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“Cold War Ideology or Corporate Profit?: The Motivations Behind the ‘Movietime U.S.A.’ Tours, 1951-1952”

The postwar years in the United States were an era of flux and confusion: prosperity mixed with paranoia and a pervasive shift in political and cultural life. With the Cold War and Red Scare creating hysteria and suspicion at both the Federal and local levels, what was acceptable and “normal” was established for the “average American.” Hollywood and the film industry had been a tool for the Federal government during World War II and was believed to have undue influence over the masses, but with the high prevalence of labor unions, left leaning personalities, and the racy culture of Hollywood, the industry became a lightning rod for fears of Communist infiltration and the disintegration of morals.

The public relations campaign launched by the Council of Motion Picture Organization (COMPO) in 1951 called “Movietime U.S.A.” was the largest and most involved effort to tackle the issues facing the industry. It was a public relations campaign to demystify, de-villainize, and clean up the tarnished image of Hollywood and increase the box office profits that had been steadily declining. The Movietime U.S.A. campaign was one of Hollywood’s attempts to conform to the new dominant culture pervading Cold War era America to fend off attacks and to increase their profits.

In her study of Hollywood, anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker argues that,

Movies meet, wisely or unwisely, man's need for escape from his anxieties; they help assuage his loneliness, they give him vicarious experiences beyond his own activities; they portray solutions to problems; they provide models for human relationships, a set of values and new folk heroes.¹

Her analysis helps demonstrate the power of movies in 1950 as a cultural shaper, and because of this power to influence the behavior of man, the film industry faced harsh criticism from conservatives and the increasingly conservative masses. The film industry also experienced actual quantitative evidence of a shift when there was a decline in profits from 1946 through the early 1950s. This decline could be attributed to taxes and changes in how the industry functioned, but a change in culture seemed the most apparent. The famously non-conformist, glamorous, racy industry found itself in a new era of conformity and stability leading to a campaign to change its image.

To understand the significance of Movietime and the problems Hollywood was facing, it is important to understand the circumstances that led to such an endeavor. The culture, politics, and economy of post-war America heavily influenced the content of the Movietime campaign because the conservative values and trends during the post-war/Cold War era were a major departure from the norm of pre World War II and during wartime. Because of this departure it is important to clarify what changed and establish a cultural and political context for Movietime U.S.A.

The 1950s ushered in a new way of life for the "average American". The memories of the Great Depression and World War II were still fresh in the minds of many, so with a new realization of prosperity, many Americans strove for stability.

¹ Powdermaker, Hortense. *Hollywood, the Dream Factory; an Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-makers*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1950, 15.

The explosive growth of the suburbs, the emphasis on laying down roots with a family and a community, as well as a streak of consumerism all reflect the cultural tendency toward stability.² When talking about the “average American” it should be made clear that an “average American” was a white, generally Protestant, middle-class person.³ This is important because the culture of the white middle-class became the dominant culture of 1950s America and their values pervaded American politics, economics, and the media.

After World War II ended, middle-class Americans had money to spend whether it be from military service, women working, or from having saved up during wartime rationing, and with this new surplus of funds, young men and their new wives were able to buy homes. Many wanted to leave the apartments of the city and settle down with their new spouse in a quiet area in their own house and start a family. This trend led to a massive influx of young, white Americans to small town communities outside of the large cities where each block of single family owned homes became it’s own community. Here, in these communities, is where the “average American” culture was born and reinforced.

It should be noted that not everyone fit this “average American” characterization. While the white, middle-class culture is the remembered ideal of the 1950s; other groups and non-suburban housewives also existed and rebelled against the pervasive image of the domestic white woman. Many worked to

² May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988, 3&11. While this book has been argued about for the last 20 years, it gives insight into the white, middle class, suburban family culture that this project focuses on. Other texts have corroborated the picture of the middle class that May presents. It is however lacking for every other demographic.

³ May, *Homeward Bound*, 13.

construct their own identity, as Joanne Meyerowitz outlines in her compilation *Not June Cleaver*,

Various women portray themselves as garment workers, nurses, unionists, public servants, citizens, political activists, community organizers, pacifists, communists, victims of harassment, immigrants, Chinese Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, white women, unwed mothers, abortionists, lesbians, butches, femmes, and Beat bohemians. The ways they portray themselves demonstrate that women in the postwar era saw themselves as more than women or wives or mothers.⁴

This summary of “other” identities for women of the postwar era is evidence of the diversity that existed during the era, but is also evidence of how pervasive the “average American” identity was, and still is, such that these others were ignored and forgotten. These identifiers also are in opposition to the established norm, giving us an idea of who and what were stigmatized in society.

The 1950s were an era of conformity to the established culture and the policing of this conformity was not the Communist investigation committees or some secret police, but the neighbors and even one’s family.⁵ This emphasis on conformity helped establish and solidify the suburbs as a community and the culture within that community. Those who did not follow the values or moral code set by their community were stigmatized, alienated, and immediately under suspicion. The moral code and value system were focused directly on the family and the roles within that structure.

