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## "In-Betweening" Disney: An Animated History of Hollywood Labor and Ideological Imagineering, 1935-1947

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“IN-BETWEENING” DISNEY: AN ANIMATED HISTORY OF HOLLYWOOD LABOR  
AND IDEOLOGICAL IMAGINEERING, 1935-1947

by

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B.A. May 2017, Old Dominion University

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## ABSTRACT

### “IN-BETWEENING” DISNEY: AN ANIMATED HISTORY OF HOLLYWOOD LABOR AND IDEOLOGICAL IMAGINEERING, 1935-1947

Bradley Edward Moore  
Old Dominion University, 2020  
Director: Dr. John Weber

The Walt Disney Company’s meticulously-crafted corporate mythos, as it developed in the mid-twentieth century, hid a conflicted history of anti-New Deal, nationalist ideology that was popularized during the clashes of the Hollywood labor movement in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1935, the National Labor Relations Act was passed as Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) entered full-scale production, and each were central to the labor-management conflict that lurked behind the scenes of the motion picture industry. By the mid-1940s, following the conclusion of the Second World War, Congress passed the Labor Management Relations (Taft-Hartley) Act and imposed a series of restrictions on U.S. labor organizations, including those in Hollywood. Compounding matters further, Hollywood’s elite and the federal government alleged that the specter of Communism had infiltrated major motion picture studios. In 1947, Walt Disney, among several others in the film industry, placed their fears on record before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

The biographies of men like Walt Disney have continued to dominate historical discussions related to U.S. industry and cultural production respectively. To date, however, there has been a peculiar disinterest in the artists and laborers who toiled behind the scenes of the U.S. filmmaking industry. This inattention to those artists has created noticeable gaps in the historiography of U.S. labor, more generally. In an effort to elevate the voices of Hollywood’s working class, this project places various primary sources, including organizational records,

artwork, and oral history interviews in conversation with corporate and government sources. This thesis deconstructs the mythmaking carried out by the Walt Disney Company, and places the animation studio's history at the intersection of U.S. labor organization and the proliferation of anti-New Deal ideology. This study argues that Walt Disney's status as successful Hollywood industrialist, asset of the federal government, and rabid anti-New Dealer fueled his campaign to demonize the organizational efforts of his artists and depict their assertions of federally-guaranteed labor rights as the subversive actions of cartoonish villains.

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This thesis is dedicated to my personal Disney Princesses: Kaydee, Taylor, and Olivia.

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too numerous to mention, have provided me with an endless supply of *happy thoughts* throughout my post-secondary education.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AFL	American Federation of Labor
AMPAS	Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
CSU	Conference of Studio Unions
FSC	Federation of Screen Cartoonists
HUAC	House Un-American Activities Committee
IATSE	International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees
MPA	Motion Picture Society for the Preservation of American Ideals
MPSA	Motion Picture Society for the Americas
NLRA	National Labor Relations Act
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
NWLB	National War Labor Board
OIAA	Office of Inter-American Affairs
OWI	Office of War Intelligence
SCG	Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Guild, Local 852
WDC	The Walt Disney Company
WDP	Walt Disney Productions, Ltd.

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## CHAPTER I

## AN INTRODUCTION TO “IN-BETWEENING” DISNEY HISTORY

The title and theme of this thesis, “in-betweening Disney,” pay homage to animators—past and present—and a double entendre.<sup>1</sup> The process of in-betweening, in the literal sense, was performed by those near the bottom of the labor hierarchy at Walt Disney’s fabled cartoon factory. By the late-1930s, the process of hand-drawn animation, arguably perfected at Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. (WDP), relied on a stratification of labor in order to maximize its output while maintaining quality. At the pinnacle of this hierarchy were the lead animators. These were men tasked with creating the “key, or extreme drawing[s] for a particular character.”<sup>2</sup> Next, were the breakdown men. As their title implied, they were responsible for “break[ing] down the action,” to maintain an animation unit’s “efficiency.”<sup>3</sup> At the bottom rungs of the animation hierarchy, just above the gendered work of the Ink and Paint Department, one would find the overworked and underpaid in-betweeners.<sup>4</sup> They were responsible for one of the most labor-intensive and thankless tasks at Disney’s studio and often received the lowest

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of disambiguation, Walt Disney has been generally referred to herein by his last name. His last name, however, has sometimes been used to describe any and all things “Disney” (e.g. his brother: Roy, the company they built together, etc.). Great effort has been taken to distinguish between meanings, but the researcher apologizes in advance for any subsequent lack of clarity.

<sup>2</sup> Although this is an oversimplification of the process, see: Walt Disney Productions, Ltd., *Information about the Walt Disney Animation Department*, n.d., John Canemaker Animation Collection, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, truncated herein as “JCAC.”

<sup>3</sup> *Information about the Walt Disney Animation Department*.

<sup>4</sup> As noted by Tom Sito, former President of the Motion Picture Screen Cartoonist’s Guild, Local 839 (formerly the Local 852), animation historian, and Disney animator, most “ink-and-paint departments were jokingly referred to as ‘hen houses’,” whereas Disney’s ink-and-painters had dubbed their department “Tehachapi, after a California women’s prison,” see: Tom Sito, *Drawing the Line: The Untold Story of the Animation Unions from Bosko to Bart Simpson* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 26.

compensation. In-betweening required great skill and concentration, and this repetitive labor was necessary in order to depict fluid and organic movement in animated pictures.

Scenes including key events and/or figures, animated without adequate in-between work would appear unnatural to audiences. Paradoxically, in-betweeners were considered a disposable resource, yet the product of their labor was indispensable. In the context of the present research, this process of “in-betweening” has been appropriated to describe a re-examination of key events and figures, in order to correct a series of historical omissions concerning Disney’s corporate record between 1935 and 1947. In 1935, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) was signed into law by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. More commonly known as the Wagner Act, the NLRA called for the formation of a board of government adjudicators, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), to handle labor-management disputes.<sup>5</sup> As the Wagner Act passed constitutional muster in the courts, Walt Disney’s animation studio had begun an industrial-scale animation project, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). Critical acclaim for the latter achievement belied Disney’s contempt for the former.

A labor-management crisis was brewing at Disney’s cartoon factory.<sup>6</sup> The rigorous working conditions required for *Snow White*—a feature-length, hand-drawn animated film—exacerbated tensions at the studio. Disillusionment among the industrial artists employed by Disney began to bear poisonous fruit. Many animators began to reject the representation offered by the Federation of Screen Cartoonists (FSC), a company-controlled union meant to limit self-

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<sup>5</sup> James A. Gross, *The Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board: National Labor Policy in Transition, 1937-1947* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> Disney’s labor struggles have been well documented by so many of his critics that this statement hardly needs qualification. Nevertheless, see: Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1997), 247-62; Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997) 204-27; Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 101-51.

organization among those employed by WDP. In response to the artists' attempts to assert their constitutionally-guaranteed right to organize their own union, Disney grew incredulous and began publicly berating his employees for daring to question his paternalistic benevolence.

In February 1941, Disney held mass meetings at his studio on Hyperion Boulevard.<sup>7</sup> During these meetings, Walt reminded his employees that he had once been a starving artist too, but he was able to pull himself up by the bootstraps and made the sacrifices necessary to ensure the enterprise he and his brother built would become self-sustaining. Disney had also set his sights on the labor leaders inside his studio, as they attempted to form an independent unit under the banner of the newly-organized Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Guild (SCG). Art Babbitt, a talented, spirited, and charismatic animator, eventually had his contract terminated for appearing too radical and subversive.

The SCG had allied itself with Herbert K. Sorrell, a career union organizer who became involved with Hollywood's labor movement by joining the International Brotherhood of Painters while employed by Universal Studios during the 1920s. In a response to corruption in the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Entertainers (IATSE), Sorrell and his painter brethren went on strike in April 1937. They elected him "Picket Captain" for the demonstrations at the Warner Brothers Studio because of his "experience in the shipyard strike in Oakland," when he and other longshoremen "turned over the patrol wagons" of local police officers.<sup>8</sup>

Early in 1941, in the wake of Disney's firing of Babbitt and other artists who favored the new union, the working class of the animation industry coordinated with Sorrell to strike WDP in

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<sup>7</sup> Walt Disney, "Talk Given by Walt to All Employees," February 10 and 11, 1941, Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Guild, Local 839 Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Oviatt Library, California State University, Northridge, truncated herein as "MPSCG."

<sup>8</sup> Herbert K. Sorrell, *You Don't Choose Your Friends: The Memoirs of Herbert Knott Sorrell*, interviewed by Elizabeth I. Dixon, 1961, Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles, 1963, 15-22.

1941. The Animator's Strike signified more than a rejection of the prevailing anti-unionism at Disney's studio. It was a watershed moment in the era of Hollywood unionization that galvanized support for Herb Sorrell among the industry's left wing.

WDP executives knew that a work stoppage threatened the company's bottom line, but their efforts to prevent the unionization of Disney's artists led to attacks from all sides. While the labor-management conflict took root in Hollywood, Walt Disney had already cast his gaze on Central and South America. Before a resolution with the striking animators had been reached, Disney and several of his loyalists coordinated their efforts with Nelson Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs. Their mission was to foster hemispheric solidarity and out-propagandize the Third Reich. In the process of becoming a model Good Neighbor, Disney was able to experiment with more didactic forms of animation. For a moment, Donald Duck became one of the United States' most recognizable foreign dignitaries. Other film makers and businessmen embarked on similar "south of the border" ventures, but Disney and his studio benefited greatly from the economic, social, and political capital gained through lucrative contracts with the federal government and private industries.<sup>9</sup> This marriage between the state and art helped Disney's studio transition from an innocuous cartoon factory to a fully-fledged American war machine.

As the U.S. entered the Second World War, Disney's studio continued to produce films for the military and other branches of the federal government. No amount of government connections, however, granted him total victory over his enemies in Hollywood's continuing labor movement. WDP lost its public battle with Art Babbitt when the NLRB found in favor of

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<sup>9</sup> J.B. Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney: Walt Disney and the Good Neighbor Program, 1941-1948*, (New York: Disney Editions, 2009).



the artists for wrongful termination and lost wages following the Animator's Strike of 1941.<sup>10</sup> By 1945, however, the SCG had drawn itself—quite literally—into a jurisdictional dispute between the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU), led by Sorrell, and leadership of the IATSE at the Warner Brothers Studio.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the previous strike at Disney's studio, wherein the violence was mostly symbolic, the Warner Brothers affair erupted in actual bloodshed. Although Hollywood's working class was only a segment of a larger, nationwide labor movement, the federal government's postwar legislative reaction was clearly aimed at organizations like the CSU. In 1947, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which effectively neutered agitators like Sorrell and left-leaning unions such as the CSU. Hollywood's right-wing, Disney included, had crushed their opposition by the latter half of the 1940s.

By the end of 1947, a moral panic enveloped Hollywood. Radicalism and alleged subversive activity came to be viewed as national security threats. The panic was based on an alleged Communist plot to gain control of the motion picture industry and its didactic apparatus. Some of the seeds of this fear were planted by Disney and other right-wing ideologues such as Ayn Rand, an author and Soviet émigré. Disney, Rand, and other elites from the film making industry organized the Motion Picture Society for the Preservation of American Ideals (MPA), a group that intended to combat the alleged Red Menace operating behind the scenes at the movie studios. These events culminated in a series of congressional hearings held by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in October of 1947, which in turn lead to the

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<sup>10</sup> *NLRB v. Walt Disney Productions*, 146 F.2d 44; 1944 U.S. App. LEXIS 2231.

<sup>11</sup> Roy Brewer, *I.A.T.S.E. Informational Bulletin* (International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees, November 13, 1945), *Sorrell, Herbert K. – Investigative File*, Exhibits, Evidence, and Other Records of the Investigative Section of the Internal Security Committee During the 79th through 94th Congress Related to the Hollywood Black List. Committee Papers, 1945-1975, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789-2015, Record Group 233, National Archives Building, Washington DC. Subsequent references to these investigative documents and witness files were truncated herein as “RG233.”

“Hollywood inquisition” and the blacklisting of several prominent writers and artists.<sup>12</sup> Walt Disney’s role in all of these events—from his labor troubles that began in the mid-1930s to his testimony before Congress in 1947—was informed by his steadfast commitment to right-wing, nationalist ideology.

### **Storyboarding the Past**

In 1937, it may have been true that the efforts of artists in tinsel town to organize their labor bore little resemblance to those of the autoworkers in Dearborn, Michigan or Chicago’s steelworkers. For numerous reasons, Hollywood’s labor movement has been overlooked by working-class historians. In part, this inattention to unionization within the motion picture industry has been the result of apathy towards film as an ideological medium, particularly among U.S. labor’s rank and file. Historian Steven Ross inferred, from an interview in the late-1980s with David Beck of the Teamsters, that the leadership of the labor movement “fail[ed] to appreciate that cultural struggles were...just as important as workplace struggles.”<sup>13</sup> Since the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the motion picture industry has had a genuine connection to the working-class in America. It was not the magical kiss of the Roosevelt Administration’s New Deal—nor its “contradictory programmatic mélange,” as it has been described by Joseph McCartin—that aroused Hollywood’s labor movement from its slumber.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-60* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Ross provided Beck’s incredulous response verbatim: “Movies? Who gives a fuck about the movies!” See: Steven J. Ross, “American Workers, American Movies: Historiography and Methodology,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* no. 59 (Spring 2001): 81, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547901004100>, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph A. McCartin, “‘As Long as There Survives’: Contemplating the Wagner Act after Eighty Years.” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* 14, no. 2 (2017): 22-3, *Duke University Press*, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1215/15476715-3790138>, accessed: January 2020.

By the time the constitutionality of the National Labor Relations Board was affirmed, America's working-class had been wide awake for decades.

In the 1980s, Roy Rosenzweig argued that "it may be more fruitful to focus on the movie going experience, rather than...content."<sup>15</sup> While movie theaters were sites for interclass conflict and exchange, consumption was only part of the equation. The motion picture companies in Hollywood were built on the same industrial foundations as many other U.S. corporations. Film production and distribution played equally significant roles in the industry's rise to prominence. Also, as Lizabeth Cohen has noted, corporate takeovers involving the distribution of films and industry advances in technology "disrupted the equilibrium between the neighborhood theatre and the chain-owned picture palaces" of the 1930s in Chicago.<sup>16</sup> If Rosenzweig or Cohen had turned their gaze a bit higher than the working-class moviegoers themselves or the raucous theaters they frequented, then they might have caught a glimpse of a hostile takeover in the projection booth. As Rosenzweig and Cohen have suggested, working-class Americans still crowded the seats of movie theatres during the mid-1930s, despite the deleterious effects of the Great Depression.<sup>17</sup>

The Chicago mob found its way into the motion picture racket by infiltrating the IATSE vis-à-vis the screen projectionists during the Great Depression. As Herbert K. Sorrell, founder of the CSU and alleged Communist, recalled when providing his oral history to Elizabeth Dixon in the 1960s, George Browne, representative for Chicago's film projectionists and later president for

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<sup>15</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, "From Rum Shop to Rialto: Workers and Movies," in *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920*, Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Modern History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.) 199.

<sup>16</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, "Encountering Mass Culture," in *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 125.

<sup>17</sup> As theatres increased their capacity, crowds of working-class moviegoers and their behaviors became more heterogeneous, see: Cohen, "Encountering Mass Culture," 121-31; Rosenzweig, "From Rum Shop to Rialto," 198-204.

the IATSE in the 1930s, and Willie Bioff, his enforcer, were central to the plot.<sup>18</sup> During the Great Depression, Browne and Bioff ran a racket where they would recruit projectionists, arrange to collect wages for two men, staff the theatre booths with a single man, and then pocket the difference. Through this scheme, Browne and Bioff gained admission to the IATSE's executive leadership, with a little help from the Chicago mob, but the production process was where the magic of motion pictures really shined. Walt Disney despised unions, but WDP—like most other major studios—made exceptions for the IATSE. The IATSE's muscle and backroom connections in Hollywood made tolerating the organization's presence a necessary evil for many major motion picture studios.

At this point, it may also be appropriate to address the other flying elephant in the room: “Ideological Imagineering.” As with in-betweening, this is another bastardization of Disney's corporate jargon with a complex meaning. The term, Imagineering, has traditionally been used to describe the creative engineering process for developing guest experiences at the Disney theme parks. Ideological Imagineering, on the other hand, has been applied to the WDC's relationship with U.S. history. In the mid-1980s, Mike Wallace addressed the concept of Imagineering in an essay on the national mythmaking performed at California's Disneyland and Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, or what he called “Mickey Mouse History.”<sup>19</sup> There was a great deal of disservice being done to public history, he argued. Imagineering has been a key element of Disney's very public and profitable mythmaking since the company's beginnings as a young

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<sup>18</sup> Sorrell became a prime example of labor historians' inattention to Hollywood's unionization. For what little analysis there has been on the labor agitator's significance, see: Laurie Pinter, “Herbert K. Sorrell as the Grade-B Hero: Militancy and Masculinity in the Studios.” *Labor History* 37, no. 3 (1996): 392-416, *Taylor & Francis*, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00236619612331386883>, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Mike Wallace, “Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World,” *Radical History* no. 32 (January 1985): 33-57, *Duke University Press*, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1985-32-33>, accessed: January 2020.

animation startup in the 1920s. According to Wallace, “At Disneyland in California and Disney World in Florida, the past is powerfully evoked for visitors—using music, movies, robots, and the latest in special effects.”<sup>20</sup> Logically, Imagineers were part of that process. As an “Imagineer” explained to Wallace in the 1980s, their job was to “create...a ‘Disney Realism’, sort of Utopian in nature, where we can carefully program out all the negative, unwanted elements.”<sup>21</sup> This Disney Realism has been practiced in the physical realm—in its theme parks—and in the ideological realm—in its mass media products and their merchandising. Both were the product of the WDP’s long and sordid history involving the Hollywood labor movement and Ideological Imagineering.

At the end of Ross’ “American Workers, American Movies,” the historian called on future scholars to “convey a new appreciation of film as integral to organizing the *American workplace* and the *American mind*.”<sup>22</sup> Though Wallace’s analysis of Disney’s theme parks and their presentation of public history preceded Ross’ call to action by nearly two decades, it also suggested that Disney’s history laid at that crossroads. The research presented here places WDC’s corporate history at that intersection of the “American workplace and the American mind.”<sup>23</sup> More importantly, it endeavors to simultaneously answer Ross’ prompt while expanding upon Wallace’s scathing critique. This thesis is a deconstruction of the legacies of Walt Disney, the company that bears his name, and their shared histories of Ideological Imagineering.

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<sup>20</sup> Wallace, “Mickey Mouse History,” 35.

<sup>21</sup> Wallace, “Mickey Mouse History,” 35.

<sup>22</sup> Ross, “American Workers, American Movies,” 99. Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> Ross, “American Workers, American Movies,” 99.

## The Breakdown

In the early-1940s, social and political scientists took notice of labor organization in the motion picture industry. In 1941, Murray Ross, for example, declared that “Hollywood is a union town” in his opening statement of *Stars and Strikes*.<sup>24</sup> A closer examination of the politics involved in Hollywood’s labor-management relations, however, would have betrayed Ross’ enthusiasm for the progress he documented. Although the passage of the Wagner Act set the stage, so to speak, for substantial momentum among the film industry’s workers, recognition of their federally-guaranteed rights to organize did not magically appear once the legislation passed constitutional muster in the courts.<sup>25</sup> Those rights had to be asserted, and as it was in other industrial sectors, that process was often ugly. According to a later assessment by Ross, “the Hollywood craft unions returned to their traditional jurisdictional quarrels...after the end of World War II.”<sup>26</sup> As suggested by one of Ross’ fellow social scientists, the expanding popularity of the motion picture industry exacerbated economic disparities in Hollywood. In 1948, A.P. Dawson agreed with Ross that “motion picture employees [were] among the highest paid workers in the world,” but major labor organizations like the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU) and the IATSE had been plagued by “internecine squabbles.”<sup>27</sup> By the end of the decade, it was difficult to ascertain whether academics like Dawson and Ross agreed that efforts to unionize the labor of the motion picture industry had paid off for the working class.

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<sup>24</sup> Murray Ross, *Stars and Strikes: Unionization of Hollywood* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1941), 1.

<sup>25</sup> For a recent analysis of the Wagner Act’s significance and legacy, see: McCartin, “‘As Long as There Survives’,” 21-42.

<sup>26</sup> Murray Ross, “Labor Relations in Hollywood,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 254, The Motion Picture Industry (November 1947): 63, *JSTOR*, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1026140>, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>27</sup> A.P. Dawson, “Hollywood’s Labor Troubles,” *International Labor Review* 1, no. 4. (July 1948): 640 and 645, *JSTOR*, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2518472>, accessed: January 2020.

One strategy that actually paid dividends for Hollywood's labor movement from 1935 to 1947 was falling in line with Herb Sorrell and the Conference of Studio Unions. This tactic required both stamina and courage, however. Throughout the latter half of the 1930s and into the mid-1940s, the smaller CSU remained in constant conflict with the much larger IATSE. Hollywood's left-wing laborites resisted the corruption of mob influence from the beginning. Furthermore, some of the avenues for suppressing labor's resistance included accusations of subversive or radical activity and Communist tendencies or affiliations.<sup>28</sup> Such charges had razor-sharp teeth and could bring the weight of the federal government down to crush left-wing opposition. As Sorrell explained, "it's unbelievable how far people will go to win a point. When they find someone that won't sell out...they try to kill him or, at least, call him a Communist."<sup>29</sup> Democratic unionization may not have won the war for control of Hollywood's labor movement, but thanks to men like Sorrell and the CSU, they managed to put up one hell of a fight for the better part of the decade.

One particularly interesting segment of Hollywood's workforce included its animators and cartoonists. In *Drawing the Line*, animator and historian, Tom Sito updated Ross' 1941 declaration with an addendum: "Hollywood is a union town...Mickey Mouse...Donald Duck, Goofy...Ariel...Roger Rabbit [etc.] were all created by union men and women."<sup>30</sup> As media intended for child-consumers, these cartoon characters have been sold to the public as innocuous entertainment. However, nothing could have been further from the truth with regard to the

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<sup>28</sup> "Testimony of Walt Disney," *Hearings Regarding the Communist Infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, October 20-30, 1947), 280-6, *ProQuest*. PDF, subsequent references to these transcripts have been truncated herein as "*Hearings*."

<sup>29</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 194.

<sup>30</sup> Sito's list included several others, but the non-Disney characters were omitted for brevity, see: Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 6.

ideology involved in their creation. Sito further argued that “no one can hope to really understand the history of the American animated cartoon without knowing the unions’ story.”<sup>31</sup> The first rumblings of American animators’ unionization came from the home of Popeye and Betty Boop in 1937. As noted by Sito, artists employed by Max Fleischer’s animation studio in New York City were among the first to invoke their newly-acquired constitutional rights under the Wagner Act.<sup>32</sup> In Hollywood, several animation departments faced little resistance to their lobbying for higher wages and better working conditions. Most of the major studios quickly folded to the demands of their artists once Sorrell began negotiating on their behalf. Although, as evinced by the events surrounding the Animator’s Strike of 1941, pinning a union button on Mickey Mouse and/or Donald Duck would prove to be an arduous task.

Though Sito alluded to Disney’s hasty departure from the country during the Animator’s strike, Darlene Sadlier offered a view from the top regarding the significance of Disney’s efforts in shaping the face of Good Neighbor diplomacy. In *Americans All: Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II*, Sadlier provided a thorough examination of the OIAA’s multi-faceted approach to “smart power,” including the agency’s Motion Picture Division, headed by John Hay Whitney.<sup>33</sup> The work of Greg Grandin, however, offered a more interesting historiographic opening in which Disney’s Central and South American exploits could be examined. According to Grandin, in *Empire’s Workshop*, the western hemisphere was where the U.S. empire gradually transitioned to a militaristic form of intervention, justifying “belligerent

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<sup>31</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Notably, the modern-day zeitgeist that includes the wildly popular genre of superhero films would not have been the same if it were not for the strike at Fleischer’s studio. At that time, a young in-betweener named Jacob Kurtzberg resigned from Fleischer’s. Kurtzberg continued working under the assumed name, Jack Kirby. Kirby then teamed up with Stan Lee and Joe Simon in 1941, and together, they founded the cultural juggernaut, Marvel Comics, see: Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 98.

<sup>33</sup> Darlene Sadlier, *Americans All: Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012).



diplomacy, not just for the sake of nation building but to advance ‘freedom’.”<sup>34</sup> By the early-1940s, Disney and his artists had expanded their focus beyond cultural production. By currying favor from defense industries, WDP had ingratiated itself to the U.S. military-industrial complex. Additionally, Disney had co-conspirators and competition in Central and South America. American entrepreneur, Henry Ford, and fellow Hollywood filmmaker, Orson Welles, made useful—albeit tangential—examples for comparison. Conservatively stated, Ford and Welles experienced modest failures in their Central and South American missions, whereas Disney became a paragon of the Good Neighbor program with industry support and the assistance of Rockefeller’s OIAA.<sup>35</sup>

Returning to the domestic concern of Hollywood’s ongoing labor movement, Gerald Horne offered a more nuanced, macro-level perspective in *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950*.<sup>36</sup> Horne’s work was complimentary to the research performed by Sito—an industry insider. Examining several internal conflicts among the labor movement, Horne argued that while “a more complete understanding of movies may be within the ‘intellectual’s grasp’, it cannot be reached... absent an understanding of the basic relations of production” in the motion picture industry.<sup>37</sup> In addition to inter-class conflict, Horne also noted that there were problematic views held by actors and activists on either side of Hollywood’s ideological spectrum. The CSU faced internal struggles as it battled with IATSE dominance. According to

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<sup>34</sup> Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*, 1st ed., The American Empire Project (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 3-6; Sadlier, *Americans All*, 1-3.

<sup>35</sup> Regarding the comparisons to Welles and Ford respectively, see: Catherine Benamou, “Dual-Engined Diplomacy: Walt Disney, Orson Welles, and Pan-American Film Policy during World War II,” in *¡Américas unidas!: Nelson A. Rockefeller’s Office of Inter-American Affairs, 1940-1946*, eds. Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch (Madrid, Spain; Frankfurt, Germany: Iberoamericana; Vervuert, 2012), 107-142; Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford’s Forgotten Jungle City* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Gerald Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds and Trade Unionists* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001), 35.

<sup>37</sup> Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 13.

Horne, Jeff Kibre, another prominent California labor leader, would have agreed that the IATSE served as an industry-wide “company union and scab-herding agency” for Hollywood filmmakers by the mid-1940s.<sup>38</sup> Labor and ideology appeared to be inseparable, so this led to the realization that a case study of Disney’s labor-management conflict, when combined with his ideological zeal, had significant implications regarding the lifeblood of his Burbank studio in the 1940s.

Lastly, Thomas Doherty’s *Show Trial* moved beyond the immense complexity of the “Hollywood inquisition,” as studied by Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, to argue that the HUAC hearings regarding the motion picture industry in 1947 were simply part of an elaborate production.<sup>39</sup> The need for the inquiry was largely substantiated by information contained in the investigative reports of H.A. Smith, a former agent at J. Edgar Hoover’s Federal Bureau of Investigation. As Doherty noted, the 1947 hearings were a reprisal of the relatively mundane inquiries made by the HUAC in 1938, helmed by Martin Dies.<sup>40</sup> This earlier iteration of the HUAC and Dies’ red-baiting failed to maintain the attention of the American public, who were easily distracted by the nation’s preparation during the War. Postwar prosperity, however, had delivered American consumers more than enough daily bread.<sup>41</sup> The government needed a new

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<sup>38</sup> Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 53-4.

<sup>39</sup> The work of Ceplair, Englund, and Doherty has become more prescient as Donald J. Trump has incessantly asserted that he has been the victim of “hoaxes... and witch hunts,” congressional or otherwise, since he was elected to the U.S. presidency in 2016. As suggested, for a more thorough examination of the investigations into Communism’s role Hollywood, see: Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-60* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Thomas Doherty, *Show Trial: Hollywood, HUAC, and the Birth of the Blacklist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). For a less veracious discussion of recent uses of those terms, as well as congressional inquiry, see: Donald Trump, *Letter to Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House of Representatives*, December 17, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Doherty, *Show Trial*, 16-8.

<sup>41</sup> If the calculations provided to Disney by the U.S. Department of Agriculture were correct, then American farmers had produced enough wheat to fill the entirety of Red Square in Moscow with one massive loaf of bread, see: “Food Will Win the War,” 1942, *Walt Disney Treasures: On the Front Lines*, DVD (Walt Disney Productions, Ltd., 2004).

type of circus. According to Lowell Mellett, former head of the Bureau of Motion Pictures for the U.S. Office of War Intelligence (OWI), that “three-ring circus” was to be presented in October of 1947.<sup>42</sup> Together, these factors ensured that the public remained somewhat preoccupied as the U.S. entered into its Cold War with the Soviets, and Walt Disney became a prized witness when called to testify before the HUAC.

This thesis expounds on the meticulous research and historical labor of those discussed above, while filling in perceived gaps in the literature. Chapter I, “Of Mice and Layout Men,” furthers Sito’s argument that Disney animators such as Dave Hilberman, Art Babbitt, and Bill Hertz—among numerous others—should be “renowned for their artistic achievements...and lives as labor activists.”<sup>43</sup> Chapter II, “Donald Diplomacy,” accentuates the transitional period between the U.S. empire’s use of “soft power” and militaristic influence over its hemispheric neighbors, as posited by Sadlier and Grandin.<sup>44</sup> Unlike Horne’s broader analysis, which was insightful in its own right, Chapter III, “The American Art of War,” shifts attention to the artwork created by participants in the Hollywood labor movement and discusses their interpretations of the CSU’s clashes with IATSE forces and industry executives. The fourth and final chapter of this thesis, “Artists Shrugged,” concerns Doherty’s observation that “when the capitals of entertainment and politics converge the result is mutually corrosive,” but narrows its focus in order to evince a rather simple proposal.<sup>45</sup> During the mid-twentieth century, Disney and his studio, the Hollywood labor movement, and the government of the United States were caught

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<sup>42</sup> Lowell Mellett, “Three Rings in the Coming Circus and the Ring to Watch is the Third,” *The Washington Star*, October 14, 1947, *Mellett, Lowell – Investigative File*, RG233; Doherty, *Show Trial*, vii-viii.

