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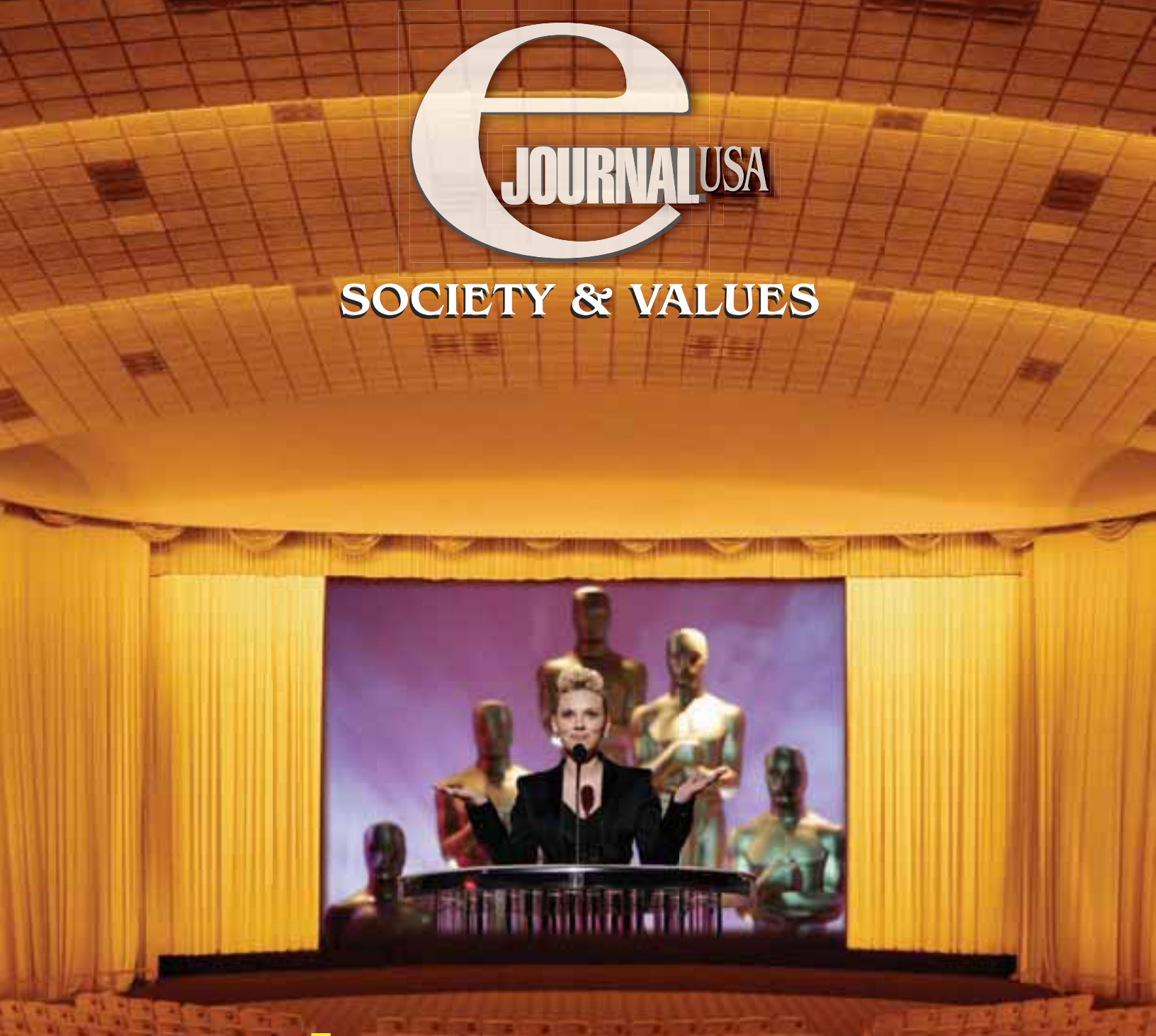

# THE MOVIE BUSINESS TODAY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE / BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAMS

**Society & Values: Volume 12, Number 6**


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Editor, *eJournal USA*
IIP/PUBJ
U.S. Department of State
301 4th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20547
United States of America
E-mail: eJournalUSA@state.gov

# About This Issue—Beyond Blockbusters

The late film director Richard Brooks once said, "The images come first, and with images, like music, the primary reaction is emotional." The extraordinary popularity of movies made through the Hollywood system among audiences the world over for more than 100 years testifies to this core truth. In an age of globalization the emotional power of pictures translates easily across cultures and makes Hollywood films one of America's major exports to other countries.

Movies are not simply entertainment, a vicarious roller-coaster ride of thrills for audiences in the dark. As our title, "The Movie Business Today," indicates, one way to see American films is as a kind of industry. An obvious but often overlooked truth is that a film succeeds or fails first in the white heat of the marketplace. Will people pay to see it? That's the bottom-line question industry moguls ask themselves when considering a potential film project, and it's the key to understanding American movies.

At the same time, filmmaking is more than a business. It's also a highly collaborative art form that employs hundreds on a single film—from the high-priced "talent" who act, direct, and write to the skilled craftspeople who build the sets, light the scenes, and apply make-up to the stars.

Finally, like all forms of popular culture, a film contains certain larger values its creators inevitably embed as a result of the hundreds of choices required to make a movie. Rarely do these values take the form of explicit themes or messages; they are more often a subconscious result of what all filmmakers try to do—hold the audience's attention.

What then is American about American movies these days? There is a well-known and somewhat stereotypical answer: the blockbuster, a smash hit that sells tickets around the world and turns a large profit. This term usually suggests an action movie or a thriller, with a $100-millon-plus budget and a star with a track record of delivering at the box office. The star plays an athletic, clever, and resolute hero who against long odds must overcome some extremely evil villains who have a plan that threatens much of civilization. Viewers can count on a blockbuster to deliver sudden plot reversals, elaborate chase scenes, and big, big explosions. On the other hand, the blockbuster is not likely to provide much depth of character or social background or realistic depiction of the lives of ordinary people.

At the 2007 Academy Awards, actor Will Smith offered a different view: "The common thread that you will find in American movies, that make them distinct as American, is that there is none. Each is as different as America itself, some stand up and cheer for us, some make fun of us, some sing for us, some cry for us, but each tells the world who we are as a people: a country that evolves through our social and political and religious differences."

Here Smith emphasizes several values commonly associated with the United States: first, the idea that this nation is a work-in-progress, one whose political system allows it to move in the direction of its ideals, and second, diversity, the celebration of the multiplicity of the American people. Looking at the Hollywood film industry it is easy to spot some other values that Americans treasure: innovation, entrepreneurship, optimism, creativity, and an openness to other cultures that often takes the form of immigration.

One of our purposes in presenting this issue of *eJournal USA* is to make our readers aware that American movies are far richer and more varied than the blockbuster stereotype would suggest. The articles in this issue capture an industry in flux. Our authors analyze the increasing internationalization of the film industry, both in terms of audiences and filmmaking talent; the rise of a more personal style of independent filmmaking in recent years; the market for foreign-produced films in the United States; and the effects of the Internet and the digital revolution on how movies get made and distributed. Shorter pieces focus on film festivals like Sundance that seed young talent and some film studios' efforts to go green in making movies. A photo gallery spotlights a few in the multinational cadre of youthful writers, directors, producers, and actors who are creating a buzz in the competitive cauldron of Hollywood.

So yes, as Richard Brooks would have it, Hollywood movies still supply the world with a rich trove of iconography and emotion as we enter the 21st century. In the words of Richard Schickel, dean of American film critics, "The American movie tradition has always operated above and below the intellect." ■

*The Editors*

# SOCIETY & VALUES

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YouTube co-founders Chad Hurley (left) and Steven Chen pose with their laptops. The video-sharing Web site hosted their first film awards in 2007 for films made and posted in 2006.

# What's American About American Movies?

Thomas Doherty

© AP Images/The Daily Courier, Jerry Jackson

Monument Valley is often featured in American movies, especially the classic westerns of director John Ford.

*The American film industry, despite its critics, continues to dominate the world market for movies. The author discusses why this is and relates the impact of several recent movies in the United States and abroad. Thomas Doherty is a professor of film studies at Brandeis University near Boston, Massachusetts, and the author of several books, including* Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II *(1999) and* Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s *(2002).*

The Americans have colonized our subconscious," says a character in Wim Wenders's *Kings of the Road* (1976), speaking as much in admiration as complaint, which only makes sense in a road movie by a German director who, first chance he got, rushed to shoot a picture on location in Monument Valley, Utah, an area frequently used by famed Hollywood director John Ford.

Wenders's double-edged attitude to the mother country of the movies expresses a common enough sentiment among the "colonials," one often shared by the host country nationals. Hollywood's genius for projecting the stuff that American dreams are made of may be undeniable, but non-American moviegoers can't help but resent this invasion of their brainstem. No wonder every year at the Cannes Film Festival the cinephiles joke that the odds-on favorite for the Palme d'Or is always an anti-American film . . . from America. Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) fit the bill perfectly.

Despite onslaughts from DVD pirates and YouTube videographers, the company town for the mass production and widescreen exhibition of American values in the 20th century seems poised to dominate the market well into the 21st century. Detroit, Michigan, home to the American automobile industry, may have buckled under the competition of carmakers in Toyota City (Japan) and Sindelfingen (Germany), but Hollywood still retains its brand supremacy in popular entertainment. In part, the preeminence of the American logo is due to the intrinsic appeal of a quality package filled with gleaming treasures: individualism, freedom of movement, upward mobility, pursuits of happiness (erotic and financial), and heroes who achieve moral reform through violent means. Yet the corporate descendents of film companies 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers, and MGM have also thrived by

doing what automobile manufacturers have not: adapting to new market forces and co-opting the competition. Today the Hollywood product line is not only being manufactured to overseas specifications but assembled by imported engineers.

## International Influences

According to the entertainment news source *Variety*, more than 50 percent of Hollywood's box-office revenues typically derive from ticket windows beyond American shores. Often the gross receipts—upwards of 70 percent in the case of transnational blockbusters like *Casino Royale* and *The Da Vinci Code*—surpass domestic tallies. That is, the bonehead antics, brain-dead plots, and really big explosions that, in the eyes of foreign detractors, define the worst exports result from Hollywood's trawling for a global mandate not a domestic constituency. A simple, predictable plotline, dazzling visual effects, and monosyllabic grunts that require minimal subtitling travel better than intricate webs of narrative causality, multilayered characterizations, and fast-breaking wisecracks—which is why the ticket queues from Singapore to Senegal match up pretty well with the buying habits of American teenagers.

Of course, as an international industry hustling to sell its wares beyond American shores, Hollywood has always had an eye out for foreign customers. Even during the classic studio era, when soundstage-bound motion picture production meant that the movies were 100 percent made in America, they were never 100 percent made for America—or, more to the point, made by Americans. Then as now, the ratio of indigenous ingredients to exotic elements recorded a variable percentage, with the play-off between native-grown and foreign-born influences changing on a film-by-film basis. The most visible signs of the mix and match were the very names on the marquee, stars and directors alike. Hollywood's only prejudice was against the foreign talent who could not be bought out. In the 1920s and 1930s, German and British directors willingly succumbed to the open checkbooks of American film producers Louis B. Mayer and David O. Selznick; lately, Mexican and Taiwanese filmmakers have proven just as susceptible to the lure of magical technology and bloated budgets. In short, perhaps what makes American movies most American is how readily the non-American strains are absorbed.

Every year-end wrap-up of the past season's release chart offers evidence aplenty that Hollywood has long since supplanted Ellis Island as the emblematic port of entry for offshore talent angling for a piece of the action. However, the 2006 vintage, Oscar-worthy and not, offers a particularly rich sampling of immigrant success stories. It is a testimony to the assimilationist power of the medium, and the business, that the films with the deepest American roots are not always credited to an American name above the title. Consider:

***The Departed*:** Martin Scorcese's latest study of the rituals of American gangsterdom is a mixed-blood crossbreed: a blarney-drenched remake of the Hong Kong crime thriller *Infernal Affairs* (2002) recast with Hollywood stars, set among the Boston Irish, and rendered with the adrenaline energy that has been the Italian-American Scorcese's signature touch since *Mean Streets* (1972). Featuring native Boston sons, actors Matt Damon and Mark Wahlberg, spitting out their distinctive accents in authentic area locations (a commitment to verisimilitude that is no minor attraction when the chameleon cities of Canada are usually hired to impersonate stateside metropolises), the film made the tribal national and (judging by its huge popularity overseas) international. Highly acclaimed, the film won the best film and best director Academy Awards this year.

