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Imagineering America:
Disney's View of the USA in its Theme Parks

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Contents

Imagineering America:.....	0
Disney's View of the USA in its Theme Parks.....	0
Acknowledgements.....	2
Abstract	3
Introduction	5
PAST.....	22
Introduction	22
The Magic Kingdom.....	28
Main Street USA.....	29
Frontierland	38
Liberty Square	44
Disney's America: The Failed History Theme Park.....	52
Early Park Ideas:.....	53
History as entertainment?	57
Native America (1600-1810).....	60
Civil War Fort (1850-1870).....	65
Reaction to Park:.....	67
Past: Conclusion	76
FUTURE.....	79
Introduction	79
Tomorrowland.....	84
Inspiration for the park.....	86
Disney/Man in Space.....	89
Park Design.....	92
Attractions:	94
Experiences of park	100
EPCOT: The Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow	105
Walt Disney's Original EPCOT Vision	107
The EPCOT of Today	112
Future: Conclusion.....	126
Conclusion:	130
Bibliography	135

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Abstract

One of the largest, and most influential entertainment companies, the Walt Disney Company has effectively created its own 'Disney's America' which is represented through its theme parks by producing an immersive experience for guests in both the past and future. With the influential power of the Disney company, they are able to form and present their own vision of America, through the various attractions and architectural designs which create an immersive experience. What began as simply Walt Disney's visions of America through his fascination with the past and promise of the future, has become corporate controlled, with Disney controlling the perceptions of America through the theme parks through the use and presentation of a Disney history and future within the parks. Through the Disney theme parks, a 'Disney's America' of both the past and future is created. These representations of both American history and the future are typically Disneyfied, representing the Disney vision of both the past and future by altering perceptions of America to fit the typical Disney image of family-friendly fun and happiness.

A sense of Disney history is created through Disney's representations of the past which is found within both three lands at The Magic Kingdom: Main Street USA, Frontierland and Liberty Square, and the failed planned Disney history theme park. With the company providing representations and recreations of history which are edited, solely positive and idealised versions, history is altered within this vision of America. The darker, less appealing aspects of American history are typically excluded from this Disney vision to ensure only a positive version of America's past is represented.

The vision of the Disney future is presented through Tomorrowland, Walt Disney's original plan for a new community of tomorrow and the Disney theme park, Epcot. These present a future filled with optimism and advancements, working towards creating a better, improved future. There are multiple visions of the Disney future: the fantasy future of Tomorrowland, Walt Disney's personal vision and the vision of the Disney company itself. These are similar

in that they represent a future of advancement and optimism with negativity removed, still fitting with the Disney image.

The 'Disney's America' is created through the immersive experiences provided throughout the Disney theme parks where guests first-hand experience the Disney vision of the past and future, entering the world of a Disney's America. Disney creates these experiences through the attractions and architectural design of the parks which effectively result in enjoyable, unforgettable guest experiences. Disney has become an integral part of American culture and America has become Disney.

Introduction

What began nearly a century ago with one man, a mouse and a dream has become one of the world's largest conglomerates: The Walt Disney Company

Being one of the world's largest entertainment companies, the Walt Disney Company has the power to influence the public on many levels. For U.S progressives, it is crucial that the company both maintains and presents accurate representations when it comes to history or other important topics such as race and gender. Due to its increasing power to influence, the company needs to ensure it is producing the correct representations, otherwise it becomes victim to intense, possibly damaging, criticism from liberals. Disney is arguably becoming more progressive with its representations in the twenty-first century, importantly becoming more culturally aware and inclusive. Additionally, as Disney is predominantly viewed by a younger audience, many who are likely to learn or take something away from the films or parks, Disney is keen to speak to modern values- while maintaining its family friendly nature and protecting the Disney image.

Disney itself is also closely identified with American values, even seen as America personified. It remains an iconic American company, perhaps considerably more so, than other giants such as Coca Cola or McDonalds which are also defined as quintessentially American¹. When finding words which represent or signify America, to the outside world Disney is a common one to occur, a direct link between the company and country, blurring any distinction between the two- Disney is America, America is Disney.

The Disney company, started by Walt Disney, was primarily focused on animation as its business model whereas the 1950s saw a change in the Disney corporation as it progressed into the production of television, documentaries and theme parks. In the more recent years, the company has expanded into more diverse areas such as cruise ships and digital

¹ The concept of McDonalidization is explained in George Ritzer's book: George Ritzer, *The McDonalidization of Society*, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1998)

television. This Disney brand has become associated with many forms of entertainment and has diversified over the last century. The brand has diversified to such an extent that there arguably is not a clear specific sense of what Disney is today, whereas it used to be clearly associated with family friendly entertainment and the beloved Mickey Mouse, today it is much more than simply this. My work is focused primary on the business of the Disney theme parks in the form of Walt Disney World, and how these theme parks have played, and recreated America.

The focus of this project, the United States of America is depicted as a subject by Disney in a variation of ways through its many films and popular theme parks - Disney represents America in multiple time periods, looking at its past and future. Films such as *Pocahontas*² (1995) or the notorious *Song of the South*³ (1946), attempt to represent historic time periods or events while others including *Tron*⁴ (1982) and *Tomorrowland: A World Beyond*⁵ (2015), consist of elements and ideas of a new futuristic world shaped by American technology. Meanwhile, the various Disney theme parks such as the Magic Kingdom contain each of these different time periods through their various 'lands', ultimately, creating a sense of a "Disney's America" for the audience and visitor to explore.⁶

Where does this 'Disney's America' come from? Certainly, as a starting point, Walt Disney's visions and passions heavily influenced certain aspects of his creations, indicating that the idea of 'Disney's America' is a very personalised one, initially created by one man and his dream. Walt Disney's love of small-town America is shown through the design of Main Street USA within the Magic Kingdom and the importance of family and traditional values which are consistently exhibited through his productions, parks and messages. His constant eye for the future and want of improvement is evident in his designs and ideas for the futuristic aspects

² *Pocahontas*, dir. by Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg, (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 1995)

³ *Song of the South*, dir. by Harve Foster and Wilfred Jackson, (RKO Pictures, 1946)

⁴ *Tron*, dir. by Steven Lisberger, (Buena Vista Distribution Company, 1982)

⁵ *Tomorrowland: A World Beyond*, dir. by Brad Bird, (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2015)

⁶ Mark Gottdiener, *The Theming of America: American Dreams, Media Fantasies, and Themed Environments*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001)

such as Tomorrowland and the EPCOT theme park - the last project designed and envisioned by Walt Disney himself. Walt Disney loved America and this is evident through his passion for his creations, the design of the parks and consistent connections to America itself- collectively adding up to a more specific 'Walt Disney's America'.

Walt Disney can be considered to be both an entertainer and an educator, and moulded his 'America' around ideas of both entertainment and education. Through his ideas, films, television programmes and theme parks, he produced products and experiences which are entertaining but informative. As Izard states, "He [Walt] was a master of communications who brought both entertainment and education into the world in a distinctive way"⁷ Walt Disney's ideas and products were unique with this combination, resulting in the products being incredibly successful and appealing to the world. Although Walt Disney did not tend to admit he was an educator, he dealt with factual information in his own way and as a result, became considered to be an educator due to the information provided and included through these products. Everything Walt Disney created and did was done in a distinctive way, the distinctive Disney way.⁸ The result is a personal vision of America built on Walt Disney's own curating of nation.

Disney's America is also the product of the corporate Disney which continued following Walt Disney's death. This is something quantifiably different from Walt Disney's America. Films and theme parks following Walt Disney's death owe their existence to boardroom politics, a multitude of film directors, asset holders, and a company seeking its own path in America's culture wars. Clearly, Disney shareholders are keen for the company to sell American values and make money out of America which it has become a huge part of, but what 'America' best sells or speaks to a new generation? Since the 1970s, Disney's America is part of the

⁷ Ralph S. Izard, 'Walt Disney: Master of Laughter and Learning', *Peabody Journal of Education*, 45, (1967), 36-41 (p.36)

⁸ Chris Rojek, 'Disney Culture', *Leisure Studies*, 12.2 (1993), 121- 135

company's broader desire and purpose to educate people, sell products, and grow, without Walt Disney's personal influence.

This research project sets out to uncover and understand more about 'Disney's America': what it includes, what it excludes, what representations and meanings it presents. My thesis allows us to question if Disney is accurately representing or misrepresenting American history and the American past, and also ponders what sort of American future is being depicted. My focus on 'Disney's America' is through Walt Disney's theme parks. This project specifically focuses on the theme parks of Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida as this resort has more, and varied, theme parks compared to the original location of California which allows the opportunity for a wider American vision, including both the past and future. This focus on the theme parks in the Florida resort also provides an American future vision through the Epcot theme park which Disneyland in Anaheim lacks.⁹ The project focuses on the theme parks as opposed to Disney's films as Disney's America can be understood best through the architectural design and immersive experiences created within the Disney parks, and the stories that they tell.¹⁰

Walt Disney was unsatisfied with existing amusement parks which he would visit with his children, frequently stating they were too dirty or appeared to be deteriorating. His solution was to design and create his own improved theme park which would include various themed lands, it would be clean, safe and enjoyable for the entire family. The first Disney theme park, *Disneyland*, opened in Anaheim, California on the 17th July 1955.¹¹ This park was the beginning of the Disney theme parks which would continue to grow and become replicated

⁹ A few of the key works on the theme parks of Walt Disney World: Cher Krause Knight, *Power and Paradise in Walt Disney's World*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014)

Karen R. Jones and John Wills, *The Invention of the Park: From the Garden of Eden to Disney's Magic Kingdom*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2005)

Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence, ed. by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark West, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011),

¹⁰ Robert de Roos, 'The magic worlds of Walt Disney', *National Geographic*, August, (1963), pp. 159-207

¹¹ Sam Gennawey, *The Disneyland Story: The Unofficial Guide to the Evolution of Walt Disney's Dream*, (Birmingham: Keen, 2014)

across the globe.¹² These are immensely successful and popular theme parks and continuously visited by millions of people each year. The Disney theme park was a new type of park, it was exciting, themed and ultimately created by the famous Walt Disney.

One of the main purposes of the Disney theme parks is to provide an experience. Each attraction, land, and detail are designed intentionally to help create the best experience for park guests. As Gabler notes, “Disney reconceptualized the amusement park as a full imaginative experience, a theme park, rather than a series of diversions, and just as his animation revised graphic design, his park eventually revised urban design.”¹³ The Disney theme parks, would inspire others in the future in a similar way that his use and innovation of animation for full-length feature films would soon be used by other companies. Walt Disney designed his parks with the purpose of providing an imaginative experience, which would be continued throughout all of the other Disney theme parks. The importance of these theme parks creating an experience is a key part of the Disney representation and vision of America as this is how the guests understand and experience the sense of ‘Disney’s America’.

I plan to explore ideas around Disney’s America by looking at the park spaces, their features and their rides, and seeing how America is depicted within them. I am keen to highlight the temporal elements of these rides, of how Disney seeks to control ideas of the American past and the American future.

¹² A few of the standard works on theme parks and the American amusement industry: Judith A. Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills*, (Woodbridge: Twayne Publishers, 1991)

Scott A. Lukas, *Theme Park*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2008)

Robert Riley, *Theme Park Landscapes: Antecedents and Variations*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)

David Bell, 'Preface: Thinking about theme parks', in *Culture and Ideology at an Invented Place*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 1-21

Salvador Clavé, *The Global Theme Park Industry*, (Oxfordshire: CABI, 2007)

Time and Temporalities in Theme Parks, ed. by Filippo Carlà-Uhink, Florian Freitag, Sabrina Mittermeier and Ariane Schwarz, (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2017)

¹³ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Biography*, (London: Aurum Press, 2008), p. xi

The first chapter is on Disney and the American past. It will focus on elements including three lands within the Magic Kingdom, namely Main Street USA, Frontierland and Liberty Square, as well as Disney's failed American history theme park, 'Disney's America'. I will focus on their architectural design and various attractions depicting the history of the United States such as the *Hall of Presidents*. This section will also consider issues such as racial commentary by looking at Disney's depiction of history. The examples of Disney representing history in its parks raises further questions regarding whether Disney is able to accurately represent history or if it solely presents a 'Disneyfied' version of everything the corporation touches, often to the detriment of its subject. This section also determines what ultimately creates 'Disney History' and to what extent this is effectively presented in the theme parks.

The second chapter focuses on Disney and the future of America. It will consider Walt Disney's constant eye for the future, new improvements for his parks and his consistent optimism for a better and brighter future. This chapter will focus on the land of Tomorrowland located in the Magic Kingdom and the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, Epcot, focusing on both Walt Disney's original vision and the current day theme park in Walt Disney World. These two parks contain different 'Disney Futures', but both full of optimism and excitement for new America of endless possibilities.

There is a sense of both a unique 'Disney History' and a unique 'Disney Future' being created and depicted through the theme parks studied here. Collectively, such lands construct an immersive 'Disney's America' that people interact with. They depict the Disney versions of the past and future within the parks to much applause. These versions of American past and future are highly choreographed. The Walt Disney Company chooses what concepts consist of, what history or future ideas should be included, they have a large amount of control on the types of past and future America being represented, and what is emphasised within the parks. These ideas of America are manipulated and controlled to

ensure they fit the Disney image and present the visions and ideas which the company chooses.

By focusing on the Disney theme parks, their architectural designs and varying attractions, this project will provide an insight into the idea of a 'Disney's America' in both past and future. The project will discuss and analyse what this 'Disney's America' consists of, and how it represents America itself while also providing clear insights into Walt Disney's vision of America and how this influenced the parks.

Within this project I consistently argue that 'Disney's America' is one of fun and imagination, as is clearly found through its theme parks experiences, and that history is depicted in true Disneyfied style. However, it is also one which attempts to show certain historical aspects, through its park lands, films and attractions, with some accuracy, but the history is always optimistic and positive in message. The Disney company has become progressive in its representations and portrayal of topics such as race and gender in recent decades, perhaps presenting it as a more positive representation of liberal America, and a more inclusive 'Disney's America'. Selling this America to today's masses matters. Both the Walt Disney Company and 'Disney's America' in the parks now push predominantly positive representations and something for all the family as the company claims. This project will look at how Disney provides this positive message and appreciation of America. Disney ultimately represents optimism in the American way and continues to popularise this idea through its theme parks. This concept remains steadfast. As Disney is such a large, influential company, what it represents always matters. However, Disney's push of an idealised form of America is a powerful move that can court controversy. Everything is sprinkled with Disney magic, including America.

Turning to Disney scholarship, little research has previously been carried out surrounding the idea of a Disney's America, a gap which my project aims to fill. Instead, current research

primarily focuses on Walt Disney himself, specific films and parks, or the impact of Disney as a whole on society.

One of the prime interests of Disney scholars is the vision, history and life of Walt Disney himself. There are many biographies of Walt Disney, key works include: Michael Barrier's *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*¹⁴ (2007), Louise Krasniewicz's *Walt Disney: A Biography*¹⁵ (2010), Katherine and Richard Greene's *The Man Behind the Magic: The Story of Walt Disney*¹⁶ (1991) and several others. Another key scholar who provides deep insight into the life and work of Walt Disney himself is Neal Gabler. His biographies¹⁷, *Walt Disney: The Biography* and *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (2006) are impressive. Gabler's take is mostly positive, with his books containing detail into the life of the man who started it all, the efforts he went to, achievements, and his progress during his life.

Ralph Izard presents an engaging and interesting discussion and concept of Walt Disney being both an entertainer and educator. He explores this idea within his article, 'Walt Disney: Master of Laughter and Learning'¹⁸, a concept which can be applied to several of the Disney aspects. This is a particularly relevant idea in application to several of Walt Disney's creations, whether that is identifying teaching about nature and animals within his documentary series, *True Life Adventures*¹⁹, or unintentionally giving history lessons through his films which either directly or indirectly acknowledge historic events. This proposed idea is one which can be continuously applied to the Walt Disney Company and the products of

¹⁴ Michael Barrier, *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)

¹⁵ Louise Krasniewicz, *Walt Disney: A Biography*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010)

¹⁶ Katherine and Richard Greene, *The Man Behind the Magic: The Story of Walt Disney*, (New York: Viking, 1991)

¹⁷ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Biography*, (London: Aurum Press, 2008)

Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006)

¹⁸ Izard, Ralph S., 'Walt Disney: Master of Laughter and Learning', *Peabody Journal of Education*, 45, (1967), 36-41

¹⁹ *True Life Adventures* is a series of short and full-length nature documentaries released by Walt Disney Productions (1948-1960)

today, indicating that the idea of 'Disney's America' is one of entertainment and education, an idea I draw from in my work.

In comparison, film historian and critic Richard Schickel discusses both the Disney company and the life of Walt Disney himself in a very critical manner with little way of praise. His book, *The Disney Version*²⁰ (1968) was one of the first to provide such a harshly critical view of Disney. Schickel does out of fairness acknowledge the profound impact which Disney has had on American culture alongside his critical biography of Walt. Put alongside more positive portrayals, this literature is useful as it provides a deeply critical perspective, helping to provide a clear two-sided debate surrounding both Walt Disney himself and the Disney company which is something not all arguably like to criticise or break down in such a negative manner. The book also raises the question as to whether the idea of a 'Disney's America' should also be heavily criticised if its creation originated from the visions of the man who is heavily criticised.

Disney Studies scholars often tend to focus on specific films or theme parks, taking into consideration their impact on the world, whether they are positive or negative, and the meanings behind them. Some individuals consider the importance of Disney, praising it for its innovation and imaginative products, while others write to criticise the beloved giant conglomerate. These above scholars are examples of the conflicting perspectives on Walt Disney, as a person and his ideas, showing an insight into one area of the debate within the literature.

Sharon Zukin provides an interesting insight into the concept of 'landscapes of power' in *Landscapes of Power: from Detroit to Disney World*.²¹ Her concept suggests that powerful interests shape the spaces we inhabit and that individuals and institutions have the power to alter the course of change. This concept is useful as part of the understanding of the Disney

²⁰ Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 3rd edn, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997)

²¹ Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991)

theme parks in that they are not simply a mutual landscape but instead are landscapes of power. This thesis shows how these landscapes are able to have power over how the park guests see America and the American experience within the theme parks.

Those who have studied Disney parks and the history of Walt Disney World include one of interest to this project, historian and geographer, Richard Francaviglia²², who gives clear and interesting perceptions through analysis of specific 'lands' such as Main Street USA or Frontierland in the Magic Kingdom and the significance of these places within his scholarship, *Main Street Revisited* (1996), 'History After Disney: The Significance of "Imagineered" Historical Places' and 'Walt Disney's Frontierland as an Allegorical Map of the American West'. By predominantly focusing on the architecture of the parks and their individual 'lands', Francaviglia provides new observations of the impact which their design details had on public perceptions. He discusses Walt Disney's reasoning behind their creations, including the fact that Main Street USA was created as the entryway so it would expose the visitors to the familiar while Frontierland was created as a testimony to the power of the frontier experience. Alongside his architectural analysis, Francaviglia also notes the profound effect which Disney had on the public's perception of both historic places and history, further suggesting that Walt Disney was a visionary who heavily influenced culture. Both his literature and propositions are useful to me as they provide a new angle through an architectural lens of implying that these places are truly significant, both in the past and present. This concept can be applied to the idea of a 'Disney's America', especially within the parks.

Additional key scholars and newer literature which have more recently looked at this area include: *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience: The Tourist as Actor*,

²² Richard V. Francaviglia, *Main Street Revisited*, ed. Wayne Franklin, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996)
Richard Francaviglia, 'History After Disney: The Significance of "Imagineered" Historical Places', *The Public Historian*, 17, (1995), 69-74
Richard Francaviglia, 'Walt Disney's Frontierland as an Allegorical Map of the American West', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 30, (1999), 155-182

²³(2019), edited by Jennifer A. Kokai and Tom Robson, Richard Snow's, *Disney's Land*²⁴(2019) and Sabrina Mittermeier's, *A Cultural History of the Disneyland Theme Parks*²⁵(2020). Each of these books provide useful perceptions of the theme parks, including their history and various attractions. Mittermeier's book in particular focuses on the various Disney theme parks across the globe and provides a comparative study between them. Alongside discussing their historical context, she provides insight into the impact of both culture and class on these global theme parks.

There are also scholars who have attempted to understand the workings of Disney sociologically and have provided theories of Disney. Alan Bryman²⁶ explores both the idea and impact of 'Disneyization' on society and recognises the widespread impact Disney has had through the theme parks. His book, *Disney and his Worlds*, provides an overview of the company with an additional focus on the Disney theme parks. Bryman discusses and acknowledges their considerable impact and significance on culture and society.

Additionally, within his article, 'The Disneyization of Society', Bryman suggests that as the theme parks increasingly continue to dominate more and more sections of society, they essentially become part of it. Differing from the term 'Disneyfication', he defines this new concept of 'Disneyization' as a process 'by which the principles of the Disney theme parks dominate more and more sectors of society'. By implying a sense of the Disneyization of America, Bryman's concept directly links to the proposed idea of a 'Disney's America' through the increasing domination of Disney over society. This idea is quite useful with regards to this project, especially when identifying the representations, in their accuracy, of the history presented by Disney. It allows discussion to grow around to what extent Disney is producing accurate depictions of historic events or whether it is producing versions which

²³ *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience: The Tourist as Actor*, ed. by Jennifer A. Kokai and Tom Robson, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

²⁴ Richard Snow, *Disney's Land*, (New York: Scribner, 2019)

²⁵ Sabrina Mittermeier, *A Cultural History of the Disneyland Theme Parks*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2020)

²⁶ Alan Bryman, *Disney and his Worlds*, (London: Routledge, 1995)

Alan Bryman, 'The Disneyization of Society', *The Sociological Review*, 47, (1999), 25-47

have been 'Disneyfied' to better fit the family friendly values and name connected to the company.

Scholars have also looked at the influence of the Walt Disney Company over America. A key scholar, Stephen M. Fjellman, within his book, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*²⁷, discusses the theme parks alongside Disney's connection to America itself. He provides analysis on the various Disney theme parks, their attractions and history, providing a helpful overview and details into the parks and certain relationships with America. Through this discussion of the parks and culture, Fjellman provides useful perceptions of Disney and America.

Additionally, film historian, Douglas Brode, discusses the expanding influence of Disney over American culture and society within his literature²⁸. *It's the Disney Version!* looks at both the positives and negatives of the Disney Company's products, and their relation to the actual source that the inspiration came from. Similar to Bryman, this helps to understand the process, if any, of Disneyfication of certain elements. *From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney Created the Counterculture*, shows how Disney both impacted and created somewhat a subculture, demonstrating a heavy influence on society once again, another possible contribution to the 'Disney's America' concept. *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment*, gives a clear indication of the impact which the Disney Company has on society and Brode clearly acknowledges that it does have the power to influence. He suggests the importance for it to present both accurate and fair depictions due to the fact that younger audiences are strongly influenced by it. Brode directly acknowledges that Disney has a greater influence than any of its competitors, implying both the importance and power of the company, once again supporting the idea of a 'Disney's America'

²⁷ Stephen M. Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992)

²⁸ *It's the Disney Version!* ed. by Douglas Brode and Shea T. Brode, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016)
Douglas Brode, *From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney Created the Counterculture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004)

Douglas Brode, *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005)

Although there is a vast amount of literature and Disney Studies scholars who refer to various Disney films or the theme parks, there is a gap in this literature which this project aims to complete. There is a divide between those who critically tear them apart while others give praise to their beloved Mouse and friends yet none consider how Disney represents America through the lens of the varying time periods: past and future. Scholars tend to focus on the business procedures or the creation of the theme parks and less so on the ideas of America being represented. This project aims to fill this gap by focusing on the Disney theme parks, their individual lands and attractions, with a prominent focus on the architectural design and experiences of the parks, to provide insights and analysis to gain an understanding of the concept of a 'Disney's America' in the past and future. This is significant as it acknowledges the power of Disney to shape our views of America. Disney has the ability to rewrite, and Disneyfy American history and represent it through its theme parks which guests unquestionably accept as correct. This project will develop a greater understanding of the power of Disney in altering perceptions of America through its influential power and the immersive experiences created within the theme parks but also how and what the company creates for its 'Disney's America'.

To understand this 'Disney's America' and how the theme parks project American values, we need to understand more about the creator, Walter Elias Disney - the man who started it all with a mouse and a dream who is central to Disney's vision of America's past and future, the originator of the Disney Company.²⁹

His name alone is globally recognised and evokes powerful images of imagination and magic. "For millions of people, merely hearing the name Walt Disney conjures up images both powerful and enduring. Notions of fun and fantasy- of enchantment, imagination,

²⁹ There are a useful range of biographies on Walt Disney: Diane Disney Miller, *The Story of Walt Disney*, (New York: Holt, 1957), Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, (New Haven: Yale University, 2001), Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney: An American Original*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976)

excitement, and inspiration- fill the mind and spirit with unbridled anticipation."³⁰, notes Kevin Kern. Simply the name Walt Disney creates powerful images and ideas of positivity, fantasy and excitement, the name alone shows the importance of Disney, of its popularity and connection to the important themes of Disney- happiness, optimism and imagination.

During his time growing up in Marceline, Missouri, Walt Disney developed his love for art at a young age, beginning his animation career with the Kansas City Film Ad Company in 1920. This passion continued to develop over the years, with the founding of the Laugh-O-Gram Film Studio together with animator Ub Iwerks and *Alice in Cartoonland*³¹ in 1923. 1927 saw the creation of the beloved character, Mickey Mouse following Disney losing the rights to his original character, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. Following the success of the studio, Walt Disney was driven towards the new idea of producing the first full length animated feature film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*³² (1937). This film revolutionised the industry and proved the ability of both animation as a format style and the ability of the company itself.³³

Alongside the continuous growth of the company's success in the animation productions of the company, Walt Disney was also looking to expand outside of this area.³⁴ He was always thinking of the next idea, what to develop, improve or create and there was always room for progress and new ideas. One of the next major milestones for the company was the creation of the Disney theme parks. Unsatisfied with the amusement parks Walt Disney had visited with his family, the idea for a new, improved, cleaner park emerged - Disneyland, Anaheim (opened 1955). This park would be the beginning of something huge for the Disney company, which would continue to develop across the years and continue to be beloved and

³⁰Kevin M. Kern, Tim'O Day and Steven Vagnini, *A Portrait of Walt Disney World: 50 Years of the Most Magical Place on Earth*, (Los Angeles: Disney Editions, 2021), p. 44

³¹ 'Alice in Cartoonland', *Alice Comedies*, dir. by Walt Disney (Margaret Winkler, 1923)

³² *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, dir. by, David Hand and others, (RKO Radio Pictures, 1937)

³³ 'Mouse and Man', *Time*, 1937

Leonard Maltin, *The Magic Kingdom and the Magic of Television*, (USA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2001)

³⁴ An article by Benjamin Schwarz provides a good overview of both Walt Disney's and the Disney Company's progress and successes: Benjamin Schwarz, 'Walt's World', *Atlantic*, December (2006) <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/12/walts-world/305375/>

successful to the present day. *Disneyland* was the beginning of the Disney theme parks. Variations of the Disney theme park soon spread across the globe to Florida, Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong and Shanghai, along with other various theme parks, resorts and more.³⁵ Both Walt Disney himself and the Disney company have become incredibly well-known while also integrating itself as a huge part of American culture.

