



# The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney's New Town

By Andrew Ross Ph.D.

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Scholar and iconoclast Andrew Ross spent a year living in the much scrutinized, and often demonized, Celebration--the picture-perfect town that Disney is building for 20,000 people in the swamp and scrub of central Florida. Lavishly planned with a downtown center and newly minted antique homes, and front-loaded with an ultraprogressive school, hospital, and high-tech infrastructure, Celebration was to offer a fresh start in a world gone wrong. Yet behind the picket fences, gleaming facades, and "Kodak moment" streetscapes, Ross discovered a real place with real problems, and not a theme park village cooked up by the Imagineers. Compelling and wide-ranging in its analysis, The Celebration Chronicles provides a startlingly fresh perspective on the link between contemporary urban planning and corporate bottom lines.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

In *The Celebration Chronicles*, Andrew Ross has written a moving and subtle account of his yearlong stay at Disney's glistening suburban development in Celebration, Florida. Readers might expect that Ross, the director of American studies at New York University and a devoted urbanite, would contribute to both the fashionable sport of Disney bashing and the tired genre of suburban reproach. But, like an anthropologist gone native, Ross immersed himself in the community, interviewing dozens of the 20,000 residents, volunteering at the local school, and finding himself pleasantly surprised when his subjects had christened him an honorary Celebrationite.

Celebration, Ross argues, is the latest in a long line of utopian communities built to realize the American dream. Many wealthy and eager romantics flocked to the town with a faith that Disney magic would fulfill their hopes for a perfect community (and increase their property values). When the majority of these people found their dreams dashed against the corporation's bottom line, however, they engaged in grass roots activism that did more to bring their community together than any of the schemes from Disney "imagineers." Moving from a cogent analysis of the town to a multifaceted consideration of the environmental implications of American liberty, *The Celebration Chronicles* is a masterpiece of American studies scholarship. As astute as it is readable, Ross's book shows how Celebration's high-octane pursuit of happiness resulted in a limited civic culture and contributed to an overall ecological catastrophe that continues to worsen with each new drive toward the American dream. --*James Highfill*

#### From Publishers Weekly

The object of unrelenting media scrutiny since its inception in 1996, the small, Disney-built town of Celebration, Fla., has, according to Ross, been portrayed as either a real-life embodiment of a Disney fantasy of good, clean American values or as a haven for slavish Disney devotees who fall in line like dutiful Stepford wives. Like Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins, whose *Celebration, U.S.A.* (Forecasts, July 26) records 12 months in the life of the town, Ross lived there for a year and came away with mixed feelings. The director of the American Studies program at NYU, Ross points out that the one thing most vividly separating Celebration from other communities is the glare of the media: perennially aware that they're under scrutiny, residents are subject to "performance anxiety" and tend to be highly self-conscious about their actions and decisions. While Disney's ideas about desirable urban design—which include such features as Muzak continually piped into the main street from speakers hidden beneath the palm trees—do suggest a sugar-coated utopia, most of the residents Ross encountered were seeking an alternative to the isolating design of traditional suburbia. In this respect, Ross believes, Celebration is at least "a step in the right direction." Though Frantz and Collins more vividly describe the community and its residents, Ross's writing is refreshingly unacademic as he adroitly analyzes both the various upheavals plaguing this fledgling town and the day-to-day lives of Celebrationites of all ages, providing an astute look at a notable, if in some respects surreal, experiment in community building. (Sept.)

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#### Review

"Entertaining . . . Insightful . . . Ross is a raconteur with delicious--and telling--anecdotes."  
--The New York Times Book Review

"Our first astronaut-in-residence on Planet Disney returns with astonishing tales of its strange life-forms and

customs. As an explorer of brave new worlds, Ross is a shrewd cross between Jonathan Swift and C. Wright Mills."

--MIKE DAVIS

Bestselling author of *Ecology of Fear* and *City of Quartz*

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#### **Tameika Ahmed:**

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