

Early Cinema

Innovations Necessary for the Advent of Cinema:

Optical toys, shadow shows, 'magic lanterns,' and visual tricks have existed for thousands of years. Many inventors, scientists, manufacturers and scientists have observed the visual phenomenon that a series of individual still pictures set into motion created the illusion of movement - a concept termed *persistence of vision*. This illusion of motion was first described by British physician Peter Mark Roget in 1824, and was a first step in the development of the cinema.

A number of technologies, simple optical toys and mechanical inventions related to motion and vision were developed in the early to late 19th century that were precursors to the birth of the motion picture industry:

- [A very early version of a "magic lantern" was invented in the 17th century by Athanasius Kircher in Rome. It was a device with a lens that projected images from transparencies onto a screen, with a simple light source (such as a candle).]
- 1824 - the invention of the **Thaumatrope** (the earliest version of an optical illusion toy that exploited the concept of "*persistence of vision*" first presented by Peter Mark Roget in a scholarly article) by an English doctor named Dr. John Ayrton Paris
- 1831 - the discovery of the law of *electromagnetic induction* by English scientist Michael Faraday, a principle used in generating electricity and powering motors and other machines (including film equipment)
- 1832 - the invention of the **Fantascope** (also called **Phenakistiscope** or "spindle viewer") by Belgian inventor Joseph Plateau, a device that simulated motion. A series or sequence of separate pictures depicting stages of an activity, such as juggling or dancing, were arranged around the perimeter or edges of a slotted disk. When the disk was placed before a mirror and spun or rotated, a spectator looking through the slots 'perceived' a moving picture.
- 1834 - the invention and patenting of another *stroboscopic* device adaptation, the **Daedalum** (renamed the **Zoetrope** in 1867 by American William Lincoln) by British inventor William George Horner. It was a hollow, rotating drum/cylinder with a crank, with a strip of sequential photographs, drawings, paintings or illustrations on the interior surface and regularly spaced narrow slits through which a spectator observed the 'moving' drawings.
- 1839 - the birth of still photography with the development of the first commercially-viable *daguerreotype* (a method of capturing still images on silvered, copper-metal plates) by French painter and inventor Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre
- 1841 - the patenting of *calotype* (or *Talbotype*, a process for printing negative photographs on high-quality paper) by British inventor William Henry Fox Talbot
- 1861 - the invention of the **Kinematoscope**, patented by Philadelphian Coleman Sellers, an improved rotating paddle machine to view (by hand-cranking) a series of *stereoscopic* still pictures on glass plates that were sequentially mounted in a cabinet-box
- 1869 - the development of *celluloid* by John Wesley Hyatt, patented in 1870 and trademarked in 1873 - later used as the base for photographic film



- 1870 - the first demonstration of the **Phasmotrope** (or **Phasmatrope**) by Henry Renno Heyl in Philadelphia, that showed a rapid succession of still or posed photographs of dancers, giving the illusion of motion
- 1877 - the invention of the **Praxinoscope** by French inventor Charles Emile Reynaud - it was a 'projector' device with a mirrored drum that created the illusion of movement with picture strips, a refined version of the Zoetrope with mirrors at the center of the drum instead of slots; public demonstrations of the Praxinoscope were made by the early 1890s with screenings of 15 minute 'movies' at his Parisian Theatre Optique
- 1879 - Thomas Alva Edison's first public exhibition of an efficient incandescent light bulb, later used for film projectors

Late 19th Century Inventions and Experiments: Muybridge, Marey, Le Prince and Eastman

Pioneering Britisher Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904), an early photographer and inventor, was famous for his photographic loco-motion studies (of animals and humans) at the end of the 19th century (such as 1882's published "The Horse in Motion"). In the 1870s, Muybridge experimented with instantaneously recording the movements of a galloping horse, first at a Sacramento (California) race track. In June, 1878, he successfully conducted a 'chronophotography' experiment in Palo Alto (California) for his wealthy San Francisco benefactor, Leland Stanford, using a multiple series of cameras to record a horse's gallops - this conclusively proved that all four of the horse's feet were off the ground at the same time.



Muybridge's pictures, published widely in the late 1800s, were often cut into strips and used in a **Praxinoscope**, a descendant of the *zoetrope* device, invented by Charles Emile Reynaud in 1877. The Praxinoscope was the *first* 'movie machine' that could project a series of images onto a screen. Muybridge's stop-action series of photographs helped lead to his own 1879 invention of the **Zoopraxiscope** (or "zoogyroscope", also called the "wheel of life"), a primitive motion-picture projector machine that also recreated the illusion of movement (or animation) by projecting images - rapidly displayed in succession - onto a screen from photos printed on a rotating glass disc.

True motion pictures, rather than eye-fooling 'animations', could only occur after the development of film (flexible and transparent celluloid) that could record split-second pictures. Some of the first experiments in this regard were conducted by Parisian innovator and physiologist Etienne-Jules Marey in the 1880s. He was also studying, experimenting, and recording bodies (most often of flying animals, such as pelicans in flight) in motion using photographic means (and French astronomer Pierre-Jules-Cesar Janssen's "revolving photographic plate" idea).



In 1882, Marey, often claimed to be the 'inventor of cinema,' constructed a camera (or "photographic gun") that could take multiple (12) photographs per second of moving animals or humans - called **chronophotography** or serial photography, similar to Muybridge's work on taking multiple exposed images of running horses. [The term *shooting a film* was possibly derived from Marey's invention.] He was able to record multiple images of a subject's movement on the same camera plate, rather than the individual images Muybridge had produced.

Marey's chronophotographs (multiple exposures on single glass plates and on strips of sensitized paper - celluloid film - that passed automatically through a camera of his own design) were revolutionary. He was soon able to achieve a frame rate of 30 images. Further experimentation was conducted by French-born Louis Aime Augustin Le Prince in 1888. Le Prince used long rolls of paper covered with photographic emulsion for a camera that he devised and patented. Two short fragments survive of his early motion picture film (one of which was titled *Traffic Crossing Leeds Bridge*).

The work of Muybridge, Marey and Le Prince laid the groundwork for the development of motion picture cameras, projectors and transparent celluloid film - hence the development of cinema. American inventor George Eastman, who had first manufactured photographic dry plates in 1878, provided a more stable type of celluloid film with his concurrent developments in 1888 of sensitized paper roll photographic film (instead of glass plates) and a convenient "Kodak" small box camera (a still camera) that used the roll film. He improved upon the paper roll film with another invention in 1889 - perforated *celluloid* (synthetic plastic material coated with gelatin) roll-film with photographic emulsion.

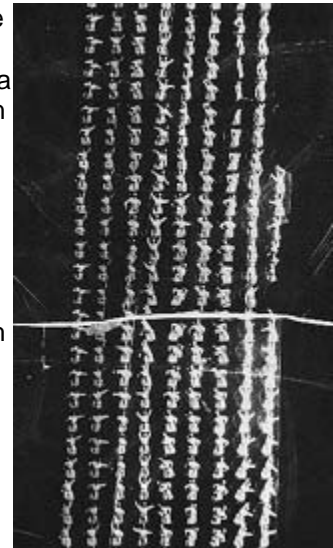
The Birth of US Cinema: Thomas Edison and William K.L. Dickson

In the late 1880s, famed American inventor Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) (and his young British assistant William Kennedy Laurie Dickson (1860-1935)) in his laboratories in West Orange, New Jersey, borrowed from the earlier work of Muybridge, Marey, Le Prince and Eastman. Their goal was to construct a device for recording movement on film, and another device for viewing the film. Dickson must be credited with most of the creative and innovative developments - Edison only provided the research program and his laboratories for the revolutionary work.

Although Edison is often credited with the development of early motion picture cameras and projectors, it was Dickson, in November 1890, who devised a crude, motor-powered camera that could photograph motion pictures - called a **Kinetograph**. This was one of the major reasons for the emergence of motion pictures in the 1890s. Edison Studios was formally known as the **Edison Manufacturing Company (1894-1911)**, with innovations due largely to the work of Edison's assistant Dickson in the mid-1890s.

The motor-driven camera was designed to capture movement with a synchronized shutter and sprocket system (Dickson's unique invention) that could move the film through the camera by an electric motor. The Kinetograph used film which was 35mm wide and had sprocket holes to advance the film. The sprocket system would momentarily pause the film roll before the camera's shutter to create a photographic *frame* (a still or photographic image). The formal introduction of the Kinetograph in October of 1892 set the standard for theatrical motion picture cameras still used today. However, moveable hand-cranked cameras soon became more popular, because the

motor-driven cameras were heavy and bulky.



In 1891, Dickson also designed an early version of a movie-picture projector (an optical lantern viewing machine) based on the Zoetrope - called the **Kinetoscope**. In 1889 or 1890, Dickson filmed his first experimental Kinetoscope trial film, *Monkeyshines No. 1*, the only surviving film from the cylinder kinetoscope, and apparently the *first* motion picture ever produced on photographic film in the United States. It featured the movement of laboratory assistant Sacco Albanese, filmed with a system using tiny images that rotated around the cylinder.

The first *public* demonstration of motion pictures in the US using the Kinetoscope occurred at the Edison Laboratories to the Federation of Women's Clubs on May 20, 1891, with the showing of *Dickson Greeting*.



The very short film's subject in the test footage was William K.L. Dickson himself, bowing, smiling and ceremoniously taking off his hat.

On Saturday, April 14, 1894, a refined version of Edison's Kinetoscope began commercial operation. The floor-standing, box-like viewing device was basically a bulky, coin-operated, movie "peep show" cabinet for a single customer (in which the images on a continuous film loop-belt were viewed in motion as they were rotated in front of a shutter and an electric lamp-light). The Kinetoscope, the forerunner of the motion picture film projector (without sound), was finally patented on August 31, 1897 (Edison applied for the patent in 1891). The viewing device quickly became popular in carnivals, Kinetoscope parlors, amusement arcades, and sideshows for a number of years.

The world's *first* film production studio - or "America's first movie studio," the **Black Maria**, or the Kinetographic Theater (and dubbed "The Doghouse" by Edison himself), was built on the grounds of Edison's laboratories at West Orange, New Jersey, on February 1, 1893, at a cost of \$637.67. It was constructed for the purpose of making film strips for the Kinetoscope. It was a black, tar-paper covered building/studio (with a retractable or hinged, flip-up roof to allow sunlight in), and built with a turntable to orient itself throughout the day to follow the natural sunlight.



In early May of 1893 at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Edison conducted the world's *first* public demonstration of films viewed through a Kinetoscope viewer and shot using the Kinetograph in the Black Maria. The exhibited 34-second film was titled *Blacksmith Scene*, and showed three people pretending to be blacksmiths.

