Walt Disney: A Pioneer’s Leadership & Legacy
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Walt Disney had a simple dream: to bring happiness and joy to people of all ages. Not only was he incredibly passionate about his dream, but he also had countless leadership skills that he used to help him achieve it. While making a name for himself in the film and animation industry, he used his dream as a basis for everything he did. Walt Disney was able to live his dream through his theme parks, films, animations, television, and through his merchandising. Today The Walt Disney Company uses the same dream, philosophies, and leadership styles that Walt originally used to help them succeed in keeping Walt Disney’s legacy alive, and help them succeed in being one of the most valuable companies in the world.1

Disney tried incredibly hard to make his dream a reality, especially while creating and building Disneyland. In the speech he gave when opening Disneyland he described it as a place where “age relives fond memories of the past… and youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future.”2 Disney wanted to create a place that would bring joy to all ages, not just a select group. The entrance of Disneyland now contains a plaque that reads, “Here you leave today, and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy.”3 (See Appendices A for picture of the plaque.) Disney didn’t want to create “just another amusement park”; he wanted to create a park where people could go to escape reality completely; a place where they could just have fun.

To ensure his dream was achieved in Disneyland, he took every bit of reality and blended it into the fantasy world of the park. Disney went as far as inventing a new color, “Go-Away Green,” that was formulated to be least distracting to the human eye to make sure nothing distracted people. He painted trashcans, benches, and even administrative buildings this color.

All electrical outlets were blended into trees so they wouldn’t be seen. On top of all of that, Disney himself recruited and coached employees so they could give customers the best experience possible.4

Walt Disney designed Disneyland itself to give off a “cinematic affect,”5 meaning he wanted his guests to feel like they were walking into their own movie when they walked into Disneyland. A movie where they could be any character they wanted to be, and do anything they wanted to do.

Disney’s original plans for the park were highly controversial. Other people at the company told him that it was unrealistic to have all the guests enter the park through the same entrance. They also said that they were spending too much money creating one part of the park (Town Square), especially since it wasn’t going to be making the company any money. However, Walt continued with his ideas, saying that he wanted all of his guests to share the same experience when walking into the park. Disney also said that he wanted the park to make a good first impression on the guests, and he knew Town Square would do that.6

One of the biggest parts of the legacy left by Walt Disney have been his theme parks, and his original ideas are used in both Disneyland and Disney World today. These things are the keys to their extraordinary success. For example, the senior facilitator responsible for recruiting, hiring, and training “cast members” (Disney’s name for employees), Jeff Williford, said that The

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Walt Disney Company “consistently over-manage[s] certain things that most company’s under-
manage or ignore.” When hiring new “cast members” they look for people of strong character,
who can do what their job requires them to do without hesitation. There are over 3,000 job
classifications at Disney World, and they all share one common goal: “exceptional guest
experiences,” Williford said. The Walt Disney Company is so serious about training its
employees that none of them even see a guest for the first six weeks of working. Disney trains
their employees to immerse themselves completely into the culture and history of Disney, and to
connect to guests on an emotional level.

Another example of how Walt Disney’s dreams and ideas are still used today is that “Go-
Away Green” and “No See-um Gray” (another color created by Disney) are still used in the
parks today. They’re used to coat over some park benches, trashcans, and administrative
buildings, just like they were back in Walt Disney’s day.

Walt Disney’s ideas, risks, and creativity when creating both Disneyland and Disney
World are the qualities that made the parks succeed in the past. The parks continue to follow
Walt’s original philosophies and ideas, which is what is making them as successful as they are
today. In 2008, the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida had over 17 million visitors to Magic
Kingdom, almost 11 million at Epcot, 9.6 million at Disney’s Hollywood Studios, and 9.5
million at Animal Kingdom. Disneyland had around 14 million visitors, and Disney’s California

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Adventure had almost 6 million. Disneyland is often referred to as “the happiest place on Earth.”

His theme parks weren’t the only way Walt Disney was able to live his dream of spreading happiness. He also did it through his films, animations, cartoons, and television. He took risks in these areas that other producers laughed at, but that ended up paying off. He did so many things that were deemed impossible that by the time he was out of the business, nothing was.

Walt Disney wanted to innovate animation. In 1928 he did this for the first time. He and Ub Iwerks made *Steamboat Willie*, the first cartoon to have synchronized sound. The eight minute black and white cartoon did so well that after just two weeks, it was released in the Roxy in New York City, the world’s largest theater at the time.

