

given Americans their most intensive—if highly distorted—picture of their country's past, from the styles of the rich and famous to the underside of American life. It has been instrumental in shaping our deepest presuppositions about race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual conduct. Movies have helped form the country's self-image and have provided unifying symbols in a society fragmented along lines of race, class, ethnicity, region, and gender. In certain respects subversive of traditional cultural values, movie culture has helped Americans adapt to an ever-changing society.



The Wizard of Oz

INTRODUCTION

One night a year the country shuts down. All across the United States tens of millions of people press the buttons on their remote controls, sit back in their easy chairs or recline on their couches, and become the world's largest congregation, watching a major event in the country's civic religion—the Oscars. Even though movie attendance has fallen steeply—to just one-fifth of what it was at the time of the first Academy Awards ceremony in 1927—Americans still gawk at the limousines as they pull up to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles, gaze at the stars' tuxedos and gowns, and wait impatiently for a memorable moment—a streaker racing across the stage or perhaps Jack Palance performing one-handed push-ups.

Americans watch the Academy Awards presentations for many reasons: To see briefly a more human side of their favorite movie stars; to pit their judgment against that of the five thousand members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; to partake in the trashy pleasure of watching the glitziest extravaganza that Hollywood is capable of producing. But the Academy Awards ceremony also gives Americans a chance to recognize the movies that entertained them, engaged their emotions, expressed their deepest hopes and responded to their anxieties and fears. From *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a graphic portrait of the horrors and futility of war that came to embody the pacifism of the late 1920s and early 1930s, to the bleak revisionist western *Unforgiven* that deglamorizes the mythic western frontier and its violent traditions, Oscar winners and nominees have offered a vivid record of shifting American values.

Of all the products of popular culture, none is more sharply etched in our collective imagination than the movies. Many Americans instantly recognize images produced by the movies: Charlie Chaplin, the starving prospector in *The Gold Rush*, eating his shoe, treating the laces like spaghetti; James Cagney, the gun-toting gangster in *Public Enemy*, shoving a grapefruit into Mae Clarke's face; Paul Muni, the jobless World War I veteran in *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang*, who, asked at the end of the bleak, determinist film how he lives, replies, "I steal"; Gloria Swanson, the fading movie goddess in *Sunset Boulevard*, belittling suggestions that she is no longer a big star: "It's the pictures that got small." Even those who have never seen *Citizen Kane* or *Casablanca* or the *Treasure of Sierra Madre* respond to advertisements, parodies, and TV skits that use these films' dialogue, images, and characters.

As cultural artifacts, movies open windows into American cultural and social history. A mixture of art, business, and popular entertainment, they provide a host of insights into Americans' shifting ideals, fantasies, and preoccupations. Like any

cultural artifact, the movies can be approached in a variety of ways. Cultural historians have treated movies as sociological documents that record the look and mood of particular historical settings; as ideological constructs that advance particular political or moral values or myths; as psychological texts that speak to individual and social anxieties and tensions; as cultural documents that present particular images of gender, ethnicity, class, romance, and violence; and as visual texts that offer complex levels of meaning and seeing.

This book offers examples of how to interpret classic American films as artifacts of a shifting American culture. Film history is at its clearest against a broader backdrop of American cultural and social history.

THE BIRTH OF MODERN CULTURE

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a New York neurologist named George M. Beard coined the term "neurasthenia" to describe a psychological ailment that afflicted a growing number of Americans. Neurasthenia's symptoms included "nervous dyspepsia, insomnia, hysteria, hypochondria, asthma, sick-headache, skin rashes, hayfever, premature baldness, inebrity, hot and cold flashes, nervous exhaustion, brain-collapse, or forms of 'elementary insanity.'" Among those who suffered from neurasthenia-like ailments at some point in their lives were Theodore Roosevelt, settlement house founder Jane Addams, psychologist William James, painter Frederic Remington, and novelists Owen Wister and Theodore Dreiser.

According to expert medical opinion, neurasthenia's underlying cause was "over-civilization." The frantic pace of modern life, nervous overstimulation, stress, and emotional repression produced debilitating bouts of depression or attacks of anxiety and nervous prostration. Fears of "over-civilization" pervaded late nineteenth-century American culture. Social critics worried that urban life was producing a generation of pathetic, pampered, physically and morally enfeebled ninety-seven-pound weaklings—a poor successor to the stalwart Americans who had fought the Civil War, battled Indians, and tamed a continent. A sharply falling birth rate sparked fears that the native-born middle class was committing "race suicide." A host of therapies promised to relieve the symptoms of neurasthenia, including such precursors of modern tranquilizers as Dr. Hammond's Nerve and Brain Pills. Sears even sold an electrical contraption called the Heidelberg Electric Belt, designed to reduce anxiety by sending electric shocks to the genitals. Many physicians prescribed physical exercise for men and rest cures for women. But the main forms of release for late nineteenth-century Americans from the pressures, stresses, and restrictions of modern life was by turning to sports, outdoor activities, and popular culture.

Few Americans are unfamiliar with the wrenching economic transformations of the late nineteenth century, the consolidation of industry, the integration of the national economy, and the rise of the corporation. But few Americans realize that this period also brought the birth of our modern culture.

In the last years of the nineteenth century an ethos of self-fulfillment, leisure, and sensual satisfaction began to replace the Victorian spirit of self-denial, self-restraint, and domesticity. Visual images took their place beside words and reading,

which had been the essence of Victorian high learning. A new respect for energy, strength, and virility overtook a genteel endorsement of eternal truths and high moral ideals. Above all, a varied culture deeply divided by class, gender, religion, ethnicity, and locality gave way to a vibrant, commercialized mass culture that provided all Americans with standardized entertainment and information.

The Revolt Against Victorianism

The new mood could be seen in a rage for competitive athletics and team sports. It was in the 1890s that boxing began to rival baseball as the nation's most popular sport, basketball was invented, football swept the nation's college campuses, and golf, track, and wrestling became popular pastimes. The celebration of vigor could also be seen in a new enthusiasm for such outdoor activities as hiking, hunting, fishing, mountain climbing, camping, and bicycling.

A new bold, energetic spirit was also apparent in popular music, in a craze for ragtime, jazz, and patriotic military marches. The cult of toughness and virility appeared in the growth of aggressive nationalism (culminating in 1898 in America's "Splendid Little War" against Spain), the condemnation of sissies and stuffed shirts, and the growing popularity of such aggressively masculine western novels as Owen Wister's *The Virginian*. Toward the end of the century, the New Woman—personified by the tall, athletic Gibson Girl—supplanted the frail, submissive Victorian woman as a cultural ideal. The new woman began to work outside the home in rapidly increasing numbers, to attend high schools and college, and increasingly to press for the vote. During the '90s American popular culture was in full-scale revolt against the stifling Victorian code of propriety.

During the mid-nineteenth century, urban reformers responded to the rapid growth of cities by advocating the construction of parks to serve as rural retreats in the midst of urban jungles. Frederick Law Olmsted, the designer of New York City's Central Park, believed that the park's bucolic calm would instill the values of sobriety and self-control in the urban masses. But by the end of the century, it was clear that those masses had grown tired of sobriety and self-control. They craved excitement and self-expression. This was clearly seen at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, where the most popular area was the boisterous, rowdy Midway. Here, visitors rode the Ferris Wheel and watched "Little Egypt" perform exotic dances. Entrepreneurs were quick to satisfy the public's desire for fast-paced entertainment. During the 1890s, a series of popular amusement parks opened in Coney Island. Unlike Central Park, Coney Island glorified adventure. It offered exotic, dreamland landscapes and a free, loose social environment. At Coney Island men could remove their coats and ties, and both sexes could enjoy rare personal freedom.

Central Park was supposed to reinforce self-control and delayed gratification; Coney Island was a consumer's world of extravagance, gaily, abandon, revelry, and instant gratification. It attracted working-class Americans who longed for at least a taste of the good life. If a person could never hope to own a mansion in Newport, he could for a few dimes experience the exotic pleasures of Luna Park or Dreamland Park. Even the rides in the amusement parks were designed to create illusions and break down reality. Mirrors distorted people's images and rides threw them off

balance. At Luna Park, the "Witching Waves" simulated the bobbing of a ship at high sea, and the "Tickler" featured spinning circular cars that threw riders together.

In part, the desire for intense physical experience would be met through sports, athletics, and out-of-doors activities. But its primary outlet was vicarious—through mass culture. Craving more intense physical and emotional experience, eager to break free of the confining boundaries of genteel culture, Americans turned to new kinds of newspapers and magazines, new forms of commercial entertainment, and, above all, the movies.

The Rise of Mass Communications

The last ten years of the nineteenth century were critical in the emergence of modern American mass culture. In those years emerged the modern instruments of mass communication—the mass-circulation metropolitan newspaper, the best-seller, the mass-market magazine, national advertising campaigns, and the movies. American culture also made a critical shift to commercialized forms of entertainment.

