THE 1890S-1900S: HOW THE TURN OF THE CENTURY INFLUENCED THE BIRTH OF MOVIES

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ABSTRACT: Like all works of art, silent films (as in those made between the 1890s and the advent of sound in 1927) were influenced by the sociohistorical events of their time during their production. Given that most films were produced initially as entertainment, they can also act as windows into the times they were created in – whether intentionally so or not. This is especially true given the volatile times that occurred when a new art form – movies – was born, causing a deeper impression to be made within that art form that isn't seen at first glance. This paper, therefore, covers how aspects of the Second Industrial Age and the Progressive Era influenced some of the earliest films of the silent era: Employees at the Lumière Factory (1895), The Great Train Robbery (1903) and The Kleptomaniac (1905). The paper first goes over these sociohistorical events to highlight the issues that were occurring at the time of each profiled film's production. Then, it incorporates background information about each film's production as well as visual analysis of these films to contextualize each film and show the influence made by these concurrent sociohistorical events. As movies stand as cultural landmarks since their invention over a century ago, recognizing their origins remains critical to understanding their evolution to what we have today. Connecting the finished product with the sociohistorical times they were produced remains critical to truly understand these cultural origins.

Movies have been one of the cultural mainstays in the United States since their invention in the 1890s. What has kept them around since their beginning in the silent era has been the audience's response to a given film and the outside experiences they bring to what they see on screen. Like all works of art, movies have been either explicitly or implicitly influenced by the world outside of their creation. The matter, then, is how movies of the very early silent period were influenced by the world around them. In this paper, I look at three silent films of the early period between the mid-1890s and 1905 – Louis and Auguste Lumière's Employees at the Lumière Factory (1895) and Ewin S. Porter's The Great Train Robbery and The Kleptomaniac (1903 and 1905, respectively) – and see how changes in labor during the Second Industrial Revolution, the death of the American Frontier, and the widening class divide has influenced the films themselves.

Seen as one of the first films, the Lumière brothers' Employees at the Lumière Factory shows just that – "workers leaving the Lumières' Lyon factory [which produced photographic plates and paper] at dinnertime, consisting of some eight hundred photographs and lasting one minute" (Kobel 1). Given that photography had only existed a few decades prior, the relative speed to arrive at photos being run in quick succession to create the illusion of movement was a technological breakthrough of its time. The birth of motion pictures coincided with the rise of urbanization in the U.S. during the latter half of the 19th Century as people left rural agricultural areas primarily for manufacturing jobs in the cities (Jaycox 6). A trend that kickstarted the First Industrial Revolution in England during the 1790s had moved across the Atlantic almost a century later. By 1890, "35 percent of the total U.S. population was classified as urban," not solely for seeking out manufacturing jobs,

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but for the "conveniences…and marvels of an urban lifestyle" such as streetlights and streetcars (Jaycox 6). In no small part because of this economic migration, between 1880 and 1890 the number of cities with at least one million inhabitants went from just New York City to also include Philadelphia and Chicago, showing how cities with large populations were starting to grow westward, away from the East Coast (Jaycox 6, 587). By contrast, the city that housed the Lumière factory, Lyon, had a population of 459,009 by 1901 (De Oliviera 81). For comparison's sake, seven other U.S. cities had roughly the same population by 1890: Boston and Baltimore on the East Coast; Buffalo in western New York; Cleveland, Cincinnati, and St. Louis in the Midwest; and San Francisco on the West Coast – with Pittsburgh and New Orleans coming in near the quarter-million mark (Jaycox 6, 587). The workforce leaving the Lumière factory in 1895 was part of a good-sized city within Europe, but even then, could not match the massive leap in population that arose from the Second Industrial Revolution in cities across the U.S. at the same time.

As this rise in urban populations was happening, the centuries-long standard of having skilled workers run urban economies was disrupted by the arrival of unskilled workers. Skilled workers historically devoted their working lives to learning a skill (such as woodworking, textile weaving, or pottery) from start to finish, usually apprenticed under a more experienced person in their trade and earned more in their lifetime. Unskilled workers, on the other hand, usually had no training, participated in only a single task within a skill, and earned less in their lifetime. The unskilled worker during this time had to endure many hardships while being employed, including "low wages, long hours (the twelve-hour day was not uncommon), harsh conditions, abusive managers, and high accident rates on the job" (Calhoun 44). One major difference between U.S. manufacturing factories and the Lumière brothers' factory was the concept of worker's compensation. Between the years of 1888 and 1908, a study found that "an estimated 35,000 workers were killed and 536,000 were injured" on the job in the U.S. (Jaycox 337). As workers transitioned from being one-stop shops to cogs in the proverbial machine, there was a divide in how to care for wounded workers or the families of workers who died on the job. As Britain and "other industrialized European nations," such as France, had undergone Industrialization many decades before the U.S., they had already devised "workmen's compensation" programs that allowed "automatic payments for workers injured or killed on the job" (Jaycox 337). In the U.S. during this period between 1888 and 1908, programs like this "did not exist," and therefore, "America's accident rate was far higher than that of industrialized nations in Europe" such as France (Jaycox 337). The lack of a metaphorical safety net in the U.S. at this time made working in factories a dubious highwire act to perform day in and day out.

