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The Limits to the Imagineered City: Sociospatial Polarization in Orlando

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Abstract: Postindustrial city development has become increasingly privatized, in addition to being based more and more on “imagineering” place for sale to footloose producers and consumers. As a result, cities have taken on many of the characteristics generally associated with theme parks. Themed built environments envelop highly selective communities essentially isolated from others, both socially and spatially. I argue that these sociospatial results of Disneyesque urban development do not bode well for urban social relations. I substantiate this claim by documenting the evolution of sociospatial isolation and polarization in Orlando, Florida, which has grown quite rapidly since the arrival of Disney World in the early 1970s. This “other” Orlando is proving to be ever more difficult to imagineer away and, indeed, represents the social limits to Disneyesque development.

Key words: urban development, urban policy, sociospatial polarization, Orlando.

Orlando, Florida, is not really a place. It is a collage of places, each with its own specific sociospatial character. Orlando is a prime example of what Sorkin (1992, xi, xiii) calls the late-twentieth-century “geographical city,” consisting of little more than “a swarm of urban bits” without a central place. Metropolitan Orlando’s bits are loosely unified by highways, an international airport, and, most importantly, a still-hegemonic Disneyesque theme associated with “clean” high-tech manufacturing, service, and tourist industries. This Disneyesque image, so attractive to now-global and footloose professionals who manage and service postindustrial firms, is virtually the only thing that renders metropolitan Orlando a specifiable whole. As Zukin (1995, 77) has recently put it, Disney has imposed a “frame of meaning on the city, a frame that earlier in history came from other forms of public culture.”

What follows is a critical history of this Disney-led “imagineering” of Orlando. Strictly, imagineering is the Disney practice of “blending creative imagination with technical know-how” in the “theming” of goods, services, and even places (Beard 1982, 25). More generally, imagineering

can be considered the very process behind what Lash and Urry (1994, 15) call the “aestheticization of material objects” that increasingly takes place “either in the production or the circulation and consumption of such goods.” With regard to place, the Disney-led aestheticization of Orlando can be considered a prime example of the now widely perceived need to imagineer cities “for sale” on the competitive place-commodity market (Kearns and Philo 1993; Ashworth and Voogd 1990).

In its details, imagineering involves attempting to construct the reality of goods or places on the basis of nostalgia and amnesia, or partial memory and partial forgetting. As Lowenthal (1985, 8) puts it, nostalgia is “memory with the pain taken out.” It is not false memory or history, but rather selective memory. Similarly, amnesia, for the present purposes, is social consciousness with the pain taken out; not false consciousness but selective consciousness. The attempt to imagineer places for sale thus opens a potential site of social struggle over *whose* reality is to be narrated and promoted. In the case of Orlando, the choice is between that represented by the still-dominant Disneyesque image of a

postindustrial urban success story or, instead, the less pleasing reality of growing social and spatial polarization along class and ethnic lines. This paper is an attempt to narrate this "other" metropolitan reality in order to portray more completely what social relations in Orlando actually have become, regardless of the prevailing Disneyesque spin.

Orlando City, Florida

Orlando is often described as having been "sleepy" before the arrival of Disney in the late 1960s (Zehnder 1975; Fjellman 1992). Until World War II, Orlando's economy was based on transportation and warehousing, given its central location in the state, and on citrus farming. Like most other small southern crossroads towns, it had a long-established social hierarchy based on class and ethnicity (Bacon 1977). With little industry, Orlando maintained class differences based on landownership and services. In turn, the color-line was a legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, with blacks working largely as migrant farmworkers and confined to particular neighborhoods or nearby rural communities like Eatonville, now famous as the original home of Zora Neal Hurston (Argrett 1991; Miller 1993).

In such a tightly knit, hierarchical social context, the articulation of class and ethnic differences is actively suppressed (Bacon 1977). While World War II brought rapid change to the area, this local reality was not significantly altered. Three major military bases—Pinestate to the southeast, Orlando Air Base, and Sanford Naval Air Station to the northeast—opened, bringing significant numbers of people to the area, many of whom eventually settled. New highways were built and old ones widened to aid the war effort. The highways facilitated urban sprawl as new residents built homes and businesses near the outlying bases and along the highways (Orange-Seminole Joint Planning Commission 1965, 28).

High-tech aviation-related activities also began in earnest during the war, bringing highly educated professionals to the area. Orlando benefited especially from being the nearest major city to the U.S. Missile Test Center at Cape Canaveral. The Martin Company (now Lockheed Martin) opened a large-scale missile manufacturing plant just over six kilometers (four miles) south of Orlando's downtown area in 1957. As early as 1961, Martin employed more than 10,000 people and was a catalyst in attracting other firms in the industry to the Orlando-Cape Canaveral corridor (Bacon 1977, 204, 214).

These high-tech professionals also eventually settled outside the city limits, particularly to the south- and northeast. These new arrivals did not, therefore, affect traditional Orlando society as much as might be expected. Instead, their social impact was felt largely in what were then the suburbs and exurbs of their own making. Traditional elites continued to dominate city and county politics and society until well into the Disney era (Langford 1976; Zehnder 1975).

