APOCALYPSE LATER

ZINE

ISSUE #3

APOCALYPSE LATER BOOKS
BY HAL C. F. ASTELL

FILM

Huh? An A-Z of Why Classic American Bad Movies Were Made
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ZINE

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Cultural References in Blazing Saddles

APOCALYPSE LATER ZINE #3

CULTURAL REFERENCES IN BLAZING SADDLES

BY HAL C. F. ASTELL

APOCALYPSE LATER

APOCALYPSE LATER PRESS
PHOENIX, AZ

Apocalypse Later Zine #3— December 2022
Cultural References in Blazing Saddles
ISBN-13: 978-1-961279-06-3
Apocalypse Later Press catalogue number: ALZ003

All text by Hal C. F. Astell.

Cover art is an edited screenshot from *Blazing Saddles* modified in Dream by Wombo.
https://dream.ai/

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Mel Brooks and everyone else involved with the creation of *Blazing Saddles*. It's still the most effective tool to spear racism by poking fun at it that the film industry has ever made.

And to the many YouTube reactors who have gone into this movie completely blind in a very different time. Thank you for your bravery and insight.

Hopefully I got everything right. If I didn't, all mistakes are mine, of course.

And what did I miss out? I'd love to hear about other cultural references in *Blazing Saddles* that I missed, even through research. I'm sure there are some. For instance, why is there a painting on Hedley Lamarr's office wall that only shows people's backs? What's a number 6 dance? Who's the unlucky patron of Grauman's Chinese Theater that Lamarr inadvertently sits on? (I know the voice is Brooks but the actor isn't). Do you know who the sweater guy is on Olive Ave.? Inquiring minds want to know.

Send your comments to me at hal@apocalypselaterempire.com.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Blazing Saddles is a film that pokes fun at racism by showing it in all its ugliness but in the context that racism is stupid and so racists are stupid. Therefore, it uses racial slurs that are not acceptable in a decent society. All such instances used here are direct quotes from the film, used with the same intent. Racism is stupid. Don't be a racist. Let's poke fun at it.

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WARNER BROS.


A MEL BROOKS FILM


BLAZING SADDLES

INTRODUCTION

Here's an odd issue of the *Apocalypse Later Zine*, as I settle into what I want to do with my issues about film. The impetus came out of a habit that I've fostered of watching YouTube reactions to *Blazing Saddles*, Mel Brooks's pioneering 1974 spoof on westerns.

The bottom line is that most reactors are young, in their twenties at most, and many are black. They tend to know nothing about the film going in and their reactions are often similar. They're quickly shocked by the casual cruelty and use of the N word, among other pejoratives, but find a fast grasp of the central drive of the film, that racism is idiotic and so racists are idiots, and end up loving it. One common statement is a variation on "they couldn't make this today", only for commenters to point out they couldn't make it in 1974 either but Mel Brooks did it anyway.

The more I watched these reactions, the more I realised that some of the humour remained as accessible half a century on—*Blazing Saddles* premiered on 7th February, 1974 and I'm publishing this in December 2022, not far away from its fiftieth anniversary—but some of it goes over their heads, including some running jokes. The most accessible humour tends to be the slapstick and the wordplay. The most dated humour tends to tie to cultural references.

Being much older than these reactors, I got a lot of those cultural references. However, I also realised that I was missing stuff too, partly because I was only three years old when it came out and partly because I'm not American and grew up with a different cultural heritage.

Two instances stuck out for me in particular and inspired me to create this zine. One reference was crystal clear and I should have seen it but it somehow went completely over my head; one of those young whippersnapper reactors caught it and I facepalmed. The other was a reference that both I and every reactor I've seen thus far has missed but which I stumbled into elsewhere.

The former is part of the infamous scene in which Bart arrives in Rock Ridge to assume duties as their new sheriff and Howard Johnson extends "a laurel and hardy handshake". I heard that as "hearty" so didn't catch the reference to Laurel & Hardy, one of the most iconic comedic double acts of all time and particular favourites of mine.

The latter happens when Mongo rides into town on a bull and a Hispanic character's only line in response is, "Mongo! Santa María!" I had no idea that was even a joke, but Mongo Santamaría was a famous Cuban percussionist. That joke is actually why Mongo is called Mongo.

So I started to tally up all the cultural references I could recognise, then dived into a lot of deep rabbit holes for the ones I thought might be but didn't recognise. This zine collates them all.

Now, I have no interest in explaining humour, because that's a fool's game. Things are funny or they aren't. All I'm going to do here is provide the cultural background to explain why things like that Mongo Santamaría joke are jokes. Whether you find them funny or not is up to you.

Let's suffice by saying that the point of the movie is to shoot 1974 in 1874 with an ending that unmistakably merges the two and move on from there. Enjoy.

— Hal C. F. Astell, December 2022



A Frankie Laine-Type

One important cultural note to get started with is that, while *Blazing Saddles* absolutely spoofs western tropes, those tropes weren't just from western movies, as we might expect. In the early days of television, westerns ruled the airwaves. By 1959, there were thirty western shows airing at prime time in the U.S. They faded away in the sixties, but didn't go away entirely until *Blazing Saddles* speared them so ruthlessly that they had no credibility left.

Frankie Laine sang the theme tunes to a number of these television westerns, such as *Rawhide*, *Rango* and *Gunslinger*, and so Mel Brooks wanted a Frankie Laine sounding singer to sing a Frankie Laine sounding theme song to *Blazing Saddles*. He even advertised in the trade papers for "Frankie Laine-types" and, to his surprise, Frankie Laine himself offered his services.

"Frankie sang his heart out," Brooks explained later, "and we didn't have the heart to tell him it was a spoof. He never heard the whip cracks; we put those in later. We got so lucky with his serious interpretation of the song." In fact, he was lucky enough that it was nominated for an Acadamy Award (see page 75).







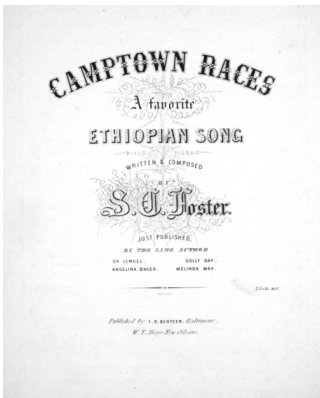
I Get a Belt Out of You

The song choices when Lyle is trying to goad the railroad workers into entertaining them are a great example of role reversal in racial expectations in music, as a pristine example of trolling the racists without them realising it.

Lyle wants them to sing "a good old nigger work song", so meaning something stereotypically black. Bart sings *I Get a Kick Out of You*, a Cole Porter song from the 1934 musical *Anything Goes*, so something stereotypically white, merely with a doo wop accompaniment.

It was first sung by Ethel Merman on Broadway and later by such singers as Frank Sinatra and Dolly Parton. Mel Tormé won a Grammy for it in 1996, in the Best Instrumental Arrangement with Accompanying Vocal(s) category. Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga's version was nominated for Record of the Year in 2022. Needless to say, all those artists are white. Black artists did sing it too, such as Ella Fitzgerald, but then it fell into the category of jazz, which was seen as a degenerate form of music entirely for black people.

Lyle, a racist white man, can't stand this beautiful rendition—"What the hell is that shit?"—and so asks for a "real song", citing two stereotypically black pieces of music: *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, an African-American spiritual, and *Camptown Races*, written by a white man, Stephen Foster, as a minstrel song, so sung by white singers in blackface.



Beyond the joke in altering "kick" in "I get a kick out of you" to "belt" to reflect working conditions on the railroads, there's also a timing joke here too, the first of many.

Bart sings "Some get a kick from cocaine" but that changed to "Some like the perfume in Spain" for a 1936 film adaptation of *Anything Goes*, because it was a drug reference and those were banned by the Production Code, which was enforced from 1934. Bart wouldn't know that, singing in 1874, and could sing the original lyrics in 1974, because the Production Code had fallen by the wayside in the late sixties. Unlike, say, actual racism.



Wide World of Sports

When Taggart rides up to interrupt Lyle and his men distracting the workers from doing their jobs, he cries, "What in the wide wide world of sports is a-goin' on here?"

That's such an anachronistic line for 1874 that I knew, even as a kid watching this for the first time somewhere back in the eighties, that this had to be a cultural reference, but I'm British so didn't get it at the time.



Wide World of Sports was a pioneering anthology sports program that aired on ABC from 1961 to 1998, an incredible thirty-seven seasons in all, making it a pivotal American experience for generations.

A quick success, it was franchised out to a string of other countries, including Canada, Australia and Mexico, and it made it to the UK in 1965, only to get a rename only six weeks later to just *World of Sport*, which is the name that I remember it being in the eighties when I was watching sports shows. I wasn't even a gleam in 1965.

I bumped into this show much later, when I was researching Andy Sidaris, the mastermind behind a series of "BBB-movies" in the eighties and nineties, like *Hard Ticket to Hawaii* (1987), BBB standing for either "Bullets, Bombs and Babes" or "Bullets, Bombs and Boobs".

He was the first director of *Wide World of Sports* and he remained in that role for a twenty-five year stint. He even won an Emmy in 1969 for directing ABC's coverage of the Summer Olympics a year earlier, *México 1968*.

Incidentally, it was at *Wide World of Sports* that he invented the "honey shot", a standard device today where, in moments where nothing interesting is happening in a sporting broadcast, the camera focuses briefly on a pretty girl in the audience to keep our attention.



My Grandmother Was Dutch

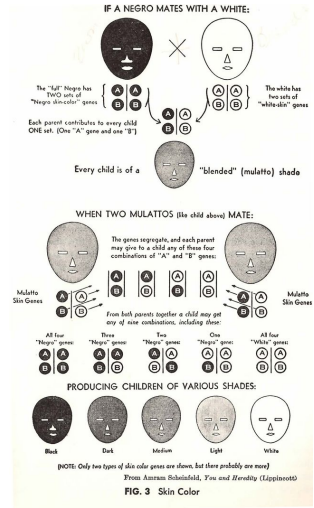
Because there might be quicksand ahead, Taggart asks Lyle to check it out. Famously, he says, "I can't afford to lose no horses, you dummy. Send over a couple of niggers."

Lyle chooses Bart and one of his colleagues to head down the rails on a handcar, but Bart tries to get out of it in memorable fashion: "Sir, he specifically requested two niggers. Well, to tell a family secret, my grandmother was Dutch."

That seems pretty straightforward as an instance of casual racism and a comment on the value of human life in 1874, as compared to the value of horses, but there's more going on.

There's a legal term called hypodescent, often called the "one drop rule". Put simply, if a person's ancestry had any amount, however small, of African blood, then they could also be legally classified as "black" and deemed worthy of fewer human rights than someone who was entirely white.

There was a whole structure built around this concept with dedicated terminology. A person with one white parent and one black parent was a "mulatto", meaning not that they were half white but that they were half black and so could be treated as such. Someone who was a quarter black was a "quadroon", an eighth black an "octoroon" and a sixteenth black a "mustee".



Of course, by this point, that's someone with fifteen white great-great-grandparents but one black one, meaning that they probably looked a lot more white than black and so could "pass" for white in any company. With hypodescent, that one drop of black blood meant legally inferior.

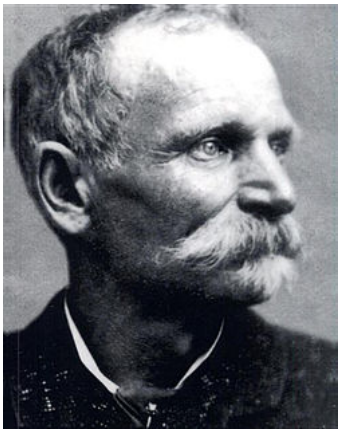
In this scene, Bart was therefore reversing the "one drop rule" to suggest that, while he might be three quarters black, he's also a quarter white, and so worthy of different categorisation.

Of course, because the whole point of hypodescent is to keep a subordinate group subordinate, this doesn't work out for him in the slightest.



Black Bart

Up until this point, the only names we've heard belong to white characters, like Taggart and Lyle, presumably deliberately to highlight how black characters were deemed less important.



It's when these two unnamed railroad workers discover quicksand that one of them starts to become important and so gains a name: "Bart? Am I wrong or is the world rising?"

This came from Black Bart, an early title for the film that referred not only to its lead character but also a 19th century highwayman. It became the title instead of a proposed TV show, *Black Bart* (1975) with Louis Gossett, Jr. in the lead role, that would serve as a theoretical sequel to *Blazing Saddles*.

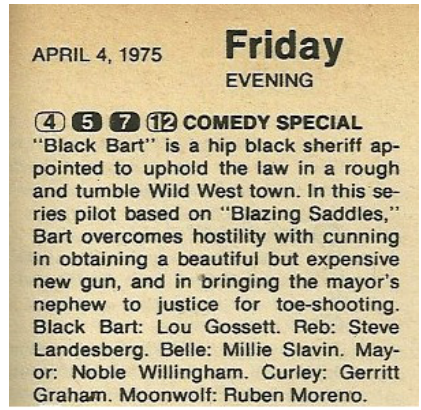
Charles E. Boles was born in England circa 1829, but moved to New York state with his family at the age of two. In 1849, he and his brothers felt the call of the Californian Gold Rush but failed to strike it rich near Sacramento, as he did later on his own in Idaho and Montana.

Particularly aggrieved with Wells, Fargo & Company, he became Black Bart and robbed at least twenty-eight of their stagecoaches in northern California between 1875 and 1883, making much more money doing that than he ever did prospecting for gold. He was eventually caught and sent to San Quentin for six years, but was released after four for good behaviour.

He also became famous for his poetry, even if he only left poems at two crime scenes, one of which reads rather like something that Mel Brooks might have written into a script:

I've labored long and hard for bread,
For honor, and for riches,
But on my corns too long you've tread,
You fine-haired sons of bitches.





APRIL 4, 1975 **Friday**
EVENING

4 5 7 12 **COMEDY SPECIAL**
"Black Bart" is a hip black sheriff appointed to uphold the law in a rough and tumble Wild West town. In this series pilot based on "Blazing Saddles," Bart overcomes hostility with cunning in obtaining a beautiful but expensive new gun, and in bringing the mayor's nephew to justice for toe-shooting. Black Bart: Lou Gossett. Reb: Steve Landesberg. Belle: Millie Slavin. Mayor: Noble Willingham. Curley: Gerritt Graham. Moonwolf: Ruben Moreno.

By the way, if you're wondering why you never saw the *Black Bart* television show, it's because it was never produced. What exists is a twenty-four minute pilot episode that was aired once on CBS, on 4th April, 1975, even though that was more than Mel Brooks wanted.

In fact, on the advice of his attorneys, he included a clause in his contract to avoid the studio making sequels without his involvement, which he could use to block them entirely:

> "My lawyers, bless their souls, came to me and said, 'Warner Bros. is going to try and take away your control of the movie. Let's put in a crazy condition that says they can't do any sequels unless they make it right away or make a TV show out of it within six months.' Which is brilliant. They couldn't make a sequel in six months, and the movie was too vulgar to be a TV show. Now it would air in family hour if that was still a thing. So the lawyers put that in, never thinking they'd make a TV show."

Of course, Warner Bros., with a hit movie on their hands, saw this very differently and chose to put a TV show into production quickly. Their goal was to shoot a six episode season during the winter break when most productions would be on break.

While there is discussion online about the studio having made multiple episodes of *Black Bart*, which they even showed to Mel Brooks, it seems that this was entirely false and all that was ever made was the pilot, which aired once but was not picked up for a full season and so the idea was never pursued further.

Source: *Black Bart* (Lost Media Wiki)
https://lostmediawiki.com/Black_Bart_(non-existent_unreleased_TV_sitcom_based_on_%22Blazing_Saddles%22_Western_comedy_film;_1975-1979)



This is 1874. You Can Sue Her!

One of the longest running jokes in *Blazing Saddles* is also one of the most frequently missed by younger reactors, namely the fact that nobody gets Hedley Lamarr's name right. This refers to Hedy Lamarr, an actress and inventor born in Vienna, then in Austria-Hungary, in 1914.

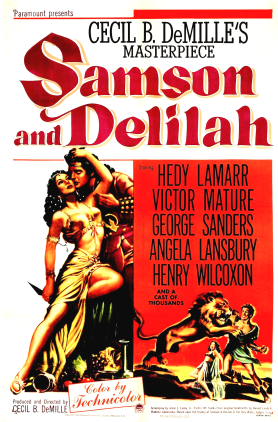
Hedwig Eva Maria Kiesler was born in Vienna in 1914, in what was then Austria-Hungary. She began her career in Austria, working as a script girl and then a bit part actor, under the name of Hedy Kiesler, including an early Peter Lorre film, *Die Koffer des Herrn O.F.*, or *The Trunks of Mr. O.F.*

Her breakthrough role was in *Extase* (1933), or *Ecstasy*, a Czechoslovakian film which became infamous for shooting her not only naked but also performing a simulated orgasm.

When she moved to the U.S., where she was signed by MGM, Louis B. Mayer renamed her to Hedy Lamarr, as an homage to a silent film star, Barbara La Marr, and promoted her as the "world's most beautiful woman".

She starred opposite Charles Boyer in *Algiers* (1938) and Clark Gable in *Boom Town* and *Comrade X* (both 1940), among others, in a career that lasted until 1958. Her largest role was as Delilah in *Samson and Delilah*, 1950's highest grossing film, directed by Cecil B. DeMille (see page 42).



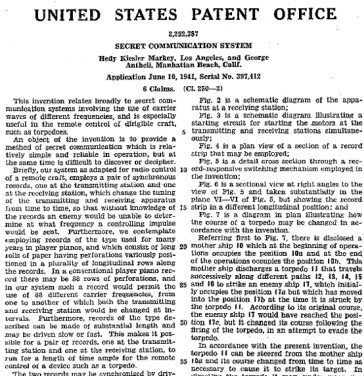




Today, she's remembered more as an inventor, who was primarily self-taught but designed and draughted a host of inventions, often in between takes on set. That's mostly because one of those inventions gained a second life in a completely different era.

During World War II, when she was married to her first of six husbands, Friedrich Mandl, who was an arms dealer and the third richest man in Austria, she designed and patented, along with a composer friend called George Antheil, a frequency hopping system that allowed radio control of torpedoes without them being jammed by the enemy. They obtained a patent for this technology.

A further refinement of this patent, known as AFH (adaptive frequency hopping), is now used in Bluetooth technology, which won Lamarr and Antheil the Electronic Frontier Foundation's Pioneer Award in 1997 and the pair induction into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in 2014.



UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE

2,292,387

SECRET COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Hedy Kiesler Markey, Los Angeles, and George Antheil, Manhattan Beach, Calif.

Application June 10, 1941, Serial No. 397,412

6 Claims. (Cl. 250—2)

This invention relates broadly to secret communication systems involving the use of carrier waves of different frequencies, and is especially useful in the remote control of dirigible craft, such as torpedoes.

An object of the invention is to provide a method of secret communication which is relatively simple and reliable in operation, but at the same time is difficult to discover or decipher.

Briefly, our system as adapted for radio control of a remote craft, employs a pair of synchronous records, one at the transmitting station and one at the receiving station, which change the tuning of the transmitting and receiving apparatus from time to time, so that without knowledge of the records an enemy would be unable to determine at what frequency a controlling impulse would be sent. Furthermore, we contemplate employing records of the type used for many years in player pianos, and which consist of long rolls of paper having perforations variously positioned in a plurality of longitudinal rows along the records. In a conventional player piano record there may be 88 rows of perforations, and in our system such a record would permit the use of 88 different carrier frequencies, from one to another of which both the transmitting and receiving station would be changed at intervals. Furthermore, records of the type described can be made of substantial length and may be driven slow or fast. This makes it possible for a pair of records, one at the transmitting station and one at the receiving station, to run for a length of time ample for the remote control of a device such as a torpedo.

The two records may be synchronized by driv-

Fig. 2 is a schematic diagram of the apparatus at a receiving station;

Fig. 3 is a schematic diagram illustrating a starting circuit for starting the motors at the transmitting and receiving stations simultaneously;

Fig. 4 is a plan view of a section of a record strip that may be employed;

Fig. 5 is a detail cross section through a record-responsive switching mechanism employed in the invention;

Fig. 6 is a sectional view at right angles to the view of Fig. 3 and taken substantially in the plane VI—VI of Fig. 5, but showing the record strip in a different longitudinal position; and

Fig. 7 is a diagram in plan illustrating how the course of a torpedo may be changed in accordance with the invention.

