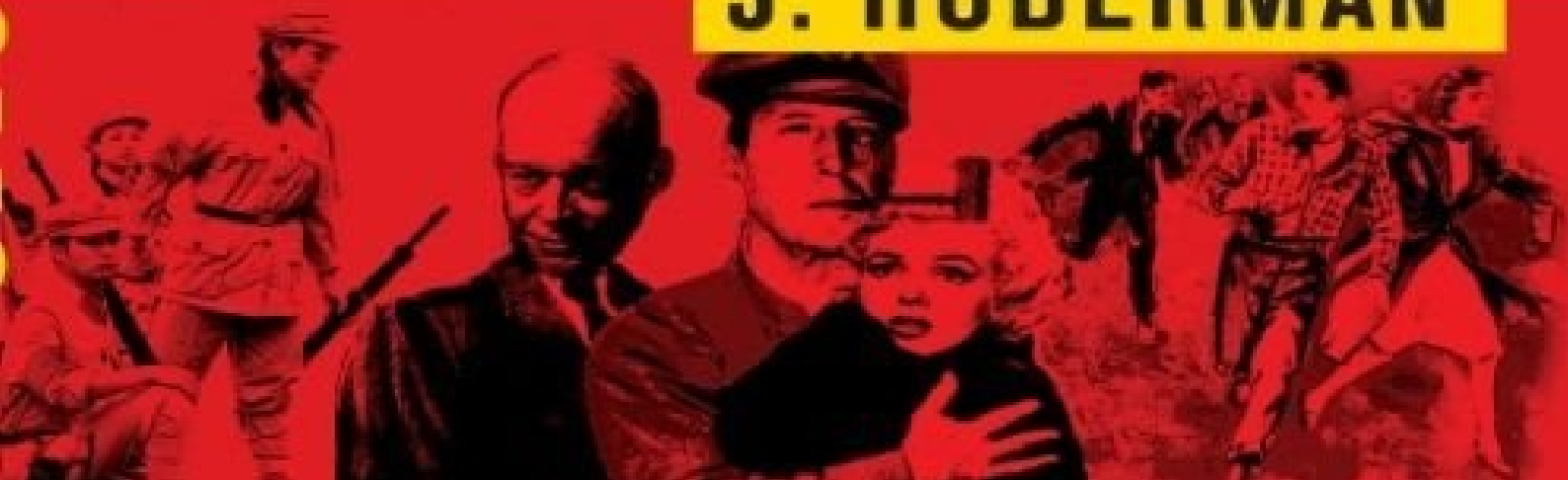


AN **ARMY** OF **PHANTOMS**

AMERICAN MOVIES
AND THE MAKING
OF THE COLD WAR

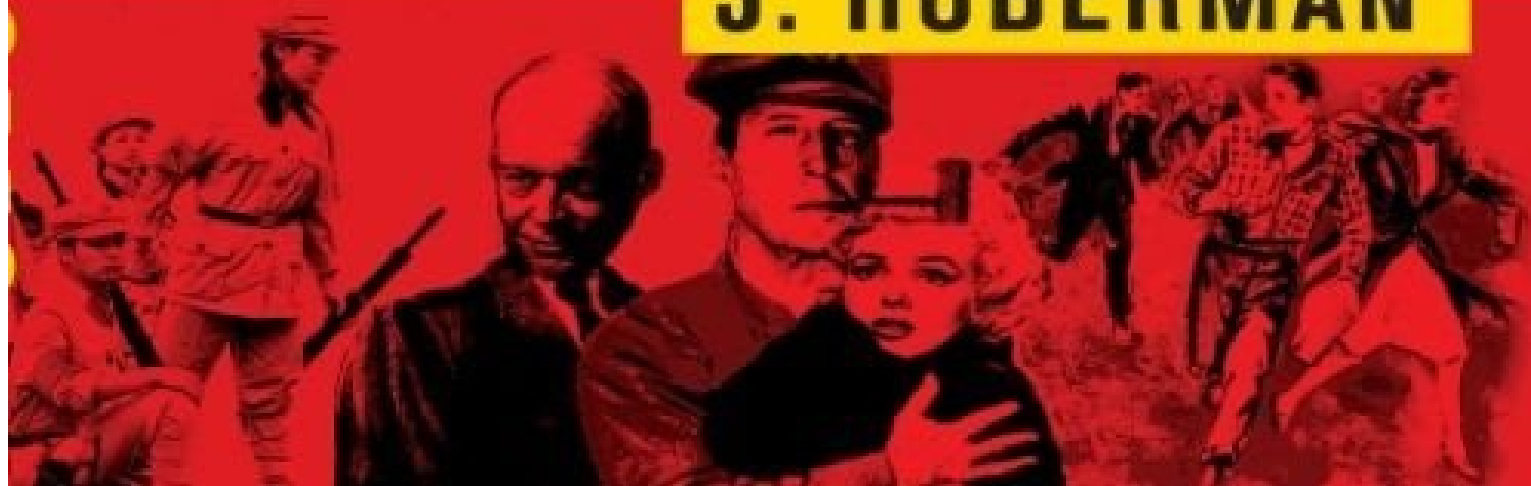
J. HOBERMAN



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*An army of phantoms vast and wan
Beleaguer the human soul.*

