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American Visions
THE MAGAZINE OF AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURE
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Interview: Rappin’ With Spike Lee
By David Frechette
The director of She’s Gotta Have It is back. With a new film that examines class and color conflicts among Black college students

Looking at School Days
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Facing Tomorrow

Lucerne Media has released a new film chronicling the United Nation's "Decade for Women." The film's primary focus is the official U.N. conference held in Nairobi in 1985, and the implications of the largest gathering of women in history. *Facing Tomorrow* was produced and directed by Inge Langen and is available for sale or rental. For more details contact Lucerne Media, 37 Ground Pine Road, Morris Plains, NJ 07950, or call toll free (800) 341-2293. (In New Jersey (201) 538-1401)

5 Days in July

The National Alliance of Third World Journalists presented a screening of *5 Days in July* at its 5th National Conference in Atlanta, April 21-24. The film, produced and directed by Spencer Moon, documents Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign. For information about the film: Realize Your Energy, 766-1/2 Hayes Street, San Francisco, CA 94102, or call (415) 864-2941.

Visions of the Spirit

Alice Walker is back on film—not as the writer this time, but as the subject. Producer/director Elena Featherston's *Visions of the Spirit* premiered April 20 at the Palace of Fine Arts Theatre in San Francisco. The premiere was a benefit for the Women's Building, a support center for women's projects in the Bay Area. *Visions* takes an in-depth look at Walker's life and work, including her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Color Purple.* For information contact: Karen Larsen at (312) 957-1205.

Have Camera, Will Travel?

The Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation is now accepting applications for its 1988/89 Visual Arts Residency Program. The program seeks to encourage artists to develop and pursue special projects and begin new ones. It is open to non-profit organizations in the mid-Atlantic region willing to sponsor individual artists or critics based within the region but outside of the host organization's state. Residencies are from two weeks to three months and pay $2,000 a month plus up to $300 for documentation of activities during residency. Applications must be received by the foundation by July 15, 1988. Contact: Trudi Ludwig, arts program assistant at (301) 539-6656.

By Janet Singleton

Topper Carew has earned a doctorate by way of Yale, Harvard and M.I.T. Yet, he says he loves television. When he looks at it, he doesn't see the proverbial "boob tube"—he sees possibilities.

For 14 years, Carew has been making those possibilities into realities by producing and writing television shows. His latest production is the new comedy series, *Bustin' Loose.* Based on the 1982 film of the same name, it stars Vonetta McGee and Jimmy Walker as the custodians of four lively foster kids.

*Bustin' Loose* is Carew's 12th television series. His cinematic career began when he started writing and producing children's shows for public television in 1973. Carew wrote and produced the documentary series *Rebop* from 1974 through 1978. He produced the comedy series, *The Righteous Apples* (winner of a National Education award) and special features such as *And the Children Shall Lead* and *This is the Home of Mrs. Levant.*

In the '80s, Carew went commercial. He worked with the famous Mr. T on a home video for kids called *Be Somebody.* In '83 he produced the feature film, *D.C. Cab,* a hectic multiracial comedy with a flavor similar to the mid-'70s movie, *Car Wash.*

*D.C. Cab* wasn't the sweetheart of critics but Carew is undisturbed by that. "In no way will I disavow the accomplishment of being a Black man who mounted an $11 million film," he says.

Still, he admits there were problems. "The film got rushed out for Christmas. It was supposed to be a February release," he says. Therefore, he says, *D.C. Cab* didn't do as well as it could have at the box office. "But there is a resurgence of it in the home video market," he adds.

"Someone like myself has to struggle..."
to get things done," he says. That leads Carew to pragmatism. "I tend toward more conceptual ideas—ideas driven more by a concept than by a star.‘ Concepts are cheaper than stars.

Carew says his primary interest is comedy. "Serious stuff is less challenging than comedy," he says. "It’s harder to make people laugh than it is to make people cry—that is, from a creative point of view."

However, comedy is politically risky, he observes. "It’s an area some Black intellectuals find offensive because you run into stereotypes." Conceptual comedy, though, is where Carew finds the most inspirational lessons. He says D.C. Cab was relevant because it was about "multi-ethnic underdogs struggling" to make good.

Bustin’ Loose also has its struggling ethnic underdogs, particularly in the character Sonny, played by Jimmy Walker. "He’s the kind of guy we root for because he’s just about there but somehow falls short," he says.

