

Introduction

DELIVERING THE TRADES

This book contains many stories, some shared for the first time, almost all concerning people long gone. So, let me begin with a more recent story from my own life. Without this experience, I can say with confidence that the book you are reading would not exist.

Before I ever pursued academia—a career path that would lead me to teaching students, poking around archives, and digitizing millions of pages of old movie magazines—I pushed around a mail cart at 7 a.m. every day, delivering copies of *Daily Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*. It was 2005, and my first job out of college was working in the mailroom of a large Hollywood talent agency. There wasn't time to read the trades on my delivery runs. So, when most of the office cleared out for lunch, I would pull crumpled trade papers out of the recycling bins. I devoured them like the free donuts laid out every Friday morning.

I read the trades for news and information. As an agent trainee, I was expected to have a sense of “who's who” and where industry players fit within Hollywood's hierarchy. But I also read the trade papers with a critical eye. I learned this practice from the people around me. Talent agents dismissed certain stories as puff, desperate attempts to put a positive spin on a string of flops. At the same time, however, those same agents invested a tremendous amount of meaning in the trades. A tirade ensued, for instance, when a young agent was omitted from a list of up-and-coming movers-and-shakers. As I came to understand, the trade papers communicated information, but they did much more, playing important gatekeeping and scorekeeping functions within the industry's culture.

Fast-forward a decade. Now working at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, I was far from the talent agency mailroom in Beverly Hills. Yet I was more immersed than ever in Hollywood trade papers. Through a mixture of good timing, great collaborators, and a whole lot of grunt work, I was playing a leading role in the open access digitization of historic sources for film and broadcasting

history. As codirector of the Media History Digital Library (MHDL), I worked closely with the project's founder, David Pierce, on making millions of pages of out-of-copyright trade papers openly accessible online. To build this collection, we collaborated with a number of leading film heritage institutions, including the Library of Congress, Museum of Modern Art, and the Academy's Margaret Herrick Library, as well as private collectors, such as Karl Thiede, Eileen Bowser, and Richard Koszarski. Thanks to their generosity and the support of sponsors, we were making decades of *Film Daily*, *Motion Picture News*, *Moving Picture World*, *Motion Picture Herald*, and *Variety* freely available for users all over the world to search, read, and download. We were also scanning many fascinating yet lesser-known publications, such as *Film Spectator*, *Film Mercury*, and *Cine-Mundial*.¹

All of these publications (and more) now pop up when researchers run keyword searches in Lantern—the search platform for the MHDL that my team and I developed. Much of my subsequent work became driven by a new question: how could I help users interpret and utilize these historic sources they were encountering online? How could I provide new contexts for the otherwise decontextualized snippets that they scrolled through on the Lantern results page? This line of inquiry led to the creation of publication descriptions within Lantern, experimentation with computational research methods, and the publication of several research articles.² I became part of a community of film and media historians curious about movie magazines and trade papers, a scholarly community that took the sources used by others in the field as our own objects of study.³ But this work also brought me back to memories of the talent agency—back to being twenty-two years old, dressed for work in a baggy, hand-me-down suit, reading the trade papers, and observing the ways that the people around me read them. The Hollywood trade papers actively participated in the creation and maintenance of industry cultures and communities, not merely as vehicles for disseminating the news. Interpreting the trade papers requires understanding the constituents of the industry and their norms, fears, and aspirations at particular moments in time.

A new research question emerged from so much scanning, coding, reading, and thinking about the trades: why were there so many publications covering the same industry? The movie business was an outlier. Between 1915 and 1950, no American industry had more trade papers devoted to it than the movie business. During this period, the American film industry consistently had a dozen or more national trade papers reporting on and influencing its actions. Additionally, many more regional trade papers profiled film production, distribution, and exhibition. As I came to discover, many executives, workers, and publishers within the film industry a century ago were asking my same question—*why so many trade papers?* They viewed the number of papers, as well as the unruliness of some in particular, as industry problems. They wanted to find a solution. In 1930, *Exhibitors Herald* publisher Martin Quigley forged a collaboration with the Hollywood studios with the goal of eliminating all the competing trade papers. But the plan ultimately

failed. *Ink-Stained Hollywood* is the story of why this and numerous other attempts at consolidation flopped.

Ink-Stained Hollywood examines the film industry trades' most heterogeneous and tumultuous period—from the early feature film era in the mid-1910s to the vertically integrated studio system, strained by the Great Depression, of the mid-1930s. By chronicling the histories of well-known trade papers (such as *Variety* and *Motion Picture Herald*) alongside many important yet forgotten publications (such as *Film Spectator*, *Film Mercury*, and *Camera!*), my book challenges the established canon of film periodicals and offers new frames for interpreting them as sources. I explore the communities of exhibitors and creative workers that constituted key groups of subscribers, and I argue that a heterogeneous trade press triumphed by appealing to readers' specific sensibilities, values, and fears. I also argue that we are best served by taking a broad view, analyzing the trade papers in relation to one another and to other players within the film industry's ecosystem rather than looking exclusively at individual trade papers in isolation. By taking this broad view, we can see how the trade papers were frequently in tension with the norms of industrial journalism, as well as in tension with one another and sectors of the film industry.

There is a great deal of ground to cover. But before this cart can leave the mail-room, there are more letters and parcels that need to be brought aboard. In the remainder of this introduction, I seek to accomplish this onboarding, surveying the fields and scholarly literature in which the book makes its contributions, the theoretical frameworks that inform my analysis, the sources and methods used to gather evidence, and some key background history about the entertainment trade press.

SCHOLARLY FIELDS, LITERATURE, AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Ink-Stained Hollywood draws on and contributes to two growing subfields and modes of cinema and media studies: new cinema history and media industry studies. Significantly, both of these subfields define themselves less in terms of periodization or national cinemas (though there is certainly a great deal of scholarship in both areas on American cinema during the period covered in this book) and more in terms of approaches to studying film and media and their relationships to the economy, society, and culture. New cinema history has emphasized the value of investigating cinema's connection to society, as well as its meaning in the lives of the people who have participated in its exhibition, circulation, and reception.⁴ In the introduction to the edited collection *Looking Past the Screen*, film historian Eric Smoodin referred to this basic approach, with its emphasis on nonfilmic primary sources, as "film scholarship without films," a description that fits this book as well.⁵ Similarly, media industry studies has sought to bring

together aspects of political economy and cultural studies for a more nuanced understanding of how media institutions operate, how individuals exercise agency within larger systems, and what the consequences are for our larger culture.⁶ Both new cinema history and media industry studies have embraced mixed-methods toolkits, including welding together techniques from the humanities and social sciences, an approach that animates my own research, with its blend of archival research and quantitative content analysis.

As this project draws from new cinema history and media industry studies, I also hope to contribute something to both fields by enriching our understanding of Hollywood trade papers. New cinema history scholars frequently footnote the trade papers as evidence without critically interrogating their editorial frameworks. Media industries scholars, in contrast, are more likely to analyze the trades' discourse, but it is often at a general level that doesn't take into account the unique histories of particular papers or their specific functions. This book seeks to constructively address these gaps in a manner that will assist other researchers as they search and interpret the trades.

