

## THE MAKING OF DISNEYLAND

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*From William Graham, II, True Stories  
from The American Post (1993), 179-196.*

The decade of the 1950s has a special place in Americans' collective memory. It is fondly recalled as the last "good" decade: an innocent, affluent, peaceful, and secure time, before the riots and protests of the 1960s set Americans against one another, and before the defeat in Vietnam, the Arab oil boycott, Watergate, and other events of the 1970s forced the American people to begin the painful process of reevaluating the nation's position and role in the world. God's country. Hula Hoops and Pat Boone. A two-bedroom ranch house in the suburbs. Television. Disneyland.

Many Americans actually lived this idealized version of the fifties—enough so that it could be fashioned into a believable myth. After the Korean War ended in early 1953, the nation was at peace. Beginning in 1946, an unanticipated baby boom helped sustain high rates of economic growth while fostering a new family-based domesticity in the rapidly expanding suburbs. By mid-decade, living standards were at an all time high, and Americans were buying consumer goods in unprecedented quantities. In a story entitled "Everybody Rich in the U.S.?" U.S. News and World Report claimed that poverty had virtually disappeared, and that it was an "unusual family that does not own a home, a car, a TV, many luxuries. Nothing like it has ever been seen before." Holding this "new economic order" together was the intrepid consumer, whose purchases would presumably prevent the economy from reverting to the depression conditions of the 1930s. There were, to be sure, anxieties about the "affluent society," even in the 1950s: Consumers were heavily in debt; automation was threatening to eliminate skilled work; and to some social critics the homogeneity of the suburbs seemed boring and even threatening. But by and large, Americans wanted to believe that their worries were over—and they did.

When it opened in 1955, Disneyland represented this collective dream. As George Lipsitz' account reveals, all of Disneyland was fantasyland, an imaginary world of universal experience where poverty didn't exist, where slavery had never happened, and where no real work was ever done. Like the postwar suburbs, which generally excluded blacks and other minorities, Disneyland was designed not for all families, but for those—mostly white and middle-class—that could afford the admission charge and desired the isolating experience that the park provided. And in

the shops on Main Street, park patrons lined Walt Disney's pockets and did what in the fifties seemed very much an act of social benevolence: They consumed.

If at times Disney's perspective seems narrow and provincial, it is well to consider that Disneyland was the success it was in part because the founder's fantasy so closely resembled the shared desires of millions of Americans. To what extent, then, does the Disneyland experience merely reflect American values? Were the white, middle-class Americans who patronized Disneyland in search of uniformity, homogeneity, and passivity? Were Americans responsible for Disney's pioneering multimedia promotions, or for the ugly heritage they have yielded: hour-long commercials that masquerade as entertainment; news "documentaries" that dramatically recreate past events; and feature films that relentlessly promote particular products? Did Americans seek to be constituted as consumers rather than producers? When youngsters bought Davy Crockett coonskin caps and spent their weekly allowances on Mickey Mouse ears, were they exercising free choice, or were they being prepared—like millions of visitors to Disneyland—for advanced consumer capitalism?

On July 17, 1955 a nationwide television audience watched the opening of the Disneyland amusement park on that evening's broadcast of the Disneyland television program. Before what was then the largest concentration of television equipment and personnel assembled for any one event (63 engineers and 24 live cameras) hosts Bob Cummings, Art Linkletter, and Ronald Reagan presided over ceremonies that one critic likened to "the dedication of a national shrine."

Despite 3 months of rehearsal for the program and an \$11 million investment in the park, all did not go smoothly on opening day. Audio and video portions of the program went dead intermittently, and the hosts had considerable difficulty synchronizing their reporting with the pictures on the screen. The park's drinking fountains did not work, leading to long lines at the concession stands. Hot weather melted the freshly laid asphalt on streets and walkways, causing women in high-heeled shoes to sink into the pavement and providing small children with the opportunity to track footprints and leave rude messages on the sidewalks. In an emblematic indignity, the dramatic appearance of actor Fess Parker (dressed as his television character Davy Crockett) riding on horseback through Frontierland lost some of its intended drama when someone accidentally turned on lawn sprinklers, soaking Parker and his horse. One disappointed critic described Disneyland as being "like a giant cash register, clicking and clanging, as creatures of Disney magic came tumbling down from their lofty places in my daydreams to peddle and perish their charms with the aggressiveness of so many curbside barkers."

If everything seemed to go wrong for Disneyland on opening day, everything seems to have gone right for it ever since. By 1958, the annual attendance at Disneyland surpassed the number of patrons at Yellowstone, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon combined. After 10 years of operation, one quarter of the U.S. population had visited the park and Disneyland had earned \$273 million

for the Disney Corporation. In the early 1970s Disney Enterprises joined the list of the 500 largest corporations in America, and by the late 1980s California's Disneyland and Walt Disney World in Florida accounted for 62 percent of the sales and 70 percent of the operating earnings for a corporation the annual revenues of which approached \$3 billion each year.

