

AMERICA ANIMATED: NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY
IN WARNER BROTHERS' *ANIMANIACS*

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AMERICA ANIMATED: NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY
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THESIS ABSTRACT
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Television cartoons help to construct and maintain our perceptions of social reality. A depth hermeneutic approach for studying the Warner Brothers' cartoon, *Animaniacs*, is described. Analysis of episodes featuring Yakko, Wakko and Dot as well as episodes featuring Pinky and the Brain were analyzed and compared with a historical analysis of the conditions in the United States in 1993.

Analysis reveals nationalist messages in *Animaniacs* that position the United States as superior to other nations in the world. The show is found to not be a reflection of actual historical conditions of the time period when the show aired. The ideological implications of these messages are discussed.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Pinky: Gee Brain, what are we going to do tomorrow night?

Brain: The same thing we do every night Pinky. Try to take over the world! (Ruegger, 1993d)

This quip is typical of the dialogue found in the cartoon hit, *Animaniacs*.

Animaniacs is a Warner Brothers cartoon that premiered on FOX on September 13, 1993 (Graham, 1993). Riding the coattails of such widely popular cartoons as *Looney Tunes* and *Tiny Tune Adventures*, *Animaniacs* follows a similar format. The show features a variety of characters starring in a series of shorts throughout the 30-minute program. The most notable of these characters are the Warner brothers, Yakko and Wakko, and their sister, Dot. The basic premise of the show is that the studio created the Warner brothers and Warner sister in the 1930s, but they were far too zany and ran amok through the studio. They were eventually captured and thrown in the studio water tower, where they remained until the 1990s, when they finally escaped and began to wreak havoc in the studio once again (Gates, 1995). With a combination of slapstick humor, original songs, clever wordplay and a range of cultural references, the *Animaniacs* became one of the most popular cartoons of the 1990s.

Although *Animaniacs* was designed as a children's cartoon, the cultural commentary and humor is such that it has been appreciated by both children and adult audiences. Though on the surface it appears to be nothing more than a zany cartoon filled with silly musical numbers and slapstick comedy, it carries subtle cultural

commentary. Aside from the music and comedic elements, the show also features references to cultural events and historical figures that the viewer may not immediately identify as significant. The contradiction between superficial comedy gags and serious cultural messages makes the cartoon a fascinating subject for study. Although this program was wildly popular and culturally significant, few communication scholars have given it serious consideration.

Historical Overview

Although *Animaniacs* is one of the more recent Warner Brothers cartoon shows to carry strong cultural messages, it is certainly not the first. Warner Brothers began its popular cartoon production in 1929 with a film titled *Bosko the Talk-Ink Kid*, which was an early success at synchronizing sound and animation (Sigall, 2005). When the first official Bosko cartoon, *Sinkin' in the Bathtub*, premiered, Bosko, who resembled a humanized version of Mickey Mouse, became the first official Looney Tune. The Bosko cartoons were so popular that in 1930 they spawned another series titled *Merrie Melodies*, which starred characters such as Foxy and Piggy, while *Looney Tunes* continued the Bosko series. The wide popularity of the *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies* in the mid 1930s led to the birth of some of the Warner Brothers' most popular characters, such as Porky Pig, Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd. Easily the most popular cartoon ever created by the Warner Brothers, *Looney Tunes* won six Academy awards and created more 1,000 cartoon stars—more than any other studio (Schneider, 1988).

After their initial success in theaters, *Looney Tunes*, *Merrie Melodies* and other Warner Brothers cartoons began to make their way onto television screens in the mid-

1950s (Mittell, 2004). The shows achieved great commercial success and Warner Brothers continued to produce popular animated films until 1963, when it dismantled its animation department. The studio continued to produce the *Looney Tunes* series through 1969, only with limited graphics and animation. Throughout the next few decades, Warner Brothers released several feature length compilations, most of which were Bugs Bunny specials (Adamson, 1990). After a decades-long hiatus from working on an animated series, the studio premiered *Tiny Toon Adventures* in 1990, which was a spin-off of *Looney Tunes* and featured young counterparts to the classic *Looney Tunes* characters (Mittell, 2004). *Tiny Toon Adventures* shared multiple similarities with the classic Warner Brothers cartoons such as complex musical numbers and emphasis on slapstick comedy. Finally, in 1993, a year after the cancellation of *Tiny Toon Adventures*, the studio debuted *Animaniacs*. The show ran until 1998 and was the last cartoon series of its kind produced by Warner Brothers.

Animaniacs ran from 1993 to 1998. By its second season, *Animaniacs* was the second most popular children's television series, second only to the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* (Gates, 1995). The show was also popular with adults. Although the show was originally targeted at children and teenagers ages 6-16 (Waters, 1993), "More than 21 percent of the weekday audience (4 P.M., Monday through Friday) and more than 23 percent of the Saturday morning (9 A.M.) viewers are adults 25 or older" (Gates, 1995, p. 31). The cleverly placed adult humor in the show allowed for it to reach a much wider audience than was their actual target demographic. Though the show has been off the air for a decade, it is still reaching large audiences across the country. Three volumes of the show were released on DVD in 2006 and 2007 (IMDB, 2008), there have been

myriad *Animaniacs* video games, and the show has a strong Internet following (Gates, 1995).

Beyond simply being forms of entertainment, television shows such as *Animaniacs* may carry ideological messages. Mitchell (1995) asserts, "Television is an indelible feature in the enculturation or socialization process which teaches children their culture" (p. 7). Mitchell strengthens this argument by adding, "A popular cartoon, such as *Animaniacs*, must draw its material from the cultural reality of a large percentage of the population" (p. 8). If that is true, then it is likely that the show carries messages that reflect the current cultural and historical conditions under which it was created. In turn, the show could the function to create, change or reinforce its audience's ideological perspectives.

In *Animaniacs*, the most commonly recurring characters are the Warner brothers and sister, Yakko, Wakko and Dot and the genetically engineered lab mice, Pinky and the Brain. A common story line that runs through *Animaniacs* episodes featuring these characters is how the characters, who are American, relate to the rest of the world. Yakko, Wakko and Dot frequently find themselves in foreign locations and unleash their zany antics on the foreigners they encounter. Pinky and Brain, on the other hand, are two mice bent on global domination and spend each episode hatching a new plot to take over the world, often from within the United States. Because the topic of how these American characters relate to the rest of the world is common throughout the first season of the show, these episodes carry ideological messages about where the United States itself stands in relation to the rest of the world. Specifically, the show carries messages about

the superiority of the United States over the rest of the world. These messages mask reality and endorse nationalist and ethnocentric beliefs.

Research Question

Despite its vast commercial and cultural influence, *Animaniacs* is almost completely absent from scholarly research. One reason for this is that most Warner Brothers cartoons put more emphasis on performance rather than narrative, so while scholars have studied the technical aspects of these cartoons, they have paid little attention to the actual messages imbedded in them (Sartin, 1998). By studying the messages that lie inside the text of *Animaniacs*, I answer the following question: What does *Animaniacs* articulate about the United States' position in the world during the time period that the show aired, and how does that articulation function ideologically? The messages in *Animaniacs* are important because they distort reality by presenting images of the dominance of the United States in the early 1990s when in fact the country's global dominance was in jeopardy. These messages promote a nationalist ideology which has dangerous implications for Americans and the nations with which the United States interacts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Television and Culture

In order to understand the importance of an ideological study of *Animaniacs*, it is first important to explore the existing research on it and other cartoons. Such an examination of existing cartoon scholarship points to areas that have already been studied by media scholars and reveals shows and ideas that have not been addressed by communication researchers. This literature review discusses existing scholarship on television, the significance of cartoons, and scholarship on cartoons such as Disney cartoons, adult cartoons and Warner Brothers cartoons. It also looks at existing scholarship on *Animaniacs* itself. In addition, it discusses scholarship on nationalism and ethnocentrism, which are two concepts that are not present in existing cartoon research.

Television is, and continues to be, an important part of everyday life for millions of people across the globe. Since its invention, television has become a major source of information as well as form of entertainment (Gerbner, 1998). During the 2004-05 season, Americans watched, on average, 8 hours and 11 minutes of television per day (Gyimesi & Tatham, 2005), an increase of almost an hour per day from 1996 (Gerbner, 1996). In fact, according to Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein and Page (2005) besides work and sleep, Americans spend more time each day watching television than engaging in any other activity, and “children spend more time watching television than at any other waking activity” (p. 254). The researchers also report that, “By the time the average person reaches the age of 70, he or she will have spent the equivalent of 7 to 10 years

watching television” (p. 254). Television viewing is on the rise, so it is important to study the ideological implications of messages carried through this medium.

Because television viewing is such an immensely popular American pastime, it has the potential to have strong cultural implications for Americans. Kottak (1990), who conducted an anthropological study of television and culture, posits that television influences culture because Americans who watch television end up with common information and experiences as a result of the programs they have watched. Kottak states, “Television content also influences mass culture because it provides widely shared common knowledge, beliefs, and expectations” (p. 9). People who watch television experience common meanings in the programs that help shape and reinforce their already existing knowledge and beliefs. In addition, Gitlin (1983) asserts that television shapes cultural reality because even though the images on the screen are extraordinary, they appear in ordinary settings such as living rooms and bedrooms. Media gatekeepers ratify or suppress public fears by feeding American’s images of their own desires. Because television messages shape cultural reality, they have the potential to be ideological and carry meanings that favor the interests of those in power. Gitlin states, “The images register with us as symbols, as diversion and ideology at the same time, by virtue of the fact that our guard is down when we watch” (p. 333). Television therefore carries ideological messages whether audiences are aware of it or not. For adults, television serves not to define cultural reality, rather to shape and reinforce already existing beliefs and world views.

Cartoon Crossover to Television

One critical type of television programming that is an important area of study for communication scholars is cartoons. Although cartoons originally premiered as theatrical productions, they eventually made the crossover to television. Mittell (2004) states, “There is no ‘canonical’ history of television animation, as animation has been a marginal topic within film studies—and within the small body of animation scholarship, television has been viewed primarily as ‘the cartoon graveyard’” (p. 61). According to Mittell, the cartoon genre was not considered culturally significant because scholars and critics viewed it as a simple vehicle for children’s amusement rather than a legitimate form of narrative and entertainment. Solomon (1989) echoes this sentiment. According to Solomon, television animation began to flourish in the late 1950s and early 1960s when theatrical studios closed. Over the next few decades, critics deplored television cartoons because they felt the shows were assembly-line animation with no real personal feeling. The cartoons of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s were made to appeal to both sophisticated and un-sophisticated audience members, but in the 1960s and 1970s they began to be stereotyped as children’s shows, which is a distortion because there has always been a large and diverse audience for animation (Mittell, 2004).

According to Solomon (1989), animation officially made the move to television in 1949 with the cartoon series *Crusader Rabbit*. Disney also became a television cartoon pioneer in 1954 with the primetime hit, *Disneyland* (Mittell, 2004). Other cartoon studios such as Terrytoons, Warner Brothers, Columbia and Paramount followed suit shortly afterwards and sold their cartoon collections to television. Many cartoons were not allowed to be shown on television because of questionable content such as Warner

Brothers' "Coal Black and De Sebben Dwarves," which premiered in 1943 and was considered extremely racist by most audiences due to its racial stereotyping. Also, many images of guns, drinking and smoking were edited out of cartoons when they made the move to television. Furthermore, Mittell (2004) states that in the 1950s cartoonists started experimenting with creating cartoons explicitly for television. It was only after this shift to television that animators started designing cartoons specifically for children. Because children were not seen as refined audience members, most of the original cartoons created for television in the 1960s were crude, low-budget and not considered culturally significant. Solomon states that early children's cartoon shows were nothing more than a collage of old theatrical cartoons from earlier decades. Mittell also asserts that although many early cartoons were devalued because of their apparent appeal to only children, many cartoons that are now considered classics, such as *Yogi Bear* and *Huckleberry Hound*, were praised for their adult wit and use of satire. A handful of other cartoons now considered to be classics also debuted in the early decades of television animation such as *The Flintstones*, *Rocky and Bullwinkle* and *The Jetsons* (Solomon, 1989). The combination of adult humor and simple visual appeal to children created hybrid audience of both groups sometimes referred to as "kidult." Though animation studios continued to produce cartoons after they moved to television, the shows created specifically for television were largely viewed as children's shows and did not appeal to adult audiences (Mittell, 2004).

When *The Simpsons* premiered in 1990, it showed that cartoons could break free from their reputations as children's programs (Mittell, 2004). The 1990s gave birth to myriad cartoons targeted at adult audiences. Among these are three Warner Brothers

cartoons that premiered in the 1990s: *Tiny Toon Adventures* in 1990, *Animaniacs* in 1993 and *Pinky and the Brain* in 1995. Mittell states that these cartoons “have been positioned as ‘neo-classical’ throwbacks to these traditions, often containing direct references to the ‘golden age’ via character cameos or clever allusions” (2004, p. 82). Mittell concludes that the period from the 1960s to the 1990s was nothing more than a wasteland for cartoons with only a few quality shows. Finally, in the 1990s, there were once again cartoons that could be considered culturally significant and therefore warrant serious study.

Cartoon scholarship in media and communication studies

Cartoons and Culture

Cartoon scholarship has studied this genre from a variety of viewpoints; much of the existing cartoon research focuses on either the effects of cartoon violence or the cultural implications of cartoons. Regarding cartoons targeted to children, one study found that 79.5 percent of cartoons contain violence, and had 24.8 episodes of violence per hour (Gosselin, DeGuise, Pacquette & Benoit, 1997). As of 1995, there was three to four times more violence in children’s programming than in other programming (Signorielli & Gerbner, 1995). Comic violence, such as the type of violence often portrayed in cartoons, may have a negative impact, because children learn from humor and will not ignore comic violence simply because it is unrealistic (Signorielli & Gerbner, 1995). Because of the possible detrimental effect of cartoon violence in children, researchers in the social sciences have been studying this aspect of cartoons for decades. Siegel (1958) Bandura, Ross and Ross (1963), Ellis and Sekyra (1972) and

Friedrich and Stein (1973) all found that viewing violence in cartoons caused children to behave aggressively either towards their peers or some object.

Though the effect of cartoon violence on viewers is the most widely researched aspect of cartoons, scholars within the humanities have also paid attention to the cultural implications that cartoons may have. Smoodin (1993) asserts that cartoons have great importance in American culture. Cartoons, according to Smoodin, can carry political and ideological messages, such as the cartoons of World War II, which Smoodin argues helped spread American ideology across the globe. The main reason that cartoons are such strong vehicles for ideological messages is that most people view cartoons as pure entertainment and are unaware of the hidden persuasive messages they may contain.

In addition to communicating American ideology to different countries, cartoons also have ideological implications for people within the United States. According to Swan (1998), cartoons help to shape and reinforce social reality because cartoons simplify reality, making the messages easier to understand. Some aspects of American culture that are evident in cartoons are depictions of age, ethnicity and gender that contribute to the development of stereotypes. This type of cartoon research also looks at how cartoons contain messages that privilege dominant groups over the subordinated ones. Swan (1998) looked specifically at the impact of Saturday morning cartoons and found that these cartoons reflect the social conditions and cultural biases of American society. For example, ethnic minorities are often portrayed in cartoons as being tokens, much in the same way that they are treated as tokens in the real world. Along with depictions of race, gender, and age, settings in cartoons also shape ideas about cultural reality. Swan states that the settings in cartoons suggest that, “one lives in the suburbs,

dreams of the country and fears the city” (1998, p. 97). Because of the depictions of American culture in cartoons, the researchers posit that the messages of Saturday morning cartoons are no different from the messages of American society.

One example of the ways in which cartoons help privilege dominant groups and oppress subordinate groups is through depictions of villains. Warner (1990) looked at the ways in which cartoon villains perpetuate the social typing of deviance. The research found that a villain’s deviant behavior is almost always caused by biological or psychological factors rather than by sociological ones. This means that according to cartoons, deviance is created genetically rather than socially. In addition, villainous characters are usually identifiable by physical cultural stereotypes. For example, villains might have bloodshot eyes or pointed teeth. They also might violate social norms by initiating conflict. Also, Warner posits that villainous characters tend to form instrumental rather than emotional relationships. These stereotypical characteristics of villains help perpetuate cultural stereotypes about deviance through cultural production. If one sees a villain in a cartoon initiate conflict, then that person may look at someone in the real world who initiates conflict and immediately identify that person as a villain based on the concepts of villains that have been reinforced through deviant characters in cartoons.

Cartoons for Adults

Though most of the scholarship about cartoons looks at cartoons created for young audiences, some scholars have studied cartoons that were produced for adult audiences. One of the first, and most popular, adult cartoons, *The Simpsons*, is the subject of the majority of this scholarship (Alberti, 2004; Bhattacharya, 2000; Dobson,

2006; Frank, 2001; Gray, 2005; Gray, 2007; Henry, 2007; Hull, 2000; Irwin, Conard & Skoble, 2001; Larson, 1993; Lewis, 2002; Meskill, 2007; Ott, 2003; Todd, 2002; Wood & Todd, 2005). Scholars have found that *The Simpsons* carries a variety of cultural messages. Meskill (2007), for example, suggests that the show deviates from typical depictions of education and instead reflects true critiques of the United States educational system while at the same time reassuring viewers that teachers always have the best interests of their students in mind and will go to any lengths to keep the educational system functioning. Meskill notes that these messages are most prominently disseminated through the use of humor and complex allusions. In contrast, Hull (2000) asserts that *The Simpsons* portrays schools as places that rob children of their liveliness and instead prepares them for their drab lives of being obedient employees. School is also compared to prison and is described as being extremely boring. These contrasting analyses of the educational system in the show are a strong example of the ways in which cartoons can have multiple readings.

Other analyses of *The Simpsons* deal with issues beyond education. Gray (2007) notes a number of messages in the show, such as strong critiques of the American Dream, suburban provincialism, and capitalism. Wood and Todd (2005) argue that Springfield, the setting of *The Simpsons*, depicts urban life as a conflated and dislocated environment that has rules and consequences that are vastly different from those in everyday life. Henry (2007) posits that *The Simpsons* is a sophisticated satire of American culture and asserts that the show offers a progressive view of feminism in the United States. Race is also an issue in the show, as stated by Dobson (2006), who found that the show often portrays negative and stereotypical aspects of different cultures. This variety of messages

in the show again points to the strong cultural impact of cartoons, whether they are designed for children or for adults.

