What is Chaplin’s message to the world?

Charlie Chaplin's first talkie, made over a decade after the introduction of sound, stands as a brave and controversial piece of filmmaking. Entering production in 1937, at a time when many Americans saw Hitler as an ally rather than an enemy, the film was first released in 1940, prior to the United States' entry into the Second World War.

Satirising Adolf Hitler, Chaplin plays a dual role: firstly as Adenoid Hynkel, the great dictator of the title and despotic ruler of Tomainia; and secondly - in a stroke of genius - as an amnesiac Jewish barber, who returns from the trenches of the First World War to discover that his shop is now part of a ghetto presided over by thuggish stormtroopers.

Playing on the coincidental similarity between Chaplin's moustachioed tramp and Hitler himself, "The Great Dictator" was frequently criticized for attempting to turn the Nazis' rise to power into comedy. Indeed, Chaplin claimed that he would never have tried to burlesque mass genocide once the truth of the Holocaust became known after the film's release.

Strangely, though, what remains so powerful about the film's satire is its outright silliness. Exaggerating Hitler's animated demagogic style at the microphone into complete absurdity, Chaplin's childish satirical swipes work because of - and not in spite of - their refusal to accept Nazism as anything other than an outrageously bad joke.

Ridiculing the anti-Semitic policies of the party (after the Jews, Hynkel promises to wipe out the brunettes; he, of course, is both) and demoting Hitler to the level of a clown, "The Great Dictator" exposes the farcical base of fascism, bursting the swollen bubble of reactionary pomposity with deafening finality.

The result is an incredibly effective satire. No wonder Hitler, Mussolini and Franco banned it outright.
Starring:
Actor:    Role:
Charles Chaplin ...   Adenoid Hynkel - Dictator of Tomainia (parody of Hitler) / A Jewish Barber
Jack Oakie ...   Benzino Napaloni (parody of Mussolini)- Dictator of Bacteria
Reginald Gardiner ...   Schultz
Henry Daniell ... Garbitsch- pronounced “garbage” (parody of Hitler’s right hand man Joseph Goebbels)
Billy Gilbert ...   Herring (parody of Luftwaffe chief, Hermann Göring)
Grace Hayle ...   Madame Napaloni
Carter DeHaven ...   Bacterian Ambassador
Paulette Goddard ...   Hannah
Maurice Moscovitch ...   Mr. Jaeckel
Emma Dunn ...   Mrs. Jaeckel

Miscellaneous connections:

“Phooey” – Führer
“Tomania” – play on “ptomaine poisoning” and mania (madness)
Adenoid – the tissue in the back of the throat behind the tonsils
Bacteria (Italy) – obvious reference to germs
Benzino – play on Benzine - a colorless liquid hydrocarbon; highly inflammable; carcinogenic
Benzino Napaloni – a portmanteau (new word formed by joining two others and combining their meanings) of Benito Mussolini and Napoleon Bonaparte
Herring - a fatty fish. Could also be a reference to “red herring” – a tactic of diversion
Music during the Globe scene – Wagner’s Prelude to Act 1 of Lohengrin (Wagner was famously anti-semetic)
Osterlich – Austria
Symbolism of the globe scene – Hitler playing with the world, squeezes it too tight and breaks it.
The “double cross” – parodies the swastika, with a play on words – to “double cross” someone means to betray them
The Great Dictator – Charlie Chaplin

The Great Dictator is a comedy film written, directed, produced by, and starring Charlie Chaplin. First released in October 1940, it was Chaplin's first true talking picture, and more important was the only major film of its period to bitterly satirize Nazism and Adolf Hitler.

The film is unusual for its period, as the United States was still formally at peace with Nazi Germany. Chaplin's film advanced a stirring, controversial condemnation of Hitler, fascism, antisemitism, and the Nazis, the latter of whom he excoriates in the film as "machine men, with machine minds and machine hearts".

The film was Chaplin's first "talkie", as well as his most commercially successful film.

