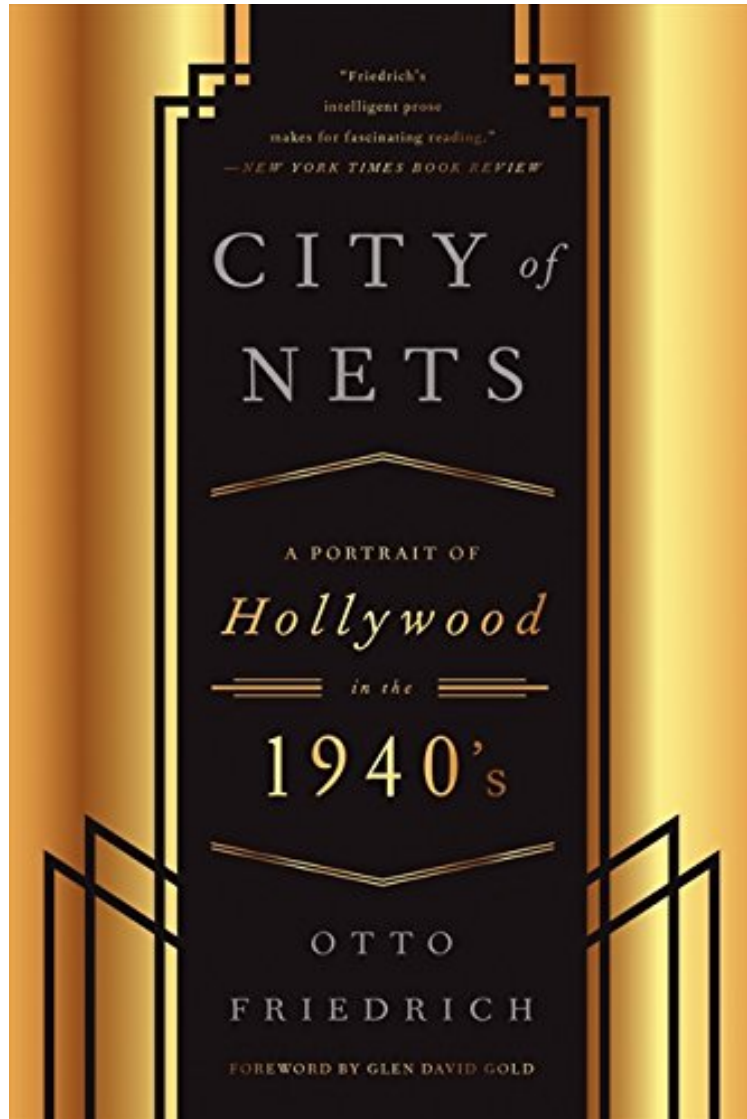


(Free) City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940's

## City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940's

*Otto Friedrich*

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**Otto Friedrich : City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940's** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940's:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. a compendium By Douglas McKeown Nothing new here, unless you've never read about Hollywood. The author himself says as much upfront. He also reminds us that most of the famous anecdotes come in many different versions, because these showbiz types are tall-tale-tellers, after all. But then

if he relates two of them, it is hard to know which is the more likely. In other words, he is not doing any real investigation for us. Okay, so we know what we're getting: no "new" interviews with surviving Hollywood people, no new and revealing research. That makes this book less compelling by far, but at least we're getting a sweeping survey of the decade's moviemaking in one tome, right? Sort of. I should point out there are some small errors of fact, such as details of what actually appears on the screen (!). The book was published before the explosion of restored films on VHS and DVD, so the author may have had to rely on memory. Not that facts matter in Hollywood. Anyway, if you crave entertainment in the form of a highly readable "sort of" history of a crazy but fascinating time and place, this book will serve. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. *The Underbelly of Hollywood's Golden Age* By Steve C. There's been much written about Hollywood in the 40s, most of it about its biggest stars. This very well-written volume digs below the surface and shows a different perspective: the wheel works behind the glittering machine the public got to see (and still gets to see on TCM). If you're looking for dirt on the stars, there's quite a bit of that here as well, but the author's focus is more political in nature. The Communist scare and the resulting blacklists (interesting) get a lot of pages, as does union labor unrest in the workers that aren't at the top of the film credits (less interesting to this reader), and the studio system's monopolizing practice of owning their own theaters and controlling exactly what (and who) the public got to see. The author admirably injects some high culture into the mix and the reader will see how some of the great composers and writers of the era fit in (usually not very well) with the world of Hollywood. There's a bit too much focus on, for instance, Bertolt Brecht for my tastes, but, hey, Friedrich forewarns you in his introduction that he's going to present a different picture than you're accustomed to reading. The writing is five-star all the way and Friedrich makes even the drier parts interesting, but I did find myself more interested when the focus shifted to the figureheads rather than the relatively peripheral figures. That's the only thing preventing me from giving *City of Nets* a perfect rating, and it's probably carping a bit. Truthfully, I've given higher ratings to books that intrigued me more but weren't nearly as well done as this gem. For that reason, I'm tempted to up my rating. Call it 4.5 stars, for now. But, oh, my, if there were a book of this quality and magnitude that focused more on the stars (a la *Hollywood Babylon*) I'd be downloading it now. By the way, if you're reading a digital copy, the footnotes provide interesting tidbits and are definitely worth reading (as annoying as it is to jump back and forth in the text on your Kindle). 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Excellent book on Hollywood By Banjo Friedrich was the editor (I think) of *Saturday Evening Post*, a fine magazine in its day, and his top-notch journalistic skills are in evidence. He wrote that he had read 500 books about Hollywood before sitting down to write his own, and the deep research shows. He unearthed such gems as the history of *The Maltese Falcon* written by Dashiell Hammett. It had two earlier versions, both flops. And then John Huston took a liking to it and picked Humphrey Bogart, then a B actor, to star in it over studio objections (they wanted Edward G. Robinson). Huston told a secretary to transcribe the novel. Misunderstanding, she put it in scenes and that is the way it was shot. The book abounds in these vignettes. Charlie Chaplin stole the idea for *The Dictator* and had to settle out of court for a princely sum -- there's another example. I heartily recommend this.

