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## Theater and Film Through the 20th Century: The Positive Impact

Nicholai Stroupe  
nicolukis2010@gmail.com

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**Theater and Film Through the 20th Century: The Positive Impact on Society**

Nicholai J. Stroupe

Bachelor of Integrated Studies w/ Emphasis on Theater and Film, Murray State University

Bachelor of Integrated Studies 437 (BIS 437)

Prof. George Barton

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## **Abstract**

20th Century theater and film overall had a positive impact on society. This essay will cover how theater and film can positively but also how some events negatively had an impact or affect on theater and film itself. Here, you will be led through the many things related to theater and film that have affected all countries and cultures, in ways some have, and some have never realized. All matters of economic, political and social events will be discussed as they relate to theater and film. The reader will be led through in decades. The reader will first be informed of the very start of theater and film, where it began and how it was expanded upon in the following decades that will be covered. Here they will learn of the technological advancements that were made in order to evolve theater and film. The goal is to give the reader good, reliable information and knowledge on theater and film, as well as society and by the end of this research paper, they will have much more knowledge of the 20th century.

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## **Introduction**

This essay will lead you through the history of theater and film in the 20th century and how it had a positive impact on society. You will be led through inventions, political changes, economic episodes, and other interesting facts. Given the grandiose scale of such a topic to research, this paper will only cover the most important and relevant aspects of the 20th century in relation to the theater/film industry and how that positively impacted society. You will be led through this essay in decades. Starting with the beginning of the 20th century and leading up to the end and 21st century. But first, you must know the origins of theater and film. Where it was born and how it was expanded upon.

## **Early Entertainment**

“The first plays were performed in the Theatre of Dionysus, built in the shadow of the Acropolis in Athens at the beginning of the 5th century, but theaters proved to be so popular they soon spread all over Greece” (PBS, n.d). Much of what theater has become all started in Athens Greece. Among the higher ranking of the Greek hierarchy there were those that found a fond taste of the theater arts. Finding an interest in characters that were so foreign compared to themselves. Although it is not exactly known who the first ever playwright was, the history and birth can most certainly be traced back to Greek culture and society. Some have linked it back to the rise of poetry or folk songs and lyrics. It was extremely fond amongst the ever-growing Greek community, so much so that it became a staple of Greek tradition. The word theater comes from Greek vocabulary. They deemed it “theatron” which stands for “a place of seeing”. Most

Greek plays were either comedy or tragedy. Although most were tragedies. “Plays were performed in an open-air theater(*theatron*) with wonderful acoustics and seemingly open to all of the male populace (the presence of women is contested). From the mid-5th century BCE entrance was free” (Cartwright, M., 2023). Showing us our first real example of theater being a good-natured force giving a populace a positive outlook on life and a real grounding experience of escapism that can transport you to somewhere else and allow you to be someone or something else.

Theater really began to take off and cement itself in the 6th century. Greece was ripe with thoughts of war and surrounding nations were no exception. Wars lasted decades and showed little to no mercy to society. Song and dance were a wonderful way for villagers and nobles to pass the time but there was only so much that could be explored with technology at the time. Theater opened a new gateway and an unlimited number of possibilities for us to explore, act out, and give ourselves a way to escape the real world and heal from trauma that it can bring.

The beginning of the 19th century was a time with great chaos and booming industrial powerhouses. America started to show off their political and economic state in the world and just how powerful they truly were. Growing economic tension was rising, the great stock market drop of 1907 was waiting around the corner. World War 1 is about to become a major problem for the world. Activism was becoming an ever-growing problem that the government could not contain then. Everything was culminating and mixing in a stirring pot of heat and excitement, heightening fears and paranoia at the same time amongst the public.

If there was ever a time to begin giving society an outlet for all of this built-up emotional anguish from a nation that is supposed to take care of their own, it would be now. The entertainment industry began hundreds of years before the era we are going to discuss.

### **Beginning of 19th Century**

As stated before, the beginning of the 19th century was a time of great economic and political stress, but not nearly as harrowing as the following decades. At this time, there was much more to look up to than there was down upon. It was a time of great accomplishments and new ground being made on technology. This had a great impact upon the theater industry. Here are a few of the major events that happened in the beginning of the 1900s. “In the year 1900, Hawaii officially became an American state. In 1901, the first Nobel prizes were awarded. The following year the first electric air conditioning unit was invented. The first flight of the Wright brothers in 1903. Construction of the Panama Canal began in 1904. In 1905, Albert Einstein formulated the special theory of relativity. A year later, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.9 would kill 3,000 in San Francisco, California. 1908, the Ford Motor Co. invents the model T. And in 1909, William Howard Taft was inaugurated as president of the United States” ( SEMO, 2024).

The list just mentioned may not seem the most relevant to this research paper's thesis. However, everything may affect different factors and outcomes in life, as I'm sure we are aware. Take the first air conditioning unit being invented in the year 1902 for example. This recent technology was a profound advancement in the quality of life and comfortability in the homes

and workplaces of all people. No longer does the environment decide how comfortable you are going to be while working or achieving everyday tasks. Vehicles were still quite rare amongst average consumers and the air conditioning unit gave people the opportunity to stop somewhere to cool off and escape the hot summers.

Places that took full advantage of air conditioning when it was still quite rare amongst average consumers were theater companies and unions. As stated, this innovative technology was quite expensive and not easily accessible when it was first introduced. Only the biggest companies and businesses could afford such luxuries. One industry that could was the entertainment industry. While not all theater companies, most would be able to afford air conditioners. While something we take for granted now, this changed the theater industry forever and made it a viable option for entertainment, even for people that never would have previously considered theater as a form of legitimate media. By this time, the film was also well in effect and being spread worldwide. Invented by George Eastman in 1885, paper film and Kodak camera were created. And in 1903, just a year after air conditioning was invented and now starting to become a hot commodity amongst civilization, the first real significant short length film was released to the public. Titled “The Great Train Robbery” starring Justus D. Barnes. It was long for the era but relatively short for today's modern film scene, having a length of just 10 minutes. To say that this film was popular would be an understatement, most everyone that was in the theater/film scene wanted to view this magnificent creation like nothing before it. Another film that wasn't quite as popular but was just as historically important was “The Story of the Kelly Gang” released in 1906. This was the first full length film to be released to the public. It



had a total run time of 1 hour and 10 minutes. Making it, at the time, the longest film to ever be recorded.

Before the air conditioner, these films would have been viewed in cinema houses without any air circulation and would have been quite uncomfortable for many during the sweltering summer months. Oftentimes, these cinema houses would be packed. People shoulder to shoulder, feeling one's breath and body heat emanating. This combined with the heat and humidity would become quite an unbearable combo. Before, the only cooling methods available were hand fans that were used by female occupants. But now, families can go into their local town with the intention to view new media, cool off, and take time away from which there was plenty to go around. There could also be refreshments and snacks that could be purchased depending on the theater, which was also another attractive factor for the theater industry.

Although the theater was mainly used for plays and films. It was home to all oddities and sorts. “The movie theater remains a rather curious institution, an unlikely bricks-and-mortar outpost for a cultural form heralded as defiantly mobile, malleable, reproducible, and accessible. Plainly, the basic idea of a theater long predates cinema, pulling forward the significance of dedicated or specially demarcated spaces for traditions and practices of live drama, performed music, and public oration as well as circus barkers, burlesque artists, magicians, and middle-brow occultists” (Haidee Wasson, 2016). And as time continued to go on, and the 1910’s began to approach. All was looking bright for the future of this media.

Here is a comprehensive list of all other major events that took place during this decade as they relate to theater and film as mentioned in this section:

- “In the year 1900, Hawaii officially became an American state. In 1901, the first Nobel prizes were awarded.
- The following year the first electric air conditioning unit was invented. This would have a great impact upon revenue for theaters and the amount of time families spent in the cinema.
- The first flight of the Wright brothers in 1903. This would lead to great advancements in transportation.
- In 1905, Albert Einstein formulated the special theory of relativity.
- A year later, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.9 would kill 3,000 in San Francisco, California.
- 1908, the Ford Motor Co. invents the model T. Although cars would be rare for some time after this, this would be another great advancement in transportation.
- And in 1909, William Howard Taft was inaugurated as president of the United States” (SEMO, 2024).

