

## Course Introduction

The instructor summed up the content of the course and the course requirements, basing himself mainly on the syllabus (available at the course website).

Since American movies have a distinctive style that accounts for its popularity throughout the world, it is worth our while to define the “Hollywood Style”. It was first developed by D. W. Griffith and then perfected by the studio system between about 1920 and 1960. American “A” films of today still display these characteristics.

## The Hollywood Style

It is (an “invisible”) film style in the service of **telling a story**. Hollywood movies “move,” are filled with action, tell a story/narrative that follows a particular pattern: definition of a **protagonist** (charismatic hero?) and antagonists with a **problem or conflict** that generates rising tension in the progress of the narrative; Hollywood stories have a certain melodramatic quality – you are never in doubt as to who are the good guys and who are the bad guys and the audience is encouraged to root for the former; the action is developed to the point of a **crisis/climax** which challenges the hero to make a difficult choice or to overcome a difficult obstacle; the crisis is resolved and **order is restored** in a resolution/dénouement that is usually “happy” or at least satisfying, if the hero dies. Hollywood movies also sketch out credible characters, who in the course of the plot change in some important way (e.g., Cary Grant finally loosens up in ‘Bringing Up Baby’). The strength of the American movie has always been that it “**moves**” and is thus exciting; Europeans came to like American films because they had energy and gave them **action**.



**Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck in ‘Roman Holiday’**

**Romance** is usually important in Hollywood movies – even mainstream westerns which are men’s movies, usually have a romantic subplot. To impress themselves on the audience, lovers must have ‘chemistry’ between them.

The film is shot in **classical style**: an editing (cutting) together of shots (close-ups, medium shots, and long shots) into sequences that stress the **psychological or dramatic** aspects of the scene with the purpose of involving the audience emotionally in the film. E.g., low angle or high angle shots can alter the meaning of a scene; and shooting a conversation between two characters in a stable two-shot can convey a different meaning to the viewer than alternating single close-ups of each individual. This editing style is supposed to be “**invisible**”, i.e., subordinated to the job of telling the story; the audience is not supposed

to notice the style’s changes in perspective or its manipulative aspects. The audience is drawn into the progress of the plot, but without being aware that there is any style at all. The purpose of the techniques of the classical style is to make sure the audience is completely absorbed in the story. (We will return to this point in the section on D. W. Griffith.)

The system uses the **star system** to draw the audience into the theater and to involve the audience in the story. Successful stars have the physical beauty and charisma to help people to suspend disbelief when they are watching a movie and to get wrapped up in the characters and the plot. Fans go to a Marilyn

Monroe movie because she is in it, not because they are interested in the themes developed by the director, the expertise of the cinematographer, etc.

Hollywood movies are expensive and thus have **high production values** – beautiful and credible sets, costumes, the best cinematographers, a glossy and appealing finish to the images, the most popular actors and actresses, witty and eloquent screenplays, a memorable and evocative musical score.



**Dorothy and Toto in  
'The Wizard of Oz'**

The Hollywood style tends to be **idealized**. The main **characters** have a certain ideal glow, a romantic aura that raises them somewhat above the common run of humanity. The actors are more beautiful and **glamorous** than everyday, real people. The **dialogue** is usually not raw, realistic, or just like everyday speech – that might be boring – but



**The very glamorous Lana Turner**

often catchy, witty, perhaps poetic. Hollywood movies praise virtues such as love, justice, and freedom as sacred qualities that must be defended. The films usually have **happy endings** – boy gets girl, the protagonist rises to the challenge, the cowboy rides off into the sunset after vanquishing the outlaws, or even if the protagonist dies, he does it nobly and courageously so that we leave the theater with a good feeling and admiring the character for his courage, sacrifice, true love, etc.

Hollywood never gets far from the idea of **salvation or redemption** for the protagonist at the end of the movie. Like Tom Cruise, who usually moves from a callow, obnoxious youth to something more sensitive and mature, the Hollywood hero must learn something important by the end of the film or have achieved something that made up for his failings earlier in the film.

A good summary of the style is that it is **expensive**. American movies stand out because the moviemakers spend a lot of money to good effect.

