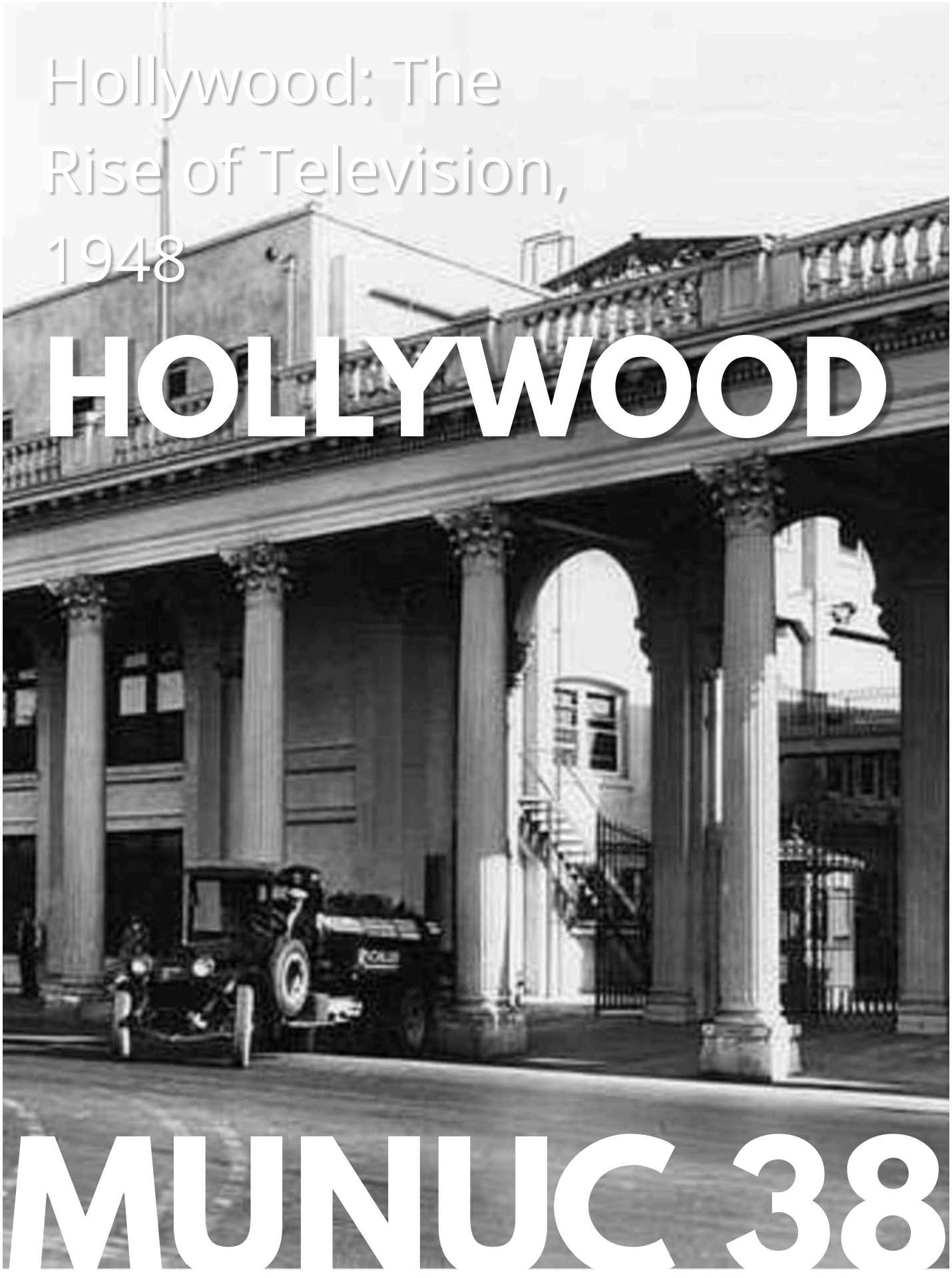
Hollywood: The Rise of Television, 1948

HOLLYWOOD



MUNUC 38

Model United Nations of the University of Chicago

Chair Letter

Dear Delegates,

We are very happy to welcome you to MUNUC 38! My name is Ava Lucarelli and I will be your chair for the Hollywood committee. I am from Long Island, New York, and am currently a second year at the University of Chicago majoring in Global Studies and Art History. Outside of MUN, I love reading, traveling, and eating pizza (but not deep dish!). I am also a part of Women in Law, and am learning poi as a part of the UChicago circus. Within MUN, I compete as a member of UChicago's travel team, and was an assistant chair for the YORK committee in MUNUC and the WHO committee in ChoMUN (UChicago's college conference) last year.

I am excited to be your chair for this hybrid committee as you find creative ways to face the rise of television and the ups and downs of Hollywood. Your Crisis Directors and I hope you learn something new about this exciting period while you develop your public speaking skills, create exciting arcs, and most importantly grow as delegates. We hope to create an environment where you feel comfortable to speak your mind and motivated to challenge yourself and others. Along this line, we trust that you will conduct yourselves with maturity when discussing sensitive topics that arise during committee.

As a hybrid committee, Hollywood contains both a GA format and crisis elements. This being said, if you have any questions regarding the committee or expectations as a delegate, feel free to email us. We cannot wait to meet all of you and make this committee as collaborative, engaging, and fun as possible.

Good luck!

Ava Lucarelli

Chair, *Hollywood: The Rise of Television, 1948*

alucarelli@uchicago.edu

Crisis Director Letters

Dear Delegates,

I would like to give you a warm welcome to Hollywood! My name is Nik Ochoa, and I am currently in my second year at the University of Chicago majoring in Public Policy and Psychology, with a minor in Media Arts and Design. I am originally from Southern California, spending most of my childhood in Los Angeles and Hollywood!

This past year, I enjoyed my time serving as an Assistant Chair for the Coney Island Committee for Model UN. I am also involved with interning for my local Congresswoman Norma Torres and serving on various boards for the Institute of Politics of the University of Chicago. I am excited to be one of your Crisis Directors for the committee and watch as you handle the social landscape of Hollywood. As a hybrid committee, we will be incorporating both General Assembly debate and crisis elements, offering a unique experience. I encourage you to take full advantage and be creative and collaborative with others. The most engaging committees are ones where delegates fully embrace their character and the opportunity to shape the narrative.

While hybrid format can be challenging, I am sure all of you will be able to handle it. If any questions or issues arise, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or any of my fellow execs. We want this to be a learning experience, and asking questions may be helpful to all of those in your committee. As a committee, we will all hold ourselves to the highest standards and treat each other with the utmost respect. I am looking forward to getting to know all of you.

Best of luck and get ready for the show!

Nik Ochoa

Crisis Director, *Hollywood: The Rise of Television, 1948*

ochoa8@uchicago.edu

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Hollywood committee at MUNUC 38! My name is Elizabeth Zeilman, and I am a second year student at UChicago studying political science. I am originally from the most underrated city in America, St. Louis. I have become very involved with Model UN in college and compete for the UChicago travel team. Along with competing, I was previously an assistant chair for *Yongle's Bongles* at ChoMUN XXVII, UChicago's collegiate conference, and for WINDIES at MUNUC 37. I had a great time helping run my committee last year, and I am excited to be your crisis director for the Hollywood committee this year at MUNUC 38!

As an avid consumer of movies and television, I am hoping that this committee will be as interesting and fun as it is educational. As your crisis director, I am looking for creative and hard-hitting arcs that can drastically change the direction of the committee. That being said, as a hybrid committee, and therefore a slightly more challenging committee including both GA and crisis elements, I am also looking for you to grow your skills and adapt to challenges through collaboration and diplomacy as you navigate MGM Studios through a tumultuous era of Hollywood.

As your crisis director, I expect all delegates to be kind and respectful to each other, and I want to emphasize collaboration and learning as the key ideals of MUNUC. Please be mindful and think responsibly of any topics that may be problematic for arcs. I want this committee to be as fun and fulfilling as possible for all delegates while ensuring a friendly environment. If you have any questions feel free to email us.

I can't wait to have a blast. See you all at MUNUC 38!

Elizabeth Zeilman

Crisis Director, *Hollywood: The Rise of Television, 1948*

emzeilman@uchicago.edu

AND NOW, A MESSAGE FROM OUR FEARLESS LEADER:

To my newly formed MGM Crisis Board,

It is I, Louis B. Mayer, MGM Studios' head of production. I have formed this new board because MGM faces its biggest crisis yet: the rise of television. As such, I have gathered MGM employees from all sectors of our great studio. Actors, producers, publicists and more will draw from their unique backgrounds and roles within the company to move us all forward in this new era. Even though the board is made of studio employees from all different walks of life, do not be mistaken. There is no hierarchy in this group; everyone has equal say in making decisions that will affect the entire company. Additionally, even though I will preside over the board, you all will choose what happens in committee. I trust that you all will make the right decisions and save our company from an early demise!

Best,

Louis B. Mayer

Sensitivity Statement

As we dive into the complexities of Hollywood in 1948, it's important to approach sensitive historical topics with care and respect. This committee is a space for creativity, but also one of inclusivity and historical awareness. While the era was marked by glamor and spectacle, it was also shaped by serious societal issues that affected real people. These should be handled with the seriousness they deserve.

Please avoid promoting or making light of ideologies such as communism and militarism in ways that ignore the real harm they have caused. In particular, references to World War II and other conflicts should be handled with thoughtfulness, avoiding glorification or insensitive commentary. Additionally, though this committee takes place three quarters of a century ago, we still expect you to engage with each other in a way that represents current values. This includes upholding mutual respect and inclusivity. Discrimination of any kind (sexism, racism, and homophobia, for example) will not be tolerated. We also ask that you avoid bullying or excluding others from conversation. Everyone plays an important part in this committee, and everyone deserves to feel welcome and heard.

