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Mice meet world: How Disney and Nintendo allowed consumers to escape from, re-enter, and later re-envision a war torn world

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Mice Meet World: How Disney and Nintendo Allowed Consumers to Escape From, Re-Enter, and Later Re-Envision a War Torn World

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Dedication

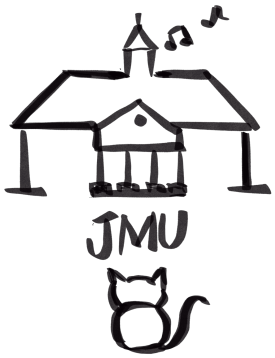
This Master's Thesis is dedicated to:

My Family & Friends,

Included in that, but, who deserve more acknowledgement:

Two professors who profoundly influence and inspire me, Mike Gubser & Evan Friss

And a small black Pomeranian named Prissy!



"There is an enthusiasm which is engendered by the presence and the association of beloved friends; an immediate influence, whereby the muses appear to us, awakening joy and strength in us, and brightening our vision: to this I have all my life owed whatever was best in me. Thus it is to the friends in whose midst I returned to studies long abandoned or feebly pursued that I owe thanks if the work is successful." Bartholdi Georg Niebuhr translated by Fritz Stern

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Butt, Dr. Chappell, Dr. Davidson, Dr. Davis, Dr. Dillard, Dr. Fitzgerald, Dr. Galgano, Dr. Gayne, Dr. Hametz, Dr. Hanifi, Professor Hartog, Dr. Herrington, Dr. Hyser, Dr. King, Dr. Meixsel, Dr. Mulrooney, Dr. Owusu-Ansah, Dr. Seth), I know I have benefitted greatly from having met all of you, for you kind smiles, care, concern, and for all of your expertise. To Dr. Van Norman, thank you for taking a chance on one very, very, late application and for sharing it with the committee members who also thought that I belonged here.

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These few pages do little to capture the true extent of my appreciation for my history department and my experience here. I hope, and wish, that all of you will see in yourselves, and most importantly in each other, what I see in all of you. All of you are the heart of our department, what makes it so great, and it is because of that, because of everything I have learned from all of you and the kindness that all of you have shown me that there will always be a place in my heart reserved for those I have come to know here.

"While friends remain within our hearts and knowledge guides our way,
James Madison has [and will continue to lead me] on to conquer each new day."

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Disney and Nintendo appealed to consumers in both the United States and Japan by celebrating ideals that spoke to consumer's existing perceptions of national identity and national exceptionalism, particularly the dream of upward mobility. This thesis highlights four character traits that both the Japanese and Americans found heroic and that comprised the wider dream of upward mobility: hard work, perseverance, tenacity, and kindness. Through the immersive experiences that Disney and Nintendo provided, consumers became the heroes of their own journeys and brought these characteristics to life both in the fantasy worlds each company created and in the real world. As consumers continued to embrace each company's stories, they forged close connections with both Disney and Nintendo.

Introduction

This thesis examines how two corporations, Disney and Nintendo, permeated the Japanese and American markets in the 1970s and 1980s. Their successes were intrinsically tied to American and Japanese exceptionalism and the idea of the American dream—or more broadly speaking a dream of upward mobility. For Americans who helped rebuild Japan after World War II, actions were defined by American identity, particularly ideas that portrayed America as a model of civilized society and progress. The way the United States hoped to achieve such a vision hinged upon the willingness and dedication of its citizens to become successful and productive members of society. To do this Americans required something to work towards, a dream of sorts.This concept is familiar to citizens of the United States today and, some might even argue, a longstanding part of American tradition and identity—even if the term "American dream" is of more modern provenance.[1]

One historian, Jim Cullen, argued that the American dream remains a longstanding and inherent part of American ambition. He demonstrated this by tracing its origin to the arrival of the first pilgrims. But rather than focusing on the term "American dream" Cullen boiled it down to a single word: dream. In this way, Cullen argued that the American dream was something that permeated the minds of all Americans, even the first pilgrims, despite the fact that the use of this phrase is a modern American development. The implication of focusing on the American dream as simply a dream means that one could potentially expand its applicability even further. While Cullen used this broader term to encompass America's first pilgrims, my thesis applies it to places that celebrate distinctly different cultures—places like Japan. Stripping away Cullen's

[1] Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 5-7.

American context and referring instead to a dream of upward mobility, means that the hope of a better life through the success of hard work, tenacity, and perseverance can, and in this thesis—will, be defined more broadly as a successful work ethic.[2]

What made this a potent dream, and not just a work ethic, was the idea that people were paving the way towards an honest, comfortable, or even lavish, future built upon ethics of hard work, perseverance, and tenacity. Leading an honest and comfortable life continues to be something most people can aspire to. Boiling down the American dream into a single word demonstrates that at its very core a dream of success through hard work is something that most could want to achieve.[3] Perhaps this was why people who immigrated to America in search of a brighter future for themselves, or their loved ones, had so easily adopted the American dream as their beacon of hope. At its very heart, in other words, the American dream articulated an aspiration that was not just American—it was something that spoke to a wider and more general audience. In this thesis the American dream will be referred to as the dream of upward mobility —measured in material and social wealth—and within that dream character traits of tenacity, hard work, and perseverance will contribute to a successful realization of this dream.

Disney and Nintendo heroes, alongside of those pursuing dreams of upward mobility, incorporated tenacity, hard work, and perseverance, into defining and appealing characteristics. They added one more important character trait. In light of the bloodshed and destruction of the World Wars, people needed something warm-hearted, kind, and whimsical to help them forget the violence of the past. Thus, included within the previously listed themes of hard work, tenacity, and perseverance there will be the added character trait of kindness. Kindness created

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[2] Cullen, *The American Dream*, 4-10.
[3] Cullen, *The American Dream*, 4-10.

another contrast to a post World War II world, one that had previously witnessed violence and destruction on unprecedented levels.

These particular characteristics became defining traits of the dream of upward mobility because they embodied discipline, honesty, wisdom, and innocence. While the pursuit of material and social wealth could be perceived as greedy and corrupt, moving up through one's own tenacity, hard work, and perseverance made the dream a reward for the honest effort put into achieving that dream.[4] Rather than simply having wealth and status handed to an individual, the proper success story framed by a dream of upward mobility, would have an individual rise from humble, often times difficult, beginnings. By doing this the hero would better retain their humility and kindness because they could empathize with those also came from very little. Once the hero succeeded and achieved their dreams, they would be kind enough to share their wealth so that another hard working individual would be able to succeed. In other words the hero would pay it forward enabling their fellow citizens to thrive. Each hero's humble beginning their stories relatable they were the everyday man. There was nothing extraordinary about them, the hero possessed the virtues of anybody who wanted to achieve an honest dream of upward mobility. This made the dream something anyone could work towards regardless of origin.

For Japan, the dream of upward mobility would manifest itself in a different way. Rather than an individual dream, Japan would achieve upward mobility through its challenge to Western imperialism. The collective and united efforts of each citizen to defend their home from Western control and elevate its prestige on a national stage through their collective successes made them the heroes of their own upward trajectory. In these examples, we see that since the beginning of

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[4] Cullen, *The American Dream*, 60-182.

American colonialism, to Japan's strength as a nation in the face of imperialism, history, and the individuals who defined it, provided each nation and by extension their citizens, with examples of how hard work, perseverance, tenacity, and kindness could result in success. This would be used to foster, or increase, senses of national exceptionalism within each nation.

To foster a strong sense of exceptionalism, the dream of upward mobility and the heroic characteristics it celebrated provided a strong framework that nations could build national narratives around. Through these narratives, citizens would learn about how individuals from their home countries were able to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them through the particular cultural and social constructs that their nations established. The successes of those heroes would inspire other citizens to pursue similar paths within their nations and establish within each citizen a sense of pride in the way that their nations offered pathways to successful dreams of upward mobility. The belief in the ability of one's nation to provide the tools for upward mobility combined with existing, and strong feelings of loyalty, pride, and a dedication to see the success of one's nation in competition with others, created powerful loyalties to one's nation and the possibilities that it offered to its citizens. These feelings, although they ebbed and flowed in their fervor throughout history, is something that can be described, felt, and observed —to some extent—by many citizens. Often, exceptionalism is a heavily criticized aspect of a nation's self-perception. But, for the purposes of my thesis, it is important to understand how exceptionalism influenced the way consumers received the narratives created by Disney and Nintendo.

To explain existing and strong feelings of loyalty and pride not directly tied to exceptionalist narratives, it helps to explain the role that personal identity played in the creation

of a national identity. Most people, depending on their world views, have a particular idea or sense of the self that they are aware of. Dror Wharman in *The Making of the Modern Self* asserted that identity was historically grounded, continuously redefined, and an answer to the "who am I" question. To Wharman, the creation of an identity was akin to a soundbox of sorts, one in which small inconspicuous noises reverberated enough to grow into more defined sounds. When those different noises were placed into a single sequence they started to represent fully realized ideas, or in this analogy a recognizable tune.[5]

In this example we can see how, like the small inconspicuous noises, snippets of ideas would eventually come together to create individual identities. When the same analogy is applied to the context of a nation, the individual identity becomes the snippet of noise and together multiple ideas of self created cultural or national identities within the movements of nations. This meant that personal identity was not a single thread or idea developed independently from the world, but rather a conglomerate of many perceptions from different people sharing the same place. This in turn created a national identity. Never ending cycles of interactions between perceptions of national identities and personal identities would continually reaffirm notions, or conceptions, of identity on a personal and national level. Even if nations encompassed individuals who did not share similar heritages or histories, theoretically speaking, out of those differences similarities could still be woven together to compose a specific sense of self, and a specific sense of nationhood, within a particular time period and place.[6]

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[5] Dror Wharman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), introduction.

[6] Wharman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, introduction.

This discussion of what constitutes identity and how it is defined could go on for much longer, but as stated earlier, in this thesis identity ties exceptionalism and the dream of upward mobility together into a coherent narrative. As it does that, these two themes also serve to narrow the scope of identity research, making it a much more manageable idea. Exceptionalism and the dream of upward mobility therefore focus this thesis on particular character traits of American and Japanese identities that were also recognizable parts of Disney and Nintendo narratives.

By celebrating hard work, perseverance, tenacity, and kindness, in other words all that was good within national identities, Disney and Nintendo, through their emphasis on dreams of upward mobility, exceptionalized consumer's perceptions of themselves, and their nations. In a world full of distasteful memories, these heroic characteristics were the things that people most wanted to remember. This is especially true of moments in history when communism became a constant threat to democratic ideals, or in Japan's case, violent and destructive actions had resulted in a violent and destructive end to life as they knew it. In dreams, or in the dreamlike approach that Disney and Nintendo championed, the only things emphasized were positive. Because of this Americans and Japanese alike found that they could forget their worries by purchasing Disney and Nintendo experiences. As consumers engaged with these companies, individuals from both the United States and Japan could synthesize and unify their national identity into something more optimistic and idealistic by muting the dissonant, violent, and ambiguous parts of their histories that they would rather forget. In doing so they could continue to embrace the aspects of their collective identities that made them feel good.

This is not to argue that the dream of upward mobility is the only facet of American and Japanese cultural identities. There were, and still are, many things that contribute to, influence,

and integrate themselves into the distinctive and unique fingerprint that defined cultural identities around the globe. These identifying characteristics often change as new ideas and challenges arise.[7] What makes the dream of upward mobility important to understanding Cold War U.S. and Japan was that the characteristics of hard work, tenacity, perseverance, and kindness idealized and realized American and Japanese democracy and citizenship in a time when they were challenged by the outcome of World War II and the following threat of communism.

For Americans, the dream of upward mobility became a tangible expression of American ideals in a time when Americans most wanted to realize, or actualize, those ideas within themselves.[8] While other parts of American history may not have drawn upon or referenced an American dream, the Cold War era used this phrase as a touchstone—a way to ground Americans in democracy when it appeared to be in danger of slipping away during the Cold War.

In Japan, the traits embodied by the dream of upward mobility grounded the Japanese in the hope that they could rise from the ashes of World War II with strength and grace. This meant that particular aspects of the dream could pertain to Japanese visions of their post World War II futures. By emphasizing these particular traits in a new war order, the Japanese could ensure that the violence of the past would not repeat itself, or at least console themselves by attempting to erase their prior actions from memory.

By focusing on particular characteristics within the dream of upward mobility and having them become the most celebrated traits of storied heroes, Disney and Nintendo appealed to Americans seeking reprieve from the threats of the Cold War and Japan's desire for a peaceful

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[7] J. T. Way, "Why Do Central American Migrants Seek Asylum in the United States?" (Lecture, Democracy in Peril Lecture Series James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, 20 February 2020).

[8] In this thesis the term "realize" becomes a verb. A way for consumers of Disney and Nintendo products to actualize fantasy into reality through their actions.

world order, through consumer's need to affirm exceptionalist self-images. Making characteristics of hard work, perseverance, tenacity, and kindness, defining points of their hero's character meant that as individuals were whisked away to worlds of magic and wonder their ideals became an intrinsic part of their consumer experiences, and eventually their daily lived experiences. For Joseph Campbell, when people took part in these stories they were also given the power to actualize the heroic traits that they had come to admire. When storied experiences became lived experiences it allowed consumers to forge powerful connections with these two companies.[9]

Narrative becomes an important feature of this thesis because it was through stories that heroes were brought to life. Narratives continue to serve as the medium through which historians attempt to share compelling and enlightening analysis. They were also the way that consumers interacted with the fantastical worlds of Disney and Nintendo. To demonstrate the power of narrative let us look at Jim Cullen as an example. In his attempt to demonstrate American's longstanding ties to their dreams he used great literary stories. From the Founding Fathers to Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, from history to fiction, the individuals in each story Cullen used still spoke to a dream's possibility, even if they did not necessarily speak to its merit. Each story gave the people who read them an idea of where their place was in the grand scheme of things. In the characteristics that each hero embodied and in the successes that each hero achieved—no matter how short lived—consumers saw examples of the success that they too could potentially reach. This gave them hope that a brighter future could be achieved and this

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[9] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, commemorative ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), prologue.

encouraged them to continue to push themselves towards the futures that they envisioned.[10] The characteristics and frameworks embodied within Cullen's examples also defined the stories that Disney and Nintendo told. But instead of relegating these stories to the pages of books, Disney and Nintendo brought stories to life in a way that made them lived experiences.[11] In doing so, these corporations enabled people living in a post-war world to momentarily forget their troubles, envision themselves in a new future, and eventually project fantasy into reality.

