

The 1964 New York World's Fair was a unique moment in history, where titans of American entertainment and industry came together to celebrate American capitalism at the height of the Cold War against communism. The 1960s was a time of major cultural change in the United States, as well. From 1960 to 1965, the country saw the height of the civil rights movement, a continuing Cold War, an escalation of military force in Vietnam, and the assassination of President John Kennedy. It was an altering decade for the country, and the 1964 New York World's Fair sat at the heart of it. Arguably the major cultural moment in that decade, the fair was career altering for two men: Robert Moses and Walt Disney. Both took an intense interest in the planning and design of the fair, but for different reasons. The results of the fair changed their personal views of urbanism, and shifted the trajectories careers in major ways.

The 1964 New York World's Fair hardly was unique in terms of its size and cultural impact. Although they are not as prevalent today, world's fairs were major cultural and political events throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The first world's fair was London's Great Exhibition in 1851, celebrating the new power of Victorian London. Joseph Paxton's iconic structure the Crystal Palace premiered with this fair, setting a precedent of major architectural developments at subsequent fairs. By the late 19th century, world's fairs were extremely popular and attracted millions of people from all over the world to their host cities. Major landmarks like Paris's Eiffel Tower, Seattle's Space Needle, San Diego's Balboa Park, and San Francisco's Palace of Fine Arts were all built for major world's fairs in their city. At the 1876 Centennial Exposition, the designs for the Statue of Liberty were unveiled; fairs were on the public radar as consistently showing off the newest developments in modern society. In 1928, the Bureau of International Exhibitions (BIE) was created, to officially oversee, regulate, and sanction world's fairs as their popularity continued to grow and increase. The BIE operated out of Paris, France, and acted as the official governing body for world's fairs.

The 1939 New York World's Fair was one of the most popular and highest attended in history. New York's city planner, Robert Moses, oversaw the planning and construction of the fair, which celebrated a new age of American prosperity under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs. Moses conceived of a grand new park in Queens to hold the 1939 Fair, so he built Flushing Meadows-Corona Park on the Corona ash dumps. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote about the Corona ash dumps in his novel *The Great Gatsby*, describing the area as "a valley of ashes" on the outskirts of the city. Moses saw that New York City was quickly expanding out into Queens and beyond, and believed this grand new park could become a new central park, as it laid at both the geographical and population center of New York City. Although the fair was extremely popular and heavily attended, it was still a financial disaster. Because it was funded by New Deal programs, however, Moses was not blamed for the financial failure, as the federal government poured its own money and resources into the 1939 Fair to make a statement about American industry in a country still recovering from the Great Depression. Unfortunately, because the fair did not turn a profit, Moses was not able to complete his vision of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.

Planning world's fairs was a large task, but only represented a small fraction of Robert Moses's career. An unelected bureaucrat, Moses was Commissioner of the Parks Department, and oversaw the funding, construction, and design of all public works projects in New York City from the 1930s through 1960s. He was the single most

influential city planner in the 20th century, and is often compared to Baron Georges Haussmann, the unelected bureaucrat who fundamentally remodeled Paris in the 19th century. The 30 years Moses controlled this urban design was a period of unprecedented growth and redevelopment in the city, especially as cars became the main mode of transportation for Americans. Moses rose to power by acquiring control of various authorities. An authority is an independent government agency created to fund and build various public works projects. Moses's biggest project was the Triborough Bridge, which connected Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx for the first time. The bridge spans over 5100 feet, and was the biggest construction project in the history of New York City when it began. The Triborough Bridge Authority, therefore, became the most powerful public works agency, and was overseen by Moses autonomously. Throughout the course of his storied career, Moses not only developed the 1939 New York World's Fair and the Triborough Bridge, but also Lincoln Center, Shea Stadium, the Bronx Expressway, the Brooklyn-Battery link, and effectively tripled the amount of public parks in the city. He also persuaded the United Nations to build their headquarters in New York, instead of Philadelphia, by exercising eminent domain laws to acquire and clear prime real estate property along the Manhattan shoreline.

