The U.S. Hollywood Studio System (1920s-1960s)

*The greatest movie-producing system the world has ever known.

1. An Oligopoly: A limited number of studios--5 "majors" (#1-#5 below), 3 "minors" (#6-#8), Disney, and two independent producers (#10, #11); others not listed included such small “poverty row” studios as Monogram, Hal Roach, and Republic. During the Depression, the U.S. Justice Dept. encouraged this; later, the 1948 Paramount Case decision ended it.

2. Moguls: The importance of a handful of similar men in formulating the system

3. The studio characterized by a large physical plant
   * soundstages vs. backlots
   * other facilities that ensured the independence of the studio (e.g., fire station, medical center, sleeping bungalows, restaurants)

4. A stable of crew and contract players (both stars and bit players); e.g., Donna Reed, Jimmy Stewart, Thomas Mitchell, Beulah Bondi, Lionel Barrymore, Ward Bond, Frank Faylen from *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1947)

5. The star system
   * the "grooming" of stars under contract
   * star vehicles

6. Studios as family or "protectorates"
* studio head as patriarch (e.g., Louis B. Mayer)

7. Properties developed from within the studios

8. The importance to most studios of the development of one or more genres

*From the 1950s on, this system fell apart with competition from TV, and buyouts by huge conglomerates.

*Each studio had its own "personality" profile:

The 5 Majors

1. MGM ("The Supreme")
   Moguls: Louis B. Mayer, Irving Thalberg
   Genres: Musicals, comedies
   Stable: Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, Gene Kelly, Judy Garland, Spencer Tracy, James Stewart, Elizabeth Taylor, Vincente Minnelli
   Other: Mottos--"The Greatest Motion Picture Studio the World Has Even Known," "More Stars Than There Are in Heaven"; prestigious and flashy

2. Paramount ("The Sophisticate")
   Mogul: Adolph Zukor
   Genres: Romantic comedies, epics
   Stable: Cecil B. DeMille, Ernst Lubitsch, Preston Sturges, Bing Crosby, Marlene Dietrich
   Other: The studio with a European accent; its stars
had "sexy elegance, wit and dinner clothes"

3. RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) ("The New Yorker")
   Mogul: Pandro Berman, Howard Hughes (later)
   Genres: Musicals (early), film noir
   Stable: Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Katharine Hepburn, Irene Dunne
   Other: The urban counterpart to Fox; only studio to actually disappear, after Hughes bankrupted it and Lucy bought it ("Desilu")

4. 20th Century Fox ("The Rube")
   Mogul: Darryl Zanuck (the only non-Jewish mogul)
   Genres: Social message films, action/adventure, soaps, disaster films
   Stable: Shirley Temple, Betty Grable, Tyrone Power, Henry Fonda
   Other: Rural in focus

5. Warner Brothers ("The Slicker" or "The Cynic")
   Mogul: Jack L. Warner
   Genres: Film noir, gangster, weepies, "women's films," war films
   Stable: James Cagney, Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, Erroll Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, John Garfield, Ida Lupino
   Other: The "factory" studio, made movies "fast, cheap and furious"; featured themes of prejudice and inequities, "the cynicism of the sociopolitically disinherited"
The 3 Minors

6. Columbia
   Mogul: Harry Cohn
   Genres: Screwball comedies, "Capra-corn"
   Stable: Frank Capra, the 3 Stooges
   Other: "Poverty Row" studio, borrowed stars from other studios; was first to adapt to TV, via Screen Gems

7. United Artists
   Mogul: Joseph Schenck
   Genres: "Quality" films
   Stable: The four founders--Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith
   Other: The first "logo without a lot," just like today's model

8. Universal ("The Old Monster")
   Mogul: Carl Laemmle Sr.
   Genres: Horror, weepies
   Stable: Deanna Durbin, Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Abbot & Costello, Rock Hudson, Tony Curtis
   Other: Old-fashioned, often behind the times; last studio to survive intact
Disney (a category of its own)

9. Disney
   Mogul: Walt Disney
   Genres: Animated features, live-action family films
   Stable: Mickey & Minnie, Fred MacMurray
   Other: Has continued to diversify, e.g., with Touchstone Films

Independent Producers

10. Samuel Goldwyn (independent producer)
    Mogul: Samuel Goldwyn
    Genres: Classics, drama
    Stable: William Wyler, Ronald Colman, Gary Cooper, Gregg Toland
    Other: The mogul hired the elite, but was rough himself, known for "Goldwynisms" (e.g., "Include me out")

11. Selznick International (independent producer)
    Mogul: David O. Selznick
    Genres: Mysteries, epics
    Stable: Ingrid Bergman, Gregory Peck, Joseph Cotten, Joan Fontaine, Jennifer Jones, Hitchcock (early)
    Other: Produced many star vehicles for the stars under "personal" contract