Bustin’ Loose, with its adopted orphans and committed social worker, "makes an important statement using humor," Carew asserts. "It says we should be our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers and as generous as possible to the next generation, whether they’re our children or not."

Carew doesn’t fear that the small-screen medium will dwarf his visions. "The demands of television are far greater than film," he says. "It’s volume business. Television depends very heavily on characterization. The success of a television show depends on an audience coming to like a character it can root for and trust. In a movie, you just get one shot; it has to be a special event in which the characters on a one-time basis are larger than life. On television, they are life."

Carew approaches television with an eye on demographics. He estimates that there are 50 areas where the Black population is concentrated and these tend to be large, urban areas. According to a survey, these markets include up to 80 percent of all Black viewers. "In those areas with a larger Black population, we’re likely to have higher ratings," Carew says. "Black audiences tend to be loyal to Black programs."

While Bustin’ Loose seems to be doing well in areas where Blacks are a significant part of the population—Tribune Broadcasting has ordered 26 more episodes—it is having difficulty in two predominantly white cities. "We’re having a tough time with ratings in Denver and Seattle," Carew says. When he called Denver’s major white publications to publicize the show, he was told the papers didn’t have much of a Black readership and the city didn’t have many Blacks, according to Carew. "And they said (a lot of) the ones that are there are married to white people," he says.

Still, Carew doesn’t doubt that he can produce shows for wide audiences. He is gearing up his production company, Golden Groove, for the production of network programs as well as syndicated ones. "We’re beginning to talk to the networks," he says.


taken no way will I disavow the accomplishment of being a Black man who mounted an $11 million film.

Writer and producer Topper Carew

Carew keeps a foot in the door of filmmaking. D.C. Cab whet his appetite. In '88, he wants to begin production of a feature film. Yet, he says, "I love television. My heart will always be there."

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By David Frechette

Spike Lee's She's Gotta Have It was the runaway success story of 1986. The R-rated comedy about a young Black woman and her three boyfriends, made on a guerrilla budget of $175,000, grossed more than $1 million in its first six weeks.

It wasn't the young Morehouse College alumni's first time directing a movie. While at New York University Film School, and before he was 30, Lee made three short films. Sara and The Answer were both distributed by the Black Filmmaker Foundation. The 1983 Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads, his master's thesis, was chosen by the Film Society of Lincoln Center for its prestigious New Directors/New Films series and appeared on public broadcasting stations across the country.

She's Gotta Have It cemented Lee's reputation as a promising young filmmaker. He began in 1984 with an $18,000 grant from the New York State Council of the Arts and a $10,000 Jerome Foundation Grant, both transferred from a scuttled project called The Messenger. With an additional $500 from the Brooklyn Arts and Cultural Association, Lee and cinematographer Ernest Dickerson (Brother From Another Planet, Krush Groove,) began filming in Lee's Brooklyn neighborhood. Lee wrote the script, produced, directed, edited, and played one of the major roles. It was a family affair, with his sister acting in the film, his brother taking still photographs, and his father writing the music. His crew was made up of friends from the film school at New York University.

After premiering at the 1986 San Francisco International Film Festival, She's Gotta Have It was picked up for distribution by Island Pictures. The rest is history — between $7.2 million and $8 million worth.

Spike Lee has a flair for controversy. His acerbic barbs at Whoopi Goldberg (for wearing blue contact lenses) and Rae Dawn Chong (for starring in Soul Man) have removed him from consideration for the Dale Carnegie Award. A two-picture deal with Island Pictures fell through because of budget disagreements over Lee's School Daze, and the $6.1 million comedy was released by Columbia in February.

Black Film Review's David Frechette caught up with Spike Lee in Junior's restaurant, a Brooklyn landmark famous for its cheesecake, where Lee held forth on School Daze and other topics between sips of a black-and-white malted.

BFR: In the book Spike Lee's Gotta Have It, you said you generally dislike performance art. Some of the rituals in School Daze seem so highly stylized that they approach performance art.

Lee: When I spoke about performance art, I meant this avant-garde crap that nobody understands except the person that's doing it, where your goal is to create something that few people can understand. Film costs too much to do that. Plus I want to try to reach the Black masses.

