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## "The Jeep is Here to Stay!" Projections of America and Franco-American Relations During World War II

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“The Jeep is Here to Stay!”  
Projections of America and Franco-American Relations During World War II

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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in  
History  
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by

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iv
Introduction.....	1
The Office of War Information.....	7
The Case of France .....	16
<i>Projections of America in France</i> .....	21
<i>The Cowboy</i> .....	23
<i>The Town</i> .....	26
<i>Autobiography of a Jeep</i> .....	28
Conclusion .....	31
Bibliography .....	36
Vita.....	38

## **Abstract**

During World War II, the Office of War Information produced American and Allied propaganda that was used at home and abroad. Robert Riskin, head of the Bureau of Motion Pictures Overseas Branch, was responsible for creating *Projections of America*, a documentary film series made to introduce foreigners to America whilst combating negative impressions of Americans that arose in the interwar years. Films from *Projections of America* contained themes of American culture, ideology, industry and technology, and democracy. In France, these films were used to sway French opinion of Americans while promoting friendship and appreciation for American culture. Ultimately, the films served to prepare the French for the oncoming American occupation. This paper will argue that the *Projections of America* film series and its use in France successfully promoted American culture while also negating negative perceptions of Americans during World War II.

Keywords: World War II, France, OWI, Riskin, propaganda, Projections of America

## Introduction

In 1942, the United States government established the Office of War Information (OWI) to serve as the United States' propaganda branch during World War II. During the war, the OWI created thousands of books, pamphlets, radio broadcasts, films, and other media that was used at home and abroad. Two branches of the OWI were established for overseas functions: the San Francisco Branch and the New York Branch. The San Francisco Branch oversaw OWI material being used in the Pacific Theater, while the New York Branch oversaw materials shipped to the European Theater.

Within the New York's branch was the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP), headed by screenwriter Robert Riskin. Riskin was well-known in the Hollywood motion picture industry, partnering with Frank Capra on popular films such as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. One of Riskin's most important contributions to the OWI's motion picture effort was the creation of a documentary series titled *The American Scene*, also known as *Projections of America*. In 1943, Riskin announced his plan to fight Hollywood's image of America. The OWI and the BMP would release a series of short documentary films that depicted the many facets of American life. Riskin's idea for the series emphasized a spiritual and cultural vibrancy within the United States.<sup>1</sup> The name of the series was *Projections of America*, and it consisted of short documentaries that covered a variety of images of American life, designed to introduce America to Europeans and counter the narrative that the United States was a country swarming with gangsters and cowboys. Compared to Frank Capra's popular documentary series *Why We Fight*, *Projections of America* was more subtle in its production, and attempted to sum up the vast essence of American life, culture, and ideology for its foreign allies. Riskin oversaw the

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Scott, "From Toscanini to Tennessee: Robert Riskin, the OWI and the Construction of American Propaganda in World War II," *Journal of American Studies* 40, no. 2 (2006): 351, 349.

production of twenty-six documentaries that made up *Projections of America*. Each film was translated into twelve languages over the course of World War II. In total, the OWI translated the films into twenty-seven languages. The films were distributed to OWI outposts around the world as a part of commercial packages, accompanying Hollywood features across Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Africa.<sup>2</sup> When American troops entered these liberated territories, their first job entailed confiscating enemy films and replacing them with American productions. In towns where theaters had been bombed, or in towns with no electricity, mobile theaters would be sent in and set up in public squares, ensuring foreign audiences would be able to view the American films.<sup>3</sup> *Projections of America* coincided with a larger OWI propaganda initiative known as “Projection of America.”

Each film of *Projections of America* presented a different facet of America and the American lifestyle. Generally, Europeans viewed Americans as youthful, wealthy, and optimistic. On the other hand, Americans were also seen as materialistic, vulgar, racist, and violent.<sup>4</sup> These films were made to counter these impressions, while also instilling the ideology of American life and policy in foreign audiences. For example, the film *Cowboy* tells the story of a young British child who is sent to the American West and learns what it means to be a real cowboy, versus the Hollywood “cowboys and Indians” depiction. At the same time, the boy learns about what it means to be an American, while also learning about America’s industrial machine. *A Journey* focuses on how ordinary citizens adapt to disruptions of war manufacturing in towns from Alabama to the Rocky Mountains. Another film, *The Cummington Story*, tells the story of a small New England town that initially refuses European refugees, but over time

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<sup>2</sup> Scott, “From Toscanini to Tennessee,” 351.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Wright, *Los Angeles Daily News*, May 22, 1944.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 9.

welcomes them into the community. Each film found in *Projections of America* told a unique story; the story designed to introduce foreigners to their liberators and the nation these liberators were from.<sup>5</sup>

The OWI meticulously planned its propaganda objectives. Each nation had its own directive for how propaganda objectives were to be carried out. Intelligence surveys told leaders within the Overseas Branch the political and social climate of the occupied state, the morale of its citizens, and the state of destruction throughout cities. Each nation's situation called for specific propaganda materials to be sent abroad. One theme was unanimous throughout all nations – the need to convince foreign citizens to believe America and its democracy were the essential allies.

The OWI conducted propaganda initiatives in four phases – *Ajax*: the period of pre-combat, *Bacchus*: the period of front line propaganda, *Ceres*: the period of military occupation, and *Dion*: the period stemming from the Ceres phase where there is growing civilian predominance.<sup>6</sup> The Ceres phase was a critical phase. Liberated nations faced a period of a second occupation from Allied soldiers. During this time, attempts to sway public opinion were critical to ensure Allied occupation was successful.

By the time the OWI reached France, the French had undergone four years of brutal Nazi occupation. A collaborative government, an exiled Resistance leader, and the loss of civilian lives through Nazi brutality and Allied operations left the French weary. Many French at the time harbored negative feelings towards the United States – wartime politics between the two nations left the French feeling abandoned by their American allies, and the Great Depression only

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<sup>5</sup> Scott, "From Toscanini to Tennessee," 355, 358.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Editorial Board on October 22, 1943; Memorandum from Mildred B. Allen to OWI Leadership; Box 807, RG 208, Records of the OWI, NARA, College Park, MD.



furthered their opinions that Americans were greedy and materialistic. Hollywood films produced in the interwar years also contributed to these negative impressions. Movies depicting cowboys versus Indians and big-city gangsters led many French to believe this image of American life to be factual. Riskin and his team gave a great amount of thought when planning the propaganda initiatives for France. BMP leaders carefully selected films from *Projections of America* for use. Each film chosen countered specific pre-war impressions while also introducing the French to certain aspects of American life and society.

The United States National Archives in College Park, Maryland houses Record Group 208, the Records of the Office of War Information. In this paper, folder titles are missing from OWI archival citations. The OWI collection is loosely organized, and many box folders are unlabeled. Films from *Projections of America* are not found within Record Group 208. Instead, many are found within Record Group 306, the Records of the U.S. Information Agency. Additionally, the films are not organized under any unified heading and must be located by a search of each individual film title.

