

Not Just an Actor:
Socially Conscious Stardom and the Rise of the Postwar Actor-Producer

by

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Abstract

This dissertation considers the role of *socially conscious stardom* in the formation of star-founded production companies, arguing that the contemporary industrial trend emerged from a taste culture that formed in post-World War II Hollywood. While today's star-founded production companies are primarily financial or business endeavors, these companies are nevertheless frequently promoted as a means by which a celebrity can claim an interest in developing projects that either explore or help to ameliorate a larger societal or political issue. Scholarship typically locates the origins of the independent-actor production company in either the silent era, with the founding of United Artists in 1919, or in the waning years of the studio era, following the aftermath of the Paramount Decree of 1948. However, this dissertation argues that the amalgam of actor-founded independent production companies and *socially conscious stardom* has its roots in the post-WWII recasting of the movie star as someone whose job is, in part, to capture public attention and shape social discourse. Chapter One examines John Garfield's early venture in combining the socially conscious impulse with an independent outfit. Garfield's Roberts Productions begins the trend of using incorporation to inculcate a taste culture that prizes greater racial representation in cinema, fair wage practices, and aesthetic realism. Chapter Two, considers Ida Lupino's production company The Filmakers, exploring why Lupino's anomalous stature as the only woman director meant that she had to negotiate her femaleness, as well as her independence and social agenda, within the patriarchal hierarchy of Hollywood. Conversely, Chapter Three explores how Kirk Douglas used his production company, Bryna, to advance his persona as a "rugged businessman," which highlighted his intellectual capacity and his outsized masculinity in the service of offsetting any upset caused by the anti-war narratives he pursued as a producer. Chapter Four concludes with an analysis of

Harry Belafonte's HarBel Productions, which he formed for the exclusive purpose of promoting more realistic depictions of Black people in cinema. It argues that despite the company's brevity and limited output, it is among the most influential examples of advancing a cause through independent production. To gain a holistic understanding of how and why these companies were promoted, this project relies on archival documents including internal company memos, paratextual material, and contemporaneous trade press. Such a method offers fresh insights into the evolution of the contemporary industry phenomenon and provides a necessary intervention on the hazards and relative utility of using a capitalist enterprise as a platform of civic importance.

Introduction:
Not Just an Actor: Socially Conscious Stardom and the Rise of the Postwar Actor-Producer

In August of 2021 actress Reese Witherspoon sold her production company, Hello Sunshine, to an entity backed by private equity firm Blackstone for a total that was said to be upwards of \$900 million. In a statement following the sale announcement, Witherspoon offered a nostalgic reminiscence about the founding principles of the company and how this new venture will allow her the means to manifest those founding principles on a broader scale. Her statement reads:

I started this company to change the way all women are seen in the media. Over the past few years, we have watched our mission thrive through books, TV, film and social platforms. Today, we're taking a huge step forward by partnering with Blackstone, which will enable us to tell even more entertaining, impactful and illuminating stories about women's lives globally.¹

Though her company is arguably the most high-profile celebrity founded production company, she is not alone in claiming virtue by aligning her organization with feminist or representational priorities. This is a regularly occurring phenomenon in Hollywood with actresses as wide-ranging as Jennifer Lopez's Nuyorican Productions which touts their emphasis on "projects that support diverse female actors, writers and filmmakers"² to Lena Waithe's Hillman Grad which similarly claims to have, "...built a platform to empower underrepresented artists by amplifying and celebrating the stories and voices of diverse, historically marginalized communities across all industries."³ Citing diversity and amplification of voices typically

¹ "Reese Witherspoon's Hello Sunshine Sold for \$900 Million to Media Company Backed by Blackstone," *Variety online*, August 2, 2021. <https://variety.com/2021/film/news/reese-witherspoon-hello-sunshine-sold-1235032618/>.

² Ester Kang, "Jennifer Lopez 'Can't Wait' to Adapt Emily Henry's Happy Place Into TV Series with Her Production Company," *People*, June 25, 2024, <https://people.com/jennifer-lopez-cant-wait-to-adapt-emily-henry-happy-place-to-series-8669264>

³ "Who We Are," Hillman Grad, Accessed Sept 14, 2024, <https://www.hillmangrad.com/about>.

unheard in Hollywood film is a frequent talking point, but the statements can also skew towards more amorphous moral and social good. For instance, among the most high-profile celebrity production companies is Brad Pitt's Plan B entertainment, which specializes in mid-budget independent dramas that regularly receive Academy Award attention, such as *12 Years a Slave* (McQueen, 2013), *The Big Short* (McKay, 2015), and *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2015). In a 2020 interview with comedian Marc Maron, Pitt compared Plan B to Walter Cronkite's news model, thereby aligning his producorial output with those of documentaries or media seen to have greater civic consequence.⁴ He also downplays his own financial stake in the company, claiming that it had yet to "earn a dime" despite producing some of the most critically acclaimed movies of the era. All this rhetoric positions Plan B as less of a money-making venture and more of a public service. Of course, this interview predated the 2022 deal with French production company Mediawan in which Pitt reportedly sold 60% of the company assets for approximately \$300 million.⁵ This amalgam of capitalist interest mixed with presumed social import perfectly crystallizes the concept of modern day *socially conscious stardom*. Some details of these statements read as uniquely twenty-first century, particularly the emphasis on social media outreach as one of the major tendrils of Hello Sunshine's upscaling efforts. Additionally, the synergy between all the company's different media products is, if not a uniquely twenty-first century phenomenon, then a product of the modern conglomeration of Hollywood.

⁴ Brad Pitt, "1086: Brad Pitt & Leonardo DiCaprio," interview with Marc Maron, WTF with Marc Maron, January 6, 2020, Podcast, mp3 audio, 01:09:14, <https://www.wtfpod.com/podcast/episode-1086-brad-pitt-amp-leonardo-dicaprio>.

⁵ Elsa Keslassy, "Plan B Boasts Oscars and Brad Pitt, But Can New Owner Mediawan Get Audiences Back for Prestige Movies?" *Variety*, December 14, 2022. <https://variety.com/2022/film/news/plan-b-brad-pitt-new-owner-mediawan-sale-1235460920/>

Despite all the details that mark this sale as a byproduct of the contemporary media landscape (including the substantial price tags) the notion that an actor can harness their star power and influence to create a production company with tremendous earning potential and industrial clout has its lineage in the silent era. Some historical narratives might even trace these companies' roots to the 1919 foundation of United Artists, wherein some of Hollywood's most well-known actors and filmmakers - including Charles Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and D.W. Griffith - established and ran their own studio.⁶ The rhetoric they employed to explain this venture pointed to a desire for artistic autonomy, not unlike the way Witherspoon, Pitt, et al. gesture toward cultural import. However, my contention is that companies like Hello Sunshine and Plan B are actually products of two other, more recent historical, cultural and institutional phenomena: the move toward independent production during the breakup of the studio system in the post-World War II era and the rise of *socially conscious stardom*.

There are a handful of notorious cases of actors breaking away from the studio system via incorporation, such as John Wayne and Burt Lancaster, and there is no shortage of material that addresses the rise of American independent filmmaking, however, only a select few histories draw even a tenuous connection between independent production and celebrity activism.⁷ Despite the wealth of literature on independent film production, there are very few works that theorize how the confluence of stars' self-styled narratives of their independence and social importance affects public conceptions of stardom. There are even fewer still that attempt to situate this phenomenon within a historical production context. Even works which do posit a historical connection between the restructuring of the studio system and changing socio-political

⁶ Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company Built by the Stars*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

⁷ For details regarding how Wayne used his production company for political ends see Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

dynamics largely focus on either political contributions (monetary or activation of cultural capital), business or labor histories of individual companies or guilds, or the making of specific stars or star texts. Most of the current research does not attend to the ways that producing films meant to bolster a cause or highlight an injustice can be activated for entrepreneurial ends, or the ways that even good faith alignments with specific causes can be used as marketing fodder. This dissertation will define the concept of *socially conscious stardom*, and how it intersects with entrepreneurialism in the formation of independent production companies.

Historically speaking, the idea of an actor taking a strong stance on a divisive issue would seem antithetical to one of the central tenets of Hollywood. Classical Hollywood is rarely portrayed as a bastion of social realism. Common vernacular terms such as “The Dream Factory,” “La La Land,” “The Star Machine,” have long evoked the particular mixture of geographical specificity, capital, and phantasmagoric wonder that is associated with Hollywood filmmaking. This popular understanding of Hollywood as an apolitical fantasy delivery machine exists in part because of careful marketing and self-mythologizing practices that date back to the industry's beginnings. One of the chief promotional strategies involved careful packaging of personas which could serve as all manner of glamorous effigies of human exceptionalism. Upstanding heroes, dastardly villains, romantic partners, put-upon maternal figures, innocent naïfs, were all commonplace characters not just for the films but also for the paratextual and marketing materials that accompanied each new release.

There are several tensions in this admittedly reductive summation of Hollywood and the star-making process. The first is that, while many Hollywood films do serve as showcases for the glamor, charm, and wealth of its stars, there are also narratives that eschew the visible trappings of fantastical genre conventions. Instead, these films employ visual codes of realism that

purposefully deny the viewer a comfortable remove from everyday existence. Indeed, these kinds of films were so prevalent within the studio era that they became something of a genre unto themselves. This explicitly political material seems to run contrary to the impulse towards the imaginary, and there is a long history of filmmakers and even entire studios making a commitment to political engagement. For instance, in the 1930s Warner Brothers specialized in producing gritty hard-boiled dramas, some of which dealt with poverty, criminality and even indirectly indicted Nazism, making them prematurely anti-fascist.⁸ Additionally, the so-called “social drama” picture has many iterations and conventions, but broadly speaking, they feature narratives that tackle an issue with pressing, real-world implications.⁹ Although there are several kinds of Hollywood pictures that diverge from the more fantastical or contrived genre conventions, the reputation of Hollywood artifice was a regular point of contention for socially conscious production companies. While the formal elements and visual approaches vary from film to film, a continuity that exists among these production companies and the marketing strategies that accompanied their films’ releases is a claim for realism as a legitimizing force. Questions then arise about whether socially conscious production companies are delivering material that radically diverges from standard Hollywood fare, or if they are simply using aesthetic markers of social import to imply a vast difference. Does this discursive construction of Hollywood as the “dream factory” actually align with its material output, or have the star-

⁸ Amanda Klein explores Warner Bros. production of the “Dead End Kids” films in the 1930s and how it gave way to a cycle of social problem films about juvenile delinquents. She describes the films’ use of codes of realism to facilitate the social message. Amanda Ann Klein, *American Film Cycles: Reframing Genres, Screening Social Problems, and Defining Subcultures* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011) 60-99.

⁹ For more research on the social problem film see, Jennifer Frost, and Steven Alan Carr, *Teaching History with Message Movies*, (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2018), Amanda J. Field, *Evading the Issue: Hollywood and the Social Problem Film*, (Luton, Bedfordshire: Andrews UK Ltd., 2015), and Roffman, Peter. *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981)

producers perpetuated this notion to bolster their own discursive construction and set themselves apart from escapist fantasy narratives?

Another element of the standard Hollywood history that requires interrogation is the role of the individual in the star-making process. My use of “they” to refer to these companies is indicative of my general approach to celebrity studies and the collaborative nature of the star image. This is particularly true of stars in the studio system when individual performers had little control over the image that marketing executives disseminated to the public. The public-facing celebrity was an amalgamation of both a star’s individual visage, acting technique, and the narrative that the publicity department promoted - a narrative which may or may not have had any relation to a star’s biography or personality. That is why this project adopts Richard Dyer’s “star-as-text” model which understands stardom as extending beyond the individual celebrity to the galaxy of representatives, lawyers, companies, and corporations that shape and disseminate the star image. To read a star text it is important to research not just the film roles, but the interviews, publicity, photoshoots, and any other public rumors or widely understood details that contribute to public perception.¹⁰

This star-system was interrupted in the postwar era when actors were given an opportunity to take the reins of their own image dissemination via “going independent.” A newfound independence gave actors the ability to assert some measure of control over their public narrative by soliciting and selecting their own film projects and having a degree of say in the subsequent press releases and marketing materials that accompanied the film’s release. My dissertation identifies potential reasons why some celebrities used that independence to promote a socially conscious image. Given the newfound freedom to construct their own persona, it

¹⁰ Richard Dyer, *Stars*, (Great Britain: British Film Institute, 1979) 68-70.

follows that celebrities would be inclined to position their work as not only fun escapism, but also of great social import. The celebrity then becomes not only proficient in their craft; they are also bastions of political consequence. This practice of elevating a celebrity profile through a campaign of moral rectitude was not exclusive to the mid-century era, but it proliferated with the rise of independent production. Because tastes and matters of cultural significance mutate across time, this dissertation will trace how manifestations of *socially conscious stardom* shifted from the mid-1940s to the late-1950s to correspond with new paradigms or conceptions of taste. This work will also theorize the ways in which the dual impulses of economic success/careerism and civic conviction work in tandem to create a celebrity persona.

Before I can analyze how the trend of *socially conscious stardom* manifests in mid-century Hollywood, I must first define this admittedly amorphous term. This amorphousness is by design. It allows for an expansive application but is specific enough that not all celebrity behavior or marketing falls under this rubric. For my purposes, I am defining socially conscious stardom as a star whose work posits an expressed commitment to a social, economic, or aesthetic cause. This commitment can take the form of political activism, or even government lobbying, but it needn't be anything more than a press release or a statement in an interview. This definition of *socially conscious stardom* is similar to the contemporary colloquialism, "virtue signaling" or the circulated display or expression of allyship with a progressive movement, typically assumed to be somewhat disingenuous. The demarcation between the contemporary idiom and *socially conscious stardom* is that the latter is less entrenched with the lexicon of social media, and it leaves open the possibility that the alignment with a progressive cause is about more than a performance of righteousness.

This dissertation examines the overall implications of celebrities attempting to circulate a political or social message via independent production. The project focalizes around this set of research questions: What were some of the major cultural, political, and aesthetic issues of the postwar era that celebrities were inclined to address and how did those causes align with their personas? In what ways were celebrities incentivized to take a public stance on an issue or cause? How did they navigate the tension between artistic/political ideals and economic pragmatism? Finally, what commonalities are there between these companies in terms of approach, personnel, and political motivations? This analysis will serve to answer larger questions about the extent to which Hollywood functioned as a conduit between tectonic social movements and the general public. Questions regarding what kind of information can be extrapolated from social stances adopted by celebrities, and how these narratives inform the public's tastes and social sensibilities, will all play an important part in teasing out the significance of the socially conscious star.

Periodization & Methodology

Scholarship around actor-formed production companies often begins in the late-1940s, in the immediate aftermath of the 1948 Paramount Decree, around when Lew Wasserman brokered a deal for Jimmy Stewart's appearance in *Winchester 73* (Mann, 1950). This deal, which netted Stewart a major percentage of *Winchester's* profit, is a significant benchmark in Hollywood histories because it heralded a new era of Hollywood business practice. The independent celebrity now had the means to harness their star power and use it as leverage during contract negotiations, which resulted in some auspicious dealmaking on their behalf.¹¹ Other accounts,

¹¹ Denise Mann, *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) 35. <https://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=340767>.

such as Thomas Patrick Doherty's, are less concerned with the legal landmarks and instead point to pivotal cultural shifts, including the influence of European cinema, the relaxing of production code regulation, and the rise of the youth market, as reasons for the studios' transformation.¹²

Others still examine an individual's path to independence, and offer a chronology of that individual's career.¹³ This dissertation takes all three approaches. By combining a business history with a star studies approach, it is necessary to adopt a hybrid methodology which accounts for both the structural design of independent production and how it functioned within the shifting corporate landscape of postwar Hollywood, and the way that stars held a liminal position operating as both paratexts and the primary commodity.

My research will first examine the progenitors of this independent movement and investigate their political and artistic motivations for founding their companies. From there it traces how commercial and cultural changes in the 1940s-50s manifested in actor-founded companies. It then explores how political threats such as the "red scare" that hovered over the industry in the late-1940s, became screenplay material in the mid-1950s. It will also trace other political movements that gained traction in this era, including the ascendancy of the Civil Rights Movement, second wave feminism, and the labor movement and how they affected presentations of the socially conscious star. The project concludes in the late-1950s and early-1960s tracing the socially conscious star phenomenon through the end of one era and into another. The case studies concern the production companies founded by the actors John Garfield, Ida Lupino, Kirk

¹² Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: the Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 13-31

¹³ There are countless biographies that include all or a portion of the research to an individual's production company. For some notable examples from classical Hollywood see: Jennifer Frost, *Producer of Controversy: Stanley Kramer, Hollywood Liberalism, and the Cold War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), Bernstein, Matthew. *Walter Wanger, Hollywood Independent*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Christina Lane, and Gabra Zackman, *Phantom Lady: Hollywood Producer Joan Harrison, the Forgotten Woman Behind Hitchcock* (Ashland, Blackstone Publishing, 2020).

Douglas, and Harry Belafonte all of whom represent distinct manifestations of social consciousness in terms of race, gender, industry, success, and chronology. Despite their differences all these companies espouse allegiance to aesthetic realism and the belief that films can make an appreciable impact on society.

An assemblage of methodologies and analytical frameworks are necessary to follow these political and social trends through an expansive and tumultuous timespan. John Caldwell's *Production Cultures* has been influential in considering how to account for the role of the individual in a massive, powerful institution.¹⁴ Caldwell's thesis, that the structural hierarchy of Hollywood is maintained by its practitioners through shared narratives, is supported by a wide array of sources including ethnographic research, interviews (both contemporary and archival), trade press, and analysis of labor and business management. Because this is a historical study, I make extensive use of archival material including trade press, popular press, fan magazines, internal company memos, personal correspondence, meeting minutes, as well as textual analysis of a selection of feature films, to determine how a given celebrity/company is shaping a narrative.

This form of analysis is also indebted to scholars such as Tino Balio, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson who have analyzed classical Hollywood film texts and the industrial context in which they were made. While this subject matter does inevitably call for some interpretation of a star's motives and influences, it was important to build off a foundational understanding of the internal workings of the classical Hollywood system and how an actor-produced film differs or conforms to more conventional modes of production. Of particular interest is Bordwell's "group" theory which posits that Hollywood's stylistic and

¹⁴ Caldwell, John Thornton, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

narrative trends owe as much to overarching structural and cultural changes as they do to the interpersonal dynamics at play within creative collectives.¹⁵ Bordwell is similarly skeptical about ascribing authorial voice to one individual arguing that norms and innovation come about through collaboration and competition between writers, directors, etc. Building off Bordwell's theory, the dissertation explores how the independent movement was influenced by groups of like-minded individuals pushing the aesthetic boundaries of Hollywood towards a more neorealist sensibility. This involves some comparative analysis between films and company dynamics to explore how themes, narratives, creative personnel, and promotional approaches overlap. To go about this systematically with as much material proof as possible, this dissertation relies on internal company documents and personal correspondence to help determine how and why a company was founded, how films were marketed to the public, and if the films display any thematic preoccupations that might indicate a political inclination.

While company documents are an essential component of my corpus, equally significant are the press statements, interviews, and promotional material that surrounded the formation of an actor-founded company and their film releases. This method applies Jonathan Gray's framework of media paratexts which assumes that an audience is likely to encounter the marketing material of a given media text before ever viewing the text itself. Gray's approach builds off the French structuralist Gérard Genette's theory of literary paratexts which argues that a book's title page, acknowledgments and other accompanying material can reveal more about the social context and the taste cultures of the book's anticipated audience than the actual prose. Gray extrapolates from Genette's theory arguing that the trailers, fan websites, advertising,

¹⁵ David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (United States: Columbia University Press, 1985) 88. Bordwell delved into "group" innovation more recently in a blog post, "Seeds-beds of Style," davidbordwell.net, November 27, 2009. <https://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2009/11/27/seed-beds-of-style/>

publicity, and licensed merchandise have their own semiotic meaning that can expose information about the message that the marketing team were trying to communicate.¹⁶

Because these methods rely on business histories and historical paratextual material, much of my evidence was found in a variety of online and in-person archives. Among the most significant archival collections include The Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research (WCFTR) which has a comprehensive collection of papers from actor/producer Kirk Douglas, a selection of material from blacklisted screenwriter/director Abraham Polonsky, and the United Artists Collection — a major studio which promoted its many contracts with star-founded independent production companies in this era. Other significant collections include Harry Belafonte and the Charles ‘Chiz’ Schultz papers at the New York Public Library’s (NYPL) Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas-Austin which holds the John Garfield collection, the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Charles E. Young Library which holds papers from producer/director Stanley Kramer, Abraham Polonsky, and actress/producer Rosalind Russell, and University of Southern California’s Cinema Arts Library which houses the papers for director Robert Wise. This project also makes extensive use of publicity materials and Production Code Administration (PCA) files available at the Academy of Motion Picture Science’s Margaret Library, and the digitized press materials available through ProQuest and Media History Digital Library.

Stars: Artistic, Business and Political Actors

A major challenge for this dissertation is the necessity of threading several disparate areas of research to piece together the social, business, political, and cultural histories of

¹⁶ Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010) 23-26.

independent production and the socially conscious celebrity. Underpinning my scholarship are several foundational industrial histories of mid-twentieth century Hollywood, and its intersection with several subfields. Broadly speaking, the four most significant areas of engagement are the restructuring of Hollywood toward independent production, “the star system,” the assemblage and dissemination of celebrity persona, and finally the socio-political trends of the era and their impact on American filmmaking.

Independent Film: The Brand and the Ethos

There is one exception to my prior assertion that there are few extensive histories on the relationship between celebrity activism and the rise of actors forming independent production companies: Denise Mann’s *Hollywood Independents*.¹⁷ Mann surveys the institutional, financial, and artistic factors that led to a preponderance of filmmaking talent taking on the role of producer in the early-1950s. According to Mann, this trend was a product of Hollywood talent (including directors, writers, and actors) feeling financially or artistically stymied under the studio system. This desire for artistic and economic autonomy led to the rise of the so-called “super-agent,” often embodied by Lew Wasserman, the head of Music Corporation of America (MCA), the most powerful agency in the postwar era. The independent celebrity now had the means to harness their star power and use it as leverage during contract negotiations, which resulted in some auspicious dealmaking on their behalf.¹⁸ Wasserman understood that his clients wanted greater freedom to choose their film projects and a greater stake in the financial success of said projects, and their star power gave them the leverage to make such demands. Mann also

¹⁷ Mann, *Hollywood Independents*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

points to the national tax policy as a major impetus for stars to form independent production companies. Actors under contract with studios were salaried employees, and as such, the Bureau of Internal Revenue was owed a major portion of their earnings. Under the financial guidance of their agents, any star who crossed a certain earnings threshold formed their own production company for use as a tax shelter. As incorporated businesses, profits were deducted based on capital gains which were subject to a much lower tax rate.

While these financial incentives were a major motivator in actors forming their own companies, Mann does distinguish between the tax-shelter incorporation and the genuine pursuit of an artistic goal. Much of the book traces the rise of Wasserman and the restructuring of the Hollywood system, but she also highlights the work of a selection of talent who earnestly formed production companies designed to make art that reflected their aesthetic agenda. In addition to the business upheaval, Mann also traces the concurrent social changes that altered who and how people saw movies. Americans previously exposed only to domestic products were now introduced to international arts and cultures thanks to WWII and the postwar importation of European cinema. Filmmakers and actors such as Burt Lancaster were interested in capitalizing on this new paradigm by making films that would appeal to more international sensibilities.¹⁹ Mann's focus aligns closely with my own in terms of subject and periodization. However, Mann's concentration is dispersed between all manner of creative talent, whereas mine largely concerns the role of the actor-celebrity and the positioning of an entrepreneurial venture as virtuous or important. This differentiation is significant because of the star's unusual positionality as both a symbol and an autonomous individual who can be both exploited and exploitative, and who's emancipation from studio control can result in greater creative freedom,

¹⁹ Ibid., 6-16.

or a reiteration of well-established marketing strategies. Additionally, her chronology locates the early-1950s as the beginning of this trend of actor-formed independent production companies, whereas I argue that this trend emerged directly out of World War II in the mid-1940s.

For a more thorough interrogation of what constitutes “independent cinema,” there is historian Yannis Tzioumakis who has written extensively on the various incarnations of independent cinema, including the wave of independent films that emerged after the Paramount Decree.²⁰ Tzioumakis argues that independence is an institutional divergence more than an ideological or even economic one. He distills the contrast between independent and studio filmmaking as small low-budget indies versus big mainstream Hollywood, while still providing for a definitional porousness between the two forms. Geoff King, conversely, adopts a Bordieuan analysis which conceptualizes the notion of independence as a system of distinction.²¹ King posits that films labeled “indie” or non-Hollywood are credited with greater aesthetic and social import, irrespective of either the quality of the so-called independent film or any given Hollywood picture. This theory of distinction is important to my analysis of how actors position their productions as artistically divergent from other studio fare. However, it is also important to question such narratives as they can be utilized by the marketing departments of studios just as easily as they can independent distributors. While King’s assertion that independence carries with it an assumption of iconoclasm or rebelliousness, these claims often have little to do with a film’s actual financing or distribution methods.

²⁰ Yannis Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema: an Introduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006). <https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/2027/heb.08011>. EPUB.

²¹ Geoff King, *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris & Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Tino Balio's comprehensive chronology of the United Artists (UA) company is pertinent, not only because of its talent-centric foundational principles and association with entrepreneurial stardom, but also because its business model made it uniquely suited among the major studios to transition into the post-Paramount era. From its outset, UA relied on financing and distributing films from independent producers, as opposed to the traditional studio model which kept all aspects of making and selling films in-house. When the Paramount Decree was implemented, the vertically integrated model in which studios controlled production, distribution and exhibition was determined to be in violation of antitrust laws, and the studios were forced to divest from at least one branch of their business. Because UA never relied on in-house production and always utilized independent outlets, they were prepared to take advantage of the new independent production set-up.²² As a result, several of the production company case studies were contracted with UA to distribute and/or finance their films.

These sweeping studies of major companies and significant practitioners provide the bedrock for all industrial histories of the independent era, but there are many others that have contributed necessary interventions into these narratives. For instance, Emily Carman's *Independent Stardom* argues that the popular periodization of the percentage deal arrangement erases the very similar agreements that studio actresses were able to negotiate in the previous two decades. While most of the literature credits the MCA takeover and the rise of the agent as the turning point in the move toward star autonomy, Carman argues that independence started much earlier in the 1930s when actors such as Barbara Stanwyck and Irene Dunne could maintain their independence by refusing the option contracts that would bind them to a particular studio, and maintain a right of refusal that allowed them freedom to act in films of their

²² Tino Balio, *United Artists*, 40-49, 87-91.

choosing. Carman also reveals that the percentage deals that most infamously developed with the rise of MCA were similarly present in the 1930s. If the star was a big enough draw, such as Carole Lombard or Stanwyck, they were able to negotiate a portion of the net gross for their films. Carman also gestures towards a feminist revision of existing histories suggesting that part of the reason why the narrative around the blossoming of postwar independence discourse is so intractable is because that is when male stars began demanding these kinds of agreements. Carman covers the 1930s and 40s, a period when women and women's pictures were big box office draws and as such, the female stars of these pictures had a quiet power that did not grab headlines but nonetheless resulted in a similar artistic and business arrangement mirroring those of the postwar era.

In addition to these industrial histories, this dissertation also engages with star studies literature that addresses the role of celebrity as both a commodity and an autonomous individual with personal agency. Within star studies there are texts that address how celebrities are received by the public and those that engage with how the star's persona or image is disseminated. For the former, Richard Dyer's aforementioned works on celebrity remain foundational in conceptualizing stars' role in constructing viewers' understanding of any given filmic text.²³ Dyer's study provides a template for analyzing star persona through an examination of both the performance and other paratextual material such as advertising and fan magazines. Also seminal is P. David Marshall's *Celebrity and Power*, which similarly theorizes the relationship between the celebrity and the public and how celebrities are tools used to "make sense" of our social world. Marshall develops a semiotic analysis of the celebrity "sign," ultimately arguing that this

²³ Dyer, Richard. *Stars*.

“sign” serves to reinforce the social hierarchy under consumer capitalism in which the dominant classes create the celebrity sign, and the subordinate classes receive and re-make the sign.²⁴

These texts are significant insofar as this dissertation attends to how individual films and celebrity personas are encountered by the public, however, my predominant intervention concerns the creation of persona and the mechanisms by which they are constructed and disseminated. Within star studies there are works that attend to the commercial history of the “star system.” Key among them is Paul McDonald’s comprehensive overview of that system, which includes the contemporary Hollywood star model and how it was initiated by practices established near the inception of studio filmmaking.²⁵ He ascribes a liminality to the movie star as both a byproduct of the Hollywood film business and a result of personal agency unusual to most film laborers. McDonald draws upon the work of a wide array of sources, including Janet Staiger and Tino Balio, to trace the lineage of the star from the beginning of the studio era to the present day. He describes the inchoate stages of the “star-system” — a means of marketing films based on the appeal of its leading actors. In the silent era, producers found that they could draw audience attention based on name recognition and the cultivation of public personas. This would ultimately prove something of a double-edged sword for the studios, when these personas became so popular that the individuals who embodied those personas gained leverage to demand higher salaries and a percentage of a film’s earnings. To protect against these demands, studios implemented “option contracts,” which effectively bound contracted actors to a single studio and severely inhibited a star's ability to demand pay increases no matter how popular they became. It

²⁴ P David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. 2 ed., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), muse.jhu.edu/book/34402.

²⁵ Paul McDonald, *The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities*, (United Kingdom: Wallflower) 2000.

also ensured that stars had little say over which scripts they were offered and how they were presented to the public.²⁶

Such restraints imposed by studio heads often led to contentious battles with stars who would use any litigious or economic means at their disposal to ensure greater control of their images and a stronger financial stake in their films. These areas of strife were examined through a cultural studies framework in Danae Clark's study of 1930 actors' and the political conflicts they encountered, *Negotiating Hollywood*.²⁷ Clark analyzes the unique position of the actor as both an idea and a laborer, and the collective actions that actors took in order to gain more control of their images. Similarly, David F. Prindle's *The Politics of Glamour* historicizes the development and ascendancy of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) — the primary actors' union operating within the studio system.²⁸ Prindle examines the ways that this collective effort grew out of concern for the precarity of actor employment within the studio system, but has also proven fertile ground for individual political gains and maneuvering.

Industrial Histories: Marketing Stardom

Much of my study concerns the rhetoric that star-founded production companies presented to the public in order to advance a political agenda. The Caldwell book, *Production Cultures* explores the significance of cultural narratives within the Hollywood work force and how they function to both reinforce the structural hierarchy of the contemporary studio labor

²⁶ Paul McDonald, *The Star System*, 40-48.

²⁷ Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor*. First edition ed., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) muse.jhu.edu/book/32086.

²⁸ David F. Prindle, *The Politics of Glamour: Ideology and Democracy in the Screen Actors Guild*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

system and disseminate a cohesive narrative about the industry to the public. The significance of this work is chiefly a function of his methodology, which seeks to reconsider the inner workings of the filmmaking business by having a “bottom-up” approach. In it, the experiences of actual filmmaking practitioners and craftspeople are as significant as those who work in above-the-line capacities. This “bottom-up” history is a product of Caldwell’s research questions which concern the ways in which those media workers narrativize the media-making process. In other words, how does Hollywood self-mythologize? What are its mechanisms of dispersing these myths and what are the functions of these narratives? How does the rhetoric change based on positionality within the industry? A major element of Caldwell’s research includes an ethnographic survey of the people who populate each level of the business. He lays out Hollywood’s socially stratified caste system and creates a taxonomy of stories that correlate to the individual’s relative rank within the industry. While Caldwell does touch on the origins of some of these dissemination techniques, a full history is beyond the purview of his study.

For a more robust history of Hollywood narrativization mechanisms, I turn to histories of fan magazines and other publications that work in tandem with studio publicity departments. Anthony Slide’s, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine* offers a comprehensive history of the fan magazine from its nascency in the late-1900s to their heyday from the 1920-1940s when they propagated stories planted directly from the studios, and finally their move toward sensationalism and scandal in the 1950s-1960s.²⁹ Similarly, Mary Desjardins’ chapter on the “systematizing” of celebrity gossip by tabloid outlets in the 1950s analyzes how the proliferation

²⁹ Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

of scandalous stories intersected with California politics and legal system.³⁰ She argues that this trend toward salacious gossip stories marks a significant break from the traditional synchronicity between the studios and magazine outlets. In the post-Paramount milieu, no longer could studios dictate their own narratives of each star's persona. This piece is of particular interest to this dissertation, not only because it concerns the shifting social mores of the postwar era, but also because Desjardin contrasts the obscene or libelous material found in the gossip magazines of the 1950s, such as *Confidential*, with fan magazine reportage in the same era. She describes *Confidential*'s methodology and aesthetic as compositing a variety of different dubious sources and rumors to create the most sensational story possible. Their stories titillated readers providing just-this-side-of-libelous tales of amoral, obscene, and law-skirting antics of Hollywood celebrities. Desjardin explains that fan magazines such as *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen* made a special effort to push back against the narrative of scandal-ridden Hollywood, writing stories about stars as model citizens.³¹ This history of the rise of *Confidential* provides important context for understanding why publicists circulated stories about stars' charitable efforts, and how such stories were used as rebuttals against the increasingly "sinful" image of Hollywood. However, it is also important to note that the socially conscious star and the independent production company pre-date the rise of *Confidential*-style tabloid culture and therefore one cannot totally attribute the phenomenon to image remediation.

Like Desjardin, Jennifer Frost is interested in the role of rumor and narrative in the entertainment field. Her research also considers the role of gossip publications and columnists in

³⁰ Mary Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal: Confidential Magazine, Stardom, and the State of California," in *Headline Hollywood: a Century of Film Scandal*, ed. Adrienne L. McLean and David A. Cook, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 206-232.

³¹ Ibid. 216-217

the construction of public sensibilities. Her study of gossip columnist Hedda Hopper argues that because of her gender and the gender of her readership, Hopper's influence has been underestimated and under-studied. Frost claims that Hopper was enormously successful at pushing a morally and politically conservative agenda because of her outsized reach. Of particular relevance is the utility of gossip in forming a celebrity persona. Frost argues that it is the mix of specific film roles, and the image created from propagation of personal information that ultimately shapes how the public perceives a star.³² Building off this idea, my project utilizes gossip press to better comprehend an individual star image, the history of Hollywood as an industry, and the star as a business unto themselves.

Where Independence Meets Activism

On the other end of the political spectrum, Frost's analysis of independent producer-turned-director Stanley Kramer offers another model for considering how liberal ideas manifested in films and how those messages were received by critical literati and general audiences. Frost also explores how the ideals Kramer espoused in his work conflicted with his professional ambition - a theme I examine in my chapter on cold war liberalism. Kramer's often incompatible impulses toward artistic merit, social import, and commercial viability, are a major theme for other producers in my study, including Kirk Douglas who similarly struggled to lead with his liberal principles when money was on the line.³³

³² Frost, Jennifer, *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism*. (New York, New York University Press, 2011).

³³ Frost, Jennifer, *Producer of Controversy: Stanley Kramer, Hollywood Liberalism, and the Cold War*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017).

Keeping with the subject of socially conscious stardom, I have also drawn from sources that contend with the role of the celebrity in influencing public opinion. Julie Wilson's article, "Stardom, Sentimental Education, and the Shaping of Global Citizens," delves into the rise of the star-turned-ambassador in the 1950s. Wilson contextualizes this phenomenon with the theory of "sentimental education," which was about "teaching Americans to understand themselves not just as citizens of an autonomous nation but as participants in a world system that inextricably embedded them within a network of multinational ties."³⁴ According to Wilson, actor Danny Kaye was the first entertainer to step onto this global stage as Mr. UNICEF - an important tool of sentimental education. From this initial instance, Wilson extrapolates to contemporary iterations of this action including the advocacy work championed by celebrities such as Bono or Angelina Jolie.

Finally, Steven J. Ross's *Hollywood Left And Right* uses institutional histories to mount a case for the overarching political significance of film production.³⁵ Ross uses a series of illustrative case studies to show how powerful figures such as Louis B. Mayer and Ronald Reagan actively bolstered the careers of prominent conservative figures and used their positionality within the business to strong arm their employees (or fellow unionists in Reagan's case) into attending Republican rallies and donating to conservative causes. The structure of the entire book is a helpful model for considering how individuals within the media production milieu can harness and deploy their cultural capital for economic and political gain. His chapter on singer-actor-activist Harry Belafonte was of particular significance. Here, Ross discusses

³⁴ Wilson, Julie: "Stardom, Sentimental Education, and the Shaping of Global Citizens," *Cinema Journal* 53, no 2, (Winter 2014), 33.

³⁵ Ross, Steven Joseph, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Belafonte's nearly anomalous position within Hollywood in the 1950s as a politically and socially engaged Black man. Ross details Belafonte's rise to fame and the ways that he used his fame to spotlight contemporaneous Civil Rights Movements. Most pertinent for my research, the book discusses Belafonte's eventual turn toward independent production in the 1950s. While the book is scarce on textual analysis and there is little information on the inner workings of the company, Ross is very clear that the motivation for Belafonte making this move toward independent production was a desire to circumvent the conservative studio system and its leadership, which was too fearful of censorship and public outrage to represent Black Americans as anything other than generic stereotypes.

Finally, there is also a limited amount of literature that attends to how the socially conscious stardom phenomenon manifests in contemporary actor-founded production companies. Sarah Louise Smyth's article on Hello Sunshine's branding relies on a blend of Witherspoon's star power and accessible feminism. Smyth analyzes Witherspoon's statements about the necessity to platform female authors and women's stories and determines that Hello Sunshine conforms to Sarah Banet-Weiser's conception of "popular feminism" - which is corporate friendly female empowerment that fails to address the economic or social forces which perpetually reaffirm patriarchal power. Smyth argues that the veneer of social importance gives cover to the material conditions of a Hello Sunshine production which indulge in the same exploitative and exclusionary practices of a major studio. She points specifically to the insistence on sidelining the characters of color, and the wresting of creative control from female director

Andrea Arnold during the second season of Hello Sunshine's television series, *Big Little Lies* (2017-2019).³⁶

Laura Schumacher, whose research focuses on “instructional feminism” in media aimed at young women and girls, offers a similar analysis of the intersection between actor-founded production companies and the popular feminist branding that accompanies their creation. She focuses on the recent industry trend to have pre-adolescent girl stars form their own production companies to embody the mature, professional feminist ideal. The primary case study for the “literal girlboss” is *Black-ish* actress Marsai Martin, who established her company (Genius Productions) in 2019, when Martin was just fourteen years old. Schumacher explores how, through interviews, press statements and red-carpet appearances, Martin promoted her persona as a thoughtful, empowered, politically inclined, business woman of color, despite being well below voting age.³⁷

These contemporary examples of how socially conscious stardom intersects with the celebrity business venture show how such melding can be troubling to those seeking to make substantive changes within either the business or political spheres. The ability to brand a company or a star through association with causes perceived to be good or important, can provide information about the public's relationship to a given celebrity and the audience they are hoping to attract. Analyzing this branding can be a window into the past's relationship with celebrities and how the star's relationship to politics and so-called “virtue signaling” has evolved

³⁶ Sarah Louise Smyth. “Reese Witherspoon's popular feminism: adaptation and authorship in *Big Little Lies*.” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 22. No. 1 (2014) 296-315. DOI: 10.1080/17400309.2023.2263690

³⁷ Laura Schumacher, “How to Be a Feminist: Media, Gender and Age in the Era of Instructional Feminism,” (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2023), 66-82. ProQuest (30636187).

over time. It also means that historical celebrity production company branding provides helpful evidence for the convictions and goals of its star and the audience they were hoping to cultivate.

Chapter Breakdown

John Garfield's Roberts Productions and the Emergence of Socially Conscious Independent Production

The dissertation begins with a survey of the independence trend in its nascency in the mid-1940s. Most histories point to the 1950s as the heyday of actor-formed independent production companies, citing companies that came to their greatest prominence in the mid-1950s. Because of their awards and box office success, companies such as Burt Lancaster's Hecht-Hill Lancaster or John Wayne's Batjac Productions are often considered the paradigmatic examples of this phenomenon. However, I argue that the confluence of independent production and socially conscious stardom started in the immediate postwar era. Tracing the major sociological, political, taste cultures and labor causes of the time, this chapter considers the various influences on Hollywood filmmaking practice and how they were guided by perceptions of quality. Factors that contributed to these sensibilities include the influx of New York City-based playwrights into Hollywood, European cinema, and the rise of the "social issue" film, both of which led to a growing interest in realism and documentary filmmaking.

The primary case study is Roberts Productions, an independent production company founded by actor John Garfield and his business manager, Bob Roberts, after Garfield's contract with Warner Brothers expired in 1946. Roberts Productions produced three films over the course of five years, two of which were co-produced with Enterprise Studios. Robert Productions affiliated themselves with Enterprise in September 1946 and began work on their first co-

production, *Body and Soul* (Rossen, 1947) two months later.³⁸ The film's script was written by Abraham Polonsky, who later accepted the Vice-President position in Roberts Productions. All three of the men associated with Roberts Productions had reputations as ardent leftists and roused suspicion amongst anti-communist alarmists. Garfield and Polonsky were eventually called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). While both initially protested, Garfield did eventually appear — although it did little to save his career. *He Ran all the Way*, which Roberts co-produced with UA executive Arthur Krim, was Garfield's final film. After its release, both he and the film's director, John Berry, were blacklisted and never worked in Hollywood again.

During its brief existence, Roberts/Enterprise was promoted as a means of creating films that speak to the issues and conflicts of the day. Garfield made films with a realist aesthetic and used his clout to insist that a Black actor, Canada Lee, had a substantial, non-subservient role in *Body and Soul*. However, the analysis of the marketing material for *Body and Soul* tells a very different story. Instead of highlighting the social importance of the projects, the pressbooks and interviews for *Body and Soul* showcase the tawdrier elements of the film's narratives and elide mention of Canada Lee's prominence and the moral complexity at the film's core. Despite his deeply held convictions Garfield and his company were still beholden to the same market demands of all other Hollywood pictures. The contrast between Roberts/Enterprise's sincerity and the marketing material serves as an initial intervention into the limits of socially conscious celebrity as a force for change.

³⁸ Clayton M. Steinman, "Hollywood Dialectic: 'Force of Evil' and the Frankfurt School's Critique of the Culture Industry," (PhD diss., New York University, 1979), 272. ProQuest (7925532).

The Filmmakers and 'Lady Bosses:' Ida Lupino and the Actress Turned Producer

My second chapter considers the relevance of gender in the founding of independent production companies. As the initial example of Hello Sunshine demonstrates, feminist empowerment narratives can be deployed as a means of shrouding a nakedly capitalist maneuver in a rhetoric of benevolence. Companies founded by women may or may not produce expressly gendered films, but there are instances where a stars' femininity has been activated for the express purpose of promoting their entrepreneurial endeavors. While there have been several histories of independent production which situate instances of female stars harnessing professional agency as a feminist act, there are few that theorize how an actress's independence and newfound autonomy were negotiated within existing production cultures. In this chapter, I interrogate the ways in which female advancement was narrativized as a positive social force. Conversely, it also analyzes the ways in which this social change was made palatable to an industry and a marketplace that was at best skeptical of, and at worst hostile to, the notion of a woman in charge.

This chapter begins with Ida Lupino both because her aesthetic and cultural preoccupations align with Garfield's, but also because she is arguably the actress-turned-producer who trespassed the most on institutional and societal gender norms. This chapter is bifurcated into two sections. The first focuses on Lupino as an individual artist pursuing a creative ideal that pushes a social agenda through her visual and narrative artistry. Ida Lupino founded two production companies, Emerald Productions and Filmmakers Inc. in the late-1940s, both of which were co-founded by Collier Young, a junior executive at Columbia. Like Roberts, Emerald and Filmmakers emphasized the aesthetic distinction between independent and studio

production. There are several interviews with Lupino and Young in which they tout the virtues of neorealist/documentary-style filmmaking, espousing the virtues of good adaptable stories that are free from “Hollywood production methods.”³⁹ Lupino’s films grapple with everything from unwed motherhood to chronic illness, all executed in the style of an Italian neorealist picture. The chapter performs a comparative analysis between Garfield and Lupino’s companies and theorizes how much of their divergent approaches can be attributed to gender difference.

The second half of the chapter situates Lupino’s directorial career within broader conceptions of female empowerment. It analyzes how Lupino navigated her precarity as the sole female star-director-producer working within the Hollywood system and compares her positionality to other male stars-turned-producers. This includes analysis of articles and interviews found in trade journals and newspapers from 1948 through 1968 and an assessment of the ways in which Lupino’s femininity is highlighted and/or made non-threatening with language meant to reinforce existing gender norms.

As the only female director of this era, Lupino’s star persona is anomalous and therefore paints an incomplete picture of actresses forming their own production companies. While Lupino was the only woman who turned to directing as a means of controlling her career trajectory, other actresses of this era formed production companies for similar ends. Therefore, the second half also includes comparisons with some of her contemporaries such as Rita Hayworth (Beckworth) and Jane Russell (Russ-Field Productions) and the way Lupino’s independence narrative differs with, and echoes, those actresses who did not take as active a role in their companies. This analysis is attentive to language that genders this entrepreneurial venture, with particular attention paid to the role of men within these production companies. Many of these

³⁹ “Exploitable Stories, New Faces Held Key to Indie Production,” *Variety*, June 14, 1950, 29. ProQuest.

companies were co-founded with the actresses' husbands, inviting a comparison between the kinds of roles that the husband took on within the company against the actress's role. Finally, it explores how scholars have oriented these female-founded independent production companies within feminist emancipation narratives and considers if that form of historiography has any purchase within contemporary critiques.

Kirk Douglas's Bryna Productions: "Rugged Tycoons" and International Emissaries

This chapter follows the actor-led production company trend into the era most associated with independent production: the mid-1950s through the early-1960s. Among the most successful, but least studied, is Kirk Douglas' Bryna Productions. Most of the scholarly attention has been devoted to the companies founded by Douglas' friends, Burt Lancaster and John Wayne, both of whom founded two of the most consequential and politically active production companies of the era. Lancaster, who first founded his company Hecht-Lancaster in 1948 (later called Hecht-Hill-Lancaster), acted as something of a bellwether for other actors turned producers. According to Denise Mann, a major factor in H-L's success was the company's lucrative production deal with United Artists, and the way Lancaster carefully balanced his company's production slate with a mixture of familiar crowd-pleasing fare and "films that satisfied his liberal political and artistic leanings."⁴⁰ Following in the footsteps of H-L, Douglas founded Bryna in 1955, seizing on independent production as a means of controlling his public persona. It permitted him an ability to craft a screen presence befitting the post-Studio era and an opportunity for greater financial gain than the classical long-term contract model.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Mann, *Hollywood Independents*, 10.

⁴¹ Jeff Menne, *Post-Fordist Cinema*, Hollywood Auteurs and the Corporate Counterculture, (New York: NY Columbia University Press, 2019), 33-68.

This chapter delves into the notable films from the first five years of Bryna's existence, including the Academy Award winning epic *Spartacus* (Kubrick, 1960) that is reputed to have ended the Hollywood blacklist that destroyed John Garfield's career. It also analyzes some of Bryna's lesser-known projects, such as his sympathetic western, *The Indian Fighter* (De Toth, 1955) and his unrealized adaptation of *Michael Strogoff* which he planned to co-produce with the Soviet Union. The ad campaigns for all these projects promote Douglas's leadership abilities and desire for world peace, suggesting that his regular globetrotting and public stature put him in he a unique position to serve as an ambassador for Hollywood and to represent the United States' interests abroad. This chapter will also investigate how Douglas navigated the tension between his "rugged," rebel persona and his advocacy for peace and disarmament; all of which could be realigned when he was incentivized to abandon his liberalism in favor of economic gain.

The Actor, the Artist and the Production Company: Harry Belafonte's Civil Rights Activism and the Creation of HarBel

In the late-1950s, Harry Belafonte became the epitome of the multi-hyphenate public figure. To distill his cultural legacy down to singer, actor or performer is to neglect the material role he played in the Civil Rights Movement as a fundraiser and vocal advocate. Even the title "activist" fails to fully communicate the ways that his political labor informs his artistry and his celebrity. In many ways, Belafonte's status as one half of Hollywood's two Black male lead actors of the era meant that much of his public persona was inevitably tied to his racial identity. However, his commitment to overhauling the entrenched representational modes of Hollywood was more than just a bid for his own acceptance. Rather, it was a call to action for other Black performers to play a more active role in the creation of realistic Black stories and a demand for more equitable treatment within the industry. The mechanism by which Belafonte chose to

pursue this new aesthetic mode was through the creation of a production company, HarBel Productions - a subsidiary of his parent media company, Belafonte Enterprises. While Belafonte's multifaceted career is often characterized by his various artistic and activist pursuits, very rarely is "producer" included among the hyphenates. The oversight could be attributed to the relative brevity of HarBel's output, as it only produced two features, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1959) and *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959).

However, this chapter contends that Belafonte's desire to utilize the means afforded by the postwar studio infrastructure is not only among the most significant of his early career, but also an important case study in the limits of systemic change through establishment mechanisms. Using the work of Ellen Scott as a methodological model, this chapter combines discursive analysis and archival resources found at the New York Public Library, University of Southern California Archives of Performing Arts and the Margaret Herrick Library to compare how HarBel was positioned in both the Black and mainstream press and how that marketing reflects the ultimate goals of the producers. It also compares the relative failure of HarBel with some of Belafonte's actor-producer contemporaries to argue that Belafonte's refusal to assimilate accounts for part of HarBel's demise. Finally, the paper will look at ways that HarBel succeeded as praxis for Belafonte's social and moral principles.

Conclusion

The dissertation concludes with a summary of my arguments about independent production and socially conscious celebrity in the post-WWII era. It also suggests further areas for research, including an extension of the chronology into the New Hollywood era. Finally, it will consider the extent to which the mixture of entrepreneurship and socially conscious celebrity

manifests in contemporary media spaces. This includes some speculation about the connection between socially conscious stardom and celebrity founded ancillary businesses, such as Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop, and how these products can be positioned as both a social good and intrinsic to an actor's persona.⁴² This pertains to the modern notion of "branding" stars as political entities - either through their production companies or their work combating Hollywood's endemic sexism and racism.

As I gesture to further areas of study, I also underline the continuities between the corporate upheaval of the mid-20th Century to that of our contemporary media landscape. Insofar as contemporary Hollywood sets goals beyond financial success, it is because powerful people within the enterprise have some investment in the concept of cinema as an art form. The expectation that cinema should have higher aspirations than mere entertainment is due in large part to actors and other creatives within the business presenting their work as important and of great social value. This study aims to interrogate how and why stars initially took up the mantles of various social causes and spotlights the ways that this history informs current conceptions of good or important filmmaking.

This midcentury time frame was among the most tumultuous in Hollywood history, and this tumult gave way to a reshaping of film's corporate structure. It moved the model away from the insularity of the studio system and towards a refracted collective in which stars were able to realize and harness their power for both economic and aesthetic ends. What they did with that power, and how they sold their power to the public, is the chief concern of my research.

However, this project's aim is not only to provide an analysis of the evolving role of the movie

⁴² Hudson started several companies, some of which have gone bankrupt including an eco-friendly clothing brand Happy X Nature by Kate Hudson. Jade Scipioni, "Kate Hudson on privilege, misconceptions and being a Hollywood entrepreneur: 'I'm a lot,'" *cnn*, June 22, 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/22/kate-hudson-on-privilege-and-being-a-hollywood-entrepreneur.html>

star within a particular period. The circumstances of the immediate postwar era through the beginnings of the New Hollywood era constitute a specific political and industrial milieu, yet my contention is that this chapter of history served as an incubation period for current popular conceptions of stardom. The way that contemporary audiences understand the role of the celebrity as both an actor and an ambassador for social, political, and aesthetic causes has its lineage in the industry's move to independent production.

Chapter One:
John Garfield's Roberts Productions and the Emergence of Socially Conscious
Independent Production

The legacy of actor John Garfield is as multivalent and storied as any to emerge from the Hollywood studio system. One might argue that he is best remembered as one of the forebears of the “Method” acting approach which would come into prominence in the 1950s with performers such as Marlon Brando and James Dean and reach a cultural apex in the 1970s and early-1980s with memorable turns from stars such as Al Pacino, Ellen Burstyn, and Robert DeNiro. In addition to pioneering a new form of onscreen performance, Garfield was also notable for his insistence on using his fame and notoriety to champion various social initiatives including labor and civil rights and was very vocal in his support of anti-fascist groups in the lead up to and during World War II. In addition to using his wealth and influence to help fund charity organizations and using the celebrity marketing apparatus of the Hollywood studios to highlight myriad causes, he also incorporated these social convictions into his work. Insofar as he had any control over the projects he took on as a Hollywood studio player, the films he made were reflective of his ethos as both a stage actor trained within the early-20th Century New York leftist theater community and the instilled social and political values that he brought with him to Hollywood. This commitment to progressivism and his association with like-minded individuals within the film and theater communities ultimately resulted in accusations of communist affiliation and the eventual destruction of his career in the early-1950s. He was called to testify in front of the House Un-American Committee, at a time when the faintest trace of communist ties was enough justification to blacklist even the most established industry player. It is believed

that the stress of this career downturn played a major role in his untimely death in 1952 at the age of 39.¹

This tragic narrative is undoubtedly a major part of the Garfield legacy, but before he became a martyr for progressivism and a progenitor of the modern acting style, he was a movie star. An unlikely heartthrob, with early critics noting his “short stocky appearance,”² his “sturdiness,” and “hard, firm hands,”³ Garfield’s background as a real-life New York City “dead-end” kid who was one wrong step away from the penitentiary or premature death, made for an absorbing and sympathetic screen persona. He and the publicists who marketed his films successfully promoted a version of Garfield as a sensitive, world-weary everyman who could charm all the leading ladies on the studio payroll, while remaining true to his artistic convictions. Garfield combined his masculine charisma with rigorous theatrical training to create one of the most indelible screen presences of the classical Hollywood era.

Yet in this assemblage of estimable attributes — method acting forebearer, progressive, blacklist martyr, movie star, etc. — one distinction that is often overlooked is that of businessman. There is justification for the frequent omission; the image of the wealthy, over privileged Hollywood type is one that Garfield actively bristled against in profiles and interviews.⁴ The portrait of Garfield as an industrialist poses a particular dissonance given his insistence on artistry, his championing of civil and labor rights, and the eventual accusations of

¹ Isaac Butler’s popular publication about the history of method acting is among the recent sources to suggest this connection. Isaac Butler, *The Method: How the Twentieth Century Learned to Act*, (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).

² Edwin Schallert, “‘Patent Leather Kid’ Revival May Star Find,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 06, 1938, A14. ProQuest.

³ Frederick James Smith, “No Glamour Boy, But-!,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1939, J6. ProQuest.

⁴ *Ibid*, J6.

communist sympathies. However, despite the apparent discordance, not only did working within the studio system bring Garfield considerable financial wealth; he was also an entrepreneur. He was actively involved in the founding of several significant cultural institutions during the 1940s, including his own production company, Roberts Productions. There is no doubt that the narrative of Garfield as a proletariat hero who flirted with class-warrior rhetoric is difficult to square with Garfield's actual economic and industrial standing. However, this chapter analyzes the ways in which Garfield, his associates, and the Hollywood mythmaking apparatus positioned these business ventures as extensions of his everyman persona. It also explores the ways in which Roberts Productions and Garfield's other businesses are situated within contemporaneous discourses and attitudes towards Hollywood and independent cinema. These companies were in many ways established to stand up to corporate interests and the artless product churned out by major studios - a new alternative vehicle for the production of art and an instrument of justice and equality. Despite the idealism of this venture, there is an inescapable conflict that arises in the merging of artistic experimentation and the practicalities of managing and sustaining a viable business enterprise. Garfield's commitment to artistic integrity was very likely genuine, but the ways in which Roberts Productions positioned itself as a virtuous alternative to Hollywood while still utilizing Hollywood infrastructure, created a template for future actors to use in the creation of their own independent companies as a necessary, even brave, alternative to Hollywood filmmaking practices.