BFR: Was there any symbolic meaning to the rituals of step dancing, frat hazing, in the film beyond the things that you remember from your days at Morehouse?

Lee: What rituals are you talking about?

BFR: The Gamma Ray pledge line sequences, for instance?

Lee: I went to Morehouse, and that's what you do. I didn't pledge, but that's what I saw. For anybody who's ever pledged a frat, School Daze is going to ring true for them. One of my classmates at Morehouse pledged the Q's. When he pledged, everybody dropped line, except for him and he became known as "Z-Dog-the-One-and-Only."

BFR: Why didn't you pledge a frat?

Lee: I had enough knowledge of self—I felt good enough about myself—that I didn't feel I needed to join an organization to become somebody on campus. Then, too, I didn't want to get my butt kicked. I think that fraternities were originally a good idea that, down through the years, got screwed up. The meaning has gotten corrupted.

BFR: So School Daze was meant to be critical of frats?

Lee: Yes, I combined the worst elements of the Q's, the Alphas, and Kappas into one for the Gammas.

Continued page 7
BFR: How was *School Daze* cast?
Lee: We looked for young, talented Black people in New York, Atlanta, and L.A. I'm real pleased with the cast and the way they worked out.

BFR: Vanessa Williams was originally slated to do the film. What happened?
Lee: She was up for the role of Jane Toussaint, but once I sent the script to Vanessa and her manager/husband Ramon Herve, they balked. They felt at the time the role wouldn't be beneficial to Vanessa's career. We saw Tisha Campbell and knew we had our Jane. Meanwhile, Vanessa's getting iffy. They wanted me to reconsider and rewrite her role. I told them 'no,' whereupon Vanessa informed me she was pregnant. So she couldn't have done the film anyway.

BFR: Do you think you've thoroughly covered all aspects of the color problem among Blacks? Or do you think there's more to be said?
Lee: Of course there is. This has been happening ever since Massa first started sneaking into the slave quarters. So how can all that be resolved in a two-hour film? This is one of Black people's skeletons in the closet, and I think we need to openly deal with it. *School Daze* doesn't have any answers, but it's a beginning. People say that color problems between Blacks don't happen anymore, but they're not being realistic. I've seen too much of it. "Why you want to make a film and let white men know about all this stuff?" was a question that a lot of Black people asked me.

BFR: How are you prepared to deal with possible charges of sexism that might be leveled at you, particularly the way the Jane Toussaint character is treated?
Lee: I think the things the Gammas do are sexist, but I don't think I'm a sexist for showing it. I don't agree with what the Gammas do but, for the most part, that's the way those fraternities feel about women. All those auxiliary groups like the Kappa Kittens, the Alpha Angels, and the Q-Pearls—they pass those girls around from one brother to another like nothing. This is sexist, but I don't think I'm promoting this kind of thing in the film.

BFR: The authority figures in the film don't come off as sympathetic. Is this meant to be a statement against the Black Establishment?
Lee: The Black administrations at some of these Black colleges are very reactionary and very backwards. Look at Morehouse. They kicked me off campus (during filming).

BFR: Where did you go then?
Lee: We shot most of the film at Atlanta University and the gym at Clark College, both of which are part of the Morehouse-Atlanta U.-Spelman-Morris Brown complex.

BFR: In the book, *Uplift the Race*, you wrote that you began with no contract and that in the fourth week, you got a letter from the lawyer for Atlanta University, asking you to stop shooting until you gave them a script. How then did you wind up shooting at Atlanta University?
Lee: AU was the only one that had signed a location agreement.

BFR: You graduated from Morehouse. Weren't you aware of how shaky they were?
Lee: I was aware of that, but I still felt I could work things out. I wanted to shoot the film where I went to school.

BFR: You once said that you write for Blacks primarily. Does that mean that you're not concerned with *School Daze*'s crossover potential?
Lee: I don't lose any sleep worrying about whether white people will go to my films. I do good films. Black folks will come. White folks will come too. I don't even deal with that crossover mentality.

BFR: Have you ever thought of collaborating with other writers or with someone like John Sayles, or are you a one-man show?
Lee: I collaborate with the actors, with my father on the music—

BFR: I meant writing scripts, apart from cast suggestions.
Lee: Right now, I can't say.