In writing this book, I am also pleased to be part of a community investigating the history of the Hollywood studio system from new vantage points. The history of Hollywood might seem well-worn owing to the foundational scholarship by Tino Balio, Douglas Gomery, Richard B. Jewell, David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger, among others.⁷ But by asking new questions and utilizing previously ignored sources, a new generation of film historians, including Kia Afra, Erin Hill, Peter Labuza, Derek Long, Luci Marzola, Miriam Petty, Paul Monticone, and Chris Yogerst, have nuanced our knowledge of the Hollywood industry and deepened our understanding of its meanings for film workers and audiences.⁸ *Ink-Stained Hollywood* joins this cohort of historical research into Hollywood, and I hope it will become a valuable secondary source for the next generation of researchers who reinvent the field yet again.

Additionally, *Ink-Stained Hollywood* draws from the history of American journalism. Books and manuals from the 1910s and 1920s on the field of "industrial journalism" were important sources for my understanding of the norms and aspirations for this larger field. Histories of American journalism by Carolyn Marvin, Michael Schudson, and Gerald J. Baldasty provided helpful models for my investigation of changes in journalism over time and for analyzing the assumptions of editors, writers, and readers.⁹ And studies of cinema's relationship to newspapers by Richard Abel, Anna Everett, Paul Moore, and Jan Olsson were especially valuable as models for bringing together these scholarly domains.¹⁰ Because trade papers are less frequently studied in histories of journalism than are newspapers and magazines, I hope that *Ink-Stained Hollywood* provides a useful model for future research in this space. As will become clear in the chapters that follow, the extent to which the motion picture industry adhered to or defied the wider norms of industrial journalism became a source of conflict and debate.

This book also seeks to contribute more specifically to our knowledge of entertainment industry periodicals. Whereas Hollywood fan magazines have received a significant amount of attention over the last two decades, Hollywood's trade press remains underscrutinized.¹¹ Moreover, the scholarship that does exist tends to focus on individual trade papers rather than analyzing them in relation to one another. Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, Richard L. Stromgren, and Gregory A. Waller, for example, have all published high-caliber essays that focus on specific writers or sections of a trade paper. The 1985 reference guide *International Film, Radio, and Television Journals*, edited by Anthony Slide, also made a valuable contribution by offering brief descriptions of dozens of film periodicals, including some of the trade papers discussed in this book.¹² I am pleased to build on these earlier works and put the various trade papers into conversation with one another and the broader industry they participated in and served.

Variety is, by far, the entertainment trade paper that has received the most attention from scholars and nonacademic writers alike. Dayton Stoddart's *Lord Broadway: Variety's Sime* (1941) and Peter Besas's *Inside "Variety"* (2000) are two books devoted exclusively to *Variety*'s history.¹³ Both books contain valuable details about the paper's operations (and some very amusing anecdotes). But they also have their blind spots, especially in tracking *Variety*'s changing relationship with the film industry. By using quantitative research methods, I present evidence that challenges Stoddart's and Besas's claim that *Variety*'s film reporting increased following a growth in film advertising. In fact, the inverse was true. Only after devoting substantial resources to covering the film industry did *Variety* reap the benefits of increases in film advertising.

In reviewing the available literature, it should also be noted that the sons of two important trade paper editors have published biographies of their fathers. Martin S. Quigley's *Martin J. Quigley and the Glory Days of American Film, 1915–1965* discusses Quigley's career as the editor of *Motion Picture Herald* and an author of the Production Code.¹⁴ More recently, W. R. Wilkerson III published *Hollywood Godfather: The Life and Crimes of Billy Wilkerson* (2018), a biography of his father, the founder of the *Hollywood Reporter*.¹⁵ Both authors provide valuable biographical details about their fathers' early lives. My research questions, analytical framework, and use of sources are all quite different from Quigley's and Wilkerson's, resulting in different emphases and interpretations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The most important theoretical framework at play in this book comes from the fields of communication studies and journalism. In his landmark "Cultural Approach to Communication," James W. Carey contrasts two frameworks for understanding communication: the transmission view and the ritual view. "If one examines a newspaper under a transmission view of communication, one sees the

medium as an instrument for disseminating news and knowledge,” writes Carey. In contrast, a ritual view of communication will understand “newspaper reading less as sending or gaining information and more as attending mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed.” As Carey points out, “a ritual view does not exclude the processes of information transmission or attitude change,” but it insists that these occur within a broader cultural framework.¹⁶

The ritual view of communication captures what I observed at the talent agency: the trade papers delivered news, yes, but it was always embedded and interpreted within a particular community and culture (in this case, show business). Carey’s model also fits the arguments and debates at play within early 1920s trade papers claiming to represent the interests of independent exhibitors, such as *Harrison’s Reports* and *Exhibitors Herald*. The expansiveness and flexibility of Carey’s model make it well suited for studying trade papers and the show business community. In conceptualizing communication, Carey defines communication as “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.”¹⁷ What is remarkable is how consistent this view is with the entertainment industry’s own thinking. “Perception is reality” has become a commonplace adage in today’s Hollywood, and many of the historic trade papers’ best customers were companies and individual workers attempting to mold and elevate their perceptions within the industry.

Carey’s ritual view of communication also resonates with the work of media industries studies scholar John Thornton Caldwell. “Perception is reality” is an example of what Caldwell calls “industry self-theorizing”—the way that film and television workers make sense of their culture and world.¹⁸ In his influential book *Production Cultures*, Caldwell argues that film and television “do not simply produce mass or popular culture . . . but rather film/TV production communities themselves are cultural expressions and entities involving all of the symbolic processes and collective practices that other cultures use: to forge consensus and order, to perpetuate themselves and their interests, and to interpret the media as audience members.”¹⁹ As will become clear in the chapters that follow, the history of the film industry’s trade press includes attempts to forge consensus and order, as well as pushback from communities that define themselves in opposition to other players within the industry.

In its emphasis on mass communication and community formation, Carey’s theoretical framework also evokes Benedict Anderson’s better-known conceptualization of “imagined communities.” In his analysis of nineteenth-century newspapers and the rise of nationalism, Anderson argues that “the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.” Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”²⁰ In applying this concept to trade papers and the film industry, we can substitute an

“imagined business community” for “imagined political community.” If, however, we consider *political* less as referring to governance and more as method (i.e., to “play politics”), then the motion picture industry was certainly both an imagined business and political community.