⁴ Meyerowitz, Joanne. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994, 10.

⁵May, *Homeward Bound*, 10-11.

The family structure and the roles of men and women were extremely important to the “average American.” There was a re-emergence of the separate spheres ideology that pervaded the Victorian era where there was a specific role and place for each gender. A family in the 1950s was supposed to subscribe to the idea that men were to be the “breadwinner” and out in the public sphere, and women were to be cultivating their home in the realm of domesticity and being a good mother. Motherhood was viewed as a civic duty, thereby reinforcing the importance of family. In her book, *Homeward Bound; American Families in the Cold War Era*, Elaine Tyler May argues additionally that family and marriage were inherently linked with the new “average American” value system,

Others linked family life to civic virtues by claiming that marriage strengthened their patriotism and morals, instilling them with ‘responsibility, community spirit, respect for children and family life, reverence for a Supreme Being, humility, [and] love of country.’⁶

These roles, values, and a happy satisfying marriage were essential to the family structure for the white middle-class American.

Gender roles in particular, were heavily focused on because many believed they were severely disrupted by both the Great Depression and the war. The mass unemployment of men during the Depression and then the hyper masculinity of war mixed with the fears of homosexuality, led to an effort to “domesticate” men into roles as family breadwinners. The war was seen as a detriment to women, not because their men were away, but because many believed it had taken away their femininity or hyper-sexualized them. Being in the workforce and working in factories made women appear more masculine while also eliciting fears of

⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, 30.

lesbianism.⁷ The pin-up girls of the 1940s and the women painted on fighter planes were purposefully sexy and used to comfort and seduce the male soldiers. After the war, factory and working girls were told to go home because the men were back or to go into more feminine jobs like teaching, nursing, or secretarial work. The ultra sexy ladies of pin-ups and fighter planes were tamed into a pretty and utilitarian housewife clad in pearls with a vacuum cleaner.

Speaking of vacuum cleaners, the money lining the “average American’s” pockets was not only spent on a home in the suburbs, but also on all of the new appliances emerging into the market. Many of these Americans remember the Depression or had parents greatly affected by the financial crisis. With these memories of struggle and money to spend, consumerism was a major aspect of 1950s American life, to the point that Vice President Nixon bragged about the appliances in American kitchens to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow in 1959 bringing about the argument over the “commodity gap”.⁸ Buying things and keeping up with the new technology was a way to conform and be patriotic at the same time. The appliances and products being purchased were made in America and buying those products helped the domestic economy and promoted the Capitalist American free-market ideology.⁹

With gender roles forming into something believed to be more “traditional” and family becoming a necessity, the moral code and value system was the backbone of middle-class American culture. Christianity, and Protestantism in

⁷ May, *Homeward Bound*, 70-72.

⁸ *Ibid*, 17.

⁹ *Ibid*, 17-18.

particular, was the vertebrae of that backbone, so to speak. Respect, devotion, and marriage are a part of the Christian faith, as well as a moral code that commands people to abstain from lying, stealing, killing, and cheating. The people living in the suburbs and controlling the culture believed in these values and this moral code creating another facet of their community and something else to conform to. The pervasive Christianity was a major reason for the stigmatization of divorce, deviance, and vice

Conformity and stigmatization were important because anything outside of the established norms was seen as suspicious. Something as innocent as not being married, not having children, the man of the house being unemployed or the woman of the house being employed, all had social consequences. These norms were enforced by neighbors, family members, and from media like the new television sitcoms depicting family life. Any kind of deviation from the nuclear family dynamic was an opportunity for blackmail or seduction from subversive others. While the post-war/Cold war era is known for its prosperity and conformity, it is also known for its paranoia and hysteria. Having a successful marriage, a home, and children were apart of the idea that a home was its own shelter, or its own barrier, to outside influences, whether they were vice or Communism.

This idea of shelter or “containment,” had both cultural and political connotations. Culturally it was related to being literally contained at home and figuratively in regard to society and relationships. Politically, containment related to Communism in the sense that they wanted to stem the spread of Communism and contain it to the nations already under Communist rule. This was partially the

rationale behind the Korean War and later the Vietnam War. The United States and free-market Capitalism were facing off against the Communist Soviet Union in what is termed the Cold War. May ties the two spheres together by arguing,

Domestic containment was bolstered by a powerful political culture that rewarded its adherents and marginalized its detractors. More than merely a metaphor for the cold war on the homefront, containment aptly describes the way in which public policy, personal behavior, and even political values were focused on the home.¹⁰

This argument reinforces all of the factors that influenced and enforced the importance of the home in the dominant American culture and the political ideology of the era. Anti-Communism and “containment” pervaded even the private sanctum of one’s home.