BFR: Speaking of your collaboration with your father, it seems on the surface that a lot of the jazz background doesn't fit the young characters in the film.
Lee: I don't agree with that. I got that same kind of backwords thinking from people like Nelson George and Mtume, who begged me not to have a jazz soundtrack for *School Daze*. "Why don't you use a more contemporary score?" they asked me. "Something that the kids can listen to on pop soundtracks. Were you alluding to films like *Fame* and *Footloose*?"
Lee: Not so much those two. I'm talking about films where the music has nothing to do with the movie. They go to Billboard, pick the top ten producers, match them up with the top ten singers, get 10 songs that they can stick anywhere and their placement makes no sense. *Top Gun* or the *Beverly Hills Cop* soundtracks, that's what I'm talking about. All they want to do is get a top-10 album so the record will promote the film and the film will promote the record.

BFR: Will you be doing any videos for *School Daze*?
Lee: We've got one out now. It's *The Butt*, by E.U. that's heard in the Splash Jam sequence. We filmed it at Brooklyn Tech High School. Our next video will be *I Don't Want to Be Alone Tonight*. The difference between these songs and those packaging jobs I spoke about was that these songs were written for the film.

BFR: Would you use jazz for a film about B-boys, or would you use rap music?
Lee: Well, I like rap music, but a film consisting solely of rap music. Twenty years from now it isn't going to hold up.

BFR: How was it working with Giancarlo Esposito and Larry Fishburne and why did you choose them?
Lee: I've seen some of Giancarlo's work for others and liked it. I've known Larry for a long time and I think he's a great actor. Of all the actors in the film, our relationship was probably the most problematic. Larry needs to be reassured constantly that he's doing OK, whereas Giancarlo, you just tell him what you want and that's it. Originally, their roles were switched, but the way it turned out I think works much better.

BFR: Are there any actors in the film you'd like to work with again?
Lee: Larry and Giancarlo, of course. Ossie Davis and Ellen Holly, too.

Continued page 20
Looking at School Daze

Critics Go To The Movies

By Janet Singleton

During the opening credits for School Daze, images of the icons of Black American history pass across the screen: the sensitive, yet defiant face of Frederick Douglass, gentle Rosa Parks as she is arrested for refusing to sit at the back of a Montgomery, Ala. bus, a civil rights demonstrator whose dark face is a chiseled mask of courageous determination.

These images lead us to present-day Mission College, an institution founded a century ago to educate the children of slaves. A judgmental look at its student body could yield the conclusion that the Black struggle for equal rights was a success. Or that it was a waste of time.

The students divide themselves into two groups separated by class and color. One faction comprises those from affluent homes who have lighter skin and eyes and straighter hair. This group is called the Wannabees, as in "wanna be white." On the other side of the dividing line are the Jigs, as in "jigaboo"—the darker-skinned, lower-income kids likely to be the first in their families to go to college.

It is this image of a piebald house divided against itself that makes some Blacks uncomfortable. While filming School Daze at Morehouse College, director Spike Lee said, "I had nothing to gain by letting them read the script. They don't know how to read a script. They probably never read one in their lives."

When asked about the conflict, gloster's ban was extended by the then­president, Hugh Gloster. When he attended Morehouse in the late '70s, the school was socially divided by skin tone and by class, he recalled. "We exaggerated it [in School Daze]," he said, "but there were cliques."

Though the ideas in the film raised his ire, Gloster didn't base his judgment on the script. Lee wouldn't show it to him.

"We asked him what the film was about, but he wasn't inclined to tell us," Gloster said. "After the film was being shot, we began to receive reports concerning what it was about from students."

Gloster stands by the vision he shows. Confined to that campus of the Center, he has signed a binding agreement with Atlanta University. Confronted with the vision he shows. When he attended Morehouse in the late '70s, the school was socially divided by skin tone and by class, he recalled. "We exaggerated it [in School Daze]," he said, "but there were cliques."

Lee has said that School Daze is not a musical, but a "movie with music." His point is moot because the film has enough musical numbers to supply any musical.

The problem with the musical portion of the film is the same one that haunts the production as a whole: a disturbing gap between ambition and execution. "Straight and Nappy," the lyrical duel between women with different grades of hair, represents a brilliant idea poorly executed. The first half-hour of the movie may have been too early to stage it, considering its climactic tone. Noisiness besets the singing as if the sound hadn't been well mixed, and the dancing has a free-for-all quality.

