

The fleischer brothers were the only real opposition in the market

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Animation history may now be dominated by Disney, but many of its techniques were pioneered by the Fleischer brother's rival studio. They invented characters such as Betty Boop and Popeye that are still shown on the screens today. However, Disney's attention to detail raised the cultural level of the masses. Their animations were more to do with the cultural world than the art world adopted in many Fleischer animations. During the 2nd World War, people's cultural perceptions changed and animation studios became fiercely competitive. During the early 1930's, Disney and the Fleischer's were aware of each others actions.

However, Disney took little notice of West coast competitors such as Celebrity Productions, Harman and Ising and Schelsinger. Their reputation enabled them to leer away top animators from East Coast competition. Walt Disney had faith in himself. He travelled 1st class even when he was broke. He was a pioneer of cultural merchandising and advertising, but he needed to develop his animations in order to keep up with the hugely successful Fleischer's at this time. In 1917, the Fleischer's became great innovators when they developed the Rotoscope.

It was a form of tracing live action film that was projected from below, frame by frame, onto a glass surface, the size of animation paper. They tested the new method by filming Dave Fleischer in a black and white clown suit. These films were known as " Koko the Clown" and made the brothers a sensation. The Fleischer brothers had joined Paramount and the Bray studios in 1921 to form the production company, " Out of the Inkwell. " They produced their first short, " Modelling" (1921). The Disney studios sought upon this as an

opportunity to make animations similar to these and called them " Alice's Wonderland. Disney combined with other animation studios, Harman and Ising, Iwerks and Maxwell to make this production a success.

They were a group of films that mixed live footage and cartoon characters. The lead character was based on a girl dressed in Victorian clothing. The films proved extremely popular with American audiences and the Disney studios managed to produce 50 films from 1923 - 1927. The Fleischer's knew they had hot competition from Disney. While their images were developing on screen, sound was becoming an important factor in the industry. " What the cinema can do better than literature or the spoken drama is to be fantastic. Otto Messmer.

The Fleischer's agreed with Messmer's approach and believed in improvisation. They produced several cartoons with roughly synchronised soundtracks. According to Hollywood Cartoons (2002) " Just as big Hollywood studios rushed to redo their scripts, the livelier animation studios converted to sound. " (pp. 189) Since 1924, the Fleischer's had been developing a series of music-based cartoons; simply called " Car-tunes" Their first of the series, " My Old Kentucky Home" was a breakthrough in animation. Soundtracks were now becoming an essential part of animation and added a whole new experience to the films.

The Car-tunes productions were made four years before any attempt by Disney to make such a statement. However, in 1928, Walt Disney produced a cartoon character like no other that would propel him to the top of his

league. The mouse-like anthropomorphism was called Mickey Mouse. It meant that sound was now coming from the drawing. Shamus Culhane (1986) states that, " Disney introduced cartoon characters who could act. "(pp. 23). He became an instant celebrity. Although, it wasn't until his third cartoon, " Steamboat Willie" (1928) that Mickey Mouse had real impact on his audience.

Mickey plays a deckhand on Captain Pete's riverboat, culminating with Mickey making music with anything he can get his hands on ensures a highly entertaining film. He even manages to play on a sow's teats like accordion buttons. In 1928, Disney also produced another critically acclaimed film, Gang War. The NY Times said Disney had produced an " ingenious piece of work" It was even said to be better than Steamboat Willie. This could be because " Walt insisted on coherent designs even for the most trivial comedies. " Kanfer (2000: p. 72). After this, there was no stopping Disney.

Continuing from the success of sound-track style cartoons, Silly Symphonies proved very popular short animations. They introduced new techniques, like detailed backgrounds and more " rounded" characters. For example, in " The Tortoise and the Hare" (1929), the whole film was guided around the music and was in-sync with the character's actions. The dialogue that was used all rhymed and it was like a sing-a-long. It cut from shot to shot instead of using camera panning techniques that the Fleischer's were using. According to Carl Stalling, the Musical Director, " the cartoon was based on a foundation of music. Sight and Sound 2004 vol. 9. The Fleischer's needed a character, like Mickey, that would give their work individuality and status.

In August 1930, Betty Boop made her debut in Dizzy Dishes. She only appeared in one scene and had dog-like features. However, her character and image developed into a sexy woman in Crazy Town (1932). She represented a type of feminism in the early 30's with her unique, almost hypnotic effect, being able to fend off the lecherous, yet maintain a degree of naivety. She won many over. For example, in " Boop-Oop-A-Doop," (1932) her cartoon boss demands, " Do you like you your job! while stroking her thigh.

