commentators reaffirms the privilege of

whiteness by crossing class and gender considerations through the use of such ahistorical terminology as "reverse discrimination" and "meritocracy," which supposedly victimizes upper-middle-class whites.[21] While we see the privileging of whiteness, a transgression of race, gender, and class exists particularly among some middle-class people of color who espouse liberal multiculturalism as well.

Cultural behavior is negotiated, contested, and consolidated within the confines of what can be called "cultural economy."[22] Individuals from marginalized communities, hence, have the capacities to accumulate enough cultural capital to transcend their marginal status and become full participants in mainstream society, though on the latter's terms. In this sense, conservatives and liberals in the U.S. have appropriated the call for inclusion of marginal groups by laying down the rules of the game, so to speak. Oppressed racial minorities, women, working-class white folk, and gays and lesbians are invited to play the game provided they adapt to what is perceived as proper comportment, which demonstrates rudimentary adherence to the "American paradigm."[23]

Individuals who accept this assimilationist or accommodationist role enter such a relationship as lesser beings. It depreciates their human value as they must shed their cultural traits and simultaneously recognize the dominant group's cultural traits as superior in order to be accepted.[24] On the other hand, some individuals resist the attempt to superimpose hegemonic social, cultural, and ideological parameters. Robin Kelley makes the observation that Nike, Reebok, L.A. Gear, and other athletic shoe conglomerates "have profited enormously from postindustrial decline" by "romanticiz(ing) the crumbling urban spaces in which African American youth must play," a mythology that results in "a vast market for overpriced sneakers"(1997, 44). Moreover, the romanticization of such decrepit urban play spaces reflects the lack of attention paid to their causation, such as decline in public funding, and reaffirms the supposed need for semi-private and private play spaces such as Discovery Zone, Wondercamp, Chuck E. Cheese, McDonald's, and "people's parks", where in order to have access people must pay admission, purchase food, or possess a key. While the subject of his chapter "Looking to Get Paid: How Some Black Youth Put Culture to Work" is the subjectivity of young urban African Americans, Kelley demonstrates how the agency

of young people is determined and results in part from their objectification by adult and societal sources. Thus, the choices that they make and put to use through their active participation and agency are often in response to outside stimuli. Nonetheless, the implications of this are felt most in the hierarchical social locations that characterize the re-construction of American nationhood at the end of the twentieth-century.

The Lion King/*El Rey León* and Nationhood

In some ways Disney's pressing for Americanization is reflected in their release of various animated films including those directed at a domestic Spanish-speaking market. One such example is *The Lion King,* which was later released as *El Rey León.* Peter and Rochelle Schweizer (1998) suggest that Disney stole *The Lion King* idea (or as a T-shirt at a comic convention notes "The Lyin' King") from Japanese animator Osamu Tezuka.[25] According to the Schweizers, *Kimba the White Lion* appeared on U.S. television from 1966 to 1977 after monumental success in Japan. Even though several creative contributors to *The Lion King* had direct contact with and knowledge of Tezuka's *Kimba the White Lion,* Disney's official position has been that the movie is "the first Disney animated feature to be based on an original story idea" and that "no one associated with *The Lion King* has ever heard of *Kimba* or seen it" (1998, 168). Still, while various characters and several portions of the plot line are almost identical to Tezuka's *Kimba the White Lion,* Disney put its own creative twist on what was otherwise Tezuka's invention.

Semantic consequences of *The Lion King/El Rey León* hold true for all children but have particular ramifications for Chicano/a youth who do not readily assimilate into the U.S. mainstream (although assimilation has become less a pressing alternative for Chicanos/as and Latinos/as in California as demographics change dramatically and rapidly).[26] Thus, the conformist messages in the movie present a dilemma. In light of this, a critical reading of *The Lion King/El Rey León* allows adults and children to discuss issues of participatory democracy, ideological conformity, and the institutional entrenchment of dominant discourse through an examination of historical practices.

