
Ana Martha Mayagoitia Soria
anmayago@ucm.es
PhD student. History of Social
Communication Department,
Faculty of Information
Sciences. Complutense
University of Madrid, Spain.

Submitted
December 9, 2016
Approved
June 14, 2017

© 2017
Communication & Society
ISSN 0214-0039
E ISSN 2386-7876
doi: 10.15581/003.30.3.99-113
www.communication-society.com

2017 – Vol. 30(4)
pp. 99-113

How to cite this article:
Mayagoitia Soria, A. M. (2017).
American social engineering
through children's educational
films (1945-1953). *Communication
& Society* 30(4), 99-113.

This research was made within the
framework of the research project
CSO2015-66260-CA-1-P *Historia de la
Programación y de los Programas de
Televisión en España (cadenas de
ámbito estatal): de la desregulación
al apagón analógico, 1990-2010*,
funded by Ministerio de Economía y
Competitividad (Spain).

American social engineering through children's educational films (1945-1953)

Abstract

This research analyzes the American educational films aimed at children attending primary and elementary education during the administration of the democrat Harry S. Truman (1945-1953). Of the 11,000 documentaries included in the Educational Film Guide (1953), the author performed a selection of productions available online, which aim to the social education of the young in regard to their behavior and attitudes in school and at home, and to the values and ideologies that were expected of them as U.S. citizens. A content analysis is implemented to quantify the subject matters of the films and the audience they were targeted to; technical resources are considered as well. It also incorporates a textual analysis that takes into account the concept of childhood, gender distinction, and the widespread political, social, and moral teachings. It is concluded that these types of films were an aid in the shaping of an ideology for a country in the postwar period, based on the war propaganda experience itself. The youngsters were indoctrinated in ideas, values and behaviors of conservative and nationalist nature, as a consequence of the concept of childhood during that period and the context in which these films were made: the Cold War

Keywords

Cinema, propaganda, childhood, postwar, ideology, United States.

1. Introduction, importance and current status of the issue

From its beginnings, cinema was considered to be very important socially, not only for its role as a media of mass communication, but also as an instrument to educate and instruct society (McClusky, 1947). Although all movies can exert some influence in that sense, there have been many films in which the sole purpose was to inform, convey knowledge or modify behaviors. These movies had a specific niche and audience, and their messages had repercussions in the educational and cultural discourse. These films, known as educational shorts, have been included within the category of *ephemeral films* (Shell, 2014), considering they were created in a precise moment, with a specific purpose (like

advertising or industrial films), and discarded or replaced when their validity was lost.

Before World War II, schools were already using educational short films; in particular, social guidance films, as part of their curriculum to aid in shaping the moral conduct of students of all ages, in the same way the Axis powers had done (Hoban, 1946: ix). Some authors, like Ellsworth (1991), compare these productions to propaganda films, as these short films were used to encourage students to follow certain behaviors and ideologies. It was intended that the citizens of the United States would receive through the media – especially from documentaries – a faithful portrayal of the American way of life; however, what these films actually depicted was a spirit of change and progress according to the objectives and policies of the government at that time (Barsam, 1992: 277-278).

Fear of communism and world events taking place during those years fueled the need to inculcate democratic beliefs and attitudes, and propagated the ideal of family and the traits it was felt a United States citizen should possess (Cristol, Mitchell & Gimbert, 2010: 62-63); the country was depicted as a plural nation, shaped by minorities (Singerman, 1951: 58). The achievement of these objectives led to the dissemination of a somewhat chimerical reality (Neuhaus, 2010), and fear became a tool with which to reinforce these ideas (Jacobs, 2010). The intention of educational short films was for children to understand that the United States always fought for noble and progressive causes, consistently stood up against the enemy who dared to threaten its values, and that they, the young ones, were part of the crusade to make their country and their future a better place (Jacobs, 2010: 27).

It should be mentioned that social guidance films were distributed not only in the United States, but also in other countries with the assistance of UNESCO. In short, the analysis of these productions happens to be of great interest, because it transcends the educational perspective in order to reveal the social and political theoretical framework of those decisive moments in the development of a country, and in international relations.

2. Objective, hypothesis and methodology

The objective of this research is to analyze the values, attitudes and behaviors transmitted by those American short films intended for the social education of children between the ages of 4 and 11, from the end of World War II to early 1953; that is, during the presidential term of Democrat Harry S. Truman. This period is of great interest for two fundamental reasons. The first reason is that production of educational short films was methodically organized when President Truman, concerned with education during the atomic age, urged the teaching community (*See & Hear*, January 1946) to direct their efforts to teaching and cultivating understanding and tolerance in order to maintain world peace. The second reason relates to the historical context in which these productions were made. After World War II, an obsession to restore family life, regain national values, and re-establish gender roles evolved, alongside the promise of perks such as safety and stability for people who had been through a war and years of economic depression a decade earlier (Spigel, 1992: 2). This was also a period in which educational needs changed, just as Truman had anticipated. The country was facing a quieter but equally feared conflict: the Cold War. It was important to control foreign policy and to keep an eye on the ideology of Americans, especially with regard to its children. It was necessary to infuse Americans with the idea that their country had ample military, economic, and social power to keep the United States strong, both as a nation and as a world power. This is the context in which the films in this research have been analyzed.

Although the role of UNESCO in the distribution of these films among its member countries (Mayagoitia, 2017) is not the objective of this current study, a reference is made to this international initiative in order to assess the importance of these short films outside the United States during the specified period.

