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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Now Showing: An American Century at the Movies *came to fruition thanks to the collaboration and contributions of many individuals. The Suzanne H. Arnold Art Gallery would like to extend sincere thanks to Stefan Kruszewski, M.D., his partner David Tobiasz, and John Tobiasz-Kruszewski for the generous loan of the vintage film posters in this exhibition and their assistance in cataloging the collection. I would like to congratulate art & art history major Rebecca Worhach '16 who so capably wrote the main essay for the catalog. Dr. Robert Machado, LVC assistant professor of English, co-curated this exhibition with me and provided a thought-provoking forward essay and skillful editorial direction. We thank Michael Pittari, LVC professor of art & visual culture, for his commentary on the visual nature of film and how he employs film in his art classes. Dan Massad, LVC artist-in-residence, served as editor and consultant and we thank him for his important role. Emily Acri, LVC graphic designer, designed this catalog and heartfelt thanks are*

*extended for her expert assistance. Crista Detweiler, assistant director of the Suzanne H. Arnold Art Gallery, provided unflagging assistance in all aspects of the preparation of this exhibition and her great work is deeply appreciated. We add special appreciation to Mario and Argelia Cueva, principals at Lumiere Poster Restoration, Moreno Valley, Calif., for their unwavering dedication and assistance to poster rehabilitation, including several items featured in this exhibition. Dr. Stefan Kruszewski would like to pay homage to Bruce Hershenson, West Plains, Mo., owner of emovieposter.com and central to movie poster collecting worldwide, for his integrity and professionalism in helping to build this collection. Now Showing: An American Century at the Movies would not be possible without the sponsorship of Friends of the Gallery, and the many members who have generously supported this exhibition. Special thanks are given to Suzanne H'96 and Ron Schrotberger for their continued support and involvement in the Gallery.*

Barbara R. McNulty, Ph.D.  
Director, Suzanne H. Arnold Art Gallery

On the cover: *Grand Hotel* (American Academy Award Best Picture), Belgium, 1932, MGM, one sheet

## FOREWORD: On Screen and Off Screen: Thoughts on Cinematic Imagery (in Two Parts)

1. Within a few years of its inception in the late-1890s, cinema was subject to ongoing debate about its role as an art form. As film historian David Bordwell explains, although cinema was an established mass medium by the period immediately following the first World War, its future development was argued by theorists and practitioners alike—some of whom perceived film as “a synthesis of the older arts” (painting, music, poetry, etc.), while others believed it an entirely new art form that “owed nothing to any other medium.”<sup>1</sup>

For all practical purposes, the century of narrative film since then has adhered to the idea that “filmmakers sought to tell stories” with “increasing skill in explicating the dramatic action and wringing more intense emotion from the audience.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, narrative films use the visual elements of the medium (cinematography) to tell engaging stories (plot). Part of what makes film so interesting, of course, is its fluidity as a medium—not only in how filmmakers interpret the relationship of cinematography and plot, but in the various ways that films can be approached as objects of study.

In courses I teach as a professor of art & visual culture at Lebanon Valley College, cinematic imagery is given primary importance. I am especially interested in the ways that light, color, and movement—key elements of non-narrative experimental film—are used within narrative film for aesthetic and symbolic purposes. For me, the power of film begins and ends with imagery, more so than dialogue or music or even plot. As I often tell students, this obsession with the visual stems from a handful of classic films that I watched as a child: not cartoons or

action films (which I watched plenty of), but serious dramas directed by John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock, among others. The distinctive imagery of these films had a profound impact on my emerging appreciation of cinematic art, an interest that has steadily grown in the decades since, and has played an increasingly important role in my work as an artist and teacher. As such, one of my goals in the classroom is to convey an understanding of film as an inherently visual medium that is intrinsically linked to the history of art and should be appreciated within that context—not at the expense of other disciplinary contexts (literary, musical, theatrical), but as a complementary mode of interpretation.

2. In viewing the collection of film posters comprising the exhibition, *Now Showing: An American Century at the Movies*, it occurs to me that the power of cinematic imagery exists not only within the on-screen space of the film, but in the various representations that extend the imagery of the cinema into the off-screen space beyond the film. Though I was too young to see *Cabaret* (1972) during its original theatrical release, I remember being mesmerized by excerpts of the film on television—fleeting images of bodies in motion and glowing light on skin. In a similar manner, the bizarre imagery and ultra-modern design of the poster for *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) housed itself in my adolescent mind well before I watched the actual film. For viewers who came of age in homes with multiple televisions and went to the movies on a regular basis, cinematic representations of all kinds pervaded our consciousness and contributed to our understanding of film as a mass medium and an art form.

Partial experiences such as these form the subject of Victor Burgin's 2004 book, *The Remembered Film*, in which he describes the virtual space beyond the frame as a "cinematic heterotopia" comprised of "places with no physical substance other than that of representations: material signifiers, psychological reality, fantasy."<sup>3</sup> For Burgin, the "experience of a film" can be "localized in space and time, in the finite unreeling of a narrative in a particular theatre on a particular day"<sup>4</sup> while also being "dislocated and dismantled"<sup>5</sup> as "image scraps scattered in space and time."<sup>6</sup> In other words, watching a film—as a singular event—is a different kind of viewing experience than encountering fragmentary bits of a film through clips, posters, production stills, and even plot summaries or reviews. While this distinction may seem obvious, the familiarity we have with films—whether an old favorite or an annoying television rerun—is never confined to the solitary moment of viewing, just as our experience of painting or sculpture is not confined to the isolated display of the museum. In this way, film posters are far more than the memorabilia of the movie industry: as two-dimensional works of art, posters encapsulate the look and feel of films and are often stunning graphic icons. Posters also signify the extension of cinematic imagery into the psychological space of individual memory, contributing to our aesthetic desires and sensibilities as viewers.

Students today experience film in even more fragmented ways than previous generations via online media and the corporate 'franchising' of movie characters and stories. Rather than attempting to counteract this paradigm, understanding and exploring the cinematic heterotopia of film representation allows us to approach this most powerful medium in even more interesting ways.

Michael Pittari  
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*Michael Pittari is a professor of art & visual culture at Lebanon Valley College, where he teaches courses in art practice, color history and theory, and film studies. He is the recipient of two Edward H. and Jeanne Donlevy Arnold Experiential Education Grants (in 2012 and 2015), the second of which resulted in the publication of Color + Culture, an interdisciplinary journal of student essays for which he contributed an essay titled "Seeing Through the Visible: Methodologies of Color + Culture." As an artist and theorist, Pittari is interested in the deconstruction of visual imagery within sociopolitical and philosophical contexts. These investigations include a series of digital prints (from 2009–10) based on American wilderness paintings of the 1800s, and, most recently, a series of paintings and video projections exploring the body in relation to architectural space and voyeurism. Prior to his appointment at LVC, Pittari served for four years as editor-in-chief of the Atlanta-based journal, Art Papers.*

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## Endnotes

1 David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1997), 25.

2 Ibid., 29.

3 Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 10.

4 Ibid., 8.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 9.

# FOREWORD: Poster Movies: Censorship, Paratext, and Watching Who You Are as You Watch

Diagnosing the state of movie advertising in the wake of contemporary movie piracy and a highly competitive DVD market, Megan McArdle explains that “films no longer have much time to build an audience. They need to roar out of the gate, rake in piles of money for a few weeks, and then retire to finish out the modern movie life cycle of international releases, cable premieres, and DVD box sets” (and now, of course, additions to streaming services). As a result, “ads and trailers need to drive novelty-hungry teenagers, the movie industry’s ripest target audience, out to the theaters in droves.”<sup>1</sup> *Now Showing: An American Century at the Movies* provides us with an opportunity to reflect on this historical moment and our shifting relation to film across media platforms as we read a century of U.S. culture through the distillation of historical movie advertisement. It also offers us a creative space in which to notice our own habituated modes of perception—what we tend to pay attention to in a poster, what we ignore, and why—and to experiment with forms of inquiry and critical engagement that increase our awareness of the pleasures—and stakes—of looking.

## Standardization and Censorship

The history of film and film advertisement censorship in the U.S., as well as of industry consolidation and standardization, factor heavily into what audiences have come to know as movies and movie posters, and thus merit special attention within a reflection on cinema and U.S. culture. From 1915–1952, following the Supreme Court decisions *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Condition of Ohio* and *Joseph Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson*, films in the U.S. were subject to censorship based on varying city and state ordinances. During this period, film was considered com-

merce, not art, and was thus not protected under the First Amendment. In 1911, for example, Pennsylvania became the first state to pass a law establishing movie censorship, and created the Pennsylvania State Board of Censors. It did so, as Harris Ross explains, “apparently at the request of Pennsylvania film exhibitors anxious to assure the middle class of the propriety of the movies.” For almost 50 years, this board “vetted every film commercially shown in the commonwealth, ensuring that citizens saw only ‘moral and proper’ films and protecting them from those that were ‘sacrilegious, obscene, indecent, or immoral, or such as tend to corrupt morals.’”<sup>2</sup>

Responding in part to attacks on provocative movie advertising by groups such as the Legion of Decency, the Code of Advertising Ethics of 1930—an addendum to the Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC) of 1930, which consolidated and extended the censorship of film and film advertisement until the late 1960s—attempted to uphold “truth, honesty, and integrity” in advertising and the moral regulations established by the MPPC.<sup>3</sup> It is worthwhile here to recall some of the “General Principles” and functions espoused by the MPPC, which recognized film as “built for the masses” and bearing “moral obligations” intrinsic to “rebuilding the bodies and souls of human beings.”<sup>4</sup>

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.

3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

To achieve these principles, the MPPC articulated narrow provisions under the headings: Crimes Against the Law; Sex; Vulgarity; Obscenity; Profanity; Costume; Dances; Religion; Locations; National Feelings; Titles; Repellent Subjects; Special Regulations on Crime in Motion Pictures; Special Resolution on Costumes; and Special Regulations on Cruelty to Animals. “Good taste,” in keeping with the moral presumptions expressed by the MPPC, was “the guiding rule of motion picture advertising” according to the Code,<sup>5</sup> which was expressed across:

press books; still photographs; newspaper, magazine and trade paper advertising; publicity copy and art intended for use in press books or otherwise intended for general distribution in printed form or for theatre use; trailers; posters, lobby displays, and other outdoor displays; advertising accessories, including heralds and throw-a ways; novelties; copy for exploitation tieups; and all radio and television copy and spots.<sup>6</sup>

Advertising had to conform to the broader restrictions of the MPPC (against nudity, salacious poses, violence, vulgar language, the depiction of liquor in “American life” beyond “the necessities of characterizations and plot,” etc.). Posters and other material also had to respect the law, the police, religion, other countries, and the “faithful representation” of the “pictures themselves”<sup>7</sup> (a dictate likely meant to uphold “truth in advertising,” but which also may have had aesthetic ramifications in the prioritization of “realism” as well). Films that passed scru-

tiny would bear the Production Code Seal required for public exhibition. The Code also further restricted independent exhibitors by compelling them to use only industry-approved advertising materials.

