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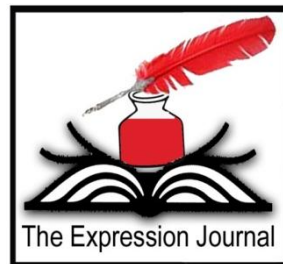
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Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

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US PROPAGANDA THROUGH DISNEY DURING WORLD WAR II

SHRI RAJARSHI MUKHERJEE

Professor

Shyampur Siddheswari Mahavidyalaya, affiliated to the University of Calcutta

SHATABDI ROY

Student

Bhawanipur Education Society College, affiliated to the University of Calcutta

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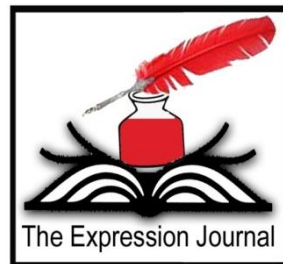
Abstract

During times of political turmoil, the views of the people become crucial in shaping the actions of the government. One way that governments can influence the views of their citizens is through propaganda, where various methods are used to promote a particular ideology. This paper explores how the United States government used propaganda during World War II to portray the Axis Powers to its citizens and to convince them to support the war effort. The entertainment industry played a significant role in this propaganda effort, serving as a powerful mechanism to manipulate public opinion and reorient ideological beliefs. Specifically, Walt Disney Studios was a key player in this effort, using its animated films to promote the government's message and shape public perception. Through an analysis of Disney's wartime productions, this paper examines how the studio's content was used to promote patriotism, support for the military, and demonization of the enemy. It explores the themes and motifs present in Disney's wartime films, including the depiction of enemy forces as evil and inhuman, and the portrayal of American soldiers as heroic and virtuous. Additionally, this paper considers the implications of using entertainment as a vehicle for propaganda, including the potential for audience manipulation and the ethical implications of using art to promote political ideology. Thus, this paper sheds light on the role that propaganda played in shaping public opinion during World War II and highlights the power of the entertainment industry in influencing societal beliefs and values. It provides insights into the complex relationship between media, politics, and propaganda, and offers important considerations for the ethical use of art in promoting political ideology.

Keywords

Propaganda, Government, Donald Duck, War, Ideology, Army, Money.

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Introduction: The Propaganda Theory

The first idea of propaganda evolved primarily in the USSR and Germany. The Propaganda Theory was a brainchild of Goebbels, the propaganda minister of Hitler, based on false claims that it was to keep the people loyal to the existing political and social system: "In politics this aim is always the conquest of the masses" (Goebbels 91). In 1988 Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, in their book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, suggested the modern propagandist approach through the Propaganda Model in an apparently democratic setup. They brought forth five filters: 'size, ownership and profit orientation', 'the advertising licence to do business', 'sourcing' information, flak, and a dominant ideology of the superior: 'us versus them'.

The news was determined depending upon the ownership of the newspaper. A privately owned newspaper would be more inclined towards profit making as they use it as capital for their business to generate further profit. This idea of 'conglomerate' was given by them. In this case the presentation of news loses its sincerity but becomes solely a weapon for profit. Often newspapers depend on advertisements for sustenance and do not intend to hurt the interest of the advertisers. The sources of information for the newspapers depend on their interests. Some act like state machineries and therefore use governmental reports thus refuting the newspaper's role as the fourth pillar of democracy. Flak generally focuses on negative response about something. An example of dominant ideology may be anti-Communism which is mainly capitalist in nature and instils fear in the minds of the people to keep them subservient to the existing system.

According to Chomsky and Herman, the newspapers use sports, crossword puzzles, funnies and similar things to divert people from what is really important. As Chomsky explains: This is an oversimplification, but for the eighty per cent [of the population] or whatever they are, the main thing is to divert them... Just get them away. Get them away from things that matter. And for that it's important to reduce their capacity to think.

