THE GRAY LADY, THE PEACOCK, AND THE MOUSE: CORPORATE MEDIA INFLUENCE IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

A Dissertation in
American Studies

by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the intersection of corporate culture and popular culture in 20th and 21st century America, focusing in particular on the role of for-profit institutions. Focusing on the themes of cultural capital and consumer agency; intangible assets as a basis for competition; and the theoretical notion of rational amusement, this project uses case studies to investigate the roles of the New York Times, the National Broadcasting Company, and the Walt Disney Company in American corporate and popular culture.

Case studies are the central keys to understanding the larger themes present within each corporation’s products and services. The New York Times is set apart in this project through its crossword puzzle and its publication of the Pentagon Papers. The crossword puzzle, through its association with the American “paper of record,” has come to be the gold standard of American-style crossword puzzles. Through an examination of the puzzle’s folklore, cultural references, and evolution, the puzzle reifies the Times’ status as the paper of record among American publications, thereby creating a recurring loop of prestige. The NBC case studies focus on its late night line-up and its Olympics coverage. NBC’s late night programming was the first of its kind on a national network, and The Tonight Show, Late Night, and Saturday Night Live serve as texts by which to examine the importance of brand loyalty and identity at the network. This case study also emphasizes the geographic importance of the late night line-up and its relation to New York and Los Angeles. NBC’s Olympic coverage is a more recent success, and the network has pulled from its own experiences, as well as those of their competitors, to
create Olympic programming for a post-Cold War, post-9/11 world. Finally, the Walt Disney Company is analyzed through its animated features and the role of Walt Disney World Resort in popular culture. The Walt Disney Company has learned as much from its failures as its successes, and therefore an analysis of its less-popular animated features, such as *Song of the South*, provides insight into the Disney brand and its long-term success. Walt Disney World is examined through the lens of rational amusement in American life. Walt Disney continues an arc of American rational amusement that began with Philadelphia’s Charles Willson Peale in the early republic.

This project signals a paradigm shift in the way the world of business is perceived within American studies. It focuses on the themes of cultural capital and consumer agency; intangible assets; and rational amusement as ways for American companies to separate themselves from the larger pack of media for-profit institutions.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS....................................................................................................vi

INTRODUCTION..............................................................................................................1

MODULE 1: THE NEW YORK TIMES

An Introduction...........................................................................................................12
Case Study A - All the Clues that are Fit to Solve: The New York Times
Crossword Puzzle........................................................................................................22
Case Study B - The Pentagon Papers and the Fourth Estate.................................48

MODULE 2: THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY (NBC)

An Introduction...........................................................................................................72
Case Study A - Late Night Television and Brand Loyalty......................................89
Case Study B - NBC’s Olympic Coverage: Tales of Transnationalism...............127

MODULE 3: THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY

An Introduction...........................................................................................................163
Case Study A - Disney Animation: Adventures in Failure....................................179
Case Study B - The Artist in His Theme Park: Tradition of Rational Amusement from Charles Willson Peale to Walt Disney.......................................................215

APPENDIX: Disney Animated Films..........................................................................246

BIBLIOGRAPHY............................................................................................................248
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Introduction

In the summer of 2001, I was a newly minted high school sophomore preparing to take my first Advanced Placement class, American History. The course required copious amounts of summer homework, and when our family embarked on a road trip to Florida’s Atlantic coast, I was armed with my books, notes, and loads of bug spray. Little did I know at the time, but the trip would be incredibly formative for me academically. The highlight of our trip was a visit to the Kennedy Space Center, and my love for all things outer space was kindled. I even met an astronaut! During the rainy Florida afternoons, my family watched movies, reinforcing my interest in classic films. Finally, I spent my days on the beach reading Daniel Boorstin’s *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, and I was so enthralled that I ended up with book-shaped sunburns on my pasty-white legs. Never before had history been presented to me in such a way. No more focusing on presidents and wars, but rather on how American life formed out of communities. There were chapters on newspaper advertising, the railroads, and even one on the ice industry. Who even knew such a thing existed? What I did not realize at the time was that I was starting my interest in American studies, particularly in how our nation can be analyzed from many angles to create a more complete picture of our culture. Hindsight allows me to see that the summer of 2001, the last summer of innocence before 9/11, orange alerts, and taking my shoes off at the airport, was also the place where this dissertation began.

Argument and Scope

This dissertation examines the intersection of corporate culture and popular culture in 20th and 21st century America, focusing in particular on the role of for-profit institutions in our popular culture. I chose three media institutions that many would claim
are “iconic” in their stature: The New York Times\textsuperscript{1}, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), and the Walt Disney Company. While other business types were certainly considered, media corporations seemed a better fit because they not only create culture, but they also simultaneously comment on this same culture. American studies is the prime discipline for such a study because it requires these institutions and their products to be examined as part of the cultural whole, as opposed to inside an academic vacuum. The prevailing academic attitude towards business and corporate culture is that these entities have a negative influence on popular culture, but this project uses a values neutral approach, examining corporate influence for its contributions to our popular culture. This approach, less common in American studies, provides an alternative perspective and contributes to the field.

Ultimately, this project’s larger argument is easily broken down into several smaller arguments. I argue that iconic American media companies are born at the intersection of long-term corporate success and dynamic popular culture products. Through this argument, this dissertation also addresses three important themes in the study of both business and American studies. Namely, these themes include: 1) The intersection of cultural capital and consumer agency, 2) intangible assets as a basis for competition, and 3) the theoretical notion of rational amusement. Cultural capital and consumer agency examine the power relationship between a company and its customers in terms of determining what ideas and products affect the larger culture. When a company gains cultural capital, one can see its products and services becoming more integral to American life, as observed both in the marketplace and in popular culture

\textsuperscript{1} When “New York Times” is not italicized, this refers to the company, not the paper.
spaces such as television, film, and music. Consumer agency comes into play when the customer makes the conscious decision to purchase or engage with a company’s products and services. While consumer agency can be reduced in cases with especially powerful companies, the concept still drives decision making in substantive ways. The three companies discussed in this dissertation all largely deal in intangible assets, or products and services that are not physically manifested in the marketplace. Essentially, it deals in the business of ideas. The brands of the New York Times, NBC, and the Walt Disney Company are, in a larger sense, the products in question, and most of their competition derives from these creative concepts and services. One such creative concept is the theoretical idea of rational amusement, or the act of being educated while also being entertained.

The large and small concepts are well illustrated through the histories and brands housed at the New York Times, NBC, and the Walt Disney Company. Most businesses strive for long-term economic growth and development, but the road to that goal is often unclear. Through the examination of these three companies, one can see a possible path to iconic status. Using case studies focused on some of these corporation’s most influential products or services, it is clear that these iconic institutions are created when an already successful company brands a product or service that is incredibly dynamic. This act elevates the company into a “game changer,” separating from the other companies in the same industry.

Three recurring themes presented themselves throughout my research, and each further cements the relation of each case study to the larger argument. The first of these themes is the intertwined idea of cultural capital and consumer agency. While many
studies of corporate culture focus on the influence of the company on the culture, it is key to remember that the public has an equal effect on the choices the company makes. If a product is of poor quality, or if there is a stronger option, the public will choose which product survives in the long-term. However, business scholars, especially those who study oligopolistic competition, would argue that consumer agency is reduced overtime as a dominating company introduces new products. Still, consumer agency is an important item for consideration. A good example of this phenomenon is Disney’s 1985 film *The Black Cauldron*. Despite being a Disney movie, it was poorly received and the public stayed away. It was the first Disney animated film to lose money, but it did not destroy the prestige created through films such as *Sleeping Beauty* or *Peter Pan*. This example illustrates both the immense cultural capital of Disney films as well as the power of consumer agency.

The second theme deals with the idea of intangible assets. The products or services examined in each case study are not simply items one could purchase at the store and take home. Instead, these products and services represent the qualities and strengths of the companies in question. The *New York Times* illustrates this well. While the newspaper itself is a tangible item that patrons can purchase, the companies induces buyers to frequent it over rival newspapers because of its superior intangible qualities. These qualities include, for example, its prestige and exemplary level of journalism.

Finally, the third theme is rational amusement, or the act of learning while also being entertained. Although this theme is the core concept in my case study connecting Charles Willson Peale and Walt Disney, it is applicable to each case study. NBC’s late night and Olympics coverage are excellent examples of rational amusement. Both allow
Americans to get their news or learn about the international scene without feeling as though they are being lectured to. It is the act of having fun while learning. This concept was revolutionary in Peale’s time, and Walt Disney helped make it a part of the traditional American educational experience.

**Structure**

Since this dissertation deviates somewhat from a typical work in American studies, there is also a need to have a different project structure. I employ a module structure in order to better address this deviation and to contain the discussion of each company, which could each fill its own dissertation. Each module contains a brief introduction to the company, complete with literature review and history of the corporation, and two case studies, organized chronologically. This structure allows the project to possess parallel structure, while also covering all necessary material without excess. The modules also provide clear cues that there is a shift in topic. While the overarching argument may still apply, it signals that I am moving forward in terms of the company, method, and theory. These modules are also organized mostly in chronological order. NBC and Disney both appeared around the same time, but NBC made its mark before Disney debuted its most innovative material.

**New York Times**

The first module examines the *New York Times* with case studies on the crossword puzzle and the Pentagon Papers. Started in 1851, the *Times* emerged in an era that was revolutionary for print journalism, but most of the major players were the sensational papers that placed more emphasis on sales than credibility. The *Times* was different, and as it stayed true to its mission of neutrality and reliability, the muckrakers
and tabloids fell away. Today, it differentiates itself from the other national papers by maintaining its original goals. The two case studies reflect how the *Times* has created its iconic image. I chose these topics in particular because they shape how the modern reader views the *New York Times* in terms of its cultural standing. First, the *New York Times* crossword puzzle, through its association with the “paper of record,” has come to be the gold standard of American-style crossword puzzles. Through an examination of the puzzles folklore, cultural references, and evolution, one finds that the puzzle has come to solidify the *Times*’ status as the paper of record among American publications. This elevated status creates a recurring loop in which the prestige of one begets the prestige of the other. The second case study focuses on perhaps the most famous chapters in the company’s history: the publishing of the Pentagon Papers. Up until 1971, the paper still strived to be largely neutral, and publishing the papers would lead to accusations of partisanship. This case study argues that the effects of the Pentagon Papers’ publication solidified the role of the *New York Times* as the paper of record for Baby Boomers, which also allowed for the paper to weather the modern print journalism crisis.

In terms of methodology and research, the *New York Times*’ module relies heavily on primary source work. Newspaper articles, crossword puzzles, and popular culture artifacts all served to present my argument about the *Times*. Most important in the crossword puzzle case study were the numerous television shows, films, and other cultural artifacts that illustrated the pervasiveness of the crossword’s reputation for intellectual entertainment. Additionally, as I researched the world that surrounds the crossword puzzle, I found a fan community with a folklore all its own existed within. As a result, the fan theories of Henry Jenkins and others came into play in this case study.
The Pentagon Papers case study required more historical contextualization, with connections to both the past and present. Without the Pentagon Papers, the Times would not have the reputation it possesses for quality journalism.

**National Broadcasting Company**

Module two appraises the value of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), which was both the first national radio network and the first national television network. NBC is an outlier in this project, because it has always resided under a much larger and stronger corporate parent. Its first parent company, RCA, created it to produce programming for its radios. Later, it was owned by combinations of Westinghouse, AT&T, United Fruit, General Electric, and now, Comcast. Still, NBC’s identity as the first national radio and television network sets it apart from its primary competitors, CBS, ABC, and Fox. The two case studies focus on NBC’s more unique programming: late television and Olympics coverage. The first case study examines the concept of brand loyalty and identity through NBC’s late night television dynasty: The Tonight Show, Late Night, and Saturday Night Live. Only after the first late night war of Leno v. Letterman did NBC have vital competition at 11:30 p.m. during the week, but the network still largely prevailed each week. No other network has posed a long-term threat. The city of New York is also deeply tied to NBC, and its late night programming reinforces an urban identity and the overall brand. The second case study investigates a more recent success for NBC, in the Olympic Games. Until 2000, the Olympics was aired on different networks, providing each company a chance to improve how the Games were aired in the United States. Being the largest media market for the Olympics, the stakes were high. ABC Sports established a formula for airing the Games, which included creating real-life
drama through the lives of athletes performing at such a high level. When NBC obtained the exclusive broadcast contract in the late 1990s, they used ABC’s formula, even borrowing personalities from its competitor to add gravitas and legitimacy to the network’s coverage. As the world’s borders become more fluid, the way the Olympics is presented must change as well, creating new challenges for the network.

The research and methodology for the NBC module differs from that of the New York Times because the medium involved changes. Primary research was still heavily employed, because viewing the actual programming is the best way to comprehend its potential impact. YouTube uploads provided hours of past Olympics Games coverage from each network, as well as IOC-produced coverage and Bud Greenspan films. The IOC uses YouTube as a digital archive for its hours and hours of event coverage, athlete interviews, and special human-interest stories. The NBC coverage was typically uploaded from a non-affiliated user who perhaps had recorded the event on a VCR or DVR. NBC provided hours of late night episodes and clips through both its official website and YouTube. Because of the massive shift in the late night landscape over the last six years, numerous industry articles and retrospectives were available as well. NBC uses both its late night programming and Olympic coverage to prop up the entire network at times. Now that Must See TV is over, these are the most profitable brands. During the Olympic Games, new sitcoms and dramas are paraded out during the most anticipated events. Most of these shows then premiere immediately following the closing ceremonies. The videos of coverage were essential to understanding how NBC uses these brands within the network.
Walt Disney Company

The third and final module focuses on the Walt Disney Company, which began as the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio in 1923. Walt’s animation truly made its mark with the sound short “Steamboat Willie” (1928) and the feature-length *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). Always the innovator, Walt frequently pushed his company to the financial and creative brink in order to invent new methods of animation and entertainment. In 1955, he opened Disneyland, which revolutionized family entertainment. After Walt’s death in 1966, his brother Roy opened Walt Disney World in 1971, which was on a completely different scale than Disneyland. This resort included provisions for an entire new city, if need be, including an airport, fire company, and nuclear power plant. Walt Disney World corrected the problems of Disneyland, including space and the encroachment of competitors. Today, especially through its partnership with Pixar Animation, the Walt Disney Studios continue to push the boundaries of animated storytelling. Disney, both the man and the company, are well-researched, and American studies is an ideal discipline to find new frameworks, as reflected in the case studies, which focus on the animated films considered “failures” and the Walt Disney World theme park. The first case study on animation seemed obvious, and any study of Disney that ignores animation as the company’s foundation is missing a major piece of the puzzle. Here, the angle of failure and resurrection is considered. Most companies learn from their successes, but Disney also learned a lot about itself by examining its films that do not perform well at the box office. There are a variety of reasons why the Disney Animation Studios have struggled during its history, but these failures are key to understanding the Disney brand and its long-term success. The second case study also
must take a unique approach in understanding the triumph of Disney over other entertainment corporations. The Disney theme parks have been discussed at length, particularly Disneyland. Here, we examine the tradition of “rational amusement,” its place in American amusement history, and its role in making Walt Disney World such a successful enterprise. The tradition starts with Charles Willson Peale and his Philadelphia museum, and it weaves its way through the 19th century, rejection in the late 1800s, and resurgence with the World’s Fairs. Walt Disney is simply a very successful extension of such an American concept.

Research and methodology for the Walt Disney Company module relied primarily on historical research, the feature-length animated film canon, corporate profit data, and past trips to both Disneyland and Walt Disney World. In the animated films case study, I combined historical research on the company with corporate profit data to uncover a clearer story of Disney’s financial past. This allowed a truer understanding of when and why Disney periodically declines, and in turn, how it resurrects its brand of quality family entertainment. In the Walt Disney World case study, I used the framework of rational amusement and traced the concept from Philadelphia’s Charles Willson Peale through the World’s Fairs to Walt Disney. While all of the case studies employ the idea of rational amusement at one level or another, this case study was heavily reliant on this concept.

The findings and arguments of this dissertation project have significance in the worlds of both American studies and business. Most importantly, my argument signal a paradigm shift in the way the world of business is perceived within American studies. Many examinations of American corporate culture seek ways that the product is
damaging to American culture. This model was most evident in my research on Disney. However, I take a more values neutral approach. Corporations are a major part of American life, and there is no ignoring that condition. I examine corporation’s overall cultural contributions as they are, rather than seeking to find the negative. The world of popular culture is also essential to understanding the American business world, as it provides a more holistic and problem-based perspective on a topic that tends to be more objective, focusing on profits and outcomes. Understanding the broader culture allows for better informed decisions from business leaders, especially with cultural products. The theoretical concepts of the intersection of cultural capital and consumer agency; intangible assets as a basis for competition; and rational amusement are all exemplified within the New York Times, NBC, and the Walt Disney Company. Each concept emerged repeatedly within each company, despite their differing fields and scopes of influence within the media world. This intervention is my primary contribution to the field, realized through my largely neutral approach to American popular culture and business.
On the Penn State Harrisburg campus, there is a program that provides free newspapers to students and faculty. The local Harrisburg paper, The Patriot-News, is printed and available only every Tuesday and Thursday, a victim of the declining state of local American print media. South Central Pennsylvania has been long served by “the Patriot,” and the paper even earned a Pulitzer Prize in 2012 for its reporting on the Penn State athletic department scandal. The free paper program also offers two national titles: USA Today and The New York Times. Inevitably, the Times always seems to be the first to run out. Perhaps it is the tradition of investigative journalism that draws readers in; maybe it is the challenging and legendary crossword puzzle. Either way, the paper that was started in a saturated newspaper market in 1851 has become the “paper of record” for the American people.

The early days of the Times came during a revolutionary age for print journalism. The numbers of newspapers were multiplying, and even the smallest towns might support two dailies. In New York City, the Times entered a market already full of popular papers: the Herald, the Sun, and the Tribune. Later, Pulitzer and Hearst would put down stakes as well, creating an exciting era of competitive journalism, always sensational even if every story was not entirely factual. The legends of this newspaper era did not include stories of the Times, but the paper remains and has thrived long after most of the storied

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rivals from the muckraking years fell away. Through the 20th century, the Times strove to be neutral in a world of partisan politics, even as some conservative figures dismiss the paper’s pretension of objectivity as false, calling it “a hopeless hotbed of liberalism, biased beyond redemption and therefore not to be taken seriously.”3 In the city of New York, the Times has long been an institution, and many readers beyond the city limits are dedicated subscribers as well. In fact, the paper’s shift to a national profile is decades old.

Along with USA Today and the Wall Street Journal, it overtly serves a national readership even as it maintains its sport as the Big Apple’s major paper. USA Today began in the 1980s with an emphasis on convenience, ease-of-reading, sports, and weather. The Wall Street Journal specialized in financial news. Other newspapers, such as the Washington Post, also developed reputations for specific areas of coverage. In the case of the Post, national politics would be the obvious area of specialty. But as a paper with national aspirations, the Times always considered all major news topics within its purview. In the 21st century, it has also aggressively positioned itself to survive into the digital era. As of May 2015, Adweek reported that the combined print and digital circulation of the Times is 2.2 million for the daily edition and 2.6 million for the Sunday Times, which is an overall increase.4 As Bryant Simon points out in his book on Starbucks, reading the Times gives passersby the impression of intellect and

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sophistication. Starbucks began carrying the paper exclusively over other national dailies in order to re-create its own image.\textsuperscript{5}

Just as this dissertation will demonstrate in the case of the National Broadcasting Company and the Walt Disney Company, the \textit{New York Times} has instilled itself in the American psyche as more than just another newspaper, but rather as a distinctive cultural institution. It is this dissertation’s mission to get the heart of that institutional image within the larger culture. As of its 150\textsuperscript{th} anniversary in 2001, the New York Times Company was a $3.5 billion corporation that encompassed numerous media outlets.\textsuperscript{6} While many of the other papers of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century have folded or been absorbed into other entities, the \textit{Times} has remained independent. It has sought outside investors, but never at the expense of control. Like the Walt Disney Company, the \textit{Times} is a family institution, and its strongest years came with the leadership of the Sulzberger / Ochs family. The paper’s former location at 43\textsuperscript{rd} Street was long part of its nickname “The Gray Lady of 43\textsuperscript{rd} Street,” and its new home at 40\textsuperscript{th} and 41\textsuperscript{st} on 8\textsuperscript{th} Avenue in Manhattan is as recognizable as Cinderella’s Castle at Walt Disney World or the NBC Studios at 30 Rockefeller Center.\textsuperscript{7} Many fledgling journalists long to write for the \textit{Times}, and the credential of working for the paper provides gravitas and credibility to any writer. Throughout this dissertation, many of the experts cited have connections to the \textit{Times}, including Bill Carter, Thomas L. Friedman, and Richard Sandomir. This trend exists

\textsuperscript{5} Bryant Simon, \textit{It's All About the Coffee: Learning About America From Starbucks} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 35 – 36.
\textsuperscript{7} McFadden, “150 and Counting.”
because as high-profile writers in their fields, their paths to career success lead through or even to the highest profile paper.

The argument for the *New York Times* as the paper of record meets with such broad agreement that it is a cliché. But it is true nonetheless, and the paper takes pride in that appellation. It is especially so considering the amount of secondary literature focusing on the newspaper. The paper itself composes articles about the company’s history, most recently on the occasion of its 150th anniversary in 2001. Essentially, the *Times* is already part of the discussion about itself in a way that Disney or NBC is not.

Studying the *New York Times* as an institution required extensive historical and cultural research. In addition to having a full understanding of the paper’s history, these sources also provided a perspective on how the Times is perceived and how it perceives itself. Many of these sources came from the *Times* itself, or at least from its current and former reporters and editors. The 1969 tome *The Kingdom and the Power*, written by former staff writer Gay Talese, traces the history of the paper up until the 1960s. It predates the Pentagon Papers affair, but many of the personality traits of the paper that the Pentagon Papers reinforced were already in place. Talese reminds the reader that the *Times* is, at its core, a family business and long term survival of the brand is key to their decision making process.8 Other texts investigate how the paper itself functions, both through insider information and outside investigations. Edwin Diamond’s *Behind the Times: Inside the New New York Times*, Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones’ *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind the* New York Times, and Max Frankel’s *Times of*

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My Life and My Life with the Times provide comprehensive looks into the company as a whole during different periods and from numerous perspectives.\(^9\)

No examination of the New York Times is complete without a little comparative study of its East Coast rival, and sometimes partner in crime, the Washington Post. The Pentagon Papers was published in both newspapers, and both publications were taken to court over their acts, but the two papers are rivals in many ways. Katherine Graham’s memoir Personal History is an excellent inside look into the inner workings of the Post during its heyday under her leadership. Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward’s reportage breaking the Watergate story was of course the greatest news triumph in Post history, and perhaps the history of investigative journalism. All the President’s Men illuminates the types of journalism that were possible after the publication and approval of the Pentagon Papers expose, specifically their Watergate investigation at the Post.\(^10\) It is worth remembering that, at the time, the Pentagon Papers, the Watergate story, and associated episodes, such as the corrupt past of Vice President Spiro Agnew or the misbehavior of congressional representatives, were perceived by the public as intrinsically related and part of the same overall story: that of corruption at the highest levels of the federal government.

As the world of print journalism deteriorates in the face of digital media, the Times has again become a major topic of discussion. William McGowan’s Gray Lady


Down follows up on his work Coloring the News, both of which explore the political and social biases at the New York Times and the impact of the paper as the universe of print media declines. The concept of the Times as a media touchstone also resonates in Seth Mnookin’s Hard News: The Scandals at the New York Times and Their Meaning for American Media. These three texts show that the Times is certainly not without its critics, but even those who are skeptical of the Times’ motivations cannot deny the importance of the paper to the American media landscape.¹¹

The concept of the newspaper was already in and of itself an institution of the United States, with much of the initial credit falling to Benjamin Franklin. Its presence in American life provided an early look at some of the roots of America’s most important values. The Zenger Trial in the 1730s had asserted the need for free speech, and the newspaper provided a public outlet with a reach farther than ever before. News still traveled slowly by today’s standards, but its pace was increasing with each issue.

The official history of the Times, laid out and sanctioned by the New York Times Company on its corporate website, seeks to situate the paper at the most important historical and journalistic moments in the American experience. On September 18, 1851, founders Henry Jarvis Raymond and George Jones published the first issue of what was then called the New York Daily-Times, auspiciously stating: “we publish today the first issue of the New York-Daily Times [sic], and we intend to issue it every morning

(Sundays excepted) for an indefinite number of years to come.” The newspaper business was in its infancy, or at most its adolescence, during this period, still largely disorganized and an open market, ready for new ideas and methods. According to Robert McFadden, a staff writer for the metropolitan desk at the *Times*, Henry Jarvis Raymond modeled his paper on the *Times of London*, which was considered “a wellspring of integrity,” relying on solid reporting over the sensationalism that was popular at the time. The *Daily-Times’* coverage of both the Civil War and Lincoln’s assassination were unparalleled, adding to its prestige. During the Gilded Age, the *Times* began its investigatory tradition with a series of articles about political boss William Tweed, who lead the Tammany Hall political machine. This story led to similar investigations over the years, peaking perhaps with the tale of the Pentagon Papers.

In the 1890s, Adolph S. Ochs purchased the *Times*, and his family created a business dynasty that still exists, an impressive feat in the current corporate climate. The paper struggled during the Depression of 1893, and was deeply in debt. Ochs brought the paper back from the brink through a reliance on solid and neutral journalism. After his death in 1935, his son-in-law, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, took the reins. In 1961, Sulzberger’s son-in-law, Orvil E. Dryfoos, becomes publisher, but his untimely death leaves the position in the hands of Sulzberger’s son, Arthur “Punch” Ochs Sulzberger. In 1992, “Punch” Sulzberger steps down, and his son becomes publisher, a position he still holds today. All three companies explored in this dissertation have some family dynasty,

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13 McFadden, “150 and Counting.”
14 McFadden, “150 and Counting.”
the Sarnoffs at NBC and the Disney’s at the Walt Disney Company, but the Ochs / Sulzberger dynasty has lasted far longer than either of those.

The *Times*, in an era when circulation and profit was king at whatever cost necessary, took a different approach to reporting than other papers of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, which might explain its lasting impact. While Pulitzer and Hearst reported any story in the most fantastic ways, Ochs began standardizing how the *Times* would publish its news, including acceptable and unacceptable words and phrases. This policy was not about censorship, but rather about illustrating a level of sophistication that would distinguish the paper from its counterparts. In the 1940s, this tradition of sophistication and standardization continued with the publication of the crossword, which still implements limits of acceptable behavior.

The *Times* began distinguishing itself through rapid reporting on major stories, including the 1912 sinking of the Titanic. The advent of wireless communication and the Marconi radio, the same industry that would bring about the National Broadcasting Company a few years later, changed the news business as well, which the *Times* tapped into quickly.\(^{15}\) The *Times* was also at the forefront of modern war reporting, solidifying its reputation during World War I. Because the paper was willing to spend adequate amounts of money on foreign correspondents, the *Times* reported on each step towards war in 1914, and it completed its coverage with a full, unabridged copy of the Treaty of Versailles.\(^{16}\)

World War II at the *Times* was a difficult period in the paper’s history, primarily because they were no longer able or willing to tell the complete version of every story.

\(^{15}\) McFadden, “150 and Counting.”

\(^{16}\) McFadden, “150 and Counting.”
This trend had much to do with the rise of totalitarianism, in its various guises, overseas, and the resonance of that phenomenon in Depression-era American political culture. Most notoriously, *Times* foreign correspondent Walter Duranty won plaudits and a Pulitzer for his coverage of the Soviet Union, in particular the Stalin-induced famine in Ukraine. Duranty was an enthusiastic booster of the Soviet regime during some of the most brutal years of its existence, and when his reportage was revealed as false in later decades, the reputation of the paper suffered. Another area of less-than-complete coverage was the paper’s mile coverage of the Holocaust. It must be admitted that most American news outlets, perhaps leery of repeating the overheated atrocity rhetoric of World War I, were likewise moderate in the way they addressed increasing evidence of the Nazi death camps. The *Times* was criticized for not bringing these atrocities to light in a more pointed way, which would have enlightened the American people sooner than 1945. In the 1950s, the *Times* attempted to cover the activities of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee, but was roundly criticized for being too objective on a subject that needed judgment. It was after this era that the *Times* began returning to its tradition of working as a member of the fourth estate.\(^\text{17}\)

The case studies in the *New York Times* module of this dissertation examine two aspects of the paper that set it apart from the others: standardization and investigative reporting. The *New York Times* crossword puzzle, an addition to the paper in 1942, was originally performed as a wartime duty, of sorts. Americans, especially New Yorkers, needed something to do in the bomb shelters and bunkers during air raids, and Britons were already solving puzzles as part of the war effort across the Atlantic. This would be

\(^{17}\) McFadden, “150 and Counting.”
no ordinary puzzle, however. Its first editor, Margaret Farrar, would see to it that the puzzle reflected the reputation of the *Times*: sophisticated, worldly, and well-behaved. Puzzle solvers can rely on certain rules to complete each day’s riddles, and a culture of sorts has grown up around the puzzle. In the second case study on the Pentagon Papers, I explore how the *New York Times* came to possess these documents, a testament to the paper’s reputation, and how the event solidified the role of the media in the present day. Both case studies help set the *New York Times* apart from other publications, even if those reasons are found on the back of the Arts section.
Case Study A - All the Clues That are Fit to Solve: The New York Times Crossword Puzzle

When I was younger, I used to watch in awe as my grandmother would complete the weekend *New York Times* crossword puzzle in ink. She sat at the end of the dining room table with her blue ballpoint pen, the paper folded over in quarters, and her Entemann’s crumb donut on a white china plate. Between this practice and her nightly viewing of *Jeopardy!* on New York’s WABC, I came to believe that she was the smartest person in the world. At seven, I had never worked the puzzle, but I knew preternaturally that these two components must mean intelligence. This anecdote points to the larger cultural perception about the connection between intelligence and crossword puzzles, as well as the broader importance of crosswords in American society. Crosswords are typically relegated to the categories of trivia and games. However, once the *New York Times* crossword becomes engrained in our popular culture through film, television, and other artifacts, the puzzle is no longer trivial and the text evolves into something more significant.

The *New York Times* crossword, through its association with the Paper of Record in the United States, has come to be the gold standard of American crossword puzzles. Through an examination of the puzzle’s folklore, cultural references, and evolution, one finds that the puzzle has come to solidify the *Times*’ status as the paper of record among American publications. This elevated status assists in understanding what sets the *New York Times* apart in American media culture and business. The *New York Times* crossword has taken on characteristics of other pivotal works in American culture, including a form of fandom, contemporary relevance, and entrance into the cultural zeitgeist.
Existing scholarship on the *New York Times* crossword puzzle is limited, in part because those outside the crossword puzzle community perceive it as a trivial topic. This situation is common among subjects widely deemed ephemeral, which American Studies as a field has turned to its advantage. Studying the familiar, or the so-called trivial, for the actually serious cultural information within, is a hallowed American Studies tradition. That said, some authors have examined the puzzle in historical or analytical ways. Aside from the data acquired through puzzle analysis, and some contextual information from puzzle anthologies, the dedicated work is Coral Amende’s *The Crossword Obsession: The History and Lore of the World’s Most Popular Pastime*. Amende herself is a *New York Times* puzzle constructor, as well as puzzle editor for *Los Angeles Magazine*.\(^\text{18}\) The first half of the work is well researched and steeped in game study and puzzle scholarship, while the second half is dedicated strictly to puzzle construction, which serves puzzle practitioners rather than cultural scholars. Most of the supporting scholarship for my argument deals with the issues of trivia, fandom, and how the puzzle has entered the zeitgeist. I also relied on primary source information that came directly from the pages of the *New York Times*, especially in articles about the retirements and deaths of former editors. In short, the puzzle is a surprisingly overlooked topic in American culture and in the broader study of journalism and the *New York Times*. This dissertation seeks to rectify this relative neglect and deliver scholarly-level interpretation of this widely known, but not widely studied text.

The primary goal in this study of the *New York Times* crossword is to discover what sets this paper of record apart from other prominent American papers. Much of this

has to do with the subtle branding that the *Times* performs in its reporting and other unique aspects of the paper, such as the crossword. No other American paper enjoys such long-term popularity partly based on a game inside its pages. Hundreds of books, calendars, and other ephemera have been published using the puzzles in these pages, creating a secondary brand of products outside the traditional newspaper pages. Sometimes a text, like the crossword puzzle, might not be widely employed or consulted, but it possesses a universal meaning that goes beyond simple engagement. Branding, in this case, is not simply limited to a common font or logo, but rather it is shaped through a type of customer, which is clearly visible through the crossword puzzle.

**History of Trivia, Word Games, and the Crossword Puzzle**

Word games, such as the crossword puzzle, are almost as old as humanity itself, having origins with the ancient Greeks and Romans. The word “trivia” even derives from the Latin *trivium*, or where three roads converge and the townspeople would gather to exchange gossip.19 These civilizations appeared to enjoy word squares and acrostics, even inserting them into dramatic plays and the Bible.20 Word squares emerged in England in 1859, and the first American word puzzles appeared in 1647.21 According to the current *New York Times* crossword editor, Will Shortz, word squares were the most popular puzzles from about 1870 until the crossword puzzle debuted in 1913. One of the world’s best known solvers and inventors was logician, author, and mathematician

20 Amende, *Crossword Obsession*, 3-4.
Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, who scattered puzzles throughout his famous *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Since the 1920s, crossword puzzles have been more popular than any other indoor game, first appearing on December 21, 1913 in the *New York World* in its “Fun” section. The puzzle became so popular that submissions overwhelmed the crossword’s editor, Arthur Wynne. He hired Margaret Petherbridge as an editorial assistant, and she would later standardize the puzzle in many ways across the discipline. Petherbridge’s standardization of the *New York Times* puzzle as its first editor lends heavily to the puzzle’s status, which is a crucial point in this dissertation.

Trivia and games often have historical moments where they take on increased significance, usually during periods of cultural or social turmoil. For example, *Monopoly* grew in popularity during the Great Depression, since it provided a cheap source of entertainment. *Trivial Pursuit* was a phenomenon for the same reason during the early 1980s, which was another period of economic recession. Today, game experts are looking to the popularity of the strategy game *Settlers of Catan* as another phase of this trend. Other puzzles, such as the *Times* crossword, transcend historical context after their creations and initial waves of popularity. Many argue that modern culture minimizes

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22 Amende, *Crossword Obsession*, 5.
the importance of cultural knowledge, such as art, film, and literature, and thus trivializes the “survival value of being culturally aware.” On the other hand, there are many examples in American popular culture that place great capital on cultural awareness, such as Jeopardy!, Trivial Pursuit, People magazine, the cultural literacies theory of E.D. Hirsch, and in turn, the New York Times crossword puzzle. What changes over time is the requisite knowledge content and context for each generation’s conception of cultural literacy. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich points out in her article about researching for A Midwife’s Tale, the importance that Martha Ballard places on trivial chores in her diary allows contemporary scholars to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the time period and the roles that women play within it. Trivia can allow future generations to better understand a civilization and its values. English writer C. Northcote Parkinson created his Law of Triviality, which theorized that the un-important usually pushes out the important in our lives because the trivial is easier to process. This concept might explain why games and puzzles increase in popularity during times of distress, such as the current financial crisis, the Great Depression, or in the recession of the early 1980s. Here again, American studies is well positioned to consider these topics, since it has long considered the so-called “trivial” as a potentially rich source of overlooked cultural significance.

26 Wexler and Sept, “Psycho-Social Significance,” 1.
27 Wexler and Sept, “Psycho-Social Significance,” 1.
The roots of the *New York Times* crossword were planted in a time of great turmoil for the United States. For decades, the *New York Times* resisted printing a crossword puzzle in its hallowed pages, feeling the inclusion of the game was undignified. The same line of reasoning explains the paper’s continued refusal to incorporate comic strips. The owner of the paper in the 1920s, Arthur Sulzberger, enjoyed solving the puzzles, which were considered a fad at the time, but even his affinity for the grids could not convince other editors to waste precious column inches for this “frivolous” game. The Japanese navy, however, was more persuasive.

After the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, it was inevitable that the United States would enter World War II. The conflict had been a reality in Europe and China for years, and the terrifying stories of air raids and bombings filled radio broadcasts and every edition of the paper. Overseas, crosswords were already playing an important role in the European war effort. Skilled crossword solvers in Britain were called up for the war effort, recruited to help decipher the German Enigma codes. In France, puzzles were temporarily banned in 1944, concerned that codes could be implanted in the clues and grids. Fearing the same lengthy and stressful air raids in the United States, the *New York Times* finally printed its first crossword puzzle in February 1942, in part as a contribution to the war effort. This action is in line with President Franklin Roosevelt’s pragmatic “green light letter” in response to Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis’ question about the continuation of major league baseball, in which the President stated that public

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entertainment supported the war effort rather than distracting from it. The inclusion of the puzzle in the *Times* would therefore not be considered a trivial notion during a time of national peril, but instead helping a war-minded public to relieve tension. The puzzle could be seen as culturally therapeutic. Even soldiers found the puzzle to be a comfort. In a May 1942 letter to the editor, Privates Henry F. Holbrook and Laurence D. Perrine thanked the paper for allowing them to compose a puzzle, “especially since both of us are ardent *Times* puzzle-fans [sic],” even after only three months of publication. The two soldiers received fan letters from all over about their puzzle and noted that they had hoped to construct a second puzzle, but the two men were off to new training camps and officer’s training.

Sulzberger, a fan of the *World* puzzle, hired Margaret Farrar (nee Petherbridge) to edit the *Times* puzzle, instructing her to standardize the game specifically for the paper. She had built a career around puzzles already. In 1924, she published her first crossword book, which was also the first offering from publishing giant Simon & Schuster. The book was a huge success, selling 350,000 copies, and Simon & Schuster found itself overwhelmed by the requests for additional printings. She eventually edited 133 collections of puzzles. Her puzzle was to be “dignified,” focusing on current events and other cultural topics featured in the paper itself, avoiding delicate or obscene concepts. Sulzberger also felt that the puzzles should be solvable within 20 minutes, the

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34 Mitgang, “Farrar Obit.”
approximate duration of the average New Yorker’s subway commute.\textsuperscript{35} It was also a diverting activity that could occupy a shelter-full of people during drills and air raids.

Since that first Sunday offering, the \textit{New York Times} crossword has emerged as the gold standard for newspaper amusements, mostly thanks to Farrar’s work to create an upscale puzzle. Part of this goal was achieved through building up a go-to group of constructors. This group was very diverse: one was a member of the New York Philharmonic, while others were state prison inmates.\textsuperscript{36} By the 1950s, the puzzle was featured in the daily paper, and in the 1960s, the puzzle became nationally syndicated.\textsuperscript{37} Syndication turned the puzzle from a more urban phenomenon into a more national trend, as it was previously limited to those out-of-towners that subscribed to the \textit{Times}.

Farrar’s puzzle style was highly influenced by the British game tradition of “cryptics,” which involve more word play and other sorts of word games such as anagrams. Farrar retired in 1969 and regular puzzle contributor and city desk member Will Weng moved into the editor’s chair.\textsuperscript{38} His style was a stark departure from Farrar’s. He filled his puzzles with absurd clues, and he encouraged more creative themes, tired of older, trite motifs that Farrar had favored. In 1977, Dr. Eugene T. Maleska succeeded Weng following his retirement. Dr. Maleska’s puzzles were even more controversial among dedicated puzzlers, as his style leaned towards the academic, including intellectual humor and almost arcane knowledge, requiring a lot mentally from his

\textsuperscript{35} Amende, \textit{Crossword Obsession}, 16.
\textsuperscript{36} Mitgang, “Farrar Obit.”
\textsuperscript{37} Amende, \textit{Crossword Obsession}, 17.
\textsuperscript{38} The Times requires retirement at age 70, but Farrar had quietly continued her tenure until two years after the cut-off.
After Dr. Maleska’s death in 1993, current editor Will Shortz took the desk. He felt his early tenure was rocky, since he had no living mentor or advisor to assist in his take-over, but he used the skills he learned as National Public Radio’s (NPR) puzzle master to make the puzzle his own. Shortz has said that he feels his puzzle and wordplay style most reflect Farrar’s. Each editor provided his or her own special touch to the puzzle, but certain aspects and traditions such as word play, abbreviations, and foreign language markers have remained over time, engraining a level of folklore into the puzzle community.

**Culture of the New York Times Crossword Puzzle: Fandom and the Secret Code**

Over the last 70 years, the puzzle has grown in popularity nationwide, developing a fandom-like following, which also includes certain folk practices. However, this fandom differs in its methods of initiation in that one must not only understand methods on completing and constructing the puzzle, but also possess a well-rounded knowledge of culture and trivia. Cultural scholar Henry Jenkins’ larger theories on fandom and how fan communities are created are very applicable in the context of the *New York Times* crossword. In his fundamental work *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins outlines the many ways that devoted television fans take ownership over their favorite texts. Rather than simply acting as consumers of media, these fans are also producers, sometimes referred to as

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40 Ibid., 34.
41 Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); while Jenkins’ text is considered the pivotal text in fan studies, there are other studies that investigate different subcultures. What set Jenkins apart from his predecessors, however, was a new approach, one in which the fan is not indicative of larger “evils” in our culture, but as an integral part of how we all engage with media. Because of my own personal investment in the *New York Times* crossword, I identify more with Jenkins’ analysis of fan culture.
“produsers.” In fact, Abercrombie and Longhurst’s 1998 study of fans created a trajectory of fandom, which reinforces Jenkins’ theories. As consumers of media become more involved in their texts, they move from consumer to enthusiast to fan, and finally, to producer. Crossword puzzle fans often easily move from consumers (solvers) to producers as they learn to construct puzzles. All three male editors began their careers as contributors to the puzzle before becoming editors, or essentially, the ultimate producers. Many other regular contributors, such as Coral Amende, are puzzle editors at other national papers, re-enforcing the status of the Times puzzle. When the editors at other papers become mere contributors to the Times puzzle, it creates a hierarchy in the crossword community with the Times at the top.

