

‘The Apostle of Family Films’: Robert B. Radnitz, Children’s Cinema and Anti-Disney Discourse in the 1960s and 1970s

By Noel Brown

Children’s cinema is a massively under-addressed field of scholarship, so it is as unsurprising as it is regrettable that the work of Robert B. Radnitz, one of its major exponents, should have received so little attention. Radnitz was one of the most unorthodox independent Hollywood producers of the 1960s and 1970s, partly because he chose to operate exclusively within the milieu of child- and family-oriented films.¹ He produced a succession of modestly popular but critically acclaimed films adapted from popular children’s novels, starring (sometimes untrained) child actors and filmed on location. Radnitz privileged a naturalistic, documentary-style approach, often eschewing sentimentalism and the unambiguously happy endings widely associated with films for children. In the process, his films found considerable favor with a wide variety of observers, ranging from civic, religious and educational organizations to critics across the political spectrum. Ultimately, the success of Radnitz’s most famous and commercially-successful production, *Souder* (Martin Ritt, 1972) – the first major Hollywood family film centering on a black family – also brought him widespread support in the black community. Qualities often identified in Radnitz’s films included ‘truthfulness’, ‘authenticity’, ‘naturalism’, ‘universalism’ and ‘humanity’. Ultimately, his public esteem far outstripped the comparatively narrow reach of his films. At the height of his popularity, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas observed: ‘The films Robert Radnitz has produced touch the common thread of humanity and that’s why he’s made such a great and glorious contribution to the living that makes our society a viable, living, vibrant whole [...] Bob [...] has done as much as any person I know to help develop in this pluralistic society of ours the mucilage of goodwill needed for the increased quality of life’ (Bacon).

What I would like to explore here are the reasons both for Radnitz’s and his films’ immense popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, and for his subsequent fall into obscurity. I would argue that Radnitz’s films responded, both consciously and unconsciously, to several of the dominant socio-cultural and concerns of the period, namely the fight for racial equality (positively reflected in several of his films’ non-Caucasian protagonists), the rise of youth culture and simultaneous decline of entertainment forms produced for the entire family (creating an unusually high demand for such products), and finally, a mounting resistance to films which espoused conservative ideologies. Of course, Disney was the pre-eminent purveyor of family entertainment in North America, and had been since the 1930s. However, as I will show, there was a mini-backlash against the company during the 1960s and early-1970s from critics who perceived a decline in the artistic standard of its films, and found its perceived conservatism, reliance on sentiment, and refusal to show the world as it really was increasingly objectionable. As a result, during this period Radnitz was widely construed in critical circles – though, importantly, not among the general public – as a sort of *anti-Disney*; that is, a producer of family-oriented films made the ‘right’ way, under principles of artistry and social conscience, with a desire to educate, rather than merely entertain, its intended

consumers. This essay will trace Radnitz's and Disney's respective statuses during this period in critical discourses, with reference to a wide array of contemporary sources, including national and regional daily newspapers, mainstream and niche-audience popular magazines, and film industry trade papers. In the process, it will shed light on one of the most culturally important but overlooked figures in Hollywood children's cinema.

The Family Film in Decline

To begin with, we must consider the cinematic context in which Radnitz operated. Over the course of the 1950s, the traditional Hollywood family film – a genre marked by its purported simultaneous appeal to adults and children – declined markedly. From the early days of silent cinema to the late-1960s, Hollywood insistently represented itself – usually via its representative trade organization, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) – as a 'family' institution which took seriously its social responsibilities to ensure that all its films were suitable for audiences of all ages.² This assertion was given credence by the operations of the Hollywood Production Code, a rigorous code of self-censorship supposedly outlawing representations of sex, strong violence and many others forms of dubious content, which had been in operation since 1934. Adult films had always slipped through the net. The Code was, in fact, set up to protect Hollywood from the threat of Federally-imposed censorship in response to mounting public criticism from civic, religious and educational organisations during the early 1930s. And the cycle of crime films and adult-orientated westerns of the 1940s serve to illustrate how producers could introduce mature or sophisticated content without breaking the letter, if not the spirit, of the Code.

But the quantity of explicitly adult films reaching theatres accelerated sharply in the mid-1950s, as public tastes changed (Balio). Avowedly adult European art-house films gained in popularity. Otto Preminger's *The Moon is Blue* (1953) was the first major Hollywood film released without a seal of approval from the Production Code Administration. Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) and Elia Kazan's *Baby Doll* (1956) received 'Condemned' ratings from the ultra-conservative lobby, the Catholic Legion of Decency, which in earlier times had constituted a guarantee of commercial failure. Both were box office successes (Black, 79-90). Such family-orientated mega-hits as Warner Bros.' *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964) and Twentieth Century-Fox's *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965) served to affirm middlebrow cultural values in an era in which mainstream Hollywood was heading into uncertain territory. But many other family epics of the period, such as *Dr. Dolittle* (Richard Fleischer, 1967), *Star!* (Robert Wise, 1968) and *Hello, Dolly!* (Gene Kelly, 1969), were resounding flops, underlining the decline in mainstream Hollywood of 'traditional' family filmmaking in which moral purity (rather than appeal for children) was adjudged the highest criteria of success. By 1966, a mere 59 per cent of films released in the United States carried the Code seal of approval, to little disadvantage, and in 1968 the Code was replaced by the modern-day ratings system (Farber, 12).

Meanwhile, the rapid development of the teenager as a mass-market consumer had an enormous impact on Hollywood's conceptualization of its audiences. The word

'teenager' did not even exist until the early-1940s, but by the mid-1950s, the spending power of this demographic can be gauged by the immense amount of entertainment and consumables explicitly targeting young people. In 1958, Eugene Gilbert (one of the key figures in the popularization of the concept of the teenage consumer) estimated that the purchasing power of teens was '\$9.5 billion – ten times the total receipts of the movie industry – two thirds of which came from their parents, and the other third from their own earnings' (Hine, 238). As a result, an entire sub-industry of films explicitly manufactured for the teen market, mostly made by independent producers, rapidly formed. One company specializing in such fare was American International Pictures (AIP), a producer of low-budget horror films. AIP's owners, James J. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff, argued that 'teenagers made up the only market that could sustain the modern Motion Picture business' (Doherty, 125). Successful independents such as AIP seemed to possess a closer understanding of demographic targeting than more established studios. By the 1960s, television and independent film producers alike had grasped the value of the male teenager, both as consumer and opinion leader. AIP developed a useful syllogism (dubbed the 'Peter Pan Syndrome') which they applied to teenage audience tastes when deciding upon film content:

- a) a younger child will watch anything an older child will watch;
- b) an older child will not watch anything a younger child will watch;
- c) a girl will watch anything a boy will watch;
- d) a boy will not watch anything a girl will watch; therefore,
- e) to catch your greatest audience you zero in on the 19-year-old male. (Doherty, 128)

Walt Disney, seemingly immune to the charms of youth culture, and dogmatically resistant to the forces of cultural change, continued to insist that he made movies 'to suit myself, hoping they will also suit the audience' (Schickel 1997, 354).