The United States government was staunchly anti-Communist to the point that people were being blacklisted and imprisoned for Communist leanings or activity. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was formed in 1938, and utilized by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the late 1940s and early 1950s. If someone was even suspected of being a Communist or of being a Communist sympathizer they were subjected to a hearing where they had to defend themselves or name others for the committee to interrogate. Senator McCarthy was a major catalyst for the Red Scare and hysteria that overcame the nation in the early 1950s. He accused government officials of being Communists and fueled the fire with rhetoric and fear mongering by insinuating that the threat was internal.

While the Cold War and paranoia were keeping the nation on edge, the economy was doing quite well. World War II had turned the United States into a

¹⁰ Ibid, 14.

factory-rich war machine, increasing productivity and setting up an infrastructure for domestic manufacturing that had previously been lacking. This is important because after the war, there was a massive demand for American made goods in Europe. The European front was devastated from city bombings and enemy occupation, so while they attempted to recover, they relied heavily on American goods. The foreign market as well as the domestic market was booming because of high demand and this meant that Americans had more money in their pockets. The level of financial security and world power that the United States gained from World War II functions as evidence for why the 1950s were characterized as the era of prosperity, for the middle-class white Americans at least.

All of these political and cultural developments of the United States are important to understanding Movietime U.S.A. To understand why executives and the Council of Motion Picture Organization (COMPO) felt that the campaign was necessary, it is important to understand how Hollywood functioned and how it was perceived by the public. The trends and workings of the film industry through the 1930s and 40s shed light on how America reacted to Hollywood, and what changed post-war. The disintegration of the studio system, the content of films, and the reactions to the violence and vice in films were of major concern to COMPO.

Up through the 1950s, the film industry was ruled by the studio system which consisted of five major production studios (Paramount, MGM, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox, and RKO) and three minor studios (Universal, Columbia,

and United Artists).¹¹ Each studio owned theaters around the country and had contracted with their own set of directors, stars, and production teams, so much so that it was possible to discern from watching a movie which studio it came from based on characteristics and stars in the film. Clark Gable, for example, was under contract with MGM from 1931 to 1954, and director Cecil B. De Mille worked for Paramount for over 40 years.¹² Through the studio system films were churned out quickly and efficiently with specific genres and generic storylines much like a factory spit out product. This system was what made the film industry so unique because it turned Hollywood into a factory that mass-produced unique pieces of art or “the dream factory” as Powdermaker coined it, while at the same time studio executives ruled the lives of its workers through binding contracts.

The studio system started to fall apart just before World War II due to a Federal antitrust suit filed against the studios. The case was dropped and then reopened in what is famously known as “the Paramount case,” and concluded with a Supreme Court ruling against the studios in 1948 that forced them to separate production, distribution, and exhibition.¹³ The studios did this slowly to keep control as long as possible, but the ruling had a real effect through the 1950s and the studio system was officially dead by 1960. Post-war strikes by labor unions, an increase in independent filmmaking, and the rise of television also contributed to the demise of the studio system. The studio system in conjunction with the star

¹¹ Belton, John. *American Cinema/American Culture*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009, 67.

¹² Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, 74.

¹³ Sklar, Robert. *Movie-Made America: A Social History of American Movies - Revised and Updated*. New York: Random House - Vintage, 1994, 272.

system had its foundation in contracts that bound stars, production crews, and distributors to a specific studio, so when this dissolved so did the tradition of business. This demise is significant because it changed the mechanics of how films were made and distributed throughout the U.S. while also affecting the lives of everyone who worked in the film industry.¹⁴

While the functional flow of Hollywood was changing, the life and glamour of Hollywood was as flashy and unique as ever. The star system and wealth of Hollywood had much to do with the lifestyle and culture associated with the people of Tinsel town. Wealth, talent, and beautiful faces characterized the stars and gave them a status that elevated them from the common person due to the admiration they received from the masses.

The 1920s were an era that pushed boundaries when it came to sex and morals, and moviemakers also experimented with themes and technology. By the 1934, however, censorship of sex, violence, and crime became the norm due to protests by civic organizations and clergy leaders. The repression of sex and violence held through the '30s but came back with a force during the war and post-war era in a genre known as film noir. Film noir was dark, charged with paranoia and sexuality, and had a "loss of innocence" motif. The reemergence of the femme fatale, where actresses like Rita Hayworth in *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948) and Lauren Bacall in *The Big Sleep* (1946) were homegrown villains, really pushed the limits of classical social, sexual, and psychological behavior.¹⁵

¹⁴ Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, 82-85.

¹⁵ Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, 234-237.

