A cultural history through the comics of Donald Duck and friends

GRAY, Joel

DOI: 10.1111/jacc.13556

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

A cultural history through the comics of Donald Duck and friends

Joel Gray

Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK

Correspondence
Joel Gray, Sheffield Hallam University, Pond Street, Sheffield, UK.
Email: joel.gray@shu.ac.uk

Donald Duck is one of world's biggest celebrities—a celeactor—which is defined as "…a fictional character who…becomes an institutionalized feature of popular culture." (Rojek, 2001, 14). Donald debuted as an animated character in 1934 and has since become one of The Walt Disney Company's (TWDC) most widely used pieces of transmedia intellectual property (IP), and a cultural icon (Dorfman, 2018). He is omnipresent across the world; television, film, theme park attractions, walkaround/costumed characters, supermarket food items, designer goods, apparel, comics, and beyond. Disney's most famous characters often emerge from television and film media, but the overlooked mid-20th century cultural phenomenon of comics has produced some of Disney's most internationally admired IP (Piepenbring, 2019). This includes Donald's family; nephews Huey, Dewey, and Louie, his uncle Scrooge McDuck, and more minor characters such as Grandma Duck and cousin Gladstone Gander. In the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, Disney's IP was being used in comics around the world: Donald Duck and Scrooge McDuck were the biggest stars of the stable, and in 1960 alone the best-selling comic in the United States was the *Uncle Scrooge* title—with over 1 million copies sold (Comichron).

By the 1970s, Disney's comics were not selling in the same volumes as they once had in America, and the most recent run of Uncle Scrooge comics of the past 15 years placed it as the 300th bestselling title in the United States (Bryan, 2021, 138). In international markets, they remain big sellers and have become cultural mainstays. 90 years on from the character's first appearance, Donald Duck comics are still sold in significant quantities across continental Europe and South America and have enjoyed commercial success in Asia (Mittermeier, 2020, 130). These characters' legacies in Anglophone markets might be reliant on television animation, but in many countries, they are cultural icons because of their printed comics presence first and foremost.

During Disney's first 100 years of operation, society has seen seismic changes: the dominance of the capitalist mode of production, changing attitudes to gender, sex, and sexuality, increasing demands for equality for the "Global Majority" (Campbell-Stephens, 2020), and fast-paced developments in technology, science, and knowledge. This paper aims to explore how some of these changes in society during Disney's first 100 years have been reflected in the Duck family comics—examining how these characters and narratives have changed (or not) over time and how this correlates with wider society. The paper will look at these themes through the lens of key characters and stories over time in each subsection.

GYRO GEARLOOSE AND REPRESENTATIONS OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Starting with the category of science, technology, and knowledge in Disney's Duck comics, official Disney Legend Carl Barks (D23.com) is who many consider to be one of the most popular Duck comic storytellers of all time (Bryan, 2021, 5–7) and the creator of most of the characters, used science and technology in his stories in the 1950s and 1960s. This was a period of great American investment in technology (NASA). The same year that NASA was founded in 1958, Barks published one of his most famous comic stories *The Twenty Four Carat Moon* (Barks, 2020). The story centered around a space race of competing peoples to be first to land on the moon; it represented the most modern technology and ideas of its time (a jet-fuelled rocket being launched into space from Earth). Indeed, Barks felt so strongly about the concept of technology and science that he created an inventor character for the Duck stories: Gyro Gearloose. Gyro was (and still is) a supporting character in most stories that he features in, and his usual purpose is being Scrooge's go-to tech expert and inventor. Gyro has been a constant in the Duck stories and his inventions are often at the vanguard of discovery

and technology—something which has progressed quickly over time—particularly post-WW2 to the present day (Roser, 2023). In Cerasi's (2019) *Ducktales: Monsters and Mayhem* Gyro is seen engaging on a social media platform called *QuackChat* (a recognizable parody of real-life platform *SnapChat*)—an example of the most recent of technologies represented in the stories at the time they are published. There are times when Gyro's inventions border on the unbelievable, perhaps because they seem ahead of the then-contemporary technological frontier. An example of this is the use of robots and artificial intelligence in the 1950s and 60s including an artificially intelligent "future forecasting" machine in *Uncle Scrooge #17* from 1957, several robots spanning multiple issues including the famous *Uncle Scrooge #58* from 1965 with giant robots used for civic duties in the city—these inventions and technological ideas did not represent the science of the day and were more akin to science fiction commonly seen in movies (Dieter & Gessler, 2018, 59) (Grand Comics Database, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

