

Document Citation

Title	Intolerance
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	book excerpt
Language	English
Pagination	106
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Intolerance, Griffith, D. W., 1916

Intolerance

U.S.A., 1916

Director: D. W. Griffith

Dist—(35 and 16 mm.) Cinegate/(16 mm.) BFI. *p.c.*—Wark Producing Corporation. *p.*—D. W. Griffith. *asst. d.*—Erich von Stroheim, Tod Browning, W. S. Van Dyke, Joseph Henabery, Edward Dillon, George Siegmann, Ted Duncan, Mike Siebert. *sc.*—(none). *story*—D. W. Griffith. THE MODERN STORY (planned as a separate film, *The Mother and The Law*) based on the records of the Stielow murder case and a Federal Industrial Commission report. *ph.*—G. W. Bitzer. *addit. ph.*—Karl Brown. *sup. ed.*—D. W. Griffith. *ed.*—James Smith, Rose Smith. *assoc. ed.*—Joe Aller. *architectural/artistic sup.*—D. W. Griffith. *construction sup./chief engineer Babylonian sets*—Frank Wortman. Motifs for the City of Babylon based on the causeway and sun-buildings of the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition, San Francisco. [*original m.*—Joseph Carl Breil, D. W. Griffith]. *cost. sup.*—D. W. Griffith. *research*—D. W. Griffith; (THE JUDEAN STORY) Rabbi L. Myers. *l.p.*—Lillian Gish (*"The Woman Who Rocks the Cradle"*); THE MODERN STORY: Mae Marsh (*"The Dear One"*), Fred Turner (*Father of "The Dear One"*), Robert Harron (*"The Boy"*), Sam de Grasse (*Arthur Jenkins*), Vera Lewis (*Mary T. Jenkins*), Mary Alden, Pearl Elmore, Lucille Brown, Eleanor Washington, Luray Huntley and Mrs. Arthur Mackley (*"The Uplifters"*), Miriam Cooper (*"The Friendless One"*), Walter Long (*"The Musketeer of the Slums"*), Tully Marshall (*Friend of "The Musketeer"*), Tom Wilson (*Kindly Policeman*), Ralph Lewis (*Prison Governor*), Lloyd Ingraham (*Judge*), Barney Bernard (*Attorney for "The Boy"*), Rev. A. W. McClure (*Father Farley, Confessor of "The Boy"*), Max Davidson (*Kindly Neighbour*), Monte Blue (*Strike Leader*), Marguerite Marsh (*Guest at the Ball*), Jennie Lee (*Woman at Dance for Jenkins' Employees*), Tod Browning (*Driver of Racing Car*), Edward Dillon (*Chief Detective*), Clyde Hopkins (*Jenkins' Secretary*), William Brown (*Warden*), Alberta Lee (*Wife of Kindly Neighbour*), Billy Quirk (*Barman*); THE JUDEAN STORY: Howard Gaye (*The Nazarene*), Lillian Langdon (*Mary, the Mother*), Olga Grey (*Mary Magdalene*), Gunther von Ritzau (*1st Pharisee*), Erich von Stroheim (*2nd Pharisee*), Bessie Love (*The Bride of Cana*), George Walsh (*Bridegroom*), William Brown (*Bride's Father*); THE FRENCH STORY: Margery Wilson (*"Brown Eyes"*), Eugene Pallette (*Prosper Latour*), Spottiswoode Aitken (*Father of "Brown Eyes"*), Ruth Handforth (*Mother of "Brown Eyes"*), A. D. Sears (*Swiss Mercenary*), Frank Bennett (*King Charles IX*), Maxfield Stanley (*Monsieur La France, Duc d'Anjou*), Josephine Crowell (*Catherine de Medici*), Constance Talmadge (*Marguerite de Valois*), W. E. Lawrence (*Henri de Navarre*), Joseph Henabery (*Admiral Coligny*), Morris Levy (*Duc de Guise*), Howard Gaye (*Cardinal Lorraine*), Louis Romaine (*Roman Catholic Priest*), Chandler House (*Page*); THE BABYLONIAN STORY: Constance Talmadge (*Mountain Girl*), Elmer Clifton (*Rhapsode*), Alfred Paget (*Prince Belshazzar*), Secna Owen (*Attarea, "The Princess Beloved"*), Carl Stockdale (*King Nabonidus*), Tully Marshall (*High Priest of Bel*), George Siegmann (*Cyrus*), Elmo Lincoln (*Gobyras, "The Mighty Man of Valour"*), George Fawcett and Robert Lawlor (*Babylonian Judges*), Kate Bruce (*Babylonian Mother*), Loyola O'Connor (*Attarea's Slave*), James Curley (*Cyrus' Charioteer*), Howard Scott (*Babylonian Dandy*), Alma Rubens, Ruth Darling and Margaret Mooney (*Girls in the Marriage Market*), Mildred Harris and Pauline Starke (*Favourites of the Harem*), Winifred Westover (*Favourite of Egibi*), Grace Wilson (*1st Dancer of Tammuz*), Lotta Clifton (*2nd Dancer of Tammuz*), Guido Corrada [Lisserani] (*Messenger*), Felix Modjeska (*Attarea's Bodyguard*), Ted Duncan (*Captain of Ingur-Bel Gate*), Ah Singh (*1st Priest of Nergel*), Ranji Singh (*2nd Priest of Nergel*), Ed Burns (*1st Charioteer of the Priest of Bel*), James Burns (*2nd Charioteer of the Priest of Bel*), Martin Landry (*Auctioneer*), Wallace Reid (*Boy Killed in the Fighting*), Charles Eagle Eye (*Barbarian Chieftain*), William Dark Cloud (*Ethiopian Chieftain*), Charles Van Cortland (*Lieutenant of Cyrus*), Jack Cosgrove (*Chief Eunuch*), Carmel Myers, Eve Southern, Jewel Carmen, Natalie Talmadge, Carol Dempster, Ethel Terry, Daisy Robinson, Anna Mae Walthall and The Denishawn Dancers (*Dancers, Slaves and Guardians of the Temple of Ishtar*), Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Douglas Fairbanks,

