

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 242

### “Dos, Don’t’s, and Be Carefuls”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“Oh, the parties we used to have. In those days, the public wanted us to live like kings and queens. So we did. And why not?”

Gloria Swanson.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 242. Dos, Don’ts, and Be Carefuls.

Today I want to talk about the motion picture industry. This is a topic we’ve touched upon before in the podcast, though perhaps I haven’t paid as much attention to it as I should have. We talked about Thomas Edison and his early experiments with motion pictures back in episode 118. In the United States, we usually think of Edison as the “inventor” of motion pictures, although that’s not quite true, although he was one of the early pioneers of the medium. He did not invent the idea of taking a series of photographs of a subject in movement and then displaying them rapidly, but he did put a lot of effort into making it practical.

Edison conceived his moving picture machine as comparable to his phonograph, by which I mean the moving pictures would be shown in a machine you looked into through a pair of eyeholes, one person at a time. These were moving pictures all right, but they were not “motion pictures” or “movies” as we know them today.

Edison also chose not to patent his invention, the Kinetoscope, in Europe, which freed Europeans to copy and improve on the design. Enter the aptly-named Lumière brothers (I say aptly named because *lumière* means light in French, see also the little candelabra guy in *Beauty and the Beast*), Auguste and Louis, who in 1895 developed the *cinématographe*, a relatively small, hand-cranked machine that could both film a motion picture at 16 frames per second and then project it onto a screen.

Unlike Edison's bulky equipment, the *cinématographe* was portable, so while Edison was limited to filming what could be brought into his studio, the Lumière brothers took their device out into the world and shot films of everyday life. But still, at this early date the interest was in the concept of a moving picture. Neither of these pioneers filmed stories, just visually interesting actions. By the turn of the century though, filmmakers were experimenting with adding the missing ingredient: a narrative. The most prominent figure in this story is another Frenchman, Georges Méliès, who was a magician and illusionist before he took an interest in moving pictures. Méliès built his own camera and studio in the suburbs of Paris where he created more than 500 short films. Méliès was one of the first to experiment with films that contained more than one scene and told stories in a linear, step-by-step fashion. He also experimented with using camera tricks to create illusions on film. In that sense, you could say he was a pioneer of special effects. For example, he would stop the camera, then add, remove, or change an object on the set, then start it again to create the illusion that the object had appeared or disappeared or changed from one thing to something else.

Méliès's most famous film is undoubtedly 1902's *Le Voyage dans la Lune*, or *A Trip to the Moon*, very loosely based on Jules Verne. I'm sure you are familiar with the iconic image of a literal face in the Moon with a spaceship stuck in its eye, which comes from this film. It was remarkable for its day, in its length, fourteen minutes long, its scope, its narrative, and its special effects. You can think of this film as the first special effects blockbuster, sort of the *Avengers: Endgame* of its day.

The history of motion pictures parallels the history of the automobile, episode 57, in that both inventions spent their adventurous youth in France, but came of age in the United States. The year 1903 saw the release of *The Great Train Robbery* produced by Edwin Porter for the Edison Company. This film was the first American blockbuster. It was comparable to Méliès's film in length and narrative, but *The Great Train Robbery* wowed audiences with its realistic portrayal of violent criminals. *The Great Train Robbery* wasn't exactly the first American narrative film or even the first Western, though it is sometimes described that way. It might be better to think of it as the first action film, highlighting crime, gunfire, chases, and violence and finishing with what was for its time a breathtaking ending: the bad guy firing his pistol right at the audience.

Initially, France had the biggest film industry in the world, but the US film industry soon surpassed it. This is often attributed to the Great War, and it is true that with all the demands the war put on the French economy, there was little room for anything as frivolous as motion pictures. American industry in general benefitted greatly from that three-year period from 1914 to 1917 when the Europeans were locked in combat while American businesses were free to focus on new generations of consumer goods like automobiles and refrigerators. And motion pictures.

But the war isn't the whole story. The US motion picture industry was catching up even before the July Crisis hit. That's because the US was a larger market, with more demand for new films

and more money available to spend making them. In 1910, a very early date in the history of film, 26 million Americans were visiting nickelodeons every week, a remarkable number for a country of only 92 million.