***Dreamgirls*:** Jump-cutting to another American city, Detroit, known for more melodious tribal pastimes, Bill Condon's adaptation of the Broadway smash is the kind of bloated, bombastic, big-screen musical behemoth that

© AP Images/Fritz Reiss

Jennifer Hudson won an Academy Award for her performance in the musical *Dreamgirls*.

© AP Images/Gus Ruelas

Emperor penguins arrive for the Los Angeles premiere of the film *Happy Feet*.

inculcating environmental consciousness, in a kind of kiddie version of Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*.

***Little Miss Sunshine*:** The most kid-centered American film of the year was also the most adult. Not unlike Wim Wenders, co-directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris took inspiration from Huck Finn, Jack Kerouac, and a rack of Hollywood road movies, packed a dysfunctional family into a beat-up Volkswagen van, and lit out for the territory. As always, the destination (California—where else?) is less important than the trip and the passengers along for the ride: a child beauty pageant contestant, a failed motivational speaker, a heroin-snorting grandfather, an alienated intellectual, an alienated teenager, and a wife and mother who holds it all together. Enormously popular—even beloved—stateside, *Little Miss Sunshine* has not fared as well overseas. Hollywood may have perfected a global positioning system of awesome efficiency, but the international swath has also meant a leveling homogeneity. A film that is too verbal, too vernacular, and too nation-specific will not cross borders profitably. Better to cultivate the transnational tagline that all true blockbusters aspire to: "a nonstop roller-coaster ride!."

© AP Images/Twentieth Century Fox, Eric Lee

*Little Miss Sunshine* used a family's cross-country road trip to chronicle their individual stories and changes in family relationships.

only the soundstages of Hollywood could choreograph. A thinly veiled *musical à clef* of the rise of Motown Records and a Supremes-like girl group, the film speaks to the cost/benefit of breaking into the Top Forty radio charts while the civil rights movement unfolds offstage. For Americans, the subtextual undertones of the success story reverberated as rhythmically as the soundtrack: Break-out star Jennifer Hudson, who was voted off the small-screen *American Idol* in 2004, morphed into an authentic big-screen American idol in the musical competition that is *Dreamgirls*. It was a good year for musicals with an American backbeat: The family-friendly *Happy Feet* featured computer-animated penguins gyrating to a rock-and-roll soundtrack and

© AP Images/Michel Spingler

Actresses Meryl Streep (left) and Anne Hathaway attend the premiere of *The Devil Wears Prada* in Deauville, France.

***The Devil Wears Prada*:** Faring better overseas was an impeccably coiffed comedy-melodrama, directed by David Frankel from the novel by Lauren Weisberger, a Cinderella story where the princess wears not a single pair of glass slippers but a wardrobe full of high-end designer clothes. As the golden girl ingenue played by Anne

Hathaway swans down the catwalk of the big screen, sleek, cool, and fabulous, the dragon lady fashionista played by Meryl Streep suffers the sad fate reserved for victims of what film critic Robin Wood diagnosed as the Rosebud syndrome: Even in America, wealth and fame is not enough without heart and character, and the soulless greedmonger will wind up like Charles Foster Kane in *Citizen Kane* (1941), dying alone, pining for the lost innocence of childhood.

© AP Images/Katsumi Kasahara

Director Clint Eastwood is flanked by Japanese actors Ken Watanabe (left) and Tsuyoshi Ihara at the Tokyo world premier of *Letters from Iwo Jima.*

***Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*:** Clint Eastwood's ambitious double bill was a roll of the dice unprecedented in Hollywood history, two separate films telling the same story from behind two different enemy lines. The staggered-release twinpack ranked high on the year-end "Ten Best" lists from elite film critics, but neither film was embraced by the American audience, for whom World War II is a sacred site, never an exercise in futility or moral equivalence, always a passage to celebrate.

Ironically, or appropriately, foreign-born artists read the American pulse more accurately than Eastwood, the iconic American actor-auteur. Like previous generations of fresh-off-the-boat émigrés, they brought their baggage from overseas, but quickly learned the lingo of the locals and achieved both critical and commercial renown.

***The Queen*:** The stateside success of Stephen Frears's modern-day costume drama reflects the longstanding American fascination with English royalty, but the byplay between a democratic ethos of feel-your-pain (Prime Minister Tony Blair) and a regal fidelity to stiff-upper-lipness (Queen Elizabeth II) sides in the end with the unexpected party as each reacts to the death of Princess Diana. Counterintuitively, the queen's traditional stoicism proves more ennobling than the easy tears shed by a celebrity culture.

© AP Images/Luca Bruno

Academy Award winner Helen Mirren is featured on this poster for *The Queen* at the Venice Film Festival.

***United 93*:** A British director also helmed what was, for many Americans, the most resonant and wrenching experience of the year in film. Paul Greenglass's inside-the-cockpit thriller was the first feature-length film to depict in detail the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Low-tech and *cinema verité* in style, unspooling virtually in real time, the film needed no star power to hit a raw nerve in the American body politic. To see *United 93* in a movie theater stateside was to receive a collective gut-punch, a bracing *memento mori* whose impact, I suspect, did not transfer to theatrical venues beyond American shores.

***Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan:*** No discussion of the impact of guest workers in American cinema would be complete without mentioning the crudest and rudest arrival hailing from the normally well-mannered United Kingdom, the agent provocateur Sacha Baron Cohen, whose twisted road movie traces the classic frontier trajectory from East (New York) to West (in search of actress and model Pamela Anderson). Though not exactly Alexis de Tocqueville, Cohen's clueless alter ego ends up

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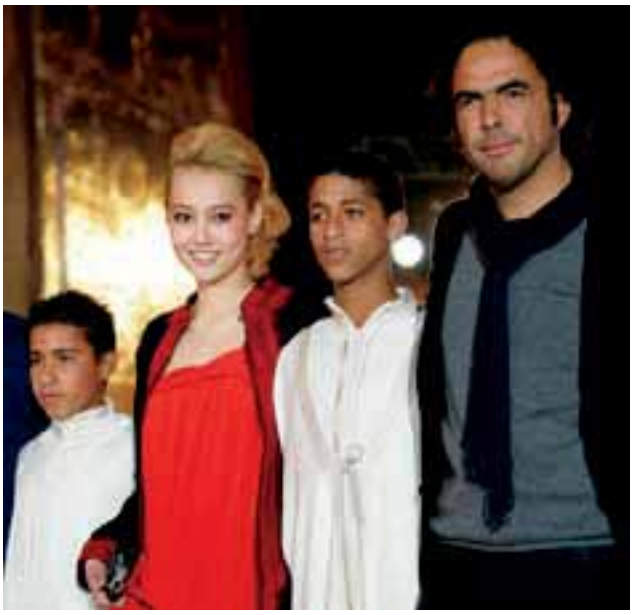
(Left to right) Mexican filmmakers Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro, and Alejandro González Iñárritu attend New York's Gotham Awards.



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(Left to right) Actors Boubker Alt El Caid of Morocco, Rinko Kikuchi of Japan, and Tarchani Said of Morocco and director Alejandro González Iñárritu of Mexico at the Marrakesh International Film Festival screening of *Babel*.

showing Americans sides of themselves heretofore unseen, namely their limitless tolerance for the most intolerant of foreigners.

***Pan's Labyrinth*, *Babel*, and *Children of Men*:** The serendipity of three Mexican directors (Guillermo del Toro, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Alfonso Cuarón) producing three high-profile marquee titles about, respectively, a nightmarish past, an interlocking present, and a dystopian future provided the most obvious proof of the infiltration of foreign agents into Hollywood. Dubbed "The Three Amigos" by the entertainment press, the trio brought a painterly texture and a tragic sense to the glittering veneer and chirpy optimism of the American mainstream, a south-of-the-border sobriety where heroes die in the end and the world is a very nasty place impervious to human intervention.

Of all the American movies from 2006, born in the USA or foreign-made, *Babel*, a film that belies its title, may be the best predictor of Hollywood's multilingual, multinational future: a congenial mélange of cross-cultural elements in casting, creators, location sites (Morocco, California, Mexico, and Japan), and sensibilities. Returning a payment in kind, the foreigners are colonizing American movies. ■

*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*

# Fields of Dreams: American Sports Movies

David J. Firestein

© AP Images/Ric Feld

Matthew Fox (left) plays one of the coaches in *We Are Marshall*, the inspirational true story of a university football team's rebuilding after a tragic plane crash killed 75 members of the team and coaching staff in 1970.

*Reflecting Americans' love for sports of all kinds, U.S. filmmakers turn repeatedly to sports themes to convey messages much larger than the stories themselves. David J. Firestein is a foreign service officer currently assigned to the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State. The author of three books and some 130 published articles, Firestein has taught at Moscow State University of International Relations (MGIMO), the University of Texas (Austin), and George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.*

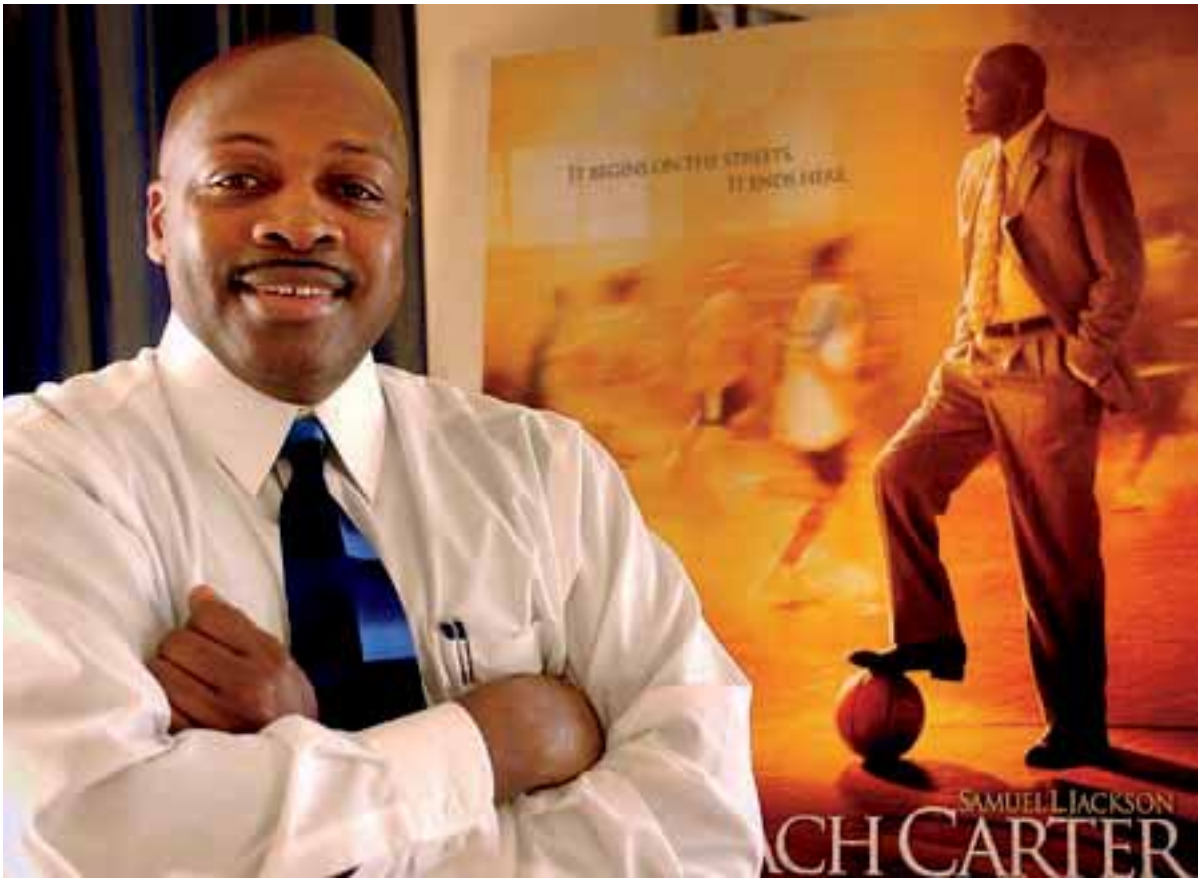
There are few, if any, countries in the world in which sports—not a sport but sports in general—permeate national life to the degree that they do in the United States. Sports are part of the very fabric of American life, discourse, and lexicon, so much so that it is commonplace to hear prominent national leaders speak about matters of state with reference to such sports metaphors as "throwing up a Hail Mary," "scoring a slam dunk," "playing hardball," and "hitting below the belt." Indeed, the little black presidential briefcase that holds the codes necessary to launch U.S. nuclear forces is referred to as "the football."