When technology is used in this way (i.e., as science fiction) it can result in cognitive estrangement (Parrinder, 1999, 29). This allows storytellers like Barks to use characters and themes (such as new technologies) to give the audience the space to reflect on contemporary society, its decision-making, and its ideological drive. The 1950s and 1960s stories featuring characters using such tech and gadgets could create space for the audience to reflect on the use of automation or how society uses technology more broadly. These reflections could result in many different conclusions, some being positive such as the ingenuity (and superiority) of American science in the Cold War era, and some could be negative in that technology such as automation impacts the American labor market. Both of these viewpoints were part of the discussions and debates in 1950s America (Wartzman, 2017, 191) and as such the comics represented real-life observations made by American society (Telotte, 2008, 81)—and this is evident in stories in both *Uncle Scrooge #17* and *Uncle Scrooge #58* which specifically reflect this zeitgeist. Ophir and Jamieson (2021, 1009) state that media exposure to science and technology can shape society's perceptions. Arguably then, if the representation of American science in these comic stories is positive, then that is likely to shape the audience's perception that science in America is positive—Belk (1987, 35) finds that almost all representations of science and technology by Gyro are positive. This could be particularly pertinent in the 1950s and 1960s as the Cold War with Russia was often debated within the paradigm of science and technology, and in turn, science and technology enjoyed huge investment and expansion from the state and private sector (Oreskes & Krige, 2014, 16) and became a talking point for American society. The emergence of science and technology and its representations in Duck comics (and media more broadly) is evidence that this theme is a dominant and consistent element of the post-WW2 American zeitgeist: from NASA, to Microsoft, to Facebook, to Apple, to Tesla, and beyond there is not a decade without American scientific or technological advancement and this constant development is represented in the Duck comics and characters. Science and technology are represented in the Duck comics in many positive instances—and often represents the technology of the day (i.e., it is not always science fiction); it is regularly modern and it is relatable to the audience and contemporary discussions; it has changed over time and is likely to continue to change as long as the comics are printed.

LUDWIG VON DRAKE AND REPRESENTATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION

Knowledge and education are linked to science and technology and are also represented in the Duck comics; albeit less visibly. Where finance and business are concepts represented by Scrooge, then knowledge and education are represented by another of Donald's uncles: Professor Ludwig Von Drake who debuted on television and comics in 1961. Although Ludwig's individual US comic series only lasted for four issues (INDUCKS), which is a miniscule output when compared to Scrooge's decades long international run (which may infer that the stories of an adventure capitalist are more in demand than that of a university scholar), he has an origin more closely linked to Walt Disney himself than most characters. Ludwig was created to co-host with Walt the 1961 television show *The Wonderful World of Color* (Fanning, 2021)—at this point in Disney history, most characters were not directly developed by Walt anymore. During the television show, Ludwig was on-screen with Walt as a professor and expert, and this extended to his comics appearances. He became a frequent guest character in Scrooge and Donald comic stories; he was a go-to source for information, guidance, and expertise on a variety of topics from psychology to history and anthropology to music. He is the only main character educated to degree level (and has degrees in almost all academic areas of study) (Disney "Pico de Paperis"), and there is very little representation of education beyond high school in the history of Duck comics and characters. Therefore whilst the introduction of Ludwig as the poster-boy for knowledge by Walt himself is important and perhaps indicates the value Walt placed on learning and on educators as a profession, he is the lone scholar in the Anglophone comics (Gyro is never revealed as being a professor and is framed as an inventor specifically rather than an academic). However, aside from business leaders and entrepreneurs, there are seldom multiple examples of any profession or job in the Duck comics, and so in that respect, it is not an anomaly or especially unusual. 1960s America saw a change in higher education which included a widening of the participation of students and faculty from more diverse backgrounds, with an increased volume of graduates, universities were seen as more accessible to more Americans than ever before (Thelin, 2018, 163). Walt's specific involvement in the use and creation of Ludwig (Fanning, 2021), and his involvement in educational media more generally (D23.com "Education Films") might suggest his own interests in having a character involved in education—and so directly reflects the early 1960s American zeitgeist of a positive societal narrative around education.

However, as Reisch goes on to confirm, this newfound hope in higher education was short lived, as protests on issues such as civil rights to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and 1970s gripped the United States, and seemed to emerge from American universities, as expected, as places of intellectual curiosity and critical thinking (Reisch, 2023, 25). Universities were portrayed by right-wing media as being synonymous with left-wing activism, with views very critical of American society, government, and culture. This narrative of higher education perhaps put universities and academics out of favor with the more conservative sections of American society, especially as America leaned right toward the 1970s.

