

## FILM

# Muckraking for a buck makes a fast-paced film

## CAPRICORN ONE

Written and directed by Peter Hyams  
Warner Brothers release,  
Rated PG

The message of *Capricorn One* is not unfamiliar: that distrust of the government and its pronouncements is justified because it and its agents have, in recent years, indulged in some undeniably foul play. One need not review the revelations of the '60s and '70s to realize that we are not living in the best of all possible worlds, and one doesn't need *Capricorn One* to suggest that it may be even worse than we have suspected.

The film is a melodrama based on a set of premises like: suppose we gave a Mars shot (read Moon shot) and nobody went; suppose that the one relatively untarnished symbol of American achievement were, in point of fact, a fraud. If you can suppose that, it's not hard to suppose that men of good will and honest values could be forced into collusion with the fraud by evil and omniscient bureaucrats, and that when they finally decide to expose it, they would be harassed, dragnetted and nearly destroyed by the aforementioned demonic powers that be.

Director Peter Hyams weaves these plot threads into a carpet that is at least interesting to look at, if not suitable to lie on. The film is slick, fast-paced and even occasionally exciting—for example, the outrageous, airborne

chase scene in the desert mountains of the Southwest. It also features a jackpot of popular players, many of whom (Telly Savalas, Karen Black and O.J. Simpson, for three) appear in mini-cameos.

In one of the more developed roles, Brenda Vaccaro, as the astronaut's earthbound wife, is at her raspy-voiced and intelligent best. Elliott Gould, on the other hand, is at his deadpan worst as the newspaper reporter who stumbles onto the government's plot

and then must scramble to avoid being killed. The part requires a tauter nerve level and a trace of peevishness; Gould never manages to convey more than the sense of being well-fed. Hal Holbrook underplays the part of the calculating NASA administrator and fails to invoke the "requirements" of national security in properly sinister fashion.

What is really distressing about *Capricorn One* is that having acknowledged the low state of the country's morale as the result of

governmental deception, it cannot resist dancing a jig. This is such irresponsible muck-raking for a buck that one never seriously asks "What if all this were possible?"

A film that explored and reflected the deeper levels of American malaise—the disillusionment with work, the luxurious ennui, even the current backlash against social progress—would be more impressive than another perverse variation on the theme that the claims of American achievement

are bunk.

For a better treatment of related subjects, take *Dr. Strangelove*, *The Bedford Incident* or even *The President's Analyst*, none of them current, but all more frightening and thought-provoking. And for a searing treatment of the corruption of the American spirit, without all the interfering shuck and jive, find a theater that's showing *Jackson County Jail*.

—Max Powell Jr.  
Max Powell Jr. is a free-lance writer in Evanston, Ill.

Elliott Gould as the investigative reporter and Telly Savalas as a biplane pilot.

## Why is human sacrifice more horrendous than the slaughter of soldiers in war?



Iphigenia (Tatiana Papamoukou) at lower right, attempting to escape.

## IPHIGENIA

Written and directed by Michael Cacoyannis  
Based on a play by Euripides  
Starring Irene Papas  
Cinema 5 Release

The mythical history of the Trojan War doesn't sound like a subject that would interest a contemporary filmmaker or move a contemporary audience to tears. But Michael Cacoyannis (*Zorba*,

*the Greek*) has made not one, but three successful Trojan War epics. *Iphigenia*, currently playing in theaters all over the U.S., is the last (first in chronological order).

Most of us know at least the broad outlines of the story: that the cause of the war was the elopement of Helen, wife of a Greek king, with Paris, prince of the ruling class house of Troy; that the cream of the fighting/ruling class of Greece gathered itself in-

to an expeditionary force, headed by Agamemnon (brother of the injured husband), sailed across the Aegean, laid siege to Troy for ten years and eventually breached its walls by a trick involving a wooden horse full of commandoes; that one of the heroes (Odysseus/Ulysses) took forever getting home; and that Agamemnon was murdered by his wife on his first day back.

The siege of Troy and the wan-

derings of Odysseus are the subjects of Homer's great poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Agamemnon's murder and its aftermath has attracted playwrights from Aeschylus to O'Neill and Giraudoux. But the story of Iphigenia has not been dramatized in this century, probably because it involves assumptions that don't go down easily with modern audiences.