The centrality of sports in American life is amply reflected in contemporary American cinema. For decades, U.S. moviemakers have successfully mined sports to produce some of the most inspiring, poignant, exciting, and memorable American movies ever made. This tradition started in the first half of the 20th century, but it remains vibrant today. Just in the past few years, Hollywood has produced popular and critically acclaimed films featuring virtually every major sport, from football, basketball, baseball, and hockey, to boxing, horse racing, and even surfing. Since the mid-1970s, four U.S. sports

films have won Academy Awards, or Oscars; most recently, *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), the Clint Eastwood film about a female boxer, won four Oscars, including the one for best picture (an honor the film shares with just two other sports movies). Though American sports movies make use of a common vehicle to explore the fullness of American life and the nuances of human psychology, they tell us many different things about the values that are important to Americans.

American football, always an important subgenre of U.S. sports cinema, has overtaken baseball in recent years as the sport most frequently featured in U.S. films. The last several years have seen the release of a plethora of serious, high-quality football movies that have explored such diverse themes as overcoming adversity (*We Are Marshall*, 2006); working hard to achieve your dreams (*Invincible*, 2006); the unrelenting pursuit of excellence (*Friday Night Lights*, 2004); the power of sports to heal racial/class divides and build communities (*Remember the Titans*, 2000); and the triumph of an athlete's innate competitive spirit and innocence over the crass commercialism and cynicism of the U.S. professional sports industry (*Any Given Sunday*, 1999). As diverse as these themes are, an overarching message about football emerges from these recent films: Football—in its epic scale, over-the-top pomp, gritty attitude, and, yes, hard hitting—is the most complete and vivid sports metaphor for American life itself.

There has been a relative paucity of recent American films about basketball and baseball, the second and third most popular spectator sports in the United States. The two most successful American basketball films of recent years, both based on inspiring true stories, address themes of racial reconciliation (*Glory Road*, 2006) and teamwork and self-respect (*Coach Carter*, 2005). Another American basketball classic (*Hoop Dreams*, 1994), one of the relatively few documentaries in the sports film genre, painted a compelling portrait of inner-city American life and the power—and real-world limitations—of dreams. In their own ways, the two more recent basketball films make




© AP Images/Tony Gutierrez

Ken Carter, a high school basketball coach, poses in front of the poster for the 2005 film that told the true story of his work. Samuel L. Jackson played Coach Carter in the movie.

the same point: whatever the color of our skin, whatever our rung on the socioeconomic ladder, we can do great things when we commit ourselves to a larger team and a loftier goal. *Hoop Dreams* tells us that, even so, it's probably not going to be easy. Meanwhile, the one major American baseball movie of the last few years (*The Rookie*, 2002), also inspired by a true story, reminds us, in true American fashion, that you're never too old to reach for your dreams, whatever the odds against realizing them.

© AP Images/Ed Reinke

Real-life jockey Gary Stevens, shown here preparing for the Kentucky Derby in 2003, played a jockey in the film *Seabiscuit*, set in the 1930s.

Hollywood has long demonstrated a fascination with boxing. The three major boxing films produced in recent years (*Rocky Balboa*, 2006; *Cinderella Man*, 2005; and *Million Dollar Baby*, 2004) are all classic underdog stories (while *Million Dollar Baby* explores other, more complex themes, as well). The underdog theme—a perennial favorite of U.S. producers of sports films—also extends to the Olympic hockey rink (*Miracle*, 2004) and the horse racing track (*Seabiscuit*, 2003), in which athletes (and, in *Seabiscuit*, a racehorse) achieve stunning victories in the face of overwhelming odds.

Collectively, these movies say a lot about American values, but they strike a chord with foreign audiences, as well. That's because these films, at their core, are less about sports than they are about that part of each of us that yearns to take the field, give our all, and live our dreams. ■

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*For further information on the relationship between sports and American society, see the 2003 eJournalUSA, "Sports in America," at http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/1203/ijse/ijse1203.htm.*

# Coming to America

Timothy Corrigan

© AP Images/Mark Avery

Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* was one of the foreign films nominated for an Academy Award in 2007. It won Oscars in three categories.

*Foreign films achieved a high level of distinction and visibility in the United States this year, but the international movie scene has been long in development. The author traces the roots of this phenomenon and discusses the reasons for "the increasingly accented cinema seen in America." Timothy Corrigan is a professor of English and director of cinema studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and the author of several books, including most recently* The Film Experience *(2004), written with Patricia White.*

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the 79th Annual Academy Awards, held in February 2007, has been the multiple nominations of three Mexican films: Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel,* Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men,* and Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*. The fact that only the last of these was nominated in the best foreign film category and that several other foreign films appeared in mainstream categories—such as the nominations for best actress of Helen Mirren in the British production *The Queen* and Penélope Cruz in the Spanish film *Volver*—suggest a decidedly global range to what Hollywood has chosen to honor. Also suggestive of this foreign migration into Hollywood's 2007 Oscar ceremony is that American icon Clint Eastwood's *Letters from Iwo Jima,* nominated for best picture and best director this year, is primarily a Japanese-language film.

Certainly the modern world has grown smaller and more familiar in many ways, and the allure of exotic populations and locales, such as the Mongolian landscapes in *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (2003), still aims to tap the traditional curiosity of movie audiences about other places and peoples. But the increasingly accented cinema seen in America has other, more concrete forces behind it.

## Birth of an International Market

However distinctive and visible this year's array of foreign films in the United States, America's complicated relationship with other film cultures is hardly new. Since the first public projection of movies in France in 1895, a key dynamic in film history has been the showdowns

© AP Images/Katsumi Kasahara

Clint Eastwood's *Letters from Iwo Jima* was not categorized as a foreign-language film, despite being primarily in Japanese.

and negotiations between the U.S. movie culture and overseas production companies and theater markets. The establishment of the Motion Pictures Patents Company in 1908, under the leadership of Thomas Edison (American inventor of the motion picture camera), aimed explicitly to limit the distribution of foreign films in the United States. Later, in the wake of World War I and with the American movie industry's growing world dominance, Hollywood globalization would reach into a floundering German economy to create the 1926 Parufamet Agreement. American film studios Paramount and MGM and the German studio Ufa agreed not only to allow Hollywood access to the German exhibition markets but also to open the door for German talent to immigrate to the United States (including *Casablanca* director Michael Curtiz and Swedish star Greta Garbo).

As America's cultural expansion grew after World War II, the Paramount Decrees of 1948 laid a foundation that would gradually but profoundly alter the direction of American movie culture and lead to the international film scene today. These decrees effectively broke up the monopolistic hold of the major Hollywood studios on the American marketplace. As a result, through the 1950s and early 1960s, both independent U.S. productions and, eventually, foreign films started to make their way into U.S. theaters. Led by films from Sweden's Ingmar Bergman, France's Francois Trufffaut, and Italy's Michelangelo Antonioni among many others, this new wave of foreign films appealed especially to an emerging demographic of youth and academic audiences curious about other cultures, but over the next several decades interest spread through an expanding population of U.S. audiences.

The postwar trends in the global expansion of Hollywood's market and the subsequent growing ubiquity and popularity of international cinema in America have today assumed their own specific economic and technological rationale and shapes. Most importantly perhaps, the contemporary explosion of international film festivals has been one of the most visible engines in announcing and supporting foreign films to an international market, most notably for the highly lucrative American theater and DVD (digital video disc) circuits.

The first film festival, the still influential Venice Film Festival, began in 1932, and today, from Cannes and Berlin to Toronto and Telluride (Colorado), the festival circuit offers anywhere from 400 to 1,000 events in cities around the world, where films such as *Life Is Beautiful* (1998) from Italy and *Run Lola Run* (1998) from Germany are catapulted into world markets after receiving awards at these festivals. Just as the original Venice festival aimed to promote its own and other national cultures through films, festivals today frequently act as conduits for offering insights into cultures outside national cinemas and Hollywood, become barometers for worldwide critical

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An international audience gathers for the film festival in Locarno, Switzerland.

© AP Images

A scene from Michael Curtiz's classic film, *Casablanca*.

© AP Images/Chitose Suzuki

Crowds line up to see some of the films of the Toronto Film Festival.

attention, and at the same time often attract funding and distribution for smaller, more creative films.

Contemporary Iranian and Korean cinema are a case in point. With little support or popularity at home, Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry,* the 1997 Grand Prize winner at Cannes, led a spate of contemporary Iranian films into Europe and the United States. After Park Chan-wook's *Old Boy* (2003), a wildly successful example of "Asian extreme cinema," garnered numerous awards from festivals in Hong Kong, Cannes, and Stockholm, the film not only found art-house distribution in the United States but landed Park in the *New York Times* magazine. Thanks to festival recognition, Hou Hsiao-hsien's films (such as 1993's *The Puppetmaster* and 1998's *Flowers of Shanghai*) found financial support and thus visibility in the United States, and when Walter Salles's Brazilian film *Central Station* (1998) won a prize at the Sundance Film Festival, its future in America suddenly became brighter.

## Cultivating Audiences

Related to these new sources for exposure and word-of-mouth promotion is a second important factor in contemporary migration of foreign films to the United States: namely, since 1990, the growing popularity and profitability of the so-called New Independent Cinema and the ability of films from overseas to, in a sense, ride the coattails of this movement. Fostered by distribution (and later production) companies such as Miramax, films by Quentin Tarantino and Jim Jarmusch offered audiences stories and styles different from many of the tired Hollywood formulas, and as this taste for the offbeat, distinctive, and new grew through the 1990s, these companies learned to seek out (usually through the festival circuit), to import, and sometimes to repackage foreign films that would be aimed at specially targeted audiences. Films like *The Crying Game* (1992) and *Il Postino* (1994) set new box-office records for foreign films in U.S. markets. *The Crying Game* offered a paradigm for a promotional campaign that turned a moderately successful British film about an IRA terrorist into a U.S. mini-blockbuster about sex and secrets.

Following the success of companies like Miramax, the major U.S. studios have, not surprisingly, created (or re-created) their own "specialty film divisions" to both discover and distribute independent and foreign films. One such division, for example, Sony Pictures Classics, currently distributes Zhang Yimou's romantic martial arts film *House of the Flying Daggers* (2004), Pedro Almodovar's offbeat Spanish suspense film *Volver* (2006), and Michael Haneke's French/Austrian/German thriller *Caché* (2005). Another company, Fox Searchlight (parented by 20th Century Fox), offers highly successful British imports like *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and *Notes on a Scandal* (2006).

Both as a product and a creator of these trends, contemporary movies are more and more coproduced by a variety of international companies, with each investment potentially promising a wider distribution around the world and in the United States. Hardly a new practice, coproduction frequently offers U.S. companies involvement in foreign movies from the ground up and often assures an English-language release in the United States. Like the Parufamet Agreement of 1926, coproductions and financing encourage shared directors, producers, technicians, and stars like Roberto Begnini, Ang Lee, Guillermo del Toro, Rutger Hauer, Penelope Cruz, and Michael Ballhaus. And with this cross-fertilization of personnel comes more and more blending

of genres and plots, easily recognized, if not as exclusively American, at least as "international" in a sense that accommodates American tastes—such as Luc Besson's *La Femme Nikita* (1990), a fast-action crime thriller.