A good example of this Hollywood style is the last ten minutes of 'Casablanca' (1942). What follows is a review of the whole film written by the instructor.

**Casablanca** 1942 Michael Curtiz (Warner Brothers) 4.0  
Humphrey Bogart as the cynical Rick, who is redeemed by his love for Ingrid Bergman, Ingrid Bergman as the preternaturally beautiful, sincere and genuine woman, Claude Rains as the cynical French police chief in Casablanca who is adept at playing a double game with a twinkle in his eye and staying true to his friendship with Rick, Paul Henreid playing it straight as Bergman's resistance hero husband, Conrad Veidt as urbane, although ruthless Nazi trying to impose himself on Rains and capture Henreid, Peter Lorre in small role as man who steals the letters of



transit, Sidney Greenstreet as the black market king of Casablanca with a fez. Terrific movie with excellent performances, a memorable script with unforgettable quotations (see below), precise and expressive cinematography, great local color and atmosphere (although all shot in the studio), and moving themes.

Bogart and Bergman are unforgettable icons as star-crossed lovers; they build a terrific romantic chemistry. Bergman remains constant, but Bogart's character develops from isolationist egotist who



**Bogart and Bergman say good-bye in the last scene of 'Casablanca.**

doesn't like women and couldn't care less about the struggle against the Nazis to a lover with rekindled attachment to Bergman; and then at the end he recognizes his duty and walks off the airport to join the Free French in Brazzaville (with, it appears, Claude Rains in tow); in the process he makes the ultimate sacrifice of giving up Bergman in the famous scene on the tarmac and sending her off to America with her husband (Bergman of course absolutely glowing as she accepts his sacrifice for the sake of the husband she does not really love). Movie has bittersweet ending – all parties go off to do their patriotic duty, but Bogart and Bergman make their terrific romantic sacrifice, and Rains renounces the

Vichy regime (throws the bottle of Vichy water into the trash) and walks off with Bogart – destination Brazzaville and DeGaulle's Free French forces. Film is a patriotic war film, in

which the two ambiguous characters – Rains and Bogart – end up getting off the fence and opting for the Allied side; the most memorable patriotic scene is Rick's café, where responding to the military songs sung by the German customers, Henreid and the band (with Rick's explicit consent) strike up a rousing version of the 'Marseillaise' drowning out the Germans. Humor plays well – Rains pocketing his gambling winnings after he closes up Rick's for gambling; Rains referring to his heart as "his least vulnerable spot" when Rick is pointing a gun at him.

Direction is outstanding with classical editing and moving camera married in an elegant style; the final sequence at the airport – enshrouded in fog, the mixing of close-up and medium shots, elegant, small camera movements, the "hill of beans" speech, the DC-3 engine starting up startlingly in a little surprise, etc., Rick and Louis striding off at the beginning of their "beautiful friendship" – is particularly beautiful. Some of the remembered lines: "Here's looking at you, kid", "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine", "Round up the usual suspects", "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a

beautiful friendship", "We'll always have Paris", "The problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world;" "Play it, Sam" (Never "Play it again"). This has to be the ideal Hollywood movie.



**New York City, c. 1910**

### **Early Development of Movies To About 1910**

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century was filled with efforts to record visual impressions on some medium, usually film. The first step was still photography, which became commercially viable in the 1880s. Earliest development of movies was in the 1870s, when scientifically oriented researchers like Marey and **Eadward**

**Muybridge** developed ways to use still photographs to measure motion; Muybridge started with his famous record of moving horses done for Leland Stanford, but then continued with humans, as viewed in the short excerpts in class of nude women walking up and down stairs, etc. These were not even moving

pictures; there was not yet a movie camera, and there was no way to adapt the pictures to commercial exploitation.

Meanwhile **American cities** were growing very rapidly under the pressure of industrialization and immigration. American cities, particularly in the East and Midwest, filled up with millions of virtually illiterate (in English) European **immigrants** enticed in to provide cheap labor for new business enterprises. These people were a vast potential market for entertainment enterprises alongside vaudeville (entertainment in a theater featuring song, dance and burlesque comedy), penny arcades, and amusement parks. The establishment middle classes in the USA also saw them as threatening because of their poverty, foreign origin, and association with radical movements; the middle classes were looking for ways to “Americanize” the new arrivals, to deter them from crime, immorality and radical politics. In any case, an entrepreneur in the entertainment field would recognize great market potential in these groups.