Moses had his share of controversies as well. Because he was a bureaucrat and never held elected office, all of his decisions were made without the consultation of voters or citizens. Through eminent domain laws, Moses displaced hundreds of thousands of people over the course of his tenure with the city to make room for his various construction projects. With little to no notice, Moses would evict neighborhoods all over the city; nothing stood in the way of Moses and his vision. His contemporaries harshly criticized Moses, saying he cared more about automobiles than people. His most controversial project, however, was the Cross-Manhattan Arterial network of expressways. Moses envisioned major highways cutting through Manhattan, to allow for easier traffic flow on the island. The plans included the destruction of a historic section of Greenwich Village, which was fought by community activist Jane Jacobs. In one of the few times of his career, Moses lost the battle as the controversy made it to mainstream media, and the Cross-Manhattan Arterial project was abandoned. This public battle, and the resulting cancellation of the project, was a huge blow to Moses's ego, and put him in a weaker political position as he entered the planning process of the 1964 New York World's Fair.

At this point in his career, Moses took control of the 1964 World's Fair Corporation, and became the sole government official in charge of planning and building the planned 1964 fair for New York. Moses wanted to top the 1939 fair, and began pouring enormous amounts of city money and resources into the planning of the fair. He wanted this fair to be a resounding financial success, to ensure that he would have enough power and money behind him to complete his vision of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. The park had effectively been sitting vacant since the deconstruction of the 1939 fair. Projections concluded that the 1964 fair needed to attract an audience of 70 million people to be profitable. This was an enormous figure, even for New York City. For reference, the most attended world's fair up to that point was Paris's International Exposition in 1900, which attracted 50 million visitors. The 1939 New York World's Fair attracted 45 million visitors. Moses fully believed he could turn a profit, and create the most successful fair in history by a wide margin.

To ensure a financially successful enterprise, Moses decided to charge all the exhibitors rent on the fairgrounds. Moses saw this as the fair's "insurance policy." Even if attendance was weak, he felt charging rent would still ensure profitability. He also extended the length of the 1964 fair to two years, while most world's fairs only lasted one year. Both charging rent and extending the length of the fair were clear breaches of the regulations set by the Bureau of International Exhibitions (BIE), and the BIE demanded that Moses play by their rules. After the BIE publicly threatened to pull support of the fair, Moses traveled to Paris to convince the BIE to approve his plans, arguing that it was the only way his enterprise would be profitable. Egos clashed in Paris, and after Moses retaliated by going to the press, the BIE formally withdrew their support of the fair, and asked all 40-member nations to not participate. This was a major blow to the 1964 New York World's Fair, and tarnished its international reputation. This meant that attendance would be significantly harder to increase, as it did not have an official sanction from the BIE. Moses believed that New York City itself was a big enough draw, and countries would decide to sponsor pavilions anyway just for the opportunity to engage with a New York audience. To attract large attendance numbers, Moses focused on inviting smaller nations to make their "debut" to a United States audience, as well as titans of American industry to sponsor pavilions and attractions showing off their creativity and ingenuity. Moses also reached out to America's entertainment industry in a major way, in hopes of attracting an audience of 70 million guests...

By the early-1960s, Walt Disney's name, face, and work was recognized all over the world as the pinnacle of American family entertainment. Disney first came to fame in 1928 with the creation of Mickey Mouse and the first ever cartoon with sound, "Steamboat Willie." He followed that with the first full length animated feature film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. He revolutionized family entertainment, and began branching into new forms of media by the early-1950s. Disney's "Tru Life Adventure" series set the standard for nature documentaries, and his "Davy Crockett" series became one of the first ever cultural phenomena, as television became a primary mode of entertainment consumption. Having perfected the animated film, and setting the standard for television entertainment, Disney began looking to other forms of entertainment for his next project, and he settled on themed entertainment design.

