

On Hollywood: The Place, The Industry. By Allen J. Scott. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005. xiii + 2000 pp. Index, notes. Cloth, \$39.50. ISBN: 0-691-11683-0.

Reviewed by Douglas Gomery

Why is the U.S. motion-picture industry concentrated in Hollywood, and why does it continue to remain there even in the age of globalization? In *On Hollywood: The Place, The Industry*, Allen J. Scott uses the tools of geography to explore these two questions. In his introductory chapter, Scott explains why the film industry centered its production—but not its distribution or exhibition—in Southern California during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In the remaining chapters, he focuses on contemporary film production. Thus, a clearer title would be *On Today's Hollywood*—as seen and analyzed by a geographer. *On Hollywood* represents a continuation of Scott's twenty years of academic work and is but another entry on a long list of publications in the field of geography, with special reference to the dynamics of urban and regional production systems. As he has taught at UCLA for many years, Los Angeles has provided his research laboratory.

Scott is a clear writer. In his introduction, he outlines the topics he plans to cover. In the first chapter, he reveals how Hollywood made its historical and geographic appearance as a unique industrial district and then shows how it subsequently developed and grew. In the next chapter, he describes how the studio system that existed in the decades following the Second World War morphed into a “new” Hollywood as a more diffuse organizational pattern of production came to the fore. Then, using the methods of a geographer, he analyzes how Hollywood functions as an industrial district of production companies while containing a myriad of firms in adjunct sectors that provide the critical physical inputs and services needed to keep the entire system operating. Since labor relations are critical to a proper analysis of Hollywood production, he devotes a chapter to the guilds and unions that have played an important role in defining Hollywood since the 1930s. Finally, he analyzes the aggressive marketing carried out by contemporary Hollywood. In tackling this last subject, he fails to recognize that global

Hollywood is an extensive system of distribution channels that have been centered in New York City since the mid-1920s.

Scott clarifies his analytical approach with this statement: “My method, rather, is to proceed by piling up, point by point, a mass of rather disparate empirical evidence in an inductive argument that I hope is convincing overall but that admittedly falls short of finality” (p. 9).

It sure does. *On Hollywood* falls into the genre of books written by an expert—in this case, a geographer—who has decided to take on Hollywood. Like many before him, albeit in other fields, Scott is convinced that the previous literature on the rise and continuing power of Hollywood is inadequate, and he is certain that a geographer can set the record straight. But once he leaves his own specialty and tackles the film industry, his mistakes are so abundant that anyone familiar with the subject can only gasp in disbelief while reading this account.

Thus he describes Hollywood proper as a relatively small district just northwest of downtown Los Angeles. Then, apparently looking away from the map, he asserts: “It was in this district that the motion picture industry was initially concentrated in pre-World War II days” (p. 1). Wrong. MGM was in Culver City, Warner was in Burbank, Universal had its own incorporated city, and Fox was near Scott’s own UCLA campus. Hollywood was never a geographic term: it was a metaphor for an industrial system. How can we take this geographer seriously? He speaks of Hollywood as a place, but he means Southern California, and even then he is speaking only of film production. Films are shown everywhere, and distribution has principally been handled in New York City.

He should have read the eloquent book *Picture* (1952)—which he fails to cite—in which Lillian Ross journeys to Culver City to tell the tale of the making of MGM’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, only to discover that all the real decisions were being made in a building at Forty-fifth and Broadway by Loew’s CEO Nicholas Schenck—blocks from her literary home, the *New Yorker*.

Even today, Viacom owner Sumner Redstone runs Paramount, the lone remaining studio with a Hollywood address, from offices in suburban Boston and in Times Square. Only Lew Wasserman—who re-invented the Hollywood system from Universal City—

settled all corporate questions from his headquarters in Southern California. Neither Schenck nor Redstone nor Wasserman are mentioned in *On Hollywood*.

As the inaccuracies accumulated, I reached the point where I had to ask myself whether it was possible to say anything nice about a book that not only fails to recognize the figures who ran the Hollywood studio system, successfully adapting first to the coming of sound and color and then to the arrival of television and VCRs, but also misspells the names of the major institutions. For but one example, the name of the corporation has been, since its founding in 1924, Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., not Warner Brothers. Harry, the eldest brother, knew how to spell, but since he would have been charged for each letter inscribed on the company stationery in those days, he saw no point in spelling out “Brothers.” He never did, nor have his successors to this day. So although viewers over the past seventy-six years could confirm that the company name is always displayed in its original, abbreviated form, Scott has chosen to correct them. However, the fact remains. There were four Warner brothers, but never a Warner Brothers corporation.

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