

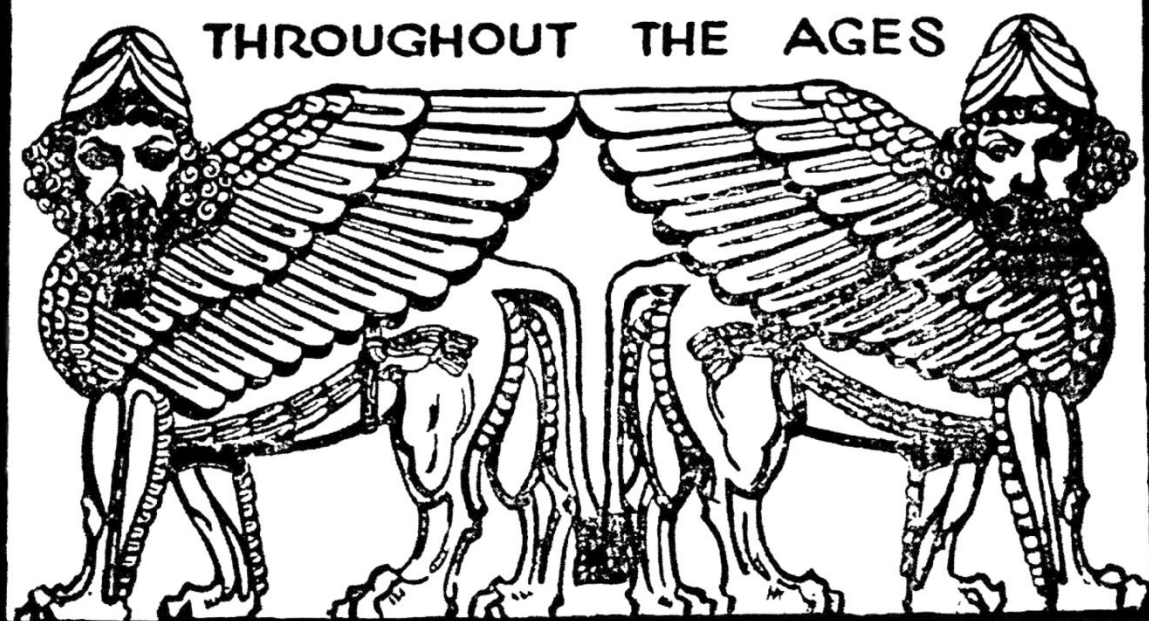


"INTOLERANCE"



THE STORY

**LOVE'S STRUGGLE
THROUGHOUT THE AGES**



Intolerance

A film by D.W. Griffith (1916)

Tuesday, October 25, 2011

Northwest Film Forum

Co-presented by The Sprocket Society
Seattle, WA

Approximately 178 minutes.

There will be a 15 minute intermission.

Our feature presentation will be prefaced with a short subject:

Birth of Nation prelude: Walter Huston interviews D.W. Griffith (1930) – sound, 6 min.

An untitled staged conversation, filmed on the occasion of the 15th anniversary sound re-release of *Birth of a Nation* (1914). Mr. Huston also played the title role in Griffith's talkie from the same year, *Abraham Lincoln*.

Front cover: The cover of the original 1916 souvenir program as presented at the Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia. Reproduced in the program notes (edited by Jacques Poitrat) for the August 29, 2007 Venice Film Festival screening of a new restoration (USA/France/Denmark, 180 min.), with a symphonic score composed by Antoine Duhamel and Pierre Jansen, at the Sala Perla Theater, Palazzo del Casinò.

Intolerance

Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages / A Sun-Play of the Ages

Wark Producing Corporation / Triangle Film Corporation

Production dates: October 17, 1915 – April 1916.

Premiered September 5, 1916 at the Liberty Theatre, New York City.

European premiere: April 7, 1917 at the Royal Drury Lane Theatre, London.

Later stand-alone features drawn from *Intolerance: The Mother and the Law* (August 1919) and *The Fall of Babylon* (October 1919)

Main Cast

Mae Marsh as The Dear One

Robert Harron as The Boy

Miriam Cooper as The Friendless One

Walter Long as The Musketeer of the Slums

Margery Wilson as Brown Eyes

Eugene Pallette as Prosper Latour

Josephine Crowell as Catherine de Medicis

Constance Talmadge as The Mountain Girl and
Marguerite de Valois

Seena Owen as Attarea, The Princess Beloved

Elmer Clifton as The Rhapsode

Alfred Paget as The Prince Belshazar

George Siegmann as Cyrus

Lillian Gish as The Eternal Mother (The Woman
Who Rocks the Cradle)

Crew

Produced and Directed by David Wark Griffith, assisted by John A. Barry

Executive Producer: Frank E. Woods

Screenplay by D.W. Griffith and Tod Browning (uncredited)

Intertitles by Anita Loos, D.W. Griffith, Frank E. Woods, with the participation of Walt Whitman and his poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking."