One thing that is particularly important in the discussion of Ludwig and representations of education is the variation in the different markets and territories of the Disney comics. In English language territories, Ludwig is a rare character—almost never appearing in original English language comic stories after the late 1960s. This is a stark contrast to Italy (one of the most buoyant markets for Duck comics; Bryan, 2021, 212), whereby he is used regularly in newly created comic stories within the Topolino or Paperino publications with his Italian language name Pico de' Paperis to this very day. Italy goes one step further and has three more characters whose profession is that of professor/academic: Professor Castle, Professor Marlin, and Professor Zapotec (Disney "Topi: Topolino, Pippo E Molti Altri"). Italy, like the United States, saw a similar expansion of higher education in the 1960s due to a liberalization of access (De Francesco, 1978), and continues to support courses and learning from across the curriculum including buoyant humanities, arts, and cultures programs (Carfagna, 2006, 18), unlike the Neoliberal Anglo-American higher education system focused on graduate salaries and business and STEM subjects. It could therefore be argued that Ludwig's enduring legacy and popularity in Italy are linked to Italian society being broadly and consistently positive about higher education and the profession of university scholar over the last six decades, and Ludwig's less frequent and lower profile in the United States linked to a more suspicious view of academics and universities from all sides of the political spectrum.

FENTON CRACKSHELL-CABRERA, THE THREE CABALLEROS, BOMBIE, AND REPRESENTATIONS OF ETHNICITY

Duck comics have been criticized for their representations of the Global Majority in the past (Dorfman & Mattelart, 1971 59), but these well-founded arguments from the 1970s are only part of the discussion needed today when we reflect on the full history to-date of Duck comics, stories, and characters. The 2018 IDW distributed *Ducktales* comic series features a diverse range of characters that make it a decidedly different comic product to that of the previous decades' Duck comics. An obvious example of this is the character Fenton Crackshell-Cabrera who is a Latinx character, with a prestigious job as a scientist working for Scrooge (and the secret identity of the armored superhero Gizmoduck). *Ducktales* main creative lead Frank Angones makes the point that "Fenton wasn't just a token Latino character. He was the MAIN SUPERHERO." (Angones, 2019). This character alone is groundbreaking for several reasons; generally, the ethnicity of most Duckburg residents is unconfirmed, and if it is known the characters are often of (white) European lineage (Rosa, 2016a, 171–176). This is the first time a character from the Global Majority is a member of the starring cast of characters. Not only that, but he has a professional and well-regarded career and represents his community in a positive way—deliberate choices from Angones—himself a Latinx creator. This contrasts to previous Disney representations of Latinx people and cultures from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s—whereby characters such as Panchito Pistoles (a rooster) and Jose Carioca (a parrot)—part of *The Three Caballeros* IP—are tropes of their Mexican and Brazilian cultural identities and have faced criticisms for the stereotypical representations of their communities. *The Three Caballeros* was a 1944 feature film and followed an earlier 1941 film *Saludos Amigos*—both products of Disney's output related to their affiliation with the United States Good Neighbor Program (Ratzlaff, 2023, 415)—aimed at fostering good relationships with Latin American nations using Donald as the average American (Bryan, 2021, 214) and goodwill ambassador. The popularity of Jose in Brazil has resulted in his own solo comic publication *Ze* (the abbreviated form of Jose in colloquial Portuguese), and this local adoration of this specific character should not be dismissed—perhaps the old-fashioned stereotype was not offensive to all Brazilians, and the Anglophone criticisms such as those from Spellacy (2006, 39) are presumptuous. Needless to say, the more modern representations of Latinx peoples are both designed by Latinx creators such as Angones and are deliberately positive rather than accidentally positive—both are huge advances and are examples of Disney Duck stories, characters, and comics developing over time.

The topic of ethnicity and representation in the Disney comics is one of the significant contemporary discussions during this centenary year of Disney. In spring 2023, Disney took the decision to communicate to its comics licensees that the printing and distribution of two specific stories was to stop, implementing a ban not only on the stories but even discussing the reason for the ban (Ducktalks, 2023). The stories in question are two chapters in the critically and commercially successful *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck* by artist and storyteller Don Rosa—originally published between 1991 and 1993 (Rosa, 2016b). There is no stated/official reason for the ban, only an assumption; that the two stories feature a character called Bombie the Zombie—a character from Africa with Voodoo links. This character was created by Carl Barks in the pre-Civil Rights era of the last century, and since that original appearance, Bombie has been redesigned, which softened (but did not eradicate) the ethnic caricatures of the original design. Rosa used this redesigned version of the character in the early 1990s for his stories. Post-1960s the political and social landscape of America was changing and rights for

marginalized groups were increasing; attitudes toward people of the Global Majority were improving and the original images used by Barks in the 1940s were no longer acceptable. The redesigned character demonstrates Disney's desire to reflect society's changing and improving views in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and also Rosa's own views on the original imagery being "…fraught with ethnic stereotypes." (Rosa, 2016a, 177). Rosa used the redesigned version so that people were not "…offended by the dated stereotypical imagery, which I would not have wanted" (Rosa, 2016a, 177).