That this was the case is also apparent when the color-line is examined. As late as 1950, Orlando was still excluding blacks from taking part in primary elections, the only city in Florida to continue this racist practice. In the same year, it was estimated that, while about one-fourth of Orlando's population was black, this "colored" population was crowded into, and confined within, merely one-fifteenth of the area of the city (Bacon 1977, 165). As late as 1972, Orlando blacks desiring to rent mobile homes outside of west Orlando City's "Black Zone" had to obtain recommendation letters from white tenants already residing in the desired lot (Miller 1993, ES 2). Finally, when Interstate-4, running north-south through historic Orlando toward Sanford, was constructed in 1957 it ripped through the heart of the black community, causing dislocation and further isolating blacks within white-dominated Orlando. The construction of the East-West Expressway (U.S. 408) in 1974

produced similar results on the western edge of Orlando's so-called "Black Zone" (see Fig. 1).

Orlando City Meets Disney

The significance of this local history for understanding metropolitan Orlando today is threefold. First, calling pre-Disney Orlando "sleepy" suggests that the entire population of Orlando was simply waiting

for the modern life offered by Disney; it belies the highly oppressive nature of the traditional society that was there. That a large segment of the local population had no say in the arrival of Disney does not disrupt this image, particularly now that pre-Disney Orlando lies deep in the sediment of local memory. As one black minister remarked just before the onslaught of Disneyfication: "Disney World will have no effect on the Negro Community. We own no motels nor

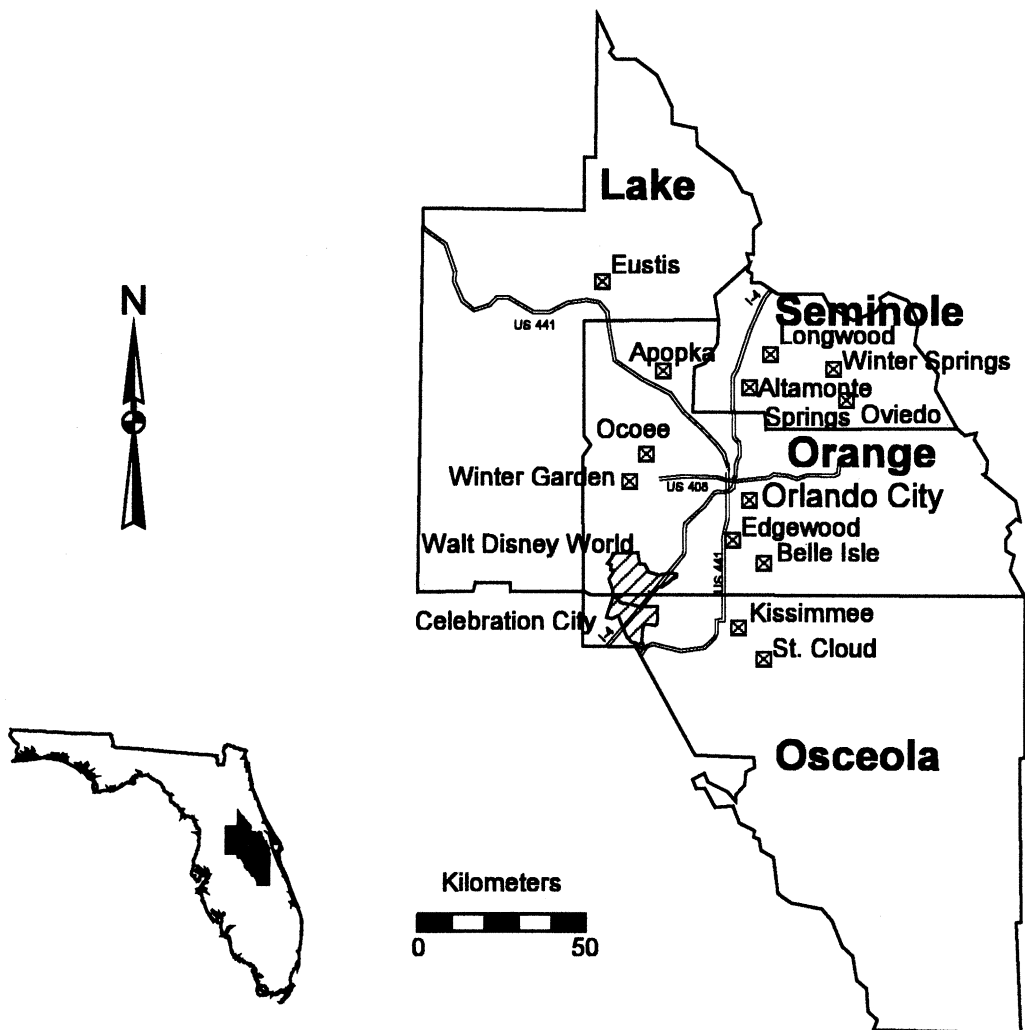


Figure 1. Orlando MSA. Source: Department of Geography, University of South Florida.

restaurants nor even taxicabs. Our bank will get no business from it. Our one integrated subdivision (Tangelo Park) is a slum. It has no dignity. Here, as in the rest of Orlando, the Negro and the White live in two different worlds" (cited in Adley Associates 1968, 44).

Second, examining the pre-Disney past helps explain the nature of the contemporary labor market. The high-tech component of metropolitan Orlando's economy is often overlooked in the description of the "tourist capital of the world." In fact, high-tech aviation, electronics, and communications constitute the core of Orlando's manufacturing activity and now account for more than 15,000 local jobs in firms such as Lockheed Martin, Siemens Stromberg-Carlson, Westinghouse Electric, and Sentinel Communication. These often-overlooked high-tech manufacturing and service jobs have shaped the local labor market into the familiar postindustrial bifurcation between high-paid professional jobs and low-paid service jobs catering to tourist-related activities.

