

The Happiest Place on Earth: Orange County's Suburban Identity in Cold War America

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On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this thesis project.

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While the image of Disneyland remains in the collective American memory an amusement park and tourist attraction, the effect that the Park had on the creation of a regional, historical identity for Orange County as distinct from Hollywood is nearly unparalleled in Cold War history. It seems unthinkable that something as monumental as the creation of Disneyland and as horrific and detrimental as the Watts Riot could happen in such proximity within ten years, yet this decade is crucial for the crafting of two separate and contrasting regional identities in the Southern California region. The creation of Disneyland in Orange County in the 1950s is a significant turning point for the history of Southern California. This thesis will explore the transformations of the region by comparing the histories of Orange and Los Angeles counties through the 1950s and 1960s. The area transformed from its agrarian, then suburban roots into a region defined by its housing of this whimsical utopia. Later, the communal identity of Orange County developed alongside Disneyland came to welcome and support a movement of conservatism, demonstrated powerfully by the grassroots campaign for Barry Goldwater in 1964. This conservative regional identity is made even more distinct by the sharp contrast between these events and the racial tensions that erupted in the Watts Riot in 1965. While they emerged in geographical proximity, the Los Angeles Watts Riot shows how different the two counties had become by the 1960s. The Riot stands as a fundamental identifier of urban Los Angeles racial history, and would simply not have happened in a place as suburbanized as Orange County at this point in history. As these two counties underwent vast changes through their respective histories, global and American histories both saw significant changes in the postwar era not unrelated to the region-specific narrative produced here.

Essentially, this thesis will argue that the unique conditions for Los Angeles and Orange counties through the two decades following World War II created a regional cultural identity that could not have occurred at any other time, or in any other place. These two Southern California counties experienced a distinct set of conditions that allowed the development of separate and distinguishable identities for the two counties, that were also both distinct from any other region in America at the time. While it could have developed into a quasi-suburb of Los Angeles, Orange County instead embraced the sunbelt suburban lifestyle and fostered a neoconservative political identity that signaled a break from the more liberal Los Angeles identity, still largely defined by the motion picture industry.

Within academia, there is a specific historical subsection dedicated to this area of focus, although what currently exists tends to hone in on very specific aspects within this larger time and place context. Lisa McGirr, who I utilize for much of my material on the Goldwater campaign and its impact on the regional history, focuses specifically on the politically conservative New Right in Orange County. This book comes into conversation with the works of other historians such as George Marsden, who focuses specifically on evangelical Christianity and its historical implications, as well as Eric Avila and Spencer Olin, who both explore the effects of racialized historical trends in the region. Stephanie Coontz and Michelle Nickerson both focus on gender identities and the contextualization of family life in this time period. Neal Gabler is one of few historians who focuses specifically on Walt Disney as a historical figure, placing the man and the incredible empire he built into a historical context. All of these sources together, in

addition to journalistic documentation from the time period contextualize my exploration of Orange County's quest for an identity that occurred through the 1950s and 1960s.

Due to California's unique relationship to colonial Spain, it comes as a stark turn that such a suburban fixture as Disneyland would come to exist in land previously owned by Spain, then Mexico. Since the sixteenth century the area later known as Southern California was ruled by the Spanish colonial powers, and the situation remained as such until Mexico won independence from Spain in 1820 and became the new ruler of the region. Mexico remained in power in the region until the Mexican-American war in 1846, when the United States triumphed and the entire California region was considered part of the United States for the first time. In 1850 California was founded as the thirty-first state, and Los Angeles County was founded the same year¹. Orange County was founded and officially recognized by the state of California in 1888, with the incorporation of the cities of Santa Ana, Anaheim, and Orange after complaints that Los Angeles County was not providing its southern region and the defining citrus industry with adequate resources². Originally all incorporated under a unified Los Angeles County, the agricultural enterprises in the southern portion – what would later be known as Orange County – began to feel their needs were ignored. They saw resources concentrated on the capital of the county in urban Los Angeles, which bred resentment for downtown Los Angeles. Eventually, these needs and resentments led to the founding of Orange as an autonomous county.

¹ Dates in this section are all from Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream*, 1973.

² Gilbert Gonzalez, *Labor and Community*, 4.

After the establishment of the two counties, it would be nearly another century before the pivotal convergence of local factors created fiercely separate identities. While the motion picture industry remained in Los Angeles, most other industries developed consistently throughout the entire Southern California region. Agrarian communities transformed into more industrialized, and, eventually, suburbanized neighborhoods through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While much of Orange County had diverse industries, Los Angeles became significantly more racially diverse and stratified. The two trends were related: white middle class families migrated to the suburban areas of Orange County for the employment opportunities, leaving a higher concentration of racial minorities and much lower concentration of job opportunities in Los Angeles.

World War II, and the subsequent emergence of Cold War ideologies marks a critical shift in the regional histories for Orange and Los Angeles counties, as the war created huge shifts in the country that affected social, political, and economic climates nationwide. World War II also heavily influenced the development of Orange County, still largely comprised of agrarian communities at the beginning of the war. While Los Angeles had concretely established a monopoly on the motion picture industry and continued to shape its local identity around this industry, Orange County was less tied down to any industry and was, therefore, largely shaped by military industries during and after the war. While Los Angeles was not entirely unaffected by the War, the regional identity of Los Angeles held fast to its ties to the motion picture industry and also its eclectic and diverse residents, architecture, and cultural influences. Meanwhile, the military-industrial complex was quickly adopted in the more fluid Orange County and in

turn helped to shift the county from its agrarian tendencies to a more industrialized region through militarized industry bases³.

The ending of World War II created the basis for the structural shifts that would come to define the two areas as distinct from one another, concurrent with the emergence of Cold War rhetoric and a deepening reliance on more ideological concepts. What people viewed as a surge of nationalism throughout the War turned into a more acute sense of U.S. exceptionalism during of the Cold War and its need to fight communism. This exceptionalism managed to relate to both a conservative movement and more left-wing political affiliations, based upon interpretations of this overarching nationalism and exceptionalism⁴. The rapidly suburbanized Orange County that existed after World War II ended fostered a welcoming environment to a more conservative and homogenous communal identity. The sunbelt image of the region also created an environment very receptive to the utopian Disneyland that opened in 1955, and reflected the more uniform image of the area that was not easily found in the more diverse Los Angeles County, where the Disney studios originated. After it opened and Orange County embraced Disneyland's particular utopia, the early 1960s saw the development of a strong conservatism in Orange County that was reinforced by its homogenous and suburban communities. Meanwhile, Los Angeles developed astonishing diversity, and one of the defining moments in creating Los Angeles history and identity came from the Watts Riot of 1965. The event and its aftermath highlighted many of the critical issues around race that had been forming since World War II. Local structural shifts like the rapid

³ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 26.

⁴ Stephen Ambrose and Douglas Brinkley's *Rise to Globalism* informed my broad contextual knowledge of the time period and national political climates.

suburbanization of the region affected members of different race, class, and political groups very differently. These rolling changes erupted into rioting aimed at law enforcement. The events of the Watts Riot saw astronomically high death tolls, injury, and property damage compared to other race riots of the same time. Arson, looting, and the interruption of traffic flow became common occurrences in the south central neighborhoods of Los Angeles, with rampant violence becoming normalized by the third day of the rioting, and which would be entirely impossible in the decentralized suburban areas of Orange County. This era, and the critical events that occurred in both demonstrate the distinct regional identities that emerged and continued to define the separate cultures in both counties.

The Disneyland mystique, as will be discussed in more detail later, was incompatible with the diverse and chaotic reality of urban Los Angeles at the time, and, therefore, was necessarily a fixture in the development of Orange County's regional identity. Neal Gabler's history of the development of Disneyland acts as the foundation for the chapter about Disneyland and its effects on the Orange County community through the 1950s by compiling multiple primary sources and crafting a narrative out of those sources. Lisa McGirr's contextualization of the county's political transformations works well in conjunction with Gabler's writing, specifically as an extension of contextualizing regional identity in Orange County. Both of these authors are then complicated by more tangentially related works, which bring invaluable secondary topics into the larger conversation and aid in rounding out the setting for the historical conversation.

In my research methodology, my own perspectives have come into play largely in my interpretation of primary resources. While I have remained fairly trusting of secondary sources – and perhaps such trust comes from the diversity of ages and genders in the authors I have been working with – my initial analysis of primary documentation of the 1950s and 1960s remains fairly focused on what is lacking, rather than what exists. Within conversations about Disneyland specifically, patrons who were excluded from the Park experience due to financial or general access complications are rarely included in conversations about the historical impact of the Park. Similarly, the notable lack of white participants in the events of the Watts Riot remains a necessary point of focus in my research and analytic methodology. My focus on the lacking is what guides my historical curiosity, and the narrative that I will craft will draw directly upon that lack, by informing the critical question of *why* certain voices and experiences are excluded from the dominant narrative.

I am of the firm belief that one's experiences necessarily and directly affect their perspective, be it interpersonally, emotionally, and even analytically. My experiences as a multicultural female raised (mostly) in Los Angeles in the twenty-first century have a direct impact on the ways I view my past, my present, and my future. My educational experiences, in a related sense, also shaped the lens through which I see the history that I am attempting to analyze; as a graduate of an all-girls education for middle and high school, I was taught about gender inequality in societal contexts as a subset of almost every discipline. Taught to identify these issues, and other issues of minority representation throughout disciplinary curricula, my attention to such aspects of analysis was only furthered throughout my education at Colorado College. The liberal arts

emphasis on interdisciplinary study has reinforced my tendency as a historian to challenge the dominant narratives and always search for alternative pieces of the big picture.

When pulling documentation from events such as the Disneyland opening, the Watts Riot and accompanying McCone Report, as well as information about the Goldwater campaign in Orange County, my interest lies initially in the regional significance of such documents, but more deeply in whose voices are strategically left out. The *Los Angeles Times* journalism on the conservative Goldwater campaign and platform do not seem to include any opinions from racial minorities, women, or poor Americans that likely had opinions, but focuses instead on the dominant narrative of Goldwater's following – that is, a white, wealthy, suburban Orange County constituency. By focusing on the lack, and asking why this is the constituency and also why the majority voice is the only one heard on the topic, I begin to form more critical analysis about the race relations in the two California counties in the early 1960s and helps to contextualize the setting for the Goldwater campaign, rather than focusing only on what does exist in the campaign and support generally for Goldwater as a political leader. This type of process speaks to my personal interests as well as my life experiences, as my experience of eighteen years in Los Angeles has also skewed my vision of a locale that is not always reflective of the same city through history.

In addition, in an era with huge cultural shifts occurring because of historical events, definitive cultural identities formed in both Los Angeles and Orange Counties in the postwar era. The Cold War influence on national trends is also undeniable, affecting the specific regions focused upon in this paper in more unique ways. National Cold War

tendencies toward liberalism and containment policies affected citizens across the country, but the specific circumstances in Los Angeles and Orange counties, like the industrial development discussed earlier led to more distinct interpretations of broader Cold War trends. Although none of the events that made history in this region were unrelated or unaffected by broader national events and contexts, I will attempt to show the ways in which the particular set of events in the region were unique to Southern California, and could not have occurred elsewhere. The two counties, with their radically different demographic makeup enabled unique identities to emerge by the 1960s that were both distinct from one another, as well as distinct from any other urban or suburban community in America at the same time.

In developing this argument, I follow a chronological trajectory in analyzing the formation of a regional cultural identity in Orange County, and in the contrast this identity had with the Watts Riot by 1965. The first chapter traces the development of Disneyland in historical contexts, touching on both the context from which it was created as well as the context it helped to form after its opening. The story of Disneyland evolves from the very early planning and aesthetic envisioning process performed by Walt Disney and his team at the Disney Production Company, starting in the late 1930s. By the early 1950s, detailed planning was well underway and the vision slowly became a reality within a county that was developing relatively in line with the utopian aesthetic ideals projected for Disneyland. The next step in the chronology comes with the events of the Opening Day festivities, and the place that day took as a definitive historical event. The implications of the opening events begin the process of Disneyland shifting from merely being a product of its historical context, to actually having an influence on the

development of the history. Next, the aftermath of Disneyland's opening will take its own section as the case study for proving that Disneyland did in fact have a definitive impact on the developing culture in Orange County.

The second chapter focuses more specifically on the 1960s, and demonstrates the results of the regional aspects of identity formation in merely a decade. The chapter is a comparative analysis of two events from the 1960s, namely the Goldwater campaign and the rise of conservatism in Orange County in 1964 and the Watts Riot in urban Los Angeles in 1965. These events together will demonstrate the distinctive suburban identity of Orange County that developed in the aftermath of World War II by chronicling the political and social identifiers that labeled Orange County. My analysis uses the Watts Riot to indicate more concretely what Orange County did *not* represent by 1965. The homogeneity of suburban Orange County eliminated the environmental context necessary for a race riot, and instead developed its identity in conjunction with the New Right movement and a utopian, Disneyland-esque image of the Cold War family lifestyle.

