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## Note on Technological Advances and the Movie Experience in the US

From Marilyn Monroe to Reese Witherspoon, Charlie Chaplin to Tom Hanks, movies and their stars have a fixed place in the American consciousness. How often, though, do we think about how we receive these influences and from where they have evolved? Movie production, distribution, and presentation have undergone revolutionary technological changes not once or twice, but countless times, in order for our generation to be able to experience movies as we do today. Thousands of people have worked incrementally at improving the film experience and thousands more have continually demanded further innovation. We are neither the first nor the last generation to laugh at movies with friends, quote lines from films at parties, idolize movie stars, and spend hours in line at late-night premieres. Nevertheless, our movie-watching habits and experiences may still be distinct from any other generation. The American movie experience has changed immensely since the late 1800s, and technological inventions at each stage of the process have been just as fast and exciting as they are today.

### 1890–1950: The Beginnings of American Cinema

The birth of film in the United States can be traced back to Thomas Edison and William Dickson's Kinetograph, a motor-powered camera that could create motion pictures, and the Kinetoscope, a type of early projector that allowed individuals to watch 30-second video clips through a peephole. These devices were popular at carnivals, where vaudeville and variety shows reigned over the entertainment market and motion picture enjoyment was restricted to the individual viewer. In 1896, Edison's new invention, called the Vitascope, which projected motion pictures on to walls and screens, allowed families and friends to enjoy motion pictures together, as they did with variety shows. Churches and halls were converted into "nickelodeons," where viewers paid five cents to watch 10-12 minute comedic "one-reelers." Soon, dime theaters sprung up across the United States, creating a dedicated space for people to enjoy movies.<sup>1</sup>

Film really started to flourish in the 1920s, the decade of silent black-and-white films with vaudevillian acting.<sup>2</sup> A typical weekend night for someone living in an urban area in the Roaring Twenties included a walk to a 5000-seat movie theater whose architecture was based on Baroque, Greek, Spanish, Egyptian, Byzantine, or Aztec art, with marble columns, crystal chandeliers, and gold-painted figures. Pipe organs comprised the sound system, and each silent movie only cost the moviegoer 27 cents.<sup>3</sup> The movie industry was booming more than ever before since Hollywood produced more than 800 feature films per year, as compared to the fewer than 500 films that it produces today. By the end of the decade, the movie industry



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