The Disney theme parks began as Walt Disney's visions of the past and future. His visions were integral to the ideas behind the parks, their design, attractions, and themes.

Walt Disney was caught up in the past, creating a vision dependent on a heavy sense of nostalgia for the past, something which would become a dominant feature of his theme parks.³⁶ He held a fascination with the past and history, especially the history of the United States, resulting in this becoming a common theme within the Disney theme parks. The inclusion of history, and certain aspects Walt Disney was particularly interested in can be found within specific lands of the theme parks such as Frontierland or Liberty Square, or a sense of nostalgia for his personal past within Main Street USA. His interests of history also occurred as themes for specific attractions within the Disney parks, including the Hall of Presidents and the American Adventure. The focus on the history of the United States combines both Walt Disney's interest and belief in the importance of the history with the influential Disney parks and products.

At the same time, Walt Disney was always looking forward for new possibilities and working towards shaping a better, brighter future. He held a consistently optimistic view of the future

³⁵ Marshall Fishwick, 'A Mouse of Influence around the World', *Orlando Sentinel*, (1992)

³⁶ Nostalgia refers to a sentimentality for the past, this can be applied to the Disney theme parks and the history being represented as the parks aim to evoke specific emotions and memories of certain times and places.

A few useful texts which help understand the element of nostalgia in relation to history:

Nadia Atie and Jeremy Davies, 'Nostalgia and the shapes of history', *Memory Studies*, 3, (2010), pp. 181-186

Marcos Natali, 'History and the Politics of Nostalgia', *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5, (2004), pp. 10-25

A useful text which examines the connection between nostalgia and tourism within the Disney theme parks:

Erika Cornelius Smith and Maryann Conrad, 'Cultivating Magic and Nostalgia: Walt Disney World and Trends in Global Theme Park Tourism', in *Global Entrepreneurial Trends in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry*, ed. by Debasish Batabyal, (IGI Global, 2020) ebook

and held an interest in new possibilities, how things might improve and new ideas for the future. This optimism is evident within the plans and ideas throughout his career, whether that was developing new animation, new ideas for films or television, or plans for the theme parks. His personal future vision is clear in his plans and designs for the land of Tomorrowland and his original plan for a new community of tomorrow. Harriet Burnes said, "No one had the foresight that [Walt] did. It was amazing how he had an ability to judge the public... He was always optimistic. He was never discouraged about anything."³⁷ Walt Disney had a constant strong, positive optimism, a characteristic which helped continuously drive him towards new ideas. He was not the type to typically give up, even in tougher times, and as a result of this, the Disney company's success continues today. This optimism is clearly found within his ideas and products, including the ideas and creation of the parks, his plan for a new community, the use of animation for full-length features, the list of his incredible endeavours and optimism is endless. Walt Disney's hopefulness for the future is evident within his ideas due to his consistent eye for the future. He was not interested in simply capturing and representing the future within his parks, he wanted to create it. This optimism is still a common trope within both the Disney future and the company today.

Walt Disney also wanted to create an experience, a new world, away from reality within his parks. He wanted guests to leave their everyday lives outside the park gates and to be able to enter a new world of happiness and excitement. In this aim he was arguably successful, guests visit the parks to visit the happiest place on earth. This meant that the parks would not contain an exact replica of reality, instead it would be altered to ensure guests would have a new experience away from reality, meaning both the past and future would be edited to fit this theme. Gabler claims, "In numerous ways Disney struck what may be the very fundament of entertainment: the promise of a perfect world that conforms to our wishes."³⁸ This indicates that the parks were designed to provide a perfect world, a word away from

³⁷ *A Portrait of Walt Disney World: 50 Years of the Most Magical Place on Earth*, p. 25

³⁸ Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Biography*, p. xiii

reality, suggesting that this was a key aspect of entertainment, including the Disney products, to provide an escape. Disney successfully manages this, providing a world of magic, imagination and happiness, as a result, also effectively creating a positive perception and experience of Disney's America.

Walt Disney's visions of both the past and future are significant as they were the original visions behind the theme parks which are the result of his fascination with the past and wanting to shape the future. With these initial visions and ideas still being prominent base for inspiration, Walt Disney's legacy continues throughout the company and its theme parks. His vision of America is also significant in understanding the concept of Disney's America as it provides insights into where it originated from and how it has continued to develop following his death. The Disney's America of both the past and future derived from Walt Disney's visions of America and have helped create the resulting immersive experience.

PAST

*"I love the nostalgic myself. I hope we never lose some of the things of the past"*³⁹

- Walt Disney

Introduction

The Walt Disney Company has regularly attempted to present history through its products. Through the design of its theme parks, the various attractions and architectural details which are meticulously thought out, Disney represents various historic time periods and aspects through a highly immersive experience. The company also represents certain elements of history through its films and other commodities.

Disney tends to present a 'Disneyfied' version of history, creating a sense of a 'Disney History' with specific corporate values. 'Disney history' can be defined as history which is cleansed, optimistic, simplistic, patriotic and importantly, predominantly happy. This effectively differentiates it from other history due to its persistent happiness and altered history. As Wills notes, "The Walt Disney Company turned history into interactive entertainment that helped Americas feel good about themselves."⁴⁰ 'Disney history' produces a sense of contentment, providing those who enjoy Disney entertainment with 'feel good' experiences. This is history which has been altered to create immersive experiences, specifically within the theme parks where Disney has edited and designed its history to ensure park guests feel good throughout their experience. 'Disney history' is effectively, good 'happy history'. This refers to the fact that several historical time periods or historical events, especially those with less 'appealing' aspects, are typically edited or omitted from Disney products. The company instead presents a cleansed, idealised version of history in order to better suit the company image of happiness and being family friendly. Joel Best acknowledges, "The Disney name is associated with childhood, family, innocence, and other

³⁹ *A Portrait of Walt Disney World: 50 Years of the Most Magical Place on Earth*, p. 77

⁴⁰ John Wills, *Disney Culture*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017), p. 63

positive values. The corporation has carefully protected the name by using it to market only the sorts of general-audience, nonthreatening, noncontroversial material that is widely understood to be Disneyesque"⁴¹ There is a requirement for the company to create only positive Disney history in order for the company to be able to protect its 'family' image. This directly recognises the fact that the Disney company does edit and omit certain aspects of history, predominantly those elements, for example the history of slavery, which are less fitting with their company image of only 'happy days'. As the Disney name has become connected with family-orientated, clean, positive entertainment in the public mind, there are perceived limits to what it can produce. Therefore, the reasoning behind Disneyfication of certain aspects is clear. This Disneyfication of history also reduces possible criticism against the content not suitably fitting the Disney image. As this is a huge, incredibly well-known company and has a positive reputation, the company attempts to reduce any area which could be open to criticism. Consequently, Disney history, and Disneyfication more broadly serves a valuable purpose in terms of supporting the company image.

This consistent Disneyfication of the past raises the question of whether there is an expectation for the company to incorporate more content with historical accuracy. The past is after all full of examples of disaster, death and harsh times. Although this may be expected more in their television programmes or films due to them being more accessible and informative than the theme parks, the parks still include elements of history, and therefore can be judged by their relationship to the question of accuracy. Central here in the parks seems a need for the company to create a Disney history so that they are able to continue to protect their 'family' image, and for the parks to offer families primarily a nice time. Disney history is a cleansed history but the question of necessity is raised, is this cleansed version of history necessary in order to protect the family or should the company instead be using its power to influence, inform and teach about these excluded aspects

⁴¹ Joel Best and Kathleen S. Lowney, 'The Disadvantage of a Good Reputation: Disney as a Target for Social Problems Claims', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 50, (2009), 431-449, (p. 443)

responsibly? Arguably, Disney is creating its Disney history ensure it fits its image of happiness. By doing so, the company feels that excluding certain aspects of history, it is protecting American families by not including many of the less appealing aspects of the nation's history.

This Disneyfied history, or 'Disney history', typically presents America as a better, idealised nation with a cleansed past and it is something many consumers simply accept as being 'right'. As it is Disney, a company that exudes trust, we accept what is being presented rather than questioning it and easily embrace the Disney magic. There is a positive perspective of Disneyfied history as it helps park guests escape reality, leaving any negativity or stress at the park gates and enter into a world of excitement with its 'happy history' after all. Walt Disney did not want guests to enter a place similar to their everyday lives, instead he wanted guests to only feel anticipation and happiness within the parks, the Disney history is useful in aiding this as it creates an immersive experience with only the positivity of the past. In comparison, Disney critic, Richard Schickel provides a more critical perspective of the process of Disneyfication. He refers to it as, "That shameless process by which everything that Studio later touched, no matter how unique the vision of the original form which the Studio worked, was reduced to the limited terms Disney and his people could understand."⁴² He directly suggests that every single product produced by the Disney Company undergoes the process of Disneyfication. Through Schickel's negative approach to understanding the concept of Disneyfication he implies that everything which becomes Disneyfied whether that is an original fairy tale or aspect of history, is reduced to something limited and somehow lesser than the original.

The Disney theme parks use a combination of reality and fantasy to create their narratives. These narratives help to produce park lands and attractions which are either relatable in their theme, through the inclusion of certain historical aspects, or magical in terms of

⁴² Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 3rd edn, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), p. 237

bringing certain Disney franchises to life.⁴³ “This utopian ideal that Walt Disney sought to capture within his theme parks is achieved through a mixture of reality-based narratives (usually rooted in the past) and fantasy.”⁴⁴ -D’ Ambrosi also suggests that the purpose of these narratives is to create a sense of a utopian ideal, to create perfect lands and experiences within the parks. History provides one of the inspirations which helps to provide a narrative based on something once happened, but is then adapted and Disneyfied in order to fit the specific theme or park. These utopian ideals and narratives can be identified within the various lands of the Magic Kingdom, as narratives help to produce history-inspired lands with additional levels of fantasy and design to ensure the ideal experience. This also connects to a popular combination of fact and fiction in the parks, something which is typically used within the Disney products, relating back to the idea of Walt Disney himself and the company being both entertainers and educators. This concept of education and entertainment links to Disney creating experiences based around making history fun, immersive, and entertaining.

The different theme parks present Disney history through intricate immersive experiences. There are various lands within the parks which typically have different themes, based off fantasy, the future or different historical time periods. These lands represent Disney history through historic inspiration and themes, in this case, often nostalgia, adventure and patriotism. The design and attractions undergo Disneyfication to ensure they fit the company image and as a result create a theme park of history, but only Disney history.

The Disney theme parks were originally designed to appear and feel like a movie set, designed to stage an experience for the guests.⁴⁵ This design, and the content within the parks are used with the purpose to ensure an enjoyable experience and escape from the

⁴³ Deborah Philips, 'Narrativised spaces: The functions of story in the theme park', in D. Crouch, *Leisure/Tourism Geographies*, (London: Routledge, 1999)

⁴⁴ Joseph R. D'Ambrosi, 'The Search for a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow: Performing Utopia with Non-Human Bodies in the Hall of Presidents' in *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience: The Tourist as Actor*, ed. by Jennifer A. Kokai and Tom Robson, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 178

⁴⁵ Florian Freitag, 'Like Walking into a movie: Intermedial relations between theme parks and movies', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 50:4, (2017), pp. 704-722

guests' everyday reality. With the employees of the park referred to as 'cast members' and visitors referred to as 'guests' and the hidden areas guests are not allowed to see as 'backstage'; this terminology enhances the experience of the park acting as a movie set. The history found within the Disney parks has to fit within this movie set design and present a type of movie-set history, much like a Disney movie.

There are two main Disney theme parks which will be focused on within this chapter to understand how Disney history is created and presented. Firstly, the Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World, Orlando, Florida. Secondly, the failed Disney American history theme park, 'Disney's America'. These two theme parks both attempt to represent various histories through their architectural design, attractions, and themes.

The Magic Kingdom depicts different historical aspects through its lands of Main Street USA, Frontierland, and Liberty Square. Main Street USA represents small-town America in the early 20th century, based on Walt Disney's childhood hometown of Marceline, Missouri. Frontierland embodies the old wild west and by taking inspiration from American folklore and mythology creates a sense of frontier nostalgia, while Liberty Square is a land which promotes patriotism in colonial America. This park depicts Disney History through very Disneyfied and manicured lands. By focusing on these three lands, their design, attractions and what various aspects of American history are being represented, they aid the creation of a 'Disney's America' within the parks.

'Disney's America' was meanwhile a planned theme park in the 1990s which would have various lands, each based on a different aspect of American history. It was proposed to have accurately depicted the history of the nation, suggesting this park would not have solely presented a 'Disney history', instead one which was more fact than Disney fiction. However, as the park was never completed, it is unclear what it would have been, instead it is left up to interpretation what this park would have been like. The previous attempts by the Disney company to represent history have not necessarily been entirely accurate, there is typically always some level of Disneyfication. This park was proposed to include historical accuracy,

suggesting that the company was attempting to change from the typical Disney ways and happy history by including some of the darker aspects of history. By looking at what the park was planned to include and the brochure which was created to introduce the idea of the park to the public, there is the sense that the company was attempting to move away from its typical Disneyfied park, focusing on various aspects of history, including some which would not typically fit into the happy Disney theme.

These parks collectively act as a walk-through of themed history. With the various lands, their design and attractions, the guests experience different time periods and places in history. Although they are Disneyfied, the inspiration of the history remains a prominent theme. These two different theme parks represent an immersive experience of both Disney history and the 'Disney's America' of the past.

The Magic Kingdom

The gates to The Magic Kingdom opened on the 1st October 1971.⁴⁶ This was the first of the four main theme parks of Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. Walt Disney's older brother Roy Disney opened this park due to Walt Disney passing away before its completion. Both Walt and Roy Disney are honoured in this park with statues, one of Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse, the other of Roy Disney with Minnie Mouse. The Magic Kingdom is the successor park to the original Disney theme park, *Disneyland*, located in Anaheim, California, which is built around the same themes. Both parks have similar 'past' templates, a main difference being a change of land, New Orleans Square in Disneyland became Liberty Square in the Magic Kingdom in order to further differentiate the parks.

The Magic Kingdom contains six different lands. Clockwise beginning with *Main Street USA*: *Adventureland*, *Frontierland*, *Liberty Square*, *Fantasyland* and *Tomorrowland*. After walking down Main Street USA towards the spectacular Cinderella's castle at the centre, the park opens up with paths in different directions to each of the various lands. This park represents the past through its depictions of various historic time periods through *Main Street USA*, *Frontierland* and *Liberty Square*. Main Street USA represents small-town America in the early twentieth century while Frontierland represents the old wild west and Liberty Square is based on colonial America. This park presents a 'walk through themed history' to its guests, who can experience various historic aspects and time periods through the different lands. Through the architectural designs and attractions, guests are transported to the various time periods and histories- entering a Disney's America of the past. The lands are idealised, cleansed versions of the past. This enables park components to better fit the Disney image and become better suited to the 'happiest place on earth'. Loosely based on specific time

⁴⁶ Walt Disney World Magic Kingdom Grand Opening Newspaper, 1971
<<https://themousemuseum.com/2018/06/05/walt-disney-world-magic-kingdom-grand-opening-newspaper-1971/>> [accessed 18 January 2023]
Walt Disney World Magic Kingdom Pre-Opening Brochure, 1969
<<https://www.disneydocs.net/1969-wdw-pre-opening>> [accessed 22 February 2023]

periods and aspects of history, they provide enjoyable experiences for guests first and foremost. There is an attempt to represent the history through the architectural design and included attractions but this history is always Disneyfied.

"The magic kingdom is dialectically complex; it is traditional in that it built on popular mainstream values, but it is radical in that it helped revolutionise the way most people conceptualise and interpret the American experience"⁴⁷- claims Francaviglia, recognising the importance of both Disney, and the theme park, in changing the way in which people see and experience the American experience. Using traditional American values and Disneyfication, the company has created a park which is complex, combining these traditional values with its Disney magic to produce something memorable, widely recognised and part of the American experience. It helps to project a Disney's version of the American experience, and a Disney's America.⁴⁸ This recreation of history creates a perfect immersive experience. Through the gates of the Magic Kingdom, guests enter a 'Disney's America of the past'.

This chapter will now explore three of the historically inspired lands, Main Street USA, Frontierland and Liberty Square, in detail, deconstructing their design and attractions to understand how they create the idea of a Disney's America through 'Disney History' within this theme park.

Main Street USA

After entering through the gates to the Magic Kingdom, guests immediately arrive at *Main Street USA*. Main Street USA sets the tone for the park, immediately engulfing the guest in nostalgia and 'happy times' with the immediate experiences of cheerful music and enticing

⁴⁷ Richard Francaviglia, 'Walt Disney's Frontierland as an Allegorical Map of the American West', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 30, (1999), 155-182 (p. 162)

⁴⁸ Arthur D. Soto-Vásquez, 'Mediating the Magic Kingdom: Instagram, Fantasy, and Identity', *Western Journal of Communication*, 85, (2021), 588-608

smells from shops such as the bakery, creating a sensory experience. It enables guests to feel a sense of familiarity, through a familiar landscape, but also the anticipation and excitement of the time ahead in the park.

Main Street USA is the only entrance, and exit, of the park. It is a land which every guest has to experience and interact with by passing through it. All guests must walk-through Main Street in order to reach the central Cinderella's castle where the rest of the park spirals out into the various lands. This is the only land which every guest will experience, the other lands are optional, but as the entrance and exit, it becomes the land which is the only shared experience, everyone in the park experiences Main Street and thus this specific slice of Disney history.

Anne Spirn states, "You've left everything behind. After you arrive, you go through a tunnel and come out into the town square. And there you've got Main Street, U.S.A, an important icon of American culture."⁴⁹ Main Street is an important part of American culture and significant here at Disney as the entrance to the park. Main Street represents small-town American values - and a time of nostalgia. Main Street is an important land as the entrance to the park, and it sells historic America as timeless.

Main Street immediately engulfs guests in emotions of nostalgia and happiness as they appreciate the land but also recall their own personal memories of a small-town America. "Main Street soothes out the challenges and intricacies of history and instead allows guests to overwrite their own memories of childhood and Disney's fictive memories."⁵⁰ -notes Robson. As Main Street provides an idealised version of the American small-town but similar enough that it evokes a sense of nostalgia, it provides guests with the opportunity to create their own experience.

⁴⁹ Barbara Faga and others, 'Magic and Power in the Landscape', *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, 80, (1990), 56-59 (p. 58)

⁵⁰ Tom Robson, 'The Future is Truly in the Past': The Regressive Nostalgia of Tomorrowland', in *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience: The Tourist as Actor*, pp. 30-31

Guests have the choice to allow themselves to become engulfed in the nostalgia and happiness of the Disney narratives here, or remember the daily stresses and troubles of everyday life. Disney tries to control this choice, to control the experience as being purely a wonderful one. The guests begin their journey into the fun and magic of the park on a high note from the moment they enter the park. They are straight away encapsulated by what they see- this idealised version of a small town- which immediately makes them forget about life outside the gates, focusing only on the happiness which is the Disney theme park and creating a sense of historical immersiveness.

Main Street began as an idea of Walt Disney's about his childhood and time spent in small-town Marceline. In 1906, Elias Walter Disney moved his family, including a young Walt Disney, away from Chicago to Marceline, Missouri. This small town was less than twenty years old when the Disneys moved there. Marceline had been established as a stop for the then-new Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad.

Although Walt Disney's time in Marceline was short, it had an unforgettable impact on his childhood and would serve for a great deal of future inspiration. His formative childhood years were times which he constantly referred to or told stories about, and Walt Disney often looked back on his fondness for his hometown, frequently acknowledging the influence of Marceline on his visions for Main Street. Walt Disney stated about his time in Marceline, "To tell the truth, more things of importance happened to me in Marceline than have happened since- or are likely to happen in the future."⁵¹ These years were full of fun, enjoyment, happy memories and big moments for Walt Disney. Such experiences and places then became inspiration for several future productions and theme park design - Marceline also holds the significance of the place where Walt Disney began his early artistic endeavours through his discovery of his love for drawing, sketching family and neighbourhood animals. Walt Disney sketched a neighbour, Doc Sherwood's horse, with this fondly recalled neighbour even

⁵¹ Brian Burnes and others, *Walt Disney's Missouri: The Roots of a Creative Genius*, ed. by Donna Martin, (Kansas City: Kansas City Star Books, 2002), p. 22

buying Walt's sketch. Diane Disney Miller also stated regarding Walt Disney and Marceline, "The energy of the city, the diversity of its cultural and professional life, his family, his friends- these were the things which shaped his character and fuelled his dreams"⁵² She emphasises the significance of Marceline and his formative childhood years and the importance they had on Walt Disney's career and personality. It can be implied that if Walt Disney had not had those early experiences in the small-town, what came next may not have happened, or to the extent that it has today.

Marceline's significance is integral to both Walt Disney himself and Main Street. As Robson suggests, "The Marceline influence did more than simply appeal to Disney's personal yearning for his past; it presented a canvas onto which other tourists could project their own yearnings"⁵³ The influence of Marceline, and small-town America, is significant for both Walt Disney himself and the theme park guests. The Main Street which was created produces a sense of nostalgia for all who walk down it, a further impact than simply just Walt Disney recreating somewhere he missed and loved.

The town of Marceline, and the years Walt Disney lived there, created a sense of what small-town America should be like: "The town left him with a notion of rural America as a sort of paradise, a world of hard-working, friendly neighbours and everyday adventures."⁵⁴ notes Burnes. Walt Disney was left with a positive perspective of an American town and what it should be. This was a place and time he remembered fondly, a small-town filled with good memories and important experiences. Therefore, his memories were predominantly positive, it was lively to become the source of inspiration when the time arose to design the Disney theme parks.

Walt Disney's love for Marceline never dwindled, always on his mind, he constantly retold stories about his time there or attempted to recreate childhood memories. It was a powerful

⁵² *Walt Disney's Missouri: The Roots of a Creative Genius*, p. vii

⁵³ *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience: The Tourist as Actor*, p. 29

⁵⁴ *Walt Disney's Missouri: The Roots of a Creative Genius*, p. 34

influence for Main Street and arguably one of the most significant aspects of Walt Disney's childhood. He had hoped to buy the Disney family farm and surrounding land with the aim to turn it into a turn of the century rural experience, the "Marceline Project", an attempt to recreate his childhood. Even after Walt Disney's death, Roy Disney continued working on this project but was unable to make significant progress due to his commitment to complete the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida so the company discarded the project.

Nevertheless, the inspiration for Main Street is clear to be from small-town Marceline and represents an idealised American small town in the early 20th century, signifying a time of simplicity and joyful memories. The architecture was meticulously designed to create a sense of nostalgia and easier times while also representing the time period with at least some aesthetic accuracy.⁵⁵ However, this is an idealised town, one which is not accurate but has been cleansed and arguably, improved. This is also a generic town, it could be anyone's small town as opposed to it being specifically and solely, small-town Marceline. This Main Street is one accessible to everyone, that is, anyone who visits the Disney theme parks. This has enabled a widespread view and engagement with this Main Street, causing it to become the most memorable image of small-town America, a generic but positive facsimile of the American past.

Main Street is very an imagined space. Francaviglia proposes, "Disney also democratised access to this idealised past, creating what has become the most memorable small-town landscape in America (and, for that matter, the world)- an archetype of the American small town at the turn of the century"⁵⁶ Main Street arguably has a unique power. It has become the most memorable small-town landscape, more memorable than any other real main street. This is an idealised, cleansed, flawless reality, similar enough to create the sense of

⁵⁵ Further discussion on the streetscapes and design of Main Street: Miles Orvell, 'Constructing Main Street: Utopia and the Imagined Past' in *Public Space and the Ideology of Place in American Culture*, ed. by Jeffery L. Meikle and Miles Orvell, (Boston: Brill, 2009)

Richard Francaviglia, 'Main Street U.S.A: A comparison/contrast of streetscapes in Disneyland and Walt Disney World', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 15:1, (1981), pp. 141-56

⁵⁶ Richard Francaviglia, 'History After Disney: The Significance of "Imagineered" Historical Places', *The Public Historian*, 17, (1995), 69-74 (p. 71)

nostalgia and represent small-town America but different enough it is clear that it has been Disneyfied. This Main Street keeps only the likeable aspects of small-town, to evoke the nostalgia and memories of an easier time. In reality, the small-town America of the past was not clean, not immaculate nor perfect, it did have its faults. Similarly, Phillips recognises this idealisation of small-town America, "The Disney Main Street, however, is not the continuation of any recognisable geography or history but rather an idealised construction of a small-town America that never was."⁵⁷ Main Street took inspiration from the small-town America of the past but what was created is a romanticised version of the past which never was. The Disney Main Street does not provide an entirely accurate depiction, instead it is a version which scholars consistently refer to as idealised or a fantasy version, an imagined space.

Main Street is not just important as a historical place, but as a conduit to other realms, acting as an entrance to another reality, one of happiness and ease. Both the park and Main Street take guests away from reality into this new, exciting happy world. This places huge importance and significance on Main Street as the entrance to the theme park, it is the immediate area which introduces guests to the Magic Kingdom and the Disney world inside. Neuman asserts, "Employing Main Street as a point of transition between the real world outside the berm and the fantastic and exotic lands within, Disney located the architecture of this spine in a peaceful period of American history both familiar and comforting."⁵⁸ Main Street aids the transition between the real outside world and the exciting lands within the Disney park, and does so in a comforting, familiar way through an idealised, slightly fantasy version of an American main street. This Main Street represents a period of American history thought to be peaceful, with the town and street architecture evoking feelings of ease immediately, history is thus blended and reprocessed as safety.

