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Bc. Iva Vejvodová

**Zobrazení rasových a etnických stereotypů v amerických
animovaných filmech**

The Portrayal of Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes in American Animated
Cartoons

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a pouze na základě uvedených pramenů a literatury a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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V Praze, dne 4. ledna 2013

Prague, 4th January 2013

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Iva Vejvodová

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Počátky a vývoj americké animace, animovaný film, rasové a etnické stereotypy, Afroameričané v animovaných filmech, produkce animovaných filmů ve druhé světové válce, válečná propaganda, poválečná éra animovaného filmu, studená válka, rasismus, hnutí za občanská práva

KEY WORDS

The beginnings and development of American animation, animated cartoon, racial and ethnic stereotypes, African-Americans in animated films, Second World War animated film production, war propaganda, post-war era of animation, Cold War, racism, the Civil Rights Movement

ABSTRAKT

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá pojetím rasových a etnických stereotypů v amerických animovaných filmech převážně první poloviny dvacátého století. Práce konkrétně pojednává o problematice zobrazení těchto stereotypů v historických souvislostech na pozadí přelomových událostí týkajících se rasového konfliktu a následných politických, právních a společensko-kulturních změn v americké společnosti. Ve své diplomové práci se soustředím na rozbor rasových a etnických stereotypů v produkci animovaných filmů z období dvacátých let do konce šedesátých let dvacátého století. Animované filmy z tohoto období jsou z mého hlediska jedním z ukazatelů společensko-kulturních jevů tehdejší americké společnosti, která procházela obdobím transformace týkající se rasových otázek jakožto nedílnou součástí americké historie.

Vlivem animace, v tehdejší době nové součásti zábavního průmyslu a médií, docházelo k upevnování afroamerických stereotypů, které byly dříve zobrazovány v literárních dílech či komických divadelních představeních. Tematicky se tedy jedná o práci, která na pozadí historických, politických a kulturních změn v americké společnosti v období před druhou světovou válkou, během ní a následně v průběhu padesátých a šedesátých let, zkoumá zobrazení těchto literárních stereotypů v animované produkci. Diplomová práce analýzou těchto animovaných filmů nastiňuje problematiku uchopení rasových a etnických vztahů v tehdejší americké společnosti a nahlíží kriticky především na témata rasové segregace a postavení Afroameričanů ve společenské hierarchii, a dále se zabývá etnickými stereotypy týkajícími se militantní protijaponské propagandy a konfliktu studené války.

Tato práce se obecně zabývá pojetím základních hodnot americké společnosti, jako jsou svoboda a občanské právo, ve které animované filmy slouží jako prostředek k reflexi problematiky vyobrazení těchto hodnot v zábavním průmyslu. V mnoha případech vulgární a často rasistický podtext vybraných animovaných filmů ve své práci následně uvádím do historických a společenských souvislostí. Při této analýze vycházím především z odborných pramenů a literárně-kritických zdrojů.

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.

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1 Introduction

America has been captivated by animation ever since Disney's release of *Steamboat Willie* in 1928. Since then, certain animated cartoons and characters have become widely recognisable in American culture. Together with the film industry, America has played a key role also in the field of animation, producing a remarkable national and cultural heritage. This thesis will study the relationship between animation and American culture. It will furthermore examine how animation reflects and shapes American racial identity and how it critiques and promotes American values and attitudes regarding race and ethnicity in particular. In my thesis, I will provide a brief systematic overview of the main eras that have significantly highlighted the start of animation as markers of race and ethnicity. I will discuss this era from the very beginning of animation in the USA to propaganda cartoons during the Second World War and I will continue to the post-war development of society throughout the 1960s. Simultaneously, I will deal with the concept of racial and ethnic stereotypes portrayed in the selected cartoons in detail and will examine the relationship between animation and stereotypical images.

Since America has undoubtedly been the biggest producer of animated films in the world, the market strategy quickly recognised the power of entertainment business and its targets. Thus, throughout its development, not only did cartoons function as a source of entertainment but they also fulfilled the political and propaganda needs. In order to fit the demand, seemingly, animation studios were creating sets of popular illustrated icons, often presented as a mere play of images. However, if we consider this issue from a broader perspective, it is, in some places, obvious that recognisable, clearly racist images were scattered all over the animation industry from its very beginnings to the end of racial segregation in the USA.

Over the last century, America has almost always been a country of the most exclusive paradoxes: two different worlds existing under one national flag. The overwhelming potential of economic power and the pursuit of individual happiness in order to reach the "American Dream" was a privilege from which the white majority could profit. On the contrary, the strict

racial segregation laws and the exploitative policy of mistreatment of the African-American citizens have shaped a whole new culture of America.

In my thesis, however, I propose to extricate from the strict dichotomy of black and white stereotypical images in the thematic concept. Instead, I suggest focusing on the aspect of race and ethnicity as a whole, examining the stereotypical images in the respective cartoons. In an attempt to analyse the diversity of American multicultural society, it is necessary to take depictions of other various ethnic minorities in animated cartoons into account. Along with the most frequently employed and occurring depictions of African-American citizens as Pickanninies, Mammies, Uncle Toms and Coons—to which the majority of the thesis is devoted—other ethnicities and nationalities such as the Japanese, Jews, and Russians will be examined amongst a thematic analysis of animated films.

Race and ethnicity have always been crucial themes in American culture and, through animation, they have become an object of seemingly innocuous entertainment. The common literary stereotypes have been recreated and redesigned in order to depict features as presumably typical for a group or an individual. In animation of those times, such stereotypes regained their absurd meaning by people viewing them in a caricaturised way, which merely enhanced the intensified perception of their genuineness. Thus, it is remarkable to see to what a great extent animated caricatures penetrated cultural life by displaying both positive and negative images of racial and ethnic groups, and how they have shaped society. The objectives for analysing racial and ethnic stereotypes in cartoons stem from the fact that whilst images of African-Americans and other ethnicities have received critical coverage and responses throughout the American literary and film history, they have often been neglected in animation. Since I believe it is fascinating to observe the way animated cartoons once played an important role in political and socio-cultural framing of society, race and ethnicity certainly deserve to be examined thoroughly in specifically selected cartoons.

Firstly, my aim is to provide a brief coherent overview of the development of the American animation industry in terms of portraying race and ethnicity from the very beginnings to the post-war 1960s America. The reason why I selected this era of American history is that the country within decades underwent so many remarkable changes in society, achieving a completely new concept of understanding and approaching race and ethnicity. Undoubtedly, the spread of media, popular culture, film and the animation industry played a key role in America's societal development.

At the same time, I will examine specific examples which, in my opinion, bear features of racist and offensive images in selected cartoons from some of the most famous animators and animation studios such as: Fleischer Brothers (Paramount), Warner Bros, Walt Disney etc. Along with these examples of animated versions of recognisable literary stereotypes, I will focus on the portrayal of different racial and ethnic groups, comparing negative images with their positive counterparts and analysing their animated depiction within a historical, socio-cultural and political context. Overall, my aim is to discuss the impact of the animation industry on the development of society in the USA, through the reflection of stereotypes portrayed in the cartoons.

As I believe it is crucial to avoid an inventory of every possible offensive image in animation, I have selected a number of cartoons which demonstrate my arguments on their presentation of race and ethnicity. These animated films, from my perspective, serve as a device to reflect the attitudes and perceptions of various racial and ethnic groups; they demonstrate changes in society and the development towards a new era of history of the USA. In an attempt to illustrate the above-mentioned aspects, I chose cartoons that were created between 1920s and 1960s, since these clearly support my argument which centres around the concept of race and ethnicity in relation to American culture and society.

In order to provide an effective analysis, I will apply commonly recognised racial and ethnic stereotypes into my selected animated films to argue the racial and ethnic subtext of the

cartoons. African-American literary stereotypes and well as images of other ethnic groups will therefore be examined in the field of animated cartoons. In its core nature, animation deploys unrecognisable human characteristics in order to enhance and highlight the cartoonist's social message; in other words, it shows bodies to be disfigured, faces to be painted yellow, pink or green and physical features to be exaggerated. Cartoons offer us far-fetched stories with unrealistic portrayals of imagined worlds and organisms in which humorous hyperbole proliferates so remarkably that we subconsciously do not recognise its offensive subtext. Nevertheless, if we examine these images in the cartoons within the historical context, we consider them racist and derogatory. It is however possible to claim that the created concrete animated images are merely our own translated intuitive perceptions of racial and ethnic minorities in the context of which the insensitive employment of stereotypes contributed vastly to a mass popular culture that propagated racist and xenophobic attitudes. In developing my argument, I will formulate a social conclusion regarding contemporary attitudes to racist and derogatory animations through complex analysis involving various secondary literary and critical sources.

Despite the fact that we might perceive animation as something far-fetched, unreal and imaginative, it is the kind of art that has caused controversy and rebellion over the decades. Considering the current situation, in which an animator of a racist or derogatory cartoon mocking religion or ethnic origin might be imprisoned and sentenced for his production, it is truly fascinating to observe the decades in which animation played a role of exclusive entertainment and the most pejorative, disturbing and repulsive racial stereotypes were presented to wide audiences camouflaged in witty and seemingly cheerful cartoon sketches. Thus, in my thesis I will argue the importance of the overlooked aspect of racist imagery in animation with regard to societal and historical changes in the USA. Indeed, those changes have been fascinating over the decades, especially taking into account the fact that present-day America re-elected a president of an African-American descent, an aspect change that would be unthinkable and impossible only few decades ago.

2 From Vaudeville to Hollywood: The Boom of Animation

In order to analyse animation within the thematic frame of race and ethnicity, it is necessary to outline the origins and development of animation and introduce the basic features of an animated cartoon. Cartoons represented the animated version of staged sketches, usually accompanied by a live music or, later on, a recorded orchestra soundtrack. With the introduction of sound films in the early 1920s, in which a pianist or a gramophone with recorded music no longer accompanied the film, the early animated sketches still presented the fascinating ability to synchronise action and music. While in sound films actors already talked, in most of the early cartoons the action was motivated by music and the characters danced, acted in a 'silly' manner, lampooned or jumped according to the twists in musical intonation or its tempo. Characters in the early animation period did not talk at all or very little, since music dictated the story. In spite of the fact that the early animation bears a certain pathetic undertone and the comical elements are based on music rather than a spoken narrative, filmmakers won the audiences' attention by experimenting with sound and its implementation into animation. Thus, the gag, originally presented in vaudeville, intensified the comical aspect of the early animations.

During the early period of experimentation with synchronising sound and music, animators used vaudeville performance features to highlight the animation's comic features. Thus, vaudeville performances provided a source for animators from the early era, borrowing the variations of circus and revue acts combined with a slapstick humour from silent films. The comedies in early animations derived from vaudeville revue humour, including physical gags, ethnic jokes and short topical references. The structure was aligned with music and its changes in tempo and dynamic. According to Sartin, the attraction of comic routines and synchronised cartoon singers had more significance and sway than an economical, causal narrative and emphasized the carnivalesque tenor rather than the narrative pleasures.¹

¹ Hank Sartin, *From Vaudeville to Hollywood, From Silence to Sound*. "Warner Bros. Cartoons of the Early Sound Era" (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998) 70.

Therefore, vaudeville was one of the main sources of isolated scenes or gags which animators implemented into early cartoons. As vaudeville relied on a group of stock characters set in conventional plots, similarly, cartoons of the 1920s depended on limited character typology. Therefore, many animators were interested in establishing recurring characters. Sartin observes that what constituted excellence in vaudeville performance was the ability of a performer to excel at a type and bring in enough differentiation to interest audiences while still working within the designated, quickly recognisable type. Since vaudeville acts lasted under twenty minutes, performers did not have sufficient time to establish fully rounded characters.² Similarly, the first cartoons lasted under ten minutes, so the employment of easily and quickly recognisable character types was desirable.

Therefore, Felix the Cat and Mickey Mouse were characters that quickly caught the attention of the viewers due to their rascal nature and comedic actions. Vaudeville characters, in relation to the limited time of a performance, tried to develop and present as many skills as possible in order to entertain all audiences. The first animated characters copied the actions from vaudeville, emphasizing the silliness of their actions driven by music (which can also be demonstrated on the names of the cartoon projects, such as Looney Tunes, Silly Symphonies etc.). In addition, the early animated stock characters like Disney's Mickey Mouse—and the later created Warner Bros' Bosko—displayed features of blackface performance. The minstrel shows were one important source of inspiration for early animation, which was preserved until the 1960s. The blackface stereotypes as well as the portrayal of African-Americans in cartoons are discussed in chapter 3, subchapter 3.2.

In a sense, taking inspiration from vaudeville clearly characterised the nature of cartoons and predicted its future development. Cartoons were designed to be short, witty and entertaining. They celebrated spontaneity, imagining a world that was easily transformable into far-fetched forms and shapes, imagining a happy relationship between audiences and spectacle. The

² Sartin, 71.

inanimate was suddenly animated, allowing audiences to fantasize and dream. Music played a key role to the early cartoons, since the fascination with a recorded sound was overwhelming to that era. However, Sartin further notes that vaudeville and its performance traditions were a temporary solution to the problem of how to use sound and how sound might change the structure of cartoons.³ This may be explained by the need for new incentives in exploring the various artistic possibilities in the field of animation. Even though the early years of animation were a period remarkably marked by a critical transition in popular entertainment, especially in terms of synchronising picture and sound, the new challenging possibilities of creating recurrent characters with humorous chase as the dominant modes prevailed.

Another important feature of the cartoons was music, as already mentioned above. In the early era, animators sought inspiration in jazz music, which they implemented into cartoons with the blackface stereotypes. The caricatures of the African-American jazz musicians and entertainers thus served the purpose of the witty short animated sketches used in the cartoons. Jazz in its original form accompanied nearly all of the blackface cartoons. Racial gags and jokes were implemented on regular basis, inspired by the recognisable African-American stereotypes from the literary canon combined with the music performances. Uncle Toms, Coons, Mammies and Pickanninies served as examples of images embedded into the cartoon plot.

The Uncle Tom stereotype represented the benign and servile Negro character who kept his faith in good deeds of his white master. Coon, according to Bogle impersonated the Negro as an amusement object and black buffoon.⁴ Pickanniny stereotype was then a variation of Coon which featured a child figure as the centre of humorous plot. Pickanninies were almost always aportrayed as timorous children chasing chickens and eating watermelons. The last black archetype occurring in the literary canon was the Mammy stereotype which presented black

³ Sartin, 69.

⁴ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks. An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) 7.

females as servile and comic characters. Mammies were obese, de-sexualised and extremely devoted to their white mistresses, enjoying their vocation as maids and cooks.