All this money created an incentive for newer, bigger, and better films. I told you in episode 104 about D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*. It's repugnant for its racism, but it told a sweeping story that unfolded over a period of years with a huge cast and a run time around three hours. It added greatly to the vocabulary of film storytelling with its dramatic close-ups, tracking shots, and other innovations, including cross-cutting, a technique in which the film cuts back and forth between say, a person in imminent danger and someone rushing in to save them, as a means of building dramatic tension. Some even called this technique the "Griffith last-minute rescue." It has been said that every film made since owes something to *Birth of a Nation*.

It was also an enormous commercial success, and a major factor in the US film industry moving from one- or two-reel short films to feature films as we know them today. Feature films proved to be good business. It was easier to advertise one film with one story than a collection of shorts such as they'd show in the nickelodeon. It was also easier to present it as a serious art form, comparable to a stage play, something more than just cheap entertainment, which in turn allowed exhibitors to charge something more than a nickel for admission. You might pay 15, 25, even 35 cents, equivalent to maybe three to five US dollars in today's money, to see a feature. Or even more. Tickets to *Birth of a Nation* went for as high as two dollars.

Higher quality films at higher prices drew a tonier audience but the new audience demanded a classier venue. The nickelodeons of old, where you sat in a small, packed room in a converted storefront that might or might not have rest rooms, faded away with the coming of the full-blown movie theater, a huge auditorium that could seat thousands, with a spacious lobby, carpeting, richly decorated with marble and mirrors, often in exotic styles meant to suggest a temple from Ancient Egypt or China or the Aztec Empire, and with plenty of rest rooms.

Unlike nickelodeons, these new theaters would be equipped with multiple projectors. Remember that movies are distributed on reels of film. The practical upper limit on a reel of film was around fifteen minutes, at 16 frames per second, less if the frame rate is more. The old nickelodeon films were only one or two reels long, but feature films might be eight to twelve reels long, so these multiple projectors were needed to transition smoothly from one reel to the next without interrupting the story.

I described to you back in episode 118 how the motion picture production industry was originally centered around New York City. Some of the earliest production companies were founded by nickelodeon owners who sought to increase their profits by starting their own motion picture studios rather than remaining beholden to producers charging top dollar for this very much in-demand product. I speak here of people like William Fox, Louis B. Mayer, Samuel Goldwyn, Adolph Zukor, and the Warner brothers. They were all Jewish, either immigrants from

Austria-Hungary or the Russian Empire, or children of such immigrants. Since motion pictures were a brand new business, and a somewhat disreputable one, it was an easier business to break into for someone who lacked the right pedigree and hadn't gone to the right schools.

These film producers came into the business from retail or from the garment industry and as such, they were accustomed to making frequent changes to their product line in response to fashion trends and thus the US film industry was born with an instinct to cater to ever-shifting public tastes.

I've talked about vertical integration before in connection with US industry. It was very much the preferred model for American businesses, when they could get away with it, and the motion picture industry was no exception. From the early days, these companies sought to keep full control of the production, distribution, and exhibition of films within their own houses. Movie studios owned their own distribution companies and their own chains of theaters where they showed only their own films. Independent movie theaters were forced into block booking; that is, the studios would not sell them individual pictures. They would have to buy them in groups, or blocks. The studios signed tough contracts with their creative talent as well, the writers and actors and directors who actually crafted the films. This was the beginning of what came to be known as the "studio system," in which a small number of powerful film studios dominated the industry.

At this same time, the industry migrated to Southern California and became known by the name of its new home town, Hollywood. The reason usually given was that Southern California provided bright sunshine and a variety of scenic locations, both of which were useful to filmmakers. Sometimes it is said that independents led the way west because they were trying to escape the power of the major studios, but those major studios soon followed them to California, and the film industry would frequently be the subject of antitrust scrutiny, and the occasional legal action, for decades to come.

[music: Zamecnik, *Sam Fox Moving Picture Music*]

The executives who ran the major film studios resisted the development of the "movie star." The talent were contract workers; if they became too celebrated, it would only enhance their negotiating power the next time their contracts came up for renewal. But the studios could not escape the simple truth that the actors were the faces on their product, whether they liked it or not, so they learned to like it. The biggest names of this era, apart from Charles Chaplin, were undoubtedly Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, husband and wife film stars who became essentially American royalty, mobbed wherever they went.

