The first panel discussion in this course involves the planned 2009 release of Disney’s “The Princess and the Frog” and the many controversial aspects of that animated feature. All class members should consider the following questions:

- The movie takes place in the French Quarter of New Orleans during the Jazz Age. Given the political volatility of post-Katrina New Orleans, with what potential sensitivities should the film’s creative staff concern themselves?

- The title of the movie has been changed from “The Frog Princess” to “The Princess and the Frog”, apparently due to the fact that the word “Frog” is a pejorative for the French. Was this an overreaction or an appropriate response on the part of Disney?

- The lead character in this film was originally Maddy, a black chambermaid to a spoiled white Southern debutante, but her name was later changed to Tiana and Disney announced that rather than a chambermaid, she “will be a heroine in the great tradition of Disney’s rich animated fairy tale legacy, and all other characters and aspects of the story will be treated with the greatest respect and sensitivity”. Given the fact that previous Disney Princesses like Cinderella and Snow White had lower class backgrounds, did Disney respond too defensively to possible accusations of racism?

- On the animation front, “The Princess and the Frog” will be the first traditionally animated film produced by Disney since 2005’s “Pooh’s Heffalump Movie”, which had been announced as the last of Disney’s traditionally animated movies. Given the mediocre performance of Disney’s traditional animation in recent years (“Pooh’s Heffalump Movie”, 2004’s “Home on the Range”, 2001’s “Atlantis: The Lost Empire”, etc.) and the relative profitability of computer animation, what are the possible motivations for Disney’s return to the traditional approach?

All students should come to class on Thursday, September 6, 2007, prepared to discuss these issues. The three panel members listed above will be expected to lead this discussion. Each panel member should:

- Investigate each issue’s background thoroughly, preparing to provide details beyond those listed here.
- Discuss the issues with other panel members, determining who will be the designated authority on each issue.
- Prepare some brief opening remarks about the issues, as a means to prompt discussion about them.