Only the Disney Company, with its resources and reputation as the nation's family entertainer *par excellence*, continued to invest substantively in family films. By the late-1950s, it was beginning to extend its dominance of the family market to almost hegemonic proportions. This was partly due to the company's successful programs of expansion and diversification earlier in the decade. In 1953, it formed its own distribution arm, Buena Vista, which removed its prior dependence on rival studio RKO. In 1955, using funds received from a partnership with television network ABC, it opened its own theme park, Disneyland, which soon attracted millions of visitors. Another reason for Disney's appropriation of the theatrical family market – previously shared between the major Hollywood studios – was the fact that its rivals were concentrating their attentions on the kinds of spectaculars and epic films that television was unable to supply. In February 1960, *Variety* observed that the film industry had 'practically forfeited the children's market to television', pointing out that no studio except Disney

is bold enough to state frankly that a particular film is "aimed at the moppet trade", preferring to employ the description "family picture". At the same time, the majority of the film companies, in offering films that have a children's appeal, are careful to leave the impression that there are elements of interest in these pix that will attract teenagers and adults as well. It is considered sacrilegious to claim unabashedly that a specific entry will appeal to children between the ages of 7 and 14. ('Secret Fear')

Teenage and young adult audiences were clearly the object of some of the biggest hits of 1960, namely *The Apartment* (Billy Wilder), *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock) and *Elmer Gantry* (Richard Brooks). United Artists explicitly advised patrons that the latter film was not suitable for children – a direct contravention of Hollywood’s supposed ethos of universal suitability (‘Do Adults Want’).

The Disney Backlash

It was at this point that the seeds for Disney’s subsequent reputation for social and cultural conservatism were sown. For much of Walt Disney’s career, as Richard Schickel has argued, he was ‘tolerated by *haute* Hollywood as an enigmatic eccentric whose presence was “good for the industry”’ (Schickel 1997, 29). But by the 1960s Walt, and his studio, had come to occupy Hollywood’s center ground and seemed embody its core values as much as, if not more than, any of its rivals: a developing reputation for professionalism in its products supported by ruthless protectionism and acquisitiveness; support for the establishment; innate, if implicit, mistrust of youth culture; and support for the nuclear family, with all the positive and negative connotations of social cohesion and exclusivism that follow. However, during the late-1950s and early-1960s Disney remained well attuned to the values and entertainment requirements of mass audiences in North America, and expanded its production operations considerably.

The studio’s increasing reliance on xerography during the 1960s enabled it to produce animation for less cost and with greater rapidity, albeit with the unfortunate side-effect that the animation lost some of its aesthetic richness and technical distinctiveness.³ More importantly, the production of live-action films accelerated greatly in 1959, after which they were released roughly at the rate of one every two months. Evidently, the studio had grasped that it was impossible to dominate the family market solely with animations. It required a year-round supply of screen entertainment to maintain its near-hegemony. Between 1953 and 1968, Disney produced a mere five feature animations, but over fifty live-action films, which could be produced rapidly and designed to fit the company ‘house style’ (Schickel 1997, 298). As Richard Schickel has observed, ‘the Disney [live-action] films tended to look alike’, and their similarity did not end with aesthetics (1997, 345). Almost all centered on the prototypically all-American nuclear family of parents and young children, with teenagers largely excluded; when they did feature, they were neutered, with disturbingly ‘adult’ intimations of rebellion and sexual awakening elided. During this period, Disney released a string of live-action and animated features that struck gold at the box office, including *Sleeping Beauty* (Clyde Geronimi et al, 1959), *Swiss Family Robinson* (Ken Annakin, 1960), *The Parent Trap* (David Swift, 1960), *The Absent-Minded Professor* (Robert Stevenson, 1961), *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (Clyde Geronimi et al, 1961), *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964), *The Jungle Book* (Wolfgang Reitherman, 1967) and *The Love Bug* (Robert Stevenson, 1968).

Joel Best and Kathleen S. Lowney have argued that most criticisms of Disney constitute a form of ‘blowback’, where an institution possessing ‘a good reputation’ is vulnerable to becoming the target of ‘social problem claims’. They present three

separate cases where Disney has found itself scrutinized for some perceived wrongdoing: i) the evangelical American Family Association's 1996-2006 boycott of Disney products for supposed liberalism (especially its support of Ellen Degeneres, one of its stars, after she 'came out' as gay); ii) conversely, criticisms from liberals dating back to the 1940s of its films' anti-union stance and, more broadly, affirmation of conservative values (such as its patriarchal representations of family, unenlightened attitude towards women, and heterocentricism); and finally, iii) sociological claims that, far from embodying values of affability, social cohesion and moral-emotional uplift, Disney in fact promotes conformity through 'trivialization, sanitization, homogenization, simplification, standardization, globalization, glocalization, manipulation, hybrid consumption, surveillance, and control'. Such allegations are seen as attempts to 'gain attention' to the accusers' political cause, and the authors believe that 'in spite of the long history of critiques of Disney, the corporation seems to have been little affected'. On this point, at least, they seem to be correct; a recent study of Disney's global impact found that 'over 93 percent of respondents agreed that Disney promoted fun and fantasy, while over 88 percent agreed on happiness, magical and good over evil', and that 'resistance to study or criticism of Disney was especially marked in the U.S.A. and Japan' (Wasko and Meehan).

