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Walt Disney Company

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Contributors: Gordon B. Schmidt

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The Walt Disney Company, commonly known as Disney, is a multinational corporation founded in the United States in 1923. The organization began as an animation studio producing content for children and families but has since expanded into many other media areas, including live-action film, radio, television, and online streaming. The company is also known for its amusement parks and resorts. This entry discusses the history of the company, its growth, and some of the criticism of its entertainment products.

Disney, based in Burbank, California, has its greatest sales within the United States but sells its media productions and related products globally. The Walt Disney Company's intellectual properties span media platforms and licensed goods and include characters such as Mickey Mouse and the Muppets and films such as *Zootopia* (2016) and *Frozen* (2013). In 2017, it announced its plan to purchase the film and television assets of 21st Century Fox. The purchase, which was completed in 2019, includes the 20th Century Fox movie and television studios and Fox Searchlight film studio.

The Walt Disney Company was started by brothers Walt and Roy O. Disney in October 1923 to produce a series of cartoons called the Alice Comedies. At the time, the company was focused exclusively on producing animated works for children and families. In November 1928, the first Mickey Mouse cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, was released. *Steamboat Willie* is notable for being one of the earliest cartoons with synchronized sound and was very commercially successful.

In December 1937, Disney released its first feature-length animated movie, *Snow White*. The success of *Snow White* would establish Disney as a successful feature-length animation studio. In 1950, the company released its first fully live-action film, *Treasure Island*.

Disney expanded into television with the anthology show *Disneyland* in October 1954. In July 1955, the first Walt Disney Company amusement park, Disneyland, opened. The company began its own cable network, the Disney Channel, in April 1983.

Disney made a huge addition to its media empire in July 1995 by acquiring Capital Cities, which included ABC and ESPN and stakes in several other cable networks and local television stations. In May 2006, Disney acquired Pixar Animation Studios, which had produced popular films for Disney such as *Toy Story* (1995), *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), and *Finding Nemo* (2003). Other companies and intellectual properties it has acquired include the Muppets, which it purchased from the Jim Henson Company in 2004; Marvel Entertainment, which it acquired in 2009; and Lucasfilm, which it purchased in 2012, acquiring the rights to the *Star Wars* and Indiana Jones franchises. After its purchase of Lucasfilm, Disney continued the *Star Wars* franchise with *The Force Awakens* (2015) and *Rogue One* (2016).

Intellectual properties are a key part of Disney's success. Its initial base of intellectual properties was built into the company's original focus on animation. Out of animated shorts came characters such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Minnie Mouse, Goofy, and many others. These characters are still prominent in its theme parks and merchandising and are featured in television programs. Disney's full-length animated movies such as *Snow White* (1937), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *The Lion King* (1994), have also meant. These properties extend across media platforms and licensed products. The purchase of Marvel Entertainment, whose products included comics and films featuring characters such as Spider-Man, Captain America, and Iron Man, was especially rich in opportunities to profit across media platforms and licensed products. The Marvel characters are part of what is referred to as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which includes films featuring different characters but with shared elements.

Disney creates and distributes live action and animated films for presentation in theaters, on DVD or Blu-ray, video on demand, and online streaming. These are generally distributed through Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar, Marvel, Touchstone, and Lucasfilm in the United States and through other companies globally.

Disney's cable networks include ESPN, Disney Channel, ABC Family, and SoapNet. They also own the UTV/Bindass networks in India. It owns the broadcast network ABC and related channels and 30% of the online streaming company Hulu. As of 2017, it also owned eight local television stations.

Disney produces television shows through ABC Studios that are shown on their own channels, other channels, and in syndication. The shows include *Criminal Minds*, *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *Marvel's Daredevil*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *How to Get Away With Murder*, *20/20*, and *The View*.

Disney's amusement parks and resorts include attractions tied to its intellectual properties. In the United States, it owns Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida and Disneyland in Anaheim, California, which include rides, attractions, and hotels. It also has part ownership of, or licenses operations in, amusement parks and resorts in Paris, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Tokyo and runs Disney-themed cruises and trips to multiple locations.

The Walt Disney Company is also involved in a number of other activities. They do significant merchandizing of their media properties including toys, clothing, and other branded productions. The company-owned Disney Store is one outlet for selling their merchandise. Disney also has a music publishing arm, Disney Music Group. Disney has been the subject of controversy many times over the years, often for portrayals of women or minority groups that are seen as stereotypical. One example is the reception to the movie *Song of the South*, first released in 1946 and based on the Uncle Remus stories of Joel Chandler Harris, which Harris said were based on stories he heard from slaves while he worked on a plantation during the Civil War. Some Black leaders and members of the Black press objected to the vernacular and traditional songs in the film and said the film glorified slavery, though Disney said the film took place after the Civil War. The film was rereleased in theaters several times but has never been released on home video in the United States.

Disney also has been criticized for producing numerous animated films featuring royal characters and female characters who are focused on romance over careers or individual interests, and with leads who are White and voiced by White actors. Some more recent Disney films have had a greater variety of plots and featured non-White actors, however. Recent animated films have included *Moana* (2016), set in ancient Polynesia and featuring a multiracial lead actress, and *Coco* (2017), based on the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead and featuring a mainly Latino cast. In 2018, it released the live-action films *Black Panther*, a superhero film set in Africa with a nearly all-Black cast, and *A Wrinkle in Time*, an adaptation of the 1962 novel with the lead character played by an African American girl.

See also [African American Characters on Television and in the Movies](#); [Animation](#); [Blockbusters](#); [Children's Movies](#); [Comics](#); [Corporate Media Consolidation](#); [Female Characters on Television and in the Movies](#); [Film Production](#); [Intellectual Property](#); [Movies, History and Economics of](#); [News Corporation](#)

Websites

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Gordon B. Schmidt

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Further Readings

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