For many fans, the importance of the fandom is not limited to just an emotional attachment to the text, but also to the social aspects of the fan culture. Jenkins points to a variety of ways that fans create social networks through fan culture, including through “filk,” fan videos, and fan fiction. These forms take an original text and draw new meaning from relationships and themes within, sometimes also decontextualizing the characters or situations. While crossword fans do not have character relationships to draw from, some do write songs about the puzzle and its solvers, including one written and performed by Victor Fleming in the documentary film Wordplay. He wrote it for the

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43 “Filk” is fan music written about a text or the relationships within. Jenkins discusses this at length in chapter 8 of Textual Poachers, but it has become an even larger phenomenon over the last 15 years within the Harry Potter subculture.
44 Jenkins, Textual Poachers.
“American Crossword Idol” talent show at the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, and it became part of the soundtrack to the film.\(^{45}\)

In fandom, trivia is often used as a litmus test of true “fan” status, separating the real fans from casual consumers. Henry Jenkins claims trivia is an integral part of the act of “textual poaching,” although he refers to trivia as “fan culture.” In other words, understanding the intricacies and nuances of a fictional universe or canon (Star Wars, Star Trek, Doctor Who) allows fans to fully enter that world and immerse themselves in it. In fandom, what is seen as trivia in mainstream culture works as cultural capital. In Nathan Hunt’s study of the magazine SFX’s coverage of Star Wars: Episode II, The Clone Wars, he discovered that trivia in fandom allows fans both to illustrate dominance over a text and to identify insiders and outsiders.\(^{46}\) Understanding how to decipher clues and solve the Times puzzle works in much the same way, helping to distinguish the indoctrinated from the beginner in the puzzle community.

The New York Times crossword puzzle has a fandom all its own, although most puzzlers would not refer to themselves as such. Like other fandoms, early communication among Times puzzle-solvers was via mail, and they met in person at conventions and competitions, such as the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament in Stamford, Connecticut. Today, the community of solvers has moved to the Internet. One of the most popular solvers online is Rex Parker, who runs the blog Rex Parker Does the NYTimes Crossword Puzzle. Each day, he solves the puzzle and provides a detailed explanation of his answers and the theme. This sort of site allows the entrenched fan to understand new

\(^{45}\) Wordplay, directed by Patrick Creadon, IFC Films / Weinstein Company, 2006.

methods and cultural references, while the new solver learns the basic language of solving. The folk practices within the puzzle, especially informal learning of the “code,” place the puzzle in a more pivotal place within American culture.

The *New York Times* crossword puzzle straddles the line between popular and folk cultures through its mix of informal learning, traditional cultural knowledge, and mass distribution. These folk practices within the realm of popular culture provide another framework in which to view the puzzle and its solvers. One must understand the unique “language” of the puzzle to effectively solve it, but one must also possess an understanding of both highbrow and lowbrow culture to actually answer the clues.

While some consider the puzzle universally challenging, the well-initiated know that the puzzle actually increases in difficulty throughout the week, excluding Sunday. The Monday puzzle is reliably the easiest to solve, using more obvious wordplay and contemporary references. Many of the best solvers can solve a Monday puzzle within two or three minutes, but it is constructed to adhere to Farrar’s “subway length” solving time for the average person. Saturday is the most difficult puzzle, incorporating challenging wordplay, long answers (up to 15 blocks), and more obscure cultural terms. The Sunday puzzle, which many mistakenly consider the most difficult due to its size (usually a 23 x 23 versus the Monday through Saturday 15 x 15 grid), is on par in difficulty with a Thursday puzzle and usually contains a more elaborate theme than can be integrated in the smaller daily puzzle.

Wordplay, and the ability to spot and solve it, is another defining aspect of the puzzle. Farrar and Shortz’s puzzles tend to include wordplay more than the puzzles of other editors, or at least the type that is well established from Britain’s “cryptic
crosswords.” Former editors Weng and Dr. Maleska used more creative wordplay that did not stem directly from the British tradition. There are many signals that the solver can look for to spot an instance of wordplay. Most prevalent in the Times is the question mark at the end of the clue. For example: “How to use excess cotton or silk?” answers as MAKE A NIGHTY OF IT.\(^{47}\) In other situations, there are signal words, such as a non-English word to show that the answer will be in that same language. Anagrams, another popular type of wordplay, can be signaled with words such as “around” (a word inside another word), “mixed up,” or another synonym. If the solver is to play around with the spelling of a word (sometimes called “removal” or “reversal”), they may see clues that use terms like “left out,” “nearly,” or even “headless,” if the first letter should be removed. Here are some examples from a British-style cryptic crossword:

- “Headless man with time for insect (3) – ANT (Ant is AN (man without its first letter) with “T” (abbreviation for time))”

- “Left out of void business establishment, dealing with money (4) – BANK (Bank (business establishment, dealing with money), which is BLANK (void) without the letter “L” (left))”\(^{48}\)

The wordplay in the Times is not quite as complicated, but usually stems from the puzzle’s theme.

If wordplay is executed through a theme, the title of the puzzle can also provide a clue, although only Sunday puzzles tend to have a published title. For instance, the puzzle title might be “B-Movie,” and the answers to the theme clues would be films with a “B” added to make a pun. In the Coral Amende puzzle “O Captain, My Captain,” the theme


answers relate to a variety of fictional captains. Eight total clues involve some sort of
captain. “Captain Hook” answers as PANSNEMISIS; “Captain Kirk” solves as
SPOCKSSUPERIOR; and “Captain Nemo” translates to SCIFISUBMARINER. The size
of the Sunday puzzle makes it more hospitable to themes, but these motifs can also be
found in any daily puzzle.49 The difficulty of the theme, or figuring out that a theme
exists, can contribute to the editor’s decision about which day the puzzle should be
published.

Will Shortz has posited that he aims to reflect the news and cultural topics of the
paper in the puzzle, and as a result, the puzzle content remains fluid and constantly
relevant. The most famous example of this is an iconic puzzle from Election Day 1996,
which ended the presidential race between incumbent Bill Clinton and Senator Bob Dole.
The clue for 39-Across was “Lead story in tomorrow’s paper (!), with 43-Across.” The
answer to 43-Across was ELECTED, so the answer to the first clue had to be one of the
candidates. Solvers across the country were flummoxed, believing that constructor
Jeremiah Ferrell had either jumped the gun in declaring a winner, or that he would look
quite silly on Wednesday morning when his prediction was incorrect. In fact, Ferrell had
created a puzzle in which both CLINTON and BOBDOLE were correct answers and fit
into the same grid. This puzzle is an example of a “Schrödinger puzzle,” or a puzzle that
has multiple correct outcomes, usually pairing related clues. Shortz spent the next few
days responding to angry solvers who felt the puzzle breeched the established code.50

50 Fernando Alfanso III, “This GIF explains the most clever crossword puzzle in history,”
*The Daily Dot*, February 13, 2013, accessed December 10, 2013,
Their anger reflects their faith that there is a near-sacred internal code, and that breaching said code is akin to heresy, if not trickery, and epitomizes the overall idea. Examples like this also illustrate the creative possibilities of the New York Times grid.

Solvers must be aware of new cultural developments, due in part to the fluid nature of the content covered in the puzzle. This policy does not guarantee that all new cultural phenomena will appear in the puzzle, but those words and phrases that facilitate puzzle construction have greater odds of being used. For instance, in the December 10, 2013 puzzle, the 45-Across clue was “Band with the 2007 #1 album We Were Dead Before the Ship Even Sank,” with an answer of “Modest Mouse.”51 This alternative rock band first hit the mainstream charts with 2003’s “Float On,” but the numerous vowels make it a most attractive puzzle component. Other notable contemporary inclusions are rapper Dr. Dre, the CSI franchise, and even the mail-order acne medication Proactiv. The unique combinations of letters in these phrases make these more popular than other terms. Additionally, some answers have remained while the clues have evolved to suit the times. In the late 1990s, actress Nia Long was a frequent fixture in the puzzle thanks to her popularity in films like The Best Man. However, after the success of 2002’s My Big Fat Greek Wedding made writer and comedienne Nia Vardolos a household name, it is just as probable to find both women as clues leading to the answer “Nia.”

Perhaps the most controversial cultural topic that has been added to the puzzle is that of rap and hip-hop culture. Shortz defends his use of the culture in the puzzle: “Rap and hip-hop culture in general is an increasingly important part of life. And so it should

have an increasing role in the crossword.” As Joe Coscarelli notes in his article about rap in the puzzle, Will Shortz began his tenure as editor in 1993, just as gangster rap was becoming more mainstream. In February 1994, Shortz included his first rap reference: “Noted rapper” = ICET. Thanks to Ice T’s current turn as an actor on the popular Law and Order: SVU, he is now a puzzle fixture. Some rap references have come to replace more arcane clues, such as in the case of DRAKE (rapper replacing the historical Sir Francis) and NAS (rapper replacing the television show Emerald Point N.A.S.).

Tangentially related, the Kardashian clan, including rapper Kanye West, has invaded the puzzle over the last five years. Since 2011, the group has been mentioned in clues or in the puzzle 12 times. While the Kardashians have staying power, other youth references can prove to be a “flash in the pan,” as in the case of The Jersey Shore’s Snooki. Her name lends itself to the puzzle, and she appeared four times, but Shortz has noted in interviews that her time may be up as she leaves the limelight.

The New York Times readership has been reluctant to let this culture seep into its institutions. In June 2015, National Public Radio listeners protested, and even threatened to withhold donations, when Kim Kardashian was a guest on the popular weekend quiz show Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me. The stereotypes of the intellectual NPR crowd tend to overlap heavily with those of the New York Times’ readership. Shortz is unfazed by such

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53 Ibid.
55 Coscarelli.
reactions. “I got a letter within those first couple of months from someone who rejected
the modern cultural references and said, ‘you’re trying to appeal to young solvers, and
there’s no way they’ll ever solve the Times crossword.’ I’m glad to have proven him
wrong.”\textsuperscript{56} According to Shortz’s data, the average age of a Times puzzle solver has
dropped 15 years to around 40 years old.\textsuperscript{57} As puzzle constructors continue to get
younger, the cultural references will logically skew younger as well.

The reverse of this trend is also true, requiring younger solvers to become more
aware of older references that remain staples in the puzzle as they assist in construction.
Although The Andy Griffith Show’s popularity peaked almost 50 years ago, Ron
Howard’s character, Opie, is frequently referenced in the puzzle. The show is considered
a classic, and it remains broadly available 50 years after its heyday through syndication
and subscription services like Netflix. That continued popularity makes it work as a
source, whereas an obscure program that is less available, like The Man From
U.N.C.L.E., unseen for decades, would not support the puzzle’s practice and structure.\textsuperscript{58}
The 1997 Peter Fonda vehicle Ulee’s Gold is another popular, but strange reference in the
puzzle, as the film has not remained a popular title. Perhaps its presence in the puzzle
speaks to its niche popularity, and it reifies its reputation as a cult text in the crossword
community.

\textsuperscript{56} Coscarelli.
\textsuperscript{57} Roy.
\textsuperscript{58} The reference to The Man from U.N.C.L.E. is less obscure now because of a 2015 film
with the same premise as the television show. The film was not terribly popular, but the
reference is now more modern.
The Cultural Presence of the Puzzle: Perceptions of Intelligence

Fandom alone cannot imbue a cultural item with importance, but paired with a broader cultural relevance, the *New York Times* ascends to a new level. In popular culture, the puzzle signifies intelligence and perhaps even a form of elite entertainment. This concept is evidenced through a variety of examples, from television to Broadway musicals. The song “Crossword Puzzle” from *Starting Here, Starting Now* has an early mention of the crossword, before it had become a wider phenomenon with editor Will Shortz. The musical review opened in New York in 1977, and its loose narrative explores the details of city romances. “Crossword Puzzle” features a female character bemoaning a lost love while she attempts to fill out the Sunday *New York Times* puzzle, which the couple used to complete together:

I’m sitting here doing the Sunday *Times* crossword puzzle, somehow the words won’t come.
I am staring at squares, but my eyes never focus and my mind’s feeling strangely numb. What’s a five-letter word meaning… Here’s an example, two down: “A Peruvian poison dart.”
Why, when Hecky and me used to breeze through the puzzle on Sundays, the answer would leap in my… “Harte-beest. That’s a gnu. G N U. boo-boopy doo”.

The wordplay in the song is parallel to the Weng-style wordplay that appeared in the puzzle itself at the time. Later in the song, she refers to her self as a Phi Beta Kappa, and she cannot understand why she is having so much trouble with the puzzle. She perceives herself as an intelligent person, but her love-sickness makes the entire world a difficult place to navigate.

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In another New York-based example, the puzzle was part of a storyline on the CBS sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*. On this program, Ted Mosby, a New York architect, tells his children the story of how he came to meet their mother through his misadventures with his four best friends. One of Ted’s friends, Barney, seems to know how to weasel his way into any situation, and in the episode “Robots Versus Wrestlers,” “the gang” finds themselves at a high society party. Ted, a pseudo-intellectual, is especially excited when he discovers that one of the guests is Will Shortz, and he is burning to ask Shortz about the use of *Ulee’s Gold* in the puzzles. As mentioned above, *Ulee’s Gold* is referenced on a frequent basis on the puzzle, despite the lack of references to the film in many other contexts. This piece of puzzle subculture itself becomes fodder for the puzzle reference on the show. Ted suspects the clue is used due to the unique combination of vowels, and in an amusing cameo, Shortz confirms Ted’s hypothesis. The presence of Shortz among other guests such as commentator Arianna Huffington and director Peter Bogdanovitch leads the audience to believe that intellectuals populate the party, while the rest of “the gang’s” hostile disinterest in the puzzle signals their more lowbrow tastes, illustrated further in this episode with their desire to view a robot versus human wrestling match.

*Brooklyn 99*, another sitcom set in New York, uses the crossword to distinguish the highbrow characters from the lowbrow. Detective Jake Peralta, who likes to appear intellectually disengaged, is dating fellow detective Amy Santiago. In the episode entitled “Mattress,” Jake and Amy are discussing their relationship with their buttoned-up and intellectual captain. Amy tells the captain that she almost broke up with Jake.

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when he did not know who Will Shortz was. The captain is flabbergasted, and this interchange positions Amy and the captain in a position of superiority over Jake for not being part of the crossword fandom.\textsuperscript{61}

Other programs use this same formula to reinforce the idea that a specific character is more intelligent than others. On \textit{The Simpsons}, season 20 episode 6, daughter Lisa begins competing in crossword competitions, and in an illustration of her father’s idiocy, Homer bets against her. Shortz also makes a cameo here, immortalized in yellow among Springfield’s population. Another example of the puzzle’s appearance on television is on the CW drama \textit{Supernatural}, which revolves around brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, who hunt down various ghosts and demons. In the episode “Free to Be You and Me,” Sam is at a bar and completes the Saturday \textit{New York Times} crossword, the most difficult puzzle of the week. A bartender who is romantically interested in Sam takes this as an indication of Sam’s intelligence and continues her pursuit.\textsuperscript{62} On \textit{The Golden Girls}, Dorothy is often seen working on a crossword puzzle, which is an activity her roommates and mother would not find enjoyable.

On political drama \textit{The West Wing}, showrunner Aaron Sorkin uses the crossword on multiple occasions to indirectly characterize the President and his Chief of Staff, Leo McGarry. In the pilot episode, Leo is doing the puzzle over his breakfast, and he claims to have found a mistake in the puzzle involving the name of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Gaddafi’s name is often spelled differently from source to source, but Leo feels he has the authority to correct the \textit{Times} over the phone:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Brooklyn 99}, “The Mattress,” episode 3.7, directed by Dean Holland, written by Dan Goor, Michael Schur, and Laura McCreary, Fox, November 15, 2015.
\end{quote}
17-across is wrong...you’re spelling his name wrong. What’s my name? My name doesn’t matter. I’m just an ordinary citizen who relies on the Times crossword for stimulation. And I’m telling you that I’ve met the man twice, and I’ve recommended a preemptive Exocet missile strike against his air force, so I think I know how...they hang up on me every time.63

This interaction positions Leo as an intelligent man who may have a short fuse from time to time. He is serious in almost everything he does, which the audience later finds expands to his Italian suits, his daughter Mallory, and his lunchtime sandwiches. In a third season episode, Sorkin uses a similar device to provide a window into the relationship between President Jed Bartlet and his wife, Abigail. As the First Lady dresses for her birthday gala at the White House, President Bartlet solves the puzzle to pass the time. The interchange between the Bartlets gives us insight into the couple’s dynamics:

Abbey: Social Darwinism.
Jed: No, that's not the answer, see, because social Darwinism isn't a doctrine. It's a force of nature. The answer is 'libertarianism'.
Abbey: I'm going to be ready in two minutes.
Jed: Take your time.
Abbey: Passive aggression is not going to get me out the door any faster.
Jed: Booboo, I gave up on getting you out the door in the late seventies. Plus, it's your birthday. You're old, and you don't move around that fast.
Abbey: 'Libertarianism' has fourteen letters, not fifteen.
Jed: I know, so I'm shading in the extra box.64

64 Alan Connor, “Top 10 crosswords in fiction, no. 8: The West Wing,” The Crossword Blog – The Guardian, June 7, 2012, accessed June 19, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/crosswords/crossword-blog/2012/jun/07/crosswords-in-fiction-west-wing. It also should be noted that in another Aaron Sorkin project, The American President, which is very similar to The West Wing, President Shephard (Michael Douglas) also has a conversation that involves a discussion of the Times puzzle.
Unlike Leo, President Bartlet is relaxing with his puzzle, rather than getting worked up about it. Leo is unable to divorce himself from his work, which results in a divorce from his wife, but President Bartlet makes the puzzle a calm activity with his wife. He is so relaxed about it that he is even OK with scratching out those pesky extra boxes. Throughout the show, we note that the Bartlets can get easily swept up in their lives as President and First Lady, but they are more adept than Leo at stepping back and evaluating what is important, for the most part. The puzzle’s reputation is so ingrained that it can be easily used as a device in indirect characterization in any medium.

Based on some interesting evidence, perhaps it is President Bartlet’s past life as an economics professor that gives him an advantage on the puzzle. Will Shortz has come to the conclusion that some of the best solvers are those who are either mathematically or musically inclined, citing their special reasoning and their ability to spot patterns. Therefore, while a certain type of intelligence is needed to work the puzzle, it is not the type of intelligence most expect. Other studies, including a 2012 evaluation by Glück, Bischof, and Siebenhüner, have found that even children perceive crossword puzzle solvers as more intelligent.

In 2006, director Patrick Creadon went inside the world of New York Times crossword puzzle fans in his film, Wordplay. He interviewed famous solvers, including

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65 Connor, “Top 10.”
66 Wordplay.
former President Bill Clinton, documentarian Ken Burns, and the Indigo Girls, in addition to other celebrities and fanatical solvers. In these interviews, the ritual of puzzle solving and the fandom surrounding it become most apparent. A lengthy discussion of the right writing implement (pen is preferred) moves into a discussion in the importance of folding the paper correctly (into quarters). Through these interviews, it is clear that the ritual of puzzle completion is as important as the puzzle itself. Viewers of this film, connected to its subject matter through personal investment in the puzzle, could see themselves as part of a subculture that includes such prominent figures among its ranks. President Clinton enjoys puzzles that contain a lot of wordplay, claiming that the problem solving skills he acquired doing the puzzle helped him through some difficult presidential decisions. Former Baltimore Oriole and New York Yankee pitcher Mike Mussina, known as a baseball intellectual who graduated from Stanford, enjoys working the puzzle in the dugout using his knee, citing the importance of his “crossword stance,” thus placing focus on the ritual of the puzzle. Ken Burns likens the puzzle to “a vice,” and claims that he always completes the puzzle in ink, a sign of expertise in the crossword puzzle world. Finally, the Indigo Girls joke that being mentioned in the puzzle was the pinnacle of their careers and very flattering. As mentioned before, such inclusion in the puzzle signals an entrance into popular culture.

The narrative of *Wordplay* revolves around the 28th Annual Stamford Crossword Puzzle Tournament, which is run by Shortz himself. Not surprisingly, the tournament uses the *New York Times* crossword. As a result, the puzzle is the standard of excellence in the American crossword circuit. The winners of the tournament not only possess the knowledge to finish crossword puzzles in general, but also the secrets to how the puzzle
is constructed and effectively completed. The competitors are diverse, except in their passion for the puzzle. The social aspect of the competition is just as important as the actual solving, with friendships being made over the years of friendly competition.

In his 2009 book *Everything But the Coffee*, Bryant Simon makes an important connection between Starbucks and the *New York Times* in terms of public perception. In looking to connect with what Simon calls “the right people,” Starbucks sought ways to brand themselves as the intellectual’s coffee shop. They sold *USA Today* to their customers for a few years, but because the paper had the perception of being “the McPaper,” Starbucks felt that by switching to the *New York Times*, the “educated class,” who had money to spend on things like $4 coffees would associate Starbucks with the same ideals as the *Times*.\(^6\) This anecdote also points to why the crossword puzzle might also be seen as puzzle of record. The *Times* is seen as well-established and of the cultured, educated middle and upper class, and therefore the puzzle is seen in the same light.

In *Wordplay*, comedian Jon Stewart discusses the importance of the puzzle as the standard, stating: “I’ll solve a *USA Today* in a hotel, but I don’t feel good about myself after.” In his analogy, Stewart likens the inferior *USA Today* puzzle to perhaps extra-marital relations in a hotel or motel room, which is obviously overblown for comedic effect, but the sentiment is clear. The new paper on the block contrasts itself with the *Gray Lady* in every possible way. Large graphics with bold colors make it universally easy to understand, and it publishes news in small, bite-sized chunks, much like Twitter and its’ 140-character limit. Detractors disparaged *USA Today* as the “McPaper,” the fast-

food equivalent of journalism. Tasty, perhaps, but not tasteful. They are cheap, unwholesome, and strictly for the “unwashed masses.” Ultimately, it was in competition with the *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* in a late 20th century contest to crown a truly national newspaper. Each of the three still competes for the title, even as local papers lose much of their daily salience across the country. In contrast to *USA Today*, the *New York Times* is classy, pricier, and considered by some to be only for the culturally elite.

Subway riders project specific images of themselves based on the newspaper they carry as they course through the underground tunnels of the 1 train from Penn Station down to the Financial District. In fact, being able to read the *Times* with one hand while strap-hanging on the subway is part of any self-respecting New Yorker’s identity. This point about status is something I will expand upon often in the dissertation.

In its 70-year history, the *New York Times* crossword puzzle has emerged as the standard-bearer of all crossword puzzles, creating a unique fan culture, and integrating itself in the culture at large. The puzzle is held to this higher esteem through the Times’ reputation, but in a twist unimaginined in the 1930s, the crossword contributes to the paper’s august reputation. In the universe of word and trivia games, the *New York Times* crossword is the established leader of trends in puzzles. Outside this world, it is a sign of intelligence and intellect, more so even than an SAT score or GPA to the average person on the street. Through its association with the *New York Times*, those who complete the puzzle are thought to be smarter and more elite than other solvers. No other puzzle following in the United States enjoys a set of fan cultures and folk practice, still setting the *Times* puzzles apart. Thinking back to my grandmother, introduced at the start of this chapter, I now know that the crossword puzzle and a daily dose of *Jeopardy!* are not the
only indicators of intelligence. But I am also sure that I was not wrong in my assumption about my grandmother and that with a few extra years, Maureen McGee could have certainly given those folks at the Stamford Tournament a run for their money. This realization helps to demonstrate that the puzzle functions in an austere and thoughtful way, acting as a litmus test for intellectual capacity and a marker of the same. Across many boundaries, in a highly dispersed yet unifying way, the crossword puzzle delivers what matters so much to the *New York Times*: a sense of intelligent substance that shows the fun of being smart. At the same time, the paper’s high level of repute shores up the puzzle’s trust factor. In true sense, the puzzle and the newspaper reify what matters so much to the *New York Times* and its puzzle-loving public.
Case Study B - The Pentagon Papers and the Fourth Estate

On the same June day that *The New York Times* ran a cover story about the White House wedding of Tricia Nixon, another story ran alongside it that would have more impact on President Nixon than his daughter’s marriage. The June 13, 1971 edition of the *Times* saw the first installment of what would become known as “the Pentagon Papers,” a series of classified documents and shocking revelations about the three decades of United States’ involvement in Vietnam that was officially titled *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945 – 1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense*. This story would cause the American people to question the government and its motives, a trend that would escalate a few years later with Watergate. With the Pentagon Papers’ publication, *The New York Times* would strike a legal blow for the fourth estate in its crusade to place checks on the entire government. The publication of the Pentagon Papers by the *New York Times* was a watershed moment of the 1970s, both in terms of journalism and the Nixon administration. What this module argues is that the effects of the Pentagon Papers’ publication also solidified the role of the *New York Times* as “the paper of record” for Baby Boomers, allowing the paper to weather the crisis of print journalism today.

**Historical Context**

In 1971, President Richard Nixon was looking at the end of his first term and planning his run for a second. His long political career stretched out behind him, and he had overcome a working-class childhood to rise to the highest office in the nation. After graduating from Whittier College and the then-fledgling Duke Law School, he had difficulty finding work with larger law firms, and eventually returned to Whittier as a
divorce lawyer.\footnote{Perlstein, Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America (New York: Scribner, 2008), 20, 23 – 24.} During World War II he first worked for the Office of Price Administration, which was charged with controlling prices and rents during the war to prevent inflation.\footnote{Perlstein, Nixonland, 23; Plains Humanities Alliance and Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, “Rationing,” The Great Plains During World War II, last updated 2008, accessed January 16, 2016, http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/homefront/rationing?section=homefront.} After that, he enlisted in the navy. In 1946, his political career began because of a recommendation from the president of Whittier College to a group of conservative businessmen looking to run a Republican candidate against a five-term incumbent.\footnote{Perlstein, Nixonland, 26.} Nixon ran this successful campaign on the platform of anti-Communism, the issue that would not only get him elected to Congress, but also help him create a national name for himself once he arrived.\footnote{Ibid., 27.} During the Alger Hiss controversy, Nixon was on the House Un-American Activities Committee, and he used that fame to launch himself into the Senate in 1950.\footnote{Ibid., 29 – 35.} Two years later, he was on the Republican Presidential ticket, as running mate to General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower had been courted by both parties to run for president, and he needed a running mate with political experience who was a true conservative. Eisenhower and Nixon were in the White House for the next eight years, and the next logical step for Nixon was to run for President in 1960.

Nixon’s personality would sometimes derail him, and ultimately be his undoing with the Pentagon Papers and Watergate. As Rick Perlstein puts it in his biography Nixonland, “Richard Nixon was a serial collector of resentments. He raged for what he
could not have or control.” The 1960 Presidential Election would certainly shine light onto this part of Nixon’s personality. While Nixon had been serving as Vice President, Kennedy was also rapidly rising through the ranks as a war hero from World War II. His upbringing was everything that Nixon’s was not: political dynasty, Ivy League graduate, and Pulitzer Prize winning author for Profiles in Courage. At the same time, American news media was rapidly changing, focusing more on the visual medium of television than radio. Nixon and Kennedy would both appear on Tonight with Jack Paar, and they would also participate in the first televised Presidential debate. This debate would long be considered part of the reason Nixon lost in 1960.

According to Erik Barnouw in his television history Tube of Plenty, the debates themselves really had little to do initially with the candidates. The debates were an effort to abolish Section 315 of the Communications Act, which stated that if a station gave television time to a “legally qualified” candidate, that same offer or the same price had to apply to other candidates. Politicians were finding ways to get themselves on television without assistance from the station, and the law was becoming a major problem. In 1959, Congress clarified the law, but the networks were looking for ways to repeal the statute entirely. The debates prompted Congress to suspend Section 315 during the Presidential campaign of 1960.

“The Great Debates,” as they were called, ushered in a new era of Presidential campaigning and presidential politics. Americans were seeing their candidates in action live on television, and during the first of the four debates, Nixon did not fare well. He had

74 Perlstein, Nixonland, 21.
even been encouraged by Eisenhower not to accept the invitation to debate, partly because Nixon (the better known candidate) had more to lose than gain over Senator Kennedy. The first debate came shortly after Nixon had been ill, and he looked pale and small juxtaposed with the tan and quick-witted Kennedy. Because Kennedy had forgone make-up, Nixon followed suit to look like an equal. The small amount that was applied to Nixon’s face made him look worse. Although the other debates went well for Nixon, the first image many Americans had of Nixon next to Kennedy provided Kennedy with an edge. Nixon would from that point forward be very careful in crafting his image to the American people.

Nixon suffered another electoral disappointment in 1964, when he lost a race for governor of California, and he infamously told reporters they would not have him to kick around anymore. But the post-Goldwater GOP was in a state of flux, and Nixon still had abundant intraparty credibility. In 1968, Nixon ran again for President on the Republican ticket. In the eight years since he had last run, the Republicans had not fared well, but circumstances were changing. The Vietnam War and other cultural issues were deeply dividing the American electorate, and the Democratic Party was not running incumbent President Lyndon B. Johnson. Johnson had intended to run, but he was badly shaken by what first looked to be a token challenge from anti-war Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy. McCarthy nearly won the New Hampshire primary, signaling Johnson to announce his retirement and also opening up the primary campaign. New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy moved in to challenge McCarthy, but he was assassinated in June 1968. Vice President Hubert Humphrey also ran once Johnson stepped aside. A

76 Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, 271.
77 Ibid., 273.
traditional New Deal Democrat with strong civil rights credibility, Humphrey’s Achilles heel was his association with Johnson and a checkered history with the Vietnam War. Ultimately, Humphrey was the nominee, much to the dismay of radicals who protested at the notorious Chicago convention. Democratic disarray lent credence to Nixon’s claim that he, not his opponents, stood for virtues such as law and order. At the same time, Independent George Wallace ran, capitalizing on his anti-civil rights reputation and damaging the Democratic stronghold of the “old South.” In his book *The Selling of the President*, Philadelphia Inquirer reporter Joe McGinniss outlines how Nixon’s campaign tapped into the idea of “advertising” a presidential nominee, and Nixon was far more careful in how he looked during this particular campaign.\(^7^8\) Law and order, as well as a promised coherence on Vietnam, were central to the 1968 Presidential ad campaign.

In 1971, the Vietnam War was entering a period of what President Nixon referred to as “Vietnamization,” allowing the South Vietnamese to take the reins of the conflict while the United States reduced boots on the ground. The idea was for the United States to concentrate primarily on air support while the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN, the South Vietnamese army) took over ground combat. This tactic allowed Nixon to avoid total withdrawal, while also reducing the number of Americans in the theater. It was seven years since President Johnson’s 1964 Tonkin Resolution, which provided him Congressional cover to upgrade the American effort in Indochina. However, the controversy over the conflict only grew stronger as success, or even an idea of what success would look like, seemed to elude the Pentagon and White House. Many Americans increasingly saw the war as unjustified, especially as reports of combat

atrocities and corruption in Saigon mounted. Meanwhile, the draft raised tensions all over the country as a politicized youth culture debated why young men were being called upon to fight a faraway war that had a purpose that was vague at best. Some impassioned American activists became convinced that the United States was, in fact, on the wrong side of the war.

President Nixon is best remembered for the Watergate scandal and his subsequent resignation, but his real skills as a president lay in foreign policy. It was Nixon who arranged the rapprochement with formerly hostile Maoist China, offering that nation a de facto friend in its intra-communist rivalry with the USSR. Nixon also opened up channels of détente to Moscow, and he often hoped to use his diplomatic skills to gain major power help to de-escalate American involvement in the war. During his Vice Presidency, he had also performed famously in the Kitchen Debate, and he made frequent high-profile trips to Africa, South America, and French Indochina during the period of decolonization. As President, his travels continued, most notably to China, but also to the USSR, Middle East, and Latin America. Indeed, there is evidence that he considered the Vietnam War an inherited annoyance and impediment to his plans for Grand Strategy, but was also leery of appearing to “cut and run,” thereby abandoning an ally, South Vietnam, and appearing to countenance American weakness. At the same time, Nixon came into office as an already controversial figure on the left, which had no trouble transferring its anti-Johnson Vietnam sentiments to Nixon. This was true as well in the press.

Content of the Pentagon Papers

In 1967, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara commissioned a report on the United States’ involvement in Vietnam. McNamara did so because he no longer believed
that the war was winnable and an “unfavorable peace” should be brokered between the United States and North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{79} This move marked a massive come-down for McNamara, who had been the leader of the Kennedy / Johnson “Best and Brightest” advisors, convinced that proper strategy and tactics must win the war. The report was completed in 1969, which was after the Johnson administration had ended and the Nixon administration was just finding its feet. In a classic case of being correct, but too late, the report stressed the complicated historical pattern of Indochinese history, which the United States had refused to consider deeply when picking up the burden of French colonialism after Dien Bien Phu. The 7,000 page document detailed the relations between French Indochina and the United States from 1940, through the Franco-Viet Minh War (1950 – 1954) and the escalation of the Vietnam War until 1968. Three thousand pages were analysis of the actions taken during the study period, while the other 4,000 pages were various supporting documents.\textsuperscript{80} The group that completed these studies were from the RAND Corporation, a leading think tank, which employed the leaker, Dr. Daniel Ellsberg.\textsuperscript{81} It also compiles all public statements made by the Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations concerning United States’ involvement in the region. Because of the report’s timing, the Nixon administration is not

included in the report. While America did not officially enter the Vietnam War until 1964, the Pentagon Papers see the nexus of America’s involvement in the conflict stemming back to 1942, when Secretary of State Sumner Welles promised France that its empire would be intact after World War II, while also advocating “national self-determination and independence” for the Indochina region. \(^82\) This was, of course, a notoriously difficult position for the United States during World War II, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to reconcile traditional American anti-colonialism with the strategic needs of Britain, its closest ally. To a real extent, Indochina was thought of as a backwater or an ancillary issue, since most American and British attentions on the colonial question were then focused on India. But Southeast Asia saw the French and Dutch colonial administrations defeated by the Japanese, and the end of the war made it clear that it would be difficult for the Europeans to reassert themselves, having lost their aura of invincibility. Truman would extend and clarify America’s policy towards Indochina, reassuring France that it would continue to possess Vietnam, because by then, American concerns about communist expansion began to trump traditional anti-colonialism. \(^83\) All of this, of course, was known to historians. But few Americans, even policy-makers, had troubled themselves over the details of Southeast Asian history as the United States incrementally increased its responsibilities in Vietnam and the surrounding areas. By the time of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the only “narrative” that the public was aware of was of communist expansion, presumably driven by Chinese and Soviet designs. The fact that this was after the Sino-Soviet split, and that Vietnam had never

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\(^83\) *Ibid.*, 412.
enjoyed comfortable relations with the Chinese – who had a long record of colonialism in the area themselves – went unnoticed. Therefore, the Pentagon Papers carried a great deal of valuable historical perspective which should have been digested prior to American involvement. They also covered in great detail the messiness of a campaign in which none of the combatants agreed upon the nature of the conflict. To Americans, it was a war against communist incursions opposed to South Vietnam; to North Vietnam, it was a war for national independence against a puppet regime; to South Vietnam, it was a war for survival against a deeply familiar and hated internecine political foe; to the Chinese, it was a battle against American presence on their doorstep; to the Soviets, it was a national liberation movement as well as a chance to humble the United States. American strategists at times considered all of these ideas, but never settled upon a primary interpretation. Therefore, the basic notion of desired outcomes was fuzzy.

Ellsberg Leaks the Papers

In March of 1971, reporter Neil Sheehan of the New York Times came into possession of an extensive set of Pentagon documents, provided by Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, a former Pentagon employee. Ellsberg’s involvement with the Vietnam War began before his time with the RAND Corporation. He had formerly worked at the Defense Department and as an analyst for the State Department in South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{84} His time both in South Vietnam and with the Vietnam Study Task Force convinced him that the United States government had long been hiding the extent of the involvement in the war in Indochina.\textsuperscript{85} As a result, Ellsberg had been photocopying the task force documents since

\textsuperscript{84} Moran, “The First Domino.”

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
1969. It exposed the American involvement in Vietnam reaching back to the Truman administration, further than most would have previously associated the conflict. Ellsberg gave the papers to reporter Neil Sheehan, formerly United Press International’s (UPI) Vietnam reporter who had long opposed the war in his reporting. Sheehan had recently completed *A Bright Shining Lie*, a book outlining the Vietnam War through the biographical lens of John Paul Vann, a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Army. Vann, highly distinguished in combat and enjoying excellent relations with the South Vietnamese, should have been one of the most influential American officers in the war prior to his death in 1972. But his outlook, particularly his favored tactic of small-arms groups instead of massive offensives, ran counter to Pentagon dogma, and he was marked as a troublesome maverick. The book remains one of the best and most honest, nuanced, and meticulously sourced works on the war. Meanwhile, Ellsberg had actually hoped to give the Pentagon Papers to a member of Congress, but the four that he asked all declined. It would have been very controversial for a representative or a senator to appear as if they were undermining the war effort. Senator George McGovern gave Ellsberg the idea to pass the documents to the “fourth estate,” specifically the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. Ellsberg decided to heed McGovern’s advice, and his paper of choice was unsurprisingly “the paper of record,” which is to say the *Times*.

The decision to publish the Papers seems bold today, but it was an even more agonizing decision in 1971. It is hard to remember today, when the press has a multi-decade record of very aggressive critiques of American war methods and efforts, but in

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86 Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 739.  
87 Talese, *The Kingdom and the Power*, 466.  
88 Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*.  
89 Moran, “The First Domino.”
those days there was worry lest a paper seem to be unpatriotic. It was within living memory, for example, that Edward R. Murrow had worn a military uniform and reported as if an honored guest of the Army, rather than as a potential critic of American fighting performance. So nerves were taut as the decision to publish or not loomed. But at the same time, increasing public anger and protest at the war clarified the need for the paper to take a stand against what was clearly becoming a massive, government-inspired social and military crisis. Three days before the Pentagon Papers were to be published, it was decided to go against the negative recommendation of Lord, Day, & Lord, the attorneys for the *Times*, and go ahead and publish the documents. One of the attorneys, and a former member of the Eisenhower administration, at Lord Day & Lord would not even read the contents of the Pentagon Papers out of fear that simply viewing its contents would be legally dicey.\(^90\) That illustrates how controversial the issue was. However, *New York Times* Publisher and Chairman Punch Sulzberger gave the green light after it was understood that no current government secrets would be published.\(^91\)

On the second day of the series, Sheehan focused on a September 1964 strategy meeting of the Johnson administration, which would solidify the administration’s plan running up to the Bay of Tonkin incident in late 1964. At this meeting, it was concluded that escalations would call for air attacks against North Vietnam, probably in early 1965.\(^92\) The administration had earlier hoped that such escalation would be rendered unnecessary, especially in the climate of the 1964 elections. Johnson, running for a full term of office,

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ran against Republican Barry Goldwater, a military hawk and reserve Air Force pilot who was openly in favor of “full-scale air attacks.” Johnson worried about seeming “soft” on military issues, as compared to Goldwater, while at the same time working to paint the Republican candidate as unreliable on security matters. As in any modern election year, an incumbent’s policy revolves around hot button issues and ways to distinguish the administration from the opponent. One of the supporting documents that Sheehan included with this particular column was a series of memos between Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton, which emphasized the goal to appear reasonable and restrained in contrast to Goldwater.  

For the first day, the story of the papers went largely unnoticed. The Times had gotten the scoop on Patricia Nixon’s wedding to Edward Cox, and since she had been visible during the campaign and in other ceremonial roles with her father, the nation was intrigued by the story. Even as the Washington press corps interviewed Defense Secretary Melvin Laird on Sunday morning, he received no questions about the documents. As former editor Max Frankel recalls, the story was printed in such a way that it would not draw attention to itself. Aside from the Nixon wedding distraction, it was printed with a small headline that meant to emphasize the historical context of the article.  

In terms of the Vietnam War, popular opinion had swayed significantly against American involvement in the region by 1971. As Peter Osnos notes in his article in The Atlantic about the Pentagon Papers’ legacy: “Ultimately, the contents of the Pentagon Papers mattered less to events that the great confrontation over whether the press could

94 Frankel, Times of My Life, 334.
override government’s objections to their release.” Soon, the legal precedent that evolved out the Pentagon Papers would allow for the investigative reporting that lead to the Watergate scandal and the fall of Richard Nixon. The Vietnam War would not officially end until 1975, while Nixon left office in 1974.96

President Nixon, seeing only the names of many of his political advisories implicated in the Papers, saw positive outcomes for his future. He was eyeing re-election in 1972, and he hoped to use the contents of the Papers to hurt his Democratic opponents.97 However, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger saw the full potential impact of the article and the documents on the Nixon administration. He correctly suspected that the leak came from within his jurisdiction, and he feared similar events in the future. A conversation transcribed by Jordan Moran of the Miller Center provides very telling evidence about Nixon and Kissinger’s initial reactions:

Kissinger: In public opinion, it actually, if anything, will help us a little bit because this is a goldmine of showing how the previous administration got us in there.
President Nixon: I didn’t read the thing. Tell --- give me your view on that in a word.
Kissinger: Oh, well, it shows massive mismanagement of how we got there. And it pins it all on [former President John F.] Kennedy and [former President Lyndon B.] Johnson.
President Nixon: [laughing] Huh. Yeah!
Kissinger: And McNamara. So from that point of view, it helps us. Form the point of view of the relations with Hanoi, it hurts a little, because it just shows a further weakening of resolve.98

96 America signed the peace treaty with North Vietnam in 1973, but the war itself, and the American involvement in the region, would not completely cease until the Fall of Saigon in 1975.
97 Frankel, Times of My Life, 334.
98 Moran, “The First Domino.”
This conversation illustrates a few aspects about how the Pentagon Papers would be perceived in the Nixon administration. First, Nixon looks at the ramifications of the leak primarily in political terms, while Kissinger already sees a larger picture. Nixon was not a novice in terms of international politics, but his focus was clearly on the 1972 election season. Kissinger remains the consummate diplomat, with eyes always on the international scene. Nixon is also still holding a grudge against Kennedy and Johnson, the ticket that defeated him in 1960. Johnson was an old Capitol Hill foe, while Kennedy bothered Nixon both personally and professionally. To see those men implicated in this damning document is to give Nixon an apparent advantage, even if only in his own mind, although the Eisenhower administration’s role in the drift to involvement was highlighted as well.

After the initial publication, The New York Times put its Pentagon Paper series on hold in order to await a Supreme Court decision as to the legality of the story. Many onlookers, especially President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger, felt that the story breached national security, exposing secrets that could potentially provide the North Vietnamese with important information. The New York Times sued the United States government, believing that its First Amendment rights had been violated. United States v. New York Times Company et al. (1971) quickly made its way through the pipelines of the judicial system, being decided 6-3 in favor of the Times. The case also decided United States v. Washington Post Co., which argued the same issue for the Washington Post,
who published its own articles about the Pentagon Papers after the New York Times suspended its series.  

A Supreme Court case from seven years prior had expanded the First Amendment protection for journalists, paving a legal path for the New York Times’ actions with the Pentagon Papers. New York Times v. Sullivan (1964) made it more difficult for public officials to sue journalists for libel and slander, requiring the plaintiff to prove both that the articles were untrue and that the journalist acted recklessly and knew the information was incorrect, published with intent to damage someone’s reputation.  