My first viewing of *The Lion King* and later *El Rey León* revealed the obvious—light colored characters are good, dark

colored characters bad; males strong, females subservient. Still, *The Lion King/El Rey León* had another set of messages that was fitting for its time of release, which was marked by political intolerance, sociocultural conformity, and anti-youth scapegoating in the re-creation of nationhood during the post-Civil Rights era.[27]

Several defining moments in *The Lion King/El Rey León* construct accepted political beliefs and social behavior. While these parameters are constructed, dissenting beliefs and behavior are made to appear evil. Interpretation of *The Lion King/El Rey León* must assess these social constructions in light of the plot line and the derivative discourses of homogeneity and nation-building. I suggest that three "C's" characterize the plot line: Conformity, Contestation, and Consolidation. Combined, the three "C's" reflect Mufasa's (the patriarch and father of the young lion king) lessons to his son and heir apparent Simba; they reflect the circle of life. Thus, these C's suggest a pseudonatural composition of state building at various stages: establishing the state, repressing dissidence, and reaffirming privilege for the status quo.

The first of these C's—conformity—is reflected across species and gender. The opening scene of *The Lion King/El Rey León* depicts different species traveling long distances to greet Simba the newborn lion cub and heir to the throne. This convergence of beasts and their genuflection to the newborn prince denotes their acceptance of a hierarchal social positioning. Animals at the bottom of the food chain gladly accept their suppressed state. The calm peace among the juxtaposed wild species, some of them natural enemies, further suggests the mission of *The Lion King/El Rey León* as an attempt to control diversity.[28] Here, the implications are that diversity is good only when groups who represent difference are content with their respectively unequal social positioning.

A second example of conformity is Mufasa's statement to Simba that "everything that exists, exists in delicate equilibrium: the circle of life." In doing this, Disney animators and creators, through Mufasa, construct a pseudo-objective reality, suggesting in social Darwinist fashion that social hierarchy and its mechanisms are natural. Simba's eventual place atop that hierarchy must be closely guarded as a "delicate equilibrium."[29] This event establishes parameters for the rest of the film. It foreshadows events to come such as contestation and eventual consolidation.

Gendered conformity is also apparent in several instances. One example of this includes Simba's "rough-housing" with his young female friend and eventual spouse, Nala. As they play, she outwits him and physically overpowers him. All the while Nala teases Simba that she (a girl) is smarter and stronger than he (a boy). Despite these "innocent" affirmations, both concur that it doesn't matter since Simba, not Nala, will be king one day. Another example of this type of conformity is the reluctant acquiescence of the lionesses to Scar, Simba's villainous uncle. At one point, Scar manipulates Simba into believing that he is responsible for Mufasa's death and convinces Simba to flee and never return. Scar, who is next in line to the throne, becomes king by forging an alliance with the lions' natural enemy, the hyenas. While the lionesses are visibly in disagreement, they do not act on their beliefs until Simba's return. Thus, the females of the species remain loyal to the "natural order" and submit to male authority and privilege.

The nature of Scar's disloyalty to the lions and, in short to the kingdom/nation, is significant for several reasons. This event represents the first real challenge to the "natural" order. Scar's defection and the hyena's rise to power highlight the second "C"—contestation. Initially, lions and hyenas conflict over territorial rights. This dichotomy is represented in light of the fruitful kingdom/nation that belongs to the lions and the "shadowy place" that is the domain of the hyenas. The peripheral place reminds the audience of the presumed inability of non-whites to run their own states, or, in urban spaces, to run their own local governments. Scar, the dark and sinister lion, allies himself with the thug-like hyenas to conspire and take over the kingdom. As Robert Gooding-Williams reminds us, in this sequence *The Lion King/El Rey León* suggests:

> that the impoverished life of America's inner cities is itself the product of a communicable malaise embodied by inner-city residents. Enfranchise poor blacks and Latinos, Disney's movie intimates, and this malaise—a sort of biological and perhaps racist version of the Moynihan Report's 'tangle of pathology'—will spread inwards from the polity's periphery, entirely consuming its vital resources. (1995, 377)

Further, by appropriating Whoopi Goldberg's and Cheech Marin's voices to "represent speech . . . as black English and Latino slang" (375), Disney correlates the proliferation of marginal identities with social demise. These two are paired with a third bumbling and inarticulate hyena known only as "Ed." As the cultural fabric of the "shadowy place" predominates, audiences are reminded of the alleged urban/inner city inadequacies that constitute an "underclass" (Kelley, 1997). Indeed, as impoverished urban populations enter suburban America with their cultural and political "baggage," "white flight" has taken off for rural landscapes like Idaho and Montana or secessionist movements in Los Angeles.

