

Reviving the Nomad: Racialized Wandering in Disneyland

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In the postwar period, from its opening in 1955 until the late 1960's, Disneyland held great cultural significance to the psyche of Americans entrenched in the Cold War. The disappearance of the western frontier and the proliferation of racially homogenous suburbs during this era limited the ability of white Americans in particular to participate in racialized nomadic wandering. This paper will argue that Disneyland situated this wandering within the context of imagination and perpetuated it on a mass level. Ostensibly nomadic Indigenous peoples, as well as the natural landscapes associated with them, were held in an historical stasis in Disneyland. This allowed white Americans—the real nomads—to imaginatively explore manipulated Indigenous cultures, even as the mainstream values Disney promoted continued to psychologically anchor and comfort white Americans.

Disneyland, one of the most iconic symbols of American idealism, is a study in contrasts, merging artful illusion and reassuring tradition into an ostensibly seamless, and enticing, utopian dream world. As the nearly overwhelming droves of eager visitors in July of 1955 demonstrated, this dream world struck an emotional chord with the American public; Walt Disney had effortlessly “cast his spell” over a population which acquiesced quite contentedly to his enchantment.¹ This prompts one to consider the source of this seemingly boundless appeal: why did Americans flock in the millions to what was and is ultimately an “artifice,” consisting of only the palest imitations of

¹ Anonymous, “Cinema: Father Goose,” *Time Magazine*, December 27, 1954
<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,857906,00.html>.

adventure, exploration, and discovery?² Historians have supplied numerous answers to this question. The park's tendency to cater to middle-class, postwar norms has been credited with creating a sense of reassurance, particularly in an era of rising Cold War tensions.³ Walt Disney's status as a kind of populist icon, the lovable hero of the American family, further reinforced these ideals.⁴ Even before the opening of the Magic Kingdom's gates, Disney and his corporation reigned over an empire of popular culture, based on cartoons, motion pictures, and television shows, which were incorporated into the Disney theme park.⁵ In turn, the miniaturized and intimate architecture of Disneyland evoked a sense of nostalgia, even as many of the park attractions celebrated technology and boundless progress.⁶ Perhaps most importantly, Disneyland convinced visitors that they had entered a world of wonder and adventure, distant from the monotony of daily

² Gary S. Cross and John K. Walton, *The Playful Crowd: Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 172.

³; Karal Ann Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks," in *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: the Architecture of Reassurance*, ed. Karal Ann Marling (New York: Flammarion, 1997), 79-86; Cross and Walton, *The Playful Crowd*, 169-179; Karen R. Jones and John Wills, *The Invention of the Park: Recreational Landscapes from the Garden of Eden to Disney's Magic Kingdom* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 104-107.

⁴ Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), xv-xvii; 33-58; 99-100; 143-163.

⁵ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 64-91; 391-392.

⁶ Michael Steiner, "Frontierland as Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Architectural Packaging of the Mythic West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 48, no.1 (1998), 14-15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4520031>; Michael Steiner, "Parables of Stone and Steel: Architectural Images of Progress and Nostalgia at the Columbian Exposition and Disneyland," *American Studies* 42, no.1 (2001), 54-57.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40643155>; Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks," in *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*, 79-86.

realities.⁷ All of these observations share a common thread, namely that Disneyland managed to discern and embody the desires of the “American psyche,” as Richard Francaviglia terms it, with an uncanny accuracy.⁸

With this in mind, one may consider Ann Curthoys and John Docker’s observation that throughout history it has been the colonizers, those “inveterate wanderers,” who traipsed across continents and sailed over oceans, who were in fact nomadic, while the Indigenous peoples who have been mythologized (often pejoratively) as itinerants were comparatively settled.⁹ By the time of Disneyland’s inauguration, such nomadic inclinations—along with the inevitable racial conflict they created—were an integral aspect of the collective American cultural identity, which the notion of a harsh, but conquerable, western frontier had long defined. Yet the postwar generation was also aware that such a frontier no longer existed on any tangible level. As one Vietnam veteran who grew up in 1950s suburbia commented, the United States had become a “land of salesmen and shopping centers,” where the adventurous wanderer could only dream of a more “savage, heroic time.”¹⁰ Indeed, white Americans in particular found themselves ensconced in racially homogenous suburban enclaves, enjoying comfortable but largely predictable middle-class lifestyles. Fittingly, Walt Disney, the “symbol of prosperous

⁷Richard Francaviglia, “Walt Disney’s Frontierland as an Allegorical Map of the American West,” *The Western Historian Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1999), 158. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/970490>; Karal Ann Marling, “Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream,” *American Art* 5, no. 1/2 (1991), 185. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109036>.

⁸ Francaviglia, “Walt Disney’s Frontierland,” 162.