Chapter 1: Disneyland's lasting impact on Orange County's Regional Identity

The Early Stages: Planning and Preparation

Disneyland, since its creation in the 1950s has remained a staple of American culture and ideals, as well as a fixture of California tourism, becoming both a regional and national landmark – truly a space created to offer an introduction into a sense of utopia. The immediate postwar period and early emergence of the Cold War, coinciding with and in some respects informing the plans of Disneyland speak to the political and cultural history of the era through close analysis of the plans and implementation for the Park. Conceptually, Walt Disney placed himself at the head of virtually all Park decisions. The vision of one man became a reality through expansive networks of studio and private investors, but the vision that was created in Disney's head was necessarily informed by the larger, national political and cultural climate of the time. Within historical narratives, much has been written on the related topics of politics and culture in Cold War American contexts, while a more limited selection of scholarship does exist focusing on these themes but related specifically to the Southern California region. Historians such as Henry Heller, Elaine Tyler May, Stephen Ambrose and Douglas Brinkley have described the broad political and sociological trends of the Cold War events from a national perspective. Similarly, much has been written about Los Angeles as a topic within history. However, Cold War Los Angeles is a smaller pool, with authors like Mike Davis, William Deverell and Greg Hise, and Eric Avila forming the

core of the academic work on this topic. Focusing specifically on Disneyland provides an even narrower pool of research, with biographers Neal Gabler and Steven Watts providing most of the scholarship that took various disparate interview portions and shorter essays on the topic of Walt Disney and Disneyland and merged them into more cohesive works of historical narrative. Disney's dreams of utopia became a fabricated reality through years of stubborn dedication to both the aesthetic aspects as well as the (related) cultural values that were integral to the idea of a utopian land. In the words of Walt Disney, "Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world"⁵. Utopia can be defined as 'an imaginary and indefinitely remote place' or 'a place of ideal perfection, especially within law, government, and social conditions,'⁶ indicating an inherent need to contrast with the imperfect, the real. Utopia is often defined as inherently imaginary, necessarily *not* what reality is, as reality contains flaws and problems and other imperfections that make any place or time what it is historically. In attempting to make Disneyland a utopia, Disney intended to erase the imperfections of reality and crafted this land to psychologically speak to his patrons as a direct contrast to the woes of reality. At Disneyland, Americans could escape into perfection.

Disneyland and Orange County grew up together. This case study of codependent identities demonstrates larger regional trends, as Orange County was changed from agricultural plots into tract home suburban communities for largely white, middle-to-upper class nuclear families, exactly the audience to which Disneyland intended to cater. On a national level, rapid suburbanization trends sprang up in every region of the

⁵ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 536.

⁶ Merriem-Webster dictionary online.

country, with postwar decentralization taking its role at the forefront of American consciousness and inspiring even greater stratification between the white, middle-class suburban lifestyle and its contrast in working class urban life.

Orange County provided a perfect home for Disneyland. The diverse architecture and neighborhood development within Los Angeles didn't quite fit with the utopian ideals of Disney's plans, and the Orange County location fit the needs perfectly while also coinciding with massive transportation developments like the new Santa Ana freeway that would allow easy access to the park. Overall, the Anaheim location neatly aligned with the symbolic shifts in the region and the symbolic desires of the Disney team for the Park.

Partially made out of necessity, the decision to house the park in the newly developing Orange County also converged with particular values and identity that were essential for Disney as he translated them into the Park plans. Disneyland was formed with the intention of counteracting the impression that dirty and unorganized amusement parks offered for entertainment. It offered instead a more suburban, family-oriented vision of entertainment with an underlying dedication to order and cleanliness. Disneyland played into suburban ideals as well, with the same dedication to aesthetic spaciousness, cleanliness, and safety that the suburban image embodied by the 1950s in America.

Housing the production studios in Burbank, as part of Los Angeles, made fine sense for the logistical needs of the studio and the constant involvement in Hollywood happenings the studio needed to have. By this point, Disney Productions was working not only on feature animated films, but also within the television realm, even using

airtime by 1953 to show the new program entitled “Disneyland” as early advertising propaganda for the Park⁷. Walt Disney himself served as a host to discuss future Disney projects to look forward to, interplayed with short cartoon strips and advertisements for the Park, all funded by ABC. Yet, the extremely expansive vision Disney held for the Park meant that huge quantities of land would be necessary to turn the vision into a reality. With Los Angeles fairly developed by the 1950s, within city limits at least, Disney officials scouted out and turned to alternative Southern California locations. They also wanted to separate the new park from the chaos and unpredictability of the Hollywood scene. With Orange County just south of Los Angeles, and barely transforming into any semblance of urbanization in the postwar era, a lot of available land offered lasting influence at this crucial point in Southern California history.

Suburbanization in this county began only during and immediately after World War 2. Since it was seized from the Mexican landholders when California became a state, Orange remained mostly agricultural until the Federal Government became the largest landholder in Southern California in 1950⁸. The war brought new wealth into the area through the utilization of the newfound military-industrial complex, with both Air Force and Navy bases having a heavy presence in Santa Ana in the 1940s. This previously agricultural region became appealing to many soldiers stationed there, largely coming out of Midwestern and Southern states, and becoming enchanted with the weather and beaches. Once the war ended and many military bases relocated, rapid suburbanization of the area began, and many veterans relocated their families to the area

⁷ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 512.

⁸ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 24.

having no previous experience with it before the war, and despite the lack of distinctive industry centered in that area⁹.

While many American cities experienced both urbanization and suburbanization centered around a particular industry, such as Detroit with the auto industry, Orange County, which was necessarily distinct from the Hollywood industry to the north, relied on residual arms industry wealth after the war ended, and migration to the area resulted in diversified industry involvement that encompassed mostly military and technology development. Developing entirely unaffected by most other cities and regions, by the end of World War II it was impossible to identify a single hegemonic power structure in the Los Angeles area¹⁰. Unlike in most American cities, most inhabitants of Orange County are not natives, and chose to migrate solely for the desirable location. Because of this, the early plans for Disneyland and location scouting in 1952-1954 fell conveniently with the rapid upward trend of Orange County. Hired consultant Buzz Price advised Disney that Los Angeles was rapidly decentralizing and predicted higher growth in Orange County than most other California counties¹¹. Because of all of these factors, a 160-acre plot of land in Anaheim was settled upon for the future Park, transforming former orange groves into Disneyland over the course of approximately two years.

As Orange County transitioned into a new industrial power, Disney's very early plans for the Park began to form, with an early need to purchase the land before it all became as industrialized like Los Angeles. While Walt Disney's obsession with trains

⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, 105.

¹¹ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 501.

may have been the most personal inspiration for the park¹², the themes that emerged within the early plans and sketches of the park maintained a wide reach and a huge national relevance. The idea of bridging together past, present, and future permeated the early plans, yet all held steadfast to not only a temporal theme, but also an idealized version of each stage. Disney maintained a type of idealistic nostalgia for the past, which can be seen in his overwhelming appreciation for trains and all of train culture, as well as his desire to turn his contemporary time into a shiny, clean, utopian ‘movie set’ for his patrons to live within, even if temporarily¹³. This idealized version of history may have stemmed from Disney’s inherently biased and fantastical memory of his childhood in St. Louis, Missouri, influencing what would eventually become “Main Street, USA” within the park. While still heavily segregated and suffering the same wear and tear any American city might at the turn of the century, the nostalgia for childhood seems to override these aspects for Disney and inspire the core of the utopian Disneyland.

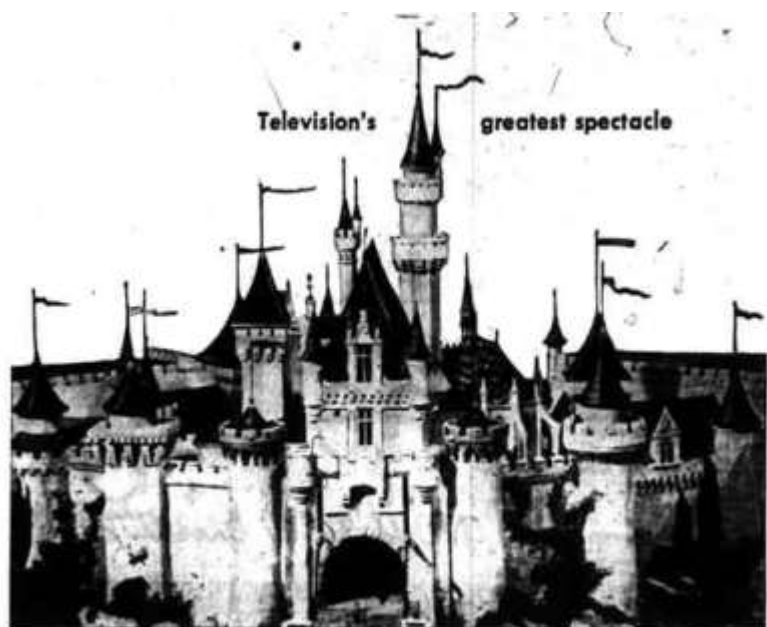
Fundamentally, Main Street, USA is Main Street, St. Louis, but the dirty, broken, or unsavory parts of Main Street, St. Louis that made it real and touchable had been polished or removed by the time Main Street, USA made its debut in 1955¹⁴. Within the park itself, each ‘land’ became a shiny, ‘perfect’ version of itself both for entertainment purposes, as well as to feed Disney’s vision of a utopian land that was intentionally and necessarily separate from the woes of the real world. Frontierland serves as a fantastical version of a pervasive Western narrative, which itself is the backdrop and setting of amusement within the larger park; rides and games center around the theme of the heroic

¹² Karal Ann Marling, “Disneyland, 1955.”

¹³ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 510.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 512.

Western narrative, intentionally limited to the proud, celebrated portions of that much larger narrative.



You'll stroll through the gates of this 100-foot castle into "Fantasyland."

Tonight, you tour *Disneyland* - Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom

An unforgettable 90 minutes of "live" television

Dial 5 at 5:30 tonight for the biggest "live" telecast in history, as Walt Disney himself guides you through the 160-acre wonderland he has created in Anaheim, California. You will steam down the rivers of America in a real old-fashioned stern-wheeler, "The Mark

"Twain"; trek to darkest Africa for a look at wild animals; ride a rocket to the moon - all in the comfort of your living room. 24 TV cameras and a staff of hundreds bring you this once-in-a-lifetime adventure tonight on

KCBO-TV

Tune in at
5:30 for

CHANNEL 5

ABC TELEVISION NETWORK

90 minutes of wonderful television

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

AMERICAN MOTORS CORP. • GIBSON GREETING CARDS • SWIFT & COMPANY

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The above image is indicative of early buzz surrounding the Park and the advertising that aligned with it. Encompassing advertisements for the Park, ABC network, and Anaheim

¹⁵ An example of early advertising for Disneyland Park, announcing the television broadcast to be aired of the opening day festivities. Courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society.

itself, the image speaks to the multi-faceted effects the opening of Disneyland had in 1955, as it was historic as an isolated event, yet also acted as a key player in strengthening the television industry and crafting a local identity.

The Main Street aesthetic and the Frontierland product both required censoring out much of the ‘real’ history in order to make elements of a romanticized past shine in the present. While other amusement parks at the time fit in the chaotic, loud, and dirty stereotype of family entertainment, Disneyland attempted to eradicate these more unsavory aspects of the amusement park experience. The idealized conceptualization of the American West for Frontierland ignores the gruesome history of the relationship between frontiersmen and the native inhabitants. Additionally, the Western history of the complex relationship between Mexican-Americans and the United States government is entirely ignored, as are the quasi-colonial aspect of frontiersmen and the concept of Manifest Destiny. Because so much of the fuller history is glanced over, intentionally, in order to maintain the focus of the park as a utopia, it becomes convenient and inherent that what exists is an entirely manufactured version of history, romanticized to fit with the fantastical nature of the setting. Specifically, if this utopian ideal is actively attempting to erase the more unsavory parts of history as well as the present, things like racial segregation, immigrant community identities, gender inequality within society, and economic struggles that may cross all of these categories are actively silenced. Because of this, the ‘ideal’ Disneyland patron would likely have to be someone without woes, any member of a nuclear prototype family that is white, upper-middle class, and suburban. In reality, the type of people who could take a vacation to enjoy the Park generally did come from middle or upper-class white families, able to embrace the lifestyle of leisure sold

both as a suburban quality and as a major facet of the Disneyland experience. Disneyland was one of the first family attractions that operated as an entirely private enterprise, so charging admission for entering was a relatively new concept and aided in filtering the type of guests that visited.

While, theoretically, the Park would be an ideal backdrop for any member of a marginalized community to forget their struggles and enjoy the utopia, realistically, the majority of guests who would likely be able to afford and enjoy the Park would be, at the time, members of communities who were already living one version of the ‘American Dream.’ In planning the Park, the patronage is assumed to embody certain qualities, as Disney envisioned his Park creating uplifting social values as an act of counterculture, opposing the heterogeneity and dissonance of urban life at the time, and envisioned the “necessity of the patriarchal nuclear family” in achieving this goal¹⁶. The imperfections of life that would be erased for, say, a white middle class father enjoying a day at the Park would be very different from the reality that any marginalized individuals would be leaving outside the berm, and, similarly, while all of history is manipulated in order to tell a specific tale of history, what is wholly left out is the history of racial struggles and class struggles. Fittingly, Main Street, USA also ignores the prominent history of racial segregation and violence in the real St. Louis, offering instead a quaint vision of small town Americana values. The reality for most citizens in urban American settings by the middle of the twentieth century involved poor living conditions, underemployment across the board, and a general lack of resources and opportunities. The specific data indicating this trend will be explored in more detail in its relation to the events of the Watts Riot in

¹⁶ Eric Avila, *Age of White Flight*, 119.

chapter 2, with many race studies conducted nationwide during the height of the Civil Rights Movement.