It catches her off-guard, then makes her mad and she responds, with " don't take my Boop-Oop-A-Doop, away! " She even slaps him and singsongs after: " You can feed me bread, and water, or a great big bale of hay, but don't take my Boop-Oop-A-Doop, away! " She displays strong female characteristics that had not been seen on the screen until now. Her character set the Fleischer's apart from Disney. She also had a pet dog called Bimbo and history was made. According to Barrier (1999) " Bimbo was the Fleischer's answer to Mickey Mouse. " There were similar features to the two, but Bimbo was inconsistent.

Sometimes he was black, sometimes he was white. Betty Boop also introduced other loveable characters to the big screen, such as Popeye the Sailor Man. He made his first animated appearance in Betty Boop meets Popeye the Sailor. (1933) the two characters made such an impression on audiences for their gags and unpredictability. With the development of sound in animation, characters were able to respond to the music on the soundtrack. Popeye and Betty Boop did this brilliantly. Although the series

was successful for the Fleischer's, Disney had gone one step ahead at this point.

They were experimenting with colour and had signed a three year contract with Technicolor before producing their first colour animation, Flowers and Trees in 1931. Popeye remained in black and white until 1942 - a long time after Disney's full commitment to Technicolor. This made a big gap between the two companies in terms of modernisation. Disney were creeping ahead of the Fleischer's and producing cartoons that were more successful with American audiences. Disney then invented the Multiplane Camera. It was similar to the Rotoscope but it allowed character's to be photographed and appear as if moving against three-dimensional backgrounds.

With the use of the Multiplane, Disney studios were able to speed up the animation process. In doing so, they made their first feature-length production Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937). By late 1934, Walt had created a special unit of men to work on developing a better story. The plot had been transformed from Walt's story, and characters were forming. Walt established the " seven dwarfs" characterization, by giving each character the name of their most recognizable quality. It was incredibly detailed for the era and paid a lot of attention the backgrounds and character movements.

The film first grossed Eight Million Dollars in the United States. Over the years it has made well over that. The popularity of Snow White allowed Walt Disney to build a new studio. The Walt Disney Studios moved to Burbank, a huge place with large areas of space. The Old Mill (1937) was a triumphant

Disney short and gained an Oscar for Walt to add to his increasing collection. The 3d effects of the background were very sophisticated for the 1930's and gave Disney the upper-hand in the competition between them and the Fleischer's. There is no dialogue in the film so the images speak for themselves.

The dramatic music adds tension as the storm gets stronger and stronger. It has an immediate sense of realism and the use of animals in the production was becoming a common theme. It had a utopian appeal at the end that left many viewers feeling content after watching it. This was the feeling Walt wanted to create. Even though the Fleischer's were having some success with Popeye, they needed to be on the same level as Disney in order to keep the competitive gap narrow. They were in the middle of the Depression-era now and competing heavily with Disney. By 1939, Gulliver's Travels was ready for release.

It brought forward excellent use of colour and was praised for its immense sense of surrealism. This sense of realism can be seen in a lot of Fleischer's work, especially Popeye. In Popeye Meets Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, there is constant movement exaggeration from the gramophone that at one point develops a mouth and eats a sandwich. Betty Boop's Snow White uses the same techniques when the Wicked Stepmother turns into a dragon. It became trademark for the Fleischer's. After this film was made, it was clear that the Fleischer's and Disney had different styles of animation.

Fleischer used gritty, city type scenes, including poor immigrants instead of just the cute animals of the Disney world. As Paul Wells confirms, " The design, context and action within the hyper-realist animated texts corresponds to the design, context and action within the live action film's representation of reality. " (p. 245). As Culhane (1986) stated before, " Disney introduced cartoon characters who could act. " The competition led the Fleischer's to differentiate their work, so they opted for a surrealist approach. Top animator Eugster believed every scene should have a gag

The Fleischer's poignant moment came when they got to animate the spectacular comic book hero Superman. In 1941, this proved highly successful in a not so successful period for Disney. " For two and a half years they created some of the most cinematic and visually stunning cartoons ever seen and in the process set the bar very high for future animators to follow. " Superman Blurb (1941). Their techniques were highly sophisticated and kept the same edgy look that they always maintained. The storylines were exciting and not utopian like Disney's work at this time. It was more thrilling.

However, the series ended after 12 episodes due to the expense. Even though both the Fleischer brothers and Disney studios enjoyed great success in the 1930's and 40's, there were other studios who produced outstanding work that rivalled the two leaders. Most Americans attended the cinema at least once a week. While there might not have been a Fleischer or Disney film released at this time, there were plenty of other animation studios ready to attract an audience. For example, Paul Terry and his series " Dinnertime"

featured human voices and orchestral backgrounds before any other animation.