Finally, even before Disney, metropolitan Orlando was becoming less a central place and more a series of satellite communities, each with its own specific social constituency. The new high-tech, military, and NASA jobs on the east coast spawned industrial and residential suburbs and exurbs, whereas Orlando City continued to cater to agriculture and transportation activities.

The arrival of Disney greatly accelerated these trends in the social geography of the Orlando area. As described elsewhere, what Walt Disney was after in the location of his eastern theme park was the ability to control both what he built and what was built on the periphery of his property (Grover 1991; Flower 1991). Control was imperative for him for two reasons. One was profit. Outside the gates at Disneyland in California, many others had profited from the tourists that Disney attracted. If Disney could control the periphery better, these profits would accrue to his firm. This is the major reason why the Florida Magic

Kingdom is built well within the 111 square kilometer (43 square mile) Disney property.

The second reason control was imperative for Disney is more social. Disney considered the modern world dangerously out of control. Even in his business life, he had to contend with what he considered to be disloyalty among his workers. As others have observed, this perceived need for greater social control is clear in both Disneyland and Disney World, where strict control is maintained over the visitors (e.g., directed crowd flow, creative line management), the workers (strict appearance codes, enforcement of the appearance of happiness), the physical geography (reconstructed, sanitized, more orderly nature), history (Main Street, history rides), and even language, as visitors become "guests" and workers "cast-members" (Haden-Guest 1973; Eliot 1993; Mosley 1985; Fjellman 1992).

The Orlando area was thus attractive to Disney because it did not display any of the uncontrolled modernism that was beginning to corrupt the Los Angeles area, nor were traditional Orlando-area officials likely to resist his grandiose plans for development. The proximity of the Space Coast, with its futuristic activities and military patriotism, also made the location ideologically ideal.

Significantly, Disney's mission in Florida was less to build another theme park than to create a new, orderly type of community with the help of corporate America. To do this would require a great deal of control, and the ability to control is exactly what he received from all levels of Florida government. Not wanting to lose Disney jobs to another state, the Florida legislature passed a series of laws in 1967 that provided Disney with its own governmental unit, the Reedy Creek Improvement District, covering Disney's vast property.

In effect, the state legislature created a wholly private political structure, controlled by one corporation and exercising unaccountable authority over a significant amount of central Florida. The Reedy

Creek Improvement District has the power to levy property taxes, issue bonds to borrow money, organize and manage its own police and fire departments, develop and manage an airport, and provide utilities (including the ability to build a nuclear reactor if Disney sees fit). In short, Reedy Creek enjoys all the political powers generally vested in publicly accountable governmental units. As a prominent politician of the time says today, Reedy Creek is "10 times more powerful than any other local government in Florida" (cited in Anderson 1991).

Disney's quest to exclude public regulation from local planning and development should be considered an early, quite successful example of the now-common tendency toward privatizing city development. The rapidly emerging postindustrial city which sacrifices, as Sorkin (1992, xiii) puts it, "the idea of the city as the site of community and human connection" and includes "rising levels of manipulation and surveillance over its citizenry" as well as "new modes of segregation" can be considered, in other words, an increasingly Disneyesque city. In terms of Orlando, the Reedy Creek Improvement District represents a fully privatized political structure in this respect. Developments within the gates of the district have led not only to the further decentralization of the metropolitan area, but also to a greatly reinforced spatial segregation along class and ethnic lines.

The Sociospatial Process of Disneyesque Development

Disney's overall impact on the development of the urban bits of metropolitan Orlando is best characterized in the Disney fashion of "inside" and "outside": what takes place inside its "gate" defines each bit increasingly in isolation from the others. In true Disneyesque manner, the inside of these bits is increasingly privatized, a move exemplified by Disney's development of Celebration City (see below; also

Foglesong 1995). In order fully to understand the contemporary inside-outside characteristics of the Orlando area, however, it is necessary to emphasize again the original Disney vision of community. As noted, Walt Disney considered it necessary to privatize community in order to create a more controlled urban reality. Like the theme parks, the key to such a community is to envelop residents in an environment seamless enough to transform their perception of reality. Such a new reality can only be created privately, because if the public is involved it will (1) promulgate competing visions of reality, thereby assuring dissent and disrupting the process of creating new realities; (2) demand participation in the future plans for such realities, thereby tying the hands of the original developers; and (3) perhaps most importantly, become cognizant of the management and the imagineered nature of this reality.

Even in the theme parks imagineering is not an exercise in mere fantasy. It is the construction, both physical and social, of a type of lived reality that Disney thought would eventually solve the ills of the modern city. Those fortunate enough to get inside the gates generally do experience a reality seemingly without social conflict or problems. As one businessperson remarked, Disney World "is easy on you...this place takes the stress away." "You don't have to feel guilty about having a little money to spend here," another guest relates, "you go to other places and people are just so poor...it makes you feel bad." Even the workers are seemingly happy, a local journalist relates, as the Puerto Rican Disney maid "scrubs with a smile," working a little harder because Disney "treats [her] good." As this journalist concludes, it is a feel-good reality because "here there are no homeless and there are no poor. Even employees with tough jobs seem to perform them with genuine concern" (all citations Bragg 1991).