Plot
The film begins during a battle of World War I. The protagonist is an unnamed Jewish private (Charlie Chaplin), who is a barber by profession and is fighting for the Central Powers in the army of the fictional nation of Tomainia (an allusion to ptomaine poisoning), comically blundering through the trenches in a tract of combat scenes. Upon hearing a fatigued pilot pleading for help, the private valiantly attempts to rescue the exhausted officer, one Commander Schultz (Reginald Gardiner), as the two board Schultz's nearby airplane and fly off, escaping enemy fire in the nick of time. Commander Schultz reveals that he is carrying important dispatches that could win Tomania the war. However, the plane quickly loses fuel and crashes. Both Schultz and the unnamed private survive. The private's landing is cushioned by a huge pit of wet mud. As medics arrive, Commander Schultz gives them the dispatches, but is told that the war has just ended and Tomania has lost.

The scene cuts to victory celebrations, newspaper headlines, the evacuation and hospitalization of the private, and to a speech given twenty years later by Adenoid Hynkel (cf. Adolf Hitler, also played by Chaplin in a double role), now the ruthless dictator of Tomainia, who has undertaken an endeavor to persecute Jews throughout the land, aided by Minister of the Interior Garbitsch (compare Joseph Goebbels, played by Henry Daniell) and Minister of War Herring (compare Hermann Göring, played by Billy Gilbert). The symbol of Hynkel's fascist regime is the "double cross" (compare the Nazi swastika) and Hynkel himself speaks a dramatic, macaronic parody of the German language (reminiscent of Hitler's own fiery speeches), "translated" at humorously obvious parts in the speech by an overly concise English-speaking news voice-over.

The Jewish private and barber, who had been hospitalized for the past twenty years, having suffered memory loss from the prior plane crash, is blissfully unaware of Hynkel's rise to power and now, at last, returns to his barbershop in the Jewish ghetto, shocked when storm troopers paint "Jew" on the windows of his shop. In the ensuing slapstick scuffle with the stormtroopers, Hannah, (Paulette Goddard), a beautiful resident of the ghetto, knocks both Stormtroopers on the head with a frying pan. The barber finds a friend and ultimately a love interest in Hannah. At one point, the barber is almost lynched by Stormtroopers, but is saved when Commander Schultz, now a high official in Hynkel's government, intervenes.

Meanwhile, Schultz, who has come up in the ranks in the intervening twenty years, recognizes the barber (who is reminded of WWI by Schultz and therefore gets his memory back) and, though surprised to find him a Jew, Schultz orders the storm troopers to leave him and Hannah alone. Hynkel, in addition, has relaxed his stance on Tomainian Jewry in an attempt to woo a Jewish financier into giving him a loan to support his regime. Egged on by Garbitsch, Hynkel has become obsessed with the idea of world domination. In one famous scene, Hynkel dances with a large,
inflatable globe to the tune of the Prelude to Act I of Richard Wagner's Lohengrin) at the end of which it suddenly pops in his hands, like a balloon.

On Garbitsch's advice, Hynkel has planned to invade the neighboring country of Osterlich (likely a corruption of Österreich, the German name for Austria) and needs the loan to finance the invasion. Eventually, the financier refuses, and Hynkel reinstates his persecution of the Jews, this time to an even greater extent. Schultz voices his objection to the pogrom and shows his empathy towards Jews; Hynkel denounces Schultz as a supporter of democracy and a traitor, and orders Schultz placed in a concentration camp. Schultz flees to the ghetto and begins planning to overthrow the Hynkel regime.

Schultz, along with the unnamed barber, Hannah, and other members of the Jewish ghetto, meet to discuss their subversive plot. Schultz says that in order to decide who will carry out this plot (which involves a suicide mission to blow up Hynkel's palace), a coin will be placed in one of five puddings, and the person who receives the one with the coin in it is to carry out the mission. However, Hannah, trying to make a pacifistic statement, has placed a coin in every dessert, leading to one of Chaplin's most comical scenes; finally, they all decide it is best to heed Hannah's advice not to attempt the suicide mission. Eventually, however, both Schultz and his barber friend are captured and condemned to the concentration camp.

