

The Film Studios of the Classical Hollywood Era

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Prologue: The Hollywood Jews

“The Hollywood Jews, at least the first generation that built the industry..., were a remarkably homogeneous group with remarkably similar childhood experiences...The most striking similarity among the Hollywood Jews, however, wasn’t their Eastern European origin. What united them in deep spiritual kinship was their utter and absolute rejection of their pasts and their equally absolute devotion to their new country. For immigrant Jews to want to assimilate, particularly when they had been victimized in their home countries, was nothing exceptional. But something drove the young Hollywood Jews to a ferocious, even pathological, embrace of America. Something drove them to deny whatever they had been before settling here. One common, undeniable factor was a patrimony of failure. All had grown up in destitution. All, with the exception of Zukor, who had no father at all, had *luftmenshen* for fathers, men who shuttled from one job to another, from one place to another. Those fathers who emigrated found themselves unable to adjust to America... One hesitates getting too Oedipal here, but the evidence certainly supports the view that the sons, embittered by their fathers’ failures, launched a war against their own pasts – a patricide, one could say, against everything their fathers represented... The Hollywood Jews embarked on an assimilation so ruthless and complete that they cut their lives to the pattern of American respectability as they interpreted it...

The movie industry held out a number of blandishments to these Jews, not the least of which was that it admitted them. There were no social barriers in a business as new and faintly disreputable as the movies were in the early years of (the) century. There were none of the impediments imposed by loftier professions and more firmly entrenched businesses to keep Jews and other undesirables out... The Jews also had a special compatibility with the industry, one that gave them certain advantages over their competitors. For one thing, having come primarily from fashion and retail, they understood public taste... For another, as immigrants themselves, they had a peculiar sensitivity to the dreams and aspirations of other immigrants and working-class families, two overlapping groups that made up a significant portion of the early moviegoing audience...

Within the studios and on the screen, the Jews could simply create a new country – an empire of their own, so to speak – one where they would not only be admitted, but would govern as well. They would fabricate their empire in the image of America as they would fabricate themselves in the image of prosperous Americans. They would create its values and myths, its traditions and archetypes. It would be an America where fathers were strong, families, stable, people attractive, resilient, resourceful, and decent... It was also, if one examined it, a fictive rehabilitation of the moguls’ own lives – lives where fathers had been weak, families destabilized, people unattractive, doomed, impractical, and indifferent... What is amazing is the extent to which they succeeded in promulgating this fiction throughout the world. By making a “shadow” America, one which idealized every old glorifying bromide about the country, the Hollywood Jews created a powerful cluster of images and ideas – so powerful that, in a sense, they colonized the American imagination... Ultimately, American values came to be *defined* largely by the movies the Jews made. Ultimately, by creating their idealized America on the screen, the Jews reinvented the country in the image of their fiction.”

- Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*

I - THE MAJOR STUDIOS

Each studio had:

- its own theory of business economics;
- its own stable of stars and conception of character types;
- its own philosophy towards what movies should be like in terms of length, complexity of plot and character development, pictorial splendor;
- its own emphasis on producers or directors and what amount of free rein it gave to its directors;
- its own balance of ordinary films and prestige pictures;
- its own worldview and political orientation.

I a - THE "BIG FIVE"

- each of the Big Five studios was an integrated conglomerate that had:
 - ownership of a production studio;
 - a distribution division;
 - and a substantial theater chain.

I. PARAMOUNT



I.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1912-1928)

Foundation and early development: the oldest of the major studios

- 1912: the Famous Players Film Corporation is founded in May by Adolph Zukor in partnership with the Frohman brothers, New York City theater impresarios; a studio is established in New York City; it succeeds immediately and Zukor becomes an industry leader
- 1913: Zukor invests in the Paramount Pictures Corporation, the first nation-wide distribution company, organized by Utah theater owner W. W. Hodkinson, which releases the films of both Famous Players and Jesse L. Lasky's Lasky Feature Play Company
- 1916: Zukor organizes the merger of Famous Players, Lasky and Paramount Pictures, so that the corporation consolidates its production and distribution divisions – the new company, the first truly big studio, is called the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, with Zukor as president and Lasky as vice-president; Hodkinson is removed and Samuel Goldfish, soon to become Samuel Goldwyn, who is Lasky's partner, is bought out; audiences begin seeing the logo *Paramount Pictures*
- 1917: Zukor gets rid of the Frohman brothers, while the company is now the most successful and competitive studio and leader of the industry
- 1910s-20s: Zukor runs two production studios (East and West Coast) and builds a theatrical chain of 2000 screens
- 1926: a new 26-acre studio is built in the Hollywood district of Los Angeles (Melrose Avenue)
- 1927: the company's name changes to the Paramount-Famous Lasky Corporation

Silent era film stars

- include Mary Pickford, Rudolph Valentino, Gloria Swanson, Clara Bow, Ruth Chatterton, Douglas Fairbanks and Wallace Reid

I.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

- 1928-30: the most profitable studio of the industry
- 1930: because of the importance of the acquired Publix theater chain, the company is renamed the Paramount-Publix Corporation
- 1932: suffers from the Depression because the theaters' bad business drain the company's coffers; Zukor fires Lasky
- 1933: over-expansion puts the company into near-bankruptcy and receivership; a bank-mandated reorganization team keeps the company intact and Zukor is kept on
- 1935: goes into bankruptcy
- 1935-36: reorganized as Paramount Pictures, Inc., which Zukor, now chairman of the board, brings out of bankruptcy; becomes reasonably successful again
- 1940-45: fortunes soar again
- 1942: takes the profit lead in the industry after ten years of dominance by MGM

Studio mogul

- **Adolph Zukor**
 - founder (1912)
 - president (1916-1936)
 - chairman of the board (1936-1959)



Biography

- 1873: born Adolph Zukor to a poor Jewish family in Risce, Hungary; his father farms and runs a dry goods store
- 1874: his father dies in a freak accident
- 1881: his mother dies and Adolph is raised by a stern Judaic scholar uncle against whom he rebels
- 1889: emigrates to America, where in New York City he attends night school and takes up boxing
- 1892: establishes a fur company and moves to the Midwest
- 1897: first gets interested in films when sees a brief film of a scene from a Broadway play in a Chicago theater
- 1899: resettles in the fashion centers of New York City
- 1902: has become a wealthy man
- 1903: loans money to a cousin to establish an arcade chain, then forms a partnership to open his own chain and he changes businesses; transforms one arcade into a theater, the Crystal Hall
- 1906: partners in a business to show short, filmed travelogues in theaters rigged up to look like trains
- 1908: becomes dedicated to the idea of realizing longer narrative films
- 1910: successfully shows in New York and New Jersey a filmed Passion play shot in Germany
- 1910: merges his holdings with theater owner Marcus Loew to create Loew's Consolidated Enterprises, but takes an inactive role in order to spend three years investigating the possibility of creating long films
- 1912: founds the Famous Players film company
- 1959: retires but stays on at Paramount as Chairman Emeritus
- 1973: dies at the age of 103 in Los Angeles

Personal characteristics and reputation

- quiet, ruthless, and very observant
- imperious, self-possessed, cautious, remote, seignorial
- aspires to sophistication and intellectual elevation
- extremely knowledgeable about Broadway
- realizes quickly that stars are not famous players but engaging personalities
- realizes stars and films are at their best with gifted directors at the helm

Other studio executives

- Heads of production 1929-1938: Jesse L. Lasky, B. P. Schulberg, Emmanuel Cohen, William LeBaron & Ernst Lubitsch
- Barney Balaban: president 1936-1966
- Y. Frank Freeman: head of production 1938-1959

Business structure

- ownership of a lot of theaters to exhibit its films in
- a looser organization in terms of mode of production than the other studios (*see business philosophy and attitude toward directors)

Power and prestige

- regarded as "Old Hollywood" by the industry because of its deep historical roots
- owns a lot of stars, more than any other studio

Business philosophy

- stars and gifted directors are key
- films must be popular but they may also be art

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- sophistication, taste, élan, and a frequent European accent or atmosphere
- combining sophistication with a certain hard-edged realism
- attractive irony
- non-egalitarian, aristocratic
- depiction of the foolish or scheming upper classes
- wit, sexual "naughtiness" and innuendo, boudoir satires and the view of courtship, marriage, infidelity and sex as transactions of various kinds
- erotic intensity
- the prototypical Paramount hero is the boudoir dandy
- experimentation and deviation from the confines of genre and cliché
- comfort with the bizarre
- instead of the spectacle, an emphasis on elegance, imagination, beauty and the vivacity of the visual
- directors who are visualist sensualists (languid and caressing cameras)

Other key aspects

- strong connection to Broadway
- frequent location filming in New York
- strong comedians (Marx Brothers, W. C. Fields, Mae West)
- uses Technicolor frequently when introduced

Favoured genres

- the "society comedy"
- surreal comedy: "zany chic" and "vaudeville running wild" (Marx Brothers, Mae West)

- the operetta musicals of the early 1930s (Lubitsch, Mamoulian)
- historical epics (Cecil B. DeMille)
- female melodramas
- adventure films
- film noirs (with added romance)

Less favoured or successful genres

- disdains the gangster film, the western and the mystery thriller, though it makes them also (often B films)
- generally fails at musicals (post-1932), a performer rather than a director's medium (melody and personality carry the Bing Crosby films)

Famous series

- the 1940s Bob Hope & Bing Crosby "road" films

Attitude towards directors

- given a lot of latitude as long as they make money; studio relies on directorial initiative and interferes less with their work
- may be called the studio of the director
- welcomes European directors (Lubitsch, Sternberg, etc.)

Attitude towards actors

- a lack of imagination in capitalizing on actors' talents, in grooming and developing the stars' careers (vs. MGM, for example); it signs anybody and puts them into anything
- the philosophy favours chance and repetition rather than strategy and planning

Key directors

Ernst Lubitsch	Preston Sturges
Cecil B. DeMille	Billy Wilder
Mitchell Leisen	
Josef von Sternberg	
Rouben Mamoulian	
George Cukor (early 30s)	

Key stars

Herbert Marshall	Miriam Hopkins
Ray Milland	Kay Francis
Gary Cooper	Claudette Colbert
Maurice Chevalier	Gloria Swanson
Fred MacMurray	Marlene Dietrich
William Powell	Carole Lombard
Adolphe Menjou	Sylvia Sydney
George Raft	Jean Arthur
Cary Grant (early 30s)	Tallulah Bankhead
Bing Crosby	Fay Wray
The Marx Brothers	Mae West
W. C. Fields	Gracie Allen
George Burns	Veronica Lake
George Bancroft	Jeanette MacDonald (early '30s)
Fred MacMurray	Dorothy Lamour
Alan Ladd	Paulette Goddard

Joel McCrea
Bob Hope

Betty Hutton
Barbara Stanwyck ('40s)

I.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1962)

Post-War period development

- 1946: records an industry record with its \$39 million profit
- 1947-48: continues to lead in profits
- 1949: following the U.S. Supreme Court anti-trust decision, splits into a production-distribution company (Paramount Pictures Corp.) and a theater chain (United Paramount Theaters)
- 1951: continues to make profits, but less dramatically throughout the decade – the company starts pursuing a “less but better” policy, averaging only 22 films a year and using distinguished independent producer-directors (e.g. Hal Wallis, George Seaton, Alfred Hitchcock, Carlo Ponti & Dino De Laurentiis), as well as high box-office stars
- 1953: pushes the “Panoramic Screen” (1.66 aspect ratio), but eventually abandons it
- 1954: creates the widescreen VistaVision system, with varying aspect ratios (1.66, 1.85, 2.00)
- 1961: starts phasing out VistaVision because of its expense for the cheaper Panavision 35

Favoured genres

- comedies (Wilder, Bob Hope, Martin & Lewis)
- romantic dramas
- the religious epic (Cecil B. DeMille)
- horror sci-fi (George Pal's productions)
- film noirs, though not an industry leader

Less favoured or successful genres

- the adventure film
- the war film
- the western
- the musical, generally dismissable
- the biographical drama

Famous series

- the 1950s Dean Martin & Jerry Lewis comedies

New key stars

Sterling Hayden

Olivia de Havilland

Kirk Douglas

Audrey Hepburn

Montgomery Clift

James Stewart

Clark Gable

Dean Martin

Jerry Lewis

Danny Kaye

Elvis Presley

New key directors

Alfred Hitchcock (1953-1960)	Robert Mulligan
Michael Curtiz	William Dieterle
William Wyler	Frank Tashlin
John Farrow	
George Stevens	

I.4 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-PRESENT)**Post-Classic Era development**

- 1966: after several years of falling profits and with a doubtful future, Paramount Pictures Corp. is sold to the industrial conglomerate of Gulf and Western Industries
- 1966-74: new production head Robert Evans restores the company's reputation for commercial success
- 1976: new CEO Barry Diller and associates put in a place a successful strategy of simple "high concept" films
- 1989: following the sale of Gulf and Western's industrial subsidiaries, Gulf and Western is refocused and renamed Paramount Communications, Inc.
- 1994: purchased by the entertainment conglomerate Viacom Inc., which starts another period of highly profitable film production
- 1999: Viacom purchases the media conglomerate CBS
- 2006: Viacom Inc. splits into CBS Corporation and the new Viacom, the latter owning the Paramount Motion Picture Group
- 2006-08: Paramount owns briefly the studio DreamWorks
- 2007-11: Paramount finishes twice first and three times second in profit making in the industry, boasting the studio's record year in 2011 (\$1.96 billion)

Current status

- one of the six major American studios

2. MGM



2.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1924-1928)

Foundation and early development

- 1915: Metro Pictures Corporation is founded by Richard A. Rowland
- 1916: Louis B. Mayer partners with Rowland at Metro Pictures
- 1916: Samuel Goldwyn founds the film company Goldwyn Pictures Corporation, which creates the "Leo the Lion" trademark
- 1918: Louis B. Mayer leaves Metro to form his own film company, Louis B. Mayer Pictures Corporation, in Los Angeles
- 1920: business magnate Marcus Loew purchases Metro Pictures to supply films to his theater chain, Loew's Theatres
- 1923: Samuel Goldwyn is forced out of his own company, Goldwyn Pictures, by his partners
- 1924: Marcus Loew purchases Goldwyn Pictures as well; then, needing someone to oversee the Hollywood operations, purchases Louis B. Mayer Pictures – Metro, Goldwyn and Mayer studios are therefore merged; Louis B. Mayer is made head of studio operations, Irving Thalberg is head of production
- 1924: The new MGM Studios headquarter in the Goldwyn Pictures studio lot in Culver City, in western Los Angeles County
- 1925: MGM quickly becomes one of the most profitable studios
- 1927: Marcus Loew dies and ownership of the studio is taken over by associate Nicholas Schenck
- 1928: second only to Paramount in profit lead
- 1928: one of the first studios to experiment with early Technicolor