This is not to say, I'd insist, that recent movies from overseas have simply adapted to American genres. On the contrary, at least as important is how other national cinemas have offered American audiences new kinds of stories and characters outside the formulas of Hollywood. It is hard to imagine the Oscar-winning *Crash* (2005) or its critical reception without Iñárritu's far more daring precedent *Amores perros* (2000).

© AP Images/Paul Sakuma

Netflix distributes DVDs through the mail, revolutionizing home video access.

## Digital Distribution

A final and particularly contemporary factor in the accenting of American cinema is the digital convergence of film production and distribution. With the now and future digital revolution at hand, the freedoms and openings once offered by home-video distribution in the 1970s and 1980s are now being translated into the new opportunities of contemporary DVD and Internet distribution. While video and DVD sales long ago surpassed theatrical ticket sales, what often gets overlooked in this shift is how the video and DVD market allowed a more targetable and more open market for the distribution of foreign films. If most foreign films are rarely seen theatrically (except in the very limited art-house circuit), the expansion of home video through the

© AP Images/Jae C. Hong

It is now possible to watch a film on a mobile phone.

expansion of DVD technology makes more and more foreign films available to all audiences and, perhaps more significantly, allows distributors to target DVDs to local communities with particular interests in, for instance, Asian, European, or African cinema.

Indian cinema, the films of "Bollywood," is an especially powerful example. *Bride and Prejudice,* an Indian remake of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice,* might be seen in alternative cinemas around the country in 2004, and Mira Nair's recent films, including *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), have distinguished themselves critically and economically in the United States during the past 15 years. Yet it is the more-or-less open and continual access to a potentially unlimited variety of Indian, and other foreign, films through neighborhood and on-line video rentals that assures an accented chatter about films in America. With subscription services like Netflix providing an even easier and globally wider choice of films, which the inevitable Internet downloading of films will only facilitate in the near future, it's difficult to resist today the romantic and utopian tendency to see again, as in 1895, the movies as, if not the universal language of Esperanto, perhaps a multilanguage dialogue in our homes and communities. ■

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*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*

# Film Festivals in the United States

Carolee Walker

Courtesy of Aspen Film, photo by Steve Mundinger

A crowd awaits the start of the 2006 Aspen, Colorado, film festival.

*Public interest in and support for film festivals has grown throughout the United States, giving new filmmakers broad exposure and audiences varied entertainment. Carolee Walker is a staff writer with the Bureau of International Information Programs of the U.S. Department of State.*

In the United States alone, more than 300 film festivals provide moviegoers the chance to see short and feature-length films that might otherwise miss the silver screen. And they offer independent filmmakers, especially young and newly trained artists, the unique opportunity to showcase cutting-edge works and dramatically moving documentaries that might have a positive impact on their careers in the film industry.

Film festivals serve two important purposes: They shine the light on independent filmmakers who need more exposure before studios will hire them to make commercial pictures, and they offer cinema enthusiasts and local communities a way to come together to talk about ideas. Film festivals come in an array of sizes and shapes, from the internationally well-known Cannes Film Festival in France and Sundance Film Festival in Utah, to such lesser-known events as the Silk Screen: Asian American Film Festival in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the Cascade Festival of African Films in Portland, Oregon. Some festivals have been around for decades, while others are relatively new, like the three-year-old Stories From the Field, a documentary film festival sponsored by the United Nations that is as much about conquering world problems as it is about effective filmmaking. (For further information about Stories From the Field, visit *http://www.mcainy.org/common/11040/?clientID=11040*.)

Although most film festivals use a combination of jury and audience awards to put some films and filmmakers in the spotlight, they also show films that are not entered into competition. Usually this is a way for films to be marketed to distributors and for independent directors and lesser-known actors to gain exposure. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which presents the Academy Awards each year, recognizes the grand prize winners of 60 film festivals in the United States and worldwide and awards Oscars to the best live-action short film and the best documentary among them.

Increasingly, film festivals are becoming annual events, and many of the most successful festival organizers have been able to attract paid memberships from film enthusiasts who sign up to see whatever festival coordinators choose to showcase. For Americans, in

particular, this amounts to a leap of faith because members pay in advance year after year. In many cases, membership dues merely entitle film enthusiasts to purchase tickets in advance. One incentive for Americans to become members of film festivals is that they are often a key venue to see foreign films in the United States. Directors and actors who attend screenings often participate in workshops, adding to the festive atmosphere and helping communities and organizations increase much-needed support. Because of the growing community involvement and interest in film festivals, the events have also become popular sponsorship opportunities for local businesses and large companies.

A listing of film festivals of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences is available at *http://www.oscars.org/80academyawards/rules/rules_shortfest.html*. ■

## The Box-Office Numbers

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)* has produced a 24-page report that summarizes box-office data, primarily using bold charts and graphs. To access the entire report, "2006 U.S. Theatrical Market Statistics," go to *http://www.mpaa.org/2006-US-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-Report.pdf*.

Highlights of the report include:

- In 2001, the U.S. movie industry's box-office revenues totaled $16.96 billion, with almost half of that, $8.41 billion, produced from domestic (U.S.) audiences and the rest from international audiences.

- In 2006, the U.S. movie industry's box-office revenues totaled $25.82 billion, with just over one-third of that, $9.49 billion, coming from domestic audiences and the rest from international audiences. Both domestic and foreign ticket sales increased from 2005, but the foreign revenues grew more.

- For the first time in 2006, a film earned more than $400 million domestically (*Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*). Films earning between $50 and $99 million grew in number, going from 36 films in 2005 to 45 films in 2006. Overall, films earning more than $50 million went from 56 films in 2005 to 63 in 2006.

- Number of new films released in the United States:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1996 | 420 films |
| 2002 | 449 films |
| 2005 | 535 films |
| 2006 | 599 films |

- Film lovers keep going to the movies, even when they have alternative technology at home. Those who own or have access to four or more other technologies (DVD player, satellite TV, etc.) went to a theater to see a movie about 10 times per year. Those who owned fewer than four alternative technologies went to the movies only seven times per year.

- U.S. movie admissions were at an all-time high in 2006, with nearly 1.5 billion tickets sold.

*MPAA is a nonprofit organization formed by six large studios to work on behalf of the film industry. On its Web site *[http://www.mpaa.org/]*, MPAA describes itself as "The Voice and Advocate of the American Motion Picture, Home Video and Television Industries."

# Photo Gallery

## Of Young Filmmakers

© AP Images/Francois Mori

### Miranda July

Miranda July was born in 1974. According to her official Web site *[mirandajuly.com/about]*, "Miranda July [July is not her original family name] is a filmmaker, performing artist and writer. She grew up in Berkeley, California, where she began her career by writing plays and staging them at the local punk [rock] club. July's videos, performances, and web-based projects have been presented at sites such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum and in the 2002 and 2004 Whitney Biennials [all three museums are located in New York City]. Her short fiction has been published in the *Paris Review*, *Harper's*, and the *New Yorker*, and a collection of stories is forthcoming from Scribner in May 2007. July created the participatory website *learningtoloveyoumore* with artist Harrell Fletcher and a companion book will be published by Prestel in fall 2007. She wrote, directed and starred in her first feature-length film, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005), which won a special jury prize at the Sundance Film Festival and four prizes at the Cannes Film Festival, including the Caméra d'Or. July recently debuted a new performance, and is currently working on her second movie. She lives in Los Angeles."

### Isabel Coixet

This director, writer, producer, and occasional actress was born in Spain in 1960. After studying history in college, Isabel Coixet began a career in advertising. Eventually her love of filmmaking merged with the production side of her advertising experience, and she started a film production company. Coixet has made films in several languages with companies in Spain, Canada, France, and the United States. Her first English-language film, *Things I Never Told You*, was made in 1996 and featured an American cast. She has been nominated twice for Spain's Goya Awards, and her films have been included in numerous film festivals, including Sundance.

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## Annie Sundberg

Working in the genres of reality TV, documentary, short, drama, and independent film, this writer, director, producer, and cinematographer has produced a number of award-winning films. Her 2006 film *The Trials of Daryl Hunt*, based on the true story about an African-American man who was wrongfully convicted and imprisoned for years, was nominated for both Independent Spirit and Sundance Grand Jury awards. *The Devil Came on Horseback*, based on a true account of atrocities in Darfur, is due out in 2007.

According to the Dartmouth (College) Alumni in Entertainment and Media Web site *[alum.dartmouthentertainment.org/newsanddocs.html]*, Annie Sundberg "co-produced *In My Corner*, a feature documentary film on the world of amateur boxing and the lives of young men who train in the South Bronx, which premiered nationally as part of PBS's award-winning P.O.V. [point of view] series (1999).

"Her television credits include A&E's [Arts and Entertainment network] "Family Plots"—a documentary series about a family run funeral parlor. As producer and director, she helped launch the series 'Now Who's Boss' for New York Times Television. Ms. Sundberg's producing credits also include the 1996 Academy Award and Emmy winning '*One Survivor Remembers*,' a co-production of HBO [Home Box Office] and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the 1995 ten-part 'History of American Cinema Project' for PBS [Public Broadcasting Service, a member-supported network]. Since starting her work in film as a reader for Miramax, she has worked extensively as a freelance writer and producer. After completing a National Outdoor Leadership School semester in Kenya, Ms. Sundberg taught English language skills through the World Food Programme in Nairobi. She is a graduate of Dartmouth College, where she earned a BA in English Literature."

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## Sarah Polley

The Canadian began her acting career as a child, working in both film and television. Sarah Polley has since moved on to roles in mainly independent films, often playing characters in the midst of tragedy of some sort. She has appeared in two Isabel Coixet films, *Things I Never Told You* and *The Secret Life of Words*. Polley has recently taken up directing, mostly of projects for Canadian television. The 29-year-old has been described as socially conscious, and she has drawn comment as much for the roles she has turned down as for those she has chosen to play. Polley, who makes her home in Toronto, has been nominated for acting awards in Canada and at festivals throughout the United States.

In May 2007, *Away From Her* hit American theaters, earning Polley directorial accolades for her sensitive handling of a love story featuring two couples, each dealing with one partner with Alzheimer's disease. Polley's promising career has achieved another milestone.

© AP Images/Diane Bondareff

## Alfonso Cuarón

Born in Mexico in 1961, Alfonso Cuarón studied film in Mexico then gained experience working with English-language films being shot in Mexico. Over the years he has made a number of films that were adapted from literature, from the children's classic *The Little Princess* and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. In 2007 two of his films were widely heralded: *Pan's Labyrinth*, which he produced, and *Children of Men* (also based on a novel), which he cowrote and directed. *Pan's Labyrinth* was nominated in several categories for Academy and BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) awards, as well as others, winning several awards, and *Children of Men* won several awards for Cuarón in both writing and directing. *Pan's Labyrinth* was produced through his production company, Esperanto Films. Cuarón is often celebrated with friends and countrymen Guillermo del Toro and Alejandro González Iñárritu, who helped bring Mexico's contributions to contemporary world cinema to global audiences. There's no confirmation yet from the studios, but there is talk of Cuarón's returning to the land of Harry Potter to direct the final film of the series. He is reported to have said that working on his first Harry Potter film was a very happy two years, and he would be glad to revisit the experience, depending on the content of the as-yet-unpublished volume.

