COM 320, History of Film

*Who Invented Movies? Selected "Players" in the Flow of Influence in Early Cinema*

**KEY**

US = working in United States
FR = working in France
GB = working in Great Britain
S = primary emphasis on scientific study of motion, film
E = primary emphasis on creating forms of entertainment, possibly art
D = primary emphasis on documenting reality
1. Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) U.S.
   Born in England, he was in the U.S. from youth. A photographer, he was most interested in
   capturing "Animal Locomotion," the title of his summary work. In 1872, he began his famous series
   of photo studies, sponsored by former California Governor Leland Stanford. By 1877, the challenge
   to prove that at some point in a racehorse's stride, all four hooves are off the ground was met;
   Muybridge had produced a series of quick-exposure photos that captured all moments in the stride
   via sequentially-placed cameras, and Stanford had won a $25,000 bet. Muybridge never produced
   "moving pictures" himself, nor did he intend to, but his work was world-renowned and an influence
   on many to follow.

2. Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904) France
   A physician and physiologist interested in animal movement, he participated in a "co-influential"
   relationship with Muybridge. His 1882 photographic "gun" was capable of taking 12 pictures per
   second, originally on a single frame of film (which he called "chronophotography"). In 1887, he was
   the first to combine flexible film (on a paper roll) and intermittent movement, later adopting
   celluloid. He did not himself create films, but his influence is indisputable. Louis Lumiere credited
   him: "What did I do? It was in the air." An 1889 meeting with Edison convinced the American that
   his assistant Dickson's phonograph-based prototype was wrong. Marey, always the scientist, was
   very open and sharing with Edison!

3. Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin (1805-1871) France
   The son of a watchmaker, he was "the father of modern conjuring" (Cambridge Biographical
   Dictionary). In Paris, he constructed mechanical toys and automata (robots, like Disney's
   animatronics), developed complex magic lantern shows that featured primitive motion, and
   performed magic in his own theatre (later to be purchased and reopened by Georges Melies). On his
   honeymoon, Le Prince went to Houdin's show repeatedly. "Houdin inspired [Le Prince] with the
   moving-picture idea" (Rawlence, 1990). [Of course, Houdin also inspired a young American
   magician and escape artist named Ehrich Weiss to adopt a name in honor of Robert-Houdin--Harry
   Houdini.]

4. Louis Aimé Augustin LePrince (1841-1890?) France/U.S./Great Britain
   From a well-to-do family, he dabbled in art, photography, optics. His wife's family was involved in
   heavy manufacturing, giving him the expertise and confidence to work on camera mechanisms.
   Inspired by Robert-Houdin's magic lantern shows, he set about to make moving pictures. His multi-
   lens (16) camera was reminiscent of some of Muybridge's setups; he received a U.S. patent. He then
   proposed a 3-lens camera, and this was later used as evidence by American Mutoscope and Biograph
   Co. in its suit against Edison in the late 1890's. (AMBC's point was that Edison was not the sole
   inventor of motion pictures; different models abounded.) Le Prince constructed a single-lens model
   in 1888, but before he could manufacture the system, he disappeared from a train to Paris in 1890.
   With him were his British patent forms, some parts and models for his invention.

5. Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) U.S.
   The prolific American inventor assigned the task of doing "for the eye what the phonograph did for
   the ear" to his assistant, William K. L. Dickson. Thus, Dickson did the actual work of invention,
   even though Edison always claimed he was "the father of motion pictures." In 1889, the
   Kinetophonograph, capable of showing film in synchronization with a phonograph record, became a
   reality. This did not prove to be popular, and Edison and Dickson continued to develop alternative
   systems, culminating in the Kinetoscope, a system that displayed short films to individuals via a
peep-show device. The Black Maria film studio was built in 1893. In 1896, Edison unveiled his Vitascope, a projector system. In 1909, Edison joined other major motion picture pioneer companies in founding the Motion Picture Patents Company. [Dickson left Edison in 1894 and co-founded the American Mutoscope & Biograph Co.—a mutoscope is an elaborate flip-book in a peep-show presentation like the Kinetoscope.]

6. William Friese-Greene (1855-1921) Great Britain
A British photographer, inventor, and businessman, he owned multiple portrait studios in England. Inspired by magic lanterns, in 1889 Friese-Greene patented his “chronophotographic” camera. He claimed it was capable of taking up to ten photographs per second using perforated celluloid film. A report on the camera was published in the British Photographic News in 1890; he sent a clipping of the story to Thomas Edison, whose laboratory had been developing the Kinetoscope. Friese-Greene gave a public demonstration in 1890 but the low frame rate combined with the device's apparent unreliability failed to make an impression. Friese-Greene’s experiments in the field of motion pictures were at the expense of his other business interests and in 1891 he declared bankruptcy.