The first motion pictures made in the Black Maria were deposited for copyright by Dickson at the Library of Congress in August, 1893.

In early January 1894, *The Edison Kinetoscopic Record of a Sneeze* (aka *Fred Ott's Sneeze*) was one of the first series of short films made by Dickson for the Kinetoscope viewer in Edison's Black Maria studio with fellow assistant Fred Ott. The short five-second film was made for publicity purposes, as a series of still photographs to accompany an article in *Harper's Weekly*. It was the earliest surviving, copyrighted motion picture (or "flicker") - composed of an optical record (and medium close-up) of Fred Ott, an Edison employee, sneezing comically for the camera.



Most of the first films shot at the Black Maria included segments of magic shows, plays, vaudeville performances (with dancers and strongmen), acts from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, various boxing matches and cockfights, and scantily-clad women. Most of the earliest moving images, however, were non-fictional, unedited, crude documentary, "home movie" views of ordinary slices of life - street scenes, the activities of police or firemen, or shots of a passing train. [Footnote: the 'Black Maria' studio appeared in Universal's comedy **Abbott and Costello Meet the Keystone Cops (1955)**.]



In the early 1890s, Edison and Dickson also devised a prototype sound-film system called the **Kinetophonograph** or **Kinetophone** - a precursor of the 1891 Kinetoscope with a cylinder-playing phonograph (and connected earphone tubes) to provide the unsynchronized sound. The projector was connected to the phonograph with a pulley system, but it didn't work very well and was difficult to synchronize. It was formally introduced in 1895, but soon proved to be unsuccessful since competitive,



better synchronized devices were also beginning to appear at the time. The first known (and only surviving) film with live-recorded sound made to test the Kinetophone was the 17-second *Dickson Experimental Sound Film (1894-1895)*.

In mid-April 1894, the Holland Brothers opened the first Kinetoscope Parlor at 1155 Broadway in New York City and for the *first* time, they commercially exhibited movies, as we know them today, in their amusement arcade. Patrons paid 25 cents as the admission charge to view films in five kinetoscope machines placed in two rows. *Young Griffio v. Battling Charles Barnett* was the first 'movie' to be screened for a paying audience on May 20, 1895, at a storefront at 153 Broadway in NYC. The 4-minute B&W film was made by Woodville Latham and his sons Otway and Grey. The staged fight had been filmed with an Eidoloscope Camera on the roof of Madison Square Garden on May 4, 1895 between Australian boxer Albert Griffiths (Young Griffio) and Charles Barnett. Shortly thereafter, nearly 500 people became cinema's first major audience during the showings of films with titles such as *Barber Shop*, *Blacksmiths*, *Cock Fight*, *Wrestling*, and *Trapeze*. Edison's film studio was used to supply films for this sensational new form of entertainment. More Kinetoscope parlors soon opened in other cities (San Francisco, Atlantic City, and Chicago).

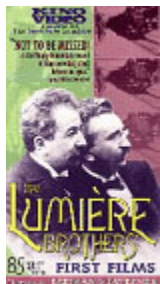


Early spectators in Kinetoscope parlors were amazed by even the most mundane moving images in very short films (between 30 and 60 seconds) - an approaching train or a parade, women dancing, dogs terrorizing rats, and twisting contortionists. In 1895, Edison exhibited hand-colored or tinted movies, including *Annabelle*, *the Serpentine Dancer*, in Atlanta,



Georgia at the Cotton States Exhibition. In one of Edison's 1896 films entitled **The Kiss (1896)**, May Irwin and John C. Rice re-enacted the final scene from the Broadway play musical *The Widow Jones* - it was a close-up of a kiss. Disgruntled, Dickson left Edison to form his own company in 1895, called the **American Mutoscope Company** (see below). [By the 1897 patent date of the Kinetoscope, both the camera (kinetograph) and the method of viewing films (kinetoscope) were on the decline with the advent of more modern screen projectors for larger audiences.]

The Lumiere Brothers:

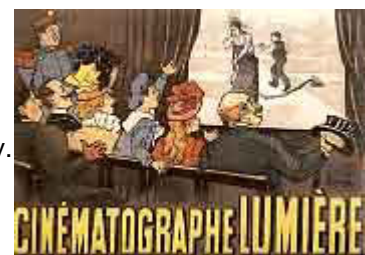


The innovative Lumiere brothers in France, Louis and Auguste (often called "the founding fathers of modern film"), who worked in a Lyons factory that manufactured photographic equipment and supplies, were inspired by Edison's work. They created their own combo movie camera and projector - a more portable, hand-held and lightweight device that could be cranked by hand and could project movie images to several spectators. It was dubbed the **Cinematographe** and patented in February, 1895. The multi-purpose device (combining camera, printer and projecting capabilities in the same housing) was more profitable because more than a single spectator could watch the film on a large screen. They used a film width of 35mm, and a speed of 16 frames per second - an industry norm until the talkies. By the advent of sound film in the late 1920s, 24 fps became the standard.



The first *public* test and demonstration of the Lumieres' camera-projector system (the Cinematographe) was made on March 22, 1895, in the Lumieres' basement. They caused a sensation with their first film, *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* (*La Sortie des Ouvriers de L'Usine Lumiere a Lyon*), although it only consisted of an everyday outdoor image - factory workers leaving the Lumiere factory gate for home or for a lunch break.

As generally acknowledged, *cinema* (a word derived from *Cinematographe*) was born on December 28, 1895, in Paris, France. The Lumieres presented the first *commercial* exhibition of a projected motion picture to a paying public in the world's first movie theatre - in the *Salon Indien*, at the Grand Cafe on Paris' Boulevard des Capucines. The 20-minute program included ten short films with twenty showings a day.



These factual shorts (or mini-documentaries), termed *actualities*, with the mundane quality of home movies, included the following:

1. *La Sortie des Ouvriers de L'Usine Lumière à Lyon (1895) (Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory)* (46 seconds)
2. *La Voltige (1895) (Horse Trick Riders)* (46 seconds)
3. *La Pêche aux Poissons Rouges (1895) (Fishing for Goldfish)* (42 seconds)
4. *Le Débarquement du Congrès de Photographie à Lyon (1895) (The Disembarkment of the Congress of Photographers in Lyon)* (48 seconds)
5. *Les Forgerons (1895) (Blacksmiths)* (49 seconds)
6. *Le Jardinier (l'Arroseur Arrosé) (The Gardener or The Sprinkler Sprinkled) (1895)* (49 seconds)
7. *Le Repas (de Bébé) (1895) (Baby's Meal)* (41 seconds)
8. *Le Saut à la Couverture (1895) (Jumping onto the Blanket)* (41 seconds)
9. *La Place des Cordeliers à Lyon (1895) (Cordeliers Square in Lyon)* (44 seconds)
10. *La Mer (Baignade en Mer) (1895) (Bathing in the Sea)* (38 seconds)

The ten shorts included the famous first comedy (# 6) of a gardener with a watering hose (aka *The Sprinkler Sprinkled, Waterer and Watered, or L'Arroseur Arrosé*), the factory worker short (# 1, see above), a sequence (# 9) of a horse-drawn carriage approaching toward the camera, and a scene (# 7) of the feeding of a baby. The Lumieres also became known for their 50-second short *Arrivée d'un train en gare à La Ciotat (1895) (Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat)*, which some sources reported was shocking to its first unsophisticated viewing audience.

Other Developments in Projecting Machines:

Two brothers in Berlin, Germany - inventors Emil and Max Skladanowsky - created their own film device for projecting films in November, 1895. Also in 1895, American inventor Major Woodville Latham developed an unpopular projector called an **Eidoloscope** (or **Panoptikon** projector). What was most innovative was its **Latham Loop**, the addition of a slack-forming loop to the film path to restrain the inertia of the take-up reel, and prevent the tearing of sprocket holes. It also allowed for the use of films longer than three minutes. (The loop is still used in virtually all film cameras and projectors to this day.) And American inventors Thomas Armat and Charles Francis Jenkins developed the **Phantascope** in 1893, an improved device (with intermittent-motion mechanisms) for projecting films on a screen. In September, 1895, they debuted their projection device at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition and patented it.

In London in January of 1896, Birt Acres also developed a machine to project films, called a **Kinetic Lantern**. In the same year, another Englishman Robert William Paul also developed and manufactured a popular projector which he called a **Theatrograph**. He became a pioneering film producer in Britain through his The Northern Photographic Works company.

In 1896, Edison's Company (because it was unable to produce a workable projector on its own) purchased an improved version of Thomas Armat's movie projection machine (the Phantascope, originally invented by C. Francis Jenkins in 1893), and renamed it the **Vitascope**. The Vitascope was the *first* commercially-successful celluloid motion picture projector in the US. On April 23, 1896 in New York City at Koster and Bial's Music Hall, the date of the *first* Vitascope projection for a paying American audience, customers watched the Edison Company's Vitascope project a ballet sequence in an amusement arcade during a vaudeville act.

The First Permanent Movie Theatres:

Films were increasingly being shown as part of vaudeville shows, variety shows, and at fairgrounds or carnivals. Audiences would soon need larger theaters to watch screens with projected images from Vitascopes after the turn of the century, using stage and opera houses and music halls. The earliest

'movie theatres' were converted churches or halls, showing *one-reelers* (a 10-12 minute reel of film - the projector's reel capacity at the time). The primitive films were usually more *actualities* and comedies.

In 1897, the first real cinema building was built in Paris, solely for the purpose of showing films. The same did not occur until 1902 in downtown Los Angeles where Thomas L. Talley's storefront, 200-seat Electric Theater became the *first* permanent US theater to exclusively exhibit movies - it charged patrons a dime, up from a nickel at the nickelodeons. By 1898, the Lumiere's company had produced a short film catalog with over 1,000 titles.

Georges Melies: French Cinematic Magician

Aside from technological achievements, another Frenchman who was a member of the Lumiere's viewing audience, Georges Melies, expanded development of film cinema with his own imaginative fantasy films. When the Lumiere brothers wouldn't sell him a *Cinematographe*, he developed his own camera (a version of the **Kinetograph**), and then set up Europe's first film studio in 1897. He created about 500 films (one-reelers usually) over the next 15 years (few of which survived), and screened his own productions in his theatre. In late 1911, he contracted with French film company Pathe to finance and distribute his films, and then went out of business by 1913.