But while it is probably true that Disney has always more or less recovered from the many criticisms it has faced over the years, it is incontrovertible that its reputation took several significant hits during the 1960s. Furthermore, it is erroneous to imply that Disney is simply an inactive victim of baseless criticisms propounded by self-serving accusers merely advancing their own positions through flagrant demagoguery. Indeed, 'blowback' is conspicuously absent in the popular adoration Disney aroused in the North American public during the 1930s, when its films were almost universally enjoyed by the masses and praised even by highbrow critics. There was a slight cooling in critical responses to Disney films after about 1941, when, as Steven Watts notes, 'a new instinct to identify and uphold American values rather than playfully to probe or lampoon them' emerged (448-49). This new, avowedly 'patriotic', spirit was further evidenced by the company's contract with the U.S. Government to produce the propaganda films *Saludos Amigos* (Norman Ferguson et al., 1943) and *The Three Caballeros* (Norman Ferguson et al., 1945) for Latin American audiences as part of the Roosevelt administration's 'Good Neighbour Policy', and, less palatably (but totemically in the eyes of its critics), by Walt's testifying as a 'friendly witness' at the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings in 1947. But in terms of public perception, during the 1950s the Disney Corporation retained, and in fact built upon, its earlier popularity among the general public. What changed was the mass emergence in the late-1950s and 1960s of 'youth culture', which embodied a widely-celebrated 'counter-culture' perhaps more imagined than actively experienced, but nevertheless symbolically galvanized in its innate mistrust of the establishment and of big business. Disney was the epitome of both.

Even among economic liberals (i.e., conservatives), monopolies – as Disney appeared to be establishing in the family entertainment arena with its filmic, televisual and theme park operations – are rarely looked upon with approval. And surely the company's increasing conglomeration, signalling its shift from a recognizably American animation studio to an increasingly globalized multimedia corporation, undercut its

projections of intimacy and social conviviality. But far more important, I would suggest, is the fact that Disney's early-1960s films became progressively reactionary in their political emphases. The studio's increasing conservatism can be gauged by the fact that the teenager – a symbol of the powerfully insurgent, anti-establishment youth culture – is largely absent in its films of the period. As a result, its films affirm the strong divisions between child and adult that the figure of the empowered, maturing teenager refutes. Disney executives were fearful of damaging its brand identity as the quintessential purveyor of multimedia family entertainment by abandoning its traditional consumer-base of parents and children. Because 'youth culture' identified itself partly in *opposition* to the traditionally-conservative social institution of the family, Disney resisted embracing this new cultural paradigm. By positioning itself within the creative confines of the beleaguered nuclear family unit with films such as *Swiss Family Robinson* and *Mary Poppins*, the studio was bound to articulate the anxieties surrounding that institution being expressed not only by the knee-jerk right-wing lobbyists perennially concerned with civil degradation, but also by respected sociologists such as R. D. Laing.⁴ Disney's refusal to engage with teenage and young adult audiences contributed directly to an artistic decline during the late-1960s that was only reversed in the mid-1980s, when a new team of executives finally succeeded in reconciling the company's traditional family audience with the now-pivotal teen and young adult demographics.

'Backlash' is perhaps too extreme a description for the wave of mistrust directed at Disney during the 1960s. It ranged from anywhere between outright hostility to vague suspicion, and it must be admitted that even this was probably restricted to a politically-engaged minority and/or intellectual/cultural elite. Indeed, Richard Schickel, author of *The Disney Version* (1968) – a groundbreaking, and, at times, biting revisionist account of the studio and its founder – has since reflected that 'there was no perceptible public demand for a closer examination of [Disney's] success story', and hitherto criticism had originated 'from the cultural margins – Marxists, for example, and child psychologists, and other easily ignored sources' (1997, 2). However, even on this level, it remains striking in comparison with the uncritical adulation Disney had previously enjoyed in the hearts and minds of generations of American youth. Schickel belonged to a new breed of film critics less positively disposed to the company than had been previous generations. While his analysis never approaches the malicious sensationalism of some later accounts (such as Marc Eliot's *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince*), he takes aim at Walt's philistinism ('the least pleasant aspect of his character in the late, prosperous years was the delight he took in conveying his contempt for art, which he often equated with obscenity'), his social imagination ('rather undeveloped'), and his ignorance of political affairs ('if he had any politics at all, they were politics of nostalgia') (2, 38, 92, 157). And by the 1960s, as Michael Barrier has observed, 'scorn for Disney's live-action films was a reflex among most critics, and for good reason [...] For all the Oscars [Walt Disney] had won – more than any other filmmaker, mostly for animated and documentary short subjects – he was not taken seriously as a live-action filmmaker, in Hollywood or elsewhere' (282). Despite all of this, popular and critical responses – measurable in part through box office grosses and contemporary reviews – to Disney's animated features (and to his best live-action films, such as *Mary Poppins*) remained strong. It is only when we turn to critical responses to

Radnitz's films, where, inevitably, comparisons with Disney were made, that we begin to perceive a slight weariness surrounding Disney's trajectory; a sense of artistic decline ranging from the incremental to the extreme, combined with a mounting suspicion that, although well-produced, they were not the most desirable entertainments for young minds.

Radnitz's Alternative

A select group of independent producers successfully bridged the gap between the 'family' and 'teen' markets with colourfully low-budget action-adventure films which privileged spectacle but remained broadly suitable for younger audiences. George Pal, Irwin Allen, and Ray Harryhausen and Charles H. Schneer all chose this path. Others, such as Ivan Tors, Gerry Anderson, and latterly, Allen, pursued a similar aesthetic on network television.⁵ Of all these figures, Radnitz is the least remembered but perhaps the most interesting analytically. The fascination he evokes is partly due to the fact that his rise to prominence was so remarkable, and his eventual critical and commercial decline so precipitous. Yet Radnitz perceived an opening in the family market for wholesome, small-scale films that were unpretentious, naturalistic, politically-progressive but also conservative in their affirmation of the nuclear family and tacit rejection of alternative family structures. Films capable, in other words, of appealing to the intellects and sensibilities of adults across the political spectrum, while still conforming to the narrative and ideological structures of the children's adventure story.