The imagery in the scenes between Scar and the hyenas reveal warnings for non-conformists. Their organizational meeting includes darkness and flames. The attempt to assert themselves and to contest the "natural order" of their domination is represented within a hellish context. The message to marginalized children is evident: don't question authority, don't question socially constructed parameters, accept your submerged position in society. To violate this message is to place oneself in the position of these villainous creatures. To plot against one's own subjugation and the privilege of others may result in hell. For adults, the marching sequence in which hyenas step to Scar's orders resembles the all-too-familiar spectacles of foreign totalitarian regimes.

The appropriation of this imagery further suggests the conscription of conscience and its internal administrator—guilt—by Disney's creative team. Ronald Takaki discusses the role of conscience as a self-regulatory mechanism and its contribution to a distinct form of Anglo-Saxon republicanism in the formation of the United States. He writes that the "love for virtue and hatred for vice" were aggressively proclaimed (though not always effectively adhered to) during the era of the American Revolution and resulted in the construction of a self-regulatory "republican iron cage." Takaki further concludes that the social construction of what Benjamin Franklin called the "Lovely White" coincided with the simultaneous construction of lazy "Blacks and Tawneys" (1990, 3–10). In a similar way, Disney creators attribute criteria for backwardness to the racialized and gendered species, who occupy the lower social positions in *The Lion King/ El Rey Leon.* Those who challenge the established order lack a moral conscience.

Addressing the self-regulatory powers of conscience, Richard Brookhiser writes that conscience "doesn't quit when the oracles fall asleep or when the cops go off duty. In societies ruled by conscience, people stop for red lights at three o'clock in the morning" (1997, 17). Thus, having established racial, gender, and class parameters, Disney creators relay a devastating message for children who attempt to challenge them. In this case, children are scared into appropriating "normal" American principles and, at the same time, warned of the devastating consequences of not accepting unequal social positioning.

The emphasis on conformity encourages conservatism by almost forcing children to want to belong to the "natural order," even if it means sacrificing the hope of privilege and power. Disney's creative team encourages children to avoid the devastation that results from revolt so that the "delicate equilibrium" of the "circle of life" is maintained. Hence, regardless of power, social order results in security. On the other hand, Disney creators also demonstrate a liberal multiculturalism that encourages children, who are aware of their compromised positions, to accept their fate, be patient, and eventually reap their reward, namely security. This is best exemplified by the reluctant acquiescence of the lionesses to the revolutionary Scar/hyena alliance.

Moreover, capitulation as a favorable form of behavior is reflected in the species on the lower end of the food chain. Abundant vegetation appeases species on the lower rungs of society because the lions' domain provides the minimum essentials for their survival. The famine and drought that accompany the Scar/hyena challenge to privilege result in an inability to provide for the kingdom/nation.

To the Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s of the world, social decay results from the ascendance of historically marginalized groups to power. Disney takes this message a bit further, suggesting that acquiescence to authority is moral and violation results in social chaos and individual death. The individual is left to determine his/her own fate by dealing with his/her own conscience.

The third "C" is represented by the restoration of the old order through a consolidation of traditional ideals. Sex and species privileges are combined and reclaimed as social forces. The hyena social structure, which is matrilineal or female dominant, is rejected in favor of the male-dominant

lion structure. Hyenas, which represent a different species, in the context of U.S. society represent different ethnicities or "outgroups." Thus, when the hyenas assert themselves and take power from the patriarchal lions, Disney asserts that the consequences are mismanagement and chaos. One can project this message onto the current debate regarding affirmative action. The implications here are that non-traditional holders of power do not measure up. In this case, the hyenas are represented as not "being qualified" to run a state.

