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Authors	Lénárt, András
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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

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Donald Duck Goes South: Walt Disney and the Inter-American Relations

András Lénárt

Abstract: *In the 1930s, with the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt believed that the United States would soon need the sympathy and cooperation of Latin America. His Good Neighbor policy sought to improve relations between the countries of the Americas. Walt Disney was commissioned by Nelson D. Rockefeller, who was in charge of inter-American relations, to make a goodwill tour of Latin America in search of inspiration for films about the region. He and his group met with politicians and artists, researched local cultures, and personally experienced the region's society, geography and wildlife. As a result of these experiences, Latin America became the setting for two Disney films in the 1940s,* Saludos Amigos *(Norman Ferguson, 1942) and* The Three Caballeros *(Norman Ferguson, 1944). The aim of this article is to describe the key role played by Walt Disney and his cartoon characters (especially Donald Duck) in the transformation of inter-American relations, especially from the aspect of culture.*

From the early nineteenth century to the present day, the relationship between the United States and Latin America has gone through turbulent periods, with cooperation often hampered by conflicts, in line with the evolution of inter-American and international relations. The relationship between the two regions has been far from balanced: the growing economic and political weight of the United States and its geopolitical and geostrategic interests have shaped its ties with Latin America, which has naturally involved cultural interactions, with special emphasis on cinema. It was in this context that the role of film diplomacy, and within it the mission of Walt Disney, became particularly important during the period between the two world wars.

This article explains how the legendary filmmaker and his fictional characters became part of the effort to improve inter-American relations. After a section on the historical and cultural context and the Good Neighbor policy that framed the mission, I examine Walt Disney's role in this mission in cultural diplomacy, focusing on two Disney studio films, *Saludos Amigos* (Norman Ferguson, 1942) and *The Three Caballeros* (Norman Ferguson, 1944). Finally, I will discuss a third, nonexistent film that would have further expanded representational approaches, as well as other influences on Disney's Latin American mission. The purpose of my article is not only to describe the specific films (this has already been done in part by other authors whose work I will mention), but also to show how Disney's involvement in the Good Neighbor policy has expanded its cultural dimensions, and why it is important that it has done so through animated films.

Historical and Cultural Background: The Good Neighbor Policy

Ever since the beginning of the twentieth century, relations between the United States and Latin America have been unbalanced, with the latter feeling subordinated (Lénárt 236–38). In the period between the two world wars, the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe made it

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clear that the United States needed to look for allies. Latin America, which was its immediate area of interest, was clearly a partner to work with, but the conflicts that had marked the previous decades (especially various US political and military interventions, together with its direct economic influences) had made these countries suspicious of the great power of the North. This required a fundamental change in inter-American relations, replacing conflict and intervention with friendship and cooperation.

To improve relations between the two regions, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt announced the Good Neighbor policy in 1933, which would ensure cooperation and joint resistance in the event of external aggression. Roosevelt's rhetoric emphasised the equal rights of all American countries and the importance of international agreements, placing inter-American relations on a new basis. It was hoped that this would allow the countries of the Americas to become "good neighbours" who could always count on each other, even in the face of constantly changing international conditions (Moral Roncal 23). This was an attempt to allay the fear and insecurity that Latin American governments felt towards the US. At the same time, Washington was aware that this was not enough: US and Latin American societies also had to be persuaded to see each other as equal partners going forward.

