

DEPARTMENT OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

"DON'T BE A SUCKER"

A STUDY OF AN ANTI-DISCRIMINATION FILM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION	1
1. The Film	
2. Research Procedure	
3. The Scope of This Article	
SELECTIVE PERCEPTION	7
1. The Problem	
2. Successful Routing	
"BOOMERANG".	11
1. Introduction	
2. Boomerang Effects Deriving from Content	
APPLICABILITY OF GERMAN THEME.	19
1. Introduction	
2. Lack of Transfer	
3. Reasons for Lack of Transfer	
EMOTIONAL PARTICIPATION.	23
1. Introduction	
2. The Hero as Primary Identification Object	
3. The Intended Bad Example	
THE EMOTIONAL CHARGE OF THE MESSAGE AND THE LIKELIHOOD OF ITS ACCEPTANCE	29
1. Introduction	
2. The Hypothesis	
3. The Hypothesis Tested	
4. Limitations of the Test: Conclusion	
THE FORM OF THE MESSAGE AND THE LIKELIHOOD OF ITS ACCEPTANCE.	35
1. Introduction: Dimensions of Form	
2. Classification of Messages in Three Dimensions	
SUMMARY.	38

INTRODUCTION

1. The Film

"Don't Be A Sucker" is an anti-discrimination film which was produced during World War II by the Army Signal Corps for use with the armed forces. After the war, a shortened version of the film was widely shown both commercially and under educational auspices. In 1947, the Department of Scientific Research of the American Jewish Committee undertook to study the impact of the film.¹

The film attacks anti-minority prejudices by means of a frank appeal to self-interest. The film tries to show that there are no superior races; that prejudice is always purposefully manipulated; that no one gains by it except possibly the manipulators, and they only temporarily; that it is therefore to the advantage of all to fight prejudice (thus the title "Don't Be A Sucker"); and that if the "minorities" stick together they will have the strength to eliminate or withstand prejudice.

In somewhat greater detail, the film is made up of the sequences described below. For purpose of later reference, each such sequence is numbered and labelled.

- I. The beginning of the film defines and describes typical "suckers".
Miscellaneous
sucker
shots A young man drinking at a bar picks up a blonde, leaves with her, and is robbed in the alley-way by the blonde's accomplice. A train passenger is inveigled into a card game from which he emerges with a badly depleted bankroll. These are some of the suckers of the world.
- II. The film then focusses upon a bright-looking young man, Mike, who is admiring the countryside from the train window. Mike is proud to be an American and happy about the limitless opportunities thus afforded him. But, we are told, there are those who want to cheat Mike of this birthright.
Mike
views
country-
side
- III. Upon alighting from the train, Mike stops to listen to a street speaker who is urging "real Americans", "American Americans", to confiscate jobs held by Negroes and by "rich aliens with foreign accents". Mike nods his agreement. But when the speaker attacks Masons, Mike is shocked into disagreement, for he is himself a Mason.
American
Agitator
Scene
- IV. An onlooker, noting Mike's initial agreement and his later dismay at being implicitly attacked, draws him aside and into a conversation. The newcomer introduces himself as a refugee professor who saw the same things happen in Berlin. He warns Mike that such talk always is motivated by the speaker's desire for gain and that people like Mike never profit from such discrimination.
Mike
and
Pro-
fessor
on Park
Bench

¹ The data were collected with the cooperation of the Institute of Social Research.

V. German Agitator Scene The refugee professor proceeds to draw the parallel between the present scene and days of Nazism in Germany. He describes a Nazi street speaker very much like the soap-box orator to whom Mike has been listening. In a flashback scene, the Nazi speaker is seen appealing to a crowd's self interest. The Nazi succeeds in isolating each minority group so that all are vulnerable. But, the narrator points out, the one who was really being swindled was Hans, a pure German according to the Nazi standards. To him, the Nazis promised everything and he believed them. But in the process of gambling with the liberty of others, he lost his own freedom.

VI. Nazi Pillage and Persecution With the help of flashbacks, the refugee professor then describes the persecution, the pillage and the wanton destruction which followed the Nazi rise to power.

VII. German Classroom Scene Educators were also punished, the professor relates. One German professor is shown lecturing on the myth of "master races".. He ironically refers to pictures of Hitler, Goebbels, and Goering as evidence that the mythical Aryans are not blue-eyed, tall and slender. As the educator concludes his lecture, uniformed Nazis stride in and attack him.

VIII. Consequences of Nazism The narrator says that everybody in Germany suffered because the people did not stick together. By permitting attacks on the first minority, everybody lost out. And when Germany was defeated, even the "true Aryan" to whom Nazism promised a job and security ended up in a nameless grave.

IX. Mike's Conversion Mike is convinced by the professor's story. He signifies his conversion by tearing up and tossing away the hate pamphlet he had accepted from the American agitator.

2. Research Procedure

The research of the study was divided into functional phases: the idea-getting phase, devoted to determining the nature of the film's impact upon audiences, and the quantification of ideas phase devoted to identifying the specific results of that impact in quantitative terms.

A. Two phases of research

(1) Idea-getting

In order to determine the nature of impact, the film was shown to various audiences and their responses were noted in detail. This phase included five steps¹, viz:

¹ The various steps of the two phases and the number of respondents involved in each step are summarily stated in table I.

- a. performing a content analysis of parts of the film, in order to identify those objective characteristics of the film to which the responses would be made.¹
- b. presentation of the film, under auspices of the research group, to four groups of adults, each group being equipped with Program-Analyzer apparatus.² Each of the four groups was interviewed (as a group) immediately following the showing. The Program-Analyzer records were analyzed in part during the interview and in greater detail later.
- c. holding intensive interviews with twenty-four individual students at a Manhattan girls high school, one week after the film had been shown as part of a school Brotherhood Week program.
- d. holding group interviews with classes at the same school; these interviews were also held one week after the showing.
- e. administering a written questionnaire to 326 third and fourth year students of the same school, the questionnaire being also submitted one week after the showing.

(2) Quantification of Ideas

A specially designed experiment was carried out to determine what changes of attitude were produced by the film.

All second year students of a Long Island co-educational four year high school were divided at random into two groups of about 500 each, the division being accomplished independently for the academic and the commercial sections of the school. In the course of a regular assembly program the experimental group was shown "Don't Be A Sucker" together with a film about vaccination. The control group at a similar assembly was shown the vaccination film and a South American travelogue. Teachers were instructed to hold no discussion with the students concerning the films or their purpose.

¹ i. e., to identify the communicational stimuli of the responses.

² The Program Analyzer is a device which enables individuals in an audience to continuously record their reactions to all parts of the program being witnessed. By pressing appropriate buttons, audience members indicate that they "like", "dislike" or are "indifferent" to what they are seeing or hearing. A permanent record of both individual and group response is provided by the Analyzer.

The Program Analyzer was developed by Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton and has been widely used in both academic and commercial research.

Four weeks later¹ students in both groups were asked to complete a written questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 100 items, bearing upon attitudes toward such diverse subjects as political parties, the relations of labor and business, social conformity and social defiance, and school issues. The bulk of the items were such that responses to them could not reasonably be expected to be influenced by the film. About one in every five items, however, dealt with inter-group relations in America or with discrimination in Nazi Germany, and the responses to these items were therefore susceptible of being affected by exposure to the film. No direct reference to the test film itself was made at any time.

After the questionnaires were completed, the two groups were compared in regard to background characteristics, and cases were deleted as necessary to render the groups completely comparable. The control group contained 491 students and the experimental group 368. The two groups contained identical proportions of students with regard to certain standard indices of personal and familial characteristics.²

The equating of groups was apparently successful. On no item unrelated to the film was there any significant difference between the responses of the experimental group and the responses of the control group. Accordingly differences between the responses of the experimental and the control groups to film-related items could be confidently regarded as being due to exposure to the film.

B. Interplay of Research Phases

As is usual in studies which employ a variety of methods, constant interplay occurred between the results of the two phases of the research. The idea-getting phase not only suggested test items for the quantifying phase, in some cases actually furnishing the exact wording of the item, but furthermore provided clues to the interpretation of the statistical findings. The statistics obtained from the quantitative phase, on the other hand, answered questions posed by the qualitative materials and also revealed additional facts which could be interpreted only by further analysis of those qualitative materials.

¹ The four-week period was chosen somewhat arbitrarily. It suited the convenience of the school and satisfied the investigators' stipulations that the interval between film showing and questionnaire be (1) sufficiently long that the students would not link the two experiences; and (2) sufficiently short that any effects the film might have had would still persist.

² Specifically, age, race, school grade, kind of course being taken, place of birth, length of New York residency, religion, frequency of church attendance, place of father's birth, father's occupation, union membership of father, telephone ownership.

C. Specific Validity of the Findings:

Two limitations of the findings are particularly important to remember.