Silent era film stars

- include John Gilbert, Greta Garbo, Norma Shearer, Ramon Novarro, William Haines and Joan Crawford

2.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

- 1931: surpasses Paramount as the most profitable studio and keeps that lead for ten years (1941)
- 1931-34: barely hurt by the Depression, MGM never suffers a losing year during the classical period
- 1932: when Thalberg becomes ill and is replaced as head of production, the studio becomes more centralized, with staff answerable to the studio chief only (Mayer) – Thalberg is replaced by several associate producers, including David Selznick
- 1936: when Thalberg dies, Mayer makes himself head of production
- 1939: starts losing its creative momentum, developing few new stars and relying on the safety of sequels and bland material, while still maintaining high profits
- 1941: production is cut from fifty films to a more manageable twenty-five films a year

Studio moguls

- **Louis B. Mayer** - head of studio operations (1924-1951)
- head of production (1936-1948)



Biography

- 1884: born Lazar Meir to a Jewish family in Minsk, Belarus (part of the Russian Empire)
- 1886: moves with his parents to New Brunswick, Canada, to escape Russian oppression; lives in poverty and suffers from emotional and physical abuse from his near-illiterate father, a peddler
- 1899: around this time, works as a supervisor at the St. John harbour in a ship-salvaging business
- 1904: leaves his family and moves to Boston and works as a scrap metal dealer
- 1907: renovates a burlesque house and builds his first movie theater in Boston
- 1909: owns several theaters and builds a movie theater empire in the Northeast
- 1912: starts a short-lived theater production company, then commits to the movies
- 1913: starts a Boston-based film distribution company, the Louis B. Mayer Film Company, then replaces it with the the American Feature Film Company
- 1913: his mother dies, whom he idealized
- 1915: after making a deal with **D. W. Griffith**, showcases *The Birth of a Nation* in Boston, which is a blockbuster success
- 1916: starts producing films
- 1916: joins the film production company Metro Pictures Corporation
- 1918: leaves for Los Angeles to create his own film production company, Louis B. Mayer Pictures
- 1924: bought out by Loew to create MGM but made head of studio operations
- 1936: makes himself head of production when Thalberg dies
- 1939: becomes and stays the highest paid man in America for eleven years
- 1951: fired by his replacement, Dore Schary
- 1957: dies of leukemia at age 73 in Los Angeles

Personal characteristics and reputation

- excessive, highly emotional, sentimental and paternalistic
- treats his studio like a family he's raising (plays father to his hundreds of employees): patronizing yet loved by some

- creates a strong sense of loyalty, care and community
- puritanical, wants to be a moral and spiritual guide
- a very hands-on supervisor, who sees himself as a (the) producer
- believes in “wholesome entertainment” and has strong conservative values
- values crowd-pleasers rather than literary works, but passionate about high culture as well as popular culture and has a pronounced penchant for cultured people
- loves movies and wants to help shape America’s image of itself
- known for his bouts of rage, his conservative zealotry, his ability to blackmail and his unctuous sentimentality masking the tyranny

- **Irving Thalberg** - head of production (1924-1932)
- (influential) producer (1932-1936)



Biography

- 1899: born in Brooklyn, New York to middle class German Jewish immigrants
- 1905-16: childhood and adolescence marked by ill health with bad prognosis for life span, including a congenital heart deformity; immerses himself in books
- 1916: skips college and starts working as secretary, then stenographer for export firms
- 1917: becomes assistant manager at an export firm
- 1918: meets Carl Laemmle at a vacation family home in Long Island and gets a job as a secretary at Universal’s New York office; through ambition and industriousness, becomes Laemmle’s personal secretary
- 1920: leaves New York for California and becomes a high-level executive at Universal
- 1921: becomes head of production at Universal Studios
- 1923: after meeting Mayer, leaves Universal for the more modest Louis B. Mayer Pictures and becomes vice-president
- 1924: becomes head of production under Mayer at MGM
- 1932: takes a year off because of a depression, then suffers a heart attack – is replaced as head of production
- 1933: returns to MGM as a successful independent producer
- 1936: dies of another heart attack at age 37

Personal characteristics and reputation

- viewed as the most creative production chief in Hollywood
- uninterested in ordinary experience yet lives with a ferocious intensity, perhaps because of a sense of mortality
- devoted to movies and willing to pour his life into them, works at all hours; a restless perfectionist
- socializes with literary people (Fitzgerald, etc.)
- called “The Boy Wonder”
- known for his ability to choose the right scripts and actors and make profitable films
- modest, disavows screen credits
- quiet, soft-spoken, aloof
- respects good direction (brings Stroheim and Lubitsch over to the U.S.) and during his reign at MGM emphasizes sex as well as romance
- very involved in the productions, tends to interfere
- clashes with Mayer over artistic vision; favours literary and stage adaptations

Other studio executives

- Walter Wanger: (influential) producer (1932-1934)
- David O. Selznick: (influential) producer (1933-1935)

Business structure

- Loew's Theaters are mostly in New York and the Northeastern United States (though some are in the Midwest) so MGM makes films that are polished and sophisticated to cater to an urban audience
- a very centralized and control-heavy system
- credited with inventing the Hollywood star system

Power and prestige

- generally viewed as the best studio in the industry

Business philosophy

- "prestige", quality pictures: high production values, with B-films upgraded to semi-A level, superior A-films and emphasizing super-A-films as studio hallmark
- invests a lot of money and time to make hugely profitable films (*Grand Hotel*, *The Great Ziegfeld*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *The Wizard of Oz*)
- invests in lavish, spectacular films
- an authoritarian studio: the producer supervises everything, including directors and writers
- directors and stars are kept in check to ensure profit line
- yet a high regard for talent, highest salaries and creative latitude in order to create the "best" studio
- team spirit
- extremely popular stars

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- an air of unreality
- the look is nice, big (spectacular), pretty, polished, glamorous and expensive
- aesthetically idealized female stars: women are beautiful, elegant, smart, and yet coolly unapproachable – fantasies of beauty
- male stars are also tall, stylish and rather aestheticized
- elite, prestige films (see above): the "budget-as-an-art-form"
- Mayer's themes are conservative: God, country and family (mothers are wise, marriage is a sacrament, etc. - e.g. the *Andy Hardy* series) – fantasies of security and family
- sex and romance until 1936 (under Thalberg); sexual browsing and adultery are strongly punished afterwards
- very charismatic stars
- vitality of combination of actors
- actors often speak the King's English, irrespective of context, rather than the urban vernacular or the rustic dialect - they also carry themselves and are photographed in a more glamorous, polished way
- often the best melodies and music in a studio that succeeds extremely well at the musical (Freed's productions)
- state-of-the-art musicals, with visual Technicolor opulence, unusual forms, excellence of composition and brilliance of performance

Other key aspects

- makes longer pictures than the industry standard (an hour and a half) for its prestige pictures: 110 minutes or more becomes routine

Favoured genres

- the musical (MGM reigns supreme)
- the female melodrama
- adventure films
- the family film
- literary adaptations
- comedies
- war films

Less favoured or successful genres

- generally fails at film noirs, because of MGM's difficulty at recognizing evil in middle-class life
- the screwball comedy (succeeds late with *The Philadelphia Story*)

Famous series

- the Weissmuller-O'Sullivan *Tarzan* films of the 1930s
- the MacDonald-Eddy operetta musicals of the 1930s
- the Mickey Rooney *Andy Hardy* series (1937-46)
- the Garland-Rooney musicals of the 1940s
- the Hepburn-Tracy comedies of the 1940s

Attitude towards directors

- kept in check; forced to obey a studio style rather than forge individual styles
- cultivated talent is in the director's treatment of the stars, enhancing character

Attitude towards actors

- actors given a lot of leverage and care to develop their persona; more enhanced than by any of the other studios - actors' personas travel across their movies and allows them to be viewed cross-contextually (Gable the heroic Dangerous Man and the Great Lover, Garbo the Vamp, Harlow the Hot Lady, etc.): the "fascination of the whole redeems the weakness of an entry here and there" (Mordden, 1988)
- groomed into being "stars" and powerful
- mythologizes its stars by controlling their public appearances and image and the access given - unglamorous facts of their lives are kept ruthlessly secret
- once persona or type is established, the actor's self is also promoted or allowed to shape that persona or give an edge to it
- the studio works best with actors who are *not* strongly theater-trained: talent and seasoning matter less than look, grit and ability to complement other players

Key directors

W. S. Van Dyke	Victor Fleming
King Vidor	George Cukor
Sidney Franklin	Vincente Minnelli
Erich von Stroheim	Victor Seastrom
Sam Wood	Richard Thorpe
Clarence Brown	
Ernst Lubitsch (on loan-out)	

Key stars

Clark Gable	Greta Garbo
Wallace Beery	Joan Crawford
Nelson Eddy	Norma Shearer

Marx Bros. (late 30s)	Mary Astor
Johnny Weissmuller	Jean Harlow
Robert Montgomery	Jeanette MacDonald (late '30s)
William Powell	Maureen O'Sullivan
Robert Taylor	Myrna Loy
James Stewart	Luise Rainer
John Gilbert	Judy Garland
Franchot Tone	Rosalind Russell
Spencer Tracy	Marie Dressler
John Barrymore	Marion Davies
Lionel Barrymore	Katharine Hepburn (1940s)
Mickey Rooney	Donna Reed
Van Johnson	Ava Gardner
	Greer Garson
	Lana Turner
	Elizabeth Taylor
	June Allyson
	Esther Williams

2.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1962)

Post-War period development

- 1946: comes in fourth among the studios in profits but still enjoying the most successful financial years in its history
- 1947: profits start to fall substantially
- 1948: president Nicholas Schenck forces Mayer to bring in another creative head of production, Dore Schary – a clash builds over Schary's desire to make more socially contemporary and relevant material
- 1951: Mayer is forced to resign after a showdown with Schary
- 1952: to increase profits, cuts are inaugurated in production costs and salaries
- 1952: starts using Ansco Color as well as Technicolor, a monopak (cheaper, faster, more easily transportable) color process
- 1954: last to obey the U.S. Anti-Trust Supreme Court decision, MGM splits into a production-distribution company (Loew's/MGM, Inc.) and the Loew's Theaters, Inc. chain
- 1956: Schary is dismissed and Joseph Vogel becomes the new studio head of production, who tightens budgets and steers the studio toward independent productions
- 1956: launches Metrocolor, its own version of Ansco Color
- 1957: first to launch Panavision, an improved version of CinemaScope; other studios follow suit
- 1957-58: registers for the first time a yearly loss, followed by a tepid profit
- 1958-60: Vogel organizes star-studded audience-grabbing films
- 1959-61: returns to escalating profits, leading the industry again in 1961
- 1960: has released all of its contract players
- 1962: expensive deals and sumptuous flops result in a smaller profit and an uncertain future

Post-War period characteristics

- the studio continues making elaborate, glossy and costly Technicolor productions
- despite technological advances, stars continue to take precedence, so that MGM holds its contractees well into the mid-to-late '50s

Favoured genres

- the musical, which continues to dominate the industry in quality and commercial success
- fantasy comedies and dramas (industry leader)
- female melodramas (leader with Fox)
- the biographical film
- romantic comedies and dramas
- war films
- the social problem film

New key directors

Stanley Donen Daniel Mann
Charles Walters
George Sidney
Richard Brooks

New key stars

Gene Kelly Debbie Reynolds
Fred Astaire Doris Day
Frank Sinatra
Glenn Ford
Yul Brynner

2.4 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-PRESENT)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1967: MGM is sold to the Canadian investor Edgar Bronfman, Sr. but profits continue to decline
- 1969: MGM is bought by Nevada millionaire Kirk Kerkorian, the glamour of the name used to launch a Las Vegas casino and hotel
- 1970: new chief of operations James T. Aubrey, Jr. severely downsizes the studio and rationalizes the operations, including fewer films and more independent productions
- 1973: with less output, Kerkorian closes the distribution offices, which are outsourced to United Artists
- 1981: Kerkorian purchases United Artists – MGM is renamed MGM/UA Entertainment Co.
- 1986: MGM/UA is briefly bought by Ted Turner, then re-purchased by Kerkorian – the studio lot (Culver City) is sold
- 1990: MGM/UA is purchased by the Italian financier Giancarlo Parretti, who owns Pathé Frères, and is renamed MGM-Pathé Communications Co.
- 1992: Parretti is in financial trouble and MGM-Pathé is taken over by the bank Crédit Lyonnais, which renames it Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
- 1996: Kirk Kerkorian re-purchases the unprofitable studio from Crédit Lyonnais and commits to making more and better films
- 1997: MGM/UA purchases Metromedia's film subsidiaries (Orion Pictures, The Samuel Goldwyn Company and Motion Picture Corporation of America)
- 2000: MGM/UA distributes its films internationally through Twentieth Century Fox
- 2000-08: MGM/UA's films are usually at or near the bottom of the top ten or twelve grossing film companies, garnering 1.5 to 5% of the market
- 2004: MGM/UA is purchased by the audio-visual-communications-technology conglomerate Sony Corporation of America – films are distributed domestically by Columbia TriStar

Motion Picture Group

- 2006-07: MGM/UA is launched into distribution again, striking deals with The Weinstein Company and others
- 2009: MGM is hit hard by the recession, flirts with bankruptcy and starts receiving offers to be sold again
- 2010: MGM files for bankruptcy, then emerges from bankruptcy with Splyglass Entertainment taking over and Gary Barber and Roger Birnbaum becoming co-Chairs and co-CEO's
- 2011: MGM resumes working on film projects and signs a deal with Twentieth Century Fox to handle its library distribution worldwide

Current status

- no longer a dominant major studio; one of the current "mini-majors"

3. WARNER BROS.



3.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1918-1928)

Foundation and early development

- 1903: Albert and Sam Warner, the two middle ranked of the four Warner brothers, enter the nickelodeon business, running a projector in Ohio and Pennsylvania
- 1905: Harry Warner, the eldest of the brothers, joins the other two and they open a theater in New Castle, Pennsylvania and form the Pittsburgh-based film distribution company Duquesne Amusement & Supply Company
- 1907: the Warners acquire a whole series of theaters in Pennsylvania
- 1909: a second film distribution company is established in Norfolk, Virginia, and the youngest of the brothers, Jack Warner, assists Sam Warner there
- 1910: because of raised fees for distributors, the Warners sell their companies and join up with Carl Laemmle's Independent Motion Picture Company, distributing films from Pittsburgh
- 1912: successful, the Warners separate from Laemmle and form Warner Features
- 1917: through a business deal, Harry Warner acquires capital to build a studio
- 1918: the Warner brothers establish their studio in Culver City, near Los Angeles, California – Harry Warner is president, while Sam and Jack Warner are co-heads of production
- 1920: the Warner brothers relocate their studio in Sunset Boulevard in west Los Angeles
- 1921: the Warner studio achieves its first success
- 1923: Warner Brothers Pictures, Inc. is officially established; achieves further success with Rin Tin Tin canine serial
- 1924: director Ernst Lubitsch is made head of production for a short while
- 1925: unable to compete with "The Big Three" (Paramount, Universal and First National), acquires theaters in the New York area
- 1927: in near ruin, sells some of its stock to Harry Cohn, head of Columbia Pictures, then establishes important success with the first sound film *The Jazz Singer*
- 1927: Sam Warner dies; Jack Warner becomes sole head of operations
- 1928: becomes one of the top studios with a series of successful films
- 1928: releases the first all-talking feature

