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# From Shtetl to Stardom: Jews and Hollywood

Vincent Brook

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# From Shtetl to Stardom: Jews and Hollywood

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## **The Jewish Role in American Life**

**An Annual Review of the Casden Institute for the  
Study of the Jewish Role in American Life**

***Volume 14***

Steven J. Ross, *Editor*  
Michael Renov and Vincent Brook, *Guest Editors*  
Lisa Ansell, *Associate Editor*

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## CHAPTER 1

# Still an Empire of Their Own: How Jews Remain Atop a Reinvented Hollywood

*by Vincent Brook*

**C**o-host Steve Martin's opening joke at the 2010 Academy Awards ceremony, as attested by its uproarious audience reception and YouTube preservation, stands out not only as that event's entertainment high point. It also marks a turning point in Jewish-Hollywood relations. As part of the standard tongue-in-cheek introduction of celebrity nominees seated in the front rows, Martin turned to German actor Christoph Waltz and continued his spiel. "And in *Inglourious Basterds*, Christoph Waltz played a Nazi obsessed with finding Jews. Well, Christoph . . ." Martin paused, then slowly spread out his arms to embrace the audience—which exploded with laughter, followed by a second explosion when Martin added, with arms still spread wide, ". . . the Mother Lode!" ("A Jew-y Moment at the 2010 Oscars").

Martin's jab at Jewish uber-representation in Hollywood was nothing new. Indeed, getting the joke demanded prior knowledge of Jews' numerical predominance in the industry, and at the highest levels, compared to their meager proportion (circa two percent) of the US population. What was groundbreaking was Martin's light-hearted treatment of the phenomenon (by a gentile, no less), its buoyant reception by his (Jewish and non-Jewish) peers, and the lack of controversy it generated among critics, organized Jewry, or (as far as has been reported) the bulk of the telecast's billion-plus viewers. What the joke provided instead was immense comic relief, which, as with the best

humor, stemmed from its touching a cultural nerve whose tendrils, in this case, extended beyond the present moment to Hollywood's early-twentieth-century origins as the world's movie capital.

Adding to the joke's potency was its functioning on multiple levels. The site-specific aspect was a bonus, allowing the jokester to show rather than tell and to give tangible substance (the Oscar night audience) to an abstract concept (the "Jewish industry"). That Waltz's SS character was the butt of the joke and Jews, for a change, got the last laugh, added poetic justice that both resonated with *Inglourious Basterds*' Jewish revenge fantasy and carried historical weight. Hitler's Führership had triggered a massive influx to Hollywood of Jewish film personnel. Their replenishment of the industry's creative ranks (from directors, actors, and writers to cinematographers, editors, set designers, and composers) bolstered an executive structure already top-heavy with an earlier generation of Jewish émigrés (Brook, *Driven to Darkness*)—and which, a few generations removed, the 2010 Oscar night audience mirrored. Antisemitism, in other words, lay at the crux of Martin's one-liner. And while a full understanding of the backstory wasn't essential to slaying the Academy audience, it is required for appreciating the joke's broader cultural significance.

## JUST DESSERTS

Without antisemitism, of the European and American variety, Jews never would have "invented Hollywood" in the first place (Gabler). The masses of largely eastern European Jews who set sail for the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, just as the movies were taking root, were driven to American shores by the latest violent eruptions of Jew-hatred in their erstwhile homelands. Here they met less virulent but mounting antisemitism, fueled by their largely lower-class immigration, which blocked their rise in more established industries and shunted them into what was then a lowly, if not wholly disreputable, motion picture business. Centuries of Old World antisemitism, meanwhile, which had barred Jews in Europe from owning land and joining guilds, forcing them instead into *Luftmensch* (airman) occupations such as salesman, agent and broker, primed their New World descendants for the similarly rag-tag, fly-by-night, seat-of-the-pants operation "the flickers" initially represented.<sup>1</sup>