Disney Cartoons

One of the most widely researched areas of cartoons is that of cartoons produced by Disney Studios. Though most Disney features were released in theaters and not on television, they nevertheless have strong cultural impact. Disney pioneered and perfected many of the techniques still used in cartoon production today. Rafaelli (1997) states, “Disney was the first to make a colour cartoon (*Flowers and Tress*, 1932); the first to build the ‘multiplane’ camera, the first to study and perfect the technique of lip synchronization” (p. 115). Because Disney pioneered these animation techniques, the production company quickly became the most widely popular and respected studio for animation. Warner Brothers cartoons have even been accused of being blatant Disney rip-offs. As Bell, Haas and Sells (1995) note, there are a number of cultural implications for Disney cartoons. According to these scholars, Disney cartoons sanitize history and political struggles and constructs gender identities. Because Disney had such vast influence on early cartoons, it is important to look at the ways in which scholars have approached these cartoons.

Gender

Scholars have analyzed numerous Disney cartoons from a variety of angles. Murphy (1995) studied movies such as *Snow White*, *The Rescuers*, *101 Dalmatians* and *The Jungle Book* and found that these movies carry strong androcentric messages. According to Murphy, *Snow White* demonstrates that women are responsible for cleaning up after men and *101 Dalmatians* sends the message that independent women are evil and

it is the woman's job to produce children in order to make the father proud. In a similar vein, Payne (1995) found that Disney movies such as *Bambi* contain patriarchal language and ideas. Bambi, a male deer, must protect his mate Feline because it is the male's job to protect the female. Also, the dominant controlling group in the movie is not humans, but rather "man," which stands for humans, but also men in a literal sense. According to the researchers, these messages in Disney movies position men as the dominant group in society and women as subordinates.

In addition to having strong patriarchal and androcentric messages, scholars have found that Disney movies also carry negative messages about females. Sells (1995) examined *The Little Mermaid* and found similarities between Ariel's role and the role of women in American society. The main tension of American feminism that Ariel reflects lies in her struggle to transition from the mermaid world to the human world. Her struggle to enter into the human world, according to Sells, reflects the ways in which women struggle to enter into the white male system of American society. Another negative aspect of the ways in which women are portrayed in Disney movies is the role of the mother. Haas (1995) found that a majority of Disney movies cut out the role of the mother altogether, even if there was one in the original story. Some examples of these include *Pinnocchio*, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Others, such as *Lady and the Tramp*, include the role of the mother, but demonstrate that she exists only to nurture the young and not for any other purpose.

Scholars have found that Disney princesses such as Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Ariel, Mulan, Jasmine, Belle, Pocahontas and Snow White tend to fit within stereotypical gender roles. According to Inge (2004), the very first Disney feature, *Snow White and*

the Seven Dwarves, is a reflection of society's view of women in 1937 when the movie premiered. Snow White is the quintessential woman of the time. Her only social role is to cook and clean for men while waiting for Prince Charming to whisk her away and marry her. Other female leads in Disney movies such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella* also fall into this stereotype of the submissive homemaker female whose sole job it is to cater to the needs of men. Inge states that this pattern did not change until 1991 when Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* showed that females can be strong, independent and not needy for a husband. Rozario (2004) notes that while these princesses all hold royal power, they still exist in a patriarchal land dominated by their fathers. As the years pass by, however, the princesses find themselves with increasing social power and freedom. The princesses, however, have become more proactive and are able to exercise some degree of power over the men who dominate them, such as by choosing not to marry their suitors as Pocahontas did. In contrast, however, scholars such as Dundes (2001) suggest that while characters such as Pocahontas may seem liberated, they still fall into stereotypical gender roles, such as Pocahontas, who falls into the stereotypical nurturer role by protecting the social fabric of her village. Though there is some disagreement among researchers, most of the gender scholarship for Disney movies suggests that these movies portray males as strong and liberated and females as submissive nurturers.

Cultural Difference

Though gender is the most common theme in Disney cartoon scholarship, researchers have also noted strong themes relating to race and other cultural differences. Lacroix (2004) for example, found that characters of color in Disney movies are depicted much differently than the white characters. Characters such as Princess Jasmine from the

movie *Aladdin*, Pocahontas, the Indian princess from *Pocahontas* and Esmerelda, the gypsy woman from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* are all characters of color and are portrayed as being sexual and erotic beings, whereas characters such as Ariel and Belle are not. Lacroix also asserts that there are powerful gender messages in these films that suggest that women are sexual objects that should be looked at in a voyeuristic manner. These representations, according to Lacroix, project racist imagery that suggests that women of color are sexual beings and that it is their bodies that are the source of their power and agency.

Other scholars have also noted the ways in which Disney cartoons portray cultural differences. Felperin (1997) looked at *Aladdin* as an orientalist text and found that the cartoon is a representation not of the real Middle East, but of stereotypical Western representations of the Orient and the original story of the character Aladdin. Though the movie attempts to depict the true Orient in its detailed background images and art, the Western technology used in the animation of the foreground characters greatly overshadows any true depictions of the Middle East. Another negative depiction of cultural difference is that of *Pocahontas*. Ono and Buescher (2001) found that the mass of *Pocahontas* products available after the movie release showed Native Americans as a mere commodity that can be bought and sold with ease. Also, in the same way that *Aladdin* is a misrepresentation of Middle Eastern culture, *Pocahontas* is a misrepresentation of Native American culture. Though the movie is loosely based on an actual historical event, Ono and Buescher note that the storyline is vague when it comes to the actual details of the Pocahontas legend, and that Disney used the story to “recast Native Americans within a western, capitalist frame” (p. 37). Again, like with *Aladdin*,

Pocahontas is a representation of a non-white culture shown through a Western viewpoint.

Warner Brothers Cartoons

Lack of Literature

Although the Warner Brothers studio has been producing cartoons for film and television since 1930, these cartoons have received little attention by scholars, especially when compared to scholarship on Disney cartoons. There are a number of reasons as to why this may be the case. First, even at the height of their popularity, cartoons such as *Looney Tunes* were often overshadowed by Disney productions and completely ignored by critics (White, 1998). Disney cartoons received most of the praise by critics and were therefore perceived as being much more influential than Warner Brothers productions. Furthermore, even when Warner Brothers' cartoons did receive attention from critics, they were often not seen as being culturally important. According to White, one critic found the *Looney Tunes* to be "rough, noisy and deficient in grace" (p. 40). Even the good reviews praised the cartoons not for their storylines, but for their visual and musical innovation. According to Sartin (1998), shows such as *Looney Tunes* stressed performance rather than narrative, which could explain why little scholarly work is devoted to the actual cultural messages contained within these cartoons. Sartin also offers another potential reason for the lack of scholarly work devoted to Warner Brothers cartoons. When cartoons became popular, audience members saw them as mere entertainment machines, or a product of industry. Since people who watched these cartoons thought they were simple entertainment devices churned out by production

studios, it is likely they did not view them as works that contained any real meaning, and therefore did not feel that they merited serious study.

Violence

Although existing scholarship in regards to Warner Brothers cartoons is limited, a few key aspects of the cartoons have been examined. Violence is one aspect of Warner Brothers cartoons that scholars have analyzed. One of the most prominent instances of violence in Warner Brothers cartoons is that of the Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote. The plot of this cartoon revolves around a coyote that uses any means necessary to try to catch a roadrunner. Taking a different approach to most studies of violent cartoons, Bruce (2001) suggests that violence sends messages about meanings and subjects other than itself and the absence of any verbal cues in the Road Runner cartoons makes them especially open to interpretation. The violence in these cartoons occurs mostly through technology. Wile E. Coyote purchases a number of devices from bombs to robots in an attempt to snag the Road Runner for dinner. Unfortunately for the coyote, the Road Runner escapes every time. Bruce draws a parallel between this cartoon and the myth of Sisyphus. Like Sisyphus, who was forced to continue the same repetitive task of rolling a boulder up a hill for all eternity, Wile E. Coyote must endure futilely chasing the Road Runner forever. Along with being a modern reflection of the Sisyphus myth, the cartoon may also stand as a reenactment of America's battle for the west insofar as it takes place in the desert and Wile E. Coyote continually tries to dominate this territory and its primary inhabitant, the roadrunner. Bruce's analysis opens the door for examining violence in cartoons not in terms of cause and effect, but instead in terms of their potential meaning construction.

Gender

Another key area of study in Warner Brothers cartoons is that of gender. Abel (1995) studied gender construction in American animated cartoons, particularly in regard to the *Looney Tunes*. According to Abel, most cartoon production studios such as Disney, MGM and Fleischer, portray their characters as heterosexual. Abel argues that the behavior of the *Looney Tunes* characters, who are mostly male, is what identifies their gender roles. For most of the characters, gender plays no role in defining their relationships with one another. Many of the cartoons feature males pursuing males. Sylvester chases Tweety Bird, Wile E. Coyote chases the Roadrunner, Elmer chases Bugs Bunny and Pepé Le Pew chases a gender-ambiguous cat. Because these characters do not fall into particular gender roles, they have the freedom to explore non-traditional ones. This is particularly evident in the cartoons in which Bugs Bunny and other characters wear women's clothing. Abel states that any instances of cross-dressing in these cartoons represent the subversion of traditional gender behaviors, which in turn represents a subversion of power. By defying stereotypical gender expectations, Bugs Bunny and the other Warner Brothers cartoons open the door for viewers to critique current power structures.

Abel is not the only scholar to take note of the gender issues surrounding Bugs Bunny's affinity for dressing in drag. Sandler (1998) draws on the work of Butler to analyze Bugs Bunny's gender. Unlike Abel, who argues that Bugs Bunny's gender ambiguity creates room for subversion of stereotypical gender roles, Sandler posits that Bugs Bunny's anthropomorphic nature actually reinforces gender norms. The differences in Bugs Bunny's male and female characters illustrate and reinforce the audience's ideas

of how males and females are supposed to look, dress and behave. Also, even when Bugs Bunny seems to subvert dominant gender roles by wearing women's clothing and kissing another male character such as Elmer Fudd, he is really just reinforcing these dominant roles. At the end of every cartoon, Bugs Bunny removes the transvestite disguise and returns to what the audience perceives as his normal state, which reinforces heterosexuality and masculinity as the normal male characteristics.

Thompson (1998) also studied gender issues in *Looney Tunes* by analyzing Pepé Le Pew, an amorous skunk who wildly chases after a female cat whom he mistakes for a skunk. Pepé Le Pew is exceptionally narcissistic and does not seem to realize that his affection is never reciprocated. Thompson posits that Pepé Le Pew is so self-absorbed that he cannot even perceive of the female's revulsion of him. Pepé Le Pew, then is an ultimate example of masculine heterosexual seduction. He relentlessly pursues the female because of his absolute belief in his own seductive masculinity. Thompson states, "Our laughter unconsciously admires Pepé's skills in sustaining his phantasmic delusions, for his prattling valentines are a colorful spectacularization of heterosexual romance and the generic conventions that inform it" (p. 153). Pepé Le Pew therefore constructs his own masculinity in an effort to stay within the typical conventions of heterosexual courtship.

Stereotypes

Scholars have also taken note racial and regional stereotypes in Warner Brothers cartoons. Lindvall and Fraser (1998) studied the ways in which African Americans are represented in Warner Brothers cartoons. According to Lindvall and Fraser, these images are important to study because they helped fuel racism, especially in the era before the

Civil Rights Movement: “The images of blacks in animated films contributed to an evolving mass popular folklore that propagated indiscriminating racist attitudes, essentially placing a mediated image of a ‘foreign people,’ even a tribal people, before a xenophobic public eye” (p. 122). Examples of such racist ideology in cartoons include characters such as Bosko and Inki, (who represented ignorant black people) and Buddy (Bosko’s white counterpart) who appeared in racist films with racist themes and messages. One of the most prominent examples is 1939’s “A Day at the Zoo,” which featured a monkey in a zoo cage who manages to convince the zookeeper that a black man should be the one behind bars instead of him. According to Lindvall and Fraser, however, these representations of African Americans reflected negatively on American culture because they reinforced an imagistic code of discrimination and fueled already existing racist attitudes.

Racial stereotypes are not the only ones that emerge in Warner Brothers cartoons. Friersen (1998) took a look at another prominent stereotype in the United States: the hillbilly. The hillbilly was a cultural icon for decades, especially during the Great Depression, and was most often portrayed as a “barefooted, shabby, black-hearted mountain hayseed with the slouch hat” (p. 87). Even cartoons as late as the late 1940s and 1950s contained images of the hillbilly. Hillbillies, according to Friersen, had great appeal for depression-era audiences because even the poorest urban audiences could take pleasure in knowing that there were still people out there poorer and less sophisticated than themselves. In particular, Friersen looks at “I Yoo Hoo” from 1936, “A Feud There Was” from 1938 and “Naughty Neighbors” from 1939. Friersen asserts that these cartoons negotiate several discourses of the time, “primarily the issue of the failing

economy in the early thirties and the impending war in Europe in the later thirties; secondarily, the gay male, commercial radio, the thirties craze for mountain music, and contemporary big-budget Hollywood spectacles” (p. 88). All three of these cartoons deal with the boundary disputes that supposedly occurred among mountain people. These disputes mostly served as a means for writers to incorporate a wide array of hillbilly stereotypes. Although these hillbilly images served mostly to make urban audiences feel better about their current circumstances, Friersen notes that their rejection of urbanization might also serve as a rejection of mainstream Hollywood and the constant patriotic messages being pumped out by other production studios.

Cultural Context

Even as far back as Bosko, the first Looney Tune, the Warner Brothers studio has been creating cartoons that reflect and comment on current cultural conditions. Dunne (2001) studied the concept of intertextuality in cartoons, which refers to cartoons making reference to the real world or to themselves as film characters. This intertextuality is especially apparent in the *Looney Tunes*. Dunne states, “Sometimes individual cartoons call upon the viewers’ extradiegetic cultural experience through brief or extended allusions to famous titles, events and celebrities” (p. 145). Bugs Bunny, for example, often mentions or parodies certain celebrities such as Humphrey Bogart and Alfred Hitchcock. One of the issues with intertextual encounters in cartoons is that the writers often assume that the audience has proper understanding of these cultural references. If the audience does not understand the references, then the message is easily lost. These intertextual encounters, however, are still important because, as Dunne suggests, much of what people understand about American culture comes from these moments of

intertextuality. Cartoon writers therefore are potentially shaping how audiences view American culture.

A critical aspect of these cultural references that scholars have noted is the ways in which cartoons reflect the social and historical circumstances under which they were created. Not only did 1930s cartoons make reference to the war and Nazism, they also helped promote support of the war. Bugs Bunny's 1942 cartoon, "Any Bonds Today?" helped promote the war effort, and these culturally significant messages continued throughout the production of Warner Brothers cartoons. Even after *Looney Tunes* ended its production, Bugs Bunny could still be seen in public service announcements in the 1980s (Sandler, 1998a).

Warner Brothers began adding cultural commentary to its cartoons from the beginning of its animation production. Birdwell (1999) analyzed Warner Brothers' cartoons during World War II and compared the plots of the cartoons to the United States' role in the war and its efforts to gain its citizens' support of the war. One of the first instances of a cartoon commenting on current events occurred only three years after the studio began production animated features. Birdwell states, "On September 18, 1933, the Warner Bros. animation unit released the *Looney Tunes* cartoon *Bosko's Picture Show*. As a parody of the March of Time newsreels, it depicted 'Pretzel, Germany,' ruthlessly governed by a buffoonish, lederhosen-clad Adolf Hitler" (p. 20). This cartoon was significant because it was the first depiction of Hitler in an American film other than in newsreel coverage. Along with being the first cartoon depiction of Hitler, *Bosko's Picture Show* is significant because it marked the beginning of a long history of Warner Brothers cartoons commenting on current political, social, economical or other

conditions. Birdwell asserts, “Between 1937 and 1941 the Warners Brothers' animation unit at the ‘Termite Terrace’ produced twenty-three cartoons that dealt directly with the war in Europe, the peacetime draft, and preparedness” (p. 25). Additionally, in 1942, the studio released “Confessions of a Nutzy Spy,” which is an anti-Nazism film. According to Birdwell, these films were a direct attempt by the Warner Brothers studio to shape public opinion about the war and about Nazism.

Warner Brothers cartoons again commented on social conditions during World War II in 1944 with the release of “Private Snafu versus Malaria Mike” (Smoodin, 1993). This cartoon, which featured a character named Private Snafu who died of malaria after he refused to wash his mess gear, commented on medical discourse during the war. Also in 1944, another Snafu cartoon titled “Target Snafu” again pictured a soldier dying of malaria, but this time he died after being attacked by a swarm of malaria mosquitoes. These Snafu cartoons helped to highlight the threat of malaria that American forces faced abroad. In addition, Smoodin states that because the Snafu cartoons show that the United States has anti-malaria medicine, they highlight the superiority of American medicine while at the same time showing that individuals have their own responsibility in the practice of science.

Not only did the Warner Brothers studio place direct messages in their cartoons about current cultural conditions, it also used more indirect means such as using its plots and characters to symbolize the United States’ actions in the Vietnam War. Lehman (2006) offers an analysis of cartoons of the Vietnam era and found a great deal of cultural commentary throughout Warner Brothers’ cartoons, particularly in *Looney Tunes*. Specifically, Lehman analyzes cartoons produced between 1961 and 1973 and asserts that

both theatrical and television cartoons produced during these years responded to the United States' participation in the Vietnam War. Though these messages were not as overt as those produced during World War II, they nevertheless made subtle references to popular opinions about the Vietnam War and other cultural issues. Some early examples include the 1961 cartoon, "Be Prepared" and 1962's "The Jet Cage." All three of these cartoons presented militarism as productive, such as in "The Jet Cage" when Tweety Bird acts as an air force pilot and uses a flying cage with a bomb chute to win a battle with Sylvester the cat. These films with positive views of militarism provided support for the Vietnam War by showing that military acts can be beneficial.

According to Lehman's (2006) analysis, one of the most telling ways in which Warner Brothers cartoons commented on the war is the way in which its key characters changed over time. The character with the most noticeable change is Bugs Bunny, who is easily the Warner Brothers' all-time most popular character. At the beginning of the Vietnam War, Bugs Bunny is portrayed as a strong, unbeatable character. Lehman states,

His status as a physical underdog who always wins struck a chord with wartime viewers after the Pearl Harbor attack had caught the United States off guard.

Twenty years later, Bugs Bunny's new aggressive streak correlated with the United States fighting the North Vietnamese as a military superpower instead of an underdog. (p. 41)

Bugs Bunny seems as invincible as the United States. In cartoon episodes such as 1964's "Dumb Patrol," Bugs Bunny relentlessly pursues Yosemite Sam because he is an enemy who needs to be destroyed. The invulnerability of Bugs Bunny, according to Lehman, coincides with the perceived invulnerability of the United States. Bugs Bunny, who

represents the United States, attacks Yosemite Sam, who represents Germany, and easily emerges victorious. In *Mad as a Mars Hare* (1963) Bugs also represents American strength by pushing his Earth ways on Mars. Bugs Bunny lands on Mars and colonizes it in the name of Earth. Bugs Bunny represents American dominance by never showing signs of weakness and constantly emerging the victor in any situation he faces. His dominance, however, changes slightly depending on the culture of the time periods in which he was created. After the United States showed signs of struggle in the Vietnam War, Bugs was portrayed as weaker than usual, which Lehman suggests is the cartoon's way of showing that even the mighty can sometimes fall.

