
Thomas Doherty’s book promises an analysis of the relationship between Hollywood and Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1939. Hollywood and Hitler accomplishes this task quite well even without offering any striking new interpretive or archival discoveries. Basing his research mostly on trade press and a few American archives, Doherty offers a balanced account of Hollywood’s dealing with the Nazis: Warner Bros. Studios was the only major production company to sever all connections with Germany after 1933, when the company’s Berlin representative, Philip Kaufman, died in Stockholm, Sweden—possibly because of a beating he had received at the hands of Nazi thugs. In mid-1939, Warner Bros. was also the first studio to release feature films that directly, or via clear historical metaphors, attacked Nazism: William Dieterle’s Juárez (1939) made Louis Napoleon III and his expansionist adventures in Mexico during the 1860s into quasi-forerunners of Adolf Hitler and his Lebensraum policies; Confessions of a Nazi Spy (1939) openly targeted the Nazis and their American supporters.

The other major studios were much more timid. After 1933 Radio-Keith-Orpheum Pictures (rko) continued to do business in Germany, albeit using somewhat unofficial channels, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios stayed open for business, and Paramount Pictures and Twentieth Century–Fox Pictures even produced newsreels about Nazi Germany that were, in one of Doherty’s many felicitous turns of phrase, “more lapdogs than watchdogs” (p. 84). None of this is new, but Doherty adds valuable information about the margins of Hollywood, including newsreels, March of Time installments, and radical documentaries such as Joris Ivens’s The Spanish Earth (1937) and Herbert Kline’s Crisis (1939). The meekness of most major studios toward Hitlerism as well as their eagerness to pursue profits at almost any cost is even more striking considering that as the decade progressed many studio employees gathered in organizations such as the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League and clamored for the making of openly anti-Nazi features. Doherty refrains, however, from hinting at any actual collaborationism between Nazis and movie moguls. The major studios did what other U.S. businesses were doing: pursuing profits at the expense of sound politics and ethics. Part of the blame for Hollywood’s timidity lies with the Production Code Administration (pca) and its leader, Joseph Breen, who often construed the “national feelings” section of the code as prohibiting of any criticism of any nation. Until the end of 1938 this effectively made the pca seal of approval unavailable to films that leveled criticism at Hitler and his regime.

Overall, I find this interpretation balanced. There is no Pollyannaish illusion about capitalism’s propensity to set ethics above profits. Doherty is correct: Warner Bros. actually did better than most American for-profit companies. Thorough and elegantly written, Doherty’s book would serve well as undergraduate reading. I am not sure that it would work as well in a graduate seminar: there is too little that is new here and too scant a discussion of the previous work of the community of inquirers that have long worked in this field.

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Negotiating Empire is an aptly titled monograph that does not immediately advertise its revisionist impulses. Latin Americanists will not miss the allusion to Mary Kay Vaughan’s Cultural Politics in Revolution (1997), but a familiarity with Puerto Rico’s historiography may be required to recognize the full import of the reference. Disavowing the “oppression-resistance dichotomy” that persists in many scholarly and cultural nationalist circles, Solsiree del Moral maintains that Puerto Rico’s teachers mediated between the U.S.-run colonial state, students, and citizens (p. 12). Rather than denounce the Americanization
and uplift policies of government officials, educators embraced aspects of the project. Even so, teachers, who were predominantly middle-class women led by older men of higher status, refused to cooperate in the creation of “tropical Yankees” (p. 7). Instead, they embraced a “neo-Lamarckian eugenic language” of regeneration, and they proposed notions of identity and citizenship that could operate within the burgeoning U.S. empire (p. 5). For del Moral, the teachers’ strategy rehearsed nineteenth-century proautonomy reformism.

“Centering Puerto Rico in historical narratives of U.S. empire,” del Moral’s account is not strictly national or insular (p. xii). The opening chapter explores the establishment of a public education system intended to showcase American know-how and rescue Puerto Ricans from degeneracy. Del Moral’s deliberate review of policies and personnel goes beyond highlighting continuities across American neocolonies to specify the location assigned to Puerto Ricans within a racial hierarchy that ranked Hawaiians, Filipinos, and Native Americans, among others. Before Puerto Ricans became citizens of the United States in 1917, “US colonial officials imagined a strong comparison between the experience of managing freed blacks’ path to civilization via education and the potential path Puerto Ricans in the US empire might be allowed to pursue” (p. 53).

Del Moral makes a strong case for the centrality of “the Diaspora” to teachers’ citizen-building projects. Faced with a 1935 report, financed by the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, which found Puerto Rican schoolchildren in New York deficient beyond remediation, island-based educators recoiled. Assistant Commissioner of Education Pedro Cebollero challenged eugenicists and immigration restrictionists who pinned retardation, delinquency, and other failings on an inconsistently imagined Puerto Rican heritage. He cautioned that immigrants were not necessarily representative of the populations in their home countries. For Cebollero and other “elite teachers,” New York’s Puerto Ricans came to represent the “‘inverse’ qualities of the island’s values and characteristics” (p. 149). The claim is provocative and illuminating, but del Moral does not historicize “diaspora” systematically.

Negotiating Empire is deeply researched. Del Moral goes beyond reports and official declarations to explore teachers’ union meeting minutes, education journals, curricular materials, and correspondence from students and parents. Her rigorous account of the shifting meanings of “Americanization” in Puerto Rico and elsewhere is one of the notable contributions of this carefully crafted book. Students of neocolonialism, Latin America, and Latino history will find that its forthright style and rich contextualization make this title suitable for classroom use.

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This timely and important book fills an important gap in the historical literature of the history of U.S. foreign policy, and it provides a very good overview of the origins of U.S. public diplomacy. With the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Justin Hart justifiably notes that U.S. public diplomacy has become central to U.S. foreign policy, focusing on questions such as “Why do they hate us?” and “How can the United States ‘win over’ the ‘Arab street’?” However, very few have discussed the historical origins of U.S. public diplomacy. This book, a useful summary of the origins of public diplomacy, will probably be the standard one-volume study for years to come.

Hart does a very good job in situating the narrative in World War II and the Cold War while discussing how the different players in the U.S. government bureaucracy perceived of the need for a new program in public diplomacy. Moreover, his analysis does a fine job discussing Congress’s role in the origins of public diplomacy. Hart consulted impressive sources, and his writing is graceful and clear.

However, Hart’s fine analysis leaves readers with questions: Were the motives of