⁹ Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 27.

¹⁰ Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1977), 5.

postwar America,” would provide a new context for their nomadic desires.¹¹

As Steven Watts observes, Walt Disney possessed a “visceral instinct for the rhythms and emotions” of mainstream American culture.¹² Watts references Disney’s ability to enthrall the nation through his cartoons and motion pictures, but his comment equally applies to the Disneyland theme park. Indeed, the Magic Kingdom manufactured a timely sense of fulfillment for the nomadic longings of Americans by satisfying them within a new and entirely accessible context: imagination. Disneyland was indeed a ‘Kingdom,’ and one in which the desires of white, middle-class Americans were sovereign; they were provided with endless opportunities for nomadic exploration even as they remained physically nestled in the bastion of mainstream culture that was Orange County, and psychologically anchored by the comforting values of Main Street, U.S.A. Those Indigenous peoples pejoratively deemed nomadic, as well as the natural landscapes often associated with them, were maintained in both a physical and historical stasis, allowing the real nomads, namely white Americans, to leisurely and imaginatively explore their cultures—or at least their Disney counterpart. Thus it was not American society, as Scott Bukatman argues, which was “reduced, frozen and sanitized,” but rather the cultures of the Indigenous peoples so disingenuously represented through Frontierland and Adventureland.¹³ Conversely, it was the mainstream American imagination which was aggrandized and freed of its inhibitions through racialized nomadic discovery.

¹¹ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 280.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³ Scott Bukatman, “There’s Always Tomorrowland: Disney and the Hypercinematic Experience,” *October* 57 (1991): 55-6.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/778872>.

And, through imagination, the moral implications of this psychological wandering were concealed; after all, one had only to catch a glimpse of the looming Sleeping Beauty Castle to be reassured that the Disneyland experience was nothing more than a harmless fantasy.

The mid-twentieth century, with its unique interface between the “stabilized or normalized surface” of American mainstream culture and the postwar tensions which seethed just underneath, offered Disneyland the opportunity to harness popular imagination with unprecedented success.¹⁴ Yet, it was not the first entity which endeavored to “translate common desires into built environments.”¹⁵ As Michael Steiner notes, the popular Columbian Exposition of 1893 also attempted such a feat, and, like Disneyland decades later, fed upon the racial fantasies of white Americans to accomplish its goal.¹⁶ The Midway Plaisance offered the voyeuristic onlooker a glimpse of ostensibly barbarous cultures, the exhibitions of which were set up in a rough evolutionary progression that culminated in the technologically utopian White City.¹⁷ Visitors were prompted to admire the latter attraction before entering the salaciously exotic Midway, in the hopes that this sequence would demonstrate how white civilization had surpassed the intellectual achievements of other races.¹⁸ As will be discussed, stark contrasts between normative and inferior cultures in Disneyland would replace such gradual progressions of racial evolution, and the park would not prompt

¹⁴ Monica Ganas, *Under the Influence: California's Intoxicating Spiritual and Cultural Impact on America* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 133.

¹⁵ Michael Steiner, “Parables of Stone and Steel,” 44.

¹⁶ Steiner, “Parables of Stone and Steel,” 42; 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁸ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 62.

so much as compel its guests to imbibe its racial lessons. The clearly delineated lines of their own cultural understandings would constrain the nomads of the 1950s and 1960s in their imaginative exploration. Similarly, Disneyland would avoid evoking the sense of “lurking anxiety” about progress which was present at the Columbian Exposition.¹⁹ Cody’s Wild West Shows glorified the victory of white civilization in the western frontier, yet simultaneously eulogized the loss of such an integral part of American identity. It is also worth noting that the Turner thesis was presented in conjunction with the Exposition.²⁰ As well, larger-than-life statues sentimentally depicted images of nature, and the ultimate adversary of white progress, the ‘Indian.’²¹ Conversely, over half a century later, *Time* magazine would unabashedly crow that Walt Disney had transformed the untouched orange groves of Anaheim into a “pleasantly bustling city”; the imaginative nomads of the twentieth century were unwilling to be reminded that their voyeuristic exploration of nature and Indigenous culture was possible only through the marginalization of both.²²

Disneyland’s ability to create a sense of reassurance facilitated the manner in which the park subtly but inexorably funneled visitors through its “master narrative” of mainstream

¹⁹ Steiner, “Parables of Stone and Steel,” 53-54.

²⁰ Ibid., 50; Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 47; Everett S. Lee, “The Turner Thesis Re-examined,” *American Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1961): 77-8. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/2710514?seq=2>. The Turner thesis emphasized the importance of the frontier to the formation of American culture and government, and hinted at the alarming ramifications of its disappearance.

