Opinion

I miss the early 2000s Walt Disney World

Walt Disney Company continues to change in its theme parks, but at what cost?

By CLAIRE FRANKLAND
Sports Editor

The Disney theme parks are constantly evolving, meeting modern-day standards and utilizing their intellectual property (IP), such as films, characters and brands, to appeal to audiences around the globe.

Let's just say The Walt Disney Company has a deep cabinet of IP, releasing some of the most classic, timeless films to date, that people can't avoid if they tried. Think "Frozen," "Indiana Jones" or even "Cars." These franchises have become integral parts of society, as I can still sing "Let it Go" word for word 13 years after its release.

However, when Disney Experiences looks to incorporate its new IP into its theme parks, specifically Walt Disney World, it's at the expense of fundamental aspects of each theme park's identity.

For instance, Disney Experiences finalized the extinction of Dinoland U.S.A. on Feb. 2, an opening-day land in the resort's youngest park. The company had been slowly letting go of the dinosaur-focused area of the park, as early as 2020, with the permanent closure of Primeval Whirl.

While nothing was officially announced about the land's closure, Disney's D23 Expo in August 2024 would spark rumors of a Tropical America extension, including IP from "Indiana Jones" and "Encanto." Right where Dinoland U.S.A. sat.

Don't get me wrong, while I love everything Disney does and always have full faith in them, I miss when Disney's theme parks held their own lands and attractions with original stories. Not stories from their films that, yes, did well in the box office.

Disney's Animal Kingdom serves as a prime example of the company replacing its original theme park ideas with basic IP from its films, dating back before the removal of Dinoland U.S.A.

From its creation, Animal Kingdom was meant to represent three different categories of animals: the past, present and mythical. The park's logo even represents it, featuring a dragon, dinosaur and lion, along with other animals.

Yet, when budget restraints forced Imagineers to push the mythical portion of the park, Beastly Kingdom, to a second phase of the theme park's construction, it simply disappeared. Today, it's occupied by none other than Pandora — The World of Avatar.

Technically, yes, The World of Avatar counts as having mythical creatures, yet once again, it's a direct representation of Disney taking a successful IP and franchise and slapping it onto their theme parks.

And I can't even blame them, because it's working. Avatar Flight of Passage has consistently held one of the longest wait times in Disney World daily for the last nine years.

It even worked over at EPCOT, despite the original imagineers of the park not wanting any Disney IP, as it was meant to showcase international culture in World Showcase and human achievement in Future World.

In 2014, Imagineers closed the Norway Pavilion's Maelstrom, which educated guests about Norwegian mythology and culture, replacing it with Frozen Ever After.

EPCOT even had a nighttime show, IllumiNations: Reflections of Earth, that ran for 20 years, featuring original music celebrating cultures around the globe and international unity, and what did they replace it with? Luminous: The Symphony of Us, featuring songs from Disney films that are not even the original versions of the songs.

Disney Experiences has seemed to do it with each of the four theme parks making up the Walt Disney World Resort. At the Magic Kingdom, closing the opening day park attractions, Rivers of America and Tom Sawyer Island to replace it with none other than the Cars franchise.

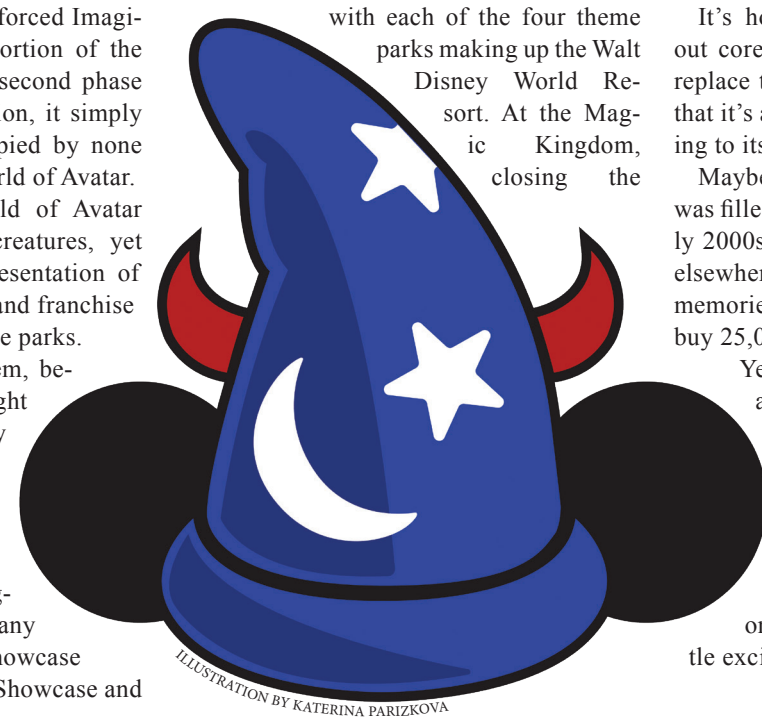


ILLUSTRATION BY KATERINA PARIZKOVA

All of these attractions have one thing in common: they were the core foundations of their respective theme park's identities

The Rivers of America and Tom Sawyer Island were a nod to Liberty Square and American culture. Dinosaur was the only existing area of Animal Kingdom that featured animals of the past.

