



WALT DISNEY: AMERICAN DREAMER

GLENN BECK

I want to tell you about an American Original, a man who saw into the future and made it a reality.

He isn't the only one to do this. There were American Originals before him—Benjamin Franklin, the Wright Brothers, John D. Rockefeller—and there are American Originals in our time, like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Elon Musk.

But in the middle of the twentieth century, there was no better example than Walt Disney. Fifty years after his death, his name still stands atop a global empire.

Raised on a small family farm in Missouri, Walt Disney arrived in Hollywood in 1923 with little more than a suitcase and a pencil. But he had something else. An idea—an idea to explore humanity's foibles through cartoon animals. Now, I know it sounds obvious now, but only because we live in the world that he helped create.

At first, Disney, like most entrepreneurs, did everything himself—he wrote, produced, directed, and animated. And animation is a painstakingly, time-intensive task. In the early days, it would take hundreds, if not thousands, of separate drawings to create a moving cartoon. But hard work was never really a problem for Walt Disney. Living on baked beans, and renting a one-room office for \$5 a month, he believed he was on to something—and nobody could convince him otherwise.

And Disney would need every bit of that conviction. Now, though the barriers to entry in Hollywood in the 1920s were low, the competition was cut-throat. But a charming rodent and the coming of sound allowed him to break through.

Steamboat Willie, in 1928, starring an early version of a whistling Mickey Mouse, confirmed Disney's belief that there was an audience—a very large audience—for what he wanted to produce.

By 1933, Mickey was the biggest star in the world. And in that year alone, a cartoon mouse received 800,000 pieces of fan mail. Within a decade, Disney had transformed his one-person operation into a major studio employing a thousand animators.

But Disney was a restless personality; he was easily dissatisfied with his own success. And he wanted to make a full-length animated feature. It couldn't be good. It had to be great. It couldn't be in black and white. It had to be in color. And it couldn't just be in color. It had to be art in motion.

It would be very expensive – far beyond what he had ever spent on a single project. But money didn't really interest him. It was only a means to an end. That end? Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

Three years in the making, it was finally released in 1937. And it was an instant and phenomenal success—worth every dime spent, every heartache he had endured.

Disney followed it with one artistic triumph after another: Pinocchio, Fantasia, Dumbo, Bambi.

But by the late forties, Disney's creative restlessness kicked in again. This time he had a new vision. He wanted to create a new kind of entertainment experience. Not 2D, but a 3D world. He called it a "theme park." And, typically for Walt, it would be very, very expensive.

Where was he going to get the money? Disney had a plan. He would trade his known quantity—his ability to engage an audience, for an unknown quantity—this crazy theme park idea. He approached the three television networks, NBC, CBS and ABC, with this proposal: He'd create a live-action TV show and in exchange they would give him the money to build this theme park.

Well, CBS turned him down—it was too risky. And NBC couldn't make up their own mind. But ABC, the youngest and the least successful of the three networks, desperately needed a hit. They said, "Yes, please."

So, with ABC's money, Disney built his park. Disneyland soon became another iconic Disney creation, the fantasy destination of every child on earth. And that's as true today as it was when it opened in 1955.

Men like Disney are rare, but far less so in America.

Why?

Well, because traditionally, Americans, unlike other people in other countries, don't rely on the government to get things done. And, ideally, the government stays out of their way. Americans instead rely on their own ingenuity. In America, the only limit to your ambition is your own imagination. And if we want more American originals like Walt Disney, let's hope we keep it that way.

I'm Glenn Beck for Prager University.