A potential issue that may be brought up during committee is the topic of censorship. While it is important to understand the historical context of what was being censored, we will not be focusing on that during our committee. We would like to invite you to instead focus more critically on who held the power to censor, whether that be the government, private companies, or other influential institutions. Conversations around censorship are approached differently today than they were in the past, and we encourage you to think deeply about the structures behind censorship rather than judging the content by modern standards alone.

If you have any questions or concerns throughout the conference, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. Should any insensitive material arise during debate, we will address it promptly to ensure that all delegates feel safe, respected, and supported. Let's work together to create a thoughtful and welcoming environment for all.

Structure and Mechanics

This is a hybrid committee composed of two General Assembly (GA) sessions at the beginning of conference, with three Crisis sessions following after. During GA sessions, delegates will create a strategic initiative as members of MGM responding to the rise of television. Through this process, delegates will form blocs to write different resolutions and conclude the session by voting on them. These resolutions could take on many forms, but we expect that they fully address the issue and the complexities that come with it.

Crisis committees offer a different set of challenges than GA. In "frontroom," delegates pass directives instead of resolutions, which are shorter in length and respond to specific crises that arise during committee. Additionally, in "backroom," delegates can implement personal objectives as a part of their arc through notes sent during committee. During GA and Crisis sessions, delegates will send notes to Assistant Chairs (ACs).

Part One: Drafting a Strategic Initiative for MGM

The first session will commence in Hollywood 1948, as television begins to cement itself as a fixture in American households. As such, in the first two GA sessions, delegates will respond to this change by passing a strategic initiative for MGM. The contents of this initiative can take many different forms depending on delegates' solutions, but it should be focused on propelling the company forward in this tumultuous time for the film industry. By the end of the second GA session, delegates will pass a strategic initiative that is fully comprehensive and promotes growth in the company. However, while it is important to pass the initiative promptly, there will be ample time to fully consider solutions and debate different clauses.

The strategic initiative passed during the GA sessions will provide the new structure and foundation for MGM. When devising the initiative, delegates should consider how MGM can structure a successful production company in the new age of entertainment while also maintaining what made them unique in the first place. With this in mind, the initiative that is passed should contain more wide-ranging solutions for the entire company, but also have specific details that build on and develop the broader solutions.

Even though Crisis elements such as your individual connections and interests are not available to you during GA sessions, they should be kept in mind while creating an initiative. Results of the passed initiative, including new powers or structures given to the company, will apply to all delegates during Crisis sessions. As such, the ways in which you shape the initiative can provide both advantages and disadvantages in following sessions. While writing the initiative, you might strengthen certain areas of the company, or create intentional weaknesses that you wish to exploit during Crisis. However, at the end of the day, it is important that the goal of the strategic initiative is to work together and strengthen the company as a whole. The most successful delegates should balance individual interests while simultaneously prioritizing the company's growth.

Part Two: Keeping the Company Afloat

Time in committee after the first two sessions will be spent in Crisis to determine the effectiveness of the initiative passed during GA. Delegates will respond to crises that test how well MGM fares in this new entertainment landscape and if they will remain an industry powerhouse. Problems will arise in the form of **crisis breaks** which delegates will respond to by passing **directives**. Crisis breaks are scenes that show the issues that committee must respond to

by passing directives. Directives are typically between one and three pages (decided and announced during committee by the Chair) and outline specific actions to resolve a crisis. Precise wording in directives is highly important, as their results will help shape the crises moving forward. The Crisis Directors are notified when a directive is passed, meaning that your directives and actions in the backroom directly affect the ongoing crisis. Additionally, it is important for you to have an idea of your individual interests and objectives, because your notes will also impact the committee by causing crisis breaks.

Notepads will be passed out in the beginning of the committee. Notes you write will outline your goals and how they will be achieved with the resources you have available. Your notes will be read by ACs who will respond as whoever you write the note to. Usually, delegates write the note to someone their character trusts, such as a family member, close friend, or secretary. In this committee, we will use a two-notepad system, which means that you will alternate writing notes to two different people. Your end goals for both notepads should be the same, but the actions to get there should be different in how they support reaching the end goal.

In your first notes for both notepads, you will want to build from whatever resources your character possesses to begin with and expand your influence for whatever plans you wish to enact. Remember that these plans should be enacted with the intention to disrupt the committee by creating a crisis break that your fellow delegates must respond to in committee. Moreover, your plans must be enacted in three crisis sessions, so keep this timeline in mind. The most successful delegates in crisis not only collaborate and lead in the front room but also keep their objectives in mind when crafting directives.

Even though the objective of this committee is to keep MGM afloat while also promoting growth during the rise of television, ultimately, the company's fate is in your hands. We are excited to see how you will learn and grow as delegates throughout committee and cannot wait to see your creative responses to whatever crises are thrown your way!

History of the Problem

The Birth of Hollywood

Before Hollywood was the entertainment capital of the world, it started as a cluster of hills and brushland on the outskirts of El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles de Porciúncula—or the City of Los Angeles—a Spanish-turned-Mexican settlement carved out by railroad. After the Mexican-American War, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848, forcing Mexico to give up Alta California to the United States and helping drive Americans to settle the newly conquered land. Railroads connecting Chicago and Los Angeles, completed in 1885, exploded the oil, agriculture, and tourism industries. Starting at only 1,600 settlers in 1850, population boomed to 50,000 in 1890.[1] Settlers were drawn by the warm weather, cheap land, and hope for a better life.

Oil especially, was the spark that turned Los Angeles from a frontier into a booming city. The first major strike came in 1892 near present-day Dodger Stadium, and by the early 20th century the Los Angeles Basin was producing roughly one-quarter of the world's oil supply, fueling both local growth and global industry. Oil derricks quickly dotted the landscape from Beverly Hills to Signal Hill, reshaping both the economy and the environment. Combined with the lure of cheap land and a warm, dry climate, the oil boom created the wealth, infrastructure, and migration waves that set the stage for Hollywood's emergence as the center of the film industry.

[1] "Historical General Population City & County of Los Angeles, 1850 to 2020." *Historical Census Counts from 1850 to Present for Los Angeles County, California*, www.laalmanac.com/population/po02.php. Accessed 17 Aug. 2025.

Hollywood Sign.[2]

One of these growing areas was a small agricultural community called Hollywood, established by Harvey Henderson Wilcox in 1887. His 120-acre ranch established a surrounding agricultural farming community, the perfect escape from the rowdyness of Los Angeles. In 1903, filmmakers Jesse Lasky and Cecil B. DeMille were drawn to Hollywood's sunny skies and wide-open spaces, perfect for developing "moving pictures" (movies for short).[3] They were also drawn for another reason though: to get away from the "Edison Trust."

[2] Glen Scarborough. "Hollywood! | Hollywood Sign - California". Flickr, https://flic.kr/p/a2gbVY. Accessed August 23, 2025

[3] Hollywood Heritage Museum, "Preserving the History of Early Hollywood," accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.hollywoodheritage.org/

After Thomas Edison helped to innovate the kinetoscope, a film projector that was critical for showing movies, he formed the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) in New York in 1908. There, he and other film producers and distributors patented as many film stock, cameras, projectors, and kinetoscope designs as he could, requiring anyone who wanted to show movies to pay the "Edison Trust." Edison even bought the Latham Loop patent, an innovation that spooled film differently and allowed for longer movies, limiting creators to shorter film projects. This heavily hurt independent filmmakers, as the licensing was quite expensive, and competing against the patent technology was illegal. In response, these independent filmmakers moved west to escape the restrictiveness of the trust.

Kinetoscope.[4]

[4] U.S. National Park Service. "Man viewing a kinetoscope which is equipped with synchronized sound.". Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Man_viewing_a_kinetoscope_which_is_equipped_with_synchronized_sound._%28bfef2c85-269d-4d5e-a9ba-d1dbc1b3fbdd%29.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025

Lasky and DeMille set up a small film studio in a barn, which would eventually become Paramount Pictures. At the time, the industry had moved beyond the hand-cranked kinetoscope, but the movies were still quite different from those of today: silent shorts, often less than ten minutes, accompanied by a pianist in the theater. Dialogue and key plot points appeared on inter-title cards, while actors relied on exaggerated expressions and gestures to carry the story; audiences had to follow the narrative almost entirely through visual cues.

Out of this style emerged figures like Charlie Chaplin and Fritz Lang, who built enduring screen personas across multiple films. It wasn't until the 1920s, however, that Hollywood truly established itself on the world stage, as silent films gave way to "talkies" with synchronized dialogue and musical numbers. These longer productions demanded larger budgets for sets and scenery, and California's geography offered filmmakers natural backdrops, from beaches to mountains, without ever leaving the state. This boom marked the beginning of Hollywood's Golden Age.

Al Jolson in "The Jazz Singer" for Warner Bros Pictures.[5]

[5] Warner Bros. "The Jazz Singer". Heritage Auctions, https://movieposters.ha.com/itm/musical/the-jazz-singer-warner-brothers-1927-lobby-card-11-x-14-/a/7055-83329.s?ic4=GalleryView-Thumbnail-071515#. Accessed 23 August, 2025

The Golden Age

In the 1920s, the film industry was flourishing. Just a few years earlier, the "Edison Trust" had been struck down by the courts. In *United States v. Motion Picture Patents Co.* (1917), the Supreme Court ruled that the trust's practices went "far beyond what was necessary" to protect patents, effectively breaking its monopoly and forcing Edison's group out of the movie business.[6] This decision opened the door for independent producers to experiment with longer films and more ambitious projects, helping Hollywood grow into a powerhouse. Now, hundreds of movies were being made and spread throughout the country and world. This put Hollywood on the map as the ideal place to see glitz and glamour.[7] Four brothers, Harry, Albert, Sam, and Jack Warner, wanted a piece of the action, incorporating Warner Brothers Pictures in 1923. One year later, Marcus Loew formed Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. (MGM).

