



Dorothy Davenport Reid

Also Known As:

Dorothy Davenport, Mrs. Wallace Reid, Jr., Dorothy Reid

Lived:

March 13, 1895 - October 12, 1977

Worked as:

director, film actress, producer, screenwriter

Worked In:

United States

by Mark Lynn Anderson

When she moved to Southern California as an actress with the Nestor Film Company in late 1911, Dorothy Davenport became one of the first members of the early film colony soon to be known as Hollywood. One early biography appearing in *Moving Picture Stories* reported that the actress had remained with the eastern branch of that company until late 1912 (31). However, a photograph in the Los Angeles Public Library shows the personnel of the Nestor Company in Pasadena, California, on December 23, 1911, with Dorothy Davenport a prominent member of the stock company. While at Nestor, which soon became a unit of Universal Pictures, she met actor Wallace Reid, whom she married in October of 1913. Both were popular players at Universal during the mid-teens, but Reid's career accelerated after 1915 when he signed a long-term contract with the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company and starred in a number of Cecil B. DeMille films, the year before the company merger that produced Famous-Players Lasky. Davenport Reid performed screen work less and less after giving birth to a son in 1917, though she was often featured in fan magazine stories about the Reids' domestic life, like the 1921 *Photoplay* article "Where Bill Lives!"

Wallace Reid's international stardom was the context for Davenport Reid's emergence as a motion picture author in the mid-1920s. When the nation's newspapers reported that Wallace Reid was a drug addict and severely ill in a sanitarium, Davenport Reid became the chief interpreter of her husband's illness. When Reid died on January 18, 1923, she quickly returned to the screen to make *Human Wreckage* (1923), a film about the tragic consequences of the illegal trade in narcotics. While she performed the role of a drug addict's wife in *Human Wreckage*, her relation to the production was far more extensive than that of a featured player, yet the question of her "authorship" of this and of the two subsequent social problem films credited to her, *Broken Laws*

(1924) and *The Red Kimona* (1925), remains a critical problem for women's film history. *Human Wreckage* is a lost film high on the list of "most wanted" from the silent era. Research establishing the specific contributions Dorothy Reid made to these film productions would be welcomed, though a far more important historical task is determining the political and ideological contexts for her emergence as a unique social authority involved in filmmaking in the late silent period. Each of the three films was promoted in fan magazines and newspapers as Mrs. Wallace Reid's personal statement on a particular social issue—drug addiction, juvenile delinquency, prostitution—yet none were officially directed or written by Davenport Reid. The first two films were made under contract with the Thomas Ince Company, but after Ince died mysteriously in 1924, *Broken Laws* was copyrighted as a "Mrs. Wallace Reid Production." Mrs. Wallace Reid Productions then produced *The Red Kimona*, but according to advertisements in the 1925 and 1926 *Film Daily Year Book*, her company also claimed the two Ince pictures as its own. Each film begins with a short prologue in which Mrs. Wallace Reid, in a direct address to the film audience, endorses the motion picture as an important message about a matter of public concern. Davenport Reid used these prologues to advocate for particular social policies, institutional responses, and changes in popular attitudes.

Davenport Reid's ability to become a "film author" rested, in part, on her ability to speak from the sometimes contradictory positions of Hollywood producer, actress, widow, mother, and social reformer. Despite the challenge that the social problem films pose for received notions of women's film authorship, there has been little sustained research on these unusual works, their reception, or Davenport Reid's attempt to innovate alternative production practices and forms of authorship. Most historians have simply attempted to settle the question of her creative contributions by recourse to conventional divisions of studio labor (Brownlow 1990, 91; Foster 1998, 317; Slide 1996b, 89). Significantly, when Gabrielle Darley sought \$50,000 in personal damages because *The Red Kimona* had used her life story and name without permission, neither Walter Lang, who received screen credit for directing, nor [Adela Rogers St. Johns](#), on whose story the film was based, nor [Dorothy Arzner](#), who had written the scenario, was named in the suit. Instead, producer Davenport Reid, cameraman James Diamond, and production manager Cliff Houghton were the named defendants.