Jews, in other words, were at the right place, at the right time, with the right skill set. And American anti-Semites who soon began railing against Jewish “control” of Hollywood had only their ilk to blame. Of course, minus its conspiratorial overtones, the control canard was not without statistical support. Already during the Nickelodeon era (1905–15), Jews had secured a foothold in the exhibition side of the movies as theater owners and managers. When New York Mayor George McClellan closed all the city’s nickelodeons in 1908, allegedly in response to public concern over the “exhibition of depravity,” and local theater owner Jacob Weinberg was arrested, the Jewish immigrant community perceived the actions as a form of pogrom (Hoberman and Shandler, “Nickelodeon Nation” 16; May 43–44). Nothing could stall the movie juggernaut, however, nor Jews’ involvement in all facets of it. By the 1920s, in addition to continued predominance on the exhibition side (Klein), Jews helmed all the major studios that would become household names, define Hollywood’s golden age, and still exist today: Paramount (Adolph Zukor and Jesse Lasky), MGM (Marcus Loew, Nicholas Schenck, and Louis B. Mayer), Fox (William Fox), Warner Brothers (Harry and Jack Warner), Universal (Carl Laemmle), Columbia (Harry Cohn), and United Artists (Joseph Schenck).<sup>2</sup>

Rather than showered with praise for their model American entrepreneurship, however, no sooner had the moguls transformed a once scoffed-at business into a lucrative and core cultural enterprise, than the Jewish control canard took center stage (Brook, *Driven to Darkness* 73). The term mogul itself, derived from the word “Mongol” and coined specifically for the immigrant studio bosses, referred pejoratively to their “alleged Asiatic [read: alien] provenance and appearance, perceived boorish [read: uncivilized] behavior, and admittedly aggressive [read: unscrupulous] business practices” (68). The moguls’ selection in 1922 of Will Hays, current Postmaster General and a Presbyterian deacon, to head Hollywood’s newly formed public relations arm, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (now Motion Picture Association of America), sought only partly to stave off criticism over a spate of sex-and-drug-related movie-star scandals. It also clearly aimed to counter “increasingly anti-Semitic attacks on the film business, not only from fringe groups but also from respected religious and business leaders” (73).

Auto magnate Henry Ford, whose *Dearborn Independent* newspaper in 1921 reprinted as fact the long-discredited *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (concocted by Czarist agents in 1905 and purporting to document a Jewish conspiracy for world domination), singled out the movies for special opprobrium. Hollywood, Ford wrote, was “exclusively under the control of the Jewish



manipulators of the public mind,” whose producers, because of their “Oriental view [that] is essentially different from the Anglo-Saxon . . . don’t know how filthy their stuff is—it is so natural to them” (Ford 51–52). Episcopalian minister William Sheafe Chase, head of the church’s International Reform Bureau, similarly charged “the few producers who control the motion picture who are all Hebrews” with using “a marvelous power for good or evil in the world . . . for selfish commercial and unpatriotic purposes, even that it has been prostituted to corrupt government, to demoralize youth, and break down Christian religion” (Chase 53).

“Filthy stuff,” of course, proved a far better fit than Jew-hatred with the Roaring ’20s. With Deacon Hays projecting gentility and toning down some of the movies’ and movie stars’ excesses, Hollywood and its Jewish elite not only managed to weather the first big antisemitic storm, but on-screen a brief period of defiant self-representation ensued. Explicitly identified Jewish characters and themes were frequently and sympathetically portrayed throughout the decade, peaking with Warner Brothers’ Al Jolson vehicle *The Jazz Singer* (1927). In foregrounding the conflict of tradition and modernity that the immigrant moguls themselves experienced, however, *The Jazz Singer* also foreshadowed troubles to come—from anti-Semites and Jews themselves.

### “TOO JEWISH”

The Great Depression, the Nazi takeover in Germany, and burgeoning fascism at home refueled a Judeo-phobia that spread beyond the confines of Hollywood but again saw in the movie capital a made-to-order target. With the concurrent rise in radical leftist politics, Hollywood Jews found themselves “demonized at both political extremes”—as cynical capitalists, on the one hand, atheistic Communists, on the other—often in the same breath (Hoberman and Shandler, “Hollywood’s Jewish Question” 61). Antisemitic grumbling was one thing, but calls for government censorship and theater boycotts that threatened the bottom-line forced the industry’s hand. Going Presbyterian Will Hays one better, the moguls brought in Catholics Daniel Lord and Martin Quigley to write a puritanical Production Code for film content, and another Catholic, Joseph Breen, to head the Production Code Administration charged with enforcing it.