Hynkel is initially opposed by Benzino Napaloni (a portmanteau of Benito Mussolini and Napoleon Bonaparte, played by Jack Oakie), dictator of Bacteria, in his plans to invade Osterlich. Hynkel invites Napaloni to talk the situation over in Tomainia, however, and attempts to impress Napaloni with a display of military might and psychological warfare, and thus invites Napaloni to a military show. The military show turned out to be a disaster. Hynkel's "light artillery" did not arrive. Hynkel's bombers fall from the sky after initially being mistaken for Napaloni's planes. The tanks do arrive, but they totally fail to impress Napaloni, who claims to have tanks that can fly and go under the water. (Herring blusters that they are concentrating on "flying dreadnoughts"). After some friction and a comedic food fight between the two leaders, a deal is made. Hynkel immediately breaks the deal, and the invasion proceeds successfully. Hannah, who has since emigrated to Osterlich to escape Hynkel, once again finds herself living under Hynkel's regime.

Schultz and the barber escape from the camp wearing Tomainian uniforms. Border guards mistake the barber for Hynkel, to whom he is nearly identical in appearance. Conversely, Hynkel, on a duck-hunting trip so that people will not expect an invasion, falls overboard and is mistaken for the barber and is arrested by his own soldiers.

The barber, who has assumed Hynkel's identity, is taken to the Tomainian capital to make a victory speech. Garbitsch, in introducing "Hynkel" to the throngs, decries free speech and other supposedly traitorous and outdated ideas. In contrast, the barber then makes a rousing speech, reversing Hynkel's anti-Semitic policies and declaring that Tomainia and Osterlich will now be a free nation and a democracy.

Hannah, who was previously mistreated by Tomanian police agents looking for the barber, hears the barber's speech on the radio, and is amazed when "Hynkel" addresses her directly: "Hannah, can you hear me? Wherever you are, look up, Hannah. The clouds are lifting. The sun is breaking through. We are coming out of the darkness into the light. We are coming into a new world, a kindlier world, where men will rise above their hate, their greed and brutality. Look up, Hannah. The soul of man has been given wings, and at last he is beginning to fly. He is flying into the rainbow—into the light of hope, into the future, the glorious future that belongs to you, to me, and to all of us. Look up, Hannah. Look up". Hannah looks up with an optimistic smile.
Cast and analysis

Chaplin (as the barber) absent-mindedly attempts to shave Goddard (as Hannah) in this image from the trailer for the film. The film stars Chaplin as Hynkel and the barber, Paulette Goddard as Hannah, Jack Oakie as Napaloni, Reginald Gardiner as Schultz, Henry Daniell as Garbitsch and Billy Gilbert as Field Marshal Herring, an incompetent adviser to Hynkel. Chaplin stars in a double role as the Jewish barber and the fascist dictator (or "Phooey", parodying "Führer") clearly modeled on Adolf Hitler.

The names of the aides of Adenoid Hynkel are parodies of those of Hitler's. Garbitsch (pronounced "garbage"), the right hand man of Hynkel, is a parody of Joseph Goebbels, and Field Marshal Herring was modeled after the Luftwaffe chief, Hermann Göring. The "Dig-a-ditchy" of Bacteria, Benzino Napaloni, was modeled after Italy's Il Duce, Benito Mussolini. Benzino is played with arrogant buffoonery by Jack Oakie.

Much of the film is taken up by Hynkel and Napaloni arguing over the fate of Osterlich (Austria). Originally, Mussolini was opposed to the German takeover since he saw Austria as a buffer-state between Germany and Italy. The international community (in particular, France and Britain, Mussolini's Stresa front partners) did not share Italy's concern over German annexation of Austria and supported League of Nations sanctions against Italy, after Italy invaded Ethiopia. In 1936, Mussolini submitted to Hitler's will, withdrew Italian troops from the Brenner Pass along the Austrian border, and moved closer to Germany, as Hitler did not apply sanctions against Italy. This conflict is almost forgotten today given Italy's alliance with the German Third Reich during World War II.