The consolidation of old views are represented in Simba's return as an adult to reclaim "his" kingdom/nation. This portion of the plot also takes on biblical proportions and can be equated with the return of the prodigal son or Christ himself. Simba's return as the savior results in the final suppression of the hyena insurrection as order is restored and good wins over evil. Simba, with celestial help from his father Mufasa, becomes the savior/king. The lionesses, upon Simba's return, join in the counter-revolutionary efforts on behalf of the kingdom/nation. Thus, while they were in opposition to the Scar/hyena "state," the lionesses still waited for the return of their male king before acting on their political beliefs. Once the insurrection is repressed and order is restored, the drought and famine end. A storm comes and vegetation grows back. The gloomy atmosphere that represented the Scar/hyena regime is replaced by scenic color and contentment. All species, whether happily or begrudgingly, once again accept their subservience to the lions. Nala and Simba have a cub together and the opening scene resurfaces. All species travel from distant places to greet and pledge their allegiance to their eventual ruler. All species submerge themselves once again so that the delicate equilibrium can be maintained.

The three "C's" construct the delicacy of equilibrium found in the race-, gender-, and class-based hierarchical social positioning, which Mufasa preached to Simba early on as the criteria of kingdomhood/nationhood. In the end, the circle of life is about the power struggles among competing factions and the ability to maintain social privilege through the guise of proper comportment. Such behavior is encouraged by threatening consequences for those who dare question authority and the established cultural, social, and economic parameters.

The consolidation of traditional systems of privilege embodied in the latter part of *The Lion King/El Rey León* reflects

a larger Disney scheme to address multiculturalism. Disney's liberal multiculturalism is embodied in productions as well as corporate policies.

Children, the Power of Cultural Capital, and Critical Race Theory

The Lion King/El Rey León presents numerous opportunities for children and adults to engage in critical discussions regarding power, domination, and repression. One form of analysis to guide such discussions is the application of critical race theory. The questions and suggestions that shape this section are preliminary and based on the understanding that critical race theory is not without its limitations. Nonetheless, it provides a workable starting point, for critical consciousness is not the exclusive domain of adults. Parents, other adults, and children contend with the power of childhood consumption and cultural capital.

Explaining the increasingly complex economic arrangements between advertisers, product manufacturers, and the children's entertainment industry, Norma Pecora notes that "No longer does Johnny ask mom to buy Ovaltine drink because Little Orphan Annie or Dick Tracy say so; now Johnny wants Batman cereal, a Looney Tunes frozen dinner, Sesame Street pasta shapes, or Smurf's yogurt" (1998, 8). By the 1980s, the close association between culturally produced children's icons and brand names resulted in the recognition that children were the *primary* consumers of various products (including 58 percent of candy and 30 percent of toys) and *influential* in others' purchase decisions for them (80 percent of clothing, 72 percent of sneakers, 65 percent of cereal, 45 percent of video movies, and 30 percent of toothpaste) (19). Disney's realization of what Marsha Kinder calls "transmedia intertextuality" (1991, 40–46) is nowhere more apparent than the eighty-one minute infomercial that was Disney's *Toy Story*. *Toy Story*, which epitomized the consolidation of children's entertainment production and the promotion of toys as an ancillary product, is perhaps the most obvious of the Disney examples. Less obvious are the ancillary toys found in McDonald's "happy meals" that promote Disney animated movies.

Childhood agency in the consumer market does not result only from their desire for material things. Media critic

Ellen Seiter writes that consumer culture provides children with "the basis for small talk and play"(1993, 7). This results in the accumulation of cultural capital, which gives an upper hand to the well-versed child. For instance, as a child I recall feeling excluded from my friends' Monday morning conversations at school regarding the last episode of "C.H.I.P.S." Growing up in a household that had only one television, the adults in my home opted to view the *novelas* that were broadcast in the same time slot. Recently, as I helped my son get ready for school, I noticed his displeasure with the blue shirt I had ironed for him. When I pressed further, he told me that he preferred to wear a white shirt as this would allow him to play the role of the "Silver Ranger" when he and his classmates played "Power Rangers" during recess.

The negotiation of childhood cultural capital takes place among children, as well as between children and adults. Thus, the role that adults play in negotiating and regulating children's consumption of media productions, as well as their auxiliary consumer products, is crucial. How children and adults view and/or discuss productions put forth by the children's entertainment industry must be understood in the context of audiences who "use media in extremely diverse and complex ways" (Trend 1994, 229). Watchers are not without agency. In *Remote Control: Television, Audiences, and Cultural Power*, Seiter et al. note, "As the gadget we use to change channels, the remote control symbolizes the viewers' selection, control, and manipulation of television broadcasts" (1989, 2). Thus, they suggest that "active," subjective audiences who choose to view particular productions receive and consume these in diverse manners. Still, just because audiences have "control" over what they watch should not imply that they critically interpret what they view. Further, the television industry, a vehicle of corporate media, determines the body of choices that are available for viewers.

