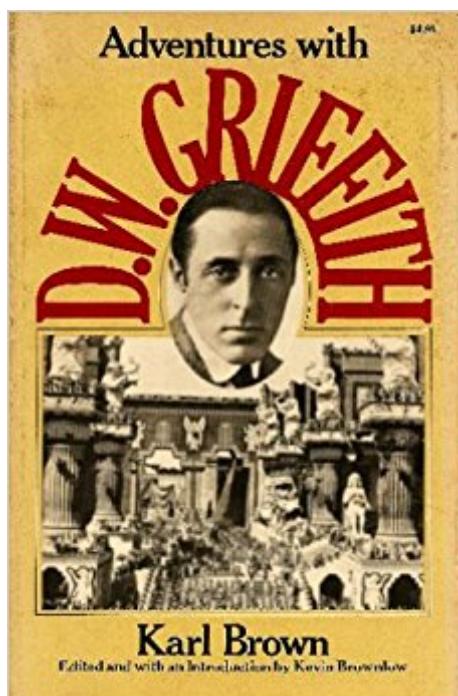


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# Adventures With D.w. Griffith (A Da Capo Paperback)



## **Synopsis**

Karl Brown, the 16-year-old kid who fast-talked his way into D. W. Griffith's film company, was a keen observer of and participant in two of the most momentous occasions in film history - the production of *The Birth of a Nation* and of *Intolerance*. Discovered in retirement by film director and author Kevin Brownlow, who has also contributed the introduction to this book, he was persuaded to tell the story of his beginnings on Griffith's crew. What emerges is a detailed account of D. W. Griffith, his world, and a bygone era of filmmaking.

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## **Customer Reviews**

Karl Brown, the 16-year-old kid who fast-talked his way into D. W. Griffith's film company, was a keen observer of and participant in two of the most momentous occasions in film history - the production of *The Birth of a Nation* and of *Intolerance*. Discovered in retirement by film director and author Kevin Brownlow, who has also contributed the introduction to this book, he was persuaded to tell the story of his beginnings on Griffith's crew. What emerges is a detailed account of D. W. Griffith, his world, and a bygone era of filmmaking.

Karl Brown being a little modest about his own role clears up a lot of Mystery surrounding DW Griffith. He really makes you feel like you're standing beside him watching the dramatic history of the movies as it unfolds. We can't go back but Brown makes us feel like we were there .

very informative

The author traces his very early days at the beginning of cinematography in a vivid and compelling way. A great read for a modern cinematographer or film student. Highly, highly recommended.

a fine memoir of dw Griffith by a colleague

Karl Brown's parents were New York actors who relocated to Hollywood when that farm community was just beginning to transform into a moviemaking town. The Browns were able to secure employment with D.W. Griffith. Sixteen-year-old Karl, who was previously with now-defunct KINEMACOLOR, convinced Griffith cameraman Billy Bitzer to hire him as an assistant, meaning a go-fer, equipment hauler, record keeper and small job doer. By the time D.W. struck gold with *THE CLANSMAN* (1915), Karl had proven his worth as more than a laborer. He was given a contract at \$40 per week, and Griffith built the teenager a lab where he could in his time off the set experiment with special effects. Karl was also an uncredited cameraman on many Griffith photoplays and even appeared as an extra in *INTOLERANCE* (1916). He later was cinematographer for James Cruze and worked on his masterpiece, *THE COVERED WAGON* (1923). Brown was with the Griffith company from 1913 to '19. In his 1973 autobiography *ADVENTURES WITH D.W. GRIFFITH*, he recalls in remarkable detail the best of those days. That his prose is such a delight is probably due to Brown's second career after stepping away from the camera, that of story and screenplay writer. His prodigious memory provides much fascinating trivia, such as: Griffith's habit of shadowboxing on the set, or dancing with Lillian Gish to a tune he himself hummed. The boss also liked foot racing with the company handyman. D.W. believed it was necessary to break a sweat once each day. Griffith had Bitzer fade in and out on every take. These fades were mostly eliminated in editing, but were there when needed. Christy Cabanne, Tod Browning, Erich von Stroheim, Monte Blue and Raoul Walsh were all Griffith errand boys. Walsh played John Wilkes Booth in *THE CLANSMAN*. Before a single frame of film was shot, the gigantic Babylon set for *INTOLERANCE* nearly got toppled by gale force Santa Ana winds. When cameraman Victor Fleming signed on in 1915, he had just given up race car driving. Louis B. Mayer was a junk dealer who made his fortune distributing *THE CLANSMAN* throughout New England. On rare occasions, Brown gets lost in minutiae, such as detailing every little step in plaster castmaking, but for the most part this is a genuine page turner for anyone interested in motion picture history. Highest recommendation!

If you are interested in silent films or David Wark Griffith, then you won't be able to put this book down until you are finished! Karl Brown worked for the Kinemacolor company as a teenager in the 1910s. Just when this company went out of business, D.W. Griffith and his stock company arrived in Los Angeles. He quickly became a camera assistant to cameraman Billy Bitzer. He worked on Griffith's *THE AVENGING CONSCIENCE*, *BIRTH OF A NATION*, and *INTOLERANCE*, among other films. His book is funny, exciting, and informative. He is in awe of Griffith and actress Lillian Gish. He works his hardest to satisfy Griffith's demands on the job, but this sometimes makes Bitzer jealous of him. Brown is confused by many of the things that Griffith does while making these films, but he soon learns why Griffith works this way. The book also includes a chapter on Brown's stint in the Army during World War I, where he was given a one-week leave of absence to help Griffith with *BROKEN BLOSSOMS*. This is the finest memoir by any silent film vetran that I've read, and I've read quite a few.

Many books has been published about the silent movies era, from picture books to great actors to the eternal Chaplin and Pickford. This one is from one of Griffith cameramen's so for once, we stand behind the camera. What is different about Brown's account is the way the narration goes: his autobiographical experience of going through that time where everything was almost new and a lot had to be done. He states the important and not so important anecdotic facts while using a sometimes ironic tone and a semi-chronological pace of remembrance. He even explain, matter-of-factly, some technical aspects of the trend, etc... This book has a lot to offer for the silent movies or Griffith fans, especially if you have seen "Birth of a Nation" and "Intolerance". This is not the typical movie-related-good-for-the -fans-only book with Ohs! and Ahs! and Wow! to sustain you throughout your reading. It is a very specific moment in the life of a guy who was there when movies were at their beginning, a time long gone...

D W Griffith figures as the patron and idol of Karl Brown. There is no doubt that D W Griffith, the director of "Birth of a Nation" and "Intolerance". the supposed inventor of the "close-up" and discover of the Gish sisters, contributed immensely to the development of motion pictures as a distinct art form (perhaps THE art form of this century). Even so, the Griffith which emerges from these pages is half tyrant and "control freak" who ultimately is made obsolete by a public becoming increasingly sophisticated in its tastes. Karl Brown was taken on as a junior camera man by Griffith, and it is through his recollections that the early years of the American cinema comes alive. Still, this

is an autobiography so we are treated to a Norman Rockwell account of the early years of this century that illuminates the milieu from which Griffith's work sprung. There is more than an element of defensiveness from Brown as he tries to reconcile Griffith's persona as a "gentleman" with his often reactionary views as exemplified in "A Birth of a Nation" (a film that was almost banned in Australia and parts of the US). Griffith does not emerge from this work unscathed. Worth reading for historical interest.

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