THE GENERAL CINEMA NORTHPARK I & II:
A CASE STUDY OF A THIRD
GENERATION MOVIE
THEATER

by

JEREMY FLOYD SPRACKLEN

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON
MAY 2015
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation for all of the friends and family who encouraged and assisted me throughout my academic career and the writing of this thesis. Specifically, Bob and Diana Cunningham, Cindy and Gary Sharp, and Jessica Tedder. I am humbled by the amount of support that I have been given.

I am thankful to my committee, Bart Weiss, Dr. Gerald Saxon, and chair Dr. Robert Fairbanks. Their suggestions and guidance throughout the research and writing of this work cannot be understated.

Additionally, I am thankful to Adam Martin for his encyclopedic knowledge of theater buildings. But most of all, I would like to thank Ron Beardmore. His infectious love for the art of projecting film, and the theaters that show them, was the primary factor in choosing this subject for study.

April 14, 2015
Abstract
THE GENERAL CINEMA NORTH PARK I & II:
A CASE STUDY OF A THIRD
GENERATION MOVIE
THEATER
Jeremy Spracklen, MA

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2015

Supervising Professor: Robert Fairbanks

The purpose of this thesis is to present a typology of movie exhibition eras and then explore one of those eras in greater detail by studying a specific market and theater within that market. This methodology allows for influential industrial, social, and economic trends to be tracked before, during, and after the operational life of what is identified as a third generation movie theater. By choosing a single theater as a case study for this thesis, national shifts in business practices and economics are examined in order to study how these affected theaters at a micro level.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. iii
Abstract .................................................................................................................................... iv
List of Illustrations ................................................................................................................... vii
List of Tables ........................................................................................................................... ix
Chapter 1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1
    The Third Generation Movie Theater .................................................................................. 4
    First and Second Generation Theaters in Dallas ............................................................... 5
    Dallas’ First Theater Row ................................................................................................. 7
    Notes on Form and Structure ............................................................................................ 9
Chapter 2 Why A Twin For NorthPark? .................................................................................. 12
    Population Migration.......................................................................................................... 13
    Raymond Nasher and the Development of NorthPark Center ........................................... 16
    Changes in the Movie Industry .......................................................................................... 19
    The General Cinema Corporation Comes to Town ........................................................... 22
    Functionality over Aesthetics: Designing the NorthPark ................................................... 24
    Opening Night .................................................................................................................... 32
    Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 34
Chapter 3 From Roadshow to Multiple Run Bookings at NorthPark, 1965–1974 .................. 36
    Booking Strategies and the Paramount Decrees ............................................................... 37
    First Runs and Roadshows ............................................................................................... 38
    The System in Practice ..................................................................................................... 42
    1971–1974 ........................................................................................................................ 46
    1974: A Case Study .......................................................................................................... 48
    The End of NorthPark’s First Decade ............................................................................... 52
    Movies Exhibited at NorthPark 1965–1974 ....................................................................... 52
List of Illustrations

Figure 1 - Dallas Theater Row Circa 1948 .................................................................8
Figure 2 - Opening Day Promotional Brochure .............................................................13
Figure 3 - Map of Future NorthPark Center Site from the 1948 Dallas City Planning Commission .................................................................16
Figure 4 - 1959 Southern-Facing Aerial View from www.texasfreeway.com ..............17
Figure 5 - Aerial Photo of NorthPark Center 1965 .......................................................18
Figure 6 - Charlottetown Mall ......................................................................................24
Figure 7 - Scan from Original Blueprint ......................................................................25
Figure 8 - NorthPark Cinema I & II Exterior .................................................................26
Figure 9 - NorthPark Cinema I Interior .........................................................................27
Figure 10 - Blueprint Design of Cinema I Shadowbox .................................................30
Figure 11 - Example of Proscenium (Fox Theatre, Atlanta) .........................................31
Figure 12 - Example of a Shadow Box Screen Frame ....................................................32
Figure 13 - Cover of Opening Night Brochure ..............................................................33
Figure 14 - Opening Day Newspaper Advertisement ..................................................36
Figure 15 - NorthPark Roadshow Ticket Policy ............................................................40
Figure 16 - Newspaper Advertisement March 15, 1968 ...............................................44
Figure 17 - 1974 Advertisement for Benji .................................................................50
Figure 18 - Inwood Theatre .........................................................................................58
Figure 19 - Opening Day Advertisement for Medallion Theatre ..................................59
Figure 20 - Newspaper Advertisement for Swamp Girl ..............................................62
Figure 21 - NorthPark Box Office Report: Weeks Ending May 26 and June 2, 1977 ....64
Figure 22 - Newspaper Advertisement for Advance Screening of Blade Runner ..........68
Figure 23 - Line Around Building for Return of the Jedi .............................................70
Figure 24 - AMC Glen Lakes .....................................................................................82
Figure 25 - United Artists Plaza ..............................................................................................83
Figure 26 - AMC The Grand ....................................................................................................98
Figure 27 - Promotional Poster for Evita at NorthPark .........................................................104
Figure 28 - Newspaper Advertisement for Titanic in 70mm .................................................106
Figure 29 - Frame from Raiders of the Lost Ark ....................................................................109
Figure 30 - Demolition of Cinema II ......................................................................................113
Figure 31 - AMC NorthPark Lobby .......................................................................................118
Figure 32 - Auditorium #5 Studio Movie Grill Plano .............................................................121
Figure 33 - Movie Theater Box Office with Menu Board Showtime Schedule .....................123
List of Tables

Table 1 - Box Office Admissions and Gross after the Paramount Decrees .........................20
Table 2 - Number of Movies Released and Movie Tickets Sold 1950–1965 .............................21
Table 3 - Movie Theaters in Operation 1965–1974 ..............................................................55
Table 4 - National Average Ticket Price 1974–2004 ..............................................................65
Table 5 - E.T. Box Office Totals .............................................................................................67
Table 6 - Movie Theaters in Operation 1975–1984 .............................................................75
Table 7 - Total of US Box Office Admissions and Indoor Screens 1980–1990 ......................77
Table 8 - Average Number of Screens Per New General Cinema Location .......................78
Table 9 - NorthPark Box Office Grosses 1988–1996 ...........................................................86
Table 10 - VCR Ownership Among GCC Patrons ..............................................................87
Table 11 - Weekly Attendance Comparison 1988–1990 ......................................................89
Table 12 - Movie Theaters in Operation 1985–1994 ............................................................96
Table 13 - Attendance and Payroll Costs for 1995 ..............................................................102
Table 14 - Movie Theaters in Operation 1995–1998 ............................................................112
Table 15 - Movie Theaters in Operation 1998–2015 ............................................................126
Chapter 1

Introduction

The American city seems to have stepped right out of the movies. To grasp its secret, you should not, then begin with the city and move inwards towards the screen, you should begin with the screen and move outwards towards the city.¹

—Jean Baudrillard

Very few subjects have captured as much interdisciplinary interest in the last century as the movie business. Numerous books and papers written on the movie industry have examined its influence within the context of various fields of study. The subjects of historical geography, social history, economics, anthropology, and population studies are just a few of the academic perspectives that have explored either the business of movies or individual films themselves in a scholastic context.²

The process of making films and the content of the movies has been the focus of nearly all the work done on the subject known as “movie history.” Because of this, leaders in both film creation (George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Ron Howard) and film distribution (Samuel Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer, and Walt Disney) have had numerous works written about their lives and contributions to the craft. In addition to these, there are a great number of books about how specific movies have been made and their impact on both society and subsequent films.

The showplace for exhibiting these works, the movie theater, has not seen the same kind of historical analysis that the production and distribution sides of the industry have enjoyed. Researcher Marye Annette Polk argues that the places of exhibition are in need of greater study because they serve as:

¹ Jean Baudrillard, America (London: Verso, 1989), 56.
A source of qualitative information about the urban cultural experience . . . Movie theaters represent intriguing objects of study because of their public magnetism, capital generation, technological display, and mediation of consumer taste. In addition, they may be analyzed as mirrors of cultural process because the moviegoer is being sold a setting and an experience as much as a product.\(^3\)

Beginning in 2000, cinema history scholars began to realize this need and started to focus more on the cinema as the site of social and cultural exchange and less on the content of the films themselves. Together, this field of research has adopted the name “New Cinema History.”\(^4\) Historians working in the area recognize the obvious fact that “cinemas are sites of social and cultural significance.” But they also recognize that a study of these sites has as much to say about “patterns of employment, urban development, transport systems, and leisure practices that shape cinema’s global diffusion as it does with what happens in the evanescent encounter between an individual audience member and a film print.”\(^5\)

At this time, the work of new cinema history is limited to a relatively small number of papers and articles (many of which are collected into published anthologies that were used in researching this thesis). Most of these are hyper-focused on a specific theme or condensed time period. Film Theorist David Bordwell argued that this approach was necessary because “there is no one film history but only various question-motivated historical accounts.”\(^6\) This idea is shared by new cinema historians who often choose the experience of a single theater location as their point of study. They argue that “the strength of cinema exhibition history lies in its aggregation of detail, in a way exactly analogous to the proposition that the more individual films we unearth and study, the more we know about films in general.”\(^7\)

---


The only complete book that has ever attempted to write the entire history of movie exhibition was Douglas Gomery’s *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Theater Presentation in the United States* and it is considered to be the most accurate and comprehensive chronicle on the subject. Given the broad scope of this work, Gomery is able to compare and contrast how movies were exhibited in different eras throughout the twentieth century. In doing so, he attempted to counter Bordwell’s theory that a singular film history could not be written.

The downside to being the primary repository for the complete story of movie exhibition is that many areas are glossed over and others are dismissed outright based on the author’s preference. Gomery clearly favors the early palace theaters over the post-WWII multiple screen venues and his bias is evident not only in *Shared Pleasures*, but also in the papers “Motion Picture Exhibition in 1970s America,”8 “If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall,”9 and “The Picture Palace: Economic Sense or Hollywood Nonsense?”10 He describes the palaces as:

Carefully crafted packages of pleasure that consistently generated high profits. Movies per se were never the sole driving force to attract audiences to ante up their quarters, fifty-cent pieces, and, at times, dollar bills. . . . The building was made so spectacular that it served as an attraction of its own.”11

The history that he presented of the post-palace cinemas was both dismissive and hyperbolic:

What movie patrons received for their entertainment dollar in mall theaters, save locational centrality, proved as far from the golden days of the movie palace as one could imagine. A cluster of unadorned screening rooms offered only feature films and concession stands . . . the function, in the age of television, was clear: show

---


blockbuster feature films and nothing else. Gone was the architectural ambience of the movie palace.”12

The Third Generation Movie Theater

In his book, *Film: The Democratic Art*, Garth Jowett attempts to break up the complete narrative of movie exhibition by identifying “Generations” of theaters, each with its own distinct architectural, economic, and operational set of standards. Jowett categorized three distinct cycles of cinemas that had been operating through to the publishing of the book in 1976: the first generation was exhibitions up to and including the Nickelodeon, the second was palaces, and the third was multiplexes.13

The purpose of this thesis is to present an alternative and more detailed history of these third generation theaters that contradicts Gomery’s position by using Dallas, and specifically the Cinemas at NorthPark I & II, as a case study. Furthermore, this approach opens up the ability to explore greater themes within the movie exhibition industry both locally and nationally during the thirty-three years that the Cinemas at NorthPark were in operation (1965-1998). These dates are important as they were not only the years this theater was open; it’s also a distinct era that starts with the large-scale closing of the downtown palace theaters (generation two theaters) and ends with the suburban megaplex boom of the late 1990s.

Dallas was chosen for study as the city because its suburbs have been influential in the way in which people watch movies throughout the entire history of motion pictures. Though the city has never been a leader in production, Dallas has the distinction of being the home of one of the first film distribution hubs (known as “exchanges,” the largest video rental company in the world (Blockbuster Video), and the third largest movie exhibitor in the country (Cinemark Theaters).

---

This theater was specifically chosen as the focal point of study for several reasons: its location in a city that has always been a leader in movie exhibition, its popularity and national recognition as a trendsetter, and the fact that unlike other theaters of its era, the building was never modified nor changed how it operated. All of the other theaters in the area (even most nationally) were victims to the trend of “splitting” auditoriums that was widespread during this time.\footnote{\textit{The practice of “splitting” was to build walls in the auditorium and break the room up into smaller rooms, resulting in new, smaller, but more numerous auditoriums than before.}} The fact that the NorthPark I & II remained a twin throughout its history makes it an outlier, and this thesis will explore the factors that made this theater different from its contemporaries and how it was able to succeed without change for thirty-three years when so many other theaters around it came and went in half the time. In order to understand where the Cinemas at NorthPark fit into the history of movie exhibition, it is important to have a little background on how movies were presented in the city prior to 1965.

\textbf{First and Second Generation Theaters in Dallas}

The history of showing movies in Dallas began 1894 when the Dallas Opera House acquired several of Thomas Edison’s Kinetoscopes\footnote{D. Troy Sherrod, \textit{Images of America: Historic Dallas Theatres} (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 13.} which would reproduce short films to an individual viewer on demand.\footnote{Gomery, \textit{Shared Pleasures}, 5.} Soon after the turn of the century, going to the movies began to evolve into more of a communal experience: first with the introduction of itinerant exhibitors that traveled from town to town with portable projection systems, and eventually the nationwide adoption of the famous “Nickelodeon” as a means of going to the movies.\footnote{Gomery, \textit{Shared Pleasures}, 18.}

Though primitive, these early Nickelodeon cinemas were an important evolutionary step as they initiated the trend toward group spectatorship in fixed, permanent locations where people assembled for the purposes of watching a film on a screen.
Here again, Douglas Gomery is quick to downplay the significance of these first generation exhibitors in his interpretation of the history of the movie-going experience. Gomery dismisses the Nickelodeon as a “small and uncomfortable makeshift theatre, usually a converted cigar store, pawnshop, restaurant, or skating rink made over to look like a vaudeville theatre.”

Setting patron comfort and aesthetic value of the physical theater building aside, the most unique aspect of this generation was the way in which the early films were handled as a commodity business. At this point in its history, film was treated as a consumable product rather than a new form of art. Film prints themselves were sold outright from the producer to the exhibitor without any contract addressing how long the movie was to play or rights of resale. Even more indicative of this view of film as a commodity was the fact that the value assigned to film was based on its length and not relative to its content, director, or performers.

In order to exploit this system in favor of the exhibitors, the city of Dallas began a pattern of trendsetting when it established itself as a major distribution center for the state of Texas. Under this emerging new model, films (which were typically being produced in San Antonio at this time) would be shipped to a distribution center or “depot” located in Dallas where they would then be rented out to theaters and returned to the depot of origin at the conclusion of the run. This new system was of great benefit to all of the theaters as it was no longer up to the individual exhibitors to trade amongst themselves, while at the same time they increased the frequency with which they could open new product. By the time the second generation of exhibition came around, with the much larger palace theaters in the early 1920s, this model had shifted to a system where films were still

18 Gomery, Shared Pleasures, 18.
21 Ibid., 34.
22 Ibid., 16.
23 Balio, 17.
rented, but the movie’s producer maintained ownership of the prints when leasing them to the individual theaters while still utilizing a centralized distribution center. Although the role and purpose of the depot would change over the years, the fact that Dallas was the first city in Texas to establish the means for the distribution and transportation of films to the state cemented the city as an integral component of the exhibition industry’s support structure that lasted all the way though the operating existence of the Cinemas at NorthPark.

Dallas’ First Theater Row

The generation of movie exhibition that included the great palace theaters is one that has elicited a large amount of historical discourse, as well as a great deal of emotion from its admirers. Though these theaters differed in terms of size and the type of programming that each had to offer, most had two common criteria. First, they were incredibly ornate structures, both inside and out, built specifically with the intention of overpowering the aesthetic sensibilities of people regardless of whether they were watching movies inside or just passing by on the street. Second, the exhibition of movies was only one of many possible entertainment uses of the facility, with others including live, vaudeville-type stage shows.

The highest concentration of these colossal theaters in the country (with the sole exception of New York’s Broadway) was found in downtown Dallas, about six miles to the south of what would become NorthPark Center. Known as “Theater Row,” the area around Elm and Main streets was packed with at least twenty of these palaces between 1920 and

---

24 Balio, 111.
25 The term “support industries” refers to a large group of businesses that provide services to the film exhibition industry. These include, but are not limited to, those involved in film transport, projector repair, theater cleaning, and concession suppliers, many of which have established Dallas as their base of operation.
26 Gomery, Shared Pleasures, 48.
27 Schroeder, 64.
28 Sherrod, 21.
1950 (picture from the 1940s shown on the next page). These theaters included the famous Rialto, Tower, and Hippodrome as well as two “super palaces,” the Palace and Majestic. This constellation of theaters was most likely located here because of the easy access that was provided by the streetcar lines that ran down Elm Street. These trolleys not only provided a means for people to get from their outlying homes to downtown, but they also proved to be an efficient way of being able to transport moviegoers from theater to theater once they were in the area.

The cinemas of the 1920s and 1930s were so spectacular in fact that they served as the primary and sometimes sole attraction for their patrons. As such, theaters themselves were often the intended destination regardless of what film was showing at the time (an issue which only intensified as theaters began to be some of the first buildings in their

---

30 Schroeder, 58.
32 Gomery, Shared Pleasures, 55.
respective cities to install air conditioning). It is for this reason that one of the biggest moguls in film exhibition at the time, Marcus Loew of Loew’s Theaters, famously remarked, “We sell tickets to theaters, not to pictures.”

This idea of selling the theater and not the movies in the palace era is one of the main distinctions between the generations that came before and after it. One example of this in practice is in the experience of Ann Duncan, a woman involved in restoring an old palace, the Tampa Theater, in Tampa, Florida, because of her love of the building. When asked to name one film that she had seen at this theater that she had dedicated her life to, she could not think of a single one. Her husband, Lee, finally interjected on her behalf that “It wasn’t the movies . . . everyone went there because it was the place to go.”

When viewed in this manner, the generation of palaces was not, as Gomery argued, the high point in the history of how movies were exhibited. If Marcus Loew and Ann Duncan are correct, the function of the films during this time was to provide background entertainment to patrons who had already bought a ticket to the theater. While it is true that the post-palace theaters were aesthetically simplistic (NorthPark is certainly no exception to this), the patrons continued to pack the auditoriums in order to see the movies, no longer lured there by an ornate venue.

Notes on Form and Structure

In presenting the history of the third generation of movie exhibition using the methodology of the new cinema history movement, this thesis will argue that the “movie generation” should be viewed as a time when the films were the only attraction and motivating force for the survival of the industry. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how the Cinemas at NorthPark was the representation of the ideal theater of this period—a facility

33 Gomery, Shared Pleasures, 54.
with the primary purpose of showing movies in the best way possible while actively removing anything in the theater that distracted from that purpose.

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter has introduced the background of the movie industry and Dallas and has discussed the first and second generation theaters. Chapter two looks at the planning and creation of the Cinemas at NorthPark, including the decisions that led to its location. The remaining chapters are broken up temporally rather than thematically in order to better highlight the shifts that were occurring in the film exhibition industry.

