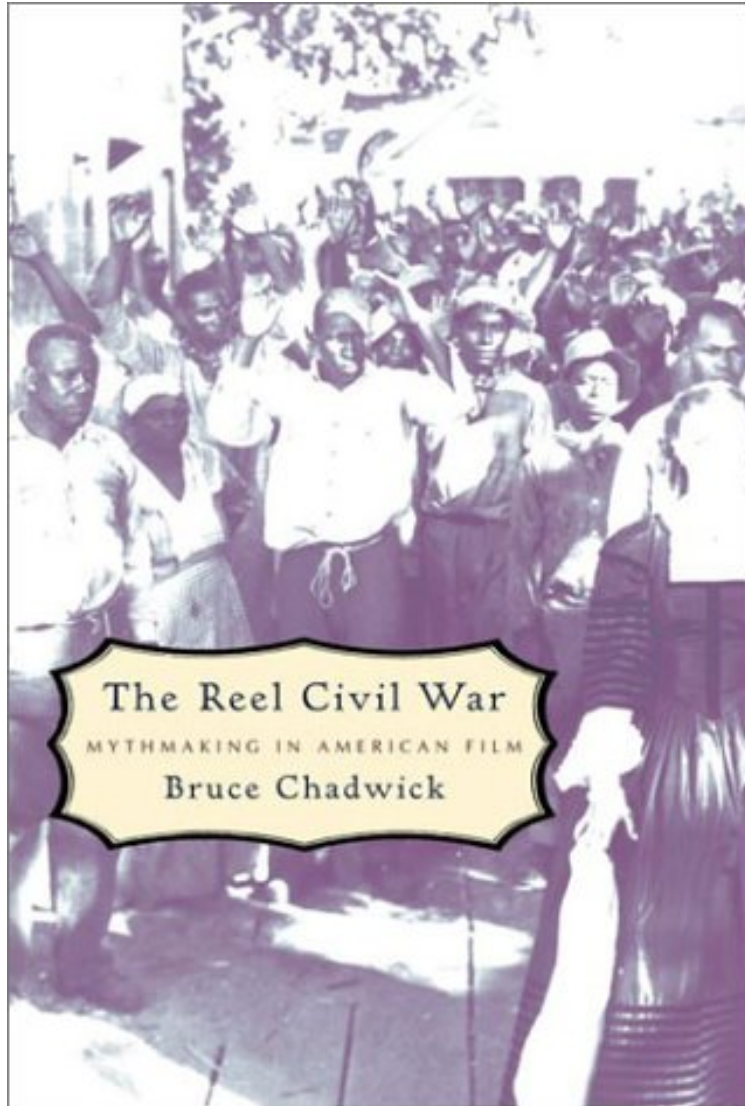


(Read free) The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film

## The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film

*Bruce Chadwick*

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**Bruce Chadwick : The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy JEREMY SKELTONgood0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy DocReally a good book on Civil War films, especially the old ones.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well-written and a good book overallBy CustomerThis book was required for my civil war class, but I honestly really enjoyed reading it for pleasure. I would definitely recommend this book to everyone.