Research Assistants: Joseph Henabery, Lillian Gish, Frank E. Woods

Historical Advisor: R. Ellis Wales

Religious Advisors: Father Neal Dodd and Rabbi Isadore Meyers

First Assistant Directors: Joseph Henabery, George Siegmann, George Beranger, Elmer Clifton, Tod Browning, Woody Van Dyke

Second Assistant Directors: Edward Dillon, Tod Browning, Allan Dwan, Monte Blue, Mike Siebert, George W. Hill, Arthur Berthelet, William Christy Cabanne, Jack Conway, George Nichols Jr, Victor Fleming, Sidney Franklin, Lloyd Ingraham & Woody Van Dyke

Directors of Photography: Billy Bitzer (Johann Gottlob Wilhelm Bitzer) and Karl Brown, with the support of 14 cameramen from the Fine Arts Studio, including William Fildew, Victor Fleming, John Leezer, Philip R. Dubois and Allan Dwan

Editing: D. W. Griffith, James E. Smith and Rose Smith, assisted by Joe Aller

Technical Director: Robert Anderson, assisted by Martin Aguerre

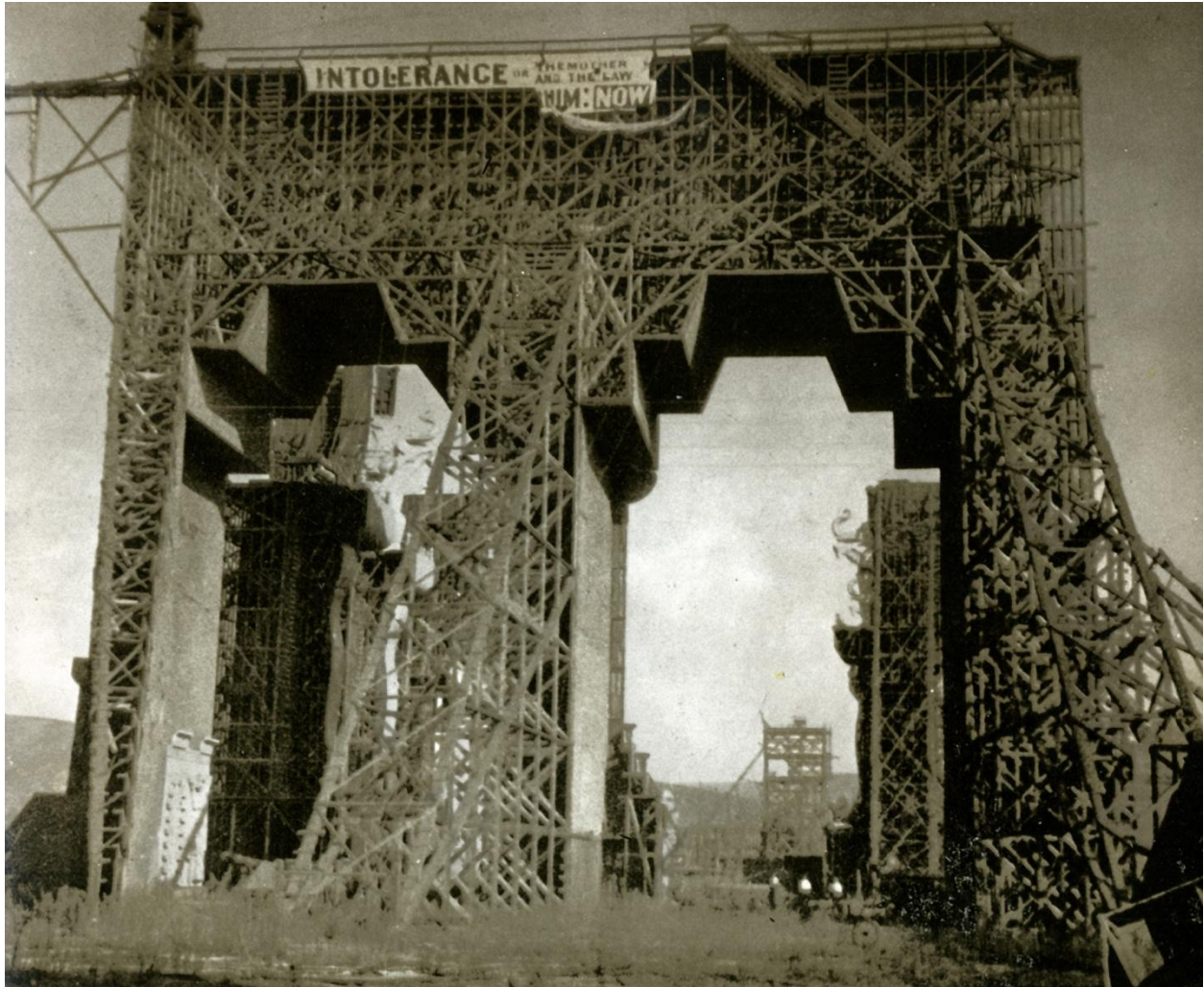
Special Effects: Hal Sullivan

Set Designers: Walter L. Hall, R. Ellis Wales and Frank Wortman, assisted by Joseph Stringer, Shorty English and Jim Newman

Notes on the Film

By Russell Merritt

Excerpted from Paolo Cherchi Usai ed., *The Griffith Project, Volume 9: Films Produced in 1916-18* (BFI Publishing, 2005), as reprinted in the catalog for the 24th Pordenone Silent Film Festival (Le Giornate del Cinema Muto), October 7-16, 2005, online at http://www.cinetecadelfriuli.org/gcm/ed_precedenti/edizione2005/GCM2005_catalogo.pdf



True to what had already become his customary practice, Griffith started work on his new movie while editing *The Clansman* [*Birth of a Nation*] in late fall 1914. The new film, called *The Mother and the Law*, was intended as a companion piece to *The Escape*, released earlier that year. In it, Griffith recast Mae Marsh and Bobby Harron for another study of prostitution and gangs in the city slums. By January 1915, the 3-reeler was virtually complete, enabling Griffith to turn his full attention to the exhibition of his Civil War feature. In late February he left California to oversee its New York premiere and battle his antagonists in the accompanying censorship brawls. Not until May, after *Birth's* controversies were at their peak, did Griffith return to his slum story, now determined to build on *Birth's* success. He famously decided to expand the story, transforming *Mother* into an exposé of industrial exploitation. He built lavish sets (notably the Mary Jenkins ball, the mill-workers' dance hall, the Chicago courtroom, and the

San Quentin gallows); added the strike sequence and last-minute rescue; and introduced the motif of mill owner Jenkins, his ugly sister, and the wicked civic reformers.