The theories of Carey, Caldwell, and Anderson inform my conception of film industry trade papers and the functions they fulfill within the culture of show business. Even so, I have chosen not to fill the rest of the book with lengthy quotations from these authors. This is partly for the sake of readability. It’s also a deliberate decision; I want my uses of quotation marks to, as much as possible, elevate the voices of historical actors and lesser-known contemporary scholars. Yet it’s a reflection of something else, too: none of the theories of communication and culture can effectively explain historical change. Carey’s ritual view of communication can help us understand why, at particular moments in time, various constituencies within the industry supported certain publications—the papers that, for instance, affirmed their worldviews as independent exhibitors or screenwriters within the studio system. But the theories don’t explain why so many trade papers sprang into being between the mid-1910s and early 1920s and why particular publications transformed considerably over time (e.g., *Variety*, *Exhibitors Herald*, *Reel Journal*) while others remained relatively consistent (e.g., *Harrison’s Reports*). Addressing these changes and continuities requires the historiographic work of identifying and weighing of causal factors. And the identifying of causal factors, in turn, depends on the selection and interpretation of sources.

SOURCES AND METHODS

Film scholars have long utilized trade papers as historical sources, and, unsurprisingly, the trades remain important sources for my own project investigating their history. But there are many different ways of going about reading and analyzing these texts, especially after they are digitized. There are also many other primary sources—such as circulation auditing records, archival lawsuits, and individual manuscript collections—that can shed light on aspects of the trade papers, including details that the editors were not keen to share about themselves in print. Identifying, locating, and integrating these sources have been among the major tasks of this project.

My most important sources in writing this book have been *Motion Picture News*, *Moving Picture World*, *Variety*, and the film industry’s dozens of other trade publications. Although I discuss some trade papers that have not been scanned (and some that are not known to be physically available anywhere), most of the publications that I analyze are freely available—either in part or in their entirety—through the Media History Digital Library. Because they exist as digital files, I have been able to embed hyperlinks in my notes. Readers of the online edition can click through to see the relevant pages I am quoting or citing as evidence. But digital access meant much more for my research process. Early on, I

applied computational methods, such as topic modeling and scaled entity search, to the periodicals as a way to look at them in new ways and see what patterns the computer might notice that I did not. The experience helped me get to know these publications better (especially calling my attention to sections that I tended to skip over), though, for the sake of readability, I have left the lengthy descriptions of the processes and results out of the historical narrative that follows. I also became a super-user of Lantern, the search engine I developed for the MHDL's collections, as a way to quickly test out hunches, chase new leads, and then follow more new leads from there (a process that film historian Gregory Waller usefully refers to as "search and re-search" and that many readers have no doubt undertaken themselves, possibly even leading them to the discovery of this very book).²¹

One useful method for studying periodicals in comparison to one another and individually, as a particular publication changes over time, is quantitative content analysis. By randomly sampling issues from a given year and assigning every page to a category (e.g., advertisement, editorial, news, etc.), a researcher can identify large-scale patterns that might be missed through close reading alone. As a method, quantitative content analysis does not require digital access; it can be done using microfilm or print originals. But the process is vastly accelerated in the digital realm thanks to the speed at which issues can be accessed and analyzed. With the help of outstanding research assistants, I was able to generate quantitative content analyses for eight trade papers: *Variety*, *Motion Picture News*, *Moving Picture World*, *Motography*, *Exhibitor's Trade Review*, *Film Daily*, *Motion Picture Daily*, and *Exhibitors Herald / Motion Picture Herald*. In all eight cases, we used a random number generator to select six issues per year—advancing every year for some publications, every two years for others—to analyze for their content.

The most in-depth and detailed content analysis was performed on *Variety*. Derek Long, Kit Hughes, Tony Tran, and I tracked the number of pages dedicated to various entertainment forms (e.g., vaudeville, burlesque, legitimate theater, motion pictures), both in news/editorial coverage and paid advertisements.²² The results were illuminating and surprising (see fig. 1). Through our content analysis, we discovered that the importance of the film industry to *Variety* did not grow linearly over the paper's first four decades. Instead, this was a relationship of fits and starts—the contribution of film to *Variety*'s financial health declined during the period of 1908 to 1912, rose during the period of 1914 to 1918, fell again during the period of 1920 to 1922, grew once more and peaked during the years of 1929 and 1930, then declined again in the early 1930s. As these results show, the increasing importance of film to *Variety* cannot be understood as simply the reflection of the industry's growth. Fully explaining *Variety*'s transformations requires scrutinizing the paper's internal strategies alongside external shifts taking place within the media industries.

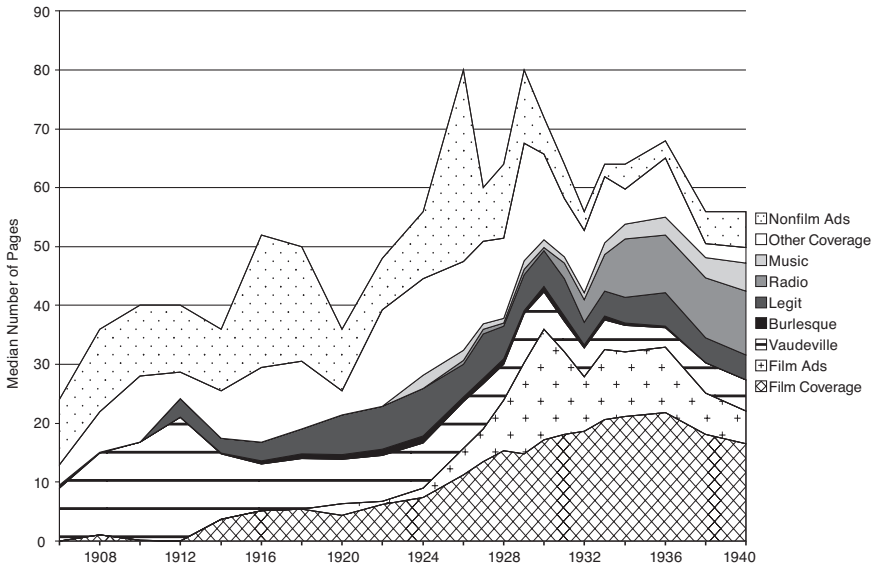


FIGURE 1. Visualization of content distribution of *Variety*, 1906–40. Source: Six trade paper issues analyzed per year, selected using a random number generator. Graphic by Lesley Stevenson.

For the other seven trade papers (which all primarily addressed themselves to motion picture exhibitors), we used a more simplified version of content analysis. For each sampled issue, we categorized pages as either (A) news/editorial or (B) advertising, counted the pages in each category, and generated averages and medians for purposes of comparison and change over time. Here, too, the results were revealing. The tremendous growth of advertising in *Motion Picture News* in the mid-1910s, and the equally clear decline in the 1920s, points toward important developments in the history of the US film industry and its press, as discussed in chapters 1, 2, and 5 (fig. 2). Similarly, the results of the content analyses of *Moving Picture World*, *Motography*, *Exhibitors Trade Review*, and *Exhibitors Herald / Motion Picture Herald* help to contextualize my discussions of those trade papers.

