

Intolerance Encyclopedia Article

Intolerance

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Intolerance (1916) is one of the first great American epic films. Over three-and-one-half hours long, it has a complex narrative which consists of four separate melodramatic plots. Each is set in a different era, and all four are intercut to create a complicated historical critique of injustice and intolerance throughout the ages. Three of the stories concentrate upon the effects of historical events upon ordinary people.

D.W. Griffith, who has been called the father of the American Cinema, was America's first great movie showman, and the first director who saw moviemaking not merely as entertainment but as an important art form. Stung by charges of racism leveled at him by the critics for his first important feature, *Birth of a Nation* (1915), Griffith responded by making *Intolerance*, a film of a complexity and scale never seen before this time—a film so grand in its conception that the original rough cut was, according to film historian David Cook, eight hours long. Although it was a critical success and is considered a masterpiece of the silent cinema, the rather preachy *Intolerance* was not a success at the box office.

Further Reading:

Cook, David. *A History of Narrative Film*. New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1990.

Drew, William. M. *D.W. Griffith's Intolerance: Its Genesis and Its Vision*. Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland & Company, 1986.

Simon, Scott. *The Films of D.W. Griffith*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1993.