The urban tabloid was the first instrument of modern mass culture to appear. Pioneered by Joseph Pulitzer's New York *World* and William Randolph Hearst's New York *Journal*, these popular newspapers differed dramatically from the staid upper-class and the staunchly partisan political newspapers that had dominated late nineteenth-century journalism: They featured banner headlines; a multitude of photographs and cartoons; an emphasis on local news, crime and scandal, society news, and sports; and large ads, which made up half of a paper's content compared to just thirty percent in earlier newspapers. For easier reading on an omnibus or street railway, page size was cut, stories shortened, and the text heavily illustrated with drawings and photographs.

Entertainment was a stock-in-trade of yellow journalism (named for the "yellow kid" comic strip that appeared in Hearst's *Journal*). Among the innovations introduced by yellow journalists were the first color comic strips, advice columns, women's pages, fashion pages, and sports pages. Using simple words, a lively style, and many illustrations, yellow journalism could reach a mass audience that included many immigrants who understood little English. By 1905, Pulitzer's *World* boasted a circulation of 2 million.

Also during the 1890s, the rise of the country's first mass-circulation national magazines revolutionized the world of magazine publishing, and created a demand for fresh types of news. After the Civil War, the magazine field had been dominated by a small number of sedate magazines—such as *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, and *Scribner's*—written for the "gentle" reader of highly intellectual tastes. The poetry, serious fiction, and wood engravings that filled these monthlies' pages rigidly conformed to upper-class Victorian standards of taste. These magazines embodied what the philosopher George Santayana called the "genteel tradition": the idea that art and literature should reinforce morality and refine sensibility, not portray reality. Art and literature, the custodians of culture believed, should transcend the real and uphold the ideal. The poet James Russell Lowell spoke for other genteel writers when he said that no man should describe any activity that would make his

wife or daughter blush. The founders of the nation's first mass-circulation magazines considered the older "quality" magazines stale and elitist. In contrast, their magazines featured practical advice, popularized science, gossip, human interest stories, celebrity profiles, interviews, muckraking investigations, pictures, articles on timely topics—and a profusion of ads. Instead of cultivating a select audience, the new magazines aimed to please the urban masses. By running popular articles, editors sought to maximize circulation, which, in turn, attracted advertising that kept the magazine's price low. By 1900 the nation's largest magazine, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, reached 850,000 subscribers—more than eight times the readership of *Scribner's* or *Harper's*.

The end of the nineteenth century also marked a critical turning point in the history of book publishing, as marketing wizards like Frank Doubleday organized the first national book promotional campaigns, created the modern best seller, and transformed popular writers like Jack London into celebrities. The world of the Victorian man of letters, the defender of "Culture" against "Anarchy," had ended.

In 1898, the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco) launched the first million dollar national advertising campaign. It succeeded in making Uneeda biscuits and their waterproof "In-er-Seal" box popular household items. During the 1880s and 1890s, patent medicine manufacturers, department stores, and producers of low-priced, packed consumer goods (such as Campbell Soups, H.J. Heinz, and Quaker Oats), developed modern advertising techniques. Earlier advertisers had made little use of brand names, illustrations, or trademarks; the new ads emblazoned snappy slogans and colorful packages. As early as 1900, advertisements began to use psychology to arouse consumer demand by suggesting that a product would contribute to the consumer's social and psychic well-being. To induce purchases, observed a trade journal in 1890, a consumer "must be aroused, excited, terrified." Listerine mouthwash promised to cure "halitosis"; Scott tissue claimed to prevent infections caused by harsh toilet paper.

By stressing instant gratification and personal fulfillment in their ads, modern advertising helped undermine an earlier Victorian ethos of thrift, self-denial, delayed gratification, and hard work. In various ways, it transformed Americans from savers to spenders and told them to give in to their desire for luxury.

The creators of the modern instruments of mass culture arose from similar backgrounds. Most were outsiders—recent immigrants or Southerners, Midwesterners, or Westerners. Joseph Pulitzer was an Austrian Jew; the pioneering new magazine editors, Edward W. Bok and Samuel Sidney McClure, were also first-generation immigrants. Unlike the men and women from Boston's Brahmin culture or upper-class New York who had defined the genteel tradition, the men who created modern mass culture had their initial training in daily newspapers, commerce, and popular entertainment. As a result, they were more in touch with popular tastes. As outsiders, the creators of mass culture betrayed an almost voyeuristic interest in what they called the "romance of real life": high life, low life, power, and status.

The popular culture they created was simple, direct, realistic, and colloquial. A new realistic aesthetic overthrew the florid Victorian style. Writers and artists rebelled against the moralism and sentimentality of Victorian culture and sought to portray life objectively and truthfully, without idealization or avoiding the ugly.

The quest for realism took a variety of guises: in the naturalism of writers like Theodore Dreiser and Stephen Crane, with their nightmarish depictions of urban poverty and exploitation; in the paintings of what was called the "ashcan" school of art, with their vivid portraits of tenements and congested streets; and in the forceful, colorful prose of tabloid reporters and muckraking journalists, who cut through the Victorian veil of reticence surrounding such topics as sex, political corruption, and working conditions in industry. The task of the journalist, novelist, and artist, declared the writer Frank Norris, was to battle "false views of life, false characters, false sentiments, false morality, false history, false philosophy, false emotions, false heroism."

The most influential innovations in mass culture would take place after the turn of the century. Thomas Edison first successfully projected moving pictures on a screen in 1896, but it would not be until 1903 that Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*—the first American movie to tell a story—demonstrated the commercial appeal of motion pictures. And although Guglielmo Marconi showed the possibility of wireless communication in 1895, commercial radio broadcasting did not begin until 1920 and commercial television broadcasts until 1939. These new instruments of mass communications would reach audiences of unprecedented size. As early as 1922, movies sold forty million tickets a week and radios could be found in three million homes.

The emergence of these modern forms of mass communications had far reaching effects upon American society. They broke down the isolation of local neighborhoods and communities and ensured that for the first time all Americans, regardless of their class, ethnicity, or locality, began to share standardized information and entertainment. They also created a truly democratic culture.

Commercialized Leisure

Among the most striking differences between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries was the rapid growth of commercialized entertainment. For much of the nineteenth century, Americans had regarded commercial amusements as suspect. Drawing on the Puritan criticisms of play and recreation and a republican ideology that was hostile to luxury, hedonism, and extravagance, American Victorians associated theaters, dance halls, circuses, and organized sports with such vices as gambling, swearing, drinking, and immoral sexual behavior. In the late nineteenth century, however, a new outlook challenged Victorian prejudices.

During the first twenty years of the new century, attendance at professional baseball games doubled. Vaudeville, already popular in the 1890s, increased in popularity, featuring singing, dancing, skits, comics, acrobats, and magicians. Amusement parks, penny arcades, dance halls, and other commercial amusements flourished. As early as 1910, when there were 10,000 movie theaters, the movies had become the nation's most popular form of commercial entertainment.

The rise of these commercialized amusements radically reshaped the nature of American leisure activities. Earlier in the nineteenth century, leisure activities had been sharply segregated on the basis of gender, class, and ethnicity. The wealthy attended their own exclusive theaters, concert halls, museums, restaurants, and sporting clubs. For the working class, leisure and amusement was rooted in partic-

ular ethnic communities and neighborhoods, each with its own saloons, churches, fraternal organizations, and organized sports. Men and women differed in their leisure activities. Many men (particularly bachelors and immigrants) relaxed in barber shops, billiard halls, and bowling alleys; joined volunteer fire companies or militias; and patronized saloons, gambling halls, and race tracks. Women took part in church activities and socialized with friends and relatives. After 1880, as incomes rose and leisure time expanded, new commercialized forms of cross-class, mixed-sex amusements proliferated. Entertainment became a major industry. Vaudeville theaters attracted women as well as men. The young, in particular, increasingly sought pleasure, escape, and the freedom to experiment in mixed sex relationships in relatively inexpensive amusement parks, dance halls, urban night clubs, and, above all, nickelodeons and movie theaters, free of parental control.

The transformation of Coney Island from a center of male vice—of brothels, saloons, and gambling dens—into the nation's first modern amusement park, complete with ferris wheels, hootchie kootchie girls, restaurants, and concert halls symbolized the emergence of a new leisure culture, emphasizing excitement, glamour, fashion, and romance. Its informality and sheer excitement attracted people of every class.

Coney Island offered an escape from an oppressive urban landscape to an exotic one. The new motion picture industry would offer an even less expensive, more convenient escape. During the early twentieth century, it quickly developed into the country's most popular and influential form of art and entertainment.

THE BIRTH OF THE MOVIES

Beside Macy's Department Store in Herald Square, New York City, a plaque commemorates the first public showing of a motion picture on a screen in the United States. It was here, on April 23, 1896, at Koster and Bial's Music Hall, that Thomas Alva Edison presented a show that included scenes of the surf breaking on a beach, a comic boxing exhibition, and two young women dancing. A review in *The New York Times* described the exhibition as "all wonderfully real and singularly exhilarating."

The Pre-History of Motion Pictures

For centuries, people had wrestled with the problem of realistically reproducing moving images. A discovery by Ptolemy in the second century provided the first step. He noticed that there is a slight imperfection in human perception: The retina retains an image for a fraction of a second after the image has changed or disappeared. Because of this phenomenon, known as the "persistence of vision," a person would merge a rapid succession of individual images into the illusion of continuous motion.