Silent era film stars

- include John Barrymore

3.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

- 1929: acquires a big studio in Burbank, California, a new major theater chain and takes over the film company First National
- 1929-31: a leader in early color films, mostly musicals
- 1930: birth of Warner Bros. cartoons, through buying shorts made by Leon Schlesinger Productions (Porky Pig, Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, etc.)
- 1931-32: suffers huge losses because of the Depression
- 1931: the market for musicals collapses and with new head of production Darryl F. Zanuck the studio turns to more gritty and realistic storylines, especially gangster films
- 1933: the successful musical *42nd Street* saves the studio from bankruptcy and starts a new slew of musical releases
- 1933: Darryl F. Zanuck resigns over a contract dispute with Harry Warner; Hal B. Wallis becomes the studio's head of production and chief creative decision-maker, but Jack Warner gives him less powers
- 1934: suffers another net loss
- 1935: shifts its primary focus from musicals to Errol Flynn swashbucklers, and profits rebound
- 1936: starts losing prestige to other studios like MGM
- 1937: starts to produce films openly critical of Germany's fascist government, a Hollywood rarity
- 1940: begins distributing independent productions
- 1941-45: makes record-breaking profits and back among the top studios
- 1942: focuses on making war films primarily for the duration of the war
- 1944: purchases Schlesinger Productions, so that Warner Bros. cartoons become central to the studio's image

Studio moguls

- **Harry Warner** - president (1918-1956)

Biography

- 1881: born Hirsch Wonsal to a Jewish family in Krasnosielc, Poland, son of a shoemaker
- 1889: with his mother and siblings, joins father in Baltimore, Maryland; names anglicized
- 1892: family moves to London, Ontario, Canada, so father can try and make living as peddler
- 1894: family returns to Baltimore
- 1896: moves at 15 to Youngstown, Ohio to establish a shoe repair shop and family follows
- 1899: opens a bicycle shop with brother Albert
- 1905: sells shop and joins younger brothers in opening a film theater in Pennsylvania (see above)
- 1912: heads Warner Features office in New York; remains president of studio until 1956



- 1956: decides with brother Jack to put Warner Bros. on the stock market, but fooled by younger brother who acquires the company and assumes the presidency; suffers a heart attack, leaves the studio and severs ties from brother
- 1958: dies of a cerebral occlusion at age 76 in Los Angeles

Personal characteristics and reputation

- sober, conservative, self-conscious, severe
- a stern moralist, likes to give advice
- serious in his commitment to Judaism
- promotes racial and religious tolerance

• **Jack Warner**

- head of studio operations (1918-1967)
- head of production (1918-1930)
- president (1956-1967)
- vice-president (1967-1969)



Biography

- 1892: born Jacob Warner, youngest brother of Henry, in London, Ontario, Canada
- 1900s: belongs to a street gang in the mafia-riddled city of Youngstown, Ohio and performs in vaudeville theater
- 1905: joins brothers in Pennsylvania
- 1909: brought into the family film theater business; assists brother Sam in Norfolk, Virginia
- 1912: establishes a film exchange in San Francisco
- 1917: sent to Los Angeles to open another film exchange
- 1918: becomes co-head of operations and production with brother Sam of new Hollywood studio
- 1927: becomes sole head of operations and production when brother Sam dies; becomes more difficult to deal with
- 1931: becomes less involved with film production but extremely fierce with employees and contractees
- 1956: buys back Warner Bros. after put on the market, behind brother Harry's back, and becomes president
- 1966: sells substantial amount of stock in company
- 1967: resigns as president, becoming longest-lasting studio mogul of Hollywood history
- 1969: leaves the studio
- 1970-72: continues work as an independent producer
- 1974: suffers stroke that leaves him blind and eventually unresponsive
- 1978: dies at 86 of heart inflammation in Los Angeles

Personal characteristics and reputation

- crude, vulgar, shallow, flashy, contrary, galling, and actively cultivates these qualities
- petty and self-aggrandizing
- a siege mentality based on fear, suspicious and hostile
- irreverent and cocky
- takes no interest in religion (Judaism)
- rules studio with iron hand
- bad-tempered, extremely tough, yoften described as a "sadist"
- tough and disliked by many actors (though not by Errol Flynn and Bette Davis)
- hides sensitivity behind cloak of toughness

- like brother Henry, very concerned about persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany
- has extremely difficult relationship with brother Henry

- **Darryl F. Zanuck** - assistant head of studio operations (1928-1933)
- head of production (1931-1933)



Biography

- 1902: born in Wahoo, Nebraska, to family of Dutch-German ancestry; only non-Jewish Hollywood mogul
- 1908: moves to Los Angeles with mother
- 1910: becomes an extra in a Hollywood film
- 1917: deceives recruiters and joins U.S. Army at age 14 to serve in France with the National Guard
- 1922: starts selling film scripts to Hollywood studios
- 1923: joins Warner Bros. as a scriptwriter and responsible for Rin Tin Tin
- 1929: becomes Jack Warner's right-hand man in studio management at Warner Bros.
- 1931: becomes head of production and chief creative decision-maker
- 1933: leaves Warner Bros. because of contract dispute and founds 20th Century Pictures (see Twentieth Century Fox)

Personal characteristics and reputation

- person most responsible for Warner Bros. political films; believes in plugging films into social currents of the day
- as a writer himself, gives writers extra leeway
- loves movies for their own sake
- a man of his word
- responsible for the reinvention of the musical at Warner Bros. in 1933

Documentary

Kevin Burns, *Darryl F. Zanuck: 20th Century Filmmaker* (1995)

45 min

- **Hal B. Wallis** - head of production (1933-1944)

Biography

- 1898: born in Chicago
- 1922: moves to Los Angeles
- 1923: starts work at the public department at Warner Bros.
- 1931: becomes a producer at Warner Bros.
- 1933: made head of production at Warner Bros.
- 1944: leaves Warner Bros. and becomes an independent producer, achieving success until late 1960s
- 1986: dies at age 88 in California



Power and prestige

- third oldest major studio (after Paramount and Universal)
- the studio that institutes the sound film
- known as the most aggressive, cantankerous and iconoclastic of the major studios

Business philosophy

- a tight-budget philosophy: save money to make money

- the only major studio that is run on a quickie studio's budget: movies are largely made fast and cheap - the opposite of prestige picture-making
- no glamorizing of stars
- not a lot of (expensive) stars – focus is on good stories and characters instead

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- urban setting, urban faces and urban talk (city lingo)
- the look is close, plain, flat, unglamorous
- films are fast-paced, with frequent suspense: short scenes, montage narration, wipes and fast cutting
- frequent use of real locations, for realistic effect
- stars that look like real people, city people
- a more liberal slant (reflecting the Warner brothers' proletarian Jewish identities)
- frequent focus on the underclass
- frequent focus on ethnicity: Jews, Irish
- Warners heroes are faintly disreputable and uprooted; they are born losers who refuse not to win, not born heroes
- the cynicism of the sociopolitically disinherited (especially late '20s and 30s) - urban politics, restless and competitive, based not on ideology but on who gets what - the films that most reflect the American Great Depression
- a shade of despair accompanies the films' energy
- more than other studios' films, they acknowledge divisions of class, roots, style, religion and values
- the films don't "lecture"; the lesson lies in the story itself, in the clash of characters
- whereas MGM's idea of the human comedy is everybody getting along because everybody wants too, Warners believes we have to work at it, sacrifice some sense of self to defeat evil
- in the mid-30s, begins also to make grander, richer, more dexterous films

Other key aspects

- frequent use of remakes because less expensive
- pioneers the big symphonic track score (Steiner, Korngold, etc.)
- uses Technicolor less than the other majors (except RKO and Universal)

1940s stylistic and thematic developments (and business)

- during World War II, the studio puts aside its subversive worldview and aesthetics
- grows big by 1940 but still stays the most compact of all the major studios, the least versatile but the most consistent
- budgets become more important and more time is spent on film crafting (*Casablanca*, etc.): starts making glossier MGM-type films in the Warners style
- continues to emphasize city settings and crime genres in the 1940s

Favoured genres* (*makes memorable productions in every genre)

- over everything else, the crime film, with its subdivisions (gangster, prison, newspaper, shyster, boxing, detective, lawman)
- the male melodrama (industry leader)
- the musical, which Warner Bros. "brings back" in 1932 using the "backstager" format and giving the films an urban and modern dimension, although it is less successful with the musical in the 1940s
- the biography film (makes the most prestigious of the '30s)
- the social problem film
- the female melodrama
- the costume-adventure film (Errol Flynn)

- the war film (industry leader)
- westerns
- film noir, which Warners pioneers as the 1940s development of the crime film

Less favoured or successful genres

- social and screwball comedy, genres that are about having money and fun, which is against the Warners philosophy

Famous series

- the Errol Flynn adventure films of the late 1930s

Attitude towards directors

- a tolerant climate that allows writers and directors to pursue their own perspectives, though directors expected to follow scripts, except directors of highest budget films and other exceptions (Jack Warner son-in-law Mervyn LeRoy)
- directors participate in editing

Attitude towards actors

- driven ruthlessly over long working hours, like all personnel

Key directors

Raoul Walsh	Howard Hawks (several films)
Mervyn LeRoy	Anatole Litvak
Roy Del Ruth	Irving Rapper
Busby Berkeley	John Huston
Lloyd Bacon	Vincent Sherman
William Dieterle	Delmer Daves
Michael Curtiz	Jean Negulesco
Edmund Goulding	

Key stars

George Arliss	Ruth Chatterton
Joe E. Brown	Olivia de Havilland
Edward G. Robinson	Loretta Young
James Cagney	Joan Blondell
George Raft	Bette Davis
Douglas Fairbanks Jr.	Claire Dodd
Ruby Keeler	Kay Francis
Paul Muni	Ann Sheridan
Errol Flynn	Ida Lupino
Ronald Reagan	Anita Louise
George Brent	Jane Wyman
Dick Powell	
Richard Barthelmess	
Claude Rains	
Walter Connolly	
Humphrey Bogart	
John Garfield	

3.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1962)

Post-War period development

- 1946: third among studios in profits, at record levels
- 1947: profits peak
- 1951: profits begin dwindling
- 1952: calls "Warnercolor" its use of Kodak's monopak Eastman Color process
- 1953: obeys U.S. Supreme Court decision and separates into Warner Bros. Pictures and theater chain Stanley Warner Corp.
- 1953: enjoys the highest-grossing 3-D film (a short-lived fad)
- 1954-56: cinemascope extravaganzas relatively unsuccessful at the box office
- 1956: Henry and Jack Warner put company on market – Jack Warner re-acquires it with a banker-led investment company as co-owners; Harry Warner is ousted and Jack Warner becomes president
- 1956: new co-owners insist on acquiring and filming pricey novels and plays
- 1958: suffers first net loss since 1934
- 1960-62: profits recover to early 1950s levels

Favoured genres

- film noirs and suspense thrillers
- the biographical film
- war films
- adventure films
- social problem films
- family, female and male melodramas
- musicals (imitations of MGM, though sometimes demythologizing), including musical biographies
- the historical spectacle film
- westerns

Less favoured or successful genres

- comedies

New key directors

Curtis Bernhardt	Elia Kazan
Alfred Hitchcock (1948-54)	Jack Webb
Gordon Douglas	Stanley Donen (late '50s)

New key stars

Gary Cooper	Lauren Bacall
Randolph Scott	Joan Crawford
John Wayne	Doris Day
James Dean	Connie Stevens
Troy Donahue	Natalie Wood
Tab Hunter	

3.4 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-PRESENT)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1963: profits suffer a drop from previous years
- 1966: Jack Warner sells control of the studio to Canadian-owned film company Seven Arts Productions (the Hyman brothers) – company is renamed Warner Bros.-Seven Arts
- 1967: studio makes profits again with success of *Bonnie & Clyde*; Jack Warner resigns as president
- 1969: sold by the Hymans to conglomerate Kinney National Company and renamed again Warner Bros, Inc.; Ted Ashley becomes president and Jack Warner leaves
- 1971: becomes a leading major studio again, using drawing power of stars (Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Clint Eastwood, Barbra Streisand); starts distributing films internationally in venture with Columbia (until 1988)
- 1972: Kinney focuses on its studio and renames itself Warner Communications
- 1972: forms a partnership with Columbia Pictures, calling themselves The Burbank Studios, sharing production facilities on the Warners studio lot
- 1988-1993: distributes its films internationally in a partnership with Walt Disney Pictures
- 1989: Warner Communications merges with the publishing giant Time Inc.
- 1990: the combined companies are renamed Time Warner – the studio (Warner Bros. Pictures) is a subsidiary
- 1990: the production lot-sharing venture with Columbia ends
- 2000: the American global internet company AOL purchases Time Warner and the merger creates AOL Time Warner
- 2000-09: finishes in the top three grossing studios for each of the ten years, except 2006 when it finishes fourth; finishes first four times, and holds between 11 and 19 % of the market share
- 2002-03: the market value of AOL drops significantly and Time Warner drops the “AOL” from its title
- 2008: breaks the all-time studio record (previously held by Sony/Columbia), grossing \$1.75 billion
- 2009: Time Warner announces it will spin off AOL as a separate independent company
- 2009: again the most successful studio in the most profitable year yet ever for Hollywood, breaking its own previous-year-set record, grossing \$2.1 billion
- 2010: finishes first in top box-office gross for the third year in a row
- 2011: finishes second in top box-office gross; has finished in the top two for five years in a row

Current status

- one of the six major American studios

Documentaries

Gregory Orr, <i>The Last Mogul: Jack L. Warner</i> (1993)	57 min
Cass Warner Sperleng, <i>The Brothers Warner</i> (2008)	1h34 min
Richard Schickel, <i>You Must Remember This: The Warner Bros. Story</i> (2009)	4h49 min

4. TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX



4.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1915-1928)

Foundation and early development: Fox Film

- 1915: theater chain pioneer William Fox merges the distribution company Greater New York Film Rental and the production firm Fox Office Attractions to found the Fox Film Corporation; a studio is first set up in Fort Lee, New Jersey
- 1917: a studio is built in Los Angeles, and Sol M. Wurtzel heads the operations
- 1926: a new studio, “Movietone City”, the best-equipped of its time, is built in the Century City area west of Beverly Hills, Los Angeles
- 1929: experiments with early widescreen formats (2.13 aspect ratio)