The content in noir films as well as reports in fan magazines, gossip columns, and the news about the stars and their behavior began to negatively affect the perception of Hollywood. Through the late 1920s and 1930s, it was generally acknowledged that there were Communists living and working in Hollywood. With the high concentration of labor unions, guilds, and the Great Depression instilling the belief that Capitalism was failing, Communism was not only acknowledged and somewhat accepted, but with a watchful eye.¹⁶

This was the case until post World War II and the start of the Cold War when Communism and the Soviets were vilified, and Hollywood caught the attention of HUAC and Congressional investigations. These investigations led to hearings where stars were interrogated and labeled “friendly” or “unfriendly” witnesses while being forced to denounce any kind of Communist affiliation and incriminate others in the industry. The leaders of guilds especially were targeted.¹⁷ It was feared that filmmakers, and writers in particular, were inserting pro-Communism messages into the films that would incite a Communist Revolution. Though none of this could be proven, ten Hollywood personalities were blacklisted and imprisoned for speaking out against the hearings, claiming that it was a violation of their civil rights; they are famously known as “the Hollywood 10.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid, 299-304.

¹⁷ Vaughn, Stephen. *Ronald Reagan in Hollywood: Movies and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, ch. 12. Ronald Reagan was heavily involved and later president (1947-1952) of the Screen Actors guild and also a committee called the Motion Picture Industry Council (MPIC) that unofficially worked with COMPO when determining the content and image of the Movietime tours. Reagan worked to improve the perception of actors specifically and Vaughn credits him with bringing respectability to the acting profession.

¹⁸ Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, 306-307.

Fan magazines and gossip columnists like Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons were also responsible for the suspicion of Hollywood personalities because of their scandalous reporting style. The “journalists” and readers were obsessed with stars like Ava Gardiner, Rita Hayworth, Marilyn Monroe, and Elizabeth Taylor due to their beauty and tumultuous love lives, but also because these magazines allowed the reader to catch a glimpse of their private lives.¹⁹ Divorce and drug use were major headlines connecting the average American reader to the extravagant stars, and the HUAC investigations turned into another juicy piece of gossip, especially for the politically interested and conservative Hopper.^{20 21} These magazines and stories of divorce, casual romance, and drug use were interesting reading material to the American people, but were also in direct opposition to their own personal values.

With the content of films pushing moral boundaries, the perceived Communist infestation, and gossip columnists like Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons sensationalizing divorce, drug use, and promiscuity in Hollywood, it is easier to understand how the image of Hollywood, and the people living and working there, became tarnished. The stars were becoming less admired, less respected, and looked onto with suspicion. In 1950, anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker went to Hollywood and wrote a book *called Hollywood the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at Hollywood*, where she studies and attempts to

¹⁹ Slide, Anthony. *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers*, University Press of Mississippi, 2010, 171.

²⁰ Lewis Jon. Review: “Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism. By Jennifer Frost ((New York: New York University Press, 2011). *The Journal of American History*, Dec. 2011. Pg. 884.

²¹ For more on Hedda Hopper and her writing see: Frost, Jennifer. *Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism*, New York: New York University Press, 2011.

analyze the culture of the area while also shedding light on the inner workings of the film industry. Her work illuminated the importance of sex and wealth in Hollywood as well as the strained relationships and warped culture of the stars and executives.²² The fact that Powdermaker even felt it was necessary to study Hollywood is evidence of the foreign culture and mystery that existed in post-war Hollywood.

Fifty years later, it seems clear that the emergence of a dominant middle-class culture would conflict with Hollywood's spicy reputation, but it was not so obvious to Hollywood executives at the time, and it took them until 1950 to realize that there was a problem. Being that Hollywood was an industry before all else, a perceived decline of profits was the central issue to be addressed.²³ Theater attendance, and therefore industry profit, peaked in 1946 and was on a steady decline for years after; by 1953 movie attendance dropped by almost half.²⁴ This peak is attributed to everything from taxes, to the effect of the War, and to the quality of films being produced. There were a number of factors that executives believed responsible for this drop, but a solution to these problems was difficult to pin point due to the disintegration of the studio system, the War, and the difficulty of discerning trends in such a short period of time.

Theaters themselves were experiencing a problem that directly affected the profits of the film industry. The dismantling of the studio system affected the

²² Powdermaker, *Hollywood the Dream Factory*, 237.

²³ *The Case Against the 20% Federal Admissions Tax on Motion Picture Theatres*. Performed by Richard Anderson, Charles Tannen, Et. Al. USA: MGM Distribution Company, 1953. Film.

²⁴ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 272.

ownership and booking of large theater chains across the nation. The actual process of obtaining the films and booking the films was more difficult than before affecting what was shown and for how long.²⁵ Theater attendance had declined and a Federal Admissions tax that called for 20-percent of gross income had, according to the industry, devastated smaller and independent theaters.²⁶ By the early 1950s thousands of smaller theaters were forced to close²⁷, and when those theaters were closed Hollywood obviously did not make money from them. Because Hollywood was an industry first and foremost, profits were their number one priority, not just for executives but also for the stars, directors, and producers who had grown accustomed to a certain lifestyle.