For all my uses of computational methods, keyword searches, and quantitative content analysis, though, much of what fills this book comes from closely reading the trade papers and other primary sources that shed light on them. The editorial temperaments and distinguishing styles of the trades most fully come to life from closely reading them, issue after issue. I hope that when readers encounter the voices of Franchon Royer, Tamar Lane, and Welford Beaton in chapter 4, they come across as a welcome change of tone from the earlier perspectives, just as they proved to be during the course of my own research.

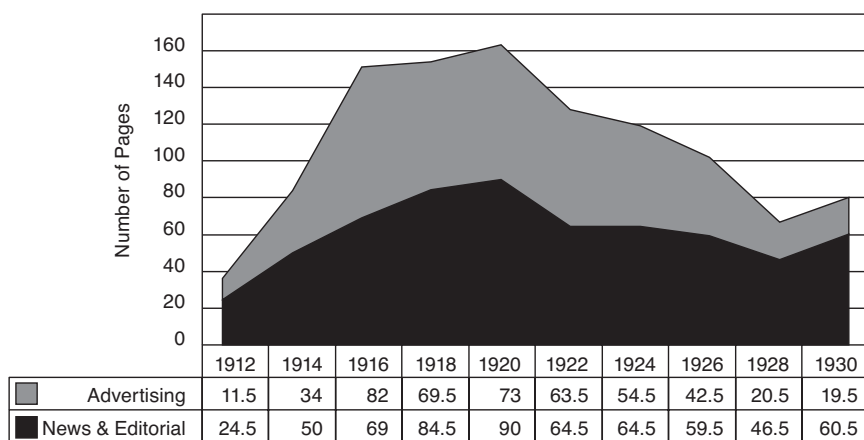


FIGURE 2. Median pages per issue by type in *Motion Picture News*, 1912–30. Source: Six trade paper issues analyzed per year, selected using a random number generator. Graphic by Lesley Stevenson.

I also benefited a great deal from being able to access and closely read unpublished archival manuscript collections. Georgetown University Library possesses the papers of *Motion Picture Herald's* publisher and editor in chief, Martin Quigley, and editor Terry Ramsaye. The Quigley papers provided key sources for understanding the publisher's perspectives and attempts at consolidating the industry's trade press, even as the majority of the archived materials—focused on his role in the Production Code and his relationships with Catholic leaders and organizations—suggest what Quigley and his family came to see as his greatest legacy. While no other trade paper publishers left their papers to an archive or collecting institution, I was able to find traces of their activities in the manuscript collections of other prominent figures within the film industry during this period, including Harry Aitken, Irving Thalberg, Edwin Loeb, and Joseph Kennedy.

My best archival sources came from the courts. Nearly all of the trade paper publishers, including Quigley, were repeatedly sued and also sued others. This litigation generated documents that are now stored in county court record centers in Los Angeles and New York, as well as National Archives repositories in San Francisco and Washington, DC. Courtroom transcripts were available in some cases, along with contracts, letters, memos, and other documents that were gathered during the proceedings and submitted to the courts as evidence. Archival court documents contain evidence and insights about the publishers' internal operations that one cannot glean simply from reading the magazines or the existing secondary literature about them. They also inherently center on conflicts, allowing us to observe tensions at play within the film industry and its press. The conflicts, involving libel, plagiarism, and tax evasion, also make for interesting stories.

One final group of primary sources has been invaluable for my research: the manuals, guidebooks, and auditing records generated by the larger field of industrial journalism. As chapter 1 discusses at length, industrial journalism underwent a period of transformation and expansion in the early twentieth century. With the field's emphases on integrity and "quality circulation," the top trade papers in most industries employed the services of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) to verify their subscription lists to advertisers. The total circulation number for each publication was generally reported in annual directories, such as *N. W. Ayer & Son's* (see fig. 8 in the next chapter for a graph of early trade paper circulations). But more granular information about the categories of subscribers, as well as the regions in which they lived, was also generated in the audits and saved by the ABC (now the Alliance for Audited Media, headquartered in Arlington Heights, Illinois). The audit reports were an outgrowth of the new standards that had developed within industrial journalism, standards that were articulated in lectures, manuals, and guidebooks. As we will see, the turn-of-the-century entertainment industry did not fit neatly within this journalistic field's categories, nor did most of its papers play by the rules.

HISTORICAL SCOPE AND BACKGROUND

This book focuses on the American film industry's trade press across the two-decade period of 1915 to 1935. Nonspecialist readers may read that line and wonder, "That's all?" Meanwhile, historians of silent feature and early sound film eras may wonder how I can possibly do justice to all the developments, transitions, and tumult during this period. I sympathize with both viewpoints, especially that of the silent film historians. Trying to describe and contextualize the institutions, changes, and complexities of the film industry during this period has been one of the biggest challenges of writing this book.

As I hope to make clear, there is a rationale for this particular structure and periodization. The book starts with a transformation within the film industry's trade press, along with the increase of trade papers becoming identified as an industry problem. The story moves forward with the introduction of yet more voices within the trade press, the construction of new industry communities, and the demarcation of new battle lines. The book ends in the mid-1930s following the unsuccessful takeover and concentration of the industry press. By that point, the marketplace was shared by several different publications that would continue to compete and stay in business for decades to follow.

To be sure, the history of entertainment trade papers did not begin in the year 1915. And while it's beyond the scope of this book to fully fill in that history (dissertation project, anyone?), some background history is important for understanding the developments and debates that took place in the mid-1910s and beyond. Moreover, it's productive to defamiliarize ourselves a bit with the very term *trade paper*.

By the rubric of early twentieth-century industrial journalism, the two trades, *Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety*, that I delivered to desks around the talent agency would have been considered “class journals” and not trade papers at all.

In the 1923 textbook *Industrial Publishing*, Horace M. Swetland wrote that “the basic purpose of Industrial Journalism is to assist in the production and distribution of commodities.” Swetland and other proponents of industrial journalism generally distinguished between three types of industrial periodicals: technical, class, and trade.²³ Technical journals, according to Swetland, were “those serving production.”²⁴ The *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* and *American Cinematographer*, for instance, exemplified technical journals that centered on motion picture production. These journals emerged from craft and technical organizations that formed within the film industry. Publishing a journal was a means of disseminating technical knowledge, legitimizing the organization, and policing the boundaries between insiders and outsiders.²⁵ They are not covered in this book because they did not compete against the class journals and trades to become part of the perceived industry problem of too many trade papers. The film industry’s technical journals remain valuable sources for film history, however, and they can tell much about technological innovations within the industry and the communities that participated in them.

The second category was the trade paper. Although the term eventually became expansive enough to include *Variety* (which came to refer to itself as a trade), *trade paper*, as defined by Swetland, was something more specific: a periodical focused on the distribution and merchandising sides of an industry. These were the publications that connected manufacturers with the industry’s jobbers and retailers. The *Dry Goods Economist*, for example, informed its readership about fabrics and other goods for sale, changing trends in women’s fashion, the threat of taxes and other policies, and the commodity markets for cotton and wool. In the case of the film industry, the retailers were exhibitors. Exhibitors needed to know about new products for sale/rental (films), but they also turned to trade papers in the 1910s and 1920s for the latest news about censorship legislation, exhibitor organizational activities, and theater designs.

