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Saludos Amigos. Disney Propaganda for Latin America

ABSTRACT: During World War II, Disney films on Nazism, health, and United States–Latin American friendship flickered across screens throughout Latin America. They were the centerpiece of an unprecedented propaganda program by the United States, and they were shown to Latin Americans both in theaters and through mobile projectors by the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA). While the OIAA and the Disney films have received considerable scholarly attention, the complex collaboration between the government organization, communication scientists, the animation film studio, and local actors in creating, distributing, and measuring propaganda has not. With the goal of creating favorable attitudes toward the United States in the minds of individual Latin Americans, the OIAA and Disney developed a novel propaganda approach based on entertainment and education. They coupled it with a comprehensive distribution system based on local projectionists who showed the films to millions of Latin Americans and measured their reactions. Local governments allowed and supported these free screenings to bolster their own popularity. Latin American voices to criticize the US instrumentalization of Disney were few, and the overall reception of the films was very positive. On the basis of an inadequate evaluation that equated popularity and reach with effect, the Disney films were considered successful propaganda by the OIAA, paving the way for a global application of the new propaganda approach. Disney propaganda for Latin America was driven by the involved actor's unbounded faith in film's suitability for propaganda and must thus be understood as a hype around the untapped potential of a relatively new medium.

KEYWORDS: Office of Inter-American Affairs, Disney, Propaganda, Film

In mid-1944, moviegoers in Argentina could see a cartoon of domestic production starring Donald Duck and a heavily caricatured Cordell Hull, the US Secretary of State, discussing measures to be taken against their country.[1] Despite intense US pressure, Argentina refused to join the Allied war effort against the Axis powers and remained neutral. In response, the United States imposed economic sanctions on Argentina, such as a boycott of raw films, which severely affected the Argentine film industry.[2] At the same time, the United States covertly helped build up the rival Mexican film industry and flooded Latin America with US movies through the US wartime organization

1. Telegram from the US Embassy in Argentina to the Secretary of State, 20.09.1944; Propaganda; Box 222, Argentina; 1. General Records (GR); Record Group (RG) 229; National Archives College Park (NACP).

2. See: Tamara L. Falicov, "Hollywood's Rogue Neighbor: The Argentine Film Industry during the Good Neighbor Policy, 1939–1945," *The Americas* 63, no. 2 (October 2006): 245–60.

for Latin American relations, the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA).[3] These movies included many Disney films, which were both shown in theaters and on mobile projectors throughout the region, including Argentina. Most of the Disney films were specifically aimed at Latin Americans, as the OIAA had hired the popular animation studio to "produce powerful propaganda films (. . .) to strengthen the morale of the Hemisphere."[4] The close ties between Donald Duck and US foreign policy, as denounced in the cartoon by the Argentine studio Sonofilm, were therefore appropriate and not merely symbolic or anti–US American.

The vilification of Donald Duck as an agent of US imperialism was an unintended response to the United States' largest foreign propaganda program to that date. The latter covered all of Latin America and involved the major mass media of the time, such as newspapers, radio, and film. In "the age of the large cinema screen," film was at the center of the OIAA's propaganda program.[5] It was considered an especially effective medium and, thanks to Hollywood's dominance, a particularly US American one. Film screenings throughout Latin America were both organized and monitored by the OIAA and US consulates, but could not have taken place without the crucial support of local actors. Detailed attendance records of the screenings indicate that Disney cartoons were the most widely viewed, and US officials pointed out Disney's popularity with local audiences.[6] US Vice Consul Henry Hoyt in Manzanillo, Mexico, reported that "the Disney cartoon of Donald Duck in 'The Life of a Nazi' was repeated three times due to local demand," and he stressed that "Disney has been made almost a household word locally."[7] In general, and despite the Argentinian cartoon mentioned above, Disney films with new popular characters such as José Carioca or Panchito Pistolas have been very well received by Latin Americans, and Disney's collaboration with the US government has helped to expand the brand in Latin America.

3. On the Mexican film industry during World War II, see Francisco Peredo Castro, *Cine y Propaganda para Latinoamérica. México y Estados Unidos en la encrucijada de los años cuarenta*, Segunda Edición (Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2012). On the OIAA, see especially Ursula Prutsch, *Creating Good Neighbors? Die Kultur- und Wirtschaftspolitik der USA in Lateinamerika, 1940–1946*, Transatlantische Historische Studien, Volume 33 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008).

4. Project Authorization: Walt Disney Productions Film Unit, December 18, 1941; Walt Disney Production Film Unit; Box 216 Disney Activities; 1. General Records; RG 229; NACP. On the wider World War II collaboration between the US government and Hollywood, see Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal (Culture and the Moving Image)* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

5. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1994), 193.

6. 16mm Films—Latin American Program—Summary by Title, Period June Report 1945; Latin American Dist.; Box 218; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

7. Motion Picture Questionnaire prepared by Henry A. Hoyt, August 12, 1943; Reports & Survey; Box 230, Colombia and Mexico; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

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While expanding the Disney brand was a welcome side effect, the OIAA's collaboration with the popular animation studio was primarily aimed at influencing Latin Americans. Disney films on topics as diverse as Nazism, health, and United States–Latin American friendship were all designed for "strengthening the US Credo [a set of positive views on the United States] and weakening the Axis Credo in the minds of individual Latin Americans," as Yale psychologist Leonard Doob explained in his blueprint of the OIAA's strategy.[8] Even before the United States entered the war in December 1941, US officials had feared Nazi infiltration and propaganda in Latin America. In the fall of 1940, Rockefeller Foundation–funded scholars of propaganda proposed US action against such threats. As a result, the newly formed OIAA, chaired by Nelson Rockefeller, relied on these social scientists, such as Leonard Doob, to develop strategies for countering Nazi propaganda and winning over Latin Americans. Such strategies had to be congruent with, or at least not in complete contradiction with, the Good Neighbor Policy, which sought closer and better relations with Latin America but also demanded no US intervention and no US interference.[9] Non-interference proved to be a flexible term though, as OIAA initiatives included the blacklisting of Axis companies, building infrastructure, and, most importantly, propaganda.

The 30 films produced by Disney under contract to the OIAA were the epitome of US efforts to win over Latin Americans during World War II and are often cited as early examples of US public diplomacy. Although the term was only coined at the height of the Cold War in the 1960s, the existing scholarly work on the OIAA has rightly pointed to the organization's role as precursor to this central US Cold War scheme.[10] At the same time, scholarship often shies away from explicitly categorizing the Disney and other OIAA films as propaganda. This may have to do with the pejorative use of the term today, its close association

8. Philosophy and organization of the CIAA [OIAA] by Leonard Doob, May 1, 1942; F. Content, directives long range, 1941–42; Box 1459; 126. Content Planning Division; RG 229; NACP.

9. For an analysis of the complex, multi-level negotiation processes around sovereignty and partnership that arose in the context of the wartime application of the Good Neighbor Policy, see Rebecca Herman, *Cooperating with the Colossus. A Social and Political History of US Military Bases in World War II Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022). For a discussion of the Good Neighbor Policy and the literature thereon, see Max Paul Friedman, "The Good Neighbor Policy," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, January 2018). https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.222.

10. On public diplomacy, see Gilbert M. Joseph, "Prologue," in *US Public Diplomacy Strategies in Latin America during the Sixties: Time for Persuasion*, ed. Francisco Rodríguez Jiménez, Lorenzo Delgado Gómez-Escalonilla, and Benedetta Calandra (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2024), XI–XIV. On the OIAA as public diplomacy antecedent, see especially Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas. The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Prutsch, *Creating Good Neighbors?*; Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See also Lars Schoultz, *In Their Own Best Interest. A History of the U.S. Effort to Improve Latin Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 145–55; Kiran Klaus Patel, *The New Deal. A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 274–78; Seth Fein, "New Empire into Old: Making Mexican Newsreels the Cold War Way," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 5 (November 2004): 705.

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with the totalitarian Nazi state, or its gradual replacement with the term "information" by US wartime organizations.[11] OIAA officials and Disney employees, however, explicitly referred to the films internally as propaganda, and they shared the conviction that they could exert control over the minds of individual Latin Americans through them, which matches the common definitions of propaganda.[12] Instead of following a specific definition, however, I try to reconstruct what the actors involved associated with the term. This historicization will help to illuminate how film propaganda and the Disney brand could become crucial US foreign policy instruments toward Latin America during World War II and how Latin Americans responded to this attempt at persuasion.

Both the OIAA's film program and the Disney films have already received considerable scholarly attention, but the complex collaboration between the animation studio, the US government organization, and local actors in creating, distributing, and measuring propaganda has not been studied in detail yet.[13] With the goal of creating favorable attitudes toward the United States in the minds of individual Latin Americans, the OIAA and Disney developed a novel propaganda approach, which focused on pleasing the audience through entertainment or education. This approach was more subtle than simply delivering a strong message, and it differed from existing government-made shorts and newsreels, with their focus on information. It not only consisted of the movies and their contents but also included their distribution and the targeting of specific population strata in Latin America. With the cooperation and support of local state and non-state actors, the OIAA built up an unprecedented mobile projector program to reach Latin Americans beyond the moviegoing urban classes. The success of this program was measured in attendance numbers and

11. For the term's connection with the Nazi state, see Rainer Gries and Wolfgang Schmale, eds., *Kultur der Propaganda* (Bochum: Verlag Dr. Dieter Winkler, 2005), 9–13.

12. For an overview of the most prominent definitions, see Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015), 1–15.