In the first place, although the qualitative data were derived from both adults and adolescents, the quantitative data were derived wholly from youngsters of high-school age. The conclusions of our research, based as they are on the quantitative data, cannot therefore be regarded as valid for adults, but only for the high school age group actually investigated.

Secondly, from the description of methods, the quantitative materials bear only on change of opinion. No data are available on the film's reenforcement effects, that is, its tendency to intensify existent attitudes. Statements derived from the quantitative data are based on the assumption that the attitudes of the control and experimental groups are similar before exposure to the test film, and that any group differences in responses to the questionnaire items is therefore a measure of change attributable to exposure to the film. For example, if fifty-eight per cent of the control group hold a certain opinion, and 79 per cent of the experimental group are of the same opinion, it is assumed that the difference of 21 per cent consists of those persons who would not hold this view without seeing the film, but do so after being exposed to it. It is assumed, in other words, that 21 per cent of the audience have changed their minds on the opinion in question. It is this conversion effect that is dealt with in the analysis.

3. The Scope of this Article

Throughout the project, the research group was concerned both with the degree to which each of the film's several messages was accepted, and with how the responses to each of these separate elements contributed to or detracted from the film's achieving its more general purposes.

Within the present article, however, no attempt is made to report upon all these specific and interlocking details. Our purpose here is to report only upon such data as bear on concepts more generally useful to producers and students of anti-discrimination propaganda. These concepts and propositions will be discussed under six headings: Selective Perception; "Boomerang"; Applicability of the German Theme; Emotional Participation; The Emotional Charge of the Message; and The Form of the Message.

Table 1. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Steps taken in the research	Number of subjects	Description of subjects	Techniques	Conditions of film showing
<u>A. Idea-getting:</u>				
I	--	--	Content analysis of parts of film	--
II	44	Four groups of adults; two church groups; one graduate sociology class at Columbia University; one group of transient residents at the Sloane House YMCA.	Group interviews (4) with Program Analyzer record	Exhibited by research staff
III	24	Students in a Manhattan girls' high school	Individual interviews	Exhibited under school auspices as part of Brotherhood Week
IV	80	Members of two classes of Manhattan girls' high school	Group interviews (2) (without Program Analyzer record)	Exhibited under school auspices as part of Brotherhood Week
V	326	Third and fourth-year students at a Manhattan girls' high school	Written questionnaire based directly on film elements	Exhibited under school auspices as part of Brotherhood Week
<u>B. Quantification of ideas:</u>				
VI	<u>Experimental:</u> 368	(Both groups; second (year students (boys (and girls), at a (Long Island City (high school	(Film shown to experi- (mental group only. (Written attitude ques- (tionnaire, containing (both relevant and (irrelevant items but (with no direct (reference to film, (later administered (to both groups.	(Exhibited under school (auspices as part of (regular assembly pro- (gram. (Not exhibited
	<u>Control:</u> 491			

SELECTIVE PERCEPTION

1. The Problem

Communication research has abundantly demonstrated that the success or failure of the communication process depends as much on members of the audience and their predispositions as it depends on the content of the stimulus and the manner of its presentation.¹ For each member of an audience, consciously or not, modifies the stimulus he perceives according to his own predispositions. To determine the direction in which these subjective factors in perception work is a central question in much audience research and in almost all research on the impact of propaganda.

"Don't Be A Sucker" is designed to influence the attitudes of an audience which varies widely in age, interests, ethnic and religious backgrounds, and in its existent attitudes about prejudice. By no means unaware of these variations in audience predispositions, the producers of "Don't Be A Sucker" injected into the film special appeals to special groups.

But, the diversity of the special appeals in a film, cannot of course approach the almost unlimited diversity of the audience. The producer must decide which of the various factors of audience differentiation are crucial to his immediate purposes. Accordingly, the producers of "Don't Be A Sucker" decided to appeal specifically to each major religious group in the audience, and specifically to show the Catholic, the Jew, and the "Aryan" (in American terms, the white Protestant) that members of his own group suffered under the Nazi regime.

Study of the film's impact thus involves the essential question of whether selective perception functions in the manner anticipated by the producers; i.e. whether specific messages are successfully routed to their specific target groups.

We will show here that in quite a few instances selective perception did occur as the producers had anticipated. In other instances (which will be discussed in the following chapter on "Boomerang") selective perception operated to defeat the intention of the producers.

¹ See, for example, Lazarsfeld, Paul; Berelson, Bernard; and Gaudet, Hazel. The People's Choice. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944.

Merton, Robert K. Mass Persuasion. New York: Harper's, 1947.

"The Effects of Presenting 'One Side' Versus 'Both Sides' On Changing Opinions On A Controversial Subject", Readings in Social Psychology, edited by Newcomb and Hartley.

Sherif, Muzafer; and Cantril, Hadley. The Psychology of Ego Involvements. New York: Wiley and Sons, 1947. See especially chapters 3, 4.

2. Successful Routing

"Don't Be A Sucker" is remarkable in the degree to which selective perception did operate with precision. From all the evidence, several of the messages scored precise hits on their intended target groups.

The film is particularly emphatic in asserting that everyone suffers under fascism. Nazi persecution is shown to have been directed against Catholics as well as Jews. Even the dominant group in Hitler's Germany, the "pure Aryan", is shown to have suffered under fascism. The appeal of these messages is clearly based on self-interest; American Catholics are assumed to be especially interested in the fate of German Catholics and the "Aryan" message is supposed to hit American Protestants with special force. That these two groups perceived and reacted to the appropriate messages is obvious from examination of Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2

Proportions of control and experimental groups agreeing with statement,

"THE CATHOLICS WERE PERSECUTED AS MUCH AS THE JEWS UNDER THE NAZIS"

	<u>Control</u>	<u>Experimental</u>
Proportions who agree among:		
American Catholics	61% (304)	72% (225)
Others	42% (187)	50% (143)

Table 3

Proportions of control and experimental group agreeing with statement,

"HITLER GOT GERMANY OUT OF THE DEPRESSION, AND BEFORE GERMANY WENT TO WAR, HE HAD IMPROVED CONDITIONS FOR THE PURE GERMANS"

	<u>Control</u>	<u>Experimental</u>
Proportions who agree among:		
American Protestants	52% (118)	26% (89)
Others	43% (373)	42% (279)

It will be noted that 61% of the control group of American Catholics agreed that under Nazism, German Catholics were persecuted as much as the Jews, but that 72% of the Catholic experimental group agreed with this statement. The film apparently promoted this view among members of the group for which it was intended.¹

The American Protestants, Table 3 reveals, were led by the film to reject the idea that Hitler helped "pure Aryans". Fifty-two per cent of the American Protestants who had not seen the film believed that Hitler had helped the Aryans but only 26% of the group who had seen the film maintained this view.

These two messages were thus selectively perceived by the groups for which they were intended. What is perhaps more striking is that the non-Catholics in the audience were not significantly impressed by the message intended for the Catholics,² (the difference between the 42 per cent in the control group and the 50 per cent in the experimental group being too small to be considered reliable) and that non-Protestants ignored the message concerning the "Aryan".

Another example of selective response in "Don't Be A Sucker" is provided by the reactions to the American Agitator scene.³ Part of the argument of the agitator is that jobs which rightfully belong to native Americans are being taken by Negroes and by "alien foreigners with accents". Presumably, one of the tasks of the film is to bring about more democratic attitudes on this score. Although the intended lesson, that there should be no employment discrimination is never explicitly stated in the film, the hate slogan of the agitator is made explicit, and it is hoped that the lesson will be inferred by the audience.

Data from the "Quantifications of Ideas" phase reveal that only one sub-group of the audience did make the desired inference. The questionnaire contained the test item:

"In times of depression, it is only right that jobs should be given first to people born in America."

¹ American Catholics were apparently particularly interested in the fate of German Catholics even before seeing the film. Note that in the control group, i.e. among respondents not exposed to the film, 61 per cent of the American Catholics and only 42 per cent of others were aware of the extent of Nazi persecution of Catholics. Selective perception had apparently been at work outside the framework of the test film.

² The eight point percentage difference is not significant at the .05 level, for which an eleven point difference is requisite. That is, the probability that this result could have been due to chance is greater than 5 out of 100.

³ Sequence III, p. 1, above.

The more intelligent¹ members of the audience who were themselves of native stock² and somewhat prejudiced³ against Jews and Negroes seemed to learn the lesson of the film. Only 27% of all such persons in the experimental group agreed with the statement, as compared to 49% of all such persons in the control group. While others in the audience, i.e. the less prejudiced, non-native stock, etc. were also apparently influenced in the appropriate direction, differences in response to the test item between control and experimental groups were not large enough to be statistically significant. The message, however, was effective among precisely those who most needed the lesson: those who have most to gain from discrimination because they themselves are native white, and those who because they are prejudiced, are most inclined to discriminate.

