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Dissent and Consent in the "Good War": Hedda Hopper, Hollywood Gossip, and World War II Isolationism

Jennifer Frost

While the common historical interpretation of the American film industry during World War II is that "Hollywood went to war with gusto", as Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black succinctly put it, famed Hollywood gossip columnist Hedda Hopper was a prominent exception.[1] When the *Los Angeles Times* picked up her fledgling movie gossip column "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood", in 1938, the struggling, underemployed supporting actress became a powerful figure in the movie industry and a celebrity journalist rival to the "First Lady of Hollywood", Louella Parsons. Syndicated in eighty-five metropolitan newspapers during the 1940s, as well as weekly papers and small town dailies, Hopper's column had an estimated daily readership of 32 million by the mid-1950s (out of a national population of 160 million).[2] Hopper, in her famous hats, had become a Hollywood icon.

Yet Hopper also saw herself as a political figure and activist. She used her journalistic platform to express what she saw as proper political values, to advise and chastise members of the film industry about their politics, and to mobilize her readers around contemporary political issues. Letters from readers throughout her career testified to their interest in politics as well. While it was not uncommon for gossip columnists to discuss politics – after all, Walter Winchell "made the seemingly improbable leap from gossipmonger to political commentator" in the 1930s, according to his biographer Neal Gabler – Hopper's main competitor was Parsons, and Parsons's "heart was not in politics".[3] Hopper's was. Always a conservative, and a proud, active, and highly partisan member of the Republican Party, she expressed strong animosity toward the Democratic Party, labor unions, the New Deal, and the Civil Rights Movement, but was best known for her strident anti-communism.

Less known, but no less significant, was Hopper's first opportunity as a new and rising Hollywood gossip columnist to take a major political stand: her opposition to U.S. intervention in World War II. When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, Hopper's gossip career was only in its second year, but she had a nationally syndicated column, a radio show and a large audience, and she fiercely embraced isolationism. "Settle our home problems (which are great but overlooked these days)", she urged in 1939, "and stop trying to run the rest of the world!".[4] Hopper's vociferous stance against U.S. intervention in World War II dovetailed with that of other isolationists in journalism, such as William Randolph Hearst. Like them, she used her column to promote her isolationist views and spur her readers in support. And like the vast majority of Americans, her isolationism can be viewed as an "intense antiwar spirit" that was more a "mood that a political position", in historian Michael S. Sherry's words.[5] Yet,

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Fig. 1. Hedda Hopper broadcasts her radio gossip program on NBC, 1943. Photographed by Len Weissman. [Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.]

even after Hopper officially fell in line and declared her patriotism following U.S. entry into the war, her conservatism and lingering isolationism continued to shape and differentiate her wartime writings.

Hopper's initial dissent (and eventual consent) regarding "the Good War", as World War II has come to be called, serves as a reminder that not all Americans entered and fought the war in the same way. Although the rhetoric and image of wartime unity owed much to the efforts of Hopper's Hollywood colleagues, prodded and encouraged by U.S. government officials in the Bureau of Motion Pictures in the Office of War Information (hereafter OWI), she did not always follow along. As a conservative isolationist, Hopper experienced and understood the war differently than many in the industry upon which she depended, and she conveyed that to her millions of readers and listeners. Just as film historians have expanded their scholarly inquiry to "people and processes outside the immediate circles of filmmaking", the voices of the purveyors and participants in Hollywood gossip should be included in the "many voices" that contributed to the making – and meaning-making – of movies and movie culture during World War II.[6] As it turned out, not everyone in Hedda Hopper's Hollywood was wholly committed to projecting World War II as "the Good War". Moreover, just as historian John Sbardellati found the FBI's forays into wartime Hollywood prefiguring the postwar Red Scare, Hopper's conservative isolationism anticipated stances she later would take as a relentless Cold Warrior.[7]

Hopper's isolationism

What Hopper sought as an isolationist was to maintain the U.S. at peace, independent, and free to act unilaterally in the world. To achieve this aim, she believed in building a strong military defense for

"Fortress America" – something pacifists opposed – and avoiding "entangling alliances" with a conflict-ridden Europe.[8] "Let's stay home and prepare a defense so strong no one will dare attack us", she argued in September 1939 after war broke out in Europe, "so that when they've made another hash of Europe we can give what's left of civilization a shelter and new hope." This anti-European position reflected Hopper's strong belief that American participation in World War I had been a mistake, and she pointed out "what we gained from the last war … white crosses in No Man's Land". Hopper's view "was not far from the mainstream of American opinion, which, as pollsters showed, overwhelmingly repudiated entry into the last war." By the 1930s, prominent isolationists, such as Republican Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota, argued that U.S. participation in the "war for democracy" was a result not of principled action but of conspiracy and collusion among greedy armament manufacturers, international bankers, and politicians. Moreover, the dislocation and debt wrought by World War I were seen by many Americans as causes of the Great Depression. Hopper's opposition to the Second World War stemmed from her understanding of the causes and results of the First, and she determined "to stay out of the European mess and keep our boys from marching 'over there'".[9]