²¹ Steiner, “Parables of Stone and Steel,” 53.

²² Anonymous, “The City: The Disneyland Effect,” *Time Magazine*, June 14, 1968. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,900135,00.html>.

American values.²³ The Columbian Exposition and Disneyland's other significant predecessor, Coney Island, both lacked this reassurance. The latter, much like the Exposition with its "honky-tonk" Midway combination of racial exhibitions and cheap attractions, offered its visitors both a genteel glimpse of exotic cultures in Luna Park and a chance to experience the bawdy thrills (including a ride called the 'Barrel of Love') of the nearby Steeplechase.²⁴ Coney Island quickly earned a reputation for possessing a seedy underbelly of promiscuity and moral laxity, which Walt Disney noted disgustedly when he visited there with his daughters.²⁵ As Jones and Wills observe, Disney consciously eschewed such a "spontaneous, carnival-like atmosphere" in his theme park, instead striving to facilitate imaginative exploration by ensuring that the cultural assumptions of his white, middle-class visitors remained not only unthreatened but positively coddled.²⁶ A staff of male "All-American types" and women who appeared to be prime candidates for "suburban motherhood" replaced leering hucksters.²⁷ Furthermore, Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty Castle drew the visitor's eye, whereas at the Exposition the White City loomed and from Coney Island the Statue of Liberty captured one's gaze.²⁸ The latter sights, although containing their own comforting traits, were reminders of technology and reality, respectively, whereas the Castle visually

²³ Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks," in *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*, 86.

²⁴ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 64; Jones and Wills, *The Invention of the Park*, 96.

²⁵ Jones and Wills, *The Invention of the Park*, 97; 103.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁷ Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 319.

²⁸ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 58; Jones and Wills, *The Invention of the Park*, 96.

reassured the visitor that they were in a world of innocence and fantasy, where moral complexity did not exist.

There are many parallels between the Columbian Exposition, Coney Island, and Disneyland, but the latter managed to reflect popular desires in an unprecedented manner. As Karal Ann Marling comments, Disneyland is so integral to the “American landscape” that it is difficult to envision a time before its construction.²⁹ Her use of the term “landscape” is noteworthy, and prompts one to consider the manner in which changing American perceptions of the natural world contributed to Disneyland’s success. As a 1958 newspaper article noted incredulously, Disneyland’s attendance rivaled that of the “Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Yellowstone National Parks combined,” the three most popular natural attractions in the nation.³⁰ The article attributes this statistic to Disneyland’s ability to stimulate the imagination of its visitors.³¹ Clearly, exploration on an imaginative level competed with genuine interaction between humans and nature and even supplanted it. Indeed, the mid-twentieth century witnessed a noticeable decline in entertainment environments, such as ski resorts and seaside hotels, which reflected the “natural features of the landscape” surrounding them.³² A burgeoning car culture enabled Americans to penetrate farther into the natural world, though their interactions with this world became limited to the visual experience the car window

²⁹ Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks,” in *Designing Disney’s Theme Parks*, 29.

³⁰ Gladwin Hill, “Disneyland Reports on its First Ten Million,” *New York Times*, February 2, 1958.
<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/114375931?accountid=14846>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1991), 30.

offered.³³ Considering that car tourism in the 1950s and 1960s instigated a clear desire for nomadic roving from within the safety of what Monica Ganas derisively terms “gated communities on wheels,” but that such exploration was generally a solely visual experience, the immense popularity of Disneyland is understandable.³⁴ The Magic Kingdom, after all, was itself essentially a gated community, where nomadic exploration involved complete sensory immersion, with the bonus of guaranteed interactions involving exotic racial minorities. Thus Disneyland’s imaginative realm became, on some level, more than a mere re-creation of famous natural destinations; it was instead the destination itself, a development which intimated, alarmingly, that mainstream imaginings of nature and the Indigenous peoples associated with it were becoming equated with reality.

There was a rather terrible irony, as Jones and Wills point out, in the fact that Americans venerated every “vinyl leaf and plastic tree” in Disneyland even as they ignored genuine natural wonders, and California’s beauty made this incongruity all the more flagrant.³⁵ Though a contemporary newspaper remarked in wonder that over forty percent of Disneyland’s visitors came from outside the state, it is perhaps more significant that over half of these visitors were therefore Californian.³⁶ The Magic Kingdom had managed to find a home where its counterfeiting of natural landscapes would go largely un-criticized. Indeed, California was emblematic of both the cultural assumptions and anxieties which Disneyland’s proffered imaginative wandering would, respectively, reinforce and assuage. California may have been a

³³ Ibid., 37.

³⁴ Ganas, *Under the Influence*, 68.

³⁵ Jones and Wills, *The Invention of the Park*, 106.