**San Francisco Kinetoscope Parlor, 1894**

**Thomas A. Edison** was a great inventor, as reflected in his American folkloric reputation, but he was also a keen businessman, who never invented anything without calculating its commercial potential for making money; indeed, he was a genius, but also a great mystifier and master of public relations. Although Edison’s laboratory did play an important role in the development of film technology and exhibition (a prime example being the invention of **film perforation** that enabled a consistent passage of the film through the projection mechanism), his role was less than that of others.

He and others were speaking in this period of big new inventions that would bring a totally **realistic representation** of reality (André Bazin’s “myth of total cinema”) into even the homes of Americans. A decade or so of additional research might have resulted in a motion picture instrument that was more realistic – including color, sound and a larger screen. As it turned out, though, film entrepreneurs plunged in with available technology – flickery black and white and silent – and were encouraged to keep turning out silent products by the instant profitability of the industry. After all, making movies is a business with expensive production and marketing costs, and CEOs aren’t going to increase their investment dramatically without good financial reason; that pressure does not come until the 1920s.



**The Lumière Brothers**

The first public commercial movies were Edison’s **kinetoscope** that projected for an individual viewer about 90 seconds of a small image in penny arcades that opened up in busy streets in the great American cities. The kinetoscope created the illusion of movement by conveying a strip of perforated film bearing sequential images over a light source with a high-speed shutter; it used 35 mm film with sprocket holes punched on both sides. The profit potential of this entertainment was limited, since you had to have a machine for each individual viewer. The experience offered

here was closer to a peep show in a penny arcade than to a true film experience.

The first **big screen** public projections started in **Paris**, and soon elsewhere, in the late 1890s. The **Lumière brothers** were the true pioneers. Probably in 1894 they developed the first movie camera (the ‘cinématographe’), which they then discovered could be used also as a film projector. They made history in 1895 when they projected a film program in the basement of a Paris café in 1895 – the program



consisted of ten of their short *réalité* films including ‘Workers leaving the Lumière Factory’. Each of these primitive documentaries was about 17 meters long, and when it was cranked by hand through a projector, it ran for about 50 seconds. The word ‘**cinema**’ was invented in Paris in this year. (The Lumière Brothers thereupon largely lost interest in films and went into color photography.)

France was the world’s greatest producers of films in the years before 1914; very large numbers of **French films** produced by companies such as **Pathé Frères** were distributed in the USA (remember that there was no spoken dialogue, and cue cards could be easily translated and inserted in the film) often without paying royalties to the parent French companies.



**Image of early Pathé rooster**

Soon American companies, such as Edison’s company and W.K.L. Dickson’s American Mutuoscope and Biograph Company (soon to be known as ‘**Biograph**’) were also producing short films for projection. Most of the early film production companies were financed and run by “native” (non-immigrant) white Americans. W.K.L. Dickson, Thomas A. Edison, Edwin Porter, and D.W. Griffith are good examples.

Going to the movies projected on screens became an instant hit in the United States, and by the turn of the century exhibition entrepreneurs were setting up small movie theaters known as **nickelodeons** – for a nickel (or so) about 20 minutes of flickery silent images projected for a working class audience, many of whom did not speak or read English very well. The nickelodeons were usually located in the middle of large cities; one source reported there were five to a block in the Harlem neighborhood of New York. Customers were lured in by barkers wielding megaphones and by “lurid placards”; inside you watched the show in the midst of a noisy crowd, body odor, and often crying babies brought in by their mothers seeking a break from shopping. The **short features**, which consisted largely of semi-newsreel pictures, short melodramas in which bad people were pursued and inevitably caught, and short comic films, made no mental or aesthetic demands on their audience. They were ideal for the short attention span.