Over the last fifty years, the midpoint of each decade has brought major changes to how movie theaters are built and operated. Over this period, the average useful life of a movie theater as it was built was less than fifteen years. In that fifteen-year window, most theaters have either closed or greatly modified their operation (changing to a dollar or genre theater and splitting big auditoriums into smaller ones are considered a modified operation; ownership changes and aesthetic remodels are not). The NorthPark I & II remained open for thirty-three years, over twice as long as the other theaters of the era, without any major modifications. The next four chapters study the theater in ten-year intervals beginning at these mid-decade points. The third chapter covers 1965-1975, a period where multiscreen suburban theaters were introduced and eventually replaced the downtown single screens. Chapter four looks at 1975-1985, a time where saturation booking put movies on more screens than ever before. Chapter five covers 1985-1995, a time of massive renovations and rebuilding as film distributors began buying up theater chains. Chapter six explores the last three years of NorthPark’s operation, 1995-1998. Though this last chapter only covers a short period of time, it was one of such great change with the introduction of the megaplex that the venerable theater was forced to close. The final chapter will summarize and provide a modern context for the work. Since chapters three through six cover the years that the theater was open for the public, a list of movies that were advertised for the public are
included at the end of every chapter. In addition to this list, there is a chart of all other competing theaters in Dallas during that period. A colored bar denotes a theater that is operating in the same manner as it did when it opened, and a bar with hash marks denotes a theater that is open but has either modified its programming (such as becoming a dollar theater) or has added screens.

A note on spelling: given that the word “theater” varies between “-er” and “-re” this thesis has standardized to “-er” for all uses of the word unless it is used in the official name of a cinema (for example, “The Majestic Theatre”).
Chapter 2

Why A Twin For NorthPark?

Growth was concentrating on the north side . . . the changes also included a dramatic shift in the shopping habits of residents of enormous consequences for downtown. Enclosed, air-conditioned retail malls such as NorthPark now provided attractive alternatives to downtown shopping. Soon after its 1965 opening, NorthPark began hosting more shoppers on a typical day than the entire downtown area.

—Darwin Payne

When the General Cinema NorthPark I & II opened to the public, customers were given a promotional pamphlet (reproduced on the following page) with the heading “Why A Twin For NorthPark?”37 At the time, there had been no other twin theaters in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, so marketing materials were created that highlighted this aspect of the new theater as something unique and different.

Although two auditoriums under a single roof was the focal point of the advertising, it was only one of four major factors that must be examined in order to answer the question “Why a twin for NorthPark?” These factors are 1) population migration to the North Dallas region (including the construction of Central Expressway); 2) the creation of NorthPark Center as a regional shopping hub; 3) industrial and economic changes within the cinema industry; and 4) the growth of the General Cinema Corporation as it became one of the leading cinema chains in the country. Together, these four factors created the proper environment for this theater to be built at NorthPark Center and to expand beyond the single screen-only design that had been commonplace heretofore.

Why A Twin For NorthPark?

From its very inception, NorthPark was conceived and developed by Mr. Raymond D. Nasher, to represent the ultimate in comfort, convenience and diversity to the people of the Dallas area. General Cinema Corporation, the nation’s leading proponent and developer of shopping center theatres, enthusiastically accepted the challenge to design and operate a theatre that would be a worthy addition to this giant shopping center complex.

Cinema I & II at NorthPark is the result.

Patron convenience is the keynote to this exciting new concept in motion picture entertainment. The duplicated facilities of a twin, including rest rooms, drinking fountains and dual cashiers, permit the elimination of waiting lines. Staggered scheduling reduces traffic congestion and provides free parking closer to the theatre since everyone is not coming or leaving at the same time.

A twin by virtue of its dual auditoriums, can present films to audiences of varied taste by presenting a family film in one auditorium while catering to a mature audience in the other. Similarly, a foreign film — or so called “art type” — can be offered in one auditorium with a conventional Hollywood production scheduled for the screen in the other unit. An additional advantage is the ability of a twin to present a road show attraction which may be scheduled for several months, while the other auditorium is presenting new films at regular intervals thus accommodating those persons who want to come back soon.

Yes, we of General Cinema are proud of Cinema I & II and feel that we have successfully met the challenge of providing a facility that will be a worthy addition to the “Wonderful World of NorthPark”.

We sincerely hope that you agree and invite you to make Cinema I & II your favorite source of motion picture entertainment.
Population Migration

The first major factor that led to the building of a twin at NorthPark Center was the migration of people to the suburban areas, specifically to northern Dallas. Throughout the 1950s, the city of Dallas was growing outward, with emphasis on northern expansion. The raw data from the 1950, 1960, and 1970 censuses demonstrate, using real population numbers, the deterioration of downtown as a residential locus and the expansion of tracts along the new Central Expressway roadway. For this comparison, nine tracts from the downtown area closest to Theatre Row and the nine tracts from the North Dallas area that are closest to NorthPark Center were selected and compared to chart the movement of people throughout the years of NorthPark’s design, construction, and opening.

In the 1950 census, the collective population of the nine selected tracts in the downtown area was 55,687, with a demographic makeup of 62% white and 38% non-white (this is the term that was used in the census).\textsuperscript{38} For the North Dallas sample,\textsuperscript{39} the cumulative population came to 38,304, with a demographic split of 97.7% white and 2.3% non-white.\textsuperscript{40}

By the time of the 1960 census, the downtown population had shrunk to 40,642 (a decrease of 27%), while the demographics remained almost unchanged (60% white and 40% non-white). The area around what would become NorthPark Center swelled from 38,304 in 1950 to 46,924 in 1960 (an increase of 22.5%) with racial division of 92% white and 8% non-white.\textsuperscript{41} This increase does not directly correspond to the loss from downtown since the population was dispersing from the city center to tracts other than just the nine selected for analysis, but it does show that the area was growing at a rapid pace.

\textsuperscript{38} The downtown tracts selected for study were 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 30, 31, 32, and 33.
\textsuperscript{39} The North Dallas tracts selected for study were D-1, D-2, D-3, 3, 75, 76, 77, 78, and 79.
The 1970 census shows even more decline downtown, with the total population reduced to 28,531 and a demographic makeup 57% white and 43% non-white. This represented a reduction of 30% from the previous census and a total contraction of 49% over the twenty-year period. In the same span of time, the North Dallas tracts expanded to a total of 69,802 with a demographic split of 95% white and 5% non-white. This was an increase of 49% and a total population increase of 82% over the twenty-year span.\textsuperscript{42}

During this period, there was a general conception that downtown had become noisy, dirty, and chaotic.\textsuperscript{43} In addition to these concerns, more automobiles were attempting to get downtown without enough parking places to accommodate them.\textsuperscript{44} This environment was devastating to the downtown theaters that started to see steady closings as early as 1952. By 1973, the demand for films in the area had dipped so low that the last remaining downtown palace, The Majestic, was forced to close.\textsuperscript{45}

The creation of Central Expressway as a convenient and direct roadway to the suburbs is likely what led the migrating citizens to prefer moving northward when leaving downtown. Planning for this highway began back in the 1940s and was to follow the old railway routes after clearance of right-of-way was agreed on with the Southern Pacific, Santa Fe, and M-K-T lines. Once secured, the construction would continue in stages as it moved northward, starting with overpasses across Ross and Hall Street, then a section to Mockingbird Lane, and finally an extension to Northwest Highway. This section, however, was only planned to be a parkway of “two thirty-two-foot streets with 125 feet of parkway between” with plans to “construct an expressway in that parkway when traffic justifies.”\textsuperscript{46} The conversion of this stretch to an expressway that connected to Northwest Highway was

\textsuperscript{44} M Hardwick, 181.
\textsuperscript{45} Sherrod, 47.
justified fairly quickly, and by April of 1952, the Northwest Highway extension was completed and opened to traffic, another clear indication of how rapid this particular area was growing.\textsuperscript{47}

\textit{Raymond Nasher and the Development of NorthPark Center}

As the population of Dallas settled into the northern quarters of the city, traveling into downtown was not only inconvenient, but was considered dangerous by many of the affluent residents. In order to take advantage of this fact, Raymond D. Nasher put together a panel of experts in economics and geography to study the feasibility of a shopping center in the North Dallas region. When this analysis was completed, they selected a site at the corner of Central Expressway and Northwest Highway as the ideal location for his new venture.\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure_3.png}
\caption{Map of Future NorthPark Center Site from the 1948 Dallas City Planning Commission}
\end{figure}

At the time, the Hillcrest Memorial Cemetery owned the site (as can be seen in the 1948 Planning Commission map) and would need to be cleared for construction. By 1962, the eventual Central Expressway route was completed through this region and it was decided that it would curve and head north, following Coit Road instead of the rail lines.

In 1961, Raymond Nasher negotiated a deal with the Hillcrest Foundation that owned the Memorial Cemetery to lease 305 acres for the development of NorthPark Center. The leased land extended much farther to the west than the mall needed and according to the contract is "bounded at the northwest corner of Northwest Highway and Central Expressway, bounded by Walnut Hill Lane on the north and Hillcrest Road on the west, excluding Temple Emanu-El and the Hillcrest Memorial Park." For this 99-year ground lease, the Hillcrest Foundation would receive an estimated $50 million over the term, to be used for charitable and educational purposes.

Figure 4 - 1959 Southern-Facing Aerial View from www.texasfreeway.com

---

Figure 4, from 1959, demonstrates that six years prior to the opening of NorthPark Center (when much of the design and planning was taking place), the North Dallas region was more or less a rural area with no housing, retail, or industrial development whatsoever. Nasher’s survey team determined that not only was this area primed for a population boom (they expected 1,200,000 people to be living within the trade area by 1975), but that the aggregate income of these residents would equal approximately $2.6 billion annually.51

After a brief construction strike in early 1965, NorthPark Center finally held its formal opening to the public on August 19, 1965, when almost 100 stores, shops, and restaurants began doing business in what was called the “largest climate-controlled suburban shopping complex in the world.”52 The theater, however, would have to wait almost another month before being ready to receive visitors. Figure 5 shows NorthPark Center right around the

---

time of the opening in 1965. It is interesting to note that there are still no other residential or commercial developments at this time and that the surrounding area remains almost unchanged from the 1959 photo. The theater is located directly across from the intersection of the two wings, but unconnected to the main shopping concourse.

Changes in the Movie Industry

The years preceding the opening of the Cinemas at NorthPark were hard on the exhibition industry as a whole, with a low point occurring in 1962. This period saw major reductions in box office gross, number of tickets sold, and overall profit.53 There are some commonly discussed factors that led to the “bottoming out” of the industry during this period. First, broadcast television was rapidly displacing the movie theater as the dominant entertainment medium in the United States. Second, soon after the end of World War II, large numbers of adults were getting married, having children, and moving to the suburbs, where there were not a large number of theaters.54 Though these were important, it is impossible to ignore the influence that the Paramount Decrees had on attendance numbers dropping over 70% in just fourteen years.

The Paramount Decrees have been the subject of numerous books and dissertations that provide a great amount of detail on how these came about and the effects that they had on the movie exhibition industry. A thorough analysis is not necessary here, but there were three aspects of these decrees that had a direct effect on the Cinemas at NorthPark and as such need to be discussed here.55

The first aspect to understand is that the term “Paramount Decrees” (which got this name because Paramount Pictures was the first company to comply) refers to a Supreme

Court decision that forced the production and exhibition tiers of the movie industry to be owned by separate entities. Prior to these decrees, a practice of “vertical integration” existed where a distribution company would own a theater circuit. This was considered to be a monopolistic practice by the court and the order to separate was handed down on May 3, 1948.\(^{56}\)

Table 1 - Box Office Admissions and Gross after the Paramount Decrees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S. Box Office Admissions (Millions)</th>
<th>Avg. Gross (Millions)</th>
<th>Number of Admissions (Millions)</th>
<th>Industry Corporate Profits Before Taxes (Millions)</th>
<th>Industry Corporate Profits After Taxes (Millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1,506</td>
<td>$.44</td>
<td>3,442.7</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1,448</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>3,168.5</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1,379</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>3,017.5</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>.469</td>
<td>2,840.2</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1,325</td>
<td>.477</td>
<td>2,777.7</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1,339</td>
<td>.509</td>
<td>2,630.3</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1,251</td>
<td>.551</td>
<td>2,270.4</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>1,204</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td>2,072.3</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>1,125</td>
<td>.594</td>
<td>1,893.9</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1,078</td>
<td>.624</td>
<td>1,727.6</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>1,553.8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>1,006</td>
<td>.676</td>
<td>1,488.2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>948.4</td>
<td>.727</td>
<td>1,304.3</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>945.4</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td>1,224.2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>874.9</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>1,080.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>925.0</td>
<td>.846</td>
<td>1,093.4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>947.6</td>
<td>.925</td>
<td>1,024.4</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{56}\) Jowett, 345.
The second important factor is that although 1948 was the year of the Supreme Court decision, full compliance did not occur until March 12th of 1959 when Loew’s Theatres negotiated the separation of its theaters from MGM studios.\textsuperscript{57} This meant that the effects of the decision were spread out over a decade and did not have an immediate impact on the films or the attendance numbers. Table 1 charts the gradual reduction in attendance and profit beginning in 1949.

The third point is the repercussion of divorcement, which meant the production tier was no longer supported directly by the exhibition side of the industry. The theaters’ cash flow came from direct sales to the consumer of both tickets and concessions. This is important as it makes for a much more immediate return on investment for the movie exhibitor. The production side was investing money on product that they would not see a return on for at least a year and in some cases more (depending on the final release date). The result was a dramatic overall reduction in the number of releases by the major film studios every year and higher rental rates charged to the theaters.\textsuperscript{58}

Table 2 - Number of Movies Released and Movie Tickets Sold 1950–1965

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Number of Movies & Attendance (\texttimes10\text{Million}) \\
\hline
1950 & 350 & 300 \\
1951 & 300 & 250 \\
1952 & 250 & 200 \\
1953 & 200 & 150 \\
1954 & 150 & 100 \\
1955 & 100 & 50 \\
1956 & 50 & 0 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{57} Lev, 198.
\textsuperscript{58} Lev, 211.
Faced with higher rental rates, fewer films to show, and dwindling audiences, it was clear that the movie business would have to change in order to survive. The first thing to go was the opulent design of the “movie palace.” Exhibitors could no longer afford to be “showman” and provide “palaces” as a place to watch movies. As a result, in the early '60s, the primary focus of the theater chains was to provide a simple, comfortable environment that promoted the sale of tickets and concessions with the lowest overhead possible.\textsuperscript{59}

The concept of “multiplexing” (multiple theater auditoriums in the same building) was a direct result of this movement to lower costs.\textsuperscript{60} The twin was the first incarnation of the multiplex and was defined by theatre architect Robert W. Kahn as:

Two auditoriums, one large and one small, share common lobby, rest room, concession, and mechanical facilities. The operator can shift features at the proper time to adjust demand, using the smaller house as the run nears its end; or he can use the smaller house for art films, re-runs, theatre parties, or special occasions.\textsuperscript{61}

Other benefits to this concept included eliminating redundant staffing, a single projection booth, and a shared parking lot. Because of these cost savings, the multiplex (specifically the twin) allowed for a much needed period of rebuilding and growth. This growth was enjoyed by two new players in the market that were not part of the old vertically integrated system. These new chains were known as American Multi-Cinema and the General Cinema Corporation.

\textit{The General Cinema Corporation Comes to Town}

The fourth factor that helps answer the question “Why a Twin for NorthPark?” is the role of the General Cinema Corporation (commonly known as GCC) as they shifted from being a leader in the drive-in theater market towards adapting a more traditional “four wall” business model.

\textsuperscript{59} Edgerton, 151.  
\textsuperscript{60} Edgerton, 48.  
\textsuperscript{61} Edgerton, 127.
Two years before the NorthPark I & II opened, drive-in theatres were already in decline, with the total number of drive-ins falling from 4,700 in 1958 down to 3,502 in 1963. The biggest reason for this decline was that as shopping centers and malls became popular, retail and residential developers were appropriating land that would have otherwise gone to a sprawling drive-in that could hold several hundred cars. This caused a spike in land costs overall, making it more difficult to profit from a drive-in.

In 1961, the owner of the General Drive-In Corporation, Philip Smith, died leaving the business to his son Richard. Richard A. Smith was a thirty-six year old Harvard graduate who saw the decline of the drive-in at the same time as the rise of shopping centers. In reaction to this, Richard began to de-emphasize the company’s reliance on the open-air cinemas and turned its focus to “hard top” locations. It was at this time that he chose to change the name of the company to “General Cinema Corporation” in order to reflect this new approach.

It was not General Cinema, but its primary competitor American Multi-Cinema (commonly known as AMC) that is credited with beginning the multiplex trend when the Parkway I & II opened as the first purpose-built twin in the U.S. on July 12, 1963, in Kansas City, Missouri. Before this opening, GCC was already working on a multiplex concept of its own by adding a second auditorium to some of their existing locations. GCC’s first purpose-built twin opened on November 6, 1963, at the Charlottetown Mall in Charlotte, North Carolina. This theater (located at the top of the picture on the next page) would serve as a model for future GCC twins, including the Cinemas at NorthPark.
The push from General Cinema and AMC towards multiplexing and cost-cutting has often been looked at as having a negative impact on the movie-going experience. Due to the fact that the movie industry was on the verge of outright collapse, it is important to see these changes not as a negative, but as an imperative. The austere approach that both AMC and GCC employed in creating the twin cinema is one of the main reasons why the exhibition industry was able to recover from the record low numbers that followed the post-Paramount Decree divestiture.\textsuperscript{68} Without the “bottoming out” that necessitated this new and innovative approach, there never would have been a twin built at NorthPark Center.

*Functionality over Aesthetics: Designing the NorthPark*

It is often assumed that William Reisman designed the Cinemas at NorthPark. As part of its corporate plan, General Cinema wanted a repeatable and familiar design for all of

\textsuperscript{68} Edgerton, 36.
their new shopping center theaters. The company liked his focus on simplicity and comfort as well as his innovative "shadow box" screen frame that eliminated all of the curtains and drapery from the auditorium.\textsuperscript{69} Reisman also favored a floor plan that put a theater on either side of the lobby with the larger auditorium always to the left of a patron walking in the front door (see previous picture of the Charlottetown Mall).

Despite the fact that William Reisman’s ideas were clearly being used in the creation of this theater, Raymond Nasher wanted the same architect that he was using for the rest of NorthPark Center to be employed by the theater. As such, the building was officially designed by the Harrell and Hamilton architectural firm of Dallas.\textsuperscript{70} In doing this, Nasher was able to maintain the same aesthetic standard used in the rest of the buildings in the complex, which included the same iconic beige bricks.

\textbf{Figure 7 - Scan from Original Blueprint}

It is impossible to verify at this point how much influence General Cinema and William Reisman had over Harrell and Hamilton in the design of the Cinemas at NorthPark. Given that the interior and function of the theater were identical to a Reisman design, it is probable that Reisman directed Nasher’s architects in all aspects beyond the exterior shell.

\textsuperscript{69} Pruitt, 60.  
\textsuperscript{70} “Additions to NorthPark Cinema,” blueprint, 1965, in author’s possession.
Part of Reisman’s goal as a designer was to eliminate the grandiose elements throughout the entire customer experience and to make the films that were showing their only focus.

In contrast to the curbside box office and cavernous spaces that were common in earlier theaters, a night out at this particular theater was somewhat of a chore for the moviegoer. The theater itself was tucked away behind NorthPark Center, completely hiding it from Northwest Highway and Interstate 75, the two main thoroughfares that marked the mall’s boundaries. Furthermore, unlike the previous movie palaces that people were used to, the NorthPark possessed no brightly lit marquee that announced either its location or the movies that it was playing.⁷¹

Once customers found the theater, all they saw was a small, non-descript beige brick building which was only identified as their destination by way of a backlit sign that simply read “I CINEMA II.” After parking (the easy part, as NorthPark proudly offered “free parking for 6,000 cars”⁷²), the customer would then wait in one line leading to the exterior box office in order to purchase tickets before proceeding to a second outside line since there

---

was not enough room in the lobby to hold the people coming to the shows. Once in this line, the moviegoer would wait, sometimes for hours, for the ushers to open the doors that led to the theater’s diminutive interior.