Disney reflecting society's changing attitudes is happening again in the 2020s. Recent tragic history such as the "…killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Nina Pop, and Rayshard Brooks…" resulted in "a tremendous resurgence in public attention" and popular support of Black Lives Matter/BLM (Maraj, 2022, 40). With BLM's global revival saw a challenge especially to people of privilege not just to be "not racist" but to be actively "antiracist." As part of their antiracist efforts, Disney seems to be banning imagery they deem to be offensive to various communities of the Global Majority; presumably to halt the spread of degrading and demeaning narratives in media outlets. Many agree with Disney's bans, however, there is more to reflect on before reaching this conclusion. If the only use of questionable imagery of people from the Global Majority were limited to these two stories it would be an easy decision to evaluate, but the use of caricatured imagery and narratives of different ethnicities is widespread in many Disney comic stories. The ban in spring 2023 of these famous Don Rosa stories is at odds with Disney allowing a reprint of the Carl Barks story *Maharaja Donald* in the same year (Barks, 2023)—whereby Donald is the head of a group of Indian people and has multiple wives in a harem alongside other narratives and images that are prejudicial and colonial in their views of Indian people and their culture. This seemingly inconsistent approach to implementing antiracist practice is difficult to understand. With comics in particular, as Disney operates almost entirely through a licensing structure, they generally do not have the level of insight and knowledge of this product as they do for wholly owned and managed products such as their movies and domestic theme parks. Despite this inconsistency and imperfect implementation, it is clear that as diversity, equality, and inclusion have become supported by many in American society (Minkin, 2023), Disney has in turn reflected these positive developments in its comic stories, and as such is another example of how the Duck stories have changed over time in line with the country more broadly.

WEBBY VANDERQUACK, DELLA DUCK, AND DAISY DUCK AND REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER

Gender was one of Dorfman and Mattelart's (1971), 44–45) central criticisms of the early Disney comics, and developments in gender equality in the United States have thankfully progressed in recent times (albeit with significant distance still to travel). One criticism of the Duck comics is that there is still a clear imbalance in the volume of male and female characters (a clear clash with the facts of a global population which is 50.4% male, and 49.6% female (United Nations)). The similarity in actual numbers of men and women in the world, while the comics remain dominated by male characters is an example of patriarchy that has continued from the 1930s to the present day. The paradigm of non-binary and the gender spectrum has yet to be approached in these stories and as such the explicit gender binary used in these comic stories is an example of Disney reflecting a binary gender normative society of male and female (Rowe, 2019, 24) and patriarchy that shows little indication of change. To date, Disney's Duck comics do not reflect society's demographics.

When we examine the quality (rather than the quantity) of the female characters we get a different perspective. Many female characters have changed: they are no longer subservient to the male characters, nor are they confined to the house carrying out domestic chores, they are seen engaging in activities other than shopping or in makeup/beauty regimes. They are now fully participating in the adventure and action stories and have characteristics in line with developments in society and the changed understanding of what roles women can and should have the opportunity to achieve in the world. One example of this change is women's role in the economy and society. In the comics of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s not only were there very few female characters, but those characters had limited economic opportunity. Daisy is almost never shown in any paid job or role but is shown as Miss Duckburg which in itself reflects one of society's aspirations for women in the mid-20th century; beauty and subservience to the patriarchy. Comparatively, Donald has several dozen jobs ranging from post worker to private detective. The other key female characters over the decades include Magica (a witch), Grandma Duck (a farm laborer), Goldie (a performer in honky tonks), and Miss Quackfaster (a secretary). Compared to Donald's varied and vast employment, and the economic success of business baron male characters such as Flintheart Glomgold, John Rockerduck, and Uncle Scrooge, then the females were relegated to the lower-paid and lower-skilled sections of the economy (if they were economically active at all) for most of the history of Disney Duck comics and stories, something which in their early years, sadly did reflect the lived experiences of women in the United States (Dalrymple & Landivar, 2020).