In order to introduce the burlesque and comic nature of the cartoons, animators in the pre-war era thus borrowed from the mentioned African-American literary stereotypes as well as from vaudeville and comedic stage performances. It is clear that the most significant inspiration for cartoonists came from blackface performances. The racial background of the minstrel shows stemmed from the musical performances of “Coons” which represented the basest dehumanising techniques of traditional black caricature. As Wonham observes, the “coon” stereotype represented the dichotomy of an imagined authentic black identity and the burlesque conventions of traditional blackface performance.⁵ Borrowing from the minstrel shows, animators in the early era created an animated blackface show on the screen by regular implementation of the recognisable stereotypes of the African-American canon.

With the development of animation techniques, the production line of the film studios was booming. The fascination of bringing pictures and sets of images into moving action caused bigger interests of the main animation studios such as Warner Bros., Paramount and Disney in producing cartoons. Discovering new improvements in animation, the studios also brought their sketches into colour definition. The new form of entertainment, based on literary comic animations and posters thus enabled race and ethnicity to be a major concept of infiltration on the screen. Animation as a new genre of artistic depiction of fictive plot stories had become immensely popular not only with children but also amongst adult audiences.

During the time of the sound film’s boom, cartoons gradually started to include characters using spoken mode. In the 1930s, its peak, animation studios produced cartoon characters which are still recognisable worldwide. Felix the Cat, Mickey Mouse, Porky Pig and Oswald the Rabbit remain the typical stock characters whose characterisations were taken from vaudeville stage performances in the early era of animation. Animation studios established a

⁵ Henry Wonham, *Playing the Races. Ethnic Caricature and American Literary Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 75.

secure position on the market, while distributing highly derogatory and offensive cartoon stereotypes in large quantities.

Moving towards the Second World War, animation was steadily used as a part of targeted propaganda, mainly because of its ability to caricature the human body and facial features. Therefore, race and ethnicity were presented in a debased manner in those cartoons, deriving from the stock stereotypical images to portray racial and ethnic features. Consequently, animation throughout the 1920s to 1960s was repeatedly misused for manipulation of public opinion, promoting various political and social ideas and frames of behavioural codes.

3 The Dark Animation: African-American Stereotypes in the Animated Cartoons

Concerning the matter of race and depiction of racial and ethnic stereotypes further on in this thesis, it is interesting to note that the blackface stereotypes were significantly imposed on characters already in the early animated sketches. Racism, deeply ingrained in the United States by the turn of the twentieth century, enabled the film and animation industry to dominate popular images from the perspective of white people. With the emergence of early cartoons, black people possessed a status of entertaining jazz musicians and dancers, a stereotype that has been created particularly due to these two main artistic abilities. Animators used this “black heritage” and employed it in their animated work by creating stock characters, assigning them excessive physical features. Mickey Mouse and Bosko the Talk-Ink Kid were characters that became quickly recognisable in terms of blackface representation. Stemming from the tradition of late-nineteenth century minstrel shows and vaudeville, animators based their comic sketches on the nitwit blackface stereotype. Similar to the minstrel shows, in which a white actor painted his face black, the blackface in cartoons was also drawn and created and therefore enabled the audiences to perceive them in a caricaturized, exaggerated way.

Animated sketches also employed a number of literary stereotypes of the African-American citizens such as the Pickanniny and Mammy in Paramount’s ‘Jasper’ cartoons, Uncle Tom in Disney’s *Song of the South* and MGM’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabaña* and other cartoons. The most influential image of African-American stereotyping in animation, however was the blackface minstrel performance. Therefore, in order to explore a vast number of blackface representations in animated sketches, it is necessary to examine the position of the African-Americans in society throughout pre-war America and define their characteristics in animated cartoons.

The societal status of the black population before the WW2 was of a lower ranking in comparison to their white compatriots in the sense that African-Americans were denied their full citizen rights and faced strict racial segregation in most of the states of the USA. Due to the legal implementation of the Jim Crow etiquette and laws, the common rhetoric of that time preached that white men were the chosen people who founded the chosen nation by God, while the blacks were cursed by their sin and deserved a status of inferiority within society. Therefore, impersonating the colour of black skin—albeit in minstrel shows, vaudeville grotesques or animated cartoons—meant de facto impersonating dimwit inferiority coupled with a mad enthusiasm for music and dancing. The animators can be therefore be seen as exploiters of these features; assigning them a far-fetched status and shape resulted in creating popular cartoon characters that performed those easily recognisable stereotypes. Naturally, from a current perspective, this contemporary stereotypical portrayal of the African-Americans seems derogatory and degrading.

As Lehman notes, by the early twentieth century, the influence of African-American folktales, music and dance was evident throughout American culture, from the ongoing performance of blackface minstrelsy to the enormous popularity of Joel Chandler Harris’s “Uncle Remus” stories¹. Consequently, minstrel shows combined with literary heritage served as a tool to re-invent popular images in animated motion pictures. Regarding the representation of black people in certain cartoons from the 1920s onwards, the problematic issue of “false representation” became apparent. In a sense, it is fair to claim that the stereotypes were basically re-invented and directly imposed on the created characters. The recognisable stereotypes originated from the aforementioned minstrel shows, in which a white actor painted his face black, emphasizing the typical physical feature of a black face in an exaggerated way—with larger lips and a bowler hat— performing seemingly idiotic and ridiculous sketches about Negro livelihood. Minstrel shows as a source for animated characters clearly marked the depiction of African-Americans in the early years of animation.

¹ Christoph Lehman, *The Colored Cartoon* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007) 2.

As a consequence of this, a typical image of a black person in vaudeville and minstrel shows would oscillate between two main stereotypes: a lazy Negro or a nitwit dancing Negro.

Stemming from a vast literary tradition, the Negro as well as other conventional examples of African-Americans, like Sambo, Coon, Pickanniny, Rastus, Uncle Tom, Mammy etc., mainly existed as offensive stereotypes, portrayed and created by white people to outline recognisable images. Apparently, these stereotypes then served as a device to demonstrate contemporary attitudes that blacks were socially inferior, comic, ‘good for nothing’ less intellectually developed than the white majority of the population. In fact, all of these derogatory stereotypes sketched various pictures of the black population, and served two main purposes: to mock the black race as a whole and to maintain the inferior representation of the blacks. What more, these stereotypes were created not only to entertain the whites, but also to show the black population how they are perceived by society.

Thus, in this time of strict racial segregation, for an average black person it might have been understandable, if not even natural, to identify his or her own behaviour with such offensive stereotypes. According to Lehman, African-Americans were generally portrayed as childlike, unintelligent buffoons who enjoyed their status as chattel. Long after the popularity of minstrelsy died, the political manipulation of the black image lived on.² Since African-Americans did not have any access to dominate any industry, including animation, they were not in a position to challenge or change the racially motivated stereotypes. It was only after a thorough cooperation of African-American intelligence when the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored people) started to release official complaints and protests against the offensive portrayal of blacks in the popular culture.

As previously mentioned, the tradition of Negro minstrelsy inspired the first animated cartoons and functioned as a source for the blackface stereotype. The origins of the minstrel shows are dated back to the antebellum America. The oral tradition combined with the

² Lehman, 3.

popularisation of entertainment for the ordinary man virtually enabled the folklore to become a stereotype. According to Robert C. Toll, the origins of the stage shows stem from the need to detach the American common man from the effete aristocrats after the War of Independence and to present the popularised superiority of a common gag and egalitarian stock characters.³ In commencing the tradition of simple and witty stage performances, characters were created and shaped into a quickly recognisable form and type. However, in this same period, as Toll further observes, these self-congratulatory boasts of egalitarianism were subjected to debasing charges of hypocrisy because of the existence of human slavery in the supposed land of liberty. Despite the knowledge that they might temporarily postpone slavery, Americans ultimately would have to make decisions about this contentious issue and the suitable position of Negroes in America. In this context, white men blackened their faces, went on stage throughout the nation, and quite literally acted out their images of black people, giving birth to minstrelsy.⁴

Indeed, the minstrel shows represented a highly recognisable and defining image of black stereotypes. Unfortunately, the post bellum America exhibits the same practices in exploiting the blackface convention: the common African-American is no longer enslaved; however his societal status is clearly given by his racial background. Certain 'frames', such as in contemporary literature and film, have dictated the representation of the African-American in society: savage tribal Africans, plantation workers, servants, maids, silly entertainers and musicians. These images, offered in literary and subsequently in animated stories, clearly define the recognisable aforementioned black stereotypes. By thus exploiting those stereotypical images in popular culture, the African-American population was generally believed to be naturally predisposed to servitude, laziness, poor grammar, immediate and primitive enthusiasm to music, dancing and seemingly idiotic humour. Those stereotypical images in literature unfortunately predetermined their animated version, in which racist

³ Robert C. Toll, "From Folktyle to Stereotype: Images of Slaves in Antebellum Minstrelsy", *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, Vol. 8, No. 1 Indiana University Press. June 1971. October 2012 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814062>> 38.

⁴ Toll, 39.

undertones were enhanced by the deployment of far-fetched and excessive bodily features. As Lehman notes, blackface minstrelsy, with its uniquely American roots, was even considered a patriotic image.⁵

However, certain elements of positive imagery of the African-Americans in cartoons are possible to view through the representation of blacks in music. Stemming from their contemporary jazz performances, Lehman states that writers and animators constructed cartoon stories loosely based on the songs that they heard the musicians played in the clubs.⁶ Thus, few contemporary cartoons employing black stereotypes, i.e. Warner Bros' *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* from 1943 remain disputable in terms of derogatory imagery, since they actually portray the contemporary music scene, if not celebrate the black culture. It is obvious from a current perspective that all of the viewed cartoons are perceived as generally racist and demeaning. Arguably, after careful observation, not all of them ought to be labelled as purely racist, since they portray an insight into the contemporary life of the African-Americans. Nevertheless, as the vast majority of the cartoons represented and still represents a clear attack and humiliation towards African-Americans, it is necessary to assess the derogatory aspects that constitute these stereotypes.

3.1 The Jim Crow Laws and the NAACP

Prior to examining numerous black stereotypes in selected cartoons, I find it crucial to devote a short subchapter to the Jim Crow etiquette and Jim Crow Laws, since I believe it is an important part of American history and promotes better understanding of the exploitation of racial stereotypes in animation. Together with the official implementation of Jim Crow Laws in numerous federative states, it is also necessary to take into account the establishment of the NAACP, a civil rights organization for coloured people. The establishment of this organization in 1909 was a milestone in American history and, due to steady operation, it succeeded in gaining full civil rights for African-American citizens decades later.

⁵ Lehman, 73.

⁶ Lehman, 30.

From 1877 and onwards, federal states legally recognised the Jim Crow Laws, a set of legal operative documents aimed at the black population of America, which originated from the Black Codes from the era after the Civil War. Despite the fact that after the victory of the Confederacy, the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments of the Constitution granted blacks the same legal protection as the white population. So it would seem that after 1877, southern and border states began restricting the liberties of African-Americans. Pilgrim states that, unfortunately for blacks, the Supreme Court helped undermine the Constitutional protections of blacks and legitimised Jim Crow laws and Jim Crow etiquette.⁷ Jim Crow laws denied basic citizen liberties to African-American population and strictly segregated the white and black environments, bringing a regime of black and white dichotomy into practice. As Pilgrim further observes, the Jim Crow laws not only interfered with the legal matters, but also perpetuated concepts of the social interaction between whites and blacks. Since interaction was under the scrutiny of individual laws, the interaction of blacks and whites was either prohibited due to the curse of miscegenation and a presumed accusation of rape (a black male and a white female), or monitored (a black person was not allowed to shake hands with the white person).⁸

The application of the Jim Crow laws led to a further emphasis of the racial differences between the whites and blacks, resulting in a strict racial segregation of their social life, educational institutions, public transport, shops and venues of entertainment. Under the label of racial exclusivity, the Jim Crow laws began taking legal steps to ghettoise African-Americans. By doing so, the white majority relied on the popular images of the African-Americans presented by media which often provided a distorted version of the actual black culture. Consequently, having comparably almost no voting rights and access to higher education within the white environment, the blacks had to undergo suppression and humiliation in order to gain civil rights and equal citizen status decades later.

⁷ Pilgrim, "What Was Jim Crow?" <<http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/what.htm>> 28 June 2012

⁸ Pilgrim

As a protest against the segregation and legalised inhumane lynching, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded in 1909. According to their description, the organization's principal objective was to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of minority group citizens of United States and to eliminate race prejudice. The NAACP sought, and still does seek remove all barriers of racial discrimination through the democratic processes.⁹ In the era of legalised racial segregation, the goals of the NAACP were echoed by the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, and both organizations succeeded in gaining full citizenship rights for the black citizens of the USA. In its very beginnings, the NAACP operated in the field of legal advocacy, focusing on the economic injustice between the white and black population. During the 1930s and 1940s, it continued to act as a legislative and legal advocate, demanding an end to state-mandated segregation. With the increasing number of released cartoons aimed to mock the black population from the 1930s and 1940s, the association openly complained about racist images in popular media, including animation.

3.2 Black Stereotypes in Warner Bros., Paramount and Disney

As previously mentioned, an accurate reading of black representation in cartoons is based on an understanding of the historical and cultural context of society. Caricatures of African-Americans appeared repeatedly in numerous animated sketches from the 1920s onwards. Interestingly enough, the cartoons deployed stereotypical images, illustrating the eras of racial segregation up to the liberation period from the mid 1960s. Viewing them from a nowadays perspective, the vast majority of them still portray black people in a derogatory and humiliating way.

There is an acute difficulty in assessing and clearly labelling racist images, largely due to the fact that the cartoons displayed physical characteristics with supernatural powers and eccentric shapes. These then served to ridicule a person or a group, including ethnic groups.

⁹ NAACP legal history < <http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history> > 12 October 2012

In fact, the nature of the cartoon is to exaggerate, ridicule, lampoon and to make the audience laugh. However, there was a clear tendency to aim the mockery at the African-Americans, stemming supposedly from their lower status in the society and their “otherness” in terms of approach to music and dancing. As Lindvall and Fraser observe in their analysis, a cartoon instruction book from the 1940s by E.C. Matthews propagated prejudice towards blacks: ‘The colored people are good subjects for action pictures...They are natural born humorists and will often assume ridiculous attitudes or say side-splitting things with no apparent intention of being funny...The cartoonist usually plays on the colored man’s love of loud clothes, watermelon, crap shooting, fear of ghosts, etc.’¹⁰

It is therefore easy to appreciate that certain stock characters in cartoons were employed to depict certain features of African-Americans, e.g. the savage African in Disney’s *Alice Cans the Cannibals* (1925), Warner Bros’ *Congo Jazz* (1930), *Buddy’s Circus* (1934) *Buddy in Africa* (1935), the natural born musician in *Bosko* and *Mickey Mouse* cartoons and the chicken and the watermelon eater, little Pickanniny Jasper in George Pal’s *Jasper* cartoons. Arguably, taking the necessary gags and caricature in the cartoons into consideration, it is possible to claim that cartoons generally showed little respect to people in general, mocking men and women and ethnic groups all together. Along with that, there was a need to define the black race in animation, stemming from the various literary stereotypes. However, as opposed to some tragic black stereotypes in literature, animation suggested a quick comic strip with the craziest buffoonery possible.