### **WW1 and the 1910's**

The beginning of the 1910s was a tumultuous time period in American history. But also history around the world. The 1910's saw great advancements in the right direction for the

theater and film industry. Feature-length films began to grow in length and became more complex and sophisticated in their storytelling. Film production companies were growing stronger and bigger than ever before. Now as times began to change, the entertainment industry really began to spread its wings and traveled West here to the United States. Before the 20th century most production companies and monopolies were based out of Europe. Specifically Britain and Victorian culture took a great fondness to theater and began making it a part of their culture.

That being said, with this form of medium having greater accessibility across the world brought even more room for creativity and imagination. Little did the world know, they would need these forms of relief more than ever before. WW1 began in Austria on June 28, 1914. The main reason for the conflict were assassinations that were taken out of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife. “At the dawn of the 20th century, few anticipated a global war, but what came to be known as the Great War began on June 28, 1914, with the assassinations of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, while they were visiting Sarajevo, Bosnia, a country recently annexed into the Austrian Empire. Many Bosnians and their Serbian neighbors resented this foreign rule and the Archduke’s visit to Sarajevo provided the opportunity for a small band of Serbian dissidents to strike back. Austria responded to the assassinations by teaming up with its ally, Germany, and declaring war on Serbia. The conflict soon involved Russia, France and Belgium. Fearful of a full-scale world war that would threaten its sea routes to other countries, Great Britain joined the fight against Germany and Austria” (Delaware State, 2021).

Most citizens and military officials could have only assumed that the conflict would resolve itself and become a non-issue after just a couple of months. Again, no one could have guessed how wrong that assumption would be. This was the second worst War in Human history behind World War II, which will be discussed later in this paper. The total number of military and civilian casualties, 40 million. “The total number of military and civilian casualties in World War I was around 40 million. There were 20 million deaths and 21 million wounded. The total number of deaths includes 9.7 million military personnel and about 10 million civilians. The Entente Powers (also known as the Allies) lost about 5.7 million soldiers while the Central Powers lost about 4 million” (Census.gov, N.d.).

To some, this seemed a small price to pay in order to keep the freedoms that humanity had earned. As we know, the human race has not always been so kind to each other. The thought of reverting our ways seemed too much to bear to the majority of citizens and military officials. The war was horrific, the amount of death and destruction almost seems incomprehensible to those of us that look on this as past history. It is important to remember that this was a reality for a lot of people during this era and it had a profound effect and impact. The reason this war became so terrible were the new inventions of war weapons such as chemical warfare. This was a huge problem for all countries involved. So much so that it would lead to the invention of the gas mask. Aircrafts were just now starting to be used on all sides of the war, and this would bring even more unnecessary destruction, but this time it was able to be brought to your neighborhood and town, rather than a specific battle location. This gave all countries (who had access to this technology) the ability to move quickly and strike even quicker. While these were technically inventions that were still in their infancy and weren't used as much in this war as its older

brother, they were still being used and pretty extensively. At this point, nuclear weapons were not created. This was one reason that the perceived threat wasn't as bad as World War II, but either way. The way the war news spread and the rate at which countries and allies were folding, this brought great fear and paranoia for most in the U.S. and shores abroad. "In 1915, the Germans used poison gasses against the Allies fighting in the trenches on the Western Front. To protect soldiers from chemical warfare, gas masks were developed. Great Britain made one of the first types of masks capable of minimizing the deadly impact of these gasses on their troops. Though considered a novelty when the war began, aircraft were used by both sides for reconnaissance, allowing personnel to observe enemy troop positions, to direct artillery fire and to photograph enemy lines. By the end of the war, the concepts of aerial combat and aerial bombing had come into being" (Delaware State, 2021).

Before we move on, here is some background information on the 1910's, other major events that took place that also had an impact on cinema as World War I was not the only event to take place during this decade just as I did for the beginning of the 20th century.

- In 1910, Jack Johnson defeated Jim Jeffries to keep his heavyweight boxing championship of the world. Sports are another form of media or cinema that I wanted to cover briefly. It is widely debated whether sports such as boxing, wrestling or sumo should be considered a form of cinema or theater. It is technically a performance, on a stage, in front of an audience. Much like a play would be. This will not be discussed any further in this research paper.
- George Herriman published the first 'Krazy Kat' cartoon also in 1910.
- In 1912, Titanic sank on its voyage to New York, this would come to be one of the highest grossing films of all time, nearly one hundred years later.

- 1914, the first telephone lines from New York to San Francisco would link, giving even easier access to communication with other production companies and filmmakers. This would give news the ability to spread nationwide, almost instantly.
- In 1917, some of the last horse drawn wagons and carts were taken off the streets of Manhattan, NY. As stated before, this expanded opportunity, convenience and transportation.
- In 1919, the eighteenth amendment was ratified, banning the sale and manufacture of alcohol throughout or within the United States.
- Also in 1919, The race riots of Washington and Chicago also took place, bringing racial uproar. Also this year, the Radio Corporation of America or RCA was founded. This was another form of media that would begin to take off in a big way.
- W. D. Boyce incorporated the Boy Scouts of America on February 8, 1910.
- Fire killed 146 workers at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, on March 25, 1911.
- Arizona became the 48th state and last of the contiguous states admitted to the Union on February 14, 1912.
- Willa Cather publishes *O Pioneers!* In 1913.
- The Panama Railway steamship “SS Ancon,” made the first official transit of the Panama Canal on August 15, 1914.
- President Woodrow Wilson signed the Jones-Shafroth Act on March 2, 1917, establishing the right of U.S. citizenship to residents of Puerto Rico.

### **End of WWI and 1910's**

World War I reigned on for more than four years and at the end, ash and rubble. Was it worth it? Did we succeed in our mission? We won, but did we truly win? These are the questions

that folks were asking themselves when the dust finally settled. Most families had lost someone or knew somebody who had. Society was in shambles, recovering from the mass amounts of destruction and despair that had been draped over families and communities. The saying goes, what goes up must come down. When it finally came down, it had a great impact on theater and film as a form of entertainment and media around the world.

Society was looking for an escape from reality. Something that they can sink into and forget all of their problems, all of the death they have faced and how that affects those around them. The war changed the way filmmaking was undertaken, and to a great degree. Not only here in the U.S. but across the pond in Germany, Russia and France. A huge part of the theater success was due to French cinema which had shaped and expanded upon this media, leading up to World War I. Creating the genre, avant garde and being great innovators in the industry. One of the biggest Cinema Production companies Pathe and Gaumont held very powerful and commanding positions in the world of Cinema. Holding a lot of the rights to other companies, their unions and equipment. After World War I, these companies would become tattered and shut down forever. This allowed the industry to blossom even further and begin to share styles, genres, and actors. It is important to note that after WWI, most films that were being produced were about such topics, War. It was still on the minds of most citizens and producing these types of films was to help alleviate some of the alienation and trauma that most shared. After the war was very much a time when it was spoken about, but was still a raw political conversation and was withheld from most people's day to day conversations with others.

Among the most famous of these films based around WWI was 'Westfront 1918' by G. W. Pabst which was released in the year 1930, twelve years after the end of the war. This film is notorious for showing some of the most brutal and graphic sides of the war. Most of the scenes that depicted these gruesome acts were cut from the final film and have not been able to be recovered, even today. There were other great films that depicted the nature of war by other

nations. And all nations benefited greatly from the war as stated before, but none more than the United States. Previously France would've had the most to gain in the industry, but the war completely shifted the momentum of cinema. "The great victor of World War I in cinema, as in all else, was, of course, the United States. Alone among the combatants, America emerged with its society and economy intact. One immediate consequence was Hollywood's domination of screens around the world. It took over the markets from which France had withdrawn; it hired away (or provided refuge to) the best talent that UFA developed" (Klawans, S., 2000).

Although it was the end of the war, the world still had another great problem on their hands. Influenza was becoming a serious threat to societal health. At its peak and from 1918 to 1920, it killed almost fifty million people worldwide. 675,000 here in the U.S. This was another event that struck great fear in Americans and other nations. Thus giving the human population another taste of their morality.