Kenneth Paulson, President and CEO of the Newseum’s First Amendment Center, sums up Sullivan’s importance to the Pentagon Papers quite succinctly: “Sullivan freed up news organizations to pursue the stories that needed pursuing.” In short, it gave both large and small papers the opportunity to reclaim their roles as members of the fourth branch of the government, providing checks and balances on the other three branches. Sullivan also showed a change in the minds of the Supreme Court concerning cases like these, in that the highest judicial body in the country believed that the media provided a major check on government abuse and secrecy.  

In the very early stages of the Pentagon Paper scandal, Richard Nixon was almost thrilled with the idea of the leak. It seemed as if his old political foes were the ones who

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101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.
would come off poorly. But this was only taking a historical perspective, not considering
the mounting national passions about what looked increasingly like a failed, or even
illicit, war. The reports implicated his predecessors, almost all of which were Democrats,
in increasing involvement in a very unpopular conflict. Nixon’s re-election campaign was
about to begin, and he hoped partisan politics would take care of the Democrats.
However, through talks with Sec. Kissinger and other top advisors, he came to realize
that one leak could beget another, and the next occurrence might not play out in Nixon’s
favor. From that point forward, the Nixon administration painted the leak as an issue of
national security, attempting to prosecute the Times and the Post for printing sensitive
materials. In 1972, Nixon created Executive Order 11652, which clarified the rules for
the classification and declassification of government documents. This order also
encompassed presidential papers, and this act illustrates President Nixon’s concern about
future leaks.¹⁰³

In the years and decades that followed the Pentagon Papers leak, it became clear
that no substantial harm was done in terms of national security. What did happen was the
addition of critical context to a story Americans already understood: the Vietnam War
had not been undertaken with clear awareness of regional history, agreement on the
stakes of combat, or an understanding of what would constitute victory. To a real extent,
each administration from Eisenhower to Nixon fell prey to “sunk cost theory,” throwing
more resources into a failing effort merely because so much had already been invested (or
wasted) by predecessors. Secretary Kissinger, protesting the effects of the story, made

¹⁰³ "Declassification of Documents." In Historic Documents of 1972, 235-46,
Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1973,
http://library.cqpress.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/historicdocuments/hsdc72-
0001191464.
reference to one secret contact involved in the North Vietnam peace talks who cut off communication after the publication of the papers, but this is the only notable effect of the breech. However, the leak could have been far more damaging. In 1971, Kissinger and the Nixon administration were working on multiple, sensitive foreign affairs initiatives that could have easily crumbled due to the leak. The Chinese government could have pulled out of talks to open trade on the basis that the United States’ government did not have control over its media. The SALT talks, the Paris peace talks, and negotiations concerning the future of Berlin could have all stalled at the thought that more classified information could be released at any time. The fact that these efforts did not collapse proves the validity of the case that Vietnam was never central to the Moscow-Washington-Peking axis of relations, and that it might have been possible to arrange an end to the war years earlier without sacrificing global strategic goals.

President Nixon had long felt a level of paranoia in the political arena, but the Pentagon Paper affair brought those feelings to a new level. His view that the press was out to get him became a conviction. In a discussion with Katharine Graham, Secretary Kissinger intimated that Nixon had long despised the Post and felt antagonistic towards the press at large. He had been looking for a fight. The leak of the Pentagon Papers continued to widen the gap between the Nixon administration and the media-at-large. This rift would eventually encompass the Watergate scandal as well. In the wake of the Pentagon Papers leak, President Nixon created “The White House Plumbers,” who were responsible for preventing further leaks to the press, a fact Carl Bernstein and Bob

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Woodward would discover in their Watergate investigation.\(^{107}\) In 1972, the “Plumbers,” a covert yet amateurish group of undercover agents acting upon Republican orders, broke into the offices of Daniel Ellsberg’s psychologist in hopes of retrieving damaging and discrediting information on the Pentagon Papers source.\(^{108}\) It was part of the “dirty tricks” campaign that sullied the GOP’s 1972 landslide victory and brought down the Nixon administration. The issue here was to gather “dirt” on Ellsberg so as to punish him for his role in leaking the story. This crime was not discovered until the investigations surrounding Watergate, a coup for *The Washington Post*, who had shared the burden of the Pentagon Papers with *The Times*. Nixon even compared the Ellsberg leak to the Alger Hiss case from his early days in Congress on the House Un-American Activities Committee. He saw these Harvard-educated whistleblowers as his enemies, and Ellsberg was joining their ranks. Nixon ranted: “It gets back to the whole Hiss syndrome…the intellectuals because, basically, they have no morals…This is a bunch of goddamn left-wingers trying to destroy’ the administration.”\(^{109}\) Now he intended to fight this case because he realized how detrimental it could be to his future.

Initially, his future continued to look bright. Nixon chose to focus on social issues in his campaign, because it was an easy to way to distinguish himself from Democratic candidates. Rather than focus on those socially-liberal, fiscally-conservative Republicans who had previously run the party, such as Wall Street tycoons from the northeast, Nixon tapped into “the Silent Majority” and other overlooked groups who were more socially

\(^{107}\) Bernstein and Woodward, *All the President’s Men*, 215.


Many Americans who had previously identified as Democrats were switching parties because of Nixon’s new perspective on what made a candidate a Republican. Later, after the 1972 Election, he would seek to reverse many of the social policies and programs of Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society.” The way Nixon electrified previously untapped social groups provided him with a landslide win over Sen. George McGovern, especially as groups that had previously been Democrats went overwhelmingly for Nixon’s new Republican party. The Pentagon Papers did not appear to have an immediate effect on the Nixon administration, at least in terms of public perception and trust. However, the Papers laid the groundwork for Watergate, which would ultimately bring Nixon down.

**Impact on the Culture of the Times**

The primary media impact of the Pentagon Papers was the political and cultural tone that their publication set for the next few decades. After the Pentagon Papers, it was clear that sometimes the government hides things from the American people for no reasons of national safety or security, but for partisan political ends. No longer could an administration simply use national security as a veil behind which to hide its actions from an investigative fourth estate. Future scandals, such as Watergate and Iran-Contra were not stretches for the American public, just further proof of reason to be disappointed in the American political system. Katherine Graham, who led the Washington Post during the Pentagon Papers and Watergate crises, spoke about the effect of the Papers in a speech at Denison University in 1971:

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111 Ibid., 41.
The sobering reality is that the process laid bare in the Pentagon Papers is precisely the process by which most of the business of government is carried forward. We may wholeheartedly embrace the pledge of “No More Vietnams,” but until we open up the system and expose its workings to the light of public scrutiny, that pledge will remain in the realm of empty rhetoric.\footnote{Graham, Personal History, 457.}

After Watergate and the Pentagon Papers, it was difficult for the American people to trust its government, and there is still a very large divide in the political spectrum that partly grows because of mistrust. The media has taken a hold of this divide and created a new industry out of its shouting pundits. News, especially television news, is no longer expected to be neutral, but rather the biases are laid out plainly, and viewers can choose to simply listen to the point of view that best meshes with their own perspective. This trend is easy to trace back to the days of the Pentagon Papers. While the Watergate scandal became the most famous, important, and influential part of the case against the Nixon administration, bringing fame and reputation to the Post, it was the Pentagon Papers which clarified the relationship between a secretive and dishonest White House and the top-level press, especially the paper of record, the New York Times. The Pentagon Papers themselves, the decision to publish, and the effects, became part of the paper’s proud lore, and further reified the idea that the paper stood in opposition to governmental malfeasance, and would not hesitate to utilize its influence, which it considered rightful rather than impecunious.

**Comparative Texts at the Times**

One of the most recent exposes that the New York Times found itself involved in was the 2007 case of Tania Head, a fake 9/11 widow & survivor. In the wake of the
September 11 attacks, human-interest stories about survivors and victims were very popular, especially in the “hometown” paper, *The New York Times*. The Times had treated the story in many ways like a local paper might treat a local tragedy, even printing well-crafted obituaries for each victim. In 2007, in advance of another anniversary, the *Times* sought to interview Tania Head, who was a major player in the World Trade Center Survivor’s Network and a familiar face around Ground Zero. She spoke often of the loss of her husband in the towers, as well as her own escape on that day. In short, the story was not initially approached as investigative journalism, but a simply a nice story about another incredible 9/11 survivor. Suspicions were raised when she backed out of three interviews, which were merely meant to verify the details of her story. As *The Times* interviewed her “husband’s” family, her supposed employer Merrill Lynch, and her alma maters Harvard and Stanford, each one claimed never to have heard of her. She had acted in this charade for over five years, no one willing to question a person who claimed to be part of a most unfortunate group. Eventually it was discovered that she had not even been in the United States on 9/11, let alone in the World Trade Center.

The *Times* has also been called out for the instances when it did not perform expose work, such as during the Ukrainian famines in the 1930s. Reporter Walter Duranty spent many of the interwar years reporting on the Soviet Union, and his articles on the nation earned the paper a Pulitzer Prize. However, he relied too closely on Soviet

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propaganda during the Holodomor, or Ukrainian Famine, of 1932 and 1933, which killed millions as a result of Stalin’s collectivization of agriculture. Calls to revoke the Pulitzer have occurred a few times, and each time, the board has decided to allow the *Times* to keep the award, primarily because the award was not given for the famine reporting.\(^{115}\)

The impact of the Pentagon Papers is also evident in how it is referenced in any situation involving the leak of documents. The website WikiLeaks can serve as a comparative text to the Pentagon Papers, but the distinct differences between the two sources illustrates the strength and power of the *Times*. WikiLeaks, which leaks documents and other anonymous pieces of information, has come under fire on multiple occasions for exposing documents that were sensitive on the grounds of national security, not unlike the Pentagon Papers. However, the Pentagon Papers dealt with just the Vietnam War, whereas WikiLeaks essentially deals in all secrets on all topics. Also, the WikiLeaks event was not the brainchild of a figure connected to a respected institution like RAND, but rather the project of a heretofore-unknown digital avenger. Julian Assange, the face and brain behind WikiLeaks, does not appear to judge the importance of the information he exposes, but simply does so because the information is secret. He operates in an anti-secrecy digital culture that opposes many other forms of restricted information access, such as encryption. These are hot-button issues in the early 21\textsuperscript{st} Century. Assange’s ultimate fate remains unclear as of this writing. He has refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in Britain, while facing legal troubles in Europe and, of course, the

United States. His defenders see him as persecuted, his opponents as an anti-American zealot. Daniel Ellsberg, an American with a long and credible professional record, was careful to withhold some of the Pentagon Papers, primarily those that dealt with the diplomatic efforts the United States was making to end the Vietnam War. He was interested in making public information he felt American’s should know, but he still possessed the wherewithal to understand the ramifications of the documents and which papers would be hurtful to the cause of ending the war. The two groups have radically different objectives, but those goals seems very similar on the surface for those who do not understand Daniel Ellsberg’s line of reasoning.

Ultimately, the publication of the Pentagon Papers changed the culture of the Times from a slightly more tentative paper in terms of “rocking the boat,” to a paper emboldened by the success of the act. The paper came to see itself as a fit opponent, not just for a presidential administration, but, if necessary, for the entire federal apparatus. That is quite an upgrade for a one-time diffident fourth estate. Whether it remains purposeful and practical in the 21st Century is unclear. Some challenge the idea of objectivity, calling for the Times and all papers to support or oppose specific administrations based upon policy, rather than treating all presidents and politicians as powers who need truth-telling. At the same time, as print media declines all over the country, it is episodes like the Pentagon Papers that remind Americans why we may still need professionally trained and dedicated journalists committed to acting on our behalf to make government more transparent. If the digital era means the opening up of

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“journalism” to anyone with an internet connection, then the position of investigative reporting is opaque. Certainly, the *New York Times* is betting that it will weather the transition to a digital environment and continue to prove the need for a professional cadre of journalists to engage in adversarial reporting when covering corridors of power. While there has been speculation that the “Gray Lady” is declining, she is weathering the storm better than most, and journalism of this caliber will keep her afloat.
Module 2 – The National Broadcasting Company

An Introduction

“That’s what I’m talking about, empathy. It’s about as useless as the Winter Olympics [turns to camera] …this February on NBC.” – Jack Donaghy (Alec Baldwin), 30 Rock, Ep. 4.4 “Audition Day”

On his poor basketball form at the White House Easter Egg Hunt: “I took 22 shots and made two of them. Two hits and twenty misses. The executives at NBC asked: ‘What’s your secret?’”...[On NBC, continued] “I understand that when the Correspondents’ Association was considering Conan for this gig, they were faced with that age-old dilemma: Do you offer it to him now, or wait for five years and then give it to Jimmy Fallon?”
- President Barack Obama, 2013 Correspondent’s Dinner

Growing up, there was an unspoken, but well understood, notion that NBC was our family’s official network. Many of my television memories growing up involve NBC shows. I vividly recall how grown up I felt when my parents allowed me to stay up and watch ER while my younger sister went to bed at the normal time. It was the episode in which there is a school bus accident, and a girl loses her arm. I believed this was the height of adult programming. Soon I was also allowed to stay up on Monday nights and watch Jay Leno do his “Headlines” segment. We watched with bated breath when Josh and President Bartlet were shot on the second season opener of The West Wing, having waited since May to find out “who had been hit.” My mom and I cried over the Frasier finale in May of 2004. When I went to college and dealt with a serious bout of homesickness, I just watched Conan O’Brien, which my parents and I had started doing that summer. All of these memories built up NBC in my imagination as an institution separate from the other networks.

One of the overarching questions of this dissertation asks what makes these three corporations iconic American institutions with identities that extend beyond the changes
made to stay alive in America’s dynamic corporate climate. The company that is perhaps
the most drastically changed since its foundation of the three is NBC. Never fully
independent, the National Broadcasting Company has had numerous corporate parents.
RCA originated the network to create programming for its own radios and televisions.
General Electric had an even longer and larger stake in the network as the sole parent
company for many years. More recently, Comcast, the Philadelphia-based cable giant,
purchased NBC in a hotly contested merger. Even as NBC moved from corporation to
corporation, it has somehow maintained a distinct identity, largely routed in institutional
memory.

Institutional memory, or the experiences of a group internalized across the
organization, is a major part of what allows the network to maintain its “NBC-ness,” and
steps have been taken to preserve it. NBC’s Page Program, well-known in the media
world and well-lampooned on *30 Rock*, creates a ground-level workforce that knows
every aspect of the NBCUniversal world, including network history, corporate tradition,
and direct interaction with NBC audiences. It was created in 1933, making the program
part of what sets NBC apart as much as it preserve institutional memory.¹¹⁷ Tourists in
New York can also take the NBC Experience Tour, which spreads the institutional
memory beyond the network’s employees to its consumers. While studio tours are
available at many other networks and cable channels, none is as popular as NBC’s. The
history of the network is well preserved and deeply discussed, which will allow a deeper
investigation into NBC’s iconic status.

¹¹⁷ “NBC Page Program,” NBCUniversal.com, 2013, accessed December 27, 2015,
http://pageprogram.nbcunicareers.com/.
In 1926, the first radio programming from the National Broadcasting Company floated through the airwaves, beginning a long-time relationship between NBC and the American people. NBC has signified the gold standard in almost every realm of radio and television broadcasting, propped up by such media luminaries as Huntley and Brinkley, Lorne Michaels, and Johnny Carson. However, in the last ten years, NBC is better known for being the butt of late night jokes and the punch-lines on its own quirky sitcoms. This phenomenon is largely due to the descent the network has experienced since the end of “Must See TV” in the early 2000s and the behind-the-scenes drama of its news division and late night programming. This bad press also connects to the fact that NBC, unlike the other big networks, has an ingrained identity in the American psyche. Perhaps because NBC was first, the network has developed its own identity that distinguishes it from the competition. CBS had such an identity through its news division, but lost a lot of credibility after the retirement of Walter Cronkite and the Dan Rather controversy. ABC, initially an offshoot of NBC to break-up a potential monopoly, is now dominated by its parent company, the Walt Disney Company.

As the NBC module of this dissertation seeks to illustrate, it has certain output that has become, and remained, the gold standard of its genre, namely its Olympics coverage and its late night programming. Much of the discussion about NBC specifically occurs in the news media versus academic texts, as most academic works focus either on television as a medium or on a specific genre of programming over the spectrum of network and cable channels. Understanding how American popular culture operates must include a detailed discussion of the business and corporate decisions that bring these icons into being.
Judging any discipline in the arts is a subjective task, and television seems to be a particularly argumentative field. Like film, it must simultaneously balance the goals of entertaining, enlightening, and making money. Therefore, it takes a lot of evidence to illustrate that one American broadcast network is superior over another in the history of television. Some networks have stronger news divisions, while others have dominated the reality realm. All four major broadcast networks have produced long-running and very successful scripted programming, although usually not at the same time. However, one cannot discuss the history of television without mentioning the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), as the network and its former parent companies, General Electric, RCA, and Westinghouse, all acted as midwives in the birth of the medium.

Being the first national radio and television broadcasting station, NBC set the tone and impact of television. Therefore, the study of NBC must have a solid foundation in the study of television and its broader effects. Lynn Spigel’s *Make Room for TV* examines the early impact of television on the American household, especially in terms of material culture, gender, and race.\(^{118}\) Henry Jenkin’s *Textual Poachers* is the foundation of any media study. Jenkin’s examines the way media consumers change their relationships with television, film, and other mediums in order to take ownership over these texts. Known as “participatory culture” or “fan culture,” these media consumers create new universes around their favorite texts, and they also protect the canon of the text. While Jenkin’s wrote *Textual Poachers* in 1992, his observations and theories are applicable to looking at the power of fans against or with NBC.\(^{119}\) Pierre Bourdieu warrants study, particularly his 1999 work *On Television*. Here, Bourdieu closely examines the unseen factors at


\(^{119}\) Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*. 
work behind television programming, providing a theoretical framework in which to
examine the decisions of NBC.\textsuperscript{120} The manipulation of the news and other events through
careful cultivation that Bourdieu discusses has application in NBC’s Olympic coverage,
which has earned criticism for what the network does and does not air. Daniel Boorstin’s
The Image is a companion text to Bourdieu, in that they both deal with the “pseudo-
event,” which defines the modern broadcast of the Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{121}

Erik Barnouw’s Tube of Plenty provides a comprehensive look at television since
its inception. He outlines the history of television starting with radio, which seems to be
a common starting point for most television histories. Barnouw uses this text to condense
his tome A History of Broadcasting in the United States, which comes in a three-volume
set. Any scholarly look at the art of television or the industry at large should start with
Barnouw’s very accessible book.\textsuperscript{122} James Roman’s From Daytime to Primetime is a
more pedestrian look at television, aimed at the non-scholar or new undergraduates. That
said, it should not be ignored, as it organizes the information differently than does
Barnouw, forcing the reader to look at television from a different perspective. Whereas
Barnouw organizes the vast history of television chronologically, Roman relies on genre,
providing chronological looks at specific sub-sets of television, such as children’s
programming or westerns.\textsuperscript{123} Steven Stark’s Glued to the Set takes yet another approach,
setting his history apart from the others. In a field as populated as television studies, one
has to create a unique perspective on the discipline. Stark chooses sixty programs or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} Daniel Boorstin, \textit{The Image: A Guide to Psuedo-Events in America} (New York:
\item \textsuperscript{122} Barnouw, \textit{Tube of Plenty}.
\item \textsuperscript{123} James Roman, \textit{From Daytime to Primetime: The History of American Television
  Programs} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005).
\end{itemize}
broadcasting events from the pantheon of television history, and he analyzes the
importance of said event. Some are obvious, such as I Love Lucy, while others provide a
new perspective on what previously seemed innocuous, such as Wheel of Fortune and its
impact on the end of the Cold War.  

Robert Thompson’s Television’s Second Golden Age is another unique
perspective on television history, concentrating strictly on network prestige dramas of the
1980s and 1990s. He argues that the corporate and creative atmospheres of this time
period, largely at NBC, allowed for dramas to break out of the established models. Shows
such as Hill Street Blues, St. Elsewhere, and Moonlighting altered the television
landscape, which allowed for highly rated dramas in the 1990s and 2000s, such as The
West Wing, ER, and Law and Order. Thompson’s work also supports the argument in
the television section of Steven Johnson’s 2005 book Everything Bad for You is Good,
which argues that the increasingly complicated storylines and complex characters
challenge our brains over time, making it easier for our minds to synthesize more difficult
concepts. A primary example Johnson uses is that if one charts out the storylines, Hill
Street Blues has two storylines, with one dominating the episode. Moving forward twenty
years, Lost or The West Wing could address six or seven different on-going story “arcs,”
some of which are not addressed each week. In a generation, television audiences have
mentally matured in immeasurable ways, challenging the networks to creating more
intriguing comedies and dramas.

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124 Steven D. Stark, Glued to the Set: The 60 Television Shows and Events That Made Us
125 Robert Thompson, Television’s Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER
(Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996).
126 Steven Johnson, Everything Bad for You is Good: How Today’s Popular Culture is
Even ten years ago, it would not be outrageous to argue that the National Broadcasting Company was an iconic American institution. However, in the last few years, the network has lost much of its autonomy and prestige through buy-outs and mergers and programming missteps. However, the network has fallen in and out of favor before, and with some introspection, it could rise to the top of the ratings again. NBC and its primary rival CBS have had a number of works written about them, but the literature at large is as comprehensive as it could be. My dissertation will build on the few works already in print, focusing on the aspects of NBC that still set it apart from the rest of the pack.

Daniel Stashower’s *The Boy Genius and the Mogul* tells the tale of the invention and evolution of the early television set, focusing on the man many see as the inventor of the television, Philo T. Farnsworth, and the iconic head of NBC, David Sarnoff. Stashower tells both men’s stories, illuminating both of their early, less than glamorous beginnings and the paths they took to meet each other at the nexus of the television industry. As many readers are not familiar with Farnsworth, it is not difficult to guess who came out on top of this battle, but Stashower creates tension in his writing, forming a narrative rather than a clinical re-telling. Understanding how NBC was first out of the gate with television is a key to understanding how NBC achieved iconic status at all.

Bill Carter’s *Desperate Networks* investigates the changing landscape of network television, focusing on the 2004 – 2005 season. As ABC moved into a golden age of drama programming, with *Desperate Housewives, Lost,* and *Grey’s Anatomy* all debuting during this season, NBC had a series of stumbles and leadership changes that are still

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The story of television, and the story of NBC, cannot be told without discussing the advent of radio. Guglielmo Marconi started his work with radio waves in 1894, and although he experienced difficulty in showing the significance of his discovery, he eventually moved to Britain and created a corporation around his “black box” radio. Marconi’s success coincided with America’s early imperialist age, and the Marconi Corporation started its relationship with the United States Navy. In 1899, American Marconi was incorporated, and the wireless revolution had arrived in the United States.

Early radio broadcasts were largely for local or military use to connect the United States to its Spanish-American War acquisitions, but its purpose as a commercial endeavor was evident. Following radio’s successful use in World War I, the United States Navy proposed that radio technology needed to be controlled in the United States, as many small, local users had popped up all over the country and the usable radio frequencies needed to be claimed before other entities tried to use them. Essentially, a monopoly was created for the newly created Radio Corporation of America (RCA) and its parent

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129 In his complete history of television, Erik Barnouw actually starts with the telephone and the possibilities of television that were abstractly imagined in 1876.
131 Ibid., 10 – 11.
132 Ibid., 18 – 20.
companies: General Electric, Westinghouse, AT&T, and United Fruit. The new frontier of broadcast communications was being tamed.

RCA created NBC in order to produce national programming for their radios, in what could be seen as an early act of product integration. Since the creation of RCA in 1919, AT&T began to dispute where their patents began and RCA’s ended, and in order to avoid an already brewing charge of anti-trust violation, AT&T dropped its broadcasting interests. In this 1926 reorganization, a company was created that would control radio broadcasting rights, and thus, NBC was born. This creation ushered in the first national radio network that would deliver a singular listening experience for its customers. Radio would become an essential part of the American experience, especially during World War II. What set American radio apart from other international broadcasting services was the private, corporate nature of the new venture. NBC staked its claim as “America’s Network,” akin to the BBC in Great Britain, but it was not state-controlled. This concept of NBC as “America’s Network” is a crucial idea in this dissertation. Although NBC would face stiff competition, first from CBS, then ABC and Fox, it has long held the position that it is an American institution. Television would only do more to solidify NBC’s place in the American imagination, and it would create a national popular culture experience like never before.

133 Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, 20 – 23; General Electric absorbed American Marconi and dominated the RCA partnership with a share of 30.1%. Westinghouse controlled 20.6% of RCA, while AT&T had 10.3% and United Fruit held 4.1% (Barnouw, 22). All of these companies had interest in the radio world, either through patents, broadcast holdings, or practical use.

134 Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, 51 – 53; NBC’s parent companies were RCA (50%), General Electric (30%), and Westinghouse (20%). The latter two companies also still owned RCA.

Experiments with television technology had been going on since the 1920s: John L. Baird in England, Charles F. Jenkins in the RCA labs, and Philo T. Farnsworth in Idaho. However, it was the vision and insatiable drive of David Sarnoff, President of RCA, who would introduce the world to television. After years of experimenting with local broadcasts in the New York metropolitan area, television would make its grand debut (of sorts) at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. Sarnoff had created quite the creation myth for himself, over time inflating his involvement in numerous early broadcasting events, including the sinking of Titanic, the founding of RCA, and the creation of NBC. These exaggerations were partly motivated by Sarnoff’s disadvantages as a Jewish immigrant to the United States, and over time, they became part of the NBC mythos as well. Sarnoff’s epic personality is a key aspect of the NBC identity.

Despite television’s debut on the same international stage that gave the world the telephone, the Eiffel Tower, and Pabst Blue Ribbon, its emergence into the American mainstream would be delayed by two factors. First, the nation was still dealing with the economic issues surrounding the Great Depression, and most Americans were not about to throw their money away on a potential novelty. Second, and perhaps more importantly, World War II was on the horizon. The fair’s first season ended as Nazi troops were taking over Poland, and as each European pavilion closed, the second season of the fair illustrated Germany’s march through the continent. America’s official entrance into the war in 1941 would move its industrial priorities to airplanes, weapons, and other wartime products. There was not really room for television production or manufacturing.

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However, television’s growth after the war was rapid. The wartime economy and the economic boom of the 1950s would see an overall growth in luxury purchases by the American public. Televisions would appear in 2/3 of American homes by 1955, and by 1960, 90% of American homes would have at least one set. According to media historian Lynn Spigel, it is the fastest growth of any home entertainment machine to that point.\(^{137}\) NBC was joined in its television broadcasts by its radio competitors, CBS and ABC, and they ushered in what is considered the first “golden age” of television with shows such as *Love Lucy*, *The Goldbergs*, and *Meet the Press*.

In the 1950s, both NBC and CBS had well-respected news divisions. CBS’s was a result of Edward R. Murrow, who had shifted to television after his wartime turn on the radio. In the early 1960s, Walter Cronkite was gaining popularity, solidifying his position as a broadcasting icon during the Kennedy assassination and the Vietnam War. On the other hand, NBC had paved the way for regular evening news broadcasts, starting in 1948 on television.\(^{138}\) These early programs on all three networks (although ABC never really gained footing in this area) were 15-minute shows that combined an on-air personality with newsreel footage that could also be played at the movies.\(^{139}\) NBC also created international agreements with the BBC and other overseas networks, giving it an advantage on stories outside the United States.\(^{140}\)

CBS would pull ahead of NBC for a number of years as a result of Walter Cronkite’s handling of the Kennedy assassination. He was long considered one of the most trusted names in news. NBC pulled ahead again in the 1980s with Tom Brokaw and

\(^{138}\) Edgerton, *Columbia History*, 142.
\(^{139}\) *Ibid*.
\(^{140}\) *Ibid*.  

in the 2000s with Brian Williams.\textsuperscript{141} ABC dominated in sports news, but struggled to find a foothold in the same way CBS and NBC did. In the late 1960s and 1970s, all three networks were also trying to brand themselves beyond just a logo. This plan would both distance each network from the other, and it would also help viewers remember the networks as more cable and satellite channels became available.\textsuperscript{142} NBC became “The Network of America,” while CBS emphasized its current lead in the ratings with “Catch the Brightest Stars.” ABC relied on its then-iconic Olympic coverage, creating a special Olympic-rings style logo and branding itself as “The Network of the Olympics.”\textsuperscript{143}

Many of the networks in the late 1970s, after the dynamic introductions of shows like \textit{All in the Family} or \textit{Mary Tyler Moore}, looked for higher ratings to go with their critical appeal. All three networks shifted towards NBC President Paul Klein’s “least objectionable programming” or LOP strategy. Some also refer to this programming strategy as “jiggle TV,” reflecting the more buxom stars of shows such as \textit{Charlie’s Angels} and \textit{Three’s Company}. NBC was struggling. Former NBC President Warren Littlefield claims that when he started at the network in 1979, “in what was just a three-way race for audience…NBC was jokingly derided as number four.”\textsuperscript{144} CBS was dominant, holding on to some of the spin-offs from the early 1970s, such as \textit{The Jeffersons}. ABC was breaking ground with some of the most highly regarded sitcoms of the 1970s, including \textit{Soap} and \textit{Taxi}.\textsuperscript{145} NBC’s then-head of programming was the creator

\begin{footnotes}
\item[141] Brian Williams, much like Dan Rather, had a serious fall from grace in 2015 when it came to light that he had exaggerated his role in certain news stories. Unlike Rather, Williams was demoted to MSNBC after a period of suspension, and he is back on the air.
\item[142] Edgerton, \textit{Columbia History}, 290.
\item[143] Ibid.
\item[145] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
of LOP, Paul Klein. Rather than focus on scripted programming, he pushed for NBC to become “The Big Event Network,” which proved to be expensive and unsuccessful in attracting repeat viewers.\textsuperscript{146} NBC had been the first home of the Academy Awards in 1953, but in 1976, ABC earned the long-term contract for the awards ceremony. Despite the high ratings for events such as the Oscars, the Olympics, and the Super Bowl, the time in-between these money-makers is painfully long for any single event to support the entire operation. Soon after, former ABC President Fred Silverman replaced Klein, and his primary goal was to turn the network around as he had done at ABC.

The two shows that would signal a turn-around for the network were both in development during this period, and both almost did not make it off the drawing board. \textit{Cheers}, regarded as one of the strongest sitcoms ever made, was almost dropped when the network could not afford to make a deal with the show’s creators. To make matters worse, at the end of the first season, the show was in last place. The new network CEO, Grant Tinker, asked Littlefield, then the head of comedy development, “Do you have anything better?” and the lack of promising pilots allowed the show to survive another ten seasons. The cop drama \textit{Hill Street Blues} was originally conceived as a comedy, but it evolved into an hour-long drama that would change the way Americans consumed dramatic television.

As television dramas and sitcoms raised the intellectual bar in the 1980s and 1990s, the American viewing public did not turn off the tube, but rather adapted to keep up with this new breed of programming. In \textit{Everything Bad for You is Good}, cultural writer Steven Johnson outlines how television has changed American intellectual

\textsuperscript{146} Littlefield, \textit{Top of the Rock}, 20.
capacity. Television shows no longer stuck to simple storylines that followed the same set of characters around for an entire episode, but rather composed multi-layered epics that had to use a more sophisticated story-telling method to help audiences keep up. Johnson notes that writers use subtle “flashing arrows” to point out important details that will help tell the story. As viewers become more sophisticated, the arrows become more and more subtle because the audience has learned to watch TV differently than before. Many of the shows that changed how we watch television were on NBC in the 1980s and 1990s, including *Hill Street Blues*, *The West Wing*, and *ER*. These programs did not “talk down” to their audiences, but rather found that viewers enjoyed being entertained with intelligent characters and witty references.

NBC employed this concept on its shows during the “Must See TV” era (1982 – 2006). *Frasier*, *Seinfeld*, and *The West Wing* expected something of their audiences, and in turn, viewers were willing to work a little harder to watch something a little different. Cultural references, intertextual references, and appropriation were expected. *Seinfeld* produced an episode inspired by Harold Pinter’s *Betrayal*, and the scenes were shown in reverse order. One of the secondary characters, Pinter Ranawat, also acted as a “flashing arrow” to those in the know, as homage to the playwright. If one is not familiar with Pinter’s work, the episode is still excellent because the show works on a variety of levels for a variety of viewers.

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148 These dates outline the period from the beginning of *Hill Street Blues* and *Cheers* until the end of *The West Wing* and *Will and Grace*. Some would extend it to *30 Rock* (2005 – 2013) and *Parks and Recreation* (2009 – 2015), while others would end it with Warren Littlefield’s ouster.
Starting in the early 1980s, with NBC’s shift away from LOP dramas and sitcoms, it began to dominate the ratings across a variety of genres. The new catchphrase was “class appeal, not mass appeal.” NBC showed that these sorts of programs could and would produce excellent ratings. *Cheers, The Cosby Show,* and *The Golden Girls* were pulling in ratings throughout the 1980s. Thursday nights were devoted to NBC’s new programming strategy. There was even a time when the revenue from “Must See TV” Thursdays supported every other program on the network.\(^{150}\) Dramas such as *Law and Order, ER,* and *The West Wing* and comedies like *Seinfeld, Frasier, Will and Grace,* and *Friends* would continue the brand through the 1990s and into the mid-2000s. The popularity of reality television and the fragmented audience share as the result of cable and online-streaming services made it more difficult to produce these sorts of programs.

The mid-2000s were a difficult time for NBC. The last pieces of its true “Must See TV” days were going off the air (*Friends* and *Frasier* in 2004, *Will and Grace* and *The West Wing* in 2006). CBS and ABC were dominating with their reality television offerings, especially *Survivor* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire.* It was this desperate atmosphere that caused the network to “promise” *The Tonight Show* to Conan O’Brien in 2004, a move to prevent O’Brien from moving to another network as Letterman had done a decade earlier. The tables were being turned among the networks, a saga that Bill Carter investigates in his work, *Desperate Networks.* NBC was in such dire straits that *30 Rock* lampooned the situation often; this interchange between Jack Donaghy and a potential buyer of NBC describes the situation well:

Jack Donaghy: Then what do you want with NBC? Why do you even want me?

Susan Crawford uses this quote to introduce her chapter “The Peacock Disappears” in \textit{Captive Audience}, which outlines the Comcast’s purchase of NBC Universal. NBC Universal President and CEO, Jeff Zucker, was at the center of the deal, and the network was not doing well, partly because of panicked decisions he had made. As Crawford notes, Zucker was protective of the NBC brand, as he had been there since 1986 and was involved in some of NBC’s largest endeavors. She even notes that Zucker saw NBC Universal as “iconic.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 123 – 124.} The 2010 purchase of NBC Universal by Comcast was well publicized and controversial. However, in this project, the event was what fueled my interest into what allows NBC to stand out, even as it is swallowed by a very powerful and pushy corporate parent.

The two case studies in this NBC module revolve around live events, rather than the scripted television that NBC is well-known for. Certain defining aspects of NBC, especially its sitcoms and dramas of the last 30 years, have been well discussed, and live events have come to define NBC in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. First is the tradition of late night television on NBC, which was the first national network to provide weeknight programming after the 11 o’clock news. Brand loyalty, as well as a long line of entertaining personalities, have kept NBC in first place at 11:30. This case study discusses the way NBC uses \textit{The Tonight Show, Late Night, and Saturday Night Live} to
maintain an identity during its wayward years, and how the geographic location of NBC is forever tied to its overall brand identity.

The second case study investigates NBC’s coverage of the Olympics. Until 2002, each games was negotiated individually, and many Baby Boomer Americans best recall the ABC coverage of Jim McKay and Al Michaels. However, NBC has the exclusive rights to all Olympic games until at least 2032, and in the years it has aired the games, it has done all it can to control every aspect of the event. Through an examination of recent opening ceremonies and the evolution of how NBC handles the Olympic Games as a television event, I argue that NBC still holds great power over American media as it frames both American viewing of the Olympics as well as American ideas of the host nation. Using the theoretical framework of Daniel Boorstin’s “pseudo-event” and Pierre Bourdieu’s *On Television*, we see that NBC makes the broadcast of the games just as much an event as the live, physical Olympic competition.
Case Study A - Late Night Television and Brand Loyalty

In the fall of 2008, I was a graduate student, and my now-husband, Jason, was living in Philadelphia. Almost every weekend, I would visit him and my college friends. The train was easy to catch from Middletown, Pennsylvania, and I spent many hours waiting in 30th Street Station in Philadelphia to make my return trips. On one such trip, I was purchasing my ticket at the kiosk, and while my credit card was processing, I simply looked up and saw Jimmy Fallon, who had just signed on to take over Late Night when Conan O’Brien moved to The Tonight Show in 2009. I looked back down to grab my ticket, but I kept my eye on Mr. Fallon. I could not believe it was him, so I did not attempt to meet him. However, he noticed my stares and waved me over to where he was standing in line for his train. After what was possibly the most pleasant interchange in which he asked me about my grad school program and the “Improv 101” shirt I was wearing, we took a picture together. When we parted ways, I realized that he had essentially practiced his interview skills on me, and I knew he was going to be one of the great late night hosts in the iconic NBC tradition. Late night television was born on NBC, and in the subsequent years, despite challenges from the other networks and cable television, it has remained the brand to beat. Late night programming, primarily in the forms of The Tonight Show, Late Night, and Saturday Night Live, has remained a brand of quality for NBC, even as the network changes corporate hands. Brand loyalty, as well as NBC’s reaction to audiences, has allowed the network to be the place to find iconic late night television. In this case study, I argue two converging concepts. First, that NBC maintains brand loyalty through its late night television offerings, even as the network itself changes corporate hands and other personalities. Second, I also argue that the NBC
late night brand is defined through both its sacred place on the television schedule and its geographic homes in New York and California.

NBC was the midwife present at the creation of the television and radio industries. The “baby” was broadcast entertainment as Americans came to know it for a century. Entertainment broadcasting by NBC quickly became a brand that Americans trusted for quality programming across genres, such as talk shows, news magazines, and scripted programming. The network also originated the concept of late night national programming, which did not exist in such a form before Steve Allen’s 1954 Tonight!, renamed and still known as The Tonight Show. NBC’s adventures in late night constitute a major segment of television history. NBC’s role in the wee hours has changed not only the range of television’s influence, but also how the business of television works.

It is virtually impossible to overstate how the iconic, overlapping NBC – late night identification has determined the shape of an entire portion of the broadcast schedule. Local power, as exercised by individual stations, was removed from yet another block of programming, allowing the national network to benefit from ad revenue and other profits streams quite literally while their executives and sponsors slept. The brand of late night television that NBC created has been replicated all over the dial, but no network has ever dominated the genre in this way for this long. NBC even found a way to conquer late night on Saturdays, building Saturday Night Live into a brand that could not be successfully replicated at other networks, despite many attempts. Even as the television landscape becomes more fragmented and focused on cable and subscription service offerings, NBC still maintains palpable brand identity and uses it to attract and hold viewers. The fact that this identity has clear cultural purchase, despite decades of
structural change across television, is a central part of this dissertation case study. The network has taken advantage of online viewing as well, looking beyond the television set itself, setting itself up to continue its unlikely brand success, even as the genre morphs during the Digital Age.

Late night television on NBC is well researched, and the hosts of NBC’s late night have long fascinated the American public. Ben Alba’s *Inventing Late Night: Steve Allen and the Original Tonight Show* is a comprehensive look at Steve Allen’s career, placing him appropriately as the creator of the late night genre. Between his time on *The Steve Allen Show* and *Tonight!*, Allen became a sought out American figure. When it comes to contemporary late night talk shows, one voice dominates the conversation: *The New York Times*’ Bill Carter. Along with his numerous articles for the *Times*, Carter has written two books about the first two “late night wars,” meaning the 1992 fight between David Letterman and Jay Leno for Johnny Carson’s seat on *The Tonight Show*, and the 2010 fight over the program between Jay Leno and Conan O’Brien. *The Late Shift* (1995) and *The War for Late Night* (2010) both shed light on the personalities and the business decisions behind filling Johnny Carson’s shoes. Despite having been off the air since 1992, Carson’s identity looms large over *The Tonight Show*’s identity, and therefore, those taking over the program do not see themselves as Leno or Conan’s successor but as Carson’s. Most recently it was announced that Jay Leno would be ousted (again) for *Late Night*’s Jimmy Fallon, who would be replaced by fellow *Saturday Night Live* alum, Seth

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Myers. Leno has made this newest development the main topic of his nightly monologues, and based on his previous behavior, he may not go quietly into the night.

In contrast, comprehensive work on Saturday Night Live has been sparse, but a few select books have emerged as the definitive guides. Tom Shales and James Andrew Miller’s Live From New York covers the first 27 years of Saturday Night Live through interviews with all of the living key players. Because of the way SNL tends to make giants out of its stars, the best way to fill in the gaps is through biographies and memoirs from its cast and crew.155 They also published an updated edition in 2014 in anticipation of the show’s 40th anniversary. This milestone has also produced Alison Castle’s Saturday Night Live: The Book, which investigates the show’s history through pictures.156 Some of the most interesting sources about Saturday Night Live and NBC’s larger business culture are biographies of those who worked there. Tina Fey’s Bossypants, Mindy Kaling’s Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?, and Amy Poehler’s Yes Please all provide behind the scenes looks at the show and its impact from the perspective of cast members and writers.157 Specific experiences are not necessary to making the larger argument about NBC as a network, but these sorts of texts to get the heart of the atmosphere of late night at “the peacock.” No other program of its kind has found the same success or stayed on the air as long. As SNL goes into its 41st season, and as Lorne Michael continues to also dominate the weeknights, late night may prove to be NBC’s life raft.

The scope of this analysis is limited specifically and intentionally to the three long-running late night programs of NBC (The Tonight Show, Late Night, and Saturday Night Live). Other late night programs have cropped up on the network – Tomorrow with Tom Snyder and Last Call with Carson Daly – but for a variety of reasons, both do not make clean comparisons with the other three shows and live outside the scope of my argument. These shows’ formats are a different breed and serve more to highlight a specific personality than the NBC franchise.

Other networks have had genre successes of their own. CBS, under Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite, was considered the most trusted news source through the 1980s. Associating the CBS Eye with top news coverage led to that network’s proudest claim: that CBS was the “network of record” for news. Coverage honed during World War II and the Kennedy assassination grew into strong investigatory coverage during Vietnam and Watergate, so CBS News, with its roots in radio, persisted in reputation for the first half-century of the television era. ABC Sports dominated that broadcast genre through the 1970s and 1980s, thanks to innovations such as Monday Night Football. As will be explained in the next case study about the Olympics on NBC, ABC’s sports department allowed NBC to pull from trusted anchors and commentators when it took over Olympic coverage. The iconic Roone Arledge helped to mold the career of Dick Ebersol, later the producer of Saturday Night Live and now the President of NBC Sports. However, NBC has only lost the late night wars a few times, and only for brief periods.