In addition to the political, military, and economic spheres, social and cultural relations also needed to be improved. While Latin Americans were suspicious of the United States, there were strong and extremely negative stereotypes of Latin Americans in American society: travelogues, newspapers, novels, and films gave demeaning and inaccurate portrayals of Spanish and Portuguese-speaking Americans, and it was clear that this could not be changed overnight. The situation was particularly problematic for films. In the American films of the 1930s, the portrayal of Latin Americans was one-sided and false, using only a few stereotypical elements: almost all the inhabitants of the region were portrayed as unreliable, lazy, violent, often alcoholic, and their whole lives driven by overwhelming emotions. Films like *The Cuban Love Song* (W. S. Van Dyke, 1931) and *Girl of the Rio* (Herbert Brenon, 1932) presented an unreliable Latin American society; even the second Mickey Mouse short to be made, *The Gallopin' Gaucho* (Ub Iwerks, 1928) painted a similar picture of the region. The Latin rhythms, the extreme sensuality and the carefree way of life were the characteristic features that seemed to be associated with Latin Americans. In most cases, these clichés kept the simplified characterisation of the peoples of this region on the surface, especially in the films made after the emergence of President Roosevelt's new attitude in 1933. Through its films, Hollywood became a kind of ethnographer of Latin American societies: American filmmakers used these images to define the characteristics of the "other" and their own approach to these still exotic peoples, which later became part of the collective memory (López 67–70). The elements of American film policy towards Latin America had to be fundamentally reshaped with the help of the appropriate institutions and individuals; Walt Disney played a prominent role in this mission.

In 1940, the Office for the Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations Between the American Republics (OCCCRBAR) was created, later known as the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA). Its main task was to neutralise Axis propaganda in the Americas and improve relations between the US and Latin America. The Office was headed by businessman Nelson D. Rockefeller, who opened a number of suboffices in various Latin American countries, all under the protection of US embassies (Cramer and Prutsch 786–87). As part of the cultural mission, famous American artists such as Orson Welles and Bing Crosby toured Latin America, reinforcing the positive image of the United States (Benamou 244–45). The Motion Picture Division (MPD), headed by John Hay Whitney, had to coordinate a change in the portrayal of Latin Americans in American films in order to increase sympathy for

Hollywood films (and also for American society and values) in local societies (Rankin 90–92). Animation has proven to be a great tool for this. As David Sloane put it, animated films are comic artifacts that help us to "reveal an incredibly colorful crazy quilt of cultural dynamism" (6–7), while Ülo Pikkov sustained that "animation has a rich tradition of debating, commenting and reflecting on the political and socio-cultural situation of society" (36).

As the most popular filmmaker in animation at the time, Walt Disney was the perfect choice to communicate the political administration's goals to the public through a genre that introduced a new, desirable approach with a light tone, simplified and condensed messages, without being direct propaganda. According to Karen Goldman, these films "exhibit a surprisingly high degree of reflexivity, underscoring their own means of production, and intentionally uncovering the nature of cartoon illusion itself" (24).

The Walt Disney Project

By the mid-1930s, Hollywood films had already begun to shift towards a more objective way of portraying Latin Americans. They were helped by artists, actors, and singers from the region who were involved in the making of new films, including Mexican Dolores del Río and Cuban Desi Arnaz, who appeared in an increasing number of films. But this was far from enough, and it became necessary for American filmmakers to acquire personal Latin American experiences to incorporate into their films.

A major project of the new film policy was launched in the early 1940s. John Hay Whitney commissioned Walt Disney to take his studio staff on a goodwill tour of Latin America to deepen and diversify the cultural dimensions of the Good Neighbor policy. Disney initially refused, not wanting to be involved in a purely propagandistic mission, but eventually accepted, partly because it would allow him to be away from the United States, thereby escaping the tensions after the Disney studio strike (29 May to 28 July 1941) and its immediate aftermath (Gabler 370–2). Together with directors, screenwriters, artists, composers, and consultants with local knowledge, they set off to Latin America to gain first-hand experience of the region's flora and fauna, ocean beaches, jungles, traditions and ethnic groups, so that their future films would be more authentic to their audiences. Prior to Disney's arrival, Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy had consisted mainly of visits to Latin America by politicians, economists, journalists, and propagandists to persuade the countries of the region to see the US as a future friend. Now, however, they were being visited by an internationally recognised and respected artist who showed great interest in their country and culture.

