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Reviews

David Blanke. *Cecil B. DeMille, Classical Hollywood, and Modern American Mass Culture, 1910–1960*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. xv + 328 pp. ISBN 978-3-319-76985-1, $135 (cloth); 978-3-030-08341-0, $98 (paper).

Largely eschewing biography as well as structural analysis of film, David Blanke approaches the long and prolific career of Cecil B. DeMille from the vantage point of cultural history. He examines how DeMille's body of work within the Hollywood industry was shaped by various aspects of American mass culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Arguing against conceiving of the famed director as an agent of causal change, Blanke writes that "DeMille's films succeeded when they reflected, not created" popular moods (13). Booming consumerism in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States introduced novel consumption experiences that produced widespread social changes. DeMille's early "brand" in the 1910s was inspired by this commercialized mass culture, as his work was recognized for depicting new material goods, independent women, and marital trouble. Fueled by commercial success and following a falling out with the leadership of the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation (FPL), he attempted to found his own independent studio in 1925.

By the early 1920s, DeMille had begun to criticize mindless consumption. He produced numerous religious-themed films over the next decade, such as 1923's *The Ten Commandments*, blending emerging modernist and fundamentalist varieties of American Christianity. Some of these works included Christian Science and Theosophical themes, reflecting DeMille's largely syncretic leanings. Despite the growing cultural influence of Hollywood at the time, broad shifts in national religious sentiments were "not prompted or led" by DeMille, according to Blanke (123). Forced to close his studio in 1928 and fearful of irrelevance after commercial failures with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, DeMille aligned himself with Hollywood's corporate culture during the Depression. He produced history films that flowed from a time of increased historical awareness in the United States. He became ingrained at Paramount Pictures (formerly FPL), hosted a successful radio show, helped revitalize the western, and became "Mr. Hollywood."

For Blanke, it was in these mid-career years that DeMille shifted toward trying to create consensus values rather than simply reflecting national moods (159). Pausing chronologically, Blanke considers DeMille's long tenure as a case study for distinct changes in the Hollywood industry, from the first emergence of studios to their integration and centralization into the 1930s. DeMille's sensibilities as an artist came under the increasingly powerful thumb of FPL executives in New York. He attempted to challenge the vertically aligned organization, defending the Southern California film community against Eastern executives as an independent producer. He humbly returned to Paramount less concerned with art and more concerned

with the bottom line. DeMille's popular radio broadcasts allowed him to mold mass culture and supported his newfound position as an industry insider.

Blanke also considers the filmmaker's tainted legacy in light of the industrial contexts within which he worked. DeMille both stood up and acquiesced to censorship over his career. As his late-career publicity and public persona evolved toward corporate celebrity and model spokesman, exposé articles in the early 1940s portrayed him as a lecherous hypocrite, to which DeMille's team responded by emphasizing his conservative politics. By that time, he had moved from being a champion of social protest and supporter of New Deal reforms to a Republican critic of Franklin Roosevelt. DeMille believed cooperation and consensus should be reached between big business and labor and supported the Taft-Hartley Act. He dramatically pushed for anti-Communist oath taking at a meeting of the Screen Directors Guild in 1950. Although DeMille's influence was sustained late into his career, for Blanke, his political activity links him to larger national trends and "models … mass culture at mid-century" (246).

While popular and academic critics have often dismissed DeMille's late-career productions as vacuous and only for the unsophisticated masses, they were widely popular and profitable. According to Blanke, both *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952) and the remake of *The Ten Commandments* (1956) spoke to Cold War audiences who privileged consensus values and ideals of freedom. DeMille's attention to realism, large crowds, and spectacular effects gave his last films wide appeal that continues to resonate today.

The tensions between DeMille the innovator and the metronome for mass culture are largely unresolved in Blanke's study. If the director helped mold popular sentiments later in his career, why did he only "reflect" them earlier? Blanke provides a great deal more biography than he suggests in the opening of the book, so this could have been addressed, perhaps in lieu of a lengthy, jargon-laden overview of film and cultural studies. Despite this, he provides an articulate and accessible cultural history of a film icon. Backed by thorough archival research, Blanke's work capably demonstrates the American relevance of DeMille as popular Hollywood showman of the first half of the twentieth century. His book suggests historical and cultural connections between DeMille and later blockbuster filmmakers that run deeper than some critics and scholars allow.

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Allyson P. Brantley. *Brewing a Boycott: How a Grassroots Coalition Fought Coors and Remade American Consumer Activism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 304 pp. ISBN 978-1-4696-6102-5 $95.00 (cloth); 978-1-4696-6103-2 $29.95 (paper).

Brewing a Boycott offers a deeply researched, thoroughly readable account of the anti-Coors boycott movements as they unfolded across four decades, highlighting the sometimes