Vertical Integration

Major studios were well-oiled machines, as they not only had contracted actors but also owned film studios, movie lots, movie theaters, production facilities, and everything else it took to make a movie. They became a business model that controlled every part of the filmmaking process, from writing, to casting, to filming, and even the exact theater each movie would show at, conveniently owned by the studio that produced it. This was vertical integration, a system where studios were both the supplier and distributor.[8] This had massive savings in overhead costs as well as decreasing transportation and turnaround time. However, this meant that there was a focus on mass-producing films with similar themes and genres. This hurt movie diversity, as it

[6] Library of Congress, "The Life of an American Fireman: Early Motion Pictures, 1897 to 1920," accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.loc.gov/collections/early-motion-pictures/about-this-collection/
[7] *Motion Picture Patents Co. v. Universal Film Mfg. Co.*, 243 U.S. 502 (1917).
[8] Ricard Gil, "Revenue Sharing Distortions and Vertical Integration in the Movie Industry," *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 27, no. 3 (2011): 518–543.

was cheaper to produce similar movies rather than branching out. Despite this, the decade rounded out with the addition of RKO pictures to the mix and 20th Century Fox joining in 1935. These five studios: Warner Bros., Paramount Pictures, MGM, 20th Century Fox, and RKO Pictures, formed "The Big Five."[9] They were the major studios with the biggest vertical integration strategies.

Contract Stars

By the late 1920s, people weren't just going to see the new technology of movies; they were going to see stars. Culture shifted as audiences fell in love with Clara Bow, Rudolph Valentino, and Greta Garbo. Fan magazines, movie posters, and star-studded events began to shape American pop culture, drawing audiences out to see the big premieres or read about them the next day. Actors and actresses felt the pressure of star power, especially as they were under strict contracts with one studio, often for years. Famous "contract stars" like Judy Garland or Clark Gable had their public images, roles, and personal lives controlled by the studios.[10] Sometimes actors would even be loaned out to other studios for specific films.

[9] Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1998.
[10] "The Hollywood Star System and the Regulation of Actors' Labour, 1916–1934."

"Don Juan" Premier at Warners' Theatre (1926).[11]

Censorship

Although the major film studios were working hard at entertaining the public, not everyone was thrilled with what they saw on the big screen. As early as 1915, in *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*, filmmakers faced pressure when Ohio attempted to create its own censorship board; the Supreme Court ultimately ruled that free speech protections did not extend to motion pictures.[12] Concerns about morality only grew in the 1920s, when some audiences and religious leaders accused the film industry of promoting questionable

[11] Irving Browning. "First-nighters posing for the camera outside the Warners' Theatre before the premiere of Don Juan with John Barrymore. The theatre advertises its "Refrigerated Washed-Air Cooling System". Wikipedia Commons. File:First-nighters posing for the camera outside the Warners' Theater before the premiere of "Don Juan" with John Barrymore, - NARA - 535750.jpg - Wikipedia. Accessed 23 August 2025

[12] *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*, 236 U.S. 230 (1915).

values. In response, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), under the leadership of Will H. Hays, created the Motion Picture Production Code in 1922.[13] Drawing heavily on Catholic principles, the code aimed to prevent inconsistent state-level censorship bills (over 37 states had attempted to pass such legislation in 1921) by establishing industry-wide regulation. Instead, President Hays decided to self-regulate the industry by asking studio executives to form committees on film censorship. MGM, Fox Film, and Paramount Pictures collaborated and released a list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls," with subjects that should be avoided.[14] These were approved by the Federal Trade Commission in 1927 and implemented by the Studio Relations Committee, a group of producers and directors that suggested guidelines for studios to follow, even though there was no real way to enforce these with the multitude of independent film companies. The goal of the code was that, "No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it… law, natural or human, should not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation."[15] Despite the moral efforts, Hays' office did not yet have any authority to remove material from a film.

[13] Motion Picture Association, "About," https://www.motionpictures.org/about/.
[14] "Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, 'The Don'ts and Be Carefuls' (1927)." Don'ts and be carefuls (1927). Accessed August 24, 2025. https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/syllabi/w/weisenfeld/rel160/donts.html.
[15] Bob Mondello, "Remembering Hollywood's Hays Code, 40 Years On," *NPR*, August 8, 2008, https://www.npr.org/2008/08/08/93301189/remembering-hollywoods-hays-code-40-years-on.

Hays Code Message.[16]

Amendments to the Hays Code would be adopted in 1934, establishing the Production Code Administration headed by Joseph Breen. This required films to obtain a certificate of approval, like the one above, before being released. The Hays Code now finally had the ability to remove immoral material from movies. For over thirty years afterwards, all motion pictures in the United States adhered to the code, despite it not being enforced in federal or state laws. Writers strongly opposed the self-regulation, since Breen frequently censored their scripts and altered entire scenes to force them into conformity. Independent studios, known as Poverty Row Studios, used the lack of enforceable law to loophole their way through the system, including using the fact that new reels were exempt from the Code. After the success of different Western films that defied the code, the Hays Code began to weaken in the 1940s.

[16] National Association of Manufacturers; Prelinger Archive. "the opening sequence of 'Plastic Age Anniversary!,' 1952." Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Credit_to_NAM.png. Accessed 23 August, 2025.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1940s, Hollywood had firmly established itself as the world's entertainment capital, with its studio system in full swing and its films shaping global culture. The major studios, especially MGM, Warner Bros., Paramount, 20th Century Fox, and RKO, controlled not only how movies were made but how they were seen, distributed, and remembered through vertical integration. The Hays Code dictated the moral boundaries of storytelling, while the star system crafted perfect public personas for actors who became icons. Technological advancements like sound, Technicolor, and improved special effects transformed films into immersive experiences. As the decade closed, the glamour, control, and artistic achievement of the Golden Age of Hollywood stood unmatched, making Hollywood not just a place but a defining force in the American identity.

The Hollywood Sign and a View of Downtown Los Angeles.[17]

1924: MGM's Founding

Beginning production in 1924, the company was founded by Marcus Loew, who merged Goldwyn Pictures, Louis B. Mayer Productions, and Metro Pictures. Loew was an industry

[17] Michael E. Arth. "View from behind Hollywood Sign overlooking LA." Wikimedia Commons, https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:View_from_behind_Hollywood_Sign_overlooking_LA.jpg. Accessed 23 August 2025.

pioneer from New York who transitioned from stage production to movie exhibition at the turn of the century. Joining him in the merger were Louis B. Mayer, the head of production, and Irving Thalberg, producer of the new studio. The new studio also involved publishing magnate William M. Hearst, the founder of Cosmopolitan Pictures, which was acquired by MGM in the merger. MGM was not only consolidating their labor forces, but also aligning itself with one of the most powerful media moguls in the country.

Loew founded the company at an opportune time: film production was becoming more popular as movie-going grew as a popular American past-time. At the time of the company's founding, Hollywood contained about fifty different production companies with around 30,000 people working in the industry. It was a perfect time for a new production company to rise to the top, competing with existing companies Universal and Paramount (and later Disney and Warner Bros.).[18]

Metro Goldwyn Mayer Logo (1926).[19]

[18] Kyle Swenson, "Louis B. Mayer, MGM's Money Man and Wonder-Boy," *Wall Street Journal*, review, accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.wsj.com/arts-culture/books/louis-b-mayer-irving-thalberg-review-mgms-money-man-and-wonder-boy-139b870b.

[19] Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer — Slats the Lion (1926)." Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer_%E2%80%94_Slats_the_Lion_%281926%29.png. Accessed 23 August, 2025

Culver City, the site of Goldwyn Films, contained the famous Culver City Studio, which was one of the largest studios in the world. The space allowed the company to film 18,000 miles of celluloid (about 17,424 hours) across its ten stages, with Stage Six covering an acre and a half by itself. Part of the novelty of MGM's new studio was the creation of its massive backlot, which contained permanent sets that captured different places around the world such as New York and Russia. The sheer size of the studio space gained in the merger reinvigorated both employees and executives. Metro executive Joseph Schenck captured this new sentiment, telling the *Los Angeles Times* that, "We are going to make more pictures and better pictures." with their new production capacity.[20]

Emblematic of the new studio's capacity is the 1925 silent picture, *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*. In Loew's words, the film was meant to be, "the greatest picture yet made and will probably make a better hit with its audiences than any film heretofore presented to the public," highlighting the potential he saw in his new company (International Herald Tribune).[21] The majority of the film was shot in Culver City Studio at a scale previously unseen in film. *Ben-Hur* pushed the boundaries of what film could be with its ambitious sets and larger-than-life scenes.

Also central to the new studio was its leadership, particularly Louis B. Mayer. While not the most powerful person in the company, as head of production he was the face of the studio. Mayer brought Thalberg into the company, the "boy genius" producer who previously worked for Universal Pictures. Under his leadership, the studio would go on to produce multiple successful films in 1924 such as *He Who Gets Slapped*, *The Snob*, *The Silent Accuser*, and *So This Is Marriage*, demonstrating the company's influence from their founding.[22]

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[20] Satiana Siegel, "MGM History: Studio Founding & Legacy," *Hollywood Reporter*, accessed June 29, 2025, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/mgm-history-studio-founding-1235880683/.
[21] "Ben-Hur a Hit in Our Pages 100, 75, and 50 Years Ago," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1999.
[22] "Louis B. Mayer: Lion of Hollywood," *Time*, archived, accessed June 29, 2025, https://time.com/archive/6734179/louis-b-mayer-lion-of-hollywood/.

The goal of the partnership between the three companies was to reduce production overlap and pool shared resources. Loew hoped that this would help with film exhibitors and simply make better films. With the combination of Goldwyn's studio (one of the largest in the world), Loew's theaters (the largest owner of theaters in the country), and Mayer's leadership, newly established MGM had the machinery and minds to dominate the industry.