One wonders what devices in the film were responsible for the precision with which selective perception operated. While the specific devices which produced this effect cannot be isolated on the basis of available data, it is believed that the selective routing of messages was facilitated by the German agitator scene.⁴ As this scene opens a closely packed crowd is listening to the agitator, but as the agitator attacks various minorities by name, the listening crowd moves away from the representatives of those minorities. Thus when the Jews are attacked, the crowd edges away from Anton, the Jewish student; when the Catholics are attacked, Eric, the Catholic, is suddenly left standing alone. To the degree that each member of the movie audience identifies himself with the film representative of his own minority group, he feels also the isolation into which his film counterpart has been thrust. By emotionally dividing the movie audience into the same groups as are portrayed on the screen, this symbolic representation of the divide-and-conquer technique probably accomplishes what is rarely accomplished through mass media: each target group is made sufficiently self-conscious to selectively perceive its appropriate message.

¹ See Appendix A for index of intelligence.

² i.e., both respondent and father native born.

³ See Appendix A for index of prejudice.

⁴ Sequence V, p. 2 above.

"BOOMERANG"

1. Introduction

Selective perception of propaganda is sometimes such as to counteract the intent of the communicator and thus to produce a "boomerang" response.¹

Such responses may stem directly from the content of the particular communication, from seemingly unimportant details within the total communication, or from the mere existence of the communication as interpreted within the frame of reference of the audience. The mere realization by the member of the audience that he is being exposed to "propaganda", for example, may arouse him to suspect and distrust both the content of the piece and its sponsors or producers.

In the present article, however, we shall discuss only those boomerang responses which derived from identifiable aspects of the content or techniques of the film. We will furthermore restrict ourselves in this chapter to those boomerangs which can be shown by the quantitative data to have in fact occurred, or to have very possibly occurred. Instances of suspected boomerang upon which no statistical data are available will not be included here.

2. Boomerang Effects Deriving From Content

"Boomerang" effects deriving from content may operate in any of several ways, of which we shall here discuss and exemplify four. Specifically, we shall discuss boomerang which occurs because:

- (a) a message intended for a specific target group is intercepted by another group (selective mis-perception).
- (b) the message is contradicted by another element within the communication.
- (c) the message is contradicted by the personal experience or previous knowledge of members of the audience.
- (d) the message resembles another more familiar extra-film concept of contrary implications.

¹ A communicational item is said to "boomerang" when it produces a result directly opposite to that which its producers intended. A radio program designed to promote pacifism, for example, would be said to "boomerang" if it in fact stimulated martial attitudes. For a thorough discussion of boomerang, see Merton, Robert K.; and Kendall, Patricia L. "The Boomerang Response", Channels, Vol. XXI, No. 7, June, 1944.

Selective Mis-Perception

"Don't Be A Sucker" contains messages specifically intended for the dominant groups in this society and other messages specifically directed toward the minorities. Dominant groups are warned to be alert to the dangers of fascism and are shown that prejudice toward minorities may serve as an opening wedge for fascism. To minorities the film points out that they are many and that if they stand united against prejudice toward any one group, they will be strong enough in union to defeat any attack.

Now if the dominant group receives this particular message meant for the minorities, the effect may be exactly opposite to that intended by the film producers. If the dominant group comes to believe that the minorities are themselves strong enough to resist encroachments upon their rights, that they require no assistance in the struggle, then this dominant group may become complacent, rather than apprehensive about threats to any minority.

Such a mis-routing of message and such results did occur in some cases. Comments made by some young Protestant adults during an intensive interview¹ indicated that these respondents interpreted that message intended for the minorities as evidence that divide-and-conquer techniques were ipso facto doomed to failure in the United States.

"I don't think that would happen so much here, for the simple reason that we have no tremendous majority of people of one race. In Germany, it's predominantly German, and therefore if you can get that majority together, then you might be able to do something; but in this country you have all races, all creeds, and all religions; and therefore I don't think it would be quite so easy."

"Oh, we've got a race problem, but we've got a hundred of them over here; and they are all so balled up - I mean, none of them are any great threats; one person has certain prejudices and another has certain others, so that none is going to control or take over."

The idea-getting phase thus indicated that some American Protestants, upon seeing the film, came to regard prejudice as composed of a multiplicity of individual prejudices, which, because they were often in competition with one another, constituted no great danger and no real step toward fascism.

¹ See Step II, Table 1, p. 6 above.

To check upon and to quantify the occurrence of this boomerang effect, the following item was inserted into the quantification phase questionnaire:

"There are so many minorities in this country that no single one would ever be persecuted."¹

Responses were suggestive but not conclusive. Thirty-three per cent of the less intelligent American Protestants in the experimental group endorsed the statement, as compared to 23% in the control group. While not large enough to be statistically significant (at the .05 level) the difference suggests that a boomerang response may have occurred among a group who perceived a message intended for another group with a different frame of reference.

The message contradicted by other elements of the communication.

The film-makers failed in their attempt to impress upon the audience that there is a real possibility of fascism developing in the United States. Precisely the same proportion (29%) of both control and experimental groups subscribed to the statement:

"What happened in Germany under the Nazis could never happen in America."

There is good reason to believe that this represents not merely a lack of impact but rather the net result of several aspects of the film operating in a way to nullify the intended message.

The film relies almost exclusively upon one device, - the parallel speeches by American and German soap-box orators² - to communicate the idea that the beginnings of fascist activity, as manifested in Germany in the early thirties, are already evident in America. The film's success or failure in communicating the idea that "it can happen here" is thus almost wholly dependent on the spectator's response to this one device. Our research reveals that for one or more of three reasons, the effectiveness of this device is likely to be nullified.

- (1) The content analysis³ revealed that while the German agitator is but one of many aspects of Nazism depicted in the film, the American agitator is the sole symptom of fascist activity in America depicted throughout the entire film. The successful communication of the message that "it can happen here" is thus dependent upon the member of the audience perceiving the similarities between, as it were, a point and a line. No extended parallel is drawn.

¹ Step VI, Table 1, p. 6.

² Sequences III and V, Pp. 1 and 2 above.

³ Step I, Table 1, p. 6 above.

- (2) Numerous persons in the audience, furthermore, are impressed not so much with the similarities of the American and German Agitator scenes, but rather with the dissimilarities, which they take as evidence that fascism could not develop in the United States. These persons are particularly impressed with the fact that the German agitator commands the attention and respect of his audience, whereas the American agitator is received with indifference and skepticism.

"...first of all, there was this very small group there, and afterwards they just sort of walked away. None stayed to discuss it in any way. They just seemed to shrug their shoulders and go off."

"All kinds of people were listening. Most of them didn't pay any attention to the speaker."

- (3) The only person in the film who seems to take the American agitator seriously is the hero, Mike, who is later quite easily converted to approved views. Many members of the audience apparently regarded the ease of this reconversion as evidence that even if Americans are momentarily blinded into following fascists, their native good sense soon brings them back onto the path of democracy. Such misinterpretation, as well as the misinterpretation described in paragraph (2) above, is attested by responses to the questionnaire administered to the 326 third and fourth year high school girls. The questionnaire included the item:

"Did anything in the picture give you the impression that what happened in Germany could not happen here? What in particular was there in the film that made you feel that way?"¹

Ninety-two students felt that something in the film suggested that fascism could not develop in America. The specific element of the film most frequently cited as promoting this view was the reaction to the American agitator. Cited next most frequently was the ease with which Mike was reconverted to democratic views.

The boomerang suggested by these data was moreover probably furthered by another process, which is discussed below.

The message is contradicted by the personal experience or previous knowledge of members of the audience.

Responses obtained in personal interviews in the idea-getting phase² suggested that the device of the American agitator boomeranged not

¹ Step V, Table 1, p. 6 above.

² Steps III and IV, Table 1, p. 6 above.

only because various elements of the two involved sequences operated to nullify the intended message, but also because that message is contradicted by the previous experience of the audience.

Many Americans apparently regard soap-box speakers in general as "lamebrains" and unintentional clowns.

"...you see these people down in Wall Street doing the same thing that the man was doing in that picture, and I just stand there and watch them to laugh at them. I mean, I get a big kick out of them."

"I've listened to several in New York City. But for the most part it's just a lot of talk and nonsense that doesn't mean much, and you do that just as a form of diversion."

The film's presentation of the sneering reception accorded the American agitator thus contributes particularly markedly to the boomerang concept that American agitators are innocuous.

"I liked the way in which the two bus drivers -- or whatever those men were -- took the rabble rouser's speech so nonchalantly. I liked it because I think those were typical reactions to street meetings. Therefore I disagree with the idea that there is danger in sidewalk talks as a starting point for social disorder. It's innocuous. It reminded me of Columbus Circle."

The film-maker's intent that the American and German agitator scenes be regarded as parallel is likewise susceptible of boomeranging because of the contradictory nature of the audience's previous experience. Many of the respondents who have personally laughed at American soap-box orators also believe, perhaps as a result of recent war propaganda, that Germans and Americans are greatly unlike. Accordingly, they seize upon the depicted different reactions to the two agitators as evidence of American superiority, which would preclude the success of local fascistic agitation.

