

The U.S. Hollywood Studio System (1920s-1960s)

*The greatest movie-producing system the world has ever known.

1. An Oligopoly: A limited number of studios--5 "majors" (#1-#5 below), 3 "minors" (#6-#8), Disney, and two independent producers (#10, #11); others not listed included such small "poverty row" studios as Monogram, Hal Roach, and Republic. During the Depression, the U.S. Justice Dept. encouraged this; later, the 1948 Paramount Case decision ended it.
2. Moguls: The importance of a handful of similar men in formulating the system
3. The studio characterized by a large physical plant
 - * soundstages vs. backlots
 - * other facilities that ensured the independence of the studio (e.g., fire station, medical center, sleeping bungalows, restaurants)
4. A stable of crew and contract players (both stars and bit players); e.g., Donna Reed, Jimmy Stewart, Thomas Mitchell, Beulah Bondi, Lionel Barrymore, Ward Bond, Frank Faylen from *It's a Wonderful Life* (1947)
5. The star system
 - * the "grooming" of stars under contract
 - * star vehicles
6. Studios as family or "protectorates"

* studio head as patriarch (e.g., Louis B. Mayer)

7. Properties developed from within the studios
8. The importance to most studios of the development of one or more genres

*From the 1950s on, this system fell apart with competition from TV, and buyouts by huge conglomerates.

*Each studio had its own "personality" profile:

The 5 Majors

1. MGM ("*The Supreme*")
 - Moguls: Louis B. Mayer, Irving Thalberg
 - Genres: Musicals, comedies
 - Stable: Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, Gene Kelly, Judy Garland, Spencer Tracy, James Stewart, Elizabeth Taylor, Vincente Minnelli
 - Other: Mottos--"The Greatest Motion Picture Studio the World Has Even Known," "More Stars Than There Are in Heaven"; prestigious and flashy
2. Paramount ("*The Sophisticate*")
 - Mogul: Adolph Zukor
 - Genres: Romantic comedies, epics
 - Stable: Cecil B. DeMille, Ernst Lubitsch, Preston Sturges, Bing Crosby, Marlene Dietrich
 - Other: The studio with a European accent; its stars

had "sexy elegance, wit and dinner clothes"

3. RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) ("*The New Yorker*")
 - Mogul: Pandro Berman, Howard Hughes (later)
 - Genres: Musicals (early), film noir
 - Stable: Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Katharine Hepburn, Irene Dunne
 - Other: The urban counterpart to Fox; only studio to actually disappear, after Hughes bankrupted it and Lucy bought it ("Desilu")

4. 20th Century Fox ("*The Rube*")
 - Mogul: Darryl Zanuck (the only non-Jewish mogul)
 - Genres: Social message films, action/adventure, soaps, disaster films
 - Stable: Shirley Temple, Betty Grable, Tyrone Power, Henry Fonda
 - Other: Rural in focus

5. Warner Brothers ("*The Slicker*" or "*The Cynic*")
 - Mogul: Jack L. Warner
 - Genres: Film noir, gangster, weepies, "women's films," war films
 - Stable: James Cagney, Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, Erroll Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, John Garfield, Ida Lupino
 - Other: The "factory" studio, made movies "fast, cheap and furious"; featured themes of prejudice and inequities, "the cynicism of the sociopolitically disinherited"

The 3 Minors

6. Columbia

Mogul: Harry Cohn

Genres: Screwball comedies, "Capra-corn"

Stable: Frank Capra, the 3 Stooges

Other: "Poverty Row" studio, borrowed stars from other studios; was first to adapt to TV, via Screen Gems

7. United Artists

Mogul: Joseph Schenck

Genres: "Quality" films

Stable: The four founders--Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith

Other: The first "logo without a lot," just like today's model

8. Universal ("*The Old Monster*")

Mogul: Carl Laemmle Sr.

Genres: Horror, weepies

Stable: Deanna Durbin, Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Abbot & Costello, Rock Hudson, Tony Curtis

Other: Old-fashioned, often behind the times; last studio to survive intact

Disney (a category of its own)

9. Disney

Mogul: Walt Disney

Genres: Animated features, live-action family films

Stable: Mickey & Minnie, Fred MacMurray

Other: Has continued to diversify, e.g., with Touchstone Films

Independent Producers

10. Samuel Goldwyn (independent producer)

Mogul: Samuel Goldwyn

Genres: Classics, drama

Stable: William Wyler, Ronald Colman, Gary Cooper, Gregg Toland

Other: The mogul hired the elite, but was rough himself, known for "Goldwynisms" (e.g., "Include me out")

11. Selznick International (independent producer)

Mogul: David O. Selznick

Genres: Mysteries, epics

Stable: Ingrid Bergman, Gregory Peck, Joseph Cotten, Joan Fontaine, Jennifer Jones, Hitchcock (early)

Other: Produced many star vehicles for the stars under "personal" contract