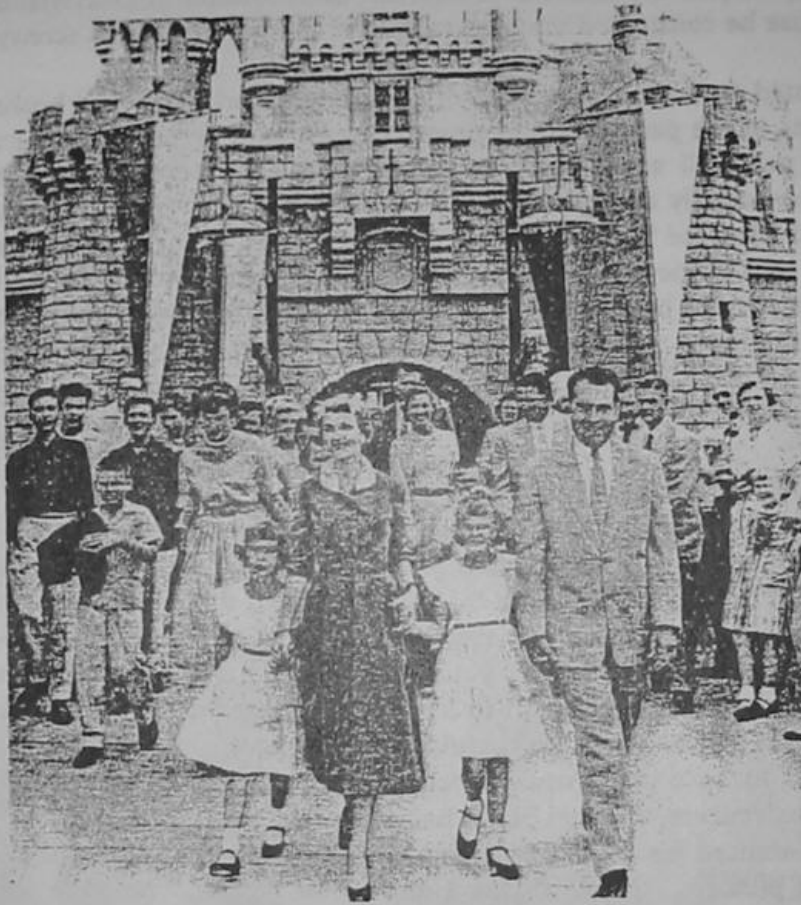
Disneyland has been more than just a financial success story. It has exercised an influence on American culture that can scarcely be measured in dollars. Film maker George Lucas (the producer of *Star Wars*) says that Disneyland was his favorite playground when he was growing up. The pop singer Michael Jackson visits Disneyland frequently, and astronaut Sally Ride borrowed from the park's terminology when she described her first trip into space as "a real E ticket ride." Harry S Truman ceremonially received the Disneyland flag bearing the image of Mickey Mouse when the former president visited the park in 1957, and every U.S. president since has put in a personal appearance at the park, as have numerous visiting heads of foreign countries. Security con-



Walt Disney dons a straw hat and picks up a fishing pole as he poses for a photograph designed to provide publicity for the opening of Disneyland. Child actors pose as Mark Twain's characters Tom Sawyer and Becky Sharp in a picture that presents Disney at the center of America's storytelling traditions. (Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA)

cerns prevented the Soviet Union's Nikita Khrushchev from visiting Disneyland in 1959, but newspaper photographs over the years have captured Egypt's Anwar Sadat shaking hands with Goofy and India's Jawaharlal Nehru piloting the jungle boat in Adventureland. "Oh, this is so much fun, father is having such a good time," enthused Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter and herself a future Prime Minister of India. "We looked forward to Disneyland as much as anything on our trip."

As the creator of Mickey Mouse and numerous other popular cartoon characters, Walt Disney Studios had become an American institution by the 1930s. But Disney's personal wealth never equaled his enormous prestige, and by the late 1940s both he and the studio he headed faced serious financial prob-



Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, his wife Pat Nixon, and their daughters Tricia and Julie visit Disneyland in 1955. This staged photo displays one function of the park—its role as a site for adult celebrities to show their “personal” sides. The smiles and postures of Mr. and Mrs. Nixon in this photo indicate that they understand this role very well, but their identically dressed daughters seem less at ease with their day at Disneyland turning into an opportunity for publicizing their father’s career. (Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA)

lems. These financial pressures encouraged Disney to diversify into the amusement park business. At that time, amusement parks were not doing well financially, and few investors thought of them as places with a potential for profit making. He borrowed as much as he could from the Bank of America in California and the Bankers Trust Company in New York, but their skepticism about his chances of building a financially successful amusement park limited the amount of money they would make available to him. When Disney exhausted his credit with the bankers, he sold his second home at Smoke Tree Ranch in Palm Springs, California, and cashed in his life insurance policy in order to finance the amusement park. He took on a personal debt of over \$100,000, confounding the bankers who expressed understandable skepticism about the likelihood of an amusement park repaying that kind of investment. Even Disney's brother Roy limited the financial investment of the studio in Disneyland to \$10,000 because he considered the park to be just another of "Walt's screwy ideas."