"In the scene showing the Nazi speaker, you have the four boys standing out and the rest of the group moving away from them -- coming under the spell of the speaker and falling under his sway. Whereas in the American scene the people walk away. They do have the sense, you might say. They walk away."

"Only one man clapped. The people listening were average Americans. They behaved like they would. They saw through it all."

Believing that Americans in general would not fall for such talk, these respondents regard Americans who do applaud the agitator as uneducated, low class, or in some other way inferior to the respondents themselves. By thus thoroughly disidentifying themselves from Americans

who might accept an agitator's views, these respondents come to believe that not only is the agitator innocuous, but the few persons he convinces are likewise of no importance or influence in the social scene.¹

"The majority would not believe such things. A few are conceited enough to exclude everyone else, but not many. (WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE LISTEN TO TALKERS LIKE THAT?) The uneducated and ignorant people listen. People who live in their own community with no outside contacts. (WHAT DOES THE PICTURE TRY TO SHOW?) That it's possible it could happen here. Be wary of public speakers. (WERE YOU CONVINCED OF THIS?) I don't know. I have quite a bit of faith in the American people."

(WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE WERE LISTENING TO THE AMERICAN SOAPBOX SPEAKER?) "People that did not have an education. In the front row there were two workers who were eating away. Educated people wouldn't stand there and eat. At the back row two people looked at each other and moved away. That proves that educated people wouldn't listen."

To determine whether the boomerang thus suggested by the qualitative data accumulated in the idea-getting phase actually increased the complacency of the audience, an appropriate test item was included in the quantification phase questionnaire.² The item and the responses to it are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Proportions of control and experimental group agreeing with statement,

"IN AMERICA, HARDLY ANYONE WOULD LISTEN TO A MAN TRYING TO SPREAD RACE HATE"

	<u>Control</u>	<u>Experimental</u>
Proportions who agree among:		
More prejudiced	32% (214)	26% (147)
Less prejudiced	19% (275)	29% (220)

¹ For an analysis of the role of disidentification in anti-prejudice propaganda, see Kendall and Wolf. "The Analysis of Deviate Cases in Communications Research," forthcoming article.

² Step VI, Table 1, p. 6 above.

It will be observed that a definite boomerang effect, toward increased complacency, did occur among the less prejudiced students. Twenty-nine per cent of such students who saw the film felt that there would be no audience for an American hate monger, as compared with only 19% of such students who had not seen the film. There is some indication that among more prejudiced students the film may have had the opposite more desirable effect, but the evidence is not conclusive, the difference between experimental and control groups being short of the 10% requisite for statistical significance at the .05 level.

That this particular boomerang should have occurred only among the less prejudiced students is quite startling, and is not wholly explicable on the basis of available data. Ordinarily, the less prejudiced student would be expected to have a better understanding of the messages of anti-discrimination propaganda. It is possible, however, that such students so dislike fascist propaganda that when they were confronted with a scene in which a fascist agitator was in fact unsuccessful, their own wishes may have influenced them to believe that no such agitator could be successful.

The boomerang suggested in the idea-getting phase was thus shown by the quantification procedures to have in fact occurred, but to have been less serious than might have been anticipated. Having occurred only among the less prejudiced, the boomerang is not likely to be as harmful as it would have been had it similarly affected the more prejudiced.

The message resembles another more familiar extra-film concept of contrary implications.

It will be recalled that the film-makers try to impress upon minority groups that in unity they will find strength. We have seen above that this message is also received by the majority, or dominant group in the audience, among whom it breeds complacency. But even when it reaches the minority group member for whom it is intended, this message seems to arrive in somewhat garbled form. The distortion seems to be due to the resemblance between this message and a more familiar extra-film concept of contrary implications.

That the United States is a "melting pot", a veritable nation of minorities, is an old concept with which probably all literate Americans are familiar. Some persons find implicit in this concept the notion that there is in fact no real majority group, and that consequently no minority group is in danger of persecution. "Don't Be A Sucker" likewise asserts that America contains many minorities, but suggests that each minority is in danger of attack, which, however, can be rendered ineffective if all minorities stand together.

Responses obtained in the idea-getting phase suggested that this film message might boomerang by virtue of being, as it were, subsumed within the more familiar message of contrary implications. Accordingly, an appropriate test item was introduced into the quantification phase questionnaire.¹ The item and the responses of minority group members² in the control and experimental groups are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Proportion of minority group members in control and experimental groups agreeing with statement,

"THERE ARE SO MANY MINORITIES IN THIS COUNTRY, THAT NO SINGLE ONE WOULD EVER BE PERSECUTED"

	<u>Minority Groups</u>	
	<u>Control</u>	<u>Experimental</u>
Proportions who agree among:		
More intelligent	28% (223)	30% (166)
Less intelligent	26% (131)	44% (106)

Inspection of Table 5 reveals that a boomerang effect did occur among the less intelligent members of minority groups; 44% of such respondents who had seen the film agreed with the statement, as compared to only 26% of such respondents who had not seen the film. No significant difference appears among the more intelligent members of minority groups, however.

It would seem likely therefore that the less intelligent members of minority groups interpreted the statements about the complexity of the United States population structure as evidence that no minority in this country need fear persecution. Rather than creating among such persons the resolve to be more vigilant about the rights of all minorities, the film produced, instead, complacency about the entire matter.

¹ Step VI, Table 1, p. 6 above.

² i.e., all persons other than white Protestants.

APPLICABILITY OF GERMAN THEME

1. Introduction

During the last several years, producers of anti-discrimination propaganda have leaned heavily upon the German theme. They have apparently believed that there is no better way to discourage people from prejudiced attitudes and behavior than to show, implicitly or explicitly, that those who practiced discrimination met disaster. But the producers of such propaganda, and in particular the producers of "Don't Be A Sucker", do not wish merely to inform people of Germany's fate. They rather hope that the audience will accept the moral of the tale, and recognize the parallel between the German scene and the American scene.

As part of our research into the impact of "Don't Be A Sucker" we therefore inquired into the applicability of the German theme. Specifically, we sought to determine whether audience members, as a result of being exposed to the film's depiction of Germany, expressed less hostility toward minorities in America than did those who had not seen the film. Our findings indicate that virtually no such transfer effect occurred.

2. Lack of Transfer

As we have already noted,¹ the film did convey to each religious sub-group of the audience that Hitler had persecuted their German counterparts and that he had used such divide-and-conquer tactics as a means of gaining power. But although a notable proportion of the experimental group accepted these messages about Nazi Germany, the group as a whole was apparently in no way influenced to apply the lesson at home. Table 6, below, reveals that when the experimental group and the control group were broken down according to degree of prejudice against Negroes and Jews,² no significant differences appeared.

¹ See Chapter II, 2, Successful Routing, pp. 8-10, above.

² For explanation of index, see Appendix A.

Table 6

Distribution of control and experimental groups
according to degree of prejudice (anti-Negro and anti-Semitic)

	<u>Control</u>	<u>Experimental</u>
Little or no prejudice	33%	38%
Mild prejudice	23	22
Average prejudice	18	14
High prejudice	11	13
Very high prejudice	15	13
100% =	491	368

Further research was undertaken to determine whether this lack of effect could be blamed on the fact that the film's messages about Germany were not completely accepted by all members of the experimental group. In reference to each of these messages, non-Jewish members of the experimental group were divided into those who had and those who had not given the approved response to the appropriate questionnaire items. The two resulting sub-groups, i.e., those who had and those who had not accepted the messages, were given attitude tests and the proportion of highly prejudiced persons in each group noted. The results of this research are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Proportions who are highly prejudiced among those
non-Jewish members of experimental group who did
and who did not accept messages about Nazi Germany

<u>Message</u>	<u>Proportion Among</u> <u>Those Who Did</u> <u>Accept Message</u>	<u>Proportion Among</u> <u>Those Who Did Not</u> <u>Accept Message</u>
Hitler used "divide-and-conquer" tactics to rise to power	15% ¹	21% ¹
Catholics, as well as Jews, were persecuted in Nazi Germany	15%	13%
"Aryans" suffered in Nazi Germany	17%	13%

¹ A ten-point percentage difference is requisite for statistical significance at the .05 level.

Table 7 reveals that among those who accepted the messages about Germany, prejudice remained as common as it was among those who did not accept the message. The inescapable conclusion is that messages about Germany, even when wholly understood, were simply not applied to America by members of the film's audience.

3. Reasons for Lack of Transfer

One explanation for this lack of transfer is probably surfeit with the German theme. The American public has been exposed so many times during the war and after it to the history of the beginnings and progress of the Nazi movement in the mass media and elsewhere, that it tends to "tune out" mentally to any new treatment of the subject.

