



Conservatism and Hollywood A History and a Few Reasons for Optimism

Actor and comedian Rob Schneider summarized the state of Hollywood today in two simple words: “dismantling itself.”¹ Schneider accurately attributes the collapse of Hollywood in the last several years to “rot,” as producers promote “woke” films and television shows. These people are less concerned with entertainment than with sending political messages.

This political messaging turned off audiences who did not want to hear advocacy of abortion, transgender or gay rights, or the notion that America is at heart an evil country. Hollywood bigwigs seemed oblivious to the success of conservative-themed movies such as *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022), which grossed \$1.4 billion at the box office, *Sound of Freedom* (\$250 million), the admiring biopic *Reagan* (\$30.1 million), Matt Walsh’s satirical documentaries *What is a Woman?* and *Am I a Racist?* and the *God’s Not Dead* film series.

Of course, the problems in Hollywood go deeper than just woke politics. Hollywood has lost 42,000 jobs since 2022.² Production costs in Hollywood led many movie and television producers to move to locations in Canada and elsewhere. The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) in the film industry is replacing actors, screenwriters, editors and many other positions.

Old Hollywood Dying

At the end of 2024, around 100,000 people were employed in the Los Angeles motion picture industry, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This marked a loss of nearly a third of the work force in a two-year period. On-location production was down 22 percent from the previous year.

Television has been the hardest hit. In a three-year period, on-location shooting in Los Angeles declined close to 60

percent. California now ranks sixth for on-location filming, as production moved to Toronto, the United Kingdom, Vancouver, Central Europe and Australia. Strikes by screenwriters and actors did not help, and Los Angeles wildfires prompted those involved in film production to flee the city.

The outlook for the film industry in Los Angeles is not getting better. Its unemployment is more than double the national average, even as unemployment nationally is dropping under the Trump administration. It’s not just the actors and screenwriters who are having trouble landing jobs. Those in marketing, development and accounting are finding themselves unemployed as well.

The state of California under Governor Newsom proposed doubling the California Film and Television Credit program. However, giving tax credits is small beer when California ranks first in taxes, even higher than Hawaii and New York.³

In the end, it’s not only about taxes or housing prices or AI. Fewer people are going to the movies and fewer are watching network television shows. Some of the decline can be attributed to high prices. It’s expensive to take a family to a movie, or even a date. Furthermore, with entertainment so available on streaming sources and YouTube videos, few people want to go to movie theaters anymore. That said, *Hollywood has shot itself in the foot with its long history of producing “woke” films and entertainment programs.*

With the re-election of President Donald Trump and his takedown of woke priorities, some in the film industry may be trying to adapt, but it could be too late for most of Hollywood. Why would studios (and stars) interject their political views on screen when their views turn off much of the audience? Isn’t it common sense that if half the audience likes the political message, then the other half might not?

How did Hollywood become so woke in the first place?

Hollywood was always a pretty liberal town. Film historians such as Kathryn Cramer Brownell in *Showbiz Politics: Hollywood in American Political Life* (2014) contend that politics in Hollywood has oscillated between the right and the left over the years. Yet contrary to her claims, conservatives were never terribly numerous in Hollywood.

In the 1920s, as the film industry was in its infancy, Hollywood was primarily focused on making money. Louis B. Mayer, head of MGM, was an exception. As chairman of the California Republican Party, he threw his full support behind Republican presidential candidate Herbert Hoover in 1928. Most movie moguls, however, stayed out of politics.

Depression Politics in California

The Great Depression in the 1930s politicized Hollywood. Left-wing historians and journalists make much of Hollywood's alleged turn to the right in reaction to the Upton Sinclair gubernatorial campaign in 1934. Sinclair, an avowed socialist, ran on a campaign to "End Poverty in California" by taxing the rich to support state-run industries. Mayer, joined by the Warner Brothers studio, produced staged newsreels of actors posing as hobos flooding into California to seek the socialistic handouts of a Sinclair victory.

Brownell and a few others argue that the "newsreels" worked and Sinclair was trounced. Brownell writes, "The campaign aroused national attention because it shocked outside observers that an electoral battle could so closely emulate a Hollywood production."⁴ Actually, Sinclair would have lost with or without the fake news produced by Mayer and Warner Brothers. President Franklin D. Roosevelt refused to endorse Sinclair, even though the candidate pleaded with him to do so.

After the Democratic Party endorsed Sinclair, the party split, as many saw Sinclair as a loser and a radical to whom they did not want to be tied. Finally, most voters did not need to be told by Mayer that Sinclair was a kook, a socialist dreamer given to causes from vegetarianism to nudism.