This is the fully imagineered reality that Walt Disney hoped to create in his experimental residential community, EPCOT.

Within the gates of his new city, Walt Disney hoped to create a community with people who would come to share his values. As Wilson (1994, 126) points out, these values, fully embedded in the landscape of today's EPCOT Center theme park, are essentially "patriotism, family-life, and free-enterprise." Significantly, such values are essentially antidemocratic, instilled rather than critically engaged in a public setting, and embodied in social institutions hierarchically organized and directed. In short, while today's EPCOT theme park may be merely an ersatz reflection of Disney's original vision for a residential community, something like it is nevertheless emerging as the Disney Company has successfully entered the commercial real estate market, first with shopping centers and time-share condominiums in Orlando and, more recently, with its creation of Celebration City.

Orlando's Post-Disney Boom

Indeed, this vision of a community of the future is coming true in many of the urban bits of metropolitan Orlando. In the numerous theme parks and tourist attractions, as well as in the wealthy suburbs and exurbs of Seminole and Orange counties, people with largely similar means and values cluster in relative isolation from others. These are places where residents and visitors can feel good about having and spending "a little money." Outside of these urban bits, however, there are tears in the social fabric of the contemporary metropolitan environment, openings within which serious difference is emerging. While this difference remains veiled by Orlando's sanitized Disneyesque image, its existence suggests that there are serious social limits to Disneyesque urban development, particularly if this difference is ever fully articulated and acted upon.

The reason for this lack of seamlessness in the Disneyesque imagineering of metropolitan Orlando is not difficult to determine. The area has grown enormously in population and in jobs during the last three

decades. As indicated in Table 1, Florida's population grew 91 percent from 1970 to 1990, largely because of immigration from out of state. Over the same period, the population of Orlando City grew by only 66 percent. Orange County, however, grew a respectable 97 percent, and Seminole County grew by as much as 244 percent, from 83,692 to 287,529, as a direct result of both Disney and defense-related activity at the Sanford base and on the Space Coast.

This suburban pattern of metropolitan expansion was strongly reinforced after Disney's arrival, with considerable residential growth in Seminole County and in unincorporated Orange County, particularly west of the city toward the Disney site. Newly arrived postindustrial professionals constructed urban bits in their own image in places like Altamonte Springs, Longwood, and eventually Winter Springs and Oviedo, farther to the north and the east of the city in Seminole County (see Fig. 1).

Similarly, to the south of the city, in the high-tech corridor, places like Belle Isle almost doubled in population between 1970 and 1990, while Edgewood, with a population of only 392 in 1970, grew by 172 percent. Significantly, rapid growth also was occurring more directly in the vicinity of the Disney site, in places like Apopka and Ocoee, as tourist-related service workers settled near their jobs. Finally, Disney rapidly became a magnet for further development southwest along Interstate 4. Osceola County was thus engulfed in metropolitan Orlando's web, particularly as a result of newly arrived service workers. These areas growing in proximity to Disney World, as well as the now rapidly growing communities of Lake County (included in the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) in 1992) and Polk County to the southwest, are suburban bits of a different social class from those of Seminole and eastern Orange counties.

While the city of Orlando has also experienced population growth, the social fabric continues relatively unchanged. Ethnic difference remains either contained within

Table 1
Population Growth, Orlando MSA

	1970	1980	1990	[2000] ^b
Florida	6,789,443	9,746,324 (14) ^a	12,937,926 (14)	[15,988,000]
Orange County	344,311	471,016 (15)	677,491 (15)	[843,600]
Apopka	4,045	6,019 (26)	13,512 (14)	
Belle Isle	2,705	2,848 (1)	5,272 (2)	
Eatonville	2,024	2,185 (98)	2,170 (95)	
Edgewood	392	1,034 (2)	1,062 (3)	
Ocoee	3,937	7,803 (0)	12,778 (1)	
Orlando City	99,006	128,291 (30)	164,693 (27)	
Winter Garden	5,153	6,789 (16)	9,745 (12)	
Seminole County	83,692	179,752 (10)	287,529 (8)	[392,500]
Altamonte Springs	4,391	22,028 (6)	34,879 (6)	
Longwood	3,203	10,029 (1)	13,316 (2)	
Oviedo	1,870	3,074 (29)	11,114 (12)	
Winter Springs	1,161	10,475 (2)	22,151 (3)	
Osceola County	25,267	49,287 (6)	107,728 (5)	[145,500]
Kissimmee	7,119	15,487 (13)	30,050 (9)	
St. Cloud	5,041	7,840 (0)	12,453 (1)	
Lake County ^c	69,305	104,870 (13)	152,104 (9)	[191,200]
Clermont	3,661	5,461 (20)	6,910 (16)	
Eustis	6,722	9,453 (23)	12,967 (20)	
Tavares	3,261	4,103 (11)	7,383 (6)	

Source: University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research (1994); U.S. Bureau of the Census (1970a, 1980a, 1990a).

^aNumbers in parentheses refer to percentage black.

^bFigures in brackets are projected.