**Early Nickelodeon, c. 1905**

The names of early entrepreneurs of the nickelodeon are instructive – Adolph Zukor, Louis. B. Mayer, Wilhelm Fuchs (becomes William Fox), Samuel Goldfish (becomes Sam Goldwyn), Nicholas Schenck, Marcus Loew, Carl Laemmle. All were **Jews**; all but one (Mayer) were **immigrants** born in European countries such as Russia, and Austria-Hungary; all came from extremely humble circumstances and started their careers in the most modest of jobs. These men tended to work in the garment industry in large eastern cities, where they learned to pay attention to the evolution of fashion (perhaps important for the movie industry!) and where they were on the lookout for good business opportunities. They found them in the nickelodeons then proliferating in the central city; after their first successes in motion picture exhibition, they opened up

more **nickelodeons**, so that they owned chains of them around 1910.

These men were to be the fathers of the American studio system – it was natural that once they gained a foothold in the exhibition end of the industry that they would become interested in production (making films) and distribution (making copies and distributing them to exhibitors throughout the country). Hence their replacement of the WASP producers at the apex of the American film industry and the creation (after about 1920) of the **studio system**.

## Kinds of early movies: the Road to the Feature Film Before 1910

The earliest type of films produced were **realistic sequences** (often shot by the Lumière brothers) of everyday life, such as children digging for clams, children riding on ostriches in a parade, babies fussy with one another, streetcars and pedestrians passing on Broadway in New York, policemen marching in parades a train arriving in a station, workers leaving a factory. Shot on location, they usually lasted less than a minute; they consisted of one long shot with no editing or variation of perspective; they did not attempt to tell a story (the exception being perhaps the dispute between the two babies!).

Edison and **Biograph** (one of the most important film production companies in the early period) also provided short realistic sequences that were consumed by the nickelodeons; since some of them were rather risqué (e.g., a woman taking off her street clothes to put on her burlesque costume, a man and a woman kissing) or used bad language (the vignettes of the ‘Dam Family’), the middle-class guardians of public taste and morality in the cities begin to consider some form of **censorship**.



**Mary Pickford in Early Biograph Film**

The class viewed three short films to get some idea of what American audiences were watching in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and to understand why would-be reformers were moving toward censorship.

- One of the **“Blue” movies** showed a young woman partially undressing in front of the camera, seductively revealing her bare arm as she reached for her change of clothes, then emerging playfully from behind the dressing screen attired in a burlesque costume with her legs clad only in tights.
- **“Peeping Tom”** was a French import that depicted a hotel servant looking through keyholes at women (and one cross-dresser) in various stages of undress and at a couple drinking champagne and presumably about to have sex. The little film appeals to voyeuristic interests. It uses a **point of view** shot with a mask over the camera lens to depict the keyhole shape. It’s one of the earliest little films to use straightforward editing to tell a story.
- **“The Dam Family”** is an amusing vignette by Edwin S. Porter showing little framed live portraits of the different members of a single family. The titles play much on the word “dam” = “damn,” ending with “The Dam Cook,” and “the Dam Dog.” He evokes humor from the little tableaux by using mild bad language

Subsequent developments pushed films on the road toward the **classic feature film** developed by D.W. Griffith – a fiction film (telling a story) at least an hour long, the extensive use of editing shots within film sequences, the classification of film narratives in several genres (westerns, comedies, science fiction, etc.), the use of identifiable stars to draw viewers into the theaters, etc.

Soon **longer films with edited cuts and a true narrative** (telling a story) became popular.



Georges Méliès

1) One very popular genre was the fantasy/magic films put out by the very inventive and original **Georges Méliès** of France. **“Voyage to the Moon” (1902)** exploited the popularity of science fiction literature by authors such as Jules Verne (“Voyage to the Center of the Earth”) and H.G. Wells (“War of the Worlds”) at the turn of the century. The film was Méliès’ 400<sup>th</sup>; it was pirated and distributed illegally in the USA by the Edison organization. The film is organized into individual scenes/shots spliced together with superimposed **fade outs and fade ins** to tell a story – planning the trip, the voyage, the events on the moon, and the return. There is no editing or changing the camera’s perspective within the short scenes, all of which are shot in **one continuous long shot** as if the camera is placed in about the 25<sup>th</sup> row in a theater audience. The tone is burlesque (humorous) and somewhat violent – moon creatures are regularly eliminated in little puffs of smoke. All is shot in the studio (indoors) in order to provide free rein to Méliès’ **fantasy**, and several effective **special effects** tricks (the iconic picture of the rocket