Referring first to Fig. 7, there is disclosed a mother ship 10 which at the beginning of operations occupies the position 10a and at the end of the operations occupies the position 10b. The mother ship discharges a torpedo 11 that travels successively along different paths 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 to strike an enemy ship 17, which initially occupies the position 17a but which has moved into the position 17b at the time it is struck by the torpedo 11. According to its original course, the enemy ship 17 would have reached the position 17c, but 15 changed its course following the firing of the torpedo, in an attempt to evade the torpedo.

In accordance with the present invention, the torpedo 11 can be steered from the mother ship 10a and its course changed from time to time as necessary to cause it to strike its target. In



There's a joke later in the film, when Hedley Lamarr corrects Governor Le Petomane, but the latter points out, "What are you worried about? This is 1874. You can sue her!"

In that context, it could be considered ironic that Hedy Lamarr did indeed sue Warner Bros., claiming that this running joke infringed on her right to privacy. Mel Brooks has said he was flattered and the studio settled out of court for "almost using her name".

Oh, and "State Procurer" means "State Pimp".



The Dr. Gillespie Killings

There's a lot going on in this scene, the most jarring anachronistic use of time in the movie, at least until the finalé, with the hangman outside Hedley Lamarr's office quite literally dressed in chain mail to highlight how the death penalty has always been mediaeval, even if it's still a thing in the U.S. to this day. The fact that Boris the hangman says that "every one is equal in my eye" jokes that the most overtly mediaeval character in the film is still one of the most progressive.

The first character we see with a rope around his neck is a distinguished gentleman who isn't given a name, but Lamarr identifies his case. "Yes, the Dr. Gillespie killings. Do your best."

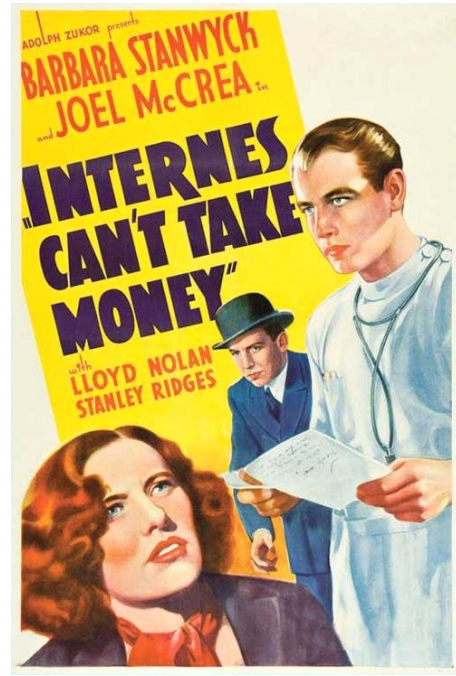
This refers to a series of films in the thirties spun off from the successful *Dr. Kildare* series. Dr. Kildare was a character created by prolific pulp author Frederick Schiller Faust as Max Brand. He first appeared in *Cosmopolitan* in 1936 and promptly moved to Hollywood for *Internes Can't Take Money* in 1937, with Joel McCrea as Dr. Kildare. MGM acquired the rights and turned it into a series with Lew Ayres as Dr. Kildare and Lionel Barrymore his mentor, Dr. Leonard Gillespie.

After nine movies, Ayres was drafted into the U.S. Army but declared himself a conscientious objector. He spent two months in a camp before being sent to the Pacific as a medic and chaplain's assistant, but the studios weren't happy so wrote him out of his own series. Film ten became *Calling Dr. Gillespie*, Barrymore's wheelchair-bound character became the focus for six movies and Dr. Kildare vanished without explanation.



Therefore Brooks was likely hinting that Gillespie might have gained the lead role in a series that were murder mysteries as well as hospital dramas by committing a prominent murder of his very own.

Paramount
Internes Can't Take Money (1937)



MGM (Dr. Kildare)
Young Dr. Kildare (1938)
Calling Dr. Kildare (1939)
The Secret of Dr. Kildare (1939)
Dr. Kildare's Strange Case (1940)
Dr. Kildare Goes Home (1940)
Dr. Kildare's Crisis (1940)
The People vs. Dr. Kildare (1941)
Dr. Kildare's Wedding Day (1941)
Dr. Kildare's Victory (1942)

MGM (Dr. Gillespie)
Calling Dr. Gillespie (1942)
Dr. Gillespie's New Assistant (1942)
Dr. Gillespie's Criminal Case (1943)
Three Men in White (1944)
Between Two Women (1945)
Dark Delusion (1947)







Lady Justice



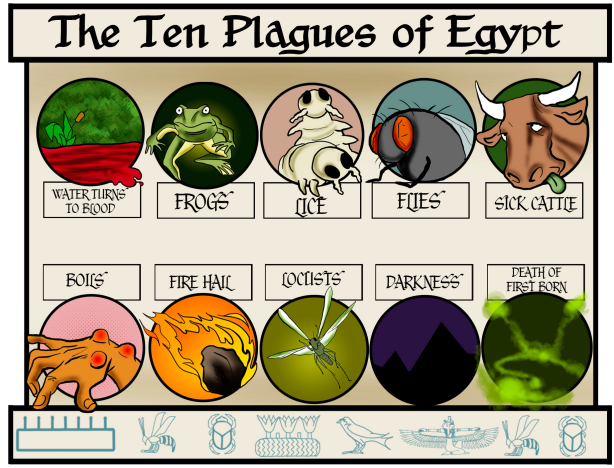
Reactors tend to seem uncomfortable watching Hedy (that's Hedley!) Lamarr get all sexual at the thought of getting rich by stealing land that rightfully belongs to other people. "When that railroad goes through Rock Ridge, that land will be worth millions and I want it! I want that land so badly, I can taste it!"

What many of them miss, amid all the other jokes in this scene, is that the statue that Harvey Korman fondles is Lady Justice, so highlighting that, as the Attorney General, Lamarr is quite happy to see justice as something to be abused for his own desires.

Lady Justice derives from Iustitia, the Roman goddess of Justice, but the personification of justice goes back to ancient Egypt and a goddess called Maat, who used scales to balance a person's heart against the feather of truth.



Too Jewish



When suggesting how to empty Rock Ridge, Taggart suggests that "We'll kill the first born male child in every household."

Lamarr responds, "Too Jewish."

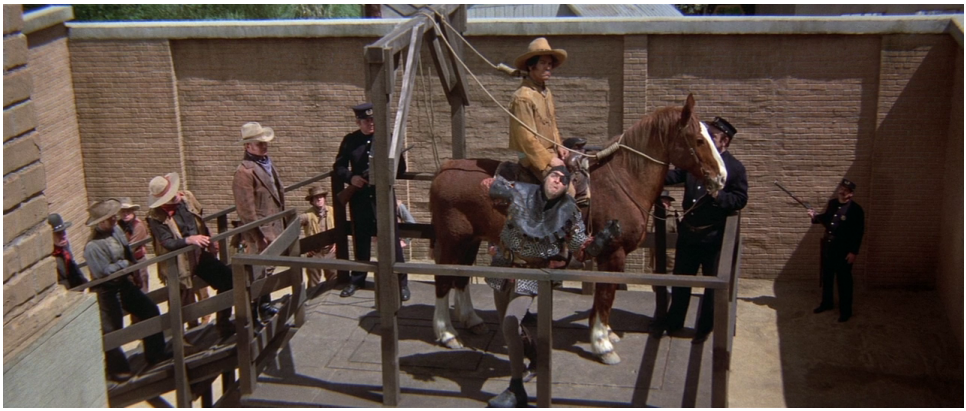
This refers to the ten plagues of Egypt, sent by the Jewish god to convince the Pharaoh to free the Israelites from bondage. The tenth and last of these plagues was the death of the firstborn son, detailed in Exodus 11:1-12:36, in which the firstborn sons of every household in Egypt would be killed, except those in households marked with the blood of a lamb, as God told Moses that so that he'd pass over them without action. This is remembered today in the Jewish holiday of Pesach or Passover.



A Number 6

Taggart's final suggestion is to "work up a Number 6 on them", explaining that it's when "we go a-ridin' into town, a-whoppin' and a-whoompin' every living thing that moves within an inch of its life". The name stems from how they treat the women. "You spare the women?" Lamarr asks him. "Naw, we rape the shit out of them at the Number 6 Dance later on."

This has to be a reference but, if it is, I haven't figured it out. Everything I can find on Number 6 dances refers back to Blazing Saddles. So am I missing something here? Answers on the back of a postcard to the usual address...



What Did the Horse Do?

This is a continuation of the previous scene with Boris the hangman, but a common response by YouTube reactors is to wonder what the horse might have done to warrant it being hanged alongside its rider. The short answer is that we don't know, so I may well be reaching here.

One possibility is that the horse is brown, a suggestion that may be more obvious nowadays than in 1974. A current phrase is that minorities are arrested or even killed for "walking while brown", so maybe the horse was simply walking while brown while its rider was arrested.

Another is that this is simply a "hung like a horse" joke, presaging more overt later examples. "They said you was hung!" "They was right!" And, of course, "Is it twue what they say about how you people are... gifted? It's twue! It's twue!" I'd lean towards this as the real reason.

The least likely is the literal take, though there is precedent. Thomas Edison was against capital punishment for humans but saw animals as fair game, killing many of them, initially stray cats and dogs but later horses, cows, gorillas, even an orangutan, in public demonstrations of the danger of alternating current, or AC, which was a competing technology to his direct current, or DC. This had no scientific justification, because both AC and DC have their different uses, but it was a way for him to associate the opposition with death and danger in the minds of the public.

Even though what has become known as the War of Currents was over by 1903, he wrapped up this sad episode in history by electrocuting Topsy, an elephant condemned to death for killing its abusive owner, an act he documented in a short film that year, *Electrocuting an Elephant*.



The reason I mention this is because he was originally planning for Topsy to be hanged, but he was forced to change that plan by the ASPCA.

So, if this isn't an observation or a dick joke and it aims to highlight a barbaric act in ridiculous fashion, like most of the film, it's a barbaric act with precedent.



Do Not Forsake Me, Oh My Darling

When we're returned to Rock Ridge, we're cleverly introduced to what's going on there using the lyrics of a song, starting with:

There was a peaceful town called Rock Ridge
Where people lived in harmony.

Here's another reference that I didn't see until much later, because the tune used is very close indeed to that of *High Noon*, the theme tune to the film of that name (1952), another western that focused on a brave sheriff facing down the bad guys threatening a small town. Its lyrics begin:

Do not forsake me oh my darling
On this our wedding day.



This song became a hit for Tex Ritter but was recorded by many other country singers, including Frankie Laine (see page 12). The lyrics vary across versions, but the version on the soundtrack is a story song just like this, the second verse starting "The noonday train will bring Frank Miller."

Of course, Mel Brooks, who wrote much of the music in this film, wrapped it up memorably with the entire congregation of the church singing:

There's no escaping this conclusion;
Our town is turning into shit.



The Orange Roof on Howard Johnson's Outhouse



Here's another reference I missed due to being English. I did recognise Howard Johnson's as an American chain of hotels and motels, but I didn't know its origins.

It began as a pharmacy in Wollaston, Massachusetts, the brainchild of Howard Deering Johnson. He soon discovered that his soda fountain was the busiest and most profitable part of the store, so focused on that. His ice cream was high in butterfat, so more flavourful than competitors, so he expanded his range to include 28 flavours and that became his trademark.

That was 1925, so Brooks's joke here is to set Howard Johnson's Ice Cream Parlor in 1884, with a trademark of "1 Flavor". Its orange roof, highlighted in dialogue later in the film, was another unofficial trademark of Howard Johnson's restaurants.

There's an irony here because, when the Supreme Court struck down segregation in schools in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (see page 44), it didn't vanish elsewhere and Howard Johnson's restaurants were one prominent location that continued to maintain a "whites only" mindset.

In fact, after an international incident was sparked by a Howard Johnson's restaurant in Dover, Delaware refusing service to the finance minister of Ghana, Komla Agbeli Gbedemah, an incident that prompted a public apology from then president Dwight Eisenhower, a string of protests and sit-ins were staged at Howard Johnson's in many states by the Congress of Racial Equality.



This "whites only" policy wasn't ditched until 1962, when they issued a statement, co-crafted with CORE and the NAACP, that condemned racial segregation and ending it in its restaurants.



Cattle Call

There are cattle in the Rock Ridge saloon, which is a joke on "cattle call" being an audition that is open to any actors, regardless of whether they're in a union or not. Why not have cattle show up to a cattle call in 1874, especially as the Screen Actors Guild wasn't founded until 1933?

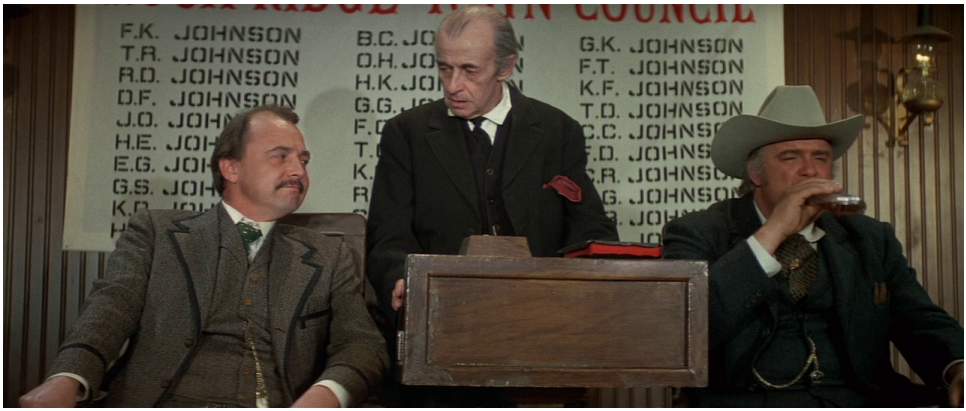


Now, Who Can Argue with That?

The character of Gabby Johnson, who speaks "authentic frontier gibberish" is a deliberate riff on the many grizzled sidekick characters with a penchant for backwoods slang who were played by character actor George Francis Hayes, ironically articulate and well-groomed in real life.

He was a successful vaudevillean who retired in 1928 at the early age of 43. However, he lost all his savings in the 1929 stock market crash, so tried his luck instead in films, moving to Hollywood with his wife and stage partner Dorothy and finding a new career. He created a niche, appearing alongside Roy Rogers in forty-four films, Gene Autry in seven and Wild Bill Elliott in fourteen.

Most of these characters were called Gabby, most frequently Gabby Whittaker but also Gabby Blackstone, Gabby Hornaday, Gabby Chapman, Gabby Kendrick and even Gabby Hayes.



Johnson & Johnson (& Johnson)

Howard Johnson and Gabby Johnson aren't the only Johnsons in Rock Ridge. In fact, we've seen already that everyone in town, including everyone on the town council, is named Johnson, a historical reference to the fact that emigrants to the U.S. during the expansion west were often Scandinavian and made up of entire families. Most, of course, are references to other famous Johnsons, and we meet a lot of them during the scene in church after the troubles started.

Olson Johnson is a reference to Olsen and Johnson, an anarchic comedy double act from days in vaudeville in the teens through movies in the thirties to radio in the fifties. Their pinnacle may be a stage show that became a movie, *Hellzapoppin'* (1941), which is as anarchic and pioneering as *Blazing Saddles*, but released over thirty years earlier.



Dr. Samuel Johnson, of course, refers to the versatile writer best known today for *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).

Van Johnson was an actor and major box office star in the forties and fifties, perhaps best known for *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944) and *The Caine Mutiny* (1954).

Harriett Van Johnson is another nod to Van Johnson but surely Harriet C. Johnson as well, an educator and suffragist who became the first female member of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America.

Anal Johnson, the bartender, is probably just a rude joke that "he always kept things nice and clean" while simultaneously being a double entendre for butt sex.

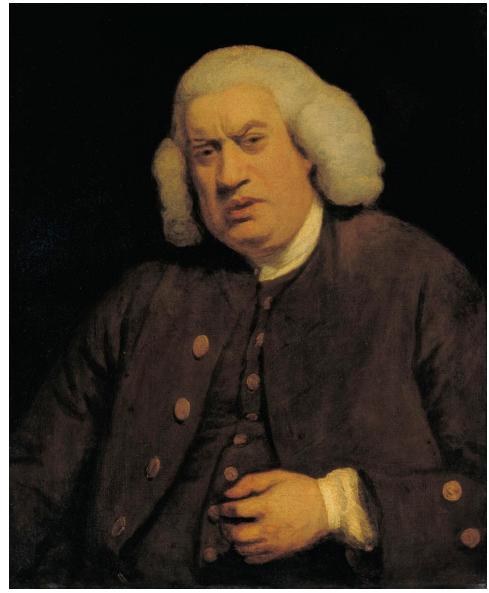
Others can be found on storefronts across the town, including Johnson & Johnson Groceries, surely a nod to the drug company Johnson & Johnson, founded in 1886 in New Brunswick, New Jersey.



Johnson & Johnson







top left: Olsen & Johnson
top right: Van Johnson
bottom left: Harriet C. Johnson
bottom right: Dr. Samuel Johnson



Fought Dicks

Another rude joke is actually two jokes in one, set up and then partially explained during Olson Johnson's impassioned speech. "What are we made of?" he asks the assembled townsfolk. "Our fathers came across the prairies, fought Indians, fought drought, fought locusts, fought dicks..."

Of course, they didn't fight dicks. They fought Dix. "Remember when Richard Dix came in here and tried to take over this town?"

Richard Dix was an American actor who worked often in westerns. In fact, he was one of the first actors to be nominated for an Oscar for acting in a western, as Best Actor for 1931's *Cimarron*, certainly the first western to win Best Picture, though he lost to Lionel Barrymore (see page 20) for *A Free Soul* . His career spiralled downhill due to alcoholism and he died young at only 56.

Incidentally, Fort Dix was a real Army post, albeit one located outside of Trenton, New Jersey, so hardly west. It was founded in 1917, named for Major General John Adams Dix, an army veteran and New York governor. It merged in 2009 with other facilities of the Air Force and Navy to become the rather unwieldy Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. When touring army bases during World War II, Corporal Mel Brooks played there.



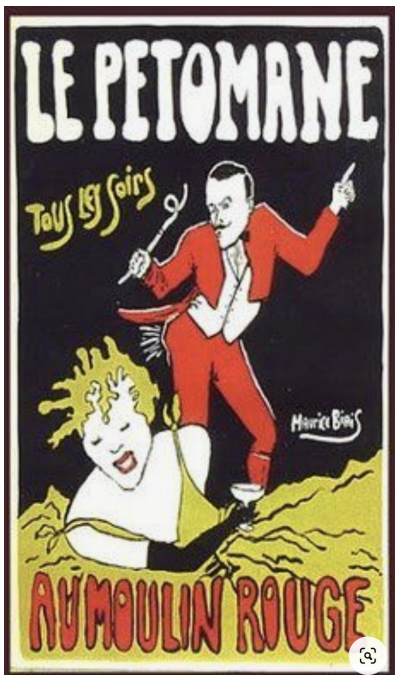




Le Pétomane

The first of three roles for Mel Brooks is Governor William J. Le Petomane, which is at least one joke and possibly two, if we stretch a little and see William as a Bill joke, given how many he signs for his attorney general without having a clue what any of them are for.

The definite one is the surname, which with an accent, Le Pétomane, was the stage name of a singular Victorian performer, Joseph Pujol, whose particular talent was to control his abdominal muscles to an extreme degree, allowing him to fart at will. He was a professional flatulist, if you can believe that, and his stage name translates to "fartomaniac".



This might seem like a very odd niche to occupy but he was a huge star in France who performed on grand stages like the Moulin Rouge and to royalty, audiences who were amazed that he could play *La Marseillaise* on an ocarina using wind he generated through a rubber tube inserted into his anus.

The point, of course, is that the governor is both full of hot air and used to talking out of his arse.





A Box of These

When Hedley Lamarr presents a bill to the governor that will enable them snatch two hundred thousand acres of Indian territory "which we have deemed unsafe for their use at this time", Le Petomane asks him, "What'll it cost, man? What'll it cost?"