Scholarship on the OWI is abundant and available. Alan Winkler's *Politics of Propaganda* is an often-cited source when it comes to general information on the OWI such as its origins and functions at home and abroad. Winkler discusses in detail OWI leaders such as Archibald MacLeish, Robert Sherwood, and Elmer Davis and their roles within the organization. Within *Politics of Propaganda*, Winkler lays out the inner workings of the OWI, and the many propaganda objective it had, including the combating of America's "gangster" image.<sup>7</sup> Although, missing from Winkler's work is any mention of Robert Riskin or his work with *Projections of America*, a series that heavily focused on combating that image. Winkler does discuss the Bureau

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<sup>7</sup> Allan Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 154.

of Motion Pictures, but again there is no mention of Riskin. Even when discussing problems between the OWI and Hollywood, Winkler does not recognize Riskin's work as a liaison between the two organizations.

The same can be said for other highly cited sources on the OWI such as *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War Two* by Thomas Doherty. In this book, Doherty provides an excellent overview of war films and pop culture during World War II. He examines Hollywood films along with films produced by the government such as the *Why We Fight* series and *The Negro Soldier*. While Doherty's *Projections of War* is a useful source for relevant information on the OWI, there is no mention of Riskin or his work in creating government films during the war years. The same can be said for Clayton D. Laurie's *The Propaganda Warriors: America's Crusade Against Nazi Germany*, where the "Projection of America" directive is discussed, but absent from the discussion is Riskin and his significance to the directive.<sup>8</sup>

The lack of Riskin and his film series in OWI historiography could simply be determined in the age of these publications, which were all published prior to the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has only been in recent years that the story of Riskin and *Projections of America* has been researched and discussed in the relevant literature. At the forefront of this research is Dr. Ian Scott, an American History professor at Manchester University. The first scholar to uncover and publish on the films since the conclusion of the war, Scott has produced multiple works on the life of Riskin and the significance of his films, the first being *In Capra's Shadow: The Life and Career of Screenwriter Robert Riskin*.<sup>9</sup> In his article, "From Toscanini to Tennessee: Robert

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<sup>8</sup> Clayton Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors: America's Crusade Against Nazi Germany* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996), 124.

<sup>9</sup> Ian Scott, email message to author, January 6, 2020.

Riskin, the OWI and the Construction of American Propaganda in World War II,” Scott argues Riskin’s documentary work to be the most incisive of the entire war.<sup>10</sup> Scott is able to back his argument through his extensive archival research and personal relationship with the Riskin family, which has allowed Scott to place Riskin and *Projections of America* within the historiography of the OWI.

The most recent publication on Riskin comes from a book titled *Fay Wray and Robert Riskin: A Hollywood Memoir*, published in 2019 and written by Victoria Riskin, daughter of Robert Riskin. In her book, Victoria presents a more personal look at Riskin’s life, and his dedication to the *Projections of America* series. Included in her book is a discussion of the 2014 documentary titled *Projections of America*, directed by Peter Miller.<sup>11</sup> After being contacted by a German film producer who believed documentaries shown in Germany after war accelerated good relations between Germany and the United States, Miller and his team began working on the new documentary. The *Projections of America* documentary includes Ian Scott as the Senior Advisor and Story Consultant, along with documents he uncovered in his research and clips from many of Riskin’s films. This film proved to be the first introduction to Riskin’s *Projections of America* for many people who were unaware of Riskin, his films, and their roles within the OWI and World War II.<sup>12</sup> By utilizing these recent sources and archival footage of the films, this project will analyze in what ways the Office of War Information used the *Projections of America* film series to promote American ideology while also combating negative perceptions of America in France during World War II.

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<sup>10</sup> Scott, “From Toscanini to Tennessee,” 147.

<sup>11</sup> Victoria Riskin, *Fay Wray and Robert Riskin: A Hollywood Memoir*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2019), 289.

<sup>12</sup> *Projections of America*, directed by Peter Miller (DOCDAYS Productions, Willow Pond Films, ZDF in collaboration with ARTE, 2014), <https://vimeo.com/98775391>.

## The Office of War Information

On June 16, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9182, officially establishing the Office of War Information. The Office of War Information (OWI) was created from the remnants of the Office of Facts and Figures, the Office of Government Reports, and the Foreign Information Service. Modeled on the Committee of Information that operated during World War I, the OWI functioned as the United States' propaganda department during World War II.

Executive Order 9182 gave the OWI the authority to create informational programs to help citizens and soldiers, at home and abroad, understand the war effort. This included government policies, combat activities, and national war aims. President Roosevelt instructed the OWI to implement programs through the press, radio, and motion pictures that would enhance people's understanding of the war. The OWI was to help coordinate the war by providing war-information activities to federal agencies, and by acting as the intermediary between federal agencies and the radio, press, and motion picture industries. Roosevelt separated the war into two categories: military victory and long-range diplomacy goals. The OWI would serve as a major component ensuring success for both. Touching on nearly every American's life during the war, the OWI became the constant focus of a great amount of popular attention.<sup>13</sup>

Elmer Davis was the first director of the OWI. Davis was a well-known radio commentator for CBS, an American television and radio broadcasting network, and accumulated a nation-wide following. He was approached by Roosevelt in May of 1942 to lead the government's newly established propaganda division. Davis is often credited and known for his role in easing the censorship of dead GIs in the American press.

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<sup>13</sup> Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors*, 113.

Robert Sherwood, playwright and speech writer for President Roosevelt, was commissioned in 1943 to lead the OWI's overseas division that handled all U.S. propaganda that was to be sent abroad. Davis and Sherwood believed the OWI needed to take an active role in winning the war, while also laying the foundation for a better postwar world.<sup>14</sup> Axis propaganda at the time followed a "strategy of terror" that often included blatant lies. The United States could not afford to lie to its audiences. Lying would have only assisted Axis claims that the United States and its ideals were hypocritical and hollow. To counter Axis claims, the OWI pursued a "strategy of truth."<sup>15</sup> This meant that OWI material was to present truthful information to the American public. Truthful material was also to be sent overseas, yet overseas materials needed to be slanted to be effective against years of Axis propaganda. For example, issues of racism and poverty were not present in overseas propaganda, as these themes would result in negative perceptions of the United States, benefiting the Axis powers. Additionally, the OWI was tasked with developing campaigns, such as war bonds or salvage drives.

The world needed to be prepared for America's upcoming role in international governance. To do this, the OWI constantly sought ways to generate interest and appreciation for American ways of life. Davis and Sherwood, along with other members of the OWI, understood they were working to combat a distorted image of America. The country had been portrayed as a gangster-ridden society due to art and motion pictures of the time, and the Axis powers took this idea and integrated it within anti-American propaganda. OWI directives and the subsequent material the organization produced presented the United States as a mighty, dedicated, and wholesome country. Most importantly, OWI material emphasized that the better interests of all people lay in the heart of American ideals. Most of the propaganda being pushed out stressed in

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<sup>14</sup> Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 76.

some way American power and productivity. American propaganda reflected not only American policy, but America itself.<sup>16</sup>

World War II brought many changes in American foreign and military policy. Propaganda crafted for overseas consumption was a crucial facet of OWI materials, as foreign audiences proved the most challenging when planning propaganda directives. In theory, overseas propaganda was an expression of American life and foreign policy.<sup>17</sup> Written in June of 1942, the Overseas Branch statement of principle mentions that “The thing we [OWI] stand for and believe in constitute the one ideology that men of freedom and good will can turn to.”<sup>18</sup> Members of the Overseas Branch felt it was America’s responsibility to make its ideology – freedom and democracy – known. Sherwood and fellow leaders of the Overseas Branch consistently saw the war as a struggle in which freedom and democracy could emerge victorious. It was a struggle that contained the potential to bring about positive changes throughout nations of the world. The Overseas Branch supervised all propaganda materials that were shipped abroad except to Latin America, which remained under inter-American affairs. Eventually, the Overseas Branch constructed twenty-six outposts across the world with stations in England, Spain, Australia, India, Iceland, and other nations. These foreign outposts were used to gather information on local morale and attitudes while distributing material about, and encouraging support for, the United States.