⁵⁷ Deborah Phillips, 'Consuming the West: Main Street, USA', *Space and Culture*, 5, (2002), 29-41 (p. 32)

⁵⁸ Robert Neuman, 'Disneyland's Main Street, USA, and Its Sources in Hollywood, USA', *The Journal of American Culture*, 31, (2008), 83-97 (p. 84)

The concept of Main Street as a transition between the outside reality and magic inside the park gates is also acknowledged by Chytry who writes, "The entry to the park was substantively separated from outside reality so that once "guests" came into "Main Street, USA"- another invention of Disney's- they were ready for "Happiness"⁵⁹ Main Street immediately prepares guests for happiness and the exciting experiences which are ahead of them at the end of the street within the park itself. Both Neuman and Chytry discuss the concept of Main Street as being a point of transition for guests. Guests leave their worries and troubles of everyday life outside of the guests and are immediately 'ready for happiness' as soon as they arrive at Main Street. This separation of realities indicates that Main Street is the beginning of the experience of the theme park, also the beginning of the 'Disney's America' that guests enter. These scholars imply that the reality inside the gates of the park is one unlike the typical reality, already indicating that a Disneyfied reality lay ahead through the gates.

Following the idea of the Magic Kingdom acting as a different reality to that outside of the park gates, Main Street also contains a distinctive architecture of comfort and reassurance based around simplicity and happiness that I turn to now. Before designing Disneyland, Walt Disney revisited Marceline in 1946 with the purpose of inspiration where he shot motion-picture footage of the town. Some of the buildings within the theme park are two-third scale recreations of the real buildings from the town of Marceline.⁶⁰ The buildings in Main Street, inspired by those of Walt Disney's home town, are integral design details of this land. Through forced perspective, the second and third storeys are shorter than the first storey of the buildings, giving the impression that these buildings are much taller than they actually are. These buildings and their architectural design are a key aspect in creating the Main Street environment, and evoking the feeling of being in early 20th century small-town America. Allen notes, "The 'toylike' charm of the buildings on Main Street is combined with

⁵⁹ Josef Chytry, 'Disney's Design: Imagineering Main Street', *Boom: A Journal of California*, 2, (2012), 259-278 (p. 37)

⁶⁰ *Walt Disney's Missouri: The Roots of a Creative Genius*, p. 35

their very real physical presence, as well as realistic period detail; so, the environment always occupies a liminal zone between 'real' and 'imaginary'.⁶¹ By designing the buildings to have an appearance which is similar to those which may be found in actual small-town in America, Main Street creates a sense of familiarity with the environment and knowledge of the time period being represented. At the same time, there is the element of Disneyfication, and the fact that Main Street is located within the theme park creates a sense of fantasy, close enough to the real thing but far enough that the Disney magic creates something which could be part of the imagination, a fantasy-reality version.

Main Street also includes other key buildings to create the small-town America environment, including a City Hall, Town Square, Fire Station, Barber Shop, Railroad Station and Emporium. "Surrounding Town Square are buildings that represent some of the key institutions of U.S life- a city hall, a bank, a railroad station, an emporium. These institutions introduce the visitor to the liminal timelessness of the Magic Kingdom, because in this transition zone, they all perform some version of the function they would have performed at the turn of the century."⁶² -suggests Fjellman. The importance of these buildings adds to and effectively complete the effect of timelessness in the land. Although guests have left their usual reality, these buildings within the park suggest a sense of timelessness.

The Main Street vehicles provide guests a journey across the time period through Main Street. Guests have the chance to enjoy a ride on four different types of vintage public transportations: a horse-drawn street car, a Jitney (early open top automobile), a vintage fire engine or an omnibus (gas-powered two-storey bus modelled after the 1920s double decker). These vintage vehicles add to the guests experience in Main Street, aiding the representation of the time period through public transportation and transition guests further into the Disney history. The history in this land progresses as guests walk through it,

⁶¹ David Allen, 'Disneyland: Another Kind of Reality', *European Journal of American Culture*, 33, (2014), 33-47 (p. 35)

⁶² Stephen M. Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 171

providing a sense of history as the technology advances, one detail of this progression of time through the street- the street lamps. As guests begin their stroll down Main Street, along the edge of the street are gas lamps which as the street progresses towards the castle, become electric lamps to represent 'America going electric', changing time and advancements. Walt Disney loved technology, and progress so it is fitting that this subtle detail is included, showing the advancement of time through technology.

The windows of the buildings on Main Street also contain subtle, typically unnoticed details, but if guests look up, they find that these windows contain the names of important individuals such as park designers, artists, companies and figures who had instrumental roles in the creation of the Magic Kingdom. The windows above the Crystal Arts store lists the names of the fake company names which were created in order for Disney to secretly purchase the land for Walt Disney World. Through this subtle detail of giving recognition to those integral individuals, and those key fake names, the history of the company is acknowledged by listing those who helped to make the Magic Kingdom a reality. Walt Disney has two windows, the first is located at the railroad station, facing the park entrance and the second is located above the Plaza Ice Cream Parlour, facing Cinderella's Castle. The named windows act almost like movie credits, the long list of names of those included within the production, something guests have to pass on both their entrance and exit of the park as Main Street is the only way to enter and leave. With Walt Disney's windows being at both the entrance at the station and at the end of Main Street, they are the first and last names guests will see, exactly as Walt Disney is the first and last name that appears on his films.

Main Street is predominantly a commercial land. It does not contain any major attractions but contains a variety of shops where guests are able to purchase every imaginable souvenir or Disneyfied delicacy, including Main Street Confectionary, Main Street Bakery, Disney Clothiers, Emporium, Main Street Gallery, The Chapeau and others. There is a slight attempt to represent history through these shops as each has been designed and named to fit within the theme of Main Street, including shops which may have been found on a typical main

street of the past e.g., a general store, ice cream parlour, bakery or large department store. This creates the concept of history as a 'store', something which guests can purchase. Within Main Street, guests are able to both experience and purchase this history, commercialising the Disney history and indicating that commercialisation is part of Disney's America.

Main Street USA represents small-town America, its small-town values and notion of easier times, simplicity and happiness. Although it evokes memories and nostalgia, this small-town main street represented is through a cleansed, idealised version. It is similar to the other lands of the park in that it is more like a movie set as opposed to an accurate representation of the area of time period. This Main Street is a heavily Disneyfied version, one which has been designed in order to act as a wonderful entrance to the park, to immediately engulf the guests in nostalgia and happiness as they leave their typical reality behind at the gates. Although it is Disneyfied, this town of red colour palettes, shops and simplicity, it provides an enjoyable and memorable entrance and exit to the park. This is the entrance to the Disney's America of the past in the Magic Kingdom.

Frontierland

After taking a left in front of the castle, beginning clockwise, located west of the park, guests arrive at the old wild west of *Frontierland*, a land of cowboys, dry and dusty pathways, giant brown rocky mountains and adventure. In an early brochure, Walt Disney World notes: "Walt Disney had a special respect for the men and women who pushed Americas western boundary to the Pacific Ocean. Frontierland is his tribute to those hardy pioneers. Its landscape blends towering conifer forests of the Pacific Northwest, red-and-ochre-hued deserts of the Southwest, and Mississippi river landings. Its frontier way of life is symbolised by the coonskin cap and the cowboy hat, the calico sunbonnet and the plantation straw."⁶³

⁶³ *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*, p. 73

The original aim for Frontierland was proposed to represent an in-depth perception of the old west.⁶⁴ Instead, it represents the Disney Wild West, altering history to create a cleansed, child appropriate west, the resulting land is different from the original description. This section will explore how Frontierland presents Western history and the impact of Disneyfication on the frontier.

Prior to the creation of Frontierland, the Walt Disney Company has previously attempted to show the old west and American frontier through television and films such as the Davy Crockett series.⁶⁵ The live-action Disney film, *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*⁶⁶ (1955), represents the frontier through the adventures of Davy Crockett. The film follows frontiersman Crockett through different stages of his life as he is elected to the U.S Congress and fights in the Creek Indian War, the film combining large sections of the narratives from the first three episodes of the Davy Crockett television series. This series and film are based on the true historic Frontiersman, Davy Crockett.⁶⁷ Here, Disney combines fact and fiction, using the history as inspiration for something that will become a predominantly fictional narrative for entertainment purposes. Although the majority has become fiction, these episodes and films do indicate certain facts or events of the history of both Davy Crockett and the frontier.

By the time Disneyland and the first Frontierland opened, Davy Crockett merchandise was huge, showing the success of both the Davy Crockett franchise and the likeability of frontier history for entertainment. Arsenault states, "The popular Frontier section of the park highlighted and manifested the Crockett phenomenon, as did frequent appearances by the

⁶⁴ John Dorst, 'Miniturising monumentality: Theme park images of the American West and confusions of cultural influence' in *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe*, ed. by R. Kores, (Amsterdam: Vu University Press, 1993)

⁶⁵ Further reading on Disney and the American Western: Steven McVeigh, *The American Western*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)

J.G O'Boyle, 'Be sure you're right then go ahead: The early Disney Western', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 24:2, (1996), pp. 69-81

⁶⁶ *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*, dir. by Norman Foster, (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 1955)

⁶⁷ Further reading on Davy Crockett: Richard Bruce Winders, *Davy Crockett: The Legend of the Wild Frontier*, (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2003)

stars of the show”⁶⁸ This demonstrates one example of the Disney company combining its theme parks with both their own films and television series with historical inspiration.

Frontierland also included inspiration from the Davy Crockett productions, putting its success to good use with park merchandise and exciting appearances by the actors. The Davy Crockett example shows the company effectively combining several of its products, parks and themes to ensure the best success overall.

Further inspiration for Frontierland derives from Frontier mythology and folklore. This idea implies that the frontier myth is a compelling yet tragic story, one which is integral to the shaping of America. “Behind the gate of Frontierland is the inspirational America of the past century. Here is the treasure of our native folklore, the songs, tales, and legends of the big men who built the land.”⁶⁹ - notes Snow. This places Frontierland as a place of importance, one which represents the inspirational history of the nation’s past by highlighting native folklore and treasures, placing those who were part of the frontier history as legends who made the land what it is today. The strong impression of the importance of both frontier history and the frontier mythology and folklore is also given by Steiner, he recognises, “The western frontier has been America’s most beguiling icon and exportable commodity, and Frontierland as it emerged in 1955 remains the brainchild and prototype for the architectural and merchandising of the frontier myth.”⁷⁰ Frontierland has been, and continues to be, the prototype for other future designs of the frontier, including the merchandising of it. This theme park land has had continuing importance and arguably promotes the western frontier and as a result, preserving the frontier myth.

Frontierland’s importance is emphasised in terms of representing this integral part of the nation’s history, continuing the ‘experience’ and promoting the western frontier, but most of

⁶⁸ Raymond Arsenault, ‘Playing with History: Walt Disney’s Historical Films, 1946-1966’ in *The Long Civil War: New Explorations of America’s Enduring Conflict*, ed. by John David Smith and Raymond Arsenault, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2021), p. 201

⁶⁹ Richard Snow, *Disney’s Land*, (New York: Scribner, 2019), p. 159

⁷⁰ Michael Steiner, ‘Frontierland as Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Architectural Packaging of the Mythic West’, *Montana the Magazine of Western History*, 48, (1998), 2-17 (pp. 8-9)

all preserving the frontier myth. Inspiration did not originate solely from American history, instead frontier mythology is the base of the majority of inspiration for this land. "Frontierland takes on directly American history or, more accurately, American mythology (...) America's conquest of the west, the eradication of the native inhabitants, and the domination and exploration of nature underlie the Frontierland narrative."⁷¹ - notes Zornado. Frontierland attempts to represent the mythology and history of the west as if the same thing. Although there may be an attempt to represent a few historical moments of the frontier, they appear to be inspiration as opposed to directly tackled with true sensitivity.

Francaviglia agrees, he recognises that inspiration derived from frontier mythology, but also that there is an added level of Disneyfication, "Like most of Disney's creations, however, Frontierland is richly layered with meanings derived from both American folklore and literature. Disney's representation of the west involved linking a vivid narrative about the region to a design that could sustain the story line."⁷² - recognises Francaviglia. There is an importance placed on the design of the land, ensuring that it tells an entertaining story. The architecture of the Disney theme parks, including Frontierland, is designed with every detail being part of a larger narrative. In this case, this representation of the frontier is designed to create a fun frontier experience for the guests, through both history and folklore, and the usual Disneyfication in order to also suit the Disney theme, this land is 'richly layered', exciting and Disney-style narrative to create Frontierland.

The concept of Frontierland also owes greatly to Walt Disney's own interest in history. He had a personal interest in the frontier, strongly believing that it was important to 'shaping America' and Frontierland became a particular favourite of his. Frontierland is also the largest part of Disneyland, Anaheim. Walt Disney once stated, "In Frontierland, we meet the America of the past, out of whose strength and inspiration came the good things of life we

⁷¹ Joseph Zornado, *Disney and the Dialectic of Desire: Fantasy as Social Practice*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 163

⁷² Richard Francaviglia, 'Walt Disney's Frontierland as an Allegorical Map of the American West', p. 163

enjoy today.”⁷³. He placed huge importance on the frontier and the fact that this was what helped to shape America as it is today, implying that without those members of the frontier, or the frontier history, America simply would not be the same. According to Walt Disney, the frontier history was legendary and brought us the good things of life which we experience today. Through an episode of the Disneyland television show, ‘*Walt Disney’s Disneyland*’⁷⁴, Frontierland is described simply as the following, “Frontierland: tall tales and truth from the legendary past”⁷⁵ Although a short description, it gives the impression of a land enriched with both fact and fiction surrounding a legendary part of American history, but also that the West exists most as a story. It is clear that the frontier is an integral part of the nation’s history but also malleable and fun. Walt Disney saw the frontier as central to the identity of the United States and the nation’s history, but also as something he could work with, a legend to be played with.

Disney’s representation of the old wild west is arguably a more family friendly version of the mythic west, presented as a land of adventure, including what is considered to be the exciting parts of the frontier history and excluding the less undesirable aspects.⁷⁶

Frontierland has been Disneyfied to fit the Disney image, ensuring that guests have an exciting time in this land. Frontierland within the Magic Kingdom is a cleaner alternative of the history, Disney’s Frontierland - “Disney built a cleaner, simpler movie set alternative. Frontierland’s two generic stockaded forts, cookie-cutter adobe and plantation style restaurants, silhouetted ghost town, and false-fronted Main Street with a board-and-batten general store and filigreed saloon- all came straight from Hollywood rather than from the messy west.”⁷⁷ states Steiner. Frontierland is an edited, Disneyfied version which appears

⁷³ Richard W. Slatta, *The Mythical West: An Encyclopaedia of Legend, Lore, and Popular Culture*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), p. 97

⁷⁴ ‘Walt Disney’s Disneyland’, *Disneyland*, dir. by Robert Florey and Wilfred Jackson, (Walt Disney Productions, 1954)

⁷⁵ *Discussing Disney*, ed. by Amy M. Davis, (Herts: John Libbey Publishing, 2019), p. 247

⁷⁶ Stephen Tatum, ‘The Problem of the ‘Popular’ in the New Western History’, *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 53, (1997)

⁷⁷ Steiner, ‘Frontierland as Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Architectural Packaging of the Mythic West’, p. 12

more as a movie set than accurate depiction of the frontier - designed more for the experience of the park guests, to contain what Disney considers as the exciting parts of the frontier history, but in a way to keep guests involved in the Frontier experience. Although not an entirely accurate depiction, it represents certain aspects of frontier history and mythology, chosen and designed by Disney to ensure the thrill of adventure is conveyed within guests experience of Frontierland.

At the time of the Magic Kingdom's opening, Frontierland only had three original attractions: the *County Bear Jamboree*, *Walt Disney World Railroad Station* and the *Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes*. The County Bear Jamboree was one of the last attractions that Walt Disney personally helped develop, originally planned for a never-built ski resort which moved to the Florida park in 1971 and continues to perform daily. Meanwhile, the Davy Crockett Explorer Canoes was a free-floating canoe experience in which up to twenty guests could paddle a canoe around the Rivers of America which closed in 1994. In the present day, there are two main attractions within Frontierland: *Splash Mountain* and *Big Thunder Mountain*. Splash Mountain (opened 1992) and follows the story of Br'er Rabbit through a colourful southern bayou, as Br'er Bear and Br'er Fox are in pursuit to catch him. This attraction is a water ride as guests plummet down a five-storey drop, likely resulting in being soaked by the end of the ride. Meanwhile on Big Thunder Mountain (opened 1980) guests go on an exciting rollercoaster ride on a train through an abandoned, haunted gold mine. Although neither is based on specific historic moments in the old Frontier, they nicely fit the aesthetic and design of this land with large brown mountains, with dusty appearances.

The architecture and design of this land truly provides guests with an experience and the feel of it being a lived-in town. With items such as saddles, chairs and lanterns placed around, even on the balconies above, it creates a sense that residents of the frontier currently live there. Additional small details which may be missed in passing include framed advertisements and posters about current issues or period items for sale, adding to the frontier town experience and time period. With worn down streets, appearance of everything

being dry and dusty and simulated cacti, the design of this land transports guests directly back into the middle of the American frontier.

Frontierland attempts to represent the past through history and frontier folklore, placing significance on this aspect of history. Walt Disney himself proposed that frontiersmen are the legends who created the world we have today. However, although inspiration originates from frontier history, this land and history have undergone Disneyfication. The accuracy of certain aspects is reduced and a cleansed, family friendly old wild west themed land has been created in a movie-set style instead of true historic depictions. The less attractive aspects of frontier history have been erased to produce a land of excitement, cowboys and a Disneyfied narrative. This ensures that Frontierland complies with the Disney image, while providing guests with an experience filled with happiness in the park. Although not an entirely accurate representation, it is a fun and enjoyable old wild west themed land.

Liberty Square

Continuing clockwise after their adventures in the old wild west of Frontierland, guests reach *Liberty Square*, a land which promotes the spirit of patriotism and the history of the nation's leaders, themed around the colonial period and encompasses an idealised colonial American town, providing an insight into the patriotic side of the 'Disney's America' of the past. Walt Disney was a patriotic man. His patriotism and interest in the history of the nation's leaders became inspiration for a new land, Edison's Square, which he planned to add to Disneyland, Anaheim, as an extension of Main Street USA. Instead, this plan was developed into Liberty Square in the Magic Kingdom. This land would be in place of New Orleans Square (featured at the original Disneyland, Anaheim) to ensure that the two theme parks were different. Additionally, as Florida was closer to the real New Orleans, a new land and theme was required for this park. Originating from Walt Disney's original designs of Edison Square, the patriotic land of Liberty Square was created for Walt Disney World.

There are several interesting, typically unnoticed, design details of this land which are significant in the land representing the history and colonial America. With the exception of those inside restaurants, there are no bathrooms in Liberty Square, due to the fact that there was no indoor plumbing during colonial America, keeping with Walt Disney's aims for authenticity within the lands. Two additional small details which typically go unnoticed are part of the building designs. Firstly, each door has a two-digit number designed to look like a street address, but if '18' is placed before these door numbers, they provide the year in which that specific style of house or building was popular. Secondly, the skewed angle of the window shutters represents another aspect of colonial history. During the Revolutionary war all available metal, including metal window hinges, was used for producing bullets. Hinges were replaced with leather ones, which with the weather and time became less stable, becoming skewed and leaning sideways.⁷⁸ These details demonstrate the intricate detail the Disney theme parks contain to create their immersive experiences of Disney history.

Although this is one of the smaller lands in this park, it contains one of the most 'historical' and patriotic attractions, the *Hall of Presidents* which was inspired by the attraction, *Great Moments with Mr Lincoln*, located at Disneyland, Anaheim. This attraction derived from the original president audio-animatronic pavilion, *Conversations with Mr Lincoln*, created by the Disney company for the 1964 New York World's Fair. Walt Disney was fascinated with the life of Abraham Lincoln and produced a pavilion for the State of Illinois which focused primarily on this president. With the success of the new audio-animatronic technology, its potential, and the attractions popularity, it moved to its current home in Disneyland, Anaheim, in 1965. Following a name change to *Great Moments with Mr Lincoln*, it became a permanent feature in the park. This attraction begins with a film about Lincoln's life, from birth to the White House, then Lincoln himself (in audio-animatronic form) takes the stage

⁷⁸ Susan Veness, *The Hidden Magic of Walt Disney World*, (Avon: Adams Media, 2009), p. 22

and delivers highlights from his greatest speeches. This became inspiration for a new attraction and developed into the Hall of Presidents, a project developed by Walt Disney until his death and is considered to be one of his legacy projects.

Meanwhile, the *Hall of Presidents* (opened 1971) is housed inside a replica of the Philadelphia's Independence Hall. The date above the entry door is the year that the U.S Constitution was ratified, and the seal on the outside is the only other of that located at the White House, further adding to the intricate patriotic design.

Beginning with an original film developed by a Pulitzer Prize winning historian which tells the story of the nation's founding, the film gives an insight into the history of the United States, including a number of defining moments such as the American Revolution or the Civil War. Following the film, the curtain rises to reveal the stage with all 45 presidents of the United States, from George Washington to Joe Biden, all together for the first time. These life-like audio-animatronics give an impressive perspective of the nation's past and present leaders with Disney's remarkable audio-animatronic technology giving life to the presidents. As each president is individually introduced in order of their time as president, when their name is read, they make a form of acknowledgement, whether that is by a simple nod of the head or raise of a hand- making the audience believe that they are truly viewing all real-life presidents together. Abraham Lincoln then rises to deliver the Gettysburg address, followed by the current president giving their oath of office. To further the remarkability and authenticity of the life-likeness of the president, the speeches are personally recorded by the actual presidents themselves since Bill Clinton, reinforcing the theme of patriotism and importance of the nation's history and leaders.

The Hall of Presidents promotes patriotism, as does the majority of Liberty Square, by focusing primarily on the various presidents, their achievements and how they worked to form the nation as it is today. The narrative of the attraction acknowledges that each president faced their share of hardships, such as the Civil War, American Revolution and slavery. Although this is informative, the Disney company omits many details of these

historical moments from the narrative, skimming over these problematic and undesirable moments, instead, predominantly focusing on aspects which were most important to the presidents, their own challenges and achievements which developed and created the nation. “By looking at these difficult moments in American history merely as opportunities for the president to learn, lead, and grow, the Walt Disney Company reclaims the past from all negativity and therefore idealises American history. If these moments never happened, the president could not lead the Nation into excellence, the American dream”⁷⁹, notes D’Ambrosi. The included history is mainly focused on the presidents, turning tough or negative aspects into good experiences by suggesting these were moments which helped the presidents to adapt and grow. By doing so, implying that these moments in history were good learning experiences for the presidents attempts to remove any negativity from the history. However, if these problematic moments of history are entirely omitted, the presidents may not have achieved the nation as it is today or led it towards the ‘American Dream’.

This is an example of history being edited or twisted into something positive with the difficult moments being presented as learning opportunities for the presidents, demonstrating the history as being slightly Disneyfied. Although American history is included within this attraction, it is in the Disney style of altering history into positive experiences to better fit the Disney history.

The American Adventure at EPCOT

In addition to the Hall of Presidents, another attraction focused on the history of the United States within Walt Disney World is *The American Adventure*, located within a colonial themed building in the United States pavilion in World Showcase at the EPCOT theme park. This attraction took the Disney Imagineers five years to complete. With 35 audio-

⁷⁹ Joseph R. D’Ambrosi, 'The Search for a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow: Performing Utopia with Non-Human Bodies in the Hall of Presidents' in *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience: The Tourist as Actor*, p. 178

animatronics, digital rear-projection images on a 72-foot screen, patriotic songs and 10 different moving sets, this is an intricate, informative and entertaining retelling of American history. Here, the audience hears about American history as told by Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain. These two audio-animatronics tell the historic story while showing landmark events such as the landing of the Mayflower, the Boston Tea Party, the penning of the Declaration of Independence, the Civil War and the Great Depression. When compared with the Hall of Presidents which primarily focuses on presidential history, the American Adventure includes more details of the nation's history, including certain less desirable aspects. Nevertheless, the history included is selected by Disney, what the company deemed important enough and what suits the Disney history, therefore its accuracy aside, this attraction and American history, is still Disneyfied to an extent.

The Liberty Square Riverboat is another attraction located within Liberty Square. The Liberty Belle is a 47-foot-tall working replica of the vessels which ferried people up and down the Mississippi. Guests board a working steamboat and enjoy a relaxing half-mile tour around Tom Sawyer Island and the opportunity to encounter a rarely seen side of the park, including sights from the early days of the American frontier: an early American settlement, a Native American village, Harper's Mill, Fort Langhorn and more.⁸⁰ Previously there were two steamboats: the Admiral Joe Fowler Riverboat (1971-1980) and the Richard F. Irvine. These were named after two company executives who had done much to help build Walt Disney World. Unfortunately, the Fowler was severely damaged after being misaligned during the water drainage, and the Irvine was renamed *Liberty Belle*. However, to continue to honour these men, two of the ferries used to transport guests from the Ticket and Transportation Centre to the theme park (originally simply called Magic Kingdom-1 and Magic Kingdom-2), were renamed with their names. A third ferry is named the General Joe Potter, another

⁸⁰ *Liberty Square Riverboat*, Attraction, <https://www.disneyworld.co.uk/attractions/magic-kingdom/liberty-square-riverboat/> [accessed 5 September 2022]

figure responsible for building Walt Disney World.⁸¹ These details provide a subtle connection to the history of the Disney company, resulting in the company representing both the history of colonial America and the Disney company. This is an enjoyable, calming journey around the scenic Rivers of America on an authentic steam-powered paddle wheeler, giving guests an experience and insight into colonial America.

Alongside its attractions, Liberty Square also contains two significant historic replicas: the Liberty Tree and Liberty Bell. The Liberty tree is located in the middle of Liberty Square, a Southern oak representing the original Liberty tree in colonial Boston during the early years of the American Revolution and the events which took place under its branches. The Sons of Liberty, an organisation formed in the American colonies in 1765 to oppose the Stamp Act and British rule, held secret meetings under the “Liberty tree”, a stately elm in Hanover Square at night to not be found or suspected. These members were influential in organising and carrying out the Boston Tea Party. There are thirteen lanterns hanging from the branches of Disney’s Liberty Tree, representing the original thirteen colonies of the United States.

