



The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910

Richard Abel

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Only once in cinema history have imported films dominated the American market: during the nickelodeon era in the early years of the twentieth century, when the Pathé company's "Red Rooster" films could be found "everywhere." Through extensive original research, Richard Abel demonstrates how crucial French films were in making "going to the movies" popular in the United States, first in vaudeville houses and then in nickelodeons.

Abel then deftly exposes the consequences of that popularity. He shows how, in the midst of fears about mass immigration and concern that women and children (many of them immigrants) were the principal audience for moving pictures, the nickelodeon became a contested site of Americanization. Pathé's Red Rooster films came to be defined as dangerously "foreign" and "alien" and even "feminine" (especially in relation to "American" subjects like westerns). Their impact was thwarted, and they were nearly excluded from the market, all in order to ensure that the American cinema would be truly American.

The Red Rooster Scare offers a revealing and readable cultural history of American cinema's nationalization, by one of the most distinguished historians of early cinema.

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