Hopper's isolationism was linked to a mother's concern for her child. She feared her son, William ("Bill") Hopper, would be drafted into the armed forces should the United States enter World War II, and she knew other women, including those in her newspaper and radio audience, shared her fears. "Let our sons know we don't believe they're cowards when they refuse to fight another's battle", Hopper told her readers, and they responded affirmatively. "I am one of the ordinary sheltered home keepers", wrote a Los Angeles reader, "a mother of four splendid sons and a son-in-law, just as splendid, *very much* interested and concerned in the terrible possibility we are facing. Any move toward honorable peace has my whole hearted sanction." "The question is", wrote an Ohio woman, "do you want your son slaughtered on a battle field or not? I don't want mine there and I'm ready to battle for it." An Iowa woman agreed. "I don't intend to see my two nephews sent 'over there' to be slaughtered if I can help it".[10] Such private concerns and emotions, Hopper hoped, could be transformed into political action. Her sentiments, rhetoric, and actions dovetailed with that of the mothers' movement, a coalition of mothers' groups that worked to oppose U.S. intervention in World War II and involved about five to six million women. There was a possible overlap between these mothers' groups and Hopper's audience, as the first mothers' organization, the National Legion of Mothers of America, was founded in Los Angeles.[11] Hopper worked along similar lines and set out to mobilize her millions of women readers into a strong isolationist movement.

"Up to Women to Avert War" headlined one of Hopper's columns in September 1939, the month Germany invaded Poland, and England and France responded with declarations of war.[12] "I'm firmly convinced that the only way we'll keep America out of war is through women", she wrote. "And that can only be done if we organize at once." Utilizing a phrase – "up to the women" – popular in women's magazines and writings of the era, and drawing upon maternalist rhetoric and stereotypes about the power of women's nurturing care and moral superiority that recalled that of the World War I women's peace movement, Hopper called for action.[13] "We've heard that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world", she declared in late September. "All right, let's use that slogan and see if we can make it come true." "History records that there's a woman behind every great man", Hopper added the next month. "Now let's get the men behind every woman, united in minding our own business." In response to critics who believed foreign policy "has no place in a movie column", she argued, "They are right, of course, but I was a mother long before I was a columnist".[14]

Hopper's isolationism meant she took great interest in the activities of likeminded members of the U.S. Congress, yet she did not support Senator Burton K. Wheeler's 1941 hearings on "war-mongering" motion picture propaganda. According to Idaho Democrat D. Worth Clark, Wheeler's isolationist ally and the chairman of the Senate subcommittee conducting the hearings, Hollywood movies were being "used to infect the minds of audiences with hatred, to inflame them, to arouse their emotions, and make them clamor for war." Revealing the anti-Semitism of many conservative isolationists, Senator Nye added that those "responsible for the propaganda pictures are born abroad", positing a Jewish conspiracy aimed at pushing the United States into war.[15] But despite Hopper's isolationism, and despite testimony at the hearings praising "how good Hedda Hopper is as a movie gossip", she publicly rejected

the premise of the Senate hearings. "The claim seems to be that the screen is being used for propaganda war pictures." "Well", she asked, "what's Hollywood supposed to do – close its eyes to the war, with news of it on every front page?" She had earlier contended that "movie patrons want timely pictures" and were "awakening to the menace of 'isms' and espionage and would be glad to see them exposed." With European markets closed off to American movies, and Hollywood experiencing the "Boxoffice Blues" domestically through mid-1941, Hopper tempered her criticisms of industry products generally.[16]

A prominent exception, one where she wholeheartedly agreed with the isolationist senators, was Charlie Chaplin's film, *The Great Dictator* (1940). Due to her long-standing personal and political objections to Chaplin, she regarded his films with great suspicion. For the FBI, *The Great Dictator* was "nothing more than subtle Communist propaganda." For Hopper, Chaplin's satirical attack on Adolf Hitler in the pro-interventionist film was an affront. As she contended, "with the condition of the world at present, no one feels like laughing at any dictator".[17] Chaplin's final speech in the film, which scholars consider an "impassioned six-minute attack on the dehumanizing material and spiritual conditions that have led to fascism", left Hopper "colder than an icicle". When Chaplin delivered the final speech at a concert celebrating President Roosevelt's third inauguration in 1941, the performance confirmed his ties to an administration Hopper loathed. As it turned out, "without Roosevelt's support, *The Great Dictator* might never have been completed." Hopper commented on these political connections while *The Great Dictator* was in production, claiming that Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, known for his strong condemnations of Hitler and the America First Committee, "was backing Charlie Chaplin in his dictator picture".[18] Due to Chaplin's independence as a filmmaker, Hopper could criticize *The Great Dictator* without hurting the struggling major movie studios and, at the same time, possibly undermine the Roosevelt administration.

