Copyright Warning and Restrictions

Title 17, United States Code of the copyright law of the United States governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions, the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), Robert W. Van Houten Library is authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction on the condition that either is not to be "*used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.*" If a person makes a request for or later uses a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use", that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

Fair Use Guidelines

Notwithstanding the provisions of section 106 and 106A, the fair use of a copyrighted work, including such use by reproduction in copies or phonorecords or by any other means specified by that section, for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright. In determining whether the use made of a work in any particular case is a fair use the factors to be considered shall include –

(1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit;

(2) the nature of the copyrighted work;

(3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and

(4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

The fact that a work is unpublished shall not itself bar a finding of fair use if such finding is made upon consideration of all the above factors.

HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN CINEMA
CHARLES HARPOLE, GENERAL EDITOR

6
BOOM AND BUST: AMERICAN CINEMA IN THE 1940s

Thomas Schatz

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley · Los Angeles · London

ius pinup

8

Regulating the Screen: The Office of War Information and the Production Code Administration

CLAYTON R. KOPPES

Regulating morality and politics on the screen was as critical from 1939 to 1945, during a period of international crisis, as at any time in American film history. While the Production Code Administration (PCA) patrolled moral barricades, major issues arose about the movies' content and their politics. After the PCA tried to eviscerate films against fascism from 1939 through 1941, the U.S. government decided wartime movies were too important to be left to the moviemakers. Through most of the war, the Office of War Information (OWI), the Roosevelt administration's propaganda agency, engaged in the most systematic governmental effort to regulate content that has been seen in any American medium of popular culture.

Together the PCA, policing morality, and the OWI, guarding politics, regulated the American screen more tightly than at any time in its history. The process yielded improvements in film content in certain areas, evasions and outright falsifications in others, high profits, and few great pictures. The unprecedented collaboration between government and the motion picture oligopoly raised questions that go to the heart of issues about control of the media in a democratic society.

The PCA and the Prewar Movie Industry

In the late 1930s, Hollywood and the PCA were still primarily concerned with the sort of pictures that Will Hays liked to describe as "pure entertainment," free of political or social controversy. The PCA under Joseph Breen devoted most of its attention to morality and vulgarity. His forceful administration of the Production Code provided what business prizes most: stability. Critics justifiably deplored the industry's lack of innovation and aversion to serious subjects. Will Hays and the studio heads thought otherwise.

They did not object to the movies' conservative tone and aesthetics, and they were able to make memorable pictures within the Code's strictures. In any case, the industry's profitability since 1934 seemed justification enough. Hays and the Hollywood heads did not want to relive the intense criticism of the early 1930s, which had threatened to bring about tougher censorship (perhaps by the federal government) or antitrust action that would destroy the carefully crafted Hollywood oligopoly.[1]

Although the PCA was a Hollywood fixture by the late 1930s, producers provoked controversies by pushing at the margins of the Code. One of the more recent and celebrated instances, as described in chapter 3, involved David O. Selznick's showdown with Breen over Rhett Butler's final line in GONE WITH THE WIND and Howard Hughes's ongoing feud over the revealing shots of Jane Russell's breasts in THE OUTLAW. Selznick prevailed, of course, and in fact the MPPDA board of directors not only allowed the line but amended the Code to allow *damn* and *hell* to be used in strictly limited cases.[2] Hughes, on the other hand, was ordered to cut some sixty seconds from THE OUTLAW—less than what was first demanded by Breen, who accurately anticipated the more drastic excisions demanded by local censor boards.[3]

The confrontations over *damn* and décolletage afforded comic relief in what was to moral guardians a deadly serious struggle over the theme, tone, and subject matter of motion pictures. In fact, the Catholic Legion of Decency rarely found it necessary to disapprove of PCA-sanctioned pictures. Breen had stumbled, however, when he approved MGM's STRANGE CARGO (1940). The Legion blasted it with a "C" (condemned) rating—the first such divergence between the Legion and the PCA since 1934—on the grounds that it promoted "naturalist religion." The PCA was dumbfounded at this bit of theological arcana. The controversy was an aberration and faded quickly.[4] The Legion's C rating for MGM's TWO-FACED WOMAN in late 1941, shortly after Breen left the PCA for RKO, was an obvious attempt to reassert its authority and to bring Breen's de facto successor, Geoffrey Shurlock, into line.[5] That incident amounted to little, finally, particularly in light of the U.S. entry into the war only a few weeks later.[6]

While battles over marital infidelity, bared breasts, and profanity followed well-worn grooves by the late 1930s, the mounting international crisis that erupted into World War II posed new challenges to the PCA's regulatory apparatus. Hitler's storm troopers, Mussolini's Blackshirts, and the Spanish Civil War offered Hollywood intensely dramatic material. Though most Americans remained resolutely isolationist, many thoughtful observers grew increasingly alarmed about the implications of German, Italian, and Japanese aggression. Hollywood was an intensely political community. Its creative personnel were predominantly liberal to leftist; they were reinforced in the late 1930s by European émigrés who advocated stronger resistance to what they saw as international fascism. Yet little of Hollywood's politics made the transition from the living room or the swimming pool to the screen.

Powerful structural barriers restricted politics on the screen. Hollywood usually eyes "message" pictures coldly, an attitude captured in the bromide attributed to Sam Goldwyn: "If you want to send a message, call Western Union." Like most purveyors of popular culture, the studio moguls tended to view entertainment and social comment as incompatible. Louis B. Mayer's philosophy, said the producer Pandro S. Berman, was that "we were selling beautiful women. . . . And he said if you're selling beautiful women *make* them beautiful. Dress them beautifully. Make them up beautifully. And photograph them beautifully." Many film industry heads were politically and socially conservative. Mayer was a Hoover Republican, and his favorite movies, the Andy Hardy series,

Impromptu wartime conference between PCA chief Joseph Breen (left) and British producer Arthur Rank.

betrayed his nostalgia for a waning Main Street domesticity. Cinema executives' endorsement of the blacklisting of suspected Communists and mere liberals after World War II reflected not merely capitulation to pressure but recognition of their own views.[7]

As seen in previous chapters, foreign trade reinforced Hollywood's caution, since it often meant the difference between break-even and profit. The studio-distributors thus were wary of doing anything that might offend any sizable foreign market. They even went so far as to fire their Jewish employees in Germany when Hitler demanded it. It was no coincidence that studios felt bolder about making antifascist pictures after their films were barred from Germany and Italy in 1940 and the British market thereby assumed greater importance.[8]