The entire point of the Park in the early planning stages was to offer a physical space devoid of all of the filth (both literal and symbolic) of the real world. Becoming disillusioned with the options for amusement and family fun in the Los Angeles area after attempting to take his daughters to the public parks already in existence, Disney set out to create an alternative option for families¹⁷. Frustrated by the reality of dirtiness that exists in public parks, the plans for Disneyland included not only a heavy emphasis on maintaining high sanitation levels, but also related that cleanliness to the thematic elements of what the park offered. The strong need to ‘clean up’ the vision of the past and present remains heavily seen throughout all of the intentionally planned details in the park. The cleanliness aspect of the Park encompassed both the literal aspects of Disney’s aesthetic needs, and also the symbolic implications of these aesthetics.

As a metaphoric representation of the particular conservative, Cold War ideologies that helped to shape the context of the Park, the extreme cleanliness and attention to visual detail present in Disneyland are indicative of political trends of the time. The intentional choices for the Park reveal the dedication to privatized consumer culture and also the attachment to one specific brand of safety represented by a homogenous and manufactured reality and narrative of history. Tomorrowland offers an imaginative and incredibly clean interpretation of the future, entirely unrealistic while simultaneously fulfilling Disney’s vision for a fantastical version of reality. Additionally, Fantasyland, as its own entity within the park serves to provide patrons with a version of

¹⁷ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 516.

the present reality that is more closely aligned with cartoon realities of Disney films and television reels than with the reality that exists for the average patron outside of the park. This intentional altering of reality in every time period is the Disneyland mystique, ultimately attempting to create an experience wholly detached from real life, yet extremely accessible to the general public.

This reality manipulation spans both the detail-level planning as well as the broader symbolic intentions of the Park. The Disney ‘Imagineers’ (a hybrid of imaginer & engineer, the term given to Disney animators and crew) created the cartoon-like setting for the Park patrons. Disney and his team of Imagineers have claimed the intentionality behind their manipulation of scale for psychological reasons, stating that the ‘foreshortening’ special effect that was applied to Main Street was done to subliminally empower patrons, making guests feel larger and more in control of the past that is shrunken to seem quaint¹⁸.



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¹⁸ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 533.

¹⁹ An example of the effects of foreshortening can be seen in this image of City Hall taken in 1955. From a distance, it becomes more apparent that the ground level is much larger in proportion than the higher levels, in an attempt to create an empowering effect on patrons. Courtesy of Huffington Post online.

This is one example of the ways in which Disney and his team remained fixated on the idea of the Park serving as a type of living movie set, purposely utilizing the special effects and editing skills of his studio team and applying such skills to the living version of his productions.

Opening Day as a Historical Event

The political relevance of Disneyland only continued to grow in the wake of its opening, with a major headline merely weeks after the opening day festivities reading “Nixon Takes Time Out for Disneyland: Vice President and Family Prove to Be Top Attractions.” Printed on August 12, 1955, the article opens with a statement about the events: “Disneyland had a new attraction yesterday – the Vice-President of the United States and his family. And they drew almost as much attention from the thousands gathered at the new Anaheim amusement park as all the rides and exhibits and fabulous sights.²⁰” The article continues with a detailed account of all the attractions and rides visited by Nixon and his family during their day at Disneyland. The very title of the piece: “Nixon Takes Time Out for Disneyland,” indicated the significance of the new park. The fact that political figureheads were taking the time to visit the Park and the fact that this was noteworthy indicates a huge symbolic significance that Disneyland held for national audiences immediately upon its opening. The fact that Nixon and his family made a special trip to Disneyland while he was serving as Vice President further indicates a wide, national appeal of the Park outside of the Southern California region.

²⁰ “Nixon Takes Time Out,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1955.

At the crux of the place Disney and Disneyland have in larger historical narratives, the opening day on July 17, 1955 undoubtedly stands as a historical event. The opening day events mark a definitive turning point for a larger Orange County identity as well as within a broader American history narrative of the Cold War. The bridging together of an idealized past, present, and future remains a common thread throughout the entire Disney mystique, from the early planning stages of the Park, to its opening, and as an integral part of its legacy. With the plans for Disneyland incorporating a very specific set of idealized American values, and, thus, reflective of the very same Americana symbolism and cultural values, the Park itself becomes a representation of a very skewed and manipulated version. This specific version of American values incorporates a more suburban ideal of America, with the values and perks of suburbanization such as safety, cleanliness, and traditional (nuclear) family values shaping the culture. This aligned nicely with Disney's vision for his utopia, as a hyper-safe, hyper-clean space shaped around traditional values so much so that the cars are physically separated and the parking lot is not in sight from the Park itself. Decentralization as a key aspect of Cold War culture helps to fuel this trend, in which the suburban aesthetic is renowned as the superior lifestyle for all Americans who could feasibly afford to achieve it, with an inherent safety implied in spatial expansion. With geographic spread as a key component of suburbanization, the ideas of space and safety become synonymous and come to represent the idealized sunbelt image. As mentioned above, the Park had been continually advertised on television in the year or so leading up to the opening, so expectations from the general public ran high, in addition to the huge pressure from investors that had poured millions into the preparations and development of the Park.

Walt Disney, never one to relinquish control, likely put the most pressure on himself solely for the purpose of his psychological need for order and control; while his brother Roy handled most of the logistical issues regarding financing and development, Walt remained fixated on the aesthetic details, inserting himself into the preparations as a patron, making slight adjustments to minor details until just moments before the first guests entered the Park on opening day²¹. Once the Park opened, every aspect of the day, from the dedication, to the presence of live broadcasters spoke to American ideals of the time period and served one very specific version of pristine, nuclear American family ideals. The presence of Walt Disney and Ronald Reagan's families at the opening broadcast event solidified the attachment to what was considered traditional American values²². The postwar era saw a return to more oppressive and stringent gender roles for American families, and a pressure to achieve the prototypical nuclear family model, reversing in many ways the social progress experienced by many disadvantaged groups that were afforded new opportunities during World War II based upon necessity.

Historian Stephanie Coontz cites Gallup polls in her assessment of the state of women and family expectations in this time period, stating that the claims by Gallup that housewives are generally content in their lives and gather their prestige from their husbands' opinions of them are inherently flawed and problematic²³. Utilizing many legal case studies from the time, Coontz also points out the ample double standards in existence regarding gender in the 1950s and 1960s, despite many assumptions that the time saw radical change and social progress. The truer presence of more stringent gender

²¹ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 536.

²² "1955 Disneyland Opening Day," ABC.

²³ Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 4.

roles in this time period plays into the rise of conservative values reinforced by Goldwater conservatism in later years, and the more immediate image of the Disneyland guest.

Local coverage of the opening of Disneyland included a live broadcast on the KABC network that lasted over an hour. It also included print sources from various authors covering opinions and facts about the planning, execution, and aftermath of the Disneyland opening event. A 1955 *Los Angeles Times* article by Walter Ames cites general anticipation around the Los Angeles and surrounding areas, writing of a broad buzz about the upcoming opening of Disneyland, but Ames also speaks to the relevant activity of the day. Published on July 17 of 1955, the same day as the live broadcast, the article titled “Fans Await Debut of Disneyland Via TV Screens Today” serves almost as an advertisement for the broadcast, stating, “millions of people all over the country [will be] peeking in on the Orange County play farm via television...” and goes on to claim that, “if the same interest evidenced locally is prevalent throughout the country – and after last Wednesday’s Disneyland show I’m sure it is – then today’s audience could be one of the largest ever to watch a single TV show.²⁴”

With one simple statement, Ames manages to encompass various aspects of the Disney history and showed how Disneyland was relevant to both the region and the nation. Such articles promoted the opening and rally support and anticipation for the Park and all of the attractions within. This justification of the buzz reinforced what the Disney company had been selling for months, informing the public that Disneyland was something deserving of both local and national buzz; the opening would undoubtedly be

²⁴ Walter Ames, “Fans Await Debut of Disneyland,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1955.

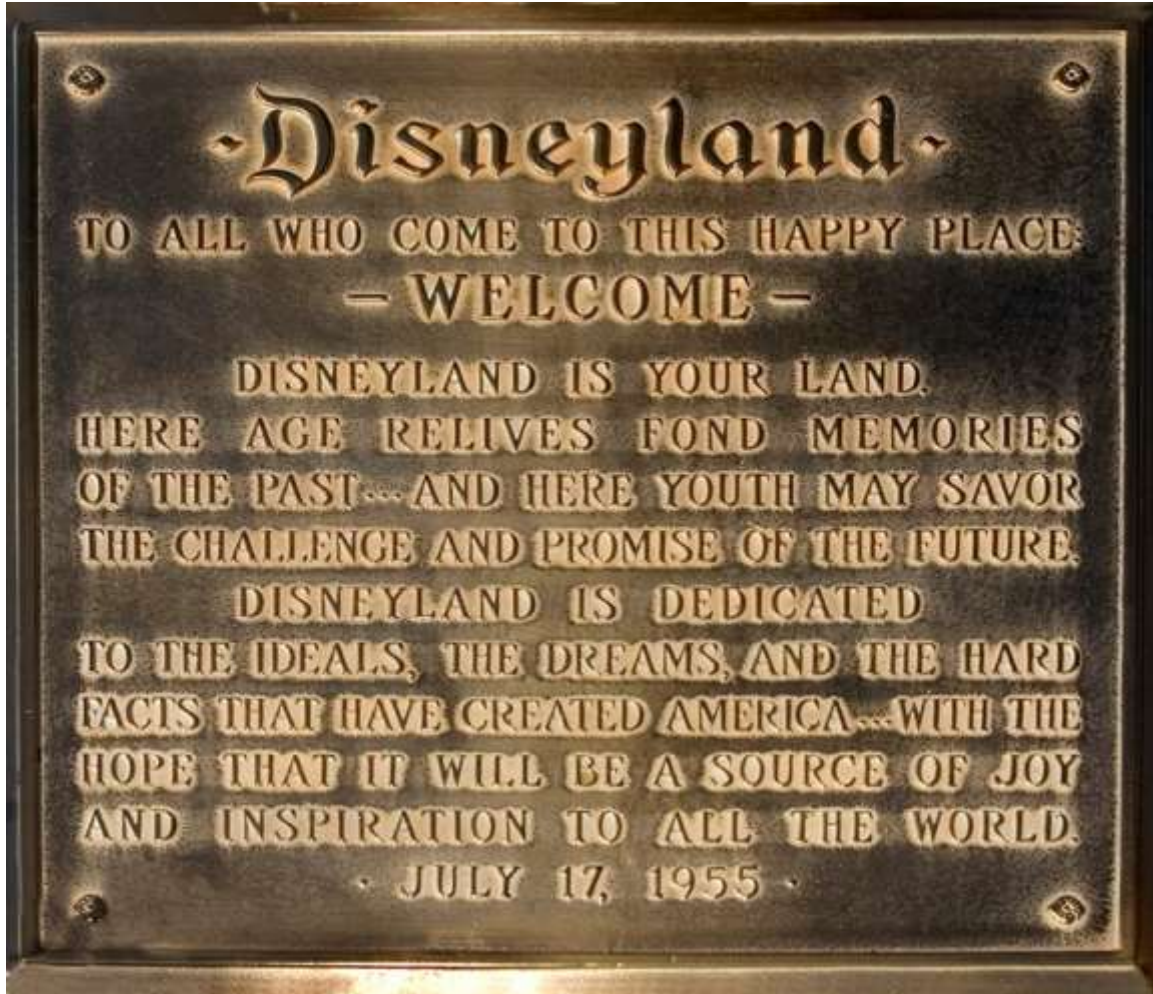
a monumental historical event. Feeling the tangible energy of anticipation clearly shows the local influence the Park had, and would continue to have on the Los Angeles and Orange county regions. Additionally, Ames points to a national buzz around Disneyland, proven further by the statistical television ratings from the promotional show a week earlier, solidifying a place in the American audience for Disneyland as a monumental event.

Nixon's visit to Disneyland stands as a historically significant moment, and remains an early example of the transformation occurring in broader terms within the way history is formed, understood, and consumed, as there was as much emphasis in the moment placed upon the convergence of the cultural, signified by Disneyland, and the political, signified by the Nixon family, and their meeting made headlines. The type of aesthetic that was manufactured for Disneyland involved many aspects of a utopian life that appealed to many Americans at the time, with emphasis placed on safety, control, and order. The focus upon cleanliness and sanitation, as well as Disney's insistence on the high berm to block out any outside noise or visuals all help to shape a contained identity that encompassed an ideal of orderliness that was especially pertinent within the Cold War context to make patrons, and even television viewers feel the vicarious safety and control over their lives that was so craved in a period characterized by global fears of nuclear war and Communist takeover.