Burbank Studios.[23]

1920s-1930s: The Rise and Golden Age of MGM

The 1920s and 30s were when MGM solidified itself as a major studio in Hollywood and created the foundation for its eventual Golden Age in the late 1930s. Because of the Great Depression and economic struggles of the late 20's, most studios at the time failed to make a profit. However, because of the vision and leadership from Irving Thalberg and Louis B. Mayer, the studio did make a profit while also curating a level of sophistication and polish to MGM's

[23] Alan Light. "Filming Spielberg's '1941.'" Flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/alan-light/4971527550. Accessed 23 August, 2025.

productions.[24] This manifested in popular films such as *Grand Hotel* (1932) and *Red Dust* (1932), which were very successful and profited $947,000 and $399,000 respectively.[25] Adding to the studio's prestige was Thalberg's marriage to Norma Shearer, an actress under MGM and one of Hollywood's most popular leading ladies. Thalberg died young at the age of thirty-seven in 1936, but he laid in place a talented roster of behind-the-scenes talents who continued his vision long after his death.

Mayer fully took over the creative leadership of MGM after Thalberg's death and ushered in a new golden age for the studio. He decided that the studio and the films it produced should be the image of moral excellence and glamour. This manifested in wholesome musicals and family series such as *Andy Hardy* and *The Thin Man*, which were as inoffensive (as not to break the Hays Code) and inspiring as possible. *Andy Hardy* was a series of films first released in 1937 which focused on an idealized, small-town American family.[26] The family patriarch, Judge Hardy, embodied the paternal guidance and moral principles that Mayer wanted to glorify through MGM's wholesome image. *The Thin Man*, a comedy-mystery film series first released in 1934 was similar in its values, although a different genre. While MGM did not invent the film series, they popularized it with series like *Andy Hardy* and *The Thin Man*, which were able to continue because of the popularity of their stars.

[24] "MGM-100: Rise and Fall of Hollywood's Grandest Studio," *Los Angeles Public Library*, https://www.lapl.org/events/exhibits/mgm-100-rise-and-fall-hollywood's-grandest-studio.
[25] *Eddie Mannix Ledger*, Los Angeles: Margaret Herrick Library, Center for Motion Picture Study.
[26] *The Epoch Times*, "A Father's Day Treat: The Andy Hardy Film Series," accessed June 29, 2025.

Poster for Andy Hardy Meets Debutante.[27]

MGM capitalized on this popularity through the "star system," a marketing strategy pioneered by Mayer which involved creating and promoting actors and actresses as glamorous, bankable stars to attract audiences.[28] Mayer did not invent this approach, but became synonymous with it after years of innovation and perfection. He once bragged that the studio had, "more stars than there are in heaven," a quote that later became the famous slogan of MGM.[29] Some of the most famous movie stars of the time were signed under MGM: Judy Garland, Clark Gable, Joan Crawford, Elizabeth Taylor, Katharine Hepburn, Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, The Marx Brothers, and Greta Garbo. The stars weren't just actors and actresses, but icons that were handpicked and polished to embody beauty, charm, and sophistication. These stars and the images curated for these stars by MGM would add a layer of glamour central to Mayer's vision of the studio. In such, MGM's publicity department worked tirelessly to present

[27] MGM. "Poster for the American comedy film Andy Hardy Meets Debutante (1940)." Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AndyHardyMeetsDebutante.jpg. Accessed August 23, 2025.
[28] Schuyler Moore, "Back to the Future: The Star System," *Forbes*, April 15, 2014, https://www.forbes.com/sites/schuylermoore/2014/04/15/back-to-the-future-the-star-system/.
[29] *Time*, "Louis B. Mayer: Lion of Hollywood," accessed June 29, 2025, https://time.com/archive/6734179/louis-b-mayer-lion-of-hollywood/.

its stars as untouchable figures, placing them in films with emphasized fantasy and romance, creating a dream world with its stars at the center of the illusion.

1939 would mark some of the studio's largest successes in Mayer-produced films like *The Wizard of Oz*, starring MGM's newest icon Judy Garland.[30] The Technicolor fantasy was one of the most expensive films ever produced, but was a huge monetary success for the company. *Goodbye Mr. Chips* and MGM-distributed films such as *Gone With the Wind* were also huge successes in their time, garnering both awards and profit for the company while also remaining a cultural mainstay to this day.

[30] "The Wizard of Oz" article, *American Society of Cinematographers*, https://theasc.com/articles/behind-the-curtain-wizard-of-oz.

Statement of the Problem

Vertical Integration

When MGM was established in 1924, it was founded with vertical integration as its goal. After the merger, the combination of Loew's theaters, Goldwyn's studios, and Mayer's creative direction allowed the company to maximize profits and control over the filmmaking, distribution, and exhibition processes. Although vertical integration was expensive to maintain, over the years the system proved successful because the studio oversaw all aspects of the operation, thereby minimizing financial risks while maintaining creative control. The other four studios in the "Big Five" found similar success with the model, cementing the studio system that characterized Hollywood for the first half of the 20th century.[31]

MGM Studio Lot (1922).[32]

[31] Hanssen, F. Andrew. "Vertical Integration during the Hollywood Studio Era." *The Journal of Law & Economics*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2010, pp. 519–43. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.1086/605567. Accessed 9 Aug. 2025.
[32] Los Angeles Public Library's Photo Collection. "MGM-studios-1922." Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MGM-studios-1922.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025

While this model provided numerous advantages and success for the "Big Five," it eventually became problematic for several reasons. The first is that the studios held a near monopoly over the movie business in Hollywood. With vertical integration, each studio had exclusive contracts with actors and directors, had ownership over the movie theaters where their movies were played, worked with each other to control how their movies were shown in independent theaters, and sometimes even owned the companies that processed their film.[33] This meant that power in Hollywood was concentrated within the vertically integrated studios, making it extremely difficult for independent studios and exhibitors to thrive.

The anti-competitiveness caused by the monopolies manifested in practices such as "block booking." With block booking, theaters were forced to licence an entire slate of movies to get access to a single popular film. As a result, independent theaters were effectively forced to waste money on less popular films to receive access to a more successful film that would earn the theater money. This limited the choices independent theaters were given, which then shrunk their customer base and gave the "Big Five" more power.[34] Additionally, because studios controlled the entire film making and distribution process, the films that were produced were made to maximize profits. This meant that films were more standardized and catered to mass-audiences instead of pushing more creative uses of the film medium. Mass-market appeal meant that smaller, more niche films were neglected and artistic and cultural diversity was suppressed because the studios were worried that they would lose profits on their release and creation.

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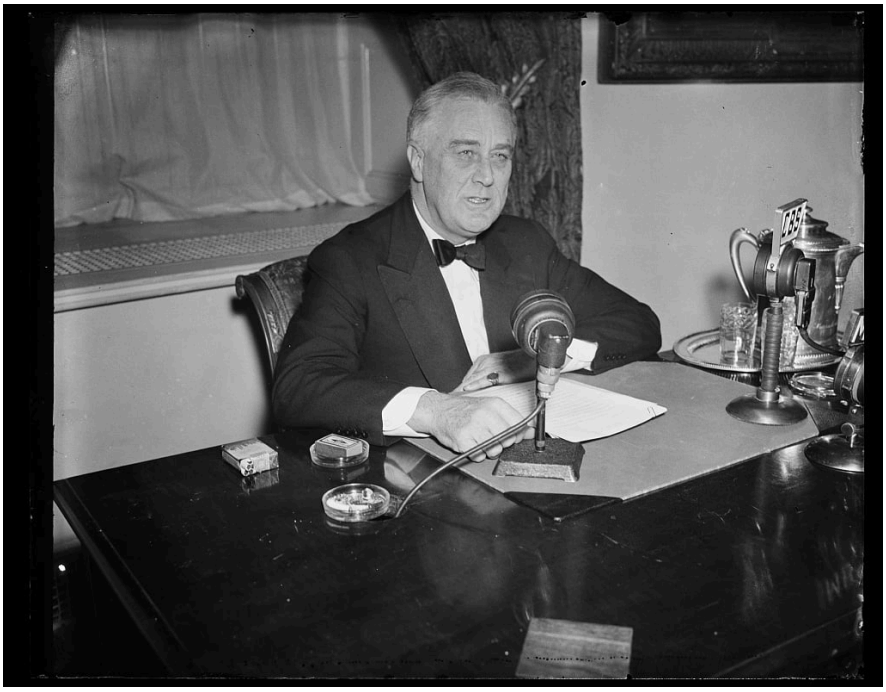
[33] Bomboy, Scott. "The day the Supreme Court killed Hollywood's studio system | Constitution Center." *The National Constitution Center*, 4 May 2023, https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-day-the-supreme-court-killed-hollywoods-studio-system. Accessed 9 August 2025.

[34] Hanssen, F. Andrew. "The Block Booking of Films Reexamined." *The Journal of Law & Economics*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2000, pp. 395–426. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.1086/467460. Accessed 9 Aug. 2025.

With these problems in mind, the Department of Justice (DOJ) began to take action against the "Big Five" and their vertical integration model. Legal action began as early as the 1920s when the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) investigated the "Big Five" in 1921 for anti-trust activities. The FTC then declared block booking to be illegal because it was anticompetitive and in 1928 took Famous Players-Lasky (the forerunners to Paramount Pictures) along with nine other major Hollywood studios to court. The DOJ won their first major victory against the "Big Five" in 1930, when the Supreme Court ruled that the movie studios were monopolies because of their illegal block booking activities and therefore their practices were against the law.[35] However, this ruling was ignored after an intervention from incoming president Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933.