13. For a discussion of the existing literature on the Disney–OIAA collaboration, see Fernando Purcell and Camila Gatica, "Hollywood and Disney in Mid-20th-Century Inter-American Relations," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History* (Oxford, May 2019). https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.640. The best study of the OIAA remains Ursula Prutsch, *Creating Good Neighbors?*. Works focusing on the OIAA's film program in general are Pennee Lenore Bender, "Film as an Instrument of the Good Neighbor Policy, 1930s–1950s" (PhD diss., New York University, 2002). Darlene Joy Sadlier, *Americans All. Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012). Some studies deal with the OIAA film program in specific regional contexts: Alexandre Busko Valim, *Brazil, the United States, and the Good Neighbor Policy. The Triumph of Persuasion during World War II* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019); Maria Rosa Gudiño Cejudo, *Educación Higiénica y Cine de Salud En México 1925–1960* (Ciudad de México: Colegio de México, 2016); Kornel Chang, "Muted Reception: U.S. Propaganda and the Construction of Mexican Popular Opinion during the Second World War," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 3 (June 2014): 569–98; Fernando Purcell, "Cine, Propaganda y El Mundo de Disney En Chile Durante La Segunda Guerra Mundial," *Historia* 43, no. 2 (2010): 487–522. There is also considerable corporate literature by Disney, the most detailed being J. B. Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney. Walt Disney and the Good Neighbor Program, 1941–1948* (New York: Disney Editions, 2009). In addition, countless articles, book chapters, and theses discuss the Disney propaganda films for Latin America without consulting archival material.

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audience reactions, which were equated with effective persuasion. Disney shorts proved to be the most popular with the Latin American public, and both the OIAA and Disney deemed their collaboration a success, paving the way for the continued use of film and Disney as instruments of US foreign policy.

World War II–Disney propaganda for Latin America was many things. It can be characterized as a US turn to a new internationalism, an institutional embrace of propaganda, a close public–private partnership, a new propaganda approach, a tolerated US interference in Latin America, a pioneering use of mobile projectors, free entertainment for Latin Americans, a vehicle for Latin American politicians, a failed application of visual education, or a precursor to US Cold War strategies. I will try to cover all these aspects, but my emphasis lies elsewhere. Communication scientists, US officials, Latin American politicians, and Disney employees shared an unbounded faith in film's suitability as propaganda instrument. I will show how the entire propaganda program was driven by this conviction and how the latter was reinforced by an inadequate evaluation. Consequently, Disney propaganda for Latin America must be understood as a hype about the untapped potential of a still relatively new medium.

The propagandists

Starting in September 1939, John Marshall, a senior officer of the Rockefeller Foundation, gathered the leading US scientists working on "the general problem of mass communication" in a monthly seminar organized and paid for by the Foundation.[14] Marshall wanted the scholars "to create a most comprehensive picture of how public opinion is being formed."[15] The social scientists were handpicked by Marshall, and in most cases they were the heads of projects or institutions that were related to mass communication and financed by the Rockefeller Foundation. They included, among others, political scientist Harold Lasswell and psychologist and pollster Hadley Cantril.[16] Additional scholars working on mass communication and propaganda, such as the psychologist Leonard Doob, were invited to specific meetings of the group.[17]

14. Project authorizations for a seminar on mass communication, August 12, 1939; F. 2672, Communications Research 1939; 1.1. Projects, Box 223; Rockefeller Foundation (RF) Records; Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC). For a detailed overview on the communications seminar, see Brett Gary, "Communication Research, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Mobilization for the War on Words, 1938–1944," *Journal of Communication* 46, no. 3 (1996): 124–47.

15. Outline "job to be done—now" by John Marshall, September 1939; F. 2672, Communications Research 1939; 1.1. Projects, Box 223; RF Records; RAC.

16. Address list communications memorandum, 1941; F. 2675, Communications Research 1941; 1.1. Projects, Box 224; RF Records; RAC.

17. Letter from John Marshall to Leonard Doob, December 14, 1939; F. 2672, Communications Research 1939; 1.1. Projects, Box 223; RF Records RAC.

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The leading member of the group was Harold Lasswell, who was probably the most prominent US scholar in the thriving field of propaganda studies.[18] He had made his name with a dissertation on the propaganda strategies employed by the main combatant nations in World War I and defined propaganda as the "control of opinion by significant symbols," which translated into "stories, rumors, reports, and other forms of social communication." As for the use of propaganda in wartime, Lasswell identified three fields of application: as a psychological weapon to weaken enemy morale, as a tool to maintain good relations with allies as well as to persuade neutrals, and finally as an instrument to boost morale and unity at the home front.[19]

Considering future involvement of the United States in the escalating wars in Europe and Asia, the members of the communications seminar deemed it inevitable that the US Federal Government would have to engage in mass communication at home and abroad. In a national poll, US Americans had contested that they feared German attempts to seize control in Latin America, and 80% of the interviewees were in favor of US action against such an attempt. On the basis of this poll, the scholars outlined a foreign communication strategy. The US government should prepare to become active and establish communication channels with and in Latin America. To do so effectively, the scholars pressed for immediate recruitment of scientists like themselves. "They [the scientists] would then be ready and available for the imminent need of maintaining good relations with countries friendly to us, particularly the countries to our south; and for any eventual need of propaganda war."[20] Their call to Uncle Sam would soon be heard, and several members of the communications seminar would actively shape US propaganda toward Latin America and beyond.[21]

Already by the end of the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration had become concerned with Axis propaganda in Latin America. US journalist Leland Stowe described how Axis agents "buy up influential newspapers, ply business leaders with champagne, bribe politicians, spend money like drunken sailors." He urged US action to counter the "propaganda and anti-democratic poison" spread by the Axis powers in Latin America. As can be observed from the poll cited earlier, the fear of the Axis gaining a foothold in Latin America was widespread. Accordingly, Latin America was seen as the only place where the Roosevelt

18. Letter from John Marshall to Harold Laswell, August 22, 1939; F. 2672, Communications Research 1939; 1.1. Projects, Box 223; RF Records; RAC.

19. Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Peter Smith, 1938), 9f.

20. Memorandum "Needed Research in Communication," October 10, 1940, 3; F. 2677, Communications Research Report 1939 (Section 1); 1.1. Projects, Box 224; RF Records; RAC.

21. By spring 1941, a US government report stressed the importance of and dependence on the Rockefeller Foundation regarding public opinion and propaganda intelligence. Gary, "Communication Research," 142–44.

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administration could become politically active without provoking isolationist backlash at home.[22] These factors led to the establishment of the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) in August 1940. Its task was to win over Latin American states as partners, foster pan- or inter-Americanism, and counter Axis activities in Latin America.[23] Soon, the work conducted by this government agency would be characterized by State Department officials as "the greatest outpouring of propagandistic material by a state ever."[24]

The organization of the OIAA reflected the strong position of its chairman Nelson A. Rockefeller. The young Republican enjoyed the trust and affection of the president and had successfully lobbied with the latter for the organization's establishment and later expansion. Rockefeller employed many personal friends and combined governmental with private initiatives. US businessmen usually formed the OIAA's coordination committees in the region and oversaw some of the agency's local initiatives; others were carried out in cooperation with the Rockefeller Foundation. These initiatives were manifold and targeted both Latin America and the United States. In Latin America, they included blacklisting Axis firms, building infrastructure, launching health initiatives, and—most prominently—spreading anti-Axis and pro–United States propaganda.[25] In that, the OIAA was "the only office of the government to whom has been assigned a specific territory to win by propaganda."[26]

However, there were limits to US involvement in Latin America, as the United States had bound itself to the so-called Good Neighbor Policy. Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt had gradually abandoned the old, imperialist Big Stick Policy and turned to a policy of mutual understanding with Latin American states. Roosevelt even conceded to "non-intervention" and "non-interference," for which Argentinian and Mexican politicians and diplomats had pressed for decades. During the 1930s, the Good Neighbor Policy led to increased trade and much better relations with Latin American countries.[27] In its discourse, the OIAA relied heavily on the Good Neighbor Policy, stressing the benefits of friendship and partnership between Latin America and the United States. Consequently, Rockefeller's office could not act unilaterally and had to seek the

22. Lübken, *Bedrohliche Nähe* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005).

23. The former OIAA employee Donald Rowland described these aims in his official history of the organization. Donald Rowland, *History of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs*, Historical Reports on War Administration (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1947), 3–10.

24. State Department Memorandum, Division of American Republics, March 10, 1942, cit. in: Gerald K. Haines, "Under the Eagle's Wing. The Franklin Roosevelt Administration Forges An American Hemisphere," *Diplomatic History* 1, no. 4 (1977): 387.