With the decline of profits, studio executives and the Council of Motion Picture Organization (COMPO), a group unifying the studios, tried to figure out just what the problem or problems were that was costing the industry millions of dollars. The executives and COMPO looked into three possibilities: culture, technology, and the economics influencing the industry.

It was evident that there was a cultural issue based on Powdermaker's work, gossip columns, and fan magazines. The culture of Hollywood was in conflict with the culture and experience of the "average" American. The values of the middle-class leaned toward a more conservative lifestyle with Christian values and family at its center, so it became apparent that the racy noir films and the perceived loose living

²⁵ Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, 83-85.

²⁶ *The Case Against the 20% Federal Admissions Tax on Motion Picture Theatres*, 1953.

²⁷ "COMPO Leaders Report All-Out Tax Fight Plans", *BoxOffice*, 16 August 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, Margaret Herrick Library. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California, *Clippings -Tearsheets*, f. 27.

stars were directly contradicting the new norm. Hollywood's reputation of non-conformity was also at odds with the emphasis on conformity that permeated the era. The issue of subversion and past affiliation with Communism, mixed with the newer issues of the "Hollywood 10" and frequent HUAC investigations, led to a large quantity of bad press. Powdermaker's book and a welter of popular media articles tarnished the image of Hollywood beyond the rumors of Communist infiltration, so not only was the industry feared but also disliked out of moral principle.

The role of women was also a major cultural dissonance between Hollywood and "average" Americans. As previously explained, gender roles were extremely important and rigid in the post-war era. Women were expected to be wives and mothers with a distinctly domestic flair. The role of wife and mother were central to a woman's identity. The sensual pin-ups of the war and femme fatales of noir films were in direct violation of these new gender roles established for women. The rumors of high divorce rates and broken families in Hollywood also opposed the role of wife, mother, and even of being a Christian. The portrayal of women on the silver screen, the perceived behavior of women in Hollywood, and even the thought of leaving the home to go to the movie theater went against the popular ideal of "containment."

Containment also related to issues with technology. The rise of television was perceived by executives in Hollywood to be a major threat to the film industry. With new technology like television and a cultural emphasis on staying at home with family, there was little reason to go out to the theater. According to the Nielson Company reports, only 9.0% of households owned a television by September of

1950, which doesn't sound like cause for alarm for the film industry, but by September of 1951, that percentage sky-rocketed to 64.5%.²⁸ Studio executives feared the rise of television so much that many of the top stars had stipulations in their contracts that they could not appear on television. Television also fit the new cultural trends of containment, as previously stated, and consumerism in the post-war era. Televisions were another appliance or commodity for American families to buy, promote Capitalism with, and enjoy together as a family.

If the new home entertainment and bad press weren't enough, an antitrust court case involving television and taxes affecting industry profits were just the icing on the cake. The Federal government was slapping another antitrust suit against the film industry, this time it was meant to make Hollywood studios give feature films to television companies so that Americans can watch movies at home, which just increased the threat of television in the eyes of studio executives. Hollywood had also just lost one of its largest foreign markets because after World War II Great Britain placed a tariff on any non-British film to promote their own domestic industry.²⁹ On top of the tariff, there was the 20-percent Federal Admission tax placed on the film industry after the war. This tax in particular was perceived as such a great injustice to the industry that COMPO set up specific committees to fight and lobby against it.³⁰

²⁸ The Nielsen Company-NTI, Sept. each year, *A Report on the Growth and Scope of Television*, TV Basics, 1950-1951.

²⁹ Brownell, Kathryn Cramer. "'Movietime U.S.A.': The Motion Picture Industry Council and the Politicization of Hollywood in Postwar America." *Journal of Policy History* 24, no. 3 (2012): 518-42, 518-519.

³⁰ Movietime U.S.A. Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, *Movietime U.S.A. 1950 Publicity/Press Releases*, f.66.

Studio executives and COMPO believed these issues were the cause of their declining profits, but to address all of these issues would be difficult. To decide what needed to be done, executives and COMPO addressed each problem separately while also attempting to address all three in some kind of cohesive matter. Regardless of what the solution would entail, it was apparent to them that something needed to be done. COMPO went to great lengths to combat the 20-percent Federal Admissions Tax. According to letters going in and out of COMPO headquarters in Los Angeles, California, there were committees created to petition and lobby Congress to repeal the tax. These committees were run by and affiliated with COMPO in cities all over the U.S. The committee in Texas was especially active in the tax fight. An industry newspaper *BoxOffice* printed two articles titled “COMPO Leaders Report All-Out Tax Fight Plans”³¹ and “Arbitration, Tax Repeal and U.S. Suit To Be on Allied Conclave Agenda”³² in August 1952 illustrating how important this tax issue and the U.S. suit regarding television had become by 1952.

