

United Artists and allowed to make *Ladybug, Ladybug*, which failed. This was a bone tossed to barking dogs in the hope that they would keep quiet. But it is one of the earmarks of the establishment that small failure is tolerated less than large failure. As for the anti-establishment forces, those who valiantly try to muster an avant-garde, they are beneath the notice of the establishment. They not only are not trusted, but are regarded as grubby little bohemians who wear sandals and beards and beat their breasts in futility.

ON the other hand, the establishment is willing to maintain liaison with those on the outside who work in a way to bring prestige to the industry. No major firm would have wanted to underwrite Ely Landau's production of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, but his effort was generally appreciated. Mr. Landau, a New Yorker who made good in television distribution, has moved into truly independent film production, but unless he is willing to join the establishment on the second level, it is felt that economic realities may soon make his position untenable. Leon Roth, a former publicist associated with the Mirisch organization, has gone into production on a low-budget level, assisted by an outside-the-establishment theater-owner and foreign film importer, Walter Reade, Jr. The establishment wishes both him and Mr. Reade well. For it is people like these who are opening possibilities for the future. The specialized cinemas have been growing in number, and people are needed who can produce the kind of high-quality films required by these theaters. The establishment is as yet unwilling to take the risk of producing films for any but the largest markets. It would rather have others take the risks.

The movie establishment, while it has sought to protect itself in every way possible, is nevertheless vulnerable. If toll television came in strongly, the need for triple the present-day production of films could knock it off balance. The establishment has failed to develop a cadre of new writers, directors, and stars. Producers are not needed, for there is already an oversupply. But how long, some ask, will the predominantly young movie audience be willing to watch middle-aged and in some cases elderly people making love on the screen? Can an old giant director know the feelings of the young man of twenty who takes his girl to the movies? Even though the establishment produces most of the better American movies, the foreign imports often manage to outshine them and may eventually get a larger share of the American box office. And even the establishment admits that it is only guessing that it knows how to proceed.

## 2. What Golden Years?

By ARTHUR KNIGHT

IT IS always just a little disconcerting to one whose personal recollection of movies extends well back into the Twenties to learn that the Thirties are considered by some the golden years of the American film, or the Forties, or even the Fifties. Can memories be so short? Where precisely was the glamour of the Depression era? What made the rickety entertainments of the war years memorable? How could the harassed Fifties possibly be golden when television was nightly biting huge chunks out of the movies' potential audience? There have always been pictures that glittered, but when was the glitter pure gold?

Even when stripped of nostalgia, each era undoubtedly had its virtues—and its vices. Nostalgia merely throws up a smokescreen of distance that filters out all but the rosier hues. Nostalgia transforms a classic profile into a first-class actor, a once-popular picture into a work of art. And it gives a period of prosperity the appearance of having been a period

without problems. Nostalgia is nothing if not uncritical—which is perhaps the explanation of its great appeal.

In addition to the inevitable nostalgia that surrounds a picture fondly remembered from a long time past, however, there is always the possibility that it was actually seen when the viewer himself was relatively uncritical. Nothing is more sobering than to catch one of these faded epics in revival, or on a late television show. Scenes vividly remembered are no longer there, or if there now seem curiously truncated and unimpressive. Lines that once scintillated with wit now sound arch and contrived. Performances that once epitomized a breezy naturalism now appear forced and false. What once passed for sophistication now seems shockingly sophomoric. What once seemed profound now sounds callow or quaint.

The thing that makes these occasional re-evaluations so very disturbing is the realization that it is not the film that has changed, but we ourselves, and the times we see them in. Celluloid is the constant,

