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| The Birth of a Nation (1915) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| *The Birth of a Nation* is a 1915 silent film by D. W. Griffith, known equally for its cinematic innovation and for the social controversy it has caused, becoming one of the most debated American films in history. The story is based on written works by Thomas Dixon Jr. that aimed to refute the pre-eminent narrative on race at the time, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Beginning in the pre-Civil-War era and continuing through Reconstruction, the story of *The Birth of a Nation* depicts the Ku Klux Klan as a heroic group indispensible in protecting white society from black infiltration. At three hours and $100,000, the movie’s length and budget significantly exceeded any previous American film. Revolutionary not only in scope and visual technique, it was also the first film to be distributed with a uniquely compiled score. Modernist filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin cited Griffith in having influenced their montage technique (Baldwin 65), although Eisenstein decried the idea of forgiving the film’s racism in light of its cinematic value (Platt 81). Still widely cited as a document of early twentieth-century racism, *Birth of a Nation* also continues to be seen as an indispensible work in the advancement of narrative motion pictures as a fine art — for its eloquence in putting a near-exhaustive array of cutting-edge photography and editing techniques in the utmost possible service of story-telling. |
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| Further reading:  (Baldwin)  (Platt)  (Stokes) |