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, “*The Beleaguered City*” (1839)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An Army of Phantoms is the first installment of a projected three-volume chronicle of American movies in the light of American politics, during the period of the Cold War. Roughly covering the years between V-J Day and Dwight Eisenhower's reelection, *An Army of Phantoms* is the prequel to *The Dream Life: Movies, Media, and the Mythology of the Sixties*, published by The New Press in 2003. A final volume picking up the story on the eve of the Bicentennial and taking it just past the fall of the Berlin Wall is in preparation.

The dust had barely settled in Berlin when I began work on this project and I have many people to thank. In New York, my research was conducted at the New York Public Library: Library for the Performing Arts, the Celeste Bartos International Film Study Center at the Museum of Modern Art, the Paley Center for Media, and New York University's Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, particularly the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives. In Los Angeles, I was privileged to work at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the University of California Los Angeles Library—Performing Arts Special Collections, the University of Southern California's Warner Bros. Archives, and the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research. This book would not have been possible without these institutions and their dedicated staff.

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Over the decades, fragments of what would be *An Army of Phantoms* appeared in a number of publications, including the *American Prospect*, *Arcade*, *Artforum*, the *New York Times*, the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and the *Village Voice*; my appreciation to their editors for giving me the opportunity to follow my interests. Finally, a shout-out to Sarah Fan, who edited my manuscript at The New Press and to copy editor Aja Pollock; to Andy Hsiao, no longer at The New Press but nevertheless responsible for rescuing this project during its darkest hour; to my invariably supportive agent Jim Rutman; and to my beloved lifelong helpmeet Shelley Hoberman.

INTRODUCTION: FROM GOD'S MOUTH TO YOUR EAR

Probably, we will never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb upon the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive in these years.

—NORMAN MAILER, “*The White Negro*” (1957)

For collective problems only collective remedies suffice . . .

—JACQUES ELLUL, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (1962)

There are movies that alter one's perspective and movies designed to do that very thing. *The Next Voice You Hear*, an MGM film directed by William Wellman in 1950, is one such manufactured revelation. (Among other things, it inspired this book.)

The transmission reached me via television on a Christmas morning, some twenty years after its theatrical release—an unexpected discovery, comparable, in its way, to stumbling upon the Taj Mahal or the Grand Canyon. Not that *The Next Voice* is, as a movie, particularly grandiose. The perfection of this dowdy black-and-white production derives from its premise—so simple as to be nearly elegant and so cosmic as to appear certifiably insane. Can any movie top it? Framed by two biblical citations representing the Old and New Testaments, the movie practices a unique form of direct address. For six consecutive nights, the Creator of the Universe commandeers the airwaves to personally talk to the American people.

The implications of such divine intervention are vast, but God's audience is essentially reduced to a single family living in a modest home in suburban Los Angeles. Joe Smith (James Whitmore) is a mechanic in the Ajax Aircraft Plant; his pregnant wife, Mary (Nancy Davis), is a gracious, superbly nurturing mother to their ten-year-old son, Johnny (Gary Gray). Initially, *The Next Voice You Hear* appears as an unfunny situation comedy with Joe both compliant wage slave and household tyrant. “Don't do like I do—do like I tell you to do,” he instructs Johnny even as he chafes under authority (defined as “everybody telling you what to do”), resenting most particularly his acerbic foreman (Al Smith) and the neighborhood cop who regularly chastises him for heedlessly backing his heap out of the driveway.

God enters history, although—as if in accordance with the Old Testament ban on representation—only by hearsay. One night, puzzled Joe tells Mary that the radio show to which he had been listening was interrupted by a self-identity Voice of God informing listeners, “I'll be with you for the next few days.” Charles Schnee's rigorously schematic script ensures that, on each of the six evenings that God addresses the public, the movie audience will miss the divine performance. Evidently producer Don Scharry feared that patrons would react with laughter—as well they might have, if perhaps a bit nervously.

Despite its bland, earnest, self-congratulatory corn, *The Next Voice You Hear* is a study in terror; it acknowledges an actual anxiety and, however pitifully, responds to a real sense of helplessness. “You're not supposed to worry about the fate of the world until you're big enough to shave,” Joe tel

Johnny after God's second broadcast—or should we say, civil defense warning. If (or rather, when there's another war, the battlefield will be everywhere. When Johnny expresses his apprehension, Joe blames God: "Scaring kids—it's gone too far." Terrorizing Johnny is Joe's job, as is made clear when the boy breaks the radio plug just before the Voice's third scheduled appearance and Joe predictably flies into a rage.