A former English teacher, Radnitz became a story consultant at Twentieth Century-Fox during the 1950s, and eventually persuaded production chief Buddy Adler to allow him to produce a low-budget adaptation of Ouida's 1872 novel, *A Dog of Flanders* (James B. Clark, 1960). It was shot on location in the Netherlands, mainly with local actors. Although it was reasonably profitable, the film's critical reception was extremely positive. It won the Gold Lion (first prize) in the Children's Film category at the Venice Film Festival – the first North American-produced recipient of the award. *Variety* observed:

At first, [the] leisurely pace [and] emphasis on character and background, rather than the frantic action of today's films, seems slow. But it has a beguiling warmth and credibility that builds a mounting interest and a cumulative effect. The 20th-Fox release proves that Disney needn't have a monopoly on this sort of wholesome film fare. ('A Dog of Flanders')

Radnitz went on to produce a series of simple but well-made family films along similar lines throughout the 1960s and early-1970s, all directed by Clark, including *Misty* (1961), *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1964), *And Now Miguel* (1966), *My Side of the Mountain* (1969) and *The Little Ark* (1972). In 1972, he had his greatest success with his production of *Souder*, which centered on the hardships of a family of black sharecroppers in the American south during the 1930s Depression.

As with Disney, Radnitz's films tended to ascribe to a simple formula. Most have as their protagonist a pre-adolescent child. All are filmed on location, often overseas.

Most are adaptations of acclaimed, but overlooked children's novels. For a producer whose films traded on their tacit rejection of Disney's excesses, it was seen as important to privilege wholesomeness and fidelity to the prestigious source material. Another important consideration was gaining the approval of educators capable of exerting influence over the viewing habits of the children in their charge. *A Dog of Flanders* and *Misty* (adapted from Marguerite Henry's 1947 novel *Misty of Chincoteague*) focus on the simpatico relationships between children and animals (in the latter, a pony). In *A Dog of Flanders* and *The Little Ark*, the central child figures are guided by sympathetic father figures (in both cases played by Theodore Bikel). *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, adapted from Scott O'Dell's 1961 novel (which won the Newbery Medal in 1961 for the best children's fiction of the year), focuses on a young Native American girl stranded on a desert island. Its central theme of the child's journey of maturation through self-sufficiency is revisited in *My Side of the Mountain*, an adaptation of Jean Craighead George's 1959 Newbery-nominated novel about a boy, inspired by Thoreau, who decides to make his way alone in a forest. Another recurrent theme, played out in *And Now Miguel* (adapted from Joseph Krumgold's 1954 Newbery-winning novel about a shepherd boy in New Mexico) and *Sounder* (adapted from William H. Armstrong's 1970 Newbery-winning novel), is of the child struggling to come to terms with their own sense of identity within their staunchly traditional, patriarchal family units. After the release of *Sounder*, Radnitz's emphasis changed slightly from family films to what he later termed 'people' films; narratives which remained essentially family-suitable, but no longer exclusively child-oriented. He oversaw three more theatrically-released productions, *Where the Lilies Bloom* (William A. Graham, 1974), *Birch Interval* (Delbert Mann, 1976) and *Cross Creek* (Martin Ritt, 1983); and two made-for-television movies, *Mary White* (Judd Taylor, 1977) and *Never Forget* (Joseph Sargent, 1991). All are well-made, thoughtful and sensitive productions, in keeping with Radnitz's earlier work, but as primarily adult-oriented dramas, they fall outside the scope of this essay.

Radnitz's reputation grew rapidly among critics who appreciated his wholesome, unpretentious style. Indeed, an article on promising young independent producers in the 1962 edition of *Film Quarterly* counted Radnitz alongside John Cassavetes and Leslie Stevens as one of 'the young men the eastern critics have been trying to discover' (Dyer Maccann). On the other hand, Radnitz quickly found favor among opponents of Hollywood's simultaneous embrace of youth- and adult-orientated entertainment. In 1962, he presented a paper on the subject of children's films at the annual Claremont Graduate School conference, and in 1964 was a guest speaker at the Federation of Motion Picture Council's national convention ('Lip Service'). He also succeeded in attracting a rare official endorsement for *Island of the Blue Dolphins* from the American Library Association. Radnitz was a showman; a skilled rhetorician whose willingness to provide a juicy soundbite ensured he was a regular interviewee in the trade papers of the period. He was particularly outspoken concerning the industry's perceived intransigent disdain for family entertainment, insisting in 1964 that:

A child will look at most anything you present to him on the screen. Therefore it behoves us to present him with exciting visual fare – fare that will stimulate his imagination creatively [...] It is a shocking indictment today that in our industry today there is not

one motion picture company, with the exception of Disney, that has a definite, planned slate of films initially aimed at an audience of children. (Oulhahan, 1964)

Radnitz's high visibility not only in the trade press but in general-interest magazines (such as *Life*) reflected the independent producer's need to self-promote. His position in the film industry was, from a commercial perspective, always peripheral. He relied on major distributors picking up his films, few of which received a wide release; nor were they always marketed effectively, as generally they were felt to possess insufficient mass audience appeal. Radnitz was displeased with Twentieth Century-Fox's handling of his first two films, *A Dog of Flanders* and *Misty*. He claimed to prefer a 'grassroots' approach to selling his films, which invited the cooperation of civic and educational groups in its promotion, in addition to press and radio interviews. Radnitz explained, 'when you believe in something you should do everything you can to sell it, and you need the help of centres of influence and opinion-makers. If they don't know about the film, how can they help?' (ibid)

Partly as a result of his tireless lobbying, Radnitz's critical stock – and that of his films – grew as the decade unfolded. The critical reaction to his earliest films, *A Dog of Flanders* and *Misty*, was more equivocal. A. H. Weiler's *New York Times* review of *Misty* observed that it 'seems bound to charm the teen and sub-teen, school-free legions [and] may also get the vote of their elders willing to overlook the obvious and an occasional stretch of tedium' (Weiler). *Life* magazine provided a more simpering assessment: 'producer Robert Radnitz and director James B. Clark forgot Hollywood's gloss and made the simply tale of children and wild ponies as unpretentiously as anyone's backyard movie. The result is a film that will please all children and delight those who ever wanted a horse' ('A Tiny Horse Opera'). And the *New York Times* conceded that 'adults and the more sophisticated youngsters will probably find "Island of the Blue Dolphins" a bit thin and sugary', while admitting its strong appeal to 'kiddies' (Thompson). These early films, then, were perceived as films *only* for children, which lacked the necessary resonance to attract adult audiences, in spite of Radnitz's oft-repeated 'Golden Rule': 'Show me a child's book an adult won't pick up and enjoy, and I'll show you a book a child won't pick up and enjoy' (Scheur).