Unlike most theaters built after the advent of the concession stand, the entrances to the auditoriums were the first thing the customers would pass, not the food counter. This was highly unusual; since popcorn and soda sales provide the bulk of an exhibitor’s profit, most theater chains position the concession stand in such a way that it is impossible for patrons to get to their films without passing by at least one.\(^{73}\)

The auditoriums, which were practically identical except for size, were perhaps the greatest shock of all to those accustomed to the beautiful atmospheric theaters built in the preceding decades. At NorthPark, they were simply large rooms that contained rows of seats on a sloped floor with no balcony, a projector in the back of the room, and a screen in the front (much like the days of the first generation Nickelodeons). Furthermore, the rooms were completely lacking in curtains. This is another stark contrast to earlier theatres as they used curtains, both on the walls or surrounding the screen, as a decoration standard.

Figure 9 - NorthPark Cinema I Interior

\(^{73}\) Polk, 40.
The view of the multiscreen theaters put forth by Gomery would argue that considering all of the above qualities, NorthPark was a sterile and unwelcoming environment for the viewing of films. There is, however, another view on this issue which was put forth by spectatorship theorist Harry Alan Potamkin. This theory argues that these qualities represent an improvement on the entire movie-watching experience (again, as opposed to “cinema-going”). As one of the first real movie critics, Potamkin reviewed films during the 1920s and 1930s, gaining an international reputation for his unusual acuity of judgment and his devotion to cinema as an art form and not a commodity. Potamkin’s love for cinema did not extend to the theaters in which this art was being presented.

The theaters in which he worked as a critic were the aforementioned palace theaters. They were the great ornate structures that conveyed opulence and importance from their mighty outdoor marquees, through their chandelier-lit lobbies, all the way down to their carefully chosen names which further conveyed the greatness of these new venues (names such as “Palace,” “Majestic,” and “Empire”). In an essay written for the National Board of Review Magazine entitled “The Ritual of the Movies,” Potamkin attacked these theaters for the harmful effects they were having on films. He argued that so-called “amenities” such as stage shows, overly ornate restroom facilities, ever present ushers, and dish giveaways distracted the viewer from the art of the film.

Potamkin did offer a solution to this problem by laying out the specifications for a new type of theater. In another article, entitled “The Movie Palace,” he combined the attributes of existing theaters with some suggestions of previous writers in order to describe what he envisioned as the perfect theater. As Potamkin had no training in architecture, he

75 Kathryn Helgesen Fuller, “At the Picture Show,” in Exhibition: The Film Reader, ed. Ina Rae Hark (New York: Routledge, 2002), 43.
76 Potamkin, 217.
77 Potamkin, 216-217.
78 Potamkin, 548.
did not “design” a theater per se; instead he examined four problems within the accepted palace theater design and offered solutions for each.

First, he pointed out that the theatres were being built around the proscenium (the large, decorative arch that marks the boundary between the stage area and auditorium of a theater) with the screen positioned behind it. Feeling that this was providing a distraction from the screen and the film playing on it, he argued that the proscenium should simply be abolished and that the screen should be hung flat against the wall.\(^79\)

Second, he felt that the ideal cinema should eliminate the chandelier as the lobby’s focal point and substitute “dimmed wall or alcove lighting.”\(^80\) Potamkin’s third point addressed the overall interior of the auditorium and argued for a design that he termed “the convergence of the lines to the screen.” Applied in conjunction with the removal of the proscenium, this idea focused on the removal of all items from the viewing room that were not necessary to the spectatorship of a film, which included the orchestra pit, boxed seats, decorative columns, and balconies.\(^81\) When completed, these modifications would create an auditorium that resembled the shape of a widened triangle with the screen at its apex.

Lastly, Potamkin argued that the owners and managers of these cinemas must consciously realize the differences between a “cinema” and “theatre.”\(^82\) This point transcends any physical limitations of a building and addresses the way in which the building is to be utilized. In order to effectively divorce the cinema from a theater, Potamkin argues that these new auditoriums must be dedicated to the “best possible exploration of pictures,” while leaving the “polyglot program . . . of ballet, fashion shows, vaudeville acts—with a mere soupcon of film entertainment” behind.\(^83\)

\(^79\) Ibid.
\(^80\) Potamkin, 549.
\(^81\) Potamkin, 548.
\(^82\) Potamkin, 549.
\(^83\) Potamkin, 550.
The influence of Potamkin on this new generation of theater construction cannot be dismissed when examining the architecture of the Cinemas at NorthPark. This theater was clearly built not only to adhere to the ideas set forth in his article “The Movie Palace,” but expanded upon them. NorthPark incorporated all five of Potamkin’s ideas into its design, including the important abolition of the proscenium, which became standard in all new multiscreen theaters. This cinema, however, took a new approach in addressing this issue and developed what came to be known as a “picture window” or “shadow box” screen frame.
In order to maximize the concept of film-as-art put forth in Potamkin’s articles, this “picture window” resembled a gigantic picture frame that was hanging on the wall, giving the audience the feeling that they were truly looking at a large work of art in front of them. The fact that the picture was literally in motion helped to return film to its basic form—the moving picture. This cross-section of the front of the auditorium shows that the screen would be built 7’4” from the back wall (this was to allow for speakers and utilities to be placed behind the screen) and sit about 6’ off the ground. On the auditorium side of the screen, an “apron” was built that extended 11’ out on the top, bottom, and both sides of the screen at a 110 degree angle from the screen.

The following photos show the differences between a shadow box screen frame and a traditional, proscenium type. Notice how one pulls the viewer into the screen and one is more distracting.

Figure 11 - Example of Proscenium (Fox Theatre, Atlanta)
Opening Night

On September 22, 1965, the theater was ready and a large Grand Opening party was held at the new General Cinema Theater to celebrate its arrival in the city. As part of this effort, the organizers of the event appropriated the glamour of an earlier time in movie exhibition by recreating the experience of an old-time movie premiere. This effort, which included an appearance by one of the biggest motion picture stars of the 1910s and '20s, Francis X. Bushman, was the first chance that the citizens of Dallas had to watch movies in one of these new twin cinemas.

As part of this premiere, a commemorative program which included the aforementioned “Why A Twin For NorthPark?” informational flyer was given to those in attendance. The use of such opening day programs harkens back to the opening of the first

---

“atmospheric” cinema in Dallas, The Majestic Theatre, which premiered downtown in 1921. The booklets that were handed out for that opening were simply and directly titled, “I Am a New Theater.”

The program for NorthPark’s opening began with a brief history of the new NorthPark retail development and the major players involved, but the bulk of the text was

---

86 Schroeder, 66.
used to educate the customer on new features and services, which ranged from patron
comfort and convenience to the differences that a twin theater would have on the types of
films that would be shown.\textsuperscript{87}

This program amounted to little more than an advertisement, one that worked to sell
the concept of a multiscreened neighborhood cinema to a city that had never had one
before. Although the multiplex would soon become the standard of movie exhibition, with
locations containing more and more screens at a single location, these theaters encountered
a large amount of resistance as they moved away from the concentrations of single-screen
houses, known as "theatre rows."\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{Conclusion}

In analyzing the question that was posed in the opening night program, "Why A Twin
For NorthPark?", it is important to understand that there were forces that went beyond why
Raymond Nasher and the General Cinema Corporation decided to have two screens at this
location instead of one. The question here goes beyond simply examining the number of
auditoriums in order to ask the question "Why This Particular Twin For NorthPark?". This is a
much more complex question that goes beyond the financial concerns in order to address
why the theater was put on this specific site and designed a certain way. Without being
incorporated into the new mall development, these cinemas might have been built further to
the south, where theaters such as the Granada, UA Cine, and the Arcadia have come and
gone. Furthermore, without the preconditions that existed within the exhibition industry,
Dallas' first twin could have been built with a greater concern put on its aesthetic value,
which would have pulled focus away from the movie as an art form.

\textsuperscript{87} "NorthPark Cinema I & II," brochure, 1965, Ron Beardmore Collection.
\textsuperscript{88} Schroeder, 58.
But for over three decades, the Cinemas at NorthPark remained a favorite
destination for both critics and audiences alike. The building was located away from
downtown, hard to find, and considered to be aesthetically cold. Inside, the lobby and
restroom facilities were woefully inadequate, and the auditoriums were little more than giant
boxes with a screen in the front. Despite these unconventional factors, the theater continued
to succeed while remaining immune to major shifts that occurred in the industry during its
operating years. These changes and the effect that they had on Dallas’ first third-generation,
multiscreen cinema will be discussed in the following chapters.
There is every indication that Hollywood will continue producing more and more “roadshow” type pictures, resulting in lengthy engagements. It’s well known that many single auditorium theaters have to bypass these pictures because of their inability to tie up the theater for an appreciable time.\(^89\)

--- Richard Smith, President of General Cinema

---

The Cinemas at NorthPark finally opened on September 22, 1965, and although the construction strikes earlier in the year had led to a two month delay, the theater still opened as the first multiscreened theater in the city of Dallas.\textsuperscript{90} Even more important than the fact that NorthPark maintained this historical distinction, the new twin was also able to keep the films that the General Cinema Corporation had chosen to premiere on the new screens. The careful selection of these films, George Stevens’ \textit{The Greatest Story Ever Told} and Vincente Minnelli’s \textit{The Sandpiper}, as part of their opening night festivities would prove to be of great importance to the success of the theater over the subsequent decade.\textsuperscript{91}

\textit{Booking Strategies and the Paramount Decrees}

Although the choice of films may seem unimportant, they demonstrate how the Cinemas at NorthPark worked to use changes in national film booking strategies to set a precedent as to how the theater was going to operate from the day that it first opened. To understand how this strategy worked and why the selection of these two films was instrumental to NorthPark’s eventual success, it is important to understand the history of film booking as a business prior to 1965.

The previous chapter discussed vertical integration as a business strategy and how the money flowed from the exhibitor through the distributor and to the producer while staying under one synergistic corporate umbrella. This also influenced which movies played at which theaters through a system known as “run-zone-clearance.” In this model, the top-tier pictures would open (or “run”) at the top-tier theaters all at once. The 1941 Film Daily Year Book accounts for 17,500 total movie theaters in the United States with only 1,360 of these maintaining this top-tier status (most of these located in major metropolitan areas), but

although there were so few locations, these theaters accounted for almost one half of all domestic grosses.\textsuperscript{92}

Upon completion of the run at these metropolitan palace theaters, the films would undergo a “cooling-off” period where they were pulled from the market and would not be exhibited anywhere. This period would allow “clearance” of time between when they played at these top-tier locations and when they would open at the lesser theaters, which was usually a larger and less exclusive pool of exhibition houses. This pattern would continue to lesser and smaller theaters with lower admission prices. Each distinct level was known as a “zone” and was specifically defined by the type of theater and not necessarily where it was located (“zoning” today refers to distance between theater buildings).

This practice, which became standard in the mid-1920s, continued as normal operating procedure for the major film distributors (known as the “Big Five”) throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, since the arrival of a film at each new zone level was accompanied by a new round of excitement and publicity, this practice seemed to reflect positively on weekly attendance and benefited distributors and exhibitors alike.

After the Paramount Decrees were fully implemented in 1958, theaters were in a more or less adversarial position with their former parent companies, with both sides attempting to maximize their own profits at the expense of the other.\textsuperscript{93} With a new dynamic between the supply and exhibition sides of the industry and a significant product shortage, a new booking strategy would be needed.

\textit{First Runs and Roadshows}

As the first multiscreened theater in the city of Dallas and one of the first in the entire country, the approach that NorthPark took toward their film booking practices had


\textsuperscript{93} Balio, 404.
ramifications that would extend deep into the industry as a whole. The sort of forethought that this theater undertook was unique, as most of the other multiscreened venues that had already opened around the country demonstrated no discernable strategy when it came to which films they chose to exhibit.

The first purpose-built twin in the United States was the Durwood Parkway One and Parkway Two in Kansas City, Missouri. The idea of twin theaters was not new at this time—outdoor drive-ins had established this model and there were already some older palace theaters that had undergone conversions from single screens to twins (usually by turning the balcony into one auditorium and leaving the floor as its own auditorium). The Parkway Twin receives recognition as the first multiplex simply for the fact that it was the first to be built, from the ground up, for this purpose.

Despite the fact that this theater was a true trendsetter in theater construction, when it came to deciding what movies to play, the Parkway Twin would have been considered a lower-tier theater in the old run-zone-clearance system. The larger house could seat 400 patrons and the smaller could only accommodate 300. It is also interesting to note that while this theater is credited with starting the world-wide phenomenon of building new theaters with multiple screens, it also began a building boom within the city of Kansas City, which had not seen a new theater built for twenty-three years prior to the opening of the Parkway Twin.

The day after its opening, the venerable trade magazine, Variety, profiled the theater and specifically discussed Durwood’s booking strategy for the new twin. Its approach would be to play the new, popular films in their big auditoriums “day and date” (open the movie at the same time) with their downtown locations. This was a novel approach as it would be the first chance for locations away from the downtown area to play first-run movies. After the

---

94 “Angles to Shopping Centre ‘Twins’: Concession Stands Also Sell to Those Outside the Durwood Situations,” Variety, July 17, 1963, 15.
movie began to taper off, it could be moved out of the main theater at the twin and play out the rest of its run on the smaller screen.\textsuperscript{96}

The Cinemas at NorthPark, however, specifically decided to open with \textit{The Greatest Story Ever Told} and \textit{The Sandpiper} in order to experiment with the economic feasibility of a twin cinema combining a first-run theater (similar concept to the top-tier of the run-zone-clearance system where they would have some amount of exclusivity on their movies) with a new innovation in film booking known as the “roadshow.”\textsuperscript{97}

The idea of “roadshowing” a film was not completely new to the 1960s. In the early days of movie exhibition in this country, small movie producers rented out auditoriums as they moved from city to city during the 1920s.\textsuperscript{98} Since these producers were taking a film “on the road,” they not only provided this booking strategy with a name, but also created a sense of exclusivity in their product due to its itinerant nature. The roadshow of the 1960s, however, took this idea of exclusivity further than its predecessor, incorporating techniques used by live theater venues in order to create a unique movie-going experience.\textsuperscript{99}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{NorthPark_Roadshow_Ticket_Policy.png}
\caption{NorthPark Roadshow Ticket Policy}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{97} Balio, 111.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
In one sense, the roadshow approach is very similar to the clearance system in that a film would debut at a small exclusive group of theaters and then expand as part of a general “wide” release at some later date. The difference between the roadshow and a film being shown as a first-run feature is twofold. First, the definition of “exclusivity” in the typical roadshow release is much narrower than its counterpart under the run-zone-clearance or first-run systems. In a roadshow engagement, only one theater in a region may play a film versus several possible venues in the same town under the clearance system, provided they had enough top-tier locations.\textsuperscript{100}

In addition to the exclusivity provided to a film by being shown at only one theater in a particular region, its exclusivity was even further limited at the venue level with theaters only running around ten “performances” per week.\textsuperscript{101} This practice was developed so that the roadshow could closely mimic the “event” atmosphere of a live theater venue, which would typically limit their schedules to 8:00 P.M. performances every night with several cheaper matinees offered throughout the week. Roadshow exhibition also appropriated other practices from the legitimate stage by offering patrons reserved, advance ticketing, commemorative programs, overtures, and intermissions.\textsuperscript{102} Furthermore, these theaters were technologically superior to other cinemas in that they were equipped with 70mm projectors and the ability to play back six-channel magnetic sound. Six-channel sound was not something that was standardized in cinemas until about the mid-nineties. Even the push for “Dolby Stereo” that would become popular in the late ’70s was only four-channel optical sound, which was inferior and had a very low adoption rate.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
Like all large companies, General Cinema had a well laid out corporate structure that kept most of the power and decision making in the upper levels of management at the home office in Boston. Film buying (booking) was the one area that had always been left to individual buyers at the local level. General Cinema continued this practice throughout the entire NorthPark period as they felt that only someone living in the region could understand the cultural and socioeconomic specifics of the area and what kinds of films the people living in that area would like. These local film buyers had the independence to anticipate popularity and structure a bid accordingly.

Although Cinema II at NorthPark (the smaller and more intimate of the two auditoriums) was designated as the roadshow house, these types of films were not always available for booking, as they were subject to the distribution plans of the film’s distributor. In the interim periods, the cinema would serve as a dual first-run house, showing two exclusive and popular films on a continuous schedule. These films, most of which were rather forgettable or undistinguished films from some of Hollywood’s biggest stars and directors, included Nevada Smith starring Steve Mc Queen, Hombre starring Paul Newman, and The Night of the Generals with Peter O’Toole and Omar Sharif. These selections proved to be mostly moderate successes at best and were not usually held over for longer than four weeks. Although these titles are not considered classics today, they were still respected films at the time and the Cinemas at NorthPark never waivered from the booking strategy into ethnic, pornographic, or exploitation as many other theaters did.

NorthPark would return to its original, opening day formula whenever possible throughout the late 1960s, which involved pairing a continuous new release with either an old favorite re-release or a new roadshow presentation.

---

103 Pruitt, 119.
104 Pruitt, 141.
105 See the end of the chapter for a full list of movies.
While these proved popular, including an eight month re-release run of Doctor Zhivago in 1966, the approach reached its zenith at the end of 1967 when Mike Nichols' The Graduate was paired with a new 70mm widescreen version of Victor Fleming's 1939 classic Gone with the Wind.\textsuperscript{106}

It is interesting to note that this paring was never planned and was actually a gamble on the part of NorthPark’s film buyer. The first-run movie that was originally booked instead of The Graduate was The Secret War of Harry Frigg. The film starred Paul Newman and was supposed to be the big pre-Christmas release for NorthPark in 1967. The movie was not ready in time for release and the theater had to scramble to fill one of the biggest weeks on the calendar. The theater decided to take a risk with The Graduate and the film enjoyed a six-month run. The Secret War of Harry Frigg, however, was unable to secure another booking for NorthPark.\textsuperscript{107}

Although revisiting this strategy for these films resulted in two of the longest and most successful runs at the theater, the social situation in Dallas had already drastically changed from what it had been only three years before, and NorthPark had already made some changes in order to adapt. One example of this can be seen in the way in which the theater presented itself in its advertising. When the Cinemas first opened, as was demonstrated by the advertisement on the second page of this chapter, NorthPark used the classic spelling on the word, “theatre” to portray a level of class while trying to bring people to the new cinema. Furthermore, the main points that they used to sell the theater in that advertisement dealt with certain touches of class as well as patron comfort, relegating the technical advances such as “TRANSISTORIZED STEREOPHONIC SOUND” to the very bottom of the ad.\textsuperscript{108}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
The newspaper advertisement from March 15, 1968, is indicative of how the outside cultural influences affected the way in which the Cinemas at NorthPark operated by the late 1960s.\textsuperscript{109} As this advertisement demonstrates, General Cinema had already discontinued using the spelling of the word "theatre" (spelled "-re" instead of "-er"), using only the word "cinema" when describing the NorthPark. Furthermore, as the \textit{Gone with the Wind} ad shows, the emphasis was no longer on easy parking and art gallery lounges as was the case in earlier advertisements.\textsuperscript{110} By 1968, the focus had shifted to the technological advancements, glorifying the "Splendor of 70mm, widescreen and full stereophonic sound!" presumably in response to shifting consumer tastes.\textsuperscript{111} Even the advertisement for \textit{The Graduate} advertised that it is "in color."

Even more interesting than what this advertisement has to say about the Cinemas at NorthPark, is what surrounds it. In the above newspaper clipping, the NorthPark ad announces showings of two of the most popular and beloved films in motion picture history. This is in contrast to the numerous theaters around town that transitioned into playing "adults-only" fare with titles such as \textit{Deep Inside}, \textit{Mondo Girls}, and even a combination film and stage show called \textit{Midnight Adult Fun Party}.\textsuperscript{112} The ads for all of these films (and many others like them) can be seen immediately surrounding the NorthPark advertisement on the previous page.