For the most part, America had come out unscathed, economically and politically. But there was much reprimandation that needed to be done. As Hollywood began to take over and invest more money and time into theater and film, the more films that were created, political, social and economical. By the end of the 1910's cities were expanding more than ever before, metal coffins were becoming more prevalent and widely accessible to the public, making travel easier and quicker. With easier traversal and transportation came easier access to cinema and everything in between. Families were now able to start actually frequenting the cinema for entertainment. Before it was something that most wouldn't be able to attend. But with the fast moving economy, new technologies, and the need for an escape created a vast and vibrant world of creativity that would only continue to grow in the coming decades.



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## End of a War and an Era

The end of the 1910's and beginning of the next decade was a time of great reflection for the world. The 1919 Seattle strike was still causing a great deal of wear across the country and one in five Americans was reported to be affected by this general strike. With most people looking for work, the theater industry was a great prospect for young, bright minds. Beginning of the 1920's would bring the era of 'silent films'. Along with this and the increasing financial prosperity brought more disposable income for families to use on entertainment. People are always looking for escapism and a way to combat reality. This was the golden ticket, per say.

“As the popularity of “moving pictures” grew in the early part of the decade, movie "palaces" capable of seating thousands sprang up in major cities. A ticket for a double feature and a live show cost 25 cents. For a quarter, Americans could escape from their problems and lose themselves in another era or world. People of all ages attended the movies with far more regularity than today, often going more than once per week. By the end of the decade, weekly movie attendance swelled to 90 million people. The silent movies of the early 1920s gave rise to the first generation of movie stars” (Khan Academy, N.d.). As stated, the silent movie industry really began to allow stars to shine within hollywood. Some of the biggest stars during this time were Charlie Chaplin, possibly the most famous star of the silent era and would come to create the most influential films of his generation, ‘The Great Dictator’ (1940). Mary Pickford was another powerhouse in this era and founder of the Motion Picture Academy. Before that, she was a sweetheart of the silent film industry and played mostly young characters with sweet, naive girls. The final character I wanted to mention was Buster Keaton, who is also amongst the most influential of his time. Like Chaplin, Keaton was also known for his physical, slapstick comedy all while keeping a straight and serious face, earning him the nickname “The Great Stone Face”.

Hollywood continued to prove its stature in the world of cinema and how much of a force to reckon with it would become. With the advancements in technology over this time and rate at which it was happening was unprecedented in human history. With this, the attendance of theater and film as a form of entertainment began to really break some record numbers. During the 20s, movie attendees numbers began to skyrocket. By the middle of the 20s rolled around, more than 50 million people would see a movie per week. That is half the number of the population in the U.S. per year. In 29', there were enough seats to fill a whole theater out in even the most popular films. To put this number into perspective, the population of Chicago based on a 1930 census was nearly 3.5 million citizens. To say that theaters and cinemas were expanding to meet up with demand would be a poor understatement.

People began to witness and view shows in their own class or division of wealth. Based on wealth, you could now begin to experience different forms of entertainment at said shows. The attendance number would continue to rise ten fold. Any urban or rural workers that wanted to attend a show would go according to their working class. At this point in time, admission was extremely cheap and most would have been able to afford it. The average price was somewhere around the 7 cent range, depending on the part of town or time of day you would attend your viewing. Broadway started to become more of an elitist form of entertainment as far as sub-genre go for theater. But other neighborhood or class based production companies started to be bought up and distributed by other powerhouse companies such as Paramount Picture Company, Fox Film/20th Century Fox and Warner Brothers to name just a few. Although this took away a lot of locality to the cinema industry, it brought a whole new level of uniformity and accessibility. In the late 1920s, theaters or cinemas that deemed themselves independent would begin to cater to the working class citizens of America. At the time, a form of showing called "talkies" was introduced, causing many working class theaters to shut their doors after being unable to meet the cost of sound conversion. And as the invention of sound was on the cutting edge, cinema would eventually become even more popular.

In the 1890's Thomas Edison would come to eventually invent the kinetophone, he would come up with the clever design of combining a kinoscope with a phonograph in order to create pictures with sound. For many years, inventors and engineers tried tirelessly to find a way to input sound into motion pictures. Thomas Edison was the first to be used but was by the worst method of easily inputting sound into film. While it worked, it was timely, costly and didn't have the best quality. This was modified and used to bring the idea of placing soundtracks directly over filmstrips in order to directly input audio. "For decades, engineers had searched for a practical technology to add synchronized recorded sound to the movies. In the 1890s, Thomas Edison tried unsuccessfully to popularize the "kinetophone--which combined a kinoscope with a phonograph. In 1923, Lee De Forest, an American inventor, demonstrated the practicality of placing a soundtrack directly on a film strip, presenting a newsreel interview with President Calvin Coolidge and musical accompaniments to several films. But the film industry showed remarkably little interest in sound, despite the growing popularity of radio. Hollywood feared the high cost of converting its production and exhibition to sound technology" (Digital History, N.d.).

The introduction to the first feature film with sound was a great deal and also a great success. In 1926 the struggling company Warner Brothers began production on a new innovative film to break the stigma that 'sound in film is overrated' mentality, which a lot of production companies at the time had. This new innovative film was meant to be a way for them to cut costs, while also increasing their overall revenue. " Warner Brothers, a struggling industry newcomer, turned to sound as a way to compete with its larger rivals. A pre-recorded musical soundtrack eliminated the expense of live entertainment" (Digital History, N.d.). This film was "The Jazz Singer" released in 1927. This movie was groundbreaking and destroyed any doubt that other companies might have about putting sound into their productions. Within only one year, over 300 theaters and cinemas had become wired for sound.

While the silent era had a profound positive impact on the cinema and social prowess. The introduction to sound brought the amount of hype to an entirely different level. “The arrival of sound produced a sharp upsurge in movie attendance, which jumped from 50 million a week in the mid-20s to 110 million in 1929. But it also produced a number of fundamental transformations in the movies themselves. As Robert Ray has shown, sound made the movies more American. The words that Al Jolson used in *The Jazz Singer* to herald the arrival of sound in the movies - "You ain't heard nothing yet" - embodied the new slangy, vernacular tone of the talkies” (Digital History, N.d.). “Talkies” were exclusively shorts that had sound as a main attraction. These included synchronized dialogue, also known as “talking pictures”. The introduction of sound also brought all new genres that weren’t able to be explored prior. Such as musicals, new comedies with dialogue and one liners, and the gangster film (film noir sub-genre). “In addition, the talkies dramatically changed the movie-going experience, especially for the working class. Where many working class audiences had provided silent films with a spoken dialogue, movie-goers were now expected to remain quiet. As one film historian has observed: "The talking audience for silent pictures became a silent audience for talking pictures. "Moreover, the stage shows and other forms of live entertainment that had appeared in silent movie houses increasingly disappeared, replaced by newsreels and animated shorts” (Digital History, N.d.).

The 1920’s saw some of the most profound changes in economy and ways of life. As stated, the automobile industry started to boom and really take off. Different inventions, new and lively, seemingly being created everyday. “Americans grappled with the implications of industrialization, technological progress, urbanization, and mass immigration with startling vigor and creativity in the 1920s even as wide numbers kept their eyes as much on the past as on the future. American industrial engineers and managers were global leaders in mass production, and millions of citizens consumed factory-made products, including electric refrigerators and

vacuum cleaners, technological marvels like radios and phonographs, and that most revolutionary of mass-produced durables, the automobile” (Murphy, P. V., 2018).

As for every decade, here is a list of related major events that took place:

- “In 1920 the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. The Constitution was passed, creating the era of Prohibition. The amendment forbade the manufacture, sale, or transportation of alcoholic beverages” (NCpedia, N.d.). This may seem unrelated to theater, but the prohibition had a direct impact on revenue for theaters after the prohibition was passed. This is widely due to drunkards and family nights out that once would migrate to entertainment now were not under the influence and were less likely to spend money on entertainment.
- 1920 was also the year that saw women now being able to legally vote for the presidency and it was also the year of the implementation of the 19th amendment as well.
- “In 1921 a revival of the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) took place. The KKK was targeting Catholics, blacks, and Jews with its terrorism” (NCpedia, N.d.). The KKK would come to have a greater impact on the cinema and entertainment industry.
- In 1922 Louis Armstrong began experimenting with different music styles and variations using his trumpet, thus creating the widely popular genre Jazz.
- 1924 saw the passing of a law from Congress that made all American Indians citizens of the United States.
- Reaching the end of 1929 saw the stock market crash again. America’s invested wealth saw a loss of 26\$ billion in value.

