

BACKGROUND GUIDE

HAYMARKET VA. DISNEY'S AMERICA

Composed by Julia Masterman



WMIDMUN-XXII

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Hello Delegates!

My name is Julia Masterman (she/her), and I am excited to be directing Haymarket v. Disney's America for WMIDMUN XXII. I am currently a senior at W&M studying Government and Global Studies, meaning this will be my fourth and final time directing at WMIDMUN. I am originally from Fairfax, Virginia, where I began Model UN in seventh grade, competing in conferences much like WMIDMUN myself. Continuing Model UN, particularly through attending college conferences, was one of my favorite parts of high school, and I'm so glad to see that you all will be getting that same wonderful experience as well.

As my four years at William & Mary are coming to a close, I am so grateful to have spent them engaged in Model UN both on the competitive side and through helping to staff conferences. I served on the Secretariat for our high school conference my freshman year, and now I am serving as our Head Delegate for our travel Model UN team for my second year in a row. Outside of Model UN, I also have a radio show (tune into WCWM 90.9 while in town!) and work with a research lab. In my free time, I love going on walks around Colonial Williamsburg, listening to music, watching Defunctland on YouTube (this is where my interest in this topic came from), and reading books.

Model UN has been such a wonderful experience for me all these years, as it has taught me hands-on about so many global issues I otherwise would not know as much about, while also helping me foster public speaking and diplomacy skills. I truly believe that no matter where your academic interests lie, Model UN helps develop skills that will be valuable for your current and future studies. WMIDMUN in particular has such a special place in my heart, as I love getting to work with students on such fun topics. This committee is certainly my favorite topic I've gotten to direct at WMIDMUN. I am excited to see how we combine both our political thinking through considering infrastructure, finances, and the larger politics surrounding the new Disney park along with our creative exploration of how to create a successful and engaging theme park.

Thank you all for committing your time to our Haymarket v. Disney's America committee this weekend. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions prior to our first committee session at Jdmasterman@wm.edu. I look forward to meeting you all and getting to discuss this topic together.

Warm Regards,
Julia Masterman
Class of 2024

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

Committee Structure

The *Haymarket v. Disney's America* committee will be a specialized agency, meaning that it will operate via crisis updates without backroom. This means that delegates will not write backroom notes like they would in a crisis committee, but they will be given routine updates on the situation at hand to respond to in the form of directives. Instead of ending with an all-encompassing resolution paper as in a general assembly committee, delegates will routinely write shorter directives to the situation as it stands at that moment. Further explanation to committee structure will be given at the start of the first committee session, but questions beforehand are welcome over email.

The committee will begin in 1994, and delegates will be recreating the US Senate subcommittee hearing on the park that took place during this year. To make debate more engaging, delegates will operate under the assumption that the park will ultimately be approved and created. Therefore, delegates representing positions that are opposed to the park's construction should focus not on arguing against the park's construction entirely but rather focus on how to productively compromise to settle their concerns. Delegates representing positions that are in favor of the park should also work to compromise to make the park as successful and feasible as possible, anticipating and responding to the concerns of committee members.

Committee Expectations

During the Senate hearing and the larger discussion surrounding the construction of the park, there was significant attention placed on the issue of how to respectfully and accurately portray American history. This is an important issue to consider; to acknowledge American history is to acknowledge the reality of genocide against indigenous populations and the role of slavery in the country's very foundations. Therefore, delegates should consider how to make a park that depicts American history realistically and respectfully. It is expected that delegates handle these sensitive issues appropriately and in accordance with WMIDMUN and William & Mary's International Relations Club's values to ensure that discussion is respectful, productive, and safe for all students. If delegates are ever unsure of whether a certain topic or idea is appropriate to discuss in committee, they are encouraged to err on the side of caution and to ask the chair, both before and throughout conference weekend.

BACKGROUND 1.0



Topic: Establishing a Lasting Disney's America Theme Park

Michael Eisner, then CEO of the Walt Disney Company, declared that the 1990s would be “The Disney Decade”, a period of vast expansion of the Disney parks. The first major project during this time was the construction of Euro Disney, now known as Disneyland Paris. In short, this project faced higher-than-expected construction costs, lower-than-expected attendance, and various operational challenges, thus leading to significant financial losses in its early years. The initial blunder of the Euro Disney project reflected poorly on the further plans for Eisner’s Disney Decade. Instead of throwing the towel on his vision for Disney’s growth in the 1990s, Eisner instead decided to focus efforts on expanding the company via smaller parks that would take less time and money to construct. Dick Nunis, head of Disney parks, suggested that Eisner and Frank Wells, President of the Walt Disney Company, take a trip to Colonial Williamsburg. Nunis was inspired by the fact that the creation of the film Pocohantas had just begun, so he wanted to explore the potential for the company to further explore incorporating colonial history into its work.