lodging in the eye of the moon, little acrobatic men on the moon disappear in a puff of smoke, the moon capsule plunging into the ocean upon return to earth, etc.) provide often humorous entertainment. The effect is still quite stagy – within the scenes static photography with a lot of characters standing around, flat backdrops without a sense of depth, no leading personalities among the characters, etc. There are no leading actors and certainly no stars.

2) **“Rescued by Rover”** (made in England in 1905 by Cecil Hepworth on a shoestring budget) was another very popular short narrative in the early years. It recounts the rescue of a kidnapped baby by a Lassie prototype. The movie was shot mostly outdoors. Several sequence shots from a stationary camera are linked in a particularly graceful way – Rover running from a distance toward and past the camera with the camera then picking him up a little further down the street; and then repeating the process (somewhat abbreviated) in the opposite direction. The film creates a certain amount of excitement and **suspense**. Will the dog find the baby? Will the father arrive in time to save her from the clutches of the evil kidnapper? etc. The **cutting to continuity** is particularly fluid: the editing within the several scenes creates an action flow that is smoother and more convincing than in “Voyage to the Moon”. It is simpler than Méliès’ film but more elegant. The genre is a **chase** movie or a thriller – characters have to hurry through the village to rescue the baby from the clutches of the evil (gypsy?) woman. Although Rover is a dog, he is the **film’s star**/principal character – he is likable, intelligent, resourceful, faithful, and affectionate; while the human parents wring their hands and collapse into their chairs, Rover has to do most of the work to find the baby and lead the father to the hovel where he is hidden.



Edwin S. Porter

3) By far the most famous of the feature (one-reel) movies of this period was **“The Great Train Robbery”** filmed by **Edwin S. Porter** in 1902-03. The film is about 11 minutes long; it recounts a train robbery, then a **chase** as the posse pursues the robbers, and then the killing of all the bad guys in the end. The film is notable for several reasons. It is one of the first chase movies where considerable suspense is generated by **parallel editing** (between the slow organization of pursuit back in town and the escape of the robbers) toward the end. It was shot mostly outdoors on location (in the eastern USA but pretending to be in the West) with a few indoor shots.

There are instances of a **moving camera**, when scenes are shot on top of the moving train. The film includes two cases of a simple **pan shot**, and several of the shots – explosions, the dark red tint of the little girl’s coat, etc. – are **hand-tinted** to give the film some color highlights. Other special effects include back screen projection and the stopping of the camera to substitute a dummy for a



**“Broncho Billy” Anderson**

real actor in order to generate the not very convincing illusion of throwing the train engineer off the train. There is one very famous **close-up** of “Broncho Billy” Anderson firing a pistol at the audience that is usually played at the end of the film, but it has no organic connection to the narrative.

It is the first significant **western (genre)** in American movies, in which the bad guys (outlaws, anarchy) are pitted against the good guys (lawmen, upstanding citizens, women and men dancing in the dance hall). Many of the western genre clichés are seen in this film – the square dance (with women) as a sign of civilization, making a man dance by firing at his feet, hitting a guy over the head and tying him up and gagging him, the shootout at the end, the defeat of the bad guys, the use of **violence** to restore law and order, etc. There is no bar scene nor ritualized gunfight in the street. This American movie, the most influential before D. W. Griffith, inaugurates the connection between American movies and American popular culture – in this case, the folklore and myth of the Old West.

Note that there are no title cards to show dialogue, that the film has no identifiable star, and that the acting style is still **histrionic/melodramatic** (when shot, the victims throw their hands up in the air, clutch their breasts, spin around at least once, and finally fall to the ground with their arms stretched out). Although Porter made his mark with this important film innovation, the rest of his career was less distinguished – actors like Mary Pickford who worked with him were disappointed with his failure to focus on acting and characterization in his films.