Garfield as Independent Producer

In his book *Film in the Battle of Ideas*, New York theater playwright turned screenwriter, John Howard Lawson wrote about the fluid definition of "independent production." He draws a

clear distinction between a freelance producer working on the “fringes of the Hollywood industry, using money borrowed from the big banks and dependent on the system of distribution and exhibition controlled by the Big Money” and a true autonomous artist “free from monopoly control, free from the class domination of the bourgeoisie...free from the ideology of the dominant class.”⁵ Though originally printed in 1953, well after Garfield’s death, Garfield would have been familiar with Lawson’s sentiment. Both Garfield and Lawson were members of the Group Theatre, which typified the Marxist, anti-establishment, anti-consumerist ethos of the New York theater scene. However, Garfield was also a populist and a moderate compared to avowed communists like Lawson and believed that Hollywood films could offer both a potent political message and crowd-pleasing appeal. Additionally, as a prominent Hollywood star, Garfield was “dependent on the system,” and did not share Lawson’s vehemence in his mistrust of corporate art. In a November 1939 profile he actively pushed back against the radical leftist dismissal of Hollywood saying, “I was proud to be in ‘Juarez’ and I was proud of Hollywood when I saw ‘Confessions of a Nazi Spy.’ Important productions like those, which take fearless stands on significant issues and really contribute something to human welfare, certainly make detractors of Hollywood look a bit silly.”⁶

In histories of actor-led independent production, the motivations for going independent are typically threefold: financial independence, freedom to choose their own projects, and artistic integrity. Indeed, the creation of independent production companies does not necessarily reflect any measurable separation between said actor and the classical studio production or economic model. Even in the most notorious example of studio actors turned independent in the silent age

⁵ Lawson, John Howard, *Film in the Battle of Ideas*, (New York: Masses & Mainstream Inc., 1953), 117.

⁶ Frederick James Smith, “Checking on Their Comments,” *Silver Screen*, November 1939, 44-45. Media History Digital Library. (Hereafter MHDL)

(Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, D.W. Griffith, and Charlie Chaplin forming United Artists) historians cast the artists as the heroes, not by virtue of any aesthetic difference, but rather the genius unbound by unfair studio business practices. It is this anti-corporate celebration of the individual over a system that continues to define the independent production rhetoric and it is indeed part of the appeal for actors like Garfield skeptical of big-business filmmaking.

The time-period that has previously been historized as the independent production era is the late-1940s through the 1950s, but this trend begins well before then. This periodization is in some ways a result of a conflation between shifting business practices with an actual artistic or political distinctiveness. This collapse is natural given how difficult it is to parse the financial motivation from more high-minded interests. As mentioned in the introduction, Denise Mann's book *Hollywood Independents* analyzes both the artistic and the financial motivations and threads them together as products of social and industrial shifts in the postwar era.⁷ She assigns the influence of Continental Theory and the influx of New York intelligentsia in Hollywood as a significant shaper of mid-century independent cinema themes. She cites work by several Hollywood luminaries, including Group Theatre alum Elia Kazan and actor/producer Burt Lancaster, as emblematic of a growing mistrust in mass market media. She analyzes the thematic content of films like *A Face in the Crowd* and *The Sweet Smell of Success* as evidence of these producers' attempts to work within and beyond the Hollywood framework. However, Mann locates the nexus of independence production and Marxist inflected American cinema as coming into prominence in the mid-1950s, well after Garfield's attempt to carve out a leftist niche for himself and concurring individuals within Hollywood.

⁷ Mann, Denise, *Hollywood Independents*.

While financial incentives were a major motivator in actors forming their own companies, Mann is careful to distinguish between the tax-shelter incorporation, versus the genuine pursuit of an artistic goal.⁸ However, this bifurcation between the different motives was not as clear to others in the industry, and other independent producers were skeptical about the legitimacy of actor formed production companies. For instance, in 1949 Hal Wallis, the Warners producer who discovered Garfield and went independent shortly before Garfield did, said publicly that independent production companies like Burt Lancaster's, Humphrey Bogart's and Garfield's were not "true independents" but rather "capital gains set-ups."⁹ It is curious that Wallis was so eager to draw a distinction between himself and producers like Garfield, since in this same article he, like Garfield, evangelized about the need for independent production as an alternative to the "assembly line" filmmaking process, which he claimed made only lifeless, uninspired product.

There was reason to be skeptical of these companies since many indeed existed purely as a means of hiding money. That said, this practice of concealing funds predates standard independent era periodization. In the mid-1940s, there were several reports that the Treasury Department intended to crack down on what the *Chicago Daily Tribune* called the "Movie Star's Racket." Several of the articles on the subject breakdown the motivation behind these schemes: namely that star salaries were taxed at a ninety percent rate, whereas capital gains were taxed at only twenty-five percent. It is particularly notable that it was the studios that helped set up these "paper corporations" in pre-production, which were then liquidated, and the profits distributed

⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁹ Ezra Goodman, "Independent Film Makers Facing Uncertain Future," *New York Herald Tribune*, August 14, 1949, C3.

after a film's release.¹⁰ This scheme dated back to the early 1940s and was a well-established practice. Ezra Goodman at the *New York Herald Tribune* speculated that this tax skirting was overlooked for so long, in part, because the former Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau was friendly with "New Deal interests in Hollywood."¹¹ Whether or not this was true (there were plenty of right-wing actors implicated in this scheme, including John Wayne and Ginger Rogers) the era of the actor founded production companies was far from over.¹² In fact, the ability to incorporate an individual was essential to the independent production business of the next decade.

In addition to distinguishing between the independent artist and the tax shelter scheme, it is also important to acknowledge the enormous privilege of the emancipatory narrative of the major star. The independent status granted to movie stars was decidedly less appealing for extras and day players who would have gladly signed a seven-year studio contract for the guaranteed employment and the formalized support network. Those freelance actors who struggled to attain regular work often found themselves at the mercy of abusive producers and directors or were victimized by exploitative schemes of con artists offering shortcuts to fame and fortune.¹³

¹⁰ "U.S. Seeks Millions in Filmland Taxes," *New York Times*, July 27, 1946, 23. ProQuest.

¹¹ "Treasury Acts to Halt Movie Stars' Racket: Tax Scheme Outlawed; Millions Demanded." *Chicago Daily Tribune*. July 27, 1946. 10. ProQuest.

¹² According to Eric Hoyt, Morgenthau was willing to look the other way when it came to Hollywood tax shelters because he was working with actors and filmmakers to push pro-income tax messaging in its pictures. This included a 1942 animated short made by Walt Disney in which Donald Duck sees the patriotic benefits of his tax dollars at work in a war effort. When Joseph Nunan replaced Morgenthau in 1945, Nunan began to crack down on the collapsible corporation loophole, much of the financial incentive dissipated, but that did not slow the creation of actor-formed production companies. For more on how income tax shaped industry practice in the studio era see, Eric Hoyt, "Hollywood and the Income Tax, 1929–1955," *Film History* 22. No. 1. (2010) 5–21.

¹³ In her book *Below the Stars*, Hollywood labor historian Kate Fortmueller into the precarity of screen extras and the sporadically employed day players who made up most of the Screen Actors Guild membership. She describes several dubious practices that extras were subject to and from which they had no means to protect themselves. Kate Fortmueller, *Below the Stars: How the Labor of Working Actors and Extras Shapes Media Production*, (United States: University of Texas Press, 2021).

That said, the 1940s saw a growing movement away from the centralized production mode of the studios, and the possibility of independence became an alluring proposition for many creatives in Hollywood. In an October 1940 *Variety* interview, Garfield's acquaintance, director Garson Kanin, excoriated the industry status quo which he said was ill equipped to adjust their stories for changing social mores. He said, "The world is undergoing vast changes, ideas and people are changing, so motion pictures will have to change with them." As a director himself, Kanin was predisposed towards putting greater creative power in the hands of directors via the production unit, but his main solution involved partitioning the monied interests from the creatives. He said "Why should the control of films be in the hands of bankers? Their business is making money, not trying to tell artists about the creative end of motion pictures. The bankers should work for the creators, not the other way around."¹⁴ While Kanin might be advocating for the creative control to fall to the director, his argument nevertheless echoes the sentiment of many actors who felt similarly stifled by the conservatism of the studio executives. This oppositional relationship between the star and the businessmen that run Hollywood provide a potent narrative that positions the independence of the star, no matter their stature, as a virtuous underdog.

One of the most prominent cases of a studio actor going independent is James Cagney, a star to whom Garfield was often compared. Garfield and Cagney's film careers both started under Warner Bros. stewardship, and both had studio-crafted images that highlighted their off-beat, streetwise charisma. Film historian Kevin Hagopian, in his article "Declarations of Independence," details the typical list of grievances that stars had under oppressive studio contracts: having no means of sharing in a successful film's profits, no ability to select one's

¹⁴ Hobe Morrison, "Kanin Yens for Low-Budget, Unit Productions; Strong for Individualism," *Variety*, October 23, 1940, 6 & 20.

projects nor say in which writers or directors were attached to said projects, an overwhelming work schedule, and no voice in how a star or star vehicle was marketed to the public. He specifies that Cagney's outsized stardom and his relative lack of economic reward or artistic freedom made the situation rife for studio conflict, and Cagney's personality ultimately ensured that he would find an alternate means of getting what he wanted. Hagopian goes on to suggest that Cagney's fight with Warner's and the way that he withheld his labor by refusing to perform laid a path for other Warners talent to follow including stars like Bette Davis and Olivia de Havilland, both of whom fought infamous battles for their own independence from their respective studio contracts.¹⁵ This change precipitated most of Garfield's cohort to begin producing films in the immediate postwar era. Edward G. Robinson, Garfield's co-star on several Warners pictures and fellow New York alum, started an independent company called Film Guild Corp. with studio producer Sol Lesser in 1946 - though this endeavor was unfruitful as they did not make any films under this banner.¹⁶ Even stars thoroughly entrenched in the studio model jumped at the opportunity to seize greater creative control. This proved a great boon for United Artists who boasted about signing a six-picture production deal with Garfield's *Humoresque* co-star, Joan Crawford.¹⁷

Garfield too indulged in this beleaguered-actor-dares-to-go-at-it-alone narrative in his promotion of future independent projects. In a January 1951 *Variety* guest column, Garfield describes feeling attacked from all sides due to his equal interest in Hollywood and Broadway

¹⁵ Kevin Hagopian, "Declarations of Independence: A History of Cagney Productions" *The Velvet Light Trap* 22; (1986) 16-32.

¹⁶ "Robinson-Lesser Also in Indie Sweepstakes," *Variety*, March 27, 1946, 3. ProQuest.

¹⁷ United Artists, "UA Presents the Great Creative Manpower Producing New Screen Excitement," *Independent Film Journal*, July 23, 1955, 11. MHDL.

and offers his own business autonomy as a means of breaking free of the theater versus film binary.

Don't think you've eliminated howls of protest when you reach semi-producer status. You work half a careertime getting to the point where you can offer suggestions that may or may not be accepted on merit, rather than refused on the snide basis that an actor is putting them forth...I've worked hard to earn the right to choose my scripts. It's (sic) norm on Broadway. It's a holocaust in Hollywood. Well, there's a simple resolution. I'll just have to make up my own mind to do what I want to do—if my wife lets me.¹⁸

The punchline, in which Garfield acknowledges and deflates his own self-importance, goes a long way in deflecting any criticism of the celebratory freelance actor rhetoric. The complication in this narrative about actor's overcoming their oppressive studio bosses, is a product of the unique position of the actor on a production. Movie stars are typically designated “above-the-line” creative talent and as such have an outsized importance within the industry as compared to a grip or electrician. However, unlike a director or producer, the creative decisions that an actor makes are primarily relegated to the set. Whether it is the most bombastic of line readings or the smallest of gestures, the actor's performance is as intrinsic to the film as the lighting or editing, but the labor of creating those lighting effects or the assemblage of edits is generally the purview of below-the-line workers.¹⁹ This liminality is unique to actors and creates an inherent tension as they occupy an uncomfortable middle-ground in the Hollywood power structure. However, through the formation of an independent production company, an actor uncomplicates their positionality and becomes resolutely above-the-line. They now have decision making power beyond what occurs in the pro-filmic event. The question becomes how

¹⁸ Garfield, John, “Steppin' Out for A Bit of Fresh Medium,” *Variety*, January 03, 1951, 8. ProQuest.

¹⁹ For a more comprehensive distinction between above-the-line and below-the-line status see Jonathan Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*. Edited by Lynn Spiegel, (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2008).
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/10.1515/9780822388968>

to present this ascendance to the public and still maintain a sympathetic and relatable persona. In publicizing the formation of a production company as a triumph over naked commercialism or greedy studio bosses, the movie star casts himself as the hero of the story. What makes Garfield's narrative unique is that he connected his story of independence to larger societal concerns that the studio system was ill-equipped to tackle.

What further distinguishes Garfield from many of his colleagues was his candor about both his personal benefit in going independent and how he hoped that said independent production company could have greater implications beyond individual advancement. In profiles and interviews, he often expounded on the potential of film as both an art form and a great impetus for social change. Garfield spoke of art as a tool of great societal import, and that film had the capacity to be among the most consequential of artistic media. It has been established that a claim for wider significance of one's own art can be self-serving, however, Garfield's specificity of vision and his commitment to progressive movements, makes his own art versus commerce distinction appear to be more than just a marketing scheme. His allegiance to a "realist" aesthetic creates a lineage between his work and other proletariat artists. While his adoption of the independent model came relatively early, the way he synchronized the rhetoric of independence, realism, and social values proved a bellwether for future actors inclined toward similar interests.

The Group Theater Mentality: Theataah's Antipathy Toward Hollywood

Forgot to tell you that I thought your radio version of "Golden Boy" was right smart. I always thought that part was cut out for you. Provided you stay in the flickers for a while, I think good radio work helps counterbalance some of the celluloid drivels.²⁰

Ira Shermin to John "Jules" Garfield April 22, 1942

²⁰ Correspondence, Ira Shermin to John Garfield, April 22, 1942, MS-04916, Box 4, Folder 8, John Garfield Papers, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin (hereafter cited as John Garfield Papers).

In his sharp-tongued dismissal of film as “celluloid drivel,” journalist Ira Shermin offers a reminder to his friend “Jules” or “Julie” Garfield, not only of his deep investment in art as an important mechanism of social change, but also an implicit hierarchy of media forms. It essentially positions theater and radio as valid means of expression and film a trivial medium of mindless entertainment. This antagonistic anti-Hollywood attitude prevailed in theatrical communities in the early-to-mid twentieth century, but traces of this cultural hierarchy, synonymizing performed “realism” with “real” art, have endured well beyond this midcentury milieu.

While Shermin is responding to a specific 1942 radio broadcast, he gestures towards the distinct role that Clifford Odets’ *Golden Boy* had in Garfield’s career, harkening back to Garfield’s origins in the theater. *Golden Boy* was first staged by The Group Theater in 1937, shortly after Garfield made a major impression as a supporting character in Odets’ 1935 play *Awake and Sing*. Odets wrote the lead role of the tortured Joe Bonaparte (a man torn between his dream of becoming a violinist and the more lucrative path of prizefighting) for Garfield, just as he was coming to prominence as one of the bright young stars of Broadway. Despite having the role tailored for him and his growing stature in the field, *Golden Boy*’s director (Group Theatre founder Harold Clurman) thought Garfield too young and inexperienced to play the lead and cast him a much smaller part. Biographies of Garfield often highlight this incident as a kairotic moment in Garfield’s career. The disappointment over this loss is what makes the heretofore stage bound Garfield more amenable to alternative paths including film roles, for which he would have likely been too skeptical - if not contemptuous - to otherwise entertain.²¹ When an

²¹ Robert Sklar, *City Boys: Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*. (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 1994), 82. Robert Nott, *He Ran All the Way: The Life of John Garfield*, (New York: Limelight Editions, 2003), 68-72, Larry Swindell, *Body and Soul: The Story of John Garfield*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1975), 98-

opportunity to leave New York for the west coast emerged, the actor reluctantly heeded Hollywood's call. This move to film acting was perceived by some as a betrayal of the Group Theater's sanctimony towards the movie industry. The move toward commercial or broad appeal media is in some ways antithetical to the foundational "realist" principles of The Group.

The evocation of "realism" requires any analytical study to wade into thorny ethical, philosophical, theoretical, and aesthetic debates that span across all forms of media. The term is further complicated by its malleability across eras and between individuals. In other words, realism in 19th century painting manifests differently than 20th century literature. Even within specific art forms, conceptualizations of realism diverge dramatically from practitioner to practitioner, critic to critic, etc. However, realism in The Group Theatre meant something specifiable and intrinsic to its social and political milieu. While this goal was not necessarily made explicit by all its progenitors, historiographies of The Group cohere around a two-pronged theory of realism: an alignment with the everyday hardships of the working class and the practice of acting as psychological excavation.

The espoused social alliance with the proletariat is not unique to The Group, but its formation during a great crisis of capitalism is a constitutional part of its philosophy. A stalled economy, still reeling from the 1929 stock market crash, gave rise to an urban artisan class increasingly drawn toward alternative political ideologies and economic systems. While Harold Clurman's initial impulse for The Group did not specify any political vision, he eventually came to advocate for an inherent continuity between the theater and the life of its players and patrons.²² In his memoir, *The Fervent Years*, Clurman claims that the chief objective of The

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²² Helen Krich Chinoy says that Clurman's initial 1930-31 talks were largely a-political but cites Clurman's April 1931 article *The Drama* as a first major advancement of a political ideology of The Group. Helen Krich Chinoy, *The*

Group was to create a collective experience between the actors and the audience - that an approach that exhibits a social integrity could bring about a synchronicity between the artist and the viewer.

Although he started in The Group as a performer, it is Clifford Odets' contributions as a playwright that have come to define the political legacy of the troupe. In some ways, founders Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, and Lee Strasberg's conceptual underpinnings run counter to the more populist strains of Odets' work. Where Clurman, et. al. advocated for radical changes to the theatrical process through experimentation and deliberate breakage with older traditions, Odets was more invested in polemical declarations. Theater historian Christopher J. Herr characterizes Odets' writing as "intuitively expressive" and argues that his great strength was his ability to articulate the "tensions and hopes of an entire generation."²³ This ability to synopsise the political discontentment of the era through narrative would prove key to The Group's acclaim.

Odets was an undeniable influence on Garfield's personal and professional life. In addition to first suggesting "Julie" (as Garfield was known) audition for The Group and writing *Awake and Sing!* (which features one of Garfield's signature roles), Odets was also Garfield's confidant and lifelong friend.²⁴ Biographies of Garfield claim a father-son dynamic, with Odets (seven years Garfield's senior) serving as the surrogate for Garfield's distant and emotionally abusive biological father. Odets fancied himself an intellectual who was prone to filibustering

Group Theatre: Passion, Politics, and Performance in the Depression Era, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 167.

²³ Christopher J. Herr, *Clifford Odets and American Political Theatre*, (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Praeger. 2003), 30.

²⁴ In a 1938 *Los Angeles Times* profile, Garfield refers to Odets and Odets' then wife, Louise Rainer as his best friends. Edwin Schallert, "Garfield to Take Bow at Downtown," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1938, 12. ProQuest.

about his latest passion, and the wide-eyed Garfield was eager to lap up all the culture and philosophy that he missed due to his primary school delinquency.²⁵

While Odets' influence looms large in Garfield's life, there were others that similarly influenced his humanistic worldview and inclinations towards liberalism. Chief among those influences is Angelo Patri, the principal of the Bronx-based P.S. 45. Patri, seeing Garfield's penchant for public disruption and showmanship, enrolled Garfield in speech and drama classes, where he excelled.²⁶ Patri's nurturing carried on even after Garfield graduated from P.S. 45, and it was Patri who paid for Garfield's fees when, as a teenager, he managed to talk his way into classes at the prestigious American Laboratory Theater aka "The Lab," run by Konstantin Stanislavski's disciples, Richard Boleslavski and Mme. Maria Ouspenskaya.²⁷

Beyond any individual's sphere of influence, the political and economic landscape of the 1920s and 1930s New York City led to inevitable encounters with wealth disparity and the horrors of industrialization, as well as efforts to counter these injustices. Garfield's wife Roberta "Robbe" Seidman recalled her 1920s childhood experience of the Lower East Side as a "hotbed of politics," with the formation of the several garment industry unions advocating for major industry reforms.²⁸ By the time he entered The Group's fold in 1934, Garfield was already thoroughly enmeshed in a theater scene animated by class consciousness and the potential for a new progressive agenda. Within The Group there was a growing faction of avowed communists who fought for more explicit political material and the adoption of equitable pay for all

²⁵ Nott, *He Ran All the Way*, 35-36. Swindell, *Body and Soul*, 66 & 67.

²⁶ Nott, *He Ran All the Way*, 18-22.

²⁷ Ibid, 28.

²⁸ Ibid., 26.

members. Ultimately, The Group's major Marxist gesture was the adoption of a non-hierarchical power structure, which in practice meant there were no stars, no names atop the marquee, no individual curtain calls, and all members were expected to help in the daily operations of the organization.²⁹

This communal philosophy extends to both the theatrical experience and also the labor that goes into the making of a play - namely the set decoration, costuming, and the blocking and building of characters through an extensive and intimate rehearsal process. Beyond the communistic structure and the avowedly populist themes of some of the most popular original productions, The Group's other legacy is the adoption of a derivative of Konstantin Stanislavski's performance "System" called "The Method." Like the "System," Lee Strasburg's "Method" held that good acting emerges from an actor's authentic embodiment of a character through psychological realism.³⁰ An allegiance to capturing real lived experience is the primary connection between what might otherwise seem an accident of history, where politics and formal daring happened to intersect. However, it is this connection between realism and the social context that birthed this aesthetic preference that informed Garfield's work as an actor and a producer.

By 1935 John Garfield's reputation as a dynamic stage presence was thoroughly cemented. He had made an enormous impression in The Group Theatre's production of *Awake*

²⁹ Chinoy, *The Group Theatre*, 169.

³⁰ Cynthia Baron outlines the basic techniques outlined in Stanislavski's writings, and as well as those who molded their practice after his teachings, in *Modern Acting: The Lost Chapter of American Film and Theatre*. She also contrasts this approach with Strasberg's and argues that the gulf between the two approaches is so wide that scholars should avoid categorizing The Method as derivative of The System. Because Stanislavski's influence is so apparent on Strasberg's Method and because Garfield encountered both practices, I do not make the same distinction. For my purposes, they are both techniques in search of the same goal: emotional realism in performance. Actor's Lab performance techniques: Cynthia Baron, *Modern Acting: The Lost Chapter of American Film and Theatre*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) 41-52. Not Derivative: xxi

and Sing! and had managed to parlay that success into other projects including, taking roles with more commercial prospects. He found an agent, Arthur Lyons, who encouraged him to play in the light comedy *Having Wonderful Time*. Other members of The Group chided him for performing in such a crass profit-oriented project, but Garfield's remained adaptable despite the pressure from his colleagues.³¹ Hollywood, of course, was the ultimate emblem of capitalist art. Even at its most high-minded or progressive (as in the films that Garfield championed) critics would still dismiss the form as simplistic, even at times insulting the intelligence of its fans.³² Despite the stated contempt for Hollywood, most New York writers and creators were much more ambivalent in practice.

Garfield was not the first nor the last member to relocate to Los Angeles for the promise of a major financial reward. Many of The Group's most ardent leftist playwrights eventually made their way west including Clifford Odets, Thornton Wilder and John Howard Lawson. As Cynthia Baron notes, Cheryl Crawford took pride in resisting Hollywood "seduction," unlike so many of her colleagues, but she also would proudly credit The Group whenever members had notable film success including Oscar wins.³³ Try as they might to deny it, The Group were deeply indebted to Hollywood. The economic realities of financing an experimental theater company in the height of the depression meant finding wealthy benefactors to fund their productions. Franchot Tone was The Group's first member to find Hollywood success and they

³¹ Nott, *He Ran All the Way*, 67.

³² In 1934 Robert Forsythe (a.k.a. Kyle Chrichton) lamented in *New Theater* the fate of the writers who go to Hollywood "to produce pictures that could be enjoyed by people who had managed to get through the 7th grade." Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the age of the New Deal*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) 52.

³³ Cynthia Baron, *Modern Acting*, 8-9.

accepted his money to finance their productions.³⁴ When talent flowed in the other direction and Hollywood actress Francis Farmer moved east, The Group took her in and used her fame to draw in audiences.³⁵ While not as artistically compromised on the scale of big-budget studio fare, the idea of bowing to the economic practicalities of making art will reverberate later when Garfield faces similar struggles as an independent producer.

Conversely, there were people in Hollywood who were similarly resistant to the mythos of the Broadway stage. Columnists, especially Hedda Hopper, were dismissive of the desire to go perform on Broadway, and indirectly accused actors who spent time on the stage of being ungrateful for their movie stardom. Garfield became a regular target of her ire for his insistence on returning to Broadway.³⁶ Other columnists were not quite so hostile, and even pointed to his background both as a stage performer and as a streetwise kid from the wrong side of the track as part of his appeal. Indeed, his storied background as a tough kid, who combined careful stagecraft with an ineffable explosive quality became the defining attribute of his persona.³⁷

Contemporary critics have identified this mixture of angst and verity as a product of the Group Theatre's Method acting technique. Historians of Method acting have pointed to Garfield as a progenitor of a particular strain of hyper-masculine, naturalistic, acting style that became most synonymous with 1950s actors, Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift.

Theater critic and historian Isaac Butler described Garfield's film debut in *Four Daughters*

³⁴ Ibid., 121.

³⁵ Nott, *He Ran All the Way*, 68-69.

³⁶ Hedda Hopper, "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1940, 08. ProQuest.

³⁷ A review of *Four Daughters* in *Silver Screen* crystallized this persona recalling his New York background and describing him as "not the least good looking" but have a certain "something." "Reviews of Pictures," *Silver Screen*, October 1938, 60. MHDL.

(Curtiz, 1938) as being “more present and more alive than anyone else on camera” He also describes the performance as so fresh that he “collapses the distance” between classical and present-day styles of acting.³⁸

Despite the stated goal of The System towards naturalism and verisimilitude, there are clear limits of The Method approach. As with all representational forms, the relationship to realism is asymptotic, and the real will always remain beyond any artist's grasp. Additionally, some of the mannerisms associated with the Method veer far from the stated goal. In fact, this oxymoronic realistic-style became so infamous in the midcentury that Hollywood films could turn the tables on this counterculture and mock it as cliché. For instance, in the 1960 film *Bells are Ringing* (Minnelli) a Marlon Brando-esq character claims an “ostrich trying to bury his head in a cement pavement” as inspiration for an acting exercise - a clear parody of a New York beatnik theater performer. However cliché the style became, Garfield’s performances stand out for their subtlety and lack of demonstrative chest pounding. He was able to successfully meld his theater training with the necessary limitations of film acting - which offers less rehearsal time and more granular repetition of lines and gestures for different camera angles.

The Group Theatre years remained an important touchstone for Garfield - both in terms of his acting practice and his aesthetic sensibilities. His friend and business partner, Abraham Polonsky confirmed this enduring allegiance when he said of Garfield, “Everything he did flowed from his magic and frustrating years in The Group. The play was the heart of it. The ensemble was the soul of it.”³⁹ In interviews Garfield would regularly insist that his heart will

³⁸ Butler, Isaac, *The Method: How the Twentieth Century Learned to Act*, 203.

³⁹ Abraham Polonsky, “On John Garfield,” *Abraham Polonsky: Interviews*, edited by Andrew Dickos (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012) 151. First published as the introduction to *The Films of John Garfield* by Howard Gelman, (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel, 1975), 7– 9. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=1074096>.

always belong to the theater, and he would spend a career trying to move a piece of the idealism and political fervor from New York to Hollywood. When Garfield relented and left New York for Hollywood, many of his business and philanthropic endeavors, including his independent production company, were efforts to try and recreate a similar artistic collective. Apart from being a formative influence on Garfield's politics, The Group also influenced his conception of the way that art and politics intertwine. The sensibilities of The Group towards a "realist" aesthetic manifest in Garfield's outspoken judgment of mainstream Hollywood style.

From One System to Another: Garfield Goes Hollywood

Garfield makes for an ideal conduit through which to examine the political and social circumstances of Hollywood in the 1940s, in part because his rise heralded many of the major industrial shifts that led to the preeminence of independent production. Not only was Garfield's ascendance reflective of changing social mores, but he was also willing to harness the agency granted to him as a major Hollywood star to magnify the stories and necessities of those without agency. In retrospect, his willingness to speak out against unfair labor practices, discrimination, mainstream aesthetics, stale narratives, and the entire Hollywood business model seems not just daring, but hubristic, especially given the economic bounty that Hollywood bestowed upon him. This insistence on biting the hand that fed him would ultimately play a role in the destruction of his career. His consistent espousal of this kind of progressive philosophy provides a record of the inherent tenuity and contradiction of the actor-producer position within the American movie business.

As soon as he was established in Hollywood, Garfield began finding ways to supplement his day job with work that resembled Broadway's mixture of art and politics. Shortly after his

triumphant debut in *Four Daughters*, Garfield began participating in a variety of anti-fascist fundraisers. One event, held by the Motion Picture Artists Committee in 1938, featured parodic sketches of dictatorial world leaders in service of raising funds for Spanish Loyalists, and was accused of having “communistic tendencies” by Washington politicians.⁴⁰ It is an accusation which foreshadows the anti-communist fervor that would later dismantle the careers of many who participated in these kinds of anti-fascist charitable functions. Garfield also participated in efforts to develop a more communal system of film production. He served as the Treasurer of the Motion Picture Guild which sought to establish a cooperative financing model to provide an economic alternative to the large corporate banks. Established in 1938, the Motion Picture Guild’s aim was to produce pictures beyond “Cinderella and comparable motifs,” which in this instance meant an allegiance to documentary and films designed to bait controversy.⁴¹ The Guild’s first project was an adaptation of Erika Mann’s book about the Nazi indoctrination of children, *School for Barbarians*, which was published that same year. Also involved with this organization, though not in a leadership role, was Robert Rossen and James Wong Howe, both of whom would work with Garfield on his independent production, *Body and Soul*.⁴²

Garfield biographer Robert Nott holds that much of this political activism was at the behest of his wife, Robbe, who was an active member of the Communist Party and was a

⁴⁰ “Filmites Deny Communistic Tendencies,” *Variety*, August 17, 1938, 05. ProQuest.

⁴¹ “Motion Picture Guild Goes Co-Op for Propaganda Films” *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 12, 1939, 12. ProQuest.

⁴² Garfield and Howe would also collaborate on several relief efforts for China, including sponsoring a banquet for the American Bureau for Medical Aid to China (which was co-sponsored by Chinese American film luminary, Anna May Wong). He had direct collaborations with the Roosevelt administration including “Night of Nights for China” a benefit for Chinese war refugees and appearances at functions set to benefit United China Relief. “Plan Benefit for China: Mrs. James Roosevelt Confers with Theater Group on May 5 Show,” *New York Herald Tribune*, April 26, 1940, 16. ProQuest. and “Pageant to Open Here Tomorrow: Film Star Will Appear in Moon Festival to Aid United China Benefit,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 06, 1941, A2. ProQuest.

formidable intellectual presence in Garfield's life. According to Nott, Robbe encouraged Garfield to sign his name to several humanitarian organizations, including the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, The American Friends of the Chinese Army and the American League for Peace and Democracy, without him ever fully considering the implications for such actions.⁴³ This is not to suggest that Garfield was himself apolitical or unconcerned with the campaigns and charitable organizations he supported. His concern for the social and political future of the country was genuine, as was his belief that art and culture had a responsibility to help shape that future. In correspondence with his skeptical New York friend, Ira Shermin, Garfield maintained that the motion picture industry controlled an important platform for disseminating important anti-fascist messaging writing: "I believe that the motion picture and the theater of today and tomorrow will center on issues of vital importance to the thinking of Americans. I'm for that kind of motion picture and theatre in a great big way."⁴⁴

This attitude was part of the steady drumbeat that eventually marched Garfield out of Hollywood. But even prior to the crucible of the blacklist era, there were forces within Hollywood that pushed back against Garfield's explicit political aggrandizement. In an exemplary interview with *Silver Screen*, Garfield bristles at the interviewer's insistence on mining Garfield's tragic past for copy. In lieu of gossip, he offers unlimited access to his views on current events and philosophy, to which the interviewer responds, "The people who read this don't care what you think about current events or philosophy. They can get that from the newspapers. They want to know about you."⁴⁵ This interviewer's frustration is relatively gentle

⁴³ Nott, *He Ran All the Way*, 110.

⁴⁴ Correspondence, John Garfield to Ira Shermin, October 10, 1941, John Garfield Papers, Box 4, Folder 8.

⁴⁵ "Another East Side Genius," *Silver Screen*, December 1938, 74. MHDL.

compared to the vitriol that columnist Hedda Hopper published about Garfield. She took great offense at his insistence that he continue his stage career despite the abundant monetary reward that Hollywood had bestowed. She delighted in the failure of Garfield's singular return to Broadway during his tenure at Warners, the 1940 production of *Heavenly Express*.⁴⁶ Key to Hopper's hatred of Broadway and New York theater was its association with liberalism. As an avowed anti-communist, Hopper took particular umbrage at Garfield's repeated dismissal of money as a motivating factor for artists, insisting that he only needed to earn enough to support his family. Particularly telling was the persistent reading of Garfield's desire for artistic freedom as an independent producer as merely a bid for more money. In a 1947 Hopper column about Garfield's agreement to perform in *The Great Outdoors* for the independent production house, Enterprise Studios, she expresses doubt that Garfield will ever return to the stage, writing "When a guy makes \$125,000 for a week's work in pictures, why return to acting? 'For love of acting, you say. To which I reply nerts!'"⁴⁷ The tenor of these articles became increasingly cruel as Garfield came under suspicion for communist sympathies. She even mocked him for the health crisis that would ultimately end his life, and when he died, she made a snide comment about the heritage (\$100,000) he left his family.⁴⁸

While Hopper's contempt for Garfield and his politics was notably vicious, she was not alone in warning him against taking strong public stances on socio-political matters. In a 1939 article in *Silver Screen*, columnist Jerry Asher writes at length about the perils of letting one's

⁴⁶ Hedda Hopper, "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, June 09, 1940, C3. ProQuest. and "Feud and Far Between--Or How Stage, Screen Made Up," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 26, 1942, C3. ProQuest.

⁴⁷ Hedda Hopper, "Looking at Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 1947. A5. ProQuest.

⁴⁸ Hedda Hopper, "Looking at Hollywood," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 03, 1949, A1. ProQuest. and "Looking at Hollywood: Russell-Mature Team to Star in Outdoor Film," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 13, 1952, A6. ProQuest.

ideals get in the way of Hollywood success. The article dichotomizes two actors: George Murphy and Francis Lederer. George Murphy is polite, does what he's told, and patiently waits for screen success and is eventually rewarded. Francis Lederer on the other hand wanted to make "fine pictures, to give fine performances... He hoped his reputation as a star would make it possible for him to talk on radios, speak on stages, give out interviews on his plan to establish world peace." The article explains that press agents, fans, and Lederer's studio got tired of all his speaking engagements and dropped him. The article subtly intimates that John Garfield has learned a similar lesson about being too vocal about politics and will no longer be a public advocate of any political causes.⁴⁹ Of course, that was not the case in 1939, and his efforts would soon redouble with the coming of the Second World War.

Actor Activism in WWII

WWII eliminated any lingering doubts that film was not solely a medium of entertainment, but a powerful instrument for disseminating information. More significantly, governmental figures understood that this information was not value neutral, and that controlling the messages emerging from Hollywood would be an invaluable tool for circulating state approved narratives about the war effort. Chris Yogerst's book, *Hollywood Hates Hitler* chronicles the role of Hollywood players in fighting fascists, including the efforts of some senators to censor Hollywood anti-Hitler films and how their inquiries into Hollywood ideologies gave way to McCarthyism in the postwar era. But in the pre-World War II years there was still some debate about the efficacy of movies to be anything other than entertainment: In March 1941 Motion Picture Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA)

⁴⁹ Jerry Asher, "Two Clever Fellows Who Found It Better to Bend Than to Break," *Silver Screen*, June 1939, 24-25, 74-76. MHDL.

President, Will Hays, released his annual report entitled, *Motion Pictures and National Defense*, in which he addressed the common belief held by critics of Hollywood, like Garfield and his theater cohort, that it was primarily a means of diversion, instead defining film as “a medium of information, education, and entertainment.”⁵⁰ On the other hand, the President of the Production Code Administration (PCA) Joseph Breen believed that film was a medium of pure amusement and discouraged studios from producing any motion pictures with any propagandistic capacity - including anti-fascistic material such as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Litvak, 1939) and *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin, 1949).⁵¹ However, the Roosevelt Administration recognized the capacity of mass media to influence public opinion and created The Office of War Information (OWI) in part to supersede the Hays Office, thereby clearing a path for the production of anti-Nazi material.

After the war ended, there was a greater recognition of the motion picture’s social capacity as a circulator of both news and ideology. In January of 1946, *Film Daily* Publisher Jack Alicoate wrote an opinion piece where he offers a prognostication about the role that motion pictures was to play in international relations in the coming years stating, “Whether one calls it propaganda or information, it is evident that, as a result of World War II, the motion picture from this day on must be regarded as an instrument of public policy as well as a great popular medium of entertainment”⁵² This change was the result of a broad epistemological vacillation coupled with a shift in the ways and types of motion pictures that audiences could access. World War II

⁵⁰ Chris Yogerst, *Hollywood Hates Hitler!: Jew-Baiting, Anti-Nazism, and the Senate Investigation into Warmongering in Motion Pictures*, (Jackson :University Press of Mississippi, 2020) 33.

⁵¹ John A. Noakes, “Racializing Subversion: The FBI and the Depiction of Race in Early Cold War Movies,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, no. 4, 734-735, DOI: 10.1080/0141987032000087389.

⁵² Alicante, Jack, “Motion Picture is Instrument of Public Policy,” *The Daily Film Renter*, January 01, 1946, 36. ProQuest.

saw the industry invest resources into documentary films and newsreels - often made with the assistance of the U.S. government. For the first time, filmgoers were subject to battlefield images unadulterated by Hays office's standards of good taste. While these images were created in tandem with the government, and their use as propaganda precludes a true realist label, the filmmaking technique and real-world on-location reporting constituted a major break for the staged action on a Hollywood lot. Some of this action included shots in which the audience could sense the hand of the filmmaker, in some cases because the camera was blown out of their hands by exploding bombs and bares the device in a way that Hollywood's invisible style was invented to conceal. This exposure of the filmic apparatus constituted a seismic formal shift, which would later manifest in post-war cinema as what Thomas Doherty calls "newsdrama cinematography."⁵³ This documentary-style, which calls attention to the camera, would become a signifier of authenticity and realism.

Just as attitudes about the nature of the cinematic form changed after the war, the role of the celebrity within the motion picture industry also shifted. The war changed governmental and industrial attitudes about the role of filmmaking in society, and it also showed that stars were not just objects of fascination and fantasy, but role models who could inspire interest in issues of real-world consequence. The war showed that stardom could be deployed in service of patriotism and could directly address global conflicts.

Actors and entertainers had a very specific function in the war effort: awareness raising. Garfield himself worked tirelessly on USO tours and fundraising efforts. Among his most notable contributions was his founding of the Hollywood Canteen with his *Juarez* (Dieterle, 1939) co-star Bette Davis. Once again, he drew inspiration from the New York theater

⁵³ Thomas Doherty, "Documenting the 1940s," *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*, edited by Thomas Schatz, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999) 410-421.

community which created the Stage Door Canteen— a nightclub where servicemen on furlough had the opportunity to interact with Broadway stars.⁵⁴ The Hollywood iteration became an institution during the war where movie stars would regularly come and mingle with enlistees. Despite severe pressure from the Canteen administration board to keep the establishment segregated, Davis and Garfield were adamant that it remain open to all races.⁵⁵ They were nominally successful in their efforts, though in actuality the social standards of the time meant that there was little substantive interaction between Black servicemen and white women.⁵⁶

Garfield was premature in his adoption of a public advocacy role relative to most other major Hollywood figures, but after the war many others joined his ranks. In her article, “Stardom, Sentimental Education, and the Shaping of Global Citizens,” Julie Wilson delves into the rise of the star-turned-ambassador in the 1950s. Wilson contextualizes this phenomenon with the theory of “sentimental education,” which concerned changing attitudes about the U.S.’s responsibility as global citizenry following World War II. No longer were Americans simply members of a single country, but a part of a larger networked system where the needs of one nation are the concerns of all nations.⁵⁷ For Garfield’s part, his postwar advocacy concerned more domestic matters including veteran affairs and desegregating Hollywood. As the war drew to a close, Garfield made gestures towards turning the Hollywood Canteen into a gender inclusive school for veterans. He made overtures about providing a place for people returning to

⁵⁴ The Hollywood Canteen was originally called the Hollywood Stage Door Canteen and was the fourth Canteen of this kind to open in the U.S. The other two were in Philadelphia and Washington D.C. “Hollywood’s Stage Door Canteen,” *New York Herald Tribune*, September 20, 1942, E1. ProQuest.

⁵⁵ “No Mixed Dancing Curb at Hollywood Canteen,” *Chicago Defender*, May 08, 1943, 07. ProQuest.

⁵⁶ Julia Stern, *Bette Davis Black and White*, citing Sherrie Tucker’s research (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021) 84.

⁵⁷ Julie Wilson, “Stardom, Sentimental Education, and the Shaping of Global Citizens,” *Cinema Journal* 53, no 2, (Winter 2014) 33.

civilian life to have a space where they can learn the filmmaking trade and reacclimate to a postwar domestic existence.⁵⁸ This notion was ultimately foreclosed when the Canteen officially shuttered in November of 1945. His gestures towards desegregation, however, were more concrete. In July of 1946 he, along with stars Olivia de Havilland, Lena Horne and Fredric March protested the Ambassador Hotel's discrimination of Black producer/screenwriter Carlton Moss.⁵⁹ He would also work in his capacity as SAG director to implement some new guidelines for "realistic" representations of Black characters in film. This return to the realism motif takes a new valence when applied to matters of inclusivity but are nonetheless central to both the white progressives in Hollywood and Black advocates fighting to rid motion pictures of harmful stereotypes.

Turning the Dream Factory into Reality

In *The Decline of Sentiment*, film historian Lea Jacobs traces the cultural ascendancy of realism and verisimilitude over florid romanticism in silent film performance. She chronologizes a shift in taste cultures of the early-20th Century which resulted in a critical reevaluation of what constitutes good or interesting use of language in a written medium. Jacobs writes, "The changes in literary taste and culture of the 1910s and 1920s thus included an affirmation of naturalism, a rejection of decorum in the selection of literary subject matter, sometimes to the point of courting legal censorship, and an appreciation of the rough and inventive aspects of American slang over

⁵⁸ Edwin Schallert, "Hollywood Canteen Shapes Program for Postwar Era," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1944, B1. ProQuest.

⁵⁹ "Film Stars Fight Hotel Jim Crow in Hollywood," *The Chicago Defender*, July 20, 1946, 06.

more polished and formal rhetorical conventions.”⁶⁰ Here Jacobs argues that the embrace of colloquial prose in American modernist literature heralded a shift in tastes across a range of other media. Her project explains the connection between the adoption of a more idiomatic vernacular in literature translated to the theater, and how the shift in theatrical tradition ultimately manifested in a less gestural, more naturalistic screen performances. Despite the protestations of columnists like Hedda Hopper, the histories of stage and screen reveal a very clear porousness between the sensibilities.

It was not just the theater community that helped cement realism as the aesthetic of high-brow cinema. The existing New York critical apparatus helped propagate the notion that European films were an artistic alternative to Hollywood movies. Tino Balio documents the growing interest in Italian neo-realist cinema among the New York literati. Critics like Bosley Crowther emphasized the documentary aesthetic and themes regarding societal and political discord as the predominant element of acclaim. This critical esteem eventually fomented a taste culture in Hollywood wherein the cinema-verité style became a signifier of realism and social import.⁶¹ Director Robert Rossen, when asked to respond to the sweep of foreign titles in the 1946 critics’ awards, confirms this bias towards realism in a statement he made to the *United Press*. He said that Hollywood’s failure to win plaudits is a direct result of the insistence on maintaining a “worn-out fairy-tale formula,” and that Hollywood will never make “good pictures” so long as they continue telling “Cinderella stories.” He remarks that British and French films, by contrast, offer stories that are “real” and “true to life,” and by implication

⁶⁰ Lea Jacobs. *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008) 21. <http://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=470861>.

⁶¹ For more on Bosley Crowther’s spotlighting European filmmaking see Tino Balio, *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946–1973*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

worthy of esteem.⁶² This cross-cultural exchange was also informed by the Neo-Marxist theory of the Frankfurt School philosophers, such as Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, who both wrote about “mass media” as instruments of both hegemonic control and products bought and sold without regard for art or human expression.⁶³

Garfield and Rossen shared this same admiration for depictions of the “real” and would soon collaborate on one of Garfield’s most significant social realist dramas, *Body and Soul*. Rossen’s sentiment echoes the standard line Garfield issued whenever he was asked about what constitutes a good picture. Most of his responses offer some iteration of the line he gave the *Los Angeles Times* in 1939, “The story is everything...Nothing can help if the story lacks reality or honesty.” While Garfield’s paradigm of realism was rooted in New York theater as opposed to international cinema, there was a global component to his philosophy of art and acting. In a 1938 article he penned for *The Theatre Arts Committee* magazine, Garfield advocated for a borderless understanding of realism, writing “The actor must know what’s real in the world today—how people feel about things—what’s happening to people all over the world. And what’s happening in the world itself.”⁶⁴ The correlation he draws between realism and social responsibility would manifest in Garfield’s independent work as he moved into social-realist filmmaking.

⁶² Article, Patricia Clary, “H’wood Censure Laid to ‘FairyTaleFormula,’” *United Press*, March 25, 1947. Robert Rossen Papers, PASC.0087, Box 13, Folder 6, Charles E. Young Library, University of California, Los Angeles. (Hereafter Robert Rossen Papers)

⁶³ Scholarship about independent film in the postwar era often points to the rise of television and the subsequent mass-market critique as one of the primary influences on the rise of realism. Denise Mann problematizes this assumption arguing that there were both ideological and industrial reasons for the rise of “New Hollywood” independence. Regardless, the leftist milieu of the New York theater community was certainly informed by Marxist critiques of commodified art. Mann, *Hollywood Independents*, 87-95.

⁶⁴ John Garfield, “An Actor Believes,” *The Daily Worker* reprinted from *Theatre Arts Committee Magazine*, September 22, 1938, 07. ProQuest.

Civil Rights

This emphasis on realism as a marker of quality extends beyond just critical approval. Just like the 1930s theater scene, the film industry underwent a similar convergence of political awakening and formal technique. Films that had some documentary component or some element of realism be it in language, mise-en-scene, or narrative structure became markers of social import. This extended to major public debates including the growing civil rights campaign when columnists from several Black newspapers and magazines pointed to the need for realism as a means of combating harmful stereotypes. Since the early 1940s, both the Office of War Information and The National Association of Colored People (NAACP) had been pressuring Hollywood to abandon “clowns, heavies, moronic servants or as superstitious individuals scared of ghosts” and depict Black people as realistic Americans.⁶⁵ Garfield made this case in a few articles printed in primarily Black publications, in which he advocated for “truthful” pictures. He argued that films should aspire to both entertain and avoid harmful stereotypes; that the use of these stereotypes is inherently untruthful and therefore an unconvincing representation of reality. Among his most prescient suggestions for attaining greater truthfulness was advocating for greater representation in all phases of production. He wrote that the dearth of Black writers, directors, gaffers, cinematographers, and story-analysts, ensured that Hollywood representations of Black people are limited to two-dimensional caricatures. He also argued that it was unethical to exploit the labor of those Black actors who did participate — another common practice in Hollywood.⁶⁶ Additionally, in 1947, in his capacity as Screen Actors Guild director, he helped

⁶⁵ Stephen Vaughn, “Ronald Reagan and the Struggle for Black Dignity in Cinema,” *The Journal of Negro History* 77, no. 1, 2 as quoted by John A. Noakes, “Racializing Subversion: The FBI and the Depiction of Race in Early Cold War Movies,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, no. 4, 728–49. doi:10.1080/0141987032000087389.

⁶⁶ John Garfield, “How Hollywood Can Better Race Relations,” *Negro Digest* 6, no. 1, 1947, 06. ProQuest.

develop a plan for greater racial integration for Black and other marginalized actors. The details of the plan stipulate that all Black characters should be played by Black actors and that they should not appear as caricatures but as everyday members of the community.⁶⁷

It is significant that the details of this plan were never published in mainstream press and that this remained an insular effort with limited institutional impact. These articles announcing the arrival of this plan appeared in *Afro-American*, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, and *Negro Digest*, but I found no evidence of its gracing the pages of *Variety* or *The New York Times*. This sequestering of civil rights matters in Black publications foreshadows Garfield's later effort to integrate his films through independent production, when *Body and Soul* marketed its Black star, Canada Lee, primarily in Black publications.

Also significant is the tension between realism as a formal aesthetic and the demands of the NAACP. There is an important distinction between the liberal rhetoric of "realism" as a social force, and the requests for the elimination of harmful stereotypes, which were much less abstract and the need for harm reduction much more immediate. That said, both the Civil Rights Movement and the liberals were aligned in the belief that Hollywood's dissemination of an apolitical, white supremacist fantasy was an impediment to social progress. One very particularly impassioned plea for realism came from a spread in *Fan Magazine* — a publication that promoted itself as the first "strictly interracial publication dedicated to the more serious desires of the movie-going public."⁶⁸ This package offered a comprehensive description of the Interracial Unity Award Committee's list of winners for 1947 and a series of editorials which

⁶⁷ "John Garfield Maps Race Relations Plan," *Afro-American*, November 01, 1947, 06. ProQuest.

⁶⁸ *Fan Magazine* article, Abraham Polonsky Papers, U.S. Mss 105AN, February 1948, Box 6, Folder 8, Archives Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison. (Hereafter cited as Abraham Polonsky Papers).

hailed 1947 as a Renaissance of socially minded films. The Committee was a non-profit organization chartered by the State of California intended to award film industry professionals for their efforts to help promote racial and religious tolerance, and to “safeguard” the representation of “racial minority groups” in the motion picture media.⁶⁹ Among the winners of the racial unity award were two Garfield starrers: *Gentlemen’s Agreement* (Kazan) and *Body and Soul* as well as *Black Gold* (Karlson), *Crossfire* (Dmytryk), *Cass Timberlane* (Sidney), and *Burning Cross* (Colmes). The editorials emphasize the importance of “greater realism” in motion pictures as well as the significance of the motion picture as a powerful propagator of ideas.

This sentiment seems to reinforce the government's position that film has a role to play in shaping public opinion. However, one editorial directly pushes back against some of the very powerful individuals within the federal government who wanted to exact “political pressure to stymie these progressive film steps,” indirectly but openly referring to the House Un-American Activities Committee and its supporters.⁷⁰ One editorial in particular, castigates Hollywood for its “unending supply of inane motion pictures” and cheers on the increasing demands made by sophisticated film-goers who showed Hollywood that greater realism in filmmaking can be profitable.⁷¹ Indeed, *Fan Magazine* was not the only publication to make note of the rise of the “realistic film.” A 1950 article in the *New York Herald Tribune* noted that movie-goers were bypassing “sugar-coated” plots for more realistic subjects, citing films about racial prejudice and mental illness such as *Pinky* (Kazan, 1949), *Home of the Brave* (Robson, 1949), and *The Snake*

⁶⁹ The package features short blurbs about each member of the Committee, all of whom are prominent members of the Los Angeles African American community. Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “Gentleman’s Agreement Opens Way for More Realism in American Movies,” *Fan Magazine*, U.S. Mss 105AN, February 1948, Box 6, Folder 8, February 1948, Abraham Polonsky Papers.

Pit (Litvak, 1948), proving that these types of subjects could be acclaimed and profitable.⁷²

Warner Bros. vs Garfield

In February of 1939, Garfield signed a long-term contract with Warner Bros— a union which presents as an ideal match of sensibilities.⁷³ Warner Bros studio output was categorized by its relative grittiness and realism as compared to the glitz of MGM or the fantastical monster movies of Universal. They ventured into social-realism with films such as *Black Legion* in 1937, which was an exposé on the inner-workings of a faction of the Ku Klux Klan. Not only did working with Warners present an opportunity to work with material that interested Garfield, the contract he signed also stipulated that he could leave for a Broadway sabbatical, provided he gave the studio enough notice.⁷⁴

This synergy between sensibilities might have provided Garfield the support and artistic nourishment he required to work within the confines of his contract, but conflicts between studio and star still erupted. In a 1938 profile in *Silver Screen* Garfield defiantly laid out his terms for remaining in Hollywood, claiming that he would return permanently to the theater if not given parts that he deemed worthwhile. He says, “If they give me good parts I’ll stick here until I feel I’m beginning to stagnate. But if they try to type me or cast me in pictures that don’t mean anything I’ll be long-gone from here before they realize what’s happened.”⁷⁵ In the 1930s,

⁷² “Studios Escape Escapism as Realistic Films Pay Off,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 14, 1950, C3.

⁷³ Long-term pact signed 13 February 1939; *Dust Be My Destiny* file, Warner Legal Collection, WCFTR as found in in Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 492.

⁷⁴ Thornton Delehanty, “Hollywood: Grandpa Vanderhof Alters His Mien on the Screen,” *New York Herald Tribune*, August 21, 1938, E3. ProQuest.

⁷⁵ S.R. Mook, “Another East Side Genius,” *Silver Screen*, December 1938, 75. MHDL.

Warners was known to take midlevel stars like Humphrey Bogart, force them into B-pictures and then suspend them when they objected.⁷⁶ While never shunted to B-pictures, Garfield quickly became dissatisfied with Warners' insistence that he appear in derivative films again and again, and he was suspended multiple times throughout the years he was under contract.

He was made particularly discontented after he starred in the successful remake of an old Douglas Fairbanks Jr. vehicle, *The Life of Jimmy Dolan* (Mayo, 1933) called *They Made Me a Criminal* (1939). This Busby Berkeley directed, crime drama co-starring The Dead End Kids featured Garfield as a former boxer on the lam from authorities when he is wrongfully accused of murder. After *Criminal* made money, Warners cultivated Garfield's public image around this archetypal drifter figure and inserted him into iterative versions of the misunderstood-criminal-on-the-run or criminal-in-jail dramas. This rebel from the wrong-side-of-the-tracks persona was a cozy fit with Garfield's biography, and media profiles would frequently highlight Garfield's adolescent gang activity and his triumph over a life of crime. The monotony and frustration of these uninspired productions was such that by mid-1939, he refused to do any more prison pictures.⁷⁷ Besides being artistically vacant, Garfield complained that they were also churned out at a breakneck pace. In 1940 Garfield took a sabbatical from Hollywood to return to Broadway, having now performed in nine pictures in two years. He referred to this break as the finale of the "Dead End" phase of his life.⁷⁸

Even after Garfield activated the clause in his contract that allowed him time to perform on Broadway, his relationship with Warners and the Hollywood establishment remained tense. In

⁷⁶ Schatz, Thomas, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*, 49.

⁷⁷ Douglas W. Churchill, "Reports that George Raft May Replace Garfield in *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* Following 'Garfield's Rebellion.'" *New York Times*, June 03, 1939, 17. ProQuest.

⁷⁸ *Silver Screen*, July 1940, 16. MHDL.

1941, he lamented to the press that he only received offers for roles that Bogart or Cagney declined.⁷⁹ Warner Bros dictated the characters and projects that Garfield could play, and they also restricted his ability to find other avenues for self-advocacy. Even his contract with his agent, Arthur Lyons, was brokered by the studio and could not be broken so long as Garfield was under contract. In 1942 Garfield filed for arbitration against A&S Lyons, but the board appointed by Screen Actors and the Artists Managers Guild, determined that Garfield had to keep Lyons for the entire term of his contract.⁸⁰ Garfield did eventually break free of Lyons and hired Lew Wasserman as his agent, who would later become notorious for fostering actors' independence from studio control.⁸¹

Amid this studio strife, Garfield started developing a business partnership with his friend Bob Roberts. Roberts, a former insurance salesman and an ardent leftist, encouraged both Garfield's political participation and his desire to leave the confines of his contractual arrangement.⁸² Thanks in part to his new representation, the quality of Garfield's roles did start to improve in the mid-1940s, but he remained a frustrated malcontent when it came to negotiating with the studio and what he saw as the "assembly line" production process. In some ways, this combativeness effectively played into Garfield's persona and drew interest to his current projects, however, Garfield's rhetoric grew so acrimonious that it is hard to imagine that any studio could have approved his cynical musings. In December of 1945, Garfield wrote a

⁷⁹ "Hollywood's Poor Relations," *Picturegoer*, December 27, 1941, 07. ProQuest.

⁸⁰ "File Garfield Decision Giving Lyons the Nod," *Variety*, July 15, 1942, 22.

⁸¹ Nott, *He Ran All the Way*, 152.