25. Prutsch, *Creating Good Neighbors?*, 33–84.

26. Memorandum on Propaganda Aims of the Motion Picture Division, April 17, 1942; F. Plans; Box 207; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

27. Friedman, "The Good Neighbor Policy."

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consent and cooperation of local governments for its projects, including the spreading of propaganda. US ambassador George Messersmith's evaluation of the Mexican case indicates that this was also a technical necessity, as he remarked that "no matter what organization we have here it can only function effectively if we have the sympathy, understanding and support of the Mexican authorities. It is the Mexican authorities and not we which control the press, the radio and the films."[28]

To develop an adequate propaganda program for Latin America, the OIAA relied on the leading US scholars in the field, who had formed part of the Rockefeller Foundation's communications seminar. Whereas Harold Lasswell and Hadley Cantril advised the OIAA occasionally, Leonard Doob was an employee of the OIAA and in charge of formulating its general strategy. It aimed at a united hemisphere under US leadership and included both short-term goals directly linked to the war effort and long-term objectives.[29] To achieve these aims, the OIAA should appeal directly to "the minds of individual Latin Americans."[30]

Leonard Doob considered film "the ideal medium" for doing so. In his dissertation *Propaganda. Its psychology and technique* (1935), he explained that, in the case of film, "the propagandist is assured of a huge audience, since people will flock voluntarily to the theatre." Doob thought that these movie-goers, seeking entertainment and relaxation, would not actively resist hidden indoctrination. Though they would reject overt propaganda, subtle, repeated messages and stereotypes would be quite successful.[31] In a working paper of the Rockefeller Foundation's communications seminar, film was considered the easiest medium to exert control over, as well as to reach and to influence a mass audience through. Four factors were identified to this respect: the centralized movie industry, its relatively small output, the few locations of exposure (the cinemas), and the importance large parts of the population gave to the movies.[32] Conveniently enough, this seemingly ideal medium for propaganda was a very successful US export product, and Hollywood had a market share of 73% and an established distribution system in Latin America by 1940. This led to some Latin American contestation, such as the Cuban Communist Party's "cine-debates" to expose US

28. Letter from George Messersmith to Laurence Duggan, July 27, 1942; Box 14, Folder 9; George S. Messersmith Papers, University of Delaware.

29. Memorandum of four core objectives of the OIAA by Leonard Doob, April 23, 1942. F. Content, directives long range, 1941–42; Box 1459; 126. Content Planning Division; RG 229; NACP.

30. Philosophy and organization of the OIAA by Leonard Doob, May 1, 1942.

31. Leonard W. Doob, *Propaganda. Its Psychology and Technique* (New York: Holt, 1935), 373–81. Doob based his assessment on the controversial Payne Fund Studies.

32. Some notes on the movies as a medium of mass communication, 1939; F. 2680, Communications Research Working Papers (6 items) 1939–1940; Box 224; 1.1. Projects; RF Records; RAC.

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imperialism, but the Hollywood stars were still extremely popular in the region.[33] Therefore, the OIAA entered a mutually beneficial partnership with the film industry to spread US propaganda in Latin America.

Some of the most prominent Hollywood stars of that time were not of flesh and blood, but of ink and color. Their names were Donald Duck, Goofy, or Mickey Mouse, and they were the property and trademarks of Walt Disney Productions. During the 1930s, Walt Disney had created the most successful and most influential animation studio in the world, delighting young and old. His shorts were played worldwide in cinemas as openers before the feature film, and he had revolutionized animation with new techniques and the early adaption of sound and color.[34] With *Snow White* (1937), which became the most successful movie of 1938, he had also created the first animated feature film.[35] However, by 1940 the earnings of *Snow White* were all gone, and Disney underwent difficult times with the loss of the European market due to the war and labor unrest at its studios.[36] In this time of crisis, Disney was approached by the OIAA.

The first contact was established in late 1940, and by June 1941 the first contract between the OIAA and Disney was signed. The OIAA would finance a survey journey for Walt Disney and 15 of his staff to South America. In return, Disney should produce 12 shorts with Latin American topics. The OIAA would not provide the money to produce the cartoons but indemnify Walt Disney Productions for possible losses. As for the content of the shorts, the Rockefeller office gave Disney free reign, as they trusted in his "sensitivity to what the public likes."[37] Not only did the cooperation with the OIAA provide financial guarantees for the stricken studio, but it also allowed Disney to escape the troubles with his striking staff, who demanded the right to unionize. Ultimately, the labor conflict at the Disney studio was settled through arbitration while Disney was away on his survey and goodwill tour.[38] Shortly thereafter, with US entry into the war, a new, much more extensive contract between Disney and the

33. Peredo Castro, *Cine y Propaganda para Latinoamérica*, 485–87. On the Cuban case, see Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba. Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959–1971*, Envisioning Cuba (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 79–81.

34. Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Animation. A World History* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 95–110.

35. Richard B. Jewell, *RKO Radio Pictures. A Titan Is Born* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 146–48.

36. Carsten Laqua, *Wie Micky unter die Nazis fiel. Walt Disney und Deutschland* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992), 162f.

37. Project Authorization: Walt Disney Field Survey and Short Subjects on the Other American Republics, June 16, 1941; Walt Disney Field Survey and Short Subjects; Box 216 Disney Activities; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

38. According to testimonies, the work atmosphere at Disney was never the same after the strike, as the patriarchal Walt Disney felt betrayed. He saw a communist conspiracy in the worker's demands to form a free union and relied on a dubious intermediary with ties to the Chicago mob for the negotiations with the strikers. Laqua, *Wie Micky unter die Nazis fiel*, 140–50.

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OIAA was signed.[39] Other government agencies followed suit so that during the war around 90% of Disney's output was contract work for the US government.[40]

One could ask whether Disney would have accepted the offer by the OIAA so willingly under different circumstances. After all, despite sympathies for President Roosevelt, the ultraconservative Walt Disney had long been an isolationist and was critical of too much state interference. At one point, he was even accused of being a Nazi sympathizer.[41] However, with his studio in crisis, Disney gladly accepted the offer to work for the US Federal Government. The nature of this work was stated in no uncertain terms in the project authorization of the second contract from January 1942: Disney was contracted "to produce powerful propaganda films to serve the democracies, (. . .) and to strengthen the morale of the Hemisphere."[42]

But Walt Disney Productions was not just a receiver of orders; they actively shaped propaganda in coordination with the OIAA. In early 1942, the novelist and Disney employee Robert Spencer Carr presented the studio's ideas to the Motion Picture Society of the Americas (MPS), the Hollywood branch of the OIAA. Carr's 39-page document was received enthusiastically, as a handwritten note by MPS official Luigi Luraschi reveals. He considered Carr's paper "the most intelligent approach to the problem at hand that I have ever read."[43] In it, Carr not only presented 49 ideas for shorts by Walt Disney Productions but also elaborated on the messages and techniques of animated propaganda as well as its distribution. Carr advocated for simple messages, delivered by a narrator voice that the audience ideally knew and appreciated, and underscored by the animation. For Carr, animation constituted a "magical medium" that was characterized by its "profound potentialities for evoking sentiment and awe." He argued for making "full use of this quality" by "creating a deeply religious feeling, and associating this with political ideals." Carr distinguished between "direct propaganda" and "indirect propaganda." The former was directly associated with the war and inter-American unity, whereas "indirect propaganda" delivered practical messages on health that would improve the

39. Contract No. OEMcr-107, January 2, 1942; Walt Disney Production Film Unit; Box 216 Disney Activities; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

40. Carl Nater, "Walt Disney Studio—a War Plant," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 42, no. 3 (1944): 170–76.

41. Art Babbit, a leading employee of Disney but later antagonist (he led the workers demanding to unionize in 1941), charged Disney with regular visits to gatherings of the *German American Bund*, the leading US Nazi organization. Marc Eliot, *Walt Disney. Hollywood's Dark Prince. A Biography* (Secaucus: Carol Publishing Group, 1993). Better documented is Disney's meeting with Nazi propagandist Leni Riefenstahl at his studios in late 1938, just after the *Kristallnacht*. Laqua, *Wie Micky unter die Nazis fiel*, 91f.

42. Project Authorization: Walt Disney Productions Film Unit, December 18, 1941.

43. Memorandum from David Hopkins to Luigi Luraschi, February 12, 1942; Motion Picture Society for the Americas (MPSA) records; Margaret Herrick Library (MHL); Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

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lives of the audience. All shorts were supposed to be educational and entertaining at the same time—something only the "Disney men" could deliver, according to Carr.[44]

Both the members of Walt Disney Productions and the OIAA shared the perception that, through the medium of film, the masses could easily be influenced, and they intended to do exactly that. In an internal OIAA document, it was stressed that motion pictures were "serving, as no other media can serve, to cause the peoples of the other American republics to like, trust and respect the peoples of the United States, and to join with them in the development of a lasting policy of Hemisphere solidarity, which is the basis for a permanent Good Neighbor Policy."[45]

The movies

In total, Disney produced 30 films under the contracts with the OIAA, which can be divided into the following three categories: "Good Neighbor pictures," "war shorts," and "educational films."[46] In the first war years, Disney focused on the first two categories, which can also be labelled "direct propaganda," according to Robert S. Carr's categorization.[47] The "Good Neighbor pictures" stressed the friendship between the United States and Latin America through encounters of Disney's stars such as Donald Duck with Latin American characters, whereas the "war shorts" debunked and ridiculed the totalitarian tactics of the Axis.

The "Good Neighbor pictures" refer to the movies that were produced "in the interests of Hemisphere solidarity" under the first contract between OIAA and Disney from summer 1941.[48] Instead of 12 shorts, as stated in the contract, Disney produced two feature films *Saludos Amigos* (1942) and *The Three Caballeros* (1944), as well as four stand-alone shorts. *Saludos Amigos* was the first of the Disney films for the OIAA to be released and consisted of four episodes, depicting some of the countries Disney had visited on his South American survey and goodwill tour in 1941. In the artful episode "Aquarela do Brasil," Donald Duck, guided by the local parrot José Carioca, explored an exoticized watercolor world.[49]

44. Ideas for a new South American Film Program. List of Suggested Subjects, by R. S. Carr, Walt Disney Productions, January 1942; MPSA records; MHL; AMPAS. Carr discredited the many female animators at Disney.

45. Description of the Motion Pictures Division; Production of War and Educational Motion Pictures; 77. PF MPD; RG 229; NACP.

46. An internal history uses this categorization. History of the Motion Picture Society of the Americas, p. 17; Box 961; 78. F MPSA; RG 229; NACP.