The 20's saw great success and advancements in cinema and theater and would continue to. The economic boom was coming to an end and the Jazz era was over, and the U.S. was about to enter the Great Depression. This would come to be a time of great stress for the American people, financially and politically. Although, it would have great positive effects on the entertainment industry.

### **1930's and the Great Depression**

The 1930s would prove to be a very successful decade for labor activism in the U.S. and it also saw major growth for unions. Theater and cinema. This would also be the decade of sound and would also come to be considered the 'golden era of Hollywood Cinema'. The Great Depression would also come to have an enormous impact on the theater and cinema industry. This era would also show great change to politics, policies and general uniform of the theater and cinema industry. "The Depression and movies with sound changed movie audiences of the 1930s from those of the 1920s and earlier. Sound silenced audiences, discouraging the sociability that had marked working-class audiences before. The Depression led movie companies to change to marketing strategies and construction plans. They stopped selling luxury and building movie palaces. Instead, they expanded their operation of neighborhood theater, displacing independents that had been more worker friendly, and instituted centrally controlled show bills and policies. Audiences also appear to have become more heterogeneous.

All this, too, discouraged the voluble behavior of working-class people. Ironically, in this era of labor activism, workers and their families seem to have become quieter in movie theaters, satisfied with the convenience of chain-operated theaters" (Butsch R., 2001). As stated, the

beginning of The Depression led directly to the development of smaller, chain operated theaters throughout America and abroad. And due to the fact that the Great Depression was ultimately an economic crisis, this would affect all of society and businesses. Theater and Cinema included. The market became quite valuable and saw many smaller chain operated theaters begin to pop up worldwide. The chain-operated theaters obviously helped to build the reputation of movie going as a form of media and entertainment. By the early 1930s, nearly all feature-length movies were presented with synchronized sound and, by the mid-1930s, some were in full color too. The advent of sound secured the dominant role of the American industry and gave rise to the so-called ‘Golden Age of Hollywood’” (National Science and Media Museum, N.d). This created quieter and more peaceful environments that also brought an interesting form of entertainment, along with snacks and other amenities that made it worthwhile to partake in. Sound and Silent films really started to break away from each other in this decade as well.

Again, it cannot be understated the rate at which this change occurred. Here is a chart that shows the growth of movie theaters with sound and their admission prices over the years. (Table 1).

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Table 1: Movie Theaters and Admissions

<u>Year</u>	<u>Sound Thea.</u>	<u>Silent Thea.</u>	<u>Weekly Attendance (in Mill.)</u>	<u>Price</u>
1927	20	21,644	57	.20



1928	100	22,204	65	.20
1929	800	22,544	80	.21
1930	8,860	14,140	90	.30
1931	13,128	8,865	75	.20
1932	13,880	4,835	60	.23
1933	14,405	4,128	60	.23

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Hopefully the chart above gives the reader a good idea of how rapidly this change between sound and silence took place. By 1935, there were over 15,000 sound theaters nationwide. And by the end of the 1930s, there were over 19,000 sound theaters nationwide. The average weekly attendance also saw a great jump in average viewer retention. By 1935, there were 80 million average viewers and by 1940, there were again 80 million viewers. The weekly attendance would continue to fluctuate anywhere from 80 million to 90 million monthly viewers until 1949, when it saw a drop off by nearly 20 million viewers.

One way the entertainment industry was trying to improve attentiveness in the audience and quiet them down. They did this by introducing sound into their cinemas and theaters. (See Table 1.) Between 1928 and 1935, nearly all of the silent film theaters had been converted into

sound theaters. Fine tuned with custom sound systems that allowed the audience to visualize and hear their entertainment like never before. This was also a time of great competition amongst different theater companies. The ones that couldn't afford to keep up with the demand of sound film would ultimately lose their businesses.

As stated, the Great Depression had a great impact on not only theater and film economy but also general society. Economically, for citizens, this is one of the toughest time periods in American history. "The Great Depression began in August 1929, when the economic expansion of the Roaring Twenties came to an end. A series of financial crises punctuated the contraction. These crises included a stock market crash in 1929, a series of regional banking panics in 1930 and 1931, and a series of national and international financial crises from 1931 through 1933. The downturn hit bottom in March 1933, when the commercial banking system collapsed and President Roosevelt declared a national banking holiday" (Richardson, G., N.d.). The Great Depression had a great and direct impact on theater and film. As seen in the chart above, the year 1930 saw a massive boost in weekly attendance and also the average price of admission. With more attendees, and the ever growing demand of movie going, the prices raised significantly in the midst of the Great Depression, but leveled itself out in the years to come. Before the recession and the end of the Depression was now the time for movies going to become a regular pastime of Americans and other nations alike. "By the 1930s most people went to the movies, but some went more than others.

In 1939, writer Margaret Thorp estimated that forty million of 130 million Americans in the 1930s were regulars, and described the audience as mostly middle-class white, between fourteen and forty-five years old, and more adult females than males. George Gallup described

the typical movie-goer just before World War II as twenty-seven years old, earning twenty-eight dollars a week (close to median income for American Families)” (Butsch, R., 2001). Age is less important as far as statistics go. Please notice that the average viewer is mostly described as white. Segregation was still in full effect at this point. There black and white cinemas for their respective race and this something that would be the case until sometime in the 1960s and 70s when segregation would finally see its end.

“During the 1930s and 1940s, cinema was the principal form of popular entertainment, with people often attending cinemas twice a week. Ornate ‘super’ cinemas or ‘picture palaces’, offering extra facilities such as cafés and ballrooms, came to towns and cities; many of them could hold over 3,000 people in a single auditorium. In Britain, the highest attendance occurred in 1946, with over 31 million visits to the cinema each week” (National Science and Media Museum, N.d.). By the end of the 1940’s, the Cinema world would now become the main source of entertainment for the average household in post war America.

As the 1930s was coming to a close, most were hoping for a better economy, government, a functioning ecosystem and above all else, security. Even the dimmest bulb in the box would be sure that there could always be another conflict, this would ultimately be the case. The entertainment industry would continue to be a great source of escapism but conflicts of different classes were always pushing the industry to strengthen. Many companies would continue to work through this trying time as would the citizens that also had to endure such a time, but theater and film, entertainment in general would make things just a bit easier or a bit less meek as you lug on through the monotony of everyday work and life.

As for every decade, here is a list of important events as they relate to theater and film:

- In 1930, the Uniform Sale of Securities Act was passed. Starting with the Kansas Securities Act in 1911, states adopted a variety of laws to protect investors from fraud and raise capital for business.
- In 1931, the unveiling of the tallest building in the world at the time of its construction, The Empire State building.
- 1932 was the year that Franklin Roosevelt was elected president of the United States. This was also the year that passed the Reconstruction Finance Corporation Act which provided aid to state and local governments and loans to banks, mortgage corporations and businesses.
- The year 1933 saw the prohibition of alcohol repealed. This was also the year that Adolf Hitler would be appointed as German Chancellor. The famous Wall Street Strike in protest of the 1933 securities act would also take place this year.
- In 1934, the Dust Bowl would take place. And Adolf Hitler is named Fuhrer.
- 1935, Germany enacts the Nuremberg laws.
- The Hoover Dam would be constructed and unveiled just one year later.
- 1936 saw the Hindenberg Explosion, The Golden Gate Bridge and world renowned pilot Amelia Earhart would vanish.

## The Second World War

The 'Second World War' as it would come to be known worldwide, was arguably, one of the worst periods of time in recent human history. This short time frame of course brought upon the holocaust with his nazi regime, which would ultimately become the main staple or main conflict that would arise during this war but there were many, many others. Theater not only offered escapism for citizens across the world but it also provided support and escapism for our soldiers, fighting the battles across the pond and beyond.