Studio mogul

- **William Fox** - president (1915-1930)

Biography

- 1879: born Fried Vilmos to Jewish parents in Tolcsva, Hungary – family emigrates same year to New York where name is anglicized to William Fox; father is a merchant but shiftless and irresponsible
- 1887: starts working at a variety of jobs at age 8
- 1890: quits school at age 11
- 1892: lies about his age and starts working as a foreman in a clothing firm
- 1900: starts his own company, an inspecting and shrinking firm for garment manufacturers
- 1903: acquires a penny arcade in Brooklyn and installs a movie theater, which quickly becomes successful
- 1906: acquires and builds a bigger theater in Brooklyn
- 1907: opens a film distribution company, the Greater New York Rental Company
- 1909-12: like Laemmle and Universal, successfully fights Edison’s monopolizing Trust
- 1915: having erected several of the largest, most opulent movie houses in the country, forms his own film production company, the Fox Film Corporation



- 1929: tries to expand empire and is sued by the Justice Department for violating anti-trust laws
- 1930: loses Fox Film following car accident, financial disarray and hostile takeover
- 1936: sentenced to prison when attempts to bribe judge at bankruptcy hearing
- 1952: dies at age 73

Personal characteristics and reputation

- obsessed with success
- demonstrative and vain
- strives to project image of gentility
- autocratic
- distrustful and arrogant, superstitious

Fox Film status

- Fox Film is an Old Hollywood firm run on a medium-sized budget with mostly second-rank stars

Silent era film stars

- include Tom Mix, Buck Jones, Helen Ferguson, Shirley Mason, Will Walling, George O'Brien, Janet Gaynor, Victor McLaglen and Charles Farrell

4.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

- 1930: William Fox loses control of Fox Film during a hostile takeover; as a result of a combination of the stock market crash, a car accident injury, and government antitrust action that forces him into a protracted seven-year struggle to fight off bankruptcy
- 1930-35: a bank-mandated reorganization props up Fox Film; Sidney Kent becomes the new president
- 1933: Darryl F. Zanuck leaves Warner Bros. and founds Twentieth Century Pictures with Joseph Schenk, the former president of United Artists, producer William Goetz from Fox Film and silent film comedian Raymond Griffith – Schenk is president and Zanuck head of production; films are produced in various studios and distributed by United Artists
- 1935: because of disputes with United Artists, Twentieth Century Pictures looks for another partner and merges with Fox Film (helped in the process by theater chain owner Spyros Skouras), becoming The Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation – Schenk becomes CEO, Kent remains president and Zanuck becomes vice-president and head of production
- 1935: Zanuck starts rebuilding the studio's fortunes and turning it quickly into a highly successful, big-budget major studio, partly through hiring and making new stars (Shirley Temple, Tyrone Power, Don Ameche, Betty Grable, etc.)
- 1939: starts averaging six Technicolor films a year, more than any other studio
- 1942: Spyros Skouras replaces Schenk as president
- 1942-43: junior partner William Goetz becomes head of production temporarily while Zanuck serves in the war
- 1942-45: due to record attendance, becomes third most profitable studio after RKO and MGM
- 1943: back at the studio, Zanuck starts emphasizing more provocative, adult films

Studio mogul

- **Darryl F. Zanuck**

- 20th Century: - vice-president (1933-1935)
- head of production (1933-1935)
- 20th Century-Fox: - vice-president (1935-1956)
- head of production (1935-1956)
- CEO (1962-1971)



Biography

- 1902: born in Wahoo, Nebraska, to family of Dutch-German ancestry; only non-Jewish Hollywood mogul (*see Warner Bros.)
- 1931: becomes head of production and chief creative decision-maker at Warner Bros.
- 1933: leaves Warner Bros. because of contract dispute and co-founds Twentieth Century Pictures; made head-of-production
- 1935: remains head-of-production at new Twentieth Century-Fox, builds studio to a major, highly successful player
- 1942-43: serves in the war
- 1956: leaves the studio to become an independent producer in Europe; remains a major influence in the studio
- 1962: returns to Fox and becomes CEO, replacing Spyros Skouras; hires son Richard Zanuck as head of production
- 1969: involved in power struggle with studio board and son
- 1971: forced out of the studio
- 1977: dies of jaw cancer in Palm Springs, California, at age 77

Personal characteristics and reputation (*see also Warner Bros.)

- in control of every facet of studio operations
- more a moviemaker than a businessman, more like Thalberg than Mayer at MGM, but favors same domination of stars' personal lives as Mayer
- supervises upper half of output with greater and lesser degrees of dominance
- overt control in pre-shooting: makes story purchase choices, controls story conference decisions, chooses leads
- gives directors their freedom on the set
- controls post-production: watches rushes, gives instructions to editors, chooses takes
- prefers to build his own stars
- loves movies for their own sake
- interested in social problems
- a man of his word
- compulsive womanizer; sexual harasser at work (female employees' fate tied to their accepting to sleep with him)

Documentary

Kevin Burns, *Darryl F. Zanuck: 20th Century Filmmaker* (1995)

45 min

Other studio executives

- Winfield Sheehan: - (influential) producer & personal assistant to William Fox (1920s-1930)
- general manager & vice president at Fox Film (1920s/early 1930s)
- head of production at Fox Film (1920s-1935)

- Sol M. Wurtzel: - (influential) producer (1918-1949)
- Joseph Schenck: - co-founder and president of Twentieth Century Pictures (1933-1935)
- CEO/president of Twentieth Century-Fox (1935-1942)
- Spyros Skouras: - CEO/president (1942-1962)

Business structure

- a centralized and control-heavy system

Power and prestige

- as big and profitable as MGM and Paramount, but not as admirable in its quality

Business philosophy

- big-budget productions with major stars

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- a conservative aesthetic, now and then broken by a defiant social critique
- a strong sense of close-knit Americana: films about the family, the land, American history
- the worldview is pacific, retrospective, self-sufficient - a very nineteenth century worldview
- a strong preference for rusticity, for the country or small towns over the city, with sweet, unknowing people (which recall the world of D. W. Griffith)
- showing what Americans know of themselves, not new places or people - affirming the public's personal experience (in direct opposition to Warner Brothers)
- recurrent use of "folk heroes" (Will Rogers, Henry Fonda)
- stars that are attractive but not complicated (not glamorous)
- predilection for soft blonde women and big dark men
- occasional political-problem films, which Zanuck brings with him from his stay at Warner Brothers, though they are also tend to be "folksy" (*The Ox-Bow Incident*, *The Grapes of Wrath*)
- frequent use of Technicolor

Favoured genres

- the biographical film
- the musical: Fox succeeds especially in the 1940s with the uncomplicated but pleasurable Betty Grable musicals - the Fox musicals tend to include rough talk and sexy squabbling that sets them apart from the more classy MGM musicals
- literary adaptations
- westerns
- the rural comedy
- the historical-costume adventure drama
- film noirs
- war films

Less favoured or successful genres

- the musicals of the '30s, usually backstagers, lack the exuberance, songs and choreography of other studios like RKO or MGM; the formula is irrelevant but spicy entertainment surrounding the star (Alice Faye, Sonja Henie)

Famous series

- the Betty Grable musicals of the 1940s

Attitude towards actors

- often kept in unyielding formats so that their films are a series of remakes (other studios do so in B-movies, but not A-pictures, except for Universal) - the exception is Tyrone Power, who plays in every genre

Attitude towards directors

- left more or less to their own decision-making once filming is started, but pre-production and editing process are controlled – except for a few exceptions like John Ford

Key directors

John Ford	Irving Cummings
Henry King	Otto Preminger
Henry Hathaway	Walter Lang
Frank Borzage	Fritz Lang
Sidney Lanfield	

Key stars

Charles Farrell	Janet Gaynor
George O'Brien	Margaret Livingston
Will Rogers	Loretta Young
John Payne	Alice Faye
Spencer Tracy (early 30s)	Shirley Temple
Richard Greene	Sonja Henie
Tyrone Power	Betty Grable
Don Ameche	June Haver
Victor Mature	Linda Darnell
Dana Andrews	Maureen O'Hara
George Montgomery	Gene Tierney
Henry Fonda	Carmen Miranda
Gregory Peck	

4.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1962)

Post-War period development

- 1946: posts biggest profits yet (\$22 million), second in industry behind Paramount; trimming of films' budgets results in continued profits for rest of decade and continues making more adult, critically-acclaimed movies
- 1951: profits tumble to \$4.3 million
- 1952: obeys Supreme Court anti-trust decision and splits into production-distribution firm Twentieth Century-Fox and theatre chain National Theaters, Inc.
- 1953: pioneers a large-screen process (2.55) it calls "CinemaScope" which helps raise profits again
- 1954: its processing of the monopak Eastmancolor process is called "Color By Deluxe", named after its Deluxe Lab
- 1954-58: maintains reasonable profits
- 1956: Darryl F. Zanuck resigns as head of production and is replaced by Buddy Adler, and the product deteriorates substantially, both commercially and aesthetically – artistically the worst of any studio in the following years; the studio maintains a 35-film-per-year slate which doesn't help its credibility and the product quality

- 1960: records a net loss
- 1961: sells its Century City back lot to raise money
- 1961-62: losses balloon to staggering \$22 and \$39 million, in part due to the extremely over-budgeted historical spectacle *Cleopatra*
- 1962: Zanuck returns to Fox to straighten out the studio, becomes president, replacing Spyros Skouras, and hires son Richard Zanuck as head of production

Favoured genres

- comedies (best until 1953) (Mankiewicz, Hawks, Tashlin)
- female and male melodramas (industry leader)
- romantic dramas (industry leader)
- family comedies and dramas
- the musical (2nd after MGM), especially adaptations of Rodgers & Hammerstein Broadway musicals
- fantasy comedies
- film noirs (a leader)
- adventure films (a leader)
- the biographical film
- war films
- westerns
- the historical spectacle
- science fiction

New key directors

Edmund Goulding	Frank Tashlin
George Seaton	Henry Koster
Joseph Mankiewicz	Samuel Fuller
Howard Hawks	Robert D. Webb
Elia Kazan	Richard Fleischer
Jean Negulesco	Walter Reisch
Robert Wise	Mark Robson
Anatole Litvak	Nunnally Johnson

New key stars

George Sanders	Anne Baxter
Anthony Quinn	Marilyn Monroe
Cary Grant	Jennifer Jones
Clifton Webb	Susan Hayward
Robert Wagner	Joan Collins
Richard Widmark	
Jeffrey Hunter	
Pat Boone	

4.4 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-PRESENT)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1963: new Zanuck management starts making series of cheap, popular features that restore Fox as a profitable major studio
- 1969: after several years of profits, starts experiencing losses again

- 1971: Zanuck replaced by president Dennis Stanfill; Alan Ladd, Jr. is the new head of production
- 1974: starts being profitable again and reaching new heights
- 1977: releases *Star Wars*, most profitable film in Hollywood history to date
- 1978: control of the studio passes to investors Marc Rich and Marvin Davis
- 1985: studio sold to media mogul Rupert Murdoch and his company News Corp; Barry Diller from Paramount is hired to run the studio; drops the hyphen to become the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation; company focuses on large movies rather than literary adaptations and more adult films
- 2000-10: places in the top six of Hollywood studios in terms of profits
- 2001: becomes the international distributor of MGM/UA films
- 2009-10: releases *Avatar*, most profitable film yet, and in 2010 makes most profitable year yet, at \$1.449 billion

Current status

- one of the six major American studios

5. RKO



5.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1928)

Foundation

- 1928: anticipating the boom in sound films and wanting to create a market for its sound-on-film technology (RCA Photophone), the electronics company RCA's future president, David Sarnoff, engineers a merger between the Keith-Albee-Orpheum (KAO) theater chain and the modest-sized film studio Film Booking Offices of America (FBO) to create the Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) holding company

5.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

- 1929: the RKO company's production and distribution arm is incorporated as Radio Pictures, Inc.; filming begins at the former FBO studio and success is achieved immediately; head of production is William LeBaron; starts purchasing more theaters for exhibition of its movies
- 1930: experiments with early, costly Technicolor musicals
- 1931: merges with the studio Pathé (U.S.), owned by FBO's previous owner, Joseph Kennedy, which comes with its own Culver City backlot and studio
- 1931: David Selznick replaces LeBaron as head of production, introduces cost-cutting measures while improving quality and popularity of films; also gives individual producers more freedom
- 1932: renamed RKO Radio Pictures, Inc.
- 1933: releases *King Kong*, the greatest special effects film of the Classical Period
- 1933: Selznick resigns over dispute with upper management
- 1933: despite successful measures introduced by Selznick, studio affected by previous financial disarray and Depression and falls into receivership, where it stays for seven years
- 1935: releases first advanced three-strip Technicolor film, *Becky Sharp*
- 1935: ownership becomes shared with a syndicate head by Floyd Odlum that includes the

Rockefellers

- 1935-37: quality of films suffer under production chief Sam Briskin
- 1936: starts releasing Walt Disney's shorts and features, until 1954
- 1937: leases long-term its studio lot to now-independent David Selznick; studio's films now produced at its central Hollywood studio and at a lot in Encino, California
- 1938: quality of films raised again under Pandro Berman
- 1939: new president George Schaefer installs policy of distributing (quality) films by independent producers
- 1940: still registers a deficit but last year in receivership
- 1941: starts distributing independent Sam Goldwyn's productions
- 1941: registers a small profit
- 1941-42: Orson Welles' films, though critically lauded, result in important losses for the studio; Schaefer resigns
- 1942: Floyd Odlum gains control of the studio; Sarnoff and the Rockefellers are edged out; production chief Charles Koerner promotes commercialism, starts hiring other studios' top stars for films, invests in successful B-pictures, and brings financial stability and profits to studio
- 1943-45: studio enjoys increasing, important profits

Studio moguls

- there is no overwhelming mogul eminence
- executive chiefs do not stay long enough to establish a lasting style

Studio executives

- **David Sarnoff:** - CEO (1929-1942)

Biography

- 1891: born to a poor Jewish family near Minsk, Belarus (Russian Empire)
 - 1900: immigrates to the United States
 - 1906: starts working in a telegraph company
 - 1922-23: starts gaining in stature at RCA (formed by General Electric in 1919)
 - 1928-29: creates RKO
 - 1930: becomes president of RCA
 - 1939: partly responsible for the foundation of NBC, the first U.S. television network
 - 1942: loses control of RKO
 - 1971: dies at the age of 80
-
- William LeBaron: - head of production (1929-1931)
 - David O. Selznick: - head of production (1931-1933)
 - Merian C. Cooper: - head of production (1933-1935)
 - Sam Briskin: - head of production (1935-1937)
 - Pandro S. Berman: - head of production (1938-1939)
 - George Schaefer: - president (1938-1942), (de facto) head of production (1939-1942)
 - Charles Koerner: - head of production (1942-1946)