By mid-decade, the critical tide was beginning to turn. The proportion of family-oriented films continued to decline, and the quantity of adult- and teen-oriented films grew commensurately. As a result, wholesome family films were viewed increasingly by critics as palliatives against edgy, violent, explicit or perverse adult films. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* was a breakthrough in this regard. *Life* magazine's review begun thus:

What's playing at the Bijou? Where can we take the kids? Well, I'll tell you what's playing at the Bijou. *The Horror of Party Beach* is playing at the Bijou. Or you might try *Slime People*. Or how about *The Strangler*? These little dainties are all specifically designed for juvenile consumption and, with lamentably few exceptions, they are just about all that kids can expect at the movies nowadays. (Oulahan, 1964)

It went on to praise the film's 'authenticity' and 'sense of human dignity'. *Time* magazine's review was equally effusive, lauding it as 'the very model of what children's pictures ought to be but seldom are', and pointing to Radnitz's ability to provide

‘sentiment without sentimentality and a moral without a lecture’ (‘Island of the Blue Dolphins’). Members of *Boxoffice* magazine’s National Screen Council (NSC) – made up of film industry professionals, journalists, exhibitors, and civic, educational and religious organisations – awarded *Island of the Blue Dolphins* its Blue Ribbon award for the ‘best picture of the month for the whole family’ (*My Side of the Mountain* and *Souder* would later receive the same accolade). Affirmative responses from NSC members included: ‘Everyone I’ve talked to agrees with my judgement that it is ideal for the family’; “‘Island of the Blue Dolphins’ may turn out to be the best family-type film of the year’; ‘this film is one of the handful of genuine family films – beautiful production’; ‘A film of many delights based on factual material, with characters, action and settings of great interest’; ‘More like this for the family, please’; ‘a compelling answer to hatred’; and ‘I can only quote: “A thing of beauty is a joy forever”’ (West Sykes, 1964).

Radnitz’s subsequent 1960s family films were received with similar enthusiasm. *Time* magazine praised *And Now Miguel* as another ‘labor of love by [...] Robert Radnitz and director James Clark, who keep turning out evidence that a movie can entertain, educate and enlarge the experience of youngsters without driving their parents up the wall. Miguel refreshes the spirit like a week at a mountain camp’ (‘And Now Miguel’, *Time*). *Boxoffice* adjudged it a ‘wholesome and entertaining film for all ages’, perceiving ‘more action and thus better box office potential’ than its predecessor, and praising the ‘documentary techniques [...] skillfully blended with the story’ (‘And Now Miguel’, *Boxoffice*). *Life* magazine – always a fervent admirer of Radnitz – labelled him ‘a craftsman [whose] films are beautiful’ (Oulahan, 1966). *My Side of the Mountain* was felt by *New York* magazine’s Judith Crist to be an ‘excellent production’; ‘that rare “family” film that deals with flesh-and-blood rather than fairy-tale or television soap opera people, that talks about today in timeless terms, that finds its comedy and its high adventure and its moments of truth in human experience’ (Crist, 1969). *Boxoffice* called it ‘family entertainment of a special kind’, and NSC members were, as usually, full of praise: ‘another contribution to family filmmaking that has a feeling of the simple yet wondrous world of nature that makes all of his films sparkle with warmth and understanding’; ‘this was a real treat for our patrons. Parents brought their families for a change and told us so’; ‘At last we got to look and listen to an adult having a conversation with a child. The picture is tops technically, in every respect, and entertainingly tasteful for everybody’; ‘A superb masterpiece for young and old alike!’; and ‘one of the most touching, warm and inspiring movies of the year. Please, let’s have more of these decent, family movies’ (West Sykes, 1969). By this point, Radnitz’s stock among critics and interested observers from across the political spectrum had never been higher. In 1969, he received a joint award from the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures and the Broadcasting of Motion Pictures, and the Film Commission of the National Council of Churches, in recognition of his ‘overall work in the production of children’s films’ (‘Radnitz Family Pic Payoff’). In the same year, he was honored with a week-long retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan, which insisted that Radnitz’s movies showed more humanity, ‘compassion and sophistication than many so-called adult films’ (Hevesi). The *Los Angeles Times*’ influential critic, Charles Champlin, dubbed him the ‘apostle of family films’ (Champlin, 1969).

The inescapable subtext in many of these testimonials is that Radnitz provided what Disney could, or *would*, not: a family film made under principles of artistry, rather

than rampant commercialism. In the minds of critics, Radnitz had indeed become a sort of anti-Disney; an articulate, creative producer who made his family films in the *correct* way, and in defiance of institutional apathy. If Walt Disney was (in Schickel's estimation) guilty of fostering 'unquestioning patriotism, bourgeois moral nostrums, gauche middle-class taste, racist exclusion, corporate profit mongering, [and] bland social conformity' (Giroux and Pollock, 44), Radnitz might have been seen to embody an entirely contrary set of values: racial and national inclusiveness (in his films' foreign locations and non-white protagonists); education, rather than economic exploitation, of children's tastes; responsibly small-scale capitalism (his success in spite of limited resources itself an affirmation of the American Dream); and stimulating social progressivism that seemed to mirror the various campaigns for social equality in the North America of the 1960s. If initial comparisons between the two producers were not favorable to Radnitz – Howard Thompson's otherwise positive review of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, which admits that the film lacked 'Disney-style showmanship', for instance – eventually a critical consensus formed that Radnitz' films were qualitatively superior. *Life* magazine's review of *And Now Miguel* made the comparison explicit:

[it possesses] the ring of authenticity that sets Radnitz's films apart from the nature works of Disney. For all their technical felicity and lavish production, Disney's films cannot resist the man-made dramatic twist, the cuteness that cloys – a bass viol for that gorilla scene, a piccolo chorus for those sandpipers. Radnitz and his regular director, James P. Clark [sic], never yield to such temptations. (Oulahan, 1966)

Many such comparisons – most of them flattering to Radnitz – were made in the 1960s and 1970s. One member of the NSC saw *Island of the Blue Dolphins* as providing 'definite proof that Mr. Radnitz is good competition for Mr. Disney' (West Sykes, 1964). In 1974, the *Milwaukee Journal* suggested that Radnitz was 'the new Walt Disney' (Bacon). *New York's* Judith Crist deemed him 'the producer of the finest movies for young people', and 'the master of the intergenerational film – and that's what family movies are essentially all about' (Crist, 1974). Columnist Dick Kleiner noted that Disney films 'are always lightweight', whilst Radnitz 'takes a realistic look at the world'. And in 1970, *Variety* called him 'a one-man competitor to the Walt Disney organisation' ('Radnitz Family Pic Payoff').