Disney wanted to build a new kind of amusement park, one that broke with the traditions of the past. While planning his own park he inspected fairs and amusement parks all across the country to see what worked and what didn't. He was particularly depressed by the conditions at New York's Coney Island, which had been the first successful amusement park in the 1890s. One journalist reports that Disney found Coney Island "so battered and tawdry and the ride operators were so hostile that Walt felt a momentary urge to abandon the idea of an amusement park. But when he visited Copenhagen [Denmark] and saw that city's Tivoli Gardens, he proclaimed 'Now *this* is what an amusement park should be.'" He felt that most amusement parks had become unsavory places, that they placed too much emphasis on risk taking, danger, "thrill rides," games of chance, barkers, and concession stands.

Disney vowed to establish a park that replaced those sensations with "educational and patriotic values" transmitted through wholesome family fun. As a publicity brochure for Disneyland explains, "As a pioneer in the motion picture industry, Walt developed an intuitive ability to know what was universally entertaining. When his daughters were very young, Walt would take them on what he later called "very unsatisfying visits" to local amusement parks. He felt he could build a park at which parents and children could have fun together. He wanted Disneyland to be a place where "people can experience some of the wonders of life, of adventure, and feel better because of it."

Walt Disney wanted his amusement park to operate by the same principles as his motion pictures. "I hate to see a down-beat picture," he once explained, "so that when I come out [of the theater], it makes me feel that everything's dirty around me. I know it isn't that way, and I don't want anybody telling me that it is." That commitment to a wholesome and upbeat view of the world led Disney to take great pains with his creations. In the case of Disneyland, he wanted a park that would physically block out any view of the outside world, so that visitors could concentrate on the pleasant fantasies within its walls. He wanted to create a forum for fun, a public space free of danger, dirt, and depravity. To millions of Americans he succeeded magnificently, and they

have repaid Disney and his heirs many times over with their patronage. But in order to accomplish all this he needed to raise large sums of money in a fairly short time.

It was Walt Disney's understanding of television that not only won him the financing necessary to build Disneyland, but also the resources to make it a success after it opened. Disney had produced a successful Christmas special in 1950, and he knew that the new medium of television was hungry for the sort of product that he could provide. He offered to produce a weekly series for television, but only if one of the networks would help finance Disneyland. ABC network officials agreed to invest \$500,000 directly and to guarantee loans of up to \$4.5 million for the amusement park in return for one-third ownership in the park and a weekly series titled "Disneyland."



During the construction of the park, Disney Corporation engineers transformed fields of orange groves and palm trees into an environment with many identities including the terrain along the Mississippi River. This photograph shows what Disney tried so hard to hide about the park—people doing actual labor in a real work place. (Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA)

Armed with this new infusion of funds, Disney commenced construction of the park. He commissioned the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) to identify a centrally located tract of land available at a reasonable price. Harrison "Buzz" Price, director of the Los Angeles branch of the Institute, recommended building the park in the vicinity of the main railroad station in downtown Los Angeles, but the cost of land in that location proved too high for Disney's budget. Disney rejected a proposed ocean-front location because he felt that the beach attracted unsavory individuals. Price and his fellow researchers noticed that residential growth in the Los Angeles area tended to follow the paths of new freeways heading east and south from the central city. They recommended several sites in suburban areas, but eventually settled on an Anaheim location because it received five fewer inches of rain per year than alternate locations in San Gabriel and in the San Fernando Valley. The SRI advised Disney to buy 65 acres of orange groves in Anaheim for \$4,500 an acre; 10 years later the land was worth \$80,000 an acre.

Disney cleared the orange groves and relandscaped them, sending his staff on scouting missions throughout Southern California to find "interesting" trees and shrubs for the park. He deliberately reshaped the terrain so that once inside Disneyland, visitors would lose visual contact with the surrounding area. "I don't want the public to see the world they live in while they're in the park," he explained to his design staff. "I want them to feel they are in another world." Yet financial considerations led Disney to include at least one part of the outside world in the park: advertising. As part of his efforts to raise money, Disney got 32 major corporations to lease concessions in the park, in effect paying him for the opportunity to sell their products and advertise their brands. The Bank of America opened up a small branch in the "Main Street" section of the park, and the Continental Baking Corporation paid for the privilege of having "Wonder Bread" designated as the "official white bread" of Disneyland.