Thus, the first tendency to define black people in animation was to portray the savage Africans who were sold into slavery in America and mock their primitive roots. Such derogatory images of depicting African-Americans as evolving from monkeys to humans suggested that their inferior status in the society should be maintained even after the abolishment of slavery. Illustrating such examples corresponds with the historical context of

¹⁰ Terry Lindvall and Ben Fraser, “African American Images in the Warner Bros. Cartoon”. *Darker Shades of Animation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998) 124.

the Jim Crow laws era. Thus, in the first cartoons from Warner Bros we can see stereotypes that are clearly defined as racist and seek to present and ridicule African-Americans as savage cannibals and primitive tribal people. Looking at the tendency to portray African-Americans in this degrading way, selected examples are examined below.

Bosko, one of the most famous animated characters from the early years of Warner Bros.' animated cartoons, displays many significant features of a prejudicial and racially motivated cartoon. Along with the physical depiction of Bosko, its creators Harman and Ising also show this tendency to ridicule tribal Africa, deriving from this "savage African" stereotype. In *Congo Jazz* from 1930, Bosko travels to Africa to discover the origins of jazz in the jungle, setting up a group to play jazz with the monkeys and other animals. Jungle or wild nature as a setting perfectly strengthens the perception of a targeted mockery of the African-Americans. In this cartoon, Bosko displays many commonly recognised patterns of a black stereotype of that time: he is terribly scarred during his journey and is often startled by suspicious sounds, being frightened by his own shadow. Later on, he appears surrounded by a chimpanzee and a gorilla whilst he plays the trumpet and dances. When he spots the monkeys dancing opposite to him, performing buffoonery, the tune of the old slavery song "John Brown" fades in. Bosko's character in *Congo Jazz* suggests that he also has monkey-like physical features, and that the monkeys differ from him only by having a tail.

Therefore, it is interesting to observe the way Bosko, apparently a black boy, resembles a monkey in terms of his facial appearance, yet he does not possess any other clear animal-like features. His clear physical features are more than perplexing in recognition. While all the other animated characters of the early era presented a clear caricatured form of an animal, in which Felix the Cat was a cat, Mickey Mouse was an actual mouse and Oswald was a rabbit, it was hard to identify Bosko within the frame of animal-like creatures. Even though Ising himself claimed that "they never thought of him [Bosko] as human, or as an animal, but they had him behave like a little boy", it was obvious that he was widely recognised as a black

boy. As Lindvall and Fraser further observe in their analysis, Bosko was in fact a cartoonised version of a young black boy... [who] spoke a Southern Negro dialect.¹¹

Considering Bosko's monkey-like face in *Congo Jazz*, surrounded by the same faces of actual monkeys, it clearly constitutes the most racist representation of blacks in any animated cartoon. When watching other cartoons featuring Bosko and his girlfriend Honey, there is no doubt about misrepresentation of races. In both black and white and colour cartoons, Bosko's and Honey's faces are painted black and so is the rest of their bodies. As Lindvall and Fraser note, Bosko was perhaps the most famous early character evolving in Darwinian fashion from an ambiguous sort of animal and eventually became a recognisable black boy character.¹² Therefore, in terms of the exploitative stereotype of a savage African evolving into an African-American, Bosko represents a clearly given role in the field of racially motivated cartoon.

After the departure of Harman and Ising in the mid thirties, Bosko as an impish black boy disappeared and Warner bros were in need of the "new star" that would alter Bosko's success, as Lindvall states.¹³ Buddy, an offensive white counterpart, replaced Bosko's black character. The jungle setting remained, incorporating the same racist imagery as with Bosko's participation. In both *Buddy in Africa* and *Buddy's Circus*, the racially motivated humour is implemented through the depiction of wild natives of African tribes with rings in their noses. The African people are portrayed as monkeys, with human bones tied up in their hair, suggesting their interest in cannibalism. They possess features of a monkey-like face and have a primitive relationship to music and dancing, imitating the black choruses and trumpet solos through their dancing movements. From a current perspective, the animators' fascination with the wild tribal Africa could be summarised as an offensive "Negro Freak Show" as Lindvall

¹¹ Lindvall and Fraser, 125.

¹² Lindvall and Fraser, 125.

¹³ Lindvall and Fraser, 126.

suggests, since the penetrating cruel and insulting cartoon humour deserves no better and suitable umbrella term.¹⁴

Apart from the popular savage African image employed in numerous cartoons, the blackface representation is another important aspect that once contributed to the creation of stereotypical black characters. As for illustration, Bosko wears a bowler hat, oversized gloves and has exaggerated large lips; these features clearly show that the painted blackface shows were inspiration for creating his character. According to Sartin, this drawing style of the face was an established conventional representation of blackness, or at least blackness filtered through blackface, in cartoons of the twenties and later.¹⁵ In fact, most of the pre-war cartoons offer a wealth of imagery in terms of the depiction of stock characters that take inspiration from the blackface stage shows.

Another typical feature of the stage blackface performances is the primitive, immediate relationship to music. Blackface representation always emphasized musical talent, however often in a rather grotesque way, ridiculing the musical part with over-exaggerated acting and movements. In his essay, Sartin argues that contemporary audiences perceived blacks as having more immediate access to music, which they associated with primitive, uninhibited emotions.¹⁶ Bosko, as well as Mickey Mouse in the early cartoons, share these stereotypical relationships to music and bodily movements. Clearly, their acting in the cartoon is inspired by the minstrels' acting on the stages of the pre-war America.

In *Parlor Pranks*, one of the colour cartoons, Bosko and his girlfriend Honey enthusiastically dance to piano music, while Bosko's oversized gloves and shoes suggest a clear minstrel-like, or more precisely, a minstrel clown-like figure. If we view some of the old minstrel shows, we can easily recognise the movements that Bosko imitates in his performance. In the scene where he performs music as a white person, he wears an artificial nose and his facial features immediately change into a white man's face. The representation of Bosko's actual blackface

¹⁴ Lindvall and Fraser, 126.

¹⁵ Sartin, 72.

¹⁶ Sartin, 73.

stereotype is thus intensified by the brisk change from a white man back to being Bosko, or in other words, the black boy again. Additionally, his girlfriend Honey has typical African-American features when she is sometimes drawn with ridgelines on her head, which signifies a short-cropped Afro haircut. Therefore it is possible to claim that Bosko, Warner Bros.' animated star, was undoubtedly supposed to be a black caricature, due to the previously mentioned aspects. As Sartin concludes, Bosko and his girlfriend Honey were recognisable character types deriving from the stage tradition of blackface. Even Buddy, Bosko's replacement in 1933, was so clearly drawn from a blackface character that he was referred to as "Bosko in whiteface".¹⁷

In an attempt to assess an objective attitude towards the racist portrayals in Warner Bros. cartoons, it is necessary to apprehend the context of the current time. Despite the view of some critics, such as Michael Schull and David Witt, who argue that there was no intentional conspiracy to attack ethnic groups, but rather only authority figures¹⁸, most of the cartoons from the pre-war era influence the viewer's understanding of the current era's clearly implemented racial stereotypes. Even though Harman and Ising might have maintained that Bosko is a normal boy, many critics suggest that his blackness has a direct relationship with minstrel blackface shows. Thus, it remains clear that there was a tendency to present African-Americans according to the previously described recognisable stereotypes.

In another Warner Bros cartoon *You Don't Know What You're Doin'*, Porky Pig steps into a cabaret to attend a musical performance. Even though Piggy is an animal character, the cartoon features other characters that represent the blackface stereotype. The first intended racial gag appears when the guard is left tricked by Piggy, who walks under his legs to enter the cabaret show, making him explode. Black smoke covers the guard's face and body and he furiously exclaims: "Mammy!" while the audience bursts out laughing. Another scene imitating the blackface performance commences entering the cabaret. The jazz musicians

¹⁷ Sartin, 72.

¹⁸ Lindvall and Fraser, 134.

dance merrily, led by a conductor whose drawn physical features clearly portray excessive lips and an Afro hairstyle. Even though the female dancers are cats, it is apparent that the way they are dressed suggests inspiration from the previous “savage African” cartoons.

Looking at the Paramount studio in terms of animation, the racist content is easily recognisable in one of its most famous cartoons of George Pal’s *Pupetoons*, which included several titles with a little black boy Jasper. Paramount was one of the prominent film studios which undoubtedly employed racist images in their works. Apart from the black stereotypes, Paramount was also the producer of the broadcasted anti-Japanese ‘Popeye cartoon series’. With the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement and demonstrations against racial oppression shortly after the Second World War, many cartoons were forbidden or banned from broadcasting due to their racist content.

When observing the black stereotypes in *Jasper and the Watermelons* from 1941, the classic and easily recognisable image of a little black Pickanniny strikes the audience immediately. Jasper, an inquisitive little black boy, was a puppet character created by George Pal, an animator hired by Paramount, who designed a whole new art of animation with his stop-motion puppetry. As Robert Neupert argues, it was precisely the strangeness of Pal’s mode of production coupled with the objectionable content of the Jasper series that has unfortunately allowed cinema studies to isolate and even ignore these strange and amazing animated films.¹⁹

Certainly, the new progressive technique of animation was, from the viewer’s perspective, very interesting and cutting-edge. Nevertheless, the use of the classic Pickanniny stereotype was more than confusing for the contemporary audiences and left many of the press reaction puzzled: “The Hollywood Quarterly said in 1946 that Pal perpetuated the misconception of the Negro characteristics. When we are building a democratic world...it is libellous to present the razor-totin’, ghost-haunted, chicken-stealin’ concept of American Negro.”²⁰ Undoubtedly, Jasper is portrayed in a racist manner, with large excessive lips, eager for a watermelon hunt

¹⁹ Robert Neupert, “Trouble in the Watermelon Land. George Pal and the Little Jasper Cartoons”. *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 1. University of California Press. Fall 2001. January 2012 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/fq.2001.55.1.14>> 15.

²⁰ Neupert, 25.

and is frightened by a scarecrow. Nonetheless, the difficulty in assessing the racist issue seems to be highly ambiguous.

Since the delicate matter of categorical racial stereotyping was unknown to Pal, a born Hungarian, it is impossible to label the cartoon as racist without further observation. Clearly, what constitutes the trouble in this cartoon is not only the exaggeration of physical features that is considered racist, but it is primarily the whole social construct of race and the respectively assigned behavioural stereotypes. In fact, in all the various contentions regarding race and its elements, it is primarily the socially constructed pattern of set images and characteristics that constitutes the label *race*. The whole concept of race and the dichotomy of blackness and whiteness is, according to Morrison's critique a social construct that inhabits African-American literary canon. In her essay, Morrison explores the ramifications of the strict black and white dichotomy and claims that the impenetrable whiteness functions as a constructed ideology.²¹ Given this context, Africans may serve as "surrogate selves for meditations on problems of human freedom, as an objectified image of reined-in, bound, suppressed and repressed darkness in the American psyche."²²

Looking at the tradition of minstrel shows which featured the African-American man as the ultimate buffoon and trickster, it is possible to link the stereotypical depiction of a Negro to Gates's theory of the signifying discourse in the African-American tradition. Gates states about the typical motif in African-American discourse:

Signifying seems to be a Negro term, in use if not in origin [...] ... it certainly refers to the trickster's ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle, and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean making fun of a person or situation.²³

²¹ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard U P, 1992) 32-33.

²² Morrison, 37-39.

²³ Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford U P, 1988) 54.

Thus, it is possible to see parallels between the discourse and the aforementioned ideological concept of race. Minstrel shows, as well as animated films which exploited various African-American images had employed a stock character who tricked and, in a sense, overpowered the white audience in order to overcome the unjust racial barrier. Consequently, the concept of race as a social construct resulted in the ultimate projection of this particular aspect into animated films. In other words, it is evident that race as such becomes an ideology possessed by the human mind which later on functions as a commodity in the entertainment industry. Thus, George Pal clearly capitalised on the omnipresent issue of race as a construct in his animated production, even though he did not directly employ the significant Coon character (as the ultimate trickster who uses seemingly idiotic discourse to overpower the white man) but portrayed the Pickanniny stereotype instead. As a consequence, Pal's ignorance and inability to register any concern over his work complicate the perception of his intended animation.

Unlike other Paramount pictures, which were clearly intended to evoke racist stereotypes, it is widely believed that Pal was excused for his ignorance of African-American culture. As Cohen quotes: "...as a European not raised on race prejudice, to Pal there was nothing abusive about a Negro boy who likes to eat watermelons."²⁴ Pal was often accused of reinforcing negative and biased stereotypes about the black community, to which he responded by disapproving those statements. According to Neupert in interviews during the 1940s, George Pal appeared to hide behind his supposed naivety, claiming that as an immigrant, he was simply bringing to life a truly American black folk character, and harboured no racial prejudices himself. To him even, the little Jasper represented the Huckleberry Finn of American folklore.²⁵ However, Neupert further claims that this sort of defence obviously sounds fairly hollow since Pal, who had seen the rise of Nazism in Europe and fled to the USA could hardly pretend to know nothing of racism and ethnic superiority. Yet for years Pal

²⁴ Karl F. Cohen, *Forbidden Animation. Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004) 58.

²⁵ Neupert, 21.

argued that upon arriving in America he was intrigued with and inspired by black culture, so he was deeply troubled when people attacked him for creating Jasper.²⁶ Whether or not the racist attack was intended, the ‘Jasper’ cartoons clearly exploit the recognisable form of literary stereotypes. It is not only the little mischievous Pickanniny Jasper; the Mammy figure is also embedded into the narrative. Also, the cartoons promote certain nostalgia over the “good old days”.

In *Jasper and the Watermelons* the little boy is told by his mammy not to eat any watermelons, since they give him “the colic”. Naturally, the forbidden fruit tastes the best and so Jasper longingly and dreamingly gazes at the watermelons in the garden when he is confronted by a scarecrow and a blackbird. They lure him into the watermelon land, in which many giant watermelons grow, tempting his appetite so intensely that Jasper’s eyes change into little watermelons as he watches them. As the story develops, Jasper is transmitted to a land with giant watermelons and mountains of pink watermelon slices. However, he is not allowed to eat any of them, and he manages to escape as the watermelons and trees become alive, and begin to chase and haunt him. He finds solace in his mammy’s arms, and she rewards him with a slice of a watermelon. As he feels deceived by the scarecrow and the blackbird, he throws the watermelon slice at them. He returns to his little house in which he lives with his mother.

