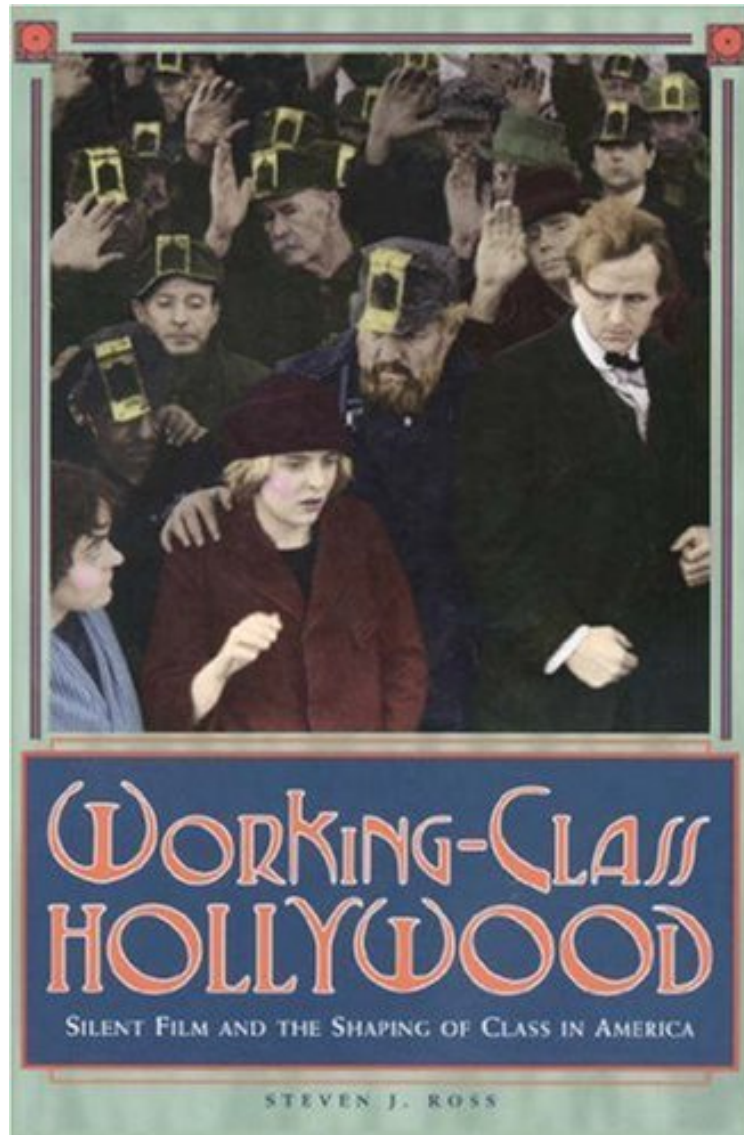


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Working-Class Hollywood

Steven J. Ross

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Steven J. Ross : Working-Class Hollywood before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Working-Class Hollywood:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant, uniqueBy jcdNo other book so thoroughly portrays the early Twentieth Century pre-Hollywood era of American film. Beyond that, the book persuasively sets those films within the social and political context of the period, and makes clear that the advent of the Hollywood studio system--the coming of industrialization and monopoly capitalism to the American film business--also reflected political and

class interests. A very well done and fascinating book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Three Stars
By chanyoungnot bad 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Little Known Labour History
By Ricky Hunter
Steven J. Ross shines a light on a little known and rarely examined period of cinema and labour history. In *Working-Class Hollywood (Silent Film and the Shaping of class in America)*, he looks at the movies created by, for or against the labour movement and its emerging class identity. It is so interesting as it is a time of growth and struggle for both the cinema and the labour movements and the author shows how these two forces bumped and grinded with each other in a way movies never would again. Movies helped create a certain image of class and by the thirties this was pretty much set in stone so it is the period of the silent film where the struggle to shape that identity ensued. This book is amazingly well researched and accessible for the reader of either cinema, labour, or American history. Sometimes the author stretches his point and the reader will be frustrated that many of the films discussed are unavailable for viewing but these are small caveats to an impressive work.

This path-breaking book reveals how Hollywood became "Hollywood" and what that meant for the politics of America and American film. *Working-Class Hollywood* tells the story of filmmaking in the first three decades of the twentieth century, a time when going to the movies could transform lives and when the cinema was a battleground for control of American consciousness. Steven Ross documents the rise of a working-class film movement that challenged the dominant political ideas of the day. Between 1907 and 1930, worker filmmakers repeatedly clashed with censors, movie industry leaders, and federal agencies over the kinds of images and subjects audiences would be allowed to see. The outcome of these battles was critical to our own times, for the victors got to shape the meaning of class in twentieth-century America. Surveying several hundred movies made by or about working men and women, Ross shows how filmmakers were far more concerned with class conflict during the silent era than at any subsequent time. Directors like Charlie Chaplin, D. W. Griffith, and William de Mille made movies that defended working people and chastised their enemies. Worker filmmakers went a step further and produced movies from *A Martyr to His Cause* (1911) to *The Gastonia Textile Strike* (1929) that depicted a unified working class using strikes, unions, and socialism to transform a nation. J. Edgar Hoover considered these class-conscious productions so dangerous that he assigned secret agents to spy on worker filmmakers. Liberal and radical films declined in the 1920s as an emerging Hollywood studio system, pressured by censors and Wall Street investors, pushed American film in increasingly conservative directions. Appealing to people's dreams of luxury and upward mobility, studios produced lavish fantasy films that shifted popular attention away from the problems of the workplace and toward the pleasures of the new consumer society. While worker filmmakers were trying to heighten class consciousness, Hollywood producers were suggesting that class no longer mattered. *Working-Class Hollywood* shows how silent films helped shape the modern belief that we are a classless nation.

