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## **Come Visit Our Fantasy Islands**

**New York Newsday - July 18, 1990**

By Mitchell Moss

I just returned from Disney World, where a child's fantasy - the Magic Kingdom - has evolved into an adult amusement park. Located on a swamp in central Florida, Disney World has become the catalyst for Orlando's emergence as the all-American city, in which recreation is a full-time business. Disney World may turn out to be America's best export product, after cigarettes and weapons, when the new versions planned for foreign markets are introduced overseas. Even the tony American Booksellers Association recognizes the appeal of Disney: they've just agreed to hold their annual convention in Orlando. Can the Modern Language Association be far behind?

Disney World is much like New York, except that the streets are litter-free, the transit system runs smoothly, everyone is polite, and Mickey Mouse trinkets are sold at every corner instead of crack. It's what makes it possible for Disney World's 100,000 daily visitors to wait on long lines with such good cheer, to ride crowded monorails with congeniality, and to shop enthusiastically at retail stores that charge list.

The essence of Disney World is simple: eliminate the distinction between reality and fantasy, pay extraordinary attention to detail, and keep adding new thematic activity centers. Traffic on Disney World's 28,000 acres flows on a tightly orchestrated system of roads, monorails, buses and ferries. Instead of employees,

there are "cast members" who wear uniforms, such as knickers and caps for carhops at the Victorian-era "Grand Floridian," that reflect a particular setting. In this land of make-believe, nothing is left to chance.

In a way, New York was once the nation's Disney World: Times Square was the premier adult playground. Coney Island's rides were scarier than those of "Tomorrowland," "Hernando's Hide-Away" was more fun than the "Hoop-Dee-Doo Revue," and the Hayden Planetarium housed the real "Spaceship Earth." Today there are more international food vendors on Sixth Avenue at lunchtime than in Epcot's World Showcase. Does anyone really think that the fireworks at MGM studios can't be matched at CBS' 57th Street back lot, where Dan Rather plays Indiana Jones?

Disney World has achieved the ultimate in synergy by design, not by accident. Everything is constructed to enhance entertainment and promote escape. The boat lagoon becomes the setting for a light show at night; the Contemporary Hotel's atrium is a monorail stop; the manicured trees are shaped to look like Disney characters.

Even the meals have become part of the playground: at crowded buffet breakfasts, everyone eats looking up, as they wait for celebrities such as Pluto, Goofy, Minnie and Mickey to come by and shake their hand. Instead of Regency Hotel power breakfasts, where whom you greet is more important than what you eat, Disney has the Character Breakfast, where Chip and Dale, rather than Larry and Bob (Tisch), prevail.

New York City has the makings of a recreational paradise: the Broadway theaters, Yankee and Shea stadiums, Lincoln Center, the Cloisters, Sailor's Snug Harbor and the Bronx Zoo (although it does its best to hide, rather than promote, these assets). While New York lacks the antiseptic charm of Disney, it does have the spontaneous energy of streetlife. It has ocean beaches, not drained swamps, and skyscrapers instead of fiberglass castles. Orchard Street and Fifth Avenue have real architectural wonders and are better for strolling along than quaint Main Street USA.

Disney packages its amusements as a consumer product rather than as a city, so it's safer, cleaner and easier to digest. And Disney World is based on a corporate vision that makes the whole greater than the parts. In New York, each

concert, parade and baseball game is a self-contained experience outshining the experience of the city as a whole. But if New York recognized its magical wonders, built exciting recreational spaces for children on its neglected waterfront, and made life easier for tourists, who wouldn't prefer the real thing to Disney World?

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