Bugs Bunny is not the only notable character who stands as a representation of American culture. According to Lehman (2006), the 1966 cartoon episode, "Mexican Mousepiece" satirizes social activism. In this cartoon Daffy Duck pits oppressed Mexican mice against one another in the same way that the United States recruited South Vietnamese, Cambodians, Thais and Laotians to fight their fellow citizens in the campaign against Communism. After the Vietnam War ended, the Warner Brothers Studio began to eliminate militaristic gags and representations of the armed forces, possibly as a response to the United States' loss in the war.

Beside their strong war commentaries, Warner Brothers films also reflected changing attitudes in American social culture. Lehman (2006) asserts that ever since the initial development of Bosko, Warner Brothers films often relied on racial humor as a staple of their films. After the passing of the Civil Rights Act and the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, Warner Brothers cartoons shifted to reflect the historical context of the time. This standpoint changed dramatically during the civil

rights movement. Mexican characters such as the mouse, Speedy Gonzales, were no longer depicted as being uneducated and impoverished. The 1968 film *Skyscraper Caper* also shows an American and a Mexican as friends, which is a drastic shift from the earlier Speedy Gonzales cartoons. Another response to the Civil Rights Moment that was seen in Warner Brothers cartoons is the 1968 film *Norman Normal*. This film depicts a character, Norman, who refuses to conform and criticizes white people as being complacent towards racism.

Yet another character who reflected current cultural conditions is Marvin the Martian. Birdwell (2001) analyzed Marvin the Martian in terms of how the Warner Brothers responded to the Cold War. Between 1948 and 1980, the studio produced seven cartoons featuring this character. Birdwell argues that Marvin the Martian's initial appearance at the same time of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigation of Hollywood is no coincidence. Marvin the Martian, according to Birdwell is faceless with only a pair of eyes because he represents the idea that a communist might not be easily recognizable and could look like anyone else. The first Marvin the Martian film, *Haredevil Hare*, featured Bugs Bunny traveling to the moon to claim it for Earth, only to find Marvin the Martian there trying to claim it for Mars. It transpires that Marvin the Martian is also on the moon because he is planning to blow up the Earth with a giant nuclear missile. Bugs Bunny manages to save the Earth, but the moon is destroyed. Birdwell asserts that the plot of this cartoon reflects the uncertainty of Americans during the Cold War. This cartoon also questioned the integrity of the United States federal government because it showed Bugs Bunny being bribed by scientists with carrots to take the space flight, but Bugs Bunny never receives his payment. According

to Birdwell, this explicitly tells the audience that they should not trust the government. Birdwell's analysis uncovers recurring messages in other Marvin the Martian cartoons, such as: Americans should not trust the government; Americans are in constant danger; American heroes can conquer any situation and if the weapons in the arms race are ever released, they will be so destructive that there will be no winners. Overall, the Marvin the Martian cartoons portray the Cold War as being both extremely dangerous as well as utterly futile.

Animaniacs

By far, most of the scholarship on Warner Brothers cartoons is about the Looney Tunes, but two scholars have devoted research to *Animaniacs*. Dennis (2003) took the popular gender approach to cartoons and studied same-sex desires among cartoon characters. Among the shows Dennis studied are *Animaniacs* and its spin-off show, *Pinky and the Brain*, which was based on the original *Pinky and the Brain* series featured in *Animaniacs*. Dennis found that both *Animaniacs* seems to reinforce heterosexual conventions and *Pinky and the Brain* steps away from heterosexuality while still reinforcing stereotypical gender roles. The main *Animaniacs* characters, Yakko, Wakko and Dot reinforce heterosexual norms in the ways they react to attractive members of the opposite sex. When the males, Yakko and Wakko, see a voluptuous female, they shout "Hello nurse!" and leap into her arms, often kissing her as well. Dot, the female, has the same reaction when she sees a large muscular male character. Dennis says "According to *Animaniacs*, heterosexual desire is intense, overwhelming and universal" (p. 134). While the *Animaniacs* overtly reinforce heterosexual desires, *Pinky and Brain* do it in a less obvious way. *Pinky and Brain* are male lab mice bent on world domination. *Brain* is the

genius and Pinky is completely lacking in intelligence. While at first the two characters are portrayed primarily as roommates on *Animaniacs*, their relationship changes when they start their own show. In the *Pinky and the Brain* series, the mice often behave as if they are in a homosexual relationship. Pinky frequently makes comments that could be conceived as sexual and acts as if he is in love with Brain. In one episode, the two characters dress up as husband and wife in order to board Noah's ark. Later in the series, Pinky and Brain combine DNA to produce a child. After doing so, they revert to stereotyped gender roles. Pinky cares for the child as the nurturing mother and Brain becomes the distant father. Although the two mice are in a seemingly same-sex partnership, they are still reinforcing heteronormative gender roles.

Aside from Dennis' gender study, there exists only one other piece of scholarship on *Animaniacs*. Mitchell (1995) uses fantasy theme analysis to analyze certain recurring themes in the show. In this study, Mitchell finds significant themes beyond pure entertainment. The first is the idea that intelligence and learning are "cool." The characters on the show spend a significant amount of time trying to outwit each other, which showcases the importance of intelligence. Also the show has numerous educational bits such as a song listing the nations of the world and another that lists all of the states and capitols. The Warners also visit important historical figures and make references to literature. The second common theme in the show is that rude and egotistical behavior is not acceptable. In most instances, those characters who behave like egoists and are rude to other characters always meet their downfall. A third theme that Mitchell notes in *Animaniacs* is that one should not follow the crowd. The most notable example of this is Chicken Boo, an oversized chicken who dresses up like a

human. In every Chicken Boo cartoon, every character except one believes that Chicken Boo is not only a human, but has extraordinary abilities and accomplishments. Eventually Chicken Boo is unmasked and the characters realize they should not have believed he was a human just because everyone else did. The final theme that Mitchell notes is that *Animaniacs* discourages gullibility and encourages people to understand the media they use. Parodies such as the fake wheel of morality teach people not to believe everything they see on television. Mitchell asserts that these themes all come together to encourage one central vision, which is, “learning and using intelligence, while considering the feelings of others” (p. 17). This central theme is shared by not only the child viewers, but adult viewers as well, which shows that *Animaniacs* may have a strong impact on how people perceive American society.

Nationalism and Ethnocentrism

Not only is research on *Animaniacs* scarce, the existing scholarship on the show ignores the potentially negative implications of the messages that the show carries. Mitchell (1995) in particular positions the show as having a positive influence on audience members and being a beneficial educational tool. What Mitchell fails to note, however, are the ideological messages embedded in the show. While some existing cartoon scholarship points to the ways in which cartoons speak to current social and historical conditions, little existing scholarship analyzes cartoons in terms of two important ideologies: nationalism and ethnocentrism.

Nationalism, according to Citrin, Haas, Muste and Reingold (1994) is a concept that implies that members of a given nation are first and foremost loyal to that nation. Nationalism is considered an extreme loyalty to one’s nation because it serves only the

interest of the nation itself and ignores the interests of the individual citizens of that nation. Because nationalism serves only the interests of the nation, nationalism functions ideologically by promoting only the interests of those who are in power and making the decisions and policies for that nation. For example, Citrin et al. posit that American nationalism may influence foreign policy because people with nationalist views may be more likely than non-nationalists to support American involvement in foreign countries. Not only is nationalism an extreme loyalty to one's nation, Kimmelmeier and Winter (2008) suggest that nationalism is an ideology of superiority of one group that implies the exclusion or domination of other groups. Kimmelmeier and Winter state, "As the only remaining superpower, Americans routinely view their own country to be superior on a number of dimensions, including politics, economics, technology, and morality" (p. 871).

Nationalism, which is especially present in the United States, is articulated through public discourse. More specifically, nationalist ideology is shaped through the mass media, particularly television (Ashuri, 2005). For example, Ashuri studied how American nationalism is articulated in television documentaries. Ashuri compared documentaries about the Arab and Palestinian conflict that were made by British and American producers and found that while the British used the documentary to downplay their role in the conflict, the American producers used the program to promote the United States as the world's greatest superpower. Nationalism in the United States, therefore, is articulated through messages of the superiority of the United States that are present in United States television programming.

Nationalist ideology in the United States dates back to the country's beginnings. Breen (1997) states that early settlers in the New World expressed extreme loyalty to

Great Britain. People in Great Britain, however, saw residents of the New World as outsiders who were not truly English. The English treated these settlers as second-class citizens, which was one major catalyst for the American Revolution. This revolt led to the creation of the United States of America and the formation of an American national identity. This national identity was fueled by propaganda that universalized American ideals such as endorsement of national rights, drive for independence, and celebration of democracy (Appleby, 1992). According to Appleby, propagandists of American democracy positioned the United States as the only country that “began with perfection and aspired to progress” (p. 424). American nationalist ideology began with the Revolutionary War in the 18th century and continued through the 19th and 20th centuries when the United States adopted a more interventionist foreign policy. This was strengthened when Woodrow Wilson declared that he wanted to make the world safe for democracy and pledge the United States' participation in a global security system (Citrin et al, 1994). As the United States continued to involve itself in the affairs of other nations, this involvement reinforced the belief that American values and beliefs are unique and morally preeminent. American nationalist ideology is fueled by factors such as American foreign policy (Citrin, et al, 1994), representations of American history (Appleby, 1992) and exposure to national symbols such as the American flag (Kemmelmeier & Winter, 2008).

Because nationalism involves notions of superiority of one nation over another, nationalist ideology is similar in concept to another ideology: ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is a term defined by Sumner (1906) who said it is “[the] view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated

with reference to it . . . Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders” (p. 13). In other words, ethnocentrism is a belief in the superiority of one group over another. In addition, Lee, Hong and Lee (2003) state that ethnocentric people will reject ideas and values dissimilar to their own and celebrate objects within their group. Furthermore, Scheepers, Felling and Peters (1990) note that groups do not need knowledge of other groups to be ethnocentric and ethnocentric groups often reject other groups without having any actual contact with such groups. Ethnocentrism can be found in a number of aspects of American culture. For example, Lee, Hong and Lee (2003) found that Americans were ethnocentric consumers, meaning that they were more likely to buy American products based on a belief in national superiority to other nations and a notion of dominance rather than actual devotion to the United States. Another example lies in American’s treatment of foreign policy issues. Kam and Kinder (2007) found that American ethnocentrism was at the heart of American support for the war on terrorism that took place after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Ethnocentric beliefs are often fueled by coverage of historic events or national rhetoric. Ethnocentrism is an ideology that is advanced through public discourse such as television and serves the interests of those in power in the United States. Kam and Kinder, for example, found that media coverage of the September 11 terrorist attack and speeches by President George W. Bush strengthened American support of the war on terror. This media coverage served the interests of President Bush by encouraging Americans to support military efforts abroad.

Though nationalism and ethnocentrism have different definitions, the two concepts are closely related. Rosenblatt (1964) states that the two concepts are similar

because they both involve a positive view of members of a particular group and a negative view of non-members. In addition, nationalism and ethnocentrism are both fueled by similar ideas. Lee, Hong and Lee (2003) posit that nationalist and ethnocentric beliefs are stronger when Americans believe that the nation is threatened by outsiders. This increase in nationalism and ethnocentrism can influence people's values or views on national issues. In addition, Lee, Hong and Lee found a positive relationship between American nationalism and American ethnocentrism. As one increased, the other increased as well. These scholars suggest that this increase is likely due to Americans' desire to protect their country from outside threats. Because American nationalism and ethnocentrism have been in place from the country's inception to present-day, it is important to study how these ideologies are articulated in American television.

Literature Review Conclusions

A review of the existing cartoon scholarship points to areas that have already been analyzed by researchers. Cartoons have been found to carry a variety of ideological messages. There are several overarching themes that cartoon scholarship points out. Some cartoons function to subordinate the role of the female and to uphold the patriarchy. Other cartoons marginalize differing social, cultural and ethnic groups by reinforcing popular stereotypes. Finally, some cartoons carry messages about the historical and social conditions under which they were created. Though these themes are the most pervasive in cartoon scholarship, there are additional themes that warrant study. In particular, American nationalist ideology and ethnocentrism are present in American society, so a study of these ideologies in a cartoon such as *Animaniacs* will point to how these ideologies are articulated and what the implications of such messages may be.

Though the existing scholarship on cartoons makes an excellent start at adding to the body of knowledge in this genre, there is still more work to be done. Research on recent Warner Brothers cartoons such as *Animaniacs* is scarce. Dennis (2003) and Mitchell (1995) make a stride towards understanding the underlying meanings of the show and help build a foundation for understanding its implications. While Dennis' research is important, there are other ideological issues at work in the show in addition to its implications for gender. Contrary to Dennis, Mitchell presents a relatively positive view of *Animaniacs* by asserting that it teaches positive values to viewers. Though Mitchell's argument is compelling it overlooks any potential negative implications of the show. Mitchell argues that *Animaniacs* teaches children not to believe everything they see on television and to view media critically, yet Mitchell's work does not look at the show from the same critical viewpoint that it encourages. The argument that Mitchell presents is potentially dangerous because it positions cartoon shows such as *Animaniacs* to be educational tools that teach children important life lessons, yet it ignores negative implications that such shows might have. Though two scholars have taken steps to uncover the underlying meanings in *Animaniacs*, but the door has been left open for future analysis of other cultural meanings embedded in the show. My analysis of the show will counter Mitchell's argument by showing that *Animaniacs* has ideological implications for both children and adults.

III. METHODOLOGY

Episodes of Animaniacs Chosen for Criticism

In order to extend and revise current scholarly literature on *Animaniacs*, I examine several episodes within the first season of the cartoon program, which ran from September 1993 to May 1994. I chose this single season because it allows me to analyze the television program within the specific cultural and historical conditions of the United States in the nine months that the show's first season ran. Of the 65 episodes from the first season, I have narrowed the show down to the ones produced in 1993, which are the first 50 episodes. I have chosen this selection because the first 50 episodes ran between September and November of 1993, and this time period contained the most *Animaniacs* episodes to be released in a single year. From these 50 episodes I have selected two categories. The first category is episodes featuring the characters Yakko, Wakko and Dot. These three characters are the focal point of the show and appear in every episode. They are the most prevalent characters and therefore likely carry more meaning than other characters. Of the mini-episodes contained within these 50 episodes, I have chosen the ones in which Yakko, Wakko and Dot visit foreign locations because these episodes help to juxtapose American culture and other cultures; these episodes indicate how American culture is represented and what its relationship is with the rest of the world. The six mini-episodes I have chosen are "Baghdad Café" (Ruegger, 1993i), "Cookies for Einstein" (Ruegger, 1993a), "Hooked on a Ceiling" (Ruegger, 1993b), "Hot, Bothered and Bedeviled" (Ruegger, 1993g), "Windsor Hassle" (Ruegger, 1993k) and "No Pain, No

Painting” (Ruegger, 1993c). Each of these mini-episodes is approximately 5 minutes long.

The second category I have chosen is episodes featuring Pinky and the Brain, who are two lab mice bent on world domination. I have chosen these characters because they were two of the most popular characters on the show, and they eventually had their own show independent from *Animaniacs*. In the first 50 episodes, there are 10 episodes of *Pinky and the Brain*. I have chosen the five of these episodes that take place within the United States. Looking at these episodes will provide a contrast to the Yakko, Wakko and Dot episodes by providing insight into how American culture is represented within the country rather than in its relationship to other countries. The five episodes I have selected are “Battle for the Planet” (Ruegger, 1993d), “Opportunity Knox” (Ruegger, 1993e), “Jockey for Position” (Ruegger, 1993f), “Bubba Bo Bob Brain” (Ruegger, 1993h) and “Puppet Rulers” (Ruegger, 1993j). My aim in this paper is to uncover the ideological messages embedded within these episodes. The Yakko, Wakko and Dot episodes and the *Pinky and the Brain* episodes I have selected are important elements in understanding how the show communicates the United States’ position in the rest of the world because they all carry storylines about American global dominance.

Critical Studies

Critical studies engages several methods for closely analyzing the ideological messages in media texts. According to Brummett (2006), “The critic’s job is to explore what a text or artifact means, including its different or contradictory meanings as well as the ways that meanings are struggled over, forced upon some people, and rejected by others” (p. 99). This method looks not simply at the literal or surface meaning of a text,

but goes a step further to uncover its underlying meanings and the implications of those meanings for those who encounter them.

Another important aspect of critical studies is its concern with power (Brummett, 2006). Critical studies is fundamentally concerned with what power is and how that power functions within a given culture. It is the job of a critical scholar not only to uncover the hidden meanings in a certain text, but to explain what relationship those meanings have to power relations. Power, according to McGee (1999) is “the capacity of an elite class to control the state’s political, economic and military establishment, to dominate the state’s information system and determine even the consciousness of large masses of people” (p. 426). The elite class usually holds power because it has great political, social or economic strength and therefore is able to control a state’s information system, which is usually the media. A critical investigation, for McGee, may determine how a media text reinforces the ideology of this elite class or, conversely, how a text subverts this ideology. The last important facet of critical studies is that it can go beyond simply interpreting a text to actually advocate change. Many critical studies scholars focus on actually addressing problems to change the world for better (Brummett, 2006). These studies are interventionist, meaning that they seek to affect change rather than simply adding to the body of knowledge.

Recent Developments in Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism has embraced critical studies’ outlook. In the past, rhetorical studies focused on speeches or written works. McKerrow (1999) builds on this concept by integrating critical studies and rhetorical criticism in a program for critical rhetorical studies. For McKerrow, the aim of a rhetorical criticism is to understand how power and

knowledge are integrated in a society. Furthermore, rhetorical criticism looks at whether this integration invites or inhibits the possibility of social change. Critical rhetoric serves to interpret the meaning of a text, its relationship with power in a society, and what possibilities there might be for social change through the analysis of signs in a text and an interpretation of what those particular signs mean.

