Film Cycles and the Hollywood Studio System

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Thesis Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to extend the prevailing understanding of film cycles beyond the dominant focus on topicality, exploitation, and low-budget productions in post-Classical Hollywood. It contributes to the field a detailed study of cycles from the 1930s to the 1960s, the period of the studio system and its immediate aftermath, and uncovers the specific ways in which these cycles were shaped by their surrounding industrial contexts and market environments.

A film cycle is currently understood as a short-term rise in the production of a particular film type: producers seek to replicate the commercially successful features of a prior hit, which results in a cluster of imitative films. The cycle declines when the inundation of these similar films saturates the market and renders their production no longer commercially viable. To date, cycle studies have focused almost exclusively on the first half of this process, the arena of production. A cycle often takes shape in circulation, however, through the way the flow of movies through cinemas is manipulated during the process of distribution. The sudden of influx of films of a certain type is then registered by viewers as a flood.

By foregrounding patterns of distribution, spaces of exhibition, and modes of consumption as key components of the form and mechanics of cycles, this thesis explores areas that have been hitherto overlooked. In examining cycles from this perspective, this study develops a methodology for defining cycles based on an analysis of the industry and trade discourse, and built upon the immediate understanding of cycles by contemporaneous industry practitioners. The application of this framework to six case studies of different cycles builds a more inclusive conception of the form, operation, and function of film cycles. The case studies selected defy the 'typical' model of film cycles established in recent studies. They comprise girl reporter programmers, prestigious historical biopics, all-star wartime musicals, wide-ranging anti-prejudice pictures, and blockbuster biblical epics. The final study of the early 1960s beach party pictures considers the more familiar form of an independent, low-budget cycle from the market-centred understanding developed through the course of the thesis, and underscores the insights that can be gained through this new perspective. Each of these studies illuminates the pragmatic business policies pursued by the Hollywood industry at particular periods, and demonstrates how the study of cycles can be a useful tool for film historians.

Cycles were a useful profit-making strategy within the high output of the Hollywood studio system, where recycling and imitation were built into production practices and the reproduction of recent successes were a means to mitigate risk. The way that these films were distributed, however, gave the

cycles their form. The timing of the films' release into cinemas and the speed of their circulation through the exhibition sector could influence how quickly audiences would tire of the cycle, thereby affecting its overall lifespan. In exploring how the studios balanced the flow of film cycles to viewers, this thesis makes evident the majors' ongoing use of distribution to regulate the market, and highlights the fundamental importance of this under-researched sector of the industry.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Film cycles are groups of similar films that are produced, circulated and consumed in a concentrated time period. As a result of this identifiable lifespan, cycles hold a traceable outline of initiation, increase, and decline. In recent years, the film cycle has emerged as a significant tool for film historians. The grouping of films according to the framework of the cycle has developed as a means to examine films within their original historical context and to consider their interconnections with those produced, circulated and consumed immediately alongside them. Current analytical conceptions of cycles and their operations remain relatively narrow, however, being centred on certain film types and largely concerned with questions of production in a post-Classical Hollywood context. A more thorough examination of the various forms that cycles assume across different industrial contexts can extend our understanding of cycles and their functions. Cycles have a commercial basis, as similar films are produced to capitalise on other companies' successful features, and cycles' limited life span foregrounds their foundation in a particular historical moment. This grounding in time, manifest both in the increased production of similar films and their circulation through theatres, also highlights the inherently reactive nature of cycles' operations as the two processes of supply and demand feed into one another. The life of the cycle remains largely dependent on its economic performance and ability to remain attractive to audiences, or to carry out its designated industrial function.

Following this focus, this thesis argues that cycles are not simply about increases in production of a particular film type, but are formed through the distribution and release of films in close proximity. Across the course of this study, it emerges that the distribution practices employed for different cycles determine their particular forms. My examination of the circulation of cycles uncovers the significance of considering cycles' flow, both in terms of their longevity and general life span, and the velocity of cycles and the rate of their release. This emphasises the importance of the role of internal and external market forces to the study of cycles, as well as factors such as the speed of product absorbency and saturation. This thesis will contend that viewing Classical Hollywood cycles from this industrial perspective, as concentrations of commodity output, enables the cycle framework to be employed as a significant critical tool in examining the economic

operations of the film industry. I demonstrate that distribution is a significant factor contributing to the operation of cycles and, more generally, to a conception of films as products circulated through a historical marketplace. Cycles tell us about more than just the production policies surrounding their origins; tracing cycles across their life spans and through the cascading distribution chain to audiences illustrates the multiple functions that they could perform for various sectors of the industry. This serves to broaden our understanding of cycles and their operations, and, concomitantly, of the particular distribution frameworks developed under the Hollywood studio system.

Cycles, genres and history

Cycle studies, as an historical means to situate films with shared characteristics, is clearly aligned with revisionist approaches to genre. Rick Altman's *Film/Genre* and Steve Neale's *Genre and Hollywood* both seek a pragmatic approach to genre films that considers their multiple functions for different users. Their work calls for a new focus on how generic labels and categories were variously applied to films at separate points in time. The study of cycles provides a means to focus the examination of groups of films that were equally historically and discursively constructed.

Altman identifies how traditional notions of genre conceive them to be inherently transhistorical categories holding clear, stable identities. He argues that synchronic approaches focusing on establishing similarities across time often erase historical difference.[1] The prevalent approach draws on the organising structures of mythology to envisage genres as broad categories into which films can be sorted, and which treat films as part of continuous, universal classes of texts that share fundamental characteristics. Such studies are reliant on the box office as indicators of 'success' and neglect to consider the real and immediate entertainment function of these films for audiences. Instead, these conventional approaches view genre as holding a ritual or ideological function, as expressions of the themes and tensions fundamental to human experience, or

[1] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), 19-20. Altman argues that these often centre on films deemed to have express the essence of a genre, such as Thomas Schatz's notion of a generic 'prototype', or treat genres as a representational form that stems from a fundamental human quality, such as Robert Lang's notion of the 'melodramatic imagination'.

as vehicles that carry to audiences the messages of the capitalist mass media.[2] Altman and Neale's work decisively rejects such strands of socio-cultural genre studies, which they posit as static and essentialist. As Altman argues, 'genres are not inert categories shared by all, but discursive claims made by real speakers for particular purposes in specific situations'.[3] This opens the understanding of genres to a consideration of their discursive basis, with Neale building on Altman's argument to define the genre as 'a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses systems of expectation, categories and labels, groups of texts and the conventions that govern them all'.[4] Neale's work explores how genres function within the Hollywood industry, identifying their operation as cost-effective product lines that enabled the studios to meet the obligations of variety and difference, regulating demand and the nature of output while minimising risk and maximising audience appeal and profit potential.[5]

Both Altman and Neale identify cycles as ongoing industrial activities that manifest at specific moments in time, and discuss their operations in practical, commercial terms. This consideration is evident in Neale's description of cycles as units of calculation under the studio system. He argues that annual studio production schedules were largely built around cycles, alongside star-genre formulations, production trends and generic hybrids, as studios sought to spread risk by hedging their bets across a variety of product. [6] In this way, cycles work as a classificatory term and indicate a type of production practice that is more specific than the broad categories of genre. In exploring the operations of genre in their work on westerns, Tag Gallagher and Peter Stanfield have argued that genres are complex and unstable groupings, rather than historically progressive categories that develop in a teleological, linear fashion over time. Features such as parody, or a self-consciousness of form, Gallagher argues, do not represent a late developmental stage of the genre, but were equally evident in the silent era.[7] Stanfield also states that a cyclical conception is more appropriate than an evolutionary view, with genres operating within

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[2] Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: BFI: 2000), 226-227. See the work of Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, Sam Peckinpah: Studies of Authorship Within the Western* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969). Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genre: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: Random House, 1981). John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975). Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).
[3] Altman, *Film/Genre*, 100.
[4] Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 1.
[5] Ibid, 243.
[6] Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 243.
[7] Tag Gallagher, 'Shootout at the Genre Coral: problems of the "Evolution of the Western"', *Film Genre Reader III* ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 266.

and across Hollywood's production trends and cycles, and marked by localised, as well as industrial, cultural and social influences.[8]

If genres can develop within and across cycles, cycles equally operate within and across genres. When genres are viewed according to Altman and Neale's conception of historically-based, discursively identified film groups, all genres have cycles as their basis. Following the work of Gallagher, Stanfield and Neale, this is evident in the example of the western genre.[9] Easily identified through their readily recognizable iconography, westerns were consistently produced in the first half of the twentieth century. The majority of these took the form of low budget, serialized productions, as the films were an output staple for the Poverty Row and minor studios. Yet above this general base line of filmmaking are moments of a concentrated production increase, particularly evident when the major studios joined in the making of westerns. When examined more closely, these clusters often share particular characteristics, such as the common narrative that united the silent outlaw films of the late teens, or the shared format found in the semi-biographical pictures of historical gunslingers in the late 1930s; some even displayed a particular thematic approach, as in the 1950s civic consciousness pictures.[10] While such western clusters were tied to specific time periods, they could also periodically reappear. For example, cycles of westerns unified by a sympathetic depiction of race relations with Native Americans are evident in the early teens, the mid 1950s, and again in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[11] Despite holding a central concern, each cycle was specifically grounded in its localized industrial and historical context and a broader generic label was

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[8] Peter Stanfield, *Hollywood, Westerns and the 1930s: The Lost Trail* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001), 6-7.
[9] For Neale's discussion of Westerns, see *Genre and Hollywood*, 133-142.
[10] Outlaw films include *Desert Law* (Triangle, 1918), *Hell Bent* (Universal, 1918), *Hands Down* (Universal, 1918), *Marked Men* (Universal, 1919), *The Midnight Stage* (Pathé Exchange, 1919), *The Sheriff's Son* (Paramount, 1919), and *The Lady of the Dug-Out* (Ernest Shipman, 1919). The historical gunslinger films include *Jesse James* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1939), *Man of Conquest* (Republic, 1939), *Dodge City* (Warner Bros., 1939), *Frontier Marshall* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1939), *Geronimo* (Paramount, 1940), and *The Return of Frank James* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1940). The civic consciousness cycles, stemming from *High Noon* (United Artists, 1952), include *Three Hours to Kill* (Columbia, 1954), *Silver Lode* (RKO, 1954), *Decision at Sundown* (Columbia, 1957), *3:10 to Yuma* (Columbia, 1957).
[11] Kevin Brownlow relates the 1911 libel charge brought against Hollywood producers for their inaccurate portrayals of Native Americans and Roosevelt's movement for conservation and attempts at reparation as influencing the production of pictures, including *The Friendless Indian* (General Film Company, 1913), *Lone Star* (Mutual Film, 1916), and *Her Own People* (Paramount Pictures, 1917) as part of this cycle. Kevin Brownlow, *The War, The West, and the Wilderness* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1979). Neale further identifies separate cycles amongst the hundreds of silent Indian pictures produced in the 'teens, exploring the place Native American characters in modern day American society, issues of miscegenation, depictions of the historic frontier wars, and dramas that centre on Indian characters. Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 136-137. The forerunner of the 1950s sympathetic portrayals was *Broken Arrow* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1950), with *The White Feather* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1955), *Chief Crazy Horse* (Universal, 1955), *The Indian Fighter* (United Artists, 1955), The *Last Hunt* (MGM, 1956), *Run of the Arrow* (RKO, 1957), and following with the mid-decade upsurge in Western popularity and production. The late 1960s and early 1970s pictures were part of the production trend for 'youth westerns', and include *Hombre* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1967), *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here* (Universal, 1969), *Little Big Man* (National General Pictures, 1970), and *Soldier Blue* (Embassy Pictures, 1970).

not attributed to this form of western, beyond a vague, infrequently-used designation of the ‘Indian western’ subgenre.

This thesis will demonstrate how the basis of genres lies in the intermittent recurrence of recognisable cycles, which in genre studies are discursively and synchronically linked together into a broad category with little temporal specificity. I will also explore how cycles can exist outside recognisable genres, drawn from a topical event or founded on a hybridity that combines successful features from a range of pictures into a new formula. For instance, the cycle of 1950s juvenile delinquent pictures, despite loose ties to the general category of social problem pictures, does not hold an immediate association with a more readily used generic category. Cycles work alongside a discursive approach to genre but, by studying film groups on a local level, we are able to consider and account for films that fall outside of established generic categories.

Cycle studies utilise the classificatory, industrial term of ‘cycle’ that was commonly employed by both studio personnel and the trade press at the time. The commentary on cycles that ran through the Classical Hollywood trade press raises questions regarding the determinants that drove these sudden increases in the production and circulation of similar films. In some instances, the development of cycles is identified as a response to a news event or a current social issue. Such topical film cycles have received the majority of critical attention in cycle studies. These works generally focus on the initial stages of the cycle’s development as producers rush to exploit public interest in an issue, and identify the decline in production as a result of a faltering box office once the audience’s attention has shifted elsewhere. Such studies are primarily concerned with exploring the relationship between the films and the contemporary cultural discourses or social anxieties upon which the cycle drew. This local perspective of cycles, and their connection to a brief moment of production and release, is fundamental to how the cycles have been previously used to explore film history. Recent work by cycle scholars that explore the topical resonance of cycles in social and cultural terms can be found in the studies of Amanda Ann Klein, Peter Stanfield, and contributors to the 2013 cycle edition of *New Review of Film and Television Studies*.[12]

[12] Amanda Ann Klein, *American Film Cycles* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011)., Peter Stanfield, ‘“Pix Biz Spurts with War Fever”; Film and the Public Sphere – Cycles and Topicality’, *Film History*, Vol. 25, No. 1-2 (2013), 215-226. Frank Krutnik and Peter Stanfield, ‘Editorial: Cycles of Sensation: Popular Media, Thrills and Outrage’, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2013), 34-55.

For Stanfield, the historical basis of film cycles and the charting of their development and interconnections provide a way to make social and cultural change visible while still situating cycles in the current production trends of the film industry. This works against traditional genre studies' connotations of a transcendence of production context.[13] Writing on the cycle of 1950s gangster biopics, he states:

> Mapping the repetitions, overlaps and fusions that form the associations that link the individual films within the cycle and in turn the liaisons and connections between various cycles of crime fictions in this period helps to produce a better understanding of film production trends than can be achieved by traditional genre analysis, because cycles are inherently temporal while genres tend to be conceived as a-historical.[14]

Stanfield's work is based on the premise that films, as cultural products, register the topical in elements such as their visual objects and music, which mark the shifts and variations of the society in which they were developed.[15] Stanfield utilises cycle studies as part of his history of the public sphere, exploring the relationship of films to their surrounding social context. His case studies centre on the 1950s and include considerations of juvenile delinquents, musical fads such as rock'n'roll, and hot rod and other subcultural forms, alongside the cycles of related pictures.[16] Stanfield avoids the deterministic and symptomatic analysis of studies that posit a direct correspondence between films and their context, instead grounding his work in an understanding of how cycles themselves were used by industry producers, distributors, and exhibitors as a means to manage and understand change. Stanfield's latest article on the late 1960s biker cycle moves further towards a consideration of how the distribution, consumption and market forces of the period contributed to the seriality of the cycle's form.[17]

Like Stanfield, Klein argues that the timeliness of cycles, in contrast to broad, transhistorical conceptions of genre, render them useful social documents; they can 'serve as a cross-section of a specific moment in time, accurately revealing the state of

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[13] Stanfield, '"Pix Biz Spurts with War Fever"', 219.

[14] Peter Stanfield, 'Punks! Topicality and the 1950s Gangster Biopic Cycle', *Media, Popular Culture and the American Century*, Bolton, Kinsley and Olsson, Jan (eds.) (London: John Libbey, 2010), 212.

[15] Peter Stanfield, *The Cool and the Crazy: Pop Fifties Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015). *Peter* Stanfield, 'Crossover: Sam Katzman's *Switchblade Calypso Bop Reefer Madness Swamp Girl* or "Bad Jazz", calypso, beatnik's and rock'n'roll in 1950s teenpix', *Popular Media*, No. 3 (2010), 438.

[16] Peter Stanfield, 'Intent to Speed: Cyclical Production, Topicality, and the 1950s Hot Rod Movie', *New Review of Film and Television*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2013), 92-110. Stanfield, 'Punks! Topicality and the 1950s Gangster Biopic Cycle', 185-215. Stanfield, 'Crossover', 437-455.

[17] Peter Stanfield, 'Run, Angel, Run: Serial Production and the Biker Movie, 1966-1972', Austin Fisher and Johnny Walker (eds.) *Grindhouse: Cultural Exchange on 42nd Street, and Beyond* (London: Bloomsbury Academic. 216), 73-91.

contemporary politics, prevalent social ideologies, aesthetic trends, and popular desires and anxieties'.[18] As a whole, Klein's work is focused on presenting cycle studies as a viable means to approach genre. Using Altman's work as her basis, she locates the difference between cycles and genres in their varying topicality, temporality, communication with audiences, perceived stability, and functionality. Klein also makes a distinction between intrageneric cycles that occur within and make up the basis of a larger genre, and intergeneric cycles that begin as independent entities. This distinction seems somewhat arbitrary, however, given her argument that both forms are equally useful for their localised expression and interaction with historical and social concerns, and the understanding of genres as unstable, discursive categories in themselves.

For Klein, the primacy of cycles' attempts to capitalise on audience interest ties them to the sensationalism of exploitation films and to low-budget pictures swiftly assembled for quick profits. In her work *American Film Cycles,* Klein focuses on the representations of social change in popular culture and how the industry capitalises upon such representations. In this framework, she regards cycles as being useful in revealing how contemporary issues were discussed, subcultures shaped, and social upheaval both reflected upon and exploited. Yet Klein posits this process as an interaction with the 'historical Zeitgeist', and presents cycles as 'fossils' to be studied. This overlooks the tenets of revisionist genre approaches that foreground discursivity as an attempt to avoid such directly causal links between films and their context and to deflect generalised assumptions of how films were viewed. Klein states that the time-frame of cycles provides a localised focus with more precise boundaries than genres, making it 'easier to make conclusive statements about their use and function'.[19] For Klein, this function tends to be the exploitation of contemporary social anxieties, specifically those around youth, as she returns to this theme in her case studies of the 1930s Dead End Kids films, 1950s juvenile delinquency pictures, and the 1990s ghetto action cycle.

This understanding of cycles' function, and the general tendency to focus on topical cycles, is limited. The Classical Hollywood trade press routinely identified non-topical pictures as cycles. We need to broaden our understanding of cycles by moving beyond the current characterisation of cycles as low budget exploitation films. A comparison of a

[18] Klein, *American Film Cycles*, 9.
[19] Ibid, 9.

wide range of cycles reveals their complex and reactive nature, the multiple functions they performed, and the competing discursive claims and different values they held for various users. The industrial approach of this thesis includes an exploration of the decision-making process throughout all levels of the industry, querying why the productions were predicted to be profitable, what the distributors hoped to achieve in the method of circulation, and how they were exhibited in cinemas and viewed by audiences. By taking this approach I avoid constructing conclusive claims about cycles as straightforward reflections of an historical moment and foreground the commercial imperatives that drove the Hollywood industry.

Such concerns are also evident in Richard Nowell's work on cycles, which identifies how the chronological progression of a cycle over time enables it to be usefully studied not simply for its social and cultural interactions, but also as a means to examine industrial developments, market shifts, and changing business strategies. In cycle studies Nowell envisions a combination of the analysis of discursive understandings with empirical research into industrial practices and processes, which he identifies as the two dominant approaches that have emerged in recent genre studies.[20] Nowell's work centres on the cycle of the late 1970s Hollywood teen slasher pictures and he establishes how the cycle adheres to the principal facets of genre, namely the ability to work as blueprint, structure, contract, and label.[21] Although they were not labelled as 'teen slashers' at the time, Nowell argues that they were consistently recognised as belonging together in an identifiable group. For Nowell, the ability to fulfil these criteria locate the teen slashers as a 'film type' founded on a similar narrative structure.

Nowell constructs a model of film cycles that identifies several distinct chronological phases of development. He holds this to be transferrable to other types of films, historical periods, and national contexts, a claim which will be tested in subsequent chapters of this thesis.[22] Defining cycles as spikes in filmmaking above the base level production of a particular film type, he suggests that a cycle forms once a film that differs from contemporaneous hits performs well financially or is seen to have economic potential. In describing this process, Nowell argues against the prevalent 'one-hit' view of cycle

[20] Richard Nowell, *Blood Money: A History of the First Teen Slasher Cycle* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 15.
[21] Altman, *Film/Genre*, 14, drawing on the work of Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 110.
[22] Nowell, *Blood Money*, 43.

initiation, arguing that a single hit is not enough to stimulate widespread production. Prudent filmmakers and distributors need further evidence of commercial viability, generally in the form of an additionally successful film that has capitalized on the former's blueprint.[23] This green-lighting process is ultimately determined by assessments of comparative profit potential, and the capacity to maintain the supply chain that links producers to consumers. It is when these conditions change that the specific film types cease to be produced and the cycle declines.[24] Elaborating on his understanding of film cycles in a later article, Nowell distinguishes between 'cycles' as the concentrated *release* of quantities of similar film types, and identifies the increase in the *production* of similar films in terms of a 'production trend'.[25] Although these two activities can and do occur separately, for the purposes of this study a cycle will be considered as an interrelated enterprise in the production and circulation of Hollywood feature films. To a large degree this is the result of my focus on the 1930s to 1950s, the period of the Hollywood studio system and its aftermath, where films were primarily produced for and consumed by audiences in cinemas. This relationship is complicated in the post-studio period with the expansion of non-theatrical markets, and accompanying changes in accessibility and the modes of viewing films.

Cycles and the Hollywood studio system

Significant inroads have clearly been made into the field of cycle studies. The scholarly works discussed in the previous section have demonstrated important ways to reconceive genre, precipitated debates over methodological approaches, and advocated for localised, contextually grounded and discursive studies. Yet these premises can be tested and extended further still. For instance, there is a need to explore the various and sometimes conflicting ways that cycles themselves were understood by contemporaries within and peripheral to Hollywood. Similarly, the numerous types of film cycles that sit outside the current exemplary case studies deserve consideration, including prestige and big budget cycles, as well as routine programmer productions. A closer, more nuanced examination

[23] Richard Nowell, 'Hollywood Don't Skate: U.S. Production Trends, Industry Analysis and the Roller Disco Movie', *New Review of Film and Television*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2013), 76.
[24] Nowell, *Blood Money*, 47.
[25] Nowell, 'Hollywood Don't Skate', 74.

of the additional industry functions that cycles enact, beyond their basic commerciality, is also required. Through a series of case studies I will here offer a more inclusive understanding of cycles through an examination of cycles that resist or contradict the current conception. This view establishes the mutability and complexity of cycles, and illustrates how perceptions of cycles shift across different historical and industrial environments. To explore these questions, I turn to the Hollywood studio system and its immediate aftermath, which is a period yet to receive an in-depth consideration in cycle studies.

In combining this discourse analysis with archival research, my industrial approach illustrates how the particular structure of the studio system gave rise to specific forms of film cycles. Following Douglas Gomery's industrial organisation model, I consider the development of cycles in relation to Hollywood's oligopolistic structure and mode of mass production.[26] As well as being a response to perceptions of consumer demand for particular film types, cycles can be understood in terms of 'market conduct', as the Hollywood studios reacted to one another's product, and as a calculated strategy for mitigating risk.[27] Cycles that operated within this industry structure and historic marketplace are a suitable object for microeconomic enquiry. As Thomas Schatz and John Sedgwick both identify in their works on the studio system, localised studies of a company's conduct and policies can shed light on the industry's behaviour at a larger operational level.[28] The various functions performed by the cycles illuminate the wider business strategies pursued by Hollywood as the industry responded to the effect of external forces on its economic environment. My consideration of the specific industrial organisation of the Hollywood studio system provides a basis for comparison with other scholars' case studies of cycles operating in later contexts.

Alongside discourse analysis, this thesis builds on extensive empirical research into the Hollywood trade press. The key trade publications used include *Variety*, *Motion Picture*

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[26] Gomery's industry organisation model centres on questions of 'how profit maximising business concerns interact with the market forces of supply and demand' and examines the structure, conduct and performance of media corporations such as the Hollywood studios. Douglas Gomery, 'Media Economics: Terms of Analysis', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 6 (1989), 43-44.

[27] Douglas Gomery, 'Hollywood as Industry', *American Cinema and Hollywood: Critical Approaches*, Pamela Church Gibson and John W. Hill (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19.

[28] Thomas Schatz, 'Film Industry Studies and Hollywood History', *Media Industries: History, Theory and Method*, J. Holt and A. Perrin (eds.) (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 47. John Sedgwick, 'Richard B. Jewell's Film Grosses, 1929-51: The CJ Trevlin Ledger: A Comment', *Historical Journal of Radio, Film and Television*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1994), 51.

Herald and *Motion Picture Daily*, *Film Daily*, *Harrison's Reports* and *The Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin*. The trade announcements and insider commentary were key in establishing the studio policies and industry debates surrounding my case studies of cycles. The publications were significant for their film reviews that frequently identified individual pictures as part of wider cycles. I used these designations and labels to establish the parameters of particular cycles. I also mined material from archive collections of Hollywood studio personnel, and gathered information from press books, inter-office correspondences, distribution plans, research scrapbooks, contracts and legal files, to establish how the film cycles were positioned in the industry and viewed by contemporaries.

The trade reviews also estimated how these films would play with different audience sectors. In the absence of material directly from viewers, these assessments, as well exhibitor reports such as *Motion Picture Herald's* 'What the Picture Did for Me' section were crucial in building a picture of the films' reception. To further explore the cycles from the perspective of exhibitors and audiences, I identified four locations with accessible newspaper archives. I searched the local newspapers for announcements of their theatre programs and for details of the screenings of the films in my cycle case studies. I compiled any available background information on the theatres to establish the context in which these films were viewed by different audience groups. These sample exhibition sites include the city of Cedar Rapids, in Iowa, a mid-western industrial centre which had a population of approximately 60,000 in the late 1930s, and housed several large downtown theatres that were affiliated with the Paramount studio. Corsicana, a small Texan town with a population under 20,000 in 1940, contained several small, independently run theatres, expanding to include several drive-ins added in the 1950s. Lewiston, Maine, and Ellensburg, Washington, were both small college towns whose theatres serviced the local region, and contained both medium sized circuits and smaller independent theatres. Examining the actual exhibition of the cycle in cinemas foregrounds how cycles can be understood as something experienced by viewers, created by the films' distribution in close proximity to one another in both spatial and temporal terms.

Given my focus on the industrial operations of cycles, I deliberately selected case studies that demonstrate the various functions of cycles. While some of these examples may seem somewhat anomalous in relation to the cycles most often discussed in the existing

literature, understandings based solely on typical examples can be reductive, falling into the 'circularity' pitfalls of genre definitions identified by Andrew Tudor as part of the 'empiricist dilemma' and *a priori* approaches.[29] Instead, analysing a range of cycles serves to broaden our overall understanding. While I establish a general explanation of cycles' workings in Classical Hollywood, an attempt to posit an exclusive definition or universal model might serve only to raise boundaries around the conception of cycles akin to those I am attempting to break. Rather, the cue can again be taken from Altman and Neale's discursive approach to genre. Here cycles can be studied in terms of their perception and discussion by contemporary users, with these discourses themselves setting the parameters for the understanding of cycles. A degree of interpretation is unavoidable in the analysis of empirical evidence but my attempt to situate these cycles contextually, and to locate the surrounding historical determinants, enables a study of the discursive construction of cycles by contemporaries, rather imposing one externally.

I deliberately forgo textual analysis in the thesis in favour of industrial analysis. This is a means to approach cycles from a perspective different from those that currently dominate cycle studies, to consider questions of economic strategies and market forces rather than those of representation and interpretation. In doing so, I also avoid falling into a selective symptomatic analysis that isolates the cycles from the films surrounding them and over-attributes meaning and representational significance to the films' content.

Finally, there are limitations in the information available for the Classical Hollywood time period. Although a consideration of how cycles were related to moviegoing practices and their perception by audiences is desirable, in this study such a discussion is necessarily restricted to the way that film cycles were exhibited, programmed and promoted in a small selection of theatres, their critical reception in newspapers and fan magazines, and from the discourses of exhibitors claiming to speak on their audiences' behalf. With the scope of this study stretching from the 1930s to the 1960s, my reliance on contemporary industry trade discourses avoids imposing a narrative of straightforward chronological development. These trade discourses were often repetitive, expressing surprisingly similar anxieties, defences, and solutions to cycles, despite being decades apart. The shifts in Hollywood's practices were not a coherently continuous process. The

[29] Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 131-150.

case studies bring to the fore the momentary preoccupations of the industry at the time of cycle, revealing both the policies that the cycle enacted and the response to these policies across the industry. In this way, cycle studies offer a way to write film history that considers the cracks in the master narratives of industrial progress and the gaps in generic trajectories; they allow us to understand the repetitions and discontinuities, the reactive and often conflicting practices that cycles were seen to embody.

This thesis consists of six case studies of film cycles from the era of the Hollywood studio system and its immediate aftermath. Each case study explores the individual operations of a cycle and its enactment of specific functions within the industry. My study of these historical, discursively-constructed groups highlights distribution and circulation as key factors in the operations of cycles. Arranged in chronological order, each case study builds upon the last to explore a different dimension of cycles, such as production contexts, distribution policies and exhibitor responses. Film cycles are created in the discursive act that labels the films as belonging to a particular group. Beyond a collection of film objects, cycles are dynamic processes located within a constantly responding industry. Such cycles could be used to enact particular studio policies or act as a publicity tool, while the industrial discourses that surrounded cycles were used to articulate the positions of opposition and disempowerment occupied by other industry sectors, particularly independent theatre owners.

Through the six cycles, I uncover their ability to operate in multiple ways and to fulfil a diverse range of functions, with individual cycles working at different points in time to target particular market sectors, demonstrate technological processes, generate particular discourses, and advertise a certain image of the industry. The first four case studies extend our understanding of what a film cycle is in the Classical Hollywood context. Through these chapters it emerges that one of the key aspects defining the form and operation of cycles was their circulation. The final two case studies concentrate on the immediate post-Classical Hollywood era and examine the effect of shifts in industry structure and policy on film cycles. Distribution is further foregrounded in my consideration of these two cycles. Here I explore how the circulation of the films was used to develop particular distribution frameworks, consolidate the power of the major studios and foster new audiences in a changing market place. My conclusion briefly

considers how ongoing developments in circulation continue to structure film cycles and points to avenues for further research.

The first chapter will briefly outline the conceptions of cycles that were prominent in the trade and industry discourses of the studio era, and how they functioned for producers as an economic strategy to reduce risk. Discussions of film cycles, their operations and their value, were evident in the trade press across this era but differed according to the position that their discussant held in the industry. For instance, while academic cultural commentators such as Howard T. Lewis linked cycles to an understanding that public interest and taste ran in short time periods, critics and trade commentators blamed the ‘cycle evil’ on the producers as unoriginal ‘copyists’, while producers themselves linked cycles to mass production and the nature of the studio system.[30] The volume of these discussions also increased at certain points in time, coinciding with the appearance of cycles with controversial subject matter for example, or as part of premature pronouncements of ‘the end of cycles’ following industrial changes.[31] Examining the discourses from this time also establishes the wide range of film types that were classified as cycles by contemporaries. In considering these numerous forms of film cycles the fundamental economic functionality of cycles is made evident.

The second chapter introduces the first cycle case study, the girl reporter pictures of the mid to late1930s. This is an example of one of the most basic forms of low budget cycles, which were utilised as an organisational tool by producer-distributors. My methodology for defining cycles is outlined in detail here. I combine a discourse analysis of the trade press with the America Film Institute’s catalogue to determine the films that were labelled as ‘girl reporter pictures’ by their contemporaries. The girl reporter films represent a character-based cycle where the already existing figure of the female journalist was adopted from the broader trend for newspaper films and fused to a particular narrative formula. The relationship between cycles and other forms of serialised

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[30] Film Stories in Cycles’, *Variety*, 25 February, 1927, 5, 14. Howard T. Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co. Incorporated, 1933), 108. Don Carle Gillette, ‘Cycles and Other Things’, *Film Daily*, 3 April, 1932, 2. ‘Critics’ Forum’, *Film Daily,* 12 August, 1932, 1. ‘Story Lack Forces Programmers: Smith’, *Motion Picture Daily,* 17 November, 1933, 10. Timely Topics: Zanuck Denounces Program Pictures’, *Film Daily*, 29 August, 1934, 5. Red Kann, ‘Blames Failure to Reduce Output on Men in Theatres’, 18 May, 1934, 1, 17. ‘Programmers About Finished – DeMille’, *Motion Picture Daily,* 21 December, 1933, 10.

[31] ‘True Murder Film Cycle’, *Variety*, 5 April, 1932, 6. ‘MPAs Relaxing Dope Traffic Opens New Cycle of Mellers’, *Variety*, 18 September 1946, 5. ‘Katz Sees Skies Clearing for Film Industry’, *Film Daily*, 2July, 1932, 1, 2. ‘Cycle-Less Season Expected for ’34-35’, Film Daily, 22 October, 1934, 1. ‘Rangy is the Term for Today’s Themes’, *Variety*, 18 November 1959, 26.

production, such as remakes and film series, is discussed, and the complex process of discursive identification is examined in detail. I also introduce in this chapter the four sample locations that are used across all of the case studies to explore the exhibition of the cycles, and compare the films' function for the studios with how they were viewed by exhibitors.

In contrast to the low budget nature of the girl reporter pictures, my third chapter examines the 1930s historical biopics as a case study of a prestige cycle. The unusual form of this cycle, which appears to flow in two waves, is examined in detail in order to test Nowell's model of four-stage cyclic development. I then explore the range of industrial factors that precipitated the cycle's formation and influenced its particular shape. In addition to the essential commercial operations, this cycle held a further rhetorical function, publicising a particular image of Hollywood entertainment that was educational and culturally legitimate at a time when the industry was under scrutiny. The final section of the chapter centres on the production history and discourses surrounding *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* (Warner Bros., 1940), which illuminates many of the debates invoked by the cycle of historical biopics as a whole.

The next case study, the wartime musical revues, is an example of a generic cycle whose established conventions were adapted to the contemporary historical context of WWII. In this chapter I examine the question of topical cycles, which I explore in relation to the ongoing oscillations among production trends, locating cycles as part of a wider system of industrial flux. The function of the wartime musical revue cycle was inextricably tied to Hollywood's envisioning of its wartime role and the status of the industry as 'essential,' and to contemporary discussions about entertainment, escapism, and propaganda. This cycle's decline was brought about not by a saturated market, but through external factors, namely the legal disputes between the Screen Actors Guild and Warner Bros. over the final production, *Hollywood Canteen* (Warner Bros., 1944). Although the film was eventually released, the delays disrupted the momentum of the cycle and contributed to a publicity backlash that weakened the original purpose of the wartime musical revues.

My fifth chapter explores the concept of cycles as process, drawing on the central idea of transference and its obverse connotation of displacement. The anti-prejudice pictures of the late 1940s and early 1950s are typically considered in terms of topicality and the

contemporary social discourses surrounding anti-Semitism and civil rights, yet the fluidity of material and process of adaptation across the cycle provides evidence of an opportunistic transposal of different 'issues' among various minority groups. I examine this transference in close relation to the films' production, narratives and reception. This is followed by a wider view of transference in my analysis of the studios' continual adaptation of their policies in response to particular changes in the market, especially in the attempt to revise the relationship between exploitation and prestige films. Finally, I explore a long-range perspective of transference in the industry's initial invocation of the anti-prejudice cycle in discussions around politics and the blacklist, and then its contrary utilisation in the fight against local censorship as part of the campaign to achieve constitutional recognition.

My sixth chapter explores the possibility of considering the 1950s biblical epics as a form of blockbuster cycle. The diffusion of newly developed technological processes was one of the driving forces behind the cycle. This challenges the conventional understanding of the typical operations of cycles as a stable, low risk profit strategy. Rather than targeting one particular market group, these films sought a wide-ranging appeal, developing the operation of 'event pictures' as audiences became increasingly selective. I begin to move from the questions of cyclic definition and form in this chapter to focus more closely on the relationship between cycles and methods of circulation. I examine the role of the biblical epic cycle in re-establishing the majors' control of the market in the wake of the Paramount decree with a particular focus on the pictures' release in Chicago in relation to the Jackson Park decree.[32] The final section analyses the distribution policies developed for *The Ten Commandments* (Paramount, 1956) as a means to explore the significant shifts in the industrial landscape occurring at this moment.

A final, much shorter case study of 1960s beach party pictures returns the discussion to the type of films that are most commonly associated with cycles. These quickly produced, low budget, independent productions capitalised on a specific audience demographic – teenagers - and exploited the subcultural trends of surfing, pop music and beach culture. Rather than using the cycle to explore questions of representation and exploitation, the

[32] The Jackson Park decree was a 1945 anti-trust ruling in Chicago that attempted to prevent the majors' monopolisation of the Chicago Loop's first run theatres by limiting runs to two weeks, prohibiting fixed admission prices and reducing the clearance period.

method of industry analysis established in the previous chapters is applied to the beach party films. Through this perspective, I treat the pictures as responses to specific market conditions and enactments of particular business policies for producers, distributors and exhibitors. This case study also enables an examination of the relationship between film cycles and industry organisation with an eye to the post-Classical period. In this chapter I explore the link between cycles, the studio system, and changing industrial practices, as well as the growth of independent production, topical cycles, and those aimed at increasingly differentiated audience sectors.

Cycles are an important means to locate groups of films within and outside of genre, to consider them within their immediate context, and to align them with their original function. While the majority of cycle studies indicate the usefulness of this temporality for understanding the cultural and social environment, cycles can also provide a unique means to explore Hollywood's industrial process as a whole. I will position cycles not just as a production practice or filmmaking phenomenon, but as the clustering of films in the distribution pipeline, and the concentrated consumption of like films by viewers in cinemas. Through the frame of cycles, I examine the business policies of the major producer-distributors, as well as independent companies operating in production and exhibition, and the major theatre chains. These are identified as responses to particular market forces, the surrounding economic environment and external influencing factors on the industry. The particular practices developed, which include double bills, remakes, day and date bookings, blockbuster production, drive-ins, competitive bidding, and roadshow distribution, all influenced the shapes assumed by the cycles. In addition to constituting a means to address these underexplored aspects of the industry, cycles provide an opportunity to reconsider pictures that may have previously been examined individually, but which can raise new questions and provide additional insight when viewed as part of a production trend. This reframing of films aligns them more closely with how they were likely conceived by the industry and viewed by original audience members.

Chapter One

'Pictures Seem to Run in Cycles': Industry Discourse and the Economics of Cycles

Types of picture stories seem to run in cycles. No sooner than a certain kind of story hits the screen and clicks, practically every company, big and independent, starts making pictures of the sure fire box office type patterned along the lines of the original picture which served as a trailblazer.[33]

In the Classical Hollywood era of the studio system, from the late 1920s to the late 1940s, the industry was structured as a vertically-integrated oligopoly of eight corporations: the 'Big Five' dominated production, distribution, and exhibition, while the 'Little Three' focused on production-distribution and utilised the majors' theatres to exhibit their films. Mae D. Huettig's contemporary account argues that the majors' financial structure at this time was dependent on their affiliated theatre chains. These cinemas were used as security to raise investment for production, and their concentrated ownership in the hands of the majors enabled them to control the first run market where the majority of profits were located.[34] A shift in the industry's economic foundation started in 1948 when, compelled by the Supreme Court's anti-trust ruling in the Paramount decision, the majors progressively divorced their exhibition chains. The majors' control over the three facets of production, distribution, and exhibition had previously acted as a barrier to entry for smaller companies which could not compete on the same scale; by outlawing practices such as block booking and forcing the sale of the affiliated theatres, the Department of Justice had sought to break the monopoly and open the market to independent companies. Yet divorcement occurred at a time when the theatres were themselves a declining asset, representing a fixed investment in an inflexible form with rapidly falling revenue.[35] Through the conglomeration and diversification of the major corporations that took place in the following decades and in the retention of their control over distribution, the essential oligopolistic structure of the majors remained in place.

[33] 'Film Stories in Cycles', Variety, 25 February, 1927, 5, 14.
[34] Mae D. Huettig, 'Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry', *The American Film Industry*; *Revised Edition*, Tino Balio (ed.) (Madison: University of Wisconsin Madison Press, 1985), 295.
[35] Nicholas Garnham, 'The Economics of the U.S. Motion Picture Industry', *Capitalism and Communications: Global Culture and the Economics of Information*, Fred Inglis (ed.) (London Sage Publications, 1990), 190.

Film cycles were particularly prominent in the Classical Hollywood era. Pictures were mass produced and in the semi-competitive studio system the majors pursued portfolio investment strategies to spread the risks of production across a wide variety of films. In an industry where a degree of imitation and recycling was accepted practice, cycles were created as competing studios sought to replicate one another's successful film formulas and build on audience expectation. The particular form of cycles was shaped by Classical Hollywood's pattern of staggered distribution, the run-zone-clearance system. The circulation of pictures was punctuated by clearance windows that divided their exhibition runs into designated geographic zones, which enabled the distributors to control the flow of films to audiences. In practice, this enabled the large theatre circuits and those affiliated with the major studios to receive top product more quickly, while delaying and limiting the access of smaller exhibitors to such product. While the former group were often sold films individually on a percentage basis, the smaller exhibitors were bound by the Standard Exhibition Contract and bought the product in bulk, a practice known as block booking.[36] As I will explore in subsequent chapters, the rate at which the films of the cycle flowed into theatres could dictate when the moment of market saturation could occur, and influenced the general lifespan of the cycle.

Throughout the period with which this thesis is concerned, the 1930s to the 1960s, the major Hollywood trade publication *Variety* primarily identified cycles as the increased production of a certain film type. This was usually based on a similarity of content, such as a narrative theme, character type, or setting, but it could also include aesthetic style or an overarching tone or treatment. The most consistent uses of the label were to announce cycles as part of upcoming production schedules, or to identify groups of similar films currently in release. Although this extended beyond the Classical era, the term was less commonly used after the 1950s.[37] This pattern of trade press usage belies the common critical assumption that cycles are largely a post-Classical era phenomenon, increasingly developed to exploit niche markets following the fracturing of the industry's conception of the 'universal audience'. There were occasional uses of the word 'cycle' in the trade press to describe and measure developments in the industry in terms of a life cycle, as in

[36] Richard Maltby, 'The Standard Exhibition Contract and the Unwritten History of the Classical Hollywood Cinema', *Film History: An International Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2013), 138-153.
[37] 'True Murder Film Cycle', *Variety*, 5 April, 1932, 6. 'Hollywood's New Sport Pix Cycle', *Variety*, 14 April, 1937, 5. 'Color 'n 'Scope History Cycle', *Variety*, 30 December, 1953, 4. 'Paramount Joins Shakespeare Cycle', *Variety*, 22 July, 1967, 25. Rock Concerts Loom Next Cycle in 3D', *Variety*, 4 November, 1981, 6.

the case of sound, independent production, the career of a particular industry worker, and the larger scale economic upward trends and downturns.[38] Such uses of the term are minimal, however, and the label was more commonly applied to groups of films.

In the trade press, industry commentators generally invoked film cycles as a way to detect patterns of change and repetition among popular types of film stories.[39] These discussions alternated between an understanding of cycles as simply a way to label and measure current audience interest and taste, and a suggestion that the industry actively constructed and stimulated this interest. This tension between cycles as a naturally occurring phenomenon and a practice actively pursued by producers ran throughout the trade discourse, and was evident in Howard T. Lewis' 1933 industry analysis:

> Pictures seem to run in cycles – producers work according to the theory that the public is interested in gangster pictures at one time and at another time is primarily interested in war pictures, and at some other time it is interested in sophisticated triangle pictures. Here again it is very doubtful whether the theory held can be sustained. What actually happens is that an outstanding gangster or war picture is produced. Immediately after other directors try to imitate it in an effort to take advantage of the new idea conceived by someone else and to capitalise on the favourable publicity which the good picture has received. As a result, a flood of such pictures, more or less copies of the original, inundates the screen. This fact does not prove that the public is interested in gangster pictures at that moment. It proves only that those responsible for production are copyists, assuming with more or less justification that the public, having seen one eminently good gangster production hopes (usually in vain) that the next on will be equally good.[40]

While producers would rather claim that they were releasing products in response to demand, the elements of the industry that suffered most from a saturated market, such as exhibitors and viewers, were more sceptical of the practice.

As economic film historians John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny argue, films are 'experience goods', the value of which is determined only after they have been consumed. Sedgwick and Pokorny's work identifies how the film industry is a high risk business for both producers and consumers, with producers anticipating the financial

[38] 'Sound Enters New Cycle', *Variety*, 17 April, 1934, 3. 'Imminent Exit of Semi-Indies Completes Film Production Cycle', *Variety*, 17 November, 1948, 7, 18. '20 Year Cycle', *Variety*, 29 March, 1939, 6. 'Domestic B.O. Hints New Sluggish Cycle', *Variety*, 25 February, 1981, 7.
[39] 'Film Stories in Cycles', *Variety*, 25 February, 1927, 5, 14.
[40] Howard T. Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry*, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co. Incorporated, 1933), 108.

performance of a film based on a perception of how it might be received in theatres.[41] Cycles are part of an attempt to mitigate risk through the replication of particular elements or formulae that have already proven successful in the marketplace.

Sedgwick and Pokorny also explore risk as something experienced by cinema audiences in terms of the gap between the expectation of pleasure and the actual pleasure derived from viewing a film.[42] This shapes the business environment faced by producers, with the task of distributors and exhibitors being to induce consumers to take the risk of paying to view an unknown product. Cycles can be considered part of the attempt to reduce risk in production investment, as well as audience consumption, through a strategy of affiliation and expectation. Producer-distributors attempt to generate a certain level of expectation in viewers that will persuade them to purchase a ticket in anticipation of a similar pleasure, while still promising a degree of novelty or difference in the product. This balance of repetition and innovation drives film production. A film is considered a 'hit', according to Sedgwick and Pokorny, when there is a large degree of positive divergence between the consumer's initial expectation for the product, and the actual pleasure derived from viewing the film, or when a high level of expectation is fulfilled. In searching for a hit formula, the studios could hedge their bets over a wide variety of product, in accordance with a portfolio investment strategy.

In Classical Hollywood, a studio would plan a large number of films in its annual production schedule, with each film holding a perceived level of risk. The production budgets for each film were determined in reference to the distribution of risk across the group as a whole.[43] Portfolios widened and production budgets expanded in response to favourable perceptions of market demand. When expectations dipped and there was a reluctance to risk large investments in potential hits, the range of budgets was generally reduced.[44] Within these large portfolios, cycles could work to differentiate a studio's output across a range of film types, and act as a risk attenuation strategy in providing proven formulas on which to model productions, while attempting to remove some of the

[41] John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny, 'Consumers as Risk Takers: Evidence from the Film Industry During the 1930s', *Business History,* Vol. 52, No. 1 (2010), 76.
[42] Sedgwick and Pokorny, 'Consumers as Risk Takers', 74-99.
[43] Michael Pokorny, John Sedgwick, 'Stardom and the Profitability of Filmmaking: Warner Brothers in the 1930s', Journal *of Cultural Economics*, Vol. 25 (2001), 160.
[44] John Sedgwick, 'Richard B. Jewell's Film Grosses, 1929-51: The C. J. Trevlin Ledger: A Comment', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television,* Vol. 14, No. 1 (1994), 51.

uncertainty over audience response by associating the film with a similar success. The allocation of space for cycles in the preparation of production schedules was addressed by Lewis when he argued for a more organised procedure. Discussing Paramount's production, he noted that the number of the company's commercial failures in the 1929-30 season revealed the necessity for a more systematised planning process that was less reliant on the judgement of executives. From 1930 the studio scheduled only 75% of its annual programme in advance to allow for the flexible production of films according to current public tastes, and incorporated market analysis to determine the existence and extent of 'style cycles'.[45]

The range of products within an investment portfolio generally followed two forms of differentiation, according to Sedgwick: horizontal differentiation and vertical differentiation.[46] With quality understood as the consumers' anticipation of pleasure, a product is differentiated vertically when it holds more desirable qualities for consumers than other products on offer. Horizontal differentiation complicates consumer choice as it offers more of some desirable qualities, but less of others. Sedgwick identifies how genres and stars are forms of horizontal differentiation, although vertical difference of quality can also exist within such categories. On a basic level, the different film cycles in circulation at any one point are an instance of horizontal differentiation by subject matter, with the range of film types positioned to appeal to a variety of audience groups and taste publics.

[45] Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry*, 93.
[46] John Sedgwick, 'Product Differentiation at the Movies: Hollywood 1946 to 1965', *An Economic History of Film* John Sedgwick, and Michael Pokorny (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2004), 197-206.

MOTION PICTURE DAILY'S BOOKING CHART

WEEK OF	COLUMBIA	M-G-M	MONO.	PARA.	PRC	REPUBLIC	RKO RADIO	20TH-FOX	U. A.	UNIVERSAL	WARNERS
June 10	THEY LIVE IN FEAR Otto Kruger Pat Parrish Clifford Severn D—65 mins. (5043)	(Seventh Block) ANDY HARDY'S BLONDE TROUBLE Mickey Rooney Lewis Stone C—107 mins. (424)	SONORA STAGE COACH (Trailblazer) O—(365)	(Fifth Block) AND THE ANGELS SING Dorothy Lamour Fred MacMurray Betty Hutton M—96 mins. (4321)	WATERFRONT John Carradine J. Carroll Naish D—(415) 65 mins.		(Fifth Block) THE FALCON OUT WEST Tom Conway Barbara Hale D—64 mins. (421)		THE HAIRY APE William Bendix Susan Hayward D—90 mins.	THE INVISIBLE MAN'S REVENGE Jon Hall Evelyn Ankers Alan Curtis D—78 mins.	MAKE YOUR OWN BED Jack Carson Jane Wyman Irene Manning C—82 mins. (317)
June 17	THE LAST HORSEMAN Russell Hayden Bob Wills "Dub" Taylor O—(5208)	GASLIGHT Ingrid Bergman Charles Boyer D—114 mins. (425) MEET THE PEOPLE Dick Powell Lucille Ball M—100 mins. (426)		DOUBLE INDEMNITY Fred MacMurray Barbara Stanwyck Edward G. Robinson D—106 mins. (4325)		GOOD NIGHT SWEETHEART Robert Livingston Ruth Terry D—67 mins. (302)	DAYS OF GLORY Tamara Toumanova Gregory Peck D—86 mins. (422) THE YELLOW CANARY (British) Anna Neagle Richard Greene D—84 mins. (423)	(June Releases—no definite date set) EVE OF ST. MARK Anne Baxter William Eythe Michael O'Shea (429) D—96 mins.	FORTY THIEVES Wm. Boyd Andy Clyde Jimmy Rogers O—60 mins.	GHOST CATCHERS Olsen and Johnson Gloria Jean C—68 mins.	
June 24	SHE'S A SOLDIER, TOO Beulah Bondi Nina Foch Jess Barker D—67 mins. (5040)	THREE MEN IN WHITE Lionel Barrymore Van Johnson D—85 mins. (427)	RETURN OF THE APE MAN Bela Lugosi John Carradine D	THE HITLER GANG Robert Watson Victor Varconi D—100 mins. (4323)		YELLOW ROSE OF TEXAS Roy Rogers Dale Evans O—(343) 69 mins.	SEVEN DAYS ASHORE Wally Brown Gordon Oliver C—74 mins. (424)	LADIES OF WASHINGTON Sheila Ryan Trudy Marshall Doris Merrick D—95 mins (430)	SENSATIONS OF 1945 Eleanor Powell Dennis O'Keefe M—85 mins.	SOUTH OF DIXIE Anne Gwynne David Bruce D—61 mins.	THIS IS THE ARMY (Re-issue) George Murphy Joan Leslie M—(224) 115 mins. (Color)
July 1		TWO GIRLS AND A SAILOR Jimmy Durante Van Johnson C—126 mins. (428)	RANGE LAW Johnny Mack Brown O—57 mins (355)	HENRY ALDRICH PLAYS CUPID Jimmy Lydon Diana Lynn Charles Smith 65 mins. (4322)	MINSTREL MAN Benny Fields Gladys George Roscoe Karns O—(404)	MAN FROM FRISCO Michael O'Shea D—91 mins. (318) CALL OF THE SOUTH SEAS D—59 mins. (319)	SHOW BUSINESS Eddie Cantor Joan Davis George Murphy Constance Moore M—92 mins. (425)			CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY Deanna Durbin Gene Kelly M—93 mins.	THE MASK OF DIMITRIOS Peter Lorre Sidney Greenstreet Zachary Scott D—95 mins. (318)
July 8	LOUISIANA HAYRIDE Judy Canova Ross Hunter C	(Special Release) WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER Irene Dunne Alan Marshall D—126 mins. (491)	JOHNNY DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE Simone Simon James Ellison D—79 mins.	GAMBLER'S CHOICE Chester Morris Nancy Kelly 66 mins. (4324)		MARSHALL OF RENO Wild Bill Elliott O—56 mins. (3312)	(Special release) ATTACK! (Documentary) 56 mins. (Sixth Block) GILDER-SLEEVE'S GHOST Harold Peary Marian Martin C—63 mins. (426)		SUMMER STORM George Sanders Linda Darnell D—107 mins.	TRIGGER TRAIL O—(8086) JUNGLE WOMAN Evelyn Ankers J. Carroll Naish D—60 mins.	
July 15	SECRET COMMAND Pat O'Brien Chester Morris Ruth Warrick D—80 mins.	(Eighth Block) (incomplete) BATHING BEAUTY Red Skelton Esther Williams M—101 mins. (Color)	ARE THESE OUR PARENTS? Helen Vinson Lyle Talbot D—73 mins.	(Sixth Block) HAIL THE CONQUERING HERO Eddie Bracken Ella Raines C—100 mins.	DELINQUENT DAUGHTERS June Carlson Fifi D'Orsay D—(416) FUZZY SETTLES DOWN Buster Crabbe Al 'Fuzzy' St. John O—(465)	CALL OF THE ROCKIES Smiley Burnette Sonny Carson O—56 mins. (356) COMIN' ROUND THE MOUNTAIN (reissue) Gene Autry O—(3305)	MARINE RAIDERS Pat O'Brien Ruth Hussey D—91 mins. (427)			THE MUMMY'S GHOST Lon Chaney D—61 mins.	(Re-issues) MANPOWER 103 mins. (341) TIGER SHARK 79 mins. (345) THEY MADE ME A CRIMINAL 92 mins. (342)
July 22		CANTERVILLE GHOST Chas. Laughton Margaret O'Brien C—95 mins.	THREE OF A KIND Billy Gilbert Maxie Rosenbloom Helen Gilbert C	TAKE IT BIG Jack Haley Harriet Hilliard C—75 mins. THE GREAT MOMENT Joel McCrea Betty Field D—80 mins.	SEVEN DOORS TO DEATH D—(417)	SILVER CITY KID Allan Lane O—55 mins. (461)	A NIGHT OF ADVENTURE Tom Conway Audrey Long D—65 mins. (428) STEP LIVELY Frank Sinatra George Murphy M—88 mins. (429)	(July Releases—no definite date set)		TWILIGHT ON THE PRAIRIE Eddie Quillan Vivian Austin O—62 mins.	THE WALKING DEAD 66 mins. (344) BROTHER RAT 89 mins. (343) POLO JOE 65 mins. (346)
July 29	MR. WINKLE GOES TO WAR E. G. Robinson Ted Donaldson Ruth Warrick D		MARKED TRAILS Hoot Gibson O CALL OF THE JUNGLE Ann Corio D	HENRY ALDRICH'S LITTLE SECRET Jimmy Lydon Charlie Smith C—75 mins.	BRAND OF THE DEVIL O—(458) MACHINE GUN MAMA Armida C—(421)	SECRETS OF SCOTLAND YARD Edgar Barrier Stephanie Bachelor C. Aubrey Smith D—68 mins. (321)	YOUTH RUNS WILD Kent Smith Jean Brooks D—67 mins. (430)	ROGER TOUHY GANGSTER Preston Foster Victor McLaglen D—65 mins. (431) HOME IN INDIANA Walter Brennan Jeanne Crain D—103 mins. (433) (Color)	ABROAD WITH TWO YANKS William Bendix Dennis O'Keefe	ALLERGIC TO LOVE Noah Beery, Jr. Martha O'Driscoll C—65 mins.	(Regular Release) ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN Fredric March Alexis Smith D—130 mins. (315)
Aug. 5			LEAVE IT TO THE IRISH James Dunn WEST OF THE RIO GRANDE Johnny Mack Brown	'I LOVE A SOLDIER Paulette Goddard Sonny Tufts D—105 mins.		SONG OF NEVADA Roy Rogers D—75 mins. (399) GIRL WHO DARED Lorna Gray D—56 mins. (322)	(Special Release) GOYESCAS Imperio Argentina M—110 mins. (461) SNOW WHITE and the SEVEN DWARFS (reissue) 83 mins. (492) (Disney Feature Cartoon) (Color)	CANDLELIGHT IN ALGERIA (British) James Mason Carla Lehmann D—85 mins. (432)			
Aug. 12	CRY OF THE WEREWOLF Nina Foch Stephen Crane D DEATH WALKS ALONE Rose Hobart Eric Rolf		OH, WHAT A NIGHT! Jean Parker Edmund Loew D	(Special Release) GOING MY WAY Bing Crosby Barry Fitzgerald Rise Stevens D—130 mins.		PORT OF 40 THIEVES Stephanie Bachelor Richard Powers D—58 mins. (324)				TRAIL TO GUNSIGHT Eddie Dew Maris Wrixon O—(8087)	MR. SKEFFINGTON Bette Davis Claude Rains D—127 mins. (319)
Aug. 19											

Dates Are Based on National Release Schedules and Are Subject to Change. Letters Denote the Following: (D) Drama, (M) Musical, (C) Comedy, (O) Outdoor Action. Production Numbers Are in Parentheses

Figure 1, Booking Chart, *Motion Picture Daily*, 6 July, 1944.

The booking chart (Figure 1) indicates the films available for first run exhibitors to book over an eleven-week period in mid-1944. The studio releases contain a variety of product that illustrates forms of both vertical and horizontal differentiation. Paramount's releases include two blocks of product and a special release. The vertical differentiation is most evident in this 'special' designation for *Going My Way* (Paramount, 1944), which was sold individually to exhibitors, rather than part of a block package. This indicates the studio's expectation for high returns for their investment. Paramount's blocks also contain several pictures whose short running times indicate their status as B features, which played a supporting role on double bills. Series entries *Henry Aldrich Plays Cupid* (Paramount, 1944) and *Henry Aldrich's Little Secret* (Paramount, 1944), sit alongside the low budget films from semi-independent producers Pine-Thomas, *Gambler's Choice* (Paramount, 1944) and *Take It Big* (Paramount, 1944) as product that holds fewer desirable qualities for viewers. Enticing qualities could instead be found in well-known Paramount stars, such as Fred MacMurray, Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour, and

directors Preston Sturges and Billy Wilder, who carried expectations of quality that differentiated their pictures vertically, and whose association with particular types of films, such as comedies or musicals, could differentiate them horizontally. The booking chart also differentiates the pictures horizontally by sorting them into the four general categories of drama, musical, comedy and outdoor action, which each hold different types of appeal to different audiences. Both within, and sometimes across these categories, are cycles that differentiate the films further. *Double Indemnity* (Paramount, 1944), for instance, is categorised here as a drama, alongside Preston Sturges' comedic biopic *The Great Moment* (Paramount, 1944), and political war drama *The Hitler Gang* (Paramount, 1944). Yet *Double Indemnity* belongs to a cycle retrospectively labelled "film noir", and has more in common with *Christmas Holiday* (Universal, 1944), which is labelled a musical in the booking chart.

Films within a cycle could also be vertically differentiated through signifiers of quality, often in the form of production values, stars' names, and story origins. The final value, however, was assigned by viewers after the film had been tested at the box office. Low budget cycles were generally less differentiated from one another and adhered more closely to a particular formula, as can be seen in the girl reporter cycle discussed in the next chapter. The studios had less of a financial incentive to differentiate low budget film cycles as the product was predominantly sold in blocks and on a flat rate basis, which guaranteed their income for producers. It was only when a widespread perception of low quality or a saturated market started to affect attendance or generate criticisms of the industry's trade practices that the studios attempted to address the issue of cycles.

Despite fulfilling this practical industrial function, cycles were continually criticised in the Classical Hollywood era. A recurring phrase in the editorial Critic's Forum of *Film Daily* is the 'cycle evil', and in a questionnaire conducted in 1932, 95% of the several hundred participants listed cycles as their biggest industry 'pet peeve'.[47] In 1932, Sam Katz, vice president of Paramount Publix identified the familiar '"cycle" evil' could be addressed through industry cooperation to eliminate 'the costly conflicting release dates'.[48] The focus on distribution in the attempt to mediate the effect of cycles recurs periodically in the industry discourse. This establishes the extent to which the rate of

[47] 'Critics' Forum', *Film Daily,* 12 August, 1932, 1.
[48] 'Katz Sees Skies Clearing for Film Industry', *Film Daily*, 2 July, 1932, 1, 2.

product circulation is a key component to the operation of cycles. In 1931, in recognition of cycles' costliness and detriment to viewers' interest, an agreement was made between the studio executives to avoid cycles.[49] *Variety* recorded Louis B. Mayer's call for an industry-wide stagger system of release, 'to vary the market and ensure sufficient diversity and novelty features to pique public interest … in a group, they go for the best and the others die'. This was described as being 'for the good of the industry' at a time when increased productions of musicals and gangster pictures were flooding the market and the heightened competition was seen to have' kill one another off' at the box office.[50] Mayer was likely responding to the discussions held between the studio heads and Will H. Hays, head of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA), earlier that year where it was decided that the release of gangster pictures should be regulated.[51] Hays' initial concern was the avoidance of criticism over film content from outside the industry; a sudden clump of objectionable films would draw increased condemnation than if the films were released gradually over a longer period. In addition to asking for the films' content to be changed, Hays and the executives further sought to dilute the negative impact of the cycle through the moderation of distribution.

In late 1931, Jason Joy, director of the Studio Relations Committee, the forerunner to the Production Code Administration, wrote to Hays:

> With crime practically denied them, with box office figures down, with high-pressure methods being employed back home to spur the studios on to get a little more cash, it was almost inevitable that sex, as the nearest thing at hand and pretty generally sure-fire, should be seized upon. It was.[52]

While the gangster and 'fallen woman' cycles were the specific targets of moral and religious groups at this time, film critics and industry commentators extended censure to the production of cycles more generally.[53] Don Carl Gillette, writing of cycles in *Film Daily* in 1932, argued for the need for originality rather than imitation. He also highlighted the pervasiveness of cycle discourses in the early 1930s: 'In the film field the minute three pictures of the same type appear on the horizon somebody yells "Cycle!"

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[49] 'Abolition of Picture Cycles Being Considered by Studios', *Film Daily,* 1 December, 1931, 1, 8.
[50] 'Mayer Suggests Stagger Release System to Kill Ruinous Cycles', *Variety*, 6 October, 1931, 5.
[51] Hays letter to Robert Cochrane (Universal), 29 April, 1931, Production Code File, reel 9, MPPDA archive, referenced in Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 110.
[52] Joy to Breen, 15 December, 1931, PCA *Possessed File*, quoted in Richard Maltby, 'The Production Code and the Hays Office', in Tino Balio (ed.), *Grand Design Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939,* Vol. 5, History of the American Cinema (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 52.
[53] Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

and the whole industry, aided by the critics, proceeds forthwith to fire away at the newcomer without as much as waiting till they can see the white of their eyes [sic]'.[54]

In response to such criticism, producers returned to an explanation of cyclic occurrence as a natural result of the production system. Editor Howard Smith and producers Darryl F. Zanuck and Samuel Goldwyn were reported in the trade papers as identifying cycles with mass production, the great quantity of programmer pictures being made, and the pattern of release dates.[55] Zanuck and Cecil B. DeMille more explicitly linked cycles to the contemporary mode of production, arguing that the industry's gradual move to a production unit system, with its specialisation and increased focus on individual pictures, should help to end cycles.[56] At the end of 1933, Zanuck, who had been accused of being the man who 'started cycles', wrote in *Motion Picture Daily*:

> In my opinion mass production is due for the discard because the day of the 'cycle' is over. Practically every new type of picture has been made and there has been no background or type of story left untouched. Producers who play a game of 'Follow the Leader' must now depend on their own resources and ingenuity.[57]

These arguments rested on the belief in a limited number of story types, with the implication that under a system of mass production these would be more quickly exhausted and lead to a greater degree of recycling and repetition. Yet, just as the producers were distancing themselves from cyclic production, the promotional material appearing in the trade press sought to identify studios as instigators of successful picture cycles. Warner Bros., where Zanuck was the head of production, declared in their trade paper ads for *Night Nurse* (Warner Bros., 1931) and *Blessed Event* (Warner Bros., 1932) that the films were certain to initiate a cycle. Similarly, in the promotions of their upcoming 1935 season, Warners asserted themselves as 'cycle starters' and 'the acknowledged pioneers of production cycles'.[58] Later, both Universal and Columbia also advertised pictures using a similar cycle discourse.[59] Usually utilised by studios with a

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[54] Don Carle Gillette, 'Cycles and Other Things', *Film Daily*, 3 April, 1932, 2.
[55] 'Story Lack Forces Programmers: Smith', *Motion Picture Daily,* 17 November, 1933, 10. Timely Topics: Zanuck Denounces Program Pictures', *Film Daily*, 29 August, 1934, 5. Red Kann, 'Blames Failure to Reduce Output on Men in Theatres', 18 May, 1934, 1, 17.
[56] 'Programmers About Finished – DeMille', *Motion Picture Daily,* 21 December, 1933, 10.
[57] Darryl F. Zanuck, 'Express Faith in NRA; See Need for Improvement in Quality of Product and Stability Up for 1934', *Motion Picture Daily,* 13 December, 1933, 1-2.
[58] *Blessed Event* ad in *Film Daily,* 2 September, 1932, 3. Night Nurse predicting cycle- *Motion Picture Daily,* 15 July, 1931, 3. WB ad for 1935 release schedule in *Motion Picture Daily,* 1 June, 1934, 6.
[59] Universal *Parole* ad 'Remember - the FIRST of a cycle is always the BEST!', *Film Daily*, 25 May, 1936, 3. Columbia advertisement for *Smashing the Spy Ring*, listed as 'the sensational start of a brand-new cycle!', *Film Daily*, 8 December, 1938, 7-8.

reputation for low budget production, this was an attempt to publicise an image of the studio as being on the vanguard of production trends.

Figure 2, Warner Bros. instigate the Nurse Cycle. Warner Bros. ad, *Motion Picture Daily,* 15 July, 1931, 3.

Following the decline of the prominent gangster and fallen woman cycles, the years 1934-35 were perceived to be relatively cycle-free, with the trade press' comments on studio production schedules noting the wide variety of topics, locales and periods.[60] Consequently, *Film Daily*'s Don Carl Gillette speaks of this reduction of cycles together with the improvement in advertising and the general cleaning up of the screen in the past year.[61] Similarly, Hays, in announcing an improvement in quality and greater number of

[60] Joseph M Schenck, 'Production Cut Predicted; Films' Appeal Seen Wider', *Motion Picture Daily*, 24 December, 1934, 1, 4. 'Cycle-Less Season Expected for '34-35', *Film Daily,* 22 October, 1934, 1.
[61] Don Carle Gillette, 'Viewing the Passing Parade', *Film Daily*, 24 January, 1936, 4.

original screenplays, spoke of cyclic production in relation to the overall image and purpose of the industry:

> Banality itself is a form of bad taste … and the imitativeness that results in a 'cycle' is a reproach to the recreational medium which serves a universal public – a public which demands ever-changing entertainment fare.[62]

1935 was heralded as the return of cycles with the much-publicised G-Men films resuscitating elements of the gangster cycle. With a number of pictures on the Department of Justice workers in production, Red Kann noted that Warner Bros. was rushing out their film to be the first.[63] Again, an industry meeting was held about the resurging gangster pictures. Hays subsequently wrote to Ned Depinet at RKO, 'The quantitative element is a serious factor and it is going to be necessary to stagger the releases'.[64] Although the stagger system was not implemented, the moralistic discourses and criticism surrounding cycles did seem to momentarily subside.

Cycle discussions resumed in the mid-1940s and carried over into the next decade. When cycles of controversial subject matter again threatened the industry's public image in 1946, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), successor to the MPPDA, sought action. In May, *Motion Picture Daily* described a recently published report that detailed an agreement between that the major producers and Joe Breen of the Production Code Administration (PCA) to abolish cycles of censorable subjects.[65] This was apparently precipitated by the recent 'Battle of Alcatraz' and subsequent submission of six separate gaol break stories by producers.[66] Although the office of MPAA head Eric Johnston denied the report, in September 1946 *Variety* recorded Breen's announcement of an 'outlawing' of cycles as part of a plan to avoid repetitious subject matter in short periods of time:

> Breen's aim is to avoid a curse that has plagued Hollywood since the industry's birth. That's the fact that as soon as one successful picture is made on a particular theme, the tendency is for a flock of other studios to cash in by turning out other flicks on the same theme. This is particularly to be noted on topical yarns following a major news event … Distribution execs in New York, who face the task of selling the cycle product, are more enthusiastic than studio toppers for the Breen scheme of avoiding duplication, although the feeling is general on both

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[62] 'Hays Predicts More Classics on the Screen', *Motion Picture Daily,* 26 March, 1935, 1, 4.
[63] Red Kann, 'Insider's Outlook', *Motion Picture Daily,* 19 April, 1935, 2.
[64] Hays letter to Ned Depinet (RKO), 6 September, 1935, Production Code file, reel 11, MPPDA archive
[65] 'Again Hear Majors, CPA TO End Crime Pix', *Film Daily,* 3 June, 1946, 8.
[66] 'Deny Production Code Will Limit Crime Pix Cycles', *Film Daily* 20 May, 1946, 11.

> coasts that the move is necessary to avoid criticism of the industry and to keep public interest high.[67]

The trade press linked Breen's effort to the recent announcement of successive production plans following the release of controversial pictures, *The Lost Weekend* (Paramount, 1945) and *Duel in the Sun* (Selznick Releasing Organization, 1946).[68] In his PCA position as overseer of scripts from across the studios, Breen felt that he was uniquely equipped to recognise and forestall these approaching cycles. Walter Wanger's subsequent production, *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* (Universal, 1947), was, however, presented by the trade press as proof to the industry that Breen had little authority to prevent cycles that complied with the Code and that producers were invariably reluctant to shelve a potentially profitable subject. After the death of Al Capone in 1947, the trade press recorded numerous production plans for gangster biopics, with a total of twenty-five related titles registered with the MPAA. At the same time, it was noted that the industry was facing church protests over the adaptation of *Forever Amber* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1947).[69] These led to a show of Code tightening, and renewed threats from the PCA to withhold their seal from gangster pictures that failed to show criminals punished for their actions.[70]

At this time, trade discussions regarding the causes of attendance decline and the means to offset this in production policy frequently returned to cycles. In *Variety*'s annual roundups of Hollywood executives' opinions on the current state of the industry, cycles were a central topic in 1948, 1950 and 1951.[71] There was little consistency to the attitudes expressed, however, and few solutions were offered. The executives fell into familiar positions: Nick Schenck (MGM) claimed cycles were the inevitable result of high quality production that drove imitation, Grad Sears (United Artists) stated that they were a lazy, imitative production practice, Barney Balaban (Paramount) argued that they were not necessarily imitative but often creative, and Herbert J. Yates (Republic) declared that there was no such thing as cycles. Jack Warner (Warner Bros.) elaborated on this last

[67] 'Wanger Ignores Breen's Ruling on "Cycles"; Another Alcoholic Picture', Variety, 1 September, 1946, 11.
[68] 'Duel Keys New Western Cycle', *Variety*, 10 July, 1947, 3.
[69] 'PC Seal to be Withheld from Films on Criminals; 25 Titles Are Eliminated', *Film Daily* 4 December, 1947, 1, 8. 'Curb Crime Films, Unsavoury Titles', *Motion Picture Daily,* 4 December, 1947, 1, 4.
[70] 'PC Seal to be Withheld from Films on Criminals; 25 Titles Are Eliminated', *Film Daily,* 4 December, 1947, 1, 8.
[71] 'Top Industry Leaders Stress need for More Creative Films, "Back to Work" Attitude for All', *Variety*, 7 January, 1948, 5-6. 'Top Execs Accent Quality Films as Sole Antidote for So-Called "Lost" Audience', *Variety*, 4 January, 1950, 5, 6. 'Goetz, Warner and Zanuck Interpret the Production Line's Obligation to the B.O.', *Variety*, 3 January, 1951, 11.

idea, arguing that a film's success was ultimately a question of timing, with a good picture made at the right time always able to do well, no matter where it sat in a sequence of similar pictures.

While Warner was right to emphasise the role of timing in a picture's success, exhibitors would have disagreed with his dismissal of release sequences. In this same period, *Motion Picture Daily* recorded the occurrence of cycle round tables as part of industry conferences held by the Council of Motion Picture Organisations (COMPO) and the Theatre Owners of America (TOA). A report on the COMPO discussion of cycles in 1951 saw the producers place the blame on exhibitors who constantly demanded pictures similar to previous hits.[72] Cycles nevertheless drew the increasing ire of exhibitors who blamed the studios for distributing the pictures in clumps that quickly saturated the market. At a 1949 conference of the Allied States Association of Motion Picture Exhibitors, complaints were voiced over the numbers of recent cycles and the results suffered by theatre owners: rental terms were usually raised by distributors on a currently popular subject, while an influx of similar pictures was difficult to program, and small town theatres were adversely affected.[73] In the case of small theatres, not only would the initial interest that accompanied the cycle have lessened by the time they reached the subsequent runs, but the higher turnover rate of programs in such cinemas would have both magnified the experience of cycles for viewers and made the flood of films easier to identify. At the same time, however, a 1951 report of the first run cinemas in an area of Los Angeles also described the effect of cycles, not only in relation to programmers based on a similar formula or headline event, but also for big budget films. Exhibitor H. Dick Dickson defined cycles in terms of the 'simultaneous release of the same type picture by all studios, or the simultaneous release in various territories of big important features with the same name stars playing the important leads'. [74] Dickson reported a total of nine musicals in three months, seven westerns, four detective stories between October and November, war pictures playing about once a month for nine months, and a total of ten message pictures, spaced roughly a month apart. Dickson's description again emphasises the release of the pictures and their flow into cinemas as a key factor in creating the effect

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[72] 'Producers Lay Blame for Cycles on Exhibitors', *Motion Picture Daily,* 26 July, 1951, 2.
[73] 'Allied Raps "Sophisticated" Pix', *Variety,* 16 February, 1949, 5. 'Allied Attack on Pix Biz Seen Aimed More at High Rentals Than High Tone', *Variety,* 23 February, 7. 'Exhibs Irked by "Cycles" Wave', *Variety,* 3 August, 1949, 3, 20.
[74] 'Urges Producer Priorities to Banish Cycles of Films', *Motion Picture Daily,* 5 March, 1952, 1-2. 'Insiders Outlook', *Motion Picture Daily,* 6 March, 1952, 1.

of the cycle for viewers. As my case studies will explore further, despite individual cycles having different rates of release, the result for audiences was often the same experience of repetition and inundation.

These exhibitors pointed out that even if cycles were not deliberately planned by producer-distributors, the consequence was the bunching of films in the same category of release during a given period.[75] In 1950, Bernie Brooks, owner of the New York Fabien theatre circuit, again argued for an intervention in distribution:

> The distributors would do us a great favour and themselves a great favour if they'd use more foresight and caution in scheduling releases to avoid this over-supply of similar product. It becomes very difficult for a buyer and booker to do justice to his houses or to the pictures when he's forced into the same position of dating the same type of product week after week.[76]

Such remedial solutions were continually voiced by exhibitors in the early 1950s. Exhibitors H. A. Cole and Dick Dickson argued that producers and distributors should co-ordinate release schedules and set up a priority system to tip off rival producers, while others suggested periodic inter-studio story conferences to prevent duplication, and a leasing pool to prevent the flooding of the market and ensure an even flow.[77] But, as Red Kann noted, these would inevitably raise further issues such as who would determine the suitable quantity of films for a cycle, and who would get the 'first crack'. He also suggested that such inter-trade agreements among producers may not be legal.[78] Following moves by the Department of Justice to halt the unfair trade practices of the studios, cross-studio agreements to monitor production and distribution in such a way could be interpreted as an act of collusion and market control. Consequently, in the aftermath of the Paramount decision, cycles were repeatedly cited by producers as indicators of healthy competition between the studios, which could spur a higher standard of filmmaking.[79]

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[75] 'Studios Again Targets of Exhibs on Pix Quality, Themes, Stars, Cycles', Variety, 1 June, 1949, 4.
[76] 'BO Being Killed by Film Cycles, Avers Pix Buyers', Variety, 16 August, 1950, 3, 23.
[77] 'Urges Producer Priorities to Banish Cycles of Films', *Motion Picture Daily,* 5 March, 1952, 1, 2. Red Kann, 'Insider's Outlook', *Motion Picture Daily,* 13 March, 1952, 1.
[78] Red Kann, 'Insider's Outlook', *Motion Picture Daily,* 22 June, 1950, 2.
[79] 'Top Industry Leaders Stress need for More Creative Films, "Back to Work" Attitude for All', *Variety*, 7 January, 1948, 5-6. 'Top Execs Accent Quality Films as Sole Antidote for So-Called "Lost" Audience', *Variety*, 4 January, 1950, 5- 6.

The industrial shifts instigated by the divorcement decree, such as the emphasis on big budget spectacles, was seen to have altered the particular industrial environment that had initially given rise to the studio's use of cycles as a market strategy decades earlier. In 1959, *Variety* declared:

> Significantly, the cycles are over. The big-studio thinking anent one money-making handling of certain type subject matter deserving another, like M-G's series ("Andy Hardy", "The Thin Man" etc.) for the most part is no more. This is largely because independent producers have taken over and more and more are trying to get away from the routine.[80]

Here the trade press specifically associated cycles with formula-based low-budget, serialised production. The emphasis on spectacle, differentiation and the rise of independent production was seen as a departure from cyclic production, a claim that I will test in my chapters on the 1950s biblical epics and 1960s beach party films.

The criticisms levelled at cycles throughout the Classical Hollywood period included the following: unimaginative, lazy production practices based on the recycling of story material; a moral condemnation stemming from a the belief that excessive onscreen representations of sexual or violent conduct could negatively influence viewers' behaviour; the generally sensationalist approach and exploitation of controversial topics for commercial purposes; and the lack of adequate differentiation saturating the market and resulting in box office decline. The tracing of the industry's discussion and active efforts to curb cycles reveals how wider criticisms of cyclic production gathered strength when cycles were attached to subject matter deemed morally reprehensible, which could draw wider public criticism and negative publicity for Hollywood. Yet, once we broaden our understanding of cycles beyond the exploitation and low budget pictures, it is clear that cycles could also function to advertise a positive image of Hollywood entertainment, such as its 'essential' role in the war effort.

From the 1930s to the 1950s, the same arguments about cycles recurred periodically, and a fair degree of consistency was apparent in the positions held across the industry, from powerful studio heads to small theatre owners. Cycles were constantly attacked as low-rent objects, complaints were raised regarding their bunching in exhibition, arguments were made in favour of regulating production and distribution, which were then refuted as

[80] 'Rangy is the Term for Today's Themes', *Variety*, 18 November 1959, 26.

being anti-competitive, and proponents of cycles claimed they were evidence of healthy competition. These perennial discussions of cycles raise the question of whether the number of cycles increased alongside fluctuating quantities of total film output, or whether it was the objectionable nature of certain sensational cycles that merely generated greater discussion. A greater number of programmer cycles were produced in times of higher studio output, as with the girl reporter cycle in the 1930s, yet cycles were perhaps more obvious when there were fewer films being produced in total, as in the years of WWII. The recurring expressions of concern over cycles in times of economic, social or industrial uncertainty suggests that while they may have been increasingly pursued as a low-risk production strategy at such moments, cycles could be conjured as a convenient scapegoat for the ills of the industry, such as a decline in attendance or external moral condemnation. The involvement of all levels of the industry in the operation of cycles meant that the attribution of direct responsibility could be avoided by any single party, be it producers, distributors, or exhibitors.

Chapter Two

The Girl Reporter Pictures: Programmer Cycles and Modes of Seriality

The first case study centres on "girl reporter" pictures, a cycle that emerged in the mid-1930s within a larger production trend for newspaper films. This positioning of the pictures provides a useful starting point for methodological questions regarding the definition of film cycles. Tracing the basic shape of the cycle raises questions over the means by which such outlines can be drawn and boundaries demarcated. The very fluidity of the girl reporter cycle, which constantly spills over into other production categories and their classifications in the surrounding discourse, demonstrates a strategy of hybridity from the studios that ran through the cycle's own production, distribution, and exhibition. Such hybridity challenges attempts to draw precise outlines around cycles and highlights how intertextuality was fundamental to the practices of production and discursive identification. The girl reporter pictures show how low budget cycles functioned for the Hollywood producer-distributors in the 1930s. Exploring their reception and tracing their process of identification and discussion by different sectors of the industry reveal the complex and contested conception of such film cycles as a business practice.

