

Early Classical Hollywood Cinema

1900's-In the early 1900s, motion pictures ("flickers") were no longer innovative experiments/scapist entertainment medium for the working-class masses/ Kinetoscope parlors, lecture halls, and storefronts turned into *nickelodeon*. Admission 5 cents (sometimes a dime) - open from early morning to midnight.

1905-First Nickelodean -Pittsburgh by Harry Davis in June of 1905/few theatre shows in US- shows GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

Urban, foreign-born, working-class, immigrant audiences loved the cheap form of entertainment and were the predominant cinema-goers

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 (Goldfish), the Warner brothers, Carl Laemmle, William Fox, Louis B. Mayer

1906-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 Charles Tait's biopic of a notorious outback bushranger, **The Story of the Kelly Gang (1906, Australia)**- Australia was the only country set up to regularly produce feature-length films prior to 1911.-

1907-Griffith begins working for Edison- Edwin S. Porter's and Thomas Edison's **Rescued From the Eagle's Nest (1907)/ Griffith**- 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.

1908-By 1908, there were approximately 10,000 neighborhood theatres

1908- Sept. 9-Edison w/Biograph bring film producing companies under control by forming MOTION PICTURE PATENTS COMPANY (MPPC) known as The Trust) – firms based in New York, Chicago, New Jersey East Coast-centered companies (including Biograph and others - see list below) led by the Edison Film Manufacturing Company, form this 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 raising admission prices, limiting censorship by cooperating with regulatory bodies, and preventing film stock from getting into the hands of non-members. 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 Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC, known as The Trust) is formed by leading film companies, notably

Edison and Biograph, to protect their patents and copyrights by pooling patents on equipment, to raise the stakes for new entrants to the industry and to reduce foreign imports, especially those from Europe, which have a 70 per cent market share.

"**The Edison Trust**" included:

- **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, who built his own camera and projector; by 1909, Selig had three studios in operation: in New Orleans (Louisiana), Edendale (California), and Chicago (Illinois)
- **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"
- **Melies** - formed by inventive French film-maker Georges Melies (see above)
- **Pathe** - the dominant company in France, formed by Charles and Emile Pathe in 1896; began as exhibitors of Edison's phonograph, and later in 1902 built their own movie studio; 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
- **Kleine Company** - formed in 1908 by George Kleine, a film distributor and producer

1908-Griffith begins with The American Mutoscope and Biograph Company (Biography) in New York City as a director in 1908. 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 Adventures of Dolly (1908)**

American producers don't think audience will sit through movie over 30 minutes 2 reels

1907-09-12 The *first* feature-length film made in Europe was from France - Michel Carre's **L'Enfant prodigue (1907)**, an adaptation of a stage play. The *first* feature film produced in the US was Vitagraph's **Les Miserables (1909)** (each reel of the four-reel production was released separately). The *first* US feature film to be shown in its entirety was H. A. Spanuth's production of **Oliver Twist (1912)**

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, where sunlight, cheap property, inexpensive non-union labor, and exotic locales (ocean, desert, and mountain landscapes) were plentiful. 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.

1909- MPPC was fought by the unlicensed independents (dubbed "pirates" or "outlaws"), led by the feisty renegade Carl Laemmle/(**Independent Moving Pictures (IMP) Company-first** Yankee Film Company / 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**).

1910- April 18th MPPC forms a subsidiary, the General Film Company, which introduces the practices of 'barring' (called 'zoning' in the US) to give particular exhibitors the exclusive rights to the first run of films in specific geographical areas, and of 'blind booking', requiring exhibitors to take whichever other films are offered in order to acquire the most popular titles. The 'first-run' concept allows a higher rental to be charged for new films.

1910- D.W. Griffith directed the *first* film made in Hollywood, **In Old California (1910)**, a Biograph melodrama.