Disney’s Liberty Square also contains a replica of the Liberty Bell. This replica was cast from the original mould in Philadelphia and was placed in the Magic Kingdom to commemorate the U.S Constitution bicentennial. The Liberty Bell, previously known as the State House bell, would ring to call lawmakers to meetings and townspeople together. The inscription, “Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof”, went unnoticed during the Revolutionary War but inspired abolitionists aiming to end slavery and has significant historic association. “First associated with American Independence, in the late 1830s and 1840s, it became known as the Liberty Bell to symbolise and focus the struggle for freedom of four million slaves”⁸², acknowledges Willis. During the abolition movement,

⁸¹ *Walt Disney World Hidden History*, pp. 64-65

⁸² Paul Willis, ‘The Liberty Bell: A Meditation on Labor, Liberty, and the Cultural Mediations That Connect or Disconnect Them’, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 595, (2004), 223-248, (p. 225)

the bell became referred to as the Liberty Bell. The inscription on the bell directly calls for freedom, freedom for everyone in the land, the message and bell became a symbol of freedom and justice during the movement to abolish slavery. This proclamation of liberty inscribed on the bell has given it important significance and relevance in both the past and present, proclaiming that everyone should have their freedom. The Liberty Bell also became a symbol for different activists and movements, giving it multiple additional histories. In 1915, the Penn Women Suffrage Association commissioned a copy of the bell, naming it the Women's Liberty Bell and in 1965 it became connected to the civil rights demonstration with the annual "Let Freedom Ring" ceremony which celebrates the life of Martin Luther King Jr.⁸³ Additionally, the bell also became associated with the Declaration of Independence following a fictional story, "Ring, Grandfather! Ring!", written by George Lippard in 1847. The story told of a bellman waiting in the State House for word that Congress had declared independence. The success and fascination with the story created a lasting association between the bell and the Declaration.

Both the Liberty Tree and the Liberty Bell are significant to this land and American history and reduce the Disneyfication by providing accurate history representations. They support the theme of liberty and provide historic insights without being heavily impacted or altered by Disneyfication. This shows Disney as a company capable of providing guidance to the past, and offering informative insights.

Liberty Square, although small, does attempt to represent this period of history fairly. With the inclusion of the historic replicas which have not been Disneyfied providing historical significance to this land. The various attractions provide insights into American history, through both informative films and visual experiences. The architectural design of this land includes several details which aid the experience of the guest, enabling them to feel as though they have truly stepped back in history to the colonial period. Although Disneyfied,

⁸³ *'The Liberty Bell: A Meditation on Labor, Liberty, and the Cultural Mediations That Connect or Disconnect Them'*, (pp. 225-226)

these details are cleverly included to enhance the guests experience of the colonial America of Disney history.

Summary:

The Magic Kingdom presents a Disney's America of the past through its Disney history created within the park. The America of the past represented is one of nostalgia, adventure and patriotism. Main Street immediately transitions guests away from the stresses of daily life and into the magic of the park while engulfing them in nostalgia as they embrace the small-town America they have just entered. This is an important experience as it prepares the guest for their experiences within the park, ensuring they begin on a positive note in the happiest place on earth. Due to this theme of happiness being a key aspect of both the park and the company itself, Frontierland and Liberty Square and their relevant histories have been Disneyfied in order to continue this experience of happiness. The less appealing aspects of American history have been excluded or edited to better suit the Disney image and the Disney history. Instead, guests experience these lands of adventure and patriotism with continued happiness with little acknowledgement of negative aspects of the nation's history. The lands contain cleaner, idealised versions of history, consisting of the history chosen by the company as suitable for its Disney history – resulting in certain aspects of American history being excluded from the park, effectively creating a landscape of historic exclusion.

Disney's America: The Failed History Theme Park

The concept of 'history as a whole park' is a step on from Frontierland. Rather than solely focusing on one specific aspect of American history or one time period, Disney's America was designed in the 1990s as an entire park dedicated to representing the nation's history. Disney's America was an attempt to create an entire theme park which would be based upon multiple time periods and different aspects of American history which would be depicted through a variation of attractions and architectural designs inside the park. Unlike other Disney theme parks, this park was proposed to have attempted to represent the various history with more accuracy and less Disneyfication. The corporation promised a historically detailed park with some aspects of history not previously covered by Disney in prior parks and entertainment.⁸⁴

The park was formally introduced to the public on the 12th November 1993, and was planned to be built in Prince William County, Haymarket, Virginia. The plans for this park went so far as scouting for and secretly purchasing land for the park to be built on, and producing a brochure complete with details of the various 'territories' and initial designs for a few proposed attractions. This park was initially a secret but once it became public knowledge it was met with an intense level of criticism and opposition. It was a controversial park from the beginning.

This chapter explores initial ideas for Disney's America and the view of American history offered in the park, in particular case studies on both Native America and the Civil War, before turning to the critical reaction which ultimately prevented its operation.

⁸⁴ 'Disney's America', Brochure, (1994) <<https://www.disneydocs.net/disney-s-america-brochure>> [accessed 15 September 2022] (p.2)

Early Park Ideas:

The vision proposed for Disney's America, within the early planning stages, and the brochure, suggests that this park would be different from anything else previously created by Disney, it would be for all ages and a place "to debate the future of their nation and learn about the past by living its history"⁸⁵ The brochure and early planning imply that guests would experience the history first hand, with the park acting as 'living history'. Additional details released during the early planning stages and brochure included the notions that this park would have economic benefits for the region, increase jobs and be environmentally sensitive, attempting to push this proposed park into a positive light by immediately acknowledging further possible benefits to the locality.

The brochure was created and circulated in order for the company and Imagineers to showcase their ideas and plan for the new park. The brochure described the park as the following: "The Walt Disney Company will create a unique and historically detailed environment in Prince William County, Virginia, which celebrates our nation's diversity, spirit and innovation- *DISNEY'S AMERICA*"⁸⁶ It was suggested that the park would celebrate both the nation's history and diversity. The brochure also included an illustrated map, showing the envisioned park layout and a descriptive list of the planned territories. The proposed territories which would be included in the park consisted of: *Crossroads USA* (1800-1850), *Presidents Square* (1750-1800), *Native America* (1600-1810), *Civil War Fort* (1850-1870), *We the People* (1870-1930), *Enterprise* (1870-1930), *Victory Field* (1930-1945), *State Fair* (1930-1945) and *Family Farm* (1930-1945). Each of these individual territories would have been inspired by the time periods and designed - with a favour of authenticity.

⁸⁵ 'Disney's America', Brochure, (1994), (p. 6)

⁸⁶ 'Disney's America', Brochure, (1994), (p. 2)

Historic inspiration and similarities to the Magic Kingdom:

Despite offering Disney's America as something radical and new, some of the proposed territories for the park had similar historic inspiration to certain lands within the Magic Kingdom. *Crossroads USA* (1800-1850) would have been designed with a similar purpose to Main Street USA as the entrance to the park, except this being a more historically accurate version. It would have been designed in the style of a mid-19 century commercial hub with a station with two steam trains which would give a journey around the nine territories, similar to *The Walt Disney World Railroad*. The inspiration for this would likely have derived from the entrance to the other parks, Main Street USA in both the Magic Kingdom and Disneyland in Anaheim, which could then spread out into the other territories. In a similar way, *Presidents Square* (1750-1800) would have taken inspiration and similarity to another land in the Magic Kingdom, Liberty Square. This territory would focus on the importance of the presidential history and the existing attraction, *Hall of Presidents*, was also due to be moved to the park. The territory was proposed to celebrate the birth of democracy and the various patriots who fought to preserve it. The similarity between the new themes and existing ones within other parks such as the Magic Kingdom, demonstrates recurrent themes of period nostalgia and patriotism. Although this history park was proposed to be different to the existing parks, it would still include known Disney references. This all suggested that the new park was building on the previous parks, instead of creating a brand-new park which was individual and unlike the existing parks, Disney's history theme park appeared to have similarities - to other Disney creations

Nostalgia history:

As with the existing Disney theme parks, this park would also have a strong element of nostalgia. Specific time periods and aspects of American life were chosen in order to have created a powerful sense of nostalgia within the guests' experience. Firstly, *State Fair* (1930-

1945), would have celebrated small town America with popular rides such as a 60-foot Ferris Wheel and classic wooden rollercoaster and a tribute to a favourite national pastime, baseball with an authentic old fashioned ball park to watch legendary greats gather for an exhibition all-star competition with a backdrop of rolling cornfields. Secondly, *Family Farm* (1930-1945), similar in terms of its time period and small-town values except this territory would specifically focus on the typical American family farm life. In this territory guests could learn how crops are harvested, how to milk a cow or make home-made ice cream. There would also be the chance to participate in a country wedding, barn dance and buffet. Both State Fair and Family Farm pushed nostalgia hard and focused on small-town America.

As nostalgia is a key feature of the company as a whole, especially its parks, Disney's new park fitted well within the fold. These two territories would arguably soften the historical harshness elsewhere in the park, ensuring there was a break from the serious, perhaps darker aspects of history which were proposed to be included. While they would still represent American history, these would have been more subtle and representative of the history of American life instead of a specific historical moment. Similar to the other Disney parks, guests would leave their everyday lives outside of the park gates and enter a new experience, this time, experience of historically-tinged comfort and happiness. There is familiarity of theming and design procedures for this park with the consistent inclusion and importance of the theme of nostalgia. As Disney appears to be based around nostalgia for the past, this park would have been another stage of the same process.

Darker history not previously covered by Disney:

Within the brochure, the park was proposed to include arguably darker aspects of history which had not previously been covered in depth by Disney. The inclusion of these aspects might have been to prove that Disney could be serious, that it could represent and include more of the nation's history, not simply the happier aspects of it, and move away from the

Mickey Mouse image typically associated with the company name. The failure of this park arguably shows that Disney's America is only acceptable as a positive concept and symbolic representation of America.

Within *Civil War Fort* (1850-1870), guests could have experienced the reality of a soldier's life and representing the 'nation's greatest crisis'. Here, guests would also have the opportunity to view a re-enactment of a battle or gather at Freedom Bay for a night time spectacular based on the confrontation between the Monitor and the Merrimac. *Victory Field* (1930-1945), was planned to have represented military advancements where guests could experience what American soldiers faced in the defence of freedom. Both of these territories would have been representative of two key military aspects of the nation's history, focusing on the significance of wars in the past.

In addition, Disney also would have included territories which focused on the industrial revolution and the significance of Ellis Island. Firstly, *Enterprise* (1870-1930), represented a factory town which presented the inventions and innovations which catapulted America to the forefront of the industry and an attraction, the Industrial Revolution, described as, 'a high-speed adventure through a turn-of-the-century mill culminating in a narrow escape from its fiery vat of molten steel'. Secondly, *We the People* (1870-1930), would have been framed by a building resembling Ellis Island and give recognition to the nation's immigrant heritage. This territory would have included a multimedia attraction which would explore how the conflicts among the various cultures continued to help shape the nation.

These proposed territories were planned to represent specific aspects of American history which the Disney company considered to be important moments which helped shape the nation. These territories would also cover aspects which had either been excluded or minimally covered by the company in the past, suggesting they were aiming to branch out and expand their idea of American history within their theme parks. The inclusion of darker aspects of history could have been a new, different path for Disney – but was nonetheless soon to be challenged.

History as entertainment?

There is a reoccurring debate surrounding the idea of whether history should be used for entertainment purposes. Questions are raised around whether certain aspects of history are suitable for being used for entertainment purposes or whether they should solely remain as information to be taught. Additionally, if history is used for entertainment, specifically within the Disney theme parks, should it be Disneyfied or ensured that it is fairly and accurately represented? This debate is relevant to this proposed history park but also continues to occur today with regards to other Disney products and using history in general for entertainment purposes.⁸⁷

The two main sides to this debate, specifically regarding the proposed Disney history theme park, are identified by Synnott, "Many scholars objected to the proposed Disney's America theme park for two reasons. First, they generally disliked the way in which Walt Disney has portrayed episodes from and cultural symbols of the American past. (...) Second, scholars and others opposed the theme park's construction because of its protentional negative impact on northern Virginia's numerous historic sites"⁸⁸ There was already existing opposition against the use of history in the previous attempts by Disney in their representations of various histories. This is likely due to the inaccurate depictions or the Disneyfication which typically takes place within Disney products and theme parks - whether that is omitting or editing history to ensure they comply with the Disney image. Additionally, the location of the new proposed park was a prominent reason for the opposition. The proposed location would place the park very close to historic sites which many did not want to be negatively impacted as a result of the theme park. Disneyfication and location were two key reasons behind both the opposition to using history for entertainment and the park.

⁸⁷ Sabrina Mittermeier, 'Disney's America, the Culture Wars, and the Question of Edutainment', *Polish Journal for American Studies*, 10, (2016), pp. 127-146

⁸⁸ Marcia G. Synnott, 'Disney's America: Whose Patrimony, Whose Profits, Whose Past?', *The Public Historian*, 17, (1995), 43-59, (p. 49)

These two sides can be applied both to understanding the opposition to the Disney history park and the general debate surrounding whether history should be used for entertainment.

The use of history within forms of public entertainment such as films or theme parks can have a constructive and positive impact. It can help the public learn and understand history through entertainment, in an engaging style of information. There are some positive perceptions of the proposed Disney history theme park, and its inclusion of American history.

The park may have had a positive impact with its historic inspiration, also informing those previously unaware of certain aspects of American history. Through attractions and park design, Disney would have provided an experience which could have created further interest and awareness of the nation's history. Verbraska suggests, "The popularisation of United States history by Disney will help combat the ignorance many Americans have about our past and spark an interest in the young to learn more."⁸⁹ The use of history in entertainment and Disney parks can be a useful way of inspiring and catching the interest of the public about history. As the Walt Disney Company has the power to influence, this park could have been a useful form of both entertainment and education, creating an enjoyable experience alongside increasing public knowledge of American history.

In addition, there is the notion that the inclusion of history within the park could have been considered to be similar to a museum, acting as an interactive museum. Similar to a museum, this theme park could have created a further interest in American history by using its form of entertainment which uses history in a style which combines entertainment and information, creating an engaging experience. The park also promised to bring new people into popular history. "Disney's America seeks something far more modest, with its own valid purpose: to involve visitors, including "historiophobes", in the energy of fun and struggle of a growing country as people experienced it. This no more challenges our great museums and

⁸⁹ David Verbraska, 'Disney Can Make American History Fun', *The New York Times*, (1994)
<<https://www.nytimes.com/1994/03/11/opinion/l-disney-can-make-american-history-fun-435031.html>>
[accessed 11 February 2022] (para 3 of 5)

memorials than “Gone With the Wind” diminishes the Civil War.”⁹⁰, claims Brown. This links the purpose of the theme park and museum, both aim to educate visitors. The history park could have had an appeal to everyone, all ages and all levels of interest in history.

The park clearly pushed an educational mandate. As the brochure stated, “Disney’s America is an extension of Walt Disney’s desire not only to entertain and inspire, but to educate”⁹¹

There was also an additional positive response to the park, especially among the Haymarket residents due to the promise that it would improve the economy and increase employment, effectively solving the issues at the time and suggesting a positive response to the park for the benefits it would arrive with, not the history inclusion itself.

In contrast to the perspective of the inclusion of history within entertainment as being positive, others believe history should simply be taught. Although entertainment especially the Disney theme parks, are popular, and influential forms, of entertainment, there is still opposition to these parks containing and using certain aspects of history or culture for their attractions. As Lukas recognises, “Even though themed spaces, particularly theme parks, remain incredibly popular forms of public entertainment, the public refuses to allow certain events or cultural ideas to be represented in some forms.”⁹² This provides acknowledgement of the fact that certain aspects of history and cultural ideas appear to be off limits for usage within public entertainment, such as Disney’s America. This became a common criticism among the opposition to this park.

Additionally, there appears to be a somewhat neutral side to the debate surrounding using history within entertainment. There is the perception that if history is used accurately, with correct information and portrayals, it is acceptable to be used within entertainment. This

⁹⁰ Joseph E. Brown, 'Disney's America: Beyond Mickey Mouse', *The New York Times*, (1994), <<https://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/03/arts/l-disney-s-america-beyond-mickey-mouse-550035.html>> [accessed 10 November 2021] (para 2)

⁹¹ 'Disney’s America', Brochure, (1994), (p. 6)

⁹² Scott Lukas, 'A Politics of Reverence and Irreverence: Social Discourse on Theming Controversies', in *The Themed Space, Locating Culture, Nature, and Self*, ed. by Scott A. Lukas, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 276

ensures that the history is used with accuracy and reduces any possibility of causing offence. A statement regarding the risk of park attractions potentially violating standards of political correctness was released by Peter Rummell, president of Disney Design and Development. He said, "An intelligent story properly told shouldn't offend anybody"⁹³ Rummell acknowledged that the company was not concerned about the park violating any standards or causing offence, implying that Disney planned to provide correct representations within their park by suggesting accurately told history which should not offend visitors. This initial statement and perspective were an early attempt to defend the park and the histories chosen to be included, particularly the darker aspects of history. Some of these ideas will be discussed later within this chapter, predominantly exploring the critical reactions to the park's existence.

I will now explore two specific visions of Disney's America, focusing on two specific territories: Native America and Civil War Fort, that provide a greater insight into the Disney history and representations of America.

Native America (1600-1810)

Previously, the Walt Disney Company had made several attempts to portray Native Americans, yet these have not always been the most accurate or even positive representations. They were often referred to as 'savages', or even to the extent of these characters simply grunting or making noise as their communication rather through actual words, indicating that they are less civilized than other characters or cultures⁹⁴ The native world which would have been represented within this territory would focus on various Native American tribes such as the Powhatans within an Indian village.

⁹³ Michelle Singletary and Spencer S. Hsu, 'Disney says VA. Park will be Serious Fun', *The Washington Post*, (1993) <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1993/11/12/disney-says-va-park-will-be-serious-fun/a1c0ef16-ae33-4d99-a489-3fbfeedd1c7b/>> [accessed 09 February 2022] (para 7)

⁹⁴ *Postmodernism and Race*, ed. by Eric Mark Kramer, (Westport: Praeger, 1997), p. 73

The company has made previous attempts to portray Native Americans notably within their films such as *Peter Pan* or *Pocahontas*. Within Disney's animated *Peter Pan*⁹⁵ (1953), Native Americans were included but only as additional side characters. In this film, the story follows Wendy and her brothers who are whisked away by Peter Pan, the character of their own stories, to the land of Neverland. Native Americans are still included in this fantastical story-like world but are not presented in the best way. These Native American characters are presented as a comical entity which simply make noises or grunts instead of clearly formulated words to communicate. Additionally, they are also referred to as 'Redskins', a racist term, with the Lost Boys going so far as to dress up and impersonate them. This is found within the included song, "*What Makes the Red Man Red*". Through this song and exaggerated stereotypes, the Native Americans tell their story through dance and song. However, the lyrics appear to attribute their red skin to their involvement and pursuit of women instead of telling a true story, once again adding to the incorrect representations of them. At the time of the film release, these representations of the Native Americans were less controversial than they have become in the present day. Today, viewers argue that these representations are stereotypical and outdated.

Furthermore, this film on Disney+ now has a content advisory warning which is shown prior to the film. It advises that the film includes incorrect stereotypical and harmful content. The Walt Disney Company has included this advisory warning on several films which include negative depictions or mistreatment of people or cultures.⁹⁶ By doing so, the company acknowledges that some of its films or shows do include representations and stereotypes which are wrong but state that rather than removing this content, they acknowledge the impact of it and hope that it can be learnt from and help to create a more inclusive future.

⁹⁵ *Peter Pan*, dir. by Clyde Geronimi and others, (RKO Radio Pictures, 1953)

⁹⁶ Full Content Advisory can be found on the company website, <<https://storiesmatter.thewaltdisneycompany.com/>> [accessed 04 July 2022]

One clear example of Disney attempting to represent Native Americans more positively is *Pocahontas* (1995), the 33rd animated feature-length film. This film broke new ground as it included the first animated Native American Disney Princess and protagonist. It is loosely based around the true story history of the colonisation and creation of the Jamestown Colony by the English Virginia Company in 1607. The film follows the story of Pocahontas, and her involvement with the English settlers, predominantly Captain John Smith, in their efforts to create the new colony and acknowledges the initial disputes and disagreements between the Powhatan tribe and the English settlers. However, the film does glaze over other historical aspects in that it does not include the battles or many deaths which occurred during the process of colonisation and responses of the Native American tribes.

Additionally, the film also adds an overemphasised romantic relationship between the two main characters, Pocahontas and John Smith, changing the narrative in order to better suit the Disney storyline. Initially, within the film Chief Powhatan wanted Pocahontas to marry tribe warrior Kocoum, yet this is not who Pocahontas desired. Instead, she falls in love with the man she shouldn't, an Englishman. The infatuation between the two eventually leads to Pocahontas saving John Smith from death and a resulting peace treaty between the tribe and colonists. However, in reality, Pocahontas never had a relationship with John Smith, instead she married English colonist John Rolfe in 1614. Following this marriage, there was peace between the Native Americans and the English until the death of Chief Powhatan. Callaghan considers, "The depiction of Smith and Pocahontas as young lovers trying to transcend the discord of their respective communities is an attempt to create a gentler, more intimate dimension to the grisly nature of genocide and warfare."⁹⁷ This is one example of the Disneyfication of history to produce a 'nicer' narrative, excluding nastier details to better fit the company's family friendly image. By Disneyfying history, editing the narrative and

⁹⁷Karen A. Callaghan, 'Symbolic Violence and Race' in *Postmodernism and Race*, ed. by Eric Mark Kramer, (Westport: Praeger, 1997), p. 74

adding a happy ending, this history-inspired narrative and characters fit the Disney style, and become an example of typical 'Disney History'.

Although an enjoyable Disney film, under a critical perspective the film contains several historical inaccuracies. Alongside the inaccuracy mentioned above the film contains several others. Pocahontas was a nickname with her real name being Matoka or Amonute. As she would have been very young at the time when she first met the colonists, it is likely her age was increased to ensure the storyline and character was more acceptable. She did save John Smith as stated in his accounts and helped improve relations between the tribe and colonists, yet after John Smith returned to England and died, she did not return to the colony for around four years, until she was taken prisoner at a later date. Alongside her marriage to John Rolfe, she was converted to Christianity and baptised Rebecca. On her return trip back to America from England, she developed a disease and died in 1617. If this film was entirely accurate, these aspects would have also been included in the narrative, and the inaccuracies instead demonstrate the Disneyfication of the film. This film could have included the less desirable aspects of this period such as the many deaths and attacks between the tribe and colonists. The true story was not an entirely straightforward encounter or as happy and romantic for Pocahontas. Although it is clear that the inspiration and narrative is based upon this history, it is clear that it has all been heavily Disneyfied.

Similar to *Peter Pan*, the Native Americans are referred to as 'savages' by the colonists with some level of violence, although this is represented through them protecting themselves, it appears that they are incredibly violent towards the colonists. Within *Pocahontas* they are directly referred to as 'savages' with an entire song sung by the English. The lyric, 'Savages, savages, barely even human', clearly reinforces the perception held by the colonists that Native Americans were uncivilised and not considered as human.

However, although the film includes stereotypical representations, it provides what was a new representation with the inclusion of Native Americans as the main characters. With the focus being primarily on Pocahontas and the tribe, not solely on the English colonists,

Disney broke new ground. “While Disney effectively appropriates and confounds Native American history and in turn transforms it into a commodity, Pocahontas also presents a forceful and impassioned depiction of imagined indigenes.”⁹⁸, claims Russell-Cook. This film demonstrates Disney attempting to both include and represent Native Americans and their history. These characters are presented as strong and powerful, regardless of the perception of them by the colonists, a development in their representations following *Peter Pan*.

So, the question is raised, why would this entire territory which would be dedicated to Native Americans be any different to the company’s inaccurate, and arguably racist, previous attempts at representation?

The Native World design:

Disney planned for a feature of Native America inside the park, it was proposed to include a Native American village and would explore their arts and understanding of the environment. As there is little detail within the plan, the vagueness appears to treat this territory simply as just Native America instead of a new territory with depth and detail. This native world would fit with prior Disney Native American depictions due the lack of information which suggests that this territory might be similar to previous representations instead of designing something detailed and new and far more authentic.

The proposed attraction for this territory was planned to be water rapid ride based on the Lewis and Clark expedition (1804-1806), a U.S military expedition led by Captain Merriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark to explore the Louisiana Purchase and the Pacific Northwest, and this a colonial, not native, view. With this attraction it is assumed that its main connection to the history of the expedition would simply be its name and fact it would take place in water. As a water rapid ride, it is unlikely that there would be historical

⁹⁸ Myles Russell-Cook, “‘Savages, Savages, Barely Even Human’: Native American Representations in Disney Films”, in *Debating Disney: Pedagogical Perspectives on Commercial Cinema*, ed. by Douglas Brode and Shea T. Brode, (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), p. 104

accuracy, instead being an attraction based on this history simply because it fitted with the time period, that those on the expedition had encountered a variation of Native American tribes and it was partly a sea expedition. Basing it on this important expedition would enable Disney to include a historical event which fitted with this specific territory. However, as this ride was never built, this accuracy or what it may have included is left purely up to speculation. This attraction would not have been from a native perspective, instead based on Lewis and Clark who were not Native American and only encountered various tribes within their expedition. Although this is a Native American territory, the only attraction within this area would be one which was not majorly based upon, or inclusive of Native Americans, questioning the authenticity and relevance of Native Americans within this territory.

The territory, Native America, was planned to have been based upon history which either directly included Native Americans or aspects which loosely involved or mentioned them. The accuracy of how they would have been represented remains unclear. Based on Disney's previous attempts through films where they are presented as savage and uncivilised, it is hoped that this territory would have been more progressive and accurate in its depictions, but little detail exists.

Civil War Fort (1850-1870)

Civil War Fort was proposed to be based on a major historic battle. The Civil War was an integral aspect of American history and the bloodiest battle of the nation's history. This territory would have demonstrated that Disney was attempting to represent some of the darker, more violent, aspects of American history which are not usually included within their films or theme parks.

This major war as a theme for a territory is questionable in several ways. This park would have been very close to a Civil War battlefield, would it have been right to make this major, bloody battle into something of fun and entertainment? The question of should this history

even be made into an attraction is also raised. As the Civil War is a darker aspect of history, history which is not typically used or considered to be suitable for entertainment purposes including attractions or theme parks, due to its violent and controversial nature.⁹⁹ it was uncertain as to whether this history would be Disneyfied or if the reality of it could be accurately depicted. This serious history is perhaps one which should be taught rather than being developed into attractions or family fun. However, as the park was never built, it is difficult to know what the company would have created to what extent if any Disneyfication or accuracy it would have entailed.

The Civil War (1861-1865) was a four-year war between the United States and the eleven Southern States which seceded from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America. The secession of these states and continuing armed hostilities were the result of a growing sectional friction over slavery. While agriculture with free labour was still a dominant factor in the North, industrialisation had also taken prominence and the North heavily invested in it whereas Southern economy remained principally based on agriculture and continued to invest in slavery. With the election of Abraham Lincoln as President (1860), candidate of the antislavery Republican party, seven southern states seceded, with another four joining them following the first encounter of the Civil War on Fort Sumter (1861). The Civil War included many battles, including the bloodiest battle at Gettysburg, (1863). This three-day battle marked a turning point with the North gaining an advantage over the South but resulting in around 7,000 deaths and 51,000 casualties. The war effectively ended with Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendering his troops in April 1865 to Union General Ulysses S. Grant.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ I am using 'Dark history' as a term to describe history which is not typically used or considered appropriate for entertainment purposes and this includes aspects of history which have previously been avoided by Disney. Disney commonly excludes history which is considered unsuitable for children, difficult for the nation, violent and typically not family friendly. This is different to 'Dark Tourism' which refers to travelling to places which are associated with death and suffering.

