D. W. Griffith

- Would-be playwright, actor
- Interested in “legitimate” theater -- not movies (considered “low-class”)
- Tried to sell script to Edison studios (Edwin S. Porter) in 1907
- Instead offered a job acting ($5 a day)
- 1st film-- Rescued from an Eagle’s Nest

Griffith Moves to Biograph

Within a year Griffith jumped to Biograph -- huge demand for films
Worked first as actor, then director
Adventures of Dolly (1908) first film as a director
Between 1908-1913 directed over 400 one reel films for Biograph

D.W. Griffith

By 1913 Griffith making best pictures -- no one knew his name -- Trust didn’t allow screen credits
Griffith frustrated by 1 reel limit (10 min. running time) -- want to make longer, more elaborate films
- The Film D’Art Company in France making 2 & 4 reel films -- but released one reel at a time in U.S.
D.W. Griffith
After seeing Italian feature films *Quo Vadis* (1912) & *Cabiria* (1913) wanted to do features
In 1914 Biography moved him to management (too ambitious & too expensive to satisfy as a director)
He left for the Mutual Film Company, taking cameraman Billy Bitzer AND his entire stock company of actors

Griffith’s Most Important Feature Films

*Birth of a Nation* (1915)

*Intolerance* (1916)

Development of Film Business (1914-1919)

Trust War all but over by 1914 (Trust finally lost battle in courts in 1917)
Innovations opposed by Trust had been used by the Independents to win the war against Edison’s Patent Company
Innovations Opposed By the Trust (1914-1919)

1. The Star System
2. Feature films
3. 1st run theaters --- first motion picture palace (The Strand) built in N.Y. in 1914
4. Move West to Hollywood

By End of World War I (1918)

System that we still recognize & understand today:
1. Studios founded by Fox, Laemmle, Goldwyn, etc... still exist
2. **Vertical integration** of industry -- combining prod./distrib./exhibition under single company

By End of World War I (1918)

3. Block-booking -- A. Zukor (Famous Players later Paramount)
   “A-pictures”, “B-pictures”, “C- pictures”
   Theater owner must buy “B & C” to get “A” - level films
4. Factory system that cranked out lots of product -- recognizable genres, powerful publicity machine, incredible technical expertise
Classical Hollywood Style

1. Focus on single character (hero)
2. Time subordinated to plot
3. Camera angles psychologically correct
4. Continuity editing psychologically correct

Classical Hollywood Style

Every element in film subservient to story

Hidden (invisible) techniques to focus viewer’s attention always on the story

Rule #1 -- Never distract -- never call attention to technique

One of Early Studio System’s Greatest Success -- Comedy

Screen comedy really began at Biograph (1909 to 1912) Griffith directed a few “Jones” comedies.

Important influence--Max Linder (French star much like Chaplin’s tramp)

Mack Sennett worked at Biograph for 2 years before starting his own Keystone Company
**Mack Sennett**

New style of comedy -- Slapstick  
Comedy of the absurd -- breakneck chases, wild sight gags  
Keystone Kops -- underdog vs. establishment  
12 directors/ large gag crew -- Sennett more of an executive producer -- worked sometimes from a bathtub

**Mack Sennett**

Stock company of stars:  
Buster Keaton, Ben Turpin, Fatty Arbuckle, Gloria Swanson, Chester Conklin, Carole Lombard, etc...  
In 1913 Sennett had contract battle with Ford Sterling --- Sennett hired Charles Chaplin for $125 per week

**Charlie Chaplin**

Former vaudeville performer -- didn’t initially discover his “tramp” character.....  
but when he did, Chaplin became the first world movie star  
Recognized **EVERYWHERE** - the 1st **International Star**
Charlie Chaplin

Salary rising like a shooting STAR:
Sennett (1915): $125 per week
Essanay (1916): $1,250 per week + a $10,000 signing bonus
Mutual (1916): $10,000 per week + $150,000 signing bonus
1st National (1917): 1 million

Buster Keaton

Also came out of the “Sennet School”
Made 1 and 2-reel comedies first... then feature length comedies
Sherlock Jr. (1924)
The General (1927)

Charlie Chaplin

Mixture of pathos and laughter
More sentimental than Buster Keaton (maybe Keaton is funnier for a modern audience)
Looks easy, but incredible trial & error to develop gags
Other Stars of Silent Comedy

Harold Lloyd
Harry Langdon

Like Chaplin and Keaton all of them eventually gravitated to feature-length films.

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Classical Hollywood Style

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