The Overseas Branch of the OWI played a central role in the United States’ propaganda efforts. By mid-1943, the Overseas Branch Headquarters in New York City was staffed 24-hours a day, with employees constantly working on hundreds of productions that were translated into

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<sup>16</sup> Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 157.

<sup>17</sup> Holly Shulman, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 76.

<sup>18</sup> Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 155.

multiple languages. The Overseas Branch received three quarters of the total OWI budget and employed two-thirds of the entire organization's staff. By 1944, ninety percent of the OWI's budget was directed to the Overseas Branch, highlighting the significance of this branch in the United States' propaganda effort.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1940s, a cooperative relationship between propaganda and the government was essential for the war effort. Leaders of the OWI believed World War II was a worldwide crusade against fascism and evil. It was their desire that the crusade be reflected within American propaganda, and Robert Sherwood believed he knew the man to fulfill the task.

Robert Riskin was a Hollywood screenwriter who was known for his work with Frank Capra on popular films such as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *Meet John Doe*. In 1941, Riskin traveled to Britain on assignment for *Liberty* magazine, where he reported on wartime activity and the state of the British film industry. During his time in Britain, Riskin worked with the British Ministry of Information and assisted with early propaganda films that became a staple in the British wartime morale effort.<sup>20</sup> Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the war, Riskin returned to the United States. In the summer of 1942, Sherwood appointed Riskin as head of the Overseas Branch's Bureau of Motion Pictures.

The Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) became an embodiment of FDR's New Deal, the economic reform that helped pull America out of the Great Depression. The United States entered the war with the goal of establishing a democratic world based on FRD's four freedoms – freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from want and fear. The BMP believed in the same philosophy established by Davis and Sherwood that the war was a people's struggle, and that all peoples of the world had something at stake in it. An Allied victory meant a decent

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<sup>19</sup> Shulman, *The Voice of America*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Scott, "From Toscanini to Tennessee," 348.

standard of living that included a job, fair housing, recreation, good health, and retirement. The philosophy of the Bureau, in this sense, was that Allied victory would lead to a world New Deal.<sup>21</sup>

When it came to motion pictures, Riskin and the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) believed that every film produced in the United States either heightened or diminished America's image and reputation abroad. Up to the 1940s, Hollywood films produced in America were riddled with scenes of gangsterism, vice, and a west filled with wagon heists and saloon shootings. The BMP understood such images to have negative impressions on foreign audiences, in turn hindering America's power and influence abroad. OWI leader Elmer Davis was aware of the significance of the motion picture, stating that "the motion picture could be the most powerful instrument of propaganda in the world whether it tries to be or not."<sup>22</sup> In 1943, the OWI's Overseas Branch took control of the BMP, giving the OWI control over not just the Bureau, but of motion picture export licenses. Gaining control of export licenses allowed the organization to have full control over what films would, or would not, be shipped abroad.

In a piece written about the BMP, the *Motion Picture Herald* quoted the Bureau as having the aim of "a production program through which it [OWI] hopes to counteract in foreign lands the impression that the U.S. is a country of gangsters and cowboys" and that the OWI mandate was to tell the truth and "dispel fanciful conceptions about America."<sup>23</sup> The effect motion pictures had on foreign impressions of the United States was known to leaders of the BMP. In a 1937 study, one thousand British teenagers were asked to identify their principle

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<sup>21</sup> Clayton Knoppes and Gregory Black, "What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1954" *The Journal of American History* 64, no. 1 (1977): 91, accessed March 15, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1888275>

<sup>22</sup> Knoppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 88.

<sup>23</sup> "OWI Films to Tell World How U.S. Folk Behave," *Motion Picture Herald*, March 13, 1943, 20.



source when receiving information about the United States. Motion pictures came out on top, with 583 teens listing cinemas as their first choice.<sup>24</sup> In a 1932 review of the film *Scarface*, Sidney Carroll of the *Sunday London Times* observed, “Do they not realize that such vivid concentration by American film directors and companies upon the putrid spots of their big cities... is gradually destroying the respect of the world for American citizenship, American manners and morals, and bringing the world to the suspicion that the whole American nation consists of a lot of perverts or fools, a pack of worse than worthless weaklings and wrong-uns.”<sup>25</sup> The America that had been conceptualized by Hollywood in previous years would no longer be acceptable for audiences during the war.

All films produced by the OWI had two goals. First, films needed to avoid anything that could be viewed as insulting to the Allies. Second, films needed to avoid any images that led to a depiction of “unattractive” aspects of American life. This included images of gangsterism, racism, materialism, and anti-intellectualism. In 1943, a Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation internal memo described these same OWI aims. The memo stated that “Misrepresentation of American life, of our allies, or of the world we live in could do incurable harm in those areas which have had nothing but Axis propaganda for years.”<sup>26</sup> The representation of American life became the forefront of the OWI motion picture goals. The OWI planned to combat misrepresentations of America and American life by fighting fire with fire. Or, in this case, motion pictures with motion pictures. To begin, the Office of Censorship placed a ban on tabooed films such as gangster and other action-type films. Many westerns fell under

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<sup>24</sup> Theodore Wilson, “Selling America via Silver Screen? Efforts to Manage the Projection of American Culture Abroad, 1942-1947” in “*Here, There and Everywhere*” *The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*, ed. Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 86.

<sup>25</sup> Sidney Carroll, “A Thug Symphony” *Sunday London Times*, July 30, 1932, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, “Selling American via Silver Screen?,” 88.

the ban too, since the genre often created impressions that the American West was rife with lawlessness.<sup>27</sup>

In late November 1944, an OWI staffer named David Wilson submitted a memo to the Washington Review Board, the OWI's "think tank." The document was titled "Draft Outline of a Directive on Projection of America." The use of "Projection" in the title is used with a double meaning. "Projection" can be interpreted as a forecast or prediction, while also being interpreted as a medium for communication about American life and ideals.<sup>28</sup> An initiative such as Projection of America was needed in order to implement the United States' national policies that regarded peace settlements and other postwar arrangements among nations, with top priority being given to topics that beared directly on that attitudes foreigners took toward international policies for the immediate postwar period.<sup>29</sup> Prior OWI reports and analysis gathered provided general impressions of Americans. Foreigners believed Americans to be "barbarian destroyers of older cultures," "ignorant of European nations," and that "terrorism and gangsterism are an accepted feature of American daily life."<sup>30</sup> In short, during the 1940s, the picture of Americans was uncultured, uninformed, materialistic, unpredictable, and unreliable. The Projection of America initiative was the most effective approach for the OWI, regarding negating the negative impressions of American life. To combat these impressions, themes in the Projection of America initiative would present Americans as well-informed, well-intentioned, progressive, unstandardized people who believed in "*E pluribus unum*," diversity within unity.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Pryor, "Dispelling A Harmful Illusion" *The New York Times*, March 7, 1943, x3.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, "Selling America via Silver Screen?," 83.