If those efforts were not enough, COMPO also produced a short film in 1953 to be shown to Congress called *The Case Against the 20% Federal Admissions Tax on Motion Picture Theatres*. The film was a plea to Congress to repeal the tax with the rationale being that the film industry was an essential American industry, on par with the steel industry, that employs Americans and helps other local businesses while promoting community and civic virtue. The film is full of statistics and graphs

³¹ “COMPO Leaders Report All-Out Tax Fight Plans”, *BoxOffice*, 16 August 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, Margaret Herrick Library. *Clippings - Tearsheets*, f. 27

³² “Arbitration, Tax Repeal and U.S. Suit To Be on Allied Conclave Agenda”, *BoxOffice*, 16 August 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, Margaret Herrick Library. *Clippings - Tearsheets*, f. 27

with strategically placed patriotic symbols and shadows. It is difficult to ascertain how valid the information is, but the testimonials from small business owners and the numbers presented a bleak picture for the struggling industry.

The film industry was also trying to fight the rise and subsequent popularity of television. As television became more prevalent, the film industry had to take measures to ensure that the novel appliance did not become a substitute for going to a movie theatre. Studios used the remnants of the studio and star systems to their advantage by putting stipulations in the contracts of big name stars and directors banning them from appearing on television. That included the sitcoms and game shows the 1950s are known for, but also the news and publicity shoots. The studios also went on the technological offensive by attempting to make going out to the theatre a unique and mystifying experience that you could not get at home. Cinemascope, VistaVision, and 3D movies were a direct response to the threat of television.³³

There was one solution launched by COMPO that directly addressed the cultural issue while also combating television and the tax problem. That solution was the massive public relations campaign called "Movietime U.S.A." The national campaign was brought about by COMPO to celebrate Hollywood's Golden Jubilee with the intention of bringing "good will" to the film industry.³⁴ The public face of this campaign was all about this so called "good will" and presenting a new clean

³³ Halliwell, Martin. *American Culture in the 1950s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 150-151.

³⁴ "Picture Industry Establishes United Front for Action", *Valley Times*, 1 August 1951, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, Margaret Herrick Library. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California, *COMPO Roundtable Clips*, f. 30.

face to the public, but behind the scenes it was all about the money. Movietime U.S.A. was the industry's attempt to conform to the new cultural ideology set by the "average American" middle class, while also trying to pluck some of those dollars lining their pockets.

The Movietime campaign was the most inclusive attempt to address the cultural issue of Hollywood and the film industry, but there were other solutions that tied into Movietime and the attempt to change the image of Hollywood. A group called the Motion Picture Industry Council (MPIC) emerged in 1948 with the intention of promoting better public relations.³⁵ They fought against censorship, lobbied against various taxes and legislation, while also attempting to clean up the image and behavior of people in Hollywood. Behavior codes were proposed and the MPIC worked unofficially on the Movietime U.S.A. campaign.³⁶ The other attempt the industry made to conform to the dominant culture was to change the actual content and storylines of the films themselves. Filmmakers strayed away from the film noir motifs and created more family friendly films. Women changed from the femme fatale and sexual objects to the housewives and good girls. This was a short-lived change that still had exceptions like Marilyn Monroe and Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), but it was the attempt that is important because it demonstrates the attitude that change and conformity were believed to be necessary.³⁷

³⁵ Vaughn, Stephen. *Ronald Reagan in Hollywood: Movies and Politics*, 184-187.

³⁶ Letter to Trueman Rembusch from Art Arthur, 18 July 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, *Art Arthur*, f.25

³⁷ Halliwell, Martin. *American Culture in the 1950s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 170-172.

Movietime U.S.A. was an industry-wide project because COMPO united the efforts of the major studios and utilized the members of the Screen Actors' Guild (SAG), the Screen Writers' Guild (SWG), as well as the MPIC. COMPO publicized the campaign through nationwide tours, radio spots, and newspaper articles while also distributing press books, kits, and posters to COMPO representatives around the country. They also supplied speeches, information material, and supplemental films for the personalities going on tour. Their goal was to promote film, the importance of movies and going to the theatre, and to connect Hollywood to the public.

Movietime U.S.A. was best known for the national tours that consisted of tours made by small groups of stars, directors, writers, and producers. Each cohort started in a large city and over the course of a week, would move through the small towns surrounding the city. The tours kicked off on October 8, 1951 and lasted for one week.³⁸ The tours were repeated in 1952 but were split up over the year to make it easier for the less than flexible stars. The itineraries were jam packed with luncheons, photo ops, meet and greets, and question and answer sessions at strategically chosen locations for maximum effect.

