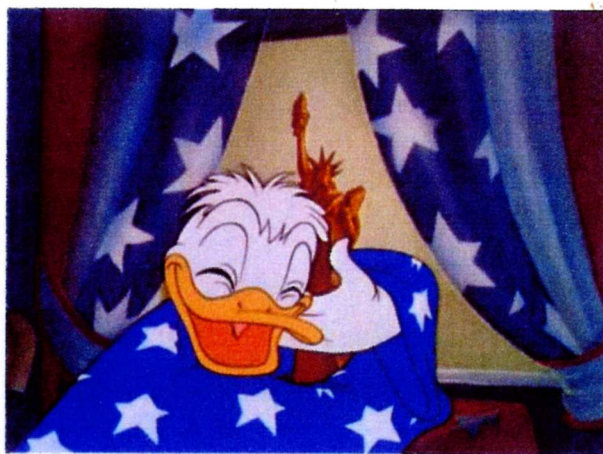


***Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943)**

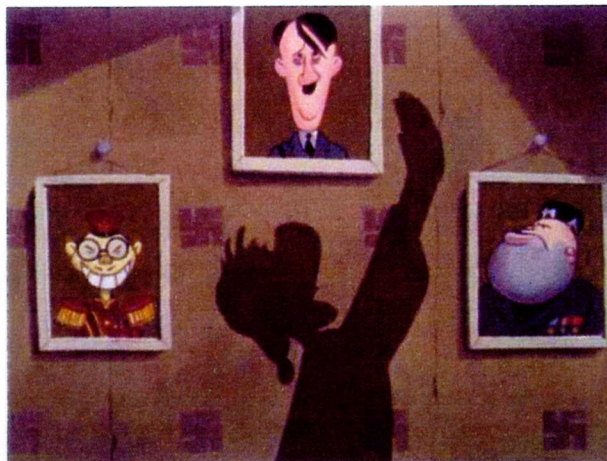
Perhaps the most famous of Disney's wartime contributions was the Donald Duck short, *Der Fuehrer's Face*. Originally to be released under the title *Donald Duck in Nutziland* but changed due to the popularity of the short's title song, written by Oliver Wallace, the short won an academy award in 1943 for Best Animated Short Film (Shale 1978, 62). The story was first intended for the treasury short and was developed by Huemer and Grant. However, it was eventually rejected by Disney as it did not lay the focus on taxes.¹³ There is no mention of government involvement in the picture under the title cards, unlike the treasury shorts. Despite the notation of government funding in the archival documents, the American public would not have been aware that the short was made under the government contract. Audiences simply believed that they were going to be viewing another Donald Duck cartoon.

The short opens with the title tune. Disney was capitalizing on the unification of the American public behind a popular song. Gabler argues that the song became an anthem for Hollywood's battle with the Nazi threat, as one and a half million copies of the song were sold (2007, 390). In combination with the music, the shot fades in to show the comical goose-step of the Nazi elite, marching in a marching band. The short, for the first time, includes animated versions of Goebbels, Goering, Tojo (caricatured heavily with yellowing skin, buck teeth and large glasses) and Mussolini. The camera pans to Donald, who is sleeping in a tiny house. In sync with the singing Nazi elite who are marching on the street outside his house, Donald even gives the Hitler salute in his sleep, ridiculing the severe indoctrination of the German people into the Nazi ideology. Donald's alarm goes off and the cuckoo in the cuckoo clock in his bedroom pops out a caricature of Hitler himself, ridiculed for his chirping 'Seig Heil!' Donald jumps out of bed and salutes the three Axis leaders in pictures



Donald is exhausted from his forty-eight hour day, implicitly suggesting that the average German is forced to work constantly and that their consistent surveillance to Nazi ideals (implied by Donald's salute of Hitler's picture on the production line) actually diminishes their productivity. The cartoon also capitalizes on the nationalistic symbolism of the late 1930s in this short to exemplify Donald's patriotism. Lady Liberty, associated with the city of New York and with American democracy, is perched on Donald's bedroom window. Donald is dressed in American flag pyjamas. This animated short uses the unifying power of these symbols to provide a stark contrast to Donald's early morning awakening in 'Nutziland'.

