

MARKETPLACE

February 11, 2004 Wednesday

Copyright 2004 Minnesota Public Radio.
All Rights Reserved

HEADLINE: University of Southern California's Martin Kaplan discusses Disney chief Michael Eisner

DAVID BROWN, anchor: An economic green light from Alan Greenspan. Why the financial world's whistling "Dixie."

And a Comcast mouse game.

Mr. MARTIN KAPLAN: Comcast brings sex, violence and nudity into people's homes. What does that do to the notion that Disney stands for quality family entertainment?

BROWN: I'm David Brown, and this is MARKETPLACE.

(Announcements)

DAVID BROWN, anchor:

If the weight of today's announcement falls on any one person, it's that guy we mentioned earlier, Michael Eisner, Disney CEO. Hate to be him right now. Already on the hot seat for failing to find a successor and scrutinized for his interpersonal skills--or as his critics put it, his lack thereof--now he has Comcast on his back. But media analyst Martin Kaplan of USC's Annenberg School of Communication wonders if this is such a bad thing for Disney's beleaguered captain.

Mr. MARTIN KAPLAN (University of Southern California): Well, in a funny way, it might make him David against Goliath. It might actually help him. There's one thing that Disney owners, directors, board members really care about more than anything else, and that's the family brand label of Disney. And I think what they can sell their analysts, their shareholders and the board members is the idea that Comcast dilutes that brand. Comcast after all is a set of pipes that brings sex, violence and nudity into people's homes. What does that do to the notion that Disney stands for quality family entertainment?

BROWN: You know, let's talk a little bit while we're talking about the corporate structure there. ABC television, its parent company is Disney. From the standpoint of the consumer, what do you think that means for the broadcast network to have a cable giant now its parent?

Mr. KAPLAN: Well, it raises all the issues of a consolidation of power. I think that we can be concerned about once again putting in fewer hands the content that's coming to consumers.

BROWN: The ABC Network might actually disappear, be sublimated in some way, to Comcast production, if you will.

Mr. KAPLAN: Well, network television in general is in the tank. Viewership is down, and the notion that viewers will want to pay advertisers in order to see stuff that they can easily get on the rest of their dial is very much in play. The whole nature of our new niche audience, no longer mass audience society, is very much on the front burner.

BROWN: We began by talking a little bit about Michael Eisner, and I realized I didn't ask whether you think he will survive this battle. Because there don't seem to be any white knights lining up to save Disney.

Mr. KAPLAN: I think the Disney board of directors, which is where all this will come down, is loyal to Eisner, and they also are probably thrilled at the stock price jumping up.

BROWN: Is there any relationship between the spat that Roy Disney has had with Michael Eisner and this Comcast deal?

Mr. KAPLAN: I think it's created the appearance of Disney's vulnerability, although as I understand it, Comcast has been sniffing around Disney for quite a bit longer than this spat.

BROWN: Thank you very much for coming in, Marty.

Mr. KAPLAN: Thank you, David.

BROWN: On top of his duties at the University of Southern California, Martin Kaplan is director of the Norman Lear Center.