In modern society, however, a rhetorical approach can be applied to other media forms such as television shows. According to Brummett (2006), rhetoric is “the ways in which signs influence people” (p. 4). Rhetoric is generally studied in terms of its persuasive value, so rhetorical scholars aim to uncover how a given text might influence its audience members. Brummett states that texts not only generate meanings about other things in the world, they also have meanings themselves. Texts are often sites of struggle over meaning because they can have multiple interpretations. According to DeWinter (2006), “Rhetorical criticism is an exercise in showing the influences exerted by signs through their meanings” (p. 95). It looks not only at written and verbal cues, but can also interpret visual signs as well. In my analysis of *Animaniacs* I will look at both the visual and verbal cues to interpret these ideological implications of the program.

Ideology

The aim of ideological study is to highlight “the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination” (Thompson, 1990, p. 23). According to Thompson, ideology is “meaning in the service of power” (p.8). This means that media messages, whatever their meanings, have some sort of relation to power. Strinati (1995) states that there are two competing notions of ideology. One is that ideology is simply an illusory set of ideas in people’s minds. The other concept is that ideology has an actual

material existence. The concept used here will be the latter. As Althusser states, “Ideology is not just about ideas or a question of mental states or consciousness, but a material practice carried out by groups and institutions” (Strinati, 1995, p. 136). The study of ideology is important because it is constantly being created, sustained, reproduced and transformed through the exchange of symbolic forms, like the ones found in media texts. Looking at texts from an ideological standpoint helps determine what that relationship is and what its potential impact may be on a culture.

Ideology in mass media is especially important because mass media can be viewed as a form of cultural transmission (Thompson, 1990). Cultural transmission involves a technical medium, such as that of television, which can be disseminated to a mass audience. This type of transmission allows for fixed content as well as mass reproduction of symbolic forms. Thompson states, “What constitutes modern societies as ‘modern’ is the fact that the exchange of symbolic forms is no longer restricted primarily to the contexts of face-to-face interaction, but is extensively and increasingly mediated by the institutions and mechanisms of mass communication” (p. 15). This ability to widely disseminate and exchange symbolic forms has had a major impact on ideology because it allows ideology to be circulated on a grand scale to nearly all members of a given society. Mass communication, therefore, is a major medium of ideology and warrants study.

One method to use to study ideology is Ricoeur’s depth hermeneutics. According to Thompson (1990), this method has three components. The first is to look at the social and historical conditions of the production of symbolic forms. It is important to understand these conditions of a text, because the text does not exist in a vacuum, but

rather in a specific cultural context that may have an impact on the meaning of that text. The second aspect of depth hermeneutics is formal or discursive analysis, which looks at the structure of a text. It is important to analyze the structural features of a text to understand the meanings in its symbolic constructions. The final component of depth hermeneutics is interpretation. Interpretation involves understanding what is said or represented by a sign or symbolic form. This phase builds on the other two components of depth hermeneutics but goes beyond those to interpret the overall meanings in the text. This method is easily adapted to ideological analysis because it allows for interpreting the connection between the meanings of these symbolic forms and how those meanings relate to “relations of domination which that meaning serves to maintain” (Thompson, 1990, p. 23).

Narrative

Before determining the cultural and historical conditions of the United States during the time period in which the show originally aired, I first analyzed the narrative structure of the shows I have selected. It was important for me to analyze the text itself before examining the historical conditions so that I do not try to force the meaning of the text to match my historical analysis. Although narrative has long been associated with storytelling in literature, scholars have found that it has useful applications in other areas, including rhetoric. Though on the surface a narrative may seem nothing more than a simple fictional story, it can still have strong underlying meanings. According to Phelan (1996), narrative as rhetoric involves “telling a particular story to a particular audience in a particular situation for, presumably, a particular purpose” (p. 4). This means that something as seemingly innocent as a children’s cartoon could carry strong ideological

meanings. Furthermore, Phelan states that because narratives may carry ideological messages, they have the potential to influence how people see the world. Phelan posits that, “The narratives we tell about our world themselves reinforce or revise our ideological commitments and our interpretations of that world” (p. 170). According to Brummett (2006), narrative is comprised of a form, pattern or structure. General structural elements of a narrative include its plot, settings and characters. By studying these structural elements, I can explain their significance and potential meanings. The narratives in a cartoon such as *Animaniacs* provide a structural framework for attributing meaning to the program and its relevance for social relations in the United States and abroad at the time of the show’s release.

Intertextuality

As I examine the narratives in the show, I also employ the use of intertextuality to identify social and historical conditions relevant to making meaning of the show itself. This term “intertextuality” has been given two separate meanings by scholars. The first definition states that intertextuality is “the way audiences unconsciously create meaning by utilizing their vast knowledge of cultural codes learned from other texts to read a particular text” (Ott & Walter, 2000, p. 429). In this definition, intertextuality is not put in place by the people creating a message, but rather by the audiences who interpret that message. Fiske (1989) posits that popular texts do not have solid boundaries and can therefore only be studied in terms of their relationships with one another. For Fiske, audiences read all texts in relation to other texts that they have encountered and construct meaning based on their experiences with these other texts. With this definition, it is not necessary for a text to actually make a popular culture allusion for an audience member

to read it intertextually. Instead, any meanings derived from a text are based on the audience member's prior textual knowledge and experience.

The second definition, which is the one most commonly used in media studies, is that the texts themselves will make specific allusions to popular culture (Ott & Walter, 2000). These allusions are not put in place by the audience, but by the authors as part of a textual strategy. These allusions are consciously put in place by the creator of a text to invoke a particular audience response. This second definition requires audience members to have specific cultural knowledge in order to fully understand the meaning of a cultural reference.

The concept of intertextuality has been evident in cultural artifacts as far back as 1653, with Rembrandt's painting *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* (Dunne, 2001). Although the term has long been applied solely to literature, Dunne argues that is a useful critical mode for other media forms as well. Dunne states, "film and other popularly mediated texts are equally available to such analysis producers and viewers of films and television are—like authors and readers—unavoidably familiar with sources, influences, and generic similarities evident in the (visual) texts immediately present" (p. 2). Because people are increasingly exposed to popular culture on a daily basis, the number of intertextual encounters that people have is also increasing, which makes intertextuality an important subject to apply to the study of mediated text.

Studying intertextuality in any text involves looking at three categories: parodic allusion, creative appropriation and self-reflexive reference. Parodic allusion involves parody, or caricature, of another popular culture text (Ott & Walter, 2000). It is different from pure parody in that it does not offer commentary on the original text, rather it seeks

to amuse the audience members and bring them a sense of worth for their understanding of the cultural reference. In addition, parodic allusion does not stand alone, but is woven into a larger text or narrative. Creative appropriation, or inclusion, differs from parodic allusion in that it does not copy another reference, but rather uses fragments of another text to enhance a text or provide some type of critique. Finally, self-reflexive reference involves a text recognizing itself as a work of fiction and drawing attention to that fact. The text becomes self-aware and often alludes to itself rather than to some outside work, although it can also use a reference to another work to draw attention to itself. Using intertextuality as a tool for analysis thus enables me to uncover ideologies hidden within a given text.

For my analysis of the *Animaniacs*, I looked for intertextual cues such as parodic allusion, creative inclusion and self-reflexive reference. First, I identify the intertextual cues in the show and analyze the messages they convey. Second, I look at how the intertextual cues in the show comment on the social and historical conditions in the United States during the time period between September 1993 and November 1993. For example, look at whether these intertextual messages give clues as to what events were occurring in the United States and how the United States was positioned in relation to other countries.

Historical Conditions

My second step in uncovering the ideological messages contained in *Animaniacs* is to understand the social and historical conditions during which the show was created. It is important to understand these conditions in order to determine whether the show reflects those conditions. Also, understanding what events and ideas were considered

important by the media assist in interpreting what ideologies were being communicated at that time. The episodes I study ran from September 1993 to November 1993. To determine the social and historical conditions of the time, I look at national newspaper headlines and news sources to identify current events from the time period in which the show originally aired to determine historical and cultural events relevant to United States foreign relations that were considered to be of national importance. Furthermore, I look at popular news stories from the three years prior to the release of *Animaniacs* to understand the major events that shaped America's culture and history in 1993. I use newspaper databases to find articles relating to the major narrative themes from the text that I identify in my narrative analysis.

Ideological Implications

The third and final step in my method is to examine the narrative analysis and intertextual cues in the context of these social and historical conditions to interpret the ideological implications of *Animaniacs*. The first two steps in this process build my interpretation. Initially, I set out to explain how the narratives in *Animaniacs* function as rhetorical homologies. A homology, according to Brummett (2007) is "a formal resemblance underlying many texts and experiences" (p. 9). This means that the plot, characters and settings in a narrative actually stand in as something else. For example, Lehman's (2006) analysis of Bugs Bunny chasing Yosemite Sam may be understood as a homology. In this instance, Bugs Bunny stands in for the United States and Yosemite Sam stands in for Germany. Thus, the events that transpire between these two characters carry tacit meanings about the United States' foreign relations during the World War II era. Another important aspect of homologies is that they follow patterns. Perks,

Winslow and Avital (2007) state “The method of homological rhetorical criticism involves uncovering formal patterns among disparate texts or experiences” (p. 33). Though certain texts may not appear to have any similarities on the surface, a homological analysis may uncover formal patterns across fictional and non-fictional narratives that can, in turn, point to the ideological messages within a fictional text. Because earlier studies of Warner Brothers cartoons highlighted homological similarity with historic events, I reasoned that *Animaniacs* would follow suit. In the process of my research, however, I came to a different conclusion. Using a depth hermeneutic approach, I compare patterns between the news coverage of historical conditions and then narratives of *Animaniacs* episodes. Instead of noting homologies, I found contradictions between the messages in the text and the historical conditions I have identified. These discrepancies led me to a different conclusion about the ideological messages of the program than I had initially conceived. Through a comparison of these programs, I determine the extent to which these patterns are representative of the social or historical condition of the time period. This comparison enables me to explain the ideological meaning of the program.

Conclusion

Through this method of interpretive analysis, I conclude that the show communicates a nationalist ideology and promotes ethnocentrism by sending messages that the United States is superior to the rest of the world. *Animaniacs* is a show that has been enjoyed by both children and adults since its initial release in 1993. Its five-year run, syndication and DVD release have allowed it to reach a mass audience in the United States. The show’s immense popularity makes it an important object of study because its

messages have reached a large percentage of the American population. Furthermore, the television industry can do things with cartoons that it cannot do with live action footage. The range of possible messages within cartoons is bounded only by the abilities of the animators themselves to create the worlds they wish to portray. It is important, then, to ask what kinds of messages are embedded in these cartoons and what implications they have for the society in which they appear. By answering these questions as they pertain to *Animaniacs*, this thesis explains how the show functions as a vehicle for promoting dangerous nationalist ideology. The following chapters show how *Animaniacs* portrays the United States as superior to other nations in its technology, economy, foreign relations and culture. It then shows how these portrayals distort reality and expresses the dangers of these ideological messages.

IV. ANALYSIS

1. Episodes featuring Yakko, Wakko and Dot

Dot: Nice bungalow, is this your place?

Michelangelo: You fools! I am the great Michelangelo and this is the Sistine Chapel!

Yakko: Oh yeah, if you're so great, what did you do with the other 15 chapels, huh? Got you there! (Ruegger, 1993b)

The basic concept behind the show is that Yakko, Wakko and Dot are characters created by Warner Brothers in the 1930s. Unfortunately, the trio was too zany and ran amok around the studio, causing chaos wherever they went. Finally, the Warners were captured and locked in the studio's water tower, never to be released. The characters remained dormant until the 1990s when they escaped from the water tower and continued their reign of chaos. The characters are not human but are also not any identifiable animal. They are most often referred to by other characters as dogs, cats or children. Yakko is the oldest of the siblings and is the group's leader. Wakko is a younger brother who eats almost everything he encounters. Dot is the Warner sister, who is playful and often introduces herself as simply, "cute."

In each of six episodes, the Warner trio finds themselves in a foreign location and proceeds to exert domination over their surroundings. Not only do they physically occupy the foreign territories that they visit, they also infuse their surroundings with American cultural artifacts and ideas. These references range from movies to consumer products to celebrities to general commentary about American life. The six episodes contain references to cultural products such as Chia Pets, Star Trek, Bob Hope, Curly

Howard, George Hamilton, the Pocket Fisherman, Life cereal, Six Flags, *ET*, Six Flags, Las Vegas, Billy Joel, Teddy Bears, Madonna, Liz Taylor, Lee Press-On Nails, Pictionary, Whoopee Cushions, *The Wizard of Oz*, and Stephen Spielberg. In any single short episode there are generally at least five American culture references. Four of the skits “Cookies for Einstein,” “Hooked on a Ceiling,” “No Pain, No Painting,” and “Windsor Hassle” find the Warners in a foreign country where a historical figure is in need of their help. The other two episodes, “Baghdad Café” and “Hot Bothered and Bedeviled” portray how the trio behaves when they encounter a foreign enemy. The narrative themes, character portrayals, and intertextual references contribute to the message that the United States is the most dominant country in the world.

Cultural Domination

There are several themes in each of the episodes “Cookies for Einstein,” “Hooked on a Ceiling,” “No Pain, No Painting,” and “Windsor Hassle” that carry messages of cultural domination. The first is that in each clip, the famous foreign historical figure needed help to complete either a historically important work or other significant task, and eventually that historical figure received that help from Americans: Yakko, Wakko and Dot. All four historical figures were frustrated at not being able to complete their work, and in these four episodes, the Warners save the day. This portrayal of Einstein, Michelangelo, Picasso and Queen Elizabeth II positions other countries as not able to complete their work without assistance from an outside party. It also portrays these countries as easily influenced by outsiders or susceptible to cultural influence from the United States.

One way in which the show indicates the influence of American culture is through its representation of internationally significant historical events. Four episodes in particular stand out as strong examples of how the show puts an American twist on events that the United States took no part in. These four episodes are “Cookies for Einstein,” “No Pain, No Painting,” “Hooked on a Ceiling,” and “Windsor Hassle.” Each of these episodes shows an important moment in history that is not only altered, but actually improved by the presence of American characters and cultural artifacts.

In “Cookies for Einstein,” the Warners are in Switzerland in 1905 trying to sell the one last box of Kidadvent cookies, which is a reference to American Girl Scout Cookies, in order to get their merit badges. They come across the last house in the town, which happens to belong to Albert Einstein. The Warners approach Einstein’s house and attempt to sell him a box of cookies, but he is so frustrated with his inability to figure out the Theory of Relativity that he sends them away. Eager to sell their last box, the Warners keep trying, offering added incentives such as a Chia Pet, a Pocket Fisherman and a book titled *Unexplained Mysteries of Fudge*. Einstein sinks deeper into despair as the Warners continue their quest to sell him cookies and the Theory of Relativity continues to elude him. Sensing his depression, the Warners try to cheer Einstein up by singing him “The ACME Song.” At the end of the song they spell “emca” (acme backwards) but Wakko’s “a” looks like a “2” and the word comes out looking like the equation $e=mc^2$. Ultimately, the Warners help Einstein with his theory by singing about ACME, a fictional American corporation invented by Warner Brothers in 1935 for use in its cartoons, particularly Looney Tunes (Sigall, 2005). Unknowingly, the Warners had figured out Einstein’s theory for him, and all four characters go on to win a Nobel Prize.

This episode showcases the importance of American culture in a number of ways. The skit takes place at Einstein's house in Switzerland. At the beginning of the episode, an announcer says that Switzerland is the home of cheese, clocks, chocolate and neutrality, which suggests that the country is culturally dull since those items seem to be all the country has to offer. Because Switzerland is the home of neutrality, the country is also positioned as globally unimportant, since it has no particular stance on world issues. After the Warner's arrive, nothing else is said about the location, which implies that the country itself is not very important.

After positioning the location as unimportant, the show goes on to suggest the importance of the United States. The fact that Einstein figured out his theory of relativity with the help of American characters and the name of an American corporation illustrates a positive influence of American culture on other countries. Also, the cultural products used in the episode play into Einstein's eventual success. Although the Warners ultimately frustrate Einstein by offering him products such as a Chia Pet or Pocket Fisherman, it is that frustration that leads Einstein to the brink of insanity, triggering the use of the ACME song. The letters of ACME, a fictional American corporation, literally spell out the equation Einstein needs. Without the Warners' infiltration of his home and the perpetual bombardment of cultural products, Einstein may never have figured out the Theory of Relativity.

The use of parody in this episode also suggests the strength of American culture. The Chia Pet, for example, is an American product that is often mocked because it is considered a cheap and worthless consumer product. Though the episode is poking fun at the Chia Pet, it also celebrates the American product. Einstein momentarily snaps out of

his nervous breakdown to cuddle the Chia Pet and comment on how cute it is. Einstein's surprise at the Chia Pet suddenly growing sprouts indicates that he had never seen the product before which suggests it is not available in his country. This portrayal of the product suggests that even the most mundane and unpopular American cultural artifacts are valuable to other countries. The Warners also parody other cultural artifacts such as dressing like used car salesmen and attempting to sell Einstein the Pocket Fisherman, which help push Einstein to the brink of needing the ACME song. When Wakko dresses as Scotty from *Star Trek* and says "I don't think she can take much more, captain. She's about to blow," Einstein completely loses it, which prompts the Warners to sing the song that saves the day.

The second episode, called "Hooked on a Ceiling" has a similar theme to the Einstein story. This time in Renaissance Italy, the Warners arrive at the Sistine Chapel, where famous artist Michelangelo is looking for help in finishing his famous ceiling painting in time for the arrival of "his eminence." The Warners take over, kicking him out while they whitewash the entire ceiling, erasing his work. Michelangelo spends a few moments outside of the chapel admiring the wallpaper samples the Warners have given him when he eventually realizes he has been kicked out. He tries to reenter, but he finds the door is locked and Yakko is leaning out of a small window dressed as a munchkin from the *Wizard of Oz* and tells Michelangelo, "Nobody gets in, not nobody, not no how," which is a quote from the scene in the movie when Dorothy tries to enter the Emerald City. When Michelangelo is finally let back in and sees the ceiling has been whitewashed, he frantically tells them that the ceiling is supposed to have pictures. The Warners quickly cover the whitewash with images of Elvis and dogs playing poker.

Furious, Michelangelo demands that they restore the ceiling, so they finally paint it correctly with the use of a paint-by-numbers pattern. The only problem is that instead of placing the famous image of Jesus in the middle, they instead paint E.T., the extraterrestrial. Fortunately, Michelangelo does not need to worry about this, because “his eminence” turns out to be Stephen Spielberg, who declares “I like it.”