*Steamboat Willie*, although the first Mickey Mouse cartoon, wasn’t The Walt Disney Company’s first produced cartoon. Five years prior to Steamboat Willie, in 1923, Walt Disney officially started the company, which was then called The Disney Brothers Studios, by signing a contract with M.J. Wrinkle to produce his Alice Comedies. The Alice Comedies were a series of cartoons in which a young live-action girl went on adventures with her animated cat on an animated landscape.

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Almost ten years after *Steamboat Willie*, in 1937, Walt Disney broke ground when he released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the first full length animated feature film.\(^{11}\) He was told his idea was foolish. The detractors said that no one would ever sit through, let alone pay money to sit through, a cartoon, or fairytale, that long. These critics were quickly proven wrong, however, when the movie grossed $6.5 million in the first two years.\(^{12}\) Disney, with the revenue from *Snow White*, bought 51 acres of land in Burbank, California specifically for creating animated features. Among the animated films created in this studio are *Peter Pan, Alicia in Wonderland, Fantasia, Bambi*, and *Cinderella*.\(^ {13}\)

Another way Walt Disney innovated animation was through his multi-plane camera. He wanted to bring animation to life in a way that shadowing and other tricks just couldn’t. In the multi-plane camera there are different levels of the scene that are certain distances away from each other. Each level moves independently of the others, giving it the feeling of being real, not animated. For example, in an animated scene containing the moon (in the background) and a house, to zoom in on the house would mean making the moon bigger. Of course, in real life when you walked toward a house, the moon does not appear any closer. With the multi-plane camera, they were able to keep the moon in the same place while getting closer to the house.\(^ {14}\)

*(See Appendices B for blueprints of the multi-plane camera.)*

In 1932, Disney was in the middle of a new cartoon called *Flowers and Trees*. They were already almost done with it when someone suggested to Walt that he should become the first to

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use the three-color dye transfer system to make his cartoons in color. Disney loved the idea and ended up throwing away everything they had already created for *Flowers and Trees*. They started fresh with the three-color dye transfer system, and *Flowers and Trees* was the first commercial film to use the system. The process was invented and owned by Technicolor.15

There were two other ways in which Walt Disney really changed animation. One of them is through widescreen animation. Before *Sleeping Beauty*, widescreen animation hadn’t been done before.16 Today almost every animated movie seen is done in widescreen format.

The final way Walt Disney made a monumental impact on animation is by bringing it to television. Before Disney, animation could rarely see any animation on the “small screen.” Disney knew that he would get more publicity if he became the first to consistently put animation on television. After Disney’s animations such as *Disneyland* (later known as *The Wonderful World of Disney*) and *The Mickey Mouse Club*, you could see almost any animation on television.17

For Walt Disney, bringing his animations to the television was more than just an innovation and a way to live his dream. It was also a marketing tool, another way for his company to be seen. Walt Disney himself was in a lot of television shows, and he took this opportunity to show the public that he was running a nice, generic company. He was charismatic, and knew that if people saw him as such, they would trust his company even more.18

In the late 1940s, Walt Disney decided to expand the studio in Burbank to include sound stages for live-action productions. The first live action-production done by Disney, and the first ever completely live-action feature (meaning there was no animation mixed in), *Treasure Island*, was released in 1950.

Walt Disney was always discouraged that his live-action films weren’t taken seriously enough, and that they weren’t entirely successful. Once, after watching *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Walt Disney was quoted saying, “That’s the kind of movie I’d like to make, but I can’t.” Although Disney’s live-action films weren’t a high point in his career, he still made history when releasing them. For example, he released the first ever fully live-action feature film. They also still brought happiness and joy to people, which was the whole point in making them.

Today, there are 54 Walt Disney Studios animated feature films (not including any sequels or movies released on DVD only), 18 of which Walt Disney himself got to be a part, 14 Disney Pixar animated films, and a countless number of live action films. Disney movies are some of the most successful in the world, for example, in 2013, Disney’s *Frozen* made a groundbreaking $1.2 billion. Walt Disney’s company’s movies still bring joy to people of all ages. When making new movies, cartoons, and animations, The Walt Disney Company still asks one simple question: What would Walt do?

