

Defending Disney

By Bruce Bawer

A *Guardian* contributor celebrates the cultural and fiscal disaster that is Hollywood wokeness.

Jeff Wang – a name previously unfamiliar to me – begins his recent *Guardian* [op-ed](#) with an anecdote. One day in 1998, he went to see the animated Disney feature *Mulan*, which is based on a Chinese legend. Leaving the cinema, he was delighted to see that a little white boy and girl had been so “enthralled” by the movie’s “gender-blurred” protagonist that they were “leaping and sparring” – just like Mulan.



This experience, writes Wang, “reminded me that Disney doesn’t just tell stories; it shapes dreams, creating heroes iconic

enough to inspire young kids to imagine and be more, and providing empowering figures that enable people from different backgrounds to see themselves – and one another.”

But such experiences, warns Wang, are now in danger.

From whom? Why, from Trump, of course. From “Maga.” In particular, from Trump’s evil FCC chair, Brendan Carr (Wang compares him to Judge Doom in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*), who in a March 27 letter informed Disney CEO Bob Iger that the FCC was initiating a probe into Disney’s DEI policies.

Wang represents Carr's targets at Disney – its “employee affinity groups, its ‘Reimagine Tomorrow’ multicultural showcase and especially the company’s ‘inclusion standards’” – as utterly innocuous. But to turn from Wang's article to Carr's actual [letter](#) is to discover otherwise.

One of the sources that Carr cited (and that Wang neglects to mention) was a 2021 *City Journal* [piece](#) by Christopher Rufo. Disney, reported Rufo, had “elevated the ideology of critical race theory into a new corporate dogma, bombarded employees with trainings on ‘systemic racism,’ ‘white privilege,’ ‘white fragility,’ and ‘white saviors,’ and launched racially segregated ‘affinity groups’ at the company’s headquarters.”

As for “Reimagine Tomorrow,” that wondrous “multicultural showcase” – whatever that's supposed to mean – it's really a “diversity and inclusion” program that had “become deeply politicized and engulfed parts of the company in racial conflict.” Rufo went on to describe obligatory “training modules on ‘antiracism’” in which Disney employees are warned against committing “microaggressions,” are told that the U.S. has a “long history of systemic racism and transphobia,” and are instructed to reject equality in favor of “equity” – that is, equality of outcome.

As for those harmless “employee affinity groups,” they're basically Maoist struggle sessions – get-togethers in which ideological conformity is strictly enforced, dissenting views are patently unwelcome, and segregation by identity group is openly encouraged.

Carr also cited in his letter (and Wang, again, ignores) a 2021 [article](#) in the *Hollywood Reporter* which noted a new Disney policy requiring that at least half of the characters – *and* actors – in new ABC series had “to come from underrepresented groups.” At a university forum, Disney entertainment chairman Dana Walden had admitted to rejecting “some incredibly well-written scripts” because they'd failed

the diversity test.

Disney's not alone in all this, of course. Every producer in Hollywood is thirsting after a decent script about a super-intersectional minority – a disabled nonbinary Latino, for example. For years now, studios have been kicking white male scriptwriters to the curb. Comedian Tyler Fischer sued his management company after being told that it was “company policy” not to hire “straight white guys.”

And this isn't just happening on the Left Coast: writing recently about the *New Yorker*, I ran across a March 21 article in which one Jacob Savage noted that while stories by “at least 24, and probably closer to 30, younger millennials” have appeared in that legendary magazine, “not a single white American man born after 1984 has published a work of literary fiction” in its pages.

Does Wang think all this is hunky-dory? Apparently he does, because the whole point of his op-ed is – incredibly – that Disney should double down on its self-destructive efforts to go woke. And to Wang, any critic of wokeness isn't just an opponent of quotas and Critical Race Theory but the contemporary equivalent of some Jim Crow advocate from a century ago. Underlying Carr's opposition to Disney's DEI initiatives, asserts Wang, is a desire to see Disney “stop making shows about Asian princesses or Black superheroes” and to stop “casting people who aren't straight or white or male.”

How is it possible to be so drenched in wokeness that you can't grasp that policies which blatantly discriminate against straights and whites and males *amount to bigotry* in the same way as policies which discriminate against gays and blacks and women?