As with Einstein’s story, this episode also highlights the dominance and positive influence of American culture. Michelangelo’s masterpiece is saved not by an American company, but by a piece of American iconography. In this episode, Americans literally leave their mark on Italian culture by painting E.T. on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. This cultural influence is further expanded by the appearance of Stephen Spielberg as “his eminence.” The religious leader, the Pope, has been completely replaced by an icon of American television and cinema. At the end of the scene Yakko says “Painting is like show business. You have to know your audience.” This quote is Yakko’s way of saying that the Sistine Chapel was designed and painted for the purposes of pleasing Stephen Spielberg, an American. Additionally, the Warners shove a bowl of cereal into Michelangelo’s hands and call him “Mikey” in reference to the old Life cereal commercial. This end sequence represents a complete infiltration of American culture into the Italian Renaissance.

This episode uses humor in a similar manner to “Cookies for Einstein.” The American cultural references that are used poke fun at American culture while simultaneously portraying it as positive. The use of Stephen Spielberg as “his eminence” is particularly telling. Throughout the episode, Michelangelo does not reveal the identity of “his eminence” so it is assumed that he is the Pope or other important religious figure.

When the great person for whom the chapel is painted turns out to be Spielberg, an American director, it adds a surprising twist to the plot. It is funny not only because Spielberg is not an important religious figure, but also because he is the creator and producer of *Animaniacs*, which implies that the show worships itself. The show highlights the importance of American culture because it implies that an American film director is more important than the Pope. Also, the Warners paint an image of E.T. on the ceiling, which is a tribute to one of Spielberg's most famous movies. It not only strengthens the message that an American cultural figure should be worshipped, it also implies that an American movie character is more important than Jesus. In addition, this image could suggest that cultural products such as film and television are more valuable than more than religion or history.

The episode "No Pain, No Painting," features yet another tortured artist. In this episode, Pablo Picasso is in his flat in Paris trying to develop a new artistic style. Frustrated at his lack of success, he advertises for a new model, hoping a new model will fuel his inspiration. The Warners arrive in Paris, see the advertisement, and offer to be his models. Picasso is not impressed by the look of these unidentifiable creatures, and kicks them out of the studio. Not to be deterred, the Warners break back into the studio and attempt to help Picasso. They suggest that Picasso should play the game "Guess the Picture," which is a game similar to "Pictionary." Wakko and Yakko are on one team and Picasso and Dot are on the other team. Picasso has to draw pictures of things such as a cow and a guitar, but even though his drawings are near-perfect representations of these items, Dot cannot tell what they are and yells out an assortment of guesses such as Wilson Phillips, Liz Taylor, the guy in the Madonna video, Spam and Lee Press-On nails.

Wakko, on the other hand, draws abstract and nearly unidentifiable pictures, but Yakko is able to correctly guess them each time. Picasso tells Wakko that his drawings are terrible and kicks the Warners out. Later, Picasso's boss arrives to see what latest paintings. He spots Wakko's abstract drawings and absolutely loves them, so Picasso claims them as his own and hires the Warners to continue to produce paintings for him.

Once again, American culture exerts its influence on another country. The cultural artifact that saves Picasso is the game "Guess the Picture" which is an allusion to the popular American board game "Pictionary." Without the game, Picasso would never have seen Wakko's abstract drawings and therefore may never have developed his signature style. Also, Picasso is not merely inspired by the drawings from the game, he actually directly plagiarizes from the American trio by claiming their work as his own and hiring them to make the paintings for him. In this instance, as with the cases of Michelangelo and Einstein, Americans ultimately are the creators of a foreign historical figure's greatest work. Again, the program infuses American culture into an event of international importance. Because the Warners are the actual artists of the paintings, the show suggests that Americans deserve credit for other countries' cultural achievements. In addition, Picasso, a famous artist, feels that the American's paintings have no artistic worth until he realizes other people like them and he can sell them for profit. The paintings then become Picasso's most famous work, suggesting that American creations, even ones not considered to have artistic merit, are easily spread abroad and people in other countries are willing to pay for them.

The use of Pictionary in this episode also adds humor to the situation. It is amusing that the American game is what saves the day, because it not supposed to be a

game that generates great artwork. The goal of Pictionary is for players to draw objects as quickly as they can so their teammates can guess what the picture is. The simple sketches created by the American characters are transformed into what is considered to be high art. While Picasso has spent a considerable amount of time trying to develop a new style, the Warners create a new style for him without even trying. This showcases not only the idea that American influence on other cultures is positive, it also portrays the ease with which America can infuse itself into other countries.

Finally, the episode “Windsor Hassle” takes the Warners to modern-day England where they encounter Queen Elizabeth II. In 1992, a fire destroyed the interior of Windsor Castle. The queen has a banquet scheduled, but is far behind in the repairs and quickly running out of money. She has recruited her children and other members of the royal family to help, but they complain about the work and then abandon the queen to have tea. The Warners get word that the queen is looking for help, so they offer to redecorate the banquet hall for her. After frustrating the queen by kicking her out of the castle and using a Whoopee Cushion on her, the Warners finish the repairs. Unfortunately, they furnish the banquet hall with nothing but a dinette set, which angers the queen. When she shows them a picture of how the hall should look, they tell her that will be very expensive, so to rectify the problem they open a cafeteria-style buffet and charge money to the banquet guests to offset the costs of the repairs.

Queen Elizabeth II is yet another figure who is ultimately saved by the American trio of Yakko, Wakko and Dot. The episode “Windsor Hassle” suggests that the United States exerts cultural influence in Western Europe. Because the queen cannot finished the renovations on her own, she seems weak and in desperate need of assistance from an

outside party. Once again, America comes to the rescue as the Warners swoop in and save the day. The Queen is so thrilled by the money she makes from charging people that she opens a fast food restaurant called “Queen Quisine.” This episode shows not only the reliance of other countries on the assistance of the United States, it also depicts a complete acceptance of American culture in the form of the ruler of England leaving her duties as queen to operate a fast food restaurant. This episode is particularly humorous because it depicts a British monarch who is supposed to be serious and refined as a cafeteria worker. What is truly amusing is that the queen is so excited about working at the buffet, which would not normally be expected of someone in that position of power. By transitioning the Queen from a traditional British monarch to the owner of a successful fast food restaurant, the show suggests that England would be more successful if it modeled itself after American consumer culture.

A final facet of the show that depicts an American invasion is the manner in which Yakko, Wakko and Dot treat the royal family. The Warners do not simply encounter a regular English citizen, but the Queen herself. Also depicted in this episode are other members of the royal family such as Prince Charles and the Queen Mother. These family members constantly complain about having to work and are shown as weak and unable to fend for themselves. The Queen Mother, for example, seems only able to utter the phrase, “I want some tea.” When Yakko, Wakko and Dot arrive at the castle, they assume total control of the situation. They even forcibly remove the Queen from the banquet hall by tossing her and her throne out into the hallway. When she attempts to reenter, the door is locked and she has to ask to be let in. This treatment of the Queen depicts the ease with which the United States’ culture can enter into another country and

exert its influence. While the queen is in the hallway, the Warners are free to add their influence to the banquet hall in any way they choose. At the end of the episode, the Queen is an eager employee of the cafeteria the Warner trio has built, which shows her as ultimately accepting of American ideas. Finally, the image of the Queen abandoning British custom to work in a cafeteria and open an American-style fast food chain implies that American-style restaurants are superior to traditional British dining.

Another aspect of these episodes that showcases American cultural importance is the ease with which the Warners are able to culturally infiltrate these other countries. Einstein, Michelangelo, Picasso and Queen Elizabeth II put up very little resistance against the Warners, even though they have annoyingly taken control of the current situation. Einstein actually shows a degree of appreciation of American culture when he momentarily cuddles the Chia Pet. When the Warners eventually stumble upon the Theory of Relativity, Einstein ignores the fact that it was completely by accident and actually goes so far as to call the Warners “geniuses.” Michelangelo also shows resignation to American culture when he allows the Warners to kick him out of the chapel and then has to beg his way back in while the Warners play out a parody of the *Wizard of Oz* scene where Dorothy and her companions try to enter the Emerald City. Picasso barely fights the infiltration by the trio and puts up virtually no protest at the Warners’ suggestion to play the “Guess the Picture” game. Queen Elizabeth II is actually excited to have help from the Warners, and willingly lets them build a cafeteria in her fancy banquet hall. Not only do these historical figures not fight against this invasion by American characters, in the end they also share the credit with the Warners for their work. The Warners share in Einstein’s Nobel Prize and they are rewarded for their work

on the chapel by a big hug from Stephen Spielberg while Michelangelo does not protest. Picasso hires the Warners to create abstract paintings for him since he seems to be unable to do so himself. Queen Elizabeth II not only praises the Warners for their help with her banquet hall; she actually works the cash register in the cafeteria and delights in being able to charge per item. There are several implications of easy infiltration by the Warners. First, it again highlights these other countries as weak and susceptible to cultural invasion. It also positions the United States as the dominant culture, and since the American cultural influences led to these historical figures' eventual success, it carries a message that the American way is the right way.

Depictions of the Warners in other countries are not the only means by which the show communicates American cultural supremacy. The infusion of American culture on the rest of the world also appears in the episode, "Hot Bothered and Bedeviled." This is an important episode to analyze because it shows American supremacy in a place that cultures across the globe believe in and fear: the underworld. Domination of this realm stands as a representation of domination of the entire world. This time, Yakko, Wakko and Dot are looking for Six Flags over Flushing, but mistakenly end up in Hades instead. At first Satan is delighted at their arrival because he has been looking for someone new to torture. He tries everything he can think of to make the trio suffer, from sending his dog Cerberus after them to locking them in a room that forces people to spend an eternity listening to whiny protest songs from the 1960s. Eventually, the Warners freeze everything in the underworld, and Satan kicks them out, furious.

Though Hell is a globally recognized concept, the underworld that the Warner trio visits is completely Americanized. All of the tortures described in Hell are purely

American. One family is bound forever to watch *The Facts of Life*, one room forces people to listen to 1960s protest songs, and Yakko suggests that the ultimate torture would be another Bob Hope special. Satan himself is also highly Americanized. When asking for someone new to torture, he requests an insurance salesman, and when asked by the Warners to do an impression, he chooses Curly Howard from the Three Stooges. The Americanization of Hell implies that the spread of American culture is unceasing, even in the afterlife.

Images of American cultural artifacts used as torture devices might seem to position American culture as negative by suggesting that being subjected to American culture is painful. Images of people in Hell being forced to watch *The Facts of Life*, for example, implies that the series was not considered to be a good show and being forced to watch it would be excruciating. While associating these American cultural influences with an evil location like Hell would seem to offer a critique of American culture, it actually strengthens the message that the United States is culturally supreme to the rest of the world. Some of the cultural products in this episode, such as 1960s protest songs and Bob Hope specials may be depicted as some of the worst forms of torture that American culture has to offer, but they are still shown as important enough to reference. The image of Saddam Hussein entering Hell at the beginning of the episode shows that people from other countries as well as Americans were residents of this particular version of Hell. In order for someone from another country to understand why watching the *Facts of Life* would be a form of torture, that person would have to have seen the show and have an understanding of why people find it annoying.

The cultural references in *Animaniacs* help foster the belief that American culture is superior to all other cultures in the world. Because every scene includes a bombardment of American cultural references, the Warners inject American culture into their surroundings. Any aspect of the foreign cultures they encounter is completely overshadowed by the proliferation of intertextual references to American culture. Furthermore, these intertextual cues suggest that American culture is also more influential than other cultures because of the ease with which Yakko, Wakko and Dot can infuse American culture into their surroundings. In addition, these references suggest that American culture is highly influential in shaping world culture.

Physical Domination

Not only does *Animaniacs* carry messages of the dominance of American culture, it also contains images that promote ideas of actual physical takeover of foreign territories, which further serves to show the United States as a dominant power in the rest of the world. One particular episode of *Animaniacs* that highlights this concept is that of “Baghdad Café”. In this episode, the Warners have scrambled all of the scripts for the show so different characters have found themselves in each other’s scripts. “Baghdad Café” features Yakko, Wakko and Slappy the Squirrel, who is filling Dot’s role. The trio travels to Baghdad, Iraq and enter one of Saddam Hussein’s palaces, thinking that it is a restaurant called Baghdad Café. They happen upon Saddam Hussein, who is in the middle of planning a major invasion of the Middle East. The trio, however, thinks Saddam Hussein is their waiter and they proceed to treat him as such. Finally fed up with what they think is bad service, they stuff rockets in Saddam’s pants and blast him out of his own palace.

There are several key elements of this episode that play into American cultural imperialism. First, like with the episodes with Michelangelo and Einstein, the Warner brothers and Slappy find it extremely easy to take control of their surroundings, even though they are face to face with a powerful dictator. Even when Saddam summons one of his guards, he is not able to remove the Warners from his presence. This scenario is a clear depiction of the United States' domination over other countries. This episode sends the message that the United States is always in control over foreign locations, even in places such as a Iraq where a dangerous dictator was planning an invasion. Another example of this is an exchange between Saddam and Wakko, during which Wakko is chewing on Saddam's invasion map.

Saddam: Stop it, you are eating Kuwait!

Wakko: Needs salt (Ruegger, 1993i).

In this instance, Wakko literally consumes another country. Not only is Wakko refusing to give into Saddam's authority, he is also vividly enacting American domination. Finally, it is also important to recognize how easy it was for the Warners to thwart Saddam's invasion and remove him from power. All it took was a few sticks of dynamite down his pants, which blasted him from the castle. This episode suggests the sheer power that America has over other countries, as well as serves as another illustration as to what little resistance there is to American global supremacy.

Another portrayal of the United States as physically dominant is found in the episode, "Hot, Bothered and Bedeviled." This episode carries the message that the United States has the power to enter and leave foreign territories at will. At the beginning of the skit, Saddam Hussein is on a balcony addressing the people of Iraq.

Suddenly a trap door opens beneath him and he falls into the underworld, landing in lava. Moments later, the Warners arrive by breaking through a wall. While Saddam is forced into Hades and succumbs to the torture, the Warners arrive purely by accident. In addition, the Warners enter by busting through the rock that surrounds the underworld, which illustrates their physical superiority over the realm, as they are able to enter as they please and behave as they like, whereas Saddam was forced there and immediately had to succumb to the torture. At the end of the episode, the Warners exert their physical power over Satan by freezing him, which momentarily debilitates him. Although the trio is facing a powerful supernatural being, they are still able to physically dominate the situation, which implies that the United States also has the physical power to control any foreign territory, no matter how powerful.

In other episodes such as “Cookies for Einstein,” “Hooked on a Ceiling,” and “No Pain, No Painting,” the Warners also physically dominate other countries. Einstein is tricked into leaving his house and Michelangelo is easily persuaded to leave the Sistine Chapel. Then, when Picasso and Einstein each kick Yakko, Wakko, and Dot out, they manage to reenter effortlessly. In all three of these episodes, the foreign figure finally relents and gives up on attempting to force the Warners out. This depiction of the American characters suggests that the United States can easily take control in foreign territories and cannot easily be ousted once in place.

Conclusion

The episodes “Cookies for Einstein,” “Hooked on a Ceiling,” “No Pain, No Painting,” “Windsor Hassle,” “Baghdad Café,” and “Hot Bothered and Bedeviled” work together to paint a picture of the United States as a culturally and physically dominant

country. In each episode, the trio of Yakko, Wakko and Dot enter into a foreign territory and proceed to exert their influence on it, whether their presence is welcome or not. These episodes not only demonstrate the ease with which the United States can physically and culturally influence other countries, they also suggest that American influence always yields a positive outcome. Images of Yakko, Wakko and Dot providing aid to important foreign figures implies that other countries need help from the United States. These episodes position the United States as culturally pervasive, physically dominant and providing successful assistance to other countries in need which ultimately suggests that the American way is the right way.

2. Pinky and the Brain

They're Pinky and the Brain, yes Pinky and the Brain.

One is a genius, the other's insane.

To prove their mousey worth they'll overthrow the earth.

They're Pinky, they're Pinky and the Brain Brain Brain Brain Brain (Ruegger, 1993i).

The above quote, the theme song of the cartoon "Pinky and the Brain," is also a basic synopsis of the show. Pinky and Brain are two genetically engineered lab mice who spend each night attempting to take over the world. Brain, as his name suggests, is extremely intelligent and is responsible for all of the pair's world domination plans. Conversely, Pinky is a dim-witted, happy-go-lucky mouse who assists Brain in all of his world takeover attempts. Nearly every episode follows the same format; Brain has hatched a new world domination plan and vainly attempts to explain it to Pinky. The two put the plan into action and nearly succeed but fall short of success because of some small error, which is usually caused by Pinky. Then the mice return home and Brain begins to work on yet another plot to take over the world. The overall plot as well as the specific details of the cartoon communicates that the United States is physically, technologically, economically, and culturally superior to the other countries in the world.

The setting of each episode is an important element of the domination theme. In each of the episodes, "Opportunity Knox," "Jockey for Position," "Bubba Bo Bob Brain," "Battle for the Planet," and "Puppet Rulers," the mice attempt to take over the world from within the United States. In "Opportunity Knox," the mice attempt to steal all of the gold in Fort Knox to control the country. In "Jockey for Position," Brain enters the Kentucky Derby to win the prize money so he can purchase a giant magnet to use in his takeover scheme. The "Bubba Bo Bob Brain" episode involves Brain becoming a country singer in Nashville, Tennessee and using subliminal messages to control people's

minds. “Battle for the Planet” and “Puppet Rulers” both use American television in the takeover plot. Pinky and Brain’s attempt to take over the world from within the United States suggests that if one controls the United States, one controls the world.

In addition, these two characters never face any outside opposition to their takeover plans. Even when Brain openly admits that he is a lab mouse engaged in a plot to take over the world, no one attempts to stop him. Brain’s plans are nearly always ruined by a simple mistake made by either himself or Pinky. If Pinky and Brain represent the United States, then their self-foiling plots suggest that there are no forces or other countries outside of the United States that could keep it from taking over the world; rather, there may be forces within the United States that are preventing it from completely taking over the world.

Through analysis of the five episodes, “Battle for the Planet” “Bubba Bo Bob Brain,” “Jockey for Position,” “Opportunity Knox” and “Puppet Rulers” I will explain how the show carries messages that the United States is culturally, technologically and economically superior to the other countries in the world. I will study the ways in which the characters and settings are depicted, the narrative structure of the episodes and the intertextual signifiers in these episodes. With these tools, I will show how *Pinky and the Brain* positions the United States as being superior to the rest of the world.

Cultural Dominance

One type of dominance implied by the text is cultural dominance. Not only does the text suggest that the United States is capable of a physical takeover of the world, it also suggests that the United States can, or already is, injecting its culture into other nations. The first manner in which this is evidenced is through the use of entertainment

media in the takeover plots. Mass media, especially television and radio, are centerpieces in three of the five episodes I have selected. Brain's decision to use television in these three plots showcases the importance of television as a medium for disseminating American values and perspectives internationally. Further, Brain's ability to distribute these messages worldwide suggests American dominance over television in the world. Though Brain is not successful in his takeover attempts, his use of television ultimately works to achieve his goals of getting his messages out to the entire world population.

