

The Clerk's Black History Series



Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



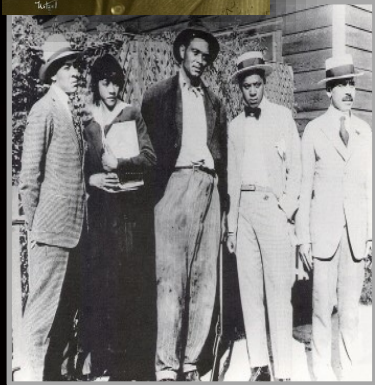
Lincoln Motion Picture Company (1916 – 1923)

"The First All-Black Owned Movie Production Company"



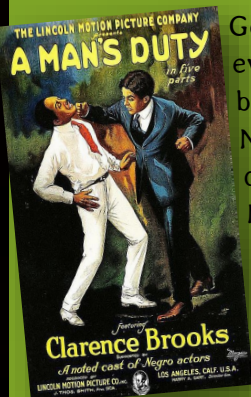
Noble Johnson

The Lincoln Motion Picture Company is the first black-owned film production company, founded in 1916 by brothers, Noble and George Johnson, in Omaha, Nebraska. At a time when African-Americans were being ignored by larger film producers, or only represented in slapstick comedies or demeaning stereotypes, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company set out to produce movies that showcased black actors in leading roles. At the time, Noble Johnson was a burgeoning actor and George Johnson worked for the post office. Within the first year of its opening, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company relocated to Los Angeles, California.



The company's first film, *The Realization of a Negro's Ambition* (1916), was a silent, short film, starring none other than, Noble Johnson. The film was the first of its kind, to be owned, written, acted and produced by African-Americans. The film was directed toward black audiences and one of the first to show the black man as a determined and educated working man, who was successful through his own merits. The movie, unfortunately, is considered a "lost" film, which means there is no trace or recording to be found.

The Lincoln Motion Picture Company went on to produce four more films, *Trooper of Company K* (1917), *The Law of Nature* (1917), *A Man's Duty* (1919) and *By Right of Birth* (1921), a bold film produced in direct response to D.W. Griffith's racially charged movie, *The Birth of a Nation*. But by the late 1910s, several members of the black film community had established their own studios, creating serious competition for funding. The increased cost of movie production and the economic effects of the Great Depression forced most independent black film producers out of business. In 1923, the company announced that its next production would be *The Heart of a Negro*, but a few weeks after this announcement, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company closed.



George P. Johnson continued working as a postal employee for 37 years and eventually compiled an extensive collection related to blacks in the movie business, which is now held by the [UCLA Research Library](#).

Noble M. Johnson continued acting and appeared in more than 140 movies from 1915–1950. Some of his most notable films include: *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, *The Ten Commandments* and *Moby Dick*. He was the tribal leader on Skull Island in the classic film, *King Kong* and its sequel, *The Son of Kong*. One of his last films was John Ford's classic, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. Although he enjoyed a full repertoire of film work, after the closing of The Lincoln Motion Picture Company, Noble was often cast as the exotic, racially ambiguous, supporting character. Noble Johnson died on January 9, 1978, in California, at age 96.