^cIncluded in the Orlando MSA in 1992.

the city's western Black Zone or segregated in peripheral farmworker enclaves like Eatonville. In the new metropolitan area of Orlando in 1960, including Orange and Seminole counties, the total black population of 52,588 represented 16.5 percent of the population. In Orlando City, however, the total black population of 20,579 represented 23.3 percent. By 1980, the black population of 90,595 was only 12.9 percent of the total metropolitan population, largely because of the inclusion of rural Osceola County in the metropolitan designation. The same year, however, Orlando City's black population of 38,429 represented as much as 30 percent of the total. In contrast, the wealthiest suburbs and exurbs of Seminole County became more white as

the traditional farm economy was overwhelmed by metropolitan growth. By 1990, blacks represented only 8 percent of the county's population, compared to 17 percent in 1970 (see Table 1).

A trend that appears to be further isolating the area's black population is the rapid growth of the Hispanic population. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this growth is the result of the ever-rising demand for unskilled service workers. Hispanics, particularly Puerto Ricans, seem to be filling more of the hotel and tourist industry jobs (Gibbs, Mchone, and Rungeling 1988). Perhaps more compelling is the spatial evidence which indicates that most of these new arrivals have settled either in southwestern Orange and

rural Osceola counties, where affordable housing is most available. For example, between 1980 and 1990 Orange County's Hispanic population grew from 19,726 to 64,946, or from less than 1 percent to 10 percent of the population. Similarly, Osceola's Hispanic population grew by over 1,000 percent, from just over 1,000 to almost 13,000 during the same period (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980a, 1990a).

The Local Labor Market: Social Bifurcation and Spatial Segregation

Since the story of the immediate social and economic impact of Disney on the area has been told (Zehnder 1975; Judge 1973; Fjellman 1992; Foglesong 1990), I focus here on longer-term trends in the metropolitan labor market. Table 2 documents the rapid growth of the Orlando economy since the arrival of Disney. The number of

jobs in all sectors grew by 345 percent between 1970 and 1990 (compared to 157 percent for Florida as a whole). At the same time, however, the local labor market is clearly bifurcating between fewer well paid high-tech and service sector jobs and low-paid, more rapidly proliferating service sector jobs related to tourism and population growth.

Jobs related to tourism and population growth include most directly those found in hotel/lodging, eating and drinking, and retail establishments. While by no means a precise measure, it is significant that jobs in these sectors grew by 468 percent between 1970 and 1990 and now account for almost 40 percent of all jobs in the metropolitan area. Few well paid jobs are to be found among these totals; most earn near the minimum wage. Among the relatively better paid, approximately 37,000 Disney employees in the area, most earn \$7.00 or less an hour (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992).

Table 2
Selected Employment by Sector, Orlando MSA
(Total as of Mid-March)

	1970	1980	1990
Construction	13,035 (11.4) ^a	20,000 (8)	37,663 (7.4)
Manufacturing	20,530 (18)	36,791 (14.7)	53,499 (10.5)
Transportation	7,908 (6.9)	15,193 (6.1)	29,086 (5.7)
Retail trade	26,368 (23.1)	57,938 (23.1)	116,372 (22.8)
Eating/drinking establishments	5,625 (4.9)	18,598 (7.4)	45,044 (8.9)
Hotels/lodging establishments	2,541 (2.2)	13,254 (5.3)	34,697 (6.8)
Services	24,078 (21.1)	76,725 (30.7)	197,481 (38.8)
Business services	3,073 (2.7)	12,225 (4.9)	32,664 (6.4)
FIRE	8,912 (7.8)	19,742 (7.9)	33,835 (6.7)
Totals (all sectors)			
Orange County	100,901	190,678	387,529
Osceola County	3,589	12,982	32,947
Seminole County	9,684	46,627	87,934
	114,174	250,287	508,410

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1970b, 1980b, 1990b).

^aNumbers in parentheses are sectoral percentages.

At the other pole, jobs in business services and finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) increased by 455 percent between 1970 and 1990. According to census figures and area salary averages, approximately 27 percent of those who work in these sectors are professionals or managers, most of whom earn over \$25,000 a year. The prognosis for growth in these well-paid professional service activities is excellent, as Orlando has become much more attractive to postindustrial professionals than cities like Tampa to the southwest with industrial histories and aging infrastructures much more difficult to imagineer (Archer 1995).

Nevertheless, because the majority of jobs created in the last three decades have been in relatively low paid tourist-related services, the demand for affordable housing has skyrocketed and is now one of the main public policy issues of the area (Miller 1993). As a result, the built environment of metropolitan Orlando encompasses ever-wider swaths of central Florida territory. Indeed, this voracious demand for affordable housing is exacerbating the sociospatial bifurcation in the housing market. As noted, this spatial bifurcation has created urban and suburban bits of a wholly different socioeconomic nature than traditional suburbs as low-paid service workers cluster in lower-cost residential areas. These suburban bits have come to exist particularly along the Interstate 4 corridor to the southwest, as well as farther out in the neighboring unincorporated areas of western Orange, Osceola, Polk, and now Lake counties.