¹⁰⁰ Suggested further reading on the Civil War: James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988)

With the Civil War being such an intensely bloody battle and the involvement of slavery, it is unclear as to what extent of this information would be represented within this territory. The summary above is only one section of the time period proposed to be included, adding multiple more aspects surrounding the war to be included. This territory was proposed to allow guests to experience the daily life of a soldier and the attraction, Disney's CIRCLE-VISION 360, would transport guests into the centre of the combat. As impressive as the technology is, Civil War combat is a questionable history to transport guests into. This proposed attraction raises further questioning of to what extent would Disney go to represent this history. Would the battle and deaths be made realistic? Or would guests be transported into an edited, romanticised version of the Civil War? Although Disney proposed accurate depictions, this historical moment in history would not fit the typical Disney image and would be branching out into more serious depictions, ones which would cause discontent and opposition if done accurately in a child-focused theme park.

Reaction to Park:

There was an immediate reaction to the plans for the new historical theme park, and it was not an entirely positive one. Opposition occurred from the initial announcements for the park, with the reasoning partly being the idea that Disney was not able to accurately represent American history. A common reaction to the proposed history park was that a theme park is unable to correctly portray history, therefore implying that a Disney park inspired by American history would not be successful in its depictions. As Sterling identifies, "When Disney first announced its plans for Disney's America, opponents quickly objected, saying an amusement park could not accurately depict American history."¹⁰¹ There was an immediate reaction against the park due to its proposed themes. The belief that theme parks are not able to depict history implies that they are simply parks which provide a fun experience as

¹⁰¹ John Sterling, 'The World According to Disney', *Earth Island Journal*, 9, (1994) P. 32

opposed to a museum which is dedicated to the facts and accurate information. The reaction came immediately from the media with sceptical articles about the prospect of this park, several showing uncertainty and disapproval of the proposed history of the park. Many believe that theme parks are unable to represent history with the same accuracy as a museum, leading to the opposition against the usage of history in theme parks, especially if it undergoes Disneyfication.

A high amount of opposition was due to the proposed location of the park, Prince William County, Haymarket, Virginia. The park would have been built close to the Manassas National Battlefield Park, a site preserving the land of two Civil War battles, including the First battle of Manassas, also known as the First Battle of Bull Run, 21st July 186, the first major land battle of the Civil War.

In response to the announcement of 'Disney's America', *Protect Historical America* was formed. This group was led by university professor C. Vann Woodward and Duke University scholar John Hope Franklin, partly founded by the Piedmont Environmental Council which also consisted of historians including James McPherson, and head of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Richard Moe. Richard Moe proposed, "Even though this [Disney's America] wasn't on historic land, it would've had the effect indirectly of destroying historic areas, Civil War battlefields, districts, the whole landscape, because of the sprawl."¹⁰² Moe argues that the park would have a negative impact regardless through the impacts of the urban sprawl, additionally removing the peace from the area through the increased amount of traffic and the effects of the unavoidable urbanisation based on the areas surrounding the other Disney theme parks. Rep. Michael A. Andrews charged that, "Disney's America would "create a whole new city" that would destroy the character of two national parks and numerous Civil War monuments in the area."¹⁰³ Similarly, Moe stated, "The Disney

¹⁰²Joan M. Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 175

¹⁰³ Stephen C. Fehr and Michael D. Shear, 'For Disney, Fight Takes New Twist', *The Washington Post*, (1994), <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/06/17/for-disney-fight-takes-new-twist/ec137169-064c-495a-abf5-96dd7907a5c0/>> [accessed 14 March 2022], (para 6 of 30)

development near Haymarket, if it goes forward as currently proposed will spark change that could obliterate much of this history forever.”¹⁰⁴ Both Andrews and Moe acknowledge the huge impact which this park would have on the surrounding area and history, claiming it would ‘create a whole new city’ and ‘obliterate’ history. Both imply that this park would completely change this area and alter the history, but not for the better.

Andrews continued by stating that he was “not opposed to Disney or the park, as long as the project is built in other location”¹⁰⁵, indicating that some opposition was primarily due to the location rather than the park itself. A heavy importance was placed on this area, and a desire to protect the location and history at all costs, resulting in several groups forming and protests were held in order to prevent the park from continuing in this location. Thousands went to Washington D.C. to protest the park on 17th September 1994, clearly demonstrating the high levels of opposition and negative feelings towards the park.

The proposed location of the park so close to an important historical battlefield was a fundamental reason behind the criticism, becoming a widespread issue and further cause for opposition. In a *New York Times* article, Wines writes, “Tourists not fulfilled by the Manassas National Battlefield Park, the solemn site of two of the Civil War’s most poignant battles, could drive five miles up the road to Disney’s America for what its designers call the Civil War “experience.””¹⁰⁶ Here, Wines shows both sarcasm and uncertainty of the media surrounding the issue of the proposed location of the park. Suggesting the close proximity of the park and battlefield as simply being up the road, meant guests did not have far to go for a Disney experience of the history. This also questioned the authenticity of the experience

¹⁰⁴ *Potential Impact of Disney's America Project on Manassas National Battlefield Park: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks, and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate, One Hundred Third Congress, Second Session, 4*, (Washington: U.S Government Printing Office, 1994), p. 84

¹⁰⁵ Stephen C. Fehr and Michael D. Shear, ‘For Disney, Fight Takes New Twist’, (para 7 of 30)

¹⁰⁶ Michael Wines, 'A Disneyland of History Next to the Real Thing', *The New York Times*, (1993), <<https://www.nytimes.com/1993/11/12/us/a-disneyland-of-history-next-to-the-real-thing.html>> [accessed 10 November 2021] (para 8)

which would have been provided by the park, implying it would not be accurate, especially when compared to the real experience provided on the actual battlefield just down the road.

People also feared that by building a theme park based on history so close to the actual battlefield would reduce the authenticity of the battlefield site itself. Lowenthal states, "In America, battlefields of the Civil War embody themed experience par excellence. But to manufacture such sites is felt to debase the "true" history these scenes memorialise."¹⁰⁷ This implies the battlefield itself is already a true Civil War experience which does not need to be replicated, meaning that the theme park would not be required to exist or create a Civil War experience. The experiences within the park could be considered to have been manufactured, removing any attempt by Disney to represent accuracy. When compared against the existing significant historical areas and battlefields, the park and its experiences simply appeared contrived and inauthentic as they would not be real.

The area contained two national parks and numerous Civil War monuments, making it a valuable historic site, a prominent cause for the opposition regarding the proposed location. "Their central grapple with Disney's America was officially still its location, not only because it would be near the Manassas battlefield, but in the vicinity of over 18 Civil War battlefields and a total of 64 historic sites- an area that is still referred to as the Cradle of American Democracy."¹⁰⁸, notes Mittermeier. The fact that the proposed location for the park was so close to these significant areas and monuments was the main cause of issue for some opposition as these were integral parts of American history which many believed should be left untouched and unhindered by any possible theme park.

Environmentalists meanwhile voiced concerns over the likelihood of increasing traffic and depletion of natural resources among others. Although the Disney Company proposed solutions to these potential concerns by offering to use environmentally sound technologies

¹⁰⁷ David Lowenthal, 'The Past as a Theme Park', in *Theme Park Landscapes: Antecedents and Variations*, ed. by Terence Young and Robert Riley, (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), p. 14

¹⁰⁸ Sabrina Mittermeier, "'Windows to the Past: Disney's America, the Culture Wars, and the Question of Edutainment', *Polish Journal for American Studies*, 10, (2016), 127-146 (p. 132)

and bussing employees and visitors, the criticism and opposition was not successfully reduced.

A further issue surrounding the opposition against the park was the belief that Disney could not accurately depict history. There was a clear view by some that the company is viewed as one which does not accurately portray history, as Sperb states, “The unbuilt Civil War theme park points cleverly to the company’s willingness to both distort and commodify American history. It also forcefully invokes issues of racial ignorance of Disney has been often accused.”¹⁰⁹ Many people were likely to have distrusted this planned theme park from the beginning since its announcement, under the assumption that the company would simply create another Disneyfied version of history, except this time, an entire theme park dedicated to their ‘Disney History’.

Controversy to this park was increased with statements by Disney officials at initial press conferences regarding what experiences they hoped to create for the visitors. Disney Senior Vice President, Robert Weis, in describing the different proposed territories, stated, “We want to make you a Civil War soldier. (...) We want to make you feel what it was like to be a slave or what it was like to escape through the underground railroad”¹¹⁰ This statement caused debate due to its controversial nature, especially surrounding the notion of making visitors experience slavery. This raised the questions of why would people want to experience anything close to slavery, and whether it is possible, or even right to turn certain aspects of history into attractions. Is it right to turn the histories of the bloodiest battle of the nation’s history, or the horrendous history of slavery, into attractions and entertainment? Some parts of history should remain as taught, not entertainment. The previous attempts by Disney which include, and represent, slavery did not receive a positive response. One clear example of this is the notorious film, *Song of the South* (1946), based on the Uncle Remus

¹⁰⁹Jason Sperb, *Disney’s Most Notorious Film: Race, Convergence, and the Hidden Histories of Song of the South*, (Austin: University of Texas press, 2012), p. 215

¹¹⁰ Michelle Singletary and Spencer S. Hsu, 'Disney says VA. Park will be Serious Fun', (para 6 of 31)

stories by Joel Chandler Harris. It received such high levels of criticism that it is no longer available for public viewing, purchase or even on the Disney streaming services.

Historian William Styron doubted that not even Disney's magic could do anything but, "mock a theme as momentous as slavery" and that "[no] combination of branding irons, slave ships or slave cabins, shackles, chained black people in their wretched coffles, or treks through the Underground Railroad could begin to define such a stupendous experience... to present even the most squalid sights would be to cheaply romanticise suffering"¹¹¹ This is one clear perspective against the usage of slavery as a means for entertainment, as an attraction, or even to be included within the park. They identify that to use this part of history would be to mock it as there is no way it could accurately be presented, and that no combination of examples could fairly demonstrate the experiences of this horrifying history.

The issue of Disney being unable to correctly and accurately depict the experiences of those involved is further reinforced by Confino who states, "Attempting to re-enact the experiences of a Civil War soldier cannot explain the multitude of historical motivations and circumstances that acted simultaneously. And it cannot explain relations of cause and effect and abstract historical factors such as economic trends—because these are not immediately translatable into personal experience."¹¹² There are certain aspects of history and their relevant experiences which are not able to be re-created, the experience of those involved, for example within the Civil War, are untranslatable experiences to the public. Although Disney may have attempted to create an environment similar, it would be almost impossible to accurately recreate those personal experiences. Confino also discusses the fact that recreating these scenarios and historical aspects are unable to clearly explain and represent

¹¹¹ Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), p. 165

¹¹² Alon Confino, 'On Disney's America: Consumer Culture and Perceptions of the Past', *Perspectives*, (1995), <<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-1995/on-disneys-america-consumer-culture-and-perceptions-of-the-past>> [accessed 14 March 2022] (para 3)

the historical factors behind them, the motivations and circumstances are too varying and personal to be depicted, reducing the accuracy of the recreation.

However, there is the possibility that Weis's statement was incorrectly received, and was poor choice of phrase, instead meaning to refer to re-creating environments through technology. Zenzen discusses that this is not entirely what Weis meant in his statement, "Weis meant to refer to Disney's use of the new technology of virtual reality, in which visitors could physically enter an environment and explore it. (...) Weis did not intend to suggest for Disney's America the sociological impacts associated with slavery, but many listeners immediately made the connection."¹¹³ Here, Zenzen recognises that Weis did not intend to suggest that the park would attempt to re-create emotions or some of the horrifying aspects instead, he appeared to refer to the technology which could show the relevant environments. In order to grasp the significance of an event, and to understand how it happened, one needs to experience it.

Although acknowledged within the brochure and at press conferences how the company and park would deal with possible issues regarding 'environmental sensitivity' and 'transportation', even emphasising the 'economic benefits' of the park, public support still weakened. Even with the vast amount of power which the company has, it was not able to overcome the opposition to this park. On the 28th September 1994, the Walt Disney Company publicly stated that it would not be continuing the park.

Summary:

The planned *Disney's America* theme park is a clear example of an attempt, albeit a failed one, by the Walt Disney Company at representing American history. The history theme park was proposed to be one of accuracy, which celebrates the nation and its history, a park

¹¹³ Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*, p. 171

which would not be like any of the existing theme parks. With the entire park dedicated to various aspects of American history, it was proposed to contain accurate depictions, including serious aspects of history which have previously been omitted from other Disney products and parks.

The two case studies of the proposed territories, *Native America* and *Civil War Fort*, provide an insight into what this park planned to include and how history might have been portrayed. Through the brochure's descriptions, the proposed attractions and territory designs it is implied that Disney might have represented these two historical aspects with some degree of accuracy but still with a level of Disneyfication. When compared to the previous depictions of Native Americans and the Civil War, it is likely that there would have been an extent of Disneyfication in order to keep in the traditional Disney theme park style and to ensure the park still suited the family theme park image.

The opposition which took place demonstrated the public's perceptions of the Disney company and its inclusion and portrayal of history within its entertainment. The criticism against the park was predominantly against the location of the park and a few of the proposed aspects due to the uncertainty of the ability of the company to accurately depict certain historical aspects. Ultimately, this park failed as a result of continuous opposition, hurting the Disney image. This failure and critical perspective suggested that people were not keen on the company branching out into more serious aspects of history, instead it was preferred for them to stick with what they know and could already successfully produce. There was also an underlying fear that people would confuse the true history with Disney history, reducing the understanding of what is truly the real America. As Gillespie acknowledges, "But undergirding the anti-development argument is the more elitist fear that people will mistake Disney's America for historical America."¹¹⁴ One of the main concerns

¹¹⁴ Nick Gillespie, 'Disney in Virginia: See How They Cry', *The Washington Post*, (1994), <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1994/07/18/disney-in-virginia-see-how-they-cry/bd681594-fdcb-491b-83dc-5e89df00af25/>> [accessed 05 September 2022] (para 13)

behind the opposition was the fear that the history of the nation would become too Disneyfied with the proposed theme park and people would forget what the true history, and true America, was. This represents the influence of Disney, the impact of the Disney history which it creates and the power it has to inform and (mis)educate people, could a history theme park blur to a sense of reality and Disneyfied experience, effectively creating a Disney history, a Disney's America of the past.

Unfortunately, it is unknown what this planned theme park might have developed to be, to what extent, if any, level of Disneyfication would have occurred, and ideas about this park are left predominantly up to interpretation as it was never completed.

Past: Conclusion

It is evident that the Walt Disney Company provides very much a Disneyfied version of the past. Disney history is a cleaner, almost edited version, as it tends to omit the less appealing aspects of history, skimming over certain aspects or simply not including them and as a result has essentially created an idealised version of the past. The theme parks do not typically tend to include the arguably more serious aspects of American history in order to ensure that happiness is continued throughout the park. Instead, the Disney version of America in the past is one designed to be more family friendly and Disneyfied to ensure a happy experience for guests and to better fit the Disney theme park, and company, image. The company naturally has control over what aspects of American history are included within the theme parks. The history of the parks is what the company chooses to be suitable, what will work best for the park and ensure the right representations and experiences are provided. Through this process, the company effectively creates their own 'Disney's America'. Through the various attractions and architectural details of the park, several time periods and historical aspects are represented and create an immersive experience for park guests, enabling them to first-hand experience Disney history.

The Magic Kingdom presents an idealised version of the past through its various lands. These lands, Main Street USA, Frontierland and Liberty Square have been designed to fit the aesthetic of the theme park and ensuring that they create 'happy times' for the guests throughout their entire experience in the park. The Disney history which is represented within this park is heavily themed around nostalgia. It produces the feeling of nostalgia to create a comforting environment and a space where guests can reminisce about their own memories while enjoying being transported back in time to a place of simplicity, ease and happiness.

With Main Street USA as the entrance to the park, guests are transitioned between the stresses of their daily life to the excitement which lies ahead inside the park, the 'happiest place on earth'. Although Main Street does not represent a huge amount of history, it instead

places guests in small-town America of the past. As this is a generic small-town, instead of being identical to the town where Walt Disney's inspiration derived, Marceline, this town becomes relatable and more applicable to guests.

Frontierland presents a sense of frontier nostalgia through an idealised version of the old wild west by taking inspiration from folklore and mythology.¹¹⁵ The frontier is represented as a place of excitement, cowboys and adventure, omitting the less appealing aspects of the original frontier. This Frontierland appears to be romanticised and more myth than fact. In this park, the west has been reduced to simply a few attractions and superficial things whereas in reality there is so much more to the history of the American frontier.

The importance of patriotism as a theme of Disney history is found within Liberty Square. This particular land does contain history, specifically through its attraction, *Hall of Presidents* and its historic replicas such as the Liberty Tree and Liberty Bell, representing presidential and liberation history. This land presents America during the colonial period and although there are strong historic connections, Disneyfication has still occurred. As Walt Disney was a patriotic man it is unsurprising that this became a key theme of the Disney theme parks.

Within each of these lands, park goers successfully enjoy an immersive experience of the Disney history through the various attractions and designs as Disney presents its positive vision of America in the past.

Disney's failed American history theme park could have presented a wider variation of American history, adding to and developing the existing Disney history, including the proposition of focusing on some of the darker areas of the nation's history which had not previously been covered in depth. This park would have been a step on from the various Magic Kingdom lands by having the entire park dedicated to representing American history

¹¹⁵ An interesting article which discusses the concept of nostalgia for the western frontier alongside how this restored faith in the future through Tomorrowland, another one of the theme park lands: Catherine L. Newell, 'The Strange Case of Dr. von Braun and Mr. Disney: Frontierland, Tomorrowland, and America's Final Frontier', *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 25, (2013), pp. 416-429

as opposed to a few lands representing just one or two aspects of history. Proposed to contain accurate depictions of history, this park could have been an attempt for the company to move away from the typical predominantly happy themes of the previous theme parks. This park also would have been a move forward for the company as it proposed to include darker aspects of history previously not focused on by Disney, suggesting a move into more serious and darker American history. This park could have been a step forwards and move away from the typical Disney. The consistent amount of opposition which faced the park demonstrated that the public was not on board with the park or Disney's proposal to include serious aspects of American history. As the park was controversial from the beginning and the plans abandoned, it is unclear of what this park would have definitely included or if the levels of historic accuracy would be as high as the company proposed.

Although a large amount of the inspiration for both the lands within the Magic Kingdom and the failed history park has been taken from American history, the resulting history which is being represented within the theme parks is typically Disneyfied and has become Disney History. Through the theme parks, guests enjoy immersive experiences as they step into the Disney past with attractions and design details softening and editing history to become what is now known as Disney history. These experiences are successful in creating a clear vision of the Disney's America of the past which is presented as one with a persistent sense of nostalgia alongside themes of adventure, patriotism and excitement. These experiences and history have also been designed to ensure happiness throughout the entire park, ensuring that both the Disney history and Disney's America of the past is also filled with happiness, continuing the traditional Disney image.

FUTURE

“There is a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow, and tomorrow is just a dream away”¹¹⁶

Introduction

Walt Disney always had a constant eye for the future, new possibilities and improvements. As an optimist for the future, he was always looking forward, thinking of potential new ideas or how the world might advance. His constant unfailing optimism for the future and belief that there would be a better future ahead was the driving force behind his enthusiasm and dedication towards his future projects – his drive towards progress was evident. As Walt Disney once said, “Many of the things which seem impossible now, will become realities tomorrow. A beautiful tomorrow just a dream away. That says we’re going places- there’s progress ahead!”¹¹⁷ Walt Disney was right, there was progress ahead, especially in terms of creating his own version of a Disney future.

The Walt Disney Company represents the future through its theme parks through both *Tomorrowland* at the Magic Kingdom and EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow) at Walt Disney World, Orlando. Both are Disney’s ideas and visions for the future, but both are company creations due to the park attractions being built after Walt Disney died.

Tomorrowland first opened in Disneyland, Anaheim, on the 17th July, 1955, introducing the land of tomorrow first. Following the design and opening of the Magic Kingdom theme park, Tomorrowland was also recreated in Florida as one of the park lands, and this is the version I will explore. Tomorrowland provides a future which is predominantly based on space exploration and science-fiction themes. Originally, at the time of the land’s opening, it was

¹¹⁶ Richard and Robert Sherman, *There’s A Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow*, (1964), <https://youtu.be/bQI98IHNE74> [accessed 14 September 2022]

¹¹⁷ Walt Disney, < <https://www.disneyparkscripts.com/carousel-of-progress-magic-kingdom-1994-version/>> [accessed 15 September 2022] (para 6)

supposed to provide an insight into what the future may have held at the time of this land being designed. It was initially planned to represent new technologies and other advancements which would improve lifestyles and the new possibilities of space travel. After consideration and initial difficulties, the plan for the land changed. Although space exploration remained a prominent theme of Florida's Tomorrowland, after redesigns, it became more inspired by science-fiction due to the inclusion of attractions and themes surrounding aliens and monsters. Within the Magic Kingdom, this land contains several popular attractions which enhance the futuristic space theme including one of the most popular rides, *Space Mountain* (opened 15th January 1975 in Walt Disney World). Other more recent attractions such as *Buzz Lightyear's Space Rader Spin* (opened 1998) and the *Monsters Inc Laugh Floor* (opened 2007), reinforce the science-fiction side of the presented future in this land. These attractions can be considered to be Disneyfied attractions and all contribute to the idea of a 'Disney future'.

In the present day, Tomorrowland's future might appear outdated. This is likely because the future is something ever changing, meaning the continual update of this land would be difficult, especially in order to keep up with the advancing, ever changing prospect of tomorrow. The concepts of future nostalgia and retro-futurism are useful in understanding the Disney future which is presented through the theme parks. These ideas suggest that there is a feeling of nostalgia for the future of the past. For some, there is a sense of nostalgia for the original ideas and hopes for the future which did not happen. These concepts are also useful in understanding how guests might experience this land and their feelings towards the outdated Disney future which is being presented to them in Tomorrowland. Although Tomorrowland may be viewed as outdated, it can also be viewed as simply, a fun, futuristic themed land. At the time of its original design, Tomorrowland was proposed to represent the year 1986 but once this year became reality instead of a future, Tomorrowland underwent a redesign to represent a 'future that never was'. Tomorrowland

also represents America as time framed as it was initially planned to represent a specific year, whereas now Tomorrowland is stuck in a specific timeframe of the future.

The Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, or Epcot, is a second clear example of Disney representing the future. Although this theme park does acknowledge new technology, and demonstrates advancements, it still has a very Disney touch.

Walt Disney's original vision for his Epcot was a new, futuristic community. This was one of his last visions for the parks, community and future, a vision he continued up until his death in December 1966. Roy Disney once said Walt Disney was continuously thinking about the parks and this new community until the end, using the tiles on the hospital ceiling to map out his plans. Walt Disney's vision for this community developed at the same time as the Florida Project was being developed, this community became part of his plan for this project, alongside the parks such as the Magic Kingdom. This community would be focused on the happiness of the residents within and on new advancements and possibilities. Walt Disney wanted this to be both a place of advancement and achievement, and a place for residents to happily live. This would be a controlled community and one which would solve the 'problems of the cities'. This was proposed to be a community of tomorrow.¹¹⁸

The Epcot which was created is a theme park dedicated to human achievement and advancement. This park focuses on developments on the land, sea and environment alongside space exploration and technological advancements. The prominent themes of this park include technological advancement, space exploration, acting as a permanent world's fair and protecting the environment. These themes are emphasised through various attractions such as *Spaceship Earth* (opened 1982), *Mission: Space* (opened 2003) and *Living with the Land* (opened 1993). While some attractions attempt to inform guests on these themes, others are simply there for the entertainment of guests, loosely based on a theme to fit the park. This park was ultimately created to both fit the theme of the Epcot

¹¹⁸ Suggested further reading: Sam Gennaway, *Walt Disney and the Promise of Progress City* and Steve Mannheim, *Walt Disney and the Quest for Community*

ideas but also that of the Disney brand. Even though this park was designed to be less fantasy based and with more serious informative themes, it is still somewhat Disneyfied, fitting the Disney name and being part of Walt Disney World.

Additionally, the Epcot theme park has a high similarity to a world's fair and acts as a Disney version of a permanent world's fair. At the time of the park's opening, the majority of the original pavilions and attractions were sponsored by corporations, immediately implying an importance between the connection of the company and attractions to the corporate world. As a result, this gave the various corporations an opportunity to promote their company and products while also giving sponsorship to these attractions and pavilions. However, in the present day, the majority of these sponsorships have dissolved and original pavilions and attractions have been left sponsorless, redesigned or completely changed. This change of sponsorship also shows a change of the Disney future -predominantly in terms of the fact that the company is now large enough to be able to continue the theme park. The connection between Disney and the World's Fair is an important one. It represents an important part of the company's history, its involvement within the world's fairs. The involvement of Disney at the world's fairs, especially the 1964-65 New York World's Fair, was integral. These consisted of several key moments in the development of the company, through advancements in their technology, one notable example being Disney's creation of audio-animatronics, the successful attractions and the new developments which took place as a result of these.

Furthermore, there is the assumption that there is one set Disney future, but this is not the case. There is not one unified Disney vision of the future or one set Disney future. Walt Disney's vision and the Epcot vision are two separate visions of the future, two different Disney futures. Walt Disney's vision was for a new futuristic community, one which would improve on existing cities and solve their problems at the same time as being a place for new advancements and research to take place. Walt Disney was always optimistic about the future and for new possibilities, something clearly found within his visions. The Epcot vision

is different, this is a vision more so of the company. This vision, similar to Walt's, still acknowledges the importance of new developments and the possibilities for advancements. This Epcot also has various other additional ideas about creating a better future, alongside the technological advancements, there is also focus on space exploration and the necessity of improving and protecting our environment. These are very Disney futures but at the same time, they are also very normal ideas about the future. They contain normal hopes for what's ahead and typical ideas of how it could be improved, for example, how to protect the environment or ideal technological advancements. These ideas appear quite normal, the difference being that they are presented in the Disney cartoon style.

Tomorrowland and Epcot provide immersive experiences of the future. The theme of progress and advancements emphasise Walt Disney's persistent optimism for the future and constant eye for new developments which remains a key message of the Epcot theme park today. Meanwhile, the inclusion of a fantasy-future also continues the fun and magic aspect of the Disney image and future. Tomorrowland and all visions of Epcot create an immersive experience of the Disney future. Through the various Disney futures, ideas, attractions and architectural designs, the visions of the future, and a Disney's America of the future is represented.