There are three points to consider when conceiving of a film cycle and attempting to establish its borders. Firstly, the intertextuality embedded in the production process, as a film is consciously composed in relation to the successes and failures of the previous season, with inbuilt elements of repetition and variance. Secondly, the similarities and differences emphasised during the discussion of the pictures in the process of distribution and exhibition, which may highlight a film's connections to others in the cycle, or attempt to distance it in favour of an emphasis on originality. Thirdly, discursive analysis must take into account the way that a cycle has been delineated as a retrospective practice by critics and historians, and how this may inform any subsequent attempt at definition. These different sets of considerations will be addressed in the course of this chapter.

The girl reporter pictures demonstrate one of the basic ways that cycles functioned for producers. The formula they followed was an amalgamation of different components,

which drew on the 'newspaper yarn' setting and its associated themes. Mystery, suspense and action were incorporated into the newspaper backdrop through the common narrative of a criminal investigation, combined with a comic treatment of the romance between the girl reporter figure and her professional rival. In this way, the pictures were composed of a range of elements that sought to maximise the film's appeal to a number of different markets. The pictures presented an appealing, low-cost film type, a blueprint that could be readily replicated and used to fill the studios' extensive production and distribution rosters.

The repetition of the girl reporter formula was not confined to feature film production, however, as the cycle crossed over into other types of media, including comics, radio and magazine stories, and was transferred onto a variety of serialised formats. The core of cycles lies in such repetitions of formulas, and within the girl reporter cycle are examples of both 'formal' and 'informal' practices of imitation that enacted separate functions and were valued differently in the surrounding discourse. The formal repetitions, such as that of the Torchy Blane film series (Warner Bros., 1937-39) and the remake *His Girl Friday* (Columbia, 1940), sit in contrast to the organic, haphazard, cross-studio feature productions of the cycle associated with exploitative imitation and commercial opportunism. Formal practices are understood here to be regulated forms of seriality whose repetition is based in the legal narrative extension of a piece of intellectual property. Informal forms of seriality, such as cycles and unofficial remakes, are separate properties that are grouped together discursively. For instance, *Wedding Present* (Paramount, 1936), was described in trade reviews as clearly derivative of the newspaper film, *The Front Page* (United Artists, 1931), but it was not positioned as an official remake in the same way as *His Girl Friday*.[81] A study of these practices and their reception can suggest the differing strategies enacted by cycles and the multiplicity of forms within them.

Much of what has been written on the girl reporter films has located them within the production category of the woman's film and within that grouping those specifically centred on working women. Aligned with an approach stemming from feminist studies of melodrama, such works are concerned with identifying the development in

[81] 'Wedding Present', *Variety*, 25 November, 1936, 15.

representations of the female character and the latent meanings that they may have held for female viewers. This approach, although illuminating in itself, privileges symptomatic interpretation as the primary lens through which the films are viewed and measured for significance.[82] For instance, Howard Good's book *Girl Reporter* addresses the 1930s pictures, focusing on the Torchy Blane series (Warner Bros., 1937-39) and evaluating them in terms of their concession or resistance to the dominant ideology regarding gender roles and working women.[83] The Torchy series is a key example of the girl reporter formula, and manifests characters, themes and storylines typical of the wider cycle. The pictures were adapted from a series of short stories by Frederick Nebel, and the gender of one of the characters was switched to add a romantic dimension in line with the playful screwball comedies popular in the mid-1930s. Across nine self-contained episodes, the wise-cracking girl reporter, Torchy Blane, competed with her police inspector boyfriend MacBride to bust crime rings and solve murder mysteries.

Good's textual analysis concludes that the Torchy character fails to break from the dominant social conventions and expectations of marriage, but represents 'ideology in motion' and the process of popular culture that 'mystifies' while simultaneously entertaining. Verna Kale's comparison of the Torchy Blane series with that of comic strip adaptation *Brenda Starr, Reporter* (Columbia, 1945), and *His Girl Friday* (Columbia, 1940), takes a similar approach. Kale argues that the girl reporter characters illustrate the 'juxtapolitical' where, through the measurement of success by marital status and the characters' resistance but not outright refusal to marry, cultural norms are reinscribed.[84] While these findings raise interesting questions regarding cultural forms and the processes of ideology, they do not fully account for the way these processes worked for the films' original viewers.

Philippa Gates' *Detecting Women* is the most substantial work on the girl reporter pictures to date, and considers the group of films as situated within the detective genre.[85] Gates' work seeks to recover the sidelined figure of the female sleuth and redress the common perception that Classical Hollywood offered very few strong and transgressive

[82] David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 90.
[83] Howard Good, *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism, and the Movies* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1998).
[84] Verna Kale, 'The Girl Reporter Gets Her Man: The Threat and Promise of Marriage in *His Girl Friday* and *Brenda Starr: Reporter', The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (2014), 341-360.
[85] Philippa Gates, *Detecting Women: Gender and the Hollywood Detective Film* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011).

models of 'good girls'. Applying Andrea Walsh's notion of the conflict between femininity and achievement in her exploration of the films' marriage vs. career themes, Gates organises the films into three periods that are demarcated by their central thematic concerns and character representations: consolidation with the 1929-32 sob sister pictures; the golden age, marked by the 1933 turning point of the New Deal and development of the newspaper crime formula; and the decline, seen in the 1940s lapse into self-parody.[86] The processes of production, promotion and consumption are, however, more fluid than Gates' periodization suggests. I would like to propose a wider consideration of girl reporter films to include those not exclusively centred on detective mysteries and the bigger screwball-inflected entries from the major studios, to present a more comprehensive view. I seek to establish an alternative to Gates' account of development by measuring production quantities, examining the place of the films in distribution and release schedules, and by tracing their promotion and programming across a range of theatres. This aims to provide a clearer perspective on the industrial development of the cycle and to enrich views centred on representational development.

The girl reporter cycle reached its peak in the years between 1937 and 1939, and coincided with an industrial and economic crisis. Under numerous external and internal pressures, Hollywood was forced to confront the methods and systems of its studios and the image they projected of the industry, while publicising the attempt to reconfigure their policies and adapting them to fit the changing marketplace. The widespread adoption of double bills as an exhibition policy from 1931, and the already established run-zone-clearance distribution system directly influenced how the girl reporter cycle was produced and circulated. Double billing, the back-to-back playing of two features in a single programme, increased the demand for product and the studios responded by raising their supply. Low budget, formula-driven cycles functioned to organise and differentiate this vast amount of product in both the production and distribution process. In the case of the girl reporter cycle, the majority of the pictures were low budget 'B' films, generally associated with double bills, subsequent run theatres, and the mass public. On a more specific level, the policies of the production studios at the time of the girl reporter cycle saw a continual wavering between strategies of increased and reduced proportions of B production and the raised and curtailed budgets allocated to individual Bs, as well as the

[86] Gates, *Detecting* Women, 10. Andrea Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience: 1940-1950* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 3.

desire to avoid the label of 'B' altogether. At the same time, series, serial productions, and remakes were on the rise.

In the reviews and discussions of the trade press, the pictures most often identified as part of the larger body of the cycle were programmers: shorter films, usually lasting between 72 and 90 minutes, which were designed for a fast play-off through the run-zone-clearance system. Brian Taves identifies programmers' flexibility for theatre managers, as they could play as an A or a B film, depending on the quality of film with which they paired, and the category of theatre.[87] In downtown first and second tier theatres, programmers would usually support a bigger budget A film, while smaller, subsequent run theatres could use the programmer as the central attraction when paired with an older A film, a series episode or a B film of even lower quality. Although the girl reporter features with greater production values and stars were often founded on the same formula as the programmers, they were not described or circulated in the same way. The distance from the cycle that was maintained by girl reporter A-features, and the closer association of B pictures to the wider girl reporter group, suggests that the production practice of cycles was viewed pejoratively. The industrial discourses and critical reception of the girl reporter pictures suggest a greater complexity, however, than the simple equation of all low budget filmmaking with lesser quality and crass commercialism.

The studios, trade press, critics and exhibitors each held different views on the girl reporter pictures which stemmed from their estimation of how A pictures functioned, and how they valued various low budget, serialised production practices, such as cycles, series and remakes. In this estimation, 'value' is a fluid concept that should be viewed historically; the value attributed to any individual picture depended on the position of the evaluator, the purpose behind their practice of evaluation, and the particular means of measuring value, according to specific aesthetic codes, for instance, or market performance. The standard by which the quality of pictures was measured was adjusted according to the shifting conceptions of worth and the role of motion pictures in American society. While quality could be tied to films of culture, education and class,

[87] William Paul, *When Movies Were Theater: Architecture, Exhibition, and the Evolution of American Film,* Film and Culture Series, Kindle ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), locations 3396–402, 2675–77. Brian Taves, 'The B Film: Hollywood's Other Half', in Tino Balio, (ed.) *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939,* Vol. 5, History of the American Cinema (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 317-8.

industry spokespeople, the trade press and exhibitors also propagated an idea of pure, democratic, quality entertainment associated with pleasing a universal audience. The distinct valuing of the girl reporter films is closely tied to the surrounding context; particular business policies, such as remakes and series production, were defended and maligned within the industry according to the economic environment and the need to project a particular image of a unified Hollywood in the face of external criticism over trade practices. In this way, a discursive examination of the girl reporter cycle illustrates how cycles constitute a significant site where values and meanings are debated.

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, I explore the process by which I have identified the girl reporter pictures as a cycle, and how this contributes to current definitional methodologies. In the second section, I examine the shaping of the girl reporter cycle by specific production practices and distributor decisions for programmer pictures. This uncovers the extent to which the relationship between the studios' policies on low budget production and their pursuit of other forms of extended imitation, such as series and remakes, were related to commercial strategies for seriality that emanated from the structure and environment of the studio system. In the final section of the chapter, I examine the critical, industrial and market reception of the girl reporter pictures, including the programming of the films in the theatres of my four sample exhibition locations in Corsicana, Texas, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Lewiston, Maine and Ellensburg, Washington. This section reveals the way in which the different discursive understandings of the cycle drew upon current perceptions of the industry and audience groups.

Defining the cycle

In attempting to demarcate the girl reporter cycle, my principal methodological framework draws upon the labelling of the pictures and identification of their components in the contemporary trade press. My comparative study of trade reviews indicates the key elements that became associated with a particular body of films from the mid-1930s. The phrases used to describe the pictures suggest that this was based on a unification of the

'newspaper yarn' with a focus on the girl reporter character, locating the form as a cycle within the wider trend of newspaper pictures produced consistently throughout the decade. The process of delineating the girl reporter cycle raises the issues of definition that have long plagued writers on genre, while highlighting the benefits of an inclusive, pragmatic, industrial approach in considering the particular shape taken by a cycle.

The newspaper picture was a recognisable film form in the 1930s, consisting of a range of associated elements which could be variously assembled. One such element was the setting: the newsroom or city desk of a large urban paper. Attached to this setting was a range of character types, among whom were the crusading editor, the star reporter, the sob sister, the cub reporter, the dopey photographer, and the corrupt editor of a rival tabloid.[88] The narrative formats generally followed the framework of a journalistic investigation into a crime, with a story of this type capable of being played for action, or drawing out suspense in a murder mystery format. These various settings, characters, and narrative structures could be combined in numerous ways and adapted to fit different trends and audience interests. When a particular combination proved a success, it could then be iterated within the same production company, or by another company which inflected it with their own house style and stars. The particular focus on the girl reporter component of the newspaper picture resulted in a set of associated themes, including the common character motivation of proving her worth to her male colleagues, the romantic angle with another professional investigator or reporter, and narrative situations where the character was placed in dangerous, sometimes comic situations, such as working undercover. From the height of its popularity in 1937, this particular 'girl reporter' expression of the newspaper picture was described in the trades as an 'angle', 'theme', and 'situation'.[89] Of *There Goes My Girl* (RKO, 1937), *Variety* stated, 'Newspaper reporters who contrive to get themselves into reportorial and romantic difficulties pending the inevitable triumph of love and professional honor, apparently are the current rage of

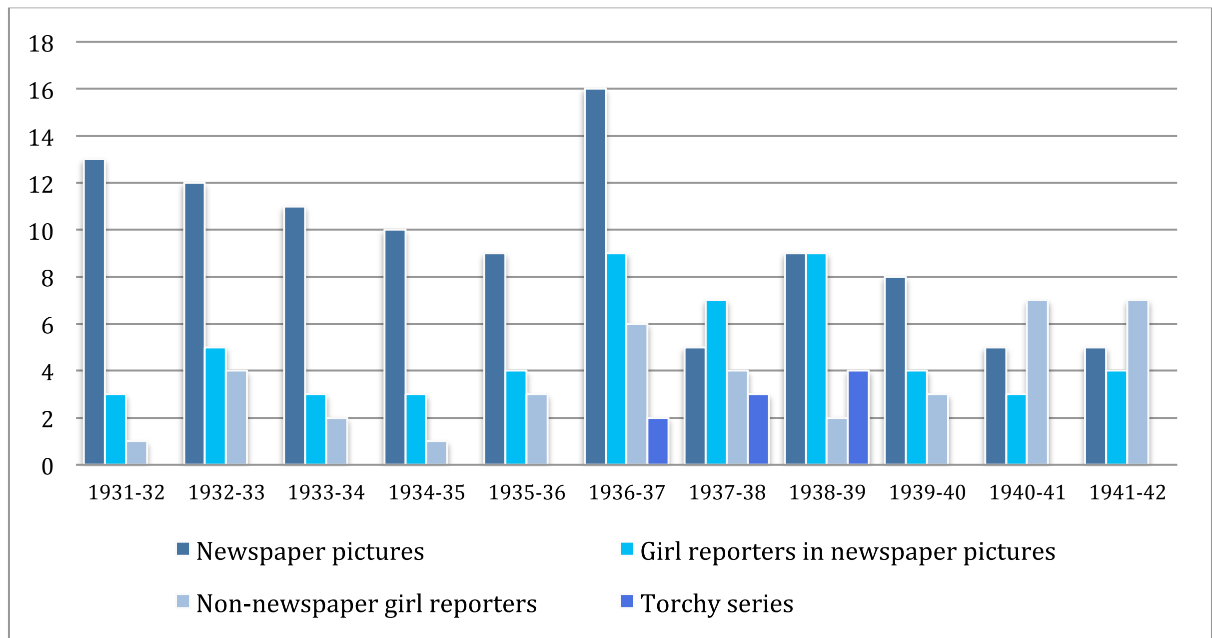
[88] The success of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's adaptation of their stage play, *The Front Page* (United Artists, 1931), spurred a cycle of newspaper productions in the following seasons, which included *Big Town* (Trojan Picture, 1932), *Exposure* (Tower Productions, 1932), *The Final Edition* (Columbia, 1932), *I Cover the Waterfront* (United Artists, 1933), *Hi Nellie!* (Warner Bros., 1934), and others.
[89]'Girl-reporter angle' in 'City of Chance', *Variety*, 24 January, 1940, 14. 'Girl reporter theme' in 'My Dear Miss Aldrich', *Motion Picture Daily*, 8 September, 1937, 2. 'There Goes My Girl', *Washington Evening Star* reprinted in *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, 19 June, 1937, 10. Girl reporter 'situation' in 'My Dear Miss Aldrich', *Variety*, 6 October, 1937, 12.

the producers'.[90] This temporal element, the widespread adoption of the film type at a certain point in time, presents the pictures as a cycle.

In attempting to establish this shape of the cycle over time my research identified the pictures that fused the two components of the newspaper yarn and girl reporter. I first searched the trade publications for a range of commonly associated terms, such as 'newspaper yarn', 'newspaper background', 'girl reporter', 'femme scribe' and 'sob sister'. A more detailed list of films was compiled for the study using the American Film Institute (AFI) Catalogue's online database. The catalogue has tags or searchable labels for genre, sub-genre, subjects (major) and subjects (minor), which include 'women reporters', 'reporters', and 'newspaper'. By viewing the list of all the films that held one such label and sorting them according to ascending years, the bunching of such pictures in the decade was evident. The listed films were cross-checked against multiple trade reviews to determine whether such elements were identified as dominant at the time of release, while my further survey of the trade publication reviews for the period turned up additional films not listed in the AFI Catalogue. I then mapped the number of productions across the decade. A clear increase in the number of girl reporter newspaper pictures is evident in the period from the 1936-37 season to the 1938-39 season, coinciding with the release of the Torchy Blane series.

[90] 'There Goes My Girl', *Variety*, 16 June, 1937, 13.

Table 1, 1930s Newspaper and Girl Reporter Pictures



The discursive identification of the pictures in the trade press establishes a loose model for the girl reporter cycle: films in which the girl reporter is a leading character, and where one or more elements associated with the newspaper picture are present, such as other journalist characters, a newspaper setting, or the narrative framework of the girl reporter taking on a story assignment for a paper. Inevitably, the process of identification uncovered instances of films that fulfilled the criteria in some ways but defied it in others, or which were contradictorily identified in the trade press, or resisted the periodisation suggested by the cycle's temporal location. Rather than disregarding those that failed to fit the cycle, they can be viewed alongside it. For example, the particular combination of the two elements of the girl reporter and the newspaper yarn were evident in films as early as 1929, with *The Office Scandal* (Pathé, 1929) and *In the Headlines* (Warner Bros., 1929), alongside the cycle of yellow journalism-themed newspaper pictures. The films that made up the larger body of girl reporter pictures, and that became particularly identified with the 'girl reporter' label employed in the trade discourse, however, clustered later in the 1930s. Although there were clear precedents in previous years, it was the particular combination of the girl reporter figure, newspaper background, crime investigation narrative, and especially the comic treatment of the professional and romantic rivalry, that was paradigmatic to the girl reporter pictures that made up the bulk of the cycle. This romantic-comedy feature was identified in a trade review of *The Hell Cat* (Columbia, 1934), as 'Basically a newspaper yarn, approaches the subject from new

tack, making romantic love story the most important feature and surrounding that asset with all the color, action and excitement commonly associated with this type story'.[91]

In the 1934-35 season, several films that developed the typical girl reporter-newspaper yarn were released to good box office returns. *After Office Hours* (MGM, 1935) was an MGM 'special' production and centred on Clark Gable's reporter character rather than Constance Bennett's debutante music critic, but the murder mystery structure and sparring romance was characteristic of the format to follow. In this season too, *Variety* made specific note of the similarity of the rival reporter plot in *The Daring Young Man* (Fox, 1935) to that of *Front Page Lady* (Warner Bros., 1935), both in cinemas at the time of the review, although the Warner Bros. production did not start filming until several months after *The Daring Young Man*.[92] A similar number of girl reporter newspaper yarns were made in the 1935-36 season, with programmer entries from Columbia, RKO, MGM, Paramount and Fox. The number of productions in the 1936-37 season was raised further, with a total of sixteen newspaper films and an additional nine girl reporter-newspaper features produced across the main studios, as well as the introduction of the first two episodes of Warner's Torchy Blane series, *Smart Blonde* (Warner Bros., 1937), and *Fly Away Baby* (Warner Bros.1937).

The number of girl reporter films dropped to seven in the 1937-38 season. Yet in this season too, particularly in the leading months of August and September, Paramount, Fox, and MGM sought to develop the girl reporter picture in different directions, such as the small town corruption explored in *Exclusive* (Paramount, 1937), the human interest drama of *One Mile from Heaven* (Fox, 1937) and the injection of slightly higher production values into a more typical newspaper yarn story with *My Dear Miss Aldrich* (MGM, 1937). By contrast, the multiple programmer entries from Warners, Universal, and Columbia focused on the screwball-inflected romantic comedy and rival reporter aspect. The release of *That's My Story* (Universal, 1937) in October was reviewed unfavourably in this regard: '[It] traverses the nut-route of newspapering, already familiar and nauseating to the average audience'.[93] The related screwball comedy cycle also reached

[91] 'The Hell Cat', *Motion Picture Herald*, 12 May, 1934, 42.
[92] 'The Daring Young Man', *Variety*, 24 July, 1935, 56.
[93] 'That's My Story', *Variety*, 1 December, 1937, 14.

saturation point at this time, with speculation of the forthcoming season predicting that it would be dropped from production schedules.[94]

Despite this, the number of productions rose to nine in the1938-39 season. Many of these pictures combined the newspaper yarn and girl reporter characters with other popular cycles, such as that of 'tough kids', or topical interest, including the Dionne quintuplets featured in *Five of a Kind* (Fox, 1938). With Warners releasing the last of the Torchy episodes and series production on the rise across all studios, the girl reporter formula was incorporated into an episode of its Nancy Drew series, and also trialled in *The Adventures of Jane Arden* (Warner Bros., 1939), adapting the girl reporter character from a popular comic strip. Reviews marked it as disappointing, however, and no similar pictures were made in the series.[95]

Girl reporter films continued to be produced into the early 1940s, but at a more sporadic rate, particularly as far as the major studios were concerned. Among the majors' productions, however, were such big budget successes as *His Girl Friday* (Columbia, 1940), which held higher production values and critically lauded performances. The figure of the female journalist who was not explicitly tied to a newspaper setting increased in frequency as the newspaper picture declined. In *Lady Scarface* (RKO, 1941), it was a female magazine photographer who worked with a detective to track down a lady gangster, while the girl reporter was reduced to a supporting role in *Pardon My Stripes* (Republic, 1941) and *Who is Hope Shuyler?* (Fox, 1942). While this character type of an active, professional woman still held currency in the next decade, it was displaced onto new forms and production trends.[96] In 1939 Warner Bros. experimented with the start of a new series, *Private Detective,* to replace Torchy Blane's girl reporter with a 'girl detective'. It was described as a repaint job of the Torchy series, the same formula beneath a new finish.[97] The 'murder mystery girl reporter mix up' was described as 'wearisome' by *Variety* in 1941 and, as a whole, the programmer pictures increasingly infused the newspaper investigations into such topical subjects as international espionage, the deportation of aliens, the black market, or horror tales.[98]

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[94] 'New Prod. Trend Will Be Away from Filmusicals and Screwball Comedies', *Variety*, 23 March, 1938, 1,63.
[95] 'The Adventures of Jane Arden', *Variety*, 5 April, 1939, 19. 'The Adventures of Jane Arden', *Harrison's Reports*, 11 March, 1939, 38.
[96] 'Studios Turn to Femmes in Profesh, After Overload He-Man Fare', *Variety*, 22 June, 1938, 5.
[97] 'Private Detective', *Variety*, 6 December, 1939, 14.
[98] 'City of Missing Girls', *Variety*, 2 April, 1941, 16.

The initiation of the girl reporter cycle is not attributable to one single hit production. Instead, the cycle was built on antecedents, part of a cumulative process where an already established film type became attractive to producers at a specific moment and caused a rise in production levels. This corresponds with Richard Nowell's idea of a cycle as a spike in filmmaking above the base level production of a film type, whatever that base level might be.[99] Cycles need not be preceded by a complete inactivity or lack of production of the film type, nor be dependent on a topical event to act as a catalyst for production. Examining the girl reporter figures outside of the cycle also reveals the ways in which female journalist characters not tied to newspaper pictures, nor depicted as leading figures in the picture, increased as the newspaper pictures declined. Such instances of variance highlight the fluidity of the cycle and the porous nature of its borders, which were embedded in its very nature as a process developed from its interconnections to surrounding pictures. The operations of the girl reporter cycle and the function they enacted for the industry were specifically derived from the production and distribution structure of the studio system and the market environment of the mid to late 1930s.

Cycles as production practice

According to Richard Maltby's understanding of Hollywood's commercial aesthetic, films are composites of different elements that are variously combined in the production process to form a particular object. In this continuous assembly of interchangeable parts, particularly successful combinations are repeated and imitated.[100] These basic ingredients include the general settings, plots, themes and characters that exist in the public domain, as well as the resources available at a particular studio for producers to draw upon, such as purchased story properties or in-house script writers, sets, costumes and props, and the stable of stars. The combination of these basic ingredients could be adapted to fit different trends and audience interests. When a particular combination proved a success, it could then be iterated within the same production company, or by another studio that inflected it with their own house style and stars. The girl reporter films represent one such group of

[99] Richard Nowell, 'Hollywood Don't Skate: Us Production Trends, Industry Analysis, and the Roller Disco Movie', *New Review of Film and Television Studies,* Vol. 11 (2013), 73-91.
[100] Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 60.

textual compounds which had an easily reproducible formula. The narrative framework of the newspaper picture was particularly malleable: its conventions could be easily recycled and restructured, often in the form of an exposé that was given a topical spin, while its distinct iconography presented a recognisable world to build upon. This gave the form a particular durability that lent itself to serialized reproduction and variation.

A cycle of this kind can be seen as a concentrated production trend. The production of pictures according to such formulae could occur through several seasons and across studios, depending on their continued popularity with audiences. Rather than being necessarily topical, such cycles represent a wider strategy available to producer-distributors under the studio system. With studios needing to fill their seasonal production schedules and provide a variety of product, including a large number of programmers, the reproduction of a formula proven relatively successful with audiences was a commercially viable way to order and stimulate production. A cycle such as the girl reporter films was a manifestation of just one such form among many others. Its commercial potential was realised in 1936 and it remained a sustainable option for producer-distributors for a number of seasons, after which cinemagoers were perceived to have wearied of the formula and other film types were pursued instead.

The debates surrounding the production and distribution policies of the studios were constant throughout the decade, and informed the reception of programmer cycles such as the girl reporter pictures. The intensity of these debates increased in the mid-1930s, however, as a result of their temporary codified status through the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933 and the National Recovery Administration's Code of Fair Competition. Adding to the industry's concerns were the ongoing attempts to legislate against unfair trade practices on both a local and national level, as well as the threat of government probes and the possibility of federal intervention that hung over Hollywood.

There was no clear consensus on issues such as double billing and B feature production. Increasing numbers of exhibitors adopted double billing from 1932, and independent theatre managers viewed them as a significant non-price competitive tactic against the theatres owned by or affiliated with the majors, using quantity to augment their limited access to the newest and highest-quality product. As the circuits and larger theatres began to adopt double billing, the pervasiveness of the practice was decried. Double features

were portrayed as a vicious circle that raised consumers' expectations and created a lower standard of value from which it was difficult to retreat.[101] As *Motion Picture Herald* pointed out in 1938, one's position on B production was tied to whether one believed that eliminating it altogether would rid the industry of double features, or whether they were accepted as established practice.[102] B film production was thus opposed by figures such as Adolphe Zukor and Cecil B. DeMille at Paramount, while others, including RKO's Samuel Biskin, defended it as an important training ground for new talent. Universal's Charles Rogers identified the label of 'B' as a handicap because of its connotation of lower-quality pictures but argued that the box office was the ultimate test of a picture's value and that B pictures acquired the designation they deserved in the marketplace. Such attitudes affected both customer traffic at the box office and studios' policies for selling their pictures to exhibitors.[103] To combat such stigma, the studios sought to inject higher production values into the pictures through increased budgets and signifiers associated with quality, or by merely relabelling the categories.[104] Such strategies are evident in certain pictures in the girl reporter cycle, with Warner Bros.' attempt to raise the status of *Front Page Woman* (Warner Bros., 1935) by attaching Michael Curtiz as a 'class' director, and labelling the Torchy series an 'A' according to their new classificatory categories 'AA' and 'A'.[105]

From 1934, as the demand for product to fill double bills increased, a number of independent companies sought to enter production.[106] In response to this competition, the major studios sought to maintain control over the market by increasing their low budget production and by developing methods of circulating this product that protected their own interests.[107] Often sold to exhibitors in bulk packages and at a flat rate, B features were

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[101] J. H. Thompson, 'Calls Double Feature Octopus Strangling Quality and Receipts', *Motion Picture Herald*, 13 February, 1937, 70. 'B Films, Exhibs and the Coast', *Variety*, 20 January, 1937, 5.
[102] '"B" Films Become Issue of Studio and Theatre', *Motion Picture Herald*, 13 February, 1937, 13.
[103] MGM's 1936 decision to reduce their output of B production was tied to the current sales terms, which followed a percentage rather than flat fee basis, and the 10% cancellation clause available to exhibitors. *Variety* records that a MGM B picture lost close to $65,000 once word spread of its lack of appeal, and exhibitors cancelled their purchase of the picture. The studio sales department argued that different rental terms were needed for pictures of varying cost and box office value. 'Metro Off 100-200G Films: Wants No "B" On Nameless Pix', *Variety*, 5 February, 1936, 7.
[104] Martin Quigley, 'Alphabetisation', *Motion Picture Herald*, 14 March, 1936, 7.
[105] 'Director's Class Touch May Be the Diff Between 'A' Pix and Also-Rans', *Variety*, 17 April. 1935, p. 3. Frank Nugent, 'Although the Warners deny making Class B pictures – the brothers label their products AA and A- 'Smart Blonde' is pretty far down the alphabet…', 'Smart Blonde', New *York Times*, 9 January, 1937.
[106] Brian Taves, 'The B Film: Hollywood's Other Half', in Balio (ed.) *Grand Design*, 321.
[107] 'Need Twice as Many Pix: Duals Decision Seen as a Boon', *Variety*, 14 August, 1934, 5. For instance, Warner Bros.' plan to increase B production for the 1937 season was linked to the desire to prevent independent production from getting 'too strong a foothold' in the industry, with Fox and Paramount considering a similar strategy, 'Warners 100 Pix Grind: Plenty of Bs for Dual Bills', *Variety*, 26 February, 1936, 5.

used by the studios to lessen the average production cost of the seasonal budget as whole, and bring the investment within the bounds of the financial return achievable from this block selling. Each year, the producer-distributors calculated the spread of their production slate according to the number of films needed to maintain their hold on the market. As *Variety* pointed out, the majors usually totalled an output of between forty and sixty pictures each per season, with these numbers generally increasing when the overall rentals of films dipped.[108] The practice of block booking, where theatre managers desiring to buy 'A's were also forced to take a number of the studio's B product, was long criticised as an unfair trade practice, with various anti-block booking and blind selling bills brought before the Senate throughout the decade. The industry was again divided on the issue with the majors on one side, and some independent exhibitors on the other. At the time of Senator Matthew Neely's attempt to restrict these practices in 1938, Sidney R. Kent voiced the defensive stance of the MPPDA, that individual selling would cause an increase in costs that would ruin independent exhibitors; the New York Independent Theatre Owners of America agreed that abolition would be impractical. Many independent exhibitors, however, such as those in Ohio recently involved in their own anti-playdate case, commended Neely.[109]

Within the studio system, the company sales team of distributors had a significant role in advising producers as to the shape of the studio's seasonal output. Drawing on exhibitor reports and box office figures, distributors would arrange production plans into classifications of story type, budget, production team, and timetable.[110] As part of this planning process, as well as in the sales conventions and the peddling of film blocks to exhibitors, cycles provided practical short-hand descriptive categories for films that could not always be distinguished by a star name. My analysis of the trade press' discussions of cycles reveals that the majority consisted of low budget pictures. This is related to the proportional number of these films needing to be produced and the way such formula films could be quickly and cheaply made, as well as the increased likelihood for them to be discursively identified and recognised as such. 'A' and special films were also

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[108] 'B Films, Exhibs and the Coast', *Variety*, 20 January, 1937, 5.
[109] 'Neely Bill Spells Ruin for Independents, Says Kent, Block Sales "Necessity" says MPPDA', *Motion Picture Herald*, 12 March, 1938, 33. 'Exhibs Differ On Block Booking Bill', *Motion Picture Herald*, 5 March, 1938, 16.
[110] See Campbell McCulloch's account, Richard Maltby, 'Sticks, Hicks and Flaps: Classical Hollywood's Generic Conception of its Audiences', *Identifying Hollywood Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds.) (London: BFI, 1999), 24.

conceived along the lines of successful formulaic elements, but were imbued with greater production values.

In the early 1930s, the studio production system also shifted from a central supervisor to individual production units within a studio. This included a unit at each of the major studios dedicated to low budget production. Many of these units were responsible for a large number of girl reporter pictures. Bob Moak's 1939 account of these 'keepers of the Bs' described their production process and argued that, while play dates were important, 'in order to garner needed number of bookings to cover nut and net, they've first got to find a script – a good one, at that!'[111] The search for plots was identified as the primary problem for all 'program moguls'. Some B unit directors worked with a strong writing team to produce original ideas, or purchased stories in the open market, while Warner Bros.' Bryan Foy wove ideas around 'basic threads of materials previously filmed or scripts shelved throughout the years by his company's A producers'. Eric Hoyt's work on Hollywood film libraries similarly identifies how a principal use of old films in the 1930s was to provide a basis for such 'derivatives' or remakes, with properties traded between the studios for this express purpose.[112]

In keeping with this adherence to current audience interest, the girl reporter pictures were closely related to other cycles popular at the time, incorporating such elements into their own narratives. In particular, the pictures drew on the different gangster and racketeering cycles that ebbed and flowed throughout the decade, utilising their villains or G-men heroes and their stories of crime and corruption, with the narrative framework of the newspaper investigation especially adaptable to topical explorations. The editorial rhetoric and exposé format could be applied to timely subjects, such as the Welfare Island prison scandal depicted in *The Daring Young Man* (Fox, 1935) and the 'parole racket' in the film of the same name (*Parole Racket,* Columbia, 1938).[113] This format could also be used to justify the treatment of controversial subject matter, such as the exploration of kidnapping, the 'snatch racket', in *The Mad Game* (Fox, 1933) following the Lindbergh case and PCA restrictions on the topic. Here, the drama was framed as 'anti-kidnapping',

[111] Bob Moak, 'Box Office Slant on Bs', *Variety*, 5 July, 1939, 5, 20.
[112] Eric Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault: The Film Libraries Before Home Video* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2014), 79-81.
[113] The Welfare Island prison scandal erupted in early 1934 after a raid from new Corrections Commissioner Austin H. MacCormick exposed the gang rule of the facility, which trafficked in drugs and enforced an extensive privilege system with the co-operation of the prison wardens.

and the trade reviews note that the sensible handling of the topic won the approval of Hays, with 'censors satisfied' by having the gangster character turn police informer and be awarded a heroic death.[114] The girl reporter pictures also drew on the concurrent screwball cycle, particularly in the depiction of the central romance and the farcical treatment of competitive situations, which earned some the 'nutty newspaper' designation.[115] Many of the pictures were also part of shorter-lived overlapping cycles such as that of aviation (*Criminals of the Air*, Columbia, 1937, *Fly Away Baby* Warner Bros., 1937), and the tough kids pictures (*Newsboys' Home*, Universal, 1938, *Off the Record*, Warner Bros., 1939). In incorporating these different elements, the girl reporter cycles sought to retain audience interest and widen their appeal.

Rick Altman's work on genre highlights the strategy of the studios of including multiple modes of address both in the films and in their surrounding promotional discourses in order to appeal to as wide a range of viewers as possible.[116] While particular audience groups were seen to favour certain film types, Susan Ohmer identifies how the findings of audience research organisations such as George Gallup's ARI emphasised the incorporation of numerous elements of appeal into a single film rather than productions aimed at one particular market.[117] The publicity campaigns were instead adjusted on a local level to target particular audience groups. In this way, the trade reviews of the girl reporter films consistently comment on the integration of several story components and their particular treatment. For instance, the 1932 picture *Dance, Fools, Dance* (MGM, 1932), with Joan Crawford as a girl reporter, is described as a mixed-up story with gangster action, romance and hokey melodrama: 'Harry Beaumont simply took all the story ingredients and made situations around each one, like playing chess'.[118] This describes one of the fundamental ways that films were made, with the application of different narrative formulae to a variety of settings and characters.

The principal identifying factor of cycles, the repetition of a familiar formula across a short period of time, is not restricted to feature films. The girl reporter was present across

[114] 'The Mad Game', *Motion Picture Herald*, 28 October, 1933, 555., 'The Mad Game', *Variety*, 14 November, 1933, 30.
[115] 'That's My Story', *Variety*, 1 December, 1937, 14. 'No Time to Marry', *Variety*, 23 February, 1938, 14.
[116] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), 57, 128.
[117] Susan Ohmer, 'The Science of Pleasure: George Gallup and Audience Research in Hollywood', *Identifying Hollywood Audiences*, 70.
[118] 'Dance, Fools, Dance', *Variety*, 25 March, 1931, 24.

a number of different media in the mid-1930s. Ishbel Ross' non-fiction account of girl reporter exploits, *Ladies of the Press*, was published in 1936 to a warm reception, and one of the main sources for the films were magazine stories, such as those of newspaper woman Adela Rogers St John and Paul Gallico in *The Saturday Evening Post*.[119] At the same time, the girl reporter character featured in radio dramas and comics. The comic strip *The Adventures of Jane Arden* originated in 1927 and was adapted as a radio serial in 1938. In 1939, when Warner Bros. released their film version, also called *The Adventures of Jane Arden,* the comic ran in 17 newspapers with a total readership of 22,000,000 and the radio show played on 18 NBC network stations to 12,000,000 listeners.[120] With this presold audience in hand, the feature was trialled as a potential pilot for a new girl reporter series. Meanwhile the cross-media current also ran in the other direction, with the newspaper film *Big Town* (Trojan, 1932) spawning a radio drama that ran from 1937 to 1952. A prominent girl reporter character absent from the original film was injected into the radio show, voiced by Clare Trevor, who already had a history of playing girl reporters in Fox films.[121] Paramount also released four Big Town features from 1947 to 1948. A television show of the same name was initiated in 1950, and a comic strip ran from 1951. The comic *Brenda Starr, Reporter* also began in 1940 and became the basis of a 13-chapter serial produced by Sam Katzman at Columbia in 1945. The proliferation of these forms, many of which crossed over into feature film production at the peak of the cycle, were no longer deemed commercially viable for mass production for cinema audiences by the 1939-1940 season, as was apparent in the decision not to continue the Jane Arden series, and in the overall decline in programmer girl reporter-newspaper films.

Within these different forms of the feature film, the film series, radio shows, and comic strips are several types of seriality. The motion picture features were composed of a narrative whole, and while the characters and storylines followed familiar prototypes, they were individual to each picture. A series such as Torchy Blane, on the other hand, carried the same characters and settings across the total nine episodes, each of which held a self-contained narrative with the different criminal investigations providing the basis for

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[119] Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936). Robert Van Gelder, 'Books of the Times', *New York Times*, 21 September, 1936, and 21 December, 1936, Gallico's stories were adapted for *Wedding Present* (Paramount, 1936), *Wild Money* (Paramount, 1937) *No Time to Marry* (Columbia, 1938), and Rogers St John's *Cosmopolitan* story, 'Angle Shooter', was made into *Back in Circulation* (Warner Bros., 1937).

[120] Warner Bros. Press Book: The Adventures of Jane Arden, 1939.

[121] *The Mad Game* (Fox, 1933), *Hold That Girl* (Fox, 1934) *Human Cargo* (Fox. 1936) and *One Mile from Heaven* (Fox, 1937).

variation. By creating a cohesive story world and repeating its characters, a series was able to generate and sustain viewer loyalty, with a pre-sold audience in place for subsequent episodes. The fans of the Torchy series were repeatedly recognised in accounts of the films by reviewers, exhibitors, and viewers themselves.[122] Actress Glenda Farrell was replaced for two of the episodes after attempting to renegotiate her salary with the studio, but when the rentals dipped and the studio was inundated with letters from protesting fans, she was reinstated with greater remuneration.[123] With the ready recycling of sets and props, such series were relatively cheap to produce and were identified in the trade press as a commercial strategy being increasingly employed by the major studios in the late 1930s.[124]

In contrast with the self-contained episodes of series, the narrative of serials spanned multiple chapters. Scott Higgins describes the high proportion of serials that were booked in theatres unaffiliated with the major studios, largely in rural areas.[125] As a product staple for audiences outside the first and second runs, Guy Barefoot argues that serials were promoted as wholesome entertainment with broader appeal, a means to attract children to the cinemas but not to the exclusion of other audience groups. The usefulness of the form for small town and independent exhibitors is illustrated in the repeated calls for adult serials from the mid-1930s.[126] Although the girl reporter was not the subject of her own serial until Columbia's *Brenda Starr* in 1945, the character type was used in Universal's *The Phantom Creeps* in 1939, as part of the ensemble fighting to prevent Bela Lugosi's mad scientist from taking over the world. This was identified as a horror-science serial by the trade press and is only marginally part of the girl reporter-newspaper cycle.[127] The girl reporter radio shows employed both forms of seriality: *The Adventures of Jane Arden* ran in 15 minute segments at 10:15 on weekday mornings, suggesting the targeting of a middle-class female market, while *Big Town* followed a series format,

[122] 'Blondes at Work', *Variety*, 16 March, 1938, 17. 'Blondes at Work', *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin*. 29 January, 1938, 11. 'In the Cutting Room: Torchy Blane in Panama', *Motion Picture Herald*, 12 February, 1938, 15. By exhibitors: 'What the Picture Did for Me: Adventurous Blonde', *Motion Picture Herald*, 8 January, 1938, 61. 'What the Picture Did for Me: Blondes at Work', *Motion Picture Herald*, 14 May, 1938, 60. In fan magazines: *Screenland*, March, 1939, 23. *Modern Screen*, December, 1938, 70.
[123] *Screenland*, March, 1939, 23.
[124] 'Newest H'wood Idea Is Series Pix; B.O. Shows Yen for Same Names', *Variety*, 26 May, 1937, 25-26.
[125] Scott Higgins, *Matinee Melodrama: Playing with Formula in the Sound Serial* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 9.
[126] Guy Barefoot, 'Who Watched That Masked Man? Hollywood's Serial Audiences in the 1930s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2011), 167-90. 'Serials Return to New Strength', *Motion Picture Herald*, 20 July, 1935: 14. 'Serials for Adults', *Motion Picture Herald*, 6 June, 1936, 96.
[127] 'The Phantom Creeps', *Variety*, 9 August, 1939, 14, 18.

airing in the evenings for 30-minute self-contained episodes, with names such as 'The Dance Hall Hostess Racket', 'Parole Racket Exposé', and 'Counterfeiting Exposé'.[128]

While the forms of series and serials were generally less flexible than feature film cycles, which could engage in a greater degree of narrative experimentation and innovation from picture to picture, the newspaper format was still relatively pliant and could be adjusted to fit the different types of stories under investigation. Despite the structural difference between the episodic series and ongoing serial narrative, both types of seriality formalise the pattern of repetition as a market strategy to retain a viewing group, participating in a process of world-building. This bears some similarities to modern-day film franchises, which have been defined by Derek Johnson as the commercial and creative extension of an intellectual property through ongoing, multiplied production.[129] Cycles, by contrast, are a collection of different properties that are grouped together discursively according to a similarity of textual elements. This can be traced to the competitive market and structure of Hollywood, which saw the studios engage in a process of legally-sanctioned imitation.

The copyright laws that protected intellectual property from plagiarism could be circumvented through variation and differentiation, and in the first half of the 1930s Hollywood fought to establish a legal protection for such practices. Peter Decherney's *Hollywood's Copyright Wars* describes how the tradition of repetition, imitation, and borrowing that was part of the industry's vaudeville inheritance was being increasingly contested as the modes of production were rationalized under the studio system.[130] In dealing with charges of plagiarism from writers, the law courts sought to determine the dichotomy between *idea* and *expression*, where an *idea* could not be protected under copyright law, but its original *expression* could. It was accepted and expected, Decherney argues, that filmmakers would take up familiar stories and themes, giving visual expression to time-worn cultural building blocks. It was not until *Cain v. Universal* in 1942 that a measure to separate the idea or formula from the original means of expression was established. This was done through the doctrine of *scènes à faire*, the idea that

[128] 'The Adventures of Jane Arden', *Variety*, 22 June, 1938, 28.
[129] Derek Johnson, 'Devaluing and Revaluing Seriality: The Gendered Discourses of Media Franchising', *Media, Culture & Society,* Vol. 33, No. 7 (2011), 1077-93.
[130] Peter Decherney, *Hollywood's Copyright Wars: From Edison to the Internet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 61.

storytelling logic dictated that certain 'situations' inevitably contained the same plots, characters, circumstances and themes which could play out in expected ways.[131] In this way, a newspaper picture could be reasonably expected to contain scenes of a girl reporter pulling a prank on a rival reporter in order to out-scoop him on a story, without being liable to charges of infringement.

In the production context of the 1930s, where all the studios participated in programmer cycles, it was not in their interest to publicly contest the practice with charges of plagiarism against one another, particularly over low budget product. For instance, statistical reports from the Title Registration Bureau, a body established by the MPPDA to monitor potential properties from across the studios, show that in 1947 207 titles were returned, 32 were rejected for moral unsuitability, and 413 protests were filed over difference of opinion regarding which studio had priority to a particular title, or issues of 'harmful' similarity.[132] Of these, however, only seven cases went to arbitration, evidencing the desire of the industry to work through its disagreements internally. The studios' attitudes were increasingly challenged, however, with the growing protection of writers' rights through the formation of guilds and unions from the late 1930s. Decherney argues that over the next two decades the studios developed a system based on contracts which could protect ideas as well as their expression.[133] This was codified in *Desney v. Wilder* in 1956, as Eric Hoyt describes: 'By interpreting Desney's idea submission as a contract, the California Supreme Court smoothed the fissures of copyright's ideas-expression distinction, offering legal protection for ideas to be commodified and sold in the media marketplace'.[134]

Such issues are brought to the fore when the informal repetition of cycles is compared to formalised imitations, such as remakes, which are based on a single intellectual property.

[131] Decherney, *Hollywood's Copyright Wars*, 85. James M. Cain brought a suit against Universal for producing a film with a scene that closely resembled one of his unlicensed short stories, that of a couple taking refuge from a storm in a church. Judge Leon Yankwich ruled that despite there being some similarities between the two the basic situation inherently contained associated actions and emotions: 'Courts have held repeatedly that such similarities and incidental details necessary to the environment or setting of an action are not the material of which copyrightable originality consists'. 'Cain v. Universal Pictures Co.', (1942), accessed 6 October, 2016. <http://www.leagle.com/decision/1942106047FSupp1013_1804/CAIN%20v.%20UNIVERSAL%20PICTURES%20CO.?>

[132] Title Registration Bureau report, May, 1948. Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) Records, file 436. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[133] Decherney, *Hollywood's Copyright Wars*, 102.

[134] Eric Hoyt, 'Writer in the Hole: Desney v. Wilder, Copyright Law, and the Battle of Ideas', *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2011), 22.

As an official remake of *The Front Page* (United Artists, 1931). *His Girl Friday* (Columbia, 1940) had the legal rights to use Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's dialogue, story and characters. The gender of a leading character was switched in the later film to create a girl reporter and enhance the romantic-comedy elements. Yet prior to the production of *His Girl Friday*, a number of lower budget girl reporter films, including *Wedding Present* (Paramount, 1936) and *There Goes My Girl* (RKO, 1937) employed precisely the same gender switch strategy and were clearly noted by reviewers as stemming from *The Front Page*. The *Variety* review of *Wedding Present* argued that 'Paul Gallico must have founded the yarn on the fabled antics of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur; only in this case he's mixed the sexes', while its review of *There Goes My Girl* stated, 'Picture opens up practically where *The Front Page* left off, plus a slight twist. There's the tough managing editor (Richard Lane) trying to prevent his star sob-sister (Ann Southern) from marrying one of the muggs (sic.) of another sheet (Gene Raymond)'.[135]

According to Constantine Verevis' outline of remakes, *His Girl Friday* represents a direct, industrial, property-based remake of *The Front Page*. It could, however, also be perceived as an indirect textual remake of *Wedding Present* and *There Goes My Girl*, although this was not explicitly observed at the time. On the other hand, the fact that these pictures were both linked to *The Front Page* by reviewers ties them to Verevis' conception of critical or discursive remakes.[136] *His Girl Friday* might have been equally influenced by the earlier pictures, but Columbia did not need to protect itself from using the same idea, as it had legally purchased the expression of *The Front Page*.

The complex process of recycling and its legal ramifications are also seen in the case of *Torchy Blane in Chinatown* (Warner Bros., 1939).[137] The script was compiled from a number of sources, including the magazine short story *The Purple Hieroglyph*, which the studio had bought back in 1921. Warner Bros. had planned a production from this property in 1929 under the working title 'Murder Will Out', but the picture never eventuated. In 1939, however, the same year as the Torchy release, Warner Bros.' British division released another production of *Murder Will Out*, and the studio secured a release

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[135] 'Wedding Present', *Variety*, 25 November, 1936,15, 'There Goes My Girl', *Variety*, 16 June, 1937, 13.
[136] Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 2-30.
[137] United Artists Series 1.7, Warner Bros. Contract and Legal File, Box 72, Folders 580, 385. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

from the English screenwriter Brock Williams for the use of dialogue from *Murder Will Out* in the Torchy picture. At the same time, credit was given to Frederick Nebel, writer of the Kennedy-McBride magazine stories from which the Torchy characters originated, despite the studios' gender switch of the male reporter Kennedy to girl reporter Torchy. The studio had paid Nebel $1,250 for the story 'No Hard Feelings', as well as 25 additional properties. Discussions took place within the studio in 1939 over their rights to use the same characters in making sequels, and Roy Orbringer clarified the legal arrangement in a letter to Hal Wallis:

> While we have the right to make one or more motion picture versions based upon these properties and have the right to add to, subtract from, interpolate in, and make changes, I am of the opinion that we do not have the right to make sequels, and particularly so with respect to certain fixed characters as established by Nebel.[138]

This understanding of repetition is aligned in some ways with Rick Altman's observations regarding proprietorial elements, series, and cycles. Altman states that the studios' major goal in producing film series, such as those of the late 1930s, was to assure a continuous influx of profit without offering any assistance to competitors.[139] He highlights the development of better legal protection and the growth of legal ownership factors, including the studio-based star system, as contributing to the relative ease and profitability of designing and protecting characters like Torchy Blane as the property of a single studio. Altman argues that such brand associations could be more valuable for studios than the broad identification with a genre or production trend, because of their exclusivity to individual companies. He suggests, moreover, that cycles are also based on proprietorial elements, with studios concerned to create cycles that are identified specifically with themselves, in contrast to the broad, public categories of genre. Here he views cycles as being based on studio-specific property resources, such as contract actors, characters, and recognisable styles, but which also contained common elements that other studios could replicate, such as subject matter, character types and plot patterns.[140]

The trade press' commentary on cycles, however, posits shareability as one of their foundational qualities. Cycles are repeatedly identified in these publications as inclusive,

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[138] Letter from Roy Orbinger to Wallace, 11 April, 1939, 'Torchy Blane in Panama', Box 72, Folder 385.
[139] Altman, *Film/Genre*, 117.
[140] Altman, *Film/Genre*, 59-60.

cross-studio occurrences, created by a rush of different producers to the same topic.[141] Given the studio's ultimate interest in self-promotion, the association of a popular cycle with a single studio is evident when the company is speaking about the cycle in its advertising discourse. For example, and as noted in the previous chapter, Warner Bros. asserted themselves as 'cycle starters' and 'the acknowledged pioneers of production cycles' in promoting their 1935 season.[142] Yet even this was not always the case. *Motion Picture Herald's* 'In the Cutting Room' report on *Exclusive* (Paramount, 1937) records the studio publicist's obligatory attempt to sell the picture to the media: 'It's got laughs like you had in *Front Page*, romantic love interest like what was in *Gentlemen of the Press*, dynamic action like what was in *Front Page Woman* and real low down authenticity like only fellows who were in on the real low down knew'.[143] The picture is described alongside successful newspaper films from rival studio Warner Bros., as well as Paramount. Many programmer-based cycles are, like genres, founded on formulaic repetition and sharable ideas, and possess the same legal conception. Cycles are a framework that fits within genre studies, a means to understand the undulating production of film types that grounds them in their historical industrial context and locates them as a specifically commercial, market-oriented phenomenon with a restricted life expectancy.

Frank Kelleter has argued that this pervasiveness of media forms premised on repetition is tied to the specific nature of American popular culture. Kelleter contends that modern commercial organisation fosters homogenized reproduction, but at the same time requires products that can appeal to a hugely diverse audience group. This system, Kelleter believes, naturally encourages both the standardisation and the open-ended flexibility found in the serial-narrative form.[144] A study of the studios' policies for late 1930s seasons reveals how the production of the girl reporter cycle was also tied more specifically to strategies responding to the economic situation of the time, particularly in regard to B features and their role in the industry.

[141] 'Pounce On Topical Yarns, Sell It Fast Becomes Credo of Film Writers', *Variety*, 2 July, 1941, 21.
[142] *Blessed Event* ad in *Film Daily,* 2 December, 1932, 6-7. Night Nurse predicting cycle- *Motion Picture Daily,* 15 July, 1933, 3. WB ad for 1935 release schedule in *Motion Picture Daily,* 1 June, 1934, 6.
[143] 'In the Cutting Room: Exclusive', *Motion Picture Herald*, 12 June, 1937, 46.
[144] Frank Kelleter, '"Toto, I Think We're in Oz Again" (and Again and Again): Remakes and Popular Seriality', *Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions: Remake/Remodel,* Kathleen Lock, Constantine Verevis (eds.) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 22.

The run-zone-clearance distribution system reinforced the increasing stratification of theatres that cemented their status in the distribution and exhibition hierarchy of the 1930s. Subsequent discussions arose, led by figures such as Martin Quigley, editor of *Motion Picture Herald,* and reiterated by theatre owners, which emphasised the idea of a diversified audience and the need for Hollywood to cater to their separate tastes. As Richard Maltby has described, the studios differentiated their audiences into separate markets or "taste publics" based on the location and status of the exhibition site, and containing further sub-categories of gender, age and class.[145] Much of the discourse on audiences evident in the trade press was built around the difference between the tastes of small town viewers and metropolitan cinemagoers. Many of *Variety's* reports thus monitor the attitude of small town exhibitors and audiences towards the large-scale 'class' productions popular in the downtown first run theatres.[146]

Quigley had long campaigned for the industry to recognise the diversity of audience tastes.[147] *Motion Picture Herald's* commentaries on MPPDA head Will Hays' annual industry reports offer insight into this acknowledgment and the changing discursive strategy adopted by the major companies' trade organisation. In 1931 Hays' argument centred on the fallacy of universal entertainment, but he still advocated a utilitarian attempt to be 'the greatest service to the greatest number'.[148] Following the 1932 survey conducted by the MPPDA on audience preferences, Hays argued that 'instead of entertainment to a fixed common denominator the industry is stepping up its entertainment standards to meet the needs of every element of the potential motion picture audience', suggesting a greater attempt to address diversity.[149] A 1937 article commenting on Hays' most recent industry report, however, hinted at a shift back towards the earlier ideas. To explain this shift, Hays pointed to the Production Code as having precipitated the production of better pictures such as literary adaptations which, in achieving widespread popular success, consequently raised audiences' standards of taste, thereby lessening the division between audience groups and reinforcing reiterating the

[145] Richard Maltby, 'Introduction', pp. 4-5, ''Sticks, Hicks and Flaps: Classical Hollywood's Generic Conception of its Audiences', 23-41. Melvyn Stokes, and Richard Maltby, *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*. Vol. 1999 (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1999).

[146] 'Stix vs City on Pix', *Variety*, 8 December, 1932, 5. 'Stix Squawk Vs Hollywood: They Don't Want Sophistication', *Variety*, 6 June, 1933, 3. 'Sticks Nix Hicks Pix: Not Interested in Farm Drama', *Variety*, 7 July, 1935, 1, 51.

[147] Martin Quigley, 'Classification', *Motion Picture Herald*, 19 January, 1935, 7.

[148] 'Some of the People All of the Time', *Motion Picture Herald*, 28 November, 1931, 3.

[149] 'MPPDA Seeks to Learn the Film Preferences of the Entire Nation', *Motion Picture Herald*, 12 March, 1932, 33.

idea of a universal public.[150] This idea of the undifferentiated or universal audience was, as Maltby has argued, a rhetorical trope employed by the industry in times of crisis.[151] For although 1936 was the industry's most profitable year since 1929, largely due to a rise in admission prices, there was also a fear that the growth of foreign nationalism would drastically decrease overseas revenue, while impending government intervention in the industry appeared increasingly likely.[152]

The idea of a differentiated audience, when acknowledged, was inevitably tied to the production of B films and the different tastes held by the mass audiences of the small town and rural 'sticks' market. Although such segmentation often led to a focus on the first run markets where the majority of profits were located for the majors, the subsequent-run audience, despite being less immediately economically significant, became a subject of greater concern when their attendance started to decline. While B films represented a stable, less risky investment for the industry, junk for the moviegoing habit of the mass, the studios were also seeking to avoid complaints from exhibitors that could draw attention to internal conflicts and unfair trade practices. The discussion of audience preferences and different tastes was linked by *Varity* writer John C. Flinn to the wider attempt to define and give voice to showmen's dissatisfaction with current industry practices at a time when organised exhibitor lobby groups were petitioning Congress for reform. He identifies the pressure created by these groups as being responsible for the passage of Neely's anti-block booking bill in the Senate in 1935.[153] Early in1936, Warner Bros., Fox, and Paramount declared their intention to increase their production of Bs, yet when the production plans of the 1937-38 season were officially announced, the number of B productions was generally reduced in favour of a focus on the first run market. Low budget production did remain constant, but over the next couple of years a larger proportion was displaced on to series production and through the employment of semi-independent producers.[154]

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[150] 'Better Films Creating a Universal Public', *Motion Picture Herald*, 3 April, 1937, 58.
[151] Maltby, 'Introduction', *Identifying Hollywood Audiences,* 4.
[152] 'Pix Cost Must Come Down', *Variety*, 30 December, 1936, 3. 'FDR Hot for Biz Control', *Variety*, 3 January, 1937, 7., 'US Crackdown on Pix?', *Variety*, 26 April, 1937, 3.
[153] 'Lah-De-Dah Stuff Blah', *Variety*, 27 July 1938, 5.
[154] 'Warners 100 Pix Grind: Plenty of Bs for Dual Bills', *Variety*, 26 February, 1936, 5. 'Record of 484-511 Pix for '37: More Westerns Fewer Shorts', *Variety*, 10 June, 1936, 7. 'First "Preview" of '37-38 Production Plans of Twenty Companies', *Motion Picture Herald*,17 April, 1937, 1. 'Pix Biz's to "B" Or Not to "B"', *Variety*, 30 March, 1938, 3. 'WB Also to Go Off "B" Film Standard', *Variety*, 6 April, 1938, 7.

The discourse around audiences took a new tack in early 1938, following an economic recession and dip in admissions. Although this downturn was less to do with the quality of productions than a wider industrial recession linked to Wall St reverses and overall unrest, the theories that circulated centred on the growing discrimination of audiences and the number of big features 'killing each other off' at the box office.[155] Alarmingly, attendance was recorded to have dropped in the sticks, where the primary consumers of programmer product were located and the habitual practice of moviegoing was strongest. This growing anxiety found voice in blaming the quality of the product, with Sam Goldwyn's assertion that customers were 'on strike against inferior pictures'.[156] Some of the suggestions to combat this specifically targeted B pictures, double billing and the production practices built around standardisation, such as cycles.[157] A 1938 memo to Hays from MPPDA Department of Theatre Services chief David Palfreyman, argued:

> By reason of this artificial circulation and the more extended playing time that poor grade cheaply produced pictures can get, there is provided a strong incentive for the studios to turn out that sort of attraction to fill this market. In other words, pictures with very little entertainment value or quality are made profitable to the producing and distributing company by this sort of an operating policy … jamming them down the throats of the theatre patrons tends to drive away patronage from the theatres.[158]

This also faults the broader system of staggered distribution that delivered this product in bulk to small theatres while restricting their immediate access to higher budget films. Trade articles described the difficulty faced by the majors in planning the forthcoming 1938-39 season in this time of uncertainty. Many of the studios declared their intention to revise their current classification and price brackets for A and B groupings, and MGM, Fox, and Warner Bros. all announced plans to cut back B production.[159] Although the studios could not drop Bs altogether because of their stabilising economic role, the industry had to appear to be addressing the decline in attendance and questions of quality associated with such pictures.

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[155] Roy Chartier, 'The Grosses', *Variety*, 5 January, 1938, 3.
[156] 'Pix Slipping in Stix', *Variety*, 20 July, 1938, 1, '"Clean House", Goldwyn Warning to Hollywood', *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, 25 April. 1938, A-8.
[157] 'Trouble is, Bs are Ds', *Variety*, 22 February, 1938, 2. 'Mix 'Em Up and Keep 'Em Away from Standardisation, Schenck Formula: Agitation the Problem, Not Dual Bills', *Variety*, 23 February, 1938, 2.
[158] Memo from David Palfreyman to Will Hays, 30 November, 1938. MPPDA Files, Record #1181, Reel 12, MPPDA Digital Archive.
[159] '38-39 Planning No Cinch', *Variety*, 20 April, 1938, 3, 21. 'WB Also to Go Off "B" Film Standard', *Variety*, 20 April, 1938, 7. 'Tell Us Another, Mr Sears!', *Harrison's Reports*, 16 April, 1938, 61.

Catherine Jurca identifies these concerns as key factors that led to the industry's million dollar, four-month publicity campaign, 'Motion Picture's Greatest Year' that opened the 1938 season in September.[160] As Jurca points out, the drive was hastily organised around the pictures already planned, rather than through the development of specific productions to showcase Hollywood's 'greatness'. Jurca concludes that the campaign achieved little more than drawing attention to the problems of the industry as it publically floundered in dealing with them, and that the external threats to the industry remained.[161] Despite one of the aims of the campaign being to improve the public image of the industry through mending relations with the press, it was observed that the proliferation of newspaper pictures in 1938 'portrayed the business in a light that is calculated to do the industry no good with the average editor'.[162] By late 1938, the five chief menaces that the industry faced were outlined in *Variety* as being Neely's anti-block-booking bill, the ongoing divorcement legislation, numerous anti-trust civil suits from exhibitors, labour unrest among industry workers, and the "Ohio playdate situation".[163] Consequently, the start of 1939 was seen as a time for the industry to 'buckle down' and 'put their house in order' following a year of cost troubles, economic difficulties, legislative nervousness, box office unease and administrative alarm.[164] Such concerns played out in the discourse surrounding films that targeted the mass audience, such as the girl reporter pictures, which subjected them to a complex system of commercial and cultural evaluation.

Cycles as discursive practice

Cycles are constructed not only through the production methods that were informed by prior features and distributors' calculations, but in the act of articulation that identifies the individual pictures as part of a larger body of films. The traces of this discursive conception of the cycle are most evident in the trade reviews of the films. These seek to identify for industry personnel where a picture fits amongst the dozen or so films released each week, estimating what value it might hold for exhibitors as a product purchased from distributors and sold on to consumers. This discourse is also visible in the

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[160] 'Press Urges Return of Theatre-Going as Habit', *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 October, 1932, 28-29. Trouble is Bs and Ds', *Variety*, 20 July, 1938, 4. 'Industry Adopts Hays' Idea of Ad-Drive', *Motion Picture Herald*, 30 July, 1938, 26. Catherine Jurca *Hollywood 1938: Motion Pictures' Greatest Year* (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2012), 15-27.
[161] Jurca, *Hollywood 1938*, 98.
[162] 'Press Pet Peeves at Pix: Chiefly Hollywood Libels the Craft', *Variety,* 19 October, 1938, 1, 26. Chartier, 'The Year in Pictures', *Variety*, 4 January, 1939, 19.
[163] 'Film's Five Major Menaces', *Variety*, 19 November, 1938, 2.
[164] 'Hollywood Buckles Down', *Variety*, 28 December, 1938, 3. Roy Chartier, 'The Year in Pictures', *Variety*, 4 January, 1939, 19.

promotional material that surrounds the films, such as the titles and posters that signal to audiences what to expect from the picture, and in the publicity articles and exploitation advice issued in the studio press books. The discursive understanding of the girl reporter cycle was not, however, necessarily consistent with the pragmatic function of the pictures. Their perceived value varied among the different classifications of films within the cycle, while also being constituted according to the role of the speaker. The A films with high production values and strong critical standing were not directly associated with the wider cycle, in contrast to the B pictures' identification with the imitative, formulaic practice. This appears to suggest a spectrum of values that stretched from the base commercialism of B productions and double bills to a cultural legitimacy associated with higher-class productions and first run audiences. The discourses surrounding the girl reporter pictures, however, suggest a greater complexity, created by the contrary attitudes held towards different types of serialization and formulaic repetition. Although there was a continued stigma attached to the commercial motivations behind cycles and remakes, the equally economically-minded series productions were legitimated through a different conception of their market function in the late 1930s.

In this section I will compare the promotion and reception of the girl reporter pictures with records of their actual programming in cinemas. The trade press carried accounts of the films' opening week performances in major metropolitan centres, but a small selection of sample theatres in Corsicana, Cedar Rapids, Lewiston, and Ellensburg illustrates how the films were programmed in multiple types of exhibition houses for different audience groups. This provides a clearer view of the operation of the cycle through the different strata of the industry and suggests that the pictures perhaps worked for exhibitors in more significant ways than industry commentators assumed.

The pictures most consistently identified in relation to the wider group of newspaper pictures and those featuring girl reporter characters were the programmer productions, described in the trade reviews in relation to their B status and purpose for building up a double feature program. Typical of this is *Variety's* review of *Woman Are Trouble* (MGM, 1936): 'as one of those inexpensively produced trivia that keep the screen bright until the main part of the double bill goes on, *Women Are Trouble* adequately fulfils its

destiny'.[165] There was a connection in such reviews between the status of the picture as a programmer and the degree to which it was deemed formulaic, with this thought to be of greater concern to some sectors of the audience than others. The audience of the subsequent-run theatres in suburban neighbourhoods and small towns, designated in terms of the mass or popular audience, was placed in contrast to the downtown sophisticates and first run cinema patrons. The former viewing group were seen as undiscerning viewers that composed the primary market for a low budget production cycle such as the girl reporter pictures. This was typified by the *Independent Exhibitors' Film Bulletin* review of *Woman in Distress* (Columbia, 1937), which named the story of rival reporters constantly striving to out-scoop each other as one of several standard formulae the film was built around, which will 'usually please the mass trade'.[166]

The trade press' market designation for the girl reporter programmers only occasionally mentioned more specific viewing groups within this mass. The juvenile market is most frequently commented upon. In reviewing the action-adventure girl reporter films, the trades often noted the appeal of such films to younger fans, the 'Saturday matinee crowd'. The integration of dramatic disaster footage into a thin plotline of a journalistic investigation in *Arson Gang Busters* (Republic, 1938), and *Emergency Squad* (Paramount, 1940) was seen to appeal to this sector. The themes of juvenile delinquency and the crossover into the 'tough kids' cycle in *Newsboys' Home* (Universal, 1938) and *Off the Record* (Warner Bros., 1939) were also positioned to appeal to a young audience. [167] In some reviews, the Torchy Blane series is also earmarked for younger viewers, with the association between children, action fans, and subsequent-run audiences suggested to result from a shared lack of discrimination and sophistication. *Variety,* reviewing *Torchy Blane Runs for Mayor* (Warner Bros., 1939), speaks of Torchy as a 'juvenile' conception of a star reporter: 'like a newspaper comic strip, it's without a pretence of intellectual maturity or plausibility but will divert peanut munchers'.[168]

Mentioned less often in the trades is any particular gender appeal of the cycle. The suitability of *Beware of Ladies* (Republic, 1936) was mentioned as adequate for both men

[165] 'Women Are Trouble', *Variety*, 2 September, 1936, 22.
[166] 'Woman in Distress', *Independent Exhibitors' Film Bulletin*, 30 January, 1937, 7.
[167] 'Arson Gang Busters', *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin*, 9 April, 1938, 10. 'Emergency Squad', *Variety*, 17 April, 1940, 13.
[168] 'Torchy Blane Runs for Mayor', *Variety*, 17 May, 1939, 14.

and women in *Film Daily's* review, while the human interest elements of *Five of A Kind* (Fox, 1938) and *One Mile From Heaven* (Fox, 1937) were suggested to be of greater appeal to female viewers.[169] Though not explicitly mentioned in the reviews, the pictures' clear featuring of a working woman likely represented an underlying appeal to the female market, regarded by the industry as the primary group of moviegoers in the decade.[170] The use of titles that highlight, sometimes provocatively or comically, the central role of the heroine is evident in many of the girl reporter films, including *Hold That Girl* (Fox, 1934), *Women Are Trouble* (MGM, 1936), *Beware of Ladies* (Republic, 1936), *Woman in Distress* (Columbia, 1937), *There Goes my Girl* (RKO, 1937), and *A Girl With Ideas* (Universal, 1937). Other pictures in the cycle sometimes combine this with a newspaper element, such as *Sob Sister* (Fox, 1931), *Front Page Woman* (Warner Bros., 1935), and *The Girl On the Front Page* (Universal, 1936), while others simply carry a newspaper designation, as in *Back Page* (Pyramid, 1934), *Bulldog Edition* (Republic, 1936), *Behind the Headlines* (RKO, 1937), *Exclusive* (Paramount, 1937), *Back in Circulation* (Warner Bros., 1937), and *Star Reporter* (Monogram, 1939). These titles serve to advertise the pictures to viewers as part of wider trends and suggest, in their similarity, their relationship to one another as part of a cohesive cycle.

A survey of the posters for the range of pictures across the cycle also suggests how some pictures sought to consciously identify themselves as newspaper yarns, often through images of newspapers and headlines or reporter characters posed at a typewriter or as if phoning through a story (Figures 1 and 2). A large number of the pictures, particularly those which had strong action or mystery elements, were more visually ambiguous, depicting a female character dressed in a typical working woman's attire of tailored suit and hat, but removed from the newspaper surrounds (figures 3 and 4).[171]

[169] 'Beware of Ladies', *Film Daily,* 12 January, 1937, 6. 'One Mile from heaven', *Harrison's Reports*, 14 August, 1937, 130. 'Five of a Kind', *Variety*, 12 October, 1938, 15.
[170] Melvyn Stokes, 'Female Audiences of the 1920s and early 1930s', *Identifying Hollywood Audiences,* 43-44. Balio, *Grand Design*, 241.
[171] It should be noted, however, that this selection of posters was limited by availability, and that there was often a range of posters that accompanied the studio-issued press books and designed to be utilised for different markets.

Figure 3, *Sob Sister* (Fox, 1931)

Figure 4, *Off the Record* (Warner Bros., 1939)

Figure 5, *That's My Story* (Universal, 1937)

Figure 6, *Criminals of the Air* (Columbia, 1937)

This imagery reinforces the idea of the girl reporter cycle as consciously inviting a broad range of associations that encompass a number of taste publics, while also suggesting that

some of the pictures avoided identifying themselves with the cycle. The ingredients that were an important part of distributors' planning and the subsequent production process again became significant in the realm of reception and exhibition. 'Exploitips' advised exhibitors to emphasise certain elements, such as the film's action sequences, the romantic angle, or a particular star, where they have previously proved popular with their local viewers. For instance, the *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin's* tips for *The Girl on the Front Page* (Universal, 1936) suggest that 'where they like comedy' declare it 'the gay romantic comedy battle of the century', while action spots should plug the 'blackmailing servants' angle.[172]

The reception of the cycle by newspaper critics adds another dimension to the discourse surrounding the pictures. In reviewing films, newspaper critics occupied a particular position as tastemakers and cultural gatekeepers. Mark Jancovich's work on the *New York Times*' reception of 1940s horror films draws on Pierre Bourdieu's idea of taste formation and distinction, structured oppositionally around popular taste and the pure gaze. Arguing that *The New York Times* represented a prestigious and respected paper in the 1940s, Jancovich identifies film critics such as Bosley Crowther as situated in a position of cultural legitimacy, tasked with policing the established aesthetic preferences associated with the paper.[173] This positioning of such critics informed their standards of quality, concern with aesthetic form, and their subsequent conception of motion pictures' function, against which different films are approved or dismissed.

The attitudes of critics towards the different forms of serialization within the girl reporter cycle often appear contradictory. Little tolerance was displayed for the girl reporter pictures that attempted to transgress into a higher class of production, but those that remained in the realm of the popular and fulfilled their basic entertainment function were met with praise; in the *New York Times*, *Criminals of the Air* (Columbia, 1937) was approved as a solid B film, with plenty of action and gusto while *Human Cargo* (Fox, 1936) was disparagingly described as 'nothing more than an assembly job of trite situations.[174] The comment that 'material for an interesting topical film does come to the

[172] 'The Girl on the Front Page', *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin*, 21 October, 1936, 5.
[173] Mark Jancovich, '"Two Ways of Looking": The Critical Reception of 1940s Horror', *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (2010), 46.
[174] 'Our departmental theme-song, in the secondary or "Class B" field, is still "Hail Columbia."' 'Criminals of the Air', *New York Times*, 28 October, 1937. 'Human Cargo', *New York Times*, 16 May, 1935.

surface occasionally, only to be submerged again by a wave of melodramatic hijinks', condemns the film for failing to live up to its potential as a topical exposé, with its implied value of cultural legitimacy. *Variety* was similarly negative in its review of *Human Cargo*, but for a different reason: the attempt to use the exposé framework, which tries to make 'Page One stuff out of news that belongs inside and way back'.[175] On the other hand, *Film Daily*, *Harrison's Reports* and *The Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin* emphasises that although the plot of *Human Cargo* was routine, it would satisfy the pop action audiences for whom it was intended.[176] Although the picture earned well under average in the big city first run openings, my sampling of the film's programming suggests how the film was presented to audiences outside of the capital cities. It was paired with *Girl's Dormitory* as a dual bill at Cedar Rapid's downtown 2,500 seat Paramount Theatre, and was the main attraction when shown in Corsicana's small Ideal cinema, accompanied by comedy shorts and a news feature.[177]

Scripted from an Adela Rogers St John story exploring themes of sensationalism and yellow journalism, *Back in Circulation* centred on a performance by Joan Blondell as investigative reporter Timmy Blake and featured perennial newshound Pat O'Brien as her fiancé and editor, Bill Morgan. When assigned to a murder case, Blake causes the arrest and conviction of the victim's widow but becomes convinced of the widow's innocence when she refuses to defend herself on the stand. Following a libel case and blackmail subplot, Blake works to uncover the real killer and solve the murder mystery. The constellation of discourses surrounding the feature illustrates how attitudes towards repetition and the adherence to formulae became an area where aesthetic value was contrasted with commercial value.

In the trade press, the film was described as different from the routine newspaper yarns, reviving the themes of sensationalism explored in the early 1930s cycle of yellow journalism pictures but adding some fresh twists and turns.[178] The reviewers praised the tempering of the newspaper background's dynamism with character and situation comedy

[175] 'Human Cargo', *Variety*, 27 May, 1936, 15.
[176] Human Cargo', *Film Daily*, 21 April, 1936, 5. 'Human Cargo', *Harrison's Reports*, 23 May, 1936, 83. 'Human Cargo', *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, 10 June, 1936, 11.
[177] New York Palace cinema with *Champagne Charlie* – 'hit the toboggan' making less than $5,000 - *Motion Picture Daily*, 27 May. 1936, 11. Louisville, Rialto, with *Little Miss Nobody*, made $3,500 (ave. $4,500), *Motion Picture Daily*, 12 June, 1936, 28. Providence, Majestic cinema, with *Murder by an Aristocrat* $5,100 (ave. $7,000) *Motion Picture Daily*, 16 June, 1936, 24. *Corsicana Daily Sun*, 21 September, 1936. *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 11 September, 1936.
[178] 'Back in Circulation', *Variety*. 28 July, 1937, 27. 'Back in Circulation', *Motion Picture Herald*, 7 August, 1937, 52.

as successful, stating that it retained appeal for action fans while still engrossing the average moviegoer.[179] The exhibitors writing to *Motion Picture Herald*'s 'What The Picture Did For Me' section were divided in their reception, reiterating the significance of local factors and often challenging the assumptions held by the reviewers. Four exhibitor reports on *Back in Circulation*, printed in a single edition of *Motion Picture Herald* nearly three months after the picture was first released in New York, illustrate the degrees of difference in reception. An exhibitor from Waterboro, Maine, with general patronage, described it as a hackneyed newspaper story of little merit, while a theatre-owner in Frankfort, Kansas, with small-town patronage described it as exactly the type of film that small towns liked. The film was rated well in other theatres with general patronage in Maine and New Hampshire, particularly for the performance of Blondell, who was identified as an audience favourite.[180]

The movie's critical reception, on the other hand, treated its efforts at originality with disdain. In *The New York Times*, Frank Nugent wrote that *Back in Circulation* was sometimes mildly funny and sometimes mildly tedious, 'as though by scrupulous examination of motives, the producers had honestly tried to convert an intrinsically Class B picture into something which might be described, even with a stifled yawn, as in the neighbourhood of Class A-minus'. S. Howard Bohell's *New York World Telegram* review added, 'director and author seem undecided whether this should be a murder mystery or another variation of the Captain Flagg-Sergeant Quirt feud, but in either case the results aren't very good'.[181] The attitude of the critics towards such films reveals the ongoing concern that the pervasiveness of low quality, low budget pictures could have a larger effect on the habit of moviegoing. Accompanying *The New York Times'* review of *The Girl on the Front Page* (Universal, 1936) is a tongue-in-cheek suggestion for the creation of a 'Cinema Adjustment Administration … to plow under some of our motion picture production before it weakens a strong entertainment market'. *The Girl on the Front Page* is described not as a capital offense but a misdemeanour, 'a perfect specimen of the sort of thing the CAA would do well to prevent'.[182] Its mediocrity is attributed to the over-

[179] 'Back in Circulation', *Motion Picture Herald*, 7 August, 1937, 52. 'Back in Circulation', *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, 14 August, 1937, 14.
[180] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Back in Circulation', *Motion Picture Herald*, 11 December, 1937, 63.
[181] Frank Nugent, 'Back in Circulation' *New York Times*, 4 October, 1937. S. Howard Bohell, 'What the Newspaper Critics Say: Back in Circulation', *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, 19 October, 1937, 12.
[182] 'The Girl on the Front Page', *New York Times*, 7 November, 1936.

familiarity of the central situation, an interfering heiress who inherits a newspaper and spats with the managing editor who is constantly on the verge of quitting.

Having considered the critical and trade reception of the cycle, the circulation and exhibition of the pictures can be examined more closely to compare the differing conceptions of the cycle's function. The same picture, *Back in Circulation*, was played as a top feature or stand-alone in the sample cinemas of Corsicana, TX, Cedar Rapids, IA, Ellensburg, WA, and Lewiston, MA.[183] For a small rural town like Corsicana, the girl reporter pictures were often played solely with shorts rather than part of a double bill, and never for more than two days. In Lewiston, a New England college town, the pictures played most often at the 700-seater Priscilla cinema for a three day run from Monday to Wednesday. Some of the pictures, such as *Behind the Headlines*, *One Mile from Heaven*, *There Goes My Girl* and *A Girl with Ideas*, initially played as stand-alone features at the first run Audion on Fridays and Saturdays where evening tickets cost 30-40c, before reaching the Priscilla seven weeks later, where they were often relegated to the bottom of the bill. In Cedar Rapids, a city with several downtown picture palaces, the girl reporter pictures played across a range of cinemas. *Back in Circulation,* for instance, was programmed with radio-gangster melodrama *Love Is On the Air* (Warner Bros., 1937), at the 2,000 seat RKO Iowa only two weeks after it premiered in New York.[184]

Despite their dismissal by newspaper critics, and offhand consignment to bottom-dualer status in the trades, programmer cycles such as the girl reporter pictures carried out a specific role in the industry. Exhibitors required large quantities and a regular supply of affordable product to fill double bill programmes, particularly for smaller theatres which changed films several times a week. The Hollywood studios also needed to fill and vary their schedules with lower budget fare, and ensure they were producing enough to prevent competing independent production companies from capturing too large a share of the profits. The distributors maintained control of the market by regulating exhibitors' access to their product through the price mechanisms of staggered run-zone-clearance system, and selling policies such as block booking. This system ensured a division between the circuit theatres affiliated with the major studios, who received top product sooner and

[183] *Corsicana Daily Sun*, 4 March, 1938, *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 8 October, 1937, *Ellensburg Daily Record,* 24 February, 1938, *Lewiston Daily Sun*, 18 March, 1938.
[184] *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 8 October, 1937, 10.

carried associations of quality films and sophisticated audiences, and the small theatres in the bottom runs that were associated with old and low-quality product, and an undiscerning popular audience.

Figure 7, *Four's a Crowd* (Warner Bros., 1938)

Figure 8, *His Girl Friday* (Columbia, 1940)

Pictures that were more highly valued in terms of quality and cultural legitimacy were less often linked to the larger cycle or to strategies of imitation. Girl reporter films that contained stars, for instance, were often advertised and discussed using different terms. A third category of posters (see Figures 5 and 6) focused chiefly on the actors, often showing the characters interacting in poses that suggested an affinity with romantic comedy and without any hint of the female character's occupation or a newspaper background. Despite the films featuring the familiar tropes of a rival reporter relationship or newsroom setting, these were linked to other production trends and an emphasis was placed on the stars' performance. These big budget pictures with girl reporters include *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Columbia, 1935), *Four's a Crowd* (Warner Bros., 1938), *Five of a Kind* (Fox, 1938), *His Girl Friday* (Columbia, 1940), and *Woman of the Year* (MGM, 1942).