47. Ideas for a new South American Film Program. List of Suggested Subjects, by R. S. Carr, January 1942.

48. Project Authorization: Walt Disney Field Survey and Short Subjects on the Other American Republics, June 16, 1941.

49. Walt Disney Productions, *Saludos Amigos (Spanish Version)*, 1942, 41.56 min, available at Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/06saludosamigos (September 2024).

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As in all the episodes of *Saludos Amigos*, and the "Good Neighbor pictures" in general, Latin America was depicted full of clichés and shown as an exotic *Sehnsuchtsort* (a place of where one longs to be). Accordingly, the films could fulfill their double function of showing to Latin Americans that they were considered and seen positively by US Americans, whereas the US audience was confronted with positive imagery on their neighbors to the south or even with an escape from the reality of a world at war.

Another recurring topic of the "Good Neighbor pictures" was the interaction of known Disney figures with new, Latin American characters. Their interactions always followed a similar script: The US characters found themselves in a new setting, making fools of themselves in their attempts at blending in, and were finally helped and a little ridiculed by their Latin American counterparts. This was true of Goofy in the Gaucho episode of *Saludos Amigos*, Pluto in the short *Pluto and the Armadillo (1943)*, or Donald Duck with his friends José Carioca from Brazil and Panchito Pistolas from Mexico in *The Three Caballeros* (1944). These new birds in the Disney universe were also a recognition of the importance of Brazil and Mexico and could serve as propagandistic coup for these governments.

A feature especially present in *The Three Caballeros* was overt sexism and the sexualization of Latin America. In the recurring live-action scenes of the film, an animated Donald Duck was shown aggressively desiring or even chasing scantily dressed, white Latin American beauties.[50] While the creation of Latin American characters and their friendship with the famous Disney stars seemed an appropriate means to evoke "Hemisphere solidarity," sexism and the sexualization of Latin America do not appear to be that promising from today's perspective. However, the depiction of Latin Americans as "lively and happy, sexy and spectacular," as Philip Swanson put it,[51] was also a conscious renunciation of former Hollywood depictions of Latin Americans as "silly or ridiculous persons, or as generally unsympathetic characters."[52] Hence, OIAA officials such as Russell Pierce, the assistant director of the Motion Picture Division, did not see those films critically, but saw an immense potential in the depiction of United States and Latin American friendship as shown in Disney's "Good Neighbor Pictures."[53]

50. Walt Disney Productions, *The Three Caballeros*, 1944, 72.56 min, available at Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/graphedt20191125195532829/The+Three+Caballeros+part+02.mp4 (September 2024).

51. Philip Swanson, "Going down on Good Neighbours. Imagining América in Hollywood Movies of the 1930s and 1940s (*Flying down to Rio* and *Down Argentine Way*)," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29, no. 1 (2009): 73.

52. Suggested Working Program for the Motion Picture Society for the Americas; Production of War and Educational Motion Pictures; Box 942; 77. PF MPD; RG 229; NACP.

53. Letter from Russell Pierce to Vernon Caldwell, April 25, 1944; Walt Disney Field Survey and Short Subjects on the other American Republics; Box 959; 77. PF MPD; RG 229; NACP.

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Quite different in their message and without visible Latin American reference were the four so-called war shorts, which consisted of anti-Nazi propaganda. The ideas for these shorts were developed as part of the second contract with the OIAA and presented to the Motion Picture Society of the Americas.[54] However, Disney feared for negative reactions if he were to produce overt anti-Axis propaganda for general distribution with sponsoring by the US government, which is why a private sponsor—the magazine *Reader's Digest*—took over.[55] Still, the OIAA paid Disney for the rights to use these films non-commercially in Latin America.[56]

Similar to anti-Axis live-action films of the time, Disney's four war shorts tried to debunk and delegitimize Nazi propaganda and tactics. In particular, the content of *Education for Death* (1943) probably rang a bell with its US audiences. The documentary style and the focus on the indoctrination of children, regimentation in the form of marching soldiers, attacks on the church, and the depiction of Germans as slaves of the state resembled Frank Capra's famous *Prelude to War* (1942).[57] The representation of Germans as slaves and victims of the Nazi Regime was also congruent with OIAA guidelines on how to depict the enemy.[58] Those guidelines in turn resembled the narrative spread by Franklin D. Roosevelt.[59] In a radio address on June 14, 1942, Roosevelt spoke of the suppressed German people "dominated by their Nazi whipmasters."[60] In *Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943), Donald Duck was depicted as victim of such "Nazi whipmasters." Pitiful Donald, living in a world full of swastikas and without privacy or enough food, was woken up by a heavily caricatured Nazi marching band including Mussolini and a Japanese soldier. They entered his house and drove him to work in a munitions factory. In factory sequences inspired by *Modern Times* (1936), Donald collapsed from exhaustion and woke up again, this time in his stars-and-stripes home. The Nazi episode turned out to be just a nightmare.[61] *Der Fuehrers Face* was a big hit in theaters and won an Oscar in 1943; its title song was sold over 1.5 million times.[62] Especially in *Der Fuehrers*

54. Monthly Report Motion Picture Society for the Americas May 1942; Box 961; 78. F MPSA; RG 229; NACP.

55. Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney. The Triumph of the American Imagination*, 5th printing (New York: Knopf, 2007), 385–90.

56. The OIAA paid 14,000 dollars per short for the rights for 5 years, starting 4 months after the short's cinematic premieres in Latin America. Second Supplement to Contract No. OEMcr-108, July 2, 1942; Walt Disney Production Film Unit; Box 216 Disney Activities; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

57. Many of the topics addressed by Capra were already present in the *March of Time* newsreel *Inside Nazi Germany* (1938).

58. Report on Information Themes by the Content Division, July 29, 1944; F. Content, Organization; Box 1459; 126. Content Planning Division; RG 229; NACP.

59. Ronald R. Krebs, "Tell Me a Story. FDR, Narrative, and the Making of the Second World War," *Security Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015): 131–70.

60. Radio address on United Flag Day (7 min), June 14, 1942, Washington, DC; FDR Master Speech File; FDR Presidential Library [Online Version, https://www.fdrlibrary.org/utterancesfdr#afdr249, September 2024].

61. Walt Disney Productions, *Der Fuehrer's Face*, 1943, 07.52 min, available at Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/donaldducknazi (September 2024).

62. Baxter, *Disney during World War II*, 59–64.

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Face, but also in sequences of the other three war shorts, Disney made use of animation's great potential to ridicule the enemy through caricature. Showing the fear-spreading Nazis and their allies as a laughingstock was therefore the great strength of Disney's war shorts.

OIAA officials liked Disney's anti-Nazi films from the beginning. Already in the story board phase of *Der Fuehrer's Face*, it was noted that "the satirical method used in the development of this subject cannot help but create in the mind of the audience a complete disgust for the ways of our enemy."[63] *Education for Death* was praised in the same report and considered an "invaluable contribution" to the Latin American propaganda film program for its showing of the Nazi break with family and church.[64] Despite not directly targeting Latin American audiences, Disney's war shorts were considered very effective by the OIAA. Ridiculing and debunking the enemy was probably most fruitful in Latin America, where Axis propaganda, which at least in the first war years was widely available, could be countered directly.

However, the war moved fast, and the short-term goal of uniting the hemisphere against the Axis under US leadership—with the notable exception of Argentina—was soon achieved. Consequently, the OIAA shifted to a long-term strategy of preserving a dominant US position in Latin America. Part of this strategy was the "educational films" commissioned by the OIAA with Disney under the same contract as the war shorts. These 19 films followed the script of Robert S. Carr's "indirect propaganda" and overwhelmingly dealt with health topics. The two exceptions were the documentary *Amazon Awakens* (1944) and the agricultural short *The Grain that Built a Hemisphere* (1943), which mixed instruction on corn with the message of a united hemisphere standing together in war. All the other "educational films" dealt with different health topics.

Health initiatives by US actors in Latin America already had a considerable history at that time. They constituted an integral part of the various so-called "civilizing missions," of which Henry Ford's rubber city Fordlandia serves as notable example. "Civilizing missions" such as Ford's saw not only the alleged overcoming of nature, in his case by cultivating rubber, but also racist and paternalizing attempts to "civilize" the local population by disease control and medicalization.[65] Ford's ultimately failed attempt was treated as success story in Disney's *Amazon Awakens*. The leading US actor in "civilizing" through health initiatives all over Latin America was the Rockefeller Foundation, with its large-

63. Weekly Report—Period ending June 24, 1942; Weekly Reports Motion Picture Society for The Americas January 1942–; Box 218; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

64. Weekly Report—Period ending June 24, 1942.

65. Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia. The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (New York: Picador, 2009).