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158 The Tonight Show (previously known under the names Tonight!, The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, and The Tonight Show with Jay Leno) airs Monday through Thursday nights from 11:30 p.m. until 12:30 a.m. Late Night airs Monday through Thursday nights from 12:30 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. Saturday Night Live airs Saturdays from 11:30 p.m. until 1:00 a.m.
Some might argue that late night television is stale and does not change with the times as much as it should, but market success provides a compelling refutation of that claim. However, the core value of building brand loyalty is consistency. Customers become emotionally attached to specific brands for a variety of ineffable reasons, and expect to find what they like about those brands each time they make their selection. For this reason, altering iconic brands has proven to be almost a non-starter, or at least extremely difficult. Of course, stasis is no formula for business success, so the challenge for any enterprise is to keep their iconic appeal from growing stale. That task is not easy. Brand loyalty is especially crucial to the network model, and it has been since the days of radio. Every time a customer “tunes in,” she makes choices about where on the dial they find what they want to hear or watch. Back in the Golden Age of Radio, NBC built its entertainment brand by featuring the best lineup of the most popular singers, comedians, and actors. That strategy continued in the Golden Age of Television. NBC has used late night programming to its best advantage for decades after virtually inventing that programming style. The network’s reign over late night has persisted because NBC did it first and it did it right, year after year. Even before the iconic era of Johnny Carson, NBC created compelling television that Americans stayed up to watch. In terms of the NBC late night experience, The Tonight Show experiences some bumps with each change in host, and Saturday Night Live finds itself the target of the “Saturday Night Dead” joke with any significant casting change. But as each new host or new cast settles in, the franchise lives on, and in retrospect, it is seldom far removed from previous iterations. It is also a living example of how an enterprise in the culture business – in this case, a broadcast network – can maintain positive brand identifiability while simultaneously
keeping things fresh. Articulating the ways in which NBC has performed this feat is a major interpretive goal of this case study.

Other examples of brand loyalty outside the media illustrate that if a product or concept overwhelmingly trounces the competition, there is no reason to walk away from a good thing. As alluded to above, Coca-Cola’s experiment with New Coke in 1985 is perhaps the most notorious example, and as a result Coke executives can testify to how fragile the line is between violating a consumer’s trust in a favorite product and exciting a new customer base with supposed “improvements.” Perpetual runner-up Pepsi was catching up in national taste tests and in market share, and Coke, long accustomed to its secure position at the front of the soft drink pack, panicked. From 1980 to 1984, Coke’s market share dropped from 24.3% to 21.8%. Coke recovered some of the market with the introduction of Diet Coke, and the company had some confidence in its research and results. When New Coke was taste-tested in advance of its release, 55% of participants preferred it over Pepsi. However, this data overshadowed another telling statistic, which was that of those tested who identified as devoted Coke drinkers, 39% said they would switch to Pepsi if New Coke replaced the current recipe.\textsuperscript{159} As a result, when New Coke was introduced and immediately derided, many faithful Coke drinkers switched to Pepsi, further eroding Coke’s market share. Both Pepsi and New Coke were sweeter than the original Coke formula, which win in taste tests (small amounts of the beverage), but original Coke tends to win in the long-term because it is less sweet. Customer protests caused the original formula (now called “Coca-Cola Classic”) to be sold alongside New

Coke. The well-publicized “switcheroo,” and subsequent switch back, became a national obsession and a national joke, joining Ford’s Edsel as perhaps the greatest self-inflicted brand glitch in history. This lesson is a textbook example of companies ignoring the power of brand loyalty.

The explosion in television ownership, and all that it represented, made the content on television a universal cultural experience, at least for a little while. In 1948, .4% of American households had television sets, 2/3 of which were in the New York City area.160 However, by 1954, 55.7% of Americans owned televisions and the number grew to 83.2% in 1958.161 Just two years later, 90% of American homes had at least one set, and the average American was watching 5 hours of television a day.162 Considering that the national networks only broadcast during primetime until the mid-1950s, most of that programming was of a local nature, but NBC would change that in 1954 through the vision of network President Pat Weaver. But years after television’s arrival in the living room, the appliance was not commonly considered to have late-night appeal. That block after the evening news, if it had any programming at all, was reserved for late night movie reruns, often in the vein of cheesy science fiction or horror. Hence, The Late, Late Show or Creature Feature became fodder for American humorists, who joked about monster movies.

Before the late night block truly broke through to the American public, NBC had dabbled in late night programming with its variety show Broadway Open House. Other than this experiment and other less successful endeavors, late night television existed.

161 Ibid., 42.
162 Spigel, Make Room for TV, 1.
only on a local level. Depending on the area in which one lived, there could be no late night programming because the demand and potential for ad revenue did not exist. However, this meant that in markets that had thriving late night revenue, NBC did not see profit from these blocks. The network sought to find new revenue streams where it could, which lead to a new strategy from network president Pat Weaver in 1954.

In the mid-1950s, the newly minted NBC President, Pat Weaver, was looking to move the network’s reach beyond prime time, which would simultaneously transform all network television from a regional programming set-up to more national influence. The sponsors and ad agencies still largely controlled programming, but Weaver wanted to see that power shift to the networks. He found that the “magazine concept” would work well, as it would allow the network to change the advertising-to-network dynamic. Weaver’s plan was called “T-H-T,” or Today, Home, and Tonight! At this point, NBC and the other networks controlled national programming from 7 p.m. until 11 p.m., and the local affiliates and their news divisions determined the rest of the slots. Weaver wanted to establish “tent pole” shows that would prop up other blocks of time. Today would establish a morning block of television, Home in the late morning, and Tonight in the late night slot. In this model, advertisers would purchase “insertions” in the programs, and the network would control the actual programming. This move was successful, considering that two of these shows are still on the air in their original time slots, and it changed the way networks operated.

163 Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, 190.
164 Edgerton, Columbia History, 163.
165 Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, 190.
Today and Home were both aimed at women, who would presumably be at home during those television blocks. This assumption reflects the gender and workplace dynamics of that era. Today has remained a staple of NBC News, launching the careers of Katie Couric, Matt Lauer, and Barbara Walters. Home only lasted three years (1954 – 1957), but despite its short run, at least by today’s standards, the show was very popular and helped to launch the daytime information genre aimed at women.166 The debut episode’s introduction is the best look into the show’s goals:

Good morning everyone, and it is a good morning. You’re looking at NBC’s newest television studio in New York – a studio especially designed for Home. And from this television laboratory – which is what is really is – each week day at this hour [11:00 a.m.], a staff of electronic editors is going to bring you news and information that applies to your home and family. Now I’d like to let you meet the editor-in-chief of our electronic magazine, Arlene Francis.167

Francis was already well known to the American public, but this program allowed her to display her intellect and truly act as an editor-in-chief. The show tackled controversial topics such as drug use, urban unrest, and education. The biggest question surrounding Home is why it left the airwaves. While there is no solid answer, the best guess seems to be David Sarnoff was attempting to wipe the slate clean for his son, who replaced Pat Weaver as NBC President in 1956.168 Despite its short run, Home established a future for afternoon-talk and informational programs like Oprah and Sally Jesse Raphael.

In its original conception, Weaver saw Tonight as a bookend to the news day, mirroring the formats of Today and Home as a news magazine, as the new formats had been very successful. In 1956, NBC finally overpowered CBS in the ratings, largely

167 Ibid., 40 – 41.
168 Ibid., 40 – 41.
because of Weaver’s talk shows. However, when Steve Allen was brought on board to host, he hoped to format the show in a way he felt comfortable. Allen’s skills lay in improvisational comedy and music, not in reading the news. When Weaver saw the potential in the program focusing on entertainment over news because of Allen’s personality and performance style, the NBC executives got on board. The late night format that would become the standard for decades was evolving at 30 Rockefeller Center. That address itself began to be associated with NBC entertainment, a first step in establishing a New York-associated geographical “hook.” It made sense, as New York City was the eastern entertainment capital, and the idea of “bringing New York into the living room” had resonance across the nation.

The first beginnings of NBC’s late night success are actually found on CBS radio in 1948, when Steve Allen first began hosting *Breaking All Records*. His popularity soon transformed the program into *The Steve Allen Show*, which CBS was naturally eager to air on television. In his foreword of Ben Alba’s definitive biography, Jay Leno ponders the importance of Allen, explaining that Allen was the dividing line between the old vaudevillian comics, then still popular on radio and television, and the new generation of television comics. Steve Allen was steeped in the old world of theater, as his mother, Belle Montrose, was a popular vaudeville star when he was young. He was even babysat back stage by Milton Berle! Allen learned a lot about comedy from his mother on the road, but he ultimately found his love of performing and hosting in college at Arizona

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169 Timberg, *Television Talk*, 34.
171 Edgerton, *Columbia History*, 170.
State University, even taking time off from his studies to hone his skills at Phoenix’s KOY radio station.\textsuperscript{174} He continued hosting in Los Angeles, where he gained some national fame with \textit{Smile Time} and \textit{Breaking All Records}, the latter of which lead to his time on NBC.\textsuperscript{175} The bits and sketches from \textit{Tonight!} were tested on these programs and became popular tropes on most future late night programs.

Steve Allen first hit the NBC airwaves on September 27, 1954. Like many of his successors, Steve Allen was a unique performer who could handle multiple levels of comedy, as well as guest interviews, sketches, and musical numbers.\textsuperscript{176} Steve Allen also fit into Weaver’s overall T-H-T plan because he had the right combination of sophisticated and silly humor that could keep the show classy while attracting large audiences.\textsuperscript{177} Many performers have found that the variety format is difficult to produce well, and Mr. Allen set the bar high in an era saturated with variety shows. He also established many of the now-traditional tropes on late night talk shows, including audience participation gags, “answer man,” funny items from the newspaper, “man on the street,” and “crazy shots,” all of which have been appropriated by every host from Paar to Fallon. He was also musical, and he spent a large portion of the show sitting at his piano, not behind a desk.\textsuperscript{178} His sidekick was Gene Rayburn, later famous for his hosting gig on \textit{Match Game}.\textsuperscript{179} Allen was soon known as “Mr. Midnight,” in the vein of Burle’s “Mr.

\textsuperscript{174} Alba, \textit{Inventing Late Night}, 31.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{176} Edgerton, \textit{Columbia History}, 169.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 172 – 173.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 171 – 172.
The show was quickly gaining a dedicated group of followers who were willing to stay up after the evening news for more television.

However, Allen’s rapid success was ultimately his undoing. In the same year *Tonight!* debuted, Ed Sullivan was renegotiating his contract at CBS. NBC hoped that if CBS could not satisfy Sullivan’s requests, the peacock could. When Sullivan ultimately decided to stay with CBS, as he would until his 1972 retirement, NBC hoped Allen could be a worthy competitor.\(^{181}\) In 1955, Allen was given a raise to $1.5 million a year, and he would host both a prime time show on Sundays (*The Steve Allen Show*) and his nightly 90-minute *Tonight!* Unsurprisingly, Allen quickly burned out. The first fix was to reduce the running time of *Tonight!* to 60 minutes and to provide Allen with a consistent guest host on Monday and Tuesday nights, Ernie Kovacs. The arrangement still proved to be too much for Allen and he left *Tonight!* in 1957.\(^{182}\)

When Jack Paar took over the time slot in 1957, NBC found that they had shifted gears in a big way with the new host. While Allen’s program had been more like a late night cabaret, with sketches and musical numbers, Paar was more serious. This shift is even evident in the slight change in title for the program. The exclamation point from Allen’s *Tonight!* was dropped for perhaps a hint at the more intellectual tone or to distinguish Paar’s program from Allen’s.\(^{183}\) Paar started out much like Allen in radio, but his comedy was of a different vein. Allen was an early sketch / improvisational comedian, whereas Paar was a stand-up comedian and monologist, which might account for his more intellectual fare. His guests were more intellectual in nature, most notably

\(^{180}\) Edgerton, *Columbia History*, 174.
\(^{181}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{182}\) *Ibid.*, 175.
\(^{183}\) Timberg, *Television Talk*, 47.
the 1960 presidential candidates.\textsuperscript{184} He was controversial, hot-headed, and lacked the Allen spark, but audiences tuned in for the thrill of seeing what the unpredictable Paar would do tonight. For instance, in 1960, upset over an issue with the NBC censor, Paar simply walked off the set and did not return for over a month. His announcer, Hugh Downs, was left to fill the rest of the hour. Paar’s erratic nature resulted in a network policy of taping episodes in the early evening and airing them later, which also allowed them to stockpile episodes in case of emergency.\textsuperscript{185} Paar eventually left the program because the stress of dealing with the network was causing him health problems.\textsuperscript{186} The new host of 11:30 pm slot would change the trajectory of late night television and create a television institution.

For many, the 1962 entrance of Johnny Carson on \textit{The Tonight Show} was the true beginning of \textit{Tonight} as a powerful cultural force that extended beyond the confines of 11:30, dominating the late night landscape, even against stiff competition. It was during the 1970s, and after his California move, that Carson turned the show into an institution, even though it had already been on the air for almost ten years. The move to Burbank, which became a recurring gag within the show, had the effect of extending the NBC late night brand to Los Angeles. Now the brand incorporated both Manhattan and Hollywood appeal. Steven Stark compares Carson to Walter Cronkite. During the reports on the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Cronkite earned the nation’s trust and its ratings.\textsuperscript{187} Carson would become just as trusted and revered; he was the one entertainer welcome in bedrooms across the country. Before \textit{Tonight}, Carson was known as a game show host,

\textsuperscript{184} Stark, \textit{Glued to the Set}, 183.  
\textsuperscript{185} Edgerton, \textit{Columbia History}, 176.  
\textsuperscript{186} Timberg, \textit{Television Talk}, 50.  
\textsuperscript{187} Stark, \textit{Glued to the Set}, 183.
and he had even been considered for the role of Rob Petrie on what eventually would become *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, a role he lost because he was already too recognizable.\(^{188}\) When he arrived at NBC, the network arranged appearances on other shows, including the venerable *Jack Benny Program*, in a memorable episode in which Benny provided a mock-up of Carson’s set and sat through a model *Tonight Show*-style interview. This exposure helped to normalize Carson’s late-night arrival and style.

As Stark notes in *Glued to the Set*, the show is an institution that did not evolve smoothly, but rather emerged in punctuated fashion, as a totally new show with each new host.\(^{189}\) Carson truly made the show his own with the move to California, which is possibly one of the most discussed topics in relation to Carson, as mentioned above. The motivation behind the move had multiple facets, some professional and some personal. Off-camera, Carson’s second marriage was falling apart, and the move with his new girlfriend, and soon-to-be-wife, could provide a clean break.\(^{190}\) So it had personal element, but it also paid professional dividends. Carson had learned from Paar’s debacle after the censor incident that it was wise to keep his private life as closed off as possible.\(^{191}\) Therefore, he became a conduit rather than the sole focus of the show. Yet, at the same time, his pleasant on-screen persona made him the central ingredient, no matter which stars he hosted. The Carson whom America watched at night was as much of a

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\(^{189}\) Stark, *Glued to the Set*, 183.


\(^{191}\) Timberg, *Television Talk*, 51.
character as any he played or interviewed on the show. In his article on television comedy and American humor, Sanford Pinker notes that the all-around appeal of Carson’s television persona is akin to Mark Twain’s Tom Sawyer. Boyish charm and a neutral Nebraska accent can go a long way in winning the hearts of Americans.

In professional terms, Johnny Carson had viable competition for the late night spot for the first time, primarily from former *Tonight* writer Dick Cavett, who was more sophisticated (read: New York) than Carson. Not only did this mean competition in the ratings, but also competition for guests. New York was no longer the primary home of television, so many film and television stars had moved to California. The small pool of notables that came to New York were in high demand, and it made it difficult to book enough interesting guests each week. Additionally, because the show had to tape earlier in California, the cocktail party atmosphere that existed in New York would change the show’s tone dramatically. Hollywood, however, offered a slew of eager stars and personalities who were anxious to appear and close in proximity. The only logistics were a publicist’s phone call and a limo ride into Burbank.

At the network, Carson gained considerable control over the show after the California move, power that was unheard of before or after. He even had final say over who followed him at 12:30. This power was not unwarranted. In many years, Carson was responsible for 15–20% of the network’s total profits. After threatening to quit in 1980, he procured a five million dollar a year contract and ownership over *The Tonight*

194 Kashner, “Theeeeeeere’s Johnny!”
195 Carter, *The Late Shift*, 17.
Carson became a king maker (or career-killer) after the California move, making comedians into stars overnight with a simple wave over to the desk. Appearing on Carson became more than convenient; it became necessary. Success during an appearance meant winning over the audience, which meant winning over Johnny. Conversely, frequent guest host, Joan Rivers, saw her career almost destroyed when she started her own show without Johnny’s help. Viewing this as a betrayal of his mentorship, he blackballed her from *The Tonight Show*, a ban that was only officially lifted by Jimmy Fallon. Other comedians, such as Jerry Seinfeld, Roseanne Barr, and Ellen DeGeneres would become stars simply because Johnny called them over to the desk after their stand-up set. This summons amounted to an official acceptance onto the A-list. By the same token, failure to get “the wave” could be read as a rebuff. Many of these comedians would eventually bring in big money for NBC in the 1990s and 2000s, especially Seinfeld. After Carson’s 1992 retirement, there was no single venue that could act as such a powerful launching pad. In this way, the California move justified itself many times over.

One of the other careers that Carson’s launched was that of David Letterman. Letterman’s career at NBC started out as a daytime host, but it was quickly evident that his brand of comedy was better suited for the late night hours. He had also been serving as Carson’s guest host from time to time, the success of which convinced NBC to launch the daytime endeavor in the first place. From June 23 to October 24 of 1980, Letterman hosted a 90-minute morning talk show that looks suspiciously like *Late Night* and *The Late Show*. In retrospect, the show is an incubator for Letterman’s later bits and a proving ground for various personalities that appeared on his later shows. Letterman’s

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196 A sampling of clips from Letterman’s morning show is available on YouTube.
signature goofy style of comedy is evident on this show, best exemplified perhaps by Steve Martin’s appearance on the show. Martin – whose first late night smash success came with repeat hosting gigs on *Saturday Night Live* – appeared on stage still “asleep” in bed, and he spent the rest of the interview wearing pajamas and slippers.\(^{197}\) While the show itself is but a small portion of Letterman’s talk show career, it is an important bridge to the rest of Letterman’s late night repertoire.

As a result of part of Carson’s 1980 contract, his show was also shortened from 90 minutes to one hour. NBC wanted to continue to cash in on those 30 minutes, if not later into the night, and the network decided to create another late night talk show to follow Carson. NBC’s head of programming, Brandon Tartikoff, hoped to attract a youthful audience to the 12:30 slot, an audience the network was already reaching through *Saturday Night Live.*\(^{198}\) Carson’s audience was aging, and so was he. The network needed to continue to find new viewers, a Sisyphean task. Carson had also made subtle hints about who he preferred as a replacement when he retired. In a joke referencing the confusion after the recent assassination attempt on President Reagan, Carson asked “If I quit, what would the line of succession be? Would it be Letterman, Bush, Haig, or would it be Letterman, Bush, Tip O’Neill, and then Haig?”\(^{199}\) The point was made and understood at the network.

\(^{198}\) Carter, *The Late Shift*, 18.
\(^{199}\) *Ibid.*, 26; While President Reagan was under anesthesia after being shot by John Hinckley, Jr., Secretary of State Alexander Haig famously statement “I am in control here,” seemingly ignoring the established line of Presidential succession. It was later clarified that until Vice President George Bush was back in Washington D.C., Haig was the point person in the administration during the emergency.
The Late Show with David Letterman debuted on February 1, 1982. It was clear from the start that Letterman was not simply conducting a continuation of The Tonight Show. His first guest was Bill Murray, recent alum from Saturday Night Live, and Murray entertained the audience with a lounge-singer rendition of Olivia Newton-John’s hit song “Physical.” There was little viable competition at 12:30 a.m., and therefore Letterman (and later O’Brien, Fallon, and Meyers) could experiment more than the hosts of The Tonight Show. As Letterman put it: “Our audience doesn’t have to get up at eight in the morning.” Letterman’s show would inspire a new generation of comedians, and his tone remained largely unchanged through the rest of his time at NBC.

At the 1991 NBC up-fronts, the newly minted network president Warren Littlefield brought out a large group of stars for the advertisers. Ted Danson, Bill Cosby, and the permanent guest host of The Tonight Show, Jay Leno. After Leno performed a short set, Littlefield had one final star to bring out: Johnny Carson. During this appearance, as he told stories and jokes, Carson subtly noted that the coming season was his last year, a fact no one else in the room had been privy to at this point. It was a shock to the network, especially as other old favorites such as Cheers, The Golden Girls, and The Cosby Show were wrapping up and the newer programs were not taking off in the same way. However, the network had already put a plan in place to secure the future of The Tonight Show. A week before the up-fronts, Jay Leno had signed a contract for $6 million that guaranteed him the program when Carson stepped down. The new contract

200 Carter, The Late Shift, 27.
201 Ibid., 5 – 8; Newer programs on the network at the time included Seinfeld, which had its breakout season in 1992.
was secret for the moment, but the war over 11:30 started a week before Carson even announced his retirement. 

Upon Carson’s retirement in 1992, it was widely assumed that one of two people would take the reins the following fall. One of those men was Late Night host David Letterman, whose show followed Carson’s every night with Carson’s approval. The other was frequent guest host and stand-up comedian Jay Leno. Leno was very different from Johnny Carson, but the transition was fairly smooth at the network. In 1992, NBC was in the middle of its “Must See TV” era, ushered in by programs such as The Cosby Show, Cheers, and Hill Street Blues. Seinfeld was finally catching on, L.A. Law was necessary water cooler viewing, and Cheers was still going strong at season 10. NBC’s future was brighter than they could imagine, with Friends, ER, Frasier, and Will and Grace still on the horizon.

However, for the first time, Tonight had real competition in the form of its scorned former Late Night host. When Letterman was snubbed for Carson’s seat, he was offered a show at CBS in the 11:30 p.m. slot. No other network had really given NBC a run for its late night money, but poaching Letterman would be a coup for CBS, always eager to stake its own claim in the late night market. Letterman gave NBC an ultimatum: match CBS’s offer, or he would walk. NBC had already decided not to ditch Leno at The Tonight Show, but hoped that money in addition to other perks would keep Letterman at the network. To complicate matters, Cheers, a show on which “Must See TV” was built on, announced that its final season would end in the spring of 1993. Ted Danson, who played the central character of Sam Malone, was compelled by a number of personal and

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202 Carter, The Late Shift, 12.
professional factors to finally leave the show after 11 seasons. The network was panicking. Incidentally, these negotiations and power plays were as gripping for many Americans as any leadership struggle in the Kremlin during the Cold War: the combination of secrecy, celebrity, publicity, and personality was irresistible to television columnists and readers. Coverage only amplified the point that late-night stakes were high and that decisions mattered.

Letterman came with a built-in audience of loyal viewers who were willing to change networks after Carson’s retirement. They had already made their switch, preferring Letterman’s edgier comedy style. The Leno / Letterman “war” had truly divided the late night viewing audience, although Leno would typically garner larger ratings. Despite the ratings, the Letterman-Leno war would continue to haunt NBC and would strangely influence events almost 20 years later.

When Letterman left the network to host his Tonight Show competitor on CBS, NBC also needed to find a new host for the Late Night slot. Enter Conan O’Brien: SNL writer, Harvard grad, and former writer for The Simpsons. O’Brien has a unique comedy pedigree, in that he did not pursue comedy in a singular way. Primarily, he is a writer, which provides an appropriate outlet for his witty and intellectual brand of humor, but he followed every path that could possibly lead to performing, including tap dance. Few, if any, writers would make such a commitment. After graduating from Harvard, he got a job with HBO writing for their parody show Not Necessarily the News, which was sort of

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a precursor to *The Daily Show*. This job led to a number of other writing gigs, most notably with *Saturday Night Live* and *The Simpsons*.

If comedy had a family tree, Conan O’Brien would form one of the closest branches to David Letterman. Comedians revered Johnny Carson, but Letterman energized and inspired a new generation of weirder personalities who were trying to find their place in the television comedy landscape. O’Brien came very close to writing for Letterman in the late 1980s, but was rejected simply because the Letterman staff already had too many *Harvard Lampoon* alums in the ranks. In an interview years later, Conan’s recounting of this anecdote was concluded with Letterman saying “Well, our loss.” O’Brien was well situated to take over *Late Night* in 1993. He would satisfy Letterman’s established audience at 12:30 a.m., but he would not directly compete with Dave in the same time slot. Conan’s time at SNL gave him the correct comic sensibility to write for those people weird enough to be awake at 12:30 a.m. He also had maintained a positive relationship when he left SNL with Lorne Michaels, who became the show’s executive producer. Michaels had conquered another portion of the NBC late night stake. He was in a unique position to do so, because NBC pulled a lot of its comedy talent directly from *Saturday Night Live*, and Michaels’ prestige at the network and positive reputation among SNL alums allowed him to take part in the endeavors of his former employees.

In 2004, NBC did something unprecedented. Acknowledging the results of letting good talent go to a competing network (see: David Letterman), the network did

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204 Competition with Letterman was a contributing factor towards the failure of *The Tonight Show With Conan O’Brien*. Two similar comics were competing for the same sorts of audiences, while Leno had offered a different type of comedy for an older, more traditional population.

everything it could to keep Conan on the payroll with his contract negotiation, including promising him the *Tonight Show* hosting gig in 2009. NBC was fully prepared to push Leno out in order to keep the younger O’Brien. However, when 2009 arrived, Leno was still very popular (read: profitable), and NBC offered him a primetime spot at 10:00 each night leading into local news and O’Brien’s *Tonight Show*. Both shows were unsuccessful. O’Brien was paid out of his contract, and Leno returned to 11:30.²⁰⁶

O’Brien’s move to *The Tonight Show* had again opened up the desk at *Late Night*. With Michaels as an executive producer, it was unsurprising that a *Saturday Night Live* alum was suggested as a replacement. Jimmy Fallon had left *SNL* in 2004 in order to pursue a film career, which like many of his predecessors’, simply didn’t pan out. His strongest role on *SNL* was playing himself at the Weekend Update desk with Tina Fey. He was charming and friendly, and he seemed like a perfect fit.

Seth Meyers creates a pattern of sorts with the *Late Night* hosts, in that he had inherited the position of Weekend Update anchor when Fallon’s co-host, Tina Fey, left the show in 2006. Meyers took over as head writer and co-hosted the segment for a few years with Amy Poehler. When Poehler left to star on *Parks and Recreation*, Meyers hosted the segment solo until he made the logical move to *Late Night*.

### Saturday Night Live

While *Saturday Night Live* seems like an outsider in the discussion of NBC late night, as it is not a talk show, its creation was a direct result of a command from Johnny Carson. Until 1975, NBC aired re-runs of *The Tonight Show* on Saturday and Sunday

²⁰⁶ For a more in-depth analysis of this “late night war,” which goes beyond this dissertation’s purview, I suggest reading Bill Carter’s *The War for Late Night*. 
nights, bringing in ad revenue on the weekends. However, Carson was looking to take more time off during the week, and he told the network to air re-runs during the week, a request that speaks to Carson’s power at the network. NBC had two options for the weekend slots. The network could either cede the slots to the local affiliates, which would also cede the ad revenue, or they could come up with new programming to fill the slot.207

The NBC executives, led by President Herb Schlosser, did not quite know what to do with this new program. Many of the early ideas looked to Carson’s established (read: older) audience; one such idea was a variety show hosted by impressionist Rich Little. Before the network had settled on a concept, Schlosser hired Lorne Michaels to be the show’s executive producer, and his experience with both comedy specials and *Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In* helped set in motion the show that would become *Saturday Night Live*.208 In essence, a show created directly because of a demand from Johnny Carson would pave the way for the next late night kingpin to emerge at NBC.

There is no denying that NBC created the concept of late night television, both through the weeknight talk shows and *Saturday Night Live*. Even in their definitive oral history of *Saturday Night Live*, Tom Shales and James Andrew Miller note that the network “had a history of invading untapped territory” with the creation of Weaver’s T-H-T blocks.209 Theirs was a pioneering effort to claim new territory in the best American fashion.

In addition to attracting audiences during the late night hours, NBC’s weekday hosts helped to create the model for almost all late night talk shows. Steve Allen’s

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original format has largely gone unchanged. While each host has put his own touch on the brand, the overall structure of the program remains. Dick Cavett, one of NBC’s first real competitors, deviated pretty heavily from this original format, focusing more on serious, long-form discussion with newsmakers and pop culture icons over comedy and publicity for up-and-comers. However, his format has not been easily replicated, partly because his show’s success was largely due to a cult of personality, akin to Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert today.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the success of NBC’s late night brand is the plethora of imitators on other networks and cable television. Some hosts, like Letterman and O’Brien, are simply taking their respective “shows on the road” to CBS and TBS. If they broke too much with their established formats, audiences might stray to the more familiar. However, every other late night show, with the exception of Late Night with Seth Myers, opens the show with a monologue, moves to a gag or funny segment, two guests, and a musical number or stand-up set.

Saturday Night Live’s imitators have had far less luck. In Living Color did bring more diversity to the television comedy landscape, but it could not sustain its popularity after the original cast, which included the Wayans Brothers and Jim Carrey, left the show. Fox’s MadTV has its fan base, but few of its segments became water cooler fare, and the show retained an off-brand air. SCTV, produced by Second City Toronto, had a cult following and featured a number of recognizable comic talents, but it suffered a similar fate to In Living Color, going off the air with its most famous cast members. Of all the competitors, SCTV has roots closest to SNL, and it even shared some cast members. For that reason, it is not viewed among fans as an “enemy” show, but as
somehow connected. Still, *SNL* alone remained the identifiable brand, its mark of consistency remaining strong even as the cast evolved over the decades.

In terms of *The Tonight Show*, most viewers cannot separate Johnny Carson from the show, even if he has not hosted the show in over 20 years. The link between Carson and the program was so strong that people might call *The Tonight Show* “The Johnny Carson Show,” or discuss what they saw “on Carson.” The post-Carson identity of the show has largely been focused around how the current host can preserve the Carson legacy. Leno performed that task well, while O’Brien struggled. This result might be explained in terms of comedy pedigree. Leno was of the generation that found success through Carson’s show. For an up-and-coming comic, the biggest break one could get was to be called over to talk to Carson after a stand-up set. Leno, Jerry Seinfeld, Ellen DeGeneres, and Roseanne Barr are all examples of comedians who got their big breaks through Carson’s “king making” power. O’Brien, on the other hand, came of age inspired by Letterman, whose sense of humor was much stranger than Carson’s. Letterman was not looking for mass appeal, but he had the support and implied approval of a Carson lead-in to craft his own sort of weird comedy that inspired many comics who are now in their 40s and 50s. He also filled a niche comedy void during *Saturday Night Live*’s weaker years in the 1980s.

At its core, NBC late night’s popularity is really brand loyalty. Even has hosts come and go, most loyal viewers remain NBC viewers, even if they temporarily stray during the transitional periods. There is a clear phenomenon at work within which millions of viewers expect to see rewarding entertainment on NBC, and associate the network with those expectations. When it works, which it usually does, this becomes a
self-reinforcing loop. Of course, it puts pressure on executives and programs to perform to NBC levels. It bears comparison to any iconic sports franchise. Fans expect to see good basketball from the Los Angeles Lakers or winning baseball from the New York Yankees. Thus, networks like to broadcast these teams. In this case, NBC’s brand carries the positive connotation of a particular and popular television entertainment destination. This concept is most evident in terms of David Letterman. When NBC chose not fight for him after Carson’s retirement, the network essentially created its own competition at CBS with a rabid fan base. This is not to say that NBC’s decision was incorrect, as Leno still regularly defeated Letterman in the ratings, but the network fragmented its audience before it even had competition from basic and subscription cable services.

NBC’s actions after the Leno / Letterman debacle illustrate that the network has the corporate capacity to learn from its past mistakes. American commercial television is very much a hit-or-miss business. NBC should, and largely does, avoid tampering with the late night brands, both weeknight and Saturday night, because customers are loyal to these brands for ineffable reasons. The ratings for the three programs in this case study have historically been lowest during periods of transition, which result in consumer doubt. Each time there is a major overhaul at Saturday Night Live, either with the staff or the cast, the perennial “Saturday Night Dead” jokes appear. While every viewer seems to have his or her own opinion on the “dark years” of SNL, 1980 – 1984 is generally considered the weakest. These were the years that Lorne Michaels stepped away from the show, believing it was the correct and safe time for him to go. He thought the brand would carry on its momentum without him. He was incorrect, and only his return brought
the show back to anything resembling its former heights. In this way, Michaels became
the living embodiment of the network’s cachet.

On The Tonight Show, O’Brien probably had the most difficulty with ratings.
O’Brien was not really on long enough for his ratings to settle out, and the network never
forced viewers to adopt a new host, as they had before, by leaving Leno accessible at
10:00 p.m. Loyal Tonight Show viewers did not feel the need to stay up until 11:30 to
watch the weird, pale new guy. They simply watched Leno at ten and fell asleep after the
evening news. Both Leno and O’Brien struggled in this set up, but Leno’s ratings
rebounced when he came back to The Tonight Show.

Fallon and Meyers have not appeared to experience the “growing pains” of their
predecessors. There are a few main reasons for this. First, both men were recognized and
respected entities from their stints at the Saturday Night Live “Weekend Update” desk.
Unlike other sketches on Saturday Night Live, “Weekend Update” uses the actor’s name
each week, giving them higher levels of recognition than their peers. Past hosts include
Chevy Chase (who had his own failed talk show in the late 1980s / early 1990s), Jane
Curtin, Kevin Nealon, Tina Fey, and Amy Poehler. Second, both had the support of
Lorne Michaels, which allowed them more power from the beginning. As mentioned, it
was widely understood that Michaels epitomized NBC success, and therefore his
imprimatur meant a great deal. Finally, Fallon and Meyers both understand the
importance of digital branding through digital-friendly sketches and segments. While
viewers might not be tuning in live, NBC’s contract with the streaming subscription
service Hulu allows anyone to watch clips or episodes the next day (or in the case of
Meyers, the same day).
NBC has also come to understand the importance of careers created at their late night programs, and they seek to retain them when possible. There are the obvious examples of O’Brien, Fallon, and Meyers, who cut their teeth on Saturday Night Live, but NBC’s scripted programs have also benefited from the training ground that is SNL. The most recent and successful examples would be Tina Fey and Amy Poehler, who were members of a very strong female cast at SNL, with Fey also serving as head writer. Both women left the show after the births of their first children (Fey in 2005 and Poehler in 2008) to star in their own sitcoms. Fey provided a faux-behind the scenes look at SNL on her show 30 Rock. Her cast pulled from other NBC / SNL personalities, including Tracy Morgan, Jack McBrayer, and frequent SNL host Alec Baldwin. Poehler’s single-camera mockumentary Parks and Recreation also used SNL alums, although largely in a guest star capacity. Fred Armisen, Will Forte, Louis C.K., and Jenny Slate all made appearances. NBC is clearly not ignoring the crop of talented comic actors and writers at its fingertips.

In many ways, the first three hosts can be seen as the ones who built the brand, while Leno, O’Brien, and Fallon can be viewed as brand protectors. After Steve Allen left, Jack Paar helped to raise the intellectual bar, interviewing presidential candidates and other political figures and making it clear that smart viewers liked the show. It may seem to some that Paar’s primary legacy was his unpredictability, but he raised the level of discourse in a way that Steve Allen – who secured the show’s humor and broad appeal – could not. The combination of format and respect that Allen and Paar brought to the show allowed Carson to come in and create a true franchise. Anyone who was anyone
showed up to talk to Johnny, which allowed the show to evolve into an American institution as deserving of study as any film, magazine, or other popular text.

Carson is revered among the late night hosts, which is evident when his descendants talk about him. The fights that occurred over replacing Johnny Carson might just be a misplaced form of flattery. Note that the fight is never over replacing the current host, but is actually over protecting and continuing Johnny’s legacy. Another piece of evidence could be the title of the show. Paar and Carson both slightly altered the title of the show when they took over the time slot, but all hosts after Carson have kept *The Tonight Show*, adding only their names. Once the institution had been established, the name had to remain. This trend is also true at both *Late Night* and *Saturday Night Live*.

Late night, and by extension NBC’s, identity also comes through geographic location. Most importantly, NBC actually has a physical icon to call its home. CBS might have the Ed Sullivan Theatre, but one of the most popular tourist attractions in New York is the NBC Experience Tour. The network is tied in the American imagination to Manhattan. Tina Fey’s sitcom *30 Rock*, which is loosely based on her experiences at *Saturday Night Live*, pays special attention to the importance of the physical location of NBC, which could be just as important in understanding the real life iterations of NBC late night. In an audaciously successful act of network imperialism, NBC manages simultaneously to claim all the appeal of Manhattan and Hollywood. Its singular late night formulae creates the bridge for these twin entertainment capitals, which are brands in their own rights, to appear in American bedrooms.

Carson truly created his own brand by moving *The Tonight Show* to Burbank. Like any good American pioneer, Carson set himself even further apart from the legacy
of Allen and Paar when he went west. In keeping with the “myth of the American west,” Carson had to strike out on his own geographically to make the show truly his own. By extension, Letterman and Fallon did the same thing moving to New York with their shows in order to be fresh and innovative in a safe way. They had the protection of the network and the late night brand by sticking to the geographic location more closely tied to NBC.

*Saturday Night Live* assisted in the revitalization of New York, both in the 1970s and following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. When *SNL* was still in the early planning stages, many assumed it would be filmed in Southern California. However, Schlosser and others wanted the show to be live, something that should not be done from the west coast. The east coast market is the primary target for live broadcasts, so the show needed to be filmed from New York. Schlosser is quoted as saying that “Everything had moved to Burbank. Even Carson had moved to Burbank. Which left a void in 30 Rock.” To preserve the energy of a live comedy sketch performance, as well as the live musical numbers, the show had to be aired “live from New York.”

It was not just 30 Rockefeller Center that was missing something, but the entire city of New York. The 1970s were a rough time for the city. Bankruptcy, blackouts, and riots, in addition to the seedy reputation of Times Square, had turned Middle America on the city long considered the center of the world. 1975, the year of *SNL*’s debut was perhaps the worst year, illustrating the rapid rise and fall in the city over the previous 30 years.

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Post-WWII New York was a place of rapid growth and change, in almost every imaginable way. The construction that had ceased during the Depression and World War II restarted, primarily under the watchful eyes of Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, so memorably portrayed in Robert A. Caro’s *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. Of course, while Caro’s biography chronicles the back end of Moses’ controversial career, there was a necessarily massive rise prior to the so-called fall.\(^{211}\) The ever-controversial Moses transformed New York City, for better or for worse, during his tenure with the city. His first job in the city was for the Municipal Research Bureau, and he soon found himself as an advisor to New York Governor Al Smith in charge of civil service reform.\(^{212}\) Smith then gave Moses the job that would provide him his power over the next 35 years, which was Commissioner of Parks, Construction, and Highways. In order to complete his projects, which were intended to convert New York City into a city for the growing car culture, frequently tore neighborhoods apart and sparked controversy among residents and city leaders alike. His power was largely unchecked, and even when it was questioned or restricted, Moses found ways around these limitations. It was not until the landmarks preservation movement of the 1960s that many questioned his ideas on urban planning, which emulated the theories of Le Corbusier. Jane Jacobs, who mourned the loss of her city in *The Life and Death of the Great American City*, lead this movement, most famously against the demolition of Penn Station and the construction of the Lower Manhattan Expressway, the latter of which was successful in preventing the


destruction of another neighborhood. In 1968, Moses, who was well past the state’s official retirement age of 65, was finally relieved of his last remaining position with the state.\footnote{Goldberger, “Robert Moses.”} Moses’s changes, along with the transformative construction of the original World Trade Center complex, completely altered the Manhattan that many knew from the movies. No longer a city of neighborhoods, many were isolated and living in an increasingly dirty and dangerous New York.

As the World Trade Center’s “twin towers” were opening in 1972 and 1973, the city was entering its darkest period. It was during these period that the city notoriously sought bankruptcy protection. As Mayor Abe Beame and Governor Hugh Carey ineffectually sought federal support from President Gerald Ford, one of the most famous headlines in American journalism history appeared in the October 29, 1975 \textit{Daily News} – FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD. That was the low point, when New York seemed like a city that could no longer manage itself. Of course, the next part of the story was the way in which financiers like Felix Rohaytn arranged relief, setting the state for the city’s renewal. All of these twists and turns played out on American front pages and news programs, while NBC continued to be associated with the Big Apple.

In the 1940s and 1950s, live television was almost always broadcast from New York City, a trend that began to shift in the late 1950s. NBC was physically tied to the city and its architecture, first through Radio City Music Hall, then through Rockefeller Center. From the beginning of the Center’s existence, NBC was always the largest tenant, and buildings were designed with the express purpose of broadcasting radio and
television.\textsuperscript{214} 8H, which now houses \textit{Saturday Night Live}, was in the early days the home of Arturo Toscanini. The attributes of the first \textit{Tonight} show hosts reflected the New York-ness of live television. While really very different people, Allen, Paar, and Carson were all urbane, sophisticated, and embodied the type of cultural background that Pat Weaver had sought for his late-night programming in 1954.

However, Johnny Carson became an institution unto himself. His popularity on \textit{Tonight} made him beloved all over the nation, and when he moved to California, as much of the television industry had done a decade earlier, it no longer mattered that he had left New York. It was not seen as a retreat, but as a typical American relocation to an attractive and sunny locale. In 1972, New York City no longer stood mainly for high culture and sophistication. It stood for crime, garbage, and vice.\textsuperscript{215}

When \textit{Saturday Night Live} debuted in 1975, the city was at its lowest point in almost every respect. It had nearly gone bankrupt and was almost left to disintegrate by President Ford, who later bailed the city out financially. The 1970s started out with a ten-cent fare increase on the subway, which was meant to fund infrastructure repair and deficit reduction.\textsuperscript{216} Still, the fee increase was unable to cover its intended costs, as ridership decreased significantly in the wake of the hike, and fares were again raised.\textsuperscript{217}

\textsuperscript{215} A personal anecdote clearly sums up 1970s New York City for me: My mother first visited New York on a bus trip from her native Gettysburg in the late 1970s. As her bus trudged up the exit ramp of the Lincoln Tunnel, my mother’s first sight inside the city was of a man relieving himself on the walls of the tunnel. It was truly a New York moment.
\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Ibid.}
The subways deteriorated in tandem with the rest of the city, and in many cases trains were forced to slow to 10 M.P.H. on stretches of bad track called “red flag zones.”218 On Christmas Eve, 1975, David Berkowitz, or Son of Sam, committed his first attack, and the following summer would be known as the “Summer of Sam,” bringing terror to a city already on edge. Landlords in the Bronx and Brooklyn were paying teenagers to burn down their uninhabitable apartment buildings for insurance money. The city was quite literally “flaming out.”

