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THE DARTMOUTH



DAILY FILM PROGRAM

1962-1963

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1930)

Abraham Lincoln	Walter Huston	Stephen Douglas	E. Alwyn Warren
Anne Rutledge	Una Merkel	Colonel Marshall	Henry B. Walthall
General Lee	Hobart Bosworth	Secretary Stanton	Oscar Apfel
General Sheridan	Frank Campeau	General Grant	Fred Warren
John Wilkes Booth	Ian Keith		

and

Lucille La Verne, Helen Freeman, W. L. Thorne, Otto Hoffman, Charles Crockett, Helen Ware, Jason Robards Sr., Russell Simpson, Gordon Thorpe, Edgar Deering, Cameron Prudhomme and James Bradbury Sr.

Script by Stephen Vincent Benet and Gerrit Lloyd. Premiered August 25, 1930 at the Central Theatre, New York.

Directed by D. W. Griffith

With David Wark Griffith's **ABRAHAM LINCOLN**, American screen audiences not only heard Lincoln talk for the first time, but were witnesses to an heroic biography which was to turn out to be the last good film of its famous director.

Ever since **THE BIRTH OF A NATION**, Griffith had been plagued by critics and perhaps his own conscience in regard to his sympathetic treatment of some of the less than laudable moments in Southern history, most notably the Ku Klux Klan, which he openly supported in his famous film. Despite his frantic denials of connection with the Klan, he felt it necessary to make an anemic cinematic apology (now almost forgotten) in a sequel, but he probably felt he more than cleared his name with **ABRAHAM LINCOLN**.

According to interviews at the time, Griffith said he had planned the film for twelve years and had read hundreds of books on the subject. Despite the fact that he said he admired Carl Sandburg's Lincoln, the Prairie Years most of all, most of the film is based on Lord Godfrey Charnwood's 1916 biography, which includes some rather bizarre incidents overlooked by the others, most notably the drinking scene at Offutt's New Salem store.

Of course, Lincoln had appeared on the screen many times in the silent films, and memories were very fresh in 1930 of a version made some six and a half years earlier by the Rockett brothers which apparently everyone thought admirable. In a number of cases, Griffith was judged inferior particularly in his handling of the assassination sequence, which is underplayed in **ABRAHAM LINCOLN**. But today, Rocketts' long forgotten, Griffith's film has a firm place in American cinema history.

It gave the late great Walter Huston one of his finest roles, despite the fact that physically he was far too short for Lincoln. Yet his

presence and delivery, even in these early days of the sound film, is deeply moving. But it was Griffith's film all the way. A curious mixture of silent techniques and sound innovations, it goes from the dreadful melodramatic of the Anne Rutledge scenes to a high point in the beautifully photographed cabinet meeting and scene in the telegraph office. Unfortunately, far too little is left to the imagination, and everything seems terribly literal. Only once in a while is there a touch of the unique Griffith technique, most notably in the fascinating passage devoted to Sheridan's victory. Oddly enough, all of the original reviewers were thrilled by what today can only be called a corny ending, the merging of the log cabin into the Lincoln Memorial. Tastes have certainly changed in thirty some years.

The cast is generally excellent, although the many veterans of the silent films are inclined to ham a bit more than necessary, most notably Herbert Bosworth, who is a terrible Lee.

From this point on, Griffith's career went downhill at an ever increasing rate, despite the fact that he was selected as director of the year for **ABRAHAM LINCOLN** and was set to begin a never realized biography of Sam Huston. Griffith's tragic death in a state of advanced alcoholism and neglect by the cinema world he had helped to form was one of the great tragedies of screen history.

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