

According to Linda William's article "Playing the Race Card" the melodramatic form is based in the suffering of innocence. Classically the innocence is personified as a female protagonist. D.W. Griffith's film "Way Down East" follows this model to a tee. The audience meets the main character Anna Moore as a simple country girl heading to the big city for the first time. Her first actions portray her as a "fish out of water" and her innocence is seen when she meets her rich cousins for the first time. In this scene Anna is contrasted with her stuck up cousins. Her cousins are dressed very formally and in dark colours while Anna is dressed very simply and in white. This contrast in light and dark instantly supplants the message that Anna is good and her cousins are bad.

Once Anna's innocence is established the film moves to quickly take advantage of it by introducing the main antagonist, Lennox Sanderson. Anna's lack of worldly experience is reviled in the scene when she rapidly falls for Sanderson's charms. Here she is tricked into being alone with Lennox and once she has fallen for his traps there is no escape for Anna. Once he professes his love for her she quits trying to get home and becomes enthralled with Sanderson. He is now in control.

She demonstrates a great level of submissiveness when she agrees to marry Sanderson in secret. She does not question his motives for a secret marriage or even question why she should marry him in secret at all. Anna is no longer in control of her actions and motivations at this point. The Victorian ideal of the "cult of true womanhood" is later reinforced when Anna is evicted from her home after giving birth to a baby with no husband present. Anna is seen as impure from the perspective of the landlady and she can no longer house Anna.

D.W. Griffith uses Victorian misconceptions of the nature of woman to facilitate the median of the melodrama in the movie "Way Down East." Anna Moore is the embodiment of naivety and innocence in the beginning to the film. These qualities allow Lennox Sanderson to act as the melodramatic evil and take advantage of Anna. Thus causing Anna great suffering although she is actually the innocent party. Griffith's narrative follows in the classic archetypes of melodrama as described in William's article "Playing the Race Card." The most predominant being the identification and sympathy of the protagonist through her needless suffering.

The sympathy gained from Anna's suffering allows Griffith to make the audience question the double standard between a man and a woman's sexuality. This inequality is personified through the Characters Anna and Lennox; Anna is persecuted for having sex out of wedlock, while Lennox's actions are condoned because it is expected that he will "sow his wild oats." "Way Down East" clearly shows the audience that Lennox is evil and is taking advantage of his position in society. While Anna's credibility as good is gained through the events that unfold on the screen. By the time Anna's terrible secret is reviled, the audience already witnessed Anna's baby die in her arms, which was the culmination of a life of suffering. She is made to suffer more because of her past actions when she runs into the storm. The audience sees that Anna was never wrong in her actions, but throughout the movie she suffers because of her loss of purity.

Griffith brings to the forefront the double standard toward women, but in following with the mellow dramatic tradition, he does not provide a real solution to this social issue rather Anna gains redemption through her final act of suffering on the frozen river. Anna "in the very activity of suffering, demonstrates her [sic] worth as" a citizen (Williams Page 24). More specifically Anna gains the approval and forgiveness of Squire Bartlett and thus the movie can end happily, but the social issue that Griffith brings forth is not actually solved rather it is glossed over in the happy ending. Griffith continues the melodramatic storytelling key of resolving "basic moral contradictions at a mythic level," but does nothing to solve the actual inequality.