Financial rather than aesthetic considerations dictated the connection between television and Disneyland. In his heart, Disney felt that television (then largely a black and white medium) was actually a poor vehicle for displaying the vivid colors and high production values of his cartoons and nature films. But he needed money for the amusement park, and he thought that the new medium could be very important as a marketing device, not just for Disneyland, but for all of his studio's other ventures. "We wanted to start off running," Disney later told *Business Week* magazine in regard to his decision to tie the amusement park to a television series. "The investment was going to be too big to wait for a slow buildup. We needed terrific initial impact and television seemed the answer." The Disneyland television program went on the air on October 27, 1954, with a full hour program previewing the opening of the Disneyland amusement park the following summer. Two other programs later in the season gave progress reports on the park.

The success of the Disneyland television series, and consequently the success of Disneyland itself, stemmed in large measure from a three-part episode broadcast during the 1954 to 1955 season about the frontiersman Davy Crockett. At first glance, the likelihood for success of such a series seemed slight. Popular tastes at the time in film and television had been moving away from

western and frontier stories. Furthermore, Crockett himself was, at best, an ambiguous historical figure—a man celebrated as a hero for his part in clearing the wilderness, fighting Indians, serving in Congress, and dying in battle at the Alamo, but one equally reviled as a villain for his destructive hunting practices (killing 105 bears in one season, shooting six deer in a day and leaving five of them to hang in the woods), the betrayal of his political supporters when he turned against Andrew Jackson and joined the Whig Party, and his crude anti-social behavior. To further complicate matters for Disney, the actor selected to play Crockett, Fess Parker, was allergic to horses and hated the costumes his role required him to wear. According to one account, Disney personnel had to teach Parker how to ride a horse, and he disliked the leather breeches that he had to wear so much that when out of camera range “he shied away from them as if they were a bunch of poison ivy, swearing they would give him ‘crotch rot.’”

Whatever shortcomings the story of Davy Crockett presented for purposes of history or drama, it nonetheless offered an ideal marketing opportunity for Disney executives. While the show was still in the planning stages, Disney merchandisers explored the possibilities for manufacturing and distributing coon-skin caps like the ones Crockett would wear on television. Even though almost no American homes had color television sets at that time, Disney producers shot the episodes in color in anticipation of stringing them together and releasing them to theaters as a feature film.

Vince Jefferds, Disney’s head of promotion boasted, “I could make a good case that licensing of an article is more profitable than manufacturing it. I often made money out of movies that were a loss at the box office.” Shortly before the first episode of the Davy Crockett trilogy was scheduled to air, producers realized that they did not have enough film footage to fill their entire program. They asked the creative staff at the studio to write a song that would enable them to bridge over some gaps in the story, and their creation, “The Ballad of Davy Crockett,” went to number 1 on the hit parade and stayed at the top of the charts for 13 weeks. Merchandisers sold more than ten million coonskin caps, making them out of rabbits and squirrels when they ran out of raccoon fur.

The filmed portions of the Davy Crockett series cost \$700,000 to make with only \$300,000 in advertising revenue guaranteed for their dates on the air. But when the episodes were spliced together for theatrical release, they made a profit of almost \$2.5 million even though they had already been seen by an estimated 90 million viewers on television. The Davy Crockett phenomenon was perfectly timed for the opening of Disneyland the following summer, each episode not only enhanced the royalties from record sales and coonskin caps, but they also served as advertising for the “Frontierland” section of the amusement park.

Television provided Disney with the money to finish building Disneyland, and the shows he made for ABC in return worked to advertise his films and amusement park. The second program of the 1954 to 1955 season was a promotional film about the making of the motion picture *20,000 Leagues Under the*



*Sea*, which was soon to be released by Disney Studios. Bolstered by the program-length commercial on the second Disneyland show, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* became the biggest grossing live-action Disney film up to that time, earning over \$6 million in its first release. "The amazing thing is that nobody complained that we were doing publicity movies," recalls Disney executive Bill Walsh. "Far from it. Our '20,000 League[s]' documentary even won us an Emmy. And it brought in sponsorship for our programs, first from Coca-Cola and then from Johnson and Johnson." The deal benefited ABC as well. The network received one third of the profits generated by Disneyland until Walt Disney Productions exercised their option to buy back the network's one-third share of ownership of Disneyland in 1960 for \$7.5 million, a sum 15 times the size of ABC's investment. In addition, the Disneyland television program established ABC as a competitive network for the first time, attracting a flood of national advertisers to their entire schedule.