This is not even considering a freefall in the U.S. economy during this period. The film was first shown in France as the U.S. was in the middle of a "major economic depression…from 1893 to 1897," in which "unemployment rose to over 16 percent" (Calhoun 42). If the film looked at American workers in 1895 leaving a similar factory, there's a good chance it might capture them leaving their workplace for the last time. Regardless of times being good or bad, the loss of a job for an urban worker "could mean being deprived of the means to survive" due to the lack of unemployment insurance from the state government or other related charitable causes and the swift business climate of the era leading to quick company bankruptcies or failures (Calhoun 42). The titular Employees at the Lumière Factory are then examples of industrial capitalism working at full steam ahead, with no visible worries on the workers' faces, in contrast to American workers who faced the brunt of these issues.

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The forming structures of “capitalist industrialization” during this time allowed for the standard of living to increase for some workers – but was split with inequities, such as those “between skilled and unskilled laborers, men and women, whites and nonwhites, and native-born and most immigrant workers” (Calhoun 42-44). The surprising thing when seeing Employees at the Lumière Factory through modern eyes is the ratio of more women than men who leave the factory doors at the end of the day. This should not be so, as women had been instrumental in being the primary source of early factory work producing textiles in northern England during the First Industrial Revolution. This was similarly echoed in the U.S., with women working for wages at least since the Lowell, Massachusetts textile mill days of the 1810s-1840s. By the end of the century “women played a growing role in the…labor force” at large (Calhoun 45). From 1870 to 1910 the percentage of working women rose from 14% to 20%, mostly working in “textile and garment production” as well as “light manufacturing,” such as the photographic plates and paper produced at the Lumière factory (Calhoun 45). The expansion from textiles to other kinds of production allowed women of the time to find more opportunities to make money. For example, by the end of the 19th Century, more and more women started working to earn wages before marriage to have an economic buffer after marriage (Calhoun 45). The film’s energy of workers leaving for the day is indicative of the hustle and bustle to help provide for the family at home. There’s a good chance that some of the female workers on screen followed this practice of starting work before marriage to set themselves up for domestic lives after marriage.

What is not commonly known is that the Lumière brothers made “at least three versions of the film,” with the first showing a single horse pulling a carriage out of the factory at the end, the second having two horses with a carriage, and the third and definitive version having no horse-drawn carriages (Srinivasan). One of the workers seen in the third version of Employees at the Lumière Factory is a young boy on a bicycle. This is one of the only examples in any of the three versions to show a working practice absent from the Western working world of today – child labor. Before the 1880s, child labor was seen as another source of income for the children worker’s families and as an opportunity to put themselves on the right moral track to avoid “sins like idleness” (Jaycox 148). According to the 1890 U.S. Census, “more than one out of every six children between the ages of 10 and 15” were found to be employed, a number that grew by the 1900 Census to amount to “1,750,000 employed children 15 or younger” (Jaycox 148). Again, if the Lumière brothers happened to film an American factory around the same time, it’s more than likely that a good number of child workers would’ve been on screen leaving their place of work. Even considering this, it’s important to note that observers at the time as well as many historians today, believe that the number of child workers was “extremely conservative” since “many child workers were not counted” in the U.S. Census for one reason or another (Jaycox 148). That makes it likely that the average workforce at an average factory between 1890 and 1900 had almost as many child workers working there as adult workers, making Employees at the Lumière Factory only slightly representative of how many children worked during this period. Incidentally, that boy on the bicycle, whose name was Francis Doublier, later worked for the Lumière brothers as one of their cameramen (“Lumière’s First Picture Shows”).