⁸² Nott, *He Ran All the Way*, 137.

diatribe in the *Hollywood Reporter* parodying a publicity release for an average Hollywood motion picture writing,

The latest picture of the Titanic Egotistical Studios titled ‘Tonight Last Night and Tomorrow Night’ opened to only average business in New York. It was ideal show weather and people were streaming into other theatres. But they might as well have had ‘measles’ sign over this theatre’s boxoffice.⁸³

He then goes on to describe Bosley Crowther’s baroque pan of this imagined film and the scriptwriter that stole the script bodily writing, “I took The Front Page and transposed every line of dialogue, every situation, every gag I copied page by page and sequence by sequence.”⁸⁴ The tenor of this article clearly indicates that Garfield had lost patience with the studio’s misleading and manipulative marketing strategies, and the entrenched system that facilitated and reproduced these falsehoods. The contempt conveyed in the *Hollywood Reporter* piece offers a stark contrast to the optimism he espoused about the future of independent filmmaking. In his lecture to The Group, also delivered in December of 1945, he expresses great hope about the ability of younger people to demand more from their movies, and that independent start-ups are going to be the “spearheads” of this new movement.⁸⁵

Garfield Goes Indie: Roberts Productions and Enterprise Studios

Though Garfield was publicly skeptical about the accrual of individual wealth, he was no stranger to business or monied interest. In his career he served as Treasurer for two organizations. The first being the aforementioned Motion Picture Guild in the late-1930s, which sought to build a cooperative funding system for producing anti-fascist and other socially

⁸³ Garfield, John, “I’m Waiting,” *Hollywood Reporter*, December 31, 1945, 297.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 297.

⁸⁵ John Garfield, “Lecture on Film Acting,” *The Drama Review: TDR* 28, Winter No. 4, 1984, 78. Jstor.

conscious film materials. Though short lived, his participation and willingness to take on a leadership position in the Guild, is early evidence that he wanted to carve out a viable alternative to the standard Hollywood production mode. The other major board on which he served was The Actor's Company—a theater troupe founded by fellow New York theater actors Gregory Peck and Mel Ferrer. Like Garfield, Peck and Ferrer were invested in creating a space that mimicked the appeal and artistic merit of Broadway, without the need to travel across the country or break from their film careers. Garfield was not only involved in the creative side of the process, seeking out new plays and choosing projects, but he was also charged with seeking out funds to build a standing space for this company, and even solicited money from Lew Wasserman.⁸⁶

While these precursors, like the Motion Picture Guild and The Actor's Company are indicative of Garfield's long-term commitment to socially conscious stardom, it was not until he founded his own production company with his business manager, Bob Roberts, that his social and artistic objectives fully coalesced. Roberts was a budding producer and a friend from New York who believed in Garfield's artistic ambitions, and in 1945 they set up Roberts Productions.⁸⁷ Garfield was still under contract with Warners until mid-1946 but he and Roberts began strategizing and optioning potential projects well in advance of the break. The company produced three films over the course of five years: *Body and Soul* (1947), *Force of Evil* (1948) and *He Ran All the Way* (1951). Two of these (*Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*) were produced under the Enterprise Studios banner. Though often mistaken for Garfield's company, he was not

⁸⁶ Correspondence, John Garfield to Lew Wasserman, November 30, 1949. Gregory Peck Papers, 210, La Jolla Playhouse Correspondence, Folder 3084, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

⁸⁷ "John Garfield Lines Up Own Production," *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 20, 1945, 02. ProQuest.

involved in the founding of Enterprise.⁸⁸ While their organizations were formed concurrently, Enterprise was founded as a separate entity by industry veterans, David Loew and Charles Einfeld. Enterprise's aim was to become a studio in the mold of United Artists, contracting with other independent production units to cover the production costs and then share in the film's profits.⁸⁹ Enterprise was able to generate immediate interest upon opening, in part because they were initially capitalized at \$5 million. They immediately reinvested some of that money in a large studio space, taking up residence in Harry Sherman's California Studios in Hollywood, and began renovation so that they could house their affiliated companies.⁹⁰

Enterprise was designed as a film studio with production resources and managerial tasks performed in-house, but they needed to outsource distribution arrangements for their releases. They had extensive negotiations with Universal and there were reports that a deal had been signed in June of 1946.⁹¹ However, the deal unraveled under mysterious circumstances, leaving only speculation about a conflict involving Universal's upcoming merger with International Pictures.⁹² This dissolution meant that not only had Enterprise failed to secure distribution, they were also denied access to the studio space and talent pool initially promised them in that proposed agreement. In lieu of Universal, Loew and Einfeld opted to go forward with companies

⁸⁸ Howard Gelman's 1972 *Velvet Light Trap* article incorrectly attributes the founding of Enterprise to Garfield and this misunderstanding endures in popular press. As of this writing (09-09-2022) Wikipedia lists Garfield as a co-founder. Additionally, in his TCM intro for *Force of Evil*, Eddie Mueller says Garfield was the founder of Enterprise. Howard Gelman, "John Garfield: Hollywood was the Dead End." *The Velvet Light Trap* 7, (Winter, 1972): 19.

⁸⁹ There remains little research, scholarly or otherwise on Enterprise. The most in-depth business history of the company is Clayton M. Steinman's, "Hollywood Dialectic."

⁹⁰ Steinman, *Hollywood Dialectic*, 270.

⁹¹ "U Sees \$30,000,000 World Gross Hypo with Enterprise Distribution Deal," *Variety*, June 05, 1946, 03. ProQuest. "Enterprise-Univ Alliance Jells," *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 27, 1946, 1,4. ProQuest.

⁹² "Enterprise Accord With Universal Off," *The New York Times*, August 31, 1946, 21. ProQuest.

with whom Loew had prior familial and professional involvement. Loews Inc. would be the international distributor, and in January of 1947, Enterprise signed a one-year six picture domestic distribution deal with United Artists.⁹³

David Loew's relationship with United Artists began in the early-1940s, well before Enterprise existed. Loew was attached to UA as an independent producer with a penchant for risky, Code-skirting material. For his first film he was discouraged from taking on the property he wanted for fear of censorship and pushback from the PCA. UA executive Murray Silverstone wrote to David Loew, "What we are very anxious to do is to protect you, to the fullest extent, from censorship or political antagonism. It would not be advisable for you, as an independent producer, —and particularly it being your first picture for us — to take any chances of that nature."⁹⁴ Given this predilection towards challenging material it makes sense that Loew would attempt to cultivate an environment in which creative people could flourish and make daring content, but however lofty or ambitious the aims, Loew's studio was not inoculated against the precarity of capitalism or ideological compromise.

While Enterprise was a separate entity, the conflation with Roberts Productions is understandable given how closely the Enterprise mission aligns with Garfield's principles. In a 1947 press statement issued by David Loew, the company reiterates many of Garfield's persistently stated motivations for going independent. The central thrust of the statement claims that more than ever, adults are becoming more selective in their entertainment needs and that the

⁹³ The contract with UA and trade sources indicate that Loews Inc. was the international distributor. I do not have access to that contract and as such have few details about that agreement. Contract, United Artists and Enterprise Studios, 1947 January 17, UA-Additions, M95-220, Box 30, Contracts Folder. Archives Division. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison. (Hereafter cited as UA-Additions)

⁹⁴ Correspondence, Murray Silverstone to David Loew, David L. Loew Papers, 1353, Folder "United Artists Corporate Contract," April 13, 1939, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. (Hereafter cited as David L. Loew Papers).

industry must focus on making films to suit these more sophisticated interests. This emphasis on elevation and tastes continues with Loew claiming, “an increasing search must be instituted for stories which lend themselves to the medium of the screen... and above all the industry must stay away from the suggestive and sensational type of film to which it turned in the early 30s and adhere to a policy which calls for the highest possible standards of good taste without sacrificing one iota of entertainment value.”⁹⁵ The statement then avows that Enterprise is uniquely equipped to take on these challenges and provide an alternative to the industry’s worst, most creatively vacuous tendencies.

This emphasis on quality and adult fare is in-line with the general sentiment of the independent producer seeking to distinguish themselves from the Hollywood juggernaut, but Enterprise went a little further in its commitment to a more progressive production model. Part of their campaign to differentiate themselves from the major studios was to highlight their humane labor practices. In a 1946 profile, Loew and Einfield described the working conditions at Enterprise as non-hierarchical: a workplace where actors, directors, and gaffers all commune together as equals. They also described some of the added fringe benefits such as free haircuts and daily tea breaks. The kinship with Garfield and his group’s cultural studies inflected beliefs is particularly notable in Enterprise’s reasoning behind this decision. They believed that tending to the bodily needs of its crew would prevent the “ding-dong effect of mechanization” on the production team’s imagination. This sentiment echoes culture theorist Walter Benjamin’s critique of mechanical reproduction which argues that the commodification of art strips the work

⁹⁵ Telegram, William Blowitz to Paul Lazarus, 1947 June 25, Paul Lazarus Jr. Files: United Artists Corporation Records, Series 4D. U.S. Mss 99AN/4D, Box 16, Folder 19, Archives Division. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison. (Hereafter cited as Paul Lazarus Jr. Files).

of its aesthetic and social value.⁹⁶ The implication is that the factory model of the major studios made the everyday technician feel dehumanized and therefore unlikely to contribute interesting ideas to a production. According to the Enterprise executives, care and attention to the below-the-line workers allowed for the possibility of greater inspiration and innovation from everyone involved.⁹⁷ Years later, director Robert Aldrich, who worked as an assistant director on several Enterprise projects including *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*, confirmed Loews and Einfeld's claims, saying that the studio had "more interest and excitement going for it among its employees, from the labourer to star, than any place in Hollywood. Personal relationships between the employees and management were extraordinary, and they paid the top dollar to all technicians."⁹⁸ This non-hierarchical, communal based filmmaking recalls the high-minded ideals of both the unionists in Garfield's circle fighting for higher wages and credit, and the egalitarian structure of The Group.

However, unlike The Group Theatre and the cohort of liberal New York creatives who came to Hollywood, progressive politics did not always extend beyond labor practices. They signed with freelance movie star Barbara Stanwyck—a prominent member of the conservative, pro-Blacklist group The Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals—for *The Other Love*, a film with no overt political or social message. Of the nine films that Enterprise produced only the two Roberts works claim a social critique. This suggests that the advertising that attempted to distinguish the thematic content of Enterprise from studio fare is perhaps disingenuous, but it is telling that Garfield was able to assemble a creative team that shared his

⁹⁶ Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. 1935. (reis. Prism Key Press, 2010)

⁹⁷ W.H.. Mooring, "Equality and Fraternity at This Studio!," *Picturegoer*, November 09, 1946, 08. ProQuest.

⁹⁸ Robert Aldrich, "Interview with Robert Aldrich," Interviewed by Joel Greenberg, 1968. *Robert Aldrich Interviews*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004) 41.

socio-political commitment and aesthetic tastes and make a pair of films which implicitly indict the U.S. system of capitalism. This team typifies what David Bordwell describes as “group style,” or a small subset of people within Hollywood who develop their own sensibilities based on the shared allegiance to a particular practice or discourse.⁹⁹ This group was animated by the desire to make films outside of the Hollywood mainstream but were still invested in conventional storytelling structure and typical (though very handsome) formal cinematic language. Roberts’ first film, *Body and Soul* (Rossen, 1947) was a boxing drama turned morality tale in which Garfield plays a New York street kid who goes against the wishes of his mother (Anne Revere) and his paramour, Peg (Lilli Palmer), and becomes a prizefighter. He gets caught up in a world of gangsters and shady deal-making — personified by fight promoter, Roberts (Lloyd Gough). Along the way, we are introduced to Ben (Canada Lee) - a former competitor who becomes Charlie’s trainer and confidante. Roberts forces Ben to fight despite his suffering from symptoms of extensive head trauma, and Ben dies as a consequence of his injuries. The film climaxes with Roberts issuing Charlie an ultimatum: throw a fight or be killed. Charlie initially agrees to compromise his ethics, but when faced with the moral rectitude of Peg and his mother, combined with his moral outrage on behalf of Ben, he defies Roberts and wins the fight. The final scene presents an unusual ambiguity for a Hollywood picture, as Charlie, reunited with Peg, leaves the arena to either face Roberts’ wrath or walk off into the sunset.

Despite Garfield’s insistence on originality and freshness, it is worth noting the familiarity of the narrative. It is a conventional, underdog boxing story in the mold of Odets’ *Golden Boy*, made extraordinary through the execution. Audiences at the time took note and the film became a financial success. Unfortunately for Roberts, Enterprise’s other films released

⁹⁹ David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 88.

through United Artists did not share in *Body and Soul*'s triumph, and the bank had a lien on Enterprise's accounts. It is unlikely that Roberts received any of the money that the film earned, but they nonetheless used the momentum to acquire more properties and move into their next production. They also offered Polonsky a position of Vice President within the company.¹⁰⁰

In the meantime, Enterprise's relationship with United Artists began to sour. Enterprise executives blamed United Artists for failing to adequately promote their properties — and UA sued Enterprise after it delayed delivery of its the big-budget historical epic *Arch of Triumph* (Milestone, 1948).¹⁰¹ After *Body and Soul* proved a financial winner, Enterprise was eager to produce Robert Productions next feature, but they had to fend off competition from other studios, including Columbia with whom Roberts Productions had reportedly arranged a production deal.¹⁰² In the meantime, Enterprise had signed a domestic distribution deal through MGM while maintaining their international arrangement with Loews Inc., and by April 1948 Roberts was back in the Enterprise fold.¹⁰³ Roberts began production on Polonsky's directorial debut, *Force of Evil* (originally titled *Tucker's People*) in mid-1948, but Enterprise Productions did not survive long enough to oversee the film's completion. By November 1948 it was agreed that

¹⁰⁰ Roberts, Garfield, and Polonsky as joint owners of Roberts Productions in "Indies Climb Aboard TV Films Bandwagon," *Film Daily*, June 28, 1948, 3. MHDL. *Film Daily Year Book* lists Polonsky as Vice President and Martin Jurow as Treasury Secretary. "Roberts Productions, Inc.," 1949, 609. MHDL.

¹⁰¹ The progression of the discord is detailed in correspondence between Enterprise and UA executives. There are accusations from Enterprise that UA was withholding money and failing to compensate them for advertising dollars spent, and UA emphatically denies these claims and sues Enterprise. The initial correspondence can be found in the Paul Lazarus Jr. Papers, United Artist Corporation, Mss 99AN, Box 21, Folder 1. Additional correspondence and information about the lawsuit can be found in the Eagle Lion Legal File, United Artists Corporation, Mss 99AN, Box 22, Folder 45-18 and 45-20, Archives Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison. (Hereafter cited as Eagle Lion Legal File)

¹⁰² "United Artists Hunts Product," *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, April 12, 1948, 17. MHDL.

¹⁰³ "Cohn's New Contract May Give Him Share of Profits," *The Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, April 26, 1948, 19. MHDL.

MGM would still supervise the distribution despite Enterprise's collapse, though the overt social message was an uncomfortable fit for the most conservative studio in Hollywood.¹⁰⁴ Garfield referred to the role as the most literate he had ever attempted, but when asked about his prospects as an investor in the project, he expressed a boastful pessimism in the financial outlook of the film. He proudly declared his disinterest in all matters having to do with his own accrual of wealth, and instead emphasized the greater artistic significance of the work.¹⁰⁵ Like *Body and Soul*, *Force of Evil* is an indictment of the corrupting force of dehumanization and greed. In it, Garfield plays a mob lawyer Joe who, through subtle manipulation, convinces his brother (Thomas Gomez) to participate in an illegal racketeering scheme. Joe can justify his behavior, and those of his business associates, by adopting a philosophy of nihilistic individualism. He holds that all people are ultimately narcissists, and that humanism and care for others is self-defeating and pointless. However, in the end, when Joe's brother is killed because of his nefarious dealings, Joe can no longer abide a lawless amoral world where money is all that matters, and he turns himself in to the police.

In some ways *Force of Evil* fits comfortably within the film noir genre in that it is the story of a man who is reluctantly lured into the dark underworld of vice and criminality. However, both *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil* subvert the typical film noir narrative by positioning the protagonist as helpless before an all-encompassing social pressure, rather than the maleficence of an individual antagonist. Film historian and theorist, Thom Andersen developed the concept of "film gris" to describe a subgenre of film noir characterized by a drab desolation that pervades the diegesis. Anderson argues that this microgenre emerged in the period just after

¹⁰⁴ "Roberts Production Continues" *New York Herald Tribune*, November 12, 1948, 21. ProQuest.

¹⁰⁵ *New York Times*, June 20, 1948, "Roberts Productions Clippings," Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

the first HUAC hearing in 1947 and ended in the early 1950s, when all the practitioners were blacklisted and unable to continue making projects this politically inflammatory. *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil* are both prime case studies for Anderson because their film noir tropes are infused with a psychological realism and a broad societal critique.¹⁰⁶

Andersen also categorizes Roberts' last production, *He Ran All the Way* (Berry, 1951), as one of the final case studies of the "film gris" cycle. Given the precarity of the Roberts Productions' distribution and financing, it is remarkable that the film even went to production. After the demise of Enterprise, Roberts had to seek out new partnerships with established industry players to ensure the continuation of the company. In mid-1949, it was rumored that Garfield would return to his old studio Warner Bros., and bring Roberts with him in that arrangement, but that deal was reportedly terminated in July of that same year.¹⁰⁷ In lieu of a studio partnership, Bob Roberts sought out other strategies for financing the film, including a deal that he arranged with Chemical Bank & Trust Co. N.Y. in November 1950 to advance Roberts Productions \$650,000 — about half of *Ran*'s estimated budget. According to an article in *Variety*, the other half came from a variety of sources including Motion Picture Center studio; De Luxe Laboratories, N.Y. (which agreed to process the film); the clients of the law office of Phillips, Nizer, Benjamin, & Krim; and Roberts and Garfield themselves.¹⁰⁸ The law office was the outfit of Robert Benjamin and Arthur Krim, who in 1951 took over United Artists, which ended up arranging distribution for the film.

¹⁰⁶ Thom Andersen, "Red Hollywood," Edited by Peter Stanfield, Frank Krutnik, Brian Neve, and Steve Neale. *'Un-American' Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007. 225-263. muse.jhu.edu/book/6169.

¹⁰⁷ "Production Notes," *New York Herald Tribune*, April 06, 1949, 20. ProQuest. And "No Warner-Garfield Deal," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 16, 1949, 4. ProQuest.

¹⁰⁸ "Chemical Advances 1st Money on Garfield Pic Without Release." *Variety*, November 01, 1950, 16. ProQuest.

Another fundraising strategy included offering a percentage deal for the blacklisted screenwriters, Hugo Butler and Dalton Trumbo, both of whom had moved to Mexico after Trumbo was released from prison in 1950. According to correspondence between Trumbo and Roberts, Trumbo was owed five percent of any profits earned from *He Ran All the Way*. Financial reports sent to Trumbo indicate that even two years after the release, the film was still running a deficit of \$139,348.23.¹⁰⁹ This inauspicious end makes a fitting conclusion to the cycle of film gris, both because its failure aligns perfectly with the cynicism and mistrust that the films convey, and because the protagonist of *He Ran all the Way* meets a very similar fate. The film features Garfield as one of his most disreputable characters, playing a small-time crook named Nick, who is on the run from the law after a botched robbery. As part of his escape, he charms an unsuspecting young woman named Peggy (played by Shelley Winters) who brings him home to meet her family. Once ensconced in their apartment, he holds them all hostage and tries to arrange for a getaway vehicle. As he waits, Nick further ingratiates himself with Peggy, attempting to convince her to run away with him. In the end, he nearly succeeds, but a final violent gesture leads Peggy's father to shoot Nick, and he dies pitilessly, bleeding out on the street. Given the circumstances of both the company and the larger political climate, this deeply pessimistic ending constitutes a clairvoyant self-reflexivity. Like Nick, Roberts Productions met an untimely, woeful demise, but the trio of films that it produced in that five-year span provide an important benchmark for representation of societal critique in mainstream cinema.

Promoting Body and Soul

¹⁰⁹ Correspondence, Roberts, Bob to Trumbo, Dalton, Dalton Trumbo Papers, 1554, Box 135, Folder 2, UCLA Library Special Collections. Charles E. Young Research Library. University of California, Los Angeles. (Hereafter cited as Dalton Trumbo Papers)

The previous section provides a broad overview of the business trajectory of Roberts Productions and Enterprise Studios, and their attempts to brand themselves as mature, responsible companies using socially conscious messaging. The following section delves deeper into the marketing of a specific Roberts/Enterprise film, *Body and Soul*, to see how its promotion aligns and diverges with the studio's overarching, socially conscious campaign. Of the three films produced by Garfield's company, *Body and Soul* is the one with appreciable institutional support behind the marketing initiative, as well as an extant record of this support.¹¹⁰ Much of this research combines a survey of available promotional material including posters, magazine spreads, reviews and pressbooks, supplemented by tracing the managerial strategy documented in the United Artists Corporate Papers. Neither of these primary sources are complete as there are press stories and memos to which I do not have access or have been lost to time. However, the dual approach allows for greater insight into the motivations behind the creation and placement of paratextual narratives.

For his first film as an independent entity, Garfield gathered several of his colleagues from his Warner Bros. tenure. *Body and Soul* was written by avowed communist Abraham Polonsky, directed by Robert Rossen who, as previously mentioned, believed firmly that film should be a reflection of everyday reality, and photographed by James Wong Howe. Howe was a veteran Warners cinematographer who had previously shot two Garfield features: *They Made Me a Criminal* and *Airforce* (Hawks, 1942), and more significantly, he shared Garfield's activist impulse - working with him on relief efforts for China prior and during World War II and

¹¹⁰ This is not to say that *Force of Evil* or *He Ran All the Way* had publicity campaigns behind them, though there are scant records for *He Ran All the Way* in the United Artists Collection. Given the circumstances of the release of both *Force* and *He Ran*, it stands to reason that they were likely expedited and dumped on the market without much fanfare.

serving on the advisory board of the Motion Picture Guild.¹¹¹ On *Body & Soul*, the producer, director, writer, cinematographer, and star were all in political alignment and were in sync about the thematic implications of the story. That's not to say there was no discord or disagreements among the crew - Polonsky admitted to having some hostility towards Rossen, and assistant director Robert Aldrich reported that he thought Rossen was too indulgent of Howe's artistic spontaneity - but the result embodies the "entertaining" morality play that Garfield envisioned as his ideal picture. It is a compelling small-scale drama that emerges naturally from its characters' interpersonal relationships. It was also the perfect vehicle for Garfield's brand of method acting for which he could fully embody his character, both by delving deep into the emotional landscape and internal conflict of the protagonist, Charlie, and by transforming his physical self by undergoing real boxing training and executing much of his own stunt work.¹¹² Critics praised both the superb realism and the intensity of the performance.¹¹³

This blend of both realism and bravura would be highlighted in the film's promotional campaign, along with a host of other hyperbolic taglines and media tie-ins. United Artist's approach was to try any means necessary to keep the film in the public conversation. This meant finding ways to court controversy and sensationalizing existing headlines that are only tangentially related to the film. One potential avenue for controversy was the prominence of Canada Lee's character Ben. Lee was a known New York stage actor who appeared in Orson

¹¹¹ "Motion Picture Guild Goes Co-Op for Propaganda Films," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 12, 1939, 12. ProQuest. "Hollywood League Calls Meeting for Feb. 13," *Boxoffice*, February 10, 1940, 30a. ProQuest.

¹¹² Nott, *He Ran All the Way*, 199.

¹¹³ The *Look Magazine* review spotlights Garfield's "realistic acting" and James Wong Howe's "forceful" cinematography. "Look's New Movie Review: Body and Soul," *Look Magazine*, September 16, 1947, 92. Body and Soul Production Files, Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS. The *Variety* review highlights Garfield's convincing performance, the authenticity of Canada Lee, and the realistic fight scenes and "sordidness" of the environs. "Body and Soul," *Variety*, August 13, 1947, 15. ProQuest.

Welles' notorious 1936 staging of "Voodoo Macbeth," which featured an all-Black cast. The social significance of this casting choice was one of many challenges that the United Artists promotional department faced in marketing this film. The difficulty comes in part because of the two opposing goals: the desire to accrue as much cultural capital as possible for featuring a "realistic" representation of a Black character to appeal to Black and progressive audiences, while simultaneously trying to avoid frightening more conservative viewers or having the film banned by racist censorship boards. The prospect of censorship itself required a delicate balancing act. The possibility of potential censorship could generate interest in a film, but if a film is banned the costly legal battle and the lost revenue may not be worth the sensational headlines.

Body and Soul received surprisingly little censorship given the prominence of a Black man within the diegesis and his close emotional and physical proximity to the protagonist. Inter-office memos suggest that United Artists was not just surprised at how limited the resistance was from local censorship boards, but disappointed as the marketing could have used the friction to stir up publicity. Enterprise executives were reportedly ready to launch a legal battle over the anticipated banning of *Body and Soul* by Lloyd Binford, chairman of the Memphis censorship board, but much to their dismay he posed no objection.¹¹⁴ According to the PCA files the only censorship board to raise any objection on racial grounds was South Africa, which would implement formal apartheid in 1948.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ United Artists National Publicity Manager, Alfred Tamarin suggested that this was likely a result of UA's previous lawsuit against Binford for censorship on the basis of race, but that is self-serving and unproven. Correspondence, Tamarin, Alfred, to Lazarus Jr., Paul N., Alfred Tamarin Papers, United Artists Corporation Records Series 6D, U.S. Mss 99AN/6D, Box 2, Folder 5, Archives Division. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison. (Hereafter cited as Alfred Tamarin Papers).

¹¹⁵ *Body and Soul*, Production Code Administration Files, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

That's not to say that all governing bodies approved of this representation. FBI files indicate that the Bureau had strong objections to the portrayal of the antagonist as a wealthy businessman and the purposeful contrast with the virtuous Black character. They wrote, "The negro fighting while injured, and his manager knowing it may be his death, and the negro refusing a bribe while the white man accepts it, shows the former as a noble and sympathetic character, while the successful promoter is shown as an unscrupulous, dishonest, and heartless character." The FBI considered this subversion of the racial hierarchy a form of inflammatory propaganda.¹¹⁶ Of course, these documents were not available to studio execs at the time and there was no way to capitalize on this agitation. Instead of highlighting the racial tension, the issue was either touted as a triumph of realism or eschewed entirely.

An instance of the former is exhibited in an article credited to Robert Rossen which appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*. In it Rossen talks about the necessity of honest depictions of bigotry on-screen, as well as realistic portrayals of the "minority problem." He then goes on to talk about the dynamic featured in *Body and Soul* in which a Jewish man and a Black man are depicted as having both virtues and flaws and are ultimately at the mercy of the same larger system of oppression. It is significant that most of the article is about the representation of the Jewish protagonist, and that the description of Ben is mostly there to draw an equivalence between the depictions of marginalized characters.¹¹⁷ This advertisement of the "honest" characters has a complicated legacy both in terms of the legitimacy of that claim, and the way that critics have subsequently interpreted the film. As the only Roberts Production to feature a

¹¹⁶ Special Agent Report, Los Angeles, 'Communist Infiltration into the Motion Picture Industry', 7 August 1947, Leab (1991), Reel 3, Frame 223. quoted in John A. Noakes, "Racializing Subversion," 11.

¹¹⁷ Robert Rossen, "Self-Imposed Taboos Termed Obstacle Blocking Good Films," *The New York Herald Tribune*, October 26, 1947, C3. ProQuest.

prominent Black cast member, it is a fascinating study in the limits of representation within a white liberal milieu.

Body and Soul stands as the first in a cycle of non-war films that promoted a racial unity within its narrative. The film does uphold many of the items detailed in Garfield's aforementioned 1947 plan for racial relations. Canada Lee's character is integrated within the narrative as a "normal member of the community," and the film affords Ben an interiority and a clear motivation for his actions which extend beyond the needs of the white protagonist. At the time of its release this non-stereotypical portrayal constituted a significant victory for the NAACP which had spent the 1940s advocating for the types of reforms that Garfield laid out in the racial relations plan.¹¹⁸ Langston Hughes praised the film for breaking "an old Jim Crow stereotype of Hollywood films" by allowing the Ben character to refer to Charlie by his first name rather than force him to bow and scrape before the white protagonist. Hughes offered his congratulations to Enterprise Productions and Robert Rossen for their "advanced treatment of Negro-white relationships on the screen."¹¹⁹ However, contemporary interpretations of the film include critiques about the way that Black man is martyred on behalf of the white man. John Nickel, for instance, has identified a common motif among the social-realist films of the late-1940s in which the Black character's physical impairment serves as a metonym for racially charged violence. He points specifically to *Body and Soul* as a prime example of this trope where the juxtaposition of Ben's death with the imagery of a swaying punching bag directly recalls a metaphorical lynching.

¹¹⁸ Vaughn, Stephen, 'Ronald Reagan and the struggle for black dignity in cinema', *The Journal of Negro History*, 1992, vol. 77, no. 1, pp. 2 as quoted by Noakes, John A., "Racializing Subversion."

¹¹⁹ Langston Hughes, "Here to Yonder: Heroes," *The Chicago Defender*, October 4, 1947. 14. ProQuest.

In addition to utilizing a narrative device that would become a pernicious trope, the marketing materials also reflect an implicit racial bias. Canada Lee's contribution was largely overlooked in the widely released paratexts. The obvious segregation of the material about the character who is arguably the second male lead speaks to the producers' hesitance. This conservatism, while perhaps out of step with the sensibilities of the mature adult audience they were looking to service, reflects the necessary calculus that goes into attempting to appeal to the broadest possible audience. The cynical tactic that United Artists and Enterprise appear to have taken is to minimize or obfuscate Canada Lee's presence in the mainstream press, while simultaneously championing his presence in Black publications. United Artists ensured that both Garfield and Lee appeared in African American publications, emphasizing the progressive racial representation. *Opportunity Magazine*, for instance, featured two articles championing the racial progress in the filmmaking approach and how equality manifests in the end result. Garfield and Lee were given the bylines for these articles, but they were actually ghost written by UA staffers.¹²⁰ In the Lee article, the writer talks about the substance of the Ben role and the refusal of Garfield and Rossen to allow any stereotypical dialogue to appear in the film. However, only pseudo-Garfield headlines appeared in mainstream publications, and they would primarily focus on the realism of the aesthetic and the verisimilitude of the boxing matches. It is a segregation that allows the company both the plaudits of Black writers and critics, and the financial benefits of universal appeal.

This obfuscation is apparent in several extant paratextual materials including magazine spreads, posters, and lobby cards. A spread in the "general interest" periodical, *Look Magazine* provides readers with a preview of the ethical quandary at the film's core and highlights some of

¹²⁰ Memo, Alfred Tamarin to Charlie Handel requesting he ghost write blurbs for Garfield and Lee, November 7, 1947. Alfred Tamarin Papers, Box 2, Folder 5.

the fighting imagery. Lee appears in one image as he's lying on the mat as Garfield has knocked him out. Lee's face is not visible within the image and there is little attention given to the character's prominence within the film. One could assign this oversight to a need for brevity, were it not for the greater attention paid to the more salacious elements of the plot.¹²¹ This diminishment of Ben's significance is seen again in the pressbook for *Body and Soul*. Lee's image appears only once on the fourteenth page of the pressbook. Published by United Artist, the only substantive mention of Lee, includes a thumbnail headshot and a brief blurb about his past as a boxer who stumbled upon the theater as an alternative career path.

The majority of the pressbook coverage is devoted to Hazel Brooks, the actress who has a minor role as Charlie's new girlfriend, with whom he takes up after abandoning his principles and his true love. Brooks appears only briefly in the film, yet much of the material plays up her role as the temptress who lures Garfield into a life vice and corruption. At points the ad campaign refers to Brooks as the titular "Body" of the title and includes several full-length photographs of her in scantily clad costume —few of which are taken from the film. Many of the photographs and accompanying blurbs exaggerate the love triangle plot with Lilli Palmer looking forlorn, Brooks sultry, and Garfield caught in the middle. The various taglines further exaggerate the illicit sexual component, with copy such as "he could kill a man with his hands... he's the kind of guy that women go for!" or other iterations like "Women whispered...I'm all for you" or simply "The story of a guy that women go for." Not only do the photographs and posters convey an illicit sexual component, they also suggest a violent undercurrent to the proceedings. The promise of a man who can "kill a guy with his hands" juxtaposed with the romantic plot presents a tantalizing mixture of sex and violence akin to a tabloid headline. That there is exaggeration in

¹²¹ Photo spread, *Look Magazine*, September 16, 1947, 92-94. Abraham Polonsky Papers, Box 6, Folder 8, "Publicity and Award" File.

promotions is so commonplace that even the most egregious overpromise of sex is barely worthy of report. However, the championing of “adult” entertainment as mature, thought-provoking content and then promising the opposite in the specifics is a rich irony that complicates the portrait of Enterprise or Roberts Productions as ethically unique. The company records indicate that the United Artists publicity team were interested in selling the film by any means necessary, including planting stories of faux-outrage and minor scandal.

This is especially clear in the way they play up the parallels to a contemporaneous scandal within the boxing world, by drawing implicit parallels to a scandal involving boxer Rocky Graziano, who was accused of failing to report an attempted bribe. The comparison was helped along when Charles Johnston, president of The Boxing Managers Guild of New York, wrote UA and Enterprise a letter calling *Body and Soul* a “slandorous picture” and suggested that the Guild take further legal action if the producers refused to “remove it from circulation.” UA delighted in this threat and developed a six-point plan to exploit it in other cities. The plan involved getting local boxing promoters to denounce the film, releasing said promoters’ statements to local newspapers, and replying to the reporters with UA’s pre-written indignant responses. They also sent sports writers an outlined release and local reporters a *Newsweek* article about the boycott to demonstrate the magnitude of the scandal and planned to seek out local fighters to confirm the accuracy of the movie.¹²²

A publicity campaign like this involves, if not mendacity, then a manipulation and exaggeration of fact. This strategy was employed beyond just *Body and Soul*. It was so prevalent, in fact, that publicists came to refer to films like *Body and Soul* as “not” pictures, meaning a film that was sold on material that was *not* in the actual product. “Not” pictures were films with

¹²² Memos and Correspondence, Alfred Tamarin Collection, Box 2; Folder 5, Undated.

subjects assumed to have limited demographic interest, including boxing films, which distributors feared would repel female audiences. Ad-executives justified this subterfuge in publicity campaigns on the principle that the promotion would lure in audiences that would not typically attend but would ultimately be won over when the film proved worthy on its own merits. A social-realist drama, even in the guise of a sports film, has already limited its potential audience. Highlighting the romantic drama draws in viewers that might otherwise rebuff the fighting content or the social critique. This attempt at broad appeal is how the blonde bombshell with minimal screen time ends up the focal point of the press book, or why the dress patterns for the film are featured in *Redbook Magazine*.¹²³ The financial success of *Body and Soul* indicates that the approach of cultivating benign controversy and misrepresenting the nature of the picture was effective. A 1949 *Variety* article cites *Body and Soul* as an example of a picture sold on “phoney” content, that ended up building an audience based on initial viewers' positive reactions.¹²⁴ Whether or not it proved a successful strategy, this kind of sensationalism runs afoul of the higher ideals of the “realist” film which it promotes.

It is unclear how involved Garfield or Bob Roberts were in developing United Artists' marketing campaign. Evidence indicates that Garfield did sign off on interviews with his name attached, but it is likely that he was otherwise insulated from the everyday business of film exploitation. It is possible that Garfield and Roberts were displeased with the campaign, but there is no extant correspondence in the United Artists collection to indicate as much. It appears that the conceptual anti-corporatist realism does not translate to the paratextual materials. This absence demonstrates a telling remove between the principles that animate the filmmaking from

¹²³ “Styling a Star,” *Redbook Magazine*, August 1947, 50-51. ProQuest.

¹²⁴ “‘Not’ Pix—Selling Them on Phoney Content—Getting Admen’s Scrutiny,” *Variety*, April 20, 1949, 5 and 18. ProQuest.

the more commercial necessities of marketing and exhibition.

The Blacklist and The End

In the late-1940s, the emergence of the Cold War brought a potent political movement that would eventually come to stifle all overt critiques of capitalism by the 1950s. This countervailing force rendered the thematic material that defined Roberts Productions films evidence of communist or communist sympathies and made Garfield's passion project infeasible. The origins of the Hollywood blacklist stem from as early as 1944 at the founding of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals an organization made up of industry professionals — including Gary Cooper, Hedda Hopper, Leo McCarey, Robert Montgomery, Ginger Rogers, Barbara Stanwyck, and John Wayne — to prevent infiltration of communist ideology into the film industry. However, the practice began in earnest when in 1947 the House Un-American Activities Committee began its investigation. From then until the late-1950s, all of Hollywood's current or former members of the Communist Party, and anyone associated with them would be called to testify in front of Congress and asked to name names of others they knew to be communist or communist sympathizers. Those who refused would either be held in contempt and imprisoned and/or blacklisted from working in the industry.¹²⁵ Many of the creative team behind Robert's Productions were blacklisted, including all of the writers and directors. John Berry, Robert Rossen, and Bob Roberts all moved to Europe and established themselves as producers and directors there. Hugo Butler and Dalton Trumbo had already fled to Mexico and continued writing under pseudonyms. Arnold Manoff and Abraham Polonsky also continued writing under assumed names, though they both stayed and developed an elaborate

¹²⁵ Brian Neve, "Hollywood and Politics in the 1940s and 1950s," ed. Brian Neve, *The Classical Hollywood Reader*, (Abingdon, Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2012) 391.

ruse in order to disguise their identities. One of the more infamous “friendly” witnesses, Richard J. Collins, a former party member who named twenty-six of his colleagues, worked for both Robert Rossen Productions and Roberts Productions and was in close proximity to many of these individuals.¹²⁶ In this case, Bordwell’s group style theory of production, which yielded a cohesive socio-political vision and allegiance to a realistic aesthetic, produced a set of confirmed emblems of communist predilections which could be weaponized against the practitioners.

Even Garfield’s celebrity and popularity did not shield him from the harshest repercussions of the blacklist. When HUAC’s inquisition first began in 1947, Garfield participated in resistance efforts to avert a Hollywood witch hunt, including signing his name to petitions and organizing a protest in the House Office Building with a group of Broadway actors.¹²⁷ When Garfield was called to testify, he admitted to voting Democrat but vehemently disavowed communist ideology (despite the former membership of Odets, Polonsky, and his wife Robbe). The testimony was then followed by an FBI probe on suspicion of perjury, particularly for his denial that he ever supported rival unions of IATSE.¹²⁸ In 1949, Garfield expressed confidence that his name would be cleared saying, “If they want to string a man up for being liberal, let them bring on their ropes.”¹²⁹ This challenge would prove unfortunately prophetic, when in the subsequent two years Garfield failed to find any substantive work in Hollywood and his health began to fail. He died on May 21st, 1952, of a heart attack at age 39,

¹²⁶ *Communism in Motion Picture Industry*, April 12, 1951, 218 and 219, MHDL.

¹²⁷ “Film Stars Bar Repression in Fight on Reds,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, October 24, 1947, 01. ProQuest.

¹²⁸ “Prosecution Urged for John Garfield,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1951, 05. ProQuest.

¹²⁹ “Screen Personalities in Emphatic Denials,” *The Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1949, 10. ProQuest.

the day after Clifford Odets's hearing in which Odets refuted any allegation that Garfield was a communist, but then proceeded to name some of his confirmed communist colleagues.¹³⁰

Garfield was arguably the highest profile blacklistee and the one who paid the harshest consequence, but he was not the only one to suffer what is assumed to be stress-induced heart attack amid his HUAC investigation. In a tragic coincidence, Canada Lee, Garfield's co-star in *Body and Soul*, was also blacklisted and died on May 9th, 1952, a few weeks before Garfield. Two other Garfield Group Theatre alumnus, J. Arthur Bromberg and Mady Christians also died while under investigation.¹³¹ Other Group Theatre members took the opposite approach and ended up naming names in order to preserve their careers. Most notably, director Elia Kazan and actor J. Lee Cobb both testified as friendly witnesses before the Committee.

In addition to the individual devastation for those who lost their jobs and were incarcerated or forced to leave the country, the blacklist had a chilling effect on the overt liberal themes that Garfield championed. Among the great what-ifs left in the wake of the destruction is what kinds of material would Roberts Productions have pursued, and how far would they have tried to push their social agenda? One tantalizing report indicated that the company was in talks to option Robert Sylvester's critique of U.S. foreign policy, *Rough Sketch*, which was to star Garfield and Lena Horne as the romantic co-leads.¹³² Roberts had also optioned Nelsen Elgrin's

¹³⁰ "Clifford Odets Tells House Probers He Was a Commie," *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 20, 1952, 11. ProQuest.

¹³¹ Sklar, *City Boys*, 224.

¹³² Garfield had previously starred in John Huston's adaptation of *Rough Sketch*, called *We Were Strangers*, in 1949. The romantic interest was played by white actress, Jennifer Jones. "2D Film to Be Based on Sylvester Novel," *Variety*, March 22, 1950, 5. MHD.

novel *Man with A Golden Arm*, which would have been an ideal showcase for Garfield's method-style intensity and psychological realism.¹³³

It is telling that it is the method actor side of Garfield's career that remains his most prominent achievement. Thanks to him, the path was laid for the Marlon Brandos and Montgomery Clifts to mark a clear delineation between the old and new eras of Hollywood acting styles. His legacy as a political figure and a businessman are resoundingly less successful in terms of both volume of output and efficacy. The three films that Garfield's company produced were critically praised and are well remembered, however, they each have clear representational shortcomings in terms of racial and gender bias. Even if these biases are products of the era and reveal themselves only with hindsight, there is also a question about the ability for popular entertainment to truly serve as a powerful pedagogical tool or agent of change. Years after he wrote *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*, Abraham Polonsky was asked about the struggle to succeed both aesthetically and politically within a populist medium. His response was notably dismissive of the possibility of Hollywood movies as catalysts of change. "You have to talk about what it means to be a radical working in a conventional medium, with certain kinds of aesthetic interests forced on you by the studio and certain kinds of aesthetic interests that you utilize out of the studio material. You also have to realize that we were in the film business not to change the world but to make films."¹³⁴ He goes on to say that the only real appreciable change he made was through his involvement with union fights and pushing against right-wing organizations within the industry.

¹³³ "Roberts-Algren Settle 'Golden Arm' Hassle," *Variety*, February 22, 1950, 05. ProQuest.

¹³⁴ Abraham Polonsky, "Interview with Abraham Polonsky," interviewed by Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, 1997, *Abraham Polonsky: Interviews*, 183.

Whether Polonsky's, Garfield's, or anyone else's labor activism was indeed more politically significant than their filmmaking is debatable. However, his statement that the system of Hollywood is not designed to foster radical filmmaking and that the proximity to Hollywood and the use of studio resources inevitably compromises an artist's political integrity is a helpful insight. It establishes a ceiling for the viability of any actor-founded production company to make anything drastically different from Hollywood product. However, Garfield's case does offer an example of one end of the spectrum of socially conscious stardom. In some ways his example serves as a potent cautionary tale about the danger of taking a marked political stance in Hollywood. Garfield sought to make unapologetically progressive films and paid for it with his career and arguably his life. That said, he succeeded in promoting a realist aesthetic among his peers and colleagues by using his independence to produce films which reflected his political and aesthetic goals. While the marketing tactics bear perfect resemblance to other Hollywood promotional campaigns, there are other ways in which the films were distinctive from an industrial and genre perspective. Given the limitations of the era, it is remarkable that Roberts Productions had even minor success. Despite the overwhelming fiscal and structural challenges, Garfield did manage to produce three significant works, and provided a template for how a socially conscious star could operate within even a less-than-hospitable production environment.

Chapter Two:

The Filmmakers and 'Lady Bosses': Ida Lupino and the Actress Turned Producer

There are countless parallels between the careers of Ida Lupino and John Garfield. They each made their acting careers at Warner Bros in the 1930s, specializing in characters with toughened exteriors that mask a wounded psyche. Both regularly appeared in hard-boiled noir thrillers, even co-starring in two features, the first of which was *The Sea Wolf* (Curtiz, 1941), a nautical adventure story that would inaugurate their professional relationship and their friendship. Although *The Sea Wolf* was among their more interesting studio projects, Lupino and Garfield nevertheless shared a dissatisfaction with the roles that Warners offered and each desired to break free of their creatively stifling employment contracts.

Like Garfield, Lupino publicly cited the mechanization of the studio production process as the cardinal reason for her desire to go independent, comparing the studio sound stages to “sausage factories.”¹ Her espoused skepticism of mass media extended beyond just a blanket mistrust of industrialization, but rather in the specific ways in which studio control limited the kinds of narratives that could be told and the means by which these stories could be made and distributed. When Lupino formed her independent production company (The Filmmakers) in 1949, the company released statements extolling the virtues of smaller scale filmmaking, with stories and an aesthetic that reflects the real-world experience of the average person. Here again, these sentiments echo statements made by Garfield, which were detailed in the previous chapter.

Because of the clear parallels in their career and as well as their personal connection, one is tempted to combine the two as part of the same trend of the post-war political awakening and the turn towards independent production. On the other hand, because their career arcs and

¹ “Ida Lupino to Make Debut as Producer,” *The Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1947, C1. ProQuest.

filmmaking aspirations have so much overlap, Lupino provides a useful point of departure from the Garfield case study. If Garfield's rise and fall serves as a cautionary tale regarding the dangers of sincere political engagement in the postwar era, Lupino offers a distinctive counterpoint in that she used her business to re-write her star text from contract actress of modest renown to burgeoning filmmaking talent. That is not to say that her venture into independent production was an unmitigated success, but she was able to develop a discursive strategy to publicly navigate the industrial and social trends more effectively than Garfield.

Additionally, to simply couple Lupino with Garfield overlooks a significant distinction in their identities and career histories. The most obvious being Lupino's gender, which conscripted her to specific roles within the industry and meant that she faced different challenges in her move away from studio control. While both Lupino and Garfield were broadly interested in creating an alternative filmmaking mode, Lupino need not have had any explicit social cause in mind for the venture to be inherently political. The very act of an actress going independent is intrinsically a move against the traditional male-dominated hierarchy of the studio system.

This intersection of ideological and social trends, and the inherent transgressive nature of a female-led independent production company, makes Lupino a particularly useful subject of inquiry.² In this chapter, I will analyze the ways that Lupino and Garfield's aesthetic and social alignment was indicative of larger industry trends towards both independent production and social realist dramas, and how these players intermingle to form an actor-led *group* or taste

² The Lupino presented in this analysis is an amalgam of the individual historical agent and a discursive figure whose persona was mediated by the reportage of columnists and magazine editors. As such, it is difficult to avoid a slippage between the woman, Ida Lupino, whose lived experience and motivations can only be guessed at, and the way that Lupino's identity was promoted in the press. This analysis does not seek to psychoanalyze Lupino or understand her personally. It assumes that all articles and interviews in which she participated were part true, part manipulation, and entirely about promoting an idea of "Lupino the filmmaker" to the public. It is this filmmaker persona and how it fits within a larger industrial hierarchy that this chapter seeks to understand.

culture. I will also deconstruct Lupino's performance of femininity in the press and explore how her championing of traditional gender roles was both a help and a hindrance to her producing career. Finally, I will broaden out and consider how independent production allowed fellow actresses like Rita Hayworth and Jane Russell an opportunity to free themselves from studio control, while also keeping them conscripted into highly gendered roles within their own companies. Through analyzing the ways in which she succeeded where Garfield failed and vice versa, I hope to gain a clearer picture of the part that gender played in the viability of actor-led independent companies, and how gender identity dovetails with the promotion of a realist aesthetic.

Critical and Scholarly Assessments of Ida Lupino's Career

Because of her singular status as the only woman director working in Hollywood during the postwar era, Ida Lupino had an outsized spotlight given the scale and quantity of her productions. Her anomalous status within the industry made her an object of curiosity while she was making these films, and today makes her a necessary figure to historicize when considering the role of women within the industry. Given this necessity, there is a relative dearth of scholarly attention to her work and even less on how her films fit into a larger industry context. Part of the reason for this paucity can be attributed to the critical dismissal of her projects. Many twentieth century histories and reviews offer condescending appraisals of her work, or what Therese Grisham and Julie Grossman refer to as a "critical habit" of damning the films with faint praise.³ Other assessments have been even less generous. For instance, film critic Andrew Sarris dismissed her directorial work declaring that, "Ida Lupino's directed films express much of the

³ Therese Grisham and Julie Grossman. *Ida Lupino, Director: Her Art and Resilience in Times of Transition*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2017) 210.

feeling if little of the skill which she projected so admirably as an actress.”⁴ One might expect this kind of repudiation from a male critic, but some female critics have also been cynical about Lupino’s directorial career. For instance, critic Molly Haskell excoriated both Lupino’s work and persona writing, “Lupino was tougher as an actress than as a director: the movies she made (*Hard, Fast, and Beautiful*, *The Bigamist*, *The Hitchhiker*) are conventional, even sexist; and in her interviews, like so many women who have nothing to complain about, she purrs like a contented kitten, arches her back at the mention of women’s lib, and quotes Noël Coward to the effect that women should be struck regularly like gongs.”⁵ This feminist disavowal is an important component of Lupino’s legacy. She gave many interviews in which she espoused some decidedly regressive attitudes about gender norms vis-a-vis labor. Some feminist scholars have argued that close analysis of her films reveals an inherent bias against women working outside the home.

However, later scholarly assessments of her filmography adopt both her work and her singularity within the industry as feminist triumphs. For instance, in *Independent Stardom*, Emily Carman traces the history of classical Hollywood actresses leveraging their star power to gain varying levels of autonomy from studio control. She cites Lupino’s turn toward independent production as one of many examples of actresses who managed to chart their own paths despite the oppressive studio resistance.⁶ Mary Lynn Navarro has similarly argued that Lupino

⁴ Sarris, Andrew, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (New York: EP Dutton, 1968) 216. Cited by Ronnie Schieb, “Never Fear (1950)” *Queen of the B’s: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera* ed. Annette Kuhn, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995) 43.

⁵ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies, Third Edition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 455-456.

⁶ Emily Carman, *Independent Stardom: Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015) 140-143.

disavowed women's empowerment narratives as a way to remain unaffiliated as she attempted to make her way through the patriarchal studio system.⁷ Other scholarship has employed textual analysis to argue that her work is either feminist or bears the marking of a female auteur. For instance, Amelie Hastie's monograph on *The Bigamist* suggests that the film is a critique of the oppressiveness of the hierarchical nature of heterosexual marriage in the postwar era.⁸ Some studies focus on the work itself, analyzing texts as evidence of either a feminist authorship or an unheralded Hollywood auteur. Grisham and Grossman's thorough study of Lupino's directorial work analyzes each of her films as well as her television work to make a case for her unique artistry across time and modality.

Grisham and Grossman do delve into the larger societal context for Lupino's films, including an analysis of the ways that Lupino's 1950 work *Outrage* aligns with Italian Neorealist themes and style. However, their work is largely about the film texts themselves, rather than the larger ecosystem of Hollywood actors interested in taking on social reform through filmmaking. This chapter's intervention means to consider the ways in which Lupino's productions are part of a traceable trend in which actors wield their fame as a means of amplifying a political or social cause. In Lupino's case, these causes include spotlighting civil rights struggles and economic deprivation as well as gender-oriented issues such as sexual assault and single motherhood. This analysis will consider the ways that socially conscious stardom was reinforced internally by a burgeoning taste culture of actors and other creatives with an interest in cultivating an alternative production system in which realism and political activism are prized over escapism. The analysis

⁷ Mary Lynn Navarro, "Against the Grain, Within the Frame: The Double Consciousness of Ida Lupino," *Ida Lupino, Filmmaker*, edited by Phillip Sipiora, (New York, London and Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021) 165-179.

⁸ Amelie Hastie, *The Bigamist*, (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

will also consider the ways that Lupino's company sold itself to the public as virtuous, as well as the ways that Lupino's female-ness was activated as a political cause in order to publicize the company's projects. Ultimately, this study aims to analyze the ways that the marketing created a platform for a socially conscious brand of celebrity and tied that brand to a realist film aesthetic.

Ida Lupino: Born into Showbusiness

Unlike John Garfield, whose working-class background and troubled upbringing made his acting career something of an aberration, Lupino's career as a performer was all but predetermined. According to biographer William Donati, Lupino's family had roots in the performing arts that date back to 17th Century Italy.⁹ However, the more immediate influence was Ida's father Stanley Lupino, a famed British comedic stage actor, and her mother Connie O'Shea (aka Connie Emerald), both of whom encouraged a theatricality and love of performance in their eldest daughter. Born in London in the midst of the first world war in 1918, it was her parents that pushed Ida to attend London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts at age thirteen, to sign a contract with Paramount Studios, and to move to the United States by age fifteen.¹⁰ An oft recounted story, appearing in several Hedda Hopper columns throughout Lupino's filmmaking career, credits Hopper with giving the youthful Ida some advice that would shape her approach to celebrity. While on the set of the 1937 Paramount feature *Artists and Models* (Walsh) when they were both aspiring ingenues, Hopper told Lupino not to let the executives shape her persona as an overtly sexualized figure. From what Hopper describes, Lupino's hair was bleached, she had heavy eye shadow, and she was made to wear high heels that made her appear more like "a

⁹ William Donati, *Ida Lupino: A Biography*, (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 1996) 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-32

girl off the streets” than an accomplished thespian.¹¹ Hopper’s advice was to break the contract with Paramount, wear more “natural” makeup, and insist that the producers give her roles that were worthy of her talents. While this advice is rooted in a regressive Madonna/whore dichotomy, within this anecdote are motifs that will repeat throughout this chapter. One motif is the idea that a woman must appear a certain way to be taken seriously by the paternal power that governs Hollywood; the other is that freedom from said paternalism can come from insisting on independence from studio control.

While parts of this story are no doubt an exaggeration, if not fabrication, it is an essential component of the Lupino persona. This narrative contends that after this interaction, Lupino took Hopper’s advice and did not work for fourteen months until she insisted on a part in William Wellman’s 1939 picture, *The Light That Failed*. This narrative communicates Lupino’s discerning tastes by insisting that she only worked on the highest quality projects with esteemed auteurs such as Wellman. It also serves to distinguish her from a ditzy feminine stereotype and lends her an air of intelligence coupled with a gentle rebelliousness. *The Light That Failed* brought her the attention of Warner Bros. producer Mark Hellinger who cast her in *They Drive By Night* (1940), which would become one of the defining performances of her acting career.¹² In it she plays a stock noir trope, the murderous femme fatale, but with a measure of sensitivity and fragility that is unusual for roles of this nature. From there, Lupino would go under contract with Warners for the first half of the 1940s and play variations on this character. *Picturegoer* columnist Margaret Hinxman once characterized the Lupino persona as “the slight, delicate

¹¹ Hedda Hopper, “Ida’s Ideals,” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 04, 1949, C6. ProQuest.

¹² Donati, *Ida Lupino*, 59-63.

woman who suddenly reveals a will of iron and a powerful driving force.”¹³ This petite-but-powerful concoction would play out in numerous performances including *The Sea Wolf* (on which she met John Garfield and writer Robert Rossen) as well as the trio’s reteaming in *Out of the Fog* (Litvak, 1941). The Lupino persona also encompasses the inverse in which her hardened exterior slowly gives way to reveal a vulnerability and moral fortitude as in *The Hard Way* (Sherman, 1943) and *The Man I Love* (Walsh, 1947). She appeared in all these films while under a non-exclusive contract at Warners. When it came time for contract negotiations in 1947, President Jack Warner insisted on a seven-year exclusive deal. Knowing that other Warner stars had revolted against the Warners long-term contract (including Garfield), and valuing her artistic freedom over financial stability, Lupino rejected these terms. When Warner refused to return to the bargaining table, Lupino was officially off the Burbank lot and out of a job.¹⁴

In the narrative arc of her filmmaking career, this decision to walk away from the comfort and stability of the studio was a major inflection point. Despite her relative success as a Hollywood actress, Lupino began to grow cynical about the movie business and particularly her role within the industry. She recognized that the shelf-life of an actress could be brutally short, and she also wanted greater creative autonomy and control of her projects. In profiles, Lupino would often claim exhaustion both with the choice of role she was offered and the acting profession writ large. Not only did she once refer to herself as the “poor man’s Bette Davis,” she also repeatedly spoke about the physical and emotional toll that being in front of a camera expends.¹⁵ Even while under contract with Warner Bros., she had ambitions toward more behind-

¹³ Margaret Hinxman, “She’s Demur But She’s Dynamite,” *Picturegoer*, December 27, 1952, 8. ProQuest.

¹⁴ Donati, Ida Lupino, 131-134.

¹⁵ For the “Poor Man’s Bette Davis” quote see “She’d Dye Her Hair Purple,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 03, 1947, E21. For examples of Lupino citing exhaustion as her reason for stepping away from acting see the following

the-scenes work and wanted to be “more than just an actress.”¹⁶ She decided that she wanted to move from acting, a notoriously challenging field for women, into directing — a role that was all but unheard of for women.