But propaganda could not come to the fore because it would have clearly provoked negative attitudes among Latin Americans. Moreover, Disney did not want to support films that were openly propagandistic. He also insisted at an international press conference in Chile that their tour was purely a research trip, that he had no explicit government mandate (which, of course, was not true), and that he had no intention of doing propaganda work. As he put it, his films were not meant to take a stand on political or religious issues, but to entertain and satisfy the needs of the audience (Purcell 511).

Despite this claim, Walt Disney's involvement in the important affairs of the US government was not uncommon, especially after the Latin American tour. After the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States' entry into the Second World War, the US Army used his soundstage as a repair shop, and Disney produced several training films and propaganda

cartoons to support his country's war effort. However, he also had conflicts with the government, particularly over financial issues, so he tried to keep his involvement with the government to a minimum (Watts, "Art" 103–04). During the Cold War, Disney also became active, using his increasingly conservative political ideology and his staunch anticommunist stance to help the US government (including the work of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, which was responsible for exposing alleged or actual communists), causing much conflict with his colleagues in the film industry (Watts 104–05).

Disney's company was facing financial problems at the time, owing the Bank of America $3,400,000, but the Latin American mission was not an expense for the bank or the company, as the costs were financed by the US governments (Thomas 152). In addition, Whitney and Disney had agreed that each of the films made as a result of the trip would receive a $50,000 subsidy from the government, which would be partially reimbursed only if the films made a profit. Disney carefully selected the members of the Latin American project, assigning them roles and responsibilities before the project began. The members were as follows: Norm Ferguson (supervising director), Webb Smith, Bill Cottrell and Ted Sears (writers), Jack Miller, Jimmy Bodrero, Lee and Mary Blair (creators of the characters), Chuck Wolcott (composer), Herb Ryman (study of landscapes, buildings and people), Larry and Janet Lansburgh (drawing of animals), Jack Cutting (consultant on foreign language versions due to his previous experience in Latin America) and John Rose (administrative matters) (Thomas 151–52).

The almost twelve-week expedition set off from Los Angeles in August 1941, and during the first few days several press conferences were held in various US cities to explain their plans. Arriving in South America, the first stop was Brazil, where they visited the zoo in the city of Belém and then arrived in Rio de Janeiro. Disney's request was that they should take part in as few social events as possible so that they could concentrate on their work. This was largely granted by the US government and the US embassy in Brazil, but Whitney, who was also in Rio at the time, insisted that they assist at a reception in Disney's honour hosted by President Getúlio Vargas and attended by some of the country's most influential politicians and businessmen. The group then spent their days visiting zoos, botanical gardens, farms, schools, museums and nature, and their evenings in bars and music venues, immersing themselves in the culture and traditions of the country. From there they travelled to Argentina, where the programme continued in much the same way, and then, on arrival in Chile, the group (or "El Grupo", as they called themselves in Spanish during the trip) split up: while some continued on to Bolivia, Ecuador and Mexico, the others took a ship back to the United States. It was a long journey, however, as the passengers, including Walt Disney himself, stopped off in several countries to gain further experience. In Colombia, for example, they took a river trip of over fifty kilometres through the jungle; it is likely that this trip was the inspiration for Disney to build the jungle section of the future Disneyland. They later reached the US-controlled Panama Canal, from where they sailed to New York, and Disney returned home to Los Angeles (Watts, "Magic" 243–48; Thomas 151–54). The group eventually returned with a huge amount of information, notes and drawings, which they used as the basis for several short films.

Walt Disney was met with great admiration and respect in Latin America. By the early 1940s, his films had become famous in many parts of the world, so people in Latin America knew very well who Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, Snow White and Pinocchio were. As a Chilean newspaper put it in 1941, although terrible things were happening in the world and war was keeping people in fear, Mickey's smile and Donald's unwavering optimism always cheered everyone up and made life better for people all over the world (Purcell 512). Therefore, it seemed a perfect idea to have one of the most popular Americans also act as a

cultural and goodwill ambassador for inter-American affairs, creating new links between the two regions. During their trip, Disney and his colleagues contacted and consulted with Latin American artists and cartoonists who could help them with their work. One of these artists was Florencio Molina Campos, one of the most important Argentine cartoonists, with whom Disney wanted to incorporate the figure of the gaucho, the national symbol of Argentina, into his work, and for this reason they signed a contract for three films (Fanchin). However, as we shall see, this collaboration was soon to come to an end.

