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*by Miles Mathis*

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You may have thought *Avatar* or *Avengers:Endgame* was the most popular movie of all time, based on box office totals. Or that *Gone with the Wind* was the most popular of all time, adjusted for inflation. But neither one is even close to being the truly most popular, **based on number of tickets sold**.

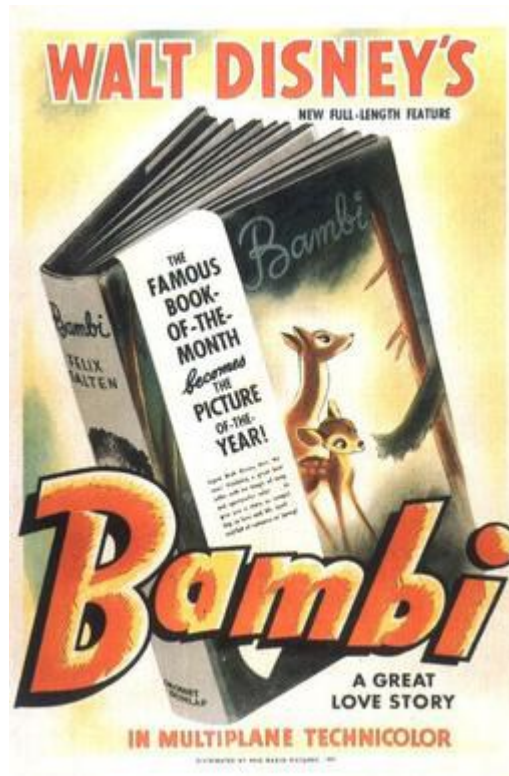
They want you to think *Gone with the Wind* is the most popular, because of course it was huge propaganda about the Civil War, selling mainstream history. As such, they promoted it far beyond anything at the time, leaving it in theaters for more than three years. It came out in late 1939, but was still on the charts in 1942. It wasn't re-released in those years like *Star Wars* later was, it was just left in theaters the entire time. It is still being promoted online in mainstream lists, selling it as the highest-grossing film of all time adjusted for inflation. And it did far out-perform *Avatar*, *Avengers*, or *Titanic*. According to the-numbers.com, *Avatar* sold 98.6 million tickets in the US.\*\* *Gone with the Wind* sold 178.9 million, almost twice as much.† But they are lying when they say it was the top-grossing film of all-time, inflation adjusted, since it isn't even close. I guess they have to lie because the truth is too embarrassing.

And no, the answer isn't *The Sound of Music*, though that film sold 161.6 million tickets. And the answer isn't *Star Wars*, which only sold 87.77 million in its initial release.

The answer is that *Gone with the Wind* was crushed by two Disney animated films of the same period: *Bambi* and *Pinocchio*.

<u>Film</u>	<u>US gross (in millions)</u>	<u>Tickets (in millions)</u>
<b>Bambi (1942)</b>	77.8	288.3
Pinocchio (1940)	52.0	216.7
<b>Gone with the Wind (1939-42)</b>	46.6	178.9
The Ten Commandments		170.8

Sound of Music	161.6
101 Dalmatians	148.4
Ben Hur	143.1
Lady and the Tramp	132.8
Titanic	128.8
Jaws	126.8
Song of the South	123.8
Doctor Zhivago	110.6
The Force Awakens	110.5
Mary Poppins	110.0
ET	109.5
The Exorcist	109.0
Peter Pan	100.1
Cinderella	98.8
Avatar	98.6
Avenger Endgame	93.5
Star Wars	87.7



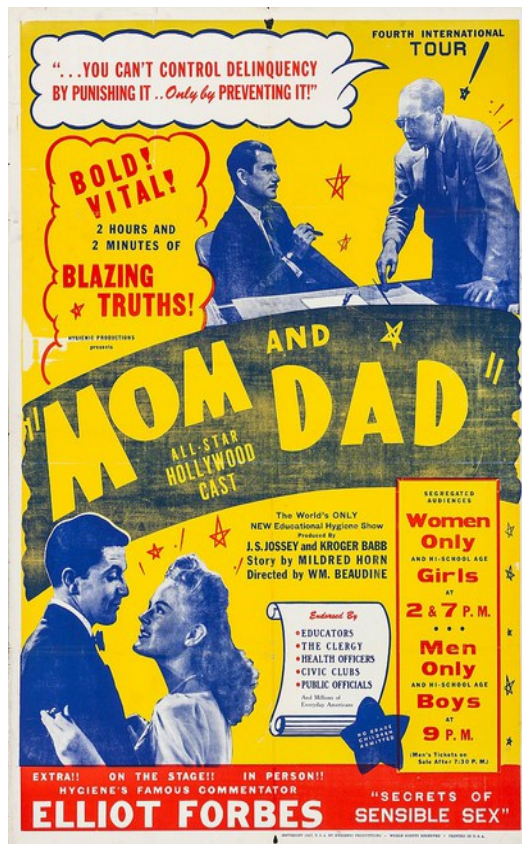
A book on the promotional poster!

