



# **Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons from the Sound Era (Communications, Media, and Culture Series)**

*Eric Smoodin*

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Long considered "children's entertainment" by audiences and popular media, Hollywood animation has received little serious attention. Eric Smoodin's *Animating Culture* is the first and only book to thoroughly analyze the animated short film.

Usually running about seven or eight minutes, cartoons were made by major Hollywood studios—such as MGM, Warner Bros., and Disney—and shown at movie theaters along with a newsreel and a feature-length film. Smoodin explores animated shorts and the system that mass-produced them. How were cartoons exhibited in theaters? How did they tell their stories? Who did they tell them to? What did they say about race, class, and gender? How were cartoons related to the feature films they accompanied on the evening's bill of fare? What were the social functions of cartoon stars like Donald Duck and Minnie Mouse?

Smoodin argues that cartoons appealed to a wide audience—not just children—and did indeed contribute to public debate about political matters. He examines issues often ignored in discussions of animated film—issues such as social control in the U.S. army's "Private Snafu" cartoons, and sexuality and race in the "sites" of Betty Boop's body and the cartoon harem. Smoodin's analysis of the multiple discourses embedded in a variety of cartoons reveals the complex and sometimes contradictory ways that animation dealt with class relations, labor, imperialism, and censorship. His discussion of Disney and the Disney Studio's close ties with the U.S. government forces us to rethink the place of the cartoon in political and cultural life. Smoodin reveals the complex relationship between cartoons and the Hollywood studio system, and between cartoons and their audiences.

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