Similarly, several movies and television shows in no way spreads political awareness among the people. While Matthew Alford notes that screen entertainment that do, are in some cases even explicitly supported by the CIA, Pentagon and White House. Often we also come across movies that only seem to go against the government but actually support it. For example, the 2005 film *Munich* was criticized by various Israeli groups for being opposed to their policy. But, a closer reading of the 'anti-war scene', a two-and-a-half minute conversation between an Israeli and an Arab, points out that the Palestinian struggle to be merely vain and immoral. The film also juxtaposes the emotional struggle faced by the civilised Israelis as opposed to the callousness of the Arabs. Therefore, the film is in reality, as Alford puts it, "an apologia for the state of Israel, the 'worthy' victim, and, by extension, its close ally, the United States." There are also several news reports that are deliberately 'buried' or films and television shows that are suppressed due to political reasons. Chomsky himself pointed to certain 'paired examples' in cinema. Although both films are now recognised classics, *On the Waterfront* (1954) was extensively praised as it was anti-union while *Salt of the Earth* (1954) was even subjected to attacks by the FBI for being pro-union. The USA and its media, therefore, portray countries in two ways, either they are worthy (USA and its allies) or unworthy (everyone else, or as Mark Curtis calls them the 'unpeople'). There are also some films that are loosely based on true stories about American domination highlighting the 'unworthy' victims, but have managed to survive the filter.

Understanding Propaganda

The word 'propaganda' is taken from Latin *propagare*, which was used to describe the process of helping plant reproduction through the use of its cuttings. In the 17th Century the term referred to the propagation of Christianity. The term began gaining a political connotation only during the French Revolution of 1889. By mid 19th Century, the term bore the connotation it carries today. The information portrayed through propaganda is generally true but it often exaggerates or hides certain facts which are not desirable to the power-holders.

Propaganda may be divided into white, grey and black, depending on its source. White propaganda has an identifiable source, Grey propaganda conceals its originator while Black propaganda is falsely attributed to a source that is not the true originator. Black propaganda may also spread false information among the people.

Aldous Huxley divides propaganda into 'rational' and 'nonrational'. While rational propaganda is dictated by and appeals to the intellect, nonrational propaganda appeals to passion. He makes a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' propaganda which leads to the confusion regarding the concepts of 'good' and 'bad'. Therefore, Neil Postman looks at propaganda, not as the "goodness or badness of causes but exclusively to a use of language designed to evoke a particular kind of response...to distinguish between language that persuades and language that doesn't" (Postman 130).

"All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others."- George Orwell

In George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) we come across a rebellion of farm animals overthrow their master, Mr. Jones. As Mr. Jones is driven off, the animals set up their new government and inscribe the seven basic tenets of Animalism. The pigs, considered to be the cleverest of all animals, change and adjust the tenets to fit their greed and it is not long when they not only begin acting like humans but are also seen negotiating with them. The novel ends with the other animals looking "from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which" (Orwell 95). This allegory

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criticizes both capitalists and communists alike, thus showcasing the plight of the common people.

Previously, propaganda had a relatively simpler model where the leader spoke and the people reacted. But it has been pointed out in recent years that like any other communication, propaganda runs in two directions. As the people react, the speaker observes and understands thus making the process a circular one.

Propaganda and Disney

Walt Disney, the winner of 32 Academy Awards, started his first animation studio 'Laugh-o-Gram' in 1920 Kansas City. He made animated films based on fairytales but less than a year later he filed for bankruptcy. The Walt Disney Company we know and love today started in 1923 in Los Angeles. After the Pearl Harbour incident, the people of USA started coming together. Automobile industries turned to the production of war machinery. In the history of the world, the Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, California was the only Hollywood film studio under military occupation in December 7, 1941. On December 8th, Disney entered into a contract of twenty war-related animated short films for the United States Government.

In the 1942 Disney film *The Ducktators* we come across a couple waiting for their duckling to hatch from an unusually black egg. As the father duck hands out cigars to the other farm animals, the baby duck cracks open from the shell. It comes out with a rather angry expression wearing a Nazi band on its arm and having Hitler-like hair and moustache. He salutes and yells, "Sieg Heil". As he grew up, he began speaking to the other animals like a leader and they attentively listened wearing Nazi bands. Disney then, in good humour, pops a message on the screen: "We wish to apologize to the NICE DUCKS and GEESE who may be in the audience." The dictator duck then creates an army out of all the animals- old and new. They stand in a line with made-up weapons and salute the Hitler duck. Even nonliving things fear Hitler so much that even they yell salutes in his name. The screen then shifts to a muscular duck, symbolising Mussolini, who has tied up a chick with a chain. As he gives his nonsense speech the chick is forced to clap and praise. The duo- Hitler and Mussolini are shown signing a peace treaty and breaking it the next moment. Then from another part of the globe a Japanese duck comes to join them- Hirohito, and the three march in a devastated land. Seeing the calamity that has spread in the farm the dove mourns and decides that peace must prevail. As he defeats the 'ducktators', we see a man coming out of an American bonds poster to shoot. It is noteworthy that both the dictators and commoners are farm animals but the American soldier is a man. The film ends with the message- "If you'd like to make this true,/ This is all you have to do"- as the US savings bonds poster pops up again.