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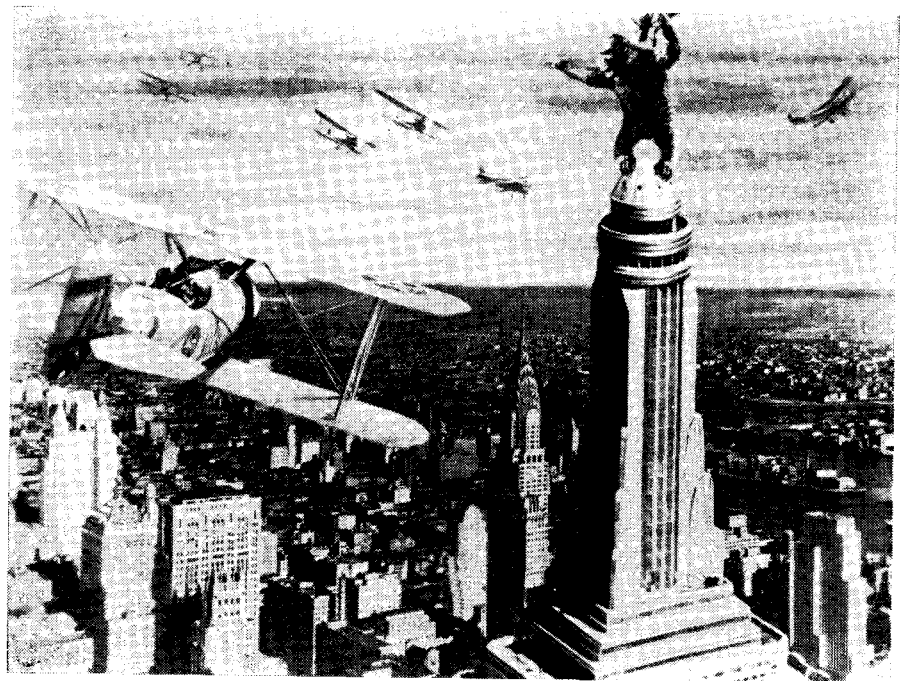
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—Photos from Culver.



**Classics recaptured**—Among the big hits and significant milestones of the American cinema's early years were *The Covered Wagon* (photos at far left) and *King Kong* (above and left).

we the variables. Nothing is more difficult to recapture than the first impression of a film; to recapture it with any accuracy years later is downright impossible. And so, instead, we laugh at the old movies (sometimes vaguely aware that it is really ourselves we are laughing at), or discover in them previously unnoted historic significances, or enjoy them for the echoes they evoke of another, more golden age.

Quite apart from the films themselves, and the personalities who produced or appeared in them, the motion picture industry has also enjoyed a rather special place in the realm of America's bigger businesses. Only recently has Hollywood begun to lose its glamorous position as the film capital of the world. Only recently has the supremacy of the Hollywood product been challenged in the American market by outstanding achievements from abroad. For most moviegoers, however, the slick, stylishly mounted, star-studded, and strictly uncomplicated adventure stories, comedies, and romances that still flow from

our studios continue to represent all that a movie should be. These were the staples on which they were reared and the foundation stone on which the American industry was built.

**T**HE need for such a standardized product became evident soon after World War I. It was a period of consolidation and expansion for the industry, marked by the rise of the "majors"—studios like Paramount, Fox, and Metro—in the triple-threat role of producer, distributor, and theater owner. Almost overnight, the movies had become big business; and, as in every business, methods of control had to be worked out. The freewheeling practices of the past, when a producer made his picture, then sold it off in the competitive "states-rights" market for the best price he could get, were no longer economical. In the new set-up, the studios had to know in advance what each picture would bring.

During the Twenties, this was achieved with a precision that is not only

remarkable but, today, illegal. The studios simply hitched their vehicles to a star, then went out and sold the star—often well in advance of actual production. Pictures were not only sold "blind," giving the exhibitor no opportunity to see what he was buying; they were also sold in blocks. To get a picture with a top favorite, the theater owner had to sign for a package containing as many as a dozen more dubious items. Thus, between the guaranteed play-offs in their own affiliated theaters and advance sales to independent exhibitors, studio heads could readily adjust production costs to a highly probable profit. As the system developed, and the "majors" were each turning out fifty-two features a year simply to keep their own theaters supplied, any serious miscalculation, any costly failure, could readily be absorbed in the over-all pattern of success.