One episode in which television takes center stage is "Puppet Rulers." This episode, which begins in the year 1954, depicts Brain as he sees how two children are enamored by a popular television show featuring sock puppets named Meanie and Treacle. Brain's original takeover plan for the day was to cryogenically freeze himself, but he was unsure of what he would do when he awoke 40 years later. After one of the children says, "I wish Meanie and Treacle was president" Brain decides that he and Pinky should become popular children's television stars. Brain reasons that if they become popular and then freeze themselves at the height of their popularity, they will be worshiped by all of their old fans when they return 40 years later and will therefore easily assume control. Brain states that the children watching his show will be future world leaders, suggesting that he will be a beloved character not only in the United States, but around the world. Pinky and Brain mail themselves to the television studio as two puppets known as Big Ears and Noodle Noggin, and they become instant stars. The children watching the show all love and worship the duo, and the show stays on the air for several months until Pinky and Brain announce their departure from the show and freeze themselves. Forty years later, they wake up and announce their return. Instead of

the warm welcome they expected, their formerly devoted fans are furious with the characters for abandoning them and insist the two pay all of their therapy bills.

There are several aspects of this episode that suggest the United States is a culturally dominant country. One factor is the way in which television is portrayed. Brain's plots always center on the idea of total world domination, so his decision to use an American television show in his takeover plot suggests that American television is a powerful cultural medium that reaches the entire world population. When Brain hears one of the children say that he wished Meanie and Treacle would be president, he assumes that all children would want these American characters to be their leaders. Brain's use of television and assumptions about the popularity of American programming suggest that the United States is a popular cultural force in the world and that its television really is broadcast globally.

In the end, Brain is unsuccessful in his takeover attempt, but he does correctly predict that he will be loved by future world leaders. One scene depicts a young Bill Clinton in Arkansas at a store called "Bubba's Toys," where he purchases Big Ears and Noodle Noggin dolls. He then turns to a television on a shelf behind him and watches as John F. Kennedy says, "And I know all other Americans join me in saying 'Ich bin ein Noodle Noggin.'" This statement is a reference to Kennedy's 1963 speech to the citizens of West Berlin (Essential Speeches, 2003) in which he said "Ich bin ein Berliner" which means "I am a Berliner." Kennedy said in the speech that all free men were citizens of Berlin no matter where they lived. By substituting the character Noodle Noggin in place of Berliner, the scene depicts a world leader such as President Kennedy showing his love for the television show. When put in the context of the famous speech, it suggests that

the rest of the world should feel kinship with these characters, just as Kennedy wished for the rest of the world to feel kinship with Berlin. The use of a future leader such as Bill Clinton implies that Brain was correct in his assumption that future world leaders would enjoy the show, which means it is likely that leaders of other countries were fans as well. By presuming that world leaders both enjoy and feel kinship with an American television show featuring American characters, the text suggests that American culture is of great importance to the rest of the world.

Another episode that suggests the importance and superiority of American media is “Bubba Bo Bob Brain.” In this episode, Brain has decided to use subliminal messages to gain control of the minds of everyone in the world. His only setback is finding a way to broadcast his messages worldwide. Brain sees Pinky watching a television show with a singer named Willy Ray Cyprus singing a song his “empty hollow head,” which is a reference to American country music singer Billy Ray Cyrus and his hit titled “Achy Breaky Heart.” Brain is inspired by the show and decides that the best way for him to transmit his message is to become a country music singer. He travels to Nashville and performs under the stage name “Bubba Bo Bob Brain.” During his performance, he plays a subliminal message that tells the audience to buy his record and listen to it twenty times a day. The message works and Brain becomes an instant celebrity. His record sells out, he appears on talk shows, and he even wins a music award. Brain is then invited to perform at the Grand Ole Opry at an event that is going to be televised worldwide. During his show, he plays a tape instructing everyone to do whatever he says. He briefly has seized control of the world’s population until Pinky calls Brain by the wrong name, which he had done throughout the episode. Brain is so frustrated that he tells Pinky to

forget his name and forget he ever existed. Unfortunately, he speaks these words into the microphone and the entire global population also forgets who he is.

There are several implications for this episode. Like “Puppet Rulers,” this episode showcases the importance of American television to global culture. Brain’s takeover attempt begins first within the United States at a club in Nashville, Tennessee. At the beginning of the episode, Brain states that the only problem with his plan is finding a way to have his message broadcast worldwide. When he sees two Willy Ray Cyrus fans on television saying that they listen to his album twenty times a day, Brain decides that the best way to distribute his message is to become a country music star. Brain says, “I will go to Nashville and become the biggest country music star of all time. Everyone will hear my record and my message and I will take over the world.” In concocting this plan, Brain assumes that country music, an American genre, will be broadcast worldwide and that by becoming a star in Nashville he will become a star internationally. Though it would seem that Brain’s plan is flawed, it turns out that he is correct. An announcer states that the Grand Ole Opry concert at which Brain performs is being televised worldwide. This suggests that American television is internationally popular and that American culture is being disseminated to other countries. Further, Brain’s success at controlling the minds of everyone in the world implies that a large percentage of people in other countries tuned into the broadcast; presumably, American television is something people across the globe desire to watch.

Depictions of the country music genre that was created and popularized in the United States further position the country as culturally superior. The episode features a Kenny Rogers look-alike singing about playing the card game Go Fish, which is a

reference to his hit “The Gambler.” Garth Brooks is one of the presenters who gives Brain his country music award. Willy Ray Cyprus, the Billy Ray Cyrus parody, is featured singing about his “empty hollow head.” The show also pokes fun at the genre itself. Brain creates a list of six things he needs in order to become a country music star. The list includes a cowboy hat, a song, a southern dialect, a name consisting of no fewer than three words, a height of at least six feet, and working class values. These representations of country music stars and the main components of the country music genre satirizes it as a genre for the ignorant masses to enjoy and one that is not considered to be a high art. The Willy Ray Cyprus character is especially telling because he not only appears ignorant by singing about his empty hollow head, he also represents a country singer who has long been considered a one-hit-wonder. While the show would seem to criticize American culture as being mindless and not true art, the fact that it is broadcast and enjoyed internationally suggests that even the lowest aspects of American culture are distributed and enjoyed worldwide.

A final episode that shows the supremacy of American culture is “Battle for the Planet.” In this episode, Brain wishes to take over the world through the use of a phony television broadcast. Brain explains to Pinky that in 1938 the “War of the Worlds” broadcast caused such a panic among listeners that people actually fled the cities. Inspired by this historic event, Brain decides to create a phony television broadcast in which it appears that aliens are attacking. He reasons that people all over the world will flee and it will be easy for him to assume control. Brain puts his plan into action and pirates the airwaves with his broadcast. He plays the role of an anchorman reporting about an alien that has crash landed on earth while Pinky plays the part of the alien. The

show depicts Pinky emerging from a space ship and destroying a city. When Brain ends the transmission, he assumes that people have fled their cities and that he can assume control. When he leaves the lab to travel to the White House, he encounters a newspaper that says that “Battle for the Planet” was a comedy smash. People did not fall for the hoax as Brain had intended and instead stayed home to enjoy it.

Like “Puppet Rulers” and “Bubba Bo Bob Brain,” this episode also assumes that the entire world is tuned into American television. Brain says that his plan is for people to flee the cities so he can take over the world, which suggests that the program will be internationally broadcast. Also, the newspaper Brain reads says “‘Battle for the Planet’ is a comedy smash. World laughs together,” which suggests that the entire world as depicted in the show did in fact watch the broadcast. If this is true, then the show once again carries the message that American television is watched by people across the globe.

Another indication of the importance of American culture is the number of cultural references, celebrities in particular, that are worked into each short episode. Though there have been hundreds of popular and culturally important people throughout history who hail from other countries, the only figures represented in the show are figures important to American culture. These episodes feature well-known American figures or parodies of these figures: Billy Ray Cyrus, Cher, Desi Arnaz (a Cuban-American), Regis Philbin, Ed McMahon, Willie Shoemaker, Minnie Pearl, Dolly Parton, Garth Brooks, Elvis Presley, Gallagher, Kenny Rogers, Mary Pickford, Bill Clinton, John F. Kennedy and Milton Berle. Further, there are references to other American cultural artifacts such as the television shows *Family Matters* and *Ducktales*, Publisher’s Clearinghouse, the Grand Ole’ Opry, the Kentucky Derby, Eggo Waffles and *Life* magazine. These

references carry several important messages. First, since intertextual cues often suggest what the audience is expected to know about, references to these cultural objects imply that the show's audience should be well-versed in American culture. The expectation that viewers be knowledgeable of these items positions American culture as being extremely important. Second, since virtually no reference is made to non-American figures, it suggests that the most important cultural figures in history have been Americans and the most significant cultural artifacts have also been American, making the United States culturally superior to other countries.

Technological Dominance

Aside from carrying messages of American cultural superiority, episodes featuring Pinky and the Brain also suggest that the United States is more technologically advanced than other countries. The first evidence of this lies within the show's representation of scientific research. Pinky and Brain themselves are evidence of the technological prowess of American scientists. These scientists have harnessed the power of genetic engineering to create Brain, an extremely intelligent lab mouse. These references to scientific achievements suggest that the United States is technologically advanced. In addition, since Brain need not look outside the country for the tools he needs for world domination, the text suggests that the United States has all of the technological resources it needs for a world takeover, should it ever decide to stage one.

One episode that demonstrates the power of American science is "Opportunity Knox." In this episode, the scientists in Pinky and Brain's lab have created a genetically engineered strain of pollen that triggers uncontrollable sneezing in anyone who inhales it. Brain and Pinky travel to Fort Knox, Kentucky and use the pollen on the guards so they

can sneak in and steal the nation's gold supply. The pollen works and the two easily sneak past the guards. Unfortunately, Brain did not anticipate how heavy the gold would be, and the two are unable to carry any of it out of the vault.

This episode showcases the prowess of American scientists in a couple of ways. First, the beginning of the episode shows an American scientist in the lab inventing a cure of the common cold, which is something no scientist has yet to accomplish. American science would have to be highly advanced in order to produce such a startling and internationally significant scientific victory. Also, the use of the genetically altered pollen suggests that the United States is scientifically advanced. It demonstrates that the United States has harnessed the power of genetic engineering. If American scientists can create something as seemingly useless as pollen that makes people sneeze, then it stands to reason that these same scientists could also genetically engineer much more powerful organisms.

The television broadcasts used in the show also assert the technological dominance of the United States. In "Battle for the Planet" Brain is able to easily overtake the worldwide airwaves to broadcast his message across the planet. The episode depicts an American satellite that Brain uses to broadcast his signal. Further, Brain explains to Pinky that the "War of the Worlds" broadcast proved to the world that radio was a powerful tool and now they have television, an even more powerful tool. For Pinky and Brain mass media are important tools for world conquest. In "Bubba Bo Bob Brain," Brain is able to broadcast his subliminal message over multiple communication channels. These episodes depict a United States that has a powerful hold on the world's communication technologies. Because Brain is able to easily hijack the communication

channels of other countries, it suggests that the United States holds control over the world's media technologies.

Economic Dominance

The final aspect of American dominance in the world depicted in *Pinky and the Brain* is the economic superiority of the United States. Money is a focal point in several of the episodes. In "Jockey for Position," for example, Brain wishes to purchase a large magnet to use to stop the Earth's rotation, causing its inhabitants to fly off.

Unfortunately, Brain cannot afford the magnet and therefore enters the Kentucky Derby in order to win the prize money. Brain calculates that he can easily win since he is the smallest and therefore lightest jockey. All he needs is the right horse. He manages to get rid of one of the other jockey's by telling him that he had just won \$10 million in the Publisher's Smearinghouse sweepstakes. Thinking he is instantly wealthy, the jockey immediately resigns from his position. Brain takes the jockey's place and prepares for the race. Pinky stows away on Brain's horse, which upsets Brain because it throws off his calculations. Before the race starts, Pinky meets Phar Fignewton, the horse in the next lane, and the two become enamored with each other. It is interesting to note that the name of the horse is a reference to the German word "fahrvergnügen" which means "driving enjoyment" and was used in Volkswagen commercials. This is another example of the way in which the show trivializes another culture by changing the spelling to reflect a popular American cookie. The race begins and Pinky loses his grip and flies off of Brain's horse, landing on the starting line. Brain's horse, Daddy's Little Angel, easily takes the lead at the beginning of the race and is two full lengths ahead of the other horses when they enter the final turn. Phar Fignewton suddenly notices that Pinky is still on the

starting line and is about to be trampled, so he races ahead to save him, passing Brain and winning the race.

This episode suggests in several ways that money is important to the country and that financial wealth is a necessary resource for a world takeover. First, Brain needs one million dollars in order to purchase his billion-ton magnet, which suggests that one cannot take over the world without some sort of financial support. In addition, the existence of events such as the Kentucky Derby with its large cash prize and the sweepstakes implies that the United States is a financially strong country because it has the means to give away large sums of money as prizes. The jockey's reaction to supposedly winning a sweepstakes also speaks to the importance of money in the United States. He literally jumps for joy upon hearing he has won 10 million dollars and immediately quits the race. This scene implies that Americans are highly motivated by money and since there are no images of people working hard for money, one does not need to work to attain financial wealth. Rather than get a job to earn money for his magnet, Brain nearly wins one million dollars in the Kentucky Derby by entering a contest, which downplays the need for a job in the United States by sending the message that it is a country where people do not have to work hard for money.

Not only does the show carry messages that the United States is financially strong, it goes a step further to suggest that the United States is financially stronger than all other countries. The episode, "Opportunity Knox" is especially revealing. In this episode, Pinky and Brain travel to Fort Knox, Kentucky to steal the nation's gold supply, which shows that the United States has a massive gold reserve. While explaining his plot to Pinky, Brain says, "He who controls the nation's capital controls this nation." He then

goes on to explain that by “capital” he means money, which highlights the importance of money to American society. Brain also clearly states that this is his plan for world domination, which implies that by taking over the nation’s money, he can take over the world. If this is true, then the United States must be vastly more financially powerful than all of the other nations of the world and has a controlling share of the world’s wealth.

Conclusion

Though each episode of *Pinky and the Brain* is ultimately unique, there similar narrative patterns that underlie each episode. Their attempts to take over from within the United States also suggest that by ruling the country, one can rule the world and that the United States has all of the means necessary for a world takeover. These five episodes combined send specific messages about the United States’ position within the rest of the world. The use of television and cultural references during the world takeover plots suggests that the United States has a cultural stronghold on the rest of the world. The technological advances depicted imply that America is far more technologically advanced than other countries and may even have the technology necessary for a world takeover. Finally, the way in which the episodes showcase the importance and proliferation of money in the United States positions the country as economically dominant over other nations. These three areas combined paint a picture of a United States that is superior to the rest of the world.

3. Historical Situation Analysis

Animaniacs paints the United States as a strong country superior in its technology, economy, political strength and culture. Though *Animaniacs* promotes ideas of American superiority over the rest of the world, the show was not actually reflective of the historical and social conditions under which it was created. The first fifty episodes of *Animaniacs* aired from September 1993 to November 1993. The early 1990s were a turbulent and uncertain time for the United States. The country had just seen the end of the Cold War with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 (Pflum, 1997) and had witnessed the Persian Gulf War take place in early 1991 (“The Gulf War,” 2006). In 1992, the nation also ushered in a new leader, President Bill Clinton. With all of the changes that were happening in the country in the early 1990s, America was uncertain of its future and its place in the world. Analysis of the historical conditions of this time period suggests that the United States was not quite the utopian society depicted in the show. This chapter provides an overview of the historical and cultural events that were taking place in the areas of technology, economy, foreign relations and culture during the early 1990s that helped contribute to the program’s meaning and ideological significance.

Technology

Genetics

The early 1990s ushered in a new wave of technological advances. Scientists made great strides in areas such as genetics, disease research, communication technology, alternative energy and space exploration, among others. Many of these scientific advances were discovered by American researchers, which strengthened the United State’s reputation for being a scientifically advanced nation. While many of these

technological advances were considered great accomplishments that would greatly benefit the world, others were met with skepticism and criticism. Also, social and economic conditions in the United States threatened to seriously damage the nation's technological edge.

One major area of scientific study that made great advances in the early 1990s was genetic research, particularly genetic engineering. In 1991, scientists worldwide embarked on an epic mission to map the human genome (Dietrich, 1993a). Genetic researchers hoped that a greater knowledge of human genetics would lead to new advances in the treatment of genetic diseases. Wanting to play a central role in this branch of research, the United States pledged 200 million dollars annually for the project. While the Human Genome Project was an international collaboration, the United States took credit for much of its success. At the onset of the project, French scientists published the first map of the human genetic code which was instrumental in launching the Human Genome Project; however, American scientists claimed a share of the credit because the system for mapping the human genome was created at Washington University (Allen, 1993). Scientists in the United States then used the French map as a jumping off point for mapping the human genome in greater detail in order to find the specific genes that cause disease.

Not only were American scientists successful in mapping out genetic codes, they also advanced in the field of putting these genetic discoveries into practice. Disease research expanded into the realm of gene therapy, a practice which staves off disease by replacing defective genes with healthy ones. In 1990, researchers in Maryland made genetic history when they successfully performed the first gene therapy on a 4-year-old

girl (“Gene Therapy”, 1991). During the next few years, American scientists continued to make extraordinary advances in genetic research. Harvard University successfully created a genetically engineered mouse to be used in cancer experiments; scientists began experimenting with fetal tissues for use in disease treatment and prevention; researchers used gene therapy to boost the immune systems of AIDS patients; and scientists discovered the genes responsible for more than a half-dozen major illnesses (Donegan, 1995). In addition, genetic research fostered new advances in cancer treatment and prevention (“Advances in Cancer Research”, 1995). Though the French scientists had initiated the Human Genome Project, Americans were using that knowledge to make seemingly exponentially increasing advances in the prevention and treatment of disease.

Humans were not the only subjects of genetic research in the early 1990s. Scientists had also discovered ways of genetically modifying foods. One use of such engineering was in livestock. Scientists introduced a synthetic growth hormone into cows to increase milk yields (Phillips, 1994). Another growth hormone was introduced into pigs to reduce the fat content in pork. The same technology was also introduced in produce. Scientists used genetic engineering to create tomatoes with better flavor, potatoes that absorbed less fat when frying, soybeans with higher protein content and fruits and vegetables that resist bruising. Not only did scientists strive to improve the quality of food, they also found that genetically modifying food could be beneficial to farmers. In 1993, scientists in Connecticut experimented with genetically engineered crops and found that such engineering could potentially increase crop yields, create insect-resistant plants and shorten growing seasons, which would help the nation produce

more food each year (Grant, 1993). It seemed that American scientists were positioned to revolutionize the food production industry.

