

# Office of War Information

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***For the benefit of both your studio and the Office of War Information it would be advisable to establish a routine procedure whereby our Hollywood office would receive copies of studio treatments or synopses of all stories which you contemplate producing and of the finished scripts. This will enable us to make suggestions as to the war content of motion pictures at a stage when it is easy and inexpensive to make any changes which might be recommended.***

**-Lowell Mellett (FDR presidential liaison to media) to studio heads, December 9, 1942 (4)**

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**The Office of War Information (OWI) was one of the numerous government bureaucracies created by the total mobilization effort of the Victory Program. On June 13, 1942, the White House announced the creation of the OWI and the appointment of its chief, Elmer Davis. OWI was to undertake campaigns to enhance public understanding of the war at home and abroad; to coordinate government information activities; and to handle liaison with the press, radio, and motion pictures. In effect, the OWI was charged with selling the war. The agency issued elaborate guidelines, divided into numerous categories, to insure conformity in every film. OWI asked film makers to consider the following seven questions before producing a movie:**

- **Will this picture help win the war?**
- **What war information problem does it seek to clarify, dramatize, or interpret?**
- **If it is an "escape" picture, will it harm the war effort by creating a false picture of America, her allies, or the world we live in?**
- **Does it merely use the war as the basis for a profitable picture, contributing nothing of real significance to the war effort and possibly lessening the effect of other pictures of more importance?**
- **Does it contribute something new to our understanding of the world conflict and the various forces involved, or has the subject already been adequately covered?**
- **When the picture reaches its maximum circulation on the screen, will it reflect conditions as they are and fill a need current at that time, or will it be out-dated?**
- **Does the picture tell the truth or will the young people of today have reason to say they were misled by propaganda? (7)**

**This last question was, at first, a consideration of extreme importance for OWI. The agency, which was often classified as "liberal" by other branches of the government, started out with the intention of truthfully representing the war. Films like [\*Casablanca\*](#)**

**genuinely attempted to inform the moviegoing audience of the causes of and reasons for the war. The OWI sought to avoid hate pictures, providing instead a balanced view. These good intentions quickly dissolved, though, as the OWI found it necessary to crack down on the motion picture industry. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hollywood turned out numerous anti-Japanese films, some of them quite racist. Particularly, the mid-summer 1942 [Little Tokyo, U.S.A.](#), which dealt with the controversial subject of Japanese internment, caused the OWI to crack down on the artistic license of Hollywood. As the OWI became more regulatory, truthfulness gave way to the use of sentimental symbolism to manipulate opinion by denying or clouding relevant information. By the end of World War II, the OWI had a heavy hand in all production coming out of Hollywood.**

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