The movies' position in American society was paradoxical. Their very popularity gave them power but also encouraged people to attribute great (probably excessive) influence to them. Ongoing anti-Semitic attacks on the Jewish-dominated industry encouraged the moguls, perennially uneasy about their status in their adopted country, to minimize the Jewish presence in the industry and avoid political positions that looked like special pleading for Jewish causes. Will Hays, the master Republican politico and Presbyterian elder, counseled industry self-regulation and avoidance of political controversy on the screen. Politics was not prohibited in the Code, but Hays often invoked the elastic rubric of "industry policy" to pressure studios not to make controversial pictures.[9]

The mounting international crisis in 1937–1938 induced some producers to challenge the institutional barriers to political films. In late 1937, Hitler and Mussolini entered an alliance, which was soon followed by the Fuehrer's *Anschluss* with Austria. The Spanish Republic fell to Franco's Nationalist forces in March 1938, and in September the Munich sellout allowed Hitler to have his way with Czechoslovakia. Some of Hays's lieutenants argued that the screen should be open to more political material, which would be helpful in countering the Justice Department's antitrust suit against the industry in 1938. Filmmakers who attempted projects on the international crisis found, however, that the PCA still threw up roadblocks.[10]

The PCA's institutional bias against political films was reinforced by Breen's anti-Semitism and anticommunism. Although he hid his anti-Semitism in Hollywood, his dislike of Jews poured out in confidential letters to fellow Catholics. "These Jews seem to think of nothing but money making and sexual indulgence," said Breen. "They are, probably, the scum of the scum of the earth." Seemingly unperturbed by the Axis powers' anti-Jewish laws, he dismissed the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League as special pleading. It was "conducted and financed almost entirely by Jews," he said, and used anti-Jewish measures to stir up hostility to Hitler. Breen was sympathetic enough to Mussolini and Hitler in the late 1930s to try to have criticism of their regimes balanced by recognition of their achievements. Like many Catholics, he endorsed Franco and despised the Soviet-aided Spanish Republic. Support for Franco and at least toleration of Hitler and Mussolini was of a piece with the Catholic Church's anticommunism, as was fighting the anti-rightist organizations in Hollywood. Breen believed he was on the front line against red propaganda. In December 1937, he confided to Daniel J. Lord, the Jesuit who had been the Code's chief author, that he was fighting nothing less than a movement to *"capture the screen of the United States for Communistic propaganda purposes."* This hyperbolic statement strained credulity, but it indicated Breen's determination to block or at least dilute criticism of the right.[11]

In 1938, the independent producer Walter Wanger began work on BLOCKADE (1938), which he intended to be sympathetic to the Spanish Republic. Since the screenplay contained no Code violations of any consequence, Breen reluctantly approved it. He insisted, however, that the film avoid identifying either side, a condition that sharply reduced its meaning for the uninitiated. He let stand Henry Fonda's impassioned appeal to the "conscience of the world," since it was cast in vague, general terms. Detached from historical context, the film seems to be a generic war movie. Wanger himself described BLOCKADE as nothing more than a "melodramatic spy story and romance in a modern setting—colorful Spain." The Catholic right nonetheless attacked the film as propaganda, the Legion of Decency warned against it, and Martin Quigley editorialized against it in his *Motion Picture Herald.* Some liberals, on the other hand, charged that Hays worked behind the scenes to sabotage exhibitions. The film had a marginally successful run. Under the PCA, the screen could not speak the name of the conflict that was on everyone's lips.[12]

The persistent, politically minded Wanger tried again with a more daring subject, a film based on the journalist Vincent Sheean's best-selling *Personal History.* The reporter-hero discovers Franco's brutality and Hitler's anti-Semitism and rescues several Jews. Breen was unmoved by this factually based material, dismissing it as "pro-Loyalist propaganda . . . pro-Jewish propaganda, and anti-Nazi propaganda." He warned Wanger that the film would cause him "enormous difficulty" and harm the industry. Wanger shelved the project until 1940, when he retitled it FOREIGN

Laraine Day and Joel McCrea in Hitchcock's espionage thriller FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT *(1940).*

CORRESPONDENT, hired Alfred Hitchcock for his second Hollywood film, and reduced it to an espionage story with most of the politics left out.[13]

The PCA was as solicitous of Mussolini as it was of Franco. When MGM bought the rights to *Idiot's Delight,* Robert E. Sherwood's Pulitzer Prize–winning play of 1936, the Hays Office expressed opposition to the project. The play offended Mussolini's government because it involved a surprise Italian air attack on Paris and condemned fascism. Trying to meet the objections of the Italian consul in Los Angeles, Breen demanded many changes in the screenplay (which Sherwood himself was bowdlerizing for a fee of $135,000). Metro agreed to most of them. Breen even carried the script to Rome on his vacation in 1938 and returned with the regime's blessing. The studio finally drew the line when the consul wanted the title changed to further blur any identification with the play. IDIOT'S DELIGHT emerged in early 1939 as a showpiece for Clark Gable and Norma Shearer. Its antifascism was tamed, its location moved to "an Alpine never-never land," and its language "denatured into esperanto."[14]

The PCA and the War in Europe

Warner Bros. broke through the dual barriers of studio timidity and PCA resistance with its early-1939 release CONFESSIONS OF A NAZI SPY. PCA staffers labeled it "a portentous departure," and it was indeed Hollywood's first explicitly antifascist picture.

IGN

m, and reduced it

MGM bought the
play of 1936, the
Mussolini's govern-
demned fascism.
Breen demanded
rizing for a fee of
cript to Rome on
o finally drew the
ification with the
Clark Gable and
pine never-never

A resistance with
it "a portentous
fascist picture.

CONFESSIONS recalled the feisty Warners of the early 1930s. The picture dealt with news as current as the morning's headlines—Nazi spies who were caught and convicted in federal court in New York City. The film reflected the anti-Nazi convictions of its director, Anatole Litvak, and star Paul Lukas, who were German émigrés, and its writer, John Wexley, and other star Edward G. Robinson, who were active in Hollywood's anti-Nazi movement. CONFESSIONS explained how Nazism worked and called for American vigilance against the German menace. Hitler still had some defenders in the PCA who argued that the film was unfair because it ignored "his unchallenged political and social achievements" and detailed his dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, matters they considered "extraneous."[15]

Breen had to concede that the evidence produced at the spy trial substantiated the charges against Germany—Warners' reliance on judicial testimony gave the studio a strong defense. But Breen still wanted to stop the picture. As one PCA staffer put it, why should the industry abandon "the pleasant and profitable course of entertainment to engage in propaganda?" Some industry executives, such as Paramount's Luigi Luraschi, doubted the movie was "smart showmanship." Breen advised Jack Warner to scrap the project, warning that several countries, and possibly even some U.S. censor boards, would ban the film. Warners forged ahead, even though several countries obliged the German government by forbidding its exhibition. While CONFESSIONS now seems melodramatic and the spy threat inflated, many contemporary critics praised it as indeed a portentous breakthrough in moviemaking. Reflecting the desire of many directors and writers to make more serious films, Wexley termed it "the most exciting and exhilarating work I have ever done in Hollywood."[16]