Truly, *The Next Voice You Hear* has many lessons to teach. On the third night, God goes to the interpersonal, asking if His listeners are afraid of Him and wondering, "Why should children be afraid of their father?" (Why indeed, when He is omniscient and holds the power of life and death?) A hard rain begins to fall as the broadcast ends, causing normally placid Mary to scream in terror. But, as this is a movie, there is nothing that can't be resolved—it was Schary, in fact, who famously called America a "happy ending nation." Thus, a quick cut: instead of the end of the world, day four brings sunshine, and, for once, Joe's jalopy starts up without a problem. But that night, after the Voice has taken credit for certain large miracles and asked listeners to reciprocate with their own small miracles of love and kindness, God gives Joe Smith a test: Mary goes into false labor and her annoying Aunt Ethel becomes hysterical, prompting jumpy Joe to further panic and shake the silly woman.

Day five falls on a Saturday. Mary is angry with her husband for his brutish behavior, so he storms out of the house to a neighborhood tavern. "If God stays on the radio, these joints will close down and somebody can be heard slurring. (If only! Hadn't movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn only recently maintained that TV was "little more than a gimmick used by tavern-keepers to induce patrons to linger over another drink"?) Sure enough, Joe meets Satan in the form of a feckless war buddy with a female familiar. Joe is ready to take off for the South Seas, fleeing the Voice of God like a latter-day Jonah, until the buddy and the barfly make light of his family. Suddenly, it's as if Joe had sulked out to a movie that caused him to think! Reacquainted with his responsibilities, he turns lugubrious and lachrymose and staggers home (again frightening Johnny, albeit inadvertently) to bury his head in Mary's lap.

That night God tells His listeners (or so we are told) that they are like schoolchildren: "You've forgotten your lessons. I ask you to do your homework." On day six, it's Johnny's turn to run away. Unbeknownst to Joe, the boy is a friend to his nemesis, the curmudgeonly foreman at his factory. Just before the Voice's nightly address, Joe discovers Johnny at the foreman's house, happily building a model airplane. (This demonstration of workplace harmony is not intended as ironic.) Manager and worker managed are reconciled; they exchange first names and bless each other. Monday evening finds the entire community expectantly gathered in church, eyes fixed on the cathedral-style radio that's been placed on the pulpit: "Ladies and gentlemen of the universe," the announcer solemnly begins, "the next voice you hear . . ."

But the radio is silent. As the minister steps into the breach, Mary goes into labor. Celestial music heralds the conclusion of the movie. Heavenly clouds fill the screen. There is no end title, save perhaps for the viewer's soft, incredulous "Wow."

"The heaviest movie Hollywood ever made," I wrote then in my film journal. "Slow-motion situation comedy alternates with accelerated soap opera. The iconography of American unconscious/alienated suffering—the workers' suburbs—is as strong as Crumb's best. . . . Fantastically symptomatic of Hollywood's impending nervous breakdown in the face of TV." Here are some more recent notes:

- *The Next Voice You Hear* appeared at a moment of crisis for the nation as well as the movie industry. The United States and Hollywood were both dazed, if not traumatized, by the loss of

a significant monopoly—the United States was no longer the world’s sole nuclear power, and the studios had been compelled to divest themselves of their theater chains. Each entity was threatened by an alien threat (Communism, television).