Television gave Walt Disney the financial resources essential for the construction of Disneyland, and it also served as a marketing device crucial to the success of the park. The rides in the park advertised Disney comic books, cartoons, films, and television programs, and all of Disney's other entertainment and marketing efforts functioned as a commercial for the park. Customers paid money to enter Disneyland and to go on rides that advertised Disney entertainment. They bought souvenir merchandise that further advertised the characters and stories copyrighted by Disney Productions. Furthermore, they bought concessions from corporations that had paid money to Disney for the privilege of associating their products with the fun and frolic at Disneyland.

Walt Disney presided over every decision about Disneyland with an attention to detail that staggers the imagination. He often slept overnight in a small apartment above the fire station on Main Street, and he insisted on training sessions at what he called "the University of Disneyland" for all employees about how to treat the park's visitors. "Always smile," he ordered his staff. "Turn the other cheek to everybody, even the nasty ones. And above everything, always give them full value for their money. If a boat ride is supposed to last 12 minutes and they only get 11 minutes 30 seconds, they've a right to feel cheated. Thirty seconds shy, and they hate us for selling them short. Thirty seconds extra, and they feel they've gotten away with something. That's the way we want them to feel. Contented, even smug." Disney insisted that his staff completely clean the streets with high pressure hoses every night, and he ordered the installation of more than 45,000 signs to communicate with the public.

Most emphatically, Disney pursued uniformity and predictability in the Disneyland experience. He wanted everyone to enter at the same place and to see the same things. As one admiring journalist observed, "He saw the need for Disneyland to flow, as did a movie, from scene to scene." To maintain the "flow" of the Disneyland experience, Disney made sure that all visitors entered by the same gate and started their day with a view of Sleeping Beauty's Castle that served as a visual lure to pull them through the Main Street shops and into the rest of the park. Visual concerns dominated the aesthetics of a day at Disneyland. A corporate publicity brochure boasted about the park's visual clarity,

its ability to present visual stimuli in a unified and coordinated manner, "Disneyland was the first to use visually compatible elements working as a coordinating theme avoiding the contradictory 'hodge-podge' of World's Fairs and amusement parks." To preserve the clean visual line of the park and to ensure that maintenance could take place outside the vision of park customers, Disney buried all water, power, and sewer lines beneath the street level. Each theme land (Fantasyland, Adventureland, Frontierland, and Tomorrowland) appeared completely self-contained and could not be seen from any of the other sections of the park. Costumed "characters" in each theme section traveled to their destinations in underground tunnels so they would never be seen in "inappropriate settings." Even on the jungle ride, Disney insisted on mechanical rather than real animals, "so that every boatload of people will see the same thing."



Opened at a time when human space flight had not yet taken place, Disneyland presented images of space travel in its Tomorrowland section. Yet the rapid pace of technological change has made this the part of the park most subject to obsolescence, as its futuristic fantasies sometimes came true in the present. (Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA)

Disney also thought of the park in transitory terms, like a television series that could undergo revisions over time. He complained about the permanence of films, about how they could no longer be changed once they had been released, and he talked longingly of making Disneyland a place that would change constantly. "The park means a lot to me," Disney explained to a reporter. "It's something that will never be finished, something I can keep developing, keep 'plussing' and adding to. It's alive. It will be a live breathing thing that will need changes."

No section of Disneyland carried as much of the burden of Walt Disney's ideals as did Main Street. In that part of the park, Disney drew on his youthful memories of Marceline, Missouri, as well as on the nostalgia for the Gilded Age evident in 1940s films like *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Disney scaled Main Street's buildings slightly smaller at the rear and top to give the illusion that they were bigger than they actually were, creating a perspective that enabled an adult to see the buildings through the eyes of a child.

In a press release, Disneyland's publicists described Main Street as "Walt's and anyone else's home town—the way it should have been." But unlike the real town squares of turn-of-the-century small towns, Disneyland's Main Street offered little space for leisure and none for work. Despite occasional parades by the Disneyland band and scattered benches in public spaces, Main Street's real social life depended on shopping, on funnelling (as rapidly as possible) enormous numbers of consumers into a "comfortable" environment for making purchases. Although buildings appeared to be distinct and separate on the outside, inner passages made it easy to walk from store to store (and difficult to walk back out into the noncommercial space of the street). The meaning of this was not lost on developer and retailer Mel Kaufman who observed that "Main's Street's purpose is exactly the same as Korvette's [a major department store] in the Bronx, but it manages to make shopping wonderful and pleasant at the same time. I'm sure people buy more when they're happy."