<sup>43</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> Sadlier, *Americans All*, 1-3; Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> Doherty, *Show Trial*, xi.

in between two sides of an ideological conflict which was exacerbated, violently in some cases by nationalist Imagineers.

### **The In-Between**

Serious analysis of Disney's past has presented several challenges for scholars of history, not the least of which has been the WDC's legion of copyright and intellectual property attorneys. Another one of these challenges pertained to accessing primary sources. Few legitimate historians have infiltrated the WDC's corporate archives, whose entrance is guarded by massive, imposing sculptures of Snow White's notorious dwarves. On the other hand, a wealth of material patiently awaits resourceful and diligent researchers beyond the confines of WDC's Burbank studio. Precisely because of Disney's longstanding relationship with the federal government, several Record Groups in the National Archives II facility in College Park, Maryland housed primary evidence related to his studio's contract work for the OIAA, Office of War Intelligence, and defense industries.<sup>46</sup> Additional records, pertaining to various related HUAC investigations were also found in the Legislative Archives maintained in Washington D.C.<sup>47</sup> These official records of government agencies and congressional inquiry, however, lacked context only available in the capital of the U.S. filmmaking industry.

Incorporating a grassroots perspective into the events examined in this thesis required some historical in-between work be performed in the archives of Southern California. A substantial collection of Herb Sorrell's personal documents related to the Hollywood labor

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<sup>46</sup> In addition to documents found in Records of the Office of Inter-American Affairs, 1918-1951, Record Group 229. National Archives II at College Park, MD, truncated herein as "RG229," and Records of the Office of War Information, 1926-1951, Record Group 208. National Archives II at College Park, MD, truncated herein as "RG208," see: Formal and Informal Unfair Labor Practices and Representation Case Files, 1935-1948. Records of the National Labor Relations Board, 1933-2000, Record Group 25, National Archives II at College Park, MD, truncated herein as "RG25," for the NLRB records relating to labor-management disputes at Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. during the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>47</sup> See: RG233, as noted above.

movement can be found in the Charles E. Young Research Library at University of California, Los Angeles. In addition to the scrapbooks kept by Sorrell during the strikes of the mid-1940s, UCLA has possession of one of the only printed transcripts of Sorrell's oral history.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, many of the strike-related records of the SCG are housed at the Oviatt Library's Special Collections at California State University, Northridge. In addition to the sources on the Disney Strike, CSUN's archive also had a noteworthy research file maintained by the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles on the MPA.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, one of the more remarkable resources consulted lied off the beaten path at the Southern California Library for Social Science and Research. The history of the library's archive was a fascinating one in and of itself. Emil Freed, the library's founder was a member of California's Communist Party, was actively engaged in labor organization prior to the merger between the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and was instrumental in founding several of the state's labor schools derided by right-wing, nationalist ideologues.<sup>50</sup> Among the useful items held at the archive founded by Freed were the personal papers of David Hilberman, one of Disney's artists and fellow founder of the

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<sup>48</sup> See: Herbert Knott Sorrell Scrapbooks about Los Angeles and the Hollywood Strike (Collection 791). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, truncated herein as "HKSS;" and Sorrell, *You Don't Choose Your Friends*.

<sup>49</sup> See: Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Guild, Local 839 Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Oviatt Library, California State University, Northridge, truncated herein as "MPSCG," and Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, Community Relations Committee Collection, Part 2, ca. 1920-1950, Series II: Fact Finding and Community Relations, ca. 1920-1950, Subseries E: Investigated Groups and Individuals, 1930-1949, Special Collections and Archives, Oviatt Library, California State University, Northridge, truncated herein as "JFC."

<sup>50</sup> Although based on hearsay, one of the archivists pointed out that some researchers have allegedly spotted the ghost of Freed, who was arrested during the Hollywood strikes of the 1940s for peddling copies of *People's World* across the street from the Warner Brothers Studio, wandering in the stacks. The library's reputation for containing so-called "radical histories" has also been posted about on its website, see: "About Us – Southern California Library," Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, URL: <https://www.socallib.org/scl-about>, accessed: December 2017.

studio's SCG unit.<sup>51</sup> In summation, exploring all of these archives, including a few others in New York City, provided an immersive historical experience unmatched by any Disney-branded theme park. This was a working-class, "Mickey Mouse History," to borrow the phrase from Wallace's lexicon, for Hollywood's labor movement.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See: Hollywood Studio Strike Collection, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, truncated herein as "HSSC," and the Disney Strike Collection, 1941, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, truncated herein as "DSC."

<sup>52</sup> Wallace, "Mickey Mouse History," 33.

## CHAPTER II

### OF MICE AND LAYOUT MEN: DISNEY, THE RELUCTANT EMPLOYER

This chapter centers on Walt Disney's industrialization of the animation process, and the labor-management conflict at his Burbank studio which resulted in the Animator's Strike of 1941. Principally, this section argues that while Disney made substantial efforts to increase the production output of his studio, he did so by attempting to circumvent mandates under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and intimidate his workforce into submission. More importantly, Disney's struggle to limit the influence of external actors on his studio's operation failed.

After the passage of the NLRA, Walt Disney's cartoon factory—inspired by other prominent American industrialists like Henry Ford—engaged in the standardization of its process of hand-drawn animation in the 1930s. At the same time, Disney and other executives of Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. (WDP) devised a strategy to prevent outside labor organizations from infiltrating the studio: the formation of a company union. In 1939, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) determined that the Federation of Screen Cartoonists (FSC), a company union, would become the exclusive bargaining agent for employees in Disney's animation department. Some artists, however, took umbrage with the FSC for its lack of legitimacy. Emboldened by key provisions of the Wagner Act, a group of animators turned to Herb Sorrell, a Hollywood labor leader who facilitated an alliance with animation departments from the other major studios. The result was an independent union known as the Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Guild (SCG). Disney rebuked the demands of the SCG's negotiating committee in private, he chided its participating employees in public meetings, and he attempted to rid his

studio of labor activists by terminating their contracts. The latter of these decisions, however, became the straw that broke the proverbial mouse's back. On the national level, the protests of these artists may have differed from the autoworkers engaging in sit-downs, and their collective fate was hardly as macabre as some of Chicago's steel workers. Notwithstanding those differences, the talented men and women who struck Disney's studio in 1941 represented some of the most creative minds in the motion picture industry. They felt sure that no one would ignore a picket line, starring Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.

### **Acting in Bad Faith**

By the mid-1930s, state actors were no strangers to violent clashes that troubled labor-management relations in the U.S. Not unlike the roles fulfilled by Pinkerton detectives in the nineteenth century, local law enforcement had been conscripted by Henry Ford to combat the United Auto Workers' attempts to better their station by engaging in sit-down protests.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, as James Gross noted, Chicago experienced its own flare-up of police brutality in response to organizers in the steel manufacturing sector.<sup>54</sup> The latter resulted in the outright murder of labor activists by Chicago police. All of this was to say that federal intervention between labor and management may have not been inevitable, but it definitely commanded attention. That negative attention resulted in the formulation of a New Deal for America's working class: the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which was passed by the federal legislature in 1935. The federally-protected right for laborers to pool their efforts, however, was anything but assured. As Joseph McCartin has argued, "even fervent supporters of labor reform

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<sup>53</sup> Norwood, Stephen H. "Ford's Brass Knuckles: Henry Bennett, the Cult of Muscularity, and Anti-Labor Terror." In *Strike-breaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 171-93.

<sup>54</sup> Gross, *The Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board*, 6-8.



doubted whether Senator Robert F. Wagner’s [NLRA]...could withstand the scrutiny of a hostile U.S. Supreme Court.”<sup>55</sup> When the Wagner Act was declared constitutional in 1937, it seemed like a dream come true for workers across many U.S. industries.

Turning dreams into reality was a booming business, but contrary to corporate folklore, the tale of Walt Disney, “the avuncular Horatio Alger figure,” did not start with a mouse.<sup>56</sup> In the mid-1920s, Walt Disney, his brother Roy, and Ub Iwerks made the fortuitous decision to invest in a joint venture and form a Hollywood animation studio. The trio’s studio, which came to be known as Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. (WDP), was able to push technological boundaries and set artistic precedents by drawing inspiration from other industrial imaginaries. According to Steven Watts, Disney and Henry Ford shared the same vision of “humane, populist capitalism that would bring a quality product to the masses.”<sup>57</sup> At its core, WDP was more than an animation studio, however. Disney’s cartoon factory had quickly grown beyond the handful of aspiring artists it started out with, and WDP soon employed an industrial workforce of several hundred.

By 1934, Disney and the artists he employed had begun their most ground-breaking experiment to date: a feature-length, animated adaptation of a classic tale from the Brothers Grimm. As a feature-length, animated project, *Snow White* was an unprecedented undertaking, particularly for an experimental Hollywood startup. Disney had a penchant for audacity, even his critics granted him that. In the 1940s, art critic Robert Feild was granted an opportunity to

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<sup>55</sup> McCartin, “‘As Long as There Survives,’” 21.

<sup>56</sup> Schickle, *The Disney Version*, 11; before Mickey Mouse was ever conceived, Walt, his brother Roy, and Ub Iwerks were animating *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* shorts (ca. 1927). The rights to Oswald were lost to Universal Pictures in a contract dispute. Oswald’s replacement, the iconic Mickey was the product of a collaborative effort between Walt and Iwerks, who found inspiration in Charles Lindbergh’s, one-time presidential incumbent, transatlantic flight when animating *Plane Crazy* (1928), see: Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 29-30.

<sup>57</sup> Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 157-8

explore Disney's fantasy factory in person. His findings were published in a 1942 monograph titled: *The Art of Walt Disney*.<sup>58</sup>

Paradoxically, as Feild noted, Disney's employees were some of the industry's most prominent producers of hand-drawn animation, but Walt Disney himself had "never been interested in 'Art'."<sup>59</sup> Instead, Disney believed that his studio could be used as a sort of cultural laboratory. In the words of Feild, WDP became "an industrial plant that allowed [Disney's] ideas to be developed as scientifically as possible."<sup>60</sup> Disney's scientific method depended on a collaborative effort. Earlier Disney apologists, such as Field, observed that "with the advent of *Snow White*...the old system [involving fewer artists] was no longer practical."<sup>61</sup>

In 1937, one writer for the *Motion Picture Herald* attempted to calculate the amount of labor required for projects like *Snow White*. The columnist reported, "had Walt Disney decided to draw...his first feature length production and in color, all by himself, he would have had a 230-year job on his hands."<sup>62</sup> Disney may have been a creative genius, but he was not a literal magician. It required hundreds of artists and technicians to bring Disney's vision into reality. The lowliest of these animators, the in-betweeners mentioned previously, "numerically form[ed] the main army of animation" at WDP.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, it was Disney's name, alone, at the top of the marquee when *Snow White* was released in theatres. It was Disney, alone, who received his honorary category and statuette—and seven miniature statuettes, delivered by Shirley Temple at

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Feild, *The Art of Walt Disney* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1942).

<sup>59</sup> Feild, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 79.

<sup>60</sup> Feild, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 79.

<sup>61</sup> Feild, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 114.

<sup>62</sup> "Rhabdology and Disney's Feature," *Motion Picture Herald*, 27 November 1937, JCAC.

<sup>63</sup> Feild, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 236.

the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Academy Awards.<sup>64</sup> It was Disney, alone, who stood on the shoulders of artistic titans, but it was he alone that failed to reward their contributions to his success—aside from granting them an opportunity of saying they worked for Disney.

Had Disney conjured up the storyboards for *Snow White* a few years earlier, his exploitative business practices may have gone unnoticed. Although, as James Gross argued in his account of the NLRB’s internal politics, the Board had some experience adjudicating disputes between employers and labor, “the massive onslaught of cases after April 12, 1937 brought the Board into full scale contact with the violence and melodrama of American industrial relations.”<sup>65</sup> The extraordinary achievements of *Snow White* came about during an interesting time. However, the enormous amount of labor the film required meant inviting the presence of labor organizers, unions, and federal arbitrators into Disney’s production process.

*Snow White* and the Wagner Act had more in common than one might have thought. Animation required for this feature-length production took place as the Wagner Act was signed into law. Furthermore, Disney’s grand experiment premiered in theaters the same year that the constitutionality of the Act was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>66</sup> Most of all, the tale of the original Disney Princess and the efficacy of WDP’s first official union were both imaginary constructs. Understanding, though not agreeing with, the implications of the Wagner Act, Disney facilitated the organization of the FSC through his corporate counsel, Gunther Lessing. The FSC served the interests of Disney’s studio but not the artists who built it. The company union was

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<sup>64</sup> Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 67.

<sup>65</sup> Gross, *Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board*, 9-10.

<sup>66</sup> As Gross also argued, the NLRB’s decisions were upheld as constitutional by the highest court in the land, but the NLRA “was under continual attack by anti-New Deal congressmen in the House and Senate, by powerful employers, by the press, and, most importantly, by the American Federation of Labor,” see Gross, *Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board*, 23; McCartin, “‘As Long as There Survives,’” 21.

mostly a tactic for placating the studio's artists as they acquired the legal right to collective bargaining. One of the FSC's primary functions was to insulate Disney's animation department from outside influence and stave off any internal attempts to unionize.

In 1938, the FSC filed a complaint with the NLRB regarding a jurisdictional dispute between the company union, the Society of Motion Picture Film Editors, the American Federation of Musicians, and several local organizations affiliated with the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE).<sup>67</sup> Based on evidence provided by the FSC, it allegedly represented a majority of Disney's workforce. At the time the complaint was filed, the FSC's membership was comprised of "approximately 602 [of the 675 employees]" who were classified as "animators, animation effects, In-B-Tween [sic]... production stenographic (front office), painting and miscellaneous."<sup>68</sup> The Federation prevailed during WDP's initial encounter with the NLRB, and the company union became certified as the exclusive bargaining agent for Disney's animators.

If there was a silver-lining in the NLRB's 1939 decision, it was the determination that "neither the IATSE nor its Locals...submitted any evidence with respect to any membership among the employees of the Company."<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately for Disney's employees, the IATSE executives were still allowed to represent some of the WDP's workforce. A racket involving the IATSE and motion picture industry began in Chicago during the Great Depression and lasted from the early-1930s to the mid-1940s. According to Gerald Horne, Willie Bioff, a Russian-born immigrant who had his first encounter with labor while "organizing local Kosher butchers," was

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<sup>67</sup> "Decision and Certification of Representatives, Case No. R-1103," July 22, 1939, 1, RG25.

<sup>68</sup> "Decision and Certification of Representatives, Case No. R-1103," 8.

<sup>69</sup> "Decision and Certification of Representatives, Case No. R-1103," 8.

one of the two men primarily responsible for this operation in Chicago.<sup>70</sup> Bioff may have been the muscle, but George Browne, the future President of the IATSE, was the likely architect of their plan. Although the lineup presented below was distributed by the Film Technicians of the Motion Picture Industry in a union periodical after events in the mid-1940s, it served to put a face on the corruption that seeped into the IATSE (see Figure 2.1 below).<sup>71</sup>



**Figure 2.1, “Graft, Inc.,” *Flashes*, ca. 1945-47, image used courtesy of the Southern California Library for Social Studies Research.**

According to Sorrell, Bioff and Browne browbeat the Chicago projectionists into participating in an extortion scheme involving movie theatres.<sup>72</sup> As the press would later confirm, Bioff and Browne received kickbacks from understaffing the projection booths in movie houses for the IATSE. Nicholas Schenck, also pictured in Figure 2.1, was a wealthy

<sup>70</sup> According to Gerald Horne, Bioff also briefly dabbled in prostitution before heading off to the movies, see: Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 45.

<sup>71</sup> Film Technicians of the Motion Picture Industry, “Graft, Inc.,” *Flashes* (Hollywood, California: Film Technicians of the Motion Picture Industry, ca. 1945-7), HSSC, image used courtesy of the Southern California Library for Social Studies Research.

<sup>72</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Chose Your Friends*, 57.

movie theatre magnate. Because he was head of Loews Movie Theatres, Schenck also had several contacts at major Hollywood motion picture studios including personal connections to Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer and Twentieth Century Fox.

As Sorrell indicated during his oral history interview, the two extortionists “celebrated too much,” and Al Capone’s organized crime syndicate caught the two men with their hands in the popcorn bucket.<sup>73</sup> Frank Nitti, one of Capone’s enforcers, wanted in on their action. In 1934, Bioff and Browne were brought in for a shakedown by Nitti. According to Horne, they were installed as puppets in the IATSE’s national leadership. In exchange for their fealty, Bioff and Browne received mob assistance with persuading non-union movie houses to enter into contracts with the IATSE.<sup>74</sup> Browne held an official position in the IATSE as its president from 1934 until he was indicted and convicted on federal extortion charges in 1941. While Bioff’s labor in Hollywood was mostly off the books, he was a local celebrity. The local trade press and paparazzi kept tabs on his comings and goings. By the mid-1930s, Bioff and Browne, along with Shenck and other co-conspirators, were reportedly exchanging five and six-figure sums of cash in elaborate backstage handoffs. Hollywood’s smaller unions, however, were not lying down on the job of pushing back on the corruption.

Before delving too much further into labor-management relations at WDP, it is important to identify and examine another one of Disney’s henchmen: his lawyer. In addition to loaning the Brothers Disney and Iwerks some of their initial investment capital, Gunther Lessing served as legal counsel and Vice President of WDP. One of Lessing’s claims to fame was his representation of Pancho Villa while the Mexican revolutionary was trying to option the rights to

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<sup>73</sup> Sorrell, *You Can’t Chose Your Friends*, 57; Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 45-9.

<sup>74</sup> Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 46.

his biography.<sup>75</sup> Disney often fed off of Lessing's anti-unionism in their decision-making during the labor-management disputes at WDP. Tom Sito argued that Lessing "had a Texas frontiersman's innate distrust of unions."<sup>76</sup> To that end, at Disney's behest, Lessing was often present when the FSC held its meetings. According to an affidavit filed with the NLRB in 1941 by Dave Hilberman, layout man for Disney and Secretary for the studio's SCG Unit, Lessing meddled in FSC business from the moment of its formation.<sup>77</sup> Hilberman explained that Lessing made his opinions of labor-management known to Disney's artists. Hilberman added that Lessing used these meetings as opportunities to insult Carey McWilliams, who was representing Hollywood's other cartoonists as they formed the SCG. Hilberman suggested that Lessing referred to McWilliams "disparagingly...as an attorney for the CIO."<sup>78</sup> This made little sense, however, as the SCG claimed an affiliation with the AFL.

As Horne also noted, there was "a surge in Hollywood union membership between 1936-1938."<sup>79</sup> Herb Sorrell and his fellow painter brethren benefited from the increased interest in unionizing among trade and craftsmen and women working in the motion picture industry. Sorrell seemed to have friends in all the right places. Bioff may have been mob-affiliated, but Sorrell was able to leverage his labor contacts to prove that the panderer was not untouchable. There had been numerous allegations that Sorrell had ties to the Communist Party, he had been under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation since the 1930s. Nevertheless, Sorrell sought the aid of federal investigators in exposing Browne and Bioff's IATSE racket. According

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<sup>75</sup> Although Lessing was one of Disney's earliest investors, he also liked to boast about his other famous clientele. However, Lessing's serving as counsel Villa was mostly viewed as comic relief among industry insiders. As Sorrell also noted, "I never heard of Pancho Villa winning a legal argument—I thought his was an armed argument," see: Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 68; Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 224.

<sup>76</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 114.

<sup>77</sup> Dave Hilberman, "Affidavit of David Hilberman – Case No. XXI-C-1584," April 1, 1941, RG25.

<sup>78</sup> Hilberman, "Affidavit of David Hilberman."

<sup>79</sup> Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 50-1.

to Sorrell, the FBI refused to offer any assistance, as did the Internal Revenue Service.<sup>80</sup>

Hollywood's journalists, however, had been organizing a union of their own and favored leaders like Sorrell. The labor organizer was able to tap their resources to make the IATSE scheme public. It was discovered, and subsequently reported in the newspapers, that Bioff had never served a six-month sentence to be served in Chicago's Bridewell Prison.<sup>81</sup>

The appearance of Sorrell, a stocky union activist who looked like he could handle himself in a scrap, may not have been too different from the IATSE's enforcers, but he was instrumental in forming the resistance to their corrupt influence.<sup>82</sup> Sorrell had discovered the means by which to eliminate at least one of the IATSE's enforcers, albeit temporarily, but the way he achieved this goal was even more fascinating. In the mid-1930s, John L. Lewis was breaking away from existing AFL leadership, literally punching a rival labor organizer in the face.<sup>83</sup> By 1938, Lewis' vision for a more radical national labor movement had metastasized into the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). According to Robert Ziegler, the gains made for auto and steel workers, by Lewis and the CIO, "unleashed a wave...that swelled union ranks and gave powerful legitimacy to the... project."<sup>84</sup> Sorrell experienced a similar boost in popularity after organizing the Hollywood cartoonists. He later capitalized on the momentum created by the Animator's Strike at Disney's studio to form the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU). Although Sorrell's primary union—the International Brotherhood of Painters—was an AFL affiliate, he continued to work with Lewis in California. Sorrell recalled that "Lewis became national

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<sup>80</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 90-92.

<sup>81</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 90-92.

<sup>82</sup> Bill Littlejohn, "Drawing of Herb Sorrell," ca. 1941, MPSCG; "Herb Sorrell," photograph, ca. 1941, MPSCG. Both images used courtesy of California State University Northridge.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Ziegler, *The CIO, 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 22-3.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Ziegler, *The CIO*, 54.



president of... [the Laborers' Non-Partisan League, and] I became president of the" League's California chapter.<sup>85</sup> Sorrell's connection to Lewis created a pathway to finalizing Bioff's extradition to Chicago. Through the League, Sorrell was able "to get a delegation to visit [California's] Governor Olson when he signed the extradition" order to send Bioff back to Bridewell.<sup>86</sup>

Other national labor leaders had taken notice of Sorrell's solicitation of aid from Lewis and the CIO. Sorrell's cozy relationship with Lewis, for example, raised a major red flag for the AFL. When Sorrell began working with the SCG organizers, Aubrey Blair, a representative of the AFL offered to fund the printing of the Guild's material.<sup>87</sup> Blair's support of the cartoonists also led to the surveillance of Sorrell and his alleged ties within the Communist community. Sorrell later discovered that Joseph Tuohy and David Beck of the Teamsters had directed Blair to observe his activities.<sup>88</sup> It was more difficult to ascertain which motion picture studios and labor organizations were not surveilling Sorrell.

Though Walt Disney and Herb Sorrell seemed destined to become mortal enemies, their biographies bore some resemblance. Both men migrated to Hollywood from the American Midwest. Disney always regarded Marceline, Missouri as the town of his youth, even though he was born in Chicago, Illinois.<sup>89</sup> Despite growing up and watching his father struggle trying to make a living as a Jeffersonian agrarian or suffering through factory work for a jelly company, Disney thought that the Horatio Alger myth was more than an American fairy tale. Sorrell, on the other hand, was actually born in Missouri. He had his first encounter with labor-management conflict

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<sup>85</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 96.

<sup>86</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 90-92.

<sup>87</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 72.

<sup>88</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 72.

<sup>89</sup> For a compassionate interpretation of Walt Disney's upbringing, see: Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 4-11.

after his family moved to a “sun-down town” in Alabama when he was only a child in 1904.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, Sorrell became a pro-labor firebrand with a heart of gold, or so he claimed. While working on his memoir in the early-1960s, Sorrell laid out his passions for the rights of working men and women. As he explained to Dixon, “I advocated then, and would still advocate, the rights of all people regardless of religion or race or color or creed.”<sup>91</sup> Unlike Disney, Sorrell believed the right for the working-class to pool their efforts was not only federally recognized, it was bestowed by a higher power. Sorrell argued that he “became a rabid union member, which I thought was my God-given right.”<sup>92</sup> False idols, however, were not allowed on the floor of Disney’s cartoon factory.

### **Abusing Animators’ Trust**

In a sworn affidavit provided to the NLRB during Disney’s dispute with the SCG in 1941, Art Babbitt revealed that Lessing and H.E. Keener, corporate counsel and paymaster respectively, were pulling the strings behind the curtains of the FSC. Babbitt was a slender, clean cut fellow, but he was no corporate puppet. Babbitt was also one of WDP’s most talented animators, and he was well-liked among the other artists at the studio. Not only was he the creator of Goofy’s personality, he assisted in breathing animated life into other signature Disney characters like Donald Duck.<sup>93</sup>

Though Art Babbitt and Walt Disney became bitter rivals as the 1940s began, their relationship was interesting from the beginning. Babbitt was interviewed by Animation historian

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<sup>90</sup> Sorrell, *You Can’t Choose Your Friends*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Sorrell, *You Can’t Choose Your Friends*, 86.

<sup>92</sup> Sorrell, *You Can’t Choose Your Friends*, 25-6.

<sup>93</sup> Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 253.

John Canemaker in 1975.<sup>94</sup> Babbitt believed Walt Disney had only hired him as a means of gaining access to Bill Tytla. During the interview with Canemaker, Babbitt revealed how he and Tytla moved from New York City to work for Disney. During his initial interview, “Disney wasn’t at all interested in me,” the animator explained, “[he] asked me ‘Now how soon can we get this guy Tytla out here?’”<sup>95</sup> Babbitt and Tytla had become close friends while working together at Terrytoon Studios in New York. The two shared a residence in California, once Babbitt had convinced Tytla to move out west to work for Disney.<sup>96</sup> Babbitt also recognized that Tytla was an extremely talented artist, and someone whom Disney could not do without. He explained to Canemaker that a scene in *Snow White*, drawn by Tytla and featuring all seven dwarves, “was a tour de force which nobody has matched at all.”<sup>97</sup> Tytla also became famous for his contribution to *Pinocchio* (1940) and the Night on Bald Mountain adaptation in *Fantasia* (1940). Tytla was considered apolitical by his peers, so it was a shock to his fellow animators like Babbitt and even Disney when the artist joined the strike. According to Babbitt, Tytla made “tremendous financial sacrifices” by selling property “worth a ridiculous figure...to pay for Adrienne’s [Tytla’s wife] illness [and] to help the other strikers” in 1941.<sup>98</sup> While working for Disney, artists became a band of brothers and sisters, bound by ink-and-paint.

In his NLRB affidavit, Babbitt attested that Dave Hilberman had expressed some concern about IATSE encroachment in December 1937.<sup>99</sup> By that time, Bioff and Browne were coercing motion picture tradesmen into signing with the IATSE with the assistance of the Chicago mob,

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<sup>94</sup> Art Babbitt, *Interview with John Canemaker*, March 18, 1975, JCAC.

<sup>95</sup> Babbitt, *Interview with John Canemaker*, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Art Babbitt and Bill Tytla were close—they assisted in raising a “little illegitimate child” together for two years, but evidence suggested their relationship was platonic, see: Babbitt, *Interview with John Canemaker*, 6.

<sup>97</sup> Babbitt, *Interview with John Canemaker*, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Babbitt, *Interview with John Canemaker*, 12.

<sup>99</sup> Art Babbitt, “Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt – Case No. XXI-C-1584,” April 1941, 1, RG25.

so the threat was legitimate. According to Babbitt, Hilberman suggested that “something should be done about the situation.”<sup>100</sup> After Hilberman brought the IATSE matter to Roy Disney’s attention, Gunther Lessing held a series of meetings with the studio’s artists to formulate a strategy that seemed mutually beneficial. Lessing assured Babbitt and the others that he was not calling the meetings “as an officer of the company but as *a friend of the boys*.”<sup>101</sup> As noted by Babbitt and Hilberman’s NLRB affidavits, Lessing explained his presence at the FSC meetings by insisting that Disney was just as concerned as the artists were about the IATSE pressure on WDP’s employees. Stopping short of encouraging Babbitt, Hilberman, and others to form an independent union, Lessing advised that they “form a loosely knit organization along social lines.”<sup>102</sup> Not only was the FSC an ineffective company union, Disney’s artists showed little interest in the meetings it held to keep up appearances. According to Babbitt, of the four meetings held by the FSC, only between “20 and 40 employees” attended.<sup>103</sup>

Babbitt valued his own reputation among the other animators, but that came secondary to the well-being of his subordinates. In private, Babbitt had personally gone to Disney to ask for a paltry raise for his assistant, Bill Hertz. As noted by Sito, Walt responded to Babbitt’s request by telling him to “mind [his] own goddamn business.”<sup>104</sup> Babbitt and a majority of the other artists at Disney’s studio agreed amongst themselves to organize independently, as the animation units of other studios had done, under the SCG’s banner. When Disney learned of their unionization efforts, he called Babbitt in for a private non-negotiation conference. SCG attorney, George Bodle, had made several attempts to have Disney sign a contract with the Guild. For example,

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<sup>100</sup> Babbitt, “Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt,” 1.

<sup>101</sup> Babbitt, “Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt,” 1. Emphasis added.

<sup>102</sup> Babbitt, “Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt,” 1; Hilberman, “Affidavit of David Hilberman,” 1.

<sup>103</sup> Babbitt, “Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt,” 2.

<sup>104</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 109.

Bodle wrote to WDP executives in early-December 1940, that “the majority of your employees engaged in the production of animated cartoons” had selected the SCG “as their sole-representative for collective bargaining.”<sup>105</sup> Moreover, they were prepared to submit proof of this claim to the NLRB. Those requests were mostly ignored on Lessing’s advice. Disney insisted that the only way forward required their signing with the company union. Babbitt explained to Disney that he “would be ashamed to face” his fellow artists after the FSC’s efforts were shown to be in bad faith.<sup>106</sup> According to Babbitt—the artists’ de facto leader—Disney scoffed at his concern. “Where would I be,” Disney asked rhetorically, “if I couldn’t stand a little ridicule?”<sup>107</sup>

According to Babbitt, there was no negotiating with Walt Disney. As the animator explained to the NLRB, Disney had once admonished him by declaring: “All the people who belong to unions are either crooks or people who want something for nothing. All people in this studio who are interested in the unions are the subversive type.”<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, after launching into a tirade about how he preferred Henry Ford’s attitude toward labor-management relations, Disney got the last word in. Walt Disney was acting more like a petulant “man-child” than a titan of industry.<sup>109</sup> “You know how I am,” Disney explained, “If anyone tells me what to do, I’ll do just the opposite. I would rather close down the studio than have anyone tell me what to do.”<sup>110</sup> In just a few months, Babbitt and the other artists who defected to the SCG would call Disney’s bluff, but not before contacting their friendly, neighborhood labor agitator: Herb Sorrell.