Ultimately, what this thesis hopes to achieve is a deeper understanding of national identity, how it influences and shapes us, motivating people throughout history. By making us more aware of what shapes identity—how history can also dictate it, how it influences us, we can better understand ourselves.[12] Perhaps the more ambitious goal of this thesis is to help people recognize that what motivates us is a complex mixture of history, culture, and identity. By illuminating this, my thesis hopes that we can become more understanding of the differences and

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[10] Cullen, *The American Dream*, 60-182.

Starting around page 179, Cullen launched into a description of Fitzgerald's great American narrative, *The Great Gatsby*. In his analysis Cullen recognized the implicit hope that surrounded American's interpretations of Gatsby's rise to fortune and how that tied into the aspirations of Americans who envisioned themselves in Gatsby's position. Cullen analyzed how Gatsby's actions were contradictory to the nature of the American dream.

Much of this thesis' focus is on the more positive aspects of an individual's successful pursuit of the American dream, more specifically the hard work, perseverance, and tenacity that it took to overcome the challenges standing in one's way. Cullen adds a couple more words to this list of character traits: honesty and trust. With his analysis of Gatsby's American tale, Cullen discusses how the means through which Gatsby achieved his great fortune were not honest or trustworthy. Yet, Gatsby remains a satisfying example of the American dream. Cullen concludes that this is because at the very heart of Gatsby's dream there was a purity and innocence that could not be lost. To Cullen, it demonstrated that the American dream itself, despite its broad appeal, had very apparent shortcomings. One being that the dreams people aspired to were often unachievable—when they were, it may have required the sacrifice of one's character and honor. The significance of this observation is this: often in its pursuit of understanding what makes Disney and Nintendo so appealing, my thesis focuses on consumer's desires to create a better world and on particular heroic traits. This may give the impression that the utopias Disney and Nintendo celebrated could be achieved by the consumers who took their stories to heart. Cullen reminds us that this is not the case. The American dream is not defined by the possibility that an individual will achieve their dreams, it is defined by the ability to dream towards a better future.

[11] In Mike Gubser's Eastern Europe class we focused on how the people who lived in Eastern Europe were affected by the ideologies that had come to dictate their daily lives. In this thesis, the focus is not on ideology, but on how fantasy is brought to life through action.

[12] This is an approach influenced by Michel Foucault. The idea being that by understanding the frameworks that shape our understanding of the world around us, we become better equipped to move, or perhaps even change, them.

ideas that seem to divide us. If many of us can find joy in Disney or Nintendo products, or if we realize that something as seemingly distant and foreign as Japan actually shares many similarities with us, it demonstrates that looking past the surface and uncovering hidden parts of the story can uncover similarities that may have otherwise been overlooked. In today's political climate where we are often at each other's throats, this is what we need more of. The ability to see past political statements to the cultures underneath—to ideas, motivations, and influences—could potentially demonstrate that we are actually not so different after all. Hopefully that would better enable us to listen to each other and eventually work together towards the brighter futures that Disney and Nintendo narratives tend to embody.[13]

[13] Disney and Nintendo were chosen in particular because of their broad cross-cultural appeal, their role in appealing to consumers in a post-World War II order, and their classic "feel good" narratives that drew people in. They also rose to prominence both technologically and globally as after the World Wars and in the midst of the Cold War. Personal affinity and interest also played a role in their selection.

Chapter I: Consuming Identities

Marty Sklar, a prominent Disney imagineer once wrote "the sun never sets on the Disney Parks."[14] In a book that helped chronicle his experience working for the Disney Company, Sklar alluded to the idea that Disney's corporate empire is as far reaching and influential as Britain's by putting a spin on a classic quote about the extent of the British Empire. The third jewel in their crown—following Disneyland in Anaheim, California and Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida—would be Tokyo Disneyland (TDL) and as visitors walk through the park, the large castle that stands proudly at the center draws their attention.[15] Blue and gold turrets stretch towards the sky and one might easily mistake this centerpiece for Cinderella's Castle in Florida's Walt Disney World. But this structure resides on the other side of the globe. Yet, despite the distance that separates the two parks, visitors who find themselves in the midst of TDL Disney magic enter a place that mirrors the fantasy world created in Florida.[16] Tokyo is another place where "dreams come true" and reality becomes suspended from the time you enter until the time you leave.[17] That is perhaps why Disney amassed such a loyal and some might even argue cult-like following.[18]

For Japan, enduring the destruction at the end of World War II and occupation by a former enemy made Disney's cinematic escapism all the more appealing. But the story of TDL is

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[14] Marty Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!: My Half-Century Creating Disney's Magic Kingdom* (New York: Disney Editions, 2013), 285.

[15] Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!*, 285.

[16] Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!*, 222.

[17] "Disney Parks Introduces 'Where Dreams Come True,' A Worldwide Initiative Tied To Global Consumer Insights," The Walt Disney Company, 7 June 2006, https://www.thewaltdisneycompany.com/disney-parks-introduces-where-dreams-come-true-a-worldwide-initiative-tied-to-global-consumer-insights/.

[18] Shunya Yoshimi, "Japan: America in Japan/Japan in Disneyfication: the Disney Image and the Transformation of 'America' in Contemporary Japan," in *Dazzled by Disney?*, edited by Janet Wasko, Mark Phillips, and Eileen R. Meehan (New York: Leicester University Press, 2001), 160-181.

not as smooth as its consistently rising park attendance. Thus, understanding how Disney came to open its first park in Tokyo, and also why both Japanese and Americans alike identified, and continue to identify, with the Disney brand are important to explaining why Disney has become such an icon.

To assign the Japanese their own agency, on the other side of the story, or world, is a company of a different origin. Their recognizable logo does not take the form of distinctively shaped mouse ears, but a simple rounded and edged shape that bears the word Nintendo. Nintendo provides this thesis with an example of Japan's agency and success. If this thesis were to focus solely on Disney it would become much easier to ignore Japan's role in creating an equally desirable and inspiring product. This would then turn into an analysis of Disney as an extension of American ideological imperialism. By incorporating research and analysis of Nintendo and their celebrated narratives, one can better see how creative entrepreneurship and themes of hard work, perseverance, tenacity, and kindness, are not unique to any one brand or country.

One can observe similarities in approach through each company's advertising. Like Disney's commercials, which emphasized nostalgia and good old fashioned family fun, Nintendo struck many of the same chords. Television ads for Disney parks, particularly in 2018 for Walt Disney World Resort, featured smiling parents and children bounding through the entrance of a castle-like hotel, dazzled by the magic that now surrounded them. Cinderella's live action heroine rushed down the grand stair case in her shimmering blue ball-gown, while storm troopers marched out of an opening elevator. The narrator himself added the phrase "even extra time with your family in the park" to this enchanted scene which further demonstrated Disney's

commitment to bringing families together to create moments that they would cherish long after they left. In this commercial, Disney drew upon beloved and recognizable characters to create a sense of nostalgia and familiarity and that would hopefully be mirrored by the on-screen children's surprised and excited gasps.[19]

Nintendo, in its "Nintendo Switch My Way" commercials for *Pokémon Let's Go Eevee* and *Let's go Pikachu*, featured two young friends playing games on a Switch in the middle of a cheerfully lit restaurant while one of their mothers praised them on a newly captured Pokémon. The scene later shifted to include a father returning from work and joining his daughter on the family couch in a gym battle. As he wielded a Nintendo Switch controller, she excitedly directed him towards the appropriate Pokémon move to use against a large stone Onyx. Although Nintendo emphasized how individuals could choose their "way to play," there was still an emphasis on connection with family and friends—just like in the Disney commercials.[20] The moments that each family, in each commercial, shared with their loved ones were experiences that they expected to lose themselves within when they purchased a Disney or Nintendo adventure. Later on those moments became fond memories that people could reflect on to evoke feelings of nostalgic happiness. If they enjoyed those moments enough, consumers could choose to seek out those experiences again. If the memories made within Disney and Nintendo experiences were better than the lives that they were trying to forget—like consumers inhabiting a post-World War II and Cold War world—they would be more likely to return to Disney and Nintendo.

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[19] Walt Disney World Resort, "Magical $98," Television advertisement, Disney World, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/dNSC/walt-disney-world-resort-magical-98.

[20] Nintendo Switch, "*Nintendo Switch My Way: Pokémon Let's Go Eevee* and *Pokémon Let's Go Pikachu*," Television advertisement, Nintendo, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97CNdeCOBc4&app=desktop.

More recent Nintendo commercials, from 2017 and following the popularity of Nintendo's Switch, also featured the distinctive snap as two parts of a Switch logo slid into their proper positions.[21] The pop was a sound almost anyone could identify, in a similar fashion to Mickey Mouse's iconic ears and Nintendo's oval like logo. This flashy new console was sold by Nintendo as something that could be enjoyed both at home and on the go. This meant that consumers could take Nintendo's stories with them wherever they traveled—a key component of the company's success throughout its history.

What the success of the Nintendo Switch represented in history was more than just the ability to play console tiered games on the go; it represented Japanese ingenuity, market savvy, and their understanding of a global economy—particularly of themes that would appeal most to broad consumer audiences. Similar to Disney, the Nintendo Company understood the appeal of heroism and the characteristics that played into each hero's success. And like Disney, Nintendo invited consumers to adopt the mantle of the heroes they looked up to as they played through their games. These sorts of hero tropes were present in games that featured some of Nintendo's most iconic and recognizable characters—Mario, Link, and Pikachu to name a few. In a similar fashion to Disney's Mickey Mouse, Nintendo's personas continue to maintain a loyal consumer base. What made Disney and Nintendo examples of unity and hope in a world torn by war is their approach to life. While other companies might also expound the same creative myths and fantasies, Disney and Nintendo were the ones most geared toward family friendly-fun and innocence—the perfect counterbalance to the events of the World Wars and the Cold War.

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[21] Nintendo Switch, "*Nintendo Switch My Way: Pokémon Let's Go Eevee* and *Pokémon Let's Go Pikachu*."

Chapter II: The World That War Created

For the Japanese, Disney and Nintendo narratives became a potential way for citizens to lose themselves following the devastating losses of World War II and occupation by former enemies. Throughout World War II Japan had proven itself a formidable and determined foe—their pride and tenacity were what made them seemingly unstoppable even until the very end. John Dower characterized Japanese troops in this way:

> the emperor's soldiers and sailors left a trail of unspeakable cruelty and rapacity. As it turned out, they also devoured themselves. Japanese died in hopeless suicide chargers, starved to death in the field, killed their own wounded rather than let home fall into enemy hands, and murdered their civilian compatriots in places such as Saipan and Okinawa. They watched helplessly as fire bombs destroyed their cities—all while listening to their leaders natter on about how it might be necessary for the 'hundred million' all to die 'like shattered jewels.[22]

Here we can see how determined the Japanese were to defend their imperial gains.[23] Their honor and glory were worth the prices that they paid in lives lost and even in the face of death, pride prevented them from admitting defeat. The Japanese would rather kill themselves or their fellow comrades than surrender to their enemies. To instill this sort of commitment to a cause, the Japanese had to give its citizens a reason to sacrifice their happiness and lives for their nation. They did this by asserting Japanese prestige in the face of Western imperialism. A strong sense of exceptionalism became important to inspiring and maintaining Japanese fighting morale and

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[22] John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc.), 1999, 22.

[23] Japan's "imperial gains" are known as the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Formed as a reaction to Britain's imperialism, Japan wanted to create a sphere that would be free from Western dependence and interference. It attempted to achieve this in the early 1940s by bringing areas of Southeast Asia under its control. (See William Swan, "Japan's Intentions for Its Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as Indicated in Its Policy Plans for Thailand." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1996): 139-49 for more on the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.)

from Dower's description the rhetoric of Japanese leaders appeared to have successfully cemented the belief of a greater Japanese cause into the psyches of their people.[24]

In observing how the Japanese reacted to events that threatened their honor and pride, prior to and during World War II, we can observe how easily a group of individuals could become wrapped up in a particular set of ideals and beliefs—particularly ideas tied to strong feelings of exceptionalism.[25] From their willingness to sacrifice themselves and their happiness to fulfill the wishes of their government for a stronger Japan, we see how deeply cultural identity binds individuals to their countries of origin and defines their sense of purpose. This makes it less difficult for one to imagine themselves in a similar position. For Americans, an example of devotion to a particular ideal can be observed in discussions of the American dream, or more broadly speaking the dream of upward mobility. Think about how particular groups of American citizens reacted to things that challenged the reality of this vision. In questioning its plausibility, those who viewed the American dream and the upward mobility it brought as an intrinsic part of their identity saw their identities stripped away. By criticizing or denouncing a defining part of their American identity, one attacked a part of their character and perceptions of self that powerfully motivated their actions and ideals. This is why individuals who identified with the American dream vehemently defended it. To lose hope in this dream would be to lose a part of themselves that brought meaning to their beliefs, thoughts and actions.[26] As these cases illustrate,

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[24] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 22.

[25] Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: A Da Capo Paperback, 1964), 281.

[26] Cullen, *The American Dream*, "Notes on Sources" 191-192.

Cullen's book as a whole is a reaction to intellectuals who tend to dismiss the American dream as "dowdy" or irrelevant because he is trying to convince people of the American dream's continued relevancy and influence. While Cullen represents intellectual interest in the American dream, both Cullen and this part of the thesis emphasize that the American dream does not simply reside in the debates of academia. The potency and longevity of the dream is the result of many American citizens believing in the possibility of its riches.

belief in exceptionalism was not exclusive to American world views. Identifying exceptionalism as something that influenced how people perceived their cultures, by extension themselves, and how that powerfully motivated them to serve their country, can serve as a way to understand why people would be drawn to stories, like Disney's and Nintendo's, which glorified and celebrated specific aspects of their cultures.