"A Drama of Comparisons". THE MODERN STORY: America, 1914. "The Dear One", "The Boy" and "The Friendless One" move to a poor city neighbourhood in the aftermath of a bloody strike at Arthur Jenkins' mill. Later, The Boy, now married to The Dear One, quits a life of crime by returning a revolver to his boss, "The Musketeer of the Slums", who then frames The Boy. On The Boy's release from jail, The Musketeer, who is attracted to The Dear One, offers to help recover her baby, who has been removed by "The Uplifters", a group of female 'philanthropists' financed by Jenkins. The Friendless One shoots dead The Musketeer, her lover, with the Boy's revolver. The Boy is convicted of murder and only narrowly saved from the gallows by The Friendless One's confession. THE JUDEAN STORY: A.D. 27. The bride of Cana; the punishment of the adulterous woman; the Crucifixion. THE FRENCH STORY: Paris, 1572. Catherine de Medici, a Roman Catholic fanatic, persuades her son, Charles IX, to sanction a massacre of the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Day. "Brown Eyes" and Prosper Latour, who are about to be married, perish in the pogrom. THE BABYLONIAN STORY: 539 B.C. The Babylonians live in luxury under the tolerant King Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar. Belshazzar saves a headstrong Mountain Girl, sent to the marriage market for rebuffing the treacherous Rhapsode. Cyrus of Persia lays siege to the city, but is repulsed after a mighty battle. The Persians, however, are admitted to the city by the Rhapsode, during premature victory celebrations. Despite the warning of the Mountain Girl, the city is sacked and its inhabitants massacred.

Time, fashions in acting, the extravagant claims of almost every critic and historian who has written about it, and the faded quality of the print under review (Cinegate, 16 mm.) compound the difficulties of reassessing Griffith's *Intolerance*. Griffith's skill at intercutting the four stories on his melodramatic rather than moral theme has been most remarked; watching a print in which the quality of Bitzer's photography is all but totally obscured, however, one is struck more forcefully (in the jumbled first half of the film at least) by the way in which Griffith neglects the most basic principles of continuity. The narrative in the Judean and French stories is so fragmented as to be virtually non-existent; even in the two costume 'show-pieces', however, such matters as plotting and the establishment of character register as almost wilfully ham-fisted. This discontinuity may partly be accounted for by the fact that the film in its original finished form lasted eight hours: the Biblical stories were heavily cut, it is said, in deference to the Jewish community of Los Angeles, and the French story was also considerably shortened (the marriage, for instance, of Henri de Navarre and Catherine's daughter Marguerite de Valois—a union which was supposed to heal the 'intolerant' rift between the Huguenots and Roman Catholics—is reduced to a title and a shot of the wedding procession). The film ran for some two hundred and ten minutes at its première (the exact running time is in doubt) and was subsequently cut by a further twenty odd minutes. The central weakness of *Intolerance*, and it is one which has dated the film as a work of art as opposed to an historic artefact, is its inspirational-poetic tone—it was shot without an anchoring script, and the players were urged, in their supposedly historically accurate surroundings, to engage in a sort of Stanislavskian identification with their roles. The emotive term 'intolerance' (extensively used by the showman Griffith, by way of a teaser, in his published defence of *The Birth of a Nation*) is stretched to the very limits to accommodate the vagaries of the four tales. (What, one wonders, have the naked dancing girls to do with Belshazzar's saintly nature?) This is not to say that the film lacks subtlety of detail—the three threads which the jailers prepare to cut in order to release the trap beneath The Boy's feet clearly (though for once no title says so) correspond to the great 'realities' spun by the Fates who gossip behind Lillian Gish as "The Woman Who Rocks the Cradle"—but it is to emphasise the abiding sentimentality and over-simplification of Griffith's view of the troubles of the human condition. *Intolerance* has been so extensively written about (for a sound detailed analysis of its structure see *Griffith and the Rise of Hollywood*, by Paul O'Dell, pp. 36–93) that it seems redundant to rehearse, once again, its innovations and influences. It is worth noting, however, that the extraordinary sets for the wall of Babylon and for the vast city concourse, in the centre of which was a set of steps flanked by columns topped by rampant elephants, still seem stupendous constructions. Ironically, in their own way, these sets are as grandiose and as empty—though Griffith would not have wished them remembered as such—as Kane's Xanadu. And, secondly, that Griffith drew from almost all his female principals quite extraordinarily intense and varied performances: Josephine Crowell's gloatingly malicious Catherine