

“ENTERING THE TOONIVERSE:” ANTI-CAPITALIST  
CHILDREN'S PLAY IN DISNEY'S *TOONTOWN ONLINE*

by

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*Toontown Online* was a massive multiplayer online roleplaying game released in 2003 by The Walt Disney Company in collaboration with Schell Games. Featuring a world of colorful, fun-loving player characters fighting against an evil invasion of grayscale, corporate-loving robots, the world of Toontown poses a culture of children’s play against a culture of adult U.S. corporatization. This thesis explores how a history of U.S. children’s media and play culture is represented through an anti-capitalist lens in *Toontown Online* and its fan-made remakes, using cultural studies and historical, literary, and media analysis. By positioning children’s play culture against U.S. adult work culture, *Toontown*’s narrative emphasizes how children’s play can be used as an act of resistance against capitalism. Themes of anti-authoritarianism, anti-colonialism, anti-corporatism, and environmentalism are used to depict a parody of U.S capitalist history through *Toontown*’s antagonists. Media fan studies is used to explore how *Toontown Online*’s fan community has expanded the game’s anti-capitalist theming after the original game’s closure.

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## Introduction

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003, the Walt Disney Company released one of their first projects for the online gaming industry: a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG) titled *Toontown Online*.<sup>1</sup> Developed in partnership with Schell Games,<sup>2</sup> *Toontown Online* used Disney's history of anthropomorphic animal cartoons and imaginative theme parks to create a wacky world of slapstick comedy and evil robots. With a small-scale free-to-play version or full-access membership of \$9.95 a month,<sup>3</sup> children and adults alike were able to immerse themselves in the virtual world of Disney like never before, in the comfort of their own homes.

*Toontown Online*'s plot and gameplay were entirely unique. The colorful player-character "Toons" of *Toontown Online* were tasked with the challenge of fighting an invading force of "Cogs," grayscale robots determined to turn Toontown into a corporate haven. Unlike what one may expect out of a massive conglomerate such as Disney, *Toontown Online* took on a bizarrely anti-corporate message, with its primarily child-aged player base encouraged to take down office buildings and factories run by the business-themed Cogs.<sup>4</sup> Though not quite the standard for Disney, *Toontown Online* follows a history of literature and media with anti-capitalist themes marketed to children in a U.S. capitalist economy. In *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*, Julia Mickenberg analyzes how anti-capitalist activists and authors found a place within the children's literature market. Even during the peak of McCarthyism-era politics when blacklisting leftist authors from the publishing industry became more common, children's books were rarely banned to the same degree as other literature and "tended to operate below the radar of red-hunters."<sup>5</sup> Leftist figures, including blacklisted authors like Meridel Le Seuer,<sup>6</sup> were able to find a home within the

children's literary market that was difficult to find elsewhere. Inching closer to the cartoon space that *Toontown Online* embodies, children's comics were also used to express anti-capitalist and other leftist beliefs. One of the earliest comic-strip artists who shaped the field of cartoons, Richard Felton Outcault, is known for his work depicting the "urban poor" and varied political commentary, including critiques of the U.S. through anti-war sentiments.<sup>7</sup> While anti-capitalist themes are not as prevalent in early animation, animated films in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century prior to *Toontown Online*'s creation were ripe with critiques of capitalist entities. Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997) are films both known for depictions of environmental devastation caused by capitalist exploits. *Princess Mononoke* presents an incompatibility between capitalism and nature,<sup>8</sup> and *Nausicaä* presents the potential for an environmentally friendly, non-capitalist future.<sup>9</sup>

The Walt Disney Company and the wider U.S. animated world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that would inspire *Toontown Online* was less known for these radical sentiments. To understand why a virtual world like Toontown would embody anti-capitalist themes, a much deeper dive into its media and cultural inspirations is necessary. Therefore, this thesis will explore both anti-capitalism in *Toontown Online* and how anti-capitalist themes are embodied in the U.S. children's media and the children's culture of play that inspired the game's creators. *Toontown Online* uses a history of play culture to create a narrative in which the child's space—a world of cooperative fun—must take down the adult's space—a world of corporate greed. I will look at how the world of Toontown and its inspirations incorporate major themes of anti-capitalism, including anti-authoritarianism, anti-colonialism, anti-corporatism, and environmentalism to show how the modern ideals of U.S. children's culture contest the adult capitalist culture they are

expected to grow into. Chapter 1 will provide a historical background for *Toontown* and analyze how its gameplay encourages an anti-capitalist reading, drawing on themes from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *Mary Poppins*. Chapter 2 dives deeper into the plot of *Toontown* by breaking down the corporate-themed Cog antagonists and exploring the influence of the *Uncle Scrooge* comics. Finally, Chapter 3 will examine how *Toontown Online*'s themes have been amplified by its fan-made remake *Toontown Rewritten* and its continued audience, including my personal experience with the game.

### **Capitalism and Anti-Capitalism**

To understand anti-capitalist rhetoric, one must first have a definition of the capitalist system. Anti-capitalists commonly use a Marxist viewpoint to define capitalism. In *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, David Ruccio uses Marx's *Manifesto of the Communist Party* to define capitalism as an economic and political system "in which capitalists are able to produce commodities that will, at least in principle, yield them a profit."<sup>10</sup> In order to yield this profit, the capitalist (or the "bourgeoisie") controls the means of production, including the labor of workers (the "proletarian").<sup>11</sup> The specific goals of contesting capitalism may depend on the anti-capitalist, from limiting corporate power to a full reconstruction of socioeconomic culture. However, anti-capitalist movements are generally in opposition to the primary capitalist ideals of private ownership, class hierarchy, and/or profit-incentive economics.<sup>12</sup> Multiple leftist political movements may be described as anti-capitalist or have anti-capitalist goals. By analyzing anti-capitalist theming in *Toontown Online*, I aim not to categorize *Toontown*'s political messaging into one specific anti-capitalist movement but to acknowledge various critiques of U.S. capitalism within the game as well as hints to non-capitalist worldbuilding.

It would be outrageous to claim that *Toontown Online* is a purely anti-capitalist game. The companies that developed *Toontown Online*, Disney Interactive and Schell Games, are both under private capitalist ownership,<sup>13</sup> and *Toontown Online* was certainly created with a profit incentive. While a free version of the game was available, it limited access to just one small section of the map and blocked many gameplay features such as having a pet, fighting bosses, and playing through the entire story. To play the full game, a \$9.95/month membership subscription was required.<sup>14</sup> However, whether any piece of media can be described as fully anti-capitalist is not the primary concern of this thesis. While authorial intent and background context for a piece of media's creation is relevant, what is most important for me is the content in the final product, its reception, and the effects of that reception. An anti-capitalist message can still be written in and/or garnered by the public in media produced through capitalist means. This is why I will be exploring how the contents of *Toontown Online* and the children's media that inspired it demonstrate various anti-capitalist themes that have influenced *Toontown's* fan community. The main themes explored include anti-authoritarianism, anti-colonialism, anti-corporatism, and environmentalism, each of which require defining from an anti-capitalist context.

### *Anti-Authoritarianism*

When defining authoritarianism from a political science perspective, scholars such as Marlies Glasius aim to distinguish authoritarian practice as an organized political effort which gains control of the public by "sabotaging accountability to people."<sup>15</sup> Though Glasius largely focuses on the sabotage of accountability between a state and its people, anti-authoritarianists do not always distinguish between political authority and other forms of authority. Anti-

authoritarianism as defined by anarchist thinker Paul McLaughlin may target any authoritative hierarchies, including private business ownership in the capitalist model.<sup>16</sup> The hierarchies of capitalism, after all, are intertwined with and supported by the political entity. From this anti-capitalist perspective, anti-authoritarianism involves dismantling systems of oppression to bring power to the people.

Using this definition means anti-authoritarianism can also include opposing hierarchies within the nuclear family, making U.S. children's literature and media particularly interested in exploring both authoritarianism and anti-authoritarianism. Critiques of nuclear patriarchal family dynamics are also an important aspect within queer studies. In Valerie Lehr's *Queer Family Values*, Lehr analyzes the nuclear family as a method of enforcing the social, political, and economic status quo, including capitalism, by encouraging an isolated, private form of personal connection rather than community-building.<sup>17</sup> This overlap between anti-authoritarian and queer theory can be found throughout unconventional depictions of family in children's literature. Queer Finnish author Tove Jansson was best known for her children's series *The Moomins*, which featured a family of white troll creatures living in Moominvalley. Though the main character, Moomintroll, appears to be a part of a standard nuclear family, Moominvalley becomes home to many queer-coded misfit characters, often living within Moomintroll's house and becoming a part of his family. Anti-authoritarian themes were common in the *Moomin* series; Moomintroll and the other child characters are often free to explore the world on their own while both child and adult characters resist both law enforcement and stricter parental figures. Swedish author Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* shares similar anti-authoritarian themes. The titular character, Pippi, is untethered to adult rule and teaches two other children the

joy of child freedom. Not all anti-authoritarian children's media aims to be anti-capitalist, but the shared theme of dismantling hierarchal relationships makes it a key piece in identifying potential anti-capitalist messaging. *Toontown Online*'s anti-authoritarian themes will be explored through this concept of child freedom in Chapter 1. By focusing on children's play without the presence of parents, teachers, or other authoritative adults, *Toontown* emphasizes the potential for anti-authoritarian non-capitalist systems within both individualized and community-oriented children's play.

### *Anti-Colonialism*

Colonialism can act as another example of an authoritarian hierarchy, and though it is not exclusive to capitalism, it acts as one of the most crucial tools in the capitalist's toolbox. J.M. Blaut argued that colonialism was the main force that allowed for the switch from feudalism to capitalism in Europe.<sup>18</sup> While religion was a common way to justify colonialism, capital gain cannot be ignored as a motivating factor. The economic success of the United States came at the cost of Native American's lives and land, with an estimated population decrease of over 300,000 from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>19</sup> and over 17 million acres of stolen land by 1803.<sup>20</sup> In tandem, the stolen labor of African slaves increased capital gain significantly; southern colonies had over double accumulated wealth than their New England counterparts due to the labor of slaves and more land procurement.<sup>21</sup> In "Decolonization: A Brief History of the Word," Raymond Betts observes a shared belief among anti-colonial scholars such as Frantz Fanon and V.I. Lenin that "decolonization was not solely achieved with national independence. Economic control also had to be obtained but was not."<sup>22</sup> This was in reference to wealth disparity found in post-colonial, predominantly capitalist countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. However, the same can be said for

the United States, which remains a colonial state to this day. Narratives with anti-colonial messaging in the U.S. therefore often contest capitalism as well. Just as colonization has acted as a tool for capitalism, anti-capitalism is incomplete without decolonization.

Direct depictions of anti-colonialism or decolonization in children's media prior to *Toontown Online*'s release in 2003 are limited, but indigenous authors have always found spaces to tell their stories. In "Irredeemable Stories? Native American Children's Literature and the Radical Potential of Commercial Literary Forms," Emily Nagin uses three examples of Native American children's literature throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries to explore both limitation and potential in commercialized literature. She finds that 20<sup>th</sup> century Native American literature such as Francis La Flesche's *The Middle Five* and Natachee Scott Momaday's *Owl in the Cedar Tree* feature themes intended for White audiences, rarely inciting discomfort over the United States' colonial reality. However, radical thought and critiques of colonization can still be found, such as with *The Middle Five* criticizing eurocentrism in boarding schools<sup>23</sup> and *Owl in the Cedar Tree* showing the importance of Native American community and self-preservation.<sup>24</sup> Nagin acknowledges that while commercial literature may be limited in its ability to produce radical imagery, there is a value in commercial literature that attempts to anyway. "Commercial books can respond to the political climates in which they are produced, imbuing forms intended to bolster systems of oppression with the potential to provide disenfranchised readers with tools of resistance."<sup>25</sup> Contemporary children's media continues to challenge what can be told in commercial stories, explicit anti-colonial themes slowly emerging in the mainstream.

DreamWorks' animated film *Home* (2015) depicts the colonization of Earth by the "Boov" alien race, including the relocation of all humans to Australia. The book the film is based on, *The True*

*Meaning of Smekday* by Adam Rex, is direct in its comparisons to U.S. colonialism, having the Boov refer to humans as “Noble Savages of Earth,” with all U.S. Americans relocated to “human preserves” in Florida.<sup>26</sup> Chapter 2 will examine how *Toontown Online* incorporates anti-colonialism in its own fictional worldbuilding; while less direct than *The True Meaning of Smekday*, the oppressive force of colonialism is represented through a parodic representation of U.S. capitalist culture.

### *Anti-Corporatism and Environmentalism*

The corporate world is a key element of U.S. capitalism, and corporation’s effects on the environment have become a significant source of anti-capitalist rhetoric in children’s literature. The last few decades in particular have seen a significant increase in anti-corporate sentiment. Nick Crossley finds that global anti-corporate protests against companies such as the World Trade Organization and the World Bank provide a glimpse into a wider movement, “representing diverse and conflicting values... taking in a variety of strands of anarchism, nationalism, environmentalism and 'DIY culture' along the way.”<sup>27</sup> While not all anti-corporate movements aim to contest capitalism as a whole, Crossley recognizes these movements come out of a larger response to conflict between capitalists and the working class.<sup>28</sup> This is also emphasized by Mary Phillips’ critique of corporate environmentalism, a rising movement to improve environmental issues within corporate entities. Phillips argues that environmental issues are caused by the capitalist pursuit of profit, and any attempts towards “green capitalism” preserves an exploitative relationship with non-human nature that weakens the message and goals of environmentalism.<sup>29</sup> From an anti-capitalist perspective, saving the environment requires at minimum a limit to big business, if not the dismantling of capitalism as a whole.

Some of the most prominent children's media has taken an anti-corporate stance through an environmentalist narrative. As mentioned previously, Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke* both feature environmental devastation caused by capitalism. Though neither film features corporations, the critique of capitalist greed and exploitation is shared with more explicit anti-corporate children's works. Mehnaz Khan and Kainat Zeb analyze Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* and Bill Peet's *The Wump World* from an anti-corporate framework, finding both books depict discourse between corporate entities and anti-capitalist resistance.<sup>30</sup> These works demonstrate how the fight against corporate greed and the fight for ecological conservation are pivotal to the larger anti-capitalist movement. *The Lorax* will be explored further in Chapter 2 in comparison to *Toontown Online*'s own anti-corporate and environmentalist themes represented by the Cogs' business practices.

### **Children's Media, Childhood, and Children's Play Culture**

Just as an understanding of anti-capitalist rhetoric is necessary, so is an exploration of the concepts of children within this thesis. What makes up "childhood" and what is considered "children's media" are both difficult concepts to define concisely. In regard to children's literature, Kimberley Reynolds argues that "there is no clearly definable body of 'children's literature' any more than there is something that could be called 'adult's literature,' nor are the two areas of publishing as separate as these labels suggest."<sup>31</sup> The same can be said about children's games, as is exemplified by the "E for Everyone" ESRB rating *Toontown Online* receives.<sup>32</sup> An "E" rating signifies the game was suitable for audiences of all ages, though it does not specify if the game was made for children or how old a child would have needed to be to have the cognitive skills to play it. Máire Messenger Davies outlines a few key features to

children's fictional literature and media in *Children, Media, and Culture*, including a prevalence for child or child-like protagonists, limits on depictions of sex or violence, language and features comprehensive to the child-aged audience, and marketing/advertisement within children's spaces.<sup>33</sup> U.S. children's games most often stress the latter two, though all four points apply. Since *Toontown Online* was a Disney product that won multiple children's gaming awards,<sup>34</sup> it is reasonable to assume it was primarily marketed to children. However, children under a certain age may struggle with controlling and understanding the game. Therefore, the definition of children's media for the purpose of this thesis will be any media that is marketed or suggested to children primarily between the ages of 6 and 12. Davies acknowledges that children can range from any age between 0 and 18+ depending on differing biological, political, and cultural definitions,<sup>35</sup> but age 6 is approximately when children are more likely and more able to play complex online multiplayer games,<sup>36</sup> and 12 is approximately the age before what is marketed to children begins to shift,<sup>37</sup> making this age range the most relevant to *Toontown Online*'s marketing.

The concept of childhood involves a mix of biological and cultural factors. While it is not entirely a modern invention, the idea of childhood being defined by innocence came about most during the Romantic period.<sup>38</sup> Childhood play, on the other hand, is more difficult to pin to a certain era. In Johan Huizinga's article "Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon," play is roughly defined as any voluntary activity distinct from everyday obligations motivated by a sense of enjoyment and fun.<sup>39</sup> Play is not exclusive to children nor to humans, but it has been recognized as an aspect of children's culture since at least the medieval ages.<sup>40</sup> In *Children at Play: An American History*, Howard Chudacoff captures what makes

children's play culture unique by outlining how children's play has manifested throughout US history. For early European colonists, children's play was limited by high mortality rates, child labor, and strict religious obedience. The Puritans of the Northeast were known in particular for seeing children's "idleness" as a sign of sin. Play was still to be found within the family through puzzles, cards, songs, and toys, but independent, unstructured play was often seen as inappropriate, even as the narrative on children shifted towards the idea of natural innocence.<sup>41</sup> European observations of Eastern Native American parents suggest that Native children were often rewarded much more freedom than their European counterparts. In *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, Gloria Main finds that Wyandot (Huron) and Narragansett parents rarely disciplined their children, and Miami and Potawatomi parents were observed to leave their children largely unattended once weaned to develop independently in their social circles.<sup>42</sup> It is likely, however, that girls experienced less of this freedom, expected to assist their mothers with household tasks like collecting water and pounding corn.<sup>43</sup> Play options for enslaved children were the most limited. While some African American children on plantations were not tasked with heavy labor until the age of 12, children were often responsible for caring for their younger siblings while their mothers worked,<sup>44</sup> and studies of human remains found still many children under the age of 12 died from malnutrition or injury from labor.<sup>45</sup> Few observations on play have been made for the slave child, but Joseph Illick found enslaved African American families would roleplay events like auctions to prepare for the future.<sup>46</sup> While roleplay can be an aspect of children's play, the removal of joy and volition in this type of preparatory roleplay distinguishes it from true play.