Disneyland opened in 1955, and immediately became one of the biggest successes in the history of Walt Disney Productions. It welcomed its one-millionth visitor after just two months of operation, and created an entirely new form of entertainment: the theme park. Originally conceived by Disney himself, he worked closely with a team of designers he put together from his animation studio to create this new blend of art and entertainment. He called them "Imagineers," due to their unique understanding of art and imagination with engineering and technology. They were based out of an offshoot of Walt Disney Productions, officially called WED Enterprises, to oversee the design and construction of this new park. Although this was Disney's first attempt at themed entertainment design, the park itself was just about perfected in the late-1960s after the opening of the New Tomorrowland, Pirates of the Caribbean, and the Haunted Mansion. No theme park, including Disneyland itself, has come to the perfection of design and entertainment that was Disneyland by 1970. In fact, around that time, city planner James W. Roust said at the Harvard Urban Design Conference, "the greatest piece of urban

design in the United States today is Disneyland.” Its organization, architecture, and operation philosophies have left an unparalleled mark on urban design and entertainment design worldwide. Disneyland propelled Walt Disney and his staff to the cultural consciousness in something more than just entertainment- they understood effective dimensional immersive design and the importance of master planning.

In the early-1960s, Robert Moses approached Walt Disney, and asked if he would be interested in designing attractions in conjunction with major American corporations for the 1964 New York World’s Fair. Moses knew he needed a major entertainment draw to attract 70 million visitors, and convinced Disney to design four attractions. Walt immediately agreed to Moses’s proposal for two reasons: it allowed his Imagineers to experiment with new technologies at the expense of other companies, and Disneyland would get four new attractions for just the cost of shipping. Even this early, Disney also had the inklings of an idea to build a new entertainment venture on the east coast, and saw the fair as a testing ground for Disneyland-style entertainment paired with an east coast audience. The team at WED Enterprises was shocked at the decision, as Disney mandated that all new projects for Disneyland were to be put on hold, and the entire organization’s focus would be on the fair. Disney recognized that the success of these attractions at the fair could be a stepping-stone to future ideas he was planning with a small group of staffers.

Disney and the Imagineers designed and built four different shows for the 1964 New York World’s Fair. Ford’s “Magic Skyway” invited guests to board Ford’s newest line of cars for a journey through the age of dinosaurs and early man, all narrated by Walt Disney himself. General Electric’s “Progressland” was a revolving theater show, following the impact of the advancement of electricity on a family over the course of the 20th century. The State of Illinois’s “Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln” became a theater show about the life and historical significance of Abraham Lincoln. Finally, Pepsi’s salute to Unicef, “it’s a small world,” was a boat ride through a vision of world peace designed by legendary artist Mary Blair. All these attractions later came to Disneyland, although the “Magic Skyway” was reduced to a vignette along the Disneyland Railroad, and “Progressland” received a name change, and became the “Carousel of Progress.” Imagineers also perfected new technologies, later seen in Disneyland, and used today all over the world. The “Magic Skyway” led to the development of the “omnimover” ride system, later used in Disneyland’s Haunted Mansion and PeopleMover attractions, and seen today in many transportation systems all over the world. “Progressland” and “Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln” allowed Imagineers to perfect human Audio-Animatronic figures, seen today in many Disneyland attractions and used constantly in film, theater, and industry. “it’s a small world” not only became an iconic Disneyland attraction, but also helped develop a high capacity boat ride system. Disney recognized the impact and significance the 1964 New York World’s Fair could have on the future of his company, and took full advantage of that prospect.

The 1964 New York World’s Fair proved to be the most attended world’s fair ever at that point, drawing over 51 million guests over the course of its two-year run. However, it fell significantly under the 70 million-attendance figure needed for Robert Moses to turn a profit. It was considered a financial failure, and lost New York a significant amount of money. In terms of its design impact, it was the meeting point for

some of the greatest designers working at the time. Walt Disney and his Imagineers had a massive impact on the fair, as did Charles and Ray Eames, who put together IBM's revolutionary multimedia exhibit titled "Think." The fair also hosted a variety of landmarks, including the Unisphere. It acted as the symbol of the entire fair, and was the largest freestanding globe ever built. The prolific mid-century architecture firm Welton Beckett and Associates built the dome over "Progressland," which with Imagineer Rolly Crump's Tower of the Four Winds, became some of the most recognizable landmarks at the fair. The New York State pavilion also became a recognizable symbol of the fair, and later New York City itself.