It was in Japan's unwillingness to accept defeat towards the end of the war that we can see an example of the tenacious spirit that the Japanese revered so much. In their refusal to back down we can see why Disney and Nintendo's heroes would later resonate with many Japanese consumers. At the very heart of each character was a spirit that nations celebrated. Even if events like World War II had drawn Japan away from a militaristic spirit, tenacity in the face of adversity generally stood as an admirable trait. This would be revealed by Japan's warrior spirit and by Western observers who still speak of the Japanese reverence for their cause with admiration.[27] Other aspects of nationhood and culture preserved after World War II can be found in the U.S. effort to preserve Emperor Hirohito as a government symbol. This effort to maintain Japan's ties to nationhood and Japanese culture demonstrate how culture, even if devastated by war and nuclear destruction, allowed people to adapt, overcome, and thrive and why would remain a strong foundation for Nintendo and Disney to draw upon during the post-World War and Cold War years.[28]

But before Nintendo and Disney could take advantage of consumer's need for escape and affirmation in regard to particular aspects of their national identities, the end of World War II

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[27] John Donovan, "Japanese Kamikazes: Heroic or Horrifying?," How Stuff Works, InfoSpace Holdings, 2020, https://history.howstuffworks.com/world-war-ii/japanese-kamikazes.htm.

[28] Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), Part IV.

created a desperate need for escapism that would have to be fulfilled in a cheap and accessible way. Disney and Nintendo were not cheap escapes. They required a stable and established economy where consumers could afford luxury goods. *Kasutori* culture became one way that the Japanese could address their need to escape the pain and humiliation of the war before the arrival of Disney and Nintendo. This decadent and vibrant counter-culture flourished in the 1950s as MacArthur and his troops ended the U.S. occupation of Japan. In *kasutori* culture, we find an example of the need the Japanese had for an accessible and complete escape during a post-World War II world.[29]

Kasutori culture becomes a potent example of escapist culture and the need for such an escape because the entire culture is characterized by the idea of escape through the pursuit of decadence. When compared to the strict moral codes of pre-World War II Japan, *kasutori* culture provided adult Japanese citizens with an almost sinful, approach. Pursuit and indulgence in one's most basic and primal pleasures offered an easy escape for adults who had both suffered devastating loss and had been previously pressured to ignore, dismiss, and suppress those pursuits within a conservative culture.[30]

Kasutori culture as Japan's rebellion against the strict moral codes that dictated their pre-World War lives, was a way for the Japanese to escape from America's presence in the same way that middle class American families used Disney theme parks to escape Cold War fears. Although *kasutori* culture drew upon Western practices and traditions, what made it a Japanese tradition and not just a Western imposition, was that the Japanese chose to interpret the West's indulgent approach to pleasure in their own way. This made *kasutori* culture both an escape and a

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[29] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 148-151.
[30] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 148-167.

way for the Japanese to forge their own paths in the face of occupation by former enemy forces. By contrasting previous Japanese traditions that had suppressed and controlled their previous lives ideas brought by American troops, the Japanese found new freedom in Western occupation.[31]

One popular form of *kasutori* escapism modeled itself closely to American strip shows. The men who watched these shows were able to lose themselves in the booze, glitz, glamour, and promiscuity of each show girl's routine. For some this descent into decadence was a natural reaction to the violence and destruction that now permeated Japanese life because the destruction of World War II had disintegrated the social constructions that had previously prevented a descent into decadence.[32] In his "Discourse on Decadence" Ango Sakaguchi wrote of Japanese participating in *kasutori* culture, "it is not because we lost the war that we grow decadent. We fall because we are human, it is only because we live that we fall."[33] In this sentence Sakaguchi was referencing the earlier parts of his discourse that placed *kasutori* culture in the context of Japanese culture prior to, and during, World War II. Sakaguchi asserts that humans, had always been drawn to decadence. The conservative culture that dictated Japanese lives prior to World War II kept the pursuit of decadence, which came at the expense of discipline and productivity, in check. The strict observances of mourning rituals that widows followed and the sense of duty and heroism that Japan's military structures celebrated were all things that people were reacting to and the world of World War II presented them with the opportunity to reimagine the now dismantled pre-war conservative order.[34] If Japan's prior culture had been dedicated to upholding

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[31] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 148-167.
[32] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 148-167.
[33] Ango Sakaguchi and Seiji M. Lippit, "Discourse on Decadence," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (1986), 1-5.
[34] Sakaguchi, "Discourse on Decadence," 1-5.

honor, glory, and heroism, but those traits led to destruction, rapacity, and violence at the hands of Japanese soldiers, then how could the Japanese that survived immediately return to, or reconstruct, the constraining ideals of duty, honor, and heroism, that had led them towards the path of destruction in the first place. For Sakaguchi there was hope. He ended his thought by saying "but I believe that humans cannot fall utterly. This is because humans cannot retain a steely indifference in the face of suffering. Humans are pitiful, frail, and consequently foolish, but also too weak to fall completely."[35] What this meant was that even though *kasutori* culture was an effort to erase the past, as well as something that affected Japan's ability to see the future, there was hope for redemption. Japanese citizens would find their way back.

While Sakaguchi's discourse, at first glance, appeared to focus on the intellectual and social critiques that *kasutori* culture offered in its escape, it becomes important to draw attention to the idea of escape itself. The decadent culture was a way for the government to draw citizen's attention from pent up frustration and disillusionment. "As this austere conspiracy thesis had it, the commercialization of sex was given tacit if not overt encouragement because, like sporting events and films, it was seen as an effective safety valve for a society beset by hunger and scarcity, confusion and despair."[36] In *kasutori* culture Japanese citizens were looking to both free themselves from the actions, thoughts, and shackles of the past, while also losing themselves in the possibility of a decadent present.

What most defined *kasutori* culture to Dower was "the blurred boundary between escapism and engagement with serious issues." This "was typical of *kasutori* culture as a

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[35] Sakaguchi, "Discourse on Decadence," 1-5.
[36] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 165.

whole."[37] What this meant was that although the Japanese were trying to escape the violence and confinement of its past and present, citizens were also engaged in moving forward and creating a better world for themselves despite their desire to escape. This is why Sakaguchi's escapist critique remains a prime example of *kasutori* culture's blurred boundaries.[38]

For those peering into the complex post-war culture that arose, the actions of these individuals may be comparable to a wayward hero, one who might have been distracted by a decadent trap, but who still continued to trudge towards victory even if they seemed to have lost their way at the moment. Thus, we are introduced to a key argument concerning Joseph Campbell's hero's journey. In Japan's *kasutori* culture we see an example of how art, or in this case fiction, imitated life.[39] Through Japan's struggles to embrace their defeat we see how this dream of a better future permeated Japanese thought and action even as they attempted to escape from their real world problems. As *kasutori* culture gave way to a less decadent culture, or as the young adults and children who survived World War II started families of their own, they required a new family-friendly escape. The narratives of Disney and Nintendo could offer a new approach to escapism. At the same time Disney and Nintendo also provided a nod to past heroism, a way to glorify past action, and a means through which a new and brighter future could be envisioned —in other words, Sakaguchi's hope for Japanese redemption.

The dream of upward mobility within Disney and Nintendo narratives fits into a cultural analysis of post-war Japan in this way. A successful realization of the dream required particular characteristics. To elaborate, for upward mobility to become a possibility there were certain traits

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[37] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 165.
[38] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 148-167.
[39] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, prologue; 111-116.

that individuals needed to possess in order to make that dream a reality. Although *kasutori* culture was a culture of escape that allowed participants to slip into a culture of decadence, it still served to preserve Japanese engagement with their societies and communities. Those who engaged in critiques of Japanese society while attempting to escape from the mistakes of the past exhibited characteristics of tenacity, hard work, perseverance in their refusal to completely lose themselves within the decadent culture. As long as the motivations framing the characteristics were different from the pre-war order they would remain viable means of achieving a successful dream of upward mobility. Following *kasutori* culture, Disney and Nintendo re-incorporated particular traits associated with the Japanese war effort into a new, less violent, narrative. The idea that these character traits that accompanied the dream of upward mobility could once again help create a positive future gave the Japanese something familiar to reflect on and use to their advantage while they worked to rebuild the things they had lost. With Disney and Nintendo family-friendly approach, the Japanese could now engage in such visions with their entire families.

This was the world that Hiroshi Yamauchi, a president of Nintendo, inhabited and it was in this world that he had to re-envision a future for the small playing card company.[40] The inspiration for the new future of Nintendo occurred after Japan and the United States had forged closer ties after U.S. occupation had drawn to a close. In the late 1950s to early 1960s Yamauchi observed an American card company who was a world leader in playing card manufacturing. From this visit Yamauchi deduced that if one small company was able to supply cards to the entire world, what need would there be for his company in the future. Having vision and

[40] Currently, I am not aware of links between individuals from Nintendo or TDL participating in *Kasutori* culture, but further research, at a later date, might reveal those connections.

ambition, Yamauchi anticipated the decline of playing cards and focused instead on gearing his small company towards toys and games—the family friendly fun that *kasutori* culture lacked. In this way he was embracing a new culture that could encompass and captivate Japan's ever evolving consumer base—one that now encompassed the young adults and children who had witnessed the end of World War II and who now had grown to have families of their own. To continue their escape these individuals would need a place that would cater to both their desire to run away from the past and allow their children to accompany them.[41]

As we very briefly traced Nintendo's history from playing cards, toys, and finally video game consoles, we again get a feel for how this new vision for Yamauchi's small company later meant that the small company would eventually grow to include the likes of Game Freak. This video game developer was the brainchild of Pokemon's founder Satoshi Tajiri, who also embodied the spirit of Walt Disney and Yamauchi in his upward trajectory to corporate—or rather Pokémon prominence. While Hiroshi Yamauchi provided insight into Nintendo's approach to play, Satoshi Tajiri's story embodied the spirit that Yamauchi attempted to capture in the new direction he envisioned for his former playing card company and this was why Yamauchi's Nintendo would be willing to support Tajiri's vision using the company's resources.

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[41] Florent Gorges and Isao Yamazaki, *The History of Nintendo: 1889-1980, from playing cards to Game & Watch*, Volume 1 (Spain: Les Editions Pix'N Love, 2008), Part 1.

Chapter III: The Journey Begins for Disney, Nintendo, and Consumers of Both

Disney's company was born in a much different world, than post-war Japan. It entered the world during a period of American optimism, the 1920s to be more descriptive. In a sense, this optimism would be preserved in Disney's narratives and their preservation of this optimism, along with their celebration of the American way, would create a touchstone that American consumers could turn towards during the uncertainty of the Cold War. This preserved optimism would also provide a means of escape for Japanese consumers attempting to forget their World War II experiences. In 1923, a few years after the end of The Great War, and U.S. success in said war, Americans had been enjoying a period of celebration. It was during this time of vibrant consumerism that Walt Disney and his brother Roy established "The Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio." Each of their characters were lovingly crafted to expound some sort of American ideal which further ingrained Disney characters into American memory.[42] In the 1930s, while the United States and the rest of the world was struggling with the Great Depression, the small company was actually expanding. They were by no means spared from financial troubles, but in the 1930s Disney had still managed to become "a worldwide phenomenon."[43]

In 1933 and 1937 Disney released the *Three Little Pigs* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The *Three Little Pigs* appealed to the downtrodden American public with messages of success through perseverance and the song *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf* became an anthem to those trying to survive the Great Depression. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* functioned in

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[42] Bethanee Bemis, "How Disney Came To Define What Constitutes the American Experience," smithsonian.com, 3 January 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-disney-came-define-what-constitutes-american-experience-180961632/.

[43] Kathy Jackson, ed. *Walt Disney Conversations* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), Chronology.

a similar manner, demonstrating that goodness and purity of heart would overcome all evils. As viewers watched Snow White overcome the challenges life threw at her, they were also offered a means of escaping their reality for the duration of the film, and this made Disney's stories all the more appealing.[44] Because many believed Walt Disney would fail in his attempt to bring fairy tales to an animated big screen for adult audiences, the success of this film became an example of the possibility of the American dream. These perceptions and receptions of Disney's work would link the Disney brand to dreams of upward mobility.[45] By preserving the celebratory and optimistic nature of the 1920s in the Disney brand, Disney provided people experiencing the Great Depression with a way to escape in the same way that TDL would later enable the Japanese to escape their World War II experiences.

On the other side of the world in 1965, Satoshi Tajiri was born in a rural area of Tokyo, Japan known as Machida. Despite the cultural and period differences that separated Tajiri's and Disney's childhoods, both of their recollections and re-envisionings of each experience preserved childhood emotions of innocence and fun. For Tajiri, his boy hood days were spent catching and collecting bugs in a similar manner to the way players caught Pokemon while running through patches of tall grass. Disney found his fondest memories while participating in community barn-raising events that showcased and celebrated spirits of camaraderie in Marceline, Missouri. Like Disney, as Tajiri grew older, he wanted to combine his love for his childhood experiences into something other people could enjoy too.[46]

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[44] David Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States: 1920-1940* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 2002).
[45] Jackson, *Walt Disney Conversations*, Chronology.
[46] "The Ultimate Game Freak," Time.com, Time Magazine, 22 November 1999, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2040095,00.html.

For Walt Disney, capturing the spirit of his boyhood days would manifest itself in his design of Main Street U.S.A. But rather than emphasizing his home life, Disney chose to preserve the spirit of small American communities—the thing that left the most impact on his childhood memories. The first scene that greeted guests to Disneyland, apart from the iconic castle, was therefore modeled after Disney's beloved town of Marceline, Missouri—the place where Disney felt he experienced true American community and spirit. In recreating this small town feel, Disney hoped for others to experience and appreciate what he loved about his old home.[47]

For Tajiri, sharing his childhood experiences meant creating a game that would allow consumers to explore wild regions though the use of Japanese animation and video games—two of his greatest loves. In Tajiri's late 20s and early 30s, he would be inspired to partner with some of Nintendo's more experienced video game developers. Shigeru Miyamoto had experience building complex worlds in the *The Legend of Zelda* series and became Tajiri's mentor—someone to help Tajiri put his thoughts and ideas into action.[48] In bug catching, we see Tajiri preserving the innocence of his childhood for consumers of his product—much like Japan wanted to preserve the innocence of a culture who had engaged in the violence and horrors of war. In Tajiri's fondness for anime we see him marry his childhood experiences with his more adult passions and also with more widely reaching Japanese culture. Pokémon brought these two

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[47] Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), Chapter I.; "About Marceline," Walt Disney museum.org, Walt Disney Hometown Museum, 2020, https://www.waltdisneymuseum.org/marceline/.