In recent years, the roles and involvement of female characters have changed substantially. This can be evidenced in 2018s IDW published *Ducktales* comic series, with characters Webby Vanderquack and Della Duck (Donald's twin sister). Both of these characters take the lead role in action stories. Both characters have agency in the stories, and as such fulfill a narrative that modern audiences would expect of female lead characters. In *Beware of the Phenomenal Pumpkin People* (Cavalieri, 2018a), Della takes an equal role

to Scrooge and Donald in this adventure story: her agency in the story is high and positive as she is the pilot of the plane, and is the only one skilled as a mechanic/technician to repair the plane after its emergency landing. Her agency is strong because the story could not have developed without her skills and knowledge; she is central to the plot and narrative. Webby's intellectual curiosity and sporting prowess feature in *Welcome To Beagle Island* (Cavalieri, 2018b) and both are key elements of the story and contribute to the eventual success of Scrooge beating the villainous Beagle Boys—without her, the story may not have resulted in this outcome, and as such she demonstrates agency and importance that exceeds traditional dominant (male) characters such as Huey, Dewey, and Louie.

Both of these examples demonstrate an alternative view of traditional femininity/role of female characters from the 1930s and 40s comics and from Disney female characters of previous decades (Singer, 2023, 4). Whelan goes further and states the importance of the characteristics of Disney characters "for generations, Disney has used the princess narrative to instil in its viewers an understanding of the position of girls and women in American society"—and whilst this argument might be in relation to Disney Princess animated movies, it is not difficult to apply this to the comics when considering the scale of impact and scope of Disney comics in the mid-20th century (Whelan, 2014, 177). Adding further to this is Muir's categorization of Disney Princesses (Muir, 2023, 202) which charts the personal traits and characteristics of these characters over time. Muir herself encourages scholars to apply this primarily Disney Princess related framework to other types of characters to test her findings, and the results are clear. The first wave (termed Passive Dreamers) comprises characteristics such as domesticity, passivity, victimhood, and desiring romance. These descriptions are broadly in line with how female Duck characters such as Daisy Duck are represented in early comic stories in the 1940s (especially domesticity and desiring romance), and this develops over time to the final wave of characteristics (named Innovative Leaders) which include assertiveness, leadership, female (peer) support and lack of romantic relationships. These characteristics almost directly map to 2018s *Ducktales* leading character Webby Vanderquack whose official biography says she is "…an excellent combatant and strategist…has an encyclopedic knowledge of adventure, ancient languages and legends" (Hughes, 2018, 91)—and she is without any romantic inclinations.

Whelan's and Muir's observations on Disney females are important; Disney's female Duck characters taking on leading roles in adventure stories, with an evolved "wave" of characteristics are developments worthy of note as they reflect the changing roles for women and girls and society's views of females and femininity. The comics are artifacts of (developing) cultural history, and as such it is evidence that Disney has moved with the times, and renders earlier critiques on gender from those including Dorfman and Mattelart to have diminished relevance on newer and more modern Disney Duck stories and comics. Where there is progress, there are also improvements that are required to fully reflect society including a more inclusive cast of characters in terms of gender spectrum, and the LGBTQ+ community which is woefully underrepresented at present.

UNCLE SCROOGE AND CAPITALISM AS THE DOMINANT SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE

Dorfman and Mattelart's main criticism in their 1971 book was that Disney's comics were a form of cultural imperialism with the aim of reproducing American Capitalism around the world (1971, 8) using their new poster-boy Uncle Scrooge. Coincidentally, in the same decade as their book was published Disney's American comic sales plummeted, and the market was overtaken and dominated by superhero stories and characters, which has continued to the present day. The Duck stories continued to be huge sellers around the world, and are still produced and sold domestically in reprinted/collector formats. From the peak of Disney comics to their decline, the nature of American Capitalism changed: from a concept of society which had a market economy but strong and necessary government involvement and interventions such The New Deal, to the emerging Neoliberalism of Reaganomics (Stiglitz, 2004, 229). American artist and storyteller Don Rosa became the successor to Barks on Disney Duck comics during the 1980s and 1990s (Bryan, 2021, 76), and as the son of a small business owner, and a fan of Carl Barks' Scrooge stories, one might expect Rosa's work to be a continuation of apparent capitalist propaganda. Instead, he developed a narrative for Scrooge beyond what any other artist or storyteller had done before, extending Scrooge's personality beyond just a love of money, and even to question Scrooge loving money at all. His most famous story concludes with Scrooge realizing that financial wealth is not the most important thing in life. The plot and the peaks and troughs of the storyline deride capitalism: it is not proposed as the answer to life's problems but at its most extreme it is presented as wholly deplorable (i.e., a powerful wealthy individual taking advantage of vulnerable communities in The Global South for the reason of making profit is presented as villainy). Making lots of money does not make Scrooge happy. Family, adventure, kinship, love, romance, and memories (and of course financial security) are all part of the conclusion of the story and the answer to Scrooge's (eventual) happiness. This narrative and the linked criticisms of capitalism have been present since Scrooge's first title comic *"Only A Poor Old Man"* by Carl Barks (Bryan, 2021, 75).

