

# Hollywood Heroes

## *How TV and movies will fix the crisis*



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The Roman writer Juvenal summarized politics in one brilliant phrase: “to the people ... bread and circuses.” Two thousand years later, that adage has become a political axiom — a tool to manipulate the masses through bribery and diversion. However, said “bread and circuses” can prove to be crucial for the sanity of a troubled nation, as long as the efforts of entertainment do not spring from a controlling government but from among the people. After all, did not Homer, Aristotle, Da Vinci, Shakespeare, and Picasso belong to times of social distress rather than utopian peace?

So who will rise in our times of distress, of terror, of pandemics, of economic crisis, of global warming? The same ones who rose during World War II and the great depression will come to rescue the United States from the abyss with popu-

lar acclaim: our heroes from Hollywood. *Casablanca*, *Gone with the Wind* and *Snow White* didn't just sweep the Oscars and rule the box-office — they also helped a nation cope with distress, and established a tradition of strengthening morale through the magic of *showbiz*.

Show business (officially called the entertainment industry) was, without a doubt, one of the best results of World War II. Granted, movie studios already existed before the war; heck, the studio system was even judged to be a Microsoft-like monopoly. Nevertheless, it was WWII and the federal support it prompted that consolidated the film industry, along with automakers and the then-new aviation companies.

Movies, in essence, were the “circus” that the government needed, though one that focused on the issues while mitigating them, rather than a circus for diversion and mere distraction.

Thenceforth, movies (and later, television) became the means for expressing the needs, hopes, and dreams of the people (as does any other art), and a hardship-coping mechanism for the masses, independent of the government.

As proof that showbiz might be one of the strongest fundamental parts of contemporary American society, let's consider and compare the current situation of the three WWII offshoots: moviemakers, automakers, and airlines. General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler are verging on corporate death if the U.S. Government does not bail them out financially, and most airlines (such as American and Continental) are struggling to keep their numbers in the black, while the studios have taken neither government bailouts nor drastic cutback measures.

Rather, they remain one of the United States' main exports, with some (such as *The Dark Knight*) single-handedly bringing billions to the feeble economy. Hollywood has proven stronger and smarter than Wall Street during this economic downturn.

There have still been cutbacks, (mainly cancellations of TV shows) some unfortunate, others just bound to happen. However, the measures should be blamed on the fact that all TV-film studios are owned by parent companies (yes, General Electric does own NBC) which have their own financial issues affecting their corporate decisions, including the studio-related ones.

Ultimately, TV-show cancellations and renewals are attempts to maximize profits in the showbiz branches to ameliorate the general losses of the parent company. Another case that prompts cancellations involves sponsors cutting off their financial support for a show. A show without sponsorship ceases to be an investment, becoming an expense for the studio. It's just how showbiz works; it is a business after all.

The most deplorable side of TV cancellations mixed with corporate greed comes in the shape of bad decisions and tele-basura (TV-trash, coined by Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar) — good shows get shut down to make way for s%#tier shows that can rack up more money and followers regardless of quality just because they are cheaper from the start.

For instance, ABC pulled the plug on *Pushing Daisies*, an excellent show that was part dark comedy and part whodunit, in order to have an extra hour for *Dancing with the Stars*, one of the many reality shows. A similar fate awaits FOX's *Dollhouse* (sorry for another failure, Joss Whedon) and NBC's *Chuck*, all of which occupy opening timeslots for reality shows.

Movies, on the other hand, are thriving on their own amidst the crisis, thanks to the herds of movie-watchers populating the theaters to catch a break from reality. In fact, *Variety* (THE showbiz magazine) has reported that the box-office records of the past weeks have not been so high since the 1992-1993 periods — yet another time of recession and transition.

With the summer comes the blockbuster season, inaugurated by *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* and followed by a new *Star Trek* movie, sequels of *Transformers* and *Terminator*, and a promising (as always) Disney-Pixar family film. This dosage of sci-fi is expected not only to earn billions in the United States and overseas but also to relieve an afflicted audience of their worries for 90 minutes a week.

So let Hollywood save us from (economic) depression with some popcorn and movie-magic. ■



The Justice League of movie-heroes comes to save us from our economic woes. Photoillustration by Kenneth Gray

Last week, Alex saw a film.  
As he recalls, it was a horror film.  
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