Social engineering is understood as the attempt of governments, institutions or companies to influence or modify attitudes and social behaviors on a large scale. The hypothesis of this work is that educational short films were produced to fulfill the mission of social engineering, because the political and social context of the time increased the need to safeguard the integrity of childhood. The use of didactic methods, in part rigid and imposed from above, as well as the inculcation of some strict attitudes in children and adolescents, were implemented as a consequence of the concept of childhood in those years; a sector of the society that had to be protected and indoctrinated.

Several sources were used for this research. First, two educational magazines, *See & Hear* and *Educational Screen*, published in the United States during the years analyzed and targeted at the audiovisual sector, were consulted in order to better understand the educational principles held by academic institutions. The *Educational Film Guide* (1953) was another source that provided information on educational films available in the United States in the years covered in this study.

However, educational short films are the main source of this research. These were located and digitized in the *Prelinger Archive*¹ and the *A/V Geeks Archive*². The films selected, all available online, had the purpose of social education of children between kindergarten and sixth grade. A final selection was made amongst the ones in which the main themes were behavior and attitudes within family and school circles, as those were sought to inculcate values and ideologies expected of children as United States citizens. Of a total of 11,000 educational films included in the *Educational Film Guide* (1953), nearly 2,000 short films produced during Truman's presidential term were of a social nature, and approximately 170 of those were intended for the socialization of younger children. The sample for this study is 22 of the 86 films that are digitized (Annex I); the final selection was comprised of short films solely intended for socialization, and whose themes are not mixed with other subjects such as hygiene, money management or learning.

A content analysis of the selected sample was carried out in order to quantify the production of these films by year and educational level, duration, if they are in color or black and white, as well as by their conveyed topics. Additionally, to understand *what the film is about*, a textual analysis of these films was conducted to study their contents; that is, their depicted values and ideologies, relationships with adults and other children, cultural patterns, the role of hobbies and recreation, etc. Finally, in regard to *how the story is told*, several aspects were considered, such as the narrative and technical resources, the voice-over, and the role of music and editing, among other elements. The purpose of this type of analysis was to identify the political, social and moral guidance included in the films, as well as the embedded concept of childhood in such teachings.

3. The production, distribution and classification process

Educational shorts were filmed with very basic equipment and crew, and in most cases, performers were not professional actors (Smith, 2000: 3). There were three main producers of this type of movie: Coronet, Centron and Encyclopædia Britannica. Coronet was the leading production company of these types of films, and was the first in the United States to use a narrative discourse (Smith, 1999: 89). After World War II, this production company took advantage of the government's perception that it needed to re-educate American society, releasing an educational short film every four days on average (Smith, 1999: 91). Coronet's dominance over this audiovisual market was indisputable.

¹ Online: <https://archive.org/details/prelinger>

² Online: <https://www.youtube.com/user/theavggeeks/videos>

Centron was founded in 1947 in Kansas. In its beginnings, the company made only instructional short films on topics like cooking and sewing. That same year, amidst the boom of educational short films depicting social themes, the distribution company *Young America Films* decided to hire Centron to make such movies. At the beginning of the 1950s, this production company became Coronet's competitor (Smith, 1999: 107).

Encyclopædia Britannica, under the name ERPI Classroom Films, had been making educational films since the early 1930s, but avoided social content for fear of controversy and being labeled as propaganda (Alexander, 2010: 21). In the mid-1940s, William Benton, the vice president of the University of Chicago, convinced the owner of Encyclopædia Britannica to donate the publication to the university, including its film production department (Alexander, 2010: 22). From then on, the company made educational films of all sorts; however, unable to compete directly with Coronet, it decided to specialize in historical and scientific films (Smith, 1999: 100).

Some directors started their careers as war or nonfiction filmmakers, and some screenwriters who had previously worked as teachers and educational film advisors decided to pursue filmmaking and direct their own short films (Alexander, 2002: 43). In the specific case of social guidance films, it was clear that in order to achieve didactic and formative features, professional screenwriters and teachers had to work as a team (Hoban, 1946: 83) to be as effective as any other audiovisual crew. The use of direct language, commentaries made only to clarify what appeared on-screen, the absence of extradiegetic music to avoid distracting the audience, as well as direct and concise titles, were common features in these productions (Lissack, 1946: 132).

These short films were never conceived as substitutes for educators or teaching. Their use was recommended only for guidance on the addressed subject, and it was advised not to make use of these movies as a recreational tool. Each short film came with a study guide for teachers, which included advice on activities for before and after the screening in order to stimulate the exchange of ideas. Viewers were intended to become participants, expressing their opinions and listening to the points of view of their peers (Bowman & Derby, 1955: 5-6).

The themes of educational films included not just social instruction, but also many other subjects ranging from social sciences to psychology, ethics and administration of leisure time. The classification used in the *Educational Film Guide* (1953) established 10 major themes that correlated with school subjects: philosophy, religion, social sciences, linguistics, sciences, applied sciences, art, recreation, literature and history. Philosophy included psychology, as well as conduct of life and ethics; social sciences included a section on customs. Each production company classified its own films into different school grades, in order to be viewed specifically by the intended audience; the grade classification was determined according to age and level of education, ranging from the earliest educational stage (4 years old) to adulthood (22 years and over).

These films were made available for rent or purchase by schools through production companies, distributors, government agencies (such as the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, among others), audiovisual educational libraries, public and university libraries, school libraries and museums (Waldron, 1949: 85). If the film was made by a government agency, the loan was always free of charge and could be obtained directly through that agency or from public libraries (Lindstrom, 1954: 39). The objective was to achieve a wide distribution range in order to train children as the citizens the country felt it needed. The economic benefits were also an incentive for production companies that wanted to maintain their business through these projects.