The war began September 1, 1939, when Germany decided to invade poland. This invasion caused an uproar amongst quite a number of supporting nations, however America was not on the forefront of the support line for Poland. In fact, America tried to maintain neutrality for most of the war until they simply could not anymore. Some nations took this neutrality for weakness. Japan decided to bomb Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Japan did this believing that (during a time of great paranoia and chaos) they could severely cripple America's fleet. This act would be the final straw in the cool demeanor the United States was trying to give off to the other nations. It is estimated that the total casualty number was somewhere close to 75 million people. People with hopes, aspirations, and dreams. Like everyone of us and those around you. Of the 75 million, around 20 million of the casualties were military personnel, 40 million of them were civilians. Most of the death was due to common war acts such as; genocide, mass-bombings, massacres, and chemical warfare. Although some deaths could be attributed to other natural factors such as famine and disease.

With all of the death would come the desire for escapism more than ever before. All decades saw extensive interest in theater and film but the 1940s during the war, and post war, would see the most amount of interest the industry had ever seen. Civilians certainly were looking for the way to escape reality, most know this. Most often don't think of the ones that were on the enemy line and how this form of entertainment was more of a relief for them than anyone. World War II saw massively extensive drafting nationwide. Other nations were having similar drafts but none to the scale of the U.S. By the peak and end of the war, there were more than 12 million active duty individuals serving across the world, stationed in various locations. Nearly 8 million were stationed abroad.

Theater was an excellent source of entertainment for soldiers and would have passed the time, no doubt. However, theater would have an even bigger impact on the psyche and mental strength of common soldiers. "General John J. Pershing reputedly said: "Give me one thousand soldiers occasionally entertained to ten thousand soldiers without entertainment" (Matson, L., 1954). Something about having this source of escapism would give many of these soldiers the second wind that they would need to get through day by day. Many soldiers adored and welcomed the idea of film and theater being used abroad; it would eventually be used extensively. The Navy would be the first branch to begin issuing different forms of entertainment to their recruits and hardened veterans. "The Navy started distributing books, phonograph records, and other entertainment paraphernalia to servicemen. The organization was headed by such men as Thomas J. Watson, President of International Business Machines, Incorporated. By May of 1941, the Citizens' Committee was sponsoring professional shows in seven trucks, serving as mobile units, to Army camps east of the Rockies. West of the Rockies motion-picture

performers were enticed into making entertainment contributions to forces at their camps' ' (Matson, L., 1954).

The evidence for the need for escapism was evident and would only become more evident as the war would wane on. The psychological and physical abuse of the mind and body was a strenuous one for soldiers and POWs in the midst of WWII. “Clinicians and researchers have explored personality factors that led to survival under these horrifying conditions and studied prisoners’ psychological reactions to the Japanese POW experience immediately after their release. Over the past 40 years, however, most researchers have attempted to identify long-term medical and psychological residuals of war captivity. As an example, Canadian investigators documented impairments in the nervous system and psychological functioning...” (Patricia B. Sutker, N.d).

With the post war maritime from WWII still weighing heavy on those that it had affected. People in the 1940’s were still trying to pull themselves out of the story that was WWII. With WWII just as WWI, there came a copious amount of great films that were filmed and produced in the light of war. These types of films are known as ‘patriotic’ or ‘escapism’ films. These kinds of films were not the first of their kind as stated. But, with the technological advancements since the first World War, these films were leaps and bounds better than the one produced and distributed during the 1910’s. “The 1940s was a watershed decade for American cinema and the nation. Shaking off the grim legacy of the Depression, Hollywood launched an unprecedented wave of production, generating some of its most memorable classics, including *Citizen Kane*, *Rebecca*, *The Lady Eve*, *Sergeant York*, and *How Green Was My Valley*. In 1942, Hollywood

joined the national war effort with a vengeance, creating a series of patriotic and escapist films, such as *Casablanca*, *Mrs. Miniver*, *The Road to Morocco*, and *Yankee Doodle Dandy* " (Rutgers University Press, 2023). As mentioned above, these films were great war time films that offered a way for people affected to escape and relate to a piece of entertaining media. *Casablanca* (1942) is a film that was set during World War II, it mainly focuses on an American expatriate (Bogart) who must choose between his love for a woman (Bergman) and helping her husband (Henreid), a Czechoslovak resistance leader, escape from the Vichy-controlled city of Casablanca to continue his fight against the Germans. As many Americans and others of different nationalities hated, or despised Germany and Nazis in particular, these kinds of films really hit home with most and at the same time was making quite a bit in the box office. *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942) is another film that is set in the WWII time frame. This one, less demanding on the mental exertion needed to watch on the audience. This was a much softer tone when it came to this style of film and made it a bit easier for younger and more sensitive audience members to digest.

As with every decade thus far, here is a list of important events that took place during the 1940's in relation to theater and film:

- In 1940, Winston Churchill would become British Prime Minister, this would also be the year the Battle of Britain would take place.
- 1942 saw the "Final Solution" for Jews which refers to the mass murder of Jews. A phrase used by high ranking and unranking Nazis alike.



- D-Day would take place in 1944, taking the lives of more than 4,400 troops. 2,501 of which were American soldiers.
- In 1945, Roosevelt died due to declining health factors. This would lead to Harry Truman becoming president. This would be the same year that the United Nations would be founded.
- The Nuremberg trials would take place a year later, bringing little semblance of justice for the atrocities committed during WWII.
- In 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded.

### **The Nuclear Age**

Many of the decades before the 1950s saw many great technological and sociological advancements but the 1950s would take this to a whole new level. The 1950's would become coined as 'The Nuclear Age'. This decade was the time of the atomic age of science and technology. This decade would see fewer but more expensive films come into the mainstream. This would give many producers and film companies time to begin upgrading their technology. Focusing on the technologies used would be a main tactic or strategy to get audiences back into the theater after the war. As the war still loomed over many and for many years to come, it was still difficult to get audiences to spend money on leisurely activities or escapism. Sure, there were still attendees on a regular basis, but not nearly as much of a boom before and after the war.

Most of the heavy weight lifting of bringing audiences back in would land on the way filmmakers presented their films and or the techniques they used to film them. One of the techniques that was used was the introduction of widescreen. This technology would be invented in April, 1953. Although it would be slow rolling to introduce to all cinemas. This would become widely popular, and would eventually become the standard for today's film and television. As for the first film released in this style, "There appears to be some debate as to what the first widescreen movie was in regards to both filming and releasing in widescreen. *The Robe* (released in September 1953) is often quoted as the first movie to be both filmed and released in widescreen. Chronologically, however, *This Is Cinerama* (released in September 1952) came out a year before *The Robe*. Why *This Is Cinerama* is often ignored is perhaps because it was more of a tech demo than what we think of as a "movie"; however, it still was released to public audiences first. Another wrinkle to the argument is that *How To Marry A Millionaire* (released in December 1953) started filming **before** *The Robe*; however, it was released later." (John, N.d.) These films would bring great success to the box office which would enthrall producers and filmmakers to keep experimenting with different filming styles and techniques.

The next technique that was used extensively was 3-D. Although this style of filmmaking was not created in the 1950s (1922) it would see a huge comeback in films in the 50s. In a three year stretch from 1952 to 1954, there were a crazy number of films featuring 3-D technology. Almost 60 films would be produced during this time. Given the fact that this specific time frame in theater and film was quite slow going, these numbers in a few year span were quite profound.