Davenport Reid eventually took conventional screen credit as a director on *Linda* (1929), a backwoods melodrama about a young woman forfeiting her education and emotional happiness to oblige the social expectations of various men. The extant film presents an interesting portrayal of strong female friendships and loyalties. Linda, played by Helen Foster, accepts an arranged marriage to a much older man in an effort to save her mother from her father's violent attacks. In its sensational treatment of domestic violence, arranged marriage, and bigamy, *Linda* looks toward the exploitation films Davenport Reid would direct for independent producer Wills Kent in the early 1930s; however, in its portrayal of Linda as a potential social worker who ultimately achieves her moral authority through reaffirming her domestic and maternal responsibilities, the motion picture looks back to the social problem films of the mid-1920s and the vicissitudes of Davenport Reid's own public and professional identities.

Some historians have argued that Darley's lawsuit against Davenport Reid put an end to her company, but Los Angeles County court records show that the privacy case, initially decided in Dorothy Davenport Reid's favor, was not reversed on appeal until 1931, after the company had disappeared. Explanations of its failure might be best sought in Davenport's Reid's unusual and precarious position in the film industry. Rather than establishing an oeuvre of film directorial efforts, more research is needed on the alternative business and production practices Davenport Reid made possible, as well as on the cultural politics of her self-promotion as a social authority. A more systematic consideration of publicity materials should aid the latter project, while the former might be fruitfully explored if business records of her company are found, though both the trade journals and the Thomas Ince papers already indicate her exceptional place in the industry in the mid-1920s.

See also: [Dorothy Arzner](#), [Adela Rogers St. Johns](#)

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"Melvin v. Davenport Reid." Civil No. 346. Fourth Appellate Court of Cal. 28 February 1931.

Slide, Anthony. *The Silent Feminists: America's First Women Directors*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996.

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Archival Paper Collections:

Thomas Ince Papers, 1913-1964. [Library of Congress](#).

Wallace Reid, Jr. papers, 1887-1975. [Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences](#), [Margaret Herrick Library](#).

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Dorothy Davenport Reid as Actress

The Golden Supper. Dir: D.W. Griffith, sc.: Dorothy West (Biograph Co. US 1910) cas: Charles West, Dorothy West, Claire McDowell, Dorothy Davenport, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

Mr. Grex of Monte Carlo. Dir.: Frank Reicher, sc.: Marion Fairfax (Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co., Inc. US 1915) cas.: Dorothy Davenport, Theodore Roberts, si, b&w, 35mm., 5 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

The Unattainable. Dir.: Lloyd B. Carleton (Bluebird Photoplays, Inc. US 1916) cas: Dorothy Davenport, Emory Johnson, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

Barriers of Society. Dir.: Lloyd B. Carleton, sc.: Fred Myton (Universal Film Mfg. Co., Inc. US 1916) cas.: Dorothy Davenport, Emory Johnson, si, b&w, 35mm., 5 reels. Archive: [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

Every Woman's Problem. Dir. Willis L. Robards (Plymouth Pictures, Inc. US 1921) cas.: Dorothy Davenport, si, b&w, 35mm, 5 reels, 4604 ft. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#). [**Note:** This film is a highly-edited 1921 re-release of the 1917 suffrage film, *Mothers of Men*, with new inter-titles).

Broken Laws. Dir.: Roy Williams Neill (Thomas H. Ince Corp., US 1924) cas.: Mrs. Wallace Reid, Percy Marmont, si, b&w, 7 reels, 6,413 ft. Archive: [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#).

The Satin Woman. Dir./sc.: Walter Lang (Gotham Productions US 1927) cas.: Ruth Stonehouse, Mrs. Wallace Reid, si, b&w, 35mm., 7 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#).

2. Dorothy Davenport Reid as Producer (Mrs. Wallace Reid Productions)

The Red Kimona. Prod.: Mrs. Wallace Reid, dir.: Walter Lang, st.: Adela Rogers St. Johns, adp.: Dorothy Arzner (Mrs. Wallace Reid Prod. US 1925) cas.: Priscilla Bonner, Theodore von Eltz, si, b&w, 35mm., 7 reels of 7, 6355 ft. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

3. Dorothy Davenport Reid as Director and Producer (Mrs. Wallace Reid Productions)

Linda. Prod./dir.: Mrs. Wallace Reid (Mrs. Wallace Reid Prod. US 1929) cas.: Helen Foster, Warner Baxter, Noah Berry, si. b&w, 16 mm, 3 reels. Archive: [New York Public Library](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Dorothy Davenport Reid as Actress