Franklin D. Roosevelt Radio Broadcasting (1933).[36]

[35] The Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers. "The Hollywood Antitrust Case." *The SIMPP Research Database*, 2005. https://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/1film_antitrust.htm. Accessed 9 August 2025.
[36] Harris & Ewing. "FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt]- radio broadcast." *Wikimedia,* https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franklin_D_Roosevelt_-_radio_broadcast.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025

Claiming that their studios were in near ruin because of the Great Depression, they asked the incoming president if he could stop the forced breakup of the monopolies. According to the studios, the nation needed movies as a form of relief during such dark times. Roosevelt agreed and used the National Industry Recovery Act to stop the breakup. However, this solution would only be temporary, because the Act was repealed by the Supreme Court in 1935. As such, in 1938 the DOJ filed another lawsuit against the studios. To stop the breakup this time, the studios signed a consent decree with the Justice Department in 1940. The decree stated that during a three year trial the studios could keep their theaters, however block booking would be regulated and theater owners could see the movies before they bought them.[37] This decision angered the heads of large production studios, who were forced to rearrange their studios to comply with the decision. In 1946, the DOJ renewed the lawsuit with the support of independent producers and won their case. Studios were not allowed to use block booking but could still own their theaters.[38] Both sides appealed this case to the Supreme Court which will make its ultimate decision about the use of vertical integration in 1948. A ruling will come soon, and it could have dramatic impacts on the film industry as a whole, threatening the very business model of "Big Five" studios like MGM.

As a part of the board, you must ask yourselves: how will the company pivot in the new entertainment environment that the results of this case will cause? Should it appease the government? Should the company keep its vertical integration model? Would this continue the studio's success or risk government intervention? Or is it better to change before the decision comes out? Would this jeopardize the company's operation? Or bring it a new, more successful business model?

[37] Antitrust Division. "Antitrust Division | The Paramount Decrees." *Department of Justice*, 7 August 2020, https://www.justice.gov/atr/paramount-decree-review. Accessed 9 August 2025.
[38] Ibid.

Television

Despite the once-glittering dominance in the Golden Age of Hollywood, a new competitor has been set to enter the scene: the television set. Once thought of as a passing fad, the television's commercial impact is becoming undeniable in 1948. Sales of the set boomed in 1948, beginning the year at only 350,000 TV sets in America, and surging to nearly 3 million.[39] This is not a mere trend, but the birth of a new medium with a new audience.

The postwar boom only accelerated this cultural shift. The rapid expansion of suburban America, fueled by federal housing incentives like the GI Bill and an expanding highway system, drew families away from urban centers and, by extension, the cinema.[40] While the nuclear family had long been a cultural ideal, it now became the lived reality for more Americans than ever, with stable jobs, single-family homes, and middle-class life within reach. The baby boom brought a surge of young children into these households, anchoring families to the home and creating a generation whose childhoods were defined by backyards, television sets, and neighborhood play. These patterns reshaped leisure time, drawing audiences away from the movie theater and toward more immediate, home-based entertainment.

[39] Eyes Of A Generation.com. "Television Milestones...1939 - 1940 Historical Events Timeline." Eyes Of A Generation...Television's Living History, 4 May 2021, eyesofageneration.com/television-milestones-1939-1940-historical-events-timeline-sometimes-its/.
[40] "The GI Bill and Planning for the Postwar." The National WWII Museum | New Orleans, www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/gi-bill-and-planning-postwar. Accessed 24 Aug. 2025.

A Family Watching Television in the Living Room (1958).[41]

The decision for film studios to start making television shows is extremely controversial within the major studios. In 1947, box office receipts showed the top 10 movie producers netting $126 million.[42] There is still an opportunity for growth in the film industry; MGM would just need to find an opening. Moving to a less luxurious and polished broadcast risks diluting the prestige the studio has cultivated since the 1920s.

[41] Evert F. Baumgardner. "Family watching television 1958." Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Family_watching_television_1958.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025.
[42] "The Box Office Digest Annual (1947) : The Box Office Digest : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming." Internet Archive, New York : The Box Office Digest, 1 Jan. 1970, archive.org/details/nationalboxoffic11nati.

At this time, television is considered a lesser form of entertainment, suited for news bulletins, variety acts, and inexpensive live broadcasts—not the lavish, meticulously produced spectacles that defined Hollywood's brand. Embracing it would mean not only technological and logistical shifts but an ideological one as well. Technologically, television has only been around for about two decades and has mostly been dominated by news networks. Regular broadcasts had only begun at the start of the decade and were plagued with delays and glitches.[43] Cameras would need to be innovated to meet the demands of shooting for television. The small home screens were also in black and white, unlike the color films that had become a hallmark of moviegoing. Space-wise, movie backlots would have to be repurposed, budgets readjusted, and the rapid turnaround time of television production would place new demands on writers, cast, and crew. All this to enter a new market without proven long-term success for the kind of media MGM produces best.

As the oldest movie studio, the question before you is clear: will you shift your fundamental business model to embrace a new revenue stream, even if it risks alienating your core audience? Do you preserve the prestige and methods that have defined the company for decades, or adapt to a changing entertainment landscape that could secure future growth? Is it wiser to act now, on your own terms, or wait until circumstances force your hand?

[43] "TV Milestones." PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/bigdream-tv-milestones/. Accessed 24 Aug. 2025.

Contract Stars

MGM Golden Age Actors.[44]

By the late 1940s the contract system was beginning to face some challenges. Major studios like MGM had maintained a large number of stable stars under long-term, exclusive contracts. These stars were carefully managed, publicized, and deployed to maximize box office profits and brand identity. But, as the postwar years unfolded, it became clear that the studio-star relationship was becoming a point of strain economically and ideologically. Change would need to be made if this system were to continue.

First, the star system was becoming hard to maintain economically. One star, Ginger Rogers, earned $355,000 (over $8 million in 2025 dollars) for her role in *Kitty Foyle*.[45] Other top earners like Charles Boyer, Jeanette MacDonald, and Bing Crosby all made over $300,000 in 1941.[46] While these were the top earners and not the median, these high prices still took a toll on

[44] "Golden Hollywood". Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Golden_Hollywood.png. Accessed 23 August, 2025
[45] "Ginger Rogers, Who Danced With Astaire and Won an Oscar for Drama, Dies at 83." The New York Times, The New York Times, archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0716.html. Accessed 24 Aug. 2025.
[46] "Cinema: Stars and Salaries." Time, Time, 30 July 1934, time.com/archive/6753625/cinema-stars-and-salaries/.

the company, especially with the slowing down of the movie industry. Stars were often signed to 7 year contracts, with their salaries often fixed amounts rather than based on the amount of projects they worked on. Judy Garland, for instance, was reportedly earning $5,000 a week by the mid-1940s, even during periods when she was unable to work due to health struggles.

Even with the salary for some stars being quite large, it came with a price: their public identity. Public personas were tightly curated through press releases, fan magazines, and studio-arranged photo shoots. Everything, from marriages to scandals, was managed with ruthless precision by the publicity departments. If a studio had no immediate use for them, they could be loaned out to other studios, often without the star's input.[47] This left many of the newer stars, who had not experienced the era of scare studio productions, eager to hop between studios and to have freedom in their careers. Some also resented being typecast, repeatedly placed into the same genre or character archetype, because it was safe for the studio.

Despite these mounting pressures, studios still had plenty of incentive to keep stars under contract. Stars were plugged into projects that suited their screen and celebrity personas, often recycling successful formulas to ensure steady profits. This system created predictable revenue streams. A studio could plan its production schedule and marketing campaigns years in advance, confident that its stars would generate reliable ticket sales.[48] The studio was also guaranteed to keep its reputation pristine. By managing a star's image in-house, studios could prevent damaging publicity and maintain the illusion of glamour that drew audiences to theaters. This control over narrative extended from the screen to the tabloids, reinforcing the studio's authority as both employer and image-maker. Audiences began to question the polished personas crafted

[47] Independent Stardom: Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System on JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7560/307328. Accessed 24 Aug. 2025.
[48] Hollywood Studio System, mediahistoryproject.org/collections/hollywood/. Accessed 24 Aug. 2025.

by the studios, while many stars themselves bristled at the lack of personal and professional freedom the system allowed.

Now, as the balance of power shifts from studios to stars, MGM must reconsider how to adapt. Will the company cling to the traditional model of exclusive contracts in the hopes of preserving brand identity and control? Or should it evolve, embracing a more flexible system that attracts top talent through competitive project-based offers and greater creative freedom? With the studio system in flux, MGM must evaluate whether it can modernize the star relationship without losing the strategic advantages that made the model so successful in the first place.

Unions

By the late 1940s, the studio system was not only under economic and ideological pressures, but also pressures from the labor they hired. The rise of labor unions in Hollywood had transformed film production from a tightly controlled top-down operation into a battleground of conflicting interests. Unions, organized associations of workers formed to advance members' rights through collective bargaining, often fought for better wages and working conditions. For much of Hollywood's early decades, this collective power had been deliberately stifled. With the New Deal Era and the Wagner Act of 1935, workers were guaranteed the right to organize, making unions not only legal but more prevalent across all sectors of American labor, including the entertainment industry.[49]

By the 1940s, Hollywood's union presence was no longer limited to technical workers. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG), Writers Guild, Directors Guild, and more militant organizations

[49] "1935 Passage of the Wagner Act." National Labor Relations Board, www.nlrb.gov/about-nlrb/who-we-are/our-history/1935-passage-of-the-wagner-act. Accessed 24 Aug. 2025.

like the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU) had taken root, each staking out territory in a rapidly growing industry.[50] By mid-decade, nearly every corner of film production, from set construction to cinematography to acting, was touched in some way by collective bargaining. Unions were no longer fringe organizations but central players in Hollywood's labor structure.

This rise in labor power was not without conflict, as previous strikes had rocked the industry. In 1937, Hollywood faced its first major studio-wide walkout, when set decorators and grips demanded recognition of their union.[51] In 1941, Walt Disney Studios experienced an infamous labor strike, led by the Screen Cartoonists Guild. That strike, which began after months of withheld pay and firings, turned into a bitter public feud, forever souring relations between Walt Disney and organized labor.