Rosa is not wholly positive about the Walt Disney Company, and this is due to his reflections on their business practices and lack of care/interest for their own IP (Rosa "Epilogue"). His reflections on their corporate culture and business practice are perhaps indicative of his broader feelings on Neoliberalism, the relationship between business and the labor force; and how multinational organizations make large profits at the expense of the worker.

This relationship is incredibly important to understanding and analyzing these comics. These contexts (e.g., the

power relationship context of commissioner and commissioned) are essential in the analysis of culture (Rose 5). This is because we need to understand the power dynamics, the values, and the motives of both parties. It is fair to say that Rosa does not share Disney's approach to the treatment of workers and payment for work—arguably views more akin to Marx than Scrooge. As previously discussed, it is also fair to say he has not used the opportunity as a Disney Comics storyteller to advance the ideals of American capitalism in the way Dorfman and Mattelart (1971, 100), Bryman (1995, 150), and others have described.

Mirrlees makes many pertinent points when examining American media artifacts (Mirrlees, 2013, 19). These often center on the premise of positive representations of America and its culture including capitalism and assumes the only possible outcome of this as negative for society. The other (albeit much less discussed) issue is when a media artifact offers criticism or thought provocation of western imperialism—after all, not all media artifacts are tools of cultural imperialism, with some offering alternative views and opinions (Rao, 2010). Jenkins makes reference to the audience and specifically fans of Scrooge and Scrooge stories, and argues that these audiences are not necessarily mindless or totally passive consumers of these products (Jenkins, 2023, 19); it is possible to consume something and still reflect and think critically, and that the European audience (for who these stories were intended from original commissioning publisher/licensee Egmont) know the details and idiosyncrasies of these characters and are not walking into these stories blindly, and thus being manipulated into any sort of ideological intents—contrary to Dorfman and Mattelart's claims. There is argument that any representation of capitalism is a form of cultural imperialism as it is assumed it will be positive but as Rao and Schiller, and latterly (and specifically to these stories) Jenkins points out this is not always the case, and even if it were it does not mean it is effective (Schiller, 1975).

Nonetheless, capitalism is the clear dominant economic structure of the world, and this reality is reflected in the Duck comics. The comics present both the sense and the senselessness of American capitalism; they are not universally promoting modern Neoliberalism, nor are they presenting the benefits of Marxism. They offer a reflection on the dominant system, but the stories offer little insight into the variations of capitalism, from the more Neoliberal American capitalism through to the tamer Nordic model of capitalism.

FINAL THOUGHTS

"Disney does such a wonderful job of representing American culture, they're almost synonymous with America" (Wills, 2017, 73)

The Walt Disney Company might be synonymous with American culture, but how well do Disney's Duck comics reflect society and how it has changed? There have certainly been positive changes in the Duck comic stories in terms of demographics and representation, there is an effort at antiracism (albeit imperfect and flawed), and there are huge positive changes with female characters (but there needs to be more of them). There are issues that require attention to reflect a more diverse contemporary society including using a broader gender spectrum and developing main characters from the LGBTQ+ community. English language comics need more positive representation of knowledge and education (which comics have proven they can do in other markets), and the assumption that the comics are tools of cultural imperialism used to promote capitalism is probably less relevant now than it was at their American sales peak 50 years ago.

It is very challenging to talk extensively about Disney comics (Ducks or otherwise) simply because the volume of the material is prolific. This includes contributions from hundreds of artists, colorists, storywriters, translators, editors, publishers, and issues of comics from across the world over the last 100 years. Different countries have different interpretations and understandings of these stories and characters. Disney (and its comics) are by default synonymous with America, and The American Dream (Wills, 2017, 3) both in and outside of The United States. Donald, and especially his Uncle Scrooge are cultural icons that represent America and its culture (Immerwahr, 2020, 23). One thing that has emerged is that the comics are artifacts of cultural history that help us, at least partly, to understand both The Walt Disney Company and American society more broadly.

REFERENCES

Angones, Frank. [@FrankAngones]. 2019. "Because Gizmoduck was a popular known character, this was aunique opportunity. Fenton wasn't just a token Latino character. He was the MAIN SUPERHERO of Duckburg. #Ducktales #RewriteHistory." *Twitter*, 21 Nov, 2019. https://twitter.com/FrankAngones/status/1197645223683190785

Barks, Carl. 2020. *Disney's Uncle Scrooge: The Twenty-Four Carat Moon*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphic.