The scheduling and truly grueling itinerary made the list of personalities involved interesting because the A-list stars generally did not participate. The exceptions being the opening luncheon in New York City where Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, and Joseph Cotton made an appearance and a dinner at the White House that Elizabeth Taylor and director John Ford attended. Aside from those two major events where many civic leaders, congressmen, and obviously the President

³⁸ "Hollywood to Invade U.S. Today in 'Movietime' Push." *Motion Picture Daily*, October 8, 1951.

were in attendance, the other tour stops had mostly B-list, and new, small-time personalities. The reasons for this seem to be scheduling, with the issue being many of the big names were working and could not take the week off to tour, and also the intense nature of the tours themselves. The tours were, as Greer Garson explained in a letter to Marvin Schenk in 1952, “[these tours] are really endurance tests...” Garson went even further in her letter to Schenk: “Did you know that there was one heart attack and one case of collapse from exhaustion on the Texas tour and one heart attack and several cases of complete exhaustion following out New York tour?!!”³⁹

The tours were hard on the people involved, and a major part of that stress had to do with the massive amount of travel each day of the tour entailed. The stops themselves generally lasted 30-45 minutes with sometimes over an hour of driving in between. In Buffalo alone, the stops consisted of LaSalle High School, Niagara Falls Senior High, Batavia Senior High, Lockport Senior High, the Veteran’s Hospital, the Niagara sanitarium, and a cocktail party with the Mayor downtown all in one day.⁴⁰ There is a considerable distance between each of those high schools and it would take real work to visit all of them in one day. This extreme itinerary was common for every tour, so a heart attack here and there is not all that surprising. There were tour stops in New York, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, the Carolinas,

³⁹ Letter to Marvin Schenk from Greer Garson, 6 June 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, *Marvin Schenk*, f.43

⁴⁰ Letter to Lou Smith from George H. Mackenna, 12 May 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, *Buffalo Tour*, f.4

Colorado, Kansas, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Virginia, Utah, and others, each with their own set of itineraries and stars.⁴¹

Within each of these tours, there were specific tour stops chosen by the COMPO representative of the area. These stops included high schools and their Parent Teacher Associations, Veteran's hospitals, Kiwanis Clubs, and other civic associations. The trend in the South was slightly different because the stops included going to local theatres, which was uncommon in other areas in part because COMPO dissuaded theatre stops in fear that they would alienate theatres not involved and might lead to the assumption that there would be a performance by the stars. In each town, the Hollywood troupes met with the mayor, town leaders, Congressmen, and even the Governor, on top of the swarms of ordinary townspeople. Both the stops and the people the stars met aligned with the conservative image they were trying to portray and also gave the Hollywood personalities the opportunity to make their case against the 20-percent tax.⁴²

The stops made aligned with new image of Hollywood that COMPO was trying to achieve, but what really makes the campaign interesting is how propagandistic the content of the speeches and Q&A sessions were. Propaganda is the only word for it because COMPO as an organization was disseminating information with a specific ideology and with clear financial and cultural motives. Before going out on these tours, the Hollywood personalities were armed with informational packets from COMPO about what to talk about and the figures to back

⁴¹ Folders 1,2,4,6,7,10,13,15,17,19,20,22. Movietime U.S.A. Collection

⁴² Letter to Lou Smith from Pat McGee, 17 Oct. 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection
Denver Tour, f.7

up their claim of “goodness”. Some of the titles included in these packets were “State of the Industry’s Economic Health”, “Un-spotlighted Side of Hollywood”, “Hollywood Church Background”, and “Hollywood Against Communism” to name a few. Each of these packets was full of talking points, statistics, and supplemental films and speeches for the stars. The “Un-spotlighted Side of Hollywood” in particular had stats on the low divorce rate and high education rates.⁴³

The New York Times covered a tour stop in a small town called Spanish Fork in Utah. Spanish Fork was truly a small town with only “5,277 souls”, but the tour stop there was representative of how most Movietime tours went. The article talks about some of the stops the stars made highlighting “the region’s Veteran’s of Foreign Wars, Kiwanis, and Variety Clubs.” The report went on: “They’ve [the stars] indulged in handshaking sessions with one governor and a handful of mayors, make four radio and TV appearances, and entertained 500 bedridden patients in a veterans hospital.”⁴⁴

The article went into detail about a question and answer session that took place at the local high school with 400 students in attendance. Keenan Wynn, Noreen Michaels, and writer/producer/director Anson Bond, talked about the workings of the film industry and their personal lives. When asked about certain tropes appearing over and over again, like “the hero always gets the girl” the stars talked about a code that writers and films must adhere to. The code they were

⁴³ Packets *General Information Re Hollywood, State of Industry’s Economic Health, Unspotlighted Side of Hollywood, etc.*, 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, Art Arthur, f.25

⁴⁴ Goodman, Jack. *Stop on a ‘Movietime’ Tour*. 9 Dec. 1951, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993) pg. 130

referring to is the in-house censorship code policed by the Production Code Administration (PCA) and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) who, as the stars explained, were advised by churches and parent groups.