It is true that not all repetition is ineffective. Quite the contrary: other studies have indicated that constant repetition may prove very effective. Certainly commercial advertisers operate on the principle that repetition sells merchandise. The formula suggested by Bartlett is that "...it is not sheer repetition that is influential, but repetition with variations."¹

"Don't Be A Sucker" does not seem to provide the requisite variation and novelty to sustain interest. For one thing, not only the German theme but its link with problems of discrimination is "old hat" to members of the audience. In addition, some of the scenes used are actually stock shots taken from old newsreels and Hollywood commercial films: the battle scenes, the Nazi demonstrations; the book-burning; the shattering of a swastika atop a building; Hitler and other high Nazi officials. There is evidence from the interview responses as well as from the program analyzer record that the spectators reacted negatively to the use of these stock shots. In fact, several of the scenes referred to as stock shots by the spectators were actually new and especially staged for this film. Apparently, the familiarity with the themes and the inclusion of some stock shots seemed to make even new staged shots seem old. This seemed to detract from the interest in the film as a whole.

But the second reason for the lack of transfer to the American scene is that war-time communications addressed to the American public were so designed as to widen the gulf between Nazis and Americans. Nazis were portrayed as such evil beings that Americans experienced a great psychological distance between themselves and Nazis. That this feeling still prevails becomes apparent in responses of the test audience to queries about the parallel agitator scenes. Respondents said, fascism couldn't come to the United States because Americans are not like the Germans; Americans are not susceptible to the propaganda of hate-mongers.

¹ Quoted by Merton, Robert K. Mass Persuasion. New York: Harpers, 1947.

"In the American scene, the people walk away...they do have the sense, you might say."

"The people listening were average Americans...They behaved like they (i.e. average Americans) would. Saw through it all."

Americans consider themselves superior to the Germans who "fell for" Hitler. Americans are too wise to be similarly trapped.

It is particularly hard to bridge this distance because it is a confirmation to each American that he and his countrymen are superior to the discredited, defeated enemy. This is, of course, an extremely gratifying belief. Consequently, any communication with a lesson for Americans based on the German example starts out with a handicap: Americans do not easily make the link between the German scene and the American scene.

EMOTIONAL PARTICIPATION

1. Introduction

Artists, authors and producers have long known that one of the most effective methods of awakening and sustaining audience interest is to ensure that members of the audience identify with the characters depicted, and thus participate emotionally in the story at hand. The emotionally participant audience member becomes vicariously involved in the struggle depicted, and vicariously anticipates and in the end relishes the hero's triumph over the villain.

Utilized by most products of mass media solely to ensure sustained interest, the device of involving the spectator serves other equally important functions in a communication designed to influence the audience. In such cases emotional participation may serve to enlist audience support for the "right", or "approved" view, or to marshal force to fight the "bad", or disapproved view. In the service of propaganda pieces, emotional involvement not only heightens dramatic appeal, but is a veritable pre-requisite to the modification of audience attitudes or behavior.

Among audiences witnessing "Don't Be A Sucker" the processes of emotional involvement do not occur as the film-makers intended. The failure is so marked as to produce many of the conditions which might lead to a boomerang effect.

2. The hero as primary identification object

The producers of "Don't Be A Sucker" sought to involve the prejudiced person in the audience through identification with Mike. The hero's initial agreement with the rabble-rouser is a bid for the sympathies of the prejudiced spectator, a device designed to involve the film's essential target group. Whereas the prejudiced spectator might turn away in boredom from the usual pro-tolerance communication, a hero like Mike with views resembling his own, might, it was hoped, startle him into attention. Once so involved, it was hoped that he would continue to identify with Mike through the hero's conversion to tolerance.

But unfortunately, identification with Mike almost never occurs. In the course of all our research we found only one person who showed any emotional attachment to him.

The qualitative data accumulated in the idea-getting phase offer various clues to explain this lack of identification.

In the first place, the actor who portrays Mike is neither particularly good-looking, nor is he well-known. Of the actors in the four leading roles, the man who plays Mike was least often recognized.

Secondly, Mike is labelled only as a "typical American", a term which carries no particular positive appeal, and as a "Mason", which term apparently conveys little or no meaning to most of the audience. Some of the personally interviewed high school students¹ expressed complete ignorance of the word:

"I didn't understand about the Masons - didn't know what they were."

"When he (Mike) heard something about his own faith - then he was mad. What are Masons? I never heard of them."

Not understanding what a Mason is, many audience members completely lost the significance of Mike's differing with the agitator when the Masons were attacked. The questionnaire administered to the 326 high school girls² contained the item:

"Did Mike disagree with anything the American speaker was saying? What?"

Only 48 per cent of the girls remembered that Mike balked when the American agitator attacked Masons, and one quarter of these revealed ignorance of the word. Some thought it a race, others a religion, and others a nationality.

Thirdly, most of the respondents found such flaws in Mike's character that they were unable to admit any particular liking for him. Most frequently cited by such respondents was the ease with which Mike was led, first by the rabble-rouser and shortly thereafter, in the opposite direction, by the refugee professor. The audience apparently felt that one so easily swayed is really a weak and somewhat contemptible character.

"Mike was an average guy but a little gullible."

"That man Mike - well, I don't think he was too good. He changed his mind immediately when he heard his own group attacked. Not a very strong mind. I didn't even like him at the end. If he could have been talked into changing his mind so easily, I wouldn't have any faith in him."

"Well, I think Mike was awfully easily swayed, either one way or the other. At first, he was swayed by the speaker on the platform. And then, when the professor spoke to him, he changed his mind and tore up the piece of paper. He was swayed that way. Perhaps, if someone else spoke to him again in another vein, he would have been swayed again...He just seemed to be a very easy-going person, very easily influenced."

¹ Step III, Table 1, p. 6 above.

² Step V, Table 1, p. 6 above.

That Mike should be regarded as particularly gullible is in itself rather disastrous. If the audience believes that Mike is more easily swayed than most people, they are likely to discount the possibility of agitators being successful. Most Americans, they would believe, are less gullible than Mike, and so would be less susceptible to fascistic ideas. In short, the characterization of Mike actually helped the audience to evade one of the basic messages of the film.

Mike is also criticized for his passivity.

"Mike should have spoken. He's just a Charlie McCarthy, listening to the refugee professor. Might have been more effective if Mike argues with him presenting his own point of view, instead of just listening."

"It seemed silly to me, because he (Mike) hadn't said a word during the whole thing. I mean, he hadn't said, 'Well, maybe' or 'Why?' or 'What?' or anything. All that argument just convinced him, and he tore up the paper and threw it away."

This passivity may well have proved harmful in several ways. The prejudiced members of the audience may have felt that Mike was not adequately representing their side, and that his conversion could not therefore be their conversion. Even the unprejudiced were apparently waiting for him to take a strong stand, and may have felt that by not doing so, Mike was placing the democratic position in an ineffectual light. Had Mike argued with the professor, or had his conversion been symbolized by some act more dramatic or courageous than tearing up a pamphlet, then Mike might have become a hero and an object of identification.

That identification might well have occurred if Mike had been more courageous is further suggested by the extremely favorable reaction of the audience to the educator who continues to teach the truth in defiance of armed Nazis.¹ This brief scene is the most popular of the entire film,² and although the actor³ who portrays the educator appears at no other time, several of the respondents identified with him.

"I liked it because you felt that you yourself would want to do the same thing in a situation like that."

"I was particularly impressed when the two guards came through the door and he invited them in, and after they came there, he did not cringe under them.. He didn't just break down and behave himself like he should have under their influence, but rather above them."

1 German Classroom Scene, Sequence VII, p. 2, above.

2 Eighty-five per cent of the audience group using program analyzer equipment indicated that they "liked" or were "interested" in this scene.

3 Felix Bressart.

Favorable reaction to this scene and to the actor persisted even when certain unrealistic aspects of the sequence were called to the attention of the respondents. Superficial awareness that the professor's actions were not true-to-life was apparently far outweighed by the gratification vicariously derived from the depicted situation. The audience member imagines himself in the professor's position; he too becomes a hero who fights for his principles against all-powerful authority and in the face of inevitable death.

If only Mike had a similar act to his credit! But poor Mike, designed to be the primary identification object, is too colorless, too unattractive, and too weak to inspire identification. He in no way helps to convey, and may very possibly block, the message that fascism can develop in the United States. For the audience may feel that only people as gullible as Mike can be swayed in the first place. And even if Mike is accepted as a "typical American", the audience may thereby conclude that if Americans stray momentarily, they quickly see the light and return to the paths of righteousness.

3. The Intended Bad Example

Hans, the "typical German Aryan" of the film, falls, as does Mike, for the Nazi bait, but unlike Mike, Hans never comes to see the error of his ways. He is intended by the film makers to serve as an object lesson for persons tempted by rabble-rousers; such persons are expected to realize that by following in his footsteps they too will suffer. Hans is designed, in short, to serve as an example of that which should be shunned.