The fact that these ads were even included indicates an acceptance on the part of Dallasites regarding the advertising of adult product in 1968, a telling commentary about the social mores of the time. When the advertisement announcing the theater originally ran in 1965, only one such ad was present and it was segregated off from the rest of the more general and family friendly fare.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Dallas Morning News}, September 22, 1965, sec. A, p. 15
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Dallas Morning News}, March 15, 1968, sec. A, p. 12
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Dallas Morning News}, September 22, 1965, sec. A, p. 15
Moreover, it speaks to the idea that Gomery and others have regarding the state of the exhibition industry between the years 1965 and 1975. Researchers have often used evidence such as this group of advertisements to argue for the overall decline that occurred in movie theaters during the 1960s and 1970s. These previous authors note that the large number of venues that had converted from first-run to alternative product (including XXX, ethnic, and martial arts films) is an argument in favor of their position.\(^{114}\) These writers, however, ignore the fact that the largest and most visible of all of these advertisements continues to be for theaters like the Cinemas at NorthPark, which continued to offer audiences both first-run and roadshow films in a safe and technologically superior manner.

1971–1974

By 1971, the roadshow was considered dead, with articles predicting the system’s demise beginning to appear as early as the year before.\(^{115}\) For the Cinemas at NorthPark, however, the roadshow did not cease to be a means of film exhibition until after a successful fifteen-week run of the historical Russian epic *Nicholas and Alexandra* in the summer of 1972, much later than both local and national analysts expected.\(^{116}\)

The elimination of the roadshow as a viable means of distribution was caused by several shifts in both the production and exhibition tiers of the movie industry. On the production side, the roadshow film, which was usually either an expensive musical or historical epic, was becoming too costly to produce.\(^{117}\) On the exhibitor side, theaters like NorthPark were experiencing the lowest per-week attendance that the industry had ever seen. To survive, the theaters needed films that could play more than once or twice a day, and the average roadshow ran between three and three and a half hours. No longer able to

\(^{114}\) Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 103.
\(^{117}\) Payne, “Movie Roadshow Twilight Nears.”
afford the large auditoriums that sat empty for a large part of the week, exhibitors and
distributors alike came to see the roadshow as a gimmick and began the process of phasing
it out.\textsuperscript{118}

Ironically, both sides of the movie industry looked to a NorthPark film, \textit{The Graduate},
as the model of efficiency they wanted to reproduce on a grand scale. In that film, the
producers found a small movie that was cheap to produce but would bring in large numbers
of people over an extended period of time. The exhibitors liked it for another reason:
although the individual tickets were slightly cheaper, they could fit in at least six shows every
day because of its sub two-hour running time, maximizing possible profit.\textsuperscript{119}

Corporate booking strategies have always had an effect on the culture of the
population that they serve, and the economic decision on the part of theaters to shift towards
continuous showtimes had significant cultural ramifications as well. When NorthPark offered
a roadshow attraction during the late '60s, audiences would reserve their seats weeks in
advance and arrive at the theater in more formal attire. The switch to more showtimes and
general ticketing changed many aspects of how, when, and where the people of Dallas
watched their movies. As such, it made the films more accessible to the general public and
as a subsequent result, going to the movies became less of an event. In fact, these
continuous showtimes were so convenient people could just walk over from NorthPark
Center and use a film as a shopping break. But even more important than the effect that
NorthPark's bookings had on how, when, and where the people of Dallas watched their
movies was the effect that Dallas' first twin cinemas had on which movies the rest of the
world saw.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
1974: A Case Study

Occurring just prior to the cinema’s ten-year anniversary, 1974 was a remarkable year for the theater in both ticket sales as well as in terms of its cultural impact. Veering away from the “safer” adult comedies and dramas that had been popular, the bookers brought in “edgier” movies, such as Sidney Lumet’s Serpico, Francis Ford Coppola’s The Godfather: Part II, Mel Brooks’ Blazing Saddles, and the Charles Bronson cult classic, Death Wish, over the course of the year. The result was a much more diverse lineup than had been present over the preceding decade.

The engagements of these movies that would become beloved classics at NorthPark worked to bond the people of Dallas to this location in a way that the modern system of films and cinemas has not seemed to appropriate. The primary reason for this could be attributed to the booking structure discussed earlier in this chapter. The exclusivity inherent under such a system meant that a visit to this theater would be the first chance the people had to see these films and as such, NorthPark provided a unique, event-type atmosphere. In contrast, today’s system of saturation booking means that a popular film like Avatar plays at every theater that will take it, and it does not create the bond between product and venue that the Cinemas at NorthPark enjoyed.

Although the concept of exclusivity works to explain why people originally came to the theater, it does not address how a personal and cultural bond was created between the people of Dallas and the theater. The reasons for this are as difficult to ascertain as they are as numerous as the number of tickets sold throughout the years. Each screening created unique memories for those present regardless of whether they were there to work or to be entertained. And while some might not have lasted beyond the car ride home, others have changed lives forever.

For example, there is the story of Robin Lang, who got her first job at the General Cinema NorthPark in the spring 1974. At the time, she was paid a paltry $1 per hour to serve
popcorn, but she has always looked back on the time fondly. When asked about her favorite experience at the theater she thought back to when the theater had the comedy classic _Blazing Saddles_. Of that experience she said, "I remember every night you’d open the doors, and the crowd would come in and start mooing, it was always fun."  

It is interesting to note that Ms. Lang chose a film from this era as the one that inspired her nostalgia since she not only stayed at the theater for many years after, but she also got promoted into management. She would later become the last manager the theater ever had. 

Of course employees were not the only people to make a personal connection with NorthPark during this period. On May 24, 1974, a long journey ended and an even longer one began when Joe Camp’s _Benji_ opened in NorthPark’s giant Cinema I auditorium. Today, _Benji_ is associated with a dynastic legacy that has at least eight spin-off films, several television specials, books, a toy line, and even an Oscar nomination to its credit. But in 1974, prior to its run at NorthPark, it was no more than a “dog movie” at a time when “dog movies” didn’t do well. 

In his 1993 autobiography, _Underdog: How One Man Turned Hollywood Rejection Into the Worldwide Phenomenon of Benji_, director Joe Camp dedicates almost an entire chapter to the role that Dallas’ first twin played in turning Benji into a household name. As his book title suggests, Camp was turned away from almost every distributor and theater in the country going into the summer of 1974. The only thing keeping _Benji_ from universal rejection had come from Dallas’ Village Theater, a struggling cinema about five miles southwest of NorthPark. This theater, which was owned by General Cinema’s competitor, 

---

120 Philip Wuntch, "That’s a Wrap: NorthPark Cinemas’ last day stirs nostalgia," _Dallas Morning News_, October 23, 1998, Section News, p.37A.  
121 Ron Beardmore, interview by author, Dallas, Texas, October 20, 2004.  
123 Camp, 205.  
124 Camp, 203.
Interstate, had offered the producers an eight week run at their theater with a guarantee of $40,000 to bring the family film to the Village.\(^{125}\)

![1974 Advertisement for Benji](image)

**Figure 17 - 1974 Advertisement for Benji**

Although the amount offered by Interstate would have paid for about one-sixth of the film’s original budget, Camp understood an important psychological component of the movie exhibition industry and how it manifested itself in the Dallas market. He recognized that “the public knew where the good pictures played, and the rotten pictures played. Put a terrific

\(^{125}\) Camp, 213.
picture into a lousy theater that usually plays lousy pictures, and no one’s going to go . . . on
the other hand, put the worst picture in the world in a theater like NorthPark and it will do at
least some business because people assume that it must be good or it wouldn’t be playing
there.”\textsuperscript{126}

Following this line of reasoning, Camp rejected Interstate’s offer and held out for a
booking at NorthPark, which finally came on the last week of May. Although Camp got the
booking that he wanted, the terms offered by General Cinema were far less favorable than
those previously offered by rival Interstate. First, they were only given a three week run—far
too short of a time for a film like this to really prove that it had “legs.” Second, they were not
given a guarantee from the theater. If the film were to fail, they would lose the added
financial security offered by the Village. And third, the opening week of the run was going to
happen while school was still in session, isolating the movie from its target audience. It was
a risky gamble, but Camp decided to take it and have the world premiere at NorthPark.\textsuperscript{127}

Needless to say, \textit{Benji} was a great success. Despite their previous reservations
about the film, General Cinema extended the run at NorthPark for another week, bringing the
grand total to four. After that, director Joe Camp was off to other markets around the country
attempting to duplicate his success in Dallas. Armed with financial records from one of the
most successful and well respected theaters in the country, he sought out what he termed
“NorthPark quality” theaters (a direct quote) in each city to play his film.\textsuperscript{128}

Camp regards the decision to open the film at NorthPark as “probably the most
important decision we made throughout the entire process.”\textsuperscript{129} This lent credibility to the
film and was ultimately responsible for its success, as Mr. Camp freely admits. As a tradition,
Mr. Camp premiered all of his subsequent films at the Cinemas at NorthPark.

\\textsuperscript{126} Camp, 212.
\textsuperscript{127} Camp, 213.
\textsuperscript{128} Camp, 216.
\textsuperscript{129} Camp, 214.
The End of NorthPark’s First Decade

By mid-decade, the industry as a whole had become depressingly stagnant. 1971 was the worst year in history for movie attendance and there had only been a moderate bounce back by 1975. In the same way that the multiscreened theaters of the 1960s were built as a way to save the film industry from the economic effects of the Paramount Decrees, both tiers (distribution and exhibition) were now in search of a new system to save them after the collapse of the roadshow. The solution for both parties would soon come, not from a dog named Benji, but from a shark named Bruce.

Movies Exhibited at NorthPark 1965–1974

1965
1. The Sandpiper
2. The Greatest Story Ever Told
3. The Yellow Rolls-Royce
4. What’s New Pussycat
5. The Cincinnati Kid
6. The King And I
7. Cat Ballou and Dr. Strangelove (Double Feature)
8. Peyton Place and Return to Peyton Place
9. Do Not Disturb
10. My Fair Lady

1966
1. Where the Spies Are
2. The Rare Breed
3. The Loved One
4. Seven Women
5. Madame X
6. Doctor Zhivago (Roadshow)
7. Harper
8. Money Trap
9. Alphabet Murders
10. Big Hand
11. Nevada Smith
12. Glass Bottom Boat
13. Beau Geste
14. One Spy Too Many
15. The Idol
16. The Fighting Prince of Donegal
17. La Dolce Vita
18. Gambit
19. Alfie

1967
1. Penelope
2. The Venetian Affair
3. The Night of the Generals
4. 25th Hour
5. Hotel
6. Taming of the Shrew (Roadshow)
7. Hombre
8. Caprice
9. Two for the Road
10. Divorce American Style
11. A Guide for Married Men
12. El Dorado
13. Luv
14. The Flim-Flam Man
15. The Tiger and the Pussycat
16. The Long Duel
17. Becket
18. Games
19. Gone with the Wind (Roadshow)
20. Jack of Diamonds
21. Rosie
22. Robbery
23. The Graduate

1968
1. Boom!
2. Where Were You When the Lights Went Out?
3. Prudence and the Pill
4. The Hell with Heroes
5. Duffy
6. The Boston Strangler
7. Finian's Rainbow (Roadshow)
8. Candy
9. The Lady in Cement

1969
1. Oliver (Roadshow)
2. Three in the Attic
3. Hell in the Pacific
4. Midas Run
5. Goodbye, Columbia
6. April Fools
7. That Cold Day in the Park
8. Me, Natalie
9. Thank You All Very Much
10. Hail, Hero
11. Take the Money and Run
12. The Comic
13. The Royal Hunt of the Sun
14. Alfred the Great
15. Marooned (Roadshow)
16. Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice

1970
1. Z
2. Airport
3. A Walk in the Spring Rain
4. The Boys in the Band
5. The Out of Towners
6. On a Clear Day You Can See Forever
7. Lovers and Other Strangers
8. Baby Maker
9. The Twelve Chairs
10. Owl and the Pussycat
11. The Great White Hope

53
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Movies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1971 | 1. Wuthering Heights  
      2. Promise at Dawn  
      3. The Andromeda Strain  
      4. Doctors' Wives  
      5. They Might Be Giants  
      6. When Eight Bells Toll  
      7. Plaza Suite  
      8. Carnal Knowledge  
      9. Blue Water, White Death  
      10. The Summertime  
      11. Oliver (RR)  
      12. See No Evil  
      13. Dr. Zhivago (RR)  
      14. Kotch  
      15. Gone with the Wind (RR)  
      16. Bedknobs and Broomsticks  
      17. Star Spangled Girl |
| 1972 | 1. Made for Each Other  
      2. Nicholas and Alexandra (Roadshow)  
      3. Pocket Money  
      4. What's Up Doc?  
      5. Stand Up and Be Counted  
      6. Play It Again, Sam  
      7. Butterflies Are Free  
      8. The Man  
      9. Slaughterhouse Five  
      10. Where Does It Hurt  
      11. Funny Girl (RR)  
      12. Lady Sings the Blues  
      13. The Valachi Papers  
      14. Young Winston  
      15. Up the Sandbox |
| 1973 | 1. Man in the Moon  
      2. Save the Tiger  
      3. Sleuth  
      4. Lost Horizon  
      5. Hitler: The Last Ten Days  
      6. The Paper Moon  
      7. Cries and Whispers  
      8. Blume in Love  
      9. Lucky Man  
     10. Touch of Class  
     11. The Way We Were  
     12. The Seagull  
     13. The Day of the Dolphin  
     14. Don’t Look Now |
| 1974 | 1. Cinderella Liberty  
      2. Serpico  
      3. Blazing Saddles  
      4. The Great Gatsby  
      5. Benji  
      6. Daisy Miller  
      7. Our Time  
      8. My Name Is Nobody  
      9. Death Wish  
     10. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz  
     11. Harry and Tonto  
     12. The Gambler  
     13. 11 Harrow House  
     14. Earthquake  
     15. The Dove  
     16. The Godfather: Part II |
Table 3 - Movie Theaters in Operation 1965–1974

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theater Name</th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>1975</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Majestic 1921 - 1973</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village 1935 - 1975/Present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casa Linda 1945 - 1973/1999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granada 1946-1977</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ervy Theater 1946 - 1972</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delman Theatre 1947 - 1978</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle Theater 1947-1969</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inwood 1947 - 1980/Present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crest Theater 1948-1973</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NorthPark 1&amp;2 1965-1988</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lochwood 1966-1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medallion 1969-1986/2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOEWS 1969 - 1974/1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwood IV 1970-1984</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMC Triangle 1971-1974</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Cities Twin 1972 - 1979/1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NorthPark 3 &amp; 4 1974 - 1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4
Competition and Saturation Bookings, 1975–1984

If any single film marked the arrival of the New Hollywood, it was *Jaws*, the Spielberg-directed thriller that recalibrated the profit potential of the Hollywood hit, and redefined its status as a marketable commodity and cultural phenomenon as well. The film brought an emphatic end to Hollywood’s five-year recession, while ushering in an era of high-cost, high-tech, high-speed thrillers.

—Thomas Schatz

On June 20, 1975, Universal Pictures forever changed the movie exhibition industry when the company released Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* to theaters. Although the classic film about a killer shark was never actually exhibited at the Cinemas at NorthPark, the introduction of “saturation booking” that accompanied this release shifted the way in which Dallas’ first twin would operate through to its closing over twenty years later. This shift in booking practices, along with the further effects of northern migration of people into Dallas’ suburbs as they pertain to the Cinemas at NorthPark and the surrounding theaters, will be the focus of this chapter.

**Northern Expansion**

In the years preceding the release of *Jaws* in 1975, Dallas had experienced a boom in small, multiscreen cinema building. Only ten years before, NorthPark had been the singular multiscreened venue in town, but by the mid-1970s, theaters with more than one auditorium had already become the norm. Advertisements from that era show that in 1975 there were a total of ten twins (including the NorthPark I & II), one triplex, four quads, as well as two locations with six screens within the city of Dallas and the immediately surrounding suburbs.

---

Of course, these multiplexes were not the only places to watch movies during this period. In addition to the previously mentioned locations (which accounted for fifty-one individual auditoriums), there were numerous drive-ins as well as a handful of single screens sprinkled throughout the area. Most of these single auditorium venues were of the type that Gomery describes as indicative of movie theaters in the 1970s in Shared Pleasures, exhibiting alternative and “B” movie product to a house full of mostly empty seats. There were, however, two single screen theaters that existed at this time which deserve special analysis at this point as they represent the exception to Gomery’s position: the Inwood and the Medallion. Both of these cinemas were similar to the Cinemas at NorthPark in their location (serving the North Dallas area) and approach to the business, and through comparison and contrast offer a unique insight into the structure of exhibition during this time period.

First, the Inwood Theatre, opened in 1947 by the ABC Interstate theater chain, was a neighborhood theater built to service the Highland Park suburb of North Dallas. Located about three miles west of the intersection of Central Expressway and Northwest Highway, the Inwood continued to offer stiff competition to the General Cinema twin throughout the 1970s even as it approached its third decade of operation. Once a master of roadshow bookings (including a record-holding ninety-two week run of The Sound of Music throughout most of 1965 and 1966), the Inwood had transitioned into a popular first-run house by this time: offering premiere features in its large, 1,100 seat, traditional auditorium with balcony. By 1980, the Inwood could no longer support the single screen model, and by 1983, it had converted to a three-screen location.

135 Ibid.
The second theater of note, the Medallion, was also owned by ABC Interstate Theatres and was located only one mile east of NorthPark.\footnote{William A. Payne, “Interstate Loop to Open Medallion Thursday,” \textit{Dallas Morning News}, October 26, 1969, sec. C, p.1.} When it opened in 1969, many considered it to be the primary competitor to the Cinemas at NorthPark. In addition to the types of films that the Medallion played, it shared General Cinema’s adherence to the minimalist vision of theater design. It was a simple, aesthetically scaled-down, “box style” theater so that the film on screen remained as the primary attraction to patrons.\footnote{Cinematreasures.org, “Medallion 5 Theatre in Dallas, TX – Cinema Treasures,” accessed February 19, 2015, http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/23608/photos/21183.}
In their attempts to compete with the NorthPark I & II, each theater had their own advantages. The Inwood was classic and comfortable to those in the immediate surrounding neighborhoods. It offered the nostalgia of a downtown theater in a more intimate and geographically desirable location. The Medallion, however, was more of a “destination” theater like the NorthPark Cinemas, bringing in people from all over the country after gaining a reputation for a superior projection and sound experience. It was for this reason that it attracted the attention of Steven Spielberg who chose to preview the aforementioned Jaws at the single screen prior to its opening in Dallas.\footnote{John Anders, “Sneaky Sneak,” Dallas Morning News, October 22, 1977, sec. F, p. 1.} The screening went so well that he
deemed the theater a “good luck charm” and continued to preview subsequent films at the location until its conversion to a discount cinema in the 1980s.\(^{140}\)

Together, these three theaters were the foundation for a new type of “theater row” that was beginning to be developed around the corner of Northwest Highway and I-75. This northward migration of theater concentrations (Dallas’ original theater row was located about seven miles south in the downtown area) mimicked the movement of people as they began to occupy the northern areas of Dallas in greater numbers.