[48] James Gates, "A Love Supreme: the Story of Satoshi Tajiri, Creator of Pokémon," Culture Trip.com, Culture Trip, 1 May 2018, https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/articles/a-love-supreme-the-story-of-satoshi-tajiri-creator-of-pokemon/.

experiences together in this way: the core experiences of Pokémon required trainers to capture and battle small creatures by finding them in tall grass and this was brought to life using anime.

While there are many American children who can say that they hunted or fished—hence the global appeal of collecting Pokemon of varying shapes, sizes and abilities—what made this a Japanese experience was that children in Japan would often find small crickets or spiders and keep them in matchboxes or tins. These captured critters would be cared for and when the time came, they would be called upon to fight the opposing creature of another child—hence the capture and fight aspect of Pokemon battling.[49] These sorts of Japanese flairs were made apparent throughout each addition of the series. From the distinctly Japanese architecture of the buildings and references to Japanese culture and preferences, even as the setting of each game drew inspiration from geographic locations like Britain or New York, Japan and its culture framed the Pokemon experience.[50] This meant that distinctly Japanese characteristics contributed to consumer experiences in the same ways that Disney's celebration of the American experience did.

Tajiri's Pokémon world and Disney's desire to bring Marceline to California and Florida demonstrated how both creators gravitated towards things that evoked feelings of familiarity, hope, and joy. In this brief comparison of how Disney and Tajiri chose to remember their childhood experiences we observe a yearning to reconnect with lost innocence. The later experiences of their lives, which were filled with struggles and uncertainties, created a need for Disney and Tajiri to reminisce, escape, and return to the carefree days of childhood. The same

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[49] German Lopez, "Pokémon Go's Surprising Roots: bug catching," vox.com, Vox, 14 July 2016, https://www.vox.com/2016/7/13/12172826/pokemon-go-android-ios-bug-catching.

[50] Toshinobu Matsumiya, *Pokémon Sword* and *Pokémon Shield*, director Junichi Masuda (2019; Tokyo: Game Freak), Video Game.; Junichi Masuda, *Pokémon Black* and *Pokémon White*, designer Satoshi Tajiri (2010; Tokyo: Game Freak), Video Game.

could be said of the consumers who eagerly lost themselves in Disney's and Tajiri's worlds after World War II and the expansion of the Cold War. To further encourage consumer's escape and enable them to feel comfortable within these new realms, Disney and Nintendo would incorporate familiar aspects of each culture into the memories they were attempting to share. This would further ground each consumer within their Disney and Nintendo experiences and allow them to better identify with each story on their own terms.

To see how Disney adjusted its narrative to appeal to different cultures despite its inherent American roots and ties to Disney's own childhood, one can compare Disneyland's Mainstreet U.S.A. with Tokyo Disneyland's World Bazaar. Rather than picturesque small town America, something that might be too foreign for Japanese audiences, Disney created a place that featured different areas of the world—a mini world showcase of sorts.[51] For the Japanese familiarity was evoked in the form of cultural cuisines and shopping experiences targeted specifically towards the Japanese culture of gift giving. This inclusivity, rather than an exclusive focus on American experiences made the World Bazaar feel more familiar.[52]

For Nintendo, Pokémon games drawing upon Tajiri's memories of the past naturally paid tribute to Japanese culture. Many of the earlier regions, from generations I through IV, took place in regions inspired by different areas of Japan.[53] Pokémon's Kanto region drew inspiration directly from Japan's Kanto, the largest region. In these examples of real world settings turned into Pokémon regions, we see Tajiri's pride in his homeland.

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[51] Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!*, 223-224.

[52] "World Bazaar Confectionary," TokyoDisneyResort.jp, Tokyo Disney Resort, 25 April 2020, https://www.tokyodisneyresort.jp/en/tdl/shop/detail/500/.

[53] In Pokémon terms, generation refers to specific regions and the Pokémon that were created to complement the look and feel of that new area. Generation I therefore featured the Kanto region and the Pokémon found here include the original 151 Pokédex entries. Generation II featured the Johto region and included its own unique species which are also encompassed by the Generation II label.

Player's of Tajiri's games would begin *Pokémon Yellow* in a place that drew inspiration directly from his hometown. Like Disney, who chose to greet visitors to his park with a memorialization of his quaint town of Marceline, Tajiri's humble roots were reflected in Pallet Town. The small pixelated town would be where each Pokémon hero would start their journey.[54] In these reminisced nods to humble and innocent childhood beginnings we see how Disney and Tajiri invited consumer's to begin their journeys in a similar fashion to theirs—within familiar, cozy, and welcoming hometowns that evoked feelings of safety, trust, nostalgia, and happy memories.

For the next three regions, Pokémon games would continue to draw upon the regions of Kansai, Kyūshū, and Hokkaido for inspiration. Each Pokémon region featured the geography, climate, and architecture of the places they paid homage to.[55] But how did Nintendo appeal to its American consumers while preserving Tajiri's representation of Japan? Localization specialists were responsible for both researching how American consumers would react to different aspects of each game and then translating those research findings into the actual games. From Pokémon cries, to nods towards American culture, although the setting and feel of each region would continue to reflect its country of origin, Americans would also be able to find references that were familiar to them within each game—just like Japanese visitors to TDL could find familiar aspects of their culture in the World Bazaar.[56]

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[54] "Pokémon World In Relation to the Real World," Bulbapedia, Bulbagarden, 5 April 2020, https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Pok%C3%A9mon_world_in_relation_to_the_real_world; Gabler, *Walt Disney*, Chapter I.

In the Japanese version of the Pokémon anime, Satoshi is also the name of the main character. This demonstrates again how Satoshi Tajiri was placing himself within this world of Pokémon while consumers of his game could also do the same within their console versions of the Pokémon world.

[55] "Pokémon World In Relation to the Real World," Bulbapedia, Bulbagarden.

[56] "Pokémon CEO Talks Challenges of Localizing Pokémon Games in the Early Days," NintendoSoup, NintendoSoup, 31 December 2018, https://nintendosoup.com/pokemon-ceo-talks-challenges-of-localizing-pokemon-games-in-the-early-days/.

In these examples both Disney and Nintendo designers and developers demonstrated a desire to celebrate, idealize, and exceptionalize familiar cultural icons into things that would turn into broadly accessible and appealing memories. By doing so each company made their narratives more enjoyable to the people that purchased their products both at home and abroad.

By evoking feelings of childhood innocence, Disney and Tajiri would also allow each experience to be encompassed by feelings of safety, happiness, and innocence. Each happy consumer would later become another loyal customer. Success, both in Disney's and Nintendo's narratives, as well as in the stories of their creators, was therefore achieved through familiar cultural references and unfamiliar, yet fascinating, cultures blended together into something that became a unique and safe experience. This helped to create a sense of adventure because the unfamiliar begged to be explored. At the same time a sense of familiarity allowed consumers to identify with each narrative. All of these things combined created a sense of familiarity and enjoyment which kept consumers coming back for more experiences that would evoke similar responses and continue to inspire them as they worked to build a better world from the ruins of World War II.

Chapter IV: The Hero in Us All

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* remains another useful tool for analyzing Disney's and Nintendo's narratives—even the upward trajectories of Walt Disney and Satoshi Tajiri themselves. Campbell outlines variations in his framework, but the main plot points of each hero's journey is summed up by the following sentence. To begin, "a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."[57] As Disney park visitors and Nintendo players made their ways through each story, they adopted specific characteristics of each hero as their own. This meant that they were the ones completing the events of the journey briefly outlined above. As Disney and Nintendo's heroes faced and overcame each step of the hero's journey the consumer saw how successful implementation of positive characteristics could result in success.[58] Campbell takes this a step further and proposed that the characteristics consumers adopted to overcome the challenges of each story became a reality in their everyday life. Consumers would come back to the real world with "the power to bestow boons on his fellow man"—the boons being the positive messages that they received from Disney and Nintendo narratives.[59]

The phenomenon can be explained in this sense: the more appreciative you were of a particular story or hero, the more accepting you became of their ideas and lessons. Conversely,

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[57] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 28.

[58] Although this thesis focuses on Disney and Nintendo characters and their heroic traits, Joseph Campbell argues that these themes, frameworks, and journeys were universal. This thesis shies away from making such a claim. Even if it does acknowledge that their are similar patterns and trends, the histories and cultures of each nation shape, or influence, experiences in a variety of ways.

[59] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, introduction.

the more you disapproved of a particular story or person, the more reluctant you were to adopt their ideas and visions as your own. You fought to resist their influence. Because Disney and Nintendo stories were things that already appealed to many people's existing sense of personal identity, it was even easier for consumers to participate in, identify with, and adopt, the ideals that each company celebrated.

While Campbell's hero's journey often found its definition in great myths and legends, in this case Disney and Nintendo narratives assumed the roles that myths and legends played in helping consumers make sense of themselves and the wider world around them. Campbell argued that the hero's journey was a definitive human experience—a tradition of the ages. This meant that the narrative structure was an inherent part of how people experienced and interpreted the world. For Disney and Nintendo this added to the familiarity and appeal of each story. Following in Campbell's tradition, Disney and Nintendo's narratives served as ways to bring unreachable goals onto a more tangible plane through consumer's reenactment of each story.

What also made the hero's journey a popular frame was the ways that it encompassed longstanding cultural ideas and traditions in a meaningful way. Think of the United States and its relationship with the phrase "a city on a hill." Many Americans today might dismiss this notion as some sort of myth or tribute to America's exceptionalist ways. Aside from its political and historical repercussions, what it often did when its image was evoked, was inspire a sense of pride in the American way and the ability of Americans to achieve dreams of upward mobility through the heroic characteristics of tenacity, perseverance, hard work, and kindness. By establishing these characteristics as heroic traits and as hallmarks of American identity, a successful completion of that dream became an act of American heroism—an act that bound the

normal American citizen to rhetoric that encompassed the idea of America as "a city on a hill." The rhetoric envisioned the "city on a hill" as a shining example of community and camaraderie where Americans would help their fellow neighbors and friends achieve their dreams meant that Americans would be bound together in their success and their failures. This notion, in all its idealism, would further strengthen the bonds between Americans and enable them to better envision a world where together they were all part of an upward trajectory that would enable their collective upward mobility and demonstrate to the world the genius of American democracy.[60]

What made the American hero an achievable part of American life was that the hero who would eventually share the successes of his dream with the rest of his fellow Americans was the common man. Like Campbell described, the hero "ventures forth from the world of the common day—" a world that every American citizen inhabited.[61] In a slight break from Campbell's tradition, the American hero would not journey through "a region of supernatural wonder" but, the hero would use characteristics of hard work, tenacity, perseverance, and kindness to work their way up from a "common" background to a place where they could then "bestow boons on his fellow man."[62] In this way the journey was more relatable to an American reality because the hero's journey took place within the realm of the average American's daily lived experience.[63] In this way, Campbell's hero's tropes, devoid of magic and wonder, provided a framework for a longstanding, exceptionalist, American world view.

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[60] See New York Time' Transcript of "Reagan's Farewell Address to the American People" 12 January 1989 for an example of rhetoric that speaks to the idea of America as a "city on a hill" in the American psyche.

[61] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 28.

[62] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 28.

[63] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 28.

Although "city on a hill" is an American phrase tied strongly to ideals of American exceptionalism, the Japanese had their own visions of Japan shining like an all-encompassing beacon of grace, civilization, and strength. Where Americans adhered to ideas of manifest destiny to tame lands in their possession, the Japanese had the word *Kōdō* or "the imperial way." It was a reaction to the interference of the West because both countries were similar in their desire to preserve and elevate the prestige of their homelands.[64]

Kōdō came to fruition when Emperor Hirohito first took the throne in 1926 and inspired the Japanese to forge their own path in reaction to the isms that defined Western thought and action.[65] The hero of Japan's national story became the citizens of Japan, or the common man, individually standing up to the "fabulous forces" of Western imperialism. What bound them together was that individual action was part of a collective action. Together all of Japan would become responsible for winning "a decisive victory." Together, through their collective actions, the common man would be able to "bestow boons on his fellow man" in the form of helping the Japanese nation establish a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere which would theoretically better serve all of Asia.[66] In this way, the hero's tropes once again created a framework for reality.

Establishing both the idea of a "city on a hill" for Americans, k*ōdō* for the Japanese, and the dream of upward mobility as hallmarks of both Japanese and American spirits meant that these ideas offered an affirmation of the heroic traits embodied within each national identity. According to David Hollinger, "identity is established by clarifying the group to which an

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[64] Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 10.
[65] Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 10-11.
[66] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 28.

individual most deeply belongs."[67] In reaffirming each nation's most heroic traits and actions, the men and women who completed these nationalized hero's journeys became recognizable national heroes. As each of these narratives continued to emphasize the common man coming together with his fellow citizens to achieve victory, these narratives unified national identity. Targeting these shared identities was how Disney and Nintendo broadened their consumer base.[68] By appealing to these broader strokes of identity, and celebrating hard work, tenacity, perseverance, and kindness as heroic traits, Disney and Nintendo incorporated the familiar into the magical. This, along with the use of Campbell's hero's journey as a framework, further grounded the fantastical experiences of consumers into familiar aspects of each consumer's lives which in turn allowed them to make stronger connections with each story.

The idea of exceptionalism, or in the case of nations the celebration of one's most patriotic and noble traits that ensured a nation's success, spoke to individuals need to be the heroes of their own journeys. Let us refer back to Japan for an example. If its goal prior to World War II had been to forge its own path, its own unique cultural identity, and win freedom from Western influence, losing to the Western allied powers, having to acknowledge American occupation, and recognizing the violent nature of their actions during the war would have been difficult to accept because those loss would have been reflected as a loss of their heroic identity.[69] In light of this they would not hesitate to lose themselves in worlds of fantasy and magic where they could reclaim their heroic status while also forgetting about their non-heroic

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[67] David Hollinger, "Identity in the United States," in *Keywords: Identity*, ed. Nadia Tazi (New York: Other Press, 2004), 30.

[68] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), introduction.

[69] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 229-231; 303-318.

actions in World War II. Both *Kōdō* and the events of World War II became the way that Disney's celebration of the American way could capture infiltrate, and enamor Japanese hearts.

In emphasizing dreams of upward mobility within Campbell's framework, both Disney and Nintendo were able to draw in a new consumer based on the premise of hope. The promise of a brighter future encompassed by a heroic role allowed citizens to reclaim lost heroism—certainly within the walls of each theme park or video game at the very least. It would be up to consumers to actualize those ideals once they returned to their realities. What this meant for the nature of consumption as a whole was that consumerism was no longer reduced to an act of passivity, it became an action to escape the present and re-envision the future.

