

Walt Disney



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From Neal Gabler, the definitive portrait of one of the most important figures in twentieth-century American entertainment and cultural history.

Seven years in the making and meticulously researched—Gabler is the first writer to be given complete access to the Disney archives—this is the full story of a man whose work left an ineradicable brand on our culture but whose life has largely been enshrouded in myth.

Gabler shows us the young Walt Disney breaking free of a heartland childhood of discipline and deprivation and making his way to Hollywood. We see the visionary, whose desire for escape honed an innate sense of what people wanted to see on the screen and, when combined with iron determination and obsessive perfectionism, led him to the reinvention of animation. It was Disney, first with Mickey Mouse and then with his feature films—most notably *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, and *Bambi*—who transformed animation from a novelty based on movement to an art form that presented an illusion of life.

We see him reimagine the amusement park with Disneyland, prompting critics to coin

the word Disneyfication to describe the process by which reality can be modified to fit one's personal desires. At the same time, he provided a new way to connect with American history through his live-action films and purveyed a view of the country so coherent that even today one can speak meaningfully of "Walt Disney's America." We see how the True-Life Adventure nature documentaries he produced helped create the environmental movement by sensitizing the general public to issues of conservation. And we see how he reshaped the entertainment industry by building a synergistic empire that combined film, television, theme parks, music, book publishing, and merchandise in a way that was unprecedented and was later widely imitated.

Gabler also reveals a wounded, lonely, and often disappointed man, who, despite worldwide success, was plagued with financial problems much of his life, suffered a nervous breakdown, and at times retreated into pitiable seclusion in his workshop making model trains. Gabler explores accusations that Disney was a red-baiter, an anti-Semite, an embittered alcoholic. But whatever the characterizations of Disney's personal life, he appealed to the nation by demonstrating the power of wish fulfillment and the triumph of the American imagination. Walt Disney showed how one could impose one's will on the world.

This is a masterly biography, a revelation of both the work and the man—of both the remarkable accomplishment and the hidden life</p>

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