Even if it was New York’s lowest moment, hope was still springing eternal on a cultural level. *A Chorus Line*, which would go on to be one of Broadway’s longest running shows, opened in 1975, as did Kander and Ebb’s *Chicago*. For many Broadway enthusiasts, this era was a new golden age, seeing the best work from Stephen Sondheim and Kander & Ebb, while also witnessing the beginnings of Andrew Lloyd Weber’s career. Through such cultural productions, Americans could see that New York would not be down forever and was rising again.

*Saturday Night Live* signaled a similar resurgence for television. All three networks were mired in a theory called LOP, or “Least Objectionable Programming,” which really just made most sitcoms into nothing special, especially in the age following the transformational sitcoms from Norman Lear and Mary Tyler Moore. There were signs of intellectual life here and there, such as *Soap* or *Taxi*, but the networks were just scrambling for a bigger slice of a three-piece pie. *Saturday Night Live* was different, and it was allowed to be different because it aired in a time slot where NBC had nothing to lose and everything to gain. NBC would see a revival in the 1980s and 1990s of its

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218 Feinman, “Transit Authority.”
comedy line-up, and perhaps the success of *Saturday Night Live* provided such a boost. Later, many of NBC’s comedy stars would come straight from SNL: Conan O’Brien, Julia Louis-Dreyfus (*Seinfeld*), Tina Fey (*30 Rock*), Amy Poehler (*Parks and Recreation*), Jimmy Fallon, and Seth Meyers. In her article “‘Live From New York!’” Susan Murray focuses on the simultaneous rebranding of both NBC and New York City in the mid-1970s, as *Saturday Night Live* provides rehabilitation for them both.\(^{219}\)

Perhaps it is too early to tell, but based on historical context, Jimmy Fallon bringing *Tonight* back to New York is significant on a number of levels. First, New York is “safe” again. Mayor Rudy Guiliani cleaned up Times Square and made the city a major family destination. Some disparagingly refer to this era as the “Disneyfication” of Times Square. After 9/11, there was justifiable reluctance to come to the island, but Guiliani’s attitude made it OK to venture across the Hudson.

Second, for any *Tonight* show host after Johnny Carson, there will always be a comparison, and it may be best to separate oneself as clearly as possible. Jay Leno thrived, while Conan O’Brien struggled. Jay Leno was nothing like Carson, and his laid back nature made California the perfect place to be. He is a stand-up comic who still works Vegas when he can, and he is very much a “west coast guy.” Leno is a notorious car and motorcycle fanatic, which fits in well with the car-centric culture of Southern California. Leno is blue collar (quite literally: he has often been seen outside the studio wearing denim button-down work shirts), while Carson was white collar and suave. Both embodied the California of their times.

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Many felt that Conan O’Brien could bring back the sophistication and fun of Carson’s *Tonight*. O’Brien had enlisted his old *Late Night* sidekick, Andy Richter, to join him on the show, and both were very excited to be part of the franchise. That said, O’Brien is very much an “east coast guy.” He is from Boston, attended Harvard, and is very much of the Northeast urban sensibility. Many of his first *Tonight* show sketches focused on how weird California was. He even attempted to swim the Los Angeles River, which is at its best a ditch that trickles through the city filled with garbage.\(^{220}\) His awkward on-screen personality no longer worked, because he just seemed truly uncomfortable with his new surroundings.

By moving to the show back to New York, Jimmy Fallon is stepping out of Carson’s shadow, at least geographically. Television is coming back to New York, especially thanks to the efforts of producers like Lorne Michaels, and Fallon has access to guests of all sorts. O’Brien was almost set up to fail by the network, but perhaps putting the show on his adopted home turf could have provided him some advantages.

Finally, Jimmy Fallon’s *Tonight* brings Lorne Michaels to the entire national late-night line-up on NBC. Michaels has long been the producer of *Late Night*, but lacked control over the 11:30 slot during the week. It brings cohesion to late-night television on NBC, which is also helped by the hosts of the two late-night talk programs. Fallon also reminds many viewers of the “classic” Carson years. Fallon loves convincing his guests and friends to play silly games and perform sketches, just as Carson did. Fallon has

\(^{220}\) O’Brien also had difficulty transferring his show from the 12:30 spot to *The Tonight Show*. Many of the bits that played well among the night owl crowd did not do as well with those who had been raised on Carson’s more sophisticated humor. Many characters, such as the fan-favorite “Masturbating Bear” had to be scrapped all-together. When O’Brien moved to cable, he no longer had the rights to any of his old bits, and he reinvented some in order to skirt legal issues.
maintained a balance between protecting the brand and making the show a unique experience that only he could bring to audiences. In the long shadow of Carson, that is a pretty incredible feat.

NBC is not oblivious to the importance of its late night line-up, especially in retaining the audiences that first came to the network for comedy, a genre that is harder to find on the network than ever before. In March, 2015, the network announced that it would offer a subscription service composed of SNL / Tonight Show bundles for those who have “cut the cord.” Audiences can still get the shows through Hulu, but for those who only want these two programs, the fee may be as low as $2.50 a month.221 Understanding why the NBC late night brand stands apart allows this dissertation to better explore why the network as a whole has maintained its status as an American media institution. Late night has buoyed the network in troubled times, as well as connecting the network to its New York roots. The personalities from The Tonight Show, Late Night, and Saturday Night Live provide the network with iconic identities to live through vicariously. Names like Carson, Letterman, Leno, Radner, Murray, Murphy, and Fey all created careers at the network through late night, and the network has reaped the benefits for more than 60 years.

Case Study B - NBC’s Olympic Coverage: Tales of Transnationalism

In the summer of 1996, the McGee family was primed for the Atlanta Centennial Games. My sister and I had just started tumbling lessons, and of course, that meant we were on the road to Olympic stardom. I even had an official Team USA gymnastics leotard in which to practice my forward rolls, handstands, and cartwheels. We were glued to the set during the women’s gymnastics competition, cheering for “the Magnificent Seven,” a septet of the greatest gymnasts we had ever seen. During the vault, Kerri Strug, who was toed as a new Mary Lou Retton, sprinted down the path to the vault, flipped, and landed in a heap on the mat. Her ankle was broken, and her landing ruined her score. She could get gold if she vaulted again and stuck the landing. In a moment almost unparalleled in Olympic sport, she went for the second vault. And she landed it. Those sorts of moments are what Olympic coverage is made of, and for my generation, NBC is the place to find them. Although ABC’s Olympic coverage is perhaps more famous to Baby Boomers, later generations will only know the Olympics on NBC. While ABC did set the stage for a strongly human-interest, upbeat style of Olympic storytelling, which Americans came to consider a requirement for presentation of the Games, that network could not hold on to its prize. NBC outbid ABC for the Games and took over the broadcasts, bringing in millions of American viewers and adding the Olympics to the network’s repertoire. The network’s coverage has evolved from run-of-the-mill airing of the events, to misguided attempts at additional revenue streams, to the current concept of wielding power over the Games themselves to make the potential coverage more profitable. NBC also attempts to make the Games more profitable by balancing the need to attract American viewers, while also appeasing other audiences internationally.
Since 1896, the modern Olympiad has presumably brought the world together to compete in various athletic contests, allowing the medalists to say that they are truly the best in the world. On the one hand, the Games were rekindled from ancient antecedents with a frankly utopian goal, to advance world peace through congenial international competition. On the other hand, the Games obviously function as a nationalistic event and are treated as such by many around the world, including host nations. At first, the resurrected Games were modest affairs, primarily including nations that were already allied and friendly. Often, in the early days, imperial nations such as Japan or Austria-Hungary included athletes from their subject peoples. There were fewer nations, less media coverage, and smaller competitions during the first decades after the rebirth of what its partisans called the Olympic Movement. But today, we have a world with over 200 nations, and each considers its moment in the flag procession at the Game’s opening a necessary demonstration of nationhood. However, as the Games have grown, so have their reach. Newsreels showed moviegoers the greatest athletes of the day in an era before most professional sports, and radio reporters and newspaper writers covered the Games in Amsterdam, Paris, and Berlin. World War II brought the Games to a temporary halt before the 1948 Games in London and St. Moritz. In the 1950s, television brought the Games inside our homes, and as the Games grew in participation and importance, so have the stakes for the media. For the first time, broadcast rights to such otherwise arcane events such as skiing or track and field were seen as valuable properties to be auctioned off and bought. Currently, NBC holds the exclusive contract for American media broadcast of the Olympics until 2032, and they have aired the Games in the United States consistently since 2002. Through manipulation of the Olympic schedule and how the
Games are broadcast, NBC shapes American perceptions of the world outside our borders, feeding into the concept of transnationalism. While one can argue that perhaps NBC, being the largest media presence at the Games, should air neutral programming, it makes good business sense for the network to make their coverage relatable. Everyone involved in sports broadcasting knows that the key to truly high ratings is to go beyond the sports fan and to include the casual viewer. This strategy requires the broadcaster and its competition to collaborate on making the contest in question a cultural event, rather than just a sporting contest. An example of this outside of the Olympics is the Super Bowl. It attracts so many viewers not because everyone watching loves football or expects a close game, but because the day itself has become a social occasion. The Olympics are similar. Television invades the private space of the American home, and if viewers can truly relate to the athletes and their stories, audiences are more likely to tune in. In this case study, I seek to show the applications of American studies to this topic through data analysis of ratings and audience shares; rhetorical analysis of opening ceremonies; and synthesis of public decision made by NBC about its programming.

While well discussed in the media, the Olympic Games do not enjoy the same level of academic discussion as the other topics addressed here, even when considering ABC’s legendary coverage in the 1970s. It is odd that this is so, since the Olympics themselves have long been understood to have a frankly propagandistic element, which is of interest to scholars of international relations and history. Leni Riefenstahl’s documentary on the 1936 Berlin games, dominated by Jessie Owens, remains a totemic text in this regard. The general neglect of Olympics studies may be a function of academia’s sometimes-tentative relationship with sports. Some historians who do cover
the Games concentrate on athletics results, which are not the crux of this examination. The Games are too often largely overlooked, save for those with especially memorable drama or exceptional feats. The 1972 Munich Olympics are especially noteworthy for reasons both athletic and political. American swimmer Mark Spitz set the long-standing record for gold medals, while Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut wowed audiences and raised the level of skill in women’s gymnastics. It was also the scene of the massacre of nine Israeli athletes by Palestinian terrorists, who kidnapped the team and executed the hostages in a bid to force the world to pay attention to their non-sports-related grievances. This event became the signature development during the terrorism phase that began in the 1960s with hijackings and lasted into the 1980s with assorted bombings and assassinations. David Clay Large’s *Munich 1972: Tragedy, Terror, and Triumph at the Olympic Games* provides both a history of one of the more thrilling events, but also contextualizes the games culturally and allows other researchers to understand what scope of research is necessary to properly discuss an Olympic competition.²²² What was so challenging about the 1972 Games was that the storytelling motif in place – namely, a formula to cover athletics and make heroes out of selected participants – was jarringly at odds with an act of international terrorism only tangentially related to sports. The fact that the International Olympic Committee, so fond of peace-related platitudes about how the games bring about better world relations, was totally clueless about how to react as the murders unfolded, made the situation all the more obviously fraught with difficulty. But certainly, NBC’s treatment of the Olympics became a major part of the network’s

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brand identity, particularly since the games were so hotly contested and chased after by different networks.

If one asks a Baby Boomer about famous network branding in the history of television sports, the boomer will almost certainly reply with a tale of ABC’s *Wide World of Sports* or *Monday Night Football* with Howard Cossell. According to my mother, Saturday afternoon television was all about watching any number of commonplace or international sports. *Wide World* concentrated on sports such as diving or relay racing not customarily thought of as spectator-friendly. It packaged them attractively by wrapping up the contest with tie-ins to drama and heroism, often concentrating on the personal stories of the participants. This was a new idea. Arledge allowed sports coverage to evolve from simply watching and commentating on the game play to creating a compelling drama around the players. The Olympic Games feature sports that only penetrate public consciousness every four years. That very obscurity actually enhances the television value, so the sacrifices of the athletes to reach that pinnacle, is an excellent foundation for these sagas. Other boomers may emotionally recall the moment on September 6, 1972 when Jim McKay reported “They’re all gone,” in reference to the Israeli coaches and athletes who were killed in the Munich massacre. It is certain that ABC – which always had a lower budget and therefore needed to be clever with lesser properties – played the original role in setting up the Olympics as an American television ritual. But golden memories of the old days in ABC coverage were nostalgic very soon after the smaller network made its success. NBC, seeing the value of the Games and believing that it could make them even more visible and lucrative, took over the Olympics and never looked back. As it happened, the Moscow Games that year were
boycotted by the United States. But that was a one-off, and NBC kept believing in the value of the property and its ability to stamp Olympic coverage with its own brand.

Therefore, if one asks the same question about watching the Olympics on television of a member of Generation X or a “Millennial,” NBC has always been the king of Olympic coverage. The Magnificent Seven and Kerry Strug’s vault on a broken ankle in Atlanta; Michael Phelps touching the wall to win his eighth gold in Beijing; Gabriella Douglas and the Fab Five going for the gold in London. These memories are shaped more than we realize by the coverage that NBC has provided steadily since 2000 and will provide until at least 2032.

One obvious lens through which to view the 21st century Olympic Games is the Cold War and its aftermath. For many years, there was a clear cut “enemy” at the Olympics for the United States and its allies. The Soviet Union was generally the big, bad, team – although this could vary, as when the cute, pigtailed Olga Korbut won American hearts. Soviet satellite nations could be rivals or occasionally favorites, as when Nadia Comenici, of Romania, won over viewers in 1976. When the Soviets boycotted the Los Angeles Games, Romania’s team was cheered and supported by Americans for showing up, even though their nation was part of the Warsaw Pact. In varied ways, therefore, the Cold War could be a gift for creative producers in search of a meta-story angle. During Hitler’s era, Germany hosted the 1936 Games in Berlin. His goal was to show the dominance of the Aryan race through these Games, but American athletes like Jesse Owens crushed that ideal. Wars typically cancelled the Games (1916, 1940, 1944), but the Cold War was a different sort of conflict. For 40 years, the Olympic Games were as much a part of the Cold War as any armed conflict, and it played out live
on national television. In some cases, we could not help but root for incredible icons, such as Romania’s Nadia Comaneci, but most of the more exciting matches were between the United States and the Soviet Union. A 1984 article by Michael Vlahos outlines this idea, but even his analysis is tainted with the “us versus them” mentality, as he claims that the Soviet Union is the entity that “corrupted” the Games, rather than both Cold War combatants being responsible. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reorganization of Europe, it was less clear who the “enemy” was. The enemies of the United States, primarily terrorist organizations, were not participating in the Olympics and worked under the radar. NBC had to find a new way to frame its coverage.

One American studies lens that is helpful in looking at NBC’s coverage of the Olympics is the recent “transnational turn.” It can be argued that transnationalism has three separate, but inter-related, definitions. First, transnational scholarship can be a comparative examination of the Americas, defining “American” beyond the borders of the United States, including Latin America, Canada, and Mexico. Transnational work can also be analyses of American life (defined more narrowly as the United States) performed by international scholars. Finally, it can deal with ideas of “postnational” citizenship, which is the definition I choose to apply here. We are looking at a media environment that creates fluid borders through corporate globalization and the access afforded by the Internet.

American studies scholar Shelley Fisher Fishkin is a champion of the transnational turn, and her 2004 Presidential Address to the American Studies Association (ASA) is especially important in understanding both the method and its use in popular culture studies. A key to understanding her perspective is to grasp that “transnationalism” is not a synonym for “internationalism.” The latter merely points to more than one nation, while the former presupposes a “decentering” in which no national perspective is privileged. In this speech, she lays out the purpose of American studies: “The goal of American studies scholarship is not exporting and championing an arrogant, pro-American nationalism but understanding the multiple meanings of America and American culture in all their complexity.”

While there has been a lot of negative discussion surrounding NBC’s coverage of the Olympic Games, especially from those on Twitter and other social media sites, this case study is not meant to make value judgments. Rather, it is looking at NBC as what it truly is: a media corporation. Its primary objective, as cynical as it may sound, is to pull large profits for its parent company. However, I cannot fully analyze NBC’s coverage of the Olympics without considering transnationalism. Corporate media and the Internet have made this “flat world” possible, and the Olympic Games are a clear example of how fluid our borders truly are. The flat-world hypothesis, put into circulation by New York Times columnist and author Thomas Friedman, argues that in the 21st century, national frontiers are no

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longer barriers to information or capital transfer.\footnote{226} It stands to reason, in Friedman’s flattened world, that coverage of major events like the Olympics might require a transnational approach, rather than a parochial, nationalistic approach. The same argument holds for American Studies. In Fishkin’s speech, she implores her audience to be mindful of “the ways in which ideas, people, culture, and capital have circulated and continue to circulate physically, and virtually, throughout the world,” and the Olympics are excellent study for such a transaction.\footnote{227} Our institutions, our corporations, and our media methods are broadcast to millions, perhaps billions, of people because of the National Broadcasting Company.

Theoretically, the Olympics are also in a unique category of events whose coverage is also in and of itself an event, or a “pseudo-event.” NBC supports the entire season of programming every few years with the hopes of successful Olympic coverage. French cultural theorist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, who died in 2002, argued in his text \textit{On Television} that the Olympics represent a case of what American historian Daniel Boorstin called a pseudo-event. There are actually two events occurring: the first is the actual Games happening in the host country, which what Bourdieu describes as “the markedly national, even patriotic ritual of the parades by various national teams, and the award ceremonies replete with flying flags and blaring anthems.”\footnote{228} However, the second event is the televised one; the one that gives the impression to its audience that they are seeing everything, while really seeing very little.\footnote{229} The concept was popularized in

\footnote{226} Thomas L. Friedman, \textit{The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century} (New York: Picador, 2007).
\footnote{227} Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures,” 21.
\footnote{228} Bourdieu, \textit{On Television}, 79.
\footnote{229} \textit{Ibid.}, 79 - 81.
Daniel Boorstin’s *The Image*, which defines a pseudo-event as one that makes an event out of covering a real news story. In Bourdieu’s words it is a “two-step social construction, first of the sports event, then of the media event.”230 Boorstin’s work only emerged a year after the first televised Olympics, and therefore he does not comment directly on the idea of the Games as “pseudo-event,” but his philosophy can be easily applied.231 This philosophy would apply to many other televised events, such as the World Cup, the Academy Awards, and the World Series. NBC would be hard pressed to show the American viewing public each and every event, but the choices it makes as to what it shows are curious and worth of analysis.

**Modern Olympics and Media**

While the idea of the Olympic Games can be traced back to at least 776 B.C., the modern Olympic Games is much younger. In 1894, Pierre de Coubertin organized the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in an effort to revive the long-dead Games.232 These first Games occurred in 1896 at Athens, Greece, a fitting host for these summer events. The Games themselves evolved with each quadrennial meeting, the first hosting 245 athletes from 14 different countries. In 1900, women were eligible for competition, and from 1912 to 1948, the Games also had an artistic arena in which participants could compete in sculpting, painting, and even literature.233 The Winter Games first occurred in 1924, due to the increased popularity of winter events such as skating and skiing. While

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231 Boorstin, *The Image*.
many nations participate in the Summer Games, the Winter Games are typically smaller because it hosts fewer events and fewer nations have the resources to train athletes in events that require cold conditions. In 2010, 82 nations participated in the Vancouver Games, including representatives from Brazil and Ghana. Professional athletes were banned until 1984, which also changed the tone of the Games in interesting ways. For example, many hockey players in the NHL hail from either Canada or the United States, but they compete for their home nations (and against each other) every four years.

Television coverage of the Games grew with the evolution of television, and it reflects the changes in the 1960s and 1970s of sports coverage in general. In 1960, CBS paid $50,000 to “cover” the Squaw Valley Winter Games. Rather than treat this an independent source of programming, CBS treated it like any other news story and failed to send an anchor to the Games. Later that same year, CBS covered the Rome Summer Games for the price of $349,000, but still used the same coverage method. However, CBS provided more substantive commentary from the New York studios, increasing their overall involvement. These Summer Games were the first to have commercially available television broadcasting rights and the first to have daily-televised coverage in

234 The Olympic Museum Educational and Cultural Services, “The Modern Olympic Games,” 7; Perhaps the most widely known example of an unusual nation supporting a Winter Games team is Jamaica’s bobsled program. They first participated at the 1988 Calgary Games, and their story has been popularized through the 1993 Disney film Cool Runnings.
235 Ibid.
237 Klatell and Marcus, Sports for Sale, 163; Maraniss (133) lists the price of coverage for CBS News at $600,000. Because of the complicated nature of media deals, many sources cite different prices for the Games.
the United States. While this seems like a major oversight, it is wise to consider how new satellite technology was in 1960. Live, international coverage was simply not possible, and even the fact that CBS could show the footage on the same day was pretty incredible.\textsuperscript{239} The three commentators were former Olympian Bob Richards, former Knick Bud Palmer, and CBS News’ LA sports director, Gil Stratton.\textsuperscript{240} The tradition of bringing former Olympians and other athletes in as commentators would define Olympic coverage, and later, such appearances would provide an amount of nostalgia for viewers.

Still, the Rome Summer Games did not seem like a major moneymaker or a very important event. They were colorful, redolent of \textit{la dolce vita}, that attractive Italian aura which permeated the decade. But their monetary value was unclear. As a result, CBS was less than enamored with providing future coverage for the Games, which allowed NBC and ABC to one-up each other, increasing the price significantly each year. In 1964, NBC paid $1.5 million for the Tokyo Summer Games, four times what had been paid for the previous Summer contest.\textsuperscript{241} As coverage of the Games evolved, so did these negotiations. Those Games that would be more difficult to cover or would not garner the same viewership would go for less money. When professional sports began to dominate the dial in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the importance of the Olympics was diminished for the networks because they were already capturing the same audience for

\textsuperscript{239} Maraniss, \textit{Rome 1960}, 133; Incredible too was the fact that the footage even got to CBS studios each night. The tapes were flown from Ciampino to Idlewild Airport (JFK), then taken by train to Grand Central Station and anchor Jim McKay’s crew would relay it to him at the studio.

\textsuperscript{240} Maraniss, \textit{Rome 1960}, 134.

\textsuperscript{241} Klatell and Marcus, \textit{Sports for Sale}, 163.
sports like football, baseball, and basketball.\textsuperscript{242} The cost of the Games no longer seemed worth the rewards.

Since 1972, the importance of the Games as a major television event has in fact only grown. As James Roman puts it best, the Olympics are “a spectacle that capitalizes on human drama, personal pathos, nationalistic zeal, and a record of achievement…”\textsuperscript{243} The network that airs the Games generally earns 50\% of the total viewership for each night of the Olympics. In addition, the network hopes that audiences fall into a routine and continue to tune in after the Games end.\textsuperscript{244} While the Olympics are not always a money maker in the short term, the long-term earnings potential is significant.

\textbf{The Roone Arledge Era}

Televised sports were not initially considered the moneymakers they are today, but that mindset shifted in the mid-1960s with the growth of American football. Sunday afternoon, which had long been a ratings desert, suddenly became a goldmine with CBS’s coverage of the National Football League in 1964 and 1965.\textsuperscript{245} The rights for NFL Games cost CBS $28 million in 1964, but the growing popularity of the game allowed CBS to secure two separate sponsors, Ford Motor Company and the American Safety Razor Company, to pay $14 million each to advertise during the Games.\textsuperscript{246} ABC’s \textit{Monday Night Football}, with Howard Cosell, moved the action to primetime.\textsuperscript{247}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{242} Klatell and Marcus, \textit{Sports for Sale}, 164.
\item \textsuperscript{243} Roman, \textit{From Daytime to Primetime}, 295.
\item \textsuperscript{245} Barnouw, \textit{Tube of Plenty}, 347.
\item \textsuperscript{246} Roman, \textit{From Daytime to Primetime}, 280.
\item \textsuperscript{247} Barnouw, \textit{Tube of Plenty}, 348.
\end{itemize}
Sports, under the leadership of Roone Arledge, would revolutionize the way Americans watched sports and would pave the way for the methods NBC would use to air the Olympics.

ABC’s legendary sports reporting in the 1970s was due to ABC Sports President, Roone Arledge, who eventually became president of ABC News in 1977. He is responsible for ABC’s Olympic coverage (he took the reins for ten Olympic Games from 1964 until 1988), as well as Wide World of Sports and Monday Night Football. Arledge took note of the changing demographics of sports viewers, as women were becoming a larger portion of viewers who spent approximately 20% of their television viewing time watching sports. He started shifting the focus of sports reporting to the human drama of the game, which made the sports genre more appealing to a wider audience. Arledge and Jim McKay’s coverage of the Munich massacre paved the way for ABC’s later coverage of other live news events, such as the Gulf War. The network used its coverage of a crisis in sports. Essentially, ABC Sports’ staff could tell a compelling story and cover almost any event with the gravitas that attracted viewers, which is evidenced through the ratings they received for their Olympic coverage (both winter and summer), as well as unheard of Saturday ratings for singular events, such as Evel Knievel’s much-hyped rocket-cycle jump over Snake River Canyon. For the first time, American television viewers were drawn to sports in large numbers, and this revolution would change network broadcasting for decades. To detractors – that is, sports

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248 Edgerton, Columbia History, 291.
249 Ibid., 286.
250 Ibid.
251 Ibid., 288 – 289.
252 Ibid., 288 – 290.
purists – this became the hallmark of ‘trash sports,’ a derogatory term for broadcasts that did not concentrate upon presumably worthwhile athletic contests, but rather covered lesser events which they hyped mercilessly. But name-calling aside, the formula was successful, and lucrative. Particularly in that last decade before cable’s revolution, there was a scarcity of sports properties on live television, so networks needed to be creative in attractive their viewers.

It also helped that the head of ABC, Fred Silverman, was tremendously supportive of Arledge’s methods, and Silverman built his network on one-time special events that included sports as well as dramatic mini-series, such as Roots. Silverman had been a programmer at CBS, but in 1975 moved to ABC, and in 1978, he became NBC president. He was unsuccessful at CBS and NBC, losing his presidency in three years, but is credited for helping to bring ABC up to par with its fellow broadcast networks.

For American television coverage of the Games, 1968 was a turning point year, particularly in terms of ABC’s relationship with the event. ABC had long been the third place network, and it could not seem to find a way to distinguish itself from NBC and CBS in any substantive way. However, two events of 1968 would allow the network to finally break through. The first was ABC’s coverage of the 1968 Presidential Conventions, held in Miami (Republican) and Chicago (Democrat). The political stakes and drama were high, but ABC News could not afford to provide the same “gavel-to-gavel” coverage of the news powerhouses of NBC and CBS. Instead, ABC chose to provide limited commentary on the event, anchored by conservative commentator

253 Edgerton, Columbia History, 295; Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, 466.
254 Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, 481 – 482.
William F. Buckley, and liberal author and screenwriter, Gore Vidal. The drama of their tense and articulate debates were good enough reason for many viewers to tune in.

1968 also signaled a change in ABC’s sports coverage, specifically in how they chose to cover the Olympics. The sports department, under the leadership of Roone Arledge, wanted to create “signature” aspects to their coverage, much of which is still a major part of NBC’s coverage. ABC became synonymous with the Games under Roone Arledge. The network paid more for the production facilities than they had to secure the rights to the Winter Games ($3 million vs. $2.5 million), and illustrated to the IOC that ABC would make a major commitment to providing the best possible coverage of the Games. According to sports scholars David A. Klatell and Norman Marcus, these sorts of gestures would allow ABC to have a significant advantage over NBC in securing Olympic coverage rights.

NBC lost its bid for the 1972 Munich Summer Games to ABC, who paid $13,500,000 for the exclusive American television rights. ABC’s end cost was twice what they had initially bid, but after calculating the amount that ABC stood to gain from the Games, the network doubled its offer. Coverage spanned through all of primetime, totaling sixty hours, and ABC charged $48,000 per minute for advertising. Additionally, in a move that foreshadowed NBC’s handling of the 1980 Moscow boycott, ABC required a clause that would allow it to withdraw should the US or USSR boycott the

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255 The Best of Enemies, directed by Robert Gordon and Morgan Neville, 2015, Media Ranch, Netflix.
257 Klatell and Marcus, Sports for Sale, 164.
Games. During the Soviet era, some of the highest ratings came from events in which the USA and USSR were pitted against one another.258

**NBC’s Early Olympic Coverage (1964 – 1992)**

Despite the loss of the summer Games, NBC broadcast the 1972 Sapporo winter Games, for which it paid $6.4 million to broadcast 32 hours of coverage. They would not broadcast the Games again until 1980.259 Because of the terrorist attack at the 1972 Games, it became clear to both the networks and viewing public that the Olympics were more than a mere sporting event, but rather a news event with the potential for drama in an unstable and unpredictable global climate.260 This revelation required a broader mindset about the Games and their possible significance.

NBC paid for the privilege to broadcast the 1980 Moscow Summer Games, and the Soviet rivalry with the United States promised to lead to big ratings. However, it was the geo-political ramifications of that rivalry that took the United States out of the equation at Moscow. In 1978, a coup placed pro-Soviet leader Nur Mohammad Taraki in power in Afghanistan, which caused unrest throughout the region. Fearing that this Soviet ally would destabilize the entire Central Asian region for the USSR, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. The West watched aghast, concerned that the Red Army was moving close to the Persian Gulf oil fields. In response, the United States did a few things. It supported the rebellion of the *mujahideen*, Islamic guerrillas fighting against the

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258 Large, *Munich 1972*, 65-66; other sources have conflicting numbers for the price of the exclusive television rights. Richard Sandomir’s article 2005 article “Remembering the Games That Were Barely There” states the price at $25 million, while Klatell and Marcus’s book *Sports for Sale* cites the price as $7.5 million.

259 Sandomir. “Remembering.”

Soviet occupation. In the person of President Jimmy Carter, the United states articulated the “Carter Doctrine,” which pledged to treat the Saudi oil fields as a vital American interest. And lastly, President Jimmy Carter --who called the Soviet invasion his own wake-up moment regarding Soviet capabilities and intentions -- called for a boycott of the upcoming 1980 Moscow Summer Games. Over 60 other nations followed suit, depriving Moscow of much-craved publicity. NBC also essentially boycotted the Games, and what was supposed to be 150 hours of programming turned into six total hours of short segments on Today. When NBC was awarded the Games in February 1977, it paid $87 million, which was more than three times what ABC had paid for Munich. The Summer Games are far more popular than Winter, and 1980 was the first time NBC had really gone head-to-head with the more experienced CBS and ABC in competing for rights to air. The two executives overseeing the production for NBC were former ABC employees / “Arledge disciples” Don Ohlmeyer and Geoff Mason. Bryant Gumbel was slated to be the prime-time anchor, a position he would eventually hold over the next few Games. The pieces for a successful Olympics broadcast were in place, save for access to the Games themselves.

The last Games that NBC would air before seeing the Olympics as a more long-term strategy was the 1992 Summer Games in Barcelona. 1992 was the last year that the Winter and Summer Olympic Games would occur in the same year, rather than in the more staggered fashion of alternating every two years. The next Winter Games would

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262 Sandomir, “Remembering.”
263 Ibid.
happen in just two years’ time, but the next Summer Games was four years off. The network thought it had learned its lesson about airing the Games and making money after the 1988 Seoul Summer Games. NBC did not yet wield the power it needed to make the Games fit their formula, rather than the other way around. The time-zone delays made airing important events at prime times difficult, and other news events around the world pulled focus from the Games.\footnote{Roman, \textit{From Daytime to Primetime}, 295.} For 1992, NBC paired with its new rival, cable, to offer real time broadcasts using a tiered pay-per-view system. The time difference in this situation made this a terrible deal. Live broadcasts started in the pre-dawn hours, and customers were not willing to pay $125 in order to watch events at inconvenient times.\footnote{Ibid.}

As Roman points out, unlike American sports like baseball or football, there is less of an emotional connection to the Olympic athletes, and therefore, American viewers are not willing to sacrifice time and money to watch the Games in such a fashion.\footnote{Ibid.}

CBS aired the 1994 Games, which drew ratings primarily because of the drama occurring in the women’s figure skating competition both on and off the ice. At the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in 1994, Nancy Kerrigan was attacked by a man who used a club on her knee. Part of the attack and the chaos following were filmed, and the public became very sympathetic to Kerrigan. Her attacker was the husband of a competitor, Tonya Harding. Both women went to the Winter Games in Lillehammer that year, and the drama between the two on the ice was simply an extension of the news story. Kerrigan ultimately won silver, but she retired from the sport soon after.\footnote{\textit{30 for 30}, “The Price of Gold,” episode 2.16, directed by Nanette Burstein, ESPN, January 16, 2014.} Like 1972, the
Games became more than just a sporting event, but rather an illustration of intense human drama in a public and international setting.\textsuperscript{268}

In 1996, NBC aired the Centennial Olympic Games from Atlanta, Georgia. Unlike the last two Summer Games, time-zone issues were not a problem. In fact, events took place during East Coast primetime hours, allowing maximum potential for NBC’s ratings. Atlanta also had a lot of fanfare around its Games because it was the 100th anniversary of the modern Olympic Games, and every single invited nation sent athletes.\textsuperscript{269} Some nations were competing for the first time as an independent entity after the fall of the Soviet Union.

The 1996 Atlanta Games, which celebrated the centennial of the modern Olympiad, were marred twice by terrorism, despite the costs the United States Olympic Committee had taken in order to avoid such a catastrophe. Terrorism was fresh in the minds of the USOC, with the Oklahoma City Bombing occurring in 1995 and the TWA 800 crash happening mere days before the Games.\textsuperscript{270} Later during the Games, a bomb exploded in Centennial Park, reigniting the fears of Munich in 1972. According to David

\textsuperscript{268} 1994 would be a year full of sports-related drama. Aside from the attack on Kerrigan, it was also the year of the Chicago World Cup, Arnold Palmer’s final U.S. Open, and the O.J. Simpson murder investigation. Simpson’s chase through the freeways of L.A., along with the World Cup opening ceremonies and Palmer’s last game all occurred on June 17, 1994; 30 for 30, “June 17, 1994,” episode 1.15, directed by Brett Morgan, written by Ryan M. Lee, ESPN, June 16, 2010.

\textsuperscript{269} At the time, there were 197 member nations of the IOC, more than the 185 recognized nations of the United Nations. Many colonies of Great Britain actually fund their own athletes (Bermuda), while other nations were still gaining independent status in the years following the fall of the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{270} Jere Longman, “ATLANTA 1996: THE GAMES BEGIN; In Atlanta, Festivities Touched by Sorrow,” New York Times, July 19, 1996, accessed January 7, 2016, www.nytimes.com/1996/07/19/sports/atlanta-1996-the-games-begin-in-atlanta-festivities-touched-by-sorrow.html; The TWA 800 crash was later determined to be an accident, not a terrorist or criminal act. However, the investigation at the time was yielding evidence that a bomb had been planted on board similar to the Pan Am 103 bombing in 1988.
Clay Large in the epilogue of his examination of Munich, the Olympic planners had put state of the art security in the Atlanta Olympic village, but in order to preserve a “party atmosphere,” they had created a more open atmosphere in Centennial Park. Eric Rudolph, who set off the bomb to protest abortion, killed two and injured numerous other spectators. These Games would not be the last to be ever mindful of terrorism.

Atlanta was in many ways a controversial choice for the 1996 Games, partly because many believed it should be in Athens, the site of the first modern Olympiad and the ancient Games. The IOC picked the city partly because Atlanta was a city already largely prepared to host the Games, with its college and professional sports arenas. Because it was in the United States, the potential for ad revenue was high. Athens does not have the sizable media reach of a major United States city and of course sits in a European time zone, which is problematic for American viewers. The IOC also felt that Athens lacked the security and infrastructure needed to host a modern Games.

Americans also had concerns about Atlanta’s role in hosting the Games, concerned that these Olympics would turn into “The Bubba Games.” The IOC itself pushed back later, as members of that notoriously corrupt group of international jet-setters bemoaned the relative lack of top-drawer amenities available to them in Coca-Cola’s town.

Nevertheless, Atlanta was excited to be the center of world attention. The opening ceremonies would include 30 chrome-plated Chevy pick-ups during a section celebrating

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271 Large, Munich 1972, 306.
273 Weisman, “Atlanta Selected.”
274 Longman, “Festivities Touched by Sorrow.”
the south, but opening ceremony producer Don Mischer posited: “There is not a doubt in my mind that this show will never be perceived by anyone as a redneck kind of show.”

*The New York Times* also noted that references to slavery would be omitted from the opening ceremony performances, including any mention of *Gone With the Wind*, one of the most famous literary references to the city. Comedian Jeff Foxworthy made his own speculation on the Games the centerpiece of his 1995 stand-up album *Games Rednecks Play*. In this bit, he expressed his concern about how Atlanta would host the Games: “The Olympics in Georgia, God you know were gonna screw that up. I guarantee you, when they let those doves go at the opening ceremony, there are gonna be guys in the parking lot with shotguns.”

That same attitude was clear during the commentary in the opening ceremony, provided the NBC commentators. They explained that many foreign commentators were struggling with how exactly to explain the concepts of cheerleading, pom poms, and stepping to international audiences. Even with an American audience, the commentators explained the background to stepping, marching bands, and Appalachian cloggers. The steppers came from various historically black colleges in the Atlanta region, but it is a tradition of African Americans, and many would not be aware of its significance or importance. Clog dancing derives from Irish step dancing, and it

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275 Longman, “Festivities Touched by Sorrow.”
originated among immigrant field workers in the South and Appalachia.\textsuperscript{279} At the end of the performance, many of the dancers and cheerleaders spelt out the phrase “How Y’all Doin’!” with their bodies.\textsuperscript{280} Evidence suggests that nothing was omitted from the broadcast, and that is partly due to the fact that it was aired live.

The 2000 Sydney Summer Games presented a number of challenges for NBC that the network struggled to overcome. First, according to Dick Ebersol, President of NBC Sports, because NBC had an exclusive contract on the Olympics for the foreseeable future, the other networks were not concerned about being competitive. The ratings from the most recent Games help to dictate ad sales for the next Olympics. However, if a network knows that it will not be selling those ads, it does not hurt them to throw whatever they can against the Olympics to pull ratings down. Also, because the Australia winter occurs during American summer, the Summer Games had to be held in September. Rather than having an audience that has little else but re-runs to choose from, NBC was competing with football on a few nights of the Olympics and the fact that school had started. Sydney, Australia is 15 time zones away from the East Coast of the United States, and therefore it was impractical to air the Games live. Sydney is one of the first Games to contend with 24-hour news and Internet coverage of the Games, so many Americans knew results well before they aired. One of the typical “must see” events, women’s gymnastics, did poorer in the ratings because many viewers already knew that the American team did not do well.\textsuperscript{281} Taped coverage garnered criticism, as it would

\textsuperscript{279} 1039WYAB, “1996 Atlanta Olympic Opening Ceremony WXIA Part 2 of 8.”
\textsuperscript{280} Author’s note: While the phrase is actually a question, the performers formed an exclamation point. Perhaps this was bad grammar or bad choreography.
with future Games in London and Sochi, but a small note in an NBC press release about the Games proves that NBC is making the smartest business decision. The press release notes:

CBC, Canada’s government-subsidized network, made the decision to broadcast the Olympics live. In the three U.S. metered markets (Seattle, Detroit and Buffalo) where the viewers have a choice of watching the Olympics in primetime on NBC or live in the middle of the night on CBC, overwhelmingly, viewers have elected to watch the Olympics on tape on NBC in primetime, when it’s convenient.²⁸²

This comparative study of how Canada and the United States differed in their coverage illustrated an idea that has driven NBC’s foreign Olympic Coverage ever since. Despite all of the flack they get from other outlets about not providing a live broadcast, and theoretically a more authentic television experience, the ratings showed that even if NBC had offered the choice, viewers would have largely chose to watch on tape in primetime.

Coming only five months after the 9/11 attacks, it was no surprise that the Salt Lake City Winter Games opening ceremonies were hyper-patriotic for the American hosts. The highlights of the opening ceremonies included the presentation of the flag that flew over the World Trade Center on September 11 to President George W. Bush, carried in by eight US athletes and members of the New York Police Department (NYPD), the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), and the Port Authority Police Department

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A bald eagle was also released to soar above the stadium. The footage was interspersed with video of our troops standing in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed the Star Spangled Banner. The 1980 “miracle on ice” hockey team, which had famously defeated the Soviet Union, lit the torch, reminding viewers of when America had triumphed over another seemingly insurmountable international foe. Jim McKay, his steady and trustworthy voice reminding viewers of the ABC years and his by-now totemic coverage of the Munich Massacre, narrated the opening to the ceremony with Bob Costas, well on his way to carving out a niche as the “conscience of sports broadcasting.” Without overtly showing footage of 9/11, images from New York City of police officers and firefighters were interspersed with different perspectives on the city itself. In contrast, the network used a montage of winter in Utah to show how far removed the Games were from the tragedy less than six months prior.