You'll recall that Chaplin, Fairbanks, and Pickford, among others, partnered in 1919 to create United Artists, which was intended as a film studio run by the artists, not by the suits. But most of them were already under contract to other studios; only Douglas Fairbanks was free to work for the new studio from the start, and the Twenties saw him star in a string of adventure tales that

would be his most popular films, such as 1920's *The Mark of Zorro*, 1922's *Robin Hood*, and 1924's *The Thief of Baghdad*. His wife, Canadian Mary Pickford, made her name playing sweet young things. She portrayed innocent teenage girls onscreen into her thirties, but she was most popular when she played the scrappy underdog. She was also said to have been the real brains behind the studio, United Artists, in its early years.

Swedish-born Greta Garbo came to the US in 1925. The only things she knew how to say in English were "God bless America" and "I am a poor Swedish girl." But in the era of silent film, who needs to speak English? The 1926 film *The Flesh and the Devil* made her a star. She was beautiful, with a complex and mysterious gaze that suggested so much. John Barrymore was a member of the most celebrated theatrical family in the US, and the only one willing to make movies, which would be regarded as less prestigious than the stage for another half century. His performance in 1920's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was his most memorable role.

Colleen Moore and Clara Bow were the screen incarnations of the flapper, one wholesome, the other a little shady. Gloria Swanson began her film career as the girl tied to the railroad tracks, and graduated to glamour star. Her fame dwindled until she made a dramatic comeback in 1950's *Sunset Boulevard*, where she wowed everyone by playing a faded silent film star so lost in daydreams of her past celebrity that she can no longer distinguish them from reality.

But the film actor whose name is perhaps most closely associated with this era is Italian-born Rudolph Valentino, who in his early film work usually played villains, dark, sexy villains, along with Japanese-born Sessue Hayakawa, because only fair-skinned blue-eyed actors could be heroes in the Hollywood of the time. Unlike Hayakawa though, Valentino managed to break into leading man roles with 1921's sensationally popular Great War film *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, followed by *The Sheik*, in which Valentino played an Arab sheik who kidnaps an English woman. American men found Valentino sexually ambiguous and therefore disturbing, but American women thought he was amazing, which disturbed American men that much more.

Even after he became a star, Valentino struggled to get paid what he was worth, which led him into the arms of United Artists. But he died unexpectedly in 1926 from complications of a perforated ulcer, at the age of 31. The shock of his passing was a major cultural milestone in the US, and accounts for a large measure of his fame. It was the first time in the history of the young film industry that the public had lost a youthful and popular film actor in their prime, someone who presumably had left us with many more great roles that would now go unperformed. The movie-going public would experience similar shocks with the sudden deaths of James Dean in 1955 at the age of 24, River Phoenix in 1993 at the age of 23, and Heath Ledger in 2008 at the age of 28. And perhaps I should add to this list the name Chadwick Boseman.

I've been talking about dramatic actors here. In the days of silent film, the techniques needed to tell a story lent themselves to certain kinds of stories and certain types of storytelling. You can see this in the kinds of films that were popular in the Roaring Twenties.

One uniquely American example is the Western. Westerns fit well within the limitations of silent film, being short on dialog and long on visuals. Westerns tended toward elemental confrontations between good guys and bad guys, and it doesn't take many words to figure out which is which. Their emphasis on pursuits, on fistcuffs, and on gunplay are inherently visual, as is the majestic scenery they demand—scenery readily available in and near Southern California.

The biggest name in Westerns during the silent era was Tom Mix. Mix grew up in DuBois, Pennsylvania and appeared in nearly three hundred films, all but a handful of which were silent. He was one of the highest paid actors in the movie business and also appeared on radio and in circuses. Mix befriended retired Federal law enforcement officer Wyatt Earp, best known as one of the participants in the gunfight at the O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona back in 1881. Earp spent the last years of his life as a consultant to filmmakers shooting Westerns, which was how he met Tom Mix. Wyatt Earp died in 1929 at the age of 80, the last of those involved in that gunfight to pass away. Tom Mix was a pallbearer at his funeral.

Under Wyatt Earp's tutelage, Tom Mix set the standard for how a Western hero was supposed to look and act. Mix himself passed away in 1940, but future generations of film actors would continue to mimic his style.

Though there were plenty of Westerns, the film genre most closely associated with the silent era is comedy. Comedy and silent film are a natural fit, like bacon and eggs. Dialog in silent films is limited and the actors have no opportunity to use intonation to express meaning or emotion, basic tools for actors on the stage and in the new medium of radio. Silent film actors do have facial expression and body movement, and they cranked both of them up to eleven to compensate for the inability to use their voices. This exaggerated physicality in silent film performances was easy to mock, easy to parody, easy to exaggerate still further into the physical comedy of slapstick.