In 1946 Wittich and Fowlkes, editors of the educational magazine *See & Hear*, conducted a study to demonstrate the effectiveness of educational films in the classroom. The study lasted nine months and included a survey of 264 children aged 9 to 11, divided into 9 groups, who answered 100 questions. The findings revealed that the way in which the film was

introduced to students and the activities that followed were decisive factors in its effectiveness (Long 1948: 67). It also became evident that when habits, actions and behaviors were clearly reflected through social guidance films, children retained that information, and it affected their critical thinking as well as their actions and attitudes (Wittich & Fowlkes, 1947: 225).

4. UNESCO and the distribution of educational films

American educational films were distributed even beyond the United States as a result of UNESCO's plan to spread its mission through audiovisual formats. Previously, the League of Nations was interested in using cinema for educational purposes; however, none of its plans were successful and this strategy was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. One of the mistakes attributed to the League of Nations was the failure to promote world peace through international projects, as it instead entrusted this task to each member country (Imle, 1946: 434).

At the end of World War II, there was a need to rebuild Europe and rehabilitate its inhabitants, both culturally and intellectually. In November 1945, UNESCO was established with the purpose of supporting educational projects in accordance with the ideals of the United Nations. At the time, access to information was considered inherent to democracy, and democracy to literacy. For this reason, for the first time in history, mass media – primarily cinema – was intentionally used for the establishment of a true universal cultural democracy.

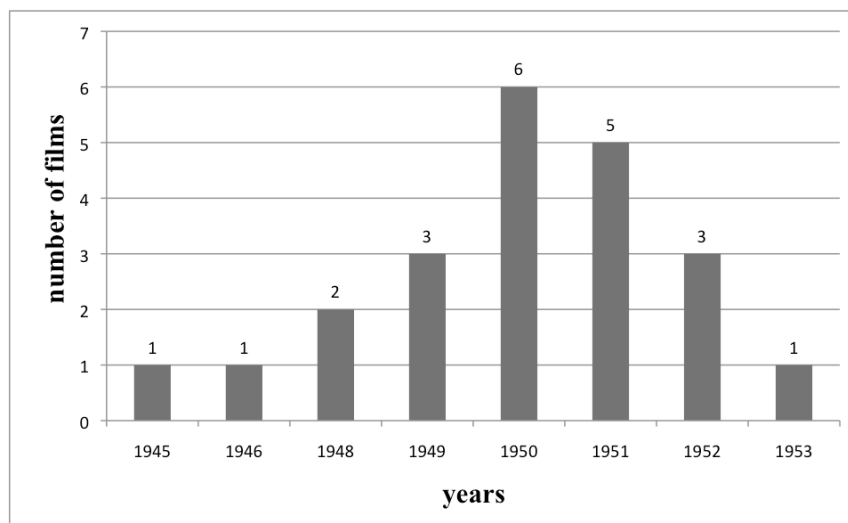
In 1946, American schools assumed the task of teaching students ideas included in the *Declaration of the United Nations*, because it was believed that democracy was won on battlefields, but it was also an ongoing educational task that should be undertaken in school education, starting with the youngest students, and then reinforced through adulthood (Mayagoitia, 2017). It was believed that if the ideas and customs of other countries were better understood, it would generate empathy and understanding between nations, and therefore prevent new confrontations. There was also a perceived necessity for a serious, well thought-out, and concrete proposal regarding the systematic use of films as a means of achieving brotherhood and international unity (Imle, 1946: 504-505).

During 1951 and 1952, the *United States National Commission for UNESCO* edited a guide titled *United States Educational, Scientific and Cultural Motion Pictures and Filmstrips Suitable and Available for Use Abroad*. This guide included an extensive list of American educational documentaries considered appropriate for use abroad. The catalog included more than 3,000 documentaries divided into educational, scientific, international, occupational and artistic subjects. Among these were films produced by Coronet and Encyclopædia Britannica Films (Mayagoitia, 2017). It must be mentioned that during the postwar period, UNESCO's critics claimed that the organization acted as a promoter of United States policies and interests because most of its advisors were of American origin (Druick, 2011: 82), and that the materials used by the institution came mostly from that country, including social guidance films.

5. Social engineering, between ethics and customs

Content analysis shows that from the 1950s, the production of social guidance films experienced a notable increase (Graph 1). The unsteady situation in which production companies found themselves by the end of the war, the slow recovery of official institutions, and the political context of those years, explain the small number of films produced in the second half of the 1940s. However, issues related to the precarious conservation of these films, should not be discounted when assessing these results.

Graph 1. Distribution of social guidance films by year in the United States (1945-1953)



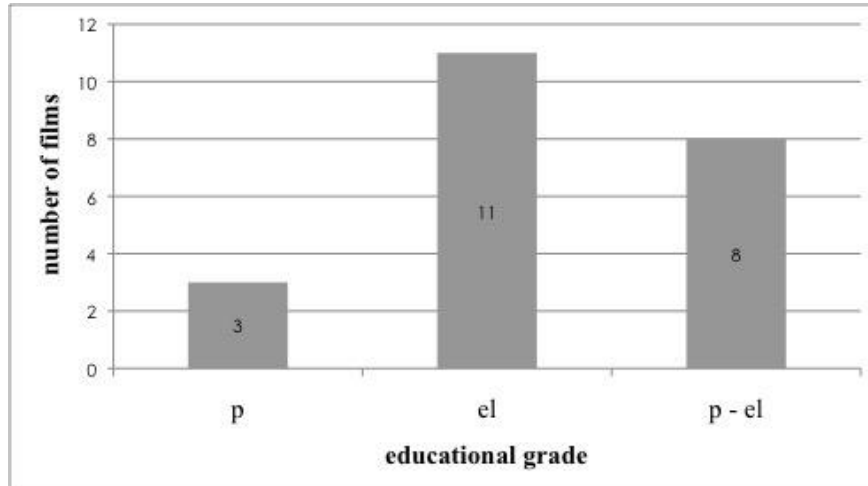
Source: own elaboration with information from the *Educational Film Guide* (1953)

