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| **Your article** |
| The Birth of a Nation |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| [Enter an **abstract** for your article] |
| One of the most watched and debated American films in history, *The Birth of a Nation* is a 1915 silent film by D. W. Griffith known equally for its cinematic innovation and the controversy it caused. The story is based on written works by Thomas Dixon Jr., which aimed to refute the pre-eminent narrative on race at the time: Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Opening in the pre-Civil War era and continuing through Reconstruction, *The Birth of a Nation* depicts the Ku Klux Klan as a heroic group indispensible in protecting white society from black infiltration. Over three hours long and with a budget of 100,000 dollars, its length and budget significantly exceeded any previous American film. Ground-breaking not only in scope and visual technique, it was the first film to be distributed with a uniquely compiled score. Modernist filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin cited Griffith as 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). Just as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in a sense begat *The Birth of a Nation*, so in turn were new forms of protest born in the famous and fervent opposition to the film, and the fledging NAACP came out of the battle significantly strengthened (Stokes 129-170). Still widely acknowledged as racist, *The Birth of a Nation* also continues to be seen as an indispensible work in the advancement of the narrative motion picture as a fine art, and for its eloquence in putting a near exhaustive array of cutting-edge photography and editing techniques (honed to some degree in Griffiths 1908-1914 shorts for the Biograph Company) in the utmost possible service of story-telling.  [File: picket.jpg]  Figure NAACP picket outside theatre in New York City protesting *The Birth of a Nation*  <http://www.corbisimages.com/stock-photo/rights-managed/IH154876/naacp-picket-outside-theatre-protesting-movie-birth>  [File: advice.jpg]  Figure Advice sheet distributed to theatres upon the release of *The Birth of a Nation* stating that “negroes” are not to be admitted to screenings “under any circumstances”  <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/content-images/05091p1.jpg>  [File: Poster.jpg]  Figure Poster advertising *The Birth of a Nation* in Seattle  <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Birth_of_a_Nation_Poster_-_Seattle.jpg>  [File: article.jpg]  Figure NEGROES OPPOSE FILM.; Ex-Service Men Say "Birth of a Nation" Misrepresents Them. (May 7, 1921) New York Times  <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=FB0E13FD355B1B7A93C5A9178ED85F458285F9> |
| Further reading:  (Baldwin)  (Platt)  (Stokes) |