- *The Next Voice You Hear* addresses this crisis in part by projecting a situation in which everyone can receive the same divine message. For Hollywood, this doubles as a form of self-celebration. What is a movie if not an idea—or a dramatized scenario—that is pictured and played out in millions of minds? *The Next Voice You Hear* is a mass-produced idea in praise of mass-produced ideas. (Published shortly before the movie opened, Hortense Powdermaker’s anthropological study *Hollywood, the Dream Factory* put this in both business and ideological terms: Hollywood “tries to adapt the American dream, that all men are created equal, to the view that all men’s dreams should be made equal.”) But if an idea is pictured by a million minds simultaneously, it is called television—which, unlike radio, does not exist in the particular utopia.
- *The Next Voice You Hear* is self-serving not just in its mission but by its affirmation of the Hegelian notion that history is a rational force with a definite goal. The invention of radio, not television, is part of an ongoing divine plan—as is, at least implicitly, Dore Schary’s ascension to the MGM front office. A studio promotional release articulated the producer’s point of view: “May I suggest that, while you do not hear God’s voice, you go to see *The Next Voice You Hear* accepting the premise that God would use the radio much as at an earlier date He used the burning bush.” But why radio and why not the burning bush? The earth was not yet denuded of foliage.
- *The Next Voice You Hear* maintains that, as the French social philosopher Jacques Ellul wrote in propaganda a decade after the movie’s release, God cannot exist in a mass society without access to the mass media. Indeed, the unheard Voice of God in *The Next Voice You Hear* is the essence of what Ellul termed “sociological propaganda”—a vague, spontaneous, all-pervasive yet half-conscious form of social bonding and ideological proselytizing advanced by advertising, newspaper editorials, social service agencies, patriotic speeches, and anything else that might use the phrase “way of life.” (The concept of freedom is to America and entertainment is to Hollywood.)
- *The Next Voice You Hear*, which might be alternately titled “Dore Schary’s Mission,” was intended as something more than entertainment. But is it entertainment as propaganda or propaganda as entertainment? Perhaps we should think of it as an illustration of an idea willing itself into history. The main thing, Ellul would argue, is that *The Next Voice You Hear* (as well as the Next Voice that is unheard) responds to actual problems—a state of national insecurity—and that it also proposes itself as a solution to these problems.
- Thus, *The Next Voice You Hear* upholds motherhood and the family and asserts that neighbors, neighbors and responsible policemen are necessary, that suburbia, “honest” work, school, and vague nondenominational Protestantism are both the natural order of things and the greatest good. “The original affinity of business and amusement is shown in the latter’s special significance: to defend society.” So wrote the social philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer from their wartime refuge in Los Angeles. “To be pleased means to say Yes.”
- *The Next Voice You Hear* defines the nation as an audience. In the second broadcast, God had been heard to complain that people wanted miracles. According to Mary, who recounts the message to Joe (who missed it, Wednesday being his bowling night), “the Voice said He was going to think about that.” (Humanity being His focus group.) But, of course, fantastical

miracles were precisely what Dore Schary did not want in his movie; he wanted naturalized everyday miracles, like *The Next Voice You Hear* itself.

- *The Next Voice You Hear* is deliberately unprepossessing as cinema precisely because it strives to locate eternity in the familiar—just as a Renaissance painting of the Annunciation might be set in a fifteenth-century Florentine courtyard. “Naturalism” is vouchsafed by offhand references to the Federal Communications Commission, Nielsen ratings, and Orson Welles, who had panicked the nation—or at least some members of the radio-listening public—with his 1938 Halloween eve broadcast, *The War of the Worlds*. Natural skeptics, Joe Smith and his fellow workers initially theorize that the alien Voice speaking through their radio sets may be Welles practicing some newfangled form of “mass suckerology.” This is an inoculation for the audience—the acknowledgment of a historical hoax to conceal the greater ahistorical hoax that is this movie.¹
- *The Next Voice You Hear* is of 1950 but not in it: the Smiths do not own a television set because, like God, TV cannot be shown on the screen. Nor is this the only absence. No one refers to the atomic bomb, let alone the recent loss of America’s nuclear monopoly. The Russians are furtively mentioned (but not China). The words “Communism” and “fascism” are never whispered; neither is the name “Jesus.” Thus, *The Next Voice You Hear* is set in a fantastic parallel universe that rigorously works to exclude, conceal, or deny that which might actually be about. Let’s call that imaginary world the Movies.

If one movie is a manufactured fantasy, a year’s worth of movies—or a decade’s—becomes an instrumentalized stream of consciousness that insinuates itself into a shared national narrative. As Thomas Mann wrote in *The Magic Mountain*, “a human being lives out not only his personal life as an individual, but also, consciously or subconsciously, the lives of his epoch and contemporaries.” As suggested by *The Next Voice You Hear*, that second, dream life is lived through the mass media.

However much the product of particular forces at a specific moment, a mass-consumed idea like *The Next Voice* draws on preexistent fantasies and contributes to an ongoing, collective drama. In some respects, *The Next Voice*’s scenario was fulfilled in 1952 with the election of a God-fearing yet soothing Christian soldier to the presidency. (Dore Schary had campaigned for General Dwight D. Eisenhower as early as 1948.) James Whitmore, the movie’s designated everyman, grew up to play two presidents, including the actual everyman writ large who occupied the White House when *The Next Voice* was made; even better, his onscreen spouse was elevated to the White House itself, in a move that suggests a logic beyond all logic operating in the Dream Life: marrying a fellow movie actor who would be elected president—the president.²

Schary mobilized the shadows; *The Next Voice You Hear* had assigned itself a mission, just as Hollywood assumed one during the last war. It was made to demonstrate that, certain technological developments notwithstanding, movies remained a powerful, positive, necessary force in American society. In this, *The Next Voice* may have been shameless but hardly unique. Evoking extraterrestrial invasion, mind control, national insecurity, and even Armageddon, Schary presents themes common to Cold War Hollywood, albeit in a more comforting sociological-propagandist form.³