Barks, Carl. 2023. *Disney's Donald Duck: Maharaja Donald*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphic.

Belk, Russell W. 1987. "Material Values in the Comics: A Content Analysis of Comic Books Featuring Themes of Wealth." *The Journal of Consumer Research* 14(1): 26–42.

Bryan, Peter. 2021. *Creation, Translation, and Adaptation in Donald Duck Comics: The Dream of Three Lifetimes*. New York, NY: Springer International Publishing AG.

Bryman, Alan. 1995. *Disney and his Worlds*. London: Routledge.

Campbell-Stephens, Rosemary. 2020. "Global Majority; Decolonising the Language and Reframing the Conversation about Race." Leeds Beckett University, April 15, 2024. https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/schools/school-of-education/final-leeds-beckett-1102-global-majority.pdf

Carfagna, Massimo. 2006. "Lo studio delle scienze in Italia." *APPROFONDIMENTI*: 17, April 15, 2024. https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?hl=en&volume=1&publication_year=2006&pages=1727&journal=+Approfondimenti+CRUI+&author=M.+Carfagna&title=Lo+studio+delle+scienze+in+Italia

Cavalieri, Joey. 2018a. "Beware of the Phenomenal Pumpkin People." In *Ducktales: Mysteries and Mallards*, edited by Joe Hughes. Sherman Oaks, LA: IDW Publishing.

Cavalieri, Joey. 2018b. "Welcome to Beagle Island." In *Ducktales: Quests and Quacks*, edited by Joe Hughes. Sherman Oaks, LA: IDW Publishing.