Even throughout the era of heavy child labor, children still found time for unstructured play, though it was often during borrowed time.<sup>47</sup> By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, with decreased child mortality, new theories of childhood development, and an expanded capitalist economy, play became an integral aspect of childhood, and a distinct children's culture of "unique clothing, furniture, literature, games, and social worlds" began to form.<sup>48</sup> Though racially segregated, both White and Black children post-civil war were able to form new social groups outside of their families thanks to expanded school requirements.<sup>49</sup> Wealthier white children were able to enjoy unstructured play within the home, playing in dedicated nurseries or in attics and basements "outside their mother's field of vision."<sup>50</sup> Lower and middle class White children instead often took their play outside when time allowed, taking to forests and fields in rural areas or seizing the streets in cities.<sup>51</sup> Non-White children, on the other hand, were not always provided the luxury of play. Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Native and occasionally African American children were forced into strict boarding schools across the country designed to strip them from their culture. Poor treatment and infectious diseases led to high child mortality rates within boarding schools, and runaways were frequent.<sup>52</sup> It was largely in fear of unstructured after-school play that playgrounds and child-oriented public spaces began to be built in both poor and middle-class neighborhoods throughout the 1880s.<sup>53</sup> Many were built in immigrant and ethnic minority neighborhoods to promote U.S. middle-class culture, leading to ethnically divided groups of children claiming certain playgrounds for their own unsupervised play.<sup>54</sup> Overall, though, playgrounds were unpopular, less than 10% of children making use of them.<sup>55</sup>

Chudacoff describes the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as "the Golden Age of Unstructured Play,"<sup>56</sup> in which the majority of children regardless of race, sex, or class had time

and space for play outside of adult supervision, continuing to find solitude in the woods or capturing urban streets for themselves. However, adults still had their hands in children's play culture. At the same time as an outdoor play culture was forming, so too was a commercialized play culture that would infiltrate children's spaces. The production and selling of children's toys, games, and books drastically increased after the Civil War, and while at first more limited to middle and high-income families, toys and children's media as gifts soon became a prominent part of U.S. culture for nearly all families.<sup>57</sup> Children's books and magazines read for pleasure rather than education had grown in popularity at the turn of the century, with books like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and *the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* becoming bestsellers.<sup>58</sup> By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with increased child labor laws and more televisions making their way into U.S. households, children's play culture was taken over by commercialized media created and supervised by adults. Today, this commercialized play culture is largely digital, most children's media finding its success on streaming services, gaming consoles, and smartphones. However, Chudacoff finds that children continue to play on their own terms as well. "Children often have inhabited two cultural realms, one that abides the expectations of parents and one that sustains children's alternative and sometimes contrary inclinations. That second realm has constituted children's independent play culture."<sup>59</sup> In contemporary children's play culture, digital media often finds itself in-between these two realms, expanding possibilities for unsupervised play while finding ways to appease the adult-oriented market.

*Toontown Online* is positioned in between these realms in a unique way. It is impossible to separate *Toontown Online* from the adult capitalist market it originates from. With Disney as its main publisher, that expensive monthly subscription model, and a strict chat moderation,

*Toontown Online* was a prime example of the emerging online commodification of children's play. Within the game, though, the world of Toontown represented freedom of play as something worth fighting for, with the same adult world that provided the game depicted as a force of evil. This thesis aims to analyze how the world of Toontown presents children's play culture, especially play separated from adult expectations and supervision, as in direct opposition with the capitalist work culture of the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Kerscher, "Disney's Toontown Online to Launch June 2003," Disney.com Press Releases, May 5, 2003, [https://web.archive.org/web/20041127025937/http://corporate.disney.go.com/wdig/online\\_releases/2003/2003\\_0505\\_wdig.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20041127025937/http://corporate.disney.go.com/wdig/online_releases/2003/2003_0505_wdig.html).

<sup>2</sup> "Toontown," Schell Games, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190530153837/https://www.schellgames.com/games/toontown/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Membership," Toontown Online, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120103105452/http://toontown.go.com/membership/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Meet the Cogs," Toontown Online, January 1, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120101120143/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/meet-the-cogs>.

<sup>5</sup> Julia L Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 127.

<sup>6</sup> Meridel Le Seuer was a prominent Proletarian author and member of the Communist party. Mickenberg discusses her work at length in *Communist in a Coonskin Cap? Meridel Le Sueur's Books for Children and Reformulation of America's Cold War Frontier Epic*.

<sup>7</sup> Julia L. Mickenberg and Philip Nel, *Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children's Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 258-59.

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- <sup>9</sup> Delila Forni, “Solarpunk Visions in Youth Fiction: The Pedagogical Utopia of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*,” *Education Sciences & Society* 14, no. 2 (December 2023): 162-165.
- <sup>10</sup> Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, eds., *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, Third edition, Keywords (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 41.
- <sup>11</sup> Friedrich Engels & Karl Marx, “Bourgeois and Proletarians,” *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 15-21.
- <sup>12</sup> Jeremy Gilbert, *Anticapitalism and Culture: Radical Theory and Popular Politics*, Culture Machine Series (Oxford New York: Berg, 2008), 75-78.
- <sup>13</sup> “About Schell Games,” Schell Games, 2024, <https://schellgames.com/about>; “Disney Interactive Media Group,” Business Week, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090221131939/http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=171889>.
- <sup>14</sup> “Membership.”
- <sup>15</sup> Marlies Glasius, “What Authoritarianism Is ... and Is Not: \* a Practice Perspective,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 3 (May 1, 2018): 527, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy060>.
- <sup>16</sup> Paul McLaughlin, *Anarchism and Authority: A Philosophical Introduction to Classical Anarchism*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Philosophy (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate Pub. Company, 2007), 37–67.
- <sup>17</sup> Valerie Lehr, *Queer Family Values: Debunking the Myth of the Nuclear Family* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 19-20.
- <sup>18</sup> J M Blaut, “Colonialism and the Rise of Capitalism,” *Science & Society* 53, no. 3 (1989): 266.
- <sup>19</sup> Joshua Rosenbloom, “The Colonial American Economy,” *Iowa State University*, 2018, 2.

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## Chapter 1. World of Toontown: Capitalist Dream or Anti-authoritarian?

The world of Toontown did not begin with *Toontown Online*, as *Toontown* is shaped both by a history of cartoons and a history of Disney products. The idea was first introduced in the novel *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?*, though only through passing mention and no description.<sup>1</sup> It was not fully conceptualized until the release of the novel's movie adaptation, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988). In the movie, Toontown serves as the city in which animated characters, called "Toons," reside, featuring various real-world cartoons from both Disney and Warner Bros. products as well as Toon characters conceptualized in the novel.<sup>2</sup> Following the success of the film, the city of Toontown was adapted into "Mickey's Toontown" in 1993, a themed space within the Disneyland Park said to be where Mickey Mouse and his friends live.<sup>3</sup>

These versions of Toontown could be described as capitalist-friendly, though there is some room for ambiguity. Toontown in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* is owned by the fictional company Acme Corporation. The owner, Marvin Acme, is depicted as a benevolent man who gives ownership of Toontown to the Toons in his will. However, the shareholder of Cloverleaf Industries, a transit company, has Marvin Acme murdered and his will hidden in a scheme to destroy Toontown and its inhabitants, building a freeway in its place. The film ends with the antagonists defeated and Toontown officially belonging to the Toons.<sup>4</sup> The movie therefore acknowledges the dangers of corporate greed and incentivizing profit over (Toon) lives, but they do so by contrasting two corporations; one characterized as good, one characterized as evil. This implies corporate greed is either caused by an individual moral failing or only present in certain industries, whereas a more explicit anti-capitalist narrative would depict the issue as natural to the private business sector. While ownership of Toontown is given to the Toons, Acme's original

ownership is never questioned, and Toons are still expected to happily participate in the capitalist animation industry. The adaptation of Roger Rabbit's Toontown into Mickey's Toontown shifted this mostly capitalist-friendly narrative into a complete capitalist dream. While references and inspiration from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* remain, the main attraction of Mickey's Toontown is Mickey Mouse himself. The land serves as a place to show off the history of Mickey's successful career through tours of his and his friend's houses and sell Mickey Mouse-related merchandise.<sup>5</sup>

This was the set-up for the creation of *Toontown Online*. When the idea of making an MMO was first pitched to Disney, lead developer Jesse Schell and his team first imagined an online theme park representing multiple parks in Disneyland, though the actual goal was getting approval to create an MMO of just one theme park.<sup>6</sup> The version of Toontown seen in *Toontown Online* takes on much of the same aesthetic visions seen in Roger Rabbit's Toontown and Mickey's Toontown. The architecture and scenery are bright and lively, with many anthropomorphized elements such as doors that tell knock-knock jokes and fire hydrants that move on their own. Various neighborhoods, referred to as "playgrounds," are named after titular Disney characters like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, even featuring them as interactable roaming non-playable characters (NPCs).<sup>7</sup> A prevalence of slapstick comedy, including pie throwing and piano dropping, also stems from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit's* world and the animated history that informs it.

What makes *Toontown Online* distinct is the need for a player-centered experience. Mickey's Toontown has this to some extent, but its focus is on short-term play that markets Mickey Mouse characters. *Toontown Online*, as a subscription-based MMORPG, can only stay afloat through diverse long-term playability; the appeal of meeting and interacting with Mickey

and friends is likely not enough to encourage the \$9.95 monthly subscription. The game must implore strategies that keep the child playing and keep the parent paying. It is the goal of player-centered, and therefore child-centered, experiences that leads *Toontown* into the direction of anti-capitalist thought by creating a communal children's world. Before analyzing the plot of *Toontown Online*, I will look at how gameplay features and the building blocks of Toontown's world contributed to the overall anti-capitalist theming of *Toontown*, particularly from an anti-authoritarian perspective.

### **Building a Children's World**

By using the existing worlds of Toontown as the basis for *Toontown Online*, the game built a world not only child-centered but decked in children's media culture. Its predecessor, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, wasn't necessarily marketed to children. Due to adult-oriented jokes throughout the movie, Roy E. Disney determined it would be released under Touchstone Pictures, a Disney production label used for more adult-oriented films.<sup>8</sup> However, the Toon world and characters depicted throughout the film are now most often seen as child-oriented media.

Mickey and friends, who are found both in Mickey's Toontown and *Toontown Online*, are the most relevant characters to dissect. Mickey Mouse's public debut in *Steamboat Willie* could not predict the fictional children's icon Mickey would grow to be. While Mickey's earliest films were marketed to all ages, the mouse quickly became popular among child audiences, a key character appearing in children's comic books and animation.<sup>9</sup> Mickey's success as a children's character was set in stone with the airing of *Mickey Mouse Club*, one of the first television shows to be made specifically for children 12 and younger. *Mickey Mouse Club*

changed the trajectory of U.S. television and children's media, leading to the creation of children's television networks and child-oriented advertising of toys and merchandise.<sup>10</sup> In this way, Mickey Mouse, and Disney as a whole, can be seen as a catalyst for contemporary commercial children's media culture. Though Mickey and friends were not the only animated legends to appear in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit's* Toontown, it is no surprise Mickey became the face of Toontown in Disneyland and in *Toontown Online*. The central playgrounds of *Toontown Online's* neighborhoods each featured Mickey or one of his friends as an interactable NPC walking around the playground. Mickey Mouse himself walked around Toontown Central, the only playground available for non-paying players.<sup>11</sup>

However, these iconic Disney characters were not the only thing Toontown took from children's media history. *Toontown Online*, like most MMORPGs, had a combat system, but instead of using any sort of traditional, potentially non-child-friendly weapons, the Toons of Toontown used an arsenal of "gags" to defeat their enemies (see fig. 1). The seven different categories of gags each represented a legacy of slapstick-style humor present throughout animated history. Slapstick is a genre of physical humor involving the infliction of violence and mishap. U.S. slapstick film took inspiration from the vaudeville genre and featured reoccurring comedic gags such as pies in the face and slipping on banana peels.<sup>12</sup> Slapstick comedy quickly made its way into animation in the 1930s, and by the 1950s, a revival of slapstick occurred through children's television.<sup>13</sup> The use of animated slapstick was recognized in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, establishing that Toons could not be seriously injured or killed by extreme gags such as being crushed by a piano or falling from a great height.



Figure 1: Sample Gag Tracker from *Toontown Rewritten*

This sample Gag Track demonstrates the various Gags that can be used in battle against Cogs in *Toontown*. Toons learn new Gags as they progress through the game. The “Drop” Track is empty because each Toon can only learn six out of seven Gag Tracks. Gag Tracker © *Toontown Online*, screenshot taken from *Toontown Rewritten*.

*Toontown Online* uses this slapstick history to establish a brand of comedic, child-friendly cartoon violence. On the occasion that gags are used on Toons, it is only out of play and comedy. In some boss fights, Toons can even throw pies at each other to restore health. Health in *Toontown Online*, though, is not quite the same as in other games. Instead of measuring physical health, the “Laff Points” of Toons measures their happiness and enjoyment, centering joy as the key to success in the world of Toontown.<sup>14</sup> Every aspect of *Toontown Online* and the fictional world of Toontown itself aims to capture the fun of childhood and children’s media, from the use of playgrounds to the cartoon history that informs it. Though the Toons of Toontown are not specifically aged, their primarily child-aged players paired with its children’s media inspirations makes Toontown out to be a society of children, or a society that prioritizes children’s-inspired

play without regards to age. Barring the cost of the full game, every Toon in Toontown is free to play to their heart's content without restrictions or supervision from adults.

### **A Play-Based Economy**

The culture of play and fun *Toontown Online* establishes runs throughout the entire game's functions and worldbuilding, not just its characters or combat. Online multiplayer worlds typically include an interactive economy to diversify gameplay mechanics and encourage player interaction. In fantasy MMORPGs, the economy can also be an immersive worldbuilding and creative storytelling mechanic. This may include a distinct currency not seen in the real world as well as unique ways to obtain or spend said currency. In the world of Toontown, that currency is jellybeans [sic].<sup>15</sup>

Jellybeans as a currency are unique due to their alternative use as a food product. While jellybeans are used to make purchases, they are also used to feed pets, grow plants, and catch fish, making them a valuable commodity to Toontown. Some ways to gain jellybeans are directly related to real skills, like gardening and fishing. However, the main way to gain jellybeans is through a collection of mini games called "Trolley games."<sup>16</sup> 1-4 player Toons can hop on the Trolley in any Playground to be randomly assigned a mini game to play. Upon completion of the mini game, each Toon receives a number of jellybeans and can then choose to play another mini-game or exit the Trolley. Most mini games are competitive; "Toon Escape," for example, rewards more jellybeans to Toons who can reach the end of a 2D platforming section the quickest. There are also a few cooperative mini games such as "Toon Memory Game," in which Toons work together to flip over cards and pair matches (see fig. 2).<sup>17</sup>



Figure 2: Toon Memory Game from *Toontown Rewritten*

The Toon Memory Game is one mini game that can be played on the Trolley with 1-4 players. Toons must select cards in attempt to find matching Gag symbols. Toon Memory © *Toontown Online*, screenshot taken from *Toontown Rewritten*.

Trolley games create a free play-based economy that encourages Toons to have fun to make profit. There are elements of a capitalist-inspired economy within Toontown—the streets are filled with what appear to be small businesses, though the only shops you can buy anything from are the Gag Shops and a furniture catalog—yet this market is entirely voluntary. Every Toon that enters Toontown is given a furnished house and free means to keep Laff Points high with items such as ice cream cones and popsicles littered around every Playground. While players must interact with the economy to progress in the game, Toons within the fictional world of Toontown are free to make their own choices without worrying about making ends meet. If a Toon wants money, they are encouraged to gain it in a way that is enjoyable rather than necessary for the economy.

As mentioned in Huizinga’s definition of play, the voluntary aspect of this economy distinctly marks it as a form of play, both for the real-world player and the fictional Toon. This

also marks the economy as having an anti-authoritarian nature to it. As far as is depicted, there are no Toon capitalists managing the labor of a Toon working class. A wealthy Toon, while having access to more material goods, holds no power over less wealthy Toons. Capitalism has often been described as a free market, but from a Marxist viewpoint, capitalism fails to promote freedom due to capitalists' control of the market and the required participation in the market to survive.<sup>18</sup> While there is no information on the role businesses play in Toontown, Toons are given much more freedom in their market choices thanks to an established welfare system for all.

### **Cooperative Gameplay**

While minor elements like some Trolley games in *Toontown Online* are competitive, the basis of its gameplay is a cooperative model. The primary tasks for players to complete (fighting Cogs, which will be discussed in Chapter 2) can be completed with up to four players at a time. Later bosses may be completed with up to 8 Toons, and many of these tasks are nearly impossible to complete alone, even for players at higher levels. Players can also friend each other, send private messages, and teleport to each other's locations. This cooperative and social gameplay model makes *Toontown* appealing to parents and Disney shareholders, encouraging peer social development and the ability for families to play together. However, it also adds to the image of a potential non-capitalist economy and government.