The first version of Employees at the Lumière Factory has the brightest light saturation of the three. This is due to the Lumière brothers filming their workers at lunch hour, versus the other two “after the Sunday mass to simulate” a lunch break (Srinivasan). Here we see one of the first examples of reshooting a given take – or recapturing what the director wants to transpire on screen because of a perceived mistake on

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a previous attempt. One possible reason for the shooting times for the latter two versions of Employees at the Lumière Factory to be at the end of the day instead of at the workers' lunch break is that "the Lumières didn't like the quality of" the first version due to the sun exposure on the film (Srinivasan). In other words, the resulting film was too washed out to see everything clearly.

The Lumière brothers' focus on making it look like their employees are leaving at their lunch break versus at the end of the working day recalls the long working hours that most factory workers had at the end of the 19th Century. As mentioned previously, 12-hour workdays for many manufacturing jobs at this time were not just uncommon, but more seen as below average. The idea of workers breaking in the middle of the workday to go to the bathroom, let alone eating lunch, was not a high priority, to say the least. It wasn't until the first decade of the 20th Century that labor unions were able to bring about a reduced working day for male workers in the U.S. (Jaycox 255). Women workers would get a reduced workday as well, thanks to the 1908 Supreme Court decision Muller v. Oregon (Jaycox 338). This was done in a rather backhanded way, however, as Muller declared the reason for this was that women did not have the physical stamina to work as long as men could. By contrast, history does not know if the Lumière brothers ended up paying the workers for their on-screen work (especially for the latter two versions, as France at this time was officially still a Catholic nation) because "there was no law in effect in France limiting the working hours" of employees (Srinivasan). Regardless, workers getting shorter workdays helped increase workplace morale, which in turn increased productivity.

The film at the end of the day establishes in fixed moving images what had been transpiring on both sides of the Atlantic for many decades at that point: "fixed schedules, sequential units, and disciplinary spaces that were crucial to the nineteenth-century industrial mode of production" (Stubblefield). This, as author Thomas Stubblefield points out, is carried out by the Lumière brothers with their "workers leaving the factory" (Stubblefield). Instead of the image of workers entering their place of work for another long, grueling day, we see the workers happy that their shift is over, and that the cycle of capitalism has, for the moment, ended. The Lumière brothers show in this film that "there is a singular space dedicated to labour and that one can actually leave it" (Stubblefield). The joy that was on film may have been manufactured to look that way, however. The latter two versions have more gussied-up clothing and a more fanciful spring in their step, due to their Sunday shoot day (Srinivasan). The workers, knowing that the shoot was oncoming, "seem wiser to the presence of the camera, more professional, so to speak" (Srinivasan). They also decided that "the factory gates should close before the camera ran out of film" in the third and final version to have a definite ending with the closing doors acting like theatrical curtains instead of the first two starting "in media res," which is Latin for "in the midst of things" (Srinivasan). With the absence of either one or two horse-drawn carriages leaving the factory, the third and final version seems like a complete and finished result, with the film being "more harmonious, less chaotic, the flow of workers out of the gates more streamlined…[and] the play of chance in this definitive version is minimal" (Srinivasan).

Almost 10 years after the first screening of Employees at the Lumière Factory, another impactful film was released – Edwin S. Porter's The Great Train Robbery. Like Employees at the Lumière Factory, The Great Train Robbery's subject matter is self-explanatory: a group of bandits stick up and rob a train out West, only to flee the scene and end up shot dead by nearby locals. The plot has been a part of the Western film canon ever since, one that is seen as archetypical of the Old West in its prime. Looking back so many years later, it's tempting to think The Great Train Robbery acts

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as a record of that Wild Wild West heyday, but by the time of the film's release, this was not true. The U.S. Census Superintendent released a bulletin in 1890 in conjunction with that year's census regarding the part of the country known as the 'frontier.' Historically this has stretched from directly east of the original 13 colonies to the Pacific Coast, constituting land that had 'four inhabitants or fewer per square mile,' but culturally speaking, the frontier constituted land west of the Mississippi River – with future states like Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wyoming being the best examples. The Superintendent mentioned in the bulletin that "up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement," but because of things like more and more settlements appearing in "the unsettled area" the frontier "can not, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports" as its own designated category – a far cry from the heyday of the Old West most associate with The Great Train Robbery (Turner 82).

Some saw this bulletin as changing the trajectory of American growth. Frederick Jackson Turner, a historian from the University of Wisconsin – an area that, decades prior, would have been considered frontier land itself – wrote an essay three years after the bulletin was issued titled "The Frontier as the Source of American Democracy." In it, Turner compared both Columbus's arrival to North America and the ancient Greeks' sailing across the Mediterranean Sea to the Manifest Destiny that the United States had been undergoing since the post-revolutionary days (Turner 82). Turner further emphasized these comparisons when he wrote "movement [westward] had been [America's] dominant fact" (Turner 82). Turner had singled out the bulletin for quelling the United States' hunger for constant westward expansion. "But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves," he writes, "and now….the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history" (Turner 82-83). In other words, the death of the frontier was the death of the 'anything goes' mentality of the Old West found in things like The Great Train Robbery.