In her exploration of the studios' series and sequel practices in the Classical Hollywood period, Jennifer Forrest identifies how the recycling strategies of the industry were part of risk-minimising marketing that was present across all types of film classifications. Forrest argues that the studios' more expensive properties were re-used less often, and were more likely to be re-released themselves, while a greater degree of differentiation was enforced through script and production values.[185] Distributed on a percentage rental basis, these A pictures were designed to play as long as possible in the first run theatres owned or affiliated with the majors in order to recoup the returns of their bigger budgets and earn a sizable profit. These big budget films, like the programmers, were able to draw upon the girl reporter formula. In *Four's A Crowd* (Warner Bros., 1937), Rosalind Russell plays a girl reporter attempting to forestall the closing of her newspaper by persuading her millionaire publisher to rehire a rogue press agent as editor. When planning their annual production slate in 1937, Warner Bros. may have classified and differentiated the story on this girl reporter basis. Such cycle-based pre-production designations as 'girl reporter', however, would be subsumed in their production and distribution handling in favour of more marketable elements, such as a marquee name, or the identification between the star and the roles with which they were typically associated. As *Motion Picture Herald* concluded of *Four's A Crowd*, 'Although this story is to be told against a background of newspaperdom, its basic ingredient is comedy-romance'.[186]

Despite clearly fitting the model of the girl reporter picture, *His Girl Friday* was not directly discussed as such by contemporaries. The press book for *His Girl Friday* highlighted the romantic comedy aspects and avoided obvious signifiers of the newspaper yarn. One of the main publicity feature articles describes the film as 'a thrilling romantic comedy set against the vibrant background of metropolitan life'.[187] While not consciously cultivated in the most prominent national advertising of the film, such as the posters and the radio-advertising scripts, the press book does encourage local exploitation that highlights the newspaper and girl reporter angles. It suggests newspaper contests based around famous women reporters, for instance, as well the invitation of local female

[185] Jennifer Forrest, 'Of "True" Sequels: The Four Daughters Movies, and the Series That Wasn't', *Second Takes: Critical Approaches to the Film Sequel*, Carolyn Jess-Cooke and Constantine Verevis (eds.) (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 36.
[186] 'In the Cutting Room: Four's A Crowd', *Motion Picture Herald*, 19 March, 1938, 39.
[187] Pressbook: His Girl Friday, Columbia, 1940.

journalists to the premiere. Another publicity article, entitled 'They Always Get Their Story: Women Make the Best Newspaper Men', is dedicated to real life girl reporters, with Rosalind Russell's character placed alongside them. This was optional for exhibitors on a local level, however, and the majority of the publicity avoided identifying *His Girl Friday* as a girl reporter-newspaper yarn. The conscious downplaying of this factor to avoid the criticism associated with imitation is suggested in *Variety*:

> No doubt having to dodge the stigma of having *His Girl Friday* termed a remake, Columbia blithely skips a pertinent point in the credits by merely stating, 'From a play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur'.[188]

Despite this, the trade reviews of the picture remain concerned with evaluating the film against its predecessor. Although they are unanimous in their praise, they do not reference other girl reporter features.[189]

With *His Girl Friday,* Columbia avoided a direct association with a cycle typified by low budget product and minimised the studio's participation in practices of recycling and imitation. The fact that this was unacknowledged in the discourse issued by the studios does not necessarily preclude the pictures from being a part of the cycle. A discursive approach to cyclic definition includes a consideration of the silences, denials, and dismissals of otherwise obvious connections in the formal, institutional discourses. At the same time, the connections made by the trade press, exhibitors, and viewers between such pictures and the larger cycle, which are often overlooked in cycle studies centred on production, grow in significance.[190]

In 1937 the practice of remakes was observed to be on the rise more generally and, in early 1939, twenty-five remakes had been announced for the season.[191] As in the case of cycles, the practice was viewed disparagingly. A trade publication for independent exhibitors, *Harrison's Reports,* noted in early 1939 that the majority of remakes failed at the box office because they usually lacked the big names of the originals, had stories that

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[188] 'His Girl Friday', *Variety*, 10 January, 1940, 14.
[189] 'His Girl Friday', *Film Daily*, 5 January, 1940, 5. 'His Girl Friday', *Motion Picture Daily*, 8 January, 1940, 6., 'His Girl Friday', *New York Times*, 12 January, 1940.
[190] As Ramon Lobato argues in his work on distribution, an examination of the informal networks and external discourses of those peripheral to the Hollywood studios is needed to avoid simply repeating and reinforcing the dominant top-down institutional point of view. Ramon Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Distribution* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 13.
[191] 'Remakes on the Uptake', *Variety*,7 April, 1937, 21. 'Have The Hollywood Brains Gone Dry?' *Harrison's Reports*, 25 February, 1939, 29.

were already familiar to audiences, and held inferior production values. Editor P. S. Harrison actively encouraged exhibitors to bring them to the attention of Congressmen as part of the campaign against block booking and blind selling:

> Your fight for the elimination of block-booking and blind-selling should be strengthened considerably if you should call the attention of your Congressmen to these remakes; you should be able to convince them that you have no power to prevent the production of pictures that may prove either demoralizing to children, or destructive to your box office.

Harrison aligned the low quality entertainment associated with remakes with other calls for the regulation of content and the belief that the production of licentious pictures could hurt exhibitors economically by alienating customers.

Several months later, in April 1939, *Variety* ran a front page story on the resentment caused by the influx of remakes. Exhibitors bore the brunt of an increase in customer complaints related to the failure of a film to be clearly advertised as a remake.[192] *Variety* attributed the surge of remakes to the efforts of producers to keep down story costs amid the studios' efforts to economize by availing themselves of previously used properties and adding twists such as switching the characters' gender, an account that resembles Bryan Foy's description of his practice in developing material for his B unit. *Variety* identified a chief concern in the fact that these were unadvertised and unacknowledged remakes that represented a disappointment to customers who expected originality. Like cycles, the remake practice is the subject of criticism based on the lack of value associated with repetitive forms without sufficient variation, which were conducted as a cost-cutting procedure that benefitted the studios while often short-changing audiences. Eric Hoyt's discussion of surreptitiously re-titled reissues, which elicited similar complaints to unacknowledged remakes, identifies how the trade press could carry out a self-regulating function in its discourse over such matters, as it criticised re-titled reissues, but not the wider reissue practice.[193] In these informal practices of repetition where the law was unclear, the trade press could establish the limits of what was and was not acceptable at different moments.

The discourses around series production, which peaked as a practice slightly before that of remakes, took a different tack. In 1937 the series was identified as the new backbone of

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[192] 'Twice-Told Films Fliv: Fans Resenting Story Remakes', *Variety*, 26 April, 1939, 1, 45.
[193] Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault*, 36.

the majors' production schedules.[194] Amidst the industry downturn the following year, the practice was described as a reaction to the steadily mounting costs of the decade: 'Hollywood bigwigs, their production appetites sated by an overdose of caviar-type films, are turning envious thoughts to their silent-day predecessors who thrived on a diet of bread-and-butter pictures'.[195] Evident here is a condemnation of the producers' greed and a celebration of the return to the wholesome, unpretentious fare of series. Although the motivation for series production was always commercial, the 'bread'n'butter' label gave the practice a respectability that could be deemed sensible, even necessary, in a move away from the excesses that had contributed to the industry's current state of crisis.

Such articles made note of the Torchy Blane series' success as a substantial earner for Warner Bros. When the series was initiated with *Smart Blonde* in 1936*,* however, the reviews were unenthusiastic, making unfavourable comparisons to other girl reporter offerings and concluding 'Warners must improve on the next to hope for success in a market already glutted with this type of product'.[196] The newspaper critics were even more damning. William Boebnel stated in the *New York World Telegram*, 'Not only does the film lack the zip and dash that one can reasonably expect of a first-rate murder mystery, but its story is hackneyed, adolescent, extremely dull and completely wastes the talents of some really first-rate players'.[197] Despite these lacklustre first impressions, *Smart Blonde* performed well at the box office.[198] The second in the series, *Fly Away Baby,* improved on the first, having cost $110,000 and earning a total of $282,000.[199] An exhibitor's report from New Hampshire described how patrons felt *Fly Away Baby* (Warner Bros., 1937) could stand alone on a program, with this further sustained in Corsicana's Sunday and Monday screening of the picture at the Iowa cinema with only a

[194] 'Newest H'wood Idea Is Series Pix; B.O. Shows Yen for Same Names', *Variety*, 26 May, 1937, 25-26.
[195] 'Bread'n'Butter Pix Back', 9 March, 1938, 5, 16.
[196] Smart Blonde', *Motion Picture Daily*, 20 November 1936, 11.
[197] William Boebnel, *New York World Telegram*, quoted in 'What the Newspaper Critics Say: Smart Blonde', *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, 13 January, 1937, 6.
[198] *Smart Blonde's* opening week earnings, as reported in *Motion Picture Daily*: San Francisco it was paired with *East Meets West* at the Warfield cinema, earning $15,500 (ave $13,000), *Motion Picture Daily*, 5 January, 1937, 4. Indianapolis' Lyric theatre played it as part of a Christmas revue and vaudeville show and made, $7,500 (ave. $7,000), *Motion Picture Daily*, 8 January, 1937, 10. New Haven's Sherman cinema, played it with *Garden of Allah* for $5,000 (ave. $4,700), *Motion Picture Daily*, 19 January, 1937, 10. Chicago's Oriental theatre, with a stage revue, $15,000 (ave. $15,000), *Motion Picture Daily*, 2 February, 1937, 10. Exhibitors report that it went over well with rural and general audience groups, 'What the Picture Did for Me: Smart Blonde', *Motion Picture Herald*, 20 February, 1937,76, and *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 May, 1937, 74.
[199] This figure does not include distribution and advertising costs. Mark H. Glancy, 'Appendix: Warner Bros. Film Grosses, 1921-51: The William Schaefer Ledger', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 15 (1995), 1-31. See Appendix.

Betty Boop cartoon and musical short.[200] The reviews of subsequent episodes of the series improved markedly, and of *Fly Away Baby* Boebnel commented, 'a new adventure in the career of the gal reporter who has a good nose for news and better one for crime, packing plenty of thrills and excitement, even if it is only a Class B production'.[201]

The discourses surrounding series production, like that of remakes and cycles, were premised on their financial asset to producers as a way to repeat a particular formula at a low cost. A series such as Torchy was also a stable money-maker for exhibitors and was popular with customers, while enhancing the reputation of Warner Bros. and its contract players. As *Motion Picture Herald* wrote of the second picture in the Torchy Blane series, *The Adventurous Blond*e:

> The primary purpose of any motion picture is to entertain, but it is also supposed to include showmanship potentialities which exhibitors may use to interest their patrons. When both objectives are attained, the chances are favourable that the show will please and make money for those most directly concerned.[202]

In the context of the recession, a series' particular economic viability was acclaimed in contrast to bloated prestige productions. So when series began to falter in the marketplace, the discourse shifted, particularly from those outside of the industry. A 1939 *New York Times* article by Douglas Churchill describes series production as a trend that was losing traction at the close of the decade.

> Producers are discovering that the pay dirt on their gold strike on series pictures is petering out. Seized upon as a cumulative factor to increase theatre attendance because of the interest of the public in characters, for a time all studios announced series films. The producers have run into trouble. They have found it difficult to hold name players in roles in the minor budget films because of pay demands and, more importantly, they have learned that the mere perpetuation of characters in film after film is not enough to capture the customer's fancy.[203]

Churchill argued that, fundamentally, series required the appeal of attractive characters and good stories, but that 'sordid money influences the studio's regard for the series idea', and all but MGM's series were made as cheaply as possible. With the trend for series production itself described as a temporal cycle, the saturation of the series form led to a familiar backlash and a questioning of the commercial motivation behind their

[200] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Fly Away Baby, *Motion Picture Herald*, 5 February, 1938, p. 74., *Corsicana Daily Sun*, 22 January, 1938, 6.
[201] William Boebnel, *New York World Telegram*, quoted in 'What the Newspaper Critics Say: Fly Away Baby', *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, 17 July, 1937, 11.
[202] 'The Adventurous Blonde', *Motion Picture Herald*, 11 September, 1937, 40.
[203] Douglas W. Churchill, 'Mr Goldwyn Storms the "Heights"', *New York Times*, 8 January, 1939.

production.[204] The cycle model illustrates the ways in which specific practices of seriality have their own limited life spans that, like the cycles themselves, were equally subject to market forces. This reveals how cycles are not simply material, the collected body of films and other media products, but are also historical, commercial processes.

The girl reporter pictures present the case of a cycle associated with formulaic programmer production, a form resulting from distribution decisions and production practices that utilised cycles to organise studio output. Cycles such as these were largely based on informal repetition, bound up in the practices of derivative, standardised, formula production that differed from the legalised duplication of direct remakes and the extended forms of series and serials. Such cycles often remain uncommented upon for their very ubiquitousness. My study of their surrounding discourse reveals the conflicting reception of the girl reporter pictures. Their status as the subjects of such contestation suggests that these low budget cycles did hold a significant role within the industry. Cycles were multi-faceted, lacking unified boundaries and singular understandings. The various forms that could be encompassed in a cycle, such as series and remakes, enacted separate strategies of repetition that held different positions in production and reception, complicating any idea of cycles as homogenous, stable forms. The occasional identification of different feature types, such as A pictures, with the larger body of the cycle, also demonstrates the dissonance that could exist between the cycle as production practice and cycle as discursive construction. At the same time, these differences in the understandings of the cycle shifted according the nature and position of the discourses, and the immediate economic and industrial context. While these multifarious factors make it difficult to establish a universal model for film cycles, they also reveal cycles' dynamism and the very aspects that make them a useful and compelling framework for film historians. The girl reporter cycle, for all its intricacy, exemplifies one of the most basic forms of cycles under the studio system. The following case study of historical biopics will examine a cycle produced in the same era that sits in direct contrast to the girl reporter pictures in both status and market function.

[204] 'Newest H'wood Idea Is Series Pix; B.O. Shows Yen for Same Names', *Variety*, 26 May, 1937, 25-26.

Chapter Three

The Prestige Cycle of Historical Biopics: Measuring the Deluge

A deluge of biographical stories is about to descend on the screen, in numbers so thick as to constitute the champion of cycles since sound came in.[205]

The historical biopics of the 1930s invite consideration of cycles beyond the internal industrial focus of the girl reporter case study. As a programmer cycle with a rapid turnover principally serving subsequent run theatres, the girl reporter pictures were closely linked to both the seasonal production and distribution policies of the studios and domestic market forces. The cycle of historical biopics, however, was developed with a much wider scope. These productions match Tino Balio's characterisation of a typical prestige picture, a big budget special based on a pre-sold property and tailored to fit top studio stars.[206] Not only did these films contain higher production values than the girl reporter pictures, but they were also constructed with a larger market in mind, circulated though different channels, accompanied by a separate set of discourses, and presented as a particular type of moviegoing experience. Previous studies of cycles have concentrated on examples of low-budget, exploitation and genre pictures. In asking whether prestige pictures such as historical biopics can be considered a cycle, this chapter challenges existing assumptions about cycles' form, operation, and function. I explore how factors relating to the 1930s production context shaped the course of the cycle through a close examination of the making and marketing of *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* (Warner Bros., 1940).

Historical biopics occurred in two waves in the 1930s, complicating the basic outline of a cycle established in the previous chapter and raising the possibility of a different understanding of cyclic production. In the first section of this chapter, I demonstrate how the points at which the cycles are measured and the tools employed for doing so are significant in determining how the cycle is shaped. To test how this cycle fits with the

[205] 'Biographical Film Cycle; Possibly Champ Trend of 1934', *Variety*, 13 February, 1934, 3, 25.
[206] Balio, *Grand Design*, 180.

pattern of the girl reporter pictures and similar low-budget cycles, I place the biopics against Richard Nowell's comprehensive model of cyclic development. The historical biopics indicate the need for a more inclusive model than Nowell's, that recognises differences in the operations of cycles of different production categories. Unlike the high-volume, cheaply-produced girl reporter programmers, where distinctive elements were often buried beneath the identification with the greater cycle, far fewer historical biopics were made and each represented a significant investment for producers. In being composed of 'special' and 'A' productions, the cycle was marked by a greater concern for product differentiation. Its development was shaped by its basis in both biographical and historical subjects, and by the efforts of producers to protect their properties from accusations of libel and plagiarism.

With scholarship on biopics only recently gaining momentum, theorists have often struggled in their attempt to define the films along traditional generic lines, which are premised on the existence of an essential set of shared conventions across time. When viewed in terms of cycles rather than genres, these conventions are historicised within the specificities of the original production context. Questions inevitably arise in discussions of biopics over the nature of their historical representations and their approaches to depicting the lives of their subjects. Contextualised as a commercial cycle that prioritised product differentiation and prestige, the historical biopics treated history in ways that were often innovative, employing it to explore contentious subject matter and developing a diverse set of approaches to depicting a life that balanced documentation with entertainment. The reception of the cycle, which applauded such use of the cinematic medium, was part of a larger promotional discourse that emphasised culture and education as a frame for contemporary audiences to view the films. These discourses surrounding the cycle pose further questions about the purpose behind such films, and whether the cycle as a whole could enact a function for the industry beyond the purely commercial. The second section of this chapter explores the rhetorical function enacted by the historical biopic cycle.

Motion pictures, and mass media more generally, were understood by social scientists in the 1930s as objects that could influence susceptible consumers and shape the views and

behaviour of wider society.[207] The influence of the medium was potentially dangerous when linked to cycles characterised by crime and sex, but could be spun into a positive attribute when tied to forms of entertainment deemed culturally legitimate, as in the educational merits claimed for the historical biopics. The biopic cycle was attached to a discourse that publicised a particular image of the industry at a time when Hollywood was threatened with federal intervention and anti-trust suits. The industry's trade association, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. (MPPDA) utilised such cycles in a conscious display of content modification, whether through the demonstration of a 'clean screen' in the early 1930s or of the 'freedom of the screen' later in the decade.[208] The portrayal of motion pictures as a social force and the assertion of cultural responsibility represented a departure from the industry's previous 'pure entertainment' defence, to which it would prove difficult to return.

These arguments are made apparent in a close examination of *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* in the final section of the chapter. Produced at the end of the cycle by a production team with a reputation for critically successful historical biopics, *Ehrlich* built upon the educational nature of films that preceded it while injecting a controversial theme to revitalise the biographical formula. The movie's fraught production history, which encountered legal disputes, disagreements over political subtexts, and a lengthy battle with the Production Code Administration, illustrate many of the factors that contributed to the development of the biopic cycle as a whole. The promotion and reception of the picture further reveals the studio's attempt to market the film on its educational and cultural value, alongside the somewhat contradictory exploitation of its more sensational aspects. Before exploring the shape and form of the historical biopics as they unfurled across the decade, the film type requires closer definition.

The extended form of the historical biopic cycle

The historical biopics clearly differ from the familiar model of cycles as low budget objects. In order to understand how the historical biopics can be considered a cycle, we

[207] Garth S Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie, Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[208] Richard Maltby, 'The Production Code and the Mythologies of "Pre-Code" Hollywood', *The Classical Hollywood Reader*, Steve Neale (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2012), 243-45.

must turn to the production practices surrounding the film, and their discursive identification as a cycle in the trade discourse. George Custen describes a biopic as a film that 'depicts the life of a historical person, past or present'.[209] As general as this definition already is, Steve Neale picks out several further areas of ambiguity, including the instances where films focus on more than one historical subject and those where real people are depicted but their names are changed on screen. Neale further questions what the depiction of a 'life' connotes, and whether it suggests coverage of a certain amount of time.[210] The historical biopics of the 1930s developed their shape through a negotiation of such matters. Commercial concerns and use of multiple stars, for instance, could widen a film beyond a biographical portrait to a multi-subject historical costume picture, and a general lack of agreement over the most appropriate approach to capturing a life led to experimentation with different forms. At the same time, concerns over defamation directed the search for suitable 'personages' in the public domain of history, which sometimes contributed to conflict between producers over similar subject matter.

There was no clear consensus on what a cinematic depiction of a life should look like in the 1930s. The studios experimented with different approaches beyond the 'cradle to grave' framework of many literary biographies, including 'career highlights', a portrait built around a single event, and a focus on the 'formative years'. *The Scarlet Empress* (Paramount, 1934) for instance, was described as differing from the standard format in its snapshot use of scattered pages from the dairy of Catherine the Great.[211] The basis of valuation of such different styles was not necessarily uniform; while *The Mighty Barnum* (Twentieth Century, 1934) was praised as colourful, highly-theatricalized and 'quite unlike anything of its type seen before on the screen', *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (Warner Bros., 1936) was seen as a remarkable departure from the familiar dramatic formula, a simple biography 'without a single trace of theatrical artificiality'.[212] Common to much of this appraisal, however, is the appreciation of films that succeed in capturing the 'human spirit' of the life while entertaining audiences. According to *Film Daily*, in *Pasteur* Warner Bros. blazed a new trail in pictures, to 'have made cold science dramatic and …

[209] George Custen, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 5.
[210] Neale*, Genres and Hollywood,* 61.
[211] 'The Scarlet Empress', *Motion Picture Herald*, 28 April, 1934, 31.
[212] 'The Mighty Barnum', *Motion Picture Herald*, 1 December, 1934, 38. 'The Story of Louis Pasteur', *Motion Picture Herald*, 30 November, 1935, 58.

fashioned a story that grips from the start'.[213] *Young Mr. Lincoln* (Fox, 1939) was described by *Screenland* as another original idea in screen biography, 'a portrait of the Great Man in the making before fame and history claimed him, a human being rather than a personage'.[214] In experimenting with different approaches the studios could tailor their roles to fit their stars, and also distinguish their films from each other's.

The issue of whether pictures that combine more than one historical personage can be considered 'biographical' is raised in films such as *Stanley and Livingstone* (Fox, 1939) and *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex (*WB, 1939), whose titles clearly indicate a dual focus. The production histories of the pictures shed light on the factors that led to such decisions, revealing how the attachment of particular stars to projects can determine the focus of the film. *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* was adapted from Maxwell Anderson's play *Elizabeth the Queen*, apparently renamed at the insistence of Errol Flynn as the original title 'gave too little marquee credit to his share in the proceedings'.[215] It is also likely, however, that Warner Bros. held an interest in advertising the second star's role in the title, particularly given Flynn's recent success in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Warner Bros., 1938). There is a market incentive for the expansion of biographical films to include multiple subjects and consequently multiple stars, to improve the overall marquee value and drawing power of a film. As Gerben Backer argues, stars were not able to guarantee a hit for the studio, but their power lay in the generation of publicity, their association with a particular studio providing a film with a type of brand-recognition for audiences.[216] Notwithstanding the promotional dual star billing of such films, the reviews often identify a central subject, as in Bette Davis' portrayal of Elizabeth I, which suggests how the film can be considered a biopic.

Neale's final point, regarding the depiction of real people under pseudonyms, raises the legal problems associated with biographical pictures and the methods adopted by the studios to protect themselves against defamation complaints. *Frontier Marshal* (Fox, 1934), for instance, drew on Stuart N. Lake's book on Wyatt Earp, but changed the character's name to Michael Wyatt following libel suits over a 'pseudo historical play' on

[213] 'Louis Pasteur', *Film Daily*, 23 November, 1935, 8.
[214] 'Young Mr Lincoln', *Screenland,* August, 1939, 53.
[215] Frank S. Nugent, 'Errol Flynn Catches a Tudor in Strand's Film of "Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex"', *New York Times*, 2 December, 1939.
[216] Gerben Bakker, 'Stars and Stories: How Films Became Branded Products', *The Economic History of Film*, John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2005), 70.

Earp.[217] The studios had good reason to be cautious of defamation charges after the *Youssoupoff v. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures* suit in Britain that followed the production of *Rasputin and the Empress* (MGM, 1932) and the libel charge brought by Princess Irina Alexandrova. In 1934 Alexandrovna was awarded £25,000 following the decision of a UK court, and a further out of court settlement of $750,000 in the U.S.A.[218] Despite MGM's defence that Alexandrovna had not been identified, and that the defamation was oral and without proof of damage done, the judge's decision established that motion pictures could be considered libellous and defamatory. This led to the introduction of onscreen disclaimers for films which claimed 'fictitious' representations and 'coincidental' resemblances to real people. This superficial denial mechanism did not, however, offer actual legal protection nor prevent viewers from interpreting the figures as real people.[219]

This legal precedent played a further role in encouraging the production of biopics that concentrated on historical, rather than contemporary, figures. In identifying the biographical cycle in 1933, *Variety* referred to a number of contemporary biopics that had run into legal difficulty. This included libel suits from families such as those of Jim Bridger over *Covered Wagon* (Paramount, 1923), Anton Cermak and *The Man Who Dared* (Fox, 1933), and William Fallon regarding *Mouthpiece* (Warner Bros., 1932).[220] The trade paper remarked that, as a result, writers were increasingly turning to history, the figures and stories of which were held to be in the public domain. The popularity of historical biopic production led, in 1935, to the MPPDA's General Attorney Gabriel Hess issuing a digest that refuted the old newspaper adage that 'it's impossible to libel the dead'. This pamphlet detailed the state-specific issues of censorship, civil suits from descendants, and charges of criminal responsibility that producers of biopics could face.[221] In response, the studios increasingly sought to pre-empt any objections from

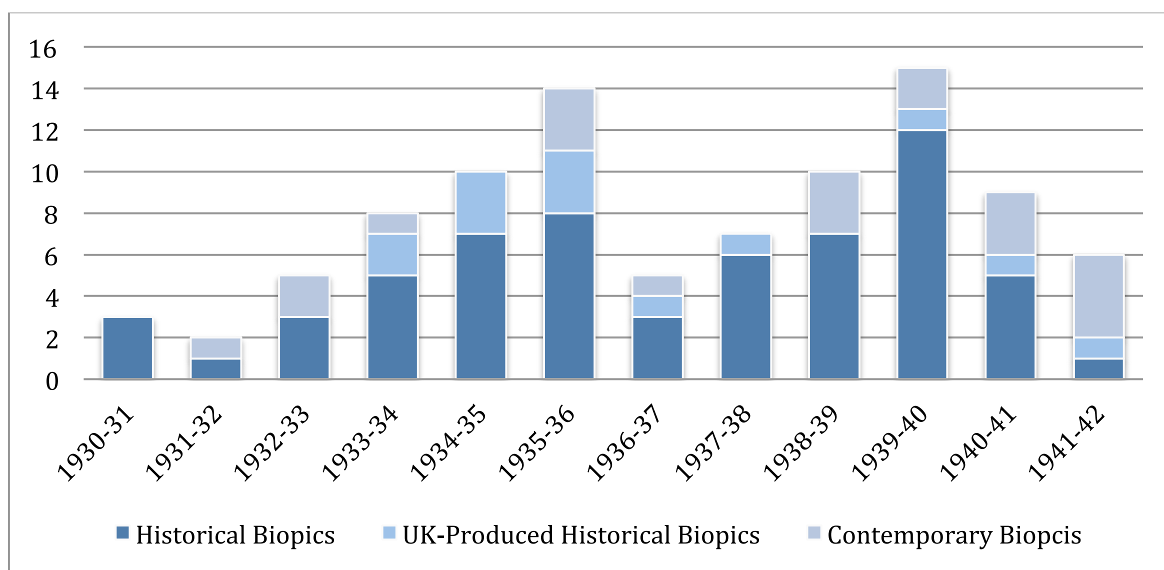
[217] 'Frontier Marshal', *Motion Picture Herald*, 10 February, 1934, 42. 'Frontier Marshal', *Variety*, 2 February, 1934, p. 34. Nonetheless the character was recognised by reviewers as representing Earp, with recommendations for exploitation tie-ins to Lake's book solidifying the connection.
[218] 'Russian Princess Wins Rasputin Suit', *New York Times*, 6 March, 1934. 'Celebrate Victory in Film Suit', *New York Times*, 11 August, 1934.
[219] Natalie Zemon Davis describes the defamation suits filed by Commander Robert Kelly in 1948 over *They Were Expendable*, and by Dr Jane V. Anderson in 1987 over *The Bell Jar,* in spite of such disclaimers. Natalie Zemon Davis, '"Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead": Film and the Challenge of Authenticity', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television,* Vol. 8, No. 3 (1998), 269-270.
[220] 'Biographical Urge Hits Hollywood; Gamblers and Kings Glorified Alike', *Variety*, 19 September, 1933, 2.
[221] 'The Law on Libelling the Dead', *Motion Picture Herald*, 6 July 1935, 47.

families by securing releases and cooperation on production at the earliest possible moment, before the development of scripts.[222]

The development of the historical biopics and their progression in the 1930s marketplace clearly drew from several specific factors endemic to the current environment. This complex understanding of biopics further influences the way that the boundaries of the cycle may be drawn. It can be questioned, for instance, whether a picture that fictionalises the events surrounding a historical figure can be considered a historical biopic. This in turn raises issues regarding whether historical accuracy should be made a part of the definition. Many of the adaptations from fictional work, such as *Cleopatra* (Paramount, 1934) or *Sutter's Gold* (Universal, 1936), and westerns, such as *Geronimo* (Paramount, 1940) fall into the 'historically inaccurate' category. In this case, examining the discourses of promotion and reception that surrounded the films can establish whether such pictures were primarily identified in relation to the cycle of historical biopics or other cycles, such as classic literary adaptations or action adventure films. The distinction between 'historical' and contemporary biopics also requires explanation. According to the trade press, contemporary biopics are characterised as having subjects currently active or present in recent living memory.[223] In this way, *The Great Ziegfeld* (MGM, 1936) is understood to be a contemporary biopic.[224] The estimation of the quantities of historical biopics in the table below is based on the pictures that were principally identified in the trades as focusing on a particular historical person, though it remains a fluid measurement.

[222] 'Biog Pics' Legal Come On', *Variety*, 28 June, 1939, 5. 'Pics' Biog Rush Has Lawyers Jumpy', *Variety*, 29 March, 1939, 5.
[223] Biographical Urge Hits Hollywood; Gamblers and Kings Glorified Alike', *Variety*, 19 September, 1933, 2. 'Biographical Film Cycle; Possibly Champ Trend of 1934', *Variety*, 13 February, 1934, 3, 25.
[224] 'Unlike the obscurely historical sagas which have heretofore highlighted the big roadshow film hits – here is an almost contemporaneous personality'. 'The Great Ziegfeld', *Variety*, 15 April, 1936, 16.

Table 2, Historical Biopic Production Quantities



Despite the lack of recognition of such prestige picture groups in cycle studies, the historical biopics were clearly and consistently identified as a cycle in 1930s trade commentary. The production of the films, being mostly specials, was specifically discussed and assessed as a group throughout the decade, often overlapping with the descriptions of the historical costume and spectacle production trends. This discourse can be traced in the trade press and placed against the dual cycle shape suggested in the chart's measurement of the quantities released each season. The first identification of a biographical cycle occurred in *Variety* in September 1933, which listed sixteen upcoming productions that covered both historical and contemporary subjects.[225] In anticipating the 1934-35 season, the double category of 'historical and biographical films' was predicted to comprise 7% of total screen fare, up from the previous season's 1%.[226] *Variety* wrote, 'A deluge of biographical stories is about to descend on the screen, in numbers so thick as to constitute the champion of cycles since sound came in. Along with them, back comes the costume pictures'.[227]

In early 1935, however, fears were expressed that the cycle might already be 'overdone', perhaps leading to a swing from historical to contemporary biographies.[228] *Variety* also

[225] 'Biographical Urge Hits Hollywood; Gamblers and Kings Glorified Alike', *Variety*, 19 September, 1933, 2.
[226] '34 Musicals Are Listed for the 1934-35 Season', *Film Daily*, 11 October, 1934, 1.
[227] 'Biographical Film Cycle; Possibly Champ Trend of 1934', *Variety*, 13 February, 1934, 3, 25.
[228] 'Costume Cycle Decline; Exhibs Chill on Big Pictures', *Variety*, 29 January, 1935, p. 3. Victor M. Shapiro, 'The Hollywood Scene', *Motion Picture Herald*, 2 March, 1935, p. 25. With *Diamond Jim* (Universal, 1935) and *The Great*

noted the prospect of a U.S. historical cycle based around Civil War figures, although none of the pictures listed as potential productions were made.[229] Despite anticipations of a possible decline, *Film Daily*'s annual survey of critics in 1936 revealed a concrete demand for further historical and biographical pictures.[230] In May 1936, *Silver Screen* reported that the costume cycle had reached its peak, noting 'never has there been a more educational or entertaining cycle'.[231] There was little comment made about the drop in production in the 1936-37 season and the discourse resumed in 1938 with *Marie Antoinette* (MGM, 1938). The film's grand release was seen to prove 'that the gentlemen who hold the purse strings of Hollywood do *not* believe that the vogue for historical pictures is a passing fad, a cycle' [emphasis in original].[232] In mid-1938, the popularity of spectacles, both "outdoor" and biographical-historical, was noted for the 1938-39 season, as well as a demand for American-themed pictures.[233] Fox's line-up for 1939 included six big biopics, three of them in colour, with *Film Daily* linking their production to the overall increase in production budgets and a solid domestic market.[234] The cycle's loss of momentum was described in August 1940, in *Photoplay's* review of *Lillian Russell* (Fox, 1940):

> It's very difficult to explain that a picture is a good picture, with gorgeous production and fine work on the part of all involved, but that, withal, it is a little dull. Expensive Hollywood epics – especially the biographical films – lately have had a habit of being longer than their minutes and heavier than their saddest moments.[235]

This discourse suggests the decade's historical biopics were marked by two peaks in 1936 and 1940, implying that there were two related cycles in the decade. This commentary is largely drawn from reviews of the pictures following their premieres, and is supported by the table above, which traces the cycle by the seasonal release of the films. The production history of biopics suggests, however, that the trend was maintained across the first period of 'decline' in the 1936-37 season. Despite the drop in theatrical release, the studios were still developing historical biopics at this time, MGM continued its long-held plans for the release of *Marie Antoinette* in the next season, and Warner Bros.

Ziegfeld (MGM, 1937) given as example, 'contemporary biographies' can be understood as those with subjects existing in living memory, which for the 1930s, suggests twentieth century personalities.

[229] 'U.S. Historical Film Cycle', *Variety*, 3 April, 1935, 2.

[230] 'Critics of the Nation Give Pointers to Producers, Exhibitors, Publicists', *Film Daily*, 9 June, 1936, 1.

[231] 'The Costume Cycle Reaches its Peak', *Silver Screen*, May, 1936, 36-37.

[232] Helen Louise Walker, 'Hollywood Buys a Book', *Silver Screen*, February, 1938, 32-33, 69.

[233] 'Seeing Specs for 1938-39', *Variety*, 11 May, 1938, 3.

[234] '20-th-Fox Planning Three in Technicolor for 1939-40', *Film Daily*, 3 April, 1939, 11. The films listed were *Stanley and Livingstone, Frontier Marshall, Steimetz the Great, Brigham Young, Belle Starr* and *Lillian Russell*.

[235] 'Lillian Russell', *Photoplay*, August, 1940, 74.

commenced the roadshow of *The Life of Emile Zola* (Warner Bros., 1937) at the very end of the 1936-37 season.

The unusual shape of the historical biopic cycle varies from the model of cycles established by Richard Nowell, who argues that cycles have either three or four chronologically distinct stages, with the process beginning when a film exhibits strong economic potential or when a film that differs from contemporaneous hits is seen to perform well commercially.[236] This initial film is described by Nowell as being either a 'pioneer production', which usually contains strong elements of innovation and differentiation, or a 'speculator production', which resurrects a film type that has not recently found commercial success. The subsequent picture, termed a 'trailblazer hit', lays the foundation of the cycle that follows. In the case of the historical biopics, the pictures most commonly identified as initiating the cycle are *Disraeli* (Warner Bros., 1929) and *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (London Films, 1933).[237] The more widely successful *Henry VIII* appears the best candidate for the 'trailblazer' hit, suggesting that *Disraeli* could fit into the 'pioneer' or 'speculator' role. *Disraeli*, being a close adaptation of George Arliss' well-known Broadway performance, was not necessarily pioneering in itself, although it garnered critical acclaim and a Best Actor Academy Award, and earned rentals of $1,489,000.[238] The film did lead to the production of *Alexander Hamilton* (Warner Bros., 1931) and *Voltaire* (Warner Bros., 1933) both with Arliss, although the initial containment of these within the same studio suggest it was yet to take up force as an industry-wide cycle. As *Variety* observed, 'with Hollywood on the verge of a biographical cycle "Henry VIII" will likely provide the slight shove needed to send the coast into an era of historical and costume pictures'.[239]

'Trailblazer hits', Nowell argues, can then initiate the production of 'cash-ins', modelled closely and systematically on the 'trailblazer'. Although these pictures can incorporate material from other viable film types, they are often disparaged as imitators in their reception.[240] Reviews of the individual historical biopics produced after *Henry VIII*,

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[236] Richard Nowell, *Blood Money*, 46.

[237] 'Activities in the Cinema Citadel; Pictorial Biographies Now Popular in the Studios', *New York Times,* 10 September, 1933.

[238] Mark H. Glancy, 'Appendix: Warner Bros. Film Grosses, 1921-51: The William Schaefer Ledger', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1995), 1-31.

[239] 'The Private Life of Henry VIII', *Variety*, 17 October, 1933, 19.

[240] Nowell, *Blood Money*, 49.

however, seldom discussed them as direct inheritors, in part because of the picture's foreign origin. Prestige and special productions also necessarily placed a higher premium on differentiation than more cheaply produced pictures. The nature of the biopic as a film type often resists a close repetition, its format and narrative determined by the life of the subject in question. Neither does Nowell's description of 'prospector cash-ins', the often risky productions that follow almost immediately to capitalise on the 'trailblazer's' success, neatly fit any of the historical biopics. *Queen Christina* (MGM, 1934) was one of the first pictures released in the wake of *Henry VIII*, yet its production had commenced before the former had created a splash in the market. The lengthy periods of production and the extended distribution of the prestige biopics, as well as the large investment these films represented, leaves them at odds with the image of quick 'cash-ins' most often associated with cycles.

Nowell states that 'the development of a film cycle hinges on the potential shown by the Trailblazer Hit being confirmed by at least one of the Prospector Cash-Ins becoming a commercial success, or a Reinforcing Hit'.[241] The majority of 1934 films that followed in the wake of *Henry VIII* were box office successes, including worldwide hits *Queen Christina* and *Viva Villa!* (MGM, 1934).[242] According to Nowell, the success of these initial 'cash-ins' can trigger a second wave of 'carpetbagger cash-ins', the final stage of the cycle's development, which often fail commercially and flood the market. The 1935-36 season of historical biopics, the numerical peak of the first wave, could possibly represent the 'carpetbagger cash-ins', with a number underperforming at the box office, such as *Annie Oakley* (RKO, 1935), which earned $620,000 at the box office, making only $48,000 for RKO once production, distribution, and advertising costs were calculated, or *Mary of Scotland* (RKO, 1936), which lost the company $165,000.[243] On the other hand, there were a number of big successes with *The Gorgeous Hussy* (MGM, 1936) and *The White Angel* (Warner Bros., 1936), as well as the great critical success of *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (Warner Bros., 1936).[244]

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[241] Ibid., 51.
[242] *Queen Christina* totalled $2,610,000 at the foreign and domestic box office, with a profit of $623,000 for MGM, and although it earned a total of $1,875,000 world-wide, the final profit of *Viva Villa!* was just $87,000. Mark Glancy, 'Appendix: MGM Film Grosses, 1924-1948: The Eddie Mannix Ledger', *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1992).
[243] Richard B. Jewell, 'Appendix 1: RKO film grosses, 1929–1951: the CJ Tevlin ledger', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television,* Vol. 14, No. 1 (1994).
[244] *The Gorgeous Hussy* made a profit of $1166,000. Mark Glancy, 'Appendix: MGM Film Grosses, 1924-1948: The Eddie Mannix Ledger', *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1992). *The White Angel* made

The declining release of historical biopics in the 1936-37 season is perplexing given the resumption of production in 1937-38, which suggests a second wave of productions. If Nowell's model is to be followed, *Emile Zola* might be taken as a 'speculator hit' and *Marie Antoinette* as a 'trailblazer', but their closeness to the preceding cycle, extensive production history, and lack of departure from a steady base level of production makes it difficult to view them as initiating a cycle anew. Nor does the discourse surrounding them suggest that, as a group, this second swell represents Nowell's final phase of 'carpetbagger cash-ins'. The second wave gathered momentum from 1938 and into 1939 when all the major studios submitted films, including Twentieth Century Fox's contribution of three American-centred pictures. Of the twelve films released in the cycle's penultimate season in 1939-40, eight were centred on American subjects, from 19th century entertainers and American outlaws to figures such as Thomas Edison and Abraham Lincoln. Only two, *The Private Life of Elizabeth and Essex* (Warner Bros., 1939) and *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (RKO, 1940) were based on pre-sold properties, the others being developed by the studios conducting their own research.

William Weaver's study of the product planned for 1938-39 identified eighteen biographical films for the season, also noting that 481 of the total 574 features would be set in the United States.[245] *Variety's* John C. Flinn saw this as part of a reaction to the complaints of independent and subsequent-run exhibitors against the European focus that characterised many of the prestige pictures. Jack Warner, on the other hand, tied it to the international situation and a growing patriotism at home.[246] Paul Vanderwood characterises the American focus as part of the industry's turn to concentrate on the domestic market in light of uncertainty over foreign revenues.[247] There was a much earlier plan to explore American historical subjects, however, and although the trade papers note the studios as having modified their product as a result of the reduced international market, by the time the majority of American-centred features were

$1,146,000 profit, and *Louis Pasture* made $1,187,000. Mark H. Glancy, 'Appendix: Warner Bros. Film Grosses, 1921-51: The William Schaefer Ledger', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1995), 1-31.

[245] William R. Weaver, 'Study of New Product Shows Emphasis on U.S. Home Themes', *Motion Picture Herald,* 10 September, 1938, 39-41.

[246] John C. Flinn, 'Lah-De-Dah Stuff Blah', *Variety*, 27 July 1938, 5. 'Patriotic Appeal to Mark 1939 Product, Says Warner', *Film Daily*, 28 December, 1938, 1.

[247] Paul Vanderwood, referenced in Balio, *Grand Design*, 190.

produced, anxieties over a drastic drop in international revenue had been allayed.[248] Instead, these films were part of a production trend for action and outdoor spectacles, and the development of inexpensive ways to produce colour films that would be enhanced by expansive outdoor locations. Tied to the increasing popularity of westerns, the distinction between historical biopics and action pictures about western folklore heroes was beginning to blur. Between 1939 and 1941, pictures covering the James brothers, Geronimo, the Daltons, Kit Carson, Daniel Boone, Billy the Kid, and Belle Star were released.[249] A greater number of biopics on contemporary subjects were also being produced, and George Custen identifies a second era of biopic production from 1941 that focused on entertainers, artists and sportspeople, rather than historical political figures.[250] The historical focus of biopics appears to dissipate from this moment, diverted into other film types as a new set of production trends developed with the entry of the U.S. into the Second World War.

When viewed as an ongoing production impulse, the historical biopics spanned almost the entire decade. This extended form was exacerbated not only by the protracted production periods, but by certain distribution and exhibition strategies. The practice of roadshowing was employed with several of the historical biopics, illustrating the very different market practices that surrounded prestige cycles and contributed to their particular shape. As Steve Neale and Sheldon Hall identify, roadshows were a promotional strategy that drew on legitimate theatre, characterised by two-a-day screenings, advanced seat booking, and higher ticket prices. Travelling to large metropolitan centres before being released into the general first runs, roadshows brought additional revenue to studios in the form of raised admissions and extended plays.[251] The failure of roadshow productions in the 1932-33 season, including *Rasputin and the Empress* (MGM, 1932), discouraged distributors from using the strategy in the years that followed. The trend was briefly reinstated after the success of *The Great Ziegfeld* in 1936, with twelve pictures

[248]U.S. Historical Film Cycle', *Variety*, 3 April, 1935, 2. 'U.S. Warns of Threats to Hollywood Abroad', *Motion Picture Herald*, 5 March, 1938, 12. 'Hollywood Readjusting Production Budgets with Eye to Dwindling International Markets', *Variety*, 23 March, 1938, 4. Roy Chartier, 'The Year in Pictures', *Variety*, 3 January, 1940, 5.
[249] *Jesse James* (Fox, 1939), *Geronimo* (Paramount, 1940), *The Return of Frank James* (Fox, 1940), *When the Daltons Rode* (Universal, 1940), *Kit Carson* (United Artists, 1940), *The Return of Daniel Boone* (Columbia, 1941), *Billy the Kid* (MGM, 1941), *Belle Star* (Fox, 1941).
[250] George F. Custen, *Bio/pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 84-85.
[251] Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale, *Epics, Spectacles and Blockbusters: A Hollywood History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 88-111.

roadshown in 1937. Some of these were profitable, but the majority, including *Marie Antoinette*, switched to regular release after disappointing openings.[252]

The distribution system of roadshowing, and the staggered, lengthy exhibition pattern that often resulted, can be considered in relation to the flow of cycles and the manner in which they are released into the marketplace and experienced by audiences in cinemas. Cycles that contain roadshows complicate the vision, derived from later film cycles, of cycles flooding cinemas in a short period of time under systems of day and date or saturation booking. Exhibition factors such as roadshows and extended runs were, however, only experienced by certain sections of the audience. This difference is evident in 1934 when *Variety* describes an influx of big pictures, with several historical biopics among them, as having 'jammed' Broadway cinemas. Although it was noted that the same bottleneck situation would likely play out in other large metropolitan first runs, for the week-to-week houses further down the line it simply promised a 'feast of good shows' coming their way.[253]

The Broadway premieres and gala openings that characterised prestige pictures can be compared to their programming in the sample theatres of Corsicana, TX, Cedar Rapids, IA, Ellensburg, WA, and Lewiston, MA. The majority of historical biopics generally played as single programs over weekends in the first run downtown houses of these locations, and in some cases screened a second time as part of a double bill in a subsequent-run house. The occasions on which films were held over for more than four days were rare, and there were few cases of roadshow bookings. As a city with a sizable population of over 55,000, Cedar Rapids generally received its films before the smaller towns, often arriving only one to two weeks after their Broadway opening. In the case of *The White Angel* (Warner Bros., 1936), Cedar Rapids received the picture simultaneously with its playing on Broadway, Los Angeles and other key cities, in the last week of

[252] Ibid., 94. *Motion Picture Herald* declared too that one of the reasons for the decline of roadshows included that audiences were growing 'show-wise', preferring to wait for popular prices 'Film Roadshows Drop; 30 in Last 5 Years', *Motion Picture Herald*, 20 August, 1938, 15.
[253] 'Big Pics Jam Broadway', *Hollywood Reporter*, 26 March, 1934, p. 1. The article describes the jam: the Astor was tied up with *The House of Rothschild*, the Capitol tied to regular MGM releases 'which must be played here on date in order to turn them loose for the subsequent revenue, so MGM is in a spot on *Viva Villa*! which is of roadshow calibre and not to be wasted on a routine Broadway engagement. This forces MGM to make a deal for another company's house, the Criterion, to get a bow on '*Villa*''. At the same time, Paramount has *Scarlet Empress* 'straining at the leash with big expectations', but the Rivoli is booked to UA releases, and must instead use the New York Paramount theatre, (usually a one, sometimes two-week steady customer house), and put an extra heavy exploitation campaign behind the it.

June.[254] The picture reached both Corsicana and Lewiston in mid-July, but did not find its way to Ellensburg until September.[255] Still, the historical biopics did often inundate the screens in large numbers. In late 1934, for instance, Corsicana's Palace played eight historical biopics between July and December, at least one weekend a month, and in Lewiston in 1940, historical biopics held ten first run engagements on the town's screens, not including additional subsequent run screenings.[256] Although the overall length of the cycle was extended by practices such as roadshows, which prevented the films from reaching smaller houses at an earlier date, such houses experienced momentary influxes of similar pictures nonetheless.

The shape of the historical biopic cycle does not conform well to the model of cycles Nowell established from his own case study, and in general different patterns of production and distribution complicate comparisons between different types of cycles. Nowell's four essential chronological stages can be loosely applied to the historical biopics. Yet the pictures do not necessarily possess the qualities with which Nowell characterises the phases. For instance, the negative reception of the cash-in films' imitation is largely absent from the historical biopics. The biopics also stretch beyond the tighter time-frame suggested by Nowell. Despite these factors, the contemporary trade press described the historical biopics as a cycle.

The differences of this cycle are largely due to the product type, which was based on production and distribution practices that took more time, cost more money, and were highly premised on differentiation. John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny describe how studios usually only produced one prestige production per season, planned as one-off hits that would be attractive purchases for the first run theatres affiliated with rival studios, as

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[254] *Cedar Rapids Tribune,* 26 June, 1936, *Variety*, 1 July, 1936, 8-9.

[255] *Corsicana Daily Sun* 15 July, 1936, *Lewiston Daily Sun,* 16 July, 1936, *Ellensburg Daily Record,* 14 September, 1936.

[256] Corsicana, 1934: *Viva Villa!, Corsicana Daily Sun,* 5 July, 1934, *The House of Rothschild, Corsicana Daily Sun,* 28 July, 1934, *Catherine the Great, Corsicana Daily Sun,* 20 August, 1934, *The Scarlet Empress, Corsicana Daily Sun,* 4 October, 1934, *The Barretts of Wimpole St, Corsicana Daily Sun,* 26 October, 1934, *Cleopatra, Corsicana Daily Sun,* 1 November, 1934, *Frontier Marshal, Corsicana Daily Sun,* 1 November, 1934, *Madame du Barry, Corsicana Daily Sun,* 13 December, 1934. Lewiston, 1940: *Young Tom Edison, Lewiston Daily Sun,* 8 April, 1940, *Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 8 April. 1940, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 23 May, 1940, *Lillian Russell, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 30 May, 1940, *Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 3 June, 1940, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 1 August, 1940, *The Return of Frank James*, *Lewiston Daily Sun*, 29 August, 1940, *When the Daltons Rode*, *Lewiston Daily Sun*, 16 September, 1940, *Edison the Man, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 23 September, 1940, *Kit Carson, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 21 October, 1940, *The Return of Frank James, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 28 October, 1940, *Brigham Young, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 4 November, 1940, *When the Daltons Rode, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 11 November, 1940, *Dispatch from Reuters, Lewiston Daily Sun*, 9 December, 1940.

well as independent exhibitors. They argue that the prestige pictures did not represent business decisions calculated on the probability of distribution risks amongst the overall production portfolio, but were seen as stand-alone investments akin to product innovations.[257] As larger investments for the studios, their attraction was enhanced by elements that emphasised the uniqueness of their product in the marketplace, such as stars and production values. The elements of repetition and likeness that allow pictures to be grouped as cycles are instead present in the adherence to the general biopic blueprint, a similarity of intention to the tell the story of a life, and the particular forms of historical subject matter, such as European monarchs and American civic leaders.

The historical biopics again raise the issues of the difference between cycles as a temporal trend in production of a particular film type, and cycles as the clumping of films in the pipeline of distribution and exhibition. The two waves of historical biopics are more evident when the cycle is calculated by the films' initial date of general theatrical release. The view of their ongoing production, when placed alongside the more definite release dates, highlights the studios' strategic distribution plans for the pictures, holding off a film's release until the launch of the new season, or until a similar picture had left the market. Rather than simply being a naturally occurring phenomenon, the studios could evidently engineer a cycle, creating and controlling its current through theatres through staggering the release of their films. Such a distribution strategy was often suggested as a means to combat the 'cycle evil'.[258] The companies' motivation here was to provide their pictures with the best chance for maximum profit, a concern which was more relevant to the big budget investments sold on a percentage basis, rather than the flat-rate programmer cycles that were guaranteed fairly stable returns. The decade-long drive suggested by the production plans, the extension of the circulation and release period, and the higher degree of differentiation, meant that the market took longer to reach saturation point. Audiences lost interest in the film type at a later period than in the case of repetitive, higher volume, and temporally-concentrated cycles.

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[257] Michael Pokorny and John Sedgwick, 'Stardom and Profitability in Filmmaking: Warner Bros. in the 1930s', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, Vol. 25 (2001), 172.

[258] 'Mayer Suggests Stagger Release System to Kill Ruinous Cycles', *Variety*, 6 October, 1931, 5. 'BO Being Killed by Film Cycles, Avers Pix Buyers', Variety, 16 August, 1950, 3, 23. 'Urges Producer Priorities to Banish Cycles of Films', *Motion Picture Daily,* 5 March, 1952, 1, 2.

Film cycles can be made up of films of various types and budget categories that might follow different channels through production, distribution and exhibition, but that remain discursively identified as cycles. The historical biopics' points of commonality and difference with low budget cycles suggest the need for a more inclusive model of how film cycles develop and operate. Such a model should be applicable to film types across a range of production categories and methods of circulation and exhibition, taking into account the various ways that cycles could function for the industry. Besides being a commercial mode of production organisation, as in the case of the girl reporter pictures, a cycle such as the historical biopics was formed by other production motivations, marketplace behaviour and reception.

The rhetorical function of the historical biopic cycle

Little was written about biopics as a genre until the 1990s and the publication of George Custen's 1992 study *Bio/pics*, which centred on Classical Hollywood productions and the form of history they told.[259] Scholars such as Dennis Bingham have speculated that the neglect of this film type from genre studies was due to the stigma of their being tedious, pedestrian, and fraudulent.[260] Recent studies, including Bingham's, Elizabeth Ford and Deborah Mitchell's *Royal Portraits in Hollywood*, and the introduction to the edited collection from Tom Brown and Belén Vidal, seek to tie the 1930s cycles of historical biopics to a more recent influx of biopics in the 1990s and early 2000s.[261] Bingham does this as part of an attempt to trace the development of biopics as a genre, arguing that 'like any genre that dates back nearly to the beginning of narrative cinema, the biopic has gone through developmental stages, emerging from each of its historical cycles with certain modes that continue to be available to filmmakers working in the form'.[262]

[259] Carolyn Anderson notes in 1988 that many prior discussions focused on specific films, issues of representation, and the relation of the viewer to the text. Carolyn Anderson, 'The Biographical Film', *Handbook of American Film Genres,* Wes D. Gehring (ed.) (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 342. Custen, *Bio/pics*.
[260] Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 11.
[261] Elizabeth Ford and Deborah Mitchell, *Royal Portraits in Hollywood: Filming the Lives of Queens* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009). Tom Brown and Belén Vidal (eds.), *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[262] Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, 17.

Drawing on Henri Foucillon and Thomas Schatz, Bingham classifies a number of progressive stages as the experimental, classic, refinement and baroque. These correspond to the early 'exotic' European melodramatic biopics, the classical biopics of the 1930s, the post-war 'warts-and-all' biopics, and a self-reflexive parodic stage. Describing these as individual cycles, Bingham adheres to a conception of genre as possessing an overall 'life cycle' with an evolutionary trajectory. In such a paradigm, the groups of films, although historicised, are simplified into a cohesive group that can be characterised as representing a singular approach or treatment. The contents of the pictures are primarily examined for the ways that they develop this pattern of the genre, usually measured in terms of how the biographical subjects are represented in relation to the prevailing beliefs of the time. Bingham's method follows the traditional ideological approach to genre that is based on a 'reflectionist' analysis.[263] Rather than selecting different biopic cycles from various points in time and placing them alongside one another in order to assess them under the frame of genre, viewing the individual cycles more closely within their original historical context can better determine the industrial and commercial factors that drove them.

Current critical considerations of the historical biopics in film scholarship display an array of attitudes towards the films' treatment of history. This includes dismissals based on their lack of authenticity and capitulation to the demands of entertainment and convention, and assessments that criticise the narrowness of their focus on white males as individualised historical narratives of 'great men'. At the same time, the biopics' usefulness as a means to understand the moment of production has been reclaimed, alongside a re-valuing of their status as popular history engaged in non-traditional modes of historicising.[264] In examining the way that the films were promoted as historical at the

[263] See David Bordwell on symptomatic of reflectionist analysis, David Bordwell*, Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
[264] See J. E. Smyth, 'Hollywood as Historian, 1929-45', *The Wiley Blackwell History of American Film, Vol. 2, 1929-1945*, Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundmann, Art Simon (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 467-494. J. E. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema: From Cimmaron to Citizen Kane* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006)., Marcia Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Custen's influential study concluded that the history Hollywood related through its films was selective, deferential, and limited, composed of corridors-of-power treatments that shaped the views of the public and set the agenda for the discussion of such topics. Custen, *Bio/pics* , Brown and Vidal, 'Introduction', *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, 6. J. E. Smyth, seeking to revise this approach, argues that Hollywood producers and screenwriters held a more complex attitude to the production of history, and points to films of the 1930s that evidence experimentation with new forms of narration, a constructed manipulation of text and image, and deliberate confrontations with controversy. This treatment of history is further situated as part of a post-WWI revival of interest in social and cultural history and ideas of historical relativism, as well as literary trends for disillusioned memoirs and 'debunking' biographies. Carolyn Anderson similarly identifies the influence of Lynton Strachey's work in the biographical field in the early twentieth century, in the movement from a hagiographic tone to a greater interest in the personalities and motives of the subjects.

time when they were produced, and the commentary provided in trades, critical reviews, and by viewers writing in to fan magazines, several discourses emerge surrounding the films' engagement with history. Not only did history provide a partially-protected legal ground for writers, it was also seen as a safe setting for films with controversial elements that might otherwise be rejected under the Production Code Administration (PCA).

The historical biopics seen to seek refuge from the PCA in history were generally those with risqué sexual situations, and those containing political commentary. The former cases occurred in the first cycle of biopics released in 1934 amid the calls for a 'clean screen', with entries such as *The Affairs of Cellini* (Twentieth Century, 1934) and *Madame Du Barry* (Warner Bros., 1934). Of Alexander Korda's British film *The Private Life of Don Juan* (London Films, 1934) *Variety* stated: 'like all historical or pseudo-documentary film productions, the nature of the subject seemingly makes it permissible to extend the romantic equation where it might normally be curbed'.[265] Nor was this use of history restricted to the perception of reviewers, as the PCA files on *Queen Christina* (MGM, 1934) suggest. The studio avoided making a number of Joseph Breen's recommended edits, opening the picture on Broadway in a cut approved by the New York censorship board but without the PCA seal of approval.[266] A jury was then empanelled to review the PCA decision, its judgement described in a letter to Eddie Mannix at MGM:

> In as much as the entire action of the play was laid back some centuries and seemed to have its basis in historic truth and accuracy, they were moved to overrule the decision conveyed to you by Mr Breen … They went on the record, however, as of the opinion that a similar situation in a modern drama would not likely have met with their approval.[267]

Other contentious elements explored in the historical biopics were politically sensitive themes, such as that of anti-Semitism, which were increasingly foregrounded in the films as explicit parallels to the contemporary international situation. *Motion Picture Herald* first noted historical biopics 'venturing into the domain of debateable subject matter' in

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Smyth, 'Hollywood as Historian', 467-494. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema.* J. Smyth, 'Young Mr. Lincoln: Between Myth and History', *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, Vol. 7, No 2 (2003), 193-214. Anderson, 'The Biographical Film', 342.

[265] 'Don Juan', *Variety*, 18 December, 1934, 18.

[266] Joseph Breen, Memorandum, 8 January, 1934. Mamoulian, Rouben. *Queen Christina (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1934).* 1934. History of Cinema, Series 1, Hollywood and Production Code Administration. Herrick Library. *Archives Unbound.* Web. 10 Dec. 2014. <http://go.galegroup.com/gdsc/i.do?&id=GALE%7CSC5106208646&v=2.1&u=flinders&it=r&p=GDSC&sw=w&viewtype=fullcitation>

[267] Letter from to Eddie Mannix, 11 January, 1934, ibid.

relation to the Darryl F. Zanuck pictures produced at Twentieth Century and starring George Arliss, *The House of Rothschild* (Twentieth Century, 1934) and *Cardinal Richelieu* (Twentieth Century, 1935).[268] *The Life of Emile Zola* again raised the theme of anti-Semitism in its depiction of the Dreyfus case, although this was more implicit than explicit, exciting comment from newspaper critics but not trade reviewers.[269] Viewers with historical knowledge of the Dreyfus affair would have been aware of the anti-Semitism themes, while viewers without that knowledge would not be able to infer that meaning from the film alone. In *Juarez* (Warner Bros., 1939) the parallelism was overt, with producer Henry Blanke and writer Aeneas McKenzie declaring in pre-publicity their intention to tell a story with a view to contemporary concerns.[270] These aspects were sensationalised in the promotion of the picture, becoming a dramatic selling point that emphasised the relevancy of the film while grounding this exploitation in the legitimacy of history. The voiceover narration of the trailer described *Juarez* as 'no wild flight of fiction but the burning realism of history's scarlet pages – a picture of great powers plotting the downfall of weaker nations'.[271]

In the reception of these and other historical biopics, the visual nature of motion pictures was celebrated as a powerful way to tell historical stories, innovative approaches were applauded, and the attempts of the films to humanise history were valued. In 1933, just before the cycle of historical biopics first gained strength, U.S. diplomat Ruth Bryan Owen argued that motion pictures could become historical documents, both of the past and for the future. She cited *Alexander Hamilton* as an example of a film that made history live and breathe.[272] Frank Lloyd, the director of *Mutiny on the Bounty* (MGM, 1935), argued that biopics do not reduce the glamour of history, but humanise the characters into living recreations rather than statues on pedestals.[273] This emphasis on the

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[268] 'House of Rothschild', Film Daily, 8 March, 1934, 8. 'Cardinal Richelieu', *Motion Picture Daily*, 25 March, 1935, 6.

[269] Frank S. Nugent, 'A Revision Upward on "Souls at Sea" – "The Life of Emile Zola", *New York Times*, 5 August, 1937.

[270] '"Juarez": The Life History of a Move', *Photoplay*, May, 1939, 22, 93-95.

[271] Warner Bros., 'Juraez Trailer (1939) with Korngold Score', 1939. Online clip, *You Tube*. Accessed on 10 December 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1f2eJa8XOc4>

[272] Laura Benham, 'Ruth Bryan Owen Defends the Films', *Screenland*, August, 1933, 22, 23. Arliss too declared that the ambition behind his performances was to make famous historical characters into human beings, often choosing to portray only the most important period in the life of his subject, rather than attempting to treat the whole life through episodes whose disjointed nature lost the interest of the audience. 'Arliss Hands Producers a Bouquet for Letting Him Do Costume Films', *Variety*, 24 October, 1933, 3.

[273] 'Hollywood is Better Equipped, Says Lloyd', *Motion Picture Daily*, 2 January, 1935, 5.[273] The popularity of this approach was verified by audience members. One viewer wrote to *Photoplay* in 1934 to acknowledge the common criticism that Hollywood makes royalty 'more hysterical than historical', but declared 'I think it's a grand idea… We

films' educational and cultural value remained an important point of evaluation for contemporary critics, and fed back into the studios' production and marketing machinery to construct a rhetoric of prestige that was utilised by the industry for publicity purposes.

As special productions that generated a large amount of promotional and critical discourse, the discussion of the films was utilised to promote a particular image of the producers, one which could be drawn upon to convey a positive picture of the industry at large. Richard Maltby's work on the PCA uncovers the ways in which the Hays Office responded to external economic threats to the industry, such as the anti-trust suits, with publicity discourses that sought to redefine the cultural function of entertainment in terms that suited their needs.[274] In the early 1930s, it was necessary for Hollywood to rehabilitate its reputation as the providers of respectable entertainment, and the industry used the same theories that underlay the current criticisms of the industry to do so.

In 1933 the industry was returning to economic strength following the initial effects of the Depression. Hollywood could again pursue the production of prestige films and afford the expenses of historical recreations and extensive research, top studio star salaries, the purchase of pre-sold properties and splashy advertising campaigns. As Balio observes, the censorship debates and the campaigns of the Legion of Decency in the early 1930s are often understood to have a causal relationship to the prestige production trend. Yet Balio points to numerous prestige pictures of the silent and early sound era to argue that the industry had sought to wait out the worst of the economic difficulties before resuming an ongoing production trend.[275] Even prior to the release of the Payne Fund studies and the discussion they generated, D. W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* (Feature, 1930) was already being promoted for school education, discussed as an opportunity to encourage healthier moviegoing habits, and held up as an example to the Better Films Committee.[276] This was consistent with the project of the MPPDA's Committee on Public Relations (est. 1922), which aimed to boost high-class entertainment in order to position movies as "improving" middle class entertainment. In 1932 Hays pointed in his annual industry report to a 'new style' of prestige films and literary adaptations that were securing box office success, and

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are more interested in the human side of monarchs'. M. F. Donee, Seattle, Washington, 'Turn on the Human Side', *Photoplay*, August, 1934, 16.
[274] Maltby, 'The Production Code and the Mythologies of "Pre-Code" Hollywood', 237-247.
[275] Balio, *Grand Design*, 189.
[276] Rita C. McGoldrick, 'When the Screen Teaches', *Motion Picture Herald*, 11 April, 1931, 61

highlighted that the support of this would be a more productive avenue for critics of the industry to channel their efforts.[277] This discourse became even more widespread with the industry's need to deflect attention from the complaints surrounding the anti-trust suits and on to picture production and content.[278]

The interwar period witnessed a growth in the field of social science, with increasing attention given to the role of media in society. 'Effects' represented the prominent view of the workings of the mass media at this time, an approach subsequently characterised as regarding the media as resembling a hypodermic needle with which the masses were injected with messages, and against which they were powerless to resist.[279] This understanding informed the premise behind the Payne Fund research conducted in the early 1930s, which sought to explore the effects of motion pictures upon children.[280] The initial results found, for instance, that films could encourage violent behaviour in young people, and their publication in 1933 fuelled demands from civic and religious groups for censorship and the regulation of the screen. In June 1933, the Payne Fund's Council Chair Professor Hibbens concluded that 'the motion picture is powerful to an unexpected degree in affecting the information, attitudes, emotional experiences and conduct patterns of children' and that the content of pictures is a matter of 'deep concern to parents', causing consternation amongst groups already concerned over the themes of violence and sex in the gangster and fallen women cycles. It was also taken by the Hearst press as an opportunity to publically call for federal censorship of the industry, which the industry desired to avoid.[281] When this concern was voiced over the potential harm caused by films with immoral content, industry spokespeople sought to re-establish the role of Hollywood films in American society. Deviating from the usual defence as purveyors of 'pure entertainment', the industry adopted a stance that drew on this assumption of 'effects' and utilised it to advocate for motion picture's influence as a positive social force, aligning itself with the film education movement.

[277] 'New Films Increasing Potential Audience, Hays Tells Directors', *Motion Picture Herald,* 16 April, 1932, 21.
[278] Maltby, 'The Production Codes and the Mythologies of Pre-Code Hollywood', *The Classical Hollywood Reader,* Steve Neale (ed.) (Winchester: Wiley and Blackwell, 2011), 239.
[279] W. J. Severin, and J. W. Tankard Jr., *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods and Uses* (New York: Longman, 1992), 105-106. N. Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality* (London: Cassell, 1999), 13.
[280] G. S. Jowett, I. C. Jarvie, and K. H. Fuller, *Children and The Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[281] 'The Researchers – And Reactions', *Motion Picture Herald*, 10 June, 1933, 9-11

As Lea Jacobs has pointed out, the film education and appreciation movements held the same underlying theory as the calls for a clean screen, but instead of fulminating for censorship they concentrated on intervening at the level of reception to offset 'effects' and to regulate the conditions of viewing. Such movements, Jacob argues, were informed by the progressive tradition of cultural uplift, and had at their base an exercise of canon building, where the selection of approved films established criteria for evaluation and set the boundaries for taste.[282] These practices were part of the growth of middlebrow culture in the 1920s and 1930s, which is described by Joan Shelley Rubin as part of the shift from producer to consumer culture. Self-definition became increasingly tied to the projected image of the self, with the exercise of taste connecting the demonstration of character with the consumption of particular goods and services.[283] In watching films associated with history, for instance, selective viewers could demonstrate and define their interests in opposition to the less prestigious pictures consumed by the mass public. The industry, as the producers of such pictures, was also able to raise its own status.

Hays and the MPPDA worked with such bodies as the National Council of English Teachers to promote the use of films in schools, highlighting the responsibility of teachers to steer the leisure time of their pupils.[284] This discourse heavily emphasised the educational benefits of pictures and drew on middlebrow taste predilections for classic literary adaptations and prize-winning plays. Historical biopics, many of which were adaptations, were described as 'connected with the general trend of production' of prestige pictures that targeted the selective audience sector.[285] The Photoplay Studies, one of the major film appreciation study guides developed for school students, were largely centred on literary adaptations but also covered several historical biopics. The discussion questions raised in the guides were not necessarily centred on history. The guide for *Mary of Scotland* for instance, focused on a comparison with Maxwell Anderson's play, while *The Prisoner of Shark Island* (Fox, 1935) examined its social significance through issues of the legal system and conviction on circumstantial evidence.[286] There was debate

[282] Lea Jacobs, 'Reformers and Spectators: The Film Education Movement in the Thirties', *Camera Obscura,* Vol. 8 (1990), 28-49.
[283] Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 24-25.
[284] Kathryn Dougherty, 'Close Ups and Long Shots', *Photoplay*, February, 1934, 26.
[285] 'New Films Increasing Potential Audience, Hays Tells Directors', *Motion Picture Herald,* 16 April, 1932, 21. 'Campaigns for Special Audiences Found Road to Increased Profits', *Motion Picture Herald*, 27 July, 1935, 13. 'Producers Aim Classics at 36,000,000 Audience', Motion *Picture Herald*, 15 August, 1936, 13-18.
[286] Mary Imelda Stanton, 'Mary of Scotland', *Photoplay Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (1936). Gladys G. Gambill, 'The Prisoner of Shark Island', *Photoplay Studies,* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1936).

amongst the Advisory Committee regarding the inclusion of *Daniel Boone* (RKO, 1936) in the series; some dismissed it for its historical inaccuracies while others, including the author Paul Bowden, treated the film as a symbolic representation of the American pioneer spirit.[287] This discussion over the suitability of certain pictures for classroom instruction suggests how education was a central arena where the boundaries for legitimate film culture were drawn.

Education was not only a promotional strategy but a market sector in itself. In joining with the film appreciation movements and their attempts to establish certain moviegoing habits, the industry attempted to develop critical audiences. It was thought that a larger body of discerning viewers would join the chorus for higher quality pictures, and further strengthen the market for prestige films.[288] As Sarah Maclean Mullen wrote in a 1935 pamphlet for high school students, *How to Judge Motion Pictures*, one of the most important questions in evaluating a film was its social value:

> Lately people have been showing, by demanding "good pictures", that they want entertainment, art, technique, and social values of the best kind. Perhaps we, too, by looking at moving pictures intelligently, by raising our own standards, by studying the rules for good pictures set down in this little study pamphlet – perhaps we, too, may become intelligent leaders in the movement for better American moving pictures.[289]

The success of films such as *Little Women* (RKO, 1933) and *Henry VIII* encouraged the production of further cycles that could disseminate this discourse, and were held up as examples of both the industry and the public's success in attaining a higher cultural plane. Soon after attending a preview screening of *The Story of Louis Pasteur* in October, 1935, Breen penned a letter to Hays that described how, although he was impressed by the picture, he felt 'it may just be a bit "over the heads" of the mob'.[290] The critical and commercial success of the film proved, however, that there was a market for such prestige productions. Two years after Breen's letter, *The Life of Emile Zola* was singled out by

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[287] Paul Bowden, 'Daniel Boone', *Photoplay Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (1936).

[288] Edgar Dale, leader of the film appreciation movement, is described by John Nichol as hoping to develop a market economy, where demand could alter supply; a more discerning audience would encourage the industry to produce higher quality pictures, including those relevant to the social concerns and interests of these audience groups. John Nichols, 'Countering Censorship: Edgar Dale and the Film Appreciation Movement', *Cinema Journal,* Vol. 46, No. 1 (2006), 3-22.

[289] Sarah Maclean Mullen, *How to Judge Motion Pictures: A Pamphlet for High School Students* (New York: Scholastic, 1 936).

[290] Letter from Breen to Hays, 26 October, 1935, 'The Story of Louis Pasteur' Production File, Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library.

Hays as exemplifying both artistic maturity and universal entertainment appeal, and was later listed by *Variety* as part of a group of films which, along with the 'nudging of Hays', contributed to the educational nature of contemporary screen fare. This was seen as going part ways towards the realisation of Hays' decade-old dream for the studios to each produce a number of pictures annually for school curricula.[291]

Public figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt reiterated Hays' discourse, commenting on the gradual change in public taste and the further educational potential of motion pictures, and offering a challenge to producers of the future: 'will movies be an instrument in the development of good taste and are we growing up to be a nation with artistic knowledge and appreciation?'[292] With this educational emphasis, the industry imbued its function to provide entertainment with a degree of social responsibility and cultural purpose. This became an answer to the question raised by James Truslow Adams and other cultural commentators who queried whether it was possible for American society to develop true artistic and cultural achievements in a system organised around mass production and consumption.[293] In implicating the public as co-authors and co-censors, able to regulate the industry by voicing their preferences at the box office, Hollywood retained an emphasis on cinema as democratic, universal entertainment, portraying the development of the prestige film trend as being in the public interest, a response to audience demand.[294]

Beyond the claim to be raising the standards of taste of the general moviegoing public, the industry also sought to attract and exploit new market sectors with these prestige productions. One of the main groups targeted by prestige product were the 'occasional moviegoers' who were highly selective, only attending pictures of special interest. In 1936 *Motion Picture Herald* calculated this sector as representing 36,000,000 people, and described the attempts of the studios to cultivate this market through precise exploitation campaigns that highlighted their interests in pre-sold material from classic literature, bestsellers and Broadways successes, as well as in historical biopics.[295]

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[291] 'Hays Sees Artistic, Social Pix as Box Office', *Film Daily*, 4 October, 1937, 1, 9. 'Historical Pix to Up B.O.: Studios Hop on Epochal Cycle', *Variety*, 20 April, 1938, 3, 19.
[292] Eleanor Roosevelt, 'Why We Roosevelts Are Movie Fans', *Photoplay*, August, 1938, 16-17, 84.
[293] Adams asked, 'Can a great civilization be built up or maintained upon the philosophy of the counting-house and the sole basic idea of profit?', Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, 30.
[294] 'Hays Asserts High Standard Must Prevail', *Motion Picture Daily*, 22 January, 1934, 1, 6.
[295] 'Campaigns for Special Audiences Found Road to Increased Profits', *Motion Picture Herald*, 27 July, 1935, 13. 'Producers Aim Classics at 36,000,000 Audience', *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 August, 1936, 13-18.

The rhetoric of higher taste and universal public was part of the justification for making pictures for this relatively small but lucrative viewing sector. As discussed in the previous chapter, in light of the anti-trust suits, the industry also sought to avoid complaints over product from groups of independent exhibitors. Prestige pictures, although seen by critics as containing enough drama and entertainment to appeal to the general public, were often viewed critically by exhibitors outside the first runs.[296] Exhibitors protested the studios' concentration on the first run audience in the production of prestige pictures, claiming they were being 'high-"C"d out of business', unfairly stuck with the task of persuading uninterested audiences of the entertainment value of the product.[297]

The promotional material issued by Warner Bros. for their historical biopics emphasise showmanship built on class, education, and quality. In the press book for *The Story of Louis Pasteur* a section is devoted to 'class' exploitation, adapted from its successful usage in the previous season's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Warner Bros., 1935), that recommended school ties-ins and student contests, direct mail campaigns, special preview screenings for select audiences, and an opening night gala.[298] Much of the exploitation emphasis in both the *Pasteur* and *Zola* press books is skewed towards the downtown and first run theatres and the means to elicit the elusive audience of occasional moviegoers. A number of productions sought to bridge the gap between these market sectors by infusing the form of the historical biopic with elements thought to appeal to the general run. Warner Bros. attempted such a strategy with *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*, with varying degrees of success.

Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet

Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet built upon the form of historical biopics developed by Warner Bros. in *The Story of Louis Pasteur* and *The Life of Emile Zola*. Made by the same

[296] See review of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (MGM, 1934), that acknowledged the danger that would dismiss it as highbrow and arty, but for exhibitors to instead appeal to the appreciation and sympathy 'to the crowd you know as shop clerks, laundry girls and truck drivers … sell it with a technique that draws the curiosity of both classes'. 'The Barretts of Wimpole Street', *Motion Picture Herald*, 4 August, 1934, 30.
[297] 'Storm Raging in Exhibition Over Hollywood's "Arty" Productions', *Motion Picture Herald*, 30 November, 1935, p. 15., 'Hell Bent for Culture', *Motion Picture Herald*, 8 August, 1936, 3. Leyendecker, 'Frankly Speaking', *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin*, 14 January, 1939, 2.
[298] *The Story of Louis Pasteur* press book, Warner Bros., 1936.

production team, in *Ehrlich* Edward G., Robinson took the central role previously assumed by Paul Muni. The story follows the career of late 19th century German physician and Nobel Prize winner Professor Paul Ehrlich, documenting his development of a theory of immunisation, the "side chain" theory, which he used to create salvarsan to successfully treat syphilis. As syphilis was a forbidden subject under the Production Code, the production required careful negotiations between the studio and the Hays Office over the picture's tone and treatment. A close examination of *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* reveals how the rhetorical function of the biopic cycle, with its discourse of legitimised culture, education and taste, was carefully balanced with the practical and commercial considerations of Warner Bros., and their employment of the historical biopic formula. There was a tension in this film over the controversial subject and its potential for exploitation, and the respectful, informative tone associated with the greater cycle. The production history, marketing, and reception of the picture exemplify many of the issues that shaped the initial development of the cycle, such as PCA negotiations, libel suits, and the use of an historical backdrop to explore potentially contentious themes.

The story drew on the structural formula of *Zola*, while employing the images of scientific laboratory work associated with *Pasteur*. Like Pasteur before him, Professor Ehrlich battles a generalised ignorance and conformity associated with the established scientific and medical profession. In the first half of the picture, the central narrative conflict is presented through the chief of the hospital, Professor Hartman, who advises Ehrlich to conform to normative codes of conduct and is unable to see beyond the scientific procedures of control groups and trials, even when lives are at stake. In the second half of the film, the research system is criticised for its reliance on funding that is led by committees focused on visible results, and Ehrlich becomes embroiled in a court case defending the administration of salvarsan. *Ehrlich* also follows *Zola*'s format in splitting the film into the period before his achievement of fame and recognition, and a later career phase where the hero's complacency is challenged, leading him to rediscover the values that first motivated his work.[299] The film also includes a penultimate trial scene, which had been used effectively in *Zola* to reiterate to the audience Zola's liberal

[299] Dieterle's script notes voice his concern that the scene of Ehrlich and Behring's falling out too closely resembles that of Zola and Cezanne in *The Life of Emile Zola*, calling it an 'exact repetition' and suggesting that the setting be shifted from the living room to the laboratory. Dieterle notes in script dated 12 August, 1939, William Dieterle collection, Cinematic Arts Library, USC.

ideals. Ehrlich too provides a brief defence for his syphilis compound, which verifies viewers' faith in Ehrlich and confirms his status as a great man.

The particular production unit that was responsible for *Pasteur, Zola* and *Juarez* was made up of several key personnel. They included executive producer Hal Wallis, producer Henry Blanke, director William Dieterle, and actor Paul Muni, as well as several screenwriters who each worked on a couple of the films: Heinz Herald, Wolfgang Reinhardt and John Huston. Janet Staiger has written on the changing production management structures in the Hollywood studio system, from a pre-1931 central producer system to a producer-unit system that was in place from 1931 to 1955, followed by a package-unit system.[300] Cycles operated within and across the different management modes, but with the specialisation of the producer-unit system and its subdivision of labour, each unit often maintained a particular focus on picture type, such as the Blanke-Dieterle-Muni unit's biographical pictures at Warner Bros. This could differentiate the output of a studio within the larger cycle; the historical biopics produced at Warner Bros. could distinguish themselves from the corresponding units at different studios such as the Zanuck-Trotti biopics being made at Twentieth Century Fox, which were associated with a different set of stars and subject matter. In capitalising on a particular film type already in circulation, the studio units sought to identify it with the proprietary characteristics of their own studio as a means of product differentiation, creating a brand identity to generate particular audience expectations and reduce risk.[301]

The pictures produced by the Warner Bros. biopic unit helped establish a branding for the studio that signified a serious tone and socially-minded treatment and which mixed fiction and dramatic realism. Dieterle, in particular, had cultivated a reputation for socially conscious filmmaking. In a 1939 profile in *Film Survey*, Dieterle was portrayed as pioneering and progressive, with *Ehrlich* falling into this lineage: 'The first man to direct a film against race prejudice, against bigoted ignorance, about the courageous Spanish

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[300] Janet Staiger, 'The Hollywood Mode of Production, 1930-1960'; in *Classical Hollywood Cinema and Modes of Production,* David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Janet Staiger (eds.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 311-337, Janet Staiger, 'Janet Staiger Responds to Matthew Bernstein's "Hollywood's Semi-Independent Production"', *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1993), 57.