© AP Images/Jim Cooper

## Noah Baumbach

Noah Baumbach was born in 1969. He has written, directed, and/or appeared in numerous films. His first film, *Kicking and Screaming*, about friends reluctantly graduating from college, premiered at the New York Film Festival in 1996 and claimed many accolades for a first film. After a few films in the late 1990s, Baumbach was more often seen as an author than filmmaker until his 2005 film, *The Squid and the Whale*. Largely autobiographical, the film starred Laura Linney and Jeff Daniels and earned Baumbach nominations for Independent Spirit and Academy Awards. His newest film, *Margot at the Wedding*, is expected to be released in 2007 and stars Nicole Kidman, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jack Black, and John Turturro. His second collaboration with Wes Anderson, *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, is in preproduction. Their previous collaboration, *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou*, was released in 2004 and starred Bill Murray and Owen Wilson. Baumbach is the son of an author and a critic and grew up in New York.

## Gabriele Muccino

Born in 1967, Gabriele Muccino attended film school in Rome and has become a successful filmmaker in his native Italy. His film *The Last Kiss* (*L'ultimo bacio*) won an award at the Sundance Film Festival in 2002 that may have helped bring his talent to American attention, introducing him to his next phase of filmmaking. He has drawn acclaim for English-language projects, including the 2006 film, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, which earned an Oscar nomination for actor Will Smith. Muccino is currently working on a television series and is in preproduction on a film entitled *Man and Wife*, which is reported to be about an immigrant's love for the United States, and a film entitled *A Little Game Without Consequence* that will star Jim Carrey and Cameron Diaz.

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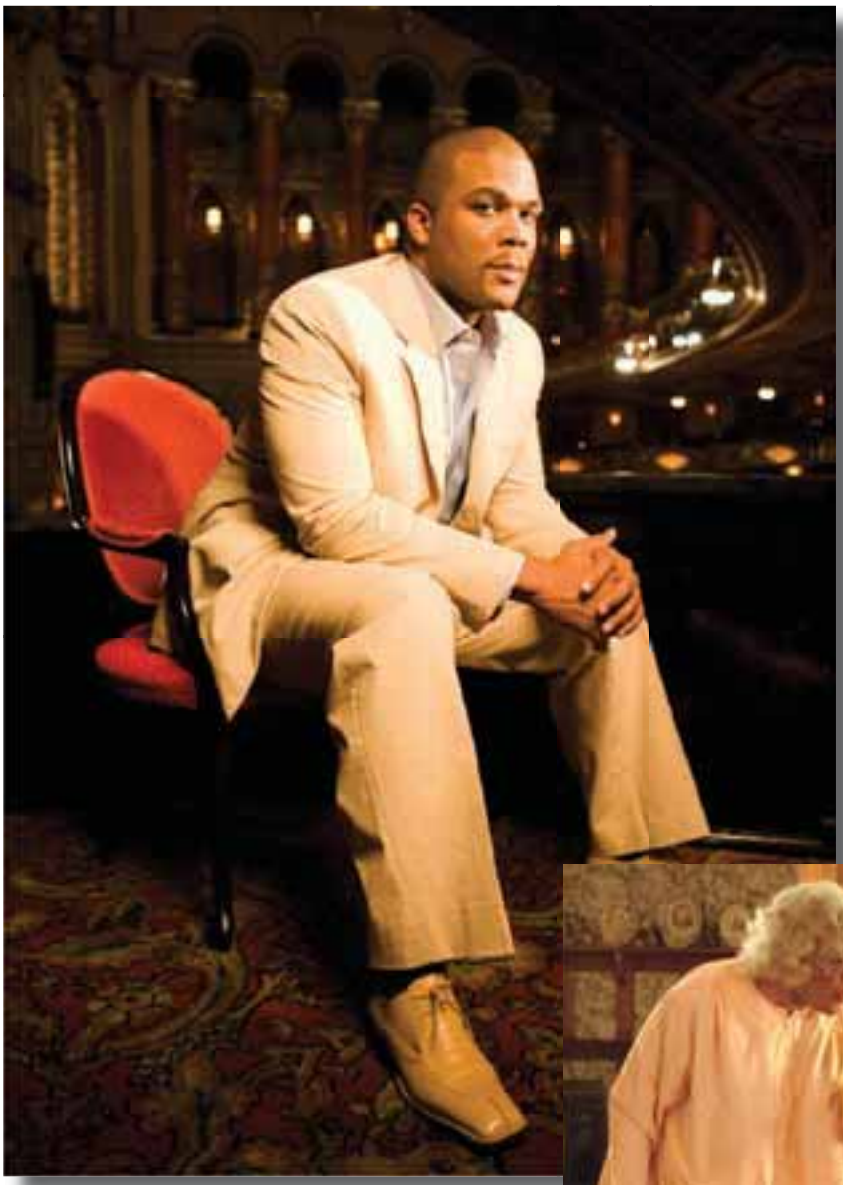

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Courtesy of Liongate, photo by Alfeo Dixon

At right: Tyler Perry as Madea in a scene from *Madea's Family Reunion (2006).*

## Tyler Perry

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1969, Tyler Perry's childhood included poverty, abuse, and hardship. In 1990 he saw an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* during which Winfrey advised people to process their difficult backgrounds through writing about them. Perry's writing eventually became his first plays. Today the award-winning playwright, author, actor, producer, and director is primarily known for his plays and films about day-to-day dilemmas of African-American life. In the first screen adaptation of one of his plays, Perry played three characters, and he continues to appear in subsequent films.

Perry's films, which reach back to African-American urban theater traditions, have been characterized as morality plays, and they often feature a prominent female character whose wisdom and conscience humorously guide the other characters. Perry drew from the influence of his mother and an aunt to create this leading character, nicknamed "Madea," and he plays her with humor, finely attuned to the culture of her community and that of his largely African-American audience.

The persona of Madea is also prominent in his first book, *Don't Make a Black Woman Take Off Her Earrings: Madea's Uninhibited Commentaries on Love and Life*. Published in 2006, it spent several weeks atop the New York Times best seller list for nonfiction and won prestigious Quill Awards that year in both best humor book and book of the year categories. At any given time, Perry may have several plays in production, movies in the theater, and television shows in the works. According to his official Web site, *www.tylerperry.com*, Perry currently has two television series under production, *House of Payne* and *Meet the Browns*, scheduled to appear on cable television in 2007 and 2008. His most recent film, *Daddy's Little Girls*, was released in February 2007.

© AP Images/Franka Bruns

## Will Smith

As a child in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Will Smith earned the nickname "the Prince" for charming his friends. According to his official Web site *[www.willsmith.net]*, at age 12 he began performing rap music, and by 16 he had become "The Fresh Prince," a well-known rapper, often performing with his friend "Jazzy Jeff."

At the same time, Smith was gaining attention for his acting; at age 22 he moved to California to star in a comedy television series called *The Fresh Prince of Belair* (Belair is an affluent community near Los Angeles, California). By the time the series ended six years later, Smith had begun working in film, and today he has become one of the most successful actors in Hollywood, having demonstrated his dramatic and comedic range in such films as *Ali*, the life story of boxer Mohammed Ali; *Men in Black*; *Hitch*; *Bad Boys*; and his 2006 film, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, for which he earned an Oscar nomination and won numerous awards, including an NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) Image Award. The success of *The Pursuit of Happyness* was particularly sweet because it was a production of Smith's film and television production company, Overbrook Entertainment, which he began with a business partner and which has already produced a number of hit films, and because the movie featured his eight-year-old son, Jaden (pictured with his father).

In April 2007 the weekly newsmagazine *Newsweek* declared the 38-year-old actor, musician, producer, husband, and father the "most powerful actor on the planet," in part due to his reported worldwide career box-office earnings of $4.4 billion. When interviewed for the *Newsweek* article, one studio head is reported to have said about Smith's popularity, "…There's Will Smith and then there are the mortals."

© AP Images/John Smock

## Lucy Liu

Born in New York to parents who had emigrated from Taiwan, Lucy Liu did not learn English until age five. After high school, she attended the University of Michigan, earning a degree in Asian language and culture. Near the end of her college career, Liu tried out for and won a role in a stage production of *The Wizard of Oz*, and her acting career was launched. Today, the 38-year-old has quite an acting resume, including voices for several animated films, a regular role in the television series *Ally McBeal*, and roles in a number of films, including *Kill Bill I* and *II* and a starring role in *Charlie's Angels* and its sequel. Liu has also started producing films, including documentaries. She starred in one of her productions, *3 Needles*, in which she played an HIV-positive woman in China.

A renaissance woman, Liu is an artist whose works have had three gallery shows. She practices martial arts, plays a musical instrument, skis, and climbs rocks. She speaks fluent Chinese, as well as some Japanese, Italian, and Spanish. Liu traveled to Pakistan and Lesotho in her role as an ambassador for the U.S. Fund for UNICEF, and she won an Asian Excellence Award for her visibility as an Asian American in the media.

## Sofia Coppola

Born to famed filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola in 1971, Sofia Coppola arrived just in time to make her movie debut as the infant being baptized in his film *The Godfather*. By *The Godfather: Part III* in 1990, she had moved up to the role of Mary Corleone. Sofia Coppola pursued an acting career, first as a child (often under the name Domino Coppola) and then as a teen and adult, but by the 1990s she had followed her father into the roles of producer and director. The 2004 film *Lost in Translation* earned her a best director Oscar nomination, making her only the third woman and the first American woman to be so honored. Her 2006 film, *Marie Antoinette,* updated the story with contemporary music, a reflection of one of Coppola's passions. It was nominated for numerous awards, including the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, where it won the Cinema Prize of the French National Educational System. *Marie Antoinette* also won an Academy Award for best achievement in costume design.

© AP Images/Dima Gavrysh

## Salma Hayek

© AP Images/Seth Wenig

Born in 1966 in Mexico, Salma Hayek has turned talent, beauty, and intelligence into a highly successful career as an actress, producer, and director in productions in Mexico, the United States, and other countries. After becoming a television and film star in Mexico, Hayek came to the United States to learn that, at that time, there were limited roles for Latin actresses in American films. Through perseverance, talent, and a bit of personal activism, the actress, who is part Lebanese, began to win bigger and more diverse roles. At the same time, and perhaps partly as a result of a desire to ensure better roles for herself and other actresses, she moved into the field of producing. Her first feature film, *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (1999), was shown at the Cannes Film Festival and was Mexico's entry for the Academy Award for best foreign film.

Hayek won many accolades for her portrayal of the legendary Mexican artist Frida Kahlo in *Frida*, a film she also produced. The film was nominated for six Academy Awards. Other films include *Fools Rush In*; *In the Time of Butterflies*; *The Wild, Wild West*; *Desperado*; *From Dusk Till Dawn*; and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*.

One of Hayek's biggest impacts has been made on the small screen, with her adaptation and production of an American version of the Colombian television program *Yo soy Betty La Fea*. The hit show *Ugly Betty*, in which Hayek has a recurring role, has won Image, Golden Globe, and Peabody Awards and has been praised for raising the visibility of minority characters and teaching audiences, especially young girls, that appearance is not the most important or valuable characteristic.

© AP Images/Markus Schreiber

## Minnie Driver

Born in London in 1970, Minnie Driver spent part of her childhood in Barbados. She was educated in England and attended the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art. Driver started with a music career, switched primarily to acting for a while, and now balances the two. Her music credits include both singer and songwriter. Her film work includes *Circle of Friends*, *Return to Me, Grosse Pointe Blank, The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Good Will Hunting*, for which she received an Academy Award nomination for best supporting actress. She had a recurring role on the television series *Will and Grace*, and in 2007 she began a new series, *The Riches*, on the FX cable channel. Driver has lent her voice to several animated films, including *The Simpsons Movie*, due out in 2007. She received producer credits for the 1998 film *At Sachem Farm* (released in 2001) and the upcoming *Ripple Effect*, in which she costars with a cast that includes Forest Whitaker and Virginia Madsen.

## Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, and Project Greenlight

© AP Images/Chris Pizzello

According to the Project Greenlight Web site *[www.projectgreenlight.liveplanet.com]*, it's the Hollywood Cinderella story. Two childhood friends struggle to break into acting. After years of hard work, they write their own script (*Good Will Hunting*), star in it, get recognized, become famous, and win an Academy Award for best screenplay. It's the true story of Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, and it inspired them to team up with *American Pie* producer Chris Moore and Miramax Film and Television to create a contest and community that would open the industry to aspiring writers who need a big break.