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<sup>105</sup> George Bodle, *Letter to Walt Disney Productions, Ltd.*, December 4, 1940, MPSCG.

<sup>106</sup> Babbitt, “Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt,” 4.

<sup>107</sup> Babbitt, “Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt,” 4.

<sup>108</sup> Babbitt, “Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt,” 4.

<sup>109</sup> Or “child-man,” see: Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography*, Reprint Edition (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1997), 104 and 272.

<sup>110</sup> Babbitt, “Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt,” 4.

## Seizing the Pixie Dust

The complaints from Disney's animation department were not unreasonable, nor were their attempts to assert their federally-recognized right to form an independent union. Disney's underpaid and overworked artists had simply had enough. As noted by Sito, *Snow White* demanded "everyone, put in twelve-hour days and seven-day weeks without overtime pay. When the budget ran out, many worked without any salary at all... Walt promised his exhausted staff that their sacrifices would be repaid with big bonuses from the profits."<sup>111</sup> While *Snow White* broke box office records and captivated audiences, *Pinocchio* (1940) and the more experimental *Fantasia* (1940) were financial disasters for WDP. These features, especially the latter experiment, imposed even more labor-intensive requirements on Disney's already-disgruntled workforce. According to Sito, "Lessing encouraged Disney to head it off by reducing the official workweek from forty-six to forty hours a week."<sup>112</sup> Roy Disney addressed this issue in a memorandum distributed to studio employees on October 24, 1940. "Naturally," Roy Disney explained, "the reduction in working hours will add a further burden of overtime payments to the losses already suffered through the curtailment of foreign revenues."<sup>113</sup> The SCG ramped up its membership drives in January 1941.

Most of the artists who worked on *Snow White* never received recompense for the film's enormous success. Instead, Disney channeled the animators' share of *Snow White*'s profits into "his aggressive expansion plans, like the \$4.5 million air-conditioned studio being built in Burbank."<sup>114</sup> At times, Disney could be downright heartless about swindling his artists into

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<sup>111</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 111.

<sup>112</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 115.

<sup>113</sup> Roy Disney, *Memorandum regarding the 40-hour Wage Law*, October 24, 1940, RG25.

<sup>114</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 112.

realizing his overly-ambitious visions. According to Sito, Disney once scolded Babbitt saying: “You and your Commie friends live in a world so small you don’t really understand what is going on around you.”<sup>115</sup> By the early-1940s, other animation studios, like Max Fleischer’s for example, tempted artists to abandon ship by doubling or tripling the weekly salaries offered by WDP. Although there were other places for these animators to practice their craft, working for Disney’s studio was more about the experience than the money. There was something special about working at a place like Disney’s studio. For many artists, it was truly a place where dreams could come true, but for some, the untenable schedules and arbitrary pay scales were part of a recurring nightmare.

On February 6, 1941, Walt Disney addressed the issue of unionization in a memorandum circulated to all of his employees. According to Disney, “footage output of the plant for the past six weeks has dropped 50%.”<sup>116</sup> Babbitt, Hilberman, and other leaders in the animation department were viewed as the cause of this problem. Disney explained that it had become “obvious that a great deal of valuable studio time is being consumed in discussing union matters.”<sup>117</sup> Not only were the union organizers stealing company time, they were being accused of out-and-out ignorance by Disney. “Due to world conditions,” Disney added, “the studio is facing a crisis about which a lot of you are evidently unaware.”<sup>118</sup> Feeling that his warnings were falling on deaf ears, Disney decided to haul his entire staff into the studio’s auditorium for a more personal lecture just a few days after distributing this memo.

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<sup>115</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 120.

<sup>116</sup> Walt Disney, *Memorandum to All Employees*, February 6, 1941, RG25.

<sup>117</sup> Disney, *Memorandum to All Employees*.

<sup>118</sup> Disney, *Memorandum to All Employees*.

Disney addressed his employees directly on February 10 and 11, 1941. He began by reminding his staff that he had once been a starving artist. Disney recalled that “In 1923...I went three days without eating a meal, and I slept on some old canvas and chair cushions in an old rat-trap of a studio for which I hadn’t paid any rent for months.”<sup>119</sup> Although Walt and his brother, Roy, had managed to make it to Hollywood, the Great Depression allegedly threatened their cartoon enterprise. After Roosevelt had called for the Bank Holiday in 1933, many of the major studios tried to agree on a fifty percent pay cut for their employees in order to stay afloat. Disney was particularly proud of himself because he withstood pressure to do the same. “I was badgered and threatened by the other studios,” he explained, “for not falling in with their... plan.”<sup>120</sup> Instead, Walt and Roy had agreed to cut their artists pay by only ten percent.

Moreover, Walt and Roy were still making personal sacrifices for the benefit of WDP. “For years,” Walt expounded, “we have been paying income tax on...salaries and...dividends we never received.”<sup>121</sup> Disney blamed the studio’s recent downturn on the collapse of foreign markets, not his over-ambitiousness with films like *Fantasia*. “The war in Europe had depreciated our markets,” Disney shared, “that wasn’t so bad till Hitler started his Blitzkrieging [sic], and then the foreign market completely disappeared.”<sup>122</sup> Of all the details provided in Disney’s pep talk, he omitted the critical points at which he and other WDP executives had deliberately violated provisions of the Wagner Act.

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<sup>119</sup> Walt Disney, “Talk Given by Walt to All Employees,” February 10 and 11, 1941, 2, MPSCG.

<sup>120</sup> Disney, “Talk Given to All Employees,” 3.

<sup>121</sup> Disney, “Talk Given to All Employees,” 5.

<sup>122</sup> Disney, “Talk Given to All Employees,” 6.



An official complaint against WDP, signed by William Walsh, was filed by the NLRB on May 8, 1941.<sup>123</sup> The NLRB had been made aware of the numerous attempts by Disney executives to strong-arm the studio's artists into joining the company union. Paragraph five of the NLRB complaint specifically outlined the FSC's "frustration of organizational attempts among the company's employees" to sign on with the SCG and affiliate themselves with the AFL.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, the complaint demonstrated that Disney executives had knowingly violated federal law for quite some time. Paragraph seven confirmed that "the course of conduct set out in paragraph five...interfered with, restrained and coerced [WDP] employees in the exercise of the rights" afforded to them under Section 7 of the Wagner Act. Although there was more than enough in the NLRB complaint to show Disney's wanton disregard for the U.S. Constitution when it did not suit his needs, insult was added to injury when Disney decided to terminate the contract of Babbitt and other artists in retaliation for their attempts at independent unionization. Dipping into his animator's palette of hyperbole, Sito described the scene of Babbitt's termination, as other "sullen, silent artists gathered in the hallways, flanked by security guards," turning the halls of Disney's animation building into "a Toon Town *via dolorosa*: the creator of Goofy was being fired, for them."<sup>125</sup> In a demonstration of solidarity, Disney's artists struck at his studio on May 29, 1941.

Given the fact that the strikers were artists—not muscular auto or steel workers—Walt Disney and his allies viewed them as vulnerable. While the SCG allied itself with Sorrell—and eventually the CSU—the American Society of Cartoonists, a sequel to the company union, counted on its affiliation with the IATSE for the sake of keeping up appearances. Though actual

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<sup>123</sup> William R. Walsh, "Complaint in re: Case No. XXI-C-1584," May 8, 1941, 2-3, RG25.

<sup>124</sup> Walsh, "Complaint in re: Case No. XXI-C-1584," 4.

<sup>125</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 121.

violence was a rare occurrence during the Animator's Strike, there were instances where artists like Babbitt were confronted by dangerous situations. According to several witnesses, rumors circulated that Disney attempted to run Hilberman over with his car on the way into the studio one morning.<sup>126</sup> Sorrell, however, recalled a much more dangerous encounter between representatives of the SCG and the IATSE's hired goon, Willie Bioff.

Disney's relationship with Bioff and the IATSE was caricatured by SCG artists.<sup>127</sup> Although their medium was cartoons, their satirical wit belied the danger inherent in some of Disney's coercive strike-breaking tactics. One evening during the strike, "Joe Tuohy, of the Teamsters, and Aubrey Blair, international organizer for the AFL...whisked away" Sorrell, Babbitt, and others for an unscheduled meeting at Bioff's secluded ranch in the valley.<sup>128</sup> A June news article confirmed all but a few details of Sorrell's account of the meeting. According to a special correspondent for *PM Magazine*, a left-leaning daily published in New York during the 1940s, the clandestine meeting held at Bioff's residence had been arranged and attended by Gunther Lessing.<sup>129</sup> Lessing encouraged the artists and Sorrell to sign with the IATSE. However, the SCG strikers refused to entertain the proposal, especially with Bioff leading the negotiations. Lessing defended Bioff's presence and insisted that "Bioff was not dictating terms, he was just trying to help."<sup>130</sup> Although few employees at Disney's studio held IATSE membership cards, Lessing and Bioff had arranged a deal to allow films produced by Disney to include IATSE certification in their credits. When the IATSE's projectionists began organizing a sympathy

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<sup>126</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 71-2; Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 130.

<sup>127</sup> "Here Are Your Answers," ca. 1941, MPSCG.

<sup>128</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 71. According to Sito, Dave Hilberman was being driven to the same meeting in a separate vehicle, but he threatened to jump out the moving car once he realized what was happening, see: Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 136.

<sup>129</sup> "Bioff Unions Sign with Disney; Disregard Strike," *PM Magazine*, July 10, 1941, MPSCG.

<sup>130</sup> "Bioff Unions Sign with Disney."

strike in support of the animators, however, Bioff swiftly quashed their efforts. The SCG needed Bioff's help like they needed another hole in their head, and if Sorrell and Babbit had not cut that evening's meeting short, then they might have received the latter.

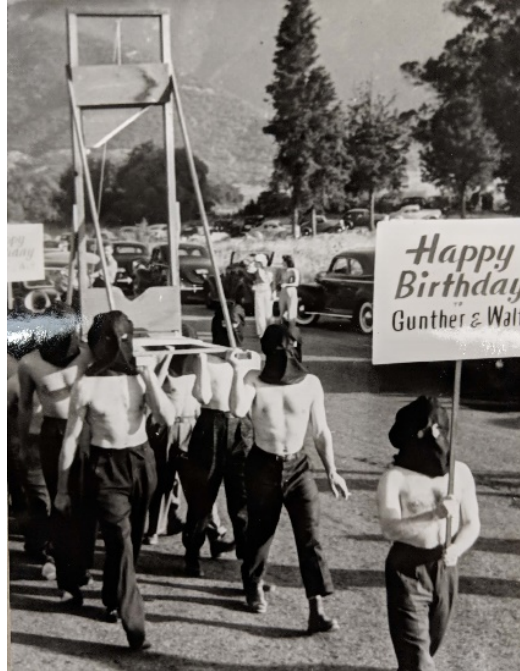
As an unofficial enforcer for the IATSE, Bioff operated outside of the law, but that made little difference. Local law enforcement was bought and paid for too. Sorrell recalled that, "Disney hired fifty guards and policemen, ex-LA policemen, and lined them up in front of the picket line. They were put there to push the picket line and run them off."<sup>131</sup> Sorrell was able to muster counter-reinforcements through Elmer Adams, Chief and friendly contact at the Burbank police department. Sorrell also arranged for longshoremen, wrenches in hand, to protect the artists encampment at night. By August, even the Teamsters Union had rallied to protect the artists' flank.<sup>132</sup> As Babbitt resisted Disney's pressure to abandon the SCG, he became the victim of relentless harassment. Babbitt was arrested by Burbank police on an alleged concealed weapons charge the same day he was to give testimony before the NLRB in the 1941 dispute.<sup>133</sup> Some of the demonstrations by strikers blurred the lines between violence and comradery. During one demonstration, several artists dressed as executioners and paraded about with a working guillotine.

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<sup>131</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 69.

<sup>132</sup> It may be recalled, however, that David Beck and his Teamsters did not "give a fuck about the movies," and they were only there to keep eyes on Sorrell, see: Ross, "American Workers, American Movies," 81; Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 71-2; Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 133.

<sup>133</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 120.



**Figure 2.2, “Happy Birthday Walt!” ca. 1941, MPSCG, image used courtesy of the Southern California Library for Social Studies Research.**

As shown in Figure 2.2 above, the demonstrators carried a sign that conveyed sardonic birthday greetings to Lessing and Disney. The crowd also sang a parody of the French national anthem, *Les Marseillais*. Among the lyrics quoted by Sito, the artists sang: “We will put the ax to Gunther Lessing, and the mess of boners he’s made.”<sup>134</sup> The strikers——beheaded an effigy of Lessing, over and over.<sup>135</sup> Disney and Lessing were no match for the demonstrators’ wit and knack for musical parody. According to a column in the *Daily Worker*, the artists “expressed...utter contempt for Lessing,” and his former client, Pancho Villa, by singing *La*

<sup>134</sup>, Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 126.

<sup>135</sup> “Happy Birthday Walt!” ca. 1941, MPSCG, image used courtesy of the Southern California Library for Social Studies Research

*Cucaracha* “as he crossed the picket line each morning.”<sup>136</sup> Although the demonstration of *fraternité* made by the Disney artists may have been jarring to some members of the American public, support for the strikers poured in from all over.

Naturally, there was support from other studios’ animation departments in the motion picture industry. Animators working at Warner Brothers were allowed, by their employer, to leave early and participate in the demonstrations outside of Disney’s studio. According to Sorrell, the artists had some fun at the expense of Leon Schlesinger, the head of Warner Brothers’ animation department, when he came out himself in a show of support for Disney’s artists. Sorrell recalled, “while I was talking to [Schlesinger], the sound wagon blasted out, ‘Herb Sorrell is now speaking to Leon Schlesinger, who has signed a very nice agreement with the [SCG].’”<sup>137</sup> That was the first and only time Schlesinger showed up at one of the demonstrations, but support for the strikers was coming from the most unlikely of places for the SCG, an AFL affiliate.

Worried about the physical well-being of his fellow strikers, Babbitt pled for aid at a Burbank CIO leadership meeting. This was either an incredibly genius move or an act of desperation. The AFL, which was backing the efforts of Babbitt and other Disney’s artists to sign with the SCG, had expelled John Lewis, who founded the far more radical CIO. According to Sito, Babbitt was “politically naïve” and did not understand the implications of an AFL-backed union leader making such a bold request.<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, Babbitt’s appeal touched the heart of the Archdiocese for the Roman Catholic Church, and food was delivered to the strikers within a

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<sup>136</sup> Charles Glenn, “News, Views, Gossip of Filmland’s Capital,” *Daily Worker*, June 3, 1941, Microfilm Collection, New York Public Library, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Branch, New York City, NY, truncated herein as “NYPL.”

<sup>137</sup> Sorrell, *You Can’t Choose Your Friends*, 69.

<sup>138</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 133.

few days. Other CIO leadership made public displays of their support for Disney's artists. Harry Jung, President of the CIO affiliated office workers' union had a change of heart while escorting a young lady to a screening of *Fantasia* at the Carthay Circle theatre. Rather than cross the boycott line outside, Jung and his date surrendered their tickets to demonstrators and the two "grabbed a spot on the line."<sup>139</sup> The picket lines had moved beyond the gates of WDP and stood between American consumers and their access to movie theaters.

New York City's working-class press had also taken an interest in the story behind the Animator's Strike. Babbitt, himself, became the subject of an interview with Charles Glenn, Hollywood columnist. According to the article in the *Daily Worker*, Babbitt was "well-paid" and "not quite what [one could] expect of a strike leader."<sup>140</sup> For Babbitt, the Animator's Strike was about recognition and freedom of expression above all else. "This is a belt-line business," Babbitt explained, "and your talents go to creating something for somebody else."<sup>141</sup> Most importantly, Babbitt felt that demonstrations held during the strike showed the real potential of his fellow artists. "It's bringing out talents in the kids they never had a chance to use, talents we never bothered to find before," he boasted, "they feel...they're actually creating something and they feel they're free *men*."<sup>142</sup> That second comment from Babbitt was suggestive of the common issues between WDP and the SCG that related to matters of gender.

Women artists dealt with Disney's patronizing pay scales and grueling schedules just like their male counterparts. It also was worth mentioning that a woman, Margaret Winkler, "the 'Great Live-Wire Saleslady of Warner Bros.," facilitated some of the earliest opportunities for

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<sup>139</sup> Glenn, "News, Views, Gossip of Filmland's Capital."

<sup>140</sup> Charles Glenn, "Disney Strike Leaders Tells of New Kind of 'Animation'," *Daily Worker*, June 7, 1941, Microfilm Collection, New York Public Library, 5th Avenue Branch, New York City, NY.

<sup>141</sup> Glenn, "Disney Strike Leaders Tells of New Kind of 'Animation'."

<sup>142</sup> Glenn, "Disney Strike Leaders Tells of New Kind of 'Animation'." Emphasis added.

Walt Disney when he arrived in Hollywood, fresh off the train from Kansas City in his early-twenties.<sup>143</sup> During the pep rally held by Disney in February of 1941, he tried to portray himself and the studio as champions for women's rights in the workplace. Walt addressed a rumor that he and other executives were "trying to develop *girls* for animation to replace higher-priced *men*."<sup>144</sup> While Disney touted his views on gender equality in the workplace, there was reason to be skeptical. His explanation of the gossip was just as patronizing as the rest of his speech. Although Disney stated, that "if a woman can do the work as well, she is worth as much as a man," he also concluded by suggesting "*girl artists*," not women, "have the right to expect the same chances for advancement as men."<sup>145</sup> Excepting a handful of experiments, authorized and overseen by Walt personally, and employees in WDP's Ink and Paint Department, women's labor had been relegated to domestic duties like cooking and cleaning. For the most part, opportunities for upward mobility were virtually non-existent for women working at Disney's studio.

The SCG's picket lines were no shining examples of gender equality, and the gendered stratification of labor was not confined to the cartoon factory's production line. In late-June 1940, *People's World* ran a profile on Libbie Hilberman which was written by Charles Glenn.<sup>146</sup> Libbie was the spouse of SCG Secretary, Dave Hilberman, so she was keenly aware of the series of close encounters between the organizing artists and Disney which led to their decision to strike. "Many of us were frightened by the whole thing," Hilberman told Glenn, "but we swallowed what fears we might have, plunged on to the picket line and into the strike

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<sup>143</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 37.

<sup>144</sup> Disney, "Talk Given to All Employees," 10. Emphasis added.

<sup>145</sup> Disney, "Talk Given to All Employees," 10. Emphasis added.

<sup>146</sup> Charles Glenn, "Women are Learning a lot From Disney Guild Strike," *People's World*, June 30, 1941, DSC.

kitchen.”<sup>147</sup> The SCG’s Women’s Auxiliary became vital to the maintenance of morale among the strikers. In addition, the Women’s Auxiliary assisted with other domestic duties. As Glenn reported, Mrs. Cy Young opened the doors of her home as a makeshift “nursery school...for mothers who feel their place is on the picket line with their husbands.”<sup>148</sup>

Libbie Hilberman also expressed great concern with the hostile anti-labor press and its reporting on the strike, but she reassured Glenn and his readers that the women could hold the line. A sister SCG Women’s Auxiliary Unit from the Warner Brothers animation department assisted in mobilizing boycotts of Disney’s merchandising products. Among the notable women on this boycott committee was Dorothy Jones, spouse of the renowned animator, Chuck Jones.<sup>149</sup> Glenn explained to his readers that Libbie was an extremely busy woman and had to cut their interview short to prepare for a demonstration that evening. “We’re together,” she insisted, “and we’re fighting for the same thing and believe me...we’re fighting.”<sup>150</sup> Whether or not Libbie Hilberman’s words reached Walt Disney was of little consequence. Women artists employed by Disney benefited from the advocacy of the SCG’s Women Auxiliaries.

All of this was to say, the Animator’s Strike at Disney’s studio in 1941 was not the work product of a handful of subversive types who managed to infiltrate the sanctity of WDP. The SCG’s Disney Unit received multi-lateral support from Hollywood’s diverse labor scene. Babbitt, Hilberman, and other Disney artists were becoming part of something much larger than they had imagined. Although it involved far less bloodshed and had no explicit connections to

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<sup>147</sup> Glenn, “Women are Learning a lot From Disney Guild Strike.”

<sup>148</sup> Glenn, “Women are Learning a lot From Disney Guild Strike.”

<sup>149</sup> Chuck Jones was most famous for his work on *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies*, but he also collaborated with Theodore “Dr. Seuss” Geisel on a series of wartime cartoons under the direction of Frank Capra and later in the 1960s with the animated adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1966), see: Capra, *The Name Above the Title*, 340; Glenn, “Women are Learning a lot From Disney Guild Strike.”

<sup>150</sup> Glenn, “Women are Learning a lot From Disney Guild Strike.”



the Popular Front, the overall strategy of the SCG mimicked that of the Little Steel Strikes of 1937.<sup>151</sup> One by one, animation departments of other major motion picture studios had toppled like dominoes in acquiescence to the SCG's demands. Sorrell was one of the catalysts that set these events in motion. After entering into a deal between the SCG and the animation department at the Warner Brothers Studio, Schlesinger asked Sorrell, "Now, what about Disney?"<sup>152</sup> At Disney's studio, nothing was impossible. The impossible just took a little longer. The artists received tangible and moral aid from other industrial workers in Hollywood and the liberal-leaning press. It would also be a fair assessment to say that the art form they created was at stake for those who colored outside the lines of Disney's studio in 1941. The art of animation had become political as well as ideological, and the Animator's Strike only reached its conclusion after Disney had left the country for Central and South America. He and his studio's executives, however, had already turned their attention to public and private defense contracts to secure WDP's financial solvency.

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<sup>151</sup> For the "community revolt" aspect of the Little Steel Strikes and its meaning for the Popular Front, see: Michael Dennis, *Blood on Steel: Chicago Steelworkers and the Strike of 1937*, Witness to History (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 8-9 and 36.

<sup>152</sup> Elizabeth Dixon noted that Sorrell audibly laughed during this recollection, see: Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 68.

## CHAPTER III

## DONALD DIPLOMACY: DISNEY, THE GOOD NEIGHBOR

This chapter focuses on the significance of the contract work performed by Disney's studio as a service to the federal government, the ideologies incorporated into these productions, and the lasting impression Disney's Good Neighbor productions left on consumers in the western hemisphere. Chiefly, the relationship between the ideology underpinning Disney's labor troubles and his state-sponsored travels through Central and South America were more complicated than some corporate historians have concluded. The evidence presented in this section shows that while Disney's studio gained institutional support from the public and private sectors, his motivations for participating in these projects were self-serving, and the ideology that governed these productions left an indelible mark on a transnational base of consumers.

As the labor protests continued in Hollywood, Disney gathered a handful of loyal artists and employees and headed south. Their expeditions into Central and South America were carried out under the auspices of the Coordinator of Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), Nelson Rockefeller. Representing a departure from Disney's labor troubles, albeit a temporary one, Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. (WDP) entered into a contract with the OIAA by the summer of 1941. Though there was some initial trepidation expressed by members of Hollywood's elite regarding the labor-management crisis at Disney's studio, the OIAA threw caution to the wind. WDP became ingratiated in Good Neighbor diplomacy and championed hemispheric solidarity. Disney's studio surpassed the federal government's aims for the project while adhering to a dogma set by the Motion Picture Society for the Americas (MPSA). More importantly, other businessmen and Hollywood filmmakers failed where Disney found success. Orson Welles,

Disney's rival in both ambition and budgetary requirement, embarked on a similar mission. Welles, however, returned from his trip with little to offer the American public. Disney's Good Neighbor productions were no doubt entertaining, but they also misrepresented and exploited the cultures of Central and South Americans for U.S. audiences. Walt Disney's Good Neighbor productions furthered a right-wing ideology laced with U.S. imperialism.

### **Patron Saint of Hollywood Animation**

Although John Hay Whitney had oversight over all the Hollywood filmmakers who participated in Good Neighbor diplomacy, he reported directly to Nelson Rockefeller, the son of the oil baron and Coordinator of the OIAA. Hollywood's elite rushed to support the efforts of Rockefeller's OIAA. For the purposes of facilitating collaboration between the U.S. "government... industry, and people of other nations," the Motion Picture Society for the Americas (MPSA) was formed in March 1941—only two months prior to the Animator's Strike at Disney's studio.<sup>153</sup> The MPSA brought together all types of industry executives. For example, Walter Wanger, one of Hollywood's Progressives, worked with the MPSA on behalf of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS). Wanger was tasked with "[ingratiating, or] acquainting the industry with basic economic, political, and social trends," mainly with an emphasis on cultural engagement.<sup>154</sup> Wanger supported Roosevelt and his New Deal policies, but the AMPAS itself was little more than a smoke screen. According to labor scholars like Murray Ross, the AMPAS was a larger industrial organization created to placate

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<sup>153</sup> Copies of an anonymously written manuscript regarding this organization have been maintained along with the federal records of the OIAA and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences at Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, CA. Both appeared to be annotated drafts, but the copy held by the National Archives II in College Park, MD was consulted for the present research. Though it reads more like a hagiographic chronicle of Disney's Central and South American exploits than a true historical work, see: *Untitled History of the Motion Picture Society for the Americas*, 1, OIAA RG229.

<sup>154</sup> The word "ingratiating" was struck through and "acquainting" had been penciled in, see: *Untitled History of the Motion Picture Society for the Americas*, 3, RG229.

Actors, Actresses, and Screenwriters.<sup>155</sup> As Gerald Horne would also confirm, “The initiation of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1927 was a direct response to... earlier growth of union sentiment in Hollywood.”<sup>156</sup>

Disney’s work for the OIAA was more than just a distraction from his labor woes. As suggested in *Walt and El Grupo*—a documentary produced by the Walt Disney Family Foundation in 2010—Disney and his travelling companions were greatly concerned about the unresolved labor troubles plaguing the cartoon factory that they were leaving behind.<sup>157</sup> Even if *Walt and El Grupo* wished to forget them, there were constant reminders awaiting their arrival in South America. According to Tom Sito, in preparation for Disney’s arrival, “the AFL contacted the heads of the labor unions in South American countries” and ensured that Walt and his artists were greeted by the jeers of “picketing longshoremen.”<sup>158</sup>

Disney also had a labor expert of his own on one of the MPSA’s committees. Gunther Lessing, vice president and corporate counsel for WDP, chaired the MPSA’s committee that was tasked with finding and encouraging projects that could be funded by the federal government, completed at a rapid pace, and broadly distributed, thereby increasing the efficiency of the OIAA’s Motion Picture Division.<sup>159</sup> Negotiating a contract between WDP and the federal government became an insurance policy for Disney’s livelihood. Herb Sorrell’s alliance with the SCG became a clear and present danger to Disney’s financial solvency.

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<sup>155</sup> Ross, “Labor Relations in Hollywood,” 59.

<sup>156</sup> Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 39.

<sup>157</sup> The reason behind Disney’s leaving for his trip to Central and South America in the middle of the strike at his studio remains a contested topic among historians. Sito insisted that Nelson Rockefeller and the OIAA’s sponsorship of Disney’s tour was “a face-saving tactic concocted to get Disney out of town so a deal could be struck.” However, J.B. Kaufman has rightfully suggested that “the ongoing labor struggle jeopardized the South American venture,” see: Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 139; Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney*, 19.

<sup>158</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 139.

<sup>159</sup> *Untitled History of the Motion Picture Society for the Americas*, 4, RG229.

According to Walt Disney's HUAC testimony, Sorrell had threatened to "make a dust bowl out of [Disney's] plant" during the Animator's Strike.<sup>160</sup> This was a particularly evocative image for a Midwesterner like Disney. As Mike Wallace noted, Walt had grown up as the son of a failed, disgruntled farmer "who voted consistently for Eugene Debs and subscribed to" socialist periodicals.<sup>161</sup> In his oral history, Sorrell admitted to taking steps in order to make good on his threat, but he did not use the dust bowl terminology. After a representative from the federal government had been sent to facilitate discussions between Disney and the strikers, negotiations remained at a stalemate. A NLRB representative asked Sorrell to find out which bank was funding Disney's studio. After some research, Sorrell was referred to "Doc" Giannini, founder of Bank of Italy—later named Bank of America, the principal source of Disney's investment capital.<sup>162</sup> Giannini suggested that Sorrell try to arrange for Jim Russell, who had arbitrated disputes between the United Auto Workers and Henry Ford during the mid-1930s.<sup>163</sup> Sorrell was more interested in a guarantee that Disney, himself, would agree to arbitration. Giannini provided reassurance to Sorrell by stating, emphatically, that Disney would "arbitrate or he won't have any studio."<sup>164</sup> Executive leadership of the OIAA and MPSA threatened Disney's future as well.

In early-July, Whitney had a telephone conversation with an OIAA advisor, John Lockwood. During the call, the two gentlemen discussed how Disney's "labor difficulties" may

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<sup>160</sup> Walt Disney, "Testimony of Walter E. Disney," *Hearings*, 283.

<sup>161</sup> Wallace, "Mickey Mouse History," 35.

<sup>162</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 70.

<sup>163</sup> For more on this contemporary labor-management dispute, particularly the Battle of the Overpass, see: Stephen H. Norwood, "Ford's Brass Knuckles: Henry Bennett, the Cult of Muscularity, and Anti-Labor Terror," In *Strike-breaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 184-8.

<sup>164</sup> Sorrell, *You Can't Choose Your Friends*, 70.

adversely affect their current plan to enter into a contract with WDP.<sup>165</sup> While Lockwood appeared concerned, Whitney was not. In response, Lockwood explained that if Disney was going to cease participation in the planned travel to Central and South American, then “it might well be in the interest of the Government that we should make such a contract.”<sup>166</sup> Neither Lockwood nor Whitney had any reason to believe that Disney and his artists would abort their mission. Lockwood further “advised [Whitney] that the Government could not reimburse Mr. Disney for expenses already incurred voluntarily.”<sup>167</sup> With regard to the Animator’s Strike at Disney’s studio, the choice for the OIAA was a simple one: Rockefeller and Whitney could disregard the labor-management dispute and enter into the contract with WDP, or “give up the whole thing.”<sup>168</sup> Whitney agreed to take the matter under advisement and decide within the week.