³⁶ Hill, “Disneyland Reports,” *New York Times*.

land of “highest mountains” and “tallest redwoods,” but it was also the heartland of booming, Cold War induced military-industrial growth, which resulted in Orange County in particular becoming the epicenter of a veritable “gold-rush” for the economic opportunities presented by this “new frontier.”³⁷ As such, Orange County experienced a proliferation of planned, suburban communities almost wholly populated by white, middle-class families.³⁸ Minorities were segregated into separate neighborhoods.³⁹ The area also boasted a vibrant, grassroots conservative movement that sought to uphold those traditions of private property and individual fulfillment which had made a middle-class, suburban, and racially homogenous lifestyle the apex of the American Dream.⁴⁰ Yet one could conjecture that the achievement of this apex subverted the roving, adventurous desires of many Californians, whose taste for the frontier was not completely sated before they found themselves ensconced in suburbia. Thus, if many of Disneyland’s visitors had already ‘conquered’ their personal frontier, it is little wonder that they found the Magic Kingdom’s continued imaginative nomadic exploration so attractive.

As an imaginative conduit for changing American perceptions of nature, culture and personal fulfillment, Disneyland was incredibly effective. The theme park’s social perceptiveness must be, at least partially, attributed to Walt Disney, who, as Francaviglia suggests, could be viewed as the greatest “representative and shaper of twentieth century American

³⁷ Ganas, *Under the Influence*, 23; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 26-8; 28.

³⁸ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 39-43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43-5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 51-3.

culture.”⁴¹ The contemporary observers’ often adulatory language describing Walt Disney supports this statement, and even foreshadows the nomadic desires which his theme park would eventually fulfill. A 1954 article in *Time* magazine, for example, began with a brief, fictional story in which a witch doctor “2000 miles from civilization” in the “equatorial forest” of the Belgian Congo conjures the figure of Mickey Mouse, demonstrating a mere evocation of the power that “infinitely greater magician,” Walt Disney, wielded.⁴² The article further remarked admiringly on the ability of Disney’s merchandise to reach “the counters of the world.”⁴³ Evidently, even before Disneyland’s inception, its creator was recognized as a symbol of the nomadic exploration into exotic cultures that white Americans craved. After his death, Disney was eulogized as a man who “refused to see life in the raw, to accept the end of innocence,” a powerful statement which contains an alarming implication; sustained naivety, if not tempered by knowledge of ‘raw’ reality, is perhaps akin to perpetuated ignorance.⁴⁴ As Francaviglia astutely observes, Walt Disney’s brand of innocence was one capable of “envisioning new empires.”⁴⁵ One could further add, however, that it was not capable of dispelling the racialized assumptions which made the very notion of empire permissible. Indeed, Disney’s “small-boy fascination with explorers, big-game animals, outlaws [and] Indians” ensured that the nomadic desires of Disneyland’s visitors

⁴¹ Francaviglia, “Walt Disney’s Frontierland,” 161.

⁴² Anonymous, “Cinema: Father Goose,” *Time Magazine*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Anonymous, “Walt Disney: Images of Innocence,” *Time Magazine*, December 23, 1966.

<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,840796-2,00.html>.

⁴⁵ Francaviglia, “Walt Disney’s Frontierland,” 164.

were sated under the auspices of innocence and amusement, which served to thinly veil racial ignorance.⁴⁶

Walt Disney's impact on the theme park's formation is visible through Main Street, U.S.A., a streetscape he modelled after an idealized version of his hometown Marceline, Missouri, and more broadly on his conceptions of turn-of-the-century, small-town American life.⁴⁷ Older generations reminisced as they strolled down this picturesque boulevard, while younger visitors caught glimpses of a lifestyle which suburban developments and urban decay were rapidly absorbing; one visiting family commented that Main Street was where adults "remember[ed] when" life was so idyllic, while children asked "why aren't things like this today?"⁴⁸ Such pleasurable ruminations were undoubtedly the intended result of this streetscape, which was Disneyland's sole entrance and exit. Conversely, over half a century earlier, visitors to the Chicago Exposition had often erroneously assumed that Cody's exceedingly popular Wild West Show marked the entrance to the fair.⁴⁹ As has been discussed, the Exposition merely suggested that visitors experience the White City before venturing into the racially variegated Midway.⁵⁰ Disneyland did not condone such misunderstandings, nor allow its guests any possibility of misconstruing the racial juxtapositions it offered; the physical inescapability of Main Street ensured that the nomadic wandering of white Americans was imaginatively initiated from a bastion of normative values.

⁴⁶ Arthur Gordon, "Walt Disney," *Look*, July 26, 1955, 29 quoted in Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 395.

⁴⁷ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 22.