Precisely because Disney messages are polysemic, discussion between adults and children is needed. Specifically, the various messages found in Disney's children's entertainment production should be scrutinized from the perspectives of U.S. history, feminist discourse, class analysis, critical studies, and critical race theory.[30]

Critical race theorists define their approach as having at least five themes that shape its basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy: 1) the centrality and intersectionality

of race and racism; 2) the challenge to dominant ideology; 3) the commitment to social justice; 4) the centrality of experimental knowledge; and 5) the interdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano 1997, 5–19). Further, while race and racism are central to critical race analysis, the intersection with gender and class discrimination are crucial (6). Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy while challenging ahistoricism and locating current inequalities and social/institutional practices as part of larger historical processes (Matsuda et al., 1993).[31] Indeed, a crucial component of analysis for critical race theorists is the challenge to ahistoricism. They write:

> Current inequalities and social/institutional practices are linked to earlier periods in which the intent and cultural meaning of such practices were clear. More important . . . critical race theorists adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage along racial lines, including differences in income, imprisonment, health, housing, education, political representations, and military service. (6)

Given the conservative-liberal reconciliation, critical race theory becomes one of several ways in which to examine the consequences of master narratives exposed to children, the epistemology and pedagogy of such discourses, and the manner in which children respond to these through their own agency. *The Lion King/El Rey León* becomes a vehicle through which adults and children can address these themes and issues together. Moreover, a critical discussion of this movie can further serve to critically assess children's cultural capital. Children from low-income families are at a disadvantage when it comes to attaining cultural capital. Simply, they have less opportunities to watch new releases in theaters, having instead to wait to view a movie until it is out on video and thus "old news"; they have less means to purchase fast food children's meals that include toys from the movies being promoted; and they are at a disadvantage when it comes to purchasing ancillary products.

In discussing *The Lion King/El Rey León's* construction of a national American character and its implications for

nation-building we must recount that the points of entry for different "out groups" into American society have established legacies of domination for their respective groups.[32] African Americans entered this society as slaves. Mexicans entered this society as a conquered population. Asian Americans entered this society as a cheap source of labor. American Indians, the original inhabitants of this land, were exterminated or placed in reservations. Women were prohibited from participating in many public exercises until the early twentieth-century. Since these original encounters, policies have followed that have served to institutionally marginalize all of these populations while creating a form of affirmative action for upper-middle-class white men and their beneficiaries that inevitably carry economic consequences.[33]

Historical and institutional exclusion from access to material resources and from public participation have led to cycles of poverty. As historian Robin D. G. Kelley reminds us, poverty is expensive. Different forms of "affirmative action" for whites, such as government subsidies and pro-white male legislation that marginalize or otherwise disadvantage non-whites, curtails the ability of non-whites to accumulate material resources and wealth.[34] Such policies marginalize racial minorities and women in order to create institutionally granted access for white males and their extended kin networks.

However, does or will material accumulation by marginalized groups solve social inequality? Paolo Freire, among others, reminds us that liberation does not come from the oppressed assuming the roles of the oppressor. Liberation, according to Freire (1970), comes from liberating the oppressor from his/her oppressive state of being as well.[35] Oppression is unchanged regardless of the skin color or gender of the oppressor if institutional criteria remain unchanged. Herein, we find a weakness of critical race theory: the almost exclusive emphasis on tangible categories of analysis that privilege the physical, biological, and material constructs of people and things. When adults choose to engage children in addressing issues of race, class, and gender, attention needs to be paid to the ideological transgressions between these as well.

In this respect, when addressing potential solutions to the problems posed in cultural production, one needs to recognize that even though members of marginalized groups have perforated the mainstream, the playing field has not been leveled nor have the rules been changed. Stephanie

Wildman and Adrienne Davis discuss hierarchies of oppression and the existence of various "-isms" that give "the illusion that all patterns of domination and subordination are the same and interchangeable. . . . [That] someone subordinated under one form may feel no need to view himself/herself as a possible oppressor, or beneficiary of oppression, within a different form. For example, white women, having an -ism that defines their condition—sexism—may not look at the way they are privileged by racism" (1995, 574).