CONFESSIONS OF A NAZI SPY cleared a path for other anti-Nazi films, though the PCA continued to set up roadblocks and detours. When Charles Chaplin decided to put his antifascist political convictions on film in 1938, the Hays Office passed the word that the project was inadvisable. Brooke Wilkinson, head of the British censor board, also indicated that such a film could not play in Britain because of the panel's requirement that a living person could be shown on the screen only if he or she consented. By the time THE GREAT DICTATOR was ready for release in September 1940, Poland and France had been humiliated and the Battle of Britain raged. There was little the PCA could reasonably object to in a screenplay that turned Hitler and Mussolini into buffoons and concluded with a plea for universal brotherhood. Breen hailed it as "superb entertainment" and Chaplin as "our greatest artist." The censor sheepishly insisted, however, that the forbidden word *lousy* be removed; Chaplin agreed, sparing all concerned what would have been an even more embarrassing row than that over Rhett Butler's *damn*. Although anti-Nazi films still faced some opposition, Chaplin's political statement made a handsome profit. THE GREAT DICTATOR suffered, however, because it bore the stamp of its origins in 1938, when satire was still a plausible tool to use against the Axis. By 1940, Hitler was scarcely a laughing matter, and Chaplin later acknowledged that he would not have made such a film if he had known of the horrors of the death camps.[17]

The boldest anti-Nazi release before Pearl Harbor was the British production PASTOR HALL (1940), which portrayed the life of Martin Niemöller, a World War I U-boat captain who became a pacifist minister and was thrown into a Nazi concentration camp. Breen tried to stop American distribution of this "avowedly British propaganda" in June 1940—the very moment Germany overran France—for fear it would expose the industry to charges of "going out of our way to propagandize for the allies." The notion that

exhibiting one such picture among the five hundred or so released annually represented an extraordinary propaganda effort suggested how drastically the PCA narrowed the intellectual scope of the screen. None of the major firms would release it. Breen relented only when James Roosevelt, the president's son, arranged to exhibit it through his Globe Productions (and eventually through UA). The American release version boasted the added cachet of a prologue written by Robert Sherwood and read by Eleanor Roosevelt, although the PCA did cut some of the more violent scenes.[18]

Hollywood's products were more timid, owing particularly to Breen's insistence that they continue to employ the Code formula of not offending any nationality by casting its members as uniformly evil; bad Nazis had to be balanced by some good Germans. Metro's THE MORTAL STORM (1940) struck this balance in its essay on anti-Semitism, as did other 1940 releases such as FOUR SONS, ESCAPE, and I MARRIED A NAZI (1940). Fritz Lang, a German émigré, challenged this convention with his MAN HUNT (1941). Dudley Nichols's screenplay, submitted to the PCA in March 1941, depicted all Nazis as "brutal and inhuman" and all British as sympathetic. Breen, backed by Hays, demanded that 20th Century–Fox tone down this "inflammatory propaganda" before issuing a seal.[19]

Hollywood skirted the problem of explicit political statements but got its interventionist point across with pictures that glorified the British. In the 1941 releases A YANK IN THE RAF and INTERNATIONAL SQUADRON, Americans aroused by Britain's peril went off to fly with the Royal Air Force. The parallel with American entry into World War I was exploited for all it was worth in SERGEANT YORK, centering on an instinctive pacifist (Gary Cooper as the marksman-hero Alvin York) who wrestles with his conscience, concludes that the Allied cause is just, and enlists. By implication, the United States should follow their examples.[20]

Hollywood was moving to an interventionist beat by the summer of 1941, and the White House was delighted. As Lowell Mellett, one of FDR's media aides, put it: "Practically everything being shown on the screen from newsreel to fiction that touches on our national purpose is of the right sort."[21] Roosevelt sent a special message to the 1941 Oscar ceremony in which he praised the industry's contribution to the defense effort. And months later, as seen in chapter 3, isolationist senators led by Gerald Nye openly attacked the industry for its interventionist propaganda—and were routed by the special counsel, Wendell Willkie, who vigorously defended Hollywood for taking an antifascist line.[22] Yet there was less to the screen's interventionism than might have met the eye. Hays and Breen forced the studios to moderate some positions, and their opposition no doubt deterred some producers from making more antifascist films. Though some institutional restraints would have remained, without the Hays Office Hollywood would have taken a stronger, more frequent stand against the Axis and would have been more sympathetic to American intervention.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor made the debate about U.S. involvement in the war moot, and it radically affected both the propaganda function and the regulation of motion pictures as well. The wartime Office of Censorship screened all Hollywood products to determine whether to permit their export. The newly formed Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, headed by the youthful Nelson Rockefeller, worked with the MPPDA to improve the portrayal of Latin America. And the most direct and systematic government regulation ever attempted of a popular American medium occurred under the Office of War Information, the propaganda agency.

The OWI in the Early War Years

Roosevelt created the OWI by executive order in June 1942 in an attempt to bring order from the chaos of the half-dozen overlapping propaganda agencies that had operated before the war. Believing the movies were crucial to the propaganda war, he charged the OWI with establishing a liaison with the motion picture industry. FDR insisted that the OWI avoid the "hate the Hun" excesses of the World War I–era Committee on Public Information (the Creel Committee), which had given movie propaganda a bad name. Experienced newsmen were chosen in the hope that they would give the agency credibility. Heading the OWI was the popular radio commentator Elmer Davis, who insisted that his agency's only goal was to "tell the truth."[23] Promoting a war in which rights and wrongs were clearer than in many conflicts, the OWI committed fewer excesses than most propaganda agencies. But controversy, evasion, and falsification were endemic in a context in which, as the *mot* went, "truth is the first casualty."