The Broken Doll, 1910; *Examination Day at School*, 1910; *The Fugitive*, 1910; *A Gold Necklace*, 1910; *The Golden Supper*, 1910; *A Mohawk's Way*, 1910; *The Oath and the Man*, 1910; *Two Little Waifs*, 1910; *Waiter No. 5*, 1910; *The Troublesome Baby*, 1910; *His Dream*, 1911; *His Son*, 1911; *Almost A Suicide*, 1912; *The Bachelor and the Baby*, 1912; *The Boomerang*, 1912; *A Brave Little Woman*, 1912; *The Cub Reporter's Big Scoop*, 1912; *The Feudal Debt*, 1912; *Her Indian Hero*, 1912; *His Only Son*, 1912; *Home and Mother*, 1912; *In the Long Run*, 1912; *Inbad the Court*, 1912; *The Lost Address*, 1912; *A Martini Mix-Up*, 1912; *Our Lady of the Pearls*, 1912; *A Pair of Baby Shoes*, 1912; *The Torn Letter*, 1912; *Uncle Bill*, 1912; *All Rivers Meet the Sea*, 1913; *A Black Hand Elopment*, 1913; *The Cracksman Santa Claus*, 1913; *The Cracksman's Reformation*, 1913; *A False Friend*, 1913; *Fires of Fate*, 1913; *The Failure of Success*, 1913; *God of Chance*, 1913; *The Heart of Kathleen*, 1913; *A Hope Legend*, 1913; *The Lightning Bolt*, 1913; *Pierre of the North*, 1913; *A Plain Girl's Love*, 1913; *Retribution*, 1913; *The Sea Dog*, 1913; *Breed o'the Mountains*, 1914; *Children of Fate*, 1914; *Countess Betty's Mine*, 1914; *Cross the Mexican Line*, 1914; *Cupid Incognito*, 1914; *The Den of Thieves*, 1914; *Fires of Conscience*, 1914; *A Flash in the Dark*, 1914; *The Fruit of Evil*, 1914; *The Great Devotion*, 1914; *A Gypsy Romance*, 1914; *The Heart of the Hills*, 1914; *The Intruder*, 1914; *The Man Within*, 1914; *The Mountaineer*, 1914; *Passing of the Beast*, 1914; *The Quack*, 1914; *The Siren*, 1914; *The Skeleton*, 1914; *The Spark of Manhood*, 1914; *The Spider and Her Web*, 1914; *The Test*, 1914; *The Voice of the Viola*, 1914; *The Way of A Woman*, 1914; *The Wheel of Life*, 1914; *A Wife on A Wager*, 1914; *Women and Roses*, 1914; *The Adventurer*, 1915; *The Bond of Friendship*, 1915; *The Crystal Globe*, 1915; *The Explorer*, 1915; *Fate's Vengeance*, 1915; *\$500 Reward*, 1915; *The Hawk and the Hermit*, 1915; *The Heritage of a Century*, 1915; *Letters Entangled*, 1915; *One Hundred Years Ago*, 1915; *The Skein of Life*, 1915; *The Toilers of the Sea*, 1915; *The Unknown*, 1915; *A Voice from the Sea*, 1915; *Where the Trail Led*, 1915; *The Witness*, 1915; *The Wolf's Den*, 1915; *Black Friday*, 1916; *The Devil's Bond Woman*, 1916; *Dr. Neighbor*, 1916; *The False Clue*, 1916; *Heartaches*, 1916; *Her Husband's Faith*, 1916; *Her Soul's Song*, 1916; *The Human Gamble*, 1916; *The Ivy and the Oak*, 1916; *A Miracle of Love*, 1916; *The Mother Call*, 1916; *Number 16 Martin Place*, 1916; *Phantom Island*, 1916; *The Question Mark*, 1916; *The Turn of the Wheel*, 1916; *Two Mothers*, 1916; *The Way of the World*, 1916; *The Wrong Heart*, 1916; *A Yoke of Gold*, 1916; *Buried Alive*, 1917; *The Girl and the Crisis*, 1917; *It Makes A Difference*, 1917; *The Penalty of Science*, 1917; *The Scarlet Crystal*, 1917; *The Squaw Man's Son*, 1917; *Treason*, 1917; *His Extra Bit*, 1918; *The Fighting Chance*, 1920; *The Masked Avenger*, 1921; *Human Wreckage*, 1923; *Hellship Bronson*, 1928.