Independent Ida

While the formation of Emerald Productions was Lupino’s first successful foray into independent production, she had a number of near misses leading up to that venture. Her first attempt came in early-1947 when it was announced that she had teamed with producer Benedict Bogeaus to form Arcadia Productions.¹⁷ This pairing was likely volatile as Bogeaus had been hostile to working with a female producer in 1944, when he teamed with Joan Harrison to make *Dark Waters*. *Waters’* director, André De Toth, recounted a dinner meeting in which Bogeaus announced to the six male investors that they had to collaborate with a woman producer, and that he hoped they would not be offended. Bogeaus’ wife then inquired “What’s wrong with women producers?” To which Bogeaus condescendingly replied “Nothing, dear, as long as they are producing children.”¹⁸ It is unclear whether Harrison’s work on *Dark Waters* tempered Bogeaus’ sexism, but four years later, he was willing to entrust a woman with another of his productions.

Hedda Hopper columns: “Ida” Should Be Spelled ‘Idea,’” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 17, 1946, C2. and “Ida’s Ideals,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 04, 1949, C6.

¹⁶ W.H. Mooring, “Ida Lupino Changes Over,” *Picturegoer*, July 16, 1949, 09. ProQuest.

¹⁷ Trade press articles indicate that Arcadia productions was formed in February 1947 see “Bogeaus and Lupino in New Production Co.,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 05, 1947, 02. ProQuest. And “Lesserman to Seek Reciprocal Talent Deals for Bogeaus,” *Variety*, February 05, 1947, 05. ProQuest. However, the company’s first production, “The Affair of the Diamond Necklace,” was first announced in April 1946. “Ida Lupino in Starring Role,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, April 23, 1946, 21A. This is significant insofar as Lupino’s journey toward independence aligns with or even predates Garfield’s.

¹⁸ “We Have a Woman ‘Producer’”: Andre de Toth, *Fragments: Portraits from the Inside* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1994), 329.” as found in Lane, *Phantom Lady*, 239.

Lupino herself was no doubt accustomed to the pervasive gender discrimination that consigned women to specific non-managerial roles within the industry but was so anxious for creative control that even an ill-advised collaboration with Bogaeus held some appeal. While relatively short lived, their partnership nearly yielded results. They signed a three year, one-picture-a-year deal, all of which would star Lupino, and secured distribution with United Artists. The first film announced in the production line-up was “The Affair of the Diamond Necklace,” which was an original story. Arcadia then purchased the rights to their most high-profile endeavor, an adaptation of Louis Bromfield’s 1927 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Early Autumn*. United Artists was confident enough in the film’s eventual completion that they included an enthusiastic announcement about the impending production and the imminent dawn of Lupino’s producing career in a June 1947 UA newsletter, referring to Lupino as a “Double Play Gal” who is teaming up with UA’s “top-flight producer.”¹⁹ This playful verbiage foreshadows the advertising copy that would follow Lupino throughout her producing career. The novelty of the endeavor is celebrated while the actual producing responsibilities are granted to her male producing partner.

In addition to the Arcadia projects, Lupino was also trying to bring a musical adaptation of a comedic play her father wrote to the Broadway stage. Her father (veteran British stage actor Stanley Lupino) had passed away in 1942, and developing his original book called “Apple Tree Farms” became something of a passion project for Lupino throughout the mid-1940s. Reports indicated that Lupino was taking time away from acting for the express purpose of rewriting “Apple Tree Farm,” including the musical score and original songs. In a profile by Hedda Hopper, Lupino ascribes her interest in this new venture to an exhaustion with acting. In the piece, Lupino describes the physical agony that befalls her after each dramatic performance as

¹⁹ “Double Play Gal,” United Artist Newsletter, June 20, 1947, David Loew Papers, 1353, Folder: “United Artist Corp. Distribution,” Margaret Herrick Library.

“tortuous,” and that she would now prefer to turn her attention to writing and producing.²⁰ As an arch conservative with little tolerance for actors’ rebellion against the studio, Hopper was unlikely to report any sign of artistic dissatisfaction, particularly because she counted Lupino as a friend and was disinclined to make her appear ungrateful or indulgent.²¹ However, this move toward Broadway was one of several maneuvers toward artistic and professional freedom that Lupino would take in this period. While reports indicate that Lupino hoped to eventually bring “Apple Tree Farm” to the screen, the movement toward the New York stage is yet another gesture that signaled Lupino’s overall dissatisfaction with Hollywood production methods.²²

Other indications that Lupino was interested in pursuing an alternative career path on the stage include an announcement in the *Chicago Defender* indicating she was in talks to play Desdemona opposite Canada Lee in an *Othello* stage production.²³ This is notable both because it offers the tantalizing possibility that Lupino might have starred in an interracial stage production while on break from studio assignments, and because it is yet another link to Garfield. Lee, a mainstay on the Broadway stage best known for his appearance in the so-called “Voodoo McBeth” in 1936, went on to co-star with Garfield in 1947’s *Body and Soul*.

Other developments in 1946 that further connected Lupino to the independent production scene — and in particular to *Body and Soul* — is the announcement that she was to star in a new

²⁰ Hedda Hopper, “Ida Lupino May Give Up Acting to Become Writer,” *The Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1946, B1. ProQuest.

²¹ According to Jennifer Frost, Hopper was one of most powerful shapers and disseminators of “star personas.” She also describes Hopper’s understudied role in propagating a cohesive conservative ideology in her column. Jennifer Frost, *Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism* (New York: New York University Press, 2011) <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/11111>.

²² This 1946 article indicates that Lupino did eventually intend to adapt “Apple Tree Farm” for the stage “Booming Story Mart Lure for Ambitious Stars,” *The Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1946, B1. ProQuest.

²³ “Deep Are The Roots’ To Close After Long Run,” *The Chicago Defender*, November 02, 1946, 10. ProQuest.

independent production, “Prelude to Night.” The film was among the first announced in the slate of upcoming releases from Equity Capital Corp, a newly organized financing firm aimed at funding independent productions.²⁴ Equity was organized by former RKO president George Schaefer who, in 1947 would become Enterprise Studio’s vice president and be charged with overseeing the company's distribution deals. According to a report in *Variety*, Schaefer had invested \$250,000 in Equity Capital Corp and in exchange would receive a percentage of the profit as well as a nominal salary for his work as vice president. This deal is rumored to have come about based on a prior working relationship with Schaefer and Enterprise founder, David Loew.²⁵

Just as the business side of Enterprise was premised on a shared interest in independent production as a potential source of economic development, individuals like Lupino were interested in its artistic possibilities. The script for “Prelude to Night” was penned by John Garfield collaborator and noted progressive, Robert Rossen. This project would have reteamed Rossen and Lupino again after *Out of the Fog* which Rossen wrote and Lupino starred alongside Garfield. Based on a social realist play by Irwin Shaw called *The Gentle People*, and originally put on by The Group Theatre, *Out of the Fog* was envisioned by writers Jerry Wald, Robert Macaulay, and Rossen as a faithful adaptation of the source material. The initial script featured a sympathetic rendering of its working-class characters and a strong indictment of corruption and racketeering which ensnares the protagonist into a cycle of poverty. However, the first round of notes from the Production Code Administration (PCA) ensured that the screenplay that Lupino

²⁴ “New \$20,000,000 Schaefer Firm to Finance Indie Prods,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 05, 1946, 1 and 17. ProQuest.

²⁵ “Schaefer's %-of-the-Gross Deal for Handling Enterprise Distrib,” *Variety*, February 19, 1947, 3 and 54. ProQuest.

was so excited to put on was a shell of its former self. According to William Donati, Lupino was irate about the changes, but was ultimately appeased when she was able to contribute story notes for the censored draft.²⁶ This project foreshadows Lupino's later work as a behind the scenes contributor, both because of the connection with the socially conscious group of independent filmmakers, but also the interest in writing and taking a more active role in the story development.

Ultimately, none of these early attempts at independent production would come to fruition. Neither her Broadway ambitions, "Prelude to Night," nor any of the Arcadia projects were ever completed, but they are interesting to consider as prologues to Lupino's more successful endeavors. Within this set of projects there is evidence of the taste culture that would inform so much of her future work, including the desire to break free of Hollywood constraints with a return to the stage and collaborate on film projects with like-minded individuals who saw the potential for film to be a medium of great social value. Arcadia Productions, in particular, foreshadows the *raison d'etre* of her later companies. In a profile showcasing her work on "Early Autumn," when asked about her producing philosophy Lupino said, "People are tired of watching murderers, drunks and psychopathic cases on the screen. Now they want relatively simple but honestly told stories and characters with whom they could trade places believably in real life." She goes on to cite the success of *Best Years of Our Lives* (Wyler, 1946) and other "homely tales of things that happen to everybody" as positive indicators of her company's box office success.²⁷ This emphasis on realism and everyday lived experience would be the primary

²⁶ Donati, *Ida Lupino*, 77-81.

²⁷ John L. Scott, "Ida Lupino To Make Debut As Producer," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1947, C1. ProQuest.

selling point of both of Lupino's later companies and the work that they produced.

Emerald Productions and The Filmmakers

Lupino's next two ventures into independent film would see her desire to create a cinematic lexicon rooted in the everyday come to fruition. Emerald Productions and Filmmakers Inc. were both co-founded by Lupino and her then husband Collier Young, a former junior executive at Columbia. They partnered with television producer Anson Bond in 1947 to create Emerald, which produced three pictures in 1949: *The Judge* (Elmer Clifton, 1949), *Not Wanted* (Elmer Clifton, 1949), and *The Vicious Years* (Robert Florey, 1950), all of which were distributed through Film Classics Inc. While all were produced under the Emerald banner, *Not Wanted*, a film about an unmarried pregnant woman, was Lupino's unofficial directorial debut. She took over filming after the film's nominal director, Elmer Clifton, became physically debilitated after suffering a heart attack just prior to the start of production. Lupino took the helm on the first day of shooting but insisted that Clifton retain the director credit.²⁸ After *Not Wanted* wrapped production, Lupino made plans to produce her second film for Emerald, which would also be released through Film Classics. *Never Fear* (1950) stars Sally Forrest and Keefe Brasselle as a pair of dancers whose lives are derailed when the female protagonist contracts polio and loses the ability to move her legs. However, before *Never Fear* entered production Young and Lupino split with Bond, dissolved Emerald in June of 1949, and backed out of their Film Classics distribution deal.^{29 30}

²⁸ Donati, *Ida Lupino*, 150.

²⁹ "Rambling Reporter," *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 07, 1949, 02. ProQuest.

³⁰ "Never Fear Withdraws as Film Classics Release," *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 19, 1949, 01. ProQuest.

Young and Lupino rebounded quickly, forming The Filmmakers Inc. with *Not Wanted* screenwriter Malvin Wald in September of that same year.³¹ Meanwhile, the success of *Not Wanted* attracted RKO head Howard Hughes, who was interested in producing low-budget material about similarly taboo subject matter. By October of 1949, the Filmmakers found distribution for *Never Fear* through Eagle-Lion and had signed a full-financing, three-picture production deal with RKO.³² These RKO releases include Lupino directed films: *Outrage* (1950), *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951), and *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953) as well as *On the Loose* (Lederer, 1951) and *Beware, My Lovely* (Horner, 1952). While these films earned more than their production budget, the distribution arrangement with RKO proved untenable as the contract stipulated that The Filmmakers had to cover all the marketing costs for the production. According to Wald, The Filmmakers were “fleeced” by Howard Hughes who benefited from all Lupino’s efforts to keep the films under their proposed budget by foisting all the promotional expenses onto the unit.³³ The unfair terms of this arrangement inspired Young to find an alternative distribution mode. By the time the Filmmakers finished Lupino’s *The Bigamist* (1953) they had already established their own distribution unit, Filmmakers Releasing Organization (FRO). The films that FRO distributed included *The Bigamist* (Lupino, 1953), *Private Hell 36* (Don Siegel, 1954), *Mad at the World* (Harry Essex, 1955), and *The Bold and the Brave* (Lewis R. Foster, 1956). This too proved to be an untenable arrangement, and the company declared bankruptcy in 1955.³⁴

³¹ “Lupino, Young in New Set-up,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 28, 1949, 01. ProQuest.

³² J.D. Spiro, “Hollywood Acts,” *The New York Times*, October 23, 1949, X5. ProQuest.

³³ Quoted in Donati, *Ida Lupino*, 177.

³⁴ For a more thorough history of the decline of FRO see Peter Labuza, “Hard, Fast, and Brokerage: Irving H. Levin, the Filmmakers, and the Birth of Conglomerate Hollywood,” *Film History*, Spring 2021, Vol. 33 (1), 46-75.

While the tenure of Lupino's companies were short, the deliberate and public way in which the companies maneuvered the liminal space between Hollywood production and true independence makes them useful objects of study. Both Emerald and Filmakers distinguished themselves by emphasizing the aesthetic and thematic gulf between their films and studio product. This was made explicit when, shortly before the 1950 release of *Never Fear*, The Filmakers published their "Declaration of Independents" in a one-page advertisement in *Variety*. Their statement distills the aesthetic and industrial ethos of their company and could have served as manifesto for the entire Hollywood realist movement:

We are deep in admiration for our fellow independent producers —men like Stanley Kramer, Robert Rossen and Louis de Rochemont. They are bringing a new power and excitement to the screen. We like independence. It's tough sometimes, but it's good for the initiative. The struggle to do something different is healthy in itself. We think it is healthy for our industry as well. That is why we independent producers must continue to explore new themes, try new ideas, discover new creative talents in all departments. When any one of us profits by these methods, there is bounty for us all—major or independent. We trust that our new Filmakers production, *Never Fear*, is worthy of the responsibilities which we have assumed as independent producers. —Ida Lupino and Collier Young.³⁵

This very public proclamation not only calls attention to the imminent release of their upcoming film, it also serves as a mission statement for all their subsequent releases. This is brand cultivation in which the company defines itself as something new and daring while also invoking existing touchstones to set audience and industry expectations. The publication in the trade press suggests that the primary target of this manifesto is other industry professionals, making it a call-to-arms for other like-minded people to help cultivate an alternative filmmaking mode. However, this branding extended beyond industry insiders and into popular press and even fan magazines,

³⁵ "The Declaration of Independents," *Variety*, February 20, 1950, 12.

as when a 1952 article in *Picturegoer* declared Lupino “The Female Kramer” owing to her interest and skill in producing “message” narratives.³⁶

The three filmmakers that Lupino and Young chose as their benchmark is particularly telling because they all represent varying levels of investment in a Hollywood aesthetic. The documentarian and newsreel producer, Louis de Rochemont is perhaps the farthest away from the Hollywood escapist cliché that Lupino and Young were aiming to invoke, but all three filmmakers were in some ways both outside and beholden to Hollywood infrastructure. These filmmakers were invested in a filmmaking mode that was rooted in a liberal ideology which believed in portraying the hardships and triumphs of everyday people. Stanley Kramer, in particular, was synonymous with the “social problem” film - a genre meant to be reflective of a liberal principle that held that films were an ideal medium for portraying systemic inequality and other intractable difficulties facing the American populace. When The Filmmakers published their declaration in 1950, Kramer was still developing his reputation as a producer of these prestigious pictures, but he had already made several successful films in this social problem vein including *Home of the Brave* (Robson, 1949) — a film about racial tensions among a World War II military platoon. Themes relating to racism and inequality would become mainstays in Kramer’s oeuvre. However, *Home of the Brave* was reflective not only of Kramer’s interests but of a trend of independent films addressing racial prejudice, including Louis DeRochemont’s *Lost Boundaries*, which was released that same year.

By citing filmmakers like Kramer, DeRochemont, and Rossen, Lupino was signaling not only an interest in an alternative production practice, but also a commitment to a specific social agenda. This commitment was reinforced in the popular press when she described her

³⁶ Hinxman, “She’s Demur But She’s Dynamite,” 8.

unsuccessful campaign to diversify the cast of *Not Wanted* for the *New York Times*. She claimed that her interest in portraying women of different races was both a matter of social justice and a desire to see her filmic world reflect the racial diversity she saw in the real world.³⁷ She relayed a similar story to *Negro Digest* but with additional emphasis on her intention to incorporate Black characters into her narratives. She describes her plan thusly, “what we do plan to do is integrate Negro actors in all our productions. We’ll show Negro college students, gas station attendants, cops, business men, housewives.” She also spoke of her aim of producing a film based on the Mexican American experience of the “zoot-suit riots” declaring that “This picture and all those I make...will say the same thing and show the same thing dramatically. This lack of feeling for one another is terrible. People must learn to love and respect each other. The movies are a good place to begin.”³⁸ Rhetoric regarding racial unity and oversimplified integration narratives was endemic to the cycle of social message pictures of this era. As Jennifer Frost notes in her study of Stanley Kramer, this vision of a color-blind society was pushed primarily by white liberal filmmakers with little input from people of the minoritized groups that were being portrayed.³⁹

In Lupino’s case, the promise of racial unity themes would go unfulfilled. The zoot-suit riot film never materialized, and none of her films deal explicitly with ethnic or racial prejudice. While The Filmakers never made a film that deals directly in matters of integration, their films do feature expressly political themes, such as unwed motherhood (*Not Wanted*), disability (*Never Fear*), sexual assault (*Outrage*), and postwar malaise (*The Bigamist*). While the intention to

³⁷ Helen Colton, “Ida Lupino, Filmland's Lady of Distinction,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 1950, X5. ProQuest.

³⁸ Robert Ellis, “Ida Lupino Brings New Hope to Hollywood,” *Negro Digest* 8, is. 10, August 1950, 47-49. ProQuest.

³⁹ Jennifer Frost, *Producer of Controversy: Stanley Kramer, Hollywood Liberalism, and the Cold War*, (United States: University Press of Kansas, 2017) 27-29.

address themes of civil rights and systemic racism might have been overstated, Lupino's *Negro Digest* interview is nevertheless further evidence of the political agenda behind forming her production company. Her attachment to independent filmmaking as a means of addressing societal ills is made explicit both in the films themselves and in the Filmmakers marketing strategies.

While not as well-known as Kramer, the mention of Robert Rossen's name was also a way to signal a specific political and aesthetic alignment. In addition to having a personal connection to Lupino, Rossen was also recently coming off his directorial efforts on John Garfield's producerial debut *Body and Soul*. Not only is that film representative of the kind that Lupino was looking to make, Rossen himself was also vocal in his misgivings about the studios' ability to produce films that reflect reality. In a 1947 interview he posited that the reason European filmmakers receive critical acclaim is that they make pictures that are "true to life," whereas American producers make formulaic fairytales. Like Lupino, Rossen's marker of quality is realism. He explains, "Real life is ugly. But we can't make good pictures until we're ready to tell about it."⁴⁰ The championing of grittiness reflects a growing weariness among American filmmakers and, to some degree, the broader public with a typical Hollywood aesthetic, and an increased awareness of alternative cinematic modes.

According to film historian Tino Balio, the success of Roberto Rossellini's Italian Neorealist classic *Rome, Open City* (1945) on American screens begat a new era of foreign film distribution and exhibition. Balio posits that much of the appeal of these films lies in their thematic and cultural divergence from Hollywood, and interest was bolstered by disproportionate

⁴⁰ Patricia Clary, "H'wood Censure Laid to 'FairyTaleFormula,'" *United Press*, March 25, 1947, Robert Rossen Papers, Box 13; Fld 6.

attention from critics and an emerging market of cineastes.⁴¹ Balio credits *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther as the main reason that this new aesthetic was popularized and critically renowned, as he admired the “candid, overpowering realism” of the Rossellini pictures.⁴²

Lupino shared Rossen and Crowther’s sentiments about the quality of imported cinema. In addition to calling out these American filmmakers, The Filmakers also sought to align themselves with this emerging European aesthetic. Legend has it that an encounter with Rossellini inspired Lupino’s move into making her own pictures. In their meeting he reportedly lamented a series of Hollywood clichés (star driven vehicles in which the characters are going crazy or want to kill their wives) and then posed a challenge: “When are you going to make pictures about ordinary people, in ordinary situations?”⁴³ Whether Rossellini ever actually said this, or whether this encounter actually occurred is almost inconsequential. What matters is that her citing Rossellini in a way that amounts to name-dropping is once again an effective way to establish bona fides and to align her work with those of an established iconoclast. She reaffirmed this connection in a 1949 article publicizing *Not Wanted* by mentioning Italian neorealist titles such as *Shoeshine* (De Sica, 1946) and *Rome, Open City* (Rossellini, 1945) as models for success both in terms of theme and mode of production.⁴⁴ While there is an aesthetic, industrial, and cultural distinction between the work of Stanley Kramer and filmmakers like Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica, they all share a perceived ideological distance from Hollywood product. The

⁴¹ Balio, Tino, *The Foreign Film Renaissance*.

⁴² Crowther, Bosley, *The New York Times*, February 26, 1946. Quoted in Tino Balio, *The Foreign Film Renaissance*, 4.

⁴³ *San Diego Tribune*, February 2, 1949. Quoted in Donati, *Ida Lupino*, 146.

⁴⁴ Thomas, Bob, “Lupino Trying ‘Unwed Mother’ Drama Film, *San Diego Tribune*, Feb 9, 1949, *Not Wanted* Production Code Administration Digitized Files, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS. <https://digitalcollections.oscars.org/digital/collection/p15759coll30/id/10592>

big budget Hollywood fantasy became a convenient strawman for producers like Lupino, Kramer and Rossellini to set themselves against. In a 1950 *Variety* article highlighting the upcoming release of *Outrage*, Collier Young claimed that the public are “weary of formula pictures” and are hungry for “good exploitable stories and new faces instead of names.” He goes on to advocate for “yarns that affect the lives of everyday Americans” and eschewing “oldtime production methods” and excessive costs.⁴⁵

While the cinematic representation of realism is a contentious ideological morass, the association of “realism” with prestige meant that both European and American producers could sell a picture based on a particular set of aesthetic characteristics. Suddenly, the attributes of neorealism – including location shooting, use of untrained actors and unvarnished depiction of everyday experience – could be sold to the public as both exotic and intellectually stimulating.⁴⁶ The formal parallels to the work of Italian neorealist films are apparent in Lupino’s work. Grisham and Grossman include an extensive analysis of *Outrage* and the influence of Neorealist style in their critical study of Lupino’s films and conclude that the documentary aesthetic and the positioning of a woman trapped within a larger patriarchal system of oppression are evidence of neorealist influence.⁴⁷ Regardless of whether or not the films themselves can be characterized as neorealist, the significance for this study is that Lupino and her associates wanted the public to view these works as similar. They wanted the association with everyday struggle, economic

⁴⁵ “Exploitable Stories,” *Variety*, 29.

⁴⁶ Nathaniel Brennan explores the marketing strategies employed by *Rome, Open City*’s American distributors Joseph Burstyn and Arthur Mayer including highlighting Bosley Crowther’s endorsement of the cinematic realism and attempting to pique interest in an foreign filmmaking style. “Marketing Meaning, Branding Neorealism Advertising And Promoting Italian Cinema in Postwar America” *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style*, edited by Saverio Giovacchini, and Robert Sklar, University Press of Mississippi, 2011. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=794510>.

⁴⁷ Grisham and Grossman, *Ida Lupino, Director*, 49-52.

precarity, systemic power imbalances, and cinematic realism so that they could position their films as similarly culturally significant and critically acclaimed.

It was not only the thematic material that she aspired to, but the artistry and frugality necessary to make \$200,000 budgets look like they were made for double that cost. In the same article in which she cites *Shoeshine* and *Rome, Open City* as influences, she also boasts of recycling sets from the Enterprise Studios lots, not only reinforcing her connection to John Garfield and her association with another high-profile independent company, it also suggests a similar ingenuity as the cost-saving measures taken by European art house filmmakers. One of the cost-saving initiatives that The Filmmakers shared with the Italian Neorealists was an aversion to celebrity. In addition to low budgets, The Filmmakers publicity touted their discovery of “fresh faces” and commitment to looking beyond the Hollywood star system as one of their artistic achievements, or as Lupino put it: “We want ability, not names.”⁴⁸ The rejection of the star-system was not necessarily shared by Lupino’s American indie contemporaries, but it proved practical both from a financial and marketing perspective. Not only did the cost of hiring a studio star pose a major fiscal risk for their independent unit, doing so would also associate the film with the falseness of Hollywood.

The Actor’s Habitus

Despite the aversion to the Hollywood star machine, The Filmmakers’ branding was not totally detached from the professional actor class. In fact, along with associating themselves with the Italian neorealist movement, another significant way that The Filmmakers positioned themselves both within the industry and to the public was by associating themselves with other

⁴⁸ Hopper, “Ida’s Ideas,” C6.

actors who were looking to import a Broadway sensibility to Hollywood. While Lupino's turn to directing was a singular achievement for an actress in this period, she was certainly not alone in her move toward independent production. Male and female actors alike were turning to independent production as means of freeing themselves from studio control, however, only a selection of these actors expressed a definitive political or social justification for this maneuver. In the previous chapter John Garfield served as the test case for this kind of industrial and aesthetic shift. Here, Lupino represents a variation on the socially conscious stardom trend, and proof of the formation of an emerging taste culture within a subsection of Hollywood's creative elite. The *group* unit in which progressive artists like Lupino and Garfield circulated was gaining traction, and their political and aesthetic edginess was becoming a formidable marketing strategy.

The connection between Lupino and Garfield and the public show of their mutual admiration offers proof of their shared mission. Garfield even claimed partial credit for inspiring Lupino's turn toward independent production. In a 1950 profile in *Daily Mail*, he describes the dividends his turn to independence yielded, including leading a wave of other actors to leave Warners and go independent. He recalls:

I met Ida and she talked about the time she went in to talk to Jack Warner about signing a term contract out at Warner Bros. She didn't want to be tied down. She wanted to be free. So Warner hit the ceiling. I'd just left that studio after doing my seven years' time. Lots of other actors were leaving, too. He said that all these kids that were leaving the protective fold were going to fall on their faces. Ida let that one go, and forgot about it. Then she ran into Warner a year or so ago and she said, 'Say, that John Garfield sure fell on his face in *Body and Soul*, didn't he?'⁴⁹

This story not only advances Garfield as the triumphant hero, it also positions both he and Lupino as anti-establishment rebels standing up together against corporate power. It also heralds

⁴⁹ Smith, Darr, *Daily News*, July 4, 1950. Roberts Production digitized files, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

independent production as the new fresh approach in which actors and those with the most public facing creative roles are the individuals who have direct control of the final product. The specific mention of Lupino creates a stronger linkage between them and their shared mistrust of the system that made them both wealthy and famous.

Garfield's sensibilities emerge from the New York theater scene and are imported to Hollywood by east coast transplants. While it is my contention that Garfield was the first actor to apply his ideology to the formation of an independent company, he was certainly not the only performer with the belief that the stage was the purest form of the actor's craft. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, The Actor's Company was founded by Garfield's *Gentleman's Agreement* co-star, theater actor-turned-movie star Gregory Peck, and was initiated as a means for Los Angeles based performers to return to their theatrical roots. Among the participants were Garfield's other *Gentleman's Agreement* co-star Dorothy McGuire, Mel Ferrer, Rosalind Russell, and Garfield himself.⁵⁰

The connections between these disparate actors are not immediately apparent, but they all shared a commitment to stagecraft and a desire to transpose the legitimacy of the theater-world to a Hollywood context. Not only did they have a designated space in La Jolla, California to put on their plays, they also toured a production of Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke*, and made regular appearances on radio programs. In addition to these very visible projects, The Actor's Company also had a networking function in which stars could communicate with producers and vice versa to fund projects they deemed worthy. They also used their multimodal platforms to promote their work, and the work of others whose message and sensibilities they

⁵⁰ Meeting minutes from November 21st, 1949, indicate that Lupino had expressed interest in becoming involved with the company, however, she was never listed as an official member. "La Jolla Playhouse Minutes," *Gregory Peck Papers*, Folder 3096.

could endorse. According to meeting minutes from 1949, Collier Young sought out the Actors Company to help promote and find distribution for The Filmakers' *Never Fear*. The Actor's Company board members Mel Ferrer and Jerry Wald were both helping to facilitate an arrangement that would ensure an optimal release of the picture. The proposed deal involved The Actor's Company arranging with Eagle-Lion (who ended up distributing *Never Fear*) to release the film in theaters before Christmas and have The Actors' Company members individually endorse the picture on thirty-second or one-minute radio transcriptions. For their services, The Filmakers would pay The Actors' Company \$25,000.00 and give them a percentage of the picture's profit.⁵¹ The minutes also indicate that The Actor's Company was concerned about the mixing of commerce with the film's disability themes. It was felt that the emphasis should be placed on the overall narrative rather than the film's virtue, lest they be accused of exploiting the subject matter. They also insisted that the film be held to a standard of quality, and that if it should fail to meet this standard, they would refuse their endorsement.⁵²

This arrangement exemplifies the ways that actors could shape paradigms of quality, the ways in which they could exercise their power within the industry to see these standards applied to projects, and the way they could use their network outside the studio system to help one another succeed. However, despite the facade of independence, units like The Filmakers and The Actor's Company were still working with longstanding Hollywood institutions and were still beholden to them for releasing and publicizing their products. Lupino and company proved adept at navigating the peripherality of the independent insider. Lupino's facility in negotiating the

⁵¹ The Actor's Company Meeting Minutes, Date Unknown, Rosalind Russell Papers, 1930-1970, Collection 183, Box 30, Folder "The Actors Company," Performing Arts Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. (Hereafter cited as Rosalind Russell Papers).

⁵² Ibid.

business of Hollywood becomes especially apparent when compared to someone like John Garfield. Like Lupino, Garfield ascribed to progressive political ideologies and seemed poised to apply these ideals to independent film production, but his public reputation was undone by lack of institutional support.

For instance, conservative gossip columnist Hedda Hopper, who was deeply invested in rooting the “red menace” out of the motion picture industry, made Garfield a target of her anti-communist crusades. She even served as a witness for the FBI in their Garfield investigation, serving a dual role as both a source of information for the Bureau and its mouthpiece.⁵³ This helped foster an air of suspicion that ultimately cost Garfield his career, and some have argued that the stress of precarious employment and government surveillance led to the heart attack that ended his life. Despite Lupino and Garfield’s matching political and philosophical perspectives, Lupino never became a target of Hopper’s attacks. Quite the contrary, Hopper wrote glowingly of Lupino’s directorial efforts and frequently held her up as paragon of femininity and an exemplary talent.⁵⁴ This is in part because Lupino returned her kindness by giving Hopper very public credit for her on-screen success, recounting the *Artists and Models* story numerous times throughout the years, including a 1965 article in which Lupino wrote a guest column for a vacationing Hopper.⁵⁵ This relationship continued throughout most of Lupino’s screen career,

⁵³ Jennifer Frost explains the relationship between Hopper and the FBI, as well as her role in the Garfield investigation in *Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood*, 130-131.

⁵⁴ For notice of her femininity and directorial ambition see Hedda Hopper’s Staff, “Drama,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 09, 1952, A6. ProQuest.

⁵⁵ Lupino, Ida, “Hedda Almost Upsets Ida Lupino’s Career,” *The Chicago Tribune*, June 29, 1965, a3. ProQuest.

with Hopper commenting on Lupino's ladylike appearance and her ability to balance her career with her domestic responsibilities well into the 1960s.⁵⁶

Another institutional advantage that Lupino utilized for her company's benefit was her ability to negotiate with the PCA. Much of her narrative and thematic content is on its face a violation of the morality standards upheld by the Code, particularly the implication of sexuality outside the confines of marriage in *Not Wanted*, *Outrage*, and *The Bigamist*. Yet Lupino managed to use her celebrity and diplomatic skill to receive the PCA seal of approval. This negotiation is on notable display for the release of her debut feature *Not Wanted*. Even before the cameras began rolling, the film had a number of road blocks on its way to production.⁵⁷ The story, originally conceived by Paul Jerrico and Malvin Wald as a semi-documentary about unwed mothers, underwent five different incarnations before it could get approval from the PCA.⁵⁸ The story treatment was initially pitched by Enterprise Studios' David Hopkins in 1948, but it was quickly dismissed by the PCA because its subject matter bordered on "bad taste."⁵⁹ However, when Lupino took over the production of the picture, she was able to address the concerns of the office in part by wielding her celebrity in order to get what she wanted. PCA files indicate that it was ultimately Lupino's decision to meet with Code administrators in person that convinced them that a tale of unwed motherhood could be made into viable thematic

⁵⁶ For a note about Lupino's appearance see Hedda Hopper, *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1961, B10. ProQuest. For comment about Lupino prioritizing her husband, Howard Duff see Hopper's comment "Ida decided being a mother was more important than a director." in "Levine's Cast of Thousands," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 06, 1965, d28.

⁵⁷ Details of the PCA negotiation can be found in Theresa Grisham and Julie Grossman, *Ida Lupino Director*, 18-28.

⁵⁸ "Took 5 Scripts to Get Breen OK on Young's Illegitimacy Picture" *Variety*, May 11, 1949, 05. ProQuest.

⁵⁹ Correspondence, Milton Sperling to Jack Vizzard, December 6, 1948, *Not Wanted* PCA files, Margaret Herrick Library <https://digitalcollections.oscars.org/digital/collection/p15759coll30/id/10577>.

material. Lupino also had regular correspondence with PCA personnel, including phone conversations in which she discussed script alterations.

To thank the office for their leniency, she made sure to speak well of them in the press describing them as “nice, broadminded human beings.”⁶⁰ The *Not Wanted* campaign became in part an image makeover for the PCA, as they requested that she advocate for them in the popular press. She obliged, going so far as to credit the office with making the picture better by insisting on maintaining certain moral standards and “adding value to the scripts.”⁶¹ The only public complaint she ever lodged against the office was that they forbade her from diversifying the cast, and she could only manage to sneak in a “Chinese girl” into a scene where the protagonist visits a home for unwed mothers.⁶² This public compromise of her vision is part and parcel of a larger ideological flexibility, wherein the project gets made but the marketing and paratextual material belie the true stories behind the production and overall artistic intent. Despite declaring an avowed loyalty to independent production, the true story of all Lupino productions involves pragmatism and dealings with Hollywood power structures.

Marketing The Bigamist

In many ways the marketing strategy for *The Bigamist*, Lupino’s last film under The Filmmakers banner, perfectly encapsulates both the alignment with independent production and a willingness to utilize old-fashioned studio methodologies. As such, it ties together many of the threads of this argument, demonstrating a compromised allegiance to cinematic realism, the pro-

⁶⁰ George Fisher Radio Transcript, “Story of the Week: A Movie Queen Battles the Movie Censors!,” *Not Wanted* PCA files, Herrick, <https://digitalcollections.oscars.org/digital/collection/p15759coll30/id/10581>

⁶¹ Hinxman, Margaret, “She’s Demure,” 8.

⁶² Colton, Helen, “Ida Lupino, Filmland’s Lady Of Distinction,” X5.

independence rhetoric, the *group* dynamic, and a compromised fealty toward Hollywood institutions. The film is about a lonely salesman (Edmund O'Brien) who, feeling disconnected from his wife (Joan Fontaine) and vocation, carries on an affair with a similarly lonely waitress (Ida Lupino) while his wife pours herself into their shared business. When the waitress ends up pregnant, he marries her rather than coming clean and revealing that he is already married. *The Bigamist* is the only one of the Lupino-directed films that The Filmakers' released under their own banner. This gives it the distinction of being the only one for which they had complete freedom to choose the marketing strategy and dissemination methods for the film. This marketing and distribution approach is unique to The Filmakers but has very clear echoes of standard industry practices.

The press book, for instance, adopts a similar pseudo-rebellious stance as The Filmakers "Declaration of Independents." Like that manifesto, this document contains a passage in which the unit adopts an iconoclastic posture, while ultimately working within tried-and-true promotional methods. The press book features another call for the industry to reimagine its staid approach and try out a new aesthetic form. In this case, the new aesthetic in question is advertisement designs and the ways that the industry has historically approached the selling of motion pictures. This "letter to the exhibitor" claims that The Filmakers have done a thorough survey of graphic style as far back as the "mid-twenties" and found that most advertisements throw "the kitchen stove at ticket buyers," and that none of the claims proved "sticky." The Filmakers then claim that they have found the solution:

in preparing the advertising for *The Bigamist* we decided to get as daring as the day we bought the story. How about going really honest? How about settling for one copy theme and staying with it? How about simplicity and the adult approach for an adult subject?

How about scrapping the tired ‘clinch’ art and telling the people exactly what we had to sell?⁶³

Once again, Lupino and Young have positioned themselves apart from the usual studio approach by appealing to a sense of good taste and artistry. They are claiming an inventiveness that comes with the freshness and independence, while also adopting a normative practice of appealing to “adult” sensibilities. Here the word “adult” serves as a double entendre meant to evoke intellectual and artistic stimulation, as well as the prurience implied in the film’s title. Despite what The Filmmakers’ rhetoric might suggest, the intermingling of sexuality with the cerebral was not a new tactic. Not only were there traces of this technique in the *Body and Soul* advertising campaign, this was also a common practice for marketing Italian neorealist films for American audiences. As Nathaniel Brennan explained, the distributors for these foreign imports adopted the bipartite tactic of emphasizing critical and aesthetic merit while also making intimations of “more sordid cinematic content.”⁶⁴ The marketing strategy for *The Bigamist* mirrors this methodology with a minimalist graphic design that signals a refined sophistication, and ad copy that highlights the most salacious elements of the narrative. For instance, the poster features a quote regarding one of the wives’ surprise pregnancy, and the “Features” section of the press book suggests foregrounding the illicit affair angle and the “unique love triangle.” Other advertisements highlight the narrative daring claiming that *The Bigamist* is an “adult” alternative to big studio cowardice. One ad reads:

Here is 80 minutes of spade-calling entertainment. Starting with a story as old as man, but startlingly new to the screen, Hollywood stops playing ‘Ostrich’ to bring you adult drama. We don’t go along with the idea that American movie patrons are equal to the

⁶³ Press Book, *The Bigamist* Production Files, Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

⁶⁴ Brennan, “Marketing Meaning.” 91.

‘Twelve-Year-Old-Mind.’ That is why we confidently dared to make this picture; that is why we proudly offer you 80 minutes for grown-ups.⁶⁵

Once again, the rhetoric is multivalent, in which the company is positioning itself as a daring, unpatronizing alternative to mainstream content, while also making it clear that this movie is not suitable for children due to its illicit content.

The Filmmakers’ overtures about their upending old Hollywood promotional techniques proves especially misleading in its presentation of its cast. *The Bigamist* has the distinction of being the only Filmmakers production to rely on star-power as a primary selling point. Not only does the graphic design foreground the marquee names (including Oscar winner Joan Fontaine), it is also the only one of the Lupino-directed pictures in which she had a starring role. At this moment in her career, Lupino’s star status was in a precarious position. Her 1948 move to a behind-the-scenes managerial position constituted a major shift in her social and business standing. The change in her job title necessitated a restructuring of her place in the public consciousness; a process that could be facilitated by a publicist.

Denise Mann argues that during this postwar transitional period “the stars’ iconic status derived largely from old Hollywood publicity techniques that were often compromised once the stars “moved up” by joining forces with management and becoming heads of their own companies.⁶⁶ By 1953 Ida Lupino was in this “moving up” predicament. She no longer had proprietary ties to a studio, at least not as a performer, and had made the transition from an on-screen talent into a supervisory position. She would need to reshape her public persona so that audiences remained endeared to her despite her accrual of power and status.

⁶⁵ The Bigamist Press Book, The Bigamist Production Files, Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

⁶⁶ Mann, *Hollywood Independents*, 206.

This effort to ameliorate the “moving up” predicament is on display when Lupino guest starred on a 1953 radio program of *The Hollywood Story*.⁶⁷ The show produced by NBC in association with The Publicist Guild, was hosted by none other than Stanley Kramer, reinforcing Lupino’s ties to the well-regarded independent producer. The show itself, however, was aimed at paying deference to important figures from studio era history, highlighting the life stories of people like Paramount founder Adolph Zukor and Carole Lombard. The show’s content centers around an aural reenactment of notable events from the star’s life, often portrayed by the stars themselves. By participating in “The Hollywood Story” broadcast, Lupino was very cannily positioned as a Stanley Kramer-like figure, or someone who functioned as a Hollywood insider while still maintaining their reputation as an autonomous visionary. In other words, the publicists behind this venture were selling the public on the notion of an independent artist—someone willing to take creative risks, but still reverent to the institutions with which the public has a longstanding familiarity. To that end, “The Ida Lupino Story” takes care to pay dutiful respect to Paramount and its executives—dropping specific names like Adolf Zukor and mentioning Melvin Shower and Al Kaufman, which only industry insiders or the most obsessive fans would recognize. After she establishes her insider bona fides, Lupino then posits a philosophical and methodological distinction between her independent producorial endeavors and typical mainstream production. The verisimilitude of her work, particularly her decision to shoot on-location and to cast unknown actors, was her primary piece of evidence of how the Filmmakers charted a distinct path from Hollywood practice. The episode then culminates in a reminder to seek out her latest release, *The Bigamist*. This rejection of Hollywood convention was a deliberate aesthetic choice and a marketing ploy. By telling the story of her rejection of

⁶⁷ “The Hollywood Story,” NBC. November 07, 1953.

Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, National Broadcasting Company Records, Disc 45A, No. 2135-2136.

mainstream sensibilities on this NBC broadcast, she managed to separate herself from the familiar star system while still taking advantage of the studio infrastructure with its expansive publicity network. This marketing approach exemplifies the tightrope that Lupino and her collaborators were attempting to walk in claiming Hollywood insider status and the cultural capital of an independent outsider.

Lady Boss

While The Filmmakers' purported impulse behind their independence might have been to enact stories about the struggles of everyday people, in many ways the most significant social gesture was the platforming of a prominent female producer. In histories of the era, Lupino is most often distinguished as the singular female director working in Hollywood in the postwar era. This fact alone has ensured that Lupino gets passing mention in most broad surveys of classical Hollywood as a strange anomaly or the exception to the patriarchal rule. Her success in a male dominated industry should have invited more literature from feminist scholars, but that has not always been the case. As was gestured to in Molly Haskell's scathing assessment of Lupino's anti-feminist rhetoric, profiles of Lupino she would often encourage women to behave in ways that fell strictly along gender lines. One very telling example of such a profile is entitled "What Every Lady Boss Should Know" in which she advises women in supervisory roles to avoid wearing "masculine" attire, "giving orders," and to remember that "at all times you are a lady, not a man."⁶⁸ If the term "Lady Boss" has a familiar ring, it might be because it precedes a more contemporary phrase adopted by third-wave feminist discourse known as #girlboss. Once a

⁶⁸ Marion Purcelli, "What Every Lady Boss Should Know," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 22, 1963, e2. ProQuest.

sincere form of cheerleading for female-led business ventures, girlboss has since become an ironic hashtag used to satirize an exclusionary type of white corporate feminism.⁶⁹ Given how #girlboss has been entrenched in contemporary online culture, it is surprising to find iterations of this moniker prior to the rise of second-wave feminism. It is even more surprising to find that similar criticism can be leveled at both refrains. Despite the fifty-year gap between these terms, the enduring ambivalence toward public-facing women remains.

Title aside, Lupino's advice capitulates to and even advocates for a patriarchal system of female oppression, which dictates that women are meant to be caretakers for men and children. How then can historians account for Lupino's advocacy of regressive gender stereotypes while acknowledging her exemplary achievements in a male dominated field? In their analysis of Lupino's television work, Mary Celeste Kearney and James M. Moran justify Lupino's comments as a survival tactic deployed to ensure continued employment as a director.⁷⁰ This historical contextualization is necessary to understand how a woman can promulgate such seemingly contrary ideologies, but it does not necessarily resolve the tension inherent in Lupino's status as a feminist icon. Perhaps the solution is to focus less on reclaiming Lupino the individual, and instead examine the larger institution and the ways that it is inhospitable to systemic change.

Just as she proved a canny crafter of public image in the marketing of her films and companies, Lupino was equally deliberate in the deployment of her femininity. Her singular status working in a male-dominated field meant that she was occupying a position as actor-director-producer that was typically held and guarded by men. In her transhistorical study of

⁶⁹ Mull, Amanda, "The Girlboss Has Left the Building," *The Atlantic*, June 25, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/06/girlbosses-what-comes-next/613519/>

⁷⁰ Mary Celeste Kearney and James M. Moran, "Ida Lupino as director of television" *Queen of the B's*, 143-145.

female labor in the studio system, Erin Hill explores the ways in which the design of the classical Hollywood workplace was itself highly segregated. She explores how each facet of the studio was designated as either male or female domains, with men taking up the technical and forward-facing creative jobs, with the women usually confined to roles involving small machinery such as sewing or typing. Hill also describes the precariousness of such roles and the expectation that not only would women need to attend to their work tasks, but also soothe the egos or temperaments of their male supervisors. Hill writes, “As studios embraced traditional notions of women’s place in business, women were expected to perform femininity and sexuality on the job, fulfilling unspoken duties and serving at once in professional and emotional capacities that, although often at odds, were an expected part of their work.”⁷¹ In addition to taking on this emotional wrangling, women were also expected to conceal this labor from their colleagues. This invisible caretaker position became yet another aspect of everyday gender performance for studio workers, and it further entrenched the understanding of certain labor as inherently feminine.

With Lupino stepping into a male-dominated role, it is reasonable to infer that she would have to figure out how to navigate through such unwelcoming terrain by anticipating the misgivings of conservative or reactionary colleagues. Her job became about crafting scripts, framing shots and blocking actors to formulate stories for the public, both in the literal and metaphorical sense. Just as she had to present a coherent visual story that brought to life the realistic, everyday existence of her fictional characters as a producer-director, she also had to narrativize and present her own life as a commodity for public consumption. Part of the calculus in crafting this persona involved anticipating the concerns and biases of her audience. Not only would she need to worry herself with daily interactions, her fame and singular position make her

⁷¹ Erin Hill, *Never Done*, 93.

fodder for discourse, meaning she would also need to be mindful of the opinions of the viewing public who were watching her step into this male sphere of influence. This status left her open to disproportionate levels of scrutiny and criticism. However, a woman successfully navigating a male space was also a human-interest story — one that fans and casual observers could invest in without having any attachment to Lupino as an actress or craftsperson. Shelley Stamp, in her study of the rise of “gal producers” in the postwar era, analyzes how three women producers (Joan Harrison, Harriet Parsons and Virginia Van Upp) were presented to the media. She argues that while these women were granted female empowerment narratives they were also characterized by “demeaning social stereotypes.”⁷² Their labor was positioned as either iterations of highly feminized creative roles (i.e. knitters) or emotional mediaries between various tempestuous male creators.

Like Harrison, Parsons and Van Upp, Lupino’s ascent through the Hollywood hierarchy drew attention and interest from the public. The novelty of this pivot, from movie star to a more behind-the-scenes role, garnered attention that might not have otherwise been afforded Lupino had she continued as a contract player at Warners. There is no evidence to suggest that this was among the chief reasons for Lupino’s transition to producing, however, the result was nonetheless both an artistic endeavor and a shrewd transformation of her star persona. She transitioned from a glamorous actress known for playing wounded femme fatales, to a strong woman in a position of authority and, most notably, authority over men.

This transgressive move places Lupino and her publicity team in a paradoxical position. The publicity must both celebrate Lupino’s groundbreaking achievement, while also downplaying the disruption to normative gender roles. In many cases, the solution was to dismiss

⁷² Stamp, Shelley, “Film Noir’s ‘Gal Producers’ and the Female Market,” *Women’s History Review* 29, no. 5, 2020, 802. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2019.1703536>

Lupino's managerial role within the company. In a 1951 article Lupino claims that she leaves most of the producing duties to Collier Young and that she only concerns herself with directing and story supervision. "I am quite satisfied to confine myself to directing, story conferences and some writing. One cannot do too many things well," she claimed.⁷³ These sorts of comments not only serve to ameliorate some of the discomfort that comes with a break in the social order, but also to demean the role that Lupino plays in the production. In other words, if a woman can do it then it must not be as significant a title as previously thought. Curiously, this article then goes on to contradict Lupino's claim by describing an incident in which she called for a budgetary meeting, thereby partially negating the amelioration.

Despite the dubiousness of the claim, this downplaying of her managerial role was a sentiment that was frequently advanced. In a 1949 *Picturegoer* profile of Lupino, the profiler even goes so far as to pronounce Ida unworthy of the producer credit for *Not Wanted*, writing:

It would be false to suggest that Ida —although she has the producer credit line—actually in the fullest sense produced it, but she did help. And her part in the enterprise gave her a chance she has always yearned for. She would like to be more than just an actress.⁷⁴

The contrast between this passage and the rest of profile, which is largely celebratory of her achievements, is stark. Here the profiler treats Lupino with condescension, belittling her producer credit by comparing her contributions to those of an aide or assistant. This relegation of her responsibilities traditionally assumed by women assuages fears about the breach of the typical chain of command. While the patronizing tone does diminish Lupino's authority within her own company, this condescension is also a sophisticated rhetorical maneuver. It both mollifies Lupino's infringement on social norms, and it trivializes the role of the performer

⁷³ Edwin Schallert, "Scoffers Singing Different Tune as Lupino Movies Make Good," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 1951, D3.

⁷⁴ Mooring, "Ida Lupino Changes Over," 09.

within the industrial social structure. This in turn locates Lupino's stature below the male authority figure but above that of the actor or movie star, thereby mitigating sexist fallout while still raising Lupino a rung in the industrial ladder.

This diminishment of the actor's role is indicative of an ambivalence about the significance of the actor in the studio era. The liminal, neither above nor below-the-line nature of the performer, makes the leap to multi-hyphenate more attractive. The ability to choose one's scripts and maintain control over one's star persona constitutes a clear advancement in rank above the contract player who is beholden to the demands of studio executives.⁷⁵ However, Lupino's press materials never explicitly say that the move behind-the-camera was meant as a bold career move, nor does it express any misgivings about the acting craft. Rather, her reasoning for the move behind-the-camera is typically expressed as self-consciousness about her appearance. Lupino would often speak candidly about her discomfort with the hyper-focus on her looks. In a 1949 Hedda Hopper profile Lupino expounds on the frustrations about movie-stardom saying,

I feel that it's about time the screen got rid of some of the old faces, including mine. I intend to give up acting altogether eventually and devote my time to other phases of picture-making...I've never really liked acting. It's a tortuous profession, and it plays havoc with your private life. You have to keep thinking of your face. If, for instance, your husband would like to go out for an evening you can't join him. You have to consider how you'll look next day if you don't get the proper amount of sleep.⁷⁶

This candor about the sacrifices that must be made in the service of the superficial is a revealing insight about her personal insecurities but could also be interpreted as a way to distance herself from her past profession. The frustration with the limits of her artistic expression as a contract

⁷⁵ For more on the implicit and explicit hierarchy among the actor's ranks, and the relative precarity of the lower rungs, see Kate Fortmueller, *Below the Stars*.

⁷⁶ Hopper, "Ida's Ideals," C6.

player was the primary narrative that was pushed in the trades for the impetus behind the founding of Emerald and Filmmakers. However, between quotes about the virtues of realism and low-budget production, there were also asides about the physical toll that film acting exacts on one's body. While never expressly stated, many of these comments suggest some resentment about the impossible beauty standards that actresses are forced to maintain. In addition to forgoing alcohol and fiercely guarding her sleep schedule to preserve an artificial vibrancy, she also spoke about health issues brought on by pressure to lose weight.

‘...there was a time when I was really fat. It was no wonder because I was always eating something sweet...Paramount sent me an ultimatum to lose weight or else. I went on a rigid skim milk and banana diet. That’s all I ate for weeks. I lost weight but I also developed anemia and was quite ill.’”⁷⁷

She goes on to recommend that women avoid “fad diets” unless they are under supervision from a doctor. On its face, this comment reads as critical of the studio beauty standards which mandated this dangerous diet regimen. These kinds of remarks operate on a similar register as the critique that Lupino made about the dehumanization of the factory model of production - one in which speed and efficiency is prized above artistic merit. Here speed and mechanization manifest in the form of crash diets which exacted a real human cost. Lupino’s candor has the marking of a genuinely altruistic word of warning, however, this candor is also self-serving. Much in the way that the values of independent film are defined in part through opposition to Hollywood aesthetics, Lupino is similarly creating a delineation between her persona and those of other contemporary actresses. Once again, realism is prized over the glossy perfection of the movie star. Lupino’s frankness about her weight, and the sacrifices she endured to maintain the glamorous veneer, directly correlates with the “realness” that she prized in her cinematic style. In

⁷⁷ Lydia Lane, “Ida Lupino Cites Personal Appearance as Vital Trait,” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1951, C11. ProQuest.

another 1949 profile, the interviewer asked Lupino where the “star” starts and the producer ends and she responded, “when I leave the office and put on grease paint.” It is a comment that reinforces the bifurcation between the false patina of the actor, and the genuine filmmaker underneath.⁷⁸

It wasn’t unusual for actors to express skepticism regarding the falsity of the Hollywood aesthetic writ large, as John Garfield did so readily, nor was it unusual to suggest that glamor or beauty was antithetical to authenticity. In 1941, columnist John Chapman lamented the plight of the beautiful actresses like Hedy Lamarr, whom he refers to as “gloriously decorative,” that are not given sufficiently interesting roles because of their looks. He compares Lamarr with Bette Davis, whom he claims is “no beauty at all,” and accounts for Bette’s outsized critical and audience approval by the difference in their appearance.⁷⁹ Chapman’s equating of beauty with the superficial and the disavowal of vanity and glamor with realism, predates the formation of *The Filmakers* by several years, but the sentiment resonates in Lupino’s dismissals of Hollywood stardom.

This commitment to realism also manifests itself in the promotion of the Filmakers’ contracted actors. Both Lupino and Young highlighted the use of unknown actors as one of the great virtues of going independent. Young mentions “fresh faces instead of names” as a selling point for *Not Wanted*, positing a stark contrast with the familiar Hollywood talent roster.⁸⁰ Lupino similarly touted the advantages of hiring fresh talent such as Mala Powers and Sally

⁷⁸ Scott, “Ida Lupino to Make Debut As Producer,” C1.

⁷⁹ Champan, John, “Beautiful But Mum!: Hollywood Hasn’t Given Glamor Girls a Chance,” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 14, 1941, D3. ProQuest.

⁸⁰ “Exploitable Stories,” 29.

Forrest, claiming that the Filmmakers want “ability, not names” and that audiences would rather concern themselves with “what” rather than “who” is in a picture.⁸¹ Implicit within these kinds of remarks is a disparagement of the star system which was Hollywood’s chief marketing strategy during the classical era.

The self-righteous commitment to untested talent allowed the Filmmakers to further distinguish themselves from the studios. Because this tactic framed the studio model as old-fashioned and bound by antiquated beauty standards, the comparison becomes highly gendered. In a profile where Lupino steps the reader through her casting process, she described the allure of signing Sally Forrest in *Not Wanted*, saying “I think I’m influenced more by natural character than by how someone is made up. But I don’t think men are. When I chose Sally Forrest my backers couldn’t see her—they said she has no sex appeal and held me personally responsible.”⁸² Not only does Lupino use this anecdote to contrast her tastes from the prevailing standard, she also attributes this difference to gender distinction. She then goes on to describe the difficulty she continued to have in casting her preferred actress, which was only alleviated when she insisted that Forrest undergo a makeover to prove that she could be attractive to male investors. She described the process as an intentional objectification, saying “I bleached her hair a soft blond, changed her hair style to something soft around her face, put her in a bathing suit and high heels and these same men became very enthusiastic about her.”⁸³ Notable in this recollection is the way Lupino distinguishes herself from the male beauty paradigm, while ultimately capitulating to its demands. Her insistence on casting an unconventional leading actress marks Lupino as an

⁸¹ Hopper, “Ida’s Ideals,” C6.

⁸² Lane, “Ida Lupino Cites Personal Appearance as Vital Trait,” C11.

⁸³ Ibid.

iconoclast, willing to experiment in a bold new paradigm, but the realities of raising capital, meant that even minor deviances had to be counterbalanced by appeals to masculine authority.

Forrest's casting saga is one of many instances in which Lupino was forced to balance executing her vision as the director-producer with assuaging concerns about breaking with codes of conduct that dictate how women are meant to appear and behave. The ways in which Lupino conceded, or even insisted, on upholding these norms evokes Mary Ann Doane's exploration of the ways in which the actress is asked to "participate in her own oppression" within the patriarchal system of exchange.⁸⁴ The formation of an independent company did not safeguard Lupino against the demands of the financiers and others invested in the same system of misogynist exploitation as the studio executives.