Although its prominence on commercial network television made Disneyland a national phenomenon, its success also stemmed from its strategic role in the cultural life of Los Angeles. Disneyland was most often described as a site specially designed for children, but most surveys showed that adults outnumbered children at the park by ratios of 3 to 1 or 4 to 1. Architect Charles Moore attributed Disneyland's success to its ability to provide Californians with a "public environment" in the midst of a region dominated by the private spaces of suburban subdivisions and automobile interiors. Just as Main Street functioned as the town square of Disneyland, Moore described Disneyland itself as the "town square of Los Angeles."

If there was ever a city in need of town square it was Los Angeles in the 1950s. Home to the first and largest automobile-oriented highway program in the country, Los Angeles developed into a major metropolis as a scattered city with many well dispersed focal points. The city had experienced longer and more sustained population growth than any American city since the 1850s, and it enjoyed particularly enormous population growth during the 1930s, with 200,000 new migrants between 1936 and 1939 alone. Defense spending during and after World War II propelled an even greater expansion. Los Angeles be-

came the second largest industrial center in America during the war (trailing only Detroit), and between 1940 and 1944 over 780,000 new immigrants entered southern California. This extraordinarily rapid growth continued after World War II. Between 1945 and 1955 more than a million and half people moved to Los Angeles, a total then equal to the *combined* total populations of Pittsburgh and Baltimore. Figures from the 1950 census reveal that more than 50 percent of the residents of Los Angeles in that year had lived in the city for less than 5 years.

Workers came west to secure employment in Los Angeles's shipyard and aircraft industries during World War II, and massive defense spending for the Cold War in the postwar era fueled even further growth. During the war, Blacks, whites, Chicanos, Native Americans, and Asian-Americans worked side by side in the defense plants and traveled together on the city's efficient and effective streetcar and bus network.

Cultural interactions enlivened urban life. The city's vibrant popular music mixed Afro-American, Chicano, and Anglo forms in reflection of the increasingly heterogeneous culture of the city. Dances and concerts at El Monte Legion Stadium on the eastern border of the city attracted youths from diverse backgrounds who combined their styles of dress, dance, and speech to form an exciting multicultural youth culture. On the playgrounds and streets of inner city neighborhoods, in public parks, and commercial amusement centers at the Long Beach and Santa Monica piers the city's heterogeneous population enjoyed the exuberant festivity of public recreation.

But the growth of the postwar suburbs (largely subsidized by tax spending on new highways and the extension of city services including water, gas, electric, and sewer lines), encouraged new forms of isolation and segregation. Racial discrimination by private realtors and developers denied most African-Americans and Mexican-Americans access to the new suburbs, while the federal government's discriminatory home loan policies effectively subsidized the creation of all-white neighborhoods in the San Fernando Valley and Orange County. The newly dispersed population made public transit less efficient per mile and the numbers of automobiles driven by commuters further slowed the speed of trolleys and buses, thereby providing central city dwellers with even more reasons to move to the suburbs. In less than a decade, Los Angeles's diverse urban space became more segregated than ever, its effective rapid transit system collapsed, and the success of suburbs and freeways only contributed to ever increasing fragmentation, segregation, and dispersal of the city's population.

Disneyland's emergence corresponded with the increasing suburbanization of Los Angeles. Even though a majority of the park's visitors came from out of town, Disneyland firmly established itself as an important public space in Los Angeles—as the place one took visitors from out of town, as a site for special celebrations like high school proms, and as an emblem of a whole way of life built around suburbanization and the automobile in Southern California. The park provided an alternative to the heterogeneous public spaces of the city, and it powerfully projected its image of middle-class suburban consumer culture as a norm to which other groups should aspire. Massive in-migration and

the city's dispersed physical form left Los Angeles without the kinds of geographic and focal points common to other cities. In addition, dependence on the automobile produced unhealthy and unpleasant smog and brought about traffic jams that inhibited access to the beaches, deserts, and mountains once within easy reach of most local residents. Disneyland came into existence as an easily reachable attraction conveniently located near new freeways in the midst of the region's largest locus of population growth. It redefined public space and culture, with its location and admission costs making it much more accessible to suburban white families than to ethnic minority residents of the inner city. But its appeal depended on more than accessibility; as a new kind of public space Disneyland contrasted sharply with alternative experiences in the Los Angeles area.

Visitors left their cars in parking lots with more acreage than the park itself, and entered a world with comfortable walkways and efficient rail public transit. The high price of admission and tickets attracted an economically homogeneous crowd and encouraged patrons to devote the entire day or evening to leisurely utilization of the park's facilities. The efficient movement of people through the park and the careful timing of rides and attractions worked against any feeling of overcrowding or stagnation, and the Disney philosophy of viewing visitors as an audience and park personnel as entertainers worked to effectively inculcate passivity in park patrons. A revealing phrase in a Disneyland promotional brochure identifies the kind of social space constructed in the park with startling precision:

Up until now audience participation in entertainment was almost non-existent. In live theater, motion pictures and television the audience is always separate and apart from the actual show environment . . . Walt Disney took the audience out of their seats and placed them right in the middle of the action for a total, themed, controlled experience.