The reply is a box of paddle balls, a ridiculous notion that's a clear nod to the famous sale of Manhattan Island for a bundle of beads. Of course, reality is not quite that simple.



The purchaser was Peter Minuit, on behalf of the Dutch West India Company, who sent him to their New Netherland colony, which he served as director and governor. He would have seen this in the way we would see it today, as an exchange of goods for land.

However, the sellers were the Lenape, the indigenous people in the area at the time, who were utterly unfamiliar with European concepts of ownership rights and didn't believe that nature, in the form of water, air or land, could be sold, rendering the exchange either meaningless or a form of ritual. As researchers at the National Library of the Netherlands pointed out, "It can be concluded that both parties probably went home with totally different interpretations of the sales agreement."

Also, the "beads" were wampum, a shell bead used by the Eastern Woodlands tribes in myriad ways, including as a means of exchange. Early colonists understood it to be a currency and used it when trading with the locals. After they used technology to produce it more cheaply, they caused its obsolescence as a currency.



Give the Governor a Harrumph!

I've long wondered about the scene where Governor Le Petomane actively solicits harrumphs from his audience for an impromptu speech and even complains, "I didn't get a harrumph out of that guy!", who promptly complies.

That's because, while "harrumph" is a word usually given a political context, it's actually just a pompous and old fashioned way to disapprove of something. In other words, the governor isn't seeking approval for his speech, he's seeking disapproval.

Then again, he's so inept at everything else, that it makes sense that he be inept at that too.



In Lieu of Pay

Another term mentioned here is "in lieu of", meaning "without". When the governor suggests, "Why don't you give these out to some of the boys in lieu of pay?", that means he's extending his theft of Native American territory to theft of his own employee's wages. That's even more ironic given that their names—Frankie, Johnny, Patsy and Kelly—all sound like stereotypical gangsters, the sort of people typically paid to do this sort of thing to other people.



Walking the Parapet

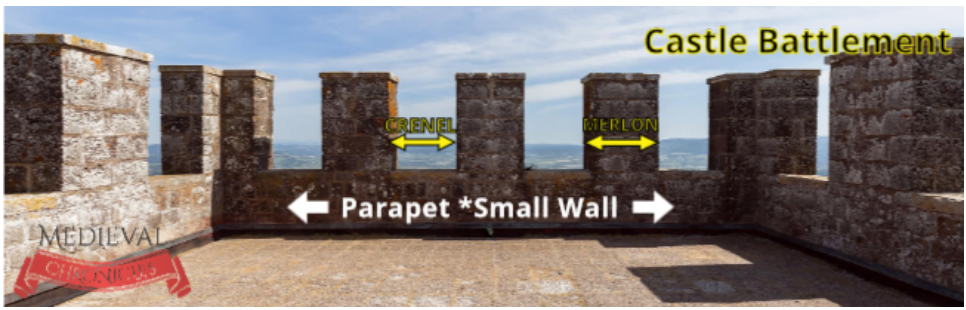
Here's one that became something of a rabbit hole for me because I was surprised to find that there was so little easily available to explain it, but what I found only made the joke work better.

Obviously, when the governor emerges from behind his thick curtains, apologetically telling Hedley Lamarr and his unusual choice for Sheriff of Rock Ridge, "Forgive me. I was just walking the parapet, taking a look around", he's offering a weak excuse, especially given that they'd just heard him telling his secretary to "Throw something on and stay in that position!"

However, I was convinced that this was an old cliché that went back to Victorian stage farces, historical dramas or period romances, involving lecherous characters in and out of each other's bedrooms via the parapets outside, and I was surprised to find no evidence for any of that.

Certainly, "parapet" as a term goes back to the 1580s and means a low wall, quickly becoming a low wall located on the edge of a structure to stop people from falling off it, which is particularly important if the structure is something as large as a castle.

However, "parapet" itself comes from the Italian word "parapetto", "para" meaning defence and "petto" meaning breast. In other words, a parapet is a defensive wall that reaches to breast height, but that turns into a wonderful joke in *Blazing Saddles*, because it means that Le Petomane, in lying about doing something that he obviously wasn't, may have accidentally told the truth. He was certainly taking a look around and that look would likely have involved "pettos", though it's Miss Stein who probably needed "para".



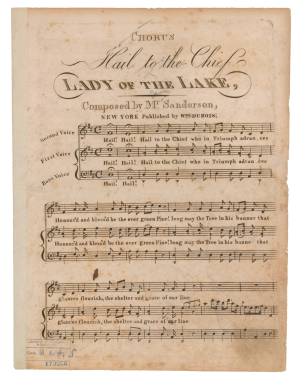


Four Score and Seven Years

There's lots of history in this scene, in which Hedley Lamarr persuades the governor to become "the first man to ever appoint a black sheriff", and much of it is pretty obvious to Americans, but it may not be so to the wider audience.

When he's comparing Le Petomane to former presidents, Lamarr starts with Washington and Jefferson, but Bart throws out "Lincoln!" That's telling in this context, because both the founding fathers were slave owners, while Lincoln, who wasn't a slave owner, freed the slaves.

George Washington inherited ten slaves from his father and bought others, while Martha, his wife, inherited 84 more from her first husband. When he died in 1799, Washington owned 123 slaves, though he also left directions in his will to free them. While Thomas Jefferson was anti-slavery, he also owned more slaves than any other president, 600 across his lifetime, though he bought fewer than 20, also inheriting most of them from his father and father-in-law. Only six of the first eighteen presidents didn't own slaves.



When Lamarr mimics striking up the band, he's "playing" *Hail to the Chief*. This was originally a welcome to Roderick Dhu, the chief of Clan Alpine, when James Sanderson adapted Sir Walter Scott's narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake* to music. That was 1810 but, five years later, it was associated with the American president when it was played to honour George Washington and the end of the War of 1812. It was played at Martin Van Buren's inauguration in 1837 and many more since. Ironically, it was used to announce Confederate President Jefferson Davis in 1861.

When Le Petomane launches into a speech, it isn't his own. It's the beginning of the Gettysburg Address, the most famous speech given by President Abraham Lincoln, telling given the context, as that the original was delivered during the American Civil War, which was fundamentally about the ability to own slaves. True to form, he doesn't quote it properly.



Gucci Saddlebags

This may be the most accessible cultural reference in all of *Blazing Saddles*, because Gucci is well known as a luxury brand. Of course, it's an anachronism, playing into the 1974 in 1874 mindset of the film, because Guccio Gucci didn't found the Italian fashion house in Florence until 1921 and, as far as I'm aware, it never produced saddlebags for western sheriffs.

It's harder to define why it's there, but it's a way to highlight status. Until this point, Bart has been dressed like nobody special, because to the world he hasn't been anybody special. He's been a railroad worker, a prisoner waiting to be hanged and an appointee expected to die in a day. At this point, he's somebody, the first black sheriff, and he and his horse are dressed accordingly.







April in Paris

One of the more surreal moments in *Blazing Saddles* that confuses reactors is a live band in the desert performing a theme tune for Sheriff Bart.

William James Basie, nicknamed Count to rank alongside Earl Hines and Duke Ellington, formed the Count Basie Orchestra in 1935 and led it for over fifty years, as the epitome of the swing era.

The music is *April in Paris*, which was written by Vernon Duke for the 1933 Broadway musical *Walk a Little Faster*, but which was performed and recorded by many artists as a jazz standard.

The Count Basie Orchestra famously recorded it in 1955 for an album of the same name, with a *Pop Goes the Weasel* solo by trumpeter Thad Jones, and that version is in both the Grammy Hall of Fame and on the JNR 108.5 fictional jazz radio station in the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV*.









A Laurel and Hardy Handshake

Ah yes, this one, the one I should have got all along but somehow completely missed.

While the townsfolk are eagerly awaiting the arrival of their new sheriff, Howard Johnson has a speech to rehearse: "As honorary chairman of the welcoming committee, it is my privilege to extend to you a laurel and hardy handshake."

Visually, it's obvious the two are different things. The laurel is a traditional laurel wreath with "welcome" attached on a ribbon. The hardy handshake is a personal equivalent, a firm welcome. Of course, neither Howard Johnson nor the people of Rock Ridge know that their sheriff is black yet and, when that becomes obvious, the "Welcome Sheriff" banner is notoriously rolled up.

Put together, Laurel and Hardy are one very famous thing, one of the greatest comedy double acts in American film history, masters of slapstick. Of course, they weren't always one thing.



Stan Laurel (born Arthur Stanley Jefferson) was a British comedian who had appeared in over fifty films, with further writing and directing credits. Oliver Hardy (born Norvell Hardy) was an American comedian who had appeared in over two hundred and fifty films. They had even both appeared in the same 1921 short, *The Lucky Dog*, but not together.

They became a double act in 1927 for a Hal Roach short, *Putting Pants on Philip*, and continued as one for a quarter of a century, until the 1950 French-Italian feature called *Atoll K*.

They made 107 films together: 32 silent shorts, 40 sound shorts and 23 feature films, including such highly regarded gems as *Sons of the Desert* (1933) and *Babes in Toyland* (1934), an American Christmas TV mainstay.

They won an Oscar for *The Music Box* (1932), arguably their best film, which involved delivering a heavy piano up a long flight of steps, now a popular Hollywood film location.

Most are extant and easily found today. Go watch them. Trust me.









Isn't Anyone Going to Help That Poor Man?

I'll skip past Bart's famous line, "Excuse me while I whip this out", cleverly followed by screams and then disappointed sighs, because that should be obvious. See schnitzengrüben (see page 61).

Instead, I'll highlight a detail from the scene in which Bart assumes the office of sheriff of Rock Ridge that every reactor I've seen thus far has missed, caught up as they are in the surreal sight of him escaping the townsfolk's guns by pulling one on himself. It's rooted in the fact that a black man in a position of power is a clear and present threat to the way of life for "white godfearing citizens" but a black man who's weak and pleading for his life is someone for "good Christian folk" to pity and help. And that extends to how black people were seen in the movies.

While there were black filmmakers like Oscar Micheaux making black films with black actors, they weren't widely seen by the American public. For decades, almost the only opportunities for black actors were in certain stereotypical roles: lazy workers like porters or elevator boys who roll dice rather than do their jobs; wide eyed sidekicks scared of their own shadows; and maids.

Below are four highly talented actors who rarely got real opportunities: Willie Best, credited as Sleep n' Eat for his first six roles to tie into studio publicity about his goals in life; Stepin Fetchit (really); Hattie McDaniel; and Mantan Moreland. McDaniel won an Oscar for *Gone with the Wind* but was not invited to the film's premiere in Atlanta due to Georgia's segregation laws (see page 38); and only got into the awards ceremony, in the Cocoanut Grove nightclub at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, notably a "no blacks" venue, when David Selznick called in a favour, and even then was required to sit in a separate section to her white colleagues.





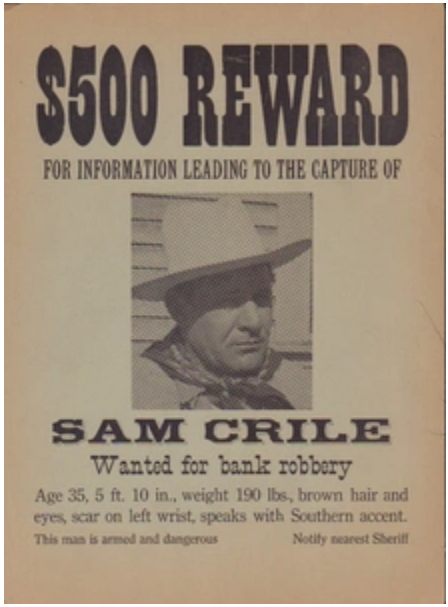



Wanted: Leo Courey and Sam Crile

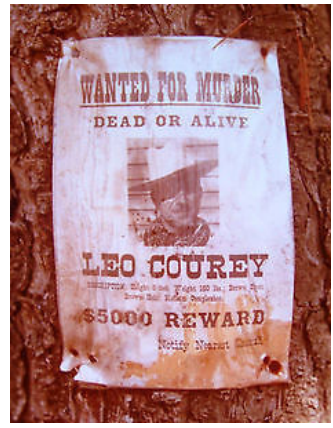
I had a feeling that Leo Courey and Sam Crile, the bank robbers featured on the wanted posters in Sheriff Bart's office, were going to be cultural references but it seems not.

Research highlights these posters may be merely studio props that were reused whenever the need arose, even venturing beyond the movies, given that an updated version of the Leo Courey poster (offering $5000 rather than merely $500) was listed on eBay as Disney memorabilia, having come from the Mine Train Through Nature's Wonderland within the Frontierland attraction at Disneyland, which was replaced in 1977 by the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad.

The Leo Courey poster seems to have been previously used in the western *Rio Lobo* (1970) and an earlier western parody, *Support Your Local Sheriff!* (1969), no doubt amongst many others.



The Sam Crile poster seems to have been used in the western TV shows *The Rifleman* and *Gunsmoke*.



It's not known who either of the people depicted in these images actually are.



I Must Have Killed More Men Than Cecil B. DeMille

When the Waco Kid ("most people call me... Jim") is explaining his back story to Sheriff Bart, he mentions that he was such a legendary quick draw gunfighter that "It got so every pissant prairie punk who thought he could shoot a gun would ride into town to try out the Waco Kid," adding that "I must have killed more men than Cecil B. DeMille."

There are multiple levels to this joke and it's not entirely sure which Mel Brooks was going for.



Certainly it's a meta thing, given that the Kid, who's talking in 1874, could not have heard of Cecil B. DeMille, who was born in 1881. DeMille was a pioneering Hollywood film director, who made one of the first features to ever be shot in Hollywood, *The Squaw Man* (1914), which was coincidentally a western featuring an interracial love story.

The Golden Globe given for lifetime achievement is named for him and he was also its first winner, in 1952.

However, there are two further details that are likely more pertinent.

The most obvious is that he was noted for his epic films, in which a huge amount of extras were needed to die on screen in spectacular scenes.

For instance, in both of his versions of *The Ten Commandments* (1923, 1956), Moses closes the Red Sea on the armies pursuing the Israelites, drowning them all.



The other is that people actually died or were seriously injured on DeMille sets.

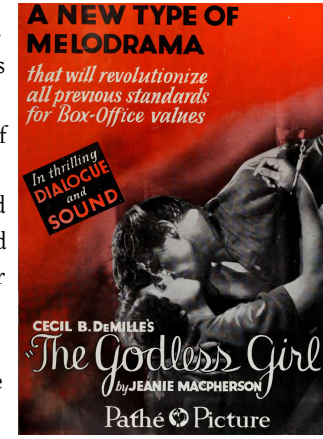
Lina Basquette was seriously burned in *The Godless Girl* (1929).

Four stunt riders were seriously injured and all their horses euthanised after a fall into a moat in *The Crusades* (1935).

Nine extras were burned on *Unconquered* (1947), because of the use of flaming arrows and real fireballs.

And, most tellingly, Charles Chandler was shot in the head and killed on *The Captive* (1915), after live ammunition was used in a scene for realism but not properly replaced with blanks for the next shot with actors.

Of course, this sort of thing wasn't particularly rare in the early years of Hollywood, when regulations were looser and the safety measures built into stuntwork more primitive.













Well, Not Exactly Part of It

There are a couple of scenes that surprise me in YouTube reactions, one because reactors tend not to notice it (but I did) and the other because they do (but I didn't). See page 55 for the latter.

The first takes place during the flashback to Bart and his family as part of a "long wagon train moving west" in 1856. "Well, not exactly part of it. You might say we was bringing up the rear."

I thought this was a relatively obvious segregation joke, but reactors seem to be too young for that to register. The races were systematically segregated across the U.S. for much of its history. This was legally reinforced by *Dred Scott v. Sandford* in 1857, in which the Supreme Court found that black people couldn't be citizens and therefore weren't eligible for civil rights, and by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 which enforced the concept of "separate but equal", but, as far back as 1832, Prudence Crandall was jailed for admitting a black girl to a white school. In Connecticut.





Frankly, the idea of a black wagon being segregated from white wagons, to the degree that it had to form its own protective circle against the entire Sioux nation ("Naturally the white folks didn't let us travel in their circle, so we made our own") is no more ludicrous than segregation in any other form.

See Komla Agbeli Gbedemah on page 26, Hattie McDaniel on page 40, Jesse Owens on page 73... ad infinitum.

The U.S. Armed Forces were segregated for both world wars, not becoming integrated until 1948. Schools remained segregated until 1954. Rosa Parks famously ignored segregation on Montgomery buses in 1955. In fact, segregation didn't end officially until 1964 with the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

I guess the lack of reaction to this speaks to how far the U.S. has come with regards to race relations, even if it might not seem that way.


EXTRA — By Executive Order

PRESIDENT TRUMAN WIPES OUT SEGREGATION IN ARMED FORCES

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Executive Order No. 1

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Under 'States' Rights'

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FIRST TIME IN BALTIMORE!

HEAR!— MRS. ROSA PARKS

Whose arrest, because she refused to be segregated, led to the Bus Boycott in Montgomery, Alabama.

BALTIMORE BRANCH N.A.A.C.P.

KICK-OFF MASS MEETING

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 1956 - 3 P.M.

SHARP STREET METHODIST CHURCH

Dolphin and Etting Streets





Redface

Oh, there's a lot here to unpack, as talk show hosts would say nowadays.

For one, that's Mel Brooks playing the Sioux chief, in his second of three roles in the film. The first, of course, was as Governor William J. Le Petomane (see page 31). The third is as an unnamed aviator waiting in line to be hired to destroy Rock Ridge later in the movie (see page 68).

This one is an an example of "redface", because Brooks is a white actor who's playing a Native American character, even though many Native American actors would have been available. This is equivalent to "blackface" and "yellowface", exactly the same thing but for other races.

This was a routine practice in Hollywood for decades and continues to this day, albeit far less often than it used to be. Most obviously, if a Native American character was a leading role, then it would be given to a white actor, but if it was a supporting or background role, then any "exotic" actors would be cast, which is why so many Mexicans played Native Americans and vice versa.

Below are Richard Barthelmess as Chief Joe Thunder Horse in *Massacre* (1934), Burt Lancaster as Massai in *Apache* (1954) and Johnny Depp as Tonto in *The Lone Ranger* (2013).





Zayt Nisht Meshuge!

For another, while Mel Brooks playing a Native American, he's also playing him as thoroughly Jewish. Here's a transcription of his words, mostly Yiddish, to Bart's family, with a translation:

> Schvartzes! No, no, zayt nisht meshuge. Loz im geyn! Khap a walk. It's all right. Abi gezint. Take off! Hosti gezen in dayne lebn? They darker than us! Woof!
>
> Blacks! No, no, don't be crazy. Let them go! Grab a walk. It's all right. As long as you're healthy. Take off! Have you ever seen such a thing? They darker than us. Woof!

There are a few reasons for this.

One is to continue to highlight redface, as white actors playing Native American characters often didn't sound like them. The logical extreme, to Brooks, was to have this Sioux chief talk in a combination of Yiddish and English that's heavily accented to sound like it's being delivered by a New York Jew, as indeed it was.



A second is to reference a line in *The Ten Commandments*, the Jewish escape from slavery story, in which Moses asks to "Let my people go!"

And a third is to serve as a direct comparison to a later scene in the film. Taggart also notes that blacks are darker than any Indian, but in a context of genocide.

In other words, while Taggart has dutifully attempted to wipe out all Native Americans and is now depressed at having to do that again with blacks, Brooks's Sioux chief chooses to free them.

Source: *Blazing Saddles It Wasn't* by Gerald Kolpan (My Jewish Learning)
https://www.myjewishlearning.com/2012/05/04/blazing-saddles-it-wasnt/



Smell the Glove

In Mongo's first scene in the film, he reacts negatively to Taggart's approach until he's made to smell his glove. "Here, it's me, Taggart, your old boss." This behaviour seems utterly bizarre with no form of context.

Surprisingly, I couldn't find much documentation on the heritage of this online, but it's clearly a form of domination, one that's emphasised by the misogynistic original album cover for *Smell the Glove* by the titular band in the later film, *This Is Spıñal Tap* (1984), before it's changed to black.

This is rooted in training dangerous animals, because that's clearly how Mongo is considered by Taggart and his men. Certainly, gloves are worn when handling dangerous animals and they often extend up the arm, whether they're gauntlets in falconry or venom defenders for handling snakes. I expected to find that there would be an equivalent in something illegal like dogfighting, because dogs like trackers are often trained to detect scent and it would be one way to protect an abusive owner of fighting dogs who uses fear as a training weapon but doesn't want to get hurt by his own dogs. Maybe that's just a movie stereotype. I don't know.