Malestrom celebrated the culture of its pavilion where it sat, which was the whole idea behind EPCOT from the beginning.

It's honestly sad to see Disney ripping out core parts of their theme parks just to replace them with IP, but I can't even deny that it's a good strategy to keep people coming to its theme parks.

Maybe I'm just a girl whose childhood was filled with Walt Disney World in the early 2000s, but I wish they could just expand elsewhere and stop destroying my childhood memories. I mean, Walt Disney didn't just buy 25,000 acres of land for nothing.

Yet, I sit here and watch, as it's only a matter of time before Disney does it again, this time at Hollywood Studios, replacing Rock'n'Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith with Rock'n'Roller Coaster Starring The Muppets.

In the meantime, I'll reminisce on what was, despite still being a little excited for what's to come.

It really is that deep

It's OK to analyze and read into everything

By GABRIELLA COZZI
Contributing Writer

I've noticed a recent trend in how we interact with each other and it's concerning. Social media is flooded with "TL DR" and "it's not that deep" responses to relatively short paragraphs of information. "Maybe the curtains were just blue," is doing damage to a generation.

Responding with "it's not that deep" to any attempt to intensely read into a situation isn't good.

Books and literature are banned for a reason. They are that deep. Books contain ideas that should inspire you and imbue you with new knowledge or opinions. An author chooses things intentionally. As someone who writes fiction as a side hobby, I know.

Claiming that things "aren't that deep" is how they get you to ignore pressing issues. For example, I've seen TikTok meme images underneath videos discussing genuine horrors in society. When you see these things in response to atrocities it subconsciously urges you to consider that situation as less severe.

Viewing complex ideas in a book through a shallow lens makes you see them as shallow in real life. Reading a book helps you look more deeply into real-world issues. There is a widespread perception at the moment that reading the classics must be performative as if you couldn't possibly enjoy a text you have to read deeply into.

I do acknowledge that good education is systemically withheld from certain communities due to intentionally zoned school districts and underfunded schools in areas where predominantly minorities live.

However, what I am commenting on is the greater shift in society towards devaluing intellectualism. I do not mean go out and make fun of someone for not having a quality education. What I am saying is if you're lucky enough to have the privilege of a good education, don't devalue it.

When I bring politics into the conversation with my sisters, they all groan. They believe that I make situations worse than they are and I shouldn't be concerned because it doesn't affect me. In other words, they believe it's "not that deep." But it is. Everything is that deep. Even if it doesn't affect me, it affects someone, and that counts.

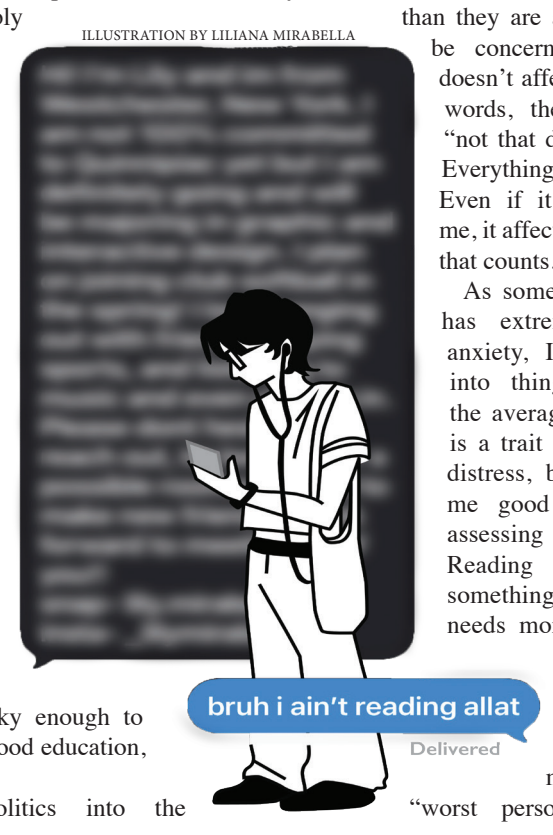


ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANA MIRABELLA

As someone who often has extreme levels of anxiety, I tend to read into things more than the average person. This is a trait that causes me distress, but also makes me good at accurately assessing a situation. Reading into things is something this generation needs more of, a whole lot more.

On social media, I often see people mocking the "worst person ever at a bookstore," pointing out books they've read or looking down on literature that is more modern. I am guilty of that sin, but I look down on certain literature for a reason.

Modern authors, I've noticed, tend to overexplain. Almost as if they think their audience won't understand the plot if it's not given to them in plain, simple words.

This is something I've also noticed in TV shows. Instead of letting the audience figure out a mystery along with the characters, they spell out the answer. This makes it easier to view while partially paying attention. Playing games or doing other things while reading or viewing a TV show is all too common. This is training our brains to half pay attention to everything, and I mean everything. Not reading too deeply into things on TV or in literature translates into real life. Your brain can't develop the skill of full attention if you don't train it to.

In a world of rising anti-intellectualism, I think it's OK to hold the material that you read in high esteem. Look into the deeper meaning behind an author's words. Read too deeply into things. It's better, I think, to be pretentious about the books you read than not to read at all.