On July 17, 1941, Kenneth Thomson, an actor and Chief Executive for the MPSA, made his concerns regarding the negotiations of the Disney contract explicitly known to Whitney and Rockefeller. First, Thomson feared that “No statement...could alter the fact that Disney would be given the semblance of government sanction at a time when he has involved himself in a very unpleasant labor controversy.”<sup>169</sup> In Thomson’s view, not only was Disney embarrassing himself by refusing to negotiate with the independent SCG, he stood to threaten the global reputation of the MPSA and OIAA. Second, Thomson emphasized that “important and honest elements of labor in the motion picture industry...will bitterly resent” government subsidies being granted

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<sup>165</sup> John H. Lockwood, *Memorandum to Nelson A. Rockefeller*, July 10, 1941, RG229.

<sup>166</sup> Lockwood, *Memorandum to Nelson A. Rockefeller*.

<sup>167</sup> Lockwood, *Memorandum to Nelson A. Rockefeller*.

<sup>168</sup> Lockwood, *Memorandum to Nelson A. Rockefeller*.

<sup>169</sup> Kenneth Thomson, *Telegram to John Hay Whitney, Care of Nelson Rockefeller*, July 17, 1941, 1, RG229.

“to Disney so long as he is allied with Bioff.”<sup>170</sup> The IATSE and Bioff had strong-armed several trade unions from major Hollywood studios, and Disney’s was no exception. Thomson felt this was need-to-know information for government officials like Rockefeller and Whitney.

Thomson’s third and final concern regarded the extremely precarious situation the OIAA risked by blessing the “unholy alliance...mixing the Rockefeller Committee, the creator of Mickey Mouse, and a convicted Chicago panderer now under [federal] indictment...for extortion.”<sup>171</sup>

Thomson pulled no punches when he concluded with a threat to tender his resignation as Chief Executive of the MPSA should the government enter into the proposed pact with Disney and his studio. Nevertheless, the OIAA entered a compact with WDP and enlisted Donald Duck into government service on August 5, 1941.<sup>172</sup> Thomson became the MPSA’s pound of flesh by December 1941, when he was succeeded as the organization’s chief executive by Wanger of the AMPAS.

One of the important provisions of Disney’s initial contract with the OIAA was that it took effect retroactively, meaning it provided for budgetary expenses from July 1, 1941 onward.<sup>173</sup> This did not allow for reimbursement of corporate expenditures for Disney and his crew, but it did ensure that Disney’s studio received an influx of federal funding while it was in violation of the Wagner Act. More importantly, the OIAA Contract was an insurance policy for *Walt and El Grupo*, as they came to be referred to by Central and South Americans.<sup>174</sup> It offered Disney financial shelter in the event that his cartoon factory manufactured a dud. Paragraph nine

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<sup>170</sup> Thomson, *Telegram to John Hay Whitney*, 1.

<sup>171</sup> Thomson, *Telegram to John Hay Whitney*, 2.

<sup>172</sup> No human blood or duck quills were involved in the signing of the physical contract, see: “Contract No. NDCarr-110,” August 5, 1941, RG229.

<sup>173</sup> “Contract No. NDCarr-110,” 1.

<sup>174</sup> *Walt and El Grupo*.

of the contract stated that “the Coordinator [Rockefeller] agreed to indemnify the Contractor [WDP] against *any loss*...[though] such indemnity shall not exceed \$150,000.”<sup>175</sup> It was contractually impossible for Disney to fail in his expansion into Central and South American markets. The commercial failures of *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia*, combined with the shrinking European markets for American motion pictures, crippled by World War II, signaled that there would have been no legacy for Walt Disney to protect if his studio’s public-private partnership with the OIAA did not pan out. The indemnity clause in paragraph nine was a failsafe against commercial failure, but its invocation never became necessary. Moreover, due to the perception of Disney’s success, the contract was renegotiated sometime later, and its budgetary allowances were increased.<sup>176</sup> Even Rockefeller’s OIAA had the courtesy to reward its contractors with raises commensurate to their successes.

Between 1942 and 1945, an anonymous chronicler for the MPSA documented over fifty motion pictures, a mixture of short subject and feature-length projects, created by the Disney studio while under the supervision of the OIAA. Twenty-two were pedagogical experiments, covering topics ranging from public health to natural resource extraction. Of the ten productions released in theatres, making them for-profit ventures, four were designated as war films. As Sito has pointed out, most of this work was completed by artists who were considered scabs by some of the SCG’s members.<sup>177</sup> One notable exception was Ward Kimball—who animated the “Jim Crow” sequence in *Dumbo* (1941) and later expressed contempt for the “Disney despots” that he

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<sup>175</sup> “Contract No. NDCarr-110,” 3-4. Emphasis added

<sup>176</sup> “Contract No. OEMcr-107,” January 2, 1942, RG229.

<sup>177</sup> Although Sito recognized that “All the artists who became known as the Nine Old Men...crossed the picket line and went back to work,” he may have overstated his argument in describing them as “loyalists.” As noted by John Canemaker, in his biography of Disney’s Nine Old Men, Ward Kimball believed himself to be “quite liberal” and “sympathized” with the strikers, even as he continued to work while Babbitt and others fought for his benefit, see: Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 124; John Canemaker, *Walt Disney’s Nine Old Men and the Art of Animation*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Glendale, California: Disney Editions, 2001) 104-5.



and the other artists labored under.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, Walt Disney became the most decorated Hollywood executive to participate in the OIAA's diplomatic mission. "Rightfully," the anonymous MPSA historian pondered, "What would Hitler do if he had a Disney?"<sup>179</sup> Thankfully, global events never provided an answer to that rhetorical question. As the nation crept closer to direct involvement in the War, Disney stayed the course. U.S. foreign policy in Central and South America passed the narrow threshold between its reliance on soft power and outright militaristic intervention. Donald Duck, the cultural attaché, remained an asset of the U.S. government for the duration of that transitional period.

### ***Los Caballeros Transnacionales***

Of the numerous shorts and feature-length films produced by Disney in the service of the OIAA's Motion Picture Division, two films stood out for the messages they conveyed to American audiences. *Saludos Amigos* (1942) blended the medium of animation with live-action travelogue, but it also demonstrated U.S. insensitivity towards the native cultures of other sovereign nations and the bodies of their women.<sup>180</sup> Even before its theatrical release, *Saludos Amigos* became the subject of criticism, but public opinion softened as WDP and the OIAA worked their magic in Central and South America. *The Three Caballeros* (1945), a follow-up film, was more problematic because it over emphasized stereotypical hyper-sexualization of Central and South American women. Furthermore, it reduced American men to fowl-mouthed sexual predators, one of whom was armed with a pair of six-shooters.<sup>181</sup> Misogyny had a

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<sup>178</sup> Canemaker, *Disney's Nine Old Men*, 95.

<sup>179</sup> *Untitled History of the Motion Picture Society for the Americas*, 18.

<sup>180</sup> Due to the composite nature of the production and staggered global release of films like *Saludos Amigos*, the dates referenced for this and subsequent Good Neighbor features came from the source referenced herein, see: *Saludos Amigos*, film (Walt Disney Productions, Ltd., 1943), *Disney+*, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>181</sup> *The Three Cabarelllos*, film (Walt Disney Productions, Ltd., 1945), *Disney+*, accessed: January 2020.

relatively minor presence in *Saludos Amigos*, whereas the *Caballeros* took the sexist themes and multiplied their intensity by three.

For several reasons, namely the sanctity of Disney's corporate image, Donald Duck—not Mickey Mouse—did most of the heavy lifting at WDP during the 1940s. According to animation scholar Nic Sammond, “the labor of animation is incredibly important as work whose product is actually a visual and auditory commentary on itself.”<sup>182</sup> Mickey Mouse had come to represent all that was exceptional about the United States. Mickey's perseverance, for example, became a salve for the ailing spirits of U.S. consumers during the Great Depression. By the mid-1930s, Mickey's wholesome status had become critical to the Disney business model. As Sammond added, “Mickey's celebrity and Disney's promotional skills made of the mouse a synecdoche, one that seemed poised to overshadow not only any other cartoon character of the era but also the craft and industry as a whole.”<sup>183</sup> Donald provided an ideal channel for U.S. debauchery directed towards Central and South America. “However wild Mickey might once have been and however much he might still look like a minstrel...he was not allowed to drink, smoke, or act too violently,” Sammond argued, “the company had created Donald as an outlet for the pent-up creative energies of its animators.”<sup>184</sup> Mickey Mouse could count his blessings for his not being invited to participate in Donald Duck's depravity in Central and South America during the 1940s.

Before it was released in theaters internationally, *Saludos Amigos* began as four different animated shorts which were intended to highlight cultural expressions of Peru, Bolivia,

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<sup>182</sup> Nicholas Sammond, *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 125.

<sup>183</sup> Sammond, *Birth of an Industry*, 130.

<sup>184</sup> Sammond, *Birth of an Industry*, 134.

Argentina and Brazil.<sup>185</sup> Disney made a last-minute decision, likely commercial, to synthesize them into a feature-length film with a longer run time. Donald starred as an American tourist visiting Peru during the opening short, *Lake Titicaca*, and another featured Pedro, a young, Argentinian mail plane, who braved the Andes mountains to ensure his precious cargo was delivered.<sup>186</sup> Of the four short vignettes, *Gaucha Goofy* became the most controversial. The premise of the cartoon conflated the gaucho culture of Argentinians with that of the American Cowboy, which was reduced to a spectacle as Goofy bumbled his way through the sequence. Goofy also wore a brightly colored costume that was purported to be traditional gaucho dress. The final sequence of *Saludos Amigos*, however, focused on the rhythmic Samba, popular among Brazilians. In this short, Donald was introduced to a sultry, female dance partner by a suavely dressed parrot. This cigar-smoking, native of Rio de Janeiro, was appropriately named José “Joe” Carioca.<sup>187</sup> Only the silhouettes of Donald and the woman were visible to audiences as the two danced, leaving his arousal implicit.

In *The Three Caballeros*, Donald Duck headed south of the border once more and took center stage in a film that was even more sexually exploitative than *Saludos*.<sup>188</sup> Donald reprised his role as a representation of the Anglo-American male, and “Joe” Carioca—the embodiment of Brazil’s middle class—came back to whisk Donald away on another carnal journey through Central and South America. This time, the Pan-American pair were joined by Panchito, trigger-happy rooster and derogatory Mexican stereotype.<sup>189</sup> Throughout the film’s production,

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<sup>185</sup> *Saludos Amigos*.

<sup>186</sup> *Saludos Amigos*.

<sup>187</sup> *Saludos Amigos*.

<sup>188</sup> *The Three Caballeros*, film (Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. 1941), *Disney+*, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>189</sup> Apparently, Gunther Lessing finally came through for his old client, Pacho Villa, and secured him a role in an animated Disney film. *Panchito* loosely translates from Spanish to: “cute little Pancho,” see: *The Three Caballeros*.

Disney's studio attempted to keep the feature's content a surprise for audiences. For all the secrecy surrounding production on *The Three Caballeros*, the exploits of these "chappies in serapes" left little to the imagination for male audiences when the film was released in theatres.<sup>190</sup>

Donald's abhorrent, misogynistic behavior had always been part of his charm. Scholars such as Leo Chavez, however, have argued that images of Central and South American women, such as those portrayed in *The Three Caballeros*, have been used to perpetuate the harmful stereotype of the "hot Latina."<sup>191</sup> In one sequence, José encouraged Donald to turn his masculine gaze to a group of female sunbathers on an Acapulco beach, so the bodies of these Latina women were clearly there for the *Caballeros*' consumption. Latinas, according to Chavez, were often portrayed in media "as exotic, sexually aggressive, flirtatious women who...have more sexual partners than their white counter parts."<sup>192</sup> In an extension of the scene from *Saludos Amigos*, Donald vies for the affection of Brazilian performer, Aurora Miranda, while several other males stalk her through the streets to the tune of *Os Quindins de Yayá*.<sup>193</sup> While lusting after the South American woman, Donald was consumed by a hormonal frenzy. Together, Donald, José and Panchito exemplified the Pan-Americanism being championed by groups like the MPSA and Rockefeller's OIAA.

Problematic as they were, Disney's *Caballeros* became a patriarchal symbol of hemispheric solidarity, but they were a tough trio to keep under wraps for very long. The truth

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<sup>190</sup> *The Three Caballeros*.

<sup>191</sup> For the "hot Latina" stereotype, see: Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 73-96; For the myriad other ways U.S., right-wing conservatives have demonized Central and South Americans, see: Chavez, *The Latino Threat*, passim.

<sup>192</sup> Chavez, *The Latino Threat*, 79.

<sup>193</sup> *Yayá* was slang for "sister," with a connotation similar to word's usage in African American Vernacular English. *The Three Caballeros*; Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney*, 196.

was they had trouble securing Mexican talent. Domestically, artists hired by Disney encountered hostility in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. According to animation historian J.B. Kaufman, José Molina—one of three siblings selected in Mexico to participate in *The Three Caballeros* by Disney and his crew—was forced to register for the U.S. selective service while crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in Laredo, Texas.<sup>194</sup> Molina, however, was not a citizen of the U.S.—or even Mexico for that matter. He was a Chilean national who had only been living with Vincente and Carmen Molina in Mexico for a short time. As a result of her brothers' being accosted by U.S. Border Patrol, Carmen Malina was forced to perform alone in the Mexican sequence of *The Three Caballeros*.<sup>195</sup> Moreover, films like *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Cabarelllos* ensured that skin tone of Central and South Americans were lightened to U.S. standards. U.S. audiences preferred the whiter versions of their Good Neighbors.

Not much of the initial criticism of Disney or the OIAA Motion Picture Division's work was positive. By August 6, 1941, the Argentinian press had quite a bit to say about "Mickey Mouse pictures with a Latin American Background."<sup>196</sup> A halt to OIAA film making was suggested, until Disney and others' work could be adequately reviewed by regional experts. According to J.R. Josephs, an OIAA contact at the *Buenos Aires Herald*, "film men...critics, theatre owners...[and] embassy officials" all expressed worries that Disney's Central and South American work "produced more ill will than good."<sup>197</sup> Many critics also wondered whether Disney and U.S. officials expected people from other nations to be flattered by appearing in the

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<sup>194</sup> Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney*, 211-2.

<sup>195</sup> Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney*, 212.

<sup>196</sup> Although it should not need repetition, Mickey Mouse himself was never invited to participate in any of the OIAA campaigns.

<sup>197</sup> J.R. Josephs, "Report on Use of Walt Disney Films in South American Good Will Program," August 6, 1941, 1, RG229; Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney*, 19.

OIAA's films. As Josephs explained in the words of one critic, "Yanquis [sic] believe that if they make a picture with...an Argentine background, Argentines will...immediately feel a warming of the heart for the States."<sup>198</sup> Local consultants felt that the U.S. empire was objectifying national and regional cultures in the same way that Donald, José, and Panchito objectified women.

To say nothing of the hyper-sexualization of Donald's Samba partner or the animated duck's chauvinist attitudes, local artists and OIAA field agents found Disney and his artists' appropriation of their culture offensive. As noted by animation historian, John Canemaker, "Florencio Molina Campos, an Argentinian artist famed for paintings of gaucho life, was consulted and gave a lecture-demonstration at the studio in full gaucho costume."<sup>199</sup> Disney's loyalist animators took several liberties when applying Technicolor to Goofy's outfit. As Canemaker added, "the final film...horrified Molina Campos because it spoofed everything he had taught and held sacred."<sup>200</sup> Criticisms, such as those expressed by Campos, softened over time. In October 1942, for example, an article in the *Buenos Aires Herald* praised Disney's efforts in bringing Argentinian culture to motion picture theaters. Disney was making the unprecedented choice to screen *Saludos Amigos* "in South America before releasing it in his own country."<sup>201</sup> Disney enjoyed watching audience reactions to his films. According to the article, "One of the events which touched Disney the deepest on his trip...was the warm reception with

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<sup>198</sup> Josephs, "Report on Use of Walt Disney Films," 1.

<sup>199</sup> Canemaker, *Walt Disney's Nine Old Men*, 41.

<sup>200</sup> Canemaker, *Walt Disney's Nine Old Men*, 41.

<sup>201</sup> "'Saludos' is Disney's I.O.U. to Local Fans."

which the Bueno Aires audience greeted *Fantasia*.<sup>202</sup> Disney was not the only U.S. businessman to seek out profits south of the border.

Against the advice of experts, Henry Ford—Walt Disney’s industrial hero—sought to exploit the Amazon rainforest for rubber production.<sup>203</sup> The Good Neighbor films helped bring WDP back from the brink of financial ruin in the early-1940s. However, Ford’s failed rubber colony served more as a weigh station for foreign diplomats and was eventually abandoned by U.S. colonists in the mid-1940s. Unlike Disney’s Good Neighbor diplomacy, the ecology of the Amazon, itself, burst Henry Ford’s Americanist bubble. Be that as it may, Disney’s studio still trumpeted the mythical success of Fordlandia in *The Amazon Awakens* (1944), which according to Grandin, “celebrated Ford’s [colony] as one of the Amazon’s four great cities.”<sup>204</sup> Ford’s failed rubber colony in the Amazon was not viewed as an example of his hubris. It came to represent the idea that U.S. capitalism, and the ideology that governed it, could be transplanted into the untamed wilds of the South American jungle. OIAA officials, however, asked WDP to dial back its over-enthusiastic portrayal of Ford’s Amazonian enterprise.

For obvious reasons, Disney celebrated Ford’s hubristic expansion into the Amazon rainforest. In mid-May 1944, *The Amazon Awakens* became the topic of conversation in a letter addressed to Ben Sharpsteen, one of WDP’s Lead Animators assigned with aiding OIAA’s Motion Picture Division.<sup>205</sup> Russell Pierce of the OIAA asked that the draft script be revised. Pierce requested that Disney remove phrasing that described Ford’s ambitious colonial project as

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<sup>202</sup> “‘Saludos’ is Disney’s I.O.U. to Local Fans.” *Buenos Aires Herald*, October 5, 1942, RG229.

<sup>203</sup> Grandin, *Fordlandia*, 16.

<sup>204</sup> Grandin, *Fordlandia*, 346.

<sup>205</sup> Russell Pierce, *Letter to Ben Sharpsteen, Walt Disney Productions, Ltd.*, May 15, 1944, RG229.

a “rush of men with vision.”<sup>206</sup> Although Disney undoubtedly viewed Ford’s operation as visionary, Pierce believed the description was overstating matters. Pierce suggested the use of the word, “arrival,” as it would have provided a less enthusiastic description when compared to that of a “gold rush.”<sup>207</sup> Once Disney had created an empire of his own, he was free to ignore those warnings. As Grandin noted in *Fordlandia*, the Adventureland section of Disneyland “featured a jungle river cruise on a boat called the *Amazon Belle*.”<sup>208</sup> Though the ride featured several exotic encounters with South American cannibals, it was likely a nostalgic interpretation of Disney’s expedition to Ford’s rubber plantation in 1941, arranged by the OIAA.

More importantly, Disney was not the only Hollywood filmmaker commissioned by Rockefeller and the OIAA. Orson Welles tried to produce a celebratory, rather than an appropriative travelogue, but his political activism in Central and South America nearly damaged his career in the motion picture industry beyond repair. Nelson Rockefeller was not only the Coordinator for the U.S. Office of Inter-American Affairs, he was a member of the executive board at R.K.O. Radio Pictures, which distributed films for both Walt Disney and Orson Welles.<sup>209</sup> Brazil was a high-value target for OIAA propaganda, but the OIAA needed more than the *Caballeros* if it was going to win over Brazil’s autocratic government. At the time, Brazil was led by Getúlio Vargas, who U.S. intelligence believed had surrounded himself with Nazi sympathizers.<sup>210</sup> Rockefeller must have understood the implications of sending a director like Welles into Brazil. Welles was still riding the high of completing the cinematic masterpiece

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<sup>206</sup> Pierce, *Letter to Ben Sharpsteen*.

<sup>207</sup> Pierce, *Letter to Ben Sharpsteen*.

<sup>208</sup> Grandin, *Fordlandia*, 346-7.

<sup>209</sup> *It’s All True: Based on an Unfinished Film by Orson Welles*, DVD (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2004).

<sup>210</sup> *It’s All True*.



*Citizen Kane* (1941), when he was approached about working for the OIAA.<sup>211</sup> He was asked to expedite production on two follow-up films he was making, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) and *Journey into Fear* (1943), in order to arrive in Brazil in time for *Carnaval*. Appropriately, the working title for Welles' Central and South American anthology was: *It's All True*.

Welles, like Disney, became infatuated with the Brazilian Samba. By contrast, Welles was less concerned with the dance's sexual undertones and intended to convey its rich cultural history to American audiences. Welles' pro-black stance, however, was perceived as a threat by the film executives in the U.S. and executives in Brazil's Vargas regime. When the initial Samba footage shot by Welles and his crew arrived in Hollywood, R.K.O. executives complained that he had only been filming "jiggaboos jumping up and down."<sup>212</sup> Unlike Disney, Welles was not interested in fetishizing the samba or its performers. He was attentive to the politics of preserving the native dance and its centrality to the festival of *Carnaval*. As Welles discovered, the Samba had originated with the *Xango* shaman, and it was practiced and disseminated from samba schools located in the city of Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*—slums or tenement villages built into the *morros*, or elevated topography around large urban centers like Rio and São Paulo.<sup>213</sup> Taking note of this, Welles insisted on arranging for Black Brazilian musical talent to be featured in his segment on the Samba.

Traditionally, the Samba Schools from the *favelas* made *Carnaval* a celebration of inter-racial and inter-class mixing.<sup>214</sup> During the festival, everyone was equal in the rhythmic

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<sup>211</sup> *It's All True*.

<sup>212</sup> *It's All True*.

<sup>213</sup> *It's All True*.

<sup>214</sup> Herivelto Martins, "A Fond Farewell to Praça Onze," trans. Amy Chazkel, in *The Rio de Janeiro Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Daryle Williams, Amy Chazkel, and Paulo Knauss de Mendonça (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 206-7.

vibrations of the infectious percussion. *Praça Onze*, or Plaza Eleven, was held dear by Afro-Brazilians because it was a place in which they could revel outside of the impoverished and dangerous conditions of the *favelas*. More importantly, the plaza was a space where residents of the *favelas* could make themselves clearly visible to upper class Brazilians, the ruling elite, and the outside world. Afro-Brazilians participation in *Carnaval*, specifically by dancing the Samba in *Praça Onze*, was a spectacle that demanded a recognition of their humanity. Unfortunately, the prized *Praça Onze* was demolished by Vargas for an infrastructure project, demonstrating the autocrat's contempt for Brazil's underclass. Though the thoroughfare became one of the grandest of its kind in the world, the project was taxing for Brazilians of color in more than economic terms. As noted by Daryle Williams, "Avenida Presidente Vargas exacted tremendous costs, as the demolition work...brought down historic churches...hundreds of humble residences...and commercial establishments that housed working-class Cariocas."<sup>215</sup> Vargas was not only demolishing sites of cultural heritage for Black Brazilians, he was exiling them to the *favelas*. According to Hélio Alves de Brito, a civil engineer working for the Vargas administration, the construction of the Avenida Presidente Vargas was "...the City's most important axis."<sup>216</sup> This was by design, in the evident plan to whiten the image of Rio's population. Vargas and his Estado Novo regime celebrated the "disappearance of old constructions in the urban center...where one notes the poverty of the architectural elements...and...the structures' disagreeable aspects."<sup>217</sup> The Vargas regime was exacting historical erasure of Black Brazilians in the physical realm.

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<sup>215</sup> Hélio Alves de Brito, "Avenida Presidente Vargas," trans. Daryle Williams, in *The Rio de Janeiro Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, 208.

<sup>216</sup> Alves de Brito, "Avenida Presidente Vargas," 209.

<sup>217</sup> Alves de Brito, "Avenida Presidente Vargas," 210.

As Welles had a strong desire to capture the samba in the voice of Brazil's downtrodden, he chose a protest song, performed by Afro-Brazilian musician Sebastião Bernardes de Souza Prata—known as Grande Othelo—and composed by Herivelto Martins, as the backing track for his Samba sequence.<sup>218</sup> The lyrics from de Souza Prata and Martins' dissident ballad were unsettling to the Vargas regime:

They're going to do away *Praça Onze*,  
 There'll be no more Samba School...  
 The *Tamborim*<sup>219</sup> weeps,  
 The entire *morro*<sup>220</sup> weeps...  
 And one day we will have a new square  
 And will sing of your past.<sup>221</sup>

In order to ensure his documentary piece on the Samba honored Black Brazilians, Welles arranged to have the *Praça Onze* reconstructed on one of his backlots. However, due to budgetary constraints, he and his crew were forced to shoot night scenes with anti-aircraft spotlights borrowed from the Brazilian military.<sup>222</sup>

If Welles, in his attempt to reveal how the other half lived in Rio was metaphorically flipping the bird to the city's bourgeoisie, then his dramatic retelling of a celebrated pro-labor story was a figurative middle finger in the eyes of Vargas. Welles was fascinated with the history of Samba, but he became enthralled with a local tale regarding a group of rural fishermen. These *jangadeiros* relied on traditional technology in their labor. Their vessels, called *jangada*, were makeshift rafts, composed of only a few tree trunks with a small sail attached.<sup>223</sup> The *jangadeiros*' labor was extremely dangerous and subject to exploitation by local elites in the

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<sup>218</sup> "A Fond Farewell to Praça Onze," 206.

<sup>219</sup> A *tamborim* is a wooden percussion instrument, traditionally made by native Brazilians.

<sup>220</sup> *Morros* were the elevated hills where the *favelas* had been erected.

<sup>221</sup> Martins, "A Fond Farewell to Praça Onze," 207; *It's All True*.

<sup>222</sup> *It's All True*.

<sup>223</sup> *It's All True*.

fishing villages. More importantly, the Vargas regime had ignored the plight of the *jangadeiros* when passing a series of social reforms that benefitted other segments of Brazil's working class. Welles capitalized on the opportunity to retell the harrowing story of four *jangadeiros* who organized other fishermen and sailed over 1,500 miles—on a *jangada*—from their home in Ceára Beach in São Paulo to the harbor of Rio de Janeiro to demand social justice from the Vargas regime.<sup>224</sup> The significance of this Brazilian, pro-labor movement was too great for Welles to ignore.

As with his segment on the Samba, Welles plans for recreating the fishermen's story became a political statement. Although the *jangadeiros'* demonstration managed to force Vargas to acknowledge their status as secondary citizens, their leader, Manuel “Jacarté” Olímpio, was marked as a political dissident by the Brazilian government. Welles' enthusiastic support for Jacarté's activism led to some of the first accusations that he too was a Communist.<sup>225</sup> Those accusations would follow him home to the U.S. Even worse, tragedy struck while Welles was staging the *jangadeiros'* reenactment in the Rio harbor. Two massive waves caused a *jangada* to capsize. Though three of the four men aboard came to the surface, Jacarté—hero to the *jangadeiros* and Brazil's struggling underclass—drowned as his son watched in horror from the shoreline.<sup>226</sup> Jacarté died in the very same waters that he had navigated on his way to demand Vargas' recognition of the fishermen's union. *TIME Magazine*, who had run the story on the *jangadeiros* that originally captured Welles' attention, summarized the grisly affair. In early-June, human remains were found in the stomach of a shark caught off the coast.<sup>227</sup> While the

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<sup>224</sup> *It's All True*.

<sup>225</sup> *It's All True*.

<sup>226</sup> *It's All True*.

<sup>227</sup> “End of a Hero,” *TIME Magazine* 39, no. 23 (June 8, 1942): 42, EBSCO, accessed: December 2019.

experts were able to determine that the victim was a *jangadeiro* from the same region as Jacarté, no one could confirm that the limbs and head belonged to the Brazilian labor leader.

As Welles stated in an interview, he believed his Good Neighbor adventure was doomed from the start. When funding was cut for a scene that was to feature an indigenous shaman—or “one of the voodoo witch doctors,” in Welles’ words—he wanted to discuss the matter personally in his office.<sup>228</sup> Welles broke the bad news to the shaman, who took great offense because his tribe had invested in new costumes, then left his office. Upon Welles’ return, he found his script that was to feature the native performance had been pierced with a “long steel needle...the mark of voodoo,” according to Welles.<sup>229</sup> In addition, Welles’ and his crew were subjected to street violence when trying to capture footage in Rio’s *favelas*. Adding insult to injury, R.K.O. executives forced Welles to make final edits to *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Journey into Fear*, remotely, while he was antagonizing Vargas in Brazil. Worst of all, R.K.O. shelved the Welles project and held the negatives hostage for several years, until the director finally gave up on trying to option the rights to his work.<sup>230</sup> Nearly half a century passed before the footage shot by Welles was seen by public audiences.

While the plantations of Fordlandia became dried out husks after the industrialist failed in transplanting Americanism to the Amazon, and Welles returned from South America nearly unemployable, Disney became the most celebrated exemplar of Good Neighbor diplomacy and its advancement of U.S. interests. Disney’s work for and with the OIAA and MPSA was viewed

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<sup>228</sup> *It’s All True*.

<sup>229</sup> *It’s All True*.

<sup>230</sup> According to Catherine Benamou, the complete Technicolor negatives for Welles’ project no longer exist. The footage compiled and referenced here was accidentally discovered by film conservationists in the mid-1980s, see: *It’s All True*, DVD; Catherine Benamou, *It’s All True: Orson Welles’s Pan-American Odyssey* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); and Catherine Benamou, “Dual-Engined Diplomacy,” 107-142.

as an unparalleled success. Although the Disney studio's apple polishing for Ford demanded some attention, it is worth noting that Henry Ford never set foot in Fordlandia.<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, it was easy to understand why an auteur like Orson Wells might have been destined to fail from the start—and while he was on his similar expedition into Central and South America. Welles' attitudes towards people of color and pro-labor views differed dramatically from those of Disney and Ford. Welles was attempting to highlight the struggles of the Brazilian underclass, but Disney was there to exploit their cultural resources and market his studios wares, just as any Good Neighbor would. Donald Duck was just chasing tail feathers. More critically, Disney tried to obfuscate the political messages embedded in his Good Neighbor propaganda with bright colors and light-hearted humor, whereas the subjects covered by Welles were overtly political. Welles' and his crew were subjected to street violence when trying to capture footage in Rio's *favelas*. The Chronicles of Disney were dutifully recorded by the anonymous MPSA historian, while Welles returned to Hollywood, branded a Communist by a Brazilian dictator. To the victor, go the spoils, especially in ideological warfare.