Whatever its origins, when we offer friendship to someone who we're meeting as an equal, we shake hands. Taggart is clearly not doing that here. He's enforcing dominance over an animal.





Mongo! Santa María!

Here's one of the cultural references that flew straight over my head when I first saw *Blazing Saddles* and on many subsequent viewings, until I accidentally came across the explanation.

To me, "Mongo! Santa María!" was a natural reaction to Mongo's arrival in town on the back of a Brahma bull. I assumed that the character was Hispanic, primarily spoke Spanish and so used a Roman Catholic exclamation, Santa María being the Blessed Virgin Mary, literally Saint Mary.

However, Mongo Santamaría was a Cuban percussionist, a well known one who spent most of his career in the U.S. Ramón Santamaría Rodríguez was born in Havana in 1917 and grew up in the streets listening to and playing African music, which he brought to New York in 1950, making some of the first folkloric recordings of rumba and moving through Santería, pachanga, boogaloo and salsa to Latin jazz over half a century. He died in Miami, Florida in 2003.

Once I heard the name, I started to bump into it all the time, most recently when reviewing a solo percussion album by Dave Lombardo, the former drummer of the thrash metal band Slayer. Lombardo was born in Cuba and Santamaría was a major influence.



And this joke is why Mongo was called Mongo.





Yes and No

And here's one of the cultural references that I absolutely notice on every viewing but couldn't figure out for the longest time, what with growing up in a different country before the advent of the internet. Frustratingly, I still can't find a photo reference for it.

When Mongo rides a Brahma bull into Rock Ridge, it has YES and NO painted on its butt cheeks and there simply has to be a reason for that.

Apparently, that reason is that large vehicles in the U.S. used to have YES and NO painted on the back to indicate which side was safe to pass. Depending on who's explaining that, the type of large vehicle varies, from school buses in the 1950s to tractor trailers in the 1960s and later. With either, the point is clearly that Mongo is huge, imposing and dangerous to encounter on the road.

In the absence of a historical photo, here's a modern update of the same concept with YES and NO becoming PASSING SIDE and SUICIDE.





Candygram for Mongo!

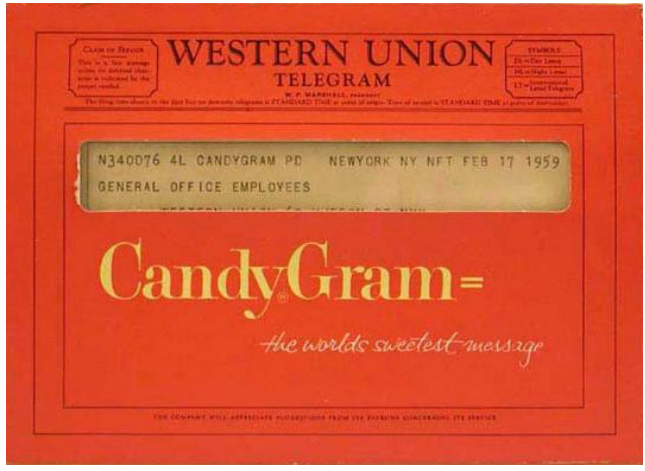
Here's another scene with a lot to unpack.

When the entire town of Rock Ridge cowers at the advance of Mongo, it falls to Sheriff Bart to do something about it and he outwits the imbecilic behemoth with a neat gadget, a candygram.

To modern eyes, a candygram makes a lot of sense. It's simply candy (which is what I grew up in England calling "sweets") that's ordered and delivered remotely. That doesn't seem surprising in an era where we have apps to order pretty much anything.

It's called a candygram as a combination of candy and telegram, telegrams being messages sent over a telegraph wire rather like instant messages today but without being able to either send or receive them without professional help.

CandyGrams did actually exist, but not until Western Union introduced them for Valentine's Day in 1959. Telephones had replaced telegrams for most personal communication by that point, so they expanded their services, this one promising delivery of a one-pound box of chocolates anywhere in the country with an accompanying note, "the worlds sweetest message".





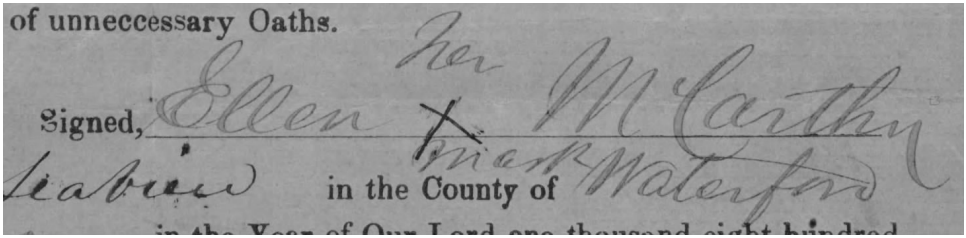
X Marks the Spot

One fundamental difference between telegrams and instant messages is that telegrams have to be signed for. No, I'm not going to dive into the intricacies of messaging protocols. If I send you an IM or a DM or whatever we want to call it this week, you don't have to sign for it.

Signing for a telegram is like signing for anything else: we write our signature. However, not everybody has a signature in the way we tend to think of it today, which is an easily identifiable way to sign our name.

At heart, a signature is merely an identifiable mark to represent a human being and it emerged as a norm as a side effect of the widespread growth of literacy. That wasn't as apparent in 1874 and Mongo is hardly the most educated character in *Blazing Saddles*. Therefore he signs with an X.

This may be a surprise but an X is still a legal signature today, though it's so open to abuse by a fraudster, someone else's X pretending to be your X, so much so that it's far from unknown for an X signature to be invalidated through acknowledgement of how difficult it is to verify.



Historically, many people signed important legal documents with an X, such as Ellen McCarthy in the above image, as she was illiterate but signing a pension fund in 1864. Often to validate that X, a supposedly reliable witness signs close to it to serve as an extra form of authentication, just as a notary would today.

Of course, Mongo's X completely destroys the receipt book, but that's a whole other matter.



Merrily We Roll Along

Mere seconds after Mongo signs his X, Sheriff Bart scoots on out the door in animated fashion, because he knows that his candygram isn't really a candygram; it's an explosive device.

If we're unable to connect this act to *Looney Tunes* cartoons featuring characters who would use this sort of approach, like Bugs Bunny and Wile E. Coyote, Brooks plays *Merrily We Roll Along* as an accompaniment, the music that closes out *Looney Tunes* and, before them, *Merrie Melodies*.

While we tend to think of this as an instrumental, it was originally a song, written by Charlie Tobias, Murray Mencher and Eddie Cantor in 1935. It was used in *Billboard Frolics* the same year, a *Merrie Melodies* cartoon.





The Bitch Was Inventing the Candygram

The final note to this scene arrives shortly afterwards in dialogue that's deceptively simple but immensely deep.

Jim is expressing admiration for how Sheriff Bart took care of Mongo, who's now chained up in their jail. Bart tellingly responds, "He was nothing. The bitch was inventing the candygram. They probably won't give me credit for it."

The founding fathers of the United States saw invention as so greatly important to their new nation that they codified it "into the first Article of the U.S. Constitution, authorising Congress to given inventors exclusive rights to their inventions for a limited time." They passed the Patent Act in 1790, which George Washington wanted to be the first law that Congress should pass.

However, this simply wasn't available to black inventors. Slaves weren't citizens, so nothing in the Constitution applied to them. Many states had laws preventing slaves from owning property, which would include patents. The *Dred Scott* decision (see page 44) affirmed that blacks, even free ones, could not be citizens and so couldn't swear to a "country of citizenship" in the Patent Oath.

What that meant was that black slaves invented things but their owners received the patents. An example would be Stephen Slade, who invented a method of curing tobacco that enabled what we would consider cigarettes. It seems likely that the cotton gin wasn't invented by Eli Whitney but a slave named Sam, and the mechanical reaper wasn't invented by Cyrus McCormick but one of his slaves called Jo Anderson. Both revolutionised farming and the United States and made the white patent owners multi-millionaires. The slaves remained slaves.

Source: The Colorblind Patent System and Black Inventors by Shontavia Jackson Johnson (American Bar Association)

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/intellectual_property_law/publications/landslide/2018-19/march-april/colorblind-patent-system-black-inventors/#2



Of Course, You'll Have the Good Taste

There are a couple of scenes that surprise me in YouTube reactions, one because reactors tend not to notice it (but I did) and the other because they do (but I didn't). See page 44 for the former.

This is the latter, which builds over a set of three deliveries by an unnamed and uncredited old woman played by Jessamyne Milner—who was born in the Wild West, in Cheyenne, Wyoming in 1894—who nonetheless got some of the most memorable moments in the entire movie, especially to reactors. The first, of course, is the one where she's beaten up by thugs during *There Was a Peaceful Town Called Rock Ridge* (see page 25), because she breaks the fourth wall and asks us, "Have you ever seen such cruelty?"

The first of the the three deliveries that matter for this page is the one where Sheriff Bart takes his first walk outside after saving himself from death at the hands of the welcome committee. He sees this old woman and comments, "Good morning, ma'am and isn't it a lovely morning?" Her reaction is simple and blatant: "Up yours, nigger!"

Fast forward to this point in the film and she walks back her words in the wake of Bart's recent success, saying:

> Good evening sheriff. Sorry about the "Up yours, nigger!" I hope this apple pie will in some small way say thank you for your ingenuity and courage in defeating that horrible Mongo.

She leaves but then returns, adding this telling line:

> Of course, you'll have the good taste not to mention that I spoke to you.

The reason this matters is in the way in which she delivers her apology. Not only does she use the N word to insult him in their initial exchange, she uses it again in her apology, which is just as offensive and renders the whole suggestion pointless. I hadn't seen that.

Given that, though, it shouldn't surprise that many reactors emphatically don't want him to eat the pie. The N word in the apology automatically renders it suspect.



When the Beast Fails

After Mongo is defeated by Bart, Lamarr decides on the opposite approach. "When the beast fails, it's time to call in Beauty."

Beauty turns out to be "Lili von Shtüpp, the Teutonic Titwillow". Oddly, the word that seems to be edgy there isn't really but the word that doesn't seem to be edgy absolutely is.

That's because "titwillow" is taken from a song in the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, *The Mikado*, where it tells the tale of a sorrowful dicky-bird. Yeah, that doesn't help, does it? What if I tell you that it was once performed on *The Muppet Show* by Rowlf the Dog and Sam the Eagle? Rowlf does point out to Sam that the song is from light opera and is therefore automatically respectable. Of course, they also cut out the verse where the sorrowful dicky-bird commits suicide by diving into a river due to a case of unrequited love.

Anyway, "titwillow" doesn't have any sexual connotation whatsoever, whatever our eight year old selves might think, until this poster, and that's because "shtup" is Yiddish for "to push" in a very specific context, i.e. to have sexual intercourse. That's very deliberate, but most moviegoing audiences in 1974 didn't speak Yiddish and the ones who did laughed.





Is Bismarck a Hewwing?

This is a prime example of a cultural reference that goes over reactors' heads, because it's not one but a whole bunch of cultural references wrapped up in just four words.

For a start, we need to know that Madeline Kahn is playing Lili von Shtüpp as a parody of the work of German actress Marlene Dietrich, but I'll look more at that opposite. That's why the lisp and the suit.

So, Bismarck isn't a hewwing. But is Bismarck a herring? No, he isn't. Yes, it is.

Otto von Bismarck was a statesman, Prince Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck-Schönhausen, Duke of Lauenburg. He unified the German states (except Austria) into what's now Germany and served for nineteen years as the first Chancellor of the German Empire.

Johann Wiechmann was a Stralsund shopkeeper who admired Bismarck and, when the German Empire was formed, sent him a barrel of pickled and filleted Baltic Sea herring, asking if he could name the dish for him. Bismarck agreed.







And so, after all that, what Lili was actually saying was "Duh."



The Bavarian Bombshell Herself

As mentioned opposite, Madeleine Kahn didn't so much play Lili von Shtüpp, hired by Hedley Lamarr "to seduce and abandon the Sheriff of Rock Ridge" as play Marlene Dietrich playing Lili von Shtüpp, and that's the key to her entire performance, right down to her singing style. If you don't know who Marlene Dietrich was, then you're not going to get this running joke or the many more that spring from it.

Marie Magdalene Dietrich was a German actress and singer who was internationally acclaimed in the silent and early sound eras especially for her feature films for Josef von Sternberg, like *The Blue Angel* (1930), *Morocco* (1930) and *Shanghai Express* (1932). While these films began in Germany, both Dietrich and von Sternberg moved their careers to the U.S. to take advantage of Hollywood.





The first two cast her as a cabaret singer, Lola Lola (below left) and Amy Jolly (below right), and they were just as willing characters as Lili von Shtüpp. In fact, Jolly in Benno Vigny's source book was a drug addicted prostitute, though that was inevitably tamed down for the movie, even before the Production Code took effect.





While Dietrich was a capable actress, whose important roles extended past the silent and early sound eras into the fifties and sixties, in films like *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957), *Touch of Evil* (1958) and *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), she became known for her exotic looks and flouting of social conventions. She wore trousers. Men's trousers. Her screen roles were often androgynous. Her personal sexuality was ambiguous.

The song *I'm Tired* in *Blazing Saddles* is a nod to *I'm the Laziest Gal in Town* in *Stage Fright* (1950) (below), but with a heavy accent like *Falling in Love Again (Can't Help It)* from *The Blue Angel* (1930).





Wie geht's, mein Schatz

While Hedley Lamarr is clearly desperate when he visits Lili, Sheriff Bart turns on the charm instead, bringing her a womantic wed wose rather than an ordinawy bouquet. What's a little less obvious is that he also talks to her in her native German.

"Wie geht's, mein Schatz" means "How's it going, my darling?" "Bitte, Baby" means "Please, baby." Later, after he leaves, "Auf wiedersehn, Baby" means "Goodbye, baby."





Something More Comfortable

Of course, when Lili excuses herself to "slip into something more comfortable", most of us aren't likely to think she actually did, seeing the results, which are rather like a showgirl's outfit without an exuberant headdress or accoutrements.

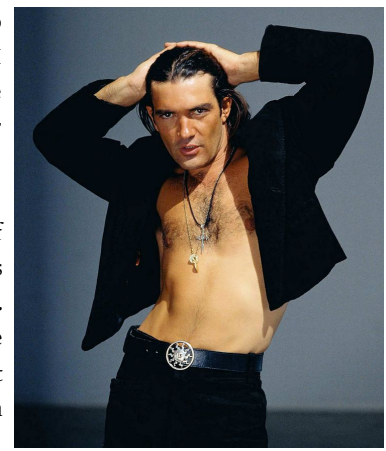
For instance, left is Marilyn Monroe in a similar outfit in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953).



Fifteen is My Limit on Schnitzengrüben

As a kid who had no idea he was neurodivergent and so took things far too literally, I wanted some of Lili's schnitzengrüben. Fortunately, I don't believe that I went so far as to ask my parents for some. Later, of course, I realised that this entire exchange was thinly veiled sexual innuendo. When Bart explains to Lili that "fifteen is my limit on schnitzengrüben", he's not talking about food in the slightest; he's talking about a long night in the sack.

However, I never actually looked up schnitzengrüben to see if it was a real German sausage. It isn't, or at least I can't find proof that it is, even though many people online seem to believe that it's real. It seems like it's just another use of a foreign language to be rude (see "Shtüpp" on page 47), but with German this time rather than Yiddish.



"Schnitzen" means "to carve", usually a figure out of wood. "Grüben" means "to dig, mine or burrow". It's not hard to conjure sexual connotations out of that combination, pun not intended.



After Lili whispers into his ear, Bart stands up and states, "Baby, please, I am not from Havana."

This is a reference to the Latin Lover, a stock character in early Hollywood (see Rudolph Valentino left) that hasn't gone away even today (see Antonio Banderas above). Why Cuba was the go to cliché in Hollywood midway through the century I don't know, but Cuba is a lot closer to the U.S. than Spain.



Mongo Only Pawn in Game of Life

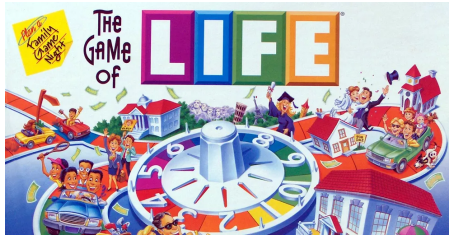
Once again, there are multiple cultural references in a single line here, beyond the obvious gag of having arguably the most uneducated character in the movie utter arguably its most profound line of dialogue.

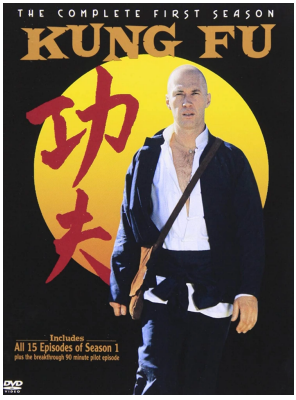


Of course, the pawn is taken from chess.

As most people probably know, even if they don't play chess, the pawn is the least important and most disposable piece on the board, with the least ability to move, just one space at a time. However, over an entire game, a pawn can work its way to the other side of the board and be exchanged for a queen, which is the most important and least disposable piece on the board, with the most ability to move. In other words, in the right moment, as when Mongo explains to Bart and Jim why Hedley Lamarr cares so much about Rock Ridge, pawns can be crucial.

While there is indeed a commercially available *Game of Life*, and it was released long before *Blazing Saddles*, as part of the centenary of Milton Bradley in 1960, that's absolutely not what Mongo meant here. Playing totally against type for one line of dialogue, he's taking a pawn, the smallest piece in chess, and placing it on the biggest board, that of life itself, thus extrapolating a playing piece into a game. That's deep, man.





The reason he does this, beyond that gag, is because of *Kung Fu*, which debuted on American television in 1972, while Brooks and his team were writing this film. It brought eastern spiritualism to America, often in conveniently quotable bite sized chunks, and it's easy to imagine this line in that TV show, even if it never was.



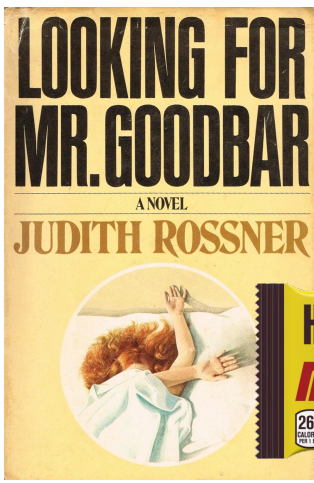
Through Being Mr. Goodbar

Here's an example of an obvious cultural reference not actually being the correct one.

I hadn't read Judith Rossner's bestselling novel, *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, when I first saw *Blazing Saddles*, and I hadn't seen the successful feature film adaptation with Diane Keaton, but I'd heard of both, so it was completely clear to me that, when Hedley Lamarr says that "I'm through being Mr. Goodbar", he was referring to either or both of them.

Imagine my surprise when I realised that *Blazing Saddles* came out in 1974 but Rossner's novel didn't appear until 1975 and the movie until 1977! So this isn't the reference. And, if it isn't, then what is it? Surely Lamarr wasn't referring to the American candy bar, which Hershey introduced to the market in 1925!

I can only assume that the name of the candy gained a broader meaning in American slang and Rossner tapped into that with her book when naming a singles bar Goodbar and having her lead character seek a series of fleeting sexual encounters there. If so, I can't find it because searching for that is blurred by the book and the movie (and the candy).



Of course, if that's the source for the book, then presumably it's also the source for Hedley Lamarr's comment to Lili. With his ego, he would naturally see himself as benefitting Lili, not the other way around.







Verkackt

Once again, Lili von Shtüpp shifts into German. She's failed to "seduce and abandon the Sheriff of Rock Ridge" so Hedley Lamarr has no further use for her.

However, because the Sheriff of Rock Ridge clearly managed to seduce and abandon her, she's got parting words for her former employer:

> You're going to need an army to beat him. You're finished! Fertig! Verfallen! Verlumpt! Verblunget! Verkackt! Wir fahren auf Engeland...
>
> You're going to need an army to beat him. You're finished! Completed! Expired! Ragged! Bewildered! Fucked up! We're heading to England...