Whatever his commitment to the truth, Davis also believed, as he confided to his staff, that "the easiest way to propagandize people is to let a propaganda theme go in through an entertainment picture when people do not realize they are being propagandized." Infusing movies with a memorable but subtle propaganda theme fell to the OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP). It was run by the former newspaperman Lowell Mellett. His deputy was Nelson Poynter, the 39-year-old liberal publisher of the *St. Petersburg Times*. Operating from a suite in the Taft Building at the corner of Hollywood and Vine, Poynter handled the day-to-day relations with the studios. While these editors' New Deal credentials appealed to the OWI, their lack of experience with film (Poynter seldom even went to the movies) proved to be a serious handicap. Several reviewers, mostly women, analyzed scripts, screened finished pictures, and helped with studio liaison. Dorothy Jones, head of the reviewing unit, devoted her life to movie analysis and political activism; after the war, she wrote a book on the portrayal of Asians in American films and founded Another Mother for Peace. The reviewer Marjorie Thorson parlayed her OWI experience into a job with MGM, where she spent many years as a script doctor.[24]

The BMP insisted that its job was to advise, not to censor. The bureau could not bar production and exhibition of pictures it disapproved. Poynter correctly maintained that the studios could make any films they wanted and distribute them in the United States, so long as they were not treasonable. But the OWI in fact had considerable power. As a government agency in wartime, it had to be taken very seriously; a recalcitrant studio risked accusations of not doing its part. Moreover, the Office of Censorship's control of export licenses gave the government economic leverage that the studios took seriously. Since its recommendations carried weight with the Office of Censorship, the OWI had more than patriotic suasion at its command. As the *Motion Picture Herald* put it: "No one has yet advanced an argument in support of producing a picture known in advance to be doomed to domestic exhibition exclusively."[25]

In the eyes of OWI analysts, Hollywood displayed more zeal about the war than it did political judgment. Bending industry conventions to the OWI's political goals was difficult. The BMP codified its view of the war in the forty-two-page "Manual for the Motion Picture Industry" in July 1942. The first question everyone involved in a production should ask, said the bureau, was, "Will this picture help win the war?" The bureau's war aims were imbued with Vice President Henry Wallace's *Century of the*

Common Man (1943), the bible of liberals and left-liberals at war. The BMP manual described the global conflict as a "people's war" between freedom and fascism. The enemy was not the German, Italian, or Japanese people but the ruling elites and their ideologies. An Allied victory promised a world New Deal, which would combine a regulated capitalism with an extension of social welfare programs; America would abandon isolationism to participate in a system of collective security. Many studios, particularly Warner Bros., whose namesakes admired Roosevelt, distributed the manual widely to their staffs. But other studios, notably Paramount, which was headed by the Georgia conservative Frank Freeman, were wary. To many industry executives, OWI doctrine was too statist and internationalist. Beneath the rhetoric of helping the war effort, the moguls fought with their new regulators over how far they would go in the OWI's liberal crusade.[26]

Conflict began in the summer of 1942 as the Bureau of Motion Pictures screened Hollywood's first war pictures. The OWI reviewers found them appalling. LITTLE TOKYO, U.S.A., a B movie from 20th Century–Fox, encapsulated most of what the OWI disliked. OWI reviewers termed it an "invitation to the Witch Hunt!" The film portrayed all people of Japanese descent in the United States as disloyal and as tools in Tokyo's diabolical plot, decades in the making, to attack Pearl Harbor. BMP reviewers also disliked the glorification of extraconstitutional methods; the detective hero tramples all over the Bill of Rights as he ferrets out traitors in "Little Tokyo" in Los Angeles. But the OWI had little leverage. The army cooperated in making the film, and the Office of

LITTLE TOKYO, U.S.A. *(1942) was precisely the kind of paranoid, jingoistic war film that the OWI railed against in the early war years.*

Censorship gave it an export license. In response to the OWI's objections, Fox made a few changes but did not alter the basic story. After all, it was the picture, rather than OWI's pronouncements, that reflected government policy. LITTLE TOKYO, U.S.A. taught the propaganda agency a lesson. To have maximum influence, the OWI, like the PCA, had to first have a look at screenplays; once a picture was nearly finished, the studios were likely to make only minor changes.[27]

OWI staffers' frustration mounted as they screened other releases in the fall of 1942. Metro's THE MAN ON AMERICA'S CONSCIENCE recklessly strayed into the tinderbox of race relations. The film limned an impossibly noble President Andrew Johnson and in the process traduced his adversary Thaddeus Stevens, the champion of the freed people during Reconstruction. The OWI settled for reshooting some scenes and a change of title to the less provocative TENNESSEE JOHNSON. Sometimes the OWI's concerns were warranted; in other cases, the humorless reviewers lost their perspective. They were convinced that Preston Sturges's THE PALM BEACH STORY, a satire of the idle rich, was a "libel on America at war" and exactly the wrong kind of escape picture for the time.[28]

Alarmed by such pictures, the OWI became increasingly interventionist. When Poynter read the screenplay for SO PROUDLY WE HAIL, Paramount's tribute to the heroic nurses on Bataan, he wrote several pages of suggested dialogue. The finished picture incorporated the thrust of his ideas but not his language, which was more suited to the editorial page than an embattled nurse. Poynter had breached an unspoken but fundamental taboo. Joseph Breen, an industry insider in a way Poynter never could be, might suggest rewriting a line or two, but never whole pages. The conservative Paramount hierarchy was infuriated by the OWI New Dealers' invasion of studio prerogatives.[29]

Compounding Poynter's blunder, Mellett overreached himself. He notified the studios on 9 December 1942 that "it would be advisable" to submit screenplays, and even treatments, to the OWI for early appraisal. Never before had a government agency demanded such control over motion pictures. "CENSORS SHARPEN AXES," bannered *Variety*. Most of the studio heads bitterly criticized the BMP's demand, fretting about the OWI's aspiring screenwriters larding their films with indigestible, liberal dialogue. Recognizing that Mellett's letter was disastrous, the OWI chief, Elmer Davis, quickly backed down and said that submissions were "purely voluntary."[30]

The moguls' outrage at being "censored" would have led the unwary to think Hollywood was a bastion of free speech. In reality, the industry had always lived with censorship. With scarcely a murmur, it had agreed to PCA regulation—a closeted, unaccountable censorship ideologically inspired by a conservative religious minority. The movies accepted censorship by a host of state and local censorship boards, bent to the wishes of pressure groups it deemed important, genuflected to southern racism, and allowed foreign—even hostile—governments to vet screenplays. Yet the industry claimed to be violated when its own government, in wartime, made similar demands. What was at stake was not a First Amendment principle but control of the production process. The PCA was a creature of the industry and had built a stable working relationship with the studios. External censorship boards dealt only with finished pictures, not the production process. Other interventions were episodic. Mellett threatened detailed invasion of studio prerogatives by an outside agency that spoke a language alien to Hollywood and whose minor bureaucrats often bypassed studio executives.