Once the PCA was in place and business restructuring caused by the Depression ceded financial control to Wall Street, anyone scratching the

surface of purportedly Jewish-run Hollywood in the 1930s would have found the studios largely beholden to WASP investors, such as the Rockefellers, and policed by the Pope. Nothing short of a Stalinist purge would have satisfied die-hard anti-Semites, and in these increasingly fearful times, showing a non-Jewish face mattered more than ever—behind and on the screen. “Too Jewish,” a pejorative apocryphally attributed to Harry Cohn in the 1920s to justify de-Judaizing actors’ names and appearances, in the 1930s led the hyper-defensive moguls to extend the practice to Jewish characters and subject matter as well (Desser and Friedman 1). In the process, the studios made strange bedfellows not only with Breen—himself an anti-Semite who called the moguls (in private correspondence) “the scum of the earth” (Hoberman and Schandler, “Hollywood’s Jewish Question” 58). Organized Jewry as well, concerned with further inflaming anti-Jewish animus, jumped on the de-Judaizing bandwagon, which now also required shelving or bowdlerizing anti-Nazi films. Other factors informed the self-censorship, and the moguls’ actions behind the scenes were a different story (see the Ben Urwand Controversy chapter for the fine points). But the Hollywood majors throughout the 1930s, a period Henry Popkin later termed the “Great Retreat” in Jewish cultural representation, tended to deracinate Jewish characters or eliminate them entirely, and to downplay or ignore the Nazi threat.

World War II took care of Hitler, but the Cold War, in thrusting antisemitism’s Communist pole to the forefront, triggered another peril for Hollywood’s Jews. The fact that six of the so-called Hollywood Ten (alleged Communist film personnel subpoenaed by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, or HUAC, in 1947) were Jews reinforced the perceived link between Heeb and Commies and their joint hold on the movie industry (Navasky).<sup>3</sup> HUAC’s reigning bigot, Mississippi Congressman John Rankin, had no trouble connecting the dots. By listing the stage and birth names of only the Jewish movie stars who had come to Washington in support of the Ten (e.g., Edward G. Robinson, né Emmanuel Goldenberg; Paul Muni, né Muni Weisenfreund), Rankin both “affirmed” the Jew/Communist connection and “proved” their joint conspiratorial intent via the actors’ “hidden” identities.<sup>4</sup>

Lest they too be tarred as Reds, Pinkos, or Fellow Travelers, the moguls not only publicly denounced the Ten before HUAC, but in the Waldorf Statement, issued shortly after the first hearings, promised to rid the industry of its Communist members. The resulting blacklist spread to the radio and upstart television industries as well, which, though then under separate ownership from the movie studios, were, if anything, even more Jewishly “infested.”

The Big Three radio/TV networks—CBC, NBC, and ABC—were all headed by Jews (William Paley, David Sarnoff, and Leonard Goldenson, respectively), thereby expanding, for anti-Semites, the parameters of Jewish media control and requiring, of equally defensive TV moguls, adapting the “too Jewish” rule to their fragile new medium as well.<sup>5</sup>

Network execs even tried to de-Judaize the popular radio show turned TV sitcom *The Goldbergs* (1949–56) by moving the titular family in mid-run from a kosher enclave in New York City to the white-bread suburbs. “They had a fit about the show being Jewish,” co-producer Cherney Berg, son of creator-star Gertrude Berg, recalls. “They wanted the Goldbergs to be the O’Malleys and it just couldn’t be done” (Brook, *Something Ain’t Kosher Here* 22). A decades-long Great Retreat on TV, similar to what the movies experienced in the 1930s, ensued. Mimicking Ivy League college admission quotas for Jews (in place since the 1910s), TV producers began adopting quotas for Jewish characters. A certain “ghetto mentality” prevailed, according to Simon Wincelberg, a prominent TV writer of the time. “They rationed you: one Jewish character a year” (Michael Elkin 25). De-Judaizing reached an extreme in *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961–66). The show was originally conceived by Carl Reiner as an autobiographical riff on his acting and writing stint on *Your Show of Shows* (1951–54), which starred the Jewish Sid Caesar and boasted an all-Jewish writing staff that included Reiner, Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, Larry Gelbart, Mel Tolkin, and Neil and Danny Simon. Reiner, however, was forced to cede the lead-writer role to quintessential WASP Dick Van Dyke and to give his Sid Caesar-based character the Irish-sounding name Alan Brady (Marc 80–82).

