

A Mickey Mouse Reader

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A MICKEY MOUSE READER



EDITED BY **GARRY APGAR**

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From University Press of Mississippi : A Mickey Mouse Reader before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Mickey Mouse Reader:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Entertaining, Enlightening Insights into a Cultural Icon and Economic Powerhouse By S. O. Higgins Mickey Mouse celebrated his 86th birthday in November 2014. His image is now found more often on merchandise than on movie and television screens, but his greatest performances continue to entertain us. Moreover, Mickey and the company built around him continue to influence world culture in ways that were inconceivable when he first attained public awareness in 1928's "Steamboat Willie," the first animated sound film. For readers who, like me, first became aware of Mickey Mouse a few years after he made his final appearance as a lead "actor" on the big screen in 1953, Garry Apgar's astutely chosen collection

of news articles and essays on Mickey's astonishing career is enlightening, comprehensive and thought-provoking. It is also fun to read. Apgar's selections cover Mickey's role in advancing film technology and the quality of animated film, raising Depression-era spirits, saving bankrupt companies (toy train-maker Lionel and watchmaker Waterbury/Ingersoll), beating the Nazis, and building the hugely successful multimedia, real estate, and merchandising powerhouse that is The Walt Disney Company. Much of the information in "A Mickey Mouse Reader" will be of special interest to Baby Boomers who as children were proud members of the televised Mickey Mouse Club of the 1950s, but who later became bored or disillusioned by The Mouse. For them, Mickey-- whose image was emblazoned on planes and combat vehicles during World War II as a symbol of American Idealism -- became their special friend ("Why? Because we -- i.e., Mickey and his Mouseketeer friends -- like you!"). However, as they grew up and faced the issues rocking the country in the 1960s and 1970s, Mickey became for many a representative of commerce gone wild and a spokesman for cultural imperialism. Apgar's collection clearly shows that, whatever Mickey has been (or not) over the years, representatives of varying political viewpoints, both in America and elsewhere, have attempted to co-opt The Mouse for their own purposes. If, of course, you have no interest in cinema, no interest in animation, no interest in the nature of entrepreneurship, or in the making of cultural icons, you'll find little of interest here. Likewise, if you are incurious as to the roles Mickey Mouse has played as a favorite of royalty, as a D-Day-related code word, and a persona of interest to writers as varied as Anna Quindlen, Walter Benjamin, Irving Wallace, E. M. Forster, James Michener, John Updike, artists Diego Rivera and Maurice Sendak, scientist Stephen J. Gould and Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt; well, this book is not for you. For those, however, who have some of these interests, "A Mickey Mouse Reader" is a surprisingly informative book, well worth the time spent with it. The volume clearly demonstrates that one cannot be dismissive of The Mouse as a cultural signifier; and, Mickey must be reckoned with as the wellspring of the Disney company's economic savvy, its creative processes, and its zealous protection of its intellectual property. The book would benefit from having illustrations but it is, after all, a "reader," not an art book. (Ideally, Apgar's forthcoming volume dealing with Mickey as an American icon will provide appropriate balance, showing interpretations of Mickey by major visual artists). The book's intellectual authority is aided by a comprehensive bibliography, capsule biographies of the essays' authors, and the inclusion of both translations and reprints of essays originally published in German, French and Spanish. Apgar has organized his selections chronologically, which enables his readers to discover for themselves the evolution of the Mickey (and Disney) story. Every article is reprinted in its entirety, resulting in the inclusion of passages that may strike some readers as repetitive. However, readers aware of how the sausage of media news is made, will find this "repetition" revealing: It demonstrates the degree to which reporters and essayists writing in the same timeframe drew upon skillfully managed interviews and "background kits" that were legitimately, but most certainly, orchestrated and provided by Disney publicists. The use of original articles in their entirety also tacitly demonstrates the way legends are built, myths created and errors perpetuated (or, less often, revised and corrected) as one generation of writers draws upon work from a preceding one. Several articles in the anthology -- notably those by Arthur Mann, Frank Nugent and L. H. Robbins deal in whole or part with the economic clout of The Mouse. (Walt Disney himself often referred to Mickey as The Mouse). The Disney Studio, particularly in its early days (it existed before Mickey, but it was Mickey that launched it as an entertainment powerhouse in 1928), derived more income from merchandising of Mickey products than from his films. (As "Mickey marketing" declined, those revenues were bolstered by licensing and sales of other Disney character images: Donald Duck, Goofy, Pluto, and major characters like those in the recent Disney blockbuster, "Frozen"). Frank Nugent writing in 1947, notes that Disney's total revenue (much of it from merchandising and licensing of characters, mostly from Mickey), totaled about \$100 million annually at the time, or about \$1.65 billion in 2014 money. Of course, this was before Disney expanded into theme parks, cable, broadcast, live-action cinema and its many contemporary operations, which will give it estimated 2014 revenues in the \$84-85 billion range. Today, it employs some 180,000 people worldwide, compared to about 650 when, at age 5, Mickey's economic muscle first began to attract notice. The University of Mississippi Press, which has established a strong presence as publisher of books on cartooning and animation, has further strengthened its reputation with the publication of this handsomely designed, built-to-last volume that makes a significant contribution to the field. By way of disclaimer, I am an acquaintance of the editor (who also wrote the book's introduction and included reprints of two of his own previously published articles). I did, however, purchase my copy (two, in fact) of this book from .com. I have no connection with the publishing house, nor with The Walt Disney Company.