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scale campaigns to fight diseases such as yellow fever.[66] The OIAA—with its close ties to the Rockefeller Foundation—took on such initiatives.[67] Those OIAA health initiatives were often closely linked to US interests, such as the campaigns against malaria that were carried out in the areas where rubber for the US industry was produced.[68]

The OIAA's fight against malaria was not only carried out in the field but also on the screen. One of Disney's first health pictures, *Winged Scourge* (1943), showed the seven dwarfs from *Snow White* (1937) taking numerous precautions to protect themselves and their house against the malaria-transmitting *Anopheles* mosquito, depicted as the enemy. In their task, shown as joyful exercise in cooperation with forest animals, they were guided by a narrator master voice. The Mexican-American OIAA employee Edmundo Lasalle considered the dwarfs "grotesque creatures of Nordic legends" and criticized the film as unsuited for a Latin American context, but his intervention was ignored.[69] The film closed with a comparison between the happy and healthy dwarves and a family afflicted by malaria. The moral of the story was expressed by the narrator: "Contrast their peace and happiness [meaning the dwarves] with the misery and sorrow of this unfortunate, plague-ridden family. These people have lost everything, simply because the failed to take a few easy precautions."[70] The same Social Darwinist moral was provided in the later films of Disney's Health for the Americas series. In *Cleanliness Brings Health* (1945), the dichotomy between healthy-and-happy and sick-and-unhappy was depicted by means of two Latin American families. Through the sick-and-unhappy family was shown how a lack of hygiene led to sickness and despair. In contrast, the healthy-and-happy family served as a model to show audiences the impact of simple health measures. The message of the short was clear and was expressed by the narrator at the end: "Always remember, cleanliness brings health and happiness."[71]

Even though the messages of Disney's early health pictures and those from the Health for the Americas series were very similar, they differed considerably in their style and targeted audience. The early health pictures such as *Winged*

66. The Rockefeller Foundation conducted those in accordance and with the support of local governments, but often without the consent of the patients. John Farley, *To Cast out Disease: A History of the International Health Division of the Rockefeller Foundation (1913–1951)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

67. The Institute of Inter-American Affairs was responsible for the health initiatives of the OIAA. It worked closely with the Rockefeller Foundation and local governments. Prutsch, *Creating Good Neighbors?*, 57–60.

68. Albert R. Dreisbach, "Industrial and Health Development in the Tropics," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 120, no. 15 (1942): 1192–93.

69. Letter from Edmundo Lasalle to Enrique de Losada, without date; F. Reaction to Films; Box 214; 1. General Records; RG 229; NACP.

70. Walt Disney Productions, *The Winged Scourge*, 1943, 09.43 min. Available at Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.47063 (September 2024).

71. Walt Disney Productions, *Cleanliness Brings Health*, 1945, 08.29 min. Available at Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/HealthForTheAmericasCleanlinessBringsHealth (September 2024).

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Scourge starred famous Disney characters, made references to the war, and were elaborately animated. They looked like any other Disney short and could be shown to wide audiences, as they combined their health messages with entertainment. In contrast, the shorts of the Health for the Americas series were very simple in their animation and did not resemble other Disney shorts. There were two reasons for this. The technique applied in films such as *Winged Scourge* was labor-intensive and lengthy. In wartime, labor and time were short. With simpler technique, more films could be produced more quickly. The other reason was the targeting of a specific rural Latin American audience with the Health for the Americas series. A survey conducted by Disney in Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador concluded that the emphasis should be laid on clear and simple messages and measures regarding the health problems the visited communities were suffering from, instead of elaborate animation and story. The survey also indicated that Disney regarded the intellect of its targeted audience as limited.[72]

Disney's prejudices against rural Latin Americans were clearly visible in the Health for the Americas films, which were racist and paternalizing. The Mexican historian Maria Rosa Gudiño Cejudo highlighted how the two Latin American families depicted in the Health for the Americas films not only differed in hygiene but also in skin color.[73] The careless and dirty family had brown skin and was animated in a caricatured way, whereas the clean family was white and drawn in realistic proportions.[74] Beyond hygienic measures, whiteness served as key to modernity. The equation of whiteness with modernity and superiority made in these films was not only common among white US Americans but also among Latin American elites, who overwhelmingly identified as white. The latter often shared the racist stereotypes toward dark-skinned or indigenous Latin Americans expressed in Disney's educational films.[75] Consequently, there were no official protests to be feared for Disney or the OIAA when operating with racist stereotypes in films for an exclusively rural Latin American audience. When in turn the OIAA and Disney presented Latin America to broad US and Latin American audiences, it was a white and progressive—or at least a white, sexy, and

72. A survey conducted for the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs by the Walt Disney Studio on the subject of Health and Sanitation, without date; F. Survey by Walt Disney Co, 1940–1945; Box 13; Washington, DC; Nelson A. Rockefeller (NAR) Personal Papers; RAC.

73. Gudiño Cejudo, *Educación Higiénica y Cine de Salud En México*, 159.

74. Disney's association of dark bodies with dirt, poverty, and disease, and the subsequent impulse to "civilize," is stressed by Lisa Cartwright and Brian Goldfarb, "Cultural Contagion. On Disney's Health Education Films for Latin America," in *Disney Discourse. Producing the Magic Kingdom*, ed. Eric Loren Smoodin, AFI Film Readers (New York: Routledge, 1994), 169–80.

75. The concepts of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* challenged such notions of whiteness, but the latter were still in place. Michael Calderón-Zaks, "Debated Whiteness amid World Events: Mexican and Mexican American Subjectivity and the U.S.' Relationship with the Americas, 1924–1936," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 27, no. 2 (2011): 325–59; Edward Telles and René Flores, "Not Just Color. Whiteness, Nation, and Status in Latin America," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (August 2013): 411–49.

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friendly—Latin America, as in *The Three Caballeros*.[76] In a climate of normalized racism, whiteness served Disney and the OIAA to either present a modern Latin America or to show Latin Americans how to become modern.

Disney's "educational films" were generally well received by Latin American governments, which sometimes even used them for their own campaigns, but they also spurred harsh criticism by some Latin American education experts. The renowned Mexican educator Eulalia Guzmán had been invited by Disney and the OIAA to advise on Disney's literacy films, four shorts on health topics that aimed at teaching the audience to write. Guzmán had a lot of experience in literacy programs for illiterate adults, as those had long been a priority of the Mexican Ministry of Public Education for which she was working.[77] Against the resistance of her US American colleagues, she drafted detailed scripts for Disney. Those were partly followed but altered in a way that was much to Guzmán's discontent. In an article in the Mexican newspaper *El Universal*, she lashed out about the resulting educational movies, which were simply inadequate in her eyes. In addition, she deplored that her contributions were completely omitted, as the films stated in the beginning that "the lessons were elaborated by US teachers and the US government to teach the people of Latin America."[78] Guzmán's critique aimed at the delicate topic of Latin American sovereignty and US ignorance toward Latin Americans, and she caused a small scandal that ultimately led to the OIAA's withdrawal of the four literacy films.[79]

The case of the literacy films reveals the fine line between successful US propaganda and offending Latin American sentiment. Disney's "educational films" aimed at improving the lives of their audiences and thereby strengthening positive views on the United States, exactly as Robert S. Carr had outlined in his report from 1942.[80] But the strengthening of positive views was the priority, which is why the literacy films stressed the contribution of US teachers but

76. The OIAA concluded from an already highly biased survey that US Americans viewed Latin Americans overwhelmingly as "dark-skinned" and "backward & lazy" and sought to counter this impression. Social Survey in Chicago on Latin America by Dr. Walter Laves and Dr. Louis B. Olom, without date; F. Social Survey; Box 233; Washington, DC; Washington, DC; RAC.

77. "Autobiografía de Eulalia Guzmán a Walt Disney." Los Angeles, 1944. EG0016 [C1/E16]. Archivo Histórico Institucional de la Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia (AHI BNAH). https://bibliotecadigital.inah.gob.mx/janium-bin/janium_login_opac.pl?find&ficha_no=205508. (September 2024).

78. "Sobre las películas de Walt Disney para aprender a leer español." Mexico City, 1944. EG3388 [C1/E28]. AHI BNAH. https://bibliotecadigital.inah.gob.mx/janium-bin/janium_login_opac.pl?find&ficha_no=208880. (September 2024).

79. Maria Rosa Gudiño Cejudo, "Eulalia Guzmán and Walt Disney's Educational Films: A Pedagogical Proposal for 'Literacy for the Americas' in Mexico (1942–1944)," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 8, no. 1 (2016): 61–77.

80. Even the topics of those films were already outlined back then. Ideas for a new South American Film Program. List of Suggested Subjects, by R. S. Carr, January 1942.

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omitted that of a Mexican educator. As most of Disney's health films made no direct reference to the United States, their propagandistic value had to be ensured through prologues and epilogues starring Mickey Mouse. It was argued that, through these, "the people who will benefit from the films may realize their origin and appreciate the contirbution [sic!] which the people of the United States are making to the betterment of the peoples of the Hemisphere and to the health and prosperity of the Americas."[81]

Distribution and evaluation

It was the "common cause" of the OIAA, Disney, and RKO Radio Pictures, the distributor of Disney's movies, to get as many people to the movies as possible.[82] In a letter to Disney, OIAA Vice-president Russell Pierce offered the whole range of promotional support. This included their monthly magazine *En Guardia*, with a circulation of 750,000 copies, and an air mail service reaching around 1,800 Latin American newspapers and radio stations, as well as excellent contacts to different magazines.[83] Publications such as the Mexican railroad journal *Ferronales* reported proudly that Walt Disney had visited Mexico and would produce a new film set in Mexico, starring a Mexican rooster called Panchito Pistolas.[84] Apart from feeding such stories to Latin American media outlets, the OIAA also organized radio interviews and even produced a free comic book to promote the Disney films.[85]

The OIAA supported US studios not only with promotional activities in the distribution of their cinema films but also with financial means to produce additional copies of the movies. Disney benefitted from such funds and produced excess film copies for the Latin American market.[86] To secure the widest cinematic distribution possible, the OIAA even reached an agreement with the major US studios to show films "considered unusually valuable" in as many Latin American cinemas as possible. This meant that the studios would distribute films produced by their competitors through their channels or even show them in their own cinemas. To incentivize the studios further, the OIAA also offered to take on

81. Project Authorization Prologues and Epilogues to Literacy Pictures, and Foreign Versions to Health Pictures, June 8, 1944; Box 216 Disney Activities; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP. Those prologues do not exist anymore. Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney*, 170f.