Thus, the aforementioned plot summary illustrates that Pal’s work was undoubtedly based on the literary black stereotypes that he coined into a new shape by using a stop-motion technique of animation. There are several indicators explaining why the cartoon was generally found offensive, apart from the fact that Jasper represents a little Pickanniny stereotype. The first stereotype relates back to the period after the abolition of slavery, which captured many African-American families as poor, uneducated and living in run down houses. Additionally, the single mother character is revealing of the stereotypical attributes of the cartoon. The loving mammy, whose face is never revealed, is portrayed as the typical maid, with obese

²⁶ Neupert, 21-22.

body, arms and legs and her frontal parts are covered with an apron. As Neupert observes, this diegetic world was not far removed from the earliest racist films that featured black folks in watermelon-eating contests or stealing chickens from a neighbour's farm.²⁷ Thus, viewing the cartoon from a contemporary perspective, there is hardly any doubt in calling it racist and offensive, albeit the pleasing and spectacular animation technique.

Interestingly enough, however, the 'Jasper' series eventually came to an end because of what Paramount saw as the excessive cost of production, not because of the content. Paramount released many other racist cartoons produced for them by Famous Studios in New York. Apart from the strong anti-Japanese propaganda from 1942 onwards, the 'Popeye' series also featured some black stereotypes, especially in *Fightin' Pals* released in 1940. Disregarding the pub humour and sexist depiction of women, the racial issue is also very important to the old Popeye series. In *Fightin' Pals*, Popeye the Sailor sails to Africa to find his Bluto comrade, who got lost during an expedition to Africa. When Popeye arrives in Africa, he immediately finds himself in a jungle. This is another exploitation of the jungle as a savage African setting serving the racist stereotype. However, the most offensive image emerges when Popeye encounters a lion, overpowers him by entering his mouth and converts him to a tamed dog. The dog is portrayed in clear blackface manner, with a bowler hat and excessive lips. In the moment of conversion, jazz music fades in. By kicking the dog's backside, Popeye utters: "Aah, a cute little loyal" and disappears into the jungle where two signs point to the "Dark" and the "Darkest" Africa.

Looking at Walt Disney's implementation of racial stereotypes into his animated films, we may consider a few of his characters as obvious black stereotypes. Clearly, the disputable issue of Mickey Mouse being or not being a blackface caricature establishes a field for a further discussion on Disney's possibly intended racism. However, several sources and critiques prove that Disney, as well as other animators of the early era, used various black stereotypes in their animations. As previously mentioned, in Disney's first animated cartoons

²⁷ Neupert, 23.

with Alice, Disney implemented caricatures of black people according to the inherent stereotype of the wild African savage. Subsequently, his popular character of Mickey Mouse, which appeared in *Steamboat Willie* for the first time in 1928, also remains disputable in terms of assessing racial stereotypes.

In one of the first Disney's cartoons *Alice Cans the Cannibals* from 1925, black people are depicted as wild tribal cannibals who attack Alice with arrows, however they are unable to target her. The cannibals have large lips and naked bodies covered with a straw cloth over their loins. The tribe dances and includes stereotypical monkey movements, clearly emphasizing their uncivilized nature. The gag suggests that Alice eventually manages to overpower the cannibals and wins the fight. It is evident that in his early works Disney shared this enthusiasm to portray African-Americans as tribal savages and portrayed them in this manner. In *Steamboat Willie*, a blackface Mickey Mouse sings a nineteenth-century gospel song, while piloting a craft through the deep South.

Unlike Bosko, Mickey is an animal caricature, a mouse with a tail and ears. However, in terms of blackface representation, he shares an immediate and primitive relationship to music with Bosko. As previously argued, the blackface element is pertinent to Disney's representation of the black culture, however only in certain aspects. Mickey, in the early cartoons, dances and imitates the movements of the popular minstrel shows. In *Steamboat Willie* from 1928, jazz music plays a key role in assessing Mickey's intended racial puns in terms of dance and lampooning movements. Nonetheless, in attempt to avoid the popular discussion of Mickey's mythical blackness, which, in my opinion, seems to be based prevalently on false interpretations and mainstream media messages due to its immense popularity, it is perhaps more interesting to focus on one of the most controversial Disney cartoons of all times: *Song of the South*, the issue of which is further discussed in chapter 4, subchapter 4.3.

In conclusion, it seems likely that the prevalent representation of blacks in the animation production studios strongly exploited the racial stereotypes. As Cohen concludes, certain animation productions clearly ridiculed and mocked the African-American culture, by assigning the stereotypes that were easily recognisable and functional.²⁸ Nevertheless, it also seems clear, as Lindvall and Fraser consolidate, that the targeted stereotypical imagery was not motivated by any personal hatred or animosity, but rather by a sort of a cultural naivety, a.k.a. institutional racism.²⁹ Based on the minstrel blackface shows as an inspirational source for animation, the white animators in Warner Bros. de facto painted their faces black, using their cartoon characters to echo the blackface performance. Furthermore, they exploited many other stereotypical images that contributed to the negative perception of the cartoons later on. Consequently, it can be seen that in the pre-war era, Warner Bros., Paramount and Disney knowingly did release racist cartoons and offered rather distorted and one-sided representation of the African-American population.

²⁸ Cohen, 57-58.

²⁹ Lindvall and Fraser, 133.

4 Animating the Second World War and Its Aftermath

When analysing race and ethnicity in America shortly before and during the Second World War, it is necessary to acknowledge the historical context and political concerns. In the mid 1930s, blackface representation was still considered a patriotic image; it was deeply ingrained in American animation and the portrayal of other ethnicities was very scarce. Occasionally, a few anti-Semitic images appeared in cartoons, however jazz, minstrel shows and savage Africa were still a reliable source to supply the vast entertainment demand. However, with the establishment of Nazi Germany in 1933, one can begin to see a clear gradual shift in portraying other recognisable human images, rather than just focusing on African-American stereotypes. The blackface character, still familiar to audiences during this time, therefore ceased to play the central role in racial stereotyping and nearly disappeared from animation shortly after the 1940s. Starting from the year 1941 when the United States officially entered the World War after the attack on Pearl Harbor, it is possible to trace the turbulent shift of racial representation in animation. Black stereotypes were eliminated, at some places even omitted, and the war propaganda targeted its audience by depicting Japanese people in a stereotypical, derogatory and racist manner instead.

In the early 1930s a few embedded stereotypes of the Jewish population were included in some animations. Several images of Jews appeared in cartoons, which stereotypically depicted anti-Semitic images centring around Jewish religion and culture. Jews in cartoons from this era are almost exclusively portrayed as peddlers and vendors, speaking with a heavy Yiddish or German accent. In all cartoons produced by Paramount and the Van Beuren Studio in New York, Jews are animated as merchants with excessively big noses and hats. Thus, we can see that there is an inherent style of animating racial groups; animators tended to exaggerate stereotypical physical features. As Cohen observes, the Van Beuren Studio's cartoons were less sophisticated than Paramount production, so they tended to do very little

with ethnic images in terms of developing solid gags. Instead they preferred to deploy basic and easily recognisable stereotypes.¹

Certain stereotypes additionally appear in the 'Betty Boop' series, an animated cartoon from the Fleischer Brothers workshop. Occasional references are included in Betty Boop's *Minnie the Moocher*, which features her father as an angry Jew, wearing a kippah, glasses and a moustache, speaking with a thick Yiddish accent. Another reference to the stereotypical portrayal of the Jews appears in Betty Boop's *Lifeguard*. The short scene presents a character with many hats stacked on his head, which, according to Cohen, is the typical caricature of a Jewish peddler.² He utters something in Yiddish and runs off from the monster that chases Betty in the undersea world.

However, what is surprising is the fact that the implemented Jewish jokes play only a subsidiary role in the story. In other words, there is no cartoon that builds up the plot line and develops it according to the stereotype or deriving from it, as many of the African-American stereotypical cartoons did. Interestingly, most of the jokes and gags were suggested by animators or co-authors who themselves were of Jewish origin. Cohen quotes that there was also a certain tendency to avoid the usage of Jewish stereotypes gradually in the Fleischer Studios and Paramount:

Animator Myron Waldman, who is Jewish, remembers being told to avoid showing signs with recognisable lettering on them whenever possible...previously, a shop sign might have said 'kosher' in Hebrew or English, but now Paramount wanted the letters to be impossible to read.³

Paradoxically, as previously mentioned, Paramount created and authorised many racist cartoons targeted against the African-American population. Moreover, Paramount was the sole producer of the 'Popeye' cartoons which featured the war propaganda content.

¹ Cohen, 72.

² Cohen, 72.

³ Cohen, 72.

Logically, the rise of anti-Semitism and Nazism in Europe in the 1930s resulted in a gradual elimination of Jewish stereotypes by the middle of the decade. A clear example of this would be Disney's cartoon *Three Little Pigs*, released in 1933, which underwent several changes in depicting the anti-Semitic images. The original version of the cartoon portrays the wolf who intends to destroy the pigs' houses as a Jewish vendor, a door-to-door brush salesman. The wolf is actually disguised, wearing a mask consisting of glasses, hat, long coat and an extremely big nose. He tries to trick the pigs with this disguise, but ultimately fails. While singing the song "Who's afraid of a big bad wolf", the pigs manage to overpower the wolf and save their houses.

Looking at the original version from the contextual perspective, it might be perceived as a clear insensitive anti-Semitic image, arousing negative emotions towards the Jewish population. By implementing the recognisable negative perspective of a Jew that has been carved into a typical presentation of a "Jewish trickster/vendor" stereotype for centuries, Disney again caused a deliberate controversy amongst its audiences. While the studio was known as having employed relatively few Jews, the scene cannot be defended as made and created by Jews themselves, as was the case of the Fleischer Brothers and their 'Betty Boop' production. According to Cohen's analysis, it is not known when the studio decided to change the big bad wolf scene; however there was a tendency from outside to convey the message to Disney that his insensitive usage of the stereotype was offensive. Also, Sam Singer, a Jewish animator for Disney left the studio because the people who worked with were openly and verbally anti-Semitic.⁴

Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe the later development of the *Three Little Pigs* story, which employs other ethnic stereotypes and references. The Metro Goldwyn Meyer version of the story called *The Blitz Wolf* from 1942 portrays the wolf as Adolf Hitler whose plan is to invade the pigs' houses; however they overpower him with their cunning plan. He burns their houses, uses gunpowder and tanks to destroy everything around him, while shouting about his

⁴ Cohen, 73.

conquest in a heavy German accent. Apart from the satire used at the beginning — the Wolf (Hitler) arrives in a tank from which he flies the banner: “I don’t want to set the world on fire” — the cartoon displays rather offensive stereotypes. Firstly, Germany as a nation is labeled as “Pigmania” on the map. This exploits the national stereotype, which, from a current perspective, labels all Germans as Hitler’s followers and provides a rather distorted and one-sided image of the problematic rise of Nazism in Europe. Secondly, the reference to attacking Japan is more offensive; when Tokyo is bombarded, a cheerful melody fades in and drowns out the original Japanese music playing just before the bomb explodes. Adding to this derogatory representation of the Japanese people, when the pigs hide in the shed, the visible sign of “No dogs allowed” is crossed out and, instead of “dogs”, we can see a red sign that states: “No Japs allowed”, a very derogatory term which originated in the war as a label for Japanese people. Disregarding the violent nature of the cartoon, we can already see the clear pejorative propaganda that served to influence American opinion, which commenced immediately after the attack of the Pearl Harbor in 1941. It seems irrelevant to consider it categorically inappropriate that such a cartoon be accessible to children; nonetheless, the metaphorical use of the three pigs building their houses to protect their piece of land from the big bad wolf cannot be labeled differently than a targeted, organised propaganda.

Interestingly enough, animation from the early 1940s gained a new method of viewing race and ethnicity. From my point of view, there was a shift towards a new approach of depicting racial and ethnic stereotypes. While the 1920s onwards presented audiences with the old, recognisable stereotypes of African-Americans, the tendency to portray other ethnicities and nationalities was rising with the outburst of war in the USA. It seems therefore likely that the caricaturised depiction of African-Americans reflected the threat of the white majority of the United States and served to strengthen the inferior social status of the black population. On the contrary, the negative depiction of the Japanese or the Russians had a common denominator: they were an enemy and threat to the whole society due to their war-like status.

Even though the Japanese and Russians possessed different features in animation, being depicted as war enemies, the need to caricaturise them in negative shapes echoed the urge to ridicule an ethnic group by exploiting the basic stereotypes without any further consideration. Since the African-Americans were regarded as the comparably inferior race to the white population, the tendency to depict them in a derogatory way and to ridicule them was a logical necessity to ensure white domination over the black population. The same method in various similar modifications classifies all the other ethnic stereotypes and this concept is later coupled with the targeted propaganda in the Second World War and the Cold War.

In order to assess the depiction of ethnic stereotypes in the propaganda cartoons during the war era, it is necessary to analyse the position of the African-Americans in this period. Since the recognisable black stereotypes gradually disappear during these years, the need for ethnic stereotyping targets its newly gained dimensions. The main fact stays that African-Americans were, for the first time in history, acknowledged as somewhat equal to white Americans due to their recruitment in the armed forces; yet their previous animated presentation is, from a current perspective, humiliating and derogatory.

4.1 Transforming Black Representation in Cartoons

Moving forwards to the war era, it is fascinating to observe the way propaganda and all its varied forms, such as short films, cartoons, songs and length featured films entered the epoch, leaving remarkable traces behind. With the official outburst of the war in America, the need for military service increased. African-American men were consequently called upon to serve for the American troops in Europe and the US, and therefore their status changed radically. Naturally, it is too early to consider civil and racial equality at that point; however the war itself accelerated the process of civil rights recognition for the African-American population. In fact, due to the necessity of their support in the US' military action, one can argue that the reasoning of the African-Americans to claim their citizenship rights strengthened and became more feasible than before. In animation, this aspect is captured by different approaches

towards racial stereotypes. Particularly, the treatment of the African-American stereotypes is rather ambivalent in its nature in cartoons created during the war era.

The struggle against fascism raised questions and demands about the social status and civil rights of the African-Americans that had been too long ignored. Lehman claims that the African-Americans who fought in or supported the war effort hoped that their liberation of Europe from Hitler's "master race" plan would result in the dismantling of Jim Crow laws in the United States.⁵ Also, in the poll taken in 1942, 18 percent of Harlem's African-American population felt that they would receive better treatment if Japan won the war, and 31 percent felt that their treatment would remain the same whether Japan or the United States was victorious.⁶ It is possible to claim that the racial issue became somewhat more delicate with the military intervention. The contemporary printing press published several reactions to cartoons in which African-Americans were portrayed according to the set stereotypes. As Lehman quotes, a few white privates serving in the army opposed to the racist content, claiming that they would rather see a picture about African-American servicemen's bravery in combat.⁷

It is possible to see a reduced number of cartoons which employed offensive depiction of the African-Americans. Furthermore, the main focus shifted to portraying the immediate enemy of the era – Japan. Black stereotypes are therefore eliminated, however what remains is the presence of the black culture in some cartoons. In certain war all-black cartoons, the prevalent stereotypical image copies the minstrel figures dressed in uniforms, exploiting the blackface image. Due to the rising protests against such portrayal from both white audiences and the NAACP, the animators produced images of black people contributing to the war effort. However, this aspect is also quite disputable. As Lehman observes, the cartoonists watered down critical and radical black expression in order to make their caricatures of wartime blacks "safe" and patriotic. In addition, the caricatures reflected the refusal of the federal government

⁵ Lehman, 74.