1911- Thomas Harper Ince moves to Los Angeles with Laemmle's with IMP/after short stint at Biograph. Supervises the Bison Company, a New York Motion Picture Company-owned studio/ranch that specialized in westerns. 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). The Bison Company became known as *Inceville*, after Ince bought about 20,000 acres of seacoast land in Santa Ynez Canyon and the surrounding hills. It became a prototype for departmentalized Hollywood film studios of the future, with a studio head, directors, managers, production staff, and writers all working together under one organization (the unit system). 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.]

1912, Laemmle founded the Universal Film Manufacturing Co., or **Universal Films** – to become Universal Pictures. Universal was the *first* major, long-lasting studio, created as a break-free challenge to defy the Motion Picture Patents Company

1912-US brings suit against MPPC. under the Sherman Antitrust Act 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) Wins in 1915-MPPC declared monopoly. Dissolved in 1917.

1913- America's *first* motion picture palace was New York City's The Regent, that opened in 1913.

1913 Griffith forms his own company

1914- 3,000-seat Strand in New York's Times Square in 1914.

1915- Georges Melies- *Trip to the Moon*

1915 -The activities of the Motion Picture Patents Company and the General Film Company, its distribution subsidiary, are declared illegal under the Sherman anti-trust law and the GFC is dissolved by federal court order.

1917-Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) is finally dissolved by federal court order.

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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, 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 10,000 neighborhood theatres.

The First Feature 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 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 Charles Tait's biopic of a notorious outback bushranger, **The Story of the Kelly Gang (1906, Australia)**, with a running time of between 60-70 minutes. [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.] Australia was the only country set up to regularly produce feature-length films prior to 1911.

The *first* feature-length film made in Europe was from France - Michel Carre's **L'Enfant prodigue (1907)**, an adaptation of a stage play. The *first* feature 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, Charles Kent's Vitagraph five-reel production titled **The Life of Moses (1909)** was also released in separate installments. The *first* film to be released in its entirety in the US was **Dante's Inferno (1911, It.)**. The *first* US feature film to be shown in its entirety was H. A. Spanuth's production of **Oliver Twist (1912)**. **Queen Elizabeth (1912, Fr.)** was the third film to be shown whole. Although US production and exhibition of feature films started slowly in 1912, the next few years demonstrated tremendous growth when foreign competition 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." He was known as the first cinematic *auteur* or storyteller. 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. 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 Adventures of Dolly (1908)**, followed by **The Red Man and 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 **A Corner in Wheat (1909)**. D.W. Griffith directed the *first* film made in Hollywood, **In Old California (1910)**, a Biograph melodrama.

He made over 400 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, romances, comedies, melodramas, historical epics, and adventure tales. He also trained and created his own company or stock of 'players' - including such newcomers (and future stars) as Lillian Gish, 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 Dorothy and Lillian Gish to the screen. One of his early films was the gangster film **The Musketeers of Pig Alley (1912)**.

In many of these short films, 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 **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.

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.

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 (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. The Warner brothers (Harry, Albert, Sam, and Jack) opened their *first* theatre, the Cascade, in New Castle, Pennsylvania in 1903, and then in 1904 founded the Pittsburgh-based **Duquesne Amusement & Supply Company** (the precursor to **Warner Bros. Pictures**) to distribute films.

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 'Trust'

In 1908, mostly a group of 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 raising admission prices, limiting censorship by cooperating with regulatory bodies, and preventing film stock from getting into the hands of non-members.

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

- **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, who built his own camera and projector; by 1909, Selig had three studios in operation: in New Orleans (Louisiana), Edendale (California), and Chicago (Illinois)
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The newly-formed cartel, the **MPPC** was created to 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 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.

IMP (the Independent Moving Pictures) Company:

From the very beginning, the MPPC was fought by the unlicensed independents (dubbed "pirates" or "outlaws"), led by the feisty renegade Carl Laemmle. By 1909, Laemmle entered into film production as the Yankee Film Company, soon renamed the **Independent Moving Pictures (IMP) Company** in New York. IMP's first film was **Hiawatha (1909)**. 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. In 1911, IMP acquired the first West Coast studio at Gower and Sunset in Hollywood (see more below). They were innovative in their making of longer, multi-reel feature films, as opposed to the standard-length 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.