Tomorrowland

The original *Tomorrowland*, located within the Disneyland theme park in Anaheim, opened in 1955 and was recreated and included within the Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World, Orlando, Florida. Tomorrowland, is one of the six lands of the Magic Kingdom. This futuristic land is located to the right of *Main Street USA*, meaning the guest will end at the future if they begin their journey clockwise around the park.

This land was intended to show the future, to be a 'working city' and present Disney's visions of the future at the time of it being designed. This was a unique concept, tied to Walt Disney himself due to his optimism for the future and with him being the driving force behind this vision for a 'working city', an idea which would come up again during the plans and designs for his Epcot community of tomorrow. Walt Disney had a very advanced, futuristic idea for Tomorrowland, to be a place for advancements to take place while being a depiction of the future, a place which helped work towards and create a new future. However, this idea for a 'working community' would eventually change and become more of a typical theme park land inspired by the future.

When looking at the role cities played in his imaginary, Eric Avila provides a useful discussion surrounding Walt Disney's personal views and ideas for his theme parks. Avila provides indications of why certain elements of the original Disneyland, Anaheim theme park (with the original Tomorrowland) and the proposed community plans were designed in specific ways. Alongside Walt Disney's personal views which went on to influence the representations which were included within the Disney entertainment and theme parks, he knew what people wanted, especially at the time of designing the parks. As Avila notes, "In a world rife with uncertainty, suburban Americans sought predictability in the domestic economy, in world affairs, in the design of suburban communities, and, as Disney realised, in entertainment."¹¹⁹ Walt Disney was constantly both designing and creating new forms of

¹¹⁹ Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 125

entertainment which would fit the time period, desires, and imagination of the American public. Whilst creating his future of America, Walt Disney was heavily influenced by his own views, political and personal, when designing his Tomorrowland and the Epcot community projects. Walt Disney was always conscious of new future prospects and advancements of America when designing these projects to reflect the possibilities ahead.

The original concept of Tomorrowland, to show advancing technology and developments, was one which went through several redesigns, changing to become a land which would be predominantly based on space exploration. After a further redesign after the land proved to be difficult to continually update to represent a future ahead, the theme of science-fiction became one of the most prominent themes. Walt Disney had a constant belief and optimism for this wonderful tomorrow ahead, as Snow acknowledges, Tomorrowland was one of the less perfectly designed lands of this park. "Tomorrowland was always the least coherent of the lands, but the idea, if not the place, was perhaps closest to his heart. He had a life-long belief in a bountiful and magnanimous tomorrow."¹²⁰ Regardless of these changes and redesign, the concept of Tomorrowland was dreamt of by Walt Disney himself, a man who consistently believed that there was always a better future ahead, his optimism never failing for the future, always believing there were new possibilities and excitement in the future.¹²¹

Walt Disney said, "The only problem with anything of tomorrow is that at the pace we're going right now, tomorrow would catch up with us before we got it built."¹²² This resulted in the fact that Tomorrowland and the futuristic views it entailed would require frequent updating in order to always be representing the new possibilities of the future. Although this land can be considered to be an outdated land, tied to 1950s ideology, it is still a futuristically themed and enjoyable land within the park.

¹²⁰ Snow, *Disney's Land*, p. 369

¹²¹ David R. Smith, 'They're following our script: Walt Disney's trip to Tomorrowland', *Future*, May, (1978), pp. 54-63
<<https://archive.org/details/TheyreFollowingOurScriptWaltDisneysTripToTomorrowlandfutureLife/page/n3/mode/2up>> [accessed 18 January 2023]

¹²² Steve Mannheim, *Walt Disney and the Quest for Community*, (Hants: Ashgate, 2002), p. 52

By focusing on Walt Disney's original ideas and inspiration for Tomorrowland, his creation of the *Man in Space*¹²³ television series, attractions, themes and the experiences of the land, the beginning of the Disneyfication is found. Tomorrowland both creates an experience of, and represents one type of the Disney future. Through the various attractions and architectural design of this land, guests are provided with an experience of the future, although this Disney future appearing more so as a fantasy-future as opposed to an accurate depiction. This family-friendly fun future fits the company image, keeping the typical Disney themes of excitement and happiness. The popular land of Tomorrowland is significant as it was a land designed by Walt Disney and is another clear representation of a 'Disney's America of the future'. Tomorrowland provides an immersive experience into the fantasy side of the Disney future of America.

Inspiration for the park

To Walt Disney, Tomorrowland was an opportunity to dream about the future and its possibilities while also showing what he considered to be exciting new technologies. His interest in science and technology was part of the inspiration behind Tomorrowland. As Williams suggested, "Tomorrowland is Walt's way of transmitting his optimism to future generations."¹²⁴ This provides an insight into another reason behind the creation of Tomorrowland, it was another physical and permanent way for Walt Disney to both show and share his optimism for the future with others, creating a lasting optimism which could be experienced by many generations. "He [Walt] also recognised the urgent need for crowd-pleasing "future technology" to anchor Tomorrowland"¹²⁵, claims Angelo. Angelo suggests that technology was already an important part, or vision, of the future and that it was something which would please guests and crowds. As this was already an idea for the

¹²³ *Man In Space*, dir. by Ward Kimball, (Walt Disney Pictures, 1955)

¹²⁴ Pat Williams with Jim Dennerly, *How to Be Like Walt*, (Deerfield Beach: Health Communications, Inc, 2004), p. 239

¹²⁵ Joseph A. Angelo, Jr, *Human Spaceflight*, (New York: Facts on File, 2007), p. 14

future, it was an idea followed upon by Walt Disney who consistently referred to advancing technology as being a key factor in the future ahead, always implying that it would have a positive impact on humanity.

The original plan and themes for Tomorrowland are further identified by Hobbs, “Tomorrowland was originally intended as a platform to experiment with and showcase new technologies for the future, including innovations in public transportation, household conveniences, and travels to outer space.”¹²⁶ However, due to the Cold War, innovations of technology went into overdrive and the attempt to ensure that Tomorrowland was always going to be far enough advanced ahead of the future proved to be an incredibly difficult endeavour, resulting in the premise for this land having to be reconsidered.

Early in the process of planning the theme park, Walt Disney realised the power of television for promoting the new theme park. On the 9th March 1955, after the usual image of the castle faded on the *Disneyland* television show, Walt Disney himself holding a model rocket appeared on viewers screens to personally introduce Tomorrowland and the possibilities ahead. He began with an introduction which described the importance and influence of science on daily life, mentioning how the impossible today could become realities tomorrow. Walt Disney also described the concept of space travel as one of the oldest dreams of humanity before concluding his piece with the fact that recent discoveries had brought us close to the beginning of the frontier of interplanetary travel. This was an important moment, for both Walt Disney himself and the entertainment industry. The episode inspired viewers while also increasing their excitement and beliefs in the new technology and new possibilities for space exploration, a new world of possibilities. The television show also progressed Disney’s involvement within television and helped to finance the park itself. “Walt Disney, supported by the world’s leading rocket scientists, spoke credibly to his audience

¹²⁶ Priscilla Hobbs, *Walt’s Utopia: Disneyland and American Mythmaking*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc, Publishers, 2015), p. 158

about the possibility of the impossible - travel through interplanetary space"¹²⁷, notes Angelo. Walt Disney was supported by leading rocket scientists, giving factual support and accuracy to his information and episode. This was a move away from the usual fantasy elements of Disney products. It provided viewers with more confidence and positivity surrounding this concept of space exploration, giving more information on an idea which previously may have appeared as daunting or thought to be impossible. As Walt Disney was an influential figure, this information coming from him personally gave an additional sense of comfort to the ideas of space exploration and advancing technology.

Walt Disney provided a description of the planned land, Tomorrowland, during an episode of the *Disneyland* television show; "A vista into a world of wonderous ideas signifying man's achievement, a step into the future with predictions of constructive things to come.

Tomorrow offers new frontiers in science, adventure and ideas. The atomic age, the challenge of outer space, and the hope for a peaceful and unified world"¹²⁸ Here, Walt Disney describes the land of Tomorrowland as one with a predominant human achievement and space theme. There is emphasis on space exploration and new discoveries with this land being a step into the future. This also shows his optimism of the future as he clearly states that tomorrow holds many new possibilities and ideas but also a hope for a peaceful and unified world. This additionally reflects the time period in which Walt Disney was caught up in as these proposed aspects of the future, were things people thought about or hoped for at the time of the episode, whereas in the present day, some of these aspects have become part of reality.

There were a number of reasons why Walt Disney did this. As with many of the Disney products, the purpose is to both educate and entertain, but in this case, also give hope. At the time, space exploration was a new prospect, one which was both perceived as exciting and daunting as it had never been done before. Disney had the influential power to promote

¹²⁷ *Human Spaceflight*, p. 15

¹²⁸ Snow, *Disney's Land*, p. 273

this prospect and provide hope for the future which although unknown, could be exciting. Tomorrowland would provide a positive perception of the future ahead.

The land of tomorrow is predominantly based on space exploration, new discoveries and achievements, and a better world. There is an underlying message of Tomorrowland which heavily indicates that science and American technology will affect humanity in a positive way. I now turn to Disney's *Man in Space* series, exploring the beginning of space exploration as a theme for Disney.

Disney/Man in Space

At the time of designing the park, scientists were discussing the possibility of space travel. A series of articles written by Wernher von Braun and other scientists for the *Collier's* magazine, discussed space travel and more possibilities for the venture into space. These articles and possibilities gave Walt Disney inspiration for Tomorrowland as he recognised the opportunity of using space travel as another prominent theme for this land.

Walt Disney commissioned a new series of episodes following his growing interest and inspiration from the *Collier's* space articles. This new theme and idea of space exploration led to a new television show, the *Man in Space* (1955) series, which introduced the public to space and the possibilities of space travel. This series was produced for the *Disneyland* television show and was a previous attempt of the Disney company representing the future, while also introducing the theme of space exploration which would be the predominant theme of the park's land. This was also a series which would nicely fit within the Tomorrowland theme.

Grampp provides a brief overview of the structure of these episodes, "There is always a small introduction with Walt Disney talking directly to the audience, after which the decade-long or even millennium-long history of respectively the space-, moon or mars projects is being retold through a cartoon. Afterwards, different aspects of space travel (such as e.g.,

rocket propulsion, construction of a space station, space medicine) are being discussed.”¹²⁹

This also hints at the fact that these episodes were still produced in the Disney style with their inclusion of cartoons alongside the attempt to ensure some degree of factual accuracy.

These episodes contain both an informative narration alongside the history of space or space projects being told through cartoon to the audience, effectively combining both fact and fiction, and entertainment with education, a common Disney trope.

Additionally, these episodes demonstrated progressive attitudes toward science and technology at Disney, and the company entering new grounds for its inspiration with science, space and technology. As Telotte states, “The typical themes of technoscience did not easily lend themselves to the sort of family-orientated narratives that were Disney’s strength, and Walt Disney insisted that Tomorrowland episodes be “science factual”... a term that pointedly ruled out traditional science fiction.”¹³⁰ This implies that science and technology were not usual Disney themes, that it was not one of the company’s strengths due to the uncommon focus on these. Nevertheless, Walt Disney himself insisted on the inclusion of these themes and that they should be factually correct as opposed to a being typical science fiction.

Once again, this relates back to the idea of Walt Disney being both an educator and entertainer, a common theme among a huge amount of the Disney products and theme parks. Walt Disney’s television shows, including the Tomorrowland episodes, did more than simply entertain. As Huebner suggests, “His Disneyland shows articulated and popularised some for the same anxieties about the future that concerned intellectuals of the 1950s- anxieties over environmental degradation, overpopulation, technology, atomic war, “mass society”, and the pathologies of an industrialised, urbanised system”¹³¹ Although these Tomorrowland episodes were dedicated to articulating his optimism towards technology and

¹²⁹ Sven Grampp, 'Picturing the Future in Outer Space at the Dawn of the Space Race. Disney's Tomorrowland (USA 1955-56) and Road to the Stars (USSR 1957)', *Repositoryum Medienkulturforchung*, 8 (2015), 1-29 (p. 18)

¹³⁰ J.P Telotte, 'Disney in Science Fiction Land', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 33 (2005), 12-21 (p. 12)

¹³¹ Andrew J. Huebner, 'The Conditional Optimist: Walt Disney's postwar futurism', *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture*, 2, (2009), 227-244 (p. 229)

the future, they did more than solely this. They also addressed common anxieties held by the audience, and presented his optimism in response. Within these, Walt Disney stated that there could be, and would be, a better future and that these anxieties of certain issues would not be the end result. These episodes were more than simply a basic show for entertainment, they offered more than merely general optimism or fantasy.

Furthermore, Angelo recognises the influence which Walt Disney could have on the public, “With the conclusion of this episode, Disney reached millions of Americans and helped them recognise that space travel was real and no longer restricted to “Fantasyland””¹³² Within this small series of episodes, Walt Disney was able to spread confidence and information on these new possibilities of space travel and exploration, presenting this idea which was previously one of the future, as something real and exciting. Walt Disney made the idea of space exploration one of reality, aiding the public’s understanding that this was no longer solely an idea of fantasy. This series of episodes suggested promise for the future.

Alongside producing enjoyable episodes, there were additional reasons for their production, one being to increase funds to build the first Disneyland park - while another was to help create a public opinion which was in favour of new projects in space. As these episodes were released around the time of the space race between the USA and the USSR, they helped to inform audiences of space and possible projects in an enjoyable, informative style to create a positive public opinion.

These episodes also matched the theme of the Tomorrowland which would be built within the future Disney parks, connecting the vision of the Disney future through both its television programme and the theme park.

¹³²Joseph A. Angelo, Jr, *Encyclopaedia of Space and Astronomy*, (New York: Facts on File, 2006), p. 189

Park Design

When the land first opened in 1955, Tomorrowland promised a bright, efficient and clean world of futuristic houses and flying cars. Rather than representing a likely future, although this may have been imagined at the time of its design, this version of Tomorrowland presented a future of dreams, one which many imagine, something almost like a movie setting future, similar to the rest of the theme park in its design as a movie set.

It was a new area for the company to explore, with themes of science, space and technology soon making appearances within the other theme parks and in later Disney representations of the future. There tends to be the recurring prominent theme of advancing science and technology benefitting humanity within most Disney futures, especially within the Disney theme parks such as Tomorrowland and EPCOT.

Additionally, alongside the serious themes of progressive technology and space exploration, there is the softer theme, one of a more fantasy future with aliens and robots. As described here, "The land is themed to represent an intergalactic spaceport, with robots, aliens and humans commingling in one peaceful society"¹³³ This advocates that this is how the land appears to guests, Tomorrowland with a predominant science-fiction theme as opposed to a land based on new advancements. This science-fiction approach arguably makes this land more children, and family friendly, fitting with the rest of the lands and purpose of the park- fun for the entire family. This Tomorrowland is a place for both humans and alien life, with this science-fiction theme allowing for more scope for what could be included within the land. It is a land based principally on the science-fiction theme, and less on the scientific facts. This also provides a sense of combining these themes to ensure that this is an enjoyable land.

Yee highlights the fact that Tomorrowland has a prominent science-fiction theme, "Tomorrowland is firmly of the science-fiction variety, with all things metal and machinery,

¹³³ *Walt Disney World Hidden History*, p. 25

most of it in motion. Even the pavement puts you in mind of the planets and what's out there just beyond our reach. Things buzz around and above you"¹³⁴ Even the smallest details within this land, including something as simple as the pavement, are valuable design details which help to place the guest into the theme. These details which create Tomorrowland and produce the futuristic feel of the area effectively locate the guest in the presented time period, in this land's case, an exciting future. Yee also refers to the fact that this land contains constant motion, surrounding the guest with the premise of constantly moving technology, the idea of a future which is not static but one which is constantly moving, and advancing.

Designing and planning Tomorrowland was challenging and time consuming. Tomorrowland was still incomplete when Disneyland opened in 1955. The plans for Tomorrowland were vague, the inspiration existed but creating a land which would be entirely based on, and represent the future was difficult. "Tomorrowland was more problematic than any other Disney domain, for unlike Main Street and Frontierland it had no models from the past to draw on; nor did it have the cartoons that supplied Fantasyland with its subjects."¹³⁵ As Snow indicates, unlike the other lands in the park which were inspired by previous events, history or specific time periods, or even fairy tales, Tomorrowland had little to be created from. Walt Disney was required to draw on completely new inspiration and ideas for this land, drawing on his own perceptions of what tomorrow and the future might look like, or what he hoped the future would become. This makes Tomorrowland quite unique to Walt Disney as the original design of the land represented his own futuristic perceptions, hopes and dreams.

Tomorrowland appears to have two main sides to it, one side is more serious and educational whereas the other is predominantly a fun, science-fiction side. These two sides indicate the different visions of the Disney future.

¹³⁴ *Hidden magic of Walt Disney World*, p. 43

¹³⁵ *Disney's Land*, p. 203

Attractions:

Tomorrowland in Florida, my case study, contains several popular attractions which help the land to present the predominant themes of space exploration and science-fiction.

Astro Orbiter is an original attraction, with two similar versions located within the Tomorrowland at several of the Disney theme parks. The original attraction first opened as *Astro Jets* in 1956 in Disneyland, Anaheim, before undergoing several renames and redesigns before eventually also becoming *Astro Orbiter* in 1998. This attraction also opened in 1994 at the Magic Kingdom. This is quite a simple ride which is also space themed. Guests 'pilot a spaceship high in the sky amid a gleaming constellation of planets'¹³⁶, controlling how high you go simply by moving a lever. This attraction does not accurately depict space travel but is an enjoyable attraction for the land with space inspiration so fits into the space theme of the Tomorrowland future.

The *Tomorrowland Transit Authority PeopleMover* opened in the Magic Kingdom in 1975 and provides guests with a tour of Tomorrowland on this mass transit system of the future. Guests ride an elevated tram and enjoy a narrated tour above Tomorrowland, even going behind the scenes of certain attractions, including Space Mountain and Buzz Lightyear's Space Rader Spin. There is also the chance to view the original architectural model of Progress City, the prototype of Walt Disney's original vision for EPCOT. Although this is not one of the major attractions, this technology and transportation system was designed by the Disney Company. Walt Disney envisioned this as the next possible major innovation in public transportation, and this alongside the monorail was the main transportation planned for his vision of his Epcot community. The original system was called the Disneyland Alewg Monorail System and opened in Disneyland, Anaheim on the 14th June 1959. At the time, it became the first daily operating monorail in the Western hemisphere. This system was granted National Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark rating by the American Society

¹³⁶ *Astro Orbiter*, Attraction <<https://www.disneyworld.co.uk/attractions/magic-kingdom/astro-orbiter/>> [accessed 31 July 2022]

of Mechanical Engineers in December 1986. Additionally, the PeopleMover was developed following Walt Disney's involvement in the 1964-65 World's Fair where WED Enterprises developed the booster brake system in order to push Ford cars around a winding track which also had elevation changes.¹³⁷ The function of the PeopleMover in Disneyland was to provide guests with a birds-eye view of the land so that after their journey above, they would know where and what they wanted to go and do next. Although this is less of an attraction and more so a type of transportation, it provides a calm journey around Tomorrowland, providing a break from the heat and excitement of the park down below, it also demonstrates a sense of the future of transportation. Walt Disney realised the potential of the monorail as a transportation system and would go on to influence his ideas of transportation for his new, proposed community of tomorrow.

The Carousel of Progress is also located within Tomorrowland at the Magic Kingdom theme park. Walt Disney's Carousel of Progress, a unique attraction originally sponsored by General Electric, was created for the 1964-65 New York World's Fair, is a fascinating insight into both the progress of technology, and America through the typical American family. The revolving theatre follows an American family across four time periods, demonstrating both the advances of technology and life- presenting America in the past, present and the future. Following its involvement in the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair, the Carousel of Progress was moved to Disneyland, Anaheim in 1967. It was then moved to the Magic Kingdom theme park and opened in Tomorrowland in 1975 where it still runs today. It is questionable whether this attraction was placed here due to their being space available or because the theme of progress relates to the proposed future. This attraction presents four different versions of the lives of an American family in the years 1890s, 1920s, 1940s and the 'present day'. At the time of its design, the final scene presenting the 'future' was based in the 1960s. This final scene has undergone changes and has been updated due to the original future becoming outdated. The future which is presented in the final scene of the

¹³⁷ Sam Gennaway, *Walt Disney and the Promise of Progress City*, (USA: Ayefour Publishing, 2011) pp. 112-116

attraction, when viewed in the present day, may be considered to be outdated, or simply showing the present day as opposed to the future. This attraction was one of Walt Disney's favourite attractions and one of his achievements as he designed and created it. For some guests this may not appear to be one of the most exciting attractions on offer in Tomorrowland, or the Magic Kingdom, but it is an enjoyable place to get out of the sun and enjoy one of Walt Disney's original and favourite creations.

One of the original attractions, which first opened in Tomorrowland at the Magic Kingdom, Orlando in Walt Disney World, is *Space Mountain* (opened 1975). This attraction was also recreated and located within the majority of the other Disney theme parks around the world, with the exception of Shanghai Disneyland (instead, this Tomorrowland contains the futuristic attraction TRON Lightcycle Power Run). The opening of Space Mountain at the Magic Kingdom theme park included a large ceremony and was the subject of the *Wonderful World of Disney* television show episode, "Welcome to the World"¹³⁸. Although this attraction may be viewed as quite simple when compared with the rollercoasters of today, it remains as one of the most popular attractions since it opened. Guests ride a 'rocket through space' - the interior of the mountain is pitch black aside from stars and 'space' sounds to add to the illusion of rocketing around through space. Space Mountain is also one of the largest 'mountains' in Florida at over 180 feet high and over 300 feet in diameter, giving it impressiveness in its size and as an unmissable dominant feature or 'landmark' of Tomorrowland.

Although this attraction is representing the future through the exhilaration of space travel, Space Mountain also includes some usually unnoticed, historic additions within its design. The lighted mural found within the queue for Space Mountain includes a reference to one of the earliest locations of the original Disney Studios. The mural includes the term "Hyperion" on its map stating 'Disney's Hyperion Resort' as a location. This detail refers to the original

¹³⁸ 'Welcome to the World', *The Wonderful World of Disney*, dir. by Marty Pasetta, (Walt Disney Productions, 1975)

studio which was located in Hollywood on 2719 Hyperion Avenue, a significant aspect of the company's history. Even though the future is being represented here, the history is not forgotten but memorialised and included through fitting, yet subtle details. This is a similar detail to the windows on Main Street USA which included the names of multiple significant figures and companies who were integral to the creation of the Magic Kingdom theme park. The history of the company remains important, even within the representations of the future as without it, this 'future' would not be here today.

Within the attraction, in the first room of the queue for Space Mountain, there is a list of 'Active Earth Stations'. This list refers to each of the other Space Mountain attractions which are located within the other Disney theme parks around the world. 'Tomorrowland Station MK-1' refers to the original, and first, Space Mountain in the Magic Kingdom and 'TL Space Station 77' honours the attraction at Disneyland, Anaheim. Meanwhile, the others around the globe are also included, with 'Discovery Landing Station- Paris', 'Ashita Base- Tokyo', and 'HK Spaceport E-TXT' (Hong Kong).¹³⁹ Similar to the subtle reference to the original studio, this list is a subtle acknowledgement to the other Space Mountains across the global Disney theme parks, beginning with the original attraction and the others which followed, adding a touch of Space Mountain and park history to this attraction.

During the planning and design stage of creating this attraction, former astronaut Gordon Cooper was hired as a consultant. Cooper was a member of the Mercury 9 and Gemini 5 missions and provided endorsement for this ride, "Space Mountain is about as close as you can safely get to actually being in space"¹⁴⁰, Cooper stated for an issue of People Magazine in 1977. This was strong endorsement from a real-life astronaut which both further popularised this attraction while also adding a sense of authentic connection between Space Mountain and space itself due to the involvement of Cooper as a consultant and his endorsement. This also shows that the company would go to great lengths to gain advice

¹³⁹ *Walt Disney World: Hidden History*, p. 37

¹⁴⁰ Aaron H. Goldberg, *The Wonders of Walt Disney World*, (Philadelphia: Quaker Scribe, 2017), p. 24

and knowledge on a subject, even for an attraction, to achieve better details and accuracy. Additionally, following the redesign of Disneyland in Anaheim, the Space Mountain attraction was officially opened by astronaut Neil Armstrong for the park's 50th anniversary. This was another inclusion of a real-life astronaut which both added to the celebration and reinforced the theme of space.

At the time of its creation, there was not anything like Space Mountain, making it something new and exciting, and as a result, an attraction which became and still remains iconic. At the time of its design, this attraction would have appeared even more futuristic in due to it being operated by a computer which was new territory at the time. This new technology and computer operated attraction would be the first of many future attractions which would become controlled by computers and technology.

Space Mountain is a key attraction for Tomorrowland. Alongside it being one of the original attractions, it is one which still remains as being one of the most popular attractions within the land and park and as an important iconic feature. Although this may not be the largest or fastest attraction, it still remains as exciting and exhilarating as it was when it first opened. This attraction uses space exploration as its theme, guests travel through the dark which represents space at a fast speed as if it were a rocket through space. This is a Disneyfied attraction to an extent as it is a Disney ride but it is not one which is attempting to be a perfect replication of a specific moment of space travel, allowing the Disneyfication to take place without much criticism. The Disneyfication of this attraction results in a ride which is a family-fun, exciting attraction, even in its simplicity. This attraction has been replicated across the other Disney theme parks, with some having an updated design and others being a clear replica of the original. Although some may view this ride as outdated, in its own way it is not. This attraction remains iconic and incredibly popular with park guests to the same extent it was at the park's opening day, showing that there is no real need to update it, its originality is what continues to thrill and excite guests about space.

The science fiction theme of Tomorrowland is reinforced by other attractions within this land. Following the redesign of the park, and in the recent years, new attractions have been added to Tomorrowland. Although they were not part of the original Tomorrowland on its opening day or early years, these have become popular attractions. These newer attractions mainly fit the science-fiction theme of the land. Certain attractions such as the *Buzz Lightyear Space Racer Spin*, the *Monsters Inc. Laugh Floor*, or the previous attraction, *Stitch's Great Escape* (opened 2004, closed 2018), have little to no connection to the science side of the future. However, their alien connection is a common trope of science fiction, giving it a futuristic feel, allowing them to be located within this land. These attractions better fit the science fiction theme more so than the predominant theme of space exploration. Robson suggests, "Their placement in Tomorrowland more closely reflects availability of space in that area of the park than any thematic consistency with the land's stated objective."¹⁴¹ -This implies that these two attractions are not located within Tomorrowland due to their connection to the theme but rather simply because there was space available to fill and attractions which needed to be homed in the park. Their connection to the science fiction part of the future does provide them with a small connection to this futuristic land, adding a fun future filled with aliens or monsters. Regardless of their connection to the Tomorrowland theme, these are still enjoyable attractions based on the popular movie franchises and characters of Toy Story and Monsters Inc.