Popular Reception

I would suggest that Radnitz's ever-increasing critical esteem during the late-1960s and early-1970s stemmed largely from the fact that his films could be interpreted, alternately, as an *affirmation* of the liberal counter-cultural movement and youth culture, and as a reaction *against* them. It is not that Radnitz and Clark made progressively better films. Rather, it is that the values they appeared to extol attained greater significance as a result of changes in society and popular culture. We have already seen the extent of the demand among cultural conservatives for the kind of wholesome family films in which Radnitz specialized, and his popularity among such contingents is clear from the various awards and testimonials he received from civic,

religious and educational organisations. But equally important, I would argue, is his appeal to the liberal intelligentsia. Outspokenly liberal himself, Radnitz made two films (*Sounder* and *Cross Creek*) with Martin Ritt, a famously left-leaning playwright and director blacklisted by the television industry in the wake of the HUAC investigations for supposed communist sympathies. This is not to argue that Radnitz's films were popular artefacts of the counter-culture movement – in fact, their staid wholesomeness embodied a mode of cinema which a new generation of film directors (such as Roman Polanski, Arthur Penn, and Robert Altman) rejected. But formal and ideological orientation should not be conflated, and it was Radnitz's ability to meld a formally-conservative mode of cinema (the family film) with a politically-progressive message that facilitated his acceptance by mainstream (e.g. *Life*; *Time*) and left-leaning (e.g. *New York*) publications alike. Radnitz's liberalism can be gauged by his films' strikingly progressive casting. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and *And Now Miguel*, for example, center on a Native American girl and Latino boy respectively.

In those cases, the effect is lessened, somewhat, by the fact that actors Celia Kaye and Pat Cardi were, in fact, white Americans. But with *Sounder*, Radnitz made a mainstream family film which focused on a black family and starred black actors. The *Los Angeles Times* called it 'beautifully acted, honest, angering and inspiring', whilst *Variety* thought it 'a film which transcends space, race, age and time' (Champlin, 1972; 'Sounder'). *Sounder* received far wider attention than the typical Hollywood release. Congressman Charles C. Diggs, Jr., a member of the House from Michigan, was quoted as saying that it 'marks a turning point in the art of the motion picture. This is a black film to take pride in' (Jackson, 122). Inevitably, *Sounder* was interpreted not merely as a family film, but as a *black* film. Radnitz was not ignorant to the cultural-political implications. In 1966, the magazine *Jet* – a publication aimed at African-Americans – quoted Radnitz as saying he was actively seeking a filmable story 'with a good Negro theme' ('Hollywood Producer-Director'). Although Radnitz's entire career as a producer testifies to his commitment to making films centering on characters from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as a showman he was surely cognizant of the publicity opportunities of producing the first major black family film.⁶ He was the only producer of family films in the United States who dared to challenge the rigid racial exclusivism that hitherto had characterized the genre. Later, Radnitz recalled being advised not to make the film by various producers and studios, and that after production had completed, his usual distributor rejected it on the grounds that 'it's a little nigger picture, and it'll never make a dime' (Wilson). In the past, non-white characters had appeared in Hollywood family films only in minor roles (as in Bill Bojangles' celebrated cameos in Shirley Temple's vehicles), or as subjects of exotic fetishization (as with the Indian child actor, Sabu, or 'Brazilian Bombshell' Carmen Miranda). Radnitz's open-mindedness towards broader racial and cultural frames of reference was undeniably facilitated by the social advances made by the civil rights movement during the 1960s, but his persistent challenge to the implicitly racist and xenophobic historical trend in family-orientated filmmaking remains impressive.

However, with the exception of *Sounder* – a film which transcended its family film modalities and became regarded as a major cultural statement – significant commercial success continually eluded Radnitz. How contemporary audiences really responded to Radnitz' films is a matter for informed inference rather than certain

reflection, but exhibitors' reports in the trade presses offer some useful indications. Ken Christianson, owner of the Roxy Theatre, Washburn, North Dakota, showed *A Dog of Flanders* to his rural audience and described it as 'One of those beautiful, wonderful family pictures every movie critic and club woman is calling for', but lamented: 'We sold more concessions at "Butterfield 8" [a 1960 drama film starring Elizabeth Taylor] than the gross of this. Ouch!' ('The Exhibitor', August 1961). Texan theatre owner Lew Bray seemingly played *Island of the Blue Dolphins* merely for public-relations purposes, commenting: 'Pictures like this keep me on the parents' "good neighbor" list of friends and baby-sitters' ('The Exhibitor', 1964). A. T. Jackson, another small-town theatre owner from Flomaton, Alaska, had this to say about *And Now Miguel*: 'Good family fare. Did lowest Sunday-Monday business in 25 years or more' ('The Exhibitor', 19 December 1966). *My Side of the Mountain* fared a little better with James Andersen, manager of the Sprague Theatre, Elborn, Wisconsin: 'Rather a dull, unbelievable picture, but it drew a good crowd – especially the kids' ('The Exhibitor', 1969). But the generally unenthusiastic tenor of these responses to Radnitz's films mirrors their lukewarm box office performances. Radnitz invariably attributed these underperformances to poor marketing from distributors, although *Boxoffice* reported that *Island of the Blue Dolphins* still failed to attract audiences 'in spite of numerous endorsements', blaming its lack of star power (West Sykes, 1964). Nonetheless, it was believed that the film had greater potential 'for subsequent runs and for small town showings [...] because of its wholesomeness' (ibid), and indeed, a 1966 re-release of *A Dog of Flanders* at the Cozy Theatre in Lockwood, Montana, improved on its initial performance: 'Now, here was a sleeper [...] Doubled with "The Guns of Navarone" and they told me "Dog" was the one they came for' ('The Exhibitor', 12 December 1966). But the big money was still earned by Disney, and by independent producers of teen- and youth-oriented films. Ray Boriski, of the Galena Theatre, Texas, reported that AIP's horror film *Black Sunday* (Mario Bava, 1960) was 'the type of picture the parents tell us not to show – and every kid in town shows up' ('The Exhibitor', September 1961).