Children's media and publishing industries in the United States often must grapple with the socialization of children in a capitalist, work-dominated culture. Competition is likely to be a factor in any child's adult future, and values such as individualism and independence are key in the competitive free market. While collaboration and sociability are also valued, much of the most prominent capitalist children's media places its attention on the individual. In Eli Cook's

analysis of “Choose Your Own Adventure Books,” he finds U.S. children’s literature in the 1980s reflected neoliberal ideals of individual market choices. Influenced by the Reagan administration, freedom of choice became both the idealized vision of U.S society and the main factor in economic success. “Make wise choices, Reagan and his ilk would argue, and you will undoubtedly succeed. Make bad choices and you have no one to blame but yourself.”<sup>19</sup> Though this can be viewed as a sort of capitalist anti-authoritarianism, themes of independent power can also be used to enforce capitalist hierarchies. One of the most well-known children’s characters, Peter Pan, takes command over Neverland through the freedom of childhood play. Despite his desire to never grow up, Peter’s actions perfectly act out the adult role of European imperial and patriarchal society.<sup>20</sup> Peter Pan represents a world of child rule which simply mimics adult rule, idealizing both individual and national desires for colonial, capital power. The role of Wendy also demonstrates how girl characters are often excluded from the individualized freedom narrative, as she is most defined by her relationships and service to the boy characters.<sup>21</sup> Cooperative themes, therefore, are present only to enforce the capitalist norm. The capitalist values of freedom of choice and independence fail to represent true freedom for all by either dismissing or supporting systems of oppression and dominance.

Community and collaboration are often crucial in anti-capitalist theory, especially if dismantling authoritarian systems is the goal. In *Another Politics: Talking Across Today’s Transformative Movements*, Chris Dixon explains the importance of “noninstrumental organizing” in anti-authoritarian movements, defined as “an organizing approach that aims to build relationships with people as collaborators in struggle rather than as instruments to achieve already determined ends.”<sup>22</sup> Dixon emphasizes this method to encourage creating non-hierarchical

communities rather than deciding what's best for a group and organizing for that goal.<sup>23</sup> Multiple examples of communal solidarity and organizing can be found in the anti-capitalist literature collected in Julia Mickenberg and Philip Nel's *Tales for Little Rebels*. Helen Kay's *Battle in the Barnyard* demonstrated working-class resistance through a colony of chickens resisting against an authoritarian rooster.<sup>24</sup> A similar story, Jerome Schwartz's *Oscar the Ostrich*, features an ostrich hiding his head in a dune while a tyrant steals all the other dunes. When Oscar's dune is finally stolen, instead of taking on the tyrant on his own, he organizes with his fellow ostriches.<sup>25</sup> Individualism and freedom of expression is depicted in stories like *X: a Fabulous Child's Story*, in which a child is raised as neither a girl nor a boy. However, this individualism is designed to challenge oppressive systems; each child in X's class finds liberation in the defiance of gender norms, and the formation of friendship and community becomes central to X's story.<sup>26</sup>

The cooperative model of *Toontown Online* enforces that the success of one Toon is dependent on the success of many. Since the game is an MMO, cooperative gameplay was not limited to playing with family or friends, either; it was fairly common practice to play *Toontown* with strangers. Player Toons would wait outside boss areas until enough Toons had gathered for the battle. Some aspects of hierarchical power did form among players, as higher-level Toons would sometimes attempt to exclude lower-level Toons from boss runs by leaving elevators when lower-level Toons joined them. This was not common practice among most players, though, and tasks were often handed out that provided incentive to help lower-level Toons. For the most part, any Toon, regardless of Laff level or jellybean accrument, were able to join with their fellow Toons for both play and resistance. To expand avenues of social gathering, *Toontown Online* added Toon Parties in 2010, in which Toons could build a Party with unique

games, music, and décor with up to 20 Toons in attendance. Similar to Disneyland's theme parks, Parties even had an option for a fireworks show.<sup>27</sup> Freedom of expression like that in *X: a Fabulous Child's Story* could also be found in *Toontown*, as boy and girl Toons were not given separate roles or expectations in Toon society (boy Toons were prevented from wearing skirts, though, a limitation which will be discussed further in Chapter 3). Combined with a welfare state and a true voluntary economy, *Toontown's* cooperative open gameplay demonstrates a child-led socio-economic system divorced from adult capitalist expectations.

### **Anti-Authoritarian Play**

The play depicted in *Toontown Online* is positioned in between two realities: The first is the real world, in which a team of adults working for corporations created a children's video game to, at least in part, make a profit. Every gameplay decision described in this chapter was designed to create an entertaining experience for children that parents would be willing to pay for. It would be foolish to ignore this reality, even if the creators of *Toontown* express a desire to create a fun experience over the profit-incentive.<sup>28</sup> The second reality is the world of *Toontown* itself, in which Toons are free to enjoy life to the fullest without restrictive authorial figures or the fear of not making ends meet. It would be foolish to ignore this reality, too, no matter how fictional it is; it is a reality every player of *Toontown Online* was given the chance to experience.

As to be expected with such opposing political gains, there are aspects of these two realities that conflict, the most notable being *Toontown Online's* chat system. Every Toon could speak to each other with a feature called "SpeedChat," in which players select from a list of pre-typed phrases. If enabled on a player's account, they could also use "SpeedChat+" to type words freely, except any word not in *Toontown's* dictionary would be rejected and turned into an

animal onomatopoeia.<sup>29</sup> This may break the immersion *Toontown Online* attempted to create for children, as they would be restricted to words allowed by the game's developers and may have not been able to type freely without parent's permission. It is these moderative aspects that prevent *Toontown* from being a truly independent form of play for children. While the fictional Toon is largely free from authoritative figures, the real player is not.

*Toontown* cannot be described as entirely unstructured play, either, due to the built-in tasks and mini games required to progress. However, as Chudacoff noted, children always find ways to make play their own. A significant aspect of *Toontown Online* was social, and many Toons took advantage of these social opportunities to engage in online roleplay. One district<sup>30</sup> in *Toontown*, titled "Toon Valley," was known as a hotspot for finding Toons to socialize or roleplay with. Roleplay often involved a host advertising in Toontown Central until enough Toons showed interest, then teleporting to the host's estate to play. The most common roleplay to host was a "game show." Toon estates featured fishing as the only mini game available, yet there was no fishing in a Toon game show. Instead, players would use the space to play hide-and-seek, conduct races, and invent their own games using *Toontown* mechanics. For example, "Closet Dodge" was a game which used house decorating and clothing mechanics; the host would enter "Move Furniture" mode and move around their closet to try to catch the players. When the closet touched a Toon, it would open and prompt a menu to change clothes, marking the player as eliminated.<sup>31</sup> Fashion shows were also common, in which Toons would be prompted with a theme, and the host or panel of judges would rank players on how well they could dress for the theme.<sup>32</sup>

Another popular form of roleplay in Toon Valley was the creation of “clans.” Clans were primarily based on *Warriors*, a middle-grade book series featuring feral cats and violence unseen in the world of Toontown. Cat Toons would gather in clans and roleplay various feral cat activities, including fighting rival clans. This required some creativity in chatting, as SpeedChat+ restricted most words related to violence. Players found ways to get past the censors using varied caps lock and code (“- sO lit claws into throw tt, -” meaning “slit claws into throat” as a roleplayed action).<sup>33</sup> Clans eventually evolved past *Warriors* roleplay into a distinct form of play in *Toontown*. Clans became a way to easily find Toons to play with as a group. Since most clans required a certain Toons species or look, clans would often be made up of new, low-level Toons who could play through the game together.<sup>34</sup>

My own most prominent memories of *Toontown Online* involve roleplaying with other Toons. While engaging with both game shows and fashion shows, I also gathered Toons for roleplay activities that were not uncommon in real-world child circles. Inspired by a mix of *Harry Potter* and *Pokémon*, I transformed my Toon estate into a classroom to teach Toon “wizards” elemental magic. Playing “house,” a common form of children’s roleplay in which players act out nuclear family roles, was also common in *Toontown*, along with roleplaying school, teen sleepovers, and horror stories. Some Toons would even use roleplay to film movies with their friends to post on YouTube, sometimes featuring dark themes; in a film by “itzfriend,” a Toon commits suicide after a fight with her best friend.<sup>35</sup> Some were more lighthearted and inspired by media tropes, such as a film by “finalpaul” about a Toon escaping from prison after robbing a bank.<sup>36</sup> *Toontown Online* became a place for children to form online social groups and to express their creativity. In an analysis of virtual communities by Celia Pearce, she argues play

bonds formed in a virtual world can be unique due to the creativity of play and the ability to connect with people one may otherwise never speak to: “Because play is ultimately a form of expression, whether experienced in a structured game world or an open-ended metaverse, it opens up avenues for personal and social development that provide alternatives to real-life roles.”<sup>37</sup> In the increasingly digitized world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *Toontown Online* is an early example of this new type of play-based social group. Just as schools provided new social avenues for children in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so too has the internet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Many of these play experiences do not represent anti-authoritarian or anti-capitalist ideals. Toons frequently roleplayed aspects of the capitalist economy, just as children do in real-world play groups. However, it is the culture of play itself that establishes an anti-authoritarian norm within *Toontown*. The ability for players to construct their own play exemplifies how *Toontown* expanded unstructured play in a time of increasing commercialization and supervision. The outdoor spaces children used to claim as their own have long been taken over by car infrastructure and businesses with “no loitering” signs, restricting much of children’s play to adult-organized play sites.<sup>38</sup> In many ways, *Toontown Online* and other virtual worlds for children acted as an extension of this trend. With less space for them outdoors, children found play inside through a mix of physical and digital media manufactured by adults. It was in the servers and chat boxes of games like *Toontown Online*, though, that children found a new form of unstructured play; socializing, roleplaying, and creating with their fellow Toons no matter the physical distance between them.

The world of *Toontown* may not be entirely separated from the authorial reality that created and maintained it, but it was through *Toontown Online*’s non-capitalist, play-based

economy, cooperative gameplay, and open social opportunities that propelled *Toontown* past its capitalist reality into an anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist dream. Despite limitations like the monthly subscription and chat moderation, children that made up *Toontown*'s player base were able to immerse themselves in a realm free of the rule of parents, the rule of money, and the rule of government. The only rule within the world of Toontown was the Toon's, the children's, the people's rule.

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<sup>2</sup> *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, directed by Robert Zemeckis (Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> "Explore Mickey's Toontown at Disneyland Park," Disneyland Resort, accessed December 10, 2024, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/destinations/disneyland/mickeys-toontown/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

<sup>5</sup> "Explore Mickey's Toontown at Disneyland Park."

<sup>6</sup> "Behind the Tooniverse: 20 YEARS of Toontown | ToonFest Birthday Bash 2023 (LIVE)," posted May 25, 2023, by Toontown Rewritten, YouTube, 1 hr. 14 min., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RntjSQJXnHQ>.

<sup>7</sup> "The World - Neighborhoods," Toontown Online, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120105081342/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/neighborhoods>.

<sup>8</sup> James B. Stewart, *Disney War*, 1st Simon & Schuster pbk. ed (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2006), 88.

<sup>9</sup> Chudacoff, *Children at Play*, 116, 120.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 147–48.

<sup>11</sup> "The World - Neighborhoods."

<sup>12</sup> Tom Paulus and Rob King, *Slapstick Comedy*, AFI Film Readers (New York: Routledge, 2010), 7.

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<sup>13</sup> Rob King, *Hokum! The Early Sound Slapstick Short and Depression-Era Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 196-198.

<sup>14</sup> “Laff Points,” Toontown Online, 2012,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120107022149/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/laff-points>.

<sup>15</sup> “About Toontown,” Toontown Online, 2012,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120103100850/http://toontown.go.com/about/>; jelly beans are spelled without a space within *Toontown Online*.

<sup>16</sup> “Activities - Trolley Games,” Toontown Online, 2011,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20111231011657/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/trolley-games>.

<sup>17</sup> “Trolley Games,” Toontown Online, 2013, <https://toontastic.sunrise.games/help/players-guide/trolley-games/>.

<sup>18</sup> Burgett and Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, 41-42.

<sup>19</sup> Eli Cook, “Rearing Children of the Market in the ‘You’ Decade: Choose Your Own Adventure Books and the Ascent of Free Choice in 1980s America,” *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 2 (May 2021): 434.

<sup>20</sup> Hyun-Joo Yoo, “Imperialism and the Politics of Childhood Innocence in Peter Pan and Wendy,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 43, no. 3 (2019): 390-395.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 391.

<sup>22</sup> Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today’s Transformative Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 231.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 231-235.

<sup>24</sup> Helen Kay, *Battle in the Barnyard* (1932) in *Tales for Little Rebels*, edited by Julia Mickenberg and Philip Nel (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 101-105.

<sup>25</sup> Jerome Schwartz, *Oscar the Ostrich* (1940) in *Tales for Little Rebels*, 127-133.

<sup>26</sup> Lois Gould, *X: A Fabulous Child’s Story* (1978) in *Tales for Little Rebels*, 233-242.

<sup>27</sup> “Toon Parties,” Toontown Online, 2013, <https://toontastic.sunrise.games/help/players-guide/toon-parties/>.

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<sup>28</sup> In “Behind the Tooniverse: 20 YEARS of Toontown,” Jesse Schell shares how he changed his language to Disney’s marketing team to convince them to send free mailers to paying members.

<sup>29</sup> “Communications and Chat Types,” Toontown Online, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111215034947/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/communication-and-chat-types#speedChat>.

<sup>30</sup> Districts are different servers within *Toontown Online* to prevent performance issues associated with too many players in one place.

<sup>31</sup> “Toontown Rewritten - First Game Show,” posted Jul. 15, 2015, by Noisy Popcorn, YouTube, 1 hr. 15 min., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nm2pA5XTJ9k>.

<sup>32</sup> “Toon Fashion Show,” posted Sept. 22, 2013, by The Catz Meow, YouTube, 3 min. 22 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhwG-OeFSf0>.

<sup>33</sup> “WARRIOR CATS FIGHT! TOONTOWN,” posted Aug. 25, 2012, by 1201195303082001, YouTube, 1 min. 19 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiKenBtdn3I>.

<sup>34</sup> “Toontown Buddy Clan Advertisement,” posted Jun. 19, 2012, by ToontasticGaming, YouTube, 2 min. 9 sec., [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxK-2am\\_5Rc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxK-2am_5Rc).

<sup>35</sup> “Damaged Friendship; Broken Soul (A TOONTOWN BFF MOVIE),” posted May 12, 2012, by itzfriend, YouTube, 7 min. 32 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C26du3FIdG8>.

<sup>36</sup> “Toontown Prison Break,” posted Aug. 24, 2009, by finalpaul, YouTube, 9 min. 45 sec., [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_QdY3qgSZoU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QdY3qgSZoU).

<sup>37</sup> Celia Pearce, *Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009): 24.

<sup>38</sup> Howard Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 174-175.

## Chapter 2. Cog Nation: U.S. Expansion, Anti-colonialism, and Corporate Terror

With *Toontown Online*'s gag-based combat system, there must have been an enemy for Toons to fight. Enter the Cogs, a team of mass-produced robots with the goal of taking over Toontown. The Cogs are not just evil robots looking for power, though. They also make up a nation of their own, one themed entirely around United State capitalist culture. There were 32 different types of Cogs found in Toontown, each falling into one of four categories: Sellbots, Cashbots, Lawbots, and Bossbots (see fig. 3). The Sellbots in dark red suits were themed around sales-based business practices, the lowest level Cog being the "Cold Caller" and the highest level being "Mr. Hollywood." The green-tinted Cashbots were themed more generally around money-making, featuring the "Short Change" and the "Robber Baron." Lawbots in blue suits represented legal and political practice, including "Ambulance Chasers" and "Spin Doctors." Finally, the brown-suited Bossbots represented climbing up the corporate ladder, starting with the "Flunky" and ending with the "The Big Cheese."<sup>1</sup>

The presence of Cogs as *Toontown Online*'s antagonists was the most blatant anti-capitalist portion of the game, one that may be surprising to find in a Disney product. In fact, the business-themed enemies almost did not make it into the game. According to *Toontown Online*'s lead developer Jesse Schell, the original pitch for the Cogs, then called "Suits," did not involve them being robots at all. The first ideas played with were evil versions of various adult roles, including teachers and dentists, but out of concern for parental response, it was decided they would be evil businesspeople. However, Disney found it to be "insulting to executives."<sup>2</sup> The

Suits were redeveloped as robots in response, but the developers supposedly kept their business theming without informing Disney executives.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 3: “Cog Gallery” from *Toontown Rewritten*

The Cog Gallery depicts every basic Cog in *Toontown Online*. The symbols on the left dictate Cog type, from top to bottom: Bossbot, Lawbot, Cashbot, and Sellbot. Cog Gallery © *Toontown Online*, screenshot taken from *Toontown Rewritten*.

The representation of Cog Nation within *Toontown Online* creates a narrative that parodies multiple aspects of U.S. capitalism and anti-capitalist resistance. The Cogs take inspiration from a history of capitalist and colonial Disney characters, anti-corporate and environmentalist children’s media, and the real-world history of U.S. colonial and capitalist exploits. The war against the Cogs is a fight to preserve Toon culture and Toon joy, painting U.S. capitalism as a depressive and oppressive force to the Toon people. This propels the narrative presented in Chapter 1 of children’s play culture as an opposing force to capitalism, prioritizing a joyful existence over a profitable existence.