But that still doesn't tell the whole story about the popularity of those movies, since it doesn't include a major factor they always leave out, even when adjusting for inflation or looking at tickets sold. It leaves out the number of people in the country at the time. At the time of *Avatar*, it was about 308 million. But in 1940 it was 132 million, an increase of 2.33 times. So to judge the popularity of a movie, we have to include that factor in our math, because we need to know the number of tickets sold relative to the number that *could* have been sold. Only by running that math can we see how many people are staying home from the movies these days. If we do that, we get this list:

Film	Year	Tickets rel population*
Bambi	1942	672.7
Pinocchio	1940	504.9
Gone with the Wind	1939-42	416.8
The Ten Commandments	1956	300.6
Sound of Music	1965	273
Song of the South	1946	260
101 Dalmatians	1961	255.3
Ben Hur	1959	246.1
Lady and the Tramp	1955	235.0
Cinderella	1950	201.9
Mary Poppins	1964	185.9
Doctor Zhivago	1965	185.8
Peter Pan	1953	180.2
Jaws	1976	179.1
Around World 80 Days	1956	157.1
Snow White...	1937	156.5
ET	1979	154.7
This is the Army	1943	147.8
Titanic	1997	142.7
The Graduate	1967	136.6
For Whom the Bell Tolls	1943	135.1
The Sting	1973	133.5
Samson and Delilah	1949	130.2
My Fair Lady	1964	130.0
The Jungle Book	1967	128.8
Notorious	1946	128.5
The Bells of St. Mary	1945	127.9
White Christmas	1954	126.7
The Wizard of Oz	1939	125.3
Best Yrs of Our Lives	1946	124.0
Star Wars	1977	123.9
Bridge on River Kwai	1957	120.6
Greatest Show on Earth	1952	120.0
20,000 Leagues...	1954	119.1
The Robe	1953	117.0
Quo Vadis?	1951	113.2
Cleopatra	1963	113.2
Giant	1956	112.6
Butch Cassidy...	1969	110.9
Return of the Jedi	1983	110.7
Mrs. Miniver	1942	110.0
Demetrius/Gladiators	1954	109.8
Going My Way	1944	109.4
West Side Story	1961	108.2
Duel in the Sun	1946	107.1
Thunderball	1965	105.2
Close Encounters. . .	1977	104.9
Love Story	1970	103.6

Fantasia	1940	101.6
Swiss Family Robinson	1960	100.8
The Jolson Story	1946	99.8
Yankee Doodle Dandy	1942	99.8
Jurassic Park	1993	99.8
The Shaggy Dog	1959	99.6
The Song of Bernadette	1943	99.1
From Here to Eternity	1953	99.1
Mom and Dad	1945	98.7
<b>Avatar</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>98.6</b>
South Pacific	1958	97.4
Airport	1970	97.2
Rear Window	1954	96.9
American Graffiti	1973	96.2
Empire Strikes Back	1980	95.7
Sayonara	1957	95.5
The Longest Day	1962	95.0
Mr Smith Goes to Wash.	1939	93.9
Grease	1978	93.5
Phantom Menace	1999	93.5
Peyton Place	1957	92.9
How the West was Won	1963	92.8
Blazing Saddles	1974	92.7
Goldfinger	1964	92.4
Mad Mad Mad Mad...	1963	92.1
The Caine Mutiny	1954	92.0
Ghostbusters	1984	91.3
The Towering Inferno	1974	89.9
Boom Town	1940	89.8
The Lion King	1994	89.0
Forrest Gump	1994	88.6
Billy Jack	1971	88.5
Saturday Night Fever	1977	88.4
<b>Avengers: Endgame</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>87.3</b>
Animal House	1978	86.6
The Force Awakens	2015	83.6

You can see why they bury this information, because it is so embarrassing. It proves that *Bambi* was almost **seven times** more popular than *Avatar*. *Avatar* is not the most popular, it is the 58<sup>th</sup> most popular. *Avengers* is #82. Twelve old Disney movies were far more popular than *Avatar* or *Avengers: Endgame*. *Avengers* barely beat *Animal House*. *Billy Jack* was more popular than *Avengers*. The *Shaggy Dog* was more popular than *Avatar*, and so was a film you have probably never heard of: *Mom and Dad*.



That was a sex hygiene film from 1945 with no stars. It was shot in six and days and cost 67,000 to produce. And yet a greater percentage of the US population paid to see it than *Avatar*. Remember, *Avatar* cost almost half a billion to make and promote.