Mellett's and Poynter's blunders proved costly indeed for the OWI. In Congress, the conservative coalition of Republicans and southern Democrats, under the guise of cutting government waste, took aim at the liberal propagandists. Part of this opposition

stemmed from Hollywood's complaints. In the spring of 1943, Congress whittled the OWI domestic branch's budget to about 10 percent of its original funding, guaranteeing it would be ineffectual.[31]

Ironically, the virtual demise of the domestic branch enhanced the power of the OWI's Hollywood liaison office. The key to the kingdom of Hollywood lay in the overseas branch. These operations were handled by Ulric Bell, who forcefully presented the case that bad pictures hurt America abroad. The studios thought they were better judges of what American audiences wanted than was the OWI, but they were hard-pressed to counter objections based on foreign and military policy. Bell convinced the Office of Censorship to follow OWI recommendations on almost all pictures; by the summer of 1943, his office had become "an advance guard for the Office of Censorship," said the *Motion Picture Herald.* The OWI could now block exhibition, a power that always made the studios more tractable. As the Allied offensive liberated enemy territory, the agency's ability to help the box office interested Hollywood even more. The standard package the liberators handed out included food, DDT louse killer, and OWI-approved movies. As industry executives realized that the OWI wanted "only to be helpful, their attitudes change[d] remarkably," observed Robert Riskin, a top screenwriter who worked for the OWI overseas branch.[32]

The OWI and Hollywood's Portrayal of the Allies

By the autumn of 1943, the once-antagonistic demands of propaganda and popular culture began to dovetail. The result was not unlike the process by which the PCA came to be accepted in Hollywood. As the studios learned that working with the OWI brought predictability and profit without damaging the moguls' control of production, they were only too ready to cooperate. The results were visible in all areas of Hollywood production—the home front, the allies, the enemy, and the hope for a peaceful postwar world.

The OWI's hopes for a suitable treatment of the home front were well realized in David O. Selznick's monumental SINCE YOU WENT AWAY (1944). Bell praised the "corking story," and his successor, William Cunningham, thanked Selznick for his "splendid cooperation with this office." As seen in chapter 7, the film traces the experience of an idealized middle-class Ohio family as they cope with the father departing for war, the mother getting a factory job, and a daughter losing a boyfriend in battle; on a snowy Christmas Eve, the family receives the report of the father's return to safety. Selznick included a host of OWI-approved vignettes to promote the war effort: the family cheerfully enduring travel on a crowded train, a sailor ponying up five months' salary for war bonds, a well-heeled businessman improbably willing to pay 100 percent in income tax, and a stout matron praising the taste of margarine in comparison to butter. SINCE YOU WENT AWAY, concluded *Commonweal*'s reviewer, Philip Hartung, was "the definitive home-front movie . . . until a realist comes along to show us what life is really like in America during World War II."[33]

A realist would have found abundant dramatic material in the tensions that suffused the home front. Not surprisingly, neither the PCA-limited studios nor the OWI's propagandists wanted to really tackle those issues. Instead, they crafted a message of reassurance as Americans tried to cope with the bewildering gender, racial, and labor conflicts that Selznick papered over in his idyll of Ohio middle-class domesticity.

Working women raised anxieties that the OWI was eager to dispel. The agency reported "all cheers and hosannas" for RKO's TENDER COMRADE (1943), a Ginger Rogers vehicle that was Hollywood's most systematic treatment of women's wartime role. With a screenplay by the Communist Party member Dalton Trumbo, TENDER COMRADE praised working women, scolded women who hoarded scarce war goods or indulged in the black market, and gave women some of the good speeches that usually went to men about what we were fighting for. Yet for all the film's supposed feminism, the OWI failed to notice that the film remained imprisoned in Hollywood gender conventions. Women are most intent on catching a man; the film implies that, when the war ends, they will leave the assembly line without complaint for their "normal" place in the kitchen and the nursery. Nor did the all-male production staff allow the heroine to grieve over her husband's death in combat. Instead, they converted this private moment into a platform for instructing wives and sweethearts on how to place their loved ones' deaths in geopolitical perspective.[34]

The OWI also hoped to use the movies to improve race relations—one of the most conspicuous wartime problems. Jim Crow still suffused American law and mores, and the United States fought for democracy with a rigidly segregated army and navy. Race riots seared major cities like Detroit. The OWI paid lip service to a campaign led by Walter White, head of the NAACP, and Wendell Willkie, chairman of the 20th Century–Fox board, to improve the depiction of blacks. Some advances were made in improving what had been, with few exceptions, a dismal record. In a few instances, blacks won better roles, although they were often limited, like Lena Horne's role in STORMY WEATHER, to the cinematic ghetto of the song-and-dance revue. In other cases, they were dignified minor roles, such as Leigh Whipper helping to avert a lynching in THE OX-BOW INCIDENT, and LIFEBOAT's Canada Lee being treated at times as an equal by his fellow survivors, though his previous occupation as a pickpocket is also highlighted. MGM's BATAAN sped up the integration of combat units by a decade by adding Kenneth Spencer to a platoon, if in a distinctly secondary position.[35]

On balance, however, Hollywood's vision was little changed by government oversight. TENNESSEE JOHNSON, the first major battle over racial issues, was also the last, since the OWI was not willing to go beyond mild admonitions to the studios about race. Lowell Mellett asked Metro to scrap the nearly completed picture, not because it was unfair to blacks but because it threatened domestic unity. The studio refused, and the OWI was content with some reshooting that softened Thaddeus Stevens's villainy, used Andrew Johnson to spotlight upward mobility and the American dream, and preached progress through the ballot box instead of bullets. The last was surely an ironic message for blacks, who won their freedom in the crucible of war and then saw their right to vote systematically denied by legal chicanery and violence. TENNESSEE JOHNSON included only two black characters and barely hinted of slavery. "Writing out" black characters and racial issues was easier than relearning race relations for wartime Hollywood. Throwbacks to pre–World War II images continued. Selznick transposed Hattie McDaniel from her role as Scarlett's devoted slave in GONE WITH THE WIND to the Hiltons' live-in maid, suggestively named Fidelia, in SINCE YOU WENT AWAY. Ann Hilton can no longer afford Fidelia during the war, but this devoted soul nonetheless returns to cook and clean for the white folks—for free—when she gets off work at the factory. The critic James Agee noted sardonically that, brimming with "malapropisms, comic relief, and mother wit," Fidelia "satisfied all that anyone could possibly desire of a Negro in restive times."[36]

The OWI was willing to fight harder for labor unions, a key component of the Roosevelt coalition. Membership in unions doubled during the war, and their members were a big part of the movie audience. In the original screenplay for his epic AN AMERICAN ROMANCE (1944), MGM's conservative King Vidor glorified his rags-to-riches industrialist hero and implied that unions were violent, subversive organizations. The OWI insisted that labor move from the streets to the conference table. Metro's E. J. Mannix "yelled and screamed," Poynter reported, and charged that the OWI forced him to make a "new deal picture." The agency and the studio eventually agreed to show moderate unions and reasonable management as cooperative rather than antagonistic, in contrast to an early version in which management dispersed strikers with riot police and tear gas. As the union president said, in AN AMERICAN ROMANCE, borrowing from the OWI manual, "Efficient production demands cooperation between labor and management."[37]

Having won a position of power in American politics, moderate labor unions could be accommodated, albeit reluctantly, on the screen. But race and gender raised divisive issues that the national discourse was only beginning to address and often preferred to bury. Both propaganda monitors and popular culture marketers found safe harbor in an illusory national unity.