By 1946, 1,160,000 photographs and more than half a million advertisements, posters, and other promotional material, including various displays, publicity stories, “exploitation items,” and movie trailers had been processed by the Advertising Code Administration. Of these materials, only 1% were rejected or required changes, and most rejected items were revised and later approved. The Motion Picture Association of America reported that “All companies gave uniformly good cooperation in making revisions necessary to meet the requirements of the Code. As a result there were no serious public protests during the year over any motion picture advertising or displays. The moral content of film advertising continues to meet the requirements of the Code.”<sup>8</sup>

By 1928, the National Screen Service (NSS), which monopolized the film advertisement industry until the mid-1940s and only recently was purchased by Technicolor (2000), had its own censor, which allowed it to edit or delete movie trailer materials so that, for example, a trailer could be shown in different regions. Commenting on this censorship within trailers, one author notes that “Western films . . . have to be watched carefully. Censors allow a chair or some weapon to be raised in a fight scene, but the actual striking may not be shown.” For war films, “only an instant of machine-guns may be seen. There can be sounds of firing, but the machine-gun must not be shown in action.”<sup>9</sup>

In an effort to improve control of materials, the NSS also developed a poster numbering system, which it stamped (typically, on the lower right-hand corner) on every movie poster that it distributed. For example, an NSS number of 65/23 would indicate that the movie was released in 1965, and was the 23rd movie title coded by the NSS in 1965. Because studios often issued more than one poster style to target different audiences, style notations, such as “Style A” or “Style X” also might be found on poster borders.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond enacting censorship based on laws and social norms, the NSS had “scouts” at nearly every Hollywood studio who would select what they considered to be the most “expressive scenes of the entire story” for use in movie trailers. In part because of this, movie advertisement during this era was vulnerable to uniform design.<sup>11</sup> As Horak explains, although some studios developed specific poster styles in the 1930s, most poster illustrators relied on forms of pictorial realism.<sup>12</sup>

In that any style ultimately might be understood as a weaving together of styles, or as an inflection of attributes selected from the range of options and voices in the world (style is always multiple, always heteroglossic), its broad distribution has the capacity to *naturalize* certain expressive constraints as well as the acceptability of homogeneity.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the apparent ubiquity of a cultural form not only can make that form appear “normal,” natural, or a given, but can reinforce conformity itself as dominant or unavoidable. Naturalized representations, in coordination with other cultural artifacts and systems, can make ideas found in films, such as the “manifest destiny” and ethnic stereotypes familiar to Westerns (addressed elsewhere in this volume), war “sani-

tized” of actual violence (as described above), notions of inherent social privilege, etc., less problematic, less traumatic, and thus culturally tolerable, or even, desirable. They also can confer dominance, power, and influence to the subjectivities (people), relations, institutions, “taste,” and values aligned with and reflected by this naturalization.

Essentializations of film by film advertisement based on the most “expressive scenes” of a story—what we might take for granted as *what a film is about*—also can re-assert “story,” and certain elements of story, as the essence of film and of moviegoing itself. This reductive account of moving pictures neglects the endless variety of possible modes of engagement available to the experience of cinema and its various forms of advertisement, which are not, in fact, easily extricable.

## The Border of Film/Advertisement

G rard Genette’s concept of “paratext” helps to clarify the mutually constitutive nature of film and film advertisement, and the process by which aesthetic standards and styles of movie advertisement can in fact direct one’s experience of film. In becoming “visible,” paratext can also awaken in spectators new sites for attention and investigation.

Derived from literary theory, paratext denotes elements of a published work that accompany the text, such as author’s name, title, preface, introduction, or illustrations. Paratextual elements surround and extend the text (and may in fact be part of it) so as to “*present* it . . . to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption . . . in the form of a book.”<sup>14</sup> This means that a book is a book because, in part,

of paratext that cues readers to recognize it, and engage with it, as such. Paratextual equivalents in film, which include opening and closing sequences that contain credits,<sup>15</sup> on-screen graphics that identify production companies, voiced or graphic introductions, etc., similarly frame and help to define “a movie,” which audience members can then interact with (comfortably) based on social conventions. Paratext includes content that appears inside of a book, film, or other medium, and content outside of the physical object (the “epitext”). The publisher’s epitext, especially germane to our focus here, includes posters, advertisements, press releases, and other promotional material.<sup>16</sup>

As Genette explains, “More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is rather, a threshold . . . a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction. . . .”<sup>17</sup> The poster, in coordination with other forms of movie advertisement—on this threshold and reflecting this transaction—can initiate spectatorship; it prepares us to watch, to pay attention, to enjoy, to remember. In many instances, a poster can also stand-in for a film that one may never see, and yet *as if* seen, become part of a life and social imaginary. This may be because as Lisa Kernan posits of trailers, movie posters also seem to embody a temporal zone of an “anticipatory” nature that combines a “heightened present tense with an ‘announcing gesture’ . . . that simultaneously speaks to audiences’ broader and deeper hopes (and fears) for the future.”<sup>18</sup> To have seen the poster, in some respects, one can feel one *knows* the film.

Instead of regarding movie posters as distinctly separate from the movies they advertise, one can recognize the extent to which the aesthetics

and representations of epitext can blur into, and in effect, *become one with* the films themselves by way of graphic and photographic distillations that convey essences and presumptions of appeal. Rather than “succumbing” passively to this epitext, which itself has been subject to the pressures of commercial imperatives and cultural normativities, we might through movie posters find inspiration to experience films differently—and perception itself differently—by further exploring our experience of looking. As we witness in posters familiar character types, poses, and roles; monsters, anxieties, desires; situations and relations to space/place, and self; colors and forms; and the conventions of narrative that movie posters can evince and call forth within us, we can use the static quality of prints as a reminder that films unfold as discrete frames. In this way, we can “watch” movie posters as, in effect, *frames of* moving pictures themselves—the movement, in this case, of the mind as it surveys and animates stills across gaps that flicker with narrative possibilities.

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## Endnotes

1 Megan McArdle, "Why Goldman Always Wins," *The Atlantic* (October 2009): 38.

2 Harris Ross, "The Pennsylvania State Board of Censors: The Great War, The Movies, And D. W. Griffith," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 75, no. 2 (2008): 227–228.

3 "The Code of Advertising Ethics," *The Motion Picture Almanac* (New York: Quigley, 1931): 319. The Production Code Administration, which administered the Advertising Code, was replaced by the Classification and Rating Administration in 1968. This system instituted the voluntary parental advisory system (film ratings system).

4 Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), "Particular Applications of the Code and the Reasons Therefore [Addenda to 1930 Code], in Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema; 1930–1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 347–349. The Code existed in a variety of versions, and was updated into the late-1960s.

5 "The Code of Advertising Ethics," 319.

6 The Motion Picture Association of America, "The Motion Picture Code of Self-Regulation," 1966.

7 "The Code of Advertising Ethics," 319.

8 Eric Johnston, *The Motion Picture on the Threshold of a Decisive Decade: Annual Report* (New York: Motion Picture Association of America, 1946): 27.

9 "Film Trailers: How the Screen Gives Advance Publicity to Coming Attractions," *The Literary Digest* (August 1, 1936): 20.

10 Re-releases of films are indicated by an "R" preceding the numbers. The NSS changed the NSS Numbering System in 1977, eliminating the slash. Edwin E. Poole and Susan T. Poole, *Collecting Movie Posters: An Illustrated Reference Guide to Movie Art—Posters, Press Kits, and Lobby Cards* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1997).

11 Keith J. Hamel, "From Advertisement to Entertainment: Early Hollywood Film Trailers," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 29, no. 3 (April 2012): 275.

12 Jan-Christopher Horak, *Saul Bass: Anatomy of Film Design* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 137.

13 "Naturalization" here denotes a process that renders beliefs "natural and self-evident," and that identifies these beliefs with "the common sense of a society" such that it becomes difficult to imagine how they might ever be different. As Eagleton explains, it is the process by which an ideology is able to offer itself as an "Of course!" or "That goes without saying." Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London; New York: Verso, 2007) 58–59.

14 Gérard Genette, *Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 1.

15 *Ibid.*, 407.

16 *Ibid.*, 347.

17 *Ibid.*, 1–2.

18 Lisa Kernan, *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (Austin: University of Austin Press, 2004), 24.

# NOW SHOWING: AN AMERICAN CENTURY AT THE MOVIES

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Accompanying the motion-picture film since its earliest appearances in public theaters during the 1900s, the film poster endures as a vital but often overlooked aspect of American culture.<sup>1</sup> *Now Showing* brings to light the ways in which American film posters express aspects of this culture, giving rise to new critical discussions surrounding American identity during the last 100 years.

Derived from the pre-existing “show-printing” tradition of circuses and other public entertainments, film posters strived to captivate and excite prospective audiences with dynamic imagery, bold color, and impressive size. The quintessential poster size—known as the one sheet—also evolved from those earlier traditions and directly inspired the size of the now-widespread contemporary poster.<sup>2</sup> As the film industry grew, other smaller and more intimate poster types, such as the half sheet, lobby card, window card, and insert, developed to further meet the advertising needs of both theaters and other local businesses.<sup>3</sup> While smaller versions of the one-sheet poster have been largely discontinued, other ancillary promotional merchandise—often sold or freely distributed at film festivals or film premieres—still command popularity among fans.<sup>4</sup>

Although primarily developed for commercial reasons, film posters often surprisingly exceeded their role as mere advertisements. After early films ran their course in theaters, film studios and poster-printing sources often destroyed the used and significantly-worn posters.<sup>5</sup> However, as film’s prominence in public culture expanded, the unique pull of the film poster could no longer be ignored. In the interest of retaining the “essence” of a film, collectors and casual film-goers alike looked to the poster and other film memorabilia as tangible apparatuses of film-going

to help preserve the memory of a film through its artifacts. Because of the poster’s often indelible link with the films they advertise, these posters cement themselves as iconic images within the continuing cultural legacy that is American film.<sup>6</sup>

As a mass medium of visual communication and cultural diffusion, film possesses the ability to both embody and shape societal ideas, attitudes, and practices.<sup>7</sup> American film, accordingly, provides a lens through which one can glimpse “America”—its values, fears, distortions, omissions, and truths—as constructed in the motion picture. Because of this, American film offers a compelling depiction of a shared and continuously developing American consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

Though there exist many approaches to examining the breadth and intricacies of American film and its artifacts, this exhibition employs the methodology of “genre.” Film historians use genre, a French word derived primarily from literary studies meaning “type” or “kind,”<sup>9</sup> to reference the way in which films “through repetition and variation” depict “familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations.”<sup>10</sup> Arising in film largely due to the exploitation of commercially-successful narrative and stylistic formulas by filmmakers, genre provides a means through which filmmakers can sell a pre-established and desired film “experience” to a prospective viewer.<sup>11</sup> By observing the manner in which genres, subgenres, and other thematic structures originate and develop in response to cultural views and desires, this exhibition seeks to delineate changing and enduring schemas of American film by way of the emblematic film poster.

