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In my opinion

Can't bring DISNEY down



ANNEMARIE KNEPPER
WORKS ON PAPER

"We feel after nine years of boycotting Disney we have made our point," American Family Association President Tim Wildmon said on his organization's Web site.

After a nearly decade-long boycott that America refused to get behind and that had absolutely no effect, the AFA gave up.

To add to the AFA's fake victory, the announcement goes on:

"Another positive sign has been the breakup of Disney and Miramax, the controversial film producing company that the Mouse House bought in 1993 for \$80 million."

Thank you, AFA, for failing to save America from the likes of "Finding Neverland," "The Aviator" and "Les Choristes." It's too bad Miramax founders Bob and Harvey Weinstein find no longer get to produce under the Miramax name they built for nearly 25 years.

The Disney/Miramax split, as has been widely reported, was not a decision to dump Miramax for its content. Far more likely, the cause was that Miramax was making too much money with hits like "Shakespeare in Love," "Pulp Fiction" and "Goodwill Hunting," and Disney wasn't getting a big enough cut. When the Weinsteins started to bomb out with movies like the largely unseen "Kate and Leopold," "The Shipping News" and "Talk Magazine," longtime Disney executive Michael Eisner could justify letting go of the artistically creative brothers with whom he had never seen eye to eye.

"It is our hope that the corporate leadership at Disney will see the error of their ways and change directions ... the company can return again to the Disney most came to love and trust in past generations," the AFA states on its Web site.

Though Walt was long dead by the time Miramax was on the scene, he did say, "You're dead if you aim only for kids. Adults are only kids grown up, anyway." In order for the company to remain successful, Disney's expansion to more adult-targeted films was inevitable.

Back to that "love and trust" of the bygone Disney. I'm curious as to which films, exactly, the AFA was referring.

Perhaps it meant the Disney movies that failed to portray a two-parent family, such as Snow White, Cinderella, Pinocchio, Sleeping Beauty (exist but are absent), The Sword and the Stone and The Lion King (mother exists but is largely absent)? Or perhaps the Disney stories that portray a woman as unable to make life choices for herself (Snow White) and as vain (nearly every Disney princess) or seen and not heard (The Little Mermaid)?

The studio also has a tendency to make men look like lovesick, obsessive dolts (Prince Charming) or angry dominant victimizers (both Beast and

Gaston in Beauty and the Beast).

Uncle Walt himself steadfastly avoided claiming any social responsibility for his films: "I don't pretend to know anything about art. I make pictures for entertainment, and then the professors tell me what they mean," he famously quipped.

The AFA's boycott was intended not only for the films but for everything Disney, especially the parks.

"Products and theme parks are subsidizing Disney's promotion of the homosexual agenda," reads the AFA's original boycott manifesto.

Well, they got that right. Big Gay Mickey has been recruiting kids into gaydom for far too long. What with those sassy shorts, stylish shoes and gloves, not to mention that mischievous, "come hither" grin.

This quote more likely refers to Disney allowing entrance of their paying gay customers during Orlando's popular Gay Day celebration. Universal Studios, the Hard Rock Cafe and several other Orlando businesses participate as well. Furthermore, Disney has, like many huge corporations who want to keep all of their talented employees healthy, extended health benefits to same-sex partners. Healthcare for your partner is not something the AFA supports.

Support is something the AFA lacked during the majority of the boycott. Even AFA backers had a hard time finding fault with Disney.

"When those phone calls came in, asking for evidence of new missteps by Disney, we were pleased to discover that they weren't as plentiful as before," Wildmon said. Translation: While we weren't willing to keep doing our own research, we did asked others to, and they came up with nothing.

Now that he has more money than he or any of his progeny could ever spend, and now that he has brought the company back from the edge of failure on which it was so precariously perched in the late 1970s and early '80s, Michael Eisner is retiring. Instead of recognizing that Eisner could spend the rest of his days swimming in a pool of money, like Uncle Scrooge, the AFA is positioning Eisner's retirement as a victory for them. With a net worth of \$700 million and a company that looks to continue on its upward trajectory for the foreseeable future, Eisner is clearly the big winner.