Cerasi, Chris. 2019. *Disney Ducktales: Monsters and Mayhem*. San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing.
Comichron. n.d. "Uncle Scrooge Sales Figures." April 15, 2024. https://www.comichron.com/titlespotlights/unclescrooge.html
D23.com. "Carl Barks— D23." April 15, 2024. D23.com https://d23.com/walt-disney-legend/carlbarks/
D23.com. "Educational Films— D23." April 15, 2024. D23.com https://d23.com/a-to-z/educational-films/
Dalrymple, Amy, and Christin Landivar. 2020. *7 Stats About Working Women to Celebrate the Women's Bureau Centennial*. US Department of Labor Blog. https://blog.dol.gov/2020/06/05/7-stats-to-celebrate-the-womens-bureau-centennial.
Dieter, Daniel, and Elyse Gessler. 2018. "A Preferred Reality: Film Portrayals of Robots and AI in Popular Science Fiction." *Journal of Science & Popular Culture* 4(1): 59.
Dorfman, Ariel. 2018. "How We Roasted Donald Duck, Disney's Agent of Imperialism." *The Guardian Online*, October 5, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/oct/05/ariel-dorfman-how-we-roasted-donald-duck-disney-agent-of-imperialism-chile-coup
Dorfman, Ariel, and Armand Mattelart. 1971. *How to Read Donald Duck*. Translated by David Kunzle. New York, NY: OR Books.
Ducktalks.com. 2023. "Don Rosa Banned Stories Update". DuckTalks.com, April 13, 2023. https://ducktalks.com/2023/04/13/don-rosa-banned-stories-updates/
Fanning, Jim. 2021. "Did You Know? 8 Genius Facts About Ludwig Von Drake.", September 24, 2021. https://d23.com/did-you-know-8-genius-facts-about-ludwig-von-drake/. *D23.com*
De Francesco, Corrado. 1978. "The Growth and Crisis of Italian Higher Education during the 1960s and 1970s." *Higher Education* 7: 193–212. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00129418.
Grand Comics Database. "Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge #17." April 15, 2024. Comics.org. https://www.comics.org/issue/13440/
Grand Comics Database. "Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge #58." April 15, 2024. Comics.org. https://www.comics.org/issue/19324/#toc_144119
Hughes, Joey. 2018. *Disney Ducktales: Mysteries and Mallards*. Korea: IDW Publishing.
Immerwahr, Daniel. 2020. "Ten-Cent Ideology: Donald Duck Comic Books and the U.S. Challenge to Modernization." *Modern American History* 3(1): 1–26.
INDUCKS. n.d. "United States: Ludwig Von Drake." INDUCKS. April 15, 2024. https://inducks.org/publication.php?c=us%2FLVD&pg=list
Jenkins, Henry. 2023. "How to Read Uncle $crooge After How to Read Donald Duck." *Participations — The Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 19(3). https://www.participations.org/19-03-04-jenkins.pdf.
Maraj, Louis M. 2022. "Unlike Conventional Form(s) of: Beyond Reparative Antiracism." *Composition Studies* 50(3): 40–58.
Minkin, Rachel. 2023. *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/05/17/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-in-the-workplace/.
Mirrlees, Tanner. 2013. *Global Entertainment Media between Cultural Imperialism and Cultural Globalization*. London: Routledge.
Mittermeier, Sabrina. 2020. *A Cultural History of the Disneyland Theme Parks: Middle Class Kingdoms*. Bristol: Intellect.
Muir, Robyn. 2023. *The Disney Princess Phenomenon: A Feminist Analysis*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
Ophir, Yotam, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 2021. "The Effects of Media Narratives about Failures and Discoveries in Science on Beliefs about and Support for Science." *Journal of Public Understanding of Science* 30(8): 1008–23.
Oreskes, Naomi, and John Krige. 2014. *Science and Technology in the Global Cold war*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
Parrinder, Patrick. 1999. *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Piepenbring, Dan. 2019. "The Book That Exposed The Cynical Politics of Donald Duck." *The New Yorker*. June 3, 2019. https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-book-that-exposed-the-cynical-politics-of-donald-duck
Rao, Nagesh. 2010. "Anti-imperialism in 3-D." *Socialist Worker*, January 7, 2010. http://socialistworker.org/2010/01/07/anti-imperialism-in–3D
Ratzlaff, Adam. 2023. "Birds of a Feather?: Lessons on U.S. Cultural Diplomacy from Walt Disney during the Good Neighbor Policy." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 29(4): 415–30.
Reisch, George A. 2023. "How American Colleges and Universities Got the Hook." *Metascience* 32(1): 23–28.
Rojek, Chris. 2001. *Celebrity*. London: Reaction Books Ltd.
Rosa, Don. 2016a. *Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge and Donald Duck: The Richest Duck in the World*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books LLC.
Rosa, Don. 2016b. *The Complete Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books LLC.
Rosa, Don. "Epilogue." Don Rosa Collection – Epilogue. April 15, 2024. https://career-end.donrosa.de/
Rose, Gillian. 2022. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 5th ed. London: SAGE.
Roser, Max. 2023. "Technology over the Long Run: Zoom out to See how Dramatically the World Can Change within a Lifetime," February 22, 2023. https://ourworldindata.org/technology-long-runOurWorldinData
Rowe, Rebecca. 2019. "Shaping Girls: Analyzing Animated Female Body Shapes." *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14(1): 22–36.
Schiller, Herbert I. 1975. "Communication and Cultural Domination." *International Journal of Politics* 5(4): 1–127.
Singer, Nermeen. 2023. "The Power of Princesses: How Disney's Female Characters Shape Girls' Identities." June 24, 2023 (Preprint Version 1) https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3054699/v1
Spellacy, Amy. 2006. "Mapping the Metaphor of the Good Neighbor: Geography, Globalism, and Pan Americanism during the 1940s." *American Studies* 47(2): 39–66.
Stiglitz, Joseph. 2004. *The Roaring Nineties: Why we Are Paying the Price for the Greediest Decade in History*. London: Penguin.
Telotte, Jay. 2008. *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
Thelin, John. 2018. *Going to College in the Sixties*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
Topolino.it. 2019a. "Pico de Paperis – Paperi – Topolino." Panini SPA. April 15, 2024. https://www.topolino.it/personaggio/pico-de-paperis/
Topolino.it. 2019b. "Topi: Topolino, Pippo E Molti Altri." Panini SPA. April 15, 2024. https://www.topolino.it/mondo-fumetto/topi/
United Nations. n.d. "*Population and Families*". United Nations. April 15, 2024. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographicsocial/products/worldswomen/documents/Population_BW.pdf
Wartzman, Rick. 2017. *The End of Loyalty: The Rise and Fall of Good Jobs in America*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs Publishing.
Whelan, Bridget. 2014. "Power to the Princess: Disney and the Creation of the Twentieth-Century Princess Narrative." In *Kidding around: The Child in Film and Media*, edited by Alexander Howe and Wynn Yarbrough, 167–92. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.
Wills, John. 2017. *Disney Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Joel Gray is a researcher, teacher and passionate advocate of culture and media at Sheffield Hallam University, and has a leadership role of Associate Dean in the College of Business, Technology and Engineering. His teaching is the subject of public relations to Journalism, Media and Marketing students. His research interests include sequential art and visual culture, popular culture and public relations/marketing strategy and campaigns.

How to cite this article: Gray, Joel. 2024. "A Cultural History Through the Comics of Donald Duck and Friends." *The Journal of American Culture* 47 (2): 124–130. https://doi.org/10.1111/jacc.13556.