Although certainly idyllic from the corporate point of view, it was also the least likely plan to encourage fresh or off-beat ideas. Indeed, its very success lay in providing the kind of formula picture that would bring approximately a hundred million customers back to the box office week after week. At one time Robert Flaherty, the great documentary director, sought to prove to his employers at Paramount that there were



ways to build a special audience for his special kind of film. Paramount could not have cared less. Their job, as they saw it, was to satisfy the habitual moviegoer with his normal ration of love, comedy, and adventure, not to drum up new audiences for a type of picture that might never be made again.

Thus evolved the conventional program feature, that procrustean bed on which all studio-nurtured talents had to be either stretched or sliced. It was not without advantages. The sheer amount of film turned out in this manner permitted the development of Hollywood's formidable cadres of trained technicians, men whose superior skills are still acknowledged by film-makers throughout the world. It gave directors, writers, and actors an unparalleled opportunity to explore and re-explore the fundamentals of their craft. And also, the system of production was flexible enough that, on occasion, an exceptional program picture—a *Covered Wagon*, a *Big Parade*, or a *King Kong*—could be permitted to grow to its full stature; or, through a happy combination of circumstances, a "sleeper" could emerge with qualities that lifted it above the ordinary run of the mill.

For anyone who was himself involved in film production during this period, it was understandably a golden era. Work was plentiful and profits were assured. And nostalgia at least now partially conceals the artistic frustrations that were part and parcel of the system.

It ended abruptly after World War II. Within a year, the government had outlawed block booking and blind selling and had reinstituted a long-delayed action to divorce production and distribution from theatrical exhibition. Simultaneously, television emerged from behind a cloud of wartime restrictions to pose a major threat to the motion picture industry. The studios, in a panic, retrenched on all fronts. No longer committed to their own owned and operated theater chains, they cut back on production, reducing by as much as two-thirds the number of pictures turned out annually. Many eliminated completely their shorts and animation departments. And, to save on the high salaries that normally went to talent, they terminated the contracts of actors, writers, directors, and even producers.

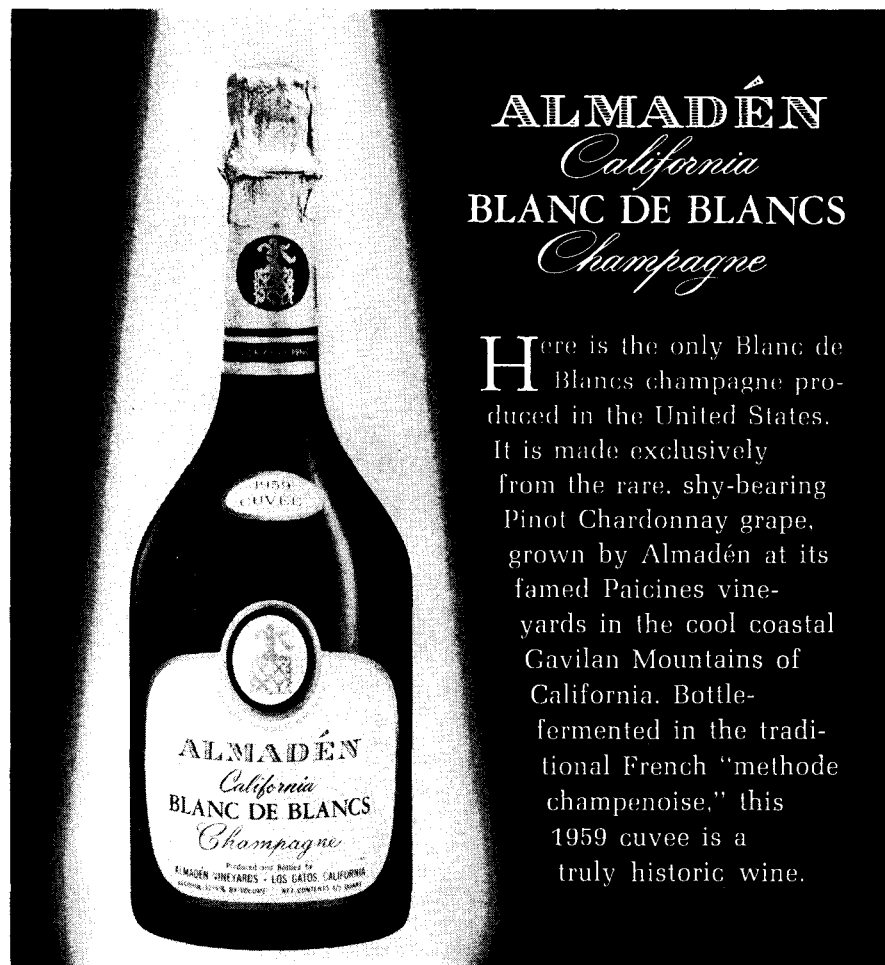
While this last move might have looked wise on paper, permitting the studios to hire personnel only when actually needed for a film, its effect was wholly unanticipated. Rather than wait around for a call, many of the film-makers went into business for themselves. Individually or in sympathetic tandem, they set up corporations and initiated their own productions—or consented to work for the studios on a co-production basis that gave them part