School Daze is a message movie in which missive precedes art, and this isn't relayed as well as it could be. At one point, the movie's protagonist, Dap Dunlap, a fiercely political activist played by Larry Fishburn, looks directly into the camera and screams, "Wake up!" The viewer could rightfully answer, "Do you want to make a movie, or do you want to make a speech?"

Effective message movies are ones in which the intended lesson remains in character, as would any of the actors. In films like Ghandi, The Color Purple, and Das Boot, political arguments—no matter how urgent—are consistently cloaked in drama. School Daze allows its message to go naked and tempts us to turn away from its immodesty.

Yet it has its virtues, virtues that are more political than artistic. School Daze is one of the first films ever made to expose the intraracial color caste. And, while other works have gingerly touched upon it, none has dared confront it.

I told a friend who grew up low in the skin tone hierarchy that the movie's treatment of the subject embarrasses Black people. "Good," she said. "They deserve it."

What Lee deserves is credit for taking the risk of public self-criticism. Many expect Black art on the Black Experience to be positive, even though the race is being eaten up by the reality of the negative, like a weak frame house by unacknowledged termites.

If Lee's film could have had in artistic merit what it has in ideological determination, it would have been all the better. Nevertheless, as an exercise in Black self-confrontation, School Daze is a move all for the good. ■
By Daniel Garrett

It is an interesting time to be an African-American (or if you will, Black) artist. It is clear we have a great cultural heritage, and access to an education that allows familiarity with all the world's cultures. This suggests an abundance of choices of aesthetics and philosophical content. Each artist makes different choices, and if each artist takes a different path, what then will connect him or her to other artists, beyond the fact that they are artists? In the same way, as greater opportunity to enter the mainstream is possible for African-Americans in this country, what will we have in common, beyond a historical identification of ourselves as African-American, or beyond the simple fact of being Black Americans?

In Spike Lee's new film, School Daze, the young Black filmmaker sets out to explore just such questions of choice, community, difference, and social change. School Daze is set at Mission College, a fictitious Black College not unlike Morehouse College, where Lee went to school. The main characters are Dap and Julian, and their girlfriends. The girlfriends — and their main function seems to be just that — are Rachel and Jane. It is homecoming week, a time of partying, football, pledges of pledging to fraternities and sororities, and the crowning of a homecoming queen.

As the film is set on a college campus, it is logical that we should see a little of the ordinary workings of a college — classes, studying, working. We do not, and this is unfortunate, for we do not see how the content of their studies influences the students' ideas or actions. Still, what we do see in School Daze informs us about the complexity of African-Americans.

Dap is an Africa-conscious Black nationalist and Julian a self-identified Black American. Julian heads the fraternity that Dap's cousin, Half-Pint, is trying to enter. While Dap leads divestment rallies, Julian leads the future pledges on their round of tortures, which includes being spanked, being led around on dog chains, sticking their hands in toilets, eating dog food, and losing their virginity.

What Dap seems to represent is an African-American essentialism, he possesses a sense of connection with all descendants of Africa, and an adversarial stance toward the West. Julian represents a constructivist stance — we are what we become (meaning what we choose) and this involves pride in self-achievement and access to whatever exists, including American mores, values, and products.

Of course, an African-American essentialism is a contradiction in terms, as the African experience and heritage have been changed through contact with the West and America. Similarly, the constructivist position is limited by the barriers still facing African-Americans.

Many of the characters in the film combine both essentialist and constructivist positions (as do most of us), and some of the characters in School Daze are not conscious of holding either. While this is implicit in the film, it would have been interesting to have had a more persistent exploration of Blacks and their relationship to each other, to various communities, and to various traditions.

Nonetheless, it is profitable to observe how race, class, sex, and style operate in the film.

The women in the film are mostly identified in relation to men and to racial characteristics. The light-skinned, long-haired women are, because they want to be white, nicknamed the Wannabees. The other women, dark and nappy-haired, are nicknamed the Jigaboos.

Dap's girlfriend, Rachel, accuses him of dating her because she is one of the darker women on campus. Dap, complaining about the lack of political activity among Blacks, says that if there were a bus with fried chicken or liquor on board, Blacks would flock to it. (Racism from a race man?)