Rockefeller's agreement with Walt and Roy Disney (Walt's brother) required the group to complete twelve short films by the end of September 1942, to be shown under the collective title *Walt Disney Sees South America*. Disney agreed to include some of his well-known American cartoon characters, as well as new animals that represent the different countries of Latin America, based on their specific characteristics. In South America, the press, which had announced Disney's arrival in advance, welcomed the group's tour in generally positive articles, expressing the hope that the region's landscape and extremely rich cultural traditions would be incorporated into Disney's animated empire (Purcell 513–14).

After a long process, El Grupo's Latin American experiences were turned into actual films, of which, contrary to earlier plans, only two were made: *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*. Both are part live-action, part animation, and both can be regarded today as propaganda films. Mixing live-action and animated characters was not common at the time, but this technique was part of Disney's roots thanks to the *Alice Comedies* (1923–1927) and was used in films by Disney and other studios. Both films were moderately successful in both the United States and Latin America. This success was not due to the fact that they portrayed these foreign societies in a truly objective and unbiased way, but rather because classic characters such as Donald Duck and Goofy, who were popular all over the world, were now placed in exotic settings, which enriched the characters' oeuvre. In addition to the cartoons mentioned above and described in more detail below, a short behind-the-scenes documentary about the group's trip, *South of the Border with Disney* (Norman Ferguson, 1941) was also shown in the United States.

Latin America According to Disney

The approaches of *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* follow the classic narrative of intercultural encounters. During the first part of the nineteenth century, the United States began the creation of spheres of influence and of economic, cultural, and geostrategic imperialism within Central and South America. In all cases, the representative of hegemony and a kind of moral-economic superiority was the (typically white, middle or upper class, and male) American, who arrived as an outsider in a remote, exotic-looking land and, out of greed or curiosity, tried to penetrate as deeply as possible into the unknown environment. In this way, he was constantly confronted with the contrast between "civilisation" and "barbarism" that had marked the encounter between the two worlds since the so-called "Age of Discovery". In these territories, he encountered "others" who were fundamentally different from him, and who he approached with fear, violence, or curiosity (Perreault 73–76). The same mentality was reflected in the two anthology cartoons set in Latin America, but in the spirit of the Good Neighbor policy, they tried to suppress negative attitudes. In these films, curiosity prevails, but the attitude of taking the US aspect for granted as representative of a more advanced society had not been abandoned.

In the two Disney films in question, Latin America is represented through a specific, US-centric lens and, as a result, not only the North American audience but also the Latin American audience has to see itself through this lens. These films "offer up an externally constructed, highly condensed and almost parodical representation of Latin American national identities", where the societies of this region appear "as exotic Others in contrast to a normative (U.S.) hegemonic culture" (Goldman 26). Throughout the films, "neither history, nor political or social reality infects the idealized and exoticized universe of Disney's Latin America" (30). The picture we see, therefore, is still far from objective, but there is a shift from the representations of previous decades. The stereotypes do not seem to be disappearing, contrary to the aspirations of the Good Neighbor policy, but the reasons for them are being replaced by superficiality, simplification and inaccurate or false generalisation. Instead of the previous disdain and underestimation (and sometimes racism), the films depict the various components of a distant culture as interesting and exotic, but also strange, thereby reinforcing the US/North American perspective as the dominant and generally accepted viewpoint. The components and values of this distant culture are therefore always defined in relation to the United States. However, in addition to this critical approach, we must also bear in mind that Disney's mission, beyond the specific representation, also played a more important role: it established a direct cultural link between the different regions of the Americas, highlighting and promoting the cultural aspects of the development of inter-American relations.