The Fleischer's were impressed and considered these the ones to beat. Warner Brothers were in opposition to Disney. With their East coast humour and parody, they recognised audiences growing sophistication for this genre. It was unlike Disney's folksy traditions. Warner Brothers was set up by Jack Warner and his brothers in 1923. They began to animate in the 1930's and had little experience compared to their competitors. For the first few years Warner Brothers were " tagging along behind Disney until former Disney members left and joined Warner Brothers. " [www. cartoonresearch. com](http://www.cartoonresearch.com).

Their animated films were among the best produced by any studio with creative talent that included Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, Tex Avery, Mel Blanc and Michael Maltese making cartoons. " The classic Warner Brothers cartoons are those which emphasise on bringing imaginative possibilities to life. " Warner Brother's cartoons were very slapstick and focused on character centrality. Animator Bob Clampett was responsible for this technique and provided some of the most beloved cartoon characters of today. It was reflexivity, an awareness of the cartoon form itself that ensured success for WB. In January 1930, animator Leon Schelsing joined WB.

Unemployed and without a distributor, Harman and Ising united to produce a three minute short " Bosko the Talk-Ink Kid" which drew the interest of well-connected financier Leon Schelsing who successfully pitched the idea to Warner Bros. In 1930, the first Looney Tunes cartoon starring Bosko in "

"Sinkin' in the Bathtub" was released. By 1936, animators Tex Avery, Chuck Jones and Bob Clampett had joined the team at Warner Brothers. Together, they devised Merrie Melodies. There was great criticism about the production of short films as they were extremely similar to Disney's Silly Symphonies.

The first animation to be produced was in 1931, "Lady Play Your Mandolin." Foxy, the lead character, looked remarkable like Mickey, instead he had floppy ears and a bushy tail Merrie Melodies and Looney Tunes combined under the name Looney Tunes in 1943. With experienced staff, most of them from the Disney Studios, Looney Tunes was ready to "compete with Disney like any other Hollywood cartoon studio." Barrier(1999: p. 156) Warner Brothers also set up their own in-house animation divisions to provide supplementary cartoons to the Looney Tunes production.

Disaster struck when Harman and Ising left the studio in 1934 to set up their own. WB was forced to employ cheap, untried talent. However, Tex Avery managed to keep his animation division together and with the help of Clampett, produced extraordinary characters that would make them a success. Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig and Daffy Duck emerged with Looney Tunes with good punch-lines and character centrality. In Porky Pigs Feat (1943) techniques such as fast cutting and reflexivity were becoming trademarks of WB. They used art-deco backgrounds, instead of the detailed ones developing in the Disney Studios.

The dialogue was fast-paced like the music and it used limited animation instead of in-depth detailing. It was more entertaining than visually

outstanding. In 1943 Chuck Jones introduces the concept of limited animation. It reduces the movement to every 2/3 frames and is not important for the character to be fluid. This can be seen in Jones' "Dover Boys" (1942) for WB. He was trying to find a way to challenge "Disney's Realism" and move away from in-house 3D representation. The Bray Studios were also rising in the 1930's.

Walter Lantz created some of the most beloved characters made in history - Andy Panda, Woody Woodpecker and he was the first to use Technicolor for his cartoons. However, he had a limited budget that showed when put up against other studio's work. Like Bray, Harman and Ising studios never rose to compete seriously with Disney. Although Warner Brothers produced some great animations, they didn't start showing their excellence until the late 1940's, when Disney had already produced classics like Dumbo and Pinocchio and had a firm reputation that was difficult to knock.

People felt that the Warner Brother's creations were too similar to Disney's in terms of musical soundtracks and character representation. The only real competitors were the Fleischer Brother in the 1920's-30's. Their invention of the Rotoscope and Bosko the Clown led the way for other animation studios. Everything that they did, Disney was copying. It wasn't until the release of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in 1933 that Disney became serious competition. According to Ann Douglas in *Terrible Honesty*, "Hollywood was beating Manhattan to the punch."

It spelled the end of the cities position as the curator and instigator of the nations culture. " By 1937, Fleischer studios had become like Disney. Almost everything amusing had disappeared from the cartoons leaving behind " badly drawn imitations. " Hollywood Cartoons (2002: p. 188). In 1942 Paramount took over completely and renamed the company Famous Studios. The Fleischer brothers were fired and the company eventually flopped. Disney still stands strong today and remains the best-known for the most beloved cartoons produced in history.