For Hopper, the Roosevelt administration and liberal activists, rather than the movie industry, was primarily responsible for conveying the interventionist message. She lamented the push for preparedness coming from liberal interventionists. "It isn't a good sign when we feel we must prepare ourselves for America's entrance into a war we don't belong in", she worried. "Let's spend our time fighting against it instead of preparing for it." But with the Japanese attack on 7 December 1941 the isolationists were discredited; the American First Committee "closed its doors" four days after Pearl Harbor.[19] Yet Hopper remained unbowed. In mid-1943 she defended "an isolationist group" attacked by Harry Warner of Warner Bros. "for a propaganda campaign against production and exhibition of war films", and claimed

MARCH 20, 1939.—[PART I.] 13

Hedda Hopper's HOLLYWOOD

George Putnam starts his new publishing company in a few weeks with "The Man Who Killed Hitler," written anonomously, but from one on the inside. Yes, Hitler will be sent a copy. If George survives his second book will be one written by 7-year-old Marrianna Lester for children. She lives on San Miguel Island, comes only once a year to the mainland and has seen one movie!

The dinner Dr. Millikan sponsored for the All Nations Boys Club, at which Mr. Herbert Hoover spoke so movingly, was one of the most successful assemblings ever held in this town. Our motion-picture producers were conspicuous by their absence, but Joe E. Brown made a fine speech. Was glad to see young Doug among those present, also Eddie Robinson, Walt Disney and George Arliss. This is a movement in which every adult person should join, and that means Hollywood, too.

Good News

Katharine Hepburn doesn't need Hollywood. When she opened her new play, "Philadelphia Story," in Boston all Back Bay society turned out dressed as though for the opera. Understand Howard Hughes will produce the picture.

"What's in now?" asked Helen.
"Democrats."
"Well, I'll take the other one."
Helen tells me that Jane is on a meat and vegetable diet and has lost four inches around her waist. She wants to be a beautiful baby!

Constant Fear

Fig. 2. Even before the war, Hopper was chastising producers for being "conspicuously absent" at an All Nations Boys Club fundraiser ("Hedda Hopper's Hollywood", 20 March 1939). The rest of the column includes the usual mix of politics (a Hitler book) and gossip (Howard Hughes and Katharine Hepburn?).

her readers did as well. "My mailbag disagrees with Mr. Warner." After the war, she indicated her belief in conspiracy theories popular on the extreme Right, suggesting that Roosevelt knew about the imminent attack on Pearl Harbor but allowed it to occur to justify U.S. entry into the war. "I hope I'll still be here when the real truth of Pearl Harbor is told by the President's best friend", she wrote Robert McCormick, the head of her newspaper syndicate and leading conservative isolationist, in 1947. For much of the rest of the motion picture industry, however, "war was peace." The outbreak of war meant the end of isolationists' attacks on film content and offered an opportunity for industry participants, including Hopper, to demonstrate their patriotism.[20]

Patriotism, Hopper style

Three days after Pearl Harbor, Hopper issued her statement on how Americans and the motion picture industry could best rally and sustain the war effort. "Let's continue to play golf, go to the movies, go on with our music", she urged. "In this way we'll keep up morale", she continued, claiming "a nation that keeps on laughing is absolutely invincible – and that's Hollywood's job from now on". As concern about military mobilization, the industrial shift to war production, and the need for civilian sacrifice and participation in the war effort dominated American life, Hopper reinforced the idea of movies as primarily entertainment. Hopper's contention that Hollywood movies should be escapist fit with the code of "pure entertainment" held by studio executives, and with the desires of theater owners.[21] But this was a distinctly prewar idea that changed dramatically during World War II, according to film historian Thomas Doherty. Instead, the movies came to be seen by audiences, moviemakers, and government officials as "critical carriers" of cultural meanings and messages, powerfully influencing politics and guiding Americans through the hardships created by the war. If "[m]oving images became the new alphabet, the hieroglyphics of meaning and memory for American culture", as Doherty argues, Hopper played an important role as a scribe and an interpreter, but always from her particular political vantage point.[22]

She regularly included reasons for "why we fight" in her column, justifying and giving meaning to the U.S. war effort. In May 1942, she contrasted Nazi book burnings with American freedoms, pointing out that "we can still buy *Mein Kampf* – except that we'd rather spend the money on War Stamps." Hopper also understood the film industry's crucial contribution to the war effort at the battlefront and on the homefront, and regularly filled her column with such news. In her 3 March 1945 column, for example, she included nine items, of which only three were purely about entertainment. Despite her complaints about the high number of war films made, she praised the films themselves for "speedily and truly" depicting the "story of a great war". She endorsed films, such as *Air Force* (1943), as "good" for audiences and the armed services, and she called for other branches of the military to be similarly "glorified in pictures".[23] She reported on the ways motion pictures raised troop morale, often by quoting letters from servicemen. "Men in the Army", she wrote, considered movies "almost as important to them as food". "Doesn't Hollywood realize", one serviceman asked Hopper from the South Pacific, "that Bing Crosby" – then the top entertainer on American music charts, radio airwaves, and movie screens and winner of a Best Actor Oscar for *Going My Way* (1944) – "does more for us than machine guns? Just listening to that crooner reminds us of home and our loved ones." Having "reached the conclusion the War Department considers Hollywood chatter unnecessary", a soldier in Africa wrote Hopper directly for the latest movie news. She also engaged in fundraising to pay for film projectors for servicemen stationed in Alaska – "it is splendid of you to interest yourself in this", wrote producer David O. Selznick – and forwarded requests from servicemen for specific films on to the War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry (WAC), which distributed films to the military.[24]