Although the Fair was prolific from an architecture and design standpoint, it was a financial disaster. Moses poured too many city resources into the construction of the fair, and the result fell far short of projections. As a result, Moses lost all political capital he had before the fair. Soon after, Moses clashed with major John Lindsay, who created the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA). The MTA effectively condensed the various authorities Moses controlled, and created a single governing body overseen by the mayor and city council. With this reorganization, the city government could now collect tolls from the bridges and parkways, instead of Moses having total authority over the collection and spending of those funds. Moses was moved to a new position as a lobbyist for New York City in Washington, D.C. for federal highway money. This effectively ended his decades long reign as master planner of New York City, as he gambled too much on a successful, but in the end too ambitious world's fair. Moses's view of urbanism changed dramatically after the fair. He saw himself as urbanism; the man who knew what was best for the city, and controlled the resources to institute those changes. With his dramatic loss of power and prestige after the financial failure of the 1964 New York World's Fair, Robert Moses was forced to take a backseat in the planning and design of New York City, the city which he completely reinvented.

Oppositely, however, the 1964 New York World's Fair completely energized Walt Disney and his Imagineers, and pushed his own career into an entirely different direction. The mid-1960s was a period of massive growth for Walt Disney Productions, as the release of *Mary Poppins* was a massive success, and solidified Disney as the most successful film producer in history up to that point. Disneyland also went through a massive period of growth, with all four attractions from the fair opening at the park, as well as construction on a newly redesigned Tomorrowland, Pirates of the Caribbean, and Haunted Mansion attractions. Most importantly, however, was the solidification of Disney's plans on the east coast. By mid-1964, Disney began acquiring land in central Florida by creating various fake companies and firms to ensure they were purchasing the land at the lowest price possible. By October 1965, Walt Disney Productions had acquired over 27 thousand acres of swampland, and announced in November 1965 that a new project was in development called "Disney World".

The working title for the project within the company was "Project X," and only a handful of people within Walt Disney Productions and WED Enterprises knew what was being developed. The original plans for "Disney World" show a theme park with the exact same layout, acreage, and plan as Disneyland in California. Disney had made a theme park agreement in his contract with the state of Florida, necessitating the need for a theme park in the project. It is interesting, however, that the original plans call for an

exact clone of Disneyland. By the mid-1960s, Disney had perfected the theme park concept, and his attention had turned to something entirely different.

Disney realized that he and the Imagineers could put all their knowledge of design and planning into something more than just a theme park. Disney wanted to make a greater impact on society, and was inspired by the work of Robert Moses to attempt at perfecting the concept of a city. The result was the “Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow”, or “EPCOT.” This was the heart of Disney’s Florida project, and became the main focus of attention for Walt Disney and the Imagineers. They envisioned a central urban area, with a large hotel and convention center at the heart of the city, surround by acres of an enclosed downtown area featuring shopping and dining experiences. Surrounding this central area would be high-density housing and apartment complexes. Surrounding that was a greenbelt with various recreational facilities, churches, and schools. Radiating outward would be low-density housing and the suburbs. Transportation would consist entirely of monorails and WEDway PeopleMovers, using the technology perfected in the “Magic Skyway” attraction at the World’s Fair. There would be separate access points for automobile traffic and shipping trucks so they would not interfere with the traffic flow of EPCOT, and bike paths throughout the city. Disney’s plan included facilities for major American corporations as well, ensuring that everyone living within EPCOT would be employed by American capitalism and continually working to improve the community as a whole.