The last part of that ("Wir fahren auf England") is delivered as a song and it indeed references one, *Wir fahren gegen Engeland*. That's a patriotic German song, *We Sail to Take on England*, that was written by a war poet killed during World War I, Hermann Löns, then later set to music. It was so popular that it gave its name to a wartime newspaper, *Gegen Engeland*, published by the Imperial German Navy for distribution to Nazi troops in occupied France, and even a board game.





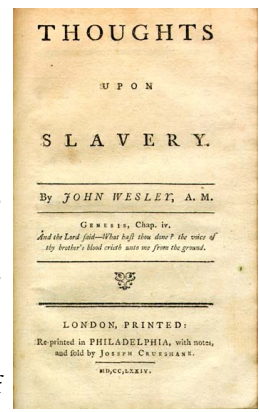


And Methodists!

Lili's mention of an army sparks an idea in Hedley Lamarr's head, so he asks Taggart take down a list so they can round up "the worst dregs ever to spoil the face of the west":

> I want rustlers, cut-throats, murderers, bounty hunters, desperados, mugs, pugs, thugs, nitwits, halfwits, dimwits, vipers, snipers, con men, Indian agents, Mexican bandits, muggers, buggerers, bushwhackers, hornswagglers, horse thieves, bull dykes, train robbers, bank robbers, ass-kickers, shitkickers and Methodists!

While some of these terms were just used for their alliterative qualities and others have clear definitions, others actually meant something in the Wild West:


THOUGHTS

UPON

SLAVERY.

By JOHN WESLEY, A. M.

GENESIS, Chap. iv.

And the Lord said—What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

LONDON, PRINTED:

Re-printed in PHILADELPHIA, with notes, and sold by JOSEPH CRUKSHANK.

Rustlers stole cattle, horses or other livestock. See horse thieves.

Bounty hunters are hired to recover criminals who have skipped bail.

Desperados are just criminals, but usually reckless ones.

Mugs are fools or suckers, who easily get mugged. See muggers.

Pugs probably refers to boxers or pugilists, from the Latin "pugnus" meaning "fist". Not dogs.

Thugs are violent criminals, but the name came from the Hindi for "swindler". Indian thugs were highwaymen who strangled travellers.

Nitwits, halfwits and dimwits are stupid people. See shitkickers.

Indian agents interacted with Native American tribes on behalf of the goverment.

Buggerers are gay men. Bull dykes are masculine lesbians.

Bushwhackers were rural guerrilla fighters, often pro-Confederate.

Hornswagglers were swindlers. See con men.

And Methodists! They're Protestant Christians who follow the teachings of John Wesley, likely included in this list because of their vehement anti-slavery stance, so bad guys to Hedley Lamarr. Wesley published *Thoughts upon Slavery* in 1774, stating that even tolerating slavery was evil.



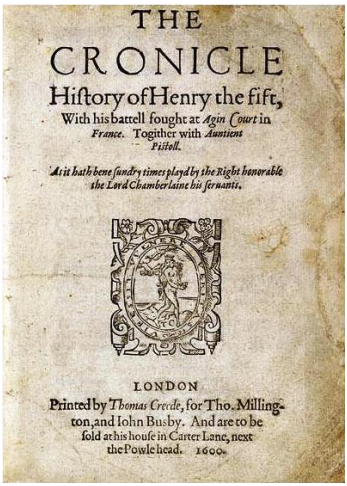
An Equal Opportunity Employer

When Sheriff Bart returns to discover the townsfolk lined up to leave, it's because of a Help Wanted ad, in which Hedley Lamarr is seeking "heartless villains for destruction of Rock Ridge".

There are a few things to note here, one of which is that the $100 per day rate for "heartless villains" is very generous. $100 in 1874 equates to $2,567.16 in 2022, which is decent pay if you can get it, whatever the work.

Another is a clever detail that Hedley Lamarr is an "equal opportunity employer", which highlights how he'll officially comply with government regulations but ignore them all.

Bart calls this "the last act of a desperate man." Howard Johnson replies, "We don't care if it's the 1st Act of *Henry V*," after William Shakespeare's play (1600). "We're leaving."


THE
CRONICLE
History of Henry the fift,
With his battell fought at *Agin Court* in *France*. Togither with *Auntient Pistoll*.

As it hath bene sundry times playd by the Right honorable the Lord Chamberlaine his servants.

LONDON
Printed by *Thomas Creede*, for Tho. Millington, and Iohn Busby. And are to be sold at his house in Carter Lane, next the Powle head. 1600.





You'd Do It for Randolph Scott

Sheriff Bart asks the townsfolk for "twenty-four hours to come up with a brilliant idea to save our town," which they promptly decline. He then responds, "You'd do it for Randolph Scott!" and they stand, put their hats over their hearts and relent.

Clearly Randolph Scott was a holy name to them, which confuses reactors who generally have no idea who he was. Well, like Hedy Lamarr, Richard Dix and Marlene Dietrich, he was an actor.

While it took three years for George Randolph Scott to establish himself on the big screen, he was a leading man for the rest of his long career and, of over a hundred films, two thirds of them were westerns, many of them highly regarded adaptations of Zane Grey novels or collaborations with Budd Boetticher.

He was the textbook actor to save the day in westerns. He was handsome, but he was also quiet and softly spoken yet still able to take care of business. *Abilene Town* (1946) pictured a small town in Kansas not unlike Rock Ridge, on the brink of war between homesteaders and cattlemen. Scott was Dan Mitchell, the town marshal, tasked with both keeping the peace and reaching a resolution to the conflict.



After that, he was the cowboy hero in all but two of his remaining films and he kept making them until *Ride the High Country* (1962), which was a goodbye to the Old West.



The Worst Dregs

The glorious pan left to show us the people in line waiting to be approved for Hedley Lamarr's army of destruction is where many reactors start to get very confused indeed.

That's because it doesn't just contain the authentic 19th century Wild West villains in Lamarr's long wishlist; it contains a whole host of stereotypical movie villains, regardless of era. In keeping with his 1974 in 1874 mindset, he didn't care about anachronisms; he embraced them:

Gunfighters and general western thugs, as you'd expect for a western.
German infantrymen from World War II, the bad guys in war movies.
At least one aviator, played by Mel Brooks in his third role (opposite above).
A motorcycle gang, though their colours are not obvious, the bad guys in biker movies.
Mexican bandits with bandoliers, frequent bad guys in westerns.
Backwoods hicks who look like they're out for a day of fishing, the bad guys in hicksploitation.
Bedouins in robes, complete with camels, the bad guys in many genres nowadays.
Members of the Ku Klux Klan, America's most prominent racist organisation (see page 70).











Have a Nice Day

Bringing up the rear of the hiring line for Hedley Lamarr's army of destruction are a couple of hooded and robed members of the Ku Klux Klan. This image, sans the motto of "Have a nice day", which, needless to say is not their real motto, is one of the most widely recognisable images of racism worldwide, even though it's a specifically American organisation. In fact, it's been three separate but similar organisations, each also known as the KKK or simply the Klan.

The first Klan was founded by Confederate veterans in the late 1860s. Its members assaulted and murdered black people and their allies in the wake of the Civil War. It declined after 1871 after federal law enforcement targetted it. This Klan had colourful robes, not white ones.

The second Klan started in Georgia in 1915 and grew nationwide in the 1920s, aided by films like *Birth of a Nation* (1915), directed by D. W. Griffith (see page 90). It was still fundamentally a violent white supremacist organisation but it broadened its scope to oppose Jews and Catholics. It's this Klan that introduced white robes and cross burnings. It declined in the late 1920s.

The third Klan was formed around 1950 and still exists today in as localised groups that oppose civil rights for anyone except them. It's classified as a hate group.





I Hope You Brought Enough for Everybody

Hedley Lamarr demonstrates how strict he is when disciplining one ruffian for "chewing gum on line." He offers an excuse, "I didn't know there was going to be so many!" but Lamarr shoots him dead. It's telling that he appreciated the rapist before him but shoots the gum chewer.

This has to be the most likely cultural reference in the movie for Americans to grasp, because it speaks to queues in school, which almost everybody went through, but it's not a reference that travelled well, so it just seemed like overkill to me, as an English kid.

It went over my head in the same way that many of the school-related jokes in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* go over the head of American audiences, like the graffiti scene. "Conjugate the verb 'to go'!" is something my generation grew up with and not only in Latin class, as was "Write out a hundred times!". The generation before me would get the grabbing by the ear thing too.

We simply didn't have the same school experience.





We Don't Need No Stinking Badges!

Here's another cultural reference I didn't get when I first saw *Blazing Saddles* but figured out over time, when I caught up with the source of the quote, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) with Humphrey Bogart.

In *Blazing Saddles*, Hedley Lamarr hands a Mexican bandit a badge to show that he's part of the army attacking Rock Ridge in the morning:

"Here's your badge."

"Badges? We don't need no stinking badges!"

In *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, Fred C. Dobbs faces an an army of deceitful Mexican bandits:

"We are federales, you know, the mounted police."

"If you're the police, where are your badges."

"Badges? We ain't got no badges! We don't need no badges. I don't have to you show any stinking badges!"







And Now for My Next Impression

After Bart betrays the colour of his hands, previously hidden beneath his stolen Ku Klux Klan robe, he runs away, stating "And now for my next impression... Jesse Owens!"

While young reactors often have no idea who most of the historical figures referenced within *Blazing Saddles* are, it's heartening to see that many of them absolutely recognise Jesse Owens.



James Cleveland Owens was a black American sprinter who won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympic Games, held in Berlin, Germany under the auspices of the Nazi party. He was a massive poke in the eye to Adolf Hitler's ideas of Aryan racial superiority, winning gold in both the 100 and 200 metre sprints, the long jump and the 4x100 metre relay. Cornelius Johnson, also a black American athlete, won in the high jump.

The importance of Owens's race didn't begin or end there. His grandfather was a slave, so he was directly connected to that era. Being black, he wasn't eligible for scholarships in college. While Hitler acknowledged his victory, the American government minimised it. In a 1936 speech in Kansas City, Owens pointed out that "Hitler didn't snub me—it was our president who snubbed me." In Germany, he had stayed in the same hotels as white athletes, but found he wasn't even allowed to enter through the front doors of his own welcoming reception in New York, due to segregation (see page 44), getting there in a freight elevator instead. Renowned on a world stage, he had to wait until the 1970s to be truly acknowledged in his own country.

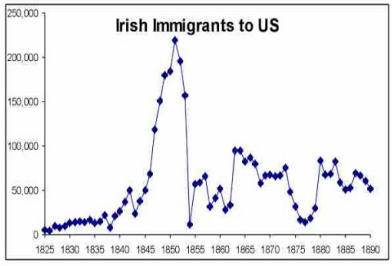




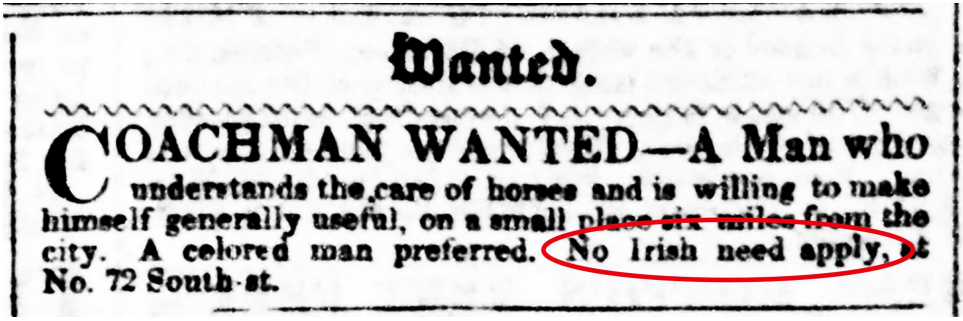
But We Don't Want the Irish

When Bart outlines to the townsfolk his plan to build a replica of the town of Rock Ridge, he's well aware that it can only succeed if they agree to do it in collaboration with railroad workers, in exchange for a "little plot of land they can call their own to homestead." That leads to Olson Johnson's famous line, "All right. We'll give some land to the niggers and the chinks, but we don't want the Irish!"

While that's another example of continuing to use offensive language even when trying to be openminded (see page 55), it ably highlights that racism isn't restricted to white people against black people. In fact, the first racism in the film is wielded against a Chinese worker ("Dock that chink a day's pay for napping on the job!"). Here, while it's still against black and Asian people, it's more overtly against the Irish, who were white.



This refers to widespread immigration of Irish to the U.S. in the wake of the Potato Famine, from 1845-1852. While the stereotype that these immigrants were poor illiterate thieves has been increasingly debunked, that's what Americans believed, leading to anti-Irish prejudice and even a preference, in examples like the wanted ad below, for "colored" people instead.



Wanted.

COACHMAN WANTED—A Man who understands the care of horses and is willing to make himself generally useful, on a small place six miles from the city. A colored man preferred. No Irish need apply, at No. 72 South-st.



Best Supporting Actor

With his newly hired army assembled in front of him, Hedley Lamarr embarks on a traditional rousing movie speech, adding that "You will only be risking your lives, whilst I will be risking an almost certain Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor."

This was another obvious anachronism, given that AMPAS, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, wasn't formed until 1927, its thirty-six original founders including Cecil B. DeMille (see page 42) and Sid Grauman (see page 86), with the first Academy Awards held in 1929.

In fact, the movie camera hadn't even been invented in 1874, regardless of which one we might think counts. In England, Edweard Muybridge's sequential photographs, which famously proved that horses did not always keep a foot on the ground while running at speed, happened in 1878. His zoopraxiscope was designed in 1879 and built a year later, allowing these photographs to be shown rapidly like a movie. In the U.S., Thomas Edison's kinetograph came along in 1890, using celluloid film. In France, Auguste and Louie Lumiere's cinematographe, displayed sixteen frames a second. Before long, everyone and their dog had invented a movie camera.



There's more to this scene though because, however much we enjoy *Blazing Saddles*, we might not think of it in terms of Oscars. It did receive three nominations in 1975, ironically none of them for Hedley Lamarr. So much for "almost certain".

Madeline Kahn was nominated for Best Actress in a Supporting Role, losing to Ingrid Bergman for *Murder on the Orient Express*.

John C. Howard and Danford B. Greene were nominated for Best Film Editing, losing to Harold F. & Carl Kress for *The Towering Inferno*.

John Morris (music) and Mel Brooks (lyrics) were nominated for Best Music, Original Song for *Blazing Saddles* (see page 12), losing to Al Kasha and Joel Hirschhorn for *We May Never Love Like This Again* in *The Towering Inferno*.



That Voodoo That You Do

Of course there are a bunch of jokes within Hedley Lamarr's speech that I don't need to detail, with an acknowledgement here that it still seems weird that American kids are forced to recite a Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America every day in school. Reciting the pledge to Hedley Lamarr, as ridiculous as that is, seems no less weird to me.

However, he does end with a reference to a song, *You Do Something to Me* by Cole Porter, which I should highlight, especially as one of the many artists to record this standard is Marlene Dietrich (see page 58), on her self-titled 1973 album. It was originally written for the musical *Fifty Million Frenchmen* (1929), in which it was sung by Genevieve Tobin and William Gaxton.

Lamarr's quote is to implore that his army "go do that voodoo that you do so well!"
The lyrics to the song are:



You do something to me
Something that simply mystifies me
Tell me, why should it be
You have the power to hypnotize me?

Let me live 'neath your spell
Do, do that voodoo that you do so well
For you do something to me
That nobody else could do

Let me live 'neath your spell
Do, do that voodoo that you do so well
For you do something to me
That nobody else could do

That nobody else could do



Du, du liegst mir im Herzen

Talking of Marlene Dietrich, Madeline Kahn is emphatically parodying her when she sings "Ja, ja, ja, ja," with the Nazi soldiers from Hedley Lamarr's army, while everyone else is battling in the fake Rock Ridge.

This is a brief excerpt from a German song called *Du, du liegst mir im Herzen*, or *You, You are in My Heart*, which is believed to date back as far as 1820. Not only did Dietrich record this song, for a 1959 German language album called *Lili Marlene*, but it also plays (sung by someone else) behind a crucial scene between Dietrich and Spencer Tracy in *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), a film that's explicitly about bringing Nazi war criminals to justice.

I don't know if Mel Brooks and his writing team were suggesting anything untoward, but that scene is the "We did not know" scene in which Dietrich's character, Mrs. Bertholt, tries to explain to Tracy, playing Dan Haywood, the chief judge at the Nuremberg Trials, that the German people didn't know about what went on in the concentration camps.



As the song builds, Mrs. Bertholt tells of how the hanging of her husband as a Nazi soldier, prompted her to hate.

"But we can't live with hate," she says.





Buddy Bizarre

After a legendary crane shot lifts the camera above the fake town of Rock Ridge and pans over the Warner Brothers backlot, it zooms to another studio building, where Dom DeLuise is shooting a musical number, *The French Mistake*.

The whole scene is full of homosexual innuendo, down to the musical number's title; it seems that a "French mistake" is when a straight man engages in a gay act which he later regrets. That includes Dom DeLuise, who was married in real life to Carol Arthur, who's better known to fans of *Blazing Saddles* as Harriett Van Johnson, the Rock Ridge schoolma'am.

Given the layout and style of this musical number, it doesn't take the moment of synchronised swimming to realise that Buddy Bizarre is a nod to pioneering Hollywood choreographer Busby Berkeley, at his artistic peak in *42nd Street*, *Gold Diggers of 1933* and *Footlight Parade* (all 1933).

The top hats and tails worn by the actors are reminiscent of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers musicals from later in the thirties, like *Top Hat* (1935).

The timeframe of the golden age is echoed by his use of a megaphone, used by many directors.

Buddy's outfit seems like a mashup of directors, including Erich von Stroheim and himself.



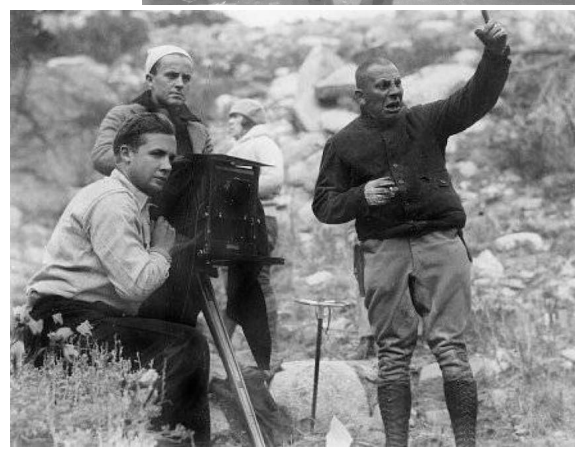
Clockwise:
Surreal Busby Berkeley synchronised swimming choreography in *Footlight Parade* (1933); Fred Astaire in top hat in *Top Hat* (1935); Erich von Stroheim in jodhpurs directing *The Wedding March* (1928); Erich von Stroheim directing with a megaphone; Busby Berkeley staircase sequence in *Ziegfeld Girl* (1940)













They Lose Me Right After the Bunker Scene

Right before the ever-expanding brawl bursts into the Warner Brothers studio commissary, an actor asks another, named Joey, how many days of filming he has left. The response is "They lose me right after the bunker scene," rather appropriately given that Joey is dressed as Adolf Hitler, who committed suicide in a bunker in Berlin in 1945, having clearly lost World War II.

Beyond the inclusion of Hitler being appropriate for a film lampooning racism, which he took to the level of genocide, one detail often missed by reactors here is that Joey's accent makes him sound like a New York Jew, adding another level of irony to his playing Hitler.

The actor was Ralph Manzo, born Raffaele P. Manza in San Francisco of Italian heritage, and I have no idea if he was Jewish. Then again, he's an actor playing an actor in a studio commissary. Assuming that he's Jewish just from his voice is arguably as equally dangerous as assuming that he's a Nazi just from his costume.

Incidentally, Manzo was a regular on television for decades, one of those faces we've seen often without necessarily recognising him. If we know him for something other than *Blazing Saddles*, it's likely to be as the fisherman in the teaser for the American *Godzilla* (1998), below.



Of course, Mel Brooks wasn't going to miss out on dotting other Nazi jokes throughout the film too. After all, he started out his directorial career in *The Producers* (1967), which was about a pair of con artist theatre producers attempting to get rich by staging a musical that's designed to fail, a musical based on a "love letter to Hitler" entitled *Springtime for Hitler: A Gay Romp with Adolf and Eva at Berchtesgaden*.