ownership of the completed picture. Increasingly over the past ten years, studios that once spearheaded production have become real estate operations, leasing space and stages to the talent that they once employed. Frequently they arrange for the financing of independent productions as well, receiving in return the privilege of distributing the completed picture for a percentage of the profits. Today, it is distribution—not production—that is the key to power within the industry.

**D**OES this mean that the golden age of the movies is over? Only for those who persist in equating it with the dominance of the studio system. But before the studio heads seized power, before the movies became a mass-produced commodity, in the brief period between 1912 and 1920, the American film enjoyed a taste of independent production during what was without question the most creative—and golden—era in its history. This was the time when Mack Sennett and Charlie Chaplin produced and directed their own immortal slapstick comedies. The father of modern film techniques, D. W. Griffith, had severed his connection with Biograph to create such masterpieces as *The Birth of a Nation*, *Intolerance*, and *Broken Blossoms*. Thomas H. Ince, considered by his

contemporaries second only to Griffith, introduced to the screen the solemn countenance of William S. Hart—and a vision of the West that has rarely been equalled for unrelenting realism. Cecil B. De Mille had his own production unit, as did Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and many more. This was the period that firmly established the supremacy of the American film, and paved the way for all that followed.

Curiously, the relationship of the directors and the stars of that day to their own productions closely parallels what is happening now. Of course, financing today is far more complicated, productions far more costly, and there are questions of censorship and foreign markets that rarely plagued that earlier generation of film-makers. More importantly, there is the problem of working creatively yet still pleasing tastes that were formed by more than forty years' exposure to the studio film formulas—made more endearing by nostalgia. Nevertheless, the accent today is once more on the individual—the creative producer, the creative director, the creative writer, the creative star. If they will only seize their opportunity, if they will only dare a little, it is not at all impossible that another generation will look back upon even the Sixties as the golden years of the American film.



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### 3. Heyday of the Documentary

By JOHN G. FULLER

SEVERAL years ago I was in the process of directing a documentary film for the CBS program *Twentieth Century* on the problems of air traffic. Titled *The Crowded Air*, it tried to show as graphically as possible the enormous difficulties in keeping modern aircraft safe from collision. Our camera was set up in the radar control room at New York's International Airport to catch in action a few approaches during a particularly soupy morning with practically zero visibility. Suddenly one radar operator yelled for his supervisor and pointed to his radar screen. A plane from a nearby military field had veered off course and was heading directly for the "stack" where a half-dozen commercial airliners were circling awaiting landing instructions from the tower. In a single scene, the entire documentary film could have been summed up.

But we never got it on film. Our camera, known in the trade as a BNC, was a 35mm. monster so heavy that it required at least two men to get it off its tripod. By the time it could be maneuvered to catch the tension in the radar operator's face, the crisis had passed.

In the past forty years, documentary films have come a long way, but they are only now beginning to capture some kind of reality, and it will be at least another forty years before they will become a completely satisfactory form of journalistic art. At the present time the villain is the cumbersome and weighty equipment that any professional documentary crew must drag around in order to capture quality pictures in realistic action. Even cut to the bone, the carrying cases that have to be hauled to des-

ert, mountain, or jungle fill the better part of a station wagon.