NBC used part of the “Forrest Gump Suite,” specifically the theme that plays under Forrest’s most incredible physical feats, to underscore a montage of winter athlete training and competing. The theme of redemption and resurrection was overt, but not

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283 These three organizations made up the core of the rescue effort during and after the terrorist attacks, and all lost numerous members. The Port Authority is a bi-state governing body that oversees numerous construction and trade-related projects, including the World Trade Center.


unwarranted. The ceremonies themselves were hosted by Bob Costas and Katie Couric, the latter of whom had reported live on Today Show during the 9/11 attacks.\textsuperscript{286}

In order to garner the highest ratings, the Salt Lake City Olympics were mostly live, except for the West Coast feed. If the prime-time events aired live, they would air from 5:00 – 8:30 p.m. on the West Coast, which would hurt ratings. Still, because Sydney did not provide the expected ratings in 2000, NBC’s network coverage would be shorter than in 2000, allowing many of the other events to air live on the cable networks MSNBC and CNBC.\textsuperscript{287} The Opening Ceremonies earned the highest ratings to that point for an Olympic opening ceremony, with a rating of 25.5 and a 42 share, incredible numbers for any program in the cable-era.\textsuperscript{288}

The 2004 Athens Summer Games returned the Olympics to its modern and ancient origin city, which had been unsuccessfully attempted for the Centennial Games in 1996. Athens is difficult to view through the lens of the modern Greek financial crisis, and one can even see some of the beginnings of reckless spending in the Olympic planning. When Greece lost the 1996 Games, it was partly because the IOC had concerns about pollution and infrastructure. The 1997 attempt for the 2004 Games was successful because those issues were addressed, and promises were made to remedy those major concerns. Aside from sports facilities, Greece improved its roads, built an airport, and


expanded its public transportation system, but it was a major scramble at great expense to complete it on time.\textsuperscript{289}

NBC’s coverage of the Athens Games brought in the highest number of viewers ever for an Olympic event outside the United States, with 203 million unique viewers.\textsuperscript{290} The time difference between Athens and the United States is not as extreme as that with Sydney, which made the tape delay less noticeable. The Games were readily available for the first time on many of NBC Universal’s cable networks (MSNBC, CNBC, USA, Bravo), decreasing the cable competition.\textsuperscript{291} Just before the Athens Games, NBC had paid $4.2 billion to air the Olympics through 2012, and many critics were wondering if such a large gamble would pay off, but as of August 30, 2004, NBC Universal / GE announced profits of over $70 million.\textsuperscript{292} In comparison to the last few Games, NBC was also not desperate to gain ratings with a large event, as they were still reaping the benefits of the last few “Must See TV” programs.

Turin, Italy was home to the 2006 Winter Games, more popularly known as the Torino Games. This bid came in the wake of a major IOC scandal involving bribery and corruption in previous bids, but the organizers stated that they chose Turin because it


\textsuperscript{292} Ibid.
promised to be a model for 21st century Olympic Games. After the bid was won, the city of Turin was dealt a major blow when Fiat pulled its manufacturing plant. In the run-up to the Games, organizers and citizens alike hoped that the Olympics would prove to be a boon for their town, rather than a burden. The Olympics could certainly help in improving tourism, and two major football teams (Torino Calcio and Juventus) were considering returning to the city after the Olympics to make the new, state-of-the-art facilities their new homes.

Certain events are “big ticket” items at the Olympics, and in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Summer Games, the head of NBC Sports, Dick Ebersol, sought the support of the International Olympic Committee to hold such events in the morning so they could be broadcast live in the United States. Ebersol even consulted swimming superstar Michael Phelps to ensure it wouldn’t affect his performance and chances at record-breaking numbers of gold medals. Ebersol is even quoted as stating that “the Olympics are about the last event that gets the family viewing together,” putting a traditional value at the center of his justification for such a move. In reality, because American broadcast money provides more funds than any other nation’s, Ebersol could influence the IOC unlike any other broadcasting head. NBC even influenced the decision to hold Beijing in August rather than September, as the 2000 Sydney Games had been, because American football audiences would have college and professional football to watch. August was


also an ideal time because American children could stay up later, since most were not in school. Pierre Bourdieu sees this as a trend even in 1998, noting that the “economically dominant” countries are the ones to which the broadcasts and the Games as a whole are tailored. The same schedule manipulations that took place in Beijing also occurred in 1988 during the Seoul Games, in which major finals were scheduled so they would be broadcast live in the United States.

NBC was lucky that one of the Games during its first major contract renewal was in North America, which tend to be the higher rated Games, with European Games coming in second. The Vancouver 2010 Winter Games were awarded to Canada in 2003, and many of the challenges NBC faces in airing the Olympics would be mitigated.

NBC aired a “mostly live” schedule from Vancouver, which is in western Canada, for the East Coast, but put the West Coast on a tape delay. Still, the events that tend to bring in the bigger audiences, such as downhill skiing, were still on tape-delay for the East Coast to be shown in primetime. The Internet was abuzz with articles from sources reputable

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296 Bourdieu, On Television, 80.

297 Ibid.


and not, both profane and academic, about the anger over the tape-delay. Clearly, this issue would become a common complaint in NBC’s coverage.

London 2012 is the most recent Summer Games (the next Games occur in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro), and the way NBC chose to air the Games brought a lot of negative attention to the network. First, NBC famously came under fire when it omitted a tribute to “those who had been lost,” a subtle homage to those who had died in the 2005 London Public Transit attacks (or 7/7). While it was not officially billed as such, it was meant to stand in for a more overt display for the victims of the 7/7 attacks, which occurred the day after London won the bid for the 2012 Games. In order to keep the peace with countries in the Middle East, the IOC avoids such tributes that cast one group in a negative light, such as with the 1972 Munich Massacre. An official tribute to those athletes and coaches has never gone forward in an effort not to offend the Palestinian delegation.

NBC also caught a lot of bad press, as it had for Sydney and other foreign Games, for tape delaying the higher profile events. In a sense, this is a reiteration of the old conflict between sports fans and casual viewers. There are fewer of the former but they are passionate, and so the idea of delaying a known result in order to show it as if “in the moment” was deemed controversial. Even more than at Sydney, it is difficult to put oneself on a “media blackout” until the events air live, and frequently, medal results are spoiled. Tape delay worked before the age of the Internet and social media, but it is

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becoming more evident to viewers that the excitement of the Games can be slightly diminished in an age where one can accidentally discover results. In 1980, the “Miracle on Ice” men’s hockey game against the Soviet Union was shown in tape delay, but as long as news outlets kept the information to themselves, the audience would be unaware.\(^{301}\)

Just before the 2012 London Summer Games, audiences were discovering the limitations of NBC’s online streaming coverage, as well as the overall broadcast schedule, and it is believed that web-designer Steven Marx started the #NBCFail hashtag to follow other similar protests of NBC’s coverage.\(^{302}\) By the end of the Summer Games, the hashtag was attached to over 750,000 tweets on Twitter alone. The hashtag’s rapid popularity gained media attention, and soon NBC was part of the story rather than covering it. #NBCFail continued to be used after the Games to protest any other unpopular moves that NBC made, including cancelled programs or bad ratings. As of January 9, 2016, the last use of the hashtag was a January 8, 2016 critique of the sitcom Undateable. A study by Brenden O’Hallarn and Stephen Shapiro examined #NBCFail as a social movement, but beyond larger events, it still has use for individual grievances.\(^{303}\)

Based on the types of news stories surrounding the London Games, one would come to the conclusion that NBC did not do well financially, but that assumption could not be further from the truth. NBC averaged 32 million viewers each night in primetime, despite any social media spoilers from earlier in the day. NBC had initially paid $1.18 billion to IOC for the exclusive television rights to the Games, and they ultimately made


\(^{302}\) Ibid.

\(^{303}\) Ibid.
$1.3 billion in advertising revenue from the six networks and other outlets that aired the Games under the NBC Universal / Comcast brand. Last minute, 30-second ads sold for as much as $900,000.\textsuperscript{304} Meg James, who covered the ratings results for the Los Angeles Times, hypothesizes that other factors may have helped to boost the ratings, including reality show fatigue (reality programming is one of the only things competing with the Summer Games), a need for escapist fare during a summer full of depressing news (including the Aurora, Colorado shooting), and the poor economy that encouraged Americans to stay home rather than vacation or go out at night.\textsuperscript{305} Ultimately, the ratings illustrated that certain events can transcend the fragmented media landscape and DVR culture in favor of a live experience.\textsuperscript{306}

NBC’s most recent Games, the 2014 Sochi Winter Games, presented the network with new challenges from the host country, as well as an extension of the challenges from the 2012 London Games. During the lead-up to the Games, President Vladimir Putin implemented very strict anti-gay laws in Russia, causing leaders in the United States’ LGBTQ community to request a boycott akin to the 1980 Games. There was fear that gay and lesbian athletes would not be safe from arrest, although the IOC and Russian government both ensured that the athletes and spectators would be protected, so long as they did not spread “homosexual propaganda.” The network feared that the issue of

\textsuperscript{305} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{306} \textit{Ibid}.
Russia’s anti-gay laws would cause internal strife at the peacock, considering that its 24-hour news channel, MSNBC, has numerous openly gay hosts and reporters.\(^{307}\)

Like London, Sochi presented issues with time zones and the decision to tape events versus air them live at inconvenient times. NBC, unsurprisingly, decided to tape and air the events during primetime. This move should no longer come as a surprise to viewers. Based on the CBC / NBC study from the 2000 Sydney Games, it is clear that the most prudent business decision is to tape events.

In May 2014, NBC paid $7.75 billion for the exclusive broadcasting rights to the Olympic Games through 2032, which the *New York Times*’ Richard Sandomir analyzes as proof of the value that media companies are placing on a live event in the age of DVR and streaming online media.\(^{308}\) The Olympics, airing only every two years, also makes the changes in technology clear, as a new media seems to emerge and dominate between each Olympiad. Steve Burke, the chief executive of NBC Universal, accounted for that in the deal with the International Olympic Committee, securing the rights in whatever form of technology is prevailing at the time.\(^{309}\)

Understanding how the Games are even put on is crucial to understanding how NBC dominates through their Olympic coverage. The Olympics is about selling an image, or many images, and this mindset pervades the entire hierarchy. The International Olympic Committee wields much of this power, and they clearly have a price. They

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choose the host city, as well as who receives broadcasting and sponsorship rights.  

Next come the large networks, including NBC, as well as the large corporations that seek sponsorship deals with the IOC. Companies like Coca-Cola and McDonalds get additional worldwide exposure by being “official sponsors.” Finally, it is the journalists who provide commentary and come to mold the image of the Games.

Considering the fact that the Games’ highest ratings are almost always the opening ceremonies, the popularity of the Games may have little to do with sports. The Olympics in and of themselves are major events, but the opening ceremony is a singular moment that can be compared across time. These ceremonies set the tone for the entire event. Salt Lake used the backdrop of American nationalism to set both a somber and hopeful tone for the Games. It is the overture and a taste of the tradition and pageantry that is come over the following days.

The opening ceremonies are also a way for the host nation to present itself to the world in two ways. First, it uses music, dance, and general performances to illustrate how the host nation sees itself. In Atlanta, it was cheerleaders and cloggers; in Salt Lake, it was the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the FDNY. London’s ceremony featured both popular culture references, like Harry Potter and Mary Poppins, and other references that were lesser-known to those outside the country, such as a whimsical celebration of the National Healthcare Service (NHS). The $42 million spectacular was directed by Oscar winner Danny Boyle. London clearly pulled out all the stops. The opening ceremonies

311 Ibid., 80 – 81.
312 Ibid., 81.
313 Beth Stebner, “Americans baffled by ‘left wing tribute’ to free healthcare during Opening Ceremonies (and what was with those flying Mary Poppinses defeating Lord
can also allow the host nation to show just how much money it could spend on the Games. While a lot of money goes towards new stadiums, state-of-the-art facilities, and the Olympic Village, the entire world will see the opening ceremonies, and each ceremony is more fantastic than the last.

NBC is the exclusive provider to the United States, so the ratings will be higher than other programs because people simply like the Olympics. NBC also has power within the IOC to shape schedules and other timing concerns in order to garner the best ratings when possible. With Beijing, there was manipulation of the swimming schedule to make it possible to air the swimming events, and Michael Phelps’ potential gold medal wins, live in the United States. While the Olympics are events in themselves, NBC’s priority is to make money on the advertising revenue. They want to make viewers as happy as possible without compromising ratings, and the ineffectiveness of social media campaigns to protest the tape-delayed Games in London and Sochi are proof of that. Those who see NBC as anything other than a business are not understanding how American media works, and they will be fighting a long and losing battle to change NBC’s coverage methods.

The next Olympics will be the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Games in Brazil, which is good for NBC because Brazil shares time zones with the United States. Despite the positive ratings of Games with tape delays, live is preferable when possible. NBC and other outlets have already gotten mileage out of the upcoming Games, as Rio struggled to prepare in 2014 for the World Cup. Pollution and crime are major issues facing Brazil,

and the waterways for major boating events are still not quite clean enough for competition. NBC has little control over which nation hosts the Games, but it is clearly and important factor in how the network fares with each Olympic Game. As hosting becomes a more costly and risky endeavor, NBC may have to find ways to incentivize or encourage American cities to take on hosting duties.
“It all started with a mouse.” – Walt Disney

As a young man growing up in the American Midwest, Walt Disney could have scarcely dreamed of the media and entertainment empire he and his brother would create in the first half of the 20th century. The year before Walt was born, the world entered “The American Century,” a time full of promise and possibility that the Gilded Age had only allowed a brief glimpse. The stage was being set for everything the concept of America would encompass over the next one hundred years. The United States entered a period of imperialism through the Spanish-American War, beginning a century rife with conflict. Film was still a widely experimental art form being shown only as a novelty, not as the tool for storytelling into which it would evolve. Personal transportation was dramatically revolutionized through the automobile, the airplane, and the still expanding railroad. The creative genius and controversial builder of an entertainment empire that is Walt Disney truly started with the dawn of this American era, although Mickey Mouse certainly had a white-gloved hand in it as well.

Walter Elias Disney was born in 1901 in Chicago, where the Disney’s lived for a number of years after father Elias had helped build the 1893 Columbian Exhibition. Walt’s family moved around frequently in order for Walt’s father and older brothers to secure steady work. As a child, Walt moved to Marcelline, Missouri, the quaint town that

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314 I use the more casual “Walt,” “Roy O.,” and “Roy E.” to avoid confusion within the Disney family and leadership. With most other parties, I will address them more formally.
would influence his values and serve as the model for his Main Street U.S.A. in the parks.\textsuperscript{316} As a child in Marcelline and Kansas City, Walt started developing his talents as an artist.\textsuperscript{317} When the United States entered World War I, Walt enlisted in the Red Cross American Ambulance Corps, which allowed 17-year-old recruits. However, being only 16 and not wanting to miss out on the action “over there,” Walt falsified his documents, and his mother signed off on his enlistment.\textsuperscript{318} Before he could reach Europe, Walt contracted Spanish Flu, which delayed his appearance at the front so long that he was not sent to France until after the armistice.\textsuperscript{319} While Walt was overseas, he continued to hone his talents as an artist by designing posters, camouflaging helmets, and drawing caricatures for his fellow soldiers to make a little extra money to send home.\textsuperscript{320}

Walt was committed to making a living as an artist after he returned home, and he secured work through his older brother Roy as an apprentice artist for the Pesman-Rubin Commercial Art Studio.\textsuperscript{321} This job would prove to be important to his future, as this is where he met his first business partner, Ubbe Iwwerks (later Ub Iwerks).\textsuperscript{322} When both men were laid off due to slow business, the two created Iwerks-Disney Commercial Artists, where they specialized in signs and cartoons. The two then moved on to working for the Kansas City Slide Company, where Walt began to experiment with animation,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{317} \textit{Ibid.}, 29.
\bibitem{319} Thomas, \textit{An American Original}, 47.
\bibitem{320} Thomas, \textit{An American Original}, 50; Gabler, \textit{Triumph of the American Imagination}, 39 – 40.
\bibitem{321} Thomas, \textit{An American Original}, 54 – 55; Gabler, \textit{Triumph of the American Imagination}, 45.
\bibitem{322} Thomas, \textit{An American Original}, 55 – 56; Gabler, \textit{Triumph of the American Imagination}, 45 – 46.
\end{thebibliography}
which provided him with the foundation he would later use to build the Disney Company.\textsuperscript{323} Iwerks continued at the Kansas City Slide Company, but Walt moved on to Laugh-O-Gram Films, which created minute long filler pieces for double features. He eventually took over the company, using it to push the limits of animation, including the *Alice* comedies that combined live action with cartoons.\textsuperscript{324}

However, Walt was not good with money, and he was soon out of funds. His move to California in 1923 would be the impetus for the creation of the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio. Roy had moved out west the year before in order to cope with tuberculosis, and he wanted to assist his brother in this new venture.\textsuperscript{325} It is worth noting that while Walt Disney is considered the father of an incredible media empire, he was a terrible businessman. Much of the credit for saving the studio from financial ruin goes to Roy O., who prevented his aspirational brother from being swindled time and time again. Many of the Disney projects that Americans consider great successes today in fact made very little money. The Mickey Mouse cartoons pulled low profits because of the bad contract Walt had entered into with Pat Powers for sound services, which were so expensive that they ate the majority of the money that came in from those cartoons. *Pinocchio* lost $1.5 million, which roughly translates to $25 million today. The anecdotal evidence of Disney’s financial exploits illustrates that Walt only stayed in business to continue creating and innovating, not to make money. As Disney scholar Neal Gabler notes in an article on this topic, only Disneyland put the company on solid financial

\begin{footnotes}
\item[323] Thomas, *An American Original*, 57.
\end{footnotes}
footing, more than 30 years after the company had been founded.326 As my case study on animation illustrates in further detail, Walt was clearly a man who learned from his errors and always pushed on through difficult periods.

Founded in 1923, Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio continued the work that Walt had started with Laugh-O-Gram, most popularly the Alice films. As these waned in popularity, Walt created Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, which helped him develop certain habits that would serve him throughout his creative life, including the idea of being an independent creator without invasive studio heads ordering him around and changing his original vision. In order to distribute and produce his new films, Walt partnered with Margaret Winkler and her husband, Charles Mintz.327 This relationship would be pivotal, as Mintz frequently pushed Walt around on various creative ideas, and in the end, Mintz would take on the role of villain in the Walt Disney story. In 1928, the popularity of Oswald made the negotiations over the new contract between Disney, Mintz, and Universal Studios very tense. Walt and his wife Lillian rode out to New York in order to be present for negotiations. Mintz was only willing to pay $1800 for the Oswald franchise, which was less than Walt was hoping for. Mintz also lured away all of Disney’s animators except for Iwerks, who unsurprisingly remained loyal to Walt. In the end, Walt gave up Oswald to save the studio, but he warned Mintz: “Protect yourself,

327 Thomas, *An American Original*, 72, 75.
Charlie. If my artists did it to me, they will do it to you.” The train ride back to Los Angeles would prove to be the start of the real Disney magic.

As the Disney lore claims, Walt and wife Lillian were traveling home via rail from New York and were unsure about their futures without Oswald. Disney doodled a little mouse and intended on naming him “Mortimer,” but his wife thought “Mickey” would make a better name. Thus, Mickey Mouse was born. Mickey and his girlfriend Minnie made their debuts in 1928’s “Plane Crazy,” an animated silent short. It was a moderate success, but Mickey became a national icon later that year when he starred in “Steamboat Willie,” the first animated film to use sound. Disney developed the Mickey short films further, and created a number of other characters, including Goofy, Pluto, and Donald Duck, during the early 1930s. As color films became more ubiquitous, Disney developed paints that could withstand the filming process and look sharp after multiple viewings. In order to showcase this new technology, and bring color to the Disney animated short, they introduced the Silly Symphony series, the most famous of which are “Three Little Pigs” and “Flowers and Trees,” the latter of which won an Academy Award. This combination of commercial and critical acclaim is what initially set Disney apart as an innovative filmmaker and animator.

These smaller experiments lead to Walt Disney’s greatest achievement in animation. In 1937, the Disney Studios released the first feature-length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which became one of the top-grossing films of all time. The film’s success came from both the technological advancements the film showcased, as well as the wide international success the film enjoyed. The company

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poured money into the animation department, even building a brand-new facility for the animators, and went to work on a number of new projects, including *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, and *Pinocchio*. The success of *Snow White* was not a fluke, but external factors were going to temporarily derail Walt’s future plans and put the studio in financial jeopardy.

The Great Walt Disney Cartoonists Strike of 1941 was particularly hurtful to the Disney Company, partly because over time, it created competitors out of former Disney animators. Pay was low, and screen credit beyond Walt was non-existent. After the strike was settled, the Disney studio was not friendly to union cartoonists, and they were usually the first fired when lay-offs were needed. The Screen Cartoonists Guild was created in 1938, but the majority of animators at the time worked for Disney, who did not join the union. After nine weeks, the strike was settled at the Disney studio, but the strain that increased wages would create was an extra factor in the wartime financial crisis for the studio. The war was already on the horizon, and the financial situation would not improve soon for the Disney Studio.

The years after *Snow White*’s release turned out to be challenging ones for Walt Disney and his animators. First, Disney was faced with problems at the studio. The company fell into debt as both the three ambitious follow-ups to *Snow White* and the new $3 million animation studio quickly ate up any profits. To combat this trend, Roy and Walt decided to make Disney a publicly traded company and gain some outside

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investors. These periods of financial turmoil also increased the importance of Disney merchandise. In 1929, a stationary company had first approached Walt about using Mickey Mouse on school notebooks, a right for which the company would pay Disney $300. This early example of what is now called “synergy” eventually lead to more than 10% of revenues coming from character licenses. A Disney tradition was born.

World War II presented a number of challenges to the Disney Studio and to Walt Disney himself. The war in Europe began to hurt Disney’s distribution efforts even before America entered the conflict in 1941. The international success that Snow White had enjoyed was now impossible to achieve, as most European nations were under Axis control, and therefore closed to American films. The power of Disney was already well understood, and the potential for his work to be used as propaganda against the Axis, and therefore the follow-up films were not distributed to the Axis powers’ holdings, which included France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and parts of Scandinavia. The Allied powers were working to make alliances all over the world, most especially in the western hemisphere. In order to secure South American partnerships during the early years of the conflict, the War Department enlisted Disney to create films for the Latin American market and encourage those nations to ally themselves with the United States and other Allied powers. Films such as The Three Caballeros came out of this period, and full-length features that had already been in the pipeline went ignored in deference to this larger project.

333 Thomas, An American Original, 164.
In addition to the Latin American films, Disney Studios produced an extensive line of educational and propaganda films to contribute to the war effort, which in turn saved Disney’s bottom line.\textsuperscript{335} In 1941, Disney created his first educational film for Lockheed Martin, and it demonstrated the four methods of riveting through techniques only possible in animation. In an attempt to drum up more business from the corporate and defense sectors, Walt screened the film, along with a few other snippets. The National Film Board of Canada was dually impressed, and they commissioned new pieces. Canada was already at war, and they saw the possibilities of Disney’s work in a different light than the American companies.\textsuperscript{336} Efficiently recycling animation from other popular Disney properties, the studio created wartime films to encourage the people of Canada (and later the United States) to assist in the war effort through bonds. “The Thrifty Pig” used animation from “The Three Little Pigs,” while “The Seven Wise Dwarfs” capitalized on the popularity of \textit{Snow White}.\textsuperscript{337} Mickey, Donald, and the rest of the gang were featured in the films “Donald’s Decision” and “All Together.”\textsuperscript{338} The effect of the war will be further addressed in the chapter on Disney animation.

After the stumbles and forgettable composite films of the mid to late 1940s, Disney hit its creative stride again in the 1950s. This era saw renewed dedication to the animation department, resulting in classics such as \textit{Alice in Wonderland}, \textit{Peter Pan}, \textit{Cinderella}, and \textit{Sleeping Beauty}. These films were based on classic texts that most English-speaking children were already familiar with, especially in the case of \textit{Alice in Wonderland.}

\textsuperscript{335} Gabler, “Crazy Like a Mouse.”
\textsuperscript{337} \textit{Ibid.}, 17.
\textsuperscript{338} \textit{Ibid.}, 17 – 18.
Wonderland. Lewis Carroll’s book had been adapted for the screen numerous times, including by Walt himself in his early experiments with combination live-action and animated film. Additionally, as the European market opened up following the war through the Marshall Plan, Disney could again profit in the same way it had with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

Animation was only one of Walt’s major overhauls for the Disney Company during the 1950s. Although Walt had been working with live-action films since before the release of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, he was newly preoccupied with it as programming for his newest world to conquer: television. As television increased in popularity, many in Hollywood sought partnerships with the rapidly growing networks to continue bringing their products to Americans. In 1954, ABC and Disney agreed to produce Disneyland, a series that would at its essence act as a very long form commercial for Disney’s California theme park. This partnership was a sign of the synergy Disney would employ fully through the 1980s and 1990s to become a media empire. In the 1980s, Disney launched its subscription channel on cable, which later would become a standard part of most cable television packages.

In 1955, Walt Disney completed his most ambitious project to date when he opened Disneyland in Anaheim, California, an idea that had consumed him for the previous decade. Finding there were no places to take his own daughters to play as a family, Walt designed a theme park where families, not just children, would be able to enjoy amusements together. The park was incredibly ambitious, and Walt himself was the

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339 ABC and Disney continue to have a fruitful relationship, as The Walt Disney Company controls ABC and its assets, which include ESPN and ABC Family.; Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, 193.
driving force behind its creation. He had specific visions that had been percolating for years, and this would be the ultimate palette for his creative visions. The debate over when precisely the idea came to him is disputed, but the concept itself was developing by the early 1950s. It would be a park for the 1950s: clean, domesticated, and designed for the entire family to enjoy together. As Disney said to former Laugh-O-Gram employee Rudy Ising: “One of these days I’m going to build an amusement park – and it’s going to be clean!”340 The park distracted him during the post war years, and one can observe the strength of the movies returning as the park went further into production and construction.341 The park opened on July 17, 1955 and was an almost instant success.

Walt, the constant perfectionist, soon decided that he needed a second park to fully realize his initial vision, although Disneyland was admittedly an amusement revolution. While all of the Disney parks are considered eternal works in progress, Disneyland had some flaws that Walt felt took away from the ultimate experience he had hoped his guests could enjoy. First, as soon as it was discovered that Walt was building a park in Anaheim, land prices skyrocketed, and there was a land grab for the property surrounding Disneyland, making it impossible to expand the park for many years.

Walt Disney passed away from lung cancer in 1966, leaving the unfinished park in the hands of his brother and business partner, Roy. The primary motivation behind the park now became fulfilling Walt’s original vision, as well as improving on issues from Disneyland that Walt had intended to originally rectify. This prevailing ideology of “What Would Walt Do?” ironically lead the corporation to stop acting like Walt, ceasing innovation and continuing on a straight trajectory from Walt’s final set of ideas. The

name of the Florida Project, which was supposed to be Disney World, became *Walt* Disney World to honor the company’s guiding mind. The company’s next major building project was an extension of an idea Walt had only begun planning at the very end of his life, and its ultimate realization would only be a shell of the original concept.

One of the biggest appeals of Disney World to Walt was the chance to build a utopian community next to the park in which employees could live.\(^{342}\) This “Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow” motivated Walt to purchase acres and acres of extra land around the park property.\(^ {343}\) Walt hoped this community, and others like it, would help cure social ills that he saw as detrimental to society as a whole, such as teen delinquency, and they would include schools, senior centers, parks, and worship centers.\(^ {344}\) He had already done some work with the youth community in Anaheim with Grad Nights, which had lists of rules to maintain decorum. The Disney Company would control the planning and construction, but other aspects would be decided through a democratic process among the citizens.\(^ {345}\) Walt’s singular vision was difficult to replicate, especially as the company was trying to stay afloat in its other sectors as well, and the more ambitious living community was largely scrapped until the 1990s. The Florida parks are discussed in more detail in the case study devoted to the American amusement traditions that Walt Disney, perhaps unwittingly, tapped into.

There is no shortage of academic discussion about Walt Disney and the empire that he cultivated. His influence on American culture is immeasurable, and he stands with icons such as Henry Ford and Thomas Edison as a personification of America’s creative

\(^{343}\) Ibid., 609.
\(^{344}\) Ibid.
\(^{345}\) Ibid.
essence. The most comprehensive investigation into Walt is Neal Gabler’s 2006 biography *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*. Gabler inspects Walt’s life from multiple angles, including psychologically, and provides a complete picture of who Walt was and what his influence continues to be.\(^{346}\) Prior to Gabler’s text, Disney expert Bob Thomas’s *Walt Disney: An American Original* (1976) was the definitive Walt biography. Unlike many media texts, both Gabler and Thomas put a few years between their subject and their books, allowing for a longer-term influence to come to the surface.\(^{347}\) Thomas also wrote one of the only books that narrows in on Roy O’s influence in the Disney company: *Building a Company: Roy O. Disney and the Creation of an Entertainment Empire* (1998). These stories are fascinating, and truly the making of American lore, but the more dramatic tales of Disney post-Walt are really the stuff of corporate legend.\(^{348}\)

Walt’s “Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow” evolved into what could be considered a permanent World’s Fair, with national outposts, rides, and pavilions featuring the latest technologies. EPCOT (later Epcot Center and simply Epcot) opened in 1982, which was a rough time for the Disney Company, and the park’s initial lack of success almost brought the company to its knees. However, this period of Disney history is also ripe for those who study the American business and corporate realm. A unique combination of executives, technologies, and external factors brought Disney back from the brink in every way, creating the company Americans today would recognize.

\(^{346}\) Gabler, *Triumph of the American Imagination*.
\(^{347}\) Thomas, *An American Original*.
After years of weak corporate leadership and the near-destruction of the company at the hands of corporate raider Saul Steinberg in 1984, the Disney Company constructed a leadership team that took the studios and parks to new heights over the course of the next ten years. This team consisted of Michael Eisner (CEO and Chairman), Frank Wells (President), Roy E. Disney (Board Member / Chairman of Feature Animation), and Jeffery Katzenberg (Chairman of the Walt Disney Studios). These men and the staff at the Walt Disney Company revived the animation department (most importantly) and took the company more global. Eisner has long been the star of this story, as he made himself quite visible to the public and was a powerful leader in a group of strong-willed men. Peter Schneider (former President of Walt Disney Feature Animation) documents this entire journey from inside the Disney Studios in his film *Waking Sleeping Beauty* (2009). This documentary focuses on the rebirth of the animation department from its lowest point (1985’s *The Black Cauldron*) to its height (1991’s *Beauty and the Beast* and 1994’s *The Lion King*).\(^{349}\) It is here that we see the importance of animation to the entire Disney machine, and without it, the entire operation could easily fall to pieces. *Waking Sleeping Beauty* also captures the beginning of the end of this new “golden age” of Disney, starting with Frank Well’s sudden 1994 death in a helicopter crash. Wells, it appeared, was the buffer preventing the strong personalities of Roy E., Eisner, and Katzenberg from tearing each other down. Katzenberg left when Eisner did not promote him to Well’s old position, and he started Dreamworks with Steven Spielberg and David Geffen, the only animation and film studio to really give Disney a run for its money in its core demographics.

Joe Flower’s 1991 book *Prince of the Magic Kingdom: Michael Eisner and the Re-making of Disney* tells the tale of Eisner’s rise at Disney. Focusing primarily on the business tactics and less on the creative end of things, John Taylor’s *Storming the Magic Kingdom: Wall Street, the Raiders, and the Battle for Disney* and Ron Grover’s *The Disney Touch: How a Daring Management Team Revived an Entertainment Empire* outline how the change in leadership brought Disney back to its former glory. These books were both published during this new Disney heyday, and both seem to see only good things in Disney’s future. Grover even opens his book with an anecdote that is exceptionally telling about Michael Eisner’s future, although Grover could not have foreseen the fall Eisner would experience. Eisner attempted to convince Grover not to write his book, which holds Eisner up as a corporate savior: “As soon as everyone starts writing books about how great you are, that’s when things start to fall apart.” Three years later, fall apart they did.

Starting in 1994, Disney entered into an age of growth, but also an age of turmoil. Eisner’s personality was no longer balanced out with other strong-willed figures like Katzenberg or buffered with an opposing force, such as Wells, and he seemed to embark on a new path of single-mindedness in his leadership. The drama surrounding Eisner’s antics is skillfully captured in James B. Stewart’s 2005 *Disney War*, which follows the Disney team from those early days in 1984 to the breaking point in 2004 when Eisner

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resigned as chairman.\textsuperscript{353} The primary weakness of Stewart’s book is that he did not wait longer to publish it; if he had waited another two years, he would have witnessed Eisner’s entire collapse, Bob Iger’s rise to Chairman and CEO, and Disney’s purchase of Pixar. Another book that suffers from this same act of jumping the gun is Kim Masters’ 2000 work \textit{The Keys to the Kingdom: How Michael Eisner Lost His Grip}. Her focus tends towards the juicier bits, paralleling Eisner’s paranoia after 1994 to that of Richard Nixon, as well as the courtroom drama that ensued between Eisner and Katzenberg.\textsuperscript{354} Before the real fall-out came, Eisner himself penned his own version of the events in \textit{Work in Progress}, which considering what came after its 1998 publication, could not be more accurately titled.\textsuperscript{355}

Finally, it is necessary to note that the nomenclature of the Disney universe can be confusing, and for the clearest understanding, it is important to clarify terms from the start. These changes come sometimes as an effort to rebrand or to reflect a larger change at the company. First, Walt and Roy Disney founded the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio in 1923, and from this seed, the empire germinated. The name changed in 1926 to the Walt Disney Studio, which remained in place until 1986, when the endeavor became the Walt Disney Company, reflecting the multi-faceted nature of the company’s output. Pixar Animation Studios was born out of Lucasfilm and funded by Apple Inc. and the Walt Disney Studios, until 2006, when its distributor, the Walt Disney Company, bought it for $7.4 billion.

\textsuperscript{353} James B. Stewart, \textit{Disney War} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).
The parks have also gone through some name and identity changes. In 1955, Walt Disney opened the Disneyland Resort, which included the Disneyland Hotel and Disneyland Park, originally just called Disneyland. In 2001, Disney’s California Adventure opened, along with the Grand Californian hotel, expanding the resort, a feat that Walt himself had not been able to do in his lifetime. This project was called “The Florida Project,” and it encompassed both what would become the Magic Kingdom and Epcot Center. After Walt’s passing in 1966, the complex was christened Walt Disney World in his honor. The Magic Kingdom opened first, along with a few of the original hotels, in 1971. Walt’s other vision for the property was to create a futuristic city, first called Progress City, then EPCOT, or Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. This vision was altered over time to become a theme park, or really, a permanent World’s Fair exhibition. It opened in 1982 as EPCOT Center, but the name was later shortened to simply “Epcot.” The third park in Walt Disney World was Disney-MGM Studios, opening in 1989. Because of licensing, the park could also be referred to simply as “The Disney Studios,” to avoid infringing on the MGM Grand Adventures Theme Park name in Las Vegas, Nevada. The park was “rebranded” in 2008 as Hollywood Studios in order to reflect the park’s changing focus from the Golden Age of Hollywood (1930s and 1940s) to the present day. As a final note, attractions, resorts, and “lands” within the parks also have been rebranded and when they come up, it will be marked clearly.
Case Study A – Disney Animation: Adventures in Failure

I was raised on Disney animated films, and being a child in the 1990s, I was able to see some of the classics for the first time right on the big screen. My first movie seen in theater was *The Little Mermaid* in 1989. When my sister was old enough, we took her to see her first movie, *Beauty and the Beast*, at Walt Disney World. It was during the previews before the movie that I experienced the power of film. When *Beauty and the Beast* came out in 1991, one of the coming attractions was *The Lion King*, and the entire preview was just the opening song and animation. Elton John’s rich orchestrations, Tim Rice’s movie lyrics, and the sights of the African savannah were incredibly enticing, even to a six year old. Every time I watch the opening moments of *The Lion King*, I get goose bumps remembering that early cinema experience. This anecdote illustrates the height of the Disney brand in the 1990s, which were some of the defining years for the Walt Disney Animation Studios. The Disney Company, while often equated with unparalleled and uninterrupted success, perhaps has more to learn from its periods of failure and downturn than its periods of success. This case study argues that traditional and innovative animation is at the foundation of the Disney brand, and that the company identity is most clearly found in periods when it was not true to its original purpose and motivation.

The literature on Disney animation is extensive, and much of it does not apply directly to the arguments put forth in this dissertation. Many sources critique the uses of gender, race, or ethnicity in the films, and while those are important topics in understanding American relationships to the films, it has little to do with the business side of things. The most revealing, and perhaps the most accurate, analyses of the Disney
Studios and its goals are texts that provide “inside looks” into the company and how it handles the use of animation, which reach back to the 1940s. Walt Disney’s “Mickey as Professor” from *The Public Opinion Quarterly* illuminates a side of the Disney Company that often overlooked when discussing the full Disney library, and that is the wartime propaganda that eventually led to the use of animated shorts as education in the post-war period. The article provides some inside perspective on how Walt viewed his own creations, as well as the ways he hoped to innovate after 1945. The documentary *Waking Sleeping Beauty*, provides an inside look from the more contemporary decision makers. Aside from depicting the rise and fall of the Disney management team from 1984 to 1994, shows the progression of Disney animation from its ink and paint days of Walt Disney and the “nine old men” to CAPS and Pixar. The film also re-enforces the notion that without animation, the Disney Company loses direction. J.P. Telotte’s *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology* highlights the Disney Company’s consistent use and innovation of new technologies as what sets the company apart from other entertainment businesses. Telotte puts animation study in a new context, providing a technological history as the framework for Disney’s animation, rather than the more common social or historical perspectives.\(^{356}\) Richard Schickel’s *The Disney Version* is, in a way, a response to art historian Robert D. Feild’s *The Art of Walt Disney* (1942), which praised Disney animation as some of the most important art of the early twentieth century.\(^{357}\) Schickel’s text, written in 1968 after the death of Walt Disney, takes a different tack. He criticizes the company as being a reflection of everything that is wrong with popular culture at the


time. In his *Journal of American History* article “Walt Disney’s Art and Politics in the American Century,” Steven Watts provides an excellent set of texts in conversation with one another that greatly informs this section of the project, as well as how Walt and his critics changed throughout his career.358

Understanding Pixar and its role within the Disney universe is crucial to the broader understanding of Disney animation. David Price’s *The Pixar Touch* illustrates the history of the company that is the future of Disney animation.359 He outlines Pixar’s evolution from Lucasfilm subsidiary to Apple subsidiary until the company was purchased in total in 2006. Along with the 2007 documentary *The Pixar Story*, Price’s text provides a complete look at Pixar before it’s purchase. Today, Pixar continues to be a major part of Disney animation, and most recently, Disney crowned a Pixar character as an official Disney Princess.

Animation undeniably constitutes the core of the Disney brand. When the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio opened in 1923, a lucky rabbit named Oswald brought some initial success. Right from the start, Walt had ideas that would innovate the art form beyond ink and paint. By the time Mickey Mouse was first sketched in 1928, Walt had found ways to mesh animation and live action together. The popularity of Mickey Mouse and the use of sound paved the way for other steps forward, most notably *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which was the first feature length animated film. It stunned viewers around the world, who realized they were seeing something brand new and

powerful in terms of genre. Without these animated characters and imagined worlds, the theme parks, cruise ships, and the media conglomerate of today’s Disney empire would simply not exist. This dissertation case study argues that American corporate culture can learn precise lessons from Disney animation’s effect on the overall brand: lessons about corporate failure, resilience, and recovery. Central to the argument is that these examples show the wisdom in embracing company values when the chips are really down, rather than attempting to redefine or flee from these values.

Because of the size of the Walt Disney Company, it is crucial to clearly define the parts of the corporate juggernaut that directly involve animation. Today, the animated films that bear only the Walt Disney name are conceived at the Walt Disney Animation Studio, which in essence has grown from the original “seed” of the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio and maintains that seed’s genetics, in business terms. These films employ both traditional and computer-assisted animation techniques, which sets the Walt Disney Animation Studios apart from its sister studio, Pixar. Pixar is responsible for the last 30 years of major innovations in the world of computer animation. It first found a stable home with Apple Computers, where Steve Jobs was a major champion of this particular application of computer technology. Jobs’ insight marked him as a fitting “partner” for the deceased Walt, and the visions and legends of both men live on in their respective companies. For more than 12 years, Pixar worked in tandem with Disney on merchandising and distribution, which leads many moviegoers to believe that Pixar has always been a part of Disney. The influence was profound, if informal, from the start. While many of the early Pixar employees were Disney cast-offs, and many of those same animators are executives with the company today, Disney did not formally solidify this
working relationship until the 2007 purchase of Pixar for over $7 billion. Disney now owns Pixar property outright, in the same way that Disney controls the creative properties of Marvel Comics and Lucasfilm (primarily the *Star Wars* franchise). These acquisitions have been important in growing the Disney brand and influence, but they also muddy the water in terms of what is purely “Disney.”

Finally, because the Disney animation studios have been so prolific, my study here encompasses three types of Disney animated films. I look beyond the recognized canon for analysis, and therefore, I want to clearly list which films I will be using as a data set. First, I include the feature-length films that the Disney Animation Studio has deemed part of their “canon,” which is listed on the studio website. I also include the “combination” feature-length films, which mix live action and animation. I include these because some of the canon films could also be considered “combination,” and allows me to study the animated portions within the scope of the case study. This category includes films like *Song of the South*, *Mary Poppins*, and *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*. Finally, I include Pixar’s films, since these overlap heavily into the Disney universe, and for the average moviegoer, the two companies have always been one and the same. During one especially slow period for the traditional animation studio, Pixar found great success, and it is crucial to evaluate the two scenarios. The full list of these films inside their categories can be found in the appendix.

**Defining Success at Disney**

It best serves the argument as a whole to define what accounts for success or failure in the Disney realm. In part, this definitional precision is required due to the economies of scale that both companies embody. What some Disney and Pixar films have
grossed in the last two decades would be considered great achievements elsewhere, in
total dollar terms and as far as cultural impact. Competitors, in other words, would
consider these failures great successes. But the Disney and Pixar definitions are different.
Each company is playing what some might term a “long game,” in which they take into
account the effect of a film on the genre and potential effects on future bottom lines.
Even some “failures” have had higher grosses and greater long-term impact than many
DreamWorks or Universal animated films. Therefore, I establish an evaluative matrix.
First, I ask three questions to determine if a Disney film is a success. Once that is
determined, I identify the periods of growth and decay in the history of Disney animation.
Films that meet all three marks are obvious successes, while films that only meet two
pieces of criteria are less so. Those that meet one or none of the below criteria are the
films that indicate a serious period of decay and are the eras of more concern for the
overall argument. These markers are: Box office revenue, post-box office merchandising
and park presence, and industry recognition.

The matrix runs as follows: first and foremost, what kind of revenue did the film
generate at the box office? In the film industry, the financial bottom-line the most
common indicator of success. Because Disney is an entertainment empire, not simply a
movie or animation studio, a film that fails to profit will have ripple effects throughout
the corporation. Should a film fail to profit at the box office, it may also fail to cast the
wide net of merchandising opportunities, which the company as a whole desires to see
actualized. For example, if the company was planning to publicize the movie in its parks
through shows, parades, or character meet-and-greets, such plans may have to be
scrapped. Because no one can guarantee the success of any film, Disney waits before
constructing permanent attractions, such as rides or more elaborate performances, until after a film has proved its financial worth and popularity at the box office and through more temporary merchandising.