Perhaps one of the biggest technological advancements for theater and film would be the introduction of the household television. This would mark the beginning of a new way to view film and television shows. Ultimately the use of the television would increase the revenue of cinemas across the country. This would be due to the fact that the more people would view feature films and television shows on their home TV, they would want to view new films that were being released only in theaters. The Cinema would now be a way for audiences to see certain films and short films early before those that would view it on their home television. It would also become an exclusive event to be able to view these films early. Not all would be great for the television industry though. With this new found technology being introduced, there would be many traumatic changes to the industry as a whole. “Throughout the period, the trade press noted consistent pressure from independent exhibitors on motion-picture producers, including threats of boycotts against any studio which released theatrical films to television or moved too precipitously into telefilm production.” (Boddy, W. 1985) As stated above, many film producers and makers were not ready yet to release full feature length films to television production companies. They believed that they would make the most money in the Cinema and that television was not yet ready to take on the revenue needed to accompany the budget of some of these films. “Despite such studio protestations, film producers and exhibitors viewed television's prospects quite differently, and the structural changes within the motion-picture industry in the early 1950s shifted the balance of power between the two groups. When the industry began to recover from its post-War economic slump in 1953, the new prosperity was not equally shared by producers and exhibitors. The feature film industry which emerged in the mid-1950s was significantly different in structure from that of the pre-War year.” (Boddy, W. 1985)

Driving audiences to the Cinema was still a main focus of all film producers and companies. Escapism was still the factor most were banking on to increase revenue. Most companies knew that WWII was still a looming factor. The 1950s saw even more paranoia as the threat of atomic or nuclear bombs was still very prevalent. On July 16th, 1945 would see the very first nuclear explosion to take place. It was fired at a testing location around 200 miles outside of Los Alamos, Ne Mexico. During the 1950s, the tension between the Soviet Union was at an all time high, causing great anxiety amongst the nation with fear of nuclear war taking place. The bombs at Nagasaki and Hiroshima gave the world a small glimpse into what this kind of warfare can lead to. “As the U.S. and the Soviet Union competed for supremacy in nuclear arms in a strategy that came to be known as Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), each side developed and stockpiled a vast arsenal of nuclear bombs and the requisite means of launching them. Both sides developed a “second-strike capability,” meaning that each country could launch a devastating attack even after sustaining one; consequently, launching a first strike was considered suicidal and thereby assured the “deterrence” of a first strike from either side.” (Moore, G., & Moore, B., 2009). With the general public beginning to understand that the threat of nuclear weapons was more prevalent than ever, paranoia would begin to become widespread, especially by the end of the 1950’s. The threat of Atomic bombs being a problem for non-target countries is what prompted America to begin practicing nuclear weapons drills. These would take place in work spaces, school spaces, and official government facilities.

The threats that were looming over citizens all over the world would begin to bring not all, but some more attendees of Cinema with the idea of escapism at the forefront. While there should have been quite a jump in cinema and theater attendances, even with all the new

techniques and advancements in technology, the industry did not see quite the jump in number that they had hoped for. This would begin to change in the following decades.

The 1950's was very much a decade defined by the post-war boom of WWII. Here is a comprehensive list of other major events that took place as they relate to theater and film:

- The Korean War would also begin in 1950 and span 3 years until 1953, whereby the war would end in a stalemate between North and South Korea.
- In 1951, the first U.S. transcontinental television transmission was created and introduced, giving the world the ability to share information and films through the television.
- 1952 saw Dwight Eisenhower elected to president and the accession of Queen Elizabeth II.
- The DNA Double Helix was discovered in 1953. Rosenberg was executed and Joseph Stalin died.
- 1955 saw the Montgomery Bus Boycott initiated by Rosa Parks.
- NASA project Mercury was founded in 1958 with 7 astronauts. This was also the year that saw a great leap forward in China.

## A New World

Dwight D Eisenhower as president, tunes of Elvis Presley ringing over most radios in America, and the economy at an all time high. Things couldn't look any brighter for the U.S. In the beginning of the 1960's other countries were doing quite well as well. Furthermore, this would be the decade that America would instate laws that redacted segregation laws not allowing any African American citizen from viewing or partaking in any sort of business with theaters or cinemas doing showings. Of course there were exceptions to the rule. There were cinemas for example that would allow black individuals to purchase tickets at an unmarked price, as well they would be forced to sit in the front of the theater or balcony seats where it was not so comfortable to sit or view the film from certain angles. "The law stated that at any theater that typically showed pictures meant for white audiences, when the audience was mixed, Black audience members were required to sit in the balcony seats.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the orchestra seats up front were occupied by the fourteen white patrons and the thousands of Black patrons were sent to the uncomfortable, crowded, and poor visibility seats in the balcony" (Broun, S., N.d.).

Segregation in America has been a problem since around 1865. Everything was segregated. From the water fountains you drink from, to where you use the restroom or even eat food. Basic human necessities were made a hassle for the black citizens going through this century long attack on their race. Most of the segregation problem was from the Jim Crow laws, enacted in 1877. The Jim Crow laws, simply put, were any laws that enforced racial segregation in the American South specifically, between the end of the Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1950s. Jim Crow laws stemmed from a judicial

U.S. Supreme Court Case *Plessy v. Ferguson* which ultimately ruled that “separate but equal” facilities for African Americans did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment. These Jim Crow laws were a great travesty to not only human history (although slavery and segregation have happened for many generations) but also the entertainment industry as well. Financially and socially. Especially in the early years of desegregation as many white Americans were still opposed to the idea and thus would not not frequent a theater or cinema as much, or commit not returning at all.

“Throughout the South, Jim Crow laws segregated the physical space of movie theaters and often required separate screening times of films for different races. Movies were a highly regulated part of social life, including what was shown on the screens, how movie theaters were spatially set up, and who attended the theaters. Movie-going experiences varied throughout the South during the long battle for desegregation” (Broun, S., N.d.). As stated before, white citizens were happy enough allowing black citizens to sit in the rafters and below the orchestra but in 1963, this would all change. “On June 4, 1963, after objections from white residents, the Lucas Theater, Weis Theater, and Savannah Theater in Savannah, Georgia, announced that they would be restoring segregation policies that barred Black people from attending film screenings on an equal basis with white customers.

Two of the three theaters completely banned Black people from attending movie showings, while the third restricted Black customers to balcony seats. In spring 1963, all three theaters announced plans to implement a policy of racial integration. On June 3, the theaters for the first time opened their doors to all patrons equally regardless of race. White community members committed to

segregation protested the change by picketing at Savannah City Hall. Less than 24 hours later, the three theaters quickly reversed themselves and announced plans to restore their segregation practices the next day. One of the theater owners explained that he was withdrawing from the integration agreement “until other businesses also feel that it’s time to integrate” (Madeo, N.d.).

This one change to a few small town theaters at the time in Savannah, Georgia would be a slow going change and process, but one that would ultimately change the entertainment industry and the world for the better. As mentioned, there were black actors that were able to make a successful career out of acting during the years of heavy segregation, but nothing compared to what the next generation would be able to accomplish. The stigma of black actors was still very much prevalent as white folks continued to become more comfortable with the idea of racially mingling with one another. At the end of the day, that is what these turns in American history were able to achieve. It for the first time allowed individuals the opportunity to interact with someone not of their own race. Seldomly the opportunity was taken voluntarily, but it was there nonetheless. Furthermore, it forced individuals to interact on a basic level. Being infuriated about being in the same room with someone of another race may bewilder some readers, but this was the harsh reality. By “forcing” people to communicate on a basic human level with one another really allowed the next few decades to really shine when it came to sociality, and the longevity of the entertainment industry. A whole new world had just then opened up and the opportunity and creativity were endless.

There would still be public outcry for many years to come, and this decade would also see the assassination of the very important Martin Luther King Jr. who was a civil rights and



african american rights activist, who spread gospel across America. This would cause even more outcry.

This would be a time that escapism would play a key role in the lives of African American citizens. The 1960's would see great success in the box with movies starring black lead roles. This would be due to public outcry, rioting, and protesting causing a lot of individuals wanting to support their black actors and role models that took these roles. Certainly, there were still white individuals that would go to view these films as well, although few and far between. But with the desegregation of most theaters well on its way, this would only increase revenue for Hollywood and the like. One such film was 'Lilies of the Field'. From 1963, "Lilies Of the Field" features accomplished and prominent actor Sidney Poitier. The film is significant due to Poitier winning the Oscar for Best Actor at the 1963 Academy Awards, becoming the first Black man to do so. The film is centered around Poitier's character "Homer Smith", an ex-GI who encounters five German, Austrian, and Hungarian nuns while on a stop in Arizona. With his Oscar win, Poitier solidified himself in the film industry, and will forever be known for his breakthrough and influence in the film industry." (Castro, J., 2023, March 6). 'Lilies of the Field' would go on to become a box office success, raking in an estimated 7 million dollars due to the stellar performance put on by Poitier.