The need to find affordable housing has dispersed the service workers of Disneyesque Orlando to places ever more distant from both their jobs and the richer parts of the metropolitan area. In a survey conducted of its own workers, for example, Disney found that the average one-way travel time for those employed in the Reedy Creek Improvement District was 30 minutes, consisting of an average commuting distance of more than 34 kilometers (21 miles) (Disney Company (DRI) 1991, 32-

1). Given that most of its workers earn between \$15,000 and \$25,000 a year, it is not too difficult to determine why this is the case. The chances of finding affordable housing rise the farther one goes into less urbanized areas of central Florida. In Orange County, the median value of owner-occupied housing units in 1990 was \$81,400, while in Seminole County the median value was \$91,500 (Fig. 2). This compares with a median value of \$77,100 for Florida as a whole and, more importantly, with median values of \$75,700 and \$67,800 for more rural Osceola and Lake counties.

A similar story can be told with regard to rental properties. Again, while only 59 percent of the rental units in Seminole County and 69 percent of those in Orange County had rents below \$500 a month, 73 percent and 90 percent of the rental units in Osceola and Lake counties had rents below \$500 (Fig. 3). Moreover, these housing value figures ignore the popular affordable rural alternative of mobile homes, which account for 20.1 percent and 35.6 percent of the total number of housing units in Osceola and Lake counties (University of Florida 1994).¹

Another indication of this necessary sprawl is commuting trends in the area. By 1980, almost 51 percent of workers in metropolitan Orlando commuted from suburb to suburb, compared to 40 percent for all Florida MSAs. By 1990, 55 percent of Orlando workers so commuted (versus 45 percent for Florida MSAs). Largely because of Orlando's pull on the more rural parts of the neighboring metropolitan area of Lakeland-Winter Haven to the southwest, suburb-to-outside MSA commutes in this area also increased from 5 percent of the total to over 9 percent (CUTR 1994).

¹ By contrast, mobile homes account for only 4.3 percent and 7.1 percent of the total number of housing units in Seminole and Orange counties.

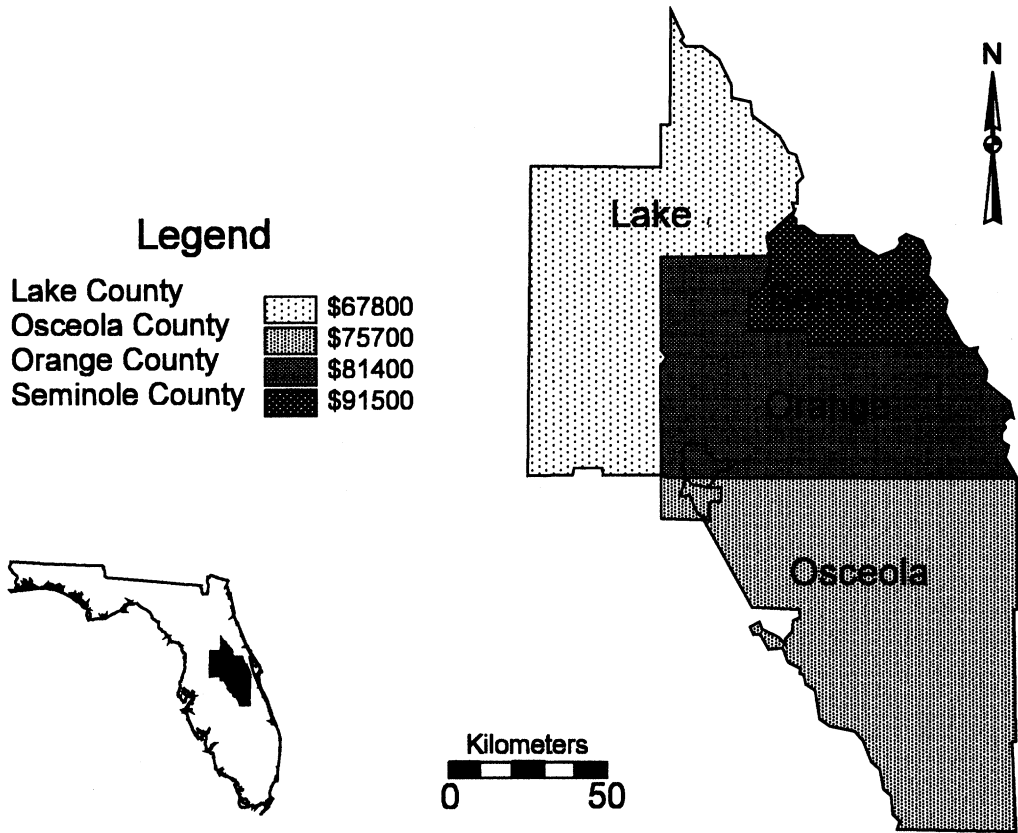


Figure 2. Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 1990.
Source: University of Florida (1994).

As Disneyesque service sector jobs continue to grow in Orlando, then, the metropolitan area will necessarily expand considerably as a result of low-income workers' search for affordable housing. In its proposal to create Celebration City, Disney contended that it was not necessary to supply affordable housing in the new city itself, as required by Florida's growth management law. According to Disney, workers already commuted rather long distances and within such distances already existed a significant amount of affordable housing in rural Orange, Osceola, and Lake counties; it was not necessary, therefore, to produce more. This example of the Disney philosophy of "outside the gates be damned" simply became self-fulfilling prophecy.