Regarding the issue of race, I agree with Peter McLaren and Rodolfo Torres who assert that "We should not accord analytical or explanatory status to the idea of 'race' as if it corresponded to some biological or epistemological 'type', 'absolute', or monolithic social category. The use of the term 'race' has become an analytical trap precisely when it has been employed in antiseptic isolation from the messy terrain of historical and material relations" (1999, 46). Indeed, race, gender, and class as categories of analysis need to be assessed beyond their physical, biological, or material existence. Rather than limiting one's focus on the tangible factors (biological, physical, or material) of these categories of analysis a shift to understanding intangible factors such as the culture and ideology of these categories is necessary and already underway. Moreover, the relation between culture and ideology is such that cultural behavior functions as the currency of ideology in a highly regulated ideological marketplace. That such a market place of ideals exists should not obscure the fact that unlike other market places, this is one in which ruling elites resist the application of *laissez faire*, or the free market principle.

Conclusion

In their prophetic book *The Burden of Support: Young Latinos in an Aging Society,* David Hayes-Bautista, Werner Schink, and Jorge Chapa (1988) call attention to the marginalization of Latino/a youth and argue that investing in the improved social and economic status of a young Latino/a population would benefit the non-Latino population as well. They write, "Anglo Baby Boomers will retire in the early part of the twenty-first century, and our work force will become far more dependent on the skills and productivity of Latinos and other minorities" (viii). *The Burden of Support* points to the political

and economic context in which Latino/a youth have become a significant portion of what Mike Males calls the "scapegoat generation" (1996). This generational war is part of a larger cultural war being waged in which an aging white society refuses to view an increasing number of non-white youth as "American" and thus as their own. On the other hand, liberal multiculturalists profess their "Americanism" within the parameters of racist, sexist, capitalist, and ageist privileges. Critical multiculturalists argue that the United States is "strengthened, not weakened, by the vibrancy brought to it by immigrant and non-white communities" (Flores and Benmayor 1997, 5).

Critical, independent thinking needs to be encouraged at a young age in order for a vibrant democracy to exist. Therefore, efforts to address youth issues into the next millennium need to consider and validate diverse worldviews and ideals reflective of the changing globalizing demographic. For "America" to exist, the racist Anglo-centric application that limits this notion only to the United States needs to be reconfigured into a transnational, trans-border "America" that validates the historical, social, and cultural experiences of all marginalized people regardless of color and gender. Teaching children tolerance and respect does not come without its challenges, especially when adults don't exhibit tolerance and respect themselves. As we prepare to enter the next millennium, the social and economic contribution to society by future generations depends on their intellectual and emotional preparation as much as it depends on their ability to maintain their self-worth and integrity.

Notes

1. This observation is further enhanced in Schweizer and Schweizer (1998) particularly chapters 11 and 20 titled "The Lyin' King" and "Don't Know Much About History" respectively.

2. For a critique of Disney animation and its portrayal of gender issues, see Giroux (1996, 89–113). Further discussion of the subtext in Disney animated films can be found in Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells 1995. For an introductory discussion of Latino male gendered identity, see Ray Gonzalez (1996).

3. For an early critique of race as a physical category of analysis, see Barbara J. Fields (1982, 143–177), who argues that race should be understood and analyzed as an ideological construct. A recent provocative discussion of this question is found in Robert Miles and Rodolfo D. Torres 1999 who argue that scholars should not "transform the *idea* of race into an analytical category and use "race" as a *concept* in order to claim that individual and collective behavior is determined or motivated by a really-existing phenomenon labeled "race."

4. In the mid- to late-1980s, former State Senator Art Torres, who later helped to champion the struggle against the building of a state prison in East Los Angeles, initially favored such a project. Then Assemblyman Richard Polanco, after seeking an endorsement from the Coalition Against the (Proposed East Los Angeles) Prison by promising his opposition to the unwanted prison, was placed on the powerful assembly Ways and Means Committee. He replaced a "no" vote on the prison issue and voted "yes" to move the issue to the assembly floor where the issue was prolonged. Also, in the 1990s, former eastside Assemblyman Luis Caldera co-authored legislation that made it illegal in California for undocumented persons to be issued or possess a state driver's license. His successor, Gil Cedillo, is currently attempting to reverse that legislation.