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Today The Walt Disney Company has three television channels, Disney Channel, Disney Jr., and Disney XD. Disney Jr. is completely dedicated to children’s cartoons, with a series about Mickey Mouse and his gang.

Walt Disney, in the words of Jerry Beck, an animation historian, “pioneered sound, color, multi-plane depth… wide screen, [and] even television animation.”

Not only that, Disney was able to create incredible works of art through his live-action films. Many of these weren’t appreciated much in their time, but are now considered to be some of the most popular and “classic” movies around.

The final way Walt Disney was able to live his dream was through his merchandise. Merchandising was a way that Walt Disney could both advertise his company and spread happiness.

Disney only wanted the face of his company on high-quality products, and their merchandiser, Herman Kamen, knew that. As soon as Disney signed with him, Mickey Mouse’s face was everywhere. He was on “napkins, wallpaper, books, phonographs, all types of clothing, hairbrushes, toys, and much more.” It was due to all the work done by Kamen that Walt got enough money to start work on Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

Today The Walt Disney Company follows the same philosophy that Walt originally followed, and the Disney name is only printed on high-quality products. Disney is marketed all over the world, in almost every corner. The Walt Disney Company owns well over 100 assets

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24 Beck, Jerry. "National History Day Interview on Walt Disney and How He Changed Animation." E-mail interview. 30 Jan. 2015.

such as ESPN and ABC. All these popular companies market for Disney, and they all have the Disney brand name on them.

Walt Disney was able to live his dream of spreading happiness and joy to people everywhere through his theme parks, films, animations, television, and through his merchandising. Today The Walt Disney Company, a company often described as “for kids,” even brings joy to grown men through things like ESPN. He used his many leadership skills to help him live his dream, including his killer instincts, ability to take risks, charisma, and many more. His dream, philosophies, and leadership skills live on in The Walt Disney Company, and help it to keep Walt Disney’s legacy alive, and help it to be the huge, successful empire that it is today.

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Appendix

A.

HERE YOU LEAVE TODAY
AND ENTER THE WORLD
OF YESTERDAY, TOMORROW
AND FANTASY
B.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources-


This picture of the original animation for Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs let me see how animation has changed since the 1930s. The conclusions I made from this picture helped me write about how Walt Disney innovated animation.


This video of the ABC Broadcast of the opening of Disneyland helped me see what it was actually like in the fifties when Disneyland opened, it helped me see how people saw Disneyland, and what Disneyland was actually like when it first opened in 1955. Not only that, but this video gave me great quotes, one of which I used in my paper.


This video from 1966 gave me a lot more details about Disneyland, how it was created, and how it was built off of. It also gave me a look at what Disney World was being planned out to be.

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/w/walt_disney.html>.

This website gave me access to many Walt Disney quotes. Using this website I found quotes that relate to his vision and to his leadership styles. Some of these quotes were famous and others were not. I was able to base some of my arguments off of the quotes I found on this website.


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp4VrjvSW_k>.

This video gave me an idea of what Walt Disney was like on camera, charming. I later referenced this in my paper.


This was an obituary for Walt Disney. It explained a lot about the empire he created. It gave me information that I hadn’t known before, and gave me a look into what people actually thought of Disney in the 1960s.

This website is the official Walt Disney Animations website. On it I was able to find all of their feature films, which I referenced in paper.


This website gave me statistics on all the Disney-Pixar films. I later used these statistics in my paper when talking about how many Disney films there are today.

Beck, Jerry. "National History Day Interview on Walt Disney and How He Changed Animation."

E-mail interview. 30 Jan. 2015.

Jerry Beck in an animation historian who has written many books and is highly regarded. I asked him questions about how Walt Disney changed animation and affect it today. I was able to quote his answers in my paper when talking about how Walt Disney affected animation today.

This video of the Walt Disney explaining to the public how the multi-plane camera worked helped me better understand it and explain it in my paper. It also gave me an example to put into the paper that would help people reading my paper better understand the multi-plane camera.


This website gave me a lot of new information about Disney and Technicolor back in Walt Disney’s day. I used this information in my paper when talking about how Disney innovated animation through colored animation.


From this video on YouTube I was able to get a screenshot of how the multi-plane camera worked. I used this image in my Appendix to show my readers how the camera worked.

This is a screenshot I got from the video of Walt Disney introducing his multi-plane camera to the public. It is a picture of a blueprint for the camera. I used this picture in my Appendix.