Business philosophy

- survives through much of its history not on its production output but on the distribution deals it makes with independent producers like Walt Disney, Samuel Goldwyn, John Ford's Argosy Pictures and Frank Capra's Liberty Films
- since its chain of theaters is mostly in the Northeast, the New York metropolis becomes its targeted public

- making the most out of tight budgets for inexpensive A-material, along with a steady run of B-films

Success

- its audacious films frequently disappoint at the box office because they overestimate the daring of the public
- survives on its distribution contracts and its B series

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- an uptown aesthetic that challenges Paramount in its quest for sophistication and style, though with tight budgets (inexpensive A-material)
- its style is sharp, wise, elegantly quick
- Astaire-Rogers musicals are avant-garde, using dance characterologically and narratively
- films manifest the belief that the art matters as much as the pop, a notion more suitable to an elite theater system

Favoured genres

- the screwball comedy (an industry leader)
- the woman's melodrama
- the musical
- literary adaptations
- adventure films
- horror films
- series films
- the B-movie western

Famous series

- the Wheeler & Woolsey comedy series of the 1930s
- the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals of the 1930s
- the Simon Templar detective B-films of 1938-43
- Val Lewton's B-movie horror films of the 1940s
- the Falcon detective series of the 1940s

Attitude towards actors

- stars allowed to play unattractive roles

Key directors

Gregory La Cava	Alfred Hitchcock (three in 1940-1946)
Ernst B. Shoedsack	Jean Renoir
Merian C. Cooper	Orson Welles
George Stevens	Val Lewton (producer)
George Cukor (mid-30s)	Edward Dmytryk
John Cromwell	Jacques Tourneur
John Ford (several films)	
Leo McCarey	
John Farrow	

Key stars

Richard Dix	Irene Dunne
Joel McCrea	Constance Bennett
Ricardo Cortez	Ann Harding
Victor McLaglen	Mary Astor

Bert Wheeler	Dolores del Rio
Robert Woolsey	Dorothy Lee
John Barrymore	Helen Twelvetrees
Fred Astaire	Ginger Rogers
Gene Raymond	Ann Sothorn
Cary Grant	Katharine Hepburn
Charles Laughton	Maureen O'Hara
George O'Brien	Barbara Stanwyck
Gary Cooper	Lucille Ball
John Wayne	Joan Fontaine
Johnny Weissmuller	Lupe Velez

5.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1959)

Post-War period development

- 1946: comes in fourth among the studios in profits but is still enjoying the most successful financial years in its history; Korner dies and is replaced temporarily by president N. Peter Rathvon
- 1947: socially-conscious producer-writer Dore Schary becomes head of production until following year's events, when he leaves for MGM
- 1947: studio talent pool affected by McCarthyism and "blacklisting"; studio still profitable
- 1948: studio taken over by eccentric aviation magnate and occasional movie producer Howard Hughes, who dismisses three-fourths of the work force and delays production to investigate studio politics – profits fall back drastically and the production-distribution arm will never again be profitable; Rathvon and Schary quit, while Ned Depinet becomes president and Sid Rogell head of production, who oversees making of good films despite Hughes' erratic management
- 1950: finalizes the separation of the production-distribution arm and the theatre chain, as decreed by the Supreme Court anti-trust decision, creating RKO Pictures Corp. and RKO Theaters
- 1950: Samuel Bischoff replaces Rogell as head of production
- 1950: loss of theater chain, lawsuits, departure of prestigious independents (Selznick, Disney, etc.) and unprofitable films result in loss of \$5.8 million
- 1952: loss balloons to \$10 million
- 1952-53: Hughes and Depinet unload company stock to a chaotic Chicago syndicate, then reacquire it; Goldwyn ends his ties with the studio
- 1953: James Grainger is hired as president, who attempts to turn the studio around with more color and 3-D films but unsuccessfully, while the Encino lot is sold
- 1954: Hughes attempts to become sole owner of RKO
- 1955: Hughes sells the studio to manufacturing company General Tire and Rubber Co., the first non-theatrical conglomerate to own a film company; becomes RKO Teleradio Pictures, Inc; Daniel O'Shea and William Dozier become president and head of production, respectively – departments are restructured and key staff brought back
- 1955-56: attempts to make profitable product again fail
- 1957: studio ends all production and distribution, leaving 11 unreleased films to be distributed by other companies; remaining Hollywood studio lots sold to Lucille Ball's Desilu Productions
- 1959: last RKO film is released by Columbia; the studio ends, the company is renamed RKO

General as a broadcasting company

Favoured genres

- film noirs (an industry leader)

Less successful genres

- the musical (rare and lame-brained)

New key directors

Robert Wise	Fritz Lang
Nicholas Ray	Ida Lupino

New key stars

Robert Mitchum	Claudette Colbert
Robert Ryan	Gloria Grahame
Lawrence Tierney	Jane Russell
George Raft	Ingrid Bergman
	Jane Greer
	Ida Lupino

5.4 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1981-1987, 1989-PRESENT)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1981: RKO Pictures, Inc. is re-created by RKO General, involved in the co-production of feature films, but mostly unsuccessfully
- 1987: RKO General is dismantled and RKO Pictures is sold to private equity firm Westray Capital Corporation; film production ceases again
- 1989: RKO Pictures is acquired by actress Dina Merrill and producer Ted Hartley, and rebooted as RKO Pictures LLC.; promised renewed production is slow to start
- 1998: RKO Pictures LLC. starts modestly producing films again, mostly for television; the company maintains rights to the RKO logo and trademarks and focuses on its rights to remakes of RKO films

Current status

- a small film company

Ib - THE "LITTLE THREE"

- often called the *minor majors* because either they never owned more than a small theater circuit (Universal, Columbia) or functioned primarily as a distributor rather than producer (United Artists)

I. UNIVERSAL



I.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1912-1928)

Foundation and early development

- 1912: the Universal Film Manufacturing Company is founded in June, one month after Famous Players (Paramount) - making it the second oldest of the major studios -, by Carl Laemmle, who merges his film production company, Independent Moving Pictures, with eight smaller firms, to form a horizontally integrated company including production and distribution arms
- 1912: by the end of the year, focuses its production in Hollywood, California
- 1915: Laemmle opens the world's largest motion picture production facility, Universal Studios, a Converted lot over the Cahuenga Pass from Hollywood – studio becomes the biggest in Hollywood for a decade, though it seeks its audiences mostly in small towns, producing mostly inexpensive melodramas, westerns and serials; Laemmle does not build up an exhibition arm (theater chain) like Zukor (Paramount), Fox or Loew (MGM)
- 1919-22: Erich von Stroheim's ultra-expensive productions nearly bankrupt the studio, which is saved by sensational ad campaigns for the films
- 1920-23: Irving Thalberg makes most creative decisions as head of production, adding a touch of class to Universal film product of the time
- 1924: Thalberg lured away to MGM by Louis Mayer; Universal becomes a second-tier studio
- 1925: incorporated as Universal Pictures Company Inc.
- 1928: Laemmle's son, Carl Laemmle, Jr., becomes head of production, starts acquiring and building theaters, converts studio to sound production, and makes several forays into high-quality production

Studio mogul

- **Carl Laemmle** - president (1912-1936)



Biography

- 1867: born to a Jewish family, son of a land speculator, in Laupheim, Württemberg, Germany
- 1880: apprenticed out to a stationer's in a village five hours away
- 1883: his mother dies
- 1884: immigrates to the United States and works in a variety of jobs (errand boy, office boy, farmhand, clerk, bookkeeper) in New York, Chicago and South Dakota
- 1894: relocates to Wisconsin where he becomes a clothing store manager
- 1906: gives up his store to start a nickelodeon business after seeing one in action in Chicago and, quickly successful, starts a film "exchange" business
- 1907: starts branching out throughout the Midwest
- 1908: the distribution company opens branches in the West and in Canada
- 1909: by now is the largest film distributor in the United States; starts his own film production company, the Yankee Film Company, which quickly evolves into the Independent Moving Pictures Company, based in New York and New Jersey
- 1909: creates the star system by billing the movie stars and attracting leading players of the era
- 1910: opens a studio in Hollywood, California
- 1910: forms an alliance with other independents and challenges Edison's monopolizing Patents Company "Trust"
- 1912: creates the Universal company, acts as president and initial head of production
- 1919: wife dies of pneumonia, doesn't remarry
- 1936: loses control of the studio
- 1939: dies in Beverly Hills, California, at the age of 72

Personal characteristics and reputation

- decent, affable, ebullient
- remains relatively provincial (doesn't read books or attend theater)
- devoted to his children after becoming an early widower
- a rebel in terms of the early industry, breaking with the Patents Trust and creating his own distribution and exhibition, but not artistically independent; rather, imitative
- after World War I, persistently sends financial support to his native town in Germany
- a preference for things German (Stroheim, German Expressionist horror films)
- often grudgingly follows the lead of Paramount and Adolph Zukor; would prefer continuing to make 1910s-style Hollywood cinema
- not much of a vision for movies: indecisive, indifferent, eclectic – motivated more for providing an inheritance for his family and proving his own value

Universal Pictures silent era status

- Hollywood's biggest production center in the silent era, but culturally an outpost, with obscure billings

Silent era film stars

- include Lon Chaney, Betty Compson, Harry Carey and Laura LaPlante

I.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

- 1930: hurt by the Depression, suffers a net loss and hovers near receivership
- 1930: wins Best Picture Academy Award with critically lauded *All Quiet on the Western Front*
- 1931: horror niche is started with *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*; studio posts modest surplus
- 1932-33: suffers net losses again
- 1933: theater chain is sold to avoid falling into receivership
- 1934: posts another small surplus
- 1936: studio is foreclosed and seized by an investment group, the Standard Capital Corporation, when unable to repay loan taken out to make expensive remake of the musical *Show Boat*; the Laemmles are escorted out and Capital's J. Cheever Cowdin takes over as CEO, who institutes severe cuts in production budgets
- 1936-39: studio returns to policy of small-budget films: westerns, melodramas, serials, horror sequels; musical star Deanna Durbin helps studio back to solvency
- 1939: manages a \$1.2 million profit
- 1940-45: better fortunes generate steady, if unspectacular, profits
- 1942: studio's comedian pair Abbott & Costello become most popular stars in the country
- 1945: a short-lived merger, United World Pictures, is created between Universal, the British entrepreneur and film producer J. Arthur Rank, the independent company International Pictures, and producer Kenneth Young

Studio mogul

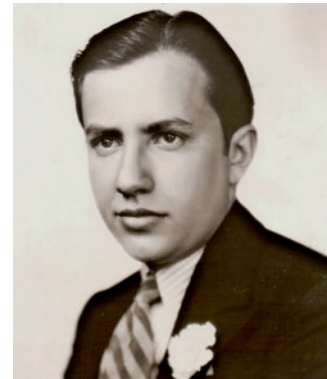
- **Carl Laemmle, Jr.** - head of production (1928-1936)

Biography

- 1908: born in Chicago, son of Carl Laemmle
- 1925: goes to work for Universal
- 1928: becomes head of production at Universal
- 1936: loses the studio along with his father; does not work in film again
- 1979: dies in Los Angeles at age 71

Personal characteristics and reputation

- responsible for modernizing Universal starting in 1928 and also executive producing many successful films
- also develops reputation for spending too much money on films that do not earn back their cost



Other studio executives

- John Cheever Cowdin: - CEO (1936-1946)
- Charles R. Rogers: - head of production (1936-1938)
- Cliff Work: - head of production (1938-1946)

Business structure

- lack of urban theaters

- messy, relative lack of proper management
- bears marks of nepotism (Laemmle Jr., etc.)

Power and prestige

- the first big Hollywood studio
- the second oldest of the major studios, and also the last to function more or less the way that studios functioned in the Golden Age

Business philosophy

- refusal to bank on stars
- need to cultivate rustic, rural patrons because of lack of urban theaters

Impact of business philosophy on films

- refusal to bank on stars erodes credibility
- lack of urban theaters and sophisticated audiences reaffirm the retroactive aesthetic
- need to cultivate the rustic patrons of the outback limits originality

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- the least ambitious aesthetic of the major studios; informality bordering on haphazardness results in lack of clarity of studio image
- best recognized for its westerns (a third of its output) and horror films
- conservative without being reactionary, i.e. old-fashioned: often firmly rooted in the past and has difficulty keeping up with the tempo of Hollywood cinema development
- in contrast to other major studios, fails to contribute to the creation of a national mythology
- lack of big stars
- virtually no reliance on Broadway or literary material
- imitative of other studios' films, that often feel like clumsy remakes
- often uses actors rejected by Paramount: Marlene Dietrich, W. C. Fields, Mae West
- occasional unique films
- innovates and reigns supreme in horror, based on the old-fashioned idea of the grotesque; films bear stylistic marks of German Expressionism (encroaching shadows, skewed and overelaborated Gothic sets, fixation on man's delicate relationship to Nature and Fate) – a lot of German émigré directors, cinematographers and actors are contracted (Leni, Dupont, Ulmer, Freud, Veidt)

Favoured genres

- the horror film (industry leader)
- westerns
- the woman's melodrama
- musicals
- series films
- comedies
- film noirs

Famous series

- the monster horror films of the 1930s & 1940s
- the Deanna Durbin musicals of the late 1930s & early 1940s (which are distinctive and unique)
- the Abbott & Costello comedies of the 1940s

Attitude towards actors

- poverty of dimension in its treatment of them, they are not cared for or flatteringly presented

Key directors

William Wyler (early '30s) Robert Siodmak
James Whale
John M. Stahl
Karl Freund

Key stars

Lew Ayres Margaret Sullavan
Bela Lugosi Irene Dunne
Boris Karloff Deanna Durbin
W. C. Fields Marlene Dietrich (late '30s)
John Boles Mae West
Randolph Scott Maria Montez
Basil Rathbone Yvonne de Carlo
Jon Hall Ella Raines
Robert Cummings
Lon Chaney, Jr.
Abbott & Costello

I.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1962)

Post-War period development

- 1946: earns highest profits ever (\$4.6 million)
- 1946: despite failure of United World Pictures merger, Rank and International Pictures remain interested in Universal and studio merges with International to become Universal-International Pictures Inc.; new studio also distributes British Rank films in America
- 1946: former Fox exec and International Pictures founder William Goetz becomes head of production and decides to bring "prestige" to the studio by increasing A-pictures with bigger budgets and upgrading B-movies to pass as A-films - becomes a completely different studio, and catches up with the times
- 1948: despite some successes, the "new" product is generally disappointing at the box-office and the studio posts a loss
- 1949: production ceases after another net loss and then starts up again with more B-films, notably westerns and serials
- 1952: the British record label Decca Records takes over the studio; Decca CEO Milton Rackmil becomes president and Edward Muhl becomes head of production; the studio's fortunes rise again as it benefits from hiring actors let go of their contracts by other studios after the 1948 Supreme Court decision, keeping budgets lean, making percentage deals with independents (James Stewart) and assembling new stars for a younger audience
- 1953: starts a new horror (monster and science fiction) film cycle
- 1957: profits take a downturn because of general trouble in the film industry and production is brought to a halt again; a \$10 million loan is required to get things going again
- 1958: suffers a net loss, making it vulnerable to takeover
- 1959: the talent agency, now also television production company MCA, buys out Universal's studio lot; the studio becomes a tenant at its own lot, while MCA starts influencing Universal policy, through its head Lew Wasserman; output is reduced by half and the focus is now on top stars, splendid productions and proven directors

- 1959-62: enjoys profits again and becomes what it has never been to date: a first-rank major studio
- 1962: MCA acquires Decca Records and therefore Universal-International, whose name is brought back to Universal Pictures Corp.