Hollywood not only provided motion pictures but also live performances for the armed forces, and stars, as well as Hopper, entertained troops on bases in the United States, overseas through USO tours, and at the Hollywood Canteen. Hopper dedicated an entire column to a show at the Santa Ana Air Base in 1944, where she heard from a serviceman that seeing a performance in Naples, Italy by actor Bob Hope – who was a top box-office draw and co-starring with Bing Crosby in their series of "Road" movies – was like "a slice of America served to us on a platter." According to another serviceman, "when we can meet a star face to face – gosh! We have something to talk about for weeks on end, something to write home about." "We know we aren't forgotten", he added.[25]

The Hollywood Canteen opened in October 1942, staffed by volunteers from the motion picture

industry, and offered free music, dancing, and refreshments to servicemen shipping overseas from Los Angeles. Hopper kept track of who was helping out at the Hollywood Canteen by calling director John Ford's wife, Mary, who ran the kitchen and snack bar, and vented her "wrath against those who shirked the duty", as did Louella Parsons. In her memoirs, Hopper also criticized – without providing names – the stars and their publicity agents who staged photo opportunities at the Canteen but were not really volunteering. But mostly she praised those, like Marlene Dietrich, who "could be found in the kitchen scrubbing dishes" for "lonely men and women passing through on their way to battle fronts".[26]

Hopper lauded other Hollywood denizens for fulfilling their patriotic duty by entering the military or pursuing war-related activities, and she did her part as well. Just as Americans across the country joined the armed forces, went to work in war industries, planted victory gardens, participated in blood drives, and sold war bonds, so did filmmakers, actors, and others in Hollywood. "Each celebrity's call to colors was a major event in his studio's publicity department", recalled actor David Niven, who served for six years in the British Army during the war. Similarly, Hopper reported on the industry employees, like Clark Gable and Jimmy Stewart, who, along with sixteen million American men, answered the call to serve in the military. She noted those with 1-A classifications (eligible for military service), and announced when they were "off to join Uncle Sam" for training and active duty, and hinted at the "slackerism" of those whom she disliked.[27] She enthused about women working in war industries, and wrote admiringly of other wartime actions, such as one actress's decision to uproot her prizewinning chrysanthemums to plant a victory garden, and how Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz were "feeding 12 poor families" from theirs. "In any emergency", Hopper argued just after the United States entered the war, if "entertaining is to be done, actors are the first to offer their services. If there are bonds to be sold, the same is true". "During the last World War", she recalled, "the largest crowd I ever saw … was when Mary Pickford, Doug Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin came on to sell Liberty Bonds". One of Hollywood's wartime tragedies – actress Carole Lombard's death in a plane crash in January 1942 – occurred during a war bond selling tour. Hopper herself sold war bonds at bond rallies, by auctioning off her hats to fans, and she was recognized for her efforts by the WAC, the American Legion, and the military, which named a C-47 ambulance plane after her.[28]

Americans on the home front in Hollywood and elsewhere supported the war effort not only by taking positive action but also by doing without. Although civilians sacrificed far less than Americans at the battlefront, they suffered the loss of loved ones, and Hopper invoked that collective sacrifice in her coverage of war widows. "I tip my hat to the widow of our first war hero, Capt. Colin Kelly", Hopper wrote about the wife of a pilot shot down by the Japanese soon after Pearl Harbor. The war also created lesser hardships for American civilians. Hopper and her industry colleagues understood that "Uncle Sam's legions come first, and that's as it should be". They demonstrated their patriotism and acceptance of the war economy by "letting help go and doing housework" themselves, and supporting government wartime measures such as rationing.[29] When sugar rationing began in April 1942, she dedicated an entire column to the topic of how the new policy would affect those in Hollywood. "Glamour girls are accustomed to sweets rationing", she noted, but prop departments "are doing some head scratching over a substitute for the panes of clear sugar used for breakaway windows in pictures". That same month she pointed out how fabric shortages would make "Victory suits, with short coats and no cuffs", the fashion. But as it turned out, they would not prevent her from keeping up with the latest millinery, including a "blackout hat", that looked like "a bunch of firecrackers among the bedsprings". In a 1943 column, Hopper mentioned losing her gas rationing booklet, "so now I walk", but paper shortages did not appear to affect her column. When a newspaper in Honolulu, Hawaii had to cut its number of pages by one-third, the editor assured Hopper "that her column was indispensable".[30]

In addition to boosting troop morale and encouraging civilian sacrifice, Hopper sought to present America's allies in the best possible light. She endorsed *The Invaders* (1941), an English film about a German U-boat crew stranded in Canada which was well received in the United States in 1942. "If there are any Americans who need to know what we're fighting for (God forbid!) this picture will tell 'em", and she recommended the film for "every man, woman, and child in America". She also endorsed a 1943 documentary film about America's Chinese ally, entitled *An Afternoon With Mme. Chiang Kai-shek*.[31] Despite her anti-communism, Hopper's coverage of the Soviet Union – which she always called

Fig. 3. Hedda Hopper's industry power is demonstrated as she "scoops the Oscars". [Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.]

