



# American Cinema 1890-1909

THEMES AND VARIATIONS

edited by André Gaudreault



## American Cinema, 1890–1909

**SCREEN**



AMERICAN CULTURE / AMERICAN CINEMA

**DECADES**

Each volume in the Screen Decades: American Culture/American Cinema series presents a group of original essays analyzing the impact of cultural issues on the cinema and the impact of the cinema in American society. Because every chapter explores a spectrum of particularly significant motion pictures and the broad range of historical events in one year, readers will gain a continuing sense of the decade as it came to be depicted on movie screens across the continent. The integration of historical and cultural events with the sprawling progression of American cinema illuminates the pervasive themes and the essential movies that define an era. Our series represents one among many possible ways of confronting the past; we hope that these books will offer a better understanding of the connections between American culture and film history.

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American Cinema,  
**1890–1909**



Themes and Variations

EDITED BY

ANDRÉ GAUDREULT



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To Eileen Bowser and David Francis,  
who made Brighton 1978 possible

We are living between two twilights: the dusk of one world, and the dawn of another. Twilight is imprecise, and the outline of all things is indistinct. Only eyes sharpened by a will to discover the primal and invisible movement of things and beings can find their way through the misty sight of the *anima mundi*. . . . Through movement created by a marvelous combination of photographic images and light, life is shown in the movie theater at the height of its action in a truly paroxysmal convulsion. Here is the sign of a new art.

Riciotto Canudo, "Triomphe du cinématographe" (1908)  
and "La naissance d'un sixième art" (1911)



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Last but not least, as they say, I must in all truthfulness say that this book would not have appeared in its present state, or at the time it has, if it weren't for Lisa Pietrocatelli's enormous and high-quality work, day after day, as editorial assistant, publication secretary, special advisor, and, at times, deputy editor of this volume. Lisa is a reliable and responsible person like few others. She is also endowed with good judgment and is always ready with sound advice. She shares with the author of these lines a never-failing optimism and proverbial good humor (readers will excuse me for including myself in these remarks!). All in all, this means that the present volume has been prepared, in my view, by a terrific team of people (I call things the way I see them).

Lisa and I sincerely believe, given all of the above conditions, which these acknowledgments wish to express, that readers will not be bored by the present volume and, especially, that they will learn much from it. We hope you enjoy it.

André Gaudreault  
Montréal  
March 2008



# T I M E L I N E



1890–1909

## 1890

- 25 JANUARY Nellie Bly completes her tour of the world in seventy-two days in a hot-air balloon.
- 1 OCTOBER Yosemite National Park is established.
- 29 DECEMBER The U.S. Army attacks a Sioux camp at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, resulting in the deaths of between 150 and 370 Sioux men, women, and children.

## 1891

- 1 APRIL The Wrigley Company is founded in Chicago, selling products such as soap and baking powder.
- 5 MAY Opening of New York's Carnegie Hall, with Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky conducting the Symphony Society.
- 20 MAY Thomas Edison demonstrates his Kinetoscope, the first peephole film device (it was not projected on a screen).
- 21 DECEMBER The first basketball game is played in Springfield, Massachusetts.

## 1892

- 1 JANUARY The Ellis Island immigration entry facility opens.
- 15 APRIL General Electric is founded.
- 7 SEPTEMBER James J. Corbett knocks out John L. Sullivan in the twenty-first round and becomes the new heavyweight champion of the world.
- 31 OCTOBER *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle is published in the United Kingdom by Newnes Press.

## 1893

- 1 MAY The World's Columbian Exposition opens in Chicago.
- 5 MAY The Panic of 1893. The New York Stock Exchange collapses, causing an economic depression (1893–1897) followed by a flurry of corporate mergers.

- 9 MAY Edison makes his first public demonstration of “modern motion pictures,” using a peephole kinoscope, at the Brooklyn Academy of Arts and Sciences. *Blacksmith Scene* and *Horse Shoeing* are shown.
- 11 JUNE In Japan, Kokichi Mikimoto obtains the world’s first cultured pearl.
- 16 DECEMBER Antonin Dvořák’s Symphony “From the New World” is premiered at Carnegie Hall.

### 1894

- 12 MARCH For the first time, Coca-Cola is sold in bottles.
- 14 APRIL Business associates of Thomas Edison open a kinoscope parlor at 1155 Broadway, New York.
- 11 MAY Workers living in Pullman City, whose wages had just been reduced by nearly a third, go on strike with the support of the American Railway Union.

### 1895

- 1 FEBRUARY Birth of John Ford, American film director.
- 3 SEPTEMBER The first professional football game is played, in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, between the Latrobe YMCA and the Jeannette Athletic Club. (Latrobe won the contest 12–0.)
- 8 NOVEMBER In Germany, Wilhelm Röntgen discovers X-rays.