The stars also used statistics to combat questions about divorce rates and drug use. To justify the coverage of the vice in Hollywood, Wynn argued, “we live in a goldfish bowl, and the court cases of Hollywood addicts, in the industry or out of it, make larger headlines than those of Salt Lakers.” Bond addressed the issue of Communist infiltration by explaining,

We’ve had some, so has Washington, and we’re hardly as important as your government. But I defy any writer or and studio to sneak propaganda into a picture. If they are doing it, the public certainly can’t spot it. You tell us the rich man is always the villain and never the hero. That’s not communism. Things have been written that way since the success of Shakespeare and Uncle Tom’s Cabin. I can only tell you our pictures aren’t being shown in Russia.⁴⁵

The stars gave answers that fit with the statistics they were given and the overall message of the campaign, and whether or not they truly believed what they were saying is a mystery, but having them tell 400 high school aged students this information gave the campaign and Hollywood some humanity. The outward appearance and goal of Movietime was to bring Hollywood to the people and renew their interest in the movies, and with Q&A stops like this, they accomplished their goal.

Whether or not Movietime U.S.A. was a success is difficult to determine because while people enjoyed the tours, they were discontinued after 1952 and, judging by COMPO’s short film, the tax problem did not go away. Even between

⁴⁵ Goodman, *Stop on a ‘Movietime’ Tour*, 130

1951 and 1952 the participation of Hollywood personalities in Movietime dropped significantly. The numbers are as follows:⁴⁶

| | 1951 | 1952 |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Actors | 222 | 55 |
| Producers | 15 | 8 |
| Writers | 35 | 7 |
| Directors | 12 | 2 |
| Executives | 2 | 0 |

These numbers reflect the drop in participation, which can be attributed again to scheduling, but also to the horror stories from the first round of tours. The word grueling is not an overstatement and many stars did not want to put themselves through the stress.

Another issue that occurred, that was not reported in many newspapers, was that there were a huge number of cancellations on behalf of the stars on the first tour, leaving a sour taste in the mouths of many city and town leaders. New York City, for example, did not want Movietime to come back in 1952 because after the massive, star-studded luncheon that occurred the previous year, the stops that were supposed to happen in the boroughs were cancelled.⁴⁷ This issue led to a significant drop in the number of tours that occurred in 1952. The number of tours dropped from 29 in 1951 to 9 in 1952.⁴⁸

The scheduling and logistics of a tour like this were the major issues of the first tour and were worked on for the second round, but the itinerary and travel still

⁴⁶ Number of People who Went Out on Tours, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, *Movietime Tours and Personalities*, f.41

⁴⁷ Letter to Lou Smith from Charles E. McCarthy, 18 April 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, *New York*, f.15

⁴⁸ Number of People who Went Out on Tours, *Movietime Tours and Personalities*, f.41

proved difficult and stressful. The ordinary people and business owners did, however, thoroughly enjoy the tours. There were many reports of massive crowds, smiling faces, and some renewed interest in the movies. While the reactions to the Hollywood stars coming to town seemed overwhelmingly positive, business owners could not definitively report an increase in box office sales.⁴⁹

While Movietime U.S.A. was about demystifying, de-villainizing, and cleaning up the image of Hollywood, it was at its core about renewing interest in the movies and increasing box office profits. COMPO distributed a packet at a members' meeting about what Movietime was all about and in this packet COMPO outlines,

Movietime U.S.A. was the idea designed to do just that [getting good news about Hollywood before the public]. It was designed to do it by sending its people who make movies and appear in them out among the people who go to the movies and let these people judge for themselves whether or not Hollywood is as bad all the way through as it was being painted. Beyond this, the idea behind Movietime was to stimulate a renewed interest in movies on the part of the public by the visits and appearances of the Hollywood people, to the end of better business.⁵⁰

This outline makes it explicitly clear what COMPO wanted out of the Movietime U.S.A. campaign, and while the profits did not soar as they had hoped, it appears that the image of Hollywood and the perception of its inhabitants were improved.

Movietime U.S.A. was Hollywood's attempt to change their image and conform to the dominant culture taking over the United States after World War II. The famously non-conformist industry felt that the change was needed after a steep loss of profits after 1946. A number of factors contributed to the decline in profit,

⁴⁹ Letter to Lou Smith from E.D. Martin with Exhibitor's Remarks, 9 July 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, *Atlanta Tour*, f.2

⁵⁰ Outline For COMPO-Movietime Talk, August 1952, Movietime U.S.A. Collection, *COMPO Meeting in LA, August 1952*, f.29

but COMPO believed that changing the image of the culture of Hollywood would be the most effective solution. Movietime addressed the changing culture, the political tensions and HUAC investigations, as well as the economy and tax problems the film industry was facing. Although it appears that the Movietime U.S.A. campaign was only marginally successful, their existence and the messages they disseminated shed light on what was important to the “average American” and the political atmosphere of the era.

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