Disneyland also spoke to the break with the past that formed an important part of the lives of Los Angeles residents. In a city made up of migrants from all over the country, no common heritage served to underpin individual or collective identity. But by presenting images of familiar figures from television and motion pictures, Disneyland spoke to the commonality of experience made possible by popular culture. People came to Disneyland with a variety of experiences and beliefs, but the reach and scope of electronic mass media guaranteed that they all shared familiarity and knowledge about Disney stories and products.

Disneyland self-consciously promoted itself as an educational institution, as a place, among other things, for learning about the past. Many people admired its successes in that regard. The Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge awarded Walt Disney its George Washington Medal, and California State Superintendent of Education Max Rafferty lauded Disney as "the greatest educator of this century, greater than John Dewey or James Conant or all the rest of us put together." When Disney died in 1966, California Senator George Murphy claimed that he knew of no individual "who has contributed more to the

general welfare of mankind" than Disney did. But Disney himself explained his goals more modestly. "I've always wanted to do American history," Disney explained to an interviewer shortly before the opening of the park. "It's due. We have taken too many things for granted. I'm not really telling history, though. I'm telling about people; history happens to be going on at the time."

Disneyland showed Abraham Lincoln agonizing over the civil war, but not over slavery. Its "authentic" Frontierland Indians came from reservations in the desert southwest, and had to learn how to handle the "real Indian canoes" from non-Indian park personnel whose knowledge came from their experiences at summer camp. All of its "adventures" replicated the history of white Euro-Americans as they conquered the American or African frontiers. It looked at the conquests of the frontier and the jungle as the spread of European civilization rather than as the plunder of the possessions of indigenous peoples.

In some places, Disneyland's liberties with the past went beyond mere insensitivity. One restaurant featured an "Aunt Jemima" theme echoing the vicious "Mammy" stereotypes of black women that became a staple of popular culture after the Civil War, showing black women invariably as fat, nurturing, child-like, and totally devoted to their white masters. For years the jungle cruise encountered a "humorous trapped safari," which depicted "four red-capped porters, all blacks, who cling bug-eyed to a tree with their white client above them as a menacing rhinoceros stands below." These may seem like innocent errors, mere manifestations of the racism extant in the larger culture of which Disneyland was a part. But Disney's personal prejudices often guided his business practices. He never employed African-Americans as studio technicians, and did not allow them to work in Disneyland in any capacity until pressured to do so in 1963 by civil rights protests. Disney's anti-semitism was equally intense; as one writer well acquainted with the details of Disney's life notes "disappointment and resentment seemed to bring out his latent anti-semitism. He was often heard making snide comments about the Jews, whose success seemed to infuriate him." Disney tried to cloak himself in the American flag and to appropriate for his own purposes the patriotism of his customers. Yet his version of the national narrative was highly selective, prejudiced, and distorted. If his amusement park united its customers in a shared fantasy, it was one tailored to the economic and social interests of a small group of people and not one reflective of the larger shared experience of unity and disunity out of which the complex American nation and society have been forged.

Disneyland management has always tried to present the park as a world apart, as an island of fun in a serious world. Yet no multimillion dollar marketing effort is really cut off from the real world, much less one with the commercial and cultural power of Disneyland. Whether one looks at the lone individual who commented that his first trip to the Mississippi River reminded him of the first part of the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, or to the five high ranking members of the Nixon Administration who received their public relations training handling both the Disneyland and the Richard Nixon accounts for the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, evidence of Disneyland's influence over American life and culture during the past 40 years has not been hard to find.

Over the years Disneyland has faced strikes ("Disneyland is a kingdom all right, and we're the serfs," complained a worker in a Br'er Bear costume during a 1970 work stoppage), lawsuits over a ban on members of the same sex dancing together, and repeated arguments over what constitutes appropriate attire at the park. One particularly vivid example of the links between Disneyland and the "real world" came on August 6, 1970, when 300 "yippies" marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima by staging a demonstration in Disneyland. The youths chanted anti-war slogans on the drawbridge to Sleeping Beauty's Castle, followed the Disneyland band down Main Street, and raised a Viet Cong flag over the fort on Tom Sawyer's



"Mouseketeers" from the syndicated "Mickey Mouse Club" television program visit Los Angeles City Hall. As a 5-day-a-week afterschool show, "The Mickey Mouse Club" extended the Disney Corporation's popular and commercial influence to the everyday experiences of children. The uniformity of the Mouseketeers' outfits (and ears) hides the symbols of youthful rebellion incorporated into adolescent dress and styles of the day. Adolescence itself disappears as the Mickey Mouse Club appears as a children's "gang" under wholesome adult supervision. (Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA)

island. They accused Disneyland of being "a plastic world of fantasy" at odds with the realities outside its walls. Over 100 uniformed Anaheim police officers equipped with riot batons eventually cleared the youths from the park, making nine arrests. Disneyland management closed the park 6 hours early and handed out refunds to 30,000 customers. The next day a *San Diego Union* editorial condemning the disruption of business at the park advised that "smaller folk who need an explanation for what happened at Disneyland Thursday might be told they saw a lifelike reproduction of the pre-historic world—before shaggy creatures with small brains gave way to the human race as we know it today."