The moment of the Park dedication is entirely characterized by its Cold War context and simultaneously influential on national politics and indicative of the future of international politics. At this particular moment in history, global climates were centered on the polarization between the Eastern and Western blocs. The split aligned largely

along ideological concerns that shaped cultural identities in unprecedented ways. Never before had a war involved so few battles and been so reliant upon cultural practices to shape the military needs, most notably aligning a social consumerist identity with nationalism and political affiliation, with Cold War notions of democratic capitalism encompassing both public and private life for American citizens. What emerged was a twofold trend that informed both international politics and nationalism and national identity; the Western capitalist model, in direct contrast to an Eastern Communism came to define America, and that new identity simultaneously stood to reinforce a nationalism that was hugely important in the morale of the Cold War from an American perspective. Thus, the moment of dedication held unparalleled influence in global terms, due to the direct connection between Park values and nationalistic American values stated explicitly within the rhetoric. This direct link creates an inescapable politicized position for Disneyland within the larger international Cold War context.

The dedication of the park can be seen below:



The dedication proclaims the opening day as a pivotal, historical event that stands at the critical point between past and future, between the preparation and legacy of Disneyland. With two main points, this dedication creates a hugely significant impact on the cultural identity of Americans in 1955. With the two phrases, Disney is able to first capture a contained, smaller cultural identity and explain exactly what and who the Park is for, why it was created, and how it is to be utilized, addressed 'to all.' With the second half, Disney manages to reach an entire national audience and link together the identity within the Park with a national mood of high morale and surging nationalism with ties to huge

ideas like the ‘facts that have created America’ in mind in the Park’s creation. The dedication remains indicative of the reflexive nature of Disneyland in 1955, both assisting in forming a national identity while simultaneously influenced by the existing national identifiers in defining ways.

The first half of the dedication is largely contained, and focused inwardly on the very broad but largely utopian desires and ideals that shape the Park, from its inception as an idea, to the reality of its opening, and even looking forward to its place in the future. The message remains largely universal, and stands in as a defining example of what type of ideals shape the actual Park, with the dedication even addressed to ‘all who come to this happy place’. The Park is, according to Disney, a happy place by definition, aligning with the utopian ideal that there is a default of happiness and positivity throughout the Park. The theme of bridging together the past and future that recurs often in regard to Disneyland appears even in the dedication, with Walt Disney stating that ‘age relives fond memories of the past’ and also that ‘youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future.’ While keeping consistent with general Disneyland plans, this symbolic bridging of the past and the future also remains consistent with another very Disney theme of focusing very intentionally on only the positive aspects of the entire time spectrum. The lands themselves have erased the realities of larger histories and instead focused on the hero narrative in Frontierland, the wholly positive presence of Davy Crockett, and no mention of conditions of Native Americans or Mexican landowners in the West during this long moment of expansion.

The conclusion of the dedication sums up the underlying message of the entire dedication, and, to a greater extent, what the Park itself really represents. The last line,

stating that the hope for the Park is to ‘be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world’ concisely summarizes the politicization of Disneyland, and also contextualizes the opening of the Park within its Cold War setting by defining a 1955 American national identity. With Disneyland, as a utopia and implicit representation of an American utopia, proclaiming its hope to inspire the rest of the world, there is a clear political parallel to the ideological nature of the Cold War, and the American notion of superiority in an international context. The American capitalist model is not only represented successfully in Disneyland as a case study of American ideals, but also the two notions reinforce each other in a national and international context, informing the national identity, which is necessarily reliant on both the cultural and related political aspects of the Disneyland-Americana connection. The international implications of this alliance falls perfectly within an ideological American stance in the Cold War, as Disneyland is both shaped by the post-war and early Cold War national climate, and also takes an active stance in the international political climate in 1955 by claiming alliance with American ideals and the morally superior nature of those ideals within the historical context. Disneyland, as a case study of the success of a capitalist system works twofold as a politicized agent of American ideological warfare, as it is strategically connecting itself to the high American morale around nationalistic ideals that ruled public opinion at the time, and in turn serves to reinforce those national ideals by acting as an example of the success of such American ideals. Aspiring to serve as an inspiration to the whole world solidifies this socio-political attachment on behalf of Disneyland to the nationalist trends and convergence of moral, political, cultural, and economic ideology that all work together to inform the historical context in 1955 that Disneyland opened within.

The opening day celebration was televised via a live stream on ABC network after being heavily advertised for months on the same network. Disney had a long relationship with ABC, so much so that much of the Park funding would have been nonexistent without the studio contracts and the mutually beneficial nature of the relationship. The television network specifically sought out Disney products to air, because the Disney name already held astronomical capital by the early 1950s due to the success of motion picture releases such as *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, and especially *Alice in Wonderland*; ABC wanted to secure a specific minimum of Disney product on their network for their own gain, and in turn the studio ended up funding a large portion of the Disneyland plans²⁵. Because of this relationship, it is logical that ABC would have the rights in airing a live broadcast of the first day of Disneyland's functional existence to the public, and the event was so significant that ABC had hosts like Ronald Reagan and Art Linkletter narrating the events of the day²⁶. From the video footage, there is a tangible energy about the day and it is clear that not only the limited number of patrons specially invited for the opening, and truly a majority of American citizens eagerly awaited the broadcast footage to give them insight into the Park²⁷.

The energy surrounding the opening came from all sides, with Disney and his team undoubtedly ready to reveal their hugely impressive product, as well as ABC network personnel fostering the high energy through the broadcast, and the American public readily consuming the broadcast, and all of the energy that came with it. Because of the huge scope of the opening day festivities, it is clear that the opening of Disneyland

²⁵ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 506.

²⁶ Karal Ann Marling, "Disneyland 1955."

²⁷ *Disneyland*, opening day, ABC network.

carved a place for itself as a historical event, memorable not just for the region, but really a transformative event for the entire nation. National coverage is largely encompassed in a *Billboard* article from April of 1955 entitled “Disneyland Public Bow Set for July 19; TV Preview June 29.” The article states that, “prior to the gala opening, the nation will be treated to a preview of the fabulous park on the Disneyland television show June 29 over the ABC network. In addition to this medium, magazines are planning spreads to break concurrently with the debut”²⁸. This type of publication is indicative of the national buzz around the opening of Disneyland, representative of the inherent monumental nature of the opening as a historical event.

The Cold War Legacy of Disneyland

In the midst of Cold War ideological tensions, Disneyland emerged as a manifestation of pointedly American propagandized ideals and values, albeit only one perspective of those American ideals. Aligning with the primary focus of the Park – the fantastical reality, the living movie set for patrons – the politicized aspect of the Park fits seamlessly into the broader historical narrative of the Cold War. This fabricated and utopian version of an American reality in the form of the Park served as an image of a pristine America itself. In a more literal sense, the Park also generated statistically significant revenue for the Southern California region and became a landmark tourist attraction for the entire region. This example of extremely successful private capitalism

²⁸ “Disneyland Public Bow Set,” *Billboard Magazine*, April 1955.

aligned perfectly with national narratives of Cold War propaganda, making American capitalist industry central to this politicized understanding of freedom.

Years after the opening of Disneyland, the Park continued to gain prominence as a cultural identifier and only expanded its reach as influential over so many aspects of life. Two years after the Park opened, a *Los Angeles Times* article entitled “Disneyland Takes Lead as Tourist Attraction” was printed on September 5, 1957. The bulk of this short article contains statistics, which are cited with the intent to prove a claim by Disneyland itself that it had become the leading attraction in the Western United States, if not the whole country. The article states that, “during its second year of operation Disneyland attracted more sight-seers than Yellowstone, Yosemite and Grand Canyon National Parks combined” (~3.6 million vs. ~4.1 million visitors in 1956)²⁹. Statistically speaking, Disneyland proved to be hugely successful very quickly, and seems to have earned the self-proclaimed title as the leading tourist attraction.

Additionally, this particular puts Disneyland within an American Western narrative, as the comparable tourist attractions of the ‘Western United States’ are all necessarily natural attractions. Prior to World War II, what the West held within American culture and identity was largely dependent on the natural resources as tourist attractions, with something like the Grand Canyon speaking directly to a more archaic understanding of a ‘Western’ attraction and the sort of frontier narrative that dominated the American history narrative. Much of the Western American identity had been formed around individualistic hero narratives that related directly to the conquering a more untamed geographical setting. A real attraction, such as the Grand Canyon, is the type of

²⁹ “Disneyland Takes Lead,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1957.

thing that would be manipulated for visual and psychological effects within Disneyland, in order to speak to a customized, artificial version of that frontier narrative. Disneyland, with this single statistic, is indicative of a much larger shift at the time period, as it surpasses the real and tangible attractions of the West economically and within regional identity. This indicates that the American population as a whole is more ready to consume in huge volumes this manufactured and surreal replica of an idealized America, even above the real and natural attractions that predate the Park.

With so much hype surrounding the preparations and opening of the Park, it is actually the aftermath of the opening that has proven most impressive in the Disney legacy, creating an identity unto itself, and also remaining hugely relevant to both regional and national identities. By August of 1955, over 50% of Southern California tourists visited Disneyland³⁰, meaning that in less than six weeks in existence Disneyland had become a staple of Southern California and also hugely profitable. While there is an overarching commitment to hyper-American rhetoric linking the national narrative to the Disneyland experience, there is also a very regional focus of the Park. The logistical need for land manifested nicely within a Western, frontier narrative of conquering land tracts and settling such land for civilized purposes. Additionally, the desire for accessibility fit precisely into the Orange County narrative of mobility, as its suburbanization worked in tangent with the National Highway Act that would even allow residents as well as tourists access to the area that was previously rural.

The geography and climate were specifically planned as well, given the distinct lack of precipitation in Orange County, relative to national averages, which would

³⁰ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 536.

become helpful in proposing a utopian land, as grey skies and rain would stand to ruin the façade of perfection. Over time, all of the specifically planned details of the Park resulted in a product that Disney would refer to as “perfect or perfectible”³¹, acknowledging both the contemporary perfection of ideals but also the willingness to adapt the Park to fit changing times and ideology shifts on a national level. While witnesses to the opening may have ascribed to the belief that the Park was as close to perfect as possible for the time, but Disney’s hope was that the Park would remain a constant project, always expanding and transforming with time. Never one to be satisfied, Disney began plans for growth and change immediately after the opening occurred, expanding with a Disneyland hotel as well as adding attractions throughout the interior of the Park as the studio released more and more films with relevance, with the Park always remaining current and maintaining a sense of tangible utopia for guests.

Throughout the planning process as well as in the early years of the Park’s existence, there remained a type of convergence between Walt Disney’s personal life experiences that influenced his desires for the Park and the national climate that reflected the personal experiences. It is seemingly impossible that any other individual could have created the Disney Empire that would quickly become a national identifier, but it also necessary to see the link to context that allowed for Disney’s personal ingenuity to manifest into a reality. Because of this relatedness, it became clear that Disneyland was crafted not just as an experience, but, rather, as an intentional space in which behavior was to be dictated by the psychological effects of the spatial organization and separation

³¹ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 538.

from urban poverty³². Whether those values were personal to Disney or indicative of broader cultural values, Disneyland is necessarily historic in that it is not just an amusement park, but representative of cultural shifts on local and national levels, and stands forever as a symbol of Cold War American ideals.

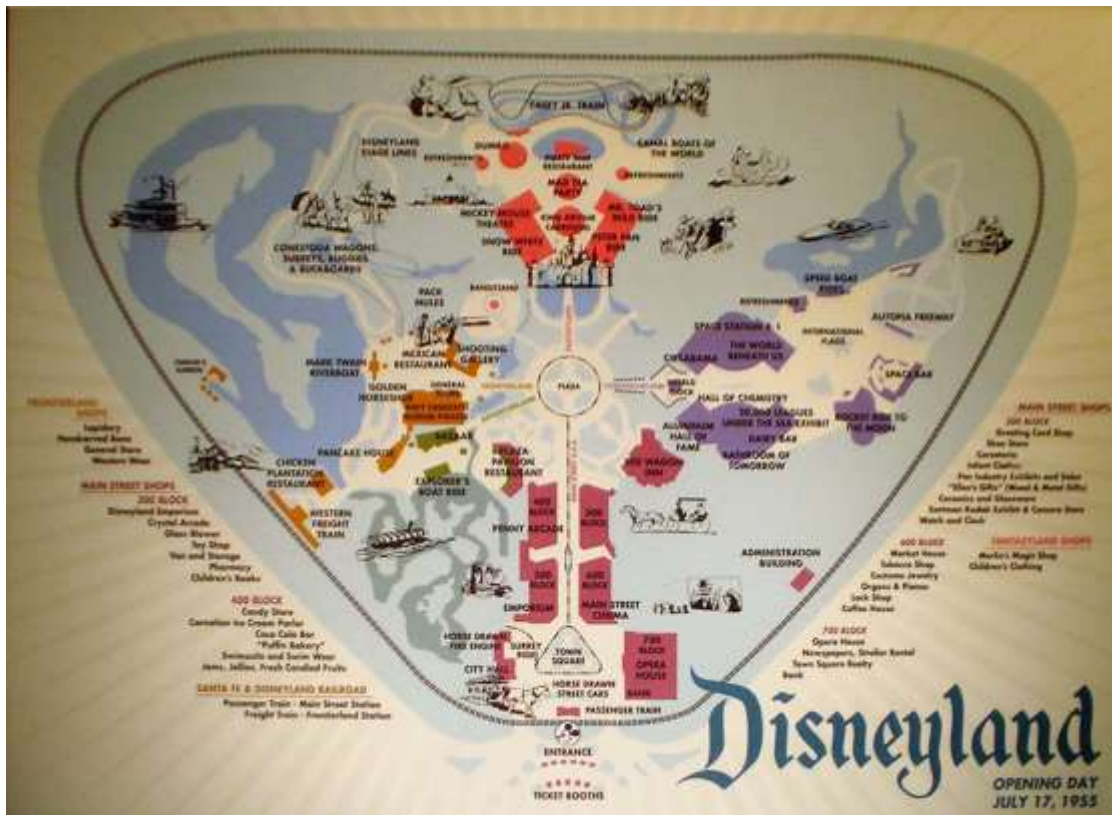
Disneyland in the legacy it created rapidly after opening came to represent at the very least the triumph of capitalism at a pivotal point in American history, the early stages of the Cold War. Because of the context, the success of Disneyland as an entirely privately funded entity that was quickly made hugely profitable for the Disney company itself spoke to a broader appreciation of rhetorical Americanized ideals. The wave of quasi-conservatism (actually labeled as liberalism and embodying aspects of American exceptionalism) sweeping the nation as a backlash to the spread of Communism on a global scale was reflected back in Disneyland as an icon of both economic triumph, aligning with the support for capitalist rhetoric, as well as the self-identified aspect of Disneyland aligning itself with very American ideals in the dedication. Disneyland, as an admittedly American entity, helped to solidify within its historical context the need for capitalist American ideology and the ethical implications that capitalism and Americana were fundamentally good and in direct opposition to the communist Eastern bloc.