[301] George Custen has also raised the idea of a studio house style as a means of differentiating the biographical products, based on the idea of the mode of production being conventionalised by a stable set of personnel. He argues, 'each studio might structure biopics according to similar general contours caused by specific differences in intramural production practices, although inter textual references made by producers in constructing films show that films made at other studios affected biopic conventions'. Custen, *Bio/pics*, 82.

people ("Blockade" will never be forgotten) should be the first man to direct a film about the social disease'.[302] Another 1940 profile quotes Dieterle on the industry's need for such films in order to keep abreast of contemporary audiences: 'Films must have a message and they must advance … You may be sure that the studio which sets itself to making films for the so-called "advanced" audiences will be the studio of tomorrow'.[303]

Thomas Elsaesser's work on the biopics made by the Warner Bros. unit identifies a number of internal and external influences on the film formula. He describes them as part of a long-term studio strategy for revamping the image of Warner Bros., a studio that wished to maintain its reputation for social realism while introducing less controversial, more respectable content after the widespread criticism of the violence of its gangster pictures. Elsaesser argues that the Dieterle unit also enabled the studio to accommodate and control Muni and Dieterle's artistic pretensions and demands by attaching them to a discourse of creative integrity and authorship. He writes:

> The biopic thus represents a *threefold compromise formation*: in terms of generic codes it reworks and rewrites motifs from the studio's other cycles; as a strategic response to censorship it substitutes narratively motivated violence for supposedly gratuitous violence; in absorbing the 'authorial' ambitions of particular studio personnel, such as its stars, it stabilises its internal organisation.[304]

This can be seen in the case of *Ehrlich*, which drew on the reputations of *Zola* and *Pasteur*, the current cycle of scientific and medical pictures, and Robinson's reputation for gangster roles, a hint of which was retained in the 'bullet' of the title. More widely, the studio utilised its reputation for making progressive and forward-thinking pictures to legitimise its choice of the sensational subject matter of syphilis. The production notes printed in a brochure distributed at the press screening declared, 'Again Warner Bros. blazes the trail, this time in shattering taboo, piercing the veil of superstition and misunderstanding, to enlighten the world on an important issue and a great man'.[305]

The origin of the *Ehrlich* screenplay is unclear. Much of the advertising surrounding the film claimed that no complete biography of Ehrlich had been written when, in fact, Paul

[302] 'A Talk with Dieterle', *Film Survey*, December, 1939, p. 7. Chris Robé also described Dieterle as a committed leftist, who had written articles for *The Daily Worker*. Chris Robé, 'Taking Hollywood Back: Gendered Histories of the Hollywood Costume Drama, the Biopic and Popular Front U.S. Film Criticism*, Cinema Journal,* Vol. 48, No. 2 (2009), 71.
[303] 'William Dieterle Gets Hollywood's New Ideas', *The Coast*, January, 1940, 8.
[304] Thomas Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 151.
[305] Warner Bros.' 'Production Notes' on press screening pamphlet, Production File for *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*, Margaret Herrick Library.

de Kruif's 1926 biography compilation, *Microbe Hunters*, did contain a chapter on Ehrlich entitled 'The Magic Bullet', and the author was involved in discussions of the project in 1938.[306] The source became a subject of enquiry in 1941, when a plagiarism suit was brought against Warner Bros. by Howard A. Gray and Alvin Harnes. They claimed that the idea for the screenplay originated in a letter written from Gray to Irving Deakin at the story department in 1937. In the letter Gray suggested a picture depicting 'the ravages of syphilis, together with its prevention and treatment', with potential biographical slant centred on Ehrlich.[307] The studio lawyers' search to discover the production's origin labelled the hazy recollections of the personnel 'embarrassing' for the studio. These included claims that producer, Reinhardt, had read *Microbe Hunters* years earlier and returned to it after the success of *Pasteur* and *Zola*, and that Norman Burnside had suggested the story in a letter to Henry Blanke, with Blanke having already read an unnamed, privately published book on Ehrlich. The lawyers also sought to sound out the position of author Paul de Kruif on the matter, noting that although he had grounds to bring a case against the studio, he appeared ultimately concerned with the spread of medical knowledge and could be made into an ally for the studio's cause.[308] The Gray case was eventually settled out of court, but these murky origins attest to the way that the use of a figure in the public domain could open the studio to charges of plagiarism.

A brief difficulty had also arisen in November 1938 with reports that the Collective Film Producers were planning to make a film called "606: The Life of Paul Ehrlich", based on a play by Dr. Maurice R. Rosen.[309] In attempting to determine the studio's response to this threat, legal advisor Roy Obringer outlined to Jack Warner the current understanding of properties in the public domain, and the available course of action against the rival company:

> Of course, anyone can produce a picture based upon the life of Dr. Ehrlich and compete with any other producer on the same subject matter. There may be some

[306] Hal Wallis quotes a letter from Thomas Parran which describes a meeting that took place in July 1938 between Parran, Hays, de Kruif and Dr O. C. Wanger. Hal Wallis and Charles Higham, *Starmaker: An Autobiography of Hal Wallis* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1980), 65.

[307] Letter from Howard G. Gray to Irving Deakin, Warner Bros. Story Dept., "Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet" Story File, File 2880, Warner Bros. Archive, USC.

[308] Letter from Finlay McDermid to Roy Obringer 27 October, 1941. Letter from Finlay McDermid to Roy Obringer, 30 October, 1941, subject: Gray & Harnes vs. W. B., "Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet" Story File, File 2880, Warner Bros. Archives, USC. Following the release of the picture, de Kruif had written to Parran complaining of the studio's use of his 'magic bullet' title, initially seeking compensation from Warner Bros. Parran's reply commented that the descriptor was a phrase Ehrlich himself supposedly used for his work, and de Kruif dropped the case. Lederer and Parascandola, 'Screening Syphilis', 357.

[309] Lederer and Parascandola, 'Screening Syphilis', 65.

> angle, but not a serious one, from the standpoint of unfair trade competition, should 2 pictures be exhibited at the same time dealing with the same subject matter and the second producer in point of release time attempts to identify his picture by using the same title or incidental identification similar to the first picture. The one who releases first would have a basis for claiming unfair competition, but otherwise it would be a practical matter of an open field of exhibition and picture values.[310]

This reveals the added incentive for studios participating in cycles to ensure their product reached the market before that of their rivals.

The concern of the studios over protecting their property extended beyond litigation and libel suits to include conflicts with other production companies. When the British production of *Catherine the Great* (London Films, 1934) was released in early 1934, Paramount delayed releasing its own picture on Catherine, *The Scarlet Empress* (Paramount, 1934) by four months. Although some reviews declared the pictures too different in approach to warrant a close comparison, and even noted the extra publicity it might bring the film, for a variety of reasons the reception of *The Scarlet Empress* was lukewarm.[311] In 1935, MGM, Paramount, and Warners each sought to develop scripts for a biopic on Florence Nightingale. Paramount first processed the idea through the Title Registration Bureau and complained to the Hays Office when MGM announced the development of a script shortly thereafter, but Warner Bros. rushed out a production first, *The White Angel* (Warner Bros., 1935).[312] When a major studio's own historical biopic was threatened by an independent production on the same subject, as when the British film *David Livingstone* (Fitzpatrick Pictures, 1936) clashed with Fox's *Stanley and Livingstone,* or *The Mad Empress* (Miguel C. Torres, 1939) treated the same period of Mexican history as Warner's *Juarez*, the studios bought up the distribution rights to limit the market impact of their competitor.[313] If cycles can be understood as a flood of similar products to the market at one time, such measures taken by the studios to protect their own product against outside competitors and control the flow of films, worked to shape the cycle's development.

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310 Inter-office communication, from Roy Obringer to Jack Warner, 12 January, 1939, "Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet" Story File, File 2880, Warner Bros. Archives, USC.

311 Victor M. Shapiro, 'The Two Catherines', *Motion Picture Herald*, 28 April, 1934, 23. 'Scarlet Empress', *Film Daily*, 15 September, 1934, 8. 'The Scarlet Empress', *Variety*, 18 September, 1934, 11. The reviews generally found fault in the direction of the film and lack of emotional resonance.

312 'Par Protests Metro's "Florence Nightingale", *Variety*, 13 November, 1934, 3. 'Nurse Pix Have Warners, Par Racing to Barrier', *Variety*, 18 September, 1935, 4.

313 'The Mad Empress', *New York Times*, 15 February, 1940.

A second major obstacle in the production of *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* was the surviving family of Paul Ehrlich. In 1938 Hal Wallis had discussed the picture with Ehrlich's daughter, Mrs Schwerin, who appeared amenable to the production and was willing to accept $1,000 as compensation.[314] Ehrlich's grandson, George Schwerin, proved more difficult as he assumed the role of spokesperson for Mrs. Ehrlich and issued such demands as the use of the Ehrlich name in the title, and that no family member be shown after 1925.[315] At one point Jack Warner telegraphed Wallis, 'I wish we could cut the mother out of the script and tell them to go to hell'.[316] The studio ultimately paid close to $50,000 to the family in addition to lawyers' fees, but were able to draw up a contract that allowed the studio to disregard any of the family's objections. Despite this, Schwerin persisted in his demands to see the final manuscript and in voicing his objections to the production, including the depiction of Ehrlich as dark-haired instead of fair.[317] It was such costly, lengthy litigious difficulties that had first sent producers to the realm of history for biographical subjects in the early 1930s.

Hal Wallis records that there was a 'double motive' in making the film. In addition to commercial and critical prospects, he and many others were incensed by a statement from Hitler in 1938 declaring that 'a scientific discovery by a Jew is worthless'.[318] Norman Burnstine's original screenplay and pitch to Blanke was founded on a political approach, as he argued that that there were few active producers willing to make pictures with some basis in reality. Burnstine argued that there was a need for Hollywood to go beyond the current stereotypes of Jewish people in films and combat Nazi propaganda through a depiction of Ehrlich that celebrated his Jewish traits while emphasising the anti-Semitism that hampered his efforts. This element was watered down in later versions of the script, however, and upon reading John Huston's edited screenplay, Burnstine wrote to Wallis of his frustration:

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[314] Wallis and Higham, *Starmaker*, 66.
[315] Letter from Maas and Davidson Attorneys to Morris Ebenstein, Warner Bros. Legal Dept., 25 September, 1939. United Artists Series 1.7, Warner Bros. Contract and Copyright File, Box.357, 'Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet'. Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.
[316] Wallis and Higham, *Starmaker*, 66.
[317] Letter from Schwerin to Ebenstein, 15 December, 1939. United Artists Series 1.7, Warner Bros. Contract and Copyright File, Box.357, 'Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet'. Wisconsin Historical Society Archives., Wallis and Higham, *Starmaker*, 67.
[318] Wallis, *Starmaker*, 65. At this time too, the Nazis removed the Ehrlich sign from a street in Frankfurt, making it a topical issue, Susan Lederer, John Parascandola, 'Screening Syphilis: "Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet" Meets the Public Health Service', *Journal of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 53 (1998), 352.

> If Wolfert instead of being characterized as an ignoramus is a believer in Teutonic superiority, if his animus against Ehrlich is anti-Semitic, the script instead of falling to pieces is immediately unified … instead of a documentary film about a man fighting diphtheria and then repetitiously fighting syphilis, we have a dramatic conflict, a Jewish physician seeking truth, opposed by a proto-Nazi.[319]

Earlier versions of the *Ehrlich* shooting script reveal a rousing ending that directly connects Ehrlich's overlooked status to the wilful destruction of his legacy by the Nazis.[320] The shot of Ehrlich's death bed was followed by a number of dissolves between intertitles to show the passing of time from 1915 to 1935 while the memorial music is replaced by 'Horst Wessel Lied'. This is followed by shots of Frankfurt streets draped in Nazi flags and occupied by storm troopers, the sign to Paul Ehrlich Strasse being riddled with bullets, and a short sequence involving the soldiers storming the Ehrlich Institute and smashing his bust. Dieterle's handwritten notes on the shooting script reveal his concern with this ending. They read, 'the nazi affair should be entirely left out of this picture – it belittles the great cause of this film… it must be found a new end, not one which is so much like all the endings of biographical pictures: speeches of the hero or about the hero – the idea of the film is 606 + syphilis, not so much Professor Ehrlich'.[321]

This controversial subject matter of syphilis became the major aspect by which the film differentiated itself, despite the studio's ongoing denial of a particular focus on the topic. Annette Kuhn's work on the negotiations with the PCA over *Ehrlich* reveals how the studio anticipated the project's rejection from the Code Administration, and first sought endorsement from the Surgeon General Thomas Parran.[322] Kuhn describes how the film's construction as a biopic was able to raise it above the terrain of sex hygiene propaganda and exploitation films, attaching the subject to the trajectory of Ehrlich's life and a personal, scientific, and institutional framework.

[319] Letter Burnstine to Wallis, 21 August, 1939, "Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet" Story File, File 2880, Warner Bros. Archive, USC.
[320] First Revised Version Script, 8 May, 1939, Edward G. Robinson Collection, Cinematic Arts Library, University of Southern California.
[321] Dieterle notes in script dated 12 August, 1939, William Dieterle collection, Cinematic Arts Library, USC. The deathbed speech that made the final cut does retain a vague sense of the contemporary political context as Ehrlich implores his colleagues to fight the diseases of the soul as well as that of the body: 'In days to come, there will be epidemics of greed, hate, ignorance – we must fight them in life as we fought syphilis in the laboratory'.
[322] Kuhn, 'VD Propaganda, "Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet", and the Production Code', 134-135.Wallis and Higham, *Starmaker*, 64.

When Louella Parsons first printed a report on the planned production of Ehrlich in October 1938, she identified the search for the syphilis cure as the primary subject of the film.[323] The studio had yet to approach the PCA for approval and received a strict letter from Breen that reiterated the Code's precepts forbidding venereal disease films, and cited a precedent of rejection that had been established in the case of the proposed *Damaged Goods* production several months earlier.[324] Breen remained resistant to the project and Wallis' antagonistic attitude, which described the Code as 'old fashioned' and labelled the objections against the film as 'stupid', was unlikely to have helped the cause. Breen notes that only an executive order from Hays would enable the production to proceed with Code approval.[325] Hays, negotiating directly with Jack Warner, ultimately agreed that the biographical framework was sufficient to justify the production. He wrote to Breen:

> In my opinion, there is a distinction between a picture in which venereal disease is the subject and a picture in which the discovery of a cure for venereal disease is an incident… to make a historical picture of the life of Dr. Ehrlich and not include this discovery among his great achievements would be unfair to the record.[326]

Hays was clear, however, in his rejection of the proposed title *Test 606.* He pointed to recent press articles that, like Louella Parsons' the previous year, emphasised the discovery of salvarsan as a cure for syphilis as the primary topic of the film. Hays cautioned Breen to be vigilant, not only in monitoring the script, but in ensuring that all publicity met with the approval of the Advertising Advisory Council.

The script was amended and explicit mentions and depictions of syphilis reduced to a few key scenes, with Breen viewing and approving the picture at a screening in late 1939. In March the following year Warner Bros. was still fighting to use the *Test 606* title, but Hays remained adamant in his refusal and the studio eventually capitulated.[327] When the film was released, the PCA was at pains to explain why they had approved it. An open letter, written by Carl Milliken of the MPPDA and distributed throughout the industry,

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[323] Louella Parson, *Los Angeles Examiner*, 24 October, 1938.
[324] Breen to Walter MacEwen, 24 October, 1938. Dieterle, William. Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet (Warner Bros., 1940). October 24, 1938 - December 22, 1941. History of Cinema, Series 1, Hollywood and Production Code Administration. Herrick Library. Archives Unbound. Web. 10 Dec. 2014. <http://go.galegroup.com/gdsc/i.do?&id=GALE%7CSC5106197729&v=2.1&u=flinders&it=r&p=GDSC&sw=w&viewtype=fullcitation>.
[325] Breen Memorandum for the Files re. "Paul Ehrlich" (Test 606), 21 August, 1939. Hollywood and Production Code Administration. Herrick Library. Archives
[326] Hays to Breen, 22 August, 1939. Hollywood and Production Code Administration. Herrick Library. Archives
[327] Breen letter to Hays, 22 December, 1939, Hays telegram to Milliken, 13 February, 1940. Hollywood and Production Code Administration. Herrick Library. Archives

addressed the decision of the Code Administration to allow a screenplay on a previously taboo topic. He describes how the PCA had been previously urged by public health officials to partake in campaigns to eradicate social diseases, which they had thus far resisted.

> The motion picture theatre was designed to be and is looked upon by the public as a place of entertainment. Truly, much of its program has had educational content but it was incidental to rather than the substance of the entertainment. Social disease, we held and still hold, could not properly become the subject-matter of a photoplay… In this continuity we thought we saw the opportunity to do, as an incident of entertainment, what we had so often and persistently been urged to try… It is a masterpiece. It transgresses none of the principles that together we have evolved as guides to production but presents forthrightly and dramatically, the story of a great scientist who gave his life for the progress of medicine and human happiness.[328]

This use of the educational and prestige associations of historical biopics to validate explorations of controversial content illustrates the manipulation of the image of the historical biopics to expand the concept of entertainment, as well as their use to establish a reputation and brand value for Warner Bros. The negotiations with the PCA over the title, advertising and script reveal the fine line that the film trod between exploiting syphilis as a subject and treating it as an incident. The biographical framework, and the context of the historical biopic cycle were central to the studio's justification of the project. Yet Ehrlich's discovery of the cure for syphilis did form a key element in the exploitation of the film, and the sensationalism was justified through the history of the studio's socially progressive productions.[329]

[328] Reproduced letter from Carl E. Milliken, 8 February, 1940 and addressed to Miss Margaret Gledhill at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences. Production File for *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*, Margaret Herrick Library.
[329] Norman Burnside's screenplay initially sought to explore additional issues of anti-Semitism through a depiction of the discrimination the Jewish doctor faced within the nineteenth century German medical profession. This was reduced to a couple of minor references in the film, however a sense of the contemporary political context is retained in Ehrlich's deathbed speech.

Figure 9, Trailer for *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* (1940)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0V8Hd5lfheY

The trailer for the picture takes a clearly sensationalist approach that emphasises syphilis as being at the heart of the picture. Although Robinson is described as playing a 'rebel genius', the same phrase used in the trailer for *The Life of Emile Zola*, little explicit mention is made of Ehrlich, his profession or the historical setting beyond his development of a 'magic bullet'.[330] While attempting to exploit the controversy around its forbidden subject matter, the promotion also legitimises this concern within a progressive discourse. The trailer is introduced by a voiceover describing Warner Bros.' innovations in motion picture history, accompanied by a compilation of clips that depict a 'parade of progress'.[331] This links the studio's' substantial contributions to motion picture history to the early adoption of sound technology, the critical success of the prestige biopics and adaptations, the social significance attached to *I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang* (Warner Bros., 1932), and the popularity of the gangster and backstage musical cycles. *Ehrlich* is presented as pioneering in the same fashion, telling 'the story the screen has never dared to whisper' while the trailer declares in a pre-emptive defensive stance, that the subject is 'shocking only for those who fear the truth'.

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330 Warner Bros., 'Doctor Ehrlich's Magic Bullet (Original Trailer)', 1934. Online clip, *You Tube,* Accessed on 10 December 2014. < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0V8Hd5lfheY> Warner Bros., 'The Life of Emile Zola (1937) – Official Trailer [The 10th Academy Awards]', 1937. Online clip, *You Tube,* Accessed on 10 December 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcDQlgRWJck>

331 The clips included *The Jazz Singer* (Warner Bros., 1927), I *Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Warner Bros., 1932), *42nd St* (Warner Bros., 1933), *Little Caesar* (Warner Bros., 1931), *The Story of Louis Pasteur, Anthony Adverse* (Warner Bros., 1936), *and The Life of Emily Zola*.

LA Times critic Richard Griffith felt that publicity discourse linking the picture to the prior Warner biopics might have been risky, but in this case paid off.

> Warner's exploitation for "Dr. Ehrlich" as "another Zola!" made critics fear that it would be a repetition of the form of fictionalised biography about which they were beginning to have doubts. But the formula, if formula it is, has been refreshened [sic] beyond recognition.[332]

The critic's enthusiasm was largely based on the delicate handling of the subject, the performance of Robinson and the direction of Dieterle. The trade reviewers also praised the way the realism of scientific research had been made captivating without 'injecting synthetic dramatics'.[333] This evokes one of the central values attributed to the historical biopics in their reception, with the meld of realism and drama heralded as a significant new use of the cinematic medium. Edwin Schallert described this in the same newspaper as 'an important and outstanding revelation of what pictures may do'.[334]

Although it was not intended as health and hygiene propaganda, *Variety* still remarked that the film would be a most effective 'preachment' for audiences of teenagers and young adults. *Motion Picture Herald* added a comment that the 'magic bullet' title and gangster roles associated with the star might mislead the young or uninformed into anticipating a different type of picture.[335] Yet the film was not to be seen as an amusement, the paper argued, 'but rather entertainment in the serious, studious sense of the term as applied to earnest, important biographies and similar factual works'. This summation indicates the industry's success in using historical biopics, such as those in the Warner Bros. tradition, to aid in a redefinition of entertainment in the 1930s and the status of the Hollywood studios in their delivery of such socially significant product.

The theatre showmanship for the picture followed the usual lines for prestige productions, here soliciting the particular attendance of local physicians and chemistry teachers for the opening.[336] In some cases, exhibitors also described their attempt to target the local Jewish communities through Jewish newspapers, local benefits and arrangements with

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[332] Richard Griffith, '"Abe Lincoln" and "Ehrlich" Rouse Raves', *Los Angeles Times*, 4 March, 1940, 22.
[333] 'Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet', *Variety*, 7 February, 1940, 14.
[334] Edwin Schallert, '"Dr Ehrlich" Biography Daring and Interesting', *Los Angeles Times*, 1 March, 1940, p. 13.
[335] 'Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet', *Variety*, 7 February, 1940, 14. 'Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet', *Motion Picture Herald*, 10 February, 1940, 38.
[336] *Motion Picture Herald*, 27 July, 1940, 50.

rabbis.[337] This suggests that even if the Jewish identity of Ehrlich was not made into a major point in the film, it may have remained meaningful for audiences. The international context was seen to be a complicating factor in the case of one Canadian exhibitor, who claimed that the German setting had kept customers away.[338] In most cases, however, it was the syphilis subject that was remarked to be off-putting to viewers. A *Variety* report on the first run grosses in Cleveland noted that, despite a big showmanship push, the syphilis angle and serious tone was scaring away audiences.[339] This was seen to have a greater effect on small town viewers, and one irate exhibitor from Saskatchewan, Canada, exclaimed:

> What a flop for entertainment for a small town audience. Fancy asking your customers to come to pay for a show to see how they discovered a cure for syphilis. A real treat for the younger folks from the farm for an evening entertainment. Plenty of walkouts on this. My Saturday night business killed for nothing. Put it in the can and forget it for a spot like mine.[340]

Aside from the syphilis subject matter, the tone of the picture was itself deemed unsuitable for small town audiences. An Indiana theatre owner complained that it was too highbrow, with his customers wanting 'entertainment and not education'.[341] Despite an attempt to popularise the life and research of a scientist, and to exploit the syphilis angle to appeal to viewers less interested in the more stately historical biopics, the film's critical success outweighed its commercial return. The film's negative cost for the studio was $816,000 while its total gross earnings, prior to the subtraction of distribution fees and marketing expenses, was $943,000.[342]

In 1940, former British Minister of War Alfred Duff Cooper released an article in the *Paris Soir* that identified *Ehrlich* as an example of the PCA's political censorship, arguing that the details of Ehrlich's Jewish identity had been consciously suppressed.[343] Breen's comments on this article were largely dismissive, pointing out that Ehrlich was clearly established to be Jewish in the film, and that an inclusion of an attack on Nazi Germany would be irrelevant to the story, as well as leaving the Warner Bros. studio open

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[337] *Motion Picture Herald*, 11 May, 1940, 72. *Motion Picture Herald*, 18 May, 1940, 80.
[338] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet', *Motion Picture Herald*, 25 May, 1940 57.
[339] 'Picture Grosses', *Variety*, 28 February, 1940, 11.
[340] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet', *Motion Picture Herald*, 21 December, 1940, 51.
[341] What the Picture Did for Me: Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet', *Motion Picture Herald*, 25 May, 1940, 57.
[342] Mark H. Glancy, 'Appendix: Warner Bros. Film Grosses, 1921-51: The William Schaefer Ledger', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1995), 1-31.
[343] Alfred Duff Cooper, 'The United States Risk Losing Freedom of Speech Because of Fear of Propaganda', *Paris Soir*, 17 March, 1940.

to charges of propagandising.[344] Yet, despite Breen's claim about propaganda accusations, an industry shift was occurring at this time, particularly with regards to the PCA's attitude towards politically-inflected films.

The 1938 anti-trust suit filed by the Department of Justice tied the anticompetitive practices of the major studios to the Code's restrictions over controversial subject matter. The PCA was criticised as 'hindering the development of innovative approaches to drama or narrative by companies that might use innovation as a way of challenging the major's monopoly power'.[345] This was motivated in part by the public outcry and accusations of political censorship following MGM's decision not to produce Sinclair Lewis' satirical exploration of fascism in America, *It Can't Happen Here*. The subsequent acceptance of more contentious content by the PCA, Maltby argues, was seen as a way to refute this and avoid being caught up in a violation of antitrust laws. The MPPDA's rhetoric shifted to encourage a demonstration of the 'freedom of the screen' through pictures that addressed political themes.[346] Critic Frank Nugent penned an article in the *New York Times* titled 'Hollywood Adopts a Point of View' that described the how the 'parallelism' and political concerns of historical biopics *Juarez* and *Man of Conquest* (Republic, 1939), had become standard treatment:

> Like most ideological dramas, the two operate in the sanctity of historical drama. They are past fact, plus parable for the present. The onlooker is expected to read between the lines, his task being simplified by the underscoring of significant passages.[347]

The American-themed biopics exhibit this political awareness in a milder strain, reaffirming the American way of life through a celebration of presidents and folk heroes, and their home-grown democratic values. The socially responsible discourse that accompanied the marketing of historical biopics through educational channels thus took a different turn in the late 1930s. The industry used films such as *Juarez* as evidence of its openness to political expression. But as Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black point out, this expression was largely one-sided, with the oligopolistic structure producing a monolithic product.[348] It was unlikely, then, that the anti-Semitism themes were

[344] Breen to Harold Smith, 15 April, 1940.
[345] Richard Maltby, 'The Production Code and the Hays Office', *Grand Design,* Balio (ed.), 69.
[346] Maltby, 'The Production Code and the Mythologies of "Pre-Code" Hollywood', 245.
[347] Frank S. Nugent, 'Hollywood Adopts a Point of View', *New York Times*, 30 April, 1939.
[348] Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped WWII Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 39.

suppressed in *Ehrlich* for reasons of political censorship. After all, the year before Edward G. Robinson had already starred in the much more overtly political *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Warner Bros., 1939). More likely, the changes in *Ehrlich* were a creative decision to avoid changing the tone and focus of the film away from its central conceit.

Despite the efforts of Warner Bros. to inject new energy into the historical biopic cycle, their production began to wane after 1940. Biopics increasingly took contemporary figures as their subjects and merged with other film trends, including westerns, sports pictures and war films. In 1941 Warner Bros. released the biopic *Sergeant York* (Warner Bros., 1941). Explicitly describing York's heroic First World War experience as a conversion narrative from pacifism to a commitment to service, the film was received as a thinly veiled call for intervention in Europe.[349] The release of this and other films, such as *International Squadron* (Warner Bros., 1941), amid the highly-charged political climate between interventionists and isolationists eventually culminated in a Congressional probe led by Senator Gerald P. Nye to investigate claims of Hollywood's 'warmongering' propaganda. Despite the PCA attempting to encourage the 'freedom of the screen' to dispel such accusations, Nye argued that Hollywood was a tightly-controlled, censorship-stifled monopoly and was making pictures at the instigation of the government that were designed to lead the nation into conflict.[350] The oligopolistic structure of the studio system and monopolistic practices of the majors could be invoked in arguments of censorship on both sides of the board, often employed as a means to give economic and political weight to accusations levelled at the industry. Wendell Willkie's arguments in the industry's defence used Nye's own rhetoric of democracy to claim that the industry was only making pictures that voiced widespread American sentiment, and asserted the industry's belief in the rights of individuals to freedom of speech.[351] Instead of retreating to a stance of 'pure entertainment', this suggested that Hollywood was embracing its status as a socially significant force. With Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the war nullifying the proceedings, film critic Cecelia Ager observed, 'now the stance was not

[349] Bosley Crowther, 'Sergeant York – a Sincere Biography of the World War Hero, Makes its Appearance at the Astor', *New York Times*, 3 July, 1941, 15. Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 37.
[350] Senate Isolationists Run Afoul of Willkie in Movie 'Warmonger' Hearings', *Life*, 22 September, 1941, 21-23. 'Mudslinging Pix Biz: Nye's Field Day on the Potomac', *Variety*, 10 September, 1941, 1, 4.
[351] 'Willkie Scores Probe as Threat to Bill of Rights and Forerunner to Curbing Freedom of Expression', *Variety*, 10 September, 1941, 5.

that Hollywood had made "propaganda" pictures, but that it had made so few, and those so mildly'.[352]

The cycle of historical biopics in the 1930s was developed alongside a number of industrial factors as producers, spurred by the successes of *Disraeli* and *Henry VIII,* utilised history as an arena safe from libel suits and suitable for explorations of otherwise illicit sexual or political content. The discourse surrounding the cycle, which drew upon the films' prestige as a sign of cultural status and educational worth, was utilised by Hollywood to demonstrate a socially-responsible industry that was providing culturally legitimate entertainment, the success of which was raising the taste of the moviegoing public. The historical biopics demonstrate the benefits of the perspective provided by the cycle framework for understanding the particular forms that the films took, the influence of a wider set of industrial forces on the development of big budget cycles, and the ability of cycles to take on multiple roles for the industry. This cycle, indivisible from the rhetoric that accompanied it, enacted a discursive function that stemmed from the films' status as prestige pictures, which encompassed their culturally legitimated subject matter and high production budgets, as well as their distribution and marketing towards the sector of selective viewers. The historical biopics venture beyond the fundamental commercial operations of low budget cycles as quick cash-ins and these differences in form and operation reveal the need to widen the understanding of cycles to consider a greater diversity of film types. The following chapter will explore how the industry again sought to redefine its role in the context of wartime America, and established its status as an 'essential industry' with the economic protection this provided, while negotiating with the Office of War Information over the necessary balance of propaganda and entertainment in its output. The cycle of wartime musical revues provides a case study of a concentrated cycle whose operations further challenge preconceptions of how cycles work.

[352] Cecelia Ager, 'Drama and Screen Critics See the Stage and Screen's Function as Vital in War', *Variety*, 7 January, 1942, 25.

Chapter Four

The Wartime Musical Revues: Cycles, Topicality and Industrial Flux

The wartime musical revues highlight the way in which topicality influenced the production and circulation of cycles. While the fundamental connection between cycles and their immediate context has been discussed in the previous chapters, the concept of topicality suggests a conscious exploitation of the picture's timeliness. The content of the wartime musical revues clearly stemmed from the environment of the American home front but the discourse of topicality that accompanied the promotion and reception of the cycle moved beyond the films' action and setting to consider the wider role of Hollywood. The cycle consists of seven films that were produced within three years: *Star Spangled Rhythm* (Paramount, 1942), *Stage Door Canteen* (United Artists, 1943), *Thousands Cheer* (MGM, 1943), *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (Warner Bros., 1943), *Four Jills in a Jeep* (Fox, 1944), *Follow the Boys* (Universal, 1944), and *Hollywood Canteen* (Warner Bros., 1944). Typically, the loose narrative of these films revolves around the organisation of a wartime benefit or camp show. The show itself takes up much of the film and entails of a cavalcade of comic, dance, and musical performances by big Hollywood stars. As it consists of only seven films, the condensed nature of this cycle allows for a close study of the pictures' content and the chronologies of production, exhibition and reception.

In the case of the wartime musical revues, the films' topicality was multifaceted and served a number of purposes. The wartime setting and soldier camp shows, encouraged by the government's directions for war picture production, were utilised by the studios as a self-reflexive public relations channel which drew on contemporary debates around the wartime role of the industry. The stars were recruited to perform much of their own off-screen work for the war effort in front of the cameras; they were employed as a publicity strategy to engender audience interest and the 'want-to-see' factor while advertising a magnanimous image of the producing studio with which they were associated. The topicality of the cycle can be further considered from this industrial perspective, with the effects of increased attendance

and extended holdovers, bottlenecks and booking jams all influencing the form that the cycle assumed.

Contemporaries identified the all-star element as the defining feature that demarcated the cycle from other films with comparable formats or similar narratives. The wartime musical revues illustrate one form of film cycle where a smaller cluster of films are designated within a wider group of films that hold similar features. The films are intertextual both in the identification of the pictures with one another as part of a designated group, and in their reaction to surrounding production trends. As discussed previously, rather than simply representing a temporal increase in the production of a film type, cycles operated as part of a wider pattern of industrial fluctuation between the demands of audiences and the exigencies of production. In the case of the wartime musical revues, the studios developed the cycle as a meeting point between the seemingly oppositional trends of war pictures and escapist musical entertainment.

The cycle was cut short in 1944 following a labour dispute between Warner Bros. and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG). The producers of the final film, *Hollywood Canteen*, sought to utilise the film's patriotic rhetoric internally in order to gain the services of stars at a 'charitable' price. When the SAG drew attention to this as an exploitative practice and halted the production for several months, further plans for other all-star charity productions were cancelled.[353] Although this decline stemmed from an internal industrial matter, it was also related to the discursive function of the cycle. The exposure of Warner Bros.' use of the entertainment-as-patriotic-service discourse as economic leverage generated undesirable negative publicity and apparently dissuaded producers from continuing the all-star wartime revue formula.

Hollywood was formally enlisted in the war effort shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In December 1941 Roosevelt appointed Lowell Mellet, Director of the Office of Government Records, to the task of liaising with Hollywood. Roosevelt was explicit in his vision for the industry's wartime role as being both to inform and entertain the general public.[354] The Office of War Information (OWI) was formed in

[353] Fred Stanley, 'Warners and Actos Guild Smoke Peace Pipe', *New York Times*, 30 April, 1944.
[354] 'Mellet, Film Coordinator', *Variety,* 24 December, 1941, 3., 'F. D. R's Letter to Mellet', *Variety*, 24 December, 1941, 3, 52.

June 1942 to centralise the different propaganda agencies then in existence. It was headed by former journalist Elmer Davis, with Mellet and Nelson Poynter directing the Hollywood offshoot, the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP). The OWI advertised an informational approach, which they characterised as a 'strategy of truth'.[355] In private, however, Davis confided to his staff, 'the easiest way to propagandize people is to let a propaganda theme go in through an entertainment picture when people do not realise they are being propagandized'.[356] The BMP further argued that Washington did not want to utilise the industry so much as they wanted Hollywood to utilise itself, the bureau merely furnishing producers with advice to enable an accurate and effective view of wartime problems.[357] To this end, the BMP issued a 'Manual for the Motion Picture Industry' in July 1942, which outlined a number of wartime themes for Hollywood to incorporate into pictures.[358]

While expressing a general willingness to aid the war effort, the industry voiced concern over the extent of government regulations and wartime restrictions.[359] With the consent decree expiring in late 1943, Hollywood feared the possibility of this wartime setup being protracted into post-war control, along with an anxiety that Washington would gauge the value of the industry solely in relation to its tangible contribution to the war effort. [360] As Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black have documented, many of these concerns converged in the realm of production and picture content. Mellet and Poynter increasingly interfered in this area, their requests for pre-production script submission resurrecting fears of federal censorship.[361] The cycles of films being produced also became the centre of discussions regarding the

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[355] E. Davis, 'OWI Has a Job', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1943), 5-16.
[356] Elmer Davis memo to Byron Price, 27/1/43, box 3, record of the OWI, record group 208, Federal Record Centre, Suitland, Maryland, referenced in Koppes, 'Regulating the Screen: The Office of War Information and the Production Code Administration', *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*, Vol. 6, *History of American Cinema,* Thomas Schatz (ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 269.
[357] John Hay Whitney, 'Let's Give Democracy a Break', *Variety*, 1 January, 1942, 7. A. H. Feller, 'OWI on the Home Front', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1943), 60.
[358] The six basic themes suggested as suitable topics for motion pictures were drawn from Roosevelt's January 1942 address to Congress, namely the issues of the war, the enemy, the United Nations and its peoples, work and production, the home front, and the fighting forces. The manual held that a cinematic meditation on these themes would help the public better understand the war. K. R. M. Short, 'Washington's Information Manual for Hollywood, 1942', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1983), 175.
[359] 'Film Biz Chi Unity Meeting Quickly Veers into an All-Out Industry Move to Aid America', *Variety*, 10 December, 1941, 5. 'Show Biz's Role in the War', *Variety*, 17 December, 1941, pp. 1, 22. 'How Can Films U.S. Co-Op?; "Have D.C. Cue Us on War Pix"', *Variety*, 18 March, 1942, 5.
[360] 'U.S. Needs May Stymie Pix: Question Film's Essential Status', *Variety*, 16 September, 1942, 1, 16.
[361] Clayton R. Koppes, *Hollywood Goes to War: Patriotism, Movies and the Second World War, From "Ninotchka" to "Mrs Miniver"* (London: I. B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., 1988). 'Censors Sharpen Axes; Film Biz Faces New Offensive', *Variety*, 23 December, 1942, 1, 18. 'Mellet Trial Balloon Bursts', *Hollywood Reporter*, 21 December, 1942, 1. 'Trade's Alarm Over Mellet-OWI Film Censorship Ideas Begin to Abate', *Variety*, 30 December, 1942, 6.

role of Hollywood in wartime. The musicals and war film cycles were specifically referenced in debates surrounding the effectiveness of propaganda and message pictures, and the necessity for entertainment and escapist films.[362] Film cycles, and film production more generally, were a highly visible, publicity-friendly arena that could be readily employed in public discussions of these issues. Yet other fields of the industry that have been less discussed were equally affected by the wartime restrictions and government impositions. Washington's classification of Hollywood as an 'essential' industry would have an important effect on a host of other factors, including Draft Board rulings on military service deferments and the allocation of raw film stock. The studios were equally concerned about the introduction of income and admission taxes and the wage ceilings that the government could impose, as well as the external control of export licences for product would see the government controlling the regulation of overseas distribution. Finally, both exhibitors and producers were worried about the effect that the influx of government-produced shorts and newsreels might have on theatre programming, which reignited debates about the possible end of double bill practices. [363] Ongoing discussion of such issues in the trade papers, and the changes in policy and practices that they brought about, conditioned the operation of the all-star musical cycle.

The Hollywood industry knew that the patterns established at this moment could become the prototype for any new terms set by the Department of Justice, and was aware, as ever, of the importance of its public image at this time. The rhetoric employed in discussions of the industry's role was saturated in a patriotic emphasis that stressed motion pictures as popular, democratic entertainment. This was evident in *Variety's* use of the 'fifth freedom' label, which extended the 'four freedoms' listed by Roosevelt as the fundamental rights of the people, to argue that freedom

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[362] 'Julius Gordon Believes in Escapology', 21 May, 1941, *Variety*, 7. 'Jury Still Out Whether to go Bullish on War or Escapist Film Scenarios', 21 December, 1941, *Variety*, 1. 'They Just Wanna Laugh: Top Grossers Chiefly Comedies', 25 February, 1942, *Variety*, 3. '"Go Easy On the War Films"; MPLS B.O. May Cue the Future', 30 September, 1942, *Variety*, 3, 52.

[363] 'Film Biz Wound Up Shorts but Prefers U.S. Drop Film Prod; Mellet and Harton Can't See That', *Variety*, 10 June, 1942, 3. 'Some Pic Execs Look Askance at Gov't Use of Film for "Propaganda" Shorts', 11 November, 1942, 4. 'Gov't Films Worry Exhibs; Rental Basis Gets Opposition', *Variety*, 13 May, 1942, 5. The increased production of shorts and newsreels also affected the shape of programs, which played into a wider debate over double bills. The desired government programming format was for one feature, one regular short, and then one or two further shorts dealing with government activities. Here exhibitors repeatedly called on Mellet to end duals, arguing that they were concerned with the most efficient use of raw film stock. 'Current Gov't Emphasis on Value of Good Short for Propaganda Seen as Another Wedge to End Duals', *Variety*, 4 November, 1942, 5. 'Exhibs Move to End Duals', *Variety*, 18 April. 1942, 7. 'Film Group for End of Double Features: Mellet Proposal Is Backed by Independent Theatre Owners', *The New York Times*, 14 November, 1942.

from external control was necessary for the industry to best fulfil its task of providing entertainment and diversion for the populace.[364] The same rhetoric that trumpeted the democratic significance of entertainment underlay the wartime musical revue cycle's self-referential celebration of Hollywood's contribution to America at war. In 1944 the wartime revues *Hollywood Canteen* and *Four Jills in a Jeep* were described as part of the '"selling Hollywood" campaign'.[365] The studios utilised this discourse to justify a range of production policies and was employed in arguments that emphasised the morale-building role its escapist pictures played for home front audiences.

Throughout this period the trade press conscientiously monitored audience tastes on the war and escapist picture trends through exhibitor reports, external surveys, and box office results. Many of these articles argued for the need for escapist films, not just for home front audiences but also for soldiers serving overseas or at home on leave, and the trade press tied the pictures to positive ideas of diversion, rather than evasion.[366] Will Hays declared that motion pictures were a definite element in national defense and would represent an essential industry even if its sole function was to provide recreation. As it was, Hays argued, the motion pictures were essential in maintaining morale.[367] In 1942 he stated:

> The motion picture screen is a major contributor to the war effort. The motion picture *business* will not go on as usual, but the performance of its essential *services* to the American people will go on – *not simply as usual but in an ever greater measure*. Its recuperation of flagging energies through relaxation and recreation, its provision of entertainment and education, its upbuilding of morale, are almost as indispensable as food and drink, sleep and exercise, for the maintenance of life itself.[368]

In uniting the escapism-associated musical production trend with war picture backgrounds, the wartime musical revues satisfied the OWI's requirements for pictures addressing the home front war effort and included specific elements that related to its recommended themes. These pictures utilised the natural concentration

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[364] 'The Fifth Freedom', *Variety*, 7 January, 1942, 3.

[365] FDR's four freedoms, derived from the Annual Message to Congress, 6 January, 1941, were the freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and the freedom from fear. Fred Stanley, 'Hollywood Pats Itself: Two Films Will Honor Industry for Its Entertainment of the Armed Forces', *New York Times*, 21 November, 1943.

[366] 'Sailors Love Tearjerkers', 29 February, 1943, *Variety*, 1. 'Escapology Pix for Soldiers Too, Army Poll Shows', 12 May, 1943, *Variety*, 5. 'Boys in So. Pacific Say They Know All About the War, So "Send Escapist Pix"', 15 December, 1943, *Variety*, 4, 55.

[367] Will H. Hays, 'Motion Pictures and Total Defense; Annual Report', Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, 31 March, 1941, 6-7.

[368] 'The Motion Picture in a World at War; Twentieth Anniversary Report of the President', Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, 30 March, 1942, 8.

of public attention on big budget, all-star productions to ensure that they advertised a positive image of the industry's wartime contribution. The musical form provided a suitable vehicle for the entertainment and escapism that audiences were apparently craving, while manifesting the larger message that the provision of entertainment was a significant public service in itself.

Show business at war

The first all-star musical revue to be released was *Star Spangled Rhythm* (Paramount, 1942). Set in Hollywood, the picture featured numerous Paramount stars playing themselves on screen and used a benefit show as a framework for the stars' performances. The picture took a more comic approach than many of the others in the cycle, developing farcical situations of impersonation and pretense on the Paramount lot. Betty Hutton plays a telephone operator at the studio, who, with Victor Moore as the studio gateman, must maintain the charade that he is a top production executive while his son is in the city on shore leave. The studio tour given by Moore and Hutton permits Paramount to flaunt its wares; visits to sets and screening rooms lead to several carefully staged song and dance numbers, and various encounters provide the opportunity for insider jokes playing off industry stereotypes and star personae. Many such gags are derived from the firing and sudden exclusion of 'Buddy DeSoto', an allusion to Paramount executive producer Buddy DeSylva, with a repeated refrain on the capriciousness of the motion picture business. While actors were used for the parts of DeSoto and 'Y Frank Freemont' a reference to studio vice president Y Frank Freeman, directors such as Preston Sturges, Cecil B. DeMille and the numerous guest actors played themselves. Although the picture naturally advertised the stars and productions of Paramount by way of its setting, the studio's contribution to the war effort was not emphasised to the extent of later pictures in the cycle. The stars actually require some persuading to appear in the final benefit show, their initial reluctance a joke on their trepidation at leaving the studio before the end of the working day. The picture was well-received in the trade press as solid escapist entertainment and went on to generate huge grosses at the box office.[369]

[369] 'Star Spangled Rhythm', *Harrison's Reports*, 2 January, 1943, 4. '"Star Spangled Rhythm" Rolls Up Huge Grosses', *Los Angeles Times*, 4 February, 1943, 11.

Broadway's Stage Door Canteen for servicemen had opened in March 1942. The canteen provided free food and entertainment for the armed forces of America and its Allies and was staffed by employees of the New York stage under the auspices of the American Theatre Wing. The canteen's potential as the basis for a Hollywood picture was recognised almost immediately. In mid-April Paramount announced plans for a picture called "Stage Door Canteen" from an original story by Lester Cole, and several weeks later Republic listed a forthcoming production, "House of Stars", also based on the venue.[370] By mid-May however, independent producer Sol Lesser secured the title rights from the American Theatre Wing for $25,000, with a deal to donate the majority of the picture's profits in return for use of the setting and the services of several stage stars.[371] The resulting film, *Stage Door Canteen,* centres on the experiences of four soldiers as they visit the canteen on three consecutive evenings before leaving for the front. In the opening sequence and epilogue, this leave period is described as their chance to 'store up memories to take with them', signalling the romantic, sentimental tone struck by the film. The soldiers, referred to only by the name of their home state, are played by unknown actors, as are the hostesses that they meet at the canteen, providing a contrast to the steady flow of star appearances that are interspersed with musical performances throughout the evenings. One plot strand takes the form of a 'conversion narrative' following the gradual transformation of the hostess Eileen, who initially volunteers at the canteen in the hope of furthering her theatrical career.[372] When her fiancé receives his marching orders and their romance is deferred for the duration, Katherine Hepburn arrives to impart a lesson on the importance of self-sacrifice for the greater cause: 'Don't ever think about quitting, don't ever stop for a minute working, fighting, praying, until we're got that kind of a world. For you, for him, for your children, for the whole human race, days without end'. Such speeches were apparently effective as the film's nobility of sentiment was applauded in its critical reception and the feature was soon earmarked as the high point of the wartime musical revues.[373]

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[370] *Film Daily*, 29 April, 1942, 3. 'Notes from Hollywood', *Motion Picture Daily*, 17 May 1942, 6.
[371] 'Lesser gets 7% of Gross on "Stage Door Canteen"', *Film Daily*, 17 June, 1942, 2.
[372] For more on wartime conversion narratives see Jack Nachbar, 'Doing the Thinking for All of Us: Casablanca and the Home Front', *Journal of Popular Film and Television,* Vol. 27, No. 4 (2000), 5-15.
[373] 'Stage Door Canteen', *Variety*, 12 May, 1943, 8.

MGM's contribution, *Thousands Cheer*, was the only Technicolor entry in the cycle and followed a more familiar musical romance narrative that took place in an army camp. Messages of the necessity of sacrifice and teamwork remain prominent in the story, however, as a young singer, played by Kathryn Grayson, foregoes her burgeoning musical career to take on 'recreation duty' with her father's regiment. The picture was a showcase for the singing abilities of Grayson, a new star then being developed by MGM. Her character, also named Kathryn, falls in love with a private, played by Gene Kelly, who is an individualist, resentful of the army hierarchy and suspicious of the view that he may 'not be good enough for the daughter of a brass hat'. Kelly is able to re-learn the necessary lesson of teamwork and discipline through a trapeze act, which is incorporated into the final camp show organised by Grayson. Described in the opening credits as the 'MGM Star Parade', the all-star numbers are not integrated but presented as a solid block of acts, with the narrative returning to pick up the threads of the earlier story only at the very end. The film was an expensive production, costing the studio $1,568,000 to make, and was described as having thrown in 'everything in the how-to-make-a-hit-musical book' including an array of different musical styles that were seen to cater for the full range of audience tastes. The picture was a big success for the studio, garnering a net profit of $2,228,000.[374]

Warner Bros.' picture *Thank Your Lucky Stars* was released shortly after *Thousands Cheer* in October, 1943. Like *Star Spangled Rhythm*, the picture also takes a comic, Hollywood-centred approach, but was received less enthusiastically than Paramount's effort.[375] The picture's narrative follows three young hopefuls trying to break into show business who become involved in the staging of a star cavalcade charity show.[376] Eddie Cantor plays a double role in the film, as himself, lampooning his own egotism and weak jokes, and as a Cantor lookalike who must impersonate the real Cantor to get his friends into the final performance. The film opens with Cantor's radio program, diving straight into several musical numbers, and while several more are sprinkled throughout, the majority are again held in the final charity show. Fairly clumsy references are made to Warner Bros. stars and films throughout the picture: Joan Leslie's character impersonates

[374] Mark Glancy, 'Appendix: MGM Film Grosses, 1924-1948: The Eddie Mannix Ledger', *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1992). 'Thousands Cheer', *Motion Picture Daily*, 15 September, 1943, 1, 7.
[375] Bosley Crowther, 'Thank Your Lucky Stars', *New York Times*, 2 October, 1943.
[376] One of these characters was played by Joan Leslie, who also starred in Warner Bros. other wartime musicals *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and *This is the Army*, as well as *Hollywood Canteen.*

recent Ida Lupino and James Cagney roles, members of the benefit show audience interject with praise for their favorite (Warner Bros.) star, and the film's final payoff is a wire from Jack Warner with an offer to sign the young singer to the studio. Little is made of the patriotic purpose of the show or the wartime setting more generally, although some of the musical numbers have vague, comic takes on war themes, such as 'They're Either Too Young or Too Old' and 'That's What You Jolly Well Get'. Such numbers were used by the producers to give the film a novel appeal through playing stars Bette Davis and Errol Flynn against type, dancing jitterbugs and singing seas shanties respectively. This Warner Bros. effort fell flat for reviewers, who felt that the performances smacked too much of 'amateur night at the studio'.[377]

Several months later *Four Jills in a Jeep* was released by Twentieth Century Fox. The picture differed from others in the cycle in taking real events as its basis, recounting the touring exploits of the four female entertainers Kaye Francis, Mitzi Mayfair, Martha Raye and Carol Landis, who played themselves. Raye, in a comic role, inadvertently volunteers the services of the group for a tour of England and the North African front where they experience the soldiers' life first-hand. Despite its different narrative form, the opening titles of the picture verify its purpose alongside the other pictures in the cycle, the parading of entertainers' contribution to the war effort:

> This story is based on the experiences of four of the many performers who take entertainment to America's men in uniform in the theatres of war, as well as in the camps at home. Actors who serve in this global entertainment program consider it a privilege to lighten a little the hardships endured by our fighting men and to share, in a measure, their experiences in combat zones.

In addition to the camp shows, a charity ball in London and radio show *Command Performance* form the basis for further musical numbers and guest spots for popular Fox stars. The stars' experiences had already been serialised in the *Saturday Evening Post* in December 1943, and the picture provided a ready exploitation piece for exhibitors.[378] Despite this, the reception of the picture identifies it separately from the 'special' classification attributed to the other films in the cycle. The trade press felt that *Four Jills in a Jeep* was better suited to head a double bill rather than stand alone in cinemas and that it could not to be relied upon to do outstanding business.[379]

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[377] Bosley Crowther, 'Thank Your Lucky Stars', *New York Times*, 2 October, 1943.
[378] 'Four Jills in a Jeep', *Variety*, 15 March, 1944, 32.
[379] 'Four Jills in a Jeep', *Harrison's Reports*, 18 March, 1944, 46. 'Four Jills in a Jeep', *Variety*, 15 March, 1944, 32.

Universal's *Follow the Boys*, released in May 1944, is the film most emblematic of the cycle and its publicity purpose. As studio president Nate Blumberg hyperbolically claimed, 'it represents the first time that an attempt has been made to show what the amusement industry is doing in the war effort. It's show business' tribute to show business'.[380] Despite the setting, which moves from Broadway to the Universal lot, the film resists the opportunity to follow the comic spoofing of *Rhythm* and *Lucky Stars*. It also broadens to an industry-wide focus on the real-life organisation of the Hollywood Victory Committee, which in the film is initiated by George Raft's character following his rejection from the army. A Committee meeting scene articulates the benefits of wartime entertainment and recounts the various activities taking place as numerous stars volunteer to form a touring caravan and raise funds for Army and Navy Relief. Montage sequences of the stars' various performances follow, intercut with images of their travelling and meeting servicemen, and of soldiers wistfully listening over the radio. These scenes are paralleled with a narrative of romantic conflict and misunderstanding between Raft and his wife, played by dancer Vera Zorina, which ends in tragedy. The film's epilogue draws on *Variety* writer Joe Schonfeld's 'Soldiers in Greasepaint'; a final image of a Hollywood honour roll with names of the fallen is accompanied by a ghostly voice-over from Raft which, without a trace of irony, states:

> I am the spirit of all actors … I am the modest performer and I am a star… If I brighten up the lot of a lonely soldier then this is my contribution to America at war. For this work I ask no plaudits, no eulogies. I am a soldier in greasepaint, serving free country and freedom-loving men. This service is the actor's imperishable memorial.

The final film of the cycle, *Hollywood Canteen,* was not released until the end of 1944, a full two years after *Star Spangled Rhythm* premiered. The picture followed the approach of the immensely successful *Stage Door Canteen*, being similarly centred on the Hollywood-based organisation for soldiers. The story follows the experiences of two servicemen at the venue, weaving in a romance between the soldier 'Slim' and Warner Bros. actress Joan Leslie, playing herself. This privileging of the soldiers' perspective allows for an expression of gratitude that the armed forces ostensibly felt for Hollywood's efforts, from the opening sequence of soldiers avidly watching a film on a wet Pacific island, to characters spelling out what their experience at the canteen means to them. Slim's Brooklyn buddy names 'democracy' as the maxim of the canteen, 'all 'em big

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380 'Blumberg Predicts Prosperity in Post-War', *Motion Picture Daily*, 6 March, 1944, 10.

shots listening to little shots like me', recounting how his preconceptions of Hollywood as a place with 'all false fronts' have been shattered. Slim, celebrated as the 'millionth man' to enter the canteen, becomes an immediate representative for all soldiers and provides the opportunity for speeches that spell out good work done by the people of Hollywood. Although John Garfield's brief history of the institution emphasises that 'the whole of the motion picture industry pitched in to help', the dominance of Warner Bros. stars and a brief Burbank studio tour emphasise that studio's particular contribution. Although the picture made a substantial amount at the box office, it was unable to recapture the success of *Stage Door Canteen*.[381]

The wartime musical revues incorporated elements from the OWI's six recommended themes into their content, doing this through stars and musical numbers to avoid compromising the entertainment value of the picture. In addition to the general themes of sacrifice and democracy was the celebration of Allied soldiers. Under the heading of 'The United Nations and its Peoples' the BMP's manual for Hollywood stated: 'We must understand and know more about our Allies and they must understand and know more about us. We should emphasise their might and heroism, all the victories of the Russians, the incredible feats of resistance performed by the Chinese…'[382] *Stage Door Canteen* takes every opportunity to feature Allied soldiers in clear adherence to this recommended theme. A group of Russian sailors are introduced on stage as 'our fighting allies' as a female submarine captain describes in faltering English that her child, left with her mother, is now in the hands of the Germans. Sam Jaffe drives the point home: 'these people represent the flesh and blood that stopped the Germans at Stalingrad. Did I say stopped – I meant exterminated! Yes, we're all in the same fight together'. A further scene shows Chinese pilots being carried on the shoulders of American soldiers, as Merle Oberon describes the debt of gratitude owed the Chinese people 'for all their magnificent courage and steadfastness. It is like a light to guide the free peoples of the world'. The delivery of these messages in the revues clearly extended the work of the propaganda shorts being co-produced by the studios and OWI.[383]

[381] The negative cost of *Hollywood Canteen* was $2,126,000 and gross profits were, $5,452,000, with this figure not accounting for the subtraction of distribution and advertising costs etc. Mark H. Glancy, 'Appendix: Warner Bros. Film Grosses, 1921-51: The William Schaefer Ledger', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1995), 1-31.
[382] Short, 'Washington's Information Manual for Hollywood, 1942', 177.
[383] For example, the short *You, John Jones* (MGM, 1943) directed by Mervyn LeRoy as part of United Nations Week, and featuring James Cagney, Ann Southern and Margaret O'Brien.

The musical revue structure was also used to showcase Latin American and African American song and dance numbers. The former were incorporated in support of Washington's Good Neighbor Policy, the BMP manual reiterating that a friendly, co-operative Latin America was vital to victory.[384] Most of the pictures in the cycle featured at least one Latin-flavoured musical or dance number, as with Fox's Carmen Miranda performance in *Four Jills and a Jeep*, and Dennis Morgan singing 'Good Night Good Neighbor' to a bevy of South American women in *Thank Your Lucky Stars*. At this time too, the BMP was also working with Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement Colored People to reduce negative stereotypes and encourage the studios to provide more positive images of Black Americans, which, Clayton Koppes argues, was in line with the BMP's own mildly social democratic New Deal goals.[385] Performances by popular African American stars, including Lena Horne, Hattie McDaniel, Rochester, and The Golden Gate Quartet were included in the films across the cycle. There was a bleak irony in the attempt to portray a democratic, unified home front, in spite of the zoot suit and Detroit race riots occurring at the time.[386] This is evident in the lyrics of 'The House I Live In' sung by The Delta Rhythm Boys in *Follow the Boys*, which speaks of 'my neighbours white and black' and describes America as 'a home for all God's children'. As Allen Woll observes, these musical numbers were often segregated from the rest of the performances in the revues, bracketed by stock images of curtains rising and audiences applauding, which enabled Southern censors to easily cut scenes thought to alienate theatre patrons.[387]

This brief recount of the seven films of the cycle demonstrates the form and purpose shared among the pictures. The musical revue structure was centred on barely-integrated cavalcades of star performances that advertised the studios' roster of talent and their contribution to the war effort. The cycle was not alone in its celebration of the activities of the entertainment industry. In mid-1943 a *March of Time* newsreel detailed the industry's wartime organisations, including the free overseas movie

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384 Short, 'Washington's Information Manual', 177.
385 Koppes, *Hollywood Goes to War,* 144.
386 In June 1943, violence erupted between sailors and Mexican-American 'pachuco' street gangs who were associated zoot suits. Sparked by an apparent attack on a small group of sailors on shore leave in LA, for several subsequent nights American servicemen sought retribution in the Mexican American community. In Detroit in late June, 1943, white resistance to the influx of black labour to the city's factories led to riots that saw 34 killed.
387 Allen L. Woll, *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1983), 122.

distribution provision for servicemen, activities in organising benefit shows, and the production of training films.[388] At the same time *Life* magazine ran a similar feature on 'Show Business at War' which was tied to the release of *Stage Door Canteen*, celebrating all that the industry had learned since the 'befuddled efforts' of the First World War.[389] A 1944 radio program was also developed, which consisted of thirty-minute documentaries that covered different phases of the entertainment industry's war effort.[390] The images of the newsreels and the *Life* photographs are echoed in the pictures in the cycle as the distinction between fictional recreation and documentary is blurred. The activities of the industry presented exploitable entertainment that could be profitably shown to general audiences as well as soldiers. Having examined the developments of the cycle's content in relation to its wartime purpose, I will now explore the relationship between this context and the particular form of the cycle.

[388] *This Is the Army* is cited here as the 'single greatest example of co-operation between the army and film industry', with attention also given to the Hollywood Canteen and touring activities of Landis, Francis, Mayfair and Raye that became the basis for *Four Jills in a Jeep*. March of Time, 'Show Business at War', Vol. 9, No. 10 (1943), Online clip, *You Tube*, Accessed on 18 March 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxkkU-rWOuw>

[389] 'Show Business at War', *Life*, 21 June, 1943, 71-79.

[390] '"Showbiz at War" Series to Highlight Morale Lifts', *Variety*, 2 August, 1944, 3.

Table 3, Wartime musical revue production timeline

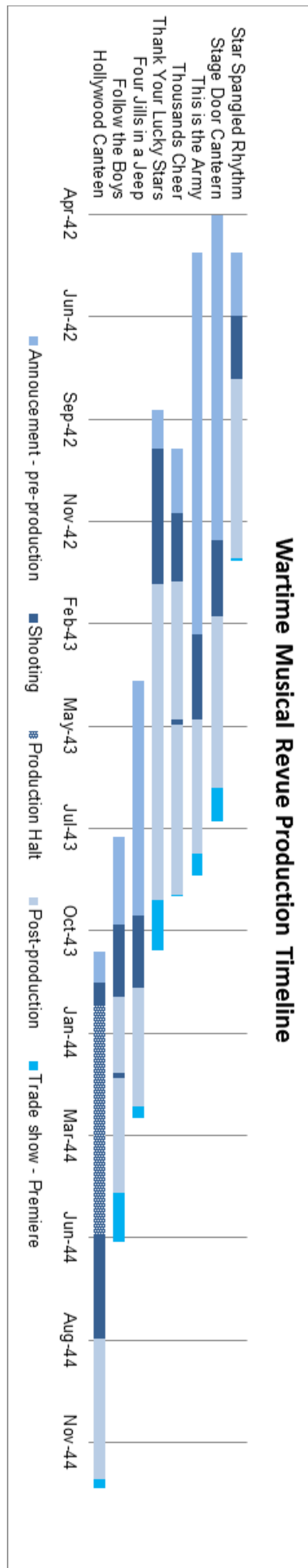
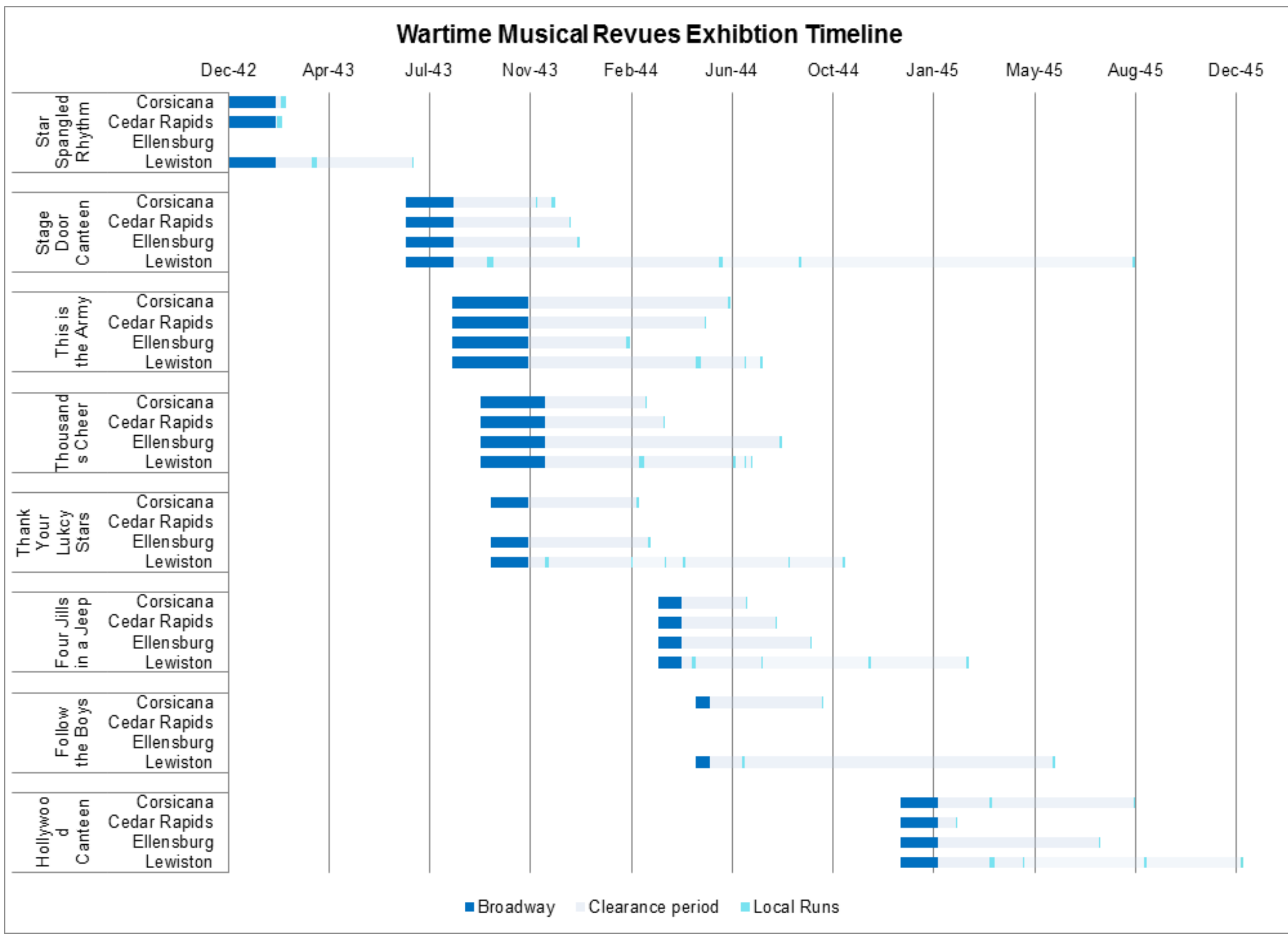


Table 4, Wartime musical revue exhibition timeline



The shape assumed by the cycle, illustrated in the production and exhibition timelines, was developed according to the industrial conditions prevailing in the wartime context. At this time, the increased concentration of the population in city centres, the rise in disposable income from wartime employment, and restrictions on gas and other forms of entertainment all contributed to a general rise in audience attendance and box office profits. [391] Records were being broken every other week as films made more money than ever and were held over for longer periods in the first run cinemas. The first of the cycle, *Star Spangled Rhythm,* made history at the Broadway's Paramount theatre with a seven week run.[392] These extended first runs, or holdovers, altered the industry's release patterns on multiple levels, from exhibitor programming and the sales policies of distributors, to the production plans of the studios.[393] In general, the studios assumed a 'fewer but bigger' policy of production in the war years. This was partly a result of the rationing of raw film stock, but the practice was also substantiated by the attendance boom that encouraged holdovers in the first run theatres and reduced the need to produce large quantities of pictures for this market.[394] For these reasons too, the studios were releasing fewer films than they were producing, creating a backlog of product.[395]

The holdovers created a 'bottleneck' in the first runs. The exhibition timeline maps the release of the cycle and compares the time spent on Broadway to the sample theatre locations. This highlights the subordinate status of the later runs and emphasises where the majority of profits were located for the studios. The effect of these bottlenecks on the cycle is evident in the case of *Thank Your Lucky Stars* and the difficulty Warner Bros. faced in finding it a suitable premiere venue. In the month

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[391] Tom Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*. Vol. 6, *History of American Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 153.

[392] '"Star Spangled Rhythm" Rolls Up Huge Grosses', *Los Angeles Times*, 4 February, 1943, 11.

[393] 'War Changing Pattern of 1943 Sales Practice', *Motion Picture Herald*, 9 January, 1943, 12. Pix Bottleneck Tightens: Fewer Dates on "Nervous" As', *Variety*, 16 June, 1943, 5. The extended playing times subsided somewhat in early 1944, and reports of their increase in October was attributed to a different reason, the result of selective customers responding to the increasing number of high quality pictures, rather than in indiscriminate rise in the general box office. 'Shopping Customers Send Holdovers to Flood Tide', *Motion Picture Herald*, 11 November, 1944, 13.

[394] The total number of pictures planned for the 1943-44 season numbered 373, of which 254 were A features. This had dropped from the 1941 seasonal total of 420 films and 1937-38 average of approximately 500. Of the 254 A films slated for 1943-44, a reduced amount would be released into cinemas. 'Trim Deliveries to 373', *Variety*, 23 June, 1943, 3. '"A" Product for 1943-44 – Inventory and Analysis', *Motion Picture Herald*, 21 August, 1943, 12. 'Record of 484-511 Pix for '37: More Westerns Fewer Shorts', *Variety*, 10 June, 1936, 7.

[395] The biggest backlog to date was announced in late 1943, with 14 completed films held back from release by MGM, 25 by RKO, 6 by Fox, 4 by United Artists, 6 by Universal and 17 by Warner Bros. These were largely light, escapist fare that kept the war background to a minimum to reduce topicality and allow them to be released at any time. 'Biggest Pix Backlog Yet: Around 86 Major Negs Unreleased', *Variety*, 27 October, 1943, 5.

planned for its release, the Strand theatre was averaging five weeks to play a single film and was already booked with another big Warner's production, *Watch on the Rhine*, while *This is the Army* was playing 'indefinitely' at the Hollywood theatre.[396] The delays caused by such situations can account for the greater lengths of time between the completion of production and release in cinemas, which are illustrated in the production timeline. A further factor contributing to these delays involved the distribution deals the studios made with the army, which meant that some of the wartime musical revues played first to overseas troops before being released in the United States. Twenty 16mm prints of *Star Spangled Rhythm*, for instance, were shipped to overseas troops for Christmas, just before the film's late December premiere and general release in February.[397]

The majors increased the use of 'move-over' theatres in an attempt to relieve the pressure of these bottlenecks.[398] Move-over theatres were sites to which the films could be transferred after their opening weeks but which were still part of the first run and did not require a clearance period beforehand. Two theatres were often employed for simultaneous openings in L.A. but in *Stage Door Canteen's* case, four Fox-West Coast theatres were used.[399] While such strategies were being developed by distributors to best exploit the first runs, the studios also exhibited caution in outlining their seasonal programs and followed policies that maximised flexibility and increased their capacity to respond to the whims of this volatile but profitable public.[400] Releases were announced at a later date than usual and could be modified in response to market reports, as in MGM's last minute decision to swap the planned

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[396] 'Warner Bros. After More First Runs', *Film Daily*, September, 1943, 9.
[397] 'AEF Troops to See "Rhythm" Christmas', *Film Daily*, 17 December, 1942, 1, 3.
[398] 'See More First runs, M.O.'s: Speed Clearance to Subsequents', *Variety*, 18 August, 1943. 5.
[399] 'Picture Grosses: L. A. Biz Still Strong Despite Tax and H.O.'s; 'Canteen' Terrif $57,000, 4 Spots', *Variety*, 14 July, 1943, 15.
[400] The production heads of RKO and Monogram outlined in 1943 the approaches of their studios. Monogram planned to provide a product 'hedge' to protect itself against sharp changes in audience responses to picture themes and the possible market satiation of war films and musicals. 'Carr Will Asses Mono. Sales Meeting', *Motion Picture Daily*, 11 June, 1943, 7. Similarly the blocks of five that were required under the consent decree were noted to include a particular range of picture types, such as a musical, a war drama, a mystery, a comedy and one other type of drama. 'Hollywood Seasons War with Vaudeville, Music', *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 May, 1943, 21. RKO planned to emphasise their output of musicals and comedies for the 1943-44 season as a response to audience demand for escapism, but, unlike the other majors, sudio executives stated that they would seek to avoid stockpiling, believing that backlogs would impede the timeliness of the pictures. 'RKO to Stress Musicals and Comedies', *Film Daily*, 17 November, 1943, 1.
Red Kann explains the motivation behind this studio stockpiling of product as resulting from an uncertainty of further demands from the military, which led to the sparing use of raw film stock in the likelihood of further restrictions being issued by the War Production Board (WPB), and the motivation to maintain regular production levels as long as is permitted by the current levels of manpower. Red Kann, '"A" Product for 1943-44 – Inventory and Analysis', *Motion Picture Herald,* 21 August, 1943, 12- 18.

release of the war film *Bataan* (MGM, 1943) for the musical *Du Barry Was A Lady* (MGM, 1943).[401] The studios' stockpiling of product meant that the distributors had greater scope in planning the timing of their products' release and could stagger their openings to prevent similar films from sitting in direct competition or from saturating the market and alienating viewers. The very short clearance period in the case of *Star Spangled Rhythm* relates to a distribution strategy timed to the Christmas holiday period, but the majority of the cycle films had much longer clearance periods.

The delays in the studios' product announcements also set the sales season back and caused a further 'booking jam' as negotiations between the distributors and exhibitors were extended. There was disagreement on both sides as to whether the studio stockpiling created a seller's market, or whether the intensified box office activity had led to a buyer's market.[402] Rental terms had increased with the greater number of specials and heightened box office performance.[403] The wartime cuts and rationing meant that there were fewer prints for distributors, leading to further delays, longer clearance periods and a diminishing supply for exhibitors.[404] The slower release of the diminished number of productions also led to a product shortage for subsequent-run exhibitors, many of whom still followed a double bill policy.[405] The reception chronology that was established in the previous case studies was broken here. Cedar Rapids, the largest location, was no longer the first to receive the pictures, which instead reached the smaller towns of Corsicana and Lewiston at an earlier date. Although this might have been tied to the bottlenecks that affected the larger city centres, in the case of the revues Cedar Rapids did not mirror the holdover situation, instead screening the films for only one or two days. On the other hand, the theatres of Lewiston and its neighbouring communities circulated the films for a much longer period, reaching six subsequent playdates in the case of *Thank Your Lucky Stars*. This pattern of circulation also disrupted the roughly sequential order of production and release seen in the production timeline (Table 3). *Stage Door Canteen*, the first of the

[401] 'Hollywood Seasons War with Vaudeville, Music', *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 May, 1943, 21.
[402] Both sides were also anxious about the rumoured imposition of ceilings for rental terms and admission prices, Roy Chartier argued, as sought to raise prices higher in order to set a top standard should ceilings be imposed. Exhibitors also demanded provisions for extended playing times, and shorter clearance periods between the runs. Roy Chartier, 'Distributors and Exhibitors May Be Moving Towards More Sympathetic Understanding', *Variety*, 5 January, 1944, 5, 55., 'B'Way Film Booking Jam', *Variety*, 31 May, 1944, 3, 27
[403] 'Majors Increase Special Handling of Features', *Motion Picture Herald,* 18 December, 1943, 15.
[404] 'Industry Toppers Fear Further Raw Film Cut Will Impair Screen's War Effort; Shortage Will Hit Exhibs', *Variety*, 27 January, 1943, 7.
[405] 'Cycle of Reissues and Repeat Dates Due to Extended Runs of Newer Pix' *Variety*, 1 September 1943, 11.

cycle to be announced, possessed the greatest market longevity, illustrating how the modification of distribution practices according to the wartime environment had a direct impact on the form of the cycle.

From the initial production announcement of *Star Spangled Rhythm* to the theatrical release of the final film, *Hollywood Canteen*, the production side of the cycle lasted less than three years. When the release dates are used to measure the cycle, *Star Spangled Rhythm* appears to be the hit film that spurred subsequent productions. A glance at the production timeline reveals, however, that there was no single successful initiator of the cycle, as several pictures were announced and planned together earlier in 1942 for release in the next calendar year. After *Star Spangled Rhythm's* success was cemented in its record-breaking opening, plans for a second round of productions were announced for the next season with *Four Jills in a Jeep*, *Follow the Boys* and *Hollywood Canteen*. There was a clear a difference between the preproduction periods of each of the films, although their shooting periods sometimes overlapped. *Thousands Cheer* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars* were announced once the earlier films in the cycle had commenced the production process. They quickly started shooting and were able to catch up and time their release to ride on the coat tails of their forerunners. Although such release patterns appear staggered in the production timeline, placing the premieres within the wider exhibition timeframe reveals the grouping of the cycle in Broadway cinemas in mid to late 1943. *Hollywood Canteen* appears to lag far behind the earlier thrust of the cycle, suggesting the loss of momentum caused by its production delays, without which the picture would have been released shortly after its predecessors. The exhibition timeline also reveals a gradual reduction in the time the pictures spent on Broadway, raising the prospect that the cycle may have been slowing even prior to the release of *Hollywood Canteen*.

The distribution and exhibition practices of Hollywood were adapted to the wartime market and restrictions, giving this brief cycle a relatively elongated shape and disrupting the usual product flow through theatres. Part of the studios' driving strategy was in the maintenance of flexibility, knowing that the market could be easily unbalanced and the star power's promise of box office receipts wasted. A comparison of the timelines of production and exhibition reveal how the method of

measuring a cycle can produce a different impression of its shape; in this case, placing the cycle in context illustrates the brevity of the periods of shooting and first run Broadway release by comparison to the time the pictures spent in preproduction and circulation. Wartime musical revues were clearly oriented towards first run box office takings at a time when attendance was high, but the different features meshed in such a way as to satisfy the demands of a range of market sectors.

The pendulum swings

As their descriptor suggests, the cycle of wartime musical revues was a hybrid form that fused elements from contemporary production trends and imbued them with star wattage. The move to produce a greater number of musicals and comedies from late 1942 was a market-based response to the war film cycle. This type of reactive movement between different cycles or trends was often described as a 'swinging pendulum' in the trade press, which identified cycles as being a studio-led production response: a cycle's apex, the point of audience and market saturation, was followed by a shift to a different direction. Drawing on contemporary ideas about the fluidity of audience interest, this pendulum concept locates the relationship between cycles and topicality within a larger, ongoing industrial process. The wartime musical revues, discussed as a meeting point between different trends, suggest how cycles existing within already established production trends can be determined, and reemphasises the significance of discursive identification.

The production of war pictures, having already commenced in anticipation of the U.S. entry into the war, increased exponentially after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The first wave that washed into cinemas in early 1942 took the form of cheap, quickly made exploitation films that were criticised by the OWI for a 'blood and thunder' approach.[406] While careful to praise the generally co-operative attitude that Hollywood had adopted towards the war effort, the OWI expressed dissatisfaction with the level of engagement with war issues in feature films produced in 1942.[407]

[406] 'The OWI Criticizes', *Motion Picture Herald*, 19 September, 1942, 9.
[407] In a speech to the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures in November, Mellet acknowledged that although the majority of Hollywood films had been acceptable and the industry should be lauded for its overall effort, he criticised the exploitation of topicality and hastiness of some productions were made, arguing for the need to focus on

The majors' more expensively-made pictures, which required a longer production period, began to reach cinemas later in the year. By early 1943 the cycle of war films was at saturation point and created a glut on the market. As exhibitor Phil Schwartz complained, 'It seems almost everything on the screen has the tinge of war'.[408] *Motion Picture Herald's* exhibitor polls on the subject supported the view that the war films were a cycle that operated like any other, with the large quantities having exhausted the audience:[409]

> It ties very directly to established trade history which records how reaction against too much of the same diet finally sets in. It has happened to the musical, the gangster and to other cycles of films. Because celluloid history has a manner of repeating itself, the conclusion on war footage ought to be obvious, too.[410]

To combat this, Red Kann argued that the industry needed to calculate how the pattern of production and release could be adjusted so that the audiences 'don't yell uncle'.

One means of adjusting the pattern was to diversify production programmes, with the studios increasing the production of musicals and comedies. In May 1943, *Motion Picture Herald* observed four different cycles being produced as part of this resurgent musical trend: those with a show business background, burlesque pictures, minstrel themed pictures, and films following the vaudeville tradition.[411] The cycle of wartime musical revues, which incorporated vaudeville formats and show business settings, drew on identifiable formulae of musical cycles that had been developed in the previous decade. Steve Neale defines revue musicals as a series of performances that lack a strong narrative framework but which can be unified through a consistent style or theme, venue, or an individual producer or filmmaker.[412] From the first, studios incorporated a large number of stars in the revue structure, as in *The Hollywood Revue of 1929* (MGM, 1929), *Show of Shows* (Warner Bros., 1929) and *Paramount on Parade* (Paramount, 1930), to showcase the various abilities of the studio's stars in the early sound period. [413] These continued to be made throughout the decade, becoming an annual fixture on some studios' production schedules.

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producing quality films. 'Government Report: Chief of the OWI's Bureau of Films Praises and Censures the Movies', *New York Times*, 15 November, 1942, 3.

[408] Phil Schwartz, Parkway Theatre, Bridgeport, Connecticut, 'Exhibitors Protest at Flood of War Film, Ask Entertainment', *Motion Picture Herald*, 1 May, 1943, 14.

'War Pix Upset Bookers; Strong B.O. But Unbalanced Fare', *Variety*, 21 April. 1943, 3, 8.

[410] Red Kann, 'Insiders Outlook', *Motion Picture Daily*, 24 March, 1943, 5.

[411] 'Hollywood Seasons War with Vaudeville, Music', *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 May, 1943, 21.

[412] Neale, *Genres and Hollywood*, 105.

[413] Balio, *Grand Design*, 211.

Another prominent musical cycle that was developed at this time centred on a backstage setting that provided a show-within-a-show frame for the musical numbers. Jane Feuer describes these backstage musicals as a particularly reflexive form. By causing the viewer to switch between identifying with the protagonist performers, and with the theatrical audience within the film, Feuer argues that they hold a dual focus.[414] In the wartime musical revues, the audience is threefold, consisting of the soldiers attending the staged benefit shows or canteens within the picture, the home front audiences watching the films in their local theatre, and the overseas servicemen to whom such films were screened for recreation on 'two hour furloughs'.[415] Feuer's description of a direct address 'ode to entertainment' category of backstage musical numbers, which express a 'no business like show business' sentiment, also fits the overall attitude of the wartime musical revue cycle.