Favoured genres

- westerns (an industry leader)
- female melodramas
- fantasy comedies
- romantic comedies and the sex comedy (new genre)
- horror science fiction
- adventure films
- family dramas
- romantic dramas

Less favoured or successful genres

- film noirs
- social problem films
- musicals (generally dismissable)

New key directors

George Sherman	Joseph Pevney
Michael Gordon	
Anthony Mann	
Jack Arnold	
Douglas Sirk	

New key stars

Jeff Chandler	Ann Blyth
Donald O'Connor	Shelley Winters
Tony Curtis	Piper Laurie
James Stewart	Sandra Dee
Rock Hudson	Jane Wyman
Audie Murphy	Lana Turner
John Saxon	Doris Day
John Gavin	
Cary Grant	

I.4 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-PRESENT)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1968: production begins to downsize as film audiences decline
- 1970: joins with Paramount in forming the Cinema International Corporation to distribute their films abroad
- 1970-75: enjoys successful films, especially *Jaws* in 1975, but is primarily a television studio
- 1981: Cinema International Corporation becomes United International Pictures, with MGM joining as well
- 1982-93: the studio remains hit-and-miss in its releases
- 1991: MCA is purchased by the Japanese electronics manufacturer Matsushita Electric; the studio is

renamed Universal Studios Inc.

- 1996: Matsushita sells control of MCA/Universal to Canadian liquor distributor Seagram
- 1997: United International Pictures begins distributing films by the studio DreamWorks
- 2000: Seagram is sold to French water utility and media company Vivendi (which owns StudioCanal)
 - the media conglomerate becomes Vivendi Universal
- 2000-01: the studio finishes second both years in profits in the industry
- 2002-10: the studio varies ranks between third and sixth every year in terms of profits
- 2004: Vivendi Universal sells 80% of the studio to American technology and services conglomerate General Electric, parent of the television-radio network NBC – the resulting conglomerate is named NBC Universal; Universal Studios Inc. remains the name of the studio
- 2007: enjoys its most profitable year to date, at \$1.1 billion

Current status

- one of the six major American studios

2. COLUMBIA



2.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1924-1928)

Foundation and early development

- 1919: along with his brother Jack and partner Joe Brandt, Harry Cohn forms the film production company CBC (Cohn-Brandt-Cohn) Film Sales, leasing space in a Poverty Row studio in Hollywood, California and making low-budget films
- 1922: releases its first feature film
- 1924: the studio is reorganized, Brandt is out and Harry Cohn becomes president, and in order to improve its image the studio is renamed Columbia Pictures Corporation – it produces moderately budgeted features and short subjects
- 1927: the arrival of film director Frank Capra pushes the studio into better material and bigger budgets and the studio progressively grows into an industry force

Silent era film stars

- include Jack Holt

2.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

- 1932-34: a series of successes solidifies the studio's status as a major studio – it never loses money during the Depression because of thrifty philosophy
- 1945: starts stepping up Technicolor productions, one of the last studios to do so

Studio mogul

- **Harry Cohn** - president & head of production (1924-1958)



Biography

- 1891: born to a working-class German-Russian Jewish family in New York City, son of a tailor shop manager
- 1905: quits school and becomes a boy singer in a Broadway play, then works as a shipping clerk, all the while engaging in a lot of hustling (pool, bowling)
- 1909: older brother Jack goes to work for Carl Laemmle of the future Universal studios
- 1912: forms a short lived singing act with a pianist, then becomes a trolley conductor
- 1913: starts working as a song seller for music publishers
- 1918: joins older brother Jack to work for Universal Studios in California as secretary to Carl Laemmle
- 1919: leaves Universal to form CBC film studio
- 1924: becomes president as studio becomes Columbia Pictures
- 1958: dies of a heart attack in Phoenix, Arizona, at age 66

Personal characteristics and reputation

- reputation as the rudest (blunt, outspoken), toughest and most hated of the studio moguls
- profane, vulgar, cruel, rapacious, philandering
- a notorious sexual predator at the studio
- courageous
- shrewd, a master strategist: displays power for a purpose
- dictatorial, an autocratic and intimidating management style
- controls and sets the studio's agenda in terms of choices of productions
- nevertheless, has a rare belief in independence: little supervision over film productions
- respects talent above personal attributes

Business structure

- in some ways a one-man studio
- owns no theaters and has few stars under contract

Power and prestige

- starts as a minor studio but becomes a major primarily because of the talent and success of film director Frank Capra
- the smallest of the studios to become a major

Business philosophy

- starts small and stays small for a long time: functions on a very budget-restrained philosophy
- very little supervision over the producers and directors: allowed to make and continue making own films in their own way as long as they make money
- money-saving strategies like hiring a name actor at marked-down prices or shooting scenes with expensive stars consecutively
- best films given respectable productions while holding the rest to a small outlay

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- not a lot of stylistic unity

- a vision often identical with Capra's vision: America as sturdy, resilient, decent, blessed with wisdom, but also where corruption, mendacity and manipulation at the very highest peaks of power are countenanced
- smart, usually astringent and finally moral comedies
- a moderately coherent populist America of sinister forces at the top pitched against decency at the bottom, though less class-conscious and embittered than the Warner Brothers vision
- middle-class characters, little ethnicity
- villains are more easily identifiable and conquerable, even convertible, than at Warners
- values of individualism, populism and debunking of pretension and duplicity
- reimagining Depression America as a place of wit, resource, security and basic values

Favoured genres

- the screwball comedy: inaugurates it with *It Happened One Night* and no other studio approaches Columbia in its success here - screwball comedy is well suited to tight budgets and focus on writing and directing rather than stars or production values, and it thrives on spontaneity
- the musical
- the woman's melodrama
- the serial
- war films
- B-westerns

Famous series

- the Grace Moore musicals of the 1930s

Key directors

Frank Capra	Alfred E. Green
Victor L. Schertzinger	Charles Vidor
Howard Hawks (several films)	
Alexander Hall	
George Stevens (several films)	

Key stars

Jack Holt	Rosalind Russell
The Three Stooges	Rita Hayworth
Cary Grant	Jean Arthur
Ralph Bellamy	Grace Moore
Glenn Ford	Ann Sothorn
Larry Parks	Ann Miller
Tim McCoy	Penny Singleton
Ken Maynard	Evelyn Keyes
William Holden	Ann Doran
Arthur Lake	

2.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1962)

Post-War period development

- 1946-47: enjoys record profits
- 1948: the U.S. Supreme Court's anti-trust decision doesn't affect Columbia, since it doesn't own an

exhibition chain, therefore eventually taking away the advantage of the other studios

- 1949: jettisons B series and invests in more big budget, adult fare productions that are successful
- 1950: steps up independent productions
- 1952: reduces its number of yearly features from 52 to 38
- 1955: becomes one of the top-five most profitable studios
- 1958: Harry Cohn dies and voting control devolves to his wife, an attorney and director George Sidney; Abe Schneider becomes president and Samuel J. Briskin head of production
- 1958-59: calls its Eastman Color process "Columbia Color"
- 1958-59: suffers sudden losses
- 1960: enjoys a slight recovery
- 1961: suffers another loss
- 1962: returns to profitability

Favoured genres

- family dramas (an industry leader)
- adventure films
- musical biographies
- westerns
- romantic comedies
- military farces
- film noirs
- war films
- B-horror films

Less favoured or successful genres

- musicals (generally dismissable)

New key directors

Henry Levin	William Castle
Robert Rossen	Budd Boetticher
Edward Dmytryk	Otto Preminger
George Sidney	David Lean
Richard Quine	

New key stars

Jack Lemmon	Judy Holliday
Humphrey Bogart	Cleo Moore
Kerwin Matthews	Kim Novak
Randolph Scott	

2.4 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-PRESENT)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1968: merges with its television subsidiary to become Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.
- 1970-72: goes nearly bankrupt and is saved by a radical overhaul, involving new management and the selling of studio lots
- 1972: forms a partnership with Warner Bros., The Burbank Studios, to share the Warner studio lot; the studio progressively regains commercial health

- 1982: purchased by Coca-Cola
- 1987: recently acquired entertainment holdings are spun off following more financial problems; the new stand-alone company is called Columbia Pictures Entertainment, Inc.
- 1987: Tri-Star joins Columbia and Dawn Steel is hired as studio boss, the first woman to run a major studio
- 1989: Coca-Cola sells the Columbia Pictures empire to Japanese electronics conglomerate Sony
- 1990: the Burbank Studios partnership ends as Sony purchases the former MGM lot in Culver City – the studio is massively re-invested and rechristened Sony Pictures Studios
- 1991: the company is renamed Sony Pictures Entertainment
- 1994: the studio suffers a huge loss
- 1997: with John Calley as new president of Sony Pictures and Amy Pascal as president of Columbia Pictures, the studio rebounds spectacularly - Columbia Pictures ranks as the highest grossing movie studio in the United States with a gross of \$1.25 billion
- 1998: Columbia and TriStar merge to form the Columbia TriStar Motion Picture Group, though both studios still produce and distribute under their own names
- 2002: is again the most successful studio in the industry, and breaks the record for biggest yearly gross ever at \$1.57 billion
- 2003-04: finishes second, then first again
- 2006: finishes first again and breaks another industry record at \$1.7 billion
- 2008-09: finishes third behind Warner Bros. and Paramount
- 2010-11: finishes fifth, then third again

Current status

- one of the six major American studios

3. UNITED ARTISTS

3.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1919-1928)

Foundation and early development

- 1919: actress Mary Pickford, actors-directors Charles Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks, and director D. W. Griffith incorporate their own film distribution company, United Artists, to market their own films and protect their creative autonomy – the company has no stars, no studio facilities and no theaters
- 1920-21: starts distributing films by its independent owner-producers
- 1924: D. W. Griffith drops out of the company
- 1924: given the high costs of distributing more and more polished feature films, the company's philosophy shifts to put under contract numerous independent producers – producer Joseph Schenck is hired as the studio's president
- 1924-28: the studio continues to struggle
- 1925: starts distributing Samuel Goldwyn's productions
- 1927: starts distributing Howard Hughes' productions

3.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

- 1929: the coming of sound ends the careers of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks but they remain owners
- 1929-45: despite never being highly profitable, the company has only two losing years because of its low overhead
- 1932: starts distributing Walt Disney cartoons
- 1933: Joseph Schenck leaves United Artists to form Twentieth Century Pictures, which distributes some of its films through United Artists – an adequate replacement is never found and the owners, especially Pickford and Chaplin, feud constantly
- 1933: starts distributing British independent producer Alexander Korda's films
- 1936: starts distributing David Selznick's productions
- 1937: starts distributing Walter Wanger productions
- 1938: loses Walt Disney's productions to RKO
- 1939: Douglas Fairbanks dies
- 1941: Samuel Goldwyn switches to RKO to distribute his productions
- 1941: Edward C. Raffery becomes studio head; is unable to replace the departing independents
- 1941-45: in contrast to the other studios that make tremendous profits during the war, United Artists' performance is lackluster
- 1942: loses Walter Wanger's productions to Universal

Studio mogul

- **Joseph Schenck** - CEO (1924-1933)
- president (1927-1933)

Biography

- 1878: born to a Jewish family in Rybinsk, Russia
- 1881: birth of brother Nicholas, who will also become an associate of Marcus Loew and eventually head of MGM
- 1893: emigrates to New York City
- 1901: with brother Nicholas, buys a drugstore
- 1908: with brother Nicholas still, builds an amusement park at Fort George, New York, attracting the attention of theater operator Marcus Loew
- 1912: becomes a partner in Marcus Loew's theater and movie house chain company
- 1917: becomes a Hollywood film producer, notably with Buster Keaton and D. W. Griffith
- 1924: hired by United Artists to become its CEO and eventually president
- 1933: leaves United Artists to found Twentieth Century Pictures with Darryl F. Zanuck
- 1935: becomes president of the new Twentieth Century-Fox
- 1942: replaced as president of Twentieth Century-Fox because of tax evasion problems
- 1946: serves four months in prison, then returns to work for Fox
- 1957: retires then suffers a stroke
- 1961: dies in Los Angeles at the age of 82



Personal characteristics and reputation

- generous and kindly
- an ostentatious dresser, a gambler and a womanizer
- wry

Other studio executives

- D. W. Griffith: - joint owner (1919-1924)
- Douglas Fairbanks: - joint owner (1919-1939)
- Charles Chaplin: - joint owner (1919-1955)
- Mary Pickford: - joint owner (1919-1956)

Business structure

- not a studio in the same sense as the other majors since it doesn't produce films – it only distributes them
- relies on independent producers-studios like Samuel Goldwyn and David Selznick

Business philosophy

- conceived as a prestige studio that distributes notable and expensive films

Favoured genres

- adventure films
- female melodramas
- biographical films
- gangster films
- fantasy films
- war films
- Chaplin's mime comedies

- spy thrillers

Key directors (*see independent producers)

Key stars (*see also independent producers)

Charles Chaplin

3.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1962)

Post-War period development

- 1946-47: enjoys very modest profits
- 1947: Gradwell Sears and Arthur Kelly become the new studio heads but are still unable to bring in prestigious independent producers
- 1947: David Selznick stops releasing his films through United Artists
- 1948-50: suffers net losses
- 1951: entertainment lawyer Arthur B. Krim and partner Robert Benjamin convince major stockholders Mary Pickford and Charles Chaplin to let them run the company for five years: they revamp the company's philosophy; offering full financing, profit sharing and creative freedom, attract new power players (Sam Spiegel, John Huston, Stanley Kramer, Otto Preminger) and return the company to profitability – Krim and Benjamin are eventually given 50% of the company's stock
- 1955: the studio has become a major player and an industry leader, with an increasing number of pictures, Oscar accolades and snowballing profits
- 1955: Charles Chaplin sells his 25% of the company
- 1956: Mary Pickford sells her 25% of the company
- 1957: the company is put on the public stock exchange
- 1959: enters into a financial agreement with Prudential Insurance Co. of America and Boston's Puritan Fund, Inc.