More movies have been produced about the Civil War than about any other aspect of American history. From 1903 (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*) to the present, film studios have released more than eight hundred silent and sound pictures about the nation's most cataclysmic event. In this wonderfully comprehensive study, Bruce Chadwick first shows us how historians, journalists, playwrights, poets and novelists of the late nineteenth century—partly as an effort to reconcile former antagonists—rewrote the war's history to create enduring legends, most of which had no basis in reality. Early silent films followed their example, presenting egregiously distorted and anti-black stories about the war, which viewers accepted as truth. Dr. Chadwick gives us a clear (and sometimes humorous) recounting of those films' plots and themes, including D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, and goes on to describe dozens of movies from the twenties and thirties, among them the classic *Gone With the Wind*. In the forties and fifties many westerns were partly or chiefly based on the Civil War, presenting veterans of both armies gone West to make a new life in the territories, now united in their hatred of the Indians, another minority group. Collectively, all these films created a deeply mythologized and racist version of the war, and of the antebellum period that preceded it and the Reconstruction era that followed. It was a war that, on film, no one actually started (unless they were radical abolitionists) and no one really lost. The movies gave us what the author calls a moonlight-and-magnolias view of the past, filled with gallant cavaliers, a saintly Abraham Lincoln, Scarlett and Rhett, brave Northern warriors and beautiful Southern belles. Slaves were portrayed as obedient servants pouring mint juleps, as happy darkies toiling long hours in the field for lovable and benevolent masters, or as mere background pieces, like furniture or bales of hay and, once freed, as menacing and vicious. Thus, Dr. Chadwick tells us, Americans were given segregation and racism on screen in a way that not only validated the racism they saw in their everyday lives but also helped to maintain it. Even after the civil rights movement, which inspired powerful films like *Glory* that portrayed the courage of black soldiers, such prejudicial films did not entirely disappear. *The Reel Civil War* is a book about the power and the perils of both movies and mythmaking, but more than that, it is a book about the American people and how for a very long period their false ideas about their country's history—in this case a terrible war—were perpetuated by Hollywood.

From *Publishers Weekly* From the first of the silent movies, Chadwick (*The Two American Presidents*) asserts, the Civil War has been presented as a national tragedy, redeemed only by the gallantry of the combatants. Its origins have been obscured, with the slavery question in particular being virtually eliminated from the story. Blacks have been marginalized, presented at best as passive recipients of a freedom won for them by white Northerners. The "old South" emerges as an epitome of civilized grace, destroyed by a war few Southerners really wanted. For Chadwick, D.W. Griffith's virulent *Birth of a Nation* did not establish these clichés; it only institutionalized them. Even Ted Turner's *Gettysburg* (1993), produced in an age of ethnic sensitivity and political correctness, is built around a story of Americans with two different visions of the right, fighting to sustain those visions. It is a white man's movie; blacks and women have no direct impact. Chadwick argues (and shows in 42 b/w stills) that while this restructuring of history may not be fair or honest, it has been necessary to reintegrate societies torn apart by civil war, and that we are only now approaching a time when the truth can be told cinematically. Others will certainly disagree, on both counts. (Sept. 26) *Forecast*: While Chadwick lectures on history and film at Rutgers University, few scholars are likely to take his pragmatic approach to heart (or syllabus). But with the racial politics of the Civil War still awaiting full cinematic treatment, this book, by dint of Knopf's distribution if nothing else, could serve as a wake-up call. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* As a lecturer on history and film at Rutgers and the author of three books on the Civil War (including *Brother Against Brother*), Chadwick is well suited to his subject. He charts the resiliency of myths about the Civil War in films dating from the silent era to the post-Civil Rights 1970s, when "revisionist" efforts began to appear. These films embraced several myths that helped to undergird racism and segregation, including the portrayal of Southerners as heroic underdogs, Lincoln as saintly "Father Abraham," and slaves as obliging minor characters. Chadwick demonstrates that such filmic distortions were based on earlier historical and cultural interpretations of the era. He usefully examines permutations of these views in chapters about Civil War Westerns and discusses recent films that are more accurate (e.g., *Glory*, 1989). This volume acquires itself well when compared with accounts like Roy Kinnard's *The Blue and the Gray on the Silver Screen* (Carol, 1996) and Jim Cullen's *The Civil War in Popular Culture* (Smithsonian, 1995), which also discussed the Civil War in the context of film. Of interest to Civil War buffs and film scholars, this volume belongs in many libraries, both public and academic. Neal Baker, Earlham Coll., Richmond, IN Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. Chadwick's dissection of the myths [these movies] helped to foster is superb. . . . [An] enlightening volume. --*The New York Times Book* [A] fine book. . . . Sure to fascinate lovers of both the Civil War and the big screen. --*The Washington Times* Chadwick . . . brings to this effort a comfortable knowledge of American history and extensive research on the many hundreds of Civil War films and their creation. Kirkus s From the Trade Paperback edition.