When Disney and Nintendo consumers stepped through park gates or powered on the latest console, they actively assumed the role of a young princess or adventurer embarking on a journey alongside their trusted Pokémon companions or various animal sidekicks. Although the new personas they adopted were different from the images of the common man embodied in nationalist narratives, each of Disney's and Nintendo's characters still embodied recognizable aspects of the dream of upward mobility and therefore represented the core ideals of each national narrative. This was what grounded each consumer within each fantastical journey. The relationship between the exceptionalist narratives and Disney and Nintendo's heroes meant that each company's narrative became the places where individuals could idealize, and eventually realize, the best parts of their cultures—the parts that were either under siege or lost.

In the case of Disney, their focus on the dream of upward mobility through hard work, perseverance, tenacity, and kindness were exemplified as the very things that contributed to an individual's, and eventually a nation's, success. For Americans specifically, Disney's celebrated

character traits created the basic building blocks of American cultural identity because the dream of upward mobility provided the core framework for the explicitly American dream. Through consumer's Disney experience, the common hero became even more real because they had partially lived his journey through Disney. Although the world of Disney was much more fantastical, the core lessons that Disney drew upon regarding the American dream could still be translated onto American's daily lives when they returned from their mythic journeys.

For Japan, Disney's celebration of the American dream which encompasses the more general dream of upward mobility, meant that although Japanese consumers did not possess an American dream, the Japanese could still idealize and aspire towards a Japanized approach to the dream of upward mobility. Japan's need to celebrate particular character traits, heroic ideals inherent to Japanese identity, was a way to reclaim the heroic aspects of themselves lost to World War II. The heroic traits embedded within Disney narratives allowed the Japanese to reclaim those mantles once more and re-envision their heroism within a framework surrounded by goodness, kindness, and hope. Japan's innate fighting spirit, shown throughout history to be tenacious and persevering—even if it had been tempered by the events of World War II, meant that Disney's stories could resonate with consumers outside of American audiences by enabling Japanese consumers to recapture, and redeem, the exceptionalized aspects of their identities.[70]

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[70] Another example of the tenacity of the Japanese and their willingness to do anything for victory can be found in the American decision to drop the Atomic bomb. If such extreme measures were not taken, many predicted that too many American lives would be lost due to Japanese perseverance. Western countries had already observed their tenacity in the early 1900s when Japan attacked Russia over its refusal to cede more control of Manchuria to Japan. Morton and Olenik wrote "Western public opinion had been pleased to see the plucky Japanese stand up to the great Russian bear" but at the same time "the powers generally were shocked to see a European nation so throughly and rapidly defeated by an Asiatic race." (See W. Scott Morton & J. Kenneth Olenik, *Japan: Its History and Culture*, 4th edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc, 2005), 167.) In these examples then, we see just how innately tenacious, preserving, and hardworking the Japanese spirit was.

The importance of these character traits in Japanese identity are exemplified by Pokémon. Nintendo came to celebrate these same ideals independently of Disney.[71] In other words, Nintendo did not draw upon American companies for inspiration. What the American example and the Japanese example demonstrate were that dreams of upward mobility developed independently in each company and held importance for consumers prior to Disney and Nintendo's exemplification of them. As consumers continued to enjoy and interact with Disney and Nintendo products, existing ties between their national identities and these heroic traits would make it easier for consumers to identify with, and internalize aspects, of Disney's and Nintendo's narratives.

Shunya Yoshimi observed this phenomenon in Japanese students when she analyzed their reactions to the book *How to Read Donald Duck.* Written by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattlelart as a Marxist interpretation of the Disney brand and its role in American cultural, ideological, and corporate imperialism, in the eyes of Dorfman and Mattlelart the innocence of Disney films were a facade meant to create and maintain a consumer base that willingly subjected themselves to the mercies and whims of Western powers—particularly the United States.[72] In response to this analysis, many of Yoshimi's students felt protective towards Disney and anger towards the authors for writing about treasured characters in a critical manner. One student wrote "it is no fun when our Donald Duck is analyzed this way." Note the use of the

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[71] This refers to the life story of Emperor Hirohito who was born a sickly and fragile child. The quiet strength that would manifest itself through Hirohito's reign was a result of his struggle to overcome illness, as well as the powerful and influential men who emphasized diligence, hard work, tenacity, loyalty, and the art of military prowess—characteristics that would also become trademarks of Japanese troops and citizens during the World Wars. (See Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2016), Chapter 2.).

[72] Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattlelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology In the Disney Comic*, trans. David Kunzle (New York: OR Books, 2018), Preface and Introduction to the English Edition.

word "our" demonstrating a strong sense of possession.[73] The same student goes on to add that the characters should not be up for cultural debate. This implied that Disney had become something students closely identified with. Identifying with these characters in such a way meant that when students were confronted by analyses that challenged their positive perceptions of Disney, they reacted as if they themselves were the ones being criticized.[74]

While culture was usually associated with specific nations or groups of people, John Wills asserted that the Disney Company had created a specific culture that consumers could easily adopt as their own—as exemplified by the strong ties that Yoshimi students exhibited to Disney's characters. Culture, as defined by Wills, "is the sharing of symbols, beliefs, and ways of thinking."[75] The "Disney Way" was the means through which Disney created its specific culture and people were Disneyfied through Disney symbols and figures of speech, the adoption of Disney values such as wonder, excitement, hope, dreams, belief, and the idea that dream of upward mobility was attainable through tenacity, perseverance, hard-work, and kindness.[76]

What first drew people to Disney's world, and eventually its culture, was the idea of "renewal." When Walt Disney added a sprinkle of pixie-dust, things became new. Disney magic "transforms the ordinary, the tired the non-Disney into the child friendly, the fun, the quintessentially Disney."[77] It provided consumers with a new take on an old classic. In this way, stories like Disney's *Pocahontas*, which remain a prime example of what more recent historians do not do (i.e. glorify or romanticize a period of colonialism and/or imperialism in their narratives) became something that audiences would enthusiastically engage with because of how

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[73] Yoshimi, "America in Japan," 161.
[74] Yoshimi, "America in Japan," 160-181.
[75] Wills, *Disney Culture*, (Camden: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 3.
[76] Wills, *Disney Culture*, 37-38.
[77] Wills, *Disney Culture*, 38.

Disney reinvented her story. In this way each narrative experience became unique to the Disney brand.[78]

What drew people to Nintendo was that like Disney, access to particular experiences could only be gained through Nintendo's consoles. While other gaming companies attempted to emulate Pokémon's success, and although they did succeed in creating worlds inhabited by many monsters and framed by their own heroic journeys, the prominence and longevity of the Pokémon name remain unparalleled, and it is only through Nintendo's handheld devices that the Pokémon world is brought to life. Thus, Nintendo in a similar fashion to Disney, created its own culture by making their characters synonymous with the Nintendo brand. While most games can be found inhabiting one or more gaming systems, Nintendo's most recognizable characters were exclusively confined to Nintendo consoles. Like consumers of Disney products, Nintendo consumers had to go straight to the source for the true experience.

By making their characters exclusive to their brand, both Nintendo and Disney controlled the narrative and could construct particular experiences that were unique to their worlds. No other substitute could be found and this created a sort of brand loyalty. When combined with consumer's personal ties to each brand, this would further increase their protectiveness towards Disney and Nintendo.

Disney and Nintendo invited people to inhabit new worlds, places where magic seemed real and viewers or visitors became the heroes or heroines that overcame adversities and villains. Here good would always triumph over evil and happy endings were sure to come true. These stories, which were told through animation, the parks themselves, and small video game console

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[78] Wills, *Disney Cultue*, 37-38.

screens, separated individuals from the doldrums and struggles of everyday life, they allowed them to renew feelings of heroism and exceptionalism. The feelings of happiness that arose as a result of creating a new reality within fantasy created strong attachments and as people became a part of Nintendo's and Disney's worlds those worlds also became a part of them.[79]

Consumers participating in the stories that Disney and Nintendo shared acquired hope for a better version of themselves and for a better future. When people lost that hope, when that core ideal was challenged and taken away, that became an unthinkable evil. Without the ideals of hard work, tenacity, perseverance, and kindness that Disney and Nintendo emphasized, people's idyllic worlds shattered and the heroes that they had internalized came under attack.[80] That is why Yoshimi's students reacted so negatively to the critiques of Dorfman and Mattlelart. When critical analyses ignored the emotional, cultural, and national attachments people had to Disney and Nintendo, cherished ideals, and identities, came under fire, and people would react accordingly.

Disney and Nintendo as outward manifestations and tangible explanations of the ideals of hope, the power of believing, and the best aspects of Japanese and American culture, were tied to people's identities. People saw the ideals and characteristics that Disney and Nintendo celebrated as ways to build a new future, maintain connections to positive aspects of their past, and lose themselves in the present. Losing these ideas to criticisms that focused solely on the evils of corporations and corporate imperialism would mean consumer's ability to believe in a better future was challenged—if those criticisms prevailed they might have even been taken away

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[79] Dorfman and Armand Mattlelart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, Chapter 1; Joseph, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, introduction.

[80] Wills, *Disney Culture*, Chapter 1.

completely. To challenge Disney and Nintendo was to take the belief of building a better world away and also take away a sense of heroic identity that had been established within the consumer's existing perceptions of self. This would evoke powerful reactions. In these examples, then, we see how Disney and Nintendo blended the hero's journey with exceptionalism and national identity to create something that throughly resonated with many consumers to the point that the two companies became tied to their personal identities.

Chapter V: Where Ideal Characteristics are Reimagined and Realized

After understanding how Disney and Nintendo culture became tied to personal identities, the question becomes why do people allow themselves to be Disneyfied, or in Nintendo's case Nintendofied? As mentioned before, Japan experienced much humiliation and pain during and after World War II while post-war U.S. felt constantly threatened by Cold War events. This meant that the willingness of Disney and Nintendo consumers to leave their realities behind was a product of their desire to forget the past and present. "To do Disney" and "to do Nintendo" was to be able to embrace a new world of hopes, dreams, and ideals. Despite violent memories and uncertain futures, Disney's and Nintendo's messages allowed consumers to believe that goodness could be redeemed and that they were the masters of their own destinies.

Walt Disney's story was a testament to this ideal because of the way that his success followed the narrative framework of dreams of upward mobility. For Americans, his successful completion of a dream of upward mobility offered an affirmation of both capitalism and the dream's possibility. From a small struggling business, Disney eventually turned into a globally recognized powerhouse and Americans who felt that their world views were threatened by communism, could look towards his perseverance and tenacity as a triumphalist example of the reality of the American dream. The successes of Walt Disney himself and the heroes he presented were proof that the American way was both viable and successful and in the heroic example and experiences that he provided for them, Americans believed that the American way would continue to thrive despite the threats of the Cold War.

For an analysis of the connection between Nintendo's Pokémon brand and the dream of upward mobility, Satoshi Tajiri's exemplified the ideal of upward mobility because of how he rose from awkward student with little to no prospects, to creator of what would become a worldwide phenomenon. Satoshi Tajiri did for Nintendo, and his Pokémon world, what Walt Disney would do for his theme parks. Tajiri became responsible for injecting an entire world of whimsy, adventure, and hope into a small handheld device.

The similarities of each creator's stories did not end there for there were many between Walt Disney's successful achievement of the dream of upward mobility and Satoshi Tajiri's rise to Pokémon prominence. Each founder faced different challenges and struggles. Like Disney, Tajiri's story resonated with the the idea of a hard working and persevering hero overcoming trials and tribulations to ultimately lead a successful life. Thus, we see in Disney's and Tajiri's own personal stories, as well as the narratives that they created, a link between worlds—particularly the U.S. and Japan, and fantasy and reality—through their achievement of the dream of upward mobility.

What made Tajiri's story of success similar to Disney's is that many of Tajiri's teachers described him as lazy, which in turn led to projections of a dismal future. It was the same personality that would later see him described as "in a nation of ultraconformists, he was a misfit who didn't even dream of college. His father tried to get him a job as an electrical-utility repairman. He refused. No one expected him to go very far, even when he came up with the game after six trying years. But it is Tajiri's obsessions, more dysfunctional than Disneyesque, that are at the core of the Pokemon phenomenon."[81] What Tajiri's teachers did not know at the

[81] Howard Chua-Eoan and Tim Larimer, "Beware of Pokemania," time.com, Time Magazine, 14 November 1999, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,34342-2,00.html.

time was that the boy who would become the creator of one of the world's most iconic and recognizable franchises was autistic.[82] What the *Time Magazine* author missed in his analysis of Tajiri was that Tajiri's ascent into Pokemon royalty did in fact mirror that of America's Walt Disney—both in his fascination with capturing days of carefree innocence and in the tenacity with which he pursued his vision. The boy whose ideas were believed to be fool's errands, the ideas that many would say could not be done, would set out to achieve the impossible through the ethics of perseverance, tenacity, and hard work.

The doubt that surrounded Tajiri's vision for Pokémon was the same sort of doubt that caused people to question Walt Disney's ability to capture the hearts of adult audiences with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Both men would succeed where others predicted failure and that is what made their resounding successes an echo of the hero's triumph—the very one framed by Campbell's hero's journey.[83] The success of these men, despite the failure that threatened to engulf what they worked for, is also what made their stories of triumph in the face of adversity so potent. In their successes, the fiction of Disney and Nintendo's stories met reality. Even if the worlds they created were fantastical, or filled with magic, at their core there was something that people could actually attempt to grasp within their lived experiences. Walt Disney and Satoshi Tajiri were living proof that dreams of upward mobility could be achieved and this made the narratives that Disney and Nintendo shared even more compelling.

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[82] Colin Eldred-Cohen, "How Satoshi Tajiri's Autism Helped Create Pokémon," Art of Autism.com, The Art of Autism, 12 August 2018, https://the-art-of-autism.com/how-satoshi-tajiris-autism-helped-create-pokemon/.

[83] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 28.