There are two massive levels of post-box office performance that Disney wants surmounted: merchandising and park presence. In this particular study, a given film is considered successful if it completely recouped its budget, and then some (that is, profit). Some of the most successful Disney animated films have been *The Lion King* ($987,483,777 worldwide gross), *Toy Story 3* ($1,063,171,911 worldwide), and *Frozen*, which is Disney’s most financially successful animated movie to date with a worldwide gross of $1,274,219,009.360

Second, has the film remained part of the Disney legacy through continued merchandising and park presence? As Buzz Lightyear parodied in 1995’s *Toy Story*, merchandising is a major aspect of the animated film industry, and considering the number of Buzz Lightyear dolls in the world, one could consider him an expert on the subject. Disney has its specialty stores all over the world that sell only Disney corporation merchandise, to say nothing of the shops in the parks and the Downtown Disney Marketplace. As of March 2012, the Disney Store had 208 United States

locations, as well as 149 overseas. Costumes, plush toys, DVDs, and action figures, as well as cross-promotion through Barbie, the Jim Henson Company, and other Disney branches, comprise much of the corporation’s ultimate revenue. Disney merchandise is also available through outside retailers and venues, such as McDonalds and Hallmark, making the Disney brand constantly visible to children and their parents.

Disney animation has the benefit of receiving “free” advertising through the Disney theme parks. As a film prepares to premiere, the parks use parades, costumed characters and merchandising to promote it in the parks and in their stores. However, when a film proves to be a box-office success, the park enshrines those lucky few through a permanent attraction or show. Certain properties, such as Snow White or Cinderella, are mainstays in the Disney parks. Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella have the added distinction of having their castles as the centerpieces of the Magic Kingdom parks. More recent film successes, such as Beauty and the Beast, Toy Story, and Frozen, are replacing rides and characters that have fallen out of popularity over time. For example, Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride was based on the film The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad, which experienced moderate success after World War II. However, in the 1990s, it was replaced by a Winnie-the-Pooh themed attraction, as Pooh and his friends have become staples in the Disney canon after the 1977 medley of three Pooh stories took off and became iconic.

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362 Both The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad and Winnie the Pooh, along with Mary Poppins, Peter Pan, and Alice in Wonderland, represent Disney’s acquisitions of famous English children’s literature. Over time, Disney has looked to world literature to attract a more international audience.
Even more recently, the movies have begun to infiltrate the parks that are less movie-centric, such as Epcot. The massive success of *Frozen* put the park planners into high gear, and it was announced that a *Frozen*-themed attraction would replace the Maelstrom ride in the Norway pavilion. On Disneyland’s Main Street, U.S.A., the display windows have always been a major attraction; the store windows of Manhattan inspired Walt Disney. During the 60th anniversary of the park in 2015, the Imagineers created new “enchanted windows,” which would change scenes every few minutes, and they used the animated properties to draw inspiration, including *Cinderella*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Princess and the Frog*. The recognizable characters and beautiful scenes draw patrons into the stores and keep them in “merchandise central,” or Main Street, U.S.A.

Most Disney animated films are also musicals, and the parks use the music for a variety of purposes. Ethnomusicologist Charles Carson argues that Disney uses music in the parks for three reasons. First, music connects visitors’ present and past through Disney nostalgia, which is heavily romanticized. Disney is now working on its fourth generation of fans, so there is a lot of music and nostalgia to tap into. Second, park music creates boundaries that separate different “areas” from one another inside the parks. The music sets the correct tone for the rides, shows, and other attractions in each section of the park. For example, as one crosses from Main Street, U.S.A. into Adventureland, the

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sounds of turn-of-the-century ragtime are abandoned for African tribal drumming, which is piped through faux rocks and hidden speakers. Music embedded in this way helps to define the Disney experience, and therefore park music provides a reference.\textsuperscript{365} David Buckingham claims that Disney music speaks to both children and their parents, the latter due to nostalgia.\textsuperscript{366} However, if a film does not do well theatrically, its music will not connect with as many guests. Carson also identifies three types of park music, which makes these nostalgic tunes inescapable. These include piped-in music, or “area music,” live performances, and pre-recorded performances.\textsuperscript{367} Music completely envelops a park guest, which makes its nostalgic properties almost inescapable.

The third and final question to determine Disney success posed by this dissertation’s matrix is, “has the film had cultural and economic impact outside of Disney for any length of time?” While this question might seem subjective at first glance, it is not. This answer can be reliably determined using a variety of factors, both in terms of honors and of scholarship. There are many films in the Disney pantheon that have evolved over time into benchmarks or quality markers for all animated film. As it was the first, \textit{Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs} tends to be a standard-bearer in the animation world. It transported viewers into a lush fantasy world of old-world Germany and used a feature-length format that soon became the measuring stick for animated films. Film experts and audiences alike realized upon seeing it that they had witnessed something new. \textit{Toy Story}, with its groundbreaking use of computer animation, is another benchmark. After its appearance and popularity, animated films were forever changed.

\textsuperscript{365} Charles Carson, “‘Whole New Worlds’: Music and the Disney Theme Park Experience,” \textit{Ethnomusicology Forum} 13, no. 2 (2004): 228.
\textsuperscript{366} \textit{Ibid.}, 229.
\textsuperscript{367} \textit{Ibid.}
and most animated movies today have switched completely to total computer animation. However, keeping one hand of their corporate presence in the past they created, the more traditional arm of the Disney Animation Studios still uses a combination of hand-drawn and computer animation. Outside recognition, particularly through the Academy Awards and the National Film Registry, has also made an impact on how Disney perceives its successes.

The Academy Awards represent the pinnacle of film achievement, at least in terms of peer-bestowed industry accolades. What makes Oscar the benchmark is both its longevity as an organization and the fact that it is awarded by industry experts and peers. Generally, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences reflects a moment in time, rather than a body of work for any one individual. Walt Disney himself won the most awards in Oscar history, with 22 statues, mainly for his producing work. But because an Oscar can reflect a moment in time and may prove ephemeral, using it as criteria of success in animation is tricky. This problem is accentuated by the fact that there was no dedicated category for feature length animated films until 2001. Some movies were honored with special awards for technical achievement (*Snow White* and *Toy Story*), while others won Oscars for scores, songs, or acting. *Beauty and the Beast*, *Up*, and *Toy Story 3* were also nominated for the prestigious Best Picture award, even while the latter two were also nominated for Best Animated Feature. Because of the industry importance of the Oscar, it will remain a possible indicator of success. Still, Disney’s unrivaled domination of its genre at the Academy Awards is clearly a compelling mark of industry respect.
A few of the films have also been placed on the National Film Registry in the Library of Congress, which dedicates itself to preserving films of all types for future generations of Americans. The Library of Congress, as a federal agency, takes seriously its mission of preserving pivotal American texts. The honored Disney movies include *Beauty and the Beast* (1991, added 2002); *Bambi* (1942, added 2011); *Fantasia* (1940, added 1990); *Mary Poppins* (1964, added 2013); *Pinocchio* (1940, added 1994); *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937, added 1989); and *Toy Story* (1995, added 2005).\(^{368}\)

Because of the mandatory ten-year waiting period before a film is eligible to be added onto the list, the National Film Registry reflects a longer-term look at the importance of a film. The Registry also honors films for cultural and historical importance, rather than simple and fleeting popularity like the Academy Awards. Disney short films on the list, such as “Steamboat Willie” (1928, added 1998) and “The Three Little Pigs” (1933, added 2007), emphasize the importance of Disney to the animation genre at large. Home movies, commercials, music videos, and test films have also been added to the registry.\(^{369}\)

Entry of a film onto the registry speaks to popularity and endurance over time, which also reflects the impact of the film on both American culture and film as a discipline.

In the purest and complimentary sense, Disney is of course a business as well as a creative mecca for American artists. Profit is expected and sought after. The films must be profitable for the other parts of the Disney machine to continue running smoothly. The market speaks volumes, and therefore, the customer rules in the business world. When

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\(^{369}\)Ibid.
those films fail, one can use American Studies methods of analysis in studying American culture to see what went wrong, rather than looking inward at the culture of the company. This example is where American Studies excels as a field, and it is one reason why I hope the field reorients itself to productive and open-minded analysis of businesses, rather than simply hewing to a predictable, anti-corporate rut. When the company is out of touch with the zeitgeist, it frequently finds itself in the red. The company also suffers in times of difficulty for the nation, when film profits become secondary to a larger cause, such as in the case of World War II. The concept that the Disney Company operates on a sort of “boom and bust” cycle is not an entirely new concept, as Douglas Gomery covers the field in his 1994 essay “Disney’s Business History: A Reinterpretation.” However, my study takes the Disney Company into its third weak period and defines the boom and bust periods differently. Additionally, my overall argument about the significance of fluctuating Disney success points to the lessons learned, rather than simply to the fact that failure occurred.

**Era 1: World War II**

“You can’t run away from trouble. Ain’t no place that far.” – The Song of the South

After the incredible success and popularity of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the Walt Disney Company was ready to tackle a full slate of feature-length animated stories. What they did not foresee was Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland in 1939 and World War II. Showing that globalization is a phenomenon with a much longer pedigree than its academic and activist opponents realize, a large part of *Snow White’s* success

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stemmed from the international distribution the movie received, being shown all over the world, including in Germany.\footnote{Aside from records, my source on the popularity of \textit{Snow White} in Nazi Germany is my own grandmother. This film was the very first movie she ever saw as a small child in Dieburg, Germany, and she would not see another movie in a theater until 1965’s \textit{The Sound of Music}, after she had arrived in the United States.} As Germany occupied Western Europe, including Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, Disney lost a large portion of its distribution market. \textit{Fantasia}, \textit{Pinocchio}, \textit{Dumbo}, and \textit{Bambi} would see much smaller ticket numbers than \textit{Snow White}. These films still became classics in the United States. As Americans sought to escape the continued difficulties of the Great Depression and the increasing horrors of the news from Europe, they found solace in Disney’s fantasy fare.

In order to access additional funding for the company, which was now struggling at the dawn of World War II, Walt Disney Productions went public in 1940. Because of the success of \textit{Snow White}, the studio had started to expand, but the next few films did not deliver financially the way they had hoped, which prompted the decision to offer stock in the company. Both Walt and Roy were reluctant to do so, because it could mean less control over the studio, but it was a financial necessity.\footnote{Joel H. Amernic and Russell J. Craig, “Accountability and Rhetoric During a Crisis: Walt Disney’s 1940 Letter to Stockholders,” \textit{The Accounting Historians Journal} 27, no. 2 (December 2000): 51.} Accounting historians Joel Amernic and Russell Craig used the letter to the stockholders from the end of 1940 as a cultural document and performed a close reading on it in order to understand the business side of the Walt Disney Company.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 49.} While Roy was the business head of the company, Amernic and Craig have substantiated reason to believe that Walt was the major author, with assistance from Roy, an analysis that Disney scholars Steven Watts and Richard
This 1940 report was the first of its kind, as it was the first fiscal year that Walt Disney Productions was obligated to public shareholders. The company had experienced a loss of $1,259,798, and had assets of over $8 million, more than half of which were tied up in film production and were therefore considered “soft.” According to a 1940 issue of Time magazine, written around the time of Disney’s IPO, Disney had four films in various stages of production: Bambi, Fantasia, The Wind in the Willows, and Peter Pan. What one can draw from this information is that the production slate would change drastically with the onset of war. One can assume that Fantasia was closest to completion, as it was released later in 1940, while Bambi was released in 1942. However, The Wind in the Willows became a combination film with the Legend of Sleepy Hollow to become The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad, released in 1949. Finally, Peter Pan was not released until 1953, and 1941’s Dumbo was not even mentioned in the article. The war and its effects clearly disrupted the studio’s schedule. The war, in addition to the lukewarm box office for Pinocchio (at least in comparison to Snow White) and difficulties containing costs at the studio, lead to the loss in the 1939 – 1940 fiscal year. This business document, in addition to Amernic and Craig’s analysis, provides a snapshot into the company culture going into World War II.

Anything that Disney produces today is generally seen as part of popular or mass culture, especially as the merchandising becomes more ubiquitous, but in the early years of the Walt Disney Company, Walt’s work was praised in all circles. In a 1942 New

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374 Amernic and Craig, “Accountability,” 52.
375 Ibid., 52.
376 Ibid., 53.
377 Ibid., 53.
378 Ibid., 54.
Republic article, David Low states that Disney is the most important visual artist since Da Vinci and that he heralded a new wave of artistic talent. However, as Steven Watts points out in his article “Walt Disney: Art and Politics in the American Century,” the tide began to turn against Disney when he was increasingly seen as a “hack.” His advancements in animation technology, which were distinctly modern, clashed with his decidedly 19th century, Victorian cultural sensibilities. For example, in Dumbo, the “Pink Elephants” scene has very modernist elements, as Dumbo hallucinates and has terrifying visions of other elephants. The entire films revolves around the baby elephant’s disconnect from his mother at the hands of the circus owners, and it can easily be analyzed from a Freudian point of view. Still, Walt Disney was bringing his brand of modernist art to the masses during very trying times.

Many of the films of the early war years (read: before direct American involvement) are considered classics, but the company was still not rolling in money. Most profits went directly into risky projects, since the feature-length animated film was not necessarily a guaranteed moneymaker. Fantasia is especially notorious for its indulgent nature. The film possessed no overall narrative, employed a large group of animators and musicians, and was very experimental. Pinocchio also went well over budget. The government contracts of the war years would help bring the company back from the financial brink, but the movies and shorts produced during this era are not terribly memorable or profitable in the traditional or Disney senses. Many other

industries would also see revitalization after the Depression through the war effort, and America does not officially exit the Depression until the end of the war.

As the war ground on, the United States government recruited Walt Disney to create propaganda films that would help enlist Latin American nations in the Allied cause. The power of film was well understood, especially in the era of the Depression, and such films would assist with Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy. This foreign policy, created prior to the United States’ direct involvement in the war, was an attempt to secure the nations of Latin America as allies against the Axis Powers, creating unity throughout the Americas and building on the Monroe Doctrine in many ways.\(^{382}\) Additionally, the United States needed to find new export revenue, as the European market they had long relied on was no longer viable in the face of the Axis.\(^{383}\)

Between 1941 and 1943, Nelson Rockefeller, who was serving as the director of the Office of Inter-American Affairs, contacted Walt to travel to Latin America in order to get information to create films to promote the Good Neighbor policy.\(^{384}\) The focus of the next animated features, 1943’s *Saludos Amigos* and 1945’s *The Three Caballeros*, were on the beauty of Latin America. Disney was persuasive, and most of the nations in question would join the Allied cause. However, the films were not really made for those at home, and the characters (save for Donald Duck) would not find long lasting popularity. In their book *Reframing Latin America*, Erik Ching, Christina Buckley, and Angelica Lozano-Alonso argue that

\(^{382}\) Erik Ching, Christina Buckley, and Angelica Lozano-Alonso, *Reframing Latin America* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009), 228.


\(^{384}\) *Ibid.*
Disney’s films reflected the prevailing attitude towards Latin America, which was still viewed as “the other.”

In *The Three Caballeros*, Donald Duck is the central character in the film, and he receives gifts from Panchito (who represents Mexico) and Jose Caricoa (Brazil). Donald uses these gifts to learn more about what Latin America has to offer; by and large, the film is structured like a travel advertisement. This structure, as well as the sexualization of Latin America, illustrates Latin America as “the other,” as Americans have long perceived it, rather than showing a deeper understanding of the various cultures in the region. Brazil and Mexico cannot honestly represent the diverse ethnic and cultural traditions of the 13 South American nations and seven Central American countries. Amy Spellacy also argues in her 2006 *American Studies* article that the impact of *The Three Caballeros* ultimately led to the “It’s a Small World” attraction at the 1964 New York World’s Fair, which has the same message of mutual understanding.

The wartime and immediate post-war films in the official Disney canon fall into three distinct categories. First, there are the films that were already in the process of being made when Pearl Harbor occurred, such as *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, and *Bambi*. While their revenues were not equivalent to *Snow White’s*, due to the loss of the European market, they later became prominent parts of the Disney canon with rides, merchandise, and iconic characters. Second are the films Walt produced in order to specifically woo the Latin American market, which were part of the plan to attract Latin American nations.

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385 Ching, et. al., *Reframing*, 228.
387 Ibid., 60.
to the Allied Powers. These included a few animated shorts and combination films, but the two that made their ways into the official canon were *The Three Caballeros* and *Saludos Amigos*. Finally, there are the “package films” that stand apart from all of the other films in the canon. These films were created through combining two or three existing animated short films and surrounding them with live-action celebrity appearances and a loose narrative (*Make Mine Music; Fun and Fancy Free; Melody Time;* and *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*). They were inexpensive, as the films within had already been completed and in many cases, released to the national market. They employed American stars such as Bing Crosby and Edgar Bergan, and they used already popular and established characters, such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy.

The films in the latter two categories have not become long lasting parts of the Disney legacy. They were serving the immediate needs of the company or the nation, rather than accessing more deep-seated and longer-lasting American ideals and values, as the “classic” films do. The birds from *The Three Caballeros* are now featured in the recent renovation of “El Rio del Tiempo” in the Epcot Mexico pavilion, now renamed “Grand Fiesta Tour Starring the Three Caballeros.” Because of Donald Duck, the other two “caballeros” have more recognition by association. The characters from *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* were already well known, as they were based on the American classic “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and Britain’s cherished *The Wind in the Willows*. Until 1998, “Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride” was an attraction at Walt Disney World, until “The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh” replaced it. Fans can still enjoy the ride at Disneyland, and it is one of the last remaining original attractions at the park.
After the war ended in 1945, Disney animators deviated from the feature-length story formula to create films that were compellations of short films and live animation, which was largely a cost-cutting measure. The trend began with *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*, with documentary and live-action footage interwoven with the primary animated story. Many of these features also “starred” Disney icons like Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, and Goofy, and therefore seemed financially safe. There is and was no singular new character to market from most of these movies, and only two films ever made their ways into the parks on a long-term basis: *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* and *Song of the South.*

Looking at the films being released, as well as the financial situation the studio found itself in at the outset of the war, it seems that the immediate post-war years were used to regroup before the classic offerings of the 1950s, such as *Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty,* and *Peter Pan.*

After the years of uncertainty and insecurity, Disney released a film that harkened back to what many older Americans envisioned as a simpler time in the United States. 1946’s *Song of the South* was a combination animated / live-action film that centered on the Uncle Remus stories. Organizations like the Junior League and the Uncle Remus Memorial Association sponsored the Atlanta premiere in hopes that the event would

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388 *The Three Caballeros* was released in 1945, towards the end of the war, and could be considered a post-war film. While Donald Duck as a solo act is featured all over the parks, Panchito and Jose Caricoa join him in the “El Rive de Tiempo” (“River of Time”) attraction in Epcot’s Mexico pavilion. Mexico is the only nation in Latin America with a permanent World Showcase pavilion, but it in many ways it represents the entire region. 389 The Uncle Remus stories were written as children’s folktales during the late 19th century over the course of a few years. Joel Chandler Harris’s characters and their overall influence are often compared with other folk characters such as Winnie-the-Pooh and Peter Rabbit; R. Bruce Bickley, “Uncle Remus Tales,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia,* August 26, 2013, accessed December 7, 2015, [http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/uncle-remus-tales](http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/uncle-remus-tales).
recreate the grandeur of the 1939 *Gone With the Wind* premiere. Matthew Bernstein’s study of the white and African American Atlanta newspapers illustrates the contrasting reactions to the film, which highly romanticizes plantation life. Bernstein sees the film’s creation as a misguided attempt at nostalgia and “comfort” in the post-WWII era, and as a result, the film has not been released in the United States since the mid-1980s.\(^{390}\) This episode in Disney history is still one of the most curious, as the film has been removed from circulation, but there are still rides, songs, and merchandise based on the less offensive characters.

The misstep that is *Song of the South* is the strongest example of this “regrouping” period. As Jason Sperb titled his 2012 examination of *Song of the South*, this 1946 movie is “Disney’s Most Notorious Film.” In this instance, the emphasis is on “notorious,” and it is not praiseworthy. At the time of its release, the film was popular, although it received almost immediate backlash from African American groups. It was based on Joel Chandler Harris’s “Uncle Remus Stories,” and most of what people remember from the film is not the live action sequences, but the cartoon exploits of Brer Rabbit outsmarting Brer Fox and Brer Bear.\(^{391}\) However, while the Disney Company was attempting to cash in on post-WWII nostalgia of an America that once was, it underestimated the amount of racial change that had taken place during the war.\(^{392}\) Segregation during the war made the ideas of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) more troubling, and more Americans were coming around to the idea of integration. President Harry Truman integrated the troops fully in

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1946, starkly contrasting with the “happy slave” depicted in *The Song of the South*.

Matthew Bernstein’s investigation into the response of black and white Atlanta residents to the 1946 premiere is especially fascinating, as the response was not singular over racial lines. The world culture had changed dramatically, especially when one views the war through the lenses of race and ethnicity. By 1945, Americans were well aware of the Holocaust and its genocidal motivations. Perhaps Disney hoped his film would represent a comforting retreat to a romantic past, much as *Gone With the Wind* had accomplished in 1939. However, the intervening years and the war’s aftermath belied this hope. Meanwhile, America was taking some of its first important steps towards dismantling Jim Crow across the South.

Atlanta, which hosted *Song of the South*’s premiere, was already embroiled in numerous racial controversies, which made the movie’s reception there different than one would expect. The state, and especially its capital city, experienced a resurgence in the KKK’s visibility, including a horrific lynching of a black family in July 1946. The city was experiencing trouble with a neo-Nazi gang called “The Columbians,” which was largely comprised of white, poor, racist, and anti-Semitic members, who prevented black families from moving into white neighborhoods with whatever means necessary. One week before the film’s premiere, four leaders of the gang were arrested and the city revoked The Columbians’ organizational charter. Segregation was also being “undermined” in the post-war years and the enforcement of *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) in

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393 Bernstein, “Nostalgia,” 219-220.
Atlanta was creating more racial tension.\(^\text{396}\) Despite this, the black community was divided in its support of the film. While some felt it was out of touch with the new American racial realities, others enjoyed it because it brought Joel Chandler Harris’ hometown (Atlanta) some much needed positive publicity and pride.\(^\text{397}\) At its core, Bernstein sees the film’s creation as a misguided attempt at nostalgia and “comfort” in the post-WWII era, a charge that would follow the Disney Company around for decades in reference to diversity in their films and representation in the parks.\(^\text{398}\) Further proof of this lack of diversity is that Disney would not have its first black princess until 2009’s *The Princess and the Frog*.

The most curious part of *The Song of the South* is its legacy at Disney. While it remained popular through the 1940s and 1950s, it predictably fell out of favor during the Civil Rights Movement. By the 1980s, it was nearly impossible to view the movie in the United States. YouTube provides Disney fans with a glimpse into this “forbidden film,” but it is not available on DVD or VHS in America. Because of Disney’s “video vault” system, it seems odd that the movie would not be released at all. Essentially, it seems that Disney is embarrassed by only parts of the movie, and will wholly embrace the parts that cannot offend. One of the most popular songs in the Disney canon is “Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah,” which the average American cannot place in terms of its source. The theme of Splash Mountain, one of Disney’s most popular rides in both Disneyland and Walt


\(^{397}\) Bernstein, “Nostalgia,” 220.

\(^{398}\) Bernstein, Nostalgia,” 220.
Disney World, the animated portions of *The Song of the South*, which are modeled after the Brer Rabbit character and his peers. After a thrilling ride through the Brer Rabbit stories, one plummets down a large hill, finally to be greeted by audio-animatronic and anthropomorphic bears, birds, and bunnies singing “Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah” on a giant riverboat. It is located in Frontierland, which seems to be where offensive representations of American minorities are generally found in the Disney parks. Never mind that the Uncle Remus stories take place in the American South, while Frontierland is largely Wild West themed.

**Era 2: 1966 - 1984**

“Life is composed of lights and shadows, and we would be untruthful, insincere, and saccharine if we tried to pretend there were no shadows.” – Walt Disney

Although the studio began to lose direction soon after Walt’s 1966 death, it can be easily argued that the Walt Disney Studios’ darkest days were not following Walt’s death, but in the early days of June 1984. In the first five years or so, projects that Walt had largely directed continued steadily and without much pause. *The Jungle Book* debuted in 1967, featuring classic Sherman Brothers songs such as “Bare Necessities” and “I Wanna Be Like You.” In 1971, Disney World opened as *Walt Disney World*, and it did not quite feel like the Disney magic had gone out of the company quite yet. Roy died in 1971, shortly after the opening of WDW, and the company chugged along under the direction of Roy E. Disney (sometimes unfairly referred to as “the idiot nephew”) and Ron Miller, Walt Disney’s son-in-law.

The struggle to construct Walt’s vision of EPCOT is what ultimately distracted the corporation from the film arm of the studio. EPCOT in Walt’s mind was much
different than the park that eventually opened in 1982. Walt first gave the public a look at his initial concept for a utopian community in the fall of 1966 in a 25-minute promotional film.\(^{399}\) Walt planned for this experimental town to be located near the Magic Kingdom in which employees could live.\(^ {400}\) The layout and structure of the community would help cure social ills, such as teen delinquency, that crippled society. Instead, he would stress the importance of schools, senior centers, parks, and worship centers.\(^ {401}\) While the ultimate creation of EPCOT would mirror the American World’s Fairs more than Walt’s original vision, Disney executives were dedicated to the project because it had been Walt’s ultimate motivation to construct Disney World in the first place, and it was his final imaginative vision.\(^ {402}\) In the two years after EPCOT’s opening in 1982, the company’s stock would drop to $30 million, while the rest of the stock market was experiencing the early Reagan years’ boom and “Morning in America.” EPCOT was not recouping its $1 billion investment, and this hemorrhaging of money would cause the studio to suffer as well.\(^ {403}\)

Every facet of the Disney Company struggled in the 1970s. The animated films were fun, but none took on “classic” status. Movies like *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (which attempted to cash in on the success of *Mary Poppins*, featuring another magical British care-giver) and *The Aristocats* have their cult followings among Disney-philes, but they are not as engrained in American popular culture.\(^ {404}\) Hollywood at large was also

\(^{400}\) Gabler, *Triumph of the American Imagination*, 608.
\(^{401}\) *Ibid.*, 609.
\(^{402}\) *Ibid.*, 609.
\(^{403}\) Taylor, *Storming the Magic Kingdom*, 3.
\(^{404}\) There are very few Disney animated feature films from this era that have a park presence. *The Many Adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh* is the standout.
changing in the years following Walt’s death. The studio system was completely dismantled in the late 1960s, as was the production code, both events allowing for more independent and experimental filmmaking. In 1969, *Midnight Cowboy*, a film that was rated “X,” won Best Picture. Clearly, “times were a-changing,” and some might have wondered if Disney would be relegated to pre-sixties nostalgia. The 1970s was an era of cultural fracturing, due to various social movements, the on-going war in Southeast Asia, and other major crises. The blockbusters of the 1970s were grittier and more fantastic than even Disney could conceive. Disaster movies had a run of popularity. Summer blockbusters such as *Star Wars* and *Jaws* changed the definition of financial and cultural success in the film world, and Disney simply could not compete in this new environment. Things at the studio were tense indeed, and the company itself began to resemble part of what Americans were leaving behind in their rush for new thrills and sensations.

The animation studio was also fast losing direction, which removed the strong foundation of the entire business. The low point for animation arrived in 1985 with the long-delayed release of *The Black Cauldron*. With one of the largest budgets in studio history ($44 million), the film only recouped half of this amount. In terms of the success matrix, the film did not even meet the first marker. The ambitious interpretation of a multi-volume book set did not land well with audiences, and it marked the low ebb both creatively and financially for the animation studio. Timing was certainly also part of the problem. In addition to fairly uninspired releases, Disney was facing its first major

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405 Today, *Midnight Cowboy* is rated R, but under the new ratings system in the late 1960s, its very mature content warranted an X rating.
competition in the feature length animation field from Steven Spielberg (already a giant in the film field and a later competitor through DreamWorks) and Don Bluth, an animator who had defected from the studio with a large number of other staff members to create his own animation studio. He and others were unhappy with the studio’s direction, and left in 1979. In 1986, Bluth and Spielberg together produced *An American Tail*, which effectively mimicked the Disney model, but performed it better than Disney had for the last decade.

In early June 1984, corporate raider Saul Steinberg offered to take over Disney, split and sell most of its assets, keeping the amusement parks to manage himself. Disney executives discovered that they could not rely on the individual stockholders to save the company, and therefore had to seek out more dramatic steps. Roy E. Disney, who inherited the company from his uncle and father, resigned from the Board of Directors in order to make room for new leadership. Four new executives were brought on board in the mid-1980s: Chairman / CEO Michael Eisner, President Frank Wells, Jeffery Katzenberg, and Peter Schneider. The four men would create a “dream team” to bring Disney into its next golden era.

Having outsiders in the company seemed to inject the studio with new life, while also keeping with many of the traditions of the old Disney guard. Michael Eisner made himself incredibly visible, even introducing the *Magical World of Disney* feature every

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408 Taylor, *Storming the Magic Kingdom*, ix-x.
409 The events surrounding the re-shaping of the Walt Disney Corporation from the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s is fully recounted in the documentary *Waking Sleeping Beauty*. 

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Sunday night on ABC, just as Walt had done in the 1950s and 1960s. Roy E. was brought back into the fray, and the “What Would Walt Do?” mentality was used to promote technological advancement and family friendly storytelling, rather than considering what Walt Disney literally would have done twenty years before.

In one of the largest technological advancements in animation, computers were introduced to Disney in the 1980s. Some of the older animators, especially members of Walt’s elite “Nine Old Men” group, were skeptical, and many took years to come around to the potential of computers. Disney decided to take a chance on Pixar, a computer software company that housed a small experimental animation division, which produced computer animation in advertisements and short promotional films. Disney hoped to replace the tedious “ink and paint” system of animation with computers, and Pixar introduced its Computer Animation Production System, or CAPS. The first major Disney test was in the final scene of The Little Mermaid, the results of which pleased the leadership so much that they commissioned an entire film with CAPS, The Rescuers Down Under, slated to release in 1990. During this time, Lucasfilm, who was already using computers and technology in innovative ways, purchased Pixar. When The Rescuers Down Under was released in 1990 to disappointing results, CAPS was temporarily dropped. CAPS advocates knew the software was helpful, and they were disappointed that Disney executives could not see the same future of animation.

For children of the 1980s, Michael Eisner was the face of Disney. For a short period of my childhood, I thought Eisner was Walt Disney.

Price, Pixar Touch, 4.

Ibid., 92.

Price, Pixar Touch, 93-94; Waking Sleeping Beauty.

Waking Sleeping Beauty.
When the CAPS system was quickly deemed ineffective, Disney abandoned Pixar, which was left to scrape together a plan to sustain itself. Disney did agree to finance the company’s first feature length film in 1991, but almost bailed on the project in 1993 when a prescreening of an early draft of *Toy Story* faltered at every level.\footnote{Price, *Pixar Touch*, 4.} Woody was unlikable, Buzz was boring, and production on Toy Story shut down immediately.\footnote{Ibid., 130.} As Pixar continued to struggle financially, Lucasfilm sold the company to Steve Jobs, who would be just the person needed to provide the company with the patience it needed to return on investment.\footnote{Ibid.} While Disney was hitting its animation stride, Pixar was still stumbling at the starting gate, but that would change at both companies in 1995.

*Toy Story* would be a long process, both at the technical and creative levels. Difficult to imagine, but the Woody character was initially mean and unlikable. The script had additional issues that director John Lasseter had difficulty overcoming. The film eventually hit its creative stride, and in 1995, it became the first feature-length computer animated film. Disney was lucky enough to distribute it just as their animation department needed the additional revenue. The film won a special Oscar for technological innovation, and was even added to the National Film Registry, solidifying its importance to American film.

**Era 3: 1995 - 2009**


\footnote{Price, *Pixar Touch*, 4.} \footnote{Ibid., 130.} \footnote{Ibid., 7.}
As Pixar was praised all over the film industry, Disney Animation entered another period of drought. *The Lion King* grossed almost $1 billion, and the returns on *Pocahontas*, long in the making, disappointed in comparison. *The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin*, and *The Lion King* had set the bar very high, and while the films that followed have become favorites of the children of the 1980s and 1990s, they never quite reached the heights of the “second golden age.” 1995’s *Pocahontas*, a woefully inaccurate look at the Jamestown settlement and its Powhatan neighbors, had been conceived along with the films of 1989 – 1994, but did not do as well as the box office. It represented Disney’s attempt to broaden the multicultural appeal of their princesses, adding a lovely Native American to the lineup. But the film’s overall performance left executives unsatisfied. Through the rest of the 1990s, Disney’s films followed the formula of other successful animated features, but they all fell short of the expectations set with *Beauty and the Beast, The Lion King, The Little Mermaid, and Aladdin*. These four major films were not simply children’s movies or family movies, but they became cultural events. All four have since been made into Broadway shows. *Beauty and the Beast* was even nominated for the Best Picture Oscar, an honor that had never before been bestowed on an animated film.

Until 2000, the animation department did well, but could not necessarily recapture the magic of the early 1990s. Animation technology became more expensive; computer animation was not as cost effective as it is today, and traditional animation requires a lot of man hours. Subsequently, the stakes for each movie rose. Failure, or even partial

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418 Original sketches suggest that the animators had intended to present the character of Pocahontas more accurately as a 10-year-old girl. However, the finished film showed her as a young adult and distorted the relationships between her and the men of the Jamestown settlement.
success, might prove to be extraordinarily costly. Film budgets increased wildly, and many of the films lost significant sums of money.\textsuperscript{419} This troubled period can mainly be attributed to the state of the animation industry at this time. For the first time since a brief period in the early 1980s, Disney was actually being challenged as the leader in feature-length animation. Aside from Pixar, which had a distribution relationship with Disney but was still largely a competitor in this respect, DreamWorks was creating animated features that the entire family could enjoy, even teenagers. \textit{Shrek} (2001), as well as its three sequels, were well received, and the company has enjoyed a positive reception to the present day.\textsuperscript{420} For the first time, Disney faced the possibility of being bested in the genre it had practically invented.

The box office receipts were even more dismal after 2000, as films began to lose money at rapid rates. Pixar and DreamWorks started to eat away at the Disney animation market, despite Pixar’s partnership with Walt Disney Studios. DreamWorks cashed in on two things. First, when Disney had unceremoniously overlooked Jeffrey Katzenberg for a promotion to President of the Disney Company after the 1994 death of Frank Wells, Katzenberg left the company and formed DreamWorks with David Geffen and Steven Spielberg. Katzenberg then took the lessons he learned during Disney’s latest heyday and transformed DreamWorks’ animation studio into a powerhouse, beginning with 2001’s \textit{Shrek}, which employed both juvenile and adult humor to bring everyone to the theatre, not just families with younger children.

\textsuperscript{419} After 1999’s \textit{Tarzan}, the only other film to make significant revenue at the box office until \textit{Princess and the Frog} (2009) was 2002’s \textit{Lilo and Stitch}.

\textsuperscript{420} Aside from the \textit{Shrek} franchise, DreamWorks is also responsible for the \textit{Ice Age} and \textit{Madagascar} series.
Pixar seemed to suck up and carry forth most of the Disney magic in the 2000s. It had a string of hits after 1995’s *Toy Story*, including *A Bug’s Life*, *Monsters Inc.*, and *The Incredibles*. Disney was able to use these properties in the parks and sell its merchandise, but the credit for the stories and constantly maturing animation techniques went to Pixar and its studio head, former Disney employee John Lasseter. Pixar would continue to build on this success, but its relationship with Disney was confusing and unstable. At the same time, Michael Eisner began to believe that 2D animation was on the outs, and he considered shutting down the traditional animation arm of the studio.\(^{421}\) Disney’s animation studio, independent of Pixar, experimented with CGI animation with 2000’s *Dinosaur*, but it did not perform as well as expected at the box office.\(^{422}\) For the early part of the new millennium, only the Pixar distribution deal and the success of certain live-action films were keeping the studio afloat.\(^{423}\)

In 2004, when the contract that granted Disney distribution rights was nearing expiration, Jobs actually pulled out of distribution negotiations with Michael Eisner. One of the many reasons was due to testimony that Eisner gave to the Senate committee on Commerce, Science, and Technology in 2002. In his statement, Eisner cited an advertisement that he felt encouraged music and movie piracy with the tag line “Rip. Mix. Burn.” This ad was in fact for Apple Computers, which was the parent company of Pixar.\(^{424}\) Jobs, with his eyes firmly on placing powerful creative possibilities in the hands of Apple customers, was offended by the accusation. His “creativity decentralization”

\(^{422}\) Ibid.  
\(^{423}\) *Ibid.*, 228.  
was a vision foreign to Disney executives, and needless to say, negotiations did not go well. Analysts speculated that this potential loss could be the end of Disney films, as Pixar distribution comprised 45% of the operating income from Disney’s film division. However, these strange actions on Eisner’s part signaled the end of his Disney tenure, and he soon left the company. When current Disney CEO Bob Iger replaced Eisner in October 2005, Iger quickly bought Pixar Animation Studios outright, a deal which amounted to $7.4 billion. Ed Catmull and Lasseter were appointed to the positions of Disney Animation President and Chief Creative Officer, respectively. They brought their unique leadership and storytelling styles from Pixar to Disney Animation. “We are trying to build back that Disney name. Success breeds autonomy. The more we can be successful, the more they’ll keep letting us do what we want to do,” posited John Lasseter to the LA Times. A new era at Disney had begun.

As Disney and Pixar fully join forces in the animation realm, a new emphasis has been placed on more traditional animation techniques, and the studio happily employs both computer-aided and hand-drawn animation, side by side. 2009’s The Princess and the Frog was created using both techniques, which allowed the computer-animated characters to be more realistic, while the hand-drawn backgrounds of 1920s New Orleans captured the old-world essence of the city. Pixar also continues to create films in a

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425 Price, Pixar Touch, 5.
426 Ibid., 4.
428 Ibid.
completely computer animated fashion, both expanding on franchises and generating new properties.

Animation has been, is, and will always remain at the core of everything the Disney Company does. Even far-flung wings of the company are connected tangentially to animation. Many of the attractions in the parks, not to mention the parades, shows, and other merchandise, are based on a Disney animated film. It is through animation that Disney characters and storylines have entered popular consciousness, as well as the collective unconscious. Animation allowed these tropes to become part of the American mythos. Michael Steiner argues that Disney himself is considered the most powerful “mythmaker” of our times, merging his own childhood with popular nostalgia to create the Disney brand.\textsuperscript{429} Steiner also notes that folklorist John Dorst believes Disney’s theme parks have replaced media as the most effective method of “conveying the spectacle and immensity of that imagined place.”\textsuperscript{430} While that may be true, especially considering the immersion into Disney that occurs in the parks, the original “imagined place” of the Disney brand is the animated film. It is the dark woods of \textit{Snow White}; it’s the world beyond the rabbit hole in \textit{Alice in Wonderland}; it’s the faux-Scandinavian nation of Arrendell in \textit{Frozen}.

As with any company, success comes from an analysis of previous failures. With Disney, as can be seen in all three areas of drought, when animation suffers, the rest of the corporation can lose its footing. Walt Disney had a philosophy of constant improvement and evolution, but when new characters do not connect with moviegoers,

\textsuperscript{430} \textit{Ibid.}
the parks cannot create new attractions or parades around them. Despite the Disney universe encompassing the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), ESPN, and Marvel brands, the continuation of the empire relies on the animated canon.

Outside forces also cause slowdowns at Disney, especially in terms of culture and competition. World War II and the cultural changes it brought almost came too fast for Disney to appropriately respond, as animation is a slow process. In the 1970s and early 1980s, America was coping with “stagflation” and recession. The competition that sprang up in the late 1990s and early 2000s was too overwhelming for Disney to overcome. It was not until Disney purchased Pixar, essentially its prime competitor, that they found their footing again.

Disney is fortunate that they tend to evolve and learn from missteps quickly, which contributes to their longevity. In order to continue to endure, the company should make all attempts to remain at the forefront of animation technology, rather than letting other small companies take the risks and pull ahead for over a decade. Additionally, Disney should work more diligently at reflecting more modern views on ethnic diversity, gender relations, and other political issues. The Disney canon is still overwhelmingly white, while the American population is increasingly non-white.

The animation arm of the sprawling empire that is the Walt Disney Company truly sits at the heart of its most important corporate strategy: synergy. Even as the parks continue to grow in popularity, parks alone cannot create the most successful products for merchandising. Looking at the two most profitable ages for Disney (the 1950s and the 1989 – 1994 eras), the company was firing on all cylinders, seemingly minting its own money. New parks were opening, blockbuster movies were being released, and the
company was incorporating television in a bigger way than before. Both Walt and Michael Eisner used the Sunday night *Wonderful World of Disney* to introduce themselves to the public and advertise the newest attractions and films each week. Today, as was in the 1970s, the corporate face of Disney is invisible to the average moviegoer. However, through the creative talents of John Lasseter and the prowess of Bob Iger, the company seems to be in another period of growth. Both Pixar and Disney Animation are producing blockbuster films, one topping the next in terms of profits. The company just announced a huge expansion of both the Florida and California parks, and at the 2015 D-23 Convention, they also announced a highly anticipated slate of animated films for the next five years. As long as the company trusts its animation foundations, it will continue into another Golden Age.
When I was a child, my family journeyed to Walt Disney World every few years; of course, the ideal time for anyone to visit a Disney park is while school is in session. In order to secure an “excused absence” from school, one has to attest to the trip’s educational value. My mother enjoyed creating cleverly-worded reasons as to why the trip was educational, but upon further review, it appears that she did not need to try so hard for clever phrasing, since educational opportunities live at the heart of the Disney experience. That key message is the core of this dissertation chapter: since its inception, the Disney experience has had a significant educational component, which the company’s clearly successful execution of the entertainment mission frequently eclipses. It is my belief that this often-obscured educational component – which I contend still retains validity in the contemporary Disney environment – has historical roots. In particular, I identify this model as part of a longstanding trend that not only avoided discriminating between education and entertainment, but which intentionally blends the two. This case study will identify and analyze the educational aspect of the Disney theme parks and consider it as part of a historical trend with roots in the early Republic, in particular, in the “rational amusement” that Charles Willson Peale’s museum exemplifies. The case study investigates what sets the Disney theme park experience apart from the larger pack. At its core, the Disney parks are a continuation of an American amusement tradition extending back to Charles Willson Peale in Philadelphia. The concept of rational amusement, or the rejection of it, is at the core of American amusements through P.T.