### “COMING OUT JEWISH”<sup>6</sup>

Though the “too Jewish” syndrome continued to dominate episodic TV into the 1990s, it began to loosen its grip on Hollywood movies in the late-1960s: partly due to radical changes in American society, partly to the contrasting balance sheets of the two industries. US television’s penetration soared from less than one percent of households in 1948 to over ninety percent in 1960. Domestic movie attendance over the same span plummeted from a peak of ninety million a week in 1946 to twenty million (of a substantially larger population) in the early 1960s. Beholden to their burgeoning mass audience and under scrutiny by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC), television

content paled (literally and figuratively) to that of the movies. Desperate for any audience at all, free of the FCC, and by the countercultural mid-1960s unchained to the Production Code as well, the movies began pulling out the stops—sexually, politically, and demographically.

The explosion of Jewish film representation, though clearly indebted to the overall identity politics movements, was boosted for Jews specifically by their increasing entry into the American mainstream and by Israel's astonishing victory in the Six-Day War. This event, which, according to American Jewish Congress leader Jacqueline Levine, "made us all stand a little taller in 1967," went a long way to allowing organized Jewry, if not quite to revel in, at least to countenance the movies' Jewish representational renaissance (Goldberg 134). Surpassing their 1920s forerunners, a new A-list of Jewish actors such as Woody Allen, Richard Benjamin, Elliott Gould, Dustin Hoffman, Charles Grodin, Carol Kane, George Segal, Barbra Streisand, and Gene Wilder could now be seen and heard playing openly Jewish types, and with Jewish names, noses, hair, and nasal accents intact—Carl Reiner's included (Erens 256).

Jews' greater visibility on screen, in mainstream society, and, via Israel, on the world stage, was certainly an advance from the defensiveness and suppression of yore. But it also highlighted what Sander Gilman calls Jews' "double bind." Attempts at hiding their Jewish identity, as John Rankin insinuated, only "[compounded] the connotations of conspiratorial subterfuge." But dropping the mask, as Jews themselves warned, carried even greater peril, in its reinforcing perception of the Chosen People's "undue" influence (Gilman 19). As the perceived Jewish threat tended to increase with the level of social unrest, it was no surprise that the upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed the first major antisemitic reaction since the McCarthy era. Even African Americans, long-time Jewish allies (and vice versa) based on the two groups' once-shared oppressed minority status, now began scapegoating their more upwardly mobile brethren.<sup>7</sup> Though not as hyperbolically as Henry Ford or William Sheafe Chase, black leader Jesse Jackson revived claims of Jewish media and government control, the latter charge having first surfaced during Franklin Roosevelt's purported "Jew Deal" (Dinnerstein 218). Jackson undercut his federal cabal case by falsely identifying Nixon aides John Erlichman and Robert Haldeman as Jews, but Nixon himself lent the presidential seal to the media control myth, and then some, declaring in an interview that "the Jews in the U.S. control the entire information and propaganda machine, the large newspapers, motion pictures, radio and television, and the big companies" (233). Taking a cue from his commander in chief, Joint Chiefs chairman

General George S. Brown brought the conspiracy full circle, alleging not only that Jews owned all the banks and newspapers (they actually owned 3.1 and 8 percent, respectively) but that their influence in Congress was “so strong you wouldn’t believe” (233).

### THE MORE THINGS CHANGE . . .

Had they stuck to the entertainment industry, neo-anti-Semites would have been on more solid ground. Besides heading the TV networks and most of the major movie studios, another Jewish cog in the media machine—talent agencies—had become ever more prominent in the post-World War period. Tom Kemper’s *Hidden Talent: The Emergence of Hollywood Agents* (2010) has revised upwards agency influence already in the classical Hollywood period (1920s to 1940s). Although “the basic functions and practices of talent agents did not change” in the post-classical period (1950s to present), the clout of increasingly corporatized agencies, similar to the trajectories of the movie and TV business over this span, rose as that of the studios receded, achieving parity with if not surpassing them altogether by the 1970s (248).

Two Jewish “super-agents,” Irving “Swifty” Lazar and Sue Mengers, made mogul-like inroads in the postclassical period through their personal stables of A-list clients. But the true paradigm shift in the industry’s power relations was orchestrated chiefly by one agency, MCA (Music Corporation of America), and one figure, CEO Lew Wasserman. A latecomer to the movie business but a pioneer in television, Wasserman established the “points system” for big-name stars, granting them a percentage of a film’s profits in addition to burgeoning up-front salaries, and, most importantly, perfected the “package system” of leveraging above-the-line talent (stars, producers, directors, and writers), thereby compounding the agencies’ return on interest from multiple clients. With talent no longer contractually bound for long stretches, as in the classical era, to a single studio, the industry dynamic was irrevocably altered, with above-the-liners and their agency underwriters now literally calling the shots.