The expansion was, in part, an effort to capitalize on the headlines surrounding John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who had stirred up controversy and resentment with the creation of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913 and was now being raked over the coals by a government board of inquiry for his role in a miners' strike that led to the 1914 Ludlow massacre at his Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. Griffith interwove details from that strike and the even bloodier riots that accompanied the Rockefeller Standard Oil strike in Bayonne, New Jersey, in 1914, to create his powerful new introduction. In this new, expanded version of *Mother*, an oppressive industrialist and a Puritanical welfare foundation provide the trigger for the misfortunes that befall Mae Marsh and her hapless sweetheart, leading not just to Bobby Harron's wrongful murder conviction, but the confiscation of their baby, and an elaborate, greatly expanded rescue sequence involving a locomotive, racing car, telephone, and the famous gallows execution razors.

Griffith continued shooting his Modern Story through the summer of 1915, re-shooting Harron's trial and penitentiary scenes and Marsh's ride to the rescue. Meanwhile (in mid-September), he started work on his French story. This was the first of two momentous developments in the evolution of the film — the decision to create a historical counterpart to the Modern Story that would be told simultaneously. We have no way of knowing whether at this point Griffith intended to contrast only the French and Modern episodes — juxtaposing events stemming from the Ludlow Massacre with those ending in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in France in 1572 — or whether the idea of a 4-part structure came to him all at once. All by itself, the addition of the French sequence opened up the film in startling, innovative ways, providing a striking inversion of the Modern Story. The focus was now sharply centered on two bloody catastrophes resulting from neurotic, violent women hardened against the claims of the family in a film still aptly named *The Mother and the Law*. But whether or not Griffith ever contemplated stopping with the French story, from the start of the expansion the stress was on spectacle. Surviving copyright frames show that the interiors of the Louvre palace were hand-tinted, and that Griffith filmed an extended version of the deadly court intrigue involving Admiral Coligny, Navarre, and the Guise family, which he would subsequently trim.