Melvin James Kaminsky was born in 1926 with a strong Jewish heritage. His mother was born in Kyiv, now the capital of Ukraine but then part of the Pale of Settlement, a European enclave of the Russian Empire that contained 40% of the world's Jewish population. His father's family were German Jews from the Polish city of Gdańsk, then Danzig in the Kingdom of Prussia.

He's spoken often about Hitler and the Nazis in interviews, often replying to Jews unable to see how he can joke about such things, saying that:

> I was never crazy about Hitler. If you stand on a soapbox and trade rhetoric with a dictator, you never win. That's what they do so well: they seduce people. But if you ridicule them, bring them down with laughter, they can't win. You show how crazy they are.

My favourite Nazi moment, beyond Ralph Manzo playing Adolf Hitler with a short time to live, arrives when Hedley Lamarr asks his assembled army of destruction to "Raise your right hand for the pledge."

At that point, everyone raises their left, because racists are idiots and can't tell the difference between left and right, and that includes the Nazi soldiers flying their Nazi eagle flags from the back of the horse-pulled wagon that they're sitting in.

What's especially funny here is, of all "the worst dregs ever to spoil the face of the west", the Nazi soldiers should be the ones best suited to know their left from their right, because they were already holding their right arms up in a traditional Nazi salute at the beginning of that scene, as demonstrated by German long jumper Luz Long on page 73, on the silver medal podium next to his friend, Jesse Owens. Long served in the Wehrmacht and died at war in 1943.





The Great Pie Fight

Still in the commissary, a chef who looks rather like Dom DeLuise (see page 78) advises to "Get your pies for the Great Pie Fight!", at which point everybody seems to have a pie close to hand to throw at somebody else's face and even Hedley Lamarr receives one to his inside the commissary Mens Room after emerging from it, seeing what's going on and retreating right back inside to avoid it. In keeping with his success rate for everything else in this film, he fails.

This is another reference to classic Hollywood, this time to the silent era, because that was the era of slapstick comedy, and throwing a custard pie, which often hit someone other than who it was aimed at, was one of the standard tools to get audiences to laugh at slapstick comedy, along with the prat fall, the chase scene and kicking other people in the ass.

However, pie fights, as against individual instances of someone throwing a pie, were rarer than history seems to have painted them, just like villains tying heroines to railroad tracks. In fact, it's far more often to see characters throwing bricks, which are much more dangerous!

The first pie may have been thrown by Mabel Normand at Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle" in a one reel comedy short called *A Noise from the Deep*. This was made at the Keystone studio in 1913, six months before they hired Charlie Chaplin and revolutionised American film comedy, but it's sadly a lost film today.





Chaplin certainly staged a pie fight in a meta short, *Behind the Screen* (1916), made for Mutual, as "The comedy department rehearsing a new idea" (left below opposite). By this point, throwing pies had already become a cliché. Note the director's megaphone in the foreground (see page 78).

Laurel and Hardy (see page 38) also staged a huge pie fight in *Battle of the Century* (1927), which was designed to include so many pies (allegedly 3,000) that it would kill off the practice forever (right below opposite). It mostly did, but not quite. *The Great Race* (1965) failed at that too.



Tarzan and Cheeta

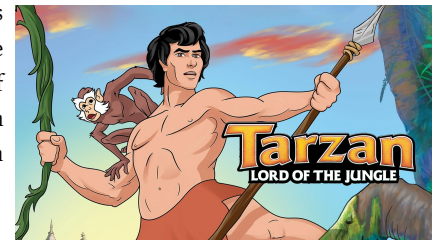
Two of the many victims in the Great Pie Fight are Tarzan and Cheeta, or at least the actors who were playing the actors who were playing them at the time.

Tarzan is a character created by Edgar Rice Burroughs for a series of twenty-five adventure novels, starting with *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912) and continuing until *Tarzan and the Castaways* (1965), with many more since by other hands. However, Tarzan was also successfully adapted to film, as early as *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918) with Elmo Lincoln as Tarzan; to radio, to television; to comics; and to pretty much every other medium, all the way to View-Master reels and pornography

Cheeta is a chimpanzee who serves as a sidekick to Tarzan in films and TV shows, but notably never appeared in any Burroughs books. He debuted in *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932), with Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan, and was played by Jiggs.

I can't confirm who plays either Tarzan or Cheeta in this fleeting scene in *Blazing Saddles*. However, given how frequently adapted the character has been, it's not surprising to find that at least one actor in *Blazing Saddles* played Tarzan at some point. It's more surprising to realise that it was Robert Ridgeley, Boris the hangman. He gave voice to Tarzan in 36 episodes of *Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle*, an animated TV show that ran on CBS from 1976 to 1980.



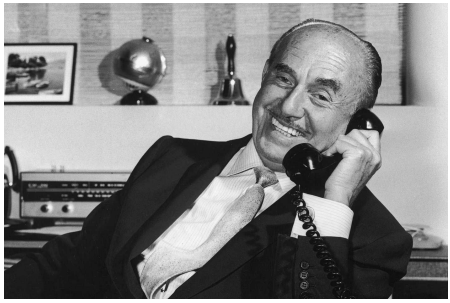




And Now We'll Go to the Special Effects Department

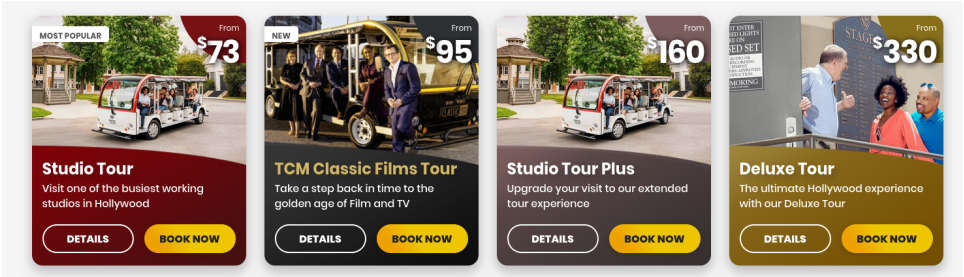
Further victims of the Great Pie Fight include a variety of members of the public who were on a Warner Brothers studio tour, who majestically stay in line even decorated with custard pies.

This is still a real thing today, sans pies, of course, but it was a relatively new thing at the time *Blazing Saddles* was made.



The first public tour—Jack Warner, co-founder of Warner Bros. in 1918 who gained full control over it in 1956, gave personal tours to special guests in the early days—was in 1973, when the studio was struggling financially. Dick Mason, who worked in the mail room at Warner Bros. was considered so knowledgeable that Warner put him in charge of these tours, which had to be reserved in advance, were limited to a dozen people at a time and cost $3. They ran four times a day and lasted about three hours.

Warner Bros. still offers studio tours today, in four flavours, from the basic Studio Tour at $73 per adult, which includes an hour with a guide and two hours without, to the $330 Deluxe Tour, a three hour guided tour that includes "an exquisite lunch at our Commissary Fine Dining Room", which may or may not involve flying custard pies.





Gate 4

I can't find confirmation of this, but when many people rush out of the Warner Bros. studio towards the end of *Blazing Saddles*, they're actually rushing out of the Warner Bros. studio in Burbank through what I believe is now Gate 4. Of course, the landscape has changed considerably in half a century, as you can see to the right.



Mel Brooks has mentioned in a number of interviews a man who wandered into this scene, which was partly on a public street, Olive Ave. After his crew removed him more than once, only for him to wander back in again, spoiling the shot, Brooks decided to have him sign a waiver and leave him in the movie, because his confusion adds to the humour.





Grauman's Chinese Theatre

The groundbreaking ending of *Blazing Saddles* arguably begins when the camera rises over the fake Rock Ridge to pan across the Warner Bros. back lot and zoom into the studio where Buddy Bizarre is shooting a musical (see page 78). However, it takes a notably meta turn when Hedley Lamarr asks a nearby cabby to "drive me off this picture" and is taken to Grauman's Chinese Theatre, which is screening *Blazing Saddles*.

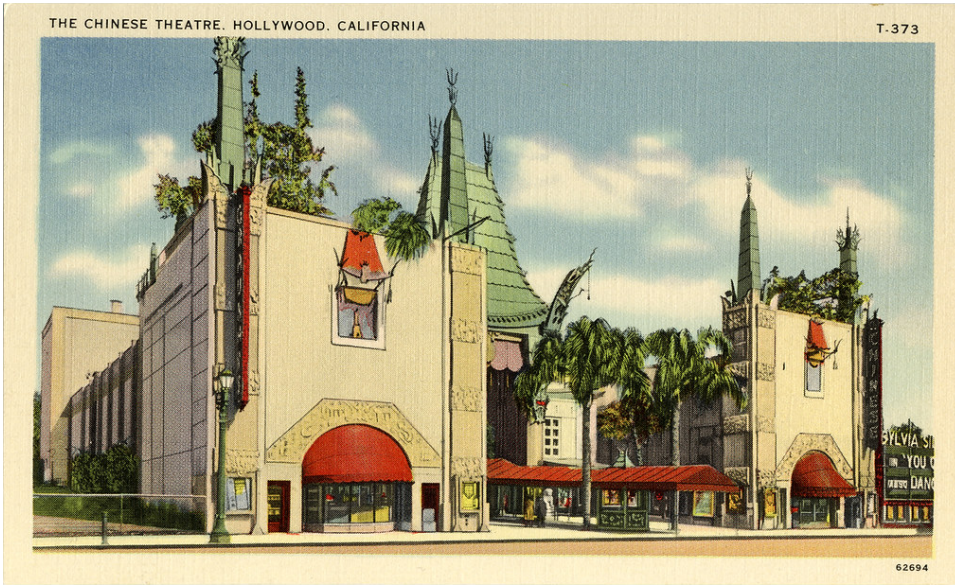


Grauman's Chinese Theatre is a first-run movie theatre located on Hollywood Blvd in Los Angeles, though its name is currently the TCL Chinese Theatre, as TCL Corporation, a Chinese electronics company, bought the naming rights in 2013 for $5m.

It opened in 1927 under its most famous name, Grauman's Chinese Theatre, because Sid Grauman (see page 75) commissioned it after the success of Grauman's Egyptian Theatre, which opened in 1922. It was converted into an IMAX theatre in 2013, which seats 932.

Grauman's Chinese hosted the Academy Awards ceremonies (see page 75) in 1944, 1945 and 1946, and is a regular location for premieres.

Its first three films were *The King of Kings* (1927), a Cecil B. DeMille picture (see page 42), a west coast premiere; *The Gaucho*, starring Douglas Fairbanks (see page 90) and Lupe Valez, a world premiere; and *The Circus*, with Charlie Chaplin (see page 82). Later world premieres included films as varied as *King Kong*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Shane*, *West Side Story*, *Goldfinger* and *Star Wars*. A full list of every film screened at Grauman's Chinese can be found at graumanschinese.org/playlist.html.



Sidney Patrick Grauman was born in Indianapolis, but grew up in Dawson City in the Canadian territory of Yukon, because his father took him there during the Klondike Gold Rush. They didn't strike it rich as prospectors, but did make a lot of money providing entertainment to the locals, learning quickly that people were willing to pay to be entertained.

Sid and his father ran vaudeville theatres, later movie theatres across the country. Everywhere he went seemed to provide another notable story.

They had run movie theatres in San Francisco when the 1906 earthquake hit, so they salvaged a projector and put up a tent, with a sign reading "Nothing to fall on you but canvas if there is another quake."

After the earthquake, they moved to L.A. and built many notable theatres, including three big movie palaces:

Grauman's Million Dollar Theater opened in 1917 on Broadway, with *The Silent Man* (1917).

Grauman's Egyptian Theatre opened in 1922 on Hollywood Blvd., with *Robin Hood* (1922), with Douglas Fairbanks (see page 90) in the lead.

Grauman's Chinese Theatre opened in 1927 on Hollywood Blvd., with *The King of Kings* (1927), a Cecil B. DeMille (see page 42) feature.



Chaplin with Sid Grauman, the theatre-owner and great movie-exhibitor, 1928



I'm in Hedy Lamarr's Shoes!

When Hedley Lamarr arrives at Grauman's Chinese, he strides past a couple of tourists, one of whom cries, "Look, Herman, I'm in Hedy Lamarr's shoes!" Of course, he chimes in with "Hedley!"

This is a reference to the "forecourt of the stars", a collection of handprints, footprints and autographs of people important to film that are inscribed in the cement of the courtyard in front of the theatre. Currently, over three hundred people have been asked to be part of this collection.

There are at least six different stories as to how this tradition began, but all end with Grauman, ever the showman, having the idea of ritualising it. Maybe Norma Talmadge accidentally stepped into wet cement. Maybe Sid Grauman did it himself. Maybe an unidentified cat did it. Maybe a mason called Jean Klossner signed his work with a handprint. Maybe Grauman took the idea from Charlie Chaplin (see page 82), who did this at his own studio in 1918. And maybe he took it from Douglas Fairbanks (see page 90) and Mary Pickford who did this at their ranch in 1926.

Whichever is true, Hedy Lamarr isn't one of those three hundred people. The tourist seems to be standing in William Powell and Myrna Loy's shoes, or close to them.

There is one member of the *Blazing Saddles* cast and crew who is immortalised in the forecourt of the stars and that's Mel Brooks himself, who wore an extra prosthetic finger on his left hand when he left his handprints and footprints on 8th September, 2014.







Raisinets!

After entering Grauman's Chinese Theatre (see page 86), Hedley Lamarr stops for concessions and buys some Raisinets, which arrive in a white box.

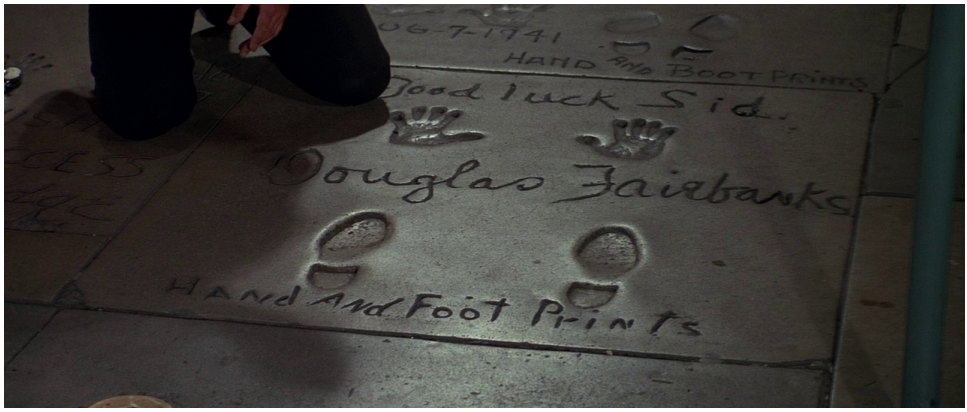
Being English, I wasn't exposed to many American brand names as a child and so assumed that a lot of them were made up for the movies. I was shocked when I drove around the U.S. in 1999 and saw a real Taco Bell, because I thought that was made up for *Demolition Man* ("in the future, all restaurants will be Taco Bell"). I was even more surprised to find a Zagnut bar in a store, as I'd assumed that was made up for *Beetlejuice*. That simply couldn't be a real brand name! Well, it is.

Raisinets are also real and the name is an American brand name for what we Brits know simply as chocolate covered raisins. They were first introduced by the Blumenthal Brothers Chocolate Company in 1927, coincidentally the same year that Grauman's Chinese opened. Blumenthal was sold in 1969 and eventually went bankrupt. Various brands including Raisinets were bought by Nestle in 1984, who sold it to Ferrero SpA in 2018.

While the packaging is bright yellow now, in all its various permutations, it used to be white. In fact, I've seen snarky comments online that ask us to "Remember how movies used to be great when Raisinets came in a white box?"







With Such Little Feet

After leaving Grauman's Chinese Theatre (see page 86) and losing a poorly rigged gunfight against Sheriff Bart, Hedley Lamarr collapses on Douglas Fairbanks's slab in the forecourt of the stars (see page 88), exclaiming "How did he do such fantastic stunts with such little feet?"

Fairbanks was one of the greatest stars of the silent era, today remembered as a swashbuckler, in a set of epic adventure films like *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), *Robin Hood* (1922) and *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924). He did many of his outrageous stunts himself.

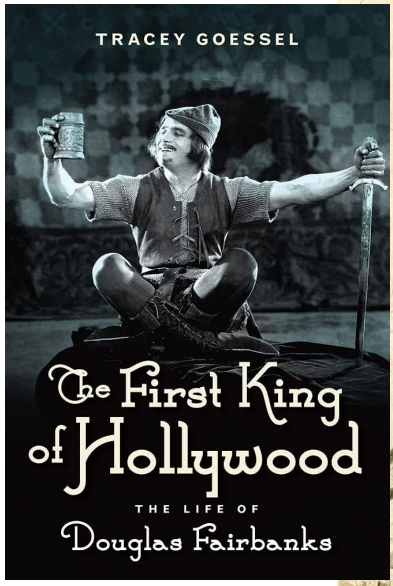
In 1919, he was one of four major industry names to form United Artists, along with Mary Pickford (whom he married in 1920), Charlie Chaplin (see page 82) and D. W. Griffith. The Fairbankses invested in Grauman's Chinese Theater, so were the first to leave their mark outside.

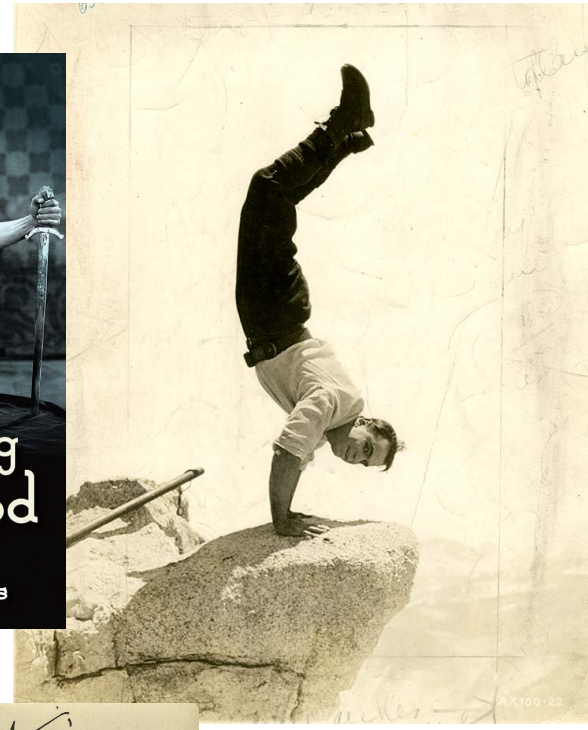
Coincidentally, the hand and bootprints right above Fairbanks's slab belong to Cecil B. DeMille (see page 42).

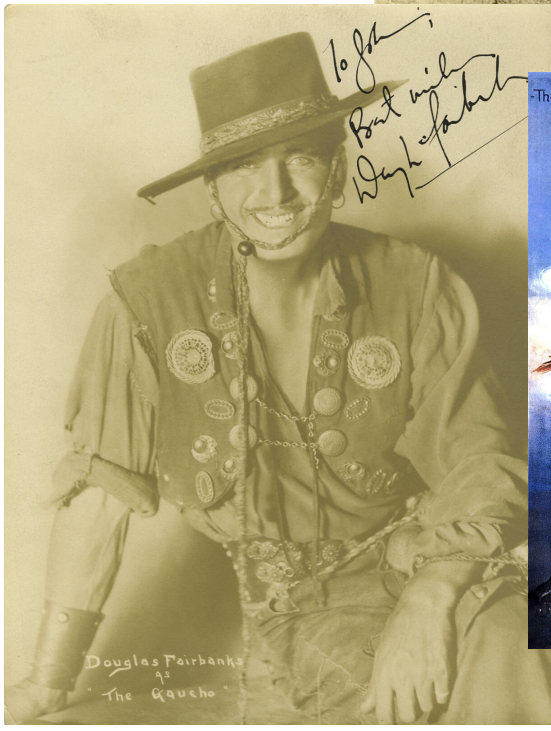




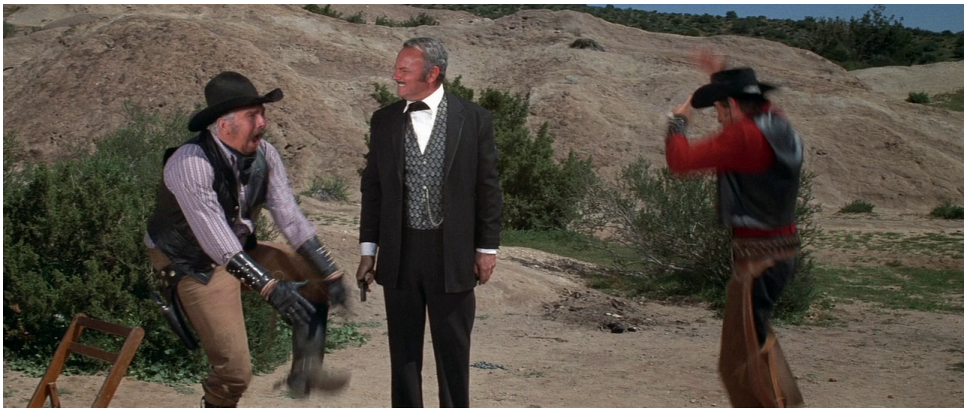



TRACEY GOESSEL
The First King of Hollywood
THE LIFE OF
Douglas Fairbanks




Douglas Fairbanks
as
"The Gaucho"


The Flying Carpet
Douglas
Fairbanks
The THIEF of BAGDAD



I Hate That Cliché!