The first successful efforts to project lifelike images on a screen took place in the mid-seventeenth century. By 1659, a Dutch scientist named Christiaan Huygens had invented the magic lantern, the forerunner of the modern slide projector, which he used to project medical drawings before an audience. A magic lantern used sunlight (or another light source) to illuminate a hand-painted glass transparency

and project it through a simple lens. In the 1790s, the Belgian Etienne Gaspar Robert terrified audiences with fantasmagoric exhibitions, which used magic lanterns to project images of phantoms and apparitions of the dead. By the mid-nineteenth century, illustrated lectures and dramatic readings had become common. To create the illusion of motion, magic lantern operators used multiple lanterns and mirrors to move the image.

The first true moving images appeared in the 1820s, when the concept of the persistence of vision was used to create children's toys and other simple entertainments. The thaumatrope, which appeared in 1826, was a simple disk with separate images printed on each side (for example, a bird on one side and a cage on another). When rapidly spun, the images appeared to blend together (so that the bird seemed to be inside the cage). In 1834, an Austrian military officer, Baron Franz von Uchatius, developed a more sophisticated device called the "Phenakistoscope." It consisted of a disk, with a series of slots along its edge, which was printed with a series of slightly differing pictures. When the disk was spun in front of a mirror and the viewer looked through the slots, the pictures appeared to move. A simpler way to display movement was the flip book, which became popular by the late 1860s. Each page showed a subject in a subtly different position. When a reader flipped the book's pages, the pictures gave the illusion of movement.

These early devices were not very satisfactory. The slides used in early magic lanterns had to be painted by hand. The pictures displayed by the Phenakistoscope or flip books could not be viewed by more than one person at a time. The solution to these problems lay in photography. In 1826, the French inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niepce made the first true photograph. He placed a camera obscura (a box with a tiny opening on one side that admitted light) at his window and for eight hours exposed a metal plate coated with light-sensitive chemicals. During the 1830s, another French inventor, Louis Daguerre, improved Niepce's technique and created the daguerreotype, the first popular form of photography.

The daguerreotype was not very useful to the inventors who wanted to produce motion pictures. The process used expensive copper plates coated with silver and required a subject to remain motionless for fifteen to thirty seconds. During the mid-nineteenth century, however, two technical advances improved the photographic process. Copper plates were replaced with less expensive glass plates, light-sensitive paper, and, in 1880, flexible film. New film coatings significantly reduced exposure time and gave photographers greater mobility. By the late 1870s, the introduction of "dry-process plates" using gelatin emulsion reduced exposure time to just one twenty-fifth of a second and freed photographers from having to process their prints immediately.

The first successful photographs of motion grew out of a California railroad tycoon's \$25,000 wager. In 1872, California Governor Leland Stanford hired a photographer named Eadweard Muybridge to help settle a bet. An avid horse breeder, Stanford had wagered that a galloping horse lifts all four hoofs off the ground simultaneously. In 1878, the English-born photographer lined up twenty-four cameras along the edge of a race track, with strings attached to the shutters. The horse ran by, tripping the shutters, and the twenty-four closely spaced pictures proved Stanford's contention.

Four years later, a French physiologist, Etienne-Jules Marey, became the first

person to take pictures of motion with a single camera. Marey built his camera in the shape of a rifle. At the end of the barrel, he placed a circular photographic plate. A small motor rotated the plate after Marey snapped the shutter. With his camera, Marey could take twelve pictures a second.

In 1887, Thomas Edison gave William K.L. Dickson, one of his leading inventors, the task of developing a motion picture apparatus. Edison envisioned a machine "that should do for the eye what the phonograph did for the ear." Dickson initially modelled his device on Edison's phonograph, placing tiny pictures on a revolving drum. A light inside the drum was supposed to illuminate the pictures. Then he decided to use the flexible celluloid film that George Eastman had invented in 1880 and had begun to use in his Kodak camera. Dickson added perforations to the edge of the film strip to help it feed evenly into his camera.

To display their films, Dickson and Edison devised a coin-operated peepshow device called a "kinetoscope." Because the kinetoscope could only hold fifty feet of film, its films lasted from just thirty-five to forty seconds. This was too brief to tell a story; the first kinetoscope films were simply scenes of everyday life, like the first film "Fred Ott's Sneeze," reenactments of historical events, photographed bits of vaudeville routines, and pictures of well-known celebrities. Nevertheless, the kinetoscope was an instant success. By 1894, coin-operated kinetoscopes had begun to appear in hotels, department stores, saloons, and amusement arcades called nickelodeons.

Eager to maximize his profits, Edison showed no interest in building a movie projector. "If we make this screen machine," he argued, "... it will spoil everything." As a result, Edison's competitors would take the lead in developing screen projection.

In devising a practical movie projector, inventors faced a serious technical problem: the projector had to be capable of stopping a frame momentarily, so that the image could be clearly fixed in the viewer's retina, and then advance the film quickly between frames. Two French brothers—Auguste and Louis Lumiere—solved this problem. They borrowed the design of their stop-action device from the sewing machine, which holds the material still during stitching before advancing it forward. In 1894, the Lumiere brothers introduced the portable motion picture camera and projector.

Finally recognizing the potential of the motion picture projector, Edison entered into an agreement with a Washington, D.C. realtor, Thomas Armat, who had designed a workable projector. In April, 1896, the two men unveiled the Vitascope and presented the first motion pictures on a public screen in the United States.

Competition in the early movie industry was fierce. Aiming to force their competitors out of the industry, moviemakers turned to the courts, launching over two hundred patent infringement suits. To protect their profits and bring order to the industry, Edison and a number of his competitors decided to cooperate by establishing the Motion Picture Patents Company in 1909, consisting of six American companies and two French firms. Members of the trust agreed that only they had the right to make, print, or distribute cameras, projectors, or films. The trust also negotiated an exclusive agreement with Eastman Kodak for film stock of commercial quality. Led by Carl Laemmle, later the founder of Universal Pictures, independent distributors and exhibitors filed a restraint of trade lawsuit under the

Sherman Anti-Trust Act. A court ruled in the independents' behalf in 1915 and the decision was affirmed by a higher court in 1918. Even before the courts ruled in their favor, the independents had broken the power of the trust in the marketplace. The trust viewed movies, in the famous words of director Erich von Stroheim, as so many sausages to be ground out as quickly as possible and rented at ten cents a foot. The independent moviemakers succeeded in defeating the trust with two potent weapons: the introduction of longer films that told complex stories and the emergence of the star system.

During film's first decade—from 1896 to 1905—movies had been little more than a novelty, often used as a chaser to signal the end of a show in a vaudeville theater. These early films are utterly unlike anything seen today. They lasted just seven to ten minutes—too brief to tell anything more than the simplest story. They used a cast of anonymous actors—for the simple reason that the camera was set back so far that it was impossible clearly to make out the actors' faces. As late as 1908, a movie actor made no more than \$8 a day and received no credit on the screen.

In 1905, hundreds of little movie theaters opened, called nickelodeons, since they sold admission nickel by nickel. By 1908, there were an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 nickelodeons. Contrary to popular belief, the nickelodeon's audience was not confined to the poor, the young, or the immigrant. From the start, theaters were situated in rural areas and middle class neighborhoods as well as working-class neighborhoods. Nevertheless, the movies attracted audiences of an unprecedented size. Admission prices were low, seating arrangements "democratic," schedules convenient (films were shown again and again); and lack of spoken dialogue allowed non-English speaking immigrants to enjoy films. Although by 1907, narrative had begun to turn films into an art form, most still emphasized stunts and chases and real life events—like scenes of yacht races or train crashes. They were rented or sold by the foot regardless of subject matter. Exhibitors then assembled scenes together to form a larger show.

While the trust continued much of the practice that was retarding the development of film as a mature art form, it introduced into the movie industry a healthy rationalization. Camera and projecting equipment was standardized; film rental fees were fixed; theaters were upgraded; and the practice of selling films outright ended, which improved the quality of movies by removing damaged prints from circulation. This was also a period of intense artistic and technical innovation. Such pioneering directors as David Wark Griffith created a new language of film and revolutionized screen narrative.

With just six months of film experience, Griffith, a former stage actor, was hired as a director by the Biograph Company and promised \$50 a week and one-twentieth of a cent for every foot of film sold to a rental exchange. Each week, Griffith turned out two or three one-reelers. Earlier directors had used such cinematic devices as close ups, slow motion, fade-ins and fade-outs, lighting effects, and editing; Griffith's great contribution to the movie industry was to show how these techniques could be used to create a wholly new style of storytelling, distinct from the theater.

Griffith's approach to movie storytelling has been aptly called "photographic realism." This is not to say that he merely wished to record a story accurately; rather he sought to convey the illusion of realism. He used editing to convey simulta-

neous events or the passage of time. He demanded that his performers act in a more lifelike manner, avoiding the broad, exaggerated gestures and pantomiming of emotions that had characterized the nineteenth-century stage. He wanted his performers to take on a role rather than directly addressing the camera. Above all, he used close-ups, lighting, editing, and framing and other cinematic techniques to convey suspense and other emotions and to focus the audience's attention on individual performers.