EPCOT was designed with efficiency in mind, undoubtedly after analyzing the work of Robert Moses in New York City. This optimistic concept of developing a “perfect” community focused on design, economics, and efficiency was a major shift in modernism for Disney. While he constantly produced television specials and used the latest technology in his film and theme park productions, the development of EPCOT saw Disney viewing urbanism and the future at a global scale. He felt a specific purpose to blend industry and design to create a better life for Americans, a direct result of his experience at the 1964 New York World’s Fair.

Today, Robert Moses continues to have a contested legacy, although modern historians and city planners take a much more neutral role than many of his contemporaries who heavily criticized Moses and his work. Robert Caro released his Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Power Broker* in 1974, which was a scathing review of Moses and his time as a public official. It blamed Moses for the destruction of many of New York City’s unique neighborhoods, and creating ghettos by isolating neighborhoods through the construction of various freeways. The book became so popular and widely regarded that Moses was forced to issue a statement, saying the book was inaccurate and totally one-sided. Moses was often criticized for caring more about cars than people. Robert Moses passed away from heart failure in 1981, at the age of 92. However, modern historians and planners have taken a much more objective look at Moses. He is often recognized for single handedly overseeing the unparalleled expansion of urban development in New York City, as well as building a series of arterial highways that created traffic flow networks and tripling the amount of public parks. He recognized that cars were the future, and was able to adequately accommodate them. However, he did destroy neighborhoods to build these highways, and two-thirds of the public parks he

built were located in middle and upper class neighborhoods. New York City would not be what it is today without the work of Robert Moses, for better or worse.

Walt Disney announced plans for his “Disney World” in November 1965. In December 1966, Walt Disney unexpectedly passed away from lung cancer, just after his 65th birthday. It was a devastating blow to Walt Disney Productions, as turmoil mounted within as to how the company should move forward. The man who signed off on every product that bore his name was gone, and even his top executives did not understand just how Disney ran his operation. His brother, Roy O. Disney (the company’s cofounder and Chief Operations Officer) took control of the “Disney World” project, and renamed it “Walt Disney World,” as a tribute to the man himself. The focus of the project was shifted to just the theme park and surrounding hotels. Although with the best intentions, Roy O. Disney did not have the skill, power, or vision to continue with EPCOT, and instead focused on getting the theme park destination built first, as their contract demanded. In October 1971, the “Magic Kingdom” opened. It was a theme park, inspired by Disneyland in California, but with some major design differences. Roy O. Disney passed away 2 months later, in December of 1971. With both Disney brothers gone, EPCOT was officially scrapped by Walt Disney Productions, which underwent a series of management changes and rocky financial periods. By the late-1970s, Walt Disney Imagineering (WDI, a renamed WED Enterprises) began planning a second park for Walt Disney World. It became a permanent world’s fair, with an area dedicated to the future and sponsored by American industry leaders, as well as an area celebrating different cultures of the world. As a tribute to Walt and his vision of “Disney World,” WDI named this new park “Epcot.” Although a popular and successful theme park in its own right, the “Epcot” that we see today is nothing like the original vision of EPCOT, but the name lives on as a tribute to the ingenuity and optimistic vision of the future held by Walt Disney at the end of his career.

The 1964 New York World’s Fair was a unique moment in history, where many unlikely designers, artists, and planners converged in a single place to dream up the future. The Fair completely altered the careers of Robert Moses and Walt Disney. Robert Moses saw himself as the definition of urbanism, effectively turning New York City into a network of arterial highways accommodating the continuing advancement and popularity of automobiles. The 1964 New York World’s Fair was disastrous for his career, effectively ending his reign as the master planner of New York City. Oppositely, however, Walt Disney often viewed urbanism from a third-person’s perspective, appreciating and celebrating the continuing advancement of technology and society. The 1964 New York World’s Fair re-energized Walt Disney’s career, and pushed him to develop a global sense of urbanism where he controlled the design and development of the future, as seen in EPCOT. The 1964 New York World’s Fair remains today as the ultimate sense of “optimistic futurism.”

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