When Hollywood Was Right

How Movie Stars, Studio Moguls, and Big Business Remade American Politics

Hollywood was not always a bastion of liberalism. Following the Second World War, an informal alliance of movie stars, studio moguls, and Southern California business interests formed to revitalize a factionalized Republican Party. Coming together were stars such as John Wayne, Robert Taylor, George Murphy, and many others who joined studio heads Cecil B. DeMille, Louis B. Mayer, Walt Disney, and Jack Warner to rebuild the Republican Party. They found support among a large group of business leaders who poured money and skills into this effort, which paid off with the election of George Murphy to the U.S. Senate and of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan to the highest office in the nation. This is an exciting story based on extensive new research that will forever change how we think of Hollywood politics.

Donald T. Critchlow is Professor at the School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies, Arizona State University. He has authored and edited numerous books, including The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Made Political History (2007, revised 2011); Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism (2005); and Intended Consequences: Birth Control, Abortion, and the Federal Government (1999). He is currently working on a data-driven book, American Democracy Now and Its Future. He is editor of the Journal of Policy History, an interdisciplinary quarterly published by Cambridge University Press, and is general editor of the Cambridge Essential Histories series.
“Hollywood wasn’t always a stronghold of the political Left. Back in the days after World War II, many movie moguls and movie stars – Louis B. Mayer, Cecil B. DeMille, Walt Disney, John Wayne, George Murphy – worked to revitalize the Republican Party. Donald Critchlow tells the exciting story of how they did, and how they helped elect Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan president.”
– Michael Barone, Senior Political Analyst, Washington Examiner; Resident Fellow, American Enterprise Institute; co-author, The Almanac of American Politics

“Few people have more insightful things to say about modern politics than the historian Donald Critchlow. Now Critchlow has focused his keen political and historical skills on Hollywood. The result is a provocative, smart, original, and entertaining book that should be required reading for all students of American politics and popular culture.”
– Steven M. Gillon, Scholar-in-Residence, The History Channel

“Don Critchlow has done it again. When Hollywood Was Right is the most comprehensive and detailed account of an epic that is too often told in black and white cartoonish tones. Critchlow captures the paradoxes of how the left-right clashes of the mid-twentieth century affected Hollywood, in many cases for the better. This fine-grained narrative, brimming with new detail Critchlow has unearthed from unused archives, leaves us wondering what is being lost in today’s almost monolithically leftist Hollywood.”
– Steven Hayward, Thomas Smith Distinguished Fellow, Ashbrook Center, Ashland University

“This incisive, first-rate study is based on extensive archival research. When Hollywood Was Right masterfully tells how anticomunism drove film industry executives, directors, and stars, allied with business leaders, to remake the Republican Party in California after World War II. As Professor Donald T. Critchlow astutely argues, the result had national implications. These conservatives backed Richard Nixon and ultimately put one of their own, Ronald Reagan, in the White House.”
– William J. Rorabaugh, Professor of History, University of Washington, author of The Real Making of the President: Kennedy, Nixon, and the 1960 Election
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Players