Barbarians at the Gate: Celebration City as a Prototype New Town

Income figures substantiate this portrait of the social polarization within metropolitan Orlando. While the mean household income in Orlando City in 1989 was \$33,136, it was \$58,881 in Winter Park, \$47,373 in Winter Springs, and \$41,720 in Oveido. By contrast, mean 1989 household income in Apopka was \$36,985, \$31,173 in Kissimmee, \$30,390 in St. Cloud, and \$27,662 in Eustis in Lake County. Family poverty rates ranged from 2.6 percent in Winter Springs to 11.5 percent in Eustis. In Orlando City, the family poverty rate

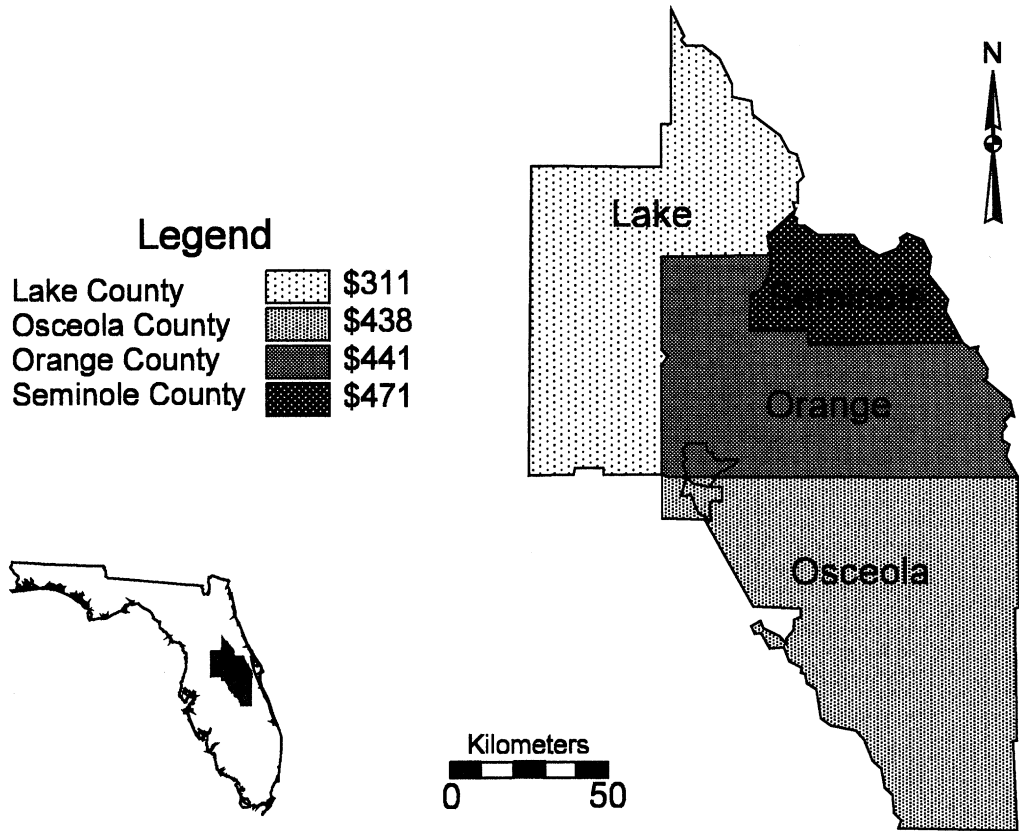


Figure 3. Median value of contract rent, total rental units, 1990.
Source: University of Florida (1994).

stood as high as 12.2 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990a).

Metropolitan Orlando has sprawled, then, largely along ethnic and class lines, with blacks confined essentially to the traditional city limits and Hispanics in the outlying areas that have affordable housing. Similarly, lower-class suburban and exurban areas, particularly to the south and west of the traditional city limits, have come to exist in relative isolation from the wealthier bits to the north and east. In the end, even the Disney facade cannot hide this sort of sociospatial polarization. While the imagined version of a wholly Disney-sanitized Orlando remains the image that most private and public sector authorities hope to maintain, it is becoming

increasingly difficult. Tourists have been shot in Kissimmee, a curfew has been imposed on youths in the metropolitan area, black officials have charged Disney with discrimination against minority workers, and local politicians are still incensed over the fact that, in 1991, the Reedy Creek Improvement District won the competition for the right to issue tax-exempt state bonds to improve its sewage capacity while local officials hoped to secure the same publicly backed, limited-issue bonds to build much needed affordable housing ("Disney Doesn't Need Charity" 1990). In short, this continually evolving "other" metropolitan reality increasingly refuses to be imagined away.

Nevertheless, today's Disney appears to have the answer to these emerging metropolitan problems, just as Walt did in the mid-1960s. The key is to assert total, hierarchically organized, private control free from public scrutiny and regulation. The key, in other words, is to reinforce private gates and to build new ones.

In the theme parks, public disorder is left outside the gates by a simple tactic: ever-higher prices. Over the last decade, entrance prices at Disney World have risen dramatically (Grover 1991, 172). In 1990, it was estimated that, without being extravagant, a family of four could easily spend upward of \$1,000 for a four-day stay at the parks, excluding airfare, hotels, meals, and rental cars. No wonder, then, that the median household income of those visiting Disney World in 1990 reached \$44,500, a full 38 percent above the national average (Flower 1991, 245–46).

Other recent trends at Disney point to an additional strategy for reinforcing the gates. Over the last decade, Disney has developed more and more hotel rooms in order to capture most visitors for a full 24 hours a day. Indeed, the total number of hotel rooms owned and operated by Disney increased by 184 percent between 1988 and 1992; they now number well over 13,000 (Disney Company, 1968–96). Moreover, what Disney calls its “accelerated buildout” of its Florida property will result in thousands more hotel rooms by the year 2000.