The First Film: *Saludos Amigos*

The film is divided into four parts: the first and fourth starring Donald Duck, the second an aeroplane called Pedro, and the third featuring Goofy. Each episode can also be seen as a cartoon road movie in which the protagonist is confronted with unfamiliar circumstances and tries to get to know them as well as possible. The outsider sees a region and its cultures from the perspective of a rather simple-minded tourist who can perceive only exotic peculiarities in the region. This approach now appears superficial and stereotypical, but for the 1940s it was a positive step forward compared to the negative attitude of the American film industry (and of politics and society) towards Latin America in the previous decades. The four episodes were originally intended to be separate short films, but Disney eventually decided that it would be more advantageous for distribution to combine them into an anthology film, so he tied the four stories together with additional original scenes shot during the tour (Kaufman 221–22).

In the first story, titled "Lake Titicaca", we visit a Peruvian town where the main targets of the humour are not the indigenous people but the American tourists: their behaviour in strange places and their expectations when they encounter the unknown. Donald is a typical American tourist (one could say he is depicted using negative stereotypes of the American abroad): he takes his camera everywhere, is amazed by everything new, and is shocked by the poverty in the Andes. But in his eyes, all the Andean countries are the same, and he cannot tell the difference between Peru and Bolivia because, coming from the faraway United States, he cannot see the differences that are so important to the people who live there. In the scene at Lake Titicaca, Donald appears as the explorer we know from many adventure novels and films, finding himself in an exotic environment far from the "modern civilisation" to which he and the audience are accustomed, and his attitude and behaviour towards the natives is adapted accordingly. He treats everything and everyone as exotic strangers, both the people and the landscape, and the encounter between the two worlds takes place mainly through visual gags.

The second story, called “Pedro”, had more long-term and positive consequences, but not for the United States or Walt Disney. During his trip to Chile, Disney learned that an aviator had flown over the Andes, which gave him the idea of using a mail plane named Pedro to represent that country in the film. In the segment, Pedro, who is replacing his father for the first time in his life, embarks on a dangerous adventure to get from Chile to Argentina. The story, which is quite simple and perhaps the weakest episode of the film, provoked negative reactions from many: it seemed that the Americans found nothing of value or interest in Chile’s history, culture and traditions, so they invented a story that could have happened anywhere else, without the Chilean setting giving it any special characteristics. In 1949, after seeing the Disney film, the Chilean cartoonist René Ríos Boettiger (better known in his country as Pepo) decided to draw a character that could truly become a symbol of Chile and that had nothing to do with Disney’s false image of Latin America. Thus was born Condorito, the mischievous cartoon condor, who remains one of the country’s most popular national characters and is regarded both at home and abroad as a representative of the Chilean people (Montes Garcés 18).

The third story, “El Gaucho Goofy”, juxtaposes the myths of the American cowboy and the Argentine gaucho through the character of Goofy, who tries out the latter lifestyle on his journey to Latin America. Through the eyes of a classic American outsider, he looks at a different, foreign culture that he finds interesting and tries it out for the sake of excitement and curiosity. The viewers are also part of the outsider’s perspective, gaining a superficial knowledge of some elements of the gaucho lifestyle, such as their daily tasks, habits, food, and clothing. The episode has been criticised for its one-sided and, according to many, biased portrayal, using stereotypes in the same way as previous works, but not considered as such by the creators. Among the negative comments, the most notable is that of the Argentinean Florencio Molina Campos, a specialist in gaucho caricatures and a consultant to Disney, who felt cheated when he saw the finished work, believing that the film made fun of Argentinean folklore and mixed gaucho traditions with elements of the American cowboy myth. In fact, Goofy’s gaucho character could have been taken from any American western, except that his clothes and speech were made to have a more Latin American look and sound, without any of the elements that characterise authentic gaucho culture. It seems that Disney’s real intention was not to present elements of Argentinean folklore, but rather to construct a character that was suitable for conveying a stereotype that the public was already familiar with. As a result, Molina Campos terminated his collaboration with Disney and refused to participate in the production of Hollywood cartoons set in a Latin American country (Fanchin).