Although it seemed that the United States was on the path to generating more food and curing disease, this research was not universally well received by the scientific community and the general population. While these technological advances suggested that American scientists would be international heroes for their discoveries, the use of gene therapy in humans, plants and animals was met with a great deal of criticism. Critics questioned whether the use of fetal tissue from aborted fetuses was ethical, suggesting that it might encourage more women to have abortions (Jost 1991). Other critics noted that there were serious risks involved with human gene therapy. Because it was a new form of disease treatment, there were many risks involved because scientists could not predict the outcome of such treatment and could put the patient at greater risk (“Gene Therapy”, 1991). Also, scientists and the American public questioned the ethics of “playing God” and argued that people did not have the right to change a person’s genetic makeup, particularly in unborn children.

Plant and animal therapy also came under heavy criticism. Scientists and people in the food industry feared that genetic engineering of food could reduce its quality and nutritional value (Phillips, 1994). In addition, genetically modified soybeans were found to have genes from certain nuts that could cause a severe allergic reaction in people with nut allergies. This discovery led people, particularly farmers, chefs and other members of the food industry to question whether or not such foods were actually dangerous to consumers (Dopyera & Leavenworth, 1993). Also, genetically engineered animals such as cows were found to be more susceptible to certain diseases, which threatened the

quality and safety of their meat and milk. Further, there was worry that genetically engineered food could lead to the accidental introduction of new viruses into the human population (Phillips, 1994).

In addition to the fears caused by gene therapy, genetics research created additional problems. Concern over genetic engineering erupted when news broke that scientists at George Washington University were experimenting with cloning human embryos (Weiss, 1993). According to Weiss, newspaper headlines reported that scientists had successfully cloned babies, leading people to believe that parents would design their own look-alike children or store frozen embryos that could later be used to harvest spare parts from a clone. In addition, the movie *Jurassic Park*, which was a blockbuster hit in 1993 spawned concerns that scientists could, and would, attempt to clone dinosaurs (Dietrich, 1993b). Though the United States seemed to be greatly ahead of other countries in scientific research, this was not necessarily true. The skepticism caused by genetic engineering blocked a significant amount federal funding of genetics research (Weiss, 1993). While the United States struggled with its ethical dilemmas, other countries were moving forward. In 1992 at least 32 countries had created, or were in the process of creating, commissions to review controversial research proposals. Because the United States had no such commission, genetic research was pushed into the private sector and scientists involved in genetic engineering and even cancer research could not receive federal funding for their projects.

Communication Technology

Genetic research was not the only major field of scientific study in the early 1990s. Scientists and engineers in the United States were also breaking new ground in

the field of communication technology. American use of communication technology was increasing rapidly during this time period. By the early 1990s, more than 92 million American households had at least one television (“Nielsen Study”, 1991), 11 million Americans owned a cellular phone (Artis, 1993) and one-third of United States households owned a personal computer (“One-third U.S.,” 1994). Because this technology was so prevalent, researchers looked for new ways to expand and improve upon it.

Although television had been a popular communication medium for decades, it saw major changes in the early 1990s. Researchers began testing video-on-demand, video games and interactive shopping (Jost, 1994) by combining television with telephone information technology. In addition, new technology allowed for increased television content. Telecommunications researchers hoped to add more than 200 cable channels within the decade (Miller, 1993). One of the most influential advances in television technology was the increased use of satellite broadcasting. In previous years, the United States had begun launching satellites into space that could broadcast television programming to any location in the world (Jones, 1992). By 1992 the United States had developed more powerful satellites and planned to launch 120 into space to create a “global village.” This technology would allow American programming to reach anywhere on earth. American broadcasting technology was becoming so powerful that Asian leaders in countries such as China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand feared that American television would overtake their own programming (Jones, 1992).

Though television was a strong contributor in the communications technology revolution, computer technology was increasing at an even greater rate. Not only were

more Americans purchasing personal computers, they were also exposed to greater access to online communication. In 1990 the first commercially available internet service provider became available and by 1992 there were more than one million internet hosts (Clemmitt, 2006). By 1993, the United States had witnessed an explosion in the use of electronic mail and online networks that surpassed many other countries (Pollack, 1993). Japan, for example, was a full 10 years behind the United States in communication technology advances. The United States was so far advanced in communication technology that Japan feared America would gain world leadership due to its mastery of the information superhighway. The United States dominated other countries as well. By the end of 1993, the United States was the world leader in the spread of computers, boasting 265 computers to every 1,000 people, almost twice as many as Australia, who held the number two ranking (Mallard, 1994).

Though it seemed that the United States was a beacon of technological prowess, there were indications that its technological advancements were not as powerful as they seemed. Though computer usage was increasing, Americans feared the new technology because they were afraid that computers would be able to do many jobs better than humans and would ultimately replace them in the workplace (Husted, 1993). In addition, Husted states that technologists and academics feared that people would become addicted to computers and even more violent as a result of playing certain computer games. Though the United States seemed to be the dominant technologically advanced nation, it faced tough competition from other countries. European countries such as Great Britain, France and Germany were advancing in the field of telecommunications. Like the United States, these countries were also increasing internet usage, researching mobile

communications and implementing satellite television broadcasts (“Telecommunications,” 1990). Internet usage was also growing in Japan. Though the growth in Japan was increasing more slowly than in the United States, the number of Japanese networks connected to the internet was steadily increasing (Mallard, 1994). China was also making a move to catch up to the United States by doubling its efforts in technological innovation in 1993 (HKE-China 1993).

Though the United States appeared to be a technological and scientific powerhouse, it was not as successful as it appeared. The early 1990s bore witness to a series of scientific failures. In 1993, the United States appeared to have a strong handle on space flight after a perfectly-executed repair of the Hubble Space Telescope (Dietrich, 1993b) and had made a deal with the Russians to build a space station (Hines & Carreau, 1993). Though this event seemed to showcase the United States as adept at space flight, this prowess was called into question when the Mars Observer inexplicably lost communication with NASA (Dietrich, 1993b). In addition, employee corruption at NASA and lagging ethical standards caused a dip in the organization’s credibility. The American scientific community was also embarrassed when the government quashed an \$11 billion atom-smasher supercollider project, even after “\$2 billion had already been spent, 200 families had been moved from their homes to make room, 1,700 employees had been hired, and 14.7 miles of tunnel had been dug” (Dietrich, 1993b, p.1). Funding for scientific research was also dwindling. An oversupply of scientists in the early 1990s meant that not everyone could get the funding they needed. Younger scientists were having more difficulty finding jobs and therefore were not seeking grants for scientific research (Rensberger, 1994). In addition, the private industry was cutting back on jobs

for scientists and the federal government planned to cut funding for research by 14 percent, which left less opportunity for scientific advancement. Though the United States may have made great strides in scientific research in the early 1990s, the domination of the country's technological advancements was as powerful as it appeared, and such advancements were not always viewed fondly by American citizens or by the rest of the world.

Analysis of the technological research of the United States in the early 1990s suggests that nationalism and ethnocentrism were being articulated in American media during this time period. News coverage of American scientific research indicates that scientists in the United States were striving towards advancements that served the interests of the nation itself more than any other group, and that the United States was superior to other nations in its scientific endeavors. In the field of genetic research, the United States demonstrated ethnocentric beliefs by positioning American scientific research as superior to that of other nations; it focused solely on the genetic advancements of American scientists and gave American scientists credit for the French scientists' Human Genome Project research. In the field of communication technology, researchers worked on satellite dishes that could broadcast American programming worldwide. This also promoted ethnocentrism because it asserted the superiority of American programming over programming in other nations and also demonstrated the superiority of American satellite technology. The transmission of American programming worldwide without the consent of other nations serves primarily the interests of the United States, despite the expressed interests of other countries who did not desire American television.

Economy

Prior to the Persian Gulf War, the United States had experienced its longest economic expansion in peacetime history (Cooper, 1991a). The federal budget had achieved a surplus (Jost, 2003), Americans enjoyed cheap gasoline (among other products) (Patch, Maize & Cooper, 1991), the dollar reached record highs (“Dollar”, 1990), and real estate values soared (Cooper, 1991a). Then, in 1991, the United States became involved in the Persian Gulf War and the economy began to suffer. Prior to the war, the United States had already anticipated the onset of a recession. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, the uncertainty of the United States entering the war caused a major drop in consumer confidence. Even after the United States had declared a victory in the war, the economy remained in turmoil. In 1991, unemployment soared to a three year high of 5.9 percent; United States corporations announced more than a half a million permanent job cuts; and approximately 25 million American workers were unemployed at some point (Cooper, 1992a). The automobile industry also showed a severe slump in 1991 and 1992 (Cooper, 1992b).

After the initial slump triggered by the Gulf War, the economy in the United States began to show some sign of improvement. The housing market began to slowly rebound in the Northeast due to reduced interest rates and the expectations that hundreds of thousands of Gulf War military personnel would be eligible for government housing loans and subsequently buy houses and boost the market (Kindleberger, 1992). By 1993 there were indications that the United States economy might be climbing out of the recession. The dollar rose against most major world currencies as the United States gross

domestic product rose 1.8 percent (“Dollar,” 1993). Although the economy did seem to be improving, the United States was still not as economically strong as it had been in the past. Economic growth was slow, unemployment was still at an all-time high, and American consumers were still uncertain about the future (“Job Losses,” 1994).

Although the United States may have appeared like an economically strong country, during the early 1990s, it was not the economic powerhouse it had been in the past. Despite massive government deficits and the ongoing recession, the United States continued to pour out money during the economic slump. In 1991, the United States canceled \$14 billion of Egypt’s debt despite its own financial hardship (Kaslow, 1991b). The United States also paid out approximately \$15 billion of the American taxpayers’ money to fund the Persian Gulf War (Kranish, 1991) and sought out \$4.8 billion to fund a 75 bomber fleet (Moss, 1991). Despite its own record-high deficits, the United States continued to distribute money to other countries or to allocate significant funds for military projects. This staggering amount of spending suggests that the United States was spending money as if it was still economically strong, despite the ongoing financial problems it faced at home.

While the United States tried to pull itself out of a heavy recession, economies were booming elsewhere in the world. The value of the Japanese yen trumped other world currency, including the U.S. dollar (“Dollar,” 1993). Other countries were reported to have stronger economies because they were export-driven. Great Britain, Canada, Germany and Japan each exported approximately 19 percent of their gross national product, whereas the United States only exported about 7 percent (Kaslow, 1991a). In addition, the United States lagged behind these countries in research and

funding to advance production techniques, which hindered economic growth. Furthermore, while the United States was trying to make ends meet, Europe was revolutionizing its economic structure. Europe wished to take its current economic community and expand it to a single unified European market (Cooper, 1998). By 1990, the European Union had a 12 country membership and looked to add new markets to its ranks. In 1992, the union agreed to establish a common currency to strengthen its economic unity. Some United States investors even poured their money into Germany rather than the United States because it had a much stronger economy with higher interest rates (Alm, 1991). These events suggest that Europe was steadily becoming an economic powerhouse, while the United States was trying to regain its economic footing. Clearly the United States did not have economic superiority over the rest of the world.

As with technology, ethnocentrism and nationalism were also present in the ways in which the United States handled its economic issues. Though the citizens of the United States faced a serious economic crisis at home, the government continued to distribute large sums of money to other nations. This action helped the country exert its economic power over other countries. The actions of the United States during the early 1990s were ethnocentric because they demonstrated the superiority of the United States economy over nations, despite the economic slump that its citizens faced at home.

Foreign Relations

While the technological and economic status of the United States remained uncertain, so did its relationship with the rest of the world. One of the pressing issues the country faced in the early 1990s was establishing its international role in the post-Cold War era. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left the United States the sole world

superpower, and the United States had to decide if it should get involved with world nations in conflict (Cooper, 1993). Early in 1991, the nation had already become involved in the Persian Gulf War when it sent troops into Iraq after Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait. The American forces stopped the Iraqi invasion and the United States considered itself victorious. After its success in Iraq, the United States had to consider if it should help police the world when it had troubles of its own back home.

Despite the economic hardships that the United States faced in the early 1990s, the country continued to become involved in foreign affairs. In 1991, President Bush extended \$2.5 billion credits to the Soviet Union for purchasing American agricultural commodities to help stave off famine the country (Cooper, 1991b). Also in 1991, the United States set aside \$400 million to help disarm Soviet nuclear missiles and played an active role in helping the nation disarm (Grier, 1991). In 1992, Bush also led a campaign to send aid to the starving people of Somalia (Cooper, 1993). The United States also had a military presence in South Korea. American troops were stationed there in the early 1990s so they could come to the country's aid should a military dispute with North Korea erupt (Marshall, 1992).

Regardless of the seemingly positive influence of United States involvement in other countries, politicians and the American public debated to what degree the country should become involved in the affairs of other nations. During his tenure as president, George H.W. Bush had expressed a need for the United States to act as global police when he sent U.S. troops into Iraq to stop the invasion of Kuwait. When President Clinton took office in 1993, however, he did not take the same view as his predecessor. Unlike President Bush, President Clinton was more focused on the state of affairs within

the United States, particularly the dwindling economy, and wanted to cut back on the country's involvement in unnecessary foreign commitments. The debate about the country's role as protector of the rest of the world came to a head shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union. After the fall, several conflicts erupted in the Balkans, caused mainly by tensions between the Bosnians and the Serbs and between Slovenia and Croatia. While many experts felt that military intervention from the United States would be the only way to stop the conflict, during his first years as president, Clinton remained unwilling to send American military troops into the area of conflict, except on peacekeeping missions. Though many Americans applauded him for maintaining his focus on affairs within the United States, others criticized him for his decision not to become involved (Cooper, 1993).

The debate over whether the United States should become involved in world affairs was fueled by a number of events that occurred in the early 1990s. Americans debated whether the United States should have involved itself in the Persian Gulf War. Prior to the war, the Bush and Reagan administrations had tried to win Saddam Hussein's favor by establishing a grain and oil trade with Iraq and ignoring the country's brutality against other nations and its own citizens (Wines, 1990). Government officials insisted this relationship would ultimately serve the United States' interests, but critics said this relationship had helped Iraq grow in strength by stimulating its economy and leaving atrocities unpunished. When President Bush decided to take offensive action against Iraq, members of Congress were skeptical of this decision because they felt that Bush had not adequately explained how the United States' interference in Iraq was vital to American interests (Rasky, 1990). These events led Americans to question the country's

intentions in Iraq. While some felt that the country had a moral obligation to the people of Kuwait, others felt the war was only justifiable if it served the interests of the United States (DowdWashington, 1991).

Although the United States had declared victory in the Persian Gulf War and had successfully driven Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, it was not without failure and consequences. Not only was Saddam Hussein still in power, he also led his troops to a crushing defeat of Shiite and Kurd forces that had rebelled after Hussein's troops were driven from Kuwait (Arraf, 1993). While an intervention from the United States might have yielded a victory against Saddam Hussein, the United States troops stood by and did nothing. Though this would seem to be an indication of the need for interference from the United States, future events suggested otherwise.

In 1993, eighteen United States troops that had been deployed to Somalia on a peacekeeping mission were trapped and killed in a gun battle in Mogadishu. This event led to the retreat of 200 United States military engineers when they were threatened by violence in Haiti (Aldinger, 1993). These surges of violence led Americans to question whether the country had sent troops to Somalia to aid the hunger victims or to spread democracy. While some United States interventions seemed to help other countries, others were met with failure, leaving Americans to question whether the United States should involve itself in the affairs of other nations.

Another significant event of the early 1990s that fueled the debate over American involvement in foreign affairs was the World Trade Center Bombing. On February 26, 1993, a car bomb exploded in the parking garage of one of the towers of the World Trade Center in New York City (Mashberg & Rezendes, 1993). The explosion killed six people

and injured more than 600 others. Though the motive for the bombing was unknown at the time, the journalists and law-enforcement officials speculated that it was an act of terrorism fueled by grudges held by displaced Palestinians, power aspirations of Islamic fundamentalists or some other Middle Eastern conflict (Mitchell, 1993). For many political leaders, the World Trade Center bombing not only threatened the United States' security, it also fueled concerns that the country's continued involvement with other nations might instigate another such attack.

The issue of the United States' responsibility to help other nations remained a heated topic of debate throughout the early 1990s. The country appeared to be divided between those who felt Clinton was right to cut military spending and focus on domestic affairs and those who felt that the United States, as the last remaining superpower, had a responsibility to come to the aid of other nations and send in military force when necessary. Critics of President Clinton's foreign policy claimed that he only wanted to become involved with other countries if the United States had some stake in the outcome (Cooper, 1993) and that the country chose which conflicts to become involved in based on how such involvement might benefit the United States. Indeed, many nations looked to the United States as a leader in global diplomacy and felt that the country had a responsibility to help solve world problems, while others felt the United States should just leave well enough alone. Whatever the case, there was no denying that the United States had not achieved the foreign policy successes expected of a global superpower.

United States foreign policy in the early 1990s promoted the interests of the United States abroad. First, the nation demonstrated its nationalism by often only involving itself in global issues that served primarily its own interests. For example, the

United States government established a relationship with Saddam Hussein in Iraq to take advantage of Iraq's oil trade and bolster the United States economy. This foreign relationship advanced a nationalist agenda because it ignored the threat posed by trading resources with Hussein in favor of serving the interests of the United States. Though President Clinton was more concerned with national issues than foreign affairs in the early years of his presidency, he nevertheless still sent American troops on peacekeeping and foreign aid missions to other countries. Along with articulating nationalist ideology, these missions also demonstrated ethnocentrism by showing that the United States was a superior nation and other nations needed its help to survive.

Culture

While the United States remained in conflict about how much it should intervene in the affairs of other countries on a military level, one facet of the United States was undeniably penetrating all corners of the globe. Though the country could not decide whether to send its troops to other countries, it had no qualms about disseminating its culture throughout the globe. American culture, with help from the mass media, has infused itself into countries worldwide. While some countries seem to embrace this culture with open arms, others view it with skepticism and worry about the adverse effects of American cultural infusion.