After a decline of musical production in the late 1930s, the resurgence of the 'filmusical' trend was identified by Jack Jungmeyer in early 1943 as one of the mainstays of escapist fare in the past year. Varying from prior cycles, musicals now sought to entice a younger audience through jive, swing and big name bands. Jungmeyer identified each studio as holding a different musical focus, dictated by the talent it had under contract, the preferences of its executives and its ownership of property rights. [416] The profusion of musicals planned for 1944 was reportedly the largest the industry had ever seen, with companies not generally known for musical production, such as Republic, Universal and RKO, including more on their production schedules than at any other point in their history.[417] These production plans were frequently discussed as reactive and the content of the pictures in their tone, approach and story focus were markedly different from the dominant tide of combat films. The view that such 'escapist' production trends were a direct response

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[414] Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical; Second Edition* (London: MacMillan, 1993), 29, 36.
[415] Maxine Garrison, 'Film at War Fronts "Two-Hour Furlough"', *Pittsburgh Press*, 3 March, 1945, 24.
[416] For instance, Fox is described as developing songs suitable for the hit parade in its musicals, Paramount as following a tongue-in-cheek brand of musical comedies, Metro was noted for its turn from operetta to focus on youth, jive and comedy, while at Warner Bros., Jungmeyer identified *Thank Your Lucky Stars* as a test balloon, 'if "Lucky Stars" clicks and makes money, it's a cinch Warners will go back to the type of musical entertainment in which it once led the field'. 'Band Pix Click in Stix', *Variety*, 17 February, 1943, 3.
[417] 'Musical Pix to Deluge the Screen in 1944', *Film Daily*, 16 December, 1943, 1. 'RKO to Stress Musicals and Comedies', *Film Daily*, 17 November, 1943, 1. 'Musicals Swarm over Stages at U', *Variety*, 1 December, 1943, 7. '68 Features Announced by Republic for 1944-45', *Motion Picture Daily*, 27 April, 1944, 13. "Rep Tempoed to Musicals', *Variety*, 29 November, 1944, 6.

to the war film cycle is evident in Red Kann's declaration that the 'broadest recognition of the need for different entertainment pitch takes the form of the staggering array of musicals on production schedules'.[418]

In 1943 *Motion Picture Herald* described how the box office revenue of war pictures was declining but that the majors still had more films to release. The paper added that, despite this, the producers were not worried, 'feeling certain that the pendulum can swing back to them again if the release of war dramas is staggered and thus made available at periodic intervals between musicals and other escapist entertainment'. The 'pendulum' idea portrays the cycles of war films and musicals as part of a wider industrial system of production trends in constant flux. This grants us a broader perspective with which to view the operations of cycles, instead of simply perceiving cycles as triggered by hit films of topical events. We can also look beyond the close focus on the details of repetition and variation among the films to explore cycles as part of broader shifts within the contemporary industrial space, as fluctuations within a continuum. In this way, the intertextuality of cycles lies not only in their immediate hybridity with similar forms, but also in relation to the films that helped to precipitate the swing, those to which the cycle specifically omits allusion and denies association. The promotional discourse that accompanied the wartime musical revue cycle emphasised their value as escapist entertainment and downplayed their wartime connotations. For example, the publicity articles issued in the studio press book for *Thank Your Lucky Stars* are free from all references to the war, and MGM changed the working title of *Private Miss Jones* to *Thousands Cheer* in early 1943 for similar reasons.[419]

This pendulum concept also works alongside the idea of cycles as an organisational tool for structuring production programmes, as discussed in relation to the girl reporter pictures. The studios attuned their expansive schedules to contemporary currents. A 1937 description from *Film Daily* records how the pendulum idea was specifically tied to cycles:

> While the Hollywood pendulum since the first of the year has been swinging in the direction of dramatic stories, there is a good chance the story cycle will change in February, according to William LeBaron, managing director of

[418] Red Kahn, '"A" Product for 1943-44 – Inventory and Analysis', *Motion Picture Herald,* 21 August, 1943, 2- 18.
[419] *Hollywood Reporter,* 30 April, 1943, 8.

production at Paramount. “Cycles”, he comments, “are becoming increasingly shorter”.[420]

Greater quantities of production were often matched by a greater propensity for cycles. This was particularly the case when large volumes of lower budget films were being made, as in the 1936-37 season, with cycles employed to organise B production programmes, provide a blueprint for filmmaking, and sell the films to exhibitors and audiences in readily identifiable terms. The shortening of the lifespan of cycles described in the quote above may be tied to an increased number of low budget cycles being produced; the rapid play-offs of these cycles could swamp theatres more quickly than bigger productions, leading to a faster turnover of popular film types and causing a swifter swing of the pendulum.

Contemporary industry analyst Margaret Thorp also described how cycles were spoken of by producers as part of theory of consumption, ‘He [Thorp’s generalised producer] has a profound belief in the movement of popular taste by cycles but he is sceptical of the possibility of predicting cycles scientifically’.[421] The studios’ recognition of the fluidity of audience interest and their attempt to accommodate this in planning output is evident in other instances where the pendulum concept was used, in describing the trend towards adult films in the early 1930s after a brief production focus on juvenile pictures, the resurgence of gangster films in the mid-1930s, and a swing from historically-focused films to a concern with depicting national and international headline events in the late 1930s.[422] The sense of fluctuation suggested by the pendulum swing informed the policies of producers, but like the oscillation between cycles of war pictures and musicals, these swings were also in part propelled by a range of identifiable contextual forces.[423]

In addition to a policy of staggering distribution and release, in 1943 the major studios sought to unite two apparently antithetical impulses by combining the war film with the musical picture. With this strategic move, the studios were simultaneously able to respond to a public apparently overfed with the war films and

[420] ‘Story Cycles Shortenings’, *Film Daily*, 1 February, 1937, 1.
[421] Margaret Thorp, *America at the Movies*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), 24.
[422] Don Carl Gillete, ‘Films Go Adult’, *Film Daily*, 22 September, 1933, 1. ‘In the Studio Cutting Room: The Glass Key’, *Motion Picture Herald*, 30 March, 1935, 51. ‘The Hollywood Scene’, *Motion Picture Herald*, 17 June, 1939, 49.
[423] ‘Hollywood Seasons War with Vaudeville, Music’, *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 May, 1943, 21.

demanding escapist entertainment, while complying with the mandate of the OWI to produce pictures that addressed the war. The cycle represented a compromise, working as a publicity vehicle for the industry's efforts while responding to the government's demands through a demonstration that entertainment was important war work.

The wartime musical revues were identified by contemporaries as a small group of films drawing on these production trends. Their designation as a separate cycle within a larger group of similar wartime musicals raises significant definitional questions for cycles more generally. A report on musical production from 1943, for instance, stated that musicals constituted a fairly dominant production trend but added, 'musicals almost furnished the basis for a "cycle" but a check-up on tune films proved that the *quantity* and *quality* [emphasis added] was pretty even with passing seasons'.[424] This infers that a cycle is understood as an increase above the norm in the volume of production of a particular type, whether that type is a distinctive variant of a production trend or not. It also suggests that cycles are not necessarily measured by quantity or volume alone, with musicals able to constitute a wider trend of steady production without being considered a cycle. Cycles could exist within a stable production trend without affecting the total quantity of the trend. If more than one particular film type is produced within this total, however, there is necessarily a reduction of other film types. For example, in one season a studio might produce a total of ten musicals: five backstage, three vaudeville, and two biographical musicals. The following season the studio might also produce the same total of ten musicals, but increase the number of vaudeville musicals to seven and reduce backstage pictures to only one, indicating the potential rise of one cycle and decline of another. This reinforces the idea of cycles as reactive, being produced and measured in relation to other films. Furthermore, the use of the term 'quality' in the above quote suggests something more than a value judgement, referring to the elements that make up a picture, with cycles consisting of films with shared qualities or traits. As the trade comment suggests, cycles are calculated not just as an increase in number but also by type, with this type something that is discursively identified.

[424] Bill Brogden, 'Dominant '42 Trend, Apart from War Stories, Was Growth of Writer Producer's Worth', *Variety*, 6 January, 1943, 13.

The reception of the wartime musical revue pictures firmly establishes how the group was perceived as a cycle, with the films frequently identified in relation to one another. The pictures were compared in terms of their similar formats, common production motivation, entertainment appeal and level of box office business. Within these comparisons several correlations emerged as particular films were more readily comparable in setting and plot: *Star Spangled Rhythm, Thank Your Lucky Stars* and *Follow the Boys* on the one hand, and *Stage Door Canteen* and *Hollywood Canteen* on the other. *Stage Door Canteen* also became the benchmark for quality against which the other pictures were measured, largely unfavourably. The reviews of *Thousands Cheer,* for instance, noted the inevitability of comparisons to *Stage Door Canteen* due to their similar format, yet few mentioned *Star Spangled Rhythm*, whose plot structure it more closely resembles.[425] Instead, *Thousands Cheer* was praised in a similar fashion to *Stage Door Canteen* for its range of performances that included 'something for everyone'.[426] A small town exhibitor from upstate New York further noted that *Thousands Cheer* did the biggest business of the cinemas since *Stage Door Canteen* last October, adding 'when we can do October business in January in this village, brothers, we've done something'.[427] These two pictures were compared not only because of the closeness of their release but because they represented similarly high box office standards that others in the cycle failed to achieve.

The trade press' reception of *Follow the Boys,* on the other hand, identified it as belonging to the same category as *Star Spangled Rhythm* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, both in terms of its narrative shortcomings as well as for the usual star cluster and behind-the-scenes treatment of Hollywood.[428] Its variety show format was unfavourably compared to *Stage Door Canteen* in the *Los Angeles Times*, which was seen to have 'set the pace for this sort of marathon more effectively'.[429] The exhibitors also rated *Follow the Boys* poorly, one theatre owner specifically identifying it as a weak imitation of *This is the Army* and *Stage Door Canteen*.[430] In

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[425] 'Thousands Cheer', *Variety*, 15 September, 1943, 10.
[426] 'Thousands Cheer', *Variety*, 15 September, 1943, 10., 'Thousands Cheer', *Motion Picture Daily*, 15 September, 1943, 1, 7.
[427] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Thousands Cheer', *Motion Picture Herald*, 19 February, 1944, 52.
[428] 'Follow the Boys', *Variety*, 29 March, 1944, 21. 'Follow the Boys', *Film Daily*, 27 March, 1944, 7. 'Follow the Boys', *Harrison's Reports*, 1 April, 1944, 54.
[429] Edwin Shallert, 'Stars Put On Variety Show', *Los Angeles Times*, 13 May, 1944, 5., 'Follow the Boys', *New York Times*, 26 April, 1944, 24.
[430] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Follow the Boys', *Motion Picture Herald*, 28 October, 1944, 43.

this general reception of the cycle, the trades' largely positive views of the mass entertainment value of the pictures sat in contrast to the many reservations held by independent exhibitors. This suggests that the films were seen to function differently by these groups, the trades focussing on first run popularity and the exhibitors often reporting on the subsequent-run response, where the films were seen to have less value.

Two 1942 wartime musicals, *Private Buckaroo* (Universal, 1942) and *The Yanks Are Coming* (Producers Releasing Company, 1942), preceded *Star Spangled Rhythm*. Both followed a camp show musical format but, as programmer pictures, lacked the star contributions that came to define the cycle. Thomas Schatz recognises the wartime musical revues in his account of 1940s production trends, and although he notes that most were 'laden with talent', this is not identified as a unifying quality. He lists the all-star revues as being the 'most successful' of a larger group of films and describes *Four Jills in a Jeep* and *Here Come the Waves* (Paramount, 1944) as subsidiaries that developed their narratives in more detail than the others but still lapsed into a revue format.[431] This raises the possibility of the all-star revue films being only the most visible tip of a larger cycle of wartime revues. An examination of the discourse surrounding such pictures reveals, however, that while all-star pictures were continually discussed in relation to one another, other revue musicals were not identified as part of the same cycle. *Here Comes the Waves*, for instance, was described as a Bing Crosby vehicle in the same vein as the hugely successful *Going My Way* (Paramount, 1944).[432] On the other hand, the presence of multiple stars in *Four Jills and a Jeep* was emphasised in the picture's advertising, and it was specifically compared to others in the cycle, such as *Follow the Boys* and *Hollywood Canteen,* in its reception.[433] *This is the Army* (Warner Bros., 1943) does not strictly fit the format of the cycle either, being based on Irving Berlin's successful Broadway show, although the film does share some of the cycle's features in its backstage setting and revue format. The cast, drawn from active servicemen, included several

[431] Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 224-25.
[432] 'Here Come the Waves, *Motion Picture Daily*, 18 December, 1944, 7., Bosley Crowther, 'Here Come the Waves', *New York Times,* 28 December, 1944, 25.
[433] The Fox trade ad for the feature used a numeric device to add up the quantities of stars, girls, jeeps, songs etc. to equal Twentieth Century Fox. Robin Coons, 'Hollywood Sights and Sounds, *Corsicana Daily Sun*, 14 April, 1944. Fred Stanley, 'Hollywood Pats Itself: Two Films Will Honor the Industry for its Entertainment of the Armed Forces', *New York Times*, 21 November, 1943.

stars, but the film was never promoted as a star picture. *This is the Army* was one of the most successful features of the war, however, and constituted a significant charitable endeavour from Warner Bros., raising close to $9 million for the Army Emergency Relief Fund.[434] *This is the Army* also played a prominent role in contemporary discussions of the industry's contribution to wartime entertainment and has been included in the timelines as a point of reference.

Cycles that are located within established genres, such as the wartime revues, are often discussed in terms of an adaptation of generic elements to topical concerns. Amanda Ann Klein draws on Rick Altman's conception of film genres to explore ideas of cycles and topicality, arguing that film cycles represent a crafting of semantic elements to contemporary events, with these semantic images developing in different directions once their current syntax is no longer deemed interesting or relevant to audiences.[435] The wartime musical revue cycle generally conforms to this pattern of development. With the onset of the war, Altman describes how historically-conditioned semantic situations were introduced to the genre, including those of troop shows, canteens, an increase in episodic plots, and a focus on the filmmaking process itself.[436] In the case of the wartime musical revues, the syntax was developed as part of the wartime environment, emphasising a patriotic tone and purpose for the backstage shows. As escapist entertainment, however, the films sought to avoid obviously topical connections that might have negative associations with war films for audiences. Topicality could also limit the flexibility being sought by the studios amidst their stockpiling practices, as a delayed release might mean the loss of topical relevance. The timeliness of the pictures may be better understood using Peter Stanfield's studies, in which he describes 'contiguous events and activities that form cycles, which in turn are limited by the specific structures within which they are produced, and which also help shape that structure'.[437]

This conception of the relationship between cycles and topicality includes a consideration of the current state of the industry and its specific practices and policies, as well as the contemporary modes of discourse, market and economic

[434] 'Camp Show Record', *Motion Picture Herald*, 27 October, 1945, 8., Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 224.
[435] Klein, *American Film Cycles*, 16.
[436] Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 120.
[437] Stanfield, 'Pix Biz Spurts with War Fever', 222.

conditions, and other aspects of the immediate environment. These factors contributed to the commercial, market function of the cycle and influenced the chosen strategy of advertising and promotion, which might emphasise or avoid highlighting the connections to other cycles, contemporary discourses or events. The wartime musical revues can be considered topical in a number of ways. The films depicted the experiences and activities of the entertainment industry that contributed to the war effort; specifically the USO camp tours and benefit shows, and the establishment of venues such as the Stage Door and Hollywood Canteens. This wartime background gave the films a relevance, realism and patriotic purpose. Additionally, the films' timeliness utilised the backstage musical formula for a complex form of self-referential interplay between the performance and documenting of wartime entertainment. The cycle represented the wartime work of the industry both in depicting and restaging their activities before the camera, and through the film itself as it played to audiences and soldiers and was utilised as a fundraising tool. Showing the entertainment effort also became the entertainment effort.

Hollywood Canteen and the all-star format

The defining feature of the cycle and the element consistently raised in the discussions of the films was their all-star format. The inclusion of multiple stars in the films worked to support their rhetorical purpose, emphasising the extent of the entertainment sector's contributions. The development of all-star pictures was specifically identified as a forthcoming cycle in early 1943. *Motion Picture Herald* argued that, having lain dormant since early 1930s features such as *Grand Hotel* (MGM, 1932); the trend for multi-star pictures had now resurfaced. The episodic comedy *Tales of Manhattan* (Fox, 1942) had recently been released, soon to be followed by Universal's historical cavalcade *Forever and a Day* (Universal, 1943). Other films listed included *Thank Your Lucky Stars, Star Spangled Rhythm, Stage Door Canteen,* and occult anthology thriller *Flesh and Fantasy* (Universal, 1943).[438] The use of multiple stars for a single film was a practice that was primarily commercially motivated, used to generate publicity and increase the films' box office draw. A further layer of realism was added in the wartime musicals by having the

[438] Vance King, 'New Hollywood Cycle in New Product Trend', *Motion Picture Herald,* 16 January, 1943, 12-13.

stars play themselves, at times re-enacting their own off-screen wartime activities. The monetisation of these charitable activities was supposedly balanced through filmic tie-ins to war bond drives and donations to war organisation that sought to verify and extend the patriotic premise of the pictures.

The promotion of the films in the cycle was clearly centred on the many stars the pictures contained. Each of the film posters listed upwards of a dozen actors, featured bands, and song titles by name. Stars and musical notes were common motifs across the posters, as were the colours of yellow and red, white and blue. These repeated design elements, which identify the films as belonging to a common cycle, signify the stars as a key component alongside the entertainment promised by the musical genre and a patriotic tone. Besides the occasional glimpse of a uniform, the only poster that referenced the war background directly was that of *Four Jills in a Jeep*, where the exaggerated cartoon style emphasises a comic treatment of the situation rather than a serious war drama.[439]

Figure 10, *Star Spangled Rhythm* (Paramount, 1942). Figure 11, *Stage Door Canteen* (UA, 1943).

[439] The *Showman's Trade Review* emphatically stated that *Four Jills in a Jeep* was not a 'war picture' but entertainment suitable for the whole family. 'Four Jills in a Jeep', *Showmen's Trade Review*, 18 March, 1944, 67.

Figure 12, *Thousands Cheer* (MGM, 1943). **Figure 13, *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (Warner Bros., 1943).**

Figure 14, ***Follow the Boys*** **(Universal, 1944).**

Figure 15, ***Four Jills in a Jeep*** **(Fox, 1944).**

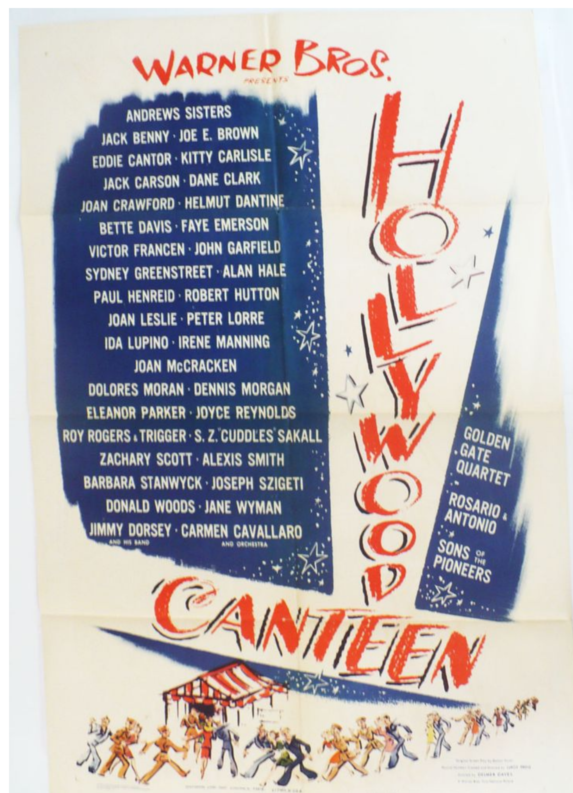

Figure 16, ***Hollywood Canteen*** **(Warner Bros., 1944).**

A picture's particular use of the multi-star format also became a means to measure its quality and value. Again, the rating of the all-star cast's entertainment value varied between the different levels of reception. The trade press assumed that the combined star power guaranteed a box office draw that would outshine the narrative failings of the films, while subsequent run and independent exhibitors reported the disappointment of their customers at the films' failure to fulfil entertainment expectations. *Stage Door Canteen* was seen to have most successfully utilised the multiple stars as part of its setting. Bosley Crowther described in a *New York Times* review how he usually found all-star films depressing, 'not only because the samples thus distributed are generally short on quality but because the obvious purpose of such pictures is just to knock the audience over with big names … In our book that's called cheap showmanship'.[440] Crowther thought that *Stage Door Canteen*, used the stars for 'real dramatic point', and captured 'the generous spirit of the show folks' desire to do their bit'. *Film Daily* also described the impromptu air and 'candid camera' quality that conveyed the documentation of a usual night at the canteen, while the romantic storyline between an unknown young soldier and a volunteer hostess was seen to offset the glare of the stars and imbue the picture with realism.[441]

A small town Texas exhibitor noted how *Stage Door Canteen* bucked the trend, since 'as a rule these all-star pictures are not much, but there's a world of entertainment in this one'.[442] This all-star trend is discussed in detail by exhibitors in relation to *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, with several exhibitors complaining of the gap between its promotional promise and uninspired delivery. Bracketing the picture as a special on the basis of the stars, Warner Bros. charged high percentage sales terms which were arguably unjustified by the material.[443] As a Canadian exhibitor argued, 'If Warners had cut out the Bette Davis, Errol Flynn, John Garfield and Humphrey Bogart numbers, this might have represented a fair "B" offering. As issued, it's very tiresome. To add to the misery they stick it in as a "special", which is merely adding insult to injury'.[444] An Oklahoma exhibitor agreed that the studio had overloaded the

[440] Bosley Crowther, '"Stage Door Canteen" and Other Pictures Play Up the Notables', *New York Times,* 4 July, 1943.
[441] 'Stage Door Canteen', *Film Daily*, 12 May, 1943, 8. 'Stage Door Canteen', *Variety*, 12 May, 1943, 8. 'Stage Door Canteen', *Harrison's Reports*, 15 May, 1943, 78.
[442] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Stage Door Canteen', *Motion Picture Herald*, 6 November, 1943, 71.
[443] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Thank Your Lucky Stars', *Motion Picture Herald*, 3 June, 1944, 60.
[444] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Thank Your Lucky Stars', *Motion Picture Herald*, 8 January, 1944, 72.

picture and 'tried too hard to make it a big one', while another pleaded, 'please don't make any more all-star pictures: this was too long and we had many walkouts'.[445] The issue taken with the films here was not its essential content or quality, but the exaggerated market value premised in the all-star format.

The multi-star format was used to differentiate the films from regular picture product, providing novelty, marquee value, and ready exploitation. This strategy appeared to be more successful in the films' openings than in subsequent runs. This marketing process was explored by George Gallup's Audience Research Institute (ARI) at the time.[446] The ARI was developing ways to measure the publicity penetration for RKO in the early 1940s, and used interviews to test whether the public could recall having heard about a forthcoming film, and the types of information that may have been retained.[447] Arguing that word-of mouth publicity was less influential than paid advertising space, Gallup sought to measure the 'want-to-see' factor for audiences. He recommended a big advertising push and simultaneous day-and-date openings when want-to-see was low but publicity saturation high. For films with a greater long-term draw for audiences, a slower, more traditional distribution strategy with 'class' advertising was advised. The multiple star casting of the wartime revues meant that the publicity penetration would have been very high for audiences. Given that the chief appeal was in the star billings and entertainment promised by musical performances, rather than in the narrative, this immediate want-to-see factor was encouraged by the studios. The openings and premieres were made into 'events' tied in to fundraising efforts for wartime organisations. For example, a highly-publicised 'proxy premiere' was held in Albany, N.Y. to coincide with the Broadway opening for *Hollywood Canteen,* and was promoted as part of the Travel Conservation program. Thirty Albany townspeople, who each purchased $100,000 in war bonds, took the usual place of the stars at the screening and entertained servicemen at the local USO afterwards. The Albany premiere was recorded to have secured

[445] 'What the Picture Did for Me: Star Spangled Rhythm', *Motion Picture Herald*, 24 July, 1943, 67. 'What the Picture Did for Me: Thank Your Lucky Stars', *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 January, 1944, 66. *Motion Picture Herald*, 3 June, 1944, 60. Similarly, an exhibitor complained that his audiences felt 'tricked' by *Star Spangled Rhythm*, arguing that exhibitors should have learned by now that all-star pictures are usually "just another".
[446] Red Kann, 'On the March', *Motion Picture Herald*, 29 July, 1944, 32. Red Kann, 'On the March', *Motion Picture Herald*, 3 August 1944, 16.
[447] Susan Ohmer, *George Gallup in Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 140.

$10,000,000 in war bond purchases from locals and a further $25,000,000 for the Sixth War Loan Drive.[448]

The commercial success and publicity draw of the revues' first runs appeared to dissipate by the time the pictures reached the subsequent runs. This may be due to the wartime concentration of the population in city centres, which contributed to an overall box office boom in downtown cinemas and meant that even weak pictures found greater profit there than they would in other circumstances. The different rates of success between runs can also suggest that, at this early stage, customer word-of mouth was less effective against the overwhelming marquee draw of the pictures. In subsequent runs, the mixed reports of slow business and disappointed patrons implied that while attendance had declined, a portion of customers still held high expectations for the pictures. These discrepancies draw attention to the shortcomings of using box office grosses as the sole indicator of success in the absence of a record of response from the first run audiences. These first run viewers may have been just as dissatisfied with the pictures as the subsequent run audiences, but without first-hand accounts or a similar forum to the 'What the Picture Did for Me' column, it remains difficult to adequately gauge their response. Susan Ohmer records how Gallup raised a related issue in his research at the time. Contrary to the attitudes of most industry executives, Gallup felt that a picture's box office gross was an unreliable indicator of success and an inadequate guide for modelling subsequent productions. This belief informed his attempt to break pictures down into their titles, stories and stars, in order to understand the appeal and success of their individual component parts for viewers.[449]

Ohmer further identifies how the interpretations made by the ARI and advertising executive David Ogilvy in regard to the value of multiple star billing went against established Hollywood practice. Ogilvy argued that multi-star billing did not represent a greater marquee value, in spite of indications that combined casting achieved more publicity than the individual allotment of value for a single star

[448] 'By Proxy', *Motion Picture Herald*, 9 December, 1944, 8. 'Proxies', *Motion Picture Herald*, 23 December, 1944, 9. 'Exploiting the New Films: Hollywood Canteen', *Motion Picture Herald*, 23 December, 1944, 36.
[449] Susan Ohmer, 'The Science of Pleasure: George Gallup and Audience Research in Hollywood', *Identifying Hollywood Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: BFI, 1999), 70-71.

name.[450] Studies since made of the economic role played by stars have found that their commercial benefits lie primarily in the form of publicity and product differentiation. There is a low correlation between stars and box office returns or film popularity, and little evidence to support claims that stars can be used to control risks.[451] As Gerben Bakker observes, the short shelf-life of films meant that the studios needed to extend branding beyond a single product, generating trademarks or star brands.[452] Drawing on previous viewing experiences and associations, brands that were recognisable to consumers would generate interest and a certain level of expectation, reducing some of the risk consumers faced in viewing decisions.[453]

The stars were the face of Hollywood for the American public and in utilising their names and images the studios could have them enact the work of the wider industry. Additionally, the use of stars under studio term contracts was cheaper than purchasing their services on the open market and could be used by the producers to fortify their association with the studio of origin.[454] The names or logos of the producing studio are clearly emphasised for on the posters for *Thousands Cheer*, *Hollywood Canteen, Thank Your Lucky Stars* and *Four Jills in a Jeep*. In the case of *Stage Door Canteen* and *Follow the Boys*, the producers' names, rather than those of United Artists and Universal, are the primary points of authorship. Using stars from across the studios and centring on industry-wide organisations, the American Theatre Wing and the Hollywood Victory Committee, rather than one specific production company, these two films suggested an image of an industry-wide war effort. This was another reason why *Stage Door Canteen* was praised. Bosley Crowther wrote that it successfully gave the impression of a volunteer show and co-operative effort,

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[450] *Ibid.*
[451] Gerben Bakker, 'Stars and Stories: How Films Became Branded Products', *An Economic History of Film*, John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2005), 71. Arthur De Vany and W. David Walls, 'Uncertainty in the Movie Industry: Does Star Power Reduce the Terror of the Box Office?', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, Vol. 23 (1999), 285-318. John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny, using a quantitative approach to consider how stars might be employed within the investment portfolio practices of Warner Bros. found that any positive effects of stardom were more likely to be found in the medium-low budget films rather than the bigger budget productions. Michael Pokorny and John Sedgwick, 'Stardom and the Profitability of Filmmaking: Warner Bros. in the 1930s', *Journal of Cultural Economics,* Vol. 25 (2001), 180. Paul McDonald, *Hollywood Stardom* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).
[452] Bakker, 'Stars and Stories', 75.
[453] Cathy Klaprat, "The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light' in Tino Balio (ed.) *The American Film Industry*. Revised Edition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 351-376.
[454] As *a New Yorker* review of *Thank Your Lucky Stars* pointed out, 'If you're hazy about which stars work for WB, you can brush up at *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, that studio's entry in the Big Name Derby which picture people are apparently holding to see who can put together the most stupendous, the most colossal, the rootinest, tootinest all-star cast even beheld by the human eye'. 'Another Crusher', *The New Yorker*, 9 October, 1943.

‘not just a parade of one studio’s contract stars’.[455] *Hollywood Canteen* was similarly premised on a cross-studio organisation but Warner Bros. sought to balance this with an emphasis on its own role in ‘presenting’ the entertainment, evident in the multi-page trade ads for the picture reproduced below.[456] Warner Bros. attempt to co-opt Hollywood’s activities into a specific association with their own studio received little support from inside the industry and developed into an internal labour dispute with the SAG.

[455] Bosley Crowther, ‘Something for the Boys’, *New York Times*, 19 April, 1943.
[456] *Hollywood Canteen* trade ad, *Motion Picture Herald*, 16 December, 1944, 16, 24, 22-22.

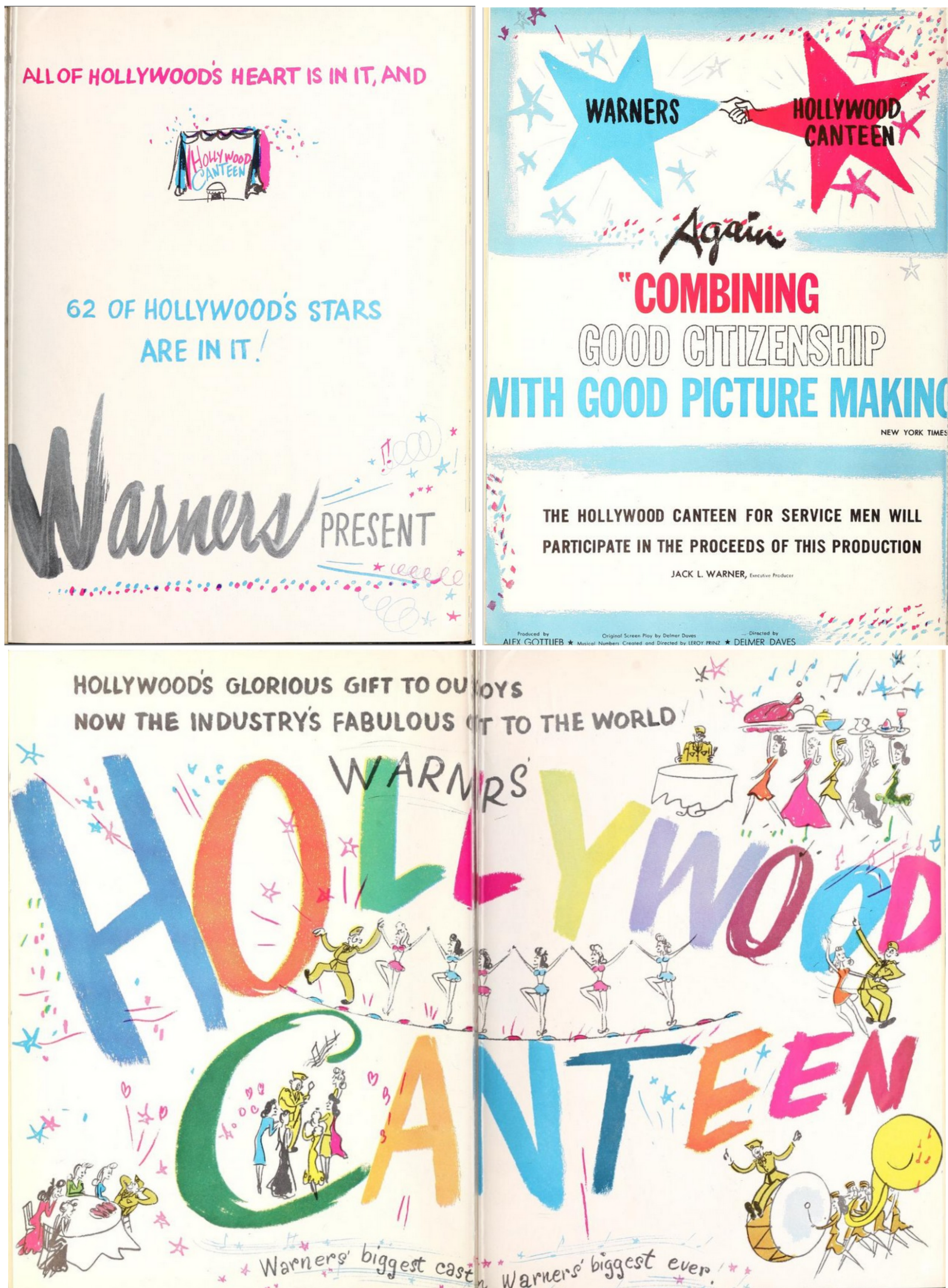

Figure 17, *Hollywood Canteen* trade ad, Motion Picture Herald, 16 December, 1944,16, 24, 22-22.

Hollywood Canteen, like *Stage Door Canteen* and *This is the Army* before it, was part of a deal struck between the charitable organisation running the venue and the producing studio. Warner Bros. paid $250,000 for the use of the name and pledged to donate 40% of

the film's profits once a fee of 25% had been removed for distribution costs. On top of the studio's employment of its own contracted stars, the script required the participation of further marquee names in guest roles. As the other major studios were reluctant to loan their own stars, Warner Bros. turned to freelance actors. After four months of planning and three weeks of shooting, the production of *Hollywood Canteen* was brought to halt. The SAG accused Warner Bros. of having violated rule 33, which stated that actors must be paid according to their accustomed stipend.[457] This rule had been developed in late 1942 during the productions of *Stage Door Canteen* and *Forever and a Day* (RKO, 1943). Pictures made for charity were described by the SAG as imperilling the economic structure of the industry and role of actors within it, by diverting revenues into external channels.[458] These charity and patriotic movies came to be classified by the SAG as 'pressure pictures', where ordinary bargaining between actor and producer was replaced by public pressure.[459] In 1943 Rule 33 was predicted to act as a deterrent: 'At this point the cycle of pictures-for-charity appears to go down in history as the shortest in cinema annals', and the musical revues following *Stage Door Canteen,* despite being advertised as contributions to the war effort, were tied to fundraising activities rather than direct donations of profit.

Nonetheless Warner Bros. sought to revive the earlier practice and used it to secure non-Warners performers. Files from the Jack Warner Archive Collection outline the potential stars listed for the picture in 1943, revealing that the studio envisioned being able to obtain a large number of top stars on loan from rival studios.[460] On the 3 December, days before the storm with the SAG broke, Jesse Lasky, initially a producer on *Hollywood Canteen*, wrote to Jules Stein, President of the Music Corporation of America, and described the difficulty he was having in securing stars:

> For instance, I called on Eddie Mannix, one of my best friends in the industry, asking him to give us a release on Hedy LaMarr for one day's work – but Mannix would not consent, for reason too lengthy to explain here. He finally agreed to let me have Basil Rathbone – and that is all I have been able to get from M.G.M. so

[457] 'WB Starts $500,000 Suit Vs. SAG Over "Hollywood Canteen" Crisis', *Variety*, 12 January, 1944, 2.
[458] Thomas F. Brady, 'Charity, Hope and Faith in Filmland', *New York Times*, 20 September, 1942., 'Short Charity Cycle', *Motion Picture Herald*, 5 June, 1943, 9.
[459] 'SAG Invites Canteen Officials to Parley', *Film Daily*, 6 January, 1944, 5.
[460] These names included Marlene Dietrich, Franchot Tone, Judy Garland, Joseph Cotton, Ginger Rogers, Shirley Temple, Basil Rathbone and others. Jack Warner Files 4.7, Cinematic Arts Library, USC. A budget from November 1943, reveals that the studio hoped to secure singers, bands, a specialty number, and actors and actresses for a total of $186,500. It detailed, for instance, twenty actresses for employment at $2,000 each and a further 34 at $100 each. Budget dated 20 November, 1943. 'Hollywood Canteen' Picture File – Law Suit (3 folders), file 2805. Warner Bros. Archives

> far. … they mention that I am working for Warner Bros., and, consequently, what I am asking from them is to loan their top people to a Warner Bros. picture, and this they do not want to do.[461]

A Warner Bros. memo details a meeting held among studio executives and SAG executive secretary Jack Dales in early December. Dales asked the producers why, given their argument that the film had immense 'industry value', the other studios were reluctant to loan out their contract stars to Warner Bros. Dales also mentioned that Paramount's vice president Y. Frank Freeman had advised the SAG that the Producer's Association was opposed to charity pictures involving a large number of stars, 'it being agreed that from the Producers' viewpoint it would be in competition with their own interest, and from the Artists' viewpoint it would be harmful by cutting down the regular playing time of regular commercial releases which would lessen the stars employment'.[462] Freeman contended that the picture was wholly a Warner Bros. enterprise.[463]

It was reported that the SAG might have changed its stance on *Hollywood Canteen* had the other studios ruled through the Producer's Association that the production was an 'industry undertaking' rather than being studio-specific, and had therefore consented to their own contracted talent appearing in the film.[464] The other studios recognised, however, that they would benefit little from contributing their talent in minor roles to a production associated with another company. Although an individual star's reputation for altruism may have been enhanced, this could easily be lost amongst the large number of other participants and overarching structure of the canteen, whose founders, Bette Davis and John Garfield, were already associated with Warner Bros.

Without the participation of the broader industry the SAG deemed the production exploitative, with the studio directly profiting from the film and its use of freelancers. The SAG argued that, despite the 40% donation and portrayal of *Hollywood Canteen* as a charitable exercise, the 60% retained by the studio represented substantial commercial profit. A similar criticism had been levelled at Sol Lesser over *Stage Door Canteen,*

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[461] Letter from Lasky to Jules Stein, 3 December, 1943. 'Hollywood Canteen' Picture File – Law Suit (3 folders), file 2805. Warner Bros. Archives, USC.

[462] Steve Trilling memo of meeting, 7 December, 1943. Jack Warner Files 4.8, Cinematic Arts Library, USC.

[463] 'Agents, Unions Got to Bat for "H'wood Canteen"', *Film Daily*, 5 January, 1944, 1.

[464] Fred Stanley, 'The Warners vs. The Screen Actors' Guild', *New York Times*, 2 January, 1944.

although he reattained only 8.5% of the picture's profit.[465] The SAG further alleged that Warner Bros. was utilising the patriotic nature of the picture as leverage over freelancers, who usually received a salary on a per-picture basis, to work at reduced rates.[466] Jack Dales of the SAG stated:

> The Guild can put no other interpretation on Warner Bros. action than that of an effort to get star talent at cut-rates under the pressure of a patriotic picture. No producer in the ordinary course of events would start a production calling for the use of 10 stars with whom he had no commitments or contract relationships without having in advance of production negotiated an understanding on wages with those stars.[467]

In January Warner Bros. instigated a $500,000 damage suit against the SAG and an injunction to prevent them from enforcing rule 33. To avoid being classified as a 'pressure picture' the studio's defence emphasised that the picture was strictly a commercial venture, rather than a patriotic film, and that Warner Bros. expected to make a profit from its exhibition.[468] Warner Bros. also accused the Guild of having only recently developed rule 33 after production had commenced. They stated that total budget for the picture was $1,550,000, of which $179,086 (not the $25,000 claimed by the SAG) had been allocated for outside talent.[469] At this time, representatives of agents and studio unions, as well participants Bette Davis and bandleader Kay Kyser, appealed to the SAG to waive rule 33 for this particular film, and the SAG did agree to consider waivers for performers volunteering for the production and specifically requesting exemption.[470] In February Warner Bros. dropped the damage suit against the SAG but still requested that the Supreme Court publish an interpretation of rule 33. A demurrer issued by the SAG in March argued that rule 33 did not violate the studio's rights established under the basic contract with the Guild, and emphasised that the true gauge of the worth of a motion picture was not the hours worked but the box office drawing power.[471]

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[465] Brady, 'Charity, Hope and Faith in Filmland', *New York Times*, 20 September, 1942.
[466] 'Warners Cancel "Canteen" Film in SAG Dispute', *Motion Picture Herald*, 1 January, 1944, 46. Figures obtained by the SAG from the casting director, which contradict the more reliable figures from the Warner Bros. archives, list the total budget allocated for outside talent by the studio was $25,000, representing half the usual amount that a single star made on a film, but with which the studio hoped to secure at least ten star names. 'WB Starts $500,000 Suit Vs. SAG Over "Hollywood Canteen" Crisis', *Variety*, 12 January, 1944, 2.
[467] *Ibid.*
[468] Letter from Roy Orbringer to Board of Directors of SAG, 20 December, 1943. 'Hollywood Canteen' Picture File – Law Suit, file 2805.
[469] '"Hollywood Canteen" Budget $1,550,000', *Film Daily,* 13 January, 1944, 8.
[470] 'Warners-SAG "Canteen" Dispute Leads to Suit', *Film Daily*, 12 January, 1944, 1, 30, 32.
[471] 'SAG Answers Warners' "Hollywood Canteen" Suit', *Film Daily*, 9 March, 1944, 8.

In April an agreement was reached. The SAG revised their initial demand for a full salary and conceded that for this picture, the minimum of a week's salary would be adequate compensation for freelancers appearing in brief roles. In return, Warner Bros. also assured them that no performer would be pressured into participating.[472] Following this decision, the Producers and Screen Actors' Guilds also decided to ban pressure pictures.[473] The repercussions of the dispute continued to reverberate through the industry. Around the time of the film's release, Warner Bros. announced its intention to quit the MPPDA the following year. Jack Warner argued that this stemmed from the controversy arising in relation to *This is the Army* and *Hollywood Canteen*:

> Every dollar of the profits was turned over to the Army Emergency Relief and the productions were planned as philanthropic ventures by us. Instead of receiving the wholehearted support of the Hollywood Guilds, particularly the Screen Actors Guild – every obstacle was cast in our path to overload our production budget … Eventually we settled a $250,000 suit with the Screen Actors Guild out of court, but the settlement was in no way due to the Hays Office and its membership in that fight we did not get it. [*sic*][474]

The critical reviews of the wartime musical revues had become increasingly cynical by this point. At the end of 1943, even before the SAG had called a halt on *Hollywood Canteen*, Fred Stanley's *New York Times* article, 'Hollywood Pats Itself' expressed a mistrust of the studios' motives. The pictures *Four Jills in a Jeep* and *Hollywood Canteen*, then still in production, were seen as a turning point: previously modest dramatizations of the industry's altruistic attributes had made an 'about face'.[475] Bosley Crowther's reviews of the pictures upon their release the following year extended this sentiment. *Four Jills in a Jeep*, released in April amidst the struggles between Warner Bros. and the SAG, was described as 'a raw piece of capitalization upon a widely publicised affair', and by the time *Hollywood Canteen* premiered at the end of the year, Crowther was explicit in his condemnation of the film's purpose:

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[472] 'End "Canteen" Fight; To Resume Shooting', *Motion Picture Daily*, 19 April, 1944, 6.
[473] Responding to the producers' claim that they were constantly forced to bargain with actors and charities, while the studios benefit little from such deals, the Guilds agreed to establish a committee of actors and producers would be established for future benefit productions, treating them as an inclusive industry matter and removing the pressure from individual studios and actors. 'SAG-Producers Plan to Ban All 'Pressure' Films', Variety, 5 April, 1944, 3.
[474] Jack Warner, *Associated Press* dispatch quoted in 'Warner to Quit MPPDA Next May', *Motion Picture Herald*, 9 December, 1944, 14.
[475] Fred Stanley, 'Hollywood Pats Itself: Two Films Will Honor Industry for Its Entertainment of the Armed Forces', *New York Times*, 21 November, 1943.

> To be perfectly blunt about it, this film seems a most distasteful show of Hollywood's sense of its importance and what its people are doing for 'the boys'. Throughout it plainly points benignly to the wonder of 'big shots' entertaining little ones and it stretches propriety to the limit in demonstrating how human the stars are. There is no question that the Hollywood Canteen has been a most welcome haven to service men and that is has done a lot to help them. But this advertisement seems a most ungracious boast.[476]

The *New York Times* argued that the negative attention surrounding the production had influenced the future plans of producers. The paper had predicted back in January that this controversy would cause the abandonment of the multiple star films where name players consented to waive their usual salaries and appear on a pro-rata basis.[477] In April, the paper reported that 'recently … nine similar "all-star" pictures were being planned by the various studios for which players were to be asked to perform at reduced salaries. All of them have since been abandoned'.[478] Although the cycle might have continued as studio-based productions that used contracted stars, the publicity purpose that previously justified the cost and effort involved in big star casts had been marred.

The wartime musical revues were a strategic response to the market environment and the multiple, conflicting demands of wartime. During these years Hollywood was affected by shortages in manpower, equipment and film stock. While audiences were demanding entertainment, the government required that the industry's production, distribution and exhibition machinery be made available for the war effort. As a composite form where elements of the musical genre were adapted to the wartime context, the pictures contribute to the understanding of the relationship between cycles and topicality. The semantic elements of characters, narrative themes and plot structure were adapted to include wartime messages of the need for personal sacrifice, images of a democratic multi-ethnic society, and a general celebration of the morale-building function and fundraising efforts of Hollywood entertainment.

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[476] Bosley Crowther, 'Four Jills in a Jeep', *New York Times*, 6 April, 1944, 27, Bosley Crowther, 'Hollywood Canteen', *New York Times*, 16 December, 1944, 19. A *Time* review echoed this sentiment, 'Unable to make it clear that the Canteen is an all-Hollywood affair, Warner Bros. has gone rather more than all out the other way… "Hollywood Canteen" is pleasant enough until it becomes plethoric'. 'Hollywood Canteen', *Time*, 15 January, 1945. The extent of such critical backlash against the picture led to defence from W. R. Wilkinson that described the film as a 'factual recording' and asked why such attacks were not made against *Stage Door Canteen*. He described reviews as having childishly injected sectional prejudices into critical judgements, 'they're using their knives to deflate the Hollywood ego and although they can't hurt Hollywood, they can hurt service men and women'. W. R. Wilkinson, *Hollywood Reporter*, 20 December, 1944.

[477] Fred Stanley, 'The Warners vs. The Screen Actors' Guild', *New York Times*, 2 January, 1944.

[478] Fred Stanley, 'Warners and Actos Guild Smoke Peace Pipe', *New York Times*, 30 April, 1944.

The revues' heightened realism, derived from having the stars play themselves on screen, together with the backstage musical form's dual audience and mode of direct address, made the cycle a particularly effective form for carrying out this publicity function. The entertainment messages supported the industry's insistence upon its essential status and worked to justify the continuance of non-war related production programmes. The topicality of the revues was also situated, however, within the larger industrial patterns of flow between different cycles and production trends. The studios developed the cycle in response to market reports, situating them between escapist musicals and war pictures, and employing multi-star casts, the formulas of revue and backstage musicals, and promotional strategies that emphasised the films as 'events' in order to orient them towards the booming first run market. This heightened box office resulted in the development of particular distribution strategies that determined the way this cycle was circulated and the form that it took in production and exhibition.

From late 1943, discussions over the role of the industry in the post-war world took place. The trade press argued that the educational, realism-based content of the shorts and non-fiction films consumed by audiences in the war era had not only led to a shift in audience taste, but paved the way for Hollywood to pursue a greater social role once the war ended.[479] Will Hays envisioned a redirection of the industry's war effort into channels of social and cultural reconstruction, and Elmer Davis noted films' educational potential in covering such issues as the lend-lease program, post-war re-employment and demobilisation.[480] NYU professor Robert Gessner noted how the industry's future could be bound up in such questions, warning that the failure of the studios to fill the market gap for such films could increase the chances of government intervention or for independent production to step in to meet such demands.[481] The industry's desire to demonstrate its own significance, and its cultural abilities, continued into the post-war period as the issues over Hollywood's anti-trade practices remained unresolved.

[479] 'Serious Themes in Post-War Pix', *Variety,* 15 September, 1943, 1, 61. '"Four Freedoms" Film Cycle Augurs Pix Role as Post-War Social Force', *Variety*, 3 November, 1943.
[480] Will Hays, 'Films' Post-War Mission', *Variety*, 5 January, 1944, 4. 'Films Need to make "Patched-Up World" Hold Together – Elmer Davis', *Variety*, 6 December, 1944, 1, 14.
[481] 'Film Industry to Mature or Else; N.Y.U. Prof. of Pix Dept. Is as Realistic as He's Practical in His Concept of the Cinema's Future', *Variety*, 5 January, 1944, 12.

Chapter Five

The Anti-Prejudice Pictures and the Process of Cycles

Transference, the movement between objects or forms, is a shifting procedure that implies both change and connection, affinity and approximation. With cycles based on the repetition and recycling of common elements between films, transference provides a useful means of understanding their operations. Such patterns of conveyance suggest that cycles are more than collections of objects or the discursive label that is applied to the group. Cycles are also a process, a systemic series of actions. This can be explored in the motivations behind such actions, their effects, and how these are fed back into the course of decision making. This idea of transference, and its relationship to the cyclic process, is particularly evident in the anti-prejudice pictures produced in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This cycle of films was unified under the broad approach of the 'social problem'. The designation 'social problem picture' was often developed in the films' reception as a label applied to dramatizations of contemporary issues or social discourses, often in a tabloid realist style centred on melodramatic narratives of individual experience.[482] In several cases in this cycle, a key element of the film's story was altered in the process of adaptation, in an attempt to increase the film's market value. The decline of the cycle saw the social issues of discrimination transposed onto other narrative frameworks. I examine the transference embedded in this cycle in three key areas: through the content of the pictures and their identification within the general 'social problem' framework; in the process of adjustment and response located in decisions of the studios' production, distribution, and exhibition of the pictures; and in the use of the cycle within a wider industry discourse.

The framework of the social problem film was transposed across different minority groups to explore instances of discrimination faced by Jewish, Black, Hispanic, and Japanese Americans. Beneath the general theme of tolerance, the social problem picture approach could be applied to a range of story types, such as crime, family drama, war films, women's pictures, and murder mysteries. These films often recounted personal

[482] Neale, *Genre and Hollywood,* 112-118. Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 1-11. Richard Maltby, '"As Close to Real Life as Hollywood Ever Gets": Headline Pictures, Topical Movies, Editorial Cinema, and Studio Realism in the 1930s', *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film: Volume II,* First Edition, Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundman, Art Simon (eds.) (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 80.

experiences of discrimination, or attempted to expose the perpetrators of prejudice and its wider social effects. The problem's transference between narratives and ethnic groups finds its counterpart in the notion of displacement. Displacement suggests a similar migration between forms that is framed negatively with connotations of avoidance and motivations of convenience, such as *Storm Warning*'s (Warner Bros., 1951) exposé of the Ku Klux Klan that featured only white victims. The tolerance pictures' displacement was an important factor in the critical and trade press' reception of the films, attributed to their nature as a cycle with a restricted time span. Viewed as a group, contemporary critics argued that the films explored the issues faced by different minority groups on a superficial level, and that they effected little substantial change.

The trade press' ongoing commentary across the cycle recorded the story properties variously purchased, developed, dropped, modified, fast-tracked, and shelved. This process of continual adjustment to the directives of audience interest emphasises the degree to which this transference was based on calculations of market absorbency. Facing the consequences of a decline in profits and a sharp drop in audience attendance from 1947, combined with the prospect of theatre divestiture after 1948, the late 1940s were a transitional period for Hollywood. The studios' responses to these circumstances saw a shuffling between various production strategies and the trialling of different distribution and exhibition practices. The form of the anti-prejudice cycle, which contained both Academy Award winning prestige productions and low budget exploitation fare, makes visible many of the studios' shifting activities. While a new mode of prestige film was developed through the success of some of the films, as Chris Cagle has described, an emphasis on realism and socially-relevant material could not always transcend the associations with exploitation.[483]

Many of the distribution and promotional strategies applied by the studios echoed those developed in the previous decade when the moviegoing habit was similarly threatened. In a parallel movement that mirrored the use of the historical biopic's educational qualities, the tolerance cycle was employed in the debates surrounding Hollywood entertainment. The early pictures of the cycle, such as *Crossfire* (RKO, 1947), became associated with subversive communist activity and socialist values as production personnel were called

[483] Chris Cagle, 'Two Modes of Prestige Film', *Screen*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2007), 291-311.

before the House of Un-American Activities (HUAC). The industry's blacklisting of the suspected communist figures involved in these productions worked as a process of disassociation for wider Hollywood. This meant that subsequent films in the cycle could be attached to a more constructive discourse for the industry. There was often a fine line between the cycle's demonstrations of democracy's courageous confrontation with American social issues and a fear that such depictions of pressing social problems might be used against the U.S. in communist propaganda. The cycle was similarly utilised in the battles against local censorship boards in the campaign for constitutional recognition of the medium, with different anti-prejudice pictures featuring in a range of censorship court cases in the early 1950s. The transference and substitution of these pictures among the cases within this campaign suggest the usefulness of the anti-prejudice cycle in the discursive effort to move beyond the image of motion pictures as a profit-centred business of pure entertainment. These films were held up as evidence of a mature, socially-relevant medium that deserved First Amendment protection.

The anti-prejudice pictures' process of transferral, in content, business policy, and rhetorical usage, illustrates the fluidity of the cycle's connection to its surrounding political and social context. Rather than social problem pictures having a directly 'reflectionist' relationship, the connections were nebulous and adaptable. A number of external threats to structure, control, and profit emerged from the late 1940s, including Supreme Court rulings on industry trade practices, the HUAC investigations and a wider economic downturn, generating extensive discussions of ways to mitigate the crisis; studying the processes behind the anti-prejudice films provides insight into the development of Hollywood's stance for the following decade.

Transference and displacement

The anti-prejudice pictures of the late 1940s fit within a larger discursive designation of social problem films or social message pictures. Usually these films were intermittently produced cycles or single films that centred on one particular social ill, such as the prison

system or juvenile delinquency, rather than uniting a range of social concerns within one cycle. This general framework of the social problem film is described by Steve Neale as a critical invention. He notes that the anti-prejudice pictures were a distinct cycle, as well as the start of a longer-term trend for explorations of race relations on film.[484] Chris Cagle's work similarly identifies the post-war pictures as integral to 'social problem films' being recognised and labelled as a genre by contemporary industry practitioners and trade commentators. He identifies a number of different cycles in the post-war social problem films and concludes, 'the social problem film was not a self-contained entity but rather a sensibility that differentiated itself culturally from a wide range of other Hollywood films'.[485] In the case of the anti-prejudice pictures, the nature of the cycle as an ongoing process, however, can be traced across its form and through its decline. This was subject to the edicts of market place, regulated by institutional bodies, and bound to short-term trajectories that necessarily confined its concerns.

As the cycle developed from the late 1940s, several instances of direct transference of the 'problem' between different narrative structures occurred. The first big picture of the cycle, *Crossfire* (RKO, 1947), took the homophobic-motivated murder of the initial story, *The Brick Foxhole*, and transformed it into the anti-Semitic murder of a Jewish man. Jennifer Langdon Teclaw's study of producer Adrian Scott's leftist politics argues that it was not just the PCA's rule against homosexuality that determined the transfer, but a concern with rising reports of anti-Semitism as a possible prelude to fascism in the United States. Langdon argues that *The Brick Foxhole* was chosen from the first with this intention in mind.[486] In a memo to Charlie Koerner and Bill Dozier at RKO, Scott had written:

> This is a story about personal fascism as opposed to organised fascism… Fascism hates weakness in people, minorities. Monty hates fairies, negroes, Jews and foreigners. In the book Monty murders a fairy. He could have murdered a negro, a foreigner or a Jew. It would have been the same thing… Anti-Semitism and anti-negroism will grow unless heroic measures can be undertaken to stop them. This picture is one such measure.[487]

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[484] Neale, *Genre and Hollywood,* 117.
[485] Chris Cagle, *Sociology on Film: Postwar Hollywood's Prestige Commodity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 118, 125.
[486] Jennifer Langdon-Teclaw, 'The Progressive Producer in the Studio System: Adrian Scott at RKO, 1943–1947', *Un-American Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, Steve Neale, Brian, Neve, Frank Krutnik, and Peter Stanfield, (eds.) (New Brunswick, NJ, USA: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 166.
[487] Adrian Scott memo to Charlie Koerner and Bill Dozier, quoted in Jennifer E. Langdon, *Caught in the Crossfire: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Americanism in 1940s Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 147.

The cycle's generalised concept of tolerance was offered to combat an equally broad concern with prejudice and was, in part, a reaction to recent fascist ideologies that had persecuted several minority and ethnic groups. As Chris Cagle describes, in 1947many American liberals 'rhetorically cast racism and prejudice as just incarnations of a broader reactionary turn in American politics'.[488] A wide approach was also viewed as less politically contentious and more palatable for a mass audience.[489] This transference was built into *Crossfire's* story, with the generalisation of the message working as a pre-emptive defensive manoeuvre. Towards the end of the film the police chief recounts his family's own experience of anti-Catholic discrimination to convince a young soldier to help trap the murderer. Initially, this was planned as a flashback, and the PCA's early draft synopsis concludes, 'In view of this speech of the police captain, the story could be defended as being a plea against all forms of racial and religious tolerance. However, the basic story is still open to the charge of being a special pleading against current anti-Semitism'.[490]

A similar act of transfer took place with the adaptation of *Home of the Brave* (United Artists, 1949). The Broadway play's focus on the anti-Semitism experienced by a Jewish soldier was switched to racial discrimination against an African American soldier. Having purchased the rights to the play several years earlier, *Motion Picture Herald* recounts producer Stanley Kramer's argument that this change of theme was not arbitrary:

> He asserts the change developed gradually, influenced by the re-election of Harry Truman, the President's civil rights program and a growing belief that the metamorphosis was local and sound. The fact that one of the features dealing with the "passing" by Negroes for whites had been about completed and a second was about to get underway served to persuade him further that the juncture was at hand for another daring and untried foray into untouched dramatic areas.[491]

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[488] Cagle, *Sociology on Film*, 12.
[489] At one stage in *Crossfire*'s production, the screenplay opened and closed with shots of Washington's Lincoln Memorial, accompanied by a voice over narration that tied the story to a broader historical narrative of anti-Semitism. The narration stated, 'This story began a long time ago… It isn't over yet, either. It began in the time of Genghis Kahn, in the time of Moses, in the time of Jesus Christ, in the time of Attila the Hun – and in time before that… This part of it happened in Washington D.C. in 1946'. First Draft Continuity, 'Cradle of Fear', 12 February, 1947, RKO Collection, Scripts, Box 1227S - Script Files. 1947. Prod. no. 1518., Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles.
[490] 'Crossfire' Synopsis, March, 1947. *Crossfire*, RKO, 1947. History of Cinema, Series 1, Hollywood and Production Code Administration. Herrick Library. *Archives Unbound.* Web. Accessed 16 April, 2015.<http://go.galegroup.com/gdsc/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DA-ASC-SORT&inPS=true&prodId=GDSC&userGroupName=flinders&tabID=T001&searchId=R1&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&contentSegment=&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=3&contentSet=GALE%7CSC5106203664&&docId=GALE|SC5106203664&docType=GALE&viewtype=fullcitation>
[491] Red Kann, 'On the March', *Motion Picture Herald*, 23 April, 1949, 54.

Clearly, the transfers cannot be attributed to any one reason but were tied to the personal motivations of the producers, surrounding social and political events, the precepts of regulating bodies, the presence or absence of similar objects, and appraisals of audience interest. These two instances demonstrate only the most direct forms of transference that took place among the cycle, made legible in the obvious manipulation of a pre-sold property to fit current market conceptions. This transference is equally evident, however, in the moves after 1950 to explore the discrimination experienced by other minority groups, in films that explored themes of prejudice without depicting any minorities, and in the burial of these themes beneath other narrative frameworks. The decisions behind these actions, the processes of mediation, and the interpretations of displacement, reveal the extent to which the cycle's development was determined by market dictums. I will now examine this process in more detail.

The discourse that identified and labelled the anti-prejudice cycle centred on the four successful 1949 'Negro problem' films, *Home of the Brave*, *Lost Boundaries* (Eagle Lion, 1949), *Pinky* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1949), and *Intruder in the Dust* (MGM, 1949). These were discussed by critics and the trade press in relation to the two popular anti-Semitism themed productions of 1947, *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1947). These pictures were accompanied by a range of lower-budget productions and documentaries that examined the same themes of tolerance and carried similar associations with realism, but which were often linked with different labels, including 'exploitation'. As will be discussed further, the social message picture and the exploitation film emerged as interrelated production trends in the post-war years. In 1948, for instance, *Variety* described the growing popularity of the 'semi-documentary' approach, particularly when applied to offbeat and headline pictures that often contain a message.[492] The racial and religious tolerance pictures were situated alongside other 'message' cycles, such as anti-Communist pictures, and the interest in controversial, readily exploitable content, such as drugs, unwed mothers and immigration.[493]

The production of the cycle is often ascribed to a group of liberal-minded Hollywood producers, including Darryl Zanuck at Twentieth Century Fox, Dore Schary at RKO and

[492] Ivan Spear, 'Production Trends for Season Ahead', *Box Office,* 20 November, 1948, 52, 54.
[493] '"Message" Pix Must Have Quality: Negro Themes B.O., Red Cycle Sags', *Variety*, 19 October, 1949, 1, 53. 'Studios Tie into News Headlines, with 50 Exploitation Pix Prepping', *Variety*, 4 May, 1949, 5.

MGM, and independents such as Stanley Kramer and Louis De Rochemont. These men provided fertile ground and support for socially-minded directors, producers and screenwriters, including Edward Dmytryk, Adrian Scott, Elia Kazan, Joseph Losey, and Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Thomas Cripps' work on the late 1940s message pictures describes their production as a continuation of the momentum from the war years.[494] The growth of Hollywood's conscience liberalism had been encouraged by the OWI and figures such as Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), who hoped to establish new standards of racial representation on screen.[495]A suitable narrative framework to introduce substantial Black characters was developed in the multi-ethnic platoons of war films, Cripps contends, with the social problem picture providing a second workable format for the post-war period. Popular documentaries and shorts such as *The Negro Soldier* (Motion Picture Industry War Activities Committee, 1944)*, The Brotherhood of Man* (United States Navy, 1944), and *The House I Live In* (RKO, 1945), worked alongside the anti-Semitism films and exploitation pictures in testing out the new formula. Such pictures were discussed in the contemporary Black press as part of a continuation of the wartime impetus.[496]

Anti-Semitism was the subject of a number of projects in development in 1947. All were based on presold properties: Arthur Miller's *Focus* was planned by the King Brothers at Monogram, Sholem Asch's *East River* at MGM, and Goldwyn's intended adaptation of Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven*, in addition to *Crossfire* at RKO and Twentieth Century Fox's adaptation of Laura Hobson's bestseller, *Gentleman's Agreement*. By June, however, *Variety* reported that all but the final two had been shelved, citing 'the general indisposition to tackle controversial story material' as well as logistical problems with casting clashes.[497] While accounts of the anti-Semitism pictures in the tolerance cycle are usually limited to *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement*, which together netted at least $5,000,000 at the domestic box office, less successful films on the

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[494] Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from WWII to the Civil Rights Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 251.
[495] 'Move Anew to Portray Negro Sensibly in Pix', *Variety*, 27 November, 1946, 1, 55. 'NAACP's White on Negroes in Films', *Variety*, 4 December, 1946, 7, 25.
[496] Cripps, *Making Movies Black,* 207.
[497] 'Pix with Anti-Semitism Themes May Narrow Down to Only 20th's and RKO', *Variety*, 11 June, 1947, 3, 21. For instance, Goldwyn dropped *Earth and High Heaven*, for instance, as his choice of star, Gregory Peck, was already scheduled for *Gentleman's Agreement.*

same topic are often overlooked.[498] For instance, independent crime programmer *Open Secret* (Eagle Lion, 1947), which depicted the anti-Semitism carried out by an organised hate group, was described in the trades as a further entry in the cycle but dismissed by critics for its exploitation angle on the issue.[499] *The Burning Cross* (Screen Guild, 1947) explored racial persecution by the Ku Klux Klan. Coming on the heels of the much publicised racial violence in Columbia, Tennessee, and the Moore's Ford Bridge lynching in Georgia, critical and trade reviews noted that this topical interest provided needed grounds for publicity and exploitation, but that its exhibition would still be restricted to double bills.[500]

Far from 1948 constituting a fallow year between the successful anti-Semitism pictures and the four racial prejudice pictures released in 1949, a number of production plans and scripts under development were announced during the year and viewers continued to consume the earlier films in this interim period. Following its Academy Award win in March, *Gentleman's Agreement* increased theatre bookings, and the majority of audiences viewed it in 1948. Several pictures peripheral to the cycle of prestige tolerance features were also released. The documentary *Strange Victory* (Target Films, 1948), explored the failed fulfilment of the double victory, at home and abroad, that was promised to Black soldiers. It received solid reviews but had limited theatrical release.[501] Message picture *The Boy with Green Hair* (RKO, 1948), formerly a pet project of liberal RKO production head Dore Schary, had been the subject of extensive negotiations over its anti-war content during this period. Howard Hughes attempted to tone down the 'message' elements of pacifism and tolerance when he took over the studio, but it was eventually released in late 1948 in a form closer to the original edit.[502] The independent programmer *Jigsaw* (United Artists, 1949) was also released before the first of the big 'race pictures' in early 1949

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[498] 'Anti-Bigotry Pix Snare $5,000,000 Domestic Profit', *Variety*, 7 July, 1948, 1, 40.
[499] 'Open Secret', *Variety*, 14 January, 1948, 10. Bosley Crowther, 'Some Quickie', *New York Times*, 2 February, 1948.
[500] 'Burning Cross', *Motion Picture Herald*, 26 July, 1947, 3746. 'Burning Cross', *Variety*, 13 August, 1947, 15. Bosley Crowther criticised its reliance on sadistic violence and unintentional condescension towards the film's Black character, 'nor can it be regarded as a thoughtful and literate contemplation of the insidious anti-social and religious philosophy that is propagated in defiance of guaranteed constitutional liberties by the hooded, bullying Klansmen'. Bosley Crowther, 'At the Victoria', *New York Times*, 20 February, 1948.
[501] *Variety* described the film's message: ''Hitlerism, the Negro question, anti-Semitism – all these and more, are unfolded to point up that none of these has been erased because of the "victory"'. 'Strange Victory', *Variety,* 21 July, 1948, 10. 'Strange Victory', *Box Office*, 24 June, 1948, A15, A16.
[502] 'Hughes Wants No "Messages" in Pix; Viz, "Green Hair"', *Variety*, 4 August, 1948, 1-2. 'After 150G Preparation, "Boy" Goes Sans Haircut', *Variety*, 1 September, 1948, 2. 'Finds Cut Version of "Boy with Green Hair" Effective', *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin,* 22 November, 1948, 22. At one point in 1948, the script contained a radio broadcast that described the potential of atomic warfare to completely destroy the human race. 'The Boy with Green Hair' Cutting Continuity, 2 September, 1948. RKO Collection, Box 1290S, Script Files. 1947. Prod. no. 1555, Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles.

with little fanfare. A low-budget film, it was described as a 'murder mystery melodrama into which has been worked a preachment against racial and religious intolerance'.[503] The film focused not on the victims of bigotry but on the exposé of a 'racket' that profited from the exploitation of emergent neo-fascist race hate groups, an approach that was echoed in a later picture in the cycle, *Storm Warning*.

The major studios had previously considered developing features on the theme of racial discrimination against Black Americans, and literary properties such as Sinclair Lewis' *Kingsblood Royal* attracted interest in 1947.[504] A deal for an independent production on the life of baseball star Jackie Robinson was announced in late 1947, but more definite plans did not emerge from the majors until late 1948.[505] At this time Twentieth Century Fox was developing an adaptation of the novel *Quality* and an original story for *No Way Out*. Meanwhile, Louis De Rochemont, who had just made a string of successful semi-documentary crime films at Fox, was hired by MGM to produce *Lost Boundaries* in the same vein, based on a true story published in *Reader's Digest*. In late 1948, however, MGM dropped De Rochement to produce their own picture on the theme, an adaptation of the William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust*. In early 1949, Stanley Kramer's announcement of *Home of the Brave*, which had been filmed in complete secrecy, caught the other producers by surprise and beat them to the market. These four films became the backbone of discussions of the cycle. The nature of their promotional discourse, which described the pictures as important, unprecedented explorations of significant social problems, also determined their critical reception, which evaluated the pictures on the basis of their treatment of racial issues and assessed their overall effectiveness.

Following the release of these four prestige films were a number of productions also identified under the umbrella of tolerance pictures. Several of these films continued the explorations of racial violence and discrimination against African Americans, such as *The Jackie Robinson Story* (Eagle Lion, 1950), *No Way Out* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1950), and *The Well* (United Artists, 1951). Another set of films enfolded Black characters and their experiences of racism into a wider narrative focus, such as *Stars in My Crown* (MGM, 1950), *Bright Victory* (Universal, 1951), *Lydia Bailey* (Twentieth Century Fox,

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[503] 'Jigsaw', *Harrison's Reports*, 12 March, 1949, 43.
[504] 'Negro Theme Stirs Film Story Editors in Sinc Lewis Book', *Variety*, 5 February, 1947, 1, 56.
[505] 'Hollywood News', *Film Daily*, 10 December, 1947, 6.

1952), and *Red Ball Express* (Universal, 1952). *Storm Warning*, already mentioned, explored the bigotry of the KKK without featuring any people of colour, while *The Lawless* (Paramount, 1950) and *Go for Broke!* (MGM, 1951) transferred their explorations of social problems to different minority groups, Mexican Americans and Japanese Americans respectively.

These later films were identified as part of the cycle through their anti-prejudice concerns, and, in most cases, by virtue of a narrative conflict featuring discrimination between different social groups. The trade reviews identified the films as part of a process of transfer and discussed them alongside the wider cycle. *Variety* wrote of *The Lawless*, 'racial tolerance gets a working over ... tolerance topic used is the Mexican-American inequities in California', and *Box Office* described it as 'still another document attacking racial discrimination, this makes a departure in theme and approach'.[506] T. P. Spiro characterised *Go for Broke!* in a similar fashion in his *New York Times* review:

> Hollywood's current concern with the problem of racial and religious prejudice continues to lead movie-makers into new explorations of this apparently inexhaustible subject. Having investigated in a succession of recent pictures the plight of the Negro in a white society and dealt somewhat less fully with anti-Semitism and with alleged discrimination against Mexican-Americans in California, the screen now is about to speak on behalf of the Japanese Americans, or Nisei.[507]

For the studios, the subject was apparently exhaustible, however. Despite occasional exceptions, such as *The Well*, an independent feature exploring the outbreak of a race riot in a small town, films were increasingly described as part of other cycles. *Go for Broke!* was most closely identified by the trades in relation to *Battleground* (MGM, 1950), the previous season's successful war picture that had catalysed a new cycle of combat films.[508] Pictures that had been initially planned as more forthright, inflammatory investigations doused their issues, submerging them beneath other characters and storylines. Schary's 1949 announcements for the upcoming production season at MGM had highlighted 'controversial pictures' as a significant part of the program: *Stars in My Crown* would explore 'a phase of the Negro problem', *It's A Big Country* (MGM, 1951) would include a sequence 'dealing with the Negro', and the studio was in the process of

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[506] 'The Lawless', *Variety*, 12 April, 1950, 6, 22. 'The Lawless', *Box Office,* 8 April, 1950, A15, A16.
[507] T. P. Spiro, 'War Heroism of Nisei Extolled in "Go for Broke"', *New York Times*, 17 September, 1950.
[508] 'Go for Broke', *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin,* 9 April, 1951, 16. 'Go for Broke', *Motion Picture Daily,* 27 March, 1951, 4.

closing a deal on a further 'controversial' property at the time.[509] While *Stars in My Crown* does include a powerful subplot of an attempted lynching of a Black man, played by Juano Hanandez in a role that echoed his performance in *Intruder in the Dust*, this theme was not mentioned at all in the promotion or reviews of the film when it was released in May, 1950.

By the time *Red Ball Express* was released in 1952, it was criticised for its 'phonily presented' treatment of the racial prejudice theme. Crowther commented, 'but since most of the soldiers in the real Red Ball Express were Negro Quartermaster troops led by white officers, the authors had to pay lip service to better race relations and did it in a patronizing and superficial fashion'.[510] This diffusion of the anti-prejudice theme into other cycles and narratives mirrors the process of cyclic decline described in the girl reporter case study: as the initial interest in the topic subsided, the productions were distilled into other frameworks and story formulae. This argument is commonly applied to the 1950s 'Indian westerns', which are described as a receptacle for racial themes in light of an increasingly conservative climate that necessitated the cover of history, allegory or fantasy.[511] *Broken Arrow* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1950) was an early example of a film that explored the historical victimisation of Native Americans by following an interracial romantic storyline. Despite applauding the attempt to move beyond stereotyped depictions, the trade reviews of the film make little connection to the anti-prejudice cycle as a whole.[512] The Black press, however, who were targeted in Fox's publicity campaign, discussed the film alongside the studio's earlier attempts to provide fair portrayals of the 'colored race', while noting that miscegenation had been allowed by the censors and discussing the film's prominent featuring of General Oliver O. Howard, later founder of Howard University.[513]

Displacement, the counterpart of transference, suggests that the same destabilised movement of transfer has an element of evasion in the shift from one form to another. The transferability of the tolerance pictures and the very structure of the cycle as a short-

[509] ''40 on MGM's Schedule Next Year: Schary', *Motion Picture Daily*, 9 November, 1949, 1, 10.
[510] 'Red Ball Express', *Variety*, 30 April, 1952, 6. 'At the Criterion', *New York Times*, 30 May, 1952.
[511] Peter Lev, *Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959*. Vol. 7, *History of American Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 219.
[512] 'Broken Arrow', *Harrison's Reports*, 17 June, 1950, 94. 'Roxy Shows Story of Indians, "Broken Arrow" – Premieres at Capitol and Palace', *New York Times*, 21 July, 1950.
[513] 'Intermarriage with Indian Allowed in "Broken Arrow?", *The Afro-American*, 29 July 1950, 8.

lived, passing pursuit on Hollywood's part, informed the reception of the films by different audience groups. This negative sense of displacement among the pictures can be explored in terms of the content being mediated and repressed by different institutional structures, as well as through the particular assessments made of the films by the Black press and leftist critics. Ellen Scott's work, *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era*, investigates the structures that limited and regulated representations of race, such as the PCA, local censorship boards and the studio production process.[514] Scott argues that in repressing such issues as miscegenation, social equality, and lynching, the attempted erasure by the PCA and filmmakers often left behind traces of indirect representation. Scott identifies a gradual and often contradictory process that took place in these post-war years as the PCA developed a new position on racial representations. Miscegenation, as shown in *Pinky*, was no longer discussed as a 'Code issue' by Joseph Breen. The PCA also displayed greater leniency towards scenes of racial violence and the discussions of these acts as part of broader systems of racial discrimination, although these were more often approved when the victim was not Black, or when the story was derived from a pre-sold property.[515] State censors, on the other hand, often went further than the PCA in their cutting and editing of such images, as they sought to remove broader implications of interracial desire and racial violence. The cycle was part of a gradual loosening of some of the strictures on racial representation. This occurred within the images of the film, as well as in the pictures' deployment in the industry's own battles against outside interference, and in the attempts to challenge the box office myths that supported both internal and external censorship.

The idea of displacement among the pictures is perhaps most evident in the films about tolerance and hate groups that fail to feature any minority victims, such as *Storm Warning*. Scott compares the picture to an earlier film in the cycle, *The Burning Cross*, which is similarly framed as an exposition of the KKK's reign of terror in a small American community. In the former, the racially-motivated violence of the Klan is clearly identified as a means to enforce segregation and white supremacy, while in *Storm Warning* Scott points out that this was 'symptomatically and obviously repressed'.[516] In this film the white victim is shot rather than lynched, the terrorised protagonist is a

[514] Ellen Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Representation and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015).
[515]Ibid., 57.
[516] Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights,* 91, 94.

sophisticated young white woman, and the Klan is portrayed as a gangster-run commercial organisation. Black extras are strategically placed in the crowd scenes around the court house in what Scott argues is an indirect signifier, an attempt to suggest Black interest in the Klan's activities due to the KKK's racist ideology. Nonetheless, the process of displacement is evident in this general shifting of characters and identities that occur across the wider cycle at this time. This might have been employed as a means to avoid censorship, as Scott suggests, while also being a strategy to downplay elements that might have repelled audience groups or provoked accusations of subversive political motives.

The concept of displacement is also fundamental to the pictures' reception by Black critics, who suggested that the form of the cycle inevitably resulted in a failure to effect change. Steven Doles has written about the Black press' reception of the five 'race problem' pictures that centred on African Americans, *Home of the Brave, Lost Boundaries, Pinky, Intruder in the Dust,* and *No Way Out*. Doles argues that the particular descriptions and analysis of these pictures expressed an awareness of the films as a cycle in what he terms 'cycle consciousness'. This, he argues, 'could serve as a prompt for articulating a vision of cinematic history connected with the audience's awareness of its own position within the struggles of its historical moment'.[517] Indeed Bob Davis observed in the *California Eagle* that in proving that Black stories and characters could interest audiences and make money at the box office, further Hollywood explorations would be encouraged. Other commentators were more cynical. [518] 'Doc' Young wrote in the *Afro-American Magazine* in 1951 that the pictures exploring racial problems were merely a passing cycle or fad that failed to improve the positions of Black people in the industry itself, with no long-term contracts offered, white players used for key roles of 'passing' characters, and many of the stereotypes unchallenged.[519] Stories of people of colour, Young argued, were only told once they were raised to the point of hysteria, and attached to a 'message'. He noted that they were almost always accompanied by offensive racial epithets to heighten their sensationalist image, and required a huge amount of publicity to 'put them over'. Instead Young proposed two concrete goals: fair employment for artists of ability and fair screen characterisation. These, he believed, could not be achieved

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[517] Steven Doles, 'Cycle Consciousness and the White Audience in Black Film Writing: The 1949-1950 "Race Problem" Cycle and the African American Press', in *Cycles, Sequels, Spin-Offs, Remakes and Reboots,* ed. Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton Palmer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 86.
[518] Bob Davis, 'Observations on the Negro Movie Cycle', *California Eagle*, 22 December, 1949.
[519] A. S. "Doc" Young, 'Hollywood Through Brown Eyes', *Afro American Magazine*, 15 September, 1951, 9.

through a temporary cycle but only through a grass-roots effort focussed on the commercial interests of the industry, by Black viewers voting with their feet and through correspondence to the studios.

A pamphlet released in 1950, *The Negro in Hollywood Films,* similarly criticised Hollywood's treatment of racial issues in the four central 1949 pictures.[520] Writing from a Marxist perspective, V. J. Jerome stated that Hollywood and Wall Street developed films that seemingly explored these issues but actually diverted attention from many of the more immediate problems faced by Black communities: 'it "tackles" the Negro question only to have us conclude that there is no Negro question – that the problem of the Negro is really the problem of the white man, his "moral" problem'.[521] In his readings of the four films, Jerome noted that, although they represented an important departure from the usual stereotypes of Black people, their status as a cycle worked against the things that they profess to do, actually generating further divisions by strategically reasserting a vision of white supremacy. Young and Jerome's arguments suggested that an ephemeral film cycle was unable to normalise representations and that, by being sold as exceptional, it could actually hinder long-term development.

A criticism common to evaluations of the cycle addressed the structure of the social message pictures whose narrative followed the general framework of problem and resolution. In discussing the pictures, the reviewers continually noted whether or not the films made an attempt to suggest solutions to the issue. A sociological study was carried out on *Crossfire* in 1948, which polled audiences before and after screenings in four test cities. The study found that the film successfully initiated a learning process but did not change base attitudes.[522] Dore Schary, speaking at a Columbia University panel on 'Communication and Human Relations', asserted that the film was not designed to eliminate anti-Semitism, unlike the 'outright bid to smother racism and hatred' in *Gentlemen's Agreement*.[523] Producers sought to avoid the suggestion that they were proposing a solution to the problem. In the discourse surrounding *Pinky,* for instance, it was emphasised that the film was an individualistic exploration that did not present a

[520] V. J. Jerome, *The Negro in Hollywood Films* (New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1950).
[521] Jerome, *The Negro in Hollywood Films*, 45.
[522] Louis E. Raths and Frank N. Trager, 'Public Opinion and Crossfire', *Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 21, No. 6 (1948), 345- 68.
[523] 'Schary Reviews Okay Impact of "Crossfire", *Variety*, 24 November, 1948, 3, 18.

definite answer. Phillip Dunne, who worked on the screenplay with input from Jane White of the NAACP, wrote in a publicity piece:

> Our film will present no one point of view as the definitive one. We try to tell a complete personal story… we have tried to present [the facts] fairly and objectively as we have tried to avoid preaching and confine ourselves to the facts … We are propagandists only in so far as we insist that every human being is entitled to personal freedom and dignity.[524]

As in the case of the wartime propaganda pictures, the producers sought to avoid any direct messages that could be construed as straight 'preachment', but attempted to balance this with entertainment. It was apparent to many observers that the different problems deserved discussion only so long as there was a viable market. The overarching label of tolerance or anti-prejudice presented a less threatening, divisive, or overtly political frame rather than a deeper discussion of the individual problems particular to different minority groups. As Gertrude Gibson wrote in the *California Eagle*, despite a little extra effort in 1949, 'with the release of these films they have really said nothing actually'. Gibson correctly predicted that with *No Way Out* such productions would recede: 'Hollywood will discontinue producing them, for they have done their share towards this problem'.[525] Indeed, Zanuck joked in 1952 that he had now run out of 'controversies' to depict on screen, despite quickly adding the caveat that he was not suggesting the world was without problems.[526] The prejudice pictures illustrate the instance of a film cycle that was united not by a repeated element of character, setting or narrative, but in the general theme of tolerance that was ascribed to them. The transference between problems, minority groups and narrative frameworks was received as a displacement of concern that was inherent to the form of the cycle. The commercial dictates that were a significant aspect of these transfers were themselves part of larger business policies developed within a changing marketplace.

