

Birth of a Nation, 1915

Introduction

This “Advice Sheet” flyer was distributed with D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* to theaters when the film was released in 1915. Significantly, the distributors are adamant that “NEGROES MUST NOT BE ADMITTED . . . under any circumstance.” The film was a treatment of a novel and play, *The Clansman*, which depicted the Ku Klux Klan as heroes and African Americans as villains during Reconstruction. The deeply racist film attracted a wide audience and stirred controversy and protests from the newly created NAACP.

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction, view the image, and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow. (Students may also first review reputable sources in order to understand how the film depicted events in the South before and during the Civil War as well as during Reconstruction.)

1. Modern viewers of *The Birth of a Nation* generally agree that it portrayed African Americans in racial stereotypes and celebrated the development of the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War. Why did the “advice sheet” warn theater managers that “negroes must not be admitted”?
2. The NAACP condemned the film as “three miles of filth”; President Woodrow Wilson referred to the movie as “history writ with lightning.” Compare these two statements. Use evidence from the film (or credible movie reviews) to support or refute either statement.
3. The “advice sheet” was issued by Jack Edwards, representative based in Atlanta. Do you think similar warnings were issued to theater managers in northern cities and towns? Explain your response.

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Image

ADVICE SHEET

D. W. GRIFFITH'S

“THE BIRTH OF A NATION”

The following information is for House Managers, and should be carefully observed:

Play date

Company arrives..... from..... via Ry.

Company leaves..... for

Manager with company is

Musical Director is

Chief Operator is.....

We carry Musical Director, Violin, Cornet, Drums.

It is very important that your projection machines are well oiled and thoroughly cleaned, in order that best results be attained.

It is vitally important that you have PIANO in tune (International Pitch) and three music stands with lights attached for our musicians, as well as shaded lamp atop piano.

Have all cuts, slides, photographs and clippings of newspaper advertisements ready for our manager on his arrival.

Please bear in mind that NEGROES MUST NOT BE ADMITTED TO “THE BIRTH OF A NATION” under any circumstance.

If by any chance you have any paper left over please deliver it to company manager. Paper costs money and can be used in other towns.

Where possible it is advisable to have reserved seats for the night performance, at least. Tickets should be placed on sale some days in advance of play date, and the public acquainted with the fact that reserved seat tickets are procurable.

Yours very truly,

JACK EDWARDS,
Southern Representative.

Permanent address
Box 1294
Atlanta, Ga.

The Gilder Lehrman Collection

Blank Advice sheet for The Birth of a Nation, 1915. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC05091)