## COMEDY



**FIGURE 1** *Gall and Golf*, 1917, Vitagraph Studios, one sheet

Comedic film emerged together with film's rise as an entertainment medium in the 1890s.<sup>12</sup> The first comedies were predominately short, and due to the limits of technology, silent. "Silent," here, is somewhat of a misnomer, however, in that music, sound effects, and even live lectures accompanied films<sup>13</sup> to emphasize their highly visual slapstick comedy style. Popularized by comedians such as Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977), Harold Lloyd (1893–1971), and Buster Keaton (1895–1966), slapstick relies on complicated physical gags to create humor.<sup>14</sup> Larry Semon (1889–1928)—described as "outrageous" and "a master of pie fights and thrill chase comedies"—embodies this slapstick style in *Gall and Golf* (1917) (Fig. 1).<sup>15</sup> As its film poster aptly depicts, *Gall and Golf* undermines class expectations through its amusing use of hyperbole, which turns dignified country club living into a scene in which golf clubs and golf balls fly everywhere.<sup>16</sup>

The Great Depression of the 1930s, "the greatest peacetime crisis in American history," actually increased spending on amusements such as comedies in spite of nationwide economic hardship.<sup>17</sup> This increase challenges notions of film as mere escapism, and suggests perhaps its cultural "necessity" in helping to negotiate emotional turmoil. During this period, Americans turned to celebrities such as child star Shirley Temple (1928–2014), the most popular box office star in the United States and worldwide from 1935 to 1938, to provide them with joy and encouragement through her "inexhaustible fund of optimism."<sup>18</sup> In *Bright Eyes* (1934), a "sentimental melodrama" about finding a family, Temple's orphaned character wins the hearts of her contending custodians with her "wondrous innocence, sweetness, and love."<sup>19</sup> In addition to her acting, Temple performs the song "On the Good Ship Lollipop" in the film's most famous scene.<sup>20</sup>

Another film of the Great Depression, Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), stands out as "one of the pioneering 'screwball' romantic comedies of this time."<sup>21</sup> "Screwball" denotes a subgenre of romantic comedies wherein an antagonistic relationship between main characters develops through "barbed and witty dialogue" and becomes romantic<sup>22</sup>—as is the case in *It Happened One Night*. The basic formula of the screwball comedy still prevails today in many contemporary romantic comedies.

Despite its often dark subject matter, the definitive all-star film *Grand Hotel* (1932) (Cover) merits consideration as comedy.<sup>23</sup> Detailing the overlapping lives of guests staying at Berlin's Grand Hotel while struggling with finances, health, or social standing, the film employs a "captivating pattern of unexpected comedy"<sup>24</sup> in order to make "its ironic point about fate and fortune."<sup>25</sup> Comedic irony takes form in the subversion of audience expectations, and in *Grand Hotel* these subversions primarily occur in social class reversals. For example, the seemingly well-off character Baron Felix von Gaigern is, in reality, a financially broke jewel thief, and terminally-ill factory clerk Otto Kringlein, who came to the hotel to experience luxury before his death, becomes revitalized after sudden success when gambling.<sup>26</sup>

As film historian Geoff King asserts in *Film Comedy*, comedy "as a social product [...] is involved—implicitly or explicitly—in the politics of representation: the way one group or another is identified, distinguished, and portrayed."<sup>27</sup> While *Grand Hotel*, and even *Gall and Golf* to an extent, creates comedy through the subversion of stereotypical representations of class, other films such as *Some Like it Hot* (1959) (Fig. 2) create comedy by complicating gender. The film follows the story of characters Joe and Gerry who "pose as members of an all-girl band in order to escape a gang of Chicago mobsters."<sup>28</sup> With rapid transformations between the characters' gendered personas and highlighted in-



**FIGURE 2** *Some Like it Hot* (Academy Award Best Picture), 1959, United Artists, insert

congruity of gendered voice, behavior, and appearance, *Some Like it Hot* elicits humor largely by exaggerating while undermining what it means to be gendered. The iconic Marilyn Monroe (1926–1962) stars in the film as a “blonde bombshell” archetype: a captivatingly sexual blonde of “questionable” intelligence.<sup>29</sup> As the film’s insert makes clear, however, Monroe’s confident and exposed sexuality—born aloft by timid males in drag who seem anything but powerful—brings into question simplifications about identity that render brains and allure mutually exclusive.

## GENDER

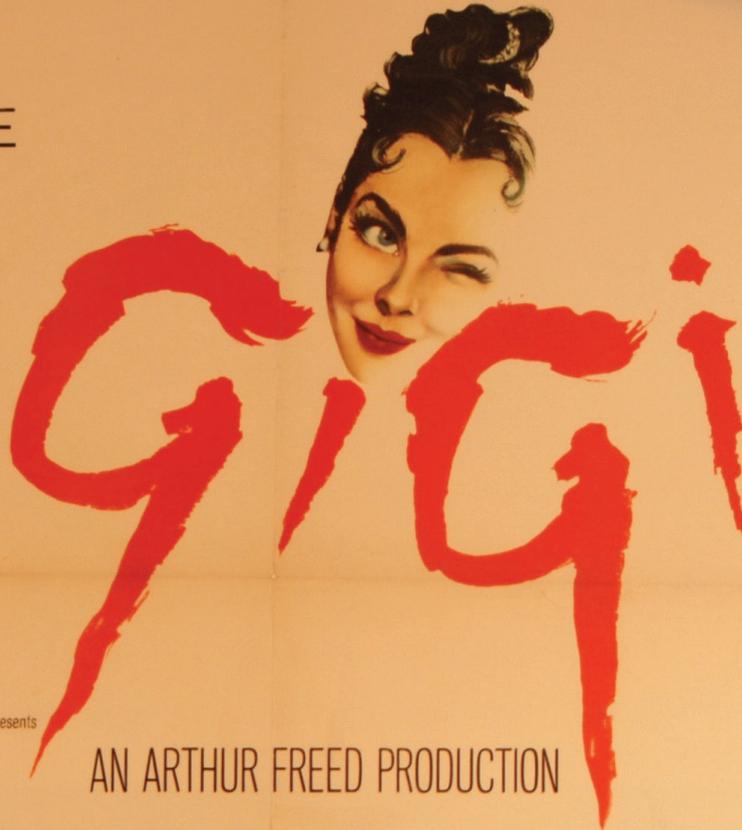
Gender, though not of course a film genre itself, plays a significant role as a developing schema within the history of film. Through varying cinematic representations, American film “depicts what it means to be a man or a woman” and “construct[s] images of how men and women are supposed to be.”<sup>30</sup> Often, this paradigm takes form in the overall prioritizing of male roles over female roles in film, and in the broad relegation of women to specific, limited character types. Typically, gender roles portrayed in film correspond with cultural norms; however, some films, such as *Some Like It Hot*, use humor to emphasize gender’s performative nature.

Early 1900s film portrayals of women commonly drew on Victorian Era (1837–1901) ideals and portrayed women as innocent and childlike (good) or sexual (bad). This Victorian dichotomy of female character types has been dubbed the “virgin-whore” complex and, in some forms, still persists in contemporary culture.<sup>31</sup> In the 1920s, both the successes of first wave feminism and an increased progressiveness toward sex led to a lessening of these Victorian ideals, which continued into the 1930s, even after the adoption of the censorial Production Code in 1930. The 1930s and 1940s yielded a variety of “woman’s films,”

melodramas created to attract a female audience. However, as these woman’s films were produced by men, they often reflected very patriarchal views of women as either overly emotional or serene as wives and mothers in the domestic sphere.<sup>32</sup> The 1950s brought increased interest in more nuanced themes in woman’s films, allowing films such as *Gigi* (1958) (Fig. 3) to re-examine women’s traditionally-accepted roles. In this musical romantic-comedy set in 1900’s Paris, *Gigi*—shown winking playfully on the half-sheet poster as a nod to her girlish charm—struggles with societal expectations as a courtesan-in-training, but falls in love and eventually upholds mainstream standards by ending the film on a path to marriage.<sup>33</sup> This adherence to traditional values, despite an initial critique of gender relations, reflects a typical pattern of these 1950s films.<sup>34</sup>

The heteronormativity of film—caused by the broad heteronormativity of past and present American society—is so ingrained that “regardless of the genre or specific goals of the protagonist,” American film “almost always includes the struggle to unite a male-female couple.”<sup>35</sup> Particularly in films before the sexual revolution and the rise of a strong counterculture in the 1960s and 1970s, heterosexuality was not only depicted as the “better” sexual orientation but “the only sexual orientation.”<sup>36</sup> Depictions of homosexuality—along with any insinuations of anything less than straight, married monogamy—were even explicitly banned by the 1930s Production Code, mentioned above. Though this code was amended in 1961 to allow overt-but-regulated depictions of homosexuality and then altogether replaced with the now-familiar Ratings System in 1968, gay characters in film mostly faced tragic endings of murder, violence, or disgrace. Few films, such as the avant-garde *Cabaret* (1972), depicted non-heterosexuality nonchalantly as a mere character trait and not a “tragic or comedic flaw.”<sup>37</sup>

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Screen Play and Lyrics by ALAN JAY LERNER · Music by FREDERICK LOEWE · Based on the Novel by COLETTE

Costumes, Scenery & Production Design by CECIL BEATON · CinemaScope<sup>SM</sup> METROCOLOR · Directed by VINCENTE MINNELLI

Hear the LERNER-LOEWE Songs  
on M-G-M RECORDS  
Sound Track Album

FIGURE 3 *Gigi* (Academy Award Best Picture), 1958, MGM, half sheet

*The  
most  
beautiful  
love  
story  
ever  
told.*



WALT DISNEY PICTURES  
presents  
**Beauty and the Beast**

WALT DISNEY PICTURES Presents "BEAUTY AND THE BEAST" Produced In Association With SILVER SCREEN PARTNERS IV



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In the 1970s, a growing contempt and fear of new gay activism led to portrayals of LGBT individuals as either jokes or outright monsters—figurative or literal.<sup>38</sup> Such negative feelings and representations only increased with the outbreak of the AIDS virus in the 1980s. However, LGBT documentary filmmaking thrived in response to societal neglect of the AIDS crisis. Arising in the 1990s as a result of this increase in independent LGBT documentaries, the “New Queer Cinema” movement opened new avenues for LGBT narratives and expression. This development brought forth innovative postmodern stylistic elements and challenges to cultural notions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Success of LGBT films at independent film festivals led to their mainstreaming and the subsequent creation of Hollywood independent hybrids focusing on LGBT content. These films, such as the tragic love story *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), often won awards and received broad acclaim.<sup>39</sup>

## ROMANCE

Love stories and romance exist in nearly every film in some form. Whether constituting only a small portion of an overall narrative or lying directly at the heart of a film’s plot, depictions of love and romance are undeniably integral to American film.