431 The terms “rational amusement” and “rational entertainment” are interchangeable, and will be used as such in this chapter.
Barnum, Buffalo Bill, Coney Island, and the World’s Fairs. While it is a corporate entity at its core, the Disney parks, particularly Walt Disney World, continues to use rational amusement to entertain and enlighten its guests.

Certainly, on my family vacations, we were also constantly entertained. The “fun” elements usually dominated our consciousness, so that we seldom realized how much we had learned until day’s end. This concept of “rational amusement,” “rational entertainment,” or entertaining while educating is not a Disney creation, although he executed it well. It has a transnational pedigree with strong Enlightenment Era roots, but in its American iteration, it begins with Philadelphia’s Charles Willson Peale and continues through to modern pedagogy. John Dewey harnessed its power in his Progressive Era works, such as School and Society, which places a premium on concepts such as “active learning” and multi-media presentation. This chapter is a case study that uses the concept of rational amusement to connect Peale to Disney, and to his creative successors at the Walt Disney Company, under the conceptual umbrella of the study of American amusement. At the same time, it provides one explanation as to why the Walt Disney Company has become such an iconic American institution. I argue here that Disney’s continuation of the rational amusement trend speaks to an impulse that Americans reflexively trust, even if they are not consciously aware of their attraction to the pedigree of this idea.

Scholarship on Disney and other American amusements provide a clear lens through which to view the concept of rational amusement and its tradition in the American experience. Focusing more broadly on family vacations, Susan Sessions Rugh’s Are We There Yet? The Golden Age of American Family Vacations explores the
phenomenon of the 1950s road trip, a trend that would inspire the creation of both Disneyland and Walt Disney World. Understanding the family vacation is an important piece to understanding the motivation and success behind the Disney parks. Disney built both of his parks during the height of the golden age of family road trips, choosing both locations because they were accessible by car. Rugh’s work is the most comprehensive on the topic, and it is well regarded within American Studies.\footnote{Susan Sessions Rugh, Are We There Yet? The Golden Age of American Family Vacations (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007).}

In terms of the parks themselves, Stephen Fjellman’s Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America is one of the few scholarly texts to focus solely on Walt Disney World as opposed to Disneyland, investigating the larger cultural impact that the second project had on American culture.\footnote{Stephen Fjellman, Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).} It is truly comprehensive in its scope, and it provides information and analysis that is invaluable in a sea of Disneyland-focused scholarship. Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West edited Disneyland and Culture, which focuses primarily on the effects of Disneyland, but expands its scope in one section to other Disney projects, including Celebration, Florida.\footnote{Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West, Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co. Inc. Publishers, 2011).} Celebration, in many ways, emerged out of the initial drafts of EPCOT Center, or Progress City as Walt called it. While this project seeks to focus on the early years of the Walt Disney World resort, it cannot overlook the overarching effects of the original park and its other iterations around the globe. Much of Disneyland is mirrored in Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom, and the analyses in Disneyland and Culture can be easily applied across the Disney universe.
Richard Beard’s *Walt Disney’s EPCOT: Creating the New World of Tomorrow* examines the construction of EPCOT from inside the “Disney bubble.”

The book itself is really a coffee table book intended for sale to commemorate the park’s opening and for Disney fanatics to collect. However, that perspective is crucial in my larger dissertation. In order to understand the business decisions made following Walt Disney’s death, I look to EPCOT. The book also provides a behind-the-scenes look at how the Imagineers operate and how Walt’s vision ultimately evolved into the Epcot of today. Finally, the book illustrates the changes made at Epcot from 1982 until today, including the changes in pavilion sponsorship and the changes to the World Showcase to reflect a more culturally sensitive outlook on the part of Disney. For example, what is now the Morocco pavilion was originally intended to be simply “Africa.” Bell Laboratories was the original sponsor of Epcot’s centerpiece, Spaceship Earth, an attraction that is now sponsored by Siemens.

Leonard Zehnder’s *Florida’s Disney World: Promises and Problems* is an analysis of Walt Disney World on a micro-level, as it discusses the issues that arose surrounding the rapid growth in central Florida following the Disney World announcement in 1964. Zehnder wrote his analysis in 1975, a mere four years after the park opened, but he allows us to see how instantly Disney impacted the Orlando area. Richard Foglesong’s *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando* investigates the strange and sometimes precarious relationship between the Walt Disney Company

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and Orlando, Florida. The notion that one private company should have such sway in an otherwise public place is fascinating and brings the world Zehnder into the twenty-first century.

Following the July 17, 1955 opening of Disneyland, the development of surrounding Anaheim, California increased at a fever pitch. Of course, the growth of Southern California was not simply a function of Disney, but Disneyland gave Anaheim the atmosphere of modernity and mass appeal that fueled the pace of nearby development. Simply put, competitors recognized the profitability of the Disney location and wanted some of the action for themselves. But Anaheim was not Disney’s alone; it was a town that was home to Disney’s creation. Before Walt Disney could control the growth through political pressure, motels and seedy tourist attractions closed in around his dream park, cashing in on Disneyland’s success by catering to tourist spillover. Suddenly surrounded by developed land and with no way of growing outward, Disney eliminated part of his master plan to constantly expand the park. Chastened but wiser for the lesson, he began plans for his next project, which would evolve into the Walt Disney World Resort outside Orlando, Florida. This location is where, posthumously, his most effective means of rational entertainment would be housed: Epcot. It is there that we will look to see the continuation of a trend that began in the United States at its birth.

In 1776, 180 years before Disneyland opened its gates, another innovative American, Charles Willson Peale, debuted his museum, which was unlike any other attraction of its day in that it was unusually and intentionally accessible to the middle and working classes. Peale’s vision did not include the idea of creating a repository of

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437 Richard Foglesong, Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
knowledge and artifacts available only to the scholarly class – a holdover of the European tradition. Appropriate to the Enlightenment, with its enthusiasm for popular learning of all sorts, the museum had dual focuses of natural history and the admittedly brief – but very promising -- history of the new American republic. Both Peale and his attendees took it for granted that the birth of the new nation heralded a remarkable future that would justify such optimism. To put it in the words found on the Great Seal of the United States (visible on every dollar bill): “Novus Ordo Seculorum.” “A New Order of the Ages” was what that saying promised, and Peale intended to show it off. He employed the tactic of “rational entertainment” to educate and amuse his visitors, much like Walt Disney would almost two centuries later. Peale’s museum was infused with a civic faith that citizenship in the new republic required and would benefit from education. Disney thus embraced such a democratic ethos, which was that his combination of education and entertainment – each element designed to strengthen the other – was open to the people rather than the provenance of privilege. In making this commitment, he took up the standard first raised in the United States to great public acclaim by Charles Willson Peale.

“The Artist in His Museum”

“Rational entertainment,” or “rational amusement,” refers to enjoying oneself while simultaneously being instructed, an activity that fit well with the Enlightenment philosophies of the early American republic. During the Age of Reason, enthusiasm for learning was such that theorists assumed that education was meant to be enlivening. Jean Jacques Rousseau encouraged well-rounded education for the ideal citizen of the republic in his work Emile, or On Education. Prior to the American republic, there were of course
many venues in which education and entertainment were seen either as complementary or synonymous, such as the Potsdam court of Prussia’s Frederick the Great or the Parisian salons of M. de Chatelet, both preferred haunts of Voltaire. Nations pointed to these venues, hotbeds of learning, with pride as examples of their respective enlightenment and advancement. But these venues were akin to or in fact part of royal courts, thus open only to nobility and the favored few. Voltaire went to Berlin at the behest of Frederick. It was as Frederick’s charge that he graced the court with his wisdom and wit and therefore, his work there was meant to contribute to Frederick’s royal glory. When that relationship soured, Voltaire’s value in Berlin was diminished. In this manner, public intellectuals were almost like battleships or aircraft carriers in a later age: they existed at least in part to demonstrate and prove a nation’s and ruler’s glory. But Rousseau had in mind a far more democratic situation. Rousseau’s work embodied the democratic ethos that knowledge and its liberating power should encompass the people, not just the aristocracy. Learning was seen as a tool for social uplift, aimed at and contributing towards the masses and their wellbeing.

Many scholars have explained how the Enlightenment was philosophically responsible for the American Revolution, inspiring the founders, especially through the words of John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*. Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, and the other founding fathers exemplified this intellectual tradition, and it is well known and honored. It is important to remember the relatively small size of the elite American community of letters and politics of that day.

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*Rousseau’s philosophy would also enlighten French educator Jean Baptiste de La Salle, who broke from the aristocracy in order to bring knowledge to the poor boys of France. One of La Salle’s namesake universities now sits on Peale’s former Philadelphia estate.*
Unsurprisingly, Jefferson and Peale were members of the same social circle. The museum comes up as a topic of conversation between Peale and Jefferson in their letters, solidifying the connection between Peale’s museum and the Enlightenment. In his letter dated June 5, 1796, Jefferson tells Peale of a potential donor from Europe, whose collection would expand the museum’s offerings of European natural life.439 The two also discussed making Peale’s museum a “National Academy,” although Jefferson called into question the constitutionality of such a move.440 Jefferson’s enthusiasm is not surprising, since he himself was a collector and believer in the importance of catalogued knowledge.

Leading scholars such as Daniel Boorstin (The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson), Henry Steele Commager (Empire of Reason: How Europe Imagined and America Realized the Enlightenment), and Garry Wills (Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence; Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment) have examined the role of the Enlightenment in the nation’s founding from various angles, ranging from the debt to French philosophers such as Montesquieu to the influence of Scottish Common-Sense Realism.441 Peale scholar Charles Coleman Sellers presents evidence that show Peale’s familiarity with the Enlightenment philosophers,

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440 Ibid., 138.
especially the French.\textsuperscript{442} This dissertation chapter concentrates on a resultant popular
culture development, which both Peale and Disney exemplify in ways appropriate to their
respective eras.

Charles Willson Peale was born in Maryland in 1741, and his interests in art and
science both took root there. After his father’s death in 1750, the family moved to
Annapolis in order to secure work for his mother. Peale himself was a bound apprentice
for ten years to a saddler, an experience that formed his zealous drive that would serve
him later in life.\textsuperscript{443} In his twenties, Peale worked in a number of trades, most significantly
watch and clock repair, in Annapolis. Aside from Peale’s interest in the natural world, he
was proud of his abilities in clock making, and he even placed clues to this passion in his
early portraits.\textsuperscript{444} These interests and skills would allow him to make connections in
Philadelphia with the upper class, which highly valued those with knowledge in science
and technology.\textsuperscript{445} Peale settled in Philadelphia during the Revolution. He could not have
established his museum in a more ideal place in the new nation. Philadelphia was then the
largest city in the United States, and it was widely considered its intellectual capital and
the entry point of the Enlightenment.\textsuperscript{446} It was in Philadelphia that new ideas – including,
not coincidentally, the Constitution – went to be weighed and tested. Additionally,

\textsuperscript{442} Charles Coleman Sellers, \textit{Mr. Peale’s Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First
Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company,
\textsuperscript{443} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{444} Sidney Hart, “‘To Encrease the Comforts of Life’: Charles Willson Peale and the
Mechanical Arts,” \textit{The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography} 110, no. 3 (July
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid., 326.
\textsuperscript{446} Myron F. Wehtje, “Charles Willson Peale and His Temple,” \textit{Pennsylvania History} 36,
Philadelphia, with its moderate Quaker roots, was not as hard-lined or suspicious about entertainments as their northern Calvinist and Puritan neighbors in New England. In that region, public amusements were always seen as doubtful at best and a menace to morals at worst. As a result, Peale faced less scrutiny about the educational aspects of the museum than he would have dealt with in other colonies.447 Philadelphia’s unique cultural background made it a prime place for intellectual exploration and revolution.

Amusements and entertainment in the colonies were tightly controlled, like many other activities, primarily to mesh with the values of each respective settlement. Every colony had its own cultural angle, which formed a backdrop to the political near-independence, which each one protected so zealously. Indeed, especially in the early revolutionary and republic phases, citizenship in a colony or state could easily trump “American” identity. This ideology was one of the major barriers in the approval of the Declaration of Independence. For these reasons, Philadelphia was fertile soil for Peale’s experiment in rational amusement.

As far as colonial popular culture went, those activities that were deemed acceptable tended to belong to the upper class, such as billiards or thoroughbred horseracing. These pastimes supported high-stakes gambling – which meant they had the whiff of real money and the repute of the same. Lower-class activities such as cards and cockfighting were hypocritically discouraged.448 Additionally, in the run-up to the war, previously acceptable diversions such as professional theatre were seen as symbols of British life and decadence, and thus seen as politically controversial and

“unrepublican.” This suspicion would actually provide a boost to rational amusement, since it combined the appeal of public amusement with that of citizenship. Many revolutionary leaders saw plays, Games, and other diversions as frivolous and not in line with the new nation’s values. For example, Connecticut passed 1773’s Act for the Suppressing of Mountebanks that prevented idle activities, and Philadelphia followed suit in 1774. However, a public still stood in need of some entertainment. Certain activities were embraced in order to still provide relaxation and amusement to colonists and early Americans. The concept of republican virtues and education plays heavily into a major American studies work, Linda Kerber’s “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective.” In the republic, it is essential that fathers AND mothers impart republican virtues onto their children in order to preserve the society. As Kerber put it, “the stability of the nation rested on the persistence of virtue among its citizens, then the creation of virtuous citizens was dependent on the presence of wives and mothers who were well informed.” Peale’s museum served these same goals, and as The Artist in His Museum suggests, women were welcome to educate themselves there on republican values and the natural world.

To Peale and his contemporaries, the concept of rational amusement was a way to circumvent these wartime laws. The Continental Congress enacted legislation that would restrict certain “nonproductive activities” in order to encourage Americans to be frugal and industrious during the Revolutionary War. Pennsylvania also passed similar laws, but

449 Ashby, With Amusement, 5.
450 Ibid., 6.
these were more to encourage moral behavior than to restrict actions. By using the phrase “rational amusement” in promoting his museum, Charles Willson Peale was able to illustrate the value of his endeavor and enhance it with the gloss of public-mindedness. Later in the 18th century, theater was made legal again on similar grounds\(^\text{452}\). However, some laws stayed in effect well into the 19th century.\(^\text{453}\) Charles Willson Peale wholly embraced the ideals of the Enlightenment, which showed in his life as an artist and an educator.

If Benjamin Franklin had never been born, it is possible Charles Willson Peale could have filled his role as the nation’s most famous innovator and scientist-at-large. The two were clearly compatriots. Peale, who is best known for his portraiture work, was a jack-of-all-trades, enthusiastically dabbling in engineering, zoology, and other natural sciences. His lack of specialization reflected this stage of the Enlightenment. The pursuit of knowledge was the goal; no subject was off limits or closed to the inquiring mind. After moving to Philadelphia in 1776, Peale began to display his own artwork; eventually, his interest in the sciences evolved into the Repository for Natural Curiosities, the formalized version of his museum depicted in \textit{The Artist in His Museum}.\(^\text{454}\) Peale was so devoted to the concept of his museum that in 1794, he announced to the Philadelphia public that he was leaving portrait painting of the new republic’s leaders to his talented sons and pursuing the museum full time.\(^\text{455}\) An early sort of pragmatism lived at the heart

\(^{453}\) Ashby, \textit{With Amusement}, 7.
\(^{454}\) Brigham, \textit{Public Culture}, 1 – 2.
of the museum concept – every artist and collector needs a venue in which to display his creations and holdings. Peale spied the inherent logic and put it into practice. The museum was meant for all Americans, not just the upper class, which is in contrast to European custom. It combined an education in zoology and botany with a cultivation and appreciation for the heroes of the new republic. Peale also felt that the natural history displays were also beneficial to the education of the new republic, as David R. Brigham points out: “…Peale expressed his belief that animal behavior provided a model for an economically productive, socially harmonious, and morally upright republic.”

The collection was very much in line with other American museums of the day, which were either eclectic and available to all or were specific and only for the upper classes. Peale sought government financial support for the museum, as he believed that an enlightened and educated public was essential to the future success of the American experiment.

The museum was located inside Independence Hall, one of the new nation’s first significant landmarks.

When Peale painted *The Artist in his Museum*, he had already begun to acquire a mastodon he was exhuming piece-by-piece. The mastodon became museum’s centerpiece, and his painting *The Exhumation of the Mastodon* depicted the process of removing the specimen from the ground. The museum was also the subject of another

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Peale piece, entitled *The Long Room*, to which his son Titian Ramsay Peale II also contributed. This work provides contemporary scholars with a more detailed view of the museum that is merely background in *The Artist in His Museum*. The artists also highlighted certain exhibits in their painting, such as portraits, William Rush’s sculptures, and North American artifacts. As David Brigham points out, *The Exhumation of the Mastodon* depicts the process of creating the museum, while *The Long Room* shows the finished venue.\(^{459}\) It can also be argued that while *The Artist in His Museum* is not chronologically first, it acts as a visual preview of the museum and its collection.

Within the discipline of American studies, Peale’s works – particularly *The Artist in His Museum* – serve as visual tropes that instructors often use to explain or introduce the field. It features in many an American Studies lecture course. It is a visual text intrinsic to the field, and in the case of my argument, it serves as a touchstone because it reflects this movement in American amusements that can be traced straight to Walt Disney’s parks in the 20\(^{th}\) century. Much of what American studies scholars know about Peale’s museum can be gleaned from *The Artist in His Museum* and *The Long Room*. With his eye on mass appeal, Peale had hoped to overcome the class, gender, and race barriers that other museums imposed, but his visitors still widely used their membership or visitor status in order to connect themselves to a specific social class.\(^{460}\) *The Artist in His Museum* depicts the diversity that Peale hoped to attract. The woman in the foreground is depicted as a Quaker, a common sight in Penn’s Philadelphia, while the others are not identified as such. Behind her are a man and a boy, which illustrate that Peale intended the museum to be for all ages. As Lawrence Levine points out, “The

\(^{459}\) Brigham, *Public Culture*, 45 – 47.

\(^{460}\) Ibid., 1.
people in the room are equally varied…[which] testified to Peale’s desire to make his
museum a source of enlightenment and “rational amusement.” Peale held lectures for
different industries, including agriculture, some of which were held at night after the
agricultural workday had ended. Oil lamps made these “extended hours” possible, and the
action was intended to make the museum accessible to those with limited leisure time.

The Evolution of Rational Entertainment

To further understand rational entertainment in its concept and execution,
consider an entertainer who signaled a movement away from this method. Showman P.T.
Barnum provides an excellent contrast to Peale, as well as an example of the type of
amusements that Peale had to contend with and modify his museum to attract. According
to popular culture historian, LeRoy Ashby, Peale’s goal of “uplift and information” was
redirected to compete with other strictly amusing entertainments. His motto of “Whoso
would learn Wisdom, let him enter here!” soon gave way to the display of curiosities
more in line with Barnum’s later offerings, including a four-legged chicken and a
murderer’s finger. Peale would also have exhibits that Barnum would later claim he
was the first to display, most notably a living rhino. In fact, Peale had been the first to
bring a live rhino to the United States in 1826 at his New York museum. In 1841, 15
years after Peale’s death, Barnum opened his museum on Broadway in New York City,
taking over a shuttered museum space. His museum had similarities to Peale’s, such as

461 Levine, Highbrow, 147.
462 Brigham, Public Culture, 3 – 5; Kunhardt, Philip B. Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III, and
Peter W. Kunhardt, P.T. Barnum: America’s Greatest Showman (New York: Alfred A.
Knopf, 1995), 37.
463 Ashby, With Amusement, 31.
464 Kunhardt, P.T. Barnum, 111.
zoological specimens, but Barnum was more widely known for his exhibits that were pure entertainment. As historian Neil Harris notes in his biography of Barnum, the shift of the concept of an American museum from a place of rational amusement to a place of pure amusement reflects the larger cultural adjustment from “Jeffersonian republicanism to Jacksonian democracy.” 465 In the early republic, which reflected Jeffersonian republicanism, the common man was celebrated, but the values of the ruling class were still the dominant hegemonic views. Under Andrew Jackson, however, the common man is the ruling class, and therefore the rules of acceptable culture shifts to highlight more pedestrian tastes.

In the early days of his museum, Barnum skirted amusement reformers with advertisements that emphasized the educational and moral values of his attractions. Later, as the working class became a more vocal audience, he dropped the ruse and catered to their more “irreverent” tastes. 466 In 1870, Barnum began his evolution into running his circus, as he joined with William Cameron Coup and Dan Castello in their established circus venture. Barnum put his museum on wheels and inside tents, creating a larger event than the modern circus-goer would recognize today. 467 Unlike his original museums, and even Peale’s shrine to rational entertainment, the circus traveled all over the nation, and it became a national institution, versus something only accessible to those with means to travel. After establishing himself as the leader of the American circus, he continued his displays of human abnormalities.

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467 Kunhardt, P.T. Barnum, 222 – 224.
Another showman of the era was Buffalo Bill, or more formally, William F. Cody, who also helped transform American amusement. Like Barnum, Cody sought to expose Americans and others worldwide to people and creatures they had not yet seen. Cody’s Wild West Show assisted in solidifying an American identity or character, despite his mythical interpretations of the frontier ethos. He was not alone in his depiction of the west, which had long been mythologized as a way to create American identity in a brand-new nation, but his show brought those ideas to life. Spectators could actually see Native Americans, Annie Oakley, and Buffalo Bill himself, solidifying previous depictions in popular culture. As Joy S. Kasson posits in her work on Buffalo Bill, Cody also brought the modern idea of celebrity into being, and he kicked off the modern American fascination with famous people.  

Barnum and Buffalo Bill aside, American amusements in the Gilded Age still largely adhered to the “rational amusement” model. During the American Victorian era, which John Kasson characterizes as “a culture in many respects more thoroughly ‘Victorian’ than the England over which Victoria reigned,” the cultural trendsetters still believed that amusement should be constructive at its core. In short, high culture was considered “official,” and was ushered through the 19th century by mainly WASP-y New Englanders. In fact, P.T. Barnum came from this same New England stock that embraced Victorian values, as he was brought up in the Congregational Church. However, the influence of colorful family members and friends would do more to shape

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470 Ibid., 4 – 5.
Barnum’s ideas on amusement, and he was almost born to be the counter to these strict Victorian values.\textsuperscript{471}

A major development in amusements was the advent and popularity of Brooklyn’s Coney Island. Most amusements had subtle (or very overt) ways of segregating its populations, especially in terms of income. In order to keep out “undesirables,” highbrow amusements, such as the opera and legitimate theatre, used expensive ticket prices to make it accessible only to the upper class. Olmsted and Vaux’s Central Park (1858), which was initially conceived as an escape for all New Yorkers, enforced stifling rules that turned the pastoral oasis into a playground for the rich.\textsuperscript{472} In contrast, Coney Island provided a universally accessible amusement that every city dweller needed: the pastoral seaside. The ocean’s pull during New York’s humid and oppressive summers was strong in the era before air conditioning, and as a result, the beach was teeming with Americans of all backgrounds and economic standings. As John Kasson posits in his \textit{Amusing the Million}, “…an essential element of Coney Island’s appeal for virtually all its visitors was the contrast it offered to conventional society, everyday routine, and dominant cultural authorities.”\textsuperscript{473} There were no barriers or rules to keep these groups apart. Some rides even physically threw them into one another. Victorian mores were sliding away, and Coney Island marks that important change in American amusement and popular culture.

Starting in the 1850s, Worlds Fairs provided educational experiences similar to those offered in Peale’s museum, primarily concerning cultural offerings and

\textsuperscript{471} Kunhardt, \textit{P. T. Barnum}, 4 – 7.
\textsuperscript{472} Kasson, \textit{Amusing the Million}, 12 – 16.
\textsuperscript{473} \textit{Ibid.}, 41.
technological advances. The first major American World’s Fair celebrated the nation’s 1876 centennial, bringing guests to Philadelphia, where the entire American experiment had begun. The 1893 Chicago Columbian Exhibition is considered a major turning point in amusements as the fun-filled Midway was juxtaposed with the sterile, more traditional White City. 474 During the Gilded Age, America was coming into its own as a country, beginning to join the cultural ranks of France and Great Britain. America hosted fairs all over the nation as it came into maturity, including St. Louis (1903 – 1904, to celebrate the Louisiana Purchase Centennial), Chicago (1933), New York (1939 – 1940), and Seattle (1962). These fairs featured innovations such as the telephone (1876), the television set (1939), and the Ferris Wheel (1893).

The awe and power of the World’s Fairs provide a smooth transition into a discussion of the most popular entertainer and amusement provider of the 20th century. Walt Disney’s connection to rational amusement began before he was born, as his father, Elias Disney, spent much of 1892 and 1893 working on the constructions of Chicago’s Columbian Exhibition to support his growing family, which Walt joined in 1901. His upbringing in the American Midwest informed his worldview, and the values espoused in the parks should come as no surprise in that they mimic the both Worlds Fairs and early 20th century Victorian values.

Walt’s career as a cultural educator began in the 1930s and 1940s, especially as the world’s nations fought for cultural dominance. Walt’s success with his feature length animated films and his very popular Merrie Melody shorts caught the eye of the American government during World War II. His work made him an effective purveyor of

ideas and American character, and the War Department hoped to harness it to gain allies. Through this wartime experience, which was very successful in convincing Latin American nations to join with the Allies, Disney discovered the power of effective filmmaking in terms of education.

In 1945, he wrote a piece for *Public Opinion Quarterly* entitled “Mickey as Professor.” In it, he outlines the many ways that film can act as a supplement to education and enrich how Americans learn. In this article, he states: “Moreover, the character of our medium and output, as well as the influence of the personalities who carried out this work, led us toward attitudes that are fundamentally educational although expressed in the manner of entertainment.” If he was not aware of the concise phrase, Disney was certainly aware of the power and sway of the rational amusement concept.

One of Disney’s most famous educational films of the 1950s is “Our Friend, the Atom,” which premiered on the *Disneyland* television program in 1957. As American Studies scholars Elizabeth and Jay Mechling point out in their 1995 article “The Atom According to Disney,” the atom was a common topic of discussion in the mid-1950s, partly because of President Eisenhower’s 1953 “Atoms for Peace” speech to the United Nations. This speech changed American perceptions about the possibilities for the nuclear power; Disney’s film reinforced the notion that this powerful force could be used for something other than violent means. The Mechlings also make the important distinction that Disney’s film “naturalized” the atom in two ways: both as a normal part

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of American life (domestication) and as a non-manufactured part of nature.\textsuperscript{476} It meshed with the popular post-war concept of “better living through science.”

Walt Disney tapped into the power of television in the 1950s to promote the Disneyland park, but also found it was effective in conveying all sorts of information, including educational materials. During World War II, Walt had produced a series of educational films about Latin America to help recruit those nations into the Allied camp. His enthusiasm for this type of filmmaking continued even as the war raged on, and numerous educational institutions courted him to discuss models for educational film. His True-Life Adventures films were well received, but they were expensive to produce and not as profitable as animated ventures.\textsuperscript{477} Walt is quoted as having reservations about moving completely into the educational realm. Ben Sharpsteen, who directed many of Disney’s 1950s nature films, noted that Walt repeated the mantra “We can’t bore the public with these things. We can’t be boring. We’ve got to be entertaining.”\textsuperscript{478} While he had the desire to educate, entertainment was always the core of the Disney mission.

While Disneyland is frequently cited as Disney’s primary contribution to American culture, Walt Disney World realizes more of Walt’s visions concerning rational amusement and his desired relationships with the natural world and the surrounding community. Walt Disney World’s unique relationship with its environment is made possible through the governmental and legal agreements that the company made when purchasing the land. The major error made with Disneyland was announcing the purchaser of the land too early. An immediate land grab occurred, and cheap motels and

\textsuperscript{477} Gabler, \textit{Triumph of the American Imagination}, 446.
\textsuperscript{478} \textit{Ibid.}, 444.
other attractions suddenly fenced in the park, attempting to siphon off business from the Disney name. In addition, Walt wanted to continue to use the creative talent who had helped design Disneyland’s attractions, while also expanding the Disney brand to the East Coast.

Disney’s goals went beyond the pragmatic. He wanted to provide an environment that mimicked the worlds he created in his movies, and at the same time, provide his guests with an experience that would be controlled and safe in an unpredictable world. Neal Gabler calls this concept “vicarious empowerment,” which would attract visitors in the unstable post-war and Cold War periods. The timing was right for such a venture, as this era found Americans with an increase in mobility and disposable income. It was the golden age of road trips and jet travel, which is what most Americans would have to use to get to the Anaheim park. The location offered weather conditions that allowed for year-round visitors, but ultimately, only 2% of its early visitors would be from east of the Mississippi.

This single issue drove the action surrounding Disney World’s conception. Walt was missing out on the large percentage of the American population that lived east of the Mississippi River, and he planned to place the park in the southeast. Many locations were considered, but Orlando, Florida’s consistently warm climate and proximity to major interstate highways made it the strongest choice. In 1963, Walt sent a team of

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480 Foglesong, *Married to the Mouse*, 2.
481 Watts, “Art and Politics in the American Century,” 422; One of the considered locations was St. Louis, Missouri, which was also home to the Busch brewing family. When Disney declared that he would not include alcohol at the Magic Kingdom, August Busch rudely told him off, and the location was struck from consideration. Later, the
executives to scout 5,000 – 10,000 acres of land in Florida for the new project. Robert Foster, Disney’s general council, set up dummy companies to purchase the land to protect Walt and his project. The new owner of the 27,000 acres was kept a secret until Walt Disney and Florida Governor Haydan Burns announced the new park at a joint press conference. Disney World (later Walt Disney World) would completely transform the economy of central Florida, but there were a few hurdles left before the park would open in 1971. In 1971, a small town at the intersections of numerous Florida highways became the home to the most popular tourist destination in the world. Walt Disney felt good about the state of Disneyland, but felt that he could improve upon the concept, as well as tap into the much larger East coast population. Only two percent of Disneyland visitors were coming from east of the Mississippi River, and Walt Disney sought out a location that would allow him to build a larger and more fluid park, as well as have more autonomy than Anaheim, California seemed to provide. Orlando became the spot for its easy access to Interstates 4 and 95, as well as the vast empty tracts of land that were available just to the south of the city in Lake Buena Vista. Walt Disney World, or the Florida Project as it was originally called, provides a look into how the Disney Company changed between 1955, as well as in the years following Walt’s 1966 death. His original vision for Epcot and what was eventually constructed there is especially telling.

The experience of visiting a Disney park was established with Disneyland, and it paved the way for a park that would more fully encompass the tradition of rational entertainment. As Disney scholar Neal Gabler notes in his definitive biography Walt

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483 Watts, “Art and Politics in the American Century,” 421-422.
Disney: *The Triumph of the American Imagination*, the park inspired a “philosophical transformation” throughout the staff.\(^{484}\) The park would differ from other amusement parks of the day by providing its guests with a “unified experience,” in that it opened the imagination to a world of fantastic possibilities. Epcot would take that concept a step further with its more purposeful use of education.

At the 1964 New York World’s Fair, Walt Disney designed and executed a show that would illustrate the intersection of American life and industry since the turn of the century.\(^{485}\) General Electric’s The Carousel of Progress was a memorable part of the fair, as was its sister attraction, UNICEF’s It’s a Small World. The audio-animatronic robots that populate the continuously running shows were a technological marvel at the time, and many guests, like my father, still remember seeing the show for the first time 50 years ago. Situated at the back of Tomorrowland, next to Space Mountain, the attraction now only opens during more crowded seasons as a method of crowd control. Despite an update in the 1990s, the show does not hold an audiences’ awe the way it did in 1964.

Another attraction that wowed visitors to the New York World’s Fair was Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln, which was presented in the Illinois State Pavilion. Again working with audio-animatronics, Walt Disney composed a show that allowed Abraham Lincoln to recreate his greatest oratorical moments. In 1965, the attraction opened on Main Street U.S.A. in Disneyland as the only non-shopping or restaurant attraction on the street. While the original show was replaced in 1973, the core idea of the attraction can

\(^{484}\) Gabler, *Triumph of the American Imagination*, 496.  
\(^{485}\) Disney also had an attraction at the Ford Motor Company Pavilion during the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair, which was a 360-degree movie about the United States. While this attraction is not repeated exactly at any park, the format can be found at Epcot in the Canadian pavilion.
still be seen in Disneyland. Walt Disney, always a man of big ideas, had actually wanted to compose a show that featured all of the U.S. Presidents. This dream became reality in Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom. After a pre-show that takes the audience through major events in American history, a curtain opens to reveal every president. Lincoln speaks, as does the current president, but each president moves when introduced.

**Epcot Center**

Walt’s original concept for Walt Disney’s World’s second park was not for a theme park, but for a utopian community; one that used the best practices of urban planning and community development to revive the type of town that the average Eisenhower-era family would hope to live in. It would also embody the City Beautiful movement that grew out of the 1893 White City. However, he was unable to develop the concept fully before his 1966 death, and soon EPCOT took on a new life as a pseudo-memorial to the life of Walt Disney. The early days of EPCOT (now simply Epcot) offered diverse attractions that varied greatly from those in the Magic Kingdom. Rides were very tame, characters were almost total absent, and the park mirrored the dual “Midway – White City” set-ups of the American World’s Fairs. Each pavilion, whether located in Future World or the World Showcase, was co-sponsored by a major corporation or by the host nation. In the long term, this practice was not feasible and

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486 It is worth noting that the United States has not hosted a Worlds Fair since 1984, two years after the opening of EPCOT. Worlds Fairs, like Olympic Games, are very expensive to produce and usually do not result in a return on investment for the organizers. It can be easily argued that EPCOT takes the place of Worlds Fairs for Americans.
caused some issues at the park, especially among Disney park purists who sorely miss their favorite attractions.  

Epcot, which seeks to provide a stylized, guided, and compelling view of the desired future, features a number of attractions that focus on nature and the environment. The Land pavilion is the most obvious of these, in that it embraces concepts such as sustainable agriculture, renewable resources, and other ways that humans can “live with the land.” Circle of Life: An Environmental Fable, features characters from *The Lion King* and uses a combination of live action footage and animation. Chiquita’s Living with the Land takes guests on a boat ride through the future of agriculture, including an introduction to hydroponic technologies. The Living Seas pavilion examines life under the water, now through the lens of the Disney / Pixar feature, *Finding Nemo*. Talk show host Ellen DeGeneres can be found in the Universe of Energy pavilion, which teaches visitors about the many ways that humans can take energy from the Earth. With help from Bill Nye the Science Guy and *Jeopardy!* host Alex Trebek, DeGeneres learns about saving energy and how we are all responsible for being energy aware. The rational entertainment ethos is especially strong here. These celebrities cinch the entertainment factor, while the subject matter is undeniably and unapologetically educational. Trebek and Nye built careers on the concept of rational entertainment, Trebek with *Jeopardy!* 

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487 Notably, the Wonders of Life, World of Imagination, and Norway are the most controversial changes in the park for Epcot fans. MetLife ceased sponsorship of Wonders of Life in the late 1990s, and its rides and attractions, which were quite popular, never opened again. World of Imagination, home of Dreamfinder and Figment, was sponsored by Kodak. Kodak owns one character, while Disney has successfully purchased Figment. Until Kodak sells the other character, Disney cannot reopen the original attraction. The popular Maelstrom ride, housed in the Norway pavilion, in October 2014 after the host nation could not ante up funds to update the attraction. A *Frozen* themed ride is replacing the Maelstrom.
and Nye with his 1990s children’s show *Bill Nye the Science Guy*. That model is a key to the system: the presentation is assumed to be diverting, and the audience is directed to enjoy it. This presentation marks a vital distinction between other entertainment models, in which educational aspects are either excluded or – as in the case in the era when federal mandates require some level of education in children’s programming – added on in an almost apologetic or artificial way.

Although the Magic Kingdom houses Disney’s actual attractions from the 1964 World’s Fair, Epcot overall is a stronger reflection of the spirit of the fairs themselves. In essence, Epcot has institutionalized itself as a permanent world of tomorrow. Initially, each pavilion in Future World was sponsored by at least one corporation that has a vested interest the future of that particular industry. For example, Test Track, which simulates the testing that cars endure, is sponsored by General Motors. The company uses the exit of the ride as a very elaborate showroom for its newest vehicles and technologies. However, as some corporate sponsors have moved on, Disney has reimagined these pavilions with Disney characters and properties (see: The Seas with Nemo and Friends; Dreamfinder and Figment.)

Other attractions have changed sponsors, which reflects the changes in that industry. Spaceship Earth, affectionately referred to as “the big golf ball,” takes guests through the history of human communication. At the end, riders are able to email a picture of him or herself to a friend, and before they exit, they can explore new communication technology. It was here in the early 1990s that I first video chatted with anyone. Granted, it was with my dad and sister who were across the room, but it was still pretty amazing. Initially, the Bell Company and Bell Labs sponsored the ride, but after
the creation of the “baby Bells,” the new parent company, AT&T, took over. In 2005, Siemens began their sponsorship, and they continue to display new technologies in the lobby to the present.

The other half of Epcot, World Showcase, focuses on the cultures of the participating nation pavilions. One can enjoy traditional foods, listen to national music, and view educational films. Each pavilion takes a different tact to educate. The American Adventure is an audio-animatronic show featuring emcees Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain, complete with soaring soundtrack praising the “golden dream.” France, Canada, and China feature films in large screen formats, including a 360-degree feature. Mexico features “El Rio del Tiempo,” or River of Time, which introduces guests to the history and culture of Mexico, starring the birds from *The Three Cabelleros*.

A clear line can thus be drawn from Charles Willson Peale to Disney through the theme of “rational amusement.” While other figures have entertained and entranced American audiences in numerous ways, Peale and Disney stand apart. They set out to enlighten the public, rather than just to entertain them, like P.T. Barnum and Buffalo Bill. Of course, the respective zeitgeist in which they lived and operated conditioned each creator-entrepreneur but each strove forthrightly to deliver “the truth” as they perceived it. Their long term effects, from Disney’s inspiring force for artists and Peale’s influence, although indirect, on the creation of the Smithsonian and other American

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488 Lawrence Levine relays an example that works against Peale’s total seriousness: “Peale…was not above publicizing his new Mammoth Room by dressing his handyman in American Indian garb and parading him through the streets on a white hours preceded by a trumpeter.” Peale also displayed natural curiosities akin to Barnum, such as a five-legged, two-tailed cow giving milk to a two-headed calf. (Levine, *Highbrow*, 147)
cultural institutions, also speak to their overall importance to American popular
culture.\footnote{Charles Coleman Sellers, \textit{Mr. Peale’s Museum}, 2 & 331.}

First, both Peale and Disney sought to democratize education through rational
amusement. Local Quakers in Philadelphia asked that Peale make his museum financially
feasible to those of all classes, which would align the museum with Quaker values of
equality. On the same note, Disney used film as a democratizing force, as it was a very
affordable form of entertainment during the mid-twentieth century. However, both
Peale’s museum and Disney’s parks became a way for Americans to distinguish
themselves as members of an upper class. In terms of Peale, the leisure time required to
attend his museum was only available to those of the upper class. Additionally, the
European idea that museums were for the upper classes was transplanted to the United
States. While Disney’s parks were initially very affordable at one dollar admission and
the option to purchase ride tickets, the tickets today are out of reach of many working
class Americans, and most middle-class families have to budget and save for a vacation.

When considering Disney’s parks as a whole, we can see that they execute the
same goals as Peale’s museum, particularly in the areas of civic and natural science
education. Looking closer at one of the documents that inspired the American
Revolution, and the tradition from which “rational amusement” stems, it is unsurprising
that the natural world and the American republic are tied so closely together. A particular
passage from Locke’s \textit{Second Treatise of Government} inspires this analysis:

“The \textit{state of nature} has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every
one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but
consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to have another in his life, health, liberty or possessions.”

Locke emphasizes the idea that the rights he espouses, which the American people had taken as the foundation of their new government, are of the natural world. Thus, Peale and Disney’s juxtaposition of the American experience and the natural world seems to have deeper philosophical seeds. Both men also have a reverence for the great figures of American history, often at the expensive of the larger American story. The Magic Kingdom covers areas of historical and civil education, although there is copious debate over the accuracy or cultural sensitivity. In the last two decades, the parks have thought less about “What Would Walt Do?” and more about what is in step with modern sensibilities concerning race and gender, especially in Frontierland and Adventureland, both of which did not always deal with “the other” in a sensitive manner. As a whole, these changes are in step with Walt’s original mission of Walt Disney World, which was to constantly improve the parks and keep them relevant.

The juxtaposition of Peale and Disney makes it clear that they are cut from a similar cloth. Both men embody the mythological American Dream, pulling themselves up by the proverbial bootstraps from inauspicious beginnings. Their artistic abilities allowed for early success, and paired with serendipitous timing, they captured the imaginations of important American generations. Peale used the Enlightenment philosophy of his day to reach out and educate those who sought knowledge, and he proclaimed the bright future of the new republic while it still lingered in its infancy. Walt Disney had a similar challenge. He emerged during a time of American crisis and major

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change, and his parks helped to capture the energies of the post-war era as America evolved into a world superpower. The use of rational amusement is what sets Walt Disney apart during an age of media saturation. Rational amusement is entrenched in the American experience; it simply took the talents and creative instinct of Walt Disney to set it ablaze for the 20th and 21st centuries. He tapped into the American tradition of rational amusement, and the result was the strengthening of the legacy of democratic education started by Peale on the second floor of Independence Hall.
APPENDIX
List of Disney Animated Films

Animated Canon According to Disney Animation Studios\textsuperscript{491}

1. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)
2. *Pinocchio* (1940)
3. *Fantasia* (1940)
4. *Dumbo* (1941)
5. *Bambi* (1942)
6. *Saludos Amigos* (1943)
7. *The Three Caballeros* (1945)
9. *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947)
11. *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949)
12. *Cinderella* (1950)
13. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951)
14. *Peter Pan* (1953)
32. *The Lion King* (1994)

\textsuperscript{491} “History,” Walt Disney Animation Studios, last modified 2014, accessed April 17, 2015, \url{http://www.disneyanimation.com/studio/history}. 
41. *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001)
42. *Lilo and Stitch* (2002)
46. *Chicken Little* (2005)
51. *Winnie the Pooh* (2011)
52. *Wreck It Ralph* (2012)
54. *Big Hero 6* (2014)
55. *Zootopia* (2016)

**Partially Animated Live Action Feature Films**
1. *The Reluctant Dragon* (1941)
2. *Victory Through Air Power* (1943)
3. *Song of the South* (1946)
4. *So Dear to My Heart* (1948)
5. *Mary Poppins* (1964)

**Pixar Feature Films**
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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2rRiXSrzw.


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=id_OHVExHHA.


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