The film actually treats Hans quite sympathetically. The role is played by Kurt Krueger, a man of virile good looks who is something of a pin-up boy among high school girls and was in fact recognized more often than any other actor. One of the girls interviewed, asked how she thought the audience liked the film, said:

"They weren't too much impressed. They whistled at the handsome men like Kurt Krueger and they talked all through it. It was supposed to be educational but they whistled at the pure German."

The casting of the role thus produces at least some conflict in the minds of the audience. On the one hand they are inclined to dislike the character because he is a Nazi; on the other hand they are favorably disposed to the handsome Mr. Krueger.

Sympathy for Hans is increased by his activities in the film, especially by his tender adieu to his pretty young wife and his two little children when he goes off to war.

"I didn't think Hans looked like a Nazi at all...He seemed to have a sweet looking wife and the kiddies being so sweet; usually you think of the wife being harsh and having a sour face or something. And he himself was ca-yute."

"I think he was desperate...The part where he went off to war, leaving his wife and two children behind, and they didn't look any too well-clothed or fed."

Accordingly, Hans is regarded not as evil, but as weak, and in fact as a rather pitiable victim of circumstances:

"I believe he was the simple type of person who reacted agreeably to flattery and who probably had some of the basic troubles that most people have, and was weak enough to put the blame on whoever he could openly and therefore a person with that weakness could be easily led and easily made to believe such things as the Nazis broadcast."

"I liked Hans. I liked the way he acted. He thought he'd get ahead if he followed the rules. He was all set to go ahead. I felt sorry for him. They were trying to influence him and in the end he got in trouble."

This sympathetic portrayal of Hans works one particularly disastrous effect. Hans is of course designed to appear a sucker rather than an actual villain. Accordingly, the audience is not expected to feel intense hostility toward him, but rather to regard his decisions and fortunes as things to be shunned. But our research reveals that many members of this audience not only sympathize with Hans, but also regard this appealing fellow as a valid prototype of Nazi youth. The audience's sympathy therefore is extended toward "most Germans" or "most Nazis". And thus his appealing qualities tend to produce a boomerang effect of evoking skepticism about Nazi abuses and brutality.¹

"Well, of course, there they didn't show him kicking people in the face and doing those things which are usually associated with Nazi brutality. They only showed him as a working man and as a family man, which is very probably what most of the Germans living in Germany at the time were. I don't believe they all went in for committing the brutalities and atrocities. They were ordinary working people, but they worked under a Nazi regime."

"I felt he was quite typical. I thought it gave a sort of good side of the German soldier...I liked the idea of their showing him in his family group instead of on the war front." (WERE YOU SORRY FOR HANS WHEN HE WAS FINALLY KILLED IN BATTLE?) "Yes, I was sorry for all of them. Not much more sorry for him than for the rest."

¹ This suspected boomerang could not be checked by quantitative techniques, since reference to the film itself was not permitted in the quantification phase questionnaire.

Our research thus raises, but does not answer, the question of how the "typical Aryan" should best have been portrayed. Our respondents seemed relieved that the film "didn't make him into a monster practically, as so many films have done;" but the film certainly defeats its own purpose if it creates good-will toward Nazis. While we do not pretend to know the answer to this dilemma, it does seem that it would be better if both understanding and disapproval of the villain were evoked. His motivation should be carefully developed so that the audience could understand his behavior and realize that they might act similarly in a similar situation. But Hans should also emerge as a clear example of something undesirable. The audience must not be permitted to lose sight of the fact that Hans is an enemy, a prototype of those who must be defeated if the more desirable community is to survive.¹

In summary, characterization seems to be one of the chief flaws of "Don't Be A Sucker". The hero fails wholly to serve his function. Drab in appearance and lacking any force of character, he invites no identification. As a result, the prejudiced members of the audience, who comprise the film's particular target group, are not emotionally involved. For the audience in general, complacency may be promoted since many concluded that fascist ideas can attract only peculiarly gullible Americans who can thereafter be quite easily reconverted to democracy. The intended Bad Example, on the other hand, is an appealing character, and the audience, generalizing from the one case, is led to think somewhat sympathetically of rank and file Nazis. The characterizations of Mike and Hans thus serve functions quite opposite from those which they were intended to serve, and so tend to greatly reduce the effectiveness of the film as a whole.

¹ An example of this technique and its results is to be seen in the treatment of the central character in "The Informer". The pressures exerted upon him are clearly depicted, but although he evokes considerable audience sympathy he remains an obvious social danger, and his punishment is regarded as necessary and desirable.

THE EMOTIONAL CHARGE OF THE MESSAGE AND THE LIKELIHOOD OF ITS ACCEPTANCE

1. Introduction

Every attempt to modify attitudes is inevitably resisted in some degree by those persons at whom the attempt is directed.

The psychological nature of such resistance, and the processes which produce it and determine its intensity, are obviously matters of extreme importance to the student of propaganda communications. No exhaustive survey of the problem, however, can be here attempted. The relevant factors are so many and so complex in their interaction that a single study can today hope to address itself only to carefully delimited areas of the larger field.

Our present study offered an opportunity to investigate certain specific aspects of group resistance to attitude change. More particularly, we attempted to devise a yardstick which would measure the degree of resistance a given message designed to modify attitudes would encounter within a given group. The present chapter will present the hypothesis on the basis of which such a yardstick was formed and will describe the tests to which the hypothesis was subjected.

2. The Hypothesis¹

A message designed to modify attitude finds in its audience two sub-groups: (a) those who already possess the attitude which the message

¹ The ensuing discussion does not attempt to distinguish between "emotionally charged attitudes", "ego-involved attitudes", or other terms which have been used by various theorists in describing attitudes which serve an individual's basic personality needs. We simply accept as axiomatic that all such attitudes are more zealously maintained than are attitudes less important to the individual. Conversely, we assume that any attitude zealously held and rigorously defended is more emotionally charged for the individual in question than is an attitude he is more willing to relinquish.

A discussion of these tenets can be found in any of several current works on the psychology of attitudes. For a brief but thorough discussion of relevant experimental facts, see Gordon Allport, "The Ego in Contemporary Psychology," Psychological Review, L (1943), 451-78. For a more exhaustive treatment of the whole topic, see Muzafer Sherif and Hadley Cantril, The Psychology of Ego Involvements (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1947).

Attitudes toward minority groups have been found to be in general highly ego-involved. See, for example, Eunice Cooper and Marie Jahoda, "The Evasion of Propaganda," Journal of Psychology, XXIII (1947), 1.

is intended to strengthen or engender; and (b) those who possess a contradictory attitude. Conversion to the desired attitude can, of course, occur only among members of the second group, and resistance to the message will likewise appear only in the conversion potential.

If the majority of the group already possesses the attitude in question, then it may be said that in regard to that group, the climate of opinion for the message is favorable. Taken as a whole, the group sanctions the attitude, and those who do not, i.e., the conversion potential, are deviates.

It is our hypothesis that when such a message is directed into a favorable climate of opinion, the intensity of resistance to that message will vary inversely with the proportional size of the conversion potential, or, in less technical terms, that the smaller the group of deviates, the more they will resist the message and the attitude change it is supposed to produce.

The rationale of this hypothesis is not hard to find. If the great majority of any group hold a given attitude then there is automatically extreme group pressure in favor of such a view. The few who persist in holding contrary views must rigorously resist this group pressure. For some reason, their deviate attitude is for them highly emotionally charged, and they are able to maintain that attitude despite the extreme pressure. Such deviates may reasonably be expected to continue resisting any effort to make them conform. Whatever argument is presented to them is not very likely to succeed where numerous other arguments, if not the same one, have already failed.

In short, if the deviate group is very small, resistance may be expected to be strong.

On the other hand, if the deviate group is very large, i.e., if it is only slightly less than half the total group, then group pressure toward conformity is not likely to be very intense. The deviate group is likely to be, in a manner of speaking, untried, and so still to contain a fair number of persons who have not a strong allegiance to their deviate views. For such persons the deviate attitude is not highly emotionally charged. They will be less resistant to attempted change and some are likely to be in fact amenable to conversion.

In short, if the deviate group is sizeable, resistance may be expected to be relatively mild.

3. The Hypothesis Tested

The data available to us could be examined in such a way as to throw light on this hypothesis.

The research was focussed on ten messages from "Don't Be A Sucker", for each of which appropriate test items were included in the quantitative phase questionnaire.¹

The proportion of the control group who reacted unfavorably to the item, i.e., who expressed an attitude contrary to that implied by the message, was regarded as the conversion potential. A statistically significant difference between the proportions of the two groups which reacted favorably to appropriate items was regarded as an effect of the film. Such a difference in favor of the experimental group was regarded as evidence that the message was accepted to some degree; lack of significant difference as evidence that the message was not accepted; and a difference favoring the control group as evidence that the message boomeranged.

Stated in these terms, our hypothesis is that when messages are directed at a given group with a favorable climate of opinion, the intensity of resistance to those messages will vary inversely as the conversion potentials of such messages, or, therefore, that the likelihood of acceptance of such messages will vary directly with the conversion potentials.