Romance can even be found in films directed at children even though children are often too young to engage in or even be interested in romantic relationships of their own. Despite this, animated Disney films, particularly Disney “princess” films such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) (Fig. 4), center on romantic love. Based on the classic French fairy tale, *Beauty and the Beast* was marketed to adults as “the most beautiful love story ever told” on its accompanying poster, which features a softly lit dancing couple. Films such as *Beauty and the Beast* also play a pivotal role in the shaping of childhood perceptions of romance.<sup>40</sup>

Films, though, need not focus on romance directly to address individual and societal perceptions of romantic love. Descriptions of romantic love by film characters, too, can provide great insight into such perceptions. The coming-of-age film *The Scent of a Woman* (1992), which focuses on the platonic, mentorship-like relationship between prep school student Charlie Simms and blind, retired army colonel Frank Slade, seemingly has little to do with romance at all. However, during the time the two spend together, Slade shares his thoughts on the wonder of women, regarding them with “mixed yearning and fascination,” and he confides in Charlie his life-long aspiration to one-day wake up next to a woman—an aspiration Slade feels he cannot fulfill.<sup>41</sup> His longing for a romantic relationship endears the often abrasive and miserable man to the film’s audience, and also suggests that everyone should aspire to have love and romance in life.

Not only is romantic love directly upheld as an aspiration in many films, it can also broadly factor into most narratives if only as a part of what constitutes normative human experience. *Forrest Gump* (1994) details the life of its intellectually-disabled titular character as he experiences and even influences many of the most iconic events of the latter half of the 20th century. Throughout the film, Forrest repeatedly crosses paths with his childhood friend and love interest Jenny, and, despite stretches in the film where the two are separated from each other for significant periods of time, the film ends with Forrest and Jenny together. The manner in which Forrest and Jenny’s relationship develops—a pattern of chance meetings each adding dimension to their connection—characterizes their relationship as being an inevitability of fate.

## FAMILY

Just as film explores romance and romantic relationships, it also portrays the varying dynamics of family relationships. Many films depicting family life often promote certain standards of “family values,” exploring the differing roles of family members and, on occasion, punishing the characters that fail to live up to these roles. But other films examine the intricacies of family dysfunction and immorality to produce high drama and conflict, rather than construct a moral narrative.

The early silent film *Daddy* (1923) (Fig. 5) explores distinct embodiments of family in the different caretakers of a young boy named Jackie. In the film, Jackie is first cared for by his mother, who is loving but unsupportive of Jackie’s musical prowess. When she dies, she leaves him in the care of the well-meaning but elderly and financially struggling Holden couple.<sup>42</sup> Unsatisfied with the family and not wishing to be a further burden, Jackie departs to find work playing music in the city. There, he meets the street-musician Rocco Cesare, who fathers him and nurtures his talent, and the famous violinist Paul Gallini, Jackie’s biological father. After Rocco’s passing, Paul takes in Jackie, and the two end the film as a happy, newly-forged family.<sup>43</sup> In emphasizing the importance of Jackie’s shifting father figures, both biological and not, the film prioritizes the family role of the father in the life of a young boy. The film poster further highlights the absence of “Daddy” as a clearly troubled and disheveled Jackie ineptly attempts to prepare himself a meal.



FIGURE 5 *Daddy*, First National Pictures, 1923, one sheet

*Sins of the Fathers* (1928) (Fig. 6) also draws attention to the role of father within the family, but in a decidedly contrasting manner. In a tale of infidelity and immorality, *Sins of the Fathers* illustrates the disastrous consequences when a patriarch fails to live up to his responsibilities as husband and father. In the film, restaurateur Wilhelm Spengler



FIGURE 6 *Sins of the Fathers*, Paramount, 1928, window card



FIGURE 7 *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Warner Brothers, 1951, insert

falls for Greta, “an unprincipled adventuress,” causing his overworked and already sickly wife to die from a “broken heart.”<sup>44</sup> The miscreant Greta then persuades Wilhelm to begin business as a bootlegger. Set and produced during American Prohibition (1920–1933), the film unambiguously condemns Wilhelm’s illegal sale of alcohol. Wilhelm’s son literally goes blind after drinking his father’s bootleg hooch and Wilhelm himself is arrested in a bootlegging raid, while Greta runs off with another man and all of Wilhelm’s money. Just as the film condemns Wilhelm’s abandoned role and moral failings, so too does its window card, which depicts an image of the devil atop Wilhelm’s shoulder gesturing gleefully at the word “fathers.” Only years later, when Wilhelm repents and is released early from prison for good behavior, does Wilhelm reunite with his now miraculously cured son and embark on a path toward improved fatherhood.<sup>45</sup>

Many films highlight immorality and dysfunction within families to build drama. However, few films centering on familial dysfunction sparked as much controversy as did the classic film based on Tennessee Williams’ 1947 Pulitzer Prize-winning play of the same name: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) (Fig. 7). In its tale of the mental and emotional deterioration of aging Southern belle Blanche DuBois as she resides with her sister Stella and brutish brother-in-law Stanley, the film depicts numerous adult themes such as “insanity, rape, domestic violence, homosexuality, sexual obsession, and female promiscuity.”<sup>46</sup> The film insert, in fact, references such adult themes by depicting Stella and Stanley in a desperate, iconic embrace that occurs after Stanley strikes Stella in a drunken rage. Despite the dark subject matter to which the insert alludes, the poster portrays Stella and Stanley’s embrace with an idealized sensuality—particularly in its depiction of Stanley bathed in a soft light that highlights his delicate facial features and muscular back exposed by his artfully-ripped shirt. Even with the removal of several scenes specifically referencing Blanche’s



backlash from Italian-American filmgoers who resented its revival and romanticizing of the 1930s Italian-American gangster stereotype.<sup>51</sup>

## RACE

Less of a genre and more of an evolving paradigm of representation, the portrayal of race within film, like that of gender, is decidedly nuanced. Though many white viewers may think only of race in relation to film when viewing films regarding racial or ethnic groups different from themselves, race can also be seen, perhaps even more clearly, through the seemingly ubiquitous positioning of “whiteness” as the default category of race in American film. As writers Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin theorize in *America on Film*, there is an assumption among many film creators and viewers that, while white viewers may not be able to fully identify with non-white characters, all viewers can identify with white characters.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, while this section of the exhibition does concern the portrayals of non-white races within American film, the topic of race should not be viewed as an isolated perspective relevant only to this section. The frequent exclusion of non-white characters from many films makes it abundantly clear that race is a key element in other film categories highlighted in this collection.

Stereotyped images of African Americans appear in even the earliest films (1890s) and such stereotyped characters were often not even played by African American actors, but rather by white actors in black makeup (blackface).<sup>53</sup> So-called race films (“independently produced black-cast films”) produced in the late 1910s through 1950s were a means through which African Americans could counter popularized racist imagery and take control of their narratives.<sup>54</sup> *The Bronze Venus (The Duke is Tops)* (1938) (Fig. 9)—an exemplary race film—notably introduced African American singer and “cultural icon” Lena Horne

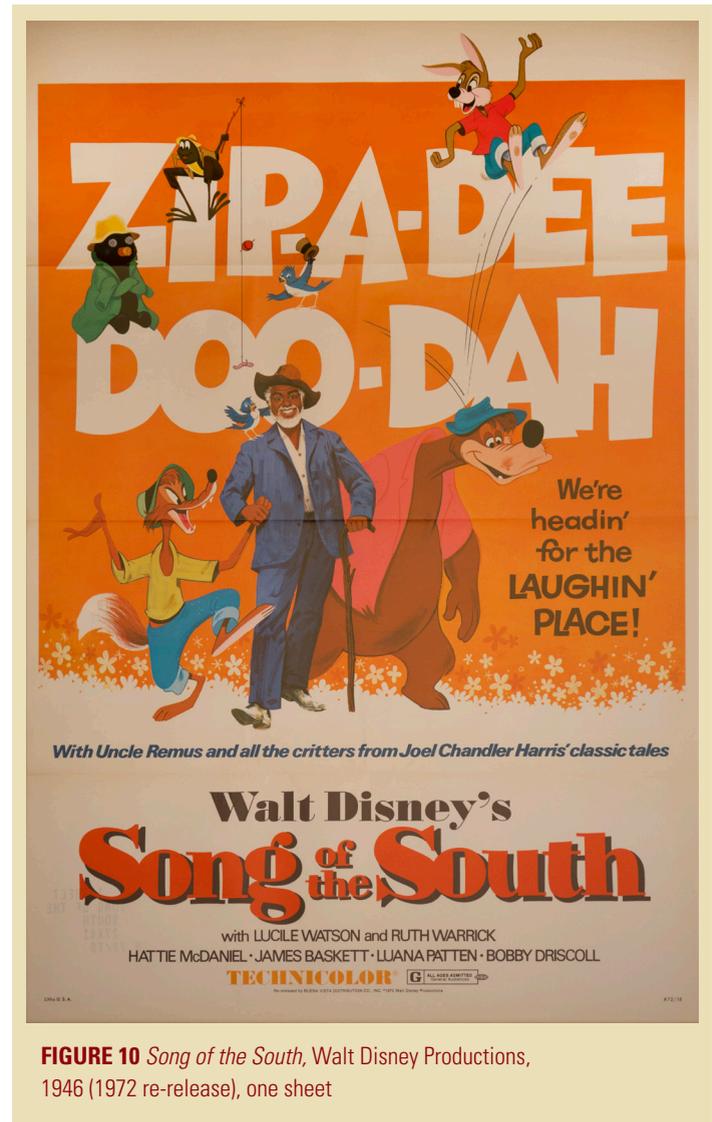


**FIGURE 9** *The Bronze Venus (The Duke is Tops)*, Toddy Pictures Company, 1938, one sheet

(1917–2010) to the screen.<sup>55</sup> Horne features prominently on the linen-backed poster with a glowing smile, a nimbus of stars, and a trio of dancers, speaking to the film’s overall lightheartedness. Race films that foregrounded entertainment and spectacle over direct treatment of racial politics were common in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>56</sup>

