

City lights a film by charlie chaplin: how the wealthy creates artificial shortag...

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Many renowned critics have called City Lights Charlie Chaplin's greatest work. It is praised for its bravery to persist in the use of silent film, for the cinematography itself, and for the use of a recorded score. Yet underneath all of the technical elements, there is a very powerful human element to be found in the story of this great film. While it may be somewhat evident to the casual viewer, it is made far more powerful when viewed in the context of the time period when it was filmed. Therefore an understanding of both Chaplin's personal history and the social climate of the pre-depression era are imperative to really understand City Lights theme of how wealth and social class create an artificial sense of inequality.

One of the ways that this theme was portrayed in City Lights was through the "eyes" of the blind girl. Unlike the other characters in the film, she could never see the Tramp for how he appeared, only how he acted. While she believed throughout the film that he was an upper-class gentleman, her inability to see is what finally helps her to understand the truth. Her final words in the film, "Yes, now I can see," clearly have more meanings than one. They are meant not only to convey her new physical sight, but also her understanding of whom the Tramp really is, and how little that detail matters. Her emotional tenderness conveys that she realizes, along with the audience, that the Tramp didn't need to be wealthy to be either a love interest or a benefactor.

This theme is amplified when one understands Charlie Chaplin's own background. Chaplin himself is classic rags to riches story. During his early life his family suffered from poverty and difficult circumstances. He

eventually came to the United States where his illustrious film career took shape and Chaplin became a member of the higher class. however, we can see through his films like City Lights and his portrayal of his well-known “Tramp” character that Chaplin never forgot his roots. Furthermore he denied any perceived differences between the classes, as can be seen expressed in this film. When Chaplin’s circumstances are taken into consideration, it is more clear that he did not believe in a system that perpetuated inequality between classes.

One of the most powerful scenes in the film is when the Tramp wanders dejectedly down a street, still looking for money after losing a boxing match. A crowd of upper-class citizens leaving a theater throngs him, causing the audience to feel a paradox between the happy smiling faces of the theatergoers and the forlorn cause of the Tramp. This social disparity illustrates the humanity of all people, and yet how wealth appeared to separate people during this time period. Each time the millionaire kicks the Tramp out of his house, it serves as a reminder that the only difference between the two types of people is the way society views them.

In light of historical context surrounding the release of this film, the idea of a false sense of social disparity is made much more powerful. City Lights was released in 1931, shortly after the start of the Great Depression. This was a time period of great class division in the United States. There was a great chasm between the poor and the rich, yet Chaplin’s film shows that there really was no difference on a more human level. Chaplin condemns the idea of classism, showing that the Tramp is the same person whether he is

viewed through the eyes of a drunk, by the hands of a blind girl, or simply by a casual passerby.

While any casual viewer may have observed the theme of the negative effects of inequality created by class and social systems, it can be much better understood when looked at through the lens of history. By incorporating an understanding of Charlie Chaplin's life and a review of the pre-Depression era into this analysis, the theme becomes starkly more clear and poignant. It is little wonder that many critics call City Lights Chaplin's finest work. Undisputedly he made the correct decision in maintaining his long history of silent film in order to perpetuate the message of this landmark piece of cinema.