The first Project Greenlight screenwriting contest (PGL1) started in the fall of 2000 and received more than 7,000 original scripts. The contestants were short-listed to 250, then narrowed down to 30 and finally to ten very excited finalists who got to shoot a scene from their screenplay. The top three participated in an interview process that awarded Pete Jones a $1 million budget to shoot his winning script, *Stolen Summer*.

Within months Jones's completed film, starring Aidan Quinn and Bonnie Hunt, premiered at Sundance, and Jones was on the promotion circuit telling national audiences about his film. In a series that has been nominated for an Emmy three times, HBO documented the journey from script to screen, and Affleck and Damon's goal was realized. Chris Moore said about PGL1, "The show helped people see how hard it is to make a movie, how stressful it is to make your first movie, and finally how rewarding it is when you show it to your first paying audience." PGL2 in 2003 and PGL3 in 2005 expanded into new film genres, giving a professional venue to two more groups of would-be filmmakers.

In their own stellar careers, Affleck (at left, in above photo) and Damon have come a long way from the undiscovered roommates who dreamed up that first screenplay. Damon has played Jason Bourne, a fictional undercover CIA agent, in three films; appeared in *Ocean's 11* and its sequels; been nominated for an Oscar for *Good Will Hunting*; and recently appeared to high acclaim in the hits *The Good Shepherd* and *The Departed*. Affleck has also been busy. He has acted in four films released in 2006 and 2007, including *Hollywoodland* and *Smokin' Aces*, and he is writing, producing, and directing *Gone, Baby, Gone*, due out in 2007.

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## Drew Barrymore

At age eight, Drew Barrymore became a world star for her role as the little sister, Gertie, in Stephen Spielberg's 1982 blockbuster *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, although it was by no means her first role. Her first television commercial was aired when she was only 11 months old. Born into one of Hollywood's legendary families, Barrymore's success carries on the tradition of her Barrymore and Drew relatives, including Lionel, Ethel, and John Barrymore. As a teenager and young adult, Drew Barrymore had a bad-girl persona, inspired by her real problems with substance abuse and the types of parts she chose to play. Beginning in 1996, she reinvented her career, appearing in a series of romantic comedies, including *The Wedding Singer*, *Never Been Kissed*, and *50 First Dates*, in which she often, in a rather complete turnaround, played shy, vulnerable roles. Barrymore also made forays into more dramatic roles, such as that of a teenage mother in a failed marriage in the 2001 film, *Riding in Cars with Boys*. Along the way, Barrymore formed a very successful production company, producing her *Charlie's Angels* films, as well as other projects, including an updated version of Cinderella, *Ever After*. She currently stars with Hugh Grant in the film *Music and Lyrics*.

Drew Barrymore was recently chosen to represent Giles Deacon, a British designer. In a March 2007 interview with the British edition of *Vogue*, Deacon explained his reasons for choosing her: "She's highly intelligent, a great businesswoman, and a role model, but she's also someone that's made mistakes in the past and come through and I think people respond to and respect that."

Exploring her interest in documentary films, Barrymore has directed several projects that garnered critical attention. One project involved her working in and filming child-feeding programs throughout Africa over the course of more than a year. She became increasingly involved in the plight of hungry children and in the work of agencies and groups trying to address this problem. In recognition of her work in this area, in May 2007 the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) named Barrymore their Ambassador Against Hunger and challenged her to use her celebrity to advocate for school feeding projects. One of her first assignments was to attend meetings on Capitol Hill with U.S. senators to lobby on behalf of feeding programs.

Courtesy of Bader ben Hirsi and Arab Film Distribution

## Badr Ben Hirsi

Badr Ben Hirsi grew up in London, where his family went into exile during Yemen's revolution in the 1960s. He earned a master of arts degree in drama production from Goldsmiths College. In 1995 a visit to Yemen led to his making of *The English Sheikh and the Yemeni Gentleman*, which has been described as a lyrical documentary. It follows a British expatriate with years of experience living in Yemen introducing Ben Hirsi to his homeland.

After September 11, 2001, there was much demand for documentaries from Arab filmmakers. Ben Hirsi's projects included the 2003 documentary *Yemen and the War on Terror*, and the 2002 film *9/11 Through Saudi Eyes*, which featured interviews with the families and friends of the hijackers, Arab media representatives, political and military analysts, a psychologist, and others—who gave their perceptions of events and issues involving September 11. This video, the first documentary to scrutinize 9/11 from the Saudi perspective, has been included in the social studies section of the Cambridge Educational Core Curriculum Video Collection, which had described it as "a powerful learning tool for students of political science, the Middle East, and Islam."

Ben Hirsi turned to feature films. His *A New Day in Old Sana'a* won the prize for best Arab film at the 2005 Cairo International Film Festival. It was shown at the Alwan Film Festival in New York. Although Ben Hirsi had received Yemeni government approval and funding at the beginning of the project, the minister of culture would not allow the film to be shown commercially in Yemen; however, it was shown as a British entry in a Sana'a film festival.

Ben Hirsi hopes his experience making films in the Middle East will encourage other Arab filmmakers, particularly in the more conservative Gulf countries, which have little in the way of a cinema tradition. He has seen other young directors who were trained in Europe or North America returning home to make films despite the difficulties. "There's a new wave of Arab film," Ben Hirsi said in an interview on the Netribution Web site. He adds that there is "a new and very exciting style and things are changing."

© AP Images/Felix Films

A scene from one of Ben Hirsi's films set in Yemen.

# The Rise of the Independents

Kenneth Turan

© AP Images/John Bazemore

Delta Airlines sponsored a film festival in 2004 that encouraged thousands of students at eight Georgia college campuses to become filmmakers, some for the first time. Sarah Whitmarsh made a film about her University of Georgia student organization.

*The modern U.S. film industry was born when a few courageous directors spent their own money to produce movies that Hollywood studios were not interested in financing. Public appreciation for these usually low-budget, high-quality films, however, has enabled the independent film industry to grow and thrive. Kenneth Turan is the film critic for the* Los Angeles Times *newspaper and for* Morning Edition *on National Public Radio. He is the author of several books, including* Now in Theaters Everywhere: A Celebration of a Certain Kind of Blockbuster *(2006) and* Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made *(2002).*

Most countries consider themselves fortunate if they have a film industry to call their own. While some areas of the world—India and Hong Kong come immediately to mind—have industries that are thriving, the United States is privileged in having not one but two viable motion picture industries.

The first industry, the one known everywhere movies are shown, is the mainstream Hollywood business. This is where the blockbusters come from, the films like *Spiderman* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* that cost hundreds of millions of dollars to make, earn literally billions of dollars worldwide in return, and spawn sequels almost without end.

But over the past 20-plus years, a parallel American movie industry, the independent film world, has grown up and prospered. It has its own annual festival (Sundance in Park City, Utah) and its own version of the Oscars (the Independent Spirit Awards, held a few days before the Academy Awards). There are even theaters that specialize in showing independent films and actors and directors who do mostly independent work.

That doesn't mean that there isn't something of a symbiotic relationship between these parts of the American movie whole: There very much is. Big Hollywood stars sometimes gain praise for appearing in independent films, the way Tom Cruise did when he took a part in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia*. And independent stars sometimes find a home in bigger Hollywood films, the way indie (independent) stalwart Steve Buscemi did when he appeared in traditional blockbusters such as *Armageddon* and *The Island*. And the independents have also come to be a major force in

that most Hollywood of institutions, the Oscars. Finally, though, two key elements separate the Hollywood movies from the independents. One is budget—how much money a film costs to make—and the other is sensibility and subject matter—what a film is about. As always in the American movie business, the two are linked.

## Emphasis on Artistry

When a film costs $100 million plus, as the average studio film does, it has to appeal to the widest possible audience, not only in the United States but all around the world, in order to make its money back. That means an emphasis on action, the one element that audiences everywhere respond to, as well as on the qualities that appeal to the 25-and-under crowd that is the most frequent moviegoing audience.

Independent films, by contrast, cost less: They can be made for anywhere from a few thousand dollars to $15 to $20 million. Though that may seem like a lot of money, by Hollywood standards it is not. And that lower cost frees these films to be more personal, more idiosyncratic, more concerned with character and story than explosions. These films can care more about artistry and self-expression and less about what will work at the box office, which is one of the reasons that they tend to do better at the Oscars than the big money-makers.

If any American movie fan wanted these kinds of experiences from movies 40 or 50 years ago, the only place he or she could get them was in foreign-language films, which is part of the reason the 1950s and 1960s saw an ever-increasing audience for films from France, Italy, Japan, Scandinavia, and elsewhere.

The independent alternative, which allowed American audiences to experience these kinds of films in their own language, did not arrive out of nowhere. The late actor and director John Cassavetes (the only filmmaker to have a prize named for him at the Independent Spirit Awards) was making independent-style films as early as 1957, when his legendary *Shadows* was shot.

© AP Images/HO

Actor and director John Cassevetes.

© AP Images/Krista Niles

Writer and director John Sayles.

Many people also credit John Sayles's 1980 *The Return of the Secaucus Seven* with starting the modern independent movement. It cost $60,000 to make, which Sayles financed himself, partly with money made rewriting studio films, and it ended up earning $2 million. For the first time it was clear that money as well as creative satisfaction could be had outside the studio system.

## The Independent Establishment

Two other films, both distributed by independent world giant Miramax, the company started by Harvey Weinstein and his brother Bob and named after their parents, made it clear that independent films were here to stay. In 1989, Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape* won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and went on to take the Palme d'Or at Cannes, beginning the international recognition of American independent film.

Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* did that film one better, not only winning the Palme in 1994 but becoming the first independent film to earn more than $100 million at the box office. This underlined the wisdom of the Disney organization when it acquired Miramax the previous year.

Soon every studio, understanding that independent films were too different to be made by their regular personnel, wanted to have an independent arm of its own. Today these specialty divisions (as they are known in the business) include Fox Searchlight, Warner Independent Pictures, Universal Focus, and the venerable Sony Pictures Classics.

The films these specialty divisions make are the top-of-the-line independent films, the ones with the biggest budgets and biggest stars. These films may seem like Hollywood movies, but the reality is that Hollywood isn't making these kinds of films anymore. A case in point is *Little Miss Sunshine*. Though the film was nominated for

© AP Images/Damian Dovarganes

The technology of filming and editing movies is changing, as demonstrated by the new equipment on display at a Las Vegas electronics show.

best picture and its script ended up winning an Oscar in February 2007, it had been turned down numerous times by the major studios.

In addition to having a different sensibility, independent films can reflect different constituencies and tell different kinds of stories. Because independent films don't have to cost a fortune, the indie world is a place where African-American directors like Spike Lee and gay directors like Gregg Araki have been able to make films that deal with marginalized characters but potentially speak to a broad audience.

## The Digital Effect

The question of cost has also been a factor in the rise of the documentary side of the independent world. We are living through a time when more independent documentaries are being made and reaching more viewers than ever before. There are several reasons, but the real key is that the inexpensive nature of shooting with digital equipment has placed the means of production in the hands of the filmmakers.

Scott Hamilton Kennedy, a music video and commercial director, is a case in point. He would never have made the well-reviewed *OT: Our Town* if he hadn't met the teacher who was putting on the Thornton Wilder play in a California high school. When she told him about her project, he knew he had to record the experience, no matter what. "I never tried to raise money, or put a crew together," he said. "I knew that if any time was wasted trying to do all that, this moment was going to pass undocumented."

So Kennedy went to the high school with a camera so unimpressive he said it looked like a model you can buy at Circuit City, a consumer electronics chain store. But the unintimidating nature of his equipment enabled the students to relax around him, helping to create an intimacy and trust that is the film's greatest strength. Independence in financing leads to independent thinking, resulting in some of the finest filmmaking America has seen in years. ■

© AP Images/Steve Helber

Filmmakers test equipment in a cathedral in Louisiana. They are producing a documentary entitled *New Orleans Story* about Hurricane Katrina.