This land has been designed in order to represent a place of the future, somewhere shiny and new with a futuristic feel. The predominant colour palette used for Tomorrowland consists of various shades of blue and metallic colours including silver which are designed to present a simple yet shiny future. This use of colour also helps this land to stand out and differentiate it from the other lands within the park. Other subtle design details include a robot statue which sells the Galaxy Gazette newspaper (previously sold the Tomorrowland

¹⁴¹ Tom Robson, 'The Future is Truly in the Past': The Regressive Nostalgia of Tomorrowland', in *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience: The Tourist as Actor*, p. 34

Times), shiny metals, and the futuristic street lamps around the land. The architectural design of this land helps guests to become immersed in this futuristic land of tomorrow.

Experiences of park

Tomorrowland appears outdated to the guest visiting the land in the present day. When viewed today it appears to contain outdated representations of the future or a more fantastical future of the imagination as opposed to a consistently accurate representation of the future ahead. Tomorrowland creates a sense of future nostalgia, nostalgia for the ideas of the future developed in the past which did not happen but are perhaps still hoped for today. As Koehler states, “Contemporary Tomorrowland fuses the 1950s utopian hopes for the future with the opulence of the 1980s, and produces a Tomorrowland that infuses tomorrow with Disney’s affectionate memory of the past.”¹⁴² This implies that Tomorrowland is a combination of both hopes for a better, brighter future and a sense of nostalgia for the future of the past, effectively creating a sense of future nostalgia. Although they appear to be part of a fantasy-future, these ideas are still a dream of the future, the dreams and ideas are not outdated, instead it is simply the promise of these aspects which appears outdated. Guffey suggests, “In the new Tomorrowland, the future had become retro.”¹⁴³ This is an interesting concept which suggests that Tomorrowland’s future is now a retro future, something not quite outdated but classic.

Supporting the notion of future nostalgia within this land is the idea of retrofuturism, a term referring to the past’s vision of the future. “According to Disney officials, Tomorrowland’s renovation in 1998 mined the past because ‘the dreams of the future are as appealing today as they were yesterday’”¹⁴⁴ Through a combination of representing the optimism for the future to nostalgia memorialisation of past future visions, this land creates an appealing

¹⁴² Dorene Koehler, *The Mouse and the Myth: Sacred Art and Secular Ritual of Disneyland*, (Herts: John Libbey Publishing, 2017), p. 147

¹⁴³ Elizabeth E. Guffey, *Retro: The Culture of Revival*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 23

¹⁴⁴ *Retro: The Culture of Revival*, p. 165

notion of tomorrow. Although the land may appear outdated in the present day, the notions of future nostalgia and retrofuturism explain why this land is still pleasing to guests through its futuristic representations.

After a redesign which was inspired by Disneyland Paris and its newly opened *Discoveryland* in 1994, the Walt Disney World Tomorrowland saw an update in themes and changes in attractions. Tomorrowland was redesigned almost as a 'future that never was'. It acknowledges that the future being represented within Tomorrowland is not an accurate one. Instead, it uses previous ideas of the future, ones which did not happen to inspire the land with it still remaining futuristic. Even in the newly designed Tomorrowland, it still considered to present an outdated future and receives criticism surrounding the fact that it does appear to be an outdated land, one which does not accurately represent the future, instead one which represents a future which appears to be more fantasy than a realistic future. The aspects which were originally proposed or promised did not take shape in the entirety that they were originally stated. The future of today is one which is notable different from which the land represents. "To many observers, however, Tomorrowland's most recent adaptations represent not normal evolution but failure and broken promises. These social critics see the revisions as proof that the future is scary, progress a fantasy, and technology suspect."¹⁴⁵ Here, Postrel implies that Tomorrowland is a land of broken promises, a future which did not happen but instead has undertaken an abnormal evolution and resulted in a future which might appear in a movie or the imagination. Tomorrowland does not represent an accurate depiction of the future, or arguably or what might happen tomorrow. Instead, Tomorrowland now represents a future which some argue belongs in Fantasyland with its inclusion of aliens and monsters, but this design fits nicely into the theme of science-fiction, connecting it to the future but removing any issue of requiring constant updating to ensure an accurate future is represented.

¹⁴⁵ Virginia Postrel, *The Future and Its Enemies: The Growing Conflict over Creativity, Enterprise and Progress*, (Touchstone: New York, 1999), p. xii

The criticism is somewhat questionable as it is evident that there has been a great deal of progress in life, since the original Tomorrowland opened and continuing today. Although progress is evident, albeit not to the extent to which science-fiction or the Disney future proclaims in this land, critics stand firm with the notion that Tomorrowland is incorrect, outdated and representing broken promises. As Postrel further suggests, "To them, a good future must be static: either the product of a detailed, technocratic blueprints or the return to an idealised, stable past"¹⁴⁶ The future is unknown and can be a scary concept. For critics, Tomorrowland does not represent a likely or clear representation of the future, causing unease and focus on the aspects which are not included and those 'broken promises' which are being represented here instead. The future is unclear, it is everchanging so it is not possible for the premise of the future to be static. The longing for a return to the past which is well-known instead of an unknown future is comforting to many, and Disney attempts to keep some of the original ideas for the future within its land and evokes the sense of future nostalgia in the guests. The redesign of this land, referred to by Postrel as the 'not normal evolution', was in part done to reduce the amount of criticism surrounding its outdated futures. The new design and themes create a new future, a less accurate but fun Disney future, one which is closer to being fantasy than reality.

The live action film, *Tomorrowland: A World Beyond* (2015) is a more recent attempt by the Walt Disney Company at representing the future. This film was produced after the theme parks and Tomorrowland were created and is an attempt at representing a futuristic world but linked to park ideas.

Within the film, when the main character Casey projects herself into the recruitment video for the utopia of Tomorrowland, Space Mountain sits in the background. Although uncommented on within the film, the inclusion of Space Mountain aligns this film directly with the Tomorrowland located within the Disney theme parks. Robson acknowledges a

¹⁴⁶ *The Future and Its Enemies: The Growing Conflict over Creativity, Enterprise and Progress*, p. xii

connection the film and actual land, “The presence of Space Mountain tells us that Tomorrowland the movie aligns neatly with Tomorrowland the theme park. They are one, sharing a common ideology of optimism and nostalgic “futurism.” The park now informs the movie, which in turn reinforces the park, adding layers of reinscription.”¹⁴⁷ Although the film is named after the iconic land of Tomorrowland in the Disney theme parks, the film itself has little to do with this land. There are small connections between the two, including the glimpse of the Space Mountain building. As Robson notes, the film and land both share the ideology of optimism and future nostalgia, creating further layers for both the film and the park by subtly connecting the two. Space Mountain is the most popular, and one of the original attractions, of Tomorrowland. The fact that it is included in the future world presented in the film, increases the importance and significance of it, it acts as a ‘landmark’ of the future. An additional detail which connects the land and film is that the pins within the film are the Tomorrowland logo [T]. Along with the name of the film being ‘Tomorrowland’, there are small but significant connections between the land and the film. As this is a film which is created for entertainment purposes, it is not presented an accurate representation or vision of the future. It is designed to be futuristic and contains the Disney magic, it relates to the land of Tomorrowland in that both the land and film present a fantasy-future as opposed to an accurate prediction.

Summary:

Tomorrowland is Disney’s America of the future based around space exploration with a prominent science-fiction theme. The land’s attractions are ones which were not designed to accurately represent the future, or space exploration. Instead, they are either based on movie franchises or loosely on various space elements. These attractions, including Space Mountain were created more for fun instead of aiding an accurate depiction of the future.

¹⁴⁷ Tom Robson, 'The Future is Truly in the Past': The Regressive Nostalgia of Tomorrowland', in *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience: The Tourist as Actor*, p. 36

Although Tomorrowland was originally planned to be a 'working city', it became a theme park land instead with both science-fiction and space exploration themes. Similar to the EPCOT theme park, there is an element of technology as being a key part of the future but this is not the prominent theme of this land. Technology was an aspect predominantly mentioned within Walt Disney's television episodes and did not become something hugely obvious as a main theme within Tomorrowland. Instead, Walt Disney's vision of technology being an integral part of the future would become more evident within Epcot.

Despite some believing this land to be outdated as it does not accurately present a realistic future, it is still one of fun and in the typical Disney style. This future appears more like a movie set and a fantasy future as opposed to a land attempting to show a possible future with its inclusion of science-fiction elements such as aliens and monsters. By doing so, the land appears less outdated due to it now not trying to keep up with the ever-changing future and attempting to accurately depict it. The ideas within this fantasy future are similar to those ideas about the possible future at the time of the original design, a time when space exploration was beginning to appear possible, which evokes a sense of future nostalgia. Just as Main Street USA creates a sense of nostalgia for the past, Tomorrowland evokes a sense of nostalgia for previous ideas about the future. Additionally, also similar to Main Street USA which provides a transition away from reality, Tomorrowland also provides an escape, in this case, to a future of ease, exploration and excitement. The land of Tomorrowland does present a Disney's America of the future. Through its design, themes and attractions, it creates its own fantasy future, creating one vision of the Disney future which is enjoyable for everyone and continuing in the Disney style.

EPCOT: The Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow

The Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, Epcot, formally called the EPCOT Centre (1982-1994), opened 1st October 1982 as the second theme park of Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida.¹⁴⁸ This park was the last project envisioned by Walt Disney himself but the theme park as it is today is quite different to what he had planned. This park is significant as it was the last project envisioned by Walt Disney himself, but also as it is a Disney theme park which is less focused on Mickey Mouse and fantasy elements, and more focused on the advancement of technology and creating a better future. It represents a different vision of the future compared to the Disneyfied version of the future presented in Tomorrowland. Whereas Tomorrowland appears to have a heavier science-fiction theme, this Epcot theme park is predominantly themed on progression, advancements of aspects such as technology or environment, and improvements. However, both Tomorrowland and Epcot have the similar main theme and message, that there will be a better, brighter future ahead.

There are two types of EPCOT: the original Epcot community envisioned by Walt Disney, and the current theme park. This also provides two different types of a 'Disney's America of the Future' represented within these Epcot's. There is Walt Disney's original vision, focused primarily on a better community of the future and technological advancements, and then there is the company's vision, a theme park based on human achievement and new possibilities through various themed areas with attractions and entertainment. Both Walt Disney's original plan for his Epcot community and the Epcot theme park are significant, especially for understanding the Disney future.

¹⁴⁸ EPCOT Centre Pre-Opening Brochure, (1981), Disney Collector Archives, <<https://themuseum.com/2017/08/09/epcot-center-pre-opening-brochure-1981/>> [accessed 18 January 2023]

EPCOT Opening-day Dial Guide, (1982), <<https://themuseum.com/2017/08/09/epcot-center-opening-day-dial-guide-1982/>> [accessed 18 January 2023]

Walt Disney's vision for Epcot was a plan for a new community, a community of tomorrow. He envisioned a community which would be designed for both ensuring the residents have everything they require in one place, and a good living environment, but it was also designed for research, to be a place for new advancements to take place. Mannheim notes the core philosophies of the community as the following, "to showcase the development, utilise and test new materials and ideas from American industry, find solutions to Urban problems, EPCOT would be in a state of becoming, focus on the needs of the residents, and generate demand for new technologies."¹⁴⁹ Walt Disney's Epcot community represented a futuristic vision and possibility for the future of communities, a new community for both residents and research. It presents a Walt Disney's 'Disney future', one of constant optimism. This plan for a new community was one of the last projects envisioned by Walt Disney before he died.

The Epcot theme park is especially significant as it is entire park dedicated to representing new developments and the future, as a result, both creating a vision of, and representing a Disney future. There are four main areas within the Epcot theme park: *World Celebration*, *World Nature*, *World Discovery* and *World Showcase*. Previously, the park was divided into two distinct areas, *Future World* and *World Showcase* but redesign of the park saw a change in names and attractions in 1994. The original Future World consisted of several pavilions which primarily focused on communication, energy, land/environment/sea, transportation, space exploration and imagination. These themes still remain in the park following its redesign, they are now simply spread across the various three new worlds. World Showcase still remains almost the exact same after the redesign. This showcase surrounds the large lake, World Showcase Lagoon, with eleven different countries showcasing their entertainment, dining and shopping. This park has predominant themes of human achievement and the advancement of technology, space exploration, protecting the environment and the similarity to being a permanent world's fair. With experiences rooted in authenticity and innovation, this park is a celebration of curiosity, discovery and possibility.

¹⁴⁹Mannheim, *Walt Disney and the Quest for Community*, p. xiv

As the official Epcot page on the Walt Disney World website states, this park is, “Where the Impossible Becomes Possible”¹⁵⁰ This implies that Disney can make anything possible and that this Epcot theme park is where anything is possible, similar to Walt Disney’s belief of both the Disney company and the future ahead.

Both designs for the original community and the theme park are significant in understanding the Disney view of the future. They provide insights into what both Walt Disney himself and the company considered to be important aspects of the future. Walt Disney’s original plan for his community of tomorrow represents a Disney future in terms of both residential and research progress. Alongside proposing it could improve existing cities, it presents a future where technology plays a key role, especially with advancements, and that technology can have a positive impact on the future ahead. The Epcot theme park represents a future of human advancements with some focus on technology. This Disney future is one which will constantly be advancing, preserving the planet and finding better ways to do things. Epcot is created with the Disney’s perspective of the future, although it attempts to present various ways to create a better, brighter future, there are still elements of Disneyfication.

Walt Disney’s Original EPCOT Vision

Walt Disney’s Vision

Originally Walt Disney envisioned for Epcot to be a new futuristic, contained community. This community would be residential, catering to all needs and the happiness of its residents while also being a space for research and new advancements to take place. “The promise of Progress City was that EPCOT would become a laboratory to test new technologies, processes, and policies to create a more liveable urban environment.”¹⁵¹ - explains Gennaway. As Gennaway summarises, Walt Disney’s original idea for Epcot was that it

¹⁵⁰ EPCOT, < <https://www.disneyworld.co.uk/destinations/epcot/> > [accessed 7 June 2022]

¹⁵¹ Gennaway, *Walt Disney and the Promise of Progress City*, p. 163

would be an experimental community, one which would test and develop new ideas, both in terms of research and living community.

Additionally, this community would also be an experiment in terms of improving the existing cities, to create an enhanced community. Walt Disney once said, "I don't believe there's a challenge anywhere in the world that's more important to people everywhere than finding solutions to the problems of our cities. But where do we begin?"¹⁵² Walt Disney's community would show how science and technology could improve on the existing cities through its continuous developments and benefits to its community and society. "Part of Walt Disney's original intent was to make EPCOT Centre a demonstration of the utopian efficiency of science and applied technology in solving the "problems of the cities".¹⁵³ - notes Fjellman. As Fjellman acknowledges, Walt Disney's vision was for the community being a place where science and technology is both developed and demonstrated, and a residential city, almost a type of utopia, which would be better than the existing cities by adapting the aspects which are wrong with them. This community would even be contained in a bubble in order to gain more control, even over the weather conditions.

At a press conference, 15th November 1965, Walt Disney released his plans for Epcot. "Besides a vacation destination containing a Disneyland-style theme park, resort hotels, and camp sites, the site was planned to contain an "airport of the future", and industrial park showcasing "American Industry at work", the Lake Buena Vista living community, and most importantly, EPCOT."¹⁵⁴ Walt Disney's plans were much greater than simply building another theme park, his vision even stretched further than this new project being more than simply another vacation destination. This Epcot was to be a vacation spot but also a place for people to live, alongside somewhere to be able to carry out research and showcase advancements. This planned, controlled community was to be much more than simply a

¹⁵² Richard E. Foglesong, *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*, (New Haven: Yale University, 2001), p. 67

¹⁵³ Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*, p. 349

¹⁵⁴ Sabrina Mittermeier, *A Cultural History of the Disneyland Theme Parks*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), p. 60

holiday spot or basic community. The following year, on the 27th October 1966, "Florida Film"¹⁵⁵, a preview to EPCOT, was released. Within this film, Walt Disney personally introduced the idea of EPCOT and explains how the concept will work. This film showed his original visions for this Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow and the details of what this would entail.

The film showed how EPCOT would be safe for all, with no traffic in pedestrian areas and the control and containment of the community would provide additional safety for children. It was also proposed to be environmentally better, with less emissions and developments to both improve and protect the environment. The community was also planned to be a place where new developments could occur, to ensure the progression of research while also being a successful residential community. This Epcot community was one which had been designed with multiple improvements based on the less likeable aspects of the existing cities, it was designed to solve the 'problems of cities'. Walt Disney stated, "Everything in EPCOT will be dedicated to the happiness of the people who live, work, and play here, and those who come here from around the world to visit our living showcase."¹⁵⁶ The new community was also about the happiness of people within it, ensuring that this was a place where people were comfortable and happy. This idea was similar to the notion of the other existing Disney theme parks which focused on making 'dreams come true' and ensuring that guests had a wonderful, stress-free time while at the parks.

The importance of the residents was a continuous factor which heavily influenced the design of the community and ideas surrounding it. Walt Disney was persistent that this would be a community for the people, developed with them in mind. He wanted to create a community which would be suitable, and designed specifically, for both residents and research.

Gennaway acknowledges, "The entire development would be very compact and would

¹⁵⁵ EPCOT Film, (1966), < <https://youtu.be/z3pTvwPzITg>> [accessed 6 May 2022]

¹⁵⁶ EPCOT Film Transcript, (1966), <<https://sites.google.com/site/theoriginalepcot/the-epcot-film-video/transcript?authuser=0>> [accessed 6 May 2022]

efficiently use the land, resources, and infrastructure in a thoughtful way. Walt Disney wanted to build a city that was planned for people- not for architectural magazines and the critics."¹⁵⁷ As like every idea developed by Walt Disney, this community would be meticulously designed and built to ensure every aspect was resourceful, efficient and the best it could be, in the same way that the theme parks were created, Walt Disney put an incredible amount of thought behind each aspect of this proposed community.

Walt Disney also considered how to move around the city, deciding on the best form of transportation which would be suitable for the size of the community, amount of people, reducing traffic and transportation which would be reliable. The community would be in two main sections, the residential area and the main hub which would contain everything residents would need. These two areas, and other surrounding areas further outside of the community such as the workplace or theme parks would be connected via transport lines. The main transportation system planned to be used within this community was the monorail. Inspired by the PeopleMover, the monorail would be constantly running, unlikely to break down, and would reduce traffic by being the main form of transportation in the community. Cars would be used less, predominantly for leaving the community, therefore would reduce emissions and traffic and improve the pedestrian safety. This is one example of Walt Disney's consistent view of the future and looking for ways in which to improve it. The monorail is still in place today within the Disney parks, continuing part of Walt Disney's hopes to use it as part of the transportation system.

During this film, Walt Disney also states that EPCOT would always be in the state of becoming, it would never be completed, it will continue to evolve. The film stated, "It will be a community of tomorrow that will never be completed, but will always be introducing and testing, and demonstrating new materials and new systems."¹⁵⁸ Walt Disney envisioned this as a place with continuous discovery, innovations and continuing progress. It would be a

¹⁵⁷ *Promise of Progress City*, p. 163

¹⁵⁸ EPCOT Film Transcript, (1966)

place which changed with the times in order to keep up with advancing technologies while also dedicating specific areas to help improve and develop them further. The new systems and technologies which would be constantly introduced and tested in this Epcot would help it always be a community of tomorrow as it would always be staying up to date with the new. Walt Disney was always optimistic about the future, for new possibilities and changes and stated a similar notion about the other Disney theme parks, "Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the word."¹⁵⁹ He believed that these parks, and similarly, this new community, would always be in a state of becoming, places which would continue to develop and evolve, whether that was through new ideas for technology or imagination.

This film provided a clear insight into Walt Disney's original vision for this new community of tomorrow with the vision and ideas being described directly from himself. Audiences could hear and see the enthusiasm and optimism Walt Disney held for these new possibilities and plan, it was clearly a project he was very hopeful for and incredibly dedicated to. Although the film was primarily made to persuade and encourage various corporations and the American industry to become involved, it provides a deep understanding of Walt Disney's original visions and plans for EPCOT. Walt Disney's vision for a new, futuristic community was an interesting concept but, unfortunately, it was not something easy or feasible to produce. For these reasons, the Disney Company changed the plans into a theme park, loosely based on Walt Disney's vision.

Despite the fact that Walt Disney's Epcot community was never created, the Disney Company did create Celebration. This small-town community was founded by Disney and completed in 1996. Designed by world famous architects, this master-planned community is an idealised actual living community with a small-town America aesthetic, colourful buildings and scenic views. Although Celebration is no longer owned by Disney, it is still referred to as

¹⁵⁹ Dave Smith, *The Quotable Walt Disney*, (Glendale: Disney Editions, 2001), p. 61

'Disney's Celebration'. As it was created by Disney, it is still somewhat connected to the company name and a large amount of the popularity of it is due to the Disney name. Aside from this, Celebration is does not have a huge connection to Disney as it is not a Disneyfied town, there are no character references or hidden Mickey's there, it was simply a town created by the company to be a new community. As Bartling writes, "The most prominent of New Urbanist developments to date is Celebration, Florida, where building civic engagement and its ever-elusive relative, "community", dominated the planning paradigm. Celebration has garnered a considerable amount of publicity since its incarnation in 1994 because of its size and the unique prominence of its developer, the Disney Company."¹⁶⁰ This demonstrates that the residents, and community aspect, was still prominent in the design process, similar to Walt Disney's importance on the residents throughout his ideas. Bartling also acknowledges the fact of the popularity being connected to Celebration being built by the Disney Company. This community was the first, and only American small-town community created by Disney, providing it with uniqueness and popularity. This town has also sparked the interest of many, as the town sees many visitors who are simply curious about the community developed by Disney. Celebration became, and is, a type of Disney community, albeit not quite as futuristic or exactly what Walt Disney planned but it is still a community created by the Disney Company.

The EPCOT of Today

Making EPCOT

Following the death of Walt Disney in 1966, the plans for EPCOT changed. The new community envisioned by Walt Disney was not a feasible endeavour, therefore the company needed to change direction. After losing their leader, the company was lost and devastated along with the rest of the world at the loss of the legend, Walt Disney. With Walt Disney

¹⁶⁰ Hugh E. Bartling, 'Disney's Celebration, the Promise of New Urbanism, and the Portents of Homogeneity', *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 81, (2002), 47-67, (pp. 45-46)

gone, the main vision for the Epcot community was also lost, nobody had the same extensive vision for the community as Walt Disney did. As Randy Thornton, Award-Winning Producer for Walt Disney Records, said, "After Walt's death, the EPCOT project fell apart because no one had the vision to carry it on. The whole company was lost without him."¹⁶¹ The Epcot community becoming a reality was very reliant on Walt Disney as he was the main driving force behind this plan. This project needed Walt Disney, his passion and ideas for the community in order to take place which unfortunately was never completed. With the passing of Roy O. Disney in December 1971, caused a change in personnel on the board at the Disney Company, Don Tatum became chairman of the board and E. Cardon "Card" Walker became president and CEO. Another reason for the plan for Epcot changing was due to it appearing less feasible or straightforward to create, especially following the loss of both the visionary behind the idea, Walt Disney, and his brother Roy Disney. The company stated that they would not be continuing the original Epcot plan which Walt Disney had previously discussed and presented to the public during his Florida EPCOT film, but instead that they would be creating a different type of Epcot.

On May 15th, 1974, Card Walker told a meeting of the American Marketing Association that the Disney company was reconsidering EPCOT "from the point of view of economics, operations, technology, and market potential" and was no longer looking at it as a place where individuals and families would live."¹⁶² - acknowledged Williams. The Disney company did attempt to see if the original community idea could be feasible and created. However, after initial research into the project, the company came to the conclusion that it would not be a financially feasible project so changed direction to something different but still inspired by Walt Disney's original vision.

¹⁶¹ Pat Williams with Jim Denney, *How to Be Like Walt*, (Deerfield Beach: Health Communications, Inc, 2004), p. 292

¹⁶² *How to Be Like Walt*, p. 292

The company developed Walt's idea into a new theme park as part of the Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida.¹⁶³ This theme park contained some of the original ideas and themes from Walt Disney's original plan, still having a focus on advancing technology and creating a better future, but ultimately at the time of opening, this was a theme park with attractions with corporations as sponsors. When the plans for this Epcot theme park were released, it was described as something incredibly new, fun and very futuristic: a theme park of the future. As one brochure described - "Dozens of pavilions will be stocked with space-age exhibits: loquacious robots; solar-powered rides; animated movies created by the viewer with laser disks; demonstrations of zero-gravity farming; and more."¹⁶⁴ This was originally what the park was proposed to include at the time of opening, outlining what supposedly would appear in the park. This description of the proposed attractions appears to create a very advanced and futuristic image of Epcot, one which is likely to excite guests at the prospect of this new park in its initial announcements and first description. However, the park itself did not completely meet this proposed description. Although the park did contain a somewhat space theme with a huge number of futuristic advancements, it was not as prominent as the description implied.

The Epcot theme park which was created was quite different from Walt Disney's original vision. The predominant difference between the two Epcot's is the present-day Epcot became a theme park rather than a living community. The change between Walt Disney's original Epcot vision as a living community and the resulting theme park is summarised by Fjellman who notes, "What had been envisioned by Walt Disney himself as a living city of the future, organised by ever changing experimental technology, has instead become a kind

¹⁶³ Richard R. Beard, *Walt Disney's Epcot Center: Creating the New World of Tomorrow*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc. Publishers, 1982)

¹⁶⁴ Fred Guterl and Carol Truxal 'Entertainment/control technology: The Wonderful World of Epcot: Walt Disney Productions unveils a futuristic amusement park that may be even more intriguing to engineers than to the public at large', *IEEE Spectrum*, 19, (1982), 46-55

of permanent World's Fair, with industrial expositions and national pavilions."¹⁶⁵ This park does still attempt to show some technological advancements and propositions for the future within its attractions and pavilions, even sometimes suggesting possible new ideas for the future, or ways to improve it. However, these ideas and innovations, and the park itself, are not the way in which Walt Disney had originally planned it.