The 1945-46 CSU strike was the most damaging to the industry. The Hollywood Black Friday Strike saw a six month strike by 10,500 set designers and film technicians outside of the Warner Bros. studios.[52] The strike was crushed and the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 broke up the CSU and restricted certain types of strikes, while allowing employers to deliver anti-union messages. Although this was a crushing blow, unions were still around and still very much at risk of striking during 1948. Their grievances were not limited to pay; many workers cited harsh working conditions, long hours, and a lack of job security as serious points of contention. Set designers, technicians, and other behind-the-scenes staff faced pressures that went beyond money; they sought respect, safety, and fair treatment in an industry that often prioritized profits over people. These issues, combined with lingering frustration from the previous strikes, meant

[50] California, State of. "Entertainment Industry Associations, Guilds, and Unions." California Film Commission, 21 July 2025, film.ca.gov/production/associations-guilds/.
[51] Randle, Chris. "The Long, Wild, Bloody History of the Hollywood Strike." The Nation, 8 Nov. 2023, www.thenation.com/article/activism/hollywood-strike-history-sag/.
[52] Doherty, Thomas. "The Crew Strike That Shut down Hollywood in 1945." The Hollywood Reporter, The Hollywood Reporter, 16 Mar. 2022, www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/black-friday-hollywood-in-1945-1235021178/.

that labor unrest was never far from the surface, making the possibility of another strike both real and imminent.

After the CSU strikes just years prior, MGM has every reason to fear further labor unrest. On one hand, cooperating with unions might help avoid costly production disruptions. Work stoppages, damaged relationships with stars and crew, or even a reputational hit from being perceived as anti-worker could all harm box office performance. By taking a more collaborative stance, MGM might be able to influence labor negotiations in a way that maintains stability without ceding full control. Moderate unions could become partners rather than adversaries.

On the other hand, supporting labor unions comes with clear risks. Meeting union demands may result in higher payroll costs, stricter work conditions, and extended timelines for production. Such changes could cut into MGM's profit margins. More fundamentally, union influence threatens the centralized authority that studios have historically enjoyed. Fixed labor schedules and rules may slow production and reduce the number of films MGM can release annually, weakening the studio's long-term revenue streams and brand dominance.

Now, as labor tensions rise across Hollywood, MGM stands at a crossroads. Will the studio continue to resist organized labor, holding onto full control but risking strikes and growing unrest? Or, should it seek compromise, negotiating with unions to secure temporary peace, even if it means higher costs and reduced authority? With the balance of power beginning to shift from management to workers, MGM must determine whether it can adapt to a changing industrial landscape without undermining the control that has long defined its operations.

Censorship

By the mid 20th century, the Hays Code, once the foundation of Hollywood's moral compass, was beginning to lose its grip on the industry. Originally adopted in 1934, the Code had been enforced by the Production Code Administration (PCA), a branch of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA).[53] It was designed not only to protect public morals but also to shield the industry from direct government regulation by demonstrating that it could self-police. For decades, this system worked: censorship kept studios in the public's good graces. Profits remained steady, and the image of Hollywood was carefully managed.

William Hays (1921).[54]

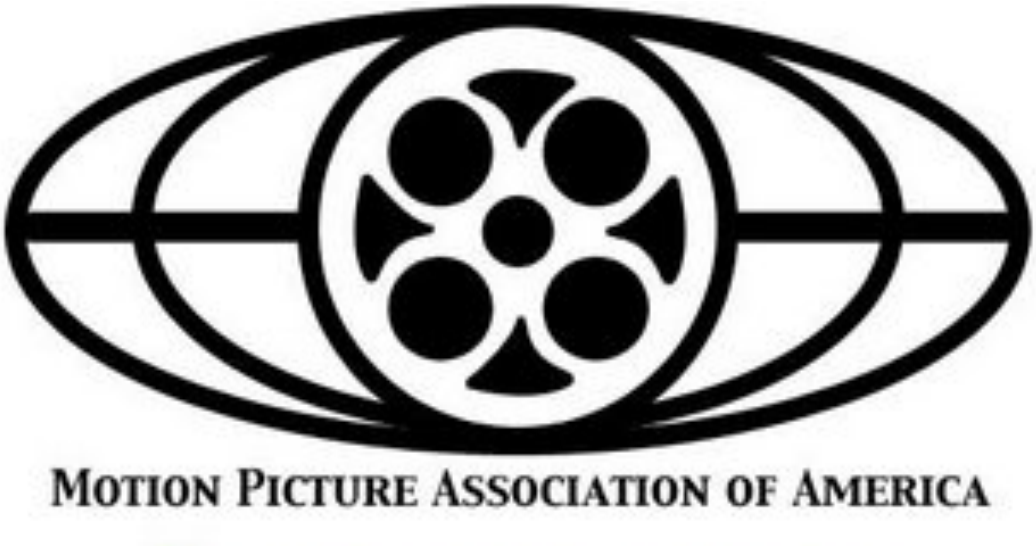
But now, with shifting cultural values in the postwar years, the strict moral guidelines imposed by the Code are increasingly seen as outdated. Audiences, particularly teenagers and

[53] Yogerst, Chris. "100 Years Ago: How Hollywood's Early Self-Censorship Battles Shaped the MPA." The Hollywood Reporter, The Hollywood Reporter, 2 Sept. 2022, www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/100-years-ago-how-hollywoods-early-self-censorship-battles-shaped-the-mpa-1235210771/.

[54] Underwood & Underwood. "Will H. Hays." Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Will-H-Hays.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025

young adults, seek films that challenge conventions, explore new ideas, and reflect a more complex, modern world. In this new climate, enforcement of the Code is weakening, and some studios have begun to test its boundaries. As the Hays Code begins to erode, it leaves in its wake an uncertain future for Hollywood's moral and regulatory framework.

At the center of this uncertainty is the question of whether MGM and other major studios should continue supporting the MPPDA. As one of the founding institutions of Hollywood's self-regulation, the MPPDA has long offered a buffer between the industry and federal oversight. Continuing to support the MPPDA may still provide significant advantages: it maintains a structure of internal accountability and allows the industry to speak with a unified voice in Washington D.C., avoiding government intervention.[55]



MPAA Logo.[56]

[55] "The History of Film Ratings." Philip Rossen, www.philiprossen.com/the-history-of-film-ratings. Accessed 24 Aug. 2025.
[56] Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., "Motion Picture Association of America's 1967 logo." Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Motion_Picture_Association_of_America_1967_logo.svg. Accessed 23 August, 2025.

Unaligning with the MPPDA also has strategic value. By using their own censorship guides, MGM can tailor its content to meet the demands of its specific audience segments, balancing moral responsibility with greater creative freedom. This autonomy would allow MGM to move more quickly in response to cultural shifts without waiting for consensus from a larger, slower-moving industry body. Unaligning from other studios also enables MGM to differentiate itself in a crowded marketplace, positioning the company as a leader in responsible but progressive storytelling.

At MGM Studios, a decision needs to be made on the future of censorship. Will MGM fall in line with other studios and the MPPDA, risking profits, or will they use their own code, risking government intervention and censorship but allowing for new revenue streams?

Delegate Positions

John M. Stahl

John M. Stahl is a veteran director and producer known for his progressive storytelling. Born in 1886 to Jewish immigrants, Stahl began directing during the silent film era and rose through the ranks as a respected craftsman and quiet force within the studio system. His career highlights of *Imitation of Life* (1934) and *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945), are both praised for their bold themes and visual innovation. Though not a loud political figure, Stahl is widely viewed as a quiet progressive. He was one of the 36 original founders of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science, now known for putting on The Oscars, showing his prestige and deep ties within the industry. As an established director, Stahl now plays as the mediator between established studio heads and the changing cultural values of America.

Norma Shearer

Norma Shearer was once the undisputed queen of the MGM lot, reigning through the 1930s as a key contract star. Born 1902, her marriage to the legendary Irving Thalberg, "The Boy Wonder" film producer, elevated her not just as a star but as a fixture of studio power politics. Known for pushing the boundaries of film, she maintained her position even after Thalberg's death in 1936. Although now, Shearer has largely stepped away from acting, her influence lingers. She remains a symbolic figure with close ties to talent, producers, and studio heads. Her opinions are still sought after, and she is a key feminist pioneer fighting for women's rights in cinema.

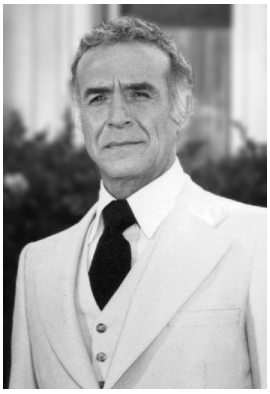
Douglas Shearer

As one of the most respected technical minds in Hollywood, Douglas Shearer plays a key role in revolutionizing sound recording in the film industry. Born in Montreal in 1899, as brother to Norma Shearer, he joined MGM in the late 1920s. Shearer quickly rose to prominence as he developed innovative sound techniques that transitioned the studio from silent films to talkies, even developing new techniques that eliminate background noise. Over the past two decades, he has won numerous Academy Awards for sound recording and has played a crucial role in building MGM's reputation as a technically superior studio. Despite his behind the scenes role on set, Shearer wields a significant influence in studio infrastructure and technological direction. As the film industries face pressure from emerging technologies like television, increased union demands from technical crews, and a limiting budget, Shearer finds himself caught between innovation, loyalty to MGM, and a rapidly changing Hollywood.

Eddie Mannix

Eddie Mannix is one of the most feared figures behind MGM. Born in 1891 in New Jersey, he started off as a bouncer and treasurer for an amusement park. While not a public facing executive, Mannix is a control freak who is in charge of protecting the studios brand at all costs. A former bookkeeper turned studio enforcer, Mannix has risen through the ranks by keeping contract stars in line and out of trouble. Although he isn't the star on set, he certainly has his connections in and out of the studio and knows how to work the press. An enemy to television (*way* too gauche for the brand) and a fan of self-censorship, his conservative nature often strikes up arguments against the creatives. He now has new challenges of negotiating with unions and operating from the shadows, maintaining MGM's grip on talent and prestige.

