**Transnational Hollywood:**

**French-American Relations and Circulations in the Screen Media Industries**

**PICS Transnational Hollywood**

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In April 1925, Famous Players-Lasky (then parent company of Paramount Pictures) announced the purchase of the famed Vaudeville Theatre on Boulevard des Capucines in Paris in order to construct a new “Paramount” super cinema for the American film company. This was only one example of the American invasion of French film exhibition that year. The following month, Loew’s, Inc. (parent company of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) announced a landmark agreement with the vertically integrated Gaumont company for Loew’s to supervise Gaumont’s the distribution, marketing, and exhibition of Gaumont films and cinemas. Gaumont-Loew-Metro (G.L.M.) was established to manage Gaumont’s global chain of cinemas while a separate unit, Gaumont-Metro-Goldwyn, was responsible for the distribution of Metro-Goldwyn and other films in France. Gaumont-Loew-Metro managed Gaumont’s foreign operations and its presentation and exploitation operations in Belgium, Switzerland, Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Palestine, and Tunisia where Gaumont had already created a strong presence with foreign branches and cinemas.

Loew’s and MGM executives were ferried from New York to Paris and on to the Middle East and North Africa to supervise and implement American exhibition and marketing practices in France and Francophone markets and to ensure the favorable distribution of MGM films. While Loew’s and Paramount looked forward to the impending upgrade in presentation at their French cinemas, the American invasion was denounced by Michel Carré of Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques, who demanded a limit be imposed on American acquisitions of French cinemas. Over the next few years, Loew’s/MGM’s management, and Paramount’s new French cinema, became a flashpoint for the concern over the increasing Americanization of French screens, a subject of concern that led to threatened boycotts against Paramount in England. While company founder Marcus Loew was awarded by the French government for “improving the quality of French amusements both in regard to films and theatrical ventures,” others argued that Loew’s/MGM employees in France were out to “colonize French cinemas for personal gain.”

The growth of American exhibitors in France during the 1920s serves a stark contrast to the ubiquity of Pathé’s extensive distribution network in the United States between 1900 and 1910, a subject Richard Abel has covered extensively in his book *The Red Rooster Scare* (UC Press, 1999). My research on American corporate expansion in France (and Francophone markets) in the 1920s serves to illustrate the comparative changes in the global film industry between 1900 and 1930 and the way that the circulation of exhibition personnel, management techniques, and the many “invisible architects” on both sides of the Atlantic helped cement the ongoing shift of power from one media capital (Paris) to another (New York) during the mid to late 1920s.

The Gaumont-Loew agreement provides a fascinating glimpse into the ascendant power of American multinational conglomerates during the 1920s and the interwar struggles of French and other vertically integrated European film companies to maintain their global prominence in local and global distribution and exhibition.

**2017 Project Update:**

Since the first PICS meeting, I have completed my research and writing on Paramount and MGM’s operation of French cinemas beginning in the 1920s. I have now added additional information on their cinema operations in France in the 1930s and 1940s, including what happened before, during, and after the Nazi occupation. I have also completed another chapter on American cinema operation in the Middle East, focusing especially on Egypt where exhibitors provided innovative methods for multilingual presentation to their audiences, including the projection of French titles outside the screen and French announcements in printed programs.

Currently, my attention has turned to Francophone West Africa where I am researching and writing about Fox and MGM’s interest in building/operating cinemas there after World War II. By 1960, both companies were fully divorced from their domestic theater companies but actively pursuing real estate and exhibition operations overseas that could grow their foreign revenues through both exhibition *and* distribution.