Much of this theater and population migration to the area can be attributed to the housing construction in the immediate vicinity surrounding NorthPark Center. Most influential towards this end was The Village Community, which opened its initial phase in 1971.\(^{141}\) This “Community” was a constellation of apartment complexes positioned directly between the Cinemas at NorthPark and the Medallion Theatre. This one community alone would eventually be responsible for bringing 10,000 young, middle-class residents (prime moviegoers) to a 337 acre area which directly fed the customer base of these two theaters.\(^{142}\)

\textit{Saturation Booking}

Without the financial support from the stronger distribution and production companies, theaters were now forced to rely solely on profits derived from concessions and a small percentage from the box office while absorbing 100\% of the overhead. Furthermore, this system put the theaters in an adversarial position against the film distributors, who were their sole product suppliers. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, while the exhibitors were doing everything they could to lower their overhead by way of building design and reducing

\(^{142}\) Ibid.
staff, the distributors were pitting the theater chains against each other by forcing them to compete for the on-screen product.\footnote{Pruitt, 136.}

Ostensibly outlawed by a provision in the 1948 Paramount Decrees, this new form of blind booking that was introduced in the early 1970s was presented to theaters as the only way to get bigger budget epics to movie screens. Under this system, the distributors would require a deposit from the theaters on a particular film in order to cover the rising costs of the production. This deposit would then be recouped from the opening grosses of the film when it finally came out. Obviously, this was done without the exhibitor ever seeing the movie as the deposit was typically required prior to the commencement of filming.

The theaters knew that they would need a steady stream of product in order to survive and went along with blind booking while attempting to fight it in the courts and by trying to pass legislation that made the system illegal.\footnote{Cook, 17-18.} In practice, exhibitors were now not only responsible for assuming all of the risk and overhead at the local level, but they were also financing the movies for the production/distribution side of the industry. Along with taking on the financial risk of movie making, it also meant that the exhibitor’s money was tied up, limiting their ability to make capital improvements to existing theaters and preventing them from being able to build new ones. The result of this was the austere multiplex of the ’60s and ’70s.

The idea of saturation booking (showing the same film at multiple venues in each town) was nothing new when Universal released \textit{Jaws} in the summer of 1975. Alternative content and drive-in films almost always had their releases on as many screens as possible when they opened in Dallas in order to maximize profits off of a single run. The ad from 1971 for the film \textit{Swamp Girl} demonstrates how the distributor would skip the typical first-run theaters and immediately begin with the lower quality and less exclusive locations.
reason for this approach was that since these movies were of a lesser quality, they would be able to beat bad reviews and poor word of mouth by getting as many tickets sold as quickly as possible.

With the release of *Jaws*, Universal Pictures opted to apply this model on a national scale to a popular film, and in doing so, forever changed how people in this country watched their films by providing audiences with greater accessibility to them. This would be the first time that the top-tier, first-run theaters would be incorporated into this practice of “saturation booking.”

![Newspaper Advertisement for Swamp Girl](image)

Figure 20 - Newspaper Advertisement for Swamp Girl
As discussed in the previous chapter, prior to the release of *Jaws* in 1975, most big studio films would open at just one location in each major city during their first-run release. Depending on how wide the distributor wanted to define the term, “major city” would determine how many locations in the country played the film. During the roadshow days, this could be as few as five theaters spread throughout the country, but at the height of multiple runs in the early 1970s, this number went as high as fifty. In contrast, *Jaws* opened concurrently on about 467 screens nationwide.\(^{145}\)

This was not an incremental change, it was a dramatic jump that had a profound effect on the industry as a whole, creating a never before seen phenomenon—the “blockbuster.” The movie-going public had never experienced anything like this. Up to this point, distributors had spent the last forty years creating a paradigm where excitement for the better films would be built through exclusivity. For the public, this meant further drives, longer lines, and a higher admission price for those who chose to attend them during their earlier stages of a release. The industry had taught the consumer that if the film was good, access to it would be limited. The new model flipped this to a point where distributors would go as far as to publish screen counts as a way to demonstrate and exaggerate expected demand.

Although directors like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas have been credited as the “creators” of the blockbuster because of films in this time period like *Jaws, Star Wars,* and the *Indiana Jones* series, it should be noted that this is more of a marketing term than a precise, quantitative definition for a specific type of movie.\(^{146}\) The term was coined as a way to categorize certain “supergrossers” that had attained a certain level of status in American culture as well as their ability to garner ancillary, non-theatrical profits from sources like toy,

---


game, and soundtrack sales. The practice of saturation booking is just one aspect of this greater definition.

*The Movies: From Star Wars to Return of the Jedi*

The release of *Star Wars* in 1977 marked the high point for the Cinemas at NorthPark, both in business terms and in how it helped cement this particular theater in the hearts of Dallas residents. As is the case with most things having to do with the hugely popular space adventure, there are many points of contention regarding *Star Wars*’ original release in Dallas. Popular memory has become clouded over as to what sound and picture format debuted at NorthPark (Mono vs. Dolby Stereo, 35mm vs. 70mm) with many people claiming they watched it in 70mm Dolby Stereo and that the Cinemas at NorthPark was one of the sites to open the film on May 25, 1977 (a Wednesday). This was not the case. The daily box office figures from that time show that the movie opened in Cinema II on Friday, May 27 in 35mm mono.

![Figure 21 - NorthPark Box Office Report: Weeks Ending May 26 and June 2, 1977](image)

---

147 Balio, 442.
These numbers not only provide proof that there were no shows of *Star Wars* until May 27, but it demonstrates the popularity of the film from its first day of release. On its opening day, the one auditorium showing *Star Wars* grossed almost the same amount as both auditoriums combined for the entire previous week (dispelling the common misconception that the film took time to build its audience).

Regardless of whether it was for reasons of exclusivity or because they thought that they had a “dud” on their hands (another point in contention), Twentieth Century Fox decided to scale back from what had become a standard, six hundred screen release after the start of saturation booking in 1975, and elected instead for a limited run of forty-three locations across the country, with only two of these being in the state of Texas.\[^{149}\] This release strategy granted NorthPark an exclusivity on the film that harkened back to the days of the old roadshow system.

Table 4 - National Average Ticket Price 1974–2004

Ultimately, the original engagement of Star Wars extended to 54 weeks, taking in an estimated $1.5 million in that time. In order to understand the enormity of that figure, the average ticket price at the time was $2.23, versus today’s price of $8.13. This would have amounted to a $4.42 million take at a single box office window by today’s standards. Furthermore, the studio’s figures for the initial, national release of the film put their total at $215 million. When broken down mathematically, that means that one out of every two hundred people in the country that saw the film in its original release saw it at NorthPark.

Due to the unusually long engagement of Star Wars throughout 1977 and much of 1978, combined with extended runs of films like Superman, The Empire Strikes Back, and The Deer Hunter around the turn of the decade, NorthPark hit their lowest mark in number of films played per year, not breaking thirteen releases again until 1981. This should not be viewed as a negative situation, but one that demonstrates how important the movie product itself was at this time. In the age of the palace theaters, a theater could go through several movies in one week. The modern first-run cinemas will typically cycle through three to four new releases per week, or almost two hundred movies per year, with most films only running two to three weeks on average. The fact that a major cinema was only changing out movies once a month (with one in and one out), meant that the films were held for eight weeks on average, which had not been seen before or since. Even long roadshow runs in the 1960s were rare, and the other run-zone-clearance films of the early 1970s were being held for closer to three to four weeks.

The year 1982 was another slow year in terms of product changeover, but extremely important in terms of cementing NorthPark’s historic significance. In that year, the twin

---

cinemas went against their well-established formula of playing popular, adult-themed films in order to play what was considered to be a children’s movie. This strategy had been attempted with little success in the early days of the theater with a string of unremarkable Disney films during the late 1960s. This time, however, the film would be one of the Steven Spielberg blockbusters—*E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*—and it became one of top ten grossing films of all time.\(^\text{154}\)

Table 5 - E.T. Box Office Totals

![Graph of E.T. box office totals](image)

Of course the run of *E.T.* at NorthPark was wildly successful. In fact, its popularity grew over its first couple weeks of release with weeks three and four being the highest grossing periods. This is something that is almost completely unheard of in a wide-release situation with attendance being so heavily front-loaded. But to those that frequented the Cinemas, the movie about the loveable alien conjures a story about an equally loveable Broadway star that had nothing to do with the film at all. This is because when she was in town for a touring theater performance, Carol Channing stopped in to catch an afternoon screening of the film and distributed tissues to crying patrons at emotional points in the

Celebrities stopping in to see a movie was nothing new to the Cinemas at NorthPark. In fact, there was a private balcony that could only be accessed from the projection booth that many directors and actors had used over the years in order to judge audience reactions or simply enjoy a film in private without anyone knowing that they were there.\textsuperscript{156}

Another favorite story that consistently resurfaced at the time of NorthPark’s closing also came from 1982. On March 6 of that year, the theater held a special advance screening of the new futuristic adventure film, \textit{Blade Runner}.\textsuperscript{157} This was one of only two advance screenings that the film ever had and the only one with actor Harrison Ford, director Ridley Scott, and producer Alan Ladd Jr. in attendance.\textsuperscript{158} The screening was not met with universal acclaim. One member of the press described the atmosphere: “Almost dead

\begin{flushright}
Figure 22 - Newspaper Advertisement for Advance Screening of \textit{Blade Runner}
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{155} Philip Wuntch, “RETURN OF E.T. – After 3 years, a boy and his alien still work magic,” \textit{Dallas Morning News}, July 19, 1985, sec. Arts and Entertainment, p. 1C.
\textsuperscript{156} Ron Beardmore, interview by author, Dallas, Texas, October 20, 2004.
\textsuperscript{158} Philip Wuntch, “He’s Just a Regular Indiana Jones: ‘Normal’ Actor Harrison Ford Isn’t Impressed with Film Stardom,” \textit{Dallas Morning News}, February 3, 1985, sec. Arts and Entertainment, p. 1C.
silence greeted the end of the film. As the lights came up, the audience filed out as quietly as if they were leaving a funeral service. Many were confused and depressed by the film’s atmosphere and ambiguous climax.”

In addition to negative patron reactions at the end of the film, there were also a large number of walkouts. The film’s distributor, Warner Brothers, decided they could not release the movie as it was presented that night and the film underwent extensive editing, a changed ending, and the addition of a Harrison Ford voiceover.

The patron reaction to this screening of Blade Runner changed the way that people saw that particular movie when it was released to theaters. But the following year, NorthPark would go beyond content changes in individual films and become influential in the way that movies would be viewed and heard for the next twenty years. That was the year they installed their much celebrated THX system in Cinema I.

The patron reaction to this screening of Blade Runner changed the way that people saw that particular movie when it was released to theaters. But the following year, NorthPark would go beyond content changes in individual films and become influential in the way that movies would be viewed and heard for the next twenty years. That was the year they installed their much celebrated THX system in Cinema I. The THX system installed at NorthPark was only the third one to ever be completed in the country and because of that, it helped to define standards for the future of the system. The idea for THX, which stands for the Tomlinson Holman eXperiment, began over a decade prior to the 1983 release of George Lucas’ Return of the Jedi when the sci-fi director released THX-1138 to theaters. At the time, Lucas was concerned about the varying picture and sound qualities that he experienced when visiting theaters around the country that were showing his film due to the lack of standardized practices. He went to then corporate technical director of Lucasfilm, Thomas Holliman, for a solution to the problem.

THX is usually misunderstood to be a sound system or sound format. Instead, it is a collection of standards on theater construction and equipment installation that include the physical structure of the auditorium, the projection system, the seating arrangement, and the

---

160 Sammon, 291.
sound system. When Holman personally arrived at NorthPark to design their new THX system, he found a theater that already exceeded many of the standards of his ideal new theater. In fact, according to head projectionist Ron Beardmore, Holman was so impressed with what he found at NorthPark that many of NorthPark’s design elements became required in future THX installations around the world. It is important to note that at this point the theater was almost twenty years old and had not undergone any major renovations to the auditoriums. Even so, it was still considered to be of such high quality that THX tried to duplicate it around the world. The engagement of Return of the Jedi was only one of six for the Dallas area and was so popular that lines wrapped around the building with customers eager to “see it at NorthPark.”

The Effects of Saturation Booking on North Dallas Theaters

After the release of the original Star Wars in 1977, the runs for the big films became less exclusive as multiscreened theater expansion exploded again and distributors embraced the blockbuster/saturation model as the status quo. This shift would have some

---

163 Ibid.
164 Ron Beardmore, interview by author, Dallas, Texas, October 20, 2004.
effect on NorthPark as the middle of the 1980s approached, resulting in somewhat smaller audiences, shorter runs, and less exclusivity on the films they booked. In reality, these changes were small and NorthPark was able to remain relatively unaffected by these throughout the decade by maintaining a slate of high-caliber bookings and by not making any reactionary changes in their practices or the facility.

NorthPark’s competitors, however, did not handle the changes in the industry so well. Both the venerable Inwood and Medallion theaters spent large amounts of money on construction projects in order to remain economically viable after being unable to keep up with the new multiple run, blockbuster booking system which required multiple auditoriums in order to keep up with the amount of available product.

After a mysterious fire damaged the interior of the building in 1980, the Inwood was forced to close its balcony and eventually convert it into two small cinema screens, each capable of holding less than one hundred people. Its downstairs auditorium remained mostly intact throughout this process; the original screen was kept by moving the projection booth down to the seating level.

The changes at the once mighty and acclaimed Medallion Theatre were even more drastic than those that occurred at the Inwood; the main auditorium was converted into three smaller screens, with two others eventually added to the periphery of the building. The first phase of this new construction came as a result of the sale of the theater to the United Artists theater chain.

Once again, this demonstrates the way in which the Cinemas at NorthPark were able to remain on top, while the others around them failed, despite drastic shifts in the way the industry operated. It is important to note that General Cinema did build another location

---

across I-75 from NorthPark Center in 1975 and operated it under the names “NorthPark III & IV” and “NorthPark East.” This location was booked independently from the original and did not share the same personnel until the mid-1980s, and as such, it did not share any more history with the Cinemas at NorthPark than other locations operated by the General Cinema Corporation at the time (such as the Irving or the Valley View).

Conclusion

At the end of NorthPark’s second decade of operation, the theater had been both popular on a local level and influential on a national one. The great twin had survived while the competition around it had faltered because of their ability to exploit shifts in booking strategies and their focus on the product. This was the first time in its history that the success of NorthPark could not be explained by exclusive runs, but by the fact that they were preferred by customers when given a choice.

But the industry was about to change directions once again. Vertical integration was about to return for the first time in fifty years and with it, an incredibly aggressive construction boom. This new group of theaters would move NorthPark’s direct competition within walking distance and finally consolidate the new central zone/theater row along Central Expressway.

Movies Exhibited at NorthPark 1975–1984

1975
1. Funny Lady
2. Shampoo
3. Nashville
4. The Fortune
5. Three Days of the Condor
6. Fantasia (RR)
7. Camelot (RR)
8. Hearts of the West
9. The Hindenburg
10. Lucky Lady

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
<th>6.</th>
<th>7.</th>
<th>8.</th>
<th>9.</th>
<th>10.</th>
<th>11.</th>
<th>12.</th>
<th>13.</th>
<th>14.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Gable and Lombard</td>
<td>Family Plot</td>
<td>Hawmps!</td>
<td>Blue Birds</td>
<td>Midway</td>
<td>Harry and Walter Go to New York</td>
<td>The Tenant</td>
<td>The Devil Is a Woman</td>
<td>The Lion in Winter</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Led Zeppelin</td>
<td>The Front</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>A Star Is Born</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1981
1. Tribute
2. All Night Long
3. Eyewitness
4. Coal Miner's Daughter
5. Breaker Morant
6. Lion of the Desert
7. Atlantic City
8. Outland
9. History of the World Part One
10. Arthur
12. Eye of the Needle
13. Body Heat
14. Prince of the City
15. Rich and Famous
16. Time Bandits
17. Arthur (RR)
18. Buddy, Buddy
19. Absence of Malice

1982
1. On Golden Pond
2. Chariots of Fire
3. Annie
4. E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial
5. Pink Floyd: The Wall
6. Jinxed
7. Days of Heaven
8. Fame
9. Reds
10. Fiddler on the Roof
11. Sophie’s Choice
12. Still of the Night

1983
1. The Chosen
2. The Personals
3. Gandhi
4. Max Dugan Returns
5. Return of the Jedi
6. War Games
7. Brainstorm
8. The Right Stuff
9. Star 60
10. Yentl
11. Silkwood
12. 2010

1984
1. Blame It on Rio
2. Tender Mercies
3. Police Academy
4. Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes
5. Making the Grade
6. Terms of Endearment
7. Streets of Fire
8. Gremlins
9. Rhinestone
10. The NeverEnding Story
11. Red Dawn
12. Irreconcilable Differences
13. Amadeus
14. American Dreamer
15. 2010
16. Dune
Table 6 - Movie Theaters in Operation 1975–1984

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theater</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1985</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village 1935 - Present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casa Linda 1945 - 1973</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granada 1946-1977</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delman Theatre 1947-1978</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inwood 1947 - 1980/Pres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTHPARK 1&amp;2 1965-1988</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lochwood 1966-1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medallion 1969-1986/2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOEWS 1969 - 1974/1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwood IV 1970-1984</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Cities Twin 1972-1979/1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NorthPark 3 &amp; 4 1974-1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC Valley View 1975-1991</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loews Park Central 1977-1996</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC Prestonwood 1979-1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skillman 1979-1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC Galleria 1982-2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caruth Plaza 1 &amp; 2 1984-1992</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA 8 South 1984-1999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5

There have been some fundamental industry changes which we think will enhance the long-term attractiveness of the first-run movie exhibition business. These changes involve the vertical integration of film production companies with theatrical exhibition and the increased importance of the home video market.”

—General Cinema Annual Report 1986

The exhibition industry experienced another multiscreen construction boom during the mid-1980s that was as prolific as it was counterintuitive. This time, movie theaters doubled in size from the usual twin, triple, or quad to an average of between six and eight screens at each location. Exhibition chains expanded deeper into suburban markets in a search for greater profits at a time when box office sales had become stagnant. This chapter will focus on the underlying national causes for this massive building boom as well as the effects that these causes had on the theaters that immediately surrounded the Cinemas at NorthPark 1 and 2 (by this time, General Cinema had discontinued using the roman numerals in the name as they found that it was confusing and outdated).

**Industry Expansion – National**

The second chapter of this thesis examined the introduction of third generation theaters, like the Cinemas at NorthPark, as a direct reaction to the Paramount Decrees. The end of the vertical integration between the distribution and exhibition tiers had created a financial crisis for both sides of the industry and forced a new economical approach. New theater chains, specifically American Multi-Cinema and General Cinema Corporation, who were not former “Big Five” companies, were able to create an original business model based on multiple screens with smaller auditoriums as a way to reduce costs in this new climate.

---

The situation began to change in the 1980s as the fourth generation of theaters began to be built. These new cinemas not only had even more auditoriums, but the rooms were larger with more seats and there was a renewed focus on aesthetics and customer comfort. It is interesting to note that these new cinemas were not built in response to an increase in demand for movies on the part of the general public. In fact, as is shown in the chart below, the number of domestic admissions remained relatively stagnant throughout the decade, reaching its lowest point in 1985. Curiously, theater construction, which had matched the trend of ticket sales until about 1982, exploded at a time when admissions had leveled off. The number of theater screens in the United States continued to climb throughout the 1980s, with an increase of 57% by the end of the decade.\textsuperscript{172}

Table 7 - Total of US Box Office Admissions and Indoor Screens 1980–1990

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & # Of Admissions & # Of Indoor Screens \\
\hline
1980 & 15000 & 10000 \\
1982 & 16000 & 11000 \\
1984 & 18000 & 12000 \\
1986 & 20000 & 14000 \\
1988 & 22000 & 16000 \\
1990 & 25000 & 18000 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

There are three complementary theories that address the disproportionate expansion of cinema building during this period of stagnation and decline. First, exhibition analyst Thomas Guback argues that a changing approach to business at the local retail level that was the main factor in the building boom. He points out that shopping mall developers were seeking to add movie theaters to their complexes as a way to draw traffic to their other stores and that there is a direct correlation between the rise in theater construction during this period and the number of shopping centers and malls being built. Furthermore, the theater chains were enticed by favorable leasing arrangements with these retail developers, which meant that the up-front capital required from an exhibitor was minimal.

