

ARSENIC AND OLD LACE



Cary Grant, 1941-44

This film was almost a literal transcription of its brilliant theatrical model, although certain minor roles were rewritten and expanded to accord with the star system (e.g. the character played by Cary Grant). In the original, the cream of the jest lay in the fact that a character who resembled Boris Karloff was played by... Boris Karloff; Capra cast Raymond Massey in the role, to general bewilderment. Critics remarked that the screen version was somehow more gruesome than that of the stage, but otherwise accepted it as an efficient though over-energetic transcription. It is more crude, though, than the later State of the Union, itself by no means a true adaptation to film form either, but done with greater skill and subtlety. For a more esoteric, but highly questionable, interpretation of Arsenic and Old Lace, see Parker Tyler, Magic and Myth of the Movies.

"... The 'Why We Fight' series deserves close examination by students of film technique. The formidable power of the film medium can be seen at its source in these elementary examples of the effects to be gained by the composition of images in counterpoint with sound, music, and speech. In particular, their use of imagery commands attention. The hackneyed symbols of popular sovereignty come alive in these films; the words and voices of statesmen incomparable, of course, of Roosevelt take on new meanings in association with images. . . The instantaneous response of this juxtaposition is both emotional and intellectual; it conveys an idea, but an idea saturated with emotion. Such devices existed in embryo before the war and were used intermittently, but it remained for the 'Why We Fight' series to develop them fully and to use them to solve the problem of giving dramatic construction to factual material.

Sunday, January 30, 7:30 pm

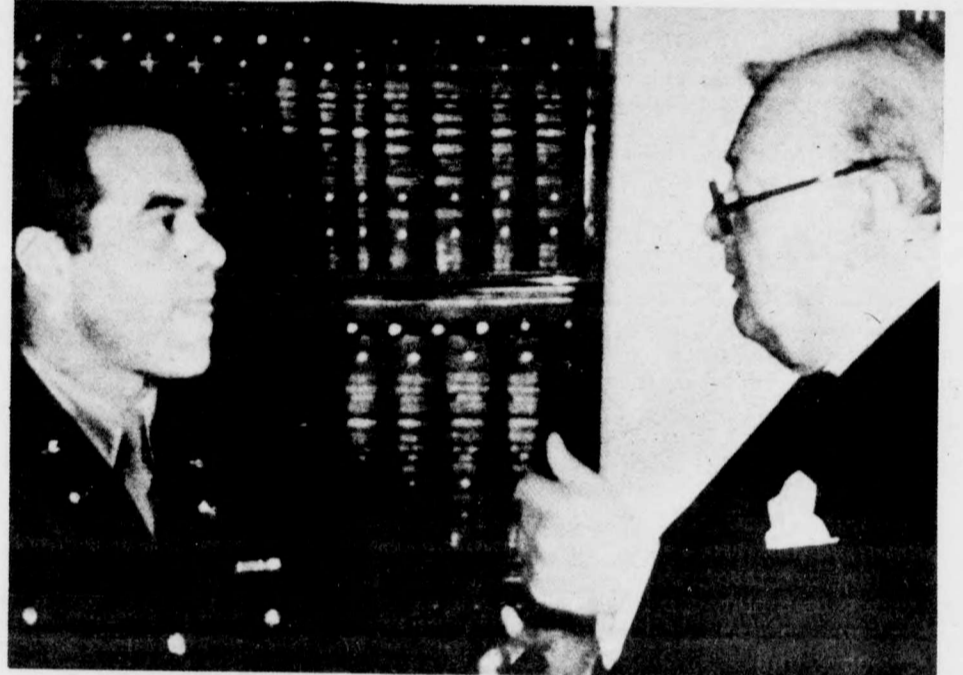
A HOLE IN THE HEAD



Frank Sinatra, 1959

This film has a comparative theme to the aforementioned of Frank Sinatra portraying a man who thinks that gambling with the friendship of an old time racketeer will be the source of his wealth. He finds to his dismay that there is no reality in a world which depends on a gangster's benevolence. He finds reality in the same forces that opposed him from the beginning as portrayed by Edward G. Robinson, as his critical uncle, Thelma Ritter, as his severe aunt, and Elinor Parker, who wants to be a mother for Sinatra's son, as portrayed by Eddie Hodges.

THE 'WHY WE FIGHT' SERIES



Documentaries:

POCKETFUL OF MIRACLES



Glenn Ford, 1962

This was a remake of Frank Capra's Lady for a Day. This film was a fairy tale by Damon Runyon. Its complete divorce from the American reality amidst which it pretended to occur was happily signalled by Richard Watts, Jr.: "There is something as frank and unashamed about the straightforward sentimentalism of Lady for a Day as there was about the gallant rowdiness of Miss West's She Done Him Wrong. If the cinema is to go in for the unembarrassed use of the smile between the tears, it seems to me much better to drop all pretence and shoot the works." It now appears that its popularity derived from its gallery of characters whom American audiences took to their hearts, and who were to them as vividly enchanting as the inhabitants of Disneyland or Chaplinland. Historically interesting are the first hints of that "fantasy of good will" which was to become the Capra-Risking major theme.

OUR MISTER SUN

Documentaries:

Frank Capra was commissioned by Bell Telephone to do this documentary on the sun and the way it benefits man. Many of the techniques used in it were developed from his early war documentaries.