Turner's essay did not consider multiple aspects of Western growth such as big businesses present in frontier lands – including lumber, agriculture, and mining; railroad expansion bringing in government subsidies; and preexisting Indigenous and Hispanic peoples (Jaycox 3-4). Despite this, the sentiment of the 'completely free frontier' disappearing, and with it went any chance for opportunity or the American Dream that arose from Turner's thoughts, soon came to be known as the highly influential "Turner Thesis or [the] Frontier Thesis" (Jaycox 3). The Turner Thesis wrapped itself in the United States' "national identity" and argued that those now living in the frontier had no legitimate means to create any original or independent wealth for themselves (Jaycox 3). This sense of hopelessness would merge with a trend that had been spreading for a generation or so – the wealth gap.

During the heyday of the Wild Wild West, "between the Civil War and 1890," the incredible amount of industrialization and growth back east led to "rapid, dramatic, and unprecedented economic growth" for the GDP (Jaycox 9). Especially during concurrent times of economic hardship for most Americans at the time, this created an opportunity for business leaders to build on their prodigious profits. Because so few business taxes existed at this time and zero taxes were collected on earned income, large business owners were able to amass even more enormous amounts of personal wealth that created "an increasingly obvious gap between the rich and the poor" (Jaycox 9). Historically, it used to be considered bad form to be so open with your money during previous periods of tremendous growth in the U.S., with the affluent publicly concealing the total amount of their opulence. Times were about to change, however. As the 19th Century ended, the wealthiest of these families broke tradition by flaunting symbols of their wealth, such as "opulent city mansions and

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country estates, private yachts and private train cars," publicly, even allowing such displays to be covered in the press, read by the common folk (Jaycox 9). These ritzy private trains are exactly the sort of trains that had been prime targets for bandits, like the one seen in The Great Train Robbery.

Another aspect of this wealth gap during this time was the rise of the 'Social Darwinism' theory. Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species was published in 1859, so within the subsequent 40 years the theory of evolution "inspired social theorists to devise parallel interpretations of humanity and society" (Jaycox 123). With such rapid changes in how people lived and worked, it makes sense to want to understand why, and marrying such a popular theory of scientific change with an explanation became the result. A popular subset of those preaching Social Darwinism was misinterpreting the related concept of "survival of the fittest" as "a justification for the ruthless accumulation of wealth by individuals" (Jaycox 123). The thinking behind this new interpretation was that of equating financial success with evolutionary success. People who had more money were seen as carving out the path for humanity's future, while people with less money were seen as eventually withering away and dying off as other species who cannot adapt to their surroundings do. This hoarding of wealth by some of the richest families, justified through Social Darwinism, helped contribute to the growing class divide that led to countless strikes and revolts for a sense of survival amongst the working class and the poor (Jaycox 9-10).

This wealth gap was not limited to urban areas. In part due to the mass migration away from rural areas to the cities and prices for agricultural goods falling due to the recession between 1893 and 1897; "many farmers also failed to share in the general prosperity" of the times and "were increasing financial distress" (Jaycox 9). This led to different ways for farmers to survive the Depression years. Some turned to gather in alliances, either to lobby state legislators for help or to educate themselves out of their situations (Hicks 2, 130, 178). Others aimed to create the same change but from inside the political system itself. Some like-minded farmers came together to create the Populist Party, which in part aimed to quell land speculation in the frontier, regulate the railroad industry in their backyards, and reform the financial system regarding credit and currency stability (Durden 1-3). The Populist Party took off like a rocket and helped create a movement against the wealth gap's exponential growth. This movement led to events like the Coxey's Army march in the spring of 1894 from Ohio to Washington, D.C., which lobbied for public works projects on the scale of the eventual New Deal (Aybar 151-152).