The history of the 1960s would not be complete without the mentioning of the Vietnam War which was not mentioned previously due to the amount of time it occurred. It spanned from 1955 to 1975. It is being mentioned here due to the fact that the war was occurring majority of the time in the 1960s. According to the Vietnam Conflict Extract Data File of the Defense Casualty

Analysis System (DCAS) the Extract Files contain a record of 58,220 American casualties in the war spanning its length. Although the Vietnam war would not loom over the heads of the world as WWII or WWI did. It is still worth mentioning as a major event as it had a great impact on the entertainment industry as well. Bringing in many major box office hits based on the events of the war such as ‘Apocalypse Now’, ‘Good Morning, Vietnam’ and many more that can not be listed here. Although it would not be to the extent that WWII was taken. “Government documentaries also had the Vietnam experience. However, Peter Davis's *Selling of the Pentagon* (1971) notwithstanding, the Vietnam War produced nothing like the government film efforts of World War II, in part because Lyndon Johnson feared that, once aroused, public opinion could not be easily restrained” (Rollin, P. C. 1984). Government documentaries were also another great source of entertainment for citizens and official personnel. The knowledge gained from these documentaries would then lead to more attendees to vietnam based films and shows and vice versa. Ultimately leading people back to the entertainment industry as a whole. An aspect not often referred to is how these sorts of films or documentaries affect veterans of this era and after. It would be interesting to see data referring to those statistics.

Here is the list of important events of note from the 1960s as they relate to theater and film:

- John F. Kennedy was elected president in 1960 and assassinated in 1963 to the hands of Lee Harvey Oswald, although the true killers are debated.
- In 1961 the Berlin Wall was erected in Berlin, Germany dividing East and West Berlin due to Soviet occupation.

- 1965 would see the first space walks with Neil Armstrong, Edwin ‘Buzz’ Aldrin, and Michael Collins.
- 1968 not only saw the assassination of MLK but also the little brother of president JFK Robert Kennedy.
- Apollo 11 landed on the moon in 1969.

### **The Me Decade**

The 1970s would see many new additions to entertainment. From sports networks popping up, to the very beginning of the most famous blockbuster hits that are known from past generations to present such as; The Godfather, Star Wars, and Jaws the 1970s truly had it all and was really starting to solidify the prowess of modern day Hollywood. The 1970s would see major recessions in unemployment throughout the 1970s adding the well familiar added pressure that comes with every new decade. With inflation rising steadily and citizens beginning to worry, this would force policy makers to make changes. The 1970s would on the bright side finally see the end of the 20 year war reigning on in Vietnam, which would alleviate some of the economical and political pressure.

With the 1970s being labeled as ‘The Me Decade’ there was bound to be a reason for such a title. The 70s was certainly a decade of rebellion and change, not just in society, but in the world of entertainment as well. The 1950s and 60s saw a major foundation in household television, but by the time the 1970s rolled around your everyday average Joe was bound to have

a television set himself. Although television remained the dominant force in the entertainment industry throughout the 60s and 70s, a massive amount of “multiplexes” would start to pop up around the nation, in different suburban and urban neighborhoods, giving many more people the accessibility to theaters in a time when TV reigned supreme. “In the 1960s and 1970s, “multiplex” theaters popped up in nearby suburban shopping malls. This transition represents the last major technological transformation in theatrical movie-watching in the twentieth century , but it also reveals the film industry’s continued pattern of pursuing its audience/market: when the audience moved to the suburbs, so did the movie theaters.

The 1970s would also see the popularization of the VCR, or Video Cassette Recorder which was invented in 1956 by Charles Paulson Ginsburg. Although by the end of the 90s, it would become obsolete. The VHS was created in 1971 by the Victor Company of Japan, or JVC. And this would come to wildly popularize home movie viewing, although it would still be a maintained battle with television.

The movie theater industry’s “resignation” to TV’s dominance led, once again, to speculation about the demise of this old, and now basically unattractive, technology, especially by the late 1970s and early 1980s, when cable movie channels and VCRs began to permeate the marketplace. Gomery summarized the situation best: Critics claimed fans would go out on occasion to watch their favorites, but the burgeoning set of television channels that show movies at home would kill the theatrical movie show. The image of the movie fan would shift from the darkened theater to the home equipped with cable television” (Corbett, K. J., 2001). As the result of the number of television sets rising in America, so did the number of bored citizens lowering.

This could be argued that this decreased the likelihood of criminals or other no gooders not being captivated to take action simply based off of boredom that would've loomed prior to the age of the easily accessible television.

As mentioned before, the 1960s saw the Civil Rights Movement of 1964 and segregation laws beginning to subside after many, many decades showing great positive impact on the entertainment industry and general society. This would continue into the 1970s with more lead roles with black actors, male and female. It would also see these actors become paid increasingly well as the decades would continue into present day. Although racial prejudice would continue to be quite unbearable, the laws and policies changes were starting to weigh in the African American communities favor. "The decade of the 1970s has been one of considerable racial change in city neighborhoods. Advances were made in reducing social segregation between races, but the residential segregation between blacks and whites has increased" (Fly, J. W., & Reinhart, G. R., 1980). Although the decade was remembered as the decade where racial prejudice and segregation subsided the most, this simply was not the case.

Things were also not looking great on the forefront for African American citizens economically. Especially after the civil rights movement of the 1960s, many folks were hoping for a more bright future for the racial tensions that were still brewing during this time. Government officials were however making strides to increase the effectiveness of the civil rights movement such as Richard Nixon, United States president from 1969 to 1974. Focusing more of the efforts towards young black Americans' education as well as voting rights. "The Nixon administration addressed the underlying problems of bigotry and economic empowerment

by putting teeth in anti-discriminatory laws, boosting the budget of civil rights enforcement, and sponsoring minority business initiatives. Brown recalled that one of his priorities as a Nixon staffer was to promote black colleges. He arranged a series of meetings between Nixon and black college presidents, "knowing that the president saw education as a great equalizer." President Nixon doubled aid to black colleges and issued an executive order denying tax deductions for contributions to segregated schools. John Calhoun, a black special assistant to President Ford, would continue this concern for the status and funding of black colleges. He strongly supported the Ford administration's efforts to renew the Voting Rights Act and to improve the funding and research capabilities of black colleges. President Ford backed Calhoun's efforts to reach out and to work with African American members and staffers on Capitol Hill. Calhoun held monthly luncheon meetings. This outreach program and Calhoun's access to the president was significant to shaping decisions concerning busing, school desegregation and voting rights" (WHHA, n.d.).

However prejudiced some may have been, America and the world surrounding were seeing these new African American stars taking charge, and it started to have a more positive impact in the following decades. Giving the reader even more examples of the ways theater and film had a positive impact on society.

Comprehensive list of other important events as they pertain to theater and film:

- 1971 is the year that the NASDAQ system was introduced and this allowed merchants and market makers to be able to conduct manual transactions through an automated quote system.

- The following year in 1972 would be the downfall of the then president Richard Nixon, after the Watergate Hotel scandal flipped the world of politics on its head.
- 1975 would see the New York stock exchange see massive changes, what was known as “Mayday”, the U.S. The Securities and Exchange Commission enacted Rule 19b-3, which in turn ended the monopoly that was the NYSE.
- On May 25th, 1977, Director George Lucas would release the all-time cult classic Star Wars. Creating an entire universe, like many would do in the future such as Harry Potter.
- Rule G-15 was created in 1978 which gave customers a tool with the ability to compare and consider alternative investments.
- 1978 was also the year that the 401k was introduced, known as the 1978 Tax Reform Act

### **Decade of Greed**

While all of the decades prior to it had their own personalities and the things that made them unique and special, carving out their own history and legacy for the younger generations to look back and decipher. However, no decade would take this to the next level that way that the 1980s did. This was the decade of rebelling against ‘the man’, or the government. This rebellious nature was seen mainly in the teen to young adult range but was not limited to. “The 1980s had indisputably gotten a reputation as the “Decade of Greed.” For Lagerfeld, the theme of the 1990s—just halfway over at that time—was clear. It was the “Edgy Decade.” From novels to music, critics considered “edgy” to be a word of praise. Email was edgy, and so was the attitude of the foundering young Generation X” (Lagerfeld, n.d.). Film would have a great impact on this rebellious nature with such films as: Footloose (1984), The Lost Boys (1987), The Outsiders

(1983) and many more. Although there were films that were seen as “edgy” for their time in every decade, no decade would take it as far as the 80s.

