

Document Citation

Title	Chaplin film opens at Fox Oakland
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Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	1941 May 16
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	The great dictator, Chaplin, Charlie, 1940

Chaplin Film Opens at Fox Oakland

'The Great Dictator' **Has Elements of** **Comedy and Tragedy**

By **WOOD SOANES**

The long absent Charlie Chaplin and the long-awaited "Great Dictator" arrived on the screen of the Fox Oakland yesterday to provide one of the most interesting film productions of the year, one in which Chaplin takes the talkie to his heart and tacitly admits that it is here to stay.

After side-stepping all contact with sound and maintaining his dignity as king of pantomime, Chaplin permits himself two long and involved speeches in "The Great Dictator" in addition to the usual dialogue. In the first he gives a bitterly satirical and enormously funny imitation of Hitler in the throes of a harangue; in the second, as a barber mistaken for Hitler, he delivers a thoughtful, sometimes powerful, sermon for peace on earth.

"The Great Dictator" is more tragic than comic, however, and may thus prove something of a disappointment to those who have come to accept the little clown as a fellow who brings only fun to the screen. This picture represents Chaplin carrying to the screen the theories he has entertained privately for many years, theories of international geniality and good will. He advances them by contrast showing what happened to Germany.

Chaplin is a friendly little barber caught in the maelstrom of the first war. A crack on the head gives him amnesia and when he is released from the hospital many years later it is to find a new world in which a madman rules, Jews are objects of derision and storm troopers are raging like mad dogs through the country-side. The barber is a mite but has the courage and he starts a singlehanded fight.

Of course this profits him little and presently he is in prison again only to be released and mistaken for the Dictator. The picture ends abruptly, a matter that was undoubtedly brought about by the fact that it took Chaplin so long to make it that the spirit of the people had changed and Hitler was no longer a strictly comic figure in the European scheme of things.

Chaplin is delightful both as the real Hitler and as the timid barber. He pauses every so often to introduce some of the rich comedy for which he is famous. There is a hilarious scene in which as the daffy dictator he does a sort of bubble dance with the globe for a balloon; another in which he and Jack Oakie, as Mussolini, battle for position in a conference; another in which with a group of conspirators, he tries to avoid the black mark that will end his life; and several others of similar character.

Chaplin himself is in fine spirit throughout the picture on which he spent pots of money in production; Oakie contributes an excellent characterization of the pompous Mussolini; Paulette Goddard is appealing as a Ghetto girl and in smaller parts are Maurice Moskowitz, Reginald Gardiner, Henry Daniell and a cast of well chosen types. Laughter may not always rock the rafters of the Fox-Oakland but audiences will know they have seen one of the great pictures of the year and one of Chaplin's greatest performances.