Not until the end of the year did evidence of his second momentous decision emerge, when the famous sets for his Babylon sequence began to loom over the cottages on Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard. The start of his costliest story was treated like the first day of a new production, as in a sense it was. Griffith radically reoriented and redefined his film, as now his French and Modern stories were to be set off against the Utopian pageantry of a pre-Christian hedonistic wonderland. Celebrities — including California Governor Hiram Johnson — were permitted to tour the sets. By January 1916 Griffith commandeered the full resources of the Fine Arts studio. Fourteen cameramen were available to [cinematographer Billy] Bitzer between program assignments, and according to *The Brooklyn Citizen* (6 November 1916), "eight cameras working at the same time was no unusual sight."

The Babylonian sequence took four months to shoot, from January to April 1916, longer than it had taken to shoot all of *The Birth of a Nation*. And when it was over, Griffith returned yet again to his Modern Story. Griffith, still dissatisfied with the trial and execution scenes, ordered the sets he had torn down the previous summer rebuilt. A production still of the Babylon set found by Marc Wanamaker in the late 1980s shows the gallows and portions of the courtroom set freshly constructed on the floor of Babylon's Great Hall. He then redressed the set to shoot Lillian Gish rocking a cradle.

The result, when combined with the Passion sequence (shot in December 1915), was a conglomerate of stories and styles in search of a unifying principle. Part morality play and part 3-ring circus, the movie was of a piece with the new eclectic aesthetic that had all but buried the older ideal of organic synthesis. Along with Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* and Charles Ives' *Third Symphony*, *Intolerance* remains one of the period's great hybrids.

The release and distribution of *Intolerance* provides a more complex tale, which I described in some detail on the occasion of the Museum of Modern Art's 1989 reconstruction ("D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*: Reconstructing an Unattainable Text," 1990 [see *Suggested Reading*]). But from the start, Griffith continued to treat his film as what Richard Schickel called "a mighty improvisation," tinkering with it off and on for the next 10 years.

Intolerance first saw the light of day at the Orpheum Theater in Riverside, California, on 4 August 1916, where it had a two-day run under the rather grandiose title, *The Downfall of All Nations, or Hatred The Oppressor*, directed by one Dante Guilio [sic] — a "famous Italian director," according to news accounts, "who is now held a prisoner by the Austrians in Vienna." According to the advertisements, Dante Guilio's epic — self-proclaimed as "GREATER THAN 'THE CLANSMAN,' 'CABIRIA,' and 'BEN HUR' COMBINED" — played in 11 reels.

This was the famous performance that drained at least two members of the audience with its soporific titles and tedious detail; and in retrospect, these two — rather misleadingly — assigned it Wagnerian running times. In the 1920s, Lillian Gish remembered it as an exhausting experience that seemed to last "forever." Stanford University president David Starr Jordan, recalling the preview six months after he saw it, imagined that it went on for some six hours, though he admitted that he sat through only the first part of it. From these accounts, legends have arisen about the film's inordinate length, but in fact the film — even in preview — appears to have been somewhat less than 3 hours. What is clear from the reviews, however, is that the film was considered slow and the titles verbose.

The Riverside screening was only the first of *Intolerance*'s public previews. Griffith traveled back to Los Angeles to rework both his titles and continuity, and 10 days later previewed the film again, this time in Pomona, California. The film was still *The Downfall of All Nations*, and Griffith was still calling himself Dante Guilio, but now the film was advertised at 12 reels and described by the man at the Pomona Progress as lasting "almost three hours." The film, performed with an 8-piece "symphony orchestra," drew a front-page rave, but the production was clearly still in trouble (*The Pomona Bulletin*, 17 August 1916).

Behind the scenes, assistant director Joseph Henabery recalled the sense of disillusion he and others felt at this second try-out. "I was utterly confused by the picture," he said. "I was so discouraged and disappointed... He just had too much material... But the thing that disturbed me more than anything else was the subtitles."