Adjustment and response

The commercial production of a mass media object, such as a Hollywood film, is based on a mutually influential cause and effect process, which is governed by supply and

[524] Red Kann, 'Insider's Outlook', *Motion Picture Daily*, 15 July, 1949, 2.
[525] Gertrude Gibson, '"Typical Hollywood": Excuse the "Yawn" Please', *California Eagle*, 23 February, 1950.
[526] 'What – No Problems?', *Variety*, 11 June, 1952, 19.

demand. The production of cycles was a response to indications of audience receptivity while producers also sought to direct and develop the market towards the type of product they were providing. While the studios were careful in assessing whether audiences would be receptive to the confrontational content of the pictures, their calculations were also driven by ideas of market absorbency. This refers to the rate at which a group of films can be exhibited profitably before the market reaches the point of saturation and audiences are reluctant to consume any more. This became both more challenging and increasingly crucial in the changing circumstances of the late 1940s. Not only was Hollywood beset by internal industrial strife and labor disputes, but the industry also became the focus of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) publicity-driven Anti-Communist probe, faced a decline in attendance and reduction of profit margins, was afflicted by new domestic and international tax policies, and saw the culmination of the ongoing anti-trust suits, which ruled for divorcement.[527] Facing this range of problems, the Hollywood companies actively developed strategies to respond and adjust to the changing climate. The anti-prejudice pictures illustrate the industry's attempts to manage change, actively mediating the market in response to the shifting environment.

In an attempt to break the system of vertical integration, the Supreme Court's 1948 Paramount decision ruled that the major studios must divest their exhibition chains and reform their unfair distribution strategies. Without the affiliated and studio-owned theatre chains' acceptance of bulk product, and with smaller theatres resistant to the prices demanded by the majors, there was no longer a guaranteed market for programmer and lower budget productions. As a result, their production began to subside.[528] John Sedgwick adds that the increasingly unequal distribution of revenues was also a significant factor in shaping the production policy over the next few decades. The top end of the market was able to sustain itself with 'hits', marketed as event films in order to attract increasingly selective filmgoers, while films in the lower rankings performed progressively poorly at the box office. The use of programmers to offset risk as part of the portfolio investment approach was no longer an option.[529] Yet the movement to focus on a 'fewer but bigger' policy did not occur immediately following the Paramount decision.

[527] Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 285-86.
[528] Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema; Second Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 186.
[529] John Sedgwick, 'Product Differentiation at the Movies, Hollywood 1946-1965', *An Economic History of Film,* John Sedgwick, Michael Pokorny (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2005), 188.

The years of the late 1940s were a transitional period in which the studios struggled for solutions to the changing market and industry structure.

Thomas Cripps argues that the 'message' films of 1949 were not timed or part of a planned pattern, but were coincidental in their release as they were rushed into theatres.[530] There were elements of the unplanned to the cycle, in the way that *Home of the Brave* was sprung upon the industry without warning and in the competitive push to complete and release the films. The cycle was portrayed as a 'race' at several points in the trade discourse, particularly in the early months of 1949. Initially, De Rochemont sought to beat Fox to the box office with the release of *Lost Boundaries*, with this intensified by the sudden announcement of Kramer's imminent *Home of the Brave*.[531] This competition to reach the market first suggests that the producers had a firm idea that there was a limited reception for their films. The market for message pictures was treated as having a fast rate of absorbency, able to hold only a small number of these pictures before reaching the point of surfeit. This perception informed Kramer's transfer of *Home of the Brave*'s story to that of a Black soldier, with the trades observing that the anti-Semitism theme was seen to have saturated the market with only a couple of pictures. *Variety* wrote that 'Arthur Laurent's Broadway play originally had an anti-Semitism theme, but the film version, with the thought that this phase might already be overplayed, was switched to point up discrimination against the Negro'.[532] By late 1949 these comments were echoed in relation to *Intruder in the Dust's* relatively poor box office: 'it is believed that one of the reasons for the comparatively tepid grosses is the fact that the cycle is beginning to wear thin'.[533] In 1950, *No Way Out* was referred to in the same way: 'coming as it does on the flag end of the market for social-document films, "No Way Out" will have to depend strongly on full-scale ballyhoo'.[534] These comments suggest that the calculations of market absorbency were dependent not just on picture type, but also on its budget classification and impact. Big prestige productions could bring a premature close to a

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[530] Cripps, *Marking Movies Black*, 221.
[531] 'De Rochemont Racing 20th With Negro Film', *Variety*, 23 February, 1949, 6. 'Kramer's Negro Theme Pic May Overtake Both 20th and de Rochemont', *Variety*, 2 March, 1949, 3, 18. The production of *Home of the Brave* was kept entirely secret and was completed at high speed, from the January rehearsals, with shooting and post-production completed by early April. Thomas F. Brady, 'Hollywood Survey', *New York Times*, 20 March, 1949. 'Film Completed Prior to Production Date', *Motion Picture Daily*, 23 March, 1949, 3.
[532] 'Home of the Brave', *Variety*, 4 May, 1949, 11.
[533] 'Anti-Bigotry Pix Snare $5,000,000 Domestic Profit', *Variety*, 7 July, 1948, 1, 40. '$20,000,000 Boxoffice Payoff for H'wood Negro-Tolerance Pix', *Variety,* 30 November, 1949, 1, 18.
[534] 'No Way Out', *Variety*, 2 August, 1950, 16.

cycle through their more extensive permeation of the market, whereas a programmer's impact was more limited.

The market's rate of absorption had undergone a wider change in the late 1940s. The declining attendance and profits ended the extended runs and bottlenecks of the war years and increased the pace of product through theatres. In December 1946, when the box office was at its peak and exhibitors complained of a product shortage, the majors had pursued a plan of regimented release, matching their output to the 'slow pace of absorption by the market'.[535] The shifting conditions of attendance and the changes in production policy that were occurring from 1947 hastened the market's rate, suggesting that it took less time for product to reach saturation point. Barney Balaban's account of Paramount's production plans in September 1949 touched on this idea as he explained that the company had not scheduled a precise number of pictures or planned their exact releases, but would instead distribute them according to the rate at which the market would be able to absorb product in 1950.[536] This changed absorption contributed to the development of saturation booking, reforms of the run-zone-clearance system to ensure a swifter return of profits to the studios, and the reduction of the studio backlogs.[537]

Climbing production budgets and drops in receipts gave way to new economizing efforts from 1948. The first of these saw an increase in low budget production, often through semi-independent companies attached to a studio, and the development of original stories as an alternative to buying presold properties.[538] When smaller studios Universal and Republic announced in early 1950 that they would be looking to produce big pictures, this was seen as a reverse of the current economy trend. The argument given was that big pictures, or 'leaders' would bulwark an entire season's product and bring in heavier sales bookings from exhibitors by raising the tone of the rentals more generally. This suggests that the investment portfolio approach still held some traction.[539] In 1951, trade reports suggested the downturn might be levelling off and that bigger productions were now able

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[535] 'Shortage of Top Pix Likely to Continue to Preserve '47 Backlog', *Variety*, 4 December, 1946, 6.
[536] '"More Pix, Less Quality"', *Variety,* 7 September, 1949, 3, 2.
[537] 'Starting to Thin Out Backlogs', *Variety*, 12 March, 1947, 9. 'Post-war Prod. Cuts Cash Tills', *Variety*, 23 April. 1947, 9, 18. 'Metro to Double Production', *Variety*, 14 May, 1947, 9, 22. 'Quick Clearance Boomerangs', *Variety,* 8 March, 1950, 3, 61.
[538] Terry Ramsaye, 'Announcing the Bs', *Motion Picture Herald*, 4 October, 1947, 8. '20ths-Fo's 48 Pix for '48, Increase of 15 Over '47', *Variety*, 12 November, 1947, 3, 18. '506 Releases in 1948; Up 39', *Variety*, 19 November, 1947, 8, 18. 'More Pix in 1948 but Fewer As?', *Variety*, 3 December, 1947, 3, 18.
[539] 'More Epics as "B" Pix Pegs', *Variety*, 11 January, 1950, 5, 22.

to generate greater profits. Disregarding the previous season's prioritizing of flexibility and the reluctance to finalise production schedules in advance, the majors returned to long-range planning.[540] In the 1951 season, the studios further increased their production quantities and many included more escapist fare in their portfolios. The trade press viewed this as a swing away from the offbeat and message production trends.[541]

The studios were also exploring different approaches to distribution. After the passing of the Paramount Decree, it was acknowledged that distribution would be the central field of profit following divorcement. A return to flat rate deals was observed in 1947, accompanied by an argument that a sales focus on the big percentage deals with key theatres was more efficient, as the 6,000-7,000 minor houses only represented a small portion of the profits.[542] The following year, however, there was a move back to percentage terms for the next season, followed by an attempt to raise the minimum terms of sliding scale rental deals.[543] In general, the sales seasons of 1949-51 were characterized by an extra forceful and competitive drive from the studios as the majors prepared for the loss of their theatre chains and devoted increased attention to smaller theatres and an individualized sales service.[544] In 1950, however, it was reported that these efforts to gain profit from distribution had been unsuccessful so far, averaging only 6% of the total income, while theatre takings still represented the majority of the net take.[545] There was also experimentation with other forms of booking strategies, such as David Selznick's saturation plan developed for *Duel in the Sun* (Selznick Releasing Organization, 1946), which saw the film open simultaneously across Broadway and outlying New York theatres at a raised admission, or 'hard ticket' price.[546] Although this so-called 'day-and-dating' strategy paid off for Selznick, *Variety* later noted that the majors approached saturation booking cautiously, voicing the fear that its over-use would damage the prestige of the first run.[547] Universal and RKO, who further explored this strategy,

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[540] 'Biz Levelling Off After Reaching Mid-Sept. Peak', *Variety,* 7 November, 1951, 3, 57. 'Pix Back to Top-Priced Novels', *Variety,* 12 September, 1951, 3, 17. 'Top Product in Upturn at B.O.', *Variety,* 12 September, 1951, 1, 54.
[541] Mike Connolly, 'Escapism the Trend Among 68 Pix Going into Prod. In 1st 6 Wks. Of '51', *Variety*, 10 January, 1951, 7, 18.
'Escapism Dominates Par's Early '52 Sked', *Variety,* 14 November, 1951, 5.
[542] '20th's Swing to More Flat Rentals May Pave the Way for Other Distribs', *Variety*, 2 July, 1947. 'Trend to Flat Rentals Grows', *Variety*, 16 July, 1947, 5, 13.
[543] ''Distribs Switch Back from Flat to More % Deals', 28 April, 1948, 3. 'Major Distribs Seek to Hike Basic Figures on Sliding Scale Rentals', *Variety*, 27 October, 1948, 13.
[544] 'Distribs Set for Sales Battle', *Variety*, 23 March, 1949, 5, 18. 'Hottest Sales Rivalry in Years', *Variety,* 25 October, 1950, 3, 20.
[545] 'Big 5's Thin Distrib Payoff', *Variety*, 1 March, 1950, 5, 18.
[546] 'Ingenious Film Booking Ideas, Shorter Runs, Relieve B'way First Run Pile- Ups', *Variety*, 9 April, 1947, 3, 20.
[547] 'Majors Wary of Blitz Booking', *Variety*, 11 June, 1947, 5, 21.

pointed out that it was better suited to certain picture types, including headlines and topical subjects.[548] In Ellensburg, *Pinky* was day-and-dated with its Seattle opening only a month after it was first premiered on Broadway, and *Stars in my Crown* was shown there prior to Seattle, advertised with quotes from locals from a preview screening.[549]

The prominent strategies relevant to the anti-prejudice cycle were those of prestige and exploitation. As Lea Jacobs has written, these types of classifications were often developed in the process of distribution and exhibition, rather than being assigned by production budget alone.[550] The cycle includes examples that were associated with both categories, with films able to rise above programmer or B status through socially relevant content and a new style of realism. Chris Cagle maintains that the late 1940s social problem pictures played a key role in an industrial shift to a new mode of prestige film.[551] The critical and commercial success of tolerance pictures such as *Gentleman's Agreement* verified the use of such features as 'mature' subject matter and demonstrated the commercial viability of semi-documentary realism, which offset the lack of literary content and high production values that were traditionally associated with prestige productions. These industrial shifts were accompanied by cultural changes that included a growing middlebrow legitimation of film as art. Pictures such as *Crossfire* and *Boomerang,* Cagle contends, used social subjects to cross over from a lower-budget classification and achieve a higher cultural status. Dore Schary voiced this sentiment in announcing the RKO schedule in 1947, shortly before the release of *Crossfire*. He stated that an approach based on marketing and surefire box office formula would 'kill' films, and instead argued for the need for the screen to develop a 'point of view'. He added that *Crossfire* was something daring and speculative, an experimental venture that did not require huge spending and which exemplified one of the ways B production could be usefully employed.[552] His argument connected the high purpose of the film to more practical, profit-oriented concerns.

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[548] '"One Punch" Openings and Theatres', *Motion Picture Herald*, 6 August, 1949, 12. In 1949 RKO also followed a strategy for saturation booking for Disney's *So Dear to My Heart*. This modified the set up for *Duel in the Sun*, instead occurring in two waves, opening across 133 theatres on Washington's birthday, followed by a clearance period of seven days before additional screens were added. 'Disney's Blitz Preem for "Heart"', *Variety*, 2 February, 1949, 5.
[549] *Ellensburg Daily Record*, 27 October, 1949. *Ellensburg Daily Record*, 15 July, 1950.
[550] Lea Jacobs, 'The B Film and the Problem of Cultural Distinction', *Screen*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1992), 1-13.
[551] Chris Cagle, 'Two Modes of Prestige Film', *Screen*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2007), 291-311.
[552] 'Schary Blasts "Planned" Film Ideas, Cites Need for Screen to Grow Up', *Variety*, 7 May, 1947, 4, 29.

In January 1946, *Variety* writer Whitney Williams discussed how exploitation pictures were undergoing a shift in meaning.[553] Marketed on the basis of timely or controversial subject matter, these pictures were previously the domain of independent and smaller production companies who were unable to afford marquee names to draw customer interest. In the past year, however, they had increasingly attracted interest from the major studios. Trade reports in 1948 and 1949 affirmed the popularity of readily exploitable subjects.[554] Building on the idea of increasingly individualized picture selling after the Paramount decision, Peter Stanfield suggests that low budget films grew to rely on sensational exploitation as a chief means to differentiate and publicise pictures.[555] He views social problem pictures, such as the 1950s juvenile delinquent cycle, in relation to sensationalist topicality, describing an intensification of the dialogue between film and the public sphere. The trades identified topicality as a production trend at this time, tied to studios' economizing efforts emphasising the in-house development of original stories.[556] Yet exploitation and topicality alone was not enough. *Variety*'*s* comparison of the racial prejudice and communist cycles of 1949 concluded that they performed contrary to industry expectations, with 'quality' the necessary factor for ensuring the success of the anti-prejudice pictures:

> Pointing up the crucial factor of quality, the box-office payoff of the two cycles is a reversal of the trade's general expectations. While the anti-Red pix are riding with the prevailing political wind in America, the pro-Negro films have made good despite the undeniable existence of strong ideological resistance to their themes.[557]

There were a range of promotional strategies employed in relation to the anti-prejudice cycle, much of which depended on their level of prestige aspirations and early critical response. The marketing of the social message pictures, like that of *Ehrlich*, balanced sensational advertising with critical acclaim, which was employed as a mark of prestige.

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553 Whitney Williams, '"Exploitation Pictures" Paid Off Big for Majors, Also Indie Producers', *Variety*, 9 January, 1946, 36.

554 'Studios Tie into News Headlines, with 50 Exploitation Pix Prepping', *Variety*, 4 May, 1949, 5. Ivan Spear, 'Production Trends for Season Ahead', *Box Office,* 20 November, 1948, 52, 54.

555 Peter Stanfield, *The Cool and the Crazy: Pop Fifties Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 15-16.

556 A heightened interest in topical picture production had also been reported in 1932, 1936, and 1941, suggesting that it too was subject to trends and cycles. 'Pictures Venture into New Fields for Cycles: Satires on Politics and Radio Hot', *Variety*, 22 March, 1932, 3. 'Warners' New Headline Pix', *Variety*, 9 December, 1936, 2. 'Pounce on Topical Idea, Sell It Fast, Becomes the Credo of Film Writers', *Variety*, 2 July, 1941, 21.

557 '"Message" Pix Must Have Quality: Negro Themes B.O., Red Cycle Sags', *Variety*, 19 October, 1949, 1, 53.

The marketing plan for *Crossfire,* which trod uncertain ground as the first of the cycle, followed a cautious route that avoided direct reference to anti-Semitism. Barret McCormuch, RKO's head of publicity, argued:

> We don't want people to be kept away from the theatre because they're given the impression that the film is straight pamphleteering … Besides cleverly working its plea for tolerance into the plot, the film is also a fast-moving murder mystery. Patrons will draw their own lessons from the film, once they see it.[558]

Successful previews for *Crossfire* that had been held in both L.A. and New York were worked into the film's trailer.[559] This featured a narration of the production process by Dore Schary, from the initial development stages to the circulation of the script, which 'dealt with a subject that alarmed some people at the studio'.[560] Shots of studio memoranda are accompanied by voiceovers, such as 'are you sure the public will want to see this?' and 'this is very outspoken but have we got enough guts to make it?' The trailer generates interest in an apparently controversial, socially significant and divisive picture without further detailing its precise subject matter. The tagline of the film is simply, 'hate is like a loaded gun'. The lower-budget pictures, despite having similarly socially-minded content, were not always raised in status by their adult concerns in the way that Cagle suggests. While a film such as *Crossfire* could achieve critical recognition and crossover success, able to stand on its own in theatres and being held over for extended runs, many of the later films in the cycle were equally well-reviewed but unable to make such a transition. An examination of the distribution, promotion and exhibition of *The Lawless*, *No Way Out* and *Storm Warning,* released between 1950 and 1951, reveal the points of overlap and departure in this intersection of prestige and exploitation.

Independent production *The Lawless* received the markers of quality associated with prestige productions but was unable to find mainstream success. The film was developed by Pine-Thomas Productions, which was attached to Paramount as a semi-independent company. Known as 'the Dollar Bills', William Pine and William Thomas had a reputation for economical B filmmaking. The film's narrative follows the growing animosity of a small Californian town towards the Mexican-American community when a local Latino teenager is accused of assault. The social concerns of *The Lawless* marked a

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[558] 'RKO to Sell "Crossfire" As Whodunit, Sans Any Anti-Semitism Reference', *Variety*, 18 June, 1947, 3, 55.
[559] J. D. Sprio, 'Hollywood Wire', *Ney York Times*, 6 July, 1947.
[560] RKO, 'Crossfire Trailer', 1947. Online clip, *You Tube*. Accessed on 16 April 2015.
<https://youtu.be/Qf_tJx9SwMk>

new direction for the Pine-Thomas company and for Paramount, which, if successful, would lead to further social message productions.[561] A few weeks before the release of *The Lawless*, a publicity piece by screenwriter Geoffrey Homes was published in the *New York Times*, which described the production in terms of the prestige mode of social realism.[562] Homes stated of Pine and Thomas, 'They are practical men, not at all averse to making money, even if it involves a spate of social consciousness. Anyway, they agreed to a hero who isn't two-fisted, a heroine named Garcia, and a couple of boys who are kicked around because their skins have an olive tinge'. The sixteen-day location shoot is then described, with Homes noting how the pressures of time and money forced the incorporation of weather conditions, local interiors and townspeople as extras; 'far from hurting the film, this method of shooting gave it reality'. Homes noted too how their heavy film equipment was left behind on some shoots in favour of a lighter French camera and hand-held microphone, which tied the filmmaking to the neorealist methods emerging from Europe at the time. The progressive stance of the film was cemented through the use of outspoken journalist Drew Pearson, who had recently published a series of columns attacking Senator Joe McCarthy, and who was secured to introduce the trailer and provide copy for the ads.[563] At the same time, this content was morally sanctioned though an award from the Parents' Institute, which was featured on the film's poster. Special screenings of the film, attended by star Macdonald Carey, were held for civil liberties organisations and 'policy-making individuals' from the realms of law, labor, politics and public relations, as well as journalists, in an effort to ensure the film's promotion reached a wider range of newspaper readers.[564] Like the films in the cycle before it, Paramount was clearly making a bid for prestige in forging these connections.

The Lawless was incorporated into both a Pine-Thomas sales drive and Paramount's 'Golden Harvest Sales Drive of 1950', which ran from September to December and offered cash prizes as incentives to the sales force.[565] For the distribution, Pine-Thomas recommended a slow approach with long runs at smaller houses to build word of mouth

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[561] 'Pine-Thomas to Lens More "Significant" Pix if "Lawless" Clicks', *Variety,* 10 May, 1950, 5, 14. 'More "Controversial" Themes Go On Pine-Thomas Schedule', *Motion Picture Daily*, 5 May, 1950, 2.

[562] Geoffrey Homes, 'New Study of Migratory Workers in California', *New York Times*, 5 March, 1950.

[563] 'Pearson Pitch in Trailers, Ads', *Motion Picture Daily*, 24 April, 1950, 3.

[564] 'Special Groups See "Lawless"', *Motion Picture Daily,* 6 April, 1950, 7.

[565] 'Schwalberg Slates 17 Pictures for Pine-Thomas Drive', *Motion Picture Daily*, 9 August, 1950, 6. 'Paramount "Harvest" Sales Drive Starts', *Motion Picture Daily*, 1 September 1950, 1, 4. Pine-Thomas made the unprecedented move of offering 10% of the film's profits to branch managers who attended a sales convention in June. 'To Share "Lawless" Profit', *Motion Picture Herald*, 13 June, 1950, 11.

before wider circuit bookings.[566] The film premiered in San Antonio, Texas, a major centre for Mexican American immigration, taking a different approach to the social problem films of the previous year which avoided early openings in the South. This was followed by eight further pre-release engagements at cities throughout the country, before general release the following month.[567] The picture was well received by critics, one reviewer stating 'Immediate comparison is inevitable with another courageous experiment of a few seasons back … *Crossfire*, which proved an opening salvo in the cinematic battle on behalf of minorities'.[568] Despite such praise, the key city openings, with the exception of San Francisco, were generally mild.[569] The picture reached subsequent runs in small towns throughout 1951, often playing as part of a double bill. Like the critics, exhibitors were full of praise for the film. A theatre owner from Fruitia, Colorado, hoped his screening 'did some good' for his town with a large Hispanic-American population, while a North Dakotan exhibitor lamented that the gangster associations kept the patrons of the 'goody goody' town away, regardless of his best advertising efforts.[570] Despite their positive views of the film, the exhibitors described lacklustre business.

No Way Out, written by Lesser Samuels in 1948, was the subject of a bidding war between Paramount, Universal, Warner Bros., Columbia and Fox, which forced the price of the screenplay up to $87,500.[571] The film was released shortly after *The Lawless* in October 1950. Zanuck had planned *No Way Out* as a deeper exploration into some of the issues raised in *Pinky* and although they were developed at the same time, *No Way Out*'s release was held until the start of the next season 'so that it doesn't suffer from being caught currently at the tail end of the cycle of Negro-themed pix'.[572] While this film did secure profits at the box office, its impact was far more limited than Fox's predecessors in the cycle, *Gentleman's Agreement* and *Pinky*. *No Way Out* follows the experience of a

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[566] 'More "Controversial" Themes Go On Pine-Thomas Schedule', *Motion Picture Daily*, 5 May, 1950, 2.
[567] 'Eight Pre-Release for Para.'s "Lawless"', *Motion Picture Herald*, 29 May, 1950, 6.
[568] 'The Lawless', *Footlight*, 4 August, 1950.
[569] Omaha, Orpheum theatre w. Barron orchestra, light $15,000. 'Picture Grosses', *Variety,* 11 October, 1950, 11. L.A., Hollywood Paramounts, with *Shot Billy the Kid*, fair $20,000. 'Picture Grosses', *Variety,* 2 August, 1950, 10. San Francisco, St Francis theatre, great $15,000. 'Picture Grosses', *Variety,* 21 June, 1950,11. Philadelphia, Earle theatre, thin $9,500, *Variety*, 5 July 1950, 9. Minneapolis, Lyric theatre, mild, $3,800, *Variety*, 30 August, 1950, 8. New York, Astor theatre, first week 'satisfactory' $15,000, second week $14,000, 'meeting requirements', third week at the Astor a 'dull' $5,000, *Motion Picture Daily*, 5 July, 1950, 2. *Motion Picture Daily*, 12 July, 1950, 4.
[570] 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: The Lawless', *Boxoffice,* 4 August, 1951, B2. 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: The Lawless', *Boxoffice*, 9 June, 1951, A3. 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: The Lawless', *Boxoffice,* 25 November, 1950, A3.
[571] 'New Hollywood Enterprise', *New York Times*, 9 January, 1949, 5.
[572] 'Ruth Chatterton Novel Points Up Growing Studio Interest in Problem Pix', *Variety*, 12 April, 1950, 3. 21.

Black doctor whose patient, a petty crook, dies under his care. When his bigoted brother accuses the doctor of murder, a race riot erupts. As a divisive film shown only in an edited version in many states, *No Way Out* was unable to obtain the universal approval usually required of prestige pictures. While many critics applauded the film for its uncompromising, progressive stance, its sensational approach was criticised by others.[573] The Negro Publishers Newspaper Association, for instance, wrote to Eric Johnston with regard to the use of racial epithets in *No Way Out*. While Col. Jason Joy defended the language as an emphatic indictment of the particular character's bigotry, the Newspaper Association argued that such a dramatic effect could be otherwise achieved without adding to the vocabulary of hate speech.[574]

Like *The Lawless*, *No Way Out* formed part of a studio-wide, $2 million campaign from Twentieth Century Fox that attempted to change the moviegoing habits of viewers and encourage greater attendance from selective moviegoers.[575] A specially selected cabinet of public relations experts was assembled for the promotion under Charles Einfeld and given a budget of $400,000.[576] Part of this drive saw an advertising blitz in the run up to the film's New York premiere, with major newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* running successive teasers that culminated in full-page spreads tying the picture in to Fox's history of progressive filmmaking.[577] At the same time, the distinctive modernist design of the promotional material, developed by Erik Nitsche, Paul Rand and Saul Bass, was featured in a concurrent exhibition of the history of film advertising at the American Associated Artist Galleries. One of the film's stars,

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[573] Christopher Kane applauded the picture, 'Everything Darryl Zanuck failed to do in *Pinky* – and I persist in thinking that that wasn't a very effective picture – he's made up for in *No Way Out*. Here is a film so brave, and uncompromising, and emotionally racking, they'll say it isn't "entertainment". 'No Way Out', *Modern Screen*, October, 1950, 14. Hollis Alpert pointed out the discomfort created by the film and argued that the industry was 'ducking its responsibility when it insists upon casting its problem films in sheerly melodramatic terms'. Hollis Alpert, *Saturday Review*, 2 September, 1950, 28-29. *Saturday Review*, 14 October, 1950.

[574] Letter from Carl Murphy, Vice-President of the Negro Publishers Newspaper Association to Eric A. Johnston, 20 October, 1950. Letter from Jason S. Joy, Director of Public Relations at Twentieth Century Fox, to Joseph Breen, 3 November, 1950. Letter from Carl Murphy, Vice-President of the Negro Publishers Newspaper Association to Eric A. Johnston, 15 November, 1950. *No Way Out,* Twentieth Century Fox, 1950. History of Cinema, Series 1, Hollywood and Production Code Administration. Herrick Library. *Archives Unbound.* Web. Accessed 16 April, 2015. <http://go.galegroup.com/gdsc/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DA-ASC-SORT&inPS=true&prodId=GDSC&userGroupName=flinders&tabID=T001&searchId=R1&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&contentSegment=&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=13&contentSet=GALE%7CSC5106212508&&docId=GALE|SC5106212508&docType=GALE&viewtype=Manuscript>

[575] '$2-million Set for 20th Fox Ads to Jan. 1', *Motion Picture Daily*, 29 July, 1950, 1, 3.

[576] '"Cabinet" to Promote 20th's "No Way Out"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 12 July, 1950, 2.

[577] 'Full-Page Newspaper Ads for "No Way Out"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 16 August, 1950, 4.

Linda Darnell, was also engaged for appearances across the city's theatres, posing for photos with the mayor and selling tickets at the box office as a gimmick.[578]

Figure 18. Designer Paul Rand next to a New York billboard advertising the premiere of *No Way Out*, 1950.

The New York premiere of *No Way Out* at Broadway's Rivoli theatre was described in *Variety* as having a fast opening, aided by favourable reviews of the film, before slumping slightly, but regaining ground over the Labor Day weekend.[579] Following the Broadway premiere, *No Way Out* then opened in a series of special engagements across key Northern and Mid-Western cities to take advantage of the New York publicity push. Trade reports in October noted that 123 playdates had been secured and a total of 36 extra weeks of playing time were calculated from recent holdovers.[580] Further publicity was generated by the police ban of the film in Chicago, and the outcry from local and national organisations that led to the restriction being lifted.[581] The picture achieved greater box office in the metropolitan centres, with Zanuck claiming to have already written off at

[578] Red Kann, 'Insider's Outlook', *Motion Picture Daily*, 18 August, 1950, 4.
[579] 'Picture Grosses', *Variety,* 23 August, 1950, 10.
[580] 'Special Engagement for Zanuck Picture', *Motion Picture Daily*, 29 June, 1950, 4. 'Extended Release of 20th's "Now Way Out"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 29 September, 1950, 2. '123 Key-City Dates for "No Way Out"', *Motion Picture Daily,* 5 October, 1950, 2. 'No Way Out" Gains Extra Playing Time', *Motion Picture Daily*, 18 October, 1950, 2.
[581] 'Lift "No Way Out" Ban in Chicago', *Motion Picture Daily*, 31 August, 1950, 1, 4. 'Chicago Censors Slap Ban on "No Way Out" Film', *Afro-American*, 2 September, 1950, 3.

least 3,000 accounts in the South in the planning stage.[582] Again the exhibitors in small towns responded favourably to the picture but described the lack of appeal for their patrons and complained that the publicity was skewed towards city audiences.[583] Several exhibitors declared that their customers were increasingly demanding different subject matter, including films for relaxation and entertainment.[584] *No Way Out* was commercially successful, securing $1,350,000 after five months and around 2,000 playdates, but still fell short of *Pinky*'s $3,800,000.[585] Despite Zanuck's effort to hold off the film to prevent too close a release to the previous year's pictures, *No Way Out* still reached a market already saturated with message films.

Launched at the end of January the following year, *Storm Warning* was the only Warner Bros. entry in the cycle. Producer Jerry Wald had been working on the film since 1948. In a letter to Steve Trilling in August Wald urged the executive to accelerate the production and try to beat MGM's rival production, *Intruder in the Dust*, in the same way that *Crossfire* had beaten *Gentleman's Agreement* to the box-office.[586] A year later, Wald voiced his fears of a saturated market to Irv Kupcinet of the *Chicago Sun Times* and described his vision for a different product:

> I also feel that there are too many minority problems being put on the screen and not enough majority race problems. Most of the agents in Hollywood spend their time trying to find a new minority race to do a film about and it's getting so that every time an agent says, "I have a new subject matter for you", I shudder and say, "Now what new race of people has this gent dug up?" Too many of the producers are rushing to make topical stories with typical plots and this must react unfavourably in the long run. What we are trying to do in "Storm Centre" is to tell the story of a community in which an act of violence is committed by the Klan. The point that we are trying to make is, "who is more guilty – the people who belong to the Klan, or the people who just turn their backs and say, "it's none of my business."[587]

[582] Zanuck to Lesser Samuels, 1 February, 1949, quoted in Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights*, 130-31.
[583] 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: No Way Out', *Boxoffice*, 17 March, 1951, B4. 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: No Way Out', *Boxoffice*, 28 April, 1951, A4.
[584] 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: No Way Out', *Boxoffice*, 21 December 1950, A4. 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: No Way Out', *Boxoffice*, 16 June, 1951, B3.
[585] 'War Pix Among Top '50 Grossers', *Variety*, 3, January, 1951, 59.
[586] Letter from Jerry Wald to Steve Trilling, 24 August, 1948. "Storm Warning" Research, File 1018. Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California.
[587] Letter from Jerry Wald to Irv Kupcinet, 11 November, 1949. "Storm Warning" Research, File 1018. Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California.

The publicity at this early stage in the production centred on Lauren Bacall's refusal of the role as part of a battle against her contractual terms with the studio.[588] She was replaced by Ginger Rogers, who starred alongside other up-and-coming names such as Ronald Reagan and Doris Day. Shot on location in Corona, California, which stood in for a typical Southern town, the film was based on a hard hitting exposé story written by Richard Brooks, author of *The Brick Foxhole*. While the trades believed that those elements could be converted to good business, *The Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin* noted that it was not the type of picture that usually found general success, adding that it was unsuitable for average family theatres, but would find strong grosses in action houses and art houses.[589] The pressbook also recommended special handling for the film, stating '"Storm Warning" is the kind of picture for which an Advance Screening (Exchange Centers and wherever else possible) can do much good'.[590]

The premiere of *Storm Warning* took place in Miami with the four lead actors in attendance, and was tied to a benefit for the local children's hospital. An editorial from the *Miami News* took the opportunity to query whether Hollywood, in exploring latent American fascism in the film, was failing to examine the equally dangerous extreme of Communism.[591] The trade reviews similarly located the film in relation to the contemporary political climate, albeit ambivalently. *Motion Picture Herald* argued that 'in these troubled days with 'democracy on the defense', the picture is a tribute to the producers and the country in which it was allowed to be made.[592] T. P. Harrison, however, was wary that the picture could 'do considerable harm to the national interest' as it could be utilised by communists for anti-democracy propaganda.[593] Others criticised the film as somewhat insincere: 'Unfortunately for the film's highly touted crusading intent, no mention is made of the fact that the Klan's usual victims are a good deal duskier in complexion that the blonde Miss Rogers … [it] is aimed more at breaking box office records than it is at breaking a nefarious brotherhood'.[594] Although the film was well received otherwise, these early mixed responses may have tempered the studio's decisions regarding any further push for crossover success.

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[588] *Hollywood Reporter*, 21 October, 1949. "Storm Warning" Research, File 1018. Warner Bros. Archives, USC.
[589] 'Storm Warning', *Motion Picture Daily,* 6 December, 1950, 4. 'Storm Warning', *Variety*, 6 December, 1950, 15. 'Storm Warning', *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin*, 29 January, 1951, 17.
[590] 'Storm Warning' pressbook, Warner Bros., 1951.
[591] 'Inside Stuff- Pictures', *Variety*, 4 April, 1951, 15.
[592] 'Storm Warning', *Motion Picture Herald*, 9 December, 1950, 605.
[593] 'Storm Warning', *Harrison's Reports*, 9 December, 1950, 195.
[594] 'Storm Warning', *Saturday Review*, 10 March, 1951.

After the late January screening in Miami, *Storm Warning* opened across smaller cities the following week, including Louisville, Portland, St Louis, and Cleveland, before hitting Boston, L.A., San Francisco and others the week after. When the film reached the Strand theatre on Broadway in March, it was teamed with a stage performance by Josephine Baker. Rather than using this as an opportunity to exploit any social message or progressive angles, the advertisements downplayed the film in favour of the stage show, in an apparent attempt to capture the 'carriage trade and long hairs'.[595] The three-week showing at the Strand was declared a smash solely for Baker's show and the film achieved average grosses in its key openings elsewhere despite strong reviews.[596] Rather than the cultural aspirations associated with prestige, the promotion of *Storm Warning* was accompanied by more sensationalist ballyhoo methods, particularly in smaller locations. In Madison, Wisconsin, ushers dressed in Klan costumes to hand out leaflets downtown.[597] In a small town in Georgia, a local newspaper editorial praising the theatre manager for booking the film was written in response to early local grumblings. The exhibitor's exploitation included a six-foot electronic cross hanging above the theatre, a mock herald headlined with 'Under the White Hood He Was Pure Yellow', and an offer of free admission to any local Klansmen who came along dressed up in full regalia.[598] An Arkansas exhibitor also praised the film, noting that it was the first of the 'heavy dramas' to do well in the town, and commenting 'we're glad to see sides definitely taken against the Klan. Right or wrong, we believe the public would rather see a definite stand in such issues than the adoption of wishy-washy attitude'.[599] Other small town exhibitors were less enthusiastic about its suitability for their locations, while one noted that 'Except for the Klan background it is just another cops-and-hoodlum affair'.[600] *Storm Warning* just made the threshold for *Variety's* annual 'top grossers' list, at $1,250,000, placing it behind *No Way Out*'s box office, but ahead of *The Lawless*.[601]

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[595] 'Inside Stuff –Pictures', *Variety*, 14 March, 1951, 16.
[596] Boston, Fenway, with *North Great Divide,* not too strong $5,000. 'Picture Grosses', *Variety*, 31 January, 1951, 8. Dallas, State theatre, okay $5,800. 'Picture Grosses', *Variety*, 31 January, 1951, 8. Washington, Warner theatre, fine $16,000. 'Picture Grosses', *Variety*, 28 February, 1951, 20. Denver, Webber theatre, with. *Blondie to College*, sock $8,000. 'Picture Grosses', *Variety,* 7 March, 1951, 8.
[597] 'Klansman Ballyhoo "Storm Warning", *Box Office,* 24 February, 1951, 35. This is reminiscent of the exploitation of the early KKK expose, *The Burning Cross*, where a fake lynching was set up with a dummy and spotlight in the Bronx. 'Hanging Party Exploits "The Cross" in Bronx', *Box Office*, 25 September 1948, 45.
[598] 'Editorial in Newspaper Aids "Warning" in Georgia', *Boxoffice*, 9 June, 1951, 33.
[599] 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: Storm Warning': *Box Office,* 16 June, 1951, B3.
[600] 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: Storm Warning': *Box Office*, 12 May, 1951, A3. 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: Storm Warning', *Box Office,* 2 June, 1951, B3.
[601] 'Top Grossers of 1950', *Variety*, 3, January, 1951, 58. 'Top Grossers of 1951', *Variety*, 2 January, 1952, 70.

The distribution, exhibition, and reception of these three films illustrate how they remained tied to the pejorative connotations of low budget films, including the sensationalist treatment of social problems, despite the studios' attempt to position them for a crossover success comparable to *Crossfire*. Such approaches could also be viewed disparagingly as feeding into anti-American propaganda, or for the misuse of melodrama and hateful language to cause shock and generate publicity. While the films were well-reviewed by critics, and often supported by exhibitors, this critical acclaim did not translate into box office success, particularly in the rural and small town market sector. One of the underlying reasons for this was the absorbency of the market. By 1950, the pendulum was seen to be swinging away from social problem pictures. Offbeat pictures were subject to increasing criticism in reception, as small town exhibitors repeatedly reported that they were unsuitable for their situations.[602] An exhibitor from Columbia City, Indiana, had reported of *The Boy with Green Hair* back in 1949, 'We had to look carefully to see if green grass was growing in the aisles on the second day of this opus. We have never had a more disgusted and irritated audience than on this one. Supposed to carry a message but if so the public are getting fed up with messages'.[603] The majority of exhibitors agreed that the problem pictures 'do have a place in theatres', but expressed the familiar anxiety that, as with any cycle, they could 'surfeit the public and convert a theatre from a place of relaxation into a forum for social issues'.[604] In early 1951 several reports from showmen claimed that this audience indifference was growing.[605] A survey of 22,300 patrons conducted by exhibitors in Detroit found that, given the choice, viewers would choose lighter entertainment over problem films, with many stating that their reasons for attending the cinema was for relaxation and escapism. The sensationalised aspect of the films was described as part of the backlash: 'moviegoers said that particularly obnoxious were the type of problem films which humiliated minority, racial and religious groups by reviving nicknames and expressions that have long since been forgotten'.[606]

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[602] 'Showmen Wary on Problem Pictures; Fear Cycle May Surfeit Audience', *Showmen's Trade Review*, 5 November, 1949, 13.
[603] 'What the Picture Did for Me: The Boy with Green Hair', *Motion Picture Herald*, 16 April, 1949, 54.
[604] 'Wary on Problem Pictures; Fear Cycle May Surfeit Audience', *Showmen's Trade Review*, 5 November, 1949, 13.
[605] H. Blank, 'Midwest Showmen Wants "Earthy", Not Problem Pix; Thinks H'wood Salary Levels Can Be Trimmed', *Variety*, 3 January, 1951, 23.
[606] Fred Tew, '"No Problem Pix" Survey Shows', *Variety*, 24 January, 1951, 3, 14.

Social problem films, premised on controversial and potentially divisive content, introduced a greater degree of uncertainty and risk. This was often represented in the spectre of the Southern box office. The Southern box office was frequently conjured by producers addressing controversial content, and became, according to Thomas Cripps, a 'monolithic creature' that dictated the images of race that emerged from Hollywood.[607] Cripps argues that this assumption was largely unsupported; the South had a lower box office in general, but there was no indication that this was related to racial themes and the trades were often wrong in such predictions. Instead, Cripps believes, it allowed the industry to create 'a myth of their own innocence'.[608] The anti-prejudice cycle was used to test this myth while acknowledging the growth of the overlapping market sector of Black viewers.

Trade reports from *Motion Picture Daily* detail the increasing recognition of the commercial potential of the Black audience in this period. Arthur Knight, in his work on Black moviegoing in the small town South, argues that such cinema culture may have been more extensive than many scholars have supposed. Using data from the *Film Daily Yearbook,* Knight identifies a marked increase of theatres catering to specifically Black audiences in the post-war period, and in the South in particular. The total number rose from approximately 442 in 1945 to 925 in 1950, reaching 1,045 in 1955.[609] *Motion Picture Herald* reported on this expansion of Black theatres in 1947, while also describing newly developed advertising campaigns that included or were specifically directed at African American audiences.[610] With theatres designated as private rather than public spaces by law, the desegregation of theatres did not gain momentum until the late 1950s.[611] There is a single mention of *Home of the Brave* providing an opportunity to

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[607] Thomas Crips*,* *Slow Fade to Black*, 110.
[608] Thomas Cripps, 'The Myth of the Southern Box Office: A Factor in Racial Stereotyping in American Movies, 1920 – 1940'm, *The Black Experience in America: Selected Essays*, James C. Curtis, Lewis L. Gould (eds.) (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1970),116-144.
[609] Arthur Knight*,* 'Searching for the Apollo: Black Moviegoing and its Contexts in the Small-Town U.S. South', *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyest, Philippe Meers (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2011), 230.
[610] 'Negro Theatre an Expanding Field', *Motion Picture Herald*, 12 April, 1947, 18. 'Manager's Round Table', *Motion Picture Herald*, 2 August, 1947, 47. 'SAG Warns Members on Signing Contracts', *Motion Picture Daily*, 2 September, 1947, 4. At the same time, radio was also being explored as holding a significant market sector of Black Americans. Kathy Newman argues that this economic recognition was seen as one route to break down segregation, with civil rights' equation with the right to consume good for the economy as well as race relations. Kathy M. Newman, 'The Forgotten Fifteen Million: Black Radio, The "Negro Market" and the Civil Rights Movement', *Radical History Review*, Vol. 76 (2000), 119. See also 'That Negro Market: How to Tap $15 Billion in Sales', *Time Magazine*, 5 July, 1954, 70.
[611] Robert C. Allen, 'Race, Region and Rusticity: Relocating U.S. Film History', *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema,* Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes, Robert C. Allen (eds.) (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 25-44. Thomas Doherty, 'Race Houses, Jim Crow Roosts and Lily White Palaces: Desegregating the Modern Picture Theatre', *Going to the Movies*, 196-214.

stage a peaceful protest against a theatre's segregation policy in Austin, Texas.[612] With increasing concerns about the 'lost audience' generated by declining attendance, the Black audience market, with a weekly attendance around 3,500,000 a week was calculated to be worth $13,000,000 in 1953. Many white exhibitors, however, concluded that 'race' productions were unprofitable and that Black audiences were content with mainstream Hollywood products.[613]

The industry used the cycle to test the Southern market for social problem films. The South was continually held up as a potential barrier to successive pictures in the cycle. Although each film served to break down conceptions of the Southern box office's receptivity, the discourse remained a useful means to promote the courage of the picture and differentiate it from other films in the cycle, each seeking to go further than the last. In the case of the anti-Semitism pictures, the trade press remarked that the South was generally resistant to such controversial subjects. *Gentleman's Agreement*, which explicitly referenced the anti-Semitism of three Southern politicians in its dialogue, was noted for performing far better in the South than the studio expected, where it became Fox's second highest grosser of all time.[614] *Home of the Brave* was thought of as uncompromising and likely to stir up opposition in Southern communities for its general theme of racial discrimination. The film was screened for Southern exhibitors who were enthusiastic, and launched there after being screened throughout the North.[615] When such films did open in the South, they played in theatres that could accommodate a segregated audience, and were accompanied by a strong publicity push that was followed by reports of success, as a means to encourage further exhibitor bookings.[616] Although United Artists had reportedly written off any Southern receipts for *Home of the Brave*, this was revised when it opened to surprisingly good business in Dallas and Huston, and Stanley Kramer later concluded that the South was a 'walkover'.[617] *Pinky* was described as even

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[612] '"Message" Pix Must Have Quality: Negro Themes B.O., Red Cycle Sags', *Variety*, 19 October, 1949, 1, 53. *Variety* records that 'a group of hotheads tangled with the picketers but the fight was quickly suppressed'.
[613] 'Despite High Weekly Draw, Pix Aimed at Negro Audiences Don't Pay Off', *Variety,* 12 August, 1953, 7, 16.
[614] '"Agreement" 2th's Top Grosser This Year, $3,900,000', *Variety*, 22 December, 1948, 3, 16.
[615] 'See No Problems in Selling "Brave"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 27 April, 1949, 4. While *Home of the Brave* cost under $500,000 to produce, it was allocated a $250,000 advertising budget for a campaign targeting mass circulation magazines, periodicals and the Black press. 'Kramer Budgets $250,000 for "Home of Brave" Ads', *Showmen's Trade Review*, 16 April, 1949.
[616] 'Atlanta "Pinky" Reaction Keys 20th-Fox in Setting Other Deep South Dates', *Variety*, 23 November, 1949, 25.
[617] '"Home of the Brave" in Dallas, Huston Without Tension', *Motion Picture Herald*, 16 July, 1949, 21. 'Press Like "Brave" in Dallas, Houston', *Motion Picture Daily*, 11 July, 1949, 11. '"Brave" Big Draw in First Southern Date', *Motion Picture Daily*, 8 July, 1949, 2. '"Brave" at Under 300G, "Champion" About 525G, Spell Bif SP Profit', *Variety,* 27 July, 1949, 4.

more risky for the 'vivid and uncomplimentary' Southern setting of racial intolerance, and *Intruder in the Dust* as particularly hard-hitting for its racial lynching storyline set in Oxford, Mississippi.[618] *Pinky*'s success in its first Southern booking in Atlanta, where it grossed over $13,000 in its first four days, led to a schedule for simultaneous openings in New Orleans, Oklahoma City and Miami.[619] These Southern successes led *Variety* to venture in 1949, 'As against forebodings that the films would cause racial friction, events in the last couple of months have proved that even the Deep South may be changing their traditional attitudes'.[620]

Looking back on the cycle in 1954, however, *Variety* found that, despite the acceptance of the prestige films in the South, this was not necessarily the reception granted to later social problem films.[621] Independent productions *The Joe Louis Story* (United Artists, 1953) and *Go Man Go* (United Artists, 1954) both faced difficulty in booking Southern playdates. Sterling Silliphant, producer of *The Joe Louis Story*, recounted the resistance he experienced from southern exhibitors who warned him that he would not get any bookings in white houses; 'there was a kind of whispering campaign that we intended to press down hard on the racial issues, which wasn't true at all'.[622] Demonstrations in New Orleans ultimately caused *Go Man Go* to be pulled from the cinema, which was seen as a surprise after the sports picture *The Jackie Robinson Story* had been successfully booked there in 1950. The paper ventured that the earlier films' success was due to the fact that 'they ignore racial controversy theme and concentrate on the people involved. Such pix as "Pinky" and "Lost Boundaries" roused the South by hitting at an existing problem and providing a jumping-off point for anti-censorship moves'.

While in 1957, some Southern television stations were willing to book the package of *Go Man Go* and *The Jackie Robinson Story*, the release of *Island in the Sun* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1958), with its controversial depiction of miscegenation, revealed that the

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[618] 'Home of the Brave', *Motion Picture Daily*, 29 April, 1949, 1, 3., 'Home of the Brave', *Motion Picture Daily*, 29 April, 1949, 1, 3. 'Pinky', *Harrison's Reports,* 1 October, 1949, 159.. 'Intruder in the Dust', *Harrison's Reports*, 15 October, 1949, 167. Zanuck had voiced his determination to screen *Pinky* in the South, even if the studio would have to rent their own theatres to do so. 'Will Show "Pinky" in South: Zanuck', *Motion Picture Daily*, 21 September, 1949, 10. The film was perceived as more forceful than the previous entries for its decision to set the story in the deep South itself, which was predicted to meet strong resistance, 'there may be some situations where courageous theatre owners will play it, but undoubtedly a majority will choose to skip the picture of southern decadence and "poor white" sadism which it presents'. Bosley Crowther, 'Look Away Dixieland', *New York Times*, 9 October, 1949.
[619] 'Atlanta "Pinky" Reaction Keys 20th-Fox in Setting Other Deep South Dates', *Variety*, 23 November, 1949, 25.
[620] '"Message" Pix Must Have Quality: Negro Themes B.O., Red Cycle Sags', *Variety*, 19 October, 1949, 1, 53.
[621] 'South Still Snubs Negro Films', *Variety*, 7 April, 1954, 5, 18.
[622] 'Publicist-Turned-Producer Details Problem of "Joe Louis" Prejudice', *Variety*, 18 November, 1953, 10.

barrier of the Southern box office was believed to have remained in place and that these bookings had just been exceptions.[623] The following year, Stanley Kramer resorted to his earlier distribution model for *The Defiant Ones* (United Artists, 1958), playing the picture in the northern states first to generate word of mouth before contemplating bookings below the Mason-Dixie line.[624] It was convenient for the majors to build up the Southern box office as an obstacle for the anti-prejudice cycle, particularly as a means to frame the fight against local censorship. In invoking an image of Southern resistance, the industry reinforced the idea that a barrier existed and then claimed credit for having toppled it. By rebuilding the sense of Southern opposition after the cycle had waned, the studios also gave themselves another chance to knock it down again once a new wave of progressive films came along.

This continual process of companies revising and amending their production, distribution and exhibition plans for the pictures demonstrates the way in which cycles are developed. The typical image of a cycle is a flood of similar films released almost simultaneously into theatres as the producers impulsively rush to capitalise on a timely topic. While there was a competitive element to the timing of this cycle, the anti-prejudice pictures reveal how the producers were extremely heedful of the conditions of the market. They continually assessed the absorbency and receptiveness of different viewing groups and carefully adjusted their circulation and release strategies to ensure that their product would have the greatest impact.

Disassociation and parallels

The discussions of cycles as message pictures echoed many of the discourses circulating about propaganda and entertainment in the years of the Second World War. An initially resistant stance from the PCA against controversial pictures evolved over the next few years to the point where, in 1949, Eric Johnston was pleading with producers to make films with 'more adult' content.[625] The censorship cases that developed at this time held an added significance for the industry during an economic downturn and box-office

[623] 'Negro-Themed Pix Okay for South', *Variety*, 21 August, 1957, 28. 'South Wavering on "Island in the Sun"? L'ville Clicks Despite Race Angles', *Variety*, 19 June, 1957, 1.
[624] 'UA Builds "History of Success" Before Pressing for Playdates On "Defiant Ones"', *Variety*, 12 November, 1958, 5.
[625] 'Again Hear Majors, CPA TO End Crime Pix', *Film Daily,* 3 June, 1946, 8. 'Deny Production Code Will Limit Crime Pix Cycles', *Film Daily* 20 May, 1946, 11. '"More Adult" Pix Key to Top Coin', *Variety,* 9 March, 1949, 1, 24.

decline that started in mid-1947 and continued into the next decade. The screen's freedom for adult treatment was thought of as an important factor in giving motion pictures a competitive advantage over other entertainment forms, such as television.[626] As in the late 1930s, there was an industry-wide publicity push to combat the industry's decline, and in the rhetoric adopted by the MPAA that reasserted the social value of motion pictures. Following a disavowal of subversive political implications, the blacklist worked to displace incriminations and expel liability for the cycle's early associations. The anti-prejudice cycle was then adopted as part of the campaign for Constitutional recognition and protection under the First Amendment.

The HUAC investigations, the blacklist, and the assessment of films in terms of their global effect, establish the connections that were being made between the cycle and the fraught political environment. Writers, directors and producers associated with anti-prejudice pictures such as *Crossfire*, as well as with the wartime shorts and documentaries on the subject, were featured in the anti-communist probe of the industry carried out by HUAC. The initial hearings of friendly witnesses and the unfriendly 'Hollywood Ten' commenced in 1947 and were resumed, after a break, from 1951. As the Committee investigated whether communist-affiliated creative personnel had imbued Hollywood productions with politically-subversive content, several of the Hollywood Ten underscored the connection between the prejudicial accusations of the Committee and the cycle of tolerance pictures. Samuel Ornitz pointed to the recently reported rise in anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism in the U.S and argued that it was no coincidence that the makers of films that treated Jewish and Black people sympathetically were being targeted.[627]

Adrian Scott's statement went further in accusing HUAC of waging a 'cold war' against Jewish and Black Americans. In statements that were not permitted to be read publically, Scott named the unfriendly witnesses and listed their works that explored the treatment of minority groups. Pointing to the widely-known racism and anti-Semitism of politicians

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[626] 'When the picture business needs freedom for as adult treatment as possible of film subject matter to meet competition of other forms of entertainment and offset broad apathy by the public towards pix in general'. 'See Tighter Censorship of Pix', *Variety*, 28 February, 1951, 1, 54.

[627] Samuel Ornitz's statement, quoted in Gordon Kahn, *Hollywood on Trial: The Story of the 10 Who Were Indicted* (New York: Boni and Gear, 1948), 99. Ornitz referenced the contemporary civil rights movement and recent appeal to the UN for support of anti-lynching legislation, warning the Committee that the eyes of the world were upon them; 'let them not see that civil rights has become a mockery in America in a Congressional caucus room of all places'.

Gerald L. K. Smith and John E. Rankin, Scott further argued that despite 'protestations of individual innocence, the evidence of the Committee's collective guilt is cynically clear'.[628] These were not unfounded claims. John Noakes' work on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's files from the period reveal that the federal agency was also investigating a possible communist infiltration of Hollywood in terms which were specifically racialized, with depictions of Jewish and Black people taken as indications of subversive activity.[629] Films such as *Crossfire* and *Home of the Brave* were cited in the FBI reports as excessive criticisms of American life that worked to undermine democracy by stirring social unrest.

The industry's response to the HUAC hearings shifted from an initial stance against government interference in the industry's affairs to a forswearing of responsibility and association with the Hollywood Ten and their fellow travelers. Jon Lewis has explored how the establishment of the blacklist was part of a long-term strategy for industry control that stemmed from the recent labor unrest, in which the Hollywood Ten were sacrificed in a protectionist measure to reduce the threat of direct government intervention.[630] Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy's account of the social message trend argues that the blacklist gave way to a conservative atmosphere that dissuaded producers from continuing social problem picture production beyond the early 1950s, turning instead to individual rather than social concerns.[631] In the season after the blacklist was introduced, the trade papers reported that message pictures were being quietly dropped from production schedules, including Zanuck's adaptation *Quality*.[632] Nevertheless, the cycle continued. The expulsion enacted by the blacklist enabled the studios to continue the production of similar types of pictures without accusations of direct communist involvement. The process of dissociation was crystalised in an instance in late 1947 when Eric Johnston accepted a humanitarian award for *Crossfire* on Dore Schary's behalf, excessively praising the film in his acceptance speech while studiously avoiding any reference to the film's blacklisted director producer.[633]

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[628] Adrian Scott, quoted in Kahn, *Hollywood on Trial*, 107.

[629] John Noakes, 'Racializing Subversion: The FBI and the Depiction of Race in Early Cold War Movies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* Vol. 26 (2003), 728-49. Noakes notes that three of the central criteria used to measure subversive content were the positive portrayal of black characters, the attribution of 'racism' to white characters, and an excessive focus on race relations.

[630] Jon Lewis, '"We Do Not Ask You to Condone This": How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood', *Cinema Journal,* Vol. 39 (2000), 3-30.

[631] Roffman Purdy, *The Hollywood Social Problem Film*, 284-299.

[632] 'Drop "Message" Pix', *Variety*, 18 August, 1948, 3.

[633] '"Crossfire" – Almost Literally', *Variety*, 25 February, 1948, 6.

This displacement saw the social problem pictures attached to a modified discourse of mature, adult entertainment. An umbrella term such as 'tolerance' broadened the pictures' concerns beyond any direct political connotations other than a generalised concern with 'democracy'. Samuel Goldwyn had performed such a manoeuvre at the time of the Committee's hearings in 1947. Acknowledging that the influential nature of the medium inflated its role in the international battle of ideologies, Goldwyn pointed to *Gentlemen's Agreement* and *Crossfire* as examples of films which 'hold a mirror up to an ugly part of our American scene and dare to speak freely … if we face our imperfections honestly, the rest of the world will have new confidence in us'.[634] Paradoxically, the films could both enact democratic expression and be cited as an anti-democratic attack on American society. The anti-prejudice cycle became more particularly tied to the image of a mature medium as one expression of this democracy.

Motion Picture Herald argued against the use of the phrase 'mature', likening it to the 'educational' label that became widespread in the 1930s and which was 'hammered into meaninglessness before it ceased to impair the flow of a rapidly evolved new slice of box office material'.[635] These publicity labels were tied to the industry's efforts to rebrand and develop a new market sector. Producer-distributors could further develop the label from something that was retrospectively applied to films by critics and the trade press, into an approach and prospective descriptor that they used in their production plans. This occurred in the case of the 'mature' and 'adult film' label, which developed into a production trend that spanned the following decade. As in the 1930s cycle of historical biopics, the studios sold this trend to the public as part of the films' renewed social function. Zanuck addressed this redefinition of entertainment taking place in early 1948 in direct relation to the anti-prejudice pictures. He stated:

> The thought patterns of the public can be stimulated and shaped by a film even while it is stimulating the emotions. A film may provide diversion and at the same time have something to say about life and its problems. It is a matter of great personal satisfaction that 'Gentleman's Agreement' has demonstrated this point; because it was undoubtedly one of the severest of tests.[636]

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[634] Samuel Goldwyn, 'World Challenge to Hollywood', *New York Times*, 31 August, 1947.
[635] '"More Adult" Pix Key to Top Coin', *Variety,* 9 March,1949, 1, 24.
[636] Zanuck, quoted in 'Top Industry Leaders Stress need for More Creative Films, "Back to Work" Attitude for All', *Variety*, 7 January, 1948, 5-6.

Beyond a development of a new mode of prestige production, this redefinition was tied to a wider public relations drive. As in the 1937-38 publicity campaigns, in 1948 and the years that followed the industry united to combat the negative press surrounding the HUAC investigations, the implications of unfair trade practices aired in the Paramount case, and the general audience decline. Inter-industry organisations such as the Council of Motion Pictures Organisations (COMPO) and the Motion Picture Industry Council (MPIC) were formed, and press offensives, film festivals and star tours were carried out. Kathryn Brownell's account of the MPIC's 1951 'Movietime U.S.A.' campaign examines the wider political position of Eric Johnston, outside of his role as MPAA president. Johnston propagated his 'people's capitalism' ideology through MPIC as he sought to promote the image of Hollywood as a successful private industry, free from government regulation. Brownell argues that the MPIC used a post-HUAC anti-Communist stance to strengthen its position in relation to national politics, free markets, and self-regulation.[637] When Johnston accepted Schary's *Crossfire* award in 1947, he deflected the blacklist issue by seizing the opportunity to address the recent banning of *Curley* (United Artists, 1947) in Memphis. He stated, 'Hollywood has helped open the door of opportunity regardless of racial background or religious belief … [the industry] knows that discrimination is bad business and that the very opposite of discrimination is a factor in success'.[638] Here Johnston cemented the connection between commerce, democracy and freedom of representation.[639]

The films of the anti-prejudice cycle became a significant tool in the industry's campaign against local censorship boards on the road to the constitutional recognition of motion pictures by the U.S. Supreme Court. The cycle enacted different forms of transference in relation to the censorship cases: individual state censor boards changed their stance on films within the cycle while the industry continually shifted its focus from one case to another as they travelled through the judicial system. Margaret McGhee and Melissa Ooten's respective works examine the Atlanta and Virginia censorship boards' banning of racial representations. They trace the censors' justifications regarding the films' potential

[637] Kathryn Cramer Brownell, '"Movietime U.S.A": The Motion Picture Industry Council and the Politicization of Hollywood in Postwar America', *Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2012), 518-542.
[638] 'Industry is Foe of Bigotry: Johnston', *Motion Picture Daily*, 5 December, 1947, 1, 4.
[639] Johnston later declared that the fight against censorship was a matter of freedom of choice and individual liberty: 'The issue is broader than the interests of the American motion picture industry. It is the issue of the whole American system, our system of free schools, free communication, free speech. There is a case when giving an inch means losing a principle'. 'Censor Strikes Again at Screen's Freedom', *Motion Picture Herald*, 6 November, 1949, 14. 'Eric Johnston, Censorship as a Stupid Insult', *Motion Picture Herald*, 29 October, 1950, 14.

to incite crime, the response of the industry and other local and national organisations to the bans, and the reasons behind the censors' later changes in stance.[640] In Atlanta, for instance, McGhee argues that *Lost Boundaries*' indirect promotion of integration was seen as a potential threat that could disrupt the current social system and image of Atlanta as a racially serene city. *Pinky*, on the other hand, was passed because, once the scenes of potential miscegenation were cut, the segregated boundaries remained intact in the narrative. The film also had the support of a major studio, and was framed and sold as a women's picture.

Although the industry's campaign against local censorship started with the Memphis ban of *Curley*, a family film in the 'Our Gang' series, and ended with New York ban on the Italian import *The Miracle* (Joseph Burstyn, 1949), much of its stance was consolidated around films from the anti-prejudice cycle. As a whole, these films could be more easily invoked in the rhetoric of democracy and freedom of speech alongside other constitutionally-protected forms. In establishing this status, the courts needed to overturn the 1915 Supreme Court ruling in *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*, which found that, unlike the press, motion pictures were a business conducted for profit, and did not qualify for free speech protection that prohibited forms of censorship.

Curley had been banned by notorious Memphis censor Charles Binford in late 1947 on the basis of an integrated school room scene. Binford wrote to distributor United Artists, the South 'does not permit Negroes in white schools nor recognize social equality between the races, even in children'.[641] United Artists and producer Hal Roach sought to challenge this ruling, and attracted the support of the MPAA who saw it as a potential means to test the authority of local censorship boards in the courts.[642] *Motion Picture Daily* noted the additional interest the case held for the industry as it journeyed to the U.S. Supreme Court, with First Amendment protection possibly exempting films from a range of taxes.[643] Binford's allowance of *Home of the Brave* in 1949 complicated UA's attempt to establish Binford's racial rulings as a principle of the board, however, and despite the

[640] Margaret T. McGhee, 'Disturbing the Peace: Lost Boundaries, Pinky, and Censorship in Atlanta, Georgia, 1949-52', *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (2006), 23-51. Melissa Ooten, 'Censorship in Black and White: The Burning Cross (1947), Band of Angels (1957) and the Politics of Film Censorship in the American South after WWII', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television,* Vol. 33, No. 1 (2013), 77-98.
[641] '"Same Old Song", Chants Memphis on Hollywood's Try to Still Binford', *Variety*, 24 September, 1947, 14.
[642] 'Action Filed on Memphis Censor Ban on "Curley"', *Motion Picture Herald,* 11 October, 1947, 42.
[643] 'Basic Issue of Censorship to High Court', *Motion Picture Daily*, 16 March, 1950, 1.

Tennessee Court's disagreement with the ban it found that Binford's action was not a denial of free speech.[644] The focus was subsequently switched to the *Lost Boundaries* case in Atlanta, in *RD-DR Corporation v. Smith*.[645] The Georgia court upheld the Atlanta ban in the case, feeling that it was beyond the realm of a district court to overturn a Supreme Court ruling. Despite this, the statement issued by Judge Neil Andrew indicated the changing view of pictures in relation to freedom of expression and the suitability of the anti-prejudice cycle to test this concept. Andrew stated that such censorship ordinances should be placed 'in the attic which contains the ghosts of those who, arrayed in the role of Bigotry, armed with the spear of Intolerance, and mounted on the steed of Hatred, have through the ages sought to patrol the highways of the mind'.[646]

After the failure of the *Lost Boundaries* appeal, the *Pinky* case, *Gelling v. Texas*, became the next vehicle for the industry's hopes. This was thought to be a more clear-cut test of local censorship's constitutionality as, in this instance, a Texan exhibitor was fined by a local board for playing the banned film.[647] The case reached the Supreme Court at the same time as the *Miracle* case, *Joseph Burnstyn Inc. v Wilson*, in 1952. By this time, the Paramount decision had already laid some groundwork in the Supreme Court, Justice William O. Douglas had included in the Paramount decree the statement, 'We have no doubt that moving pictures, like newspapers and radio, are included in the press whose freedom is guaranteed by the First Amendment'.[648] The ruling on *Pinky* became an extension of the *Miracle* decision. The Supreme Court's citing of the earlier case in its *Pinky* ruling indicated that the latter's banning was viewed in the same light; standards such as 'sacrilege' were too ill-defined to be used as grounds for prior restraint censorship.[649] Ultimately, the Supreme Court decision awarded the motion pictures some free speech protection rights in 1952, but did not completely prevent regulation or

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[644] *United Artists Corp. v Board of Censors of City of Memphis,* 'Binford's Surprise OK on "Brave" May Jeopardize UA's Test Suit', *Variety,* 10 August, 1949, 5. 'Memphis Ban of "Curley" Called "Unconstitutional"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 5 October, 1949,1. Curley" Ban Held Invalid by State Court; Censor Test Off', *Motion Picture Daily*, 20 December, 1949, 1.

[645] 'Court Refuses to Rule on Censorship', *Motion Picture Daily*, 9 May, 1950, 1, 3.

[646] Judge Neil Andrew quoted in Ira Carmen, *Movies, Censorship and the Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 46.

[647] 'Texas "Pinky" Case on Way to High Count", *Motion Picture Daily*, 21 January, 1952, 1, 5.

[648] Justice William O. Douglas had included in the Paramount decree the statement, "We have no doubt that moving pictures, like newspapers and radio, are included in the press whose freedom is guaranteed by the First Amendment'. Carmen, *Movies, Censorship and the Law*, 45.

[649] Richard S. Randall, *Censorship of the Movies: The Social and Political Control of the Medium* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 37. Ira Carmen records that, following these decisions there was an initial response that questioned whether these rulings that overturned the bans were made on the basis of films as free speech, or because the censorship standards were too loose and meaningless. Carmen, *Movies, Censorship and the Law*, 53.

restriction of films in all circumstances. Nonetheless, the victories were hailed by the industry as a triumph of democracy.[650]

Collectively, the anti-prejudice pictures were notable elements in the framing of discussions of the film industry's future role in American politics and society. The relatively progressive stance of the pictures made their liberal producers the target of HUAC until Hollywood could partly exonerate itself by instituting the blacklist. This enabled the cycle to be attached to a range of other discourses that emphasised Hollywood's new maturity and social responsibility. Johnston used the tolerance pictures to argue that Hollywood's self-governance made both external federal regulation and state censorship unnecessary, while film's freedom of representation should be enshrined in the constitutional protection of free speech.

The anti-prejudice cycle foregrounds the need to understand development and change as intrinsic to the form of cycles. With the general framework of anti-prejudice transferred across the films, this case study necessitated an examination of the driving forces behind such change. In the first section, my close focus on the shifting production decisions regarding content and the interpretation of these by critics and consumers illustrates how the mutable nature of the cycle was perceived to detract from the films' ability to impact society in a meaningful way. In the second section I explored the cycle's operations on a broader level. This examination of the studio's decisions over how to distribute and exhibit their films reveals how the cycle's shape was also determined by rates of market absorption and the industry's responses to greater problems. This suggests a degree of improvisation and ongoing adjustment to the formation of the cycle as the producer-distributors attempted to determine how the cycle would develop in relation to audience's receptivity. In the third section the cycle was examined with a wider scope. This revealed the way in which the cycle's form and the associations attached to it underwent a number of discursive changes as they were molded to represent a useful image of Hollywood's own social significance.

In determining the shape of the cycle, this case study reminds us that a cycle's form is not predetermined. The pictures do not necessarily follow a path suggested by the initial

[650] Bosley Crowther, 'Hollywood Hails Action: Decision Called Acknowledgement of Films Social Status', *The New York Times,* 27 May, 1952.

films, although they do retain an imitative form and are still grouped together discursively. The producers, distributors, and industry figures followed a fluid approach in developing, distributing, and speaking about the cycle that enabled them to match the shifts in wider audience interest and changing political and social climates. The plans that were set forth in the planning and production process could develop in different directions as the pictures were circulated and consumed, with the potential to transfer between categories and wider associations in the promotion, trade, legal, and political discourse surrounding the films. This fluidity underscores the significance of considering cycles as process.

Chapter Six

The Biblical Epics: Blockbuster Cycles and Market Control in the 'New Era'

The anti-prejudice pictures illustrated how cycles could enact the studios' adjustment to the market shifts that took place in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The case study of the biblical epics, which began with the release of *Samson and Delilah* (Paramount, 1949) and ended with *The Bible… In the Beginning* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1966), present a blockbuster cycle that developed as a result of these industrial conditions. The biblical epics exemplify Hollywood's revised business practices in light of the changes in audience habits and the landscape of exhibition, as well as the antitrust prohibitions of the Paramount decision. In this chapter, I specifically focus on factors surrounding the biblical epics' circulation, which was where the cycle's significant industrial function was located.

The understanding of cycles that developed under the studio system of mass production and brief theatrical play-off is challenged by big budget films such as the biblical epics. As in some of the instances already discussed, the question can be raised as to whether the biblical epics can be considered a cycle, given the traditional understanding of cycles as a relatively short-term increase in production. In 1958 *Variety* reported King Vidor's stance on this matter during the production of his film *Solomon and Sheba* (United Artists, 1959): 'He doubted "Solomon" was adding to the pattern of another Bible cycle since religious film spectacles have been in continual production for two decades'.[651] In my previous chapters, this concept of cycles' temporality has largely been considered in relation to their duration and the span of time they spend in the marketplace. In this case study, I will explore how cycles can also be defined by another aspect of temporality: velocity. The concept of cycles' velocity builds on the previous chapter's exploration of market absorbency and saturation to consider cycles in terms of their speed and momentum through the marketplace. Cycles derive their force from the distribution and exhibition of similar films, and it is the exhibitor's and audience's experience of an influx into theatres that can lead to the identification of the films as a cycle.

[651] 'King Vidor Primes Start of "Solomon and Sheba", Budget at $3,500,000', *Variety*, 23 July, 1958, 3.

The biblical epics illuminate the wider developments in distribution that altered the temporal pattern of film circulation in the 1950s, decelerating the rate of release through a focus on the individualised selling of pictures. As the studios re-centred their business practices on distribution, they also altered their production policies to establish a sellers' market, based on product scarcity and high prices. Blockbusters such as the biblical epics were highly desirable products for exhibitors and were utilised by the major companies to reconstruct a system of circulation that provided them with favourable selling terms and increased distribution revenue. This altered the quantity of production and tempo of distribution, which in turn affected the operation of film cycles in the post-Classical era.

The first section of this chapter will examine the place of the Biblical epics within the 1950s 'new era' of blockbuster production. The films illustrate many of the studios' responses to the market environment: the choice of biblical subject matter was deemed suitable for mass appeal both domestically and internationally; it fed into the trends for location shooting and international financing; and the spectacular aspects were accentuated by the technological processes then under development. Production budgets were climbing across the board in the early 1950s, with top A-features costing close to $2,000,000 in 1952.[652] The immense budgets of the biblical epics, with *Quo Vadis* costing $7,000,000 in 1951, represented an even greater investment for the studios.[653] This risk could be mitigated through such factors, and the films were accompanied by sales campaigns that highlighted the pictures as 'events' that offered a new, uniquely cinematic experience. This was supported by the mode of distribution of the films. The studios developed pre-release engagement policies and variations on roadshow circulation with extended runs and raised ticket prices, which enabled the films to secure significant box office grosses.

The product shortage and slow play-off policies of this new era, and their development through the biblical cycle, meant that many of the films took a central place in the complaints lodged by exhibitors against the distributors. The second part of this chapter traces the debates held between bodies such as Allied States Association, the Department of Justice, and the Subcommittee on Retailing, Distribution and Fair Trade Practices of the Senate Select Committee on Small Business. This is significant in illuminating some

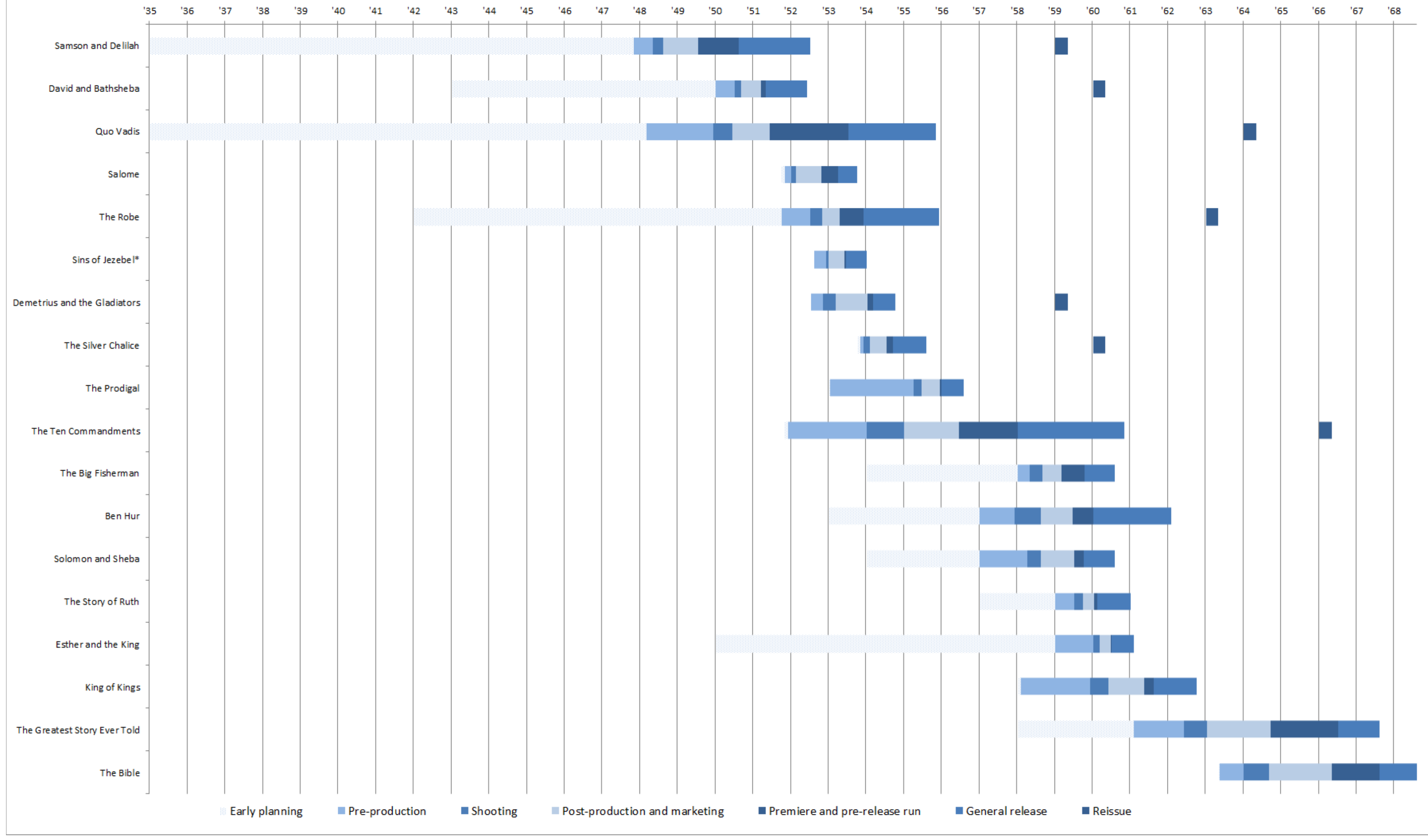
[652] 'Hollywood's Growing Gamble', *Variety*, 30 July, 1952, 3, 177.
[653] 'Precedent Policy For 'Vadis' Seen In Metro Selling', *Variety*, 7 November, 1951, 7, 53.

of the primary ways in which the major companies reasserted their market control through distribution in the post-studio era. Using the biblical epics as leverage over exhibitors, many of the unfair trade practices prohibited by the Paramount decision were circumvented or re-established in a modified form via new circulation policies. The studios took advantage of the competitive bidding system to instigate a form of price fixing and discriminate against theatres in less lucrative situations. This enactment of this process can be clearly seen in the case of Chicago through the 1940s and 1950s, which I will examine in detail.

In the late 1950s, many of these debates coalesced around *The Ten Commandments* (Paramount, 1956). In the third section of this chapter, I focus exclusively on the innovative distribution plan that Paramount developed for *The Ten Commandments*, which involved hiring out theatres to play extended runs in key locations and envisioned an extensive play-off that would unroll across the country over several years. In implementing their distribution policy in smaller cinemas, Paramount divided theatres into a revised system of runs and zones which would bid against each other for the film. The studio's assumption that exhibitors' bids would detail expected admission prices and holdover periods was criticised as anti-competitive behaviour. The negligible response of regulatory government bodies to the exhibitors' protests by illustrates the success of the major studios in securing control through this distribution system and the legal affirmation of such practices.

In the final section I return to the question of whether the distributors' alterations to the rate of theatrical release might have prevented the biblical epics from being experienced and consumed as cycles, as Vidor suggested. My exploration of the velocity of cycles thus leads to a consideration of the behaviour of cycles in terms of temporal consumption by viewers. I explore this question more closely by examining the range of prices charged for viewing the biblical epics, and specific exhibition of the biblical epics in the theatres of Lewiston, Maine. Despite the changes in theatres and technology, the retention of aspects of the old system of distribution suggests that the effect of cycles was still present for such audience groups. This reinforces the case that a short life span is not essential to our definition of cycles; we need to consider the experience of cycles and look beyond a temporal frame centred on the initial release and the first theatrical run of a film.

Table 5, Biblical epics production and release timeline



The 1950s biblical epics drew on the form of religious spectacles popular since the early days of cinema.[654] The first film of the post-war cycle, *Samson and Delilah*, was made by Cecil B. DeMille, the filmmaker most closely associated with the film type. Although DeMille had initially developed ideas for a picture on this subject in the 1930s, Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale identify Paramount's green-lighting of the project as part of a wider revival for historical costume pictures in the post-war period.[655] The extravagant Technicolor production was given special sales treatment by the studio and garnered extensive returns through a slow play-off policy that established it as the top grossing film of 1950.[656] Its success was repeated with *David and Bathsheba* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1950) the following year.[657] As Hall and Neale comment, in the industry's economic downtown of the early 1950s, the pictures were significant exceptions that illustrated how revenue could be maximised through the strong, individualised promotion of a big budget picture with wide appeal.[658]

In 1953, after MGM's successful remake *Quo Vadis* (MGM, 1951) had joined the fold, the trade press identified the deluge of upcoming biblical productions in familiar cycle terms: 'Past huge success of such themes unquestionably is behind this avalanche, producers feeling that even in a declining market Biblical subjects will draw'.[659] Thomas Pryor also noted the biblical tendency in the *New York Times* in 1953, listing twelve forthcoming projects planned amongst the studios.[660] While not all of the dozen projects planned reached the screen, most of the major studios released a biblical epic over the next few years, with varying degrees of success. These included *Salome* (Columbia, 1953), *Sins of Jezebel* (Lippert Pictures, 1953), *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1954), *The Silver Chalice* (Warner Bros., 1954) and *The Prodigal* (MGM, 1955). A second DeMille production, *The Ten Commandments*, was released soon after to hitherto unmatched grosses and it prepared the way for a further production surge that reached the screen at the close of the decade. This second group included *The Big Fisherman (*Buena Vista, 1959), *Ben-Hur* (MGM, 1959), *Solomon and Sheba* (United

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[654] Syzmon St. Deptula 'Biblicals: An Early Pix Cycle', *Variety*, 2 May, 1962, 21.
[655] Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale, *Epics*, *Spectacles and Blockbusters: A Hollywood History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 139.
[656] 'Top Grosser in 1950: "Samson and Delilah"', *Boxoffice*, 30 December, 1950, 12-13.
[657] '"David and Bathsheba" Top Money Film in '51', *Boxoffice,* 22 December, 1951, 9.
[658] 'Battle of the Biblical Specs', *Variety*, 1 February, 1952, 71.
[659] 'Studios in Production Upswing On Biblical Subjects with 12 on Tap', *Variety*, 17 June, 1953, 4, 16.
[660] Thomas M. Pryor, 'Biblical Hollywood', *New York Times*, 14 June, 1953.

