

easy riders raging bulls how the sex drugs and rock n roll generation saved hollywood by peter biskind april 4 1999

Easy Riders Raging Bulls: How the Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood by Peter Biskind, published on April 4, 1999, presents a riveting exploration of a transformative era in American cinema. The book chronicles the rise of the New Hollywood movement during the late 1960s and the 1970s, focusing on the filmmakers and actors whose vision and rebellious spirit brought an artistic renaissance to an industry that was struggling to adapt to changing social norms and audience expectations. Biskind's narrative is both a critical analysis and a celebration of the creative forces that revolutionized filmmaking in America.

The Context of Change: Hollywood in the 1960s

During the 1960s, Hollywood was grappling with a crisis of identity. The traditional studio system, which had thrived for decades, was in decline due to several factors:

- Television's Rise: The advent of television provided audiences with alternative forms of entertainment, which siphoned off viewers from cinemas.
- Cultural Shifts: The counterculture movement was challenging established norms, leading to a demand for more authentic and provocative storytelling.
- Economic Pressures: The financial success of films was increasingly uncertain, with studios struggling to connect with younger audiences.

To counter these challenges, a new generation of filmmakers emerged, unafraid to push boundaries and explore themes that resonated with the zeitgeist.

The Birth of New Hollywood

Biskind identifies a group of influential directors and actors who played pivotal roles in shaping the New Hollywood. These figures were not merely filmmakers; they were cultural icons who embraced the ethos of the 1960s and 70s. Among them were:

- Dennis Hopper: His film *Easy Rider* (1969) became a defining work of the era, capturing the spirit of freedom and rebellion.
- Francis Ford Coppola: With *The Godfather* (1972), Coppola blended artistry with commercial success, creating a template for future filmmakers.

- Martin Scorsese: Scorsese's Taxi Driver (1976) dissected the darker sides of urban life and the American psyche.
- Peter Fonda: As a countercultural icon, Fonda's involvement in Easy Rider exemplified the merging of art and activism.

The Influence of the Counterculture

The counterculture movement significantly influenced the themes and styles of New Hollywood films. Key elements included:

1. Sexual Liberation: Films began to explore themes of sexuality more openly, breaking taboos and reflecting the changing societal attitudes.
2. Drug Culture: The experimentation with drugs became a popular motif, both as a narrative device and as a reflection of the lifestyle of the filmmakers.
3. Rock 'n' Roll Soundtracks: The integration of contemporary music into films provided a vibrant backdrop and connected with the youth audience.

This cultural revolution was not without its challenges. The filmmakers often faced backlash from conservative elements in society as well as industry executives who were wary of the new direction.

Key Films and Their Impact

Biskind's book meticulously analyzes several landmark films that encapsulated the ethos of the New Hollywood era. Each film not only pushed artistic boundaries but also influenced future generations of filmmakers.

Easy Rider (1969)

- Synopsis: Following two bikers traveling across America, this film explored themes of freedom and disillusionment.
- Impact: It became a cultural phenomenon, signaling the arrival of a new generation of filmmakers willing to challenge the status quo.

The Godfather (1972)

- Synopsis: This epic saga of a crime family redefined the gangster genre and showcased complex characters.
- Impact: It demonstrated that a film could be both commercially successful and critically acclaimed, paving the way for future blockbuster filmmaking.

Taxi Driver (1976)

- Synopsis: The story of a mentally unstable Vietnam War veteran navigating the dark underbelly of New York City.
- Impact: The film's gritty realism and exploration of alienation resonated deeply with audiences, influencing many filmmakers in the years to come.

The Personal Lives of Filmmakers

Biskind delves into the personal lives of the filmmakers, highlighting how their experiences shaped their art. The sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll lifestyle were not just superficial elements; they were integral to their creative processes.

- Substance Abuse: Many filmmakers struggled with addiction, which often influenced their work and personal relationships.
- Romantic Entanglements: The relationships among the filmmakers and actors sometimes mirrored the complexities of their films, leading to collaborations and conflicts alike.

These personal narratives add a layer of depth to the understanding of their films, emphasizing the connection between the artists' lives and their creative output.