Ricardo Montalbán



Ricardo Montalbán.[57]

Ricardo Montalbán was born in 1920 in Mexico City and arrived in Hollywood during the height of the U.S. government's Good Neighbor Policy, which sought to strengthen ties with Latin America through culture and media. MGM quickly cast him in a series of stereotypical roles, but Montalbán's natural charisma allowed him to rise as one of the few Latin American actors with a foothold in the studio system. Despite being grateful for these opportunities, he is becoming increasingly frustrated with typecasting and the industry's treatment of Latino culture. While he plays the charming romantic lead onstage, he is quietly trying to reshape Hollywood to have more authentic and respectful representation. His clean image and bi-cultural identity make him the perfect symbol for studio publicists and progressive reformers alike.

[57] ABC Television. "Fantasy Island Ricardo Montalban". Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fantasy_Island_Ricardo_Montalban_%28cropped%29.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025.

Elizabeth Taylor

Elizabeth Taylor.[58]

Elizabeth Taylor may only be 16, born in 1932, but she is taking Hollywood by storm. Even as a child star, breaking through at the young age of 12, she is no stranger to the studio working to make her an icon. Groomed by studio handlers at a young age, Taylor represents the new generation entering the scene, beautiful yet controlled. The studio has put her in braces, dyed her hair, tried to change her name, and have even controlled who she has tried to date. Despite her disliking being pushed to do such mature films at a young age, she is quickly becoming an incredibly bankable star. She straddles a volatile line of being loyal to the studio that has raised her and breaking free from the limits of the star system.

Ida Koverman

Ida Koverman may not be a household name, but she is certainly well known within MGM as "the woman who runs Hollywood." Born in 1876 and originally a political organizer in California, she was brought in personally by Louis B. Mayer to be his executive secretary. She

[58] Kate Gabrielle. "Elizabeth Taylor." Flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/slightlyterrific/5365679670/. Accessed 23 August, 2025

was known for being meticulous, patient, and ambitious. These traits became advantageous in her career, but also her prize-winning bonsai collection (named Ida's little trees) that she tended to with the same care she did with the young stars she worked with at MGM. Now she shaped MGM's public image, talent roster, and ideological direction. She has been instrumental in the careers of Robert Taylor and Clark Gable, running her own school for young stars to develop them into icons. Now, as the studio faces growing pressures from outside forces, Koverman is determined to keep business as usual.

George Sidney

George Sidney is one of MGM's most commercially successful and technically innovative directors, known for his work on splashy Technicolor musicals and romantic comedies. A former child extra-turned-editor-turned director, Sidney helmed hits like *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) and *The Harvey Girls* (1946). Despite only being born in 1916, he had his first lead role in 1921 in a New York City Theatre. Known for his lavish visual style and willingness to experiment with form, Sidney is a favorite among stars, musicians, and choreographers alike. But Sidney is more than just a studio director, he also loves some animation. As he works on founding the Hanna-Barbera animation studio, he also wants to integrate animation into live action. Maybe there is room in the studio for some animated television too.

Dore Schary

Dore Schary.[59]

Dore Schary has risen through Hollywood as a screenwriter and producer, never afraid of any challenge. He was born in 1905 and brought in by Nicholas Schenck in 1937 to modernize the studio and counterbalance the out of touch Louis B. Mayer. As Mayer clings to outdated formulas, Schary is trying to balance the younger executives and progressive talent, all while making sure the studio stays within budget. He has always had a math-minded brain and is diligent with the company's numbers. This perfectionism transfers to his side career as a horologist (watch repairman) and he is quite well-known in the small-but-mighty watch-repair community.

Mervyn LeRoy

Mervyn LeRoy began as an actor and gag writer in silent films before breaking into talkies. He was born in 1900 in San Francisco and frequented many theaters growing up. He is best known for working on *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) as an uncredited producer, much to his

[59] Uncredited. Published by the United States Information Service. "Dore Schary." Wikimedia Commons, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dore_Schary_1956.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025

chagrin. Since this incident, LeRoy hates musicals and even started an anti-musical club within the company. It has been observed that he will have episodes of rage after hearing the song, “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.” Despite the studio politics, he is quickly becoming a trusted lieutenant to Louis B. Mayer, producing and directing major studio vehicles designed to appeal to mainstream American values. LeRoy represents old-school showmanship and polished commercialism, trying to keep the reputation of MGM intact. Now, with Mayer under pressure from East Coast financiers and reformers like Dore Schary gaining influence, LeRoy must decide whether to defend the current system or reposition himself for the new era.

Lucille Carroll

Lucille Carroll is the head of MGM’s talent department, and she makes sure everyone knows it. Born in 1906, she is a former actress-turned-casting executive, she has built her reputation on being able to groom star power for even the youngest actors and actresses. As a trusted middlewoman between actors and executives, she often is the intermediary between creatives and business executives, ensuring that the talent pipeline remains strong. Carroll is not a fan of TV, believing that it will saturate the market with new stars and remove her kind of star grooming power by flooding the casting industry. She commands influence over talent contracts and public image campaigns, making sure they stay within budget and on brand.

Roger Edens

Roger Edens is one of the most influential creative forces behind the MGM musical, a genre synonymous with the studio's golden era. A gifted composer, arranger, and producer, he was born in 1905 and began his career in 1935 with MGM as Judy Garland's vocal coach and evolved into the uncredited mastermind behind many of the studio's greatest musical numbers. He played a key role in shaping Garland's career, as well as orchestrating the careers of other major stars like Gene Kelly and Esther Williams. Though publicly soft-spoken and discreet, Edens is a powerhouse within the Arthur Freed Unit, arguably MGM's most artistically ambitious and profitable production team. He embodies the quiet rebellion within the studio: pushing creative boundaries, promoting vulnerable stars, and subtly resisting the conformity and censorship imposed by the Mayer regime. As the studio system falters and musicals come under pressure for being too expensive and "frivolous," Edens finds himself at the center of the fight to protect artistry.

Jack Martin Smith

Jack Martin Smith is one of MGM's most respected art directors. He was born in 1911 and contributed to the visual grandeur of the studio's most iconic films throughout the 1940s, he is now known for his precision and ability to adapt to wildly different genres. Though not a headline name, Smith wields considerable behind-the-scenes influence, often consulted on high-level visual planning, budgeting, and logistical design. These budgets, however, often kept him stuck on the backlot to save money. This was a big problem for Smith who was, as we now call it, a shopaholic. He loves shopping and has a special affinity for buying different types of fruit jams. Caught between studio executives demanding faster, cheaper output and younger

labor pushing for more credit and fairer pay, Smith must decide whether to entrench himself in MGM's hierarchy or align with the rising creative labor movement.

Arthur Freed

Arthur Freed may be one of the most influential art directors in all of MGM. Born in 1894, he is the director of the "Freed Unit." He has his own personal cabinet of artists, set designers, and creatives, he sends them out to all the MGM movies to make the movies pop. His loyalty and openness to new ideas makes him the ally of most artists, but the enemy of anyone trying to keep a film under budget. His favorite projects to work on would have to be musicals, as they bring a sense of grandeur to the theater. Unlike many other studios, as a producer he allows his directors and choreographers free reign. As long as the movie is big, bold, and a traditional MGM film, it is perfect; until he can be convinced that the magic of the silver screen blockbuster can be transported into the American home, Freed remains a staunch opponent of diverting resources to experiment with television.

Mickey Rooney

Mickey Rooney.[60]

Mickey Rooney is nothing less than a star. Having only been born in 1920 and started off in Hollywood in 1926, Louis B. Mayer personally saw to it that his image was tamed and that he was America's most lovable boy. He now plays one of the most iconic movie figures, Andy Hardy, showing off his boyish charm and small-town wholesomeness. Off-screen, Rooney's quick wit and boundless energy made him a favorite on set, but his reputation for impulsive decisions and high-profile romances often drew headlines. Now though, as his days of playing a teenage sweetheart are running out, he will have to redefine himself as a new leading man. Maybe he will even see what the television has to offer him.

[60] Studio publicity still. "Mickey Rooney still." Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mickey_Rooney_still.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025

Cedric Gibbons

Tarzan and His Mate.[61]

Cedric Gibbons is a production designer, focused on establishing MGM's signature visual style. Born in 1890, he has always been pushing for glamour, and is a regular on any set in the studio. In order to keep this perfection, he has tight control over any artist he works with, maintaining a high standard of elegance and precision even if it breaks a few contract hours—putting him in direct conflict with unions. He is most notably recognized for designing the Oscar statue that debuted in 1928. His tastes lean towards modernist architecture and Art Deco, both styles he often has to fight for when dealing with directors who want to maintain control of their films.

[61] Auteur inconnu. "Tarzan his mate poster". Wikimedia Commons, https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Tarzan_his_mate_poster.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025

Katharine Hepburn

Katharine Hepburn is one of the most well-known actresses in the world, and some say it isn't a film until she walks on set. Born in 1907, she is well known for her spiritedness and independence; she often plays a strong-willed woman in films. Off set, her goal is to make sure everyone around her is taken care off, fighting with studio executives to make sure that her writers are being paid their fair share. Her notoriety and generosity give her the rare power to choose her directors and co-stars, often launching the careers of those lucky enough to share the screen with her. Now, with her influence at its peak, Hepburn faces a new frontier, deciding whether to use her clout to push MGM toward riskier, more modern stories on the television, or to safeguard her legacy in the golden formula that made her a star.

Helen Rose

Helen Rose is the chief costume designer at MGM, and she has big shoes to fill. She was born in 1904 and attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, designing stage costumes for various acts around the city. She moved to Los Angeles in 1929, ready to take the city by storm. The previous costume designer, the well known Adrian, recently departed, leaving her to have to live up to his fabulous designs. Although quiet at times, she is well-liked by the actors for designing their most famous looks and making sure they look perfect just in case any press comes by. Stars have even asked Rose to make copies of their silver screen outfits to go in their wardrobes, if she has time with the many movies she works on.