By focusing the camera on particular actors and actresses, Griffith inadvertently encouraged the development of the star system. As early as 1910, newspapers were deluged with requests for actors' names. Most studios refused to divulge their identities, fearing the salary demands of popular performers. But the film trust's leading opponent, Carl Laemmle, was convinced that producing films featuring popular stars would bring financial stability. As one industry observer put it, "In the 'star' your producer gets not only a 'production' value . . . but a 'trademark' value, and an 'insurance' value which are . . . very potent in guaranteeing the sale of this product." In 1910, Laemmle manufactured the first star, Florence Lawrence was already the most popular anonymous star. Laemmle lured her away from Biograph, and launched an unprecedented publicity campaign on her behalf. As the star system emerged, salaries soared. In the course of just two years, the salary of actress Mary Pickford rose from less than \$400 a week in 1914—at the time a huge sum in its own right—to \$10,000 a week in 1916.

Meanwhile, an influx of feature-length films from Europe, which attracted premium admission prices, led a New York nickelodeon owner named Adolph Zukor to produce four- and five-reel films featuring readily identifiable stars. By 1916, Zukor had taken control of Paramount Pictures, a movie distributor, and had instituted the practice of "block-booking"—requiring theaters to book a number of films rather than just a single film. Within a few years, Zukor's company had achieved vertical integration—not only producing films, but distributing them and owning the theaters that exhibited them.

During the second decade of the twentieth century, immigrants like Laemmle and Zukor came to dominate the movie business. Unlike Edison and the other American-born, Protestant businessmen who had controlled the early film industry, these immigrant entrepreneurs had a strong sense of what the public wanted to see. Virtually all of these new producers were East European and Jewish. Not raised in the Victorian ethos that still held sway in "respectable" Protestant America, they proved better able to exploit ribald humor and sex in their films. Less conservative than the American-born producers, they were more willing to experiment with such innovations as the star system and feature-length productions. Since many had come to the film industry from the garment and fur trades—where fashions change rapidly and success requires staying constantly in touch with the latest styles—they tried to give the public what it wanted. As Samuel Goldwyn, one of the leading moguls, noted, "If the audience don't like a picture, they have a good reason. The public is never wrong. I don't go for all this thing that when I have a failure, it is because the audience doesn't have the taste or education, or isn't sensitive enough. The public pays money. It wants to be entertained. That's all I know." With this philosophy the outsiders wrestled control over the industry away from the American-born producers.

During the 1920s and 1930s, a small group of film companies consolidated

their control and formed fully integrated companies. Paramount, Warner Brothers, RKO, 20th Century-Fox, and Lowe's (MGM) were known as the Big Five—and the Little Three consisted of Universal, Columbia, and United Artists. With the exception of United Artists, which was solely a distribution company, the major studios owned their own production facilities, ran their own worldwide distribution networks, and controlled theater chains that were committed to showing the company's products. And at the head of each was a powerful mogul—such giants as Adolph Zukor, William Fox, Louis B. Mayer, Samuel Goldwyn, Carl Laemmle, Harry Cohn, Joseph Schenck, and the Warner brothers—who determined what the public was going to see. It was their vision—patriotic, sentimental, secular, and generally politically conservative—that millions of Americans shared weekly at local movie theaters. And as expressed by such producers as Irving Thalberg, Darryl F. Zanuck, and David O. Selznick, it was a powerful vision indeed.

American Film in the Silent Era

Some film historians have argued that early silent films revolved around "characteristically working class settings," and expressed the interests of the poor in their struggles with the rich and powerful. Other scholars maintain that early movies drew largely upon conventions, stock characters, and routines derived from vaudeville, popular melodrama, Wild West shows, comic strips, and other forms of late nineteenth century popular entertainment. Since thousands of films were released during the silent era and relatively few have survived, it is dangerous to generalize about movie content. Nevertheless, certain statements about these films do seem warranted.

Kevin Brownlow has demonstrated the preoccupation with the sources of crime, the nature of political corruption, shifting sexual norms, and the changing role of women, themes that were a dark background to the innocent surfaces of well-dressed tramps and childlike waifs. The silent screen offered vivid glimpses of urban tenements and ethnic ghettos, of gangsters, loan sharks, drug addicts, and panderers. American films were born in an age of reform, and many early silent movies took as their subject matter the major social and moral issues of the Progressive era and beyond: birth control, child labor, divorce, immigration, political corruption, poverty, prisons, prostitution, and women's suffrage. The tone of these films varied widely. Some were realistic and straightforward, others treated their subjects with sentimentality or humor, and many transformed complex social issues into personal melodramas. Yet there can be no doubt that many silent films dealt at least obliquely with the dominant issues of the time.

Many early films mocked authority, poking fun at bumbling cops, corrupt politicians, and intrusive upper-class reformers. Highly physical slapstick comedy offered a particularly potent vehicle of social criticism, spoofing the pretensions of the wealthy and presenting sympathetic portraits of the poor. Mack Sennett, one of the most influential directors of silent comedy, would later recall the themes of his films: "I especially liked the reduction of authority to absurdity, the notion that sex could be funny, and the bold insults hurled at Pretension."

Many films of the early silent era dealt with gender relations. Before 1905, movie screens had played with salacious sexual imagery and risqué humor, drawn

from burlesque halls and vaudeville theaters. Early films offered glimpses of women disrobing or passionate kisses. As the movies' female audience grew, sexual titillation and voyeurism persisted. But an ever increasing number of films dealt in a more sophisticated manner with the changing work and sexual roles of women. While D.W. Griffith's films presented an idealized picture of the frail Victorian child-woman, and showed an almost obsessive preoccupation with female honor and chastity, other silent movies presented images of femininity ranging from the exotic, sexually aggressive vamp to the athletic, energetic "serial queen"; the street smart urban working gal, who repels the sexual advances of her lascivious boss; and cigarette-smoking, alcohol drinking chorus girls or burlesque queens.

In the late teens and the twenties, the movies began to turn from the remnants of Victorian moralism and sentimentality, as well as reformism, and increasingly featured glamour, sophistication, exoticism, urbanity, and sex appeal. New kinds of movie stars appeared: the mysterious sex goddess, personified by Greta Garbo; the passionate, hotblooded lover, epitomized by Rudolph Valentino; and the flapper, first brought to the screen by Coleen Moore, with her bobbed hair, skimpy skirts, and incandescent vivacity. New genres also appeared: swashbuckling adventures; sophisticated sex comedies revolving around the issue of marital fidelity; romantic dramas examining the manners and morals of the well-bred and well-to-do; and tales of flaming youth and the new sexual freedom.

During the 1920s, a sociologist named Herbert Blumer interviewed students and young workers to assess the impact of movies on their lives, and concluded that the effect was to reorient their lives away from ethnic and working class communities toward a broader consumer culture. Observed one high school student: "The day-dreams instigated by the movies consist of clothes, ideas on furnishings and manners." Said an African-American student: "The movies have often made me dissatisfied with my neighborhood because when I see a movie, the beautiful castle, palace, . . . and beautiful house, I wish my home was something like these." Hollywood not only expressed popular values, aspirations, and fantasies, but also promoted cultural change.

The Movies as a Cultural Battleground

Reformers of the Progressive era had taken a highly ambivalent view of the movies. Some praised movies as a benign alternative to the saloon. Others viewed nickelodeons and movie theaters as breeding grounds of crime and sexual promiscuity. In 1907, the *Chicago Tribune* threw its editorial weight against the movies, declaring that they were "without a redeeming feature to warrant their existence . . . ministering to the lowest passions of childhood." That year, Chicago established the nation's first censorship board to protect its population "against the evil influence of obscene and immoral representations." Also in 1907, and again in 1908, New York's mayor, under pressure from various religious and reform groups, temporarily closed down all of the city's nickelodeons and movie theaters. A presidential study concluded that films encouraged "illicit lovemaking and iniquity." A Worcester, Massachusetts, newspaper described the city's movie theaters as centers of delinquent activity, and reported that female gang members "confessed that their

early tendencies toward evil came from seeing moving pictures." Several bills were introduced in Congress calling for movie censorship.

The drive to censor films spread from Chicago to other municipalities and states, especially after a 1915 Supreme Court ruling that movies were not protected by the First Amendment since they "were a business pure and simple . . . not to be regarded as part of the press of the country or as organs of public opinion." Eager to combat the trend toward local censorship, movie manufacturers in 1909 began working with moral reformers in New York to establish the voluntary Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures to review the movies' treatment of violence, drugs, prostitution, and, above all, sexual immorality (such as "over-passionate love scenes; stimulating close dancing; unnecessary bedroom scenes in negligee; excessively low-cut gowns; [and] undue or suggestive display of the person").

After World War I, a series of sex scandals raised renewed threats of censorship or boycotts. William Desmond Taylor, a director, was found murdered under suspicious circumstances; actor Wallace Reid committed suicide amid allegations of drug addiction; and comedian Fatty Arbuckle was acquitted of rape and complicity in murder. To clean up Hollywood's image, the industry banned Arbuckle and a number of other people implicated in scandals, and appointed Will Hays, President Warren Harding's Postmaster General, to head their trade organization. Hays introduced a voluntary code of standards.