An illusionist and stage magician, and a wizard at special effects, Melies exploited the new medium with a pioneering, 14-minute science fiction work, **Le Voyage Dans la Lune - A Trip to the Moon (1902)**. It was his most popular and best-known work, with about 30 scenes called *tableaux*. He incorporated surrealistic special effects, including the memorable image of a rocketship landing and gouging out the eye of the 'man in the moon.' Melies also introduced the idea of narrative storylines, plots, character development, illusion, and fantasy into film, including trick photography (early special effects), hand-tinting, dissolves, wipes, 'magical' super-impositions and double exposures, the use of mirrors, trick sets, stop motion, slow-motion and fade-outs/fade-ins. Although his use of the camera was innovative, the camera remained stationary and recorded the staged production from one position only.



Further US Development:

The key years in the development of the cinema in the U.S. were in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when the Edison Company was competing with a few other burgeoning movie companies. The major pioneering movie production companies, mostly on the East Coast, that controlled most of the industry were these rivals:

- the **Edison Manufacturing Company** - began producing films for the Kinetoscope in 1891, with headquarters and production facilities in West Orange, NJ (see above); formally became a company in 1894. Afterwards, Edison intensely fought for control of 'his' movie industry by harrassing, sue-ing, or buying patents from anyone he thought was threatening his company.
- the **Selig Polyscope Company** (originally called **The W.N. Selig Company**), was founded in 1896, in Chicago, Illinois by "Colonel" William Selig. Initially, the company specialized in slapstick comedies, "jungle" films, historical subjects, serials, travel films, and the early westerns starring Tom Mix.
- the **American Vitagraph Company**, formed by British-born Americans J. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith in 1896. The company's first fictional film was *The Burglar on the Roof*, filmed and released in 1897. It soon became the largest film company, turning out 200 films a year.

- **American Mutoscope Company**, founded in 1895 in New York City, NY by disenchanted Edison worker William K. L. Dickson, Herman Casler, Henry Marvin and pocket lighter inventor Elias Koopman. Their first motion picture machine was the **Mutoscope** - a peephole, flip-card device similar in size to a Kinetoscope. Instead of using film, a spinning set of photographs mounted on a drum inside the cabinet gave the impression of motion. This was followed by a projector - the **Biograph Projector**, that was first demonstrated in New York City in 1896. It was the first time projected images from an American film company were shown to an American movie theatre audience. They also devised a camera called the **Mutograph** (originally called the **Biograph**) that didn't use sprocket holes or perforations in the motion-picture film. The company released its first film in 1896, titled *Empire State Express*.



Soon, the American Mutoscope Company became the most popular film company in America. They were formally renamed the **American Mutoscope and Biograph Company** in 1899. They were known for many firsts:

- the first filming of the Pope, at the Vatican, in 1899
- the first production company to be contracted by the White House, in 1899, and the first studio to record films of a living president, William McKinley
- in 1903, establishment of the first movie studio in the world (in NYC) to rely exclusively on artificial light
- makers of the first western film shot and produced in the West, **A California Hold Up (1906)**
- in 1906, Biograph's Florence Lawrence was the world's first "movie star" -- dubbed: "The Biograph Girl"
- the first major motion picture company in southern California to make an actual film in Los Angeles -- **A Daring Hold-Up in Southern California (1906)**
- makers of the first film shot specifically in the village north of LA known as "Hollywood" - a "Latino" melodrama titled **In Old California (1910)**
- makers of one of the first full-length feature films, D. W. Griffith's epic **Judith of Bethulia (1914)**

Their competition caused Edison to file a patent-infringement lawsuit against them in 1898. In 1903, they began making films in the 35mm format (rather than 70mm). They employed D. W. Griffith in 1908 (who became one of the pioneers of silent film), and were re-named the **Biograph Company** in 1909 - (see below).

Breakthrough Films of Edwin S. Porter - the "Father of the Story Film":



"Moving pictures" were increasing in length, taking on fluid narrative forms, and being edited for the first time. Inventor and former projectionist Edwin S. Porter (1869-1941), who in 1898 had patented an improved Beadnell projector with a steadier and brighter image, was also using film cameras to record news events. Porter was one of the resident Kinetoscope operators and directors at the Edison Company Studios in the early 1900s, who worked in different film genres. Porter was hired at Edison's Company in late 1900 and began making short narrative films, such as the 10-minute long **Jack and the Beanstalk (1902)**. He was responsible for directing the six-minute long **The Life of an American Fireman (1903)** - often alleged to be the *first* American documentary, docudrama, fictionalized biopic or realistic narrative film, with non-linear continuity. It combined re-enacted scenes, the dreamy thoughts of a sleeping fireman seen in a round iris or 'thought balloon', and documentary stock footage of actual fire scenes, and it was dramatically edited with inter-cutting (or jump-cutting) between the exterior and interior of a burning house. Edison was actually uncomfortable with Porter's editing techniques, including his use of close-ups to tell an entertaining story.

The Great Train Robbery (1903)

With the combination of film editing and the telling of narrative stories, Porter produced one of the most important and influential films of the time to reveal the possibility of fictional stories on film. The film was the one-reel, 14-scene, approximately 10-minute long **The Great Train Robbery (1903)** - it was based on a real-life train heist and was a loose adaptation of a popular stage production. His visual film, made in New Jersey and not particularly artistic by today's standards - set many milestones at the time:



- it was the first narrative Western film with a storyline, and included various western cliches (a shoot-out, a robbery, a chase, etc.) that would be used by all future westerns [Note: the same claim was made for the earlier 21-minute **Kit Carson (1903)**]
- it was a ground-breaking film - and one of the earliest films to be shot out of chronological sequence, using revolutionary parallel cross-cutting (or parallel action) between two simultaneous events or scenes; it did not use fades or dissolves between scenes or shots
- it effectively used rear projection in an early scene (the image of a train seen through a window), and two impressive panning shots
- it was the first 'true' western, but not the first actual western [Note: Edison's **Cripple Creek Bar-Room Scene (1899)** may actually be the first western.]
- it was the first real motion picture smash hit, establishing the notion that film could be a commercially-viable medium
- it featured a future western film hero/star, Gilbert M. Anderson (aka "Broncho Billy")

In an effective, scary, full-screen closeup (placed at either the beginning or at the end of the film at the discretion of the exhibitor), a bandit shot his gun directly into the audience. The film also included exterior scenes, chases on horseback, actors that moved toward (and away from) the camera, a camera pan with the escaping bandits, and a camera mounted on a moving train. Porter also developed the process of film editing - a crucial film technique that would further the cinematic art. Most early films were not much more than short, filmed stage productions or records of live events. In the early days of film-making, actors were usually unidentified and not even trained actors. The earliest actors in movies, that were dubbed "flickers," supplemented their stage incomes by acting in moving pictures.

Nickelodeons: Expanded Film Exhibition



In the early 1900s, motion pictures ("flickers") were no longer innovative experiments. They soon became an escapist entertainment medium for the working-class masses, and one could spend an evening at the cinema for a cheap entry fee. Kinetoscope parlors, lecture halls, and storefronts were often converted into *nickelodeons*, the first real movie theatres. The normal admission charge was a nickel (sometimes a dime) - hence the name *nickelodeon*. They usually remained open from early morning to midnight.

The first nickelodeon, a small storefront theater or dance hall converted to view films, was opened in Pittsburgh by Harry Davis in June of 1905, showing **The Great Train Robbery**. Urban, foreign-born, working-class, immigrant audiences loved the cheap form of entertainment and were the predominant cinema-goers. One-reel shorts, silent films, melodramas, comedies, or novelty pieces were usually accompanied with piano playing, sing-along songs, illustrated lectures, other kinds of 'magic lantern' slide shows, skits, penny arcades, or vaudeville-type acts. Standing-room only shows lasted between ten minutes and an hour. The demand for more and more films increased the volume of films being produced and raised profits for their producers.

But newspaper critics soon denounced their sensational programs (involving seduction, crime, sex and infidelity) as morally objectionable and as the cause of social unrest and criminal behavior - and they called for censorship. They also criticized the unsanitary and unsafe conditions in the often makeshift

nickelodeons. By the early 20th century, nickelodeons were being transformed into more lavish *movie palaces* (see more below) in metropolitan areas. By 1908, there were approximately 8,000 neighborhood theatres.

The First Feature-Length Films:

In the early years of cinema, film producers were worried that the American public could not last through a film that was an hour long, thereby delaying the advent of feature films (60-90 minutes in length) in the US. According to most sources, the *first* continuous, full-length narrative feature film (defined as a commercially-made film at least an hour in length) was writer/director Charles Tait's five-reel biopic of a notorious outback folk hero and bushranger, **The Story of the Kelly Gang (1906, Australia)**, with a running time of between 60-70 minutes. Only fragments of the film survive to this day. Australia was the only country set up to regularly produce feature-length films prior to 1911.



[The film was remade many times, notably as director Tony Richardson's **Ned Kelly (1970)** with rock star Mick Jagger in the lead role, and as **Ned Kelly (2003)** with Heath Ledger, Orlando Bloom, Geoffrey Rush and Naomi Watts.]



The first US documentary re-creation, Sigmund Lubin's one-reel film **The Unwritten Law (1907)** (subtitled "A Thrilling Drama Based on the Thaw-White Case/Tragedy") dramatized the true-life murder -- on June 25, 1906 -- of prominent architect Stanford White by mentally unstable and jealous millionaire Harry Kendall Thaw over the affections of model/showgirl Evelyn Nesbit (who appeared as herself), Thaw's wife. The film was considered quite controversial for its sensational and scandalous story of murder and sex. [Alluring chorine Nesbit would become a brief sensation, and the basis for Richard Fleischer's biopic film **The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing (1955)**, portrayed by Joan Collins, and E.L. Doctorow's musical and film **Ragtime (1981)**, portrayed by an Oscar-nominated Elizabeth McGovern.]

The *first* feature-length film made in Europe was from France - Michel Carre's **L'Enfant Prodigue (1907, Fr.)**, an adaptation of a stage play, that premiered in Paris on June 20, 1907. The *first* feature-length film produced in the US was Vitagraph's **Les Miserables (1909)** (each reel of the four-reel production was released separately). A second feature film, Stuart Blackton's Vitagraph five-reel production titled **The Life of Moses (1909)** was also released in separate installments.

The *first* feature-length film to be released *in its entirety* in the US was the 69-minute epic **Dante's Inferno (1911, It.) (aka L'Inferno)**, inspired by Dante's 14th century poem *The Divine Comedy*. It opened in New York on December 10, 1911 at Gane's Manhattan Theatre. It was made by three directors Francesco Bertolini, Giuseppe de Liguoro, and Adolfo Padovan, took two years to make, and cost over \$180,000.