## **Cogs' Origins: Capitalist Portrayals of Scrooge McDuck**

The origins of Cogs within *Toontown Online*'s lore were not always consistent. Upon downloading the game in its early years, a video played that demonstrated how Cogs were first created. The video featured the characters Scrooge McDuck and Dr. Gyro Gearloose from the *Uncle Scrooge* comics and *DuckTales* television series. Scrooge, upon finding a giant robot created by Dr. Gearloose, attempts to activate it to assist the citizens of Toontown and make him money. Upon activation, the robot creates the Cog army and commands them to take over Toontown.<sup>4</sup> However, this video was eventually removed, with no reference to this origin within the game itself and the website stating, "Nobody knows for sure where the Cogs come from."<sup>5</sup> Though the Cogs' backstory was never referenced in-game and may not have been considered canon later, Dr. Gearloose's creation of the Cogs was later referenced in the 2017 *DuckTales* reboot.<sup>6</sup>

Jesse Schell cites *Uncle Scrooge* and the fictional city of Duckburg within the comics to be a major inspiration for Toontown,<sup>7</sup> yet there is a stark contrast between the two world's political atmospheres. The city of Duckburg was created by cartoonist Carl Barks to serve as the home for Donald Duck and his family in Disney's comic book universe. Depictions of Duckburg's size, location, and governance have been inconsistent, but what remains true about the city is its presence in the United States and the great financial hold Scrooge McDuck has on it. Scrooge, Donald Duck's great uncle and richest person in the world, is well known for the "Money Bin" he built in Duckburg, a massive building made to keep Scrooge's piles of wealth. While Scrooge's greed remains a weakness in his character, his characterization in *Uncle*

*Scrooge* and *DuckTales* emphasizes his heroic spirit as a self-described “adventure capitalist,” his wealth acquired from the bottom up through a life of exploration and hard work.

The jump from the heroic capitalist Scrooge to the antagonistic capitalist Cogs makes much more sense when considering earlier depictions of Scrooge McDuck and the pitfalls that come with depicting him as a protagonist. Carl Barks first created Scrooge for the 1947 Donald Duck comic *Christmas on Bear Mountain*. Named after Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge McDuck is introduced as Donald’s rich uncle who decides to invite him and his nephews over for the holidays to test Donald by scaring him with a bear costume. Throughout the comic, Scrooge is depicted as selfish and misanthropic like his namesake, but his heart is changed when he believes Donald and his nephews to be courageous and worthy of gifts.<sup>8</sup>

The next comic featuring Scrooge, *The Old Castle Secret*, introduces key aspects of his character such as his Scottish heritage, but he is depicted as cowardly rather than adventurous like his later depictions. Barks used Scrooge’s character in *Donald Duck* comics to push the plot towards adventure for Donald and his nephews, often due to the actions of Scrooge himself. While not a direct antagonist in most stories, Scrooge’s capitalist exploits are shown to cause trouble. This is demonstrated in the 1949 comic *Voodoo Hoodoo*. By this comic’s publication, Scrooge’s character had been established as the richest man in the world and tells a story about how he stole land in Africa from a “tribe of ferocious savages” to create a rubber plantation.<sup>9</sup> In an attempt to shrink Scrooge with a Voodoo doll in vengeance, Donald is inflicted instead. The rest of the comic features Donald and his nephews flying to Africa to remove the curse. The story is a dark reminder of the racism and glorified colonial narratives present in Disney’s works, with stereotypical caricatures of African people and misrepresentation of African diasporic

religions like Haitian Vodou. The villagers are given no sympathy, the ending of the comic showing them being squashed by the same rubber that motivated Scrooge to steal their land. However, Scrooge is also recognized as being at fault for Donald's happenstance. When Donald demands he funds his trip, he agrees only to get Donald out of his hair and gives him money for a plane ticket. Donald describes the money as enough only if "I don't eat on the way, and if I don't mind walking the last two thousand miles."<sup>10</sup> The story uses Scrooge's cruelty and greed for comedic effect and to add additional problems to be solved by the nephews. Scrooge plays the same role in the Cogs' origin story, inciting the creation of the Cogs yet having no role in stopping them. Donald, however, does not take the fall for him this time, as Scrooge is captured by the Cogs and is said to have gone missing.<sup>11</sup>

The switch to Scrooge as a protagonist in the *Uncle Scrooge* series did not significantly change his character at first. Issue #1 still sees Scrooge be stingy with his fortune, underpaying his nephews for work and demonstrating a paranoia in losing his money. However, the story emphasizes the hard work Scrooge puts in to make his fortune and places him as a proactive character in protecting it, much less cowardly than he was in *Donald Duck* comics. While Donald allows Scrooge to lecture him about the benefits of saving money throughout the issue, Donald tells him in the end that his wealth makes him "only a poor old man,"<sup>12</sup> the official title of the issue. Though Scrooge dismisses him, a portrait panel of Scrooge with a shocked, serious expression suggests the words affected him and could have been explored in later issues. This creates an immediate distinction between *Donald Duck* and *Uncle Scrooge* comics; while *Donald Duck* follows a working-class protagonist characterized by his frequent laziness, *Uncle*

*Scrooge* depicts a protagonist that demonstrates the value in Donald's life through the extreme means Scrooge must go to for his wealth.

*Uncle Scrooge*, while still featuring comedic aspects, features longer, more action-adventure focused stories than Barks's work in the *Donald Duck* comics. Each story is also part of a continuous plot, referencing each other and building upon Scrooge's backstory. While a lust for money never leaves Scrooge's character, he becomes more sympathetic over time. In Issue #30, *Pipeline to Danger*, Scrooge almost accidentally drowns a shrunken village with oil. Due to his mistake, he spends millions of dollars to provide the village with fresh water and soil, claiming it was to protect his image.<sup>13</sup> This seems far from the Scrooge who smiled while telling the story of his land theft in Africa, and future writers of Scrooge's character recognized this. In 1994, comic book writer Don Rosa rewrote the *Hoodoo Voodoo* backstory in *The Empire-Builder from Calisota*, likely with the goal to reconcile the darker depiction of Scrooge with the more heroic modern character. Rosa depicts a younger Scrooge who has become more selfish and hardened due to his increasing fortune, making unfair business deals his family does not agree with. Scrooge commits the same atrocity that he did in the original story, hiring a group to run the "Voodoo Tribe" out of their village. The narration describes the event as "the only dishonest deed of his entire life... one that would haunt him for years to come!"<sup>14</sup> When Scrooge's sisters leave him, he realizes the cruelty of his actions, failing to live up to the promise of making honest money. After failing to make amends with the leader of the village, he plans to return home and apologize to his sisters but instead gets distracted by various money-making ventures around the world for 30 years. By the time he returns to Duckburg, he is distrustful of all people and shuts out his family.

Don Rosa successfully captures both the original, misanthropic Scrooge McDuck and the adventurous, hardworking, secretly noble Scrooge of the modern era. However, he also captures a problem that comes with depicting Scrooge as a protagonist. Rosa attempts to paint Scrooge's land theft in Africa as a uniquely cruel and dishonest moment in his life of fortune hunting, but the way Scrooge collects his fortune as an "adventure-capitalist" implies some level of theft throughout his career. This is highlighted in the original 1987 *DuckTales* television series, as many episodes involve Scrooge McDuck taking Donald's nephews on adventures to hunt for ancient treasure. While Rosa would likely depict Scrooge making honest sales deals for said treasure, the Scrooge of *DuckTales* often finds and takes lost artifacts without consideration of where they come from. In season 1, episode 45, for example, Scrooge finds the lost city of Troy in a mining expedition and takes multiple treasures, including a magical harp. While Scrooge ends up returning the harp in the end to prevent disaster, the rest of the treasures are displayed in Scrooge's personal museum.<sup>15</sup> It's only apt that this episode is named after the Indiana Jones movie *Raiders of the Lost Arc*, a film about the US acquisition of a biblical artifact from an Egyptian dig site. In the article "Tomb Raider Archeologists and the Exhumation of the US Neoimperial Cinematic Fantasy," Rebecca Weaver-Hightower critiques the film for "presenting US characters as the more successful imperial raiders."<sup>16</sup> Instead of using direct colonial land acquisition, these stories aim to represent a material power over other nations. Rosa was not incorrect in claiming that Scrooge's dealings were honest from a legal standpoint, but the presentation of Scrooge as an honest, hard-working protagonist requires justifying a continued history of imperial capitalist gain.

Perhaps that is why Scrooge's character is removed from the picture when it comes to the Cogs' origin story. The original backstory video depicts Scrooge being terrified of the Cogs' creation, yet the Cogs are not very different from Scrooge himself. The Cogs aim to introduce a capitalist market to Toontown, including oil factories and office buildings just like the ones Scrooge owns. The Lawbots ensure the same level of legal honesty Scrooge follows, too, no matter how exploitative their actions may be. In Rosa's comics, many people in Duckburg have grown to resent Scrooge McDuck for his capitalist exploits despite the economic success it has brought to the city. In Barks's comics, Donald sees the joylessness that comes with Scrooge's success. This is the Duckburg that informs the creation of Toontown: A world that resists the economic power of capitalist exploits in a pursuit of joy.

### **Cog Infrastructure: The Devastation of Capitalist Culture**

The idea that Cog Nation is designed to parody U.S. economics and government is easy to find in the names of the Cogs themselves. The strong Cashbot "Robber Baron," for example, references critiques of U.S. businessmen in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century for business practices such as cornering the market, interfering with the government, and damaging natural resources.<sup>17</sup> Scrooge McDuck himself would have certainly been described as a Robber Baron for his actions during the Great Depression, where he "managed to corner the market—on everything—by paying only a penny on the dollar for hard-hit companies!"<sup>18</sup> The comparison between Cogs and U.S. capitalists does not end with just names, though. Analyzing the methods Cogs use to construct their economy and government is crucial to understanding the anti-capitalist framework used for *Toontown Online*'s worldbuilding.

The Cogs were made to be a contrast to the Toons, representing everything Toontown was not. While the Toons and their playgrounds were painted with every color of the rainbow, the Cogs primarily existed in dull-colored bodies and grayscale buildings. While Toon businesses were small and seemed to cover unique niches in the market (as unexplored as they are in the plot), Cog businesses consisted of giant factories and looming buildings filled with undefined office labor. The main Cog businesses seen are the “Cog buildings,” described as “gray, scowling corporate monoliths”<sup>19</sup> (see fig. 4). What is particularly unique about the Cog buildings is their method of construction. On any Toontown street, a Cog could decide to enter one of the Toon buildings. Then, a Cog building would come crashing out of the sky to replace it. Once settled, 1-4 Toon players could enter the building through an elevator to defeat Cogs on each floor. The Cog building would blow up if the players were successful, and the original Toon building was saved.



Figure 4: Cog buildings from *Toontown Online*

This illustration depicts an example of each Cog building by type, from left to right: Bossbot, Lawbot, Cashbot, and Sellbot. The shapes are accurate to in-game Cog buildings, but the colors are not; every Cog building is gray in *Toontown Online*. Received from “Cog Buildings,” Toontown Online, 2013, <https://toontastic.sunrise.games/help/players-guide/cog-buildings/>.

The replacement of a small business with a “corporate monolith” is comparable to anti-corporate critiques of global capitalist business practices. Nick Crossley describes a rising world

of activism against global corporatism, describing a corporate invasion “in which town centres are being replaced by private shopping malls and every blank wall is becoming advertising space... in which university campuses and even courses are increasingly corporate sponsored.”<sup>20</sup> While Crossley describes this as a type of colonization, using such terminology can potentially confuse and dampen the real definition of colonialism as a force against indigenous populations, which is why I instead use “invasion” to describe this concept. “Invasion” and “takeover” are also the terms used by *Toontown Online* to describe the Cogs’ infiltration of Toontown streets and businesses. The Toons’ mission to take back the streets of Toontown is reminiscent of Reclaim the Streets, an anti-corporate and anti-car movement aiming to take back public spaces for the community.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to say if Toontown streets are community owned without more information on how small businesses in Toontown are run, but it is clear the battle against Cog buildings is a battle against a corporate takeover of the Toon economy.

However, the Cog building represents more than just an economic invasion, as both Toon and Cog buildings act as an extension of Toon and Cog culture. Cog culture is largely defined by the capitalist market they aim to create, as can be seen through the infrastructure of not just Cog buildings, but the entirety of “Cog Nation.” Each of the four Cog types featured a “Cog HQ” on the outskirts of Toontown, and each Cog HQ gives a much deeper look at the economics, government, and culture of Cog Nation, one shaped by a parodic and critical image of U.S. capitalist culture. Due to its multi-faceted representation of U.S. culture, this is also where themes of colonialism come into play, the invasion of Cog culture acting as an allegory for U.S. colonial pursuits in tandem with capitalist pursuits and the devastation they can lead to.

### *Sellbot HQ*

The first Cog HQ accessible in the game was the Sellbot HQ, located in the bottom left corner of the map just off Daisy's Gardens (see fig. 5). Its imagery was bleak; the ground and sky drop are entirely gray, contrasting the blue skies and green hills of the Gardens. The land is littered with pipes, buckets, and oil spills, suggesting the Sellbots' main economic product is oil—unsurprising, due to their robot status. Within the HQ is the Sellbot Factory, where 1-4 Toons could fight their way through to defeat the Factory Foreman. The Factory shows that the Sellbots are the main producers for much of the Cogs' resources, including oil, paint, gears, pipes, and office supplies.<sup>22</sup> Defeating the Factory enough times allowed players to collect a Sellbot disguise and enter Sellbot Towers with up to eight Toons to battle The Sellbots' Boss Cog, the Senior Vice President. The specifics of the Senior V.P.'s role for the Sellbots or Cog Nation was not explored in the game, but he was shown to promote Cogs as "full-fledged Sellbots"<sup>23</sup> and was able to store Cogs within his underbelly.<sup>24</sup> The Senior V.P also kidnapped various Toon NPCs, most of whom were shopkeepers.

The Sellbot HQ's dark, lifeless land of oil-filled factory work was not the first depiction of environmental corporate destruction in children's media. Deidre M. Pike outlines multiple examples of "Enviro-Toons," animated works depicting varying ideas of the environment throughout the last century. An early example of humans as a destructive force to the environment is found in Disney's 1942 film *Bambi*, in which humans only exist as a background antagonist leading to the death of Bambi's mother and the destruction of the forest. This

destruction is not yet distinctly corporate, but it demonstrates a view of human interference with romanticized nature that becomes a common theme in ecocritical children's media.<sup>25</sup> Corporate



Figure 5: Map of Toontown from *Toontown Rewritten*

The map of Toontown shows each Playground and Cog HQ in *Toontown Online*. On the bottom left corner is the Sellbot HQ, the top left corner is the Cashbot HQ, the top right corner is the Lawbot HQ, and the bottom right corner is the Bossbot HQ. Toontown Map © *Toontown Online*, screenshot taken from *Toontown Rewritten*.

themes begin to appear in both Enviro-Toons and children's literature alongside the emergence of a global environmentalist movement in the latter half of the 20th century.<sup>26</sup> Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* is a famous example of this, depicting the gradual destruction of a forest due to one person's desire to continuously grow his company. The dichotomy between a green, plant-filled world and a gray, desolate one seen in *Toontown Online* resembles the ecological devastation seen in *The Lorax*. As the Once-ler's business grows across the pages with the destruction of the Truffula Tree forest, the sky grows darker, and the ground turns grayer. *The Lorax* is a clear

warning against the greed of corporations, but it ends with a hopeful note. The Once-ler provides a child with the final Truffula Tree seed to tend to, stating, “UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.”<sup>27</sup> Marwa F. Alkhatat argues *The Lorax* tells an anti-capitalist story through an ecocritical lens by emphasizing the irony of the corporate world’s goals of unending growth.<sup>28</sup> If the Toons did not care a whole awful lot, the Cogs would continue to inflict corporate destruction until there was nothing left.

### *Cashbot HQ*

The next HQ players typically entered was the Cashbot HQ, found on the top left corner of the map off Donald’s Dreamland. The Cashbot HQ functioned as a large indoor train station, not to transport Cogs but to transport money. Windows to the outside showed a dark sky with large gray office buildings, suggesting an extended Cog Nation not accessible in-game. The Cashbots oversaw the production and distribution of “Cogbucks,” the Cogs’ main currency. Little was established about Cogbucks in the game and no interactions were available, but the Cashbot HQ included three mints for Cogbucks production: the Coin Mint, the Dollar Mint, and the Bullion Mint, demonstrating a similar currency system to the United States. Every Mint held a Supervisor that players could defeat to gain their Cashbot disguise, enter the Cashbot HQ Vault, and battle the Chief Financial Officer.<sup>29</sup>

By situating the Cashbot HQ as an interior surrounded by a cityscape, *Toontown Online* acknowledges the exploits of capitalism manifest differently depending on geographical resources. The Sellbot HQ’s background is largely empty, representing a rural land polluted by oil excavation. The Cashbots, on the other hand, are centered in an urban landscape, just as

devoid of life as the rural but disguised by a bustling material culture. This is, quite literally, where the money is made.

The image established by these two HQs seems reminiscent of the image of Toontown's destruction by a transit company in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. While the Toontown of *Toontown Online* is not described as being in any real-world place, the Toontown of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* is more of an animated neighborhood within Los Angeles than it is its own governing body—that is, until the Toons are given ownership of Toontown at the end of the film. The destruction of Toontown and the genocide of Toons to build roads is not without its real-world implications, either. The film emphasizes the importance of the L.A. streetcar system, which was a reliable and cheap mode of transportation throughout L.A. County that was removed throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The building of a car-centric infrastructure in replacement led to the displacement of thousands of residents, most of whom were Black and Latinx. A project examining freeway expansion in Pasadena found routing through historically Black neighborhoods was intentional.<sup>30</sup> Thousands of homes in predominantly Mexican and Venezuelan American neighborhoods were forcefully bought and destroyed; while the predominantly white city of Beverly Hills was able to prevent freeway construction due to their independent status, protests in ethnically diverse communities like Boyle Heights were unable to prevent freeway construction.<sup>31</sup> Similar racial bias was found in other L.A. urban renewal projects such as the development of Dodger Stadium in Chavez Ravine. Mexican American residents of Chavez Ravine were displaced from the neighborhood initially for the purpose of building public housing, but the public housing project was eventually cancelled largely due to increasing associations with communism,<sup>32</sup> and the Dodge Stadium was built in its place.<sup>33</sup>

While Cog Nation uses trains and not cars, references to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*'s political history remain in the use of the Trolley throughout Toontown's playgrounds.