82. Letter from Vernon Caldwell to Richard Rogan, July 14, 1942; Disney in South America; Box 216 Disney Activities; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

83. Letter from Russell Pierce to Vernon Caldwell, April 25, 1944; Walt Disney Field Survey and Short Subjects on the other American Republics; Box 959; 77. PF MPD; RG 229; NACP.

84. Ferronales, Walt Disney vino a México, January 1943, 20; Centro de Investigación Ferrocarrilera.

85. Letter from Russell Pierce to Floyd Gottfredson, July 19, 1944; Walt Disney Field Survey and Short Subjects on the other American Republics; Box 959; 77. PF MPD; RG 229; NACP.

86. Inquiry files to Supplement 2 of OEMcr-107; Walt Disney Productions Film Unit (OEMcr 107); Box 959; 77. PF MPD; RG 229; NACP.

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the costs of dubbing the films into Spanish and Portuguese.[87] The agreement between the OIAA and the studios is a clear example of the very close cooperation between the US government and private companies in the propaganda effort toward Latin America.

On the basis of the numbers of the studios, the OIAA estimated that 15 million people would attend Latin American cinemas weekly in 1942.[88] To get a better idea of the habits of Latin American movie-goers, the OIAA relied on its regional coordination committees and US consulates. This is especially well documented for Mexico, where US consulates prepared detailed reports on the cinemas in their respective cities. Vice-consul Henry A. Hoyt reported on the port town of Manzanillo, with its two cinemas with a combined capacity of 2,000 people. Hoyt considered the movies "the principal form of entertainment" in town and described how people would flock to the movie houses about two or three times a week. Most of the visitors were part of the working class, and many could not read. Therefore, they preferred dubbed US cartoons or Mexican films over the subtitled US feature films. Of less concern was the quality of the movies, as the locals were used to old reels of poor quality that only came to Manzanillo 6 months or even 1 year after the movies had premiered in Mexico City. Hoyt also described how Disney movies were the most popular of the US films reaching the town.[89] Other OIAA reports suggested similar tendencies for all Latin America.

Still, cinematic distribution was not enough to reach all the sectors of the Latin American population, as it was limited to cities. To reach people without access to cinemas or to target specific groups, the OIAA established the 16mm program, named after the format of portable movie projectors. Film screenings with mobile projectors to reach remote areas were nothing new; Soviet film trains had existed since the 1920s, and German and US pharmaceuticals already did commercial film tours in Latin America when the OIAA started its program.[90] However, the OIAA would so on a new scale. Of the 30 Disney movies produced under contracts with the OIAA, 20 were shown exclusively in the 16mm format in Latin America. Another four, the so-called war shorts, were shown in this format 4 months after they had premiered in cinemas.[91] Not only

87. Project Authorization: Acceleration of Theatrical Distribution in the other American Republics, October 23, 1942; Box 946; 77. PF MPD; RG 229; NACP.

88. Project Authorization: Acceleration of Theatrical Distribution in the other American Republics, October 23, 1942.

89. Motion Picture Questionnaire prepared by Henry A. Hoyt, August 12, 1943.

90. On Soviet film trains, see Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), 40; on commercial film tours in Latin America, see Valim, *Brazil, the United States, and the Good Neighbor Policy*, 59–61.

91. Second Supplement to Contract No. OEMcr-107, July 2, 1942; Walt Disney Production Film Unit; Box 216 Disney Activities; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

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did using mobile projectors mean expanding the spatial reach of US propaganda, but it also contributed to the breakthrough of the 16 mm format and mobile projectors, which later in the war were also used for war bond campaigns in the Unites States and would revolutionize class rooms in the postwar period.[92] By May 1945, the OIAA's 16mm program comprised of hundreds of employees, 326 mobile projectors, and 69 trucks for transport to remote areas.[93]

The 16mm program was organized by countries, and it often worked in collaboration with private US companies and local governments. In Colombia, the OIAA employed a total of 35 people—2 managers, 1 secretary, 17 projectionists, and 15 assistant projectionists to run the program. But it also relied on the services of the Sidney Ross Company to get the movies to hard-to-reach areas.[94] OIAA local committees in other countries also worked with Sidney Ross, which belonged to the US pharmaceutical company Sterling Products and did commercial film tours all over Latin America for advertising purposes. Additionally, the OIAA cooperated with local carriers, such as the national railroads of Chile and Colombia or bus and boat companies in Uruguay and Argentina, to get the widest coverage possible. The collaboration in the spreading of the propaganda even extended to local politicians, as mayors sought after the free movie exhibitions to take credit for them. They invited the OIAA projectionist teams and provided for the transportation, as a report from Brazil reveals.[95] In sum, the 16mm program and Disney's films could not have had the reach they had without the crucial support of these local actors.

While local politicians hoped to profit from individual screenings, national governments collaborated with the OIAA and Disney on a larger scale to pursue their own propaganda goals. In Brazil, many of the film screening were jointly organized with the Ministry of Press and Propaganda, which worked closely with the OIAA to advance United States–Brazilian partnership.[96] In Mexico, the powerful interior minister and later president Miguel Alemán desired the strengthening of the Mexican film industry and control over it. With the OIAA, he successfully negotiated US support in the form of machinery, covert financing,

92. Kathryn Cramer Brownell, "'It Is Entertainment and It Will Sell Bonds!' 16mm Film and the World War II War Bond Campaign," *Moving Image* 10, no. 2 (2010): 60–82; Charles Dorn, "I Never Saw as Good a Nature Show Before': Walt Disney, Environmental Education, and the True-Life Adventures," *History of Education Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (May 2023): 254.

93. 16mm Films—Latin American Distribution; Latin American Dist.; Box 218; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

94. Background Information on Motion Picture Program in Colombia; March 7, 1945; Reports; Box 230, Colombia and Mexico; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

95. Memorandum-BD-No, 4511, September 25, 1944; Reports; Box 228, Brazil; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP. For a detailed account of the Brazilian 16mm program and the symbiotic collaboration between the OIAA and Brazilian authorities, see Valim, *Brazil, the United States, and the Good Neighbor Policy*, 51–88.

96. For a detailed account of the Brazilian 16mm program and the symbiotic collaboration between the OIAA and Brazilian authorities, see Valim, *Brazil, the United States, and the Good Neighbor Policy*, 51–88.

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and expertise for Mexican studios, even against the wishes of Hollywood and the US ambassador in Mexico.[97] In return, and not without self-interest, Alemán embraced the popular Walt Disney publicly and supported the proliferation of his OIAA films personally. After the shorts of Disney's Health for the Americas series had been shown to him, he promised government-imposed screenings in all Mexican cinemas, in addition to support with the 16mm showings.[98] In Mexico, those were partly handled by the Ministry of Public Education, which took care that it would also get credit for the Disney movies it showed in its schools.[99] Latin American support for the OIAA's 16mm program was thus not selfless, but rather a calculated embrace of a seemingly popular product.

Government support for 16mm was not as extensive everywhere as in Mexico and Brazil though, and the main share of the screenings lay with OIAA officials and local employees. A look at Bolivia helps provide a better idea how the 16mm program worked in the field. The Bolivian 16mm program is especially well documented thanks to the extensive and quite literary reports by the local coordination committee president Kenneth Wasson. He described how Bolivia was no priority for cinematic distribution. It had only few cinemas, and most US film reels to reach Bolivia would already be 3–4 years old by the time they got there. Therefore, the 16mm program had huge potential in his eyes. Motion picture tours would reach many rural areas, where people would see movies for the first time.[100]

In December 1943, Wasson accompanied such a motion picture tour to the town of Sorata to the north of La Paz. When the party, consisting of Wasson, two Chilean projectionists, and the wife of one of the projectionists, arrived in Sorata, the electric power supply of the town was interrupted. With the permission of the local authorities, they decided to act and restore the supply, as the film screening depended on electricity. Wasson considered the restoration of the power line and the subsequent screening a great success "from a propaganda and goodwill standpoint." He wrote, "I heard almost as much favorable comment on the speedy restoration of the electric power service as I did about the movies. It [the restoration] was generally regarded as some sort of miracle—a kind of Yankee miracle."[101] Still, Wasson felt a need to justify such costly screenings to

97. Peredo Castro, *Cine y Propaganda para Latinoamérica*, 105–73.

98. Subjective Report on Health and Literacy Film testing Trip, July 16–November 17, 1944; Box 698; 49. General Correspondence; RG 229; NACP.

99. Report attached to letter from Herbert Cerwin to Wallache Harrison, December 19, 1945; Reports; Box 230, Colombia and Mexico; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP. Gudiño Cejudo, *Educación Higiénica y Cine de Salud En México*, 143.