Just as the home front had to be remodeled into an idealized America, so too were the Allies airbrushed into progressive democracies. This effort required Hollywood to modify some of its cherished stereotypes of foreigners (specifically the British and Chinese) and to tackle a subject it had long avoided—the Russians. The results were misleading and in some cases grossly deceptive—in their own ways as bad, or worse, than Hollywood's old stereotypes. Where Hollywood once tended to exoticize foreigners, the OWI taught how much they resembled Americans.

Great Britain presented the fewest problems. Although Americans generally admired and trusted the British, the OWI feared that hatred of imperialism and the class system might undermine that support. With Churchill determined to hang on to the empire, the OWI decided to ignore the issue. When MGM wanted to re-release KIM, and RKO GUNGA DIN (1939), two Kiplingesque adventures that glorify imperialism, the OWI appealed to the studios to leave them on the shelf, and they agreed. The class issue bedeviled Metro's THE WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER (1944), peopled by condescending aristocrats who acted as if the war were being fought to preserve Ashworth Manor. Although the studio submitted eighty pages of script changes in response to OWI criticisms in 1943, the film's warm aristocratic haze remained. The studio paid for its indulgence in 1944 when the OWI overseas branch ruled the film could not be shown in the lucrative British market. Ironically, two films that the OWI considered models of how to deal with the class issue—MGM's Oscar-winning MRS. MINIVER and Fox's THIS ABOVE ALL—were both released in 1942 before the OWI began its regulatory efforts. Both films projected a unified Britain, mobilized for war, in which class lines were being dissolved. If the class system proved more durable than these warmhearted films depicted it, they were nonetheless popular propaganda for Americans who believed they were all resolutely middle-class.[38]

"Give us a Mrs. Miniver of China and Russia," Poynter implored studio executives. He was asking the impossible, but Hollywood tried to comply.[39] The Chinese reality scarcely fit either the OWI or Hollywood image. Roosevelt envisioned China as a major power that could serve as one of the "four policemen" of the postwar world. But the country was riven by civil war between Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists and Mao Tse-

tung's Communists, neither of whom resembled FDR's democratic ethos. The OWI wanted China portrayed as "a great nation, cultured and liberal," that had been fighting the Axis since 1933 and was evolving toward democracy. This political mythmaking clashed with Hollywood's mythic China, which veered between the simple, lovable peasantry of THE GOOD EARTH (1937) and the sinister factionalism of SHANGHAI EXPRESS (1932). Hollywood capitalized on China's exotic background for several pictures released in 1942 before the OWI began work. The propaganda agency disliked all of them, such as the John Wayne vehicle FLYING TIGERS, because they showed Americans winning the war single-handedly and the Chinese relegated to inferior positions.[40]

The OWI converted Hollywood to its own myth, with results that were as politically dubious as the studios' prewar fantasies, and certainly more tedious cinematically. The original screenplay for MGM's DRAGON SEED, based on Pearl Buck's novel of the same title, offended the OWI by showing the Chinese as backward illiterates with little political consciousness. The drastically revised screenplay, submitted in 1943, adopted the OWI's vision of politically astute Chinese mobilized for the "people's war." Both the OWI and Hollywood preferred a Westernized China. Since Asians were unthinkable in the leading roles, DRAGON SEED starred (most improbably) Katharine Hepburn, who was Orientalized with slanted eyes.[41]

The OWI took pride in another propaganda victory—KEYS OF THE KINGDOM, starring Gregory Peck as a Roman Catholic missionary in early-twentieth-century China. The OWI objected bitterly to the initial screenplay, by the star writers Nunnally Johnson and Joseph Mankiewicz, which showed a backward China beset by marauding warlords.

Walter Huston (center) and Katharine Hepburn (far right) in DRAGON SEED *(1944).*

The agency rejected the studio's idea of an easy fix—a prologue stating that the film dealt with an earlier China. To the OWI, the screenplay should show the Nationalist forces battling for a new, modern, unified China. T. K. Chang, the influential Chinese consul in Los Angeles, seconded the OWI. Twentieth Century–Fox finally agreed and adopted the OWI's political analysis. As always when Catholicism was portrayed, Catholic priests stood by to oversee church matters. Released in 1944, KEYS OF THE KINGDOM shows Republican Nationalist forces fighting for a new China, and peasants' mud huts are transformed into what elated OWI reviewers described as "neat, little brick places with considerable feeling of civilization about them." The China that Hollywood constructed under OWI regulation offered a reassuring—if grossly inaccurate—tribute to a modern China that was awakening, under Western political and religious tutelage.[42]

Remodeling the image of the Soviet Union was an even more daunting task than Great Britain and China presented. Before the war, Hollywood made few movies about the Soviet Union; the industry had no market there, and Russian subjects did not seem likely to be popular with Western audiences. The PCA was prepared to veto a picture favorable to the Soviets, as Lewis Milestone found in 1934 when Breen warned him against making "Red Square." The most memorable prewar Russian film was NINOTCHKA (1939), in which Melvyn Douglas, an émigré Russian count, induces Greta Garbo, a Communist dominatrix, to defect by plying her with capitalist luxuries and romantic love. In place of such sly satire, Hollywood collaborated with the OWI during the war to humanize the Russians and whitewash Stalinism. As *Variety* said: "War has put Hollywood's traditional conception of the Muscovites through the wringer, and they have come out shaved, washed, sober, good to their families, Rotarians, brother Elks, and 33rd Degree Mason."[43]

The most important—and controversial—wartime film about the Soviet Union was Warners' MISSION TO MOSCOW (1943). The Warners eagerly accepted Roosevelt's request that they make a picture from the memoirs of Joseph E. Davies, who as ambassador to Moscow from 1936 to 1938 displayed a credulous sympathy for the Soviet experiment. Davies worked closely with the studio and twice reported personally to Roosevelt on the film's progress. While the OWI took a backseat in these negotiations, some of its favorite themes emerged, particularly the isolationists' folly and the Soviets' devotion to collective security. In MISSION TO MOSCOW, the Soviet Union became a pleasant land of consumerist plenty, the dreaded secret police bumbling Keystone Kops, Stalin an omniscient world statesman, and the massive purges of the 1930s necessary measures to root out a fifth column. The OWI called the film "a magnificent contribution" and superb entertainment—a judgment in which Jack Warner happily concurred.[44]