2 of 3

people found the following review helpful. Defining the Mouse

By M. Sonntag

Mickey Mouse was born in 1928 out of economic desperation and went on to far exceed the humble dreams of his creator Walt Disney. Mickey put Walt on the map and allowed him to fulfill his potential as a creative and entrepreneurial genius. Mickey is more than a cartoon star, he's a cultural icon who remains the corporate identity of the studio he made famous. Although there were Disney cartoons before Mickey, Walt was certainly on the mark when he said "It all started with a mouse." Quite frankly, with Mickey's success it did. But what made Mickey so special? What's his story? What is the appeal? Writers since day one have asked that question, Walt himself often seemed to struggle to define his greatest breakthrough.

Garry Apgar opens up the vault as it were, on the discussion. In *A MICKEY MOUSE READER* you will hear from Walt Disney himself to contemporary journalists, artists and historians about Mickey's appeal, his history and his future. You will journey through time and very literally witness the cultural evolution of the greatest cartoon star of all time. It's an entertaining journey, one to savor. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By RICHARD ROBROCK Very interesting collection of archival articles. The history is fascinating.

Ranging from the playful, to the fact-filled, and to the thoughtful, this collection tracks the fortunes of Walt Disney's flagship character. From the first full-fledged review of his screen debut in November 1928 to the present day, Mickey Mouse has won millions of fans and charmed even the harshest of critics. Almost half of the eighty-one texts in *A Mickey Mouse Reader* document the Mouse's rise to glory from that first cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, through his seventh year when his first color animation, *The Band Concert*, was released. They include two important early critiques, one by the American culture critic Gilbert Seldes and one by the famed English novelist E. M. Forster. Articles and essays chronicle the continued rise of Mickey Mouse to the rank of true icon. He remains arguably the most vivid graphic expression to date of key traits of the American character—pluck, cheerfulness, innocence, energy, and fidelity to family and friends. Among press reports in the book is one from June 1944 that puts to rest the urban legend that "Mickey Mouse" was a password or code word on D-Day. It was, however, the password for a major pre-invasion briefing. Other items illuminate the origins of "Mickey Mouse" as a term for things deemed petty or unsophisticated. One piece explains how Walt and brother Roy Disney, almost single-handedly, invented the strategy of corporate synergy by tagging sales of Mickey Mouse toys and goods to the release of Mickey's latest cartoons shorts. In two especially interesting essays, Maurice Sendak and John Updike look back over the years and give their personal reflections on the character they loved as boys growing up in the 1930s.

"This book does a good job curating particularly significant pieces about the Mouse—from such noted writers as John Canemaker, John Culhane, E. M. Forster, John Updike, M. Thomas Inge, Charles Solomon and our own Jim Korkis, among many others. The highlights for me are reading the older pieces—with such noted authors as Irving Wallace or a screenwriter like Frank S. Nugent discussing the evolution of Mickey Mouse in the 1940s—written at a time when the maturing studio was still in a "golden age." And there is also some real meat here—Arthur Mann's 1934 article for *Harpers' Magazine* on Disney's finances and distribution is a real find. Just when you think you've read it all, *A Mickey Mouse Reader* will indeed add to your knowledge of the Disney studio and its most famous creation. This is a good one, and I recommend it." —Jerry Beck, *Cartoon Research* (9/10/14)

In his introduction to *A Mickey Mouse Reader*, editor Garry Apgar advises readers to enjoy the book's segments at random, but I didn't follow his suggestions. I found this much more fascinating to read all the way through. As someone who rarely lets a quality Disney book or research work go by without devouring it, I found it more fun and interesting to see how the Mickey Mouse phenomenon grew from hot new fad to artistic triumph to passe; to dismissible to artistic and important over the decades. Having read many works that have excerpted selections from many of these essays, it was nice to read them in context, because it really drives home the cultural dynamism of Mickey Mouse and the Disney empire, as well as its effect on those who lived through the various eras. Apgar created a fine assemblage of writings that are a good reference for enthusiasts and perhaps an eye-opener for those who can't understand all the fuss about Mickey." —Greg Ehrbar, *Blog Tracks* (10/31/14); co-author (with Tim Hollis) of *Mouse Tracks: The Story of Walt Disney Records*

"My dad referred to Mickey Mouse as 'a little creature dedicated to the purposes of laughter.' He also advised us to remember that 'It all started with a mouse; . . . the empire that resulted that bears his name. Mickey means different things to different people, and Garry Apgar has compiled a fascinating selection of essays on The Mouse by some very important people. On Mickey's behalf, I am very impressed.'" —Diane Disney Miller (1933–2013) was president of the Walt Disney Family Foundation and co-founder of The Walt Disney Family Museum

"*A Mickey Mouse Reader* is a book that commands attention for many reasons, but not least because it is a continually surprising pleasure to read. There is in the book much that is worth reading for its own sake, and not just as a record of how critical and public sentiment have changed in the more than three-quarters of a century since Mickey's debut. Apgar's own commentary gives the book a reassuring 'spin' of informed judgment; that is, his authorial persona—especially his sophistication as a scholar in the visual arts—encourages the reader to accept his choices of what to include in the book. He has taken seriously the job of choosing the contents and as a result has come up with many fascinating items, including some originally published in other languages, that a less industrious compiler would have missed." —Michael Barrier, author of *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*

"*A Mickey Mouse Reader* is a seminal book which will delight both casual Mickey Mouse enthusiasts and Disney history scholars. Thanks to Garry Apgar, no serious research about Mickey will ever be undertaken from this day forward without first absorbing the fascinating content of this delightful book." —Didier Ghez, author of *Disney's Grand Tour* and editor of the *Walt's People* book series

About the Author Garry Apgar, Bridgeport,

Connecticut, is an art historian and former cartoonist and journalist. He is the author of *Mickey Mouse: Emblem of the American Spirit* and coauthor of *The Newspaper in Art*.