Der Fuehrer's Face is also the first Disney cartoon to provide developed caricatures of the Axis power elite. While Hitler's first caricature was provided in *Stop That Tank* (1942), Disney had previously left figures such as Goebbels, Goering, Mussolini and Hirohito untouched. The American public were used to negative caricatures of the Japanese, as they were widespread in the Hollywood film industry following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In films such as *Remember Pearl Harbor* (1942), *A Prisoner of Japan* (1942) and *Danger in the Pacific* (1942), the Japanese are often stereotyped and typified by their cruelty. However, little had been shown of the other Axis powers. Their forms appear ridiculous in this short, making them comical to the American public, lessening the impact of their threat. Similar to the way in which the Big Bad Wolf and the villainous Pete are easily defeated by the pigs and Mickey Mouse, the Nazi threat seems defeatable in *Der Fuehrer's Face*. While other treatments of the Nazi menace are more ideologically based, the entire regime is ridiculed in this short. This is a lighter propagandistic treatment before the Disney Studios began to use its skill in animation to undermine the underlying ideology of Nazism.



Tracey Louise Mollet. *Cartoons in Hard Times: The Animated Shorts of Disney and Warner Brothers in Depression and War 1932-1945*. Bloomsbury. 2017. 122. 126.

Commando Duck (1944)

While many of the 1942 and 1943 Disney cartoons featured a direct attack on the Nazi regime and its ideology, no such treatment was placed upon the

Hirohito regime. Similar to the situation within Hollywood, an effort was made within animation to separate the German people from the evils of the ideology of Nazism. However, the Japanese were simply depicted as a cruel, barbaric race of people, led only by their animal instincts. Their appearances were ridiculed and caricatured throughout animation. Interestingly, while the Warner Brothers cartoons featured extensive caricaturing of the Japanese race, the Disney Studios only really depicted the Japanese race through the last battle themed short of the war: *Commando Duck*.

In previous shorts, the threat from the Japanese was secondary to that faced by Hitler's Nazi regime, reflective of Roosevelt's 'Europe First' policy.⁴ However, with the threat of the Axis powers in Europe fading quickly during 1944, the enemy in the Disney cartoons shifts to the Japanese. Donald fights the Nazis in his dreams in *Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943); however, in the final years of the war, when the American army focused its strategy on the Japanese, Donald is put directly into the Pacific war zone.

The short opens aboard an aircraft. Donald is heavily burdened with weaponry and equipment but having seemingly conquered his fear of jumping from planes, he receives his war assignment to find an enemy airfield with pride but also demonstrates his fear for what is about to happen to him. He jumps from the plane and lands safely, launching his emergency boat. Visibly displaying caution, Donald sets sail on the river. On the banks, however, the audience sees two Japanese snipers aiming for Donald. They are hidden in trees but upon hearing their accents and seeing them bow to each other, they are immediately identified as the Japanese enemy. The short then shows many Japanese rifles pointed in Donald's direction.

Tracey Louise Mollet. *Cartoons in Hard Times: The Animated Shorts of Disney and Warner Brothers in Depression and War 1932-1945*. Bloomsbury, 2017. 153-54.

Blair. Also examined will be the two periods in which most of the famous superheroes were first created: the Great Depression and World War II era, which gave birth to Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, and the sixties, in which Spider-Man, the Fantastic Four, the X-Men, Iron Man, the Hulk, and *Doctor Who* were first created. The 1980s was another critical period in comic book history, as the World War II-era characters were all radically revamped; their serialized stories began anew with a retelling of their "origin stories" set in the "present" of the 1980s, and their heroism was defined either in support of, or in opposition to, Ronald Reagan's America.

Superhero narratives, as they are traditionally understood, involve colorfully garbed heroic icons that demonstrate uncanny strength, intelligence, supernatural powers, and near-infallibility. Their amazing character traits may be a result of their divine or mythical origins, as in the case of Wonder Woman or Thor; alien heritage, as with Superman or "the Doctor" (from *Doctor Who*); or magic, as in the case of Zatanna Zatara, Doctor Strange, and Harry Potter. In contrast, there are other superheroes such as Iron Man and Green Lantern who are unremarkably "human," but are made supremely powerful by access to advanced technology, or, like Batman, Sherlock Holmes and James Bond, through spending years mastering fighting techniques and honing detective skills. Superheroes such as Aquaman, Spider-Man, and Tarzan are humans who mimic amazing abilities demonstrated in the animal kingdom. Finally, there are those superheroes such as Captain America and Asterix the Gaul whose amazing abilities are derived from performance enhancing drugs or magic potions.

Marc DiPaolo. War, Politics and Superheroes: Ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film.

McFarland. 2011. 2.