The film contains several of Chaplin's most famous sequences. The rally speech by Hynkel, delivered in German-sounding gibberish, is a caricature of Hitler's oratory style, which Chaplin studied carefully in newsreels. The German words schnitzel, sauerkraut and liverwurst can be made out, as well as "Katzenjammer Kids" (a turn of the century comic strip) and English phrases such as "cheese'n'crackers" and frequently "lager beer", in the fake German. Hynkel speaks during the rally and at other points in the film when he is angry (though he normally speaks English). Billy Gilbert as Herring is also required to improvise this fake German at times, and at one point (where he is apologizing for having accidentally knocked Hynkel down the stairs) he comes up with the word "banana". Chaplin is clearly taken by surprise and repeats, "Der banana?" before incorporating the word into his own reply. Chaplin, as Hynkel, has a tendency to remove Herring's medals when he gets angry. In the scene where Hynkel receives news that Napaloni mobilized his troops along the Osterlich border, Hynkel not only removed all of Herring's medals, but removed all of his buttons on his shirt, revealing a striped shirt with suspenders and then slaps Herring.

Chaplin, as the barber, shaves a customer in tune with a radio broadcast of Johannes Brahms's Hungarian Dance No. 5, recorded in one continuous take. The film's most celebrated sequence is the ballet dance between Hynkel and a balloon globe in his palatial office, set to Richard Wagner's Lohengrin Overture, which is also used at the end of the film when the Jewish barber is making the victory speech in Hynkel's place. The globe dance had its origins in the late 1920s, when Chaplin was filmed at a Hollywood party doing an early version of the dance, with a globe and a Prussian military helmet (this footage appears in the documentary Unknown Chaplin).

The film ends with the barber, having been mistaken for the dictator, delivering an address in front of a large audience and over the radio to the nation, following the Tomainian take-over of Osterlich (a reference to the German Anschluss of Austria on March 12, 1938). The address is widely interpreted as an out-of-character personal plea from Chaplin.
The Third Reich's official taste in art and architecture is frequently parodied. The distance between the front door and Hynkel's desk is ridiculously long, and while a painter and a sculptor try to create his official image, the dictator never stays posed for more than a few seconds at a time. In the main thoroughfare of the capital the Venus de Milo has been "repaired" to give a fascist salute, and Rodin's The Thinker still sits, but now also has his arm raised.

Some of the signs in the shop windows of the ghettoized Jewish population in the film are written in Esperanto, a language which Hitler condemned as a Jewish plot to internationalize and destroy German culture.

Garbitsch, who constantly counsels and advises Hynkel, seems to be the one guiding him. This is an allusion to the rumors that Goebbels was the actual ruler and Hitler only a puppet-leader.

**Making of the film**
The film was directed by Chaplin and his half-brother Wheeler Dryden, and written and produced by Chaplin. The film was shot largely at the Chaplin Studios and other locations around Los Angeles. The elaborate World War I scenes were filmed in Laurel Canyon. Chaplin and Meredith Wilson composed the music. Filming began in September 1939 and finished six months later. Chaplin was motivated by the escalating violence and repression of Jews by the Nazis throughout the late 1930s, the magnitude of which was conveyed to him personally by his European Jewish friends and fellow artists. The Third Reich's repressive nature and militarist tendencies were also well-known at the time. However, Chaplin later stated that he would not have made the film if he had known of the true extent of the Nazis' crimes.

Several similarities between Hitler and Chaplin have been noted and may have been a pivotal factor in Chaplin's decision to make The Great Dictator. Chaplin and Hitler had superficially similar looks, most famously their toothbrush moustaches, and this similarity is often commented upon. (Tommy Handley wrote a song named "Who is This Man Who Looks like Charlie Chaplin?") Furthermore, the two men were born only four days apart in April 1889, and both grew up in relative poverty.

