



# **Birth of a Nation: D.W. Griffith, Director (Rutgers Films in Print)**

*Robert Lang*

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The Birth of a Nation (1915) remains the most controversial American film ever made, and its director, D. W. Griffith, one of the most extraordinary figures in film history. It was the first true feature film and did more than any other to launch Hollywood both as an industry and as an idea. The film consolidated a trend in cinematic technique and an approach to dramatic narrative that define American cinema to this day. As a great but ideologically troubled film that offers us a reflection of ourselves as Americans,

The Birth of a Nation continues to intrigue, challenge, infuriate, and awe. Robert Lang's introduction to this volume explores in fascinating detail the warped view of history that this great film presents. Griffith, a Southerner, was intent on resurrecting, idealizing, and justifying the South. In The Birth of a Nation, it is racism that unites the white North and South; the protection or abolition of slavery is not the divisive issue. In a powerful synthesis of spectacle and narrative, Griffith seeks to give the Southern cause a sense of glamour and high purpose. Lang considers the film as a historical melodrama, and by examining Griffith's "historiography as ideological practice," he traces the way in which the bloody, traumatic reality of the Civil War and Reconstruction becomes melodramatic myth. This unparalleled guide to The Birth of a Nation offers a shot-by-shot continuity script; a biographical sketch of the director; a sampling of contemporary reviews; a series of essays by distinguished critics including James Chandler, Michael Rogin, Janet Staiger, and Mimi White; and a filmography and bibliography.

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