In the execution of the Disneyland plans, a high berm was built around the entire perimeter of the Park, intending to keep the real world distinctly separated from the happenings within Disneyland³³. The symbolic implications of complete isolation are clearly in line with Disney's vision for an entire utopian land that was completely separate from the realities of everyday life. Once patrons entered inside the barrier, their

³² Eric Avila, *Age of White Flight*, 113.

³³ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 498.

experience was to be entirely shaped by Disney's vision for the park, entirely fantastical and pristine. Yet, according to Disney himself, the berm was intended not to offer an escape from reality, but rather to allow control and empowerment to rule while inside³⁴. This very pointed focus for the isolation again speaks to the larger global implications of the time period, as the national Cold War temperament was largely shaped by a desire for control and stability in the wake of World War 2 and the newness of atomic weaponry.



The overarching need for control that shaped all of Disney's decisions and plans for the Park is another example of the ways in which his personal experiences were informed by the national narrative he lived within. However personal the desire for control may have been for Walt Disney as an individual, there remained a desire for

³⁴ Ibid., 479.

³⁵ Disneyland map circa opening day, 1955. Courtesy of Disneyland.com.

control that was fairly universal throughout all of America and its citizens in the mid-1950s, and Disneyland became a symbol of that safe, controlled utopia that many Americans were searching for within the larger national identity. What Disneyland stood to offer, necessarily contained within the berm around the Park, was an experience, a mental state, in which joy and fun were the only concerns, and the threat of nuclear warfare was nonexistent. There seemed to be no place in America that the threat of international warfare, or even the ideological threat of Communism were not huge and omnipresent aspects of life, and Disneyland may have been the only exception to that notion with the way in which intentional control and order were implemented in the planning and execution of the Park. Yet the manufactured reality that was created in Disneyland stood in so many different ways as a symbolic representation of the triumph of American ideology and the politicized victory of capitalism in a global sense.

Even further down the road, a 1964 article from the Los Angeles Times explores specifically the economic impact the Park has had in almost ten years of operation, relevant in 1964 due to the proposal by Disney to establish an amendment to the commercial-recreational area policy. Revenue reports by the Disney team as well as from objective outside sources, like local journalistic enterprises revealed significant revenue in the forms of tourism and taxes for the region, making Disneyland as well as Orange County incredibly powerful economic entities³⁶. According to the article, “the amendment would establish height limits on buildings near Disneyland. Officials of the Magic Kingdom have contended their year-around operation and future developments depend on establishment of a formula for building heights – heights which will not

³⁶ Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 562.

visually intrude on the land of fantasy.³⁷” With this proposal, and the fact that official city boards were so willing to examine the benefits of such a request, it is clear that in nine years Disneyland had become a massive force and power within local politics as well as culture and identity. However, altering official city planning regulations for the Park may have ended up being hugely beneficial for the city of Anaheim and Orange County as a whole, as Harrison Price of the Economics Research Associates group claimed that “Disneyland’s economic impact is running slightly over \$60 million a year. The figure, he said, comes from in-park sales, retail trade and service sales in the city, wholesale trade purchases in Anaheim, and sales tax generated by the Disneyland recreation complex.³⁸” Astronomical profit as well as political influence over regional development indicates a prominent place in history for Disneyland, not just in retrospective historical analysis, but a recognizable significance throughout its entire existence.

Fittingly, Disneyland became a staple of Orange County tourism and also the American identity in forming its legacy. The power of the Disneyland name became so embedded that Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was famously outraged when his Disneyland plans were cancelled in 1959 during his trip to America. After deciding that there would not be ample security for Khrushchev and his wife, the trip was abruptly cancelled. The outburst of anger and disappointment came during a lavish Hollywood gathering on the same day that Disneyland was to be visited. American government officials assigned to Khrushchev during this trip received first a note from Khrushchev

³⁷ “Disneyland’s Impact on City,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1964.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

stating, “I understand you have canceled the trip to Disneyland. I am most displeased”³⁹.

Later, during his speech to an audience filled with major Hollywood stars that had to fight for their spot in that room, Khrushchev attempted to make light of the Disney cancellation, but quickly devolved into the true anger he felt for the situation. A transcription of his reaction can be found here:

”Just listen,’ he said. ‘Just listen to what I was told: ‘We—which means the American authorities—cannot guarantee your security there.’ He raised his hands in a vaudevillian shrug. That got another laugh. ‘What is it? Is there an epidemic of cholera there? Have gangsters taken hold of the place? Your policemen are so tough they can lift a bull by the horns. Surely they can restore order if there are any gangsters around. I say, ‘I would very much like to see Disneyland.’ They say, ‘We cannot guarantee your security.’ Then what must I do, commit suicide?’ Khrushchev was starting to look more angry than amused. His fist punched the air above his red face. ‘That’s the situation I find myself in,’ he said. ‘For me, such a situation is inconceivable. I cannot find words to explain this to my people.’⁴⁰”

At a crucial moment in global history, 1959 stands directly in the midst of Cold War tensions and ideological warfare and propaganda. On principle, some Hollywood stars like Ronald Reagan, who hosted the Disneyland opening broadcast, rejected their invitations to the lunch with Khrushchev out of political protest for the Communist leader⁴¹. And yet, despite the undeniable international political angle that remained a fixture of the time period as well as Khrushchev’s trip, the cancellation of Disneyland, which remains a symbolic fixture of the American identity by 1959, caused the Soviet leader to become outraged with the entire trip. National coverage of the incident tended

³⁹ Peter Carlson, “Nikita Khrushchev Goes to Hollywood,” 2009.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Peter Carlson, “Nikita Khrushchev Goes to Hollywood,” 2009.

to downplay the outburst and deliver the mere facts that the trip was cancelled⁴², while it is apparent from the above resources that local coverage focused heavily on the display on behalf of Khrushchev, although it remains significant that the incident qualified as nationally newsworthy.

While Disneyland did definitely feed into an American psychological need for control and comfort during the Cold War, that universal appeal of a fantastical utopia clearly had much farther reaching effects, and hence created a place for itself in the international sphere as well. The glamour of Hollywood stars and the lifestyle that came with it, exhibited by the celebrity presence at the lunch event did little to repay the fact that Disneyland would not be an option, solidifying yet again a clear distinction between the Los Angeles, Hollywood lifestyle and what Disneyland represented to patrons. While Disney was involved with Hollywood and did much to change that field as well, Disneyland was geographically as well as psychologically distinct from the realities of Hollywood, and truly became a land of its own merely four years after it opened. The movie set inspiration for much of the Disneyland setting was necessarily altered in the execution process for the Park, in order to manufacture a utopian reality entirely autonomous from the Los Angeles roots. Walt Disney set out to create a ‘perfect or perfectible’ utopia that proved to be an economic success as well as a fundamental piece of regional identity, yet which also reflected more universal aspects of the concurrent national historical narrative by erasing and altering the more negative aspects of a true reality, thus carving a place in history that can never be reversed. The effects that Disneyland had on shaping the Orange County identity were irreversible, and set the

⁴² “Premier Annoyed By Ban on a Visit to Disneyland,” *New York Times*, 20 Sep. 1959.

foundation for compounding historical events that would solidify this identity. After Disneyland set up a model for the Orange County suburban identity, local climates reinforced a growth of neoconservative values that helped to distinguish it from its Los Angeles legacy before World War II. The 1960s brought to the region the Goldwater campaign and the Watts Riot, both events that worked to conclusively define two concretely separate identities for Los Angeles and Orange counties.

Chapter 2: Race and Class Politics as Foundations of Regional Identities in the 1960s

By the early 1960s, Orange County had begun to develop a distinctive regional identity, as evidenced from the previous chapter. After its primary identifying characteristics became white and suburban, the beginnings of the New Right rapidly created an even more specific cultural characterization of the locale. What emerged in the suburban neighborhoods of Orange County was a convergence of cultural and political identity, a powerful and new socio-cultural identity. The region echoed the consumerist trend of suburban 1960s America, but also very specifically veered toward conservative politics.

The first part of this chapter assesses the campaign for conservative presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, a pivotal case study in the emerging conservative movement in the region. That campaign solidified demographic characteristics of Orange County into a relatively homogenous conservative constituency. The second half of this chapter will examine the events and aftermath of the Watts Riot in 1965 in Los Angeles County. This alternative case study will examine the contrast between the two places, and focus upon the racial and economic diversity in Los Angeles that led to the rioting, and the type of diversity that was necessarily nonexistent in Orange County by 1965. The race rioting only occurred in Los Angeles because there was enough racial diversity to fuel frustration, which simply did not exist in Orange County. The lack of racial and economic diversity in Orange County formed its regional identity as distinct from Los

Angeles, as the realities of urban life that involved chaos, disorder, and diversity were excluded from the suburban development in Orange County.

The Barry Goldwater Campaign and the New Right

Though characterized most directly by the grassroots presidential campaign for Barry Goldwater in 1964, the conservative movement that emerged in Orange County in the early 1960s coincided with a newly formed regional identity that welcomed and fostered the politics of the New Right. An “economic and racial homogeneity” in Orange County favored a movement that leaned more toward conservative and libertarian ideals⁴³ like individualism and private property, yet emerged as a New Right because of the unique conditions of the postwar era. The region included a high proportion of veteran citizens and experienced a surge of evangelical Christianity. Those factors plus racial and economic homogeneity in the county created a particular regional identity open to the rise of the New Right. The political movement serves as an important case study within the larger regional history of Orange County specifically (and as a contrast to Los Angeles County). Deep-rooted regional history caused residents to find appeal in the resurgence of conservative and libertarian ideals, very different from the identity in neighboring Los Angeles by the early 1960s.

Republican candidate Barry Goldwater did not have a typical career path in terms of political campaigning. He never had steady growing support, but, rather, came up as a late contender who rapidly gained localized communities of support. Goldwater shot to the forefront of the political race because of his evolving conservative platform that fed

⁴³ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 42.

off of the newly emerging conservatism. The bulk of reporting on Goldwater and his campaign occurred approximately two months before the Republican Convention in 1964, when his candidacy was officially announced. Media attention peaked in June of 1964, a month before the Republican Convention, placing Goldwater and his conservative platform in a prominent position within journalism, especially in local news outlets⁴⁴. Goldwater ended up winning California in the primaries after taking only four of the state's sixty-eight counties⁴⁵. Given the populations and political influence of Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties, this regional pocket of support had a huge impact in the larger political race, and exemplified the strengths of the Goldwater campaign in Southern California, and its impact on state, and, then, national politics. The suburban communities that made up Orange County by the early 1960s worked both for the grassroots political campaign, as many members of the suburban areas – especially the suburban women who did not work – had the time and passion to organize for Goldwater. His conservative platform reinforced the values⁴⁶ that shaped and were shaped by the communities offering him support, as is indicated in *Los Angeles Time* article “Orange County Proves True Goldwater Area.” The article begins by stating, “primary election returns showed Orange County was living up to its reputation as Goldwater country. Heavy Republican registration, with a 20% edge, gave Sen. Barry Goldwater 30,893 and Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller 15,552...⁴⁷” While the larger history

⁴⁴ Numerous articles from the *Los Angeles Times* in June of 1964 show the developments in Goldwater's campaign as important news – see bibliography.

⁴⁵ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors* 112.

⁴⁶ The conservative values shaping these communities were characterized by a dedication to more traditional ideals involving fiscal privatization, social homogeneity, and often more antiquated gender roles within a nuclear family structure.

⁴⁷ “Orange County Proves True,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 1964.

of Orange County helps to lay the groundwork for a community welcoming of the New Right platform represented in Goldwater's campaign, even more immediate local climates were necessary in fostering such a receptive audience.