The Rise of Hollywood and the Arrival of Sound

In cinema's earliest days, the film industry had based itself in the nation's theatrical center, New York, and most films were made in New York or New Jersey. A few were shot in Chicago, Florida, and elsewhere. Beginning in 1908, however, a growing number of filmmakers located in southern California, drawn by cheap land and labor, the ready accessibility of varied scenery, and a climate ideal for year-round outdoor filming. Contrary to popular mythology, moviemakers did not move to Hollywood to escape the film trust; the first studio to move to Hollywood, Selig, was actually a trust member.

By the early 1920s, Hollywood had become the world's film capital. It produced virtually all films shown in the United States and received eighty percent of the revenue from films shown abroad. During the decade, Hollywood bolstered its position of world leader by recruiting many of Europe's most talented actors and actresses, including Greta Garbo and Hedy Lamarr, directors Ernst Lubitsch and Josef von Sternberg, and camera operators, lighting technicians, and set designers. By the end of the decade, Hollywood claimed to be the nation's fifth largest industry, attracting 83 cents out of every dollar Americans spent on amusement.

Hollywood had also come to symbolize the new morality of the 1920s—a mixture of extravagance, glamour, hedonism, and fun. Where else but Hollywood would an actress like Gloria Swanson bathe in a solid gold bathtub or a screen cowboy like Tom Mix have his name raised atop his house in six foot high letters?

During the 1920s, movie attendance soared. By the middle of the decade, weekly attendance was at fifty million—the equivalent of half the nation's population. In Chicago, in 1929, theaters had enough seats for half the city's population

to attend a movie each day. And as attendance rose, the movie-going experience underwent a profound change.

During the twentieth century's first two decades, movie going had tended to conform to class and ethnic divisions. Urban workers attended movie houses located in their own working class and ethnic neighborhoods, where admission was extremely inexpensive (averaging just seven cents during the teens), and a movie was often accompanied by an amateur talent show or a performance by a local ethnic troupe. These working class theaters were rowdy, high-spirited centers of neighborhood sociability, where mothers brought their babies and audiences cheered, jeered, shouted, whistled, and stamped their feet. The theaters patronized by the middle class were quite different. By 1910, theaters in downtown or middle class neighborhoods became increasingly luxurious. At first many of these theaters were designed in the same styles as many other public buildings, but by the mid-teens movie houses began to feature French Renaissance, Egyptian, Moorish, and other exotic decors. Worcester, Massachusetts's Strand Theater boasted "red plush seats," "luxurious carpets," "rich velour curtains," "finely appointed toilet rooms," and a \$15,000 organ. Unlike the working class movie houses, which showed films continuously, these high class theaters had specific show times and well-groomed, uniformed ushers to enforce standards of decorum.

During the late-twenties, regional and national chains purchased independent neighborhood theaters catering to a distinct working class audience. As a result, the movie-going experience became more uniform, with working class and middle class theaters offering the same programs. Especially after the introduction of the talkies, many working class movie houses shut down, unable to meet the cost of converting to sound.

For decades, engineers had searched for a practical technology to add synchronized recorded sound to the movies. In the 1890s, Thomas Edison tried unsuccessfully to popularize the kinetophone—which combined a kinoscope with a phonograph. In 1923, Lee De Forest, an American inventor, demonstrated the practicality of placing a soundtrack directly on a film strip, presenting a newsreel interview with President Calvin Coolidge and musical accompaniments to several films. But despite the growing popularity of radio, the film industry showed remarkably little interest in sound. Hollywood feared the high cost of converting its production and exhibition to sound technology.

Warner Brothers, a struggling industry newcomer, turned to sound as a way to compete with its larger rivals. A prerecorded musical sound track eliminated the expense of live entertainment. In 1926, Warner Brothers released the film *Don Juan*—the first film with a synchronized film score—along with a program of talking shorts. The popularity of *The Jazz Singer*, which was released in 1927, erased any doubts about the popular appeal of sound, and within a year, some three hundred theaters were wired for sound.

The arrival of sound made for a sharp upsurge in movie attendance, which jumped from fifty million a week in the mid-twenties to 110 million in 1929. But it also produced a number of fundamental transformations in the movies themselves. As Robert Ray has shown, sound made the movies more American. The words that Al Jolson used in *The Jazz Singer* to herald the arrival of sound in the movies—

"You ain't heard nothing yet"—embodied the new slangy, vernacular tone of the talkies. Distinctive American accents and inflections quickly appeared on the screen. James Cagney's New Yorkese or Gary Cooper's Western drawl became familiar sounds. The introduction of sound also encouraged such new film genres as the musical, the gangster film, and comedies that relied on wit rather than slapstick.

In addition, the talkies dramatically changed the movie-going experience, especially for the working class. Many working class audiences had provided silent films with a spoken dialogue. Movie-goers were now expected to remain quiet. As one film historian has observed: "The talking audience for silent pictures became a silent audience for talking pictures." The stage shows and other forms of live entertainment that had appeared in silent movie houses were disappearing, replaced by newsreels and animated shorts.

The Movies Meet the Great Depression

In 1934, Will Hays, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, said that "No medium has contributed more greatly than the film to the maintenance of the national morale during a period featured by revolution, riot and political turmoil in other countries." During the Great Depression, Hollywood had a valuable psychological and ideological role, providing reassurance and hope to a demoralized nation. Even at the Depression's depths attendance at the movies was from sixty to eighty million each week, and, in the face of doubt and despair, films helped sustain national morale.

Although the movie industry considered itself Depression-proof, Hollywood was no more immune from the Depression's effects than any other industry. To finance the purchase of movie theaters and the conversion to sound, the studios had tripled their debts during the mid- and late-twenties to \$410 million. As a result, the industry's very viability seemed in question. By 1933, movie attendance and industry revenues had fallen by forty percent. To survive, the industry trimmed salaries and production costs, and closed the doors of a third of the nation's theaters. To boost attendance, theaters resorted to such gimmicks as lowering admission prices (cut by as much as 25 cents), double bills, give-aways of free dishes, and Bank Night—in which a customer who received a lucky number won a cash prize.

Why did Depression America go to the movies? Escapism is what most people assume. At the movies they could forget their troubles for a couple of hours. Depression films, one left-wing critic maintained, were a modern form of bread and circuses, distracting Americans from their problems, reinforcing older values, and dampening political radicalism. Yet movies were more than mere escapism. Many films of the Depression years were grounded in the social realities of the time. The most realistic films were social problem films—like *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang*—torn from the headlines, usually by Warner Brothers or Columbia Pictures. Yet even the most outrageously extravagant Busby Berkeley musicals—portraying chorus girls as flowers or mechanical windup dolls—were generally set against recognizable depression backdrops.

During the Depression's earliest years, the kinds of movies that Hollywood produced underwent the first of the changes that would reflect shifts in a troubled public's mood. Despair was reflected in the kinds of characters Americans watched

on the screen: a succession of Tommy Gun-toting gangsters, haggard prostitutes, sleazy backroom politicians, cynical journalists, and shyler lawyers. The screen comedies released at the Depression's depths expressed an almost anarchistic disdain for traditional institutions and conventions. In the greatest comedies of the early Depression, the Marx Brothers spoofed everything from patriotism (in *Duck Soup*) to universities (in *Horse Feathers*); W. C. Fields ridiculed families and children; and Mae West used sexual innuendo and double entendres to make fun of the middle class code of sexual propriety, with lines like "When a girl goes wrong, men go right after her."

The gangster pictures and sexually suggestive comedies of the early thirties provoked outrage and threats of boycotts from many Protestant and Catholic religious groups. In 1934, Hollywood's producers' association responded by setting up a bureau (later known as the "Breen Office") to review every script that the major studios proposed to shoot and to screen every film before it was released to ensure that the picture did not violate the organization's "Code to Govern the Making of Talking, Synchronized and Silent Motion Pictures." The Production Code, drafted by a Jesuit priest, Father Daniel Lord, had been originally adopted in 1930, but the producers had regarded it as a public relations device, not as a code of censorship. But in 1933, the newly appointed apostolic delegate to the U.S. Catholic Church, the Most Reverend Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, called on Catholics to launch "a united and vigorous campaign for the purification of the cinema, which has become a deadly menace to morals." Many Catholics responded by forming the Legion of Decency, which soon had nine million members pledged to boycott films that the Legion's rating board condemned. Threatened by fear of boycotts, the producers decided to enforce the production code and place one of their employees, Joseph I. Breen, in charge. The code prohibited nudity, profanity, white slavery, miscegenation, "excessive and lustful kissing," and "scenes of passion" that "stimulate the lower and baser element." It also prohibited Hollywood from glorifying crime or adultery. To enforce the code, the Breen Office was empowered to grant or withhold a seal of approval, and without a seal, a movie could not be played in the major theater chains.

The Breen Office shaped the character of films in the later 1930s. On the positive side, it led Hollywood to cast more actresses in roles as independent career women, instead of as mere sex objects. But it encouraged moviemakers to evade the harsher realities of Depression-era life and to shun controversial political and moral issues. It also contributed to what Maury Klein has called a "stylization of technique" as directors and screenwriters searched for subtle, creative, and often witty ways to treat sexuality and violence while avoiding censorship.