The third category of publication, according to Swetland, was also the most amorphous: class publications. Typically, class publications spoke to a profession at large. *Variety*, *Billboard*, the *New York Clipper*, and the *New York Dramatic Mirror* were all publications that Swetland would have viewed as “class papers,” addressed to entertainment professionals. Although the papers differed in terms of their emphases and editorial voices, they shared certain characteristics. They carried news items related to the theater (a popular new play in London, for instance), and they reviewed productions and new acts (taste, then as now, mattered to creative professionals). Additionally, all of these papers contained classified advertising sections—*Billboard*’s was especially large—that connected managers with

performers, performers with hotel rooms, and even the occasional theater for sale with a prospective buyer.

Motion pictures first emerged, in ink, within the pages of these American theatrical “class” papers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *New York Clipper* (est. 1853) and the *New York Dramatic Mirror* (est. 1879), followed soon after by *Billboard* (est. 1896) and *New York Morning Telegraph* (est. 1897), opened their pages to advertisements from motion picture services and reports on exhibitions at vaudeville houses, fairgrounds, and other performance venues. These papers cast attention on motion pictures—and sought the advertising patronage of their manufacturers and distributors—during the vitascope’s “novelty phase” of 1896 to 1897, the rise of story film in 1903, the nickelodeon boom of 1905 and 1906, and the decade (and beyond) after the American film industry had four trade papers dedicated exclusively to it. To understand the theatrical papers, we need to take stock of the performance industries they covered, industries that underwent tremendous growth and transformation from 1880 to 1905, along with the growth of American journalism and publishing during this same period. Theatrical trade papers piggybacked and thrived off the industries they covered, but they operated and competed within the publishing industry and, more specifically, the sphere of industrial journalism.

By analyzing the performance industries alongside the field of industrial journalism, we can see numerous similarities that unite the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, founded in 1879, with other trade papers launched that same year, such as *Pottery and Glassware Reporter*, *Western Undertaker*, and *Butcher’s Advocate and Market Journal*.²⁶ All these trade publications aggregated and delivered timely information to their industries. They all depended on the growth of the railroad. Their advertising pages became virtual marketplaces for buyers and sellers to meet, and their editorial columns offered prescriptions for industry improvement. Perhaps most basically, they legitimized their respective industries and professions, much like the small western town that, after a printer published its first newsletter, felt validated as a community on the map.

But for all the similarities across the publications devoted to theater, butchery, and other industries, there were also important differences. Some of the differences were tied to the particular structures of the industries. Other differences were cultural, rooted in the values and identities of the industry’s participants. The culture of show people was especially strong. Show people cared about making a living, but they also participated in a community that cared about taste, status, and applause (ideally, from both the public and their peers). They cared about belonging, and this required recognizing that others did not belong. Their ability to understand the Broadway slang that appeared in print and to identify the targets of satirical attacks marked them as insiders. The theatrical trade papers were community gatekeepers. And, as legitimate theater and vaudeville became

entangled, they turned increasingly into community ushers—assigning players, writers, managers, vendors, and performance forms to their place within a shifting hierarchy.

The American performance forms of theater, vaudeville (fig. 3), and lectures experienced a period of dramatic growth and transformation in the decade leading up to the large-scale debut of motion pictures in the US in 1896 and 1897. Many of the causes for these transformations can be traced back to changing social conditions of the audience, especially the growing population in American cities and the demand by workers and inhabitants of those cities for leisure time and recreation.²⁷ Additionally, a robust transportation infrastructure supported new forms of industrialized entertainment: national rail lines transported traveling showmen and acting troupes into the city; municipal streetcar networks enabled residents to congregate in central districts for work, shopping, and pleasure. Legitimate theater and vaudeville were especially important for the theatrical trade press, and I will limit my discussion here to them. But fairs, parks, and lectures were also intertwined with the nascent motion picture industry and covered in the theatrical press. In all four cases, the content of the performance mattered less than its exhibition context. As social historian David Nasaw has argued, the same act (and, later, film) could move across the different forms and mean something different in each space, depending on the site of its presentation and the demographics of the audience.²⁸

The highest form in the pecking order of American performance arts—and the form of greatest importance to the theatrical trade press prior to the 1890s—was the “legitimate” theater (with that adjective, *legitimate*, signifying much). Even within the legit theater world, not all performers were equal; actors fell into hierarchies based on the roles they played and where they played them. Stars, who would headline a play, enjoyed top-tier status. Stars were followed in the hierarchy by leads, then character actors, then supernumeraries and chorus girls. Similarly, the type of company an actor worked for connoted status. According to theater historian Benjamin McArthur, itinerant repertory companies sat at the bottom, followed by local stock companies, which declined in numbers during the 1870s. The same performance unit that displaced the stock company also rose to occupy the top of the theater world’s hierarchy: the touring combination company, which McArthur defines as “theatrical companies that performed a single play for a season on a pre-arranged tour.”²⁹ Although the combination system sent actors out on the road, it also demanded a hub for actors, managers, and booking agents to come together. By the time the *New York Dramatic Mirror* launched in 1879, New York City, which already possessed more theaters than any other American city, had become precisely this hub for producing and planning combination tours.³⁰ New York-based theatrical trade papers thus attached themselves to America’s theater capital and its central command center for the planning of touring shows.



FIGURE 3. The outdoor stage for Oscar John Schendel's "All Star Vaudeville, Big Three-Ringed Circus, and Mammoth Menagerie" (1901), representative of the growth and enmeshment of performance forms at the turn of the twentieth century. Schendel would have likely subscribed to *The Billboard* and *New York Clipper*. Photograph courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

An especially important development in the theater industry coincided with the appearance of motion pictures in the theatrical trade press. In 1896, the two biggest booking agencies, led by partners Charles Frohman & Al Hayman and Abe Erlanger & Marcus Klaw, joined with theater owners Samuel Nixon and J. Frederick Zimmerman to monopolize theater bookings in the US. The Theatrical Syndicate, as it became known, had the power of Frohman's prolific producing company behind it, and the syndicate either owned or partially owned thirty-three first-class theaters in major cities. Even more importantly, they managed the bookings for more than five hundred theaters, many of them the only theaters in small-to-mid-sized cities that a combination company needed to play in order to make a tour break even and keep the company in the black.³¹ Some theater managers welcomed the Theatrical Syndicate for the greater efficiency and stability that it brought (broken contracts were all too common in the preceding years, as evident in reports of touring companies failing to show up as promised or, alternatively, arriving to find another troupe performing in their place). As a monopoly, though, the syndicate undermined free competition and reduced the bargaining

power of both individual theaters and the touring actors. With its tremendous market power and polarizing effect within the theatrical world, the Theatrical Syndicate foreshadowed similar developments that would come in the vaudeville and motion picture industries.