100. Report from Kenneth Wasson to Nelson Rockefeller, August 24, 1943; Motion Picture Misc.; Box 225, Bolivia; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

101. Report on Sorata Trip, January 10, 1944; Reports January 1, 1944; Box 225, Bolivia; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

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rural audiences largely made up of "Indians and mestizos who cannot be considered as important or decisive factors in the Bolivian public thought or opinion."[102] Although they did not have a say in current Bolivian politics, they could become a factor in the future. "In such a case it would be a distinct advantage to us that they hold a favorable attitude toward the United States. These showings, then, may perhaps be justified—if on no other grounds—as a hedge against revolution."[103]

However, the most important screenings in Bolivia were not those in rural communities such as Sorata but the weekly performances at the Colegio Militar. Wasson pointed out that the cadets from the country's best families would form the future ruling elite, if things in Bolivia would continue to function as they had in the past. "Reaching these boys at an impressionable age and creating in their minds a favorable attitude toward the United States seems to me a very worthwhile accomplishment." In addition to the young cadets, the films were also watched by some of the officers, who would slowly abandon their pro-German stance thanks to Allied victories and the Bolivian entry into the war.[104] Disney films were especially sought after by the military audience. A note on a screening in a Bolivian barrack reads succinctly: "This group is requesting more Walt Disney pictures."[105] The same was true for Sorata, where Disney's *Der Fuehrer's Face* was shown on request of the mayor.[106] The admiration of Disney even extended to the Bolivian ambassador in Washington, who regarded Donald Duck as "one of the most important figures that have visited Bolivia."[107] These cases coincide with an earlier assessment by Wasson that Disney movies were especially sought after by the Bolivian audiences.[108]

Conclusively, the look at Bolivia shows the popularity of Disney propaganda films there, and how the OIAA targeted a wide spectrum of Bolivian audiences, ranging from rural communities to the current and future elites of the country. But it also reveals how these audiences were not passive receivers and had their own ideas of which movies they wanted to watch, in many cases Disney cartoons. Reports such as the ones by Kenneth Wasson from Bolivia were one way of assessing the distribution of the movies and the effects they had on their

102. Report on 16-mm. motion picture tour, January 15, 1943: Reports; Box 225, Bolivia; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

103. Report from Kenneth Wasson to Nelson Rockefeller, August 24, 1943.

104. Report from Kenneth Wasson to Nelson Rockefeller, August 24, 1943.

105. Specific Comments from CC for Bolivia re Content of Motion Picture Program, August 8, 1944; Reports August 1944; Box 225, Bolivia; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

106. Specific Comments from CC for Bolivia re Content of Motion Picture Program, August 8, 1944.

107. He referred to the "Lake Titicaca" section of *Saludos Amigos*. Letter from Carlos Dorado to Nelson Rockefeller, March 19, 1945; F. Mexico City Conference—General; Box 20; Washington, DC; NAR Personal Papers; RAC.

108. Report from Kenneth Wasson to Nelson Rockefeller, August 24, 1943.

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audience. But the OIAA also relied on a standardized system of documentation for such evaluation of its film propaganda campaign in Latin America.

Every film screening that formed part of the 16mm program was recorded and evaluated. The projectionists registered the location, the type of audience, and their number in a standardized form. In a separate sheet, they reported the general reaction of the audience to each of the movies shown by ticking off one of four to five categories ranging from excellent to bad. But the responsibility of gauging reactions to the movies did not lie exclusively with the projectionists, as the OIAA applied other quantitative and qualitative measures to that purpose as well. By measuring the reach of the propaganda films and the reactions they provoked, the OIAA hoped to assess the effects of its propaganda campaign.

OIAA statistics reveal that the propaganda films of the 16mm program were shown to a wide spectrum of people. For Bolivia, this was already indicated in Kenneth Wasson's reports and can be confirmed by the statistics. Screenings for general audiences, but also in schools, factories, private clubs, hospitals, or barracks, were listed.[109] This picture presented itself similarly all over Latin America. Screenings in Argentina were held in schools, private clubs, churches, or hospitals and libraries. Typically, 100–200 people attended such screenings. And despite tense relations between neutral Argentina and the United States, the OIAA could also show movies to Argentinian officers in the Ministerio de Marina in November 1944.[110] As already stressed in the Bolivian case, the targeting of elites, particularly military officials, was an important part of the distribution strategy, and the fact that Brazil's Getúlio Vargas watched OIAA movies in his presidential palace was celebrated as a success.[111]

The statistics on the screenings all over Latin America were compiled into monthly summaries, indicating the totals of screenings and attendance numbers per film. Thanks to these figures, the reach of the 16mm program can be quantified, and the most watched pictures can be identified. Of the top four of all films listed, three were from Disney. *Der Fuehrer's Face*, *The Winged Scourge*, and *The Grain that Built a Hemisphere* all had attendance numbers well over 4 million people by June 1945, and the figures for other Disney shorts were in the millions as well. The 4,974,610 individuals who had seen *Der Fuehrer's Face* through the 16mm program amounted to 3.9% of the population of all Latin America.[112]

109. Latin American Distribution—Bolivia, Period October 28–November 24, 1945; Reports; Box 225, Bolivia; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

110. Argentina Report on 16mm Film Exhibition for the month of November 1944; reports 1944; Box 223, Argentina; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

111. Memorandum-BD-No, 4511, September 25, 1944; Reports; Box 228, Brazil; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

112. 16mm Films—Latin American Program—Summary by Title, Period June Report 1945. The calculation is based on the Latin American population size of 127 million, provided by the OIAA in the same report.

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But its audience must have been considerably larger still, as the short also generated "biggest record sales" in Latin American cinemas.[113] The Latin American box office receipts cannot be provided, but historians with access to the Disney Archives maintain that the feature films *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* were very successful in Latin America, while not performing that well in the United States.[114] Overall, they brought in 1.2 and 3.4 million dollars, respectively.[115] These revenues exceeded the production costs by far and hence indicate that Disney's collaboration with the OIAA was quite lucrative. In sum, Disney's pictures had a wide reach, and the collaboration with the OIAA proved to be profitable and good promotion for the brand.

The OIAA did not want to measure just the reach of its propaganda but also the effect the propaganda had on Latin Americans. To that end, several quantitative and qualitative measures to gauge audience reactions were implemented. Audience reaction was largely equated with effect. Again, it was social scientists such as Leonard Doob and Hadley Cantril who designed these methods. Leonard Doob implemented the general reaction sheets that the projectionists would have to tick off after each screening, based on their perception of the audience's reactions to the films.[116] A large sample of reaction sheets from Mexico reveals that usually only the highest categories were ticked off.[117] Some reasonable doubt to such widespread euphoria seems appropriate, and such doubt is nurtured by observations of Herbert Cervin from the OIAA coordination committee in Mexico. In a letter to Nelson Rockefeller, he described how the projectionists "usually put anything that suits them" in the reaction sheets. He himself witnessed a screening with poor audience reaction that the projectionist would tick off as "Excellent." He concluded, "I do not think that the Motion Picture Division can base sound judgement from these improperly filled reaction blanks."[118] The reaction sheets were the most extensive method to measure audience reactions, and they depended on local projectionists, who probably had an interest in reporting positive reactions, as their jobs depended on the OIAA's conviction that its propaganda was successful. Consequently, the reliability of these reaction sheets regarding actual audience reactions is very limited.

113. Inquiry files to Supplement 2 of OEMcr-107; Walt Disney Productions Film Unit (OEMcr 107); Box 959; 77. PF MPD; RG 229; NACP.

114. Richard Shale, "Donald Duck Joins Up. The Walt Disney Studio during World War II" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1976), 207–11; Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 402; Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney*, 101–5, 239–44.

115. Shale, "Donald Duck Joins Up," 238.

116. Memorandum by Leonard Doob on how to measure audience reactions to films, May 18, 1942; F. Reaction to Films; Box 214; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

117. Exhibition Reports on Non-theatrical Films; Reports, Box 230, Colombia and Mexico; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

118. Letter from Herbert Cervin to Nelson Rockefeller, May 29, 1944; Films (Misc.); Box 235 Mexico; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

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The reaction sheets were not the only method to measure reactions and the effect of the propaganda, though. The OIAA also planned to make "systematic reports on sentiments in the Other American Republics," which meant widespread interviews and polling. Despite confidentially discussing the implementation of such a program with George Gallup and Hadley Cantril, the two most prominent pollsters in the United States, widespread polling was never implemented.[119] Hadley Cantril's Motion Pictures Medellín Survey, which assessed the cinema habits in that city, remained an exception. Some measures that were carried out were occasional interviews with movie-goers and the analysis of local newspapers to assess the reception of the movies by the press, which was implemented by Leonard Doob.[120] However, the scope and the reliability of theses reaction measurement methods seemed quite limited—especially as indicators for the effects of the propaganda films on the people, which was the actual goal of measuring reactions.

In practice, the OIAA relied heavily on the reports of its coordination committees for the evaluation of the propaganda films. For these reports, committee members would often use a mix of some of the discussed methods and enhance the results with their personal evaluation. In fact, the personal evaluation often lay at the core of these reports. An example already discussed are the reports from Bolivia by Kenneth Wasson, who saw the 16mm program as a very effective means to influence the Bolivian public.[121] His colleagues in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay seemed to agree on the effectiveness of the film propaganda. In a report from Brazil, the residents of a remote village were quoted exclaiming, "here is an example of how the Americans know the way to use propaganda" in regard to the 16mm program.[122] Radio pioneer Herbert Cervin from the Mexican coordination committee concluded that "films fix the attention upon both subject and goodwill message more than can be done via newspapers, radio or magazines."[123] In a regional conference of the River Plate countries committees, the attendants stated that "it was unanimously agreed that this [16mm program] was one of the most effective efforts of our information campaign and has proven extremely valuable in all countries."[124] These people in charge of overseeing and coordinating the OIAA's propaganda campaign in the field agreed, on the basis of their personal experience and impression, on film propaganda as the most effective measure to influence the Latin American public.

119. Memorandum by Leonard Doob to NAR on systematic reports on sentiments in the other American Republics, May 23, 1942; F. Reaction to Films; Box 214; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

120. Rowland, *History of the CIAA*, 85.

121. Report from Kenneth Wasson to Nelson Rockefeller, August 24, 1943.

122. Memorandum-BD-No, 4511, September 25, 1944.

123. Report attached to a letter from Herbert Cerwin to Wallache Harrison, December 19, 1945; Reports; Box 230, Colombia and Mexico; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP. On Herbert Cervin, see Prutsch, *Creating Good Neighbors?*, 114.