### **“Feathers Plucked and Well-Roasted”**

The efficacy of OIAA propaganda had begun to wane by the end of the 1940s. According to Sadlier, the OIAA, along with its Motion Picture Division, was decommissioned before the end of World War II.<sup>232</sup> The Central and South American marketplaces for Disney's films, comics, and other merchandise, however, remained intact. If, as Greg Grandin has argued, the same geographic spaces became the laboratory where the American empire honed its craft of nation building, then it was in that imperial “workshop” that Disney “ingratiated” his studio to

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<sup>231</sup> Grandin, *Fordlandia*, 372.

<sup>232</sup> Sadlier, *Americans All*, 195-6.

the U.S. military-industrial complex.<sup>233</sup> The historical legacy of this transition became apparent after a few decades had passed. In the early 1970s, Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattellart, two Chilean cultural critics, rhetorically informed Disney's corporation that it could have its duck back, "feathers plucked and well-roasted."<sup>234</sup> This was a strongly stated opinion but one with historical foundations. Until President Salvador Allende was unseated by force in 1973, Dorfman served as a cultural advisor to the Chilean government and Allende, personally. Between 1971 and 1973, Dorfman partnered with Mattellart to pen a Marxist criticism of Disney's brand of cultural imperialism and its deleterious impact on their fellow Chileans.<sup>235</sup> According to cultural theorist, John Tomlinson, Dorfman and Mattellart's *How to Read Donald Duck* was "as much a refusal of American consumer-capitalist values," as it was a critique of Disney's "ideological [impact] on Chilean society."<sup>236</sup>

Affection for Donald, the world's most famous cartoon duck, was a difficult emotion to suppress, but the polarity of Disney's polemic could be reversed. According to instructions provided by Dorfman and Mattellart, "to expel someone from the Disneyland Club," one had to demonstrate that Disney was "trying to brainwash children with the doctrine of colorless social realism, imposed by political commissars."<sup>237</sup> Disney comics implied that adherence to class-based stratification was required for an orderly society. As the Chilean critics further suggested, "Every Disney character stands either on one side or the other of the power demarcation line. All

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<sup>233</sup> Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, passim; *Untitled History of the Motion Picture Society for the Americas*, 3.

<sup>234</sup> Dorfman and Mattellart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, 10.

<sup>235</sup> Although it would have presented several challenges as a secondary source, Dorfman and Mattellart's diatribe about Disney was useful in demonstrating the legacy of Walt, the Good Neighbor, in Central and South America. John Tomlinson has argued that their analysis came up short in terms of providing a theoretical approach useful for much aside from criticizing a specific media company's long-term influence in an equally specific political milieu, see Dorfman and Mattellart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, 9; John Tomlinson, "Media Imperialism," in *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 34-67.

<sup>236</sup> Tomlinson, "Media Imperialism," 41.

<sup>237</sup> Dorfman and Mattellart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, 30.

those below are bound to obedience, submission, discipline, humility.”<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, an underdeveloped nation like Chile could only aspire to be, at best, just behind nations like the U.S. in the emerging global order. Neo-colonialism would become a fact of life, and little could be done to compete with a global superpower like Chile’s hemispheric neighbor to the north. “Since the noble savage is denied the prospect of future development,” Dorfman and Mattellart argued, “...unbridled capitalist despoliation is programmed with smiles and coquetry.”<sup>239</sup> Dorfman and Mattellart’s criticism aimed for the metaphorical jugular vein of Disney, the company, and Walt, the man who was by then deceased. “Attacking Disney was no novelty,” they added, “he has often been exposed as the travelling salesman of the imagination, the propagandist of the ‘American Way of Life’, and a spokesman of ‘unreality’.”<sup>240</sup>

As Allende was forced from office by the Augusto Pinochet regime, Dorfman and Mattellart fled Chile seeking political asylum. Their critique persevered as well. Disney media was more than “occasional entertainment,” Dorfman and Mattellart concluded, “it is our everyday stuff of social oppression.”<sup>241</sup> According to John Tomlinson, copies of *How to Read Donald Duck* were rounded up and set ablaze during Pinochet’s violent *coup d’état*, clandestinely supported by the U.S.<sup>242</sup> Although Donald Duck never personally piloted any military helicopters, he honorably served in the U.S. armed forces for several decades after his sojourn south of the border. This form of Disney-branded imperialism was a boon for U.S. foreign

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<sup>238</sup> Dorfman and Mattellart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, 35.

<sup>239</sup> Dorfman and Mattellart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, 52.

<sup>240</sup> Dorfman and Mattellart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, 95.

<sup>241</sup> Their full quote was immediately followed by a statement that “Putting the Duck on the carpet is to question the various forms of authoritarian and paternalist culture pervading the relationship of the bourgeoisie among themselves, with other, and nature,” see: Dorfman and Mattellart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, 98.

<sup>242</sup> Tomlinson, “Media Imperialism,” 41; Dorfman and Mattellart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, 9.



policy, and Disney's successful exploits were a testament to U.S. supremacy in the western hemisphere.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE AMERICAN ART OF WAR: DISNEY'S ENEMIES, FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC

This chapter places Disney's continued partnership with the federal government within the context of one of Hollywood labor's most violent episodes. Labor leaders within the film industry faced an increasingly violent battle against assets of the state. Primarily, this section contrasted the wartime productions of Disney's studio, mostly government-subsidized, with Hollywood labor's continued struggle against corruption, violence, and other anti-union strategies on the domestic front.

In the mid-1940s, Organizations like the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU) confronted insurmountable odds. The nation's late entry into the Second World War had adverse effects on the U.S. labor movement, including the filmmaking industry. The IATSE was firmly entrenched on the backlots of the major motion picture studios like Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. (WDP). During its early years, the CSU had squared off against mob bosses and accusations of subversion, both employed by studio heads like Disney, but jurisdictional disputes continued within the growing labor movement. Sorrell was still there, leading men and women into battle under the banner of the CSU. With the moxie and support of other left-wing activists, the Hollywood labor movement's militant faction persisted in their efforts to rid the trenches of the motion picture industry littered by sweetheart deals and conservative press. The public spectacle of a series of strikes, beginning in early-1945, however, granted more and more political capital to right-wingers trying to curtail union activity on a national level. By October, the violence was not metaphorical. Even worse, the Labor Management Relations Act, also known as the Taft-Hartley Act, was passed by Congress in 1947, fed the growing paranoia surrounding the spread

of Communism and increased accusations of subversive activity into deadly weapons on the battlefields of Hollywood.

### **Victory through Animation**

Throughout the 1940s, once the U.S. officially entered the Second World War, the nation's military-industrial complex became a proto-Disneyland. Disney's studio became a state-backed institution, and its engines were primed for psychological warfare on the domestic front. In 1940, Charles Glenn made a hyperbolic comment in a column for *People's World*. Saddened by the industrialization of U.S. filmmaking as an artform, Glenn lamented, "[Hollywood] has imposed on itself the title of America's Cultural Center... Maybe big business hasn't heard of culture. Or, like [Joseph] Goebbels, reaches for its gun."<sup>243</sup> As time would reveal, Glenn's remark was prescient. Months before the U.S. officially entered the War, Disney was working on Imagineering weapons-grade material in his cartoon factory. Disney had been redlining his animated war machine for years by the time the War neared its finale in 1945. Although the OIAA and OWI exercised some editorial control over Disney's productions and told his artists "what to do," he never did "just the opposite" and shuttered his studio.<sup>244</sup>

For labor-management relations, as James Gross argued, "the war years provided the NLRB with a respite from the constant political pressure under which it had operated."<sup>245</sup> Since the beginning of 1942, organized labor had been under the jurisdiction of the National War Labor Board. The NWLB continued to quell labor-management disputes, but more importantly, it insulated the production of wartime industries.<sup>246</sup> Even if they were over worked and under

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<sup>243</sup> Charles Glenn, "Hollywood Vine," *People's World*, February 3, 1940, NYPL.

<sup>244</sup> Babbitt, "Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt," 4.

<sup>245</sup> Gross, *The Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board*, 243.

<sup>246</sup> Gross, *The Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board*, 243.

paid, Disney's artists could no longer strike against their employer without risk of being targeted as a national security threat. When WDP unleashed its Americanist menagerie on theatres during the War, it did so by exploiting its labor force. The artists who animated those characters were kept quite busy while Disney was in the business of warlording.

In 1941, WDP released two memoranda to various defense production industries, mainly airplane manufacturers such as the Lockheed Company. One of these memos discussed technical training films. The sales pitch suggested that experts on pedagogy could “testify to the remarkable power of the animation medium to present...processes which ordinary photography cannot portray, nor personal instruction convey.”<sup>247</sup> This unprecedented level of didacticism was innovative. Live-action subjects would gain “effectiveness, clarity and instructional value” by inserting “animated diagrams, graphs, maps or animated statistics.”<sup>248</sup> Producing these subjects would result in little to no disruption of normal industrial operation. “An engineer or other representative of the client...sits down at a conference table in the Disney studio and tells his story to a group of highly trained mechanical draftsmen and artists.”<sup>249</sup> Disney's artists, as the best in the business, were crafting an invaluable product for industrial manufacturers of food, munitions, and war technology. The benefits provided by Disney's “superbly equipped modern plant and the hundreds of...artists which Walt Disney could make available” would only be limited by the “imagination of your own instructors.”<sup>250</sup>

On the same day, another memorandum was distributed, offering evidence that supported the use of Disney's most popular characters in morale films. As suggested by this document,

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<sup>247</sup> Walt Disney Productions, Ltd., *Memorandum on: Use of Animated Cartoon Medium for Technical Training Films in Defense Industries*, March 12, 1941, 1, RG208.

<sup>248</sup> *Memorandum on: Use of Animated Cartoon Medium*, 1.

<sup>249</sup> *Memorandum on: Use of Animated Cartoon Medium*, 2.

<sup>250</sup> *Memorandum on: Use of Animated Cartoon Medium*, 2.

“Cartoon characters...can painlessly put over lessons on touchy points,” such as, “aspects of morale and discipline problems.”<sup>251</sup> Disney executives already had several new and original suggestions in mind for such characters. “Types of workmen common to every plant – the wise guy, the chronically tardy man, sloppy Joe, hasty Harry” could be dealt with on “screen in a friendly, good natured, and yet trenchant manner.”<sup>252</sup> Not only would these Disney films be practical, they would also be entertaining. In one example provided, Disney executives suggested that a series of shorts could be built around a “‘Little Loud-mouth’, who talks entirely too much both in the plant and outside.”<sup>253</sup> Some of Disney’s prized possessions were off limits, however. As Disney executives argued, the “irascible Donald Duck and the witless Goofy” were highly regarded examples according to “certain psychologists...since they carry over a wealth of earlier pleasant associations,” but Mickey Mouse was nowhere to be found on their list of suggestions.<sup>254</sup> Moreover, Disney’s assistance to defense industries was not being offered for free. “Funny, fast-moving animation cartoons...with the inimitable Disney charm, of course, were “costly to produce.”<sup>255</sup> The suggested morale films could be purchased in bulk to reduce costs. Disney executives offered a guarantee that the final pricing would be “substantially less than the well-known short subjects...being produced for theatre distribution.”<sup>256</sup> The only limitation of these films was that they comported to an orderly industrial setting. This idyllic setting, envisioned by Walt Disney, valued laborers’ subservience to their employers above all else.

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<sup>251</sup> Walt Disney Productions, Ltd., *Memorandum on: Use of Walt Disney Cartoon Characters in Morale Films*, March 12, 1941, 1, RG208.

<sup>252</sup> *Memorandum on: Use of Walt Disney Cartoon Characters*, 1.

<sup>253</sup> *Memorandum on: Use of Walt Disney Cartoon Characters*, 1.

<sup>254</sup> *Memorandum on: Use of Walt Disney Cartoon Characters*, 1.

<sup>255</sup> *Memorandum on: Use of Walt Disney Cartoon Characters*, 2.

<sup>256</sup> *Memorandum on: Use of Walt Disney Cartoon Characters*, 2. Emphasis in original.

Several times over, Disney's studio had to be warned by government officials to temper the ideological messages of its wartime animated shorts and features. Increased production was the U.S. government's chief goal in financing training films for defense industries, but it was not to be suggested at the expense of worker morale. Lowell Mellett, Director of the Office of War Intelligence's (OWI) Bureau of Motion Pictures expressed his desire that Disney tone down its anti-labor rhetoric. In a letter written to R.S. Carr, who was handling the government and defense projects internally for WDP, Mellett provided some constructive criticism. The technical training films created for the Lockheed plant may have been "agreeable to the Lockheed company," according to Mellett, but other "aircraft manufacturers" should have been able to decide for themselves whether they wanted to participate in Disney's didactic experiments.<sup>257</sup> The anti-labor sentiment expressed in the second memorandum was more disconcerting to Mellett.

In contrast to Mellett's view on the potential for technical subjects, he informed Carr that he was "not sure that you are on equally safe ground in undertaking morale films using cartoon characters."<sup>258</sup> Disney might have been able to get a few laughs out of industrial workers, but they would not take kindly to becoming the butt of Donald Duck or Goofy's gags. "The danger of cartoons," Mellett added, "is that they hit awfully hard. Few can take it from a cartoon, except time-toughened politicians."<sup>259</sup> Mellett concluded that "nothing is worse than to have any employee made the butt of a joke by a superior."<sup>260</sup> That sort of criticism coming from outside the industrial setting was wholly unacceptable to Mellett. While Mellett professed that he was a

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<sup>257</sup> Lowell Mellett, *Letter to R.S. Carr, Walt Disney Productions, Ltd.*, March 19, 1941, 1, RG208.

<sup>258</sup> Lowell Mellett, *Letter to R.S. Carr*, 1.

<sup>259</sup> Lowell Mellett, *Letter to R.S. Carr*, 1.

<sup>260</sup> Lowell Mellett, *Letter to R.S. Carr*, 2.

longtime fan of Disney's productions, he was adamant about his warning to back away from insulting labor.

While Disney's studio produced a wide variety of wartime propaganda and leased its resources to numerous federal agencies, one feature was a constant for all these films. Every title card featured an IATSE certification, giving Disney's operation the appearance of adhering to federal labor law. When the Japanese Empire launched its attack on Pearl Harbor at the end of 1941, many producers in the Hollywood film industry—Disney included—committed themselves to the U.S. war effort. According to film historian Leonard Maltin, no studio made a larger contribution “of its time and resources” to U.S. propaganda efforts than WDP.<sup>261</sup> Disney's cartoon factory in Burbank was even converted into a base for the U.S. armed forces. In spite of his patriotism, Walt Disney complained profusely when Navy commander Raymond Farwell occupied his office complex. According to Steven Watts, “Farwell not only slept in Disney's bed...he apparently made a habit of walking through busy staff meetings in Disney's office lugging a jar of pickles and dropping crumbs from an oversized sandwich.”<sup>262</sup> Nevertheless, Disney was more than happy to pat his boys on the back for performing their patriotic duty.

A press release distributed by WDP emphasized that “75% of the studios total output” had been devoted to government-sponsored propaganda.<sup>263</sup> More importantly, the studio had shattered all previous records for footage produced since it opened. The press release vaunted the fact that “Old and new cartoon stars” were appearing in “settings of tanks and battleships.”<sup>264</sup>

Disney believed that it had developed the perfect formula for merging entertainment with

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<sup>261</sup> “Introduction by Leonard Maltin,” *Walt Disney Treasures: On the Front Lines*, DVD (Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2004).

<sup>262</sup> Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 233.

<sup>263</sup> “Disney Studio Devotes Seventy-Five Per Cent of Production to U.S. Defense Films,” n.d., RG208.

<sup>264</sup> “Disney Studio Devotes Seventy-Five Per Cent.”

training and morale films. Long before Walt Disney acquired the rights to produce an adaptation of P.L. Travers' *Mary Poppins* (1964), WDP gloated that its "Sugar coated messages have always been easier to digest, and a coating of Mickey Mouse promises to be extremely palatable."<sup>265</sup> Global war was a bitter pill to swallow, but with far less effort, Disney could have channeled his factory's saccharine resources into remedying his labor troubles.

Many of the war films were relatively innocuous, even if some were glaringly insensitive. For example, *Food Will Win the War* (1942), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, suggested to audiences that the "hope of American Agriculture" would win the War for the Allies.<sup>266</sup> The narrator celebrated that American farmers outnumbered the Axis soldiers by a two-to-one margin. These "embattled farmers are armed," the faceless voice added in a militaristic tone. There was, however, no mention of the migrant labor critical to American agribusiness but unprotected by federal labor law.<sup>267</sup> The short film made use of Disney's artists to demonstrate how American food production dwarfed that of any other nation in the world.

The animated sequences brought the impossible to life, as it showed the food processing industry had "canned enough vegetables to cover the wall of China," and U.S. farmers had produced enough flour to "snow the German army in for another Russian winter."<sup>268</sup> Although the short was intended to be informative, it did have a few disturbing images. A morbidly obese woman, held aloft by a crane on a battleship, was used to symbolize all the oil and fat produced by U.S. manufacturers. Even worse, Disney's *Three Little Pigs* ushered a horde of their fellow

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<sup>265</sup> *Mary Poppins*, film (Walt Disney Productions, Ltd., 1964), Disney+, accessed: January 2020; "Disney Studio Devotes Seventy-Five Per Cent."

<sup>266</sup> "Food Will Win the War."

<sup>267</sup> "Food Will Win the War."

<sup>268</sup> "Food Will Win the War."



swine off to American butchers, marching to the patriotic tune of fife and drum.<sup>269</sup> If WDP had added any more huff and puff, then Disney's studio might have blown down all the nation's industrialized slaughterhouses.

As with Disney's OIAA films, Donald Duck seemed to steal the show. Other wartime shorts, like *Education for Death: The Making of a Nazi* (1943), were adapted from works by European expatriates.<sup>270</sup> Donald, however, was featured in several animated classics from the era, including a few that were nominated for Awards by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Art Babbitt's long-time friend, Bill Tytla was credited for his work on *Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943), but the Oscar-winning, propaganda film was directed by Jack Kinney.<sup>271</sup> In the short, Donald went through a jarring experience of being conscripted into the Third Reich's defense production industry. The animation sequence featuring the film's title song was sung by a marching band composed of German, Italian, and Japanese forces. The latter group was portrayed with exaggerated facial features, such as squinting eyes and bucked teeth.

As the short feature progressed, the cartoon duck was forced to goosestep his way to the production line at a German munitions factory and give the Nazi salute while at the business end of several bayonets. Held at gunpoint, Donald was forced to work until he suffered a psychotic break. As Donald descended into madness, his arms and legs contorted into the shape of a swastika, and he hallucinated a portrait of himself becoming Adolph Hitler. When Donald woke up from his nightmare, he realized it was all a bad dream. The cartoon duck—still in his star-

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<sup>269</sup> "Food Will Win the War."

<sup>270</sup> *Education for Death*, which purportedly showed the ways in which Hitler Youth were institutionally groomed, was based on the written work of Gregor Ziemer, see: "Education for Death," 1943, *Walt Disney Treasures: On the Front Lines*.

<sup>271</sup> "Der Fuehrer's Face," 1943, *Walt Disney Treasures: On the Front Lines*.

spangled pajamas, ran to his window and hugged a model of the Statue of Liberty, and declared his gratitude for being “a citizen of the United States of America.”<sup>272</sup>

The labor of Donald Duck was in high demand during the war years. In 1942, the OWI leased Donald Duck’s labor to Henry Morgenthau over at the U.S. Department of Treasury. Through this work, Donald Duck earned Disney’s studio another Oscar nomination. *The New Spirit* (1942), which was edited and re-issued the following year as *The Spirit of ’43* (1943), encouraged citizens to pay their income taxes.<sup>273</sup> The short feature placed Donald in the role of an American taxpayer, suffering from a moral dilemma on payday. One half of Donald’s conscience, speaking in a Scottish accent and clad in a tartan kilt, informed him that the “War [was his] war too,” the narrator explained to audiences that paying income taxes was a “privilege,” not a duty.<sup>274</sup> The other half of Donald’s taxpayer brain encouraged him to spend his money in the local Nazi dive bar. After some encouragement from the character who became the miserly Scrooge McDuck, however, Donald filed and paid his taxes.

Innovative animation from *The New Spirit*, an example of the techniques hyped in the technical memo to defense industries, was repurposed and inserted into *Spirit of ’43* after the sequence with Donald Duck. In these scenes, the narrator declared that the U.S. military-industrial complex needed citizens’ taxes to fund American factories. The disembodied voice ominously demanded citizens’ “Taxes...for machine guns, anti-tank guns, long-range guns, guns, guns, guns...”<sup>275</sup> By voluntarily withholding their periodic income tax payments, U.S. citizens could do their part in supporting the Allies abroad. The government needed its citizens’

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<sup>272</sup> “Der Fuehrer’s Face.”

<sup>273</sup> “The Spirit of ’43,” 1943, *Walt Disney Treasures: On the Front Lines*.

<sup>274</sup> “The Spirit of ’43.”

<sup>275</sup> “The Spirit of ’43.”

“Taxes to bury the Axis,” but several government officials questioned the efficacy of Donald Duck’s salesmanship.<sup>276</sup>

Although Disney bragged to the press about how valuable Donald’s contribution was to the nation’s coffers, there was little evidence to support that U.S. taxpayers were affected by the good word spread by *The New Spirit*. The artists at Disney’s studio had contributed in numerous ways to government fundraising efforts, and some projects targeted children in particular. According to another press release distributed by WDP, the organization “inaugurated a campaign to promote the sale of War stamps to children.”<sup>277</sup> Disney partnered with Random House to publish and distribute a stamp book. In addition to the book, which featured a “combination game and story featuring Disney characters, and...a practical lesson in thrift and patriotism,” Donald Duck’s voice actor, Clarence Nash, made personal appearances at retail locations participating in “The Victory March” campaign around the country.<sup>278</sup>

In addition to his government contracts, Disney bankrolled a collaboration with Andrew De Seversky, a booster for the Lockheed aircraft company. Of all the works produced at Disney’s studio on behalf of the U.S. military-industrial complex, the wartime auteur believed *Victory through Air Power* (1943) to be his *coup de grâce*.<sup>279</sup> Disney paid for the film’s production on *Victory* out of his studio’s war chest, so its content was not under the purview of the federal government. Unlike the government-sponsored war films, however, *Victory* was not well received by U.S. military officials. According to Steven Watts, officials from the U.S. Navy

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<sup>276</sup> “The Spirit of ’43.”

<sup>277</sup> “Walt Disney Defense Films,” 3, n.d., RG208.

<sup>278</sup> “Walt Disney Defense Films,” 3.

<sup>279</sup> “Victory through Air Power,” 1943, *Walt Disney Treasures: On the Front Lines*.

lobbied against a film that advocated for diverting their funding to air power.<sup>280</sup> *Victory* was more than another training exercise of morale film, however.

Nelson Rockefeller personally congratulated Disney on his collaboration with De Seversky. Rockefeller told Disney, “*Victory Through Air Power* is singularly important in that it clearly demonstrates the almost limitless possibilities of the medium.”<sup>281</sup> Five artists at Disney’s studio also pitched in by producing hundreds of pieces of nose art for warplanes and military insignia for other branches of the U.S. armed forces.<sup>282</sup> The Allies drew inspiration from at least one of its scenes for use in live-fire operations. Disney and De Seversky may have dreamed it, but the Allied Powers had done it. Additionally, a new type of bunker-busting armament, which was developed by the U.S. and British military engineers. “The Disney Bomb Project” was inspired by one of *Victory*’s animated sequences. The Disney bombs were too large for conventional bombers. U.S. Bombardier Pat Spillman recalled that the weapons “had to be carried...under the wings of the B-17.”<sup>283</sup> Only a handful of these bombs were used on combat missions in early-1945, but they proved effective in piercing the concrete shielding submarine bunkers and detonating inside. In Walt Disney’s mind, when Axis forces spotted one of his characters in the sky, they could be assured that death and destruction would follow. It was a dreary juxtaposition for Disney’s stable of animated characters.

By the end of 1944, Disney was dealt a crushing blow in his personal war on labor. Disney, Lessing, and WDP tried for years to have the NLRB decision in favor of the SCG reversed. Between 1941 and 1944, WDP and its corporate counsel engaged in a protracted legal

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<sup>280</sup> Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 235-6.

<sup>281</sup> Nelson A. Rockefeller, *Letter to Walt Disney*, July 10, 1943, RG229.

<sup>282</sup> “Walt Disney Defense Films,” 3.

<sup>283</sup> Pat Spillman, “The Disney Bomb Project,” in *92nd Bomb Group (H): Fame’s Favored Few* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1996), 76.

battle with the NLRB, Art Babbitt, and the SCG. The result was a decision handed down from Justice Albert Stephens, Sr. of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in California on December 5, 1944.<sup>284</sup> In the Ninth Circuit ruling, there was some poetic justice at work which provided a convenient summary of how the Animator's Strike of 1941 ended. According to the decision, the strike ended in early-August with an arbitration that specifically referenced Art Babbitt's wrongful termination and recommended he be rehired. Even though Disney complied with the award, Stephens noted, Babbitt's immediate supervisor, Harold Adelquist, "purposefully avoided assigning [him] work."<sup>285</sup> Babbitt was terminated again in November 24, 1941 and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps.

In spite of the pleas from WDP attorneys, the Court refused to review any evidence or find fault in the NLRB's decision that Disney had violated the Wagner Act. Not only did Stephens and the other Appellate Justices' decide not to overturn the NLRB charges against WDP, it reissued the orders that Disney "cease and desist from discouraging membership in the [SCG]...or in any other manner interfering with, restraining, or coercing" any other artists from "exercising their right to self-organization."<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, Disney was ordered to pay Babbitt lost wages. To Disney and Lessing's dismay, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review the lower court's decision, granting the NLRB and Babbitt final say in the matter. While Disney ultimately lost his battle against the SCG, Herb Sorrell had been actively resisting the IATSE's sprawl through the other Hollywood studios.

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<sup>284</sup> *NLRB v. Walt Disney Productions*. 146 F.2d 44; 1944 U.S. App. LEXIS 2231.

<sup>285</sup> *NLRB v. Walt Disney Productions*.

<sup>286</sup> *NLRB v. Walt Disney Productions*.

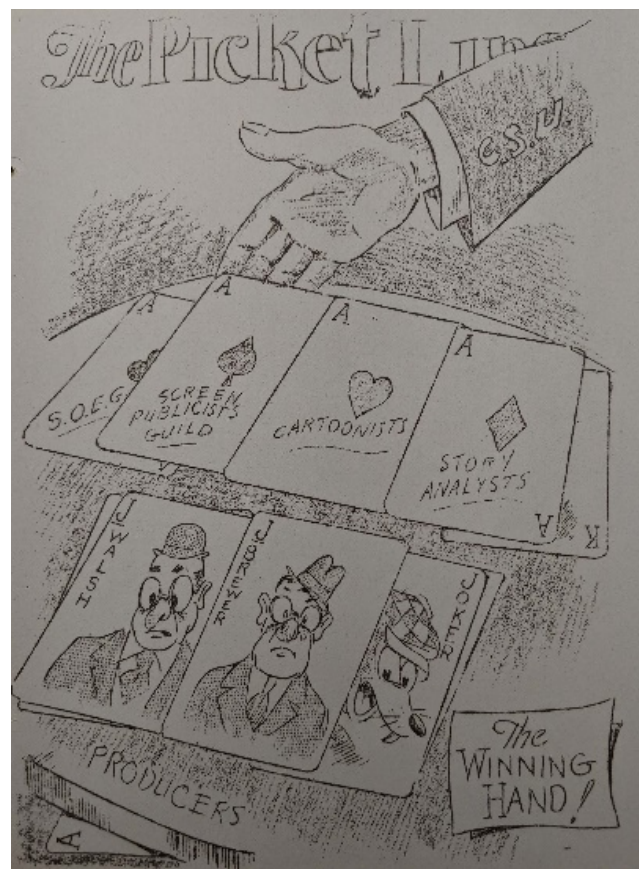
## **On The Picket Line**

The Motion Picture Screen Cartoonist Guild (SCG) still supported the CSU, but Sorrell had increased his sphere of influence in the motion picture industry by recruiting Story Analysts, Office Workers, and some of the unions who represented members of the press. Not that Sorrell or the CSU could compete with the conservative might of William Hearst's publishing machine, but two of the three groups just mentioned could assist in crippling production at many of the major Hollywood studios. With the assistance of Jeff Kibre, another local labor leader, Sorrell had mustered up enough support to take the fight to the IATSE and hit its masters where it hurt the most: on the backlot of their motion picture studios.

In March 1945, the IATSE became embroiled in a jurisdictional dispute over the Screen Decorators, who wanted to sign on with Sorrell and the CSU. In series of political cartoons entitled *The Picket Line*, scab laborers working for the IATSE were anthropomorphized as rats. Several of these drawings relied on racist iconography to convey their message. A few of these sketches, however, depicted something sinister at work at the gates of the Warner Brothers Studio in the mid-1940s. In a show of mob violence that cast a dark shadow over the whimsical Animator's Strike of 1941, the CSU ordered picket lines to seize the means of production at the Warner Brothers Studio.