Although film could be a great motivator for rebellious behaviors, it would not come even close to the impact that music would have at this time. Bands like Iron Maiden, Metallica and Slayer were shaking up the music industry and in specific the rock & roll scene as before the 1980s, the most hardcore rock & roll had gotten was AC/DC, which in its own right was a very “hardcore” and “rebellious” band for the time. Again, the jump was pretty massive and music would continue to work in conjunction with other media to really allow the 1980s to blossom into the decade that we know now through Pop Culture.

With so many cult classics seemingly being released every month during the decade of the 80s, expansion of the cinema industry was bound to be in order. Indeed it was in order as by the end of the 80s, many new types of theaters with better amenities were starting to be constructed across the country and world. The western part of the world saw the quickest advancement such as places like Hollywood. Before this, Drive-In theaters were a very popular and inexpensive way for families to view these new films on a big screen with okay sound quality.

Most cinemas at this time were just old theatrons, converted with a screen instead of curtains and a projector instead of live actors and directors. Making it not the most appealing or comfortable when most times these theatrons were not built with the viewing of a big screen in mind, jarring the neck upwards and causing discomfort. These new types of theaters or cinemas



for blockbuster movies would come to be known as a ‘Megaplex’. “A new type of theater was to bring back the magic: the megaplex. Giant modern theater complexes began overtaking smaller multiplexes after the mid-’80s, with Kinopolis Brussels opening the world’s first megaplex with 25 screens in Belgium in 1988. The path toward the megaplex era is well documented in *Boxoffice Pro*. That history cannot be told without the Canadian Cineplex Odeon Group and its president and founder, Garth Drabinsky. Drabinsky and Nathan A. Taylor founded Cineplex Odeon in 1979. By the end of the decade, according to the magazine’s new Giants of Exhibition list, it had become North America’s fourth-largest circuit, with more than 1,500 screens in the U.S. and Canada. Megaplexes were often located in malls...” (Pahle, R. & Loria, D., 2020).

These new megaplexes were constructed with the viewing of these large screens in mind. Angling the seats in a way that made viewing easier and also allowing more room and comfort for those that you had to sit beside. Audio in these megaplexes blew new patrons away when they first saw the Dolby Stereo systems that gave much more punch and bass when viewing films, almost turning into an interactive event with the shaking, vibrating, and pounding of these new systems. This would be even more intense in films that utilized these systems well, as an example, *Terminator* (1984).

This would again, in turn, allow everyone of all ages the accessibility to these different films and outlooks on life that allowed people to form more cohesive and personal opinions than ever before. As a race, we like to think that we are not molded by the things around us, that we decide who we are going to become, but this simply is not true. You are a product of your environment and these new films, music and ways of intaking both would come to mold the

1980s into The Decade of Greed. While this decade was given this moniker, it is unfair to label this decade this way. It is human nature to indeed want more the more knowledge you gain, and society is only getting more clever. Technology would certainly have a greater positive impact on the entertainment industry, with the invention of the internet in the 1990s.

Here is a comprehensive list of important events as they relate to theater and film:

- Ronald Reagan was sworn in as President of the United States in 1981.
- MTV was also introduced in 1981 which would go on to transform the music and television industry.
- The internet was created and first used in 1983, although it wouldn't see major accessibility until the late 90s early 00s.
- HIV was discovered and named in 1984 and this would also be the year of the First Apple Macintosh computer release.
- 1985 would see the year of the Titanic wreckage being finally found and also the year that Microsoft Windows would be released.
- Finally in 1989, the Berlin Wall which separated East and West Berlin for more than 30 years, fell.

## **Decade of Globalization**

This decade is referred to as the Decade of Globalization due to the sheer amount of advancements in technology, communication, medicine and international trading which really began to open the arms of different countries. This was also a time of great political and cultural change as well for the better. The 1990s would also mark the end of the Cold War. By many, considered to be the best decade during the 20th century, by comparison anyway. Theater and film would continue to evolve over this decade into what we now know as modern Hollywood. With this modern Hollywood, the education aspect was profoundly expanded upon. Many more rising stars in the acting world, and hopeful actors looking to learn a thing or two to give them the edge they needed in such a competitive industry. Acting schools had always been around, but now they were extremely popular as the entertainment industry continued to grow. The internet would also come to have a great impact on the rate of learning, making the industry even more competitive in the coming years.

As mentioned before the VHS was invented in 1971 and was used extensively up until the late 1990s whereby the DVD or the Digital Video Disc would be invented by American inventors, David Paul Gregg and James Russell. The first DVD was invented in 1997 and would change the way everyone viewed film and television forever. This physical media has always been a way for people to connect and communicate with one another. Perhaps one person was wanting a VHS to view while another person had that VHS. This allowed others to share

memories, experiences and overall get to know each other on a more personal level. Even being able to share the physical media itself gave people a reason to connect in person rather than over the landline, or computer in the later stages of this VHS era. The DVD would do much of the same good that the VHS did but it was ten fold. The new DVD was lighter, easier to operate and cheaper to make, allowing more accessibility for films and television across the entire world.

With the DVD on the massive rise and gaining extreme popularity by the 21st century, the internet was right in the middle of the battlefield, figuring out how to expand and increase revenue. With the internet brought along many new ways for individuals to purchase, view, and share any sort of media. Whether it be movies, or video games the internet would come to have it all, and be accessible very easily at that. The internet would spark what would come to be known as the DIY culture. Giving people the freedom of creativity like never before with home computers. “Playing with technologies has always been an important driving force behind technological transformation. This is even more the case in the digital era, which has given rise to a lively Do-It-Yourself (DIY) culture, in which amateurs and ordinary users have become prominent players in the technological game. It is argued that play offers an interesting angle to understand the characteristics of this DIY culture. In the digital DIY culture technology is used and tinkered with in an open-ended way. In the process of playing around, new connections, ideas, and applications spring up. Improvisation, trial and error, and playing with the rules characterize these practices. Digital DIY practices are highly socially driven: collaboration and communication with others is a crucial element. The motivation of a digital DIY enthusiast is not so much to produce serious, intentional innovations, but is more intrinsically shaped by the fun and enjoyment of tinkering itself, which can be quite an absorbing pastime. Innovations are often

just the accidental results of such processes” (Frissen, V., 2015). As stated, this new era of technology would bring so many new ideas and cultures to the world of theater and film with so much new knowledge and new found freedom.

By the 1990s CGI technology was being used extensively in films and television in order to transport the audience or immerse them with otherworldly or never before seen visuals. In 1995, Disney would find a way to create the first fully animated film Toy Story. It was a box office hit and would change the way that people use these new technologies. Arguably, practical effects may look better if done correctly, and CGI can look quite wonky if not done correctly. The cheap and quick nature of CGI was all too valuable in an industry that moves at a thousand miles per hour. With all the new technology, genres like sci-fi and others were finally getting the respect they deserved.

Companies and individuals still are trying to find ways to bring society together as it relates to theater and film. The escapism that it brought and the memories that were formed have not been lost on billions of people. There is a reason that even today, theater and film have still continued to heavily shape or form our society into what it is today. No doubt theater and film have had a major positive impact on society. Bringing us closer together, teaching us more about ourselves and those around us.

As for every decade, here is a comprehensive list of important events as they relate to theater and film:

- On December 31, 1991 the Soviet Union (USSR) finally dissolved and fell out of power.
- Amazon was launched in 1994 by entrepreneur Jeff Bezos, which would come to be the largest online book and general store.
- The classic Sit-com hit Friends also debuted in 1994.
- J.K. Rowling publishes the first book of her Harry Potter series, which would come to be a massive blockbuster hit worldwide.
- In the year 1998, Google was created and released by Sergey Brin and Larry Page. This is the best well known search engine to date.

### **Recap**

This research paper took the viewer through every decade during the 20th century. Showing examples of how theater and film had a positive impact on society through different eras of technology, political and economical changes. The reader has attained knowledge regarding each era of the 20th century and all it had to offer. Giving people a reason to connect, create new ideas, and to go after them. Hopefully the reader has a better understanding of not only theater and film, but also society as a whole and how entertainment can positively impact a society in so many different ways.

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