The ways that each man succeeded in the face of doubt were the real life manifestations of the hero's journeys that consumers of Disney and Nintendo engaged with.[84] In Walt Disney's and Tajiri's case art imitated life—some like Joseph Campbell might say Walt Disney's and Tajiri's stories brought art to life.[85] Although historians are more eager to dispel the generalizing and celebratory characteristics of narratives that are an inherent part of grand stories of success, these examples of exceptionalism still find their preservation in Disney and Nintendo—both through the fictional narratives brought to life through theme parks and games, but also through the stories of Walt Disney and Satoshi Tajiri themselves. For the consumers who participated in these stories, who thrust themselves into each theme parks and game, the narratives they participated in became a different sort of enjoyable experience because the specific and untouchable historical figures from the past were brought down to their level. Instead of simply reading about a grand and untouchable figure of history, in Disney and Nintendo stories the consumer became the great hero who changed the course of history.[86] In these David and Goliath-esque stories consumers saw a realization of the dream of upward mobility, both in the fictional narratives they participated in, and in the real life examples of Tajiri and Walt Disney. These two things combined further linked fantasy and reality in the minds of consumers.

Both Walt Disney and Satoshi Tajiri, possessed great foresight, perseverance, and a knack for showmanship that drew people into their products. The fact that they exhibited the

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[84] In *Keywords: Identity* David Hollinger contributes to this collection an essay on American perceptions of identity. Here Hollinger discusses how identity is both described by the individual and by those who wield power over the individual. This thesis focuses on identity as described by the individual because it focuses on the things that draw individual consumers towards a specific narrative. How others choose to label the individual therefore has little to no bearing on what each product makes each consumer feel and how that affects their decision to participate in Disney and Nintendo narratives. (See David Hollinger, "Identity in the United States," in *Keywords: Identity*, ed. Nadia Tazi (New York: Other Press, 2004), 42.)

[85] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, introduction.

[86] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, introduction.

characteristics that would help them become successful examples of the dream of upward mobility meant that these individuals were storybook heroes brought to life in the real world. This helped to further legitimize dreams of upward mobility and the importance of the characteristics that defined those who were successful in their pursuit of that dream. By tying each entrepreneur to the reality, or possibility, of that dream, consuming the products of those corporate heroes might mean a little bit of entrepreneurial luck or prowess might rub off on consumers themselves.

The hope and belief in a better future, realized by Walt Disney, Satoshi Tajiri, and the consumers who participated in the stories they sold, encouraged those who struggled with past and present horrors to look beyond their current situations. Like each visionary of the companies they came to identify with, consumers would see that Disney's and Tajiri's strength came from the convictions they had to achieve their dreams. Through tenacity, perseverance, hard work, and kindness, Disney and Tajiri were able to create new worlds for consumers to enjoy. For consumers, then, rather than dwelling within the war torn past and present, they could follow the examples of Walt Disney and Satoshi Tajiri and take action. Each fantastical new lands that consumers visited enabled them to participate in a brighter future, reemphasize the heroic traits they clung to, and then enabled them to bring those lessons back to a reality where they could project their new visions for a better world onto the theoretical clean slate that World War II left in its wake. This new world would reincorporate existing exceptionalist ideals and Disney and Nintendo narratives into a place where consumers would shy away from fear or destruction in favor of goodness and unity.[87]

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[87] Mujeeb Khan, "Japan as a Guiding Light." http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/384373/pdf/Encouragement_Khan.pdf?t=1487305910555.

With this in mind, it again becomes evident that if one were to criticize Disney and Nintendo, the criticism would not be limited to corporate policy or practice. Rather, the ideas of hope and goodness that Disney and Nintendo celebrated would also come under fire. If those attacks were successful, and Disney and Nintendo were dismissed as frivolous fantasies or tools of imperialism, this would mean that both the goals of Japan and the United States in a post-World War II and Cold War world would be rendered meaningless. The identity that consumers had resuscitated from the ruins of a past war and the threats of a new war, the identity which reemphasized the positive ideals of both nations by encompassing principles of hard work, tenacity, perseverance, and kindness, would be ripped away.

Chapter VI: Nintendo Meets Disney, Disney Meets Japan

Prior to the establishment of Walt Disney's small company in the 1920s, the Japanese had been captivated by the glitz and glamour of America's Hollywood. This was demonstrated by their consumption of Western hairstyles, clothing, and pastimes.[88] According to Yoshimi, the Japanese of that era found American ideas appealing because they wanted to emulate Western consumers purchasing power and lifestyles, and they would do that—on their own terms. Once Disney came onto the historical scene, by celebrating American ideals, like the dream of upward mobility encompassed within an all American dream, the company had become quintessentially American. This made it all the more appealing to the Japanese who were eager to re-emulate the purchasing power and lifestyles of their Western counterparts after the WWII.[89]

Through their emulation of Hollywood styles, Japan had experienced Western goods and later, after the war, Japanese entrepreneurs would be more willing and able to adapt those ideas and products to their own tastes.[90] This is where preexisting fascination with Western culture are

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[88] Yoshimi, "America in Japan," 165.
Page 12 of Edward Said's *Orientalism* discusses how there exists an unequal exchange because of Orientalist perceptions. What Yoshimi demonstrates is how the Japanese were conscious consumers of Western products even before the destruction of World War II. At any given moment the Japanese could have decided that they were not interested in emulating Western styles. Morton and Olenik also demonstrate Japanese agency throughout their narrative of Japanese history, citing Japan's tendency to Japanize, or adopt certain things as their own.

[89] Yoshimi, "America in Japan," 160-181.

[90] In W. Scott Morton and J. Kenneth Olenik's fourth edition of *Japan: Its History and Culture* Morton and Olenik present a condensed version of Japanese history. Spanning from pre-history to the present, they demonstrate how throughout their history Japan had shown a penchant for maintaining a unique cultural identity. In their chapter titled "Japan in Isolation" they demonstrated how Japan's unification led to its isolation as the newly unified nation struggled to hold its people together. Although the isolation occurred at the same time that other nations were forging bonds with each other, Morton and Olenik allude to the idea that by focusing on strengthening a cohesive national identity when Japan was ready to open its doors it would be more ready to adopt new ideas with a distinctly Japanese flair without compromising the foundations of their identity.

On page 123 we learn that in the face of modernization (during the late nineteenth century), the ideals of the samurai, that were strengthened during the early years of the Tokugawa Shogunate, would lay the foundations for successful modernization due to their emphasis on duty, hard work, and courage. In other words, what we see here is the endurance of Japanese values in comparison to the endurance of U.S. values and ideals. This provides an example of how Japan held ideals of the dream of upward mobility throughout their history which in turn demonstrates the appeal of Disney's narratives.

arguably what would make the Japanese more successful than other countries in terms of adopting American modes of manufacturing and ideologies.

Previous experiences with the consumption of foreign cultural goods better enabled the Japanese to discern what would and would not work for them. The ability of Japanese entrepreneurs to cherry pick specific ideas and adapt them to their own cultural tastes is exemplified in the 1950s when Nintendo Co. struck a deal with Disney that allowed them to print Disney characters on their playing cards. This not only exemplified the prowess of Japanese businessmen; it also demonstrated how after World War II, because of Disney's role in promoting American military interest, his characters had grown into easily recognizable and popular figures around the globe.[91] It is the prior consumerism of American ideas and goods, as well as an increasing American political presence in response to the Cold War, that further helps us to understand how Disney became a part of Japanese identity despite its American flair. At the same time, Nintendo in its adoption of Disney characters demonstrated the ease with which both companies could bring American and Japanese markets together into an appealing product that would draw in consumers from both countries.[92]

Nintendo's decision to print Disney characters on their playing cards was not the only example of Disney's potential success in a Japanese market. Ten years after the end of World War II, Walt Disney's entrepreneurial dreams and fantasies turned into reality as his first park opened in Anaheim, California. It is in Disney's first park, opened in 1955, that we see his carefully crafted atmosphere of almost utopian idealism. Among the throngs of eager visitors

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[91] See the Introduction of Philip Ther's *Europe Since 1989* for an idea of how Poland exhibited the same sort of market savviness that Ther argues contributed to their relative success in Eastern Europe. Also see Mike Gubser's "The First Third World" which initially inspired this train of thought.

[92] TokyoMagicToo, "Tokyo Disneyland Opening - 1983," video, 2:17, 26 April 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMnWKdonkSQ.

wishing to lose themselves within Disney's new Disneyland utopia, was Kunizo Matsuo, the head of the Matsuo Entertainment Company in Japan.[93] Matsuo saw the potential to create a similarly themed park in his homeland and came up with the idea for Nara Dreamland. Located in the heart of Nara, Japan, the site was chosen because it was the former capital. In doing this Matsuo desired to acknowledge Japan's culture and history in his adaptation of Walt Disney's Disneyland.[94] Kunizo's interest in Disney's park demonstrated how widely appealing Disney's core themes of hope, belief, and perseverance were to audiences abroad, especially following wars as extensive and violent as World War II.

A former Japanese Kabuki actor turned business entrepreneur at a time when Kabuki Theater was struggling, Matsuo wished to continue to bring joy to people using theatrical experience even if he was no longer acting. He envisioned entertaining the masses in a similar style to Disney's Disneyland but in his lands the Japanese could lose themselves within fantastical experiences without having to travel to the United States. At first Matsuo sought to use Disney's trademark characters and stories but the details of the creation of Nara Dreamland, Matsuo's first park, become unclear in terms of Walt Disney's approval. There is evidence to suggest that Walt Disney placed Matsuo in contact with Disney Imagineers, who were—and still are—responsible for bringing Disney's creations to life. Unfortunately this vision would not be completed as initially planned. Whether this was officially approved remains to be unseen. What is known is that close to Nara Dreamland's completion, Matsuo and Disney were not able to agree on the licensing fees for Disney's characters. This meant that Nara would be hastily turned

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[93] Kunizo Matsuo was not linked to the Nintendo Company, but his business enterprise was also dedicated to bringing entertainment to Japan's consumers. What he provides to this thesis is an example of how Disney could and would appeal to Japanese audiences—eventually at the expense of Matsuo's ventures.

[94] Defunctland, "Defunctland: The History of Nara Dreamland," video, 16.30, 2 April 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iU6GCosr_NM.

into what many now dubbed a "Disney knock-off" where Matsuo would use traditional Japanese narratives to transport his visitors to magical lands.[95] While this was not what Matsuo originally envisioned for his guests, it would better appeal to Japan's cultural heritage and pride—the things that they would continue to uphold even as the United States worked to influence them. Because exceptionalism often takes the form of reactions to things that threaten a country's ways of life and their traditions, Matsuo's world became a place for the Japanese to enjoy fantasy and whimsy while reemphasizing and strengthening their cultural heritage in the process. With its whimsical Japanese spin and fantasy lands, in 1961 Matsuo returned Japanese park goers, and their families, to a time of innocence and fun—a refuge that transported visitors away from the unsavory memories of World War II and American occupation.

Under the jurisdiction of Japan Dream Tourism or Nippon Dream Kanko, the two Dreamlands were meant to inspire a Japanese tourism industry. Matsuo envisioned throngs of visitors flocking to his gates much like they did in Disney's California park. This meant that although Disney's well-loved and well-known characters would not grace the streets of Matsuo's fantasy, the similarities of Nara's construction were astounding. Think of the image of TDL and DisneyWorld's Cinderella's Castle as globally recognized icons, but instead the castle at the center of Nara Dreamland resembled Sleeping Beauty's Castle in Anaheim, California.[96]

Like the iconic castle, each of Matsuo's rides were modeled on popular Disney attractions but later adapted to popular Japanese myths and folklore. An example of this is the turtle boat rides which were modeled after Disney's canal boats.[97] The Nara Dreamland version took

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[95] Defunctland, "Defunctland: The History of Nara Dreamland."
[96] Defunctland, "Defunctland: The History of Nara Dreamland."
[97] Defunctland, "Defunctland: The History of Nara Dreamland."

visitors aboard turtle shaped rafts that told the story of Urashima Taro, a fisherman who saved a sea turtle that later brought him to Ryugu-jo, a palace residing at the bottom of the ocean where the Dragon King lived. It was here that guests were introduced to the mythic Japanese Princess Otohime, instead of one of Disney's famous princesses.[98] This marriage of Disney themes with Japanese cultural heritage was met with strong park attendance, which demonstrated that there was indeed a strong desire from Japanese consumers for parks like these—parks that would offer escape from the realities of their daily lives.

The success of Nara Dreamland would inspire Matsuo to build its sister theme park Yokohama in 1964 but this park also met an untimely end after closing in 2002. Unfortunately for Matsuo, Nara Dreamland would not fare much better closing in 2006. While both parks enjoyed success, problems with the crumbling infrastructure of both parks added to growing debts and dwindling park attendance.[99] As attendance for Tokyo Disneyland, opened in 1983, skyrocketed, the number of visitors to Yokohama and Nara Dreamlands—its most similar rivals—would continue to decrease and eventually the theme parks would be abandoned and later destroyed.

While both Dreamlands faltered and failed, they spoke to the desires of Japanese consumers. As Sklar would later allude to in his memoir, it was not the idea of Disney that failed here; it was the fact that "copies of foreign iconic product were sold to the Japanese public as representing the original product, when in fact they were poorly designed and made."[100] The Japanese wanted real Disney magic, the kind that came with Disney's exacting attention to detail

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[98] "The Tale of Urashima Taro," Public Relations Office Government of Japan, 2009, https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/201407/201407_09_en.html.

[99] "Daiei's losses come to 3.99 billion yen," japantimes.co.jp, Japan Times, 20 October 2001, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2001/10/20/business/daieis-losses-come-to-3-99-billion-yen/#.XpqDny2ZOqA.

[100] Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!*, 222.

and quality construction—the kind that would more fully immerse them in lands of wonder, magic, and fantasy. They wanted stories that would make them active heroes and champions, not simply observers of well known myths and legends. This was the legacy of Walt Disney, who in his original designs, wanted to perfect the American carnivals or amusement parks that failed to fully immerse and welcome visitors into the worlds they created.[101] This is also indicative of the exclusivity of the Disney experience. Disney provided consumers with an unrivaled or unparalleled experience which forced consumers to seek Disney for their particular narratives and immersive experiences.

[101] *The Imagineering Story*, 1, "The Happiest Place On Earth," directed by Leslie Iwerks (12 November 2019, on Disney+, https://disneyplusoriginals.disney.com/show/the-imagineering-story.