Figure 1: Donald Duck and José Carioca are having fun.
***Saludos Amigos*. Directed by Norman Ferguson, Walt Disney Productions, 1942. Screenshot.**

In the fourth story, "Aquarela do Brasil", Donald Duck arrives in Brazil, where he gets a superficial glimpse of the local conditions and culture and introduces a character who later returns in *The Three Caballeros*: José Carioca, the parrot. Like a cartoon travelogue, the film focuses on the highlights of Rio de Janeiro, including the famous carnival and Brazil's diverse flora and fauna.

In *Saludos Amigos*, the cultural and geographical diversity of Latin America was reduced to a few sketchy elements, but the film created and partly satisfied the desire for direct knowledge, forming a kind of (cinematic) bridge between the countries of the Americas. Obviously, this was far from impartial. According to María Belén Calvache and Daysi Tufiño Villacrés, Disney created a hegemonic cultural construct that served its own interests as well as the economic and political interests of the United States. This facilitated a relationship of domination by peaceful means through cultural products: the Latin American societies that became the subordinate party in this relationship did so almost unconsciously, fascinated by the North American culture that was spread through cinema and television, while seeing themselves projected in comic book characters (Calvache and Villacrés 151–52).

The Second Film: *The Three Caballeros*

Like *Saludos Amigos*, this film was made with the dual aim of making Latin American countries and their societies more attractive to the US and of presenting a more positive image of US society in Central and South America. In this case, the intention of the filmmakers was to create a more coherent film out of the individual segments. The first two shorts (the first about a penguin at the South Pole, the second about a flying donkey in the familiar Argentine gaucho setting) had already been made in 1942, at the same time as *Saludos Amigos*, so they are not closely linked to the main plot of the anthology film (Kaufman 223–24). The main thread of the film is about the gifts Donald Duck receives. When he opens one, a new story begins in which Donald takes a virtual trip to a Latin American region. In addition to the cartoon animals, there are also real-life characters such as the Mexican singer-actresses Carmen Molina, Aurora Miranda, and Dora Luz.

The segments that make up the film have not managed to get rid of all the stereotypes when we meet Argentine gauchos or get samples of Brazilian gastronomy. Three birds form the group of protagonists, the American duck Donald, the Mexican rooster Panchito Pistoles and the Brazilian parrot José Carioca, each representing a segment of their nations' cultures: Panchito is a caricature of Mexican revolutionaries (like the legendary "Pancho" Villa), and José is a simplified version of the ever-cheerful Brazilian who lives his life at Carnival. The stories introduce Donald to various species of Latin American birds, as well as the main features of Brazil and Mexico. The other two birds become Donald's guides, and, through their virtual travels, we learn about the different traditions, festivals, and cultural elements of each country. For example, Panchito's behaviour and dress recall the stereotypical image of the Mexican bandit from American adventure novels and western films: he likes to shoot, sing, have fun, and has a less serious attitude to life and its challenges than his bird friend from the north. These three caballeros are also a symbol of Pan-American solidarity and friendship, embodying the intentions of President Roosevelt.

Amy Spellacy argues that Latin America in the film is a projection of Donald's sexual desires. The protagonist is an oversexed sailor who is actually chasing Latin American women; for him, this is the main goal of his journey. As a cartoon character, his desires seem