In 1939, fifty million Americans went to the movies every week, Louis B. Mayer was the highest-paid man in the country, and Hollywood produced 530 feature films a year. One decade and five thousand movies later, the studios were faltering. The 1940s became the decade of Hollywood's decline: anticommunist hysteria excommunicated some of its best talent, while a 1948 antitrust consent decree ended many of the business practices that had made the studio system so profitable. In this masterful work of cultural history, the legendary Otto Friedrich tells the story of Hollywood's heyday and decline in a vivid narrative featuring an all-star cast of the actors, writers, musicians, composers, producers, directors, racketeers, labor leaders, journalists, and politicians who played major parts in the movie capital during the turbulent decade from World War II to the Korean War. Friedrich draws on sources from celebrity biographies to trade-union history, mingling lively gossip with analysis of Hollywood's seedier business dealings and telling the stories of legendary movies such as *Citizen Kane*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Double Indemnity*, and *All About Eve*. A classic portrait of a special place in a special time, *City of Nets* gives us a singular behind-the-scenes glimpse into a bygone era that still captivates our imaginations.

.com The late Otto Friedrich enlivened the pages of many newspapers and magazines with his vigorous prose. His journalistic ability to convey complex material in a vivid, accessible manner is evident in *City of Nets*, a mordant portrait of Hollywood in the 1940s. (Originally published in 1986, it's the middle volume in a trilogy of superb urban histories that also includes *Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s* and *Olympia: Paris in the Age of Manet*.) Friedrich drew on his voluminous reading of everything from celebrity bios to trade-union history to create a unique synthesis that, for a change, depicts Tinseltown not as a dreamland floating above American reality, but as a city subject, like any other, to economic and political forces. Friedrich mingles enjoyable gossip with hardheaded analysis of Hollywood's often unsavory industrial underpinnings, including studio heads' willingness to rely on gun-wielding gangsters to solve their labor problems. There's no other movie book quite like it; Rita Hayworth's divorce proceedings against Orson Welles follow hard on the heels of a gruesomely detailed description of Bugsy Siegel's

execution. The '40s were the decade of Hollywood's decline: a blacklist prompted by anticommunist hysteria shut out some of its best talent, while a 1948 antitrust consent decree ended many of the business practices that made the studio system so profitable. Friedrich's brilliantly selective use of colorful anecdotes and revealing details perfectly captures a decaying, but still glamorous, culture. --Wendy SmithFrom Publishers Weekly

In 1939, when 50 million Americans went to the movies every week, Louis B. Mayer was the highest paid man in the country and Hollywood produced 530 feature films, among them *Gone With the Wind*, *Ninotchka*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Wizard of Oz*. A decade and 5000 movies later, the studios were tottering, Ingrid Bergman and Charlie Chaplin were exiled, the Hollywood Ten went to prison and millions were watching Milton Berle at home. What happened in those 10 years is as rich and colorful a story as can be imagined and Friedrich has more than done it justice this is his liveliest book since the popular *Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920's*, and certainly one of the best books ever written about Hollywood. Taking his title from Brecht's *Mahagonny*, that "city of nets" where everything is permitted, Friedrich tells the familiar story of Hollywood's heyday and decline as part of a sweeping social and cultural history that takes in everything from Rita Hayworth's electrolysis (to give her a higher hairline) to union corruption, the Zoot Suit riots, the gangster Bugsy Siegel inventing Las Vegas. He is particularly good on the European refugee community Mann, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Brecht, et al. who produced some of their most distinguished work while their neighbors turned out Betty Grable musicals, and whose encounters with the studio moguls are among the most richly comic moments in our cultural history (Schoenberg, asked to score a movie, told a startled producer he would have to control the dialogue as well, so the actors would "speak in the same pitch and key as I compose it in"). The moguls themselves, semiliterate, comfortable with racketeers but lusting for respectability (and in no way the "showmen" legend has made them) could be Preston Sturges characters. Friedrich avoids the cliché Goldwynisms, but has unearthed a good Disneyism: when Walt saw what the Fantasia animators had done to the "Pastoral" Symphony, he said, "Gee, this'll make Beethoven." Friedrich mixes all these elements (and more) in a narrative that is often funny and remarkably even-handed (e.g., his concise account of the HUAC hearings) a must for movie buffs and a rewarding read for everyone else. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal

In the foreword to his social history Friedrich freely admits that all the information in it has been published before, but he goes on to say that the book's value lies in the range of coverage: "If you already know a lot about Rita Hayworth, you may not know a good deal about Arnold Schoenberg, or vice versa . . . you may not know a good deal about Bugsy Siegel, or the aircraft industry, or Herbert K. Sorrell." Though subject specialists will not learn much new, and Friedrich has no keen insights to offer, his prose is very readable, and his book serves as a good introduction for those interested in this aspect of American social and cultural history. John Smothers, Monmouth Cty. Lib., Freehold, N.J. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc.