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Colin Quinn: Long Story Short (2011/VSC/MVD Blu-ray)/Birth Of A Nation (1915/Kino Blu-ray/DVD Set)/Tora! Tora! Tora! (1970/Fox Blu-ray)/Vietnam In HD (History Channel/A&E Blu-ray Set)

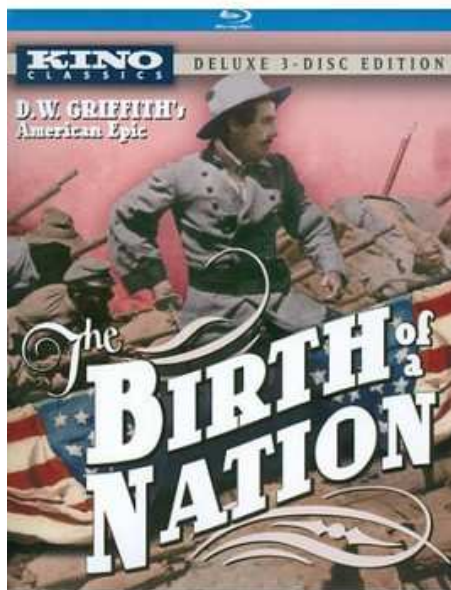
Picture: B-/B/B/B- Sound: B-/B/B/B- Extras: B-/B+/B/D Main Programs: B

History is something some people know is vital, but others would like to manipulate for personal gain. The rule of thumb is, oversimplification usually is about lying and the following four diverse examples show how this plays out in drama, documentary and everywhere in between.

We start with a comedy concert, **Colin Quinn: Long Story Short**, directed and co-written with the comic by no less than Jerry Seinfeld. In a remarkable routine, Quinn talks about the rise and fall of historical civilizations from the beginning to now, why they rose, fell and how this has shaped the world we live in all the way to the present in one of the cleverest, most honest, brutal and sometimes politically incorrect ways we will ever see. Quinn hits a new peak and the insight is ironic, deep and bold, running 75 dense minutes that makes it one of the best stand-up concerts we have ever seen on home video in any format. Go out of your way to see it. Extras include Press Events Footage, Behind The Scenes footage and a feature length audio commentary by Quinn and Seinfeld worth hearing after you watch the concert.

On the other side of the coin is D. W. Griffith's landmark 1915 film **Birth Of A Nation** which claimed to tell the true history of how the U.S. was formed and even starts with a disclaimer about how it does not want to be censored and how we should listen and watch. It was the first-ever feature film (and 192 minutes at that!) and talks about the struggle for the country after The Civil War. At first, it seems innocent enough, even shows the Lincoln Assassination, but something is wrong here.

At first, the few African Americans we see are white actors in blackface playing it straight, if that is possible. Then the film builds up more of that on the side as it shows us well-known history, followed by more black-faced actors. Then those pseudo-blacks become predators, but



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 Weng-Chiang (Special
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when then-decimated Klu Klux Klan shows up to stop those predatory, freed "negroes" who were once slaves, the film no longer hides the intent that it is a propaganda film plain and simple and Griffith is a white nationalist who felt the Klan was needed. The film was a blockbuster hit and the Klan was revived in a way that still sticks with us to this day, not to mention their various offshoots. It also set a high standard of propaganda that was answered by the then-new Soviet Union with **Battleship Potemkin** (1925, also issued by Kino on Blu-ray, and reviewed elsewhere on this site) and by the German Nazis with **Triumph Of The Will** (1935).

Whether out of innovation or necessity to get his points across, it established the book-like Hollywood narrative as the town grew into what it is today. Griffith was a giant for a time, including his own Triangle Studios (which eventually went to MGM), was a co-founder of United Artists (before bad health had him drop out), he could not make the transition into sound and his longer follow-up to this film (Intolerance) bankrupted him, but that is another story for another time. But in this film, Griffith was at the peak of his powers for better and worse, keeping the narrative going without fail and keeping an audience who had never seen anything like this before enthralled, no matter what path he took them and the country down.


It is ultimately an ugly film, but **Birth Of A Nation** is still a classic and the Classical Hollywood narrative that is still with us still has yet to totally break from what the film established and in some ways never will. Extras include Spoken intros on film with Griffith and Walter Huston made for sound reissues of the film on the Blu-ray, the first bonus DVD adds a 1993 version of the film restored by David Shepard and a Making Of featurette by Shepard with footage compiled by Russell Merritt and the second, final DVD adds 7 Civil Wars shorts directed by Griffith, sections of the original souvenir program to the film and *New York vs. Birth Of A Nation* about one of the films many battles over censorship and how the changes made when it finally opened in 1922.

Richard Fleischer directed **Tora! Tora! Tora!** (1970) about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, though Akira Kurosawa shot some footage as well. This hit epic about the bombing of Pearl Harbor holds up very well, but it is very readerly, journalistic and (as it should be) serious showing both sides of the historic event. Problems include the idea that the U.S. had no idea it was going to happen, but the cast is solid including Martin Balsam, Joseph Cotton, E.G. Marshall, Toshio Masuda, Jason Robards, James Whitmore and others in a well cast and well recreated (it holds up well against the mixed Michael Bay **Pearl Harbor**) and reminds us of how bad the Japanese Imperialists were at a time in recent years where some political interests want us to forget they ever existed!

Extras include the DigiPak booklet with text and illustrations, while the Blu-ray adds the Original Theatrical Trailer, a slew of Fox Movietone Newsreels on the actual event (12 in all), **AMC Backstory** episode on the film, Production Gallery, Behind The Scenes gallery, Original Theatrical Trailer, *Day Of Infamy* documentary, **History vs. Hollywood** episode on the film and feature length audio commentary by the late director Fleischer and Japanese Film Historian Stuart Galbraith IV. You can read more about the music on the film at this link of a Limited Edition CD issued of Jerry Goldsmith's famous score:

[http://www.fulvuedrive-in.com/review/1029/Tora!+Tora!+Tora!+\(Limited+CD\)](http://www.fulvuedrive-in.com/review/1029/Tora!+Tora!+Tora!+(Limited+CD))

Finally we have the documentary mini-series **Vietnam In HD** from The History Channel that gathers hundreds of film clips, usually in color and adds actors reading the words of participants in the fiasco. Like Japanese Imperialism, there are many political interests that want to forget Vietnam for the worst possible reasons, but here is yet another solid, key work telling the story and preserving it, though the footage is so



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compelling that it could work with no words and even silent title cards. Michael C. Hall is the main narrator and its showing of history is as inarguable as anything on the list, joining **Apocalypse Now**, **The Deer Hunter** and **Full Metal Jacket** on Blu-ray as defining works on the subject and hopefully not the last.

The 1080i 1.78 X 1 digital High Definition image transfers on **Quinn** and **Vietnam** have their detail flaws and limits, but for different reasons. **Quinn** is simply shot on stage that way and uses more than a little bit of digital animation that is limited, but serves the purpose, while **Vietnam** has a footage mix that includes more instances of taking 1.33 X 1 material and stretching it sideways than it should. Also, color varies throughout and some material looks like low-def transfers of film footage, which is here in every format from 8mm, Super 8mm and possibly 9mm to 16mm and 35mm film. Maybe A&E should have found a way to show the 1.33 X 1 images correctly and added something else on the side.

The 1080p 1.33 X 1 digital High Definition image transfer on **Nation** is a moiré recent HD transfer that shows how well the film has held up despite how many prints were made back in the day to keep up with blockbuster demand. There is tinting of many scenes, but this is a black and white film otherwise and retains that famous Griffith look throughout. The 1080p 2.35 X 1 AVC @ 20 MBPS digital High Definition image transfer on **Tora** has been cleaned up and though some footage can show its age, the film is pretty clean and clear throughout with even a few demo shots, while the DTS-HD MA (Master Audio) 5.1 lossless mix on the film can be towards the front speakers as this was a film originally designed for 6-track magnetic sound in 70mm blow-up prints with traveling dialogue and sound effects, but that is still better than the Dolby Digital 4.0 mix that sounds more like the magnetic 35mm prints than the 70mm version.

DTS-HD MA (Master Audio) 5.1 lossless is also used on **Vietnam**, but that is stretching it a bit with readings and sound effects, while the same format offers the instrumental score for **Nation**, which is also here in PCM 2.0 Stereo as is the **Quinn** concert, which all sound just fine.

- Nicholas Sheffo

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