more harmless to the viewer than if he were a flesh-and-blood actor in a feature film, but his instincts are the same. Latin America is therefore also presented here as a site that is essentially a place for the satisfaction of US desires: Spellacy's argument is that in the film, Donald's emotional and (essentially) physical desires are, in reality, symbolic of the US desire for the political, economic, and military subjugation of the Americans. The Latin American women do not resist; many of them, including the characters played by the real actors, are attracted to Donald, so they are not simply seduced, but seem to want to be the objects of his desire (Spellacy 57–58). It becomes clear that this film also suggests that there is a hierarchy between the United States and Latin America, and between men and women. With the appearance of Carmen Miranda, the embodiment of the stereotypical Latin American woman of overheated sexuality, Donald becomes a kind of male predator who must be stopped by his Latin American parrot friend from being completely consumed by his sexual desires. In later scenes, Donald is also driven to sexual ecstasy by women. Thus, not only have the previous stereotypes not disappeared, but for contemporary analysts the situation has been made more serious by the fact that Latin American women have been made the objects of American sexual desire in a cartoon.

The Non-Existent Third Film and Other Effects of the Disney Tour

The list of Latin American-themed Disney films discussed above could not, of course, include every country in the region, but one was conspicuously absent from the list: Cuba. Apart from Mexico, this Caribbean country had the closest ties with the United States since the mid-nineteenth century, and these intensified after the Spanish–American War (1898), so it may seem surprising that it did not appear in Disney's films. There were plans to make a third anthology film in which Cuba would feature prominently alongside Mexico and Brazil and, in October 1944, a small Disney group visited the country with the same intention as their earlier trip to other parts of the region: descriptions, photographs, and storyboards were produced. Disney representatives held several meetings with Cuban government officials during which it was agreed that a new character would be created for the film to symbolise the Cuban nation: a fighting rooster, the *kikiriki*, popular in Cuba. However, the indifferent reception of *The Three Caballeros* by audiences and critics, alongside the end of the Second World War (and the consequent decline in the importance of the Good Neighbor policy) led both the US government and Disney to believe that it was not crucial to strengthen further the friendly relations with the region (Kaufman 230–32). This perfectly illustrates that the exploration of the Latin American region and the inclusion of related themes in the films were essentially geopolitical and propagandistic, and that when the need to develop inter-American relations was temporarily eclipsed, the importance of exploring the different societies of the Americas was also lost.

Although the US needed the cooperation of the whole of Latin America as part of its Good Neighbor policy, Mexico was of paramount importance. As a neighbouring country, they were linked by closer economic ties, and there was a greater risk of German agents or saboteurs trying to infiltrate the United States via its southern neighbour, as had happened during the First World War. US–Mexican friendship was therefore a priority. Since eighty percent of the animated films released in Mexico during the 1940s were the product of the Disney studio (Mercader 57–58), it was not surprising that films with a Latin American setting were also successful, although, as mentioned above, they still showed many signs of bias. After the US entered the Second World War in December 1941, the Disney studio began making patriotic, anti-Nazi propaganda films, many of which starred their popular and well-known characters (Mercader 64–66). These films were also distributed in Latin America, where they played an

important role in winning over the region's societies to US interests; Mexico was a key player in this. From 1941, with the approval of Mexican President Ávila Camacho and the support of the US Motion Picture Division, Walt Disney produced educational short films for Mexican audiences which were later distributed to other Latin American countries. These films focused primarily on agriculture and health and sought to educate the public about good living and working practices based largely on the experiences of Disney and his colleagues during their travels. The target audiences were workers, farmers and schoolchildren, and mobile units and projectors were used to distribute the films to remote rural areas. One of the most widely screened of these animated shorts was *The Grain that Build a Hemisphere* (Bill Justice, 1942), which was even nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary. The film emphasises the importance of solidarity through economic and cultural ties between the countries of the Americas and uses corn, one of the region's most important cereals, as a symbol of this solidarity. Although the film makes it clear that this solidarity must be led by the United States, Disney also made sure that the main target audience, the Mexicans, felt that they were at the centre of this solidarity: it mentions the Maya and Aztecs as the most ancient representatives of the "corn culture". Other Disney films, also popular and distributed in Mexico, raised awareness of the dangers of mosquitoes, the importance of vaccination (where viewers could be vaccinated after the screening) or good nutrition (Mercader 64–71).

