

Disneyland: A Source of Joy and Inspiration

“Disneyland will never be completed as long as there is imagination left in the world” — Walt Disney

When Walt Disney formally dedicated Disneyland on opening day (July 17, 1955) he stated that he hoped that it would be “. . . a source of joy and inspiration to all the world.” Now as the original Disney theme park nears its 50th anniversary, Disneyland continues to be as popular and vibrant today as it was on opening day.

Over the past nearly five decades the Disney theme park that started it all has welcomed over 500 million guests from all corners of the globe and continues to introduce new forms of entertainment and technology that fulfills Walt Disney’s goal that Disneyland “never be completed as long as there is imagination left in the world.” The creation of Disneyland was, perhaps, the single greatest entertainment achievement of the 20th century – - introducing an entirely new concept in outdoor family entertainment and launching today’s global theme park industry. In creating Disneyland, Walt Disney sparked the world’s imagination and established an icon of fun and magic known the world over.

Today, more than six generations of families and friends from across the USA and around the globe have grown-up with the familiar and comforting experience of Disneyland, making it a treasured part of our collective consciousness. “The Happiest Place on Earth” can count among its guests seven US Presidents (From Harry S. Truman thru George H. Bush), numerous heads of state (Prime Minister Nehru of India, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Emperor Hirohito of Japan, etc.), plus countless famed actors, actresses, singers, musicians, artists and athletes (a virtual “Who’s Who” of the 20th century and young millennium).

One head of state that never made it to Disneyland, but made worldwide headlines in the process, was Nikita S. Khrushchev (Premier of the Soviet Union). He complained bitterly to the media about being denied a visit to Disneyland (due to security concerns) during his historic 1959 US tour. Khrushchev’s outrage became an international incident and elicited numerous reactions. Author Herman Wouk (“The Caine Mutiny,” “The Winds of War,” etc.) wrote, “I don’t blame Khrushchev for jumping up and down in rage over missing Disneyland. There are few things more worth seeing in the United States, or indeed anywhere in the world.”

Khrushchev was not the only person to hold Disneyland in high regard. Through the years many commentators, including noted planners, futurists and even presidents have remarked on the contributions Disneyland has made to pop culture and the world. Famed writer and futurist Ray Bradbury commented in a 2003 interview: “Walt did more to change the world for the good than almost any politician in history and his motivation for creating Disneyland was the best motivation in the world: his family.”

In 1990 US President Ronald Reagan described Disneyland as “a place that has captured the imagination and earned the affection of four generations of Americans . . . And a place that has served as host and goodwill ambassador to millions of visitors from abroad.”

By creating fantasy and happiness Disneyland has even influenced such diverse areas as vacation trends (the park redefined the concept of the family vacation), transportation (first daily operating monorail in the western hemisphere; first daily operating PeopleMover system in the US), training and development (introduced and popularized nametags in the workplace, the “University” approach to training) and even urban design. In the realm of entertainment the park has introduced such revolutionary concepts as Audio-Animatronics, air launched fireworks, re-programmable attractions, and innovations in lighting systems, sound design and costuming.

A 1997 touring museum exhibition entitled “The Architecture of Reassurance” highlighted many Disneyland innovations. Karal Ann Marling, Professor of Art History & American Studies at the University of Minnesota, assisted in producing the exhibit and commented that (Disneyland)...is the “most complex, baffling and beloved work of art produced in postwar America.”

The legend and lore of Disneyland has been celebrated in numerous books, TV documentaries, magazine articles and even museum retrospectives. The park has been invoked in numerous movies and many popular songs and has become a staple of American pop culture that has been successfully exported to Florida, Japan, France and soon China.

But most importantly the dedication speech that Walt Disney read on opening day is still relevant and applicable today as it was almost five decades ago: “To all who come to this happy place – welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts that have created America . . . with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world.”

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