Wells and Eisner were drawn to Colonial Williamsburg’s design of living history, which allowed for tourists to not only learn about history but feel immersed within it. Through this trip, Eisner and Nunis became interested in establishing a Disney park to similarly immerse visitors into American history. They were initially considering developing a park within Colonial Williamsburg itself, but they quickly realized that this area lacked the space and did not bring in the amount of tourists needed to bring in significant enough profit. Since many tourists to a Colonial Williamsburg park would presumably be coming to Virginia via Washington DC, they decided to instead consider locations nearer to DC itself, as per the recommendation of the head of the Disney Design and Development Company, Paul Rummell.

BACKGROUND 1.0



In 1993, imagineer Bob Weis quickly drafted up park plans that included a number of ambitious, chronological attractions to tell the story of American history. The Presidents' Square (1750-1800) would celebrate democracy with its main feature being a replication of Disney World's Magic Kingdom's Hall of Presidents. The Civil War Fort (1850-1870) would simulate a Civil War fort and battlefield with regular re-enactments. It would also include re-enactments of the battle between the Monitor and Merrimac ships on Freedom Bay. The Enterprise (1870-1930) would represent the Industrial Revolution through a fictional factory town, featuring thrill rides and exhibits depicting technological advancements during this period. We the People (1870-1930) would resemble Ellis Island, telling the story of America's immigration through music, restaurants, and live shows. The Family Farm (1930-1945) would provide an immersive experience into food production through replicating authentic American farms. Lastly, State Fair (1930-1945) would offer a roller coaster, a ferris wheel, and an exhibition on American baseball.

While Weis was drafting up the aforementioned park design, Rummell was working to select and purchase the specific land for the park within the Washington D.C. area. Rummell was drawn to Haymarket, VA due to its proximity to DC and the availability of land there. Since the park had not yet been announced to the public, Disney executives decided to procure the land secretly, using methods such as shell corporations and hidden identities. Disney kept this secret hidden even from government officials, not telling Governor George Allen or Haymarket Mayor Jack Kapp about their plans for their park until the week of the public announcement. On November 11th, 1993, Disney announced their plans to build a history-based theme park in Haymarket, Virginia with an expected opening date in 1998.

Public Response

Governor Allen, the local chamber of commerce, and Walt Disney Company were all optimistic about this project immediately upon announcement. They believed that it would create significant economic and development opportunities within the state. Based on the park being open 10 months each year, Disney estimated that they would bring in 6 million visitors each year. They also anticipated that it would bring in thousands of new jobs, millions of dollars in revenue, expansion of transportation infrastructure, and increased financial resources for the area to divert to local schools. Alongside this optimism from the business perspective, the first major concern over the new park developed from the same announcement press conference.

BACKGROUND 1.0



During the public press conference, imagineer Bob Weis attempted to assuage potential concerns over a theme park telling the story of American history. He was worried that people would find the park to be dishonest and glorifying in its portrayal of historical events, and therefore decided to explain how Disney's America would instead immerse visitors into the true, gruesome version of these events. Weis stated that "We want to make you a Civil War soldier," further adding that "We want to make you feel what it was like to be a slave or what it was like to escape through the Underground Railroad". These comments further worried those that were already concerned about the "Disneyfication" of history. Soon after, concerned historians founded the group Protect Historic America to protest the park's location and portrayal of historical events. The group's president, James McPherson, explained that "We anticipated that the development and traffic associated with the opening of the park...would have severely impaired people's ability to come visit, understand, and appreciate the battlefields". Thus, the concern over history was twofold: the park would both profit off of a problematic account of American history and was also expected to detract from the Civil War battlefields it bordered.

Just days after the announcement, opposition to the park had significantly grown from a variety of different perspectives. Historians remained concerned about the park's telling of history, local environmentalist groups were organizing to protest the environmental degradation that would come with building a new theme park, and wealthy landowners near where the park would be built organized to oppose a parking being built near residential areas. At the same time, however, there remained excitement within the local community as well about the potential financial flow from the park. The Walt Disney Company was aware of these concerns and decided to invest in lobbying efforts to support the park's creation. Disney hired historians Eric Foner and James Oliver Horton as historical consultants to determine how to best implement historical events into their park. Disney also worked with lobbyists and Governor Allen to demand a \$163 million incentive package be passed through Virginia's legislature to widen the interstate near the park. Some state legislators were in favor of this expansion, noting that the interstate already needed to be expanded apart from the park. Others were opposed, citing the heavy burden that such significant state spending would place on Virginian taxpayers for the construction of a theme park. In response to increased opposition to the park's construction, Disney threatened to move the park out of Virginia if the incentives package was not approved, leading to it ultimately passing the legislature.