The results of this research are presented in Table 8. Messages are arranged in order of increasing conversion potential.

¹ Step VI, Table 1, p. 6, above.

Table 8

Conversion Potential and Degree of Acceptance
of Ten Messages in "Don't Be A Sucker"

<u>Message</u> ¹	<u>Conversion Potential</u>	<u>Acceptance (by at least part of audience)</u>
Americans should not be prejudiced against Negroes	12 (%)	No
Americans should not be prejudiced against Jews	13	No
There are no master races	22	No
There should be no job discrim- ination in America	27	Yes
Fascism can develop in America	29	No
Negroes are not lazier than other people	35	Yes
Catholics, as well as Jews, were persecuted under the Nazis	39	Yes
Hitler used divide-and-conquer tactics as a means to power	41	Yes
"Aryans," as well as minority-group members, suffered under the Nazi regime	44	Yes
Americans should be wary of soapbox speakers	45	Yes

¹ Each of these statements except the first, second, seventh and tenth is a summary of one or more appropriate test items. In regard to the message about Catholics, a deliberately extreme test item was employed, for reasons cited above. In regard to the messages about prejudice and about soap-box speakers, the conversion potential is the percentage of the control group which performed in specific ways when told to cross out from a list of words anything which they did not like.

Inspection of Table 8 reveals that the conversion potential is in all cases less than 50%. This is to say that the majority of the group already sanctions the attitude in question, i.e., that the climate of opinion is in all cases favorable.¹ To each of these messages, therefore, our hypothesis presumably applies.²

Further examination of Table 8 reveals that the data tend to conform to our hypothesis. It will be observed that the three messages for which the conversion potential was the smallest were not accepted, the resistance of the few deviates was apparently too intense to be overcome by the film. The five messages for which the conversion potential was largest, however, were each accepted by at least part of the audience; among the relatively large number of deviates there were apparently some whose resistance was relatively weak and who were in fact converted.

4. Limitations of the Test: Conclusion

The data presented in Table 8 must be regarded, however, as merely suggestive, rather than as conclusive.

In the first place, these data indicate a tendency but are not in themselves adequate to define a correlation. To confirm the tendency and to define a correlation it would be necessary to show that the actual degree of acceptance varied with the conversion potential -- that the message about "Aryans," for example, was accepted by a greater

¹ Such a favorable climate of opinion is of course to be expected among New York City high school students. In that city's schools, as well as newspapers, radio programs, and public billboards, the American creed of racial equality is "the explicitly expressed system of general ideals in reference to human interrelations.... As principles which ought to rule, the Creed (is) ... made conscious to everyone..." (Myrdal, Gunnar, An American Dilemma (New York: Harpers), 1944, p. 3, in reference to America as a whole.)

Verbal acquiescence to the creed is thus to be expected of the majority of New York City high school students. Whether their actual social behavior is in accordance with their response to verbal test items is another, and from the point of view of this particular study, an irrelevant question.

² The hypothesis does not apply to charged messages directed into an unfavorable climate of opinion. In such a case, the variables would be ranged altogether differently. The deviates would be those who sanctioned the attitude and thus offered no resistance. Those who opposed the message, on the other hand, would be conformists and their opposition would be fortified by group opinion.

proportion of the audience than was the message about Negroes. Such precise tests can be valid, however, only if all other conceivably contributing factors, such as characteristics of presentation, can be either rigidly controlled or precisely measured. The conditions of our research did not permit so refined an experimental technique.

In the second place, the data admit of an alternate interpretation, based entirely upon concepts of probability. Proponents of this view would assert that the cited results were to be expected, since the probability of converting one member of a large universe is greater than the probability of converting one member of a small universe. Some proponents of this view further maintain that existing techniques for measuring increased agreement are not reliable when initial agreement is greater than 85% (i.e., when the conversion potential is less than 15).

Our data offer no evidence to contradict such views, nor do we regard them as untrue. We suggest, however, that to accept such an interpretation without question is to come up against a dead-end which in and of itself precludes any psychological or sociological interpretation, however valid such interpretations may prove to be. We therefore suggest that, above and beyond the workings of chance, and quite aside from the limitations of our instruments, a communication which proposes to strengthen or to engender attitudes already sanctioned by the majority of the group will be less successful if the deviates are few, and more successful if they are many. For when the deviates are few, their resistance to conformity is great.

To the degree that this hypothesis is correct, and to the degree that resistance to a message designed to modify attitudes is indeed negatively correlated with the size of the conversion potential, it may be said that the likelihood of such messages being accepted increases as does the conversion potential. To the degree that our hypothesis is correct, therefore, the messages in any communication can be arranged in order of their likelihood of acceptance.

This hypothesis, however, deals exclusively with the content of the message. And though a given type of content may be one of the necessary conditions to a message being accepted, such content is usually not in itself a sufficient condition.

We cannot of course here attempt to identify all conditions affecting the likelihood of a message being accepted. But our research has served to define certain other variables. Two of these, relating to the form of the message, will be discussed in the succeeding chapter.

THE FORM OF THE MESSAGE AND THE LIKELIHOOD OF ITS ACCEPTANCE

1. Introduction: Dimensions of Form

Our research suggests that the likelihood of a message being accepted is dependent not only upon whether its content is emotionally charged, but also upon the form in which the message is presented. Two aspects of the form which seem particularly crucial are (a) the degree of explicitness, and (b) the degree of specificity. Each of these aspects may be regarded as a dimension of form, and any message may be said to be to a certain degree explicit and to a certain degree specific.

Thus, in regard to explicitness, a given message may be clearly and explicitly stated, or, in the other extreme, it may be merely implied. A particular communication, for example, may be designed to convey the message that "Negroes should have exactly the same job opportunities as Whites, regardless of economic conditions". This message may be explicitly stated in so many words; or the message may not be stated at all, but rather left for the audience to infer from related remarks or scenes.

A message may likewise be phrased in a very generalized form, or may be specific and segmentalized, referring to particular people, events, or locales. The message "Britains are admirable", for example, is more generalized than the message "Britains are brave", which is in turn more generalized than the message "The British were brave during the bombing of London".

These two dimensions of explicitness and specificity are wholly independent of one another. Thus a highly generalized message may be explicitly stated or left for the audience to infer, and a highly explicit statement can be either general or specific. Each of these two dimensions of form are, moreover, wholly independent of the emotional charge of the message's content.

2. Classification of Messages in Three Dimensions

In an attempt to acquire further information on the factors contributing to the likelihood of a message being accepted, we re-examined the ten messages of "Don't Be A Sucker" in the light of the two identified dimensions of form. To render this initial exploratory research the more feasible, the three variables, all of which are in fact continua, were temporarily regarded as dichotomous. Each message was therefore classified as "more" or "less" explicit, and "more" or "less" specific. The three dimensional classification is presented in Table 9. Each message appears in its appropriate cell and is annotated as regards the degree to which it was accepted.

Table 9

Degree of Acceptance Accorded Ten Messages of "Don't Be A Sucker"
Classified According to Degree of Emotional Charge, Explicitness, and Specificity

MORE SPECIFIC		LESS SPECIFIC (GENERAL)	
More Explicit	Less Explicit	More Explicit	Less Explicit
More Highly Emotionally Charged	There should be no job discrimination in America (I) Negroes are not lazier than other people (I)	There are no master races (N)	Americans should not be prejudiced against Jews (N) Americans should not be prejudiced against Negroes (N) Fascism can develop in America (N)
	Hitler used divide-and-conquer tactics as a means to power (A) Catholics, as well as Jews, were persecuted under the Nazis (A) Aryans, as well as minority-group members, suffered under the Nazi regime (A)	Americans should be wary of soapbox speakers (A)	
Less Highly Emotionally Charged			

Key: Degrees of Acceptance

- (A) Accepted by target-group for which intended
- (I) Accepted by more intelligent only
- (N) Accepted by no sub-group

Careful examination of Table 9 permits at least three suggestive formulations:

- (a) As was already revealed by Table 8¹, the less highly charged messages were more widely accepted than the more highly charged messages. All four less highly charged messages were accepted to at least some degree, while of the six less highly charged messages, four were not accepted by any sub-group, and none was accepted by all sub-groups.
- (b) The more highly charged messages which were in more specific form were more widely accepted than the more highly charged messages in general form. Thus the generalized concepts that "Americans should not react negatively toward Jews and Negroes" were not accepted, whereas the more specific message that "There should be no job discrimination" was accepted to some degree. Similarly, but more conspicuously, the generalized message that "There are no master races" was not accepted, despite its having been explicitly stated, while the less explicit but specific message that "Negroes are not lazier than other people" was accepted to some degree.
- (c) Less explicit messages, whether or not highly emotionally charged and whether general or specific, were not accepted by the less intelligent members of the audience. By virtue of their implicit form, such messages may well have been actually inaccessible to this less intelligent group.

