

How was animation utilized to support the American war effort during World War II?

NAME

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Plan of Investigation

From 1941 to 1945, the United States was involved in the fighting of World War II alongside the Allied Forces to combat the Axis Powers. At the same time, animation was one of the newest forms of media to come into widespread popularity. How, then, was animation utilized to support the American war effort? This investigation will both compare and contrast animation's use in the sectors and military to advocate preparedness and motivation using publically released animated shorts from Disney, Warner Bros. and MGM and the *Private Snafu* series of videos respectively. Additionally, the manner in animation was used to defame the enemy will be examined, also using the shorts released to the public.

Summary of Evidence

- **Preparedness and Motivation Military**
 - *Private Snafu* was a series of animated military training videos, advocating the importance of topics such as equipment maintenance. (*Fighting Tools* Clampett)
 - Other *Private Snafu* shorts dealt with subjects like dangers of revealing military information. (*Spies* Jones)
 - “a [Snafu] training film had been shown to two Air Corps rookies... after viewing it, they were immediately sent up in a B-17 bomber and came away with three [confirmed downed aircraft]... and three [unconfirmed downed aircraft]” (Blanc & Bashe 194)
 - “We’re working like hell in the old hometown. They’re working in the old hometown.”(*The Home Front* Tashlin)
 - “All the roads are pretty rough... and all the services are tough... so weather you fight as soldier or gob... get in there and pitch and finish the job.” (*The Infantry Blues* Jones)
- **Preparedness and Motivation Public**
 - “[*Wacky Blackouts*] depicted the effects of blackouts and other wartime regulations on farm animals. Obviously, they symbolized the general populations.” (Blanc & Bashe 195)
 - “Audiences identified with the [*Looney Tunes*] characters... which made them excellent conduits for Warner’s preparedness message.” (Birdwell 25)
 - Bugs Bunny was used to promote the sale of government war bonds. (*Any Bonds Today?* Clampett)
 - “I hate war, but once begun, well, I just didn’t choose to run” (*The Ducktators* McCabe)

- “If you’d like to make [the defeat of Hitler, Musselini and Hirohito] true, this is all you have to do. For victory buy United States savings bonds and stamps.” (*The Ducktators McCabe*)
- **Defamation**
 - Japanese characters feature overly large teeth and squinted eyes. (*Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips Freleng*)
 - “Oh regrettable-a insolent. Oh not-a knowing honorable-a general. Oh excuse-a prease-a.” (*Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips Freleng*)
 - “Insults that would have been considered defamatory had there not been a war going on... Subtlety was not our intent. Comedy was” (Blanc & Bashe 196)
 - “Welcome workers of Nazi-land. What a glorious privilege is yours to be a Nazi. To work 48 hours a day for the Fuhrer.” (*Der Fuhrer’s Face Kinney*)
 - “[A young nazi] grows up. In him is planted no seed of hope, laughter, tolerance or mercy...the grim years of regimentation have done their work; now he's a good Nazi. He sees nothing but what the party wants him to see, he says nothing but what the party wants him to say, and he does no more than the party wants him to do. And so, he marches on with his millions of comrades, trampling on the rights of others”. (*Education for Death Geronimi*)
 - “The unfit are taken away by the state... and are never heard of again.” (*Education for Death Geronimi*)
 - “That master rabble rouser [Hitler] destroys reason by preying upon the weakness of emotion with fear, sympathy, pride and hate” (*Reason and Emotion Roberts*)
 - “But Adolf, that would break our treaty... you wouldn’t go back on you word.” “Are you kiddin’?” (*Blitz Wolf Avery*)

Evaluation of Sources

Education for Death is an animated short film based on the non-fiction book of the same name by American author and educator Gregor Zeimer. Zeimer lived and worked in Germany as the headmaster of the “American School in Berlin” from 1928 to 1939 when he was forced to flee Germany. Zeimer also wrote the book *Two Thousand and Ten Days of Hitler*, and an excerpt from one of his books was presented as an affidavit during the Nuremberg Trials, though it was deemed propaganda by some. The book was adapted for animation by Walt Disney Productions who were heavily involved in the creation of propaganda during the war. The short film is valuable as it shows an American perspective on the Party’s indoctrination of children to their ideals as well as some elements of German life under the Nazi Party. However, it only shows

indoctrination practices during early childhood. This, along with the fact that the reader is not provided an unbiased point-of-view to contrast with the biased one, is an limitation.