And not only in the movies—indeed, it was MCA’s and the William Morris Agency’s (WMA) initial foothold in television, through their original New York offices’ greater proximity to the major networks and advertising agencies, that helped these firms leap-frog, when not buying outright, their Los Angeles-based agency rivals (Kemper 247). Ultimately, through their broad

talent pools, a corporate structure more suited to a rapidly changing industry, and diversified “holdings in real estate, production companies, and other businesses,” MCA, WMA, and other emergent agencies became, in effect, the new studios, and Beverly Hills, whence most of the top agency offices soon gravitated, the new Hollywood (248).<sup>8</sup>

Whatever their geographical headquarters—and “Hollywood,” of course, had always been more generic signifier than jurisdiction—the agencies’ makeup was as Jewish as ever. With its acquisition of Universal Studios in 1962, Wasserman’s MCA, from anti-trust concerns, was forced to dissolve its agency arm. Its (mainly Jewish) former agents would go on to form newly prominent firms such as the Agency for the Performing Arts (APA) and United Talent Agency. And there was no lack of other heirs apparent. WMA, the granddaddy of them all and the ur-Jewish agency by virtue of its 1898 founding and eponymous immigrant founder (né Zelman Moses), started out representing vaudeville performers and only became a major player in Hollywood, like MCA, in the late 1940s (Kemper 234, 241). By the 1970s, under longtime head Abe Lastfogel and movie chief Mike Zimring (both Jewish), WMA was prominent enough to spawn another agency powerhouse via the defection of five of its top agents: Michael Ovitz, Michael Rosenfeld, Ron Meyer (future head of Universal), William Haber, and Rowland Perkins (the only non-Jew). The newly formed (in 1975) Creative Artists Agency (CAA) soon catapulted to the top of the heap, with CEO Ovitz further demonstrating agency supersession of the studios by replacing Wasserman as Hollywood’s “most powerful man” (Brady 122).<sup>9</sup>

Ovitz and CAA were by no means the only new Jewish players. Taking a cue from WMA and MCA, which had bought their way into the business by acquiring classical-era agencies, Jeff Berg formed International Creative Management (ICM) in 1975 through a merging of Creative Management Agency and International Famous Agency. Bitten by the CAA bug, four ICM agents—Ari Emanuel, Rick Rosen, Tom Strickler, and David Greenblatt, all Jews—fired for secretly planning to form their own agency, did just that, starting Endeavor Talent Agency in 1995. The incestuousness came full circle in 2009 when Endeavor, under partners Emanuel and Patrick Whitesell (also Jewish, despite the name), merged with WMA to form William Morris Endeavor (WME). By the second decade of the new millennium, seven agencies, mirroring the eight major studios of the classical era, ruled the New Hollywood roost: CAA, WME, United Talent, APA, Paradigm, ICM, and the Gersh Agency—headed or majority-partnered by Jews—all except for APA’s James H. Gosnell, Jr. (who sure looks Jewish!).

Hollywood finally gave agencies their due in the hit HBO cable series *Entourage* (2004–11) and same-titled Warner Bros. movie (2015). Inspired by the real-life experiences of Mark Wahlberg, both the small- and big-screen versions prominently feature Wahlberg's stand-in's agent Ari Gold, based on Wahlberg's actual agent Ari Emanuel (played by the Jewish Jeremy Piven and unabashedly—some would say embarrassingly—portrayed as such on the show). Overdue acknowledgment notwithstanding, while the balance of New Hollywood power may have shifted from the studios to the agencies, by the new millennium the entire industry had undergone such a mega-corporate make-over as to render their usurpation moot. Spurred by globalization, merger mania, and Internet-based technological convergence, not only the major movie studios and television networks (broadcast and cable) but the entire media machine including music companies, newspapers, magazines, book publishers and theme parks were gobbled up by six multinational multimedia giants: Disney (ABC, Marvel, Pixar, etc.), Viacom (Paramount, CBS, Showtime, etc.), News Corp. (Twentieth Century Fox, Fox TV, etc.), Time-Warner (Warner Bros., HBO, etc.), Comcast (NBC, Universal, etc.), and Sony (Columbia, TV production, etc.).<sup>10</sup>