⁶ Eric Smoodin, "Disappearance of Dissent: Government Propaganda and the Military Film Bill". *Animating Culture* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993) 74-75.

⁷ Lehman, 75.

itself to take seriously the participation of African-Americans in the war effort. According to Lehman, by 1943 only 79'000 of the 500'000 African-Americans in the U.S. Army were in active combat; the rest were serving in segregated units overseas, performing the menial tasks of unloading ships, building roads and driving supply convoys.⁸

Thus, the issue of the involvement of the African-Americans in the military service was presented in an ambivalent and rather puzzling way. Firstly, there is an obvious absence of black heroic figures. Propaganda cartoons targeted at soldiers and recruits overseas featured male heroic archetypes. Despite the numerous proportions of black people involved in the war effort and in the military, the only heroic figures featured as part of propaganda animation are white. Warner Bros.' *Private Snafu* cartoons, paid and sponsored by the government, employ a white male hero that wins over the fascist Axis powers, albeit his poor social manners, lazy behaviour and virtually no education. Secondly, it is the minstrel blackface stereotype that still functions as a source; yet is reductive and scarcer in its implementation of the stereotypical portrayal. The reliance on racial humour is also the central plot line in the Warner Bros. parody cartoon *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*.

It is necessary to note that from a contemporary point of view, the cartoon actually assigns partly a positive role to the black culture. It is true that it is dedicated to America of the African-Americans; since it references their heritage and historical background and acknowledges their role in the military service. On the other hand, it exploits the recognisable stereotypes of minstrel shows and blackface, coupled with the over-sexualised black female image, even though it portrays black female sexuality for the very first time in animation. From a current viewpoint, the cartoon is undoubtedly racist as it deploys exaggerated physical and bodily features. However, even nowadays the juxtaposition of the complimentary dedication and the minstrel stereotyping leaves the audience puzzled. Since the cartoon implies both negative and positive race stereotypes, it is not possible to claim that the implied

⁸ Lehman, 75.

racist overtones are clear-cut in this particular animated sketch, as was the case with the pre-war cartoons.

The theme of *Coal Black and De Sebben Dwarfs* constantly oscillates between two different positions: one deals with assigning a specific stereotype to a certain ethnic group, for example, with the deployment of racist images, whilst the other acknowledges those images positively, in order to understand the culture of the “other”. Since *Coal Black and De Sebben Dwarfs* does not deal with the factual representation of a lazy Negro, nitwit minstrel entertainer or a servile Uncle Tom as such, but rather a culture assigned to the “other”—meaning other than the white population—it is interesting to observe the perception of the attributes of race that were present to the time when *Coal Black* was created. In terms of black stereotypes, the popular culture of race stereotyping had developed over decades from ridicule and mockery into careful acknowledging of the otherness, in terms of racial and ethnic characteristics. In order to understand those aspects of racist stereotypes, it is necessary to analyse its content and context thoroughly.

Since there was no other image that would define the features of African-Americans, it was crucial to re-define the culture of the blacks, and that is where *Coal Black and De Sebben Dwarfs* is a turning point in this era. The images of African-Americans in the *Coal Black and De Sebben Dwarfs* are of a juxtaposing, unclear nature. On one hand, certain classic stereotypes are implied: a robust Mammy figure tells a story about a Snow White, with a strong African-American accent, one of the dwarfs is portrayed as a minstrel and all black characters throughout the story dance to the beat of jazz music. This, as previously mentioned, clearly embodies the disappearing stereotypes typical for depiction of African-Americans. However, what Robert Clampett, the creator of the cartoon, intended was to allow the audience the view on the “other” culture that coexists in the American society. According to Lindvall, Clampett actually visited nightclubs in black neighbourhoods of Los Angeles in order to become acquainted with the African-American culture and the way they relax and

socialise.⁹ This, at least from my perspective, serves as an illustration of careful consideration before actually animating the cartoon, and their attempt to re-enact a realistic portrayal of a black community.

Therefore, it is possible to claim that, in Clampett's case, it was no longer the stereotypical image of the blacks that would be portrayed, but rather his personal experience amongst this community. Naturally, when we overlook his intentions and focus on the animation itself, we find certain racial overtones in the cartoon. In terms of physical features, the stereotypes assigned to the protagonists are present from the very beginning to the end. On one hand, the depiction of Prince Chawming's giant lips with huge teeth fashioned by dice and So White's oversexed black female body fulfils the actual basis of animation, which is exaggeration and fantasy. On the other hand, such depiction is regarded racist or, at least, inappropriate. So, again the ambiguous label emerges. In my opinion, after considering all the possible facts, it should not be primarily regarded as offensive to the African-Americans. Also, as Lindvall observes, African-Americans themselves did not know how to appropriately react to the cartoon. Lindvall quotes Thomas Cripps, pointing out the actual ambivalence of the cartoon that left black audiences without a consensus of opinion. The NAACP was trapped by the ambiguity, complaining of the seven grotesque dwarfs but amongst themselves, at least, appreciating the humour.¹⁰

Lehman analyses *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* as racist in terms of the false representation and interpretation of the black characters, especially in regard to the soldier dwarfs. He argues that African-American service is demeaned and miniaturised and resembles the inept acting of the blackface entertainers. *Coal Black's* also known as 'So White's' vocation as a happy washerwoman is actually an inverted Mammy stereotype.¹¹ Certainly, Lehman carefully observes hints of racial stereotyping that are capitalised once again to

⁹ Lindvall and Fraser, 131.

¹⁰ Lindvall and Fraser, 131.

¹¹ Lehman, 78.

entertain audiences and mock ethnic groups. He also observes that the comical depiction of African-American soldiers enraged the NAACP.¹²

However, in addition to this, it is necessary to mention that there are moments in the cartoon, which are clearly intended to show a positive image of the African-Americans. Therefore, these images support my argument on the rather non-racist nature of the cartoon, naturally from the contemporary wartime perspective. The fact that the grotesque dwarfs declare “We are in the army now” underlines the claim that Clampett’s aim was to acknowledge the African-American people as equal inhabitants of the United States, serving in the military. The blacks are acknowledged as equally important citizens in the time of a war, not to be overlooked and ignored any more. Furthermore, when “So White” fries eggs for the dwarfs, the image of the American flag emerges. This then might be perceived as a symbol for not only the unity of all the men in the war, but also the unity of whites and blacks, united under the same flag and American identity.

A similar animated frame can be spotted in the scene where “So White” dances with the Prince Chawming; when the classical music plays, they seem less interested in dancing, but as soon as the tune of beat and jazz fades in, they dance enthusiastically. The scene of them dancing is not portrayed in a rude, offensive way, but in a comical display of the previously mentioned “otherness” of the African-Americans, stemming from their temperament and sense of rhythm. Even though it may be also perceived as a stereotype assigned to the blacks (that their main interests are simply singing and dancing), it is not presented with an offensive intention, at least from my perspective. Disputably enough, it is not possible to state clearly what the creator’s intention was, be it a portrayal, perhaps a “celebration” of the African-American culture, or a racist cartoon aimed to mock the black citizens in the United States. According to the facts stated earlier in this analysis, I would disregard the latter claim.

¹² Lehman, 79.

Indisputably, one thing remains transparent, and that is the fact of that it was the norm to implement certain racial stereotypes into such depiction. Nonetheless, whether those stereotypical images were used in order to describe the different nature of the African-Americans or to function as a targeted racist rhetoric is difficult to ascertain. The fact is that the cartoon earned a significant amount of attention even from the black audiences and was not primarily considered racist. That is, at least from my point of view, evidence of the creator's intention to portray the African-American culture as realistically as possible.

In fact, as Lindvall and Fraser conclude, the representation of blacks was rarely abusive, albeit its vulgarity and mockery. Since cartoons are an embodiment of irreverence in their nature, it is possible to see the art of parody. Paradoxically, where one finds the most heavy-handed scenes with derogatory stereotypes are in the references to the Japanese such as when "So White" advertises: "We rub out anyone for a price; midgets, half price; Japs free."¹³ To conclude, it is possible to claim that if we take the hypothesis of a cartoon as a tool to ridicule everything and everyone, we might digress from the racist issue, disregarding it and not giving this aspect its deserved importance.

However, after immediate closer observation, the inspiration from minstrel blackface performance, which was utterly racist and offensive, highlights the fact that cartoons functioned as targeted racist propaganda, particularly throughout the animation era's Golden Age, even though some might claim otherwise. Nevertheless, the treatment of black stereotypes remains ambiguous in the war cartoons, in other words, they are eliminated at some point, and employed not as often as in the pre-war era. With the outburst of war at the US territory, the immediate rise of anti-Japanese propaganda captured animation as one of the exclusive mediators of the negative stereotypes amongst audiences.

¹³ Lindvall and Fraser, 133.

4.2 Propaganda Cartoons and the Japanese

During the Second World War, animated cartoons were employed strategically to convey political and patriotic messages for the American servicemen. In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, cartoons portraying the Japanese in a derogatory manner were highly successful in their production. The negative stereotypes and physical caricatures of the Japanese were designed to strengthen the resistance towards their military power. As Smoodin states, in the 1940s military propaganda the film bill constructed a space where propaganda, advertisements and the like could be shown, but one overriding theme was apparent: a national consensus accepting the challenges of hardship and the undertaking of responsibility to achieve an American-made peace. To control this, he observes, the power of controlling the ‘male gaze’ was crucial to achieve the desired goal of boosting moral.¹⁴ Thus, cartoons were animated according to the tastes and manners of the soldiers serving in the military forces and received funding and sponsorship from the national government. The cartoons were created for educational purposes and influenced male audiences’ thoughts on topics such as class, race, gender, technology, religion and leisure. Two of the most famous propaganda state-funded cartoons were the *Private SNAFU* films mentioned earlier in the text, in which a lazy private was educated about spies, war enemies and the use of arms and weapons, and the *Popeye the Sailor* cartoons, which ridiculed and mocked the Japanese military forces.

As previously mentioned, racist references towards the Japanese already appeared in the *Blitz Wolf* and *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* cartoons. However, in terms of clear racial stereotyping, the Popeye cartoons—Paramount’s production sponsored by government funding—depicted the most derogatory racial images of the Japanese in animation. In *You’re a Sap Mr. Jap* Popeye sails the sea, singing a song about the Japanese, when he spots the Japanese flotilla. He is tricked by their banner declaring peace to the United States and decides to sign the peace treaty but meanwhile his shoe explodes. The Japanese soldiers attack

¹⁴ Smoodin, 75.

him again, but he nevertheless overpowers them and fights back with the help of a can of spinach, leaving the Japanese battleship to drown in the sea.

Certainly, the excessive physical caricature represents the most obvious example of racial stereotyping. All the Japanese in the 'Popeye' cartoons are portrayed as short men with oversized buckteeth, thick glasses and excessively slanted eyes. They speak with a heavy accent and their teeth are usually rotten and discoloured. Their physical features are caricatured and their bodies are likened to apes, dogs, vipers and spies. Their physical abilities are ridiculed and in all the cartoons, they are portrayed as inefficient soldiers since Popeye wins all the battles against them. In *Scrap the Japs*, Popeye the Sailor takes the Japanese into captivity and triumphantly places them in a cage on the ship called "Jap Scrap Repair Ship". In *Seein' Red, White n' Blue* the Japanese are first portrayed as babies in an orphanage. However, their faces are depicted in the same way as their adult counterparts are. Their teeth are massive and they all wear thick glasses. At one point, they all transform into military service men, ready to intervene with knives and scissors placed among their teeth. They are later taken captive and imprisoned. Popeye demonstrates his victory by singing a song, while pulling the captives on a boat behind him.

In Leon Schlesinger's cartoon *Tokio Jokio*, the Japanese themselves present their power over winning the war in a news-like programme. They are sketched as little monsters with giant faces and excessive physical features with an accent that incites ridicule from audiences. Their war victory is portrayed as the naked "Japanese victory suit" with no cuffs, no pleats, no lapels and no food. The Japanese general is depicted as being so short that he has to use stilts to walk. Furthermore, when analysing the propaganda cartoons, it is possible to see a tendency to sketch the Japanese as monkey-like creatures. Thus, in these cartoons the racial stereotypes represent the very basis from which to create an enemy war-like situation, in other words, the stereotypical images serve as alpha and omega in developing the plotline.

In order to cultivate attitudes about nationalism and patriotism, the producers used the most distasteful racial images in these cartoons, relying on, and then exaggerating the stereotypical ways of portraying an ethnic group. As Wells observes, the cartoon in its nature becomes inherently metaphysical because it is playing out creative ideas, which are extrapolated from, and interpretive of, observational and representational coding. This invariably results in expression which moves beyond the recognisable limits of the material world in order to comment upon them.¹⁵

Thus, taking racial stereotyping in animation as a mere fantasy of a work of art, for that is one interpretation of the cartoon itself, it is possible to disregard the content as offensive. However, looking at the historical context, it is obvious that we must consider art as a device to manipulate political concerns about nationalism and societal views, depicting an utterly offensive image of the war enemies. Looking at the historical background, it is necessary to note the following:

Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, dated February 19, 1942, gave the military broad powers to ban any citizen [American citizens of Japanese ancestry and resident aliens from Japan] from a fifty- to sixty-mile-wide coastal area stretching from Washington state to California and extending inland into southern Arizona. The order also authorized transporting these citizens to assembly centers hastily set up and governed by the military in California, Arizona, Washington state, and Oregon.¹⁶

Taking into account the fact that these targeted propaganda cartoons received regular funding from the government and that, during and shortly after the war Japanese servicemen were imprisoned in American concentration camps and citizens of Japanese origin had been ghettoized and separated on purpose from the white population of the United States, it is apparent that the portrayal of the Japanese in the offensive manner was clearly intended to be racist, demeaning and humiliating. With regard to the facts mentioned above, it is possible to

¹⁵ Paul Wells, *Animation in America* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 7.

¹⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order No. 9066, February 19, 1942 <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5154/>>

observe that America of the 1940s was still vastly influenced by racial segregation, ethnic diversity and targeted separation of different ethnic groups from the white majority of the population. In addition, apart from the majority of the Japanese population, Roosevelt's Executive Order included the eviction of citizens of German and Italian descent from certain areas. Furthermore, what remains fascinating about this historical era is that many white citizens and, as previously mentioned, white servicemen in the war, strongly opposed to African-American stereotypes in animation; yet they completely disregarded the negative depiction of the Japanese during this era as of similar relevance.