[Added October 2023 and updated again November 2024: I came across [Box Office Mojo's list adjusted for inflation](#), and finally noticed how they fake it. Just so you know, Box Office Mojo is run by IMDB, which is now owned by Amazon. So, yes, it is another arm of the Octopus, managed from Langley or somewhere. As I am showing you, the real all-time numbers are too embarrassing to report, so they have to fake them. But how is Box Office Mojo faking this list? Simply by using the wrong inflation multiplier. All we have to do is check their math on *Bambi*, which they list down at #55. Its original gross was \$102 million, but they raise that to about \$583 million, so their inflation multiplier is 5.7. The problem is, inflation of ticket prices since 1942 isn't 5.7. It is about 33. They admit this [on a linked "how are grosses adjusted page"](#). They are all adjusted to a 2019 ticket price of \$9.01. The 1942 price is listed as \$.27. So the adjusted number should be over **\$3.4 billion**. Meaning, they fudged the answer down by 5.9x. At #1 they list *Gone with the Wind* at \$1.85 billion, so that would put *Bambi* at #1 by a huge margin. *Bambi* should be almost twice as popular as *Gone with the Wind*. So using Box Office Mojo's own numbers, it is even worse than I just told you. By my "tickets rel pop" calculation above, we found *Bambi* was 1.6x more popular, or 60% more popular. But using BOM's own numbers, we just found *Bambi* was 1.9x more popular, or 90% more popular.

If we do the same thing for *Pinocchio*, we find its adjusted gross to be \$3.16 billion. *The Bells of St. Mary's* adjusts to \$1.61 billion, putting it ahead of the *Sound of Music* at \$1.4 billion. *Cinderella* adjusts to \$1.16 billion. *Fantasia* adjusts to \$2.7 billion, placing it just below *Pinocchio*. *101 Dalmatians* adjusts to 1.9 billion.

What about *Snow White* from 1937? The ticket price then was \$.24, so the multiplier is 37.5, making the adjusted gross \$6.94 billion, more than double that of *Bambi*! Which gives us very old Disney movies in all five of the top spots.

So we have to completely redo our list again. In this recalculation using numbers from BOM, we still haven't included the tickets rel population thing, which will make this even worse. Let's see how much. Let's compare *Snow White* to *Star Wars*. BOM also miscalculated *Star Wars*, which should be about \$2.1 billion adjusted. But there were 1.7x more people in the US in 1977 than 1939, so if we keep *Star Wars* at 2.1, we have to raise *Snow White* to \$11.8 billion, making *Snow White* 5.6 times more popular. ]



Why am I telling you this? Mainly because I find it amusing. But also because it plays into my larger critique of Hollywood and Modern civilization. It shows that these people aren't even trying to give the audience what it wants. Instead, they are doing their best to corrupt us, spending more money each decade to do so. But it isn't working. You can see from that chart that the percentage of people going to theaters is dropping every decade, and has been since the 1940s. Real people simply aren't interested in the garbage Hollywood is putting out, and they are less interested every year.

Even Disney has forgotten how to make movies. It had already gone of the beam by 1991 with *Beauty and the Beast*, which I now see as a turning point. Disney was trying to return to past glory, but it was a complete miscalculation. Despite all the five-star reviews, I found it unwatchable. It was loud, hyperactive, and obnoxious in every way. All subtlety in pacing, characterization, and even animation had gone out the window. It is as if they were trying to substitute speed and volume for a real script. This has been the trend in all movies since then, animated and live.

It also applies to *The Lion King*, the only later Disney animated film that made our list here. It isn't as hyperactive as *Beauty and the Beast*, but is in many ways more obnoxious. The script has a slimy Modern feel—shallow, plastic, and preachy. It has that cloying, self-satisfied air that is the scent and hallmark of the contemporary American. The jokes are smarmy, the cliches abound, and every character is off-putting in his or her own generalized way. It is difficult to really put your finger on what is so revolting about the modern human until it is distilled and packaged and perfected by Disney in this way. Only by transporting our awful personalities into animals can the true horror of them be

appreciated.

As an example, the first scene of *The Lion King* is a baboon with a staff arriving to baptize the new cub. Why would a lion need to be baptized by a baboon? There is something really icky about the idea, though most people seem to have missed it. All the animals are bowing to the lions, or dropping curtsies. Icky again, since I thought we had quit kings and all the bowing to them. So why is it being promoted here? In the next scene, Zazu flies in to scold Scar for not being at the christening. Zazu is supposed to be a hornbill, but looks nothing like one. They have nothing to do with lions in real life. Scar is torturing a mouse, but lions don't eat mice. Scar then tries to eat Zazu, but lions don't eat hornbills either. It is all so Mufasa and his brother Scar can growl at each other. The next scene is a long one with Mufasa lecturing to Simba about how the world works. Just what we need this early in the film right, a long exposition. We soon get to plenty of action, but is only so these sick scriptwriters can steal the worst part of *Bambi*, having Simba's father Mufasa killed in front of him. To make it worse, the young Simba is told it was his fault. Could anything be more traumatizing to children having to watch this? *Bambi* was bad enough, but this is a thousand times worse, **on purpose**. You can now understand why they named the brother Scar. The scriptwriters are intentionally scarring their young audience. And that was **scarring**, not scaring, though they are doing both, to prepare them for the long PTSD life ahead of them created by the Phoenicians. So the film reads as both a result and a cause of widespread—and one might say generalized—mental illness.