We've already talked about the pioneering film comedy of Mack Sennett, most memorably in his Keystone Cops shorts. We also talked about Charles Chaplin, the English comic actor who had a childhood Oliver Twist would have found familiar, went into vaudeville, then was hired by Sennett to appear in films. He became the world's most highly paid entertainer, one of the most famous people on Earth, and co-owner of his own Hollywood studio, United Artists, by the time he was thirty years old.

It's impossible to talk about silent film comedy without putting Chaplin front and center, but he was not the only one. His closest competition was the American comic actor Joseph Frank Keaton, known to moviegoers as Buster Keaton. Keaton had served in the US Army during the Great War and began a career in film shortly afterward. In contrast to Chaplin, who usually portrayed stubborn, ill-tempered, albeit sympathetic underdogs, Keaton was a stony-faced everyman who doggedly persisted in the face of calamity after over-the-top calamity. His work has been described as Zen comedy. Keaton wrote, directed, and starred in ten acclaimed feature-

length comedies in the 1920s, a greater output than Chaplin, who only managed four over the same period. In 1928, Keaton signed with MGM, the biggest studio of the day, but gave up creative control over his work and never achieved the same success afterward, although he continued to perform in movies and on television until his death in 1966. His last feature film appearance was in that year's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

Keaton's work was not so highly regarded as Chaplin's in his time, although you will find those today who would put them side by side, or even perhaps give Keaton the edge. Third in line would have to be Harold Lloyd, an American whose signature look included big glasses with round frames and a straw hat. His characters tended to be ambitious go-getters who strove in the face of the most ridiculous obstacles imaginable. It is Lloyd who performed the iconic man-hanging-off-a-clock scene in the 1923 short *Safety Last*. You've probably seen clips of that bit. Lloyd appeared in twelve feature-length comedies in the Roaring Twenties.

Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd were the big three of film comedy, but honorable mention has to go to the team of Englishman Stan Laurel and American Oliver Hardy, who were already both well-established as film comedians individually before they were first paired in a short in 1926. Laurel's character was clumsy and childlike; Hardy's was large and pompous. They did their best work in the silent era, but unlike the others I've mentioned, transitioned successfully into talking pictures in which their comedy transitioned from slapstick to verbal sparring, often involving Laurel trying and failing to explain something to an increasingly frustrated Hardy. They're best remembered today for Hardy's catchphrase, spoken to Laurel, "Well, here's another nice mess you've gotten me into!" followed by Laurel whimpering or breaking into tears. The line was borrowed from Gilbert and Sullivan and is often misquoted as, "Here's another fine mess you've gotten me into!" a sentence which Hardy never said on film, although the pair did perform in a 1930 short titled *Another Fine Mess*, which is probably the source of the confusion. I hope I've cleared that up for you. Oliver Hardy also originated the expletive "D'oh!" in the duo's first talking picture, the short film *Unaccustomed as We Are* in 1929. Sixty years later, it would be adopted by Homer Simpson.

[music: Zamecnik, *Sam Fox Moving Picture Music*]

There's one more comic film actor of this period I need to introduce: Roscoe Arbuckle. Who? You are more likely to recognize him by his nickname, "Fatty" Arbuckle, and if you still don't know the name, I'll explain why in a minute. Arbuckle began his career in vaudeville, singing and doing comedy. He graduated into doing comedy on film for Mack Sennett, just like Charles Chaplin, appeared in some Keystone Cops shorts, and became one of the first silent film comedians to get a pie in the face, a comic bit developed by Fred Karno in British music halls that would become a staple of silent film comedy. Arbuckle was a large man, weighing over 300 pounds, hence his nickname, which had gotten attached to him during junior high school, and followed him around ever since, and which he very much resented.

His singing career fell by the wayside, although the story goes that Enrico Caruso once heard Arbuckle sing and told him to “give up this nonsense you do for a living” and become a singer. He did not heed that advice, but he did well enough with the nonsense. By 1920, he was one of the most famous and highly paid performers in Hollywood.

Over Labor Day weekend 1921, Arbuckle and two friends drove to San Francisco, where they stayed at the St. Francis Hotel and threw themselves a party. One of the party guests, a model and aspiring film actor named Virginia Rappe became ill. The hotel doctor examined her and concluded that she had had too much to drink. Two days later, Rappe was hospitalized; she died the following day of complications from a ruptured bladder, a condition which could have been aggravated by heavy drinking.