It is the story of the sacrifice of Agamemnon's oldest child to appease an angry deity who has shut off the wind so that the Greek fleet can't sail on its mission of pillage. It's quite a chore to convince today's movie-goer that insulting (or appeasing) Artemis has serious meteorological consequences, or that the whole warring peninsula would unite to avenge the domestic disgrace of a minor king—even one with major connections. And there is the character of Agamemnon, the father who orders and carries out the ritual murder—how to make him something more interesting than a bloody, superstitious barbarian.

Cacoyannis chose as the basis for the screenplay a drama by Euripides, the last and most "modern" of the classic Greek playwrights. He has kept very close to the original, freely translating it into modern Greek (which is translated into passable English subtitles), adding almost nothing and omitting less than you'd expect.

What has been omitted is for

the most part the sort of poetic description that becomes redundant with a camera to supply the images. What has been added makes sense of the ancient fable and gives it meaning for today.

This *Iphigenia* is a telling condemnation of wars of aggression, no matter how they are packaged for sale. Much of the effect is achieved by irony through the character of Iphigenia, who is seized with a nationalist passion that nerves her to walk proudly to her death "for the sake of Greece," glorifying in the fact that she and her compatriots are not "slaves or barbarians."

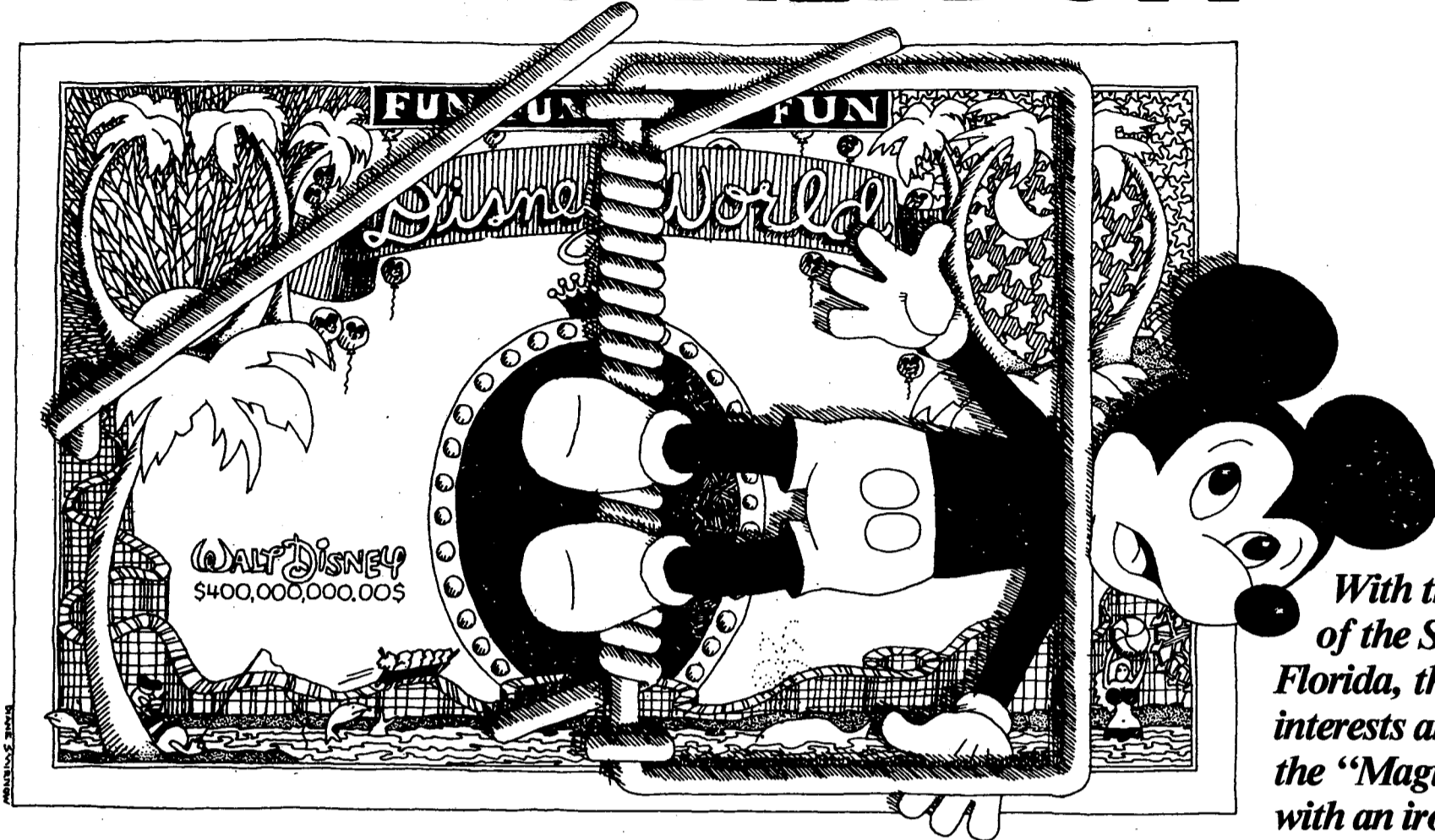
Tatiana Papamoukou, the 13-year-old actress who plays the title role, is phenomenally good. She was "discovered" by Cacoyannis when they were fellow passengers on a plane flight. (Her father is an airline pilot.) She seems headed for the place in the international film firmament now occupied by Melina Mercouri and/or the actress who plays her mother in this film—Irene Papas.