The *first* US feature film to be shown *in its entirety* was H. A. Spanuth's five-reel production of **Oliver Twist (1912)**. The four-reel silent costume drama **Queen Elizabeth (1912, Fr.) (aka Les Amours de la Reine Élisabeth)** (starring Sarah Bernhardt) was the third film to be shown whole, in its US premiere in July at the Lyceum Theatre in NYC. The five-reel **Richard III (1912)** is thought to be the earliest surviving complete feature film made in the US. Although US production and exhibition of feature films started slowly in

1912, the next few years demonstrated tremendous growth when foreign competition (with often superior products) encouraged development.

D. W. Griffith: Early Film Pioneer at Biograph

The greatest American pioneer/auteur in film was Kentucky-born David Wark (D. W.) Griffith, "the master storyteller of film" or "the father of film". He was known as the first cinematic *auteur* or storyteller who gave future film-makers the 'grammar' of film-making. An unsuccessful young stage actor and writer, he had appeared in Edwin S. Porter's and Thomas Edison's **Rescued From the Eagle's Nest (1907)** (the earliest-known surviving work with Griffith as an actor in his first starring role) and other one-reelers, such as **Her First Adventure (1908)**, **Caught by Wireless (1908)**, and **At the French Ball (1908)**.



Inspired by the experience, Griffith joined **The American Mutoscope and Biograph Company** in New York City as a director in 1908, where he remained until 1913. He was expected to direct/produce two one-reel films each week - a prodigious rate. Griffith's first contracted film, released by Biograph, was the 12-minute **The Adventures of Dollie (1908)**, adapted from Frank Norris' novel *The Octopus* and his story "A Deal in Wheat," followed by the one-reel **The Red Man and the Child (1908)**, the first of his films to be reviewed by *Variety*. He went on to direct over 60 short films the following year, such as the 14-minute **A Corner in Wheat (1909)** - based on Frank Norris' 1903 novel *The Pit*. D.W. Griffith directed the *first* film made in the small village of Hollywood north of LA, **In Old California (1910)**, a Biograph "Latino" melodrama.



Elderbush Gulch (1913).

He made about 450 one- and two-reelers (15-30 minutes in length) over a period of four years for Biograph, including **Fighting Blood (1911)** and **Under Burning Skies (1912)**, although his name never appeared in the credits. His early films were mostly westerns, urban life dramas, romances, comedies, 'ride-to-the-rescue' crime stories, Civil War era melodramas, historical epics, social commentaries and adventure tales. Two of his Biograph films included the 18-minute urban gangster film **The Musketeers of Pig Alley (1912)** (with notable menacing close-ups) and the early 29-minute western **The Battle at**

Elderbush Gulch (1913).

In many of these short films, he realized the potential of the new film medium, with his cameraman Billy Bitzer. He experimented with early lighting and camera techniques (closeups, fade-outs, varied shot depths including establishing shots, far shots and medium shots, backlighting, naturalistic, low-key light sources, increased use of locations, etc.) and systematized their use - and would later bring them to artistic perfection in order to shape the film's narrative. In the one-reel chase film **The Lonely Villa (1909)** with Mary Pickford, Griffith employed his most sophisticated use to date of the cinematic technique of "cross-cutting" to build up tension within scenes. He also used the same technique with rapid editing in **The Girl and Her Trust (1912)** - another film with a suspenseful last-minute action sequence of a rescue (a Griffith trademark). The film also featured outdoor filming, and an early use of a tracking shot of a train.

He also trained and created his own company or stock of 'players' - including such newcomers (and future stars) as Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Mary Pickford, Blanche Sweet, Mae Marsh, Harry Carey, Henry B. Walthall, Mack Sennett, Florence Turner, Constance Talmadge, Donald Crisp, and Lionel Barrymore. Biograph insisted that the actors' names remain uncredited. Griffith's 15-minute, one-reel thriller **An Unseen Enemy (1912)** introduced two young actresses: Dorothy and Lillian Gish to the screen, as they were menaced by a closeup of a gun pointed at them - and at the camera to scare the audience.



Contributing to the modern language of cinema, he used the camera and film in new, more functional, mobile ways with composed shots, traveling shots and camera movement, split-screens, flashbacks, cross-cutting (showing two simultaneous actions that build toward a tense climax), frequent closeups to observe details, fades, irises, intercutting, parallel editing, dissolves, changing camera angles, soft-focus, lens filters, and experimental/artificial lighting and shading/tinting. Toward the end of his time at Biograph, his most artistic film was the two-reel, 23-minute **The Mothering Heart (1913)** with Lillian Gish in an early lead role.

The Growing Film Industry:

Businessmen soon became interested in the burgeoning movie industry. Some of the biggest names in the film business got their start as proprietors, investors, exhibitors, or distributors in nickelodeons.

- Adolph Zukor
- Marcus Loew
- Jesse Lasky
- Sam Goldwyn (originally named Goldfish)
- the Warner brothers
- Carl Laemmle
- William Fox
- Louis B. Mayer

They realized that further profits could be derived from new systems of distribution, and by expanding the film audience to the middle-class, women, and children. At first, films (and the necessary projection machinery and equipment) were sold, not rented, to exhibitors. As film production increased, cinema owner William Fox was one of the first (in 1904) to form a distribution company (a regional rental exchange), that bought shorts and then rented them to exhibitors at lower rates. Carl Laemmle opened his first nickelodeon in Chicago in 1906.

Early Warner Brothers History:

The Warner brothers (Harry, Albert, Sam, and Jack), originally soap salesmen in Youngstown, Ohio, visited nearby Pittsburgh, PA and realized the potential of nickelodeons. In 1904 (some sources claimed 1907), they founded the Pittsburgh-based **Duquesne Amusement Supply Company** - reportedly the first film exchange (or distribution company) in the US. They bought a used Edison Kinetoscope projector, and toured through W. Pennsylvania and Ohio to exhibit films (mostly *The Great Train Robbery (1903)*). They also opened their *first* silent film theatre, the 99-seat Cascade Theatre, in the mining town of New Castle, Pennsylvania in 1907, which they operated until 1911. In 1912, Sam Warner opened a film production office in Los Angeles, **Warner Bros. Pictures**, and formally incorporated in 1923.

Soon, successful exhibitors turned their profits back into their businesses and were able to provide additional amenities for their viewership, including comfortable seats, pre-show entertainment, peanuts/popcorn for sale, and accompanying pianists and orchestras for the silent films.



The Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC): The Edison 'Trust'



In 1908, mostly a group of nine leading East Coast-centered companies (including Biograph and others - see list below) led by the Edison Film Manufacturing Company, formed a partnership or consortium to become

cooperative rather than competitive. From 1909 on, they pooled their resources, and legally monopolized the growing American film industry, specifically in New York and on the East Coast. Their main goal, to stifle up-and-coming independent film makers, was accomplished by hiring lawyers and strong men to enforce their restrictions. They raised admission prices, limited censorship by cooperating with regulatory bodies, and prevented film stock from getting into the hands of non-members.

The nine major film companies in the newly-formed **Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC)** in 1908, known as "**The Edison Trust**" or "**Patents Trust**" included:

Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC)	
Edison	originally known as the Edison Manufacturing Company (1894-1911), see above
Biograph	see above
American Vitagraph Company	formed in 1896 by Englishmen Albert E. Smith, J. Stuart Blackton and Ronald A. Reader; in 1904, they built a new studio and opened a film office in Chicago (Illinois)
Selig Polyscope Company	formed in 1896 by William N. Selig, an early American film pioneer, who built his own camera and projector; by 1909, Selig had three studios in operation: in New Orleans (Louisiana), Edendale/Los Angeles (California), and his base in Chicago (Illinois); as a result of litigation, when he was brought to court by Thomas Edison for patent infringement in 1905, Selig joined with Edison (and other companies) to form the MPPC
Lubin	formed by Siegmund Lubin (one of the first movie moguls), originally an optical and photography expert in Philadelphia, who built his first state of the art studio in 1910 - known as "Lubinville"
(American) Star Films or Pictures (Melies)	formed by inventive French film-maker Georges Melies (see above)
(American) Pathe Pictures	the dominant company in France (Vincennes) and then all of Europe, originally formed as Société Pathé Frères by brothers Charles, Emile, Theophile and Jacques Pathe in 1896; began as exhibitors of Edison's phonograph (and records), and later in 1902 built their own movie studio, and later a chain of movie theatres; became a dominant supplier of motion picture cameras and projects; eventually merged with RKO in 1931
Essanay Studios	formed in 1907 in Chicago, Illinois by George K. Spoor and Gilbert A. "Bronco Billy" Anderson (known as the first western movie star). The name was derived from the initials of the founders - "S" and "A"
Kalem Company	founded in Glendale, California in 1907, named after its founders George Kleine, Samuel Long and Frank Marion

Also included in the MPPC was the leading film distributor, **the Kleine Company**, and the major raw film supplier, **Eastman Kodak**. Kleine was formed in 1908 by George Kleine, a prominent film distributor and producer in Chicago.

A newly-formed cartel, the **MPPC** was created to legally control distribution, production, and exhibition of films, with agents and detectives to enforce its rules. To limit competition from other independent companies and to protect and increase profits, it bought and pooled major patents (on movie machines

such as cameras and projectors), and charged anyone (by issuing licenses) who wanted to use their equipment or hire their films. Its goals were to reduce foreign imports, fight movie piracy, protect film copyrights, reduce the power of other emerging distributors, and drive other rivals out of business.

The burgeoning monopolistic trust limited the length of films to one or two reels, charged royalties/fees on exhibitors using their movie equipment (\$2/week), refused to give screen credits to players, and established a standard price of half a cent per foot for film prints that were to be rented (rather than sold) on a weekly basis. They threatened sanctions to prevent exhibitors from showing non-Trust films or from renting non-Trust projectors. The MPPC attempted to threaten and close down competing studios, distributors, and exhibitors, limited directorial artistic freedom, and required film-makers to purchase Trust-approved film stock. The company had signed a contract with George Eastman for the exclusive rights to his supply of famed film stock. In 1910, the MPPC formed the **General Film Company** to further manage the distribution of its members' films, and stamp out non-licensed independents.

Unlicensed Independents Fought Against the MPPC:

From the very beginning, the monopolistic MPPC was fought by the unlicensed independents (dubbed "pirates" or "outlaws"), led by IMP's founder Carl Laemmle (see below). Others who fought the MPPC included Harry E. Aitken (**Majestic Films**), William Fox (founder of the **Fox Film Corporation**), and Adolph Zukor (**Famous Players**, the precursor to **Paramount**). The flexible, stealthy, and adventurous independents avoided coercive MPPC restrictions (the requirement to use only Trust film stock and projectors, for example) by using unlicensed equipment, obtaining their own film materials, and making films on the sly. Soon, they moved to California and opened up a rival film-making industry, where they could be comparatively safe, and there was abundant sunshine for film-making.