Vaudeville proved especially important in trends within the theatrical press that would later extend into covering the film industry. Vaudeville's popularity increased dramatically from 1880 to 1900. The essential structure of a vaudeville show remained consistent across the period: a performance comprising several discrete acts, which might include comedy, dance, music, acrobatics, or drama, that were united on the same bill. But much that surrounded that basic structure changed. B. F. Keith and his manager (and future business partner) Edward Albee implemented several important innovations that expanded vaudeville's appeal to a much larger audience and enabled new economies of scale. Beginning in 1880 with his Dime Museum in Boston, Keith found ways to appeal to middle-class, female, and family audiences who never would have stepped into a saloon for a variety performance. Keith, along with other similarly minded vaudeville managers, forbade the sale and consumption of alcohol, ejected disrespectful male patrons, censored off-color material from acts, kept the interior as clean as possible, and advertised in newspapers and other respectable forums. Albee would later describe the three C's on which his empire with Keith was built: "cleanliness, comfort, and courtesy."³²

If one could add a fourth C, then it would be "continuous." Beginning around 1885, Keith theaters turned into repeating loops of performances. Families, shoppers, and other audience members could purchase a ticket anytime between 10:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. and step into a show. They knew it was time to leave when the same juggler or singer they had seen when they first walked in was back onstage performing his same act again.³³ Later, one-reel pictures would be included as acts within the program of many vaudeville shows.³⁴ Continuous vaudeville increased seat turnover and ticket sales. Keith and Albee reinvested the increased revenue from continuous vaudeville by booking better acts and acquiring and building better theaters. They developed a network of vaudeville theaters in the eastern US among which performers would move and tour, complemented by the Orpheum's network of theaters that dominated the West and Midwest. With the exception of major stars, vaudeville performers had very little power within the system, and they correctly perceived that Keith and Albee wanted to chip away at what little agency they did have.

The founding of *Variety* in December 1905 occurred during a period of escalating tension between vaudeville management and labor. In its debut issue (see fig. 4), *Variety* emphasized that it was to be "an artist's paper" and "ALL THE NEWS ALL THE TIME" and 'ABSOLUTELY FAIR' [were] the watchwords."³⁵ *Variety's* emphasis on fairness, artists, and the separation between editorializing and advertising were intended to distinguish it from the theatrical trade papers (especially the *New York Clipper* and the *New York Morning Telegraph*), which

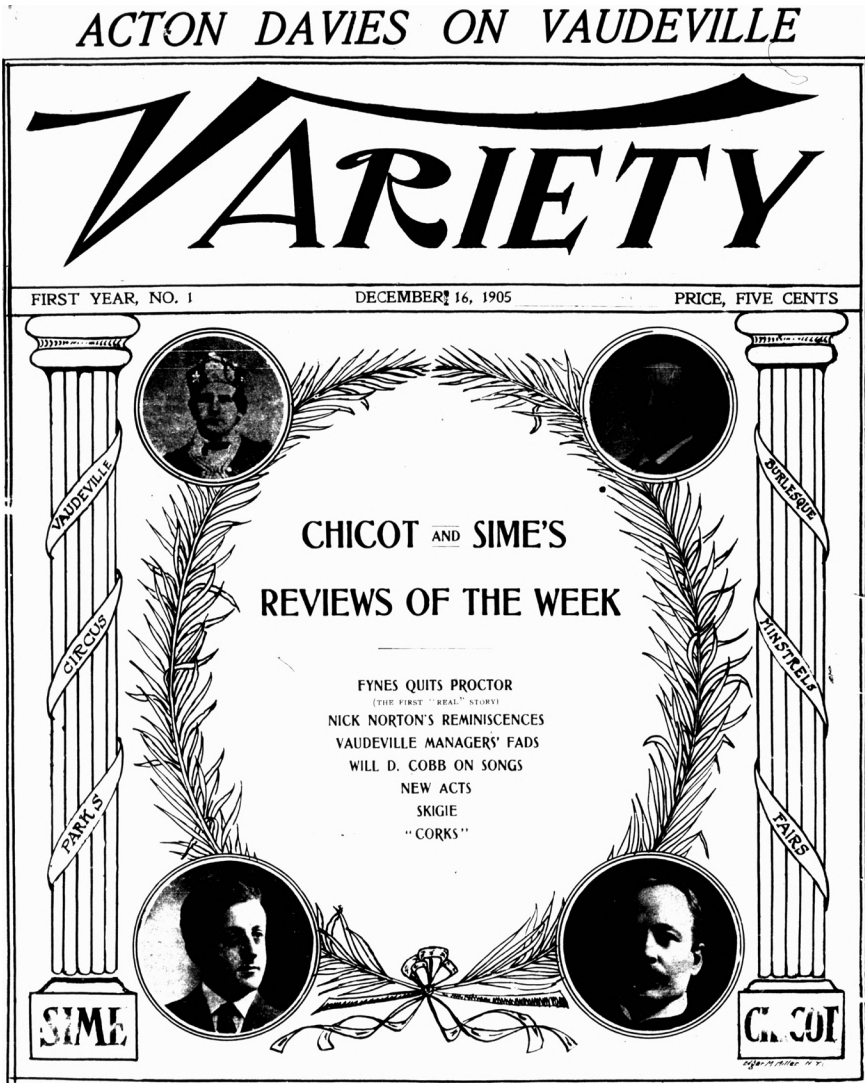


FIGURE 4. Cover of the debut issue of *Variety*, Dec. 16, 1905. The cover emphasizes the paper's initial focus on "vaudeville, circus, parks, burlesque, minstrels, [and] fairs" and introduces its iconic and long-lasting waving V logo. Courtesy of the Media History Digital Library.

it implied were management-oriented organs for their advertisers. Throughout its first year in print, *Variety* largely followed its stated mandate. One example occurred in the summer of 1906, when Keith and Albee merged the Western Vaudeville Association and the BF Keith Booking Agency to create the United Booking Office (UBO). It was a key moment in the consolidation of the vaudeville industry, coinciding with the expansion of theaters controlled by Keith and Albee

to roughly 130. Additionally, the UBO continued the controversial practice of charging artists a 5 percent booking fee.

The *New York Clipper* praised Keith, saying he was a man of “courage, determination, [and] inflexible purpose” to have built “this great superstructure of vaudeville.”³⁶ In contrast, *Variety* analyzed what the consolidation and new booking agency would mean for performers. The paper cynically remarked on the intent behind the name *United Booking Office*: “The Keith executives think that the name of ‘Keith’ left off the title would in a measure remove the red flag from the artists’ sight.”³⁷ And in his editorials, *Variety* publisher and editor Sime Silverman kept raising the red flag again and again, arguing for the need for vaudeville artists to organize and stand up to Keith and Albee before it was too late.³⁸ *Variety*’s relationship with the most aggressive vaudeville labor union, the White Rats, ultimately proved to be complicated and fraught, as I will discuss in chapter 2. But the stances it took in its first year—emphasizing its independence and allegiance to artists—became important frames for the way members of the vaudeville industry perceived *Variety* in relation to the more established *Clipper* and *Morning Telegraph*.