The United States experienced increased liberalism after World War II as many people felt compelled to examine racism within themselves after warring with the “avowedly racist” Axis nations.<sup>57</sup> During this time, the NAACP, as well as other activist groups, petitioned Hollywood for the inclusion of “more diverse, less stereotypical” representations of African Americans and did so to some success. Even so, films like Disney’s *Song of the South* (1946) (Fig. 10), which depicted black people as “happy, docile servants,” were still produced and widely appreciated—though not without controversy.<sup>58</sup> This “happy-docility” imbues the film’s poster with cheerfully-grinning Uncle Remus, one of the “servants” of *Song of the South*, standing in the bright foreground among an equally cheery myriad of animated animals. Uncle Remus’s placement among animals whose characteristics reinforce racist stereotypes about black identity, such as the lumbering dopiness of the bear, served to underscore the “animalistic” nature of African Americans. Remus’s complicity, represented on the poster through dialect—“we’re headin’ for the laughin’ place”—further naturalizes this subordination as self-directed.

Through the 1930s to the late 1950s, Hollywood did produce a small number of all-black cast films to advertise its commitment to liberal values. These films were “mostly musicals with religious overtones,” and, while having all-black casts, were all produced, written, and directed by white men.<sup>59</sup> This factor accounts in part for the romanticized, paternalistic, and stereotype-laden portrayals of black culture in these films, as can be seen in *Porgy and Bess* (1959) based on the 1935 opera.



**FIGURE 10** *Song of the South*, Walt Disney Productions, 1946 (1972 re-release), one sheet



FIGURE 11 *Drums of Fu Manchu*, Republic Pictures, 1940, one sheet

African Americans were not the only racial minority stereotyped by film: a variety of other non-white races also had their identities reduced to cinematic clichés. Despite the hundreds of culturally distinct and complex ethnic groups of Asia, Asians and Asian Americans, for example, were frequently simplified into one stock “Oriental” character with “shifty behavior” and “broken English.”<sup>60</sup> Leading Asian roles were almost always played by white actors in yellowface, a tradition in Hollywood that carried on into the 1960s and 1970s even after the tradition of blackface lost social approval. Two of the most iconic and replicated Asian character types of 1930s and 1940s Hollywood—detective Charlie Chan and Dr. Fu Manchu—were, again, almost always played by white actors in yellowface.<sup>61</sup> *Drums of Fu Manchu* (1940) (Fig. 11) features white actor Henry Brandon (1912–1990) in yellowface as the villainous Fu Manchu.<sup>62</sup>

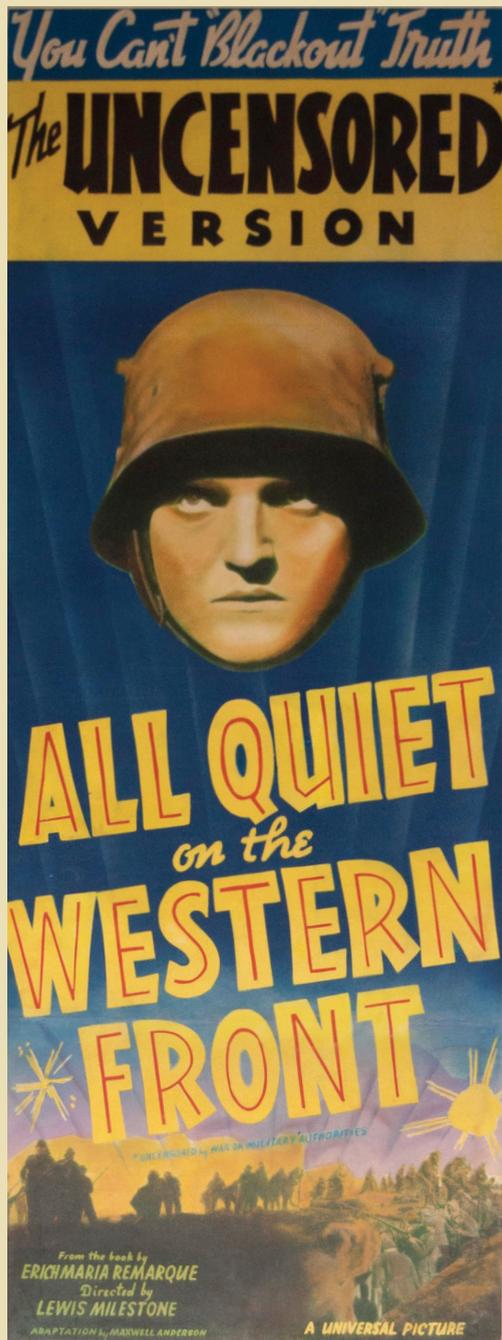
While “Latino” does not denote a race but the overlapping regional heritage of the people and cultures of Central and South America, Latinos also experienced racial “othering” in American film. One of the earliest and most common Latino stereotypes of the 1910s, the “oily, dark-skinned and mustachioed bandit” known as the “greaser,” was joined in the 1920s with the alluring and hypersexualized “Latin Lover.”<sup>63</sup> The Good Neighbor Policy, a propaganda plan adopted by the United States due to its increased interest in strategically strengthening its relations with neighboring countries at the dawn of World War II, did increase the presence of more varied representations of Latinos in the films of the 1940s. However, in the 1950s and 1960s, American film depictions often regressed. The greaser type developed into that of the violent Latino gang member, a stereotype seen in the portrayal of Puerto Rican gang members of *West Side Story* (1961)—a film that also calls for greater understanding between ethnicities.<sup>64</sup>

Constructed racial images of Native Americans as either violent, bloodthirsty savages or benign, noble savages were popularized long before the birth of cinema and began as early as Columbus’s “discovery” of America.<sup>65</sup> These stereotypes persisted through American film and culture, and still today one can witness the continuing trope of the “noble savage” in films such as Disney’s *Pocahontas* (1995). *Pocahontas* and other modern films that invoke the “noble savage” stereotype strive to be culturally respectful, yet still repeat this old, romanticized character type. The perpetuation of the Native American as “a holder of divine, transcendental spirituality,” an aspect of this noble savage trope, can even be seen in the poster for *Pocahontas*, where a soft glow and a dancing, supernatural wind surrounds Pocahontas and her animal companions.<sup>66</sup>

## THE WESTERN

The Native American identity portrayed in film, however, cannot be considered without also mentioning the iconic western genre. Popularized depictions of Indian Wars, conflicts between U.S. Cavalry and Native American nations who refused to be forcibly relocated, and depictions of white male heroism in the West coalesced into the now familiar, “all-American” western.<sup>67</sup> With their identities almost entirely flattened and distorted, Native Americans became standard, downtrodden victims of the “shoot ‘em and bang ‘em up” westerns.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the silent western *Drums of the Desert* (1927) centers on an attempt by white men to exploit a Navajo tribe.<sup>69</sup>

Not all westerns, however, contained Native Americans. Western plots generally consisted of the “classical, simple goal of maintaining law and order on the frontier in a fast-paced action story” allowing the genre to be continually varied and expanded.<sup>70</sup> Western narratives in which a



**FIGURE 12** *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Academy Award Best Picture), Universal, 1930, insert

hero seeks to bring justice to those on the “wrong side of the law” are present in both *Santa Fe* (1951), wherein one of four ex-confederate brothers attempts to bring his siblings to justice,<sup>71</sup> and *Sugarfoot* (1951), wherein Southern aristocrat “Sugarfoot” seeks to bring the criminals who have wronged him to justice.<sup>72</sup>

## WAR

The Western hero in many ways became the emblematic American hero: “representing masculinity, individuality, strength and justified violence in the name of God and country.”<sup>73</sup> This archetype often carries over into the portrayal of the American hero in the war film genre, and film critics have subsequently drawn connections between the violence of the Western and “extreme” American patriotism and warlike foreign policy.<sup>74</sup> However, war films were not solely a celebration of the American hero, as early westerns often were. War films often presented a more nuanced look into American culture, serving “as both mirrors and lenses, sometimes reflecting quasi-official or popular perspectives and at other times affording valuable if discomfiting insights into the nature of war in general and of Americans at war in particular.”<sup>75</sup>

