My Semester at the Woodrow Wilson House

Elizabeth Hashimoto
Winter/Spring 2023
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learning about museum work and researching Wilson's racial legacy

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Hi, I'm Elizabeth Hashimoto

- I am from the Kingdom of Hawai‘i
- Art History and Museum Studies graduate student at Georgetown University, class of 2023
- I hope to work in the art museum world after graduation
- I enjoy both analyzing and creating works of art
As an art history major, I am interested in how fictional works have the power to influence real world opinions.

I choose to research Wilson's decision to screen *The Birth of a Nation* at the White House in 1915.

Many visitors ask about Wilson and this movie, and I wanted to produce something to help educate them.

Quotes from Wilson’s own writing which Griffith inserted into Birth.

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Research Methods

- Engaged with research papers about Wilson's racial attitudes and policies, as well as the history of and themes in *The Birth of a Nation*
- Watched "Wilson in an Age of Racial Reckoning" online seminar
- Interviewed Wilson history expert John Milton Cooper
- Performed visual analysis of contemporary newspapers and posters advertising the film
Final Product

- I synthesized my research and compiled it into a brochure.
- This format allows visitors to read the information while at the House or to take it home with them.
- My project can serve a physical accompaniment to a future exhibit planned about Wilson and race.
My Brochure

What can we take from this?

What natural resources are needed for the development of The Birth of a Nation? In what ways does the film reflect the historical context of the era?

Sources


Fig. 5. A still in the film quoting Wilson.

The Birth of a Nation and Woodrow Wilson

Elisabeth Hashimoto
W.H. Scholar
Winter/Spring 2023

On February 16, 1915, she saw the film "The Birth of a Nation," directed by David Wark Griffith. She was drawn to Woodrow Wilson's portrayal of the film's central character, and was fascinated by the way he used the film to advance his political agenda.

Why did the White House show the film?

Hemans and author Thomas Dixon, Jr., was so impressed with the features of the new film that he went to see it. He was so impressed with the film that he decided to use it as a tool for political gain.

Fig. 4. Poster advertising the Birth of a Nation.

Fig. 2. What does this write-up reveal about Woodrow Wilson's involvement in the film and its impact on politics?

How does this relate to Wilson's larger legacy on race?

When Wilson delivered the national address, he was greeted by a standing ovation and a standing ovation for his speech. In the context of race relations, it is clear that Wilson's legacy was complex and multifaceted.

Fig. 4. A NAACP member protests the film.

Fig. 3. Still from the film, showing the Klu.

Fig. 1. My Brochure cover.
On Site Work

- Researched paintings in the house for a forthcoming art tour meant to attract those interested in art to the house
- Miscellaneous tasks around the house such as room set up, preparation for board of trustees meeting, and folding brochures
Conclusion

- This internship gave me a chance to engage in online and in-person museum work in a beautiful, historic structure.

- I gained experience with the collections management platform re: discovery while researching paintings owned by the house.

- I had the opportunity to create a project that brought together aspects of art analysis, museum education, and graphic design.
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