The average length of these films, all shot in 16 mm, does not exceed 10 minutes, as it was understood that the attention of children declined after that span of time, reducing the effectiveness of the message. Only one exception was found: *What It Means to Be an American* (1952), with a duration of 22 minutes. The explanation for this anomaly might rely on the fact that some films were classified into two or more age groups, in order to reach a wider audience.

Most of the films of this era are in black and white, with the exception of *Brotherhood of Man* (1946), *Parties are Fun* (1950), *Skipper Learns a Lesson* (1951) and *What It Means to Be an American* (1952). Color film was expensive, and production companies wanted to stay within budget. On the other hand, some studies on the effectiveness of color over black and white film in learning showed that color favored retention but not learning (VanderMeer, 1954).

The films analyzed were classified with “p” if addressed to students in primary grades (between 4 and 9 years of age), and with “el” for elementary grade students (between 9 and 11 years old). The latter is the group for which a higher number of social guidance films were made (Graph 2). However, although the number of short films specifically aimed at students between 4 and 9 years of age is smaller, it should be noted that a substantial percentage of films could be used in both primary and elementary education (p-el).

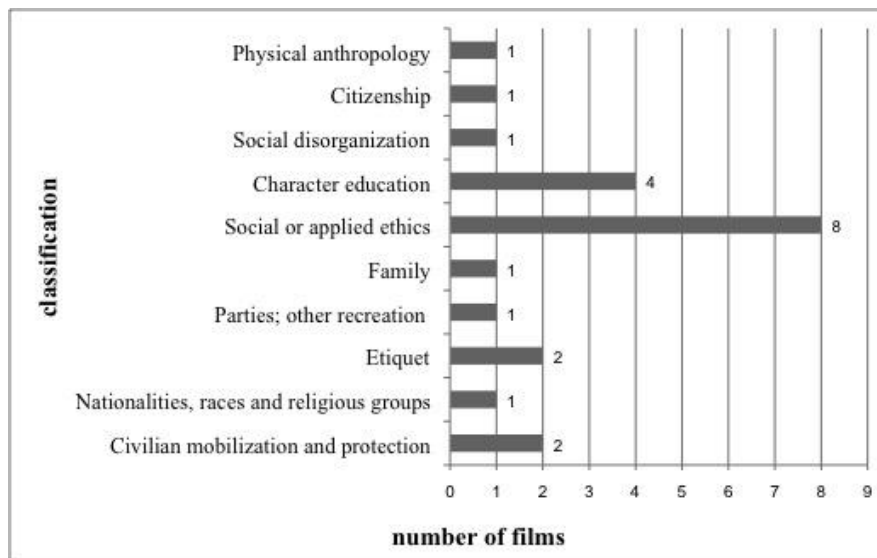
Graph 2. Classification by educational level of the analyzed educational films produced in the United States (1945-1953)



Source: own elaboration with information from the *Educational Film Guide* (1953)

According to data included in the *Educational Film Guide* (1953), the social education classification included different themes. The enumeration of these subjects gives an idea of the extent of the concept of socialization that was intended to be achieved. This included ethics (social and individual), character education, aspects related to family relationships, manners, civics, civil protection, knowledge of country celebrations, and awareness of different races and religions, among other aspects. Most of the films analyzed in this research are classified within the social or applied ethics theme, followed by character education, with the other subjects being less frequently depicted, according to this classification (Graph 3).

Graph 3. Number of analyzed films according to *Educational Film Guide* (1953) subject classification



Source: own elaboration with information from the *Educational Film Guide* (1953)

It should be mentioned that in addition to this general classification, the *Educational Film Guide* (1953) also arranges short films into more specific themes related to their various content. For example, a film classified in ethics can also be linked with cooperation, conduct, friendship and honesty, as illustrated by the short film *Am I Trustworthy?* (1950). Regardless of the main theme, it was found that in most of the shorts analyzed in this research, there was mention of multiple values such as tolerance, honesty and courtesy (*The Fun of Making Friends*, 1950). Emphasis is placed on family as the backbone of social development in children (*Your Family*, 1948), as well as the importance of belonging to a group outside the family home (*Are You a Good Citizen?*, 1949). Some films illustrate the responsibilities and manners children should practice at home, at school, and at play (*Parties Are Fun*, 1950).

Remarkably, World War II is only mentioned in two films: *Revolution in Toyland* (1950) and *The House I Live In* (1945). Although the intended social engineering was, in many aspects, a result of the experiences and consequences of the war (as demonstrated in the textual analysis of this work), it is evident that some sort of self-suppression was used as a strategy to overcome the conflict. It should be noted that children between 4 and 11 years old were aware of the conflict. These children were either born during the war, or spent their early childhood in those years. There is also no direct reference to the confrontation with the then-USSR, or to the Cold War, except the instruction regarding the series of actions that should be taken in case of a nuclear attack. *Atomic Alert* (1951) and *Duck and Cover* (1952) should be seen as films intended to reassure children, rather than expose them to the dangers or devastating effects of the nuclear bomb.