The recreation of the world of prehistoric Greece—or the creation of an acceptable version of it—is a real triumph. (Compare it, for example, to the furry Peter Brook production of *King Lear*.) The costuming is especially effective, except for the shorts in which the becalmed soldiers lie about on the beach (The soldiers are a problem in other ways as well. There are just too many of them for directorial comfort, and the unison shouting in their big scenes reminds one of a football rally.)

The score is by Mikis Theodorakis, who has composed the music for most of Cacoyannis' films, including *Zorba*, *the Greek*.

—Janet Stevenson

# DISNEY'S FIEFDOM



*With the willing help of the State of Florida, the Disney interests are able to rule the "Magic Kingdom" with an iron hand.*

By Becky O'Malley

## WHEN WALT DISNEY

productions announced it wanted to build a 17,000 acre sports village at Independence Lake in the High Sierra near here, Harold A. Berliner, a former county district attorney and mountain lawyer, got curious.

To grasp the environmental and community impact that such a development might have on the area, he flew to Orlando, Fla., for a close look at another Disney enterprise, the ten year old Disney World. What he found sent him speeding back to California dead set against the development.

What disturbed Berliner was not so much the environmental or social impacts of Disney World but that the resort's fantastic success came in large part because it had managed to create its very own government—an entity that has taxing powers and is exempt from most Florida laws governing individuals and corporations.

The Florida legislature, says Berliner, "created one of the most generous laws ever seen in the United States solely for the benefit of Disney."

"That law," which because of a legal technicality is not even printed in the regular statutes of the state of Florida, "abrogated nearly all state laws, environmental and otherwise, by means of an act which converted a simple drainage district to an improvement district with expansive powers—the Reedy Creek Improvement District."

### Governed at Disney's pleasure.

"Behind the modest title 'Reedy Creek Improvement District,'" says Berliner, "hides one of the most powerful governmental units this side of the Iron Curtain, which is governed solely at the pleasure of Disney."

The boundaries of the Reedy Creek Improvement District coincide with the 44 acres purchased by Disney and Disney associates. The district is governed by a board composed of five supervisors, elected by landowners who get one vote for each acre of land owned.

The little-known law creating the district exempts it from virtually all the zoning laws, land use laws and building regulations of the state and county. The district is also granted the right of eminent domain "for any of the projects of the district," and control over a wide assortment of functions such as water and sewer systems, waste disposal, sanitation, roads

and transportation—functions normally subject to state laws.

Reedy Creek is also exempted from state laws regulating the levying of taxes, which the district is permitted to do, and from controls over district budgets and finances.

Revenue from tax-exempt bonds sold by the district (\$20 million worth of bonds were issued in 1972) may be used to finance all projects of the district, meaning the entire infrastructure of Disney World. "Disney, in effect," says Berliner, "is able in this manner to borrow money for up to 30 years in the five percent interest bracket because of the [tax] exemption, hardly competition to regularly charged interest rates in the 1970s."

