



# The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney

*Michael Barrier*

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## **The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney** Michæl Barrier

Walt Disney (1901-1966) was one of the most significant creative forces of the twentieth century, a man who made a lasting impact on the art of the animated film, the history of American business, and the evolution of twentieth-century American culture. He was both a creative visionary and a dynamic entrepreneur, roles whose demands he often could not reconcile.

In his compelling new biography, noted animation historian Michael Barrier avoids the well-traveled paths of previous biographers, who have tended to portray a blemish-free Disney or to indulge in lurid speculation. Instead, he takes the full measure of the man in his many aspects. A consummate storyteller, Barrier describes how Disney transformed himself from Midwestern farm boy to scrambling young businessman to pioneering artist and, finally, to entrepreneur on a grand scale. Barrier describes in absorbing detail how Disney synchronized sound with animation in *Steamboat Willie*; created in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* sympathetic cartoon characters whose appeal rivaled that of the best live-action performers; grasped television's true potential as an unparalleled promotional device; and—not least—parlayed a backyard railroad into the Disneyland juggernaut.

Based on decades of painstaking research in the Disney studio's archives and dozens of public and private archives in the United States and Europe, *The Animated Man* offers freshly documented and illuminating accounts of Disney's childhood and young adulthood in rural Missouri and Kansas City. It sheds new light on such crucial episodes in Disney's life as the devastating 1941 strike at his studio, when his ambitions as artist and entrepreneur first came into serious conflict.

Beginning in 1969, two and a half years after Disney's death, Barrier recorded long interviews with more than 150 people who worked alongside Disney, some as early as 1922. Now almost all deceased, only a few were ever interviewed for other books. Barrier juxtaposes Disney's own recollections against the memories of those other players to great effect. What emerges is a portrait of Walt Disney as a flawed but fascinating artist, one whose imaginative leaps allowed him to vault ahead of the competition and produce work that even today commands the attention of audiences worldwide.

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