Another guest at the party accused Arbuckle of raping Rappe and thereby causing the injuries that led to her death. The national press picked up the story and ran sensationalized reports depicting Arbuckle as a serial sexual predator who had used his large body to overpower innocent young women. Fellow performers who had worked with Arbuckle, including Charles Chaplin, vouched for his gentle nature, to no avail. The district attorney in San Francisco chose to prosecute Arbuckle for rape and manslaughter, producing months of news stories. Newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst later said that the Arbuckle case sold more newspapers than any other story since the sinking of *Lusitania*, episode 107, and nothing like it would be seen again until the O.J. Simpson case seventy-three years later.

The Arbuckle scandal was just one of a series of scandals that rocked the US motion picture industry in the early 1920s. Film stars were typically young people who were hugely popular and making lots of money. The combination of youth plus wealth plus public acclaim often leads to poor life choices, and rumors often flew of film celebrities living wild lives revolving around booze, drugs, sex, and general hedonism. And in that regard, not much has changed in the century since.

A year earlier, Olive Thomas, a film actor and wife of Jack Pickford, another film actor and Mary Pickford’s brother, died after accidentally ingesting a drug her husband was using to treat his syphilis, though it was rumored to have been suicide. Five months after the Arbuckle case became public, film director William Desmond Taylor was found shot to death in his home in Los Angeles. That murder was never solved, although a number of film stars were rumored to have been involved, including Mabel Normand, a comic actor who had frequently worked with Charles Chaplin and Roscoe Arbuckle.

Also at about this same time, film star Wallace Reid collapsed on the set from complications of morphine addiction. His studio has something to answer for here; the studio doctor started giving him morphine injections so he could continue to perform while recovering from injuries he sustained in a railroad accident. A year later, his morphine addiction would kill him.



Motion pictures were hugely popular, but there was also a backlash from traditionalists and religious groups who believed that the movie industry was destroying the nation's moral fiber, and there were plenty of newspapers eager to cover any celebrity scandal. There was no such thing as First Amendment protection for the movies at this time. Many state and local authorities had censorship boards with the power to ban films they deemed immoral. The studio executives decided it made good business sense to head off potential censorship and boycotts by creating a trade association to regulate the industry from within. In January 1922, they formed the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, the MPPDA.

To chair the new association, the studios turned to the US Postmaster General, a 42-year-old man named William Harrison Hays. Hays had been Warren Harding's campaign manager during the 1920 Presidential election. Afterward, Harding appointed him Postmaster General; it was customary at the time to offer that position as a reward to a political supporter. Hays resigned that post to take the new job in Hollywood, which turned out to have been a good career move, as it got him out of Washington before the Harding Administration scandals began to hit.

Hays's job had three parts. The first was to police the industry in order to avoid censorship, which he had to do without knowing exactly what standards these various state and local censorship boards applied to their decisions. That was something they kept to themselves; there was no written code. The second was to give the studios a clear idea of their dos and don'ts ahead of time. No studio wanted the expense of filming a scene that Hays would later tell them to cut out of the picture. They wanted to know up front what they could and couldn't put on celluloid.

And third, Hays was face of the Hollywood film industry. He would be responsible for public relations, to convince the censorship boards and the industry's critics, both in the US and abroad, that they could relax. Hollywood had everything under control.

Meanwhile, Roscoe Arbuckle was tried three times for the death of Virginia Rappe. The first two trials ended in hung juries; the third time around, the jury acquitted him in just six minutes, and not only acquitted him, but took the highly unusual step of presenting a public declaration that a "great injustice" had been done to the film star.

Despite this highly unusual acquittal with apology, Will Hays banned Roscoe Arbuckle from the film industry and ordered no further distribution of his films. It was a little reminiscent of the Black Sox scandal, episode 229, where they banished the tarnished stars in order to do damage control for the game. Afterward, Arbuckle did a little directing under a pseudonym for a small studio. In 1932, he made the beginnings of a comeback, signing with Warner Brothers to make six talking comic shorts. After completing that contract in June 1933, Warner's signed him to do a feature film. He went out that night to celebrate with some friends, declaring it "the best day of my life." Later that night he died in his sleep of an apparent heart attack. He was 46 years old.

