



The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life

Steven Watts

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The Magic Kingdom is a full-length investigation of the life of Walt Disney, arguably the principal architect of mass culture in our time. By mid-century, "Uncle Walt" had become an American icon and was universally acknowledged as the spokesman for the American way of life; yet, paradoxically, he was instrumental in changing our social assumptions. Probing Disney's public life as a creative entrepreneur, Steven Watts argues that Disney reflected a central irony of modern American culture: while proclaiming a genuine allegiance to the values of an earlier age (self-reliance, the work ethic, the culture of domesticity, sexual inhibition), he also took the lead in creating the modern world of consumer self-fulfillment. His great creations - from Mickey Mouse to Disneyland - embody the transformation of American popular culture, moving from the satirical edge of what Watts calls the "sentimental populism" of the Depression era to the uncritical, celebratory "sentimental libertarianism" of the Cold War. Watts also digs deeply into Disney's private life, investigating his roles as husband, father, and brother and providing fresh insight into his peculiar psyche - his genuine folksiness and warmth, his domineering treatment of colleagues and friends, his deepest prejudices and passions. Full of colorful sketches of daily life at the Disney Studio and tales about the creation of Disneyland and Disney World, The Magic Kingdom offers a definitive view of one of the most influential Americans in the twentieth century.

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