<sup>29</sup> Outline of a Directive for Projection of America, November 30, 1944, Box 807, RG 208, Records of the OWI, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>30</sup> Outline of a Directive for Projection of America, Box 807, RG 208, NARA.

<sup>31</sup> Outline of a Directive for Projection of America, Box 807, RG 208, NARA.

During the spring of 1944, the BMP drafted its new *Operational Guidelines for Motion Pictures*. The directive emphasized that the main purpose of distributing motion pictures was to indirectly create a favorable impression of America, thus inducing audiences into full cooperation. To do this, OWI films were required to avoid including images that created impressions of lawlessness and corruption, contained themes of social or economic injustices, or presented Americans as uncultured and materialistic.<sup>32</sup> Films that were produced could not be openly propagandistic in their tone or content, whilst each film needed to be seen as a worthwhile contribution to the goals of the OWI when presenting the United States to the world. Regardless of the content, OWI films were required to carry the conviction of faith in Allied victory, in the democratic process, and a better post-war world.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the Overseas Branch constantly concerned itself with matters of political and psychological conditions of its foreign audiences. Psychological reactions of audiences were essential when establishing plans for propaganda initiatives. In respect to motion pictures, films were viewed as a major factor in psychological warfare as the goal was always to stimulate admiration and respect for America and its ideals.

OWI leaders believed documentary films one of the most direct ways of projecting America's active role in the war effort and in the establishment of a better postwar world. America's role in the postwar order was a subject of great concern for many foreign audiences. Documentaries were the visual tool that attempted to overcome misunderstandings about American life with an honest presentation of facts. Through documentaries, Riskin and his staff stressed the United States' interest in cooperating with the rest of the world, by telling the world about America whilst learning about other countries. Simply put, a memo titled *Suggestions for a*

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<sup>32</sup> Revised Operational Guidance for Motion Pictures, April 12, 1944, Box 806, RG 208, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>33</sup> Revised Operation Guidance for Motion Pictures, Box 806, RG 208, NARA.

*Guidance on OWI Documentaries* states, “Our program is then a presentation of America which informs, which is designed to correct clichés, which makes no odious comparison, but rather stresses our awareness of the relationship of our culture to that of other countries, as well as our awareness of the difference that exists.”<sup>34</sup>

OWI documentaries were kept simple, with each film carrying one major theme and various supplemental themes.<sup>35</sup> For example, one occurring theme was the “Vitality of American Democracy.”<sup>36</sup> Democracy was believed to be a concept that was rooted in human nature and had brought great reforms to America. “Unity Within Variety” was another present theme among OWI documentaries, where films depicted various people in America and their regional pride, while emphasizing the unity of all.<sup>37</sup> American government structures and legislative reforms, education systems, scientific research, culture and entertainment were considered strategic themes to be presented in OWI documentary films. Material was made that avoided segregation and religious prejudices to combat the widely believed European concept of universal prejudices found in America.<sup>38</sup> Riskin and his team gave much thought and consideration to documentary themes, so that all worked to provide the most idealist projection of America. Each documentary idea was first sent to the Washington Review Board. Submitted ideas needed to state the psychological warfare or informational purposes that would be achieved by the film, along with the theme, subject matter, treatment and materials, and languages in which the film would be dubbed. Once approved by the Review Board, the film would go into production and be integrated into a propaganda directive for select countries.

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<sup>34</sup> Suggestions for a Guidance on OWI Documentaries, September 27, 1944, Box 807, RG 208, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>35</sup> Suggestions for a Guidance on OWI Documentaries, Box 807, RG 208, NARA.

<sup>36</sup> Suggestions for a Guidance on OWI Documentaries, Box 807, RG 208, NARA.

<sup>37</sup> Suggestions for a Guidance on OWI Documentaries, Box 807, RG 208, NARA.

<sup>38</sup> Suggestions for a Guidance on OWI Documentaries, Box 807, RG 208, NARA.

## The Case of France

When planning propaganda initiatives, OWI leaders had to consider each foreign nation's specific situation. Material sent to allied audiences in England might not work as effectively on liberated audiences in Italy. When it came to France, American propagandists were unsure where they stood. The BMP had to consider France's political and military relations with the United States. By the start of the 1940s, Franco-American relations were murky. The United States had not been helpful to France's efforts to repel the Nazi invasion of 1940. During the interwar years, French intellectuals often denounced American culture and lifestyle. Riskin and his team gave careful consideration when deciding the appropriate material to send abroad.

In a 1924 play titled *les Américains chez nous*, Parisians learned about mechanized American farming, and believed it threatened the pastoral idyll life of the French countryside.<sup>39</sup> The development of American industry often led the French to believe Americans were lazy, money-hungry people, as the use of technology over hands-on work for mass production and heightened profit margins was opposite of the centuries-old lifestyle of French farmers. Many French did not envy the economic boom the United States experienced following World War I.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, America lost the slightest appeal to prosperity. The stock market crash of 1929 left many Americans broke, unemployed, and homeless. The French believed the American economic model failed to satisfy material needs. The Great Depression and America's turn to isolationism following the First World War did not do much to better French impressions.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 2.

Young French scholars and theorists of the 1930s rejected American modernity.<sup>41</sup> French culture and way of life was rooted in its traditional Christian values and fellowship along with traditional humanism. Theorists argued that modernity, in the American fashion, was the wrong direction for France. In the 1930s, this viewpoint of the United States circulated throughout French society. Many centered it in their writings, and those who did not at least mentioned their distaste for American modernity.<sup>42</sup> Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu published essays titled “*Le Cancer Américain*” that denounced the American way of life for France. Thierry Maulnier, a French journalist, defined America as the “new barbarism,” reducing human beings to animalistic needs, enslaving them to an economic monster, and defining them by their functions.<sup>43</sup> It was the same for French writer André Siegfried, who believed America was primarily an economic phenomenon. Siegfried believed American’s pursuit in life was essentially for wealth, and that monetary considerations came before and above everything else.<sup>44</sup>

The Great Depression only reinforced the notion to see America in only economic terms. Siegfried also believed that the mixing of economic and moral values in American life was all the more clearly exposed in the disaster of the Depression.<sup>45</sup> The French believed Americanization to be a mixture of huge industrial factories, expansive urban sprawls, a relentless way of life, and an obsession with money – the economic state that is America.

Hollywood was a major component that fueled negative French impressions of America. Motion pictures enabled the French to view Americans to be addicted to crime and violence.

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<sup>41</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 13.

<sup>42</sup> Donald Allen, *French Views of America in the 1930s* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), 64.

<sup>43</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Allen, *French Views of America in the 1930s*, 64.

<sup>45</sup> Allen, *French Views of America in the 1930s*, 73

Americans were fond of and rich enough to indulge in pleasures of the flesh, and in no ways were subtle in their indulgences.<sup>46</sup> Hollywood became the quintessential expression and image of American life. The French believed Hollywood made film-making an industry exploited for profit, and that the Hollywood corporations threatened true film culture because of its obsession with box office profits. Simply put, the French believe American cinema “standardized people.”<sup>47</sup>

With impressions of Americans poor in the 1930s, and the imminent war approaching, the United States stood back while the French hoped America would become an ally in the defense of French independence.