IMP Becomes the Precursor to Universal Films:

In 1912, Laemmle founded the Universal Film Manufacturing Co., or **Universal Films** - the precursor to Universal Pictures, from the merger of many independent companies:

- **IMP** (Carl Laemmle)
- **Powers Motion Picture Company** (Pat Powers)
- **Rex Motion Picture Company** (William Swanson)
- **Champion Film Company** (Mark Dintinfaas)
- **Nestor Film Company** (founded by David Horsley in 1910) - established the *first* real studio to open in Hollywood, California in 1911, and soon was producing three movies a week; merged with Universal in 1915
- **the New York Motion Picture Co.** (Charles Baumann and Adam Kessel)

Universal was the *first* major, long-lasting studio, created as a break-free challenge to defy the Motion Picture Patents Company.

IMP's *first* feature-length film - the *first* American feature-length sex film - was the 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 \$5,700, although its record earnings were \$450,000. The company was also 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,

director Erich von Stroheim's first film **Blind Husbands (1919)**, Rupert Julian's **Phantom of the Opera (1925)** with Lon Chaney, and its first talkie **Melody of Love (1928)** with Walter Pidgeon.

More Modern Picture Houses:

More modern movie theaters or 'picture houses' 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. 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.

East and West Coast Film Studio Development:

As a result of the MPPC's corporate efforts, independent film makers both fought back. For example, Laemmle encouraged the US government to bring anti-trust action against the Patents Company, and also signed deals with Lumiere 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, where sunlight, cheap property, inexpensive non-union labor, and exotic locales (ocean, desert, and mountain landscapes) were plentiful. 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.

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. In 1908, the first film was made in Los Angeles (Francis Boggs' and Selig's **The Count of Monte Cristo (1908)**, also made partly in Colorado and other areas around LA), challenging production in New York City and Ft. Lee, New Jersey. The *first* dramatic film made solely in LA was Francis Boggs' **In the Sultan's Power (1909)**. In 1910, the population of Hollywood was only 5,000. In about ten years, it would grow to 35,000. In the early 1910s, the **Selig Polyscope Company** established the *first* film studio in the Los Angeles area at 1845 Allesandro Street in Edendale, where Tom Mix gained fame before going on to Fox. By 1911, New Jersey film producer David Horsley established/opened Hollywood's *first* motion picture studio, the **Nestor Film Company**, in an old tavern at the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Gower Street (later dubbed "Poverty Row") and "Hollywood" was soon on its way to becoming the film capital of the world. [Many years later, the site of the Nestor Studio was occupied by the West Coast headquarters of CBS.] It was also developing a 'movie colony' and distinctive carefree lifestyle for its film-makers and actors.

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. 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 dissolved by 1918 - to officially end its illegal monopoly. 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** 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, and expanded into California in 1910. [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.

Carl Laemmle:

One who had journeyed West was movie mogul Carl Laemmle, now a maverick film distributor with his own company founded in 1909 - the **Independent Moving Picture (IMP) Company** or the **Universal Film Manufacturing Company** (the precursor to Universal Pictures in 1912) after being forced out of distribution by the Edison Trust. By 1915, Universal Pictures had set up its own unincorporated town (called Universal City) in the San Fernando Valley north of Hollywood, and built a studio there.

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.

Early Film Stars and Firsts:

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. 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 audiences.

for theatre

Another Biograph actress with long, cork-screw blonde curls, (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 joined First National with a production deal worth millions of dollars. At the same time, actor Charlie Chaplin signed up with First National.

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. *Photoplay*, the *first* true movie fan magazine, debuted in 1911, and gave rise to the whole idea of a celebrity culture. *Motion Picture Stories* (1913), *The Moving Picture World* and *The Motion Picture News* also offered interviews and gossipy columns about the personal lives and careers of the stars.