A renewed sense of optimism generated by the New Deal combined with Breen Office censorship to produce new kinds of films in the second half of the Depression decade. G-men, detectives, western heroes and other defenders of law increasingly replaced gangsters. Realistic Warner Brothers exposés rapidly declined in number. Instead audiences enjoyed Frank Capra's comedies and dramas in which a "little man" stands up against corruption and restores America to itself. The complex word-play of the Marx Brothers and Mae West increasingly gave way to a new comic genre—the screwball comedy. Such films as *It Happened One Night* and *My Man Godfrey*, which traced the antics of zany eccentrics, presented, in Pauline

Kael's words, "Americans' idealized view of themselves—breezy, likable, sexy, gallant, and maybe just a little harebrained."

In the face of economic disaster, the fantasy world of the movies kept alive a belief in the possibility of individual success, portrayed a government capable of protecting its citizens from external threats, and sustained a vision of America as a classless society. Again and again, Hollywood repeated the same formulas: A poor boy from the slums uses crime as a perverted ladder of success. A back row chorus girl rises to the lead through luck and pluck. A G-man restores law and order. A poor boy and a rich girl meet, go through wacky adventures, and fall in love. Out of these simple plots, Hollywood restored faith in individual initiative, in the efficacy of government, and in a common American identity transcending social class.

Wartime Hollywood

Beginning in September 1941, a Senate subcommittee launched an investigation into whether Hollywood was campaigning to bring the United States into World War II by inserting pro-British and pro-interventionist messages in its films. Isolationist Senator Gerald Nye charged Hollywood with producing "at least twenty pictures in the last year designed to drug the reason of the American people, set aflame their emotions, turn their hatred into a blaze, fill them with fear that Hitler will come over here and capture them." After reading a list of the names of studio executives—many of whom were Jewish—he condemned Hollywood as "a raging volcano of war fever."

While Hollywood did in fact release a few anti-Nazi films, such as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, what is remarkable in retrospect is how slowly Hollywood awoke to the fascist threat. Heavily dependent on the European market for revenue, Hollywood feared offending foreign audiences. Indeed, at the Nazis' request, Hollywood actually fired "non-Aryan" employees in its German business offices. Although between 1939 and 1941 the industry produced such preparedness films as *Sergeant York*, anti-fascist movies as *The Great Dictator*, and pro-British films such as *A Yank in the R.A.F.*, before Pearl Harbor it did not release a single film advocating immediate American intervention in the war on the allies' behalf.

After Pearl Harbor, however, Hollywood quickly enlisted in the war cause. The studios quickly copyrighted topical movie titles like *Sunday in Hawaii*, *Yellow Peril*, and *V for Victory*. Warner Brothers ordered a hasty rewrite of *Across the Pacific*, which involved a Japanese plot to blow up Pearl Harbor, changing the setting to the Panama Canal. The use of search lights at Hollywood premiers was prohibited, and Jack Warner painted a twenty-foot arrow atop his studio, reading: "Lookheed—Thataway."

Hollywood's greatest contribution to the war effort was morale. Many of the movies produced during the war affirmed a sense of national purpose. Combat films of the war years emphasized patriotism, group effort, and the value of individual sacrifice for a larger cause. They portrayed World War II as a peoples' war, typically featuring a group of men from diverse ethnic backgrounds who are thrown together, tested on the battlefield, and molded into a dedicated fighting unit. Many wartime films featured women characters serving as combat nurses, riveters, welders, and

long-suffering mothers who kept the home fires burning. Even cartoons, like Bugs Bunny "Nips the Nips," contributed to morale.

Off the screen, leading actors and actresses led recruitment and bond drives and entertained the troops. Leading directors like Frank Capra, John Ford, and John Huston enlisted and made documentaries to explain "why we fight" and to offer civilians an idea of what actual combat looked like. In less than a year, twelve percent of all film industry employees entered the armed forces, including Clark Gable, Henry Fonda, and Jimmy Stewart. By the war's end, one-quarter of Hollywood's male employees were in uniform.

Hollywood, like other industries, encountered many wartime problems. The government cut the amount of available film stock by twenty-five percent and restricted the money that could be spent on sets to \$5,000 for each movie. Nevertheless, the war years proved to be highly profitable for the movie industry. Spurred by shortages of gasoline and tires, as well as the appeal of newsreels, the war boosted movie attendance to near-record levels of ninety million a week.

From the moment America entered the war, Hollywood feared that the industry would be subject to heavy-handed government censorship. But the government itself wanted no repeat of World War I, when the Committee on Public Information had whipped up anti-German hysteria and oversold the war as "a Crusade not merely to re-win the tomb of Christ, but to bring back to earth the rule of right, the peace, goodwill to men and gentleness he taught." Less than two weeks after Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt declared that the movie industry could make "a very useful contribution" to the war effort. But, he went on, "The motion picture industry must remain free . . . I want no censorship." Convinced that movies could contribute to national morale, but fearing outright censorship, the federal government established two agencies within the Office of War Information (OWI) in 1942 to supervise the film industry: the Bureau of Motion Pictures, which produced educational films and reviewed scripts submitted by the studios, and the Bureau of Censorship, which oversaw film exports.

At the time these agencies were founded, OWI officials were quite unhappy with Hollywood movies, which they considered "escapist and delusive." The movies, these officials believed, failed to convey what the allies were fighting for, grossly exaggerated the extent of Nazi and Japanese espionage and sabotage, portrayed our allies in an offensive manner, and presented a false picture of the United States as a land of gangsters, labor strife, and racial conflict. A study of films issued in 1942 seemed to confirm the OWI concerns. It found that of the films dealing with the war, roughly two-thirds were spy pictures or comedies or musicals about camp life.

To encourage the industry to provide more acceptable films, the Bureau of Motion Pictures issued "The Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture." This manual suggested that before producing a film, moviemakers consider the question: "Will this picture help to win the war?" It also asked the studios to inject images of "people making small sacrifices for victory—making them voluntarily, cheerfully, and because of the people's own sense of responsibility." The Bureau evaluated individual film scripts to assess how they depicted war aims, the American military, the enemy, the allies, and the home front.

After the Bureau of Motion Pictures died out in the spring of 1943, government responsibility for monitoring the film industry shifted to the Office of Censorship. This agency prohibited the export of films that showed racial discrimination, depicted Americans as single-handedly winning the war, or painted our allies as imperialists.

Post-War Hollywood

After experiencing boom years from 1939 to 1946, the film industry began a long, steady period of decline. Within just seven years after 1946, attendance and box receipts fell by half.

Part of the reason was external to the industry. Many veterans returning from World War II got married, started families, attended college on the GI Bill, and bought homes in the suburbs. All these activities took a toll on box office receipts. Families with babies tended to listen to the radio rather than go to the movies; college students placed studying before seeing the latest film; and newlyweds purchasing homes, automobiles, appliances, and other commodities had less money to spend on movies. Then, too, especially after 1950, television challenged and surpassed the movies as America's most popular entertainment form. In 1940, there had been just 3,785 TV sets in the United States. Two decades later, nine homes in every ten had at least one TV set. For pre-war Americans, the movies had shaped clothing styles, speech patterns, and even moral attitudes and political points of view. In postwar days, television largely took the movies' place as a dominant cultural influence. The new medium reached audiences far larger than those attracted by motion pictures, and it projected images right into family living rooms.

Internal troubles also contributed to Hollywood's decline. Hollywood's founding generation—Harry Cohn, Samuel Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer, Darryl Zanuck—retired or were forced out as new corporate owners, lacking movie experience, took over. The film companies had high profiles, glamour, undervalued stock, strategically located real estate, and film libraries that television networks desperately needed. In short, they were perfect targets for corporate takeovers. The studios reduced production, sold off back lots, and made an increasing number of pictures in Europe, where costs were lower.

Meanwhile, Hollywood's foreign market began to vanish. Hollywood had depended on overseas markets for as much as forty percent of its revenue. But in an effort to nurture their own film industries and prevent an excessive outflow of dollars, Britain, France, and Italy imposed stiff import tariffs and restrictive quotas on imported American movies. The decline in foreign markets made movie making a much riskier business.

Then an antitrust ruling separated the studios from their theater chains. In 1948, the United States Supreme Court handed down its decision in the *Paramount* case, which had been working its ways through the courts for almost a decade. The court's decree called for the major studios to divest themselves of their theater chains. In addition to separating theater and producer-distributor companies, the court also outlawed block booking, a practice whereby the exhibitor is forced to take all of a company's pictures to get any of them, the fixing of admissions prices, unfair runs and clearances, and discriminatory pricing and purchasing arrange-

ments. With this decision, the industry the moguls had built—the vertically integrated studio—died. If the loss of foreign revenues shook the financial foundation of the industry, the end of block booking shattered the weakened buttress.

One result of the *Paramount* decision and the end of the monopoly of film making by the majors was an increase in independent productions. Yet despite a host of innovations and gimmicks—including 3-D, Cinerama, stereophonic sound, and cinemascope—attendance continued to fall.

