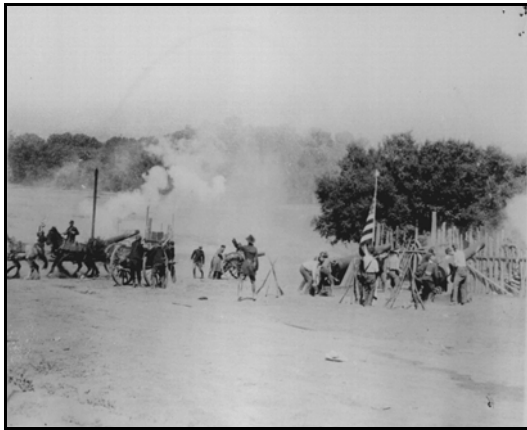


THE
**BIRTH OF
A NATION**
1915



Cast

Ben Cameron.... Henry B Walthall
Margaret Cameron.... Miriam Cooper
Flora Cameron.... Mae Marsh
Dr Cameron.... Spottiswoode Aitken
Mrs Cameron.... Josephine Crowell
Austin Stoneman.... Ralph Lewis
Elsie Stoneman.... Lillian Gish
Phil Stoneman.... Elmer Clifton
Silas Lynch.... George Siegmann

D.W. Griffith Corporation 1915
Directed by D.W. Griffith
Scenario.... D W Griffith
and Frank E. Woods
Photography.... G W Bitzer
Editors.... James and Rose Smith

A tinted print
Duration: 189 minutes
Projection speed: variable
Special equipment: three-bladed shutter
Aperture: full

Score by Joseph Carl Breil
Arranged and adapted by
John Lanchbery
(52 players)



LIVE CINEMA

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

The Birth of a Nation is perhaps the most important film ever made. In the 1970s it was still listed as the top moneymaker of all time. Its runaway success boosted the fledgling cinema industry, converting nickelodeons into picture palaces. It launched the era of the full-length feature and established the grammar of film-making as we know it. Above all, it demonstrated just how much the cinema was capable of in terms of emotional impact.

D W Griffith based his film on a play by Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman*. Dixon's inflammatory views on race and history made the play highly controversial and guaranteed Griffith a project that would cause a stir. But Griffith aimed higher than notoriety. As befitting the subject - the American Civil War and its aftermath - he made the film on a heroic scale featuring many historical reenactments such as the restaging of a vast battle, Lincoln's assassination and a sitting of an early Southern legislature. By expanding Dixon's story of two families - one Northern, one Southern - he encapsulated the human cost of war. He made an epic narrative of the trials and tribulations of Ben Cameron; his idyllic life as eldest son of a Southern family, his wartime heroism and his vigilante stand against the forces that laid waste to his homeland. The second Act is essentially Dixon's original, although Griffith toned down much of the racism. Newly-freed slaves are goaded by carpetbaggers to rise against their former masters. Anarchy prevails and the 'Little Colonel' calls for the South to save itself - a call for the 'Night Riders' or the Klansmen.

The ride of the Klansmen remains a cinematic *tour de force*. Griffith juggles several different locations, characters, and plot elements in a dazzling finale with two cliff-hangers. Its highly developed technique of cross cutting startled and excited audiences. The film also enraged some sectors of society by portraying the Klan as the saviours of the South. By mirroring the popular concept of America's recent history Griffith alienated the socially progressive. Widely criticized for its depiction of blacks, it caused riots in some states and was banned in others. Despite this, and perhaps because of it, the film was a colossal success. Not only had it hit a raw nerve in American history, it made history itself. The period following the Civil War was chaotic and destined to cause controversy. But in terms of the cinema, the artistic strength and popularity of *The Birth of a Nation* demonstrated the power of film as an opinion former, a power that would soon be exploited universally for political and commercial interests alike.

Music played a major part in *The Birth of a Nation's* phenomenal success. Griffith commissioned Joseph Carl Breil to write an orchestral score using themes from the classical repertoire, traditional Civil War songs and his own music. For this restoration John Lanchbery rearranged Breil's score adding some themes of his own but sticking to the original compilation score format. A new film print was made from original nitrate material so this historic masterpiece is now available fully tinted in a quality that reveals its dramatic power.