The change to a railway system instead of a freeway system is notable, though, as it expands the possibilities of Toontown's cultural representations. The U.S. did not begin their territorial expansion with cars, after all. As seen in the famous 1872 painting *American Progress*, railroads were used as a symbol of Manifest Destiny, the idea that European Colonists were fated to expand their U.S. colonial project westward.<sup>34</sup> The construction of Western railroads in the 1860s was largely conducted by Chinese workers often paid half the wages of white workers.<sup>35</sup> This exploitative labor went unrecognized by many U.S. leaders and journalists,<sup>36</sup> and proponents of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 such as Leland Stanford expressed that "the limit of their usefulness has been reached."<sup>37</sup> Both Chinese immigrants and Native Americans were exploited through railroad construction. Manu Karuka describes the United States' historical railways as tools for both colonial and capital spread. "Railways enabled the circulation of colonial commodities throughout the imperial core, and even more importantly, they made the large-scale export of financial and industrial capital to the colonies a central feature of global capitalism."<sup>38</sup> Whereas *Roger Rabbit*'s antagonists aim to displace and destroy a minority neighborhood, Cog Nation is representative of a much larger cultural takeover, transforming Toontown into a world fit for the capitalist Cogs just as the colonists transformed what is now known as the United States. The robotic Cogs represent an expansion of Manifest Destiny; created to expand business ventures, they determine the invasion of Toontown is well within their intended purpose. The Cashbots' role in this colonization is one of transportive infrastructure, promoted by the promising flow of cash.

## *Lawbot HQ*

The Lawbot HQ, located in the top right corner of the map, was unique for its representation of legal procedures rather than economic procedures. The main exterior features shiny marble flooring, giant statues of gavels, and a background of buildings and skyscrapers. *Toontown Online*'s website warned that "The Lawbots are manipulating the Toontown legal system with Cog rulings!"<sup>39</sup> Toons could enter the District Attorney's Office to steal Jury Notices and eventually access the Courthouse, where they would battle the Chief Justice. The boss fight featured a Toon NPC on trial for an unspecified case. Players would fight for Toon spots on the jury and tip the "Scales of Injustice" in their favor while Cogs created evidence against the Toon.

The legal proceedings of Toons are unclear in *Toontown Online*. The moderation team who approves of Toon names and enforces the game's rules are referred to as the "Toon Council" in-game, but their role within the world of Toontown is not specified outside of how it affects the real-world player. Since it is stated Lawbots are "manipulating" the Toon legal system, it can be assumed that both Toons and Cogs use a judicial system. Without reading this context on the website, though, it appears the Lawbots are enforcing their own legal system onto Toons just as they are enforcing their own economy. Regardless whether it is a manipulation of a pre-existing legal system or one built by the Cogs, the Lawbots' Courthouse is designed to parody the United States' own judicial government and how it has been used to support colonialism and capitalism.

While capitalists have not always followed the law, legal and governmental proceedings are an important factor in the strength of capitalism in the U.S. In *The Silent Takeover: Global*

*Capitalism and the Death of Democracy*, Noreena Hertz outlines how government interference in the economy, particular during the Reagan administration, led to global corporations having too much power over socioeconomic policy. She argues governmental priority shifted from “general welfare” to providing “the best environment for business to flourish.”<sup>40</sup> John J. Reardon explains how these global corporate dealings began to be exposed to the public in the 1970s. The Subcommittee on Multinational Corporations publicized hearings which revealed International Telephone & Telegraph Inc. offered \$1 million to the U.S. government to prevent a Marxist presidential candidate from being elected in Chile.<sup>41</sup> After the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act passed in 1977 to prevent bribing foreign election officials, many more corporations were found to have conducted foreign bribes. However, by 1978, enforcement of the law was already in significant decline, corporations “already knew how to circumvent the law if the transaction seemed profitable.”<sup>42</sup> Under the Reagan administration, the private sector expanded, public welfare shrank, corporate taxes decreased, and regulations on business were loosened.<sup>43</sup> In the restrictions and taxations that remained, the corporate world was able to find more legal loopholes, often with governmental support on their side. Antitrust laws were enforced selectively if at all, and businesses were able to escape taxation through selective filing in different countries and states as well as funding politicians to not campaign for corporate tax increases.<sup>44</sup>

These issues were not unique to the Reagan administration, and while Reardon argues the partnership between U.S. government and global corporations diminished as these corporations became independent from the U.S., one cannot ignore the U.S. corporate history that gave corporations global power. Scrooge McDuck was not created during the Reagan administration,

after all. These same issues of legal manipulation are found in the era of Robber Barons, many of which found seats in the congress and senate along with their lawyers, and those who did not still funded campaigns that suited their interests.<sup>45</sup> Just as seen during the Reagan administration, existing legal restrictions were also ignored; the Supreme Court during both the Cleveland and McKinley administration turned a blind eye to the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, designed to prevent monopolies.<sup>46</sup> Publicly, it seemed the U.S. government was placing more restrictions on business during early 20<sup>th</sup> century Progressivist-era politics. Labor movements and unions were also on the rise, with union membership reaching a peak of 5 million in 1920.<sup>47</sup> Under the surface, though, businesses continued to face little to no repercussions for legal influence, lobbying and campaign financing still common practice.<sup>48</sup> For the most part, the U.S. government and the U.S. private sector enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship in which the government either actively promoted or stayed out of business dealings while corporations funded their campaigns.<sup>49</sup>

Long before Robber Barons, U.S. law was also protecting and enforcing manifest destiny. The most infamous example of this was the passing of the Indian Removal Act of 1830 by the Jackson administration, forcing displacement and death upon thousands of Native Americans from the Eastern states.<sup>50</sup> However, Gary Clayton Anderson finds that ethnic cleansing had been a key tool for U.S. colonialism from the beginning. The early colonial period was fraught with conflict over land, leading to Pontiac's rebellion in 1763 and the creation of Paxtang and Carolina Rangers who hunted and destroyed Native American villages for colonial expansion.<sup>51</sup> The Revolutionary War empowered U.S. colonists to continue expansion, and when Native Americans like the Cherokee's retaliated, U.S. law supported colonists in violently fighting back,

often calling upon the militia during the years following the Revolutionary War.<sup>52</sup> There was never a long stretch of time in United States colonial history that did not involve the displacement and destruction of Native American lives and culture, the law always prepared to support colonists in manifesting their capitalist destiny. If the Sellbots and Cashbots represent the rise of industrial capitalism in the colonized United States, Lawbots represent the governing bodies that feed capitalist power and enforce colonial rule. Though the Lawbot HQ is specifically judicial, it parodies one branch of the “checks and balances” U.S. government which has continuously found itself supporting and being supported by the capitalist economy.

### *Bossbot HQ*

The final hideout for Cogs, the Bossbot HQ, was in the bottom right corner of the map attached to Chip n’ Dale’s Minigolf. With the Lawbots representing the judicial branch, one would assume the Bossbots would provide a representation of the Executive or Legislative branches, but law and government are not quite what is found within their HQ. Instead, the Bossbot HQ demonstrates culture “outside” of politics and economics. It is just as dark and barren as the Sellbot HQ, but not for the purpose of any sort of production. This is the location of the Bossbots’ Country Club, where elite Cogs join together in the delights of golf. Toons could infiltrate the Cog’s golf courses to collect Stock Options and fight the Bossbot Chief Executive Officer in his Banquet Hall. The fight involves disguising as a waiter, feeding oil to impatient Cogs, and pelting the C.E.O. with golf balls.<sup>53</sup>

The use of golf to represent Cog leisure culture is the final nail in the coffin for *Toontown Online*’s parody of U.S. capitalism. Golf is a sport of wealth, where the businessman and the elite gather to enjoy acres of perfectly cultivated land for the sole purpose of hitting a ball into a

hole. While golf's origins are most often said to be Scotland, Brad Millington and Brian Wilson argue the early 20<sup>th</sup> century rise of golf courses in the U.S. formulates current cultural understandings and critiques of the sport. U.S. greenkeepers emphasized keeping their golf courses in perfect conditions year-round, staging a war against natural plants and insects within their acres.<sup>54</sup> Chemical solutions were slowly introduced in the 1920s and became normalized upon growth in the pesticide field after World War II. Golf represented a purposeful conquering of nature for human entertainment, a sport economist Armen Alchian described as "purely capitalist."<sup>55</sup> Alchian's claim is supported by current U.S. President and businessman Donald Trump, who owns his own golf club, Trump International Golf Club Scotland Limited.<sup>56</sup> President Trump has been found golfing during times of economic crisis like the 2025 stock market crash, senator Chuck Schumer critiquing his stay at his private golf resort in Florida "while the American people are trying to put food on the table."<sup>57</sup> With environmental concerns rising in the 1960s and 70s, the golf industry began to present itself as responsible corporate environmentalists, backing laws regulating pesticide use while ensuring those laws exempted golf courses.<sup>58</sup> Due to golf's waste of land, overuse of water and pesticides, and status as a sport for the wealthy, it has become a target for some environmentalist and anti-capitalists groups. The Global Anti-Golf Movement (GAGM), for example, fights to restore golf courses back to their natural state or transform them into public spaces.<sup>59</sup> Golf is not just another economic product of capitalism, but a major symbol of capitalist culture as a corporate industry and elite leisure activity.

It is worth noting, then, that Toons were not entirely exempt from the golf world themselves. However, their golf is quite different from the golf played by the exclusive Bossbot

Country Club. For one, it is attached to a public park, *Chip n' Dales Acorn Acres*. This playground did not have streets and buildings like the others, instead acting as a nature zone surrounded by mountains, woods, and natural water sources. The golf section was not traditional golf, but minigolf, a bite-sized version of golf fun for all ages. In the real world, minigolf is simply a product of the golf industry, an artificial land selling entertainment to kids not so different from Disneyland. It is another reminder of the capitalist origins *Toontown Online*'s play culture is built from. However, within the context of the game world, Toon minigolf acts as a contrast to Cog golf. The capitalist context for the game is absent; it is open and free for all Toons to play, located in the public parks GAGM dreams of. Cog golf, on the other hand, is privatized, a country club that has destroyed the natural landscape and become the capitalist playground for only the wealthiest Cogs to enjoy. It is the final demonstration of stolen land, environmental devastation, and parading of wealth that makes up the Cogs' culture of capitalism—and the United States.

### **A Joyful Resistance**

Unlike the United States, though, Toontown has not been taken over. While war continues, the Toon Resistance has been successful in keeping the Cogs away from their homes and playgrounds. As discussed in Chapter 1, Toons battle Cogs using Gags like throwing pies and squirt guns. It is the one thing a Cog cannot take: a joke, a resistance of joy. When a Cog defeated a Toon player, it was not any sort of physical health that was lost. The Cogs implemented a psychological attack, sucking the joy, or “Laff Points,” from Toons by exposing them to the gray, busy work of capital. Oil, paperwork, corporate jargon, and anything deemed unfun by the Toons could lessen their joy. Upon defeat, a Toon would turn Sad, prompting them

to return to the nearest playground to recover. Cogs, on the other hand, were not given the luxury of recovery. Once enough damage was taken from gags, they would explode into gears and bolts.

In reality, joy and play may not be enough alone to resist capitalism. Much of the play Toons indulge in, such as minigolf, are products of capitalism in the real world, after all. However, joy has been recognized as an important piece to resistance in many marginalized spaces. In *The Black Joy Project*, a collection of essays and images dedicated to Black community, Kleaver Cruz begins with an ode to Black joy as a resistance tool: “Black joy offers a space for using one of the most radical tools to which Black people have free access: imagination.”<sup>60</sup> Saturn Sigourney Rage writes that trans\* joy and community acts as a threat towards capitalism. As capitalist culture has reshaped relationships and identity through the lens of material culture and class hierarchy, trans\* joy acts as a resistance from “the categories that capitalist dominating structures depend on for control.”<sup>61</sup> These joyful resistances emphasize the importance of cultural expression, community, and most of all, agency, something not always present under capitalism.

*Toontown Online* poses that children’s joy, too, is antithetical to capitalism. It is the main force posed against the environmental devastation, colonial theft, political control, and elite privatization that Cogs aim to spread across Toontown. Cog infrastructure demonstrates a detailed parody of U.S. capitalism, built upon years of critique in both political spaces and children’s spaces. From Scrooge McDuck to Cog Nation, children’s media cannot be separated from the political and economic world it derives from. However, the culture of play within children’s spaces, though constructed by capitalism in many ways, can act as a resistance to

capitalist culture, too. Through creation, community, and expression of agency that the adult capitalist world attempts to diminish, the Toons, the children, fight back.

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<sup>1</sup> “Meet the Cogs,” Toontown Online, 2012,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120101120143/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/meet-the-cogs>.

<sup>2</sup> “OMG!Con 2015 - Jesse Schellivision,” posted June 13, 2015, by Toontown Rewritten, YouTube, 12 min. 59 sec.,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1a9Ue0ouC4>.

<sup>3</sup> “Behind the Tooniverse: 20 YEARS of Toontown | ToonFest Birthday Bash 2023 (LIVE),” posted May 25, 2023,

by Toontown Rewritten, YouTube, 1 hr. 14 min., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RntjSQJXnHQ>.

<sup>4</sup> “Toontown - How the Cogs Were Made (Old Download Intro),” posted Sept. 22, 2009, by Sir Max, YouTube, 3

min. 15 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Faoq72PZYkE>.

<sup>5</sup> “Cogs,” Toontown Online, 2012,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120104155832/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/cogs>.

<sup>6</sup> *DuckTales*, season 1, episode 4, “The Great Dime Chase!” directed by John Aoshima, aired September 23, 2017,

on Disney XD, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-sV2zyL4Lo>.

<sup>7</sup> “OMG!Con 2015 - Jesse Schellivision,” 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Barks, *Walt Disney's Donald Duck in “Christmas on Bear Mountain”* (New York: Dell Comics, 1947).

<sup>9</sup> Carl Barks, *Walt Disney's Donald Duck in “Hoodoo Voodoo”* (New York: Dell Comics, 1949), 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> “Toontown - How the Cogs Were Made,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Faoq72PZYkE>.

<sup>12</sup> Carl Barks, *Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge Adventures in “Only a Poor Old Man”* (New York: Dell Comics, 1952), 34.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Barks, *Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge in “Pipeline to Danger”* (New York: Dell Comics, 1960), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Don Rosa, *Walt Disney's The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck, Part Eleven: “The Empire-Builder from Calisota”* (Prescott, AZ: Gladstone Publishing, 1993), 9.

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- <sup>15</sup> *DuckTales*, season 1, episode 45, “Raiders of the Lost Harp,” directed by David Block, aired November 20, 1987, in broadcast syndication, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD-fEgfcMS4>.
- <sup>16</sup> Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, “Tomb Raider Archeologists and the Exhumation of the US Neoimperial Cinematic Fantasy,” *The Journal of Pop Culture* 48, no. 1, (2012): 117.
- <sup>17</sup> Matthew Josephson, *The Robber Barons: The Great American Capitalists* (San Diego: Harcourt Inc., 1934), 313-345.
- <sup>18</sup> Don Rosa, *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck*, 22.
- <sup>19</sup> “Cog Buildings,” Toontown Online, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130805024555/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/cog-buildings>.
- <sup>20</sup> Nick Crossley, “Even Newer Social Movements? Anti-Corporate Protests, Capitalist Crises and the Remoralization of Society,” *Organization* 10, no. 2 (May 2003): 297.
- <sup>21</sup> André Carmo, “Reclaim the Streets, the Protestival and the Creative Transformation of the City,” *Finisterra* 47, no. 94 (2012): 109.
- <sup>22</sup> “Sellbot HQ,” Toontown Online, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111222183027/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/sellbot-hq>.
- <sup>23</sup> Disney’s Virtual Reality Studio & Schell Games, *Toontown Online*, The Walt Disney Company, 2003.
- <sup>24</sup> “Sellbot HQ,” Toontown Online, 2011.
- <sup>25</sup> Deidre M. Pike, *Enviro-Toons: Green Themes in Animated Cinema and Television* (Jefferson, North Carolina London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), 47.
- <sup>26</sup> John McCormick, “The Environmental Revolution” in *The Global Environmental Movement* (London: Belhaven Press, 1989), 47-68.
- <sup>27</sup> Theodor Geisel, *The Lorax* (New York: Random House, 1971), 64.

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<sup>28</sup> Marwa Essam Eldin Fahmy Alkhatat, "Screening Nature in Walt Disney's Bambi (1942) and Dr. Seuss's The Lorax (1972): An Ecocritical Approach to Enviro-toons," *Nile Valley Journal of Human, Social and Educational Studies and Research*, 28, no. 1 (October 1, 2020): 48-49.

<sup>29</sup> "Cashbot HQ," Toontown Online, 2011,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20111222182519/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/cashbot-hq>.

<sup>30</sup> Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris et. al., "The Implications of Freeway Siting in California: Four Case Studies on the Effects of Freeways on Neighborhoods of Color," *UCLA: Institute of Transportation Studies* (2023): 66,  
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7mj2b24q>.

<sup>31</sup> Avila Eric, "L.A.'s Invisible Freeway Revolt: The Cultural Politics of Fighting Freeways," *Journal of Urban History* 40, no. 5 (2014): 833-835.

<sup>32</sup> John H. M. Laslett, *Shameful Victory: The Los Angeles Dodgers, the Red Scare, and the Hidden History of Chavez Ravine* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 80-100.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 103-122.

<sup>34</sup> John Gast, *American Progress*, 1872, oil on canvas, 11 1/2 in x 15 3/4 in (29.2 cm x 40 cm), Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon Chang et al., "Introduction" in *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon Chang, "The Chinese and the Stanfords" in *The Chinese and the Iron Road*, 355.