The story of the 1945 Strike was viscerally expressed by illustrators working for the CSU's propaganda machine, but this was not the IATSE that operated under the Browne and Bioff regime of the early-1940s—Sorrell and his friends in high places had seen to that. This was a new and improved IATSE. Richard Walsh had ascended to the union's presidency in 1941 while Bioff and Browne stared down the barrel of federal extortion charges. Walsh was supported by Roy Brewer, a cornfed leader for the AFL out in Nebraska, as his international

business representative for the IATSE. By Hollywood standards, Brewer was clean as a whistle. Walsh's sordid history with Browne, however, was a matter of public record. While the Screen Publicist Guild and the Story Analysts were critical players in the Hollywood labor movement, the members of the SCG were still the "heart" of the CSU's public relations campaigns.<sup>287</sup> With Willie Bioff and George Browne out of the picture, the CSU felt they held "The Winning Hand" in Hollywood (see Figure 4.1 below).<sup>288</sup>

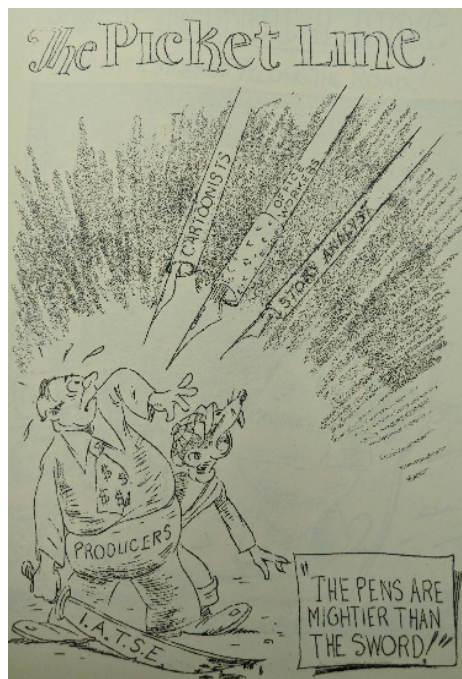


**Figure 4.1, "The Winning Hand!" *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-7, Conference of Studio Unions, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.**

<sup>287</sup> Conference of Studio Unions, "The Winning Hand," *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-7, HKSS, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>288</sup> "The Winning Hand."

As demonstrated during the Animator's Strike, a few dedicated and talented artists could muster public attention rather quickly, and their wit could sting just as rapidly. As Hollywood's militaristic left wing was steeling itself for war as Sorrell, the CSU, and other pro-labor organizations had become concerned with the ideological pendulum that was swinging to the right. Motion picture executives relied on the IATSE and scab labor to produce what they could while the CSU boycotts continued outside the gates of the major studios. The combined forces of the Cartoonists, Story Analysts, and Office Workers were the weapon of choice in the jurisdictional dispute between the IATSE and CSU (see Figure 4.2 below).<sup>289</sup>

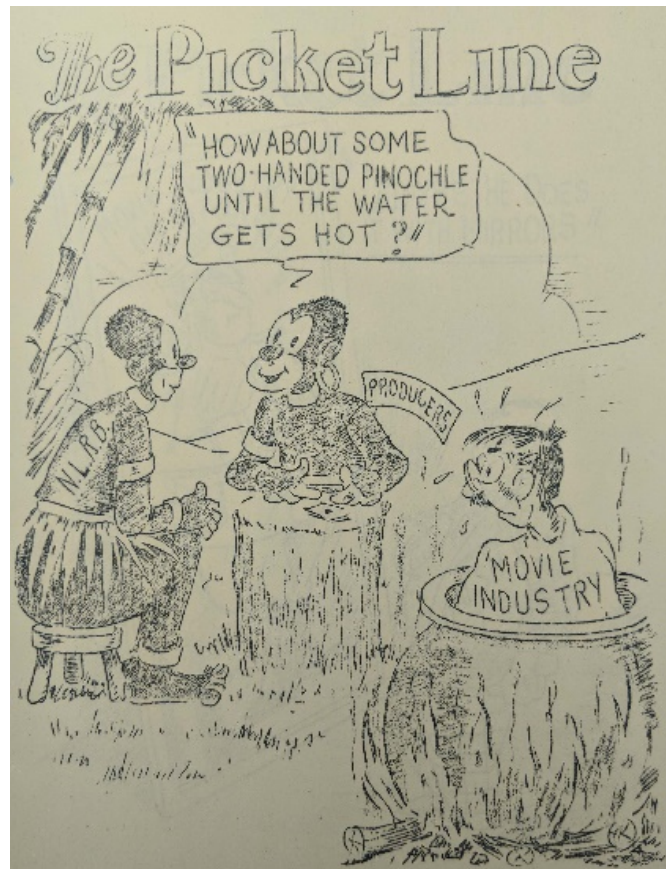


**Figure 4.2, “The Pens are Mightier than the Sword!” *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-47, Conference of Studio Unions, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.**

<sup>289</sup> “The Pens are Mightier than the Sword,” *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945, Conference of Studio Unions, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.



Undoubtedly, illustrators for *The Picket Line* thought of themselves as clever. Figure 4.3 below, however, demonstrated that some of their cartoons were incredibly racist and burdened by their exoticism.<sup>290</sup>



**Figure 4.3, “How About Some Two-Handed Pinochle?”** *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-47, Conference of Studio Unions, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

The artist’s deliberate choice to depict the NLRB and motion picture producers as cannibals—with dark black skin and oversized white lips—was questionable at best. The cartoon showed that the artists believed the laissez-faire attitude of film producers and the NLRB placed

<sup>290</sup> “How About Some Two-Handed Pinochle?” *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-7, HKSS, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

the entire industry in a precarious position. The mustachioed white man, stewing in the pot, was an appropriate analog for the pressure building between the CSU and the IATSE in the motion picture industry. Hollywood's labor movement had separate, but equal, spheres for its participants of color.

Sorrell's militant support of Hollywood's underclass belied his relative disdain for Black Americans and other ethnic minorities—Italian laborers for example.<sup>291</sup> Sorrell's racism was casual, rather than overt. According to Horne, Sorrell once gave testimony before a congressional committee in which he described his financial status as “‘n——— rich’,” meaning he spent his earnings as quickly as he received them with little regard for his future.<sup>292</sup> More specific to his labor leadership, Sorrell happily trumpeted a story of African Americans joining in the Disney boycott during 1941. However, when Black office workers lobbied CSU executives, their pleas for increased representation fell on deaf ears.

A copy of the *I.A.T.S.E. Informational Bulletin*, distributed on November 13, 1943, contained circumstantial evidence of Sorrell's involvement with Hollywood organizations whose motivations were suspect. According to Brewer's *Bulletin*, Sorrell had been present for a meeting of the Hollywood Peace Council that “constituted a violent attack on [President] Roosevelt and the ‘warmongers’.”<sup>293</sup> Several other supporters of the CSU, including screen writer Dalton Trumbo, had attended the Council's meeting. Brewer also noted that Sorrell had joined with Carey McWilliams and other delegates recruited by Ellis Patterson in 1940, in order to prevent Roosevelt's election to his third term as President.<sup>294</sup> While it cannot be confirmed, nor denied,

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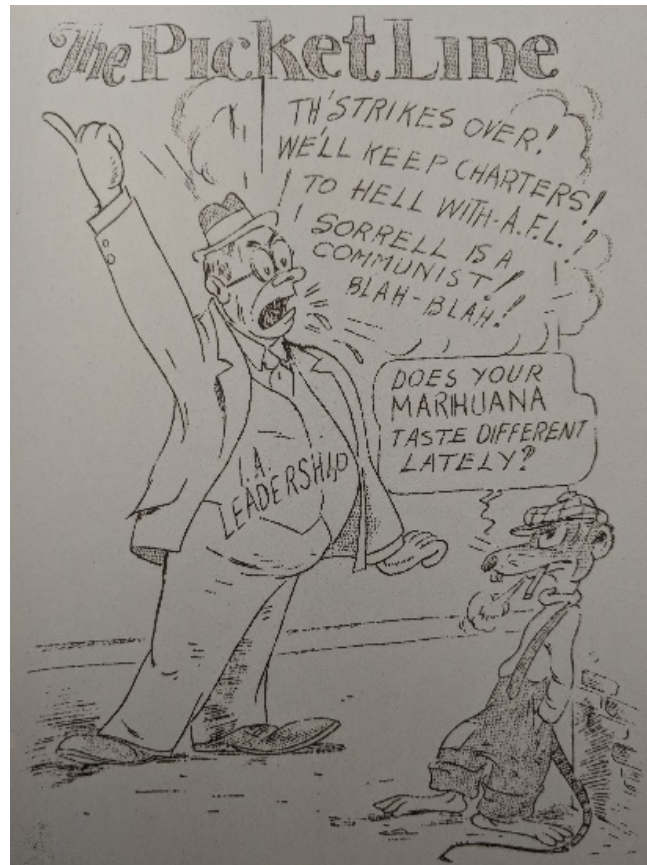
<sup>291</sup> Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 16-7.

<sup>292</sup> Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 16.

<sup>293</sup> Brewer, *I.A.T.S.E. Informational Bulletin*.

<sup>294</sup> Brewer, *I.A.T.S.E. Informational Bulletin*.

that Brewer personally suffered from “reefer madness,” the cartoon shown in Figure 4.4 below, he and IATSE leadership that the jurisdictional dispute with the CSU had subsided.<sup>295</sup>



**Figure 4.4, “Does Your Marihuana [sic] Taste Different Lately?” *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-47, Conference of Studio Unions, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.**

While a concerned laborer looked up and asked an IATSE executive if his “marihuana [sic] tastes different lately,” the stand-in for Roy Brewer referenced a weekly screed being published and circulated by the IATSE. Among the most egregious offenses committed by

<sup>295</sup> Conference of Studio Unions, “Does Your Marihuana [sic] Taste Different Lately?” *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-7, HKSS, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

Sorrell, per Brewer's *Bulletin*, was his attendance at a summer press conference, hosted by *People's World*. According to a statement printed in the pro-labor newspaper, and contradictory to an early charge in the *Bulletin*, "...*People's World* leads the...field in understanding the contributions of industry and labor in Hollywood to America's war effort."<sup>296</sup> The statement was reportedly signed by screen writer John Howard Lawson and Herbert Sorrell, President of the CSU. The IATSE made sure to send a copy of this Bulletin to J. Parnell Thomas, Chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee in January 1947.<sup>297</sup>

For U.S. labor on the national level, a tenuous armistice had been brokered between Eric Johnston, President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and national labor figureheads on April 1, 1945. Johnston, William Green, President of the AFL, and Phillip Murray, President of the CIO, entered into an agreement called the Charter for Industrial Peace.<sup>298</sup> The Hollywood Strike of 1945, which Sorrell ordered in March, was in violation of this no-strike agreement made by unions during World War II and violated the spirit of the Charter, which complimented federal opposition to the stoppage of wartime production. Neither Sorrell, IATSE leadership, nor studio executives had any way of predicting that the sustained firebombing campaigns carried out by the Allies or the U.S. decision to drop nuclear bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima would lead to the total surrender of the Japanese Empire. Be that as it may, the War's dramatic conclusion brought the demand for wartime film and propaganda to a screeching halt. As the heat of the summer faded and the Hollywood Strike entered its seventh month, tensions flared at the Warner Brothers Studio.

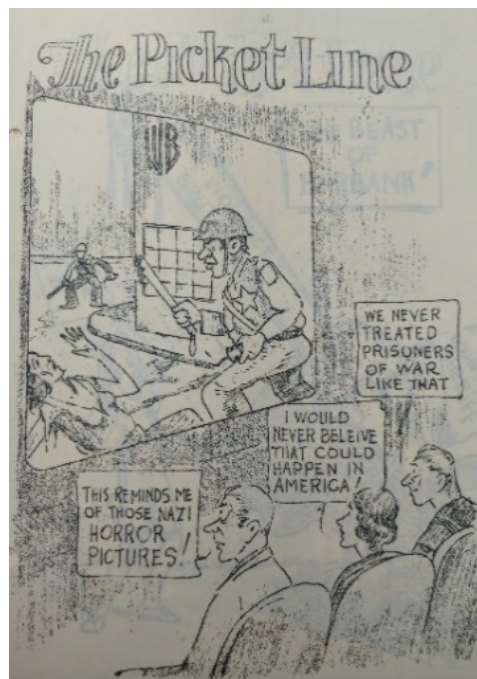
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<sup>296</sup> Brewer, *I.A.T.S.E. Informational Bulletin*.

<sup>297</sup> I.A.T.S.E., *Letter to J. Parnell Thomas, Chairman, House Un-American Activities Committee*, January 1947, *Sorrel, Herbert K. – Investigative File*, RG233.

<sup>298</sup> Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 215.

On October 5, 1945, in a grisly scene that could only have been choreographed by the motion picture industry, Sorrell directed the CSU's demonstrators towards a single mass picket operation at the Warner Brothers Studio. The opposition mobilized its own shock troopers in response. As stated by Larry Ceplair and Robert Englund, "the studio's police and fire departments...and a vigilante squad of one thousand IATSE thugs...equipped with chains, rubber hoses, blackjacks and metal cables," attempted to break the CSU's lines.<sup>299</sup> The event that came to be known as Hollywood's Bloody Friday resulted in state-sanctioned violence against pro-labor demonstrators (see figure 4.5 below).<sup>300</sup>



**Figure 4.5, "Those Nazi Horror Pictures," The Picket Line, ca. 1945-47, Conference of Studio Unions, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.**

<sup>299</sup> The private police and fire squads were armed with tear gas and firehoses respectively, see: Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 220.

<sup>300</sup> "Those Nazi Horror Pictures," *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-7, Conference of Studio Unions, HKSS, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

The CSU picketers became the victims of violence inflicted by heads of the Warner Brothers Studio—through their private police force—and state actors—through the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department. The CSU was not alone in its jurisdictional conflict with the IATSE’s over the Set Decorators. Sorrell and Jeff Kibre repeated a strategy from the Animator’s Strike of 1941. The two labor organizers had commanded a small army of longshoremen, bricks and chains in hand, to protect the protestors. Additionally, several members of the Screen Writers Guild—including Dalton Trumbo and John Howard Lawson—made a showing of solidarity and stood with the CSU. Even Aldous Huxley emerged from his hermitage to join his brethren at the Lockheed plant in lending their voices to the movement.<sup>301</sup> Political cartoons were not the only violent representations of the strike.

The photograph in Figure 4.6 above was taken by a member of the Los Angeles press.<sup>302</sup> Just out of view, to the top-right of the photograph, an audience surveyed the carnage below. According to Tom Sito, “[Jack] Warner and the studio’s senior management stood on the rooftop of a soundstage and supervised the action like generals,” but their appearance was cropped out by members of the press.<sup>303</sup> The photograph also showed that several vehicles had been overturned and that employees of the studio had been instructed to turn fire hoses on the strikers. Several of the CSU strikers, including Herb Sorrell, were arrested by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department for inciting the riot. The sheer volume of those arrested during the demonstrations resulted in mass trials, making a mockery of the local justice system. However, public opinion favored the CSU.

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<sup>301</sup> Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 187.

<sup>302</sup> “Warner Brothers Strike,” photograph, October 1945, HSSC, image used courtesy of the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research.

<sup>303</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 163.



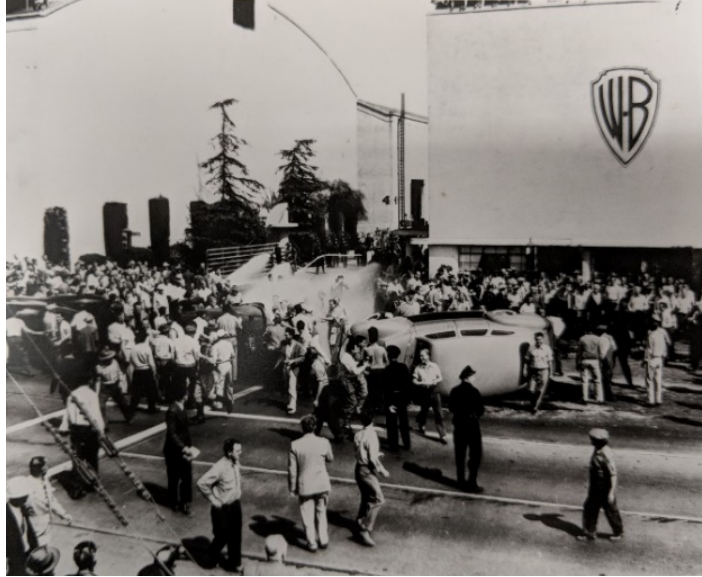


Figure 4.6, “Warner Brothers Strike,” October 1945-47, HSSC, image used courtesy of the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research.

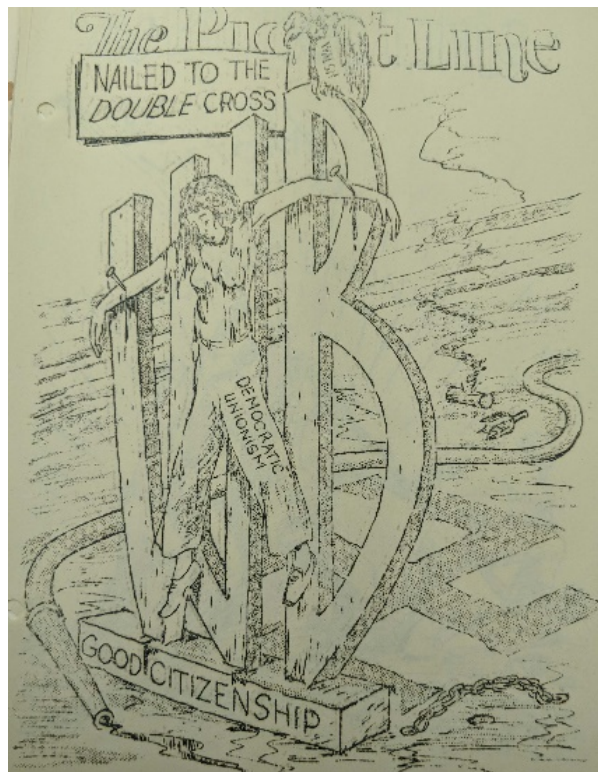


Figure 4.7, “Nailed to the Double Cross,” *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-47, Conference of Studio Unions, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

One of the sketches in *The Picket Line* gave the bloodshed at the Warner Brothers Studio a religious subtext. “Nailed to the Double Cross” portrayed a feminized symbol of “democratic unionism,” crucified on the sigil of the Warner Brothers Studio (see Figure 4.7 above).<sup>304</sup> The figurative crucifixion signified the innocent self-perception held by the strikers allied with Sorrell and the CSU, but the “double cross” was also a play on words. Demonstrators felt betrayed by studio executives and local law enforcement. The allusion to Warner Brothers’ actions as those of fascists was even more conspicuous. The CSU strikers were not Holocaust victims, yet their artists used hyperbole by depicting a swastika in the shadow of the mock crucifixion.<sup>305</sup> A fire hose, which had been aimed at the lines of mass picketers, snaked its way around the grisly and sardonic model of “good citizenship.”<sup>306</sup> Whatever sacrifices were made by Sorrell, the CSU, and their allies had been made in vain. Though the CSU won the day and was granted jurisdiction over the Set Decorators, many protestors had been arrested or badly injured, the strikes exhausted the organization’s resources, and most of all, Hollywood’s labor movement needed to return to work.

### **“Unity or Impotence”**

While Sorrell had hoped to unite the motion picture industry’s working class under the CSU banner of democratic unionism, politics in Los Angeles, the hired muscle, and local law enforcement all made resistance to the IATSE’s supremacy dangerous. At the end of the year, an introspective article in a circular, distributed by the film technician’s union, was published under

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<sup>304</sup> “Nailed to the Double Cross,” *The Picket Line*, ca. 1945-7, HKSS, image used courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>305</sup> “Nailed to the Double Cross.”

<sup>306</sup> “Nailed to the Double Cross.”



the headline: “Aftermath of the Strike – Unity of Impotency?”<sup>307</sup> Russell McKnight, President of the Film Technicians of the Motion Picture Industry, made a “plain statement” that highlighted the fact that there were “always elements...creating disunity in the ranks of labor...a few even sow the seeds of discord from within...inter-union fires.”<sup>308</sup>

Right-wing organizations, like the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals (MPA), had become a blight on democratic unionism and the Hollywood filmmaking industry. The strategies of Brewer, the IATSE, and the MPA were Machiavellian, in that they relied on “the telling of...a colossal lie and wanton use of the big lie as a political weapon.”<sup>309</sup> According to an issue of *Flashes*, a periodical distributed by the Film Technicians’ union, groups like the MPA purported that they were the last line of defense against Communist incursion into U.S. filmmaking. This “last bulwark” had also taken to describing itself as “the ‘white hope’ of Hollywood, as Germany styled itself the ‘white hope’ of Europe.”<sup>310</sup> The publication also bemoaned that Brewer had forged an unholy alliance with other powerful conservatives like William Hearst, Westbrook Pegler, Jack Tenney, and John Rankin. Hollywood’s labor movement may not have been impotent, but the industry’s left wing faced an uphill battle against the forces of ideological conservatism. The wide reporting of Sorrell and various other Hollywood liberals’ exploits also assisted state and federal investigators in their laborious development of the labor leader’s file.

In Sorrell’s HUAC file, federal investigators noted that, on November 8, 1945, the California State Legislature began its investigation into the Hollywood strike “to determine

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<sup>307</sup> Film Technicians of the Motion Picture Industry, *Flashes* 8, no. 3 (Hollywood, California: December 1945), 1.

<sup>308</sup> *Flashes* 8, no. 3, 1.

<sup>309</sup> *Flashes* 8, no. 3, 4.

<sup>310</sup> *Flashes* 8, no. 3, 4.

whether a breakdown in law and order had occurred.”<sup>311</sup> Such an obvious conclusion, however, did not necessitate the formation a state or federal committee. In March of 1947, Sorrell was the victim of kidnapping, when three unknown individuals forced him into a car, then beat and left the labor leader for dead over one hundred miles outside of Los Angeles. According to HUAC investigators, *Variety* reported that the response from left-leaning unions had been to wage a telegram campaign, directed at the Mayor of Los Angeles and federal legislators. The movement called for the “dismissal of charges against [CSU picketers] arrested during the [1945] Strike, termination” of continued inter-organizational violence, and protestation of the changes in federal labor law being brought forward by Senator Robert Taft (R-OH) and Congressman Fred Hartley, Jr. (R-NJ).<sup>312</sup> The clamor among Hollywood’s labor movement remained loud, albeit ineffectual, but it could no longer be heard over the cacophony created by right-wing ideologues.

While the CSU achieved several victories throughout the decade, at Disney’s studio and elsewhere in Hollywood, they never came to dominate the industry like the IATSE. Ultimately, the CSU’s left-wing campaign for democratic control of Hollywood labor was defeated by the crushing weight of federal legislation and a Congressional inquisition. According to Horne, the SCG, Office Workers, and Story Analysts wanted to return to work by 1946. Before the series of jurisdictional strikes ended in 1947, and against Sorrell’s wishes, the unions had done just that.<sup>313</sup> The Taft-Hartley legislation neutered labor’s power on the national level and within the motion picture industry. In late-February of 1948, a House Labor subcommittee used the Act to persecute Sorrell after some convincing from an IATSE attorney. According to an article in the *Daily Worker*, Chairman Gerald Landis (R-IN) “issued a ruling permitting hearsay,” against

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<sup>311</sup> “Herbert K. Sorrell with alias Herbert Stewart,” September 13, 1947, 2, RG233.

<sup>312</sup> “Herbert K. Sorrell with alias Herbert Stewart,” 4.

<sup>313</sup> Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood*, 17.

Sorrell, “to the effect that ‘Communist influence’ was responsible for the dispute” between the CSU and IATSE.<sup>314</sup> Sorrell was removed from the CSU’s executive leadership shortly before the organization dissolved. What independent unions remained at the end of the 1940s had no other choice but to fall in behind the AFL-backed IATSE.

Between the 1930s and 1940s, in metaphorical terms, the Wagner Act had been a sledgehammer in the hands of the U.S. film industry’s working class. Though Sorrell and the CSU initially felt that they had the “winning hand,” both were forced to fold because the ideological deck was stacked against them.<sup>315</sup> Hollywood’s labor movement had Virginia Congressman Howard Smith to thank for that, for he had opposed the NLRB from its inception. The Smith provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act, which became the law of the land in 1947, and the HUAC were used as razor-sharp sickles to cut down resistance among Hollywood’s working-class. According to James Gross, “fundamental changes came with the enactment of the Taft-Hartley Act which itself was a legacy of the Smith Committee.”<sup>316</sup> Union leaders were forced to affirm their patriotism, in writing, by signing affidavits swearing they were not affiliates or members of the Communist Party. Jurisdictional and sympathy strikes were outlawed as well. Moreover, these were just a few of the anti-labor measures of “the House bill that bears Hartley’s name was actually written in Smith’s office using Smith’s 1940 bill as a model.”<sup>317</sup>

The relationships between Disney, other Hollywood elites, and government were official and reciprocal. State and federal investigations were launched because of personal vendettas.

Beaten—literally—and broken—financially, Sorrell and the left-leaning unions like the Screen

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<sup>314</sup> Gerald Gook, “House Group Sets Stage to Prosecute Film Labor Leaders,” *Daily Worker*, February 27, 1948, Sorrell, Herbert K. – *Investigative File*, RG233.

<sup>315</sup> “The Winning Hand.”

<sup>316</sup> Gross, *The Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board*, 225.

<sup>317</sup> Gross, *The Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board*, 253.

Cartoonists Guild and the Office Workers may have won several Pyrrhic victories, at Disney's studio in 1941 and Warner Brothers in the mid-1940s. The IATSE, however, ultimately won the war for Hollywood. Disney and other film producers wanted hegemony over all aspects of the business, the nation, and the world. The motion picture industry's right-wing was taking no prisoners.

## CHAPTER V

## ARTISTS SHRUGGED: DISNEY'S COMRADES, ACTORS AND AGENTS

This final chapter emphasizes the importance of the 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee proceedings, while elucidating the events in Chapter III from a different perspective. In part, this section demonstrates that Walt Disney's testimony before Congress was heavily influenced by his interactions with Hollywood's other right-wing ideologues, their co-dependent relationships with the federal government, and the longstanding grudges held between motion picture executives and industry labor activists like Herb Sorrell.

The government's case against the alleged Red Menace plaguing Hollywood propelled the ugliness of the industry's labor-management conflicts into the national spotlight. Ultimately, the public was led to believe that the fate of the U.S. filmmaking industry, an American institution, was under attack by brainwashed artists and alleged Communist agents. In February of 1944, the Motion Picture Society for the Preservation of American Ideals (MPA) was formed to stand against the rising tide of perceived attacks on Americanism. All the while, U.S. government officials and investigative agencies launched and continued inquisitions into countless allegations of Communist activity. Like many other friendly witnesses, Walt Disney had little to offer the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Disney's celebrity status and favorable relationship with the U.S. government granted credibility to his testimony. The subsequent testimony of Roy Brewer, an international representative for the IATSE, provided circumstantial, but damning, evidence of the suspected plot to usurp power in the motion picture industry.

## Perverting a Powerful Medium

Throughout the 1940s, Disney had clung to the firm belief that the motion picture industry, like his studio after the passage of the Wagner Act, had to be protected from subversive outside influence. Disney was not alone. By the mid-1940s, he had joined with several other right-wing ideologues to form the MPA. As noted by Ceplair and Englund, the MPA “was the brainchild of Hollywood anti-Rooseveltians,” primarily men like Sam Wood, a protégé of Cecil B. DeMille, and rabid anti-laborites such as Walt Disney.<sup>318</sup> In early-February 1944, news of this alliance of anti-New Dealers reached major cities like Disney’s hometown of Chicago almost immediately. According to an article run in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, Wood announced that he had been elected president by the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, who hated Communism but had no qualms about lengthy organizational titles.<sup>319</sup> Walt Disney had assumed the role as First Vice President for the MPA, and Ayn Rand, a neo-liberal novelist, took on the duties of public relations for the Alliance. The *Tribune* article printed the MPA’s initial declaration which stated: “we refuse to permit the effort of communists, fascists, and other...groups to pervert the powerful medium [of film] into an instrument for the dissemination of un-American ideals and beliefs.”<sup>320</sup>

On June 29, 1944, an article in *The Hollywood Reporter* demonstrated how various pro-labor organizations were coming together to combat right-wingers like the MPA and its ilk. According to the article, the Council of Hollywood Guilds and Unions was created to safeguard

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<sup>318</sup> Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 209.

<sup>319</sup> As noted in Doherty’s work, the standard abbreviation used to describe this group was “more than a mouthful,” but so was its full name. To that end, the right-wing MPA, discussed presently, should not be confused with the Academy of Motion Picture of Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) or the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), see: “Group Formed in Hollywood to Fight Reds,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, February 6, 1944, JFC; Doherty, *Show Trial*, 43.

<sup>320</sup> “Group Formed in Hollywood to Fight Reds.”

“more than half of Hollywood’s 30,000 workers.”<sup>321</sup> The Council passed several resolutions condemning the MPA and praising the efforts of Sorrell and the CSU. Turnabout was fair play, as the Council branded the MPA “as ‘a subversive and dangerous organization’.”<sup>322</sup> Several members of Hollywood’s liberal elite had turned out in support of the Council. Sorrell and Walter Wanger, an “unofficial guest,” spoke at the Council’s initial meeting.<sup>323</sup> Others, like Orson Welles, pledged their support by telegram. The anti-labor sentiment among the membership of the MPA was strong. The MPA’s statement of purpose described the organization as a “rallying point for [those] who think like we do...who heretofore have been unheard and unnoticed in the din [created] by a small but highly organized, cleverly led, and...articulate minority.”<sup>324</sup> Arguably, the MPA was one of the most overtly conservative groups formed in the filmmaking industry since the founding of the Motion Picture Association of America, which established and enforced censorship guidelines for Hollywood since 1930. Though nearly everyone involved in making motion pictures in the mid to late-1940s asserted their patriotism whenever they could, screen writers were unsettled by the right-wing nationalism expressed by groups like the MPA.

In November 1944, Elmer Rice, a New York playwright, strongly voiced his concerns about the MPA in an editorial for *The Saturday Review*.<sup>325</sup> Rice characterized the MPA’s motivations as sinister. “One need not look far below the surface,” Rice wrote, “to discover that the [MPA] and its leading spirits are deeply tinged with isolationism and anti-unionism

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<sup>321</sup> “Labor Bands to Guard Industry,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 29, 1944, JFC.

<sup>322</sup> “Labor Bands to Guard Industry.”

<sup>323</sup> “Labor Bands to Guard Industry.”

<sup>324</sup> “Group Formed in Hollywood to Fight Reds.”

<sup>325</sup> Elmer Rice, “The M.P.A. and American Ideals,” *The Saturday Review*, November 11, 1944, 18, JFC.

and...with strong overtones of anti-Semitism and Jim Crowism.”<sup>326</sup> Rice’s claim was biting because it was true. Several motion picture industry leaders, Disney included, had been vocal about their disdain for union activity. Disney’s idolization of Henry Ford may have informed Rice’s accusation of anti-Semitism.<sup>327</sup> However, insensitivity to race and ethnicity were not mutually exclusive to either pole of Hollywood’s ideological spectrum. While Rice’s charge that Walt Disney was a closeted anti-Semite was circumstantial, at best, his other criticisms had teeth. Disney’s racially-tone deaf proclivities were screened in theaters, nationwide.