President Roosevelt stated the United States was to become an “arsenal of democracy,” yet no arsenal presented itself during the fall of France. Hitler’s success in France shocked many people in the United States, and it set the stage for a new set of attitudes and relations between the two countries.<sup>48</sup> Neither the collaborative Vichy government nor Charles de Gaulle’s Resistance sustained cooperative relations with the United States.

Initially, the United States maintained relations with Marshal Pétain’s Vichy France until 1942 to obtain political and military information about the situation in Europe.<sup>49</sup> U.S. leaders assumed that Vichy would be more of use in defeating Germany than the Resistance, therefore maintaining diplomatic relations with the Nazi-collaborative government. But Vichy’s diplomatic alignment became increasingly German, and internal policies moving in undesired directions caused discord in Washington. In the end, fighting broke out between American and

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<sup>46</sup> John Blair, “First Steps toward Globalization: Nineteenth-Century Exports of American Entertainment Forms.” in *“Here, There and Everywhere” The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*, ed. Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 74.

<sup>47</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Crane Brinton, *The Americans and the French* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 63.

<sup>49</sup> Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 81.

Vichy French Troops in 1942 during Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of French North Africa.<sup>50</sup>

There was little to no relation between Vichy and London; the United States was the only power able to exert any influence over Pétain's government. This resulted in largely ignoring de Gaulle and the Free French in London, despite the Resistance's obvious sympathy to the United States.<sup>51</sup>

Relations between the French Resistance and the United States were hardly any better than relations between the U.S. and Vichy. Roosevelt consistently opposed de Gaulle as head of France's provisional government, causing a rift and distrust between the two figures. The Free French resented the United States for recognizing Pétain and Vichy as the government of France. Communist elements within the Resistance in France harbored reservations about what the future would bring should France be liberated by Americans, fearing the potential dependency of world capitalism.<sup>52</sup> A call to arms announced by de Gaulle fell on deaf ears in America. In the eyes of the Resistance, American acceptance of realities in France came too little and too slowly.

Relations between the United States and the Resistance were further strained following an event that occurred on the southern islands of Newfoundland. Two islands, Saint Pierre and Miquelon were French colonial territories. De Gaulle wanted the Free French to have control over the islands, a request that was resisted by Washington. On December 24, 1941, de Gaulle and the Free French landed on the islands anyway. Cordell Hull, the United States Secretary of State, claimed the "actions taken by the so-called Free French at Saint-Pierre and Miquelon was

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<sup>50</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *France and the United States* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976) 152.

<sup>52</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 18.



arbitrary action contrary to the agreement of all parties concerned.”<sup>53</sup> Hull’s use of the phrase “so-called” did not sit well among the men who were volunteering to take on the Germans; the same resentment fell amongst Americans too. The State Department soon became flooded with telegrams to the “So-Called Secretary of State.” Following the event Hull labeled de Gaulle as a dangerous adventurer and a budding dictator. Roosevelt allowed himself to be influenced by his Secretary of State and continued to treat de Gaulle as a nuisance rather than an ally.<sup>54</sup>

Following Operation Overlord, the Allied cross-channel invasion of Normandy, French attitudes towards the Allies were mixed as liberation came at a high cost. 13,000 Normans lost their lives in the operation from Allied bombing raids in the days prior to the landings, and the subsequent battles that followed as the Allies made their way into central France.<sup>55</sup> The Norman city of Caen suffered through ten weeks of battle, with up to ten tons of bombs dropped upon the city. Surrounding towns lost 75% of their structures and thousands were left homeless.<sup>56</sup> By June 1944, Vichy propaganda attacked “Jewish” America for its atrocities.<sup>57</sup>

During World War II, historians estimate that between 150,000 and 270,000 French civilians died by air raids, executions, deportation, or internal combat.<sup>58</sup> The pride of the French was left injured and unacknowledged, fueling the anti-American attitudes of the early 1940s. The country suffered internal division between Vichy and the Free French and failed to liberate its own people, relying on Allied assistance to complete the liberation of France. The United States knew that upon the success of Operation Overlord, military leadership intended to occupy

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<sup>53</sup> Duroselle, *France and the United States*, 154-155.

<sup>54</sup> Duroselle, *France and the United States*, 155.

<sup>55</sup> Kate Lemay “Gratitude, Trauma, and Repression: D-Day in French Memory” in *D-Day in History and Memory: The Normandy Landings in International Remembrance and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Dolski, Sam Edwards, and John Buckley (Denton, University of North Texas Press, 2014), 159; See also William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: The Human Cost of Allied Victory in World War II Europe*, (New York, Free Press, 2008), 19-59.

<sup>56</sup> Lemay, “Gratitude, Trauma, and Repression: D-Day in French Memory”, 168.

<sup>57</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Lemay, “Gratitude, Trauma, and Repression: D-Day in French Memory”, 173

France. Once the whole of France became free, the French people would then decide for themselves how they wished to be governed. Until then, Allied forces, with the aid of French assistance, maintained order in France.<sup>59</sup> This was the situation in which Riskin and the BMP had to overcome.

### Projections of America in France

Out of the four propaganda phases, the *Ceres* phase, the third phase of occupation, was the most critical phase in France. The *Ceres* phase began once combat in liberated areas moved forward, leaving the zone free for reorganization of civil life and administration.<sup>60</sup> In the *Ceres* phase for France, OWI staffers needed to convince liberated French populations that it was in their best interest to cooperate with Allied forces and the American people, in regards to the rebuilding of a peaceful and prosperous international order.<sup>61</sup> A direct goal of the propaganda that would be implemented in France was the maintaining and strengthening of the bonds of friendship between the American and French people. Other goals of the *Ceres* phase included persuading the French people of the American desire to share the fruits of scientific and technological advances made in the United States at a time when, under Nazi occupation, the French could not make such advances. Additionally, propaganda would need to persuade the French to appreciate American culture and social advances.<sup>62</sup> The *Ceres* phase would capitalize on Franco-American friendship and relations, convince the French of eventual Allied victory, and combat tendencies to abandon the democratic way of life.

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<sup>59</sup> Brinton, *The Americans and the French*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> Draft Operational Plan for France in the Ceres Phase, February 8, 1944, Box 806, Record Group 208, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>61</sup> Draft Operational Plan for France in the Ceres Phase, Box 806, RG 208, NARA.

<sup>62</sup> Draft Operational Plan for France in the Ceres Phase, Box 806, RG 208, NARA.

When the time came for the *Ceres* phase to be enacted, the Evaluations Division completed a report on the situation in France. In a memo titled “Our Audiences in Liberated France,” a representative from the Evaluations Division reported that “For some five years they [the French] have lived in a partial vacuum and for the last five months (preceding liberation) in a complete vacuum.”<sup>63</sup> The occupying Nazis took control of the newspapers and confiscated radios. If someone managed to keep a radio, the radio was rendered useless due to electricity being cut off. The French were anxious for information and entertainment. Following liberation, OWI leadership expected the French to become increasingly nationalistic and expected that French opinion would require reassurance regarding American democracy. Documentaries that would serve as a projection of America in France needed to be carefully selected. The various films chosen were selected by Riskin based on his own experience and interpretation of the need in foreign lands.<sup>64</sup> In short, the long-term propaganda goal in France may be assumed under one large heading: to consolidate, intensify and perpetuate Franco-American friendship.<sup>65</sup> The following discussions are of three *Projections of America* films that were used to build a favorable perception of the United States among the French.