<sup>38</sup> Manu Karuka, "Railroad Colonialism," in *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 40.

<sup>39</sup> "Lawbot HQ," Toontown Online, 2012,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120101120138/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/lawbot-hq>.

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<sup>40</sup> Noreena Hertz, *The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (New York: Harper Business, 2003), 23.

<sup>41</sup> John J. Reardon, *American and the Multinational Corporation: The History of a Troubled Partnership* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 113.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 155-157.

<sup>43</sup> Hertz, *The Silent Takeover*, 24-26.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 55-57.

<sup>45</sup> Josephson, *The Robber Barons: The Great American Capitalists*, 345-354.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 358; Reardon, *American and the Multinational Corporation*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Stanford Cohen, "The AFL and the CIO" in *Labor in the United States* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1979), 69-70.

<sup>48</sup> Reardon, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Leslie Hannah, "Government: Trustbuster or Promoter?" in *The Rise of the Corporate Economy* (New York: Methuen & Co., 1983), 46-53.

<sup>50</sup> Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian: The Crime that should Haunt America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 156.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 79-82. Other examples early colonial ethnic cleansing activities include but are not limited to the manipulation of Iroquois Natives to give up land east of the Ohio River, *Ibid*, 83; the intentional spread of infection by British and American officers, Barbara Perry, *Silent Victims: Hate Crimes Against Native Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), 26; and King Philip's War in response to theft of Wampanoag land, Jason Edward Black, *American Indians and the Rhetoric of Removal and Allotment* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 20-21.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, 87-90.

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- <sup>53</sup> “Bossbot HQ,” Toontown Online, 2012,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120105022835/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/bossbot-hq>.
- <sup>54</sup> Brad Millington and Brian Wilson, *The Greening of Golf: Sport, Globalization and the Environment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 54-56.
- <sup>55</sup> Peter Calcagno and Whitney Whitson, “Of golf, capitalism, and socialism: an empirical analysis,” *Atlantic Economic Journal* (2011), 199, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11293-011-9267-1>.
- <sup>56</sup> Brad Millington and Brian Wilson, “Contested terrain and terrain that contests: Donald Trump, golf’s environmental politics, and a challenge to anthropocentrism in Physical Cultural Studies,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 52, no. 8 (2016): 910-923.
- <sup>57</sup> Fatima Hussein et al., “As stock market continues plummeting over tariffs, Trump spends the day at his golf course,” AP News, Apr. 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-tariffs-golf-813c7a300021445636f63fddbdf38c83>.
- <sup>58</sup> Brad Millington and Brian Wilson, *The Greening of Golf*, 131-140.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid, 154-156.
- <sup>60</sup> Kleaver Cruz, “Black Joy is an Act of Resistance” in *The Black Joy Project* (New York: HarperCollins, 2023), 13.
- <sup>61</sup> Saturn Sigourney Rage, “Trans\* Joy as Resistance: Possessor, Tangerine, and Affective Trans\* Embodiment under Capitalism,” *Screen Bodies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 55, <https://doi.org/10.3167/screen.2023.080205>.

## Chapter 3. Toon Resistance: *Toontown Rewritten* and the Greater Toontown

### Community

It is no secret to fans of *Toontown Online* that the game followed anti-capitalist belief. “Toonblr,” a community of Toontown fans on the microblogging site Tumblr, frequently discusses *Toontown Online*’s political framing; one user, @lafflanes, titles her blog “anticapitalist funny animal game enthusiast.”<sup>1</sup> Another user, @friendlyfangs, has drawn their Toon character with the words, “Let’s be anti-capitalist animals... together” (see fig. 6).<sup>2</sup> On the forum site Reddit, user Professional\_Cat\_437 described *Toontown Online* as “based and anti-capitalist.”<sup>3</sup> However, Reddit users in the comments pointed out the irony of the game’s expensive subscription model. While it is clear *Toontown Online* succeeded in capturing anti-capitalist imagery, its corporate upbringing and goals may have prevented its radical messaging from being taken seriously or being reached by all parties. Trapped inside an expensive game for capitalist entertainment, Toontown’s message of joyful, anti-capitalist resistance may come off as a child’s fantasy of rebellion against the adult world rather than a genuine statement of anti-capitalist revolution. Its message was clear to its fans, but limitations remained in its Disney branding and ownership.

Consider it destiny, then, when *Toontown Online* failed to thrive within the capitalist economy. While the game saw success in its early years, subscription-based online gaming became a less successful business model with the rise of ad revenue and mobile gaming. In August 2013, Disney announced the closure of *Toontown Online*’s servers, planning to focus their attention on new mobile apps.<sup>4</sup> *Toontown Online* officially shut down on September 19,

2013, ten years after its initial release. While Jesse Schell had discussed ways to bring *Toontown* back with Disney executives,<sup>5</sup> there have been no hints of its return as of 2025.



Figure 6: Digital Illustration by @friendlyfangs on Tumblr

Friendlyfangs' drawing of their Toon original character is an example of the Toon fan community recognizing and embracing *Toontown*'s anti-capitalist themes, inviting others to join in on *Toontown*'s anti-capitalist play. © friendlyfangs 2023.

With *Toontown Online*'s closure, however, an opportunity opened. *Toontown Online* could have remained a lost Disney product, only spoken of with nostalgia and remembrance, but the Toons of *Toontown* were taught better. What happens when a decade-running game about community-building and resistance against capitalist forces is taken offline by the very same capitalist forces it parodied? The Toons did not just fight back; they took it as their own.

### ***Toontown Online's Closure: The Almost-Death of an Online World***

The closure of *Toontown Online*, despite its diminishing audience over the years, was major news. Days after the closure was announced, an article on CNN Business discussed the topic, sharing how the loss of the MMO will affect the lives of children and adult fans alike.<sup>6</sup> The article demonstrates early outrage for *Toontown's* closing, supposedly over 9,000 fans signing a change.org petition to keep the game alive, but the decision was already made on Disney's side. The world of Toontown, as it stood, would no longer exist.

The month before *Toontown's* servers went offline represented a different *Toontown* than months prior. For the first time since its public release, *Toontown Online* was made entirely free to play for everyone. Paid memberships were automatically cancelled, every Toon given unlimited access to the world of Toontown.<sup>7</sup> This was a glimpse into what *Toontown* could have been: a world of public access, replicating the public communal spaces the in-universe Toons were able to enjoy. Though outrage and sadness were found throughout the Toon community, fans still flocked to the servers for the final month to mourn the closure and celebrate Toontown together. In the last days, *Toontown Online* often had full, lagging districts due to the unseen numbers. Toons on YouTube filmed their last moments in the game, including a two-hour-long video depicting the game's final minutes.<sup>8</sup>

With past MMO closures, the gaming communities surrounding the games would be left without a homebase, searching for a new virtual reality to call home or desperately holding on to a dying game fandom. Celia Pearce documents one example of these "online refugees" in *Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds*. The players of 2003's *Uru* were only given five days' notice when its beta online server *Uru Prologue's*

closure was announced. Though occurring nearly 10 years before *Toontown Online* shut down its servers, the closure of *Uru Prologue* was nearly identical. Players joined together in its final moments, and when the game was finished, they flocked to forums to grieve together and begin searching for a new “homeland.”<sup>9</sup> While the community found other online worlds to gather in, Pearce describes a sentiment among the *Uru* community that “the best solution would be one not controlled by a corporation.”<sup>10</sup> One community member would create a small game replicating a space in *Uru Prologue* for former players to gather, and eventually, hackers were able to publish a fan server of the original game called *Until Uru*. While players did gather and celebrated *Until Uru*, they also remained in the communities built in other virtual worlds that they had assimilated in. The official *Uru* would eventually return, shut down again, then release for free in 2010, but the “*Uru* diaspora” remained spread across multiple MMOs and forum sites since *Uru Prologue*’s initial closure.<sup>11</sup>

Toons were more hesitant to migrate when *Toontown*’s closure was announced. Since the closure happened alongside the closures of Disney virtual worlds *Pixie Hollow* and *Pirates of the Caribbean Online*, it seemed Disney was choosing to prioritize their last standing MMO, *Club Penguin*.<sup>12</sup> Popular *Toontown* YouTuber Quackity critiqued Disney’s choices, claiming that “Clupenguin [sic] sucks, and besides more people play toontown than clubpenguin.”<sup>13</sup> In another video filming the final minutes of *Toontown Online*, one Toon is seen saying, “I’m never joining club penguin!”<sup>14</sup> Disney virtual worlds were not going to be a viable option for the Toon diaspora about to form, and it is difficult to say if any other virtual reality would be able to live up to the cartoon world of *Toontown*. What most Toons did not know at the time, though, was that a project was being worked on in the background since the moment Disney announced the

closures. On September 19<sup>th</sup>, just as *Toontown Online* was shutting down, Joey Ziolkowski—often referred to by his Toon name, Sir Max—announced his intentions to create a “Community Server” for Toontown. Joey described the server as “the exact same game that we have all known and loved for a decade now, however this time it will be ran by Toons, for Toons.”<sup>15</sup> Similar to *Until Uru*, *Toontown Rewritten* intended to republish the *Toontown Online* servers for free. With the quick announcement, though, there was much less need for the world of Toontown to be mourned. Toons would not go without a home for very long.

### ***Toontown Rewritten: Taking the Capitalist out of Toontown***

Only a month after *Toontown Online* shut down, *Toontown Rewritten* was placed into closed Alpha. This was already later than the *Rewritten* team aimed for, but in compiling *Toontown Online*’s decade-old data, they found much of it needed to be reworked for *Toontown Rewritten* to run smoothly. The first Alpha release was therefore only open to 100 Toons and featured just one mini-game, one neighborhood, and no Cogs,<sup>16</sup> but the team was committed to preserving and updating the entirety of *Toontown* to last. Daily updates to the game were provided throughout the rest of the Alpha test. At the beginning of 2014, an interview was posted to the *Toontown Rewritten* blog giving a behind-the-scenes look at *Rewritten*’s development. Unlike Disney, the *Rewritten* team had no hierarchical structure or profit incentive, claiming it was not right to ask for money for a game that was not their original idea.<sup>17</sup> Although they criticized Disney for the way *Toontown Online* was closed, the disdain towards Disney seen within the community was not present within *Rewritten*’s public communication. After all, the world of Toontown would not exist without Disney, and *Toontown Rewritten* was working under

a legal gray area. It would not have taken much effort for Disney's own Lawbots to have *Rewritten* shut down for good.

*Toontown Rewritten*'s Alpha ended with a "Presidential Election" event in which Toons were able to vote for who would be the Toon Council President out of two Toon NPCs. Throughout two months of event promotion, some Toons in the comments of their blog posts were disappointed at the lack of major game updates.<sup>18</sup> However, when the election results were streamed live, players were rewarded with two surprises: the reintroduction of Cogs and the closing of *Toontown Rewritten*'s Alpha test.<sup>19</sup> To celebrate *Toontown Online*'s 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *Toontown Rewritten*'s Beta version was released on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 and opened fully to the public on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014,<sup>20</sup> a year after *Toontown Online*'s closure. The 3D Disney mascots that used to roam Toontown's playgrounds never returned in *Toontown Rewritten*, likely due to copyright concerns. The *Rewritten* team used to reference Disney's characters throughout the Alpha build, including a reference to Scrooge McDuck's disappearance from the original Cog origins video,<sup>21</sup> but references slowed to a halt throughout the Beta build. However, Disney characters remain on signs throughout Toontown and neighborhood names, such as "Donald's Dock" and "Goofy's Gag Shop." The fear of a Disney takedown someday is still relevant; in 2022, *Club Penguin Rewritten*, a fan server of *Club Penguin*, was taken down for copyright infringement.<sup>22</sup> Though the site supposedly made ad revenue, unlike *Toontown Rewritten*, and Disney was still using the *Club Penguin* name for other products, it is not outside the realm of possibility that Disney would one day decide to shut down *Toontown Rewritten*, especially if *Toontown Online* is ever brought back in any way.

In the early years of *Toontown Rewritten*, fans hoped Disney would not abandon the world of Toontown for good. The *Rewritten* team expressed that they did not believe they could live up to Disney's name,<sup>23</sup> only holding the *Toontown* title for as long as the official title was absent. Some of these sentiments are still found on the *Toontown Rewritten* "help" page: "Toontown deserves a team of full-time employees who can give the game the love it deserves, and we absolutely want that to happen!"<sup>24</sup> Now over 10 years since *Toontown Online* shut down, though, *Toontown Rewritten* has become much more than a temporary preservation of the world of Toontown. In celebration of *Rewritten*'s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Joey celebrated the success of the project and its achievements so far: nearly 2.5 million accounts, over 60,000 unique players a month, over 4 million Toons, and much more.<sup>25</sup>

In 2015, the *Rewritten* team hosted their first in-person event, ToonFest, with over 200 Toons attending.<sup>26</sup> This began a yearly tradition, with the most recent 2024 ToonFest hosting hundreds once more and announcing major updates to the game.<sup>27</sup> While still preserving *Toontown Online* mechanics, multiple new features have been added, including redesigns of the Cog HQ mini-bosses and updated Cog HQ textures,<sup>28</sup> a new boss found in Cog Field Offices around the map,<sup>29</sup> and a new neighborhood still in development today.<sup>30</sup> When the *Rewritten* team collected *Toontown Online*'s code in 2013, it was in a state of disrepair, filled with memory leaks and opportunities for hackers to break the game entirely. Though Disney has always had the assets to make *Toontown Online* great, *Toontown Rewritten* proved the game was better off in the hands of the Toons. Joey makes sure not to take credit for this feat, stating, "Your kindness, resilience, friendships, humor, and joy are what keeps Toontown going every day..."

Let me be clear: YOU saved Toontown!”<sup>31</sup> Somehow, the ending of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* became prophetic: Toontown belongs to the Toons.

With new, non-capitalist ownership, *Toontown Rewritten* was free to expand the lore and story of *Toontown Online* how they saw fit, though their goals remained to preserve the original feel of *Toontown Online*. The first expansions were seen in the Toon Council Presidential Election, in which Toontown was established to have democratically elected leadership in some form. The Toon Council continues to act as the name for moderation and Toon name approval, remaining a small limitation in its anti-authoritarian themes to keep the game approved and safe for children. However, the *Rewritten* team has found other ways to improve and expand upon the anti-capitalist narrative. In a 2023 blog post interviewing a Toon fan community dedicated to Lawbots, the team writes that Toons do not understand Cog law. “What’s a clause? Has anyone ever heard of a subsection? And what on earth is a bench?!”<sup>32</sup> This overrides the implication from *Toontown Online* that Cogs were manipulating Toon law, instead attempting to override Toon law with their own—a more accurate representation of U.S. colonial exploits. The *Rewritten* team has also centered the game’s story and events around the Toon Resistance. Led by NPC Lord Lowden Clear, the Toon Resistance was created after the initial invasion of the Cogs, reintroducing HQS and the collection of Cog disguises.<sup>33</sup> The Resistance would continue to report on all updates to Cog Nation, and in 2015, they re-hosted an event from *Toontown Online*, “Operation: Storm Sellbot HQ,” to allow all Toons the opportunity to fight the V.P. together, regardless of level.<sup>34</sup> The Toon Resistance continues to be a successful tactic in keeping the *Toontown Rewritten* community active and promoting the anti-capitalist narrative.

The mention of Scrooge during the Presidential Election was not the only way *Toontown Rewritten* incorporated original lore into the story. In fact, the world of Toontown in *Rewritten* is established to be a separate timeline caused by Dr. Gyro Gearloose's tampering. After the Cogs invaded the Election and kidnapped President Elect Slappy, Gyro went into hiding for six years out of shame for accidentally building the Cogs.<sup>35</sup> When he finds out Slappy was "erased" by the Cogs, he returns to Toontown, predicting that the Cogs would eventually erase all Toons if they were not valuable to Cog Nation.<sup>36</sup> To attempt to fix the timeline, Gyro creates the "Rewritten Device," which allows him to transform into a new Toon, "Doctor Surlee," and go back in time to stop the Cog invasion.<sup>37</sup> This creates the *Rewritten* timeline, but instead of preventing Cog Nation, Dr. Surlee's interventions lead to the Cogs being accidentally created once again and events from the original timeline occurring quicker. By 2019, the *Rewritten* timeline now in unseen territory, Dr. Surlee admits his past mistakes; "in a long forgotten timeline, I was Gyro Gearloose... At this point, I've grown to accept who I really am though—Doctor Surlee."<sup>38</sup> This story allowed *Toontown Rewritten* to both acknowledge Disney's creation of the Toontown world and make Toontown their own, its "rewritten" creation separate yet built from the original. Dr. Surlee's acceptance of his current name marked a beginning of a new era for *Toontown Rewritten*, one where they are no longer weighed down by Disney's legacy.

