



Photo by Pavel Danilyuk: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-man-in-yellow-hoodie-sitting-on-black-leather-chair-eating-popcorn-7234267/>

WHEN DID HOLLYWOOD MAKE MOVIES THAT MEN ACTUALLY WANTED TO WATCH?

David Maywald



ABSTRACT:

Hollywood used to produce films that appealed to men (and to women, and to children). But it has been a quarter-century since the last big cluster of films that were made for men, around 1999. The lost decade of woke Hollywood has been a desert for positive depictions of masculinity, with superficial strong female leads and diversity-washing that has crowded out any space for healthy masculinity. The weak box office for woke movies has forced the studios to curtail their unpopular product, amidst a corporate and social retreat from DEI.

Keywords: cinema, film, Hollywood, males, men



In December 2024, I posted this question to LinkedIn and to Facebook: “What are the all-time best movies for men?” and shared a long list of suggested ideas. These posts received dozens of comments, especially suggestions of movies that men like to watch (and films that they recommend to other men). This prompted the creation of a small database of movie titles, to which I added the year of their release.

David Maywald • You
Non-Executive Director and advocate for positive social change
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What are the all-time best movies for men?

Some ideas are: Dead Poets Society; Fight Club; Seven Samurai; Saving Private Ryan; Star Wars (original trilogy); Top Gun, Life Is Beautiful; Dirty Harry; Shine; Tropic Thunder; Good Will Hunting; Black Panther; Full Metal Jacket; Rainman; Apocalypse Now; The Good, The Bad and The Ugly; Singin' in the Rain; James Bond series; Gallipoli; Memento; Patch Adams; Goodfellas; A Few Good Men; Grand Theft Auto; Shawshank Redemption; Godfather; Strictly Ballroom; Citizen Kane; The Matrix; Lord of the Rings; Office Space; Gladiator; Casablanca; L.A. Confidential; There Will Be Blood; Die Hard; Terminator; Mad Max; Rocky series; The Truman Show; Rush Hour; Scarface; Mrs Doubtfire; The Wild Bunch; American Beauty; 300; Pulp Fiction; 12 Years a Slave; Crocodile Dundee; 2001: A Space Odyssey; A Clockwork Orange; Alien; The Great Escape; Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid; The Endless Summer; Good Morning, Vietnam; Bull Durham; Hoosiers; Last of the Mohicans; The Bicycle Thief; Field of Dreams; North by Northwest; The Outsiders; Rambo; The Manchurian Candidate; In the Heat of the Night; Double Indemnity; Mar Adentro (The Sea Inside); The Maltese Falcon; Gandhi; Rebel Without a Cause...

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Glad you included Mrs Doubtfire. Only people who don't understand the pain of forced separation from their children regard this movie as a comedy.

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David Maywald
3 December 2024

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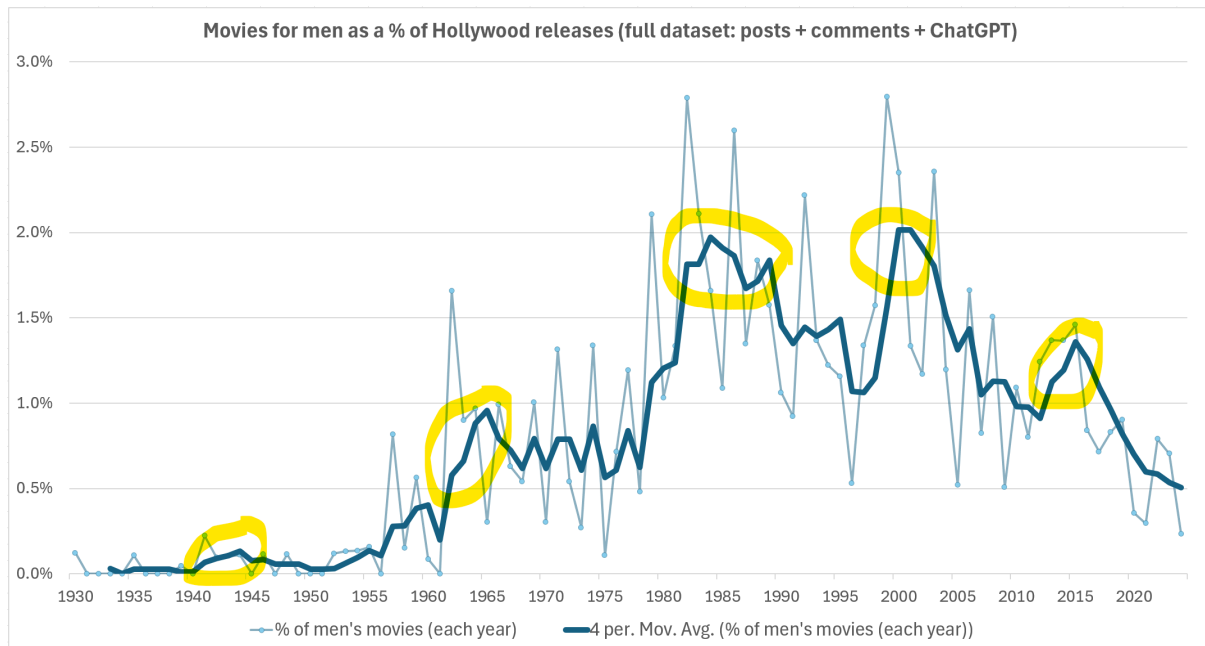
Chris Harris
Over the top
Blues brothers
Gran Torino