The second theory for this expansion was basic cost cutting (both at the corporate and individual theater level) and the attempt to maximize the usefulness of resources that has always been present in the industry. Theater owners were expanding on the corporate

Table 8 - Average Number of Screens Per New General Cinema Location

---

174 Acland, Screen Traffic, 87.
level by building more theater locations within a small geographical area so they could consolidate film bookers, advertising personnel, and district directors into defined regions.\(^{175}\) Furthermore, the reason theater owners sought to increase the number of screens on the individual theater level was the same reasoning that brought the twin to Dallas in the first place. Owners hoped to make use of a single parking lot, concession stand, and set of bathrooms while at the same time offering their patrons either a wider range of film selections or the convenience of a greater number of showtimes.\(^{176}\) This time, however, it was up to eight cinema screens sharing one set of requisite facilities, not just two as was the case with a twin. For perspective, this gave patrons the ability to see eight different films in one building—nearing the number of options they would have had on “Theatre Row” forty years before. The difference was that this time all of the screens would be owned by one company and serviced by a single concession stand, management team, and projection staff, which eliminated redundancy and greatly reduced overall operating expenses.

The third factor for this expansion is attributable (somewhat ironically) to a former screen actor who was active during the peak of the palace era, Ronald Reagan.\(^{177}\) When Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency in early 1981, he brought with him a laissez-faire economic policy that was vital to reenergizing the struggling domestic movie exhibition industry. The hands-off policy of the Reagan Justice Department meant that a consolidation of exhibition and distribution resembling the one that existed prior to the 1948 Paramount Decrees was possible in theory, but it had to be tested first. Because the “Big Five” (Paramount, Fox, MGM, RKO, and Warner Brothers) were actual signatories of the anti-trust legislation in 1948, none of them could be the first to try out the new climate.

\(^{175}\) Pruitt, 140.
\(^{177}\) Pruitt, 184.
Instead, it would be the relatively smaller companies of MCA (which owned Universal Pictures) and Cineplex Odeon that would be the first to participate in the rush back to vertical integration when MCA bought almost half of the Cineplex Odeon theater chain for $159 million.\textsuperscript{178} After seeing that MCA was able to complete the acquisition without significant government intervention, the other major studios sought to add an exhibition arm under their corporate umbrella. Paramount bought Mann’s Theaters, Trans-Lux, and the Festival chain; Columbia/Tri-Star purchased Loews; and Warner Brothers acquired the Paramount chain of cinemas.\textsuperscript{179} It took almost eleven years for the practice of vertical integration to be broken up in the 1950s after the Paramount ruling was handed down and only five years for it to return after the rules were eased.\textsuperscript{180}

This expansion even pleased the distributors who had not acquired theaters, as they understood how this new building boom would attract a greater audience and would provide a greater number of screens to accommodate the ever-expanding slate of films.\textsuperscript{181} Exhibitors that were not involved with these new ownership arrangements also benefited, as they were now able to grow their brand in a way that they could not have in the previous thirty years. In fact, in their annual corporate report for 1986, General Cinema welcomed these vertically integrated players saying:

Film company ownership of theaters should not present a formidable threat to our circuit. If a film company favors a theater in which it has equity interest, that will drive its competitors to seek other theaters to play their films. There are typically only two to four multiplexes (12 to 14 screens) in a given film zone. If one of them is playing the films of a particular distributor, the other multiplexes will have less competition in securing films from the remaining distributors. Therefore, for every film that we have less chance to play, there will be another freed up for which we will have a greater chance. Therefore, on balance, we expect the vertical integration of film production to have very little impact on General Cinema’s ability to secure an adequate share of all the film product available.\textsuperscript{182}

\textsuperscript{178} Acland, \textit{Screen Traffic}, 97.
\textsuperscript{179} Acland, \textit{Screen Traffic}, 98.
\textsuperscript{180} Pruitt, 185.
The General Cinema Corporation was unique in its approach as it went against the vertical integration trend and opted instead for a program of investment and diversification. Despite dabbling in a couple of movie-making ventures in the mid-1970s through a company called "Associated General Films," General Cinema had always decided that it was best to stay out of the business of making movies and focus on acquiring businesses in other industries. These ventures included radio and TV stations, department chain Neiman Marcus, book publisher Harcourt Brace, furniture retailer Alpert's, as well as a hugely successful Pepsi bottling franchise. The bottling operation, known as General Cinema Beverages, was so lucrative that the 1986 annual report shows the beverage division's revenue about 2:1 over the theater division's revenue with earnings closer to 3:1.

**Theater Expansion – Dallas**

Despite the optimism that General Cinema showed in their annual report about potential product allocations after the return of vertical integration, these new theaters did end up competing for the same territory which resulted in oversaturated "war zones." The most notable of these were Woodland Hills, California, Las Vegas, Nevada, and, of course, NorthPark’s territory in North Dallas.

Though the competitive "central zone" around NorthPark was still regarded as one of the strongest grossing areas in the entire country, the early and mid-1980s were a relatively quiet period for this area. The Inwood, UA Cine, and the Medallion, which had been NorthPark’s primary competition throughout the 1970s, were no longer serious competitors for the mainstream, first-run crowds. The Inwood and UA Cine had both shifted

---

183 These films included *Capricorn One*, *March or Die*, *The Domino Principle*, *The Eagle Has Landed*, and *The Cassandra Crossing*.
184 Pruitt, 86, 170, 211, 88, and 67.
to art and foreign programming while the Medallion had been split into five screens and become a discount theater.

As such, General Cinema’s dominance in the area remained completely unchecked throughout much of this period. As of 1985, the only theaters showing first-run movies in the central zone were the NorthPark 1 & 2, the NorthPark 3 & 4, and a new theater General Cinema bought from Plitt located almost exactly between the two NorthPark Cinema buildings. This theater was located at the northeast corner of Park Lane and Central Expressway and was named the Caruth Plaza 1 & 2.  

The first challenger to General Cinema’s dominance in the area would not appear until 1988 in the form of the AMC NorthPark. The appropriation of the name “NorthPark” was an obvious attempt to capitalize on the popularity of the more established General Cinema location as well as the NorthPark Center in general. The eight screen AMC version,

---

which was located across the highway and an exit to the north, eventually accepted that this only led to confusion and officially changed the name of the theater to “AMC Glen Lakes” (which was the name of the shopping and business development of which it was a part) a mere two months after opening.\textsuperscript{190}  

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure25.png}
\caption{United Artists Plaza}
\end{figure}

In 1989, the United Artists Theater Chain (also known as UATC, and no relation to the United Artists distribution company) became a competitor in the central zone once again when they built a theater directly between the General Cinema NorthPark and the AMC Glen Lakes (the name change was official by this time).\textsuperscript{191} This new theater also opened with some confusion surrounding its name. Although there had been numerous UA theaters in the city prior to this new ten screen, it had been given the name “The United Artists Theater,”

\textsuperscript{191} Philip Wuntch, "Theaters Bring Back Comfort and Style," \textit{Dallas Morning News}, June 11, 1989, sec. C.
which did not differentiate it from other theaters with that name. This theater's name would eventually be changed to the “UA Plaza” in order to eliminate this confusion.\textsuperscript{192}

After being unimpressed with the theaters coming out of the 1960s and 1970s, \textit{Dallas Morning News} film critic Philip Wuntch heralded these new cinemas and their ilk as a renaissance in theater building. Since starting his career at the now defunct \textit{Dallas Times Herald} in 1968, Philip Wuntch often wrote commentaries on the exhibition industry by way of pieces on new theater openings or old theater closings. As such, Wuntch is one of the best resources on the local cinema-going experience during the last half of the twentieth century.

Reviews that he wrote around the time of the opening of The United Artists Theater and the AMC Glen Lakes highlight their “ornate chandeliers,” "luxurious drapes,” and “attractive neon.”\textsuperscript{193} In addition to the aesthetic changes, the theaters began to focus more on the manner in which movies were shown, with a specific importance being placed on picture and sound quality. Many of these theaters advertised better viewing angles, clearer sound, and less sound bleed-through between auditoriums.\textsuperscript{194} Wuntch would later admit that despite the emphasis that these new locations put on the sound experience, the most powerful sound system in the city was still found in Cinema I at the Cinemas at NorthPark.\textsuperscript{195}

The central zone was not the only area in Dallas to see new theaters at this time. The major exhibition chains were expanding their suburban footprint at a very quick pace. Between 1985 and 1994, there were sixteen new cinema locations opened up in the areas around Dallas and the immediate suburbs, a pace of a new theater almost every six months.\textsuperscript{196} These new locations accounted for 138 new screens over sixteen locations, many of which were built in new, highly competitive suburban zones. The most notable of


\textsuperscript{194} Wuntch, “An Elegant Addition to Theater Row.”


these were the Gus Thomasson area of Mesquite, South Arlington, Hurst, and Plano as populations settled in suburban areas away from Dallas proper.

Apart from the Loews location at Preston Park in Plano, all of the new screens were built by either AMC, GCC, or local companies O’Neil Theatres (the West End 10) or a Plano based startup, Cinemark Theaters. This meant that at the time, the Dallas market was not directly affected by the companies that had become vertically integrated, but were still trying to keep up with the national trend. Another similarity that these theaters shared was their brief existences, with most not keeping the doors open through the twenty year mark (for reasons that we will see in the following chapter). Of the sixteen theaters mentioned here, only two are still open today (the Cinemark Grand Prairie 16 and the Lewisville 8) with the average lifespan being right about fifteen years.

Stagnation and Decline

The chart on the second page of this chapter demonstrates the leveling-off trend in movie ticket sales throughout the 1980s. The early 1990s were even worse. 1991’s gross total was down 8% from 1990, and the following year it slipped down another two points. This 10% downturn resulted in one of the worst periods in movie exhibition since the previously discussed bottoming out that occurred in 1971.

This dip in national attendance did not have a huge impact on the Cinemas at NorthPark. The theater actually saw their numbers rise and fall over the period, which was largely based on the movies they were showing. Overall, NorthPark was able to weather the national epidemic of the time. More importantly, it demonstrates that after the novelty of the two newcomers to the area wore off (the AMC Glen Lakes and the UA Plaza), the customers were still choosing to patronize to the General Cinema.

---

198 Acland, Screen Traffic, 73.
199 Edgerton, 50.
The ticket sale decline was only one of the issues facing the exhibition industry in the early 1990s. The building boom that had nearly doubled the domestic screen count was not able to positively affect the number of people seeing movies. In fact, the enormous amount of energy and capital that went into the closure, construction, and refurbishment of the theater sites caused an increase in ticket prices and film rental rates.200

Casual observers often point to the rise of alternative media options in the late 1980s, such as pay TV and VHS rental outlets, as a way to explain the decline at the box office. This was not the case. Since the distributors now owned most of the film outlets in the country, they were not as concerned about making a profit at the box office, but were looking at the long-term return potential on a movie. Because of these new media options, distributors were able to pre-sell the TV and video rights to films before the movie’s release.

as a way to offset production costs. They had effectively gotten around blind booking laws by having newer, lower profile means of home exhibition shoulder the costs of the movie before it was even made. Just as when they were using blind and block booking before, they were able to funnel that money back into production in order to make the higher budget movies that more people wanted to see.

Furthermore, General Cinema did a survey of their customers in order to see how many of their frequent patrons owned VCRs. They found that 73% of their customers owned the home video format, almost twice the adoption rate in the United States at the time. This lead them to believe their customers were “more discriminating and more sophisticated” cinema patrons and that watching films at home helped immerse them in film culture.

Table 10 - VCR Ownership Among GCC Patrons

---

Although GCC was incorrect about the impact that vertical integration would have on print allocation and theater competition, future writers have agreed with their argument concerning the positive role of the VHS player in creating film culture immersion. Leading film business analyst Charles Acland has argued that it was around this time that the culture of “cinema-going” started to return.\textsuperscript{203} With this, the population becomes so involved in the culture of films and talking about them that it starts to get caught up in “insiderism.”

Insiderism occurs when the general public starts to have an interest in knowing the kind of information that was once reserved for the heads of studios. This information includes budgets, stars, directors, trivia, and behind the scenes gossip.\textsuperscript{204} The media also helps fuel this phenomenon as they make the weekend box office grosses one of the top news stories on Sunday\textsuperscript{205} so they can be discussed and debated in offices all over the country the following week.\textsuperscript{206}

For these reasons, the period of stagnation and decline might have been somewhat attributable to the alternative media options that were becoming available, but just like the introduction of television created a brief downturn in movie admissions in the 1950s, it was only a temporary lull and was necessary in setting up a culture of more constant media consumption.

\textit{The Movies}

The movie exhibition industry has always relied on the movies that it shows for profitability, and this period was no different. While the NorthPark 1 & 2 had not changed in any significant way from the time that it opened, the industry around the theater had seen drastic shifts. Now, instead of having a regional exclusive on a film, theaters all across DFW

\textsuperscript{203} Acland, \textit{Screen Traffic}, 76.
\textsuperscript{204} Acland, \textit{Screen Traffic}, 6, 76.
\textsuperscript{205} Grosses for Sundays are always estimated and final, revised totals are available on Monday.
\textsuperscript{206} Acland, \textit{Screen Traffic}, 4.
were playing the same films as Cinema 1 & 2. Even if people preferred to go to NorthPark, the appeal of proximity often determined that they would go to the theater close to their suburban homes.

Although the NorthPark 1 & 2 was sharing the big movies with its suburban counterparts, it was having to compete for films against newer, local competitors. Only a couple years before in 1985, General Cinema enjoyed dominance over the area with only six screens between three buildings (all owned by GCC). But as of 1990, there were now twenty screens spread out over four buildings located at or near NorthPark, and only two of those buildings were operated by General Cinema. Furthermore, Hollywood product had declined from 470 movies in 1985 to 410 in 1990. If this had been spread evenly across the number of screens, each theater would have opened about twenty films for every screen they had in the building. Under this formula, the Cinemas at NorthPark should have played forty films. Instead, they only exhibited nineteen movies in 1990. The movies that did show,

Table 11 - Weekly Attendance Comparison 1988–1990

---

however, tended to be the bigger films, with five of the top ten grossing films from that year playing at NorthPark.\textsuperscript{208}

The chart on the previous page shows the turbulent ups and downs for NorthPark in the years following the opening of the AMC Glen Lakes and the UA Plaza. Overall, it appears that 1990 was the most balanced out of the three years in terms of overall attendance, with the low points being about the same as the other years but with more spikes for bigger movies throughout. The absolute peak over this period came on Memorial Day weekend of 1989 when the theater opened Tim Burton’s \textit{Batman} on both screens. The total number of patrons for the Friday to Thursday period was 32,446.\textsuperscript{209}

\textit{Batman} provides a good example of Acland’s insiderism at the theater level since it was playing on both screens and audiences clearly favored seeing the film in Cinema 1. The gross box office take for the week in Cinema 2 was $45,465 compared to $108,425 for Cinema 1.\textsuperscript{210} Many patrons were aware of Cinema 2’s larger screen and more impressive sound system and decided to see those showtimes at a ratio of over 2:1. Other individual movies had newsworthy moments during this period. These stories didn’t reflect changes in the larger movie industry or greater cultural shifts, but were important to the history of the theater itself.

There were two specific filmmakers whose films and presence left their mark on the aging cinema. The first of these was the return of \textit{Benji} creator, Joe Camp, for the world premiere screening of \textit{Benji the Hunted} on June 4, 1987. The Cinemas at NorthPark had hosted numerous world premieres and advance screenings before, but this one came with unique fanfare. The premiere included massive tents in the parking lot, stretch limousines, and even an appearance by Jeffery Katzenberg, the chairman of Walt Disney Studios at the

\textsuperscript{208} Wikipedia, “1990 In Film,” last modified 2015, accessed March 1, 2015, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1990_in Film. The top five films that were shown at NorthPark were Pretty Woman, Back to the Future: Part III, Presumed Innocent, Home Alone, and Kindergarten Cop.


\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
time. General Cinema, proud of its role in creating the Benji franchise, awarded the film’s namesake with an engraved star outside the entrance to Cinema 1. This was the only film or individual to ever receive such an honor at NorthPark. After the premiere, the film had a two-week exclusive at NorthPark before its national opening.

Oliver Stone was another filmmaker who added to the history of NorthPark with his films. The first time was on January 24, 1987, when the theater was evacuated during a screening of *Platoon*. During a particularly graphic and violent scene in this film about the Vietnam War, a woman began spraying people with mace while yelling, “You’ve got to see what they did; you’ve got to see how the war started!” Two security guards and one customer were sprayed directly and the remaining fumes were enough to force the full evacuation of the theater. Oliver Stone would visit the theater himself on December 19, 1991, for a premiere screening of *JFK*, which had been shot in and around Dallas.

The addition of digital sound to 35mm film was also important to films and how they were viewed during this period. When digital sound first premiered in 1992 with the release of *Batman Returns*, this was one of the first theaters chosen for the new Dolby SRD format (digital sound printed on the film). In 1993, they were also one of the first adopters of the DTS digital sound format for *Jurassic Park* (digital sound playback from synchronous CDs).

There were two other competing digital sound formats around this time that the theater could have chosen to install but did not due to reliability concerns. Cinema Digital Sound (CDS) was created with no analog backup and was deemed unusable by the studios soon after, with only nine titles ever released in the format. Sony Dynamic Digital Sound (SDDS) was also available around this same time, but suffered from severe playback issues as prints aged.

---

Conclusion

At the end of 1994, the Cinemas at NorthPark completed its third full decade of operation. Over the previous ten years, it had been able to overcome competition from the new fourth generation theaters that had been built in the central zone as well as competition from substitution forms of entertainment such as pay TV and VHS. Even the threat of having to go up against the newly integrated distribution/exhibition chains did little to affect NorthPark’s business or popularity. But, as was the case with all other periods of stagnation and decline in the exhibition industry, the conditions were in place for another generational shift.