Hollywood also suffered from Congressional probes of communist influence in the film industry. In the late 1930s, the House of Representatives had established the Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to combat subversive right-wing and left-wing movements. Its history was less than distinguished. From the first it tended to see subversive Communists everywhere at work in American society. HUAC even announced that the Boy Scouts were Communist infiltrated. During the late 1940s and early 1950s it picked up the tempo of its investigation, which it conducted in well-publicized sessions. Twice during this period the committee traveled to Hollywood to investigate Communist infiltration of the film industry.

HUAC first went to Hollywood in 1947. Although it did not find the party line preached in the movies, it did call a group of radical screenwriters and producers into its sessions to testify. Asked if they were Communists, the Hollywood Ten refused to answer questions about their political beliefs. As Ring Lardner, Jr., one of the ten, said, "I could answer . . . but if I did, I would hate myself in the morning." The witnesses believed that the First Amendment protected them. In the politically charged late 1940s, however, their rights were not protected. Those who refused to divulge their political affiliations were charged with contempt of Congress, sent to prison for a year, and blacklisted.

HUAC returned to Hollywood in 1951. This time it called hundreds of witnesses from both the political right and the political left. Conservatives told HUAC that Hollywood was littered with "Commies." Walt Disney even recounted attempts to have Mickey Mouse follow the party line. Among the radicals, some talked but most did not. To cooperate with HUAC entailed informing on friends and political acquaintances. Again, those who refused to name names found themselves unemployed and unemployable. All told, about 250 directors, writers, and actors were blacklisted. In 1948, writer Lillian Hellman denounced the industry's moral cowardice in scathing terms: "Naturally, men scared to make pictures about the American Negro, men who only in the last year allowed the word Jew to be spoken in a picture, who took more than ten years to make an anti-fascist picture, these are frightened men and you pick frightened men to frighten first. Judas goats, they'll lead the others to slaughter for you."

The HUAC hearings and blacklistings discouraged Hollywood from producing politically controversial films. Fear that a motion picture dealing with the life of Hiawatha might be regarded as Communist propaganda led Monogram Studio to shelve the project. As *The New York Times* explained: "It was Hiawatha's efforts as a peacemaker among warring Indian tribes that gave Monogram particular concern. These it was decided might cause the picture to be regarded as a message for peace and therefore helpful to present communist designs." The hearings persuaded Hollywood to produce musicals, biblical epics, and other politically neutral films.

The HUAC hearings also persuaded Hollywood producers to make fifty

strongly anticommunist films between 1947 and 1954. Most were second-rate movies starring third-rate actors. The films assured Americans that Communists were thoroughly bad people—they didn't have children, they exhaled cigarette smoke too slowly, they murdered their "friends," and they went berserk when arrested. As one film historian has commented, the Communists in these films even looked alike; most were "apt to be exceptionally haggard or disgracefully pudgy," and there was certainly "something terribly wrong with a woman if her slip straps showed through her blouse." These films had an impact. They seemed to confirm HUAC's position that subversives lurked in every shadow.

At the same time that HUAC was conducting its investigations of Communist subversion, moral censorship of the movies began to decline. In 1949, Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* became the first film to be successfully exhibited without a seal of approval. Despite its glimpses of a brothel and a boy urinating, this Italian film's neo-realist portrait of a poor man's search for his stolen bicycle received strong editorial support from newspapers and was shown in many theaters.

In 1952, the Supreme Court reversed a 1915 decision and extended First Amendment protections of free speech to the movies. The landmark case overturned an effort by censors in New York State to ban Roberto Rossellini's film *The Miracle* on grounds of sacrilege. In addition, the court decreed that filmmakers could challenge censors' findings. Otto Preminger's sex comedy *The Moon Is Blue*, appearing the next year, was the first major American film to be released without the code's seal. The Legion of Decency condemned the film for its use of the words "virgin" and "pregnant," but efforts to boycott the film fizzled and the film proved to be a box office success. In 1966, the film industry abandoned the Production Code, replacing it with a film rating system that is still in force.

New Directions in Post-War Film

During the early 1940s, a genre known as film noir had arisen. Though film noir received its name from French film critics and was heavily influenced by German expressionist filmmaking techniques, it stands out as one of the most original and innovative American movie genres. Characterized by sexual insecurity, aberrant psychology, and nightmarish camera work, film noir depicted a world of threatening shadows and ambiguities—a world of obsession, alienation, corruption, deceit, blurred identity, paranoia, dementia, weak men, cold-blooded femme fatales, and inevitably murder. Its style consisted of looming close ups, oblique camera angles, and crowded compositions that produced a sense of entrapment. The film's narratives were rarely straightforward; they contained frequent flashbacks and voice overs. Film noir belonged to a time of indefinable anxieties and apprehensions: the disorientation of returning GIs, fear of nuclear weapons, paranoia generated by the early Cold War, and fears aroused by the changing role of women.

After the war, Hollywood's audience not only shrank but fragmented into distinct subgroups. An audience interested in serious social problem films expanded. Independent filmmakers produced a growing number addressing such problems as ethnic and racial prejudice, antisemitism, the sufferings of maltreated mental patients, and the problems of alcohol and drug addiction.

Although the early postwar period is often regarded as the golden age of the

American family, the popular family melodramas of the 1940s and 1950s reveal a pattern of deeply troubled family relationships. These films depicted sexual frustration; anxious parents; cold, domineering mothers; alienated children; insensitive or fretful fathers; defiant adolescents; and loveless marriages. In part this obsession with the ills of marriage and family life reflected a popularized form of psychoanalytic thought, which offered simplistic formulas to explain human behavior. Films of the early postwar period laboriously repeated the argument that sexual frustration inevitably leads to neurosis and that harsh, neglectful, or uncomprehending parents produce alienated children. It was far from the soothing and funny fare available on TV.

According to many of the popular films of the period, family problems come of a lack of familial love. Love was treated as the answer to problems ranging from juvenile delinquency to schizophrenia. Adolescents in such films as *Splendor in the Grass* are rebellious because their parents "won't listen." Husbands and wives drink too much or stray sexually because they cannot communicate adequately with their spouses. Still, the underlying message is hopeful. Even the most severe family problems can be resolved by love, understanding, and perseverance.

At the same time that it turned out serious social problem films about drugs and family life, Hollywood produced movies that explored disturbing changes in the lives of American youth. Films such as *The Wild One* (1954), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) portrayed adolescents as budding criminals, emerging homosexuals, potential fascists, and pathological misfits—everything but perfectly normal kids. On close inspection, cultural critics concluded that something was indeed wrong with American youth, who like Tony in *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957) seemed closer to uncontrollable beasts than to civilized adults. As Tony tells a psychiatrist, "I say things, I do things—I don't know why." Critics were preoccupied with finding reasons for adolescent moral decline. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, linked a rise in juvenile delinquency to the decline in the influence of family, home, church, and local community institutions. Frederic Wertham, a psychiatrist, emphasized the pernicious influence of comic books. He believed that crime and horror comic books fostered racism, fascism, and abuse of women.

In fact, these fears were grossly overstated. During the late forties and fifties, juvenile delinquency was not increasing. But changes were taking place, and popular movies suggest some of the responses to these broader social transformations. In retrospect, it appears that the proliferation of juvenile delinquency films reflected adult anxieties and also the growth of a distinct market among adolescents who liked being seen as outlaws. During the 1950s, a new youth culture began to arise, with its distinctive rock-and-roll, dress, and language, as well as a disdain, somewhat affected, for the world of conventional adulthood. Marlon Brando captures the attitude when to the question, "What are you rebelling against?" he responds: "Whadda ya got?"

The growing popularity of science fiction thrillers reflected not only the emergence of the youth market but the spread of a certain paranoid style during the Cold War years. Historian Richard Hofstadter defined the paranoid style:

The distinguishing thing about the paranoid style is . . . that its exponents see . . . a "vast" or "gigantic" conspiracy as the motive force in historical

events . . . The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of this conspiracy in apocalyptic terms—he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values.

As Nora Sayre has shown, science fiction films of the fifties can be viewed as allegories of the Cold War and its byproducts at home: the fear of domestic subversion, the pressures for conformity in a mass society. Unlike the humorous, quasi-religious science fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, the films of the fifties conveyed paranoia and foreboding, the possibility of mind-control, the after-effects of atomic bomb tests.

The “New” Hollywood

As the 1960s began, few would have guessed that the decade would be one of the most socially conscious and stylistically innovative in Hollywood’s history. Among the most popular films at the decade’s start were Doris Day’s romantic comedy *Touch of Mink* (1962) and the epic blockbusters *The Longest Day* (1962), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), and *Cleopatra* (1963). Yet as the decade progressed, Hollywood radically shifted focus and began to produce an increasing number of anti-establishment films, laced with social commentary, directed at the growing youth market.

By the early 1960s, an estimated eighty percent of the filmgoing population was between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. At first, the major studios largely ignored this audience, leaving it in the hands of smaller studios like American International Pictures, which produced a string of cheaply made horror movies, beach blanket movies—like *Bikini Beach* (1964) and *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965)—and motorcycle gang pictures like *The Wild Angels* (1966). Two films released in 1967—*Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate*—awoke Hollywood to the size and influence of the youth audience. *Bonnie and Clyde*, the story of two Depression-era bank robbers, was advertised with the slogan: “They’re young, they’re in love, they kill people.” Inspired by such French New Wave pictures as *Breathless* (1960), the film aroused intense controversy for romanticizing gangsters and transforming them into social rebels. A celebration of youthful rebellion also appeared in *The Graduate*, which grossed more money than all but two previously made films. A young college graduate rejects a hypocritical society and the traditional values of his parents—and the promise of a career in plastics—and finds salvation in love.