To political critics, the film should have been titled, as the bitter joke went, "Submission to Moscow." Breen abhorred the film's politics. But ever the realist, he realized that the PCA had to yield to Washington on wartime political matters. Ruefully noting Davies's and the OWI's sanction of the film, he said: "In the face of all this, it seems to me that we . . . can do little but approve the material." He cautioned Warners, however, that the film would arouse "considerable protest." It did. Outraged editorialists and dogged pickets harried the film; most of the protest was generated by the right wing, but some emanated from tough-minded anti-Stalinist leftists. (In 1947, as the cold war and red-baiting intensified, Jack Warner withdrew MISSION TO MOSCOW from release and delivered Howard Koch, whom he had pressured to write the screenplay, to the wolves of the House Un-American Activities Committee.) Nor was the long, talky

film as entertaining as the OWI and Jack Warner had hoped. "This mishmash is directly and firmly in the tradition of Hollywood politics," said the *New Republic*'s Manny Farber. "A while ago it was Red-baiting, now it is Red-praising in the same sense—ignorantly. To a democratic intelligence it is repulsive and insulting."[45]

Every major studio except Paramount enlisted with a Russian picture, but they tried to minimize the politics. The OWI and the Soviet embassy read the screenplays. The best known was Samuel Goldwyn's THE NORTH STAR (1943), written by Lillian Hellman and directed by William Wyler. THE NORTH STAR tried to humanize average Russians and to valorize their resistance to the German invaders, but it succeeded mainly in Americanizing them. Metro offered a musical tribute with SONG OF RUSSIA (1943); romance leavens politics in United Artists' THREE RUSSIAN GIRLS (1943); love and resistance are joined in RKO's DAYS OF GLORY (1944); and a band of teenagers thwart the Wehrmacht almost single-handedly in Columbia's BOY FROM STALINGRAD (1943). The last Russian film, Columbia's COUNTER-ATTACK (1945), boasted a screenplay by John Howard Lawson, a Communist Party member, who worked in many of the OWI's points. But by the time of its release in 1945, mounting doubts about Soviet-American friendship led Columbia to downplay ideology for straightforward action.[46]

The propagandists tried to get the studios faithfully to translate national policy about the Allies to the screen. In this they were, perhaps regrettably, successful. The results too often were ludicrous: a classless Britain (or worse, a romanticized aristocracy) devoid

Hollywood's efforts to celebrate—and romanticize—Russia's war with Germany included THE NORTH STAR *(1943).*

of imperial ambitions; a progressive, unified China under Chiang Kai-shek instead of a desperately poor society plagued by corruption, brutality, and civil war; and a benign Soviet Union led by an avuncular, farsighted Stalin. Although the movies took on particular colorations because of the OWI's intervention, they reflected a national disposition, which Roosevelt encouraged, to construct artificial allies and avoid hard questions. Experienced political journalists, epitomized by Henry Luce's *Time* and *Life*, constructed the Britains, Chinas, and Soviet Unions they thought would be useful to their political agendas.[47] For all their encomiums to "the truth," neither the White House, the OWI, the news media, nor Hollywood was willing to run the risk that the public would draw the wrong conclusions during wartime from a "warts and all" portrait.

The OWI and Hollywood's Portrayal of the Enemy

The care which the OWI lavished on the portrayal of the Allies was mirrored by its concern for the correct image of the enemies. The propaganda agency warned against the simplistic "hate pictures" which stirred up irrational hatred during World War I and thwarted postwar peace efforts. The enemy, insisted the OWI, was the doctrine of fascism and its ruling cliques, not the German or Japanese people. The Allies would win, but only with a supreme effort against these "cunning, tough, cruel" foes. Movies that showed wisecracking Yanks effortlessly knocking off the enemy deceived the public about how tough this war was. With its penchant for adapting the formulas of Westerns and gangster pictures to the war, Hollywood needed the OWI's correctives. If anything, the propagandists underestimated the brutality of the enemy, particularly Germany, about whose anti-Semitism the OWI remained too cautiously mute.[48]

The portrayal of the Japanese was the single most intractable problem government regulators faced. Pictures such as LITTLE TOKYO, U.S.A. established the themes of diabolical Japanese conspiracy and revealed a deep-seated American racism. The OWI was timid, and largely unsuccessful, in challenging these racist representations. Most movies showed all Japanese as fanatically devoted to the emperor, routinely practicing despicable battlefield tactics, and lacking any redeeming qualities. They were not individuals but, as explained in Frank Capra's "Why We Fight" documentary KNOW YOUR ENEMY—JAPAN (1945), "photographic prints off the same negative." One of the few individualized Japanese characters was the propaganda minister in BEHIND THE RISING SUN (1943), who realized his country's cause was wrong and committed suicide. In such films as BATAAN (1943), GUADALCANAL DIARY (1943), and THE PURPLE HEART (1944), the Japanese were little more than beasts who took naturally to jungle fighting. Faced with the virulent hatred of the Japanese, the OWI seldom fought such portrayals, choosing to block export licenses only in the most flagrant cases.[49]

While the PCA deferred to the OWI on political questions, its preoccupation with profanity and individual guilt remained intact. In Zanuck's THE PURPLE HEART, a young Chinese man murders his traitorous father. The OWI praised the politically conscious character as an exemplar of the new freedom-loving China. But Breen ruled out parricide, even in the cause of democracy, and insisted that the son be tried by the Japanese for murder. The PCA chief also tried to protect the screen from profanity even when it peppered the exact words of none other than General Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell in a prologue to the Errol Flynn vehicle OBJECTIVE BURMA. Breen initially vetoed Stilwell's comment that U.S. forces took a "hell of a licking," only to reverse himself. But the PCA

chief refused to allow the general to say "by God" on the screen because the expression was "intrinsically objectionable." Meanwhile, the PCA allowed repeated references to the Japanese as "dirty yellow rats," "blasted monkeys," and the like to litter the screen.[50]

The Germans received a much more nuanced treatment than the Japanese. As fellow Caucasians, they did not suffer from anti-Asian racism, and they had not launched a surprise attack on American territory. Moreover, the endemic horror of Nazism, culminating in the Holocaust, was inadequately grasped by Americans during the war. In contrast to the evil Japanese mass, Hollywood followed the OWI's lead and created individual German characters and distinguished between good Germans and evil Nazis.