Another important scene involves Dap's confrontation with school authorities over his anti-apartheid activity, during which he is told he will be expelled if he continues. Earlier, the president of the college and a trustee discuss the fact that the college receives most of its money from white philanthropists.

Dap and his friends argue over how far to go with the anti-apartheid protests. One young man says, and the others agree, that politics cannot be allowed to threaten his chance to gain an education, thereby redeeming his family's sacrifice. When Dap and his friends meet a few of the working-class men from the town wearing jeti curls, these men resent the college students' arrogance and potential for upward mobility, while Dap and his friends are disturbed by their appearance.

Jane, Julian's girlfriend, meets with her sorority sisters to plan an event, and one of them complains about their being maids to men. Is this the beginning of a feminist revolt? Dap and Rachel argue about her expectations of his support, even when she won't do what he wants her to. The scenes between them have a direct, strong sexuality seldom shown on the screen between Blacks. There is a love scene between Julian and Jane that is almost pornographic, though it is not explicitly rendered. Indeed, it is revealing of the director's heterosexual male gaze, as is the party scene in which the band performs "Doin' the Butt," and we see mostly female bottoms. There are also crude homophobic comments by Dap during a campus gathering — an intellectual weakness that is as problematic in the film as in real life.

Jane has a song steeped in glamor and sex, in which she says she's not just for show, needs love, and wants to make things right. It is contradictory, especially when one considers her humiliation at the end of the film when she sleeps with Half-Pint in the name of the fraternity system.

Aesthetically, the film is quite watchable. The narrative is fragmented, but has an inclusive, suggestive logic. The dialogue is often rich and always telling. I have reservations about an early fantasy sequence revolving around women and hair — whose fantasy is it? And, there were some scenes where the features of dark-skinned actors could barely be made out. Still, School Daze is funny and critical, musical and dramatic and evocative of difference. It is an important contribution to culture and dialogue.

Daniel Garrett is a graduate of the New School for Social Research and a contributing editor of Changing Men.
A Conversation With A Rising Star

By Arthur Johnson

love the fact that it's controversial," confessed School Daze co-star Giancarlo Esposito in his dressing room in Washington, D.C.'s Warner Theatre recently. The 30-year-old star, who dazzled audiences as "Julian" in Spike Lee's much-discussed follow-up to She's Gotta Have It, was preparing for another performance in the touring gospel musical Don't Get God Started.

"It's a film that really deals with Black people's principles and desires and it deals with how Black people came together. I think that people oftentimes don't look at it that way," Esposito explained. Instead, some have criticized the film for its depiction of life at a contemporary Black college.

"The people who are on those college campuses today have to understand that Spike is making a movie about his experience and—not most importantly—that's what he has experienced and that's what he needs to be truthful to. He's not saying it still exists in the manner it did when he went to school, but it's still there," said Esposito of the film's color-caste subplot.

"He says on campus the light-skinned Black woman is always the one everyone is going after. So if that's the way he saw it, that's the way he saw it."

Esposito declines requests to explain the film's somewhat ominous ending and recently advised a young man who approached him at the stage door seeking an interpretation: "I would like to do that but I can't, and I urge you to see the movie again."

A veteran of several films, including Taps (his film debut), Trading Places, and Running, the television movies Sweet Lorraine, Roanoke, an adaptation of James Baldwin's classic Go Tell It on the Mountain and the misguided The Cotton Club, Esposito has also appeared in three Miami Vice episodes (as villain, he says) as well as in Vice star Don Johnson's music video for his album Heartbeat (as a good guy, he says.)

He also volunteered his services to appear with his friend, business associate and Daze co-star Larry Fishburne in the rap group Whodini's anti-drug video Growing Up. He portrayed a teen-ager who dies after using drugs purchased from the character Fishburne plays.

But it is Esposito's film career that commands attention these days. He has worked with two of the film industry's best-known directors—Lee and Francis Ford Coppola (Cotton Club)—and in the film realization of Baldwin's classic first novel.

"It wasn't acting," he remarked when asked about the authentic religious fervor of the church scenes in Mountain.

"I told Hiro Norita (the film's cinematographer), 'This is only going to happen once, maybe twice if we're lucky, but we're asking for the spirit of the Holy Ghost to come down to this little store-front church while we have our cameras rolling to get this scene."