The aftermath of war was marked by several factors in development of animation. Firstly, the shock of the Pearl Harbor attack managed to exclude Japanese from the society, who, neglected and ghettoised, had to abandon their businesses and face a societal oppression and racial prejudice. Secondly, the cartoons of the aftermath were still teeming with African-American imagery. No new characters were developed, however the tendency to return to the African-American recognisable stereotype after the end of the war was apparent in some studios. However, due to the involvement of African-American servicemen in the war, the controversial attitudes protesting their negative stereotypical depiction were becoming more and more prevalent in society and soon they became impossible to ignore.

4.3 Disney and the Song of the South

The partly animated and partly live action version of Joe Chandler Harris's *Tales of Uncle Remus* was surrounded by critical attitudes and controversial statements immediately after its release, though from a current point of view it represents one of Disney's forgotten and abandoned cartoons. After its release in 1946, as Cohen states, *Time* magazine called Uncle Remus a character bound to enrage all educated Negroes and a number of damyankees.¹⁷ However, Disney denied there was any real antagonism towards the film. As Cohen further quotes, Disney declared that: "the time had not yet come when Negro susceptibilities could be

¹⁷ Cohen, 60.

treated with as much delicacy as Hollywood reserves for, say, American Catholics.”¹⁸ Such a strong statement stirred up several leaders of the black community to speak out against the picture. The film features the traditional Southern Negro dialect, employing one of the many easily recognisable stereotypes. Uncle Remus is a typical servile Negro, the Mammy and Aunt Jemima figure is present and all the clichés contain a slightly nostalgic view of the past, promoting false illusions about master-slave relationship. Indeed, no matter how much we may view it as fairytale fiction, the overall image of the blacks singing their spirituals, listening to Uncle Remus’s tales and obeying their white counterparts creates the ideal picture of slavery.

After its release, the reaction of the black community was immediate. Walter White, an executive secretary of the NAACP, sent the following telegram to the press on the 27th November, 1946:

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People recognizes in “Song of the South” remarkable artistic merit in the music and in the combination of living actors and the cartoon technique. It regrets, however, that in an effort neither to offend audiences in the north or south, the production helps to perpetuate a dangerously glorified picture of slavery. Making use of the beautiful Uncle Remus folklore, “Song of the South” unfortunately gives the impression of an idyllic master-slave relationship which is a distortion of the facts.¹⁹

As Cohen further observes, the protests of the black community increased during the National Negro Congress in December 1946 where one-day demonstration was held to voice dissatisfaction with the release of Disney’s version of Uncle Remus.²⁰ The situation after the WW2 was more than delicate. Since many African-Americans were recruited in the US army, racial tensions in the media were silenced for a few years. An image of a happy Negro telling tales to his younger companions within the formerly legalised system of slavery enraged

¹⁸ Cohen, 60.

¹⁹ Cohen, 61.

²⁰ Cohen, 61.

many African-Americans who, by declaring: “We fought for Uncle Sam, not Uncle Tom” clearly demonstrated that the release of Disney’s film disrupted peaceful race relations and promoted “Uncle Tom-ism as the model of how Negroes should behave in the white company.”²¹

Indeed, when watching the film, it is impossible to separate history from the present and view it merely as artistic fiction. In my opinion, the problem of the film is undermined by the fact that the recognised racial stereotypes are applied onto the characters without providing any real alternatives to them. Disney’s inspiration by Harris’s novel about the happy Negroes on a plantation then serves as an attack on the whole modern black population that has just returned from war, serving the nation on the fronts. After the silenced period of eliminating black stereotypes in media, Disney shocked the public with a, by this stage slightly outdated, film about simple, happy old uncle Remus and his hearty relationship with little Johnny. Even from a current perspective, the overall impression the film gives is more than disturbing.

As in many other novels, Harris’s *Tales of Uncle Remus* provides an insight into the history of America. Even though Harris proclaimed that he merely gathered the stories that he heard while working on a southern plantation, his attitude towards slavery was positive. In defense of slavery, his novels promoted idyllic master-slave relationships between blacks and whites in particular. In a stark contrast to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Harris promoted the image of a happy former slave, knowing his place within the white society. Taking into account the fact that in 1946 racial segregation was still fully supported and legally recognized, albeit tensions against its abolishment were rising, releasing the film adaptation of a book defending slavery caused Disney a lot of controversy.

As critics observe, Disney knew about the possible politically ambiguous message he was sending to audiences in his partly animated and partly live action film. Despite the fact that the Disney Studio repeatedly expressed surprise over objections to the film, claiming that the

²¹ Cohen, 61.

most sympathetic character in it was the Negro, Disney knew that *Song of the South* might create controversial attitudes when released.²² When commencing the casting of the film, Disney's studio faced difficulties in assessing the black stereotypes. In her essay on Disney's version of Uncle Remus, Russo states that Clarence Muse, an African-American actor who was hired to help with the writing project, made suggestions for upgrading the image of the black characters of the film. When those suggestions were rejected, Muse resigned, saying that he believed the movie would be detrimental to the cultural advancement of the Negro people. Following suit, actor Rex Ingram turned down the role of Uncle Remus, reasoning that the film would set back his people's cultural and political advancement by many years.²³

In fact, Disney's film shows many aspects of intended racism, even though the general perception suggests that it is mere adaptation of a novel that inherently contributed to American literary heritage. In my opinion, there are several racial stereotypes employed. Firstly, it is noteworthy that the African-Americans are portrayed as plantation workers, who are seemingly contented with their livelihood, as demonstrated by their singing. Secondly, the African-Americans share picturesque wooden cottages, while the wealthy, white plantation owners live in a mansion. The stereotype of Mammy is present, since Chloe, an asexual obese smiling maid, knows her place in the society: working for the white family. Thus, by re-imposing those recognisable images on his characters, emasculating black men and diminishing black women, Disney created a seriously disturbing picture to every educated African-American in the post-war American era.

However, critics vary in their opinions on Disney's possibly intended racism. The first objection to view Disney's film as racist is that no one was really sure in which era the film takes place, however they assumed that it was before the Civil war. Therefore, the characters the enslavement of the characters was considered to be socially incorrect. In his book *Multiculturalism and the Mouse*, Douglas Brode defends Disney and argues that the storyline

²² Cohen, 62.

²³ Peggy A. Russo, "Uncle Walt's Uncle Remus: Disney's Distortion of Harris's Hero" *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 University of North Carolina Press. Fall 1992. October 2012 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20078053>> 22.

is set in the post bellum South, in the year 1867.²⁴ The film's black characters are therefore freed men who chose to work on a plantation where they were once working as slaves, and now they work for wages. Another objection he proposes is that the picture was criticised in promoting the image of a lazy, idle and indolent Negro as a less advanced race, whereas Brode claims that the black lead characters are always seen working.²⁵ Undoubtedly, Brode is correct about the setting and characterization, however the historical context of Disney's film release plays such an important role in viewing the picture, that it is difficult to support fully such subjective viewpoints.

Firstly, I strongly disagree with Brode's interesting, yet a very disturbing description of Disney's film as a peaceful work of art overcoming racial barriers. He responds to the fact that Uncle Remus is, in fact, portrayed as a bowing servile Negro by claiming that Disney established in Remus another typical Disney hero character that understands authority must, when proven wrong, be challenged.²⁶ Brode quotes Cinderella as an example, to which I must object by claiming that these two characters are categorically different in order to be compared. Uncle Remus is by no means a fairytale, it is a novel based on slavery. Harris's book promotes the longing for the old South and sets Uncle Toms, Mammies and little Picanninies to their clearly defined roles in the society. It is, indeed, a work of art in which race issues are the most important topics of the book, exactly because of this historical context. Similarly to Pal's ignorance to the myths and stereotypes created to mock African-Americans, Disney pleaded ignorance of this issue in the film.

Secondly, according to my analysis, clear and recognisable stereotypes are imposed on the black characters, promoting nostalgic longing for good old Uncle Tom, which Remus represents. Additionally, after the *Song of the South* won an award of the Parents' magazine in 1947, NAACP sent a telegram to the magazine expressing its shock at the decision:

²⁴ Douglas Brode, *Multiculturalism and the Mouse. Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005) 57.

²⁵ Brode, 57.

²⁶ Brode, 57-58.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is shocked by award of January Parents' magazine medal to *Song of the South* which glorifies racial stereotypes and virtually justifies slavery by picturing it as idyllic system. One of the chief causes of racial friction in this country is the half-truths and untruths, which are planted, in the unsuspecting minds of young people, which in later years cause the perpetuation of dangerous and divisive prejudices.²⁷

Taking the aforementioned elements into account, the only positive outcome of Disney's animated version of Harris's novel might be the fact that Remus is able to overcome the pre-existing class and race barriers by bringing children of both races together, capturing their attention with his fantastic stories. However, as Donald Bogle states, *Song of the South* glaringly signaled the demise of the representation of Negroes merely as fanciful entertainers or comic servants.²⁸ As evidence for the clear racist depiction, it should be noted that the *Song of the South* was never aired again after the 1980s.

²⁷ Cohen, 66.

²⁸ Bogle, 136.

5 The Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement

The aftermath of the world war was still oscillating between the waning African-American stereotypes in animation and the rising awareness of the Civil Rights Movement to ensure full citizen rights for the African-American population of the United States. In terms of racial stereotyping, black images served again as a reliable source for comedy, nonetheless their return did not last long. As previously mentioned, Disney's release of the *Song of the South* caused controversial attitudes as well as the release of *Uncle Tom's Cabaña* did in 1947. Created and produced by the MGM Studio, the story of Uncle Tom was shifted into the contemporary America, using parody and wit to overcome racial prejudice. Regardless of the parody implemented in the animated story and the first portrayal of the possible miscegenation on the screen, the cartoon still exploited the blackface stereotypes to a certain extent by depicting excessive physical and facial features of the characters. However, the tendencies to portray race as otherness and not necessarily as an imposed stereotype were growing steadily.

In 1946, shortly after the war victory, the United Productions of America (who, for instance co-produced the *Private SNAFU* cartoons) released a surprisingly acceptable cartoon in terms of racial depiction. The *Brotherhood of Man*, in my opinion, represents a watershed moment in animating race and ethnicity. The story line develops over the recognition of different races and ethnic groups, assigning each a special treatment and introduction. By proclaiming: "We'll get along...we've got to! The future of the civilization depends on brotherhood" the characters listen carefully to a lecture on brotherhood and unity. People of all races and ethnicities clap their hands and nod their heads in agreement. Nevertheless, after few moments all the men start fighting against each other when an authoritative voice interrupts them by saying: "Wait a minute, what about this thing of brotherhood?" The characters oppose by claiming they are all different. At that moment, the over voice commences an explanation on uniqueness of races, skin colours, physical appearances and bodily features.

During this lecture, three different races are recognized and described-the Caucasian (Europoid), the Negroid and the Mongoloid. It is interesting to note that other racial types in the common typology are omitted. Additionally, an important moment is the declaration of no difference in physical strength and intellect whatsoever. Despite the witty moment of an enraged white man asking about the difference in brains, the over voice proceeds in the claims that there are clearly different sizes of brains, however the content and potential do not vary in terms of racial diversity. The men are referred to as equals, for if one took off their skin, the skeletal frame is still the same amongst all races. In a humorous style, it is paradoxically the white man who is juxtaposed to the black and Asian man, portrayed as the one who needs to be educated about the biological similarities of black and white people, such as blood types. He is given a lecture on four basic groups of blood, but is reassured that there is no such thing as a black or Asian blood, a myth that was created and spread vastly throughout American history as a plague.

Another interesting scene occurs when the white character questions the differences in living standards between the whites and blacks, wondering why the blacks live in poor conditions. The voiceover communicates the message: "...It wasn't always that way. For instance, at a stage of history when the so called 'pure whites' of Northern Europe were little better than savages, the darker skin mixed people of Mideast and Africa had flourishing cultures." He then goes on to explain the importance of learning from and experiencing other cultures, the importance of family and social surroundings. The amazing aspect of animation embodies the actual watershed moment in the whole cartoon. The cultural stereotypes and shaped images of all men of different races sketched as the characters' miniatures evaporate, and the humans live together peacefully and happily. The cartoon concludes with the perpetuation of the necessity of equal chances for everyone regarding jobs, healthcare system and education, promoting the values of equality and the acceptance of people as individuals without a racial label.

Thus, it is possible to see a notable shift towards better understanding of race and race relations in the aftermath of the Second World War. The *Brotherhood of Man*, from my perspective, serves as a milestone in American animation history with regard to racial stereotyping. At the same time, however, *Brotherhood of Man* was itself participating in systemic racism by using racial stereotypes to illustrate cultural differences. As Lehman argues, the film does not set out to stress the ‘Americanness’ of different groups or the blending of the races into a melting pot; instead it promotes acceptance of and respect for cultural differences. Aside from the narrator, however, only the white man has a speaking role. Consequently, the film discusses multicultural sensitivity from a white perspective without giving a voice to or taking into account the specific concerns of the other racial groups represented.¹ Nonetheless, the progressive message remains clear and we may thus observe a change in attitudes towards race relations in America. Even though it was still a more than a decade before the African-American population succeeded in being recognised legally as equal citizens, *Brotherhood of Man* proves that the animation industry was beginning to avoid racial stereotyping and leave the old myths behind.

Furthermore, as the wartime alliance between the USA and Soviet Russia resulted in Cold War tension, animated films were used to shift the negative depiction of the Japanese and Nazis onto the ubiquitous threat of communism. As Sharm states, the bestial savagery and mindless obedience that had been associated with the Japanese, and the mad ambition and secretive, cunning personality traits assigned to the Nazis, were now united in America’s nightmare image of Soviet Communism.² In other words, the establishment of the Soviet Union provided America with a new enemy and threat, distracting the attention from African-American and Japanese stereotypical images and shifting it towards caricatures of Russian communist spies.

¹ Lehman, 105-106.

² Rekha Sharm, “Drawn-Out Battles: Exploring War-related Messages in Animated Cartoons” *War and the Media: Essays on News Reporting, Propaganda and Popular Culture*. Paul Haridakis et al. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 2009) 79.

Consequently, we can see a modification of race relations moving towards new era in animation, in which the racial stereotyping gains new shapes and forms. As an important issue it is to be noted that animation and its production were steadily moving away from theaters and cinemas due to the proliferation of television. The 1950s conformity era had begun with building massive urban estate complexes in which modern technology such as kitchen appliances and televisions were a necessity to every household. With the boom of technology, the Cold War also embodied a threat of the nuclear weapon attack. Several educational animated videos distributed information about the possible dangers of the explosion and were circulated to raise awareness.

In terms of race, however, the desirable societal status was still modeled according to the white patriarchal husband and housewife concept, regardless of the attempts to modify this perception (as in the *Brotherhood of Man*). Nonetheless, the post-war reactions towards the fact that the merits of the African-American servicemen on the home front and overseas were left unacknowledged were gaining strength. During the post-war years, the NAACP commenced protests to combat segregation, triggering a wave of massive demonstrations that ensued across the country.