4) A final example of early short films produced a few years later is **‘The Bangville Police’** created by the incomparable Mack Sennett in 1913. This little film is a direct predecessor of the “Keystone Kops” films that were extremely popular between about 1912 and 1917. The film features an early film star, Mabel Normand, who, spooked by noise in her farm home, calls the “police” to rescue her. The police are bumbling, to say the least – stumbling over one another, waving their clubs wildly, mistakenly firing their pistols into the air, riding in a car whose exhaust explosions leave craters behind it; although Mabel and her family are happy and safe at the end, the community would probably be safer without this inept police force. The film is a good example of early humorous films that appealed to the suspicions of their popular audience toward the police and mocked authority in all its forms. It is a later, more mature film than some of its predecessors viewed so far in this class: it has a clear star, Mabel Normand, who is gifted with several “cute” close-ups at the end; it also has an aggressive cutting style that matches the fast pace of the action.



**‘Fatty’ Arbuckle & Mabel Normand**

### **Early Attempts at Censorship – New York, 1908**

In response to the sudden glut of movies dealing with bad language, obscene subject matter, and unpunished violence, various **censorship** movements began in eastern and Midwestern American cities. The “establishment” classes (traditional, white, middle class) were concerned about the impact the movies would have on the character of the immigrant working classes; every effort needed to be taken to socialize and Americanize them. Certain cities, particularly **New York**, began to take measures against



the nickelodeons in 1908. Since these municipal actions were often quite disruptive, the film producers, under the lead of Thomas A. Edison, took counter-measures.

The producers, distributors and exhibitors organized into a Motion Pictures Patents Company in 1908 (see below) and agreed to submit all their films to the New York-based **National Board of Review of Motion Pictures** for approval before they were released. The “dignified women in broad-brimmed flowered hats and dour-faced men” (Sklar, 31) recruited by the film producers forbade perhaps a fifth of the movies submitted on the basis of obscenity, foul language, and incitement to crime. The National Board of Review became a sort of unofficial self-censorship organ for movies in the entire country. The organization still exists today. With the subservience of the film industry to community standards, the issue soon died down, not to reappear until the early 1920s.



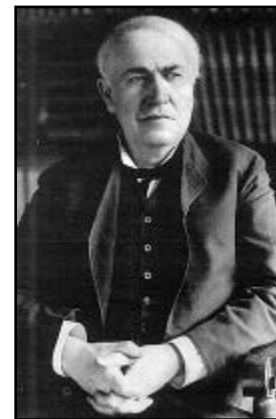
Irving Berlin on the movies

## Edison's Grab for Monopoly, the Triumph of the Independents, and the Appearance of the Feature Film, 1908-20

The film industry is generally divided into three parts or stages – **production** (making films through personnel and specialized equipment such as cameras and film stock); **distribution** (getting the copies of the film out to the exhibitors in the country); **exhibition** -- the exhibitors, who show the films to the public in movie theaters.

Between about 1900 and 1920, then, the film industry was decentralized with large numbers of different companies dealing with the different phases of film production, distribution, and exhibition. The business was a kind of Wild West with unrestricted competition and a penchant for ruthless business practices. The tendency of the development of the industry from the beginning until the 1920s was **vertical integration** of these three functions. Vertical integration remained strong through the studio era until the 1950s, when legal and financial developments caused the breakup of the classic system.

Contrary to much received opinion beginning in the 1920s that asserted that film production was dominated by foreign Jews since the beginning, most of the early owners of film *production* businesses were traditional white, middle class businessmen (**WASP** = White Anglo-Saxon Protestants), who organized early production companies such as **Biograph** and **Vitagraph**. Thomas A. Edison and D.W. Griffith were quintessential members of this group. (At the same time, the Jewish Independents were creating large chains of nickelodeons for theatrical *exhibition*.)



