

## Document Citation

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D.W. GRIFFITH'S: "MUSKETEERS OF PIG ALLEY"

Producing Company: American Biograph Company,  
Writer and Director: D.W. Griffith  
Release Date: October 31, 1912  
Running Time: 16 Minutes  
Cast: Lillian Gish (The Little Lady); Kate Bruce (The Mother); Harry Carey (One of the Snapper Kid's gang); Mabel Normand (a friend of Lillian)

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THE STORY:

Lillian's brother, "A poor musician, goes away to improve his fortune." He leaves Lillian with their aged and ill mother. Shortly afterward, Lillian meets the Snapper Kid, a small-time gangleader, and rejects his advances. He admires her spunk. While she's out, the mother dies, and Lillian finds her so on her return to their slum room.

The musician "returns with replenished purse", only to lose it to the Snapper Kid and his gang (the "Musketeers" of the title) in Pig Alley, one of the many slum passages in the area. Determined to recover his money, he sets out after the crooks. Meanwhile a friend of Lillian's tries to cheer her up, and takes her to the gangsters' ball. A mobster there takes her into a back room, and offers her a drink, but the Snapper Kid comes in and breaks it up. The rival gangsters decide to settle the matter outside, and the two rival gangs follow each other out to the alley and shoot it out. The police descend upon the scene almost simultaneously with the shooting, but the Snapper Kid makes good his escape, not, however, before the musician, who had been nearby, recovers his stolen money from the nonplussed gangster.

The Snapper Kid takes refuge from the police in The Little Lady's apartment, where he learns that the musician is her brother. A policeman enters, but Lillian, grateful for the Snapper Kid's having rescued her previously, gives him an alibi, and the policeman departs. The Kid offers her a drink, but when she refuses, he shrugs philosophically and leaves brother and sister alone.

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COMMENT:

D.W. Griffith is considered by most film historians as being the father of the modern film. He started life as the son of an impoverished Southern war hero, and achieved an early love for writing and acting. His first contact with the infant movie industry occurred in 1907, when he tried to peddle some story ideas to the Edison Studios in New York City, and instead found himself an actor in a film called "RESCUED FROM THE EAGLE'S NEST", which was directed by Edwin S. Porter of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY fame. As with most stage actors of the time who accepted work in the movies, he did not use his correct name, and it was as Lawrence Griffith that he was paid for his movie acting. He found more success when he attempted to sell stories to The Biograph Company, where he again reluctantly acted in a few films. He shortly found himself directing, however, and soon discovered that he had at last found his milieu. While he has since been credited with having created almost every film technique in use today, the truth of the matter is that almost everything he did had already been done earlier by someone else. His genius lay in the uses he was to make of the techniques, applying them in meaningful ways to heighten the emotional impact of a scene or character.

MUSKETEERS OF PIG ALLEY has often been described as the progenitor of all gangster films to follow it. However, this film, as with so many of the hundreds of films he turned out for Biograph, holds up to the present day because of his treatment, which was simple, sincere, and sentimental. Make-up was kept to a minimum. Instead of relying upon stage actors as so many other directors did, he created a "troupe" of "filmic" actors, whom he trained for the new medium, and used in film after film, where they gave moving and memorable performances.