Acting in Her Own Best Interests: Actresses Go Independent

Claims that independent companies are truly distinct from the ideologies and methods that govern Hollywood are often overstated, particularly when it comes to framing an actress's production company as a female emancipation narrative. The remainder of this chapter offers a discourse analysis of the ways that Lupino's unique positionality was celebrated, gendered, and ultimately sanitized as an interesting aberration rather than a true intrusion on industry status quo.

The chapter will also compare Lupino's performance of femininity to other actress-turned-producers who similarly had to either embrace or abdicate a female empowerment narrative as part of their persona. For instance, Rita Hayworth's Beckworth offers a parallel example, in which an actress framed her business venture as a means of escaping the

⁸⁴ Doane, Mary Ann, "The Economy of Desire: The Commodity Form In/Of The Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 11, no. 1, May 1, 1989, 24.

dehumanizing effects of glamor promotion. Film historian Adrienne McLean's study proposes that Hayworth was a nexus of both an idealized anglicized body and an object of ethnic exoticism. She analyzes Hayworth's paradoxical public persona — one which showcased her seeming effortless beauty as the so-called "Love Goddess" while also highlighting the extreme, often painful, lengths she went to in order to achieve this effect. Born in Brooklyn of Spanish descent, Hayworth (nee Margarita Carmen Cansino) became a well-known dancer in Mexico as a teenager, before transitioning to motion picture performance.⁸⁵ Her identity was at once a selling point and a detriment to her career as a Hollywood leading lady. Her ethnicity and dancing ability garnered interest, but they were not enough to cement her place as an infamous pinup girl or headlining actress. To conform to studio demands, the traces of Hayworth's heritage, including her name, face and body were forcibly transformed through draconian diet and exercise rituals, vocal training to remove any regionality or ethnic specificity, and electrolysis treatments to extend her hairline.⁸⁶ Though the results of these efforts (the seemingly natural beauty) are the primary identifier of her persona, Hayworth undercuts this image with candid interviews in which she admits to the challenges and artificiality of the cover girl image. McLean argues that this approach to the maintenance of her celebrity is a result of an inherent "star paradox" that arises when an individual must reconcile their public and private selves, compounded by Hayworth's fissure in her cultural identity.⁸⁷ Her straightforward admittance of the struggle to maintain the American girl image aligns with Lupino's embrace of transparency as an empowerment narrative. Hayworth and Lupino's candor about the difficulty in maintaining

⁸⁵ Adrienne McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom*, (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2004) 49. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/10610>.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

an unrealistic beauty ideal reveals enough to give them the veneer of credibility and agency, even as they implicitly reinforce the impossible body standards of the Hollywood starlet. By admitting that their personas are part fabrication, Hayworth and Lupino become both a glamorous commodity and the engineer behind that persona, affording them an authority not otherwise permitted to contracted stars.

Hayworth's creation of her production company was another means of advancing this empowerment narrative. Beckworth Corp., named as a portmanteau of Hayworth and her daughter, Rebecca Welles, was founded and signed a distribution deal with Columbia in March of 1947.⁸⁸ The terms of the deal, negotiated by John Hyde of the William Morris Agency, was that Hayworth would produce two pictures a year for seven years.⁸⁹ Of the fourteen films promised to Columbia, Beckworth delivered only four: *The Loves of Carmen* (1948), *Affair in Trinidad* (1952), *Salome* (Dieterle, 1953) and *Miss Sadie Thompson* (Bernhardt, 1954). By 1947, Hayworth had just ended her second marriage to actor Orson Welles, a match that left Hayworth overshadowed in the press by Orson's outsized personality and "boy wonder" reputation. The formation of Beckworth was a sound financial decision and an opportunity to assert her independence and foreground her own intellect in the press. There are some questions about the precise role that Hayworth played in the operation. According to McLean, witnesses who were present during filming were dubious that Hayworth actually had much producing authority beyond script approval.⁹⁰ However, contemporaneous press materials touted Hayworth's

⁸⁸ "Rita Hayworth Organizes Own Producing Outfit," *Box Office*, July 12, 1947, 56. ProQuest.

⁸⁹ "Beckworth to Produce Hayworth Pix for Col.," *The Film Daily*, July 11, 1947, 4. MHDL.

⁹⁰ McLean, Adrienne. *Being Rita Hayworth*, 12, 62-63. McLean also refers to Hayworth as Virginia Van Upp's protege. As the lone female producer at Columbia Studios, Van Upp's performed all of the duties (and then some) that the producer title entails. It is unclear what kind of mentorship or encouragement Van Upp bestowed, but if Hayworth did draw inspiration from Van Upp, it is possible that her producing career did include more managerial

newfound freedom and financial sovereignty. During the press tour for *Carmen*, Louella Parsons cheered Hayworth's new position, writing "A far better label than The Goddess of Love for Rita as she is today 'Miss Independence.'"

Despite the seeming show of female solidarity, Parsons undercuts this narrative with comments expressing incredulity over Hayworth taking on a more fiscally oriented role in the company, writing "The picture of the glamorous Hayworth staying home nights going over the company books flashed through my mind and amused me so much I couldn't help laughing aloud." The inability to reconcile a sex-forward persona with business acumen speaks to a pigeonholing that actresses underwent, as well as the entrenched sexism perpetuated by both men and women invested in upholding gender norms. Looking to position herself on the other side of this sexy versus intellectual binary, Hayworth rejoins Parsons's dismissal by casting off her old life of romantic scandal and advancing an image of a self-sufficient "boss" who commands respect rather than leering from men. She says:

I can feel the change in myself. For one thing, I'm plenty tired of night clubs and casual dates. I'm far more interested in good screen stories than in romances...Having a financial interest in a picture is far more intriguing than being merely the star. You can bet I'm never late on the set these days! Charles Vidor, the director, calls me 'Boss.' ⁹¹

Like Lupino, some of Hayworth's best-known performances feature her as dangerous femme fatales in twisting noir plots. Films such as *Gilda* (Vidor, 1946) and *The Lady from Shanghai* (Welles, 1947) showcase both the allure and danger of Hayworth's overtly sexualized body, whereas Lupino's noir turns in films like *They Drive by Night* and *The Hard Way* cast her as an ambitious woman driven mad by her professional instincts and desire to chart a life beyond the confines of marriage. While Lupino and Hayworth's star personas diverge in distinct ways, there

and/or creative tasks.

⁹¹ Louella Parsons, "Ask the Boss," *Photoplay*, March 1948, 90. MHDL.

are parallel sentiments in their desire to be taken seriously as formidable creative talents. Most especially, the touting of “good stories” as paramount echoes the statements made by The Filmmakers about the significance of recognizable stories over Hollywood glamor.

Lupino and Hayworth were early adopters of the independence trend, but other actresses soon followed in their wake in the 1950s, and they similarly had to carefully thread the needle between appearing too domineering and too frivolous. Jane Russell, best known for roles that foregrounded her sexuality in comedies like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hawkes, 1953) and melodramas such the Howard Hughes directed, *The Outlaw* (1943), took on the mantle of producer in 1953 when she formed Russ-Field with her then husband Robert Waterfield. Like Hayworth and Lupino before her, Russell had to mollify any potential upset that this transgressive move might induce, while also crafting a positive emancipation narrative that fans could unreservedly applaud. Here again, the method of touting her story selection skills was the focal point of her producorial career. In a 1957 interview, when asked if she was a shrewd businesswoman, she issued a vehement denial, saying “No, no, I’m not a good businesswoman... I don’t mastermind the money department—that’s for my husband. I’m only interested in the scripts, directors, costumes and so on.”⁹² Her deferral of all financial matters to her husband speaks to the specific constructs of the Waterfield-Russell marital dynamic, and the social expectation that financial matters are the exclusive purview of men.⁹³ Waterfield, a retired pro-football player with little industry experience, was no better versed in the economics of film

⁹² John L. Scott, “Jane R. Lighter of Fuses: Jane Russell Asserts She’s Lighter of Fuses,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 1957 August 11, E1. ProQuest.

⁹³ In her study of Jane Russell, Christina Rice delves into the interpersonal relationship between Russell and Waterfield, and suggests that Waterfield was uncomfortable, not only with Russell’s overt sexuality, but also insecure about her outsized fame and wealth. Christina Rice, *Mean...Moody...Magnificent! Jane Russell and the Marketing of a Hollywood Legend*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2021) 101-114. muse.jhu.edu/book/83376.

production than Russell, yet the press material clearly relegates her responsibilities to the “creative” roles.

While the conscription to the craft side of production was a form of gender discrimination, there are ways in which the ability to choose one's costumes could be genuinely liberatory. This is particularly true in the case of Russell, whose exposed neckline in the press materials for *The Outlaw* became the site of a years-long scandal.⁹⁴ When given the ability to control the messaging, Russell pushed back against her reputation for courting controversy through her sexuality. She argues that while she's not against selling a film on “cheesecake,” it must be in good taste, and that given the choice she prefers to don more modest attire.⁹⁵

The fixation on Russell's clothing might be justified by how much controversy her wardrobe generated. However, the press did not limit their fixation on appearance to actresses infamous for their costuming. Even the trio of so-called ‘gal-producers’ (Joan Harrison, Harriet Parsons, and Virginia Van Upp) who emerged in the 1940s were subject to a level of superficial scrutiny that a male producer with equivalent standing would never have to face. Despite never having a career in front of the camera, their femaleness garnered enough attention that even they were charged with keeping up the similar standards of glamor as their more famous counterparts. In a 1945 profile in *Movieland* magazine in which she recounts her experience working on the upcoming film noir release, *Phantom Lady*, Joan Harrison is described as “no one's idea of a super-executive.” The profiler notes that Harrison does not “go in for heavy, sensible shoes, black-framed glasses, or a mannish hair-cut” and instead “cuts quite a swath” opting for style and

⁹⁴ For more on the choice to highlight Russell's physique in *The Outlaw*'s publicity campaign and the battles between producer Howard Hughes and the PCA see Rice, *Jane Russell*, 82-100.

⁹⁵ “Jane Russell Glad Mansfield Lifted Her Prominence,” *Variety*, April 17, 1957, 2-15. ProQuest.

“shoes that look like shoes.”⁹⁶ Film historian Shelley Stamp has analyzed the press coverage surrounding the high-profile emergence of gal-producers like Harrison, and suggests that the attention to their looks and life-style were primarily meant to serve as aspirational fodder for women readers of fan magazines. In order to augment the growing female audience for film noir thrillers, the women producers behind these pictures were foregrounded in the press as the aspirational figures behind these dark tales.⁹⁷ Stamp is critical of the ways that the marketing materials characterizes the gal-producer’s work as stereotypically feminine, though her critique does not delve into the ways that this material implicitly chastises working women who fail to live up to this feminine ideal. Despite the supposed female empowerment narrative, these profiles applaud Harrison’s commitment to glamor while tacitly criticizing women with “mannish” features.

Lupino was the subject of similar beauty-oriented women’s magazine pieces. She herself contributes to this hyperfocus on her visual presentation by offering tips on how to look one’s best on set. The advice ranges from relatively benign— she advises women to get eight hours of sleep and close the book on work when you get home⁹⁸ — to severely regressive. In one 1949 article in *Movieland* she even goes so far as to advise other women to make sure they keep up their feminine visage lest they lose their husbands to women who are more fastidious in preserving their looks. The article, credited to Lupino, called “How to Be the Other Woman,” offers women advice about how to remain attractive to their husbands despite the inevitable

⁹⁶ Holliday, Kate, “The Lady Vanquishes,” *Movieland* 3, no. 7, August 1945, 41. MHDL.

⁹⁷ Stamp, Shelley, “Film Noir’s ‘Gal Producers.’”

⁹⁸ Dahl, Arlene, “Ida Lupino Outlines Some Shortcuts,” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1952 August 29, A8. ProQuest.

overfamiliarity that comes with cohabitation. She counsels that women should remain steadfastly feminine and conform to a husband's aesthetic expectations despite exhaustion from work.

At times her suggestions seem to emerge from her own experience of straying into the masculine realm. Just as she mentions upcoming plans to produce her first feature, *Not Wanted*, the next paragraph she advocates that women avoid “nagging” their husbands by adopting a “helpless woman” affect. She cautions women saying, “It doesn’t hurt any wife to be just a little helpless. No matter what they say, men like helpless females. It gives them added strength.”⁹⁹ This piece exemplifies the news media’s and Lupino’s attention to appearance as well as the fixation on maintaining the traditional domestic power dynamic. While it is possible that this piece was ghostwritten, the interconnection between appearance and male approval was repeated consistently throughout Lupino’s directorial and producing career. The press was particularly interested in the ways she maintained her femininity despite working in a male dominated environment. In a 1951 piece, Lupino proclaims that she “makes a point of looking as lovely as she can when she is directing. ‘The men notice it and regard it as a compliment to them,’ she commented. ‘And a husband will notice it, too, if you stop to freshen up and make yourself pretty for him when he comes home. Your whole life can be influenced by the way you get yourself together. I know mine was.’”¹⁰⁰

This hyperfocus on appearance would continue long after her producing career was over. Her femaleness remained a subject of fascination well into her television directing career in the 1950s-60s, and her adherence to a performative femininity grew more dogmatic. She even went so far as to criticize other women who neglect their looks. In the “Lady Boss” profile, columnist

⁹⁹ Ida Lupino, “How to Be the Other Woman,” *Screenland* 53, no. 6, April 1949, 59. MHDL.

¹⁰⁰ Lydia Lane, “Ida Lupino Cites Personal Appearance as Vital Trait,” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1951, C11. ProQuest.

Marion Purcelli asks Ida Lupino to divulge her best tips for women entering the workplace. Much of Lupino's advice involves suggestions on how to interface with the opposite sex, and seven of her nine suggestions involve ways to anticipate and meet the needs of men on set. Much of this advice is contradictory and involves a level of self-presentation and self-reflection that would surely distract from the task at hand. For instance, she claims it is important that a woman maintain her femininity and not attempt to be "one of the boys," on the other hand they cannot be so ostentatiously feminine that they alienate men.¹⁰¹ She also discourages shows of favoritism toward women as that foments mistrust and resentment among male colleagues. A generous reading of this position is to interpret the sentiment as a stance against gender discrimination, regardless of whether it is directed towards a man or a woman. However, that a woman in a managerial role is charged with guarding against the appearance of favoritism involves further monitoring of outward appearances not asked of men, and it discourages female solidarity when such a move could help normalize women in leadership roles.

In addition to a careful negotiation of gender presentation, Lupino also recommends a vigilant bridling of outward emotions. She spoke out against yelling multiple times and reiterates in "Lady Boss" that you must figure out how to give instructions to men in a firm, but quiet way.¹⁰² She even offers a script for women to follow, advocating the use of lines such as: "Do you mind, dear? Let's try it this way" or "I'd love to try the scene that way." Lupino prefaces her directions with a comforting line that gently impresses upon the receiver that they need not feel threatened by these instructions because they ultimately have the final say in whether they choose to acquiesce.

¹⁰¹ Purcelli, "What Every Lady Boss Should Know," E2.

¹⁰² Peter Bart, "Lupino the Dynamo," *The New York Times*, March 07, 1965, X7. ProQuest.

This couching of direction in niceties is part and parcel of the emotional labor that was expected of women who were asked to act as both workers and maternal figures. Not only does this insistence on protecting men's feelings place an additional burden on women, it also infantilizes the male subordinate. Lupino advises that women never publicly correct a man saying, "If it is necessary to correct or instruct a man in his job, do so privately and quietly." She also favors making male discomfort the purview of women, suggesting that if a man is wary of working with a woman because of her gender, she ought to seek out that man's advice on several important matters and prove to him that he is respected. This is yet another form of gentle coddling that casts the woman as the caretaker rather than the leader.

Lupino believed in this maternal role to the point where she made it explicit. She relished being called "mother" on set and used that moniker to garner respect.¹⁰³ The strategy of adopting a matriarchal affect aligns with the postwar assumption that women be conscripted to the domestic sphere. Media scholar Lynn Spigel has documented the role that popular media, including television and magazines, played in the post-World War II romanticization of the suburban nuclear family as the ideal model of middle-class paradise. She traces how the war upended previous notions about what professional spheres women were allowed to occupy, and how television traded in a nostalgia for familial dynamics that aimed to remind women about their familial obligations. She writes,

...even while married women increasingly took jobs outside the home (by 1962 they comprised about 60 percent of the female workforce), popular media typically glorified the American housewife/mother who tended to her family on a full-time basis. Meanwhile, the fact that most female occupations were unchallenging, low-paying, "pink-collar" jobs that

¹⁰³ For a more extensive analysis on reportage of Ida's nickname see Kearney, Mary Celeste and James M. Moran, "Ida Lupino as director of television" *Queen of the B's*, 143-145.

the middle class thought of as second incomes gave credence to the popular idea that women would find fulfillment at home rather than at work.¹⁰⁴

Lupino's move into a male dominated field would seem an egregious intrusion given the cultural push to have women return to the home. It stands to reason then that she would want to project an image as a maternal figure to conform to the social strictures of the time. If she failed to adequately perform motherhood, it could alienate her from a sizable portion of her audience. As a result, many of the stories and interviews with Lupino focus attention on her dual role as director and domestic goddess. For instance, in an article published in *Women's Wear Daily*, Lupino mentions how much she misses her husband and child when she is on set and how she cannot wait to get home to them and give them an enormous hug.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, in a 1958 article entitled "Ida Likes Role in Kitchen," Lupino revels in her duties as wife to Howard Duff and mother to their young daughter Bridget.

This reverence for traditional gender presentation is part of why feminist film criticism was reluctant to take Lupino up as a symbol of female liberation. That said, in the post-war era, when Lupino stood alone as the sole woman director of her era, she expressed sorrow and insecurity about her singular status, lamenting

...in the directors' building at RKO I am completely surrounded by men. I feel funny walking by the offices in high heel shoes, wondering if my stocking seams are straight. I didn't know whether I belonged or not at the Screen Directors' Guild meeting. There were practically all men present, except special guests. I hope Claudette Colbert joins me as soon as she indicated, because I feel terribly misplaced and lonely in this man's world.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 33.

¹⁰⁵ Etta Froio, "The Fashions: Auntie Mame Takes the Veil," *Women's Wear Daily* 110, no. 52, March 17, 1965, 8. ProQuest.

¹⁰⁶ "Lonely in a Man's World," *The New York Herald Tribune*, June 26, 1950, 09. ProQuest.

Once again, we see the clothing serving as synecdoche for femininity with the “high heels” and “stocking seams” marking Lupino as other, as well as hindering her ability to accomplish her work. However, within this lament is an encouragement for other women to follow in her footsteps. The mention of actress Claudette Colbert references announcements made in October 1949, that Colbert had signed on to direct a film called “All Women are Human,” about a female biochemist for independent producers Jack Skirball and Bruce Manning.¹⁰⁷ Lupino had encouraged Colbert to follow her lead into the director’s chair, but a reported back injury permanently delayed the project.¹⁰⁸ Prior to pulling out of “All Women are Human” Colbert expressed some misgivings about taking on a historically masculine role on set, saying “It’s always difficult when a woman is in a position of authority, but I think if a woman uses her head, she can rise above the category of directors who only get a routine response from a company.”¹⁰⁹

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Lupino expressed a similar mix of gender essentialism and advocacy when she spoke about women taking on leadership roles. In a 1950 profile she expounded on why women are uniquely qualified to take on directing responsibilities, proclaiming “It may be a man’s world, by

¹⁰⁷ Thomas F. Brady, “Deal as Director Made by Colbert” *The New York Times*, December 23, 1949, 18. ProQuest.

¹⁰⁸ Hill, Gladwin, “Star in Distress,” *The New York Times*, March 05, 1950, 100. ProQuest.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Bernard Dick suggests that the reason Colbert did not end up following in Lupino’s footsteps was because of both disposition and lack of interest. He claims that Lupino’s hard bitten persona was better able to take command of film production whereas Colbert’s lighter touch was not suited for the role. Additionally, he argues that Colbert’s interest in directing arose primarily from an interest in script selection and having greater control over her own lighting, not from an holistic interest in the filmmaking process. The assertion that Colbert’s interest in directing arose from an impulse to assure more flattering compositions of her own face is simplistic, and to ascribe the failure to helm a production to her demeanor seems especially condescending given the systemic obstacles that all but barred women from the director’s chair. Bernard Dick, *Claudette Colbert: She Walked in Beauty*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008) 129-130.

and large, but it's a woman's emotional world." She then decries the studio double standard that assumes that the telling of women's stories is the exclusive purview of men, saying "If a director is supposed to know the hearts and minds of the characters in his script, who is there to say that a man has a deeper understanding of human emotions than a woman?"¹¹¹ In claiming that women are not just capable, but perhaps better suited to portray the emotional landscape of the human psyche than men, Lupino reinforces the significance of aesthetic and narrative realism. Her contention that her embodiment as a woman grants her a greater depth of human understanding validates her own artistic skill and reinforces the group aesthetic to which she wants entry. Of course, the assumption that women are naturally more emotionally mature than men could also be interpreted as yet another way to code her work as feminine so as to soften any misgivings about her trespassing into a masculine space. However, given how much of the marketing material's rhetoric aggressively sought to tamp down female ambition, this advocacy for other female filmmakers seems a genuine call for women to harness their determination and work to foment larger industrial and aesthetic change.

Conclusion

Despite what her current cultural imprint might suggest, Ida Lupino was not just a "female filmmaker." Her reputation and legacy are more complex and nuanced than the oversimplified "lady boss" narrative promotes. Not only does her history of advocating for what some have interpreted as anti-feminist or a regressive gender binary complicate her standing, the historicizing of her achievements as singular diminishes the role she played within the larger filmmaking ecosystem. That she is an imperfect figurehead for a feminist reclamation speaks to

¹¹¹ "Hollywood Still a Man's World: But Ida Lupino, Director, Hopes to Change That," *The New York Herald Tribune*, October 08, 1950, D5. ProQuest.

her *sui generis* status as a woman attempting a solo navigation of an inhospitable environment, and it reflects a wider industry flux in which normalized procedure was interrupted by social and economic shifts. The postwar era saw a number of organizational and cultural transformations within the American filmmaking business. Lupino, as both a woman and a filmmaker committed to overhauling popular filmmaking conventions, is in the direct nexus of these changes. Not only was she at the vanguard of the move toward independent production after the Paramount Decree, she was also part of a larger *group* aesthetic which consisted of individuals like John Garfield, Robert Rossen and Stanley Kramer who believed this industrial shift could have larger socio-political consequences. They held that the standard Hollywood mode of filmmaking resulted in banal products which infantilize their audience and dehumanize the artists who make them, and that if given autonomy filmmakers could produce films more reminiscent of “real” human experience.

However, as with Garfield and other socially conscious stars, the gulf between the rhetoric and the actual practice was wider than the press releases and rhetorical maneuvering would indicate. The pronouncements that Lupino’s companies made in the trade and popular media, served to distinguish them from mass media production methods, but the reality of working with and adjacent to Hollywood meant that Emerald and The Filmmakers were reliant on studio infrastructure and marketing methodologies. Unlike Garfield, however, Lupino proved adept at utilizing these tools and institutions to her advantage so that she could successfully produce projects with the social and political significance she desired. Between Emerald and The Filmmakers, Lupino produced eleven films, six of which were directed by her. That Garfield was only able to produce three films despite being a bigger star, indicates that she was better able to negotiate her progressive ideals with the political realities of the time. Lupino’s ability to work in

tandem with establishment stalwarts like Hedda Hopper and the PCA was essential in getting her projects made and distributed.

Not only did Lupino have to mediate between her desire for more daring thematic content and appeasing the more conservative safeguards that sought to impede these progressive impulses, she also had to position her womanhood in a way that redressed the concerns of these same traditionalist institutions. She, like many of her fellow actresses, took to producing as a method for seizing control of her career path and her public image. Their emancipatory gesture was met with an equally forceful defensive gesture, which saw Lupino, Hayworth, et. al. reinforcing some of the most restrictive and demeaning gender divides. The way Lupino positioned herself as both an empowered woman and a woman beholden to entrenched patriarchal power structures, downplayed her transgression within the existing hierarchy. While her history as a female role-model is not without complication, it is unquestionable that her work as a politically engaged star pushed the industry toward a new more daring aesthetic. This push towards a European art-house mode of production would continue to grow within the industry, and the emerging belief in the representation of realism as a social virtue would continue to gain purchase with critical and artistic tastemakers in the coming decades.

Chapter Three:
Kirk Douglas's Bryna Productions: "Rugged Tycoons" and International Emissaries

Of all the companies analyzed in this project, Bryna Productions is the one that can most readily be called a success. From its founding in the mid-1950s, the company would see staggering profit with a selection of crowd-pleasing genre fare as well as critical plaudits of the highest order with a handful of aesthetically and thematically challenging "art films." On the company's masthead is the angular countenance of Kirk Douglas, Bryna's founder and President. Part of the cohort of actors who rose to prominence in the waning days of the centralized studio system, Douglas followed the leads of his classical Hollywood forebears and formed his own independent production unit in the mid-1950s. As soon as he had established a marketable screen persona, amassing enough clout to secure funding and entice the necessary personnel to manage the business operations, he joined the ranks of Garfield and Lupino as an actor in the upper echelon of Hollywood's power structure. Yet the independent production of Bryna looks and functions differently than that of the immediate postwar era.

Kirk Douglas embodies the post-classical era movie star dilemma — how to navigate the slowly turning societal tides of the counterculture movement so as to appear distinct from stars of yore, while simultaneously delivering a persona with traditional, non-threatening mass-appeal. By the mid-1950s, the iconography of the early-20th Century still held significant sway on the cultural landscape. The western, which remained among the most reliable box-office draws, was now a fixture on television, further cementing its potency as a genre workhorse. However, other less traditional genres were also gaining a foothold on the cultural landscape. The ascendance of "youth culture" accounts for the rise of beach party pictures and various teen-oriented media, but this shift also includes the emergence of art house cinema and an interest in more international films. This necessity to operate between these wider cultural and industrial shifts places Douglas

in a decidedly different position than Garfield or Lupino. While this negotiation between the contemporary and classical sensibilities required tricky maneuvering, Douglas was in the enviable situation of having had a path to independence laid out for him by those previous actors. What was left for him to do was harness and mine these oppositional impulses that were inherent in this new liminal era. Namely, he was required to appeal to the same domestic markets that Garfield, Lupino and co. would have served, while also expanding his appeal to international audiences. He needed to court markets hungry for standard genre fare and the younger viewers who valued more rebellious or artistic sensibilities, and cultivate the appearance of someone with deeply held social beliefs without alienating either side of the political divide.

Another distinction between the pre- and postwar eras is the widespread understanding within Hollywood that the celebrity has a role to play beyond the confines of the movie-making business. Celebrities raising money and galvanizing public interest in the war effort evolved into a post-WWII global advocacy for all manner of charitable interests and political causes. Douglas himself espoused a philosophy of the actor as more than just a performer, but a public figure akin to an emissary for the motion-picture industry and the U.S. as a whole. This chapter seeks to explore the ways in which Bryna served, in part, as a mechanism for Douglas's conception of the star as part artist, part international delegate, and part businessman. Like Garfield and Lupino, Douglas identified as a liberal, but unlike them he was able to thrive within the anti-communist fervor of the era in part by stationing himself as above the squabbling of domestic political discourse and elevating himself to a higher level of global authority. He ultimately established a company that could weather the vicissitudes of shifting audience tastes and favor and succeed as both a business entity and an extension of Douglas's political philosophy.

This chapter, then, analyzes the ways in which Douglas managed these conflicting imperatives by using Bryna as both a marker of his artistic and social integrity while also serving as proof of his business acumen. It will also consider how Douglas was able to navigate treacherous political terrain by finding a geopolitical cause that bestowed prestige and influence, which played into Douglas persona as a strong, trustworthy leader, while also mitigating the risk of upsetting any political or institutional strongholds. Ultimately this chapter argues that he used traditional industry mechanisms and ideology to give the appearance of someone with strong social convictions, while promoting his business savvy and masculinity to offset any appearance of weakness and sentiment associated with altruism or liberalism. As such, Bryna encapsulates a new phase of socially conscious stardom by representing the evolution from the necessity of studio emancipation and the championing of realism as an aesthetic virtue, to the heralding of a new era of business and cultural leadership.

Kirk Douglas: The Man and the Production Company

Douglas' turn to producing did not meaningfully begin until nearly a decade into his Hollywood career, but it is in many ways the primary engine of his cultural legacy. He had several significant star turns in high profile roles prior to going independent. Among the most notable being his Oscar nominated turn as a brooding prize fighter prone to self-destruction in *Champion* (Robeson, 1949) and as an unscrupulous reporter willing to sacrifice the well-being of his subjects for a chance at a good scoop in *Ace in the Hole* (Wilder, 1951). He even played a producer before he adopted the designation in earnest in Vincent Minnelli's show business satire, *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952). Despite the small sample size, this trio of films showcases the

essential Douglas persona, a cynical, ethically-flexible anti-hero who is prone to violent confrontations with authority and with women who share in his moral plasticity.

By the time Douglas founded Bryna in the mid-1950s, he was already a known quantity within the industry and to movie-goers. Profiles often featured what in hindsight seems almost a leitmotif: he's rugged — spotlighting his “rugged maleness”¹ or referring to him as a “rugged tycoon”² — he's a gambler, he is learned but unpretentious, and adventuresome. These descriptions are usually followed by some notes about his physical presence, of all which serve to underscore his virulent machismo. One *Sight & Sound* article even describes his “masculine charm” as akin to John Garfield's, in that his persona combines aggression, brashness, intelligence and talent all of which are major draws for female cinema-goers.³ There were certainly similarities, not only in terms of their production companies, but also their ethnic heritage (Like Garfield, Douglas was born to Russian-Jewish immigrant parents and spent his youth living in relative poverty in New York State) and the types of roles they were drawn to as performers. However, their personas diverge in some very significant ways. Douglas made no secret of his quick temper and rampant egoism, whereas Garfield was known for a sweetness masked by a tough exterior. The “rugged tycoon” aspect was unique to Douglas as well, who was known to speak multiple languages and was open about his interest in making money. Early profiles highlight Douglas's willingness to take on new challenges claiming in one piece that “There's nothing I can't learn in six easy lessons.” This same piece goes on to disclose that

¹ Jon Whitcomb, “Kirk Douglas Makes a Violent Movie,” *Cosmopolitan* 144, no 6, June 1958, 16-19. ProQuest.

² Charles Bayne. “Two Toughies Murder a Myth,” *Picturegoer*, October 04, 1958, 10-11. ProQuest.

³ Catherine de la Roche, “Stars,” *Sight and Sound*, April 01, 1953, 172. ProQuest.

Douglas had spent the past year in Europe to take advantage of a recently implemented tax exemption.⁴

Despite making no secret of his ultimate aim of making money, Douglas also crafted an image as a risk-taker, calling himself a gambler who is willing to bet on himself.⁵ He cited a childhood spent in privation as the source of his courage and a willingness to return to zero if the money and fame were to disappear. He claimed his readiness to gamble is what led him to take on challenging, off-beat, less-commercially viable projects and to form his own production company.⁶ It is true that one of his most enduring legacies, and one of his supposedly perilous moves, involved giving Dalton Trumbo credit for writing the screenplay for Bryna's 1960 feature, *Spartacus*. This is reputed to have played a major role in ending the blacklist that destroyed Garfield's career, and the lore surrounding this gesture assumed it took a great deal of bravery given the size of the production and the amount of money at stake. However, this was largely a narrative exaggerated in interviews, but belied by the evidence. According to Jeff Smith, not only did other companies plan to make similar disclosures, but the film's distributors (Universal) took great pains to ensure that they faced minimal financial exposure by disclosing the real identity of the screenwriter.⁷ This reframing of intractability, the tendency to take undue credit, and rampant egotism as celebrated characteristics ingrained in the temperamental genius was a recurring pattern in Douglas's producing career.

⁴ Louis Berg "Doubling in Brash." *New York Herald Tribune*, July 12, 1953, SM20. ProQuest.

⁵ Donovan Pedelty, "Douglas Gambles on Himself," *Picturegoer*, October 19, 1957, 26. ProQuest.

⁶ Howard Thompson, "'Journeys of 'Ulysses': Kirk Douglas Reflects on Rough Road to Success," *The New York Times*, February 14, 1954, X5. ProQuest.

⁷ Smith, Jeffrey P. "'A Good Business Proposition': Dalton Trumbo, 'Spartacus', and the End of the Blacklist," *The Velvet Light Trap* 23, (Spring 1989): 75-97.

Film scholar Jeff Menne describes Douglas's pursuit of artistic integrity as "aestheticism unbound."⁸ Douglas was drawn to stories about rebels or individuals who refuse to abide by societal norms and having his own production company permitted him the autonomy to make projects that were notable in their formal and thematic audacity. However, this artist persona conceals the liminality of his position. He is both an artist and a businessman - someone who desires the cultural capital of the artist moniker and the monetary capital of a good return on investment. In reality he entered into independent production as both a money-making investment and as a means of personal expression. In an article he authored called "Using My Two Heads," Douglas expounds on the nature of genius, collaborative art, the benefits of independent production versus studio, and the purpose of film. It echoes much of the rhetoric found in Lupino and Garfield's statements, specifically in the criticism of mechanization and the commodification of art. For example, Douglas writes, "making a movie is not turning out an automobile, or a string of sausages, or a paper clip. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one and unless it receives the love and attention it deserves, it may result in a film with the inspiration of a sausage."⁹ While quotes like these are reminiscent of the cultural studies inflected critiques that Lupino and Garfield issued, Douglas was also pragmatic, claiming to favor proficiency and technical skill over "emotional rawness."¹⁰ He was also quick to extol the virtues of capitalism and proudly avowed his ultimate goal was to make money.

⁸ Jeff Menne, *Post-Fordist Cinema: Hollywood Auteurs and the Corporate Counterculture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019) 65.

⁹ Kirk Douglas, "Using My Two Heads," *Film & Filming* (June 1961) 42, Kirk Douglas Core Collection. Margaret Herrick Library. AMPAS.

¹⁰ "U. S. Moviemaking Most Efficient, Says Kirk Douglas," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 29, 1954, 03. ProQuest.

Some of his most public declarations of intent involved taking advantage of the tax breaks afforded to individuals working abroad. In particular, workers could avoid paying income tax, thanks to a 1951 Internal Revenue Act which stipulated that wages earned abroad were exempt provided the individual worked internationally for 17 out of 18 months and did not work in the U.S. during that period.¹¹ Douglas was among the most high profile actors to take advantage of this rule, working exclusively in Europe for long stretches of the early-1950s. Bryna similarly shot several of their works in Europe and many in the industry assumed that was largely to avoid paying the higher rates of U.S. guild members. He drew particular fire from I.A.T.S.E. for opting to shoot his 1957 adventure epic, *The Vikings* (Fleischer) in Sweden and Germany instead of using Hollywood union crews.¹² As Daniel Steinhart explains in his book *Runaway Hollywood*, the postwar era saw many production companies including major studios move production to Europe to take advantage of frozen funds, cheaper labor and exotic locales.¹³ In addition to those reasons, Douglas also proffered his version of socially conscious stardom by proposing that the opportunity to become good representatives of the U.S. is in itself a social virtue. When asked about the ethics of taking advantage of this 18-month tax exemption, Douglas justified his decision saying, “every American citizen tries his utmost to cut down his taxes, and I think it’s so unfair to criticize movie actors as a group for doing what every American citizen does... Most movie stars over here are serving as ambassadors of good will

¹¹ Edwin Schallert, “30 Actors in Foreign Lands Now,” *The Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1953, D1. ProQuest.

¹² “Vikings Case Irks Coast Cameramen,” *Variety*, May 15, 1957, 03. ProQuest.

¹³ Daniel Steinhart. *Runaway Hollywood: Internationalizing Postwar Production and Location*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019). <https://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=5628766>.

and are doing as good a job as the diplomats.”¹⁴ While this quote from 1953 predates Bryna, this sentiment would become something of a mantra for Douglas, and he would frequently use his production company as a means of advancing an image of himself as a cultural diplomat.

The Socially Conscious Cultural Ambassador

It is apparent the ways in which Douglas’s company is part of the lineage established by performers like Garfield and Lupino. Like them, Douglas and his publicity team touted Bryna as a means of creating work that stands apart from the studio system. Douglas argued that he was able to make financially and aesthetically challenging films like *Paths of Glory* (Kubrick, 1957) and *Lonely are the Brave* (Miller, 1962) only because he himself was able to take control of his project selection.¹⁵ Like Roberts Productions or The Filmakers, Bryna provided an opportunity for personal expression not available to creatives working within the more conservative centralized studio mode. One of the primary ways that Douglas diverges from my previous case studies is in how his political persuasions manifest in his work. While Garfield and Lupino’s independent efforts are informed by the communal New York Theatre scene and Italian neorealist sensibilities of the immediate postwar era, Douglas’ works reflect a much broader, more diffuse political landscape. Instead of incisive criticism of the power structures that uphold the racist and classist U.S. system of capitalism that infuse the Roberts films, or the structural

¹⁴ “Top Names Think It Unfair to Be Rapped on 18- Month Law.” *Hollywood Reporter*, May 11, 1953, 1 and 7. ProQuest.

¹⁵ At the time of *Paths* initial distribution, Douglas’s quotes focused more on his business acumen than his artistic sensibilities. Douglas made statements to this effect well after *Paths* was released. This suggests that either Douglas did not want to undercut any potential grosses by prematurely referring to *Paths* as a labor of love, or it could be a reframing of the Bryna narrative to capitalize on *Paths*’ canonization. David Castell, ‘Kirk Douglas’ (Interview), *Films Illustrated*, vol 1, No. 11 (May 1972), p.11 as found in Philip Davies “A Growing Independence,’ *Cinema, Politics and Society in America* ed. Davies, Philip and Brian Neve (New York: Manchester University Press, 1981), 126.

inequities and threat of sexual violence against women confronted in The Filmmakers' works, Bryna is an extension of Doulgas's professional philosophy that an actor's primary political action should be in service of an international cultural coalition.

In order to serve as an effective representative of the United States, Douglas held that actors should avoid language that could alienate potential fans, and generally stay out of domestic politics. In a 1960 interview, when asked about his views on the current presidential campaign, Douglas adamantly refused to identify his preferred political candidate arguing that it would be an "unfair use of his position."¹⁶ However, while Douglas bristled at domestic politicking, he was very much in favor of the celebrity taking a leadership role abroad, arguing that actors should work with the State Department to help assist in matters relating to foreign relations. He said:

We have to be aware that American movies are one area where we have won the so-called cold war. There is no other country in the world that makes movies that are so sought after in every part of the globe, as Hollywood. Therefore, it is important and should be recognized that whenever American movie stars travel in every part of the globe they should be in contact with the State Department because they are important ambassadors, if you will, for America. I think there should be a closer working together. Very often we go into a foreign country and I think we should be briefed about the problems of the country, where we are shooting. I think we would be glad to be called upon to help in many different ways and commence with our positions to help as American citizens.¹⁷

This presumption, that the actor's domestic politics are separate from their public persona, diverges from the beliefs that Garfield and, to some extent, Lupino held, but it is ultimately much more aligned with present day understandings of celebrity activism. Evoking the Cold War places this statement in a specific cultural timeframe, but the notion that a famous person is well

¹⁶ "Kirk Douglas Talks of Politicking, Susskind and U.S.-Brand Diplomacy," *Variety*, November 02, 1960, 01. ProQuest.

¹⁷ Ibid, 17.

equipped to take on a role on the world stage is a notion familiar to those well versed in modern celebrity culture. In many ways, the actor as global ambassador is the primary way that stars strive to make an impact beyond their film roles, and as such it is the focus of a lot of celebrity studies literature. While this chapter aims to outline why the Douglas case is unique, he was not the first prominent entertainer who sought a larger role in world political theater. Julie Wilson delves into the rise of the star-turned-ambassador in the 1950s. Wilson contextualizes this phenomenon with the theory of “sentimental education,” which concerned reframing the American citizen’s understanding of themselves as belonging not just to an autonomous nation, but as part of a larger system that “embedded them within a network of multinational ties.”¹⁸ According to Wilson, actor Danny Kaye was the first entertainer to step onto this global stage as Mr. UNICEF -- a figurehead in the United Nations mission to educate the American public about its responsibilities and obligations to international populations. She explains that the postwar international community mobilized prominent liberal figures to help publicize efforts to create emotional bonds with people from the East and Global South.

Wilson also wrote a piece exploring the UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadorship of Audrey Hepburn in the late-1980s. She argues that Hepburn was able to harness her “Cinderella” image and re-articulate it as an extension of her advocacy work. Using Michel Foucault’s concept of “pastoral power,” Wilson maintains that Hepburn adopted the techniques and concerns that once would have been the purview of the church, such as tending to the community and caring for the souls of individuals and activated them in the service of helping underserved or impoverished communities around the world. Hepburn’s adoption of a global teacher persona set expectations within the United Nations for the potential efficacy of such a role. Of particular importance for

¹⁸ Julie Wilson, “Stardom, Sentimental Education, and the Shaping of Global Citizens,” *Cinema Journal* 53, no 2, (Winter 2014), 33.

this study is the ways that this mode of celebrity activism is gendered or understood as a caretaking role. Wilson also argues that because of Hepburn's star image, the expectation for this kind of peacekeeping was forever-after coded as a feminine activity — that Hepburn's brand of "authentic" femininity set the template for how a global ambassador should look and sound.¹⁹

Other scholarship supports and expands on this thesis, exploring how more contemporary female celebrities have adopted a similar global foster-mother persona as a means of shaping their images. The actress-producer-director-ambassador, Angelina Jolie, especially, represents a form of celebrity activism that intersects with maternalism, neocolonialism and self-promotion that has proven a fertile ground for scholarship. Spring-Serenity Duvall writes about the ways that Angelina Jolie has activated the transnational appeal of celebrity culture to bolster her own public image and craft a persona that indulges a postfeminist Western feminine empowerment narrative. Duvall argues that the widely disseminated image of Jolie as a single mother of multinational children enhances the perception of her as a maternal figure of enigmatical origin whose status as both adoptive mother and humanitarian is imbricated with her status as "the sexiest woman alive." Her sexiness is in part a result of the overtly sexualized feminine body as seen in her star vehicles, and the way that her transgressions are ameliorated by her charity work and generosity towards the world's children. She also argues that the positioning of Jolie as a global mother figure infantilizes the third world, non-white beneficiaries of Jolie's caretaking.²⁰ This problematizes the assumed righteousness of Jolie's work and acknowledges that Jolie has reaped much of the benefit of the perpetuation of her globetrotting mother persona.

¹⁹ Julie Wilson, "A New Kind of Star Is Born: Audrey Hepburn and the Global Governmentalisation of Female Stardom," *Celebrity Studies* 2, no. 1, 2011, 56-68, DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2011.544163.

²⁰ Spring-Serenity Duvall, "Celebrity Travels: Media Spectacles and the Construction of a Transnational Politics of Care." *Circuits of Visibility* ed. Radha Hegde (New York: NYU Press, 2011) 140-156. muse.jhu.edu/book/12613

Of course, there are ways that global advocacy can also be coded as masculine. John Wayne, for instance, worked closely with the Department of Defense (DoD) to make *The Green Berets* (Wayne & Kellog, 1968) and was a vocal proponent of U.S. intervention in the Vietnam War. Although he largely collaborated with the government through his independent production company, Batjac Productions, rather than through the United Nations, like Hepburn and Jolie, John Wayne traveled the world advocating for a geo-political cause and forever bound an anticommunist, traditionalist position to his persona.²¹ Instead of caretaking, Wayne adopted a bellicose, global protector stance thereby reinforcing his well-established image as a paragon of American machismo. In addition to assisting the DoD with a laudatory, revisionist narrative about the Vietnam War, Batjac also facilitated the production of films that are thematic endorsements of military might and U.S. supremacy. Historian Rodney Wallis describes *The Green Berets* as of a piece with Batjac films like *The Alamo* (Wayne, 1960), which depicts the doomed band of Texans who attempted to hold off the Mexican General, Santa Ana's march through the territory, and *Cast a Giant Shadow* (Shavelson, 1966), which showcases a lapsed Jewish Army Colonel who dies fighting for Israeli independence shortly after the state was established. All three of these films highlight and valorize the heroic measures of individuals involved in momentous combat missions, all of which, Wallis argues, are celebrations of American interventionism.²²

²¹ There is a wealth of literature on Wayne's pro-War advocacy and his collaboration with the Department of Defense. For recent examples see Tricia Jenkins, "Re-remembering the American Experience in Vietnam: A Look at the Film Industry's Relationship with the Department of Defense," *Journal of American Culture* 42, no. 2. 2019, .99-111. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/10.1111/jacc.13020>. And Matthew Alford, "The Political Impact of the Department of Defense on Hollywood Cinema" *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 33, no. 4, 2016, 332-347.

²² Rodney Wallis, "John Wayne's World: Israel as Vietnam in *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966)" *Journal of American Studies* 53, no. 3 (2019) 725-743. DOI: 10.1017/S0021875819000124.

What then to make of the 1963 Global Ambassadorship of Kirk Douglas? As a contemporary of Wayne's, he is subject to a similar set of expectations for normative gender performance. There were also some issues for which Douglas and Wayne were politically aligned, after all Douglas did co-star in the aforementioned *Cast a Giant Shadow*. Yet Douglas would largely take inverse political stances, advocating for a robust global coalition to avoid international conflict. Statements he made indicate that he earnestly believed in the power of film/art, and the even greater power of shared economic incentive, to help prevent nuclear war. While this chapter largely focuses on the ways that Bryna facilitated his social advocacy, he also engaged in some political work beyond movie production. Among his first and most passionate forms of activism was his advocacy for the state of Israel. From its formation in 1948 through the end of his life, Douglas remained a staunch supporter of Israel and worked to secure continued support from the U.S. government. While filming the Stanley Kramer produced, *The Juggler* - the first pro-Zionist motion picture filmed on location in Israel - Douglas was given the red-carpet treatment.²³ He met with dignitaries and cabinet officials who highlighted the pro-labor progressivism of the Israeli government and its function as a safe haven for Jews displaced by the Holocaust.²⁴ Not only was this a deeply moving experience, it also gave him a taste of the soft power of celebrity which he would later activate on a greater scale in his producing career.

In addition to his Israel advocacy, Douglas would also attend various functions, galas and fundraising efforts alongside other politically active celebrities. Among these events includes an

²³ For an analysis of the reception history and narrative complexity of *The Juggler* see Dan Chyutin's "'I Have a Great Passion for Americans': The Juggler and the Question of National Cinema Casting a Giant Shadow:" *The Transnational Shaping of Israeli Cinema*, edited by Rachel S. Harris, and Dan Chyutin, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021) 39-61.
<http://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=6633195>.

²⁴ For a more complete overview of Douglas's Israeli advocacy, see Tony Shaw and Giora Goodman, "Star Power: Kirk Douglas, Celebrity Activism and the Hollywood-Israel Connection," *Historical Research: The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 93, no. 259, (2020):153-171. DOI:10.1093/hisres/htz006.

event benefiting SANE - a non-profit urging the banning of nuclear testing - which was put on by the subject of the next chapter, Harry Belafonte.²⁵ Additionally, a letter from Douglas appears in the Harry Belafonte Papers indicating that he enthusiastically donated money to The Committee to Defend Martin Luther King.²⁶ Douglas was also unafraid to use his celebrity to involve himself in domestic and international concerns. In his autobiography, he boasts about social encounters with John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert Kennedy and visiting Ronald and Nancy Reagan at the White House. He similarly describes encounters with world leaders in his capacity as global ambassador and how he worked toward ending world hunger and prevention of war.²⁷ Not only did Douglas pride himself on his commitment to social causes, he also relished the access that his celebrity gave him and made it a major element of his career legacy.

Defusing the Bomb: Political Diplomacy Through Cinema

Douglas's brand of socially conscious stardom involved becoming a spokesperson for Hollywood and promoting American exceptionalism - and by extension his own exceptionalism - to the world. Douglas's advocacy for various causes was affixed to his public image, but how did this advocacy coalesce around his production work? I argue that it was the founding of his independent company that augmented this image of Douglas as a broker of peace between

²⁵ "Belafonte Doing SANE Show Here," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 15, 1960, 03. ProQuest.

²⁶ Correspondence, Kirk Douglas to Sammy Davis Jr., May 5, 1960, Harry Belafonte Papers, MG933, Box 27, Folder 12.

²⁷ In his autobiography, Douglas recounts glad handing with prominent domestic politicians including the Kennedys and the Reagans, as well as his international work on behalf JFK, and a particularly illuminating encounter in which he used his celebrity to arrange a meeting with Yugoslavian President Josip Broz Tito. Kirk Douglas, *The Ragman's Son: An Autobiography*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988) 366-377, 483-490.

nations and that his image as “successful businessman” helped to advance this *celebrity-of-the-world* persona.

Trade press articles indicate that Douglas founded Bryna Productions in 1950, but its first major movement as a company did not come until January 1955 when they signed a financing and distribution deal with United Artists.^{28 29} The western, *The Indian Fighter* (De Toth, 1955) was the first feature that Bryna produced under UA, and as the maiden venture *Indian Fighter* needed to offer a robust announcement of the arrival of this new business entity. While the frontier milieu seems discordant with the stately, ambassador persona that Douglas would ultimately adopt, closer analysis of the *Indian Fighter* plot reveals an unexpected similarity between its settler protagonist and the international diplomat that Douglas would become.

A narrative analysis reveals why it was a safe choice to lead off Bryna’s release slate and serve as an announcement of Douglas’s ultimate political goals. The *Indian Fighter* very intentionally activates well-worn genre tropes all of which have a steadfast masculine fan base. It allows Douglas to establish his reputation as a symbolic interlocutor between nations, with the plot situating Douglas as the bridge between the Sioux tribe and the white settlers. Serving double duty, it augments Douglas’s iconoclast persona and stakes a political claim on the standard western cowboys versus Indians trope, while also mitigating financial risk by taking on an old-fashioned genre. Inaugurating an independent with a tried-and-true genre piece was not unique to Bryna. Douglas was following a blueprint laid out by Burt Lancaster’s company whose first release, *Apache* (Robert Aldrich, 1954), was a gunslinger with a similarly sympathetic bent. Several articles in popular magazines noted this trend including one in *Cosmopolitan* that cites

²⁸ “Feldman, Douglas Pick Bryna as Firm’s Name,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, January 18, 1950, 8. ProQuest.

²⁹ “Kirk Douglas Packages Own,” *Variety*, 12 January 1955, 15. ProQuest.

The Indian Fighter and Marlon Brando's rumored upcoming producorial debut as typical of the emerging trend of actors subverting traditional genre tropes while still ensuring a "foolproof" box-office return.³⁰

Among the array of western tropes, the one that arguably occupies the greatest part of our collective understanding of the genre is the omnipresent theme of wilderness versus civilization. These films often set up a personified dichotomy between these forces. Among the most well-known and pernicious of dichotomous elements is the "cowboys versus Indians" storyline. These stories typically align the cowboys along the axis of law and civilization, whereas the Indians are ensconced as components of the unruly wilderness. This is in many ways the defining legacy of the genre, particularly in the classical Hollywood era, however, the postwar western saw a marked shift in attitudes or tastes when a cycle of westerns sought to complicate this simple civilization versus savagery binary. Instead of the marauding droves of tomahawk wielding combatants, these films feature much more sympathetic portrayals of Native peoples and question the nobility and fairness of making claims on already-occupied land. *Broken Arrow* (Daves, 1950), in which James Stewart befriends an Apache chief and *Fort Apache* (Ford, 1948), which features an unsympathetic white Civil War captain mounting a poorly conceived battle against an Apache tribe, are among the best known examples, but the corpus is sizable enough to comfortably identify this as a growing postwar trend.³¹ Bazin called this reversal the "political

³⁰ Jack Scott, "The Adult Gunslingers," *Cosmopolitan*, December 1957, 44-51. ProQuest.

³¹ This postwar movement is by no means the first time that Indigenous Americans were portrayed sympathetically in mainstream American film. For a study of the complicated legacy of the sympathetic western narrative in silent cinema and early 20th Century media see Joanna Hearne, *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

rehabilitation of the Indian”³² in which filmmakers would recast their heroic gun-wielding protagonists as either saviors of Native tribes or united in the fight to impede the encroachment of civilization. A contemporaneous *Newsweek* article also notes this trend, with the author cynically observing that, “tribesmen have, of late, been getting nobler and nobler” and occasionally survive the trials of the plot with the help of an “understanding white man passing the pipe of peace.”³³

The Indian Fighter falls squarely into this postwar western cycle. Its protagonist, Johnny Hawks (Douglas), is an adventurer who is tasked with shepherding White settlers through Sioux territory on their way to Oregon. While en route Johnny falls for a Sioux woman, Onahti, and successfully brokers a peace deal with her father, Red Cloud, the head of the tribe. All is well until a white settler played by Walter Matthau attempts to steal the tribe’s gold and ends up murdering the chief’s brother; at which point the tribe retaliates by attacking the settlers who take refuge in a military fort. Ultimately, Johnny is able to renegotiate a peace treaty by arguing that the Sioux chief will need to learn how to live among white people because his future grandson will be half-white, thereby indicating that he intends to marry Onahti and build a life among the Sioux.

This Johnny Hawks character embodies what Jeff Menne calls the “border raider.”³⁴ A figure who is equally comfortable and uncomfortable within the white and Native worlds. This iconoclastic figure fits within Douglas’s broader persona as a rugged individualist who teeters between the world of the Hollywood elite and the new generation of film artists. This liminality

³² Andre Bazin, “The Evolution of the Western,” *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005), 151.

³³ “Safe Box Office,” *Newsweek*, January 9, 1956, 71.

³⁴ Jeff Menne, *Post-Fordist Cinema*, 41.

is explicitly brought home when Johnny offers the didactic dialogue in which he laments the coming of civilization and the imminent loss of the pristine terra incognita. The central conflict of the film posits the standard civilization-wilderness divide with the Natives providing a synecdochical representation of said wilderness, by equating Johnny's love of the outdoors and sense of adventure with his interest in Sioux culture. *The Indian Fighter* protagonist is positioned as the bridge between cultures. While in this case the bridge resides within North America, the narrative is nonetheless a representative example of the thematic preoccupation of Douglas and, by extension, Bryna. The Bryna hero is one whose allegiance is only to justice and peace, not to any one group or nation.

Internal company documents confirm that the reliability of the action western was part of the impetus for using *Indian Fighter* as a solid starting point in Bryna's cross-collateralization financing arrangement with UA. Their production agreement stipulated that profits from one of the contracted Bryna films would be used to pay off any losses for future films. Hence UA executives highly encouraged Douglas and company to start off conservatively before working in less reliable genres. In a 1956 letter to Douglas, UA Executive Arthur Krim reiterated this case, explaining that *The Indian Fighter* is a good example of how to provide "protection" in the commercial area. After *The Indian Fighter*'s successful debut, Krim encouraged Douglas to continue in this vein making westerns and other bankable pictures so that he has a reserve of funds, which he could use to mitigate risk for less salable projects. He writes, "I do feel that in your own interests in building up the kind of reserve which will give you greater latitude later, this is the time to ride to the hilt some of the tried-and-true values."³⁵ Douglas, of course, failed

³⁵ Correspondence, Arthur Krim to Kirk Douglas, April 24, 1956, United Artists Records Used for "United Artists: The Company That Changed the Film Industry, Volume 2: 1951-1978, MCHC82-046, Box 3, Folder 14. Archives Division. State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison.

to heed Krim's advice and proceeded to make a series of films that either broke even or lost money.

1957's *Paths of Glory* is among these box office disappointments. While the United Artists release is now considered by many to be among the most exemplary works in the Western film canon, nothing about its initial public reception suggested that it would one day be regarded with such esteem. The film was, to some degree, a critical and financial disappointment; particularly to the production team who were counting on Academy Award recognition to bolster the box office return. Douglas stars as Colonel Dax, a commanding officer leading a regiment of French soldiers during World War I. Dax and his men are ordered to attack a well-fortified German post by the Generals Broulard (Adolphe Menjou) and Mireau (George Macready), for no purpose beyond serving the Generals' own venal career ambitions. After taking heavy casualties, the men refuse to continue in this futile attack and remain in their trenches in protest. When the Generals hear about this uprising, they insist on bringing charges of cowardice against three men, chosen nearly at random (one of whom was twice cited for bravery). Colonel Dax, an attorney in his civilian life, attempts to defend the men against these charges, but quickly surmises that the trial is a farce and that the generals are merely trying to save their reputations by relegating blame to these infantry men. In the end, the three accused men are found guilty and executed by firing squad. General Broulard then offers Dax a promotion, falsely assuming that Dax's attempt to save the accused was a mere career ploy. When Dax admits that his efforts were sincere, Broulard chastises him for his sentimentality and sends him and his regiment back to the front lines.

