

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the depiction of racial and ethnic stereotypes in American animated cartoons particularly from the first half of the twentieth century. It studies the relationship between animation and American culture and examines how animation reflects and shapes American identity in terms of race and how it critiques and promotes American values and attitudes regarding race and ethnicity in particular. Considering the historical, political, legal and cultural background of the contemporary eras of American animation, the thesis analyses the portrayal of racial and ethnic features in animated cartoons from the 1920s to the 1960s. Such stereotypes represent, in my opinion, significant aspects of societal and cultural changes in American society of the examined eras of animation.

The beginnings of the entertainment industry affected the booming era of animation by implementing commonly recognised literary stereotypes of the African-Americans into animated cartoons. This thesis strives to study the development of animated features of the racial stereotypes throughout the contemporary eras. It provides a brief systematic overview of the main eras that have significantly highlighted the start of animation as markers of race and ethnicity. Simultaneously, it discusses the problematic understanding and depiction of racial and ethnic features in animated cartoons due to the contemporary political concerns and legal conditions of the African-American citizens of the USA.

Thematically, this thesis strives to achieve a complex social commentary upon the tackling issues of the contemporary eras in American society such as racism, racial segregation, legal injustice, military propaganda and the Cold War conflict. It examines these topics through reflection of the animated production by selecting and analysing specific (prevalently overtly racist) cartoons involving African-American, Asian, Jewish and Russian stereotypes. Simultaneously, with the help of various secondary literary and critical sources, my thesis examines the relationship between animation and American racial and ethnic identity.