The 1896 election ended up being the crucible for the Populist movement in the countryside. Populist nominee William Jennings Bryan's stirring 'Cross of Gold' speech that advocated for rejecting the gold standard in favor of "free silver'" – or easier access to money and lower interest rates – led to his dual nomination for president by both the Populist and the Democratic parties (Durden 1, 85, 87). It's not a stretch to imagine some Populist supporters liking this outcome as it doubled Bryan's chance to become president and enforce the 'free silver' that he called for. The election did not go the Populists' way, as Byran's dual nomination helped split the votes to make financially well-backed Republican nominee William McKinley, the winner (Durden 121, 125). If the election itself was the Populists' crucible, the result was its breaking point. Feeling helpless after the election, many farmers had no place to turn after the collapse of the Populist party (Hicks 404). This led many to forgo farming in place of what was available to them – easy money by living a life of crime in the Wild Wild West.

The McKinley years saw the anguish that had led some farmers to criminality in the Wild Wild West, combined with the right person being in

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the right place at the right time. As Thomas Edison had been developing his movie studio out in New Jersey (affectionately dubbed the "Black Maria"), he had made what would turn out to be a consequential hire – the eventual director of The Great Train Robbery, Edwin S. Porter (Kobel 8). Porter was originally employed – in early 1901 – as "a projectionist and engineer" to "improve the technical facilities" at the newly opened studio located on "East Twenty-first Street in New York" (Kobel 19). Over time, Porter was promoted by Edison to become the "chief cameraman" (what we would call nowadays the director) and eventually the "head of studio production" (Kobel 19). The next couple of years saw Porter evolve from films that consisted of one shot to films that told stories over multiple shots – such as the four-shot Execution of Czolgosz with Panorama of Auburn Prison (1901), which showed real footage of the space McKinley's assassin had been kept in, mixed with studio re-enactments of the execution itself (Kobel 20). This finally culminated with the December 4, 1903, release of the 12-minute The Great Train Robbery (Kobel 20). Becoming the "most famous American film of the early period," The Great Train Robbery saw Porter's growth as a cameraman to cover 14 different shots that were distinct from each other, building off earlier films of his, such as Execution of Czolgosz with Panorama of Auburn Prison and 1902's Life of an American Fireman (Kobel 20).

The Great Train Robbery had by no means an original screenplay. Porter, in an uncredited writing job, had many elements that influenced the film's story. The title and the general framework for the story were adapted from the 1896 play of the same name by Scott Marble (Musser 256). Despite its stage roots, The Great Train Robbery comes off on screen as having "nothing stagey about it" because of its on-location sets (Kobel 20). Various live entertainments that purport to showcase elements of the Wild Wild West were popular attractions nationwide (Musser 256). The Great Train Robbery's success created the presumption over time that it was the first Western film, but that isn't the case. Some figures like Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley were popular enough to warrant films of their own, with three films from 1894 – Annie Oakley, Buffalo Dance, and Bucking Bronco – all coming from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show (Kobel 65). Edison Studios itself released Cripple Creek Bar-Room Scene in 1899, which "suggests the West at least in costumes" (Kobel 65). Finally, "newspaper accounts of train holdups" such as ones perpetrated by Butch Cassidy and his Wild Bunch, served as ripped-from-the-headlines examples of the story Porter was trying to tell (Musser 256). All these disparate elements came together to help "audience understanding by providing a necessary frame of reference" (Musser 256).

The amalgamation of sources used to create The Great Train Robbery alone was not enough to make it an iconic film. Porter's direction and command of craft were needed to bring it home. Film techniques such as panning the camera (or moving it on a horizontal axis) and double exposure were utilized by Porter to "advance the narrative" within the film (Kobel 20). It was "the first film to use editing to alternate between two separate but concurrent lines of actions," also known as crosscutting (Jaycox 220). The film also utilized multiple camera positions, both interior and exterior settings, location shooting, and established the shot as the building block for movies going forwards.

The iconic shot of actor Justus D. Barnes looking directly into the camera and shooting his revolver "at the audience in medium shot" suggests a couple of things (Kobel 22). The shot itself has no bearing on the story itself, with "the Edison catalog" itself saying that the shot could be placed "at the beginning or the end" of the film (Kobel 22). When placed at the beginning, the shot foreshadows the type of violence that is found in the film; while having the shot at the end – which is how most surviving prints have it – acts as an additional thrill for the audience.

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Breaking the fourth wall in this manner had not been seen since the train coming towards the camera in the Lumière brothers' 1895 film Arrival of a Train at la Ciotat, and likely, a good amount of audience members who saw The Great Train Robbery hadn't seen Arrival of a Train at la Ciotat.