Favoured genres

- the social problem film (the industry leader)
- westerns (the co-industry leader with Universal)
- courtroom dramas (a leader)
- male melodramas (a leader)
- film noirs (a leader)
- biographical dramas
- historical spectacles
- satirical comedies (Wilder, Mann)
- family dramas
- war films

Less favoured or successful genres

- musicals (rare)

Key directors

Robert Aldrich
Stanley Kramer

Robert Wise (late '50s)
Billy Wilder (late '50s)

Phil Karlson
Stanley Kubrick
Delbert Mann

John Frankenheimer

Key actors

Burt Lancaster
Rossano Brazzi

3.4 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-PRESENT)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1967: Krim and Benjamin sell control of the still-successful studio to the insurance company Transamerica Corp. and it continues to be an industry leader
- 1973: takes over the sales and distribution of MGM's films
- 1978: following a dispute, Krim and Benjamin leave to form Orion Pictures
- 1980: the big-budget flop *Heaven's Gate* puts the studio in the red
- 1981: the studio is bought and absorbed by MGM (*see MGM), which becomes MGM/UA – production is cut sharply
- 1990: following ownership turmoil (*see MGM), United Artists essentially becomes dormant
- 2001-02: repositioned as a specialty studio, rechristened United Artists Films
- 2004: MGM/UA is purchased by the audio-visual-communications-technology conglomerate Sony Corporation of America – films are distributed domestically by Columbia TriStar Motion Picture Group
- 2006: actor Tom Cruise and production partner Paula Wagner, in collaboration with MGM, resurrect the United Artists studio as United Artists Entertainment LLC
- 2008: Paula Wagner leaves United Artists
- 2009-11: United Artists' future is in doubt because of the problems, then takeover, of its parent company, MGM

Current status

- a minor studio ; as part of MGM, a “mini-major” studio

II - THE MINOR STUDIOS

Often called the “Poverty Row” studios, these studios either came and quickly went after a few releases, or operated on more or less the same terms as — if vastly different scales from — the major film studios.

The most successful and longest-lived of such lower-tier companies maintained permanent lots (and many standing sets that dedicated moviegoers could frequently recognize from movie to movie), had both cast and crew on long-term contracts, and had a more varied output than smaller firms.

Producing pictures (mainly westerns) on very tight budgets, the minor studios aimed their product primarily at rural Americans. Some of these operations maintained their own domestic distribution exchanges, while others utilized states’ rights outfits to market their movies in difference sections of the country. Overseas distribution of their films was not widespread.

I. REPUBLIC



I.1 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1935-1945)

Golden Age period: foundation and development

- 1935: Herbert J. Yates merges his film processing company Consolidated Film Industries with three minor film companies – Mascot, Monogram (*see below) and Liberty – to form Republic Pictures
- 1937: Trem Carr and W. Ray Johnston of Monogram leave the company to re-launch Monogram

Studio owner and president

- **Herbert J. Yates**

Biography

- 1880: born in Brooklyn, New York
- 1922: after working as a tobacco salesman and account executive, creates Consolidated Film Industries
- 1935: founds Republic Pictures
- 1958: ousted of Republic Pictures by stockholders
- 1966: dies at age 85



Power and prestige

- the most ambitious, famous and profitable of the minor studios
- has the best special effects/minatures department in the industry, contributing to a high quality of film
- after World War II, occasionally hires important directors like John Ford and Nicholas Ray and makes occasionally great films

Business philosophy

- low-budget B-films (westerns, serials)
- also attempts to make more ambitious major studio-like films (musicals, etc.), but often not very successfully

Favoured genres

- westerns
- series and serials
- mysteries
- musicals (“hayseed” musicals aimed at rural audiences)

Famous series

- the Gene Autry and Roy Rogers singing cowboy films

Key stars

Gene Autry	Vera Hruba Ralston
Roy Rogers	Judy Canova
John Wayne	
Ray Corrigan	
Duncan Renaldo	

I.2 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1959)

Post-War period development

- 1957-58: suffers losses after declining profits and number of features released in preceding years, hurt by television fare putting matinee cinema out of business
- 1958: Herbert Yates retires and sells the company to banker-realtor Victor M. Carter
- 1959: stops producing and distributing films
- 1960: the independent distribution company National Telefilm Associates purchases Republic’s film

library

Favoured genres

- westerns
- series and serials, including science fiction
- war films

New key actors

Rex Allen

I.3 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1986-PRESENT)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1986: NTA, having re-syndicated the Republic films, purchases the Republic Pictures name and logo
- 1994: the television company Spelling Entertainment purchases Republic, reducing it to a marketing brand name
- 1999: Viacom purchases Republic, so that it becomes a division of Paramount

Current status

- an in-name-only distribution company under Paramount

2. MONOGRAM-ALLIED ARTISTS



2.1 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1931-1935, 1937-1945)

Golden Age period: foundation and development

- 1931: Monogram Pictures is created through the merging of W. Ray Johnston's Rayart Productions and Trem Carr's Sono Art-World Wide Pictures, both specializing in low-budget features; Carr becomes head of production
- 1935: Monogram is absorbed by Republic Pictures (see above)
- 1937: Carr and Johnston leave Republic and re-launch Monogram Pictures

Business structure and philosophy

- offers a balanced program of genre films but all on a lean budget
- produces the same quantity of films as any major studio

Favoured genres

- westerns
- serials
- action dramas
- mysteries & thrillers
- comedies

Famous series

- the Charlie Chan series
- the Rough Riders & Range Busters series

Key stars

Herbert Rawlinson	Jean Parker
Wallace Ford	Gale Storm
Frankie Darro	
Bill Cody	
Tim McCoy	
Bob Steele	
John Wayne	
Boris Karloff	
Tom Keene	
Tex Ritter	
Buck Jones	
Ken Maynard	
Ray Corrigan	
Bela Lugosi	
Sidney Toler	

Key directors

Herbert Rawlinson

2.2 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1962)

Post-War period development

- 1946: launches a subsidiary, Allied Artists Productions, Inc., headed by president Steve Brody, which creates a quality line of product to compete with the majors, with enhanced production values and frequent use of color (sometimes called B+ pictures)
- 1947-50: Allied Artists suffers net losses
- 1951: Allied Artists starts enjoying profits and does so until 1958
- 1953: Allied Artists subsumes Monogram and increases its offerings (36 films per year)
- 1956: starts making more expensive productions with A-star and directors like William Wyler and Billy Wilder; producer Walter Mirisch, now executive producer, has great influence on the studio
- 1959: the studio suffers a net loss and starts reducing pictures drastically (13 a year)
- 1962: a huge net loss puts the studio into serious trouble

Favoured genres

- westerns
- serials
- gangster films
- horror-science fiction films
- adventure films
- comedies

Famous series

- the Bowery Boys series

New key stars

Leo Gorcey

Huntz Hall

Stanley Clements

2.3 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-1979)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1966: ceases production and becomes a distributor of foreign films
- 1972: starts production of films again, but big budget films translate into little profit
- 1979: runaway inflation and high production costs force the company into bankruptcy

3. GRAND NATIONAL



3.1 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1936-1940)

Golden Age period: foundation and development

- 1936: film exchange manager Edward R. Alperson creates Grand National in 1936; intended to distribute films, it soon begins its own production after acquiring a studio complex
- 1940: unable to carve out a niche in the film industry, the company ceases

Studio executives

- Edward R. Alperson: - president (1936-1938)
- E. W. Hammons: - president (1938-1940)

Favoured genres

- westerns
- mystery serials

Key stars

Tex Ritter
Ken Maynard

Dorothy Page

4. PRODUCERS RELEASING CORPORATION



4.1 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1939-1945)

Golden Age period: foundation and development

- 1939: producer and director brothers Sigmund Neufeld and Sam Newfield form the film production and distribution company Producers Releasing Corporation (PRC), evolved from the defunct Producers Distributing Corporation

Studio executives

- George Batcheller: - head of production

Business structure and philosophy

- makes small-budget B films (inferior quality) shot in a week or less
- makes occasional bigger productions
- has no star names and uses character actors or idle stars

Favoured genres

- westerns
- serials
- action dramas
- comedies
- film noirs
- horror films

Key directors

Sam Newfield
Edgar G. Ulmer

Key stars

Neil Hamilton Patsy Kelly
Eddie Dean
Wallace Ford
Ralph Morgan

4.2 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1947)

Post-War period development

- 1946: the distribution arm is absorbed in the formation of the British film Eagle-Lion Films
- 1947: the studio ceases to exist when the production arm is also absorbed by Eagle-Lion Films

5. AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PICTURES



5.1 POST-WAR ERA (1954-1962)

Post-War period: foundation and development

- 1954: former Realart Pictures sales manager James H. Nicholson and entertainment lawyer Samuel Z. Arkoff form the film production company American Releasing Corp.
- 1955: the studio starts releasing features
- 1956: the studio expands and is renamed American International Pictures, headquartered at Charles Chaplin's former Sunset/La Brea studio – the studio averages 8 films a year

Studio executives

- James H. Nicholson: - president
- Samuel Arkoff: - vice-president

Business philosophy

- dedicated to releasing independently produced, low-budget films packaged as double features, primarily aimed at teenagers and young adults
- audience-grabbing titles that pre-sell the product (an industry first) (titles found first, then script written)
- heavy emphasis and financial investment in marketing and advertising
- uses "focus groups" (another industry first) to find out what teenagers like

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- sensationalistic, "exploitation" movies
- the "AKROFF formula":
 - Action (exciting, entertaining drama)
 - Revolution (novel or controversial themes and ideas)
 - Killing (a modicum of violence)
 - Oratory (notable dialogue and speeches)
 - Fantasy (acted-out fantasies common to the audience)
 - Fornication (sex appeal, for young adults)
- cinematographer Floyd Crosby responsible for the "AIP look: innovative use of surreal color and odd lenses and angles

Favoured genres

- horror films
- sensationalistic juvenile delinquency social problem films
- other "wild youth" films (drag-racing)
- science fiction

- rock & roll musicals
- westerns (early years only)

Famous series

- Roger Corman's Edgar Allen Poe horror cycle of the 1960s

Key directors

Roger Corman

Key stars

Vincent Price

5.2 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-1980)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1963: launches the beach party film genre
- 1966: launches the motorcycle gang film genre
- 1971: starts releasing mainstream films
- 1972: starts releasing some of the "blaxploitation" films; death of James Nicholson
- 1979: the company is suffering because of increased budgets and Arkoff retires and sells American International Pictures to the American television and film production company Filmways
- 1980: becomes a subsidiary production unit and renamed Filmways Pictures

6. OTHER STUDIOS

6.1 MASCOT (1927-1935)

- Mascot Pictures releases serials and occasional features (westerns, war films, literary adaptations)
- chief executive: Ned Levine
- actors include John Wayne and Harry Carey
- merges with Republic Pictures in 1935

6.2 MAJESTIC (1932-1935)

- Mascot Productions releases low-budget films
- head of production: Larry Darmour

III - THE INDEPENDENTS

- the independents were small studios that were actually independent production units that would distribute their films through the major studios

I. SAMUEL GOLDWYN PRODUCTIONS

I.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1923-1928)

Foundation and early development

- 1923: producer Samuel Goldwyn is forced out of his film production company, Goldwyn Pictures (which is acquired a year later by MGM), and forms Samuel Goldwyn Productions – he eventually acquires the Pickford-Douglas Studios lot in West Hollywood and establishes Samuel Goldwyn Studio there
- 1925: begins releasing films through United Artists

I.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

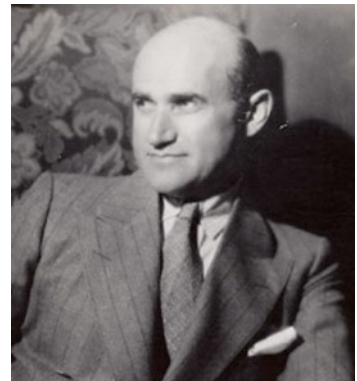
- 1931: receives the first of several Best Film Oscars nominations for a production
- 1941: stops releasing through United Artists and strikes a distributing deal with RKO

Studio mogul

- **Samuel Goldwyn**

Biography

- 1879: born Schmucl Gelbfisz in Warsaw, Poland (Russian Empire) to a Polish Jewish family, son of a used furniture dealer
- 1895: leaves on foot to England where he anglicizes his name to Samuel Goldfish
- 1899: emigrates to the United States and soon becomes a salesman in the garment industry in Gloversville, New York
- 1910: established in New York, he marries the wife of vaudeville performer Jesse S. Lasky and helps in getting Paramount Pictures started
- 1914: produces his first film, Cecil B. DeMille's *The Squaw Man*, with Lasky and Adolf



Zukor

- 1916: is bought out of the fledgling Paramount studio
- 1916: founds the film production company the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation with Broadway producers Edgar and Archibald Selwyn, using an amalgamation of both last names to create the name; he then changes his name to Goldwyn; the studio rents production facilities in Fort Lee, New Jersey
- 1923: is forced out of Goldwyn Pictures and becomes an independent, establishing Samuel Goldwyn Productions
- 1959: produces his final film
- 1974: dies of natural causes in Los Angeles at the age of 94

Personal characteristics and reputation

- relentlessly ambitious
- obstinate and perseverent
- inarticulate and uncultured but determined to be known for taste, vision and excellence
- known for malapropisms, paradoxes and other speech errors since called *Goldwynisms*
- a bad temper
- a genius for publicity

Business structure

- owns his own studio but a one-man operation
- films distributed through other studios

Power and prestige

- a veteran of Old Hollywood

Business philosophy

- unique projects, dictated according to Goldwyn's preferences and whims
- expensive, eminent productions

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- a parvenu and insecure unsophisticate's searching for Class through renting it (adaptations of Eminent Authors: famous novelists & playwrights, etc.): the mark of someone ambitious to be the "biggest producer" without much love or knowledge of the medium or art itself
- frequent use of Broadway stage material and elements
- frequently B-film material displayed with A-film production values
- lack of unity, as befits a one-man studio

Favoured genres

- literary adaptations (dramas)
- romantic dramas
- romantic comedies
- musicals
- biographical/historical dramas

Key directors

George Fitzmaurice
John Ford
King Vidor
Howard Hawks
William Wyler

Key stars

Ronald Colman

Anna Sten

Eddie Cantor

Virginia Mayo

Merle Oberon

David Niven

Gary Cooper

Dana Andrews

I.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1959)**Post-War period development**

- 1952: last year of consecutive yearly releases, last film for RKO and last release for three years
- 1955: releases a new feature through MGM, his next-to-last
- 1959: releases last production through Columbia, a critical and financial failure (Samuel Goldwyn Studio keeps its name until the lot is purchased by Warner Bros. in 1980)

Favoured genres

- fantasy comedy dramas
- romantic dramas
- musicals

New key directors

Norman Z. McLeod

Mark Robson

New key stars

Danny Kaye

Teresa Wright

Farley Granger

2. HOWARD HUGHES

2.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1927-1928)