After gaining reliable support in specific local communities, such as Orange County, the fundamental conservative platform that Goldwater stood for began to solidify due to prominent political voices conveying support for the common values evident in the campaign and in the county. One such statement came from Richard Nixon in a *Los Angeles Times* interview from June of 1964, where the former Vice President formally stated his support for Goldwater as a Republican candidate. According to the article, "Nixon said Sen. Barry Goldwater's views on major issues, with the exception of civil rights⁴⁸, generally conform with Republican Party platform principles." It added that, "Goldwater...has moved to a position in which he accepts the major tenets of the Republican platform...[and] has moved from a sectional to a national candidate."⁴⁹ With Nixon's prominent political voice, Goldwater's reputation in both local and national audiences quickly shot from rather anonymous, or 'sectional' to widespread and heavily influential. The effect that such changing climates had – as exemplified in both articles – was specifically relevant to and telling of a more particularized support within Orange County for Goldwater throughout the final stretch of the campaigning process. Goldwater's platform resonated in Orange County, and because of its increasing political power within California, made it a player in national politics.

⁴⁸ Goldwater's official stance on Civil Rights encompassed a general belief in equality, but a firm opposition to big government enforcing Civil Rights reforms. Speeches involved statements indicating that laws in place specifically for the advancement of disadvantaged groups may do more to hurt social inequality than to help in a theoretical sense. <http://www.4president.org/brochures/goldwater1964brochure.htm>

⁴⁹ "Nixon Believes Goldwater is in Line with Party Platform," *Los Angeles Times*, 1964.

The frontier narrative that glorified the rhetoric of manifest destiny and individualistic conquering of the wild lands in the Western part of the country characterized the history of the Western United States. This trend highlighted the individualistic and isolationist attitudes reflected in many conservative political beliefs and therefore resonated well in this specific location. Some of the values highlighted in Goldwater's political platform involved a strict belief in laissez-faire race relations, specifically denouncing the idea that the government should get involved in race relations, as well as an opposition to the idea of a welfare state and dedication to states' rights. By focusing on a certain conservative set of American ideals in his campaign, Goldwater appealed to a very Western audience, as his focus on more 'traditional' values that realistically translated to highly conservative values, began to align with a more libertarian Western identity⁵⁰. Orange County's embrace of conservative values did become countywide, but the mere population and diversity of Los Angeles proper kept that county fairly liberal. The whiter, wealthier, and highly suburbanized Orange County proved to be an eager audience for Goldwater's more radical political platform.

After these suburban conservatives latched onto Goldwater as a representative of their communal (and paradoxically individualistic) values and helped to launch his political career into national recognition, the result turned out favorable for the Republican constituency. Goldwater won the nomination at the Republican Convention in July of 1964. Goldwater's acceptance speech at the Convention lays out his individual platform and beliefs, but also those of many conservatives in Orange County. Goldwater began his acceptance speech by stating, "I accept your nomination with a deep sense of

⁵⁰ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 132.

humility...my fellow Republicans, our cause is too great for any man to feel worthy of it. Our task would be too great for any man, did he not have with him the heart and hands of this great Republican Party...⁵¹”

As a candidate who never shied away from more radical and extreme campaigning tactics and political stances, Goldwater’s speech fittingly begins with a firm grip on his party affiliation and the rhetoric of the existing political dichotomy between parties. After proclaiming an overwhelming attachment to the Republican identity, Goldwater explicated the values he espoused as a conservative. In his address, Goldwater claims, “Now, my fellow Americans, the tide has been running against freedom. Our people have followed false prophets. We must, and we shall, return to proven ways – not because they are old, but because they are true. We must, and we shall, set the tide running again in the cause of freedom.⁵²” The rhetoric of aligning such a universal concept such as freedom with conservative and traditional values is a strategic political move. Universal freedom and anti-communist sentiments were symbolic values that would undeniably appeal to broad audience, including the white suburban audience.

Within a Cold War climate, Goldwater could rely on such abstract and unarguable positives as freedom and tradition in their theoretical forms. With the more realistic and nuanced threats of nuclear warfare and the doom of Communism spreading, it became difficult to rely on any tangible legislation changes, so the reliance on more ideological reassurances became necessary to offer any type of comfort or stability. While Goldwater did not garner enough support with his radical conservative platform to beat Lyndon B. Johnson in the presidential race in 1964, the overwhelming support that came

⁵¹ Presidency.ucsba.edu transcript of Goldwater speech.

⁵² Ibid.

from such a contained community as Orange County is revealing of general political climates at the time. The localized support also aids in characterizing the climate within Orange County that created an environment welcoming to such political extremisms.

The specific demographic makeup of Orange County can be broken down into racial, economic, and religious categories in order to critically assess its political tendencies, although many other aspects of identity are not unrelated. Along racial lines, the predominantly white majority that emerged in Orange County was necessarily linked to the high proportion of Midwestern and Southern migrants. With new industrial opportunities in the region after World War II due to the existing military-industrial complex in Orange County, the area welcomed a huge community of migrants in the 1950s and 1960s. Migrating largely from overcrowded Midwestern and Southern urban and suburban communities, many Orange County residents brought their local social values with them that helped to inform their political views⁵³. These migrants, often coming from agricultural backgrounds generally maintained a strong sense of family responsibility and small town communal values. The result of larger trends, such as the economic and racial alignments into urban centers and suburban peripheries that occurred in cities throughout the nation, as well as the high economic demands of the suburbanization trend throughout the sunbelt created in Orange County a relatively homogenous citizenship that was white and middle-to-upper class as a prerequisite to even inhabit the formative generation of Orange County identity. After establishing such a uniform environment by the mid-1950s, Orange County had entered a political phase in which “economic and racial homogeneity favored the Right,” with an incredibly strong

⁵³ Kevin Phillips, *Emerging Republican Majority*, 507.

middle class presence informing the political tendencies of residents⁵⁴. This very white and economically stable characterization of Orange County stands as a fairly accurate characterization of most American suburbs that emerged in the aftermath of World War II, which also linked suburbanization with Civil Rights rhetoric and growing racial tensions in most urban centers throughout the nation.



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By 1967, Orange County had become the second most populous county in California, second only to Los Angeles, with cities like Anaheim becoming powerful rapidly⁵⁶, indicating hugely exponential population growth, which also gave it new

⁵⁴ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 42.

⁵⁵ Orange County visibly suburbanized along strategic geographic divides; the mapped suburbs were also intentionally built with the new freeway system as a foundational guide; <https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~kennyk/oc/recent.html>

⁵⁶ Kevin Phillips, *Emerging Right Majority*, 511.

political power. Orange County proved politically powerful by aiding in the Goldwater primary nomination, as one of three counties whose numbers alone decided the statewide win for Goldwater. In addition to the mere power in numbers that emerged in less than two decades in Orange County, the particular values that the non-native portion of residents (61% by 1960⁵⁷) were necessary for developing the countywide political ethos that led to the massive support for Goldwater and the New Right movement. The huge military presence (specifically, white veteran presence) in the region, represented by both citizen demographics, with over half of the civilian male residents over the age of fourteen classified as veterans by 1960⁵⁸ - a statistically significant portion – as well as both Air Force and Navy bases housed in Santa Ana, helped to fuel conservative political sentiments.

These veterans and their families, with their post-war consumerism and opportunities of military-industrial expansion in Orange County enabled more libertarian ideals. The GI Bill helped to fuel the trend of homeownership and suburban consumerism, by offering war veterans benefits like home mortgages and education. Paradoxically, this government support allowed more individualistic identities for many veterans and encouraged more conservative political beliefs. Such ideals favored privatized economics that were, in this context, being associated with a Southern California suburban image and allowing these families to embrace the symbolic relaxation and leisurely lifestyle being sold. The sunbelt image relies heavily on the fair weather and ample space to advocate for family recreation and a reinforcement of traditional communal values in a safe and comfortable environment. This image is also

⁵⁷ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 45.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

associated with the economic stability and growth rampant in the area, encouraging residents to fully utilize their private capital and essentially purchase the lifestyle being sold. People wanted a post-war, homogenous community that is safe and welcoming to American nuclear families. While basking in the positive aspects of such capitalist practices that truly did favor white male veterans at the time, many residents became strong supporters of privatization and more conservative economic and political practices in order to ensure the longevity of their new lifestyle⁵⁹.

Additionally, a concurrent surge in evangelical Christianity at the time also converged with the myriad other factors making up the demographic of Orange County residents. By the 1960s, this religious shift did prove to be politically influential. Religion in the region became not just a spiritual experience but also a rapidly emerging economic and political entity. With the particular demographic makeup of Orange County, the churches in the region quickly became very powerful economically. Their normal congregation members – mostly middle-to-upper class families – made regular donations: the economic power of the church was further strengthened by donations from a few very wealthy individuals. The alignment of political and spiritual life can be summed up for the time period with the statement that “the 1950s was an era of genteel conservatism under the benevolent leadership of Dwight D. Eisenhower”⁶⁰. This trend continued, so much so that Christianity became the leading industry in the region behind only real estate and motion pictures by 1960⁶¹. The rise of evangelical Christianity, both in numbers and in its economic and related political power, achieved both large-scale

⁵⁹ Lizabeth Cohen, *Consumer's Republic*, 121.

⁶⁰ Richard Pierard, “The New Religious Right,” George Marsden, 164.

⁶¹ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 31.

transformations and allowed more individual experiences that altogether informed a more general political shift in the 1950s and 1960s in Orange County residents and their political tendencies⁶².

On a personal level, individual leaders of spiritual congregations began to hold much more influence by incorporating relevant current events and political opinions into the practice of worship. The Catholic hierarchy in the area reinforced a resurgent conservatism with socio-political values, as well as its more rigid structural dynamics within the Church and its internal politics. Cardinal James Francis McIntyre⁶³ preached extreme right-wing beliefs, both in terms of personal, moral values, and political ones, indicating an alignment with conservative social politics at the time. The Cardinal had very conservative political beliefs, and utilized religious rhetoric to appeal to his supporters and sway them toward the Right politically. His power came parallel to a growing fundamentalist Protestant movement in Orange County. The rapid growth of more fundamentalist Protestant sects in Orange County in the 1960s also aligned well with the New Right movement. The ideological foundations of these evangelical practices appealed to individualistic spiritual practices and personal relationships to God that were echoed in the politically conservative rhetoric being spread around Orange County. Logistically, the religious and political ideals had more in common than just the ideology, as local businesses (including wealthy churches) donated to the Goldwater campaign in addition to preaching support for the Republican candidate⁶⁴. As the population of Orange County clearly tended toward homogeneity in terms of race and

⁶² George Marsden, "Evangelicals, History, and Modernity," 102.

⁶³ J.F. McIntyre served as Archbishop of Los Angeles 1948-1970, became a cardinal in 1953

⁶⁴ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 136.

class, which undeniably aided in connecting the local community to Goldwater's conservative campaign, the heavy presence of Christianity added an additional layer in the political right leaning. The Goldwater platform resonated with both Catholic and evangelical Protestant communities, with the common theme of traditional values and individualistic conservatism, such as a dedication to privatized economy reflecting in both arenas.

Political historian Alan Brinkley attempts to explore what he calls the "Problem of American Conservatism" as one piece of his larger analysis of liberalism in American history. While there are clear factors that contributed to Orange County becoming a regional pocket of hyper-conservative political support, a larger question remains. Why conservatism had such an impact in the 1960s and what the presence of the New Right means in the context of much larger historical trends? Brinkley proposes that conservatism has largely been omitted from larger histories, and that the reason for this omission lies in the historiography of political ideology, not with conservatives themselves⁶⁵. With a pervasive rhetoric of American exceptionalism as the nation responsible for the liberation of the rest of the world in the wake of World War II, liberalism⁶⁶ began to inform a majority of foreign and domestic policymaking, with the ideological freedoms that came to define American identity translating to a globalized policy.

After the success of liberal New Deal reforms under Roosevelt aiding in the end of the economic hardship, and the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II, the

⁶⁵ Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, 277.

⁶⁶ Merriam Webster defines liberalism as: a political philosophy based on belief in progress, the essential goodness of the human race, and the autonomy of the individual and standing for the protection of political and civil liberties.

dominating liberalism tended to appeal to much of the American audience into the early years of the Cold War, leaving the conservative supporters as more localized pockets of influence. With soaring nationalism and a resounding, almost universal support for American liberal policy and exceptionalism in its self-titled position as the liberator of the free world throughout involvement in World War II, it was only after the post-war boom, that it became acceptable to “critique liberal culture⁶⁷” such as President Johnson’s ‘Great Society.’ While there were many individuals who both believed in the conservative movement and represented the ideals of the party, Brinkley proposes a pivotal reminder of the overwhelming factor of context. The larger historical climate of World War II that occurred prior to the emergence of the New Right allowed the movement to gain support. The liberal ideals that persevered throughout World War II stood in direct contrast to conservative ideology, but necessarily shaped post-war consumerism and suburbanization. This created the very environment welcoming to more fundamentalist, traditional conservative values such as individualism and a revival of private property as a priority in political belief that characterized the conservatism of 1960s Orange County.