Where the Bryna publicity team were able to successfully market the genre subversion of *The Indian Fighter*, their foray into the war genre proved much more challenging. However, the

campaign is a landmark for this study, not because of the film's enduring critical appeal, but because it was the first Bryna film to foreground Douglas's coterminous Hollywood/activist ambition and advance an image of him as a global celebrity. Among the most significant persona-shifting moves was the choice to highlight Douglas's various trips to US war bases; his ability to speak German and the adoring European crowds who appreciate hearing an American celebrity using their language; and, most significantly, his fervent anti-war conviction.³⁶

This stance is best exemplified in a telegram issued from Kirk Douglas to *Time Magazine* where he states, "Happy you consider *Paths of Glory* current and choice. If anti-war attitude is 'passion out of fashion' then please make note that I am old fashioned."³⁷ This quote was a pithy retort directed at anyone who suggested that *Paths of Glory* trafficked in an outmoded, socially conscious iteration of the war genre. Here Douglas was proudly declaring his allegiance to liberal causes, and subtly suggesting that he was an independent thinker, unafraid to be considered a maverick among his peers and the general public. This steadfast allegiance to both pacifism and old-fashioned values takes up two opposing rhetorical stances. Much like Douglas's combination of antithetical ideologies, *Paths* is a nexus for similarly clashing discursive trends. It has an affiliation with "old-fashioned" war movies but refuses the feel-good patriotism of most contemporaneous films in that genre. It is a film that offers no easy answers and little in the way of redemption for its characters, nor the military system that permitted the events depicted to take place.

³⁶ Internal company documents offer an itemized record of the publicity team's efforts to endear Douglas to the European market amid the *Path's* production. Press Publicity Activities Report, March 1957 to May 1957, U.S. Mss 102AN. Box 23. Folder 25. *Kirk Douglas Papers, 1945-1978*. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research. Madison, Wisconsin, USA.

³⁷ Telegram from Kirk Douglas to *Time Magazine*. 13 December 1957, U.S. Mss 102AN. Box 23. Folder 24. *Kirk Douglas Papers, 1945-1978*. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research. Madison, Wisconsin, USA.

Paths is one of the few examples of Bryna films that attempts and fails to use Douglas's liminality as both classical and modern performer. Most of the paratextual materials, including ad imagery and copy, focus on Douglas's character as a fierce warrior, indicating to viewers that the film is a conventional war picture, yet Douglas's statements suggest a staunchly anti-war film. An additional discordance was caused by the film's onset publicist, Syd Stogel, whose campaign focused on the interiors and exteriors of Schleissheim Palace—the generals' opulent headquarters—suggesting that the exotic European locales were a major part of the film's appeal.³⁸ The message that this press material sent was completely antithetical to the themes of the film, and potentially caused some confusion regarding the visual and thematic content. Bryna's attempt to have it both ways, and take advantage of Douglas's generation spanning appeal, backfired, resulting in a lackluster box-office and disappointing Oscar season.

Bryna learned from its mistakes on their next European production, *The Vikings*. Once again, the international component was a major part of the marketing campaign, with several profiles noting the real-world European locations, such as the Hardanger Fjord in Norway and Fort La Latte in France.³⁹ However, the moral ambiguity and political indictment so intrinsic in *Paths* was replaced by a straightforward, crowd-pleasing adventure tale. For *The Vikings*, it was entirely appropriate to highlight the setting and the swashbuckling bravery of its star, as the film has no aims beyond exhibiting exciting, often violent, spectacle. Yet, the nascent statesman tendency continued in Douglas's press tour for *The Vikings*. The lavish premieres alone are indicative of Bryna's interest in promoting the internationalism of its company. Although the

³⁸ For an overview of Syd Stogel's on-set promotional campaign see Richard Daniels, "Selling the War Film: Syd Stogel and the Paths of Glory Press Files," *Stanley Kubrick: New Perspectives*, ed. Tatjana Lujujic, Peter Kramer, and Richard Daniels. (London: Blackdog Publishing, 2015) 91.

³⁹ See Granger Blair, "'Vikings' in Brittany," *The New York Times*, August 25, 1957, 117. ProQuest. And Philip K. Scheuer, "'Vikings' Filled with Violent Action Scene," *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1958, 02. ProQuest.

film was only partially shot in Scandinavia, the New York premiere was sponsored by the American Scandinavian Society for the benefit of Crown Princess Martha Friendship Fund, attended by the Norwegian Consulate General, and reportedly raised \$22,000 for Norwegian exchange scholarships.⁴⁰ Douglas was also honored by the Norwegian Society of Washington with a guest list that reportedly included “many top government officials.”⁴¹ The most significant *Vikings* premiere, in terms of Douglas diplomatic ambitions, was the Basque Film Festival. Douglas attended the event gala with U.S. Consul Richard Aldrich as guests of the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA), which was attempting to make inroads into the Spanish film market with a big budget Hollywood picture, and they were also an instrumental player in Douglas’s attempt to get his next major undertaking launched.⁴²

The Road to Freedom Fighter: Michael Strogoff

Bryna’s boldest endeavor toward international diplomacy was the 1958 effort to produce a film in the Soviet Union. Seeking to take advantage of a recent thawing in U.S.-Soviet relations, Bryna solicited representatives from the Kremlin and Washington D.C. in an attempt to be the first Hollywood company to film in Soviet territory. This effort was facilitated by a years-in-the-making cultural exchange agreement between the United States and the USSR that arose shortly after Stalin’s death in March 1953. According to Russian studies scholar Andrei Kozovoi, the successions of Georgii Malenkov and then Nikita Khrushchev to head of the Soviet Union was

⁴⁰ “Vikings’ NY Preem Raises 22G for Scholarship Fund,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 12, 1958, 12. ProQuest. and “Notables at Premiere: Stars Of ‘Vikings’ and Officials at Benefit Screening” *The New York Times*, June 12, 1958, 35. ProQuest.

⁴¹ “Douglas in Washington for *Vikings* Promotion,” *Motion Picture Daily*, June 02, 1958, 03. MHDL.

⁴² “Gervasi gets U.S. Committed Big at San Sebastian,” *Variety*, July 02, 1958, 04. ProQuest.

followed by increasing gestures of congeniality toward the West and a bolstering of the role of film as an important cultural bargaining chip. President Eisenhower was similarly interested in using cinema (specifically Hollywood films) as a tool of public diplomacy, or “soft power,” rather than weapons escalation, or “hard power,” and so created the United States Information Agency (USIA) in August of 1953 to project a positive image of the U.S. abroad.⁴³ The subsequent five years saw further advances towards a reciprocal exchange agreement, which culminated in the signing of the Soviet-American executive agreement, “Exchanges in Cultural, Technical and Education Fields,” also known as the Lacy–Zarubin accord. While the exact terms of the agreement (how many films would each side import, what would they cost, etc.) would not be ratified until October of that year, Douglas took this very public show of interest from the Soviets as an opportunity to announce his own interest in facilitating a cultural exchange.

In a March 1958 letter to the Soviet attaché in the USSR’s Washington Embassy, Tamara Mamedov, Douglas outlines Bryna’s plans to adapt the Jules Verne novel *Michael Strogoff* for the screen and proposes a co-production with the Soviet film industry. The letter seeks to flatter the attaché with Douglas’s admiration for the cultural contributions of Soviet artists and to convince her of the merits of collaborating with a star like himself, who had a proven record of recent financial success and critical acclaim. One of Bryna’s major selling points was the mainstream appeal of the narrative and the novel’s fully realized, sympathetic Russian characters. The Bryna team emphasize the “lusty, exciting adventure” element that they promised would entice viewers without risking offense to either the Soviet or the U.S. government. The letter reads, “Audiences everywhere will be able to understand and appreciate

⁴³ Andrei Kozovoi, “A foot in the door: the Lacy–Zarubin agreement and Soviet-American film diplomacy during the Khrushchev Era, 1953–1963,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 36, no. 1 (2016): 21–39. DOI: 10.1080/01439685.2015.1134107

and sympathize with the actions and motives of the Russian characters. Its strength lies in the quality and character of the story, which is enormously effective because it cuts across and through political boundaries to strike directly on a person-to-person level.”⁴⁴

Mamedov contacted Bryna shortly after their introductory letter and expressed optimism about the project’s viability. She encouraged Douglas to attend an upcoming meeting in Washington between Soviet delegates and Eric Johnston — the head of the Motion Pictures of America Association (MPAA) and the newly appointed head of the U.S. delegate in these negotiations. Once Bryna had reason to feel confident in the adaptation’s viability, they reached out to the official U.S. branch of the treaty — the head of the USIA, Turner B. Shelton. Shelton’s response indicates that he too would approve of this proposed co-production, but he warned that no such collaboration could go forward without a signed agreement between the USIA and the Soviet delegates Aleksandr N. Davydov, Aleksandr A. Slavnov and Gavrill G. Vladimirov who represented Sovexportfilm.⁴⁵

When agencies from both governments had given their nominal approval, Bryna issued a press statement optimistically announcing that Bryna would be the first company to successfully broker a production deal with the Soviet Union. Their public statements all take care to foreground the loftier aims of the collaboration, including the possibility of future business arrangements and even the prevention of armed combat. In one statement Douglas explicitly claims peacekeeping as his major motivation for attempting this initiative.

It’s a rare thing for an actor to become a part of world affairs. No one could ask for greater adventure, nor a finer opportunity to keep the world fuse from igniting. I also

⁴⁴ This letter was drafted by Stan Margulies but signed by Kirk Douglas. Correspondence, Kirk Douglas and Stan Margulies to Tamara Mamedov, March 10, 1958, Kirk Douglas Papers, U.S. Mss 102AN, Box 40, Folder 2, Archives Division. State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison. (Hereafter cited as Kirk Douglas Papers).

⁴⁵ Correspondence, Turner B. Shelton to Kirk Douglas, April 9, 1958, Kirk Douglas Papers. Box 40, Folder 2.

think *Strogoff* could be the biggest financial success in movie history. If I'm not allowed to shoot the film in Russia I will drop the whole idea. I want to do more than make a great movie. I want to prove Americans and Russians can create an artistic triumph together.⁴⁶

This statement has three functions: to suggest that a capitalist collaboration could temper resentment and mistrust long enough to avert nuclear war, to propose that art and cultural product transcends the political maneuvering of politicians, and finally to acknowledge the enormity of this task and suggest that Douglas's stature as an actor/businessman makes him uniquely suited to broker this deal. The implication that movies can serve a higher function than to merely entertain has echoes of the neorealist inflected work of Garfield and Lupino, where the narrative and formal elements of a film are reflective of the "real" lived experience of everyday people. However, in the case of *Strogoff*, the intervention comes not from the text itself but the hidden from public view, above-the-line diplomacy. Bryna's assurance of great financial return with the hyperbolic promise that *Strogoff* could be "the biggest financial success in movie history," not only signals to the American press Bryna's continued fealty to the American system of capitalism, it also reaffirms Bryna's commitment to filmmaking craft above partisanship or political agenda. This is further enforced with an explicit declaration that the reason that Bryna chose this property is because of its political neutrality, saying "it's a Jules Verne story about a man who travels across Russia from Moscow to Siberia to deliver a message. There are no politics in the script."⁴⁷ Other statements found in the archive offer iterations of this same message, assuring readers that that the story is politically benign and that it is merely the ability to collaborate on a creative endeavor that could build new lasting bonds between nations. One

⁴⁶ Wire-service article, Vernon Scott, *United Press*, April 28, 1958, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 40, Folder 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

reads “The film will contain no ‘message,’ but it may offer something more important—the excitement and laughter and tears that make the whole world kin.”⁴⁸

Ironically, it was Bryna's insistence that the theme of *Strogoff* remain politically neutral that may have doomed the co-production. While there was parallel movement between Bryna and the Soviets, and Sovexportfilm and USIA, both negotiations were slow and subject to setbacks. Douglas, and Bryna executives Stan Margulies and Edward Lewis, did go to Washington to meet with Shelton, and the attaché Mamedov did arrange a meeting between the Bryna team and Slavnov and Davydov to go over the co-production arrangements, but as these negotiations stretched well into the summer of 1958, the *Strogoff* project lost momentum. In August, Shelton invited Douglas to be present for Johnston's briefing of American film companies on the status of the cultural agreement, however, at that point Douglas was in Europe filming *The Devil's Disciple* (Hamilton & Mackendrick, 1959) and unable to attend.⁴⁹ Margulies, nonetheless, assured Shelton of Bryna's continued interest in *Strogoff* and asked to make arrangements for Douglas to travel to the Soviet Union as a tourist as they await the final negotiations.⁵⁰ This trip too would prove untenable, as by the time that the official “Agreement on Cinematography” was signed on October 9th, 1958, Douglas was busy with pre-production on another ambitious project, *Spartacus*.

No documents in the archive specify precisely why this project never reached fruition, but the timing of *Spartacus* no doubt dampened momentum for *Strogoff*. There is also some question about the Soviet reaction to the whole proposition. While Sovexportfilm delegates did

⁴⁸ Statement, Kirk Douglas, (Undated) Kirk Douglas Papers. Box 40, Folder 2.

⁴⁹ Correspondence, Turner B. Shelton to Kirk Douglas, August 07, 1958, Box 40, Folder 2, Kirk Douglas Papers.

⁵⁰ Correspondence, Stan Margulies to Turner B. Shelton, August 14, 1958, Box 40, Folder 2, Kirk Douglas Papers.

meet with the Bryna team, this meeting was arranged separately from the talks with Johnston and may have only served to prolong the negotiations. According to Andrei Kozovoi, Johnston (on behalf of the MPAA) was extremely frustrated by the Soviets' efforts to circumvent deliberations by going directly to an independent producer, and he insisted that all such extracurricular talks cease.⁵¹ Additionally, Bryna's insistence that *Strogoff* remain politically neutral was hardly a selling point for the Soviets, who held to the belief that film is first and foremost a means of propagating Marxist-Leninist ideology, both in theme and aesthetic. While the signed import/export agreement did include films without any overt social critique such as *Oklahoma* and *Roman Holiday*, this sort of material was unlikely to meet with the thematic and aesthetic standard of a Soviet produced picture. Indeed, these so-called "trophy films," or Western films made without any political message, were immensely popular with Soviet audiences, but were exclusively made by foreign producers.⁵² Douglas's insistence that the Verne story remain politically neutral to avoid social critique of either government, could have had the opposite of its intended effect. When asked about the project in November of 1958, the esteemed Soviet filmmaker, Sergei Yutkevich expressed skepticism that the Soviets would ever consent to make *Strogoff* because of its "false elements," a shorthand for its fantastical escapist aims.⁵³

Also, Bryna's proposal to the Soviets stipulated that Douglas would star in the picture, which could have been an additional point of contention. As Kristin Roth-Ey explains in her

⁵¹ Andrei Kozovoi, "A Foot in the Door," 26.

⁵² Term "trophy film" was coined in the postwar era when Russian soldiers brought home reels of western motion pictures as spoils of war. They gained popularity despite frequently being re-edited to fit within the communist ideological paradigm and/or being critiqued as bourgeois propaganda. For a more thorough history of the trophy film see Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011) 40.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv2z6qdn2.6>

⁵³ "Communist View: Films Serve State; Calls Yank Tales 'Beautifully Empty,'" *Variety*, November 26, 1958, 22. ProQuest.

history of postwar Soviet cinema, the Soviet film industry did use actors to help sell motion pictures but rejected the “star-culture” of Hollywood, which encouraged audiences to form attachments to individual actors and in doing so lures viewers into a culture of fandom, which then inculcates them into the capitalist system. The Hollywood star system was considered a mechanism of seduction whereby businesses could extract greater and greater profit. The Soviet system did have its share of famous actors, but generally the performer was merely a conveyance of great heroes and stories. It was the luminary historical figure and the narrative surrounding them that was meant as the object of worship, not the individual in front of the camera. This distinction was largely upheld by cineastes and film enthusiasts, but not necessarily the everyday citizen. As Roth-Ey explains, the post-Stalin era saw an emergence of a film culture led by teenagers, largely young women, and some began to challenge the notion that worship of any heroic figure is inherently better than celebrity fandom.⁵⁴ Still, the Sovexportfilm delegates and the higher authorities in the Kremlin would have held some weariness regarding the outsized role that Kirk Douglas intended to play as both the lead actor and the producer. In many ways, Bryna’s entire raison d’être is antithetical to the Soviet system - it is a company built to bolster an individual star above all other creative contributors, and to use the stature of that individual to derive profit.

Yet, the *Strogoff* co-production came improbably close to fruition. If Douglas were not already deep into his next major project by the time the “Agreement on Cinematography” was signed, it may very well have been the first American-Soviet co-production. The project’s failure does limit the extent of its wider significance, but it is nevertheless a very important benchmark for Bryna. While *Strogoff* never made it into production, Bryna maintained its ties to Shelton and

⁵⁴ For a more thorough explanation of the distinction between the US and Soviet star-system see Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 98-106.

the USIA well after Bryna's interest in a Soviet co-production had passed. Douglas continued to make public statements indicating his interest in "serving his country abroad," and in 1960 Margulies wrote a letter to Shelton on Douglas's behalf indicating Douglas's interest in an ambassador role.⁵⁵ Douglas using the power of his business to affect geopolitical trade deals, and create a role for himself as a broker of business deals, and de facto peacemaker, is an important step in the creation of his persona and in the historical conception of the celebrity ambassador.

Douglas is *Spartacus*

Though *Strogoff*'s political potential was more concrete, Bryna's 1960 film *Spartacus* is the ultimate study in how an actor transposes their social and business aims into a larger-than-life character. The film's most obvious political significance is the role that it played in ending the Hollywood blacklist, thereby adding another nail in the coffin of the McCarthy Era. While giving Dalton Trumbo credit for his screenplay may have had the greatest material impact, the political resonance extends beyond just the movie industry. The press materials for Bryna advanced a narrative about the film that bolsters the image of Douglas as a global statesman. *Spartacus* was the capstone of a series of sword and sandals pictures that were popular in the 1950s. It features Douglas playing Spartacus - a gladiator who fights his way to freedom and leads a revolt against the Roman legions in the first century B.C.

As previously mentioned, much of the press focused on the enormous costs of the production and the cast of veteran actors that Douglas assembled. However, the other major selling point was the political urgency at the film's center. Internal company documents reveal that Bryna conceived of this project as an "entertaining" treatise on the origins and purpose of

⁵⁵ Correspondence, Stan Margulies to Turner Shelton, November 2nd, 1960, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 37, Folder 2.

“freedom in the growth and organization of civilization.”⁵⁶ The theme of freedom remained a throughline from conception to release and was deployed extensively in marketing materials. In one profile, Douglas, when asked why he went to such great lengths and expense to produce *Spartacus*, answered that “movie-making to him poses a moral responsibility. The character of Spartacus always has been a symbol of freedom... a freedom that is so closely identified with the American heritage.”⁵⁷ This same profile features another example of the conflation between independent production and artistic integrity, claiming that it was Douglas’s status as an independent producer, and the ability to select his own projects, which permitted this massive and meaningful undertaking.⁵⁸ The profile posits Bryna as a conduit to freedom, both for Douglas the individual, and the film itself, which in turn allows for the freedom to disseminate *Spartacus*’s socially important message.

The paratexts sell *Spartacus* the character, and by extension Douglas, as a symbol of freedom, which becomes a significant motif throughout the promotional campaign. *Spartacus* is routinely promoted as a “freedom fighter” and therefore has an added political dimension that the publicity team sought to activate. One of the major political proposals included a “special item” on the marketing team’s checklist: to tie the picture in with the United Nations. Not only would this further cement Douglas’s role as part of a global democratization effort, it would also reinforce the notion that *Spartacus* was “one of the earliest known freedom fighters.” According to meeting minutes of the advertising team, the U.N. representatives were receptive to the idea of

⁵⁶ Project analysis: “Copy Points and Preliminary Thoughts on Story of a Film for Bryna Productions,” Format Films Inc. November 10, 1959, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 37, Folder 2.

⁵⁷ Herbert G. Luft, “Our Film Folk.” *Jewish Telegraph Agency. Inc.*, September 4, 1959, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 37, Folder 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

displaying a gallery of color stills from the film in its New York building. They also mentioned that, if the plan went through, it would be the first time any film would be honored in this fashion.⁵⁹ In addition to the U.N. tie-in, the team also explored other political associations, including messaging that compares Spartacus to “other great freedom fighters like George Washington,”⁶⁰ and supplying several thousand *Spartacus* branded notepads to be handed out in press kits at the 1960 Democratic convention.⁶¹ Other politically inflected publicity stunts included inviting California’s Democratic Senator Claire Engle to make a cameo in the film. When the senator’s schedule did not permit this appearance, Stan Margulies framed the exchange of letters and suggested using them for publicity purposes.⁶²

This request is notable in part because it suggests a definitive political allegiance to the Democratic party, but Douglas was judicious in his hedging of political affiliations. An interview transcript found in the *Spartacus* promotional files features an interview of Douglas conducted by his publicist, Warren Cowen, of the public relations firm Rogers & Cowan, Inc. The interview was designed for Cowen to pull quotes from the transcript and deliver them to various media outlets. Part of this lengthy conversation finds Douglas musing about the responsibilities of actors, espousing a seemingly contradictory determination wherein it is unethical for an actor to attempt to influence audiences on domestic politics but that is an actor’s civic responsibility to become involved in international matters. Douglas said:

We have a lot of problems on Cuba. When I was in Mexico I saw some problems in Mexico. American movie stars are known and recognized the world over. It has always amazed me. If I’m in a little town in Italy, they know me, or recognize you, and for the

⁵⁹ “Spartacus Ad Meeting” Minutes, April 19, 1960, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 37, Folder 1.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Press Release, “Spartacus Has Gone Democratic.” July 7, 1960, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 37, Folder 7.

⁶² Memo, Stan Margulies, March 13, 1959, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 37, Folder 11.

most part they like you and admire you. If I were in the State Department and I had that ammunition at my disposal I would use it in some way, whether the Embassy called on me as an American, whatever country I'm in, to take part in a charity program for that country, local level or national level of that country.⁶³

According to Douglas, the actor is uniquely qualified to intervene on matters relating to citizens of Mexico, Cuba and Italy, yet obliged to stay out of matters related to American politics. He continues:

If the same amount of effort that stars have expended in this domestic political campaign were expended on an international scene not as certain individuals as Democrats or as certain individuals as Republicans, but certain individuals as Americans then I think they would do a tremendous amount of good will toward promoting better relationships between America and the rest of the world.⁶⁴

The notion that an actor has a responsibility to avoid using their platform to influence domestic politics but a similar responsibility to become a tool of the State Department, requires a logical leap that disregards the inherent political implications of international relations.⁶⁵ First glance suggests that Douglas is engaging in a willful hypocrisy that allows him the opportunity to use his platform for the socio-political affairs that most interest him, while condemning those celebrities who would take a similar stance on matters that hue closer to home. However, assuming that Douglas and his publicist are acting in good faith, it is telling that they see this view as not only justifiable, but a virtuous use of the celebrity platform. The rhetorical maneuvering here not only justifies Douglas's own perspective, it elevates his behavior to more

⁶³ Interview transcript, Kirk Douglas to Warren Cowan, (undated) Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 36, Folder 18, 17.

⁶⁴ Interview transcript, Kirk Douglas to Warren Cowan, (undated) Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 36, Folder 18, 18.

⁶⁵ In fairness to Douglas, Cold War international relations fall under a political gray area in part because the notion of a multinational effort to avoid further global conflict was a new undertaking. Fred Turner delves into the history of the anthropological and psychological research efforts that took place in the 1940s and 1950s to ensure that authoritarianism could never again take root in the western world. Nevertheless, I contend that there is an inherent hypocrisy to championing celebrities as ideal figures for the brokering of world peace but criticizing their support of individual political candidates. Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to Psychedelic Sixties*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013) 151-180.

than just candidature — his civic responsibilities transcend petty party politics and become an act of magnanimity. Not only does this language make Douglas appear virtuous and charitable, it also plays into his persona as the sensible broker of peace deals. His dismissal of both the Republican and Democratic sloganeering allows him that same liminality that granted him passage into the white and Native worlds in *The Indian Fighter*, arguing that because he has no home in either party, he is uniquely qualified to transcend the divisions between the two. Not only does this centrist position allow Douglas to augment his persona as a world-straddling figure, it also prevents him from alienating members of either political persuasion by avoiding a firm endorsement of either side.⁶⁶

Douglas could genuinely hold the opinion that stars should stay out of domestic politics but given that he would eventually declare his allegiance to the Democratic party, it is more likely that this declaration of bi-partisanship is more pragmatic than deeply held. The ability to appear committed to a cause, while simultaneously using that commitment to promote a film is an important element of socially conscious stardom. The way that Douglas maintains a populist appeal while still garnering a moral superiority perfectly exemplifies the performative social justice endemic to these kinds of celebrity endeavors. It combines independent production, publicity, taste cultures and pageantry to create an image of a celebrity as an instrument of public good, while simultaneously using that image for financial gain.

⁶⁶ Ideology regarding war and nuclear proliferation did not cleave evenly along party lines. Douglas reportedly attended a speaking engagement in 1960 with then GOP Vice-Presidential candidate Henry Cabot Lodge who argued that Nixon was the candidate who would best work with the United Nations and lead the world onto a “new plateau of peace.” “Lodge to Speak at Dinner Tonight,” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 1960, B1. ProQuest.

Economic Pragmatism Begets Cultural Goodwill

While Douglas's goals for himself and his films might have been loftier than mere money making, internal company documents indicate that Douglas was equally interested in promoting an image of himself as both a serious artist and a formidable businessman. An outline by Warren Cowen details the goals of Bryna's *Spartacus* promotional campaign to be conducted alongside the efforts of the distributing studio, Universal-International. The outline enumerates Cowen & Rogers, Inc.'s goals indicating that their primary mission is to "...assure that Bryna and Kirk Douglas emerge from this epic film with the greatest possible prestige and stature. a) Within the entertainment industry. b) In the business world in general. c) With the press. d) With the movie going public."⁶⁷ It is telling that Bryna's publicity efforts were centered so much around Douglas's standing in the industry and the business world more broadly, as opposed to the more intuitive appeal to potential audiences. The assumption was no doubt that Universal would attend to promoting the film to the public whereas Cowan's goals were centered specifically around promoting Bryna and Douglas. It is nevertheless an interesting, inverse of expectations for a private company to place more emphasis on prestige than box office earnings. Nevertheless, the attempts to appeal to industry professionals and business interests often overlapped with the persona honing work that endeared Douglas to his audience. The company found ways to both highlight the commercial aspect of his company, while still augmenting Douglas's status as a creative force. Indeed, the Cowen outline specifies that it was as important that Douglas be

⁶⁷ Correspondence, Warren Cowan to Stan Margulies cc Kirk Douglas, Aug 17, 1960, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 37, Folder 2.

recognized “not only as an actor” but as a facilitator of great art, and that *Spartacus* be perceived not just as a “big” film but “one of the classics.”⁶⁸

A series of articles published concurrently with *Spartacus*’s release, affirm Douglas’s commitment to film as more than just entertainment or a lucrative investment. In a 1960 interview in *Seventeen Magazine*, Douglas positioned himself as a maverick producer, making films for the love of cinema rather than economic gain. He’s quoted saying, “Making movies just for money is nuts. Motion pictures are a creative art. To find a story, to have a writer fashion it into a screenplay, to cast it properly, to go through the endless complexities involved in making a movie, is a fascinating, demanding, engrossing, challenging job.”⁶⁹ This quote plays directly into the “aestheticism unbound” side of his persona, emphasizing his integrity as an artist over any monied interests or the dictates of the studio. Yet, throughout his producing career, Douglas’s rhetoric about the role of money presents a clear divergence from previous case studies. In the 1960 interview with Cowan, Douglas also sounds off on the centrality of money in all Hollywood ventures. Unlike Garfield who expressed misgivings about the exorbitant salaries of movie talent, Douglas sees the opportunity to make money as a virtue and condemns anyone who would claim otherwise. He specifically cites a quote from director, Edward Dmytryk who had recently offered a public critique about the outsized importance of money in the entertainment industry.

I distrust a person if he’s not interested in making money because then he’s not aware of the realities of life, you have to live, you can still be an artist and make money. Picasso is a fine artist, but I haven’t seen him giving his pictures away.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “Kirk Reacts to Sheer Delight: Meet Kirk Douglas,” *Seventeen Magazine* 19, no. 5, (May 1960): 116-117. ProQuest.

⁷⁰ Interview Transcript, Kirk Douglas to Warren Cowan, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 36, Folder 18, 29-30.

Douglas's rejection of the Marxist inflected art-versus-commerce dichotomy not only positions him as the sensible, everyman who is well attuned to the needs and desires of people living under the U.S. system of capitalism, it also situates him within the fine art world with the evocation of the internationally renowned painter, Pablo Picasso.⁷¹ Here again, Douglas cannily elevates himself as a bridger of worlds, using his desire to earn money to align himself with a working-class ethos, and his vocation as a producer to align himself with the high-brow, creative-class. In making this alignment, he implies a connection between the high and low brow based on a shared authenticity.

This is not the first time Douglas drew this connection. From Bryna's beginnings, Douglas took a defensive stance against critics who suggested that it was somehow unethical or anti-art to make populist films as an independent producer. A press release issued near *The Indian Fighter*'s release is a precursor for the mission proffered in the *Spartacus* transcript. In one particularly illuminating press release, Douglas is candid about his reasoning for founding Bryna. It reads, "Kirk Douglas, a few weeks ago, said right out loud that he, an actor, was interested in making money - and he's been busy defending himself ever since. 'Frankly, I didn't know it was a secret, or anything to be ashamed of... 'Sure, that's the reason I formed my own motion picture company, Bryna Productions. And I'll bet a lot of other stars have become producers for the same reason, whether they admit it or not.'" The release goes on to cite the tax benefits of incorporating as the impetus for founding Bryna and dismisses the notion that money should never enter the realm of the artist. Douglas continues, "Many fellow performers have

⁷¹ Picasso is a more apt comparison than Douglas likely realized as Picasso was a very shrewd manager of his own image and was similarly unashamed of his desire for fame and fortune. For a comprehensive study of how Picasso's association with the avant-garde tastemakers in early-20th century Paris, and the subsequent ways that he deployed scandal, artistic temperament and other markers of "authenticity" as means of crafting his own "brand," see Albert M. Muñiz Jr, Toby Norris, and Gary Alan Fine. "Marketing Artistic Careers: Pablo Picasso as Brand Manager," *European Journal of Marketing* 48, no. 1 (2014): 68-88. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-01-2011-0019>.

jumped on me and told me that it isn't fitting for creative people to admit their concern about money. That this dollar-interest destroys illusions and lowers cultural and aesthetic levels. Eyewash!" He goes on to compare himself to a steel executive, a musician who plays for pay and an artist who sells their canvases, before ending with a plug for the *The Indian Fighter's* upcoming theatrical release, saying "I think it's going to be a good movie...I hope it will make money."⁷² This statement maneuvers the art versus commerce discourse through the nimble orientation of Douglas's company as both an astute business arrangement and an extension of his own artistic integrity. It becomes an acknowledgement of the realities of working within a mass-market medium, while maintaining the guiding principles of the creative endeavor.

The *Spartacus* campaign's emphasis on quality and social import would appear to represent a clear divergence in strategy from the naked capitalist venture of *The Indian Fighter*, which centered on promoting Douglas's business sense and his willingness to speak openly of the economic benefit of becoming a producer. The degree that Douglas stresses the artistic and social motivations involved in taking on the enormous financial gamble to shepherd *Spartacus* to the big screen modifies Douglas's persona as not just a rebellious outlaw with a conscious, but someone deeply committed to pushing the aesthetic possibilities of the medium, and beholden to the notion that the film's themes have larger geopolitical ramifications beyond mere entertainment. However, this change from iconoclastic, liminal cowboy to "freedom fighting" ambassador is less of an evolution and more of a careful finessing of Douglas's public image. Throughout his producing career, Douglas's marketing team maintained a delicate balance between augmenting Douglas's artistic bona fides and promoting his business acumen. The advertising campaign for *Spartacus* serves as a perfect distillation of how this persona could

⁷² Press Release from Stan Margulies to Vernon Scott, U.P., Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 16, Folder 14.

meld together into one cohesive whole. Not only was the film a box office success, it also garnered six Oscar nominations (winning four), and it became a defining film in Douglas's career, cementing his reputation as a principled anti-hero who is unafraid to stand up for what is right.

Codification of the Independent Boys Club

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the interplay between the business and artistic sides of the Douglas persona. It will explore how Douglas's obligation to both business and social justice coalesced into a brooding, tormented artist figure who was willing to be thought of as unpleasant if it meant greater artistic freedom. It will also analyze how this constructed identity played into and further entrenched normative gender roles within the industry, by comparing the ways that Douglas forwarded his creative and business contributions to Ida Lupino's statements about her role within her own company.

Ida Lupino's production company has particular historical import due to its anomalous status within the industry, whereas Bryna is significant for the ways that it reinforced popular notions about artistic sensibilities. By the time of Bryna's founding Douglas was one of many popular male stars who formed their own production company and used it as a means of bolstering their own power. With this trend, came a reconceptualization of this arrangement as more than just a convenient tax scheme, but proof of an actor's popularity, intelligence, and artistic discipline. Instead of the skepticism, or even hostility that Garfield faced when he broke free from the strictures of the studio contract, the independent actor was now so commonplace that they no longer had to position this move as a more artistically sound alternative to studio pictures. Instead of being an indictment of studio production methods, the formation of an

independent company was established as a means of collaborating with the studios.⁷³ This rebranding towards a less combative rhetoric is indicative of the settling of the industrial model after the shake-ups of the post-Paramount era. With the rise of the super-agent, celebrities (mostly actors) had the means to harness their star-clout and mobilize it to their own creative and financial ends. Now that the practice of forming a production company and using it as a negotiating tactic was well-established, the need to situate the indie product as something distinct and better than studio fare was lessened.⁷⁴ In addition to avoiding the us-vs-them stance with the studio system, the indie units were also promoted as collaborative rather than competitive enterprises.

Douglas would regularly cite colleagues' companies, such as Hecht-Hill-Lancaster (HHL) and Batjac, as inspirations for his founding Bryna. He even published a thank you letter in *The Hollywood Reporter* to HHL when the company dissolved, which, among other things, credited them with kickstarting the indie film movement and rejuvenating the major studios. He argued that the majors had ceded too much ground to television, but thanks to HHL's example, they were forced to acknowledge the continued viability of the thoughtful, well-made feature film.⁷⁵ He made similar public acknowledgements about other independent producers such as

⁷³ While Douglas does make statements promoting his collaborations with major studios, he would occasionally echo the cultural studies rhetoric that Lupino and Garfield espoused. His 1961 article in *Film & Filming* includes a reference to film production as distinct from "sausage making" and that the medium is not suited to the mechanization of a factory model. However, unlike Garfield and Lupino, he never implies that the current studio model is akin to making cars or other non-artistic commodities. Kirk Douglas, "Using My Two Heads," Kirk Douglas Herrick Core Collection.

⁷⁴ In a 1959 column for *The Hollywood Reporter* Douglas takes care to declare the vitality and importance of the major studios, while simultaneously arguing that they are made stronger thanks to the indie units. Kirk Douglas, "Kirk Douglas Sheds a Tear Over Dissolution Of Rival Indie, H-H-L," *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 29, 1959, 04. ProQuest.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Mike Todd and Sam Goldwyn, and the comparative spirit of collaboration that exists now in comparison to the classical era where each studio functioned like a “fortress.”⁷⁶

Noteworthy is how little of this spirit of fraternity extended beyond a narrow selection of A-list actors. Yes, the formation of a company meant that an actress could wield more authority than she could under studio contract, but generally access to power was reserved to men. It was unusual in this era for an actress to command the same creative freedom or economic status as a top tier actor, as most of these substantial percentage deal contracts benefitted male actors and their representatives. When on the odd occasion that a woman could make a similar arrangement ala Marilyn Monroe’s 10% profit-sharing deal for *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder, 1959), it was considered novel and therefore newsworthy.⁷⁷ While Douglas might have felt a greater sense of kinship with his fellow indie producers than the studio execs, it may have been because he was on the inside of a fortress that he helped construct, and the indie film movement of the mid-to-late 1950s was merely another iteration of Hollywood’s impenetrable boys club. The distinction here is that the production company, in addition to being a facilitator of social justice and a tax shelter, becomes yet another marketing tool meant to offer proof of an actor’s virility.

Part of this move to reframe independent production as a masculine venture involved emphasizing the challenge of managing a high-stakes creative undertaking. A 1958 *GQ* article by Hollis Alpert provides an example of how forming a business is transformed from a bureaucratic financial move into a bold affirmation of male prowess. The article starts by stepping through the history of the tax shelter setup, explaining that these companies were and continue to be a convenient means of avoiding the high salary tax rates. It then pivots, explaining that it would be

⁷⁶ “Kirk Douglas: Rival Prods. Now Help Each Other, Unlike Yesteryear,” *Variety*, June 04, 1958, 21. ProQuest.

⁷⁷ Scheuer, Philip K, “Top Stars’ Strangle Hold on Film Profits Poses New Woe to Beleaguered Studios,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1958, E3. ProQuest.

a mistake to assume that all actor-formed production companies are just tax shelter setups, and that actors like Douglas, Burt Lancaster and Gregory Peck created companies as a means to “hold the reins” of their careers. Just the expression “hold the reins,” evokes the image of the cowboy taming the wild west and codes this undertaking as inherently masculine. However, a semantic gender decoding is hardly necessary as the article specifies that it is “A good many of the male stars” who are taking the challenge that the contemporary movie industry provides for “the more daring film producer.”⁷⁸ The article continues describing the appeal of going independent as taking charge of a large scale production, “usually involving upwards of a million dollars” and the ability to select properties, consult with script writers, estimate budgets and plan shooting schedules.⁷⁹ The narrative that this column creates posits independent production as a daring risk that allows men to gain control of their own careers and assert dominance over individuals who would have otherwise been more powerful, such as studio heads and above the line creatives.⁸⁰ It also reaffirms the actor-producer’s superiority over the below-the-line trades people such as Assistant Directors and Line Producers who are typically charged with arranging schedules and managing budgets, etc. This upsets the existing industrial hierarchy in which actors reside somewhere between the below-the-line blue collar workers and the above-the-line

⁷⁸ Hollis Alpert, “The Actor is a Producer,” *GQ: Gentlemen’s Quarterly* 28, no. 5 (1958) 79. ProQuest.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁰ There are numerous analyses of the ways that masculinity is performed in the media. Of particular relevance here is the literature on male “genius” as transcending the normative modes of film narrative and bestowing elitist credentials on a small group of masculine creatives to the exclusion of all others. For this Jane Gaines offers a helpful feminist relocating of genius as part of an intrinsic aspect of genre and reception rather than transcendence by a male auteur. Jane Gaines, “The Genius of Genre and the Ingenuity of Women” *Gender Meets Genre in Postwar Cinemas*, edited by Christine Gledhill (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2012). 15-28. <http://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=3413971>.

managerial class, by placing them firmly within the higher echelons of the social stratum.⁸¹ It simultaneously reasserts existing power structures in which a selection of largely white men manage or dictate which projects are made, and those at the bottom of the hierarchy do the work of building the sets, loading the film, feeding the crew, and seeing the project through to fruition.

The justification for this stratification and the higher pay scales of the managerial set are often defended in the press with claims of exceptionalism or higher levels of risk. In the case of the actor-turned-producer, the vaunted star-status already makes the A-list actor exceptional, then they are further justified in their status because they are gambling on a production's success.⁸² Unlike the more conservative role of contracted studio performer, the star-producer's earnings are often contingent on profit rather than a steady paycheck. In the case of Bryna, the company released statements promoting the size of the production and the danger that Douglas faced if these films failed to perform. Press around *The Vikings* emphasized the financial hole in which Bryna found itself after going a million dollars over budget. One article features Douglas boasting about the bloated budget, stating that even if the film makes \$9 million dollars he "still won't earn a dime."⁸³ Bryna recycled this strategy with the release of *Spartacus*, making statements not only about the scope and difficulty of the production, claiming "it is the most

⁸¹ For a thorough examination of the ways that hierarchies are formed and maintained within the American film industry see John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture*.

⁸² As sociologist Mark Banks notes, this stratification has become more acute in contemporary Hollywood's labor structure. He argues that the labor pool for creative workers has grown to such an extent that executives can easily find cheap or free labor and therefore have no need to pay a living wage. This divides the industry into two categories, the low-wage earners and the elite "economy of superstars" who are rewarded at the ordinary worker's expense. Mark Banks, *Creative Justice: Cultural Industries, Work and Inequality*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017) 09.

⁸³ "Kirk Douglas Learns the Hard Way" *The New York Herald Tribune*, August 15, 1957, 08. ProQuest.

expensive picture ever produced in Hollywood,” but also the scale of the marketing campaign.⁸⁴ They publicized the *Spartacus* billboard mounted in front of the DeMille Theatre on Broadway, claiming that it was one of the “largest and most expensive signs” to ever herald the release of a motion picture.⁸⁵ This willingness to take great financial chances is once again situated as an outgrowth of Douglas’s hyper-male, maverick persona.

The discourse in which business acumen and masculinity are yoked together in the press creates the impression that one quality is fortified by the other. A 1958 *Cosmopolitan* profile, with the ostensible purpose of promoting Bryna’s upcoming release of *The Vikings*, characterizes Douglas’s screen persona using only an array of adjectives all meant to bolster Douglas’s hyper-masculine appeal. The profile describes Douglas’s “rugged maleness” and his penchant for taking on “hairy chested parts.” It then expounds on these “manly” qualities and associates them with an aggressive business strategy, commenting on Douglas’s notoriety for alienating junior business colleagues stating, “He is aware that he has a reputation in some circles for being difficult and egoistic, but it doesn’t worry him. Explaining this to an employe(sic), he once said ‘You can’t afford to be a bastard. I can.’”⁸⁶

Not only did Douglas expose these seemingly unflattering aspects of his personality, he flaunted them, making them a constitutional part of his public persona. He even jokingly implored a journalist, in a 1956 article, to avoid saying nice things about him because “You’ll

⁸⁴ There were multiple press releases found in the Promotion folders in the Kirk Douglas Papers, with an exemplary one being: Press Release, “News from *Spartacus*,” (Undated) Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 37, Folder 7.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Kirk Douglas Makes a Violent Movie,” *Cosmopolitan*, 19.

destroy my reputation.”⁸⁷ This boasting about a public figure's unlikability might seem a dangerous strategy, as it risks alienating audiences put off by anti-social conduct, however, articles like this absolve Douglas's behavior by linking it to his artistic conviction. His willingness to forgo general niceties or perform the emotional labor of managing his employee's feelings was advanced as indicative of his unflinching righteousness and duty to the filmmaking process. For instance, *Picturegoer* ran a profile of Douglas, Lancaster, and Laurence Olivier during the production of *The Devil's Disciple*, in which it describes Douglas as selfish and unwilling to “adjust himself” to others. It reports similar unflattering attributes for Lancaster such as a bad temper and stubbornness, while in the same paragraph using the familiar refrain that they are “more than just actors” as rationalization for their behavior. They are described as “hard-headed business men who seek only their perfection,” thereby associating managerial pressures and artistic perfection with heteronormative masculine behaviors like aggression and callousness.⁸⁸

This association continued when, a few months later, *Picturegoer* ran another profile by the same author on Douglas and Lancaster going into further detail on their anti-social behavior and probing them for explanations. It once again justifies Lancaster's brooding and Douglas's temper by casting this behavior as typical of men who must contend with their level of financial and reputational risk. Once again, Douglas does not shy away from his less-than-endearing qualities, instead propping up his quick temper as evidence of his indefatigable work ethic. The article also mentioned Douglas's next big speculative venture, *Spartacus*, which was then

⁸⁷ Marie Torre, “Kirk's Involuntary Retreat From TV,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, August 29, 1956, A8. ProQuest.

⁸⁸ Charles Bayne, “Three Starry Temperaments - This Could Be the Clash of the Year,” *Picturegoer*, June 21, 1958, 06. ProQuest.

budgeted at \$4 million. Douglas declared, “I’m a gambler But even a gambler doesn’t get results like this without setting, personally, the highest professional standards. And, if anyone falls out of line, that’s when the trouble can start.” He continued, “I’m an impatient man. I work hard and if the others with me don’t—I blow up.”⁸⁹ The article then refers to Lancaster and Douglas as “rugged tycoons” who are merely engaging in “healthy conflict” for the benefit of their companies and the artistic process.

Despite attempts to reframe the tumultuous fights on *Disciple*’s set as “healthy conflict,” rumors continued to abound. Philip Scheuer for the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the film’s first director, Alexander Mackendrick, was replaced by Guy Hamilton at the behest of the film’s two lead actors. The producer, Ben Hecht was eager to advance the narrative that Mackendrick was let go over a difference in script interpretation, but Scheuer, reported from the set that it appeared that Lancaster and Douglas were “having as much to say as Mr. Hamilton,” implying that it was the two leading men who were calling all the creative shots. Scheuer then excuses Douglas and Lancaster’s behavior, editorializing that this over-reach is expected of “two high-voltage stars...who also function as ‘bosses.’”⁹⁰

This trend continued with *Spartacus*’s promotional material in which Bryna released statements with similar sentiments when the film’s first director, Anthony Mann, was replaced by *Paths* director Stanley Kubrick. They once again claimed the reason was “artistic differences” that arose between Mann and Douglas, and that Mann bowed out of the production ten days into

⁸⁹ Charles Bayne, “Two Toughies Murder a Myth,” *Picturegoer*, October 04, 1958, 10-11. ProQuest.

⁹⁰ Philip K. Scheuer, “Burt and Kirk Still at It---but Abroad: 'Devil's Disciple' Set Visited,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 08, 1958, B13. ProQuest.

filming.⁹¹ Like the situation on *Devil's Disciple*, Bryna would highlight Douglas's behavior and justify it by invoking the artistic temperament. For instance, one promotional campaign featured an illustrated artist's rendering of Douglas in character, accompanied by ad-copy that reads,

Kirk is interested in every detail of movie-making. Driving everyone hard - himself, hardest- he is known as "themixmaster." His vitality, a hallmark on-screen, is (sic) key feature off-screen as well.⁹²

The company never shied away from Douglas's bad temper or his mercuriality, instead transforming them into evidence of his passion and strong work ethic. They also imply that he is the driving engine of these productions, whose hand is the thing that forces the project through to release. This represents the inverse of the Ida Lupino/female producer phenomenon wherein actresses demur when asked about the managerial aspects of their roles. This is particularly stark in the case of Lupino who insisted that she let her husband, Collier Young, handle the budget portion of production and even refused credit for directing her first feature, *Not Wanted*, when the film's director suffered a heart attack shortly into production.⁹³ Douglas, however, took the opposite approach. Instead of downplaying his role in Bryna, Douglas was accused of exaggerating the level of his involvement in managing the day-to-day tasks of his company. Press statements released by Bryna's publicity team emphasize the magnitude of Douglas's responsibility as Bryna's leader. He appeared happy to take credit for the production work even though he likely delegated much of the producing tasks to others.

The publicity team was eventually taken to task for this overreach by veteran producer Jerry Bresler, who publicly complained that Douglas was hoarding credit that he did not earn.

⁹¹ Press Release. "*Spartacus*: About the Production" author unknown, undated. Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 37, Folder 9.

⁹² Promotion campaign, author unknown, undated, Kirk Douglas Papers, Box 36, Folder 13.

⁹³ See Chapter Two for an analysis of how Lupino navigated her gender difference in Hollywood.

Bresler worked as a producer on *The Vikings* and later lamented that the publicity campaign bestowed credit to Douglas that was due to many other individuals on the crew. He acknowledged that the press was more likely to pay attention to the work of the star thespian, but that the star then has an obligation not to take advantage of those who work for him. He argued that the act of forming a production company does not automatically make an actor a producer and that “there are many activities and production functions that an actor is not equipped to handle and that under the actor-owner setup the performer frequently receives credit he doesn’t deserve.”⁹⁴ Other long-time directors and producers advised that directors stay away from actors with their own production studios because they often felt entitled to weigh in on issues beyond their purview. In 1959, Director Fred Zinneman, when asked if he had any advice for young directors said “Never work as a director for a film star who produces his own pictures. They have too much control and don’t know what to do with it. They want not only to produce and star but they want to direct as well.”⁹⁵ Veteran studio producer Darryl Zanuck attributed his leaving Hollywood for Europe due in part to the disproportionate power given to actors via their agents. He declared, “Actors are now directing, writing, and producing; actors and their agents have taken over Hollywood completely. They want approval of script, stars, still pictures. The producer hasn’t a chance to exercise authority.”⁹⁶ He then cites Douglas, Wayne, Marlon Brando, and Richard Widmark as examples of stars who are guilty of this overreach.

⁹⁴ Hy Hollinger, “Producer: Not Star's Stooqe,” *Variety*, June 18, 1958, 3 and 10. ProQuest.

⁹⁵ Don Ross, “‘Public Is Not Always Right About Movies’ -- Zinnemann,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, June 21, 1959, D3. ProQuest.

⁹⁶ Hedda Hopper. “Zanuck Vs. Hollywood: Actors Should Act and Let the Producers Produce, Says Veteran of the Film Wars.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 08, 1961, 140. ProQuest.

These public accusations that Douglas monopolized all the credit for his films were met with Bryna doubling down. A profile in *Picturegoer* goes even further, not only using testimony from a Universal-International executive to corroborate Bryna's claims that Douglas manages all aspects of production, but also stating that *Spartacus*'s credited producer, Edward Lewis is only nominally serving in that capacity. The executive asserted that "Douglas is on every single facet of filming this movie. He is consulted about wardrobe, lighting, casting, background, historical data...everything." and he continues saying, "Kirk's the driving force of every picture he does. Eddie Lewis is actually producing *Spartacus*—but in theory only. Because Kirk calls all the shots."⁹⁷ Not only does this stand in stark contrast to Lupino's deferral of credit, it poses such an extreme opposite that it exaggerates Douglas's dominance over other above-the-line producers.

It is also worth noting that both Douglas and Lancaster made no secret of their misogyny and disrespect towards women. Denise Mann details the public accusations of sexual misconduct made against Lancaster in *Hollywood Independents*, and recent news items indicate that Douglas may have been similarly aggressive, even criminal, in his treatment of women.⁹⁸ Lana Wood has posthumously accused Douglas of sexually assaulting her sister, Natalie Wood, when Natalie was a teenager.⁹⁹ While never formally accused or charged, Douglas's public statements about women reveal a deeply misogynist streak that denies female autonomy or personhood. In one particularly horrifying quote from an article entitled "American Woman's 'Bossiness' Take a

⁹⁷ Charles Austin, "Dominating Douglas," *Picturegoer*, June 27, 1959, 6-7. ProQuest.

⁹⁸ Denise Mann cites Ernest Lehman's experiences working on the set of *The Sweet Smell of Success* as evidence of Lancaster's misogynist tendencies. In particular, Lehman recalls his first meeting with Lancaster for the actor-producer was in a good mood because a woman that he had allegedly sexually assaulted had decided not to sue. Mann, *Hollywood Independents*, 201-202.

⁹⁹ Savannah Walsh, "Natalie Wood Was Raped by Kirk Douglas, Her Sister Alleges in a New Book," *Vanity Fair*, November 4, 2021 <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2021/11/natalie-wood-was-raped-by-kirk-douglas-her-sister-alleges-in-a-new-book>

Slap from Movie Actor Kirk Douglas,” Douglas says that women will have a much easier time dealing with men once they accept that the “man is boss.” He advises that “No matter what she might say,’ he insists, ‘a woman wants a man to dominate her.”¹⁰⁰

Douglas’s certainty that women want to be dominated is one of the central tenets of what Susan Brownmiller first identified as rape culture, which is itself a symptom of the need for men to reaffirm the patriarchal hegemony over women and men who are insufficiently masculine presenting.¹⁰¹ Not only is Douglas’s incriminating statement steeped in rape culture, it also reinforces his persona as a domineering bully writ large. Other statements, while not quite as violent, similarly reaffirm Douglas’s sexual prowess and gender superiority. For instance, during his lengthy stay in Europe, Hedda Hopper asked Douglas to describe the difference between American and European women and he responded, “European women feel that the man is more important than they are. They cater to him, look after him, and make him comfortable. They don’t argue about equality. I heard rumblings from European men that we spoil our women. They may have a point.”¹⁰² The emphasis on subservience and the traditional pursuer/pursuee dynamic is also at play in his interpersonal relationships. When asked what attracted Douglas to his second wife Anne, Douglas says that she rebuffed him several times before relenting to his romantic advances, and what appeals to him now is that now she does not “nag” him when he throws a party without warning.¹⁰³ This emphasis on male dominance and complaints about

¹⁰⁰ Nora Martin, “American Woman’s ‘Bossiness’ Take Slap from Movie Actor Kirk Douglas,” *The Call*, April 10, 1953, 08. ProQuest.

¹⁰¹ Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. United Kingdom: Simon and Schuster, 1975.

¹⁰² Hedda Hopper, “World Travels Add Polish to an Already-Bright Kirk.” *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1954, D1. ProQuest.

¹⁰³ Arlene Dahl. “Kirk Talks of Women and Love,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 19, 1959, B4. ProQuest.

“nagging” women are not so dissimilar from the advice that Lupino offered to women in her profiles. As previously explored, Lupino would regularly advise women to never challenge their husband’s superiority or power. She made statements suggesting that nagging is emasculating, and wives will get more mileage out of playing up their femininity rather than trying to assert control. In both cases, Douglas and Lupino’s statements serve to reinforce the longstanding cultural hierarchy. Where Lupino attempted to paper over her trespasses into a male space with the formation of her company, Douglas tried to reaffirm the status quo by reinforcing his masculinity while also adopting a more feminized teacher/caretaker role in his promotion of world peace.

Conclusion: The Ambassador Posture

Douglas’s avowed persona as a volatile misogynist seems to run counter to the aims of diplomacy and social cohesion to which he appeared deeply committed. One wonders why so many of Douglas’s and Bryna’s statements relished his unpleasantness and played into his notoriety for obstinance. It is possible that Bryna’s publicist was merely trying to perform damage control in response to unflattering rumors regarding Douglas’s on-set behavior, but the frequent recurrence of the tough businessman profile suggests that publicists were not responding to an isolated story or incident but were looking to make Douglas’s churlishness an important component of his reputation.

How then does one square the conflicting goals of highlighting the discord created on set with the larger goal of international diplomacy and peaceful exchange? Are these components of Douglas’s persona meant to coalesce into one coherent digestible commodity that the public could readily embrace? While these two strategies may at first appear either unrelated or

incompatible, further examination reveals how the interplay between the “rugged tycoon” side and the charming ambassador side of Douglas’s persona work in tandem to mitigate the dangerous or unappealing aspects of both. The ambassador side who actively promotes peaceful relations between nations is the persona that falls squarely within the traits of the socially conscious star. It is a very public way for a celebrity to gesture towards concern for a cause that is outside of the stars’ immediate interest and do so in such a way that the star can reap cultural capital as well as potential financial capital. However, even relatively benign public posturing does come with some risk of alienating the fandom. This is particularly true for those who might object to friendly dealings with the Soviet Union, or those who are committed to isolationist or even antagonistic international policies. To the unsympathetic, such calls for diplomacy might appear insufficiently masculine and therefore threaten the male supremacy in the patriarchal hierarchy. Here again, we see an inverse of the strategy that Lupino employed to offset the threat that her femininity posed within male dominated Hollywood. While Lupino took pains to downplay her managerial tasks and made a show of retaining the exterior trappings of femininity, Douglas does the opposite by performing an exaggerated masculinity and making a public show of dominance over his workplace subordinates. To offset the liability of appearing too feminine, Bryna is transformed from a company largely run and managed by seasoned producers, to a vehicle of control for Douglas.

This is not to say that Bryna’s function is entirely about image control. While Douglas was always careful to straddle both sides of any cultural divide, he was interested in making films with a political dimension and having the ability to option books and scripts allowed him the freedom to take on riskier projects. He spoke about the pedagogical potential of film and how it gives audiences a transnational empathy. In the “Using My Two Heads” article that he penned,

he runs down the list of Bryna produced films, highlighting the various ways that his projects “usually try to say something” about freedom, justice, guilt or innocence, etc. He then casts his scope wider, arguing that audiences around the world have “matured,” and that they now expect their films to reflect that maturation. He says, “...while we will not propagandize, there is a legitimate place to educate—if I can introduce such a musty word—in our films. People want to know more about the world, and through motion pictures they can.”¹⁰⁴ While Douglas’s statements gesture towards a broader scale, particularly in his attention to international audiences, he maintains the same conviction that Garfield and Lupino held. They all argue that film has a larger role to play in society than mere entertainment, and it is the filmmaker’s responsibility to recognize its importance and make films worthy of the medium. In all these cases, these declarations serve as equal parts mission statement and self-serving affirmation of their own significance as producers. Nevertheless, Douglas represents an important evolution of this kind of rhetoric, where the political transgression is mitigated by other more conventional statements. In this way, it is not an evolution but a cycle that leads potential social or industrial upheaval back towards a heteronormative, patriarchal, hierarchized stasis quo.