Little is known about the educational advisors who collaborated in the writing of the scripts for these films; however, they were academic specialists who meticulously researched the subject in order to adjust it to the desired educational level, and they helped the scriptwriter translate those results into film. Despite the lack of a bibliography to corroborate these facts, it is confirmed in the credits of some of these productions that educational advisors were university specialists, and although their area of expertise is not specified, there is mention of their university affiliation and position (Table 1).

Table 1. Educational advisors who collaborated in the writing of social guidance films analyzed for this study (1945-1953)

Educational Advisor	University	Position	Film(s)
Elizabeth B. Carey	University of the State of New York	Supervisor Bureau of Instructional Supervision	<i>Let's share with others</i> (1950) <i>The fun of making friends</i> (1950) <i>How honest are you?</i> (1950) <i>Am I trustworthy?</i> (1950) <i>Parties are fun</i> (1950)
William E. Young	University of the State of New York	Divisional Director	<i>Everyday courtesy</i> (1948) <i>Let's play fair</i> (1949)
Harl R. Douglass	University of Colorado	Director of College Education	<i>How friendly are you?</i> (1951)
Viola Theman	Northwestern University	Associate Professor of Education	<i>Your family</i> (1948)
Jerome G. Kerwin	University of Chicago	Professor of Political Science	<i>Are you a good citizen?</i> (1949)
I. Owen Foster	Indiana University	Associate Professor of Education	<i>Developing responsibility</i> (1949)
Margaret M. Justin	Kansas State College	Dean, School of Home Economics	<i>Good table manners</i> (1951)

Source: own elaboration with data from the films viewed for this study

In short, the content analysis reveals that the main social function intended by the distribution of these short films in American schools was the education in ethical values of young citizens of the United States.

5.1. The standard model and its variations

In social guidance films, part of the life of the American middle class is represented in a very idyllic way. Films of this period show stereotypical and one-dimensional characters in ideal worlds, displaying models of behavior expected to be imitated by the children who view them.

The analysis revealed that there is a standard model repeated in most films; that is, a basic narrative structure inclusive of setup, conflict and resolution, except in the cases of *What It Means to Be an American* (1952) and *Let's Be Good Citizens at School* (1953), which are more descriptive and documentary-like. Most of these movies have male or female voice-overs. Typically a female voice is used in films intended for younger children, symbolizing the maternal voice. Both male and the female voice-overs will ask direct questions to the viewer (such as, "What would you do?"), with the intention of encouraging discussion after the viewing of the film. In these films, the role of the voice-over is to guide and offer a precise and specific interpretation of the picture, describing and sometimes explaining the actions of the characters, and occasionally explaining their feelings.

Music is used in most of the films, but only as introduction and conclusion of the feature. There are only two exceptions, in which music plays a relevant role. In *Revolution in Toyland* (1950), music is used to narrate the story, and most importantly, to dramatize military actions. The second exception is *The House I Live In* (1945), in which music plays a very important role. The action starts with Frank Sinatra performing a song in a recording studio and ends with him singing the song that gives title to the film. The song talks about the daily life in the American dream: its people, children playing in parks, different religions living together in harmony, etc. The film ends with the image of a group of children walking together, starting a new friendship, as the melody of *America the Beautiful* (a song that talks about of the greatness of the United States) is heard as background music.

Plots usually unfold indoors (at home or school), except in *Let's Share with Others* (1950), in which the street serves as a learning setting for a child who does not share his lemonade-sale business with his friends; and in *Skipper Learns a Lesson* (1951), in which the characters (dogs of different races) fight and reconcile outdoors. In that age, the family home, the school, and the street were the stages on which children's daily lives were usually carried out, and so the stories presented in these films are set in such spaces in order to generate an affinity with their intended young audience.

As mentioned, and as corroborated in this analysis, these films were low-cost productions starring non-professional actors. In most cases, they had no sound recording and were created with very simple linear editing. Flash-backs are used only in *How Honest Are You?* (1950), *The House I Live In* (1945), *Cheating* (1952) and *Other People's Property* (1951).

Special mention should be made of the films made by Coronet and Centron. Coronet productions endings are optimistic, and the same formula is invariably repeated time and time again: a child has a problem, a responsible adult gives some advice, the child follows the advice word for word, and the problem disappears. Another characteristic of these productions is the constant repetition of actions and on-screen text. Clearly, this strategy was used with the purpose of embedding the film's ideas and messages in viewers' minds (*Everyday Courtesy*, 1948).

Centron films used commercial movie techniques, such as fade-outs, overlays, sound effects, and voice-overs to represent the voice of conscience of the characters. These stories

are full of drama, stages are dark (with lighting and aesthetics similar to that of *film noir* productions), problems are not easily solved, and the consequences are sometimes quite serious. These films always end with a question mark to incite debate among viewers (*Cheating*, 1952).

Some themes have a constant presence in most films, showing an intention to educate viewers in and reinforce certain values and ideas from an early age. For example, there is encouragement of unity and cooperation between different groups of people, emphasizing the importance of being part of a community. The nuclear family operates as a warehouse of democratic and American values, and from there, the youngest ones learn how to relate with the outside world. School is another learning environment, although its presence in these films is not prominent. Gender roles are noticeable and striking, but this must be interpreted within the social context of the time: the father was the protector and sole provider, the mother was responsible for the housework and the education of the children, and the youngsters helped with household chores, were obedient, and fulfilled all their obligations. It is worth mentioning that in the analyzed films, the main characters are male, with the exception of *Parties are Fun* (1950) and *Atomic Alert* (1951), which both star girls.