In 1950, *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther bracketed *The Next Voice* with the nearly simultaneous Eagle-Lion release *Destination Moon* as an instance of “stimulating movie fantasy.” *Destination Moon*, produced by George Pal and directed by Irving Pichel, also insisted on its verisimilitude. *Life* magazine’s production story absurdly maintained that the movie was so realistic that it “met its chief obstacle in the form of important scientific visitors who poked around the painted craters just

get an idea of what a trip to the moon might really be like.” But *Destination Moon*—its title unavoidably echoing the wartime hit *Destination Tokyo* (1943)—was far more concerned with geopolitical danger than extraterrestrial exploration.

Crowther’s review cited the Soviet threat in its lead paragraph, noting that no one had yet reached the moon unless “the Russians have pulled a fast one on us,” and musing that it was “arresting to hear an eloquent scientist proclaim that the first nation which can use the moon for launching missiles will control the earth.” *Destination Moon* addressed the very national security problem that the Truman administration had grappled with for the past three years: how to prepare for war and prepare the people for war when, as yet, there was no war.

One mission stood in for another. Opening at the White Sands military installation, site of the original atomic bomb tests and the present home to the von Braun rocket team (which had been largely transplanted from Germany in 1945), *Destination Moon* immediately evokes the notion of top secret technology, the specter of enemy sabotage, and the necessity of a lunar military base in more uncertain terms: “There is no way to stop a missile launched from outer space. That is the most important military fact of this century.” This hard sell echoes the rhetoric of NSC-68, the U.S. National Security Council report that advocated massive rearmament in the aftermath of the Soviet atomic bomb and, like *Destination Moon*, was in production in early 1950.⁴

As *The Next Voice* imagines God as the miracle of television without TV, *Destination Moon* conceives of national security as a Hollywood super-production and assigns the leading role to private industry. “If we want to stay in business we have to build this ship,” one visionary plutocrat tells a conclave of his tuxedo-clad peers. (If anything, the government is an impediment. The expedition blasts off in defiance of a court order, one step ahead of the police—which is to say, reality.) *Destination Moon* anticipates the “space race” by the better part of a decade and Ronald Reagan’s “Star Wars” program by some thirty-three years.) As the Cold War heated up, Hollywood naturally sought the divine guidance of an earlier mission. Underlying the stimulating fantasies of *The Next Voice You Hear* and *Destination Moon* was the movie industry’s unprecedented World War II mobilization and sense of purpose.

The actor James Whitmore was not just Joe Smith but, for the audience of 1950, an Oscar-winning supporting actor in a previous Dore Schary production, *Battleground* (1949), and thus an iconic “Joe.” Indeed, for Schary, *The Next Voice* was a sequel to if not a remake of *Joe Smith, American*, a patriotic morale booster that helpfully propagandized President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s preparedness program; it was produced by Schary’s old MGM B-movie unit and released four months into World War II. In the apocalyptic glow of the Soviet atomic bomb, Schary had the idea of letting God, rather than FDR, speak directly to Joe Smith, American.

If *The Next Voice You Hear* imagined a cosmic fireside chat, the scenario projected by *Destination Moon* seemingly took its cues from the novelist Ayn Rand, an influential right-wing critic of liberal Hollywood, in promoting an anti-New Deal plutocracy to safeguard America. Despite their ideological differences, both movies took it for granted that fantasy could be instrumentalized, and both celebrated Hollywood’s capacity to change the world. War included a war of images. Entertainment had a vital social function: just as Joe Smith is instructed by the radio, so the industrialists are educated in the principles of rocketry by a specially prepared Woody Woodpecker cartoon.

The Next Voice You Hear and *Destination Moon* suggest that Hollywood’s World War II mobilization

along with the belief that the people who made movies were not just professional entertainers but politically aware culture workers, continued after the war ended, through the Truman presidency and into Eisenhower's first term. Hollywood accepted a new mission and assigned itself a role, albeit largely unofficial one, in the new war—both in terms of movies made and careers unmade.

An Army of Phantoms: American Movies and the Making the Cold War initiates a three-part chronicle of American politics from 1945 through 1990, as filtered through the prism of Hollywood movies—their scenarios, backstories, and reception. The middle part has already been published as *The Dream Life: Movies, Media, and the Mythology of the Sixties*; the conclusion, *Found Illusion: The Romance of the Remake and the Triumph of Reaganocracy*, is in progress. This chronicle makes no pretense to providing a comprehensive history of Hollywood during this period. The movies discussed are not necessarily the most critically prized, nor even the most popular with audiences; their makers are not always Hollywood's greatest artists, some of whom may be conspicuous by their absence. Rather, these are individuals responsible for those movies that best crystallize, address, symptomize, or exploit their historical moment—or, just as importantly, were understood to do so at the time.