7. Louis & Auguste Lumiere (1864-1948; 1862-1954) France
The two sons of France's largest manufacturer of photographic products, they were inspired by Marey and by Edison's/Dickson's work on the Kinetoscope (which they saw in Paris in 1894). They invented the Cinematographe, a combined camera and projector, and shot their first film, Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory, in 1895. December 28, 1895, has been called by many "the birthday of world cinema"—the Lumieres presented a program of 20 short films, projected at the Grand Cafe in Paris. The program was "held over" for weeks. Subsequently, Louis Lumiere dispatched photographers all over the globe, with the combined task of selling Cinematographs, showing films to paying audiences, and filming newsworthy events and actualities (e.g., "travelogues") to be marketed worldwide. Although the Lumiere company did produce some narrative and even humorous short films, most of its offerings were in the "realist" style, and the name Lumiere remains firmly attached to the roots of the realist school of filmmaking.

8. Georges Melies (1861-1938) France
From a wealthy manufacturing family, he was the "odd" child, more interested in art, puppetry, and magic than in business. In 1888, he sold his interest in the family shoe business, and reopened the Theatre Robert-Houdin in Paris, and soon became famous for his shows of magic and illusion. When he saw the Lumiere program at the Grand Cafe in 1895, he begged the brothers to sell him film equipment, but they declined. He purchased a Bioscope projector from Robert Paul, and began showing Edison shorts; but soon after, he invented and had constructed his own camera/projector system. Although he produced a number of literary films (e.g., Joan of Arc, 1900), he is remembered most for his contribution in the realm of fantasy, and special visual effects (e.g., A Trip to the Moon, 1902). If the Lumieres were the fathers of realist filmmaking, Melies was the parent of expressionism. (A highly fictionalized version of Melies was portrayed by Ben Kingsley in Martin Scorsese’s Hugo (2011)).

9. Early British Cinema is exemplified here by four important filmmakers. Two are from the “Brighton School” of filmmakers, true movie pioneers who experimented with dark comedy and melodrama in their “homemade” studios, creatively demonstrating early visual effects: G. A. Smith and James Williamson. Two are from London: Robert Paul and Cecil Hepworth. See also: Paul Merton on Early British Comedy (includes the Brighton School), http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tours/merton/tourmerton1.html
A. G.A. Smith (1864-1959) England
An established portrait photographer, he built his own film camera in 1896 and began making movies. An innovator, he patented double-exposure as a film device in 1897, and was early to use close-ups. Later, in 1908, he founded a company that developed and sold a two-color film process.

B. James Williamson (1855-1933) England
A photographer, he bought a movie projector in 1896 and converted it to a camera. He founded a studio in 1902, and in 1904 began manufacturing film stock and movie equipment, eventually getting out of filmmaking completely to concentrate on the manufacturing of film equipment.

C. Robert Paul (1869-1943) England
This early British film pioneer got into the business by way of his training as an engineer; he was hired to copy Edison's Kinetoscope, which was not patented in Great Britain. He eventually designed his own system, began producing and directing films, and built England's first indoor studio in 1899.

D. Cecil Hepworth (1874-1953) England
His father was a magic lantern lecturer, and from accompanying his father on tours, Hepworth developed a fascination with moving pictures. He patented several photo inventions, and in 1898 published a handbook on film, Animated Photography, "possibly the earliest published work" on film (Katz, 1994). He began directing films in 1899, and in 1903 started his own studio. While his Rescued by Rover is identified as "a landmark in cinema history, one of the earliest films to employ advanced continuity and narrative techniques through sophisticated cutting" (Katz, 1994), he failed to keep up with innovations, and went bankrupt in 1924.

10. Pathe Freres (Pathe brothers)
A phonograph company founded in 1896 by Charles Pathe and his three brothers, the firm got into filmmaking in 1901. In 1902, they built a studio and began turning out one or two shorts a day. Foreign offices were established all over the globe, and by 1908, Pathe was an international empire, by far the world's largest movie producer ("selling twice as many films in the U.S. as all American companies combined," Katz, 1994). After many changes/mergers/etc., the name is still held by a French film company.

11. D.W. Griffith (1875-1948) U.S.
What can one say about the "single most important figure in the history of American film"? He didn’t invent film, but he “molded the syntax” of film, creating a language of visual storytelling that is still used today. Be sure to read the entire chapter in our textbook (Ch. 3) on his contributions to the development of narrative form. Re his background and auteurship: Son of a Confederate colonel, steeped in lore of the old South; Actor and playwright—focus on story; Acting for Edwin S. Porter (Rescued from an Eagle’s Nest) led to other work in film (writing and directing at American Mutoscope and Biograph). His innovations: Interframe narrative; Intraframe narrative; Feature-length film