In addition to the suggested movies and social media comments, I used ChatGPT to scour for the best movies according to men, films that are popular with male audiences, and positive depictions of masculinity in movies. Several different prompts along these lines were used, with iterations in order to attain movie titles. There is a heavy recency bias in the generative AI results (due to much more digital information being available during the last couple of decades), with ChatGPT skewing towards movies in the early-2010s and late-1990s, while the comments and posts skewed towards the 1980s and the late-1990s.

In total, 540 movies were mentioned, with release dates from 1930 through to 2024. They have been sorted by the year of release to analyse how the prevalence of men's movies has varied over time. My subjective interpretation of the data is that there have been two epic periods for movies that appeal to men (the biggest one during the 1980s, and the second largest



just before the turn of the century), along with three other periods of important depictions of masculinity (the end of WWII, early-1960s, and the early-2010s).



The raw number of movies each year was divided by estimates of the number of Hollywood releases in that year, which fell from high levels during the 1930s/1940s, plateaued at low levels in the 1960s/1970s, and then slightly grew during subsequent decades. Annual data is quite “noisy”, going up and down from year to year. Hence, moving averages were used to identify peaks in the data (3-year, 4-year, 5-year, and 10-year averages were used, with the 4-year average presented above in bold).

For each of these five periods, here is a sample of movies released, including notable titles that are highlighted in green.

1. Winning the war effort during the early to mid-1940s. Positive depictions of Allied masculinity were important to drive motivation for English-speaking forces and their supporters at home. Examples such as *Citizen Kane*, *Casablanca*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*.

1st period from early to mid-1940s	
<i>Citizen Kane</i>	1941
<i>The Maltese Falcon</i>	1941
<i>Casablanca</i>	1942
<i>Double Indemnity</i>	1944
<i>It's a Wonderful Life</i>	1946

2. Baby Boomers coming of age during the early 1960s. Passing on Western culture, social norms, and history during the post-war boom. This era saw the first three James Bond films released, along with *Lawrence of Arabia*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Zulu*, and *The Great Escape*.



2nd period during the early-1960s	
Dr. No (first three James Bond films)	1962
The Manchurian Candidate	1962
Lawrence of Arabia	1962
The Longest Day	1962
To Kill a Mockingbird	1962
From Russia with Love	1963
The Great Escape	1963
Goldfinger	1964
Zulu	1964

3. The greatest period of movies for men, from the early to late 1980s. From adventure to inspiration to romance, this golden era of men's films had everything. Featuring Top Gun, Die Hard, Blade Runner, Terminator, Platoon, Indiana Jones, Rain Man, and Dead Poets Society.

3rd period from the early to late-1980s (the greatest era of movies for men)	
Blade Runner	1982
First Blood (Rambo)	1982
Gandhi	1982
Rocky III	1982
Octopussy	1983
Scarface	1983
Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi	1983
The Outsiders	1983
Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom	1984
Repo Man	1984
The Terminator	1984
A View to a Kill	1985
Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome	1985
Rambo: First Blood Part II	1985
Rocky IV	1985
Aliens	1986
America	1986
Crocodile Dundee	1986
Hoosiers	1986
Platoon	1986
The Mission	1986
Top Gun	1986
Full Metal Jacket	1987
Good Morning, Vietnam	1987
Over the Top	1987
Predator	1987
The Living Daylights	1987
Bull Durham	1988
Die Hard	1988
Mr. North	1988
Rain Man	1988
Rambo III	1988
The Big Blue	1988
The Chocolate War	1988
The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad!	1988
Dead Poets Society	1989
Field of Dreams	1989
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade	1989
Licence to Kill	1989
Road House	1989
When Harry Met Sally	1989
Weekend at Bernie's	1989

4. Positive masculinity and collaboration between the sexes during the late 1990s. This was generally an optimistic period of balanced perspectives. Epic movies such as The



Matrix, Fight Club, Saving Private Ryan, Gladiator, Life is Beautiful, Good Will Hunting, and The Castle.

4th period during the late-1990s (the second greatest era)	
Life Is Beautiful	1997
Good Will Hunting	1997
Tomorrow Never Dies	1997
L.A. Confidential	1997
Alien Resurrection	1997
The Castle	1997
Gattaca	1997
Saving Private Ryan	1998
Patch Adams	1998
The Truman Show	1998
Rush Hour	1998
Fight Club	1999
The World Is Not Enough	1999
The Matrix	1999
Office Space	1999
American Beauty	1999
Galaxy Quest	1999
Memento	2000
Gladiator	2000
Cast Away	2000
In the Mood for Love	2000

5. Darkening themes in the early-2010s, with a small peak in 2015 prior to the ascendancy of woke Hollywood. In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession, there are hints of zero-sum thinking in these releases. They feature Avengers, Hunger Games, The Hobbit, The Wolf of Wall Street, John Wick, The Dark Knight Rises, and Mad Max: Fury Road.

