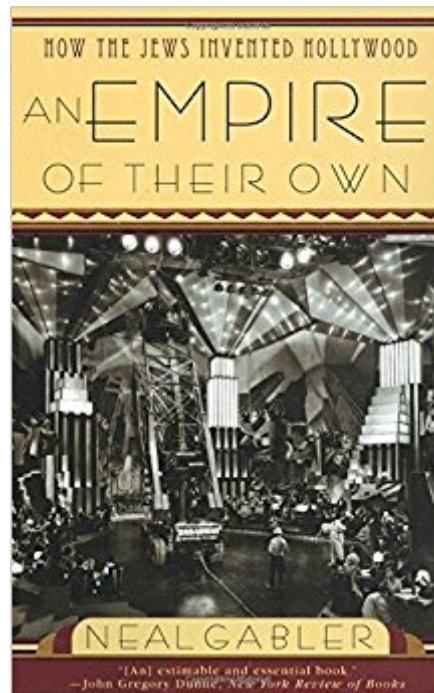




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# An Empire Of Their Own: How The Jews Invented Hollywood



## Synopsis

A provocative, original, and richly entertaining group biography of the Jewish immigrants who were the moving forces behind the creation of America's motion picture industry. The names Harry Cohn, William Fox, Carl Laemmle, Louis B. Mayer, Jack and Harry Warner, and Adolph Zucker are giants in the history of contemporary Hollywood, outsiders who dared to invent their own vision of the American Dream. Even to this day, the American values defined largely by the movies of these immigrants endure in American cinema and culture. Who these men were, how they came to dominate Hollywood, and what they gained and lost in the process is the exhilarating story of *An Empire of Their Own*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

That subtitle may inspire in some readers waves of ethnic pride, and in others waves of ethnic revulsion, but the point of this book is that its claim of origin is quite literally true. And what makes it an interesting read for political types is the way it demonstrates that no matter how much the founding Hollywood moguls and their successors tried to peddle an idealized, escapist form of entertainment, bubbling up under and around their every project was ideology, racism, ethnic prejudice, class friction, domestic and international politics and all the other raw, seething stuff that distinguishes this country from all others. In Gabler's hands, the Industry draws a picture of American political history in spite of itself.

The author presents "an entertaining, wide-ranging, in-depth account" of the Jewish studio

executives, theater owners, producers, writers, lawyers and talent agents who dominated the American film industry until shortly after WW II. "Gabler vividly recreates a way of life now gone forever," commented PW. Photos. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is an excellent, well researched book about the men who invented Hollywood and the movies according to their own ideas about what the American Dream should be and what their ideal of America might look like. If you think MGM musicals are realistic, blame Mr. Mayer. But the book's not only about the glory days of Hollywood. The Red Scare, HUAC, and the black list--and how the studios acquiesced and then some of them fought back is also covered. If you like movies and want some real history about them and the studios that made them, this is the book to read.

Gabler is a uniquely erudite cultural critic. This is the third book I have read by him and I am deeply impressed with the unusual breadth of his coverage. In this case, he writes about the founding fathers of Hollywood, the dictatorial dreamers and shapers of its golden age (to the late 1940s). In his telling, they are all Eastern European Jews, striving to become part of the American dream and at the same time providing many of the images that entered the American psyche. They all started with the penny arcades at the beginning of the century, and built empires in which they exercised total control of content and creation. This book is less about the economics of the studio system - cartels that manufactured films on lots, virtually owned the "talent" via long-term contracts, dominated the distribution of their films, and controlled many of the theatres that played them - than about the culture and ethos they were trying to create in their dictatorial domains. The era passed with the Supreme Court trust-busting ruling, political attacks during the McCarthy era, and the rise of independent talent in actors, producers, and writer-directors. As Gabler sees it, these founders were fairly secular Jews, who wanted to fit into the American ideal of pseudo-aristocratic entrepreneurs (from poverty). This was the source of their maudlin, sentimental style and crude American ideals, each studio with its own peculiar character. I must admit, I find this angle of analysis, with all the objections one can make for its subjectivity, quite fascinating and given their power to shape things, dead on the mark. Gabler tells the story in the form of serial biographies. It is a wonderful flowing narrative, superlatively written and with a genuine depth of historical understanding. Indeed, while I think this early book is somewhat weaker than his later books, *Disney and Life: The Movie*, I will read any book that this critic writes. Warmly recommended. This is not my usual domain of interest, so the reading is often hard going for me, but I have learned an immense amount from this critic, who is a real intellectual.

Extraordinary account of the founding and development of the movie industry in the U.S. Penetrating analysis of the character, ambitions, determination, and, yes, ruthlessness of those transplants from European destitution who fought and connived their way to power on East and West coasts of America. Great reading.

I can't say enough what a great find this book was. Whether you are an avid film junkie, Jewish, or both, this is such a great book. The insight into the culture that helped create movies is very interesting. The personalities are larger than life. One particularly interesting thing about this book is how much of a villain Thomas Edison comes across. You don't hear about his behavior very often. Check it out! This is a must have book for any book collection- as who doesn't like the movies?!

Movie critic Neal Gabler wrote "An Empire of Their Own" the story of how the Jews invented Hollywood. The book was published in 1989 becoming an essential read for: a. persons interested in Hollywood history b. persons interested in the story of Jewish immigrants in the United States c. persons interested in a good read about the movie industry in its salad days of the early twentieth century. The book is a treasure trove of quotable quotes, Among a quiverful of Gabler insights which hit the target are the following sage comments: "The Hollywood Jews embarked on an assimilation so ruthless and complete that they cut their lives to the pattern of American respectability as they interpreted it." -p. 4 "Mayer didn't only want to belong-he wanted to be a father to the whole world..." -p. 81 (Gabler's characterization of Louis B. Mayer of MGM fame) "By the early thirties, MGM had clearly displaced Zukor's Paramount as the supreme studio..." -p. 119 "...the Warners ...regarded themselves as outsiders and underdogs, and they trusted no one beyond their family circle." -p. 130 (Gabler's comment on the Warner Brothers Studio moguls) "...no other studio was built through a single talent the way Columbia was built through Capra." -p. 165 (comment on Frank Capra the famous director of such hits as "It's A Wonderful Life" and "It Happened One Night." -p. 165 "Everything about MGM bespoke quality." -p. 210 "The Hollywood Jews had another vice... They loved to gamble." -p. 258 "If anyone changed the Jews' self-effacement in Hollywood, it was Hitler." -p. 302 "America was at war, and the Hollywood Jews were on the side of the angels." -p. 347 (Jewish filmmakers were very patriotic in turning out films during World War II.) "Louis B. Mayer in exile was like Napoleon on Elba." -p. 413 (Gabler's observation after Meyer was ousted by MGM in the mid 1950s.) The 502 page book is well illustrated with period photos and an extensive bibliography. The moguls who are profiled from Adolph Zukor to L.B. Meyer, Irving Thalberg, the

Warner Brothers, Harry Cohn and others were colorful, profane, poorly educated but brilliant men who made the movie industry into a bonanza industry. Show business was looked down upon by WASP society so the movies were a perfect venue for Jewish show business genius and hutzpah! Gabler has produced a classic book on his subject! Well recommended!

love this book.

This is a great book for classic movie buffs and anyone interested in the early film industry. It is written in an entertaining and comprehensive style. The book is well-researched, thorough and holds the readers attention. Jennifer Leigh Wells Author of "Rebecca: The Making of a Hollywood Classic"

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