It must be stated that as a Christian and a human and a feminist, I do find

some images Disney projects to be, to say the least, distasteful. Ariel the mermaid looks more like a Playboy bunny than a typical 16-year-old girl. Belle of "Beauty and the Beast" suffers verbal and physical abuse before deciding in a song, "Now he's dear, and so I'm sure, I wonder why I didn't see it there before."

This may seem obvious to the more astute readers, but violence and sexuality are everywhere in mainstream media. Disney is no exception. Maybe it's time to step up and be parents instead of asking Disney to raise your children for you. Maybe it's time to actively participate in society not by shielding your children from all potentially objectionable images, but by engaging them in discussion about why you agree or disagree with what is portrayed.

The AFA's last gasp on the subject encourages people to "keep an eye on Disney."

"[This] does not guarantee that AFA will never again call for a Disney boycott, should the company do something particularly egregious. If, for example, Disney removed the clear Christian symbolism from The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe film, then all bets would be off ... as far as we're concerned, Disney is on probation."

As reported by the Orlando Sentinel, Colorado-based Focus on the Family, one of the groups that led the boycott, has been included in the early stages of the marketing campaign for "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

And yet Disney is keeping its distance in an effort to look Christian, but not too Christian.

"We don't want to cater to one fan base over the other, or at the expense of another," said Dennis Rice, Disney's senior vice president for public relations. Translation: We want as much money as possible from as many different types of people as possible.

Don't you get it, conservative Christians? Disney is playing you! The market for openly Christian movies and products is huge right now (see the profits for Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" for evidence) and Disney, as usual, wants a piece of the action. The "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" mentality nullifies any point the AFA and Focus on the Family have tried to make to Disney in the past decade.

So Disney is now "on probation."

With a threat like that, Eisner and Team Disney are sure to be shaking in their ... huge vat of money, which they will continue to use to make the same type of movie they always have: Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, violent fighting and exuberant songs ensue, boy gets girl. The End.

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Editorial

Outlawing sexuality is dated and irrational

SEX!

Now that we've got your attention, take a moment to consider these two tidbits of news:

Earlier this month, two students at Winona High School in Minnesota were suspended for wearing shirts and buttons with the phrase "I (heart) my vagina." Forty-five fellow students wore similar paraphernalia; some male students even proclaimed with their clothing, "I support your vagina."

The reason for this showing of support on behalf of a female body part? In February, it was just one person sporting such gear. Inspired after viewing the play "The Vagina Monologues," Winona student Carrie Rethlefsen wore an "I (heart) my vagina" button, which school officials quickly asked her to remove. Rethlefsen led students in their larger-scale free-speech battle earlier this May.

The Winona administration might have students' best interests at heart, but making the word "vagina" taboo is not the way to keep sexual distraction out of classrooms. Indeed, Rethlefsen reports that she originally wore her button for some time before anyone took notice and demanded that she remove it; if the pin were a real distraction, it would have been noticed much earlier.

Another problem with the school's stance is that for students, it represents a rule that silences issues of female sexuality. Rethlefsen said that she wore her button as a way to subtly speak about issues such as sexual assault.

The administration must surely realize that outlawing the "vagina" button was the only real cause of distraction for students. Lifting the regulation on "vagina" gear will therefore be the best solution for everyone involved. At this point, all school officials have accomplished is a reinforcement of the notion that female anatomy is automatically taboo — that is, something to be either sexualized, ashamed of, or both.

Unfortunately, the regressive sexual politics don't end there. Currently, the American Civil Liberties Union is working to rid North Carolina of its anti-cohabitation law. According to that 200 year-old doctrine, unmarried heterosexual couples may not live together.

The potential problems with this law are not just possibilities, they are reality: One woman in North Carolina was forced to quit her job as a sheriff's dispatcher after her boss told her to either marry her live-in boyfriend or move out. Likewise, with the anti-cohabitation law, it is legal for landlords to evict unmarried couples.

This cohabitation law is ridiculously outdated and should be removed from the books immediately. In a nation with skyrocketing divorce rates and an increasing numbers of happy, non-traditional families, there is no reason that the government should be pushing citizens into marriage. Since when is it the job of the government to put a scarf on its head and play Yenta?

Regressive sexual politics are nothing new to a country founded on Puritan principles. Nevertheless, in both of these cases, those lauding repression will hopefully remember that positive sexuality is not impossible: It can be found on a T-shirt, a button, or living right next door.

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