2. Dorothy Davenport Reid as Producer

The Earth Woman, 1926; *Linda*, 1929.

C. DVD Sources:

Pioneers: First Women Filmmakers. DVD/Blu-ray. (Kino Lorber US 2018) - contains *Linda* (1929) and *The Red Kimona* (1925)

Linda. DVD. (Grapevine US 2011)

The Red Kimona. DVD. (Kino International US 2008)

D. Streamed Media:

[*The Red Kimona*](#) (1925) is streaming online via Kanopy

Credit Report

Erroneous production credits have been commonplace for Dorothy Davenport Reid, particularly for the first three films she made after her husband's death in the period 1923 to 1925. For example, while she is sometimes credited with writing the story for *Human Wreckage*, in all likelihood she had nothing whatsoever to do with the scripting process. C. Gardner Sullivan wrote the script for the film, most likely basing it on an untitled seven-page story treatment by Will Lambert that still exists in the file for *Human Wreckage* in the papers of Thomas Ince at the Library of Congress (see note 23 in Anderson, 104). The idea that Davenport Reid authored the film was, of course, widely promoted in the publicity materials produced by the film's distributor, Film Box Office (FBO). Similarly, Davenport Reid is often promoted as the co-director of *The Red Kimona*, an idea that seems to have its source in Anthony Slide's contention that she sat next to director Walter Lang during the entire production and "approved each take," a claim he garnered from a 1974 interview with the film's lead actress, Priscilla Bonner (Slide 1996, 89). Nevertheless, Davenport Reid is not listed as the film's director in the original on-screen credits, nor is she listed as a director in existing copyright and censorship records. According to the minutes of its board of directors, the Thomas H. Ince Corporation entered into a contract with Davenport Reid on February 1, 1923, for the making of two productions in which she was to star and for which she was to receive a percentage of the receipts. Those two motion pictures were *Human Wreckage* and *Broken Laws*, both produced by Ince and both distributed by FBO. Each featured "Mrs. Wallace Reid" as the principal actress, and each also included an extended prologue in which Davenport Reid addressed the film audience "as herself," a role sometimes described as a "presenter" or an "endorser." When Ince died at the end of 1924, Davenport Reid formed Mrs. Wallace Reid Productions to make *The Red Kimona*, and trade advertisements for that production company subsequently assumed credit for the two earlier Ince productions, perhaps leading researchers to think that Davenport Reid had also produced those films. Her first verifiable producer credit is on *The Red Kimona* in 1925 (though it is possible that she co-produced *Broken Laws*), while her official directorial debut was on *Linda* in 1929. Unfortunately, Davenport Reid's contributions to the motion pictures of the mid-1920s have been forced into familiar production roles at the expense of appreciating her unique "authorship" of the films

though documenting her more significant labor as a cultural authority on social problems in the 1920s. Along with Thomas Ince, [Adela Rogers St. Johns](#), and William Randolph Hearst, Davenport Reid seems to have been committed to a mass media of reform in which women's voices vitally mattered, an interventionist project that, by the mid-1920s, was being rapidly eclipsed by the consolidation of a corporate entertainment industry. *Every woman's Problem*. Dir. Willis L. Robards (Plymouth Pictures, Inc. US 1921) cas.: Dorothy Davenport, si. b&w, 35mm, 5 reels, 4604 ft. Archive: GBB (Note: It is very likely this film is a highly-edited 1921 re-release of the 1917 suffrage film, *Mothers of Men*, with new inter-titles.) Reid is not credited at all for *His Son*, *Boomerang* and only reference is Braffs. *Cub Reporter's Big Scoop* is unconfirmed by IMDB, she is not credited elsewhere.

Citation

Anderson, Mark Lynn. "Dorothy Davenport Reid." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds. *Women Film Pioneers Project*. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013. <<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-dorothy-davenport-reid/>>