⁴⁸ Barstow Family, *Disneyland Dream*, 1956, 22:00-22:15.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZKHnAT_0c0.

⁴⁹ L.G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 137.

⁵⁰ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 62.

Indeed, with this in mind, one could posit that Main Street did not act as a “key” that “unlocked” the rest of Disneyland.⁵¹ Instead, it was a sort of psychological tether, preventing the imaginative nomad from wandering too far into the racialized netherworlds of Adventureland and Frontierland. As Walt Disney once commented, he wanted to create “a place where you can’t [could not] get lost.”⁵² For the imaginative adventurers who experienced the forced march down the Main Street synopsis of American values, becoming psychologically lost was undoubtedly difficult.

Even as Main Street acted as an imaginative anchor for the roving nomad, it contributed to the stark contrasts between normative and inferior cultures which made its comforting presence necessary. As Marling observes, Main Street terminated in a “Hub,” or circular area in front of the Sleeping Beauty Castle, from which the eager explorer could suddenly glimpse the entries to the other areas of the park, including the “Frontierland stockade,” and the “bamboo portals of Adventureland.”⁵³ There was an evident visual and physical differentiation between the “familiar milieu” of mainstream hegemony in Main Street and the rest of the theme park.⁵⁴ Disneyland would countenance none of the gradual racial progressions of the Chicago Exposition, instead plunging the imaginative nomad abruptly into the fantastic and—in the case of Adventureland and Frontierland—racialized realms of the Magic Kingdom. As Jiminy Cricket commented in *A Day at Disneyland*, the termination of Main Street was “the end of the

⁵¹ Francaviglia, “Walt Disney’s Frontierland,” 162.

⁵² Henry A. Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 42.

⁵³ Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks,” in *Designing Disney’s Theme Parks*, 73; 74.

⁵⁴ Richard Francaviglia, “Main Street, U.S.A.: A Comparison/Contrast of Streetscapes in Disneyland and Walt Disney World,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no.1 (1981): 147. DOI: 10.1111/j.0022-3840.1981.00141.x.

line,” a slightly foreboding remark which intimated that nomadic adventuring only truly began once the visitor had left the comforting embrace of Main Street.⁵⁵ Thus Main Street did not serve as a “spatial mediator,” capable of arbitrating the differences between civilized American society and the “other cultures and landscapes of the park.”⁵⁶ It was, instead, a spatial differentiator, serving to remind visitors of the inherent inequalities between these entities. Perhaps the only structure capable of ‘mediation’ in this context was the Sleeping Beauty Castle, which alone served to remind the psychological nomad that the overarching context of imagination made their roving exploration, from culture to culture and landscape to landscape, morally acceptable .

This sense of intrepid adventurousness, invoked by juxtapositions like the one between the normative Main Street and the exotic worlds of Adventureland and Tomorrowland, was purposefully manufactured.⁵⁷ As one of Walt Disney’s former designers commented, the park was intended to allow visitors to triumph over adverse situations, thus assuring them of their ability to “handle the real challenges in life.”⁵⁸ Despite the irony of such a contrived sense of reassurance, it was certainly a fitting fulfilment of the nomadic desires of a restless suburban population. Disneyland’s transportation, or lack thereof, fostered such feelings of capability and daring: once one reached the terminus of Main Street, the only means of proceeding were by

⁵⁵ Walt Disney and Jiminy Cricket, *Horse Car Ride Down Main Street U.S.A.*, from *A Day at Disneyland with Walt Disney and Jiminy Cricket*, 1957. TPAA636. Theme Park Audio Archives, 4:30-4:36. http://www.themeparkaudioarchives.com/members/archives_disneyland_recor_ds_day_at_disneyland.html

⁵⁶ Wilson, *The Culture of Nature*, 160.

⁵⁷ Steiner, “Frontierland as Tomorrowland,” 11-12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

foot or by train.⁵⁹ The former implied a sense of engagement with the act of exploration, allowing the nomadic wanderer to correlate their imaginative roving with physical travel. The latter, which “girdled the theme park” much as trains had once encircled colonized areas, provided a less labour intensive but still symbolic means of exploration.⁶⁰ Indeed, the train was perhaps the most apt emblem of the nomadic desires which Disneyland fulfilled; it was representative of white progress and civilization, yet it never actually travelled beyond the clearly delineated boundaries of an imaginary world. Likewise, the psychological nomad, who traversed new frontiers and voyeuristically experienced other cultures without ever deviating from the mainstream ethos of postwar American society, was limited to a purely imaginary experience.