### 1896

- 1 FEBRUARY In France, Henri Becquerel discovers radioactivity by accident.
- 26 MAY The Dow Jones Industrial Average, now the world’s oldest stock-exchange index, is established as part of the New York Stock Exchange.
- 2 JUNE Guglielmo Marconi patents the radio.
- 29 JULY Chop suey is invented in New York.
- 3 NOVEMBER Republican William McKinley is elected president of the United States.
- 16 NOVEMBER Electric power is transmitted between two cities for the first time.

### 1897

- 19 MAY Oscar Wilde is released from Reading Gaol, where he had been imprisoned on sodomy charges.

26 MAY *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, goes on sale.

17 JULY The Klondike Gold Rush begins.

## 1898

1 JANUARY Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx are incorporated to form New York City. Staten Island is added on 25 January.

13 JANUARY In France, Emile Zola's *J'accuse!* exposes the Alfred Dreyfus affair.

21 APRIL Start of the Spanish American War, which lasts until 12 August. The Treaty of Paris between the United States and Spain forces Spain to relinquish Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States.

21 DECEMBER In France, Marie and Pierre Curie discover radium.

## 1899

3 JANUARY The *New York Times* uses the word “automobile” for the first time.

14 FEBRUARY Voting machines are approved by the U.S. Congress for use in federal elections.

6 MARCH Trademark is registered for Aspirin.

20 MARCH At Sing-Sing prison in New York State, Martha M. Place becomes the first woman executed in an electric chair.

4 NOVEMBER Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* is published.

## 1900

19 SEPTEMBER Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid commit robbery together for the first time.

2 DECEMBER Gillette files a patent application for the safety razor.

12 DECEMBER U.S. Steel is formed.

## 1901

17 MARCH A showing of his canvases in Paris makes Vincent Van Gogh a sensation, more than a decade after his death.

2 SEPTEMBER At the Minnesota State Fair, Theodore Roosevelt says, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.”

6 SEPTEMBER At the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, the anarchist Leon Czolgosz shoots President William McKinley, who is seriously wounded. On 14 September, McKinley dies and Vice President Theodore Roosevelt, a forty-two-year-old New Yorker, becomes the twenty-sixth president of the United States.

12 DECEMBER Marconi transmits the first transatlantic telegraph.

**1902**

- 21 FEBRUARY Dr. Harvey Cushing, the first U.S. brain surgeon, performs his first operation.
- 25 FEBRUARY Hubert Cecil Booth founds the Vacuum Cleaner Company.
- 9 AUGUST Edward VII is crowned King of England; the Victorian Age is over.

**1903**

- 15 JANUARY The teddy bear is introduced in America.
- 1 OCTOBER The first game of the first World Series is played between the Boston Americans and the Pittsburgh Pirates.
- 17 DECEMBER The first successful powered airplane flight is made by Orville and Wilbur Wright at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

**1904**

- 22 MARCH The first color photograph is published in a daily newspaper, the *Daily Illustrated Mirror*.
- 30 APRIL President Theodore Roosevelt inaugurates the Louisiana Purchase Exposition.
- 8 NOVEMBER Roosevelt is elected to his first full term as president.
- 31 DECEMBER The first New Year's Eve celebration takes place in Longacre (now Times) Square.

**1905**

- 14 JUNE In Russia, sailors mutiny aboard the Battleship *Potemkin*.
- 5 SEPTEMBER President Roosevelt acts as the mediator in peace talks between the Russians and the Japanese following the Russo-Japanese War, won by Japan.
- 28 OCTOBER Sinn Féin is formed by Arthur Griffith.

**1906**

- 19 FEBRUARY W. K. Kellogg and Charles Bolin found Battle Creek Toasted Corn Flake Company.
- 18 APRIL The Great San Francisco Earthquake, estimated at 7.9 on the Richter scale, leaves thousands homeless and causes more than three thousand deaths.
- 22 SEPTEMBER A white mob gathers on Decatur Street in Atlanta and begins destroying African American businesses on nearby Auburn Street. The mob kills five African Americans, burns hundreds of homes, and destroys vibrant sections of the city.

 **1907**

- 21 MARCH The United States invades Honduras.
- 31 MAY Taxis first begin running in New York City.
- 4 JUNE An automatic washer and dryer are introduced.

 **1908**

- 11 JANUARY The Grand Canyon National Monument is created.
- 24 JANUARY General Baden-Powell starts the Boy Scouts.
- 12 MAY The *Lusitania* crosses the Atlantic in a record four days, fifteen hours.
- 12 AUGUST The first Model T Ford is built.

 **1909**

- 12 FEBRUARY The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded.
- 6 APRIL Robert Peary reaches the North Pole.
- 19 AUGUST The first race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway is held.



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