A World's Fair, a theme park, the 'future' created there in 1982

Epcot was arguably like a permanent world's fair. The park included several attractions and pavilions which were initially sponsored by various corporations at the time of its opening. Along with its World Showcase, and current attractions and pavilions which still demonstrate or propose new technologies or advancements, it becomes very similar to a world's fair. World's Fairs are large international exhibitions designed to showcase the achievements of nations. They include a variety of cultural, industrial and scientific items which are on show for a period of time. World's Fairs have had a significant role in the emergence of the industrial urban space and culture. These pavilions provided the opportunity for various companies or states to demonstrate, and effectively promote the company's various products. One example of this is the General Electric and "Progressland"/the Carousel of Progress, this attraction was both entertaining and informative but also allowed them to promote their products which increased their sales in the following years.

The Disney company had designed and created several attractions for previous World's Fair pavilions. For the 1964/65 World's Fair the company designed and built four attractions: "Pepsi-Cola Presents Walt Disney's It's A Small World'- a Salute to UNICEF and the World's Children" for the UNICEF pavilion, "Ford Magic Skyway" for Ford Motor Company, "Progressland" for the General Electric pavilion, featuring the "Carousel of Progress" and "Great Moments with Mr Lincoln" for the State of Illinois. These attractions were moved into

¹⁶⁵ Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*, p. 213

the Disney theme parks after completing their time at the world's fairs. After being renamed and some slightly altered with developments, some became, and still are some of the most popular attractions within the parks.

Originally when the Epcot theme park was built, there were multiple attractions which were sponsored by various companies, just as pavilions were sponsored for the world fairs.

Epcot's original sponsored attractions and pavilions include: *Horizons* was sponsored by General Electric, the *Universe of Energy* by Exxon (1982-2004), the *Wonders of Life* sponsored by Metlife and the *World of Motion* was previously sponsored by General Motors but has now been replaced by the attraction *Test Track* by Chevrolet. Additionally, the *Living Seas* was sponsored by United Technologies until 1998 and has now changed to become the *Seas with Nemo and Friends*. *Journey Into the Imagination* was previously sponsored by Kodak until 2010, this still remains but without a sponsor.

Warren acknowledges, "Each Disney attraction began with a kernel of commodity and wove a distinctly (and almost exclusively) Disney narrative around it."¹⁶⁶ Various sponsors would provide general themes, then the Imagineers would incorporate these themes into the Disney narratives to produce the attractions at the Epcot. As a result, attractions or pavilions were created which incorporated the idea or theme provided by the corporation with some Disney magic, producing successful and popular additions to the Epcot Park. This World's Fair styled Epcot was a theme park where corporate sponsorship meets Disney. The original sponsored attractions and pavilions created Disneyfied corporations. At the time of its opening, the Epcot theme park was less 'Disney' than the other theme parks such as the Magic Kingdom due to there being no Disney characters and little reference to it being a Disney park. However, there was still some element of Disneyfication due to the park being predominantly focused on the resulting attractions and less on the specific companies, they were mainly just a sponsor, therefore there was still a subtle sense of Disneyfication in

¹⁶⁶ Stacy Warren, 'Epcot: Disney's (sort of) World's Fair in *Meet Me at the Fair: A World's Fair Reader*, ed. by Laura Hollengreen and others, (Carnegie Mellon University, 2014), p. 448

Epcot. The redesign of the park saw more Disneyfication enter the park and a move away from the involvement of outside corporations with less sponsors and more Disney.

Redesign of the park:

There were several reasons for the redesign of the Epcot theme park in the 1990s, not long after opening. Alongside the decreasing number of Epcot visitors, Euro Disney or Disneyland, Paris, opened in 1992 but unfortunately was not the success that Disney hoped it would be. Instead, there was threats of permanent closure and other projects were cancelled due to the financial impact of this park. Around this time, several of the original Epcot attractions were closed, and there was a transition to more thrill rides in the park as their replacements and Disney hoped that these new attractions would help increase the number of park visitors. Disney characters were also introduced to this park, a new change as characters were previously not included to differentiate this park from becoming another Disneyland. As this park was representing the future, it was likely to be ever-changing and this redesign saw an adaptation on the Epcot vision of the future. Although it still continues to demonstrate new possibilities and improvements for the future ahead, in the present day it has more of that Disney touch, adding to the creation of the Disney future.

Following the various redesigns, the redesign beginning in 2019 created a change in the names and areas of the Epcot theme park. This park is now divided into four main areas: *World Celebration*, *World Discovery*, *World Nature* and *World Showcase*. Similar to the Magic Kingdom and Disneyland theme parks, each of these areas has a main theme, or 'showcase'. These various areas split up the park into several ideas which represent different areas of achievement or technological advancements or improvements. These themes are emphasised by the various attractions within each area and the detailed architecture.

World Showcase is one area which has remained largely unchanged since the original opening of the park, with changes mainly being attraction based. Surrounding the World Showcase Lagoon are eleven different countries: Mexico, Norway, China, Germany, Italy, United States, Japan, Morocco, France, United Kingdom and Canada. Each of these individual countries showcase their relevant cultures through dining, commerce, attractions and the specific design of each country. The architecture of these individual areas is designed to closely resemble the countries in an attempt to fairly showcase the countries, and ensure the guests feel like they are truly in that place. Each cast member is from their relevant country, landmarks, albeit downscaled, are included, music and building design are all part of creating the guests experience, as closely as possible to the real thing. This world showcase is very similar to a world's fair due to its direct showcasing of the various countries and their cultures. This also links to one of Walt Disney's original hopes of inclusivity and bringing the world together to create a united future. "The World Showcase part of the theme park ties in Walt's vision of a global neighbourhood/community in a World's Fair style setting"¹⁶⁷, notes McDaniel. The World Showcase keeps some of Walt Disney's original ideas and hopes for both his Epcot community and the future. He hoped for inclusivity and a global community, a place for everyone. This theme of inclusivity of bringing the world together is similar to the attraction, *It's A Small World* which promotes a 'small world' and brings the children of the world together in one place, reinforcing the theme and message of inclusivity within Disney, and that Disney is for everyone.

¹⁶⁷Brain McDaniel, *Walt Disney World: The Full Report*, 4th edn, (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008), p. 124

Epcot Specific Visions of the Future Dissected

The Epcot Park has specific themes within its visions of the future. It predominantly focuses on the themes of advancing technology, space exploration and protecting our environment. These themes are represented through various attractions within the park.

Advancing the Importance of Technology

Upon entering the park, it is impossible to miss the signature symbol of the park, the giant golf ball like centrepiece, the well-known 'landmark' of Epcot. This geosphere contains the attraction, *Spaceship Earth* (opened 1982), a ride through the history of communication, and future possibilities. In the Disney style, audio-animatronics bring to life various landmark moments of the innovation that made today's communications possible, from the stone age to the computer age. At the end of the ride, there is an opportunity to design the kind of future you would like to live in by answering questions on the touchscreen, guests will then be able to see a possible future. This final section of the ride is an arguably more fun aspect to end the ride as opposed to an accurate prediction of the guest's future.

A common theme within the Disney vision of the future is the notion that advancing technologies is a key part of the future. This is presented as something integral to the progression of humanity and to ensure a better future. As Wilson states, "Its publicity says it is dedicated to the imagination, to our fantasies and our "dreams for better tomorrows".

Disney publicity makes it seem as though a brighter future were just a matter of "creative thinking" and "futuristic technologies."¹⁶⁸ This provides emphasis on the future being both created and improved with new technology and innovation alongside reinforcing the heavy focus on the notion of improving technology as being a prominent key factor in developing this new promised improved future. The Epcot theme park attempts to show that technology will improve life and become a huge part of the future, having a positive impact on the future

¹⁶⁸ Alexander Wilson, 'The Betrayal of the Future: Walt Disney's EPCOT Centre' in *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, ed. by. Eric Smoodin, (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 119

of both humanity and the world. Through its attractions such as *Spaceship Earth* and others, it shows the progression and advancement of technology in a positive light. With a lack of negative elements shown, this positive progression of technology is suggested to be the key to our future, a better future.

Another popular attraction which depicts technology is *Test Track* (opened 1999), sponsored by Chevrolet. This focuses on the transportation side of Epcot's theme of technology. Once guests have entered the circular building, resembling a wheel, they have the opportunity to design their own virtual concept car before boarding a 'SimCar' ride vehicle to race and undertake performance tests. This is an interactive and very fast attraction, reaching speeds of nearly sixty-five miles per hour. The attraction itself is extremely high tech, as stated in the *Imagineering Field Guide to Epcot*, "Each car carries on board more than enough processing power to run the Space Shuttle."¹⁶⁹ The vehicles themselves are very technologically advanced, each vehicle is also equipped with an onboard audio-visual system. They are complex vehicles to manage due to the varying paces of the attraction which includes various speeds, a complete stop and maintaining intervals between the vehicles. The special effects and elements combined with the vehicle itself made Test Track one of Walt Disney Imagineering's most challenging achievements. This attraction is fitting with the theme of technology in the Epcot theme park while at the time same, it demonstrates the developing and impressive technology of the Disney Imagineers and company.

Space exploration

Located in *World Discovery*, *Mission: SPACE* (opened 2003), is an attraction based on a NASA styled mission. Guests enter a spacecraft for a simulated space 'mission', each guest will be assigned a different role and during flight will initiate a mission critical sequence. There are two levels of intensity for this attraction. Orange Mission (Mars Mission) is more

¹⁶⁹*The Wonders of Walt Disney World*, p. 79

intense, with tilts and spins, replicating a slingshot around the moon and a tough landing on Mars. This mission simulates the speed and G-forces of a space launch, using technology similar to that which is used by NASA to simulate physical experiences astronauts would encounter during spaceflight. Meanwhile Green Mission (Earth Mission) offers a calmer ride, with light movement and no spins, providing a realistic orbit around the Earth, providing views of the Hawaiian Islands and the Northern Lights. These views are authentic as they were captured by cosmonauts and astronauts on during their time on the International Space Station.¹⁷⁰ Although this attraction is not a complete accurate depiction of an actual space mission, it provides guests with an enjoyable ride closely depicting the movement. As this attraction is attempting to resemble a space launch, it does not completely romanticise space travel, instead attempts to depict it as with an as accurate as possible experience. The theme of space exploration is not as focused upon within Epcot as it is in Tomorrowland but it is still part of the Disney's vision of the future within this park.

Environment

Located in *World Nature* are two attractions specifically focused on the planet and environment, working towards protecting it, admiring it and what advancements are possible. Firstly, *Living with the Land* (opened 1982) focuses on agricultural advancements and developments of farming, to provide a 'Hopeful vision of farming's future'.¹⁷¹ On this gentle boat ride through the greenhouses, guests will experience a history of farming and see crops from all over the world being grown. Walt Disney World horticulturalists use innovative growing techniques and cross breeding high-yield crops with the purpose to help increase food production. The agricultural techniques which are used within the lab here produce impressive results. These include a one-of-a-kind 'tomato tree' which has produced thirty-

¹⁷⁰ *The Wonders of Walt Disney World*, pp. 78-79

¹⁷¹ *Living with the Land*, Attraction, <<https://www.disneyworld.co.uk/attractions/epcot/living-with-the-land/>> [accessed 5 May 2022]

two thousand tomatoes from a single vine and a lemon weighing nine pounds. These fruits and vegetables which are produced here are used in the Walt Disney World restaurants. Over the years the lab has achieved other noteworthy science. During the 1990s scientists worked on genetically altered peanuts to develop a more nutritious peanut oil. The lab also worked with genetically altered peach trees to produce peaches which would stay firm longer and worked to molecularly alter the design for the pear tree. Scientists created a new rootstock for these trees in order to reduce growth to make them shorter and easier to both grow and harvest, making these trees more productive. These breakthrough developments show that Epcot is more than simply a theme park, but also a place where new developments, creations and progress takes place. Secondly, *Awesome Planet* (opened 2020), is a ten-minute film featuring spectacular imagery from around the globe. In partnership with the Disney Conservation Fund, this attraction uses in theatre effects such as wind and water, to tell the story of life on the planet and why it is vitally important to take care of it. This attraction is one which inspires guests to take care of our planet to ensure the survival of both the earth and humanity, to be more environmentally friendly, protecting it to achieve a better future.

Walt Disney did commission nature documentaries in the 1940s and 1950s and held an interest in nature and animals. These documentaries were developed to educate audiences on the world, although not created in the Disney style of fantasy, these were done in the successful Disney style of being both educational and entertaining, providing enjoyable episodes into our world. Walt Disney cared about the environment and his interest in it can be seen through his inclusion of sustainable environment ideas within his various project plans, and the creation of several informative episodes surrounding nature and environment. This is something the company has continued, caring and protecting the environment has remained of importance. The Walt Disney Company has publicly stated their intentions and actions for protecting and preserving the environment. Their official website on the company's environmental sustainability clearly addresses the company's environmental

goals, changes and ways to improve and protect the environment. The website states “The Walt Disney Company is committed to protecting the planet and delivering a positive environmental legacy for future generations as we operate and grow our business.”¹⁷² This clearly declares their intent to protect the environment in the present and for future generations. This declaration is supported by the actions taken by the company to help protect the environment, including: 292 acres of solar panels at the Walt Disney World Resort, reducing emissions wherever possible, investing in nature-based climate solutions which help to provide habitats for animals and provide resources for local communities. Additionally, around nine million trees have been planted and localised watershed strategies which focus on water conservation have been implemented and creating lower impact products. The actions taken by Disney, their plans for future actions and the inclusion of *World Nature* at Epcot all support the theme of protecting, improving and advancing the environment, clearly showing that Disney is committed to creating a better future environmentally. With the National Geographic series still being created and the active effort of the company to develop and protect the environment, Walt Disney’s vision for a better future, even environmentally is continued.

These various attractions represent the main themes of the Epcot theme park, and as a result, create an immersive experience of the Disney future, and American future, being presented in this park.

Summary:

Walt Disney’s vision for the future and the current Epcot park are different Disney visions of the future. Walt Disney envisioned a living community of tomorrow meanwhile the Epcot

¹⁷²The Walt Disney Company, ‘Environmental Sustainability’
<<https://impact.disney.com/environment/environmental-sustainability/>> [accessed 4 June 2022]

which was created is a theme park which focuses on various aspects of future developments such as environment through attractions.

The living community which Walt Disney designed and hoped to create would have been a controlled community, dedicated to both the happiness of those who lived there and towards new advancements and possibilities for a better future. This new community was planned to solve the 'problems of the cities', implying an improved and better future meanwhile proposing a new type of a 'Disney's America of the future'.

The Epcot park of today, and the one created in 1982, is not the community Walt Disney envisioned. Instead, it is a theme park, presenting the future through various attractions and pavilions with main themes of advancing technology, space exploration, similarity to a world's fair and improving and protecting the environment. Certain attractions and pavilions somewhat attempt to show the progression of technology and suggest improvements for the future. This theme of technological advancement is similar to part of Walt Disney's original hopes for his new Epcot community as he had hoped his community would also be home to research where new developments could occur. Although the theme of space exploration is less focused on here compared to that of Tomorrowland, it is touched upon in an attempt to fairly depict it while also keeping space exploration as part of the Disney vision of the future. Environmental protection has been a prominent theme of Epcot since its opening, with the Land Pavilion being one of the first pavilions, initially sponsored by Nestle. After the redesign, becoming Living with the Land and unsponsorless, this land is still an important part of Epcot and the Disney future. The emphasis in this land of ensuring the environment is protected, matches the company's environmental goals and commitments to protecting it for the present and future generations. Additionally, this Epcot theme park closely resembles a world's fair through the original design with various pavilions and attractions which had corporate sponsors and the world showcase clearly showcasing various countries. The original design and layout of the Epcot Centre from 1982 acts like a permanent world's fair.

Although there are two separate versions of Epcot, one being Walt Disney's community, the second the resulting theme park, they both present a palatable version of a 'Disney's America of the future'. Walt Disney's vision in this case is arguably a different vision to that of the company, creating a 'Walt Disney's America of the future' and a 'Disney's [Company/corporate] America of the future'. One clearly presents Walt Disney's optimism and hopes for the future and new advancements, however as this was never completed, it is unknown to what extent, if any, typical Disneyfication occurs within the community and future. Meanwhile, the other, is a theme park designed to better fit into the Walt Disney World, and the Disney theme. This is a successful park with a higher focus on attractions and ensuring the guests have a wonderful time as opposed to a main focus on the progression of technological advancements for a better future.

EPCOT is significant because it provides multiple insights into what is considered to be a 'Disney's America of the future'. It suggests the importance of technology, but also other factors such as environmental protection and other developments. Both would provide a sense of the American experience of the future, through a new American community and experience through various themed attractions. The Disney future being presented through both versions of Epcot is predominantly focusing on the idea that there will be a better, brighter future.

Future: Conclusion

The Disney theme parks represent a Disney's America of the future through Tomorrowland and both versions of Epcot, Walt Disney's community plan and the theme park. Through the architectural design and attractions, community design and theme park, the company is able to present its representation and vision of the future, effectively creating the Disney future.

This Disney future is a positive one, either a future of fantasy and imagination, or a future which is improved and shown to be possible if certain advancements and progression takes place. There are almost no negative elements shown or suggested within the park and this future is predominantly positive in almost all of its representations. This is likely to ensure the parks and everything included and presented still align with the Disney company values and image.

Tomorrowland, presents a fantasy-future type of the 'Disney's America' of the future through its predominant themes of space exploration and science-fiction. The attractions within Tomorrowland emphasise these two main themes. One of the original attractions and most popular rides, *Space Mountain* emphasises one of the original themes of Tomorrowland, the theme of space exploration, as the inspiration for the attraction derives from space travel and the new possibilities of it at the time of designing the park. The science-fiction theme is emphasised by other attractions such as *Buzz Lightyear's Space Rader Spin* and *Monster's Inc Laugh Floor* which include aliens and science-fiction aspects, with characters and themes of Disney franchises. These attractions are also examples of the Disneyfication which takes place, and are additions to the Disney future being represented. The design of this land also aids the guest's experience of being in this Disney future. With robots selling newspapers and constant movement all around, guests feel as if they have entered a land of science-fiction and space. These materials and surfaces quite literally shine and reflect with the sun and bright lights, emphasising the shiny future ahead.

Some consider Tomorrowland to be outdated as it no longer represents an accurate depiction of the future. A land based on the future is one which is difficult to both accurately, and consistently maintain due to it requiring constant updating to ensure it is keeping up to date with new possibilities and future endeavours. As the future is something unknown, and everchanging, it makes this land impossible to keep up to date and to always be representing a new, possible future. This was not an easy task for Disney as it became impossible to maintain, therefore instead a more fantasy-like future is presented, with a predominant science-fiction theme with elements of space exploration. Although not entirely accurate, it can still be considered to be a futuristic land.

Furthermore, the concepts of retro-futurism and future nostalgia provide a new perspective on the future represented within Tomorrowland, and on the Disney future itself. These concepts suggest that certain aspects and ideas which are still imagined, or hoped for the future in the present day, are still as appealing as when they were the original ideas of the future. These ideas, although they did not occur when originally hoped for or predicted, are still as appealing and for certain ideas, still hoped for in the future, just as they were in the past when the land was originally being designed.

The Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, both Walt Disney's original community vision and the current theme park, (and the original from 1982), present a 'Disney's America' of the future. There is however, not one unified Disney vision of the future. Walt Disney's vision of his Epcot community and the theme park created by the company are two different versions of both Epcot and the Disney future. Although there is the assumption that there is only one set Disney future, this is not the case. Walt Disney's visions for the future and what he hoped his Epcot would be are different from the visions and reality of the Epcot which was eventually designed and created by the company.

Walt Disney's original vision for his Epcot was to create a new, improved community of tomorrow. His community would be both dedicated to the happiness of the residents and a place of advancement and achievement. Walt Disney hoped to design and create a

community which would cater to all needs of the residents while also being a place for research and developments to occur. He included areas which would be dedicated for research of science, technology and more. This Epcot community was also planned to have been a controlled community which would effectively solve and improve the 'problems of the cities'. This would be a community of tomorrow, one which would not be static but instead would always be progressing, always a community of the future.

In contrast, the Epcot of both today, and the original of 1982, is a theme park rather than Walt Disney's original community vision. The theme park is dedicated to human achievement and advancement while also focusing on the specific developments on the land, sea and environment alongside space exploration and technological advancements. The original Epcot of 1982 acted almost as a permanent world's fair. Each of the original pavilions and attractions held corporate sponsors. These pavilions and attractions would promote their product or company in the Disney style, by adding a Disney narrative to a general theme suggested by the individual companies, they became interactive, engaging elements of the park. The significance of Epcot to a World's Fair is that it demonstrates the connection between Disney and the corporate world and new company products and progress were presented while also showing the corporate side of Disney. The Epcot theme park of today still attempts to represent actual advancements and innovations, one example being the Land pavilion in which real life agricultural developments take place and are continuously being improved. This pavilion suggests various ways to both improve and protect the environment, including developing farming of the future in a sustainable and promising way. Environmental protection has also become a promise of the Disney Company itself, indicating that the company is adding its own values into the theme park and the Disney future. The Disneyfication in this theme park is not as intense or persistent with the Mickey Mouse theme compared the other parks but there is still some level of Disneyfication due to this still being a Disney theme park in Walt Disney World.

One of the most prominent themes of all Disney futures within their theme parks and products is that there can be, and will be a better, brighter future. These are two very Disney futures but at the same time, they are also very normal futures. The future of Tomorrowland is one imagined by many; a typical future as inspired by that of science-fiction. Meanwhile, the future of Epcot is one of advancements and working towards creating a better, improved future. These two futures are typical ones imagined or hoped for by many. Even without the additional Disney influence and adaptations on these ideas, they originate as quite normal futures. Through Tomorrowland and both Walt Disney's community visions and the Epcot theme park, a Disney's America of the future is found and presented.

Conclusion:

Within Disney theme parks, guests consistently enter Disney's America. The theme parks create an experience of both the past and future through the Disney lens of America, resulting in an experience designed to entertain. These depictions and representations of America are not accurate but they are predominantly enjoyable, exciting and memorable experiences. Through the design of the parks, architectural details, attractions and various lands, a Disney version of the American experience is produced, reinforcing the concept of a Disney's America within the theme parks.

Disney's America of the past is thoroughly created within the Disney theme parks through historic inspiration. The production of 'history' involves the park's design, attractions and the resulting immersive experiences which are created.

The three Magic Kingdom lands, Main Street USA, Frontierland and Liberty Square are all themed around various aspects of American history, collectively creating the experience of the 'Disney history'. The main themes of the Disney past within this park are nostalgia, patriotism, and adventure. Disney history is thus an experience of an idealised past filled with exciting and nostalgic experiences. Park goers experience of Disney history is pure happiness, the park consciously avoids negative historic memories, instead providing an experience of positive history and nostalgia for the past.

The planned American history theme park may have deviated from the typical themes of the Disney representation of the past by its proposed inclusion of some of the serious aspects of American history, and stating that this history would be accurately depicted rather than Disneyfied. As the park was never completed the level of accuracy is unknown but the plan for the park indicated that the company was attempting to represent history accurately which could have been a new path for Disney. However, the park was judged by the standard set by prior theme parks – a 'happy version' of the past. Disney is to some degree trapped in its

own version of the past with its Disney history being based around easy, arguably inaccurate, idealised versions of history.

A Disney's America of the future is also created through the theme parks and their futuristic ideas and visions which are represented. The land of Tomorrowland, and both Walt Disney's original idea for his Epcot community, and the Epcot theme park that emerged, all create a sense of the 'Disney future', pushing the predominant themes of advancements, science-fiction, space exploration and progress.

Tomorrowland provides an insight into the fantasy-future Disney vision of the future through its design of both space exploration and science fiction. Tomorrowland is an example of the progression and development of the Disney future as it began in the 1950s as one which was attempting to accurately portray the early 2000s future, and pushed the possibility of space travel. As this idea no longer became feasible due to mass ideas of the future everchanging, the theme of science fiction was introduced more to this land and effectively created the fantasy-future side of the Disney future.

Meanwhile both Walt Disney's Epcot community and the Epcot theme park that was created represent a different vision of the Disney future, one predominantly focused on advancements and developing an improved social and democratic future for all humankind. Both versions of Epcot imply there are endless possibilities ahead, and that we can improve the future, whether that is through technological or environmental advancements. Epcot represents mass American optimism for the future, a key aspect of Walt Disney's original vision and one which is continued through the company today.

There is not only one fixed Disney future, there are multiple versions. There is the Tomorrowland vision of 1950s space and corporate technology alongside Walt Disney's original vision for his community of tomorrow, and the vision of the Disney company from the 1980s that pushes other kinds of progress. Although they present different futures, at a base

level they are similar in that they continue to represent a sense of optimism for the future that lacks challenge.

Both the Disney past and future have been intricately designed by the Disney imagineers in order to create a highly immersive experience. This experience of America within the theme parks is one which is typically cleansed and idealised where all negativity has been removed from both past and future paths. However, the extent of the idealisation of this past and future is determined by what already exists in the Disney canon. The past has been idealised more as it is based on true American history, albeit in a limited way, and therefore can only be edited or romanticised as opposed to being completely changed. As there is knowledge of the nation's history the amount of change Disney is able to do is reduced, with the danger that the history it is representing becomes too unrealistic and more like a fantasised version of events which would weaken Disney's legitimacy. In comparison, the future is unknown which provides the company with the greater opportunity to decide what future to represent within the parks. This Disney future is presented as one of endless possibility and some element of fantasy. Disney has chosen to create both a fantasy-future and an arguably more serious future of advancements, including both technology and environment.

The Disney perspective of America is a predominantly positive one. The representation of America within the Disney theme parks presents it as a place where enjoyable and exciting experiences take place. This is an America which has been imagineered to create a positive American experience. The architectural design of the parks, their various lands, attractions and the typically unnoticed details, help to produce the Disney American experience of the past and future within the theme parks and make it authentic. These parks have been heavily themed and work towards creating an immersive experience for the guests. The Disney's America is most of all about experience, one which is a physical and sensory taste of America, it is the experiences which create this idea of a Disney's America.

Disney has been successful in developing both its Disney history and future in the theme parks. As a result, Disney has effectively created these experiences for millions of guests. The fact that these experiences and representations are automatically accepted proves the influential power which the company holds. They have control over what becomes part of their past and future, and what guests will accept as they enter the park, Disney has in this way both the control and influence over these two time periods and their representations of America. This is a significant power over the masses.

The significance of this power may be that people base their ideas of America on experiencing Disney theme parks. Interestingly, an escape from reality may condition ideas of the real American country, its past and its future. Disney provides an escape from reality which is positive and filled with happiness for everyone, but it also shapes cultural ideas about the United States.

Disney is America, America is Disney.

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