While the citizens of the world may debate the quality and benefits of American culture, it is undeniably a powerful force in the world. One area of American media that has penetrated countries across the globe is United States cinema. In 1993, the United States had a stronghold on global cinema. Blockbuster hits such as *Jurassic Park* had been distributed worldwide and the American movie industry was so pervasive that

industries such as the European film industry were at risk of dying out (Smith, 1993). American cinema was popular around the world because people in other countries were awed by the big-budget spectacular with state-of-the-art special effects (Sterritt, 1991). Aside from its widespread reach, American cinema also overshadowed productions from other countries in film competition. In 1992, the United States dominated the Cannes Film Festival in France, boasting a quarter of the total of films selected for the festival (Gumbel, 1992). An American film, *The Player*, took home the Palme d' Or, or Golden Palm, which is the festival's top honor. This victory was the third consecutive win at Cannes for American films. The United States had been so dominant at the festival that it had been nicknamed "Hollywood on the Riviera." Also in 1992, the United States took home the top honor in the Berlin Film Festival (Heinrich, 1992). Though at the time, India led the world in movie production, the United States had still proven itself to be a strong cultural force across the globe.

If American cinema was a dominant cultural form, it paled in comparison to the influence of American television. In 1992, American television was one of the nation's biggest exports and was widely popular because people from other countries felt that they could watch it to gain a look into what life is really like in America (Heitman, 1992). American television in the early 1990s was a dominant force across the globe. In India which is the world leader in movie production, people flocked to television sets to catch satellite broadcasts of American shows such as *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Remington Steele* and *M*A*S*H* (Gargan, 1994). Germans were likewise fixated on American television. Shows such as *General Hospital*, *Mr. Ed*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Murphy Brown*, *Bonanza* and *Beavis and Butthead* ranked among the most popular in Germany

(Kinzer, 1994). The United States exported its television to countries across the globe, selling \$2.8 billion of programming in Europe alone (Hift, 1991) and by 1994, 7.3 million Europeans watched MTV every day (Neuffer, 1994). The pervasiveness of American television and strength of American broadcast technology allowed American culture to spread to countries worldwide. The popularity of American television suggests that other nations welcomed this American programming.

Not only was American media a dominant global cultural force, so too were American cultural products. Disney staked its claim on foreign soil in 1992 when it opened EuroDisneyland, the first European Disney theme park (Lavin, 1992). At this time, Disney also already had a theme park operating in Tokyo, Japan. Theme parks were not the only American cultural export. Fast food restaurants such as McDonalds were also cropping up worldwide. By 1991, McDonalds had more than 3,000 foreign locations in 53 countries and was looking to expand into Africa and Eastern Europe (Pendleton, 1991). Across the globe, American cultural products such as Pizza Hut, rap music, Coca-Cola, MTV, Dunkin Donuts, Baskin Robbins, Harlequin romance novels, American comic books, country music and American sports, to name a few, have become integrated into foreign cultures and become popular worldwide (Neuffer, 1994).

While the proliferation of American cultural products in foreign countries across the globe would seem to suggest that these countries are openly embracing these cultural influences, this may not be the case. Though Hollywood cinema flourished in the early 1990s, it was also met with heavy criticism. At the Berlin festival where an American film won the highest honor, critics complained that the United States only won because some of the newer European films were not eligible for the festival and therefore the

United States had virtually no competition (Heinrich, 1992). European filmmakers criticized Hollywood as being a business venture rather than an entity that produces any real art (“European Filmmakers,” 1993). In addition, many moviegoers criticized American cinema for lacking any real depth. Though American movies were still immensely popular, they were in grave danger of being overshadowed by productions from other countries.

American movies were not the only cultural media criticized by other countries; American television was also met with heavy criticism. Germany blamed the show *Beavis and Butthead* for the increasing violence and rebelliousness among its youth (Kinzer, 1994). England had not had a widely popular American television show since *Dallas* in 1984 because it desired shows with British context (Darnton, 1994). Foreign countries were no longer as enamored with American television as they had once been, and many countries sought to produce their own content. While American television was present and popular in many countries in the early 1990s, there were strong indicators that its popularity was dwindling. In almost every European country, the most popular shows were the locally produced ones and not the American imports (Hift, 1991). Europeans were upset with Americans for shutting European shows out of the American market and responded by imposing quotas on the amount of television that their countries could broadcast (Hift). American television did not have as strong of a presence in other parts of the world as it did in Europe, so the revamping of Europe’s television industry seriously threatened America’s television presence European countries.

Cultural products from the United States also faced criticism from foreign countries. Although EuroDisneyland was a popular tourist attraction, many residents of

France were angered by its presence, even going so far as to call it a “Cultural Chernobyl,” suggesting that Americans were on the brink of a cultural invasion of France (Lavin, 1992). Canada also rallied against American culture in the early 1990s by attempting to oust certain American cultural products from the country. For example, an American country music station operating in Canada was evicted from the country to make room for a Canadian-owned country music station (Trueheart, 1994). Canada also levied an 80 percent excise tax against American-owned *Sports Illustrated Canada*. The American popular culture invasion seriously worried countries across the globe, especially those in Europe. Many European countries had tried to limit the influence of American culture because they felt that Americans embraced the dark side of life, which included things such as murder, rape and sex crimes (Neuffer, 1994). Europeans, however, admitted that while they may not have enjoyed the infiltration of American culture, it was so pervasive that they knew they could never entirely rid themselves of it.

A way in which the interests of the United States were advanced in the early 1990s is in the country’s dissemination of American culture. American culture was pervasive in other countries because the United States built American stores, sold American products, and distributed American movies and television in other nations. This distribution of American culture advanced nationalism because it served the interests of American corporations and media while ignoring the desires of other countries. Despite other nation’s attempts to block American cultural influences, the United States continued to spread its culture worldwide. It also demonstrated ethnocentrism by showcasing American culture as superior to that of other nations, even when those nations did not want any cultural influence from the United States.

Conclusion

The early 1990s were a time of tension and change in the United States. Though the Soviet Union had fallen and the United States was the last remaining superpower, that status came with a heavy burden. Many countries looked to the United States for economic and political assistance, while others criticized the country's interference in world affairs. In addition, while American culture was pervasive abroad, countries throughout Europe and Asia viewed American culture with disdain and attempted to corral its influence on their own cultures. Meanwhile, the United States itself faced turmoil at home. The economy was in a deep recession and the value of the dollar was weak against foreign currency. Technology was on the rise, but was not always well-received by Americans. In addition, a lack of funding threatened to shorten the United States' lead over other countries in technology research. In the early 1990s, the United States' globalization was contested and not guaranteed to secure the country's position as a global superpower.

While the nation's superiority in the early 1990s was called into question, this analysis of the condition before and during the time period in which the show aired suggests that nationalist and ethnocentric ideas and policies were already in place in other arenas of American life. In the technology sector, the United States declared its superiority over other nations by taking credit for the Human Genome Project and attempting to implement technology that would force American broadcasts on other nations without their consent. Though the country was not necessarily superior in its attempts, it nevertheless continued to attempt to exert technological dominance on other nations. Similar policies were in place in regards to the economy. Though the United

States faced financial hardship and was not necessarily economically superior to other nations, the country still presumed authority over other nations by financially involving itself in the affairs of other countries. American foreign policy also bolstered a nationalist and ethnocentric world view among Americans because it presumed that the United States was responsible for the welfare of other nations. American interference in world affairs suggested that the American way of handling international conflict was the superior way. Finally, the pervasiveness of American culture promoted nationalism and ethnocentrism by pushing American cultural products and media into other countries, which also sent the message to Americans that the United States knows what is best and its culture is superior. Nationalism and ethnocentrism were already in place in the United States at the beginning of the 1990s and the country's efforts to exert its dominance and proclaim its superiority over other nations served to reinforce these ideologies.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Episodes featuring Yakko, Wakko, Dot and those featuring Pinky and the Brain in the first season of *Animaniacs* carry strong messages about the United States' position in the world. These cartoons portray the United States as a superior nation, especially with respect to technology, economy, culture and military force. Though the show paints a picture of the United States as a powerful and respected country, analysis of the historical and cultural conditions of the time in which the episodes first aired suggests that the country's dominance was in jeopardy and its influence on other nations was not always welcomed. Indeed, the country was strong in many respects. Technology was on the rise, American culture was spreading abroad, and the country had declared itself victorious in a war with Iraq. However, the economy was in turmoil, technology faced tough competition from other nations, and the country's spreading of democracy and culture was met with skepticism worldwide. The conflict between what the show suggested about the United States in the early 1990s and the actual state of affairs in the country points to the ideological messages in the text. The show promotes ethnocentrism and a nationalist ideology that is problematic and potentially dangerous for ordinary Americans who do not have access to political authority. Further, these ethnocentric messages could have negative implications for other nations who do not wish to be subjected to American interests.

In order to understand the nationalist ideology in the show, it is important to first understand how the show's use of comedy functions as a form of celebration of the

United States rather than as a critique. *Animaniacs* is, for the most part, a comedic cartoon that would seem to offer heavy amounts of satire. According to Bogel (2001), satire is "art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation" (p. 1). Satire uses laughter as a weapon to criticize a certain subject. Though *Animaniacs* pokes fun at everything from historical figures and events to cultural products to media and entertainment, it does not necessarily function satirically. The jokes in the show appear in the form of friendly teasing rather than harsh criticism and function more as parodic allusions designed to amuse the audience rather than offer a critique of the subjects reflected. The portrayal of country music in "Bubba Bo Bob Brain," for example, pokes fun at the genre and would seem to suggest that country music is a mindless form of entertainment. At the same time, however, the genre is seen broadcast worldwide, which positions it as enjoyable for everyone. Another example lies in the Yakko, Wakko and Dot episodes. On the surface, the characters appear to be "ugly Americans," who are loud, obnoxious and ethnocentric. The characters, however, are always shown as having a positive influence on their surroundings, which praises rather than criticizes the idea of the ugly American. Satire in *Animaniacs* functions not as a form of serious critique, but rather as a form of flattery. The light-hearted jabs at the United States and its culture seem to praise it with friendly teasing more than criticize it. While friendly parody functions to amuse viewers, it also has negative implications. This type of parody praises the United States rather than offering a critique of historical conditions, which sends viewers messages that are contradictory to social reality.

One finding from my analysis of *Animaniacs* is that most of the messages in the show did not function as homologies to historic events during the time the program aired. In fact, the messages in the show contradict the actual historical conditions in the United States in the early 1990s. There was, however, a homology to nationalist and ethnocentric policies in place in the United States during the time the show aired. The messages in the show and the actual conditions in the United States both demonstrate that the United States was attempting to promote its own interests and exert its superiority over other nations. This homology functions ideologically by upholding already existing nationalist and ethnocentric beliefs in the United States. For the most part, however, depictions of the United States in the show mask reality by sending messages contradictory to what was happening outside of the text at the time the show aired and encouraging the promotion of American interests abroad.

Distortions

A comparison between the way the United States is portrayed in the show and the actual events of the time period when the show aired reveals discrepancies between the messages in the text and reality. The representation of genetic engineering in the show is a reverse of the actual conditions in the United States at the time. Though in actuality genetic research in the United States was working towards improved health and quality of life for all people, in *Animaniacs* it is portrayed as a form of power held only by the United States. Furthermore, no foreign technology is shown on the show, which implies that the United States was the most scientifically advanced nation in the world and is solely responsible for the advances in genetic research. In the show, genetic engineering

is a means to power for the United States, while in reality it was used to improve conditions of life worldwide.

In addition, portrayals of communication technology in the show do not reflect reality. In the show, communication technology is not a means for greater communication within the United States; rather, it is an avenue for world domination. This portrayal of technology is a reversal of the actual state of communications in the early 1990s. *Animaniacs* celebrates the use of American technology's use in spreading American broadcasts to other countries. In actuality, other nations were working to find ways to block or filter messages broadcast from American satellites. Rather than reflect the actual historical conditions in the United States, the show functions as a means for encouraging American support for using the nation's communication technology to spread American interests abroad.

Not only does the show carry messages of technological dominance, it also suggests that the United States was an economic powerhouse in the early 1990s. Though the nation faced serious financial crisis at the time the first season of *Animaniacs* aired, the show gave no indication of such turmoil. In fact, quite the opposite was true. While Americans may have been hopeful during the recession, consumer confidence was still extremely low during this time period. The depiction of America's strong economy in *Pinky and the Brain* carries the message that the country did have a strong economy at the time, which in turn sends an encouraging message to consumers to bolster their confidence in the economy. The absence of a depiction of people working hard at their jobs downplays the job crisis that the country was facing at the time. Because people in the cartoon do not have to obtain jobs to earn money, the show portrays unemployment as

irrelevant. The Yakko, Wakko and Dot episodes also contain messages of encouragement to consumers. By bombarding the people they encounter with American products, Yakko, Wakko and Dot send a positive message about consumerism by promoting American products as desirable. The narratives about the economy mask economic reality, endorse consumerism, and bolster the idea of the United States as an economically strong nation.

While the United States was struggling with its technological advances and economic recession, it also faced questions about its role in the world. While some American policy makers believed the United States had a responsibility to act as a police officer for the rest of the world, others felt that it was not the country's responsibility to become involved in the affairs of other countries. *Animaniacs* takes the stance that not only is the United States more physically powerful than other nations, but also that the country has a responsibility to take on global issues. In addition, the show suggests that this foreign involvement always yields a positive outcome. The depictions of foreign relations in the show offer yet another reversal of reality. The messages in the text and the actual dialogues about the United States' involvement abroad contradict each other. Because tensions among the United States and other countries were high in the early 1990s, *Animaniacs* again serves as a means to mask the negative outcomes for the United States and other nations such as Iraq in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War. Also, the show's portrayal of the positive outcomes of American intervention ignores the ways in which the United States created greater tensions in places like Iraq and Somalia as a result of our intervention there. By portraying the country as militaristically strong and

beneficial to every nation with which it interferes (as if it is the world's hero), the show encourages support of the country's interference in world affairs.

Finally, the show suggests the dominance of American culture. *Animaniacs* suggests that not only are American products pervasive across the globe, they are also embraced worldwide. In part, the representation of the pervasiveness of American culture worldwide does reflect reality; American television, movies and cultural artifacts such as restaurants, theme parks and products were cropping up in countries around the world. Such cultural objects, however, were not as well-received as the show would have it appear. The depiction of American culture abroad in *Animaniacs* carries the same messages as presented in the depictions of technology, economy and foreign relations. Again, the show is a vehicle used to quell tensions within the United States and send the message that American culture is both dominant and well-liked in the rest of the world.

Implications

The messages in *Animaniacs* about technology, economy, foreign relations and culture encourage a nationalist ideology that has dangerous implications for American viewers who are not in a position of power. Further, the shows' celebration of ethnocentric beliefs encourages bigotry among viewers who interact with members of other countries. The show's depictions of American technological research suggests that American technology is superior by ignoring the contributions of foreign scientists. This depiction is dangerous because it encourages an ethnocentric view of American technology. In addition, the show celebrates the use of technology for spreading American ideals worldwide. It endorses the idea that Americans should support the spread of the United States' interests abroad, even to nations who are unwilling recipients

of such messages. Not only is this depiction ethnocentric, it is nationalist because it celebrates the interests of the United States while ignoring the interests of other nations. This nationalist ideology poses a danger because it reinforces the idea that Americans should cheer on policies that ignore the interests of other nations when in fact such policies might foster conflict with other nations.

The distortion of state of the United States economy also has negative implications, especially for middle or working class viewers. American economic strength depicted in the show ignores the financial hardships that Americans faced in the early 1990s. The show celebrates consumerism and downplays the recession, leaving viewers with the message that their livelihood is secure and they should spend money without concern. These messages leave Americans vulnerable to financial hardship because viewers may not realize that their finances are in danger due to the struggling economy and rising unemployment rates. Further, the show fosters ethnocentrism by suggesting that the American economy is so superior to other nation's economies that the United States has economic control over the rest of the world. These messages of economic control also contribute to a nationalist ideology by suggesting that since the United States is the most economically powerful nation, then its economic interests are the most important. The belief in the superiority of the nation's economy is dangerous because it justifies the use of economic power for controlling other countries even though the nation did not necessarily have the economic strength implied by the show.

Another negative implication of the nationalist ideology promoted in the show lies in the show's portrayal of foreign relations. *Animaniacs* distorts how the United States instigated conflicts in other countries, interfered in nations that did not want

American intervention, and left countries with which we had interfered, such as Iraq and Somalia, in a bad state. The messages in the show justify American involvement abroad, even when that involvement leaves other countries in a worse condition than they were before the country interfered, such as with American famine relief efforts in Somalia that instigated conflict. These messages validate extreme nationalist views and defend the support of leaders who only institute foreign policies that serve the interests of the United States. The show also fosters ethnocentric beliefs by suggesting that the interests of the United States are more important than the interests of other nations. This willful ignorance of the interests of other countries also contributes to the view that Americans should support foreign policies that instigate conflict with other countries rather than providing assistance. In addition, this extreme nationalism encourages the belief that Americans should support any foreign policy that serves the interests of the United States, regardless of the consequences it may have for ordinary Americans or other nations.

Finally, depictions of American culture as superior to other cultures also have negative implications for viewers. *Animaniacs* ignores the benefits such as education and enrichment that people can attain by experiencing other cultures. Also the show may justify ethnocentric views of America, which contributes to the idea that discrimination is acceptable. The show's depictions of American culture also promotes a nationalist ideology by showcasing the importance of American culture and ignoring the cultural interests of other nations. Further, the messages in *Animaniacs* support the infusion of American culture worldwide even though such pervasiveness of American culture could overshadow or negatively influence other cultures across the globe.

Conclusion

The messages in *Animaniacs* ultimately contribute to a world view that promotes the interest of the United States over other nations and justifies American ethnocentrism. The ideological messages in the show are especially important because the show is a cartoon. Gitlin (1983) points out that people are more susceptible to ideological messages in television programs as opposed to other forms of communication because their guard is down when they watch television. Cartoons leave viewers especially vulnerable to ideological messages because viewers who perceive cartoons as mere children's programming will have their guard down even further. The cartoon format of *Animaniacs* contributes to its position as a powerful ideological medium. Cartoons also function as particularly powerful outlets for advancing ideology because the messages in cartoons are bound only by the imaginations of their creators. In other words, anything is possible in a cartoon, so there is no limit to the ideological messages that this form of television show can carry.

In its portrayal of American technology, economics, foreign relations and culture, *Animaniacs* offers a distorted view of the historical and cultural conditions of the country during the early 1990s. Though the United States was viewed as the last remaining world superpower and had long been highly regarded for its scientific prowess, financial strength, militaristic power and impressive culture, this positive view was called into question at the beginning of the decade. The portrayal of the United States in the cartoon promotes an idyllic view of American society and masks reality in order encourage a positive view of the nation and send the message to Americans that the United States was still the most powerful country of the world in terms of its technology, economy, foreign

relations and culture. This type of ideology promoted in media texts is dangerous because it tells viewers that the American way is the right way and upholds the promotion of American interests even though those interests may ultimately engender extreme nationalistic beliefs and ethnocentrism among the American population.

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