Norita set up three cameras—one on the floor where the scene's action took place, one on a scaffold looking down into the church and one on a dolly looking straight into the church, said Esposito. After the emotional scene was shot the first time, shooting was suspended for an hour, said Esposito.

"That's unheard of in film. That's a lot of time in between, but the extras started bumbling off the walls... these old, old women who had been in the church all their lives. The spirit of the Holy Ghost came down there. We had church," he declared.

Of his other controversial film, the whitewashed Cotton Club, Esposito feels that Coppola was prevented from making a film focusing on the legendary Black performers (who made the Harlem mecca famous) by the backers who wanted a "middle-of-the-road" film to attract white-ticket-buyers.

"I don't think Cotton Club was the Cotton Club. There's very little about the Cotton Club (in the film). I think Francis (Coppola) tried to fight that. I really felt Francis was true in that he really wanted to make the right film and do the right thing, but I don't think he had any choice."

Although he has worked with prestigious directors in high-profile productions, Esposito is well aware of the stereotyped roles and degrading treatment—parodied in Hollywood Shuffle—that America's Black actors face.

"I do feel that the casting people more or less really put that on you more than directors. Once you're dealing with a director in Hollywood I do understand it to be very superficial and very, very on the light side. 'Be a little more jivey, be more this or more that,' he mimicked.

"But in New York I don't experience that in the same kind of way. In New York I think directors have more respect for actors in general, especially for Black actors."

Like many Black actors, Esposito is not waiting idly for that rare film role and is aggressively creating suitable and meaningful projects for himself. With the creation of MAHA Films: Black American Classics with Fishburne as partner, Esposito has already purchased 10 classic Black films which are being converted to videotape.

"We also have all the correlating graphics during the time period of 1938 through 1942—all the lobby cards, all the posters; we have 8-by-10s, scripts. To begin with we want to market the films on videotape and sell licensing agreements to Japan, Germany and other European countries, and then we will have some cash to do our own film," he said.

Esposito is especially excited about a film MAHA has acquired titled Gun Moll (also known as Gang Smashers). Esposito and Fishburne plan to remake the 1940 film, which was written by Ralph Cooper. "It takes place around a night club and Nita Mae McKinney, who was a wonderful singer of the Billie Holliday ilk, stars in it. If you saw this film you'd see it far surpasses Cotton Club as far as the dancing and singing is concerned. You only got short snatches in Cotton Club."

MAHA's first project will be two music videos, the first of which will be made this summer, dealing with "waking up religiously... waking up spiritually."

"I'm tired of seeing videos that always promote the girls with the low neckline and all that. That's great but we need videos that help uplift," he said.

Esposito also has his sights set on appearing in a film version of Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple stores—to which he says Quincy Jones owns the rights—and would also jump at the opportunity to portray Hughes himself in a biographical film somewhere down the road.

"Black people very rarely get a chance to really develop their lives on screen. I've had a wonderful opportunity to start doing that," he said.

Arthur J. Johnson has written film reviews and about film for several metropolitan Washington publications.
Africa Through African Eyes

An Interview with Idrissa Ouedraogo

By Francoise Pfaff

Born in Burkina Faso in 1954, Idrissa Ouedraogo is one of the young hopefuls of African cinema. His films have already attracted the attention of international critics. His first full-length film, Le Choix (The Choice) was shown at many film festivals during 1987, among them the Festival Pan africain du Cinema de Ouagadougou (FESPACO) as well as the Cannes, London, and Amiens film festivals. Le Choix was also shown at the second Washington, D.C. Filmfest DC.

This interview was conducted in Amiens, France, in Nov. 1987 by Francoise Pfaff and translated from the French by Ruth Rhone.

BFR: How did you get into cinema?
Idrissa: By accident, like most Africans. After high school, I studied English at the University of Ouagadougou. I was lucky that the same year, 1977, the Institut Africain d’Education Cinematographique (INAFEC) was created there. I took the entrance test and was accepted.

BFR: How far back does your interest in cinema go?
Idrissa: I have always been interested in the theater. I started acting in high school plays and youth groups at an early age. I then became more and more involved in writing and serious thinking, which led me to write plays while I was studying at the university. All of these activities may explain why I chose to become a filmmaker.