CURRENT STATUS



In response to the growing controversy surrounding the construction of Disney's America, a hearing was called in the Senate Public Lands and National Monuments Subcommittee. Chaired by Senator Dale Bumpers, the hearing featured a multitude of perspectives, including historians, Governor Allen, local government officials, and representatives from the Walt Disney Company as testifying witnesses. The hearing was called to determine which, if any, actions Congress should take in response to the growing debates surrounding the construction of Disney's America. The hearing was called largely due to the precedent of what is commonly referred to as The Third Battle of Manassas. In 1988, developers were planning the construction of a shopping mall next to Manassas Battlefield. In response to growing concern over the loss of the historic site's integrity, Congress took action through a \$119 million buyout to prevent the mall from being constructed. Since Manassas Battlefield is the same site that would potentially be harmed from the construction of Disney's America, many in opposition to the park looked towards Congress to take action and prevent development in this area.

Many members of Congress, however, argued that the hearing was fundamentally useless. They believed that it was not the place of federal lawmakers to take part in state land disputes. Additionally, the hearing took place towards the end of that year's Congress, meaning that there was limited time to take action on policy goals that members valued higher than settling the zoning issues of Disney's America. Thus, the start of the Haymarket v. Disney's America Congressional hearing was already at a point of gridlock and controversy, with underlying concerns over the park compounded by concerns over the Senate's role in addressing them.

It is up to this WMIDMUN committee to determine what will happen from here, considering how to best accommodate the demands of the variety of stakeholders to establish a fairly zoned, environmentally friendly, historically just, and engaging Disney park.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What will make Disney's America unique and appealing as a historical experience, considering that Washington DC already has free museums nearby?

How can Disney's America be built while addressing concerns over its proximity to historic battlefields and potential effects?

How can surrounding infrastructure and transportation be improved to make the experience of traveling to the park more enjoyable?

How can Disney's America most respectfully and effectively teach park-goers about American history?



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What creative ideas can be implemented to make the park fun and enjoyable for guests of all ages?

Togo

Dossier

1. John R. Kapp - Haymarket Mayor (1990-2002)
2. Frank Wells - President of Walt Disney Company (1984-1994)
3. Michael Eisner - Disney CEO 1984-2005)
4. L. Douglas Wilder - Outgoing VA Governor (1990-1994)
5. George Allen - Incoming VA Governor (1994-1998)
6. David McCullough - Historian, Member of Protect Historic America
7. C. Vann Woodward - Historian, Member of Protect Historic America
8. John Hope Franklin - Historian, Member of Protect Historic America
9. Robert E. Martinez - Virginia Transportation Secretary (1994-1998_
10. John Dreyer - Disney Vice President (1992-2001)
11. John Warner - VA Senator
12. Ben Nighthorse Campbell - CO Senator
13. Peter S. Rummel - President of Disney Design and Development Co. (1991-1994)
14. Dale Bumpers - AR Senator, Subcommittee Chairman
15. George Frampton - Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of the Interior (1993-1996)
16. Jane Garvey - Federal Highway Administration Deputy Administrator,
17. Kathleen Seefeldt - Prince William County Board of Supervisors Chairman (1992-1999)
18. Dana Nottingham - Disney's America Real Estate Development Director
19. Bob Weis - Disney Senior Vice President and Imagineer
20. Eric Foner - Historian and Professor at Columbia University, consultant for Disney's America
21. Dick Nunis - Chairman of Walt Disney Attractions
22. Mark Pacala - Disney Senior Vice President, incoming General Manager of Disney's America
23. James Oliver Horton - Historian and Professor at GWU, consultant for Disney's America
24. Shelby Foote - Historian, Protect Historic America member
25. John Chafee - RI Senator

Works Cited

Blitz, Matt. "The Story of the d.c.-Area Disney Park That Almost Was." *DCist*, 27 Sept. 2019, dcist.com/story/19/09/27/the-story-of-the-d-c-area-disney-park-that-almost-was/.

"Civil War Battle Sites and Disney Theme Park." *C-Span*, 21 June 1994, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?58037-1/civil-war-battle-sites-disney-theme-park#>.

Delpozo, Brian. "Disney's America: What Happened to Disney's History Theme Park?" *AllEars.Net*, 14 Aug. 2023, allears.net/2023/08/15/disneys-america-what-happened-to-disneys-history-theme-park/.

Perjurer, Kevin. "Defunctland: The War for Disney's America." *YouTube*, 5 July 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oqDqnQR5Aw&ab_channel=Defunctland.

Taylor, Drew. "Inside Disney's America: The Most Controversial Never-Built Theme Park." *Collider*, 3 July 2020, collider.com/disneys-america-cancelled-theme-park-explained/.