The law also deals handily with any potential problems from conflict of interest between district supervisors and the Disney organization, which happens to employ the supervisors.

The concept of conflict of interest is simply abolished—no board member can be deemed to have a conflict simply because he or she works for or owns shares of a company doing business with the district. Numerous contracts have been negotiated between the district and Disney.

The law also makes it a misdemeanor not only to violate the regulations adopted by the district, but even to talk about violating them—"to advocate, propose, suggest, use or exhibit a map, plat, survey or plan of subdivision or development of land except in conformity with this act and the rules...of the Board of Supervisors."

Says Berliner: "The nature of this act is to set up a feudal domain... It is difficult to imagine an action more antagonistic to the American democratic form of government."

### A feudal barony indeed.

Miami lawyer Marshall Harris, who has neither met Berliner nor read his report, "The Real Magic in the Magic Kingdom—Disney World's Own Local Government," confirms Berliner's analysis of the strange law and adds some additional observations. Harris was one of only five state legislators who voted against the act in 1967.

"Reedy Creek legislation really set up some sort of feudal barony in the state of Florida," he says. "It contains some very peculiar governance provisions."

Harris chiefly objected to giving the district the right to issue tax-exempt municipal bonds to finance the operations of

a single private corporation. "The trick, basically, was that with tax-exempt money they were doing most of the infrastructure for Disney world—the roads, the electric lines, a whole bunch of things which regular developers had to get from private money sources like banks."

"It was a price for coming into Florida," says Harris. "I don't know what percentage of their infrastructure in the total area developed was met out of such funds versus funds Disney borrowed on the commercial market, but I assume a rather substantial percentage or they wouldn't have made it such a necessary *quid pro quo* for their entry into Florida."

Harris believes Disney was able to obtain passage of the law by presenting it as a "special act," copies of which are not published or even reprinted for all members of the legislature who must vote on them. To find out what's in a special act legislators must go to the legislative clerk's office to read the original bill.

"Special legislation need only be advertised in the county in question, and generally the legislators never even see the text of such special legislation unless they're very curious," says Harris.

Harris believes that Disney's threats to re-locate the Disney World complex in another state unless the law was passed were "nonsense. They'd spent two-and-a-half years assembling the land package. They were locked into it."

### California maneuvering.

Copies of the Berliner study have now been distributed to a variety of environmental activists in California in an effort to head off any similar attempt to circumvent state and local law in Sierra County, where Disney wants to build its resort.

On March 8, Disney informed the county planning commission it was suspending its development plans because of bureaucratic foot-dragging and environmental red tape.

Said project director Wing Chao, "It is the irresponsible proliferation of delays, the never-ending requests for more and more irrelevant information and studies, the bureaucratic sidetrackings and meanderings into unreasonable alternatives and the ever-increasing attendant costs to the applicant..."

Berliner, now joined by the Sierra Club and the Friends of the Earth, sees the withdrawal as a ruse to obtain special permission for Disney to operate outside California law, just as it does in Florida.

"With the Reedy Creek experience in mind, it becomes easier to understand Dis-

ney's impatience with ordinary government it doesn't own or control," he says. "It has been so used to having its own way in Florida in every conceivable field, and immediately, that the slightest exercise of regulation drives its officials wild."

A statement distributed by the Sierra Club claims, "Disney has made it clear that it seeks the same kind of above-the-law treatment it got in Florida."

Disney spokesman Wing Chao refused to comment on the charge.

Bill Press, director of California's Office of Planning and Research, which coordinates the dealings with Disney, agrees that red tape and delays on permit approvals are not the only reasons for Disney's announced withdrawal. "The process has barely begun with Disney, and already they're crying wolf," he said. "Their charge of delay is totally unfounded—they're really just getting underway."

Press points out that the state's environmental impact process has been radically streamlined since Dow Chemical Company cited it as the reason for pulling out of a multimillion dollar planned project near San Francisco a year ago.

Berliner feels that the sanctity of the law itself is now at stake. "What I saw in Florida," he says, "convinced me that it is Disney's ideas about government that are the real issue facing California. What is at stake here is whether or not we can maintain the rule of law in small, rural counties faced with a huge corporation. If Disney is able to intimidate the state of California and Sierra County into ignoring the legally established procedures, Disney will become the effective government of Sierra County."

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