Because of the extremely small number of messages in any single cell of Table 9, these formulations cannot be carelessly extended into predictions for all propaganda communication. The formulations are in fact intended to be suggestive rather than conclusive. We do, however, suggest that:

- (a) The higher the emotional charge of a message, the less will be the likelihood of its acceptance;
- (b) Highly emotionally charged messages which are stated in generalized form are not likely to be accepted by any significant portion of an audience;
- (c) Messages which are not explicitly stated are likely to be entirely lost upon the less intelligent members of the audience.²

¹ See p. 32, above.

² The three formulations seem to suggest that a highly emotionally charged message would be most effective if it was both explicitly stated and in specific form. None of the ten messages investigated answers these conditions, however, and thus no empirical evidence for or against such a view can be adduced in the present study.

SUMMARY

1. The Film

"Don't Be A Sucker," a film produced during World War II by the Army Signal Corps and later shown under civilian auspices, attempts to curb anti-minority prejudice by appealing to the self-interest of the audience.

The film indicates that anti-minority prejudice helped the Nazis rise to power, but that every one of the minorities and the Aryans as well suffered under the Nazi regime. Similar prejudices are shown to exist in this country and it is suggested that such prejudice be rejected by Americans.

2. The Research

In order to study the impact of the film, the Department of Scientific Research of the American Jewish Committee pursued an extensive course of research. In the idea-getting phase of this research, a content analysis of the film was performed, 148 persons who had seen the picture were interviewed either individually or in groups, and an additional 326 persons who had seen the film filled out printed questionnaires. A minute-by-minute record of the like-dislike responses to the film of 44 persons was obtained. On the basis of the ideas accumulated during this exploratory phase of the research, the nature of the film's impact was determined. In the second, or quantificational phase of the research, the impact of the film was measured. Identical questionnaires were administered to a control group of 491 persons who had not seen the film and to an experimental group of 368 persons who had seen the film. Both groups consisted of second year students in a Long Island City co-educational high school. The two groups were equated so that each contained the same proportions of students with certain personal and familial characteristics and who were also proportionately equal in their responses to questionnaire items unrelated to the film.

3. Selective Perception

The film succeeded in conveying to Catholics and to Protestants the messages about Germany respectively intended for those groups. Members of the test audience were made more aware of the degree to which their German counterparts suffered under Hitler. Selective perception of the appropriate message by each of these groups occurred to a surprising extent. There is some reason to believe that the precision with which selective perception operated may have been due to a scene in which representatives of the various faiths were singled out and made conspicuous.¹

4. "Boomerang"

The film, however, also produced certain effects directly contrary to those intended by the producers. Statistical evidence indicates that such "boomerang" occurred or very possibly may have occurred in each of four situations.

¹ Sequence V: German Agitator Scene, p 2 above.

a) "Don't Be A Sucker" attempts to convey to American minority group members that they are many and that if they stand united against prejudice toward any one group, the union will be adequately strong to defeat any attack. This message, however, was as it were intercepted by members of the dominant American Protestant group who seem in some cases to have taken it as a reason to believe that they need have no concern for the future of their minority group fellows in America. Statistical evidence suggests that such a boomerang occurred, but the evidence is not conclusive.¹

b) The film completely failed to increase the audience's awareness that fascism could develop in the United States. Content analysis reveals that the burden of communicating this message is thrown entirely upon one device, the parallel speeches by German and American agitators. The speech of the American agitator is furthermore the one symptom of native fascism in the entire film. Both qualitative and quantitative data reveal, however, that numerous persons regarded the dissimilarities of the two agitator scenes as evidence that Americans were so superior to Germans, or at least so psychologically unlike, that race hate could gain no significant foothold in the United States. The intended message was in this case contradicted by other elements of the film.

c) Nullification of the same message was aided by the personal experience or previous knowledge of members of the audience. Many Americans are apparently inclined to regard soap-box speakers in general as clowns or "lame-brains" and to feel that intelligent citizens would not take such agitators seriously.

Statistical evidence indicates that the boomerang suggested here and in b, above, did in fact occur. The film led a significant portion of the audience to believe that "In America, hardly anyone would listen to a man trying to spread race hate."² But this boomerang occurred only among the less prejudiced members of the audience, and was thus not as disastrous as it might have been.

d.) The message that American minority groups were so many that they could find strength in union boomeranged not only for dominant group members, but for minority members as well. These persons apparently confused this idea with the more familiar extra-film concept that America is a melting pot of minorities and that no real majority group exists. A significant portion of minority group members were convinced by the film that "there are so many minorities in this country, that no single one would ever be persecuted."

5. Emotional Participation

Film characters intended to serve as identification objects failed to serve their functions.

¹ i.e. , does not meet requirements for significance at the .05 level.

² Nevertheless, the film did increase audience dislike of soap-box speakers in general. See Tables 8 and 9, pp 32 and 36 above.

The hero, himself somewhat prejudiced at the outset, was apparently intended by the producers to be an identification object for prejudiced spectators, who, by such identification, would participate in the hero's conversion to democratic views. But the hero is a "Mason", - which term is meaningless to many persons, - and is portrayed as physically colorless, and as peculiarly gullible. He is thus neither physically nor intellectually strong enough to serve as an attractive identification object for the prejudiced. His gullibility was furthermore regarded by the unprejudiced on the one hand as atypical of Americans, and on the other as a sign that Americans, even if temporarily misled, can be easily returned to the paths of righteousness.

The pure "Aryan", intended to serve as an object lesson for the American Protestant, was played by so physically attractive a man and was portrayed with such sympathy, that he inspired the pity of the audience. Many persons furthermore regarded him as a valid prototype of the average German and were thus led by the picture to condone and sympathize with rank-and-file Nazis in general.

6. Applicability of the German Theme

Although the film succeeded in teaching its lessons about Germany, the lessons were not applied to the American scene. Neither among those who accepted the messages about Germany nor among those who did not, did the film produce any diminution of prejudice toward Negroes and Jews. The audience's belief in the psychological dissimilarity of Germans and Americans probably contributed to this lack of transfer.

7. The Emotional Charge of the Message and the Likelihood of its Acceptance

Our research suggested that the relative likelihood of several charged messages being accepted by persons initially disagreeing can be estimated in terms of the degree of sanction already accorded the messages by the group in question. We propose that when charged messages are directed into a group the majority of which already sanctions the attitudes implied, then the likelihood of these messages being accepted varies inversely with the size of the deviate group. This hypothesis is based on the belief that a small deviate group has already withstood extreme group pressure toward conformity and is unlikely to be converted, whereas a large deviate group is itself evidence that group pressure toward conformity is relatively light, and that the deviates are thus still untried and to some degree amenable to conversion.

The research data are in accord with the hypothesis but do not disprove alternate hypotheses based on theories of chance and probability.

8. The Form of the Message and the Likelihood of its Acceptance

The likelihood of messages being accepted by target groups was recognized as being due not to the content of the message alone, but also to the manner in which it was presented. Ten messages from "Don't Be A Sucker" were classified as regards degree of emotional charge

(proportion of group originally resistant), degree of explicitness, and degree of specificity. The degree to which these messages of various types were accepted suggest, but do not conclusively prove, that in regard to propaganda communication:

- (a) The higher the emotional charge of a message, the less will be the likelihood of its acceptance;
- (b) Highly emotionally charged messages which are stated in generalized form are not likely to be accepted by any significant portion of an audience.
- (c) Messages which are not explicitly stated are likely to be entirely lost upon the less intelligent members of the audience.

APPENDIX A

1. Index of Prejudice: Degree of prejudice was determined from answers on eight questionnaire items concerning attitudes toward Negroes and Jews. An index of degree of prejudice was derived from the number of answers indicating prejudice, each item being given equal weight. The eight indicators were:

- (a) Crossing out (indicating dislike) of the word "Jew".
- (b) Crossing out (indicating dislike) of the word "Negro".
- (c) Crossing out (indicating dislike) of the words "Sadie Goldberg".
- (d) Crossing out (indicating dislike) of the words "inky hair".
- (e) Selection of an unfavorable adjective (out of a list of many adjectives) to describe the Jew.
- (f) Selection of an unfavorable adjective (out of a list of many adjectives) to describe the Negro.
- (g) Agreement with the statement: "There are some exceptions but you can always tell a Jew by looking at him."
- (h) Agreement with the statement: "Although some Negroes are ambitious, most Negroes are lazier than other people."

Those who gave prejudiced responses to six or more of the eight items were classified as "very highly prejudiced"; those who gave prejudiced responses to five were called "highly prejudiced"; to four or three, "of average prejudice"; to two, "mildly prejudiced"; to none or one item, "not prejudiced".

2. Index of Intelligence: Intelligence level was decided on the basis of course of study. Students enrolled in the academic course were rated as more intelligent and those in the commercial course, as less intelligent. Support for such a procedure is to be found in the statistics taken from the Monograph of the National Survey of Secondary Education by Kefauver, G. N. called "Horizontal Organization of Secondary Education," 1932.