

Cartoon Manipulation

“Hollywood cartoon series in the past century that were racist”

“Hittin’ The Trail For Hallelujah Land

It is the only cartoon from the Harman-Ising Studio that was censored. This film gives a hint of how Hugh Harman and Rudolf Ising diverge in caricaturing African Americans. Harman worked with jazz scores and fashioned his Looney Tunes star Bosko as a blackface crooner of contemporary music; later at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), he directed cartoons featuring caricatures of African American jazz artists. Ising, in contrast, handled cartoons set in the antebellum South. *Hittin* is the first, but later at MGM he directed *The Old Plantation*.

But back to *Hittin*, it is very understated in its depiction of the antebellum South. No one specifically mentions slavery, and no dialogue or scenes refer to a southern location. The river and the riverboat are not identified as the Mississippi River and a Mississippi showboat.

Scrub me Mamma with a Boogie Beat (1941)

Back in 1941 activists had not organized campaigns to get cartoons pulled from theaters, and they made no effort to target *Scrub Me Mama* then. By the fall of 1948, however, World War II came and went, and in that time civil rights groups began decrying films that grossly stereotyped African Americans as giving propaganda to the enemy.

After the war, organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) argued that such films were harmful for children; the NAACP's later work in the *Brown v. Board* case showed how stereotypes became ingrained in children at very young ages. Meanwhile, animation producers met with some activists as early as 1944 and agreed to tone down the content. So, in 1948, a reissue of a broad-humored cartoon from before the war stuck out among civil rights groups like a sore thumb.

Jungle Jitters (1938)

This Technicolor episode of Warner Brothers' "Merrie Melodies" series is yet another entry directed by Friz Freleng, and it follows his pattern of filling the first few minutes with quick gags and then a thin plot for the remainder of the film. In this case, dark-skinned and half-clothed natives star in the gags. Their jewelry serve as jump ropes and as a merry-go-round prize. The merry-go-round consists of natives sliding up and down on their spears in a circle. Concerning ethnicity specifically, the lips of a native dramatically shiver after he eats a persimmon.

After these gags is a plot full of colonialism. A dopey, canine caricature of fictional radio character Elmer Blurt arrives at the native community. He is a pale-skinned, fully clothed door-to-door salesman, and the natives immediately put him in a pot for boiling. However, when they tell their queen—a blond, pale-skinned, fully clothed anthropomorphic chicken—about the visitor, she orders them to bring him in for her to meet. She becomes infatuated at first sight and calls for an immediate wedding, and the salesman goes through

with it. But when it is time to kiss the bride, the groom voluntarily jumps back in the boiling water.

All This And Rabbit Stew – Bugs Bunny (1941)

This is the third and final cartoon from director Tex Avery, and it is also the only banned film to star Bugs Bunny.

In the “Merrie Melodies” episode *All This and Rabbit Stew* (1941), an African American hunter tries repeatedly and fails to shoot the bunny. The hunter has large lips and feet, and he speaks in the standard ethnic dialect for African American fictional characters in popular culture at the time. Just when the hunter has a close range to shoot as the film ends, Bugs entices him to gamble and proceeds to literally win the clothes of his adversary’s back. Then, the bunny derisively imitates his humiliated predator’s shuffle and dialect.

So, why was it censored in 1968? The image of the rural, shuffling African American in dialect was out of step with the times, and Bugs’s mimicking of the shuffle and dialect did not help matters. The dice game and the hunter’s weakness towards it also smacked of ethnic stereotyping.

Tom and Jerry in “Plane Dumb” (1932)

‘Plane Dumb’ is arguably one of the most racist cartoon ever released. It’s so full of severe racial stereotypes, it’s practically unwatchable today. The short’s only highlight may be in the animation of the whale, which has some menacing quality.

Merrie Melodies – Coal Black And De Sebben Dwarfs (WWII cartoon 1943)

Clearly, Warner Bros. Merrie Melodies has an ugly past with several racist cartoons. Coal Black and De Sebben Dwarfs is arguably one of the worst. The title alone speaks for itself. Like the other cartoons, it features several racial stereotypes of African Americans and was banned by United Artists in the 60's.

Goldilocks and the Jivin' Bears (1944)

Written by Tedd Pierce and directed by Fred Freleng, Goldilocks and the Jivin' Bears was initially released by Warner Bros. under their Merrie Melodies cartoon series. It was later banned due to the racist stereotypes of African Americans portrayed by the three bears.

Uncle Tom's Bungalow (1930)

Another banned Merrie Melody cartoon by Warner Bros., Uncle Tom's Bungalow is a parody of the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, featuring awful racist stereotypes of African Americans. It's included in what many call the "Censored 11," a list of banned cartoons due to insensitive material.

The Isle of Pingo Pongo (1938)

Made in 1938 by Warner Bros., the Isle of Pingo Pongo is a spoof by Tex Avery...one of many by him. However, in 1968, United Artists, the owner at the time, banned it from syndicating on television. Like

many of the other "Censored 11," it was banned for its racist stereotypes of African Americans.

"Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips"

Another old World War II era Merrie Melodies cartoon with racially insensitive material is called "Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips." It's about Bugs Bunny washing ashore on an island where he is chased after by Japanese soldiers. It was also banned by Warner Bros. for having racist stereotypes of the Japanese. Somehow it still ended up in 1990's VHS re-releases. They were quickly pulled from the shelves due to complaints.

All This and Rabbit Stew

All This and Rabbit Stew was another early Warner Bros. Merrie Melodies cartoon featuring Bugs Bunny. Directed by Tex Avery, the story involves Bugs Bunny heckling an African American hunter. It originally released in the theater. However, it was later banned by Ted Turner for its racist stereotypes of African Americans.

Tin Pan Alley Cats

Tin Pan Alley Cats was another "Censored 11" cartoon by Warner Bros. Much like the others, it parodied African American culture and presented gross racial stereotypes. It featured a "Fat Waller" alley cat who leaves the mission in order to join the local jazz club.

Song of the South

While not technically “banned,” Song of the South has been constantly mired in controversy for its depiction of African Americans. It’s also been criticized for its ambiguous nature regarding racial relations in the south, making them seem much more harmonious than reality. In 2010, Disney’s CEO Robert Iger called the movie “antiquated” and “rather offensive.” It’s been locked away in the Disney vault for some time. It is unlikely to ever be re-released again.”

Source: Face 2 Face Africa

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