Though Disney’s *Song of the South* (1946) made its public debut a few years after Rice’s criticism appeared in *The Saturday Review*, it was mired in race-based controversy. In order to assuage criticism of the film before it was released, Disney deliberately hired Maurice Rapf. “Mainly known for his work on...’youth’ films,” Rapf adapted the original script for Disney’s *Song of the South*.<sup>328</sup> In hiring Rapf as a writer, Disney believed he was getting an ideological bargain. According to M. Thomas Inge, Rapf “seemed to have the appropriate liberal credentials to guarantee a noncontroversial treatment” for the script in that he was Jewish and sensitive to issues dealing with discrimination.<sup>329</sup> Rapf warned Disney that his casting choices might perpetuate derogatory stereotypes. Uncle Remus, the film’s main character, was played by James Baskett, and Disney cast Hattie McDaniel, who starred in *Gone with the Wind* (1940), to reprise her role as an African American woman relegated to the sphere of domestic labor. In response to

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<sup>326</sup> Rice, “The M.P.A. and American Ideals,” 18.

<sup>327</sup> Notably, Ford was also being investigated by the same Jewish community in Los Angeles that had been following developments related to the MPA. Ford vehemently denied his anti-Semitism in a letter to Sigmund Livingston in 1942. He stressed a firm commitment to his belief that “when [World War II] is finished...hatred of the Jew...and hatred against any other...group, shall cease for all time,” see: Henry Ford, *Letter to Sigmund Livingston*, January 7, 1942, JFC.

<sup>328</sup> M. Thomas Inge, “Walt Disney’s *Song of the South* and the Politics of Animation,” *The Journal of American Culture* 35, no.3. (2012): 221.

<sup>329</sup> Inge, “Walt Disney’s *Song of the South* and the Politics of Animation,” 221.



Rapf's concerns, Disney simply played dumb and replied, "That's why I want someone like you to work on it...Most of us—even if we have no racial bias—commit boo-boos that offend people all the time."<sup>330</sup>

Additionally, Rapf conceded that "Bad-mouthing Disney" was "something of a popular sport."<sup>331</sup> Rice's charge of anti-Semitism was bombastic, but Rapf offered an opinion to the contrary. The writer had his doubts that Walt Disney harbored any ill will towards Jews. As Rapf explained further, "Disney was a dyed-in-the-wool Republican, [but] he may even have known that I was a Communist...he certainly knew I was Jewish."<sup>332</sup> Disney's intent in hiring Rapf made little difference at any rate. All of Rapf's racially-sensitive labor was disregarded when the final revisions to the script were handed off another writer. According to Inge, Morton Grant, "who was neither Southern nor liberal...and mainly worked on inexpensive western films for Warner Brothers," got the last word in on *Song of the South*.<sup>333</sup>

In choosing to debut the film in Atlanta, Georgia, Disney merely poured salt in the festering wound of U.S. race relations. Regardless of how loudly or joyfully Uncle Remus whistled, November 27, 1946—opening day for Disney's *Song of the South*—was not a wonderful day for African Americans. When *Song of the South* debuted in U.S. theaters, Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People condemned it for "perpetuating a dangerously glorified picture of slavery."<sup>334</sup> Shown in vibrant Technicolor, *Song of the South* was a feature-length production that blended live action with animated

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<sup>330</sup> Maurice Rapf, "Animation and Disney," in *Back Lot: Growing up with the Movies*, Filmmakers Series no. 64 (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1999), 130.

<sup>331</sup> Rapf, "Animation and Disney," 131.

<sup>332</sup> Rapf, "Animation and Disney," 131. According to Tom Sito, Rapf was investigated by the HUAC then placed on the Hollywood blacklist after leaving Disney's studio, see: Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 148;

<sup>333</sup> Inge, "Walt Disney's *Song of the South* and the Politics of Animation," 222.

<sup>334</sup> Inge, "Walt Disney's *Song of the South* and the Politics of Animation," 223.

interpretations of African American folklore. Picket lines and demonstrations were held by the National Negro Congress in several major cities nationwide. As Inge also noted, Atlanta, specifically, was reeling from the recent lynching of a Black family.<sup>335</sup> In accordance with Jim Crow laws, the theater chosen by Disney for the film's premier followed strict guidelines for race-based segregation in public spaces. *Song of the South's* two African American stars, Baskett and McDaniel, as well as other Black attendees, had to use the back entrance and were forced to view the film's premier from the theater's segregated balcony.

Returning to Rice's criticism of the MPA, he also recognized the imperial power wielded by Hollywood's elite. Rice appropriately declared, "the motion picture...is today...the most potent medium in existence for coloring the emotions and shaping the attitudes of the *world's population*."<sup>336</sup> Ideological hope was not lost among the film industry's working class. Progressives still resisted the MPA's attempts to control Hollywood. According to Rice, Walter Wanger and Herb Sorrell were representative of the "fine militant spirit...among Hollywood workers" which stood in opposition to the MPA's America First tendencies.<sup>337</sup> The writer offered readers of *The Saturday Review* commentary made during a meeting held by opponents of the MPA. "When a fellow wraps himself in the American flag," the anonymous labor leader quipped, "it's usually because he's afraid of being caught with his pants down."<sup>338</sup> Rice believed the fundamental right to freedom of expression was being threatened by groups like the MPA. By the latter-half of the 1940s, both side of the conflict were closing ranks.

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<sup>335</sup> Inge, "Walt Disney's *Song of the South* and the Politics of Animation," 223.

<sup>336</sup> Rice, "The M.P.A. and American Ideals," 18. Emphasis added.

<sup>337</sup> Rice, "The M.P.A. and American Ideals," 18.

<sup>338</sup> Although Rice did not attribute the quote directly to Sorrell, it was witty enough to infer that it was the leader of the CSU who made the statement, see: Rice, "The M.P.A. and American Ideals," 18.

In 1947, in an op-ed published during his tenure as editor for *The Washington Star*, Lowell Mellett, former head of the OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures, indicated that a "three-ring circus" was on its way to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.<sup>339</sup> This second iteration of the House Un-American Activities, originally chaired by Martin Dies, would be led by Congressman J. Parnell Thomas, a Republican from New Jersey. Most of the background information for the 1947 HUAC had been collected and synthesized by H.A. Smith and a team of federal investigators. However, Robert E. Stripling, who offered his services voluntarily when the Dies Committee ran out of funding, remained on as the Committee's Chief Investigator. To the left of Chairman Thomas sat Richard Nixon, a Republican Congressman from California.

According to Mellett, the HUAC and its investigators had "subpoenaed the Barnums, Baileys, and Ringling Brothers of the picture world," but discussing Hollywood's labor movement presented an arduous task.<sup>340</sup> Even though he was a former official of the OWI, Mellett became caught up in the Hollywood inquisition. An accusation had been circulating through the press that the former Roosevelt appointee had coerced actor, Robert Taylor, into appearing, "against his will," in Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer's *Song of Russia* (1944).<sup>341</sup> In a letter to Chairman Thomas, dated June 5, 1947, Mellett rejected the allegation and the HUAC's taking up of the issue. Mellett advised Thomas that he "wish[ed] to protest this hit-and-run or smear-and-run action."<sup>342</sup> He concluded with a demand to defend himself before the HUAC as soon as possible, but such a spectacle would be delayed until Autumn of 1947.

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<sup>339</sup> Lowell Mellett, "Three Rings in the Coming Circus and the Ring to Watch is the Third," *The Washington Star*, October 14, 1947, *Mellett, Lowell – Investigative File*, RG233.

<sup>340</sup> Mellett, "Three Rings in the Coming Circus."

<sup>341</sup> Lowell Mellett, *Letter to Hon. J. Parnell Thomas, Chairman, House Un-American Activities Committee*, June 5, 1947, *Mellett, Lowell – Investigative File*, RG233.

<sup>342</sup> Mellett, *Letter to Hon. J. Parnell Thomas*.

The Committee's choice in witnesses showed that the HUAC's attempts to prove the existence of a significant Communist presence in Hollywood were calculated. Ronald Reagan, a young, attractive actor and future President of the United States, answered the congressional call. Reagan had been described by one of his peers as a "reformed Leftist," and he still considered himself a "New Deal Liberal."<sup>343</sup> Furthermore, he supported the rights of employees in the motion picture industry to organize themselves democratically. Reagan had served on the Board of Directors for the Screen Actors' Guild. He had also been elected as union president many years before. This posed an ideological difficulty for the HUAC.

Summoning Regan before the dais allowed the HUAC to present their questioning as fair and balanced, but the inquisitors had to tread lightly. According to H.A. Smith, if the questioning became too personal, Reagan was likely to callout "professional Red-baiters" by name.<sup>344</sup> As suggested by Smith's witness report, Reagan was fearless, and otherwise "a nice talker, [and] well informed."<sup>345</sup> Reagan turned out to be one of the more level-headed witnesses called before the HUAC. Through his testimony, Reagan revealed that he had personal experience with the ongoing conflict between the CSU and the IATSE. As Reagan explained to Stripling, the Screen Actors Guild had tried to broker a deal between the producers and "both factions in the jurisdictional dispute."<sup>346</sup> Reagan recalled that the first time he heard of Communist involvement in the quarrel was at a meeting with leadership of the Carpenters' union, held in Chicago. According to Reagan, William Hutchinson, the union's president, offered to assist in running

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<sup>343</sup> H.A. Smith, "Excerpt from the Smith Report [on Ronald Reagan]," *Reagan, Ronald – Witness File*, RG233.

<sup>344</sup> Smith, "Excerpt from the Smith Report on [Ronald Reagan]."

<sup>345</sup> Smith, "Excerpt from the Smith Report on [Ronald Reagan]."

<sup>346</sup> "Testimony of Ronald Reagan," *Hearings*, 216.

“Sorrell and the other Commies out,” if Richard Walsh would agree to settle the strike.<sup>347</sup> When it came time for Reagan to discuss the Communist Party directly with the HUAC, the actor was reticent to vilify anyone personally. Reagan did “not believe that Communists have ever...been able to use the motion-picture industry as a sounding board for their...ideology.”<sup>348</sup> Although Reagan could provide no evidence to further the HUAC’s case that Communists had been running amuck in Hollywood, he confessed that he did fear that the Party’s existence in the U.S. threatened the ideal of a Jeffersonian republic. Calling Hollywood artists, like Reagan, to testify presented a gamble for the HUAC, but the payoff differed dramatically when they summoned artists suspected of Communist affiliations.

The testimonies of John Howard Lawson, Dalton Trumbo, and Alvah Bessie—all part of the “Hollywood Ten” who were sentenced to one year in prison for their refusal to comply with the Committee’s investigations—demonstrated how un-democratic the HUAC proceedings were.<sup>349</sup> Calling Lawson before the dais quickly descended into a sideshow of American ideology. Lawson informed Stripling and the HUAC that they had no authority to interrogate him as they planned. While Stripling tried to gavel him down, Lawson argued that “the raising of any question here in regard to membership...political beliefs” was beyond the Committee’s constitutional authority.<sup>350</sup> To confirm his membership in the Screen Writers Guild, Lawson indicated to the HUAC, any member of congress, or U.S. citizen for that matter could consult the public record. The gallery broke into applause, but Chairman Thomas quickly silenced them.

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<sup>347</sup> “Testimony of Reagan,” *Hearings*, 216.

<sup>348</sup> “Testimony of Reagan,” *Hearings*, 217.

<sup>349</sup> Excepting the turncoat, Edward Dmytryk, the other nine of the “Ten” were tried and convicted for contempt of Congress, fined \$1,000, and sentenced to federal prisons. For the creation of the Hollywood Blacklist, see: Sito, *Drawing the Line*, ; Ceplair and Englund, *The Hollywood Inquisition*, 353; Doherty, *Show Trial*, . For the screen writers’ testimonies, see: “Testimony of John H. Lawson,” 290-6; “Testimony of Dalton Trumbo,” 329-42; and “Testimony of Alvah Bessie,” 383-8; all in *Hearings*.

<sup>350</sup> “Testimony of John H. Lawson,” *Hearings*, 291.

Later, Lawson thanked the Chairman for making “it perfectly clear that [Thomas was] going to threaten and intimidate” other HUAC witnesses.<sup>351</sup> When Stripling attempted to review Lawson’s body of work, the screen writer refused to confirm or deny any of his efforts. According to Lawson, he would have to answer questions “outside of the province of this committee.”<sup>352</sup> By the time the HUAC’s questioning turned to the writer’s affiliation with the Communist Party, the Chairman was infuriated. Lawson, too, seemed to have had enough. To a mixture of “applause and boos,” which were gaveled down by Chairman Thomas, Lawson was ejected from the inquiry by force.<sup>353</sup>

Dalton Trumbo’s oratory before the HUAC was equally eventful. Chairman Thomas repeatedly shouted down Trumbo’s efforts to have a written statement entered into the Congressional Record.<sup>354</sup> Stripling began by attempting to instruct Trumbo on how to answer the Committee’s questioning. According to Stripling, “all of...the various questions can be answered ‘Yes’ or ‘No’,” but Trumbo argued that “very many questions” could only be answered in such a manner “by a moron or a slave.”<sup>355</sup> Furthermore, Trumbo attempted to direct the public’s attention to the HUAC’s anti-labor voting record. All of the Committee’s members, he noted, “voted in favor of the Taft-Hartley bill...and might be considered...hostile to labor.”<sup>356</sup> When Chairman Thomas asked Trumbo to publicly confirm his membership in the Communist Party, the writer demanded evidence supporting such a charge. Trumbo’s request was met with laughter and applause from the gallery, as Chairman Thomas dismissed him from the stand for refusing to

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<sup>351</sup> “Testimony of Lawson,” *Hearings*, 292.

<sup>352</sup> “Testimony of Lawson,” *Hearings*, 293.

<sup>353</sup> “Testimony of Lawson,” *Hearings*, 295.

<sup>354</sup> “Testimony of Dalton Trumbo,” *Hearings*, 330-1.

<sup>355</sup> “Testimony of Trumbo,” *Hearings*, 331.

<sup>356</sup> “Testimony of Trumbo,” *Hearings*, 333.

answer. While being forcibly removed from Congressional chambers, Trumbo cried out: “This is the beginning, [Thomas gaveled], of an American concentration camp.”<sup>357</sup> After the Chairman restored order to the proceedings, he requested that the rest of the HUAC’s evidence against Trumbo be presented.

Like Lawson and Trumbo, Alvah Bessie’s testimony was an extremely brief spectacle. The HUAC allowed Bessie to enter a written statement into the record, although Chairman Thomas expressed “some doubt that [it would be] pertinent to the inquiry.”<sup>358</sup> In his statement, Bessie attempted to defend his First Amendment rights, which he felt the HUAC was trampling on. Bessie’s “experience” showed him that the present proceedings were “precisely . . . identical” to those held “by un-Spanish . . . un-German . . . and un-Italian committees” before those respective nations “succumbed to fascism.”<sup>359</sup> When Stripling asked the “\$64 dollar question,” pertaining to Bessie’s membership in the Communist Party, the writer invoked his right to remain silent as a U.S. war hero had once done.<sup>360</sup> “General Eisenhower refused to reveal his political affiliations,” Bessie explained, then he offered to have the “secretary read it back” if anyone on the dais had misunderstood. While asking Bessie to be removed from chambers, the Chairman suggested that if the writer desired “to make a big speech,” then he could do so outside, “under a big tree.”<sup>361</sup> While being escorted out, Bessie expressed his gratitude and bursts of laughter erupted from the gallery.

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<sup>357</sup> “Testimony of Trumbo,” *Hearings*, 334.

<sup>358</sup> “Testimony of Alvah Bessie,” *Hearings*, 383.

<sup>359</sup> “Testimony of Bessie,” *Hearings*, 385.

<sup>360</sup> “Testimony of Bessie,” *Hearings*, 386.

<sup>361</sup> “Testimony of Bessie,” *Hearings*, 387.

### The Americanist Manifesto and a Distressed Soviet Damsel

There were writers for the stage and screen more sympathetic to the HUAC's cause. Morrie Ryskind, for example, was a founding member of the MPA and captured investigators' attention when he responded to Rice's assault on the integrity of the Alliance. Ryskind's reply to Rice appeared in an issue of *The New Leader*, published in January 1945.<sup>362</sup> While Ryskind had previously considered himself a Socialist in the 1930s, he later withdrew his support from Roosevelt in 1940 and subsequently became a hardline conservative. Ryskind justified his own membership in the MPA by comparing its goals to the Committee for Cultural Freedom. According to Ryskind the MPA and the Committee were "formed... 'to combat the rising tide of totalitarianism... through *subsidized propaganda*, through *energetic agents*, through political pressure, the totalitarian states succeeded in infecting other countries'."<sup>363</sup> However, this did not stop him from reminding his readers that Disney had fought the good fight, against subversive labor types, at his studio in 1941. Evidently lost on Ryskind were the U.S. government's own subsidies which funded Good Neighbor diplomacy and promoted the war effort—to say nothing about Disney's happily lapping up those subsidies. Ryskind was a playwright, not a story analyst.

When Ryskind was summoned before the HUAC, he provided more ambiguous claims. Ryskind insisted to Chief Investigator Smith that one "would have to be deaf, dumb, and blind not to observe those activities," yet he provided no physical evidence that Communists had successfully infiltrated the motion picture industry, much less taken it over.<sup>364</sup> The Communist

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<sup>362</sup> Morrie Ryskind, "The Motion Picture Alliance and American Sovieteers: A Reply to Elmer Rice," *The New Leader*, January 13, 1945, JFC.

<sup>363</sup> Ryskind, "The Motion Picture Alliance."

<sup>364</sup> "Testimony of Morrie Ryskind," *Hearings*, 182.



Party, according to Ryskind, attacked Hollywood from two angles. First, were the “general commie fronts for suckers,” and second were their efforts to overrun the industry’s labor movement.<sup>365</sup> He also admitted that his spouse had been one of those suckers. As Ryskind informed the HUAC, his wife had “joined this League Against War and Fascism,” but she resigned several weeks after joining because they seemed “interested in civil liberties, but only for Communists.”<sup>366</sup> Ryskind also accused the *Daily Worker* of absconding with funds raised to defend the Scottsboro Boys—the nine African American teenagers who were being railroaded in Alabama by false accusations that they raped several white women. Ryskind offered no proof to support such a claim, but then again, most of the MPA members based their conclusions on hearsay and paranoid conjecture. It was par for the course.

Another friend of the MPA and witness for the HUAC, Ayn Rand, was described by investigators as a “Russian Jewess” and author of *The Fountainhead*, a novel based on her interpretation of neo-liberal fantasy.<sup>367</sup> The HUAC was extremely interested in her first-hand account from Soviet Russia, but their gendered expectations gave them momentary pause in calling her to publicly testify.<sup>368</sup> Rand’s speaking voice and her appearance could have made her testimony problematic. According to the Smith Report, it was “a little difficult to understand” Rand when she spoke, and “her appearance [was] slightly detrimental in that she [had] a semi-mannish haircut.”<sup>369</sup> Rand was the guilty party behind the MPA’s ruthless word count, but she was not of much use at public speaking engagements. The HUAC felt they could extrapolate a

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<sup>365</sup> “Testimony of Ryskind,” *Hearings*, 182.

<sup>366</sup> “Testimony of Ryskind,” *Hearings*, 182.

<sup>367</sup> H.A. Smith, “Excerpt from the Smith Report [on Ayn Rand],” *Rand, Ayn – Witness File*, RG233.

<sup>368</sup> Smith, “Excerpt from the Smith Report [on Ayn Rand].”

<sup>369</sup> Smith, “Excerpt from the Smith Report [on Ayn Rand].”

parade of Soviet horrors from Rand’s personal experiences, her Russian accent and short hair notwithstanding.

Rand also penned the *Screen Guide for Americans* on behalf of the MPA.<sup>370</sup> The *Screen Guide* was more of an imposition of right-wing, ideological prescriptions than a list of ways to improve upon U.S. filmmaking. Rand’s *Screen Guide* demanded that American films not “smear the free enterprise system...[because] Americanism and the Free Enterprise System...are inseparable, like body and soul.”<sup>371</sup> According to Rand, there was nothing honorable about public institutions or charitable organizations. More importantly, Rand insisted that U.S. filmmakers not “smear industrialists.”<sup>372</sup> This suggestion would have protected industry leaders like Disney and Henry Ford. Rand had seen “a constant stream of such pictures as pernicious political propaganda,” in that they generated “hatred for all businessmen...and [made] people receptive to the cause of Communism.”<sup>373</sup> “It is a basic tenet of Marxism,” Rand continued, “that man...is only a soulless, witless collection of meat and glands.”<sup>374</sup> Inadvertently, Rand had just described Donald Duck. Rand’s conclusion for the *Screen Guide* was full of outright falsehoods, especially in light of the strikes that plagued Hollywood from 1945 to 1947. Rand argued, “We do not use **police force** to forbid the expression of Communist...ideas—which means that we do not **pass laws** forbidding Communists to speak.”<sup>375</sup> Yet, that is precisely what Chairman Thomas did by having Lawson, Trumbo, and Bessie ejected from the HUAC hearings—if they were

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<sup>370</sup> Ayn Rand, *Screen Guide for Americans* (Los Angeles, California: Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, ca. 1944-7), *Rand, Ayn – Witness File*, RG233.

<sup>371</sup> Rand, *Screen Guide*, 2.

<sup>372</sup> Rand, *Screen Guide*, 3.

<sup>373</sup> Rand, *Screen Guide*, 3.

<sup>374</sup> Rand, *Screen Guide*, 6.

<sup>375</sup> Rand, *Screen Guide*, 12. Emphasis in original.

actually Communists. Despite the reservations held by investigators concerning Rand's outward appearance, she possessed right-wing credentials.

According to HUAC investigators, Rand's direct encounters with Communism in Hollywood's motion picture industry were scarce to say the least. She had emigrated to the U.S. after surviving the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, then Warner Brothers optioned *The Fountainhead* in order to produce a film adaptation. Rand's services as a screen writer, however, were turned away by producers at Paramount Pictures. As investigators noted, "they were not interested in making pro-capitalist pictures."<sup>376</sup> It was Rand's working relationship with the MPA that made her a person of interest for HUAC investigators.

The HUAC inquired about Rand's interpretation of what might become of Hollywood, and thus the U.S., as a result of Communist influence. Stripling asked her to compare what she had seen in Russia to the alleged conspiracy in Hollywood. Rand responded with what has been described by Thomas Doherty as an "appalled exegesis of MGM's *Song of Russia*."<sup>377</sup> In the film, Robert Taylor played an American conductor. Rand explained that she became disgusted when Taylor "starts playing the American national anthem...[which] dissolves into a Russian mob, with the sickle and hammer on a red flag...above their heads."<sup>378</sup> After members of the dais reviewed the recent historical justifications for the U.S. alliance with Russia, Rand concluded her testimony by explicating what it was like to live through the Bolshevik Revolution. "It is almost impossible to convey to a free people what it is like to live in a totalitarian dictatorship," Rand explained, "try to imagine what it is like if you are in constant terror...afraid of anything and

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<sup>376</sup> Smith, "Excerpt from the Smith Report [on Ayn Rand]."

<sup>377</sup> Doherty, *Show Trial*, 299.

<sup>378</sup> "Testimony of Ayn Rand," *Hearings*, 83.

everybody.”<sup>379</sup> Fear was the emotion fueling the MPA’s propaganda and the HUAC investigation.

### **Mr. Disney’s Flying Circus**

Jack Warner was the fourth person with knowledge of the alleged Communist plot to be called by the HUAC once they had commenced their October proceedings. The Committee appeared disinterested in having Jack Warner restate his account of the recent labor troubles at he and his brother’s studio. No member of the dais asked Warner to recount the days he ordered his private police and fire squad to unleash tear gas and hoses on CSU strikers. It would not have been good showmanship on the part of the HUAC. They did, however, enter into the record and reaffirm much of the testimony Warner had given to Los Angeles Assemblyman Jack Tenney’s smaller HUAC on May 15, 1947. The true nature of their inquiry related to uncovering evidence that several recently released films, Warner Brothers Studio’s *Mission to Moscow* (1943) for example, allegedly conveyed messages planted by Communist actors. In his opening statement, Warner pointed out that “many charges, including the fantasy of ‘White House pressure’ have been leveled at our wartime production *Mission to Moscow*.”<sup>380</sup> Warner defended his studio’s involvement in the film, and suggested that there were more pressing matters to discuss. “Ideological termites,” Warner explained, “have burrowed into many American industries, organizations and societies.”<sup>381</sup>

Eager to prove himself, Congressman Nixon was curious about how U.S. films might be used to shape ideology abroad. Nixon opened his questioning of Warner by repeating that

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<sup>379</sup> “Testimony of Rand,” *Hearings*, 90.

<sup>380</sup> “Testimony of Jack Warner,” *Hearings*, 10.

<sup>381</sup> “Testimony of Warner,” *Hearings*, 10.

“dictatorships could not be fought by borrowing dictatorial methods.”<sup>382</sup> Nixon was quickly making his way toward defending the HUAC’s investigations by comparing the methods of subversive agents to those employed by fascist nations, such as Germany. Warner admitted that he was no foreign policy wonk, but he believed “there were not any movies shown” in Europe, aside from those depicting “the destruction of man by the Nazis.”<sup>383</sup> When Nixon pivoted to the Russian press, Warner could only rely on information he had gleaned from American newspapers. To Nixon’s delight, Warner also provided a long list of films— “43 of 100”— produced by his studio, since the First World War, that vilified “Fascist Germany.”<sup>384</sup> Nixon professed his fondness for the pro-American pictures produced at the Warner Brothers Studio. He described such films as “selling America,” in that they highlighted “the benefits of our American system and...describe the freedoms which we have here.”<sup>385</sup> Warner, in turn, offered to saturate Russian movie theatres with feature-length films and short subjects advertising American virtue. Nixon agreed that “it was essential...to attack the Communist and Fascist way of life with a free press and free screen.”<sup>386</sup> Warner concluded by committing to the dais that he and his executives would “act very effectively” if they were provided “supporting proof” of any malfeasance at the Warner Brothers Studio.<sup>387</sup> Studio heads like Walt Disney were more proactive in their approach.

According to a memorandum penned by H.A. Smith in early-September 1947, he and other investigators “experienced some difficulty...in convincing [Disney] that his testimony

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<sup>382</sup> “Testimony of Warner,” *Hearings*, 11 and 20.

<sup>383</sup> “Testimony of Warner,” *Hearings*, 20.

<sup>384</sup> “Testimony of Warner,” *Hearings*, 21-6.

<sup>385</sup> “Testimony of Warner,” *Hearings*, 28.

<sup>386</sup> “Testimony of Warner,” *Hearings*, 29.

<sup>387</sup> “Testimony of Warner,” *Hearings*, 54.

would be of value.”<sup>388</sup> Smith disagreed and expressed his confidence that Disney would make a compelling witness. The investigator added that he and his team felt “that in view of the type of picture which he makes...[Disney’s] statement opposing Communism would be of material value so far as the younger generation is concerned.”<sup>389</sup> According to the HUAC’s investigation, Disney referred to Mellett, who had consulted with WDP during its production of government-sponsored propaganda, as a “rabid New Dealer.”<sup>390</sup> Furthermore, Disney accused Mellett’s assistant, who was given significant freedom while working at WDP, of subversive activities. Disney alleged that the assistant was “attempting to spread propaganda, whereupon his activities were closely watched.”<sup>391</sup> Disney related to investigators that his suspicions were reported through proper government channels. At the same time, Disney was “attempting to get into...16-mm educational films, which he strongly believes must be kept clean of propaganda because they will go directly to the schools and will help mold future Americans.”<sup>392</sup>

As far as Disney’s labor-management issues were concerned, Smith reported that, per Disney, “Sorrell stated he would not have an election [and] that he used the NLRB or those government agencies only when they served his purpose.”<sup>393</sup> The memorandum also conveyed that the Animator’s Strike of 1941 had a noticeable impact on WDP’s manpower. As of September 1947, “Disney [had] approximately 700 workers,” which was a reduction in WDP’s

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<sup>388</sup> H.A. Smith, *Memorandum re: Walt Disney*, September 8, 1947, 1, *Disney, Walt – Witness File*, RG233.

<sup>389</sup> Smith, “re: Walt Disney,” 1.

<sup>390</sup> Smith, “re: Walt Disney,” 2.

<sup>391</sup> Smith, “re: Walt Disney,” 2.

<sup>392</sup> Smith, “re: Walt Disney,” 1.

<sup>393</sup> Smith, “re: Walt Disney,” 1.

labor pool totaling “around 1,000” when his artists went on strike.<sup>394</sup> Labor took center stage by the time they called Disney to testify.

On October 27, 1947, at Chairman Thomas’ direction, Disney was interrogated by H.A. Smith, who began by lobbing softball questions in the witness’s direction. One line of inquiry related to WDP’s global distribution of its animated shorts and features:

Mr. Smith: Where are these films distributed?

Mr. Disney: All over the world.

Mr. Smith: In all countries of the world?

Mr. Disney: Well, except the Russian countries.

Mr. Smith: Why aren’t they distributed in Russia, Mr. Disney?

Mr. Disney: Well, we can’t do business with them.

Mr. Smith: What do you mean by that?<sup>395</sup>

Disney’s answer to Smith’s last question was an ideologically-driven oversimplification. “They looked at a lot of our pictures,” Disney replied, “but then turned them back to us and said they didn’t want them, they didn’t suit their purposes.”<sup>396</sup>

When the conversation turned to the propaganda produced at Disney’s studio, Walt’s replies became muddled and contradictory. Smith asked, “Have you ever made any pictures in your studio that contained propaganda?”<sup>397</sup> Disney was forced to concede that they did, but he used war as a justification. He also touted his studio’s work for the federal government and *Victory through Air Power*, a film he took a great deal of person pride in creating. Smith followed up with a similar question. Changing the tense of his verbiage, Smith inquired, “Do you permit pictures to be made at your studio containing propaganda?”<sup>398</sup> This time, Disney offered a

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<sup>394</sup> Smith, “re: Walt Disney,” 1.

<sup>395</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 281.

<sup>396</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 281.

