

AMST 351 Essay Assignments

The South in History, Fiction, and Film

M. Thomas Inge

Essay Number 1: Racial Stereotypes

Both *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) have been charged with portraying and fostering ethnic, social, and cultural stereotypes. When *Birth of a Nation* was released, it touched off race riots in five cities in the United States, was banned in five states and nineteen cities, and was protested and picketed by members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), who called the film “an insult to more than thirty million African Americans.” To show the film, said the NAACP, “is to pay tribute to America’s shameful racial history and to encourage a repeat of that history.” Historian John Hope Franklin called the film a “dastardly” effort to “libel a whole race of people.” *Gone with the Wind*, some would argue, continued to support and sustain those same racist stereotypes twenty-four years later.

What exactly are some of the stereotypes depicted in the two films in terms of race? How might they be categorized? What do they seem to be saying about the types of people they represent? Why is this a negative thing? Do racial stereotypes do any harm or are they benign? Why do people object to them? Are there any circumstances under which they are justified?

Should such films as these be banned from public showings? Under what circumstances should they be shown?

AMST 351 Essay Assignments

The South in History, Fiction, and Film

M. Thomas Inge

Essay Number 2: Women in the South

Discuss the types of women portrayed in the books and films we have studied so far. Can they be categorized in terms of types? Are they stereotypical and how so? What do they say about the role of women in the Old and New South? Do some of the women in the books and films break away from the traditional portrayals and demonstrate independence and self-sufficiency? What are the consequences? What was considered the ideal Southern woman? Are the same characteristics admired today? Among the fictional female characters we have met, which one do you admire the most and why?

Essay Number 3: Men in the South

Apply the same questions outlined above to the male characters in the books and films we have studied so far in the class.