Movies Exhibited at NorthPark 1985–1994

1985
1. The Killing Fields
2. Mrs. Soffel
3. Fantasia
4. Mask
5. Return of the Jedi
6. Ladyhawke
7. Brewster’s Millions
8. The Goonies
9. A View to a Kill
10. Back to the Future
11. Mad Max
12. American Flyers
13. After Hours
14. Rainbow Brite
15. Rocky IV
16. The Color Purple
17. Out of Africa

1986
1. Cobra
2. Poltergeist III
3. Legal Eagles
4. American Anthem
5. Aliens
6. Howard the Duck
7. Extremities
8. Blue Velvet
9. The Name of the Rose
10. An American Tail
11. True Stories
12. Crimes of the Heart
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Movies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1. Brighton Beach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Born in East LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Prayer for the Dying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Platoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. The Pickup Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Lethal Weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Rosary Murders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Raising Arizona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Baby Boom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Hannah and Her Sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. The Princess Bride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. The Secret of My Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. Cross My Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Benji the Hunted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20. Stacking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Harry and the Hendersons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. Date with an Angel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Dragnet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. Dancers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Full Metal Jacket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23. Empire of the Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. The Living Daylights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24. Wall Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1. Cry Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Die Hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Barfly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Midnight Run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Good Morning Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Moon Over Parador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Off Limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Gorillas in the Mist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Stand and Deliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Clara’s Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. The Milagro Beanfield War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. The Land Before Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Willow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Cocoon 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. The Lady in White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. Twins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. The Great Outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. Rain Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Phantasm II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1. The 'Burbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Parenthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Fletch Lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Sea of Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Dream Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. The Fabulous Baker Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Roadhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Batman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Back to the Future Part II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Peter Pan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. The Abyss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1990
1. Born on the 4th of July
2. Men Don’t Leave
3. Pretty Woman
4. Opportunity Knocks
5. The Guardian
6. Bird on a Wire
7. Back to the Future Part III
8. The Jetsons
9. The Adventures of Ford Fairlane
10. Presumed Innocent
11. Problem Child
12. Darkman
13. Millers Crossing
14. White Palace
15. Reversal of Fortune
16. Home Alone
17. Havana
18. Kindergarten Cop
19. The Bonfire of the Vanities

1991
1. Hamlet
2. Once Around
3. The Hard Way
4. Guilty By Suspicion
5. Marrying Man
6. A Kiss Before Dying
7. Spartacus
8. Switch
9. Backdraft
10. Robin Hood
11. Dying Young
12. Bill and Ted’s Bogus Journey
13. Mobsters
14. Pure Luck
15. The Commitments
16. Paradise
17. Little Man Tate
18. Cape Fear
19. For the Boys
20. JFK

1992
1. Fried Green Tomatoes
2. White Man Can’t Jump
3. The Babe
4. Beethoven
5. Far and Away
6. Batman Returns
7. Housesitter
8. Death Becomes Her
9. 1492
10. Sneakers
11. The Last of the Mohicans
12. Captain Ron
13. Aladdin
14. Hoffa
1993
1. Lorenzo’s Oil
2. Matinee
3. Cemetery Club
4. Falling Down
5. Mad Dog and Glory
6. Jack the Bear
7. Huck Finn
8. This Boy’s Life
9. Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story
10. Splitting Heirs
11. Made in America
12. Jurassic Park
13. Hocus Pocus
14. Heart and Souls
15. True Romance
16. Little Buddha
17. Love and Money
18. The Nightmare Before Christmas
19. Carlito’s Way
20. Schindler’s List
21. The Pelican Brief

1994
1. In the Name of the Father
2. Greedy
3. The Paper
4. The Flintstones
5. The Cowboy Way
6. The Lion King
7. The Shadow
8. The Client
9. The Little Rascals
10. Quiz Show
11. The River Wild
12. My Fair Lady
13. Love Affair
14. The War
15. Junior
16. Disclosure
17. The Jungle Book
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movie Theaters in Operation 1985–1994</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village 1935 - 1975/Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casa Linda 1945 - 1973/1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inwood 1947 - 1980/Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTHPARK 1&amp;2 1965-1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lochwood 1966-1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medallion 1969-1986/2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NorthPark 3 &amp; 4 1974 - 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC Valley View 1975-1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loews Park Central 1977-1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC Prestonwood 1979-1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skillman 1979-1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC Galleria 1982-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caruth Plaza 1 &amp; 2 1984 - 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA 8 South 1984-1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMC Glen Lakes 1988-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA CINE 1989-2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West End 1993-2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1985</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>1975/Present</td>
<td>1980/Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inwood</td>
<td>1980/Present</td>
<td>1980/Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6

Suddenly, or so it appeared, auditoriums expanded, screen size grew, sound systems became clearer and louder, and food choices were more abundant. The tiny multiplex cinemas that swept through the malls in the early 1980s were being consigned to the past.\textsuperscript{215}

---Charles R. Acland

Though there had been numerous shifts in the exhibition industry since the opening of the General Cinema NorthPark in 1965, the Cinema 1 & 2 had been able to maintain relevancy throughout the third and fourth generations of movie theaters. The changes that came with the fifth generation of cinemas would prove to be too much for both the NorthPark theater as well as its parent company. Appropriately, the instigator of this change would occur about six miles west of NorthPark, which was almost the exact amount of distance that separated the NorthPark Cinemas from the downtown locations that it replaced exactly thirty years before.

\textit{The Fifth Generation – The Grand Megaplex}

The era of fifth generation theaters began on May 19, 1995, when American Multi-Cinema (AMC) opened the first “megaplex” in the United States, which is defined as a single theater location containing sixteen or more screens.\textsuperscript{216} Unlike most of the multiplexes that preceded it, this theater’s name was not created from its location and number of screens; instead AMC appropriated a name from the palace era and simply called it “The Grand.” This was the start of the fifth generation of movie exhibition and was located about seven miles west of the Cinemas at NorthPark.

\textsuperscript{215} Acland, \textit{Screen Traffic}, 85.
The AMC Grand was a new approach to cinema building that was more than just an increase in the number of screens. As the first example of this new experiment in theater design, The Grand adopted a futuristic space theme for its lobby, hallways, and individual theater entrances. AMC intended for this to be the symbol of the future of going to movies and wanted the aesthetic to convey that point. This theater was made to be both impressive and convenient, which made it an instant and unparalleled success. The Grand featured twenty-four individual screening rooms with a total capacity of 3,200 seats. The theater also featured stadium seating, wall-to-wall screens, and digital sound—all of which were features that became standard in future theater design. It was such a paradigm shift from the multiplexes of the 1980s that it was thought of as more of a “big box” store than a movie theater. Peter Brown, CEO of AMC, went as far as to say, “It might make sense to think of the movie theater as a superstore of entertainment.” *Dallas Morning News* architecture critic.

Figure 26 - AMC The Grand
David Dillon took this idea of retailer one step further saying that these megaplex theaters were "shopping malls adapted for leisure."²¹⁷

Most of the ideas behind the creation of the megaplex were borrowed from earlier generations of cinemas. The construction of more auditoriums in a single building meant a better use of resources as it could improve on the utilization of a single set of facilities and staff. This idea is no different than what brought twins in the 1960s and multiplexes in the 1980s, but on a much larger scale than had ever been used before. Even the new stadium-style seating was borrowed from the tiered seating rows of balconies in older movie palaces.²¹⁸ Don Gregory, AMC’s director of design and development, admitted that this was no coincidence. He stated that “We’ve just taken the balcony and dropped it onto the floor.”²¹⁹

Digital sound was also nothing new as it had been around for about four years by this point, but it was usually only installed in a complex’s largest auditoriums. Once a movie’s popularity began to wane, the film would move down to smaller screening spaces with more diminutive screens and lower quality sound. By equipping all auditoriums with some form of digital sound (SDDS in the case of The Grand), the megaplex improved on the audio experience.

The AMC Grand also expanded on the idea of customer choice that had been a part of the history of the cinema experience. In the second generation, customers could travel downtown to see a movie without determining what that movie would be in advance. They could walk down the street, looking at movie posters and showtimes, and find one that they wanted to see. When saturation booking removed the possibility for extended, exclusive runs of a movie, theaters attempted to expand choice by playing a film on multiple screens in the

²¹⁸ Melnick, 181.
²¹⁹ Dillon, “Entertainment Destinations.”
same cinema. This allowed for staggered showtimes, allowing greater flexibility for when a patron could see a film. The megaplex was able to combine the choice of film with choice of showtime. Some patrons were once again deciding on the act of seeing a movie without making the choice of what to see until they got to the cinemas.\textsuperscript{220}

When Stanley Durwood opened the Parkway Twin in Kansas City, he intended for the theater to be scalable in its booking structure. According to the \textit{Variety} article announcing its opening in May of 1963, the theater would be able to play a movie in both cinemas if needed or cycle through movies as business demanded, giving patrons more options of what movies to see.\textsuperscript{221} The plan for The Grand was to be able to offer more showtimes of the popular films while at the same time dedicating some of the auditoriums to art and foreign films. There was even excitement from the art film distributors that patrons would arrive at the theater to find all of the blockbusters sold out so they would give the smaller films a try. Mark Gill, Miramax’s marketing president, said of The Grand:

> One night, maybe 20 of the 24 theaters will be sold out, so what will the customers do? They’re already there, so they’ll try an art film or foreign-language film. They’ll come out thinking it wasn’t bad at all, even if it was subtitled. And they’ll be willing to try another one.\textsuperscript{222}

To execute this approach, The Grand opened with \textit{Die Hard With a Vengeance} on four screens so the popular new film could have more showtimes; a selection of films already in release, including \textit{Crimson Tide} and \textit{While You Were Sleeping}; and a few smaller, art films so as to soften some of the anti-megaplex prejudice in the film community. The wide range of art films included \textit{Forget Paris}, \textit{The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill But Came Down a Mountain}, \textit{My Family}, and \textit{Swimming with Sharks}. They also included foreign films, such as Japan’s \textit{Gamera}, China’s \textit{God of the Gamblers Part II}, Vietnam’s \textit{Tear Drop Pearl},

\textsuperscript{220} Acland, \textit{Screen Traffic}, 62.
\textsuperscript{221} “Downtown-Shopping Center in Tandem,” \textit{Variety}, May 29, 1963.
and Mexico’s *Bride to Be*. This eclectic booking policy lasted exactly one week. The following weekend was Memorial Day weekend (one of the biggest holidays in the movie industry) and AMC wanted to add additional showtimes for newcomers *Casper* and *Braveheart*. Even twenty-four screens were not enough to keep art films on screens.

What truly set this theater apart from the previous generations was not booking practices or amenities; it was location. In every era before this, the theater locations were built in areas of shopping and commerce. The palaces were built downtown, the twins were in or near malls, and the multiplexes were constructed as part of strip malls and shopping centers. The Grand, however, was built in the middle of an industrial park that had no retail stores and only a handful of restaurants in the general area. Instead of being part of something, AMC intended on this *being* the destination.

After its first year of operation, The Grand had welcomed three million moviegoers. For perspective, during the same period of time (May 1995 to May 1996) the Cinemas at NorthPark had 237,351 patrons. Although The Grand was able to enjoy roughly twelve times the business as NorthPark over the period, they also had twelve times as many auditoriums. When broken down to a per auditorium, per day number, NorthPark had 325 customers whereas The Grand only had a nominally higher 342.

The success of megaplexes like The Grand came from the same economic theory that brought multiscreen theaters to cities in the first place: the ability to limit facility and staffing costs while serving a greater number of patrons. The chart below examines the

---


225 The Grand did return to playing art and foreign films when there was room in the schedule, but not as part of a stated booking strategy.


relationship between number of patrons served and the amount of payroll dollars spent at NorthPark during this period. This demonstrates that an expense like payroll remains fairly constant and is only mildly affected by an increase or decrease in customers. A megaplex simply used this model to make use of the same personnel (a general manager and projectionist for example) and was able to have those employees serve a much greater number of patrons at very little additional cost (see week 7 and week 52).

Furthermore, a suffering theater is only able to make minor reductions to staffing costs when attendance is low, making it much more difficult for it to stay profitable, especially in the spring and fall when the smaller movies are released.229 In the chart above, the year starts and ends with Memorial Day Weekend since that is what was used for comparing attendance for NorthPark and The Grand. Weeks 1 through 12 are the summer months, there is a slight jump on week 28 for Thanksgiving, and then a small plateau in weeks 31

229 Ibid.
through 35 for Christmas break. This is a fairly standard representation of the movie theater calendar.

The deployment of fifth generation theaters was very similar to the manner in which the third generation theaters were rolled out in the 1960s. Once one company had provided proof of concept, it became the norm in theater construction, with each exhibitor chain trying to outdo each other in terms of quantity. The trend that started in 1995 with The Grand was no different than the generational shifts that came before it. In 1965, the suburban multiscreens were forcing the closure and remodeling of the palace theaters. In 1985, the original multiscreens were replaced with a building boom of newer and larger versions. In 1995, the newer multiplexes were demolished in favor of the megaplex.

NorthPark in the Fifth Generation

There is no doubt that the Cinemas at NorthPark continued to be popular after the introduction of the megaplexes, but the way in which they operated had changed significantly. The year 1996 was filled with a slate of films that mixed wide releases with studio-backed art product. Of the last three years of operation, 1997 was the most important in terms of historical significance. Not only was it the last full year of operation, but it was also a return to the films and four concepts that had made the theater stand out over the years. It featured an exclusive roadshow engagement, a Star Wars film, a saturation release blockbuster, and finally, a 70mm box-office sensation.

On January 1, the theater opened the Dallas exclusive of the film version of the popular Broadway musical Evita. Like the musicals of the 1960s, the release of Evita was staggered so that excitement and anticipation could build up over a period of time. The film debuted in New York and Los Angeles on Christmas Day, then had a ten-day, exclusive run
at twenty-two venues across the country.\textsuperscript{230} Although the twenty-two roadshow venues did not go as far as to have programs and only two showtimes per day (a matinee and an evening performance), the tickets were made available through a special Ticketmaster telephone line so they could be purchased like a touring Broadway show.\textsuperscript{231}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure27.png}
\caption{Promotional Poster for \textit{Evita} at NorthPark}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{231} “Evita: NorthPark Cinema I & II Exclusive Poster,” poster, 2015, in author's possession.
The next film of note to be exhibited was the special edition re-release of *Star Wars* on January 31, 1997. It was a nostalgic success for staff and customers alike, but it was clear that the business had changed.\(^{232}\) When NorthPark exhibited *Star Wars* in 1977, they had the Dallas exclusive and only ran it in a single auditorium. That opening week, *Star Wars* grossed $100,058 while the film in the other auditorium, *Cross of Iron*, grossed $6,431. Applying the average per ticket price of $2.23 that was used earlier in this thesis, that comes out to 44,869 patrons for *Star Wars* and 2,883 for *Cross of Iron* for the week beginning on May 27.\(^{233}\)

Unfortunately, the box office records for the re-release are unavailable, but a comparison can be made with a similar film. In May of 1997, exactly twenty years after *Star Wars* first opened, NorthPark opened the new Steven Spielberg movie *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* on both screens. This film was released as a saturation booking, with 3,241 theaters playing the film\(^{234}\) as opposed to the forty-three screens showing *Star Wars* on its opening weekend.\(^{235}\) For *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, the combined total for both auditoriums was $57,806, which represented 12,130 patrons. This represented a 75% decline in patrons from the same weekend twenty years before. Typically that kind of customer base loss would be proof that a theater had lost its relevancy, but most of the decline was due to the oversaturation of print allocations and not necessarily to the location losing its top-level status. According to boxofficemojo.com, the film grossed a total of $104 million across 3,241 locations during its opening weekend. This divides out to a per location average of $31,960.\(^{236}\) The Cinemas at NorthPark had almost double the average. The box

\(^{232}\) Ron Beardmore, interview by author, Dallas, Texas, October 20, 2004.

\(^{233}\) “General Cinema Theaters Weekly Summary 11/76 to 11/82,” binder of box office reports in author’s possession.


office revenues had been split over a much larger group of theaters, but NorthPark was still able to stay ahead of the national average.

The last film of note for 1997 opened in Cinema 1 and occupied that auditorium for most of the spring. This was a 70mm exclusive of James Cameron's *Titanic*. The NorthPark 1 & 2 was one of only twelve venues in the entire United States, and the only one in the southern half of the country, to play the film in this format. This engagement of *Titanic* would be the last new movie released in Dallas on 70mm film until *Interstellar* opened in November of 2014.\(^{237}\) When NorthPark closed in October of 1998, many of the articles pointed to the run of *Titanic* as the high point of a theater with many things to brag about. One customer, Chris Vognar, "The Big Screen: *Interstellar* and the Celluloid Revival," *Dallas Morning News Online*, November 6, 2014, sec. Pop Culture, accessed March 4, 2015, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uta.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/15172F2CCD3220C8?p=AWNB.
Daniel Dunnan, went as far as to say, “If you saw Titanic here, you saw a better movie than if you saw it anywhere else.”

*The Last Picture Shows*

The second chapter of this thesis described how the Cinemas at NorthPark were created by a combining of forces within the city of Dallas, NorthPark Center, the movie exhibition industry, and specifically the General Cinema Corporation working to create a footprint in the Texas market. These exact same forces would combine to close the theater three decades later. The first part of this chapter discussed how The Grand and other megaplexes were beginning to pull customers away from the older, established theaters to the new entertainment destinations with more screens and amenities. These changing customer preferences and the economic forces that went with them were causing a decline in overall attendance at the Cinemas at NorthPark.

The movie exhibition industry as a whole had changed and NorthPark was unable to maintain relevancy in the new paradigm. The industry changes then led to Nasher wanting to build a newer, bigger theater as part of a larger mall expansion that he was planning. This created two problems for the Cinemas at NorthPark. First, the physical space that the theater building was on was in the direct path of this expansion. The second issue was that although NorthPark Center offered to find a new place for General Cinema to build a new theater, their plans included a “modern” megaplex theater, which was a style that GCC had not fully adopted in their business model.

Finally, the General Cinema Corporation, which had always maintained a program of moderate change and diversification, conceded that they were not going to be able to keep up with the megaplex building boom. In 1998, the once great exhibition giant had already

---

closed several of their locations in the Dallas area that year, including cinemas at Irving Mall, Collin Creek, Prestonwood Town Center, and the NorthPark 3 & 4. These were done as part of a major purging they were performing throughout their Texas locations so they could focus more on other markets.**239** The closing of the NorthPark 1 & 2 had always been rumored to be a part of this wave of closings, but remained open through to October. GCC did leave several suburban theaters in operation for about another year, and even made an attempt at a modern megaplex-style location to replace the closed theater at Irving Mall.**240**

The Cinemas at NorthPark had several different closing performances depending on the person’s relationship to the theater. On Thursday, October 22, the last two films shown to paying audiences were the highly forgettable pairing of *Simon Birch* and *A Night at the Roxbury*.**241** The following morning, Universal rented out Cinema 1 for a press screening of their new Brad Pitt film, *Meet Joe Black*. As far as most people are concerned, those were the last official films on NorthPark’s calendar.

But on the night of Friday, October 23, about one hundred people gathered together at the theater to watch a double feature of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The informal gathering featured stories and goodbyes from the different eras of the theater’s thirty-three year history. There were managers, projectionists, concessionists, box office attendants, film buyers, and a few lucky “friends of the theater” that heard about it through word of mouth. It was not a somber occasion, but a celebration of movies and the place that they are shown. The last ever image on the massive Cinema 1 screen was of the magical “ark of the covenant” being loaded into a box and warehoused with thousands of other identical boxes—something unique and special becoming lost. This film was not chosen to make some grandiose pronouncement on the future of the movie exhibition.

