That's entertainment!

Paper 1, Part 7 -Gapped Text



In the years after the Second World War, the Hollywood film industry underwent a major transformation. Increased competition from foreign films, falling numbers of cinema audiences, and attacks on the studio structure by government agencies led to a loss of revenue which crippled the American industry, and forced it into rapid and profound change.

1

This phenomenon cannot simply be blamed on the rise of television, as it began five years before television existed as a viable alternative to movie-going. After the Second World War, there was a demographic and cultural shift in urban America that profoundly altered the leisure patterns of US society.

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The Hollywood studios were not oblivious to these population shifts. They saw the need to provide new theatres, and, once the necessary building materials became available, they began the process of constructing 4,000 drive-ins throughout the USA. The drive-in theatre offered a pleasant, open space where movie fans in parked cars could watch double features on a massive screen. By June 1956, at the very height of the drift away from the urban environment to green belt areas, and of the baby-boom, more people in the USA went to the drive-ins than to the traditional 'hard-top' theatres.

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Meanwhile, the shift of movie houses to where the audience was now located created another problem for the shaking foundations of the Hollywood studios. The disappearance of the division between 'first-run' houses in town centres showing prestige pictures, and local neighbourhood cinemas, changed the pattern of film demand, necessitating a major change in the organisation of film production.

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Even before the war, Hollywood studios had been up in arms about attempts to break up their vertically integrated systems of production, distribution and exhibition. They appealed the case all the way to the Supreme Court; but 1948 proved to be the end of the road, and, in what became known as the 'Paramount decision', the court ruled for the divorce of production and exhibition, and the elimination of unfair booking practices.

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However, the studios still retained a significant measure of direct control through international distribution. The 'Paramount decision' wounded Hollywood, but did not break it. Although the major companies would have adjusted far better to the new conditions had they retained their theatres, they still held sway as long as they produced what exhibitors and audiences wanted.

6

In 1939, Technicolor had lit up the screen in *Gone with the Wind*, but throughout its early years had only been employed for a select group of features, principally historical epics and lavish musicals. Just over a decade later, Technicolor lost its market monopoly as a result of anti-trust laws, and the giant Eastman Kodak soon surged into the market, introducing Eastman Color, which required only one, not three, separate negatives. The studios brought out Eastman Color under a variety of names, and soon virtually all Hollywood movies were being made in colour.

7

However, theatres which contracted for the new process were required to employ three full-time projectionists and invest thousands of dollars in new equipment, and this financial outlay proved too much for most.

CPE Level C2 - Reading practice

A A further blow to the stability of the studio system was delivered by the government. The years immediately after the war saw the culmination of federal anti-trust action against the Hollywood studios; a campaign that had started in the 1930s, but had been temporarily halted by the war.

B So Hollywood looked to innovation and new technology to tempt patrons back to the theatres. Films were designed on a spectacular scale, clearly superior to the black and white video images broadcast into the home. The first of the 'new' film technologies, colour, had long been available to the movie industry.

C People were cashing in the savings bonds accumulated during the war and buying houses in the suburbs, accelerating a trend which had begun at the turn of the century. This took away the heart of the film-going audience. Suburbanisation also raised the cost of going out to the movies: upon relocation it became inconvenient and expensive to travel to the centre of town simply to see a film.

D A more permanent solution arrived with the shopping centre theatre. As new malls opened in record numbers, the locus of movie attendance permanently shifted. With acres of free parking and ideal access for the car, shopping centres generally included a multiplex with five or more screens.

E In 1952, the Hollywood studios went one step further, and made their movies bigger. Cinemas offered spectacular widescreen effects by melding images from three synchronised projectors on a vast curved screen. To add to the sense of overwhelming reality, it also included multi-track stereo sound.

F What the Hollywood studios needed was a widescreen process without the added complications of 3-D, or the prohibitive investment of Cinerama. Fox's CinemaScope seemed to be the answer: a widescreen process which used an anamorphic lens to expand the size of the image.

G Perhaps the most important of these watersheds in the Hollywood system began in the middle of the last century. Certainly, by the early 1960s, attendances at US movie houses were half what they had been during the glory days, and thousands of flourishing theatres had closed for ever.

H During Hollywood's 'golden age', the major studios had directly controlled their own destinies by owning the most important theatres. Now they were legally obliged to sell these off and split their companies in two; the 'golden age' was over and a new age loomed.

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