That's Not All Folks is the autobiography of Mel Blanc, a prominent voice actor from 1937 to 1990 made famous by his voicing of popular characters such as Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Porky Pig. Blanc provided voices for many animated propaganda shorts during World War II. The book is co-written by Philip Bashe, a former magazine editor and author of many other books. *That's Not All Folks* is valuable as it provides context for animation's role in the war, this time from the perspective of someone involved with the creation of the propaganda. However, there are limitations such as the fact that the book is reliant mainly on Blanc's recollection and personal interpretation of events and as such has bias. Also, Blanc, while involved with its creation, cannot provide insight into the writing and conception of the propaganda.

Analysis

From 1941 to 1945, the United States was involved in the fighting of World War II alongside the Allied Forces to combat the Axis Powers. At the same time, animation was one of the newest forms of media to come into widespread popularity, and as such it was used in the production of propaganda during World War II.

When in any war, it is vital for effort and resources be spent on the military, and during WWII, animation was no exception. A series of animated training videos titled *Private Snafu* were produced by Warner Bros. studios which showed the importance of various military protocols via the comedic bumbles of the titular character. Topics ranging from equipment maintenance to the dangers of revealing military secrets (*Fighting Tools* Clampett) (*Spies* Jones). The shorts were effective; reportedly, "a [*Snafu*] training film had been shown to two Air Corps rookies... after viewing it, they were immediately sent up in a B-17 bomber and came away with three [confirmed downed aircraft]... and three [unconfirmed downed aircraft]" (Blanc & Bashe 194). In addition to serving as training videos, the *Private Snafu* shorts sought to raise morale by addressing common complaints of an infantryman, such as belief that another unit had an easier job or that the people back on the home front were not doing their part in the war (*The Infantry Blues* Jones; *The Home Front* Tashlin).

The military's *Private Snafu* shorts were directed at an audience that was already involved in the war and as such focused on keeping up morale and maintaining upkeep. The American public however, required motivation to stay involved in the war, and as such the animated propaganda had to focus on different issues. One of the most prevalent messages in animated propaganda was a push for preparedness via war bonds (*The Ducktators* McCabe). At one point, popular Warner Bros. character, Bugs Bunny was used as a spokesman for bonds (*Any Bonds Today?* Clampett). "Audiences identified with the [*Looney Tunes*] characters... which made them excellent conduits for Warner's preparedness message" (Birdwell 25). This message was not limited to bonds however. "[*Wacky Blackouts*] depicted the effects of blackouts and other wartime regulations on farm animals. Obviously, they symbolized the general populations"

(Blanc & Bashe 195). In addition to advocating preparedness, animation was used to address moral issues regarding the war. As said by the Dove of Peace in one short, “I hate war, but once begun, well, I just didn’t choose to run” (*The Ducktators McCabe*).

At the time, animation was a medium largely used for comedy, so the obvious use of this trait during WWII was to mock the enemy. Many animated shorts, particularly ones produced by Warner Bros, featured overblown stereotypes, such as giving Japanese characters exaggeratedly squinted eyes, large teeth and verbal and depicting Germans as willing to break any promise of peace (*Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips Freleng; Blitz Wolf Avery*). Working conditions in Germany were shown to be ridiculously strict, saying that it was every Nazi’s “privilege” to “work 48 hours a day for the Fuhrer” (*Der Fuhrer’s Face Kinney*). In reference to these stereotypes and generalizations, voice actor Mel Blanc said “Subtlety was not our intent. Comedy was.” Indeed, the main purpose of these shorts was to point out how ridiculous the enemy and by extension their beliefs and goals, were. Not all of the defamations of the enemy were comedic, however. *Education for Death* was a Disney short that provided a serious look at the way that a German boy was raised to believe in the values of and eventually indoctrinated into the Nazi Party (*Education for Death Geronimi*). Additionally, Hitler’s speeches and motivation tactics were shown as manipulative (*Reason and Emotion Roberts*). This provided American viewers with a sense of how brainwashed members of the Nazi Party were, which devalued the ideals of the Nazis’ even more, as well as making the Nazi leaders seem all the more detestable.

Conclusion

During World War II, animation was used to support the American war effort. The military utilized the *Private Snafu* cartoons to prepare their troops and prevent morale from dropping. The public was exposed to a variety of animated short films and commercials, prompting them to do their part for the war by buying war bonds and conforming to the various wartime regulations as well as remaining certain that the war was necessary. Part of the way that animation kept the public certain that the war was just was by defaming and demonizing the enemy. In these ways, animation was used to support the American war effort.

Works Cited

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