Thomas A. Edison

Soon **Thomas Edison** moved to establish monopoly control over the production and distribution ends of the film industry. He sought to control the film industry indirectly by enforcement of his patents on film technology such as the **sprocket mechanism** and its motor; all parts of the film industry would have to bow to his will since, he hoped, they would be using film technology that carried his patents; exhibitors would also have to pay a fee to the Trust whenever they showed films, whether they were produced by Trust members or not. He even signed contracts with Eastman Kodak (the only American manufacturer of raw film stock) that made it impossible for producers who did not join the Trust to get film for their

work. Edison and his allies came close to creating a monopoly with the formation of the **Motion Pictures Patents Company** in 1908 (The '**Edison Trust**'). Since a lot of producers and exhibitors tried to ignore the Trust, Edison employed large numbers of lawyers whose job was to harass the non-conformists legally.



**Aerial shot of original Universal Studios**

The Trust however had some problems. For one thing, as illustrated by the anti-trust campaign of President Roosevelt after the turn of the century, the American public and the federal government were **not friendly to monopolies**. Propaganda in favor of the independent film producers fell on fertile soil in American public opinion.

There was a second problem for the Trust. Thinking it would not be necessary to absorb the entire industry, the Trust did not attempt to submit all the smaller companies to their

contracts; this opening gave enterprising businessmen a chance to strike back.

### **Jewish Immigrants**

These men tended to be **Jewish immigrants from Central Europe**; they held first small jobs, particularly in the garment industry, and got into the theatrical end of show business by the purchase of a single nickelodeon (soon to be expanded into a chain) in either New York or Chicago.

Such was **Carl Laemmle**, who began as the manager of a clothing store in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He told the story that he was impressed by the popularity of the nickelodeons on a buying trip to Chicago in 1905, even watching the box office of one for a day, counting the customers and calculating the money collected. "Drei Wochen nachdem ich diese komische Bilder gesehen hatte, hatte ich mein eigenes Theater." He began to **buy nickelodeons** and within a short time he owned a chain of them. He soon went into the distribution business, and then production. One of the most aggressive of the Independents, he founded IMP (Independent Motion Pictures, fondly called "**IMP**" by the opponents of the Trust), and then moving to Los Angeles, California, he renamed it **Universal Studios in 1914**. He built his studio, Universal City in the San Fernando Valley the following year, soon opening it to visits by tourists (which of course is still happening).



**"Uncle" Carl Laemmle**

A shrewd businessman, Laemmle ("Lem-lee") was also a much-loved figure in the Hollywood community, and he was very loyal to his family: he appointed his son, Carl Jr. to be head of production when he

turned 21 (not an entirely successful move). He had so many relatives on the Universal payroll that the famous humorist Ogden Nash composed his well-known ditty, "Mr. Lem-lee had a very large big fem-lee." In contrast to the ruthless and aggressive Zukor, Laemmle was known for his kindness and good humor. He was also very supportive of fellow Jews who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

Another of the Independents was **Adolph Zukor**, a furrier, who also bought nickelodeons, merged with Marcus Loew in 1905 to go into distribution, and then went into film production with the formation of his Famous Players Film Company in 1912 (we will return to him later as the founder of Paramount Studios). **William Fox** was another successful early film mogul. All these Jewish immigrants had risen through the

clothing industry – the attention to fashion trends requisite in the clothing business put them perhaps in a good position to understand the entertainment preferences of the American public. Did you have to be a Jewish immigrant furrier to be successful in the film business?



**Florence Lawrence,  
the first real movie star**

**The Independents**, as one might suspect, fought back vigorously against the Trust. They imported Lumière film stock from France, did some production in Cuba (generally unsuccessful), and used Edison cameras on the sly, ready to cut filming suddenly if lawyers were on the horizon. Around 1910-1911 they moved from the East Coast to **California** where the grip of the Trust was not as strong; the Federal District Court of Appeals in California at that time was reluctant to enforce some patent claims. (The urban legend that they moved to California for quick escape across the Mexican border if raided by the police is apocryphal; Los Angeles is too far from Mexico.)