5.2. Principles and Values of a Generation

It must be remembered that these films were made for people who had just emerged from a six-year war, and the films' objective was the re-education in certain values in order to make the world a more stable and tolerant place. *Revolution in Toyland* (1950) is a puppet animation film; its story is a metaphor about the war, and values like solidarity, collaboration and union against the enemy are highlighted; although the two sides are not clearly defined ideologically or geographically, the characters are clearly typified as good and bad. On a gentler note, the film *Brotherhood of Man* (1946) is an animated feature that shows ideas of brotherhood, understanding and respect of others; it addresses the diversity of races and religions, but never makes reference to specific countries.

The theme of diversity is also depicted in *Skipper Learns a Lesson* (1952), through a tale that revolves around friendship beyond differences. Skipper is a dog that unlike his owner Susan, who plays with children of different races, refuses to play with other dogs because they look strange to him on account of their color and other aspects. Eventually, with the help of children, Skipper changes his mind and apologizes to the other dogs, and those dogs let Skipper join their pack. The film is original because of the creative storyline used to deal with the subject of racism.

Most of the films analyzed encourage tolerance and unity as pillars of socialization among children. It is also made clear that this kind of education should begin at home, under the guidance of parents or older siblings. In *Your Family* (1948), the main theme is the relationships within the family circle, and it is shown how the family members work as a united group, doing household chores or enjoying leisure time together. In this film, responsibility plays an important role: each individual must fulfill the tasks assigned before turning to leisure, which, it should be noted, is enjoyed with the family. In *The Fun of Making Friends* (1950), a mother gives advice to her son on how to make friends, by encouraging him to follow some easy steps: look for good things in people, smile at them, talk to them about pleasant things, and never tell them your problems. Another short film dealing with friendship and socialization is *Parties are Fun* (1950), in which the planning of a birthday party becomes a family event. Here it becomes clear once again that the family is the backbone of the life and development of children, and also that it is fun to attend social events in order to meet people and make new friends.

These films were also intended to educate the youngest children in social behavior and norms. They focused on responsibility and courtesy, and constantly emphasized the

importance of being fair and honest in any situation. This is clearly shown in *Let's Play Fair* (1949), in which two brothers argue over a chemistry set. Dramatization serves as a model to show the importance of such values, and makes mention of remorse and sacrifice to make up for any damage or loss. Unlike the prior mentioned films, the children in *Cheating* (1952) and *Other People's Property* (1951) make mistakes and are reprimanded for their poor decisions and ill-considered actions. Honesty and good sense play an important role in the education of children, as these appear as fundamental values for social harmony.

How Honest Are You? (1950) is a film featuring teenaged characters, and demonstrates that being honest isn't always easy. This is one of a few films that recognize the difficulties in achieving certain values. *How Honest Are You?* addresses the acts of pondering decisions, asking questions before accusing someone, and avoiding rumors because people's reputation may be damaged. These values are very important, considering that during those years, the United States was dealing with McCarthyism; that is, a communist *witch hunt*.

In fact, the threat of communism and the beginning of the Cold War directly affected the approach of social engineering, since education was partly conceived as a response to the social needs of the moment. The most notable change was the need to defend democratic and American values, as well as a noticeable invitation to participate in social activities outside the family circle. *Let's Be Good Citizens at School* (1953) shows what every student was expected to do during a school day: pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States, prepare notebooks and pencils before class, help other students feel like one of their peers, and even vote in order to choose what to play during recess. School symbolizes the country, and the students represent its citizens, who know how to behave with solidarity and democratic values.

Are You a Good Citizen? (1949) is another film that illustrates the concept of community by demonstrating the traits a good civilian should possess: paying taxes, voting, obeying the law, staying informed about public affairs, and being part of public or private organizations to improve neighborhoods.

Only one film specifically exalts patriotism and values that should be important for Americans. *What It Means to Be an American* (1952) makes direct and explicit mention of communism. There is an affirmation, in spite of different landscapes and nationalities, about all American citizens sharing the same ideals. A comparison is made between a dictatorship and a democracy, to emphasize that American citizens are encouraged to think for themselves and express their opinions from an early age. The film ends by making a call for unity against an invisible enemy who wants to attack their values and lifestyle.

The Cold War is not a theme that is constantly present in these short films. As already mentioned, the two short films that directly address the civil response to a possible nuclear attack are *Atomic Alert* (1951) and *Duck and Cover* (1952). In both features, it is mentioned that although the possibilities of an attack are small, the duty of children is to protect themselves and request the help adults when in need. In *Atomic Alert* (1951) the main characters are two siblings – a teenage boy and a girl about 8 years old – who take refuge in their home basement from a bombing, keeping calm and following the rules until two civil defense officials come to their aid. *Duck and Cover* (1952) combines live action and animation, and encourages viewers to follow the actions of the main character, Bert, a turtle whose presence is linked to a catchy song that advises children to *duck and cover* in order to protect themselves during an atomic attack. Although both films were intended to instruct and reassure children, repeated images of reactions during atomic attacks, as well as the sound of alarms and detonations of nuclear bombs, make the fear and anguish palpable. Another characteristic of these two films is that the only mention about the effects of the atomic bomb refers to buildings (not to people), and its destruction is shown exclusively through animation.