A number of the most influential films of the late sixties and early seventies revised older film genres—like the war film, the crime film, and the western—and rewrote Hollywood’s earlier versions of American history. *Little Big Man* reexamined the nineteenth-century Indian wars, *Patton* presented World War II, and *M*A*S*H* reconsidered the Korean War in light of America’s experience in Vietnam. *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971) offered radical reappraisals of the mythology of the American frontier. Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather* (1972) revised and enhanced the gangster genre by transforming it into a critical commentary on an immigrant family’s pursuit of the American dream.

During the mid- and late-1970s, the mood of American films again shifted sharply. Following the political mood of the country, Hollywood turned right.

Unlike the highly politicized films of the early part of the decade, the most popular films of the late 1970s and early 1980s were escapist blockbusters like *Star Wars* (1977), *Superman* (1978), and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), featuring spectacular special effects, action, and simplistic conflicts between good and evil; inspirational tales of the indomitable human spirit, like *Rocky* (1976); or nostalgia for a more innocent past, like *Animal House* (1978) and *Grease* (1978). Glamorous outlaws like *Bonnie and Clyde* were replaced by law and order avengers like *Dirty Harry* and *Robocop*. Sports—long regarded as a sure box office loser—became a major Hollywood obsession, with movies like *Hoozers*, *Chariots of Fire*, *Karate Kid*, and *The Mighty Ducks* celebrating competitiveness and victory. Movies which offered a tragic or subversive perspectives on American society, like *The Godfather* or *Chinatown*, were replaced by more upbeat, undemanding films, and especially by comedies, featuring such actors as Dan Ackroyd, Chevy Chase, Eddie Murphy, Bill Murray, and John Candy.

Critics blamed this trend toward “deliberate anti-realism” on economic changes within the film industry. In 1966, Gulf and Western Industries executed a takeover of Paramount and the conglomeratization of the film industry began. In 1967, United Artists merged with Transamerica Corporation; in 1969 Kinney Services acquired Warner Brothers. In one sense the takeovers were logical. Conglomerates wanted to acquire interests in businesses that serviced American leisure needs. The heads of the conglomerates, however, had no idea how to make successful motion pictures. Too often they believed that successful movies could be mass produced, that statisticians could discover a scientific method for making box office hits.

A trend toward the creation of interlocking media companies, encompassing movies, magazines, newspapers, and books accelerated in 1985 when the Department of Justice overturned the 1948 anti-trust decree that had ended vertical integration within the film industry. As a result, many of the major studios were acquired by large media and entertainment corporations, like Sony, which purchased Columbia Pictures, Time-Warner (which owns *Time* magazine, Simon & Schuster publishers, and Warner Brothers), and Rupert Murdoch, whose holdings include HarperCollins publishers, the Fox television network, and Twentieth Century Fox. At the same time that these large entertainment conglomerates arose, many smaller independent producers like Lorimar and De Laurentis disappeared.

Nevertheless, film continued to address important issues. Many movies explored problems of romance, family, gender, and sexuality, aspects of life radically altered by the social transformations of the 1960s and early 1970s. Certainly, some films tried to evade the profound changes that had taken place in gender relations. *An Officer and a Gentleman* featured an old-fashioned screen romance, and *Flashdance* presented an updated version of the Cinderella story. *10 and Splash* depicted male fantasies about relationships with beautiful, utterly compliant women. But many other popular films addressed such serious questions as the conflict between family responsibilities and personal needs (for example, *Kramer v. Kramer*) or women’s need to develop their independence: *An Unmarried Woman*, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, and *Thelma and Louise*. Movies like *Boyz in the Hood*, *Grand Canyon*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Jungle Fever*, and *Menace II Society* examined social issues politicians and news journalists had abandoned. Film was prepared to

portray the racial gulf separating blacks and whites, the conditions in the nation's inner cities, the fate of single parent families, the fact of police brutality and urban violence.

Not until the late 1970s did the Vietnam War begin to be seriously examined on the screen. Although many films of the late sixties and early seventies savored the bitter aftertaste of the war, the conflict itself remained strikingly absent from the screen. Hollywood, like the country as a whole, had difficulty adjusting to the grim legacy of a lost and troubling war. During the conflict, Hollywood produced only a single film dealing with Vietnam—John Wayne's *The Green Berets*. Modelled along the lines of such World War II combat epics as *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and earlier John Wayne westerns like *The Alamo*, the film portrayed decent Americans struggling to defend an embattled outpost along the Laotian border nicknamed Dodge City.

Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, the returning Vietnam War veteran found his way into film. He was first portrayed as a dangerous killer, a deranged ticking time bomb that could explode at any time and in any place. He was Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* (1976), a veteran wound tight to the point of snapping. Or he was Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* (1979), who adjusts to the madness of war by going mad himself. Not until the end of the '70s did popular culture begin to treat the Vietnam War veteran more seriously than as a madman produced by the war. *Coming Home* (1978) and *The Deer Hunter* (1978) began the popular rehabilitation of the veteran, and such films as *Missing in Action* (1984) and *Rambo: First Blood II* (1985) transformed the veteran into a misunderstood hero. In *First Blood* (1982), the opening film in the Rambo series, John Rambo captures the pain of the returning veterans: "It wasn't my war—you asked me, I didn't ask you . . . and I did what I had to do to win. . . . Then I came back to the world and I see all those maggots at the airport, protesting me, spitting on me, calling me a baby-killer. . . ."

Some films, like the Rambo series, present the exploits of one-man armies or vigilantes armed to the teeth, who had been kept from winning the war because of government cowardice and betrayal. Another group of Vietnam War films, including *Go Tell the Spartans*, *Platoon*, *Casualties of War*, and *Born on the Fourth of July*, portray innocent, naive "grunts"—the ground troops who actually fought the war—losing their beliefs, coping with the breakdown of unit cohesion, and struggling to survive and sustain humanity and integrity in the midst of war.

Hollywood Today

In a 1992 bestseller *Hollywood vs. America*, Michael Medved, co-host of public television's *Sneak Previews*, describes Hollywood as a "poison factory," befouling America's moral atmosphere and assaulting the country's "most cherished values." Today's films, he argues, use their enormous capacity to influence opinion by glamorizing violence, maligning marriage, mocking authority, promoting sexual promiscuity, ridiculing religion, and bombarding viewers with an endless stream of profanity, gratuitous sex, and loutish forms of behavior. Once the movies offered sentiment, elegance, and romance. Now, Medved contends, ideologically-motivated producers and directors promote their own divisive agenda: against religion, against the family, against the military.

In fact, the picture is more complicated than Medved suggests. As film critic David Denby has observed, abandonment of the Production Code in 1966 did indeed increase the amount of sex, violence, and profanity on the screen; but particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, Hollywood has also increased the amount of family entertainment it offers, including feature-length cartoons like *Aladdin* and *Beauty and the Beast*; family comedies, among them *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*; and affirmative portrayals of the teaching profession, such as *Dead Poet's Society* and *Stand and Deliver*. At the same time that Indiana Jones or the *Back to the Future* trilogy merely exploited history as a backdrop for action and adventure, such films as *Glory* and *Malcolm X* seriously examined critical issues in America's past. Independent directors released a growing number of idiosyncratic and sensitive films, such as *The Crying Game*. New voices were also heard. Female movie makers, like Penny Marshall and Susan Seidelman, and African-American film makers, like Spike Lee, have received an unprecedented opportunity to bring fresh viewpoints to the screen.

Nevertheless, as the movie industry enters its second century, Medved is not alone in complaining that quality has declined. A basic problem facing today's Hollywood is the rapidly rising cost of making and marketing a movie: an average of \$40 million. The immense cost of producing movies has led the studios to seek guaranteed hits: blockbuster loaded with high-tech special effects, sequels, and remakes of earlier successful movies and even old TV shows. Hollywood has also sought to cope with rising costs by focusing ever more intently on its core audiences. Since the mid-1980s, the moviegoing audience has continued to decrease in size. Ticket sales fell from 1.2 billion in 1983 to 950 million in 1992, the biggest drop occurring among adults. The single largest group of moviegoers now consists of teenage boys, who are particularly attracted to thrills, violence, and crude laughs. And since over half of Hollywood's profits are earned overseas, the industry has concentrated much of its energy on crude action films easily understood by an international audience, featuring stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone.

For a century, the movie industry has been the nation's most important purveyor of culture and entertainment to the masses, playing a critical role in the shift from Victorian to distinctively modern, consumer values; from a verbal to a visual culture; from a society rooted in islands of localities and ethnic groups to a commercialized mass culture. The movies have taught Americans how to kiss, make love, conceive of gender roles, and understand their place in the world. Whether in the theater or in television and video releases, films will long continue to serve as the nation's preeminent instrument of cultural expression—reflecting and also shaping values and cultural ideals.