The promotion of desegregation of education in public schools resulted in the 1948 abolishment of the racially restrictive covenant, a practice that barred blacks from purchasing houses in white neighbourhoods. As for the historical background of the achievements of the organisation, the NAACP's official website states that the greatest legal victory of the African-American population dates back to 1954, when Thurgood Marshall and a team of NAACP attorneys won "Brown v. Board of Education" of Topeka, Kansas. In this landmark decision, the Supreme Court held that segregation in public education violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Brown consisted of six separate cases in five jurisdictions: Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, the District of Columbia and Delaware. This victory inspired the marches and demonstrations of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s. These wide-spread protests ultimately

led to the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting rights Act of 1965 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. During this period, the Association represented civil rights workers and fought to implement the “Brown” case in numerous desegregation cases across the nation. Cases were filed that successfully challenged discrimination in public accommodations, housing, employment and voting.³

As the US was moving towards the Cold War era, the tendency to caricature African-Americans was vanishing from animation and the focus shifted onto the mysterious and unknown enemy of the Soviet Union. There were numerous cartoons released such as Warner Bros. *Marvin the Martian* or *Roadrunner and Coyote*, into which the political concerns about the cold war were included. However, the thematic cold war cartoons of the 1950s and 1960s differed from the targeted propaganda of the Second World War. In order to examine the depiction of the threat of communism and the Cold War as such, it is necessary to analyse the contemporary historical background.

5.1 McCarthyism and the “Second Red Scare” Cartoons

The era of the post-war development of the world leading powers and its dissolution into two main enemies represented by the United States on one side and the Soviet Union on the other affected the American film and animation production significantly. The conflict of the two superpowers commencing the long lasting Cold War provided a frightening framework for everyone living in this era of incomprehensibly destructive nuclear weapons. The hysteria was spreading all over the country, while the invisible enemy was chased and persecuted in the so-called “Second Red Scare” era (“Second Red Scare” was represented by Stalinist Russia, following the Red Scare of Leninism a few decades earlier). The implementation of legal documents to combat espionage from the Soviet agents and operatives from the Soviet-controlled Eastern Bloc led to the omnipresent fear of communism. The outburst of the Korean war in 1950 under Dwight D. Eisenhower only

³ <<http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-legal-history>>

strengthened the fearful moods and the position of the Republican senator Joseph McCarthy, resulting in the era of McCarthyism, a term coined by the American cartoonist Herblock.⁴

The most significant aspects of the “Second Red Scare” era and McCarthyism were defined by widespread actions of groups and individuals whose intention was to frighten the American public by, in many cases, false and exaggerated accusations of espionage, subversion to the Soviet communist ideology and cooperation with the communist politburo and KGB (Soviet Committee for State Security). Robert Griffith states “McCarthyism, the charge of ‘communism in government’ was not just a response to status anxieties or to the tensions of the Cold War, but was generated by the American political system.”⁵ McCarthy rose to power due to the political situation of the era. According to Griffith, the uncertain official response of American policy toward Communist nations and the more specific issue of “communism in government” were, to be sure, made viable by the Cold War; but they were made available by the Republican partisans for whom they represented success or a means to success.⁶

Therefore, the overall fear so well propagated during the outburst of the Cold war era, led to the proliferation of the anti-Soviet and, specifically, anti-Russian moods in society. As Althaus notes, McCarthy made a false public accusation that more than 200 ‘card-carrying communists had infiltrated government of the United States.’⁷ This led to the spread of general threatening atmosphere among the public, which animation, as a part of the booming film industry, took advantage of. As previously mentioned, the cartoons represented the ubiquitous fear that embraced all Americans in their fight against an invisible enemy. Since there was no real attack, the twilight of Communism served again as a tool to manipulate public opinion.

⁴ Althaus et al., *Drawing the Curtain, The Cold War in Cartoons* (London: Fontanka Publications, 2012) 83.

⁵ Robert Griffith, “The Political Context of McCarthyism”, *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 1. Cambridge University Press. January 1971. November 2012 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1406357>> 25.

⁶ Griffith, 25-26.

⁷ Althaus, 83.

One of the most famous animated cartoons from the beginning of the Cold War era is *Make Mine Freedom*, released in 1948. The cartoon's credo is based on the propaganda against the Communist rule in Soviet Union, which represents the threat to the essential freedoms and civic liberties of American citizens. Using the character of an exotic appearance with a foreign accent, the cartoon indoctrinates the vision of free America with all its civil rights. These exclusive freedoms are threatened and challenged, as a dubious vendor of with foreign accent tries to sell a magic pill to solve troubles in a capitalist world called "ISM". "ISM" ensures work for everyone, control of the state, over the economy and over the citizens. While the group of American men enthusiastically nod their heads in agreement and prepare to sign the pact and buy the flask with "ISM", one character opposes and explains the way American market economy in farming and other industries gained its exclusivity and uniqueness. He points out the benefits of capitalism while tempting his fellowmen to taste a bit of the "ISM" formula. When they see what happens to the farms, private property and their freedom, they chase the merchant and then, they can fully appreciate their nation's values.

Even though this cartoon deals more with the political than racial subtext, it is interesting to observe the false proclamations that are declared by the American opponent. He states that the right to vote and the equality of races are one of the core values of an American citizen. Naturally, this is only the case in terms of the white American population. This declaration is illustrated on the depiction of American citizens as inhabitants of the greatest nation in the world, earning more money than anyone else in the world, reaping all the social benefits and civic freedoms. However, all the characters illustrated as examples that accompany these claims are white. Thus, paradoxically, this cartoon is another example of a targeted propaganda, which used hypocrisy and false claims (no African-American citizen had the right to vote in 1948) in order to manipulate the public's opinion and promote values that were accessible only to the white majority in the country.

In most of the cartoons, the communist agents were usually of Russian origin and spoke with heavy Russian and Eastern European accents. The stereotype of a Russian as a trickster or a spy working for the secret state services thus formed a general opinion of all citizens of the Slavic ethnic group. This is illustrated in another famous cartoon, *Rocky and his Friends*, which was created a decade later in 1958 and was broadcasted for both children and adult audiences on television. As Sharm notes, the cartoon was both a political allegory that bore features of political ridicule as well as ethnic stereotyping. It conveyed moral guidance on American culture and the Communist threat. The title character, Rocket J. Squirrel symbolized the fighting spirit of Americans as well as conveying the strength of the American space program. Bulwinkle J. Moose represented the naivety of Americans as consumers who simply wanted a comfortable life and who took a passive stance on matters of politics.⁸

In *Metal Munching Mice* and other cartoons of the *Rocky and his Friends* show, the inept villains of the cartoon—Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale, inhabitants of a fictitious nation Pottsylvania—were a representation of the Russian stereotype as communists infiltrating into the American peace and prosperity. Both Boris and Natasha, led by their sinister boss Mr. Big, speak in a thick Russian accent and usually use disguises to manipulate Rocky and Bullwinkle when they try to steal their assets. The primary themes of the cartoon series, Sharm argues were warnings to an American audience preoccupied with materials excess and lulled by a temporary peace between nations. Tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was a battle between good and evil in which the Russians also known as Communists would always try to sabotage the American way of life and thus embody the omnipotent evil.⁹

It is apparent that the era of the Cold War dealt more with the political and ideological context in the cartoons than racial tension; however the element of ethnicity played an

⁸ Sharm, 80.

⁹ Sharm, 81.

important role in animation. Since Soviet Union was controlled by Russian supremacy, the portrayal of ethnicity corresponded to the animated images of political ideologies. Despite the fact that there are no typical features portrayed, the Russians are depicted as evil villains who cannot speak proper English and whose sole interest is to conquer America. Undoubtedly, such depiction promoted hatred and generally negative attitudes towards the inhabitants of the former Eastern Bloc countries. Albeit the lack of physical caricature, it is possible, in my opinion, to label the aforementioned cartoons as collectively promoting offensive stereotypes of an ethnic group.

Popularity of animated cartoons about Cold War themes declined by the start of 1960s when occasional references to the space race were made instead. However, it entailed that the animation production studios were gradually ceasing to use the theme of the threat of nuclear weaponry. America in the 1960s was criticised for its dealings in Vietnam War, thus the focus shifted onto the alternative animated production in the studios such as UPA, which challenged the controversial issues of conformity, racism and racial inequality. Thematic racial stereotypes as such were no longer the main focal point in animation, due to several historical events. From the 1960s onwards, race in animation started to gain new representation mode and in many cartoons it was treated with respect and careful consideration.

Despite the acknowledgement that race still served as prerequisite for societal categorisation, the counter-culture movement protested against racism, achieving racial liberty in the long run. Thus, by the start of the 1960s, racial stereotypes in its original form (excessive physical and facial features, type of behaviour assigned to a group or an individual, ridicule and mockery) had gradually disappeared from the animated cartoons.

5.2 Counterculture of the 1960s

In 1960s America, the Cold War with all its consequences and threats was still a very persistent issue which influenced literature, film industry and therefore, along with that, animated cartoons. After the intensive propaganda against the Communist horrors, general society in America was forced to solve many other issues within its own political and civic spectrum. The demands of the Civil Rights Movement were becoming more difficult to ignore, followed by the ‘swinging’ wave of the 1960s. The apparent change of race relations can be traced back to the growing influence of the UPA production. The studio, Lehman states, populated its films with white human figures drawn in a stylized, linear fashion in stories that reflected contemporary social attitudes.¹⁰ As previously mentioned, this was also the case of UPA’s release of the *Brotherhood of Man*.

By the early 1950s, as Lehman observes, African-American characters had significantly smaller roles in cartoons set in the South. The designs for black characters remained exaggerated, and musical scores cartoons still made references to minstrel songs romanticizing slavery whenever black figures appeared on the scene.¹¹ However, black figures did not appear in cartoons about modern post-war society and if they did in short few second gags, they did not dominate the plot line. As UPA won Academy Awards for films that rejected cheap racial jokes, other studios eventually abandoned racial slapstick. As Lehman concludes, the blackface image still appeared in cartoons but with decreasing frequency. Blackface, however, had a different context in the 1950s and 60s than in the early 1900s. In the first half of the century, blackface was a necessity for studios producing cartoons on a rigorous schedule. However, by the 1950s, blackface had become an “other” image. When the black caricatures outlived their usefulness to the industry, they simply faded from the screen.¹²

¹⁰ Lehman, 111.

¹¹ Lehman, 110.

¹² Lehman, 118-119.

Thus, UPA represented, in a way, a pioneering animation, which intended to be free of racially motivated humour and plot lines. Its animated films such as *Norman Normal* not only protested against the representation of social conformity in the U.S., they strived to demean the culture of traditional domestic values. It additionally criticised the hypocritical and bigotry nature of society as a whole, due to their attitudes to other ethnic groups. It is clear that the *Norman Normal* cartoon questions some of the attitudes that society values as “normal”. Hence, it is interesting to observe the character of Norman in *Norman Normal* from a critical point of view and analyse the reasons why he chooses not to conform and disobey.

As mentioned earlier in the text, post-war America was taken over by a stultifying culture of conformity under which some rebellions existed but were kept largely under the surface. This concept derives from the idea of a ‘normal’ citizen, who follows a certain set of rules dictated by society to adhere to his or her social class through their standard of living by the ‘traditional rules’ of their homogenous community. Issues like social order are based on biological predetermination, gender roles, race and generation gaps were beginning to be tackled and questioned openly by the beginning of the 1960s.

From the very beginning of the story, Norman is depicted as a fairly ‘normal’ character; he wears a suit, has a normal and acceptable haircut, a white collar and lives according to the certain social standard which is expected from him. Overall, he appears to be a slightly boring character as well, which might have been the creators’ intention. Additionally and importantly, he is portrayed as a “good man”, introducing himself as a hero at the beginning of the cartoon. He represents the white conformist majority of the United States of those times.

Paradoxically, Norman wishes to be normal and to live according to the law; however, society does not share his high moral and living standards. He faces social dilemmas such as alcoholism, hypocrisy over racial and ethnic issues and sees that society is in crisis.

When he is asked to get a man drunk in order to sign a contract, as he is instructed by his boss, he objects, claiming it is against his moral code. When his boss suggests that no one will ever find out, Norman claims that he *himself* will know. Simultaneously, he is ridiculed by his boss and is considered not manly and aggressive enough for such a job.

Later on, when Norman goes to his father to ask for advice on what is right and wrong, he is told that his parents did the best they could to provide Norman with a good life, good material support, good car, good clothes etc. His father meanwhile drifts around the room. This is certainly one of the surrealist visual effects, which enhance the mood of the 1960s fascination with non-conformity, racial equality, psychedelics and an urge to tackle problematic societal issues; along with this, Norman's father later on blends into his office wall, explaining the importance of conformity and uniformity. Following Lehman's statements further, this suggests a type of an avant-garde visual feature of animation, which, however, occurs minimally throughout the cartoon.¹³ Consequently, it is possible to argue that the intention of Norman is not to stay out of the crowd and provoke, but it is to stay normal, respecting social rules but not conforming to the corrupted society in which he lives.

Norman refuses to approve of society, which proclaims identical lives, derogatory attitudes towards racial and ethnical minorities and bigotry. As an illustration of this viewpoint, at first he disapproves of laughing at the pejorative joke about an Inuit referred to as Eskimo, but nevertheless, he laughs along with the rest of the party guests. Nonetheless, he questions the political correctness of the joke by stating: "Is this a joke you're gonna tell me about a minority group and after you tell it we're all gonna laugh and feel superior?" This suggests his insecure oscillation between the society in which he inhabits, and his constant thoughtful questioning of the society corrupted by materialism, racial prejudice and conformity. He is critical of the poor behavioural choices of the people in his social

¹³ Christopher Lehman, *Animated Cartoons of the Vietnam Era. A Study of Social Commentary in Films and Television Programs 1961-1973* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006) 112.

circle and, eventually, chooses not to conform, since society around him mirrors its one-dimensional materialistic and money-oriented interests of its citizens. In my opinion, the creators of *Norman Normal* used his attitude as an effective device to question the values of racially unequal capitalism, the very basis upon which American society has been built.

Capitalism in its corrupted way results in obeying conformity of authorities who have very little actual authority. This can be illustrated by the example of Norman's father who, from a traditional point of view, should represent an authority; however his only advice to Norman is to fit in the society, without making any waves. Thus, he fails in being an example to his son since he has already become a part of the corrupted capitalistic system. The fact that the scene takes place in Norman's head suggests that to question and tackle troublesome issues such as authority and conformity of those days is actually a matter of everyday life of an average citizen. Nonetheless, only a few really step out of the crowd and decide not to conform to the system. Therefore, it is interesting to observe how the topic of political correctness emerges in the 1960s and how the urge to change the society functions, in terms of the aforementioned matters like racism, bigotry, pretence and false morals. *Norman Normal* serves as a significant example of a silent protest against white social conservatism, not necessarily calling for revolution and social anarchy, but rather for respecting the morals, racial equality and revelation of one's true self, liberated from conservative social codes and limiting boundaries.