**239** Maria Halkias, “NorthPark, AMC Plan 18-Screen Theater, Mall also will add outdoor plaza, restaurants,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 8, 2000, sec. News, p. 1A.


industry, but because the projectionists liked the film and wanted to see it there one last time. Though not intended, this image did make a statement.\textsuperscript{242}

After the movie, the audience left the theater in small groups, with attendees walking past the reader board marquee on their way to the parking lot. The sign that had announced the names of the movies playing inside with white plastic letters now simply read, “Thanks for the memories. 33 years. Goodbye.”\textsuperscript{243}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{raiders-of-the-lost-ark-frame.jpg}
\caption{Frame from \textit{Raiders of the Lost Ark}}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{242} Ron Beardmore, interview by author, Dallas, Texas, October 20, 2004.
\end{flushleft}
Movies Exhibited at NorthPark 1995–1998

1995
1. Murder in the First
2. Miami Rhapsody
3. The Hunted
4. Man of the House
5. Losing Isaiah
6. Jefferson in Paris
7. Doctor Zhivago
8. The Cure
9. Crimson Tide
10. Casper
11. The Bridges of Madison County
12. Apollo 13
13. Waterworld
14. To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything!
15. Unstrung Heroes
16. How to Make an American Quilt
17. The Scarlet Letter
18. Gold Diggers
19. Casino
20. Nixon
21. Grumpier Old Men

1996
1. 12 Monkeys
2. White Squall
3. Beautiful Girls
4. Up Close and Personal
5. Diabolique
6. Sgt. Bilko
7. A Family Thing
8. James and the Giant Peach
9. The Quest
10. Twister
11. Flipper
12. Dragonheart
13. Hunchback
14. The Nutty Professor
15. Joe’s Apartment
16. Jack
17. She’s the One
18. Bulletproof
19. Giant
20. Emma
21. Sleepers
22. Michael Collins
23. Ransom
24. Vertigo
25. Daylight
26. The Crucible
27. My Fellow Americans
1997
1. Evita  14. Nothing to Lose
2. Mother  15. Event Horizon
3. Star Wars (RR)  16. Mimic
4. Rosewood  17. Kull the Conqueror
5. Jungle 2 Jungle  18. L.A. Confidential
7. Inventing the Abbots  20. The Edge
8. Murder at 1600  21. A Life Less Ordinary
9. Romy and Michelle’s High School  22. Critical Care
    Reunion
10. Lost World  23. Anastasia
11. Hercules  24. Midnight in the Garden of Good and
12. Out to Sea  25. Titanic (70mm)
13. Contact  26. Good Will Hunting

1998
2. Good Will Hunting  9. A Perfect Murder
3. Krippendorf’s Tribe  10. Armageddon
4. U.S. Marshalls  11. There’s Something About Mary
5. Mercury Rising  12. Dead Man on Campus
6. The Object of My Affection  13. Simon Birch
7. The Horse Whisperer  14. A Night at the Roxbury
Table 14 - Movie Theaters in Operation 1995–1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theater Name</th>
<th>Operation Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village 1935 - 1975/Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casa Linda 1945 - 1973/1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inwood 1947 - 1980/Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NorthPark 1&amp;2 1965-1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medallion 1969-1986/2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NorthPark 3 &amp; 4 1974 - 1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC Prestonwood 1979-1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skillman 1979-1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC Galleria 1982-2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA 8 South 1984-1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMC Glen Lakes 1988-2006</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA CINE 1989-2004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West End 1993-2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinemark Webb Chapel 1995-Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loews City Place 1995-2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMC The Grand 1995 - 2010/Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA Galaxy 1996-Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone 1997 - 2010/Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 7
Epilogue and Conclusion

We are bound together by our fascination and passion for cinema. This has been our past and our present and it is also our future.

—Cheryl Boone Isaacs

The closing and ultimate demolition of the NorthPark 1 & 2 was only the beginning of a downward trend for its parent company, the General Cinema Corporation, and many other exhibition companies like it as they were either sold off or went bankrupt during the fifth generation of movie exhibition. In the two years following the closing of the Cinemas at NorthPark, thirteen significant theater chains that could not remain competitive in the megaplex building boom filed for bankruptcy. Dallas-based Silver Cinemas was the first to file for Chapter 11 in May of 2000 and were almost immediately followed by the once great chains of United Artists, Carmike, Mann Theatres, Edwards Cinema, Loews Cineplex

![Cinema II Demolition](image)

Figure 30 - Demolition of Cinema II

---

Entertainment, and Regal Cinemas. In 2001, after almost forty years of being direct and fierce competition, AMC purchased General Cinema out of bankruptcy for the paltry sum of $195 million dollars, or the amount that AMC would have paid to build about eight new megaplex locations.

In pure economic terms the numbers were staggering. During this period, the top five exhibition chains at the time—AMC, Carmike Cinemas, Cinemark USA, Loews Cineplex, and Regal Entertainment—combined to spend over $4 billion in capital to build these new megaplex theaters. Although many older theaters were closing while the new ones were opening, the screen count still grew at a rate of 7.5% per year while the attendance only expanded by 2.4% annually. In the early years of the megaplex, many of the smaller operators attempted to survive with older locations by offering lower pricing on tickets and concessions hoping to draw in a focused audience made up of families, seniors, and customers that wanted the convenience of close proximity. Most of these were gone by 2000.

The megaplex trend did have its share of early skeptics that recognized the inherent flaws in the model. In 1996, executive vice president of the National Amusements theater chain, Shari Redstone, voiced her concern about the new theaters. She warned exhibitors, "For the sake of the industry, I hope circuits really think about where and what they build, and the need in any given market for additional screens. In the end, the whole industry must work together for exhibition to reach its peak and be a success."

---

248 This total does not include money spent in closing older theaters and lease penalties.
249 Mariach, 229.
251 Shari Redstone is Sumner Redstone’s daughter. Sumner Redstone is the majority share owner for both the CBS group of broadcast networks as well as Paramount Pictures.
competition and hubris led to unprecedented over-screening both locally and nationally. One Houston-area journalist said it best when he wrote that from the perspective of the theater chains, “It’s always the other guy that’s overbuilding. Your brand new megaplex, on the other hand, is an example of strategically finding a little noticed gap in the market.”253 In theory, this was no different than the other building booms that had come before and were discussed in the previous chapters except that the “little noticed gap in the market” had become smaller than ever before. By 2002, movie exhibition had experienced a complete, industry-wide destabilization, and by the end of the year most all of the third and fourth generation theaters were gone, as were the companies that built them.254 Even the theater that started it all, The AMC Grand, would only have a lifespan of fifteen years before it was closed. It would reopen a year later with a new owner after an extensive overhaul that removed ten of the screens.255

The most important outcome from all of the restructuring and consolidation is that it allowed the distributors who held stakes in these exhibition companies to quietly extricate themselves from the volatile climate in the new era. The entire fourth generation of cinemas were built because of the return to vertical integration, but the large amount of capital that was spent on these new locations was just too much for them to keep investing. As of today, of the 41,518 screens in the United States and Canada, only 423 of these are affiliated with a movie distributor. National Amusements, who operates these 423 screens, owns both CBS and Paramount Pictures.256

Ownership transfers and closings were not the only changes introduced in the fifth generation of movie exhibition. Changes in theater construction, specifically in the auditorium, were the defining characteristics of this generation. These changes were not met with universal praise, as some might believe. The customers might have preferred the new amenities and greater options, but some began to worry about how these new cinema designs were affecting audiences and how they viewed movies. When commenting on new theaters in 1997, Philip Wuntch pointed out that some sound experts argued that stadium seating was not ideal for movie theaters and even pointed out that at the time of the writing, the Cinemas at NorthPark still had a better and more powerful sound system than the buildings that were being built at the time.\(^{257}\)

In addition to inferior sound,\(^{258}\) stadium seating also changed how people watched movies in the theater. Roger Ebert, longtime advocate for the old movie palaces, argued that there are different psychological reactions to a film that are dependent on whether the viewer is looking up at the screen as opposed to being level with it or even looking down to it. He stated that the solution to this problem is not to raise the seats, but raise the screen and gently rake the floor.\(^{259}\) He went on to say that this was the design of the classic movie palaces, but he was only half right because he ignored the balcony seats in his analysis. The Cinemas at NorthPark were designed with the screens so high off the floor that it was nearly impossible to have another customer obstruct a view.


\(^{258}\) The inferior sound in stadium seating auditoriums is often attributed to the fact that cinema speakers are designed for a lateral dispersal and do not provide adequate coverage from the lower rows to the top rows. New speaker designs compensate for this and use an “array” design similar to those used at stadiums and concerts.

The New NorthPark and the Future of Dallas Cinema

This thesis has demonstrated that the generations of movie exhibition are cyclical and that those cycles are clearly defined by the types of buildings that are built to show the films. The first generation of theaters—the Nickelodeons and other makeshift viewing spaces—were not well adorned and did not have any customer comforts or amenities. These early spaces predated both interior air conditioning and concessions. They were not comfortable places, but people patronized them because they were the only place to see movies. The second generation was highlighted by the urban palace theaters. They were magnificent buildings that were destination attractions in their own right with movies serving as only part of the entertainment. Feature films were accompanied by live music, cartoon shorts, and newsreels; even live productions were often scheduled when not showing movies. The third generation featured the practical, utilitarian sites like the NorthPark I & II. They were stripped of unnecessary decorative elements and focused on selling the movie over the theater. The fourth and fifth generations were similar to each other in that they both represented a return to selling the theater and the customer experience. Theaters evolved with more screens and greater focus on giving the customer a better experience as they competed with viewing films in the home during this time.

The new theaters that are being built today are in a unique position as they attempt to merge modern technology with a feeling and aesthetic of the past. When AMC opened a new fifteen-screen theater at NorthPark Center in 2006 to replace the NorthPark 1 & 2, they designed the lobby with images from earlier times in movie history. These design elements included a mural of celebrity graphics, director’s series photographs on the walls, 

---

260 Mark Jancovich, Lucy Faire, and Sarah Stubbings, The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption (London: British Film Institute Press, 2003), 203.
261 The included picture shows quotes from Who Framed Roger Rabbit and Shrek. The mural shows A Nightmare on Elm Street, The Wizard of Oz, and Breakfast at Tiffany’s.
and a terrazzo floor inlaid with movie quotes distributed throughout the lobby. Although they do remind the customers of films that predate the cinema they are in, these elements are not included as part of the architecture. These adornments were designed in a way that they can be changed, updated, or ultimately removed without requiring an expensive remodel.

The opening epigraph for this thesis posed French philosopher Jean Baudrillard’s idea that to understand the modern American city, you had to start with the movie screen and work out towards the city as a whole. Though this seems a bit hyperbolic, there is evidence within the city of Dallas to support this position. Given that movie theaters provide a rare intersection of commerce and popular art, the history of these cinemas provides

---

263 Baudrillard, 56.
researchers of many disciplines with information regarding localized consumer and leisure habits, transportation issues, real estate trends, and the dispersion of people.

But these particular screens have something to contribute to a study beyond the city limits of Dallas. Over the last hundred years, this has been a city at the forefront of shaping how movies are watched. Not only has it provided great venues for study, but it was also the location of the first Blockbuster Video. This store, which fostered the adoption of VHS in homes across the world, was located just a mile and half from NorthPark at the intersection of Northwest Highway and Skillman Avenue.264

Despite playing such an important role in how movies have been exhibited and seen, the city of Dallas has only thirteen active movie theater locations with a total of 114 screens today. Three of them specialize in art films (Texas Theatre, The Magnolia, and Angelika Film Center Dallas) and two of them are exclusively dinner and a movie concept locations (the Studio Movie Grills at Royal and Northwest Highway). This leaves only eight traditional, first-run movie theaters in the entire city and only one screen south of I-30. Located in Oak Cliff, the Texas primarily features live shows, repertory and art films, leaving customers that are looking for the big Hollywood blockbusters completely unserved throughout the southern half of the city.

Ironically, the two main factors for exhibitors not wanting to build new theaters in Dallas is the same reason that drove the customers out of downtown theaters in the 1960s: crime and parking. While south Dallas remains disproportionately under-screened today, this was not always the case. In the 1980s, General Cinema operated ten screens in and around Red Bird Mall in two separate buildings (one building was named the “I-IV” and the other was the “V-X,” similar to how NorthPark had the I & II as well as the III & IV). Seeing an under-screened area, or “little noticed gap in the market,” United Artists built one of their

fourth generation multiplexes just south of I-20 in the same area. Not long after opening, these theaters gained a reputation for being dangerous, as did Red Bird Mall and the area in general, and attendance suffered. The reputation proved to be well earned when the manager of the General Cinema V-X was murdered when she was followed while leaving the theater after her shift.265

Parking is also a major concern for exhibitors attempting to open a theater in Dallas. The city ordinance that specifically covers indoor movie theaters requires a ratio of 0.27 parking places for every seat in the theater.266 AMC’s The Grand, as an example of a megaplex, had 5,000 seats which required 1,350 parking spots. According to a study at the University of Tennessee, the average parking lot is designed with spaces that are 10’ by 18’ or 180sf each. In this study, they suggest traffic lanes that are 24’ in width on the interior and 12’ on the outside (this study did not include any landscaping). With this layout, they were able to fit 144 parking places per acre. The result would be a requirement of 9.3 acres of open space to build sufficient parking to satisfy zoning requirements. The entire footprint of The Grand (including sidewalks and a large outdoor common area) occupied 133,000sf, or a three-acre space, bringing the grand total of space needed to build a new twenty-four-screen megaplex to Dallas to about twelve acres. It is interesting to note that the same zoning statute would require only 320 parking places if this same building held a big box retail store and only 133 if the building housed light manufacturing.267

In a manner similar to the way in which theater patrons in the 1960s were abandoning the downtown theaters because they couldn’t find a safe place to park, the theaters are abandoning the city because they can’t find a safe place to build a parking lot. If, somehow, they were able to find a large enough area of land that was safe, it would also

---

267 Ibid.
have to have a surrounding population large enough to serve as a clientele and a lease or purchase arrangement that would prove to be profitable. There are at least two exhibitors that have done exploratory studies of the area and cited the parking issue as the reason they chose not to build within the city of Dallas.268

The question then becomes what does all of this mean for the future of watching movies in Dallas. Given that a large area of land that could economically support a standard megaplex does not seem to be available, the push appears to be towards a smaller, boutique experience. AMC has launched a remodeling initiative that is specifically directed at their auditoriums. The conversions center on removing the standard movie theater chair and replacing it with reclining La-Z-Boy-type seats. Following the conversion, the seating capacity is usually about one-third what it was before the seating modification.269

Figure 32 - Auditorium #5 Studio Movie Grill Plano

---

Another popular trend is in-theater dining. These can be either purpose-built or conversions from an existing multi- or megaplex cinema. Regardless of origin, these also greatly reduce a screening space’s possible seating capacity by adding tables, counters, and walkways for food runners and servers. One of these companies, the Alamo Drafthouse, has announced a new location in Dallas to open in late 2015 or early 2016. It will have the distinction of adding eight screens south of I-30, but only barely, as it will be located just south of downtown in the South Lamar area.

In addition to lower seat counts, what the dual trends of recliner seats and dining service have in common is that they are both primarily focused on customer comfort and convenience. These new theaters are bolder, brighter spaces that attempt to overwhelm the moviegoer with the experience of going to that particular cinema and are less focused on the movie on the screen. In fact, these theaters are showing fewer new feature films than ever as they are incorporating broadcasts of live theatre productions, repertory movies, concert videos, and live television programming. This type of offering is what Harry Alan Potamkin referred to in the palace era as a “polyglot program” and a distraction away from a movie theater’s primary purpose: showing movies.270

The exhibition industry has returned to an age of, using Marcus Loew’s words, “selling tickets to theatres, not movies.” In addition to the manner in which the theaters advertise themselves, there are two conditions that are common between the second generation palace theaters and the modern theaters that prove the idea of selling tickets to theaters and not the films on screen. The first necessary condition is a small window in which a movie can be viewed in a theater.271 During the second generation, 60% of the US population was attending at least one movie weekly.272 Turnover was key as they were

---

270 Potamkin, 550.
271 Hark, 6.
attempting to entertain the audience once they were in the building with a product that was essentially disposable and would be replaced with something new the following week. Although movies do typically stay at a theater for longer than a week in the modern era by virtue of having smaller auditoriums to move to, there is always a new slate of two to five films to choose from the following week. This is in contrast to the third generation where runs of a year were possible even through the late 1970s. Although a movie could run at a single location for that amount of time, the multi-tiered run-zone-clearance system allowed a particular film to move through the levels of exhibitors over a long period of time. A version of this existed through the 1990s when dollar theaters would extend the theatrical run of a film to a total of three to six months after its initial release. Once the average video release date dipped below four months after premiering in theaters, these post-first-run theaters no longer had a place in the market. The Medallion 5 closed in December of 2001 and there have not been any of these in Dallas since.

Figure 33 - Movie Theater Box Office with Menu Board Showtime Schedule
The other necessary factor in selling the theater and not the movie is that the customer’s primary impetus for going to the movies is either the particular cinema or just wanting to experience the act of going to the cinema without regard to the film showing. In 2014, The Nielsen Group, who has been tracking entertainment consumption since the 1940s, released a study of modern movie-going habits. In it, they found that 23% of people pick a movie after arriving at the theater. This means that almost one quarter of all of the tickets sold in 2013 were purchased by customers who had decided to go to a cinema with the movie choice being a secondary concern. This is the modern version of “selling tickets to theaters” in practice.

Conclusion

The year is 2015. Once again, it is mid-decade and the box office sales are in decline. The year 2014 saw the lowest number of tickets sold since 1994, the year before The Grand started a new type of theater construction and renewed interest in movie going. Both distributors and exhibitors are beginning to realize that the newness of the megaplex has worn off and changes are being made on both sides in an attempt to reverse the trend. Exhibitors are modifying their theaters to make them more comfortable and appealing to audiences.

Distributors, on the other hand, are experimenting with two antithetical approaches. Some of the studios are looking to bypass the theater experience completely and sell directly to customers through a Video On Demand (VOD) model. This practice takes the wide-release model that was introduced with Jaws to a larger scale by making the movie available

---

on an infinite number of screens. Other producers and distributors are trying to make going
to the movies more of an event by making them more exclusive. An early NorthPark practice
is even returning this year with Quentin Tarantino’s new film *The Hateful Eight* planning a
70mm roadshow release.²⁷⁶

The conditions that exist today are the same that have historically forced other
drastic shifts in the ways that films are exhibited. The exhibition tier of the movie industry is
once again separate from distribution. The trend to have as many as thirty screens under
one roof has ended and screen counts within a theater are in decline. The last theater that
AMC, inventor of the megaplex, built in the DFW area had only nine screens. The new
amenities that the theaters have been installing have caused a rise in average ticket prices.
A recent study by PricewaterhouseCoopers found that 53% of those surveyed cited lower
prices as a factor that would motivate them to go to the movies more often. Only 8%
responded that a “better theater experience” would make them want to go to the movie
theater more often than they do now.²⁷⁷

A natural conclusion to draw from this is that a way to save the movie exhibition
industry would be to return to an era similar to the third generation of theaters. When the
theater chains were in decline they adopted an austere philosophy that was applied to both
cinema building and how the operations were run. The Cinemas at NorthPark were the
epitome of the third generation theater. It was a simple approach that was successful for
thirty-three years without any costly building modifications or operational changes. It is
important to know the history of this theater as it could very well serve as an example for the
future.

²⁷⁶ Mike Flemming, Jr., “Quentin Tarantino on Retirement, Grand 70mm Intl Plans for *The Hateful Eight*,” *Deadline
retirement-hateful-eight-international-release-1201280583/.
²⁷⁷ PricewaterhouseCoopers “Consumer Intelligence Series: Summer 2014 Movie Going Declines a Blip on the
Table 15 - Movie Theaters in Operation 1998–2015

Majestic 1921 - 1973
Village 1935 - 1975/Present
Casa Linda 1945 - 1973/1999
Inwood 1947 - 1980/Present
NORTH PARK 1 & 2 1965-1988
Medallion 1969-1986/2001
NorthPark 3 & 4 1974 - 1998
GCC Prestonwood 1979-1998
Skillman 1979-1998
GCC Galleria 1982-2000
UA 8 South 1984-1999
AMC Glen Lakes 1988-2006
UA CINE 1989-2004
West End 1993-2000
Cinemark Webb Chapel 1995-Present
Loews City Place 1995-2010
AMC The Grand 1995 - 2010/Present
UA Galaxy 1996-Present
Keystone 1997 - 2010/Present
AFC Dallas 2000-Present
Magnolia 2000-Present
AMC Valley View 2004-Present
AMC NorthPark 2006-Present
SMG Royal 2008 - Present
Texas Theatre 2010-Present
Look Cinemas 2013-Present

2000 2010 2015
Bibliography


*Dallas Times Herald*. September 1965.


*Palm Beach Post.* August, 2000.


Biographical Information

Jeremy graduated from The University of Texas at Arlington in 2004 with a double major in History and Philosophy. Professionally, he has managed technical and projection operations for many of the top theaters in Dallas as well as the USA Film Festival. Currently, he is working for the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and the Telluride Film Festival, handles special projects in the Jones Film and Video Collection at Southern Methodist University, and continues to be active in the film exhibition industry.