The local press picked up the cry. *The Pomona Progress* reported, "The only human interest in the drama is in the scenes where the poor little mother shows her devotion to her baby and her persecuted husband." After interviewing Griffith another reporter wrote, "There is to be a rearrangement of the thousands of scenes, a lot of work in cutting out of unnecessary scenes, and the music is to be yet made appropriate to the scenes — the reaching of climaxes in proper shape and fitting of music to the character of the scene. Mr. Griffith has many a long day of hard work yet to do on his immense drama before it is ready for the public."

Griffith reworked his film once again, and had a third preview in San Luis Obispo, followed by a private press screening at Tally's Broadway Theater in Los Angeles. Then he finally took his film to New York for its formal debut.

Opening night at the Liberty Theatre, 5 September 1916, provided a spectacle all its own. Griffith's art director had the theatre made over into an Assyrian temple, with incense burning in a lobby festooned with Oriental decor and carpentry. Female ushers were dressed as Babylonian priestesses, while male ushers were decked out in red and black satin tuxedos. Preparing for the performance, Griffith lived in the theatre for 10 days, supervising rehearsals not only of the 40-piece orchestra and chorus, but also of a specially designed lighting system to tint the screen various colors, and a baggage carload of sound effects machinery that, according to press reports, was so large it had to be crammed into the Liberty's backstage. Projectionists, too, were kept on call 18 hours per day to rehearse the various speeds required to synch the picture to the sound effects and music. All told, *The Moving Picture World*

(30 September 1916) estimated 134 people were involved in the New York theatre presentation, including 7 men responsible for “the considerable amount of explosives” used with the battle scenes.

All in all, one way or another, the first-night New York critics were stunned. For all its reputation as a critical dud, *Intolerance* attracted consistently favorable reviews. Trades, fan magazines, and local newspapers alike jumped on the bandwagon, expressing only minor misgivings. Julian Johnson in *Photoplay* (December 1916) wrote, “Here is a joy-ride through history; a Cook’s tour of the ages; a college education crammed into a night. It is the most incredible experiment in story-telling that has ever been tried.” According to the *New York Herald* (6 September 1916), “...the Babylonian warfare thrilled a thoroughly wise audience into involuntary applause with its intense realism. Then Belshazzar’s Feast in celebration of the repulse of Cyrus took place in halls a mile in length, with the all-seeing camera moving through every foot of the spectacle.” The reviewer for the *N.Y. Call* (10 October 1916) showed his own flair for epic in the title of his review: “The Most Majestic Thing Yet Recorded by Art of Motion Picture Director.” His review began: “It makes *Cabiria* look like a penny-poppy show — if that’s the way you spell it.” Even Alexander Woollcott, who gave *Intolerance* a critical drubbing in *The New York Times* (10 September 1916) — “unprecedented and indescribable splendor of pageantry is combined with grotesque incoherence of design and utter fatuity of thought” — thought the “scenes of wonder richly reward a visit to the Liberty.... The imagination and personal force represented in such an achievement suggest a man of stature. Really, Mr. Griffith ranks with Cyrus. They both have taken Babylon. And the Babylonian picture would in itself be worth going miles to see.”

And so it went as Griffith opened his film across the country, first in Brooklyn, then in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and St. Louis. Griffith modified and refined the performance, adjusting parts of his film as he went along. Among other things, he and his company enlarged the vocal chorus when the film came to Chicago and Pittsburgh; in Washington, DC, he experimented with soloists rather than a chorus, singing the songs of Babylon and the music of France. When he sold nation-wide distribution rights to *Intolerance* in June 1917, he put in the proviso that the distributor “gives [his] entire attention to *Intolerance* and experiment with a lecturer.”

There is no hard evidence that Griffith added any pictorial footage after the New York premiere, but if he did, it would have been within days of the début. The shots in question are of the semi-nude women who pose in the Temple of Love and who are also cut into the Dance of Tammuz. Whether or not the Love Temple and Dance of Tammuz scenes that we now see appeared in time for the New York premiere is unknown. But we know the sequences were in place by mid-November because a New York enthusiast sent Griffith a 26-foot scroll of doggerel verse that refers to them. We also know they were in the film when it played Chicago, because the Chicago board of supervisors insisted Griffith take them out. The semi-nudes survived that fight, as they had similar encounters in San Francisco and Los Angeles. They were also targets in the furious battle Griffith waged with the Pennsylvania censor board. In Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, the semi-nudes were used as bargaining chips or distractions to keep the censors away from the labor strike and the anti-reform satire that several boards considered defamatory.