Thus, animation can be used as a means of exploring domestic cultural values and race relations in the late 1960s. Along with the critical social commentary of the UPA studio, there are more positive images to be found in the cartoons of Terrytoons production. The animation studio producing for 20th Century-Fox created cartoons free of racist stereotypes and often depicted a positive racial image of an ethnic group or an individual. According to Cohen, Terrytoons were the first studio to create a positive image of an Asian person. In 1959, a director of Japanese descent Bob Kuwahara developed the character Hashimoto, a

Japanese mouse who is an expert at judo.¹⁴ In *Hashimoto Mouse* it is possible to explore positive images about the cultural and societal values of Japanese society. Hashimoto has a wife and two children and together they explain Japanese folklore to an inquisitive American reporter. They teach American society about the importance of education, family and decency. Hashimoto acts as a very polite character who loves his life and family. According to Cohen's analysis, the year in which the Hashimoto series was released (1959) is the year Warner Bros. produced its final cartoon with offensive Asian stereotypes *China Jones*, the last cartoon that featured buck teeth, slant eyes and exaggerated physical features.¹⁵

Consequently, the tendency to avoid racial stereotyping and to offer positive images to audiences was increasing. The urge to compensate for the derogatory stereotypes created before and during the war era led to the disappearance of negative Asian stereotyping in cartoons and, a few years later, to the vanishing of African-American stereotypes. By the late 1960s African-Americans finally succeeded, with the help of the Civil Rights movement and the NAACP in gaining voting rights, following Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech and various other oratorical figures' ambitions. As Abernathy states in his essay on contemporary black life in America, there was a still long way to go. African-Americans were no longer seeking civil rights; however they were on their quest for human rights. Racism, albeit seemingly surpassed, was still a very persistent issue in society of the sixties and seventies.¹⁶ However, the system of racial segregation, which had lasted for centuries suddenly collapsed within a decade, changing the social status of African-Americans, liberating them from oppression and unequal treatment. It is therefore remarkable to observe how animation influenced the social perception of the individual ethnic and racial groups in the sixties in which the counter-culture movement gained its strong position and influenced changes in societal history.

¹⁴ Cohen, 59.

¹⁵ Cohen, 59.

¹⁶ Ralph D. Abernathy and Rhoda E. Goldstein ed., *Black Life and Culture in the United States* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971) 199-200.

6 Conclusion

As the emergence and development of the American entertainment industry vastly contributed to the establishment of the mass media, animation became a necessary part of the deal. Over the past decades, American animation has gained its position within the entertainment industry, having developed a solid base of animation studios known all over the world. The fascinating technique of bringing animated sketches to life changed the whole development of animation, from the very beginnings in the 1920s to complicated computer based techniques employed nowadays. In general, cartoons allow human bodies to be disfigured, strangely shaped and unreal. However, looking at the beginnings of animation, it was the racial aspect that inspired many artists who worked with the blackface image as a reliable source. Thus, in the pre-war era, the majority of the cartoons sought inspiration in literary canon, staged blackface minstrel shows and jazz music. Such cartoons were intended to entertain the wider public by presenting racial gags and stereotypical humorous performances, which employed African-American stereotypes.

However, from my perspective, cartoons are not only a mode of entertainment and we cannot approach them as a mere play of images on a screen. In an attempt to illustrate this claim in my thesis, I focused on the aspect of racial stereotyping in regard to the historical context of the time frame while considering the political and social background of the contemporary eras. Thus, it is apparent that the concept of racial stereotypes, which was typical for animation in the 1920s and 30s, was transforming during the Second World War and its aftermath. In the pre-war era, the main focus was centred on the blackface stereotype in which the legacy of minstrel shows played a key role. It is clear that Vaudeville gags and seemingly humorous scenes misused those racial stereotypes in animation in order to strengthen the position of this assumed patriotic icon.

During the war, however, the portrayal of blackface stereotypes was ceasing to exist in its traditionally recognised form. As African-American men served the nation in the military personnel at home and overseas during America's involvement in the war, blackface stereotypes were throughout considered to be derogatory and pejorative. At the same time, however, the humiliating depiction of the Japanese in cartoons sponsored by the federal government was booming in their production. Propaganda cartoons were designed to educate, inform and manipulate servicemen involved in the combat. The ultimate end to this stereotyping concluded the end of the war that was victorious for the United States. In the aftermath of the Second World War the tendency to return to the blackface stereotypes of the African-American strengthened, nevertheless, it was inhibited by the establishment of dissent in the Civil Rights Movement, which with the support of the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People massively protested against such stereotypical imagery.

Thus, the last notably controversial animation deploying a stereotypical portrayal of African-Americans was Disney's release of the racist animated film *Song of the South* in 1946, which employed old literary African-American stereotypes and promoted a seemingly idyllic master-slave relationship of the white and black population of the United States. Undoubtedly, this cartoon was not the only example of the confusing animation related controversy after the painful era of the war; however I consider it significant in terms of understanding the further development of race-related animation within the newly forming historical and political context. The cartoon contributed to the gradual disappearance of blackface as the source for humorous cartoons as well as to the surge of the Civil Rights Movement to appeal to American government to start changing the laws on suffrage and racial segregation for African-American citizens.

Moving towards the 1950s, a new thematic source emerged as the main focus of many animated cartoon series. With the formation of the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc allies, the communist threat became an omnipresent issue to the American public. Under the

mask of fabricated trials of McCarthyism, the fear of Russian espionage penetrated the contemporary film and animation industry. In the cartoons from the Cold War era we can observe the tendency to portray Russians as ultimate villains who seek to dismantle the security of American peace. Even though the thematic aspects of the cartoons deal more with communist ideology than with the depiction of ethnicity, elements of ethnic stereotyping such as heavy accents and sly behaviour are assigned to the animated characters.

With the emergence of the counter-culture movement in the late 1950s, social issues like conformity, hypocrisy, bigotry and racial prejudice were tackled in heated debates and organized protests. African-Americans succeeded in gaining their full civil rights in the mid-sixties. The tendency to compensate for the overt racism in cartoons was represented by an attempt to create positive racial and ethnic images. Consequently, black, Asian and other negative stereotypes gradually faded from animation by the end of the 1960s as the term “political correctness” was consolidated.

Apparently, the legacy of the race-related cartoons corresponds with the development of American society. In my thesis, I analysed examples of racial stereotypes in cartoons from the contextual perspective, outlining the main historical events to demonstrate and support my claims. Thus, it is possible to argue that the majority of the examined examples represented a display of overt racism and only in a small number of the cartoons were race and ethnicity treated positively. It is interesting to observe, however, that the tendency to portray other ethnicities such as Hispanics or Chicanos was relatively small in comparison to the African-American and Asian imagery. Even though there are examples of Hispanic stereotypes, as for instance in Disney’s *The Three Caballeros* from 1945 or anti-Arab stereotypes in the 1980s and 90s production, their impact is not as strong as in the other racially motivated cartoons.

Certainly, the issue of race and ethnicity could be viewed from different perspectives and examined on several levels. In attempt to provide a coherent overview of the role of animation in society and its development throughout the crucial decades of American history, I chose to apply the commonly recognised stereotypes of ethnic groups personified in animated cartoon characters, and to analyse them within the historical and socio-political and cultural frame of a variety of eras. For further research ideas, I would suggest that one could focus on a more in-depth analysis of the key issues that have been raised during this paper; however my completed secondary reading has supplemented a detailed analysis of the given key topics. The prevalent part of the thesis thematically examined African-American stereotypical images, nevertheless, since I find it truly fascinating to observe all various interpretations of different ethnicities, I devoted a part of my thesis also to the Asian, Jewish and Russian stereotypes.

Consequently, it is interesting to ascertain that the actual overt racism of the majority of the analysed cartoons was left unacknowledged and served the entertainment industry for decades. While nowadays artists and cartoonists who ridicule, insult or caricature ethnic or religious group are criticised and, in many cases, even prosecuted and imprisoned, only few decades ago the mass media provided the wide public with the most offensive, derogatory and humiliating racial stereotypes in cartoons which were produced by some of the most famous film studios in the world. Looking at the issue of race from this perspective, my intention was to examine the factors that led to racial stereotyping, developed and modified it and further on helped it to fade away from animation. In my opinion, the racial segregation, the social oppression, exclusion, the war and the subsequent spread of “Red Scare” hysteria were reflected in various media sources and their reflections echoed in the animated cartoons.

As evidence for my claims, many of my analysed cartoons were banned from official public broadcasting and withdrawn from television and cinema. Nevertheless, they are accessible through the Internet on 'Youtube' which, in some cases, states warnings about their racially offensive content. The fact remains that our contemporary society has moved on and developed to the point that multiculturalism and racial diversity is no longer strange to us. Such cartoons are logically considered racist and treasured as the dark past of the film industry in studios' archives. The unconcealed racism in the analysed cartoons therefore surprises its audience with its seemingly innocuous humour and entertainment. Therefore, it is possible to claim that race as such is no longer recognised as a social construct, as was the case of the contemporary animated cartoons analysed in my thesis.

However, as Gilroy analyses in his book, the recent victory over racism in our society has brought other troublesome issues in terms of new stereotyping of racial features into consideration. In his book, Gilroy examines the way in which media and commodity culture exploits race and racial characterisation, reducing people to mere symbols of the spectacle. The corporate interests on the market has always played a key role in the entertainment industry and race, albeit liberated from the restrictions of the first half of the twentieth century, still shows significant aspects to capitalise on marketing strategy.¹⁷ Thus, race is misused, twisted and distorted in order to function according to our societal frames, despite the fact that racism does not legally exist any longer. Following Gilroy's interesting concept of a race-free society, it is possible to claim that our perception of race is no longer constructed, however its persistent features have not yet fully disappeared from the global entertainment industry.

¹⁷ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race. Imagining the Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001)

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Cartoons

- 1925: Disney: *Alice Cans the Cannibals*
- 1928: Disney: *Steamboat Willie*
- 1930: WB: *Bosko: Congo Jazz*
- 1931: WB: *Porky Pig: "You Don't Know What You're Doin!"*
- 1932: Fleischer Studios/Paramount: *Betty Boop: Minnie the Moocher*
- 1933: Disney: *Three Little Pigs*
- 1934: WB: *Bosko: Parlor Pranks*
- 1934: WB: *Buddy: Buddy's Circus*
- 1934: WB: *Buddy in Africa*
- 1934: Fleischer Studios/Paramount: *Betty Boop: Lifeguard*
- 1940: Paramount: *Popeye: Fightin' Pals*
- 1941: Paramount: *Jasper and the Watermelons*
- 1942: MGM: *Blitz Wolf*
- 1942: Paramount: *You're a Sap Mr. Jap, Scrap the Japs, Seein' Red White and Blue*
- 1943: WB: *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*
- 1943: Leon Schlesinger Production: *Tokio Jokio*
- 1946: Disney: *Song of the South*
- 1946: UPA: *The Brotherhood of Man*
- 1947: MGM: *Uncle Tom's Cabaña*
- 1948: John Sutherland Production: *Make Mine Freedom*
- 1959: Terrytoones: *Hashimoto Mouse*
- 1959: Jay Ward Production: *Rocky and His Friends: Metal Munching Mice*
- 1961: UPA: *Norman Normal*

8 Index

KGB	Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti: Soviet Committee for State Security
MGM	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Production
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People
UPA	United Productions of America
WB	Warner Bros. Production

9 Appendices



Illustration 1: Blackface Minstrel Show Performance



Illustration 2: Bosko the Talk-Ink Kid as a blackface caricature

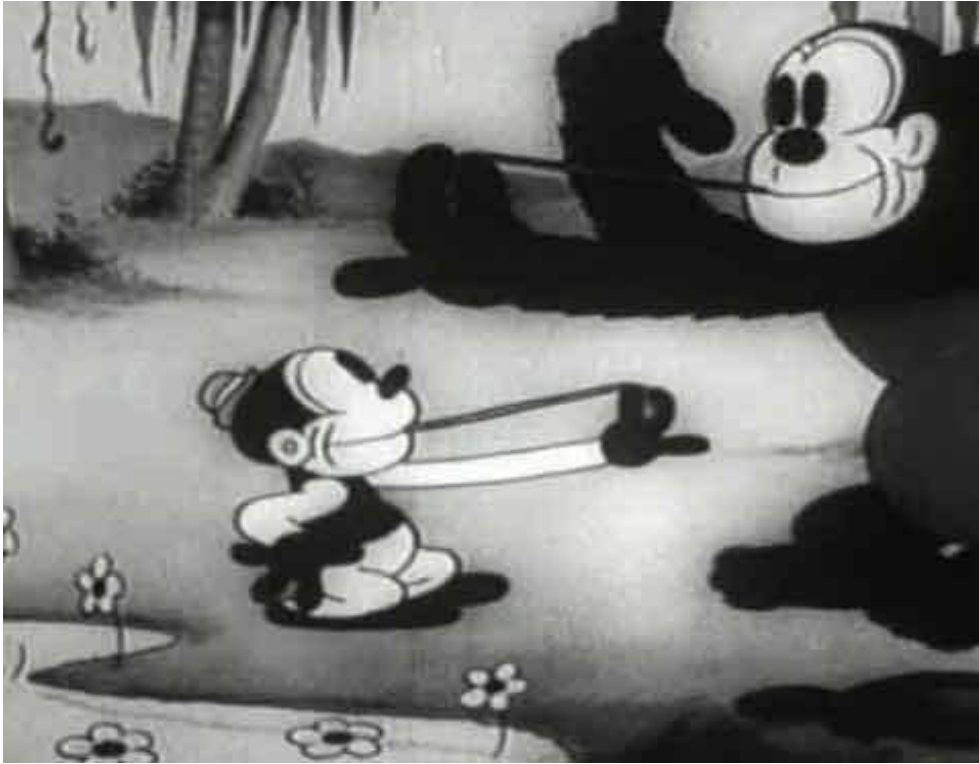


Illustration 3: Bosko the Talk-Ink Kid in *Congo Jazz*



Illustration 4: Uncle Remus in *Song of the South*



Illustration 5: The chicken and melon eating Pickanniny stereotype



Illustration 6: Pickanniny caricature in *Jasper and the Watermelons*



Illustration 7: *Popeye the Sailor* series and the anti-Japanese propaganda



Illustration 8: *Popeye the Sailor* series and the anti-Japanese propaganda



Illustration 9: *Three Little Pigs* with the Big Bad Wolf



Illustration 10: The original omitted version of a Jewish vendor in *Three Little Pigs*



Illustration 11: Boris Badenov, Natasha Fatale and Mr. Big in anti-Russian *Rocky and Bulwinkle Show*



Illustration 12: Positive images of the Japanese in *Hashimoto Mouse*