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*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*

# Sundance—Supporting the Work of Independent Filmmakers Worldwide

© Mark Maziarz

Cinema fans throng each winter to Park City, Utah, for the Sundance Film Festival events.

*The Sundance Film Festival and its sponsor, the Sundance Institute, offer support and exposure to independent filmmakers from around the globe.*

The 10-day Sundance Film Festival, one of the most respected film festivals in the United States, is presented annually in January in the snowy mountains of Park City, Utah. Originally conceived as a showcase for movies by emerging independent filmmakers, Sundance has grown to include panel discussions, youth programs, online exhibition, and live music. More than 45,000 people from around the world attend the festival each year. Since it began in 1985, several American and international independent films that opened at Sundance have gone on to receive numerous Academy Award nominations and Oscars. The growing prestige of the festival attracts international celebrities to attend the screenings. The quality of the work shown has encouraged many to act in and direct independent films, often at salaries well below Hollywood standards.

Jury prizes and audience awards are announced on the last day of the festival in documentary and dramatic categories for both American and international films. Jurors are respected, working artists in the film industry. Awards are given for screenwriting, acting, directing, and cinematography, in addition to special awards. Not all films showcased at the festival are entered into competition; some are selected for special premieres or screenings to attract the attention of distributors, and several short films are screened in different categories and can also be viewed online at the Sundance Film Festival Web site at *http://festival.sundance.org/2007/*.

In 2007, 64 American and international films in dramatic and documentary genres were screened at Sundance, and five dramas made by American directors featured characters speaking mainly in

© AP Images/Kevork Djansezian

In addition to fans and the media, directors and actors attend the festival. Here, actresses Toni Collette of Australia (left) and Abigail Breslin of the United States arrive for the screening of *Little Miss Sunshine*.

Spanish, Hindi, Korean, Portuguese, or Muskogee (an American Indian language). Most of the more than 3,000 feature films submitted for consideration focused on global issues. Companies with a major presence at Sundance include France's Gaumont, Celluloid Dreams, and Wild Bunch; Germany's Bavaria Film International; Denmark's Trust Film Sales; and Fortissimo Films, an international company with offices in Amsterdam, London, Sydney, and Hong Kong. Festival director Geoffrey Gilmore has been widely quoted as saying that the Sundance Film Festival consciously made a move to increase its international focus when it introduced competitive prizes for non-American features and documentaries in 2005.

The film festival is sponsored by the Sundance Institute, which was founded in 1981 by the award-winning actor and director Robert Redford and is also located in Park City. The institute is important not only because it exhibits films that are daring and cutting-edge in both style and subject matter, but because it provides a vast international marketplace for small and large distributors and sales companies to acquire independent films for exhibition on movie screens around the world.

The Sundance Institute sponsors numerous year-round screenings and programs that support the work of independent filmmakers, screenwriters, composers, playwrights, and theater artists. The documentary film program encourages the exploration of innovative nonfiction storytelling and promotes the exhibition of documentary films to increasingly broader audiences. Each year about 25 emerging filmmakers from the United States and abroad participate in the institute's popular feature film program, which supports independent projects through its screenwriters' and filmmakers' labs and its post-production project. The program also provides ongoing creative and practical advice and financial support through fellowship opportunities. The film music program brings emerging composers to the institute, and the theater program nurtures the diversity of artistic expression among theater artists and supports original and creative work. The institute also maintains an independent film collection at the University of California, Los Angeles. ■

© AP Images/Kevork Djansezian

Actor/director and Sundance founder Robert Redford.

# A Film Festival in Your Living Room

Daniela Cossali/ITVS

A scene from *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill* from *Independenent Lens.*

*Two documentary television series bring stories from around the world to home viewers in the United States and eight other countries, and producers plan to expand their reach in coming years.*

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) *[http://www.itvs.com]* has produced a series of documentary films that is shown in the United States on member stations of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). Called *Independent Lens: A Film Festival in Your Living Room,* the series includes films of both U.S. and foreign origin. Information about the program can be found at *http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/about.html*. One critic called the series "the greatest showcase for independent film on television today" (especially for those without access to the Sundance Channel, which is available on only some cable systems).

Each season the series includes stories made by filmmakers working and living outside the United States. More and more of these movies are made by filmmakers who are not U.S. citizens, telling stories about their country, their culture, and their people. The 2006-2007 season of *Independent Lens* included the following international films: *Shadya,* the story of a 17-year-old Muslim girl living in Israel, who must balance her religious commitments and others' expectations as she succeeds as a world champion in karate; *Motherland Afghanistan,* in which one of the filmmakers looks at her own father's struggles as an obstetrician in Afghanistan, where nearly one in seven women die in childbirth; and *Revolucion: Five Visions,* the stories of five Cuban photographers who have lived and worked for more than four decades, covering everything from the Cuban Revolución to contemporary life in their country.

Judy Irving/ITVS

*The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill* will air this year on the television series *Independent Lens.*

Courtesy of Budoco, Ltd./ITVS

*Shadya* is about a 17-year-old female karate world champion who lives in a small Muslim village in northern Israel.

Other films presented in the current season include *Black Gold; Calicot; China Blue; Democracy on Deadline: The Global Struggle for an Independent Press; Beyond the Call; The World According to Sesame Street; Paris, 1951; The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill; Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room; and The Cats of Mirikitani.*

A number of film celebrities have hosted *Independent Lens* over the years, including the current host, award-winning actor Terrence Howard, who starred in the hit independent films *Hustle and Flow* and *Crash.* Previous hosts have included Edie Falco, Susan Sarandon, Don Cheadle, and Angela Bassett.

Photo Linda Hawkins Costigan/ITVS

*The World According to Sesame Street* is a documentary about international versions of the award-winning children's television series. The movie includes such characters as Kami from the South African program, *Takalani Sesame*.

Offered to foreign audiences, its sister series *True Stories: Life in the USA* is a groundbreaking 16-part documentary series, hosted by Benicio Del Toro, that shares the stories of American people and places with international audiences. Made by independent filmmakers, these films show the richness and complexity of life in the United States, from American Indian reservations to the Mexican border, from surfers to poets, fishermen, and coal miners.

© AP Images/Louis Lanzano

Hosts of *Independent Lens* have included independent film stars such as the current season's host, Terrence Howard, who starred in the independent films *Hustle and Flow* and *Crash.*

Working closely with television broadcasters around the world, *True Stories* makes these programs accessible free of charge to audiences that have little exposure to independent documentaries, offering views of the United States rarely seen in the headline news or commercial media. In 2006 *True Stories* was broadcast on public broadcasting systems in Peru *[http://www.irtp.com.pe]*, Malawi, and Egypt *[http://www.ertu.gov.eg]*. In 2007 the series will expand to include public broadcasting systems in Colombia *[http://www.rtvc.gov.co]*, Bahrain *[http://www.bahraintv.com]*, Indonesia *[http://www.tvri.co.id]*, Bangladesh, and Hong Kong. The series' producers plan to expand the reach each year.

The current season will include *American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawaii*; *Downside Up*; *Family Undertaking*; *First Person Plural*; *In My Corner*; *In the Light of Reverence*; *Kiss My Wheels*; *Larry vs. Lockney*; *Los Angeles Now*; *Maid in America*; *On a Roll: Family, Disability, and the American Dream*; *Outside Looking In: Transracial Adoption in America*; *The Split Horn: Life of a Hmong Shaman in America*; *Summerstock*; *Taking the Heat: The First Women Firefighters of New York City*; and *Troop 1500.* ■

# The Digital Revolution

Steven Ascher

© AP Images/Paul Sakuma

Apple Computer Chief Executive Officer Steve Jobs walks in front of giant, simulated iPods playing different movie clips. In September 2006, Apple launched an online movie service that makes it easier to watch movies at home or on the road.

*Filmmakers first used digital technology in the 1980s to create fantastic new kinds of images for the screen. Since then, increasingly sophisticated tools have made it possible to produce, market, and distribute motion pictures digitally. Steven Ascher is a director of feature-length documentaries, including* So Much So Fast *(2006) and* Troublesome Creek: A Midwestern *(1996), which was nominated for an Academy Award. A new edition of his best-selling text,* The Filmmaker's Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age, *will be published in July 2007.*

In the history of motion pictures there have been decisive moments when a new technology changed everything. In 1927 *The Jazz Singer*—the first "talkie"—marked the beginning of the sound era. Suddenly, silent film stars were out and a new type of star and a new type of story were in, changing how movies were written, filmed, and shown.

Today digital technology is driving a revolution that's even more earthshaking. Young people who have grown up in the Internet era don't realize how seismic the changes have been. Movies—all kinds of media, really—will never be the same.

What digital means technically is that pictures and sounds are converted to digital data (ones and zeros) that can be stored, manipulated, and transmitted by computers. Once in digital form, a world of possibilities opens up.

## A New Reality

The digital era in movies began in the 1980s but picked up momentum around 1990. From the beginning, digital technology was used to create new kinds of images. Filmmaker George Lucas's company, Industrial Light and Magic, pioneered astonishing visual effects that made the most fantastic space stories look stunningly realistic. With programs like Photoshop we could now digitally alter pictures—say, to remove a person or add a building—which changed our basic understanding of photographed reality. In the digital era, statements like "pictures don't lie" and "seeing

is believing" are clearly untrue. Digital editing systems helped shape new filmmaking styles and techniques, such as the use of very short shots, graphics that fly around the screen, and objects that seamlessly transform (morph) into other objects. The look of most television commercials today would not be possible without digital tools.

The 1990s brought an explosion in digital video (DV) and the now-familiar miniDV camcorders that give amateurs the ability to shoot and edit inexpensive, very good-quality video. Independent filmmakers seized DV cameras and used them to make movies that were suddenly being shown on television and at prestigious film festivals. In the traditional Hollywood production model, films are shot with big 35mm film cameras and big crews to handle them. While DV is not up to 35mm quality, it's good enough and cheap enough that a wide range of fiction and documentary projects that would have been impossible, or impossibly expensive, before can be made in DV.

© AP Images/Yesikka Vivancos

Yvonne McCormack Lyons founded the Women's International Film Festival to showcase the work of women filmmakers, who make up only 5 to 7 percent of the profession.

As digital video took off, so did the World Wide Web. At first, Hollywood didn't know what to do with it. *The Blair Witch Project,* a 1999 low-budget thriller shot with small-format video cameras, is credited as the first movie to exploit the Internet's marketing power. By posting hints on the Web that the horror in the film was real, the producers sparked intense debate, helping propel the film to a $248 million worldwide gross. Today, Web sites, blogs, online reviews, and discussions on sites like MySpace.com are essential elements in building "buzz" for a new film.

The Web opens the door to a new model of filmmaking and distribution. The majority of movies are created and distributed by large corporations—such as film studios, television broadcasters, or big distribution companies. However, the Web makes it possible to produce a movie for a specialized audience and sell DVDs (digital video discs) directly to that audience, bypassing the gatekeepers who would have likely rejected the project for lack of broad appeal. Distribution expert Peter Broderick notes that *Reversal*, a drama about high school wrestling, has never been shown in theaters or on TV or even offered in video stores, but it has generated more than a million dollars in sales of DVDs and merchandising over the Web. In *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More,* author Chris Anderson describes how the Web enables producers and distributors to target niche audiences with products that don't sell in high enough volume for traditional retail outlets. The ability to make a profit while producing smaller and more unusual types of productions increases as we move away from selling or renting physical objects like DVDs and toward downloading electronic files.

## Digital Delivery

Meanwhile, recent advances in high-definition television (HDTV) have brought a quantum leap forward in picture and sound quality. If you've been to an electronics store lately, you know how incredibly clear, vivid, and downright huge the new flat-panel screens are. Every frame of digital video is made up of tiny dots of light called pixels; the more pixels, the sharper and better the image, especially when shown on a big screen. Traditional, standard-definition video uses about 345,000 pixels for each frame; the best high-

© AP Images/Paul Sakuma

*Pirates of the Caribbean* is shown on a computer monitor.