This picture, which I got from the Harvard library database, is an image of the Jungle Cruise ride at Disneyland when it first opened in 1955. This picture helped me better understand how Disneyland has evolved since then.


<http://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g29092-d103346-i24263549-Disneyland_Park-Anaheim_California.html>.

The picture I used of the entrance plaque in my Appendix was the picture on this website.
Secondary Sources-


This was a paper about Walt Disney's leadership. It gave me information about some of his leadership styles, his vision, and his success. It was very helpful and a lot of the information I found in this paper helped me immensely in creating my final product. I referenced this paper many times in my paper for things like why he appeared on TV as much as he did, and how he lived his dream through his parks.


http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=37&sid=04159d68-1a86-40c1-87214a2c83b37048%40sessionmgr4005&hid=4209&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=bsh&AN=3665077.

This article was obviously about the Disney legacy. It gave me a lot of facts about the ideas Walt had that are still alive today, and how those ideas are helping the company today.


This article is about brand loyalty, and how Disney achieves it. Through this article I got a real definition of brand loyalty, and I found out the countless tricks that Disney uses to achieve it, most of which are based off Walt Disney’s initial dreams and ideas for the company.


One of Walt Disney’s main goals was to focus on the costumers and give them what they want most. In this article I figured out how The Walt Disney Company achieves that goal today. I spent a lot of time talking about that in my paper.

This book talked about how Walt Disney “created” the normal American child. This book helped me understand more about Walt Disney films and animations affected children, which eventually helped me write about Disney’s legacy.


This book explained how Walt Disney was a workaholic, and helped me understand how creative in this business he really was. I used some of the points explained in the book when writing my paper.


This website, which I found on the Internet Public Library, gave me an almost full history of The Walt Disney Company. I used a lot of information that I got from this website in my paper.


This list of the most valuable brands from Forbes Magazine told me that The Walt Disney Company was the fourteenth most valuable brand in the world. Although I didn’t list the exact number, I did reference this website when talking about The Walt Disney Company today and how successful they are today.


This article gave a lot of information on how Walt Disney and the Imagineers created Disneyland and how ahead of their time all their ideas were. I used a lot of the information I found in this article in my paper.


This website compared Disneyland and Disney World. I was able to see what one has that that the other doesn’t. I used this information when talking about the Disney theme parks in my paper.


This website gave me information on Steamboat Willie that I hadn’t known before, such as the fact that it was released in the largest theater in the world. I referenced this fact, and a few others I got from the website, in my paper.


On this website I was able to find statistics about visitors in both Disneyland and Disney World. I later used these statistics in my paper when talking about the success of the two parks today.


This gave me some extra information about Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. I was able to use this extra info in my paper when talking about the film.
"Disney History | The Walt Disney Company." *Disney History | The Walt Disney Company.*


This website gave me an inside look on the history of The Walt Disney Company. I used it to find out things like when *Steamboat Willie* was created, when *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was released, and about different films and animations done by the company.


From this website I was able to get information on the Technicolor process, the first film ever to use it, and how it worked. I used this information in my paper when talking about Disney being the first to use the process to create a colored film.


On this website I found out that *Sleeping Beauty* was the first ever animation to use 70mm format, or widescreen format. I referenced this information in my paper when talking about how Walt Disney innovated animation.

On this website I found information about television animation and how Walt Disney changed it. I referenced this information in my paper when talking about how Walt Disney innovated animation.


This article gave me an inside look at how The Walt Disney Company today uses Disney’s original philosophies and dreams, and always asks the question: What would Walt do?. I referenced this information in my paper when talking about the same thing.


This was a website dedicated to how Walt Disney marketed back in the day. It gave me insights to who marketed for them, what their marketing philosophies were, and how they were used. I referenced all this in my paper when talking about how Walt Disney and merchandising.

<http://www.cjr.org/resources/?c=disney>.

This website gave me a full list of every company The Walt Disney Company owns. I referenced this information in my paper when talking about how many assets The Walt Disney Company has.


This website gave me information on Walt Disney’s live-action films, how he felt about them personally, and even a few quote on the subject. I referenced this information and one of the quotes in my paper when talking about Walt Disney’s live-action films.


This website gave me an idea as to how popular and successful Disney movies are today. I was able to use some of the information I learned on this website in my paper, when talking about how popular and successful Disney movies are today.