Mel Koontz

Mel Koontz is one cool cat, especially with all the animals he works with. He was born in 1910 and has to have nerves of steel to work with that many lions, tigers, and bears—oh my! As a respected animal trainer, Koontz handles Jackie, the 2nd iconic MGM lion, whose roar appears in countless films. He himself has also appeared in many films along with his animals as a stunt double, despite not being paid well to do so. Beyond the lot, he always makes sure his animals are well taken care of, otherwise they can't perform to perfection. He would choose his animals over the studio any day of the week, but while he's here he will fight for the rights of the animals he works with and, if he has time, the average worker in the studio, too.

Albert Arnold "Buddy" Gillespie

Buddy Gillespie is a special effects director and master of the prop shop. He was born in 1899 and began reporting under Cedric Gibbons in 1925. He did the special effects for *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), and has been on the rise ever since. Gillespie has had an affinity for chemistry since childhood, running experiments on the bugs in his front yard that would probably enrage Mel Koontz. He still loves to experiment and studies the latest innovations in chemistry to invent new effects for movies. He is not one to consider the long-term effects of whatever chemistry he cooks up, he just wants the effects on camera to be the biggest and brightest they can possibly be. Last year, he even won the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects for his work on *Green Dolphin Street* (1947). Despite his success, he often has to fight for his seat at the table, as his special effects have been known to cost a lot of money or harm actors in the process.

Frederick Quimby

Tom and Jerry.[62]

Frederick Quimby may not be the most well-liked executive; his studio does tend to speak for itself. He was born 1886 and is the executive of the MFM cartoon studio, and works on animated shorts. Though not an animator himself, Quimby proved adept at securing budgets and keeping his department profitable in the competitive Golden Age of Animation. His claim to fame is that he approved Tom *and Jerry* (1940). While the series won multiple awards, it was marked with friction over fighting with animators over taking sole credit of the shorts and for lacking creativity and artistic vision. Still, his short features would be perfect for the small screen, if only he could convince MGM to consider television.

[62] "T&J_LOGO." Flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/70344776@N04/6394775731. Accessed 23 August, 2025

Anita Loos

Anita Loos rose from a small-town girl born in 1888 to one of Hollywood's most celebrated screenwriters. She began her career in the silent era before transitioning over to talkies with MGM. Her quick wit and snappy dialogue made her one of the few women to thrive in the male-dominated studio system. Loos is a go-to script doctor and free agent, often brought in to punch up lines and help with troubled productions, even through censorship laws. She is incredibly excited for television, hoping the shorter and more frequent productions allow her to show off her storytelling skills. Despite her being a member of the Writers Guild, she often has to rely on her husband, John Emerson, to speak with the directors she works with and convince them to follow her lead.

Frederick Bean "Tex"Avery

Tex Avery is not an MGM native, but instead got his start animating at Walter Lantz Productions and later Warner Bros. He was born in 1908 in Texas and dropped out of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1942, frustrated with creative restrictions at Warner Bros., Avery moved to MGM's Cartoon Studio, a department dominated by Fred Quimby's managerial oversight but in need of fresh, inventive content. At MGM, Avery has unleashed some of the most inventive animated shorts in Hollywood history. Although he is still overworked and often clashes with others, he rejects sentimental storytelling, focusing on exaggerated visual humor, fourth-wall breaks, and lightning-fast comedic timing, the type of comedy that would be perfect for television. Avery's cartoons stood apart from Hanna-Barbera's Tom and Jerry in tone and pacing, offering MGM a more adult-oriented alternative while still appealing to kids—leading audiences to question what values should go on film.

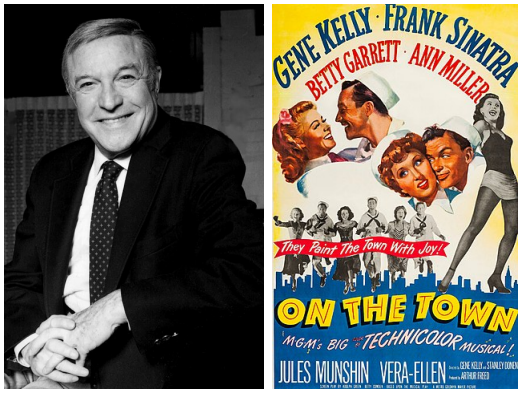
Jack Dawn

Jack Dawn is a master of cinematic makeup and the head of the makeup department. Born in 1891, he is known for his artistry. Dawn is responsible for shaping the on-screen look for MGM, from beauty enhancements to elaborate prosthetics. Dawn's most famous achievement was his groundbreaking makeup work on The Wizard of Oz (1939), where he created iconic looks for the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion. He even created a synthetic plastic called "vinylite resin." He loves combining his inventiveness with his painting hobby, and he creates new art materials for fun. While generally well-liked, he could be fiercely protective of his craft and resistant to rushed schedules that threatened quality. He now works closely with the publicity department, making sure actors look flawless on screen and in promotional materials.

Robert Montgomery

Robert Montgomery is best known as a leading man with a polished screen presence. He was born in 1904 and got his start in New York City before moving to sunny California in 1929. Beyond Hollywood, Montgomery made history as president of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) from 1935 to 1942, fiercely advocating for actors' rights and better working conditions. He is known as a diplomat who could navigate studio politics, labor negotiations, and emerging media landscapes. His advisory role to politicians during the postwar period makes him a key figure in shaping how public figures used television to communicate. Now, Montgomery is pushing MGM to embrace television, hoping to leverage his talents and media savvy to become a star of the small screen.

Eugene Curran “Gene” Kelly



Gene Kelly and “On the Town.”[63,64]

Gene Kelly has risen to become one of the most dynamic figures in American film musicals. Born in 1912, after establishing himself first as an actor on Broadway in the late 1930s, Kelly signed with MGM in 1941, bringing an athletic, masculine energy to dance that broke from the graceful Fred Astaire model. Kelly became a central figure in MGM’s golden era of musicals developing his skills as a choreographer. While a star asset to the studio, Kelly often clashes with executives who resisted his desire for greater creative control. His insistence on longer rehearsal periods, location shoots, and experimental sequences sometimes causes budget issues. However, his box office draw and critical acclaim make him difficult to refuse. Known for integrating dance seamlessly into narrative storytelling, he pushes the boundaries of what musical numbers can achieve on screen.

[63] Allan Warren. “Gene Kelly 2 Allan Waeren.” Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gene_Kelly_2_Allan_Waeren.jpg. Accessed 23 August 2025
[64] Loew's Incorporated. "On the Town (1949 poster)". Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:On_the_Town_%281949_poster%29_crop.jpg. Accessed 23 August, 2025.

Janet Leigh

In 1948, Janet Leigh is just beginning her career—three years ago, at age 18, Norma Shearer saw Leigh's face in a photograph and knew she had to be on the big screen. Janet Leigh was born in 1927, the year "The Jazz Singer" revolutionized what was even possible to show in a movie. As a child at the cinema, Leigh saw the studios expand what could be accomplished on the big screen in terms of technology and artistry, and now that she has been given her chance she wants to be a part of that process of exploration and pushing the envelope in terms of genre and artistry. Leigh wants to be in every type of movie there is and can be: musicals, comedies, dramas, horror. That last one especially intrigues her… Now that she is at MGM, she wants her face to be the one that encourages the next generation of movie watchers to bring cinema to even further heights.

Perry Como

Born in 1912, Perry Como has been in the game for a while, but he is new to MGM—and there is more than a little bit of culture shock. Como is used to working at Fox, a studio with a much different approach to its actors. Working on MGM's star-studded musical *Words and Music* (it's scheduled to release this year; Como despises it already), he got a first taste of what the star system is really like—smothering his personality in workshopped professional charm in the hopes of creating another icon. Como finds the star system to be not only deeply disingenuous to who he is, but unhealthy in the degree to which they force actors to forfeit their personal lives. A deeply committed family man, Como believes that no film, no piece of art, is worth sacrificing that much. Como is deeply intrigued by the emergent field of television, which he hopes will allow him to be himself (and present his varied talents in singing and acting) in a medium not so

highly polished that it loses touch with reality. In his past life, Como was a barber. He has made fast friends with the hair and makeup team at both Fox and MGM—they have even learned a thing or two from him!

Lionel Barrymore

Born in 1878, Lionel Barrymore has seen the entire history of Hollywood. Barrymore was trained in acting for the stage (part of the old Barrymore acting dynasty), and he was one of the first stars in early silent films of the 1910s and 1920s. Even back in those days, his joints made it difficult to work. Now, his arthritis has become so severe that he needs excessive pain medication just to stand in crutches for an hour; he has to use a wheelchair full-time. His developing disability has made it incredibly clear how difficult it is for someone without full movement to access all of the basic functions of the industry—and that is with a longstanding career that has given him the privilege of support from senior executives in the studio. Now that he is entering the twilight years of his career, Barrymore hopes to make a difference for the emergent disabled actors and backstage people, making sure that the studios are accessible and they are granted all the resources and support they need to succeed. His classical training made him hesitant to even join film back when it took off, and though he has since been convinced that film allows for true acting, he is deeply skeptical that television could ever hope to present the complex emotions and storytelling of the stage. He will not passively allow the studio to water down the craft to which he has given his life, at least while he is still around to have a say.

Oscar Levant

Oscar Levant was born in 1906, and he has spent his life enmeshed in the music scene. He has been in Hollywood for 20 years, where he became fast friends with jazz and contemporary music extraordinaire George Gershwin. Over that time, he composed nearly 20 film scores, and has composed plenty of music in his free time. But he has also seen his own star rise somewhat in that time: the studio executives have recognized his fast wit and wry charm (if not quite Hollywood-star looks), and have offered him supporting roles in some major upcoming musicals. After Gershwin's untimely death, he has felt torn between taking up the mantle of expanding jazz in and outside of cinema while balancing his own rising star. Perhaps the realm of television could grant him the opportunity to showcase his variety of talents? Or perhaps it would water down the artistry of his endeavors. These questions keep Levant going back and forth on his next choices, but it's always better to have too many options than too few.

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