In the mind of his admirers, Radnitz's relative lack of commercial success was seen both as lamentable and as the quintessential marker of his integrity and authenticity. Surely there is an elitist subtext to such affirmative responses; a tacit assumption that only erudite, culturally-literate observers are capable of perceiving the worth of such films. Indeed, such an attitude is akin to self-serving convictions among intellectual coteries for centuries that specific art forms can only be recognized by those possessing true artistic distinction; the failure of the masses to appreciate such cultural forms ultimately confirms, rather than refutes, their artistic value (a phenomenon explored at length in its wider iterations by Pierre Bourdieu). If Radnitz was the connoisseur's family entertainer of choice, doomed never to be widely appreciated, then Disney was the vulgar purveyor of lowest-common-denominator entertainment for the great generalities. The fact that Radnitz posed no threat to Disney on a commercial level emphasizes the David vs. Goliath meta-narrative that proved irresistible to many commentators. One 1964 article on Radnitz is revealing in this regard:

Erudite, pipe-smoking Robert B. Radnitz, a graduate of the University of Virginia, is boldly invading a film making domain – pictures aimed for children and the family trade – long considered a virtual monopoly held by one studio, Disney. ('Children's Film Field')

In this passage, Radnitz's intelligence, literacy, benevolence (implicit in the pipe-smoking reference, suggesting a wise, homely grandfatherlyness) and bravery are all strongly emphasized. And Radnitz himself was happy to encourage the comparison. In a 1964 interview, he bemoaned Hollywood's unwillingness to follow Disney's profitable pursuit of the family market, but criticized the latter's over-reliance on sentimentality and violence, explaining that 'I try to stimulate creatively. I talk up to children, never down. I try to use film in its true sense as an art form and to make it transcend age borders' ('Lip Service'). In 1970, he went further, describing Disney's films as 'sugary and saccharine – a "cutesy-poo" view of a "cutesy-poo" world. If it ever existed, it doesn't today [...] Most so-called films in that area don't stimulate youngsters, or any kind of audience, creatively' (Goldstein).

As we already know, Radnitz was a skilful self-publicist, and we should avoid the temptation to portray him, as some did, as a quasi-messianic figure within children's culture. We should also guard against reading his films as unproblematically enlightened. At times, they were patriarchal, didactic, patronizing to young audiences, and (in spite of Radnitz's reputation for realism) sentimental and sanitizing in their presentation of detail. *Time's* favorable review of *My Side of the Mountain*, which centers on a Thoreau-inspired boy called Sam (Teddy Eccles) who runs away from home to live in the wild, pointed out that

Jacob's ladders of sunshine, a parade of deer, fox, owl and bear, and a vigorous outdoor atmosphere that practically chills the viewer's nostrils, all give the film an air of actuality.

Parents know better. Sam spends five months without a bowl of cereal or a pair of rubbers, yet never catches a cold, never asks for a glass of water at night and never needs a Band-Aid. "My Side of the Mountain" may be as delightful as *Walden* but it is plainly as fantastic as "Snow White". ('My Side of the Mountain')

Such distortions may be permissible in children's fiction – except Radnitz repeatedly emphasized that he was not making films only for children. And on the charge of sanitization, it worth pointing out that *Island of the Blue Dolphins* is not quite the 'true story' that the publicity claimed. The story centres on Karana, an adolescent girl whose Native American island tribe is wiped out by a gang of mercenary Aleuts. Although U.S. missionaries eventually arrive to evacuate the survivors, Karana is left behind, and lives alone on the island for eighteen years before she is rescued. But Juana Maria – the real-life Karana – was not an adolescent, but a mature woman. Furthermore, the book and film end with Karana's rescue, with the tacit implication of a happy resolution to her story. But Juana Maria – as the last member of a lost tribe – found it impossible to communicate with her rescuers, and, having no immunity against new-world diseases, died several weeks later. Radnitz received more damning criticism for his bowdlerization of the life of novelist Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings in *Cross Creek*. As Robert E. Snyder has observed, Radnitz and director Martin Ritt 'deliberately altered and shuffled the facts of the real life Rawlings' in order to (as the *Los Angeles Times*' Sheila Benson noted) 'suit a 1980s view of the tough-minded, entirely self-sufficient woman', while the *New Yorker's* Pauline Kael saw the film as a 'sun-coated and sugar-cured [...] child's storybook women's liberation approach' (Snyder). Ironically, given the

producer's reputation for truthfulness and fidelity, audiences of *Cross Creek* were, as Snyder suggests, 'advised to go to the library rather than the theatre to learn about Rawlings'. Individually, these distortions may be excused as dramatic license, but collectively they render two of the supposed virtues of Radnitz's films – their educational value and their refusal to juvenilize – problematic.

Conclusion

After 1970, the charge of excessive sentiment in Radnitz's films began to be voiced more loudly. Paul Warshaw's review of *Souder* in *Film Quarterly* raised the matter but largely dismissed it, conceding that by 'striking us with some of the quality of a fairy tale or a fable' it is 'open to the charge of sentimentality', but that 'this charge is valid in only a very limited way', as in 'a refusal to go to extremes of violence, suffering or confrontation'. Roger Greenspun, in the *New York Times*, was less forgiving, deeming it akin to 'something unusually worthy, like the United Fund or a UNICEF Christmas card', 'lack[ing] the excitement that may have come from plumbing greater depths and discovering a few tougher, less accessible insights'. The accusation reared its head again, more forcefully, with the release of *Where the Lilies Bloom*, which concerns the attempts of 14-year-old Mary Call (Julie Gholson) to support her orphaned, share-cropper family after the death of her parents. Richard Schickel observed that it was made 'as a G-rated family movie, which is the probable reason – though hardly a good excuse – for avoiding the harsher, more pressing realities of the situation the movie portrays. It wants to be liked for its good intentions alone' (Schickel, 1974). And Radnitz was no longer insulated from such criticism by his status as a producer of films for children, for increasingly it was an identity that he rejected. In a 1974 interview, he claimed to have 'found a way out this nonsense about labels. A Canadian film critic came up to me and said, "Hey, why don't you just say you make movies about people?" And that's precisely what I have been trying to do – make movies about people' (Renninger). Shortly afterwards, he admitted that he would have been proud to have produced *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972), reflecting that 'Its message [...] is that without love there is nothing. What could be more moral than that?' (Kleiner). One of his productions made in collaboration with Mattel, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich* (Ralph Nelson, 1978), contains swearing, drug abuse and some nudity, a fact which Radnitz justified with reference to ever-developing public tastes, and prevailing unhelpful distinctions between 'family' and 'adult' cinema.