As Hitler and his Nazi Party rose to prominence, Chaplin's popularity throughout the world became greater than ever; he was mobbed by fans on a 1931 trip to Berlin, which annoyed the Nazis, who published a book in 1934 titled The Jews Are Looking at You, in which the comedian was described as "a disgusting Jewish acrobat." Ivor Montagu, a close friend of Chaplin, relates that he sent Chaplin a copy of the book and always believed this was the genesis of "Dictator."

Chaplin prepared the story throughout 1938 and 1939, and began filming in September 1939, one week after the beginning of World War II. He finished filming almost six months later. The 2001 BBC documentary on the making of the film, The Tramp and the Dictator, presented newly discovered footage of the film production (shot by Chaplin's elder half-brother Sydney) which showed Chaplin's initial attempts at the film's ending, filmed before the fall of France.

The making of the film coincided with rising tensions throughout the world. Speculation grew that this and other anti-fascist films such as The Mortal Storm and Four Sons would remain unreleased, given the United States' neutral relationship with Germany. The project continued largely because Chaplin was financially and artistically independent of other studios; also, failure to release the film would have bankrupted Chaplin, who had invested $1.5 million of his own money in the project. The film eventually opened in New York City in September 1940, to a wider American audience in October, and the United Kingdom in December. The film was released in France in April 1945.
When interviewed about this film being on such a touchy subject, Charlie Chaplin had only this to say: "Half-way through making The Great Dictator I began receiving alarming messages from United Artists ... but I was determined to go ahead, for Hitler must be laughed at." The documentary The Tramp and The Dictator provides audio of a 1983 interview with Chaplin associate Dan James, in which he reports that President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent his adviser Harry Hopkins to personally meet with Chaplin and encourage him to move ahead with the film.

According to The Tramp and the Dictator, the film was not only sent to Hitler, but an eyewitness confirmed he saw it. According to the Internet Movie Database, Chaplin, after being told Hitler saw the movie, replied: "I'd give anything to know what he thought of it."

**The final speech from *The Great Dictator* by Charlie Chaplin**

I'm sorry, but I don't want to be an emperor. That's not my business. I don't want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help everyone if possible; Jew, Gentile, black man, white. We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other's happiness, not by each other's misery. We don't want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone, and the good earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way.

Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical; our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost.

The airplane and the radio have brought us closer together. The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men; cries out for universal brotherhood; for the unity of us all. Even now my voice is reaching millions throughout the world, millions of despairing men, women, and little children, victims of a system that makes men torture and imprison innocent people. To those who can hear me, I say, do not despair. The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed, the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress. The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people. And so long as men die, liberty will never perish.

Soldiers! Don't give yourselves to brutes, men who despise you, enslave you; who regiment your lives, tell you what to do, what to think and what to feel! Who drill you, diet you, treat you like cattle, use you as cannon fodder. Don't give yourselves to these unnatural men - machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines, you are not cattle, you are men! You have the love of humanity in your hearts! You don't hate! Only the unloved hate; the unloved and the unnatural. Soldiers! Don't fight for slavery! Fight for liberty!

In the seventeenth chapter of St. Luke, it is written that the kingdom of God is within man, not one man nor a group of men, but in all men! In you! You, the people, have the power, the power to create machines, the power to create happiness! You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure. Then in the name of democracy, let us use that power. Let us all unite. Let us fight for a new world, a decent world that will give men a chance to work, that will give youth a future and old age a security. By the promise of these things, brutes have risen to power. But they lie! They do not fulfill that promise.

They never will! Dictators free themselves but they enslave the people. Now let us fight to fulfill that promise. Let us fight to free the world! To do away with national barriers! To do away with greed, with hate and intolerance! Let us fight
for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness. Soldiers, in the name of democracy, let us all unite!

Hannah, can you hear me? Wherever you are, look up Hannah! The clouds are lifting! The sun is breaking through! We are coming out of the darkness into the light! We are coming into a new world; a kindlier world, where men will rise above their hate, their greed, and brutality. Look up, Hannah! The soul of man has been given wings and at last he is beginning to fly. He is flying into the rainbow! Into the light of hope, into the future! The glorious future, that belongs to you, to me and to all of us. Look up, Hannah. Look up!