

MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY

Intro to Movies

Introduction

After television, movies represent the biggest shared experience in American media. By that I mean that we are more likely to all have watched a particular television show than read a particular newspaper. We're more likely to all have seen the same movie than to listen to a particular radio station.

If I mention "Titanic" or "Blair Witch" you are more likely to know what I am talking about than if I mention last week's newspaper article on Nigeria or the cover story of last week's Time Magazine. Even if you did not see the same movie, you are more likely to know something about it owe can "share" the experience

While not as pervasive as television, movies play a big part in our lives in America.



The lure of the concept of reality in motion is as old as mankind itself, even if the technology isn't. Look at the earliest cave drawings, even they are an attempt to capture the illusion of motion.

Chinese shadow plays were elaborate puppet shows that drew on your imagination to



capture the motion of a story.

Mankind has long been attracted to capturing motion. But before movies could come onto the scene. There were at least five essential steps to be taken for movies to exist.

Five essential steps

1. **The persistence of vision** -- When we watch movies we are not really seeing motion. We are seeing a stream of still photographs. Our brain just doesn't process the images fast enough for us to see them as individual images. Instead, we see the images as motion.

Imagine you are camping trip. You pick up a stick with a burning ember on the end and quickly rotate it in a circle. You'll see a circle of fire, but you know it is not a circle of fire. But when you see a movie you forget the individual images.

The concept of the persistence of vision started with flip books, images you flip through rapidly enough to look like there is movement taking place. With further technology you move toward movies.

2. **Photography** -- The whole concept of photography had to be developed . . . and this just

capture still images. The whole science of understanding lights and its effects, how to manipulate light, and the study of optics for lenses were all part of the process.

Early photographs were captured on metal and glass, not the paper and plastic we're used to today. Daguerreotypes were among the first photographs and were recorded on metal more flexible form of recording had to be developed. Add the study of plastics to the list.

3. **Motion picture camera** -- Capturing an image is one thing. Capturing images quickly enough to simulate motion is another. You've camera that will capture the images on the film. Eadward Muybridge paved the way by using multiple cameras, but that was pretty primitive. [\(click here to see an animated Muybridge version of this image\)](#) .



4. **Film** -- And to capture the images you need a film that will run through the camera. It had to be something flexible, but something durable. Celluloid was used at first, but more durable and flexible plastics replaced them.
5. **Projector** -- The whole science of projected light had to be mastered. Early slide projectors used images painted on glass slides. Eventually Thomas Edison and others created projectors that could show multiple images quickly.

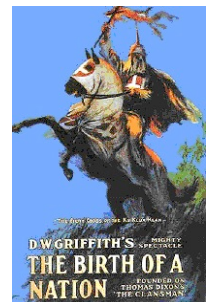
Motion picture milestones

Your textbook presents a far better history of motion pictures than I can, especially in one lecture. But there are some milestones I want to emphasize.

- **Early 1900s** -- The early 1900s saw the introductions of nickelodeon, the first movie theaters. There were two types. There were the arcades that featured kinescopes where one person could view flipbook type images. Not very efficient.

The second type of nickelodeon was a small movie theater set up in the back of grocery stores and other businesses, or in tents. For five cents you saw 15 minutes of action on film. No plots, no sound, just motion. But it was an attractive novelty.

- **1915 - Birth of a Nation** -- In 1915 D.W. Griffith came out with his controversial full length film [Birth of a Nation](#). It was the first full length motion picture. The film showed a revolution by black American slaves, which angered Caucasians. It also showed stereotypes of slave, which angered blacks. Find out more about the film at [this link](#)
- **1922** -- Facing increasing criticism for the content of films, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association adopted a production code, sometimes called the [Hayes Code](#), that affected picture content. It included three major principles:



1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence, the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime,

- wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
 3. Laws, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

The code then divided its rules into 12 categories of wrongdoing, including murder, sex, obscenity, costumes, and more. The modern day equivalent would be the movie rating system of G, PG, PG-13, R and NC-17.

- **1927** – [The Jazz Singer](#) became the first movie to include sound. It was mostly a silent picture with just a little sound. The movie featured Al Jolson, a popular white actor, in minstrel makeup, something that would not be considered today.
- **1950s** -- The introduction of television onto the scene had a devastating impact on the movie industry. In the 1940s it was common for people to go to the movies at least a couple of times a week. But when television started showing up in the home people started staying home. The movie industry tried a number of gimmicks, including 3D and wide screen movies to provide a viewing experience that could not be duplicated on the television screen.
- **1960s** -- When the gimmicks didn't work anymore the movie industry resorted to an earlier model before the motion picture code. More spectacular violence and more explicit sex and nudity brought people back to the movies, but also brought back criticism of movies. In the 1980s when television censors started allowing nudity to be shown on the small screen, the movie industry was right back where it started and had to up the ante. Today there is a renewed effort by law makers to connect the violence of movies with problems in society.
- **1998** -- The [American Film Institute](#) saluted the American film industry by listing the top 100 top movies. It updated that list in 2007. The top 10 include:

1. Citizen Kane (1941)
2. Godfather (1972)
3. Casablanca (1942)
4. Raging Bull (1980)
5. Singin' in the Rain (1952)
6. Gone with the Wind (1939)
7. Lawrence of Arabia (1962)
8. Schindler's List (1993)
9. Vertigo (1958)
10. The Wizard of Oz (1939)



How many of these have you seen? Would they be among your top 10? The next homework assignment will ask you to look at the top 100 and indicate which you have seen. You'll also create your own list of your favorite movies. Maybe some of them will even be on AFI's list. You can find out more about AFI's list at www.afi.com.

Since the top 100 was selected AFI has capitalized by coming up with other lists of the top musicals, top villains and heroes, etc. One of my favorites is the [100 Most Memorable Movie Quotes](#). Take a look and see whether you know the top lines and

where they come from. For instance, can you name the movies these top five lines came from?

1. *Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.*
 2. *I'm going to make him an offer he can't refuse.*
 3. *You don't understand! I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I could've been somebody, instead of a bum, which I am.*
 4. *Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.*
 5. *Here's looking at you, kid.*
- **2000** -- Digital Projection came onto the scene. It represents the future of movie delivery to the theater. Rather than send out reels of films to the movie theaters, the movie studios will send the movies out in digital format via satellite. This will give the studios more control of when and where films will be shown, and under which circumstances. "Star Wars: The Phantom Menace" was the first of films to be shown this way, but only in selected theaters. Digital projectors are costly and it will be a few years before they become common.

Reading Assignment

You should be reading the chapter on movies in your textbook to get more information about the movie industry.

Exercise

What are the technologies that had to be mastered before we could have a medium such as movies?

Note that when submitting the answer start the subject line with:

J100x - YourLastName - Movies

Send to rcameron@cerritos.edu