Chapter VII: Creating Disney Worlds and the Pokémon Universe

Nara Dreamland had cut costs in materials and labor. No such corner cutting would happen in Tokyo Disneyland which began construction in 1980. Take for example the 600 acres used in TDL's construction which was reclaimed, meaning built up from the sea. Instead of hastening the beginning of construction on this newly created land, Disney and Japanese engineers allowed a long settlement period which would later ensure that the structures built on top would be able to withstand the Tsunami that arrived in 2011.[102] This careful attention to detail and planning were a result of the fact that there were Disney ideals to uphold—the kind that had become so intrinsically woven into both Disney personas and different cultural identities that they could not be separated, or ignored, lest the Disney facade be broken.

But before ground could be broken for TDL, there first had to be a desire for a Disney venture in Tokyo. Disney's continuous attention to detail had helped make California's Disneyland a resounding success and this was what attracted the attention of multiple countries who began vying for the right to open their own parks so that they too could reap the economic benefits of the Disney brand. The Oriental Land Company (OLC) would be responsible for convincing Disney that Japan was the right place for more Disney magic. In 1974 the OLC contacted the Disney Company in the hopes of having what was now known as Walt Disney Productions assist with the planning, development, and operation of "a Disneyland-type theme

[102] Marty Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!*, 221-222.

park on Tokyo Bay."[103] Responding to their interest, Walt Disney Productions did a study that outlined the potential of Japan's population to sustain a Disney park.

When comparing the Tokyo area to California, Walt Disney Productions found that the existing population there was three times the size of Anaheim's. The projected plans for attendance during periods of increased leisure and economic stability would ensure that the park could maintain a steadily increasing guest list. If Disneyland in California was doing well in a place with one third of the population of Japan, then Tokyo would be the next best choice for a successful venture.[104]

Numbers were one thing but there was also Japan's experience with World War II which still left deep emotional and psychological impacts on Japanese citizens. Where Americans during earlier periods of the Cold War had feared nuclear detonation and sought Disney as a way to distract themselves from those Cold War fears, Japan had lived it. Even if the war was now more of a memory than a reality, the Japanese still wanted to absolve themselves from the legacy of their World War II actions and from the consequences that had followed. This meant that Disney's style—completely immersive, cinematic escapism—was also an attractive means of distraction and validation for Japanese consumers.[105]

Despite Walt Disney Productions interest in the economic potential of a Tokyo based park, TDL is not actually owned by Disney. During the time of its conception, the Disney Company was focused on the construction of Disney's Experimental Prototype City of Tomorrow, better known as EPCOT, to be opened in 1982. Coupled with Card Walker's

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[103] Ted Linhart, "A Rare Look at How Disney Decided to Build Tokyo Disneyland," DizAvenue, 6 November 2016, https://www.dizavenue.com/2016/11/a-rare-look-at-how-disney-decided-to.html.

[104] Linhart, "A Rare Look."

[105] Wills, *Disney Culture*, Chapter 2.

experience with Japanese kamikaze during World War II, Disney's Chief Executive was reluctant to have much to do with TDL in terms of monetary investment.[106] What Walker's unwillingness to work with the Japanese demonstrated was that World War II era experiences and perceptions were something still prevalent almost 30 years after the war. In this example, we see how historical events continued to shape perceptions of Americans towards the Japanese despite the idea that Disney, and its celebration of particular themes and narratives, were drawing the two nations together.

Although Card Walker remained reluctant to fund the Tokyo venture, the Disney Company still worked closely with park designers to ensure an authentic Disney experience for Japanese consumers. This meant that the layout of TDL would still closely resemble Disneyland in California and Magic Kingdom in Florida's Disney World, which opened in 1971.[107] In TDL, Disney's signature hub and spoke design made another debut with Western Land and International Land (or the World Bazaar), taking the place of Frontier Land and Main Street U.S.A. respectively. In this way Disney adjusted its narrative to appeal to its Japanese audience and enabled Japanese guests to better connect with the park's themes and experiences. By enabling a stronger connection between Japanese consumers and the Disney experience, it would help consumers entwine the Disney experience into their existing personal identities.

In Disney's fully immersive and welcoming setting guests could more easily and more completely lose themselves in the worlds of their choosing. These easy escapes were exactly what consumers wanted—whether they were seeking reprieve from the events from World War II and its legacy, or Cold War fears. When consumers left, not only had they experienced Snow

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[106] Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!*, 221-222.
[107] Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!*, 221-222.

White's triumph through a heroic journey—or any other of Disney's theme park story adaptations—they were also confronted with Walt Disney's monumental success. In this way, both fantasy and reality demonstrated the possibility of the dream of upward mobility and contributed to leaving lasting impressions on consumers of Disney experiences even as they sought to escape the less savory realities of their daily lives.

For Nintendo, immersing consumers in new worlds came on a much smaller, but no less technically complex scale. Although consumers were not experiencing the same sights, smells, or tastes of a world brought to life in Disney Parks, they were still able to take control of a hero's actions, hold the keys to a new world, and interact with that world through a series of actions that were centered around their own personal beliefs and ideas. Nintendo's immersive experiences required consumers to participate in much more world building than a Disney experience and this meant that the actions outlined above would hold even more meaning for them.

For this thesis, the term world building refers to the combined efforts of Disney, Nintendo, and their consumers to create fully immersive worlds to inhabit. This required a level of personal imagination that was inevitably colored by personal experience. When this was combined with feel-good narratives and sold to consumers that had witnessed violence, uncertainty, and the promise of a new future in the span of a lifetime, a potent combination that continued to attract consumers was born.

The key to Nintendo's success on the world building stage was how players had to fill the Pokémon world with many of their own ideas. Disney allowed people to identify with their creations through establishing each theme park as a gateway to a new world. Nintendo created the same idea on a much smaller, much more portable scale. This offered an immersive

experience in a less constructed but no less meaningful way. It became a more meaningful experience, despite the limitations of Nintendo's handheld, because players filled in more of the story gaps by themselves. Consumers were using more of their own imaginations to detail the Pokémon world. This meant that consumers placed more of themselves into their Nintendo experiences creating an even stronger bond between the hero and player.

When visitors stepped into a new Disney land it was a stationary experience. The framework that visitors operated within was much more fleshed out with sights, smells, tastes, and textures. Consumers were completely surrounded by the world that Disney wanted them to inhabit. The limited gaming technologies of the 1990s, where Nintendo's *Pokémon Yellow* found its home, produced small pixelated stories. The images lacked color and any real definition—a far different representation of a fantastical new realm to explore.[108] But by enabling players to evoke these images into being anywhere in the world, messages of hope, kindness, perseverance, and tenacity became even more accessible and closely tied to player's identities. This also meant that the dream of upward mobility was always within reach—an easily accessible, portable way to forget the troubles of a post-war world for as long as consumers gazed upon the screens Nintendo sold.

What made each park and gaming experience a successful and appealing escape was that participants in both Disney and Nintendo narratives were involved in world building exercises that placed them within a safe framework. Unlike rebuilding a war torn country, the framework provided by Disney and Nintendo proposed that anything was possible—and successful redemption was not just a possibility, it was guaranteed. This meant that while Disney and

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[108] Satoshi Tajiri and Ken Sugimori, *Pokémon Yellow Special Pikachu Edition*, composer Junichi Masuda, (Tokyo: Game Freak, 1998).

Nintendo encouraged feelings of safety to foster a sense of connection between consumers and Disney and Nintendo's experiences, the worlds themselves perpetuated more than just general feelings of safety and familiarity. Within these realms consumers could not fail—the hero would always prevail. While consumers might be confronted with the possibility of failure in their realities, in Disney's and Nintendo's worlds failure ceased to exist. Although the fantasy worlds were not permanent and consumers would have to face uncertainty of reality again, the lessons, themes, and dreams that they brought back to their realties remained with them. In this way each story and lesson continued to provide a touchstone and safety net for consumers to reflect upon which would in turn further strengthen the connection to both companies.

Whether each company provided a full walk through experience, or happiness on the go, Disney and Nintendo provided multiple opportunities for consumers to engage with their stories and narratives on a personal level. With each immersive experience, Disney and Nintendo gained a large and loyal fan base as each consumer merged fantasy worlds with their real life experiences. In this way world building helped to further emphasize the link between reality and fantasy because consumers were not just passively reading stories that featured the hero tropes Campbell analyzed, they were bringing them to life through their actions—they were realizing them.[109] When consumers eventually left these fantasy worlds to return to their daily lives, they took with them memorable experiences and a stronger belief in the possibility dreams of upward mobility because they had participated in a successful reenactment of a heroic journey within each park and console experience.

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[109] Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, introduction.

Chapter VIII: Bonds Forged in Fantasy

The worlds that Disney and Nintendo brought to life were strengthened by the combination of heroic journeys, real life examples of heroes who successfully completed dreams of upward mobility, and the mixtures of those fantasies and realities during in narratives that also combined the personal experiences of each consumer. What further incorporated the fantastical into the real would be the experiences that consumer shared with other people.

On TDL's opening day Cast Members, or those charged with bringing Disney's visions to life within each park through acting, received consumers eager visitors. Cast Members were another way to help immerse consumers in Disney's particular brand of magic and to ensure that each Cast Member would maintain the exacting standards set by Walt Disney himself, the Disney Company would send people from its American parks to TDL for short periods of time. Doing this preserved the integrity of each consumer's experience, ensuring that they would get an authentic Disney memory.[110] This interpersonal detail enabled consumers to forge relationships with the fantastical worlds around them allowed them to make connections with other like-minded people. Through a collective experience, in other words a shared experience with members of a Disney community, the bonds between fantasy and reality became further strengthened and more easily brought back to consumer's daily lives.[111] This would further integrate Disney's themes, narratives, and ideals into consumer's identities.

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[110] Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!*, 221-222.

[111] The idea that a "collective" and "shared" Disney experiences creates a sense of community between consumers of Disney products draws upon the work of Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities*. Although Anderson was analyzing how shared culture, history, and language could create a sense of community within nations, I argue that the same concept can be applied to consumers of Disney and Nintendo who share common themes, dreams, and experiences. (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, introduction).

Unlike Disney, Nintendo did not have to rely on things like Cast Members to bring their stories to life and forge interpersonal connections. Instead, Satoshi Tajiri had to find a different way to create bonds between players. In video game development, networking brought games to life as different ideas and experiences came together to create a memorable product. This collaborative spirit—the ability to communicate with people from all different walks of life and even all around the world to create a memorable experience—was what Tajiri wanted to emphasize in his games. As Disney recognized with its Cast Members, Tajiri also realized that bringing people together made for more meaningful and powerful memories and experiences. By focusing on how consumers would interact with each other through the Gameboy's communication systems, as well as with the Pokémon narratives, Tajiri brought the game world into the real world.

The handheld nature of Nintendo's small Gameboy made creating the Pokémon world a grand challenge, but it would allow players to interact with each other in ways that no other console could replicate.[112] By using a small black cable, two Gameboys, the home of Nintendo's *Pokémon Yellow* game, could communicate and this allowed trainers to trade, battle, and most importantly bring the Pokemon world into their real time lives.[113] In doing this Tajiri made connections with players both on and off the screen.

Establishing a strong emphasis on person to person interactions meant that Tajiri could create an entire lived experience characterized by Pokémon. This meant that his world would not be limited to the confines of a screen. Instead, the Pokémon world would jump off the screen—

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[112] Gates, "A Love Supreme: the Story of Satoshi Tajiri, Creator of Pokémon."

[113] Florent Gorges, *L'Histoire de Nintendo: 1989-1999 L'incroyable histoire de la Game Boy*, Volume IV (France: Omaké Books, 2019, 135.

living through the experiences that consumers would have with each other. To encourage more person to person interactions, at least two versions of each Pokémon game would be released. Within each version there would be exclusive Pokémon and to "catch 'em all," players would have to trade with each other to collect the monsters that their versions lacked. When not trading, players could choose to battle each other. When it comes to battling, Pokémon lore often reveals that battling one another was the only true way to know a trainer's heart. As each player urged their Pokémon to do their best, and gave a piece of themselves away to a fellow trainer in need, through battling and trading with each other bonds were forged. Even when consumers exited the world of Pokémon by powering off their consoles, they were still left with the deeper and more lasting impressions created through their interactions with fellow trainers. Like Disney did with his theme parks, Tajiri immersed players into the world of Pokemon by enabling them to forge bonds not only with the Pokemon they battled alongside of, but also with fellow consumers of Nintendo products.

Tajiri also encouraged players of Pokémon to bond with in game characters. Unlike Mickey Mouse, whose power lay in his human-esque posture and mannerisms—at times often mirroring the man who created him, and who acted quite independently of consumers, Pikachu was different. Where Mickey retained more human characteristics and could be imagined as a mouse-eared friend, Pikachu was more like a loyal and constant companion. For Disney consumers who admired and coveted the relationships Disney princesses had with their animal friends, Pikachu realized that wish.[114] His travel-sized stature, fuzzy yellow body, stubborn

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[114] Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, 111-165.
Also see Elizabeth A Lawrence, "In The Mick Of Time Reflections On Disney's Ageless Mouse," *Popular Culture* Vol. 20, Fall 1986.

nature that had to be won over, and red cheeks created a face most everybody could find *kawaii*. Once befriended he was loyal and powerful, and when trainers interacted with him on screen, after they had earned his trust, Pikachu would react with multiple hearts floating around his head —instead of turning his back towards them if trainers had not bonded with him enough. In the game, the bond Pikachu established with his trainer became a testament to the potency and potential of kindness, hard work, perseverance, and tenacity—it would allow players to achieve strength that no other in game character could achieve.[115] In emphasizing the bonds between trainers and Pokémon, and combining the in-game experience with bonds established between players in the real world, Tajiri created a powerful and memorable experience that would leave lasting impressions on each player long after they had turned off their consoles.

For both Disney and Nintendo, bringing people together to share in these bonding experiences meant that consumers not only identified with the worlds on the screens, they further merged reality with fantasy. This made each world more lived, more experienced, and something that people could more easily identify with.

What framed each interaction within Disney and Nintendo narratives were themes of perseverance, tenacity, hard work, and kindness—found within dreams of upward mobility. Thus, the dream continued to define the overall experience that each consumer took part of. In this way the dream connected fantasy with reality, familiar and unfamiliar, and became the shared experience that would create a sense of connection and community between consumers.

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[115] Satoshi Tajiri and Ken Sugimori, *Pokémon Yellow Special Pikachu Edition.*

The Hero's Journey. In his book, Campbell argued that people are drawn to specific genres because it enabled them to envision themselves as triumphant heroes for the duration of the films they watched. In his dissection of a successful narrative which would encapsulate this trope, the hero faced specific plot points in a certain order which always resulted in the triumph of their goodness and hope.