Foundation and early development

- 1927: producer Howard Hughes launches his career as an independent producer, forming The Caddo Company, and releasing through United Artists

2.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1933, 1941-1945)

Golden Age period development

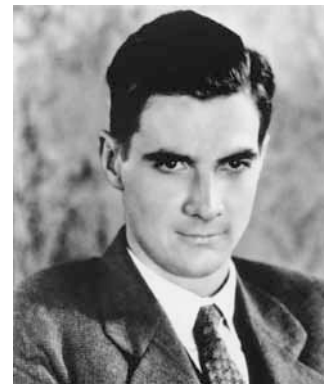
- 1930: directs his own feature, the aviation war film *Hell's Angels*
- 1932: releases the influential gangster drama *Scarface*, the last Caddo Company production and Hughes' last release for eleven years
- 1941: resumes film career with Howard Hughes Productions and the sexually provocative western *The Outlaw*, the release of which is delayed by the censorship board for two years
- 1943: *The Outlaw* obtains a limited release before general release in 1946

Studio mogul

- Howard Hughes

Biography

- 1905: born in Texas
- 1916: an engineering prodigy, builds Houston's first radio transmitter at age 11
- 1919: takes flying lessons at age 14
- 1924: declared an emancipator minor at age 19 following parents' deaths; drops out of Rice University
- 1925: moves to Los Angeles with the goal of making films
- 1926: produces first feature but stops its distribution because of his poor esteem of it
- 1927: launches film producing career
- 1932: founds the Hughes Aircraft Company
- 1935-38: sets airspeed records in his decorated parallel career as an airplane pilot and designer
- 1946: suffers a near-fatal airplane crash
- 1947: builds the Hercules, the largest flying boat ever built
- 1948: gains control of RKO Studios
- 1955: sells RKO
- 1957: releases last production and retires from film industry
- 1966: moves to Las Vegas and starts purchasing casinos; becomes a recluse
- 1972: moves to the Bahamas
- 1976: dies from kidney failure at age 70 on a flight from the Caribbean to Texas



Production characteristics

- releases relatively few films

Key directors

Lewis Milestone

Howard Hawks

2.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1957)**Post-War period development**

- 1948: takes control of RKO Studios and ends career as an independent
- 1955: sells RKO
- 1957: releases last feature

3. WALTER WANGER PRODUCTIONS

3.1 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1934-1945)

Golden Age period: foundation and development

- 1934: producer Walter Wanger leaves MGM and launches Walter Wanger Productions as an independent, distributing through Paramount
- 1936-38: maintains the largest group of stars under contract to any independent producer
- 1937: switches to United Artists for distribution
- 1942: switches to Universal for distribution

Studio mogul

• Walter Wanger

Biography

- 1894: born Walter Feuchtwanger to an upper middle-class Jewish-German American family in San Francisco that values the high arts
- 1905-07: travels and studies in Switzerland with his mother after his father's death; learns French and German
- 1907: moves to New York City with his mother
- 1911-15: studies at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, Heidelberg in Germany, and Oxford, England; gets immersed in drama
- 1915: enters the professional theater world
- 1917-18: serves in the army during the war, then in intelligence and propaganda
- 1920: meets theatrical/movie producer Jesse L. Lasky and starts working for Paramount Studios
- 1921: leaves Paramount for England, where he converts the British Royal Opera house into a cinema theater
- 1923: returns to Paramount and becomes general manager of the company in New York City; responsible during his tenure for bringing in the stars Claudette Colbert, Kay Francis, Miriam Hopkins and the Marx Brothers among others
- 1929: starts producing films for Paramount
- 1931: fired from Paramount and becomes vice-president of Columbia Pictures, where he also produces films
- 1933: leaves Columbia to work as a producer at MGM
- 1934: becomes an independent
- 1940: marries actress Joan Bennett
- 1941-45: massively supports the war effort
- 1951: serves a jail sentence for shooting his wife's agent out of suspicion of adultery
- 1954: produces last film for Walter Wanger Productions
- 1958: produces second to last feature, and last for United Artists
- 1963: produces last film, the big-budget *Cleopatra* for Twentieth Century Fox
- 1968: dies of a heart attack at age 74 in New York City



Personal characteristics and reputation

- known as an intellectual and a socially conscious movie executive, motivated to address politically sensitive subjects

Power and prestige

- for a time, rivals Samuel Goldwyn and David O. Selznick
- produces some of the most highly regarded works of top directors like Hitchcock, Lang and Ford
- regarded as possessing a golden touch akin to that of Darryl F. Zanuck at 20th Century Fox

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- frequent political themes and social issues

Favoured genres

- romantic dramas
- social problem dramas
- mysteries and crime dramas
- war dramas
- political dramas
- romantic comedies
- musicals

Key directors

Raoul Walsh	Tay Garnett
William Seiter	John Rawlins
Fritz Lang	Arthur Lubin
Henry Hathaway	
John Ford	
John Cromwell	

Key stars

Charles Boyer	Loretta Young
Henry Fonda	Beulah Bondi
Alan Baxter	Joan Bennett
Alan Mowbray	Sylvia Sydney
George Raft	Madeleine Carroll
John Halliday	Diana Barrymore

3.2 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1949, 1952-1958)

Post-War period development

- 1946: films start experiencing critical and commercial failure
- 1948: last films distributed through Universal
- 1949: two films distributed through Eagle-Lion Films, followed by three year pause in film release
- 1952: resumes productions distributed through minor studio Allied Artists and occasionally Twentieth Century Fox
- 1958: next to last film released through United Artists

Favoured genres

- romantic dramas
- adventure films
- war films
- musicals
- film noirs
- westerns

New key stars

Robert Cummings

Susan Hayward

4. SELZNICK INTERNATIONAL PICTURES



4.1 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1935-1940, 1943-1945)

Golden Age period: foundation and development

- 1935: producer David Selznick leaves MGM to become an independent, founding Selznick International Pictures with investor John Hay "Jock" Whitney and leasing a section of the RKO Pictures lot in Culver City, California; Whitney becomes CEO and Selznick president
- 1936: Selznick International starts releasing its films, distributed through United Artists; the studio immediately becomes a major force in the industry
- 1936: Whitney's cousin's Pioneer Pictures merges with Selznick International
- 1939: Selznick brings Alfred Hitchcock to America by putting him under contract for SIP
- 1939: releases the record blockbuster *Gone with the Wind* (distributed by MGM)
- 1940: becomes the top-grossing studio in Hollywood but closes down because of tax problems and an ensuing deal with the IRS
- 1943: Selznick establishes Vanguard Films, Inc. as his new production company, still located at the RKO studio and which continues releasing through United Artists

Studio mogul

- **David O. Selznick**

Biography

- 1902: born to a Jewish family in Pittsburgh, son of a silent film distributor (born in Kiev, Ukraine-Russia); raised in New York City
- 1919: works in the film industry for his father; eventually also studies at Columbia University
- 1923: his father's company goes bankrupt
- 1926: established himself in Hollywood, gets a job as a reader in the story department at MGM and advances quickly
- 1928: leaves MGM for Paramount
- 1929: becomes an associate producer for Paramount



- 1930: promoted to producer
- 1931: leaves Paramount to become head of production at RKO
- 1933: returns to MGM as a top producer and executive producer
- 1935: leaves MGM to become an independent
- 1939: brings Alfred Hitchcock to America
- 1948: ends career as full-time producer
- 1949: marries actress Jennifer Jones, manages her career
- 1957: executive produces his last film
- 1965: dies in Hollywood at age 65 of cardiac arrest after several heart attacks

Personal characteristics and reputation

- charming manner, intelligent, blunt, stubborn, impulsive
- arrogance based on vision, articulateness and talent
- micromanages his directors' films and known for his interference
- a workaholic who uses amphetamines
- a seducer of actresses

Business structure

- uses its own studio lot, loaned out from RKO
- a large talent pool (stars, directors) is put under contract

Power and prestige

- rivals the major studios in 1936-1940

Business philosophy

- the release of a few films per year, but very expensive, quality pictures
- the producer (not director) as "auteur", i.e. David Selznick
- talent in directors or writers not vastly praised
- most imposing stars are hired
- grooming and launching of stars (e.g. Ingrid Bergman, Jennifer Jones)

Stylistic and thematic characteristics

- cultural polish, films based on literature (rather than Broadway or the day's Eminent Authors), e.g. Dickens
- a commitment to the classics out of love and respect, not shallow prestige
- faithful adaptations of literary works
- big, long films
- frequent use of Technicolor in 1936-39 when color is rare and prestigious
- gloss and prestige comparable to MGM

Favoured genres

- adaptations of literary classics
- romantic dramas
- romantic comedy dramas

Key directors

John Cromwell William Dieterle
 William A. Wellman
 Alfred Hitchcock

Key stars

Fredrich March

Douglas Fairbanks Jr.

Joseph Cotten

Gregory Peck

Janet Gaynor

Carole Lombard

Ingrid Bergman

Joan Fontaine

Dorothy McGuire

Jennifer Jones

4.2 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1948)**Post-War period development**

- 1946: Selznick Releasing Organization is created to distribute Vanguard Films products
- 1948: ends his production company; goes on to executive produce a few films between 1949 and 1957

5. WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS

5.1 PRE-CLASSIC ERA (1923-1928)

Foundation and early development

- 1923: cartoon animators Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks, and Disney's brother Roy, set up Walt Disney Productions, a film animation production company, in Hollywood following the bankruptcy of their previous company in Kansas City
- 1924: starts producing exclusively the successful Alice comedy shorts, featuring a live action character in an animated landscape, distributed through Margaret J. Winkler
- 1927: end of the Alice shorts and association with Margaret J. Winkler
- 1928: creation of the Mickey Mouse cartoon character and the first sound cartoons, distributed through Celebrity Productions
- 1929: launches the *Silly Symphonies* musical animation shorts series

5.2 GOLDEN AGE ERA (1929-1945)

Golden Age period development

- 1930: signs a new distribution deal with Columbia Pictures
- 1930: creates the Pluto character
- 1932: switches from Columbia to United Artists for distribution
- 1932: wins an Academy Award for the creation of the extremely popular Mickey Mouse character
- 1932: creates the Goofy character
- 1932: starts using three-strip Technicolor
- 1934: creates the Donald Duck character
- 1934: starts costly three-year production of first animated feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*
- 1936: switches to RKO for distribution
- 1938: the very successful *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is released, the first ever animated full-length feature
- 1939: builds a new Walt Disney Studios campus in Burbank, California

Studio mogul

- **Walt Disney**

Biography

- 1901: born in Chicago to parents of Irish-Canadian and German-American descent
- 1904: family moves to Marceline, Missouri, where Walt discovers drawing
- 1911: family moves to Kansas City and Walt attends Saturday courses at the Kansas City Art Institute
- 1917: family back to Chicago; Walt attends night courses at Chicago Art Institute and becomes the high school newspaper cartoonist



- 1917-18: drops out of school and joins the Red Cross during the war, working in France
- 1919: moves to Kansas City and starts working in designing ads
- 1922: becomes an animator and produces cartoons under the banner “Laugh-o-Grams” for a Kansas City theater owner
- 1923: after company goes bankrupt, forms new company, Walt Disney Productions, established in Hollywood
- 1947: becomes a founding member of the anti-communist Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals and testifies before the House Un-American Activities Committee
- 1950: produces his first television special
- 1954: debuts first weekly television program
- 1955: opens the Disneyland amusement park in Anaheim, California
- 1966: dies of lung cancer at age 65 in Burbank, California

Personal characteristics and reputation

- known for his authoritarianism and insistence upon absolute artistic control

Genres

- animated shorts and features

5.3 POST-WAR ERA (1946-1962)

Post-War period development

- 1946: releases an animation-live action hybrid, *Song of the South*
- 1950: resumes release of animated features after budget-saving period of releasing inexpensive package films
- 1950: releases first all-live-action feature
- 1950: enjoys first post-war year of profits
- 1954: ends distribution deal with RKO; starts distributing films with the new Disney-owned Buena Vista Film Distribution Company, Inc., thereby also increasing profits
- 1954: profits from animation hit a high mark of \$6.5 million
- 1960: suffers first year of net loss since the 1940s because of lavish expenditure on *Sleeping Beauty*
- 1961: vice-president Bill Anderson starts running day-to-day studio activity
- 1961: enjoys another high-mark net profit year, at \$4.4 million

Favoured genres

- animation
- adventure films
- comedies

Key directors

Ken Annakin
Robert Stevenson

Key stars

Richard Todd	Dorothy McGuire
Fess Parker	Janet Munro
Fred MacMurray	Jane Wyman

James MacArthur
Brian Keith
Tommy Kirk

5.4 POST-CLASSIC ERA (1963-PRESENT)

Post-Classic Era development

- 1966: death of Walt Disney; Roy Disney becomes chairman
- 1967: company starts slow seventeen-year decline due to directionless leadership
- 1971: Roy Disney dies; Donn Tatum becomes chairman and Card Walker president
- 1982: Walt Disney's son-in-law, Ron W. Miller, succeeds Card Walker as CEO
- 1983: Walt Disney Pictures is created as the new film banner
- 1984: studio narrowly escapes buyout attempt; Walt Disney's nephew, Roy E. Disney, removes Ron W. Miller as CEO and brings in Michael Eisner; Eisner brings leadership vision and increases quality of theatrical releases
- 1984: creates Touchstone Pictures label to aim films at more mature audiences; Disney/Buena Vista becomes acknowledged as a major studio
- 1986: name Walt Disney Productions is changed to The Walt Disney Company
- 1986: studio finishes third in industry profits, behind Paramount and Warner Brothers
- 1989: studio returns to making successful animated features, starting with *The Little Mermaid*; next ten years is called the "Disney Renaissance"
- 1993: acquires independent film distributor Miramax
- 1998: Buena Vista Motion Pictures Group is created to handle and oversee the various Walt Disney film production companies; it reports to Walt Disney Studios, which reports to The Walt Disney Company
- 2000: Robert Iger becomes president
- 2000: studio finishes first in the Hollywood film industry profits
- 2001: end of "Disney Renaissance" following smaller successes and some commercial bombs
- 2001-07: finishes between first and fourth in industry profit lead for each year
- 2003: finishes again at the top of the Hollywood film industry profits, with a studio record of \$1.5 billion
- 2005: Robert Iger replaces Michael Eisner as CEO, rebuilds Disney brand by focusing on core assets
- 2005: turns to computer-animated films in collaboration with Pixar Animation Studios
- 2006: acquires Pixar
- 2007: the name Buena Vista is dropped and the Buena Vista Motion Pictures Group becomes the Walt Disney Motion Pictures Group, Inc.
- 2008-09: finishes sixth and fifth in the top grossing studios
- 2009: Roy E. Disney dies, the last member of the family to be actively involved in the company
- 2010-11: finishes fourth both years in the top grossing studios

Current status

- one of the six major American studios