"Russia" – was similarly positive, although her response to Warner Bros.' *Mission to Moscow* (1943) was more measured. Based upon the memoirs of Joseph E. Davies, President Roosevelt's ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1936-1938, the film had the strong support of the President and the OWI, and was designed to convey sympathy for America's "awkward" ally at a critical point in the war, when the USSR fought desperately to repel the German invasion. Hopper backed the film while in production. "It's goal – to sell America on Russia. We already bow to their fighting spirit." Upon the film's release, however, she was less enthusiastic. In an effort to "flatter" Stalin, the film whitewashed such Soviet actions as the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Red Army's invasion of Finland over the winter of 1939-1940. Hopper expected, correctly, "lots of controversies over this", and the film was labeled both "pro-communist" and "sloppy history". But she, like Warner Bros., Davies, and Roosevelt, also understood the instrumental value of the film, expecting it to foster the wartime alliance with, and win "gratitude" from, "Joe" Stalin.[32]

As for America's adversaries, Hopper contributed to Hollywood's portrayal of Germans and Japanese – but not Italians – as formidable enemies who "must be fought and defeated." One reason why Hopper admired *The Invaders* was the film's "sheer honesty" in portraying the Germans as "ruthless and perverted" and "lost to every sense of decency". But, like most Americans remembering Pearl Harbor, Hopper feared and hated the Japanese far more than the Germans, and her location caused her anxiety about "a possible Japanese air raid", or a repeat of the December 1941 and February 1942 Japanese submarine attacks on California.[33] As a result, Hopper devoted more column inches to the Japanese enemy. She called for films about "Jap atrocities" in the face of an OWI ban on atrocity scenes. The OWI and the War Department were concerned that anti-Japanese films would provoke retaliation against American prisoners of war (POWs). "[O]ur studios have been told to hug the middle of the road in war pictures and not go all out on hatred, revenge and murder of the enemy", Hopper wrote a year into the war, but she vehemently disagreed: "you've got to hate them as much as they hate us". The next year

she reported that 20th Century-Fox had made, "under cover", *The Purple Heart* (1944), a film about "our pilots who were beheaded over there". Her report prompted a "howl of protest" due to the OWI ban, but the U.S. government lifted the ban following revelations about Japanese atrocities in January 1944. *The Purple Heart* was rushed into release, and Hopper claimed that studio chief "Darryl Zanuck is thanking me for breaking the news".[34]

Hopper and the politics of war

In all of her war work, Hopper "adopted an all-out pro-Allied attitude", yet she "still betrayed unconscious traces of ambivalence" from her conservative isolationism. She never romanticized the war but instead recognized its destructive reality. "War is hell", she wrote in December 1942, confirming the message of "war is hell but we have to do it and win" conveyed in World War II combat films. Hopper believed the American public should be exposed to all the horror and pain of war, rather than protected by government censorship, and disagreed with the idea that "the American people couldn't face the whole truth".[35] She also sought to break down the distance between home front and battlefront. She criticized civilian "indifference" to the experience of soldiers, urging Americans to visit military hospitals so "that attitude would change". And in 1945 she published a hard-hitting letter from her former "leg-man", Spec McClure, then serving in the Army in Belgium. "During this war, as both civilian and soldier, I've seen ideals trampled in the mud by those who most profess to uphold them", McClure wrote, telling Hopper he had difficulty finding any "nobility" in this "sordid, selfish, shameful business". These sentiments were far from the "high-mindedness" literary historian Paul Fussell found to characterize America's popular support for World War II, and closer to the "grim sense of necessity" other scholars have found "at the heart of wartime consent".[36]

Where Hopper's reluctant consent appeared most explicitly was in her limited vision of American wartime unity. For the Roosevelt administration, liberal intellectuals, progressive activists, and many Hollywood moviemakers, World War II provided an opportunity to expand the circle of citizenship and put racial, ethnic, religious, political, and class conflicts aside. In the interests of fostering a unified and harmonious society, Hopper did demonstrate a measure of tolerance for racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. For example, she reported on the wartime activities of African Americans, noting of one fundraising event how contralto Marian Anderson "sang divinely" and boxing heavyweight champion and now Sergeant Joe Louis "gave a very fine talk". She announced the naming of a ship after Booker T. Washington in recognition of African American contributions to America's past and the present war efforts, and she avoided blatant racism toward African Americans in her column.[37] To demonstrate her religious ecumenicalism, she reported on Jewish religious services and ostentatiously offered the first pledge at a fundraiser for Jews in Palestine – although the amount was a modest $300. Still, Hopper never gave up her belief that American society should be dominated by white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and she never embraced the new pluralistic vision of American society projected during "the Good War".[38]