Some of the analyzed films continuously show scenes in which democratic actions are represented: the characters express their own opinions, cast votes, participate in debates and reach agreements (*Are You a Good Citizen?*, 1949; *Cheating*, 1952; *Let's Be Good Citizens at School*, 1953). In addition, some films emphasize nationalism and show evident patriotism (*Are You a Good Citizen?*, 1949; *What It Means to Be an American*, 1952). This suggests that one of the main objectives at the time was to build a country with a strong sentiment of nationalism, and on the other hand, to encourage the Americanization of its new citizens. Films dealing with the topic of civil defense against possible nuclear attacks remained within the United States, possibly because it was the country that most feared being attacked by the USSR during those years.

6. Arguments and conclusions: an education in the service of the needs of the State

American educational short films served as aids in the organization and teaching of opinions, attitudes and values in children and pre-adolescents during the studied period, not only in the United States, as stated by Ervin-Ward (2009), but also in other UNESCO member countries; hence the importance of its study and analysis. It is true that it is not possible to assess the degree of long-term penetration of these films' messages, but it can be assured that these films had an important presence in schools, as evidenced by their high production and distribution rates, as well as the fact that with the arrival of television, audiovisual materials were being used as aids during an era impregnated with visual language.

One of the most striking aspects of the analyzed films is the absolute confidence shown in the family as the primary environment for socialization during childhood; in this case, school has a secondary place. It is also important to mention that the family symbolizes the nation: parents guide children just like government leaders guide citizens.

Another characteristic is that the actions shown are always explained, but there is little reflection regarding the motives; there is simply encouragement to follow rules and discipline. In this sense, it can be said that the intended education was rigid and imposed from above: the child is a member of society, but with little individuality. It should be noted that these productions encouraged dialogue and the exchange of ideas, either through questions asked directly to the viewer or by activities suggested in the study guides provided to the teacher with each educational film. However, the main objective of these productions was to gain the acceptance of the proposed reference model; only in this sense can these features be understood as propaganda films as mentioned by some authors (Ellsworth, 1991).

The world depicted is ideal, but this does not equate to an absence of problems; however, the problems are explained and resolved with amazing ease. Children are portrayed as "perfect" in general; that is, they are absolutely obedient, they acknowledge their mistakes, fulfill their daily duties, and think of others. The scenarios (the family home or the school) are abstract, and the reality or identity of the country (except exceptions) is never shown, which indeed, allowed the films' distribution to other countries.

The messages of this social engineering vehicle, created for children's education, center on teaching socially accepted models of behavior (Bowman & Derby, 1955), but there is emphasis on the obligations children must fulfill. Little space is given to play, leisure or entertainment; if they play, they do it by setting up a lemonade-stand business (*Let's Share With Others*, 1950). They were encouraged to form part of a group outside the family circle in order to function in unity, like a shield against what they perceived as an unstable world under the constant threat of enemies that could harm their American values. The atmosphere created by the Cold War is perceptible in these productions, in particular, the nuclear threat and the war against communism (*What It Means to Be an American*, 1952); the importance of honesty, fair play, being part of "legal" social groups (religious, labor-union,

cultural or social), or achieving the American ideal (Cristol, Mitchell and Gimbert, 2010), should be understood within the political context of the American *witch hunt*.

Another important characteristic is that the main characters are usually male. Girls do not represent a guide or model to follow; their role is always secondary, consistent with the gender differences of the time. Children of different races don't appear in the analyzed films, except those films showing coexistence in diversity, as in *Skipper Learns a Lesson* (1952). For a country in which there was evident racial segregation, especially in the southern states, human and civil rights are not addressed in any of these productions, which would be an effective rationale behind these lessons.

These observations do not mean that the teachings intended by the American educational system were undemocratic, but the concept of childhood was presented, in a way, similar to that of totalitarian governments: a part of society that should be protected and educated in values such as discipline, hierarchy and obedience. This way of conceiving children was not exclusive to the United States, but rather a general mindset, present in both democratic and authoritarian countries, and not only seen in educational short films, but also in some children's television programs as well (Paz & Martínez, 2014; Wiedemann & Tennert, 2004; Mikhalets, 1975).

Lastly, it should be noted that the themes shown in educational films changed gradually. In the mid-1940s, they focused mainly on racial and religious tolerance, whereas by the end of the decade, the main themes were family, honesty and courtesy. As the 1950s began amidst an anti-communist mood in the United States, there was a perceived need to impart a sense of patriotism to the nation in order to fight communism and raise awareness of a possible atomic war.

Future research will be beneficial in assessing which elements remained and which were modified in the socialization of American children through social guidance films in the following years, as well as in the evolution of the concept of childhood and its perceived needs.

References

- Alexander, G. (2002). An Academic Perspective: The life and films of John Barnes. *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 2(2), 41-72.
- Alexander, G. (2010). *Academic films for the classroom: A history*. North Carolina: McFarland.
- Barsam R.M. (1992). *NonFiction Film: A Critical History*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Benedict, R., & Weltfish G. (1946). *The Races of Mankind*. New York: Public Affairs Committee.
- Bowman, M. & Derby, D. (1955). Use and Objectives of Educational Films. *The Coordinator* 4(1), 5-7.
- Cristol, D., Michell, R., & Gimbert B. (2010). Citizenship Education: A Historical Perspective (1951-Present). *Action in Teacher Education* 32(4), 61-82. doi: [10.1080/01626620.2010.549725](https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2010.549725)
- Druick, Z. (2011). Unesco, Film and Education: Meditating Postwar Paradigms of Communication. In C.R. Acland & H. WassonUseful (Eds.), *Useful Cinema* (81-102). Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Duck and cover (1952). *Educational Screen* 31 (3), 114.
- Ellsworth, E. (1991). I Pledge Allegiance: The Politics of Reading and Using Educational Films. *Curriculum Inquiry* 21(1), 41-64. doi: [10.1080/03626784.1991.11075351](https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.1991.11075351)