From *Library Journal*
Ross (history, Univ. of Southern California) offers a thought-provoking examination of silent film and its social reverberations. This medium provided the earliest, cheapest, and most far-reaching form of entertainment to capture the public, frequently portraying working-class life with truth and empathy. These productions made definite statements about labor and politics while vigorously defining class issues and struggles—a potent combination during any era. The resulting government and corporate disdain created pressure, but the vast potential for profit was quickly perceived as well. Soon, the studio system took hold with its far softer approach to content. This work abounds in solid information on films, events, trends, historical details, and people along with intelligent analyses of the changing perceptions of class that were partially shaped by these early cinematic ventures. Essential for scholars and serious students of film and American culture. —Carol J. Binkowski, Bloomfield, Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.
From *Kirkus* s
An impassioned celebration of a movement that depicted social issues at the birth of the big screen. In this century's first three decades, filmmakers could "entertain, educate, and politicize millions of Americans" in silent movies, according to Ross (*History/Univ. of Southern Calif.*). From the days of the earliest nickelodeons, film was the most egalitarian of industries. A largely immigrant, working-class audience, attending one of the few types of entertainment they could afford, saw their lives reflected sympathetically on the screen by Charlie Chaplin, Upton Sinclair, and D.W. Griffith (whose working-class sympathies in early films were as pronounced as the appalling racism he demonstrated in *Birth of a Nation*). Moreover, start-up costs were low enough to entice newcomers of all ideological stripes to the field. Among these latter were individual workers, unions, and radicals who came to see film as a medium with revolutionary potential for shaping mass views of what it meant to be a worker. Although comparatively few in number, these leftist filmmakers were considered dangerous enough that J. Edgar Hoover assigned secret agents to spy on them. With the rise of the Hollywood studio system in the 1920s, the worker-film movement collapsed, undone by rising costs, inability to secure financing from Wall Street or large union groups such as the AFL, and censorship. Ross draws on labor newspapers, union records, and government documents, as well as more conventional film-studies materials to limn this obscure corner of early cinema. But he occasionally lapses into academese (e.g., "gendered space"), and never proves the centrality of film in shaping notions of class. Moreover, he criticizes conservative films for stereotypes while never hinting that some radical cinema might have

failed because it was more agitprop than entertainment. A valuable addition to cinema history, though marred by leftist sympathies that seldom allow for subtle analysis. (28 pages bw illustrations) -- Copyright 1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. Winner of the 1999 Book Award, Theatre Library Association One of Los Angeles Times's Best Nonfiction Books for 1998 "One of the satisfactions in reading Working-Class Hollywood is that the author is as happily polemical as his subjects and not afraid to take sides. This gives his impressively researched and annotated book a scrappy, personal tone that is refreshing to find in a work of such academic weight."--Los Angeles Times "A breakthrough volume in terms of American film history."--Vancouver Sun "A rigorously researched and refreshingly accessible book."--The Nation "Working-Class Hollywood is ... a meticulous and beautifully accomplished re-creation of the lost world of labor and radical films.... No one reading this masterly new study can look at nearly a century of movie making in quite the same way again."--Journal of American History "Working-class Hollywood, Steven J. Ross has gone a long way to show, is an oxymoron. Ross has uncovered a lively scene of decentralized, diversified production in the early motion picture business."--Michael Rogin, American Historical "A vividly written chronicle of multi-faceted struggles over the meaning of class in American life as they took shape in silent film. . . . By analyzing the range of perspectives on class in early feature films, Ross provides a nuanced picture of the ways class issues and class relations were defined for movie audiences. . . . [A] rich, well-researched monograph . . . [and a] provocative and informative book."--Kathryn J. Oberdeck, s in American History "An impassioned celebration of a movement that depicted social issues at the birth of the big screen. . . . A valuable addition to cinema history. . . ."--Kirkus "Steeped in labor and class history, sweetened by a perceptive moviegoer's parsing of onscreen images, Working-Class Hollywood is a fascinating study of how movies make us."--Washington Post Book World "Steven J. Ross spent a decade laboring on Working-Class Hollywood, and it shows on every page. It is a phenomenally well-researched study . . . And yet is highly readable, without a hint of droning pedantry."--Ben Singer, Modernism/Modernity "Steven J. Ross has an important story to tell, and he tells it with great passion and conviction."--Peter Krmer, Labour History