Being good businessmen, the Independents soon saw the advantages of wooing the middle classes into the theaters. One of their most important innovations to achieve this end was originating the **star system**, which the mainstream producers had been resisting. Carl Laemmle hired America’s first film star **Florence Lawrence** away from Biograph and then staged a fake death for her in order to publicize his coup. When IMP announced in a newspaper ad that Lawrence was alive and well, fans mobbed her in a media appearance in St. Louis, Missouri, tearing “the buttons from her coat, the trimmings from her hat, and the hat from her head”. (Whitfield 105) He also hired and publicized **Mary Pickford**; she became an enormous star, earning \$10,000 a week when she subsequently went to work for Adolph Zukor (and her mother thought it wasn’t enough!) and shortly after that \$350,000 a picture when working for First National. The star system gave more power and money to the star players, but as marketing tools it was so effective that it more than made up for the added expense.

Taking their cue from foreign filmmakers – mainly the Italians – , the Independents, led by Adolph Zukor, also began a trend toward **longer, more dramatic and more carefully designed films** that would appeal to the more educated middle classes, while traditional filmmakers in the Trust remained conservative, sticking with shorter, less expensive movies. The Independents reasoned that they would make more money if they could lure the **middle classes** on to the movie bandwagon: they would pay higher admission prices and they would quit “persecuting” the movies. With the importation of elaborately produced Italian feature films such as ‘Quo Vadis’ (1913), the trend was toward **the feature film** even before the production of ‘Birth of a Nation’ in 1915. It was however only under the direction of D.W. Griffith that natural cinematic language was fully incorporated into films (see the following section).



**Uniformed ushers in Los Angeles movie palace, 1920s**

To help draw the middle classes into the movie theaters, around 1915 film exhibitors began also to build **motion picture palaces**, large, luxurious, often fantastically decorated (Moorish, Egyptian and Roman palaces) movie theaters in the heart of the larger cities; here all classes rubbed elbows in their quest for escape and amusement. **Roxy Rothapfel** was the “first great showman of motion picture exhibition,” equipping his theaters with special lighting, orchestral music, uniformed ushers, and rest rooms fitted and furnished with “royal splendor”. By about 1920 going to the movie became an important cultural activity for all classes of American society from the immigrant masses to the wealthy middle classes; by that date the movie-going experience was a far cry from the dirty store fronts, the Spartan accommodations, and the flickering images of the early nickelodeons.

### Victory of the Independents

When the **U.S. Supreme Court** dissolved the Trust in 1915 (**Mutual Film Corporation** decision) as in restraint of trade, it didn't make much difference, since the Independents were already thriving with their superior understanding of the potential of the

American market. It is interesting that the court also ruled that movies were not primarily an art form but a form of business, and that they were thus **not protected by the free speech provisions** of the First Amendment: “...the exhibition of moving pictures is a business, pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit ... not to be regarded..., we think, as part of the press of the country, or as organs of public opinion.” The decision also stated that films were “capable of evil” (i.e., possibly

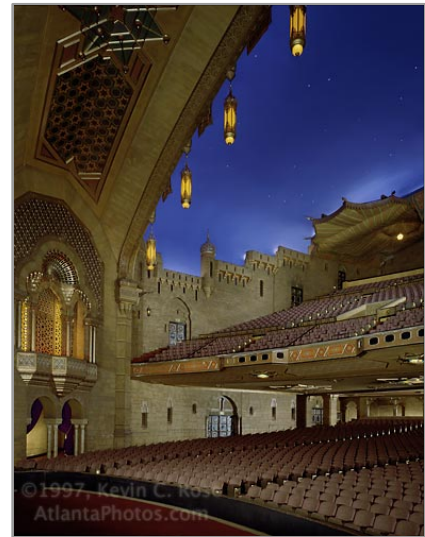


**In the Mutual Film decision the Supreme Court ruled that films are not protected by free speech.**

having a bad influence on the viewers). It thus opened up – perhaps even encouraged – the possibility of state or federal censorship of the film industry, although there was little of it for the time being. (The decision was not reversed until the important ‘**Miracle**’ decision of 1952; after 1952 it has been difficult to censor movies shown in the USA.)

With the victory of the Independents the stage is set for the development of the Hollywood studio system and the flourishing of the feature film in America.

Meanwhile the **First World War** wrought a revolution in the worldwide position of American movies. Whereas French films, especially the **Pathé Frères** Company, were preeminent in world



**Interior of Atlanta's Fox Theater**