

## Document Citation

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# films of D.W. Griffith,

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Far from being the outdated sentimentalist he is considered today in some circles, D. W. Griffith was the American Cinema's first great director, an extraordinarily mature, subtle and sensitive artist. He was also the cinema's great technical innovator: Griffith did not, strictly speaking, "invent" such devices as close-ups and cross-cutting, but he was the first director to use them with any real sophistication and meaning. Griffith's insight into human emotion was equalled by his ability to express his insight through his technique and his players: the performances of Lillian Gish, Mae Marsh and Dorothy Gish in Griffith's films are legendary. By the time Griffith entered the sound era, he had perfected and refined his art to a state of stark simplicity.

Doc Films has presented Griffith's two best-known masterpieces, **THE BIRTH OF A NATION** and **INTOLERANCE**, several times in the past. This series consists of three of his lesser-known silent masterpieces, and his two sound films, made under great hardships but still remarkable works.

**Oct 8: BROKEN BLOSSOMS (1919)** Cobb 8:00 75¢  
A genuine silent masterpiece which gave the world Richard Barthelmess. Set in London, Barthelmess and Lillian Gish give painfully effective performances as two doomed lovers of the slums. Barthelmess is an opium-smoking Chinaman who cannot adjust to Western Civilization; Gish is a delicate young girl brutalized by her sadistic father. At turns lyrical and realistic, **BROKEN BLOSSOMS** is a milestone on the road to modern cinema. [silent]

**Oct 15: WAY DOWN EAST (1920)** Cobb 8:00 75¢  
Gish and Barthelmess again, this time in the ultimate in classical melodrama. **WAY DOWN EAST** is a story of innocence betrayed and lost, a story replete with thwarted love and heart-tugging evictions. Gish is a country girl seduced and abandoned by a "city slicker." The final chase across the ice floes makes outstanding use of real exteriors, as Griffith's imagery produces an unforgettable feeling of cold and suffering. [silent]

**Oct 22: ISN'T LIFE WONDERFUL? (1924)** Cobb 8:00 75¢  
Bearlike Dick Sutherland chases sensual Carol Dempster through a grove of slender trees, while masses of starving workers wait demoralized in breadlines. **ISN'T LIFE WONDERFUL** was made on location in Germany, and chronicles the effects of the great depression of the 1920's on the common people. The depression is directly linked to World War I, an extension of the anti-war sentiment Griffith expressed in **THE BIRTH OF A NATION**. The title refers to Griffith's belief that love and dignity could make life "wonderful," even in squalid economic conditions. [silent]

**Oct 29: ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1930)** Cobb 7:00 75¢ for both  
Griffith's first sound film demonstrated his mastery of the medium, from the sublime opening image of the lonely cabin in the snow. Walter Huston stars as Lincoln, in a performance far more interesting and accomplished than the later, duller Raymond Massey. The simplicity of **ABRAHAM LINCOLN** adds to its beauty and power.

**THE STRUGGLE (1931)** Cobb 9:00  
His last film, **THE STRUGGLE** dealt with one of Griffith's favorite themes: the effects of alcoholism on the family. Anita Loos wrote the screenplay; Griffith's direction vividly depicts hard labor in a steel mill, a Bronx street, a pre-Prohibition Beer Garden, and a 1920's jazz speakeasy. Hal Skelly (as the alcoholic) and Zita Johann (as his wife) give convincing, realistic performances. Photographed by Joseph Ruttenberg (who won an Academy Award nearly 30 years later for **GIGI**).