¹⁰⁴ Kirk Douglas, “Using My Two Heads,” Kirk Douglas Herrick Core Collection.

Chapter Four:
The Actor, the Artist and the Production Company: Harry Belafonte's Civil Rights
Activism and The Creation Of Harbel

“We feel that the effectiveness of the March can be tremendously aided by the presence and participation of a large number of theatrical and artistic personalities of our nation. The presence of such popular idols and well-known national and international figures will have a tremendous impact on the Congressmen and Senators whose votes will be needed to get the bill through.”¹

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Harry Belafonte. July 22, 1963

The above quotation comes from a telegram from Martin Luther King to his friend, confidante, and ally in the struggle for civil rights, Harry Belafonte. Not only does this quote speak to the disproportionate influence of celebrity in realms beyond just the movie industry or a particular fandom, it also illustrates how that celebrity can be wielded strategically to mobilize political action. In this instance, King goes on to request that Belafonte take charge of a “celebrity plane” that would transport an array of famous individuals from California and New York to Washington D.C. for the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom protest. This event is best known for King’s delivery of the “I Have a Dream” speech and is credited with helping to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964. What is less well known is the behind the scenes politicking by Hollywood’s elite that ensured the March had this seismic impact. From U.S. war bond drives to celebrity goodwill ambassadorships, this intermingling of Hollywood notoriety and government was a well-established means of awareness raising and political activism. Of course, the Civil Rights Movement is unique from the other socially driven causes such as labor, feminism, and globalism discussed in previous chapters. Not only has the movement continued to shape public discourse about the history and future of the United States, it has influenced

¹ Correspondence, Martin Luther King Jr. to Harry Belafonte. 1963 July 22. Harry Belafonte Papers, Sc MG 933, Box 31, Folder 20, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Manuscripts. Archives and Rare Books Division. The New York Public Library. (Hereafter cited as Harry Belafonte Papers).

every sphere of American life. Given the resounding historical influence of his cause, and his access to real levers of power, it is evident that Harry Belafonte is an important node to explore within discourses of socially conscious stardom.

Of all the individual cases I have studied for this project, Harry Belafonte not only has the most enduring cultural legacy, but also the most thoroughly examined. Belafonte's work spans across multiple disciplines—from musicology to international relations—and has had a colossal impact on larger social and governmental movements of the mid-to-late 20th century. From the transnational amalgam of folk music tradition in Belafonte's early calypso hits in the 1950s to the efficacy of his famine relief efforts in Africa through the 1985 celebrity benefit single "We Are the World," Belafonte's work has had wider geopolitical ramifications beyond one localized cultural moment. Within this long, storied, and multifaceted career, this project is most concerned with the mid-century era, wherein Belafonte rose to prominence as a matinee idol while simultaneously coming into his own as an outspoken advocate for the Civil Rights Movement. The shifting cultural landscape that allowed Belafonte, a black man born in Harlem and of West Indies descent, to become not only a movie screen icon but a sex symbol, was among the most significant steps toward a more racially integrated American media industry. Here again, this historical moment has invited plenty of analysis and interrogation, with scholarship that has challenged this notion of advancement and explored the limitations of Black representation in postwar Hollywood cinema. Work from scholars like Steven J. Ross and Judith E. Smith explore Belafonte's relationship to activism and how his fame was informed by his lived experience and his adjacency to many of the most significant civil rights leaders in all American history.²

² Steven J. Ross, "Politics in Black and White: Harry Belafonte," *Hollywood Left and Right*, 185-226.
Judith E. Smith. *Becoming Belafonte: Black Artist, Public Radical*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

Given this huge body of literature, what is left to say about Belafonte and his relationship to political activism? Indeed, even his film production company, Harbel, has been the subject of a few scholarly inquiries.³ Yet none of these studies place Harbel within a larger industrial trend of celebrity production companies created with an eye towards socially conscious stardom. While there are studies that concern Belafonte's early Hollywood career and how it was informed by his racial, ethnic, and political identity, this chapter approaches HarBel as endemic to contemporaneous media industry practice. HarBel was not only a means of disseminating films about a particular cause, it was also a means of gaining financial and managerial autonomy for Belafonte. As the previous case studies have demonstrated, the star's independent production company was a culmination of financial, political, and artistic incentive, activated through the established industry process of incorporation. There is a clear through line from the socialist agenda of Roberts Productions, the neorealist sensibilities of *The Filmakers* to the films of HarBel. However, Belafonte's distinctiveness within the industry means that he is also distinct from other actors-turned-producers. Like Ida Lupino, Belafonte's personal identity and singularity makes his achievement notable. Lupino's distinction is that she was the only female director working within the Hollywood studio system; Belafonte's was that he was a Black man attempting to use his fame as a means of promoting an integrationist agenda and upending conventional depictions of race relations. What differentiates Belafonte is his defiance. Where Lupino used her femininity to ingratiate herself within the Hollywood managerial class, Belafonte refused to placate or indulge the racial biases of the Hollywood elite. In this chapter, I

<http://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=3571789>.

³ Both Judith E. Smith and Steven J. Ross devote sections of their analyses to HarBel and its significance (or lack thereof) within Belafonte's larger career. Both contend that his late-1950s movie production was a symbolic victory but was ultimately overshadowed by other more notable achievements.

will argue that Belafonte's positionality is distinct within the Hollywood context and his more combative relationship to the industry informs how HarBel was positioned as a tool of activism. In short, I will first explore the ways that the business side of HarBel informs and impedes the more civic aims of its creator, then how Belafonte was incentivized to use his singularity within the industry as a marketing strategy, and whether HarBel created greater opportunity for other Black celebrities to gain control of their careers or if the achievement was reserved to Belafonte. Ultimately, I contend that HarBel is the product of a short history of socially conscious stardom and the increasing belief that film and film stars have an important role to play in shaping public discourse. HarBel is not the apex or the culmination of this trend, but a key case that bridges the socially conscious, progressive inflected art-film to the Civil Rights Movement, and thereby moves the trend into the realm of real activism.

From Harlem to Hollywood: Belafonte's Rise to Stardom

Despite Belafonte's bountiful accomplishments, for the uninitiated his career is often distilled down to "the singer of Day-O." Reductive as this summation is, it is true that Belafonte rose to fame in the 1950s as the "King of Calypso," and his 1956 version of the Jamaican folk song "Banana Boat (Day-O)" is an enduring pop song with cross-generational appeal. Though no other aspect of his professional life ever eclipsed his singing career, this "singer of Day-O" shorthand neglects his lifelong work as a performer and civil rights advocate.

Born in New York in 1927, Belafonte spent much of his youth and early-adulthood pushing back against authority figures and searching for direction. Both of his parents were bi-racial immigrants of West Indies descent who struggled to provide food and shelter for their growing family. His father, Harold George Belanfanti, worked as a cook on board shipping boats carrying produce from the Caribbean for distribution in the United States. This kept his father

away for long stretches of time, and even when he was home, he was an unreliable source of financial support or caregiving. His mother, Melvine “Millie” Love, supported the family as a day worker providing various kinds of housework for whoever she could find to hire her. Their financial precarity led to housing instability, and his family bounced around various cramped Harlem apartments. Eventually, his mother sent him and his younger brother Dennis to live in Jamaica with her parents while she looked for more stable employment in the States. Belafonte’s autobiography recalls feeling resentful about his mother’s abandonment, but also enriched by the music and ethnic diversity of the Caribbean.⁴ Millie retrieved her children in 1940, fearing that the British Territories could become enmeshed in the war in Europe. When the war eventually made its way stateside, Belafonte enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1944, which exacerbated his already acute anger at systemic white supremacy. His experience with racist white peers at public school and his mother’s regular meetings with followers of the Black nationalist Marcus Garvey ignited his interest in social justice, but it was the military, which doled out uneven punishment for offenses of Black soldiers and disproportionate rewards to white ones, that radicalized him.⁵ ⁶ When his service concluded, he returned to New York a lost and angry young man.⁷

While Belafonte is best remembered as a singer, it was acting that set him on the path to stardom. In one of many parallels to John Garfield, Belafonte’s artistic and social ambition

⁴ Biographical information was sourced from Harry Belafonte’s memoir *My Song: A Memoir*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011). As well as Judith E. Smith’s critical study, *Becoming Belafonte: Black Artist, Public Radical*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

⁵ Belafonte, *My Song*, 43.

⁶ Belafonte recounts serving a two-week sentence in a Navy prison wherein the black prisoners were subject to worse treatment than the Nazi POWs. *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

coalesced around the New York theater community. For Belafonte, it was the leftist American Negro Theatre company (ANT) that offered him an outlet to channel his frustrations and surrounded him with likeminded individuals equally committed to using art as a conduit for large-scale change.⁸ It was this fusion of politics and performance that eventually led Belafonte to folk singing and from there to worldwide acclaim. He made his film debut as a co-lead in MGM's low-budget drama set in an elementary school, *Bright Road* (Mayer, 1953). Not only did the film highlight the importance of a good education across race and class, it also featured a primarily Black cast including Dorothy Dandridge, who would become Belafonte's regular co-lead. The pair were featured the following year in *Carmen Jones* (Preminger, 1954), an adaptation of the Oscar Hammerstein musical which itself was an adaptation of the Georges Bizet opera, *Carmen*. While *Bright Road* failed to make much impact critically or commercially, *Carmen Jones* was a success on both fronts. It was nominated for two Academy Awards, including one for Dandridge, and turned Belafonte into a genuine movie star. This success, coupled with his continued rise on the music charts, brought further interest from Hollywood, but Belafonte was eager for a project that better reflected his political agenda. The result was *Island in the Sun* (Rossen, 1957), a "network narrative" wherein a mosaic of principle characters are granted their own storyline all of which intersect and inform one another.⁹ The film was meant to be a holistic portrait of Caribbean life under the shadow of British colonialism. Unfortunately, the political resonance of the film was compromised by studio intervention, and Belafonte

⁸ For a history of The American Negro Theatre's and its relationship to the civil rights movements of the 1940s/50s see Jonathan Shandell. *The American Negro Theatre and the Long Civil Rights Era*. 1st ed., (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018). <https://doi.org/10.1353/book59654>.

⁹ For further explication and analysis of network narratives see Bordwell, David. *Poetics of Cinema*, (New York and London: Rutledge, 2008) 207.

determined that the only way he could make a film that truly communicated his social agenda was to make it himself.

The result of this determination was HarBel; Belafonte's film production company which produced two films in the postwar era. The first was *The World the Flesh and the Devil* (MacDougall, 1959), an allegory about the perils of racial discord set in a post-apocalyptic New York City. This was followed by *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Wise, 1959), a film noir penned by Robert Productions Vice President, Abraham Polonsky, which features a Marxist critique of American capitalism similar to that of *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*. The lineage between Roberts and HarBel is particularly evident in the decision to work with Polonsky, but ideological connection extends beyond just personnel. Like Belafonte, Garfield wanted to manifest his leftist social agenda through his company, and the resulting films share an aesthetic allegiance to realism and a disavowal of the glamor and excess of Hollywood. Another important parallel between Garfield and Belafonte is their commitment to on-screen diversity, which they claimed major studios were ill-equipped to execute. Despite their similarities, the central argument of this chapter is that Belafonte's position as a powerful Black man with a specific cultural agenda distinguishes him from all other independent, socially conscious performers who preceded him.

Entrepreneurial Activism

Belafonte is an essential component of this project because he allows for an analysis of the differentiation between activism and socially conscious stardom. While not mutually exclusive, celebrity activism and socially conscious stardom are two distinct phenomena within the entertainment industry. Both involve the harnessing of power to champion a political agenda or social movement, but not all celebrity altruism or philanthropy is tantamount to activism. In

order to parse the difference, it is important to first set the parameters of what it means to do activism or be an activist. The term activism has been conceptualized in many ways by as many different scholars, yet the term remains somewhat slippery due in part to the different applications and contexts in which it is deployed. In her study of Asian American media activism, Lori Kido Lopez defines the word as “intentional participation in a political act designed to remedy a social injustice.”¹⁰ For Lopez, the definition of “politics” and “acts” can be nebulous if the intentionality remains clear and that the participants are mindful of the results of their actions. She further specifies that the social justice in question cannot be a matter of personal desire or preference, but a necessary long-term aim that serves to ameliorate a social deficit. While this clear demarcation of what does and does not constitute activism provides a helpful and broad rubric for identification, it does not attend to the ways that activism can be in the service of a collective group of minoritized people but primarily advantage the individual activist.

Many scholars are more skeptical, if not cynical, about celebrity activism in part because it often benefits the celebrity more than the cause they are promoting. There is a slew of political science literature which theorizes how celebrity power can be activated in the political realm. Much of this literature acknowledges that a great deal of this political activity is ultimately self-serving, in that it helps to propagate an image of a celeb as someone interested in a cause beyond their own fame and wealth.¹¹ Indeed, Harry Belafonte’s 1985 piloting of the charity single “We

¹⁰ Lori Kido Lopez, *Asian American Media Activism: Fighting for Cultural Citizenship*, New York University Press: (New York, 2016) 24. muse.jhu.edu/book/76171.

¹¹ For celebrity studies literature based on political science research see P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, Chris Rojek, *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and its Consequences*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012) 10.5040/9781849661386. Mark Harvey, *Celebrity Influence: Politics, Persuasion, and Issue-Based Advocacy*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017).

Are the World” and the formation of the charitable organization that it was meant to support, USA for Africa, is a paradigmatic example of the benefits and dangers of “celanthropy.” While the single, which brought together many different high profile musical artists to perform and sing together, did raise money, there was backlash from cultural critics like Greil Marcus who argued that the assemblage of big names performers was more about raising their public profiles than actual altruism.¹² More recent scholarship from Michael K. Walonen suggests that projects like “We Are the World” are an extension of American paternalism and neoliberalism, which casts the participants as celebrity-saviors to the amorphous, dehistoricized pan-Africa in dire need of American assistance. Walonen argues that this type of performance perpetuates a popular colonialist trope — that humanitarian disasters in Africa are the “white man’s burden” rather than a direct result of larger geopolitical maneuvering caused by state governments and Western intrusion. He also argues that this kind of celebrity intervention extends into the present day with stars inserting themselves into disaster relief efforts like the viral Covid-19 “Imagine” video from 2020.¹³ This kind of initiative spotlights the celebrity and distracts from the larger systemic issues and collective failures that bring about humanitarian crises and global inequities.

That said, the public’s relationship to celebrity was different in the 1950s and 1960s, and that is particularly true when it comes to Black celebrity. Additionally, the ways that Hollywood approached the Civil Rights Movement is unique in American history, in part because of the level of risk involved in taking a stance on the issue. High profile Black celebrities found themselves in a bind because their fame and wealth were contingent on the continued support of

¹² Greil Marcus, “We Are the World?,” *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses*, ed. A. McRobbie (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1989) 276–282.

¹³ Michael K. Walonen, “An Idea of Africa in ‘We Are the World’: Decontextualization, Celebrity Savior Complex, Race, and Neoliberal Charity,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 55, June 29, 2022, 561-574. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/10.1111/jpcu.13144>

their white audiences. Artists like Belafonte were attuned to the potential peril of falling out of favor with their supporters because the lives of Black artists were uniquely vulnerable to waves of anti-communist fervor. By the time Belafonte rose to stardom, there was already a sizable list of Black artists who fell victim to the red scare. Canada Lee, John Garfield's co-star in *Body & Soul*, was a prominent casualty of the blacklist. However, it was the career of Black singer-actor Paul Robeson who provided both a blueprint and a cautionary tale for Belafonte. Robeson, who rose to fame in the 1920s and remained a high-profile star throughout the 1930s, was a vocal anti-racist and frequently spoke out against the Hollywood caricatures of Blackness, even criticizing some of his own performances. Robeson's career was derailed in the mid-1940s when he gestured towards a solidarity with the Soviet Union and argued that their government offered better support and opportunity for Black citizens than the United States. This public endorsement of communism coincided with the rise of HUAC in the mid-1940s, and Robeson not only faced social pressure, but also political pressure to disavow his statements. Eventually he lost favor with both the Black and white press and was all but banished from public life in the late-1940s.¹⁴

Nevertheless, Belafonte cites Robeson as a major career inspiration for his uncompromising fusion of artistic and political expression. In his memoir, Belafonte describes his first in-person encounter with Robeson backstage at the American Negro Theatre (ANT) in 1936, claiming that Robeson's conviction that celebrity should be used for advocacy would become a guiding light for the rest of his life. He writes: "What I remember, more than anything Robeson said, was the love he radiated, and the profound responsibility he felt, as an actor, to use

¹⁴ For a more complete history of the discourse surrounding this Robeson scandal see Sarah J. Jackson, "Paul Robeson at Peekskill, NY, 1949," *Black Celebrity, Racial Politics, and the Press*. New York: Rutledge. 2014. 20-44. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/10.4324/9781315887043>. Erika Spohrer. "Becoming Extra-Textual: Celebrity Discourse and Paul Robeson's Political Transformation." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no. 2, June 2007, 151-168.

his platform as a bully pulpit.”¹⁵ Belafonte was not alone in his admiration for Robeson.

Renowned ANT actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee also followed in Robeson’s footsteps, using Robeson as a model for how to enact change through public engagement. By using the art to influence public opinion, the currency of celebrity to gain access to power, and money to fund activist groups, Belafonte and other performers committed to the cause could wield tremendous influence in the fight for civil rights.

However, despite their relative wealth and power, it was still a great risk for Black celebrities to broadcast their political views. Robeson himself advised caution and prudence in speaking out for progressive causes, knowing how quickly the public spotlight can dissipate after accusations of communist affiliation. He told both Belafonte and fellow ANT alum Sidney Poitier to avoid the perception that they were “too radical,” lest they lose credibility with mainstream audiences.¹⁶ Sidney Poitier was a strong supporter of civil rights who also participated in protests and stood alongside Belafonte with several activist organizations—though the historical narrative usually implies that this affiliation was never at the expense of his white fan base.¹⁷

The story of Belafonte’s Hollywood career is tied to the ascendance of Sidney Poitier. This association was in many ways inevitable given the dearth of Black movie stars in the 1950s

¹⁵ Belafonte, *My Song*, 64.

¹⁶ Aram Goudsouzian, *Sidney Poitier: Man, Actor, Icon* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004) as found in Ross, Steven J., *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2011. 196. <http://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=746724>.

¹⁷ In a 1967 New York Times interview, Poitier admits that he is often tasked with playing “loveable neuters” because white Hollywood demands that he remain the paradigmatic sexless, virtuous Black male character. He claims that he does not play these roles by choice, but because of the limited options for Black actors in Hollywood. Joan Barthel. “He Doesn’t Want to Be Sexless Sidney.” *The New York Times*. August 6, 1967. As found in “A Blues for Tom: Sidney Poitier’s Film Sexual Identities.” Ian Gregory Strachan. *Poitier Revisited, Reconsidering a Black Icon in the Obama Age*, ed. Ian Gregory Strachan and Mia Mask Bloomsbury: London & New York, 2015, 164-165.

and their co-emergence amid the Civil Rights Movement. The increasing calls, not just for greater volume of roles for Black performers, but also for greater dignity in Black screen representation, marked Belafonte and Poitier as heralders of a new era for racial diversity.

Poitier, in particular, became the paradigmatic face of integration, starring in a series of “social problem” films that dealt explicitly with the inroads made towards integration. Among the most notable of these films include the Stanley Kramer produced and directed *The Defiant Ones* (1958), for which Poitier became the first Black actor nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor, and the ceremonial torch passing exercise of *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967) in which golden age legends Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy reluctantly grant Poitier access to their inner sanctum.

Kramer, himself, is known as the architect of a series of popular but toothless films about segregation that frequently enact a white utopian vision of racial harmony in which white prejudice and Black resentment are overcome by the realization of their shared humanity. Poitier became the avatar of the Black man who can disarm the white characters through his undeniable poise and integrity, and his stoicism in the face of both extreme racialized violence and smaller scale micro-aggressions. For instance, in *The Defiant Ones*, Poitier plays an escaped prison convict on the run from the law while handcuffed to his white counterpart played by Tony Curtis. Their initial acrimonious relationship eventually softens as the racism of the Curtis character gives way to a mutually beneficial partnership and eventual friendship. *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* presents a similar erosion of white prejudice as Poitier plays the charming fiancée of a college-aged young woman who goes home to meet his betrothed’s parents for the first time. While Poitier’s career was long and storied, and included many different chapters, it is this late-1950s through the late-1960s incarnation that has come to define his cultural legacy.

Critics and scholars have theorized that his appeal is likely owed to his “mild-mannered” affect and his message of peace and gentle reform that coddled the white liberal sense of justice.¹⁸

Critics argue that Poitier’s persona of non-threatening gentility rendered him sexless and docile. Belafonte’s persona, by contrast, was defined by exoticism and sexual appeal. Belinda Edmondson, in her comparative analysis of Belafonte and Poitier, notes that despite their parallel personal biographies, their cultural footprints diverged in ways indicative of the limited roles for Black men of the era. She observes that while both stars are of Afro-Caribbean descent with a background in the New York American Negro Theater community, only Belafonte was able to openly celebrate his cultural lineage. Edmondson argues that Poitier’s stoicism and affected voice—which mimicked an American newscaster—effectively stripped him of his Bahamian heritage.¹⁹ Thanks to this “accentlessness,” 1950s white America did not register Poitier as *foreign* but the incarnation of the “Black Ideal.” Belafonte’s stardom, however, was intrinsically tied to his Caribbean identity, both because his folk music career was influenced by the Calypso tradition, but because his status as a sex symbol evoked an American notion of “Caribbean Blackness.” As Edmondson notes, Belafonte’s open-shirted singer with comparatively lighter skin provided an outlet for Americans to indulge their erotically charged fantasy of the sexually liberated Islander.²⁰

¹⁸ Ian Gregory Strachan and Mia Mask’s Introduction to *Poitier Revisited* suggests a bifurcated interpretation of Poitier’s legacy suggesting that to some critics it was his non-threatening bearing that made him a star amongst white audiences, while others saw him as a figure of black uplift and social reform. The intention of suggesting that Poitier’s appeal was due in part to his conservative demeanor, is not to overgeneralize about his intended audience or his cross-demographic glamor, only to suggest that Poitier’s persona provided a convenient way for Belafonte to stand in contrast. Strachan and Mask, *Poitier Revisited*, 1.

¹⁹ Belinda Edmondson, “Caribbean All-Stars: Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, and the Rise of the African American Leading Man,” *Poitier Revisited*, 64-65.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

Indeed, much of the publicity of the era takes great care to describe his physique, noting his “lithe” figure or “golden” features, and his shirts unbuttoned “all the way down to his leather belt.”²¹ A 1959 profile by Maurice Zolotow in the *Los Angeles Examiner* notes his “libidinous aura” manifested through “calculated gyrations of the pelvis and arms.” Not only does Zolotow’s white gaze objectify Belafonte through detailed description of his body, it also suggests Belafonte delights in a predatory exhibitionism as the profiler describes Belafonte removing his clothes and taking a bath while conducting the interview.²²

This form of hyper-sexualization of the Black male body has been theorized by Keith M. Harris as an inverse of the depiction of the shackled slave. Both images participate in what he calls “semantics of containment,” or a discursive method of reinforcing racial stereotypes as a means of maintaining white supremacy.²³ According to this theoretical framework, Zolotow’s suggestion that Belafonte’s bath was an expression of an unbridled libido is apiece with the history of representing Black sexuality as pathological or monstrous. Though Harris’ notion of containment applies primarily to visual media, Zolotow’s detailed description of Belafonte’s physique and his intimation of predation, reinforce a cultural narrative of the Black body as both erotic and dangerous. However, in Belafonte’s case, the dangerous but appealing sexuality and focus on his body provided some cover for the more radical agenda he had for the media industry and for the culture at large.

²¹ Emily Coleman, “Organization Man Named Belafonte,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 13, 1959, 35. Harry Belafonte Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

²² Maurice Zolotow, *The American Weekly in LA Examiner*, May 10, 1959, 9. Harry Belafonte Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library. AMPAS.

²³ Keith M. Harris, “The Burden of the Beautiful Beast Visualization and the Black Male Body,” *Hyper Sexual, Hyper Masculine: Gender, Race and Sexuality in the Identities of Contemporary Black Men*, ed. Brittany C. Slatton and Kamesha Spates, (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014) 42.

Despite the media history of othering and objectification, Belafonte overcame the exotic beefcake paradigm and became an outspoken political activist. It is in this arena that Belafonte is most often compared to Poitier, as Poitier's involvement with the Civil Rights Movement was perceived as more muted or calculated than Belafonte's full-throated support of integrationist organizations like Southern Christian Leadership Conference and voting rights activist groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The exotic, happy-go-lucky foreigner persona may seem at odds with the uncompromising political figure, but these two elements of Belafonte's persona fused in the public consciousness.

Edmondson argues that it was exactly his otherness that allowed Belafonte the freedom to be outspoken and that his islander persona gave him enough remove from the behavioral expectations normally imposed on Black men in America to defy the racist social imperative of silent assimilation.²⁴ The notion that Belafonte's jovial affect gave him more latitude to foreground his social agenda seems counterintuitive given the wildly different set of expectations one has about an archetypical 1950s pinup versus a political activist. Yet Edmonson's comparison to Poitier yields a helpful contrast, noting that Poitier's fame is more attached to prestige and a general American-ness which hindered his ability to break out of the celebrated actor mold, whereas Belafonte's stardom offered him the flexibility to take part in very public protests. What Edmonson's comparison does not consider is HarBel or the ways that Belafonte took purposeful steps toward harnessing and shaping his own public persona.

²⁴ Edmondson, "Caribbean All-Stars" *Poitier Revisited*, 64-67.

The Founding of HarBel and Group Legacy

While it is accurate to surmise that Belafonte fit within an established industry model of the exotic foreigner fighting against injustice, it is also important to note the ways that he modified this prototype for his own entrepreneurial and political benefit. He did this in part through establishing HarBel Productions - a subsidiary of his larger corporation, Belafonte Enterprises. HarBel is unique not only because of its politics or even the personal identity of its star, but because it originates beyond any established bounds of the Hollywood studio system. Belafonte was able to mobilize his music business foundations to approach the film industry at an unconventional angle.

At this point in industry history, it was common practice for movie stars to incorporate once their fame and box-office reliability was established. With only three pictures under his belt *Bright Road* (1953), *Carmen* (1954) and *Island in the Sun* (1957), Belafonte was an unlikely candidate for this transition typically reserved for industry elite such as John Wayne or Kirk Douglas. It not only granted such stars more control of their project selection and their public image, it also facilitated lucrative percentage deals that ensured them a sizable portion of their film's profit. Yet by the late-1950s, Belafonte was already eager to break free of studio control, and he had access to an established business apparatus that permitted such a move. While Belafonte's screen career began as a Hollywood player, his career as a popular singer is ultimately what enabled him the autonomy of the independent producer. He had the advantage of coming from the music world and was already attuned to issues of ownership and copyright.²⁵ Not only was he already aware of the earning potential of artistic autonomy, he also had existing infrastructure in place that would allow him to hang his own production shingle in Hollywood.

²⁵ Belafonte, *My Song*, 157.

He had founded his management company, Belafonte Enterprises in 1956, through which he would hire press agents, lawyers, and various other personnel to oversee his two music-publishing companies.²⁶ Not only was the business apparatus already in place, Belafonte's musical background gave him an understanding of the power of intellectual property, and the expectation of creative freedom. As a 1961 *Sepia* article observes "...Belafonte earns more from each record than the nine-cent royalty he used to draw as talent. He now draws royalty as producer in addition. The main point, however, is that it gives him greater or complete control over the kind of material he wants himself and his contract artists to record."²⁷ This line of reasoning, where the financial advantage of producing is downplayed in favor of the artistic benefit, is in line with the independent actor rhetoric of the Roberts Productions era. However, HarBel is unique in its bicoastal scope and the specificity of its progressive aims.

In some ways, HarBel was made possible by actors like Garfield, Lupino, and Douglas who charted a path for the socially conscious celebrity to monetize their political and career ambition through independent production. In other ways, Belafonte's positionality as a Black man working within the confines of the hierarchized studio organizational scheme was forced to find his own path to artistic autonomy. The Hollywood managerial structure was designed to reinforce white male supremacy and cut off access to levers of power for women and non-white individuals, and those rare instances where individuals were able to break through these systemic obstacles were able to do so in their own unique ways. What made Belafonte's breakthrough possible was his unwavering conviction that Hollywood needed to make greater advances toward racial integration, and his refusal to celebrate incremental changes above real progress. For

²⁶ Smith, *Becoming Belafonte*, 138-139.

²⁷ *Sepia Magazine*, Harry Belafonte Papers, Sc MG 933, Box 107, August 1961.

Belafonte, the formation and existence of the company was a “moral mission,” which superseded any profit or artistic output. It was a way to command respect in a business where Black people were expected to be “grateful for what they got.”²⁸

A major catalyst for HarBel’s founding was his compounding frustrations while on the set of his 1957 starring vehicle, *Island in the Sun*.²⁹ Directed by *Body and Soul* helmer, Robert Rossen, *Sun* was originally conceived as an exploration of the effects of colonialism, racism, and labor exploitation in the West Indies. Perhaps most radically, the film depicts a romance between Belafonte’s local trade unionist and the widow of a plantation owner played by white actress Joan Fontaine. During production the actors sought to make the interracial love story unambiguous with scenes where the characters consummate their clear attraction, but the film’s producer, Daryl Zanuck, intervened and insisted that Rossen remove all scenes with overt physical affection. The studio additionally forced Belafonte to avoid all public mention of Fontaine, in an attempt to both quash outrage from virulent racists groups and potentially to stir up additional publicity with Black publications. Zanuck was aware of the potential firestorm that could erupt if the film depicted any overt miscegenation narrative, yet he nonetheless welcomed a degree of outrage in order to galvanize interest.³⁰ Susan Courtney’s analysis of contrasting reportage of this “silencing” in the Black and white presses reveals that while Belafonte’s response was one of disappointed capitulation in the white press, he was positioned as outraged

²⁸ Belafonte, *My Song*, 158.

²⁹ Ibid, 163-169.

³⁰ Judith E. Smith analyzes archival materials to explore how Zanuck both courted and avoided controversy for *Island in the Sun*, Judith E. Smith, *Becoming Belafonte*, 147-155.

and defiant in the Black press.³¹ This frustration eventually made its way into the trade press with Belafonte breaking an industry taboo by denigrating *Island's* artistic merit.³² Ultimately the film was financially successful, but Belafonte viewed the experience of making *Island in the Sun* and the resulting film as an artistic failure. Press statements at the time indicate that he put a great deal of the blame on managerial intervention and saw independent production as a means of side-stepping studio bureaucracy and harnessing the power of his stardom to spearhead riskier, more progressive works.

HarBel was greeted with some fascination by the popular press upon its founding. A profile in *Redbook Magazine* highlighted Belafonte's managerial know-how boasting about the four companies that were run under the Belafonte Enterprises umbrella and his \$100,000 payroll. It also characterizes him as "angry young man" who's been able to convert his rage into action by forming this company. The profile describes him railing against the mediocrity and exploitative practices of the entertainment business, proclaiming that "nobody dictates to me."³³ While he keeps his reasoning vague in this profile, in other articles he makes his aims more explicit by calling out the harmful racial stereotypes perpetuated by conservative middle-men afraid of push back from southern theater owners. In calling out the racial stereotypes and the threat of southern censorship, Belafonte spotlights two significant reprimands of Hollywood

³¹ Courtney suggests that such controversy was purposefully timed to coincide with the film's release, and that the difference in the headlines is indicative of studio marketing strategy. In addition to a discursive analysis Courtney also includes a textual analysis to reveal how the interracial romance is both elided and strongly implied in *Island in the Sun*. Susan Courtney. *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. 193-201. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/10.1515/9780691240220>.

³² "'Sun A Terrible Pic, Says Belafonte' in 'Holly wood's Summer Films Tackle Some Sweaty Topics with Varying Success,'" *Life*, July 22, 1957.

³³ Eleanor Harris, "The Stormy Success of Harry Belafonte: An Angry Young Man Speaks Frankly of Love, Ambition and What it Means to be a Negro," *Redbook*, May 1958, 102-105. ProQuest.

proffered by Black critics. As Anna Everett summarizes in *Returning the Gaze*, several postwar Black critics, such as Robert Jones and William Thomas Smith, refuted the argument that Hollywood was beholden to the demands of southern racists. They gathered quantitative evidence, such as box office returns, to counter the logical missteps of this argument and suggest that Hollywood has its own reasons for continually resurrecting the phantom of “southern” resistance. They conclude that Hollywood is not a puppet of southern ideology, but willful bolsters of white supremacy who use the southern argument as cover.³⁴ That such criticisms began in the late-1940s and were still salient by the late-1950s shows how intractable this southern argument was, and why Belafonte’s turn toward independent production was so necessary.

Much of the press coverage highlighted the extraordinary circumstances of HarBel’s formation and the virtuosity of its founder, but Belafonte’s actual responses kept the spotlight on the mission of the company rather than his own stardom. He would continually reiterate that HarBel had greater implications beyond his own career, and that it would impact all Black artists and entertainers hoping to break into the movie industry. His statements often position HarBel as more utilitarian than artistic, with the pragmatism of independent production taking center stage. For instance, in one profile he says directly that he founded HarBel as a means of creating motion pictures that depict Black people as “individual beings—not stereotypes or symbols—as men and women experiencing universal emotions.”³⁵ His push for greater variety extended beyond pushing for roles that treat Black characters with dignity, but for roles that portray Black

³⁴ Everett, Anna. *Returning the Gaze: a Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001) 299-303. <https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/2027/heb08229.0001.001>.

³⁵ Edward Ellis, “Telling the Truth as I See It: Harry Belafonte Speaks Out,” *World-Telegram and Sun Feature Magazine Section*, October 24, 1959, Robert Wise Papers, Collection no. 2295, Box 13, Folder 5, Cinematic Arts Library, USC Libraries, University of Southern California. (Hereafter cited as Robert Wise Papers).

characters with human imperfections and fallibilities typical of most Hollywood protagonists. In a 1959 profile in the *New York Times*, Belafonte even calls out his friend Sidney Poitier, suggesting that Poitier is similarly frustrated by the limited number and variety of roles that Black actors are offered. Belafonte said:

“The majors are still pretty wary of going too far with this sort of thing...As we’ve said, it breaks down to two questions, the kind of role the Negro plays and the amount of work for him in films. On the matter of roles, the Negro always has played the same part, or a variation on the same part. Take my good friend Sidney Poitier, he always plays the role of the good and patient fellow who finally wins the understanding of his white brothers.’... ‘Naturally, I hope to prove that Hollywood’s fears about showing the Negro out of type have been misplaced.’ he said, ‘and that others will follow suit and create more jobs for Negro performers.’”³⁶

During HarBel’s run from 1958-1960, Belafonte often reiterated that his aim for the company went beyond his own career, intimating that he wanted to lay the foundation for a bigger industry-wide change. Profilers would often amplify or endorse his mission statement with rhetoric that highlights the historic nature of HarBel and Belafonte’s achievement as the first Black movie star to found his own production company. For instance, the *New York Times* article’s author, Richard W. Nason, not only reports Belafonte’s frustration with the industry status quo and his plans to implement change, but champions Belafonte and HarBel as monumental steps towards greater racial diversity, writing:

“Harry Belafonte’s recent formation of Harbel Productions could turn out to be one of the most important developments in the American Negro’s long and drawn-out struggle for equal representation on the nation’s movie screens. Considering that United Artists has backed his independent company with long-range financial support, Mr. Belafonte’s position of potential influence is unprecedented in the Negro’s fight for recognition, both as a performing artist and as a vital cultural image in American films.”³⁷

³⁶ Richard W. Nason, “Evaluating The ‘Odds’: Harry Belafonte Tries Broad Racial Approach,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 1959, X7.

³⁷ Ibid.

Mixed in with Nason's description of HarBel's righteous mission is the matter of implementation and the practical concerns of running a business. Nason specifies that it is the partnership with UA which ensured that Belafonte had the institutional and financial support necessary to see the project through to completion.

The economic viability of HarBel was another frequent area of interrogation for the press. Not only did Belafonte field questions about his managerial efforts and the size of his staff, he was also asked about his own financial stake in his activist activities. In a 1959 *World-Telegram* profile entitled "Telling the Truth as I see It" he describes his formation of HarBel as a way of "putting his money where his mouth is."³⁸ That before he would merely complain about these hackneyed performances, but now he had the means to make substantive changes. Here we see a similar conflation of business success with social merit, evidenced in the Bryna press cited in my previous chapter. Like Douglas's company, HarBel highlighted the great economic success of its leader as evidence of his intelligence and work ethic. Several articles in Black publications from the late-1950s, take great pains to highlight the high earnings of all of Belafonte's business ventures, holding his gains up as aspirational for readers.³⁹ However, Belafonte is also careful to draw a distinction between material success and real substantive reform. His dismissal of the financial benefit of independent production is a near perfect echo of the proletariat rhetoric espoused by Garfield when asked about the wealth that he amassed as a famous movie star. Belafonte also broaches the topic of taxes - a major incentive for actor incorporation - before dismissing the notion claiming, "There's not much point if when you earn

³⁸ Ellis "Telling the Truth as I See It: Harry Belafonte Speaks Out" Robert Wise Collection, Box 13, Box 5.

³⁹ See "Belafonte Becomes 'Big Business,'" *Ebony*, June 1958, 17-20, 24, Harry Belafonte Papers, Box 107. and *Sepia Magazine*, August 1961, Harry Belafonte Papers.

a million dollars 91 cents of each dollar goes to the Government. I am more interested in the destiny of man as an artist than financially.”⁴⁰

Belafonte and his team are also careful to show how the success of him as an individual will translate to larger success for the Black community. For instance, in the aforementioned 1961 article in *Sepia Magazine*, HarBel’s executive producer Phil Stein declares that Belafonte did not grow his company for the money, but rather that Belafonte is “trying to prove that a Negro performer can be successful in the industry and retain his dignity and self respect.”⁴¹ The relationship to money wherein Belafonte is celebrated for defying the odds and making huge sums for his labors in an industry that had historically exploited and underpaid its Black performers also risks alienating fans who would bristle at the unseemly celebration of enormous wealth. This conundrum was offset by claims that Belafonte was more interested in art and freedom than money. For instance, a 1958 profile in *Ebony* features Belafonte mounting the argument that his companies are not just a means to financial success but a path to artistic freedom. He says, “I’m not at all interested in piling up millions. I simply want to be economically secure enough to do the things I want to do in my field without having to take orders from agents, from bookers or producers. I am my own boss.”⁴² Belafonte also reiterates the familiar refrain about the creative bankruptcy of the mainstream film industry and assures readers that HarBel’s aims and business model are not trying to mimic the hierarchy of the corporate business structure but seeks to provide an alternative for creative individuals looking for another route to artistic fulfillment. He then goes further declaring that the success of his

⁴⁰ *Daily Express*, 1958Aug01, Harry Belafonte Papers, Box 87 “Clippings.” Schomburg Center Special Collections.

⁴¹ *Sepia*, August 1961, Harry Belafonte Papers, Box 107, Schomburg Center Special Collections.

⁴² “Belafonte Becomes Big Business,” *Ebony*, June 1958, 24, Harry Belafonte Papers, Folder 3, Box 107.

company will benefit other artists who have traditionally been barred from Hollywood and other artistic media due to their racial, ethnic, or economic background. He says:

Frankly, we're not out to build a gigantic corporate octopus with tentacles all over show business. We are far more concerned with unearthing and developing new singers and dancers who have so much to give...We will provide adequate financing and skilled production people and no one will dictate to us how our shows will be staged. We want to set up a cultural center where Negro artists and sculptors can exhibit their work under the best possible conditions. We will arrange for playwrights and TV script writers to work without having to worry about the landlord's knock on the door.⁴³

Belafonte, as the first and most prominent Black actor who was able to parlay his success and ambition into a side career as a producer, is certainly a major divergence from any of the other case studies, but in many ways the rhetoric HarBel and its publicists adopted echoed those of its forebears in its championing of artistic independence. Like Roberts and The Filmmakers, HarBel deployed an oppositional tactic, which positioned their films as artistically and socially honest in comparison to the cynical aims of the big studio. For Belafonte, the complaints about the nature of art created by bureaucracy extended beyond just Hollywood. In addition to lamenting the lack of opportunity for Black artists and the general mediocrity of the movie industry, he also criticized the mainstream music business claiming that it is run by people who are fundamentally incurious or indifferent to its product. He points the finger at the "middle men" and "hangers-on" who are ill-informed but nevertheless dictate the artistic direction of the industry.⁴⁴ These complaints were often followed by a mention of his companies as a means of fighting back against this exploitation.

Though his aims were not identical to other actors-turned-producers, the careers of all these individuals intersect in notable ways. Garfield's company offers a singularly instructive

⁴³ Ibid., 19-20.

⁴⁴ Harris, "The Stormy Success of Harry Belafonte," *Redbook*, 102-105.

point of departure since both Belafonte and Garfield worked with Abraham Polonsky and Robert Rossen for some of their most high-profile works. The decade between the productions of *Body and Soul* and *Odds Against Tomorrow* and the relative stature of the creative talent involved, offers a tidy story of the fall and resurrection of Hollywood's Left. The perpetuation of the same social and thematic goals described in Chapter One, which came to prominence with Robert's Productions, not only speaks to the enduring power of these principals, but also to the persistence of David Bordwell's theory of *the group* as one of the most significant drivers of narrative and aesthetic trends in Hollywood. Bordwell's argument is that it was not the zeitgeist or broader cultural discourses that influenced writers and directors, but rather their peers, colleagues, and friends. These internal allegiances determine the creative and political priorities of Hollywood, rather than an outside force dictating the tastes and aims of the filmmakers.⁴⁵ Bordwell's assertion can certainly be challenged as it is hard to argue that wider cultural phenomena have little impact on individuals who live within said culture. However, the aesthetic and thematic cohesion of the politically invested independent production unit exemplifies how this group theory not only worked in practice but endured across time despite multiple cycles of changing cultural tides.

In the case of the Roberts to HarBel timeline, the persistence of group influence is due in part to the galvanizing capacity of social justice issues, especially the Civil Rights Movement. The filmmakers who sought to address the intractability of class and race as determinants of economic and social stratification in *Body and Soul* were, if not physically present for Belafonte's productions, then spiritually and artistically guiding the way. Not only were some of the personnel attached to Belafonte responsible for the "realist film" trends of the previous

⁴⁵ For group theory see Bordwell, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*. For Bordwell's case against "reflectionist" readings of cinema *Poetics of Cinema*, 27-55.

decade, the specter of the victims of the Hollywood blacklist loomed large in the production of HarBel's films. That it was a Robert Rossen (director of *Body and Soul*) film that instigated Belafonte's turn toward independent production could be mere coincidence, but the parallel is certainly worth noting. While it was not their shared sensibility on the set of *Island in the Sun* that led to the formation of HarBel, it is true that Rossen was even at that late date still advocating for the realist aesthetic he advanced in the immediate postwar period.⁴⁶ In 1961, while doing publicity for his upcoming feature *The Hustler*, Rossen's rhetoric echoed the anti-corporate ethos of both Roberts/Enterprise and HarBel. In a press release he expounds on the anti-art mandate demanded by studio executives who are determined to feed the public "pap" instead of "realistic" "adult" content. He said, "We who make films have the right point of view and would like to treat movie-goers like adults. But the dead hand of the industry has been upon us."⁴⁷ This villainization of the money-driven higher-ups, echoes Belafonte's sentiment about the overly bureaucratic conservatism of both the music and film industries. Belafonte's concerns about realism are rooted in upending the racial stereotypes perpetuated in Hollywood films, but he and Rossen both point the finger at Hollywood as a regressive entity devoted to artifice and fantasy. This is not to say that it was Rossen's influence that inspired Belafonte. In some way, Rossen's statements about "realism" exemplify how such sentiments can be deployed as marketing fodder without any actual allegiance to realist principles. In his autobiography,

⁴⁶ Belafonte was not only frustrated by the censors and the studios, but also with Robert Rossen, who capitulated to the studios demands. What might initially seem an extension of the socialist-inflected sensibilities of the late-1940s, proved to be inert as the once politically radical director Robert Rossen was now an alcoholic. However, Ellen Scott suggests that Rossen was integral to humanizing Belafonte's role, David Boyeur, changing his character from a corrupt politician to a sincere labor organizer. Ellen Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression, and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015) 140. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/36775>.

⁴⁷ Press Statement, Robert Rossen, *United Press International*, September 22, 1961. Robert Rossen Papers, Box 13, Folder 7.

Belafonte recalled with frustration the way that Rossen succumbed to the studio's demands to remove the interracial intimacy from *Island in the Sun*.⁴⁸ In this case, the "realism" of the on-location shooting, and "adult" themes is window dressing for a story that is condescending to its audience and compromised by studio intervention, whereas Belafonte wanted a filmmaking strategy that made social justice intractable from the realist aesthetic.

The distinction between the marketing rhetoric and the realities of both the behind-the-scenes labor conditions and/or the concession to censorship was an issue that faced many social conscious actors-turned-producers. Over and over, independent artists are forced to either alter their visions to placate distressed studio heads or permit the misrepresentation of their films in the press. Belafonte's independent projects would face similar obstacles related to financial precarity and artistic compromise. However, Belafonte's company had a clarity of purpose and, thanks to his musical career, multiple revenue streams to keep him both driven and financially solvent.

The World, The Flesh and the Devil

What then came of all this monetary opportunity and artistic freedom? Ultimately, the first incarnation of Belafonte's movie producing career amounted to the completion of two theatrically released motion pictures: *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* and *Odds Against Tomorrow*, both released in 1959. First, HarBel made *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* in tandem with Sol Siegel's production company. The narrative follows a Black man and a white woman as they embark on an uneasy relationship in the aftermath of a nuclear apocalypse. The themes allowed Belafonte to explore not only his interest in portraying fully realized Black

⁴⁸ Belafonte, *My Song*, 163-165.

characters but also his growing concerns about nuclear proliferation. The film is notable in part for its stark depiction of New York landmarks devoid of all but two human lives. Initially, Belafonte's Ralph Burton traverses the empty city streets calling for help but finds no answer, until his white counterpart, played by Inger Stevens, appears. She is eager to start a romantic relationship with him, but he demurs, claiming her interest is just exoticism of his otherness rather than real attraction. Their relationship is further complicated when another white man suddenly arrives, and the three characters must find a way to co-exist peacefully and repopulate the earth. The film's blend of science-fiction, realism and "social-problem" narrative provided a vehicle to explore not only Belafonte's anti-segregationist principles but also his anti-war activism. *The World's* "social problem" narrative revamps the social-realist film explored by Garfield and Lupino in which issues of race, class and gender are explored through the lens of a relatable protagonist who is caught up in an ethical dilemma.

One striking parallel between *The World* and Roberts Productions' *Force of Evil* is the use of real-world locales, specifically New York City, as signifiers of both authenticity and the inexorable force of systemic oppression. As with *Force of Evil*, the looming skyscrapers are positioned to tower above the protagonist – a mise-en-scene that both indicates a realism and a symbolic reminder of the larger power structures that restrain individual choice and behavior. The probing social commentary combined with the use of real-world locations melded the phantasmagoric aesthetics of the horror film with the cinema verité approach, creating an uncanny documentary effect. *The World's* director, Randal MacDougall, takes this assertion even further, referring to the film as "science-fact" to distinguish it from the horror-inflected science fiction films of the past, thereby ushering in a cinema that seeks to contend with the larger social and environmental implications of the advancement of space age technology. He says "There are

men who will not settle merely for the unknown-beast menace any more...but who wish to bring an adult authenticity to the challenging idea of exploring the space frontier. Also, there is a national urgency to publicize knowledge, essentially scientific knowledge.”⁴⁹ MacDougall’s statement speaks to the emphasis on realism or “adult authenticity” and the social necessity of portraying real-world anxieties on-screen. He makes a familiar appeal to the elevated tastes and intellect of the audience, suggesting that modern audiences are not only attuned to the wonderful possibilities of scientific discovery but also the repercussions when those discoveries are used maliciously or irresponsibly. This theme also harkens back to the dynamics explored in Chapter Three on Bryna Productions, which focused largely on the geopolitical aims of its founder, Kirk Douglas. The pacifist message of *The World* mirrors the anti-war message of Bryna’s output including the film texts *The Indian Fighter* and *Paths of Glory*, plus Douglas’s outspoken advocacy for creative and economic collaboration between the United States and the USSR as a means to avoid nuclear war.

Despite the parallels to previous case studies, *The World*’s major point of departure is the centering of the psychological and material distinction of the Black protagonist from his white counterparts. While Roberts, The Filmmakers and Bryna made strides towards diversification, Belafonte made it the company platform with public insistence that independent production was the only means by which he could make real advancements in representational equality. In her textual analysis of *The World*, Stephanie Larrieux argues that the portrayal of the Black protagonist exemplifies W.E.B. Du Bois’s concept of “second-sight,” or the notion that Black people are stripped of their own self-consciousness and must view themselves as they appear and accord with larger societal expectations. Larrieux argues that the protagonist, Ralph Burton, has

⁴⁹ Philip K. Scheuer. “Robert Wise Will Direct Belafonte.” *The Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1958. *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

internalized this “double-consciousness” to such a degree that he continues to feel the watchful eye of white hegemony even after the forces that govern that hegemony have vanished.⁵⁰

Larrieux’s analysis finds that this second-sight is present in both Burton’s relationships with his white counterparts, and in the way that the symbols of white society loom in the background of the frame. This relationship between Burton and whiteness is established through photographic compositions which feature old institutions, such as the New York Stock Exchange and the George Washington Bridge, dwarfing Burton as he roams the vacant streets of Manhattan. The effect is that Ralph is still oppressed by the same ideologies that existed prior to the apocalypse and that he will forever be under surveillance by the dominant white ideology.

While Larrieux’s argument that *World*’s mise-en-scene and narrative structure present a cohesive allegory about the bifurcated psyche of the Black American man is convincing, the released film is not the story that Belafonte set out to tell. The production history of *The World* recalls that of *Island in the Sun* where Belafonte’s vision of a radical representational departure was compromised by executive unease and the director’s acquiescence. What exists is an eroded version of a more radical narrative that was meant to feature a consummated interracial romance and a more resolute ending. That these compromises are a direct result of studio intervention speaks to an obvious inauthenticity, which is particularly ironic given Ranald MacDougall’s rhetoric about the rise of brave, “adult” storytelling in Hollywood. Not only did MacDougall herald the coming of challenging material in Hollywood, he also credited the audacity of producers as the primary engine behind the shift. He said, “the true courage is exhibited by the producers and studios who finance the new, important ‘idea’ films upon which the present adult

⁵⁰ Stéphanie Larrieux, “*The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*: The Politics of Race, Gender, and Power in Post-Apocalyptic Hollywood Cinema,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 27, no. 2, February 16, 2010. 133-143, DOI: 10.1080/10509200802241423

era is based.”⁵¹ He adds that in addition to studio support, the writers are also energized by the new freelance era in which they work for a flat fee in lieu of a salary. He claims that: “One of the most notable changes in Hollywood was the end of the salaried writer. For too many years there was a terrible lack of vitality among the writers. Now there is a general opening up—a new freedom and a genuine wish to explore and to find creative projects.”⁵² This statement not only bolsters the assumption that the labor structure of independent production begets better material than that made under studio contract, it also implicitly suggests that economic stability was the primary reason for the creative stagnancy of classical Hollywood. This glorification of precarity is an inchoate version of the self-serving myth-making that would come to define the contemporary Hollywood screenwriting practice. Production studies historians like Jonathon Caldwell and Bridget Conor have theorized that the screenwriters are, like so many laboring in the creative economy, systematically marginalized by the insistence that the ability to perform such labor is a privilege not to be vulgarized by economic reward. As Conor explains, such a system results in an “entrenched insecurity” that rewards the producers atop the studio hierarchy.⁵³

While Belafonte and many other subjects of this project also made claims about the comparative conservatism of major studio production, MacDougall’s statement is significant because it shifts a portion of the blame from the studio bureaucracy to the creatives who developed the studio projects. Given that *The World* is itself an MGM production, it makes sense that the director would exalt his bosses as the major drivers of change. Its larger significance,

⁵¹ Hy Hollinger, “True Courage is Film Studios,” *Variety*, March 25, 1959, 01.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 78.

⁵³ Bridget Conor. *Screenwriting: Creative Labor and Professional Practice*. (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014) 46. <http://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=7245505>.

however, is that it is a co-opting of independent production marketing tactics to bolster a major studio project. Instead of highlighting the small collaborative spirit of an independent production, MacDougall points to studio restructuring, which resulted in writers becoming independent contractors, as the reason for a renewed creative energy. This new precarity was, perhaps, the subtext of all the independent outfits championing their products. Independent production always meant lower budgets and fewer resources, but the reward was an aesthetic and thematic divergence from studio product. However, it also did not always necessitate significantly lower pay or substandard working conditions as we saw with the Enterprise Studios model from Chapter One. MacDougall's statement is significant because it trades on the cultural capital of independence, while still operating within the newly established major studio model which adopts only the precarity of independent labor and not necessarily the ethos or artistic freedom.

MacDougall's statements about studio bravery ring especially hollow given that it was the studio's nervousness about the interracial romance that led to much of the creative compromise. In another example of the studio wanting to have it both ways, Ellen Scott has analyzed how the Production Code's anxiety around the use of racial slurs limited how colloquialisms and pointed language could be activated for a political point. Her work largely focuses on the history of censorship of the use of *the n word* during the studio system, arguing that the Production Code had to balance the demands of verisimilitude, Black activists who fought to have incendiary and belittling language removed from Hollywood film, and the desire to avoid controversy from both progressives and conservatives. According to Scott, the single use of the word in *The World* was designed to be as benign as possible while still maintaining the veneer of authenticity that marks this as "adult entertainment" and edgy social critique. Scott also observes that the context in which the word was uttered further neutralized the word. It

comes as Burton is explaining why he and Sarah cannot be together, saying “If you’re squeamish about words, I’m colored. If you face facts, I’m a negro. If you’re a polite southerner, I’m a nigra. And I’m a nigger if you’re not.” Not only is this the only use of *the n word*, but it is also the only overt discussion of race and difference in the film. Scott argues that having the word uttered by Belafonte, instead of one of the white characters, stripped it of its inflammatory potential.⁵⁴ The effect, however, is to engender a sense that Burton is strangely paranoid about race and class given the circumstances, instead of justifying his anxiety by placing the word in a white character’s mouth.

While certainly illustrative of the studio’s conservatism, an even more egregious example of toning down the racial element of the narrative is in the MGM pressbook. Rather, it is what is plainly missing from the advertising materials that is indicative of the approach. The pressbook has only a circuitous mention of race. The second page includes a pseudo-scrapbook graphic that “clips” reviews from three Cleveland-based publications. Two of the three of these reviews note the theme at the heart of the narrative observing how race shifts the power dynamics between the three principal characters. Aside from these “clippings” all mention of race is elided or omitted. All the copy released by the studio makes only oblique mention of what Belafonte sought to be the film’s central theme, with a brief note about race followed by a statement by Mel Ferrer claiming, “Under stress of this kind, neither race nor color counts, it is only the individual.”⁵⁵ This statement aside, there is no other mention of race in the entire book. Instead, the

⁵⁴ Ellen Scott, "Regulating "Nigger": Racial Offense, African American Activists, and the MPPDA, 1928-1961," *Film History* 26, no. 4, 2014, 23. <https://ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/login?url=https://www-ProQuest-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/scholarly-journals/regulating-nigger-racial-offense-african-american/docview/1750970293/se-2>.

⁵⁵ “What Would You Do If You Were One of Only Three People Left Alive in New York City?” *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* Pressbook, 1959, 4. *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

advertisements focus on the romantic drama or the high concept premise. The suggested poster copy includes “The Most Unusual Story Ever Told,” “The Last Three People Left in the World! Only two men and a women(sic) with a world of love to give...” “What if one of these people were YOU! The world’s greatest city is deserted...the last three people on earth walk its empty streets...jewels, furs, treasures there for the taking. This is how the story begins...to grip your imagination as NO FILM has ever done before!” and finally “Talk about something NEW on the screen. It’s the most unusual story ever told. What would YOU do if YOU were this girl, alone with two men? Who wins when these two stalk each other through empty streets, over roof-tops with rifles in hand and lust in their hearts?”⁵⁶ While it is not revelatory to suggest that marketing campaigns were often hyperbolic or even fallacious, it is notable when the marketing deliberately conceals the centrality of a race in a film that is pointedly addressing miscegenation and racial bias. Advertising copy that highlights the “rifles in hand and lust in their hearts” campaign presents the story as a tawdry action adventure rather than a meditation on the intractability of white supremacy.