After Bart and Jim escape from the hiring line for Hedley Lamarr's army (see page 68), clad in Ku Klax Klan robes (see page 70), Bart impersonating Jesse Owens (see page 73), Taggart offers to "head them off at the pass" and Hedley Lamarr shoots him in the foot, saying "I hate that cliché!"

Of course, *Blazing Saddles* punctures a lot of western clichés throughout its running time and so the final shot, another western cliché, seems like a good place to wrap things up for this zine. In fact, the entire ending of the picture is nothing but western clichés, ironically given how ground-breaking the meta scenes leading up to it were. Each scene is an 1874 cliché with a 1974 twist.

The hero faces off against the villain, with Bart being honourable and offering to "settle it like men, with our fists" but Lamarr being villainous and pulling a concealed weapon. Of course, it's in the forecourt of the stars (see page 88) at Grauman's Chinese Theatre (see page 86). The hero gives a rousing speech about moving on, orating. "My work here is done. I'm needed elsewhere now.... wherever a people cry out for justice!" Of course, the magically integrated town promptly calls "Bullshit!". Then the hero collects his sidekick (who's still holding a popcorn bucket) so the pair can ride off into the sunset (in a limousine), to the delightfully vague "nowhere special".











Trivia

Blazing Saddles is a Warner Bros. picture produced by Crossbow Productions, released in 1974. It was directed by Mel Brooks for $2.6 million and grossed $119.6 million at the box office. It was nominated for three Academy Awards, but won none. It did, however, win the writing team the Writers Guild of America Award for Best Comedy Written Directly for the Screen.

It was originally titled *Tex-X* (as a play on Malcolm X's name), then *Black Bart* (the name of the eventual TV show sequel) and *Purple Sage*. The title *Blazing Saddles* came to Brooks in the shower.

Richard Pryor, a crucial member of the writing team, was the original choice to play Bart, but the studio refused to finance it with him in the lead, given his history of drug abuse and arrests.

Brooks offered the role of the Waco Kid to John Wayne, who declined because it didn't work for his image, but assured him that "he would be the first one in line to see it". Dan Dailey and Gig Young were also considered and the latter was cast, only to be replaced when he collapsed on set during his first scene from alcohol withdrawal.

Johnny Carson and Gene Wilder both turned down the role of Hedley Lamarr, Wilder becoming the Waco Kid instead after Gig Young's collapse.

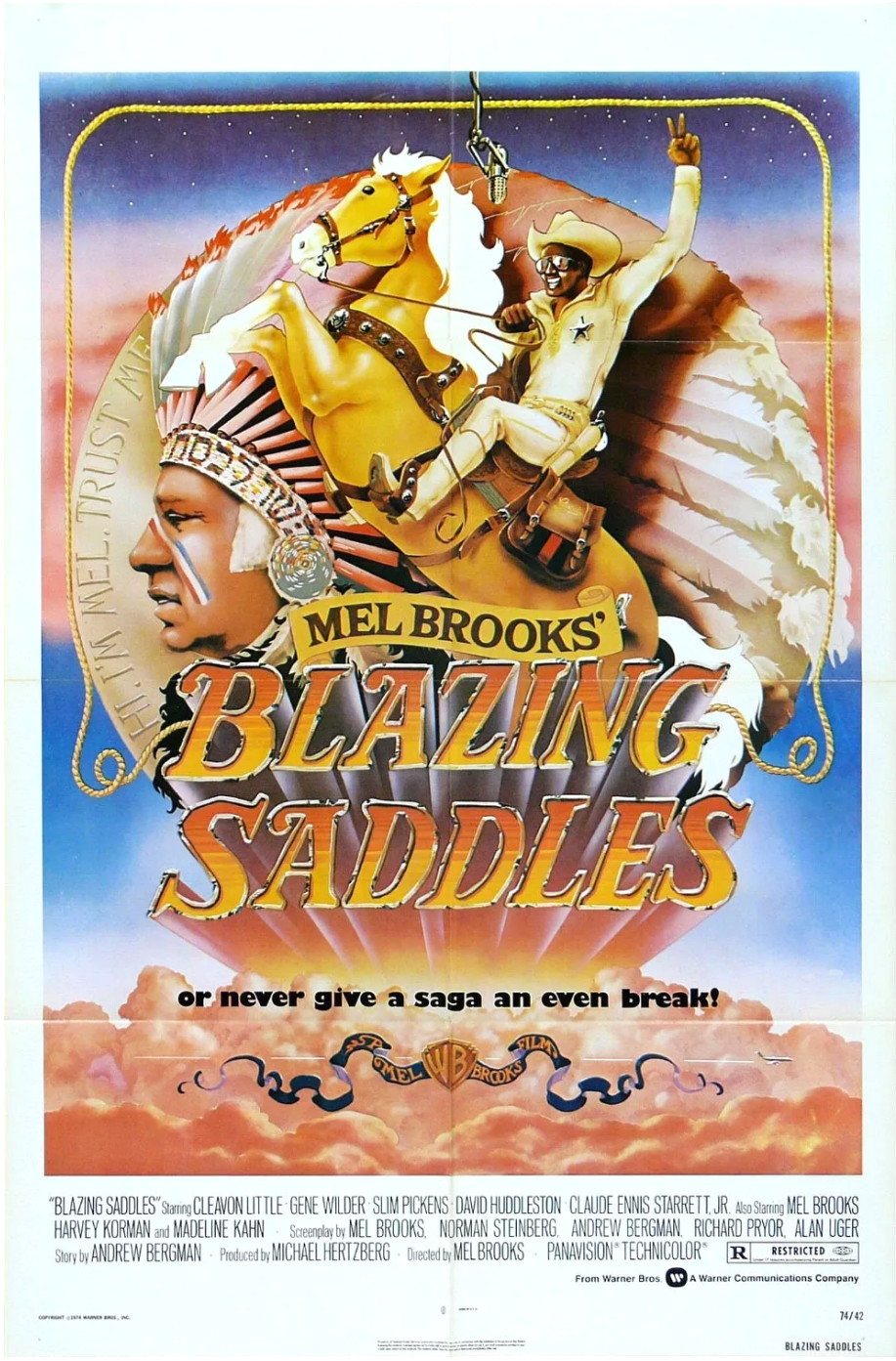
The campfire scene didn't just break wind, it broke ground with the first audible farts in movie history, at least in America. There isn't a list, unfortunately.

Studio executives hated the movie and the initial screening for them was quiet. Brooks has said that the head of distribution suggested "Let's dump it and take a loss."

The world premiere took place on 7th February, 1974, at the Pickwick Drive-In near the studio in Burbank, California. It was invite only and everyone watched the film on horseback.

The film was selected for preservation in the National Film Registry in 2006, as "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant".

The 2022 animated film *Paws of Fury: The Legend of Hank*, originally titled *Blazing Samurai*, was both "equally inspired by and an homage to *Blazing Saddles*". Mel Brooks served as an executive producer; voiced Shogun Toshi, based on his role of Governor William J. Le Petomane in *Blazing Saddles*; and received a credit on the screenplay.


HI, I'M MEL. TRUST ME.
MEL BROOKS'
BLAZING SADDLES
or never give a saga an even break!
MEL BROOKS FILMS
"BLAZING SADDLES" Starring CLEAVON LITTLE · GENE WILDER · SLIM PICKENS · DAVID HUDDLESTON · CLAUDE ENNIS STARRETT, JR. Also Starring MEL BROOKS HARVEY KORMAN and MADELINE KAHN · Screenplay by MEL BROOKS, NORMAN STEINBERG, ANDREW BERGMAN, RICHARD PRYOR, ALAN UGER Story by ANDREW BERGMAN · Produced by MICHAEL HERTZBERG · Directed by MEL BROOKS · PANAVISION® TECHNICOLOR®
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74/42
BLAZING SADDLES



Cleavon Little

According to the opening credits, *Blazing Saddles* stars Cleavon Little and Gene Wilder. Many of the reactors recognise the latter, but none yet that I've seen have recognised the former.

However, Cleavon Little, who plays Sheriff Bart, was well established in 1974.

Cleavon Jake Little debuted as a professional actor in 1967 in an off-Broadway play, *MacBird*, following up with another called *Scuba Duba* the same year. While appearing in the latter at night, he played Hamlet by day in schools and parks, courtesy of the New York Shakespeare Festival.

He debuted on film in *What's So Bad About Feeling Good?* (1968), television in a two-part episode of *Felony Squad* (1968) and Broadway in *Jimmy Shine* (1969).

His first major awards were for *Purlie* (1970), a Broadway play in which he played the title role, of a travelling preacher called Purlie Victorious Judson. That landed him a Tony for Best Actor in a Musical (left).



He also starred in an ABC hospital sitcom, *Temperatures Rising* (1972) (below), as the only consistent cast member as it was reworked into *The New Temperatures Rising Show* (1973).



I haven't seen him that early, but I have seen him in *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) and *Vanishing Point* (1971), a blaxploitation flick (below left) and a cult film (right) respectively, playing a memorable blind DJ called Super Soul in the latter.





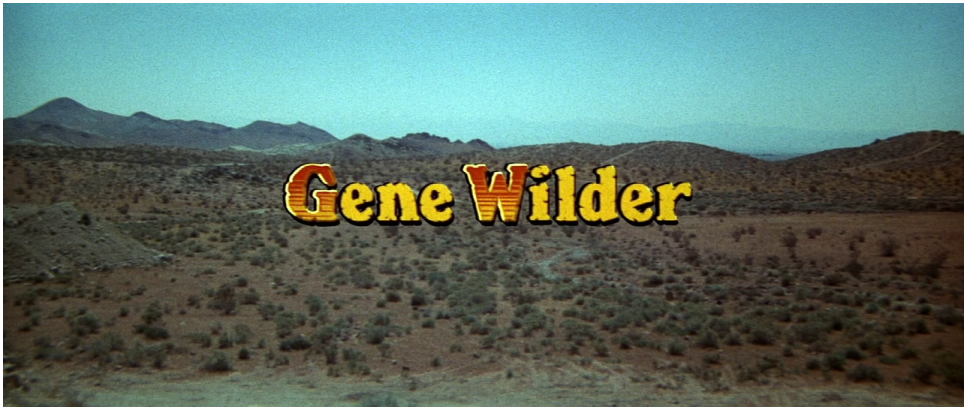
He also played a supporting role in *Greased Lightning* (1977), alongside Richard Pryor (below), who was the original choice to play Sheriff Bart.

I've also seen him in *Once Bitten* (1985) and *Fletch Lives* (1989), but his most important role may have come in an episode of a TV sitcom *Dear John* (1989), playing a closeted gay man called Tony Larkin who had just ended a marriage to a woman, because that won him a Primetime Emmy as the Outstanding Guest Actor in a Comedy Series.

His final appearance was as a guest on an episode of *Tales from the Crypt* (1992).

He has a posthumous star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Hollywood Blvd.





Gene Wilder

Many reactors recognise Gene Wilder ("Is that Willy Wonka?" being a common response when they see the Waco Kid hanging upside down in Sheriff Bart's cell). However, he's often the only cast member of *Blazing Saddles* that they recognise.

He was also well established in 1974 and had already worked with Mel Brooks on *The Producers* (1967) (see page 81), which landed him a Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor (see page 75). He later wrote *Young Frankenstein* (1974), which Brooks directed and which landed them both an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay, losing to Francis Ford Coppola and Mario Puzo for *The Godfather Part II*. It was a tough year.

Like Cleavon Little, Jerome Silberman started out on stage, often in Shakespeare. His first role in front of a paying audience was in *Romeo and Juliet* (1948) and his first as a professional actor was in *Twelfth Night* (1951), doubling as the fencing choreographer. In fact, he took the stage name of Gene Wilder while studying at the Actors Studio, because "Jerry Silberman in *Macbeth*" didn't sound right.

He won an award for his role in *The Complaisant Lover* (1962), off-Broadway.

However his most notable early stage role was surely originating the role of Billy Bibbit in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1963, right).

Of course he eventually made it to the big screen, in a supporting role in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) (top right opposite). *The Producers* with Mel Brooks came later that year.







He appeared in other movies as the seventies began but soon found his trademark role in *Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory* (1971). It might not seem believable today, but while it was a critical success, it wasn't at the box office. It didn't flop, but its legend didn't build until much later.



In a very different vein, he was a psychiatrist who fell for a sheep in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* (*But Were Afraid to Ask)* for Woody Allen and then returned to Brooks for *Blazing Saddles* and to bring life to *Young Frankenstein* (1974).

While he would act in, write, produce and direct many later movies, he's probably best known for his collaborations with Richard Pryor—*Silver Streak* (1976), *Stir Crazy* (1980), *See No Evil, Hear No Evil* (1989) and *Another You* (1991). Sidney Poitier has called them "probably the funniest pair that's ever been on screen."



Like Cleavon Little, he won a Primetime Emmy as Outstanding Guest Actor on a Comedy Series, for a pair of episodes of *Will & Grace* (2003 and 2003).



Slim Pickens

The name of Slim Pickens often raises a laugh from reactors who pay attention to the opening credits, even though they don't know who he is. No, that's not his real name. Yes, it's the name he used throughout his career, going back to his days competing in rodeo. His father didn't want him doing that and he was told by those in the know that there would be slim pickings (i.e. not a lot of prize money), so he signed up as Slim Pickens. He won $400 at his first event.

His real name was Louis Burton Lindley, Jr. and, while he was highly memorable as Taggart in *Blazing Saddles*, it's not his most important role or the most important film he was in. The one that made him as an actor was as Maj. T. J. "King" Kong in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), in which he gets many pivotal scenes, including the one where he rides an H-bomb like a bronco, starting World War III in the process. It's one of the defining film images of its era.





Given that he was a real cowboy, many of his films, once he found his way to Hollywood after a couple of decades in rodeo, were westerns. In fact, his first role was as an rodeo cowboy in *Smoky* (1946) and many of his earliest films (12 of his first 16) saw him credited as Slim Pickens in a role also named Slim Pickens.

Of course, he didn't need a stand-in to shoot scenes on horseback and he often rode his own horses rather than borrow those available to a picture.

His first credited role was in *Rocky Mountain* (1950) and he made it to television in *Stories of the Century* (1954). However, none of his early films, almost all of which were westerns, were notable.



Arguably his first important role was as Deputy Lon Dedrick in *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961) (above), a western but one directed by Marlon Brando. *Dr. Strangelove* arrived three years later and suddenly so did he. "After *Dr.* Strangelove," he once said, "the roles, the dressing rooms and the checks all started gettin' bigger."

I've certainly seen more of him in the sixties, in *Major Dundee* (1965), *The Flim-Flam Man* (1967), *Will Penny* (1967) and even *Skidoo* (1968), only half of which were westerns.



He continued to act in westerns in the seventies, of course, including as Sheriff Cullen Baker in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* (1973), *Blazing Saddles* and *The Apple Dumpling Gang* (1975) (above). He played a lot of sheriffs, both decent, upstanding heroes and sleazy, corrupt villains.

The market had changed and fewer westerns were being made, but he was up to the challenge. He was memorable in movies as thoroughly different as *Poor Pretty Eddie* (1975), *Beyond the Poseidon Adventure* (1979) and *The Howling* (1981).

His honours are more on the rodeo side, including being inducted into the Rodeo Hall of Fame, the ProRodeo Hall of Fame and the Hall of Great Western Performers.



David Huddleston

While the supporting actors in *Blazing Saddles* may not be household names, many of them have faces that are immediately recognisable to fans of film and television.

David Huddleston, who played Olson Johnson in *Blazing Saddles*, is a quintessential one, whether it's because we know him as Santa Claus in *Santa Claus: The Movie* (1985) or as the Big Lebowski in *The Big Lebowski* (1998). No, Jeff Bridges didn't play the Big Lebowski; he played the Dude.





His first professional role was on television in an episode of *Shotgun Slade* (1960), while his first film appearance was in *All the Way Home* (1963). Notable film parts included *Rio Lobo* (1970), *The Klansman* (1974) and *Capricorn One* (1977), and he had recurring TV roles on *Petrocelli* (1974-1976) and *The Wonder Years* (1990-1992), playing Fred Savage's grandfather.

Liam Dunn

Liam Dunn, who played Rev. Johnson, was part of Mel Brooks's stock company, appearing for him not only in *Blazing Saddles*, but also *Young Frankenstein* (1974) and *Silent Movie* (1976), the year of his death. However, he had a screen career before that going back to *That's My Man* (1947) that came to life in the late sixties and took off after *What's Up, Doc?* (1972), in which he played Barbra

Streisand's dad, Judge Maxwell (right).



That led him to Brooks and other directors who were able to cast him as characters much older than he was.

While he's best known for *What's Up, Doc?* and *Blazing Saddles*, he also found parts as doctors in live action Disney movies like *Herbie Rides Again* (1974). Other notable roles include *Papillon* (1973) (below) and *Killer Bees* (1974).



Alex Karras

If Alex Karras hadn't become an actor and played Mongo in *Blazing Saddles*, he'd probably be best known today as an American football player. He won the Outland Trophy as the best college interior lineman in the nation, was an All-American in 1957 and spent twelve years as a defensive tackle for the Detroit Lions. He's a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

His acting debut was as himself in *Paper Lion* (1968), a sports film about the Detroit Lions, and he took other roles in film and on TV, but it was Mongo that put him on the map.

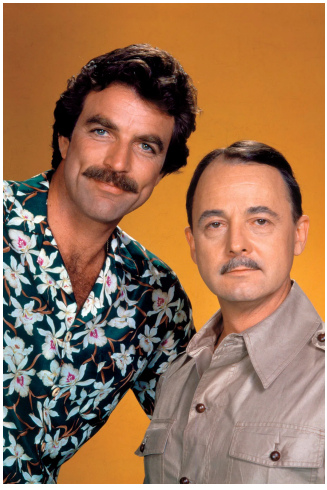


Later notable roles include *Porky's* (1981); *Victor/Victoria* (1982) (right), playing James Garner's closeted gay bodyguard; and *Webster* (1983-1989), in which he and his real life wife, Susan Clark, played Webster Long's adoptive parents.



John Hillerman

Even more than David Huddleston, my generation is mostly likely to recognise John Hillerman from the supporting cast of *Blazing Saddles*, where he played Howard Johnson, because he brought life to Higgins, the thorn in the side of *Magnum, P.I.* (1980-1988) (left) for eight seasons.



However, he was also an easily recognisable face in a bunch of films going back to *They Call Me Mister Tibbs!* (1970). He was in *The Last Picture Show* (1971), *What's Up, Doc?* (1972) and *High Plains Drifter* (1973) and had notable roles in *Paper Moon* (1973) (below) and *Chinatown* (1974). He was Betty White's estranged husband on TV in *The Betty White Show* (1977-1978).



George Furth

George Furth, who played Van Johnson in *Blazing Saddles*, was another recognisable face in a whole slew of movies before this one, but he was also a playwright, best known for writing the book for the concept musical *Company* (1970), with music by Steven Sondheim. It was nominated for a recordbreaking fourteen Tony Awards, winning six, including one for him.