5th period during the early 2010s	
The Dark Knight Rises	2012
The Avengers	2012
The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey	2012
Django Unchained	2012
Hunger Games	2012
12 Years a Slave	2013
The Wolf of Wall Street	2013
The Equalizer	2014
John Wick	2014
Edge of Tomorrow	2014
Spectre	2015
Mad Max: Fury Road	2015
Creed	2015
The Revenant	2015

Movie reviewer *Critical Drinker* has explained in great detail why he believes that Hollywood hates men, here in conversation with Chris Williamson (Chris on left, Will Jordan on right):



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSY0SrJ8V2Y>



Critical Drinker - Why Does Hollywood Hate Men So Much?

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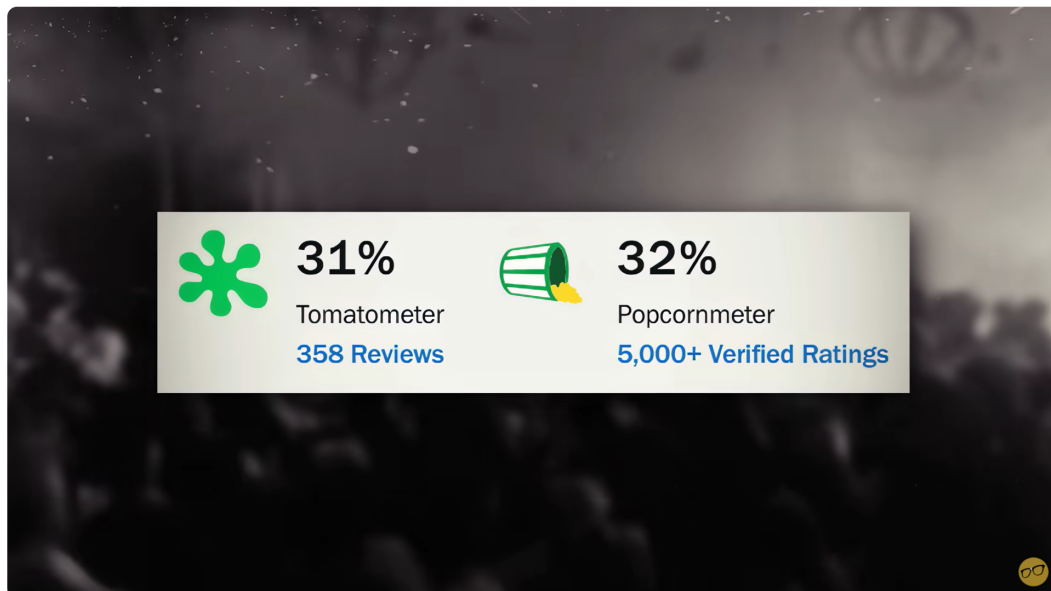
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Critical Drinker explains why Hollywood seems to have such distaste for men. Is Hollywood anti-masculinity? Why are there no male role models any more? What does the future of movie making have for men?

Influencer and film critic *Nerdrotic* has shone a huge spotlight onto identity politics and woke Hollywood, with an unflinching and entertaining style:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxBZ7jCB56U>



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 **Nerdrotic** 
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While this rudimentary analysis above has been able to locate several clusters of films that men enjoy and recommend to their friends, there is lots of scope to take this research approach much further. From hundreds of movie listings to thousands, gathering data from many more men, adding box office receipts, or segmenting the preferences of men by their age.

What are your favourite movies, and why?

The content creator *Life is a Story* points to *Platoon* as exemplifying the highest form of courage:

“*Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone, has a special place in the Vietnam War movie canon. In *Full Metal Jacket* and *Apocalypse Now*, the main character doesn't have a moral force pulling them away from a lifestyle dictated by primal urges. In *Platoon*, Sgt. Elias becomes that positive force for Taylor. Eventually, Elias goes to war with his humourless foil, Sgt. Barnes, and the results are fascinating. Their war is over the definition of courage. Is bravery doing whatever it takes to secure victory, or is it standing up for what's right?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewpKCecIYik>



The Highest Form of Courage | What Platoon is Really About (Film Analysis)



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AUTHOR PROFILE



David Maywald is father to a son and a daughter, and has been happily married for over a decade. Fatherhood brings added meaning to his life. He was a boy during the 1980s, a teenager during the 1990s, studied at the Australian National University, and then worked for two decades as an Investment Manager (specialising in research and analysis). He has served on boards as a Non-executive Director for almost three decades, with a governance portfolio that encompasses charities, foundations, and private businesses. David is proud to be a champion for boys and men, while also supporting girls and women. His book *The Relentless*

War on Masculinity was published on International Men's Day in 2025. International Men's Day has been held on November 19 every year since 1999.

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