Sacred virgins aside, the alterations Griffith made in his film from September 1916 through late February 1917, when he finally stopped attending the American *Intolerance* débuts, were relatively small refinements in a strange unwieldy work that from the start had been developed as a mighty improvisation. Exactly when he deleted the expository shots from his Christ story, dropped the short distractive sequence of Coligny’s assassination from the Huguenot slaughter, or altered this or that title, is virtually impossible to chart because Griffith never stopped thinking of his film as an ongoing creation. The alterations continued through 27 February 1917, when Griffith attended his last American road show premiere, in St. Louis. After that, the original roadshow version was finally locked into place — at least until the end of June, when *Intolerance*’s roadshow season ended.

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Suggested Reading

- Russell Merritt, "D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*: Reconstructing an Unattainable Text," *Film History*, vol. 4 no. 4 (1990) – Archived online at <http://www.zzproductions.fr/pdf/griffith's-intolerance-by-russel-merrith.pdf> [sic]. This outstanding article by one of the preeminent Griffith scholars examines the evolution of the film's edit over the years, revealing fascinating details and taking to task MOMA's 1989 "reconstruction."
- Jean E. Tucker, "Voices from the Silents," *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* (vol. 37 nos. 3-4, Summer-Fall 1980) – Discusses the production in 1916 of David Wark Griffith's silent film *Intolerance* by using interviews with five people associated with the film: the actresses Lillian Gish, Anita Loos, and Miriam Cooper, actor and film researcher Joseph Henabery, and cameraman Karl Brown. (Available at the University of Washington Library, in the Government Publications section.)
- William M. Drew, *D.W. Griffith's Intolerance: It's Genesis and Its Vision* (McFarland & Co., 1986. Second edition: 2002).
- Vance Keypley, "Intolerance and the Soviets: A Historical Investigation," *Wide Angle* (vol. 3 no. 1, 1979). Reprinted in Richard Taylor & Ian Christie, eds., *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema* (Routledge, 1991) – Examines the influence *Intolerance* had on the groundbreaking work of early Soviet filmmakers.
- Continuity script for *Intolerance* by D. W. Griffith, Tod Browning, Anita Loos, and Frank E. Woods (Alexander Street Press, 2003) – Available online via academic or institutional subscription only. (Those with UW Library computer network access can find it there.)
- Theodore Huff, *Intolerance: The Film by David Wark Griffith, Shot-by-Shot Analysis* (Museum of Modern Art, 1966).
- Tom Dicks, "Intolerance (1916)," FilmSite.org (n.d. – ca. late-1990s?), online only at <http://www.filmsite.org/into.html> – A thorough transcription of the film.
- Arthur Lennig, "The Mother and the Law," *Film History* (vol. 17 no. 4, 2005) – Traces the evolution of the original 1914 film that grew to be the centerpiece of *Intolerance*, later re-emerging as a stand-alone feature in 1919.
- Karl Brown, *Adventures with D.W. Griffith* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973; DaCapo Press, 1976) – Brown worked as an assistant cameraman under Billy Bitzer. In this memoir he describes in detail the planning, shooting, and post-production of *Birth of a Nation*, *Intolerance*, and *Broken Blossoms*.
- G. W. Bitzer, *Billy Bitzer: His Story* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973) – Autobiography of Griffith's cameraman for many years, who got into the industry on the ground floor in 1896 and went on to help define grammar of cinema.
- Richard Schickel, *D. W. Griffith: An American Life* (Simon and Schuster, 1984).
- Robert M. Henderson, *D. W. Griffith: His Life and Work* (Oxford University Press, 1972).
- Scott Simmon, *The Films of D.W. Griffith* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- Stan Brakhage, *The Brakhage Lectures: Georges Méliès, David Wark Griffith, Carl Theodore Dreyer, Sergei Eisenstein* (The Good Lion/School of the Art Institute, 1972) – Archived online as a PDF at <http://www.ubu.com/historical/brakhage/>
- William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (Oxford University Press, 1978).
- Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928* (University of California Press, 1994) – Volume 3 in the excellent series, *History of the American Cinema*.

Griffith

Griffith

D.W. GRIFFITH'S

epic 1916 masterpiece

Intolerance



Love's Struggle Throughout The Ages

A rare screening of the legendary silent film.

"The treasure of treasures...lyrical,
passionate and grandiose."

- Pauline Kael -

Northwest Film Forum

Tuesday, October 25, 2011

7:00 PM ~ One Show Only

With Intermission

Presented by The Sprocket Society of Seattle, Washington

1515 12th Avenue



on Capitol Hill