Even more pertinent is what appears to be the next step in this process of privatized urban development. The Disney Vacation Club now offers more than 500 time-share condominiums on its property to those wealthy enough to purchase a minimum of 190 “points” at \$59 each, with an additional \$2.70 per point in annual dues (mid-1995). This new approach allows for longer stays within the gates for people with similar values and similar means who can afford these fees.

The final step of this strategy of providing a more controlled urban life is Disney's creation of Celebration City in northern

Osceola County. This new town is modeled specifically after Walt's original plan for EPCOT. Disney plans to develop approximately 2,023 hectares (5,000 acres) of Florida scrub-land into a multi-use, residential community eventually including about 20,000 permanent residents. The project will have four phases over a period of 25 years, with an estimated total investment of \$2.5 billion. In Disney discourse, the city is planned in the “tradition of Bath, England, and the 19th century American towns designed by Frederick Olmstead” (Disney Company (DRI) 1991). It will include the largest retail center in central Florida, a hospital, an experimental school/institute for “lifelong learning,” an industrial park (“The Workplace”), almost 279,000 square meters (3 million square feet) of office space, a town center with small shops, and about 8,000 residential units built, significantly, in pre-World War II architectural styles. In short, Celebration City represents the next stage of urban development based on nostalgia and amnesia: the attempt to imagineer lived reality in its entirety. This will be a wholly privatized community, much more seamlessly enveloping than even the equally gated “neotraditionalist” suburban places now prevalent elsewhere (Knox 1992a; Bookout 1992).

Celebration City thus represents a significant expansion of privatized gates in the Orlando area. The increasingly chaotic metropolitan public will be kept out around the clock. For those with the means to enter these gates (homes will range from approximately \$120,000 for townhouses to \$1 million estates), the clean, safe, imagineer theme park experience will never end (Heery 1993). In the end, Celebration City represents the fulfillment of Walt's dream: a private, totally controlled urban community, imagineer on the basis of hierarchical “family” values and free enterprise, with the traditional American ignorance, suspicion, and sociospatial separation of class and ethnic difference.

Conclusion

I have argued that the Disneyesque imagineering of Orlando as a postindustrial urban success story—a prototype new town for the twenty-first century—can be achieved only by veiling the problems of sociospatial isolation that accompany the Disneyfication of the metropolitan area. The evidence suggests that imagineering away local problems is becoming increasingly difficult, particularly given the explosive growth of low-end tourist-related employment. Putting a happy face on metropolitan Orlando as a whole appears to be a problem even the Disney Company is not able to handle.

Nevertheless, Disney arguably still leads the way toward finding solutions to these social “ills” of the contemporary postindustrial city. The key is to reinforce the gates of privatized urban bits in order to maintain social control and to achieve community among generally similar citizens. In other words, now that much of metropolitan Orlando has grown beyond its control, Disney has concentrated its imagineering efforts on those urban bits it can control. Gated communities are actively imagineered on the basis of nostalgia and social amnesia as a means of solving postindustrial urban problems. Disney’s solution to such problems is to exclude as much of the public as possible from decision making in order that those who actually are allowed to make decisions do so in a like-minded way. Indeed, this is the same solution that Walt Disney came up with many years ago in his original plan for EPCOT. Community control must be privatized, according to this vision, if it is to be effective in preventing alternative realities from emerging and thereby disrupting the overall imagineering process.

This message, so clear in the recent history of the Orlando area, is apparently being heard by increasing numbers of urban developers and policymakers. As the authors contributing to Sorkin’s recent collection (1992) point out, both urban policy and urban public space are indeed being privatized, particularly as cities attempt to

capture increasingly footloose service sector jobs (see also Harvey 1989; Swynghedouw 1989). Similarly, the expanding phenomenon of gated communities—or what Knox (1992a) calls the “packaged landscapes of post-suburban America”—suggests that the Disneyesque model of imagineering community and place is of growing importance in the redevelopment of contemporary cities (Pearson 1990; Mohny 1988; Knox 1992b).²

If, as I have argued, the experience of metropolitan Orlando is any indication of the likely effects of Disneyesque urban development, then these recent trends do not bode well for the future of a truly urban society. As Goldsmith and Blakely (1992) describe in great detail, the transition from industrial to postindustrial economies has resulted in the creation of dangerously separate societies of wealth and poverty in many other U.S. cities. Similarly, the papers in Galster and Hill (1992) document quite clearly the increasing sociospatial polarization of power and wealth in cities, particularly along ethnic lines. In the end, the continued construction of privatized, imagineered bits within metropolitan areas will only exacerbate these trends of segregation and polarization of classes and ethnic groups. As is the case in metropolitan Orlando, rather than engage in the vicissitudes of public life in order to find common solutions to common urban problems, privatized communities simply will be expanded and reinforced, and the larger public outside will be excluded. The result of this Disneyesque solution will be only greater social conflict as those left outside privatized gates increasingly demand action on their behalf, whether publicly or, indeed, privately.

² Most recently, Disney has been touted as the leading force behind the redevelopment of 42nd Street in Manhattan, perhaps signaling the beginning of the imagineering of Times Square

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