As the train which endlessly encircled Disneyland further implied, there was simply no reason for an effective means of transportation when the desired destination had already been reached. For visitors like the Barstow family, who won a free trip to the Magic Kingdom in 1956 and recorded their adventures in the homemade documentary *Disneyland Dream*, the theme park was undoubtedly such a destination, capable of reducing genuine natural wonders to mere subsidiary side notes.⁶¹ White and likely middle-class, the Barstow family jubilantly received the news of their free vacation while standing on the well-groomed lawn of their suburban-looking home, and their similarly white and respectable-looking neighbours wished them well on their adventure.⁶² Released from their racially homogenous suburban enclave, they began—somewhat ironically—their physical travel

⁵⁹ Marling, “Disneyland, 1955,” 185.

⁶⁰ Francaviglia, “Walt Disney’s Frontierland,” 179.

⁶¹ Barstow Family, *Disneyland Dream*, 1956.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 2:20-7:05.

towards their imaginative journey, flying from Connecticut to California.⁶³ Though this initial portion of their trip was arguably more demonstrative of real nomadic exploration than Disneyland ever could be, they deemed it simply an enjoyable means to an end, glimpsing the “Mississippi River” and the “Great Plains,” but expressing no regret that they were unable to tangibly experience these natural wonders.⁶⁴ Upon reaching their destination, they embarked on a quick expedition through California, viewing the orange groves that once blanketed Anaheim, and experiencing for the first time the waters of the Pacific Ocean.⁶⁵ Yet even this nomadic wandering, offering a more palpable sense of exploration than their aerial glimpse of the American landscape, was still considered ancillary to the imaginative opportunities that awaited them. The cold waters of the Pacific merely “invigorated” the Barstows before they reached that “climax of [their] family dream journey,” Disneyland.⁶⁶ As this demonstrates, imaginative exploration had managed to psychologically supplant genuine nomadic interactions with the natural world.

This appropriation of natural surroundings becomes all the more alarming when one considers its racialized implications. After all, Disneyland’s proffered imaginative exploration would not have thrilled its nomadic visitors had it not exposed them to ‘exotic’ natural landscapes, and, inevitably, the barbarous peoples which the popular mind imagined inhabited them. Indeed, the diction of contemporary observers, especially when commenting upon Adventureland, demonstrated that mainstream distinctions between Indigenous peoples and nature were disturbingly

⁶³ Ibid., 7:10-7:30.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 9:20-10:10.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 13:40-52; 18:30-19:00.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 18:50-18:56; 19:00-19:10.

muddled. One contemporary article mentioned offhandedly that both the “animals and savages” were mechanized in the Jungle Cruise attraction at Adventureland, while another noted that “trap-jawed crocodiles and painted warriors glare[d] menacingly” at the passing visitor.⁶⁷ As these casual but telling comments suggest, exotic natural scenes and glimpses of racial minorities were equally likely to imaginatively tantalize the psychological nomad at Adventureland, despite the misrepresentation this fabrication entailed. Fittingly, in *A Day at Disneyland*, Adventureland was the area immediately experienced after the visitor had reached “the end of the line” at the terminus of Main Street, again emphasizing the contrast between normalcy and the “visceral, sensual experience[s]” this racialized realm offered.⁶⁸ A more foreboding soundtrack replaced the jaunty and cheerful music which had accompanied Jiminy Cricket’s tour of Main Street once Adventureland’s threshold was crossed.⁶⁹ Notably, however, this music took on a less menacing air when Walt Disney’s voice began its narration.⁷⁰ This provides a rather apt metaphor for the larger experience Adventureland offered, in which nomadic wanderers roved through distant, alien cultures, even as that incessant ‘voice’ of their own racialized assumptions helped them to remain comfortably bounded.

⁶⁷ Hill, “Disneyland Reports,” *New York Times*; Anonymous, “Show Business: How to Make a Buck,” *Time Magazine*, July 29, 1957.

<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,825227,00.html>.

⁶⁸ Walt Disney and Jiminy Cricket, *A Boat Ride Through Adventureland*, from *A Day at Disneyland with Walt Disney and Jiminy Cricket*, 1957. TPAA637.

Theme Park Audio Archives,

http://www.themeparkaudioarchives.com/members/archives_disneyland_records_day_at_disneyland.html; Walt Disney and Jiminy Cricket, *Horse Car Ride Down Main Street U.S.A.*, Theme Park Audio Archives, 4:30-4:36; Marling, “Disneyland, 1955,” 173.