The collective drama that *An Army of Phantoms* recounts was not restricted to America's movie theaters but played out in the press, comic books, popular music, ongoing FBI investigations, congressional hearings, and political campaigns. Thanks to the movies, however, this drama was elevated to a cosmic struggle against National Insecurity for possession of the Great Whatzit. The war was waged in the desert surrounding Fort Apache and in the streets of Hadleyville, as well as the hills of Korea and the halls of Washington, DC, and invoked all manner of imaginary beings. In the national Dream Life, this war was fought by archetypal figures: the Christian Soldier and the Patriotic Roughneck were pitted against an Implacable Alien Other, as well as the Wild One, and sometimes themselves.

PROLOGUE:

MISSION FOR HOLLYWOOD—STALINGRAD TO V-J DAY

The world at war; Americans at the movies. “Every night is Saturday Night!” Variety declares exultantly. Ticket sales and domestic rentals nearly double between 1939 and 1946. Hollywood has never been more important to America, and America’s Communists have never been more important to Hollywood—or so they think.

November 10, 1942, a few weeks from Pearl Harbor’s first anniversary, two months into the Battle of Stalingrad, another day that will live in infamy: behind their studio gates, Warner Bros. begins production on its patriotic super-spectacle *Mission to Moscow*.

The project, based on the bestselling memoir by America’s envoy to the Soviets, Joseph E. Davies, is enthusiastically supported by the Office of War Information and looked upon with favor by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Throughout production, Ambassador Davies, who has scribbled his approval, will keep Roosevelt apprised of the movie’s progress.

Mission to Moscow is shooting even as *Time* magazine declares Joseph Stalin the Man of the Year, the United States engages Japan at Guadalcanal, and atomic physicist Enrico Fermi orchestrates the first self-sustained nuclear chain reaction beneath the football stadium at the University of Chicago. In Washington, the Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, chaired by Senator Harry Truman (Democrat of Missouri), is holding hearings on irregularities in Hollywood’s military contracts, including alleged favoritism on the part of Twentieth Century-Fox chieftain Darryl Zanuck, accused of taking home \$5,000 per week for four months while on active duty, as well as failing to protect his Fox stock in trust.

Zanuck must have slipped his mind: Zanuck is already pondering the peace and planning a colossal tribute to America’s last war president, Woodrow Wilson. Elsewhere in Hollywood, an old nightclub on Cahuenga, near Sunset, has been transformed into a star-spangled USO center—the Hollywood Canteen, brainstormed into existence by Bette Davis and John Garfield in the exclusive, starson Green Room of the Warner Bros. commissary. The Canteen was the Green Room at war: servicemen on leave might dance a dance with a visiting glamour gal while volunteer starlets served coffee and sandwiches made in a kitchen run by John Ford’s wife, Mary—the director, having organized a naval photographic unit, is also on a patriotic mission.

Taking advantage of Zanuck’s absence, Fox producer-director (and European refugee) Otto Preminger is planning a movie focused on another U.S. diplomat, William Dodd, ambassador to Nazi Germany from 1933 through 1937; the source is daughter Martha Dodd’s book *Through Embassies and Eyes*, recounting her life among the Nazis—or at least part of her life. Martha is both a sexual adventuress and an enthusiastic Soviet spy. Preminger has hired Communist screenwriter Rian Lardner Jr., fresh from the Army Signal Corps, to work on the script. Over at Paramount, Communist director Frank Tuttle is filming *Hostages*, a tale of the Czech underground adapted by Communist writer Lester Cole from the newly published, well-received antifascist novel by the young German

Jewish (and Communist) exile Stefan Heym.

Formerly with Paramount, independent producer (and Comintern agent) Boris Morros has planted the story that Ingrid Bergman, Swedish star of two current Popular Front dramas, *Casablanca* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, has been approached to star in a movie based on *The Russian People*—the Konstantin Simonov play recently adapted by Communist playwright Clifford Odets. Morros and fellow independent Sam Spiegel have engaged Lewis Milestone to direct, just as soon as the ultraliberal Russian-born Milestone finishes *The North Star*, a big-budget Samuel Goldwyn production set in a miraculously uncollectivized Ukrainian “farming village,” with an original screenplay by noted playwright (and fellow traveler) Lillian Hellman. Soon after *The North Star* goes into production, the Los Angeles office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation presents director J. Edgar Hoover with the comprehensive report on Communist activity in Hollywood that Hoover had requested the previous summer.⁵

The talk of the industry is the box-office success of RKO’s lurid cheapster *Hitler’s Children*, made for less than \$190,000 and predicted by the trades to gross a million or more. The movie was adapted by the liberal, politically ambitious playwright Emmet Lavery from Gregor Ziemer’s *Education for Death: The Making of a Nazi* and directed by Edward Dmytryk, who, the following year, would be invited to a small gathering at Frank Tuttle’s mansion in the hills beneath the Hollywood sign, then recruited into the Communist Political Association by screenwriter Alvah Bessie—a veteran of the *New Masses* and (exotic for Hollywood) the Spanish Civil War.