It could hardly get worse, but somehow they found a way in the 2019 CGI remake. About the only thing good about the original was the traditional animation, which really was beautiful in places. It showed that some few still exist who can draw and render in the old style. But the remake dispenses with all that in the name of realism, creating a film ten times more scary than the original. It is scarier not only in the immediacy of it, but in the sense of unease it creates from the first scene. CGI has always been spooky, but it just keeps getting spookier. I personally refuse to watch it, since it gives me a stomachache. It makes me dread the future almost more than anything else. If you don't understand why, your humanity has already been drained from you, and I am genuinely sorry for you that you were born into this time.

And now for the cherry on top: a CGI remake of *Bambi* is in the works. I am sure they will find a way to make it far more traumatizing for children than the original. Maybe they can hire a pedophile uncle to accompany each and every child to the theater.

You will say my critique always applied to Disney films, which have been meretricious and noisy from the start. And although that is true to some extent, it misses my point. Disney films—for all their flaws—didn't have that modern stink until the 1980s or 90s. 70s films like *The Love Bug* were manic, but they didn't have that plastic posing modern feel that all films now have. And I recommend you compare late Disney films to 60s films like *Pollyanna* or *The Three Lives of Thomasina*, both of which were miracles of restraint and subtlety compared to newer movies. They seem to come out of another world altogether than the world that produced *Aladdin* or *The Emperor's New Groove*.

This is the same reason the successful period piece is nearly extinct, and will soon probably be impossible. Modern actors simply can't play those parts anymore, because they have been brought up with too much attitude. Every strut and turn of the head cries out “spoiled modern baby”. Think Robert Downey trying to play Sherlock or Kristen Stewart trying to play. . . anyone. The spirit revolts.

But all is not lost. Many seem to still appreciate the old movies, but the new writers and producers—as well as their audiences—can't seem to comprehend the charm of them, or the charm of the pre-modern

person. That is to say, the modern person can't understand why and *how* these old actors and movies have charisma, while they have none. How was it accomplished? Could it be accomplished again?

It could, but it would require a complete re-education. It would require jettisoning the entire trainwreck we call contemporary culture and starting over. It would require ditching all of modernity as a gross error in judgment and returning to a simpler, more direct time, where attitude counted for nothing and substance was everything. You will say that time never existed, which strictly is true, but it was nearer existing in the past than it is now. Hollywood was always false, but it gets falser every decade.

Modernity is defined by an ever accelerating dive into coolness, inflection, hipness, and surface. It is an abandonment of all individuality for a pretense of individuality which is really no more than a hiding in type. It is the selection of a category, more than anything, in order to hide in one group or another as protection. "Expression" is the shibboleth, but almost no one has anything to express except one or another fashion disaster they have learned from TV. And this doesn't just apply to their clothing, it applies just as much to their speech and thought, which is a TV speech and a TV thought. Everyone is aping some ape, and therefore can never transcend apishness.

But under this unctuous veneer and varnish, we are what we have always been, which is why we retain the ability to respond to these old movies. Although we mirror and are mirrored by the grotesque characters in current films, we still prefer the characters of old, who we can see have some charm we lack. They are altogether more quiet, reserved, subtle, and nuanced. They are more elevated and less needy. They can support a slower pacing, because they can fill the empty spots with character. They don't have to rely on intrusive scores, narration, camera tricks, quick edits, or CGI, because they have something better: a cohesive script. And outside of film, people in the old days had something similar to a cohesive script: it was called a morality. They believed in something beyond a wage and a pose. They had studied something other than the stock market or *The New York Times* or the Netflix schedule. They got their information from old books, not from some propped-up monstrosity on CNN.

So hope remains: the old books still exist. True, most old books are little better than the new ones, but wisdom yet remains in the world, along with restraint, subtlety, and sweetness. And despite what movies like *The Lion King* would lead you to believe, we haven't been able to corrupt animals in the least. They are exactly what they have always been. My kittens are just as sweet as the first kittens ever born. They know nothing and can know nothing of the vulgarity of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. May they inherit the Earth.

\*Using Avatar 2009 as zero year.

\*\*I use US numbers here because it is the only way to compare old films to new ones. Using worldwide numbers would bring in many more variables and unknowns, including population changes by countries, different levels of promotion, different levels of release, and variances in reporting.

†Not including many later re-releases.