### SAME FOLKS, DIFFERENT STROKES

Though the industry's internal dynamics may have altered dramatically, Jewish numerical predominance at the highest levels, and thus fodder for the Jewish control canard, has not. Thus while overt antisemitic reaction generally subsided from its Nixon-era stirrings to the 1990s, Jews, from long experience, remained wary. Sounding like a broken record from the 1930s, Jewish NBC President Brandon Tartikoff explained in 1985 that TV's aversion to portraying Jews and Judaism was because "so many Jews are behind the camera," and as Eric Goldman, director of the Jewish Media Office, elaborated, they "don't want to draw attention to themselves" (Michael Elkin 25). Tartikoff even played the "too Jewish" card on *Seinfeld* (1989–98), initially nixing the show because the eponymous star's name, stand-up comic profession, and New York City residence amounted to ethnic overkill (Kronke and Gautier C13).

*Seinfeld*, of course, not only went on to become the biggest hit of the 1990s but helped spark an unprecedented surge in episodic series featuring explicitly identified Jewish main characters: from *The Nanny*, *Mad About You*,

and *Friends* to *The Larry Sanders Show*, *Dharma and Greg*, and *Will and Grace* (Brook, *Something Ain't Kosher Here*). What role the increased exposure played in the ensuing backlash is open to question, but Tartakoff and Goldman's neo-defensiveness was vindicated in the mid-1990s, from two unlikely sources. In 1994, William Cash, in an article for the British magazine *Spectator*, ironically helped perpetuate the Jewish control myth by claiming that "a self-perpetuating Jewish cabal had created an exclusive Power Elite in Hollywood" (Games 12). Avowed philo-Semite Marlon Brando counterintuitively stirred the pot in a 1996 *Larry King Live* interview, complaining that Jews who "run" and "own" the entertainment industry "should have greater sensitivity about the issue of people who are suffering because they've [also been] exploited." Exhibiting questionable sensitivity (and historical accuracy) himself, Brando added, "We have seen the nigger, we have seen the greaseball, we have seen the slit-eyed Jap . . . but we never saw the kike, because they knew perfectly well that's where you draw the wagons around" (Tugend 13).

Brando tearfully apologized for his remarks at a Los Angeles news conference a few days later, and subsequently tried to make amends by praising Yiddish theater to the skies. His *mea culpas* were a sign that attacks on the "Jewish" media had become politically incorrect, but their obituary was far from being written. In the early 2000s, the salvos actually increased—in number, virulence, and, in some cases, originality. *New Republic* columnist Greg Easterbrook fell back on the old clichés in 2003, blaming boorish Jewish movie moguls who "worship money above all else" for a spate of Hollywood gore-fests (Blake Elkin 21, 37). The Parents Television Council took the tired "Christian" line in 2004, decrying the anti-religiosity of the "Jewish" television industry (Smith E1, E6). William Donahue of the Catholic League for Civil Rights began his 2004 diatribe conventionally: "Hollywood is controlled by secular Jews who hate Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular." Then he boldly trod where previous bigots had only tiptoed: "It's not a secret, OK? . . . Hollywood likes anal sex" (Rutten E1, E26–27).

Strikes below the belt from the religious right, as perverse as they might be, also were somewhat predicable from a group that felt its straight WASP (and Catholic) privilege under siege in the multicultural age. More unusual and more revealing, not in their messages but in the reactions to them, were the antisemitic rantings from within the belly of the beast. Two years after reviving the Christ-killing canard in his self-directed and produced film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), Mel Gibson became the latest Jewish-control freak when TMZ (a celebrity news website) leaked his remarks to a police officer



following a pull-over for drunk driving in Malibu. After seeming to counter the notion of a Jewish-run Hollywood by telling the officer that “he owns Malibu and will spend all his money to ‘get even’ with me,” Gibson took the Jewish control canard to new extremes by spewing, “F\*\*\*\*\*g Jews! Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world. . . . Are you a Jew?” (TMZ staff).

