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Hollywood East: Louis B. Mayer and the Origins of the Studio System

Diana Altman

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Diana Altman : Hollywood East: Louis B. Mayer and the Origins of the Studio System before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hollywood East: Louis B. Mayer and the Origins of the Studio System:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Hollywood Wasn't KingBy Loves to ReadI really enjoyed reading the other side of the story which is that contrary to popular opinion, Hollywood wasn't king. All the final approval from contracts to film budget wasn't in Hollywood but in New York where the money men were stationed. Lots of great information for anyone who is a fan of film and it workings.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. No issues.By James MelloniOk

One of the most respected--and feared--men in Hollywood, Louis B. Mayer rose from pioneering film distributor to all-powerful studio head, personally responsible for thousands of careers. With flair and style, Diana Altman traces the development of Mayer the mogul and his contemporaries, delving into the rise of the studio system. Photographs.

From Publishers WeeklyAltman (whose father was a former MGM East Coast talent scout) outlines the early careers of such film-industry founders as Adolph Zukor, Albert Warner, William Fox, Marcus Loew and others, making the

point that the industry's true headquarters during its first five decades was not Hollywood but New York City. Her narrative spotlight is aimed mainly at Louis B. Mayer, the very emblem of the Hollywood movie mogul who, it turns out, was answerable to bosses at 1540 Broadway ("across the street from the Camel Cigarette sign blowing smoke"). Altman describes the cutthroat competition among industry pioneers, attempts by organized crime to muscle in--Mayer was one of the few movie moguls to fight back--and the changes wrought by WW II and the postwar advent of drive-in theaters and television. Finally, she relates the story of Mayer's dismissal in 1957 by the powers at corporate headquarters in Times Square and his brave comeback attempt, which failed when MGM stockholders voted against him. This is an entertaining though superficial chronicle, remarkable only for its admiring treatment of Mayer. As Altman remarks in the introduction, "Louis B. Mayer-bashing is a current fad." Photos. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal

Film historian Altman pledges to defend the reputation of early mogul Mayer, attacked most notably in Bosley Crowther's *Hollywood Rajah* (LJ 2/1/60). Since no one really cares, it is fortunate that she writes from a bird's-eye view of the rise of American motion pictures with Mayer just one of the various personalities who had a part. Twentieth-century world history, cinema history, biography, news clippings, and anecdotes come together in a blunt style that somehow works beautifully and cleanly. This is sophisticated storytelling and admirable history that reads like historical fiction. It even includes a poem by Rudolph Valentino. The problem of subjectivity is overcome by the book's structure. Recommended for popular collections. - Brian Geary, West Seneca, Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus

Business history of the moviemaker from Minsk who helped found MGM, became feared and powerful, treated his stable of stars like a tearful father, and was a renowned vulgarian whose mangled bons mots were the lifeblood of movie colony gossip. Film historian Altman is the daughter of the late Al Altman, MGM's New York talent scout from the time MGM was founded in 1924 until the early 60's. The energetic and devoted Mayer started early in the amusement business. In 1907, at age 22, in Haverhill, Massachusetts, a small city north of Boston, he borrowed \$600 and opened the town's second movie theater, formerly known as the "Garlic Box" and renamed by him as the "Gem." "Louey said he regretted quitting school when he was twelve. He should have quit when he was ten. That way, everyone would not have had a head start on him," Altman tells us. Business gave Mayer stature. Then he had an even grander idea and cofounded a distributorship that delivered films to theaters, by rail in fireproof tins from New York, and got rental contracts from exhibitors for specific dates, then advertised the films to theater owners and the public. Mayer began making films in Brooklyn and, in 1923, made boy genius Irving Thalberg his production head. While the public still thought of Hollywood as the center of power for filmmaking, all money decisions were made in the studios' New York home offices. Joining his Mayer Company to the already established Metro and Goldwyn companies, Mayer became an employee of MGM, answerable to board chairman Nicholas Schenck, who in 1954 fired him. As MGM builds, then loses, its empire, Altman tells amusing stories about Metro stars, her father's screen tests of Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo, and of Mayer's great crying act when arguing with angry studio folk. Business and personalities well mixed--a much lighter read than Neal Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own* (1988). (Photographs--not seen.) -- Copyright 1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.