Certainly, Hopper did not include Japanese Americans in "Americans All." Like most Americans and moviemakers, Hopper made distinctions between Nazis and "good" Germans that she did not make among Japanese – either in Japan or in the United States. In her column, she mixed items about Japanese fighting in the Pacific War with items about Japanese immigrants and their children living in the United States, associating the actions and atrocities of the former with the latter. She held to the popular understanding of the attack on Pearl Harbor "as a powerful symbol of American innocence, Japanese perfidy, and lasting peril to the United States", and a "stab-in-the-back" which she applied to all Japanese.[39] In this way, Hopper sought to justify the forced relocation and internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans living on the West Coast ordered by President Roosevelt in February 1942, which she, like the vast majority of Americans, strongly supported. In 1943, when Japanese-American men became subject to the draft and – after having to prove their loyalty despite their U.S. citizenship – could be inducted into the military, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt suggested the release of other Japanese Americans from internment camps. But Hopper wondered "how the mothers of our flyers who were executed in Japan would feel about that", and claimed a "treacherous misuse of hospitality" on the part of Japanese on the West Coast. Later, she juxtaposed a reader's letter critical of her defense of Japanese internment with one from a "fighting marine in the South Pacific", detailing Japanese killings of civilians. Even after Hollywood filmmakers began

Fig. 4. As the endless expanse of newsprint suggests, the press was a highly efficient vehicle for carrying Hopper's mix of gossip and politics to readers across the country. [Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.]

to distinguish between "Japs in Japan" and loyal Japanese Americans, Hopper continued to conflate the two populations.[40]

Hopper's incomplete acceptance of the wartime ethos of national unity appeared in her treatment of African Americans. World War II provided an opportunity and a catalyst for African Americans to advance their struggle for equality in society and for "dignity in cinema".[41] Long recognizing the impact of racial images on U.S. race relations, civil rights activists used the rhetoric of wartime unity to challenge and change racist caricatures of African Americans in the movies. In 1942, Walter F. White, executive secretary of the NAACP, held the national convention in Los Angeles and met with studio executives about ending black stereotypes – "rolling eyes, chattering teeth" and "none-too-bright servants" – which were "doing the Negro infinite harm". The OWI agreed, and from 1942 to 1943 its Bureau of Motion Pictures worked to change this portrayal.[42] Hopper resisted such change and lamented the disappearance of old, familiar stock stereotypes, as in a black segment of *Tales of Manhattan* (1942). Many African Americans saw little improvement in the film's racial depictions, civil rights organizations criticized its "sentimental depictions of plantation life", and one of its stars, Paul Robeson, agreed to picket it. But Hopper felt the film had gone too far and looked back fondly on *Green Pastures* (1936), an all-black musical about black folk religion. One of her African American readers responded with his and his fellow servicemen's views, for "we are negro soldiers and know our race." "We know how terrible can be the effect of a bad pictures", he wrote, "and I hope and pray that the last of the *Green Pastures* and *Uncle Toms* are gone – not only for my race's sake, but for the sake of all America".[43] Such compelling arguments did not change Hopper's (or much of Hollywood's) views of racial, and racist, filmic representations.

Moreover, Hopper fiercely maintained her political antagonisms to the Democratic Party, to organized labor, and to the political Left. She continued to snipe at the Roosevelt administration, questioning U.S. government decisions about military appropriations, "boondoggling in civilian defense", and "the steady stream of money flowing into all sorts of projects outside of war".[44] She criticized organized labor, particularly labor leaders who sought higher wages or workers who violated the wartime no-strike pledge. Although most labor leaders and workers cooperated fully during the war, there were exceptions, such as John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, who "repudiated his union's no-strike pledge" and "led five hundred thousand coal miners on strike" for higher wages in 1943. Hopper, as well as most Americans, considered Lewis and the strikes unpatriotic, and she quoted a soldier's sarcastic suggestion in her column: "Let our rallying cry be, 'Up and at the enemy for higher wages'". As for political leftists, Hopper launched her offensive attacks claiming she occupied a defensive, and populist, position. "I'm so sick and tired of all pseudo-intellectuals and their isms", she wrote in late 1942, defending her anti-communism. "If you don't believe in Communism, you must be a Fascist".[45]

In her wartime attacks on leftists, labor, and liberals, Hopper anticipated the domestic Cold War, most prominently through her role in the formation of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals (hereafter MPA) in 1944. A charter member of the MPA and later a committee member

and an officer, Hopper was joined by many prominent Hollywood conservatives over time, including director Cecil B. De Mille, studio head Walt Disney, actors Adolphe Menjou, Robert Taylor, and John Wayne, union leader Roy Brewer, and screenwriter and novelist Ayn Rand. "We believe in, and like, the American Way of Life; the liberty and freedom which generations before us have fought to create and preserve", the MPA declared, and pledged to fight Communist subversion in Hollywood, which members considered rampant.[46] Anti-communist Senator Robert R. Reynolds, a North Carolina Democrat, praised the new organization for counteracting "the flagrant manner in which the motion picture industrialists of Hollywood have been coddling Communists". Not all observers were happy, however. For screenwriter and playwright Elmer Rice, the MPA followed "orthodox Red-baiting and witch-hunting lines", and its members' views were "tinged with isolationism and anti-unionism and off-the-record of course … anti-Semitism and Jim Crowism".[47] Rice's description accurately captured Hopper's less than tolerant views during World War II and predicted her strident political tactics during the Cold War.