Independents were innovative in their making of longer, multi-reel feature films, as opposed to the standard-length one-reel films produced by the MPPC. And they realized that audiences desired to learn the names of uncredited film performers - hence, the development of the star system. The growth of Hollywood, the studio system, the take-over of cinema by businessmen and entrepreneurs, and the film star system were coming quickly. By 1911, dialogue titles (first used in 1910) came into popular use, and credits started to appear in films. (see more later)

IMP (the Independent Moving Pictures) Company - Precursor to Universal Films/Pictures:



By 1909, Carl Laemmle had become a feisty renegade and maverick movie mogul and film distributor. Involved in both movie distribution and film production, he founded his own company in New York in 1909 -- the **Yankee Film Company**, with Abe and Julius Stern. It was soon renamed the **Independent Moving Pictures (IMP) Company**. IMP's *first* film was the one-reel **Hiawatha (1909)** - arguably the first 'independent' film. Soon, he journeyed West where he began to expand his film production by

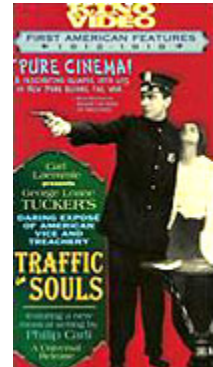


1910. In 1911, IMP acquired one of the *first* West Coast studios at Gower St. and Sunset Blvd. in Hollywood, on the opposite corner from **Christie-Nestor Studio** (see more below). Before permanently relocating westward in the Los Angeles area, IMP's final two pictures produced in NYC were the two-reel **The Dawn of Netta (1912)** (it was the *first* film released by the newly-formed Universal, see below) and the one-reel **The Nurse (1912)**.

In 1910, Laemmle hired a former IMP actor named Thomas H. Ince to run and direct films in this new Hollywood studio, called the **IMP (Independent Moving Pictures) Studio**. However, in 1911, Ince left and joined the **New York Motion Picture Company (NYMP)** for a short while before moving west again to the 'Echo Park' area of California where he wrote and directed westerns for **Bison Life Motion Pictures**, a subsidiary of NYMP, for \$150 per week. The first western directed by Ince was **War on the**

Plains (1912), followed by Ince's production of the successful **Custer's Last Raid (1912)**. He was soon dubbed "Father of the Western" for his prolific making of one- and two-reel westerns. (more later on Ince)

IMP's *first* feature-length film release - the *first* American feature-length sex film - was the six-reel melodrama **Traffic in Souls (1913)** (aka **While New York Sleeps**). It was a "photo-drama" expose of white slavery at the turn of the century in NYC, although the film exploitatively promised steamy sex in its advertisements. This was one of the first films to understand that 'sex sells,' although its producers worried that a 'feature-length' film on any subject wouldn't be successful. It was the most expensive feature film of its time at \$57,000, although its record earnings were \$450,000.



In 1912, after being forced out of distribution by the Edison Trust, Laemmle founded the **Universal Film Manufacturing Co.**, or **Universal Film Company** - the precursor to **Universal Pictures** in 1915. It was formed from the merger of many independent companies, including:

- **IMP Studios** (Carl Laemmle)
- **Powers Motion Picture Company** (Pat Powers)
- **Rex Motion Picture Company** (William Swanson)
- **Champion Film (or Motion Picture) Company** (Mark Dintinfass)
- **Christie-Nestor Studio, or Nestor Film (or Motion Picture) Company** (founded by David Horsley in 1910) - established the *first* real studio to open in Hollywood, California in 1911, and soon was producing three short one-two reel movies a week (one comedy, one drama, and one western); it merged with Universal in 1915
- **the New York Motion Picture Company** (Charles Baumann and Adam Kessel), which controlled **Bison 101**

One of Universal's land acquisitions in Los Angeles in 1914 was a large 230-acre Nestor Ranch site bought for \$165,000 - that soon became known as Universal City. In early 1915, Laemmle *officially* set up and opened up Universal City as its own unincorporated town, located in the San Fernando Valley north of Hollywood. He built **Universal Pictures** studio there -- the world's first self-contained location dedicated to film-making. At first, the studio allowed visitors (who were charged admission) the chance to watch films being made there - the forerunner of Universal Studios tours today. The *first* feature film made at Universal City and completed just before the official opening was the six-reel epic feature film **Damon and Pythias (1914)**, starring William Worthington.

Universal Pictures was the *first* major, long-lasting studio, created as a break-free challenge to defy the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC). The company was successful with films that were adaptations of classic literature, such as one of the earliest versions of **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1915)** with King Baggot, or Lois Weber's moralistic message picture **Where Are My Children? (1916)** about birth control, and director Erich von Stroheim's first film **Blind Husbands (1919)**. Their most successful silent film to date was **The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1923)** with Lon Chaney as Quasimodo. This led to their next major Chaney film, Rupert Julian's **Phantom of the Opera (1925)**.



Their first talkie was **Melody of Love (1928)** with Walter Pidgeon. Silent westerns, comedies, and action-adventure films would soon become the studio's trademark productions, as well as horror films in the 1930s.

Grand and Modern Picture Houses:

Grand, modern movie theaters or 'picture houses' (palaces) that charged from ten to fifteen cents admission began to appear (and replaced nickelodeons) by 1912. Vast urban populations were eager for

a cheap form of entertainment. America's *first* motion picture palace was New York City's The Regent, that opened in 1913, with a capacity of 1,800.

The trend toward larger, opulent 'picture palaces', to cater to increasing upper-class audiences, was exemplified by the opening of the 3,000-seat Strand in New York's Times Square in 1914. The *first* US air-conditioned theatre was established in Chicago at Central Park Theatre in 1917 by chain operators Sam Katz and Barney and A. J. Balaban (known as "B & K"). [In 1925 B&K merged with Famous Players-Lasky Studio to become the foundation of the national Publix chain, that existed until the mid 1940s, at which time federal laws dismantled the film industry's vertical integration.]

East and West Coast Film Studio Development:

As a result of the MPPC's corporate efforts, independent film makers fought back. For example, Laemmle encouraged the US government to bring anti-trust action against the Patents Company, and also signed deals with the Lumieres in France to provide a supply of film stock. The independents had sought places free from oppressive, strong-armed interference by the powerful trust, from 1908-1912. That led them away from East Coast urban centers (New York and New Jersey) and lawsuits from the Edison Trust's lawyers to Southern California (near the Mexican border), where sunlight, cheap property, inexpensive non-union labor, cooperative business and real estate interests, and exotic varying locales (ocean, desert, and mountain landscapes) were plentiful.



In 1903, Hollywood was officially incorporated as a municipality. In 1910, the population of Hollywood was only 5,000. In about ten years, it would grow to 35,000. The rapid growth of film production in the Los Angeles/Hollywood area accounted for over 60% of all US film-making by 1915. Independent producers also formed their own production companies in Europe.

The Move to Los Angeles / Hollywood:

Budding filmmakers were lured to the West Coast by incentives from the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, with promises of sunshine - an essential before the dawn of indoor studios and artificial lighting, a potentially-cheap labor force, inexpensive land for studio construction, and varied landscapes for all the genres of films. Soon, West Coast production was challenging other studios in New York City and Ft. Lee, New Jersey.

With the one-reel **The Count of Monte Cristo (1908)**, the **Selig Polyscope Company** claimed it was the *first* studio to shoot a narrative film in Los Angeles, although Biograph was first. It was also made partly in Chicago and other areas on the coast around LA. Selig was probably the *first* U.S. company to shoot a two-reel film, **Damon and Pythias (1908)**. [The *first* dramatic film made solely in LA was Selig's director Francis Boggs' **In the Sultan's Power (1909)**.]

In 1909, the Selig Polyscope Company established the *first* permanent film studio in the Los Angeles area, at 1845 Alessandro Street (now Glendale Blvd.) in Edendale [present day Echo Park]. This is where Tom Mix and G.M. "Broncho Billy" Anderson gained fame before going on to other studios. In 1913, Selig purchased 32 acres of adjoining land, where he established the **Selig Zoo** at 3800 Mission Rd. in Eastlake Park. The company became well known for animal and jungle pictures, having at hand the resources of the zoo - the largest privately owned zoo in the country at the time. In 1916, Selig sold the Edendale property to William Fox and moved his studio onto the zoo property. Selig Polyscope made the *first* true serial, **The**



Adventures of Kathlyn (1913-1914), but closed down its operations in 1918 when it went bankrupt, and the Selig facilities then became **Louis B. Mayer Pictures**.



By 1911, New Jersey film producer David Horsley established/opened Hollywood's *first* motion picture studio, the **Christie-Nestor Studio**, also called the **Christie Film Company** or **Nestor Motion Picture Company**, in an old tavern at the corner of Sunset Blvd. and Gower Street (later an area dubbed "Poverty Row"). The area around the corner became known as "Gower Gulch". [Many years later, the site of the Nestor Studio was occupied by the West Coast headquarters of CBS.] The city of Hollywood was developing a 'movie colony' and distinctive carefree lifestyle for its film-makers and actors. "Hollywood" was soon on its way to becoming the film capital of the world.

Kinemacolor:

The primitive natural color film system dubbed **Kinemacolor**, commercially-developed around 1906 by expatriot American Charles Urban and his inventive British partner George Albert Smith, was one of the primary rivals to early Technicolor. Kinemacolor was a very early, simple two-color additive process (although not the first), which used only red and green. The 8-minute UK short film **A Visit to the Seaside (aka A Visit to the Seaside at Brighton Beach, England)**, directed by Smith himself, was the *first* commercially-produced film in natural color - using the revolutionary process. It was first exhibited in 1908, then shown publically in 1909 in London, and later released in the US in late 1910.



In 1909, it established itself as the **Kinemacolor Company of America**, and built a film studio in Los Feliz (near Hollywood where Sunset and Hollywood Blvds. meet). It became most notable for its Hollywood studio being taken over by D. W. Griffith in 1913 and renamed **Griffith Fine Arts Studio**. Griffith also took over Kinemacolor's failed plans to film Thomas Dixon's **The Clansman**, which eventually became **The Birth of a Nation (1915)**.

Although this two-color system was quite successful in Europe, and quite a few films were made using the process in the teens - including two of the world's very *first* color feature films: the documentary **The Durbar at Delhi (1912)**, and the first feature-length color film **The World, the Flesh, and the Devil (1914)** that premiered in London, the onset of the Great War and damaging patent lawsuits brought about its demise.

Anti-Trust Action Against the Trust:

By 1912, 15 film companies were operating in Hollywood, and large studios were becoming the norm. Nickelodeons were on the decline and were being replaced by larger movie palaces, and audiences demanded longer films beyond one or two reels. Movie production was becoming divided between the East and West Coast studios.