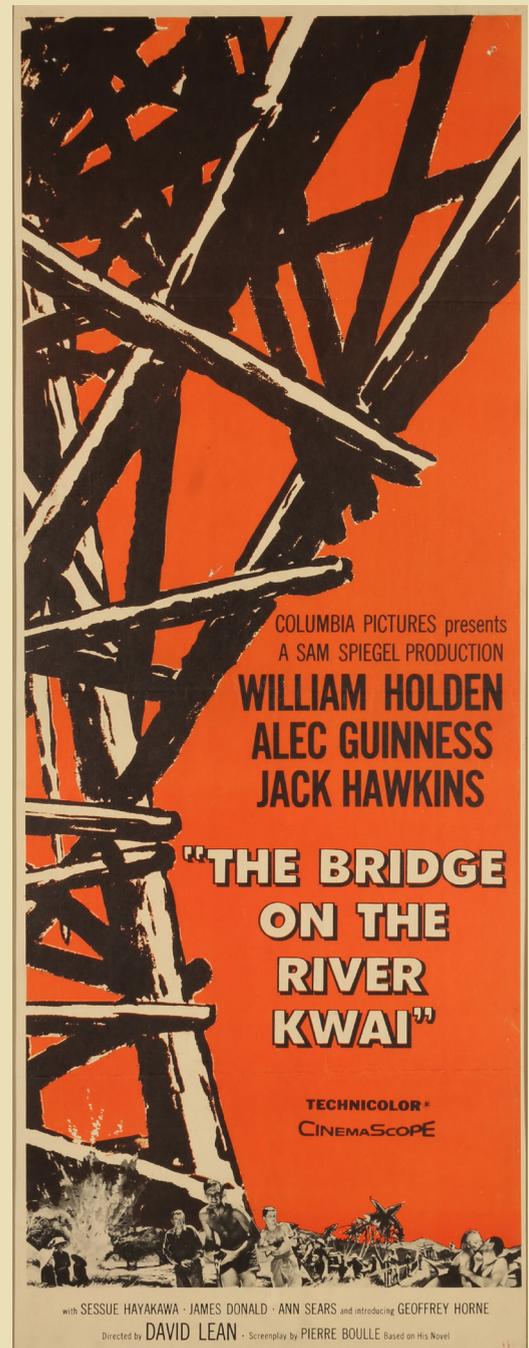
Films depicting war and combat have existed since the silent film era (1890s–1920s), but the outbreak of World War I inspired the emergence of the war film as a major genre.<sup>76</sup> The end of World War I did result in a decline of interest in the war genre, likely due to residual trauma from the war; however, the genre successfully regained popularity in America in the mid-1920s.<sup>77</sup> In fact, the popularity of World War I films established the still current visual iconography of the war, such as the rain, mud, trenches, devastated landscapes, and ruined buildings that appear in films such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) (Fig. 12).<sup>78</sup> This iconography, specifically the trenches, lies at the bottom of the film’s poster insert, while the intensely serious face of a soldier looms above

in the dark sky. Additionally, the insert's top bears the words: "You Can't 'Blackout' the Truth: The Uncensored Version," nodding to the greater public knowledge of war's true horrors after the 1920s.<sup>79</sup> The poster's words now seem eerily prophetic. In 1933, the Nazis rose to power in Germany and banned *All Quiet on the Western Front* in a direct attempt to "blackout" its anti-war message. Furthermore, Eric Maria Remarque's novel, which provided the basis for the film, was one of the first books symbolically burned in Nazi demonstrations.<sup>80</sup>

In the late 1930s, film studios began to promote antifascism in response to growing turmoil overseas. The Popular Front, a liberal coalition, had "an active constituency in [...] the movie capital." Hollywood's Anti-Nazi League, founded in 1936, "raised awareness of Hitler's threat [...] and sought to pressure studios into making topical pictures."<sup>81</sup> Independent features, too, made political statements, such as Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940). Chaplin's first all-talking picture, *The Great Dictator*, vividly satirized Hitler, and German audiences were subsequently banned from viewing the film.<sup>82</sup>

In 1941, Hollywood truly became swept up in war mobilization after the attack on Pearl Harbor, which led to America's entrance into World War II.<sup>83</sup> During the war, the film industry experienced significant profitability<sup>84</sup> through the production of a great many war films—most of which promoted the nobility of U.S. involvement.<sup>85</sup> However, not all films created during this time were propaganda-laden. Some films, such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), which focused on the difficulties of demobilization and the problems of veterans returning to civilian life, sought to humanize American soldiers rather than to idealize them.<sup>86</sup>

Even after its end in 1945, World War II remained a prevalent subject of the American war film. In fact, "more films have been made about World War II than about any other armed hostility in American history," largely due to "its clear-cut political struggle against the Nazi regime."<sup>87</sup>



**FIGURE 13** *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (Academy Award Best Picture), Columbia Pictures, 1957, insert

Instead of focusing on the more current Korean War, many films in the 1950s and 1960s instead continued to look back at both earlier world wars. Director Fred Zinnemann's *From Here to Eternity* (1953) focuses on career military life before U.S. World War II involvement<sup>88</sup> and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) (Fig. 13) satirically illustrates the “madness of war” by focusing on the 1943 construction of a bridge for the Burma-Siam railway by British prisoners-of-war.<sup>89</sup>

American film continued with this pattern of “looking back” through the Vietnam War (c. 1955–1975). Given that the subject of the war was largely “too close to home to deal with” for Americans during the war’s progression, film used other wars and even other genres to allegorically reflect America’s underlying anxieties and sense of “moral confusion.”<sup>90</sup> One such black comedy, *Catch 22* (1970), follows the story of a defiant World War II pilot attempting to escape the war. Only in the late 1970s and 1980s did the film industry address the Vietnam War directly.<sup>91</sup>

## HORROR AND SCIENCE FICTION

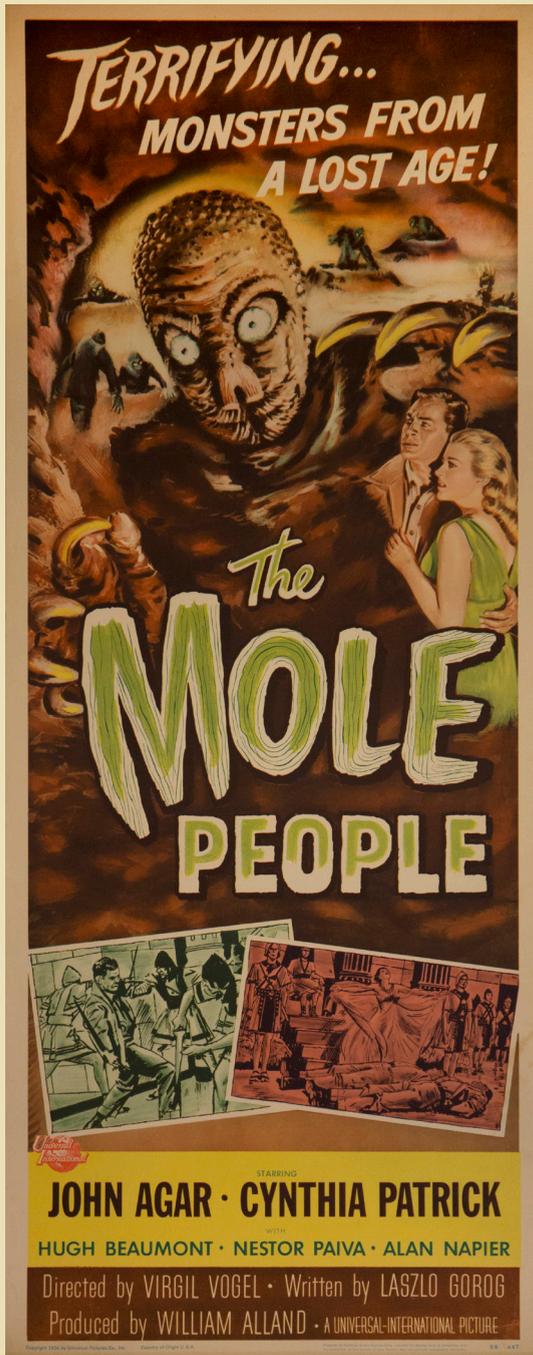
America’s anxieties and fears certainly did not present themselves on the film screen solely through the war genre. The horror film was specifically designed to frighten its viewers, while simultaneously captivating and entertaining them without the threat of actual danger. This particular escapist genre often becomes hybridized with the “thriller,” which promotes excitement, suspense, and anxiety. Additionally, horror can, in many cases, become intertwined with science fiction when the fantastical, futuristic technologies and inhuman entities of the latter genre become malevolent.<sup>92</sup>

In the 1930s and early 1940s, American film studios produced a number of these combination horror and science fiction films, often focusing on

the actions of “mad scientists” creating monstrosities through laboratory experiments.<sup>93</sup> *The Black Cat* (1934), also known as *The Vanishing Body*, is one such horror-science fiction hybrid that depicts an “age-old struggle between good and evil science” complete with “dark sexual repression, twisted relationships, and aberrant behavior.”<sup>94</sup> This film, loosely inspired by Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Black Cat” (1843), is considered the first psychological horror film by some reviewers and contains the first joint appearance of “horror masters” Bela Lugosi (1882–1956) and Boris Karloff (1887–1969).<sup>95</sup>

The 1950s and 1960s also yielded a plethora of such combinations—but this time with decidedly more weight on science fiction and with considerably less acclaim. These science fiction films, for the most part “dreadfully grotesque, cheesy low-budget science-fiction flops or turkeys,” are today “often regarded as kitsch or cult classics.”<sup>96</sup> *The Mole People* (1956) (Fig. 14), for instance, attempted to attract younger audiences to the cinema with highly sensationalized horrors.<sup>97</sup> In *The Mole People*, these horrors ensue when a group of archaeologists discover an underground civilization of mole-like creatures—depicted menacingly at the insert’s center—controlled by cruel, albino Sumerians.<sup>98</sup>

The evil entities of the horror and science fiction genres were not limited to monsters or the occult. The egregious actions of ordinary people and society could set off equally strong alarms when displayed on the film screen. Stanley Kubrick’s futuristic dystopia *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) (Fig. 15), adapted from Anthony Burgess’s novel of the same name, focuses on the state’s behavioral modification of the violent, jailed criminal Alex. Reaching out with a dagger from a stylized letter “A,” Alex smirks sinisterly above the image of a bound woman in the film’s poster. Despite Alex’s obvious sadism, his behavioral modification is depicted as “another violent act, rather than a solution,” which, along with the film’s X-rated violence, drew great controversy.<sup>99</sup>



**FIGURE 14 (left)** *The Mole People*, Universal International Pictures, 1956, insert  
**FIGURE 15 (above)** *A Clockwork Orange*, Warner Brothers, 1971, one sheet



**FIGURE 16** *The Song of Bernadette*,  
20th Century Fox, 1943 (encore release), insert

While science fiction and horror film often explored futuristic, unreal, or virtual realities in the 1980s, so-called “virtual reality” films gained true momentum in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>100</sup> Made possible by the advent of digital photography technology—known as the “digital revolution”—innovative special effects in turn enabled the creation of “fantastic yet tangibly real” virtual realities within film.<sup>101</sup> An iconic exemplification of this virtual reality can be located within *The Matrix* film series, beginning with *The Matrix* (1999), and followed by *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003). The trilogy follows its characters as they attempt to bring “both physical and psychological freedom” to the whole of humanity, who have been trapped within “a massive artificial intelligence system... using their brains and bodies for energy.”<sup>102</sup>

## JOURNEYS IN FILM

The narrative theme of journey, much like the above journey of *The Matrix* characters to freedom from technological imprisonment, is a staple of the film medium. The word “journey” here is used somewhat loosely as a movement from one place to another, with “place” referring to anything from a literal, geographic location to a mental state of being.