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<sup>63</sup> Our Audiences in Liberated France, Memo from Evaluations Division, September 8, 1944, Box 2204, Folder “Audience Reaction Reports”, RG 208, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>64</sup> The Need for a Coordinated Government War-Time Motion Picture Program, Box 3, RG 208, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>65</sup> Long Range Policy Guidance for France, October 5, 1944, Box 804, RG 208, NARA, College Park, MD.

## The Cowboy

*The Cowboy*, a story on American West, was created for the purpose of dispelling the false idea that American cowboys were like those portrayed in popular Hollywood westerns. Written by Arthur Arent and narrated by actor Ralph Bellamy, *The Cowboy* was filmed on location, using Marfa, Texas as the backdrop for the American West. The film focuses on David, a young boy from England whose parents sent him to the United States after his home in Plymouth was bombed. David is fascinated by the cowboy and is excited to partake in his own adventure in the American West. David is disappointed when he arrives, as he quickly learns the life of a real cowboy did not resemble the “Wild West” he envisioned. David is taken around the ranch to learn the various tasks of a ranch hand, learning the true life of hard-working American cowboys as they produce beef and leather for the Allied fighting forces.<sup>66</sup> After spending some time on the ranch, David slowly begins to respect the work of cattlemen and the hard daily toil they experience.<sup>67</sup>

The film opens with a travelling David, who is dreaming up images of the Wild West. Excited to explore the ranch, David skips breakfast his first morning after arriving in Texas and is disappointed to find an empty field with a single tractor. David’s host reassures him that “there’s been no mistake David, you’re on a cattle ranch alright. The cowboys are here David. That was one running the tractor.”<sup>68</sup> The host claims he knows it would be better if they were running around “shooting desperados,”<sup>69</sup> but that the cowboys were busy running equipment such as trucks and tractors. With no cattle in sight, David begins to suspect the cowboys are all frauds. As his host begins to explain the cattle are scattered across acres of land, the cowboy

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<sup>66</sup> The Need for a Coordinated Government War-Time Motion Picture Program, Box 3, RG 208, NARA.

<sup>67</sup> Scott, “From Toscanini to Tennessee,” 356.

<sup>68</sup> *The Cowboy*, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, RG 306, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>69</sup> *The Cowboy*, RG 306, NARA.

Jimmy York enters. York is the first man David sees with a pistol, and he is once again instilled with the promise of western adventure.<sup>70</sup>

Unfortunately, Jimmy turns out to be a disappointment for David, too, as their time spent together involved fixing fences, testing soil for food values, and learning the process of growing, harvesting, and storing hay. As David is still unsatisfied with his western adventure, his host begins to tell him of the real value of a man's worth on the ranch during winter. David learns how in winter cowboys must keep herds moving so that they do not freeze to death, and how cowboys must also be gentle and kind-hearted to rescue calves stuck in the snow. He learns about round-up season, where cowboys begin to move the herds together, and the scientific and technical side of these ranchers. Cowboys were educated people; they went to school and received degrees. They understood how to administer injections to cows to prevent diseases, and educated themselves on various breeds of cows, resulting in breeding healthy steers to market and produces higher quantities of beef.

David learns of the fall drive to the loading stations, which cowboys do along the 2000-mile front that is the West. The host tells David the fall drive is "not as exciting as shooting from the hip or chasing down bank robbers, but can assure its more important."<sup>71</sup> Loaded with cattle, the trains ship off with the "cowboys' contribution to the world."<sup>72</sup> David's host then explains that there is more than just beef in the train cars. Leather obtained from the cattle created boots for soldiers and helmets for pilots. Shells for gunners and fats for explosives all came from the cows supplied from the West. Most importantly, the cows fed the Allied soldiers. *The Cowboy* concluded with this final message:

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<sup>70</sup> *The Cowboy*, RG 306, NARA.

<sup>71</sup> *The Cowboy*, RG 306, NARA.

<sup>72</sup> *The Cowboy*, RG 306, NARA.

*“There’s a new world building David, but it can’t be done on an empty stomach. Men everywhere are making plans so that kids like you, wherever they may be, will never have to go hungry. And the West is taking part in those plans. The cowboys you read about are alright in their place, but I know you won’t mind if the real ones don’t waste time shooting up saloons and stick to raising cows. Alright with you David? Good.”*<sup>73</sup>

*The Cowboy* demonstrated how cowboys and ranchers were hard-working men who were dedicated to their traditional lifestyles. These cowboys existed miles away from the Hollywood conception that the American West was overrun by gunslingers, shanty towns, and saloons.<sup>74</sup> The film served two purposes: dispelling the myth of the American cowboy while highlighting the process of cattle raising. By highlighting this process, the film successfully presented the United States’ cattle industry. Subtly but surely, features like *The Cowboy* presented the coming of America’s industrial market that would rise in the postwar world. Farming on a wide commercial scale became a marketing boom for farmers, as it was the cause of American consumerism that would be released into the world.<sup>75</sup> As all films in *Projections of America*, *The Cowboy* touched on the universal theme of a collaborative war effort by highlighting how beef was transported overseas and used to supply and feed Allied soldiers. With *The Cowboy*, Riskin and his team worked to dispel the popular myth of the American cowboy whilst introducing foreigners to the industrial American cattle market.

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<sup>73</sup> *The Cowboy*, RG 306, NARA.

<sup>74</sup> Scott, “From Toscanini to Tennessee,” 355, 356.

<sup>75</sup> Scott, “From Toscanini to Tennessee,” 357.

## The Town

*The Town* was a documentary filmed to show the “melting pot” town of Maddison, Indiana. Directed by Joseph von Sternberg, *The Town* aimed to show the rural Indiana town not as naïve and disengaged from world events, but as a town where a simple life led to tolerance, hope, and community.<sup>76</sup>

The film opens with various images of an unknown town; an old English tower, an Italian campanile, a gothic doorway, and even columns that resemble those of ancient Greek and Roman temples. While the images of these structures come into view, the film’s narrator begins to ask questions such as, “Where is it? Is it somewhere in France? Does this walk lead to the shores of a blue Austrian lake?”<sup>77</sup> The narrator then reveals that this is Madison, Indiana, located in the United States, and begins to explain how the country was built by men from all corners of the Earth. He explains how all United States citizens remember where they, or their grandparents, came from, giving the example of Johnny McGuire, whose grandfather came from Ireland.

The narrator then begins to explain daily life in Madison. Scenes of a Sunday farmers market are shown, highlighting a farmer standing by a scale to sell his tomatoes “just as his forefathers did in a market in Europe.”<sup>78</sup> The film features Madison’s Main Street, where citizens find plenty room to expand, plan for their families, and can begin their own enterprises. At night, Main Street becomes an area for farmers and townspeople to meet, with the film showing scenes of bowling, socializing, and dancing. The corner drug store, Saturday night orchestras, and Sunday religious worship are all presented in the film, highlighting the many events citizens of Madison partake in.

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<sup>76</sup> Scott, “From Toscanini to Tennessee,” 365, 366.

<sup>77</sup> *The Town*, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, RG 306, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>78</sup> *The Town*, RG 306, NARA.