<sup>397</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 281.

<sup>398</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 282.

denial. “We never have,” Disney firmly asserted then added that “we watch so that nothing gets into the films that would be harmful in any way to any group or any country.”<sup>399</sup> Disney claimed that he and his executives had exhaustively labored to keep offending material out of the studio’s productions. WDP’s *Song of the South*, however, demonstrated how little Disney understood about the “limitless possibilities of the medium,” or committing racist “boo-boos.”<sup>400</sup>

The next topic brought up by the HUAC dealt directly with the labor-management dispute during the Animator’s Strike of 1941. According to Disney, the entirety of the SCG’s legitimate dispute was based on an elaborate scheme, concocted by Herb Sorrell and Communist front organizations. Disney vehemently denied that his studio had experienced “a labor problem at all.”<sup>401</sup> He felt that the pro-labor press—including *People’s World*, the *Daily Worker*, and *PM Magazine*—had engaged in a campaign to besmirch the reputation of his cartoon factory. “I even went through the same smear in South America,” Disney said while adding, “...they called my plant a sweat-shop.”<sup>402</sup> At this point, Chairman Thomas interjected with a question of his own regarding Disney’s relationship with Sorrell and the SCG. “Supposing you had given in to him,” Thomas asked, “then what would have been the outcome?”<sup>403</sup> Disney seized the opportunity to grandstand. “I would never have given in to him,” replied Disney, “because it was a matter of principle with me, and I fight for principles.”<sup>404</sup> As the HUAC’s questioning continued, Disney continued to harp on Sorrell and the artists who organized the SCG’s Disney unit.

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<sup>399</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 282.

<sup>400</sup> Rockefeller, *Letter to Walt Disney*; Inge, “Walt Disney’s *Song of the South* and the Politics of Animation,” 221.

<sup>401</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 283.

<sup>402</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 283.

<sup>403</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 284.

<sup>404</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 284.



Disney claimed that Sorrell had professed his ties to Communism during a private meeting. Allegedly, Sorrell once asked Disney, “You think I am a Communist, don’t you,” then the labor leader proceeded to gloat about receiving funding from the Communists in 1937.<sup>405</sup> Whereas Sorrell valued the confidentiality of his associates, Walt Disney was fine with accusing his unionizing artists of allegedly exhibiting subversive behaviors. He was extremely careful not to mention Art Babbitt by name. According to Disney, David Hilberman, “the real brains of this...had no religion and...had spent considerable time at Moscow Art Theatre studying art direction, or something.”<sup>406</sup> However, Disney failed to mention Bill Tytla—a prized Ukrainian animator and personal friend of Babbitt’s—in the plot to overthrow leadership at his cartoon operation. According to John Canemaker, Tytla had once entertained the idea for creating a Disney-like studio in Moscow while traveling in Europe with several other artists.<sup>407</sup> Tytla had struck with the other animators in 1941 but only out of loyalty to his cartoonist comrades.

As Disney’s testimony began to wind down, Smith solicited his opinion on the Communist Party. Disney happily obliged and stated that he “believe[d] it [was] an un-American thing...”<sup>408</sup> Furthermore, he resented Communists for their ability to infiltrate labor unions, and he felt that the ideologies of his employees had been misrepresented to the world. “We must keep the American labor unions clean,” Disney continued, “We have got to fight for them.”<sup>409</sup> Chairman Thomas concluded the HUAC’s questioning of Disney on a laudatory note. While thanking Disney for his public service, Thomas expressed that Walt “as a creator of

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<sup>405</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 284.

<sup>406</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 284.

<sup>407</sup> John Canemaker, “Vladimir William Tytla (1904-1968): Animation’s Michelangelo,” *Cinefantastique* (Winter 1976): 10, JCAC.

<sup>408</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 285.

<sup>409</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 285.

entertainment [was] probably one of the greatest examples in the profession.”<sup>410</sup> As the Chairman dismissed the witness, he thanked Disney for his national service. Following Disney’s testimony, the HUAC adjourned for the day. On the whole, Disney’s testimony provided justifications for his anti-union activities. Leadership for the IATSE would later reinforce Disney’s alarmist stance.

After adjourning for the weekend, the HUAC reconvened on October 30, 1947. Roy Brewer was called before the HUAC as a representative for the IATSE. While Brewer was not the culprit behind the numerous schemes and plots that marred the IATSE’s reputation, he was appointed to its leadership in 1945, during the organization’s jurisdictional dispute with the CSU. Brewer touted his government service and his time as president of the AFL’s state affiliate in Nebraska to members of the HUAC.<sup>411</sup> After that brief introduction, Brewer claimed that the CSU’s purpose in Hollywood was illegitimate and a front for radicalism. Although the CSU claimed affiliation with the AFL, Brewer claimed Sorrell’s organization played an essential purpose in the Communist Party’s “definite attempt...to take over the entire structure of the [Hollywood] trade-union movement.”<sup>412</sup> Stripling then asked Brewer to identify the persons behind the alleged Communist takeover of the motion picture industry. Brewer replied by suggesting that Sorrell had been assigned to fulfill the Communist Party’s directives after Jeff Kibre, another alleged agent provocateur, had moved on to disrupting other industrial settings on the west coast. Brewer alleged that Kibre was a busy man, instigating California’s North

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<sup>410</sup> “Testimony of Disney,” *Hearings*, 286.

<sup>411</sup> “Testimony of Roy M. Brewer,” *Hearings*, 343.

<sup>412</sup> “Testimony of Brewer,” *Hearings*, 344.

American Aviation Strike, becoming an official for the CIO's fishermen's union, and being "indicted and convicted...for violating anti-trust law."<sup>413</sup>

As for the part played by Sorrell specifically, Brewer's alleged that the organizer was one of two key figures in the Communist plot. According to Brewer, Sorrell was attempting to "infiltrate and control...technical labor," while John Howard Lawson was doing the same in "talent guilds and so-called cultural groups."<sup>414</sup> The accusation by Brewer may have had dire implications, but it was hardly a revelation. As noted by Doherty, J. Edgar Hoover had warned of this two-pronged approach before the HUAC in March 1947. At that time, Hoover testified that American Communists were directed by Moscow to commence "a 'furtive drive on Hollywood...to infiltrate the labor unions and to infiltrate the so-called intellectual and creative fields'."<sup>415</sup>

The second half of Brewer's HUAC testimony was briefly interrupted by a telegram, transmitted by Leo "The Cisco Kid" Carrillo. Carrillo was a Hollywood performer, whose Spanish family tree had deep roots in local and state politics in California. In 1944, Carrillo had also performed in a quasi-Mexican minstrel show, for a Republican fundraiser, emceed by Cecile B. DeMille, organized by R.K.O. Pictures head of production David Selznick, and featuring a speech by Walt Disney. The Mexican-American actor lauded the efforts and courage of the HUAC investigators, and his telegram was entered into the *Congressional Record*. According to his urgent message from the western front in Hollywood, "Communist rattlesnakes are bent on inoculating the mind of our American youth."<sup>416</sup> Nevertheless, Carrillo assured members of the

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<sup>413</sup> "Testimony of Brewer," *Hearings*, 351.

<sup>414</sup> "Testimony of Brewer," *Hearings*, 356.

<sup>415</sup> Doherty, *Show Trial*, 57.

<sup>416</sup> Leo Carrillo, "Telegram to the Un-American Activities Committee," *Hearings*, 394.

HUAC that they were “not injuring our industry” through their interrogations, they were “helping to keep...out the rats.”<sup>417</sup>

Carrillo’s message was delivered to the HUAC just before Chairman Thomas cited Alvah Bessie and another writer for contempt, then Brewer’s testimony resumed for a short time. As Thomas explained to Brewer, the HUAC had “a heavy schedule of witnesses...and were getting further behind.”<sup>418</sup> In closing, Brewer complained that he had been the victim of litigation funded by the Communist Party. Brewer and Congressman John McDowell (R-PA) joked back and forth about how much they had been sued for. Brewer had been sued for “\$150,000,” whereas McDowell had been sued for “\$100,000,” but Chairman Thomas shut down their libel suit measuring contest by stating that he did not “think [either] was pertinent” to the present hearings.<sup>419</sup>

The scenes acted out before the HUAC in October 1947 were reminiscent of several of the animated sequences featured in *Dumbo* (1941), which was produced and released during the Animator’s Strike of 1941.<sup>420</sup> Briefly, *Dumbo* was the tale of an elephant calf, named Jumbo Jr., who was ridiculed by fellow members of his “proud race” for a phenotypical difference, his oversized ears.<sup>421</sup> In one problematic scene, Jumbo and his companion, Timothy Mouse—no relation to Mickey—passed out from an accidental, all-night bender. Although the sequence depicted underage drinking, it was a technical masterpiece. As Jumbo and Timothy awoke from their drunken stupors, somewhere in the American South, the two were greeted by a quintet of

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<sup>417</sup> Carrillo, “Telegram to the Un-American Activities Committee,” *Hearings*, 394.

<sup>418</sup> “Testimony of Brewer,” *Hearings*, 397.

<sup>419</sup> “Testimony of Brewer,” *Hearings*, 398.

<sup>420</sup> Certain scenes in *Dumbo* were animated by those artists and referenced what was going on right outside of WDP’s cartoon factory. As noted by Sito, some striking artists continued to consult on *Dumbo*’s animated sequences while on the picket line, see Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 124.

<sup>421</sup> To avoid the need for disambiguation, the title character has been referred to as Jumbo, his given name at “birth,” see: *Dumbo*, film (Walt Disney Productions, Ltd., 1941), Disney+, accessed: January 2020.

harmonious blackbirds. The murder of anthropomorphized Jim Crows serenaded Jumbo and Timothy with skepticism over the pachyderm's ability to fly.<sup>422</sup> Though the animated minstrel show deserved criticism, the means by which the juvenile elephant and his mouse companion came to get lost in the sauce were far more disconcerting.

In 1941, Disney was Hollywood's ring master. Although Bill "Vladimir" Tytla and Art Babbitt were identified as Animation Designers in *Dumbo*'s opening credits, the Animator's Strike threatened the film's production.<sup>423</sup> Before Jumbo and Timothy gained access to liquor, the circus clowns had been imbibing and organizing for the purpose of collective bargaining with the ring master.<sup>424</sup> The protagonists in *Dumbo* nearly lost their minds because of the carelessness of the working-class. The newly-unionized troop of clowns carelessly disposed of their leftover alcohol by tossing it in their camp's potable drinking water. They were headed to "hit the big boss up for a raise," and they gleefully sang that they "going to get more money" on their way to assert their federal right to collective bargaining.<sup>425</sup>

The ringmaster of the "Three Ring Circus" on Capitol Hill, as Lowell Mellett described the HUAC hearings, was Chairman J. Parnell Thomas.<sup>426</sup> Six years earlier, Disney executives received a different warning, directly from Mellett. There were fewer things more insulting to industrial workers, Mellett cautioned, than being "made the butt of a joke by a superior."<sup>427</sup> Disney and the artists animating *Dumbo* must not have read the memo. The film's climatic sequence involved the antics of the ersatz clown union, responsible for the title characters' long

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<sup>422</sup> *Dumbo*.

<sup>423</sup> *Dumbo*.

<sup>424</sup> *Dumbo*.

<sup>425</sup> *Dumbo*.

<sup>426</sup> Mellett, "Three Rings in the Coming Circus."

<sup>427</sup> Mellett, *Letter to R.S. Carr*, 2.

strange trip. In their act, the circus clowns made fools of themselves as they attempted to extinguish a mock structure fire. The scenes produced by the HUAC in October 1947 were not all that different. Arguably, the HUAC's friendly witnesses were the clowns of that circus. Together, Disney and his right-wing, nationalist ilk comically tried to extinguish a fictional, cartoon fire.

## CHAPTER VI

## IN-BETWEENING YESTERDAY AND FANTASY: AN OPIATE OF THE MOUSE

Historical truth is often stranger than commercial fiction. Indeed, the Walt Disney Company, a transnational multi-media behemoth that prides itself on its family-friendly branding, would hardly benefit from revisiting a time when its artists protested inequity. Reproducing the images of artists masquerading as shirtless, hooded executioners would do little to increase the WDC's bottom line. Furthermore, Donald Duck was more than a mere cartoon character in the 1940s. He was an asset of the U.S. empire. In the hands of the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), Donald became a symbol of imperialism that socialist critics would have sent back "feathers plucked and well-roasted," if given a choice.<sup>428</sup> This was the legacy left in Central and South America by Disney and his studio's federal benefactors.

During the 1940s, Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. (WDP) produced very little outside of its contributions to the OIAA, various federal agencies, and defense manufacturers. WDP pursued few creative ventures aside from *Bambi* (1942)—which did not make it past the first scene without the title character's mother being murdered, *Make Mine Music* (1946)—a compilation of ten animated shorts, and the racially-insensitive *Song of the South* (1946). The lion's share of labor performed in the House of the Mouse constituted productions that furthered U.S. foreign policy and aided the military-industrial complex. For Hollywood labor activists, Disney, the man, would be remembered as one of several moguls who invited racketeering schemes into their studios and thugs into their union halls. This made the assertion of their federally-recognized rights under the Wagner Act difficult, if not mortally dangerous. The Taft-

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<sup>428</sup> Dorfman and Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck*, 10.

Hartley Act was used to cut the left wing of Hollywood’s labor movement down to the quick after violence proved to be an ineffective deterrent. The congressional testimonies of Disney and his fellow right-wingers added insult to injury for artists of the motion picture industry. Walt Disney, the man, and The Walt Disney Company—an American institution—may have been separate entities, but their ideological underpinnings compelled this process of historical “in-between” work.

### **“King of Disneyland”**

Walt Disney’s personal empire of Disneyland, a theme park in Anaheim, California, opened in the sweltering heat of summer in the mid-1950s. On Disneyland’s opening day, a reporter asked him if he would be interested in running for political office. “Why would I want to be President of the United States,” Disney asked rhetorically, “I’m the king of Disneyland.”<sup>429</sup> Over the years, several prominent politicians and foreign dignitaries became invitees to Disney’s kingdom. Ronald Reagan donned a white tuxedo and mugged for the masses and cameras for Disneyland’s opening ceremonies.<sup>430</sup> In June of 1959, the Nixon family joined Disney in christening his kingdom’s iconic monorail in.<sup>431</sup> However, there were internal worries among Disney’s Imagineers that the monorail would burst into flames, or worse yet explode, but the Nixon family embarked on the attraction’s maiden voyage without incident.

That same summer of 1959, just before then-Vice President Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev squared off in the Kitchen Debate, the Soviet First Secretary and his wife, Madame Nina Khrushchev were denied access to the “Happiest Place on Earth.” Although President

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<sup>429</sup> *American Experience: Walt Disney* (Public Broadcasting Corporation, 2015), DVD.

<sup>430</sup> “Ronald Reagan on Dateline Disneyland,” July 17, 1955, *The Disney Archives*, URL: <https://d23.com/featured-photo/ronald-reagan-dateline-disneyland/>, accessed: January 2020, image used with permission of the Walt Disney Company.

<sup>431</sup> “Vice President Nixon Dedicates the Monorail at Disneyland,” June 14, 1959, *The Disney Archives*, URL: <https://d23.com/this-day/vice-president-nixon-dedicates-the-monorail-at-disneyland/>, accessed: January 2020, image used with the permission of the Walt Disney Company.



Eisenhower later suggested that it was the Soviets who rained on Khrushchev's Main Street Electrical Parade, local law enforcement claimed that it "could not guarantee his safety."<sup>432</sup> Either possibility was plausible. American heroes were always welcomed in the sanitized version of Walt Disney's world. In 1984, Reagan had the distinguished pleasure of celebrating Donald Duck's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday by honoring the character's original voice actor, Clarence Nash, for his community service. Reagan and Nash were grinning from ear-to-ear, but the Donald Duck doll they were holding together at the podium appeared less enthusiastic. Although the Walt Disney Company has attempted to fashion itself as an apolitical institution over the years, its digital archives still tout its "Connections to Commanders-in-Chief" for the United States of America.<sup>433</sup>

Every day, tourists from all over the world are invited to walk where the Khrushchev dared not tread: Disney's personal fiefdom in the former Orange Groves of Anaheim, California. When visitors have enter through the turnstiles and pass under one of two archways, a plaque mounted on the keystones declares, "Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy."<sup>434</sup> As most are keenly aware, the sensory experiences awaiting them on Main Street U.S.A. have been dutifully contrived. However, if these pilgrims to Disney's magic kingdom have kept their eyes peeled, then they may even spot the dedication plaque which strikes a more personal tone:

To all who come to this Happy Place: -WELCOME- Disneyland is *your* land. Here age relives *fond memories of the past*...and here youth may savor the challenge and promise

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<sup>432</sup> Frank Sinatra offered to rectify the situation, telling the press that he would offer "that old broad" a tour of Disneyland himself, see: Stephen Whitfield, "The Road to Rapprochement: Khrushchev's 1959 Visit to America," in *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Mid-Century Icons*, ed. Joel Foreman (Urbana; Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 307 and 317.

<sup>433</sup> "Ronald Reagan Honors Clarence Nash (Voice of Donald Duck)," 1984, in *Disney's Presidential Past: Connections to Commanders-in-Chief*, February 16, 2017, URL: <https://d23.com/disneys-presidential-past-connections-to-commanders-in-chief/>, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>434</sup> *Entrance Plaque*, Disneyland Resort, Anaheim, California, July 17, 1955.

of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the *ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts* that have created America...with the hope that it will be a *source of joy* and inspiration to all the world.<sup>435</sup>

Decades after Disney's passing, the Walt Disney Company (WDC) continues to honor one of its founder's legacies and prides itself on ensuring that "the ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts that have created America" remain those of the consumer-friendly variety.

If the executives of the WDC ever take suggestions on how to re-Imagineer their blended narratives of corporate and U.S. history, then several come to mind. Hopefully, the following few will suffice. Although no one would be lining up for Mr. Babbitt's Wild Ride, they could have at least pinned a union button prominently on Goofy's suspenders or Donald Duck's naval uniform. Splash Mountain—a flume ride based on a minstrel show and featuring nearly all the characters from Disney's *Song of the South*—should probably just be demolished. No one should be laughing in that place. While they are at it, they could update the historical interpretations presented in the Hall of Presidents, featuring Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon. While the twenty-first century has presented the Walt Disney Company with myriad opportunities to move beyond the criticisms of Mike Wallace's "Mickey Mouse History," the corporation's attitudes toward labor-management relations and Ideological Imagineering have shown little change over time.<sup>436</sup>

### **A Casting Call for U.S. Labor**

Despite the Walt Disney Company's pioneering achievements in entertainment, didacticism, and the perpetuation of its consumer feedback loop—which consists of its films and television programming, merchandising, and the convergence of the two at its phenomenally successful theme parks—the corporation's record on labor-management conflicts has remained

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<sup>435</sup> *Dedication plaque*, Disneyland Resort, Anaheim, California, July 17, 1955. Emphasis added.

<sup>436</sup> Wallace, "Mickey Mouse History."

consistent. The facts remain that Disney, himself, actively worked to suppress labor organization at his studio in the mid-1930s and beyond. He did so by squelching the voices of artists and firing employees who attempted to form an independent union. Though Disney lost his protracted legal battle with one of his studio's most animated labor leaders, he further justified his actions by banding together with his right-wing allies in Hollywood and hurling accusations of subversive activities at his ideological opponents. This was the legacy of Disney, the shrewd businessman, the Good Neighbor, the fervent supporter of the U.S. war effort, and friendly witness for the HUAC's Hollywood inquiry. For all their faults, Walt Disney and the art produced at his cartoon factory are still considered national treasures.

Sadly, Art Babbitt passed away in 1991, before Disney's animation department experienced its renaissance period under artists like Tom Sito. Babbitt's assistant, Bill Hertz—the artist whose pay was none of Babbitt's "goddamn business" per Disney—managed to get in a final dig during Babbitt's burial at Forest Lawn Cemetery.<sup>437</sup> Babbitt was laid to rest on a hill that overlooks the Disney studio below in Burbank. As Babbitt was a U.S. Marine, he received a twenty-one-gun salute during his graveside memorial. According to Sito, Hertz was heard whispering: "If Art had his way, those guys would lower their rifles slightly."<sup>438</sup> Apparently, those who laugh last tend to laugh best. Though it should not be construed as another laughing matter, the WDC has continued to honor Walt Disney's anti-unionism by exploiting its workforce in multiple sectors. As twenty-first century business has grown dependent on

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<sup>437</sup> Babbitt, "Affidavit of Arthur Babbitt."

<sup>438</sup> Sito, *Drawing the Line*, 151.

information technology, Disney's corporation has turned to sponsoring H-1B visas for foreign-born employees in order to maintain its network infrastructure.<sup>439</sup>

Additionally, evidence of economic disparity can still be found outside the Disney's gates, or right on top of them, as is the case with the esplanade separating the Disneyland Resort from its sister theme park, Disney's California Adventure. The outlook is rather bleak beyond the walls and fencing surrounding the "Happiest Place on Earth." The WDC's theme park and hospitality divisions have continually found strategies to avoid paying Disneyland and Walt Disney World "cast members" a living wage.<sup>440</sup> For years, each and every morning in Anaheim, California, landscapers and custodial staff, mostly migrant laborers, power wash the sidewalks along Harbor Boulevard and shoo away members of the city's homeless population. This is done to keep the resort area sparkling clean for the tourists who come to visit Disneyland. The company has denied culpability for any negative experiences that take place on Anaheim city property. The WDC, however, negotiates the contracts for laborers staffing more than a few Starbucks locations nearby. Suffice it to say, Disney's engagement with labor-management relations has not improved over the years.

### **The Media Empire's New Groove**

In recent years, the WDC has continued to consume its industrial competitors virtually unabated, becoming an unstoppable force in the global mass-media market. The cultural exploits and sexual escapades of *The Three Caballeros*, however, were bankrolled by the federal government and became a proof of concept for Disney's brand of cultural imperialism during the

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<sup>439</sup> Julia Preston, "Pink Slips at Disney. But First, Training Foreign Replacements," *The New York Times*, June 3, 2015, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/04/us/last-task-after-layoff-at-disney-train-foreign-replacements.html>, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>440</sup> Tarpley Hitt, "Disney Sued by Labor Union for Failing to Pay Living Wage: Employees Have to 'Live in Their Cars'," *The Daily Beast*, December 11, 2019, URL: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/disney-sued-by-labor-union-for-failing-to-pay-living-wage-employees-have-to-live-in-their-cars>, accessed: January 2020.

1940s. Recently, Donald, José, and Panchito have been brought out of retirement for a new generation of global consumers. Recently, *The Legend of the Three Cabarellos* (2017) was produced for distribution in the Philippines.<sup>441</sup> Donald has since received an honorable discharge from military service, “Joe” Carioca has given up cigar-smoking but remains as dapper as ever, and Panchito has holstered his guns and left his bandoliers behind.

Disney has increasingly turned to acquisitions in order to control properties that threaten the global hegemony of the mass-media empire. In 2012, the company acquired George Lucas’ rights to the Star Wars franchise and oversaturated markets with “the force,” and most recently, “the Child.”<sup>442</sup> In global terms, Disney’s profits were in excess of \$11 billion, and that was only in theatres. By the end of 2019, the company controlled nearly the same market share of domestic box office profits (“33.2%”) as its closest three competitors—Warner Brothers (“13.7%”), Universal (“13.4%”), and Sony Pictures (“11.9%”)—combined.<sup>443</sup> America and Hollywood’s “Free Enterprise System,” as touted by Ayn Rand, has allowed the WDC to simply consume its competitors.<sup>444</sup>

In early 2019, the WDC bought out Twenty-First Century Fox and its entire back catalogue of intellectual properties, but the company’s acquisition of Marvel Comics has arguably had the most global impact.<sup>445</sup> The wartime legacy of Marvel Comics and the WDC’s

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<sup>441</sup> *The Legend of the Three Caballeros*, television Series (Walt Disney Animation, 2017), *Disney+*, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>442</sup> *The Mandalorian*, film (Lucasfilm, 2019), *Disney+*, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>443</sup> There are nations in the world, albeit small ones, who have lower reported GDPs than Disney’s film revenue, and no state and federal taxes are applicable on movie ticket sales in the U.S., see: Adam B. Vary, “Disney Explodes Box Office Records with \$11.1 Billion Worldwide for 2019.” *Variety*, January 2, 2020, URL: <https://variety.com/2020/film/box-office/disney-global-box-office-2019-1203453364/>, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>444</sup> Rand, *Screen Guide*, 2.

<sup>445</sup> As of 2019, Disney’s acquisition of Fox did not include the company’s right-wing, conservative news outlet, New Corp, which is still owned and operated by Rupert Murdoch and his family. It was also worth noting that the rights to superhero properties created by Marvel’s rival, DC Comics, were acquired by the Warner Brothers Studio. Warner Brothers, however, has only produced false starts in its attempts to create its own cinematic universe, see: Schwartz, Matthew S. “Disney Officially Owns 21st Century Fox,” *National Public Radio*, March 20, 2019, URL:

unrivaled success in its creation of an entire cinematic universe had an explicit connection to the Disney studio's own relationship to the federal government. In *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), Chris Evans, who assumed the titular role, became a super soldier, created by the U.S. military industrial complex in 1941 in order to fight the Nazis.<sup>446</sup> Following Donald Duck's nightmarish encounter with the Third Reich in *Der Fuehrer's Face*, he felt compelled to serve his corporate overlord and government taskmasters. These fictional characters were born of the same militaristic ideology, prominent in the U.S. during the 1940s.

As a transnational leviathan, the WDC has, most recently, turned its Hobbesian gaze to the digital realm. The company's streaming service, *Disney+*, has become available to consumers all around the globe. The platform has brought many of Disney's classic films and television programs out of the company's proverbial vault, but it fails to provide viewers the necessary historical context to ethically and critically assess these productions. *Dumbo*, for example, was included in the initial offerings of *Disney+*. It also includes a disclaimer statement that the film was "presented as originally created. It may contain *outdated cultural depictions*."<sup>447</sup> Disney's *Song of the South*, on the other hand, has yet to be sung on the WDC's extremely popular streaming platform.

Under the guise of multiculturalism, the WDC has continued to reap extraordinary levels of profit from films like *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), which included Disney's first African

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<https://www.npr.org/2019/03/20/705009029/disney-officially-owns-21st-century-fox>, accessed: January 2020; Joanna Robinson, "DC Films Finally Admits Marvel Studios was Right All Along," *Vanity Fair Magazine*, March 18, 2019, URL: <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/03/suicide-squad-reboot-ezra-miller-flash-dc-marvel>, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>446</sup> This modern-day, film adaptation of Captain America's tale was originally brought to the silver screen by Paramount Pictures, who eventually succumbed to pressure from Disney and sold the property rights to the WDC in 2013, see: *Captain America: The First Avenger*, film (Marvel Studios 2011), DVD; Christopher Palmeri and Michael White, "Disney Buys Rights to Marvel Movies from Viacom's Paramount," *Bloomberg*, July 2, 2013, URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-07-02/disney-buys-rights-to-four-marvel-movies-from-viacom-s-paramount>, accessed: December 2019.

<sup>447</sup> *Dumbo*, film (Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. 1941), *Disney+*, accessed in January 2020. Emphasis added to one of the greatest oversimplifications ever.

American princess, Marvel Studio's *Black Panther* (2018) and a computer-generated remake of *The Lion King* (2019), featuring a more Afro-centric cast than its predecessor.<sup>448</sup> Most of the characters who originally appeared in *The Lion King* (1994) were voiced by white actors and actresses. This had always been a peculiar aspect of the Disney film that appropriated regional folklore and depicted the untamed wilds of the African savannah. Notwithstanding the spirited anticipation for and reception of the twenty-first century films listed above, Uncle Remus, Brer Rabbit and the "tar baby," have remained immovable objects. "Wakanda forever," indeed.<sup>449</sup>

Spoiler alert! In *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), Evans retired "America's ass," but not before he gifted his red, white, and blue "vibranium shield" to a Black superhero.<sup>450</sup> As Captain America passed his star-spangled buckler to the African American Avenger, he also revealed what he had been up to after he saved the universe by travelling through time to ensure the integrity of the past was preserved—the film was science fiction of course. The Captain explained that he chose to live out the rest of his days with his paramour during the mid-twentieth century, before the era of Jim Crow had ended. In July 2019, following *Avengers: Endgame*'s theatrical release, Marvel Studios and the WDC, had reportedly crossed the threshold, a modest \$2.79 billion in worldwide ticket sales, making it the most successful motion picture in the history of the industry.<sup>451</sup> Although the film shattered box office records, turning profits from imperialist propaganda, with murky racialized politics, is all in a day's exploitative labor at the Walt Disney Company.

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<sup>448</sup> *The Princess and the Frog* (Walt Disney Studios, 2009), Disney+; *Black Panther*, film (Marvel Studios 2018), Netflix, Accessed in January 2020; *The Lion King*, film (Walt Disney Studios, 2019), DVD.

<sup>449</sup> *Black Panther*.

<sup>450</sup> *Avengers: Endgame*, film, (Marvel Studios, 2019), Disney+, accessed: January 2020.

<sup>451</sup> An entire section of Disney's Animal Kingdom in Orlando, Florida has been constructed to provide an immersive experience based on the film it overtook, See: Rebecca Rubin, "'Avengers: Endgame' Passes 'Avatar' to Become Biggest Movie in History," *Variety Magazine*, July 20, 2019, URL: <https://variety.com/2019/film/news/avengers-endgame-box-office-record-avatar-2-1203256562/>, accessed: January 2020.

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- HSSC Hollywood Studio Strike Collection. Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles.
- HKSS Herbert Knott Sorrell Scrapbooks about Los Angeles and the Hollywood Strike (Collection 791). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
- MPSCG Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Guild, Local 839 Collection. Special Collections and Archives, Oviatt Library, California State University, Northridge.
- NYPL Microfilm Collection. New York Public Library, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Branch. New York City, New York.
- JCAC John Canemaker Animation Collection. Fales Library and Special Collections. New York University Libraries.
- JFC Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, Community Relations Committee Collection, Part 2, ca. 1920-1950. Series II: Fact Finding and Community Relations, ca. 1920-1950. Subseries E: Investigated Groups and Individuals, 1930-1949. Special Collections and Archives, Oviatt Library, California State University, Northridge.
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