



# **Lincoln before Lincoln: Early Cinematic Adaptations of the Life of America's Greatest President**

*Brian J. Snee*

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Remembered as the Savior of the Union, Abraham Lincoln is one of America's most revered presidents. There have been tens of thousands of books published about him since his death, but he has proved to be a surprisingly daunting subject for filmmakers. Despite a wealth of biographical material, relatively few full-length motion pictures have taken the man and his life as a primary subject. In this detailed study, Brian J. Snee provides a sweeping overview of the cinematic representations of the sixteenth president from the silent era up to Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* (2012)—a film which, he argues, marks a seismic shift in the way Hollywood presents the Great Emancipator on-screen.

Snee focuses on six of the most popular and influential movies and TV miniseries of the twentieth century to address the life of Abraham Lincoln: *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Abraham Lincoln* (1930), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940), *Sandburg's Lincoln* (1974–1976), and *Gore Vidal's Lincoln* (1988). Snee examines how each work has contributed to public memory of the president, addressing issues of production, textual construction, and audience reception, as well as their contemporary historical contexts and underlying cultural theory.

The absence of video and other recording technology during Lincoln's lifetime forever shrouds his mannerisms, thought processes, and interactions with his peers and advisers. That man, Snee argues, is lost to history. This fascinating book offers a revealing and groundbreaking assessment of how Hollywood has imagined and reimagined America's greatest president on-screen, contributing to the popular image and myth of the legendary man.

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