Wang even goes so far as to blame the colossal box-office failure of Disney's recent *Snow White* remake on “controversy over [Rachel] Zegler's advocacy on behalf of Palestine and

racist backlash over her Latina heritage from online creeps.” Yes, some people were irked over Zegler’s tiresome advocacy. And, yes, some rolled their eyes upon learning that Disney had cast a Latina to play Snow White. That doesn’t make them racists; it just means they’re tired of all this predictable virtue signaling. What’s racist, in fact, is the virtue signaling itself – the belief that hiring Zegler was in itself, simply because of her skin color, some kind of noble act.

(Weirdly, just two paragraphs before saying that opponents of Zegler’s casting are racist, Wang himself makes a joke about how bizarre it would be to cast Timothée Chalamet as Black Panther. Is Wang’s joke racist? Not according to CRT, which dictates that racism is by definition white on non-white – never the other way around.)

Which brings us to the self-contradiction at the core of Wang’s argument: on the one hand, he’s still delighted, more than a quarter-century later, by the spectacle of two white kids identifying with a Chinese protagonist; on the other, he supports corporate policies designed to promote a fixation on group identity and outright segregation. How does that add up?

The self-contradiction recurs at the end of the piece. Wang laments that he grew up “in an era nearly devoid of Asian representation in Hollywood,” and says that he wants today’s children to have cartoon heroes who look like them. But his article *began* with the thrill of seeing those white kids who loved *Mulan*’s non-white protagonist.

So which is it, then? Could it be that Wang dreams of a world in which all the cartoon characters are non-white, so that non-white kids can see people who look like them, and so that white kids can be forced to see themselves in people who *don’t* look like them?

It’s a head-scratcher. So to try to get a better sense of

where Wang is coming from, I checked out his [Wikipedia](#) page. Born to a Taiwanese American family, he writes something called the “Tao Jones” column for *The Wall Street Journal* and formerly wrote the “Asian Pop” column for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He’s the author or co-author of books about Asian American pop culture, Asian movies, and the Asian influence on American culture. He’s edited anthologies of Asian American comics, worked in marketing to Asian American consumers, published a magazine for Asian Americans, and produced an “Asian American television show.”

In short, being Asian is at the very center of Wang’s identity. Without an identity-group label, he’d be lost.

Still, that’s no excuse for him to be so big on DEI. Doesn’t Wang know how disastrous DEI has been for his fellow Asian-Americans? Isn’t he aware that Asian-Americans have been royally screwed over by college-admissions quotas designed to give blacks and Latinos a leg-up? Surely he’s learned that corporate DEI programs like Disney’s, rooted as they are in a narrative of white-on-black oppression, tend to render Asians invisible?

One thing Wang really doesn’t seem to realize is this: it was precisely a preoccupation with identity-group labels and a tendency to see prejudice at every turn that led to the failure of *Snow White*. You see, when the project was first announced, Peter Dinklage, the dwarf actor, publicly complained that the very idea of remaking *Snow White* was backward – an insult to real-life dwarfs. Terrified by this reaction, the honchos at Disney responded by ditching the dwarfs entirely and insisting that they wished to “avoid reinforcing stereotypes.” (What stereotypes? That dwarfs live seven to a house, work in mines, and whistle while they work?) Then Disney changed its mind again and opted for cartoon dwarfs – a decision that drew fire from dwarf actors who resented not having a rare shot at a major feature-film role. In short, the studio’s obsession with pleasing every potential

victim of prejudice ended up turning off absolutely everybody.

Disney's determination to make this *Snow White* a story about "female empowerment" didn't help either. Instead of being true to the fairy tale's inherent meaning, they twisted it out of shape to create a woke fable – a charmless, humorless cinematic equivalent of, well, a training module in woke identity.

Wang pretends that the box-office consequences of Disney's woke policies have been mixed. No. They've been utterly disastrous. Woke-inspired changes in one beloved cartoon franchise after another have alienated millions of potential fans. On IMDb, the new *Snow White* is already one of the very lowest-rated movies *of all time*.

So yes, Disney. Listen to Jeff Wang. By all means, double down on this ideological idiocy. Keep going woke, and leave it for others to entertain and delight the children of tomorrow.

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