*Rewritten* is also able to respond to the Toon community in ways *Toontown Online* was never able to. In the last five years, *Rewritten* has released multiple updates to improve representation within Toontown. In 2022, the ability to add pronouns that would be displayed when other Toons clicked on one's name was added.<sup>39</sup> In 2023, the *Rewritten* team released an update long in the works to rework gender. Originally, players would pick to be a boy or a girl

when creating their Toon. Girl Toons had eyelashes and could wear both skirts and shorts, while boy toons had no eyelashes and could only wear shorts. According to the *Rewritten* team, this was a difficult feature to change due to how Toons were originally coded, but after major work, any Toon is now able to wear skirts or shorts, eyelashes can be toggled on or off, and gendered language was removed from the Make-a-Toon room.<sup>40</sup> These updates not only made *Rewritten* more inclusive, but helped to emphasize the anti-capitalist utopia Toontown represented by diminishing heteronormative and patriarchal standards that have perpetrated the capitalist system. Toontown's narrative of joyful resistance now explicitly includes Saturn Sigourney Rage's ideas of trans\* joy, promoting non-capitalist community and agency.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps one of the most important contributions to preserve Toontown's anti-capitalist theming was the continued use of a phrase introduced in *Toontown Online*: "Toons of the world, Unite!" To anyone familiar with Marx's work, the slogan will likely sound familiar. It references a phrase first written by Karl Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*, commonly translated to English as "Working Men of All Countries, Unite!"<sup>42</sup> The phrase was later popularized as "Workers of the world, unite!"<sup>43</sup> The phrase "Toons of the world, Unite!" was a secret easter egg in *Toontown Online*, accessible by asking the shopkeeper Whispering Willow, "Would you like some help?"<sup>44</sup> This feature remains in *Toontown Rewritten* and is referenced throughout the team's website, first spoken by President Flippy when Cogs invaded the Presidential Election.<sup>45</sup> Its inclusion in *Toontown Online* and *Rewritten* is one final nod to the game's corporate-fighting message, making it clear no mistakes were made in theming the Toon Resistance around the fight against anti-capitalism. While it may not have been intended as a real-world call to action, Toons still heard the call. *Rewritten*'s preservation of *Toontown Online* paired with its new and

expanded stories continue to represent Cogs as a colonial capitalist force willing to commit both cultural and physical genocide to prove their superiority, while Toons continue to resist in-game and out of game.

### **“Toons of the World, Unite!”: The Toontown Fan Community**

*Toontown Rewritten* was not the only fan server to come out of *Toontown Online*'s closure, and neither is it the beginning or end of the Toontown community. Another early fan server, *Toontown Infinite*, acted as a friendly competitor to *Rewritten*—until it was no longer friendly. After an incident in 2014 in which *Infinite* team members supposedly used an exploit to send unfiltered chat messages in *Rewritten*,<sup>46</sup> the *Infinite* server was shut down. While this incident showed a lack of unity among some fans, the community did not tolerate such behavior. Moderators for the Toontown Reddit page ended official support for *Infinite*, and users came together to share their disappointment with the *Infinite* team's actions.<sup>47</sup> The message was clear: Toons should stand together, not apart.

Throughout the last 12 years, the Tooniverse has grown larger than ever and has expanded through many different types of fan creations, including customizable and single player servers through *Toontown Realms*<sup>48</sup> and the more recent single player roguelike game *Toontown: The Grindworks*.<sup>49</sup> Next to *Rewritten*, the server with the most popularity is *Toontown Corporate Clash*, a game with significant updates to the Toontown world. *Clash* launched in 2018 after its original server, *Project Altis*, went offline due to server hacking and leadership changes.<sup>50</sup> Unlike *Rewritten*, *Clash* aims to provide Toons with a more updated experience compared to *Toontown Online*, with new Toon species, new neighborhoods, an updated progression system, and a unique story. References to Disney characters are entirely

removed from the game, names like “Minney’s Melodyland” changed to “Mezzo Melodyland.”<sup>51</sup> Its popularity is largely due to expansions within the Cogs. *Clash* adds its own Cog type, the Boardbots, which mainly acts as operations management for C.O.G.S. (Coal, Oil, and Gas Syndicate) Inc.<sup>52</sup> *Clash* therefore reimagines Cogs as strictly a mega corporation rather than also representative of a larger economic and governmental system. In theory, this puts *Clash* closer to the politics of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, as the game parodies specific corrupt corporate entities within the energy sector. However, just as *Roger Rabbit* was able to develop meaningful critique of U.S. business practice, *Clash* uses its added Cogs to explore meaningful anti-capitalist ideas.

One of many added Cogs in *Clash* is the Rainmaker, a Lawbot in the Regional Manager position who is themed around the weather. The Rainmaker is unique in her expressed desire to befriend and play with Toons. In her boss battle, she expresses a disinterest in fighting Toons and does not understand why Toons continue to treat her with disdain. During one of her attacks, she states, “I didn’t join this company to hurt you!”<sup>53</sup> Toons are given the option to defeat her or spare her at the end of her battle. The Rainmaker runs away upon defeat, but upon sparing her, she first gives a monologue about how both Toons and Cogs have harmed her. While she is presented as a sympathetic character due to the ability to spare her, her managerial role within C.O.G.S. Inc. makes her intentions questionable. The Rainmaker appears to be empathetic towards Toons and recognizes how Cogs have acted as an oppressive force, but she continues to be not only complacent, but an active force in the oppression of Toons. The Rainmaker is a complex and realistic depiction of how people who benefit from systems of oppression who present themselves as allies may still fail to understand their own role in oppression—even when

they may be oppressed themselves. Characters like the Rainmaker are what bring the *Clash* community together, even if different opinions can sow discourse. While some Toons come together to express their love for certain *Clash* Cogs, others remind Toons not to overly glorify their colonial behaviors.<sup>54</sup>

Despite issues between “competing” fan servers in the past and separate fandoms for *Rewritten* and *Corporate Clash*, the Toontown community still comes together in many ways to celebrate both games and Toontown’s legacy. ToonHQ, a website created by “wife duo” Toons Mrs. Leah Pumpkinhopper and Cara Pumpkinhopper, serves both *Rewritten* and *Clash* in providing helpful guides and resources for the games.<sup>55</sup> The site also publishes event times for the Cold Caller’s Guild, a community of Toons who provide opportunities for *Rewritten* players of all skill levels to run bosses.<sup>56</sup> “Toontown PRIDE!” is a community on Discord for LGBTQ+ Toons known for hosting major pride parades in *Rewritten* and *Clash*, promoted by the *Rewritten* team themselves.<sup>57</sup> *Corporate Clash* has also organized charity events for LGBTQ+ causes.<sup>58</sup> The Toontown Reddit page, which was created before *Toontown Online*’s closure, supports a userbase of over 30,000 Toons and provides lists of all open servers and resources, including *Toontown*’s source code.<sup>59</sup> All of these community events and resources continue to run to this day. Now more than ever, the Toontown community comes together to create a safe space for Toons of all ages and backgrounds.

Along with in-game pride parades hosted by the “Toontown PRIDE!” team, nothing better represents the Toon community more than beanfests. After defeating the C.F.O in the Cashbot HQ, Toons receive one of various special “Unite!” phrases. The phrases include “Toons of the world, Gag-up!” which restores gags, “Toons of the world, Toon-Up!” which restores

Laff, and “Toons of the world, Spend Wisely!” which gives Toons jellybeans.<sup>60</sup> Because these phrases can be used outside of battle, a tradition began in the early days of *Toontown Online* to host “beanfests,” in which high-level Toons would collect multiple jellybean “Unite!” phrases and gather together a group of Toons to disperse the jellybeans to. Players would even schedule beanfests on forum sites to ensure as many Toons as possible could reap the rewards.<sup>61</sup> This unofficial tradition has continued into Toontown fan servers to this day, with multiple Toon communities hosting weekly beanfests across servers (see fig. 7).<sup>62</sup> It is only apt that the name of the phrases these wealth-distributing events are built around comes from the initial “Toons of the world, Unite!” phrase. From the very beginning, the Toon community has embodied *Toontown Online*’s anti-capitalist and pro-communal messaging to create a welcoming environment where no Toon is left behind.

Fan transformation is not unique to the Tooniverse or Toon community. Fandom has been a force of creation and transformation for decades, a space where fans can both celebrate and reimagine their favorite media. Henry Jenkins recognizes modern fan culture as a response to the capitalist media industry; fandom acts as a sort of folk culture, reclaiming public and communal forms of storytelling in an age of largely commercialized storytelling.<sup>63</sup> Fandom also fills in the gaps of commercialized pop culture, “a space within which fans may articulate their specific concerns about sexuality, gender, racism, colonialism, militarism, and forced conformity”<sup>64</sup> which may otherwise be lacking in the source material. That is not to say that any fan community holds the same sociopolitical opinions throughout or that fandom is always radical, but fandom provides opportunity for radical expression and community building. The Toontown fandom finds itself in a unique position, though, as the original media it was based



Figure 7: Beanfest in *Toontown Rewritten*, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025

Toons gather for Beanfests in Donald’s Dreamland to wait for Toons who have jellybean “Unite!” phrases. When a “Unite!” phrase is used, every Toon in the vicinity is given 200-600 jellybeans depending on the phrase’s level. Toons with “...ZZZ...” chat bubbles over their head are idle players. © *Toontown Online*, screenshot taken from *Toontown Rewritten*.

upon is hardly relevant. Jenkins describes media fans as “peasants” within media culture, as they have little control over what happens to commercial media and “must beg with the network to keep their favorite shows on the air, must lobby producers to provide desired plot elements or to protect the integrity of favorite characters.”<sup>65</sup> When shows are taken off air or books stop being produced, fandom is left to their own devices, surviving off re-consumption and fan creation or dying off entirely. Toons, however, did not have anything to re-consume. *Toontown Online* was no longer playable. There was only one option, then—to seize the means of production. Now, nearly 12 years without *Toontown Online*, servers like *Toontown Rewritten* and *Corporate Clash* have become the new foundation for fan creation. *Online* has certainly not been forgotten about—in 2021, the *Rewritten* team launched the Toontown Preservation Project, a digital archive preserving *Toontown Online*’s history<sup>66</sup>—but history is all that *Online* has become. Fans

no longer wait for *Online*'s return, and searching "Toontown" results first in *Toontown Rewritten*'s website (the link for Mickey's Toontown, the location in Disneyland Parks, is the fourth result, right before *Corporate Clash*). The Toon community has become self-sufficient, a microcosm of the anti-capitalist utopia *Toontown Online* presented over a decade ago. Disney's version of Toontown was unable to fully embody the anti-capitalist themes it presented, bound with subscription fees and a legacy of capitalist exploits. However, Toons paid attention; when the Cogs tried to take Toontown, Toons resisted, and when the real-world Cogs abandoned Toontown, Toons united once more.<sup>67</sup>

Though nearly 12 years have passed with no intervention by Disney, the future of the Tooniverse is still left up to Disney. A model for successful mobile multiplayer RPGs has been defined by games such as *Genshin Impact* and *Raid: Shadow Legends*. Despite *Toontown Rewritten* claiming Toontown's world is in better hands with an official Disney release, the current landscape for MMORPGs would likely lead to any official *Toontown* having significant paid features. The last 12 years has proven the Toon community can thrive even with limited resources and no funding. Disney taking back the Toontown world could lead to more damage than *Toontown Online*'s closure ever did, but with its two-decade-running community, Toons will always find ways to make Toontown their own. In the book *The Queer Art of Failure*, queer scholar Jack Halberstam explores how depictions of failure can be used to critique capitalist and heteronormative structures of living. When children's media depicts failures, he argues it acts as a reminder to "the child viewer that this too is what it means to live in a world created by mean, petty, greedy, and violent adults."<sup>68</sup> However, instead of trying to avoid and hide from failure, or turn failure into individual fault as the capitalist system encourages, accepting failure "involves

the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy.”<sup>69</sup>

This is where *Toontown* and its many iterations finds itself. While promoting a hopeful and positive message, Toons accept failure into their absurd, silly, and goofy lives. The slapstick comedy of the Gags embraces little failures, laughing at the falls and accidents of the body. The Cog invasion in *Toontown Online* and *Rewritten* demonstrates large failures, from Scrooge and Gyro’s accidental creation of the Cogs in *Online* to the ultimate forgiveness Toons show Surlee in *Rewritten* when he makes the same mistakes again. When the closure of *Toontown Online* brought these failures to reality, the Toons of the real world found a path forward and made the best out a bad situation, allowing for more silliness in the Tooniverse than ever before. Failure may one day strike the community again if Disney decides to intervene, but Toons will continue to find ways to strive in that failure. That is where Toontown succeeds—not in winning the game, not in defeating the Cogs once and for all, but in finding community in anti-capitalist play no matter the circumstances.

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<sup>3</sup> Professional\_Cat\_437, “Toontown is based and anti-capitalist,” Reddit, 2022, [https://www.reddit.com/r/toontownrewritten/comments/xkmm2n/toontown\\_is\\_based\\_and\\_anticapitalist/](https://www.reddit.com/r/toontownrewritten/comments/xkmm2n/toontown_is_based_and_anticapitalist/); “Based” is a slang term referring to something agreeable and cool.

<sup>4</sup> “About Closing,” Toontown Online (Disney, 2013), <https://web.archive.org/web/20130820194414/http://toontown.go.com/closing>.

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<sup>5</sup> “OMG!Con 2015 - Jesse Schellivision,” posted June 13, 2015, by Toontown Rewritten, YouTube, 12 min. 59 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1a9Ue0ouC4>.

<sup>6</sup> Heather Kelly, “Coping with the Loss of an Online World,” CNN Business, August 23, 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/tech/gaming-gadgets/closing-toontown/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> “Closing News,” Toontown Online, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130820194414/http://toontown.go.com/closing>.

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<sup>9</sup> Celia Pearce, *Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009): 88-94.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 105-107; 248-252.

<sup>12</sup> *Pixie Hollow* was a MMORPG based on the *Tinker Bell* movie franchise. Similarly, *Pirates of the Caribbean Online* was an MMORPG based on the movie franchise of the same title. *Club Penguin* was an original MMO bought by Disney in 2011.

<sup>13</sup> “Why toontown is really closing,” posted Aug. 20, 2013, by Quackity, YouTube, 1 min. 47 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RX45dQi6KNI>.

<sup>14</sup> “Final Minutes of Toontown,” posted Sept. 20, 2013, by Bricktoons1, YouTube, 1 min. 54 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNwv5RyR4ec>.

<sup>15</sup> JoeyZio, “Toontown Rewritten - A Community Server for Disney's Toontown Online,” MMO Central Forums, 2013, <https://www.mmocentralforums.com/forums/showthread.php?t=345478#post3919917>.

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<sup>44</sup> Disney’s Virtual Reality Studio & Schell Games, *Toontown Online*, The Walt Disney Company, 2003.

<sup>45</sup> “The Toon Council Presidential Elections,” Toontown Rewritten, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtlO-41kpZQ>.

<sup>46</sup> TooManySecrets, “TTI was behind today’s TTR shutdown,” Reddit, 2014, [https://www.reddit.com/r/Toontown/comments/2puvsh/tti\\_was\\_behind\\_todays\\_ttr\\_shutdown/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Toontown/comments/2puvsh/tti_was_behind_todays_ttr_shutdown/).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Toontown Realms, “About,” <https://toontownrealms.com/about>.

<sup>49</sup> Evan, “Toontown: The Grindworks,” itch.io, 2025, <https://itsevan.itch.io/toontown-the-grindworks>.

<sup>50</sup> Suplewich, “Toontown: Project Altis rebrands and redesigns, team releases a statement,” Reddit, 2017, [https://www.reddit.com/r/Toontown/comments/7idwoe/toontown\\_project\\_altis\\_rebrands\\_and\\_redesigns/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Toontown/comments/7idwoe/toontown_project_altis_rebrands_and_redesigns/).

<sup>51</sup> Corporate Clash Team, “Launching Toontown Forward,” Toontown Corporate Clash News Archive, 2018, <https://corporateclash.net/news/article/5>.

<sup>52</sup> “C.O.G.S. Inc. Employee Information System,” Toontown Corporate Clash, C.O.G.S. Inc and subsidiaries, <https://cogs.ink/>.

<sup>53</sup> Corporate Clash, *Toontown: Corporate Clash*, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Strawglicks, “My recent post abt ttcc fandom...” Tumblr, 2024, <https://www.tumblr.com/strawglicks/749663394265808896/my-recent-post-abt-ttcc-fandom-had-a-lot-of-pp!?source=share>.

<sup>55</sup> “ToonHQ | Guides for Toontown Rewritten and Corporate Clash,” ToonHQ, <https://toonhq.org/>.

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<sup>56</sup> “Toon HQ – CCG,” Toon HQ, <https://toonhq.org/ccg/>.

<sup>57</sup> Clerk Clark, “Show Your True Colors for Pride Month!” Toontown Rewritten, 2024, <https://www.toontownrewritten.com/news/item/884/show-your-true-colors-for-pride-month>.

<sup>58</sup> Corporate Clash Crew, “The Firestarter and Pacesetter Makeship Pride Campaign Begins Now!” Toontown Corporate Clash, 2024, <https://corporateclash.net/news/article/155>.

<sup>59</sup> Bingus\_party, “Toontown Resources Masterlist,” Reddit, 2025, [https://www.reddit.com/r/Toontown/comments/1jg52rz/toontown\\_resources\\_master\\_list/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Toontown/comments/1jg52rz/toontown_resources_master_list/).

<sup>60</sup> Toontown Online, “Cashbot HQ,” 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111222182519/http://toontown.go.com/help/players-guide/cashbot-hq>.

<sup>61</sup> Princessintoons, “How do beanfests work?” MMO Central Forums, 2005, <https://www.mmocentralforums.com/forums/showthread.php?t=73997>.

<sup>62</sup> OstensiblySpiraling, “Beanfest Schedule?” Reddit, 2024, [https://www.reddit.com/r/toontownrewritten/comments/1cep2qh/beanfest\\_schedule/](https://www.reddit.com/r/toontownrewritten/comments/1cep2qh/beanfest_schedule/).

<sup>63</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 268-273.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 283.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>66</sup> “About,” Toontown Preservation Project, Toontown Rewritten, 2021, <https://toontown.notion.site/Toontown-Preservation-Project-4e9594a785724e4cb53458b8940afec0>.

