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Intermediate Composition

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## Assignment Two

“The Birth of a Nation” is a classical yet controversial film which premiered in 1915. The plot took place in the South during the Civil War with the exploitation of the black Americans in many ways. For the analysis I will be comparing it to a historical piece written by a black man himself, struggling in the society. For basic perspective: “The Birth of a Nation” premiered eighteen years after W.E.B Du Bois “Strivings of the Negro People” (1897). The ways that these two individuals, DW Griffith and W. E. B. Du Bois are differentiated in my opinion, even though they use the same appeal, they structure it very differently.

At the time that the film was released the racial tensions were not really minimalizing, and most say that the film rekindled the practices of the KKK. “The Birth of a Nation” stresses the point that black Americans are inferior in a crazy way that today's society is acting toward Spanish men (but that’s a whole different controversy). The particular part of the film that we took a look at was when Flora was being followed by a black man, Gus, and Flora's brother Ben running looking for her. Taking a look at the aim of argument that Griffith chooses to use through the film: he is arguing to convince. There are different techniques that Griffith uses as a director to persuade the audience to feel a certain way about both Flora and Gus. Some of the techniques that he uses are the lighting, music, costumes, body language of the actors as well as

the editing (specifically the split in perspectives when Ben comes looking for Flora) and there are many more.

Let's start off with the basics: lighting and the music. The lighting changes when Gus is in the picture and again when Flora is on the screen, the effects of the lighting that Griffith chooses to use is very telling of his opinions, when the camera focuses on Gus the lighting goes dark and the music is dark as well as if horror movie style. When the camera focuses on Flora- the lighting is bright, the music is cheerful, this is to let you know who the antagonist is (in this case being Gus, of course). When taking a look at the costumes and the way that the characters are portrayed it is very clearly shown that Gus is the "bad guy" because his clothes are torn and the way that the actor is walking makes it seem like Gus is a predator. Griffith does the complete opposite with Flora, she is seen wearing a nice gown and the way she walks and acts is almost childlike. When taking a look at the editing techniques that were used by Griffith it's easy to tell that his aim to convince the audience that Gus was bad news was obvious. Multiliteracies in this case is the different techniques that Griffith used and the meaning behind them, that is not known to the public but the implications that he made were obvious. When doing research for a secondary article, I came across something funny. Given, I was being very broad with my google search, I looked up "1915 racism" just for general, additional information of the life at that time. The results I got were all, every single one, related to "The Birth of a Nation" and how it sparked the reunion of the KKK. I think that it's interesting to see the impact that this film had on our history, some say it's the best film they've ever seen and others are the complete opposite. As stated by the History Channel, they believe that the film is not as innocent as Griffith wanted to

make it seem after the premier, it played a huge role in the once again rise of the KKK, which became even bigger than ever.

The way that W. E. B Du Bois comes across as a lot softer than Griffith. Du Bois having first hand experience as a black man in a racist society, and his approach is a whole lot different when speaking to the public about his struggles. Du Bois's aim is to persuade, he wants his audience to have sympathy for him, adding that emotional appeal. Not only did Du Bois want the understanding of his audience he also wanted them to jump into action, to realize how bad the situation is and to fix it. Although his approach might seem a little more intimidating than Griffith, it is not the case because the way that Du Bois chooses to lay out his argument, it is not confrontational at all to the opposite side, he is not placing blame on anyone, stressing the point that we are all the same. When comparing Griffith who makes it clearly known that one is bad and one is good it's easy to see the difference.

Since I have previously stated that I believe that both Griffith and Du Bois are using the same argument, all the evidence would lead one to conclude that in terms of better use of arguing to persuade, Du Bois would win. He is much more toned-down about his message, even though it is filled with emotion he does not attack the other side, he wants everyone to accept the difference and be one. The film had a lot of emotional appeal to it as well which made the audience feel a certain way about the character Gus, but it was in a malevolent way to attack the other race. I can see how the KKK would rise up again after the premier of this film, it was very moving, but once again I still stand with W. E. B. Du Bois because his argument was more appealing to me because there was so much genuineness in it.

### Cited

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