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 **The Adventures of Kathlyn (1913)** (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) 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)**. 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 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. His **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.

He supervised the **Bison Company**, a New York Motion Picture Company-owned studio/ranch that specialized in westerns. 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). The Bison Company became known as *Inceville*, after Ince bought about 20,000 acres of seacoast land in Santa Ynez Canyon and the surrounding hills. It became a prototype for departmentalized Hollywood film studios of the future, with a studio head, 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 and Mack Sennett to form the **Triangle Motion Picture Company** (with a studio on Sunset Boulevard). After the Great War, Ince broke off from Triangle and joined competitor Adolph Zukor to form **Paramount/Arctcraft**, and Ince built another studio in Culver City. When that association 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



Cat's Meow

when a drunken Hearst caught circumstances with Charlie and killing Ince instead). Very few of Ince's films from his prolific days of film production survive to this day.

yacht in the harbor of San Pedro while celebrating his 42nd birthday. (The murder was recreated in Peter Bogdanovich's **The** (2002), which speculated that he was shot his mistress, Marion Davies, in amorous Chaplin and shot at him, accidentally hitting

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 there, he left to co-found the Keystone Pictures Studio in 1912 (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.

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. The hapless *Keystone Kops* were particularly hilarious, enduring automobile collisions, near-misses, mishaps, and other physical comedy. The Keystone Studio did not do well after the departure of Sennett in 1917, and eventually went bankrupt in 1935.

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*) 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**, 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). Soon afterwards, Chaplin signed the first million-dollar film contract in 1918 with First National and made **The Kid (1921).**



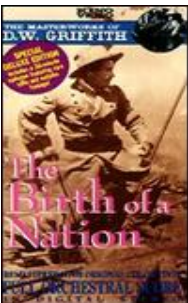
Griffith's Landmark Epics:

D. W. Griffith also advanced cinema by experimenting with longer film lengths, after the phenomenal success of the two-hour Italian epic **Quo Vadis? (1913)**, 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 (1914)**, 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.

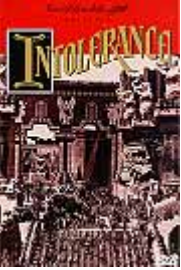
The film's story was based on the Apocrypha and told about an attractive widow/martyr of ancient Bethulia who undertook to save her city under battle siege by seducing and killing the Assyrian general/conqueror. The film marked the transition point between shorter films and longer feature films, and 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, he 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.

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 novel 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 members of the Klan riding to the rescue of besieged farmers threatened by Piedmont's black militia.



The film premiered in Los Angeles, 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, 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, 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.

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.

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 (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 (Goldwyn) and Cecil B. DeMille. [The yellow

barn that the new company rented would become legendary - it became the birthplace of the *first major* film studio in Hollywood. The 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

In 1914, debut film



remained for 50 years.] young, unknown and aspiring director Cecil B. DeMille made his 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, 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, the Lasky Company merged with its friendly rival, Adolph Zukor's Famous Players Film Company in 1916. When Zukor merged his studio with Jesse Lasky - the combined company was renamed **Famous Players-Lasky Corporation** and it migrated to Hollywood. 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 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).

Samuel Goldfish-Goldwyn:

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.] When Goldwyn experienced difficulties working within the studio system, he sold his shares in Goldwyn Pictures and became an independent producer. In 1923, he formed **Samuel Goldwyn, 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.

Goldwyn's shares were acquired by **Metro**, and after a succession of more mergers (early theater exhibitor Marcus Loew merged with Goldwyn and Louis B. Mayer), the studio known as **Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)** was born in 1924. **MGM** was destined to become the dominant studio of Hollywood's Golden Age during the 30s, under Louis B. Mayer's direction.

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).**]

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**. 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. UA became a prestigious firm distributing only independently-produced films.

The Birth of the Major Studios:

By the end of the decade, studio producers, including Warner Bros. (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) 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.