While proposing that conservatism is not in fact an ideology, but, rather, a “cluster of ideas” that are sometimes related to one another⁶⁸, Brinkley proposes a larger trend in the history of conservatism and narrows in on the sway that regional ties can have for specific case studies of conservative movements. Brinkley notes a specific tie to a narrative and identity that comes out of the American West. More libertarian, individualistic values remain consistent with a Western theme of resentment for the

⁶⁷ Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, 281.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 281.

East⁶⁹ – which represented for some a large government presence in the development of cities up and down the Atlantic Coast and a closeness and inter-connectedness that simply did not exist within the Frontier narrative of the West. Further, conservatives in the post-war period remained steadfastly dedicated to the ideals of the West.

Conservative scholar Kevin Phillips, who coined the term ‘sunbelt’, states definitively that, “the frontier is still open in terms of economic and intellectual opportunity”⁷⁰. Such a perspective shift indicates a more general climate of an anti-federal, individualistic regional sentiment regarding politics, with a clear desire to cling to perhaps archaic definitions of the West. While the exploratory nature may have defined the frontier narrative during the nineteenth century, the lifestyle that emerged from the settling of the West had thematic parallels in the twentieth century suburbanization of Southern California. These definitions could be manipulated to fit with the conservative message of the New Right and more libertarian-leaning ideals that easily appealed to the individualistic nature of wealthy white Orange County residents by the 1960s.

Support for Goldwater and a particular conservatism in Orange County in the early 1960s fostered an environment that appealed to more ‘traditional’ values encouraged by the homogeneity in the suburban community. This environment set up for a direct contrast to underlying tensions in regard to social unrest and racial inequalities within Los Angeles County and helped to drive a wedge between the two communities and form distinctive local identities between the two. What could have been considered a suburban extension of Los Angeles, Orange County developed a unique regional identity that was largely characterized by the neoconservative spread throughout the region. Its

⁶⁹ Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, 285.

⁷⁰ Kevin Phillips, *Emerging Republican Majority*, 515.

actual demography began to closely resemble the type of homogenous utopia imagined by Walt Disney in creating nearby Disneyland, with the capitalist lifestyle of leisure and nuclear suburban ideals being sold to eligible candidates. The picture seen below indicates a prototypical image of an idealized suburban man for the time period, with a focus on the recreational aspect of gardening in the targeted ad for lawn fertilizer.



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Such eligible candidates included middle or upper class families that overwhelmingly were also Caucasian and Christian. This furthered the chasm between the two areas, by creating a region that was largely still segregated, despite an official legal ban on racial segregation.

Such unofficial prerequisites for residence in the Orange County suburbs reinforced a utopian image of the area and furthered the trend of ‘white flight’ out of Los Angeles neighborhoods for the bedroom communities and good schools to the south. Although Brinkley proposes that conservatism has an uncommon trend within political history, namely in being largely excluded from most literature, in the case of Southern

⁷¹ An example of the suburbanized, leisurely lifestyle being sold to Americans at the time; the advertisement from YardViews is archived via the Duke University library; http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adviews_yard_master/

California it serves to reinforce the geographic divide between Orange and Los Angeles counties by characterizing a regional identity in Orange County at the time.

The Watts Riot: the Antithesis of Orange County by 1965

In August of 1965, a series of events occurred that together make up what is considered historically as the Watts Riot, and within just six days created a monumental moment in racial history. Brewing issues of police brutality, social and economic inequality for blacks, and the rapid suburbanization occurring in Los Angeles, made the events of the Watts Riot an urgent and necessary assessment on a statewide and national level about race relations in the aftermath of the height of the Civil Rights Movement. A routine traffic stop in the South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles escalated into a public outburst of rioting and looting – so much so that the National Guard was eventually called in by the Los Angeles Police Department and an enforced curfew put into place in certain Los Angeles neighborhoods. Analyses of the events –both contemporary and historical – reveal many layers of social unrest and contradictory perspectives⁷².

⁷² Research will come from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including periodicals and the McCone Report from the time and scholarly analyses of the event.



The Watts Riot officially ended on Tuesday August 17, 1965 when Governor Edmund Brown of California ordered a lift of the curfew that had been in place since the previous Saturday, during the height of the rioting. In the aftermath of the rioting, Governor Brown called for a full and deep exploration of the events, utilizing the McCone Commission to assess both the details and chronology of rioting events, as well as larger underlying causes of the Riot and recommendations for preventative action moving forward. John McCone, a politician who served as the Director of Central Intelligence during the Watts Riot headed the committee, and the rest of the group consisted of various staff attorneys, research specialists, and investigators. The official McCone Report was sent to Governor Brown on December 2, 1965 and consists of nine chapters that explore in great detail the very questions posed by the Governor. The Report begins with a detailed chapter entitled “The Crisis: an Overview” which provides statistical comparisons to other race riots from the previous year across the nation, and offers some preliminary theory about why a riot erupted in Los Angeles and what some of the larger thematic issues were that led to the violent events. Within this chapter, there

⁷³ National Guard patrolling the streets of south-central neighborhoods in Los Angeles, 1965; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/23/rena-price-dead-woman-whose-arrest-triggers-watts-riots_n_3486647.html

is a subsection entitled “Why Los Angeles?” that explores what specifically caused the Watts Riot to be locally significant and distinct from other Civil Rights protests throughout the country. The poor living conditions for blacks in Los Angeles happened to be paired in this case with disproportionately high hopes for what the city might bring in terms of racial equality, and, therefore, significantly high quantities of disappointment and disillusionment occurred when the city offered little equality to its black population. Specifically notable are statistics indicating damages. The Watts Riot had extremely high numbers of deaths and injuries, as well as an exponentially larger quantity in damage costs estimated, compared to riots in seven cities across the nation the previous year. Thirty-four deaths compared to a high of four in Rochester, with all others coming in at zero or one death, as well as over 1,000 injured, compared to a high of 350, also in Rochester⁷⁴. While it is proposed by the McCone Committee that the root causes of the rioting remained consistent for all of the cities in the study, the statistical significance of damages in the Watts Riot created a necessity to study the unique local conditions in Los Angeles that created this significant of an event. While many of the larger structural inequalities in Los Angeles were on par with the national trends, the McCone Report points to a sense of disillusionment as the theoretical cause for the underlying tension that erupted in the Watts Riot.

The common themes proposed in the Report that remained consistent in the Los Angeles events as well as rioting in other American cities were unemployment rates, inadequate educational opportunities, and a resentment of police, all related specifically

⁷⁴ McCone Report 1965, USC archives.

to the black experience⁷⁵. The McCone Report cites evidence presented in a 1964 Urban League⁷⁶ ‘statistical portrait’ stating that Los Angeles ranked first out of sixty-eight American cities studied in terms of housing, employment, and income for blacks⁷⁷. While it may remain true that predominantly black neighborhoods in Los Angeles were preferable to similar neighborhoods in other cities, at least partially due to the generally good weather, the realities for black Americans in Los Angeles in 1964-1965 were anything but ideal. Although, “a Negro in Los Angeles has long been able to sit where he wants in a bus or a movie house, to shop where he wishes, to vote, and to use public facilities without discrimination. The opportunity to succeed is probably unequaled in any other major American city.⁷⁸” While claiming that Los Angeles is more accessible and desegregated than most other American cities may be true in a statistical sense, the comparison between black Los Angeles and white Los Angeles for employment, housing, and education opportunities acts as a reminder of the more grim reality – that inhabiting a city with the best opportunities as a black American does not counteract the larger reality of hardship for black Americans in every city in the country in 1964. What emerges with the above statement is the implication from the McCone Committee that relativity is necessary in assessing something as qualitative as race politics and simultaneously discounting the real effects of race politics on a structural level.

This reality is what the McCone Committee speaks to next, in addressing the issue of disillusionment. While a massive population surge specific to the black community is

⁷⁵ McCone Report 1965, USC archives.

⁷⁶ The National Urban League serves as a national organization dedicated to aid the African-American community in ensuring economic self-reliance and civil rights to which they are entitled as American citizens.

⁷⁷ McCone Report 1965, USC archives.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

cited as one factor behind the tensions (75,000 to 650,000 between 1940 and 1965), the larger ideological issue of false hope and the realities of racial inequalities fueled much of the unrest that led to the rioting. As the Report finds:

Much of the increase [in the black population] came through migration from Southern states and many arrived with the anticipation that this dynamic city would somehow spell the end of life's endless problems. To those who have come with high hopes and great expectations and see the success of others so close at hand, failure brings a special disillusionment. Moreover, the fundamental problems, which are the same here as in the cities racked by the 1964 riots, are intensified by what may well be the least adequate network of public transportation in any major city in America⁷⁹.

This set of observations encompasses both ideological effects of the structural inequalities and the more tangible realities of daily life for black Angelenos, and offers an explanation for the severity of the Watts Riot specifically and as distinct from other race riots in America. This disappointment stands in direct contrast to the extreme optimism presented in the Disneyland image of the land of high hopes and no woes. Multiple case studies, such as one interview with a Chester Himes, describe the general trend of migration to Los Angeles for many black families during and immediately after World War II, with the consensus being that there was great opportunity at some points, and still great frustrations at other points⁸⁰. The idea of disillusionment is particularly interesting because of the very nature of its abstract characterization of black life in Los Angeles. While the afterthought of public transportation is included, it is actually the portion that could be the most compelling argument due its concrete and measurable nature, especially when comparing to other major American cities. Emphasizing the abstract

⁷⁹ McCone Report 1965, USC archives.

⁸⁰ Josh Sides, *City of Promise*, 112.

was a conscious choice on behalf of the authors, as the focus shifts to the future and the suggested ‘remedies’ for avoiding future unrest and another riot are almost entirely contingent upon huge structural shifts and the necessity of ideological changes that come with those structure transformations. The McCone Committee, a group of (largely) conservative political leaders and government representatives appointed by Governor Brown wrote the McCone Report in the several months following the Watts Riot and released it in December of 1965. According to the McCone Report, the entire educational system would need to change, as well as the programs in place to handle unemployment to ensure that another riot wouldn’t come out of Watts, but that racial opinions in an ideological sense would simultaneously need to shift for the structural changes to be as effective as necessary.

The two major areas for reform in the Report are the interrelated fields of education and employment in the Los Angeles black community. Scholars vary in their opinions on these issues, with many historians categorizing these two issues as impractical for the time period, while others view it as an accurate representation of the state of affairs. These broad fields ultimately converge to make up a general overview of a lifestyle prescribed for many black citizens in Los Angeles that is neither entirely positive nor opportunistic. Focusing specifically on the ways in which unemployed black males, as the heads of households are particularly disadvantaged and the psychological results of high unemployment, the Report states:

There is no immediate total solution to this problem, but it is our opinion that far more can be done than is now being done by government, by the private business sector, by organized labor, and by the Negro community individually and jointly, to find jobs in the short range and in the long

range to train Negroes so that a high proportion of them will not remain out of work⁸¹.

With this one statement, the Report manages to prove the necessary nature of breadth and theory when discussing such complex issues as race politics in the 1960s. This is partially due to ideas of race and identity broaching both personal experiences, as well as remaining a predominant issue throughout the nation that is somewhat quantifiable on institutional levels. While most of the Report remains broad and vague, particularly within the sections dedicated to improvements, this stylistic choice itself is indicative of the actual scope of racial issues in Los Angeles in 1965. Even the official government commission called upon to offer suggestions for improvement remained stuck on the details. The Report glossed over tangible pragmatic shifts that would ensure a higher quality of life for black Angelenos, such as actual legislative reform proposals to make educational opportunities more universal, and therefore relied heavily on more thematic shifts and the very large picture.

By calling upon such large entities as the government and the entire private sector of business, the Report manages to simultaneously acknowledge the huge structural inequalities for black Americans and also push the responsibility for solving these issues onto vague entities that have clearly, to this point, done little to improve racial equality within the job and educational markets. While it may be true in many respects that significant overhauls of huge American corporations (as well as the government) would be necessary to create a more egalitarian reality for black Americans, the realistic small shifts – such as new government programs to eradicate the huge employment disadvantages for black Angelenos – that would make up such huge transformations are

⁸¹ McCone Report 1965, USC archives.

lacking in the official Report, with the focus instead remaining fixated upon the theoretical need for huge financial dedication to fixing the education system as well as an unrealistic suggestion of halting the nationwide suburbanization process to ensure more diversified urban school settings.

As the issues for black Angelenos turn out not to be entirely distinct from the inequalities plaguing black Americans as a whole group, the disillusionment that came from a false hope for betterment specific to the Los Angeles hype is one proposed contribution that made the Watts Riot distinct and so much worse than many other race riots. Additionally, one distinctive aspect of the Watts Riot was the related underlying issue of resentment and distrust for the police in Los Angeles County that did not seem to exist, or at least in such magnitude in other American cities, according to the McCone Report. With a long history of police brutality complaints, many Los Angeles organizations had begun to investigate this issue as a whole, rather than just in specific cases, and the racialized nature of the brutality became a specifically relevant issue as the national Civil Rights Movement began to gain support and spread.

