

# Motherhood as a sin: the kid



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Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* appears to be a light-hearted film about companionship, fighting, and trickery, but an examination from a cultural standpoint reveals the film's intellectual depth. Chaplin illustrates the will to survive despite the degrading aspects of capitalism through his struggle to raise the kid he discovered. When Chaplin first finds a baby abandoned on the street, he picks it up out of compassion and attempts to return it. Since car thieves transported the child from his mother, Chaplin fails at his quest. Charlie, a poor bachelor, considers himself unfit to care for a child and attempts to place the child in the care of several pedestrians. The police thwart his plans and remain unreceptive as he tries to explain. Ultimately, Chaplin discovers the note attached to the baby and decides to raise the child as his own. This is the only viable option for Chaplin, who cannot turn to the law or civilians for help. He must raise the child.

Even though Chaplin's character lacks the resources to provide adequately for himself, he provides for the kid. Chaplin makes a living, not through gainful employment, but instead by systematically destroying property and rebuilding it at a fee. The police uncover Chaplin's ruse and discover the circumstances in which Chaplin came to raise the boy. Upon reading the note left with the baby, the policeman berates Chaplin for raising the boy without acceding to the authorities. The authorities "take care" of the child, and after a lengthy journey, Chaplin reunites with his son.

*The Kid* was released in 1921. The Carnegie model of philanthropy reached its peak a few years before this. In this model, businessmen who built up large companies through exploitation and fierce business procedures donated public buildings, such as libraries and concert halls, in order to

foster learning and a strong work ethic in their communities. Although the results of their philanthropic practices were almost universally extolled, these moguls often received criticism that those they helped were the very people they targeted in their business practices. Just as Chaplin looked for guidance and help before raising the child, those who struggled in Carnegie's age looked for support within the workplace by way of reasonable hours or benefits. Upon the denial of these, they continued to work. Then, they were offered institutions such as libraries that served as very public, direct action to help them. This was provided without their input and without consideration as to how they came to be so impoverished and uneducated. From the actors to the producer, the "above-the-line" employees of film made sure to produce movies that appealed to wholesome movie audiences. Because of this, Chaplin struck a balance between crafting a message that appealed to those frustrated by an exploitative working culture and crafting one that upheld traditional values.

The mother of the child plays an important role in this balance. She appears to be a wealthy, well-connected woman "whose sin was motherhood." Her amicable relationship with Chaplin at the end of the film reassures audiences that the message of *The Kid* is not too subversive. Audiences understand the pressures and hypocrisies of society as they affect Charlie, while understanding the virtues of those involved in law. Ultimately, Chaplin reunites with the child within the confines of the law, as emphasized by the physical setting of the orphanage. The woman's character ensures that the audience completely comprehends the lack of absolutes. The woman's compassion after she becomes a star is notable and emphasizes that money

does not necessarily cause evil in the audience's mind. The filmmakers crafted this in order to appeal to a wealthier audience. As shown by her interactions with Chaplin and the kid, the woman remains slightly clueless but truly wishes to help. Much of the audience of *The Kid* likely fit this description.

*The Kid* allows viewers to understand the intricacies and difficulties of life for the poor in the early 1900s. It covers topics of weighty significance, but allows the audience to enjoy the spectacle that an often-hypocritical legal system provides. The filmmakers choose to portray the antagonists as fundamentally confused, rather than as evil men who wish to ruin the lives of the main characters. The policeman truly does not understand the difficulties of Chaplin's existence, and neither did the audience. Comedies such as *The Kid* allow viewers to appreciate the gravity dilemmas without getting caught up in a diatribe or lecture. Chaplin persists despite the odds or the lack of an ally; this allows him to reunite with the child.