In order to further secure the park and to control the nature of its experience, Disney officials began a rigid policy of dress and grooming codes, denying admission to the park any individuals whose hairstyles or clothing seemed inappropriate to park guards. This policy was based on the idea that there was only one respectable way for people to look and dress, that men should not have long hair or beards, that women should not wear sandals and "love bead necklaces," that black people should not have "Afro" haircuts or be allowed to wear African "dashikis." But as popular styles changed and allowed for more diversity, park guards found themselves facing a losing battle trying to stem the tide of rapidly changing subcultural styles and fashions. Similarly, the park's administrators enforced a policy against men dancing with men or women dancing with women on the grounds that "some patrons might find partners of the same sex offensive," until a lawsuit charging the park with violating the Constitutional rights of its patrons convinced them to drop the policy.

## AN INTERPRETATION

Any cultural expression advances one view of reality, and in the process runs the risks of ignoring or erasing other ways of looking at the world. Any struggle over meaning influences struggles over resources, because cultural stories, signs, and symbols help determine what is legitimate and what is illegitimate, what is permitted and what is forbidden, who is included and who is excluded, who speaks and who is silenced. Like many other sites of commercialized leisure, Disneyland provides a useful site for the examination of these larger social questions.

Disneyland initiated and refined distinct cultural practices that characterize much of American society today. It created one of the most important public spaces in our society out of the imperatives of a private profit-making corporation. It redefined public recreation as primarily spectatorship and shopping, and carried the forms and logic of commercial network television outside the home. Its multilayered opportunities for profit-making mixed marketing, merchandising, and advertising into one unified activity, and it broke down barriers between media by blending film, comic book, and television references in the shared space of a theme park. It connected the personal memories of individual childhoods with carefully crafted narratives about the "childhood" of the na-



tion, and it injected a profit-making corporation into the shaping of family life in an unprecedented manner.

In fact, Disneyland is such a microcosm of cultural practices in our society, it is sometimes difficult to view it as a carefully created and manipulated artifact. Like any good ideological cultural work, it seems to flow naturally from the consciousness of the audience and to demand no special investigation. To think of fun as consisting of shopping and spectatorship makes sense in a world of shopping malls and television sets, but these inevitably erode our collective memory of other more sociable, active, spontaneous, and creative ways to have fun. Disney's idea of a park that would always be in flux is a perfect expression of an economic system that is constantly in the service of fashion—changing clothing styles and automobile styles regularly to create “new” needs for what are essentially the same old products. Disney's success at creating a centralized site for recreation that standardizes stories for people around the world speaks powerfully about the forces of homogenization that have undermined localized ethnic and folk traditions that keep alive creative differences among and across diverse populations. Coming into existence at the same time that commercial network television and suburbanization changed the nature of culture and social life in America, Disneyland succeeded at least in part by recognizing that its visitors were likely to watch television and live in suburbs, and that consequently they expected a park that would conform with their other experiences.

Yet asking questions about Disneyland can help us begin to think critically about the world in which we live. It can help us to inquire into the relationships between commerce and art, between labor and leisure, between citizenship and spectatorship, and between our roles as consumers and our lives as community members, gendered subjects, and world citizens.

In 1955, Walt Disney and his corporation established their phenomenally successful amusement park in the wake of the popularity generated by their television films about Davy Crockett. More than 100 years earlier the historical Davy Crockett boasted that “Fashion is a thing I care mighty little about, except when it happens to run just exactly according to my own notion. . . .” Walt Disney created an amusement park, an entertainment empire, a version of American history, and an important element in the lives of many children by getting fashion to run exactly according to his own notion. We know that Disneyland's blend of commerce and art, its exclusion of those outside of mainstream narratives, and its insertion of cash transactions into the operative realities of family life have been the profitable thing, the successful thing, and the effective thing. But we need to think again about their consequences for what we think we know about the American past and for how we live the American present and future.

*Sources:* The Disneyland story has been told many times from many different points of view. From the wide range of secondary sources on the establishment and development of the amusement park in relation to the larger vision of the Disney Corporation, I have drawn repeatedly on the valuable information and insights presented by Herbert Schiller in *The Mind Managers* (Boston: Beacon,

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