All these reasons allowed The Great Train Robbery to be "a huge hit and continued to play for years," with its total box office being reported by Moving Picture World as two million dollars (Kobel 22). Clearly, domestic audiences "continue to demand multishot story films in the wake of The Great Train Robbery" (Kobel 23). The success of The Great Train Robbery allows "films that tell fictional stories [to] quickly increase in number" (Jaycox 220). The film's release was part of the transition for movie distribution to move away from 'unofficial' venues, such as vaudeville houses or churches, to more official "movie storefronts," with locations "before the turn of the century in New York and New Orleans" as well as "in Chicago and Los Angeles in 1902" (Jaycox 270). Despite The Great Train Robbery's massive success, Porter's journey to becoming "the most important of early American filmmakers" was not over yet – he had other stories to tell (Kobel 19-20).

While The Great Train Robbery cemented Porter's place in film history, his filmography did not end in 1903. Porter "continued to direct films for Edison until 1909" and crossed many genres along the way (Kobel 22). One genre that he focused on after his massive success with The Great Train Robbery was "socially conscious dramas" like 1905's little-known The Kleptomaniac (Kobel 22). The film shifts from rural to urban settings to cover two separate women in then-contemporary New York City, who are caught stealing and are sent to the same courthouse – "one who steals a loaf of bread for her hungry child [and] the other a rich woman who shoplifts [from] Macy's" (Kobel 22). Porter, who again both wrote and directed, shines a spotlight on "the unequal justice [that is] meted out to" both women, with the poor woman being convicted and sent to jail, whereas the rich woman "goes scot-free" (Kobel 22). The idea of class divides played a part in the success of The Great Train Robbery, but its application towards women instead of men, the notion of working women in the rising phenomenon that is the department store, and the types of audiences that went to see The Kleptomaniac tie into what makes the film so biting in Porter's filmography.

The visual contrasts between the settings and circumstances for both characters tie back into the wealth gap of the time. The Edison Films catalog for The Kleptomaniac in July of 1906 details the scenario for the film and describes the character of the rich woman (played by Aline Boyd) as "a handsome and richly gowned lady…with coachman and footman in full livery" (Musser 297). Her costume provides some symbolism; the rich woman's black dress indicates her wickedness that will entail. She lives in "a beautiful residence in a fashionable residential section of New York City," which suggests that "all the surroundings indicate wealth and fashion" (Musser 297). Again, with the very affluent by this time more than willing to parade around their affluence in any and every form imaginable, the trappings of luxury would not appear to be too shocking to the average audience in 1905. The rich woman is seen going to "a well-known department store at Herald Square, New York City" (Musser 297). Since 1902, this location has been the flagship store for Macy's department store, knowledge that would have been well known to people – especially New Yorkers – of the time. British-American film historian William Everson talks about the shoplifting scene itself, with "'the interior shot of the department store [being] so 'busy,' with so many identically dressed women bustling around in a protracted long shot, that the audience is given no guidance at all" (Musser 297). This confusion would have likely been a directorial choice by Porter, to visually highlight the ease of wealthy people's ability to

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rob right out in the open and not get caught. The rich woman is caught, however, by the Macy's detectives – one male and one female (played by Phineas Nairs and Jane Stewart, respectively) – and the next scene shows that "a carriage drives up to the door" of the police station with a leisurely pace that without context would look like nothing had happened (Musser 297, 298). What Porter implies visually moments ago is now seen in plain sight: the very rich play by a different set of rules compared to everyone else.