By the 1940s, the Disney Studio was experiencing severe financial difficulties. Its films were generally unprofitable, and most of the propaganda and educational films made at the request of the US government were made for free out of patriotic duty. Of these, *Saludos Amigos* was one of the few to make a profit: it cost $300,000 to produce, grossed $500,000 in the US and about $700,000 abroad (mostly in Latin America) (Thomas 165).

Conclusion

In assessing the cultural (in this case, primarily cinematic) dimension of the Good Neighbor policy, we must of course bear in mind that it was closely linked to the well-designed foreign policy considerations of the United States. There were two main objectives in improving inter-American relations. One was to adapt to a changing world, i.e., to take account of the fact that political developments (or threats) in Europe at the time could soon have a direct impact on the countries of the Americas. On the other hand, only a few years after the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, it was essential for the United States to maintain harmonious relations with most Latin American countries in order to preserve old markets and establish new trade relations. It was fundamental to change the attitudes of US society and politicians towards this largely unknown world and, of course, to make Latin America sympathetic to the US. Socially, politically, and economically, the positive effects of the new approach were soon felt. In the cultural sphere, the new inter-American film policy, while maintaining some of the stereotypes previously associated with the portrayal of Latin Americans, sought to promote mutual understanding between the peoples of the Americas. Films made under the Good Neighbor policy on Latin American themes, characters or locations could be used to facilitate propagandic, economic, and cultural rapprochement, as well as the pursuit of international cooperation as part of a larger and more complex mission. The image and way of life that the United States wished to promote could be made better known in the target countries through Hollywood films; at the same time, a positive image of Latin America and its society had to be created for the American public, refuting stereotypes that had previously been created and disseminated, largely by the film industry. This worked in the short and medium term, but the end of the Second World War and the advent of the Cold War

provoked a new kind of confrontation as the US was forced to change its foreign policy and reassess its role in international relations. Naturally, the new demands of US foreign and domestic policy were also reflected in film policy: at home and in most of Western Europe and Latin America, Hollywood had a major influence on what audiences saw in the cinema and what they learned about the world, to include learning about an idealised version of it.

The two Disney films essentially presented an imaginary Latin America based on a real scenario: the tour of the region by Walt Disney and his colleagues; nonetheless, it had little to do with reality. Nevertheless, these films temporarily fulfilled the hopes placed in them. For the American public, they presented a more attractive, liveable, and interesting image of Latin America which, unlike earlier depictions, was not (only) populated by bandits, idlers, and alcoholics, but also promised foreigners an exciting, exotic adventure. In the historical context of the time, it was essential for the US to be trusted by Latin America and to see its society as a partner. Walt Disney's version of Good Neighbor policy proved useful at the time: Donald Duck and Goofy were both considered attractive, sympathetic ambassadors of the American way of life, and helped to improve relations (at least temporarily) between countries in the Americas, even though it now seems clear that it was a one-sided portrayal and manifested the relationship of superiority to inferiority. Today, the representation of Latin Americans in Disney animated films is fundamentally different: film productions such as *Coco* (Lee Unkrich, 2017), *Encanto* (Jared Bush and Byron Howard, 2021) and the television series *Elena of Avalor* (Craig Gerber, 2016–2020) are now based on a more diverse representation, moving away from the simplistic approaches of the 1940s. Given the fundamentally different historical period in which they were made, and the different roles they played within constantly evolving inter-American cultural relations and cultural politics of the time of their productions, it is natural that the Latin American characters and environments had to be adapted to a different set of intentions and expectations.

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András Lénárt is Associate Professor at the University of Szeged, Hungary. His main areas of research are the contemporary history and cinema of Latin America and Spain, the relations between history and cinema, and Inter-American Studies. He is the author of three books, more than 150 book chapters, essays and articles written in English, Spanish and Hungarian, and the co-editor of four volumes. He is President of the International Federation of Latin American and Caribbean Studies (FIEALC) and a member of various international research groups and academic associations.