Gibson, like Brando, publicly apologized for the outburst. And in another indication that anti-Jewish broadsides were no longer kosher, the actor-director’s post-tirade career, which had reached new heights with *The Passion*’s blockbuster success, sank to a new low, with the Malibu incident itself becoming an industry marker for unacceptable antisemitic behavior. When Charlie Sheen, then co-star of the hit sitcom *Two and a Half Men* (2003–15), in 2011 called showrunner Chuck Lorre a “stupid little man and a pussy punk,” *Business Insider*’s Ujala Sehgal blogged, “The only thing missing from Sheen’s rant was some Mel Gibson-style antisemitism. Then he came back with some Mel Gibson-style antisemitism.” Aping John Rankin’s Jewish-outing routine before HUAC, Sheen called Lorre (né Charles Levine), in interviews and in a letter to TMZ, “Chaim Levine.”<sup>11</sup> Sheen, given his already notorious bad-boy rep, didn’t suffer quite the ostracism Gibson did. Though his first attempt to flout his Trump-like outrageousness in a one-man stage show, “Violent Torpedo of Truth, Defeat Is Not an Option,” bombed, his second, in the sitcom *Anger Management* (2012–14), based on the 2003 film of the same name, lasted for two seasons on the FX cable channel.

### THE MOTHER LODGE

The controversy over the lack of black nominees for the 2016 Academy Awards was not the only reason the show’s emcee Chris Rock chose not to revisit the Jewish media control myth for his standup material. His own race also played into the omission. Though the black antisemitism that surfaced in the late 1960s and early ’70s was by then old news, a more virulent form that emerged in the 1980s and ’90s, and had not fully subsided, remained a sensitive topic. The twist to the new strain, and cause for its longer shelf life, was its academic imprimatur. According to Leonard Jeffries, a City College of New York professor and “a leading voice in the new black scholarship,” Jews had not merely to answer for being “cynical manipulators of the civil rights movement” and “demonizers of blacks through their control of Hollywood”; their tormenting of

the black race allegedly went back centuries: as “architects of the Atlantic slave trade” and “apologists for the Southern plantation system” (Goldberg 327–28). Though thoroughly discredited by other researchers, Jeffries’s “historically based” charges gave new life, “legitimacy,” and, most ominously, an effective recruiting tool for Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan’s long-running anti-Jewish campaign. Besides avidly promulgating the slave trade and plantation myths, Farrakhan and his followers honored Henry Ford by selling copies of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (329). Partly to avoid being painted with the Jeffries/Farrakhan brush, both Jesse Jackson and NAACP head Kweisi Mfume steered clear of the Jewish control canard while decrying the dearth of African American representation in network television during the so-called “Lily White” controversy<sup>12</sup> of the late 1990s (Brook, *Something Ain’t Kosher Here* 172).

Rock would have been on firm ground *factually* had he taken a swipe at the persistently sizeable Jewish presence in Hollywood, especially in positions of power. Jewish predominance in the agency business has already been glossed. As for the upper echelons of the half-dozen media giants, these also mirrored to a remarkable degree the demographics of yore. Though deposed around Oscar time, due to declining health, from his decades-long throne at Viacom, Sumner Redstone’s hand-picked successor, Philippe Dauman, maintained the Jewishness of the reign.<sup>13</sup> The corporation’s main media subsidiaries, Paramount and CBS, have long had Jews at the top: Brad Gray and Leslie Moonves, respectively. Although Warner Brothers studios’ longtime Jewish co-bosses Barry Meyer and Ron Horn recently stepped down, parent company Time-Warner regained Jewish leadership in 2013 under CEO Robert Marcus. Disney, which went Jewish for the first time in the 1980s under chieftain Michael Eisner, has remained firmly under Jewish management since Eisner passed the baton to Robert Iger, with the main movie and TV branches Jewish-helmed as well: Alan Horn of Walt Disney studios, Kevin Feige of the recently acquired Marvel studios, and Alan Sherwood of ABC. Comcast, which recently acquired Universal and NBC from GE, is run by Jewish Brian Roberts, with Jews Adam Fogelson and Jimmy Horowitz in charge of Universal and Robert Greenblatt of NBC. News Corp.’s top dog Rupert Murdoch, though not raised or identifying as Jewish, was born to a Jewish mother, while the unequivocally Jewish Stacey Snyder co-chairs 20th Century Fox studios. And even the Japanese company Sony’s movie and TV operations featured Jewish heads: Michael Lytton and Tom Rothman for movies and Steve Mosko for TV.<sup>14</sup>

Along with the undeniable persistence of Jewish executive predominance, a quick web search reveals that the media control canard, with antisemitic

overtone intact, also maintains a hold on the public imagination. That a more balanced counter-narrative has usurped its antipode in cultural cachet, however, was reaffirmed at the 2016 Golden Globes ceremony, held a month prior to the Oscars. British comic Ricky Gervais, unconstrained by race, had been handed the perfect foil for a Steve Martin-like jape in Mel Gibson, whom he was set to introduce as a presenter. Christoph Waltz, after all, had only played a Nazi; Gibson had actually spouted Hitlerian views, which Gervais duly dredged up in his set-up, recalling how he had scolded Gibson for the Malibu incident upon introducing him at the Globes ceremony a few years back. That experience, he bemoaned with his best hang-dog expression, made his introducing Gibson now rather awkward. “And I blame NBC for this terrible situation,” he grouched at the show’s producing network, then added, to Mother Lode-like laughter, “Mel Gibson blames—you know who he blames!” (“Ricky Gervais Mel Gibson Golden Globes 2016”).

## Notes

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1. Jews, along with southern Europeans, were not designated as “white” in the US census until the 1940s (Brodkin). The term “flickers” derived from the flickering of light caused by an initially inadequately rapid projection rate, which was soon corrected. “Flicks” remained a slang synonym for the movies into the 1960s, and has been revived in the digital age by the movie streaming/production company Netflix.
2. Fox Films was founded by Jewish immigrant William Fox in the 1910s. When it became 20th Century Fox in the 1930s, with non-Jew Darryl Zanuck as head of production, its chairman, Joseph Schenck, was still Jewish. Schenck had also served as president of United Artists (UA), founded in 1919 by Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and D. W. Griffith. In the 1950s, UA was taken over by two Jewish lawyers, Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin. Jewish involvement in the lone defunct golden age studio, RKO, is the most complex. The studio was formed by a Jew, David Sarnoff, head of Radio Corporation of America (RCA), and Jews David Selznick, Pandro Berman, Charles Koerner, and Dore Schary variously served as heads of production in the 1930s and 1940s. Company ownership, however, shifted to the Rockefeller family in the mid-1930s and to Howard Hughes in the late 1940s.
3. The Hollywood Ten’s six Jews were screenwriters Alvah Bessie, Lester Cole, John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, and Samuel Ornitz, and director Herbert Biberman. Non-Jews included producer Adrian Scott, director Edward Dmytryk, and screenwriters Ring Lardner, Jr., and Dalton Trumbo.
4. The actors and other film personnel who publicly supported the Ten were part of an ad hoc group called the Committee for the First Amendment.
5. Paley and Sarnoff had founded the CBS and NBC radio networks as well.
6. The section heading is the title of a book by Jon Stratton.
7. Jews had helped form the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 and played a disproportionate role, among whites, in the civil rights movement.
8. International Creative Management (ICM), as the newly formed ICM Partners, moved its offices from Beverly Hills to nearby Century City in 2006, and Creative Artists Agency (CAA) followed suit the same year.
9. That the studios, despite their relative loss of power, still lorded it over the agencies in glamour and prestige was demonstrated when Ovitz left CAA at its peak in 1995 to become Disney President—a short-lived move that ended disastrously for all concerned. After a tumultuous tenure under CEO Michael Eisner, Ovitz was unceremoniously (if lucratively) sacked in 1997. His severance package (a come-on for his taking the job in the first place) was valued at \$38 million in cash and \$100 million in stock.

10. Viacom and CBS split into separate companies in 2006, but both remained under the corporate umbrella of Viacom-founder Sumner Redstone's controlled National Amusements, Inc.
11. Sheen's attempted antisemitic disclaimer, that his mother, Janet Templeton, was Jewish, was quickly debunked (Bloom).
12. The controversy was dubbed "Lilly White" because, counter to recent incremental progress in casting characters of color in network TV shows, the proposed slate for the 1999 season had backtracked. An unprecedented united front among black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian media-monitoring groups led to immediate casting concessions by the networks and, more importantly, a promise to hold annual meetings with the groups. The groups also began issuing annual diversity report cards, giving networks letter grades in casting and the hiring of other creative personnel.
13. As of mid-2016, a power struggle between Dauman and the Redstones (the mentally feeble Sumner and his daughter, Shari Redstone), left Viacom's ultimate, though likely still Jewish, leadership in limbo.
14. Mosko left Sony in June 2016 and was replaced by an executive team that includes Jews Jamie Erlicht and Andy Kaplan (and obvious non-Jew Keith Le Goy!). For confirmation and the latest changes, see the various companies' and related websites.

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