Hopper's initial dissent and eventual consent in the Good War would not be repeated with the Cold War, which she and her MPA colleagues fought vigorously and vociferously from the very start. But Communism always bothered Hopper more than did fascism: her embrace of Leni Riefenstahl, Adolf Hitler's favorite filmmaker and director of *Triumph of the Will* (1935), during her visit to Hollywood in 1938 is just one example. While much of Hollywood criticized the Führer's filmmaker, Hopper defended Riefenstahl in several columns. "Leni's only here to sell her picture!".[48] Attention to Hopper's writings both extends our understanding of the Hollywood Right and demonstrates its essential continuity during the World War II and Cold War eras, from Good War to Red Scare. It also indicates the ways in which politics and popular culture intertwined in "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood." Hollywood gossip – as practiced by Hedda Hopper – was always political and never just trivial or idle talk.

Notes

1. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), vii.
2. Over time, Hopper's column was variously titled "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood", "Hedda Hopper Looking at Hollywood", and "From Under Hedda's Hat". For biographical information on Hopper, see George Eells, *Hedda and Louella* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972); for a recent, comprehensive study of Parsons, see Samantha Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood: A Biography of Louella Parsons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
3. Barbas, *First Lady of Hollywood*, 271; Eells, *Hedda and Louella*, 242; Neal Gabler, *Gossip, Power, and the Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Knopf, 1994), xiii, 193.
4. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (19 October 1939): A11.
5. Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 26-27.
6. Hiroshi Kitamura, "Hollywood's America, America's Hollywood", *American Quarterly* (2006): 1263; Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry, *We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema during World War II* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 23.
7. Richard Slotkin, "Unit Pride: Ethnic Platoons and the Myths of American Nationality", *American Literary History* 13 (Fall 2001): 469-498; John Sbardellati, "Brassbound G-Men and Celluloid Reds: The FBI's Search for Communist Propaganda in Wartime Hollywood", *Film History* 20, 4 (2008): 412-436.
8. Justus D. Doenecke, *Not to the Swift: The Old Isolationists In the Cold War Era* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979), 12; John E. Moser, *Twisting the Lion's Tail: American Anglophobia between the World Wars* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 2.
9. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (21 September 1939): A8, (16 May 1940), A10, and (19 October 1939): A11; Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, 24-26.
10. Eells, *Hedda and Louella*, 196; Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (21 September 1939): A8; EMB, Los Angeles, Calif., to HH, 3 October 1939; EM, Cincinnati, Ohio, to HH, 26 September 1939; and FV, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to HH, n.d., Charles Lindbergh folder, Hedda Hopper papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California [hereafter Hopper papers]. Although readers' letters to Hopper were public and not private letters, I am using initials to protect the privacy of respondents.
11. Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mother's Movement and World War II* (Chicago: The

University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1, 45; Laura McEnaney, "He-Men and Christian Mothers: The American First Movement and the Gendered Meanings of Patriotism and Isolationism", *Diplomatic History* 18 (Winter 1994): 47-57.

12. This title was used in a clipping of Hopper's 22 September 1939 column, Charles Lindbergh folder, Hopper papers, but does not appear in the version that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. It is a variation on the title of Eleanor Roosevelt's 1933 book *It's Up to the Women* and monthly column in *Ladies Home Journal*. See June Melby Benowitz, *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right-Wing Politics, 1933-1945* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 81, 83.

13. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (21 September 1939): A8; Susan Zeiger, "She Didn't Raise Her Boy to Be a Slacker: Motherhood, Conscription, and the Culture of the First World War", *Feminist Studies*, 22, 1 (Spring 1996): 10.

14. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (28 September 1939): A14; (19 October 1939): A11; and (6 December 1939): 13.

15. D. Worth Clark and Gerald P. Nye quoted in Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts (eds), *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films* (St. James, N.Y.: Brandywine Press, 1993), 189, 187.

16. Henry McLemore, "The Lighter Side", *Los Angeles Times* (September 30 1941): 3; Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (10 September 1941): 12 and (18 February 1940): C3; Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 27.

17. FBI quoted in John Sbardellati and Tony Shaw, "Booting a Tramp: Charlie Chaplin, the FBI, and the Construction of the Subversive Image in Red Scare America", *Pacific Historical Review*, 72 (November 2003): 500, n. 16; Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (23 May 1940): A11.

18. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (11 January 1939): A17 and (16 October 1940): 17; Dan Kamin, "'Who is This Man (Who Looks Like Charlie Chaplin)'", 9 and Frank Scheide, "*The Great Dictator* and Chaplin's Tramp as an Awakened *Rip Van Winkle*", 23 in Frank Scheide, Hooman Mehran, and Dan Kamin (eds.), *Chaplin: The Dictator and the Tramp* (London: British Film Institute, 2004); Charles J. Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 197.

19. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (16 November 1939): 16; Doenecke, *Not to the Swift*, 9.

20. Hedda Hopper to McCormicks, 25 September 1947, Robert McCormick (*Chicago Tribune*) folder, Hopper papers; Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown, 1988), 352-353.

21. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (10 December 1941): 17; Thomas Schatz, "World War II and the Hollywood 'War Film'", in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 90.

22. Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 5-6; David Farber, "War Stories", *Reviews in American History* 23, 2 (1995): 320.

23. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (15 May 1942): 13; (2 March 1945): A8, (9 May 1943); (26 April 1943): A8; and (22 February 1944): A7.

24. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (20 May 1943): 30; and (18 June 1943): 15; U.S. serviceman quoted in Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (23 May 1943): C3; David Selznick to Hedda Hopper, 6 April 1942, David Selznick folder, Hopper papers; Ted Lloyd to Hedda Hopper, 20 December 1944, Hollywood Victory Committee folder, Hopper papers.

25. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (18 February 1944): A11; U.S. serviceman quoted in Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (23 May 1943): C3.

26. Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 149; Joseph McBride, *Searching for John Ford* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 368; Eells, *Hedda and Louella*, 220; Hedda Hopper, *From Under my Hat* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1952), 306; Hopper, "Hollywood: 1942 Brought to Light", *Los Angeles Times* (1 January 1962): C10.

27. David Niven, *The Moon's a Balloon* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 297; Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (2 March 1945): A8 and (3 July 1942): A9.

28. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (28 May 1942): 12, (17 December 1941): 17; (14 December 1944): 10; and (11 December 1944): 11; Harry Brandt, National Chairman, War Activities Committee, New York, to Hedda Hopper, 11 December 1944, Hollywood Victory Committee folder, Hopper papers; Eells, *Hedda and Louella*, 224, 209.

29. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (19 March 1942): 12; (28 February 1943): C3; and (26 March 1942): 15.

30. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (19 April 1942): C3; (7 April 1942): A9; (19 February 1943): 14; and (2 March 1943): A9; Eells, *Hedda and Louella*, 12.

31. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (26 March 1942): 15; (18 June 1943): 15; and (18 February 1944): A11; McLaughlin and Parry, *We'll Always Have the Movies*, 32.

32. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (3 July 1942): A9 and (12 May 1943): 19; David Culbert, "Our

Awkward Ally: *Mission to Moscow* (1943)", in John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson (eds), *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1979), 121-113; Terry Christensen, *Reel Politics: American Political Movies from* Birth of a Nation *to* Platoon (New York: Blackwell, 1987), 67-68.

33. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (26 March 1942): 15 and (29 April 1942): 13; McLaughlin and Parry, *We'll Always Have the Movies*, 101, 32.

34. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (23 December 1942): 11 and (3 February 1944): A10; Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, 92; Doherty, *Projections of War*, 136.

35. Eells, *Hedda and Louella*, 224; Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 98; Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (18 December 1942): A9 and (9 May 1943): C2.

36. Hopper, "Looking at Hollywood", *Los Angeles Times* (17 April 1943): 14 and (7 January 1945): B1; Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 167; Michael S. Sherry, "Projections of Hegemony and Consent in Film", *Diplomatic History* 19 (Fall 1995): 715.

37. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (17 April 1942): 17 and (23 September 1942): A10.

38. Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, 291; Slotkin, "Unit Pride", 470, 486.

39. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, 65; Schatz, "World War II and the Hollywood 'War Film'", 105.

40. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (28 April 1943): 17; (31 May 1943): 11 and (27 December 1944): 11; Doherty, *Projections of War*, 147.

41. Stephen Vaughn, "Ronald Reagan and the Struggle for Black Dignity in Cinema, 1937-1953", *The Journal of Negro History* 77 (Winter 1992): 1-16.

42. Walter White quoted in Doherty, *Projections of War*, 208; Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, "Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda in World War II", *Journal of American History* 73 (September 1986): 383-406.

43. James Naremore, "Uptown Folk: Blackness and Entertainment in *Cabin in the Sky*", *Arizona Quarterly* 48 (Winter 1992): 103; Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8, 74-76; Corporal Vernon Bilke to Hedda Hopper, n.d., copy in The Papers of the NAACP (microfilm), Group II, Series A, General Office Files: Films – General, 1942, Box A-275, Reel 15.

44. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (8 June 1943): 15 and (19 March 1942): 12.

45. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (19 January 1945): 11 and (30 December 1942): 11; Steve Babson, *The Unfinished Struggle: Turning Points in American Labor, 1877-Present* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 122.

46. MPA Statement of Principles quoted in Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 240.

47. Senator Robert R. Reynolds quoted in Edward Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 34; Elmer Rice quoted in Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 451.

48. Hopper column, *Los Angeles Times* (9 December 1938): 11.

Abstract: Dissent and Consent in the "Good War": Hedda Hopper, Hollywood Gossip, and World War II Isolationism, *by Jennifer Frost*

Hedda Hopper is known as the great rival of William Randolph Hearst's Hollywood columnist, Louella Parsons. But in her columns and radio broadcasts, Hopper found ways of her own to incorporate highly charged political opinions alongside privileged accounts of Hollywood celebrity culture. Working with the Hopper papers at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, this essay reveals the ways in which the columnist's conservative political agenda dealt with domestic issues, appropriate responses to the outbreak of war in Europe, and the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack. Hopper's leading role in the anti-communist movement which affected Hollywood in the post-war period is seen the logical continuation of her earlier positions.

Key words: Hedda Hopper; Louella Parsons; Hollywood columnists; World War II and American film; anti-communism in Hollywood.