Variety’s launch in December 1905 also coincided with the growth of stand-alone movie theaters in the US.³⁹ The success of early storefront theaters that showed continuous film programs bred thousands of imitators. Between 1905 and 1908, an estimated eight thousand nickelodeons (fig. 5) sprang up across the US.⁴⁰ No fewer than four national trade papers emerged during this same period to try to serve them and capitalize on the growing industry. The first US film trade paper, *Views and Films Index*, debuted in April 1906. Nickelodeon exhibitors were imagined as the core readership of the paper. The advertising base was the film manufacturers, distribution services, and theater equipment dealers who needed to reach them. *Views and Films Index* lamented in its first issue of April 1906 that “exhibitors and showmen have sought for years and still seek for their trade news in theatrical newspapers.” *Views and Films Index* professed not to be “a hybrid publication,” promising to “make a specialty of the trade and not to mix it up with a thousand theatrical details which have nothing to do with our business.”⁴¹ Despite these bold declarations, however, most of the basic practices of *Views and Films Index* and the other early exhibitor-oriented trade papers, as well as many of the structures and forms they published week after week, were inherited from the theatrical trade papers. This tension between the categories of a “class” and “trade” paper never went away. No matter how hard the new papers scrubbed, the greasepaint never fully came off.

In March 1907, a second and more influential exhibitor-oriented trade paper entered the marketplace. The new paper, *Moving Picture World*, was edited by Alfred H. Saunders, who had previously worked for *Views and Films Index*. The business operations of *Moving Picture World* were run by J. P. Chalmers Jr., who pushed out Saunders a year later and took over editorial control. *Moving Picture World* quickly surpassed *Views and Films Index* in all departments, providing



FIGURE 5. The Comet Theatre, a New York nickelodeon, ca. 1910. The Comet's managers would have been among the target readers of the first motion picture trade papers, including *Views and Film Index*, *Moving Picture World*, and *Nickelodeon*. Photograph courtesy of Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

superior news coverage, more thorough film reviews, and excellent projection guidance through the columns of F. H. Richardson. In 1908, Richardson began his “Lessons for Operators” column, and two years later, he began editing a section of *Moving Picture World* called the “Trouble Department” (later retitled “Projection Department”), encouraging readers to write in with questions about projection and theater operation.⁴² Through detailed descriptions and visual aids, Richardson explained the workings of carbon arc lamps and program boards to operators in St. Louis and Salt Lake City. Despite the highly technical discussions, Richardson sought to maintain a clear, straightforward, and unpretentious voice in his writing. He also fostered a sense of community—referring to letter writers as “friend,” “neighbor,” and “brother.”

In 1908, however, the rise of the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC, also referred to as “the Trust”) fundamentally changed the industry’s structure. These changes have been chronicled at length elsewhere, and I will discuss some of them in chapter 1. For our immediate purposes, the most important legacy of the MPPC was that it became a polarizing force—much like legitimate theater’s Theatrical Syndicate and vaudeville’s UBO that preceded it—that changed the perceptions of

the trade press. Trade papers were expected to take a stand. *Views and Films Index* became the most adamantly pro-MPPC publication, and by 1910, it was most likely financed by MPPC member companies. On the other end of the spectrum, *Moving Picture News*, founded in 1908 by Alfred Saunders after his split with Chalmers, was highly critical of the MPPC and came to define itself as the “official organ of the independent manufacturers.”⁴³ Within this polarizing environment, Chalmers’s *Moving Picture World* tried to emphasize its editorial independence, though it was generally supportive of the MPPC. In 1911, *Moving Picture World* acquired *Views and Film Index*, a purchase that increased the perception within the industry that it was on the side of Thomas Edison and the Trust.

This backstory is important because it sets the stage for what came next and the book that will follow. The decline of the MPPC and rise of the feature film created a robust marketplace in which *Moving Picture World* and *Moving Picture News* would thrive under new management (J. P. Chalmers Jr. died in an accident at an exhibitors’ convention in 1912; Alfred Saunders sold *Moving Picture News* the next year). The new editors, W. Stephen Bush at *Moving Picture World* and William A. Johnston at the retitled *Motion Picture News*, emphasized their editorial independence and took on prominent leadership roles within the wider industry. In the case of *Motion Picture News*, Johnston imported the new reforms and formal standards from industrial journalism in an effort to improve the perception of the trade press and his paper in particular. But the threat of oligopolistic industry power—so central to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industries of legitimate theater, vaudeville, and motion pictures—never went away. Traveling actors and independent exhibitors, who suffered under unequitable power structures, were quick to perceive bias in the pages of the trade papers. In the end, giving voice to their anger proved to be an easier task for the trade papers than persuading readers of their editorial independence and neutrality.

BOOK STRUCTURE AND CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

Just as trade papers have certain standardized conventions, so, too, do academic books. One such convention is that the introduction provides chapter summaries of the book that follows. If you like this convention, then read on. If not, and if you enjoy a story with some surprises, then you may want to skip ahead to chapter 1.

The book begins, *in situ*, with the film industry’s trade papers selling historic amounts of advertising and taking on prominent leadership roles within industry-wide trade organizations. In “Remaking Film Journalism in the Mid-1910s,” I analyze how the rise of the feature film, the power vacuum that formed from the decline of the MPPC, and the industry’s need to organize to oppose censorship all offered new opportunities for the trade press. The two most successful editors, W. Stephen Bush (*Moving Picture World*) and William A. Johnston (*Motion Picture News*), seized on these conditions and transformed themselves into influential industry figures. I argue that William A. Johnston left an especially

important legacy. Although he invented very little himself, his importation of practices and ideals from the growing field of industrial journalism changed the film industry's trade press. Data aggregation and market reports, a separate magazine for theater equipment, and an emphasis on circulation quality rather than quantity all became integral parts of the motion picture trade press for the next century. But Johnston proved unwilling to follow the calls of industrial journalism to stop printing publicity announcements for advertisers. His continuation of this practice—which grew in parallel to his booming pages of advertising—earned him enemies, particularly among small exhibitors and rival trade paper editors. In 1916, the perception among exhibitors that Johnston represented the interests of manufacturers, not theater owners, only increased. This set the stage for the creation of *Exhibitor's Trade Review* and what *Variety* would describe as “the war of the motion picture trade journals.”