⁶⁹ Walt Disney and Jiminy Cricket, *A Boat Ride Through Adventureland*, Theme Park Audio Archives. 0:00-1:00.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Adventureland's amalgamation of exotic peoples and landscapes proved a winning combination, and one which was particularly embodied in the Jungle Cruise ride, the "most popular of Disneyland's 42 paid attractions" by the late 1950s.⁷¹ It offered visitors a quick and entertaining synopsis of a safari experience, without any of the "mosquitoes, monsoons and other misadventures" which plagued genuine explorers.⁷² Once the imaginative nomad had embarked upon their Jungle Cruise, their "skipper and guide" warned them to "take a last good look at the dock," for, as they were jokingly reminded, they may never return.⁷³ In this context, one could conjecture that the guide acted as a sort of psychological counterweight to the racialized netherworld which was visible outside the boat. Much as Walt Disney's voice subsumed the foreboding music of Adventureland, and the Sleeping Beauty Castle mediated the contrasts between the normative Main Street and the more exotic areas of the park, the flippant comments of the guide reminded the nomadic wanderer that they remained in an imaginative, ostensibly guilt-free world in which their mainstream assumptions would go unchallenged. Fittingly, their guide thus 'protected' them from the dangers of Adventureland; as the cruise entered the ominous "cannibal country," the skipper noted the menacing visage of an 'Indian' standing on the shore, who, seconds later, shot a crocodile which had suddenly appeared on the same bank.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Anonymous, "Show Business," *Time Magazine*.

⁷² Wilson, *The Culture of Nature*, 161.

⁷³ Thurl Ravenscroft, *Jungle Cruise LP* from Side Two of *Walt Disney's Enchanted Tiki Room LP #ST-3966*, 1968. TPAA7. Theme Park Audio Archives. 0:10-0:25.

http://www.themeparkaudioarchives.com/members/archives_disneyland_adventureland_jungle_cruise.html.

⁷⁴ Walt Disney and Jiminy Cricket, *A Boat Ride Through Adventureland*, Theme Park Audio Archives.4:05-4:35.

Though the crocodile was targeted, the delineation between the two mechanical menaces is perilously thin, and one gathers that the ‘savage’ could have been as easily—and triumphantly—vanquished as the animal. Thus Mike Wallace’s comment that Disneyland convinced American visitors that the present had emerged “gently, naturally, and inevitably out of the past” is perhaps erroneous.⁷⁵ Indeed, violent, abrupt, and inhumane aspects of nomadic exploration were blatantly and imaginatively perpetuated in the Magic Kingdom for the sake of entertainment.

In Frontierland, where the “faith, courage and ingenuity of the pioneers” who had traversed the “unsettled land” of the American frontier was unabashedly celebrated, guests witnessed an intensification of this insensitive parody of brutal white nomadic exploration.⁷⁶ Such adulation implied that this particular imaginative realm perpetuated rather innocent—or perhaps ignorant is the more appropriate appellation—notions of westward expansion. As Ganas points out, California was the stage of ruthless exterminations of Indigenous tribes for the sake of an ever-progressing frontier.⁷⁷ Thus Frontierland, symbolically located, as Francaviglia notes, in the western-most portion of the park, was emblematic of a profound irony.⁷⁸ Those Indigenous peoples who had once been the ostensibly inadequate caretakers of an ‘unsettled land’ were now maintained in a physical stasis, allowing white Americans to imaginatively continue the nomadic exploration through which their roving ancestors had ‘settled’ this

⁷⁵ Mike Wallace, “Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World,” in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1996), 138.

⁷⁶ Winston Hibler, *Disneyland U.S.A.*, directed by Hamilton Luske (Walt Disney Productions: 1956), 9:35-9:44.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DG4Zk9d7Ekw>.

⁷⁷ Ganas, *Under the Influence*, 12-13.

⁷⁸ Francaviglia, “Walt Disney’s Frontierland,” 162.

land. This seeming paradox was inserted into attractions like the steam boat ride through the rivers of Frontierland, in which visitors caught a quick glimpse of a burning settler's cabin, explained in *A Day at Disneyland* by Jiminy Cricket's mournful comment that "Indians must have done it."⁷⁹ Francaviglia astutely argues that onlookers must have "intuitively" realized that such destruction was emblematic of the inevitability of westward expansion; for every burning cabin there was another just waiting to be built.⁸⁰ However, one could further add that the cabin signified the larger incongruities of Frontierland—it was, after all, an eternally static entity intended to symbolize a nomadic past—as well as the violence and brutality which Disneyland rarely bothered to expunge from its re-creations of explorative American history.

