

Citizen Kane

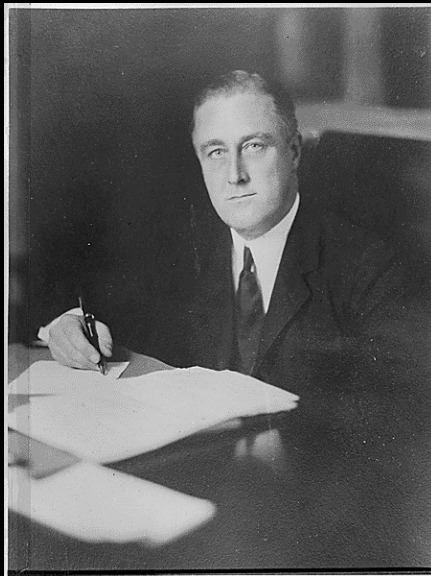
Background Information



1941

Historical Events:

- Franklin Roosevelt was US President
- Germany invaded Soviet Union
- Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and US entered WWII



1941

Other American films released that year:

Dumbo

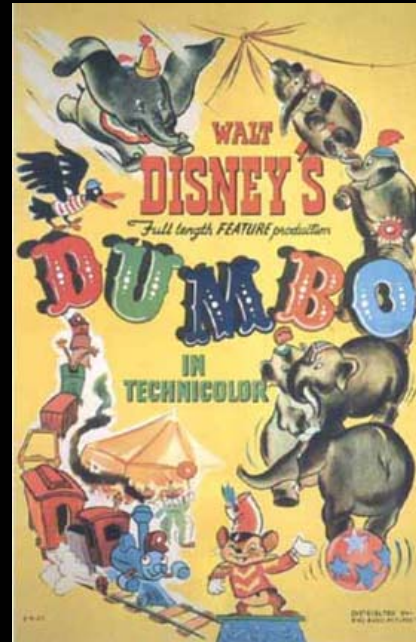
How Green Was My Valley

The Maltese Falcon

Suspicion

Sullivan's Travels

The Wolf Man



Citizen Kane was
directed and written by
26-year-old
Orson Welles
(1915-1987),
who also stars as
the title character





This was his first film in Hollywood, although he had directed many plays, including a voodoo version of “MacBeth”

Welles came to the attention of Hollywood because of his infamous “War of the Worlds” radio broadcast



Citizen Kane has influenced countless filmmakers and is consistently cited as one of the ten best films of all time.

Based on the life of publishing magnate **William Randolph Hearst**, it is an exuberant, muckraking attack on an archetypal economic baron.





William Randolph Hearst

“Yellow Journalist” and multi-millionaire newspaper publisher; shaper of public opinion

Political aspirant to Presidency by becoming New York State's Governor



Charles Foster Kane

Same kind of publisher and journalist

Political aspirant to Presidency by running for governor of New York; married President's niece



Hearst built "The Ranch," a palace at San Simeon, California, filled with a priceless art collection



Kane built "Xanadu," a palace in Florida, filled with a priceless art collection



Long-lasting affair with the young and successful silent film actress Marion Davies

Hearst bought a film studio to promote Marion Davies' stardom



Sad affair and marriage with talentless 'singer' Susan Alexander

Kane bought Susan an opera house to promote her career



Hearst was so upset by the film's cruel portrayal of his girlfriend that he tried to block its release



Orson Welles never again got an opportunity to direct a film like *Citizen Kane* (although he did direct several other great films, such as *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Touch of Evil*)

The narrative structure of *Citizen Kane* can be confusing:

- the film begins with the death of the main character
- the story of his life is told from multiple points of view



1. “News on the March”
newsreel (a miniature
version of the rest of the
film)