© AP Images/Louis Lanzano

Watching a film clip on a mobile phone are Robert Redford (center), John Cooper of the Sundance Institute (left), and Bill Gajda of GSM Association, whose members serve more than 2 billion mobile phone customers worldwide.

definition systems use about 2 million. Once you've seen a beautifully shot, widescreen movie in high definition, you never want to go back to watching old-fashioned standard def again.

High definition is transforming Hollywood movies and TV shows (using camera technology pioneered by, once again, George Lucas). Many types of projects that used to be shot on film are now shot in high definition to save time and money; the quality is now high enough that audiences usually can't tell the difference. Almost every movie today goes through a digital stage at some point in its production.

The Digital Cinema Initiative was put forth by a group of studios to bring digital technology all the way to theaters. Currently, when you go to your local movie theater, chances are you're watching a movie being shown with a film projector. New "4K" digital projectors use almost 9 million pixels and create a gorgeous picture that never gets scratched or dirty. Theaters have resisted investing in the expensive machines, but because studios can save millions by not having to manufacture and ship heavy film prints, they may eventually subsidize the equipment. However, Hollywood is terrified of the potential for piracy when their new releases come out in digital form. Piracy is an enormous problem. When the latest James Bond film opened recently in foreign theaters, the pirated DVD was already available on the street.

But just as theaters are poised to move into the digital era, consumers have an exploding number of options for viewing movies on giant flat-panel screens in their living rooms, on smaller computer screens at their desks, and on tiny iPod or cellphone screens on the street. Digital television—already available with new high-definition and standard-definition channels—will completely replace traditional analog TV in the United States on February 17, 2009. Between video-on-demand, downloads, TiVO, and Webcasts, we'll soon be able to see almost anything, anywhere, anytime. Will this mean the death of one of the great worldwide traditions—going to a theater to watch a movie surrounded by an audience that's laughing and crying along with you?

Yet again, we look to George Lucas as a bellwether. Because releasing a movie theatrically is incredibly risky and expensive, studios are driven to a blockbuster mentality, creating product for the widest possible appeal (or, depending on how you see it, the lowest common denominator). Even so, most films lose money in the

© AP Images/Noah Berger/File

Legendary director and producer George Lucas has led the industry in many technological developments, from the special effects of the *Star Wars* films, to his current vision about future film distribution methods.

theaters. Lucas, the man behind more blockbusters than almost anyone, told *Daily Variety,* "We don't want to make movies. We're about to get into television." Instead of spending $100 million to make a single film and another $100 million to distribute it to theaters, he said, he could make 50 to 60 films for television and Internet distribution. As for future audiences going to theaters, Lucas said, "I don't think that's going to be a habit anymore."

When you consider that digital technology is at its heart simply a way to convert movies to a string of ones and zeros, it's both shocking and amazing to see how it has changed the way movies are made, the stories they tell, where they're shown, how much they cost, and who's watching. Stand by for further developments. ■

*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*

# Hollywood Goes Green

Robin L. Yeager

*The movie industry, from individuals to major studios, is adopting more environmentally friendly practices. Robin L. Yeager is a staff writer with the Bureau of International Information Programs of the U.S. Department of State, and is the editor of* Society & Values.

Making movies can be a messy business, especially from an environmental point of view. "Lights, camera, action" usually means buildings and sets are constructed for temporary use, hundreds of copies of scripts need to be printed, people must be fed and kept either warm or cool, and action scenes often require explosions and pyrotechnics. Lights need power, and everyone and everything has to be driven, flown, or otherwise moved from point to point. Even digital technology results in environmental challenges from the production, use, and disposition of specialized equipment.

As one of the largest industries in southern California, the film business has historically contributed to regional pollution levels. But many in Hollywood are committed to changing how business is conducted. Those interested in supporting the environment range from the leaders and staffs of large studios to individual actors, artists, and business people.

**The Industry:** Among the studio chiefs leading their companies into environmentally friendly programs are Alan Horn, president and chief operating officer of Warner Bros., and Ron Meyer, president and chief operating officer of Universal. Universal is committed to a 3 percent greenhouse gas reduction and has taken a variety of actions, such as replacing the diesel trams at their theme park with more environmentally friendly vehicles. Warner Bros. has placed emphasis on the environment for more than 14 years and has a corporate executive in charge of environmental issues. The company's environmental projects began with waste reduction and recycling and have expanded to a comprehensive program, outlined on their Web site *[www.wbenvironmental.com]*. Select "Eco-Tour" from the menu to see Shelley Billik, vice president of environmental initiatives, tell the Warner Bros. story. Billik takes the viewer through many aspects of the film business, pointing out actions the studio has taken and making the case that, in addition to being good for the earth, environmental policies can be good for business.

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Shelley Billik of Warner Bros. discusses the studio's industry-leading environmental efforts.

**Films:** The feature film *Syriana*, for which George Clooney won a best supporting actor Academy Award, contained an environmental theme. The Academy Award-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* brought former Vice President Al Gore's presentation on global warming to a worldwide audience. Both movies challenged filmmakers to produce an entire project "carbon neutral." Carbon neutral means that greenhouse gas emissions generated by energy consumed in the production of a project are offset by planting a number of trees or through investments in solar or other renewable-energy alternatives in an amount equivalent to the energy used on the project.

**Individuals:** Actors and filmmakers keep the environment in mind when choosing roles and projects, they use their status to call attention to issues, and they financially support environmental causes. The list of those

© AP Images/Alastair Grant

George Clooney produced and won a best supporting actor Academy Award for his role in the film *Syriana*, one of the first films to be produced in a carbon neutral manner.

active for the environment includes Robert Redford, who has received numerous honors for his efforts and whose cable television Sundance Channel recently launched *The Green*, a weekly block of programming dedicated to environmental issues; Leonardo DiCaprio, whose full-length documentary project on the state of the global environment, *The 11th Hour,* is due out in 2007, and who has worked on a green-themed reality show and short films addressing environmental issues *[www.leonardodicaprio.org]*; and writer-director Paul Haggis, who backs up his professional efforts with a personal commitment to the environment, including living in a solar-powered home and driving a hybrid vehicle. Others noted for their efforts include Laurie and Larry David, Rob Reiner, Tom Hanks, Harrison Ford, Norman Lear, Cameron Diaz, Darryl Hannah, and many others.

Appropriately, during the Academy Awards ceremony in February 2007, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced that the ceremony itself was a green production and directed viewers to *www.oscar.com* for further information and links to the Natural Resources Defense Council. ■

# Government and the Movies

Unlike many countries where the government oversees cultural programs, including cinema, the United States does not have a government office or ministry that regulates the film industry. Government, however, does interface with the movie business in several ways.

## FILM PRODUCTION

In the United States, films generally come from two sources: large studios that produce many films and television programs each year and independent filmmakers, including both students and experienced filmmakers. Sometimes—through grants from universities or arts or humanities councils—independent filmmakers do receive support indirectly from funding that originated with the local, state, or federal government, but more often funding comes from private investors or through philanthropic organizations concerned with either promotion of the arts or promotion of a cause being addressed by a film.

While there is no ministry of film, there are many government offices that interact with the film industry. At the state and local levels, government film offices promote local film locations because use of their locale brings employment and other economic advantages, promotes tourist sites, or shows their region in a favorable light. These offices also help filmmakers work with the police and others to arrange for filming that impacts traffic, uses public buildings, or otherwise needs special consideration.

Similarly, government entities, especially the branches of the military, have offices that help coordinate filmmakers' use of facilities, equipment, and even personnel. It would be difficult, for example, for a filmmaker to construct a make-believe aircraft carrier or to hire a cast of extras to be in the background of a movie who look like real soldiers, sailors, airmen, or marines (whose haircuts, fitness levels, and posture are often different than that of civilian actors). The military is willing to make their facilities available, within reason, for approved projects, and each branch has an office that handles these requests. Other branches of the government address requests to use public spaces and buildings, such as monuments or parks.

© AP Images/Donna McWilliam

This film is being made with assistance of the Texas Film Commission.

Many years ago, the U.S. government did produce some feature films and worked closely with Hollywood on films that would encourage public morale during wartime. However, since World War II, these programs have been eliminated through a combination of budgetary and philosophical concerns. One exception has been work carried out by government offices that, by definition, deal with external audiences, domestic or foreign. The United States Information Agency, for example, for many years produced films for exhibition to overseas audiences to complement its other educational programs. One such film, *John F. Kennedy: Years of*

*Lightning, Day of Drums*, a posthumous tribute to the assassinated president, even won the 1965 Academy Award for best documentary. This agency, now a part of the U.S. Department of State, no longer produces original films.

## CENSORSHIP

There have been times, especially during World War II, when national security was an issue and certain types of information were restricted from wide distribution, but, in general, the government has remained hands-off with regard to censorship. In efforts to balance free speech concerns with those of public welfare and public taste, voluntary standards enacted by the motion picture industry have resulted in a rating system (G for general audiences, R for restricted audiences, and several other categories) that industry—not government—censors apply to films, allowing viewers, parents, and theater owners to better gauge the sexual, violent, or profane-language content of a film.

## FILM DISTRIBUTION

Today, with very few exceptions, films produced in the United States are distributed domestically and in other countries through commercial channels that are controlled by the market. If a film does not attract an audience, its run in the theater will be cut short and another will take its place, hoping to be a hit. In the first half of the 20th century, there was some government support to send abroad films that helped showcase American ideals. This effort has largely been reduced to a small office in the State Department that will, for example, help U.S. embassies get access to commercial films for showing to local audiences, usually in collaboration with a local sponsor, such as the ministry of culture or a university. In this way, the U.S. government supports efforts to organize film festivals and other local programs. ■

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Through special offices of the military, filmmakers can gain access to military sites and equipment, such as those used in these scenes from the film *Pearl Harbor.*

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# Internet Resources

## Additional Resources About the Film Industry

**American Film Institute**
AFI is a national institute providing leadership in screen education and the recognition and celebration of excellence in the art of film, television, and digital media.
*http://www.afi.com/Docs/about/press/2007/100movies07.pdf*

**AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center**
Presents a variety of film and video programming, augmented by filmmaker interviews, panels, discussions, musical performances, and other events that place the art on-screen in a broader cultural context.
*http://www.afi.com/silver/new/default.aspx*

**Billboard**
An international newsweekly of music, video, and home entertainment.
*http://www.billboard.com*

**Bloom**
MTV and OneDotZero have launched Bloom, a competition to find the best up-and-coming moving image talent from around the world and to commission a series of one-minute films that explore identity and community.
*http://www.mtvonedotzero.com*

**Film and History**
Published since 1970, *Film and History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* is concerned with the impact of motion pictures on our society. Also, *Film and History* focuses on how feature films and documentary films both represent and interpret history.
*http://www.filmandhistory.org*

**Film Schools**
Features basic information about each school's program, often including opinions or evaluations submitted by students and others.
*http://film_schools_browse.htm*

**Film Society of Lincoln Center**
"America's pre-eminent film presentation organization, The Film Society of Lincoln Center was founded in 1969 to celebrate American and international cinema, to recognize and support new filmmakers, and to enhance awareness, accessibility and understanding of the art among a broad and diverse filmgoing audience."
*http://www.filmlinc.com/about/about.htm*

**History of the Academy Awards**
*http://www.oscars.org/aboutacademyawards/history01.html*

**Internet Movie Database**
*http://us.imdb.com*

**Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)**
*http://www.mpaa.org*

**Movie Preview Sites**
Offers comprehensive information on the film industry, including bios, movie trailers, latest information, and news and gossip.
*http://trailers.htm*

**National Film Preservation Foundation**
The National Film Preservation Foundation (NFPF) is the nonprofit organization created by the U.S. Congress to help save America's film heritage. It supports activities nationwide that preserve American films and improve film access for study, education, and exhibition.
*http://www.filmpreservation.org*

**Script P.I.M.P. (Script Pipeline Into Motion Pictures)**
This site contains information about how to submit screenplays, how to get script coaching, how to sign up for the newsletter or competitions, and how to search databases for a script. It also has information about film school options with links to individual schools and colleges that offer screenwriting or film programs.
*http://www.scriptpimp.com/show_me/film_schools/*

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