Artists, 1959), *The Story of Ruth* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1960), and *Esther and the King* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1960).

Variety identified the ancient and biblical spectacles sweeping screens in the late 1950s as a trend with two strands, the Hollywood-made epics spawned from the success of *The Ten Commandments*, and those following in the footsteps of the Italian-made sword and sandal picture *Hercules* (Lippert, 1959), which were being picked up and distributed by American companies. Despite acknowledging the risk of saturation and hesitantly predicting that audience interest would deplete over the next few months, the journal saw the move to purchase the Italian products as a good investment in 1959.[661] In 1961 the cycle was expanded by a number of international co-productions, including *King of Kings* (MGM, 1961), *David and Goliath* (Allied Artists, 1961), *Barabbas* (Columbia, 1962), and *The Last Days of Sodom and Gomorrah* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1963).[662] In was not until 1967, after the muted successes of *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (United Artists, 1965) and *The Bible,* that the cycle was seen to have fallen away. *Variety* declared, ‘for the first time in twenty years, no similar project is in production, scheduled or even remotely planned by any U.S. or foreign company’. The article calculated that in the past two decades there had been thirty-five ‘ancient spectacles’, of which twenty-four films had an American director, producer or financing, while nine were Italian films shot in English with American stars.[663]

In its shape, the cycle of the biblical epics bears some resemblance to prestige picture cycles such as the historical biopics, being an elongated form that stretched across an extended period of time. The two cycles were linked by an overarching production trend for historical action dramas. Like the historical biopics, the biblical epics appear to have had two waves of release, although they were released under very different market conditions. The business practices of the majors underwent fundamental shifts in the 1950s, with the result that the biblical epics enacted a different commercial, industrial function to that represented by the historical biopics.

[661] Pictaculars on the March; The Good Book, Greeks and Romans’, *Variety*, 9 September, 1959, 7.
[662] Frank Leyeyndecker, ‘Bible is Source for Many Forthcoming Epics’, *Boxoffice*, 10 July, 1961, 14-15.
[663] ‘Are Biblical Pix Now Passe?’ *Variety*, 29 September, 1967, 5, 17.

Blockbuster policy and the 'new era'

The 'new era' was discussed in the trade press as a shift in industrial focus that emanated partly from the effects of the Paramount decision, but was also driven by the wider changes in audience habits that forced a reconsideration of the production, circulation, and marketing of films. The biblical epics demonstrated that large audience numbers could still turn out en masse to films marketed as 'unmissable', lavish investments promising a cinematic experience that could not be found elsewhere, including television. The studios sought to wring all possible profit from these exhibition situations, and distributed the biblical epics through a range of pre-release policies that included variations of roadshowing and staggered, local saturation openings. The 'new era', understood in terms of the studios' business policies and changes in the market, was exemplified by the cycle.

Key to this new era were the epics, costly investments that held the potential to gather huge returns, and which were labelled as 'blockbusters' by contemporaries. As Julian Stringer has discussed, 'blockbuster' has a shifting meaning, able to encompass films intentionally produced on a grand scale and calculated to earn enormous grosses, as well as those that came to be labelled as such after the fact. Central to their identity, Stringer argues, is this question of size and scale, which can have diverse contextual connotations in different markets.[664] My consideration of the biblical epics in blockbuster terms is based on a discursive understanding of how the films were labelled by contemporaries. I have also considered the studios' intentions for the films' production and distribution, and the box office result. The earlier films were clearly described as part of a new blockbuster mentality in 1953, and this understanding was substantiated by high box office returns to the studios. [665] There are instances of later epics that were designed with this large scale, high gross strategy in mind but which were less successful at the box office, such as *The Big Fisherman*, which had its roadshow distribution amended after only a few weeks. Similarly, there were smaller budget, non-blockbuster biblical films that were designed to cash in on the bigger pictures' popularity, such as *The Sins of Jezebel*.[666] Nonetheless, the majority of the films were discussed as key examples of the blockbuster pattern and

[664] Julian Stringer, 'Introduction', *Movie Blockbusters*, Julian Stringer (ed.) (London: Routledge, 2003), 2.
[665] 'Quo Vadis; A Box Office Blockbuster', *Variety*, 1 November, 1951, 5. Referenced in Hall and Neale, *Epics, Spectacles and Blockbusters*, 139. 'See Too Many Spectacles', *Variety*, 23 December, 1953, 3, 16.
[666] '25 "Hards" for "Fisherman"' *Variety*, 2 September, 1959, 5.

became central to discussions of the industry's new era policy for big budget productions. A trade article published in 1967 claimed that the cycle's emblematic status for current industry policy could be a public relations embarrassment for Hollywood, as 'opinionmakers, intellectuals and other heady types constantly equated the proliferation of ancient spectacles with Hollywood itself'.[667] The article argued that other film types, including musicals, westerns, and action-adventure pictures, had since emerged as the favoured form for high profile roadshows and blockbuster policies. Steve Neale reaches a similar conclusion regarding the cycle's decline: '[I]n part because of over-investment, overproduction, rising costs and falling profits, and in part because of changing audience demographics and increasing ideological divisions, the post-war cycle of historical spectacles came to an end in the late 1960s'.[668]

The initial choice of the biblical film type to carry out Hollywood's changed production policy was an attempt to mitigate the risk of expensive productions. Changing funding rationales within the investment portfolio model and the growing significance of the international market meant that the studios sought subject matter with wide appeal that could also showcase the latest technological developments. The producers' rationale was that this would alleviate some of the unpredictability of audience response and gain an edge over other forms of entertainment. In their analysis of Hollywood's profitability trends, Michael Pokorny and John Sedgwick have described how, following the Paramount decision, the decline of mid-budget films and changes in moviegoing meant that securing a higher portion of profits from films in the big budget category became a necessity.[669] Martin Quigley Jr. underlined how the majors' policies stemmed from the Paramount decision. He argued:

> Many of the readjustments in producer-distributor policies are also traceable to the end of block booking and theatre divorcement. With a comfortable floor for grosses on any playable picture gone, studios have had to be much more careful in production planning. A picture that does not turn out just right now grosses far less than in the old days when thousands of bookings were pre-sold.[670]

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[667] 'Are Biblical Pix Now Passe?', *Variety*, 29 September, 1967, 5, 17.
[668] Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2000), 91-92.
[669] Michael Pokorny, and John Sedgwick, 'Profitability Trends in Hollywood, 1929 to 1999: Somebody Must Know Something', *The Economic History Review,* Vol. 63, No. 1 (2010), 76.
[670] 'Product Supply and Demands', *Motion Picture Herald*, 11 February, 1956, 8.

While previously the high volume production and block booking of the studio system could spread the risks across the annual portfolios, hit films were now the primary source of revenue. This engendered the 'fewer but bigger' blockbuster mentality. The suggestion that the industry's future lay in big pictures was voiced by studio executives in 1952, accompanied by observations of how this raised the stakes for the industry. The same ratio of hits to flops, which they estimated at one to five, was predicted to remain constant, but the studio heads anticipated that the failures would carry a greater detrimental effect. [671] The big-picture approach was significant for producers attempting to secure external funding; the presence of blockbusters on the production schedule was described in 1959 as a previously attractive but now required feature for Wall Street investors.[672]

The studios also produced the biblical epics for the same reasons that they developed other cycles: the initial films proved popular with audiences and secured big grosses despite the overall downward trend in the industry. While the first of the cycle was something of a throwback, renewing a film type successful in the silent era and particularly associated with the Paramount–DeMille brand, the other studios quickly appropriated the form. Many of the biblical epics attempted to secure a predictable audience response by drawing on pre-sold properties. *Quo Vadis*, *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben-Hur* were all remakes of previously popular silent productions, while *The Robe*, *The Silver Chalice,* and *The Big Fisherman* drew on bestselling novels of the era. *Demetrius and the Gladiators* was developed as a sequel to *The Robe*, with the original screenplay written as a type of spin-off, in which one of the supporting characters took up the mantle. As *Variety* noted:

> Playing up the sequel angle is a unique departure in film biz promotion, since past experience has proven the follow-up picture rarely approaches the success of the original. However, 20th feels that by making a direct appeal to those who saw "The Robe", it'll capture at least part of the vast audience for "Demetrius".[673]

The epics were also a suitable story category for the blockbuster treatment given the wide net they cast for popular appeal. The religious subject matter, which had proven popular in the past, was thought to hold particular appeal to the lost audience groups of 'oldsters'

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[671] 'Hollywood's Growing Gamble', *Variety*, 30 July, 1952, 3, 177. '"Fewer But Bigger" Credo Actually May Make Film Biz Riskier Than Ever, as Some Execs Now Figure', *Variety*, 18 November, 1953, 3, 26.
[672] 'Blockbusters Which Don't Explode Scare Banks Off 'Indie' Producers', *Variety*, 4 March, 1959, p. 3., 'Blockbuster A Romantic Word to Wall Street', *Variety*, 1 July, 1959, 1.
[673] '"Demetrius" Tops "Millionaire" 3%', *Variety*, 23 June, 1954, 7.

and selective cinemagoers. As *Variety* writer Alfred Starr argued at the time, biblical blockbusters could capture infrequent attendees and church groups while also appealing to the general audience in their inclusion of sex, action, and pageantry.[674] Such sensationalised treatment of sacred themes drew criticism from public spokespeople and religious figures throughout the 1950s, including a Protestant leader who, unsuccessfully, called for a boycott of the films.[675] Tom Driver, a theologian and drama critic, noted in 1959 how the exploitation of the resurgent interest in religion was met with mixed responses: 'If Billy Graham touts DeMille as a super salesman for the Good Book, other see him mixing disproportionate amounts of sex in the sin and salvation scenario'.[676]

The popularity of the cycle is often linked by film historians to a wider 1950s religious revival. These scholars point to the ways in which public leaders sought to cast the Cold War in religious terms, forging an association of American national identity and democratic liberty tied to a Judeo-Christian heritage, against an atheistic, totalitarian Communist regime.[677] Jeff Smith grapples with the political parables read into religious films in his examination of the various interpretations that have been attached to *The Robe*.[678] Considering methodological approaches that examine the correspondences between the historical context of a film and its content, as well as reception reading strategies, Smith concludes that, while questions of original intention and reception can be unknowable, a text/context approach is the only model broad enough to encompass both. The connections between the biblical epic cycle and international politics were clearly being discussed at the time, as Tony Shaw points out. British film critic Catherine de la Roche commented:

> Many people, including some in Hollywood believe that the Cold War is fundamentally a conflict between Christianity and atheism and that religion is

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[674] Alfred Starr, 'The Lost Audience is Still Lost', *Variety*, 6 January, 1954, 61.
[675] 'Congresswoman Hits Some Bible Films: Claims Distortion', *Motion Picture Daily*, 5 July, 1955, 3. '"Sand and Sex" in Biblical Cycle Give Bad Impression of the Good Book', *Variety*, 16 May, 1956, 2. 'Protestants Warned on "Anti-Biblical" Films', *Motion Picture Daily,* 27 October, 1959, 1, 4.
[676] 'Bible Sagas of Sex 'n' Salvation', *Variety*, 25 November, 1959, 19.
[677] Thomas, Aiello, 'Constructing "Godless Communism": Religion, Politics, and Popular Culture, 1954-1960."', *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-present*) Vol. 4, No. 1 (2005). Michelle Mart, 'The "Christianization" of Israel and Jews in 1950s America', *Religion and American Culture,* 14 (2004), 109-47. William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Alan Nadel's work on *The Ten Commandments* best typifies the symptomatic approach taken towards many of the biblical epics. He states: 'I assume that the large collaborative, commercial filmmaking ventures reflect a consensus about how to commodify a culture's values and that commercial success indicates an audience's confirmation of that consensus'. Alan Nadel, 'God's Law and the Widescreen: The Ten Commandments as Cold War Epic', PMLA, Vol. 108, No. 3 (1993), 416.
[678] Jeff Smith, 'Are You Now or Have You Ever Been a Christian? The Strange History of the Robe as Political Allegory', in *Un-American Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, ed. by Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Barry Neve and Peter Stanfield (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 19-40.

> therefore a strong weapon against Communism. Whether the pictures dealing with these three subjects are deliberate propaganda or not, they belong to that same easily recognisable pattern of ideas.[679]

Such ideas were not only evident in reception, but were also a demonstrable aspect of authorial intention. DeMille made explicit the allegorical meaning of *The Ten Commandments* in his pre-recorded opening introduction. This topical connection was foregrounded as a marketing device in a similar way to that of *Juarez* and many of the historical biopics.[680] *Solomon and Sheba* used a similar topical strategy in its opening narration, stating:

> This is the borderland that lies between the countries of Egypt and Israel. As it is today, so it was a thousand years before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Even then these boundaries were kept ablaze with the fires of hatred and conflict.

While the biblical epics may have held greater resonance for audiences because of their religious subject matter, from the perspective of this study the greater significance of these themes lay in their commercial value to the studios, which exploited religious narratives, along with events such as the Suez crisis, for their publicity value. In the case of *Ben-Hur,* the marketing of the picture's religious dimensions resulted from audience research. MGM commissioned a Sindlinger survey to test which of the film's elements should be highlighted in the marketing campaign. Without disclosing the title of the film, three different one-page plot summaries were distributed that variously emphasised religion, action and revenge, and the romantic aspects of the plot. Religion was found of be a clear winner across the categories of age and gender, and therefore became a main feature in the publicity.[681]

The widespread appeal of the biblical pictures' formula was identified early in the cycle. The *Variety* review of *David and Bathsheba* stated:

> This is a big picture in every respect. It has scope, pageantry, sex (for all its Biblical background), cast names, color – everything. It's a surefire boxoffice entry, one of the really "big" pictures of the new selling season. It's in the same idiom of "King of Kings", "The Ten Commandments", "Samson and Delilah" and Metro's upcoming "Quo Vadis". Here is a pic reduced to popular fundamentals …

[679] Catherin de la Roche, *Films and Filming*, 1955, quoted in Tony Shaw, 'Martyrs, Miracles and Martians: Religion and Cold War Cinematic Propaganda in the 1950s', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2002), 4.
[680] DeMille described it as 'the story of the birth of freedom … the theme of this picture is whether man ought to be ruled by God's law or whether they are to be ruled by them whims of a dictator like Ramses. Are men the property of the state or are they free souls under God? The same battle continues throughout the world today'.
[681] 'Religion No. 1 at B.O., Bigger Than Sex; Sindlinger', *Variety*, 16 September, 1959, 5.

> it imparts a segment of Biblical lore which is highly palatable in its more or less authentic adaptation.[682]

Not only was this all-encompassing content important in achieving mass appeal for domestic audiences, the biblical epic also provided a product that could easily play to viewers in a global marketplace. The growing significance of the international market and its increasing proportion of gross revenue were crucial factors that further informed biblical epic production.

The foreign market increased in significance throughout the 1950s. It was estimated to represent 40% of a Hollywood film's total take in 1954, and close to 50% by the decade's end.[683] Early in the 1950s, the trade press suggested that the declining domestic market meant that overseas receipts would become necessary to make net profits on a film, and that this 40% revenue share now represented the margin between a film's profit and loss.[684] In late 1953, however, the trades expressed an anxiety that foreign returns had reached a peak. Many predicted a forthcoming slide as a result of competition from government-supported national industries, cuts in U.S. aid to Europe, the diminishing pool of frozen U.S. dollars, and the uncertain outcome of CinemaScope in foreign territories.[685] Faced with foreign industries' protective measures, such as frozen funds and quotas, film historian Thomas Guback argues that the U.S. companies had three options in the early 1950s: to wait until restrictions lifted, buy foreign goods to import to the U.S., or produce films abroad.[686] The third option was the most attractive to producers and the biblical epics presented a suitable form for such investment. Through *Quo Vadis*, for instance, MGM was able to recover close to $3 million of blocked funds in Italy as part of its production costs.[687]

Guback identifies two waves of runaway productions, the first in response to frozen funds, and a second that continued beyond the lifting of restrictions as American

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[682] 'David and Bathsheba', *Variety*, 15 August, 1951, 6.
[683] In 1952 MGM revised its amortization table to reflect this, with costs previously written off on the basis of 75% of the cost to domestic income and 25% to foreign, but which were instead allocated 66.66% and 33.33% 'M-G Fiscal Switch Points UP Foreign take's Importance', *Variety*, 23 July, 1952, 5, 21. Nathan D. Golden, 'Foreign Film Market at High Level', *Variety*, 6 January, 1954, 9. 'Fear Reprisals in Foreign Market if Unions Halt "Runaway" Prod'n', *Variety*, 31 August, 1960, 3, 63.
[684] 'Films Gotta Spread Their B.O. Power O'seas to Meet TV Surge, H'wood Feels', *Variety*, 30 April, 1952, 1, 54.
[685] 'New Danger Signs Overseas; Fear Selectivity to Hit U.S. Pix', *Variety*, 18 February, 1953, 3, 16. 'Inventory of International Problems', *Variety*, 21 October, 1953, 7, 20.
[686] Thomas H Guback., *The International Film Industry: Western Europe and America Sine 1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Pres, 1969), 166.
[687] 'Loew's Net Up Million for '50; First Quarter Up', *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin*, 15 January, 1951, 16.

companies exploited foreign governments' production subsidies. The Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA), headed by Eric Johnston, pushed a free enterprise philosophy and secured agreements with foreign state organisations in an attempt to secure a market for American films and lessen the effect of national trade barriers. A number of these agreements were made with the Italian Industry Central Trade Association (ANICA) to enable the investment of American dollars in Italian production and to purchase U.S. distribution rights for Italian product.[688] The U.S. government's own restrictive domestic policies led to the search for new investors, which also contributed to the substantial number of co-produced biblical epics that started to reach screens at the end of the decade.[689]

Independent producer Samuel Bronston's funding model for *King of Kings* exemplifies this international shift, with the purchase of territorial rights by twelve scattered distributors used to make up the production budget and share the risk between them.[690] Bronston also noted the influence of the international market on his choice of story and content;

> You can only do this sort of thing if you have big, international themes … Hollywood is making the same old movies for America. I wouldn't call them chauvinistic. Now, I call it stupid. You have to get a world audience. An international kind of subject is Napoleon, or Mohammed…[691]

In the biblical epics, the need to widen the understanding of cycles beyond Hollywood is evident, both in considering how an international market altered the scope of the production and distribution of U.S. films, and in the increased effect that co-productions and films produced elsewhere were having for the exhibition and audience consumption of cycles.

Working in conjunction with the biblical epics' location shooting was the development of widescreen processes that enhanced these visuals and differentiated the moviegoing experience from competitive forms of entertainment such as television. Contemporaries specifically linked the development of widescreen processes, including CinemaScope, as

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[688] Guback records that between 1957 and 1967, the U.S. spent $350 million to make films in Italy and to buy or participate in Italian productions. Guback., *The International Film Industry*, 176.
[689] 'Aliens Bankroll U.S. Films; Federal Squeeze Opens New Funds', *Variety*, 16 January, 1957, 5. 'Yesterday's So-called "Runaway Production" is Today's "International Co-Production"', *Motion Picture Herald*, 1 September, 1956, 22.
[690] 'Bronston Re "King of Kings" Risks', *Variety*, 20 April, 1960, 3, 15.
[691] 'Bronston Claims Gross Guaranty for "El Cid"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 20 December, 1960, 4.

contributing to particular trends in subject matter, with the scale of the biblical epics especially apt because of their exotic outdoor backdrops and their spectacular aesthetics of scale and splendour.[692] 1953 was described as the year of technological innovation, with the astounding success of Cinerama and the more fleeting popularity of 3D, as well as the launch of CinemaScope.[693] John Belton's work on CinemaScope places its development within the competitive marketplace characterised by the growth of alternative leisure activities. In this environment the cinema industry was compelled to seek strategies for enhanced experiences and greater spectator involvement.[694]

The launch of CinemaScope was centred on *The Robe*, an early Roman-Christian drama adapted from Lloyd C. Douglas' 1942 bestseller of the same name. The hyperbolic rhetoric surrounding the project demonstrates how the industry viewed the biblical epics as a barometer of the market. Zanuck claimed that Hollywood had undergone a fundamental change that necessitated big hits, such as those provided by CinemaScope, and that the industry would rise or fall on the success of *The Robe*.[695] Despite Fox's apparent confidence in CinemaScope and the early announcement of conversion for its entire production schedule, Belton notes that *The Robe* was also shot in a non-CinemaScope version, which betrays an anxiety over whether exhibitors, both domestically and internationally, would be persuaded to convert their theatres for screening the film.[696] With support from several of the other majors, Fox was able to drive the new technology into exhibition, taking an initially hard-line policy towards theatre owners in insisting they purchase the CinemaScope package of screen, lens and sound system in order to show *The Robe*. Using a biblical epic as the means to push this process emphasises how the films were perceived to be a fairly low-risk film type with mass appeal and high value for exhibitors. This was reinforced through the studio's follow-up production of *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, which started filming before *The Robe* had reached cinemas.[697]

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[692] 'Flood of Outdoor, Biblical Specs to Flow into Widescreen Horizon', *Variety*, 29 April, 1953, 4, 18.
[693] Abel Green, 'Show Biz 1953 – Wotta Year; Changing Moods, Modes and Means', *Variety*, 6 January, 1954, 1, 58-59.
[694] John Belton, 'CinemaScope and Historical Methodology', *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1988), 43.
[695] '"Hollywood Will Rise or Fall on Success of "The Robe"" – Zanuck', *Variety*, 26 August, 1953, 3, 22.
[696] John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 132.
[697] 'Set CinemaScope Filming for 7 More', *Motion Picture Daily*, 9 February, 1953, 3.

Biblical epics were used to showcase other developments in widescreen technology, including Paramount's VistaVision in *The Ten Commandments*, Super Technirama 70 for *Solomon and Sheba*, and *Ben-Hur's* Panavision MGM Camera 65. Although the films provided suitable demonstrations of these processes, they were not used as leverage in a widespread conversion process in the same way as *The Robe*. For *The Ten Commandments*, for instance, VistaVision became a passing comment in the trade reviews, and Tom Vincent suggests that Paramount failed to successfully differentiate the process in their marketing campaigns.[698]

In the early 1950s *Variety* had described how the process of risk reduction for big budget films centred on the selection of safe and appealing narratives. The trade paper predicted that this policy would lead to film cycles:

> Theatremen are worried, too, over the studios' tendency to rely too heavily on "sure bets" in picking screen material, i.e., create long cycles of pix of spectacle proportions that are aimed to show off the wide screen to best advantage while relying on oft-proved formulae.[699]

Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale have similarly pointed out how, as the blockbuster production strategy grew in the 1960s and 1970s, many already established film types, such as musicals and westerns, also engendered big budget cycles: 'given a big budget, wide screen or wide format, and protracted running time, even the most intimate of subjects could be turned into an epic … each genre produced distinctive cycles of large scale films in that period'.[700] The function of the low budget programmer cycles of previous decades stemmed from mass production and regulated release, and this strategy was less expedient in this new era. Exhibitors had held hopes that the post-divorcement focus on individual films could suggest a higher standard of quality and might mean the end of the 'cycle menace'.[701] As the biblical epics demonstrate, however, in spite of marketing and distribution attempts to emphasise unique productions, the production risks were balanced with a narrative formula that lessened the unpredictability of the films' impact, and these patterns of repetition and imitation carried cycles into the new era.

[698] Tom Vincent, 'Standing Tall and Wide: the Selling of VistaVision', *Widescreen Worldwide*, John Belton, Steve Neale (eds.) (New Barnett: John Libbey Publishing, 2010), 25 – 37.
[699] 'See Too Many Spectacles', *Variety*, 23 December, 1953, 3, 16.
[700] Hall and Neale, *Epics*, *Spectacles and Blockbusters*, 177.
[701] 'Rangy is the Term for Today's Themes', *Variety*, 18 November 1959, 26.

Circulation and market control

The changed rate of production, with a smaller number of films being made and these taking a longer period to produce, led to a changed flow in distribution. The Paramount ruling for divestiture saw the majors readjust their locus of profit to distribution while complying with the consent decrees rolled out in the early 1950s. *Motion Picture Herald* summarised what one such consent decree meant for Twentieth Century Fox:

> The trade practice provisions enjoin Fox and its officials and subsidiaries from minimum price-fixing, maintaining a system of clearances by agreement with exhibitors or distributors, granting or enforcing unreasonable clearance in such cases, carrying out any franchise, master agreement or formula deals, block booking, or licensing any film other than "theatre by theatre, solely upon the merits and without discrimination in favour of affiliated theatres, circuit theatres or others."[702]

Theodore Philip Kovaleff describes how the Justice Department fell back on the use of consent decrees under the Eisenhower administration as part of a strategy of efficiency to avoid lengthy and costly court proceedings.[703] They were beneficial for defendants as their clauses often covered future situations and, with double jeopardy not possible under antitrust law, could stop future proceedings on the same subject. The decrees were additionally advantageous to the studios as they did not count as prima facie evidence or proof of antitrust violations in private damage cases. This essentially increased the work required by an exhibitor, for instance, to bring a treble damage claimant against the studio defendants while decreasing its chance of success. Because of this difficultly in challenging violations, the consent decrees were criticised as too often representing the last word on the matter, and the attorney general admitted that they were only as effective as their enforcement.[704] This is evident in the debates that emerged around the distribution of the biblical cycle, and the accusations levelled at the Department of Justice (DoJ) for their lack of decree enforcement. Such antitrust legislation, Kovaleff points out, held a fundamental tension. Its essential purpose was to prohibit all restraints of trade. The scope

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[702] 'Decree Gives 20th-Fox Two Years for Divorce', *Motion Picture Daily*, 4 June, 1951, 1, 2.
[703] Theodore Philip Kovaleff, *Business and Government During the Eisenhower Administration: A Study of Antitrust Policy of the Antitrust Division of the Justice Department* (Athens: Ohio, 1980), 54.
[704] Herbert Brownell Jr., 'Address', delivered to the 1956 Executive Conference on Administrative Policies and Problems in Philadelphia, Pa., on 20 June, 1956, referenced in Kovaleff, *Business and Government During the Eisenhower Administration,* 54.

of this prohibition was, however, limited by its legal basis that followed the 'rule of reason'. This rule of reason meant that the courts could differentiate between 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' restraints of trade; certain restraints could be deemed 'necessary and ancillary' while 'unreasonable' restraints were those whose contracts resulted in monopolistic behaviour.[705] The line between reasonable and unreasonable trade was often called into question in the biblical epic cycle, as illustrated in the struggle of exhibitors to resist the major distributors' push back against the antitrust rulings and in the re-establishment of their control over the market.

The biblical epics' role in the industry debates reveals the high market value of the films and the exploitation of this by distributors. The films were used as leverage to extract high percentage rental deals and force up the bidding process. They further enabled the studios to dictate admission prices and to re-construct a system of runs, clearances, and zones. The reference made to such films as *Quo Vadis*, *Salome* and *The Ten Commandments* in the debates around this process suggests the struggle of exhibitors against the reassertion of the studios' control.

A *Variety* article from 1955 described how the role of the 'sales chief' had expanded in the big picture era. The studio distribution heads now oversaw the diffusion of technological processes and equipment to theatres, mediated with increasingly irate theatre-owners, and concentrated on extracting greater earnings from a smaller number of products through large-scale marketing campaigns.[706] Throughout the 1950s, the majors also won important court cases that limited the extent of the antitrust decrees, discounted exhibitor complaints, and reinstituted practices beneficial to distribution revenue. The cycle of biblical epics thus illustrates the limitations of divorcement in breaking the power of the studios. In establishing new terms for distribution policies, the anti-competitive elements of which were tacitly acknowledged by the DoJ and regional legislative bodies, the majors were able to maintain market control and justify their restraint of trade as 'reasonable' in current market conditions.

The distribution of the biblical epic cycle took different forms as the modes of exhibition changed. Multiple, simultaneous runs emerged among subsequent-run theatres as a result

[705] Kovaleff, *Business and Government During the Eisenhower Administration*, 12.
[706] 'Global Role of Sales Chiefs', *Variety*, 2 March, 1955, 5, 69.

of the antitrust ruling against clearances in the mid-1950s. Suburbanisation also drew some of the focus from downtown first run houses, and the rise of drive-ins went some way towards offsetting the steady closure of small theatres. While some commentators observed in the trade press that these cinema closures acted as a corrective measure that made up for the attendance decline and lesser product flow, the exhibitors traced their problems to the unfair practices of the distributors, as I will explore in further detail below.[707]

The independent exhibitor organisation Allied States Association of Motion Picture Exhibitors was particularly vocal in expressing the dissatisfaction with rental terms and wider product shortage. The drop in the volume of production was of increasing concern to exhibitors throughout the 1950s. In 1958, *Variety* noted that there were seventy fewer script submissions to the PCA than in 1957 and predicted that if numbers continued to lag 1959 would see one of the worst product shortages in the industry's history. *Variety* estimated the production quantities for 1959 would total 300, in contrast to the high-water mark of 1940 when 530 productions were approved by the PCA.[708] Exhibitors blamed the majors for artificially creating the shortage and attributed the industry's current state of crisis to this lack of product.[709] The response of the studios inflamed the exhibitors further, with *Variety* quoting one anonymous producer as stating, 'We shouldn't bother making more than a handful of top picture. To hell with the exhibitors. They've ruined this business long enough.'[710] Allied States consistently called for Congressional investigations and petitioned for government regulation on such matters throughout the decade. When the issues were investigated by the Senate Small Business Subcommittee and submitted to the Department of Justice, however, internal arbitration rather than an external regulation of prices was recommended.

The attempts to establish a workable industry-administered arbitration system, in contrast to the arrangement overseen by the American Arbitration Association in the 1940s, spanned the majority of the decade. There was a fundamental disagreement over terms from Allied States Association which caused them to withdraw from negotiations in1952.

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[707] Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry,* 147.
[708] 'Hollywood Production Lagging In Numbers; 70 Fewer Features', *Variety*, 20 August, 1958, 19.
[709] 'Allied Carries its Case To Congress Committee', *Motion Picture Herald*, 24 March, 1956, 13. 'Institute Panellists Study Price Scales and Product Shortage', *Motion Picture Herald*, 21 April, 1956, 12 – 13.
[710] 'Hollywood Production Lagging In Numbers; 70 Fewer Features', *Variety*, 20 August, 1958, 19.

Allied States' sticking point was the question of film rental terms. It petitioned for this to be included in the list of 'arbitrable' issues, alongside questions of clearances and runs, and pre-releases. Louis Phillips, distributor at Paramount, defined pre-releases as such:

> A pre-release, as it is understood in the industry, is an exhibition of a picture prior to its general release, under which method of release a picture is withdrawn from distribution for a period of six months to a year before putting it out on broad general release. Moreover, when a picture has been pre-released, it is licensed for first run in the same city where it had been shown on a pre-release some months before.[711]

Pre-release engagements had initially been fixed at two per year from each studio, but were perceived as difficult to determine, with the exhibitors disinclined to take a distributor's word that a film was worthy of their extra merchandising investment.[712]

In these early debates Columbia's 1953 sales policy on *Salome* was repeatedly singled out as an example of the majors' unfair trade practices. Abram Myers of Allied States argued that the pre-release policy effectively established a new system of clearances by imposing an additional exclusive run before the first run, but without the traditional six-month withdrawal from the market.[713] Columbia's policy on *Salome* applied and extended similar competitive bidding restrictions that Metro had developed for *Quo Vadis*, which had also drawn protest for price fixing.[714] Like MGM, Columbia limited its version of pre-release engagements for *Salome* to locations with populations of 75,000 and over, and asked for a first week cut of 50%. Although the studio's industry announcement of the policy stated that they did not intend to fix admission prices, it emphasised that the recent situations where exhibitors voluntarily increased ticket prices for big attractions had done very well.[715] The implication that exhibitors who did not raise admission prices would not

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[711] Louis Phillips quoted in letter from Max Hamilton to Art Arthur, 11 May, 1956, United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400Box 694.20.

[712] ''Phony' Advanced-Price Pix Major Allied Beef in Arbitration Turndown', *Variety*, 26 November, 1952, 5, 24.

[713] 'Snaper Thinks Gov't Will Act on Practices', *Motion Picture Daily*, 21 January, 1953, 1, 4. 'Pre-Releases Hit Again by Abram Myers', *Motion Picture Daily*, 25 February, 1953, 1, 4. The board argued that the central effects of the roadshow practice on theatres represented a violation of the anti-trust decrees: '[having] the effect of superimposing upon the regular clearance to which subsequent run theatres are subjected, an additional and much longer clearance in favour of the prior-run theatres which play the pictures first as a roadshow and then on regular release – and has the further effect of creating clearances over theatres and towns which have not been subjected to any clearance'. 'Allied Board Rejects Arbitration Finally', *Motion Picture Herald*, 17 January, 1953, 13.

[714] 'Announcing the Sales Plan for MGM's "Quo Vadis"', *Variety*, 21 November, 1953, 16-17.

[715] 'Col's "Salome" Sales Policy Draws Fire from Allied; Col. Defends It', *Variety*, 21 January, 1953, 7, 24. 'Col. Undeterred by Allied Beefs on "Salome" Plan', *Variety*, 28 January, 1953, 5, 16.

get the picture was, Allied argued, a violation of antitrust, and a complaint was lodged with the Department of Justice.[716]

My examination of the circulation of the biblical epics in Chicago provides a more detailed illustration of this process of erosion. The studios used the biblical epics in their attempts to amend Chicago's cardinal antirust ruling, the Jackson Park decree, which prohibited long clearance periods and extended runs in the city's first run 'Loop' theatres. The distributors pleaded that the biblical epics were 'special cases' and the court granted exceptions for their exhibition, which lead to a gradual acceptance of their "unfair" trade practices. Studying the cycle's distribution in Chicago also reveals the range of policies that were developed for the studios to circulate their product, and the ways in which these, and the changed exhibition environment, affected theatres. As the systems of faster play-offs in Chicago were eventually curbed, the multiple subsequent runs were redivided into zones, and versions of pre-release policies created additional runs.

As described in Michael Conant's *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry*, the city traditionally had an eleven-run system, with the first three runs dominated by the Balaban and Katz chain, affiliated with Paramount.[717] In 1945 an independent exhibitor of the Jackson Park theatre, Florence Bigelow, won a private treble damage action against the majors for their conspiracy to monopolise the city's first run. In a precursor to the Paramount Decision, the Jackson Park decree ruled that all Chicago's Loop first run houses, with the exception of the Oriental, the Chicago, and the Woods, be limited to two week runs, that the clearance period be reduced, and that fixed admissions prices were prohibited. The city was divided into zones and a system of competitive bidding established among a reduced number of subsequent runs; the second run was crowded with 113 theatres and the third with 77. Conant shows how this reduced the traditional play-off for a film from seventeen weeks to around seven weeks.[718] This setup of 'multiple runs', which also spread across other locations following the Paramount decision, was criticised by distributors. In 1952 Nick Schenck argued:

> There is just so much money to be gotten from one zone. When you have a series of simultaneous runs you achieve nothing but a dilution of the boxoffice potential.

[716] In mid-1953 a report in the trade press anticipated that Columbia would be changing its bidding restrictions as a result of exhibitor agitation. 'Col Holding Firm on "Salome" Selling', *Variety*, 29 April, 1953, 4.
[717] Michael Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1960), 154 – 177.
[718] Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry*, 169.

> No theatre makes any big money and it costs the distributor twice as much, and more, for his participation in a selling campaign to try to bolster business of the theatres."[719]

The competitive bidding practice within these runs also drove up prices for exhibitors, and Chicago neighbourhood theatres experienced a substantial drop in profits following the decree. Aided by city tax laws, competition from drive-ins, and the attendance decline more generally, 132 of the 310 Chicago hard top theatres closed by July 1957.[720]

In the early 1950s the tenets of the Jackson Park decree were increasingly loosened as more distributors received concessions for showing certain films for extended runs in Loop houses. MGM had petitioned the Chicago courts to grant permission for *Quo Vadis* to be played as a roadshow and given a substantial clearance period after the initial run in 1951. Illinois District Court Judge Michael Igoe's rejection of the request led to Metro's exhibition of the film in the Oriental, an independent Loop theatre exempt from Jackson Park's two-week rule.[721] Yet when the Oriental closed temporarily in late 1952, the 'exorbitant' 70-30 rental terms demanded by Metro were cited as a chief reason.[722] At this time too, there was a break from the tradition of raised admission prices for the neighbourhood theatres, with Balaban and Katz deciding to offer regular prices on *Quo Vadis*, and the other theatre operators following suit. The following year, the District Court changed its position when it granted Columbia permission for *Salome*; the film played an eight week run at the Grand, despite the theatre still being officially limited to two week showings.[723] Twentieth Century Fox asked for similar consideration in Chicago for its screening of *The Robe* in 1953. Pointing to the successful playing of *Gentleman's Agreement* for twenty-five weeks with permission from the court, the distributor argued that the CinemaScope production was also deserving of 'special treatment'. Exhibitors feared that if this was granted, it could set a precedent that would undermine the gains of the Jackson Park ruling and threaten the product flow to neighbourhood and subsequent run theatres. But Judge Igoe acquiesced to Fox's request: he ordered that the Jackson Park

[719] 'Nick Schenck Calls Multiple-Runs Top Hazard', *Variety*, 13 August, 1952, 3, 18.
[720] '132 of Chi's 310 Houses Shaken Out; Kirsch Hits Municipality's 3% Tax', *Variety*, 17 July, 1957, 5.
[721] 'Chi Judge Denies "Vadis" Right to Roadshow', *Variety*, 2 January, 1952, 48.
[722] 'See Chi Playoffs Snarled Anew by Oriental Fold; Blame High Rentals', *Variety*, 11 June, 1952, 15.
[723] '8-Week "Salome", "Rouge", "Pan" Runs Pace Loop Bid For Extended Showings', *Variety*, 1 April, 1953, 8.

area of Chicago engage in competitive bidding and declared that pictures of special interest may be exempt from the decree's first run limit.[724]

Shortly after this ruling was made in mid-1953, another important exhibitor case reached the Supreme Court, which also ruled in the distributors' favour. The neighbourhood Crest Theatre in Baltimore had charged distributors and local circuits with conspiring to prevent the theatre from receiving first run rights, or from day-and-dating with downtown houses. The usual system of downtown showcasing was thus put to review by the court, and it was felt that a ruling that upheld the Crest's argument could drastically affect the current selling system and make films available for bidding everywhere. The Crest theatre lost its case in both a district court with a jury and in the Circuit Court of Appeals, before reaching the Supreme Court, which also ruled in the distributor's favour. Associate Justice Tom C. Clark found that it would be economically unsound for neighbourhood houses to offer the first local showing when they are unable to draw the same number of patrons as the downtown theatres.[725] He argued that there was no evidence of an illegal agreement among the studios as the Sherman Act did not allow the oligopolistic pricing strategy of 'conscious parallelism' to be interpreted as conspiracy.[726] These cases in Chicago and Baltimore supported an observation made in early 1954 by the *Motion Picture Herald* that there was a definite swing away from prior antitrust litigation that favoured exhibitors.[727]

Allied States had left the arbitration proceedings in early 1953 but remained determined to police the practices of distributors, declaring that 'its members will report alleged decree violations by distributors and will send such evidence to court and lawyers and Government agents'.[728] Abram F. Myers, Allied's general counsel, pointed out the prevalence of such unfair distributor practices as refusing to give rental adjustment in accordance with box office receipts, placing theatres in higher rental brackets, increasing the minimum terms in percentage sales, and pushing flat money arrangements that shifted

[724] 'Jackson Park Ordered to Bid', *Motion Picture Herald*, 13 June, 1953, 16. 'Unlimited Run to "Robe" in Chicago: Judge Laudatory', *Motion Picture Daily*, 15 June, 1953, 1.
[725] 'High Court Rules on Film Showings', *New York Times*, 5 January, 1954, 23.
[726] 'Distributors Win Vital Test in Supreme Court', *Motion Picture Herald*, 9 January, 1954, 13.
[727] 'The Pendulum Swings', *Motion Picture Herald*, 9 January, 1954, 8.
[728] While Allied was not opposed to an arbitration system altogether, it argued that it could be designed to help the 80% of exhibitors who did not possess first run privileges, and that a system was not possible while the practices of distributors were still going unchecked. 'Allied Board Rejects Arbitration Finally', *Motion Picture Herald*, 17 January, 1953, 13.

the classification of pictures from B to A.[729] Further Senate hearings were set for 1955, with Allied States hoping that these might lead Congress to introduce legislation for the federal regulation of film rentals.[730]

Allied had pointed out that distributors could no longer follow the traditional system of providing a steady flow of product to theatres when these theatres were unable to provide the audience and receipts to support current production and distribution costs. *Variety* estimated in 1958 that 85% of domestic grosses were gathered from only 4,000 theatres.[731] These theatres, such as those of the Chicago Loop, represented the key focus of the distribution for biblical epics, with the studios planning long runs at raised admission prices, while using their position as holders of valuable goods in a seller's market to negotiate favourable rental terms. The industry's conciliation system, set up as a prelude to arbitration and to provide an informal space to hear disputes between exhibitors and distributors, was ultimately reported as a failure by the trades, with the majority of cases involving exhibitors seeking to gain earlier run status for films.[732] Myers had argued that the current arbitration plans were merely a system being used by the major companies to formalise their practices and to secure from the Courts and DoJ a legal sanction for their pre-releasing policies. [733] In 1955 Paramount responded to Myers' accusations in an open letter that described the economic situation as requiring such distribution practices while asserting that 'competitive negotiations' in the process of selecting theatres and locations for engagements were perfectly legal.[734]

The Senate Subcommittee on Retailing, Distribution and Fair Trade Practices of the Senate Select Committee on Small Business reviewed the Hollywood industry's practices in the early 1950s. There were essentially two alternatives open to the Subcommittee in making recommendations to the industry: they could ask Congress to legislate new laws to help solve the issues, or they could recommend internal arbitration, with the government only intervening when essential.[735] During its proceedings the Subcommittee

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[729] 'Freewheeling Pre-Releases Proviso by 'Arbitration' Conference Recoils', *Variety*, 2 June, 1954, 7, 20. 'Myers Warns: Government Rule of Pictures Invited by Tough Sales Policies of Distribs', *Variety*, 14 July, 1954, 4, 18.
[730] 'Senate Probe Near on Film Rentals', *Variety*, 26 October, 1955, 5, 13.
[731] Hy Hollinger, 'Hardy Dilemma: The Small Theatre', *Variety*, 30 April, 1958, 16.
[732] 'Conciliation Cases to Date Reveal Effort to Secure Earlier Runs', *Motion Picture Herald*, 14 December, 1957, 10., 'Conciliation System Sits on Iceberg; Sour Slants of Exhib and Distrib', *Variety*, 2 September, 1959, 17.
[733] 'Myers Again Hits Arbitration Plan As Aiding Majors More Than Exhibs', *Variety*, 9 November, 1955, 7, 18.
[734] 'Paramount to Allied', *Motion Picture Herald*, 3 December, 1955, 8.
[735] 'Trade Practices Soup Close to Boiling Over', *Motion Picture Herald*, 18 April, 1953, 13. 'Arbitrate or Legislate', *Motion Picture Herald*, 9 May, 1953, 8.

admonished the DoJ for not being forceful enough in ensuring the distributors' compliance to the consent decrees. Although the Subcommittee criticised aspects of the DoJ's policy, such as their approval of the 'flat sum' method of pricing pictures, they ultimately fell back on arbitration rather than regulation as a solution.[736] The Subcommittee further ruled that film rentals were not arbitrable and stated its opinion that it was not unfair trade practices but wider economic issues that were responsible for the industry's problems.[737] In answering accusations of a laxity in enforcement and dearth of sympathy for independent and small theatres, the DoJ's defence before the Subcommittee reiterated that the consent decrees were successful in creating equal opportunity for independent companies. The Justice Department ultimately defended distributor pricing policies as 'special handling', thus redefining their understanding of the reasonable restraint of trade, while they blamed competition from TV and drive-ins for the prevailing industry conditions.[738] A 1956 *Motion Picture Herald* article noted that the formerly close relationship between Allied States and the Department of Justice, which had driven the antitrust investigations of previous decades, had clearly cooled under the Eisenhower administration.[739]

The biblical epics carried an important function for the studios across the decade as the commercial value of the films were employed in the distributors' reassertion of market control. The cycle presents the circulation of blockbusters in an interim period, before the full force of television exhibition and widespread saturation openings for big budget films, when the life of a product was extended through long play-offs in theatres. The distribution strategies developed for individual films emerged alongside shifts in attendance and viewing habits that altered the way cycle consumption was understood. Rather than the typical flood and swift saturation, the rate of market absorbency continued to extend.

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[736] 'Senate Committee Report Urges Industry Arbitrate', *Motion Picture Herald*, 20 March, 1954, 21.
[737] 'Senate Report Urges Arbitration, Policing', *Motion Picture Herald*, 8 August, 1953, 13.
[738] 'U.S. Defends Decree as Allied Counter-Punches', *Motion Picture Herald*, 16 June, 1956, 12-13. Hy Hollinger argued that the 1956 Subcommittee hearings achieved little more than the provision of a forum for mudslinging and finger pointing. He later pointed out, however, that it did bring attention to the need to remove the Federal admission tax completely, and for loans for improvements to be granted to smaller theatres. Hy Hollinger, 'Pic Peace in "Deep Freeze"; Exhibs-Distribs in Wide Schism', *Variety*, 12 September, 1956, 3, 10. '"Crying Needs" of the Motion Picture Industry', *Variety*, 9 January, 1957, 7, 66.
[739] 'Allied and the Justice Department', *Motion Picture Herald*, 16 June, 156, 8.

Distribution practices and *The Ten Commandments*

The release of *The Ten Commandments* in late 1956 launched the second wave of biblical epics. The policies developed for selling the film, both to the public and to exhibitors, further elucidate the way in which Paramount used distribution to solidify its dominant position in the market and drive advantageous, anti-competitive terms without penalty. The discourse surrounding the distribution of *The Ten Commandments* highlights how, by the end of the decade, exhibitors' struggles against this process were futile. A study of the campaigns devised for circulating the film and its play-off in several locations across the country illustrates the reinstitution of a system of runs, zones, and clearances for the circulation of big budget pictures. The disputes over prices continued alongside the imposition of such exhibition structures, as admissions represented an arena where exhibitors still had nominal control. An exploration of the range of ticket prices for *The Ten Commandments*, and their relation to various types of theatres, locations, and runs, also suggests the multiple ways in which the film could be viewed. The studio emphasised the film as a unique event in an effort to drive audiences to buy hard tickets at first run screenings, but this contrasted with the film's place within a wider cycle of biblical epics, and the association of cycles with repetitive, homogenous viewing experiences.

Cyclic consumption has conventionally been understood to be a convergence of similar films in theatres in a restricted time frame, but, as discussed above, the new era's lowered production quantities, slow rate of release and extended play-offs suggests that pictures such as the biblical epics would be prevented from inundating screens in the same way. The retention of a system of runs and clearances, however, combined with the practice of theatrical re-release, ensured that the effect of a cycle could still be felt by audiences.

The studios' selling of the biblical epics continued the blockbuster emphasis on the 'got to see' factor. This suggested that these films were unique, by virtue of the large amount invested and in the aesthetic and technical presentation of a singular cinematic experience. This ties in to the emphasis on 'event', a merchandising strategy voiced by

David O. Selznick in relation to the recognition of a changed market.[740] Before the release of the films, the distributors sought to maximise the public's familiarity with the product and create a degree of expectation and excitement. The marketing budgets for the pictures accelerated alongside the production costs over the course of the decade. These campaigns were launched up to a year before the film's release and were often designed to play out over the course of the film's run.[741] The epics' advertising included the familiar radio spots, coverage in print media, and trailers, but also took advantage of television as an important new means to reach viewers.[742] Special tours, lecture circuits, and study packs were also developed for prestige and educational strategies, while particular aspects of the campaigns were aimed at different audience sectors. Specially-assembled marketing teams developed these strategies, which were implemented on the ground by a task force assembled to handle each key opening.[743]

Paramount followed the usual pattern for handling the biblical epics, with a public relations lead-up to the premiere that built associations with religious leaders and targeted non-regular theatregoers. The handling of the picture was highly controlled to the point where DeMille was able to insist that all involved must avoid using the phrase 'exploitation' in connection with the picture, in order not to tarnish its image.[744] In this initial phase, the stills and trailers also avoided showing details of the film's more spectacular scenes, such as the parting of the Red Sea, in order to build the 'want to see' factor.[745]

At the same time, the studio anticipated that the film would be the subject of repeat viewings by patrons within its initial play-off; it was expected to 'set new industry records for repeat business' and ultimately surpass the *Gone with the Wind* (MGM, 1939).

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[740] Albert Scharper, '"No Longer Habit, Gotta Be an Event": Selznick Slant on Films' Future', *Variety*, 6 November, 1957, 4, 18.
[741] 'Aim Campaign For "Commandments" At Non-Theatre Patrons, "Repeats"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 13 April. 1956, 1.
[742] 'Argue TV Downsells New Pix', *Variety*, 15 February, 1956, 11. 'New Patterns in Merchandising', *Motion Picture Herald*, 2 July, 1960, 56.
[743] James M. Jarauld, '"Samson" Campaign Unique and Varied', *Boxoffice*, 10 December, 1949, 13-14. Million-Plus Promotion Drive to Tell "Solomon and Sheba" Story to World', *Independent Exhibitors' Film Bulletin*, 6 July, 1959, 25. '"Robe" Drive in High Gear', *Independent Exhibitor's Film Bulletin*, 10 August, 1953, 4.
[744] Memorandum from Cecil B. DeMille, 17 September, 1957. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400. Box 695.5
[745] Letter from Art Arthur to Sam Friedman, 30 August, 1956. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400. Box 695.12.

[746] The advertising campaign for *The Ten Commandments* was thus designed to accompany the film through its various phases of extended release for a minimum of two and a half years. A major concern expressed several times by studio head Y. Frank Freeman in 1956 was that too much of the marketing budget would be spent on the lead up to the movie and during its first year, while Freeman saw it as imperative that the publicity push continue throughout the film's run.[747] At one stage DeMille declared 'the picture should never go into general release and you are to stay with it'.[748] The picture did play out over several years, gradually traversing several distribution phases aimed at different types of theatres. Early in the planning process, a discussion took place over the legalities of pre-releasing pictures, and how the studio could avoid violating the consent decrees in its distribution strategy. Louis Phillips, Paramount's general counsel, advised against explicitly discussing or advertising admission prices, or using the designation 'pre-release', as the studio was not stipulating any clearance periods. Instead Phillips recommended the use of phrases such as 'special exhibition' and 'merchandising engagements'.[749]

Paramount's distribution plans for *The Ten Commandments* centred on the attempt to reach every single possible moviegoer. The research carried out by the distributors to calculate this included the compilation of a list of U.S. cities that had the best business, highest wages, and lowest unemployment figures, which would be considered for the initial key openings of the film. To strategise the film's global distribution, the company collected data on a wide range of national and regional populations and evaluated them by age and average admission price.[750] Adolph Zukor argued that *The Ten Commandments* would work as a general bolster for Hollywood, demonstrating the capabilities of the medium: '[it] belongs to the world, not just to Paramount'.[751] The logic that big films such as *The Ten Commandments* would benefit the entire industry persuaded the Texas

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[746] 'Aim Campaign For "Commandments" At Non-Theatre Patrons, "Repeats"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 13 April. 1956, 1, 6.
[747] Report of 'Ten Commandments' Planning Board meeting, 19 April, 1956. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400. Box 695.6.
[748] Memo detailing phone conversation between Charles Boasberg and DeMille, 1 October, 1957. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400, Box 703.24.
[749] Louis Phillips quoted in letter from Max Hamilton to Art Arthur, 11 May, 1956, United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400Box 694.20.
[750] Global earnings charts, United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400, Box 744.1 L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University. 5 March, 1956. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400, Box 704.1
[751] 'Aim Campaign for "Commandments" At Non-Theatre Patrons, "Repeats"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 13 April, 1956, 1.

Interstate Chain to play the trailer across its eighty-one screens, despite only a single Interstate theatre receiving the film in the first year. Many independent exhibitors were less amenable to the suggestion, however, questioning why they should devote screen time to advertising a product they would not see for several years.[752]

Like other biblical epics before it, *The Ten Commandments* took a central role in the disputes over unfair distribution policies at the end of the decade. The film had been initially planned along the lines of Cinerama's limited engagements, with the theatres being leased by the studio to avoid the inconveniences of splitting the advertising and promotion costs with exhibitors.[753] Special permission from the DoJ and the Federal Court was required for any such 'four wall' plan but Paramount felt that the unusual nature of the picture and the lack of houses equipped with VistaVision might allow them special consideration. What eventually evolved was a plan for Paramount to pay exhibitors a flat sum, which represented agreed-upon theatre costs and profit, with an advance agreement on playing schedules and rental terms.[754] The plan for pricing was described as having two types of deals. The first was the four-wall deal, where a flat sum was paid to a venue and the studio paying all advertising and additional expenses but retaining 100% of the revenue. The second, more common deal was for the picture to be sold on a 70/30 basis for a guaranteed number of weeks, with the advertising costs shared between the theatre and distributor.[755]

Rather than a single, lavish premiere, Paramount unveiled *The Ten Commandments* in a series of openings in moderate-sized first run theatres with seating capacities of between 1,000 and 2,000, which were to play the film for an indefinite period.[756] Their release policy was also moulded to suit the exhibition location; while only one run was planned for New York, there were 32 engagements in the territory of Jacksonville, Florida.[757] In Chicago, the film played for eleven months at the McVickers, a 2,300 seat Loop theatre,

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[752] '"Ben-Hur" Long to Be Dim Blessing for Also-Rans; Hence Some Holdbacks on Donating Plugs for Prestige', *Variety*, 2 December, 1959 7, 13.
[753] 'If Uncle Sam Says Yes, DeMille's "Commandments" May Rent 50 Theatres', *Variety*, 1 December, 1954, 1, 68. '"4-Wall" Deals First for "Commandments"', *Motion Picture Daily*, 19 March, 1956, 1, 5.
[754] 'Para. Evolves Unique Selling "Ten" Pattern', *Motion Picture Daily*, 7 May, 1956, 1, 6.
[755] Meeting of 'The Ten Commandments' Planning Board, 1 August, 1956. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400, Box 703.24.
[756] '"Commandments" Initial Playdates', *Variety*, 18 April, 1956, 16. Over November and December, 1956, the picture played in just fifteen locations for two-a-day screenings, where it made $2,000,000. '"Ten Commandments" Sets a New Pattern', *Motion Picture Herald*, 2 February, 1957, 18.
[757] 'One Present Pace & Comparative Data Par Sees "Commandments" Gross Sure to Tally $50,000,000 to $60,000,000', *Variety*, 10 July, 1957, 14.

with a maximum ticket price of $3.30. It was noted, however, that a large portion of the profit from these screenings was derived from specially priced 90c morning screenings for group bookings of children.[758] The exhibitors of these early phases were instructed to emphasise the film's 'exclusive engagement' status with the explanation that the film would not be shown in any other theatre in the city. A guide for the handling of special engagements of *The Ten Commandments* also advised that box offices in suburban shopping areas should be established for the selling of advance tickets in downtown locations.[759]

From March 1958, the film was rolled out in a modified form of regular release with continuous, all-day screenings at raised prices. General release at popular prices did not commence until 1959.[760] While Paramount took 90% of the profit in larger cities, in towns with 100,000 populations and under, the studio took only 70% the first, week, 60% the week after.[761] Even after playing the film for two years, with 4,619 engagements and 47,750,000 admissions, Paramount calculated a minimum residual of 29,500,000 people still waiting to see the picture.[762] A letter circulated to distributors and sales people in late 1958 detailed the four major aspects of this later release phase: approximately 2,500 small theatres which had yet to play the picture and roughly 300 'sub-key' cities that had only played the picture once. The letter noted that a number of other theatre were to continue 'special engagement' screenings, while the drive-in theatre engagements which would start rolling out in spring, 1959.[763] Separate press sheets were also issued for the final phase of the film's distribution, which recommended a strategy of saturation advertising and the clear inclusion of text that emphasised 'last chance to see' and 'for the first time at regular prices'.[764]

The studio was described as playing these later stages of the film's distribution by ear, with each booking still appraised on an individual basis.[765] In New York, for instance,

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[758] 'Higher Admissions Vs. Bargains; Chicago Theatres Trend Upward', *Variety*, 20 March, 1957, 15.
[759] 'Business Building Suggestions for Handling Special Engagements of Cecil B. DeMille's Production, "The Ten Commandments", A Paramount Picture', Marketing Manual, Vertical File Collection, Folder 235, Margaret Herrick Library.
[760] Hall and Neale, *Epics, Spectacles and Blockbusters*, 160.
[761] 'Small Burg Terms on "Commandments"', *Variety*, 12 June, 1957, 17.
[762] 'U.S. Potential for "10 C's" Still Big', *Variety*, 19 November, 1958, 7, 16.
[763] E. G. Chumley, 'Revised Policy for the Continuation of Special Handling of "The Ten Commandments"', 24 December, 1958. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400, Box 703:24.
[764] Paramount Press Sheets, *The Ten Commandments*, Paramount Release Season 1957-58, Group A17.
[765] 'U.S. Potential for "10 C's" Still Big', *Variety*, 19 November, 1958, 7, 16.

after 70 weeks on Broadway, the picture was booked in twenty-one metropolitan houses, each of which played the film for four to six weeks. This system of extended runs was criticised for downgrading the value of the picture for smaller exhibitors, and Allied States stated that it ‘is more and more confining movie attendance to the big city first runs and is denying motion picture entertainment to a vast segment of our population’.[766] Allied Theatres Owners of Indiana also asserted:

> The entire question of ‘Roadshows’ is one of doubtful legality but there are some arguments for the showcasing of films in key first run engagements. But nobody but a distributor would argue for the “Commandments” plan for the sub-runs. When Allied refused to enter an arbitration plan that would give legal sanction to two roadshow pictures a year from each company they were fearful of just such developments.[767]

In Philadelphia, exhibitors protested Paramount’s overruling of the usual clearance system to make way for *The Ten Commandments*. The distributor grouped the 37 second-run theatres into five competitive zones which were then asked to bid for the picture. It was expected that the successful bids would have to play the film for approximately eight full weeks. A similar system was instituted in Minneapolis, where the 1000-seat Lyric theatre initially held the exclusive territory rights for the first run of *The Ten Commandments*. The film played on a two-a-day reserved seat basis, with a ‘hard ticket’ price of $2.25. The initial contract signed with Paramount stipulated a sixteen-week minimum run, although the studio hoped for at least six months.[768] For the subsequent runs in Minneapolis, the neighbourhood areas were divided into four zones and the bids were expected to specify to Paramount their raised admission prices and a two-week minimum playing time.[769] Local circuit owner Bernie Berger complained to the Department of Justice that Paramount elevated the terms to an impossibly high rental guarantee after he refused to give the distributor the requested admission price.[770]

In 1957, Indiana exhibitor Trueman Rembusch, who was associated with the state’s branch of the Allied States Association, responded to Paramount’s policy on *The Ten Commandments* by instituting a ‘pay what you wish’ scheme for audiences. The theatre’s advertising text stated that, as the exhibitor did not believe profit should be made from a

[766] ‘Precedential Policy Certain to Echo as Others Follow “Ten Commandments”’, *Variety*, 14 May, 1958, 5.
[767] ‘Paramount’s Latest Pre-Release Device’, *Harrison’s Reports*, 6 July, 1957, 1.
[768] ’16 Weeks Minimally but Hope DeMille Biblical Draw Rates Half Year’, *Variety*, 13 February, 1957, 13.
[769] ‘Four-Zone The Nabes in Svenskatown; Innovation for “Ten Commandments”’, *Variety*, 7 August, 1957, 16.
[770] ‘Berger Sees Victory Over Paramount Policies Re “Ten Commandments”’, *Variety*, 19 March, 1958, 13.

religious picture, revenue in excess of Paramount's share would go to charity, with nothing deducted for theatre overhead. Although Rembusch claimed that it was a novel merchandising method necessitated by the high rental terms, many trade commentators saw the move as a grass roots retaliation against Paramount's pre-release plan that 'that compels, in effect, raised admissions and imposes new and unreasonable clearances between theatres that are in substantial competition, and those that aren't competitive'.[771]

The Paramount executives were divided as to how to respond to Rembusch. Adolph Zukor and George Weltner wanted to throw the law at Rembusch and claim damages as a result of his policy, while Balaban argued that Rembusch would not be able to hurt the film's financial prospects and that it was better to let the matter lie.[772] Frank Freeman's response to Rembusch's 'pay as you wish' policy was notated as follows:

> "Let him go ahead and do it. Notify him that Paramount reserves all of its legal right to sue him." Mr. Freeman says that he is a no good b……! He had just a little b…… for a father. If Paramount sues him for not charging for 10C then he can spread that around saying he wanted to give money to charity and Paramount won't let him. That is the only theatre he gets it in and for the rest of his theatres Paramount can ask for a guarantee. Mr. Freeman would like to jerk the picture out of his house and shut it down. "This little rat has made speeches against motion picture and everything else. He is a disturbing influence in the industry."[773]

When Rembusch attempted to hold the picture over for a third week, Paramount did seek an injunction to prevent this and filed a suit seeking 'malicious injury' to the picture's reputation, arguing that its earnings at the theatre were less than what they would have been elsewhere.[774] A Paramount official reported that the average admission price volunteered was under $1.00, well below the Indianapolis average of $2.00.

A file from the DeMille archive contains details from Truman Rembusch's further campaign to garner support from exhibitors against Paramount's price fixing, with at least 24 separate letters from theatre managers confirming the admission price demanded by the distributor. The letter written from Rembusch to the Department of Justice concludes:

[771] 'Pay What You Choose', *Harrison's Reports*, 17 August, 1957, 6.
[772] Transcribed phone call from George Weltner regarding a press release in response to Rembusch, 12 August, 1957. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400, Box 693.15.
[773] Frank Freeman's reaction to Truman Rembusch, Wabash, Indiana, 13 August, 1957. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS 693.9.
[774] 'More on "Pay What You Choose"', *Harrison's Reports*, 31 August, 1957, 1. 'Paramount Asks Ban on Rembusch Policy', *Motion Picture Herald*, 31 August, 1957, 12.

> The foregoing national evidence of a uniform pricing of $1.25 for adults and 50c for children for the showing of Paramount's "The Ten Commandments" in hundreds of theatres could not be a coincidence and is outside the laws of probability. That these hundreds of theatres and others ... could arrive at the uniform price ... WITHOUT DIRECTION IS INCONCIEVABLE. It is obvious that the direction was furnished by Paramount – Paramount Pictures who is enjoined by the New York District Court under a decree affirmed by the United States Supreme Court from fixing admission "BY ANY MANNER OR MEANS." … They call for a full scale national investigation through interviews by the Department of Justice investigators of every theatre who played "The Ten Commandments" to determine the extent of Paramount's violation.[775]

When Allied States issued an official white paper to the DoJ with reference to Paramount's policy on *The Ten Commandments*, the Justice Department responded:

> It is within the business prerogative of a distributor to decide the number of theatres it will license in a given community on a particular run … it is not illegal for Paramount to license a motion picture on the basis of so much per person admitted … for the exhibitor is left free to determine for himself what the admission prices shall be … This is no different from what the purchaser of a commodity for release generally does.[776]

The responses of Paramount and the DoJ to the protests of exhibitors made clear that there would be little further regulation of distributor practices, and illustrate how the 'special handling' developed for blockbusters was seen as justifiable in the changed marketplace.

Ticket prices and the cycle experience

As Rembusch's strategy indicates, ticket prices were a mechanism used by both distributors and exhibitors to assert a degree of market control. As the industry battled the federal admissions tax in the 1950s, admissions were a subject of consistent concern. In 1951, *Variety* noted a trend to flexible prices that was reminiscent of the roadshow era, with higher 'hard ticket' prices differentiating top product. Although the article pointed out that divorcement meant this could occur more frequently at the behest of exhibitors,

[775] Truman Rembusch letter to the Department of Justice, 2 October, 1958. United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400, Box 705.9

[776] 'Allied Presses "White Paper" Demands; Skouras Calls for a Unified Industry', *Motion Picture Herald*, 18 October, 1958, 7.

this was soon brought within the distributors' control, as they used the bidding system to implement a form of price fixing.[777] It was claimed that raised prices acted as a further deterrent to audience attendance and while distributors argued that better quality product warranted higher prices and rental scales, the exhibitors queried why this logic was not applied to lower standards of product.[778] The conflicting approach to pricing also played out in Chicago, as some of the smaller theatres, such as the Ziegfeld, opted to raise tickets to increase their profit potential in the face of high rental terms, while others, including the Oriental, lowered prices for matinee sessions in an attempt to attract more customers.[779]

The marketing momentum of the biblical epics sought to drive audiences to the top prices at downtown cinemas soon after the pictures were released. The depreciating product value of films over time is seen in the reduced prices attached to subsequent run screenings. Viewers who resisted the marketing pull around *The Ten Commandments* usually had the option to wait and view the film locally at a lower, 'popular' price.

Table 6, Local pricing of *The Ten Commandments*

	PRE-RELEASE RUN	**FIRST RUN**	**SECOND RUN**	**THIRD RUN**	**FOURTH RUN**
LEWISTON	8 August, 1957 Empire theatre (1,320 seats) Two weeks, two-a-day Adults $1.50	20 September, 1957 Ritz theatre (800 seats) One week, two-a-day Adults $1.50	15 August, 1960 Auburn Drive-In Weekend screening 'Regular prices'	18 March, 1961 Ritz theatre 'First time low prices', 65c	18 June, 1966 Empire + Lisbon Drive-in (matinee indoor/evening outdoor screenings)
ELLENSBURG		23 September, 1957 Pix theatre Two-a-day Adults 90c - $1.50			
CORSICANA		19 March, 1958 Palace cinema (638 seats) Roadshow, two-a-day Adults $1.20	4 April, 1959 Palace cinema 'Special popular prices' Adult $1.00	6 June, 1959 Navarro Drive-in	28 July, 1959 Ideal cinema Adults 75c

[777] 'See Trend to "Flexible" Prices', *Variety,* 19 December, 1951, 3, 14.
[778] 'Two Sides to Upped Scale Hassle', *Variety*, 1 April, 1953, 4, 24.
[779] 'Higher Admission Vs. Bargains: Chicago Theatres Trend Upward', *Variety*, 20 March, 1957, 15.

The ticket prices indicate the value that a film could hold at a particular point in its circulation. While ticket prices represent a value imposed on the film by distributors or exhibitors rather than by viewers, these prices, in combination with factors such as theatre locations and runs, can suggest a particular type of cinema experience. An expensive, pre-booked screening in a fully-equipped downtown movie palace is vastly different from a weekend drive-in show, or a screening of the film years later as a re-release on a double bill. The consumption of a cycle such as the biblical epics was not in any sense a singular experience. The viewing of a film such as *The Ten Commandments* can be considered both within the context of other biblical epics in exhibition, and in relation to the variety of viewing experiences occasioned by the movie at different points in it run, as it passed through a range of theatre types with varying technical capacities.

Table 5's timeline of the biblical epics' overall production and release provides a panoramic view of the cycle. This illustrates an early cluster of films around 1954 and 1955, at which time production plans were made for further biblical epics that would reach theatres around 1959 and 1960. Due to the distribution policies of the studios, however, this table does not capture the availability of biblical epics to audience groups, which was more intermittent than can be represented in a general overview. Exploring the consumption of cycles suggests a reorientation away from the focus on production and the role of the studios in the operation of cycles, to consider how they might have been viewed by audiences. The experience of cycles remains speculative but a general indication can be drawn from an exhibitor's reports of the cycle effect in 1950, which was printed in *Variety*:

> Film cycles are continuing to kill the b.o., Bernie Brooks, chief film buyer for the Fabian circuit, N.Y., declared this week. Over production of westerns has been responsible for at least part of the biz downbeat during the past year and an [sic] superfluity of musicals threatens to repeat the process.[780]

This suggests the influx of similar features in a short period of time as contributing to a repetitive and boring experience for viewers which drove them away from theatres. The cycles of westerns and musicals raised in the exhibitor's example are associated with homogeneous viewing of similar films in close proximity. This contrasts with the way in which many big films of this era were strategically marketed as individualised products

[780] 'BO Being Killed by Film Cycles, Avers Pix Buyers', Variety, 16 August, 1950, 3, 23.

that could provide a unique experience. The publicity of the films and their push for early viewings at raised prices was balanced by a long-term view of their product life and the plurality of experiences that were available to viewers.

This is made clear in the study of the biblical epics' exhibition in Lewiston, Maine. The reinstitution of a modified system of runs and clearances meant that, despite slow play-offs in the first runs, cycles could manifest in a number of different screening situations in subsequent runs. While policy shifts in production and distribution changed the length of a film's exhibition as well as the rate of the release, the survival of subsequent and multiple runs, clearance periods, and the practices of reissues meant the experience of cycles remained a significant factor for audiences.

Although the film studios sold many of their earlier film libraries to television networks in the 1950s, the biblical epics were retained for theatrical exhibition. Many of the films were deemed suitable for multiple, repeat viewings and reissues in cinemas, with the religious subject matter particularly suited for holiday screenings. Paramount, for example, felt that *Samson and Delilah* still held value ten years after its first release, and specifically asked critics to consider 'the values of peddling vintage product to the theatrical market against their sale to television'. In considering the studio's policy on reissues, in 1958 Paramount distribution executive George Weltner argued that they should hold back on a re-release of *Samson and Delilah* so that it would not be overshadowed by *The Ten Commandments*. If reissues of other biblical pictures were to occur or new religious films to be made, however, Weltner stated that Paramount should then rush the film out quickly so the studio would not fall behind.[781] The picture was re-issued with a marketing campaign that drew on the renewed interest in DeMille's work following his death in 1959.[782] At the time of *The Bible*'s release in 1966, a trade review highlighted the way in which distributors calculated ongoing exhibition for the film:

> Repeat attendance is guaranteed. People will see it as children, as teenagers, later as parents taking their children. It can play on hardticket for years, and the 15 years in which 20th-Fox and Seven Arts have distribution rights seem just the beginning. Until home television or entertainment systems can present it in larger-than-life form, it belongs in theatres.[783]

[781] Letter from George Weltner to Y. Frank Freeman, 6 January, 1958, United Artists Series 1.7, Cecil B. DeMille MS1400, Box 693.15. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.
[782] 'Press Asked to Re-Peep At 10-Year-Old DeMille "Samson and Delilah" Bout', *Variety*, 19 August, 1959, 22.
[783] 'The Bible', *Variety*, 28 September, 1966, 6.

Lewiston presents an interesting case for exhibiting the cycle, as the town's drive-in was frequently used as a first run venue for the epics, alongside the town's larger Ritz and Empire cinemas. The Lewiston Drive-in held the first showings for *Quo Vadis*, *Salome*, and *The Prodigal* in the town, countering assumptions that biblical epic's first runs, even locally, would be downtown events. Although their total number declined in the second half of the decade, the many subsequent run theatres and drive-ins in Lewiston and the surrounding area meant that the cycle had a longer period of circulation. *Quo Vadis*, for instance, had two showings at local drive-ins at $1.00 adult prices in 1952, around six months after the film was first released. A year later, *Quo Vadis* returned for smaller local screenings at the Gull and the Community theatres, still at a high ticket price, before finally playing downtown at Empire in 1954 for the first time at regular prices.[784] The multiple viewing choices for audiences were also evident in local newspaper's advertisements for special screenings held outside of Lewiston. Cinerama was declared to be 'worth the trip to Boston', and a roadshow screening of *Ben-Hur* in nearby Portland, MA enabled viewers to see the film 'only six months' after its Broadway premiere. The residents of Lewiston would have to wait an additional six months before the film reached local screens.[785]

Lewiston's subsequent-runs also show the significance of theatrical reissues in contributing to the cycle. In the 1960-61 period there were four theatres operating in Lewiston in the summer months, with the local paper carrying the programming details for five further cinemas in neighbouring areas less than an hour from the town. In winter, only two cinemas operated from Lewiston, with a further two theatres open on weekends only. In this period, these cinemas were still playing off *The Ten Commandments* four years after its Broadway launch, and they held the first screenings for *The Big Fisherman, Solomon and Sheba, The Story of Ruth, Ben-Hur* and *Esther and the King*. The films often screened multiple times in various runs, and the theatres also carried the reissues of *Samson and Delilah*, *The Robe, Demetrius and the Gladiators* and *The Silver Chalice*. Additionally, the cinemas were also playing the Italian-made biblical spectacles and the

[784] *Lewiston Daily Sun*, 8 May 1952. Lewiston Drive In, Wed-Tue first Lewiston showing, adults $1.00 'this engagement only' Lewiston *Daily Sun*, 21 June, 1952. Augusta Drive in, Sun - Thu, Adults $1.00 'prices for this attraction throughout the country'. Lewiston *Daily Sun*, 14 July, 1952. Gull Theatre., *Lewiston Daily Sun*, 28 August, 1952, Community Theatre playing full week, $1.00, Lewiston *Daily Sun*, 11 January, 1954. Empire theatre playing Wed -Sat, two-a-day 'first time at regular price'.
[785] *Lewiston Daily Sun*, 5 October, 1960.

sword and sandal epics. For the people of Lewiston, this 12-month period was when the full force of the biblical epic cycle could be felt. Within this temporal frame they also had a range of viewing experiences from which to select, as indicated in the table below.

Table 7, Lewiston's exhibition of the biblical epics in 1960

Date	Film	Showing
5 March, 1960	*The Robe* + *The Angry Hills* (MGM, 1959)	Ritz Theatre (800 seats), Sun – Tues First time regular prices
17 March, 1960	*The Big Fisherman*	Empire Theatre (1,320 seats) Two-a-day screenings, adults 90c
9 April, 1960	*Solomon and Sheba*	Empire Several shows a day
21 April. 1960	*The Big Fisherman*	Lewiston Drive-in Weekend screenings
12 May, 1960	*The Silver Chalice* + *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy* (Universal, 1955)	Ritz Thu - Sat
4 June, 1960	*Solomon and Sheba* + *The Young Captives* (Paramount, 1959)	Ritz Sun – Tues
2 July, 1960	*Samson and Delilah* + *Three Stooges Fun-O-Rama* (Columbia, 1959)	Ritz Sun - Tues
13 August, 1960	*The Story of Ruth*+ *Seven Thieves* (Fox, 1960) (drive-in only)	Empire + Lewiston Drive-in, Sun - Tues Empire continuous daytime screenings
15 August, 1960	*The Ten Commandments*	Auburn Drive-in Regular prices
18 August, 1960	*The Big Fisherman*	Ritz First time low prices, adults 35c
9 January, 1961	*Esther and the King*	Empire Mon – Tue
24 February, 1961	*Ben-Hur*	Empire, three full weeks Two-a-day, adults $1.25
18 March, 1961	*The Robe*	Priscilla (700 seats), equipped for CinemaScope Mon – Thu, continuous screenings
18 March, 1961	*The Ten Commandments*	Ritz First time low prices, adults 65c

The biblical epics show that despite the blockbuster policies of reduced output and slowly-paced circulation, the system of runs and clearances that persisted in locations such as Lewiston, and particularly the practice of re-issues, meant that cycles were still present in exhibition. While Lewiston represents a single example of the effect of cycles being present for viewers at this time, a *Variety* report on Atlanta in the same period indicated that similar situations could also play out in big cities.[786]

The biblical epics clearly embodied many of the revised production and distribution policies of the new era. In turning their attention to distribution profits, the studios focussed on intense publicity pushes, increasing rental prices and conducting competitive negotiations with exhibitors, and developing play-off strategies that would maximise audience viewing windows. The increased significance of distribution, both domestic and international, as the primary source of profit, contributed to the blockbuster mentality and the production of expensive films with wide appeal.

The film type of the biblical epic, with its familiar stories, exotic locations and combination of spectacle, action and sex beneath the veil of religious respectability, was seen to appeal to the mass of moviegoers the world over. For many, the pictures testified to the fear expressed in the trade press that the pursuit of low-risk strategies as part of the big budget production policy would lead to increasingly formulaic filmmaking, suggesting a greater propensity for cycles. The budgets invested in the pictures were designed to be recovered through a sales policy that ensured they could secure every potential dollar from as many situations as possible, aided by a marketing stress on their 'got to see' factor that could appeal to non-regular moviegoers and drive viewers to the first runs. With a lesser number of films produced in the new era, and an increasingly individualised focus on selling and marketing, the blockbuster cycles operated in a different way from the organisational tool of standard, low budget cycles. The biblical epics were specifically employed by the majors as valuable products that could persuade and pressure exhibitors to comply with the distribution terms laid out by the studios. The distribution and shape of the biblical epic cycle also presents a contrasting form to the topical and exploitation cycles that also proliferated in this period, which will be more closely explored in the following chapter.

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[786] 'Atlanta's Biblical Race', *Variety*, 2 December, 1959, 15.

The biblical epics' design for a new era of industry operations and audience consumption enable an examination of how cycles developed to accommodate these shifts, and how understandings of cycles need to adjust accordingly. The 1950s saw the development of changes in the timing and speed of films in the marketplace, alongside an increased number of opportunities and means to consume this product. While it was not frequently utilised for the biblical epics in the 1950s, the additional exhibition platform of television also meant that the shelf-life of films extended almost indefinitely from the 1950s. This challenges the way that cycles are generally measured and assessed through a brief temporal window and a focus on the moment of theatrical release. The plurality of the cycle experience illustrated in the Lewiston example emphasises the way that the consumption of product in terms of brief, time-bound cycles is complicated by the development of variegated distribution polices and multiple exhibition platforms. While the studios emphasised the biblical epics in relation to theatrical exhibition, this conception of multiple or repeat opportunities for viewing suggests a wider shift to the longer tail of distribution associated with contemporary product circulation. Rather than focusing on the quantity and duration of cycles, these changes to the product life of a film suggest that the temporality of cycles must also be measured by the rate of release and the speed of product flowing into multiple markets. This includes a widening of the scope of cycles to consider foreign co-productions and international distribution as shaping Hollywood practice and product flow.

Chapter Seven

Beach Party Pictures: Independent Production, Circulation and Market Exploitation

The final chapter briefly examines the type of cycle that is most often identified and analysed in cycle studies. The beach party pictures demonstrate a common form of cyclic operation: the cycle largely consisted of low-budget independent productions that briefly exploited a subcultural trend and were tailored for a specific market. My return to this form of the film cycle enables an exploration of the pictures according to the industrial perspective developed in the preceding chapters. Such cycles are traditionally treated as practices in exploitation. They are studied for the relationship between the process of production and the subject matter, and become an avenue for exploring the response of filmmakers to social and cultural developments. My aim is to widen this focus to consider circulation as a key factor in measuring cycles and to argue that the beach party cycle developed as a result of the specific distribution and exhibition environment of the early 1960s.

In this period, the contemporary patterns of circulation continued the concentration on big budget features, which were released in the summer months and holiday periods. Aimed at a wide, undifferentiated audience, these played for extended runs at raised prices over a long stretch of time. Despite the closure of many small theatres in the 1950s and the lessening of drive-ins as a corrective force after 1958, these theatres still represented a sizable, potentially profitable market for low-budget production throughout the next decade. These small theatre exhibitors, for whom teenagers were a primary source of income, felt the effects of the post-Divorcement product shortage most strongly. Independent production and distribution companies such as American International Pictures (AIP) developed a strategy to address this need, specialising in cheaply produced films that were sold to exhibitors in double bill packages and released in springtime 'famine' stretches of the year. The circulation of lower-budget product provided a counterpoint to the extended runs and slow playoffs of contemporary blockbuster cycles such as the biblical epics and musicals. The large print numbers of the beach party films,

and their participation in strategies of regional saturation, present a more concentrated form of cycle that was released at a rapid pace and held an earlier expiration date.