As early as 1962, critical review of the Los Angeles Police Department began to emerge, and a June, 1962 *Los Angeles Times* article entitled “Minority Complaints Against Police Argued” was published and explored the fundamental issues that characterized ongoing investigations of police brutality complaints. One such investigation focused on attempting to assess general race conditions in Los Angeles and is reported on in the article: “John Buggs, who said he has headed the Human Relations Commission for eight years, said that as a result of recent surveys the county has taken a

good look at itself in employment and personnel problems.⁸²” The crucial result of this study comes from minority citizens reporting their negative impressions of police, as “Buggs said Negroes...have come to believe that in contact with officers, they can expect to be treated roughly.⁸³” This very simple statement can act as a fundamental assessment of the tension that undeniably existed between law enforcement and racial minorities in Los Angeles even before these tensions erupted during the Watts Riot.

When the McCone Report was released, the issue of police brutality was already widely recognized, and demanded an entire chapter of the Report to assess the issues and explore both sides of the debate. On the one hand, nonwhite citizens in significant numbers reported excessive force and unnecessary brutality on behalf of the police they had experiences with. On the other hand, this growing resentment has caused what the police deem excessive resistance in arrests and other types of interactions by black citizens specifically. While it is impossible to conclude whether one side is entirely factual and correct, negating the other, the two in tangent do explain in great detail why the tension had grown so strong by 1965. According to the official Report,

The conduct of law enforcement agencies, most particularly the Los Angeles Police Department, has been subject to severe criticism by many Negroes who have appeared before the Commission as witnesses. The bitter criticism we have heard evidences a deep and longstanding schism between a substantial portion of the Negro community and the Police Department. ‘Police brutality’ has been the recurring charge. One witness after another has recounted instances in which, in their opinion, the police have used excessive force or have been disrespectful and abusive in their language or manner⁸⁴.

⁸² “Minority Complaints Against Police Argued,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1962.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ McCone Report 1965, USC archives.

The claims, which were collected from over seventy cases that were voluntarily submitted to the Commission, confirm the idea that a negative relationship between minority citizens and the Los Angeles Police Department existed.

The issue of police brutality raises another set of questions that the McCone Committee again chooses to answer in philosophical terms, instead of pragmatic suggestions for improvement in the relationship. The relationship between racial minorities and law enforcement is a long and complex one, especially in Los Angeles, as chronicled by historian Martin Schiesl in his essay “Behind the Shield: Social Discontent and Los Angeles Police Department since 1950.” The Report officially claims, “our society is held together by respect for law. A group of officers who represent a tiny fraction of the percent of the population is the thin thread that enforces observance of law by those few who would do otherwise.⁸⁵” With this politically philosophical statement about society and order as a whole, the Report again states, “so, while we must examine carefully the claim of police brutality and must see that justice is done to all groups within our society, we must, at the same time be sure that law enforcement agencies, upon which so much depends, are not rendered impotent.⁸⁶” The indication of this quote suggests a theoretical acknowledgment of maltreatment, yet falls back into a harsher implication that the police remain fundamentally right as figures of power and justice. In terms of solutions, the Report largely “promotes an understanding” between the black community in Los Angeles and the police department in order to relieve much of the underlying tension. Few practical suggestions for how to achieve this mutual

⁸⁵ McCone Report 1965, USC archives.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

understanding or any sort of action in the meantime to decrease the rates at which police brutality toward black Angelenos were being reported and practiced.

This trend of falling back upon theoretical analysis of the issues as opposed to the more practical and realistic issues can be seen throughout much of the McCone Report, which was heavily utilized at the time in order to understand racial politics in Los Angeles, but is one of the reasons it began to receive heavy criticism after its release to the public. What came out in more historical critiques, both of the events of the Watts Riot and the McCone Report were the assessment that McCone himself was a loyal Republican and his beliefs tended to lean heavily toward libertarian ideology.⁸⁷ This created an inherent ideological clash between his critical assessment of race conditions in 1965 for the Report, and his personal political leanings that generally favored individualism and small government. Relying on solutions like mutual understanding and general education and sensitivity, rather than any government reforms to actually solve the inequalities for black Angelenos, McCone's libertarian ideals oppose what many felt was a need for government intervention as the only method of positive change.

Many individual citizens and scholars responded quite negatively to the Report. The generalizations used in the Report to proclaim certain behavioral and psychological patterns for both explaining the Watts Riot and attempting to prevent future rioting came under attack when many readers identified credibility issues with the methodology. Prominent Civil Rights activist Bayard Rustin publicly criticized the Report via his journalistic resources, systematically acknowledging and deconstructing many of the double standards that exist in the Report. One method of doing so was pointing out that

⁸⁷ Scott Saul, *Gridlock of Rage*, 149.

the Report “condemned black disrespect for the law but failed to condemn extralegal violence against black protest.⁸⁸” Additionally, “when faced with the McCone Report, mainline organizations like the US Commission on Civil Rights were goaded to the rioters’ defense.⁸⁹” With the factual discrepancies and extremely biased foundation, readers of the Report (which includes the general public) immediately begin to deconstruct it, and the main document in existence for comprehending the Watts Riot was deemed insufficient and heavily flawed.

Within academia, the Report also received harsh criticism. Historian Robert Fogelson called the McCone Report a “product of a particular interest group, ‘upper-middle-class whites’ who shared preconceptions about violence, law enforcement, ghettos, and slums.⁹⁰” Fogelson deconstructs many of the claims in the Report, and explores the ways in which the Watts Riot may actually stand as an example of a reasonable and eloquent form of protest. Without negating the claim that blacks in Los Angeles – and generally in America in the 1960s for that matter – have many disadvantages prescribed to them, the backlash tends to rely on the fact that the day-to-day reality for black Angelenos is highly varied by many factors. Critics and scholars argue that the source of frustration cannot be ascribed to broad, structural causes as simple as education and employment. Because it is impossible to form any concrete conclusions from so many varied and personal sources, it remains somewhat questionable what the actual cause for the rioting in 1965 *actually* was. Yet, the mere presence of such resounding denunciation of the official McCone Report from journalistic as well as

⁸⁸ Scott Saul, *Gridlock of Rage*, 150.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

academic voices can, altogether, highlight a key flaw in utilizing the Report as a sole source of comprehension of the Watts Riot. Though the Report acknowledges disadvantages for black citizens in Los Angeles County, the focus remains heavily on broad and theoretical structural criticism in finding the root cause. The loud wave of rejection heard upon its release indicates that the actual experiences of black Angelenos who lived through the Watts Riot are certainly dissatisfied and disillusioned⁹¹. Yet perhaps the disillusionment stems as much with the governmental assessment of their generalized lifestyle than with the actual disadvantages faced by black Angelenos in 1965. The reality is inherently more complex and nuanced than the Report suggested. The issue becomes finding the true source of discontent and unrest in the black community in Los Angeles in order to better understand the context of the Watts Riot, yet the startlingly low quantity of scholarship on the subject leaves many personal accounts as the bulk of the historical research on the topic, and the personal grievances are not indicative of universal sentiments.

The Watts Riot stands as a pivotal moment in Los Angeles history and acted as a critical part of forming a regional identity. In the aftermath of the Civil Rights Act, a theoretically transformative legislative achievement, the disillusionment that stemmed from existing poor conditions for black Angelenos led to the eruption in the form of the Riot. The homogenous, newly conservative community in Orange County began to contrast with neighborhoods in south central Los Angeles that were undergoing high increases to the black population, and, therefore, increasing numbers of frustrated and

⁹¹ Various Los Angeles Times articles cite discontent from liberal audiences in reaction to the generalizing claims about life for black Angelenos in 1965. Scholars and citizens both reject the ideological nature of the Report.

disadvantaged Angelenos. In comparing the Goldwater campaign in Orange County to the Watts Riot, the events work together to create a break in emerging cultural identities for the two counties. Occurring at similar times, but representing polar opposite sentiments, the events embody a turning point in regional history that created for Orange County a white suburban conservative identity and a Los Angeles identity still defined by its diversity and the social issues that the diversity created. With a strong black population, Los Angeles became a concentrated example of the larger national issues plaguing black Americans that were furthered by the contrast in lifestyle with the white suburban Orange County neighbors. As decentralization thrived, urban black communities were left further disadvantaged and protested in the form of the Watts Riot, which can be used as an indicator of a forming countywide identifier of cultural context for Los Angeles in the 1960s.

A Comparative Look at the Two Counties

The events and aftermath of the Watts Riot in Los Angeles marked a decisive break within local historical narratives, as the Riot indicated a very specific set of lifestyle characteristics for racial minorities in Los Angeles that did not apply to other communities across the county. While sources do indicate that the experience for racial minorities in Los Angeles was in many ways unique from the experiences of racial minorities in other urban centers across the United States by the 1960s, a more immediate effect can be observed through the contrast with Orange County. Given the close geographical connection between the two counties, it becomes even more noteworthy that in the span of two decades the counties had developed entirely disparate cultural

identities. As Orange County began to solidify its identity as a neoconservative hub of homogenous libertarian idealists, Los Angeles County underwent one of many cultural transformations in its long history. World War II brought a great migration of black citizens to the area, shifting the demographics and social relations while Orange County continued to attract more and more white, Protestant, suburban families from around the country and also out of Los Angeles. The two counties necessarily influenced the development of distinct identities for each other, and by 1965 had established concrete and unique cultures.

Conclusion: Distinctive Identities Emerged

While Orange and Los Angeles counties are geographically close and share some history, the postwar years in the Southern California region shaped two distinct cultural identities. The shock of the Watts Riot in 1965 helped to solidify the differences between the two locations, capping the growing separations that had been increasing for more than a decade. The creation of Disneyland stands as a pivotal moment in the forming identity of Orange County, and speaks volumes about the emerging cultural. Furthermore, the subsequent rise of political conservatism in Orange County made it even more isolated and very unique in Southern California. This conservative movement is best illuminated within history by the grassroots campaign for conservative presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in 1964. That campaign provided a contained case study that contrasts with the development of Los Angeles in the same timeframe. With the Watts Riot occurring less than a year later, the contrast of these two events represents the larger contrast between the identities that had formed in the two counties.

By 1964, Orange County had come to embrace its whitewashed suburban identity and the politically conservative tendencies that came along with it. The scholarship that focuses specifically on Southern California adequately characterizes the demographic and related lifestyle shifts that occurred in the postwar years to create this emerging identity. However, only when contrasted with the heated, racialized events of the Watts Riot do the contrasts in regional identities become clear. By 1965, the events of the Watts Riot could never have occurred in Orange County, due to the fundamental causes of the rioting simply ceasing to exist in the suburban community.

The disparate development of the two contiguous counties created environments that were entirely isolated from one another, as indicated by the case study of racial tensions. The structural inequalities for black Angelenos erupted into the violence that was the Watts Riot, yet it is unfathomable that a similar event would occur in Orange County, because the citizenship in Orange County consisted almost entirely of white, middle class suburban families. Without a diverse population, the evolving race politics on a national level had little effect on the developing identity of Orange County, which crafted its own identity at least partially out of the homogeneity that existed within the county lines. The population demographics of Orange County only reinforced what was manufactured in the postwar boom in Orange County, namely a sunbelt vision of Cold War American nuclear family lifestyle.

Fundamental to this creation was the creation of Disneyland in 1955, which marked a definitive transition in time for Orange County as well as standing as a national historical event. The utopian theme that was central to the Disneyland image fit into the image of Orange County suburban life, as well as worked to actively shape a more utopian cultural identity countywide. The interplay between Disneyland and Orange County is strong throughout the 1950s and after, with Disneyland factoring in as a central icon of the regional identity in realms spanning the economic, political, and cultural. The legislative amendment to building codes discussed earlier serves as an example of how central the Park had become to the Orange County identity by the early 1960s.

Disneyland was strategically placed in Orange County for its fair weather and ample open land, and the Disneyland iconography quickly came to aid in the formation of the Orange County identity after its opening and national impact. The timing and location of

Disneyland had lasting effects on Orange County and its image within a national context, helping to shape the broader image of a white, utopian, suburban life in the midst of a Cold War context. This county identity created a hospitable environment for the emerging New Right movement that eventually garnered much local support within Orange County, while remaining fairly contained within this locale.

In the two decades after the end of World War II, Orange County underwent rapid suburbanization that coincided with the appearance of Disneyland as a cultural fixture. The culture that was intentionally manufactured and implemented within Park boundaries is reflected in the larger community, with a very similar culture forming in Orange County as a whole. The narrow definition of the idealized setting as well as citizen – or, within the Park, guest – fit into the larger formation of communal ideals and values that appeared within the Park, and, later, as characteristics in the New Right movement in Orange County. The decade between the opening of Disneyland and the height of the Goldwater campaign in Orange County encompasses the formative years for the regional identity of the county. Disneyland and its ideas supported the more conservative socio-political tendencies that catered to a homogenous citizenship. The Watts Riot in 1965 caps the timeframe with conclusive evidence of how distinct Orange County had grown from its former capital in Los Angeles. Los Angeles continued to be defined by the motion picture industry and remained a prominent national urban center, allowing for a disorganized, diverse, and often multi-faceted identity development. This process is interrupted by the events in Watts in 1965 that aid in displaying just how differentiated the two counties had become by this point in time, with fundamentally different populations and cultural identities. Fundamentally, the events of the 1950s and 1960s

work together to create a narrative of regionalism that evolved into more concrete and distinctive identities for Los Angeles and Orange counties, apparent and indestructible by 1965.

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