In the short films *Donald Gets Drafted*, *Fall Out Fall In* and *The Old Army Game* the life of a soldier is shown. As Donald walks down the street after getting his army letter he sees posters with excessive glorification of war and army life and is enchanted as he learns that he will be popular with women too. When he begins serving he realises to his dismay the struggle of being a soldier. The soldiers march day and night in heat and cold and rain through mountains and deserts for uncountable miles. So much that even in his sleep he does not find peace. In *The Old Army Game* Donald thinks he lost his legs and even the strict senior soldier cries for his pain. But on realising that his legs are there the officer gets angry.

The 1943 film *Der Fuehrer's Face* was originally titled 'Donald in Nutzi Land' but Disney changed it after Spike Jones wrote the revolutionary song for the movie. As the film starts we see the group of five- Hitler, Mussolini, Hirohito, Goebbels and Goring- marching, beating drums and singing. In this land even trees have the Nazi band on. Donald, forced to wake up early,

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salutes the framed pictures of the trio to begin his day. He secretly drinks prohibited coffee from a safe and eats a slice of wooden bread. He has to read the Bible of the 'Nutz land'- *Mein Kampf*, because "Not to love Der Fuehrer is a great disgrace." As a responsible citizen of the land Donald is made to work forty eight hours a day. The song, playing throughout the film, sings at this point "When Der Fuehrer says we never will be slaves/ We heil heil, but still we work like slaves". As the all America watches their beloved duck getting tortured with heaping shells at the factory, he wakes up from this horrid dream. As he realises that he is home, in his beloved homeland America. He kisses and embraces the small Statue of Liberty and exclaims, "Am I glad to be a citizen of the United States of America!"

The 1941 short films *The Thrifty Pig* and *Seven Wise Dwarfs*, by the National Film Board of Canada, encourage the viewers to invest their money to buy War Savings Certificates to "KEEP YOUR MONEY FIGHTING."

Another notable contribution to the cinema during the World War II is the film *Education for Death*, where we see how the life of a German boy, Hans, is controlled from his birth. His parents are encouraged to have more children as Germany needs soldiers. In kindergarten the boy learns of the famous fairytale, *The Sleeping Beauty*, but the witch was an allegory of democracy, the beauty was Germany and the knight in shining armour was Hitler. but the Germany here, seems inebriated. In the film we see the torturous rules in place-compulsory reading of the *Mein Kampf*, naming of children only through state-approved names, taking away of sick children by the state never to be seen again, teaching children to be brutal from a tender age. As the boys grow up, smiles fade from their faces and they march on, ready to fight for the Fuehrer till they are lying in their graves. Humour and totalitarianism are seen as polar opposites. Therefore Nazi Germany was seen as a place where 'laughter could prove deadly' (Merziger 182).

Conclusion

Disney has also made movies like *Food Will Win the War*, *Out of the Frying Pan into the Firing Lane* to inform the people about the agriculture in America and how more production of food is required in the time of war. *Victory Through Air Power*, an adaption of the 1942 book of the same name by Alexander P. de Seversky, shows how atomic energy, aerial bombing can be helpful to America. Disney, being famous for its propaganda, has been analysed by various critics. In the 1971 book *How to Read Donald Duck*, originally titled *Para Leer al Pato Donald*, the Chilean critics Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart have critiqued Disney as capitalist propaganda for American corporate and cultural imperialism from the Marxist point of view. They note how the Disney characters have uncles and cousins but no sons or fathers. The only hierarchy present depends on the wealth or poverty of the characters. Harold D. Lasswell observes, "If we state the strategy of propaganda in cultural terms, we may say that it involves the presentation of an object in a culture in such a manner that certain cultural attitudes will be organized toward it. The problem of the propagandist is to intensify the attitudes favourable to his purpose, to reverse the attitudes hostile to it, and to attract them in different, or, at the worst, to prevent them from assuming a hostile bent" (629).

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