The Invention Of Cinema Essay, Research Paper

In what ways can the invention of cinema be seen to reflect the tensions and conflicts of turn of the century America?

Cinema reflects events of the time, films are based around events of the era and concern events and affairs that the money paying public are interested in and can relate to. The cinema of the past, and to some extent that of today, was based around economic catastrophes, wars, revolutions, counterrevolution, colonization,and decolinization. (Landy) In the years following 1900, American movie making became a major industry, which had a wide influence over an ever-expanding audience. Cinema had become a new art growing out of science and the older arts. (Jacobs) Film and cinema had grown in America beyond anyone s belief or understanding, moving pictures were being woven into the very fabric of daily life. (Christie) Film emerged as one of the first mass-produced cultural forms of the twentieth century. (Kellner) Although the American film industry was developed as an entertainment industry, it still had very powerful links to American society of the time and the films were not coy about dealing with the more sordid aspects of city life and crime. (Christie)

In order to resonate to audience fears, dreams and experiences, the Hollywood genres of the time had to deal with the conflicts and problems in American society, and attempt to assure audiences that all central problems could be solved within existing institutions. (Kellner) However, many films at the turn of the century were so brutal in their portrayal of society and its problems that it worried and even scared some viewers, in Biograph s A Legal Hold Up (1902) a policeman beats up and robs a prosperous citizen in broad daylight, while no passers-by intervene. (Christie) However, are we to take examples such as this as the truth; that turn of the century America was in a state of near anarchy with examples of such lawlessness being made by those who supposedly upheld the law? There are other cinematic examples of such behaviour shown in one of a number of films from the collection, The Downward Path, which shows an innocent country girl inexorably dragged into big city vice. (Christie) These films and others, which depicted similar events, touched a nerve in America, as the US was anxious about corruption in society, which was shown perfectly by the actions of the police officer in A Legal Hold Up. The cinema at the turn of the century also reflected a real and persistent struggle to square Protestant morality with aggressive morality. (Christie)