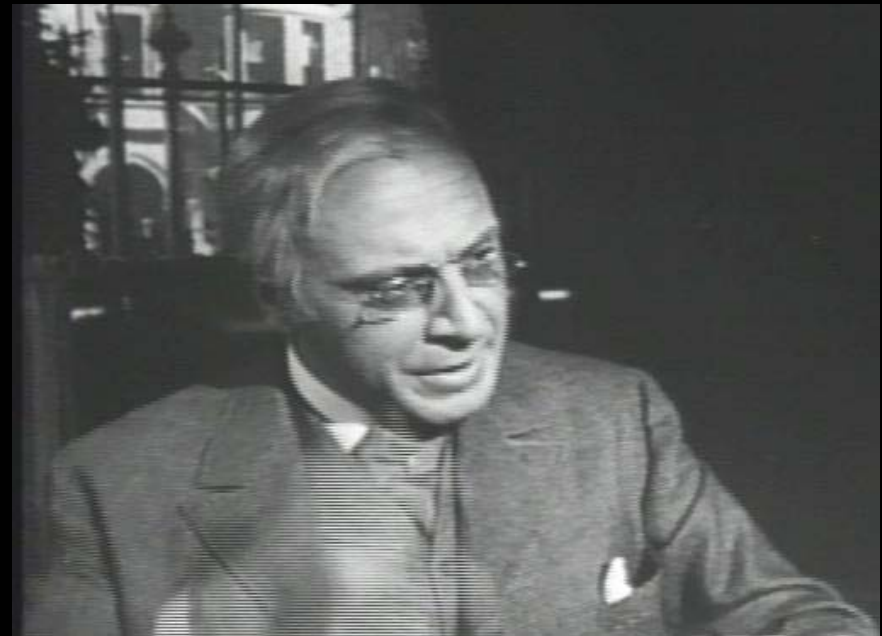


Followed by five
narratives told as
flashbacks:

2. Entries from the
diary of

Mr. Thatcher

(Kane's legal
guardian)



3. Interview with
Mr. Bernstein
(Kane's business
partner)



4. Interview with
Jed Leland
(Kane's one-time closest
friend)



5. Interview with
Susan Alexander
(Kane's second wife)



6. Interview with
Raymond
(Kane's butler)





The newspaper reporter who takes the audience on this quest is always turned away from the camera or shrouded in shadows as he conducts his interviews.



He becomes a stand-in for the audience, often appearing only as a silhouetted head in the lower right corner of the frame.



Throughout the film we are limited to the knowledge that each narrator has about Kane, so the point of view changes with each new narrator.



Welles attempted to make the sets on *Citizen Kane* realistic by having many low angle shots that revealed ceilings

“Deep Focus”

a filming technique in which subjects near the camera, in the distant background, and in between are all in focus



“Deep Focus”

developed by the cinematographer Gregg Toland



Most films made in this time period used very **shallow focus**, in which one part of the screen is sharp and the rest blurred.

This directs the viewer's attention to the key element of the action (usually the star of the film).



"Yellow" Journalism

In the late 19th century, newspaper publishers Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst were in fierce competition.

The changes they made in their efforts to sell papers led to a new style of journalism.



"Yellow" Journalism

featured sensational and scandalous news coverage, the use of drawings and the inclusion of more features such as comic strips,



References to *Citizen Kane* on "The Simpsons:"

"Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish" - Mr. Burns giving a speech with a huge poster of himself in the background. "Is your boss governor yet?" "No, not yet, son."
"YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME! I'M CHARLES MONTGOMERY BURNS!" Mr. Burns overturning furniture.

"Blood Feud" The windows and curtain behind his deathbed match those in the death scene at the beginning of the movie.

"A Streetcar Named Marge" Homer blows on a theatre program torn into ribbons (Joseph Cotton does the same when forced to endure the horrible opera debut of Kane's wife)

"Marge Gets a Job" Smithers' song-and-dance number, complete with Wellesian camera angles.

"Mr. Plow" The second advertisement includes a shattered snow-dome.

"Rosebud" Opening music and camera shot - the crate of unbreakable snow globes - title is reference to the name of the sled Kane lost for ill-gotten power

"Sideshow Bob Roberts" "Bob" backdrop, just like "Kane" backdrop

"Bart Sells His Soul" the sled on Moe's wall with "Rosebud" on it

"Treehouse of Horror VII" "Citizen Kang" spoofs the title