Even as ostensibly itinerant Indigenous peoples were maintained in a physical stasis in Frontierland—variously employed as “dancers, artisans, and canoe-paddlers”—their cultures were historically frozen to suit white visitors' imaginative expectations.⁸¹ Indeed, one could conjecture that such stasis belied the still prevalent assimilationist beliefs of mainstream Americans, which the 1934 Native American Reorganization Act and its affirmation of tribal identity had only partially vanquished.⁸² As late as 1968, *Time* magazine asserted that it was the traditions and legal customs of “reservation Indian[s]” which hindered their ability to become “completely

⁷⁹ Walt Disney and Jiminy Cricket, *Exploring Frontierland*, from *A Day at Disneyland with Walt Disney and Jiminy Cricket*, 1957. TPA638. Theme Park Audio Archives, 3:50-4:55.
http://www.themeparkaudioarchives.com/members/archives_disneyland_recor_ds_day_at_disneyland.html

⁸⁰ Francaviglia, “Walt Disney's Frontierland,” 176.

⁸¹ Steiner, “Frontierland as Tomorrowland,” 13.

⁸² Francaviglia, “Walt Disney's Frontierland,” 176-7.

assimilated by 20th century white society.”⁸³ Conversely, the narrator of *Disneyland, U.S.A.*, a 1956 Disney Productions ‘documentary’ of the theme park, assured viewers that the “permanent and popular” Indian Village in Frontierland was where Native Americans could go to “perpetuate their ceremonial customs and centuries-old cultures.”⁸⁴ The images the documentary presents quickly contradict the apparent magnanimity of this statement: predominantly white onlookers, both seated nearby and sailing past on the Mark Twain Steamboat, surround Indigenous peoples dressed in traditional clothing performing tribal dances.⁸⁵ As this suggests, the cultural practices of Native Americans in Disneyland were only preserved for the sake of their entertainment value, much as the historical adversity they symbolized was perpetuated for the thrill it provided visitors. Thus the Magic Kingdom ultimately did not encourage the “assimilation and conformity” of racial minorities to mainstream, postwar norms or at least that it did not do so within the park.⁸⁶ Indeed, the imaginative expectations of its white visitors made assimilationist policies untenable. After all, the psychological nomad would have found little satisfaction in Disneyland had they not been allowed to rove between cultures which both fit their pre-conceived notions and tantalized their sensibilities by the very unfamiliarity which assimilation would have nullified.

One may observe, of course, that the evocation of nomadic travel which Disneyland provided, with all of its resultant racial and cultural implications, was fundamentally

⁸³ Anonymous, “Civil Rights: Equality for the Red Man,” *Time Magazine*, April 19, 1968.

<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,838262-1,00.html>.

⁸⁴ Hibler, *Disneyland U.S.A.*, 1956. 19:30-20:05.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 19:30-20:45.

⁸⁶ Francaviglia, “Walt Disney’s Frontierland,” 177.

fake—little more than a mechanized, synthetic and rather feeble imitation of genuine adventure. Only on an imaginative level was one able to surmount natural obstacles, brave new wildernesses, or, on a more problematic but still applicable level, wander amongst and perhaps conquer ostensibly inferior cultures. As an executive of Sea World, a nearby and competing theme park, asked in frustration, “Have you ever tried to touch anything in *Disneyland*? Have you ever tried to sit on *their* grass?”⁸⁷ Though his outburst was applied to Disneyland in the 1990s, it nonetheless encompasses the contradictions which the Magic Kingdom embodied in the 1950s and 1960s. It was, after all, merely a theme park which offered imaginary thrills in the guise of real experiences. Yet perhaps tangibility was immaterial; as Marling observes, there was still something “blessedly real” about Disneyland.⁸⁸ Walt Disney had constructed a world in which imagination acted as the sole and sufficient conduit for the roving, nomadic, and often racialized desires of an increasingly middle-class and suburbanized population. They responded eagerly to his ability to both affirm and playfully threaten their notions of racial supremacy. For such psychological nomads’ roving pleasure, Indigenous peoples and their cultures, as well as the natural landscapes often connected with them, were held in a stasis which remained within the imaginative bounds of mainstream American norms, much as an endlessly circling train bordered the park. Thus, if Disneyland was a “global village,” as Richard Schickel rather hesitantly labels it, then it was a profoundly unequal one.⁸⁹ The differences between the ‘permanent’ inhabitants and those

⁸⁷ Susan G. Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (California: University of California Press, 1997), 103.

⁸⁸ Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks,” in *Designing Disney’s Theme Parks*, 31.

⁸⁹ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 325.

who were able to nomadically wander amongst them were clearly, if imaginatively, delineated. Indeed, the iniquities of this ‘village’ could only be disguised by placing them within the realm of the imaginary, by creating a “land of illusion.”⁹⁰ If such illusions were shattered, if the benevolent presence of the Sleeping Beauty Castle failed to remind the nomad that their wandering was morally exonerated by the context of imagination, then perhaps Disneyland would have been exposed as little more than a mechanized side-show, unable to disguise its racialized tawdriness.

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⁹⁰ Donald Freeman, “Disneyland: A Decade of Adventure,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, July 25, 1965.
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