Radnitz's public shift from 'family' to 'people' films surely reflects changing attitudes towards family entertainment as much as his own oft-cited aversion to demographic typologies. The North American public's increasing aversion to family films has been well documented elsewhere (Brown 2012, 127-50), and it may be that Radnitz was attempting to rid himself of a label which, by this point, had acquired largely negative connotations of juvenility, conservatism, stagnation and obsolescence. By the late-1970s, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg had reimagined the family film as a fast-paced, action-driven, spectacular and youth-oriented format, and Radnitz's films no longer fell within the prototypical definition of that genre. Of course, there were still sympathizers for Radnitz's more wholesomely naturalistic brand of cinema, but more

than ever, his films were minority-appeal entertainments. Their appeal had always rested centrally on their articulation of a highly specific set of values, and the qualities which had distinguished Radnitz throughout the 1960s – his challenge to Disney’s increasing hegemony in relation to the family market, his liberal agenda, and his focus on child protagonists – appeared rather less remarkable by the late-1970s, by which point North American mass entertainment was moving rapidly away from the ideological and stylistic elements his films encapsulated. Network television shows such as *Star Trek* (1966-69) managed to weave hopeful, optimistic visions of racial integration and social cohesion with mainstream appeal. While Radnitz remained a respected figure – later becoming a reliably outspoken elder statesman, always happy to provide reporters with a perceptively caustic evaluation of cinematic trends – his patented political progressiveness eventually became unremarkable. Whereas the films of his contemporaries Pal and Harryhausen can today be enjoyed for their spectacle and adventure, many of Radnitz’s films – laudable and even ground-breaking upon release – now appear, shorn of their contextual meanings, quaint and outmoded.

Disney, then, decisively won the battle of the family entertainers. In real terms, of course, Radnitz never presented any *real* threat to Disney’s dominance of the family market. It was a phony war. No shots were fired, except in the minds of hopeful onlookers. It is a testament to Disney’s resilience, its (sometimes belated) willingness to adapt to changing social mores and cultural trends, as much to its successful programs of diversification and expansion, that it has survived such blips as it experienced in the late-1960s and 1970s with its reputation and popularity intact. Its 1970s underperformance had less to do with ‘blowback’ than to a roster of uninspiring and old-fashioned films that prevented it (in Peter Krämer’s words) from ‘break[ing] out of the children’s ghetto’ and engaging with the youth-oriented mass audience. Corporately, however, it was a period of great expansion thanks to its non-filmic enterprises, such as Disneyland and, from 1971, Walt Disney World. But unlike Disney, Radnitz had no diversified corporate structure or established brand loyalty among the general public with which to rebound from a box office failure. By the time the Disney Company signalled its artistic renaissance with the successful release of *The Little Mermaid* (Ron Clements and Jon Musker, 1989), Radnitz had long since faded into the background. But it would be a pity if so talented, so creative, so courageous a producer were forgotten; or even if he were remembered merely as a test case through which a cultural historian may conclude, with glum resignation, that once again, Goliath slew David.

Notes

1. This essay will alternate between the generic terms ‘children’s film’ and ‘family film’, although I am drawn more to the latter. The two forms are partly discrete, largely overlapping, with the former implying greater diegetic emphasis on the child figure and greater appeal to the child spectator, and the latter signifying dual appeal to child and adult audiences. The family film, thus, is a broader category which encompasses the narrower children’s film category. Often, however, the genres are conflated, and the terms used interchangeably in popular discourses. Even Radnitz varied between the two terms when referring to his films, and my terminology in this essay reflects this imprecision in common usage.

2. The MPAA – Motion Picture Association of America, formerly the MPPDA – was formed by the major Hollywood film studios and producers to further their collective interests, while acting effectively as an engine of propaganda for the industry – a role it fulfils to this day. On Hollywood’s embrace of the family film during the 1930s, see Brown, “‘A Finer Type of Audience’: 1930s Hollywood and the Emergence of the ‘Family’ Film’.
3. On the aesthetic implications of the studio’s increasing reliance on xerography, see Chris Pallant, *Demystifying Disney: A History of Disney Feature Animation*.
4. Particularly disquieting in this regard was Laing’s *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, in which the family unit is seen as the potential locus of psychological instabilities, rather than nurturing cohesiveness.
5. George Pal was producer-director of *The Time Machine* (1960), *Atlantis: The Lost Continent* (1961), *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* (1962) and *7 Faces of Dr. Lao* (1964). Irwin Allen was producer-director of *The Lost World* (1960) and *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1961). Ray Harryhausen and Charles Schneer produced *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), *Mysterious Island* (1961), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), *First Men in the Moon* (1964), and *The Valley of Gwanji* (1969). On television, Ivan Tors produced *Flipper* (1964-67), *Daktari* (1966-69), and *Cowboy in Africa* (1967-68); Gerry Anderson produced *Stingray* (1964-65), *Thunderbirds* (1965-66), and *Captain Scarlet* (1967-68); and Irwin Allen produced *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1964-68), *Lost in Space* (1965-68), *The Time Tunnel* (1966-67), and *The Land of the Giants* (1968-70).
6. Although *Sounder* was the first major Hollywood family film centring on a black family unit – and I am excluding adult-orientated films such as Sirk’s *Imitation of Life* (1959) – an independent producer of ‘B’ movies, Harry M. Popkin, attempted to launch a series of films starring the Brown family. Only one film, the dubiously-titled *One Dark Night* (Leo C. Popkin, 1939), was ever produced.

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