Often the journeys present in films are literal in nature. Searches, expeditions, treasure hunts, and quests through foreign and challenging locales, common to the adventure genre, all constitute physical journeys on which a character or characters must embark to achieve some goal.<sup>103</sup> These physical journeys provide narrative avenues through which characters can figuratively “journey” and develop as human beings. Based on Jack London’s 1903 classic adventure novel and starring actor Clark Gable (1901–1960), *The Call of the Wild* (1935) exemplifies the physical film journey in its character’s arduous trek

through the harsh Alaskan wilderness in the hope of finding wealth during the historic gold rush.<sup>104</sup>

Not always literal, some cinematic journeys possess a spiritual nature, in which a character grows through the influence of a higher, often religious, power. In the *The Song of Bernadette* (1943) (Fig. 16), teenage peasant girl Bernadette Soubirous experiences a vision of the Virgin Mary in the grotto of Lourdes in the 1800s.<sup>105</sup> Throughout the film, Bernadette experiences the doubt and scorn of religious and political figures alike as they attempt to make her renounce her vision, but she remains steadfast. Transformed from peasant girl into a symbol of religious conviction, Bernadette is then posthumously canonized as a saint.<sup>106</sup> Illustrated by highly-acclaimed artist Norman Rockwell (1894–1978),<sup>107</sup> the film poster depicts a reverent Bernadette, looking up with one hand on her chest, in total darkness save for the glowing white nimbus that surrounds her.

The pious spiritual journey of *The Song of Bernadette* sharply contrasts with the desperate journey for revenge and vindication depicted in *Dark Passage* (1947). In the film, Vincent Parry, played by the acclaimed actor Humphrey Bogart (1899–1957), is wrongfully convicted of his wife's murder and must journey to find the true killer and clear his name. The transformative nature of Parry's journey is darkly highlighted when the character undergoes extensive plastic surgery in order to conceal his true appearance and take on a different identity.<sup>108</sup> The cynical and bleak stylistic tone of *Dark Passage*, known as *film noir* or "black film," was common to many crime and detective films of the 1940s and 1950s. As *film noir* arose directly after World War II, the "commingling of sex and violence" within these films may perhaps be a result of America's war trauma.<sup>109</sup>

Though not *film noir* but still horribly bleak, *Midnight Cowboy* (1969)



**FIGURE 17** *Midnight Cowboy* (Academy Award Best Picture), United Artists, 1969, one sheet

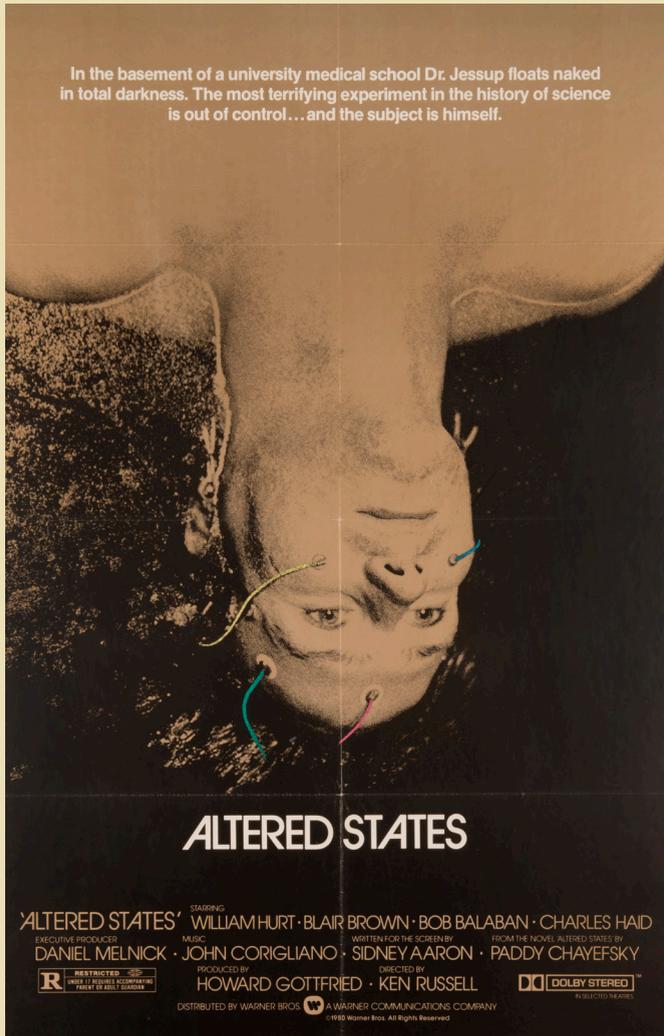


FIGURE 18 *Altered States*, Warner Brothers, 1980, one sheet

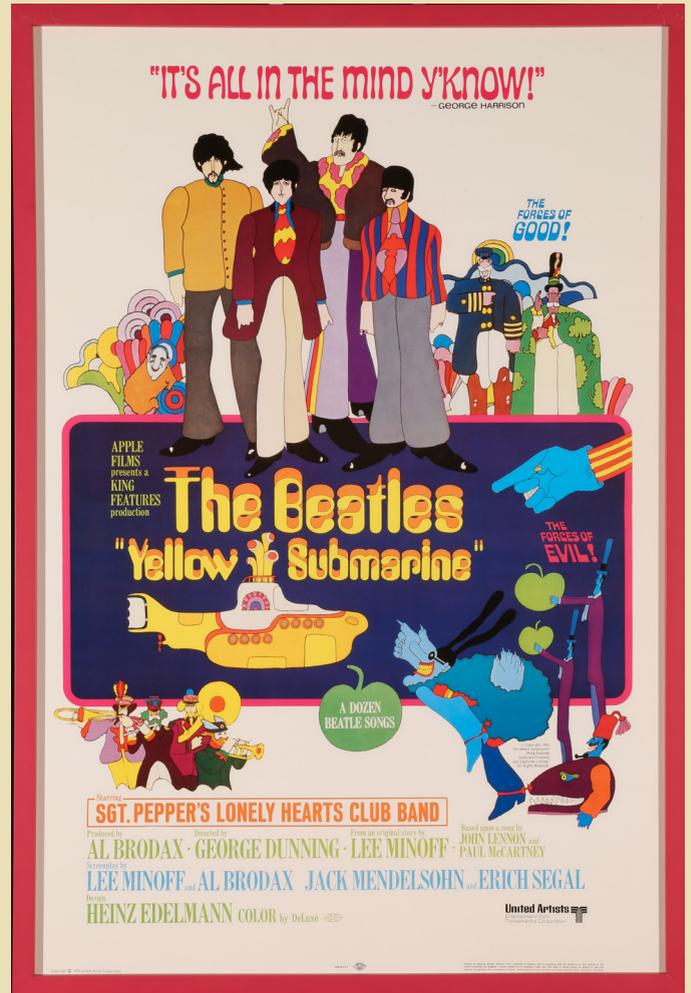


FIGURE 19 *The Beatles: Yellow Submarine*, United Artists, 1968, one sheet

(Fig. 17) details the “poignant tragic drama of two homeless, down-and-out, anti-hero drifters.”<sup>110</sup> Dissatisfied character Joe Buck travels from a small Texas town to New York City with the aspiration of becoming a high-paid sex worker for wealthy and bored women, but falls into poverty along with petty criminal “Ratso” Rizzo. The two characters’ “mutual loneliness leads to genuine friendship” between them as they struggle to survive and escape from their destitution.<sup>111</sup> But the characters of *Midnight Cowboy* also journey psychologically back-and-forth between their optimistic dreams of the future and their fear of their fates—suggested by the closed body language of the characters within the bleak, pervasive gray of the 1980 re-release poster.

While psychological journeys occur in many films, the concept of a physiological journey lies at the heart of the science fiction film *Altered States* (1980) (Fig. 18). In the film, character Dr. Eddie Jessup, a physiologist, attempts to unlock “ultimate truth” through “human-kind’s ‘physiological memory’ of the past” by using himself as subject in isolation-produced hallucination experiments.<sup>112</sup> With his increasing physiological “trips” into the past memories of proto-humans, Eddie’s physiological journeys turn biological as he begins to transform into a primordial ape-like creature during the experiments.<sup>113</sup> Attached to a sampling of colored wires, Eddie lies centered on the film’s poster with his eyes looking longingly past the viewer in his search for truth.