Eventually, a successful anti-trust suit, instigated by William Fox (founder of the **Fox Film Corporation**), was first heard by the US government in 1913 (on behalf of independent film companies including Paramount, Fox, and Universal) against the MPPC. In October, 1915, the MPPC and its General Film subsidiary were declared an illegal monopoly. The trust was ordered to pay over \$20 million in damages. Following litigation for anti-trust activities and its 'restraint of trade,' the MPPC was finally ordered to disband by the US Supreme Court in 1917 and officially dissolved by 1918. But the independents had already outmaneuvered the ineffectual trust. The dominance of East Coast studios was over, as Hollywood became the center of film production, and many of the independents on the West Coast combined into bigger companies.

Vitagraph:

During the early 1900s, **Vitagraph** (founded in 1896 by two British vaudevillians) was a major competitor to Edison's Company. It became known for its filming of historical events, including Teddy Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American War, the Boer War in S. Africa, the Galveston flood of 1900, President McKinley's assassination in 1901, Roosevelt's inauguration in 1904, and the aftermath of the San Francisco Earthquake in 1906.

In 1905, they built their *first* studio in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn, New York for their base, and expanded into California in 1910, where they opened a film-production studio in downtown Santa Monica on 2nd St., but were forced to move slightly eastward by 1915 due to Santa Monica's fog - not conducive to natural-light filming conditions. [Vitagraph's West Coast studio lot in Hollywood is now the location of ABC Television Center Studios.] And it was the *first* studio to become a film exhibitor.

Some of its earliest stars were 'Broncho Billy' Anderson, Annette Kellerman, Florence E. Turner (the "Vitagraph Girl"), Norma Talmadge, Alice Calhoun, and Clara Kimball Young. Vitagraph was the only MPPC company that survived the break-up of the trust in 1917. It was eventually absorbed into Warner Bros. in 1925.

Early Film Stars and Firsts:

Carl Laemmle was responsible for creating the 'star system.' In the earliest productions, actors' identities were kept anonymous and unknown in order to give preference to the pictures themselves, to prevent performers from overvaluing themselves, and because the profession of movie acting was considered inferior to stage acting. The MMPC also was requiring that actors remained nameless to prevent them from demanding higher salaries and becoming more powerful. At first, the popularity of uncredited film stars was determined by the weight of their post-bags. The *first* US production company to start the 'star system' trend was **Kalem**, when it issued star portraits and posters in 1910.



In 1909, Laemmle lured Florence Lawrence (the first "Biograph Girl"), a child star and one of the unknown 'players' at D. W. Griffith's Biograph studios, away from the rival studio to **IMP** - his own studio. He catapulted her to fame in 1910 by originating the '*publicity stunt*.' He orchestrated a shameless but spectacular, high-profile 'publicity stunt' with rumors of her death in a street-car accident in St. Louis, and her subsequent resurrection at the IMP Company's St. Louis premiere of her first IMP film, in March of 1910. He named her the "The IMP Girl," "The Biograph Girl" (after the company she previously worked for), or "Flo Lo".

Laemmle increased her salary to a phenomenal \$1,000 a week and she became the *first* player to receive a screen credit and to have her name revealed in her first film for IMP - director Harry Solter's **The Broken Oath (1910)**. He cultivated her stardom with a large personal, publicity campaign - Florence Lawrence was literally the very '*first* American movie star.' And she was interviewed in 1911 in *Motion Picture Story* - often considered the *first* movie star interview. Other studios followed suit and created their own stars, such as "the Vitagraph Girl", and film advertisements and



lobby posters at theaters displayed photos of the star players for theatre audiences.

Another Biograph actress with long, cork-screw blonde curly locks, (nicknamed "Little Mary") Mary Pickford (soon to be known as "the Girl with the Golden Hair") also moved over to IMP from Biograph. She took over for the departed Florence Lawrence and became the *first major* star of movie-making. In 1912, she returned to Biograph for awhile, and then moved onto **Adolph Zukor's Famous Players**. She

was soon dubbed "America's Sweetheart", became universally popular and commanded high salaries. She was paid \$175/week at first and then \$1,000/week for a five year period. Capitalizing on the intense bidding for actresses, Mary Pickford in 1916 she became an independent producer, and became the highest-paid star in the business after accepting a two-year, million-dollar contract (that included a percentage of the profits).

Then in 1918, Pickford defected from Adolph Zukor's Famous Players and joined **First National Pictures** with a production deal worth millions of dollars. At the same time, actor Charlie Chaplin signed up with First National. **First National Pictures** had already opened up a large studio facility in Burbank in 1917, and was fast becoming one of the largest film companies.

The most highly-paid performers at the end of the 1910s and in the early 20s were Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle (the first star with a guaranteed \$1 million/year minimum), Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, Alla Nazimova, and Tom Mix.

Fan Magazines:

The phenomenon of fan magazine publishing and movie trade papers was also created. The first US fan magazine *Motion Picture Story Magazine* debuted in February, 1911. *The Moving Picture World* and *The Motion Picture News* also offered interviews and gossip columns about the personal lives and careers of the stars. *Photoplay*, the *first* true movie fan magazine, debuted in 1912, and gave rise to the whole idea of a celebrity culture.



Serials:



Serials (films released in episodic installments) became extremely popular in the short period before The Great War. They included death-defying stunts, speedy plots, sensationalism, and nice-girl female leads in distress. The *first* American serial was the Edison Company's **What Happened to Mary? (1912)** (12 episodes), starring actress Mary Fuller. "Cliffhangers" were added as a standard serial feature in Selig's *first* true serial, **The Adventures of Kathlyn (1913-14)** (13 episodes), with Kathlyn Williams.

And then Pearl White had her *first* starring role in another episodic serial (of 20 episodes), **The Perils of Pauline (1914)** for Pathe in 1914. White's success led to further serials: **The Exploits of Elaine (1914)** (14 episodes), **The New Exploits of Elaine (1915)** (10 episodes), and **The Romance of Elaine (1915)** (12 episodes). For more on the development of serial films from the pre-talkie era to the 1950s, see [serial films](#).

Beginning in 1914, the feature film, the cartoon (the *first* prominent animated cartoon character was Gertie, from **Gertie the Dinosaur (1914)** by Winsor McCay), the war film, the costume epic, the western, the slapstick comedy, and the adventure serial appeared in substantial form.



The *first* publicity-fabricated, studio-created character was also popularized on Hollywood movie screens as "the vamp." In 1915, the **Fox Film Corporation** (founded by early film producer William Fox who owned a number of movie houses on the East Coast and then moved westward to Hollywood) renamed one of its main box-office stars Theda Bara (her given name was Theodosia Goodman), and she quickly became Hollywood's *first* tempting 'sex symbol' and vamp archetype after an appearance in **A Fool There Was (1916)**, Fox's *first* feature



release. Publicists intrigued moviegoers by claiming that Theda Bara's name was an anagram of 'Arab Death' and that she shared an astrological sign with Cleopatra - in actuality, the actress was a Jewish girl from Cincinnati, Ohio.

Thomas Harper Ince: Early Film Innovator



One of the earliest trail-blazing industry's innovators was producer/director Thomas Harper Ince (1882-1924), whose major claims to fame were the making of crude westerns and the development of the "factory-studio system" to mass produce films. After a short stint at Biograph as an actor and director, he joined Carl Laemmle's **Independent Moving Picture (IMP) Company**, and moved west to California in 1911. The **New York Motion Picture Co.** and the **Selig Polyscope Film Company** of Chicago set up studios near Los Angeles in Edendale [present-day Echo Park], initiating the establishment of West Coast studio production.

Ince supervised the New York Motion Picture Company-owned subsidiary **Bison Company**, or **Bison Life Motion Pictures**. It became a studio/ranch that specialized in westerns when, in 1912, his Bison Company production studios purchased the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch and the Wild West Show to use their props and performers for his assembly-line, mass-produced films, and was renamed **Bison 101 Company**. The **Bison Company** studios, also became known as *Inceville*, after he bought about 20,000 acres of seacoast land in Santa Ynez Canyon and the surrounding hills.

He developed a system of advanced planning and budgeting, and shot his films from detailed "shooting scripts" (that broke down each scene into individual shots). It became a prototype for departmentalized and specialized Hollywood film studios of the future, with a studio head (or boss), directors, managers, production staff, and writers all working together under one organization (the unit system). This pattern or system was best typified by the organizations formed by David O. Selznick and Samuel Goldwyn. Ince's best known film production was the anti-war film **Civilization (1916)** with frequent director-collaborator Reginald Barker. In the early 1910s, famed director John Ford's older brother Francis was directing and starring in westerns in California for producer Ince, before joining Universal and Carl Laemmle in 1913.

Thomas Ince decentralized and economized the process of movie production by enabling more than one film to be made at a time (on a standardized assembly-line) to meet the increased demand from theaters, but his approach led to the studio's decline due to his formulaic, unfresh, mechanized, and systematized approach to production. [However, his methods continue into the present day within Hollywood's major studios.]

His studio reinvigorated the Western film genre. Ince's authentic-looking pictures were due to the fact that he used actual props and hired real-life cowboys and Indians from the Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch and Wild West Show as extras in his films. In 1914, he was responsible for launching the career of William S. Hart, an actor who starred in dozens of westerns until 1925. In 1915, he joined D. W. Griffith (of **Griffith Fine Arts Studio**) and Mack Sennett (of **Keystone Pictures**, see below) to form the **Triangle Motion Picture Company** (aka **the Triangle Film Corporation**) (with a studio on Sunset Boulevard). (Earlier, this studio was the home of the **Kinemacolor Company**, located at the intersection of Sunset and Hollywood Boulevards.) During construction of a new Triangle studio in Culver City on Washington Boulevard [the present-day site of Sony Studios], directly next to **Thomas Ince Pictures**, Triangle moved onto the **Griffith Fine Arts Studio** lot.

After the Great War, Ince broke off from Triangle and joined competitor Adolph Zukor to form **Paramount/Artcraft**, and Ince also built another studio (named **Thomas H. Ince Pictures**) in Culver City. When his association with Zukor ended in 1919, he joined an independent film alliance named **Associated Producers**, which later merged in 1922 with **First National**. Filming ceased at the Inceville property around 1922 and the buildings burned to the ground in 1924. Ince mysteriously died one night in November, 1924, aboard William Randolph Hearst's yacht in the harbor of San Pedro while celebrating

his 42nd birthday. (The murder was recreated in Peter Bogdanovich's **The Cat's Meow (2002)**, which speculated that he was shot when a drunken Hearst caught his mistress, Marion Davies, in amorous circumstances with Charlie Chaplin and shot at him, accidentally hitting and killing Ince instead.) [Very few of Ince's films from his prolific days of film production survive to this day, with one notable exception being **The Italian (1915)**, preserved by the National Film Registry.]