Schools are shown, while the narrator explains how schools in Madison are free for all children of the community, and that each child is given an equal opportunity to learn. The Madison newspaper is viewed and is said to “speak its mind” as it disagrees with the current government administration, highlighting the right of free speech in press in American democracy. It is at this point *The Town* takes the opportunity to discuss the government in Madison, and that officials are elected, and fired, by the people. There are laws of trial by jury, as they originated in England, that are carried out in the courts. The narrator wraps up the segment on Madison’s government by stating, “In free countries, the only thing that’s secret, is the ballot.”<sup>79</sup> At the end of *The Town*, the narrator concludes with the following line:

*“This is the town, and these are its people. People whose fathers brought to the banks of a river in the new world, the culture and heritage of the old. Who now have sent their sons back across the seas to join the sons of all peoples who fight for freedom, to make this town and all towns like it, wherever they may be, free and secure forever.”*<sup>80</sup>

*The Town* was a film made to directly counter the notion that Americans were uncultured and materialistic. The rural town of Madison is far from the main stream, big-city life many foreigners assumed Americans partook in. With *The Town*, Riskin and his team were also able to present that Americans were in fact full of many cultures and were proud of their foreign heritages. It is a “melting pot” community that has learned to coexist in a place where there is an observed devotion to faith if one chooses, charity, ethnic communities, and social empathies.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *The Town*, RG 306, NARA.

<sup>80</sup> *The Town*, RG 306, NARA.

<sup>81</sup> Ian Scott “Why We Fight and Projections of America: Frank Capra, Robert Riskin, and the Making of World War II Propaganda.” In *Why We Fought*, ed. by Peter C. Rollins, John E. O'Connor (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 247.



Upon *The Town*'s completion, Riskin took the film to Hollywood for the first of a series of screenings at the Motion Picture Academy, where they received enthusiastic reviews and endorsements from the Academy and journalists.<sup>82</sup> *The Town* highlights a small town in Indiana and how its citizens are dealing with the war. It was an enlightening film, presenting to foreigners that American towns were diverse cultural hubs of various liberties and freedoms, while still keeping consistent with the war theme of America and its Allies' global fight for freedom for all.

### *Autobiography of a Jeep*

The *Projections of America* series was mainly filmed with original scenes that were shot on location. One film, *Autobiography of a Jeep*, was different. The film included archival footage, used to create a compilation of scenes that told the story of the life of an American jeep. Told in sixteen languages, *Autobiography of a Jeep* tells the story of a vehicle that came to symbolize the Allied war effort wherever it went.<sup>83</sup>

The film is narrated by the jeep itself. He begins by introducing himself, saying he comes from a country of roads that is the United States of America, where there is 3,000 miles of desert, mountains, and valleys. Because of automobiles, Americans who live 100 miles apart can be neighbors. Scenes of American roads and cities are shown, and the jeep begins to discuss the American dream, stating "...because this dream, like every other dream of a free people was threatened..."<sup>84</sup> A montage of war reels begins to play, while the jeep continues on to say, "The men of my country went to war. The automobiles of the times of peace were stopped."<sup>85</sup> The

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<sup>82</sup> Scott, "Why We Fight and Projections of America," 360.

<sup>83</sup> Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 155.

<sup>84</sup> *Autobiography of a Jeep*, Records of the OWI, RG 208, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>85</sup> *Autobiography of a Jeep*, RG 208, NARA.

jeep then begins to explain the Army's need for a new mule that could take to the highway; a vehicle that could keep up with divisions. Images of classy 1940s-era vehicles are compared to a humorous first impression of the jeep, which lacked the comfortable leather seating and flashy paint job of the desired cars of the time.

The narrating jeep begins to tell stories of when the army first began to examine the new military vehicle. Footage of the army testing the jeep begins to play, while the jeep exclaims various things the army did while seeing what the new vehicle could manage. "They tried to drown my motor. They tried to beak my back on rollercoaster roads!"<sup>86</sup> These statements coincided with scenes of water and terrain testing, both of which the jeep was able to successfully pass.

The jeep testings move into scenes of jeep trainings in army maneuvers. The jeep explains how tough the American army is, and his worries of not being good enough or able to keep up. Army footage of maneuver trainings begin to play, showing the jeep being light enough to cross bodies of water with a tarp and wire line, small enough to fit inside glider transports, and strong enough to pull the glider planes. He exclaims that "the army was getting tough – and I had to get tougher."<sup>87</sup>

Whatever the army asked him to do, he was prepared. Whether it was pulling cannons, creating roads, or to keep moving better than 70 miles per hour, it was no worse than what the driver was ready to do himself. It is at this point in the film the focus shifts to the American soldier. The jeeps explains how he and the soldier "got to be pals" while scenes of soldiers using the jeep begin to play. The jeep carries equipment such as tanks and cannons, while soldiers use

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<sup>86</sup> *Autobiography of a Jeep*, RG 208, NARA.

<sup>87</sup> *Autobiography of a Jeep*, RG 208, NARA.

the jeep to lay smoke for tank cover and also crossing a river with the jeep's amphibian conversion.

The jeep then moves into mass production and tells of his success. He is used at home to sell war bonds before he goes into packaging to be sent overseas. The jeep was sent all over. The film shows scenes of the jeep in the Pacific, the victory in North Africa, Egypt, and China. The jeep is shown travelling with Douglas MacArthur, King George and Queen Elizabeth, and President Roosevelt in Casablanca. But throughout all his travels, the jeep claims he travelled with the guy he liked best, his pal the American soldier. He often quotes, "I was a success" throughout the end of the film, but closes out with this final statement:

*"But the thing that makes me a success most of all is this – I've made a friend. I mean the soldier. Wherever you see one of us the other won't be far behind, and that goes now when we are fighting together, and after the war when we will be building together. Because the rumor is going around that the jeep is here to stay."*<sup>88</sup>

*Autobiography of a Jeep* was a humorous and witty film, winning over many of its audiences. The jeep is given human characteristics through its technological practicality and is paraded as the military's friend and companion, rather than just a workhorse vehicle.<sup>89</sup> In reality, the jeep was a huge success, being admired by leaders such as Churchill, Roosevelt, and King George VI. The films doubled in showing an American industry whilst promoting friendly relations with American soldiers. It is important to take note of the closing line of the film, as it can be interpreted as a foreshadowing metaphor for American occupation that many countries saw following liberation. This film was used as propaganda made to encourage friendly relations with American troops to its viewers, under the cover of a lightly humored film.

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<sup>88</sup> *Autobiography of a Jeep*, RG 208, NARA.

<sup>89</sup> Scott, "From Toscanini to Tennessee," 358.

## Conclusion

According to Riskin, the distribution of American films in France progressed slowly but steadily. Film distribution largely relied on combat developments, the physical adequacy of theaters, and the electric power supply.<sup>90</sup> Another hurdle was theater ownership, and the removal of ownership and operation of known collaborationists, which was handled through the Allied Military Agency and French authorities. Riskin reported to American journalists great demand for American films, stating “French people everywhere are clamoring to see the Hollywood product denied to them for the last few years.”<sup>91</sup> When theaters opened, lines immediately began to form out of the entrance. In the first five months following D-Day, film houses operated in north, south, and west France, but only three in Paris due to power shortages.

By late 1944, all propaganda and informational material selected and produced for foreign consumption was considered based on the assumption that the war in Europe had been virtually won.<sup>92</sup> Initial reports on the *Projections of America* films showed the films were received well in France.