- Ervin-Ward, A. (2009). Doing It for the Kids: Rebels and Prom Queens in the Cold War. *Colloquy: Text Theory Critique* 18, 160-181.
- Freedom of the Screen Stressed by Truman. (1946). *Educational Screen* 25(7), 400.
- Hoban C.F. (1946). *Movies that teach*. New York: Dryden Press.
- Imle, E.F. (1946). The motion picture in world peace: I. *Educational Screen* 25(8), 433-435.
- Imle, E.F. (1946). The motion picture in world peace: II. *Educational Screen* 25(9), 504-506.
- In this current month. (1946). *See & Hear* 2(1), 13.
- Jacobs, B. (2010). Atomic Kids: Duck and Cover and Atomic Alert Teach American Children How to Survive Atomic Attack. *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 40(1), 25-44. doi: [10.1353/flm.0.0142](https://doi.org/10.1353/flm.0.0142)
- Lindstrom, C.A. (1954). From Idea to Screen: Distribution. In Film Council of America (Ed.), *A Symposium: Sixty years of 16mm Film, 1923-1983* (36-44). Des Plaines: Film Council of America
- Lissack, H.R. (1946). Classroom Films - What Are They?. *Educational Screen* 25(3), 132.
- Long, A.L. (1948). Research in the Educational Film Field. In G. Elliot (Ed.), *Film and Education* (55-71). New York: Philosophical Library.
- Mayagoitia, A. (2017). "La UNESCO y los cortometrajes educativos norteamericanos en la posguerra: una herramienta para modelar a la sociedad". In L. Martínez Valerio, (Ed.), *Cultura popular y medios audiovisuales en la historia contemporánea* (143-160). Madrid: Universidad Complutense.
- McClusky, F.D. (1947). The Nature of the Educational Film. *Hollywood Quarterly* 2(4), 371-380. doi: [10.2307/1209533](https://doi.org/10.2307/1209533)
- Mikhalets, Z. (1975). Children's Television in Czechoslovakia. *Soviet Education* 17(12), 94-98. doi: [10.2753/res1060-9393171294](https://doi.org/10.2753/res1060-9393171294)
- Neuhaus, J. (2010). "Shake this Square World and Blast Off for Kicksville" Teaching History with Post-WWII Prescriptive Classroom Films. *The History Teacher* 44(1), 35-50.
- Paz, M. A., & Martínez, L. (2014). Children's programming on *Televisión Española* under Franco (1958-1975). *European Journal of Communication* 29(4), 465-479. doi: [10.1177/0267323114530359](https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323114530359)
- Shell, H. R. (2014). Films in the archive: Hollywood in detroit. *Technology and Culture* 55(3), 711-715. doi: [10.1353/tech.2014.0087](https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2014.0087)
- Singerman, M. (1951). Are we practicing democracy? *Educational Screen* 30(2), 57- 59.
- Smith, K. (2 January 2000). FILM; The Dos and Don'ts Of the Doo-Wop Age. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <http://nyti.ms/1XJNrJl>.
- Spigel, L. (1992) *Make room for TV: television and the family ideal in postwar America*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- U.S. National Commission for UNESCO. Panel on Educational Films. (1952). *United States Educational, Scientific and Cultural Motion Pictures and Filmstrips Suitable and Available for Use Abroad*. Washington D.C.: Department of State.
- VanderMeer, A. W. (1954). Color vs. black and white in instructional films. *Audiovisual communication review*, 2 (2), 121-134. doi: [10.1007/bfo2713271](https://doi.org/10.1007/bfo2713271)
- Waldron, G. (1949). *The Information Film*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wiedemann, D. & Tennert, F. (2004) Children's television in the GDR. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24(3), 427-440. doi: [10.1080/0143968042000277629](https://doi.org/10.1080/0143968042000277629)
- Wittich, W.A., & Fowlkes, J.G. (1947). Twelve Audio-Visual Aid Questions. *The Phi Delta Kappan* 28(5), 221-227.

Annex I. Social guidance films, produced in the United States between 1945 and 1953, analyzed for this study.

1. *The House I live in*, Centron, (1945).
2. *Brotherhood of man*, Brandon films, (1946).
3. *Everyday courtesy*, Coronet, (1948).
4. *Your family*, Coronet, (1948).
5. *Are you a good citizen?*, Coronet, (1949).
6. *Developing responsibility*, Coronet, (1949).
7. *Let's play fair*, Coronet, (1949).
8. *Am I trustworthy?*, Coronet, (1950).
9. *How honest are you?*, Coronet, (1950).
10. *Let's share with others*, Coronet, (1950).
11. *The fun of making friends*, Coronet, (1950).
12. *Parties are fun*, Coronet, (1950).
13. *Revolution in Toyland*, Sterling Films, (1950).
14. *Atomic Alert*, Encyclopædia Britannica Films, (1951).
15. *Good table manners*, Coronet, (1951).
16. *How friendly are you?*, Coronet, (1951).
17. *Other's people property*, Centron, (1951).
18. *Skipper learns a lesson*, Encyclopædia Britannica Films (1951).
19. *Cheating*, Centron, (1952).
20. *Duck and cover*, UW-Castle, (1952).
21. *What it means to be an American*, Frith Films, (1952).
22. *Let's be good citizens at school*, Getaway, (1953).