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Intermediate Composition

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The Genre Analysis of The Birth of A Nation and The Strivings of the Negro People

The Birth of A Nation was a film that portrayed American life at the time right after slavery. The goal of the film was to make people believe that African Americans cause division. The film also reinforced racial bias by making the African American characters seem predatory or uncivilized. The Strivings of the Negro People is about how African Americans had to strive to even get close to their dreams. Du Bois talks about how the world of opportunity was for the white Americans, they did not have opportunities to even try and succeed. The Birth of A Nation would have been more persuasive given the rhetorical context of early 20th century America.

The Birth of A Nation utilizes rhetorical appeals to make a convincing argument. The film used costumes to make people judge a character in a certain way. For example, Gus is dressed as a soldier, but his clothes are dirty. This tells us that we should be afraid of him. Flora is dressed in a plaid dress, and she has ribbons in her hair. This tells us that we should feel that she is sweet, innocent and childlike. Lighting is used to create a certain type of ambiance. The lighting is darker around Gus, this is made to make him seem more menacing. The lighting is brighter and softer around Flora to make her seem innocent. The activities of the characters tell the audience how to think of that character. As Gus is following Flora, he is crouching down and staring intently at Flora. This makes Gus seem predatory, dangerous and creepy. Flora runs around looking at things in nature, she fills up her bucket with water. She jumps around, and

looks at a squirrel. She moves back and forth on a log. These activities make her seem very childlike. Music is used to incite an emotional response in the audience. The music associated with Flora is childlike and playful. The music associated with Gus is tense.

Cross-cut editing scenes and the iris are used to tell an audience how they should feel about a certain scene. The cross-cut editing scene shows her mother frantic and worried as she tells her son that she's worried about Flora. The cut scene to Ben, shows him worried as he looks for Flora. Gus says, "I'm a captain now and I want to marry Flora". It has an iris focused on Flora as she nervously looks around. And an iris around Gus that shows that he's staring at her. This communicates danger, because the director wants us to think that Gus is trying to kidnap Flora and make her his bride. Then Flora runs away when he tries to touch her, as she's running, the music is very suspenseful. She hides and then continues running. Then Ben finds her bucket. We see Flora running around with her arms flailing. Then Ben sees Gus, and yells, "hey", then he finds Flora. And she is taken back to the house to be taken care of. The work of these writers shaped a viewing public that would accept this sequence with few to no reservations. Because their discourse and multiliteracies enforced the belief that African Americans were dangerous and predators and they enforced the idea that white people are heroes and innocent.

The Strivings of The Negro People's rhetorical appeals make a persuasive argument, because he uses logos and pathos to talk about the emotions tied to his experience and the African American's experience. Du Bois uses pathos in his essay. He appeals to emotion through storytelling and expressing the idea that all African Americans want is to really be free and have opportunities. African Americans carried around this burden of being seen as less than. They felt their poverty and the unfair competition with the rich white americans. He talk

about his childhood, how the white school children were giving newcomers visiting cards, he tried to give one to a lady and she refused it with a glance(Plessy v. Ferguson, pg. 142). This caused Du Bois to realize that he was different from others and that he was an outsider in their world. He used logos when he talked about the history of African Americans. He talks briefly about how the war and Ku Klux Klan affected them. And, how they were hopeful when the fifteenth amendment was passed, then disappointment set in when their votes were suppressed and ballot boxes were stuffed. The decade(1875 to 1885) held the ideal of “book-learning”, mission and night schools started at the time of reconstruction, “here at last seemed to have been discovered the mountain path to Canaan”(Plessy v. Ferguson, pg. 146).The readers are able to read about the African American’s perspective and feel the feelings that they felt. They can try and understand the deep longing that African Americans have to grow without being looked down upon.

The Birth of A Nation used pathos(emotions) through rhetorical appeals. They did this through music, lighting, cross cut editing scenes, an iris and more. They wanted white Americans to feel fearful of African Americans. The Strivings of the Negro People used emotions to have people think and feel from the African American's point of view. He wanted people to understand and get an idea of the deep longing for opportunities and the chance to prove oneself. The Birth of A Nation used logos in that they did show history, but they portrayed in a way that was one sided. They showed an African American soldier following a young girl, and made him seem predatory. However, they did not show that same soldier fighting courageously in the war. The Birth of A Nation twisted facts and the truth to meet their agenda. They wanted people to believe that African Americans were the root of division and evil.

The Birth of A Nation was better in terms of rhetorical appeals for the audience it was aimed at. The rhetorical context of the time was right after slavery and the civil war. People still very much had their racial bias towards african americans. African Americans had just gotten their freedom. The film used rhetorical appeals and warped history to stir up more hatred and division. The aim of the argument of The Birth of A Nation was to enforce and fortify white american's racial bias towards african americans. The film wanted for people to still see and treat African Americans as less than. The writers did not want people to treat African Americans better, even though African Americans were free. The aim of the argument of The Striving of The Negro people was to give a voice to African Americans, and make people aware of their struggles and their strivings.

Works Cited

Thomas, Brook. *Plessy v. Ferguson*.. [VitalSource Bookshelf].

Griffith, D.W. "The Birth of A Nation", 1915.