Keystone and Mack Sennett ("The King of Comedy"):

Besides westerns and melodramas, one-reel slapstick comedies were also very popular. One of the other most influential figures in film at this time, famous for a brand of physical comedy called *slapstick*, was Canadian vaudevillian Mack Sennett, originally a writer, director, and apprentice actor for D. W. Griffith at Biograph in New Jersey. The studio's early "slapstick" comedy, **The Curtain Pole (1909)**, director D. W. Griffith's only 'slapstick' comedy, with Mack Sennett in the lead role, boosted the career of the aspiring comic showman.



After three years on the East Coast, Sennett left in 1912 with financial backing to co-found the New York Motion Picture Company-owned **Keystone Film Company** or **Keystone Pictures Studio** (with Cecil B. DeMille and D. W. Griffith) in Los Angeles (Glendale). Sennett became known as the self-dubbed 'King of Comedy' - well-known for his unsophisticated, humorous **Keystone Comedies**, first released in 1913 and assembly-line produced for many years - in a period dubbed the "Golden Age of Comedy." He was the film industry's *first* real producer. The *first* Mack Sennett Keystone production was **Cohen Collects a Debt (1912)**. Sennett's *first* *Keystone Kops* short film was **Hoffmeyer's Legacy (1912)**. The hapless characters in the *Keystone Kop* films were particularly hilarious, enduring automobile collisions, near-misses, mishaps, and other physical comedy.

He made the *first* American feature-length comedy - **Tillie's Punctured Romance (1914)**, was responsible for almost a thousand, mostly crude, low-budget films - usually one and two-reel comedies, and he popularized bathing beauties with skimpy outfits. Most of the earliest, action-based, zany films were filled with improvised action, manic slapstick, physical farce, stereotyped characters, exaggerated madcap chases, pie-throwing, pranks and romances.



Comedians such as Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, Charlie Chaplin, Marie Dressler, Gloria Swanson, the Keystone Kops, Mabel Normand, cross-eyed Ben Turpin, Harry Langdon, Harold Lloyd, and Chester Conklin trace their roots to the Keystone Studio.

In 1915 Keystone was merged as an autonomous unit into the new **Triangle Film Corporation**, which united the talents of Sennett, D. W. Griffith, and American producer Thomas Ince. The Keystone Studio did not do well after the departure of Sennett in 1917, when he formed a new company, **Mack Sennett Comedies**, featuring his main stars Normand and Turpin.

Charles Chaplin and The Tramp:



The *first* truly great film star was British vaudevillian actor Charlie Chaplin - he began working as an apprentice for Sennett in 1913, playing small parts as a Keystone Kop. In 1914, he debuted his trademark mustached, baggy-pants "Tramp" character (in **Kid Auto Races At Venice (1914)**) and appeared in his first Mack Sennett short comedy *Making a Living*. In the same year, Chaplin appeared in the six-reel **Tillie's Punctured Romance (1914)**, Sennett's first feature-length picture (and the *first* US multi-reel comedy feature). Charlie Chaplin also added his famous walk to his

familiar tramp character in **The Tramp (1915)**, created under the Essanay Company. He soon began directing, writing, producing, and starring in his own films.

Having perfected his Little Tramp character by mid-decade, Chaplin left Sennett in 1916 and began working for the **Mutual Film Corporation** for \$10,000/week, making short films such as **The Rink (1916)**, **The Pawnshop (1916)**, **The Immigrant (1917)** and **Easy Street (1917)**. He also built his own studio, **Charlie Chaplin Studio**, in Hollywood in 1917. Soon afterwards, Chaplin signed the first million-dollar film contract in 1918 with **First National Pictures** and made **The Kid (1921)**.

The Growth of the Industry:

During the war years (1914-1917) before the US entered the Great War, the demand for films as escapist entertainment increased. Audiences clamored for more complicated plots, multi-reel films, and publicity information about the stars. Europe was so entrenched in warfare that the US was able to gain ascendancy in the film industry, with Hollywood, rather than New York, becoming synonymous with the American film industry. By the end of the European War when overseas film production had basically collapsed, Hollywood became the preeminent film producer and the center of world film production. 90% of all films shown in foreign countries were American.

To keep up with the demand, it was necessary for the burgeoning US film industry to develop more sophisticated and organized methods of production - hence, the development of film studios with a factory/assembly line structure that cost-effectively could churn out more films. The predominant players who were to become future, competing studio film moguls, included:

- Adolph Zukor
- Jesse L. Lasky
- Carl Laemmle
- Samuel Goldwyn (originally named Goldfish)
- Louis B. Mayer

The Development of the Studios:



Until around 1912, producers and exhibitors insisted that audiences couldn't sit through films longer than a single reel (about 15 minutes). But with the arrival of longer films from Europe (notably made by Adolph Zukor), one-reel films soon gave way to two-reel and four-reel features. In 1912, Zukor proved that there was an audience for a four-reel, 'feature-length' French film **Queen Elizabeth (1912)**, starring famous French stage actress Sarah Bernhardt. (Her appearance in the film also increased respect for motion picture

acting.)



Around 1912, Zukor established an independent film studio that he called the **Famous Players Film Company**, with distribution arranged with a new organization called *Paramount*. It included a number of famous performing personages, such as Sarah Bernhardt. Stage producer and early film executive Jesse Lasky also formed the **Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company** in partnership with his brother-in-law Samuel Goldfish (later renamed Goldwyn) and Cecil B. DeMille, to produce feature length motion picture versions of popular plays. [The yellow barn that the new company rented would become legendary - it became the birthplace of the *first major* film studio in Hollywood. The "Lasky Barn" was located in an orange grove on Selma Avenue and Vine Street. The structure was later moved in 1926 to the Paramount lot on Melrose Avenue, where it remained for 50 years.]



Young, unknown and aspiring director Cecil B. DeMille came out to the West Coast from New York, to become the new company's director-general of all film production. In 1914, he made his debut film with Lasky and co-producer/director Oscar Apfel, **The Squaw Man (1914)**. It was the *first* feature-length (6 reels @18 minutes/reel) western movie made in Hollywood at the newly-acquired studio/barn or stable on Vine Street, and the *first* film with screen credits. It was also the *first* feature-length film for the **Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company**. The film was a great success due to the marketing efforts of the Company's general manager Samuel Goldfish. [It cost about \$45,000 to produce and earned about a quarter million dollars at the box-office.] De Mille became the *first* director to remake a picture and produce the same film three times successfully. [*The Squaw Man* was filmed again in 1918 as a silent picture, and then in 1931 for MGM as a sound picture.]

After its initial success, **Jesse Lasky's Company** merged in 1916 with its friendly rival, **Adolph Zukor's Famous Players Film Company** and Frank Garbutt's **Bosworth, Inc.** . When Zukor merged his studio with Jesse Lasky - the combined company was renamed **Famous Players-Lasky Corporation** and it migrated to Hollywood, where it opened a studio in Hollywood on Sunset Boulevard. Edwin Porter became director-general for the **Famous Players-Lasky**, the forerunner of Paramount Pictures. Within months of the merger in 1916, Goldfish (Goldwyn) resigned (or was promptly fired) and sold his \$7,500 initial investment for \$900,000.



Afterwards, Zukor took control of both Lasky and Paramount Pictures Corporation (a distributing company). Zukor ultimately became the leader of the first Hollywood studio that evolved - **Paramount Pictures** - and the nation's largest movie company. Zukor forced theatre owners to accept "block booking" (the rental of groups or blocks of films) in order to assure that all of the studio's films would be distributed. [Zukor and Lasky were to rule Paramount from 1916 to 1932.]

Other studios were soon following Paramount's lead. Already, Carl Laemmle had merged his studio with several others and formed Universal in 1912. By 1915, he had built a large studio north of Hollywood (and named it Universal City), as already described.

The Beginnings of MGM:



After being forced out of the Famous Players-Lasky company in 1916, Samuel Goldfish (Goldwyn) began a new studio in 1917 with partner Edgar Selwyn, naming it **Goldwyn Pictures Corporation**. [Goldfish legally acquired the studio's name for his own in 1918 - Goldwyn, taking its name from the first syllable of Gold-fish's name and the last one of Sel-wyn's name.] In 1918, Goldwyn Pictures purchased the old Triangle lot in Culver City where they set up their studios. When Goldwyn experienced difficulties working within the studio system, he sold his shares in **Goldwyn Pictures Corporation** to the **Metro Pictures Corporation** (founded in 1916 by Richard A. Rowland and Louis B. Mayer). In a few years, Mayer left this partnership to start up his own production company in 1918, called the **Louis B. Mayer Pictures Company**. In 1920, **Metro Pictures Corporation** was purchased by early theater exhibitor Marcus Loew of **Loew's Inc.**

The new owner, Marcus Loew, merged his **Metro Pictures Corporation** (with its recently-acquired **Goldwyn Pictures Corporation**), known as **Metro-Goldwyn**, with the **Louis B. Mayer Pictures Company** to form **Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer** in 1924. As part of the deal, Loew made Mayer head of the new Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. **MGM** was destined to become the dominant studio of Hollywood's Golden Age during the 30s, under Louis B. Mayer's direction. **He Who Gets Slapped (1924)** was its *first* movie release, and the famous MGM lion roar in the studio's opening logo was *first* recorded and viewed in a film in 1928.

In the meantime, Goldwyn became an independent producer, forming **Samuel Goldwyn Pictures, Inc.** in 1925. He started to release his films through **United Artists**. He would become one of the leading, influential, independent film producers during Hollywood's Golden Era. By 1918, the cinema was one of America's leading industries, as more and more independent producers set up their own studios. Hollywood films dominated the European market, and Hollywood helped to inspire and support the war effort.



Mack Sennett's alluring 'Bathing Beauties' (including later stars Carol Lombard and Gloria Swanson) became soldiers' pin-up adornments. [Sennett's original bathing beauty in an early one-piece suit was Mabel Normand, and the very first example was found in **The Water Nymph (1912).**]

Griffith's Landmark Epics:



D. W. Griffith also advanced cinema by experimenting with longer film lengths, after the phenomenal success of the two-hour Italian epic **Quo Vadis? (1912)**, directed in Europe by Enrico Guazzoni. Griffith's response to the full-length features that were already coming over from Europe was the *first* American four-reeler, **Judith of Bethulia (1913/14)**, starring Blanche Sweet, Henry Walthall and the Gish sisters. It was the *last* film he directed for Biograph. The early epic was made over-budget and secretly produced in 1913, but not released until a year later due to concern about its uncharacteristic length. The film was made on location in Chatsworth, California.

