

Excerpts from *Hollywoodism: Jews, Movies and the American Dream* (1997, A&E, based on *An Empire of Their Own* by Neal Gabler).

Neal Gabler: “Now, why did they move to California? I believe that they went there because California was a raw social environment. And, although there was a social system in place, it was nowhere near as sophisticated, and nowhere near as entrenched, as the social hierarchy in Boston, or New York, or even Chicago, where these moguls came from. So, coming to California they realized that they could create their own social environment. They could create an empire of their own, not only on screen but within their own lives and their own social environment. And that is precisely what they did.”

Aljean Halrmetz (25:48): “I’m not sure there was an ‘American dream’ before the Jews came to Hollywood and invented it. What you had was a westward movement, and you had the idea of freedom, but you didn’t have what we have today, which is a popular culture that creates dreams, that’s a dream factory.”

Narrator: “Once the studios were in place, the Jewish moguls produced hundred of feature length films each year, movies that presented America with a new vision of itself, a vision that was very different from that of the establishment filmmakers of the Edison Film Trust.”

Judith Balaban: “They got to put their hopes and aspirations and mythologies about what a perfect life would be like, which is something I think people spend a long time thinking about when they have a very imperfect life, with a great deal of persecution and disempowerment.”

Narrator: “Unlike Edison, the [Hollywood] moguls celebrated the working class while extolling middle-class values. The moguls created a fantasy version of their own lives. They created an America where families were strong. The flight from persecution had destroyed their own families. The movies showed the family as indomitable, and treated mothers with reverence. The immigrant Jews also appealed to the aspirations of youth, another group of perennial outsiders forced to prove itself. Theirs was a mythical America. A world of boundless optimism, happy endings, and homespun truths. This was a world of clapboard houses with broad verandas and white picket fences, gleaming streets and shops with friendly picture windows. Hollywood’s America was made up of citizens who were industrious, religious, wholesome and decent. And although they were of differing classes and ethnicities, they were knitted together by a larger almost spiritual sense of family. the moguls created the images, icons, and the visual forms that we identify with the American way of life.”

Neal Gabler: “They created their own America which is not the real America, it’s their own version of the real America. But, ultimately this shadow America becomes so popular and so widely disseminated that its images and its values come to devour the real America. And so the grand irony of all of Hollywood is that Americans come to define themselves by the shadow America that was created by eastern European Jewish immigrants who weren’t admitted to the precincts of the real America.” (to 30:55, then “Somewhere over the rainbow to 32:32)

Narrator (32:32): “In the 1920’s and 30’s movie houses became temples of the new Hollywood religion ... 75% of all Americans went to the movies at least once a week.”

Jonathan Rosenbaum: “This kind of movie going was religious because it had to do with worship, it had to do with the screen being larger than you were, and you being in awe of what you were looking at, and feeling a certain reverence, and so there was, maybe you could say, a bogus spirituality, but it was still a spirituality that was believed in.”

Narrator: “Actors became the new gods and goddesses of the new American religion. And where there are new gods there must be new idols. So, the studio heads began a movie guild with the lofty title of the Academy of Motion Picture of Arts and Sciences. It was Mayer’s brilliant ideas to create the Oscars, where movie moguls could honor themselves by giving each other awards.”

Jonathan Rosenbaum (1:35:00-36:37): “There was a Hollywoodism then, there’s a Hollywoodism today. I would go further and say it is what is the ruling ideology of our culture. Hollywood culture is the dominant culture. It is the fantasy structure that we are all living inside.”