However, the poor woman (played by Ann Egleston) is seen living in "a scantily furnished room" with two young daughters, the film clearly showing their "poverty and hunger plainly in evidence" (Musser 297, 298). While the symbolism of the rich woman's black dress is foreshadowed to the audience, the wardrobe of the poor woman is more subtle. Instead of wearing all white or substantially brighter colors, Porter chose to have the poor woman dress in a dark outfit but with a brighter head shawl. This is the only indication of the film signaling the poor woman's good nature, and the result is a more realistic wardrobe for the times in any case. After her oldest daughter is unsuccessful in bringing in any food off the streets from kind strangers, the poor woman is seen leaving the house in desperation for any relief from family-wide hunger (Musser 299). With many in the first-run audiences of The Kleptomaniac experiencing the economic hardship from a decade prior, it would not be difficult at all to place those audience members in the poor woman's shoes and accept the pathos radiating from the screen. After she has been caught taking a loaf of bread from an unattended basket outside of a bakery, the poor woman is taken by police into a patrol wagon that "is being rapidly driven up the streets" to the police station (Musser 299). Porter utilizes the crosscutting that was so effective in The Great Train Robbery again in The Kleptomaniac, having the poor woman's arrival at the police station cut right after the rich woman arrives there to set up the contrast of their treatment under the law. The speed at which the two women arrive at the police station is another indicator of how the law views the women – favorably and unfavorably, respectively. The court scene seems almost comical, with the accused criminals lined up in a row in the courthouse, coming one at a time in front of the judge (played by W.S. Rising), who decides on the spot who is guilty and who is innocent rather quickly (Musser 297). The next two events are the culmination of Porter's intentions throughout The Kleptomaniac. The poor woman appears first amongst the two women, who "pleads for mercy" as "her little daughter rushes to her side and falls on her knees" in front of the judge (Musser 299). The judge, who is "deaf to all entreaties," sentences her mother to jail and both mom and daughter cry as the poor woman is sent away off-screen to her unjust fate (Musser 299). The speed of their dismissal echoes the speed at which the poor woman arrives at the police station and the speed of the judge dismissing other convicted people – just another destitute in the continuous cycle of people off the street running afoul of the law. The rich woman, unlike the poor woman, is seen with both "her husband [and] a lawyer" and gets away with her seemingly small crime as the Macy's security lady has her testimony go unheard by the judge as the rich woman "falls weeping into her husband's arms" (Musser 299). The characters of the rich husband and their lawyer are symbolically seen here as pillars – at home and legally – of the rich woman's life, as a place to return to at the end of the day and to keep her out of trouble, which given the title is likely to be often.

The Edison Films catalog labels the character of the rich woman twice – as the aforementioned titular, "Kleptomaniac" and as "Mrs. Banker" (Musser 297). It would have been one thing for Porter to ascribe thievery to the rich woman but giving her the title of Kleptomaniac suggests a medical reason for her actions to protect the high-class image she would have publicly destroyed otherwise. Had this second affiliation been mentioned in the film itself,

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however, it would have directly tied the rich woman to the "banking community" that had by this point been specifically and "frequently attacked by the Progressive movement" that saw it as reducing members of the middle and working classes [such as the poor woman and her family] to impoverishment" (Musser 301). Porter also intentionally labels the poor woman as 'The Thief' to show how the law saw her – dehumanized (Musser 297). The lack of given names to any of the characters in The Kleptomaniac leads the film to act as a parable of injustice rather than a specific case of favoritism under the law.

The circumstances of each main character's reason for being in front of the judge do, however, create intricacies that comment on their respective position in life. The rich woman's theft is "clearly premeditated," as she has "no motivation for shoplifting other than for the thrill," swiping some "nonessential baubles" that she could clearly afford (Musser 301). The poor woman, on the other hand, is "overwhelmed by temptation" as she looks for any sustenance that is "left outside and unattended" (Musser 301). These distinctions are not without difference – both characters did steal – as it is their underlying circumstances in their everyday lives that provide the context for what they stole, where they stole them from, and why they stole at all. Professor Charles Musser at the University of Yale adds to this with how the judge acts in the courtroom – as he reasons (without sound for the audience) that the rich woman had "no reason to do this" and because the act was a "stupid little thing," she, therefore, "shouldn't have to pay the price;" whereas the poor woman, who is seen as nothing more than a thief by the judge, decides that "she needs to be disciplined and…made an example of" ("Edison").

Like The Great Train Robbery's pulling from the headlines to help create its story, Porter draws upon inspirations around him to create The Kleptomaniac. The idea that the justice system works differently for two different groups – those with money and those without – doesn't just run through the plot of the movie. The ending of The Kleptomaniac is a tableau of Lady Justice (played by Helen Courtney), with her scales having "a bag of gold" on one side and "a loaf of bread" on the other – with the scales being tipped "in favor of the gold" and her blindfold "disclosing one eye" (Musser 297, 300). This image of Lady Justice favoring the rich at the expense of the poor was not unique to The Kleptomaniac, as it was "frequently [used to have] criticized and visualized the inequities [that] lacked understanding for the poor," such as a "political cartoon" on the cover of New York World in June of 1896 (Musser 301). The touch of having Lady Justice carry a loaf of bread does make the tableau tie into the story of The Kleptomaniac nicely, however, and makes an image common to the times unique for the film. Whatever the case, Patrick Loughney from the Library of Congress commends The Kleptomaniac for this type of social commentary, as he mentioned: "how [at this time] cinema began to be self-aware as a mode for bringing social problems to a wider audience as well as making a form of entertainment" ("Edison").

