

“Lincoln”- A Movie...Clothed With Immense Power”

“Lincoln” was twelve years in the making according to Steven Spielberg and one of the main difficulties was the initial script that featured Lincoln’s life through the backdrop of the Civil War. But how do you portray Lincoln as a flesh and blood person, and not have him swept away in the historical events of the Emancipation, Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, the Second Inaugural to emerge as Carl Sandburg noted in preparing for his six volume biography of Lincoln as “magnified until he was too big to see”?

But Spielberg and Tony Kushner, his screen writer, were wise to focus on the last four months of Lincoln’s life and his efforts in ensuring the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution that would eliminate slavery before the war ended with a reunited South with slavery still in place. These events are based on five pages, Pgs. 686-90, of text in Doris Kearns Goodwin’s Pulitzer Prize book, “Team of Rivals- The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln.” This narrow focus allowed a multi-faceted depiction of Lincoln’s as a person dealing with human emotions, warts and all, in his role as President in dealing with his cabinet, as a husband and father and how he dealt with personal loss in addition to those lives he caused in his role as Commander- In- Chief. Here you see the political genius of Lincoln as President, “clothed with immense power,” his loving affection for Tad as he lay on the floor next to him until Tad woke for Lincoln to carry him to his bed, and his conflicted relationship with Robert, as he slapped and then tried to embrace him. You see Lincoln’s loving patience and understanding behind Mary’s mood swings tested beyond the limits of his endurance.

Spielberg spent great lengths to give us as much accuracy as possible to the extent of recording the ticking of one of Lincoln’s pocket watches, the sound of doors opening and closing in the White House, the sounds of the carriage that the Lincolns rode in and the sound of the floor boards as he would have walked and sat down in his pew in the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church where he attended in Washington, D.C. and recreating faithfully the interior of Lincoln’s office from pictures and written sources. What you hear in the movie are these recorded sounds. The actors who portrayed Seward (David Strathairn), Stanton (Bruce McGill), Grant (Jared Harris) and Thaddeus Stevens, played by Tommy Lee Jones, all bear a remarkable resemblance to the real people they portray. Daniel Day-Lewis’ Lincoln is one for the ages for his close appearance, speech and plodding walk, a role he spent over a year studying and preparing for. Sally Field’s Mary Lincoln is a portrayal of an intelligent woman, ahead of her time, a southerner not totally accepted by the Washington establishment, overcome with overwhelming grief from her loss of her sons, Eddie and Willie.

Any inaccuracies were minor and offer food for thought. Did Lincoln actually swear as portrayed in the movie or would have the James Spader’s character reacted by saying in surprise as Lincoln entered the room, “Well I’ll be f**ked!” The Civil War took place during the time of Victorian Era morals where soldiers in camp even thought it improper to be seen without wearing a sack coat. What our politicians of today might say or react was written into the

dialogue for effect. The real Tad Lincoln spoke with a lisp that only his father and mother could understand unlike the movie, but this doesn't take away from the love and affection that father and son had for each other. As for his relationship with Robert, there never was the closeness that he felt for his younger sons, where Lincoln once remarked that Robert was "more Todd" than Lincoln. Would he have slapped Robert out of anger or frustration as shown in the movie when Robert accused his father of not letting him join the army because "he was afraid of mother"? This reaction is so out of character to everything written about Lincoln. But it was done again to show the range of emotions Lincoln, as a real flesh and blood person, had to go through. He was more afraid for Mary's weak emotional psyche and showed the greatest patience and restraint in not causing further harm to her. When Robert said it was due to his fear of Mary's anger, Lincoln reacted, as we might have, out of frustration that Robert did not understand the immense patience he had in reacting to Mary in her emotional outbursts. Robert, apparently, never understood his mother's mood swings as he later had Mary institutionalized because of her fear of not having enough money to the point where she was sold her clothing much to Robert's embarrassment. Mary was later released after she was able to prove her sanity, but it caused an irreparable strain to their relationship. Lincoln as he laid dying in bed at the Peterson House should have been shown laying diagonally on the bed since it was not long enough for his 6' - 4" height.

Finally, can anyone guess where the scenes of the debate in Congress were filmed? A big hint is the scene of Thaddeus Stevens sitting in a rotunda with the statue of Washington standing in the background. The scenes and the outdoor shot of the capitol building and interior scenes of the White House were filmed in the Virginia State House and in the Governor's Mansion in Richmond, VA.

"Lincoln" is most deserving of all the awards it has been nominated for and a must see movie even for those with little or no interest in Lincoln or the Civil War if nothing more than just for the art of movie making and acting alone!

Irving David Moy
"Lincolnshire"

December 15, 2012

POSTSCRIPT

“LINCOLN”

12 ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATIONS

including

BEST PICTURE

DIRECTOR
STEVEN SPIELBERG

ACTRESS-IN A SUPPORTING ROLE
SALLY FIELD

CUSTOMER DESIGN
JOANNA JOHNSTON

ACTOR- IN A LEADING ROLE
DANIEL DAY-LEWIS

WRITING- ADAPTED SCREENPLAY
TONY KUSHNER

FILM EDITING
MICHAEL KAHN

ACTOR- IN A SUPPORTING ROLE
TOMMY LEE JONES

CINEMATOGRAPHY
JANUSZ KAMINSKI

MUSIC- ORIGINAL SCORE
JOHN WILLIAMS

PRODUCTION DESIGN
RICK CARTER & JIM ERICKSON

SOUND MIXING
ANDY NELSON, GARY RYDSTROM & RONALD JUDKINS