Hollywood in the 1930s showed its support of Roosevelt and the New Deal in campaign contributions, public events and films. Following World War II, Hollywood appeared to swing right with what many historians describe as anti-communist hysteria, Red-baiting and the blacklist. Later histories and film would portray those as the dark years in Hollywood.

An Anti-Communist Minority Emerges

A more nuanced take on Hollywood in the aftermath of the Second World War can be found in Donald T. Critchlow's book *When Hollywood Was Right* (2013). Critchlow shows that anti-communists were a minority in Hollywood, and many in this small group opposed blacklisting communist actors and screenwriters.

It is true that the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals pushed Washington to investigate communists in Hollywood. The force behind this organization was screenwriters angry about the communist takeover of the Screen Writers Guild by the likes of Dalton Trumbo. Still, when Ronald Reagan appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, he defended the Hollywood studios by saying that the communist problem in the film industry was being addressed. Reagan spoke out against imposing a blacklist in the industry.

Hostile leftist witnesses at the televised committee hearings followed the Communist Party line at the time and denounced the hearings as "fascist." The allegation that America was a fascist country caused a public backlash. Only two years before the hearings, the United States had fought a bloody war against fascism, and now these witnesses were calling America a fascist country. Hollywood studios placed a hiring ban on all ten witnesses, soon known as the Hollywood Ten.

Many alleged communists in the film industry, including actors, screenwriters and technicians, were fired and found it impossible to find work in these years. But others such as screenwriter Dalton Trumbo continued to work under pseudonyms, and many eventually found their way back into the industry. One of the Hollywood Ten members, Ring Lardner, Jr., wrote the screenplay for *M*A*S*H*, which became a hit anti-war movie in 1970 and later a TV show.

Conservative stars like Ronald Reagan, John Wayne and Charlton Heston remained visible in the film industry in the 1950s. Lesser-known actors and film technicians, on the other hand, reported that they were blacklisted from the industry for their conservative politics. Meanwhile, Hollywood was changing as new, more liberal actors such as Marlon Brando and Paul Newman replaced the old stars. Conservatives in Hollywood became a dying breed. *By 1984, the Ronald Reagan reelection campaign could not*

find enough big stars to form a list for “Hollywood for Reagan.”

The swing to the far left in Hollywood came with the rise of independent filmmakers in the 1960s. The success of *Easy Rider* in 1969 led to a wave of counter-cultural films. Actors, directors, producers and screenwriters moved left in opposition to the Vietnam War and in support of black liberation. Journalist and author Tom Wolfe captured this radical chic culture in his laugh-out-loud collection of essays, *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* (1970), just reissued in paperback in 2024.

A Swing Farther Left

By the 1970s Hollywood as well as Broadway were rampantly radical. Old-time liberals such as the director John Ford began to retire. Occasionally, conservative films such as *Red Dawn* (1984) and overtly Christian films were released, including Martin Scorsese's controversial *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and popular biblical epics like the miniseries *A.D.* (1985) and the TV movie *Peter and Paul* (1981). Independent producers released films such as *Consider It All Joy* (1986).

Nevertheless, in a letter to the *New York Times* in 1992, the screenwriter and playwright Jonathan R. Reynolds lamented that “Hollywood today is as fascistic toward conservatives as the 1940s and ’50s were toward liberals. . . . And that goes for the movies and television shows.”⁵

Today Hollywood remains woke, but conservatives have emerged publicly. They were always there—often only big stars who had the clout to express their political views. Non-leftists in Hollywood commonly described themselves as libertarians. This allowed them to support gay marriage and gay rights, and sometimes abortion, while expressing patriotic values. By the second decade of the 21st century, more and more actors, producers, directors and screenwriters came out as conservative patriotic Americans.

Younger actors and screen writers who lean conservative remain circumspect as to their politics, but more and more are coming out, no longer afraid to say where they stand. Movies and television shows express openly conservative and anti-woke Hollywood views. In the widely praised *King of the Hill* animated television show, the central character Hank says that he will start going to the movies and stop

changing television channels when “Hollywood makes something for us again, like *Forrest Gump*.”⁶

Television watchers and moviegoers are finding crops of shows aimed especially at conservatives and Christians. The serialized historical drama *The Chosen*, now in its seventh year of production, has been watched worldwide by an estimated 280 million people. Initially launched in 2019 on a subscription basis, it is now free on multiple platforms. The series depicts Jesus's life through the eyes of the people who interacted with him, including his disciples, his mother, Mary Magdalene, Jewish religious leaders, Roman officials and ordinary people. Over a third of those watching the series identify as “non-religious.”