Exposing the indoctrination of German youth, as well as Nazi labor camps and eugenic breeding, *Hitler’s Children* centers on the doomed romance between an American-born, German-raised, true-believing Nazi boy (Tim Holt) and a German-born, freedom-loving American girl (Bonita Granville); the latter is prominently featured in the movie’s ads submitting to a ritualized flogging. Despite concerns expressed by Hollywood’s internal censor Joseph Breen, the movie more than fulfills the Office of War Information’s mandate to depict the Nature of the Enemy.

On February 2, the Germans surrender to the Red Army at Stalingrad, and, five weeks later, MGM’s *Song of Russia* swings into production. The studio’s most handsome leading man, Robert Taylor, plays an American conductor who falls for and marries a fetching young Russian pianist and *traktorist*. Like *The North Star*, *Song of Russia* depicts the horror of the German invasion as experienced by glamorous ordinary Russians. The screenplay is by two members of the CP’s writer-enriched Northwest Section, Richard Collins and Paul Jarrico, who inherited this dream job from a gaggle of other Reds—including German refugee Victor Trivas, veteran screenwriter Guy Endore, and journalist Anna Louise Strong.

Within a few days, Hearst columnist (and Hoover informant) Hedda Hopper issues a warning: “Those communistic directors who talk openly on the sets at various studios better pipe down. They’ve been reported to the FBI—and about time.” To whom does she refer? The Commies are everywhere; *People’s World* is available on street corners from Long Beach to Burbank. The action is frantic. Party leader Collins will remember attending three, four, sometimes five evening meetings a week. *Life’s* March 23 issue is entirely devoted to the USSR, with Joseph Stalin the beaming cover boy.

Antifascist heroism is ubiquitous onscreen: Fox’s *Chetniks!*, a celebration of the Yugoslav partisans, opens at the Globe New York on March 19—the same day a gang of Chicago mobsters including Frank Nitti and “Handsome Johnny” Roselli, are indicted down at Foley Square for using the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), the stage handlers’ and projectionists’

union, to extort hundreds of thousands of dollars from frightened Hollywood studios. The Globe's next attraction will be the indie cheapster *Hitler—Dead or Alive*, wherein a band of gangsters led by Ward Bond, bellicose pal of Republic Pictures' cowboy star John Wayne, take a million-dollar contract on the führer and, as sarcastically noted by *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther, are hailed as "towering heroes" in the sacrificial fade-out.

Fritz Lang's *Hangmen Also Die*, a United Artists production celebrating the assassination of Czechoslovakia's Nazi ruler Reinhard Heydrich, opens in New York on March 24 ("America's finest artistic comment on the war," per Joy Davidman in the *New Masses*); it is followed two days later by *The Moon Is Down*, a story of Norway under the Nazi jackboot, directed by Irving Pichel for Twentieth Century-Fox from John Steinbeck's novel. Some suspect Pichel might be a Red, but the FBI is more interested in *Hangmen*, directed by an alleged Commie from a script by two known Reds—John Wexley and German refugee Bertolt Brecht—with music supplied by possible Comintern agent Hanns Eisler.⁶

Director-producer Cecil B. DeMille, an FBI special service contact since December 1941, has been furnishing the bureau's Los Angeles office with information on Lang and his associates. DeMille secures an advance screening of *Hangmen*, for which an internal FBI memo will praise him as "the most all-around valuable contact in this field."

After months of publicity, *Mission to Moscow* is set to open.

Back in New York, the Trotskyist *New Leader* has been agitating against what they call "Submission to Moscow" since December, but although the *New Leader* had hoped that the Office of War Information would ensure that *Mission* "not be shaped to the grotesque pattern of Comintern propaganda," the agency could hardly be more enthusiastic. An internal OWI memo, dated April 2, terms the movie "a magnificent contribution." President Roosevelt is shown precognitive in his wisdom, past boldly scripted to serve the present, all ambiguity liquidated: the three purge trials Ambassador Davies saw as evidence of a Kremlin power struggle are compressed into one super trial exposing the heinous guilt of a Nazi-sponsored "Trotskyite" treason conspiracy.