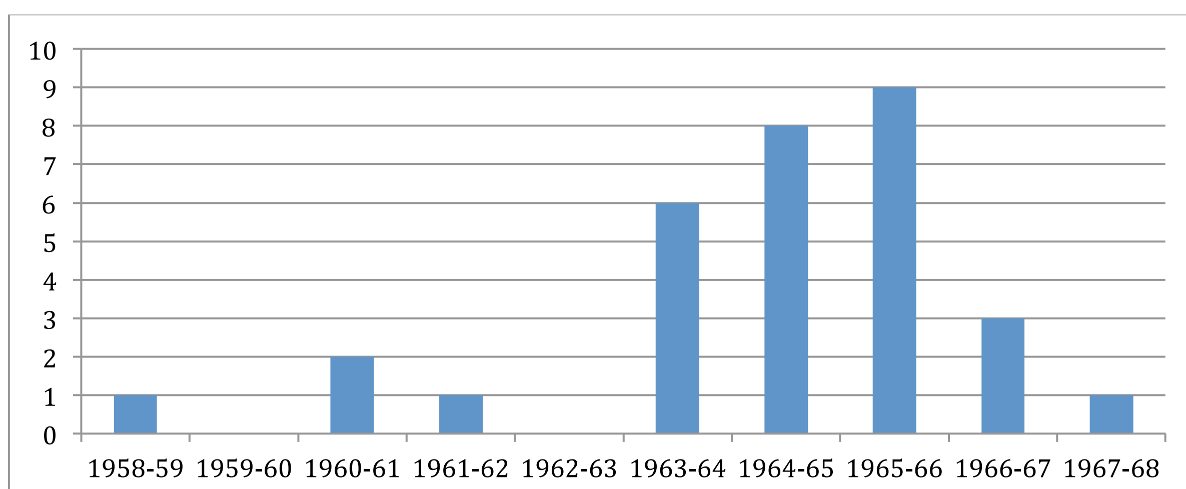
The beach party cycle spanned the years 1963 to 1965 and centred on teenagers' romantic misadventures against a summer-time beach backdrop. To heighten their appeal to the youth market the films incorporated musical numbers and surfing footage that drew upon current subcultural trends. As the cycle developed, it moved away from this surf focus and in several cases the beach background was swapped for ski slopes, poolsides and lakefronts. The same cast of characters migrated to the new settings and the iconography of the bikini, however incongruous, was retained. Central to the cycle were eight entries from AIP, the majority of them starring Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello, which set the tone for the rest of the pictures. Robert Salmaggi, writing for the *New York Herald Tribune,* encapsulated the cycle's basic formula in describing *Surf Party* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1964), an early imitation of *Beach Party* (AIP, 1963):

> "Surf Party" is another of those harmless little teen-time crackerjacks insisting that youth will be surfed, providing there's a big, wide wonderful ocean and lots of rocking, rolling music. There's the usual wide-eyed amateur-level acting, piddling plot, and babes in bikinis, all of which serves as window dressing for some half dozen songs served up in uninspired style.[787]

The form of the beach party cycle follows a familiar pattern. Its foundation lies in several early musical films on the surf culture that were aimed at the teen market, such as *Gidget* (Columbia, 1959) and the Elvis Presley picture *Blue Hawaii* (MGM, 1961). The majority of productions came several years later, instigated by AIP's low-budget hit *Beach Party*, which presented an inexpensive formula that could be easily imitated. Following AIP's lead, other independent filmmakers, such as Maury Dexter, Bart Patton, and Lennie Weinrib, developed films that could be picked up by distributors. The major studios dropped in late to the cycle with their own slightly bigger productions, such as *Don't Make Waves* (MGM, 1967) and *The Sweet Ride* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1968), aimed at a wider market.

[787] Robert Salmaggi, *New York Herald Tribune,* 12 March, 1964.

Table 8, Beach party picture production quantities



Most commentary on the beach party pictures downplays their status as a group operating within a specific marketplace. Tom Lisanti and Gary Morris offer comprehensive, descriptive outlines of the films and a particular focus on the contributions of AIP. Lisanti provides some industrial background to the cycle, with anecdotal detail on each film's production history and an evaluation of such elements of appeal as their music, surf footage, and girl-watching.[788] Morris also breaks apart these aspects of the films' formula to consider their mode of representation, presenting an ideological argument that suggests their appeal lies in escapism for teen audiences.[789] R. L. Rutsky has challenged this analysis, along with Thomas Doherty's take on the 'clean teenpix', as selective and symptomatic, marked by the ideological awareness of scholars who distinguish themselves from an audience characterised as ideologically conformist.[790] Rutsky argues that the films' promotion often emphasised the non-conformist and antibourgeois aspects of surfing culture, and that the "otherness" in the films' depictions of non-western cultures could present a means for viewers to challenge the status quo. He maintains that academics who identify hegemonic cultural discourses of conformity and escapism while positioning themselves outside of such structures should also acknowledge their own pleasure and investment in such forms.

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[788] Thomas Lisanti, *Hollywood Surf and Beach Movies: The First Wave, 1959-69* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co. Inc., 2005).
[789] Gary Morris, 'Beyond the Beach: Social and Formal Aspects of AIP's Beach Party Movies', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol 21, No. 1 (1993), 1-11.
[790] R. L. Rutsky, 'Surfing the Other: Ideology on the Beach', *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (1999), 12-23. Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpix: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s,* revised edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

The reception of the films as cult objects is also addressed by Andrew Caine, who discusses the way in which the films were produced and marketed as mainstream products, taking issue with latter-day oppositional readings that draw on paracinema strategies of 'bad taste'.[791] Other writing on the beach party films focuses on issues of gender representation and sexuality, including explorations of the particular strategies of exotification and the reification of images of white, middle class masculinity.[792] Viewing the films as an economically pragmatic cycle, however, more firmly locates them in their industrial environment and illustrates the significance of their immediate function for the distributors and exhibitors of the mid-1960s. The circulation of the beach party pictures was manifested through the closely-related factors of theatre type, time of year, and audience demographic. The cycle was squarely aimed at the drive-ins and smaller theatres frequented by teenagers over the spring and summer months. The neglect of this sector by the major studios enhanced the warmth of the beach party picture's reception by exhibitors and audiences. AIP was celebrated in the trade press for its commercially-successful pursuit of a cycle policy, while the perpetuation of 'bad film' cycles was attributed to the consumers.

Teenagers and the early sixties marketplace

As touched on in previous chapters, the steady decline in theatre attendance from the late 1940s was tied to shifts in demographics, including the baby boom, suburbanisation, increased consumer spending, a shorter working week and a wider variety of leisure activities on offer. The trades returned to the discourse of the late 1930s, that the public had lost the moviegoing habit and grown increasingly selective in their choice of films to see, and research was conducted to discover which groups could be returned to habitual attendance.[793] Teenagers, with their leisure time and disposable income, were identified by industry commentators as a one of the few remaining groups regularly going to the cinema.[794] Film historian Robert Sklar has examined several conflicting sociological

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[791] Andrew Caine, 'The AIP Beach Movies – Cult Films Depicting Subcultural Activities', *Scope* (2001).
[792] Joan Ormrod, 'Issues of Gender in "Muscle Beach Party"', *Scope* (December, 2002). Pablo Dominguez Andersen, 'The Hollywood Beach Party Genre and the Exotification of Youthful White Masculinity in Early 1960s America', *Men and Masculinities* (2014), 1 – 25.
[793] 'More Data About Audience Taste? Great! But How Does East Get Studios to Act on Finding?' *Variety*, 23 May, 1956, 5, 16.
[794] Hy Hollinger, Teenage Biz vs Repair Bills', *Variety*, 19 December, 1956, 1, 20.

discourses surrounding this 'lost audience' that explored generational difference.[795] Gilbert Seldes argued that spectatorial expectations had shifted and post-war films were not mature enough to maintain the interests of increasingly-educated audiences. On the other hand, David and Evelyn T. Riesman suggested that pictures had become too mature for the older generation of viewers who had been left behind in learning the new languages of media and communication.[796] While these conflicting approaches each raise valid points, the fundamental factor is that audiences for Hollywood films, and the way that the industry imagined them, had clearly changed over the course of the decade.

Peter Lev argues that by the late 1950s four distinct markets had emerged in the United States.[797] The top end of the market was centred on roadshow attractions that played in downtown theatres to tourists, couples, families or affluent viewers, who were generally infrequent moviegoers. These films, which were usually screened twice daily at raised prices, included blockbusters such as the biblical epics or Broadway adaptations. The second sector consisted of the traditional first and second-run markets which often held more select tastes than the prior sector, being attracted to A features with controversial topics or social themes. The third sector was the big city and university town viewers who favoured art house fare, whether Hollywood or foreign. Finally, the fourth sector was made up of working class patrons, teenagers, and small town dwellers who, as many of the smaller theatres catering to them closed, increasingly attended drive-ins. The teen market remained one of the most commercially attractive audience segments, particularly as a revenue stream for low-budget product. The demand from this sector was such that a teen film budgeted between $500,000 and $700,000 was able to comfortably secure returns in the domestic market to cover its investment, and in mid-1965 it was estimated that one in three of the current Hollywood productions were aimed at this youth audience.[798]

The distribution map had also been altered by the growth of the suburbs in the 1950s, and new release patterns saw the neighbourhood theatres and drive-ins encroach on territory

[795] Robert Sklar. 'The Lost Audience: 1950s Spectatorship and Historical Reception Studies', *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies,* Melvyn Stokes, Richard Maltby (Eds.) (London: BFI, 1999), 81-92.
[796] Gilbert Seldes, *The Great Audience*, (New York: Viking Adult, 1950), David Riesman and Evelyn T. Riesman, 'Movies and Audiences', *American Quarterly*, Vol. 4 (1952), 195-202**.**
[797] Peter Lev, *Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959*. Vol. 7, *History of the American Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 215.
[798] "Teenagers, and Their Pocket Money, a Film Market unto Themselves', *Variety*, 10 March, 1965, 4. Peter Bart, 'Standing Up To the Teenagers', *New York Times*, 15 August, 1965, 489.

that had previously been the domain of the city centre first-runs. Saturation booking practices were particularly well suited to urban centres and their surrounding neighbourhoods in areas such as Chicago, New York, Boston, and L.A.[799] This 'day and dating' was initially restricted by print shortages, as a key city such as New York required at least 80 prints while reductions in print supply had been limited to around 200 nationally in 1957. By 1959, however, Joseph E. Levine had been able to secure 600 prints for the release of *Hercules* (Embassy Pictures, 1959). This was the biggest order ever processed by the Eastman-Pathé Laboratories, with 115 prints circulated for 250 playdates in New England alone.[800] There was still some resistance from the blockbuster-focused majors to adopting the practice more widely, as the extended run patterns were still remunerative and the supposed loss of prestige associated with saturation openings remained a commonly-voiced concern. In *Variety*, Fred Hift pointed out that often the suburbs' 'want to see' factor was limited to top pictures, and that saturating an area with multiple runs of a single product was not constructive for the industry as a whole.[801]

The saturation pattern was seen as a possible threat to the downtown dominance as the traditional first-run theatres were increasingly bypassed by medium-budget releases. A swing back to downtown openings, particularly for these mid-budget films, occurred in 1958 but over the next few years there was a concerted movement to downsize many of the picture palaces.[802] In Chicago, Balaban & Katz carried out extensive renovations on their downtown cinemas, which reduced their overall capacity. Combined with the wider theatre closures, there was a loss of 10,000 seats in the Chicago metropolitan area at this time. A spokesperson from Balaban & Katz explained that 'the economics of exhibition have changed, and in a large theatre when you finish paying the staff and the unions there's nothing left'.[803] In recognition of the significance of the teen market, the circuit owners also pursued strategies to attract high school students to the Loop theatres, providing preview screenings for students to review films for school papers and offering special student rates.[804]

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[799] 'Scuttling of Playdate System by Print Shortage Reaches Crisis', Variety, 26 June, 1957, 4. 'Mass Territorial Premieres Setting New Pattern of Distribution', *Motion Picture Herald*, 6 July, 1957, 14. 'Multiple Bookings Setting New Pattern', *Motion Picture Herald*, 20 July, 1957, 14.
[800] 'Hercules Has 6,000 Dates Lined Up', *Variety*, 15 July, 1959, 32. '"Hercules" Throws Bolts in New England: Marshalling 115 Prints to Saturate', *Variety*, 10 June, 1959, 19.
[801] Fred Hift, 'Films' B.O. Rainbow in Suburbs', *Variety*, 1 August, 1956, 1, 18.
[802] Hy Hollinger, 'Nabe Openings Soon Forgot', *Variety*, 7 May, 1958, 13.
[803] 'Pull Down Ginger Palaces; B&K Folds 30 of Old Biggies', *Variety*, 16 October, 1963, 7.
[804] 'Attracting the Patrons Downtown' *Motion Picture Herald*, 1 April, 1964, 8.

In the previous decade, the trade press had predicted that big theatres in suburban locations would be a feature of the exhibition field in the years to come.[805] This prediction was repeated in 1959, when an increasing number of deals were being arranged between suburban shopping centres and 'hard top' brick and mortar theatres.[806] In the 1960s, shopping centres grew as a key site for new cinemas, providing the advantages of ease of access, high foot traffic, and parking space. *Variety* reported that two out of three theatre constructions, particularly those of newly developed circuits, were in shopping centre sites.[807] Drive-ins also retained their significance as a suburban exhibition venue. Although their construction and attendance both peaked in 1958, drive-ins accounted for 25% of domestic box office gross in 1963.[808] In 1965, there were an estimated 14,000 hard top theatres and 5,000 drive-ins across the U.S and Canada.[809]

In 1960, Twentieth Century-Fox sought to rearrange the established release patterns of the downtown and neighbourhood subsequent-run cinemas, adjusting the playoff plans to suit individual releases. The significance of these attempts was noted in *Variety*:

> It's this so-called neighbourhood plan which is attracting the most interest from both exhibs and other distribs because in many cases it requires new arrangements on the division of product. It is also the most logical plan under which those drive-ins, which heretofore have never been firstrun outlets, may be expected to get top product.[810]

For drive-ins to achieve a higher place in the distribution hierarchy, however, they often had to operate as part of a larger network or circuit. In Dayton, Ohio, the Theatre Association's four drive-ins, which accommodated a total of 3,100 cars, played a same first-run film over the course of a week.[811] Al Levin, secretary for the Association, described the booking process: 'we don't bid on the films, just return a form showing we will accept their guarantee figures for the four houses in which we want to play the pictures'. Levin acknowledged that this multiple theatre deal was the key factor for

[805] 'Big Film Theatres in the Suburbs Seen Pattern of the Future', *Motion Picture Herald*, 9 March, 1957, 17.
[806] 'Shopping Centre and Pix Pals', *Variety*, 11 March, 1959, 5.
[807] D. Murphy, 'Shopping Centres Seen A "Natural" But Warn They Do Not Assure Profit', *Variety*, 17 November, 1965, 15.
[808] Curtis Mess, 'Drive-In Functions and Potential as a Public Service', *Motion Picture Herald*, 20 February, 1963, 22-23.
[809] Robert J. Landry, 'Theatres: Cash and Culture', *Variety*, 6 January, 1965, 9, 65.
[810] 'More Drive-Ins as First Runs', *Variety*, 27 April, 1960, 5.
[811] Brainard Platt, 'Multiple Ozoners on Guarantee Altering First-Run Pattern in Dayton Area', *Variety*, 17 July, 1963, 13.

distributors, who would be less interested in booking a first-run film in a single drive-in. Similarly, the Cooperative Theatres of Michigan developed a first run, multiple theatre release system in Detroit in 1963. Consisting of twenty-six suburban hardtops and drive-ins, the co-op adopted the approach in order to ensure a quicker return of revenue and make full use of exploitation campaigns, sharing the expenses. A range of mid-budget products from Paramount and Universal were booked for the drive-in network.[812] The suburban neighbourhood theatres and drive-ins were clearly growing in significance as an exhibition sector for the circulation of product in the 1960s, but this was often restricted to low and mid budget fare rather than the more profitable blockbusters, and the distributors firmly controlled the booking terms.

The beach party pictures, and the particular production practices with which they were associated, had their roots in these industrial shifts of the previous decade. In turning to a blockbuster focus, the major studios reduced their output of low-budget production and, in some cases, shut down their in-house B production units altogether. Exhibitors increasingly complained of a product shortage, declaring in *Variety*, 'fewer but bigger pictures can't keep the theatres going'.[813] Many of the neighborhood and small town exhibitors that still practiced double billing and changed programs two to three times a week were dependent upon a steady flow of cheap, low-budget pictures to stay open. This underpinned the growth of independent production companies that sought to exploit this market gap for low-budget product, encouraged by the corporate tax offset on offer.[814] In 1955 *Variety* explained the benefits that were leading actors and other industry personnel to form independent companies: 'Corporate-stock organizations, of course, give the owners (the stars) a crack at capital gains taxation of 26% as against the straight income impost that scales upward with the amount of income going as high as 90%'.[815] Such independently produced, low-budget films could get 2,500 play dates per picture, but to be able to profit on this small circuit required negative cost be no more than $75,000.[816] Having reduced much of their own production output to concentrate on blockbusters, the major studios relied increasingly on the distribution of individually packaged films

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[812] 'Suburbans with Ozoners in New Detroit Firstrun', *Variety*, 19 June, 1963, 15.
[813] 'Gimmicks Not Enough: Also Give Branch Mgrs. More Say' *Variety,* 6 January, 1954, 7. 'Exhib-Backed Features Stack as Bs'; Hard For Major Distribs To Appreciate' *Variety*, 24 November, 1954, 21.
[814] See also Eric Hoyt's work on the relationship between the income tax and Hollywood's production policies, Eric Hoyt, 'Hollywood and the Income Tax, 1929–1955', *Film History: An International Journal,* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2010), 5-21.
[815] 'Look, Ma I'm a Corporation', *Variety*, 16 March, 1955, 1, 20.
[816] Vincent Canby, '"B" Market Dates Today: 2,500', *Variety*, 31 January, 1963, 5.

arranged by producers or talent agencies. By 1957, 58% of the pictures released by majors were produced by independent production companies.[817]

The majors would have preferred to eliminate double-bills altogether. They saw B features' lack of quality as degrading the already struggling exhibition sector and presenting a 'throwback that could kill off a potential audience sector in the sticks'.[818] Nevertheless, there was a rebirth in low-budget filmmaking mid-decade as independently-produced films targeting particular audience groups garnered large returns, and several of the majors re-entered the field.[819] The continued inclusion of low-budget pictures on the studio release schedules stemmed from the lure of big profits at a small negative cost, the need to round out distribution plans and meet exhibitor programming needs, the development of new talent, and as part of cheap deals from non-Hollywood producers.[820] In 1963, following the success of 'quality' low-budget films, *The Balcony* (Continental, 1963) and *David and Lisa* (Continental, 1962), the purse strings of the major studios and Wall Street investors were further loosened for this form of programmer production.[821] The total number of productions rose in this period too, from the 143 films made in 1963 to 156 scheduled for 1964. Of these, thirty-three were independent productions, which was nine more than the previous year.[822] The majors also resumed long-range planning for their distribution schedules amid a strong economic improvement for the industry, despite the underperformance of several blockbuster productions.[823]

The summer of 1964 was a turning point, with an 11% rise in attendance, positive business reports from the studios, a heightened pace of theatre construction, and a raft of positive press stories and general good will directed towards the industry.[824] A roadshow boom was identified for blockbuster productions, and the studios also developed their own teen picture projects with musical acts, looking to pre-sell the films by linking titles

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[817] Lev, *Transforming the Screen,* p. 26
[818] "Increased Flow of Indie Films No Cure For Biz" – Say 'A' Distribs' *Variety*, 15 August, 1956, 7, 8.
[819] Blair Davis, *The Battle For the B* s: *1950s Hollywood and the Rebirth of Low-Budget Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 67.
[820] 'Quiet Buzz of Persisting Bs; In Bust Epoch Many Stay Small', *Variety*, 9 December, 1959, 7.
[821] '"Quality Budgeters": Boom', *Variety*, 21 August, 1963, 3.
[822] '156 Made in '63; Hollywood Films Up From 143 ('62)', *Variety*, 1 January, 1964, 3.
[823] Thomas M. Pryor, 'B.O. Up But Not Production; H'wood Themes Also "Bolder", *Variety*, 6 January, 1965, 5, 42. 'Foresight Back in Fashion', *Variety*, 2 December, 1964, 3.
[824] 'Flood Tide for Films', *Motion Picture Herald*, 8 July, 1964, 4. 'The News is Upbeat – And It's Spreading!', *Motion Picture Herald*, 8 July, 1964, 6-8.

to popular songs.[825] The processes of the studios' diversification had included the acquisition of record labels in the 1950s, and this provided an added incentive for musical production and soundtrack tie-ins to the booming record market.[826] The development of early synergistic strategies also contributed to the crossovers of teen idols from television and the pop charts, and figures such as Frankie Avalon, Fabian, Edd Byrnes, and Elvis Presley all featured in beach party pictures.[827]

This form of low-budget production differed from the programmers made under the system of vertical integration. The programmers' exhibition had been guaranteed by the studios' block booking, and their flat rates assured stable returns. After 1948, it was necessary for individually-sold low-budget films to make profits in order to justify their production. To do this they needed to appeal to the particular audience groups that still frequented such cinemas, namely, teenagers. Peter Stanfield argues that a number of 1950s cycles stemmed from the recognition of a viable alternative to the production of films for an undifferentiated, universal audience, with producers increasingly targeting niche markets.[828] Stanfield believes that this contributed to cycles' possession of an increasingly topical focus in the decade: 'the period provides an intensified dialogue between film and the public sphere, with topical issues playing a more visible role in defining a film's uniqueness, while cleaving to convention became maximised in order to conform to audience expectations'.[829]

Several studies of film cycles have covered topics such as juvenile delinquency from the perspective of exploitation. These works are generally explorations of how moral panics regarding misbehaving youths fed into sensationalised film productions in the mould of the social problem picture, which exploited the imagery of the youth subculture while also influencing how the subculture perceived itself.[830] The beach party pictures were 'exploitative' in the sense that they directly targeted the teen demographic by depicting

[825] 'Roadshow Boom Coming', *Motion Picture Herald*, 22 July, 1964, 6. Peter Bart, 'Label Babel: Ad Men Spur Industry in a Hot Race for Lengthy, Exotic Film Titles', *New York Times*, 6 December, 1964, 13.
[826] "Teenagers, and Their Pocket Money, A Film Market Unto Themselves', *Variety*, 10 March, 1965, 4.
[827] See chapter on 'clean teenpics', Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: Juvenilization of American Movies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 145-186.
[828] Peter Stanfield, *The Cool and the Crazy: Pop Fifties Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 9.
[829] Stanfield, *The Cool and the Crazy*, 16.
[830] See Stanfield and Klein's studies of 1950s juvenile delinquent teenpics, Stanfield, *The Cool and the Crazy*, 69-89, Amanda Ann Klein, *American Film Cycles*, 100-137, and Snelson on 1940s juvenile delinquent cycle, Tim Snelson, 'Delinquent Daughters: Hollywood's War Effort and the 'Juvenile Delinquency Picture cycle', *New Review of Film and Television Studies,* Vol. 11 (2013), 56-72. James Gilbert, *A cycle of outrage : America's reaction to the juvenile delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

the Southern Californian beach lifestyle, while incorporating contemporary music trends. Outside of bikini shots, the marketing of the beach party pictures did not employ the traditional exploitation elements that promised sensational thrills or forbidden spectacle.[831] The posters for the films instead highlight the familiar features of the beach setting and bikini-clad girls, the theme of summer romance, the comic tone, any elements of novelty that varied the pattern, and the music. The trailers similarly set up the films' basic premise and introduced the cast of characters and bands, making reference to any LP tie-ins or dance trends, among them the surfer stomp, the watusi, the monkey and the clam.[832] The promotion forged connections with cultural trends that had been the subject of other popular cycles. This is apparent in the trailer for the 'first horror monster musical', *The Horror at Party Beach* (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1964), whose narration describes the following scene:

> While the beach set twists to the big beat sounds of the Del Aires swinging out with six rocking hits, while the cycle gangs burn up the road and strong arm their way into the party with fists flying, while teenagers prepare for a secluded slumber party, terror strikes from the bottom of the sea![833]

The marketing also referenced other films in the beach party cycle, assuming the audience's familiarity with the characters and storylines. This was particularly the case with the AIP series, which announced 'the beach gang is back' and that 'they've swapped bikinis for baby doll PJs' in the trailer for *Pajama Party* (AIP, 1964), and asked 'what do surfers and sunners do when it snows?' for *Ski Party* (AIP, 1965).[834] The trailers' narration, particularly for these AIP films, is delivered humorously, self-consciously employing surf lingo and such contemporary slang as 'ho daddies' and 'rat finks'. An awareness of the low cultural status attributed to the films is also embraced by AIP: 'It's Camp!' is stamped across the screen in the trailer for *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini* (AIP, 1966).[835]

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[831] Eric Schaeffer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

[832] Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 'Girl Happy Official Trailer #1 - Elvis Presley Movie (1965) HD', 1965, Online clip, *YouTube,* Accessed on 7 November, 2015. < https://youtu.be/Uz92a77W7mE>., Columbia Pictures, '"Winter-A-Go-Go" trailer (1965)', 1965, Online clip, *YouTube,* Accessed on 7 November, 2015. <https://youtu.be/AhliOnW2-eI>

[833] Twentieth Century- Fox Film Corp., '"The Horror of Party Beach" trailer', 1963. Online clip, *YouTube,* Accessed on 7 November, 2015. <https://youtu.be/tOS31j9dtoA>

[834] American International Pictures, 'Pajama Party Trailer 1964 Movie Annette Funicello Tommy Kirk', 1964, Online clip, *YouTube,* Accessed on 7 November, 2015. < https://youtu.be/jZmsiLU5YOw>. American International Pictures, 'Ski Party Trailer 1965 Movie Starring Frankie Avalon Dwayne Hickman', 1965, Online clip, *YouTube,* Accessed on 7 November, 2015. <https://youtu.be/5X8smBJSMNA>

[835] American International Pictures, 'Ghost in the Invisible Bikini, The (1966) - Theatrical Trailer, 1966, Online clip, *YouTube,* Accessed on 7 November, 2015. <https://youtu.be/mghTPnEDKsU>.

These tastes of the teen market were still perceived with some disdain by reviewers and critics, who resisted the attempt to comprehend the films' ongoing resonance with the target audience. *Variety's* review of *Beach Party* outlined this appeal to teens in a condescending tone: 'while many adults might find it a frightening manifestation of the culture of our age, "Beach Party" has the kind of direct, simple-minded cheeriness which should prove well nigh irresistible to those teenagers who have no desire to escape the emptiness of their lives. Thus it should swing at the box office'.[836] This attitude became gradually moderated with a begrudging admiration as the pictures performed well at the box office and the cycle continued to draw audiences. The industry reviewers acknowledged the commercial acumen of AIP in developing the formula so successfully, writing of *Beach Blanket Bingo*:

> Every notion that might appeal to what the box office has indicated is the current teenage taste is there. Not all of it is well done, polished, credible or even desirable in the normal sense of film development and construction … No one can blame Nicholson and Arkoff for continuing a pattern that has made them money, but this is ridiculous. Are teenagers responding to such drivel as good natured satire of themselves rather than identifying with it? Let's hope so.[837]

In congratulating AIP for their success in the outright solicitation of this market, the discourse shifted the responsibility for low quality production to the 'bad' or underdeveloped tastes of the teenage viewers who responded positively to the films. Attitudes to cycles had apparently shifted since the days of the vertically-integrated studio system, where low-budget cycles incited accusations of lazy, imitative, and formulaic practices. This attests to the changed function of cycles in the post-Paramount era. Rather than formulaic cycles being seen as repelling the audience, cycle strategies were welcomed for securing return attendance in an otherwise unstable environment.

[836] 'Beach Party', *Variety*, 7 August, 1963, 6.
[837] 'Beach Blanket Bingo', *Variety*, 7 April, 1965, 6.

Figure 19. Photo accompanying 1965 *Life* magazine article, 'Peekaboo Sex, or How to Fill a Drive-in'

AIP's cycle strategy

"The 14 to 24 age bracket", AIP's James Nicholson declared in 1956, "is the one to hit."[838] AIP had led the way in teen picture production in the late 1950s, initiating cycles that covered hot rod racers and biker gangs, juvenile delinquents and teen monsters. Beginning in 1954 as a distribution company that focused on international releases, co-directors Sam Arkoff and James Nicholson soon moved into low-budget production to fill the product gap identified by exhibitors. AIP was closely identified with pursuing a cycle production policy; *Life* magazine described how Nicholson and Arkoff 'made a science of leaping on and off the bandwagon of American taste', while outlining their successful pursuit of a policy based on 'Peter Pan syndrome' that courted the 19-year-old male audience.[839] *Motion Picture Herald* attributed their success to a close adherence to the

[838] Nicholson, quoted in 'Romance the Teenagers for Biz; James Nicholson's Credo Gives Disk Jockeys Vital Role in "Hot Rod Girl"', *Variety*, 22 August, 1956, 3. See also '"How Old is Your Audience?" US Audience Shifting Fast, *Variety*, 16 February, 1953, 7.
[839] Alan Levy, 'Peekaboo Sex, or How To Fill a Drive-in', *Life Magazine*, 16 July, 1965, 81-88.

philosophy of 'find a real need and fill it'.[840] James Nicholson articulated the company's lucrative strategy in relation to their sense of timing, committing to promising formulae but maintaining flexibility in adapting to new formats once the box office showed signs of cooling.[841]

With a close focus on teen viewers, AIP made marketing a primary aspect of the production process. Beginning with an idea or title around which they then developed advertising strategies, the writing of the actual script was relegated to a later stage in production. The structure of the company was also designed to fit this ethos. Blair Davis describes how AIP operated on a revolving system; finished films were used to raise funds for the next production, and a handful of small, closely-managed production companies ensured that there was a constant turnover of product, which also allowed the company larger tax breaks. Davis quotes Arkoff's explanation this process:

> Whenever a picture would get into a certain kind of profit, or it would begin to pay off profits, then you'd have to pay taxes above the minimum level of taxes. Then we'd dump another picture to be made in that corporation. Se we'd get a new write-off coming very quickly because we made the picture so fast and got 'em out so fast.[842]

Initially, AIP sold their films at flat rates to exhibitors through various states rights arrangements. The company soon moved into percentage sales with the introduction of a double bill package policy that paired two of their low-budget features together and sold them at terms similar to the major distributors' charge for a single feature.[843] In distributing their pictures, AIP also sought to take advantage of fallow periods in exhibition during the lead up to summer, which addressed a contemporary exhibitor concern regarding the shortage of a year-round supply of films.[844]

By 1964, ten years after its formation, AIP had grown to include 300 employees and 30 domestic exchanges.[845] To celebrate their 10th anniversary, a beach party pavilion was set up at the Hollywood section of the New York World's Fair and the beach gang stars were

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840 Raymond Levy, 'Hollywood Horizon', *Motion Picture Herald*, 27 May, 1964, 20.
841 James H. Nicholson, 'No Special Genius to Avoid Others' Boners', *Variety*, 22 July, 1964, 7.
842 Arkoff, quoted in Davis, *Battle for the Bs*, 110.
843 Davis, Ibid., 122.
844 Robert J. O'Donnel, 'Uneven Flow of Top Films and Not Enough 'Want To See' Ballyhoo Dent Biz The Most', *Variety*, 18 February, 1958, 30.
845 Robert B. Frederick, '10 Years Ago Nicholson and Arkoff Went into the Pix Biz (For Profit); It's Still Key to AIP's Global Setup', *Variety*, 22 July, 1964, 7.

on hand for a cocktail party and special screening of *Bikini Beach* in advance of its August release.[846] In the early 1960s, the company had ventured into slightly higher budget territory with a series of successful colour and widescreen films based on the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. In 1964, AIP planned a total of twenty-five features, sixteen of which were categorised as A features. The choice of topics, however, suggests that the company kept the tastes of the 'unsophisticated' small town market in mind. Of the twenty five pictures, three were teen dramas, two were Poe films, two were action spectacles, three were horror films, five were science fiction, three were macabre comedies, and two were musicals.[847] In the middle of 1965, AIP announced that it was further shifting its focus to higher quality pictures, arguing that the market for Bs was diminishing as double feature exhibitors were increasingly booking successful films from the previous season to play in their B slot, rather than buying newly produced low-budget fare.[848]

In 1957 Arkoff had identified their formula-based, teen-targeted production practices with that of serials in previous decades.[849] Director William Asher later likened the beach party films to the televised series format, with its repetition of key characters that are placed in a variety of settings and experiences.[850] His strategy for the films was to capture a spontaneous, youthful summer spirit on screen for viewers to vicariously enjoy, with a key proviso being plenty of flesh without any sex.[851] Asher had been instrumental in developing this aspect of the clean teenpic as an alternative to the popular delinquent-inflected representations of youth. The attempt to differentiate the focus from the other teen cycles was captured in a reviewer's description of the 'basic idea' of *Gidget* being, 'I was a Normal Teen-Age American'.[852] Arkoff later wrote in his biography:

> In a sense, Jim Nicholson and I were taking a gamble with the beach movies. After all there were no beaches in Iowa, Idaho, Kansas, or many of the other places where our movies played. But we felt that kids across America needed a change from the films about hot rods and juvenile delinquents, and that no matter where they lived they fantasized about romping on the beach. The idea of having fun on the sand, where

[846] '"Bikini Beach" Promo Plot at the Meadows', *Variety*, 24 June, 1964, 15.
[847] 'Markley: "You'll Soon Play Aces"; 25 Promised from Nicholson; Foreman Views on Trade Needs', *Variety*, 6 November, 1963, 16.
[848] 'American International Modifies Policy', *Variety*, 7 July, 1965, 18.
[849] 'Action-and-Horror Staple Stuff; 20,000100 Thrill-Seekers (12 to 25) Backbone of Exploitation Pix', *Variety*, 6 March 1957, 20.
[850] Peter Bart, 'Hollywood Beach Bonanza', *New York Times*, 13 December, 1964.
[851] William Asher, 'AIP Director's Key to Vitamin Youth: Participate in Their Fun', *Variety*, 22 July, 1964, 8.
[852] 'Gidget', Variety, 18 March, 1959, 6.

kids were exposing as much skin as the law would allow, seemed like it would appeal to just about every young person.[853]

In 1963, AIP decided to release *Beach Party* in just three cities to gauge the audience response. Although the Poe pictures had been successful, Arkoff claimed that, with several hundred thousand dollars invested in the picture, the company could not afford a flop. The initial screenings were positively received and *Beach Party* was released nationwide in the summer of 1963, with an aggressive publicity campaign that used star tours and sponsored dance parties.[854] First run exhibitors constructed their own beach parties in their lobbies, holding bikini contests, inviting local musical acts, and securing sponsorship from soft drink companies. For these openings, such as those held in Ohio across the Armstrong theatre circuit, exhibitors worked with AIP's marketing department to hard sell the picture to teens with print ads, radio and TV spots, and local news coverage. *Boxoffice* recommended the films to exhibitors as readily lending themselves to inexpensive forms of advertising and ballyhoo.

Figure 20. Beach party promotion at an Armstrong theatre in Toledo, Ohio, 1963.

By May, 1964, *Beach Party* had earned $3 million in the U.S. box office. AIP had already planned the follow-up, *Muscle Beach Party*, two months after the release of the

[853] Sam Arkoff, with Richard Trubo, *Flying Through Hollywood by the Seat of My Pants* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1992), 129.
[854] Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood by the Seat of My Pants,* 130.

precursor.[855] *Variety* wrote in anticipation, 'sequels rarely match the drawing power of an original, especially when the cycle is linked to a passing fad'.[856] *Motion Picture Herald's* review also highlights its close relationship to the former picture:

> Ready to ride the crest of another wild wave in the surfing cycle started so successfully by AIP's "Beach Party", comes now "Muscle Beach Party" following a similar pattern – in fact so much so that it seems like a second segment in a surfnick series starring Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello.[857]

Muscle Beach Party grossed $1,500,000 in its 300 dates over the Easter week alone.[858] With this success, the players demanded higher salaries and the total film budgets for the beach pictures lifted from around $600,000 to $700,000.[859]

Although the AIP pictures are most clearly identified with the beach party cycle, there were a number of other releases that closely imitated the AIP formula and contributed to its overall form. Peter Stanfield has described the form of serial production carried out by independent companies such as AIP as a 'collective mode of manufacture' within an institutional framework; stock parts are customised and reconfigured into a distinctive work that remains open to modification.[860] As in Stanfield's account of the biker film cycle, the beach party films also demonstrate the movement of ideas and personnel across the different films. *The Horror of Party Beach* was made around the same time as *Beach Party*, produced by former actor Del Tenney and drive-in circuit owner Alan Iselin. Del Tenney recounts how the film was adapted to incorporate elements from the contemporary AIP success: '[It] started as an evolutionary story about atomic waste speeding up evolution, changing a fish into a man who becomes a monster. Then Alan and I tried to work the music into it, the Del-Aires and all that stuff, and tie in some kind of beach-blanket beat'.[861] Seeking summer drive-in product, Twentieth Century-Fox picked it up for distribution on a double bill with *Curse of the Living Corpse* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1964). Soon after, the black and white film *Surf Party* was made by ex-AIP man Maury Dexter and released through Twentieth Century-Fox on a double bill with

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[855] 'Tanned Beach Youth Not Ultimate In Film Activity for Bill Asher', *Variety*, 27 May, 1964, 7. Vincent Canby, 'In the Know with Poe and Bikini Kids, AIP Needs No Other Line of Credit', *Variety*, 9 October, 1963, 4, 17.
[856] 'Muscle Beach Party', *Variety*, 25 March, 1964, 6.
[857] 'Muscle Beach Party', *Motion Picture Herald*, 15April, 1964, 27.
[858] 'Tanned Beach Youth Not Ultimate In Film Activity for Bill Asher', *Variety*, 27 May, 1964, 7.
[859] 'Bill Asher Makes Career Out of AIP "Beach" Films', *Boxoffice*, 1 June, 1964, 8.
[860] Peter Stanfield, 'Run, Angel, Run: Serial Production and the Biker Movie, 1966-1972', Austin Fisher and Johnny Walker (eds.) *Grindhouse: Cultural Exchange on 42nd Street, and Beyond* (London: Bloomsbury Academic. 216), 85-86.
[861] Del Tonney, quoted in Lisanti, *Hollywood Surf and Beach Movies*, 113.

Shock Treatment (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1964). Released in mid-1964, *For Those Who Think Young* (United Artists, 1964) was one of the first bigger budget elaborations on the cycle. It returned to the earlier spring break, college co-ed storyline of *Where the Boys Are* (MGM, 1960), while utilising extras from AIP's beach films, including surfer Micki Dora. Columbia released *Ride the Wild Surf* (Columbia, 1964) the same summer. Relocating to Hawaii to take a more serious look at surfing, this was described as an 'adult version' of the beach party pictures.[862] The next year, alongside the stream of AIP releases, MGM contributed another Elvis vehicle to the cycle, *Girl Happy* (MGM, 1965).

Several more independent companies entered the cycle in 1965. This varied from very low-budget productions, such as *The Beach Girls and the Monster* (U.S. Films, 1965), to others that had secured 'name' musicians and were picked up by the majors for distribution, including *The Girls on the Beach* (Paramount, 1965), *Beach Ball* (Paramount, 1965), and *A Swingin' Summer* (United Screen Arts, 1965). Generally, these films did not reach the box office height of the AIP films. As Asher described it:

> Every major studio made a beach picture, trying to capitalise on AIP's success and none of them were successful … because they wanted to make them *better*, better meaning that they were doing all the things that were formula concepts that no one wanted to see. They didn't go for the feeling of it, they went for the mechanics of it. They put in parents. The reality of parents. What would *really* happen if kids spent the Summer at the beach. Parents would be concerned about the whereabouts of their kids, their behaviour, what they were involved in and so on. Our pictures were fantasies.[863]

By May 1965 Sam Arkoff expressed his concern that the market was nearing saturation. Despite these predictions *Variety* recorded fourteen productions pending in mid-1965.[864] Two more beach party-inspired pictures were released by AIP before the end of the year, shifting the setting to ski slopes and setting off a smaller flurry of imitations; according to *Variety*, 'the interest in a new trend for the youth market, if only for a seasonal switch as the weather gets colder and youngster's interests turn from the beach, is indicated by the appearance of 10 new pictures either in active preparation by studios and independent

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[862] Robert Salmaggi, 'Ride the Wild Surf', *New York Herald Tribune*, 24 December, 1964.
[863] William Asher, quoted in Mark Thomas McGee, *fast and Furious: The Story of American International Pictures* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co. Inc., 1984), 153.
[864] 'Teenpix Wave Over-Done, Arkoff Tips (Doesn't Detail) Switch of Format', *Variety*, 26 May, 1965, 4, 15.

producers or registered as possible upcoming product'.[865] *Ski Party* performed disappointingly at the box office, however, and Arkoff continued the key cycle strategy of hybridity in the quest for a modified formula: 'Near the end of the beach party cycle, as we could see the trend fading, Jim and I decided to mix genres, altering the focus of the beach movies and making comedy almost important as the daring bathing suits and the fun-loving teenage antics'.[866] Back in 1963, the success of the Poe pictures and early beach party releases had elicited a semi-facetious suggestion from a critic for a unification of the two picture types. In late 1965, AIP combined the bikini iconography with a spy spoof, *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (AIP, 1965), and the Poe amalgamation was finally achieved in *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini,* where 'former "beach" types compete with old-hand comedians for laughs'.[867]

In late 1965, the AIP executives re-stated that the cycle was over.[868] In planning the twenty films to be released in the 1966-67 season, AIP again raised its sights and the planned productions, which had been slated for a combined budget of $16 million, were lifted to $19 million. These films took a more sophisticated approach to sex and initiated a series of protest films targeted at a socially aware youth audience.[869] By the time that *Catalina Caper* was released in 1967, the trade paper concluded, 'The "beach party" cycle ended about a year-and-a-half ago and there's already a quaintness and curio value about "Caper"'.[870] The fact that AIP was looking beyond low-budget and exploitation production in the late 1960s testifies not only to the growth of the company, but also to the changing market place where limitations on the theatrical life of B productions caused a decrease in their overall market value.

The rapid pace of independent production and release contributed to the speed and brevity of this cycle. Five features were made in 1963, seven were produced the following year, and in 1965 a total of nine pictures were filmed. Several of these, however, including *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini*, *Out of Sight*, *Catalina Caper* and *It's a Bikini World,* were not released until 1966 and 1967. This reinforces how the velocity of the cycle

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[865] '"Abandon Beach!" Cry Not Exactly Immediate at AIP', *Variety*, 4 August, 1965, p. 17., 'Baby It's Cold Outside as Teen Pix Switch From Sand to Snow-In Bikinis', *Variety*, 8 September, 1965, 7.
[866] Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood by the Seat of My Pants,* 135.
[867] 'Ghost in the Invisible Bikini', *Variety*, 6 April, 1966, 6. Vincent Canby, 'In the Know with Poe and Bikini Kids, AIP Needs No Other Line of Credit', *Variety*, 9 October, 1963, 4, 17.
[868] 'Film Company Seeks a New Locale for Its Teenage Movies', *New York Times*, 6 November, 1965, 18.
[869] 'AIP Will Sift Theatrical Features from Foreign-Mades for TV', *Variety*, 24 November, 1965, 4, 15.
[870] 'The Catalina Caper', *Variety*, 20 December, 1967, 6.

determined its limited lifespan. Although the pictures' ongoing circulation extended their presence in cinemas beyond these initial production years, the distribution patterns were generally geared to a similarly swift play off.

The beach films' play-off

In 1964, Curtis Mess argued that a new concept of supply was arising for exhibitors:

> With the decrease noted in the quantity of features available, the squeeze has been on the exhibitor to stretch this thin line to meet his past schedule of feature changes to an entirely new pattern of long-run engagements. Every known device has been utilized, including reissues of foreign films and, of course, extended engagements on the blockbusters.[871]

The dominance of the majors' strategies employed for these cycles led to a demand for an alternative for the less profitable sectors of exhibition that did not immediately benefit from the blockbuster policy. The beach party cycle exemplified the type of product stream that was developed for these theatres, a replacement for the programmers no longer being produced by the majors. This product generally followed a different pattern for content, marketing, distribution, screening and consumption. While the beach party films could open in key cities and be held over for a couple of weeks in downtown theatres, the majority of their playdates were in smaller venues that had booked the product in advance, played it as part of a double bill, and marketed it specifically to local teens. These pictures had a relatively swift turnover in theatres but often returned for repeat screenings. The tie-ins to contemporary youth trends limited their elements of topical appeal and gave the cycle an added factor of built-in obsolescence. The films were faster to produce and a larger number of prints were circulated, which meant that the cycles made of such product were more concentrated. These two product streams and their contrasting methods of circulation illustrate how distribution concerns helped form the different types of film cycles and their commercial operations.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the anti-trust suits had precipitated a looser, more competitive approach to the distribution system of runs and exclusives, but the major studios maintained the balance of power, dictating the terms to exhibitors and regulating

[871] Curtis Mess, 'Supply and Demand in Exhibition Today', *Motion Picture Herald*, 23 January, 1963, 30-31.

the circulation of films. In the absence of external intervention over rental terms, the chief areas of contention between exhibitors and distributors centred on blind-bidding and four-wall deals. Blind bidding, the practice by which exhibitors were required to bid for rental rights of movies before having seen the films, was not widespread in 1948 and, consequentially, was not addressed in the consent decrees. The Department of Justice (DoJ) was of the opinion that it was the responsibility of the distributors to ensure the bids were properly conducted and did not directly stipulate trade screenings in its ruling. The Theatre Owners of America (TOA) considered bringing the matter to the Federal Trade Commission, which was conducting a Hollywood investigation in 1963 following complaints from exhibitors over the breakdown of Decree-stipulated clearance provisions.[872] Although the federal courts ordered a new bidding process to be developed in 1965 and the studios entered into a consent decree to limit blind-bidding in 1969, the debate persisted until the late 1980s.[873] Four-wall plans, on the other hand, saw distributors pay a flat sum to an exhibitor to rent a theatre while footing all advertising expenses and retaining the total box office profits. The implementation of this strategy by Paramount for *The Ten Commandments* and the DoJ's apparent lack of interest in regulating the practice meant that four-walling continued over the next few decades. It reached a high point in 1974, when Warner Bros.' four-walling of *The Exorcist* (Warner Bros., 1973) caused exhibitors to again petition the DoJ.[874] But, as Syd Silverman wrote in *Variety* later that year, it was unlikely that four-wall deals would be adopted as the majors' primary distribution strategy given the amount of product they distributed and their reluctance to alienate the theatre circuits or invite scrutiny from the Justice Department.[875]

Another major complaint from exhibitors in the early 1960s revolved around the lack of consistent product flow throughout the year. As theatres equipped with air conditioning became more widespread, the summer months developed as the key season for top product, and April and May were then highlighted as a time of scarcity. This 'feast or

[872] 'No Rule that Film Must Be Shown; Exhibs Yipe Against Distribs' "Blind" Invitations as Unfair to Bidders', *Variety*, 10 July, 1963, 5, 23. 'TOA Legal Panel Ponders Practices; "Blind Selling May Go to FTC', *Variety,* 6 November, 1963, 11. 'Fed'l Trade Commission Operatives on Question Prowl in Los Angeles', *Variety*, 14 August, 1963, 28. Mory Roth, 'Swift Tides of Today's Amusements Demand Risks--Arnold Picker to TOA', *Variety*, 30 September, 1964, 5.

[873] William R. Weaver, 'Blind Bidding on Way Out', *Motion Picture Herald*, 1 September, 1965, 21.

[874] 'Hollywood Up Against the Wall-To-Wall', *Variety*, 3 April, 1974, 1, 26. 'Biggie of 1974, "The Exorcist," Into 85 Four-Wall Situations; Rumbles Rise from Theatres', *Variety*, 3 April, 1974, 4.

[875] Syd Silverman, 'US. Four-Walling: Boon or Threat?', *Variety*, 8 May, 1974, 3, 64.

famine' pattern had been the subject of an ongoing campaign from Edward Hyman, vice-president of American Broadcasting-Paramount Pictures, with the majors vocalising their support for a year-round supply in 1963.[876] AIP generally filmed their beach party productions over autumn and winter in order to release them in the warmer months, starting with Easter. The summer season was also the time of school holidays and the opening of drive-ins, the principal destination of the beach party pictures.

AIP's beach party films were booked and circulated in large numbers, but were not generally concentrated in specific regions. The number of advance bookings for beach party product suggests how the cycle strategy worked as a form of pre-selling for the company. The exhibitors knew what to expect from this product and, despite complaints over blind bidding for the major distributors' films, were willing to bid in advance for product they knew would attract a particular market. Two hundred advance dates were confirmed for *Muscle Beach Party* in October 1963, for instance, despite the launch not being until the following Easter. In June of the same year, 500 dates were confirmed for AIP's third picture in the cycle, *Bikini Beach,* ahead of an August release. While Sam Arkoff claimed that the beach films could easily book 12,000 dates in theatres, the highest number of prints that AIP was willing to manufacture for a film was 500, with these circulating among the houses over the course of several months.[877] The large quantity of prints produced for AIP's beach party pictures suggests the intention to disseminate the films over a wider area in order to reach a large number of theatres quickly. This strategy attests to the relatively short life span of the pictures' initial play offs and the way in which their market value was restricted to a short span of time.

Some of these films also played successfully outside their intended market, standing on their own in key situations. *Muscle Beach Party*, for instance, played for three weeks at Chicago's 1,400-seat Roosevelt theatre, with tickets from 90c to $1.80, and earned $18,500 in its first week.[878] *Bikini Beach*'s opening week at the Roosevelt hit $19,000, while its screening in Omaha's trio of Ralph Blank theatres made $20,000, topping the recent takings for *A Hard Day's Night* (United Artists, 1964).[879] The principal market for the cycle was, however, the drive-ins and smaller theatres with a strong teen audience and

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[876] 'Is Lip Service to "Orderly Release" Being Transformed Into Real Policy', *Variety*, 18 December, 1963, 13.
[877] 'Teenpix Wave Over-Done, Arkoff Tips (Doesn't Detail) Switch of Format', *Variety*, 26 May, 1965, 4, 15.
[878] 'Picture Grosses', *Variety,* 22 April, 1964, 10.
[879] 'Picture Grosses', *Variety*, 5 August, 1964, 10. Picture Grosses', *Variety*, 9 September, 1964, 8.

a high demand for lower budget fare for dual bills. Exhibitors consistently wrote in to *Boxoffice* to affirm the value of these films for their theatres, describing them as 'perfect dollar night material'.[880] As a Virginian theatre owner declared, 'please your teenagers and you'll stay in the black'. He described the 'scenery' on screen as appealing to his audience of small town boys, and noted that *Beach Blanket Bingo* out-grossed other big budget releases of the month such as *Cleopatra* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1963) and *Cheyenne Autumn* (Warner Bros., 1964).[881] A drive-in operator from Florida similarly described the appeal of the critically-derided *Horror at Party Beach*:

> The critics can pan this all they want to but, somehow or other, it has a definite appeal for the teenagers that make up 90% of my patrons. So, who am I to complain if this pulled above average for me, which it did. Doubled with "Fall Girl" from Dominant Pictures in Jacksonville – a fair offering, okay for Friday-Saturday.[882]

The films were also booked for multiple repeat screenings. An exhibitor from Missouri declared in 1967 that he was re-screening the beach pictures to such good business and that he was considering a third run in a year's time.[883] At later dates, the beach party pictures were often paired together. In Corsicana in 1966, a back-to-school marathon was screened at the Hillside Drive-In that consisted of *Beach Party*, *Pajama Party, How to Stuff a Wild Bikini*, and *Beach Blanket Bingo*.[884] The return of the films for repeat screenings implies that, despite their having been designed for fast playoffs, they retained some value for exhibitors in need of reliable, pre-tested product, and continued to hold pleasure for teenage viewers.

In 1967, the first of AIP's beach films were sold to CBS TV for a two-time exposure. Although Nicholson and Arkoff had been outspoken in their support for smaller theatres in the late 1950s, and declared that they would refrain from selling their films to television for at least ten years after their release, this number was reduced to five years in the 1960s.[885] '"That the TV market must be recognised", Arkoff said, "is because a

[880] 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: How to Stuff a Wild Bikini, *Boxoffce*, 13 February, 1967, A4.
[881] 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: Pajama Party', *Boxoffice*, 31 May, 1965, A4.
[882] 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: Horror at Party Beach', *Boxoffice*, 15 March, 1965, A4.
[883] 'The Exhibitor Has His Say: How to Stuff a Wild Bikini, *Boxoffce*, 9 January, 1967, A4.
[884] *Corsicana Daily Sun*, 26 August, 1966.
[885] 'AIP Promises Exhibs 10-Year TV Clearance; Hikes Slate to 36', *Hollywood Reporter*, 17 December, 1957, 1. See Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 142. [886] 'AIP: Action, Youth, Older O'seas Fans; Let TV Gravy Bubble Up By Itself', *Variety*, 22 June, 1966, 24.

combined theatrical and TV market is the only profitable coin in today's filmmaking."'[886] In early 1965 plans for a 'Beach Party' TV pilot had even been reported although it never eventuated.[887] The diminished window between the theatrical release of a picture and its exhibition on television can limit the life span and circulation of a cycle through cinemas. In the mid-1960s, the exhibition sector was still designed along lines of staggered and segmented distribution patterns and with the maintenance of a sizable clearance window before television, the beach party pictures were able to flow through theatres with some consistency for several years.

The beach party pictures are a relatively straightforward example of a brief, low-budget cycle that targeted a specific audience group, and whose marketing forged connections to current cultural trends in a form of topicality. An examination of its operations reveals how the cycle was developed out of a specific distribution and exhibition context, which contributes a new perspective to the usual focus of cycle studies on production, and concerns with ideology and representation. Arkoff claimed, 'Our movies don't set patterns of behaviour. They just set patterns of moviemaking'.[888] Rather than employing the cycle as a framework to explore the topic being exploited, I have used the beach party pictures as an avenue for examining industrial practices and the patterns of cyclic production and circulation for which AIP was celebrated. The beach party films benefitted exhibitors as well as the production-distribution company, and the ability of a cycle to draw repeat attendance was applauded in the trade discourse. Developed to fulfil the exhibition needs of a specific market, the circulation of the beach party pictures gave the cycle its particular form of quick, repetitious play offs. The distribution patterns surrounding the beach party cycle also illustrate the development of the industry's mindset in the mid-1960s, and the ways in which they adapted their practices to suit the changing conceptions of the market.

[886] 'AIP: Action, Youth, Older O'seas Fans; Let TV Gravy Bubble Up By Itself', *Variety*, 22 June, 1966, 24.
[887] 'AIP, Merchants of Youth, Continue on Course, Add Heyward, Eye TV', *Variety*, 27 January, 1965, 7.
[888] Vincent Canby, 'Bye, Bye, Beach Bunnies', *New York Times,* 2 March, 1969, 166.

Conclusion

By tracing the form and function of six case studies of cycles across the Classical Hollywood period, this thesis has explored ways in which current understandings of film cycles can be extended. Previous cycle studies have centred on production quantity and duration as the key factors in the definition of cycles. The evidence of the case studies in this thesis, however, draws attention to the significance of speed and timing in the operation of cycles, and the role played by distribution in determining these factors. The pace of cycles' release affected the amount of similar product the market could absorb before it reached the point of surfeit, when audience interest would wane. For example, if similar films were distributed with a longer interval separating their release, the cycle could generally be sustained over a longer period before declining. This process could be influenced by different categories of films; for example, big budget or high publicity films could have a higher impact on the market and permeate it more quickly, meaning that audiences might tire of the films more rapidly. The concentrated circulation of the films through cinemas contributed to the 'cycle effect' for viewers, and the response of the market influenced cycles' overall form. Consideration of the circulation, exhibition and consumption of cycles is therefore necessary to an account of cycles' operations; cycles are measured, identified, and discussed as they are released and consumed, and such discourses have a material effect on cycles' longevity and profitability.

The case studies presented in this thesis have also illustrated the variety of shapes that cycles can assume in the Classical Hollywood period, and the diversity of cycles' functions. I have considered how cycles developed across such diverse film types as programmers, prestige pictures, hybrid clusters that combined different production trends, films united by an overall approach rather than storyline, blockbusters, and low-budget independent pictures. The forms of these cycles included not only small groups of pictures that played out over a few seasons but also elongated configurations that stretched over a decade. A focus on Classical Hollywood reveals the connection between the practice of cyclical production and/or distribution and the industrial structure of the studio system. The quasi-competitive relationship between the studios meant that practices of imitation and recycling were generally accepted. There were relatively few legal contestations concerning plagiarism between the studios unless expensive story

properties were involved, and even then these disputes were often internally arbitrated through the MPPDA. These practices operated alongside the high production output and the run-zone-clearance distribution system, which saw the constant circulation of a large amount of product, institutionalising cycles as a practical business strategy for the studios. Cycles worked to reduce risk by establishing a template for the replication of prior successes that balanced the needs of repetition and innovation.

The findings of this thesis suggest that an analysis of cycles can reveal much about the specific historical and industrial circumstances in which they were produced, distributed and consumed. The girl reporter cycle illustrates how programmer cycles worked as an organisational tool and formula blueprint available to studios looking to fill their large annual production portfolios. The publicity function that cycles could enact is demonstrated by the historical biopics, wartime musical revues and anti-prejudice pictures. Hollywood advertised an image of a socially-responsible industry through the biopics, which were positioned as an educational, culturally legitimate form of entertainment. Similarly, the wartime musical revues performed the industry's contribution to the war effort as part of an argument for the essential function of this entertainment on the home front. The restrained liberal impulses of the anti-prejudice pictures were differently utilised in the post-war political environment; they became a vehicle for the industry's campaign against local censorship in their exemplification of Hollywood films deserving First Amendment protection. In the 1950s, the biblical epics enacted a new era's blockbuster production policy while reinforcing the major distributors' control of the market. By contrast the beach party cycle, rather than embodying an industrial strategy of the major studios, emanated from the post-Classical Hollywood environment, which saw the growth of independent producers, alternate methods of circulating films and an increasingly differentiated audience.

As a result of their pervasiveness, cycles constituted a site where industrial practices were contested. Such disputes included public debates around the quality of the pictures being produced, the labour concerns of the Screen Actors Guild, and exhibitor protests over serial production practices and rental terms. In the wake of the 1948 Paramount decision, the studios reasserted their control of the market by means of distribution. As it became increasingly clear that independent exhibitors who had been advocating for government regulation would be little better off under the new consent decrees, the reinstitution of the

majors' unfair trade practices and the exhibitors' attempts at resistance played out in the pages of the trade press. Given the predominance of these discussions and my methodological focus on the trade discourse, a deeper examination of the relationship between cycles' operations and specific distribution policies was required for the later case studies. These two chapters present a different understanding of cycles from other scholars' considerations of contemporaneous cycles of the 1950s and 1960s, which mostly focus on production practices and the representational qualities of the pictures without placing them in specific contexts of distribution and consumption.

The circulation of the concurrent cycles of the girl reporter programmers and historical biopics followed diverse routes that were determined by their primary markets: the programmers were designed as filler for double bills, particularly in the subsequent-run theatres, and had a rapid play-off; the prestige historical biopics courted the downtown first-run markets. The biopics' release was spread across longer periods to ensure the distributors could soak up the profits, as they were rented to exhibitors on a percentage basis rather than the block booking and flat fee basis of the programmers. World War II led to an increase in attendance, which meant that the market could deliver a greater profit on fewer productions. This resulted in distributors slowing their releases of product and extending the first run of films, which created a 'bottleneck' effect. As attendance began to decline from the late 1940s and the studios' trade practices were subjected to increased legal scrutiny, the distributors experimented with different release strategies. The regional saturation and multiple runs designed around low and mid-range product, while roadshows, extended runs and repeat viewings were built into distribution plans for big-budget pictures. These varied distribution policies reveal some of the ways in which the studios responded to internal industry pressures, as well as external economic and social factors, and indicate the part played by distribution in underpinning the overarching power structure of the studios.

This close focus on the historical industrial environment enabled by cycle studies is one of the chief advantages that the framework holds over genre studies. Case studies may include groupings of films that sit outside of the established generic categories, as well as cycles that fall within genres. In selecting the specific cycles examined in this study, I have endeavoured to show how cycles are able to account for specific, short-term clusters of pictures in ways that traditional genre approaches are ill-equipped to do. I have argued

that the immediate commercial incentives behind production, distribution and exhibition are the key determinants for understanding how and why these groups of films were formed. Following an approach that foregrounds discursive evidence, I have also centred my explorations on the discussion of cycles by contemporary industry practitioners and made this the basis of my understanding.

While the cycles examined in this study are clearly connected to their historically-specific contexts, the case studies also illuminate the operations of cycles more generally. The frameworks developed in this thesis have the potential to be applied to film industries outside of Hollywood as well as to more recent and contemporary instances of Hollywood cycles. Ideas about cycles as discursively grouped collections of films, their operation within larger industrial fluctuations of trends in taste, the continual process of adjustment and response found within cycles, and the identification of cycles among different budget categories and forms, all may be transferrable to other research contexts, suggesting avenues for future cycle studies beyond the realm of Hollywood. At the same time, the distribution-centred framework that has been established in this thesis offers a way to reconsider the cycle studies of the post-Classical Hollywood era through a different lens, and suggests the need for recalibrating the relative weight that Hollywood scholarship has accorded to production, distribution and exhibition within the vertically-integrated Classical Hollywood system itself.

Cycles in post-Classical Hollywood

In 1964, trade commenter William Weaver observed,

> There aren't any trends in production any more. And no cycles. The terms are left-overs from the time when a major studio had to turn out a picture a week to keep the company's owned and operated theatres safely supplied with product.[889]

Weaver's statement echoes the proclamations of cycles' decline made in 1934 and 1959.[890] Yet, despite the decline of the vertically-integrated studio system, film cycles

[889] William R, Weaver, 'Hollywood column', *Motion Picture Herald*, 1 October, 1964, 16.

continued to occur. Theatre divestiture and the demise of block booking meant that there was a reduction of programmer cycles in the mould of the girl reporter pictures after 1948. Nonetheless, topical and exploitation cycles remained a significant form of low-budget cycle that carried over into post-Classical Hollywood, alongside formula product targeting specific audience groups. Many of these cycles emanated from independent producers, rather than directly from the major studios.

Changes in distribution policies and restrictions on unfair trade practices, as well as increasingly segmented audiences, meant that these readily marketable forms of low-budget cycles had an increased chance of being picked up for distribution by the majors. At the same time, the studios' focus on big-budget attractions gave rise to blockbuster cycles that took contrasting forms to the low-budget products of the independents and developed the operations of cycles in different directions. In the 1960s, these types of cycles generally followed separate circulation patterns. While the lower-budget cycles developed the practice of saturation releasing, blockbusters followed a modification of roadshow distribution, which gave the cycles elongated shapes. The focus of film scholars on exploitation and independent pictures as typical of cycles has excluded many other forms of cycles from being understood as such.

While the trade discourse on cycles has subsided since the Classical Hollywood period, the basic cycle pattern is still evident in the continuation of concentrated patterns of formulaic production and imitation. Janet Staiger has demonstrated how the mode of production shifted in the post-war period to a package system, which centres on assembling individual film projects that are financed and distributed by the major studios.[891] Despite the changes in production and divorcement of theatres, the industry has retained its overarching oligopolistic structure, and distribution remains a scale-related barrier to entry for smaller companies. Cycles continue to work as a risk-reduction strategy for distributors within this semi-competitive arrangement.

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[890] Darryl F. Zanuck, 'Express Faith in NRA; See Need for Improvement in Quality of Product and Stability Up for 1934', *Motion Picture Daily,* 13 December, 1933, 1-2. 'Cycle-Less Season Expected for '34-35', *Film Daily,* 22 October, 1934, 1. 'Rangy is the Term for Today's Themes', *Variety*, 18 November 1959, 26.

[891] Janet Staiger, 'The Hollywood Mode of Production, 1930-1960', in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, ed. by David Bordwell, Kristen Thompson and Janet Staiger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 311-37.

As film scholar David Waterman explains, price discrimination and market segmentation is integral to this staggered distribution.[892] This system brackets consumers depending on their willingness to pay different prices for product; by charging a single price for viewing a film, the industry would forgo the profit that could be earned from viewers who would be willing to pay more. These segregated pricing policies were evident in the discussion in Chapter Seven of the distribution and exhibition of *The Ten Commandments*. Under the Classical Hollywood studio system, staggered distribution extended the life span of cycles as it prolonged the circulation of the product over time and through the different levels of the exhibition sector. Following the idea of scarcity through restriction of access, the periodic removal of films from the market between theatrical runs was used to extend the product's value. These clearance periods helped slow down the rate of market absorbency in order to prevent immediate market saturation.

In the post-Classical Hollywood era of the 1960s to the 1990s, before the advent of digital distribution, the industry retained a system of staggered distribution. While the tiers of theatrical runs were displaced by the widespread adoption of saturation release policies from the mid-1970s, the structure remained in place through the separation of this greater number of exhibition platforms by clearance periods. This ensured that there was still a cascading flow to the circulation of film product as it moved through theatres, subscription satellite/cable television, home video, and broadcast television. Cycles continued to follow the two paths established in the 'new era', the first evident in big-budget cycles such as 1970s disaster films, the science-fiction action blockbusters of the 1980s, and the erotic thrillers of the 1990s. The other path, followed by the independent and low-budget cycles of this period, have been studied by Richard Nowell, who describes the way in which the major distributors engaged in cycles through their greenlighting of projects deemed suitable for the market.[893] Cycles of this type are evident in the youth-oriented road movies of the early 1970s, in late 1970s slasher horror films that Nowell describes, and in Klein's case study of the 1990s 'ghetto action' cycle.

More recently, however, the development of new production, distribution, exhibition and consumption practices has altered the form and operation of cycles in Hollywood. These

[892] David Waterman, *Hollywood's Road to Riches* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 9-10.
[893] Nowell, *Blood Money*.

changes are particularly evident in the length of cycles and their speed of circulation through the marketplace. The film industry currently maintains a system of vertical integration through the small number of transnational media corporations that incorporate multiple businesses centred on production, distribution and exhibition. Over the past few decades, these corporations have developed a wider range of media content that is exhibited and consumed across an increasing number of exhibition and consumption platforms. Despite this diversification, these companies continue to focus on film products and their theatrical release as key generators and consolidators of intellectual property. Although theatrical release has grown less significant in terms of overall profit for a film, it remains important for establishing the value of a film for later distribution deals, such as sales for television networks. This means that film cycles can still be studied and measured in terms of their initial theatrical release and circulation. Increasingly, however, cycles can also arise on different exhibition platforms, as Klein has shown in her study of cycles in straight-to-DVD release.[894]

The development of content-sharing technology and practices of digital piracy means that the theatrical release of films is increasingly synchronised in cinemas across the globe. At the same time, digital distribution has led to an increase in the number of exhibition windows. Until recently, films were typically released in theatres, followed by DVD, video-on-demand (VOD) and broadcast television. A staggered system of distribution remains in the continued separation of these different widows by a clearance period. Now distributors are experimenting with releasing films on a transactional VOD basis prior to or simultaneously with theatrical exhibition. Film scholar Virginia Crisp has explored how simultaneous multi-platform releases have far been used for smaller films that would otherwise follow a limited or exclusive distribution.[895] This type of saturation release could exaggerate the effect of cycles by concentrating their force, meaning that films would reach more audiences sooner and the market could be more quickly saturated, possibly resulting in a shorter life span for such cycles. Big budget and blockbuster films are yet to be released simultaneously on multiple platforms. In early 2016, a proposal by start-up company Screening Room to offer films at home on the same day they were released in theatres was met with considerable resistance from exhibitors and the major

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[894] Klein, *American Film Cycles*, 180-189.
[895] Virginia Crisp, *Film Distribution in the Digital Age: Pirates and Professionals* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 73.

studios alike.[896] It is in the distributors' interests to maintain clearance windows to ensure a longer playoff that holds different price points for consumers, giving cycles of such films a longer life span. Waterman argues that one of the most important challenges faced by the major distributors in contemporary Hollywood is this struggle to prevent the collapse of exhibition clearance windows.[897]

Cycles of low-budget production continue to be produced, as in the case of the mid-2000s Iraq war films described by Martin Barker.[898] Increasingly, as was the case with programmers in the 1950s, these low to mid-budget products do not have theatrical exhibition as their primary arena for consumption. The contemporary cycles that are predominantly viewed by mainstream audiences in cinemas today are blockbuster cycles. Currently, much of the understanding around the forms of seriality in blockbusters centers on the concept of franchises. As discussed in relation to the girl reporter case study in Chapter One, there were several modes of seriality in Classical Hollywood. This included the formal practices of film series, serials and official remakes, where a piece of intellectual property was extended and released at intervals, as well as informal, discursively-grouped categories of cycles and unofficial remakes. The consideration of seriality raised in this thesis may be relevant to future analyses of franchises and other serial forms in contemporary entertainment media.

The franchise is largely a property-based formal mode of seriality, but this does not preclude franchises from being parts of cycles. As in the Classical Hollywood era, there are overlapping forms of seriality in play. The concentrated production and release of collections of similar franchises by major distributors, such as the current cycles of superhero films and young adult dystopian pictures, produce the familiar discourses from industry commentators and audiences on the rate of market absorption and eventual saturation, now phrased in terms of 'peak superhero'.[899] Rising production budgets and a smaller number of productions overall, as well as changing patterns of distribution and

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[896] Brent Lang, 'Day and Date Movies at Home for $50 Being Pitched to Studios, Exhibitors', *Variety*, 9 March, 2016. Accessed 18 November, 2016. <http://variety.com/2016/film/news/studios-exhibitors-consider-revolutionary-plan-for-day-and-date-movies-at-home-exclusive-1201725168/>

[897] Waterman, *Hollywood's Road to Riches,* 120.

[898] Martin Barker, *A 'Toxic Genre': The Iraq War Films* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

[899] Mark Lee, 'Have We Reached Peak Superhero?', Overthinking It, last modified 31 July, 2012, Accessed 14 November, 2016,
< https://www.overthinkingit.com/2012/07/31/peak-superhero-avengers-batman-statistics/>
Mark Harris, 'Are We At Peak Superhero?', Grantland, Last modified 22 May, 2014. Accessed 14 November, 2016,
< http://grantland.com/features/comic-book-movies-marvel-x-men-batman-dc-comics/>.

consumption, have meant that franchises with a pre-sold audience are attractive for the risk-averse studios, particularly when they already own the intellectual property rights.

Janet Harbord has described a recent transition in the legal conception of films under copyright law. This has shifted from a singular text object whose individual ownership expires after a certain period, to trademark law's perpetual corporate ownership that distinguishes a product, or series of productions tied to a piece of intellectual property.[900] Harbord asks: is film a central text with ancillary products, or just a media platform in a multimedia environment that is characterised by the circulation of a narrative through different channels?[901] The understanding of cycles established in this thesis is based on the collection of similar, individual pieces of intellectual property that are grouped together by discursive commentary. When content is no longer tied to a single film property or product, but is legally and industrially conceived as a narrative brand that is extended and circulated across different media forms and forms of consumption, we must consider what this means for cycles (and vice versa).

Previously, viewers had no other option but to consume a film at the cinema. Changes in distribution practices have now also altered patterns in consumption. Chris Anderson has described this in terms of the 'long tail of distribution': distribution is better equipped to cater to the low level demands of consumers, which means that goods remain on the market for longer periods of time.[902] In terms of film, the multiple exhibition platforms have enabled viewers to choose at which point they wish to consume a film, and protracted distribution through channels previously considered "ancillary" has increased the shelf life of a product and the overall time-span of a cycle. This elongated form can decrease the concentrated effect of cycles and their ability to rapidly saturate the market.

This brief discussion has highlighted the ways in which we can continue to expand our understanding of cycles and their operations in the contemporary media landscape. There is a need to look beyond Hollywood to explore how different industrial structures and contexts might influence cycles' form and function. Cycles can also be explored in relation to different modes of seriality, such as franchises, and across different forms of

[900] Janet Harbord, *The Evolution of Film: Rethinking Film Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 51.
[901] Harbord, *The Evolution of Film*, 45.
[902] Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice is Creating Unlimited Demand* (New York: Random House, 2007).

media. In addition, we can examine the formation of cycles outside of mainstream distribution channels and consider how cycles might occur among pirated DVD sales and downloads; Noah Tsika's work on Nollywood's recent anti-biopic cycle marks an important contribution in this regard.[903] Tsika explores how cycles can grow out of the specific context of the Southern Nigerian film industry, particularly its informal systems of distribution and its private domestic exhibition spaces. This, he argues, constitutes 'a relaxed and idiomatic framework that has enabled the industry to embrace cycles as expressions of diverse audience tastes'.[904] He further measures the discursive grouping of the cycle through online platforms, such as iRokotv, and explores their reception through comment sections and viewer's ratings. This work thoughtfully extends the consideration of cycles to a different institutional context, distribution network and non-theatrical modes of consumption, demonstrating some fruitful approaches for future research.

In conclusion, this thesis has aimed to demonstrate that film cycles, far from constituting a peripheral issue relevant only to certain moments in Hollywood history, have played a significant role in its profit-making strategies ever since the industry achieved its status as a mature vertically-integrated oligopoly. While early studies of cycles have tended to concentrate on their occasional domination of production and/or exhibition, my proposition is that the genesis, persistence and timing of cycles can only be fully understood by taking into account the operations of all three major rungs of the industry: production, exhibition, and the less-visible agency of distribution. Indeed, while the chief purpose of this study has been to examine how a more broadly-based industrial approach leads to a revised and extended notion of what may constitute a film cycle, a concomitant aim has been to argue for distribution as a critical factor in many, if not all, of Hollywood's central operations, including those on the floor of production and within the exhibition field. As relations between production, distribution and exhibition have changed throughout the industry's history, cycles provide an ongoing means to examine this dynamic relationship among the sectors, and between Hollywood and its market more widely.

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[903] Noah Tsika, 'A Lagosian Lady Gaga: Cross-Cultural Identification in Nollywood's Anti-Biopic Cycle', *Cycles, Sequels, Spin-Offs, Remakes and Reboots,* ed. Amanda Ann Klein, R. Barton Palmer, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 184- 201.

[904] Tsika, 'A Lagosian Lady Gaga', 190.

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Alexander Hamilton, directed by John G. Adolfini (Warner Bros., 1931).
Mata Hari, directed by George Fitzmaurice (MGM, 1931).
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Rasputin and the Empress, directed by Richard Boleslawski (MGM, 1932)
Silver Dollar, directed by Alfred E. Green (Warner Bros., 1932).
The Man Who Dared, directed by Hamilton MacFadden (Fox, 1933).
Voltaire, directed by John G. Adolfini (Warner Bros., 1933).
The Private Life of Henry VIII, directed by Alexander Korda (London Film Productions, 1933).
Frontier Marshal, directed by Lew Seiler (Fox, 1934).
You Can't Buy Everything, directed by Charles F. Riesner (MGM, 1934).
Queen Christina, directed by Rouben Mamoulian (MGM, 1934).

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Catherine the Great, directed by Alexander Korda (London Film Productions, 1934).
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The Scarlet Empress, directed by Josef vin Sternberg (Paramount, 1934).
Cleopatra, directed by Cecil B. De Mille (Paramount, 1934).
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Clive of India, directed by Richard Boleslawski (20th Century, 1935).
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Abe Lincoln in Illinois, directed by John Cromwell (RKO, 1940).
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Lillian Russell, directed by Irving Cummings (Fox, 1940).
When the Daltons Rode, directed by George Marshall (Universal, 1940).
Queen of Destiny, directed by Herbert Wilcox (Imperator Film Productions, 1940).
The Return of Frank James, directed by Fritz Lang (20th Fox, 1940).
Kit Carson, directed by George B. Seitz (Edward Small Productions, 1940).
Brigham Young, directed by Henry Hathaway (20th Fox, 1940).
Knute Rockne – All American, directed by Lloyd Bacon (Warner Bros., 1940).

A Dispatch From Reuters, directed by William Dieterle (Warner Bros., 1940).
Lady with Red Hair, directed by Kurt Bernhardt (Warner Bros., 1940).
The Return of Daniel Boone, directed by Lambert Hillyer (Columbia, 1941).
The Lady From Cheyenne, directed by Frank Lloyd (Universal, 1941).
That Hamilton Woman, directed by Alexander Korda (Alexander Korda Films, 1941).
Billy the Kid, directed by David Miller (MGM, 1941).
Blossoms in the Dust, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (MGM, 1941).
New Wine, directed by Reinhold Schunzel (Gloria Film Productions, 1941).
Belle Starr, directed by Irving Cummings (20th Fox, 1941).
Sergeant York, directed by Howard Hawks (Warner Bros., 1941).
One Foot in Heaven, directed by Irving Rapper (Warner Bros., 1941).
Harmon of Michigan, directed by Charles Barton (Columbia, 1941).
The Vanishing Virginian, directed by Frank Borzage (MGM, 1942).
The Prime Minister, directed by Thorold Dickinson (Warner Bros., 1942).

Anti-prejudice cycle

The Burning Cross, directed by Walter Colmes (Screen Guild Productions, Inc., 1947).
Open Secret, directed by John Reinhardt (Eagle-Lion Films, Inc., 1948).
Crossfire, directed by Edward Dmytryk (RKO Radio Pictures, Inc., 1947).
Gentleman's Agreement, directed by Elia Kazan (Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp., 1947).
Strange Victory, directed by Leo Hurwitz (Target Films, Inc., 1948).
The Boy With The Green Hair, directed by Joseph Losey (RKO Radio Pictures, Inc., 1948).
Jigsaw, directed by Fletcher Markle (United Artists Corp., 1949).
Home of the Brave, directed by Mark Robson (United Artists Corp., 1949).
Lost Boundaries, directed by Alfred L. Werker (Film Classics, Inc., 1949).
Pinky, directed by Elia Kazan (Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp., 1949).
Intruder in the Dust, directed by Clarence Brown (Loew's Inc., 1949).
The Jackie Robinson Story, directed by Alfred E. Green (Eagle-Lion Films, Inc., 1950).
The Lawless, directed by Joseph Losey (Paramount Pictures Corp., 1950).

No Way Out, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz (Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp., 1950).
Storm Warning, directed by Stuart Heisler (Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., 1951).
Go For Broke!, directed by Robert Pirosh (Loew's Inc., 1951).
Bright Victory, directed by Mark Robson (Universal Pictures Co., Inc., 1952).
Lydia Bailey, directed by Jean Negulesco (Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp., 1952).
Red Ball Express, directed by Budd Boetticher (Universal Pictures Co., Inc., 1952).

Wartime musical revue cycle

Star Spangled Rhythm, directed by George Marshall (Paramount, 1942).
Stage Door Canteen, directed by *Frank Borzage* (United Artists, 1943).
Thousands Cheer, directed by George Sidney (MGM, 1943).
Thank Your Lucky Stars, directed by David Butler (Warner Bros., 1943).
Four Jills in a Jeep, directed by William A. Seiter (Fox, 1944).
Follow the Boys, directed by Eddie Sutherland (Universal, 1944).
Hollywood Canteen, directed by Delmer Daves (Warner Bros., 1944).

Biblical epic cycle

Samson and Delilah, directed by Cecil B. DeMille (Paramount, 1949).
David and Bathsheba, directed by Henry King (Twentieth Century Fox, 1951).
Quo Vadis, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (MGM, 1951).
Salome, directed by William Dieterle (Columbia, 1953).
The Robe, directed by Henry Koster (Twentieth Century Fox, 1953).
Sins of Jezebel, directed by Reginald Le Borg (Lippert Pictures, 1953).
Demetrius and the Gladiators, directed by Delmer Daves (Twentieth Century Fox, 1954).
The Silver Chalice, directed by Victor Saville (Warner Bros., 1954).
The Prodigal, directed by Richard Thorpe (MGM, 1955).
The Ten Commandments, directed by Cecil B. DeMille (Paramount, 1956).
The Big Fisherman, directed by Frank Borzage (MGM, 1959).

Ben-Hur, directed by William Wyler (MGM, 1959).
Solomon and Sheba, directed by King Vidor (United Artists, 1959).
The Story of Ruth, directed by Henry Koster (Twentieth Century Fox, 1960).
Esther and the King, directed by Raoul Walsh (Twentieth Century Fox, 1960).
King of Kings, directed by Nicholas Ray (MGM, 1961).
David and Goliath, directed by Richard Pottier (Allied Artists, 1961).
The Story of Joseph and His Brethren, directed by Irving Rapper (Colorama Featuresm 1962).
Sodom and Gomorrah, directed by Roebrt Aldrich (Twentieth Century Fox, 1963).
The Greatest Story Ever Told, directed by George Stevens (United Artists, 1965).
The Bible… In the Beginning, directed by John Huston (Twentieth Century Fox, 1966).

Beach party cycle

Gidget, directed by Paul Wendkos (Columbia, 1959).
Where the Boys Are, directed by Henry Levin (MGM, 1960)
Blue Hawaii, directed by Norman Taurog (Paramount, 1961)
Gidget Goes Hawaiian, directed by (Columbia, 1961)
Beach Party, directed by William Asher (AIP, 1963)
Bikini Beach, directed by (AIP, 1964)
For Those Who Think Young, directed by Leslie H. Martinson (United Artists, 1964)
The Horror of Party Beach, directed by Del Tenney (20th Century Fox, 1964)
Muscle Beach Party, directed by William Asher (AIP, 1964)
Pajama Party, directed by Don Weis (AIP, 1964)
Ride the Wild Surf, directed by Don Taylor (Columbia, 1964)
Surf Party, directed by Maury Dexter (20th Century Fox, 1964)
Beach Ball, directed by Lennie Weinrib (Paramount, 1965)
Beach Blanket Bingo, directed by William Asher (AIP, 1965)
The Beach Girls and the Monster, directed by Jon Hall (US Films, 1965)
Girl Happy, directed by Boris Sagal (MGM, 1965)
The Girls on the Beach, directed by William Witney (Paramount, 1965)
How to Stuff a Wild Bikini, directed by William Asher (AIP, 1965)
One Way Wahine, directed by William O. Brown (1965)

Ski Party, directed by Alan Rafkin (AIP, 1965)

A Swingin' Summer, directed by Robert Sparr (United Artists, 1965)

Wild on the Beach, directed by Maury Dexter (20th Century Fox, 1965)

Winter a-Go-Go, directed by Richard Benedict (Columbia, 1965)

The Endless Summer, directed by Bruce Brown (Bruce Brown, 1966)

The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini, directed by Don Weis (AIP, 1966)

Out of Sight, directed by Lennie Weinrib (Universal, 1966)

Wild Wild Winter, directed by (Universal, 1966)

Catalina Caper, directed by Lee Sholem (Crown, 1967)

Don't Make Waves, directed by Alexander Mackendrick (1967)

It's a Bikini World, directed by Stephanie Rothman (Trans-American, 1967)

The Sweet Ride, directed by Harvey Hart (20th Century Fox, 1968)