Even the campaign suggestions of more elevated conversations that the film elicits neglect the racial dimension of the narrative. In the “exploitation” section of the pressbook, marketers offer topics for various talk shows and contests to promote the film. Most of these suggestions stick to generalities and benign tie-ins, but for more the high-minded the book suggests a discussion about whether men or women are better equipped to survive the apocalypse. It urges that such a discussion could include lines of inquiry such as “which of the sexes is stronger,” “whether women by nature are more immune from ravages than men,” and

⁵⁶ Ibid.

“whether women in their homes would be less exposed to calamity than men.”⁵⁷ Prompts like these suggest that the promoters are interested in the film as social commentary, but within a narrow range of issues. The focus on femininity, sensuality and the love interest’s dilemma is designed to draw in a female audience with gender essentialist provocations, but the film’s actual social commentary is ignored.

This bit of deception is ironic given that the publicity campaign highlights the film’s realism and authenticity. Like the *Body & Soul* campaign, the advertising angles encourage focusing on the most lascivious elements of the narrative while also seeking high-brow approval with claims of grown-up, socially significant themes. Not only does the pressbook stoke fears of nuclear annihilation, it also highlights the use of realism to help sell the premise. There are passages about the use of important New York landmarks and the way that they captured the eerie effect of haunted, empty streets. There is also the familiar equation of realism with quality with a piece about Mel Ferrer touting the virtues of motion pictures which feature “better-than-average intelligence.”⁵⁸ In this campaign, the indelible overlap of realism and racism is carefully occluded, and realism is a profitable marketing strategy rather than a political commitment.

One telling divergence between the *Body & Soul* and *The World* pressbooks is that unlike the *Body & Soul* book, *The World*’s does not include any material intended for Black publications. This could have been an effort to avoid a segregationist campaign wherein white and Black audiences were sold very different films. In another Ellen Scott article, she explores the divergent marketing tactics found in white and Black presses in the postwar era. Despite a

⁵⁷ “Panel (Or Round Table) Discussion Show.” *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* Pressbook. 1959. 16 *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

⁵⁸ “What Would You Do If You Were One of Only Three People Left Alive in New York City?” *The World, The Flesh and the Devil* Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

potential attempt at nonsegregated publicity, *World* aligns perfectly with Scott's observations that posters, film stills, and marketing copy found in Black press tended to augment the role of the Black performers and promise thematic and representational interest that was not actually found in the film.⁵⁹ In this case, a series of frame grabs published in the *Chicago Defender* give readers a glimpse of the supposed inter-racial romance between Belafonte and Steven's characters, with one even showing Belafonte gently cradling Steven's chin. An observer seeing these images naturally assumes an interracial romance, but in actuality theirs is only a muted, ambiguous subtextual arrangement, chastened to appease studio executives.⁶⁰

This studio intervention took place long before the pressbook was printed. Belafonte's independence could not yet ensure that he had total control over the end product, and because his producing partner, Sol Siegel, was not as committed to the cause, he conceded to the studio demands. The script as originally conceived did not specify the race or ethnic background of either of any of the leads. Belafonte was initially thrilled by the chance to play a Black character without the trappings of playing a stereotypical "Black type." Here he could simply perform and bring his physicality and instincts to the part. The natural progression of this initial story included a love story that ended with the happy consummation of Burton and his female counterpart. However, this race-neutral casting was a total fallacy and there were elements of the story that had to be changed in the name of "social progress." According to a memo from writer/director MacDougall to Siegel, the production was concerned about the broader

⁵⁹ Ellen Scott. "We proudly present ... the picture they didn't want you to see!": Black Film Advertisements, 1946–1960" *Black Camera*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Fall 2013), 5-33.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/blackcamera.5.1.5>

⁶⁰ For a more thorough overview of the film's critical reception see Judith E. Smith *Becoming Belafonte*, 181-187, 314. Not only does Smith survey reviews in popular press, but also provides information about which Black presses published material directly from the MGM pressbook.

implications for the Civil Rights Movement if they were to imply that an interracial romance was posed as the solution to social progress. MacDougall, when weighing the options for how to end the film, wrote that Burton “getting the girl” was “liable to satisfy a few customers, alienate many thousands, and most importantly do an immense harm to the progress of racial integration.”⁶¹ Whether it was genuine concern about stoking racial discord or simply anxiety over losing a sizable portion of the white audience, fear was clearly the motivating factor for the rewriting of the ending to a more anodyne message of brotherhood and unity. The production arc of *World* echoes that of *Island in the Sun*, wherein Belafonte and the actors wanted to push the representational bounds of normative Hollywood movies but didn’t have the leverage to fight back against PCA censorship or studio conservatism.

Despite these compromises and breaches in authenticity, Rand MacDougall contended that the finished film is a “ground breaking” portrait of racial conflict. He boasted that his script avoided stereotypes and any “southern attitude.”⁶² Belafonte disagreed with MacDougall, as did many critics. Many questioned the veracity and intention of the filmmakers, including the influential Black film critic, Albert Johnson who charged the film with an outdated disingenuousness in a 1959 article for *Film Quarterly*. Johnson’s piece provides an overview of recent Hollywood films with prominent Black characters, such as *Pinky* (Preminger, 1949), *Imitation of Life* (Sirk, 1959) and the aforementioned *Island in the Sun*, and argues that recent gestures towards interracial romance exist to provide an illicit thrill for white audiences while still upholding racist stereotypes. About *The World* he writes, “This parable exemplifies today’s approach to the theme of interracialism; vague, inconclusive, and undiscussed. Like a fascinating

⁶¹ *End of the World*, RM notes to SS, 8/18/58, in *The World, Flesh and the Devil* script materials, MGM/USC. As found in Smith, *Becoming Belafonte*.

⁶² Hollinger, “True Courage is Film Studios,” 78.

toy, American film makers survey the problem from a distance, without insight, and guided by a series of outmoded, unrealistic concepts regarding minorities.”⁶³ Despite all the talk of “science fact,” real-world locations and “authenticity,” critics like Johnson understood the falsity that undergirds the story and made it known to their readers. Despite the studio’s deliberate appeal to all audiences, the film ultimately underperformed, and Belafonte would have to go elsewhere to manifest his vision of authentic Black representation.

Odds Against Tomorrow

HarBel's next move was to sign with United Artists, which was known for its hands-off approach to artistic talent. Finally, Belafonte was free to make a picture that aligned with his representational mission and his social values. Directed by Robert Wise, *Odds Against Tomorrow* is about a trio of bank robbers whose heist implodes due to one of the white robber’s simmering racial resentments. Robert Ryan plays Ed Slater, this compromised white man. Slater is a bigoted southerner whose untreated wartime trauma, misogyny, and bigotry manifests in sudden rages which are directed at strangers in a bar, his long-suffering girlfriend (Shelley Winters), and most especially Belafonte’s Johnny Ingram. Ingram is a down-on-his-luck singer who begrudgingly enters into this arrangement after some mobsters shake him down for his gambling debts. Ed Begley plays Dave Burke, a corrupt former cop who hatches the scheme and convinces Ingram and Slater to work together despite their mutual hatred. The film relies on the division between Ingram and Slater, and the racism of everyday white Americans, for much of its narrative momentum. Part of Burke’s plan hinges on the bank workers’ inability to distinguish Ingram from the Black delivery man who typically brings them their nightly donut supply. The

⁶³ Albert Johnson, *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (Fall 1959) 43. https://archive.org/details/sim_film-quarterly_fall-1959_13_1/page/42/mode/2up

scheme is to have Ingram fool the bank guard into letting him through the door, while Slater follows closely behind with a gun to assist with the stick up. However, during the robbery, Slater engages in some casual sadism towards the victims and cruelly dismisses Ingram when he objects. The whole scheme unravels when their bickering gives the police time to arrive and gun down Burke. Because Slater did not trust Ingram, Burke was the only one with car keys. Not only has Slater's racism made Ingram miserable, it has also cost them their escape plan. When the police take off after the two remaining criminals, instead of working together to make a getaway, Ingram and Slater run separately into an oil refinery and exchange gunfire. A stray bullet hits an oil tank, and the entire facility explodes, leaving both men burned to unidentifiable crisps.

Like *World* and the socially conscious indies before it, much of the press for *Odds Against Tomorrow* focuses on the film as an accurate reflection of daily life. Poster taglines from the UA pressbook emphasize the film's verisimilitude claiming that, "This is real...this is raw."⁶⁴ It also highlights the extensive use of New York City locations boasting, "With the exception of one important sequence which was filmed in upstate New York, the entire picture was photographed in the big Metropolis itself."⁶⁵ A separate section also highlights the use of Central Park as an important landmark, noting that both the Central Park carousel, the Sheep Meadow and the Wollman Memorial Skating rink all make appearances in the movie. The trade press and critics echoed this rhetoric, citing the use of real-world locales as evidence of the aesthetic merit, with *Variety* praising the "sooty realism" of the New York City streets. A *Mirror News* critic even anticipated the ire of Los Angeles craft unions in his praise for *Odds'* runaway production,

⁶⁴ *Odds Against Tomorrow* Pressbook, United Artist Collection, Media History Digital Library, 11 and 15.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

but nevertheless commends the filmmakers for moving away from Hollywood sound stages.⁶⁶ Notably, a review in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* observed that the film's harshness and bitter outlook on race relations was reminiscent of the cycle of "socially significant melodramas" that were au courant a few years prior. The review goes on to note that the performances, the social message, and the cinematography harken back to the hardboiled black and white crime thrillers of the postwar era.⁶⁷ Not only does the film evoke the low-key black and white lighting aesthetic of 1940s noirs, it also has the political dimension akin to the systemic injustice depicted in Roberts Production's trio of films. The use of real-world locations and the plea for racial justice in a context of criminality and corruption certainly evokes several of the films discussed in this dissertation including *Body & Soul*, *Force of Evil* and *He Ran all the Way*.

There is also a clear lineage between Roberts Productions and HarBel in the choice to have the blacklisted filmmaker Abraham Polonsky adapt *Odds Against Tomorrow* for the screen. Polonsky served as the screenwriter on *Body and Soul* then performed double duty as the screenwriter and director for *Force of Evil*. He was then blacklisted shortly after those Roberts films premiered in the late-1940s but continued working under assorted pseudonyms throughout the 1950s. Despite his diminished stature within the industry, Polonsky's political and artistic ideals remained constant. This thematic and tonal consistency is evident between *Body & Soul*, *Force of Evil*, and *Odds Against Tomorrow*. All three exemplify Thom Andersen's concept of film gris, a subgenre of film noir created by filmmakers with known communist affiliations, which feature "greater psychological and social realism" than other contemporaneously released

⁶⁶ Dick Williams. "Odds Taut Drama of Suspense, Bigotry," *Mirror News Entertainment*, November 11, 1959, *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection. Margaret Herrick Library. AMPAS.

⁶⁷ "Odds Against Tomorrow," *Monthly Film Bulletin*. 1960. *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

noirs.⁶⁸ Unlike *Body & Soul* and *Force of Evil*, *Odds* is not mentioned among Andersen's thirteen notable examples of film gris, but there is undeniable similarity between the three narratives. All of them feature a strong political indictment and general pessimism about an individual's ability to affect larger systems of power.⁶⁹ This capitalist critique is particularly acute in *Odds* where money figures into each character's conception of their role as provider and protector. It speaks to both their individual character motivation and the centrality of money and class in societal conceptions of manhood.

That Belafonte went out of his way to hire Polonsky suggests he was drawn to the moral ambiguity and the leftist sensibilities of the immediate postwar era, perhaps even at the expense of his social agenda. Like many other blacklisted screenwriters, Polonsky continued working, albeit in a limited capacity, by employing the services of a front. His cover for *Tomorrow* was Belafonte's friend, John O. Killens, who was promoted by the publicity team as an unknown Black screenwriter.⁷⁰ Killens would become a notable novelist and playwright in the coming years, but here his credit is ornamental. HarBel needed a front to hide Polonsky's contributions, but Killens served both a practical and a discursive function. He is a public gesture to suggest there is more opportunity for under-recognized Black artists to break into show business with Belafonte's company. Killens also provides an aura of authenticity, as the uninitiated were invited to assume greater knowledge about New York City neighborhoods and the Black community from a young, unknown Black writer. There is, of course, an implicit racism in the assumption that a Black man has a greater understanding of this material, given that this is a

⁶⁸ Thom Andersen, "Red Hollywood," 183.

⁶⁹ For a more thorough explication of film gris see Chapter One.

⁷⁰ The review in *Time Magazine* notes the contribution of "an able Negro screenwriter." October 26, 1959, *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library.

story about criminality and the New York underworld, but that assumption is never explicitly addressed in the press or scholarly analysis.

Reviews and critical analyses describe the assumptions elliptically, gesturing towards Killen's firmer grasp of the material. Even the film's director, Robert Wise, when told that an untested Black man had written the screenplay, described feeling at ease despite Killens' inexperience because, "he would have a particular appreciation for the subject matter."⁷¹ Critics made similar assumptions, praising *Odds* as an authentic vision of the streets. Ironically, many reviews highlight the unsparing authenticity of the screenplay noting its bluntness in dealing with crime, race, and sexuality. The *Mirror News* review champions *Tomorrow*'s "vivid feel of reality" with its unsparing view on urban living and *Newsweek* cites the "natural and pungent" dialogue.⁷² *Variety* and *Mirror News*' reviews both highlight the "obvious" homosexuality of one of the henchmen who threatens Belafonte, the derogatory use of the word "ofay" to refer to white people, and the explicit sexuality of the Robert Ryan-Shelley Winters-Gloria Graham love triangle.⁷³ *Variety* also notes the authenticity of Ingram's domestic life as a newly separated, middle-class father whose estranged wife holds integrated Parent Teacher Association meetings in their living room.⁷⁴ The review remarks on the everyday mundanity of this activity and labeled it as revelatory since such authentic portrayals of Black life were rarely depicted in mainstream cinema.

⁷¹ Robert Wise. "Annotations to the Screenplay" interview John Schultheiss from Abraham Polonsky, *Odds Against Tomorrow: The Critical Edition*, ed. by John Schultheiss, (United States: Center for Telecommunication Studies, California State University, 1999) 137.

⁷² *Newsweek*, October 19, 1959. *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library. *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library. AMPAS.

⁷³ Dick Williams. "Odds Taut Drama of Suspense, Bigotry." and *Variety*, October 07, 1959. *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection. Margaret Herrick Library.

⁷⁴ *Variety*, October 07, 1959. *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library.

Claims of “authenticity” are more a matter of perception than reality, as the writing was done by a white screenwriter whose technique and style was forged in the Hollywood studio system. Such reactions have parallels to the *Body & Soul* press tour which spotlighted the interracial friendship of the John Garfield and Canada Lee characters and the realistic representation of a flawed but sympathetic Black character in the Black press. As was noted in the previous chapters, the championing of truth and realism as both an aesthetic and a moral good is a marketing strategy that can be activated or retracted depending on whom the publicity team is attempting to attract. These tactics can be highlighted and criticized for their inherent mendacity and misrepresentation, particularly when it comes to selling a story of racial unification and liberation to Black audiences and selling explicit sexuality and crime to others, as was the case for *Body & Soul*. It is certainly true that the promotional tactics for *Odds* used exaggeration and targeted advertising to suggest different narratives to different audiences.

The press book emphasizes the criminality and the “explosive” action, but it also stipulates that some copy is reserved for the “Negro Page.” For instance, one headline reads “No Made to Order Stories for Negroes’ —Belafonte.” Another suggests that promoters make special appeals to Black audiences by highlighting “favorite Negro artists such as Harry Belafonte, Kim Hamilton and Lois Thorne.” One suggestion is of particular relevance to this project, as it suggests that the Urban League give Belafonte a special award as producer “for his contribution to motion pictures,” thereby positioning HarBel as more than an individual achievement, but an advancement worthy of community support.⁷⁵ However, it is also true that United Artists’ primary marketing did not elide or attempt to hide the racial component of the story. Indeed, an internal company document indicates that the plan was to highlight the “racial angle” which then

⁷⁵ *Odds Against Tomorrow* Pressbook. United Artists Collection Pressbooks, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Media History Digital Library.

gives way to “human problems in a highly exciting, suspense melodrama, edge-of-seat story.”⁷⁶

The press material bears this out, with the majority of the coverage reserved for Harry Belafonte, the real-world locations, and the big action set pieces, but the press book also highlights the score by the Black jazz artist John Lewis and the feature film debut of noted Black prima ballerina Carmen DeLavallade who plays Ingram’s girlfriend.

The connections and divergences between *Body and Soul* and *Odds* are similarly found in the portrait of male subjectivity. The distinction between the Polonsky film gris approach and the typical film noir comes into relief in the film’s portrayal of gender, particularly the use of the *femme fatale* trope. The *femme fatale* is an archetypal element of the film noir - so much so that even the foundational scholars of film noir, Raymonde Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, observed that an essential element is the woman who is “fatal even to herself.”⁷⁷ Building off of this analysis, Janey Place argued that the lethal, seductive *femme fatale* is often counterbalanced by the “virginal” innocent who embodies decency and the chance of redemption.⁷⁸ Like so many noirs before it, *Odds Against Tomorrow* indulges in a characterization of women that presents them as dangerous, hypersexual, temptresses or pure, good-hearted caretakers whose desires do not extend beyond providing support for the male protagonist. In this case it is Slater’s girlfriend, Lorry, who represents the dutiful maternal figure, whose exhausting day job is the pair’s only source of income. When she comes home from work, she then has to perform additional labor

⁷⁶ Report, Mort Nathanson to Arnold Picker, August 13th, 1959, *United Artists Records Used for “United Artists: The Company That Changed the Film Industry, Volume 2: 1951-1978,”* MCHC82-046, Box 2. Folder 3. Archives Division. State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison.

⁷⁷ Borde, Raymonde, and Etienne Chaumeton, *Panorama Du Film Noir Americain (1941– 1953)*, Translated by Paul Hammond, San Francisco: City Lights, 2002, First published 1955 by Editions du Minuit, Paris. As found in James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts*, University of California Press, 2008. 26.

⁷⁸ Place, Janey. “Women in Film Noir,” *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan. London: British Film Institute, 1980.

managing Slater's emotional needs and making sure that she does not say anything to trigger his anger and feelings of inadequacy. Of course, Lorry's toils in that arena prove insufficient and he is driven right into the arms of his alluring neighbor, Helen (Gloria Graham).

A cursory analysis suggests that this dynamic plays into the familiar Madonna/whore dynamic. However, the way that the narrative connects Slater's infidelity with his sense of emasculation, implicates the larger socio-economic expectation that men serve as the primary wage-earner. The narrative and performance make clear that Slater is reluctant to take on this bank heist and the affair, refusing both offers when they are initially extended, but because Slater fails to find steady employment, his wounded masculine pride finds comfort in the possibility of a large payday and Helen's sexual advances.⁷⁹ This exploration of male inadequacy is very much in line with the narrative thrust of *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*, which feature similarly compromised characters who must either submit or rebel against the corrupting influence of capital. As John Schultheiss has observed, pride and "the assertion of one's manhood" is one of the recurring motifs of Polonsky's oeuvre.⁸⁰ It is the male protagonists, often futile, fight against the environmental forces that shape and control his fate, that gives the films their narrative momentum and sense of urgency.

In both *Body and Soul* and *Odds*, this crisis in masculinity lends both the Black and white protagonists a point-of-view that allows for audiences to relate to the characters outside of a racist paradigm. An analysis of the diegesis and advertising reflects a purposeful emphasis on

⁷⁹ This is not to say that the film presents a feminist or enlightened take on the *femme fatale* trope. It is a subversion of the usual deployment of a common narrative device, but the film is mostly uninterested in the interior life of its female characters. Helen's passion for Slater is never explored or complicated, and she is a largely functional character. The promotional material is even more dismissive of her character with one poster stating, "Even if you washed her face and dressed her up... she'd still be a tramp." *Odds Against Tomorrow* Press Book, WCFTR, MHDL.

⁸⁰ John Schultheiss, *Odds Against Tomorrow: The Critical Edition*, 253-258.

Ingram's non-stereotypical subjectivity. The decade that preceded *Body and Soul* saw a reconsideration of what non-stereotyped representation actually means. In some ways, these changes were a departure from the requirements of the NAACP that Garfield laid out in his SAG plan addressed in Chapter One. In other ways, the ensuing representational expectations were a natural outgrowth of the demand for Black performances based in naturalism and dignity. Where wartime advocates like NAACP President, Walter White, called for an end to portraits of Black primitivism and nostalgic slave narratives, by the late-1950s the Black critical establishment held differing opinions about what truly constituted positive representation.⁸¹ For some it was an expectation of Black dignity and poise. Of course, Black scholars and critics often differed in their conception of what constitutes "authenticity" and "dignity" in performance. Where some pushed for the Poitier-mode of graceful decorum and racial harmony, others sought the freedom of a range of different portrayals including the deeply flawed or morally compromised. Belafonte was a vocal advocate for the latter.

A constant refrain from Belafonte in press statements was his desire to show Black characters who are as interesting and complex as their white counterparts. Hence, Ingram's motivation closely mirrors Slater's in that both are lured into the heist through a crisis of masculinity. In Ingram's case, his manhood is threatened not only by financial inadequacy but also his failure to protect his family from threats of violence. Notably the film portrays Ingram's home life as a heteronormative, middle-class, racially assimilated space with Ingram's estranged wife hosting white and Black company in the family's living room. When Ingram's wife chides him and removes him from their apartment, he is also ejected from the comforts and niceties of

⁸¹ For a thorough overview of Walter White's, and contemporaneous Black film critics, influence on Hollywood see Ellen Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights*, Chapter Four.

bourgeois life.⁸² He is further emasculated when gangsters briefly kidnap his daughter while she is under his care. This failure to keep the little girl insulated from the hardships of racialized and economic brutality constitutes a dereliction of fatherly duty and the final straw that convinces Ingram to go along with Burke's plan.

That Ingram has a nuanced, even complex, familial dynamic certainly differentiates him, but it is not just his well-developed domestic life that distinguishes him from a stereotypical Black character. It is also notable that the audience is asked to identify with him above his white counterparts. Despite his succumbing to some ethical shortcomings, viewers are still invited to empathize with his fear of gang retaliation and with his outrage over Slater's casual racism and cruelty. The virtuous stoicism of the Black male character is subtly dismantled, not through dignity but humanity. That Ingram's fear and frustration often manifest in outward displays of anger is evidence of a freedom of portrayal that often eluded Black actors pigeon-holed into white-approved narratives.

Not only does *Odds* portray Black characters with the level of nuance that Belafonte had hoped, it also doesn't offer any easy or feel-good solution to racial prejudice. The film concludes with a tidy, but deeply pessimistic ending, in which the failed bank robbery results in a police shootout and the demise of all three main characters. In fact, Belafonte purposefully sought to avoid the assimilationist resolution in which the characters disavow their xenophobia and eventually grow to become friends. In interviews Belafonte described *Odds* as an "anti-*Defiant Ones*", where Poitier and Curtis develop a mutual understanding, learn to see past their racial differences, and come to love one another as brothers. *Odds*'s more confrontational ending

⁸² This dynamic has many correlations with Belafonte's relationship with his ex-wife, Margaritte. According to Belafonte, their differing opinions about the veracity and purpose of civil rights activism was a major source of strife in the relationship. Margaritte prioritized assimilation with white Americans, whereas Belafonte advocated for a more strident integrationist movement. Belafonte, *My Song*, 70-71, 84, 89-90.

speaks to the divergence between normative producorial perspective and the more combative stance of Belafonte. Unfortunately for HarBel, many critics noted this comparison and proclaimed favor for *The Defiant Ones*. The *New Yorker*'s reviewer offers a pithy dismissal of *Odds* noting the similar dynamic of forced communion between Black and white characters in both films but determines that in *Odds* "there isn't as much bite to the business," and he dismisses the film's conclusion as "hardly an original idea."⁸³ This verbiage indicates that the reviewer found *Defiant Ones*' social critique more substantial, preferring the sunnier, assimilationist resolution. While this is indicative of this individual's tastes, it is hardly indicative of the relative political potency of each film. Ruth Waterbury of the *Los Angeles Examiner*'s comparison offers the more honest assessment. She expresses a similar frustration suggesting that *Odds* would have been "a thunderbolt of a film" had it reached theaters before *The Defiant Ones*. She also disparages the film for its unlikeable characters: "In place of the two prisoners linked together for no explained reason in *The Defiant Ones*, you have here a no-luck gambler, Belafonte, and a white man, who wants to get money so that he can desert the woman who is keeping him. If this makes you think you wouldn't like either of these gents very much. I agree with you."⁸⁴ This critique, which speaks less to the political implications of each story, and more about the overall likeability, is emblematic of much of the critical reaction. That *Odds* was a much darker version of a dynamic featured in a recently released, Oscar-winning, commercially successful film, positioned *Odds* for critical and commercial disappointment. Indeed, *Odds Against Tomorrow* under-performed at the box office and Belafonte took an extended hiatus from motion picture production.

⁸³ "Crime and Prejudice" *The New Yorker*, October 24, 1959. *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection.

⁸⁴ Ruth Waterbury, "Odds' Is Startling Picture," *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 12, 1959, *Odds Against Tomorrow* Core Collection.

That *Odds* could not immediately prove that there existed a robust audience for motion pictures with complex Black characters was a major blow for Belafonte and the entire HarBel project. While they achieved their purpose of foregrounding Black subjectivity, the film's refusal of a feel-good unifying resolution denied audiences one of the central pleasures of a social problem film. Still, that *Odds* accomplished its goals in its depiction of Black characterization meant that it had wider ramifications beyond its initial release. Its legacy as a film produced in accordance with the vision of its Black producer was influential long after the film's initial opening.

Conclusion

Belafonte would not produce another theatrically released motion picture until *The Angel Levine* in 1970. After *Odds* failed to make the impression he'd hoped, he opted instead to focus on artistic endeavors that would more immediately serve his activism. His calculation was that his music career was more lucrative and offering financial support was a more pragmatic way that he could support the Civil Rights Movement. At that time, he saw the most urgent front of the Civil Rights Movement as the fight for voting rights and an end to government sanctioned discrimination, rather than the fight for greater penetration into the higher ranks of Hollywood. Still, despite the monetary shortcomings and subsequent decade-long hiatus between films, I contend that HarBel's late-1950s run was a symbolic triumph. Even though the company didn't have much financial success in this era, they accomplished something that no other company in my project achieved: genuine representational subversion. While *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* was an artistic compromise akin to the many concessions that so many of these producers ran up against when attempting to fight studio and Production Code regulation, *Odds Against*

Tomorrow represents a true upending of representational convention. That Belafonte refused to compromise and make a more anodyne or sentimental message film is indicative of the defiance and political clarity that distinguishes HarBel from other socially conscious production companies. Yes, HarBel existed as a way for Belafonte to advance his own public persona, but it would not do so at the expense of his larger mission.

Even within this brief timeframe, HarBel was able to make a significant mark on the media landscape. It was in part a continuation of the work that Garfield and his company started in the mid-1940s, but it also represents a dramatic leap forward in terms of prioritizing Black talent. My analysis described how HarBel and its collaborators utilized the familiar rhetoric of socially conscious stars, with its further entrenchment of the “realist” aesthetic as a marketing tactic. The association between “real-world” locations and grittiness with intelligence and import was activated throughout the paratexts and publicity for both *The World* and *Odds*. Belafonte and his marketing team also indulge a familiar indictment of Hollywood and its inability to make the realistic content that “intelligent” adults desire. However, Belafonte’s aims extended beyond the aesthetic, or even some nebulous social good. He wanted to challenge the cowardice of major studios which blamed other “southern” entities for its continued propagation of racist stereotypes and refusal to hire people of color in any creative or managerial roles. While its initial releases did not sufficiently dispel the notion that American audiences are reticent to accept Black subjectivity as mainstream, HarBel did become a bellwether for future Black-owned production companies. Reportedly, Sammy Davis Jr. was so inspired by Belafonte’s initiative that he decided to form a production company of his own.⁸⁵ The result was Trace-Mark Productions, named after Davis Jr.’s children Tracey and Mark, which produced *A Man Called Adam* (Penn,

⁸⁵ “Claims Sammy Davis, Jr. Serious About Making His Own Western Film,” *The Chicago Defender*. May 16, 1959, 19. ProQuest.

1966). Trace-Mark hired HarBel producer Ike Jones, who was among the first Black producers of a major Hollywood motion picture and was married to *The World* actress, Inger Stevens. The film also employed many notable Black performers including Ossie Davis, Cicely Tyson and Carl Lee (son of Canada Lee). Not only does Trace-Mark demonstrate the enduring potential of power of socially conscious stardom, but it also demonstrates how HarBel's influence manifested beyond just this early two-year span.

Even more significant than Trace-Mark was Belafonte's influence on Sidney Poitier's production companies. Though Poitier came to producing later than Belafonte, Poitier was even more invested in using independent production as a protection from the exploitative practices of Hollywood. The potential of creative and financial autonomy was alluring for Poitier who was convinced that such ideals are necessary for both self-determination and broader social progress.⁸⁶ Belafonte performed in several of Poitier's projects including their co-production *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and *Uptown Saturday Night* (1974), both of which were also directed by Poitier.

None of this is to say that Belafonte receded from the limelight, or even abandoned his goal of making radical content. During this extended feature film hiatus, Belafonte pivoted to television production. Viewing the medium as a more immediate way to communicate ideas to a wide spectrum of the American public, Belafonte focused on television specials that would spotlight contributions from both contemporary and historical Black artists. In terms of visibility and critical acclaim, Belafonte's television work proved much more successful. The Belafonte

⁸⁶ Eithne Quinn delves into Sidney Poitier's motivations for founding several independent production companies in her book, *A Piece of the Action: Race and Labor in Post-Civil Rights Hollywood*. She credits Belafonte with igniting an interest in independent production among his New York City-based Black actor peers and suggests that it was Poitier and Ossie Davis who took up his mantle when HarBel went stagnant. *A Piece of the Action: Race and Labor in Post-Civil Rights Hollywood*. New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2019. 127-137. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/10.7312/quinn16436>

Enterprises team went from the disappointment of *Odds Against Tomorrow* to producing two popular and award-winning television specials: *Tonight with Belafonte* (1959) and *Belafonte, New York 19* (1960). Both specials were directed by Norman Jewison, who would become a major motion picture director whose achievements would soon include directing the Sidney Poitier vehicle *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), produced by Belafonte Enterprises executives Phil Stein and Charles “Chiz” Schultz. *Tonight with Belafonte* was designed with the express purpose of celebrating Black contributions to American culture, and *Belafonte, New York 19* was meant as a celebration of the “international” diversity of the Harlem #19 postal code.⁸⁷

Belafonte Enterprises continued making television specials well into the 1960s including *Strollin 20s* (1966) which was a celebration of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s written by Langston Hughes with appearances by Belafonte, Poitier, Duke Ellington, and Diahann Carroll. They followed this with *A Time for Laughter: A Look at Negro Humor in America* (1967), which once again featured Poitier, Carroll and included Black performance luminaries Dick Gregory, Moms Mabley and Richard Pryor.⁸⁸ Belafonte also guest hosted *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* in 1968, where he insisted on a guest list of Black stars and major political figures including Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy.

While Belafonte’s producorial efforts were both influential on other Black artists and brought a consciousness of the Civil Rights Movement to a broader audience, his activism was not limited to Hollywood. Indeed, it was only one part of a many tendrilled effort to enact major structural change in all aspects of American life. But given its importance in the story of actor-

⁸⁷ Full credits and scripts for the specials are available in the Norman Jewison Papers, U.S. Mss 122AN, Box 2, Folders 2 and 6, Archives Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison.

⁸⁸ For a more comprehensive overview of the specials and their critical reception see Smith, *Becoming Belafonte*, 203-231.

founded independent production, it is necessary to consider the overall impact of HarBel and what its successes and failures portend for socially conscious stardom. This is especially true for stars claiming that their company seeks to benefit members' racial and ethnic groups whose voices have historically been silenced from Hollywood or American public life. As Maryann Erigha observes in her book *The Hollywood Jim Crow*, much of the assumptions and conservatism that governed the postwar era still motivates the decisions of contemporary studio executives. Hollywood is still regularly criticized for lack of representation and unequal employment of non-white workers. Additionally, productions that do cast and hire Black crews are often ghettoized with separate marketing campaigns and a narrow range of genre options.⁸⁹ Because this racial hierarchy is so entrenched, it becomes especially important to discern the difference between individual achievement and actual material change. In other words, pointing to the visibility of Sidney Poitier or the independence of Harry Belafonte in the postwar era does not indicate a major structural upheaval, but usefully illuminates the operations of those power structures against which they worked.

Belafonte was sensitive to this distinction between his personal success and structural change for Black culture workers and was careful to parse the difference in interviews. In a 1961 interview in *Cosmopolitan*, Belafonte celebrates just being let in the door of the trendy eatery, Trader Vics, as indicative of a larger cultural shift towards racial equality. When the reporter asks whether this is true for all Black people or just Belafonte, Belafonte admits that things are certainly better for him but “...conditions are better everywhere...The social climate has changed. People might be thinking the same things, but they don't feel free to express them. This

⁸⁹ Maryann Erigha, *The Hollywood Jim Crow: The Racial Politics of the Movie Industry*, (New York: New York University Press, 2019) <https://ebookcentral.ProQuest.com/lib/wisc/detail.action?docID=5345739>.

keeps bigots from spreading their poison.”⁹⁰ Belafonte arguing that a symbolic victory reserved for only the very wealthiest individuals is indicative of an ideological shift among the American populace is perhaps a little naive or even self-serving. The same can be said for the triumphs of the select few Black performers who managed to obtain financial and creative freedom through incorporation. However, in Belafonte’s case, he never compromised his social, political, and aesthetic agenda in the service of financial gain. HarBel was both a means of advancing his own career and promoting a radical representational mission, even at the cost of box office profits. Independent filmmaking ultimately proved ineffective for eroding the white supremacist ideology which insisted that the “southern” market mandated upholding racist stereotypes. When this became clear, Belafonte pivoted to other creative and activist endeavors that he felt were more conducive to providing financial assistance for civil rights organizations and disseminating a celebration of Black people and culture. This steadfastness and refusal to accommodate marks HarBel as unique in the trend of socially conscious stars using their businesses to advance a social or political project.

⁹⁰ Lyn Tornabene, “Lunch Date with Harry Belafonte,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 1961, Harry Belafonte Core Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the beginning stages of this dissertation, it has become clear to me that my interest in socially conscious celebrity was born of a gnawing frustration with current manifestations of celebrity activism. Stardom grants disproportionate power to individuals regardless of their social priorities, expertise, or ethics. I was also weary of the disproportionate gains in prestige associated with independent production, as having the name of an actor on a company masthead can erase the labor and creative input of all other producers and bestow undue authorial credit to the star. Additionally, media statements from companies, like Reese Witherspoon's Hello Sunshine, which yoke moral virtue to what ultimately amounts to a patent business maneuver, inspired questions not only about my own reception to these claims, but about the origins of this phenomenon and how it has transformed over time. This then led to questions such as: what makes the combination of stardom and business such an effective marketing strategy, and what is the motivation for couching such a transparently capitalistic undertaking in social justice rhetoric?

My curiosity about this contemporary phenomenon and my overall interest in Hollywood historiography led to further investigation, which in turn led me to conclude that the promotion of a production company through political association began during the postwar studio era. The four case studies included in this dissertation represent a spectrum of political commitment, effectiveness, and influence, and tendrils of their impact stretch well beyond their origins. Contemporary iterations of the actor-turned-producer, in which the combination of monetary gain, artistry, and morality incentivizes packaging business ventures as socially important, are an extension of a similar mixture that began amalgamating shortly after World War II.

My findings indicate that the reasons and strategies for a midcentury star to found a production company and promote it as a social good endure to this day. There is no question that this phenomenon is in part a product of actor vanity. The perception of business acumen and creative agency grants an air of authority that might not otherwise be bestowed to someone whose wealth and social capital was accrued primarily by performing in front of a camera. However, after looking to the past, my skepticism about actor-founded production companies has softened. It is clear that they have at times led the way on pushing important industrial reforms and have produced a number of culturally significant works that otherwise would never have been made.

That said, it is also true that the midcentury performers analyzed in this project faced greater danger in their move into independent production, and ultimately few of these postwar companies proved financially successful. While contemporary socially conscious stardom has adopted much of the same progressive language, today's stars do not have to face the same hostility or obstacles when forming their companies. In comparing the trajectories of the foundational socially conscious production companies to contemporary iterations, there is a traceable evolution in terms of the level of risk involved for the forebears of this trend. While there will always be questions regarding the true motivations for each company and the inherent tension of attaching social benefit to a business enterprise, this dissertation reveals that proclaiming social justice as a motivating factor for going independent was a treacherous prospect during the postwar era. In the worst-case scenario, John Garfield's unvarnished allegiance to a progressive cause and his resolve to chart a genuinely divergent path from the established studio structure, resulted not only in the failure of his production company, but in the destruction of his career and his untimely death.

Part of tracing this history is realizing how, over time, actors figured out ways to mitigate the danger to their careers. When it was a genuine anomaly to see an actress attempting to produce stories specifically about women's lives, it was necessary to downplay the significance of this achievement, rather than making it a central part of the promotional copy. The historical analysis allows us to see the ways that actresses like Ida Lupino were simultaneously empowered by and indebted to the hierarchies that permitted the formation of independent production companies. While risk management involved a slightly different rhetorical tactic for men, they were still forced to find ways to ameliorate any upset that their political agenda may have caused. In some cases, it was the act of their owning and managing a business that served to reinforce the existing Hollywood power structures. Kirk Douglas was able to emphasize his masculinity and ward against accusations of communist ties by promoting his business acumen alongside his pacifist agenda. Conversely, Harry Belafonte represents the refusal to make accommodations to assuage concerns about his production goals. Belafonte's stardom was already more precarious than the others, but he also had more clearly delineated goals for his company. When Hollywood proved inhospitable to those goals, Belafonte put his production company and his film career on hold, refusing to indulge the conservative ideologies which conscripted Black performers to a very narrow selection of parts. Ultimately, his work and sacrifice helped pave the way for future opportunities for greater screen representation and pathways for performers who were interested in making substantial industry reforms.

Chapter One begins with the pre-War era and the unlikely rise of a Jewish street kid from New York to the upper echelons of Hollywood stardom. John Garfield's ascendance as a stage actor amid the Great Depression and the brewing socialist movements of the New York theater scene informed his politics and aesthetic convictions, all of which he brought with him when he

made the transition to screen acting on the West Coast. The chapter explored the preludes to Garfield's incorporation, including his attempts to transplant a Group Theater experience in Los Angeles with The Actor's Company, his open revolt against Hollywood production methods, his support of the war efforts through charitable institutions such as the Hollywood Canteen, his public dismissals of wealth and stature, and his activism around labor rights and more diverse and thoughtful representations of Black characters in motion pictures. This chapter's thesis contends that both the public's and the government's relationship with celebrity was forever changed by the melding of stardom and politics during WWII. Thereafter there was an awareness of the outsized influence of Hollywood as a means of circulating information and ideology, and it normalized actors taking public stands on issues unrelated to the movie industry.

All this context and ideology manifests in Garfield's move to independent production. When Garfield founded Roberts Productions in 1946, he initiated a trend that continues into the present day; a trend which merges social movements, aesthetic philosophy, stardom, and business interest. Garfield used the formation of a company to bring together like-minded individuals who shared in his belief that *verité*-style filmmaking and narratives were artistically superior to films trafficking in Hollywood fantasy. Roberts Productions teamed with Enterprise Studios, who sold themselves on a non-hierarchical production practice where the contributions of everyone on set are valued and justly compensated. Together, Roberts and Enterprise made two films, *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*, both of which hew closely to the social-realist values that Garfield prized. Roberts Productions then made *He Ran All the Way*, after which almost everyone involved with the company was blacklisted and unable to find work. Despite the tragic arc of the company, the legacy of Roberts can be found in the way that subsequent actors-

turned-producers promote their films as exceptional as compared to mainstream cinema, thereby inculcating a taste culture that would last well beyond the tenure of the company.

The chapter also analyzes the marketing campaign for *Body & Soul*, exploring the schism between the socially conscious aims of Garfield and the pragmatic requirements of the producers. Internal documents reveal a disjunction between the publicity campaign of United Artists (the film's distributor) and Roberts/Enterprises fealty to realism and honesty. Instead of selling the film on its artistic social relevance, UA highlighted the most tawdry and scandalous elements of the narrative and downplayed the presence of the film's Black co-lead. This gulf between the ambitious film text and the paratextual content is a recurring consideration in analyzing this independent production trend. The hyperbole and falsities involved in selling the realist films is a significant way that actor-producers had to compromise their social agenda in the name of financial solvency.

Chapter Two delves into one of the direct offshoots of Garfield's company, The Filmmakers. Garfield's friend and colleague, Ida Lupino, followed Garfield's example and went independent, founding two of her own production companies in the postwar era. Both companies, Emerald Productions and The Filmmakers, adhered to the same social-realist principles that animated Roberts Productions, which further perpetuated the notion that the low-budget, "adult" oriented, non-Hollywood picture was the most socially significant form of cinematic art. However, unlike Garfield, Lupino credits Italian neorealism as her primary aesthetic and narrative influence. Her attempts to import the production methods of filmmakers like Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica to America led her to not only produce and star in her own films, but to write and direct them as well.

Her insistence on, not just facilitating, but crafting these social-realist films herself meant that she faced even more barriers to entry than a typical independent outfit. The issues were threefold. The first was that while she was something of a known entity under her contract with Warner Bros., she did not have the star power of Garfield and had no intention of selling herself as the primary attraction of her films. The second was that she intended to make thematically daring narratives that spoke directly to the struggles of everyday women, including films about becoming pregnant out of wedlock and sexual violence. This content ran afoul of PCA rules regarding depictions of sexuality and codes of morality. Thirdly, as a woman attempting to take over a position typically held by a man, Lupino was trespassing on the established Hollywood hierarchy, which presumed that all significant creative or financial decisions were the exclusive purview of white men.

The chapter examines how Lupino overcame these challenges in part by harnessing her femininity and using it to placate male anxieties. It also compares Lupino's rhetoric around the formation of a production company to some of her actress peers. Lupino's statements echoed those of stars like Rita Hayworth and Jane Russell, who all spoke of independence as a way to control their creative output, but not as a true path to liberation. The chapter argues that Lupino cannily used both her star power and her ultra-feminine persona to ameliorate any misgivings or concerns that her male subordinates had about taking direction from her, and to charm her way through the red tape of the Production Code. Ultimately, the chapter concludes that in order to embrace the progressive aesthetic of neorealism, Lupino had to align herself with the entrenched conservatism of powerful industry players, and she did that by doubling-down on regressive gender binaries which mandated female servility.

Chapter three advances the timeline to the mid-1950s when Kirk Douglas founded Bryna Productions. Like Garfield, Douglas grew up a poor Jewish kid in New York State who found unlikely success as a Hollywood tough guy turned leading man in the postwar era. Also, like Garfield, Douglas was outspoken about politics and regularly asserted his allegiance to the Democratic Party. However, unlike Garfield, much of Douglas's social circle was made up of individuals on the opposing ideological divide. He would regularly joke about being the liberal friend of film execs and fellow actors like John Wayne — who was an avowed Republican and a proponent of the Hollywood blacklist. Douglas's ideological vacillation is reflected in the films he made as a producer and the rhetoric he espoused when discussing the overall mission of his company. Much of what he said emphasized his socially conscious persona and his concern for global well-being in the age of nuclear proliferation. He was outspoken about his desire for world peace, and he felt that the outsized influence of Hollywood stars should be used by the U.S. State Department to help ease tensions abroad. He saw himself as an ambassador for Hollywood and used his company to grow his stature on a global stage.

The chapter explores the marketing techniques for Bryna productions such as *The Indian Fighter*, *Paths of Glory*, the abandoned Soviet collaboration *Michael Strogoff*, *The Vikings*, and *Spartacus* and argues that these projects served to advance Douglas's persona as a "rugged" peace broker. He was someone who openly embraced disarmament and collaboration with enemy nations, while still cultivating an air of masculine authority. The chapter's finding is that Douglas' expression of socially conscious stardom constitutes the discursive inverse of Lupino's. Instead of having to figure out how to navigate his gender difference, Douglas had to constantly reassert his masculinity in order to offset the perception of weakness or femininity in his humanitarian outreach. He did this by playing up his infamous hot-temper and reputation for

being difficult on set, as well as by emphasizing his prowess as a successful businessman through boasting about the financial success of Bryna.

The final chapter delves into the early screen career of Harry Belafonte and his subsequent challenge to industry status-quo through the formation of his production company, HarBel. As one of two Black leading men of the 1950s, Belafonte's prominence within Hollywood was both anomalous and deeply precarious. Instead of taking roles assigned to him by studio execs, Belafonte formed HarBel for the express purpose of contesting onscreen stereotypes, and for charting a new path to stardom that did not rely on kowtowing to white taste cultures or conventions. In this way, his lineage with Garfield is particularly clear in that they both pushed for more nuanced racial representations in Hollywood cinema. Belafonte also hired Roberts Productions' Vice-President Abraham Polonsky to write the screenplay for one of his films, *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959), which further cements the ideological linkage. He also was an avowed believer in the power of the realist aesthetic to push back against the simplistic and offensive representations of Black people in cinema.

HarBel's connections with companies like Roberts Productions is self-evident in the marketing approach and creative team behind the productions. However, the chapter's thesis is that HarBel constitutes a significant step forward in terms of the political potential of an independent production company. It argues that Belafonte's steadfast allegiance to the Civil Rights Movement and his prioritizing systemic change within the industry above his own financial gain differentiates him from other actor-producers that preceded him. His determination to achieve concrete, pragmatic goals within Hollywood invites an analysis of the distinction between activism and the more performative strains of socially conscious celebrity. It also solicits questions about the nature of production companies as first and foremost business

ventures and whether it is ever possible to reconcile the financial and personal advantages for the individual who owns the company with the larger aims of a social movement that seeks to make holistic societal changes that would benefit an otherwise marginalized group of people. The chapter concludes that Belafonte's unwavering spokespersonship and financial support for the Civil Rights Movement, coupled with his willingness to pause his film producing career instead of bending his convictions to appease the studio executives, provides an example of how such a company can make a material difference in the discourses and activism surrounding race and representation in Hollywood.

Looking Forward: New Hollywood and New Directions

As the liminal independent movement gave way to what has become known as New Hollywood, actors who had established themselves within the studio model had to renegotiate their personas for this new cultural milieu. The popular narrative suggests that the restructuring of Hollywood, enhanced by the youthful talent that emerged in the early 1960s, begets the period of innovation and quality that emerged in the 1970s. However, this narrative overlooks the important contributions of some precarious creative figures whose careers spanned both eras. A future research project could investigate how actors were able to use this industry tumult as a tool for personal and financial growth, while also situating their advancement as a social good.

In 1969, Sidney Poitier, Barbra Streisand, and Paul Newman established First Artists, a production company fashioned in the celebrity-founded mode of United Artists.¹ The company issued statements echoing UA's rhetoric from the 1920s, claiming that independent production was the only means by which film artists could truly harness their creative talent to make work

¹ Labuza, *Filmmakers*, 62-63.

free of the greedy, oppressive hand of the studio executive. Due in part to their ability to found First Artists, Poitier not only starred in, but directed his own pictures including, *Uptown Saturday Night* (1974), and Streisand notoriously made the 1976 iteration of *A Star is Born* in her own image. This group is of interest, not only because the company's founders are three of the major stars of the era, but because all of them have an outsized political footprint as a result of their vocal and financial support of an array of social causes. Additionally, the inclusion of Poitier would provide a perfect segue from the previous chapter on civil rights which allows for a more thorough chronology of the Civil Rights Movement's role in later decades. Barbra Streisand also has a documented history of supporting civil rights movements as well as feminist and marriage equality movements.² Plus, her status as one of the few women directors to work within the studio system connects her back to Ida Lupino.

Newman's participation has a similar connection to my previous chapters. His commitment to liberal causes is well-known, and like Garfield he was deeply invested in the New York theater community. However, Paul Newman's socially conscious stardom extended beyond even the scope of independent film production. Not only did he form a production company, he also ventured into household sundries, forming Newman's Own in 1982. Newman's Own has since become a recognized brand, specializing in salad dressings and other packaged goods, whose profits are reportedly all donated to children's charity organizations.³ While Newman's ancillary production was meant as an altruistic endeavor, future celebrity-founded companies would use the same socially benevolent rhetoric to sell their own pantry

² Streisand also connects back to the previous chapter as she appeared with Harry Belafonte at a benefit for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1968. "Hollywood Flashback: Barbra Streisand Sang for Civil Rights in 1968," *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 2, 2016. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/music-news/hollywood-flashback-barbra-streisand-sang-898675/>

³ "The Mission," Newman's Own, accessed October 1st, 2024. <https://newmansown.com/mission/>

products. Echoes of Newman's philanthropic undertaking reverberate in the marketing for brands like The Honest Company. Founded by actress Jessica Alba, The Honest Company claims to make "natural" household goods free from synthetic chemicals. This socially conscious brand is now a billion-dollar company with products extending from diapers to makeup, but it has come under some suspicion after tests revealed that the company did use synthetic materials in their laundry detergent.⁴

Also promoting a socially conscious lifestyle is Gwyneth Paltrow, whose Goop, a newsletter turned ubiquitous healthcare brand, is so successful that her persona as a wellness maven has all but supplanted her acting career. Like The Honest Company, Goop has faced criticism about the authenticity of some of its marketing claims and even settled a lawsuit after the health benefits of their "vaginal egg" were found to be not only unsubstantiated, but potentially harmful.⁵ Examples like these are avenues for future research into dubious enterprises that cloak themselves in ethical responsibility through proximity to a celebrity who is perceived to be socially conscious.

Contemporary Hollywood and Contemporary Research

While there are substantive differences in the nature of the filmmaking and marketing approach owing to major transformation in the mechanics of content dissemination, the underlying principle of using social consciousness to sell a media product is unchanged since the postwar era. The increased conglomeration of the business since the New Hollywood era with

⁴ Erik Sherman, "Jessica Alba's Honest Company Brand Is Burned," *Inc.*, March 11, 2016. <https://www.inc.com/erik-sherman/jessica-alba-honest-company-brand.html>

⁵ Sara Gaynes Levy, "Everything You Need to Know About Goop's Jade-Egg Lawsuit," *Vogue*, September 5, 2018. <https://www.vogue.com/article/goop-jade-yoni-egg-lawsuit-gwyneth-paltrow-vaginal-pelvic-floor-health>

the rise of television and social media have undoubtedly reshaped the media industry, but actors are still using their businesses as extensions of their personas and branding themselves as not only talented performers but artists with their own creative ideas, as well as good, thoughtful people who share in the concerns of their fans and followers. While it is difficult to shake the cognitive dissonance of selling an individual's business opportunity as righteous, the frustration is somewhat mitigated by taking a more industry focused view of the socially conscious stardom phenomenon. In contextualizing this trend within a larger scope of Hollywood history, it becomes clear that while most socially conscious stars' use of their platforms is largely a means of elevating their own stature, there are times where it is widely beneficial to have powerful public figures promoting change.

There are more contemporary cases of actors using their fame to diversify Hollywood and showcase narratives that would otherwise be considered too financially tenuous to be greenlit. For instance, actors can also use their production companies to prioritize diverse hiring practices, as was the case with Denzel Washington's Mundy Lane Entertainment. In a 1997 *Variety* article, Washington is quoted as saying that the main priority of his production company, above even finding roles for himself, was creating jobs for Black actors. He continued, "I'm happy to know that on a film like *Devil in a Blue Dress* we put 100 or so many black people to work, and it was the same with *The Preacher's Wife*... We do it because they're capable and because nobody else is necessarily looking out for them."⁶ Debra Martin Chase was one of the executives for both Mundy Lane and BrownHouse Productions (founded by Washington's *Preacher's Wife* co-star Whitney Houston). Chase cited similar guiding tenets for both companies, describing the casting process for the 1997 Disney Channel adaptation of *Cinderella*,

⁶ Beth Laski, "Mundy Lane Sees a Full Load Ahead," *Variety*, March 5, 1997.
<https://variety.com/1997/scene/vpage/mundy-lane-sees-a-full-load-ahead-1117343128/>

which featured a Black R&B singer/sitcom star as Cinderella (Brandy) and a Filipino actor as the Prince (Paolo Montalban), saying:

It was so groundbreaking. It's so representative of everything that I came to Hollywood to do. I know what that would have meant for me as a girl to see a Black Cinderella and so that was a huge driver. The colorblind casting was unheard of and everybody gave us such a hard time but we were determined. We just linked arms and said 'We're gonna do this' and we just fought the system and got it done and it was this huge hit.⁷

Chase and Washington, like the Garfields and Belafontes before them, are setting themselves against a typical Hollywood mode in order to sell their products as artistically and politically significant.

The examples of *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Franklin, 1995), *The Preacher's Wife* (Marshall, 1996), and *Cinderella* (Iscoe) are particularly fitting in part because all are reboots of films from the postwar era. *Devil in a Blue Dress* was a revisionist film noir which cast Washington as a hard-boiled detective in the mode of a postwar Bogart character; *The Preacher's Wife* is a remake of a 1947 romantic Christmas film, *The Bishop's Wife* (Koster) with Washington and Houston taking over as leads for Cary Grant and Loretta Young; and *Cinderella* was a live-action retelling of Roger's and Hammerstein's 1957 televised musical. These literal connections with Hollywood's past reinforce the continuity between filmmaking practices in the pre-and-post studio eras. However, the less obvious metaphorical connection, wherein Black actors use their high status to self-consciously diversify historical documents, is very much in keeping with the postwar trend of socially conscious stars forming production companies for an aesthetic, representational, political, and/or social cause.

Denzel Washington has continued in his quest to see greater representation both on screen and behind-the-scenes in his latest producorial endeavor. In 2015, August Wilson's estate

⁷ Cortney Wills, "Black Women in Hollywood: Debra Martin Chase," *The Grio*, January 22, 2020. <https://thegrio.com/2020/01/22/black-women-in-hollywood-debra-martin-chase/>

granted Washington permission to adapt the ten plays in the “Century Cycle” for the big screen. Thus far, Washington has directed and produced an adaptation of *Fences* (2016) and produced adaptations of *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* (2020) and *The Piano Lesson* (2024) for Netflix. All three adaptations were written and directed by Black creatives and feature a primarily Black cast. When asked about the significance of August Wilson’s work and the recent “trend” of featuring greater diversity in Hollywood films, Washington’s response echoes the one he issued in 1997. He said, “... there are hundreds of actors — African-American and white actors — in his plays that now will have an opportunity to not just work but to interpret a genius' work — one of the five greatest playwrights in American history's work. So I honor that.”⁸

Another significant instance of a star using their platform for larger industrial change is Geena Davis whose Geena Davis Institute exists to “to reinvent, transform and inspire how global content creators and media tell stories through authentic portrayals of the population in entertainment.”⁹ Not only does the Institute monitor representational trends within Hollywood and global media producers through quantitative research studies, it also collaborates with industry insiders to help promote gender, LGBT+, racial, and ethnic parity in front of and behind the camera. This overall mission statement recalls the aims of other socially conscious companies, but their elevation of “authenticity” as an objective is in direct conversation with statements made by companies like Roberts or HarBel in the postwar era.

While it is true that the immense power of the star can lead to substantive changes in the industry, there is still reason to be skeptical. In the postwar era as in today, the socially conscious

⁸ Denzel Washington, “Denzel Washington And Viola Davis On Adapting 'Fences' And Honoring August Wilson,” *All Things Considered*, NPR, 15 minutes, December 25, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/2016/12/25/506617435/denzel-washington-and-viola-davis-on-adapting-fences-and-honoring-august-wilson>.

⁹ “Who We Are,” Geena Davis Institute, accessed October 22, 2024. <https://geenadavisinstitute.org/about-us/>.

star can wield their power to affect large-scale industry and societal change, or simply to better themselves. Even the most positive outcome of a celebrity founded production company is still mired in questions about who ultimately benefits from such an endeavor, and whether the majority of the financial and cultural gains are reserved for a very small handful of Hollywood elites. The narratives and ideologies that these companies promote as politically constructive are not always received as such, and some can even have immense deleterious effects as when celebrities espouse unsubstantiated claims or misinformation. That the choice is at each star's individual discretion is part of what makes the socially conscious stardom phenomenon not just a curiosity, but a tectonic shift that requires a critical eye and historical perspective.

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