Lavish, polished, and—once shown in the Soviet Union—a model for Soviet social realist spectacles, *Mission to Moscow* screens at the White House on April 21 with a gala Washington, DC premiere the following week. Guests include cabinet members, senators, and congressmen. The *Washington Post* reports a profound, "almost reverent" silence until the final scene provokes a torrent of applause so sustained it nearly drowns out the orchestral finale. *Mission* accomplished!

Warners has spent a record \$250,000 to establish that "The Story of Two Guys Named Joe!" is "as American as YANKEE DOODLE DANDY!" Sockeroo in Los Angeles, *Mission* opens at three local theaters, setting a house record at Warner Bros.'s Hollywood. For the *Daily Worker*, *Mission to Moscow* exceeds all expectation—"a great political document and an event in the history of the American screen," per critic David Platt, "brilliantly acted, directed and produced, bold and lucid in its presentation of the facts." Still, Hollywood's *Mission* is attacked from the right by the Hearst press and from the left by the Socialist Workers Party.

The *New York Times* publishes a letter from philosopher John Dewey denouncing "the first instance in our country of totalitarian propaganda for mass consumption." Trotskyist-pacifist Dwight Macdonald initiates a letter-writing campaign against the movie. Republicans demand a congressional investigation. Defending *Mission* with regular updates, the *Worker* will report endorsements not just from Red unions but from the Legion of Decency, the National Board of Review, former president

candidate Al Smith, the National Maritime and Transit Workers unions, *Variety*, Eleanor Roosevelt and comedian Milton Berle. Praising *Mission*'s "skill," "sentiments," and "nerve," director Elia Kazan calls the movie "a hell of a step forward."

Variety notes that *Mission* has generated more ink than any film since *Gone with the Wind*. Still, box office soon drops off everywhere outside New York (where *Mission* runs ten weeks on Broadway) and has placards throughout the city's subway system as part of its abbreviated tenure as Department of Transportation "Motion Picture of the Month") and Washington, DC. *Variety* sagely attributes the credible evening grosses to speechifying politicians looking for something to attack in the *Congressional Record*.

May 21, the same day that the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship rallies at Carnegie Hall to support *Mission to Moscow* and less than a week after the Soviet Union announced the dissolution of the Comintern, Warner Bros. celebrates the National Maritime Union—by way of merchant marine assistance to our Soviet allies—in the Humphrey Bogart vehicle *Action in the North Atlantic*. The movie is produced by Jerry Wald and written by Hollywood's arch-Communist, John Howard Lawson. "Of all the film studios in Hollywood, only one has a consistent record of outstanding achievement," Platt writes. "That studio is the 100% New Deal Warner Brothers"—producer of *Casablanca*, *Air Force*, *Watch on the Rhine*, *Edge of Darkness*, *Mission to Moscow*, and now, *Action in the North Atlantic*.

Scarcely has *Action* opened in Los Angeles than the city is convulsed. Thursday, June 3, a sailor on shore leave is stabbed in a brawl with a group of zoot-suit-wearing so-called pachucos. The next day sailors, marines, and off-duty policemen organize a brigade of thirty taxis, driving from downtown to the East L.A. barrio, attacking random zoot-suiters en route. Saturday's newspaper predictions of a pachuco counterattack inspire hundreds of sailors and marines to spend their weekend on zoot suit patrol. The downtown becomes a war zone, with military mobs assaulting anything be-zooted, halting streetcars to eject Mexicans and other dark-skinned passengers, and invading the sanctuary of darkened movie houses. Community activist Josefina Fierro de Bright, wife of Communist screenwriter John Bright, tells the press that throughout the beatings, police stood by joking. Hearst dailies commend the servicemen for "cleansing" Los Angeles; *People's World* accuses Hearst of acting like a fifth columnist, sabotaging the war effort by fomenting a lynch-mob atmosphere.

June 21, the state legislature's Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California, chaired by Senator Jack B. Tenney, opens hearings. Tenney is particularly concerned about what seems to him a new Communist front, the Citizens' Committee for the Defense of Mexican American Youth, whose Hollywood sponsors include Bright and actress Dorothy Comingore. Meanwhile, five studios announce plans for feature films on the problem of juvenile violence, although these are dropped after an unofficial warning from the OWI. In the middle of the Tenney hearings, the Southern California division of Russian War Relief marks the second anniversary of the Nazi invasion musically with "Tribute to Russia" at the Hollywood Bowl. Leopold Stokowski conducts the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra in a program produced by Boris Morros, the only bona fide Soviet spy operating in Hollywood.

The Communists should be happy but . . .

June 28, David Platt informs his readers of two reliable reports that Paramount's upcoming *For Whom the Bell Tolls* will emphasize the worst aspects of Ernest Hemingway's novel. Hollywood's version of the Spanish Civil War "depicts the Republicans as barbarians, distorts the role of the Soviet

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