The idea of the department store was a relatively new one for audiences of The Kleptomaniac, as they had been gaining traction within the past decade or so as they "offered a new kind of shopping – many different kinds of items under one roof" (Jaycox 28). Department stores such as "Macy's in New York and Marshall Field's in Chicago" were seen as urban counterparts to the rural marketplace, where shoppers – mostly women – would take time to browse around and chat with other shoppers about their day (Jaycox 28). These stores were seen differently, however, by working women in these cities, more as "a new kind of employment" where the job of "salesladies" became "more desirable than other kinds of available work" such as textile weaving (Jaycox 28). That's not to say these new salesladies worked without problems, as they "worked for very low pay,"

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endured "12-to-18-hour days with no stools to sit on behind the counters, six-day workweeks," and did not have the benefit of having vacations (Jaycox 28). It might not be a stretch, perhaps, to potentially see the salesladies in Macy's within the film as not too far removed from the character of the poor woman herself. Not only did the rich woman steal from the store that employs these women, metaphorically taking food out of their and their families' mouths, but the poor lady might as well have gotten a lighter sentence from the judge had she been employed at a high-class establishment such as Macy's.

The dynamic of class in The Kleptomaniac was also reflected in the types of people who went to see movies in public in the first place. The Kleptomaniac was released in February 1905, right before the movie theater as we would know it would be created on June 19, 1905, by "entrepreneurs John P. Harris and Harry Davis" in "McKeesport, Pennsylvania" (Jaycox 270). This was accomplished by Harris and Davis by refurbishing "a former opera house to create a theater solely for showing motion pictures" (Jaycox 270). What seemed like a gamble at the time paid off – big time, as people flocked to their movie house in droves. This experiment's success caused movie houses to "explode exponentially throughout the United States" (Jaycox 270). The expansion of these movie houses, called "nickelodeons" by Harris and Davis because of their tickets costing a nickel (inflation on a nickel from 1905 would make it worth $1.74 in 2024), allowed them to build an audience in "working-class neighborhoods or low-rent streets" (Jaycox 270). The cheap entertainment was the manna for working-class audiences who could not see a theater-style show or visit expensive museums after a hard day at work. Film historian Eileen Bowser concurs, writing that "motion pictures have never had such a devoted and enthusiastic audience since these early years…People went night after night, or from one show to another'" (Jaycox 270). This new devoted fanbase became a melting pot of people who were connected by one common thing: wanting to be entertained. This even spread to recent immigrant audiences, as they "did not even need to understand English because all [of the] movies were silent" (Jaycox 270). There truly was no barrier to entry on who could see a movie at a nickelodeon.

This contrasts with the upper and middle-class audience for films. They did not share the regularity of movie viewing like the working classes, and they certainly wouldn't be caught dead at a nickelodeon, preferring to view them "in respectable settings like vaudeville houses, lecture or music halls, town halls, or church auditoriums" (Jaycox 270). Films shown at these places were not usually scripted, instead being "films like documentaries [like the films by the Lumière brothers, called 'actualities' at the time] and travelogues" that were seen by these audiences as being "considered wholesome, educational entertainment" (Jaycox 270). This made two aspects of this type of movie-going experience of note for these audiences: the atmosphere where the movies were shown and the content of the movies themselves – the second aspect an important sticking point regarding movies' impacts on American culture forevermore. The vaudeville houses would include movies as part of a variety show filled with singing, dancing, and comedy routines; and "usually charged a quarter (or with inflation $8.71 in 2024)" (Jaycox 270). To illustrate the difference in pricing, nickelodeon ticket-buyers versus upper-class movie ticket prices in 1905 would be comparable between movie ticket prices in 1973 (at $1.76 with inflation) versus movie ticket prices in 2016 (or $8.94 with inflation) – a 5-time multiplier, but in the same year. This dynamic would certainly be reflected in the characters of The Kleptomaniac. The poor woman would be the exact audience for a film like this – working-class, living in a city, only needing to come across a nickel to see a show, and interested in the subject matter of the film as it reflected her own life back at her. The rich woman, on the other hand, would not even bother seeing the film in the first place, most

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likely partaking in an actuality or travelogue in a vaudeville house – certainly not a nickelodeon. These two crossed paths in court, but they would never cross paths in a movie house.

As they have evolved, movie theaters have always reflected our shared reality back at us in the balconies and cheap seats. This fact about movies has not changed, and will never change, as long as movies keep being made. This, then, allows us to look back at the early period of silent movies and see how the world around them influenced what they made and how they made them. Looking back at works by masters such as the Lumière brothers and Ewin S. Porter allows all of us to see how urban laborers, failed frontier farmers, and the wealth gap seen through the prism of urban women lived, worked, and loved back then – and how these connections are everlasting.

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