The divergence between German and Japanese representations appears starkly in the 20th Century–Fox release THE MOON IS DOWN (1943). The German officers are sharply differentiated characters. While some officers are Nazi villains, Lt. Tonder is an innocent, handsome, likable farm boy who doubts Hitler's sanity and hates occupation duty in Norway. When he meets his death at the hands of a Norwegian war widow—an opportunity to salute the resistance movements—it is as a fellow human being, not a diabolical enemy.[51]

Dramatizing the resistance movements was a key theme in 1942–1943, since American army contact with the Germans was slow to develop. In THIS LAND IS MINE (1943), a collaboration of the leading talents Jean Renoir and Dudley Nichols, Charles Laughton delivers an impassioned oration against Nazi tyranny. The OWI wanted his speech to stir the townspeople to active uprising, but the agency rested content with the unusually detailed exploration of Nazi ideology. CASABLANCA, probably the most famous film from the war, provided a human story of the war's effects and of various modes of resistance. To the OWI, however, Rick's cynicism persisted too long. They wanted the picture to end not with the immortal line, "This could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship," but with Humphrey Bogart declaiming about the Four Freedoms. Luckily, Hollywood's sense of story overrode the OWI's political agenda. The OWI approved CASABLANCA for export, except to North Africa, where America's tangled relations with Vichy France made the subject too touchy.[52]

However much the OWI wished for serious examinations of Hitlerism, PCA restrictions would have blocked any film that did more than hint at Nazi horror. Paramount and the OWI worked unusually closely to make THE HITLER GANG (1944) a credible explanation of Nazism, only to find the PCA using the Code to block them. The film was not without its problems. Straining for a link between popular ideas of personal perversion and brutal statecraft, Paramount suggested that an impotent Hitler had a perverted attraction to young girls and that many Nazis were homosexual (the latter notion a travesty in view of Nazi persecution of gays). Breen objected that THE HITLER GANG contained "an orgy of bestiality and brutality such as the civilized world has never witnessed." That was, of course, the point Paramount and the OWI were trying to make. Breen insisted that such material be cut, including a blasphemous speech a Nazi had actually given. The OWI was not willing to fight the PCA over sex and blasphemy, just as the PCA deferred, however unhappily, to the OWI on politics. After five months of struggle, Paramount capitulated to the PCA. Even if Paramount and the OWI were wrong about some particulars, their instincts about Nazism's utter depravity were right. This was something which Americans gradually came to comprehend after the war and which millions of Europeans knew from firsthand experience during the war. The PCA, however, was determined to insulate Americans from all but faint intimations of the nature of the enemy.[53]

Both the PCA and the OWI wanted depictions of battlefield violence to be carefully contained. The PCA strictly enforced the Code's warnings against gruesomeness. The OWI encouraged a modicum of battlefield realism in order to prepare the public for casualties, but within rather antiseptic limits. The propagandists primarily wanted to ensure that Hollywood employed a "people's army" with ethnically, religiously, and geographically diverse platoons whose members articulated what they were fighting for. For the most part, battle films, such as WAKE ISLAND (1942), made combat look no more deadly than a football game. Combat pictures often were a variant on a proven genre—the success story. As the OWI wished, dedicated men carry out their civic virtue and are rewarded with the promise of a better life. PRIDE OF THE MARINES (1945) followed the real-life story of a Philadelphia marine who was severely wounded in the Pacific and then restored to health by a loving nurse in a well-equipped service hospital. Virtually the only exception to such formulae was William Wellman's THE STORY OF GI JOE (1945), based on Ernie Pyle's memorable dispatches. Its gritty, documentary-style realism, avoidance of false heroics, and laconic acknowledgment of the randomness of death gave the film an uncharacteristic, uncomfortable verisimilitude. Nevertheless, THE STORY OF GI JOE offered only a glimpse of realism about the war, a perspective that both the OWI and the PCA, for their own reasons, wished to ignore.[54]

Conclusion

Eager to close down war agencies, President Harry Truman abolished the OWI effective 31 August 1945. For three years the propagandists policed film politics while the PCA maintained its accustomed watch over morality and propriety. Hollywood, initially fearful of government demands, learned that propaganda and popular culture were remarkably compatible—and even highly profitable. The studios proved to be surprisingly compliant, once they were reassured that the OWI would not impair their control of production and learned that cooperation paid big dividends with foreign distribution. The OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures noted happily that from September 1943 to August 1944 the studios changed screenplays in 71 percent of the cases where the agency made suggestions or registered objections.[55]

The OWI added a degree of seriousness and political sophistication to wartime filmmaking. The agency labored within the constraints that the historian Robert A. Rosenstone has noted of feature films: "Dramatic features put individuals in the forefront of the historical process, which means that the solution of their personal problems or their individual redemption substitutes itself for the solution of historical problems."[56] SINCE YOU WENT AWAY, TENDER COMRADE, and PRIDE OF THE MARINES were cases in point. In some instances, the OWI's intervention improved wartime representations: labor unions received better treatment than they otherwise might have, important distinctions were made between the German people and their Nazi overlords, and the ideals for which the Allies fought received more recognition than filmmaking conventions ordinarily allowed. In many cases, however, the OWI supplanted old Hollywood myths with new ones cut to fit wartime fashion. Too often they entailed evasion, distortion, and outright falsification.

The OWI avoided the excesses of the World War I Creel Committee, and the agency was different in kind from the Nazi and Soviet propaganda agencies. The OWI's regulation of Hollywood was not so bad as state control of the cinema in Germany and the

Soviet Union (where, ironically, the studios ground out chiefly nonpolitical escape pictures during the war).[57] And yet in its short life, the American propaganda agency raised in a milder form the danger that government regulation may reinforce the narrow range of opinions expressed by a popular culture oligopoly as it follows a corporate strategy of limiting the scope of permissible content.

Breen's Production Code Administration held to its rigid interpretation of the Code in the face of wartime social upheaval. Moral standards were in flux as a restless nation—and particularly young adults—experienced unprecedented challenges to social conventions. Marriage, birth, and divorce rates soared. Cut loose from their home communities, millions of Americans experienced new sexual freedom. They now enjoyed the experiences the Production Code forbade the movies to display openly or without condemnation. Breen detected "a distinct tendency toward moral laxity" in the material which the studios submitted. But he saw the Code as an expression of unchanging moral precepts. He assured Will Hays that the PCA "uniformly and impartially rejected all such unacceptable material." Lapses from Breen's earlier watchfulness could be cited: the chorus line in the Carmen Miranda spectacle THE GANG'S ALL HERE (1943) that swings giant papier-mâché bananas in and out between their legs; the light treatment of marriage in Preston Sturges's madcap THE MIRACLE OF MORGAN'S CREEK; the adultery and murder that gave DOUBLE INDEMNITY a "sordid flavor." Yet the quiescence of watchdog groups, notably the Legion of Decency, testified to Breen's ability to steer films clear of dangerous territory.[58]

Breen needed all his resolve as the PCA faced new regulatory challenges after the war. With the Legion dug in behind the PCA, every inch of liberated footage in Hollywood would be hard fought. Postwar films like DUEL IN THE SUN prefigured growing opposition to the PCA. From 1939 through 1945, the PCA and the OWI had steered Hollywood through upheavals in morality and politics. Most of the challenges since mid-1934 had focused on particular points of interpretation. By the late 1940s, however, the very notion of the Code came under attack. The Code—and indeed the very structure of the industry—was living on borrowed time. The stability—and the concomitant limitations—that such regulation of content had brought to the industry would face an unprecedented threat in the changing economic, cultural, and moral climate of postwar America.