5. Indeed, Propositions 187, 209, and 227 in California have been attempts to limit access to opportunities for Latino and other marginalized youth while simultaneously creating access for those who subscribe to ideals of what Acuña (1998) calls the "American Paradigm." The origin of the current reactionary and exclusionary political climate is best illustrated in Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado's, *No Mercy (*1996). A critical approach to policy that blames and targets youth is found in Mike A. Males, *The Scapegoat Generation* (1996). Discussion of policy as it affects Latino youth is found in David Hayes-Bautista, Werner O. Schink, and Jorge Chapa, *The Burden of Support* (1988). A discussion of how Latino youth respond to social political changes around them is found in James Diego Vigil's *Personas Mexicanas* (1997).

6. These three markets are best addressed in Steinbock 1995 especially Chapter 4. See also Smoodin 1994.

7. This survey was conducted at the Target stores in Downey and East Los Angeles, California, and the Wal-Mart store in Cerritos, California, during a three-month period in 1996. It should be stated that this survey was based solely on empirical data and did not take into account market analysis.

8. For a discussion of the cultural ramifications of Disney in Tokyo for instance, see Yoko Brannen (1993, 617–634).

9. For further discussion of the Walt Disney Company's public financial record see http://www.disney.com/Investors/earnings/.

10. For further discussion of the absence of objectivity due to selected and subjective exclusion of particular perspectives of information, see Zinn (1991, 6–7, 11, 48, 50–51, 62–64).

11. I use the definitions of marginality and centrality as described in hooks's, *Feminist Theory* (1987). A critical discussion of social positionality has taken an interdisciplinary approach and is perhaps best represented in the works of literary critic Anzaldúa (1987), legal scholar Bell (1987), education scholar Darder (1991), and historian Kelley (1997).

12. According to Schweizer and Schweizer (1998, 265), Michael Eisner is active in the Democratic Party and invited President Bill Clinton to become part of the "Hall of Presidents" at Disney World.

13. While treatment of this question is extensive in the fields of Critical White Studies and Critical Race Theory, a representative collection of essays that critically assesses this question is found in Delgado and Stefancic 1997. In particular, see the section in this collection titled "What Then Shall We Do? A Role for Whites," which includes contributions from fifteen scholars.

14. I distinguish "philanthropy" and "activism" as being separate, class-based forms of advocacy. Regardless of whether a cause is working- or middle-class, one's participation in such a cause results in different consequences and rewards for the individual advocate. For instance, when communities gather to oppose unwanted toxic waste dumps, incinerators, or prisons, residents of those working class neighborhoods experience the dangers posed by such projects on a continuous basis. On the other hand, middle-class supporters often have the luxury of retreating to their suburban homes having convinced themselves that they have done a good deed.

15. I take the term "cultural sanitation" from my discussion with National Hispanic Media Coalition Board Member Adan Ortega. My thanks to Adan and the coalition for the steps they take in advocating fair representation of Latinos/as in media.

16. Important texts that address this theme are Henry Luis Gates's *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (1992), and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1993). In addition, a special issue of the *American Quarterly*, Vol. 45, no. 2, June 1993 was devoted entirely to this discussion.

17. Further discussion of this is found in David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991), Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (1995), and Karen Brodkin's *How Jews Became White Folks* (1998). A provocative account of the appropriation of whiteness among Euro-Americans "in order to remain in good standing with in their communities" is Thandeka's *Learning to Be White* (1999).

18. See also Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983).

19. A critical assessment of the institutional racism embedded in the U.S. constitution is found in Bell's *And We Are Not Saved* (1987), Chapter One, "The Real Status of Blacks Today: The Chronicle

of the Constitutional Contradiction." While Schlesinger bases much of his discussion on the "democratic" principles of the "founding fathers," Bell uses literary license to dispel the notions that such principles were fair and democratic.

20. Such arguments that decry "identity politics" are found in Schlesinger 1993 and Todd Gitlin's *Twilight of Our Common Dreams* (1995).