For any kind of theater distribution, a documentary should be shot in 35mm. film, 400 feet of which weigh ten pounds in a magazine. The lightest 35mm. camera set up and equipped for sound weighs 225 pounds. A portable battery light known as a "frezzi" weighs, with its battery, twenty-five pounds. The lightest tape recorder suitable for professional sound adds another twenty pounds to the equipment load. A single zoom lens, professional style, weighs thirty pounds. None of this is calculated to leave a film crew refreshed at the end of a day. But the worst part of it is that when a dramatic crisis arises, chances are the camera isn't ready for it.

*Cinema verité* is a phrase that is coming into frequent use in the trade, indicating the strong trend away from the slick, tidy Hollywood style of filming, in which technical perfection is somehow supposed to compensate for lack of substance. When you mention a hand-held camera, the Hollywood producer invariably shudders. Yet some of the most exciting shots in documentary work are done this way. A tripod often becomes a stifling barrier to the freshness and spontaneity required of a convincing documentary. *Camera verité* frequently calls for great footage rather than good photography. There is a tremendous difference between the two. Great footage can include a lens covered with dirt, a camera knocked out of the cameraman's hands, or a jerky camera movement. Good photography demands nothing more than proper exposure and focus. It is desirable, of course, to have both. But in documentary work, the first should have priority. The present-day

equipment problem makes it hard to get.

Some progress is being made in equipment that helps make a forty-year prognosis heartening. Equipment is slowly developing that will enable the audiences of the future to watch a real-life event develop with all the drama of a Hollywood spectacular. Embarrassing as it may be to domestic camera makers, it is the foreign companies that are taking the lead to provide the camera-artist with the proper tools. The Arriflex 35mm. camera from West Germany has made it possible for a cameraman to hand-hold shots he never could have attempted before. Yet when you try to use it for synchronous sound, it makes as much noise as a riveting machine. The Nagra tape recorder has made it possible to do sync-sound of the highest quality, using only flashlight batteries for power. Wireless mikes (those that no longer need to be connected directly to the recorder) are beginning to become more dependable—although it is not at all unusual for a police call to come in mysteriously in the middle of a critical scene. For many years, it has been necessary to have a direct wire between the camera and the tape recorder in order to keep the two in sync, as they say in film work. A new unit called *Camcon* has been developed by Bob Rubin, a CBS producer, to permit camera and sound man to be hundreds of yards apart. An independent team consisting of Albert and David Maysles has manufactured its own equipment to enable them to shoot sound film as swiftly as if they were doing home movies. The development of Double-X film by Eastman Kodak has made it possible to shed much heavy lighting equipment, and there is hope in the future that 16mm. film can eventually be projected in theaters with as much fidelity as the more cumbersome 35mm. film.

The artistry for better documentaries is already here and waiting. Writers and producers for television have been creating brilliant work in spite of the monstrous equipment they are saddled with. All that is lacking now is the technical means to do the same thing at the scene of spontaneous action.

Documentaries, to be effective, must reflect life—but they must do it artfully, with the most exacting attention to selectivity. The old-fashioned documentaries, in which subjects speak stiffly to the camera, in which people stumble about self-consciously in an abortive attempt to be themselves, in which actors portray certain roles instead of the real people, are on their way out. When the equipment catches up to the artist, not only will truth be more vivid than fiction—but perhaps the fictional drama will be looking toward documentary techniques to make its make-believe world more true and convincing.

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### Cruger's Island

By Paris Leary

IT'S a tall light shot with cold and it's got the wind behind it, comes with the sun from a winter above us and walks through the lean trees like a pale heron. Down the prospect of the Hudson ice tissues the current and bridges move in shadows over captured launches and marinas. I walk with a kind of care—it is deer and duck season and tipsy City hunters shoot at a movement or a rustle; their sportless murder fills these woods with a spare fear. My baser instincts long for bear traps and pits to hurt and confound them, give return for their awkward slaughter. I am become a regional poet, the hills my weeks and week-ends, and am much given to thoughts of the inexact mortality which hunts us all, all seasons. Across at Saugerties the squat kilns discharge their smoke, and I find I have come away again without my matches.