In a September 1944 cable, Robert Sherwood stated “The ranking movie smash hit in France is “Autobiography of a Jeep.”<sup>93</sup> Sherwood thought highly of the film. He often recommended it to be played in liberated areas, as the lighthearted humor often steered away impressions that the film was “unquestionable propaganda,” which is exactly what liberated people did not want to view. *Autobiography of a Jeep* sparked world-wide interest in the American jeep. A Parisian informant for the OWI wondered if an OWI booklet on the jeep

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<sup>90</sup> “‘Who Owns What’ Slows Distribution in France,” *Motion Picture Herald*, October 7, 1944.

<sup>91</sup> “‘Who Owns What’” *Motion Picture Herald*, October 7, 1944.

<sup>92</sup> Operation Guidance on OWI Documentary Films, November 24, 1944, Box 807, RG 208, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>93</sup> Bulletin of the Evaluations Division, September 5, 1944, Box 2201, RG 208, Records of the OWI, NARA, College Park, MD.

would be translated into French, since “the jeep apparently won the heart of the Parisian public as elsewhere in France.”<sup>94</sup> Following a September showing of *Autobiography of a Jeep* in Rennes, people exited the theaters crying “*Vive le Jeep!*” which then spread over the rest of France with liberating armies. The OWI documentaries were extremely popular in France, so much that in for nearly six weeks, when electricity was made available to theaters in Paris, the few that opened showed these documentaries exclusively.<sup>95</sup>

Following D-Day and the end of the war, Franco-American relations significantly improved. Despite the costs, French citizens were grateful for liberation. Franco-American collaboration reached its peak in 1947, with the implementation of the Marshal Plan. Congress passed the Marshal Plan, authorizing the spending of roughly \$13 billion in foreign aid. The Marshal Plan became the starting point for the economic growth that began after the war. Additionally, it helped build an alliance system that opposed the Russian system.<sup>96</sup> Following the release of *Autobiography of a Jeep* and other *Projections* films, reports done on French audiences by the Evaluations Division presented a growing interest for American life, a significant change from pre-war impressions and push back on American lifestyles. In an Evaluations Bulletin, a report conducted by the Psychological Warfare Division, dated May 16, 1945, the Psychological Warfare Division reported that the French expected future economic relations with the United States to be beneficial. The report also noted that within the French press was a tone of admiration for America, with frequent articles on leading American

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<sup>94</sup> Bulletin of the Evaluations Division, October 31, 1944, Box 2201, RG 208, Records of the OWI, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>95</sup> Virginia Wright, *Los Angeles Daily News*, December 27, 1944.

<sup>96</sup> Brinton, *The Americans and the French*, 99.

personalities and military leaders, and on American ways of life, especially how they differed from the ways of the French.<sup>97</sup>

Postwar America represented growth and prosperity, and an especially elevated standard of living. The model of postwar America was something France could not ignore or challenge. Instead, French leaders questioned how to obtain American prosperity while keeping their deeply rooted French values and traditions. It was nearly impossible for postwar France to ignore America; the United States exercised hegemony over France, as it did many other liberated areas, instilling American social, economic, cultural, and political ideologies into the public and official leaders.<sup>98</sup>

The leaders of the OWI saw World War II as a peoples' war. It was a necessary conflict which they believed could reaffirm and spread the values they cherished. Davis, Sherwood, Riskin, and many others used propaganda as a method to push foreign policy, molding American foreign policy into a reflection of what they believed was the essence of the United States.<sup>99</sup>

As the war came to a close, in April 1945, Riskin announced his resignation from the Bureau of Motion Pictures. He began work on a proposal for a State Department plan to continue the making of documentaries that resembled the ones produced in *Projections of America*. In an interview for the *Los Angeles Times*, Riskin stated, "It is startling to notice the interest manifested in documentary films describing educational, cultural, and other phases of American life."<sup>100</sup> To address this, Riskin proposed a plan involving the State Department and Hollywood coming together, where the "selling America" campaign would continue on six months after the

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<sup>97</sup> Bulletin of the Evaluations Division, May 16, 1945, Box 2201, RG 208, Records of the OWI, NARA, College Park, MD.

<sup>98</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 2, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Shulman, *The Voice of America*, 10.

<sup>100</sup> "Plan to 'Sell' U.S. Proposed: Educational Films of American Life for Export Proposed," *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1945.

OWI disbanded at the end of the war. The plan proposed for twenty-four pictures be made yearly, with approximately \$1 million regulated to finance the project. The films themes would continue to show educational, cultural, medical, scientific, and other aspects of American life. In short, Riskin's plan would assure that the government continued to "sell the benefits of American democracy" to the nations of the world.<sup>101</sup> Riskin continued to promote his postwar plan into 1946, gaining the support of top people in the film industry such as Capra and David Selznick. Unfortunately, with the start of the Cold War and political climates becoming increasing tense, Riskin's postwar documentary plan never came to pass. The production of documentaries like the ones of *Projections of America* ended, along with the OWI, at the close of the war.<sup>102</sup>

From 1942-1945, Riskin and the Overseas Bureau of Motion Pictures created twenty-six films that ranged from shorts to features. *Projections of America* is arguably one of the most influential efforts of wartime propaganda. Before the war, American films exported abroad were widespread over many European film markets. These films assisted with forming a connotation that America was a country of gangsters, who celebrated exploitation, were materialistic and full of greed. With *Projections of America*, Riskin countered that notion, while promoting liberal change that coincided with the New Deal into the postwar world.<sup>103</sup> The series was an assertion of life in America and its accomplishments. It expressed a fulfilled social life and standard of living, and that Americans appreciated the various cultures that created their communities.

Films observers noted in 1948 that the large number of outstanding documentaries produced during World War II had only a limited impact to the genre in the United States due to

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<sup>101</sup> Fred Stanley, "Hollywood Ponders a New Project," *New York Times*, March 11, 1945.

<sup>102</sup> Riskin, *Fay Wray and Robert Riskin: A Hollywood Memoir*, 298.

<sup>103</sup> Scott, "Why We Fight and Projections of America," 252.

their limited viewings to audiences at home.<sup>104</sup> Virginia Wright, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Daily News* expressed it was unfortunate that *Projections of America* was not shown to the American public, for she felt that Americans, as well as liberated peoples, could “stand a little propagandizing about ourselves.”<sup>105</sup> Unlike other OWI documentary series such as Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight*, Riskin’s series was only viewed by a select few of the general American public, usually for the film’s approval to be sent overseas. Riskin deeply rooted himself into the war effort. His time in London, his belief in Roosevelt and the New Deal, and his liberating instincts toward oppressed people, all convinced him that he could improve society throughout the world.<sup>106</sup> Riskin believed his films to be an extension of American liberty and democracy, and he believed these films carried that message to a world that was drastically and quickly changing. Riskin executed *Projections of America* in a manner that allowed foreigners to be softly introduced to the United States, and in turn accomplished one of the OWI’s most sought-out goals: making friends for America.

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<sup>104</sup> Scott, “Why We Fight and Projections of America,” 242.

<sup>105</sup> Virginia Wright, *Los Angeles Daily News*, May 22, 1944.

<sup>106</sup> Scott, “Why We Fight and Projections of America,” 244.



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