As an actor, he started out on stage but found his way to television for *Going My Way* (1962) and to film for *The Best Man* (1964). Notable roles in *The Boston Strangler* (1968) (opposite left), *Butch*

Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969) and *Myra Breckinridge* (1970) predate *Blazing Saddles*; similarly notable roles in *Airport '77* (1977), *Oh, God!* (1977) and *The Cannonball Run* (1981) (below right) were still to come, along with numerous guest appearances on TV shows over four decades.





Claude Ennis Starrett, Jr.

Claude Ennis Starrett, Jr. was credited as playing Gabby Johnson in *Blazing Saddles*, but he went by Jack Starrett for much of his career, whether as authority figures in biker movies in the sixties or a much more diverse set of characters in a much more diverse set of films much later on.

Important examples of the former are *Hells Angels on Wheels* (1967), *The Born Losers* (1967) and *Angels from Hell* (1968), each notable in its way. Later, he'd go from *The Rose* (1979) to *First Blood* (1982) (below) to *Nightwish* (1989), with the middle of the three easily his most recognisable role.

In *First Blood*, he played Art Galt, the sadistic chief deputy under Sheriff Teasle, John Rambo's nemesis. He was similarly sadistic as a foreman in the otherwise very different *The River* (1984).

While he was a memorable actor, he preferred directing and was responsible for a varied set of memorable exploitation films, including *Cry Blood, Apache* (1970), *Slaughter* (1972), *Cleopatra Jones* (1973) and *Race with the Devil* (1975).



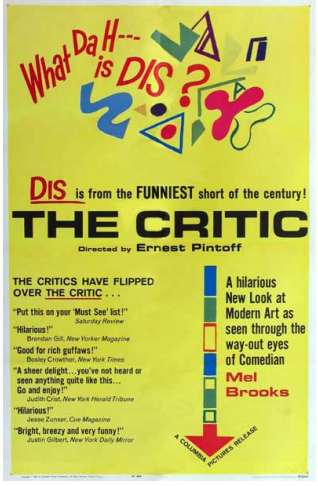


Mel Brooks

Along with Burton Gilliam, who surprisingly didn't get an opening credit for playing Lyle, Mel Brooks is the last prominent surviving member of the cast and crew of *Blazing Saddles*. Along with Gene Wilder, because of *Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory*, he's the name most reactors know. Of course, what they know him from is very much a generational thing.



He started out as a comic, writing sketches for Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows* (1950), on which he met lifelong friend Carl Reiner. They wrote the *2000 Year Old Man* sketch together, which became the first of five comedy albums over almost forty years. Caesar landed him an array of writing gigs and Reiner, who created *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, based the character of Morey Amsterdam on Mel.



With Buck Henry, Brooks created a cult TV comedy, *Get Smart* (1965), but refused to stay working in just one medium. He wrote a play that became the hit Broadway musical *All American* (1962). He conceived and heckled *The Critic* (1963), which won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film. No wonder he's one of only eighteen EGOT winners, those who have won an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony. He was the eighth to achieve that feat and, in fact, has won more than one of each except the Oscar.

That Oscar was won for writing *The Producers* (1968), his first feature film. His second film, *The Twelve Chairs* (1970) is not well known, but then he made *Blazing Saddles* and *Young Frankenstein* in the same year.

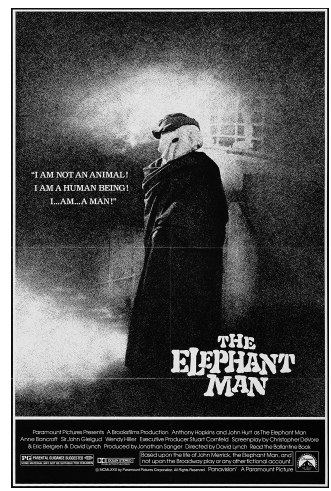






Blazing Saddles was a huge hit, the second-highest grossing movie of 1974 after T*he Towering Inferno*, with *Young Frankenstein* was third. Suddenly Brooks, who'd been a success for a couple of decades, was huge. After his next feature, *Silent Movie* (1976), in which the only word spoken is by French mime Marcel Marceau, he made the top half of the Top Ten Money Making Stars Poll.

After westerns, Universal horror films and silent movies, he took on Hitchcockian thrillers in *High Anxiety* (1977), Biblical epics in *History of the World, Part I* (1981), sci-fi action in *Spaceballs* (1987) and adventure films in *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993).



As a combination of writer, producer and director, in addition to performing multiple roles himself, his name was all over these films. What it isn't generally associated with is a string of very different films that Brooks produced through a company called Brooksfilms, deliberately so because his name would mislead anyone going to see films like *The Elephant Man* (1980), *The Fly* (1986) or *84 Charing Cross Road* (1987).

He continues to create in his nineties, producing and acting in *Paws of Fury: The Legend of Hank* (2022), an animated feature take on *Blazing Saddles,* with a samurai cat theme; and writing and producing *History of the World, Part II* (2023) as a series on Hulu.



Left is *Life Stinks* (1991).



Harvey Korman

While Harvey Korman is known for his roles for Mel Brooks, not merely in *Blazing Saddles*, in which he played Hedley Lamarr, but also *High Anxiety* (1977), *History of the World, Part I* (1981) and *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* (1995), his greatest successes are arguably elsewhere, most obviously in his ten years on the *The Carol Burnett Show* (1967-1977) (below), a CBS sketch comedy show. It gave him six Primetime Emmy and four Golden Globe nominations, winning four and one respectively.

Of all people, his earliest films were for exploitation legend Herschell Gordon Lewis: *Carving Magic* (1959), an educational short about carving meat, and *Living Venus* (1961), a fictional biopic of Hugh Hefner. Except for a role in a satire of teenage culture, *Lord Love a Duck* (1966), most of his work in the sixties was on television, including variety shows, dramas and comedies, maybe most notably giving voice to the Great Gazoo and other characters on *The Flintstones* (1964-1966).

The Carol Burnett Show made him famous, not least for sketches like *Dentist* (below), in which he laughed so hard at Tim Conway's antics that he apparently peed himself.





His choice of roles after *The Carol Burnett Show* were, shall we say, not always optimal.

On the positive side, he flexed his chops as a ruthless villain again in *Herbie Goes Bananas* (1981) (right), a fourth film for the Love Bug; played a double role in the comedy horror *Munchies* (1987); and hammed it up as Prof. Auguste Balls in a couple of *Pink Panther* movies, most notably *Curse of the Pink Panther* (1983) (bottom), making us wonder where the other Sellers/Korman collaborations were.

On the negative side, well, there was *The Star Wars Holiday Special* (1978), a legendary failure in which he played three different characters: a four-armed alien cook, a lovestruck cantina patron who drinks through the top of his head and a mulfunctioning droid (all below).

While he returned to Mel Brooks for *High Anxiety* (1977), *History of the World, Part I* (1981) and *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* (1995), as well as a quickly cancelled TV sitcom, *The Nutt House* (1989), which has been described as "*Police Squad!* meets *Fawlty Towers*" by cast member Molly Hagan.







Madeline Kahn

Regardless of Hedley Lamarr's rousing speech (see page 75), Madeline Kahn was the only actor in *Blazing Saddles* to be nominated for an Academy Award, as she had been a year earlier for *Paper Moon* (1973) (below), especially impressive as they were only her second and third features, after debuting in *What's Up, Doc?* (1972). She continued with Brooks into *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *High Anxiety* (1977) and *History of the World, Part I* (1981), but proved versatile enough to carve out an impressive resume on film, television and stage.



She never won that Oscar, or indeed a Golden Globe, though she was nominated multiple times for each, but she did win an Emmy, for an ABC Afterschool Special called *Wanted: The Perfect Guy* (1986), as the lonely mother of a 13 year old Ben Affleck; and a Tony, for *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992), as Dr. Gorgeous (below), host of a radio advice show.



She started out on stage, as a chorister in *Kiss Me Kate* (1965) off-Broadway, but found her way to film and TV in 1972, initially making the biggest impression in the former.

After her early award-nominated movies and her earliest Mel Brooks pictures, she landed important roles in *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother* (1975), for director

Gene Wilder; *Won Ton Ton, the Dog Who Saved Hollywood* (1976) (bottom left) and *City Heat* (1984). Most of her films weren't comedies but comedy dramas, so she could flex her acting muscles while making us laugh.



That held true in smaller roles in ensemble films *The Cheap Detective* (1978), *Yellowbeard* (1983) (middle) and *Clue* (1985) (top right), or when she was voice acting in *My Little Pony: The Movie* (1986), *An American Tail* (1986) and *A Bug's Life* (1998).

On television, she gained her own show, *Oh Madeline* (1983-1984) on ABC, but also appeared in a dozen episodes of *Sesame Street* (1978-1997) and was a regular on *Mr. President* (1987), *New York News* (1995) and *Cosby* (1996-1999). She hosted *Saturday Night Live* three times.











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I wasn't planning on including an index, but it seems that 120 pages is too short a book for KDP to allow me text on the spine in a consistent manner with other editions of the Apocalypse Later Zine, so I built one to get to that point. Fortunately, I think it might be fun to look through it and wonder how Lady Gaga; Maat, Eygptian goddess or Topsy (elephant) connect to *Blazing Saddles*.

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SUBMISSIONS

I welcome submissions to Apocalypse Later Music, though I can't guarantee that everything submitted will be reviewed.

Please read the following important notes before submitting anything.

I primarily review the good stuff. There's just too much of it out there nowadays to waste any time reviewing the bad stuff. Almost everything that I review is, in my opinion, either good or interesting and, hopefully, both. I believe that it's worth listening to and I recommend it to some degree, if it happens to be your sort of thing. Now, if you're a die hard black/death metalhead, you might not dig any of the psychedelic rock and vice versa. However, maybe you will! Open ears, open minds and all that.

I have zero interest in being a hatchet man critic who slams everything he writes about. I'll only give a bad review if it's in the public interest, such as a major act releasing a disappointing album. Even then, I'll often keep away.

If I do review, I'll still be completely honest and point out the good and the bad in any release.

I'm primarily reviewing new material only. Each month at Apocalypse Later Music, I review releases from the previous two months. I might stretch a little beyond that for a submission, but not far. Each January, I also try to catch up with highly regarded albums and obvious omissions from the previous year that I didn't get round to at the time. I then bundle my reviews up at the end of a quarter and publish in zine form midway through the following month.

I'm especially interested in studio albums or EPs that do something new and different. I try to review an indie release and a major band each weekday, one rock and one metal, with each week deliberately varied in both genres and countries covered.

If you still want to submit, thank you! You can do so in a couple of ways:

1. Digital copy: please e-mail me at hal@hornsablaze.com a link to where I can download mp3s in 320k. Please include promotional material such as an EPK, high res cover art, etc.
2. Physical: e-mail me for a mailing address.

Either way but especially digitally, please include any promotional material such as a press kit, high res cover art, band photo, etc.

And, whether you submit or not and whether I liked it or not, all the best with your music! Don't quit! The world is a better place because you create.

Submissions of books for review at the Nameless Zine wouldn't come to me directly. If you have books that fit the scope of a predominantly science fiction/fantasy/horror e-zine, please see the contact details at the bottom of the main page at thenamelesszine.org.

I don't review film submissions much any more, as most of my film reviews are for books.

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ABOUT HAL C. F. ASTELL

While he still has a day job to pay the bills, Hal C. F. Astell is a teacher by blood and a writer by the grace of the Dread Lord, which gradually transformed him into a film critic. He primarily writes for his own site, Apocalypse Later, but also anyone else who asks nicely. He writes monthly book reviews for the Nameless Zine.



Born and raised in the cold and rain of England half a century ago, he's still learning about the word "heat" many years after moving to Phoenix, Arizona where he lives with his much better half Dee in a house full of critters and oddities, a library with a ghost guard ferret and more cultural artefacts than can comfortably be imagined. And he can imagine quite a lot.

Just in case you care, his favourite film is Peter Jackson's debut, *Bad Taste*; his favourite actor is Warren William; and he believes Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is the greatest movie ever made.

He reads science fiction, horror and the pulps. He watches anything unusual and much that isn't. He listens to everything except mainstream western pop music. He annoys those around him by talking too much about Guy N. Smith, Doc Savage and the *Friday Rock Show*.

He tries not to go outdoors, but he's usually easy to find at film festivals, conventions and events because he's likely to be the only one there in kilt and forked beard, while his fading English accent is instantly recognisable on podcasts and panels. He hasn't been trepanned yet, but he's friendly and doesn't bite unless asked.

Photo Credit: Dee Astell

My personal site is Dawtrina. I run Smithland, a Guy N. Smith fan site. I founded and co-run the CoKoCon science fiction/fantasy convention. I co-founded the Arizona Penny Dreadfuls. I've run the Awesomelys since 2013. I write for the Nameless Zine.

The Arizona Penny Dreadfuls	azpennydreadfuls.org
The Awesomelys	awesomelys.com
CoKoCon	cokocon.org
Dawtrina	dawtrina.com
The Nameless Zine	thenamelesszine.org
Smithland	guynsmith.rocks

ABOUT APOCALYPSE LATER

Initially, Hal C. F. Astell wrote film reviews for his own reference as he could never remember who the one good actor was in forgettable episodes of long crime film series from the forties. After a year, they became long enough to warrant a dedicated blog.

The name came from an abandoned project in which he was reviewing his way through every movie in the IMDb Top 250 list. Its tentative title was a joke drawn from covering *Apocalypse Now* last and it stuck. It didn't have to be funny.

Gradually he focused on writing at length about the sort of films that most critics don't, such as old films, foreign films, indie films, local films, microbudget films, and so on, always avoiding adverts, syndication and monetised links, not to forget the eye-killing horror of white text on a black background. Let's just get to the content and make it readable.

Four million words later and Apocalypse Later Press was born, in order to publish his first book, cunningly titled *Huh?* It's been followed by plenty more with double digits worth of others always in process.

This growth eventually turned into the Apocalypse Later Empire, which continues to sprawl. In addition to film and book reviews, he posts a pair of album reviews each weekday from across the rock/metal spectrum and around the globe. He runs the only dedicated annual genre film festival in Phoenix, Arizona, the Apocalypse Later International Fantastic Film Festival, or ALIFFF. He publishes books by himself and others. He presents programs of quality international short films at conventions across the southwest.

Apocalypse Later celebrated its fifteenth anniversary in 2022.

Apocalypse Later Empire	apocalypselaterempire.com
Apocalypse Later Film	apocalypselaterfilm.com
Apocalypse Later Books	books.apocalypselaterempire.com
Apocalypse Later Music	apocalypselatermusic.com
Apocalypse Later International Fantastic Film Festival	alfilmfest.com
Apocalypse Later Roadshow	roadshow.apocalypselaterempire.com
Apocalypse Later Press	press.apocalypselaterempire.com
Apocalypse Later Now!	apocalypselaternow.blogspot.com
Horns Ablaze	hornsablaze.com

Latest film books from Apocalypse Later Press (available on Amazon):

A Horror Movie Calendar
WTF!? Films You Won't Believe Exist


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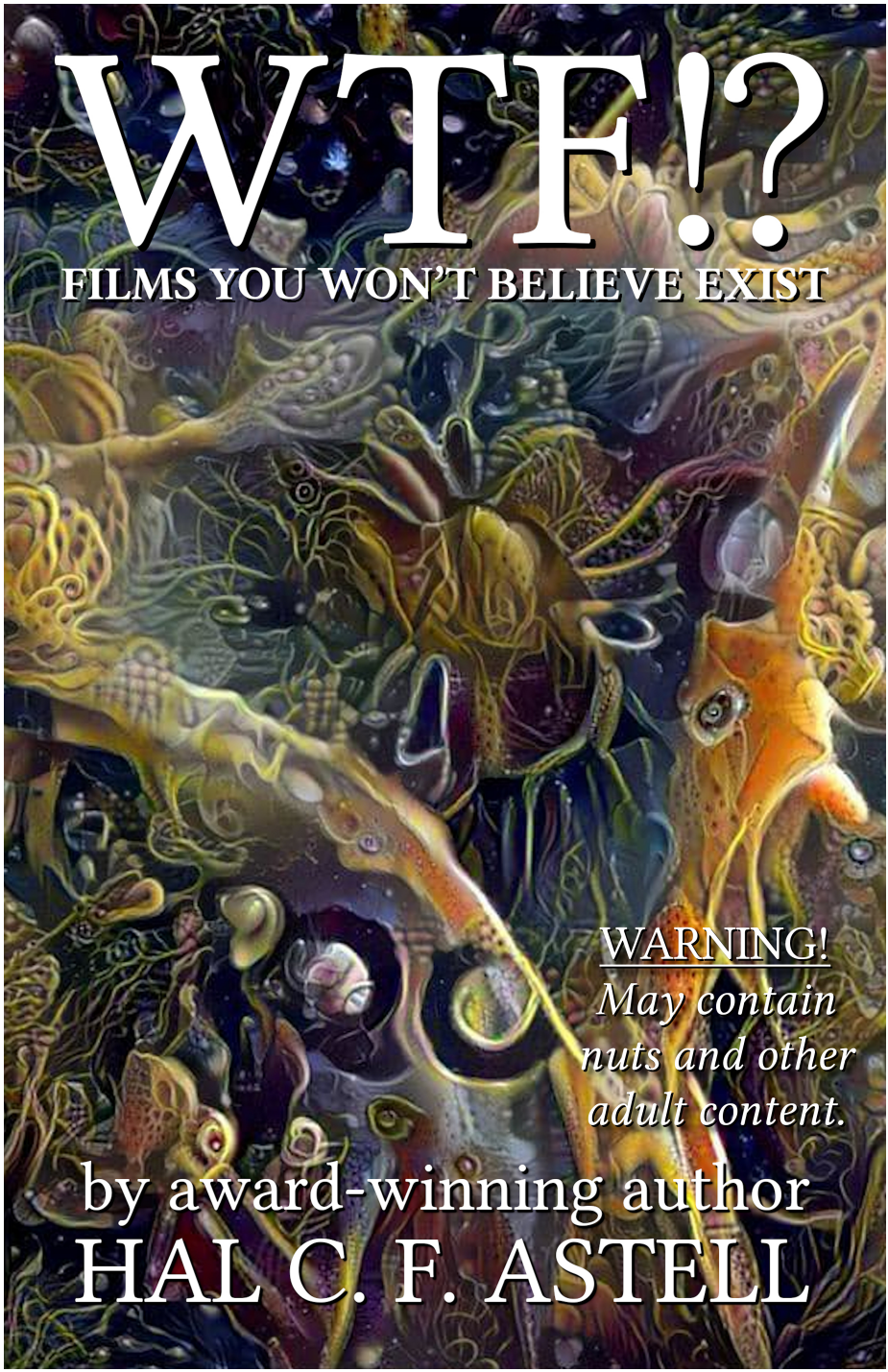
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COKOCON 2023

Tempe, Arizona — September 1-4

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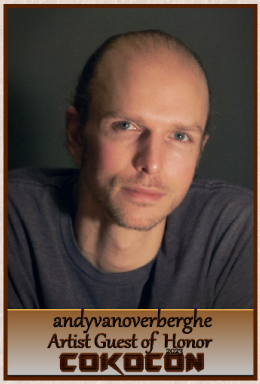

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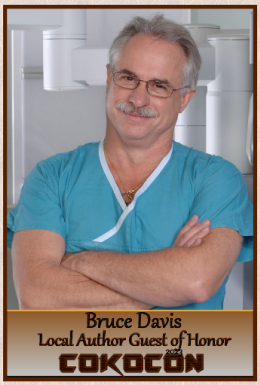

Bruce Davis
Local Author Guest of Honor
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Bruce Davis and andyvanoverberghe sponsored by Arizona Fandom
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Kristoph Klover
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COKOCON 2023

Tempe, Arizona — September 1-4

ATTENDANCE WILL BE CAPPED AT 500

LOCATION: *DoubleTree by Hilton Phoenix Tempe*
2100 S Priest Dr, Tempe, AZ 85282

MEMBERSHIP: *Adult (12+): $50 (pre-con), $60 (at con)*
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Kid-in-Tow (<7): FREE
(limit of 2 per adult member)

HOTEL RATES: *$92 per night (single/double)*
$102 (triple) or $112 (quad)

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