The Chosen is joined by the successful Amazon Prime series *House of David*. Small-town dramas displaying family-friendly themes such as *Virgin River* and *Ginny & Georgia* can now be seen on Netflix.

This move to the right, while notable, should not be exaggerated. Netflix and other production companies continue to make left-wing films. Typical of such films is the recently released *One Battle After Another*, which depicts left-wing revolutionaries battling a white supremacist secret organization in the government. Meanwhile, critics of conservative, family-friendly shows complain that corporations are bowing to right-wing actors.⁷

Today's Hollywood Right

The production of religious films is a direct response to audience demand. It's not only cartoon characters in shows like *King of the Hill* who want to see movies and films that reflect their values. Streaming and film production studios are producing films that are appealing to a broad segment of the American public in a culturally divided country. Moreover, many of these studios are making films that reflect the genuine values of their producers. For them it is not about making money but retaking the culture.

Angel Studios is a case in point. Founded as VidAngel in 2014 by Mormon investors, the company underwent a bankruptcy reorganization by raising funds through equity crowdfunding, attracting thousands of individual investors. Content produced by Angel Studios is distributed for free on their own streaming service, as well as on paid streaming sources and at the box office. The success of *Sound of Freedom* inspired investors to purchase shares in the company and its other titles, including *The Chosen*.

In 2023, Angel Guild was launched, drawing approximately one million members who review and vote on completed episodes and movies to help Angel Studios decide whether to take on a production. Guild members pay a monthly or annual membership fee to receive access to Angel Studios' film library, monthly releases, merchandise discounts and complimentary movie tickets.

Mixed Success of Angel Studios

In releasing approximately 28 films and series, Angel Studios has partnered with dozens of independent filmmakers. *Sound of Freedom* broke a previous record set by *His Only Son* (2023), which earned \$13 million. In December 2025 Angel Studios released the animated *David* in theaters.

On the other hand, Angel Studios faced heavy criticism after the release of the trailer for its new animated film *Animal Farm*. The film is supposed to be based on George Orwell's 1945 novella of the same name, which is a satire of Stalin's Soviet Union. Conservative critics charged that the film is woke and anti-capitalist, in that the plot is transformed into a tale of resistance to corporations. One critic said George Orwell is probably "rolling over in his grave." Spokesmen from Angel Studios said it stood behind the film and characterized its theme as "anti-communist."⁸

Angel Studios exemplifies a company that has tapped into a vast market of people who want family-friendly and *inspiring* movies. The Catholic independent producer and director Mel Gibson plans to release a sequel to *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) in 2027. More and more

actors and film producers are expressing their faith. As a result, the good news of Christianity is being spread in their films and, perhaps even more importantly, in interviews and public announcements.

These actors and others in the film and entertainment industry are reflections of a divided culture that is seeing the glimmer of a religious revival. Many within the Gen Z population, especially men, are returning to the Church.⁹ We should pray that this revival grows—not only for the good of our culture and nation, but for the joy that deep Christian faith brings to the believer.

¹ <https://nypost.com/2026/01/04/entertainment/rob-schneider-exposes-hollywoods-rot-as-he-claims-conservative-actors-face-industry-blacklist/>.

² <https://nofilmschool.com/entertainment-industry-crisis>.

³ <https://turbotax.intuit.com/tax-tips/fun-facts/states-with-the-highest-and-lowest-taxes/L6HPAVqSF>.

⁴ Brownell quoted in <https://nypost.com/2014/11/23/how-hollywood-became-the-sixth-estate-of-government/>. Also, <https://www.politico.com/story/2007/04/hollywood-washington-political-ties-rich-in-history-003741>.

⁵ <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-conservative-hollywood-became-a-liberal-town-3303432>.

⁶ <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/08/18/king-of-the-hill-tv-review-hulu>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <https://www.newsweek.com/animal-farm-studio-responds-to-criticism-new-film-11221154>.

⁹ E.g., "Gen Z is Returning to Christianity. Data Proves It," *USA Today*, April 20, 2025.

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10 copies	\$8.00	50 copies	\$25.00
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The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by

Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation

7800 Bonhomme Ave.

St. Louis, MO 63105

Phone 314-727-6279

Subscription rate: \$25 per year

Outside the U.S.A. \$35

We accept credit card payments.

Contributions to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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