The film's story was based on the Apocrypha and told about the title character - an attractive widow/martyr-heroine of ancient Bethulia who undertook to save her city under battle siege by seducing and killing the invading Assyrian general/conqueror. The film marked the transition point between shorter films and longer feature films, and demonstrated more of Griffith's cinematic techniques (e.g., cross-cutting of concurrent narratives).



Soon afterwards due to conflict with the short-sighted Biograph over the expensive and lengthy film, Griffith left the studio in 1913 to make longer 'feature' films, and joined the independent **Mutual/Reliance-Majestic** studio in Hollywood, California. He brought along his talented cameraman G. W. "Billy" Bitzer and other actors, including Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Blanche Sweet, Mae Marsh, Henry B. Walthall, and Robert Harron. His most noted film in 1914 was the psychological thriller **The Avenging Conscience (1914)**, an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

The Birth of a Nation (1915): Notorious, Contentious, and Sweeping

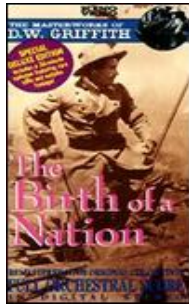


Griffith risked his own fortune of over \$100,000 and created the *first* American epic feature film, a twelve-reeler entitled **The Birth of a Nation (1915)** (originally titled *The Clansman* and based on Rev. Thomas E. Dixon's 1905 staged melodrama of the same name). It was the longest movie made in the US up to that time. Technically, the three hour epic film about the Civil War and its aftermath during Reconstruction was a brilliant and stunning new cinematic



work - a modern screen masterpiece that advanced the art of film-making to new heights, with beautifully-structured battle scenes, costuming, and compelling, revolutionary story-telling, editing and photographic techniques (dollying, masking, use of irises, flashbacks, cross-cuts and fades). The iconoclastic film that argued for white supremacy starred a cast of actors/actresses that had followed Griffith from Biograph. Although the film had moments of lyricism and poignancy, it also told an electrifying, potent story that climaxed with Griffith's trademark suspenseful

chase/rescue finale - as members of the Klan rode to the rescue of besieged farmers threatened by Piedmont's black militia.



The film premiered in Los Angeles at Grauman's Theatre on February 8, 1915, with a ticket price of \$2 (higher admission prices could be charged for feature-length movies), and on Broadway in New York, it played to packed houses for almost a year. Although its investment was \$110,000 (estimated), it became one of the highest-grossing films of all time (\$10-14 million dollars, although some figures were probably exaggerated). Griffith's masterpiece was also met with considerable controversy and protest regarding its racist message, stereotyped racial caricatures, white actors in black-face, and a sympathetic, glorified portrayal of KKK members as heroes. Even though President Wilson, following a special screening at the White House, reportedly said: "It is like writing history with Lightning. And my only regret is that it is all terribly true," the film was strongly denounced by the NAACP, and racial disturbances erupted in several cities (Atlanta, Boston, and Chicago), while the KKK experienced a resurgence.

Intolerance (1916) -

The next year after his smash hit *The Birth of a Nation*, Griffith responded to criticisms that he incited racial prejudice with an over three-hour long extravagant, follow-up masterpiece **Intolerance (1916)**, that premiered in New York to mixed reviews. Produced for about \$400,000 and shot at the **Griffith Fine Arts Studio**, the film was financially unsuccessful. The pacifistic film, that intertwined four stories about victims of prejudice, failed primarily because of its uncharacteristic and complex four-story structure and bad timing. Its release came during a period of pro-war sentiment.



The remarkable and ambitious historical pageant, with incredible cinematography by Billy Bitzer and the early use of a camera crane, interwove four stories in different historical eras (modern, medieval, Judean, and Babylonian) to chronicle intolerance, bigotry, and inhumanity throughout the ages. The story of Christ, the fall of Belshazzar's Babylon, the massacre of Huguenots by Catholics in 16th century France, and a modern story of reform and labor, were partially linked by titles and by a symbolic image. Griffith's favorite star, Lillian Gish, served as a unifying image in the film as a mother gently rocking a cradle. The film also ended with a cross-cutting finale.

In reaction to Griffith's epic **Intolerance (1916)**, Cecil B. DeMille (still at Famous Players-Lasky Corp., soon to be Paramount) went on to make his *first* large scale spectacle/epic film titled **Joan the Woman (1916)**, one of the first epic biopics. It was DeMille's version of the Joan of Arc story starring opera star Geraldine Farrar and Wallace Reid. Its release coincided with the US entry into The Great War (and echoed the raging conflict), and the film served as propaganda for the Allies, with its framing story set in the English trenches of World War I. The film received critical acclaim and was greeted with modest box-office success.

The Founding of United Artists:



While at **First National**, the highest-paid film super-stars Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford feared that their film company was soon to be merged with giant Paramount, and hence they would lose autonomy over their careers. To take control of their own work, in another precedent-setting move in 1919, Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford joined with director D. W. Griffith and fellow actor Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. to form their own movie company - **United Artists Corporation**. They built a studio on Formosa Avenue at Santa Monica Boulevard [the present day site of the Warner's Hollywood lot]. UA became a prestigious firm distributing only independently-produced films. Their aim was to provide greater independence for distribution of their films

(and those of other stars including Buster Keaton, Rudolph Valentino, and Gloria Swanson) and to thwart the efforts of the bigger studios.

Early Pioneering Female Hollywood Movie-Makers:

Lois Weber

Although women couldn't vote until 1920 (with the 19th Amendment to the Constitution), they were working in the burgeoning Hollywood in the early part of the century. They were in every major area of movie-making: writing, directing, acting, producing, and editing. One of the earliest and most successful female directors in the mid-teens to early 1920s was Lois Weber, an actress-turned director. By 1916, she was the highest-paid director at Universal Studios, and in the next year, she formed her own production company or studio, Lois Weber Productions. She was notable as the first woman to direct a feature film in the US - the Rex production of **The Merchant of Venice (1914)**, in which she also played the role of Portia. She co-directed with her husband Phillips Smalley (who played the part of Shylock). One of Weber's most controversial films was the allegorical **Hypocrites (1914)** - it featured a reappearing naked woman dubbed "Miss Truth." She directed **The Dumb Girl of Portici (1916)** featuring the screen debuts for both Anna Pavlova and Boris Karloff. Her most successful and best-known film at Paramount was the social issue film **The Blot (1921)** about a poor but proud family that wouldn't accept charity.

Her reformist principles and concerns for the social problems of women were reflected in her blunt social drama films with moral themes (about such provocative issues as abortion, birth control, capital punishment, promiscuity, racism, child labor, etc.). **Where Are My Children? (1916)** was against abortion or "race suicide," but advocated birth control. The preachiness and frankness of her directorial efforts often faced censorship hearings and fueled controversy, only adding to her fame and notoriety, until audiences in the 20s lost interest.

Frances Marion

One of Weber's young proteges was Frances Marion, who later, from the mid-20s through the late 1930s, became the highest paid screenwriter in the industry, especially when she worked at MGM. She wrote scripts for over 200 films, and won two Oscars for her original stories for **The Big House (1929/30)** and **The Champ (1931/32)**. She was the *first* female to win an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, and the *first* woman to win an award for a non-acting achievement. She was also nominated (her third and last career nomination) for her screenplay for **The Prizefighter and the Lady (1933)**.

Marion was also responsible for creating a popular character for movie star Mary Pickford in **The Poor Little Rich Girl (1917)**, **Little Princess (1917)**, **M'Liss (1918)**, and **Pollyanna (1920)**. Frances also helped boost the film career of fading Marie Dressler in her film adaptation of **Anna Christie (1929/30)** (starring Greta Garbo), and wrote **Min and Bill (1930/31)** for Marie - helping her to win the Best Actress Oscar. She also was noted for writing some of the best scripts for actress Marion Davies, newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst's romantic interest. Her work over the years was prolific - she also contributed to Victor Sjöström's **The Scarlet Letter (1926)** and **The Wind (1928)**, and also co-scripted the screenplays for **Dinner at Eight (1933)** and **Camille (1936)**.

The Birth of the Major Studios:

By the end of the decade, studio producers, including Warner Bros. (the four brothers Harry, Abe, Sam, and Jack), Adolph Zukor, Samuel Goldwyn, Carl Laemmle, William Fox, Louis B. Mayer, Marcus Loew, and others were beginning to shape the movie business. (See next section for other studio developments) Major and minor studios, each with their own distinctive style and/or stars, were soon formed from their efforts in only a few years during the next decade:



- **Warner Bros.** (1923)
- **Columbia** (1924)
- **Metro-Goldwyn** (later renamed **Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer** or **MGM**) (1924)
- **RKO** (1928)

From 1911-1919, the number of feature-length films released each year increased from 2 to 646, and grand movie palaces sprouted up in major metropolitan areas. The *first* major, feature-length melodrama, D. W. Griffith's **Broken Blossoms (1919)** (working title: "The Chink and the Child") closed out the decade, although it was made in only 18 days and cost only \$60,000. Cameraman Billy Bitzer incorporated a new cinematic technique - with a thin silk cloth over the camera, he was able to create a diffused, soft-focus effect for photographing actress Lillian Gish. The sentimental film told an evocative yet tragic love story between a young abused waif (Gish) and a gentle Chinese man (Richard Barthelmess). It was Griffith's *first* film from his new production company (United Artists) formed that same year.



Robert Wiene's expressionistic **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919)** and F. W. Murnau's vampire film **Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie Des Grauens (1922)**, with their angular distorted sets, unique compositions, expressionistic shadowy images, visual story-telling, and stylized acting (especially by Max Schreck as the title character) encouraged cinematographic experimentation. Early documentary film-maker Robert Flaherty made the landmark ethnographic study of the Inuit Eskimos - the low-budget film **Nanook of the North (1922)** that is considered the *first documentary film*. His work brought more life and realism to the screen than the earliest film documentaries that merely recorded historical events (i.e., the San Francisco Earthquake - 1906).

Stars and Studios of the Era:

Major stars in the decade before and into the Roaring Twenties included Ramon Novarro, Rudolph Valentino, Francis X. Bushman, Broncho Billy Anderson, Mary Pickford, Clara Bow, John Gilbert, Charlie Chaplin, Colleen Moore, Alla Nazimova, Lillian Gish, King Baggot, Theda Bara, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., Pearl White, German shepherd Rin Tin Tin, Louise Brooks, Bessie Love, Pola Negri, Tom Mix, Gloria Swanson, Norma Talmadge, Brigitte Helm, Emil Jannings, Marion Davies, and William S. Hart.