Hays established a list of thirteen guidelines meant to help filmmakers steer clear of censorship trouble, although what came to be called the “Hays Office” at first had no authority to enforce these guidelines. Critics of the industry remained unsatisfied, so in 1927, the Hays Office expanded the guidelines into two lists, one of eleven “Don’ts,” things that should not be in movies ever, including homosexuality and interracial romance, and twenty-six “Be Carefuls,” topics that should be handled with caution. The Hays rules also came with one big loophole, so-called “compensating values.” For example, motion pictures could not depict characters who committed adultery, if they were presented sympathetically, and/or if they got away with it. On the other hand, if the story of the film included punishment for those characters, if the adultery ruined their lives and led them to regret their poor choices, then it was okay. No filmmaker exploited that loophole more thoroughly than Cecil B. De Mille, whose 1923 film, *The Ten Commandments*, packs plenty of sex and violence, all justified in the name of teaching a moral lesson. It depicts two brothers, one of whom observes the Ten Commandments; the other flouts them. He lives wildly and dies tragically. Get the point?

By the way, that film is mostly set in the twentieth century, albeit with a 45-minute prologue recounting the Biblical story of the Exodus, the Ten Commandments, and the Golden Calf. As you already know I’m sure, de Mille would return to this topic in a 1956 film of the same title; this one would focus entirely on the Biblical story. It was de Mille’s last film, his biggest, most expensive, and most successful.

But the film industry continued to draw criticism; much of it came from the Catholic Church and Catholic laypeople. In 1929, a Jesuit priest named Daniel Lord drafted a new proposed code of standards and submitted it to Hays, who adopted it in 1930. This came to be known as the “Production Code” or the “Hays Code.” There remained much hostility to the Code from filmmakers and from more liberal elements of society. The magazine *The Nation* pointed out, for example, that under the Code it would be impossible to film the Boston Tea Party, since the perpetrators were criminals, so you couldn’t depict them as sympathetic or heroic, or tell the audience that they got away with their crime. A modern historian, Thomas Doherty, described the 1930 Code as “a homily that sought to yoke Catholic doctrine to Hollywood formula: The guilty are punished, the virtuous are rewarded, the authority of the church and state is legitimate, and the bonds of matrimony are sacred.”

In 1934, with the United States deep in the Great Depression, an outcry arose following the release of two Mae West films, *She Done Him Wrong* and *I’m No Angel*. A new group, the Legion of Decency, predominantly though not exclusively Catholic, threatened a boycott, inducing the industry to make the Hays Code mandatory. Henceforth, a motion picture would need certification from the Hays Office that it complied with the Code before it could be released and distributed.

Will Hays retired in 1945 and died in 1954 at the age of 74, but the Code continued to be enforced until 1970, when it was replaced with a rating system that assigned code letters to films

based on their content and their suitability for younger viewers. That rating system, with amendments, is still in use in our time.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Robert for his kind donation, and thank you to Randall for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Robert and Randall help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we move from Los Angeles to New York City. New York as we know it today was actually a new city, created in 1898. By the 1920s, it was becoming home to the tallest buildings in the world and home to some of the world's most prominent smart alecks. The Algonquin Roundtable, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In 1927, studio mogul Louis B. Mayer established the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, an organization that would include film actors, directors, producers, writers, and technicians for the purpose of awarding accomplishment in the industry. It was good publicity, and also, as Mayer himself put it, "I found that the best way to handle [these filmmakers] was to hang medals all over them... That's why the Academy Awards were created."

The first award ceremony was held in 1929 at a private banquet hosted by Douglas Fairbanks at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. Tickets cost \$5 each and 270 attended. Winners were awarded a gold-plated statuette of a knight with a sword, done in art deco style and standing on a base that is a reel of film. The first Academy Award for Outstanding Picture went to *Wings*, a 1927 action romance about Great War pilots, starring Clara Bow. Charles Chaplin won a special award for his 1928 film *The Circus*, the fourth feature film Chaplin wrote, directed, and starred in for United Artists. Warner Brothers got a special award for releasing the first talking picture, *The Jazz Singer*, in 1927. I will have much more to say about *The Jazz Singer* and the advent of talking pictures in a future episode.

The Academy Awards have continued every year ever since. The second ceremony, in 1930, was broadcast over the radio, and the ceremonies have continued to be broadcast over radio, and later television. The Academy Awards would be the first and most prestigious of a number of

entertainment awards that would follow: the Emmy Awards for television, the Grammy Awards for music, and the Tony Awards for theatre.

And the Academy has continued to present its awards in the form of gold-plated statuettes of the same design. These have come to be known as the “Oscar”—the origin of this name is obscure.

[music: Closing Theme]