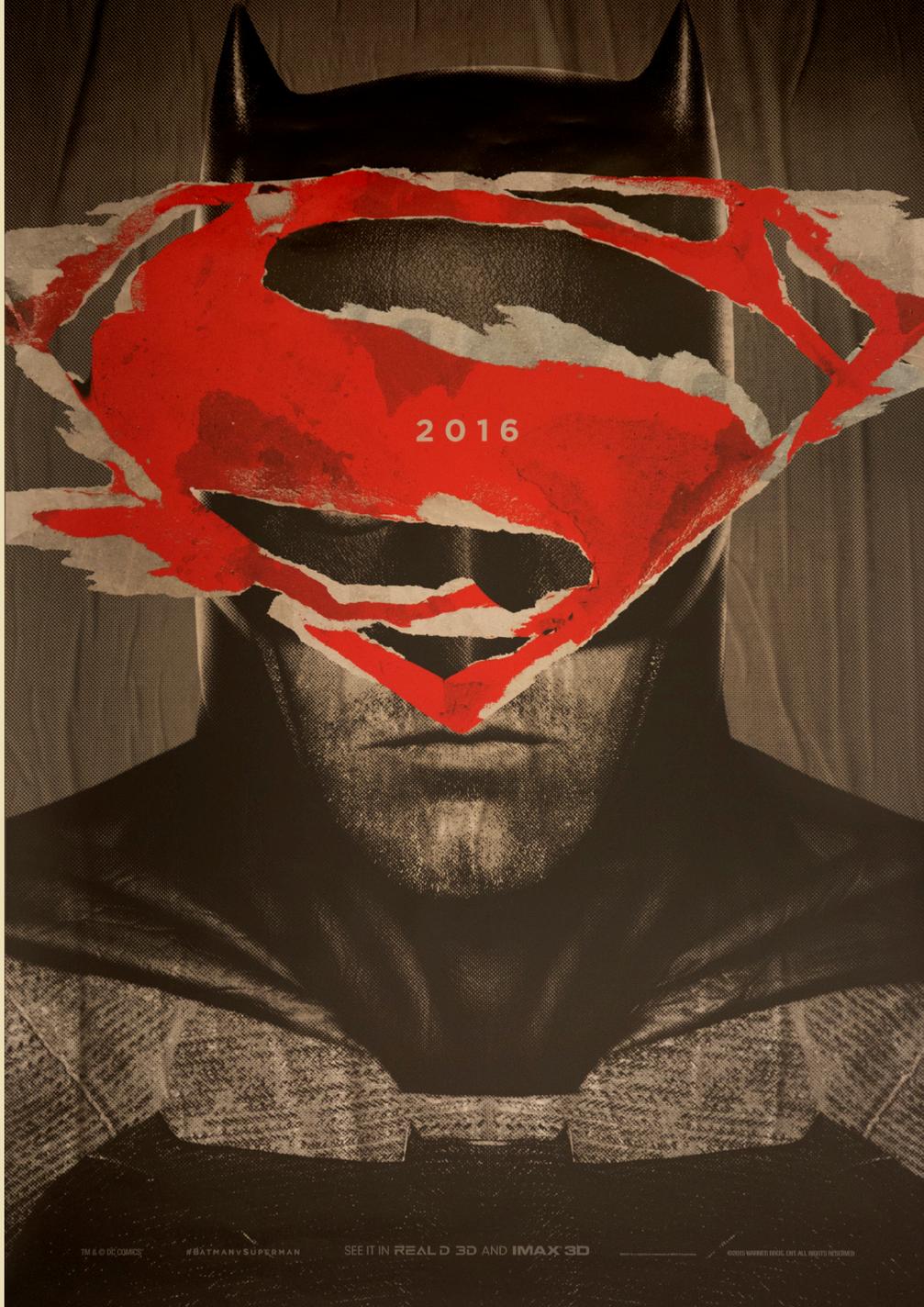
Differing significantly from physical, psychological, and physiological journeys of this section, the vibrantly colorful, psychedelic, and musical trip of The Beatles’ *Yellow Submarine* (1968) (Fig. 19) nonetheless charmingly illustrates a film journey. To the backdrop of their many highly acclaimed songs in the film, The Beatles must traverse a series of strange realms in order to save Pepperland through music.<sup>114</sup> The film’s poster captures the film’s playful and somewhat bizarre tone and The Beatles’ bright and song-filled adventure.

## ACTION AND ADVENTURE

While distinct genres in themselves, action and adventure possess “tremendous cross-over potential”, as both seek to provide viewers with a high-energy, action-packed experience and frequently even find themselves united within individual films to reach this goal.<sup>115</sup> Quite simply, action films rely on perpetual motion in the form of various physical stunts, chases, fights, disasters, and escapes, whereas adventure films, while exhibiting similarly exciting content, focus more on the exploration of unfamiliar and exotic environments through travels and conquests.<sup>116</sup> Often, an increasing blend of high-impact physicality within expeditions through elaborate environments leads to the creation of many action-adventure hybrids.

One such epitome of the action-adventure hybrid is Disney’s *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003). Pirate films, also known as buccaneering films, originated in the 1930s and generally form a subcategory of adventure. Pirate films largely fell out of popularity in the mid-1900s and, even with attempted pirate film revivals in the 1980s and 1990s, *The Pirates of the Caribbean* series contains some of the only contemporary films to successfully implement pirate themes in an “updated, thrilling and effective” manner.<sup>117</sup> The film—which follows blacksmith Will Turner who joins forces with the infamous Captain Jack Sparrow in order to rescue his love interest Elizabeth Swann from a crew of cursed, undead pirates—contains all the standard elements of classic pirate films: a damsel in distress, sword duels, sea battles, cursed villains, and a final heroic rescue.<sup>118</sup>

When action and adventure combine with other genres, such as science fiction, the exotic locales of films can become even more fantastical and quite literally otherworldly. Set in a far-away galaxy, George Lucas’ *Star*



**FIGURE 20** *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, Warner Brothers, 2016, one sheet

*Wars* (1977)—later retitled *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*—follows farm boy Luke Skywalker who intercepts Princess Leia’s message begging for help from someone named Obi-Wan Kenobi. When Luke later discovers his father’s old friend is, in reality, Obi-Wan, Obi-Wan teaches Luke about a galaxy-wide battle between rebels and the ruling Empire as well as a spiritual energy called “The Force.” Luke, Obi-Wan, and mercenary Han Solo then embark on a journey to rescue Princess Leia from the “Death Star,” the Empire’s massive warship controlled by evil villain Darth Vader. In *The Power of Myth*, American mythologist Joseph Campbell notes the parallels between Lucas’ *Star Wars* and his own theories of heroism and adventure.<sup>119</sup> He asserts that, through the use of ancient adventure themes and motifs, *Star Wars* rearticulates the classic story of the hero with powerful contemporary imagery.<sup>120</sup> One of the most “popular, profitable, entertaining,” action-adventure science fiction films of all time, *Star Wars* employed advanced special-effects technology “to a degree unseen before” to make its various space battles and environments all the more immersive and captivating.<sup>121</sup>

Action and adventure films tend to achieve great box office popularity due to their intensity and pacing. One specific subcategory of action film, the superhero film, is experiencing particularly widespread box office success in contemporary times.<sup>122</sup> Generally, superheroes engage in a battle of good versus evil, have a secret identity, special powers, origin stories, and enemies.<sup>123</sup> These film heroes, typically derived from comic books, newspapers, and magazines, first appeared during the 1930s and 1940s. However, while superheroes acquired great success on television, it was not until *Superman: The Movie* (1978) that a big-budget feature film centered on a superhero.<sup>124</sup> Films such as *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) (Fig. 20) further build on the continuing legacy of the superhero film. Featuring Batman and Superman, perhaps the two most emblematic superheroes of the DC Entertainment comics, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* presents

a highly-anticipated brawl between the two powerhouses. In the somber gray tone of the preview poster announcing its 2016 release, Batman stares ahead with stony-faced resolve—his eyes obscured by a tattered-but-still-vibrantly-scarlet Superman emblem.

By examining a century of American films and their accompanying posters through their relationship with an evolving American identity, *Now Showing* emphasizes the inextricable connection between films, their posters, and American culture. From its inception, film evolved with and impacted the societies that produced it. The film poster, as a part of this dialectic and a visual signifier of film, serves as an enduring emblem of cultural memory. While designated by many as mere advertising, the film poster should be acknowledged and celebrated as integral to American film, history, and modern constructions of identity.

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# EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

## COMEDY

*Grand Hotel*  
(American Academy Award Best Picture)  
Belgium  
1932  
MGM  
One sheet

*Gall and Golf*  
1917  
Vitagraph Studios  
One sheet

*Bright Eyes*  
Fox Film Corporation  
1934  
Window Card

*It Happened One Night*  
(Academy Award Best Picture)  
Columbia Pictures  
1934  
Lobby Card

## GENDER

*Cabaret*  
1972  
Allied Artists and ABC Pictures Corporation  
One sheet

*Brokeback Mountain*  
2005  
Focus Features/River Road Entertainment  
One sheet

*Some Like it Hot*  
1959  
United Artists  
Insert

*Gigi* (Academy Award Best Picture)  
1958  
MGM  
Half sheet

## ROMANCE

*Beauty and the Beast*  
Walt Disney Pictures  
1991  
One sheet

*Scent of a Woman*  
Universal  
1992  
One sheet

*Forrest Gump* (Academy Award Best Picture)  
Paramount  
1994  
One sheet

*Bus Stop*  
Twentieth Century Fox  
1956  
One sheet

## FAMILY

*Daddy*  
First National Pictures  
1923  
One sheet

*Sins of the Fathers*  
Paramount  
1928  
Window card

*A Streetcar Named Desire*  
Warner Brothers  
1951  
Insert

*The Godfather* (Academy Award Best Picture)  
Paramount Pictures  
1972  
Lobby cards

## RACE

*The Bronze Venus* (*The Duke is Tops*)  
Toddy Pictures Company  
1938  
One sheet

*Porgy and Bess*  
Columbia Pictures  
1959  
Insert

*Drums of Fu Manchu*  
Republic Pictures  
1940  
One sheet

*West Side Story* (Academy Award Best Picture)  
United Artists  
1961  
One sheet

*Song of the South*  
Walt Disney Productions  
1946 (1972 re-release)  
One sheet

*Pocahontas*  
Walt Disney Pictures  
1995  
One sheet

## THE WESTERN

*Drums of the Desert*  
Paramount Pictures  
1927  
Insert

*Santa Fe*  
Columbia Pictures  
1951  
One sheet

*Sugarfoot*  
Warner Brothers  
1951  
Window card

## WAR

*All Quiet on the Western Front*  
(Academy Award Best Picture)  
Universal  
1930  
Insert

*The Best Years of Our Lives*  
(Academy Award Best Picture)  
RKO Radio Pictures  
1946  
Insert

*The Bridge on the River Kwai*  
(Academy Award Best Picture)  
Columbia Pictures  
1957  
Insert

*From Here to Eternity*  
(Academy Award Best Picture)  
Columbia Pictures  
1953  
Window card with *The Naked Jungle*

*The Great Dictator*  
United Artists  
1940  
Lobby card

*Catch 22*  
Paramount Pictures  
1970  
Insert

## HORROR/SCIENCE FICTION

*A Clockwork Orange*  
Warner Brothers  
1971  
One sheet

*The Matrix Reloaded*  
Warner Brothers  
2003 (pre-release)  
One sheet

*The Vanishing Body* (*The Black Cat*, 1934)  
Realart Film  
1953  
Insert

*The Mole People*  
Universal International Pictures  
1956  
Insert

## JOURNEYS IN FILM

*Call of the Wild*  
20th Century Fox  
1935  
One sheet

*The Song of Bernadette*  
20th Century Fox  
1943 (encore release)  
Insert

*Dark Passage*  
Warner Brothers  
1947  
One sheet

*Midnight Cowboy*  
(Academy Award Best Picture)  
United Artists  
1969  
One sheet

*Altered States*  
Warner Brothers  
1980  
One sheet

*The Beatles: Yellow Submarine*  
United Artists  
1968  
One sheet

## ACTION ADVENTURE

*Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*  
Walt Disney Pictures  
2003  
Lobby cards

*Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*  
Warner Brothers  
2016  
One sheet

*Star Wars*  
20th Century Fox  
1977  
Lobby Cards

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# MOVIES

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