<sup>67</sup> A potential flaw in *Toontown* fan servers embodying anti-capitalism is the continued reliance on online servers, which can be environmentally damaging. More research can be conducted on environmentally conscious game and fandom engagement as well as methods of making online servers more environmentally friendly. See Steven Gonzalez Monserrate, “The Cloud Is Material: On the Environmental Impacts of Computation and Data Storage,” *MIT Case Studies in Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing* (2022): 1-29.

<sup>68</sup> Jack Halberstam, “Animating Failure,” in *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 186.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

## Conclusion

*Toontown Online*'s legacy is filled with irony, a game filled with contradictions from the beginning. Its creators, tasked with the creation of Disney's first MMORPG, aimed to create a game representative of Disney that captured children's imaginations and appealed to parents. By secretly defying the wishes of their executives, this led to a narrative filled with Disney inspirations yet opposed to everything the Walt Disney Company stood for. *Toontown Online* created a world for children that not only resisted adult expectations but actively presented adult work culture as an oppressive force against play that children are uniquely equipped to defeat. While making profit for one of the largest U.S. corporations, *Toontown* parodied the U.S. corporate world to create capitalist antagonists, posed against the non-capitalist player's world constructed through a history of commercial children's media. It is remembered as a bizarre yet fun anti-capitalist game for kids, despite its capitalist origins and its expensive subscription model.

It is for these reasons that it can be difficult to accept *Toontown*'s anti-capitalist themes as genuine. This is not an issue unique to *Toontown*, either. The films of Studio Ghibli have been celebrated for their environmentalist themes and complex depictions of capital-motivated human greed. Michelle J. Smith and Elizabeth Parsons describe these themes in the film *Princess Mononoke*, in which a town aiming to destroy a forest for iron mining comes into conflict with old nature gods. The protagonist, Ashitaka, finds himself in between this conflict, caring for both the forest and the mining town's people. "In this way," argues Smith and Parsons, "the film dignifies the workers of Iron Town, celebrates them as heroic... and invites empathy for them at the same time as presenting the ecological damage done by their employment as catastrophic."<sup>1</sup>

*Princess Mononoke* empathizes with the struggles of the working class while at the same being encouraged to commit environmental devastation in the name of developing wealth. With both the forest and the mining town largely destroyed in the film's climax, it suggests that the capitalist landscape is an inherently destructive force that limits coexistence. Hayao Miyazaki, co-founder and filmmaker for Studio Ghibli, is often recognized as an anti-capitalist figure, his international persona aligned as "communist or left-oriented"<sup>2</sup> due to both the political themes in his films and his support of environmental and labor movements.<sup>3</sup> However, Studio Ghibli is also significantly invested in the marketing industry, animating commercials for businesses in Japan and cultivating a global market of merchandise for their films. Do these capitalist exploits negate the potential for anti-capitalism in Studio Ghibli's films?

This dilemma can be answered by examining the animated commercial *Dear Alice*, produced by The Line with music by Ghibli composer Joe Hisaishi, made to advertise Chobani yogurt. The commercial depicts a woman running a farm in an idealistic Solarpunk future in which new technology powered by renewable energy intermingles with a natural environment. The farm owner enjoys a bountiful meal with her workers and family, collects oranges for donations, and enjoys a comfortable life with her daughter—filled with Chobani products, of course. Chobani's marketing stands out significantly in the commercial, both due to skillful product placement and the otherwise lack of plastic packaging on the farm. Christian P. Hanes describes Solarpunk as a futuristic utopian genre which depicts a sustainable relationship between humans and nature "by detaching futurity from the ongoing disaster that is capitalist progress, petromodernity, [and] human dominion."<sup>4</sup> When depicted by a brand like Chobani, the anti-capitalist vision is clouded in capitalist imagery. That is not to say that anti-capitalist themes

are entirely lost; comments on the commercial on YouTube express hope and yearning for this Solarpunk future. One comment describes *Dear Alice* as an “anti-advertisement” due to how disruptive Chobani’s products are to the vision: “good job to whoever allowed that to happen. I have never wanted to buy cup yogurt less.”<sup>5</sup> Though its capitalist origins may limit anti-capitalist rhetoric in *Dear Alice*, its themes can still be appreciated by audiences who are familiar with anti-capitalist thought or the Solarpunk genre. The limitations of commercialized media with anti-capitalist themes reside most in the mitigated likelihood that a broader audience will recognize these themes.

As a video game, *Toontown Online* functions differently than a commercial like *Dear Alice*. While Disney “products” are depicted through mascot characters, the game’s primary economic goal is to sell itself. *Toontown Online* is therefore less limited in its anti-capitalist vision, despite its capitalist production. While parents paid the monthly subscription to fund *Toontown*’s existence, the child player could be sheltered from its profit-incentive reality, immersed in the anti-capitalist utopia of Toontown. Adult players may have had to pay to play themselves, but without the blatant product placement and capitalist interference of the text present in *Dear Alice*, even those made aware of *Toontown Online*’s capitalist origins could appreciate and even learn from its anti-capitalist themes. However, interviews with *Toontown Online* creators, while not directly referencing the game’s anti-capitalist themes, suggest they were limited by Disney. In one retelling of the story in which the original “Suit” antagonists were rejected, Jesse Schell claims it was Disney senior executive Roy Disney Jr. himself who claimed the Suits were disrespectful to Disney executives, leading Schell’s team to turn the antagonists into robots without mentioning the preserved business theming.<sup>6</sup> *Toontown*’s

creators' willingness to make risky, unapproved creative decisions is what allowed *Toontown Online* to use anti-capitalist themes. This type of risk-taking behavior is necessary to produce anti-capitalist media in a capitalist context. While the *Dear Alice* commercial used recognizable aesthetics of an anti-capitalist genre, it does not challenge any capitalist framework. The creators may have taken creative risks in terms of the scope of its animation, but it appears little to no risk was taken in its political messaging. *Toontown Online* succeeded to present an anti-capitalist world to children through this political risk, defying the will of the capitalist entity that funded its creation.

Whether it was the intention of the developers for *Toontown* to be anti-capitalist is difficult to prove. Schell has stated the intention was to create a “work vs. play” dynamic, as it was “something both parents and kids could relate to.”<sup>7</sup> Intentionally or not, theming the “work” around U.S. business culture and presenting it as something to fight against created a distinct anti-capitalist narrative, furthered by the “play” operating under a cooperative model with largely non-capitalist world building. There are hints, too, that the anti-capitalist narrative was intentional, at least among some of *Toontown*'s creators. The allusion to the “workers of the world, unite” phrase is far too specific to be a coincidence or an accident—it is likely someone on the developer team noticed Marxist ideas in *Toontown* and decided to call attention to it. Just as those familiar with Solarpunk could recognize the anti-capitalist aesthetic in *Dear Alice*, “Toons of the world, unite!” is hidden in *Toontown* for those in the know.

The politicization of children's media may be questionable to some. However, it is in the work vs. play narrative that *Toontown* demonstrates how children's play is already politicized in the United States. Access to play, types of play, and moderation of play are all influenced by the

current political and economic atmosphere. As Schell alluded to, both parents and children can relate to the work vs. play dilemma because both must make difficult decisions on how to navigate children's play in an adult, work-dominated culture. Commercial toys and media have become the dominant force of children's play, informing the very creation of *Toontown Online* and its play aesthetics. To succeed commercially, one is often expected to align with the dominant political culture—or, as seen with *Toontown*, not upset the corporate world which funds one's success. While the wants of children are important to consider in acquiring commercial success, the final decision to purchase most often is in the hands of the parent, the adult figure. Children's play has become structured around the adult perspective; parents, teachers, businesspeople, and more have the power to decide how, where, and when children play, often under direct adult supervision. *Toontown Online* is not exempt from this reality, yet its online capacity expands children's play into the unstructured. Minus the chat filters, children can play *Toontown* and interact with other Toons however they want. As noted in chapter 1, it is this online freedom combined with collaborative gameplay that provides children with an avenue to explore play culture removed from the modern capitalist lens, despite remaining grounded within it. *Toontown Online* presents a world in which children not only own their play but can also wield it to defend their sovereignty.

However, anti-capitalist rhetoric is still most effective when taken out of a capitalist framework. YouTube video essayist “Waffle To The Left” demonstrated this by providing a “Decommodified Edition” of *Dear Alice*. At a first glance, the edit appears to simply remove any trace of Chobani marketing. The plastic packaging remains, but without the Chobani logo, it is now more shadowed by the bountiful fresh food and reusable resources. Another subtle yet

important change was made, though; instead of the oranges being placed in a “donation” box, the box is relabeled to be for “commons.” This acts as a reclamation of the Solarpunk genre’s anti-capitalist utopian themes, establishing the existence of shared communal resources and the absence of impoverished conditions. With no monetization present on the video as well, Waffle To The Left’s preserves and amplifies *Dear Alice*’s original vision for its anti-capitalist imagery to be recognized by a broader audience.

While the decommodified *Dear Alice* comes from the commercial’s success, *Toontown Rewritten* and other fan remakes come from *Toontown Online*’s eventual failure. Although it was a successful money maker for Disney for a decade, its popularity began to diminish, and the subscription-based MMO model became overshadowed by the rise of in-app purchases and advertisement revenue in mobile games. It is this failure that allows *Toontown Rewritten* to succeed on a larger scale than the edited *Dear Alice*. The original commercial still stands, having over double the views on YouTube than the edited version. That does not mean Waffle To The Left was unsuccessful, but the original commercialized product remains dominant. With *Toontown Online*’s servers offline, the decommercialized and non-capitalist *Toontown* fan servers have replaced it entirely. It is still adults that manage the most popular *Toontown* servers, but it is no longer under capitalist adult ownership—or ownership at all. The *Toontown* source code is open access, allowing anyone, online or offline, child or adult, to create a *Toontown* server. The world of *Toontown* belongs to the Toons because it belongs to everyone. The anti-capitalist narrative *Toontown*’s original creators cultivated can now be accessed without the conflicting capitalist reality. This is where *Toontown*’s ironic history comes to a punchline, as it is Disney’s continued copyright to *Toontown Online* that prevents any attempt to capitalize on it.

While the potential for Disney to reclaim *Toontown* still weighs heavily on the Toon community, Disney has unintentionally fostered a non-capitalist reality that keeps *Toontown* anti-capitalist.

It is important to acknowledge my personal experience with *Toontown Online* and the Toon community. I began playing *Toontown* in 2007, having watched my sister play the game and making my own Toon the moment I had enough cognitive skill to use a computer. I was enraptured by the world of Toontown from a young age, and it remained a consistent source of play throughout my childhood. I was 10 years old when *Toontown Online* closed. I still remember logging on for the last time, rejoicing when word spread of *Rewritten*. I read every daily Alpha update, cast my vote for Flippy in the Presidential Elections, and tuned in live for the Election event and subsequent Cog invasion. The first Toon I made on *Rewritten* was a blue cat named Saturn. That cat would go on to roleplay wizard classes, host game shows, lie about her age to fellow Toons, and continue to read every blog post and story update *Rewritten* provided.

By 2016, Saturn was erased and replaced with Green, a bright green cat who remains the Toon I use today (see fig. 8). This was when my engagement with the Tooniverse expanded to fandom spaces, watching *Toontown* YouTube videos and following Toon-related blogs on Tumblr. A year later, I would start using “Green” as my own first name (the Toon would be renamed to “String” as to not be using my real name online). It was through the world of Toontown that I discovered my own identity and grew into the person I am today.

I share this to demonstrate how Toontown’s message of joyful resistance never remained confined to the game itself. I, along with many other children, were raised on the cooperative and hopeful world Toontown showed. Toontown Online was not an educational game, yet it cannot be said the Toon community learned nothing from it. With its free-roam and (mostly) free-chat

structure, Toons found spaces to communicate, play, and collaborate, just as the game encouraged them to do. When the game censored that play, they found ways around it. When the game shut down, the children who had grown up with the game took it for themselves and made it accessible to everyone.



Figure 8: Digital Illustration of my Toon, 2017

I drew this in October 2017 as a reference sheet for my Toon original character in *Toontown Rewritten*. I was already using “Green” as my own name by then, and I changed the Toon’s name to “String” a month later. © Green Doyle 2017.

*Toontown Online* did not turn me into an anti-capitalist. It is doubtful that it turned anyone anti-capitalist on its own, nor does it seem to be the game’s goal. However, acknowledgement and celebration of the game’s anti-capitalist themes remains prevalent throughout the Toon community. The Tooniverse today, comprised of both fans of the original *Toontown Online* and new fans drawn in by servers like *Rewritten* and *Corporate Clash*, are drawn together by the resistance to corporate entities. While *Toontown* did not turn me into an

anti-capitalist, its anti-capitalist theming paired with its dedication to fun gameplay is what has kept me coming back to this childhood-favorite game. *Toontown* will likely not make a child anti-capitalist, but its themes of collaboration, community, agency, and the prioritization of joy and play can stick to a child long into adulthood.

The ability to produce anti-capitalist themes in children's media has expanded in the last 20 years since *Toontown Online* was created, including multiple works by Disney. *Star vs. the Forces of Evil* (2015), a show initially about a magical princess fighting monsters, follows the main character relearning her country's colonial past and choosing to destroy the magic that gave her people power.<sup>8</sup> *The Owl House* (2020) takes a different approach on magic, instead using the concept of "wild magic" to dismantle systems of oppression, celebrate diversity and agency, and reconnect to nature.<sup>9</sup> *Frozen 2* (2019), while still upholding authoritarian rule, explores an anti-colonial narrative centered on indigenous perspectives in collaboration with Sámi parliaments.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Disney has made efforts to depict non-capitalist narratives through diverse cultural representation in movies like *Moana* (2016) and *Encanto* (2021), both films also avoiding Disney's traditional heteronormative romance-focused narratives.<sup>11</sup> Children's gaming spaces have been more limited in anti-capitalist theming, dominated by capitalist-leaning Nintendo franchises like *Pokémon* and product placements for other children's media like *Paw Patrol World*. Anti-capitalist narratives are still able to sneak in through other video game adaptations such as *Snufkin: Melody of Moominvalley*. Players control the character Snufkin from the *Moomin* series as he restores Moominvalley to its anarchist origins, stopping a parkkeeper and his army of police officers from turning the valley into a rule-filled private park. These films, shows, and games represent an expanding world of contemporary anti-capitalist children's media

in a time of commercial domination of children's culture. While none of this media was likely inspired by *Toontown Online*, they continue *Toontown's* ideal of defying the capitalist market to uplift the non-capitalist aspects of children's play and entertainment.

As long as children in the United States grow up in a capitalist system, it will remain impossible to entirely separate or oppose children's play to capitalism. U.S. children's play culture is shaped by commercial media, and children frequently spend their playtime exploring adult capitalist futures. However, *Toontown* recognized an inherent anti-capitalist prospect in the culture of children's play. Children throughout U.S. history have cultivated unstructured play spaces, formed unique play groups, and defied the will of adult authority. *Toontown Online*, coming out of an early emergence of online children's play, supported child defiance through its anti-capitalist narrative and provided new spaces for independent play all while encouraging collaborative community-building. Now, *Toontown Rewritten* and other fan servers have made the Tooniverse accessible to many more players, children and adults alike finding community and an expanded freedom of expression in the post-Disney world of Toontown. While *Toontown's* parodic corporate antagonists and non-capitalist Toon utopia may not be perfectly achievable in the real world, it leaves instructions for achievable anti-capitalist action: Engage in community, prioritize joy, promote agency in expression, and never forget to play. The question is, as asked by early *Toontown Online* advertisements: "Are you Toon enough?"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Parsons and Michelle J. Smith, "Animating Child Activism: Environmentalism and Class Politics in Ghibli's *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and Fox's *Fern Gully* (1992)," *Continuum* 26, no. 1 (February 2012): 29.

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<sup>2</sup> Manuel Hernández-Pérez, “Animation, Branding and Authorship in the Construction of the ‘Anti-Disney’ Ethos: Hayao Miyazaki’s Works and Persona through Disney Film Criticism,” *Animation: an Interdisciplinary Journal* 11 (2016): 304.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 304-305.

<sup>4</sup> Christian P. Haines, "Response 3: "Unshakeable Want": Solarpunk, Petromodernity, and the Death Drive" *Utopian Studies* 35, no. 2 (2024): 511.

<sup>5</sup> Purplelord8531, 2024, comment on “Dear Alice,” posted Jul. 13, 2021, THE LINE, 1 min. 19 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-Ng5ZvrDm4>.

<sup>6</sup> “Behind the Tooniverse: 20 YEARS of Toontown | ToonFest Birthday Bash 2023 (LIVE),” posted May 25, 2023, Toontown Rewritten, 1 hr. 14 min., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RntjSQJXnHQ>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 21:45.

<sup>8</sup> Delicia Aguado-Peláez and Patricia Martínez-García, “Another Children’s Animation is Possible: An Analysis of the TV Series Steven Universe, She-Ra and Star vs Forces of Evil,” *Cuestiones de género: de la igualdad y la diferencia* 16 (2021): 402-404.

<sup>9</sup> Christina Fawcett, “‘Us Weirdos Have to Stick Together’: The Owl House, Family, Diversity, and the Grotesque,” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 14, no. 1 (2022): 130-135.

<sup>10</sup> Tuija Huuki and Kata Kyrölä, “Show yourself: Indigenous Ethics, Sámi Cosmologies and Decolonial Queer Pedagogies of Frozen 2,” *Gender & Education* 35, no. 2 (2023): 173.

<sup>11</sup> Mercedes Álvarez San Román and Asier Gil Vázquez, “Abuela Alma: Exploring Aging Femininity in Disney’s Encanto (2021),” *Feminist Media Histories* 10, no. 4 (2024): 141-148.

<sup>12</sup> “Toontown: 2003 Commercial USA - Long Version,” posted Sept. 20, 2013, by Slate and Friends, YouTube, 1 min. 56 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNXWWSVhyQo>.

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