CELEBRITIES

Fred Astaire – American actor, Broadway star, dancer, and singer with a career lasting seventy-six years
Gene Autry – American performer known as the “Singing Cowboy” on the radio, and in television and movies for thirty years
Humphrey Bogart – American icon and actor, named by the American Film Institute as the greatest male star in American cinema
Ward Bond – American actor in more than 200 movies and in the television series Wagon Train
Walter Brennan – American actor famous for winning three Academy Awards for best supporting actor
Leo Carrillo – Hispanic American actor famous for playing Latino stereotypes in movies and in the TV series The Cisco Kid
Charles Colburn – American film and theater actor; won an Oscar for The More The Merrier
Chuck Connors – American actor, writer, and sports star, best known for his role in ABC’s hit TV series The Rifleman
Gary Cooper – American actor known for his westerns; won two Academy Awards with five nominations
Cecil B. DeMille – American film director known for his movies, such as Cleopatra, Samson and Delilah, The Ten Commandments, and The Greatest Show on Earth, the last of which won an Academy Award for best picture
Edward Dmytryk – Ukrainian-American director, a member of the Hollywood Ten
Irene Dunne – American actress in the 1930s; was nominated five times for best actress Academy Award
Sergei Eisenstein – Russian filmmaker who directed Soviet-themed movies
Douglas Fairbanks – American actor, director, screenwriter, and producer; most famous for playing Zorro and Robin Hood
John Ford – Irish-American director famous for westerns; won four Academy Awards for best director
Clark Gable – American film actor, most famous for playing Rhett Butler in *Gone With the Wind*
Bob Hope – English-born American actor and comedian; hosted the Academy Awards fourteen times
Hedda Hopper – Influential syndicated *Los Angeles Times* newspaper columnist
Elia Kazan – Turkish-born American director; testified as a friendly witness before the House Un-American Activities Committee
John Lee Mahin – American screenwriter active in films from the 1930s to the 1970s, including *The Wizard of Oz* and *Scarface*
Albert Maltz – American author and screenwriter, one of the Hollywood Ten who were blacklisted
Raymond Massey – Canadian/American actor, famous for being in the first movie with sound, and many others
Adolphe Menjou – American actor, worked from 1914 to 1960; nominated for an Oscar in 1931 for *The Front Page*
Robert Montgomery – American actor and director famous for his films and for being elected president of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) in 1935 and 1946
Mary Pickford – Canadian actress known as “America’s Sweetheart”
Dick Powell – American director, producer, actor, and singer
Ayn Rand – Russian-American writer known for her two best-selling novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*
Ginger Rogers – Actress and dancer who was in more than seventy-three films
Morrie Ryskind – American screenwriter nominated for two Academy Awards
Randolph Scott – American actor most famous for westerns
Barbara Stanwyck – Academy Award–nominated film and television star; during her sixty-year career, she made eighty-five films in thirty-eight years before working in television
Jimmy Stewart – American stage and film actor, known for his distinctive voice and personality
Gloria Swanson – American actress famous for playing Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*
Robert Taylor – American film and television actor, considered one of the most popular celebrities of his time
W. S. Van Dyke – Famous American actor/director nominated for several Academy Awards and known for his versatility
John Wayne – American actor famous for his westerns; named the all-time top money-making star; seen as an American icon famous for his demeanor
Sam Wood – American film director and producer, known for making hits and winning five Academy Awards
Players

Moguls

Walt Disney – International icon and owner of Disney
Sam Goldwyn – Helped build Paramount, MGM, and United Artists
Howard Hughes – Maverick film producer of controversial films and owner of Trans-World Airlines
Louis B. Mayer – Head of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)
Benjamin Schulberg – Associate producer at Paramount pictures and producer for Columbia
David O. Selznick – Head of production at Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO)
Warner Brothers – One of the largest film studios, founded by Harry, Albert, Sam, and Jack Warner
Darryl Zanuck – Vice president of Twentieth Century Fox; won three Academy Awards

Politicos

Edmund “Pat” Brown – Governor of California (1959–1967)
Hiram Johnson – Governor of California (1911–1917), U.S. senator (1917–1945)
William Knowland – California senator (1945–1959); defeated in a run for governor in 1958
George Murphy – Californian actor and politician serving as president of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) (1944–1946) and as U.S. senator and state senator (1965–1971)
Nelson Rockefeller – Governor of New York who sought the presidential nomination in 1960, 1964, and 1968
Upton Sinclair – Famous author and candidate for governor of California
J. Parnell Thomas – Elected seven times to represent New Jersey’s Seventh District (1935–1950) before being convicted of corruption
Earl Warren – Governor of California, 1943–1953
Wendell Willkie – Corporate lawyer and Republican nominee for president in 1940

Business

Harry Chandler – Los Angeles Times publisher-owner
Justin Dart – Son-in-law to Charles Walgreen, known as the “boy wonder” of drugstores
Leonard Firestone – Staunch Republican and son of Harvey Firestone
William Randolph Hearst – American newspaper publisher famous for creating the largest newspaper chain and for his effect on journalism
Henry Salvatori – Founded Western Geophysical; a philanthropist and conservative activist
Acknowledgments

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