124. Minutes of the Regional Conference of the River Plate Countries, February 11, 1944.

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The committees also reported specifically on the effectiveness of the Disney films. Journalist Ray Joseph from the Argentinian coordination committee, who initially was very critical about the OIAA's collaboration with Disney, concluded in September 1943 that *Saludos Amigos* was "undoubtedly the best inter-American film effort to date."[125] The Uruguayan committee reported in the same vein.[126] In regard to Disney's educational films, the committees from Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina demanded that they "be enlarged—they are proving very popular and are doing an excellent job in every field they cover."[127] Another indicator for Walt Disney's popularity in Latin America can be seen in the receptions the cartoon tycoon enjoyed there during his OIAA-sponsored visits. Be it in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, or Mexico, Disney was always received by huge crowds and the heads of state, which embraced the father of Mickey Mouse to profit from his popularity. Disney even received the Ordem Nacional do Cruzeiro do Sul in Brazil and the Aguila Azteca in Mexico, the highest orders for a foreigner in these countries.[128] These positive reactions and commercial success were equated, or at least seen as key, to assess the effect of the Disney propaganda movies.

The equation of a happy audience with successful propaganda was widely shared in the OIAA, but it did also lead to some internal critique. The most prominent critic was Don Francisco, the head of the Department of Information Services of the OIAA. After a visit to Bogotá, where he witnessed a screening with a master of ceremonies, a comedian, and a small orchestra, all paid for by the OIAA, he questioned whether such expenses to entertain the audience were justified. He remarked, "I think it is true of our whole information program in Colombia, as well as other countries, that too much attention is being given to developing and pleasing the audience, and not enough to getting over a message that will help the United States."[129] Another indicator for how entertaining the audiences was prioritized is exemplified by the fact that some of the most shown movies in the whole 16mm program were three Goofy pictures without any propagandistic content.[130] The inclusion of these purely entertaining shorts in the 16mm program was probably due to the lack of Disney propaganda movies in the early

125. Motion Picture Memorandum No. 434, September 1, 1943; Reaction; Box 222, Argentina; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

126. General Conclusions on Uruguayan Film Reactions, October 22, 1943; Reactions to Films; Box 237, Peru, Puerto Rico and Uruguay; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

127. Minutes of the Regional Conference of the River Plate Countries, February 11, 1944.

128. Report on the Walt Disney South American Field Survey, December 22, 1941; Box 947; 77. PF MPS; RG 229; NACP; Monica A. Rankin, *México, La Patria!: Propaganda and Production during World War II*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 174.

129. Letter from Don Francisco to Russell Pierce, July 5, 1944; Reports; Box 230, Colombia and Mexico; 1. GR; RG 229; NACP.

130. Those were *The Olympic Champ* (1942), *How to Swim* (1942), and *How to Fish* (1942). They each had almost 2 million views by June 1945. 16mm Films—Latin American Program—Summary by Title, Period June Report 1945.

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stages of the program, and the simultaneous high demand for Disney cartoons from the audiences. Taking Don Francisco's worries seriously, the possibility remains that the OIAA's propaganda film program was just free entertainment for Latin Americans and successful branding for Walt Disney at the cost of the United States but without the desired propaganda effects.[131]

The US evaluation of the program in the imminent postwar period did not reflect such a possibility. In his Master's thesis from 1949, World War II veteran Melvin Greenstadt wrote that "it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of Disney's work in the OCIAA program." As his cartoons had "such universal appeal," it would have been "doubtful that any other approach could have succeeded in reaching and influencing the vast audiences his films did."[132] Eduardo Villaseñor in turn doubted that the OIAA had achieved its goal of influencing vast population strata in Latin America. The director of the National Bank of Mexico was a supporter of the Good Neighbor Policy, but he criticized the United States for having failed to convince the Latin American people that cooperation with the United States was beneficial for them. Consequently, ordinary Latin Americans would remain skeptical or even hostile toward the United States.[133] Although Villaseñor did not address the film program or Disney specifically in his article, his assessment stands in stark contrast to that of Nelson Rockefeller, who remained a supporter of the use of the mass media for US foreign policy and recalled the collaboration with Disney as "the most effective work in inter-American relations."[134]

Although Latin America lost importance in US foreign policy and the OIAA and its film propaganda campaign were discontinued in 1946, the United States went on to use film for its now globalized propaganda programs. Many of the OIAA's employees were transferred to the State Department, where they developed the peace-time "overseas information activities" that would take off in the ensuing Cold War.[135] Walt Disney also reflected positively on his work for the government and took it as inspiration to successfully expand the work of his studio in the realm of education.[136] He would even continue to do films on governmental request such as the "Disneyland" episode *Our Friend the Atom*

131. Kornel Chang, concentrating on the Mexican coordination committee of the OIAA, speaks of "muted reception," meaning that the evaluations of the OIAA's propaganda program showed its failure but were ignored. For his conclusion, Chang overemphasizes the more skeptical reports. Held against a broader sample of reports from all Latin America, Chang's pointed conclusion cannot be sustained, although it is indeed doubtful whether the OIAA propaganda movies achieved their goals. Chang, "Muted Reception."

132. Melvin Greenstadt, "A Critical Survey of United States Government Films in World War II," (MA diss, University of Southern California, 1949), 66.

133. La política del buen vecino, por Eduardo Villaseñor, en revista "Así," December 23, 1944; Expd. 9; Caja 1; Fondo Eduardo Villaseñor; Archivo Colmex.

134. Letter from Nelson Rockefeller to Walt Disney, May 17, 1946, cit. in: Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 412.

135. Nicholas John Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency. American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 23–32.

136. Walt Disney, "Mickey as Professor," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1945): 119–25.

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(1957) or represent the United States on the international scene.[137] Social scientists such as Harold Lasswell or Hadley Cantril would continue to shape the US approach to the use of the mass media as heads of big state-sponsored communication studies projects, and some of the Disney films produced for the OIAA were continually shown as part of the global film campaigns of the United States Information Service (USIS).[138] Consequently, Seth Fein stresses that the OIAA's wartime program was the basis for an institutionalization of the use of mass media by Washington in the Cold War.[139] The positively evaluated OIAA propaganda film program with Disney at its center then was a leading cause for the continued and expanded use of entertaining or educational films and mobile projectors as tools of US foreign policy.

When the United States reinvigorated its Latin American film program in the 1950s, it did so in a post–Good Neighbor Policy setting and under the pretext of fighting communism. USIS contracted Disney veteran Ernesto Terrazas, who created new anticommunist cartoons starring Manolin, a rooster that strongly resembled Panchito Pistolas from *The Three Caballeros*.[140] But also Disney went on to use its figures to promote ideas in line with US interests in Latin America, ultimately provoking backlash there. In their 1971 classic *Como leer al Pato Donald*, Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart pointed out that Disney comic book characters propagated US imperialist ideology to Latin American kids. Their book was a sweeping success in Latin America and found a global audience critical of Disney and the United States. In the first author's homeland, Chile, however, *Como leer al Pato Donald* was shortly thereafter forbidden and burnt on live television by the US-backed Pinochet regime.[141] For many Latin Americans, Disney and the United States had almost become synonymous, for better or worse.

Conclusion

Disney film propaganda for Latin America must be understood as hype about the untapped potential of a relatively new medium. It was the product of a close collaboration between the US government, communication scientists, and Walt

137. Most prominently, Disney was part of Vice President Richard Nixon's delegation at the American National Exhibition 1959 in Moscow, to which he contributed a 360-degree film presentation on US sites.

138. Several of the Disney shorts available online feature the fade-in "U.S.I.S. United States Information Service presents." For continuities in communication research from World War II to the Cold War, see Benno Nietzel, "Propaganda, Psychological Warfare and Communication Research in the USA and the Soviet Union during the Cold War," *History of the Human Sciences* 29, nos. 4–5 (October 2016): 59–76.

139. Fein, "New Empire into Old."

140. Nicholas J. Cull, "US Public Diplomacy in Latin America," in *US Public Diplomacy Strategies in Latin America during the Sixties: Time for Persuasion*, ed. Francisco Rodríguez Jiménez, Lorenzo Delgado Gómez-Escalonilla, and Benedetta Calandra (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2024), 61–87.

141. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (London, 2019), V–XV, 1–20.

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Disney Productions and depended on local actors and the Good Neighbor Policy. The scholars who designed the OIAA's programs had studied propaganda before the war for the Rockefeller Foundation and regarded film as the most effective medium for it. Disney's animated characters proved to be the perfect vehicles, as they figured among the most popular US movie stars in Latin America. With their focus on pleasing audiences by entertaining or educating them while conveying US values, the Disney films represented a new propaganda approach that differed from government-produced shorts and newsreels, with their focus on information. The wide reach of the Disney films was made possible by the elaborate distribution machinery of the OIAA, which relied heavily on local actors with their own agendas. On the basis an evaluation that equated popularity and reach with effect, the Disney films were considered successful propaganda by the OIAA. Given the largely positive reception by Latin American audiences and politicians, critical voices from Latin America were not weighed too much. The conviction that Disney propaganda was successful persuasion was reinforced by the OIAA's inadequate evaluation, paving the way for a global application of the new propaganda approach. Whether the films were truly successful in shaping people's opinions remains open to debate, as they may have simply been successful branding for Disney and free entertainment for Latin Americans.

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