Page xxxi: “the soul *needs* stories” its how we are taught and how we learn.

This would allow each company to further increase the effectiveness of their world building endeavors because consumers now had people they could connect with, bond with, and share experiences with even after they had left the parks or powered off their consoles. As consumers returned from their outlets of escape, together, they could apply the lessons learned in each narrative to a world rebounding from the uncertainties of wars. Confronting the challenges of a post-war world with these new insights, and connections to each other, meant that consumers could potentially work together to apply the lessons that Disney and Nintendo celebrated onto the theoretically clean slate that World War II provided.

Chapter IX: Dissecting Disney's Lands and Nintendo's Narratives, How the Exotic Becomes the Familiar

Disney and Nintendo, with their abilities to create spaces in which visitors could live dreams of heroism and upward mobility in a more immersive fashion, took things a step further than hairstyles and pastimes.[116] They allowed American and Japanese consumers to temporarily forget about their past and present while they adopted charismatic and ideal identities in new worlds and forged new senses of community and friendship. Alongside of fantastical worlds, and human connection, embedding familiar narrative frameworks and heroic traits within auras of exoticism and mystique made each narrative an attractive and adventurous outlet. This would further add to each story's appeal.[117]

A news clip gives us insight into how Americans and Japanese perceived and received the idea of TDL's immersive and exotic experiences. Featured in the clip were multiple shots of Japanese tourists. One presented an image of a group of Japanese visitors posing with a statue of a Native American in full headdress. The narrator cheerily announced "there's the old West right here in the old East."[118] Underlying this seemingly inconspicuous phrase were prominent stereotypes of the American wild West complete with feathered headdresses and gun slinging cowboys. It was Japan's prior affinity for Hollywood style cinema that would contribute to this image of the American frontier as romantic, untamable, and wild. As visitors from both countries

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[116] Yoshimi, "America in Japan," 160-181.

[117] Shunya Yoshimi expresses a similar analysis of exoticism in her chapter in Dazzled by Disney, but instead of drawing connections to Said's idea of orientalist she chooses to use the terms "familiar exotic" and exotic exotic" to denote how things are both exoticized and familiarized in different entertainment centers in Japan.

[118] TokyoMagicToo, "Tokyo Disneyland Opening - 1983."

willingly participated in the perceived wildness and romance of the Old West, Disney happily offered up an affirmation of those fantasies and stereotypes.

In Adventure Land, Western Land's counterpart, visitors participated in an affirmation of Eastern stereotypes—the idea that the East was dangerous, full of many hostile people and animals that adventurers would have to overcome to witness the riches that the wilderness obscured. In Disney's Jungle Cruise, visitors embarked on a boat ride that took them deep within lush African and Southeast Asian jungles filled with unknown dangers and native wildlife. During this adventure, participants come face to face with large African and Asian elephants, a group of cornered explorers just barely out of reach of an angry rhinoceros' tusk, prowling tigers, and partially submerged hippopotamuses. They sailed past dangerous "head-hunters" holding shrunken heads and waiting for their next victims before drifting into an ancient and earthquake damaged Cambodian temple. Once visitors had returned from their journeys, victorious and unscathed, having seen first hand the riches that the jungles had to offer, they reemerged into the throngs of civilization where they were greeted with triumphant talking drums and eye-catching Japanese folk crafts. In these exotic lands everything was given an air of mystery, untouched wilderness, fantasy, and exoticism. Each consumer, Japanese or American, was participating in "far off places, daring sword fights, a prince in disguise."[119] It was the stuff of Disney fairytales and by taking part in it, each consumer willingly accepted and participated in these interpretations of East and West.[120]

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[119] TokyoMagicToo, "Tokyo Disneyland Opening - 1983."; *Beauty and the Beast*, directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, (2010; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studio), DVD.

[120] An article found at: https://martinroll.com/resources/articles/asia/shiseido-the-asian-cosmetic-brand/, discusses how Shiseido a Japanese brand used an air of Eastern mystique to sell its products in a newly opened Western market. This adds another example of how understanding the appeal of exoticism and mystery to potential consumers was recognized both by American and Japanese companies and used to their advantage.

For many, the use of the term “Old East,” both in the narrator’s introduction of Western Land, and as a way to describe Adventure Land’s Asian inspirations, invite us to participate in a criticism of the orientalist Western perceptions that surround Asian cultures. The focus here is different. In the quote “there’s the old West right here in the old East,” East and West, two seemingly incompatible identities, were married—turned into one cohesive and celebrated idea.[121] Instead of creating a distinction between East and West, Disney physically and temporally brought two worlds together. Two worlds were physically brought together when a theme park of American origin was built in Tokyo, Japan. East and West were temporally combined when the familiar dream of upward mobility, and the sense of exceptionalism that came along with it, was integrated into fantastical narratives and settings to be shared with consumers across both spaces.

While the use of exceptionalized identities may at first appear to further divide American and Japanese consumers, because exceptionalism tends to breed competition, it instead becomes common ground in two ways. First, both Disney and Japanese consumers found the dream of upward mobility and its appeal to national identity and national exceptionalism to be something familiar—a touchstone that they could both lean upon as they encountered strange and exotic new worlds. This helped to slightly familiarize an exotic world and in this way an exotic aura was maintained but consumers could still find aspects of themselves within it to identify with. In using exceptional identities to provide American and Japanese consumers with a touchstone as they journeyed through exotic lands, two cultures that seemed diametrically opposed were using a similar idea to ground themselves within a fantastical world. Second, the dream of upward

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[121] TokyoMagicToo, “Tokyo Disneyland Opening - 1983.”

mobility, despite its appeal to American and Japanese exceptionalism, created something for Disney consumers to participate in together. In this way, the exceptional prevented competition and instead encouraged interpersonal connections through a shared experience. Through each journey that consumers shared with each other, there were identifiable examples of common ground between two cultures that were perceived to be diametrically opposed. In this way, consumers celebrating exceptionalist ideas to more fully interact with Disney's world were strengthening their Disney community through their shared experiences. In this way, Disney brought two worlds together.[122]

Dror Wharman's analysis previously demonstrated how identities were shaped by different individuals, or in this case nations. Each individual within that nation could hold competing interpretations and ideas, yet Benedict Anderson argued that they imagined themselves to be a unified community. Citizens of nations did this because embedded within their different perceptions and experiences there existed particular experiences and ideas that were similar. This allowed them to feel connected with each other.[123] In the case of the United States and Japan, Disney and Nintendo offered the common experience needed to unite both American and Japanese consumers. As consumers from both countries continued to engage with Disney narratives, they would project their lived experiences onto their fantasy experiences and project the fantasy experiences onto the real. This meant that consumers would more easily forge ties with Disney and also with each other. By enabling former enemies to see past their previous

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[122] This takes a different than Edward Said's analysis of *Orientalism* which emphasized how Western perceptions of the East were created to distinguish West from East. In emphasizing what made East and West different from each other, Said argues that the West was able to better define and exceptionalize itself. While I acknowledge that orientalist perceptions are present and should be further examined and incorporated into an analysis, this chapter will leave that for another time.

[123] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, introduction.; Wharman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, introduction.

war roles, to embrace each company—and each other, consumers of TDL experiences were a step closer to better realizing Disney's ideal of kindness.[124]

Although East and West were spatially and temporally separated, they were combined within Disney's parks physically and mentally. Adventure Land and Western Land brought East and West together, while Disney's appeal to familiar themes and dreams brought hearts and minds together. This made it easier for TDL visitors, both American and Japanese, to connect with what Disney was trying to sell and also with each other. In doing so connections were not just forged between fellow consumers of Disney products, they were forged between nations who had once referred to each other as enemies.

For Pokémon players, *Pokémon Gold* and *Pokémon Silver* were released in 1999 and these two games introduced them to the Johto region. The setting of this region was more influenced by Japan's culture and architecture than *Pokèmon Yellow*, where Pikachu first made his Nintendo debut. Like TDL's experiences, continuity came from the incorporation of familiar narrative structures and themes within unfamiliar worlds and by doing this players recognized familiar landmarks within the new and previously unexplored Johto region.[125] For American players, localization techniques helped to further embed the familiar within the exotic by allowing the Japanese style architecture that defined Johto's towns of Ecruteak and Violet cities to appear alongside of Western language and cultural references.[126] Thus, like Disney's Adventure Land and Western Land, the narrative structures that embraced themes of upward mobility and the characteristics that defined a successful realization of that dream, were turned

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[124] Wharman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, introduction.

[125] Ken Sugimori, Satoshi Tajiri, and Junichi Masuda, *Pokémon Gold* and *Pokémon Silver*, directors Junichi Masuda and Morikazu Aoki (Tokyo: Japan, 1999), Video Game.

[126] "Pokémon CEO Talks Challenges of Localizing Pokémon Games in the Early Days."

into recognizable themes and frameworks within exotic locations. This meant that Americans could also enjoy the thrill of adventure while continuing to identify with the messages, themes, and ideas, that Nintendo championed. As consumers engaged with each other, through Gameboy communication features, they were also further strengthening the bonds between fellow consumers of Pokémon products.

Japanese and American consumerism of "exotic" America and Japan meant that no one was spared from the lens of exoticism. Instead, all were subject to, and all accepted, these interpretations as part of their Disney and Nintendo experience. These realms of fantasy, as a distraction from the reality of World War II and the Cold War, made it easier to forget past negative interactions with Western ideals, and Eastern soldiers. This enabled consumers to forge a strong connection with an American or Japanese brand and also with each other. For each company, consumers escaping from World War and Cold War memories would see their negative experiences with former enemies replaced with pleasurable Disney and Nintendo moments. In finding common ground within Disney and Nintendo narratives, consumers had what Anderson argued was important to creating and maintaining the idea of a unified and cohesive community —shared experiences.[127] Consequently, continuous engagement with Disney and Nintendo experiences to ignore history's worst memories meant that American and Japanese consumers would continue to forge strong bonds with each brand and with each other.

[127] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, introduction.

Our Story Concludes…For Now?

Disney wonder, Disney magic, Disney dream, Disney fantasy—these terms enable us to understand why people in a post-World War II world came to identify so closely with Disney. It also helps us to understand how a small production studio in the United States eventually came to have an entire park dedicated to its ideals and characters in Tokyo, Japan. The success of such a venture, and the Disney parks that sprung up around the globe in its wake, have made it possible for me to say that as the sun sets as I pause this narrative for the time being, somewhere out there, the sun is rising on a Disney park—on Walt Disney's legacy.[128] Visitors are making their way excitedly through entrances hoping to make their dreams come true just like Disney himself did with his success in the film industry and the creation of his parks.

What Disney did when he celebrated the ideals that enabled his rise to success was turn his company into something that could perpetuate and share ideals of kindness, perseverance, tenacity, and hard work in a time when people needed stories of heroism the most. What the popularity of his product reveals is that in many ways, no matter how far apart they were, visitors to his parks could identify with a dream of upward mobility. As a result of their fascination with these glorified and exceptionalized versions of that dream, many adopted Disney culture, and consequently Disney identity, as their own. This united each consumer across space, time, and even across perceptively different political and national identities effectively demonstrating how companies can create transnational identities. Companies, like Disney and Nintendo, can pick out familiar, pervasive themes and patterns, and then amplify them. Although some may look at this as a negative, and rightfully warn against the dangers of homogenization, these exchanges,

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[128] Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!* 285.

as a result of World War II and the expansion of US foreign policy during the Cold War worked in both positive and negative ways. They afforded people from both the United States and Japan, opportunities to enjoy ideas and pastimes that might otherwise have had difficulty traversing the globe. What becomes noticeable is that the particular ideals that Disney set forth, concerning dreams of upward mobility and perseverance, hard work, tenacity, and kindness, the ones that create the core of a disneyfied identity, are similar ideals that Nintendo expounds in its own creations.

For Nintendo, the dream of upward mobility is not as apparent as Disney's celebration of the American dream. In spirit, however, in encompassing the ethics of tenacity, perseverance, hard work, and kindness, we find that Nintendo also embraced the themes that Disney holds dear. Their heroes, much like Disney's, much like each company's founding entrepreneur, embodied those four character traits. This brought fantasy into reality as those heroic traits were realized through the actions of each company's creators, and later as consumers experienced the narratives that each company shared. Although Nintendo may not have had Disney's particular phrasing, for example Disney magic, Disney wonder, Disney dream, Disney fantasy it did have a sort of exclusivity that required brand loyalty. Thus, like Disney, Nintendo sold a specific experience that could not be found anywhere else.

In a world divided and destroyed by one war and threatened by an ongoing Cold War, Disney and Nintendo emphasized specific characteristics of heroism within the dream of upward mobility that allowed consumers to see the best versions of their national identities, and by extension themselves, in the heroes that they championed. As consumers became the heroes of their own journeys, Disney and Nintendo offered them an escape into a place where heroism was

guaranteed—where the threats and fears of past and present melted away and everything each consumer wanted to achieve was possible. As consumers came to idealize each hero within those experiences, even if the gates had closed to each park or players had put down the latest console, those heroes would remain a part of each consumer's identity. As consumers revisited each park, or game, they increasingly identified with each hero, and would consequently continue to adopt those character traits into their own realities. Once they returned to their daily lives, they could then unleash those realities, those heroic traits that Disney and Nintendo idealized and shared, into the world that wars had changed. In doing so fantasy would become reality and forge an even closer bond between consumers and Disney and Nintendo.

The success of Disney and Nintendo can be in part explained by the world created by World War II and the Cold War, the fears that consumers were trying to escape because of these wars, and each company's use of dreams of upward mobility to appeal to existing perceptions of national identity and national exceptionalism. By encompassing and celebrating these themes, Disney and Nintendo could reach broad audiences. As consumers participated in these immersive and enjoyable experiences, links were created with other like-minded individuals, between Disney and Nintendo, and between citizens of the United States and Japan. What this demonstrates is that despite our differences, there are some things that hold, a common appeal. Kindness, hard work, tenacity, perseverance—even if they are not all referred to by the same name—these are ideas that generally people around the world want to uphold. They are the ways in which we can choose to make the world a better place and in actively making these ideals a part of the real world, not just relegated to the fantasy worlds of Disney and Nintendo, there remains the hope for the realization of a better future.

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