The Decline of New Hollywood

As the 1970s progressed, the New Hollywood movement faced its decline. Several factors contributed to this shift:

- Commercial Pressures: The success of blockbuster films, such as Jaws (1975) and Star Wars (1977), altered the landscape of Hollywood, leading studios to prioritize commercial viability over artistic expression.
- Changing Audience Tastes: The youth-oriented films of the 1960s and 70s began to lose relevance as demographics changed, and studios sought to appeal to broader audiences.
- Internal Conflicts: The collaborative spirit of the New Hollywood era often gave way to conflict among filmmakers, leading to fractured relationships and diminishing creative partnerships.

Biskind poignantly captures this transition, illustrating how the very forces that birthed New Hollywood ultimately contributed to its demise.

Legacy of New Hollywood

Despite its decline, the legacy of New Hollywood remains profound. The filmmakers of this era laid the groundwork for contemporary cinema, influencing:

- Filmmaking Techniques: Innovations in editing, cinematography, and narrative structure have become staples in modern filmmaking.
- Thematic Exploration: The willingness to explore complex themes such as mental illness, identity, and morality continues to resonate in today's films.
- Cultural Reflection: The films of this era remain a powerful reflection of American society, providing insight into the cultural shifts that defined the late 20th century.

Conclusion

Peter Biskind's *Easy Riders Raging Bulls* is not just a historical account; it is a passionate exploration of an era that redefined Hollywood and reshaped the landscape of American cinema. Through the lens of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, Biskind captures the spirit of rebellion and creativity that characterized the filmmakers of the 1960s and 70s. Their influence continues to be felt in modern cinema, and their stories serve as a reminder of the power of art to challenge conventions and inspire change. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the complexities and triumphs of an extraordinary time in film history.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main thesis of 'Easy Riders, Raging Bulls' by Peter Biskind?

The main thesis of *'Easy Riders, Raging Bulls'* is that the filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by the counterculture movement, revolutionized Hollywood by challenging traditional norms and creating innovative and boundary-pushing films.

How does Peter Biskind portray the impact of the counterculture on Hollywood in the book?

Biskind portrays the counterculture as a catalyst for change, arguing that the ethos of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll directly influenced the thematic and stylistic choices of filmmakers, leading to a new wave of cinema that reflected societal transformations.

Which iconic films are discussed in 'Easy Riders, Raging Bulls'?

The book discusses several iconic films such as 'Easy Rider,' 'The Graduate,' 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,' and 'Taxi Driver,' highlighting their significance in the shift of Hollywood's narrative and aesthetic.

What role did directors like Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola play in this era according to Biskind?

According to Biskind, directors like Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola were pivotal in shaping the New Hollywood movement, using their unique visions to create films that were both commercially successful and critically acclaimed.

How does Biskind address the theme of masculinity in Hollywood during this period?

Biskind addresses masculinity by exploring how the male-centric narratives of the time often reflected the struggles and complexities of male identity, particularly in relation to cultural upheaval and changing societal norms.

What is the significance of the title 'Easy Riders, Raging Bulls'?

The title 'Easy Riders, Raging Bulls' symbolizes two contrasting aspects of the film industry: 'Easy Riders' representing the freedom and exploration of the 1960s, and 'Raging Bulls' illustrating the intense, often tumultuous nature of the film industry and its power struggles in the 1970s.

In what ways does Biskind discuss the relationship between Hollywood and the music scene?

Biskind discusses the symbiotic relationship between Hollywood and the music scene by highlighting how rock music influenced film soundtracks and narratives, while films in turn shaped popular music culture.

What criticisms does Biskind have regarding the commercialization of Hollywood in the late 1970s?

Biskind criticizes the commercialization of Hollywood for leading to formulaic filmmaking and the prioritization of profit over artistic integrity, arguing that this marked the decline of the innovative spirit that characterized the earlier part of the decade.

How does 'Easy Riders, Raging Bulls' address the issue of drugs in the filmmaking process?

The book addresses the issue of drugs by exploring how substance use was prevalent among filmmakers and actors during this era, often influencing their creative processes and sometimes leading to personal and professional difficulties.

What legacy does Biskind suggest the New Hollywood filmmakers left behind?

Biskind suggests that the New Hollywood filmmakers left behind a legacy of artistic freedom and innovation, paving the way for future generations of filmmakers to explore complex themes and narratives that resonate with audiences.

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