Chapter 2, “Trade Papers at War,” chronicles those bitter conflicts that played out among the entertainment industry's publishers as World War I raged in Europe. In late 1916, *Exhibitor's Trade Review* debuted and immediately became a lightning rod of controversy. The paper was founded by W. Stephen Bush and Lee A. Ochs, president of the Motion Picture Exhibitors League of America (MPELA). *Exhibitor's Trade Review* claimed to represent only the interests of the American exhibitor. When *Motion Picture News* challenged the truthfulness of this claim, *Exhibitor's Trade Review* published a vicious personal attack on its editor, William A. Johnston. The papers rapidly began to fight one another—and members of the industry they claimed to serve—in a series of libel lawsuits: *Motion Picture News* sued *Exhibitor's Trade Review*; *Exhibitor's Trade Review* sued *Variety* and an exhibitor; a theater chain sued *Moving Picture World*; and the White Rats actors' union sued *Variety*, which was also under investigation by the Federal Trade Commission. Drawing from archival court case documents and the trade papers themselves, I argue that trade publishers strategically filed, provoked, and defended libel lawsuits in an effort to enhance, rather than merely protect, their reputations and credibility. At the end of 1917, William A. Johnston called for the industry to eliminate all but two papers. There were too many trade papers, he argued, and most of the industry agreed. Attempts to consolidate the film industry trade press became a major theme over the next twelve years.

The trade press war of 1917 did not have the desired outcome of putting any of the existing trade papers out of business. On the contrary, the number of film industry publications nearly doubled over the next five years. Chapter 3, “The Independent Exhibitor's Pal: Localizing, Specializing, and Expanding the Exhibitor Paper,” explores how the new papers differentiated themselves from incumbents and gained credibility through strategies of specialization and localization. In short, they succeeded by tailoring themselves to particular cultures and communities within the industry. The chapter begins by exploring a cluster of regional exhibitor papers that attached themselves to distribution exchange hubs across the country. For example, Kansas City's *Reel Journal*, founded in 1920, tracked censorship

regulations, tax proposals, and other issues of interest to local exhibitors and fostered a sense of community and shared interests between southwestern exhibitors and the Kansas City–based distribution exchanges that served them. The chapter also explores another distinctive paper for exhibitors: *Harrison's Reports*. Founded in 1919 by former *Motion Picture News* reviewer P. S. Harrison, *Harrison's Reports* addressed the critiques of the trade press head-on and became “a reviewing service free from the influence of film advertising.” Exhibitors paid several times the subscription rate of the other trades to read this four-page weekly newsletter that rejected the standard business model of trade papers. Finally, the chapter profiles Martin Quigley's *Exhibitors Herald*, which began in 1915 as a local exhibitors' paper in Chicago but grew in the early 1920s into a powerful national trade paper.

Chapter 4, “Coastlander Reading: The Cultures and Trade Papers of 1920s Los Angeles,” shifts focus to map out the overall landscape of 1920s Hollywood and the film industry trade papers that sprang up to serve it. *Camera!*, *Film Mercury*, and *Film Spectator* all spoke to Los Angeles–based communities of creative workers, as well as many readers who wanted to break in to the industry. These and other LA-based trade papers sought to speak to a creative community that prioritized taste, along with gossip, gatekeeping, scorekeeping, and self-publicity. In their addresses to a distinctive creative community, the Los Angeles papers borrowed from the conventions and structures of New York–based vaudeville papers. Meanwhile, *Variety* used the 1920s to pivot from being primarily a vaudeville publication to one focused on motion pictures. *Variety*'s 1923 acquisition of *The Clipper* and the 1925 opening of an LA office, headed by a former *Clipper* writer, were especially important for the pivot. But the paper's reputation for independence, scorekeeping, and distinctive use of language proved to be the most significant strengths of all.

Chapter 5, “Chicago Takes New York: The Consolidation of the Nationals,” explores the vertical integration and mergers-and-acquisitions environment of the Hollywood studio system during the mid to late 1920s. The decade was a period of decline for the three national trade papers analyzed in the first two chapters: *Moving Picture World*, *Motion Picture News*, and *Exhibitor's Trade Review*. All three papers were acquired by *Exhibitors Herald*'s Martin Quigley, who forged an alliance with the major Hollywood studios. In the battle lines being drawn, Quigley stood with Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) head Will Hays against the Brookhart Bill and went on to play a key role in addressing Hollywood's censorship problems through the creation of the Production Code. While these steps placed Quigley in Hays's favor, they alienated many of the nation's independent exhibitors who had previously admired Quigley and supported *Exhibitors Herald*. They also exposed rifts between the producers based in LA and the home-office executives based in New York. The chapter culminates in 1930, with the studios financing Quigley's purchase of two rival papers and the creation of *Motion Picture Herald*, *Motion Picture Daily*, and *Hollywood Herald*. More than any other moment, it seemed as though the film industry finally had a plan to solve the problem of too many trade papers.

The plan failed. Chapter 6, “The Great Diffusion: Hollywood’s Reporters, Exhibitor Backlash, and Quigley’s Failed Monopoly,” chronicles how a group of rival trade papers outmaneuvered Quigley and attracted reader loyalty (and wealthy industry patrons) during the height of the Great Depression. I look especially closely at Quigley’s most hated rival, *Variety*, as well as the paper that *Variety* took to court for stealing its news, *Hollywood Reporter* (founded in 1930). The *Hollywood Reporter*’s Billy Wilkerson understood the importance of social relationships in Hollywood, and he shrewdly supported creative labor over management during the banking crisis of 1933. In contrast, Quigley’s LA-based paper, *Hollywood Herald*, took the side of the major film corporations, and it went out of business before the end of the year (just weeks before the debut of *Daily Variety*). Independent exhibitors also perceived Quigley as a sellout and mouthpiece for the studios. New trade papers, such as *Showmen’s Round Table* and *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, as well as increasingly powerful regional papers, such as *Boxoffice* and *The Exhibitor*, competed for the loyalty of alienated exhibitors and found a stable advertising base through the output of Poverty Row studios. By 1934, more film trade papers existed than in the years leading up to the formation of *Motion Picture Herald*. Remarkably, most of these papers remained in publication through the early to mid-1960s.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

This book concludes during the decade that many readers might consider the beginning: the emergence of the *Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety*, the two daily trade papers best known within the entertainment industry. The old publishers of *Hollywood Reporter* would certainly have viewed the paper’s launch in 1930 as the right place to begin this story. In one of its anniversary numbers, *Hollywood Reporter* boasted, “No one had ever published a trade paper from Hollywood before.”⁴⁴ This statement would be true if it weren’t for *Camera!*, *Film Mercury*, *Film Spectator*, and at least a half dozen other LA trade papers that preceded *Hollywood Reporter*. Nor was *Hollywood Reporter* the first to publish celebratory anniversary issues and encourage advertisers to purchase space for its birthday presents; the strong-arm sales tactics of special issues were already well established among the trades.

When I delivered *Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety* to the desks of talent agents in Beverly Hills, I remember feeling, at times, a sense of continuity with the Golden Age of Hollywood. I can still see some of those continuities, but I now see more clearly the complexities, differences, tensions. I hope that this book helps others see them as well.

More could be said here, but my cart is feeling very full. It’s time to leave the mailroom and make our first stop.