21. See Roediger 1991 and Lipsitz 1998.

22. Further discussion of cultural economy is found in Gutiérrez's "Con Sus Calzones Al Revés, With His Underpants Inside Out: Cultural Economy and Patriarchy in Pablo de la Guerra's Letters to Josefa Moreno de la Guerra, 1851–1872" (1999).

23. For a discussion of the ideological and cultural wars currently being waged on American campuses and an insight into his own successful lawsuit against the University of California, Santa Barbara for his non-hiring, see Acuña's *Sometimes There Is No Other Side* (1998).

24. A more detailed discussion of this is found in Darder's *Culture and Power in the Classroom* (1991) and David T. Abalos's *Latinos in the United States* (1986). Darder examines the consequences of assimilationist practices in education while Abalos applies the theory of transformation.

25. See Schweizer and Schweizer 1998, Chapter 11, which is titled "The Lyin' King."

26. Conclusions drawn by some policy studies of Latino-based "think tanks" of the "emerging Latino" population, as well as in-depth, long range studies on the question of assimilation, have begun to point to cultural maintenance among this diverse population. For instance, studies by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund (1997) point to cultural maintenance among Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles. Also, in a recent study of high school youth, James Diego Vigil (1997) found that as people of Mexican ancestry in the U.S. move into the suburbs, assimilation has decreased and has become less an indicator of academic success.

27. While the literature on this subject matter is extensive, two central studies that shed light on the political climate of the post-Civil Rights era that scapegoats youth are Hayes-Bautista, et al.'s *The Burden of Support* (1988) and Males's *The Scapegoat Generation* (1996). Also, the ideological embodiment of *The Lion King* emerged in a reactionary period aptly described by Stefancic and Delgado in their book *No Mercy* (1996). However, while this insightful text documents the economic and political function in producing knowledge and in solidifying the interests, ideals, and agenda of the right, it neglects the manner in which liberals acquiesced or otherwise contributed to the construction of such an agenda.

28. I would like to acknowledge here the work of Chela Sandoval, who, in a presentation at the University of California, Santa Barbara, first introduced me to the notion that diversity, in its liberal form, can be controlled through conformist practices.

29. Feminist scientists have challenged the notion of objectivity in the sciences and its consequences of the production of scientific knowledge. See Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is 'Strong Objectivity'?" (1996, 235–248) and Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Scientific Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1996, 249–263).

30. There is a substantial body of literature on critical race theory. For the sake of brevity and in the interest of space the following are recommended: Bell, *And We are Not Saved*, (1987), and *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, (1992); Delgado, *The Rodrigo Chronicles* (1995a), *Critical Race Theory* (1995b), and *The Coming Race War?* (1996); Mari Mastuda, et al., *Words That Wound*, (1993); and, Ruth Frankenberg, ed., *Displacing Whiteness*, (1997).

31. Other important works that address the political nature of the production of knowledge with a particular critique of the western based scientific methodology include Acuña, *Sometimes There Is No Other Side* (1998), Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (1996), Fox Keller and Longino, eds., *Feminism & Science*; and Jim Davis, Thomas Hirschl, and Michael Stack, eds., *Cutting Edge*, (1997).

32. For a treatment of various groups' experiences see Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages* (1990) and *A Different Mirror*, (1993) and Sucheng Chan, et al., eds., *Peoples of Color in the American West* (1994).

33. See for instance George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics* (1998); and Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Faultlines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (1994). Additional discussion of this theme is found in Gabriel Gutiérrez, "Affirmative Action of the First Kind: White Aliens, White Privilege, and Preferential Treatment in Nineteenth-Century California." Paper presented at the 26th Annual Conference, National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, San Antonio, Texas, Spring 1999.

34. Further discussion regarding the differences in accumulation of wealth between African Americans and Euroamericans is found in Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth*, (1995).

35. See Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (1990), Chapter One.

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GABRIEL GUTIÉRREZ is assistant professor of Chicano/a Studies at Loyola Marymount University. He received his Ph.D. in history at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His publications include the forthcoming essay titled "Affirmative Action of the First Kind: Social and Legal Constructions of Whiteness and White Male Privilege in Nineteenth-Century California" in *Latino Studies Journal.*