BFR: What type of plays did you write as a university student?
Idrissa: Some of my schoolmates were budding playwrights. We wrote plays about commitment. We were not so much interested in being writers as we were in communicating our thoughts through sketches and plays.

BFR: At that same time, Burkina Faso was called Upper Volta, with a conservative political regime. Were the plays subversive?
Idrissa: I don’t think that one could call them subversive. I think that each individual, at a specific moment in his life, has ideas and a way of viewing the world, which is not necessarily influenced by a political regime. I wrote plays because I was young and I had things to say.

BFR: Let’s go back to your film training. You graduated from INAFEC?
Idrissa: After studying for three years at INAFEC, I obtained a diploma of general studies. I did not obtain my B.A. because of a student strike. Since I belonged to the executive committee of the students on strike, and because of my political ideas, I was expelled from the University. However, I was able to work for one year at the Ouagadougou Film Bureau, which allowed me to make my first film, Poko, which received the Grand Prize for best short film at FESPACO in 1981. I then left for the Soviet Union where I studied filmmaking for six months. I was subsequently admitted to the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinematographiques (IDHEC), in France, from which I graduated in 1985. Filmmaking continued to be my field of study at the University of Paris, where I obtained an advanced diploma in film studies. I am presently working under Jean Rouch on a PhD dissertation on the theoretical problems of filmmaking. I hope to defend it by the end of 1988.

BFR: INAFEC is one of Black Africa’s few film schools.
Idrissa: Yes, but I think that INAFEC is presently closed for financial reasons. Such a school is costly and African states are not as supportive as they said they would be. However, I am optimistic as to its reopening, provided it is restructured. Serious thought should be given to the number of students to recruit, based on our means, our financial and economic possibilities and the career opportunities offered to INAFEC students. There are quite a number of preliminary studies to be done, but I think that it can work. We can benefit from a bilateral cooperation with other countries as well as other universities and film schools. We may be able to prepare only four or five students instead of 10. But they will be well-trained, and will become good teachers. One has to go slowly. After three years of study, the most important thing is for the students to be able to produce a film that can be shown with pride. This is the raison d’etre of the school, and such concrete results will encourage African states to be more interested in it.

BFR: Who should get the credit for your training, INAFEC or IDHEC?
Idrissa: I think my training was mainly the result of my own reading. I realized very soon that INAFEC was not giving me a lot because the teachers, technical assistants, and others were learning at the same time as the students. However, this school made me assertive and gave me a creative dimension. I learned the rest through on-the-spot training while making films. When I shot Poko after leaving INAFEC, I did not even know how to set up the cameras. I learned that through making films. Le Choix was made the same way in 1986.

I must admit that I had a lot of nerve, because all I started out with was an idea without a definite script — peasants leaving a dry country in search of fertile soil. However, making the film was rewarding because I realized that I had to improve my scripts. It was also a good experience in that it proved I was capable of improvising. The plot had also to be modified because we were using non-professional actors.

For example, although the boy who played Ali, the youngest member of the peasant family, was talented and had screen presence, his arrogance was such that the story had to be changed. It was decided that Ali would be killed in a car accident shortly after the beginning of the film. I probably did not know how to cope with him at the time, but I think I may be using him in my next film.

BFR: The peasants in this film find fertile soil and decide to settle there immediately. Is such a thing possible in Burkina Faso?
Idrissa: I believe that the land belongs to the state and that there are still unexploited potentials. It is up to the state to solve these rural problems. My role is to being hope by showing such options as migration toward fertile land.

Author of The Cinema of Ousmane Sembene, A Pioneer of African Film and Twenty-Five Black African Filmmakers, Francoise Pfaff teaches in the Department of Romance Languages at Howard University. Ruth Rhone is a doctoral student in French at Howard University where she specializes in Francophone African and West Indian literatures.

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BFR: Thus your film emphasizes self-reliance and independence?
Idrissa: One should not depend on outside help as long as one has not exploited all of one’s possibilities. It is a pity that peasants are left in desert regions while there are richer areas that can be exploited.

BFR: What is interesting in Le Choix is that one has the impression that individuals decide themselves. The political structures that should organize these rural migrations are totally non-existent.
Idrissa: In general, the peasant does not know what exists beyond his own region. In this film, the fact that it is an old man who leaves is very symbolic. He represents wisdom. His is not a last-minute politically motivated decision, but a vital necessity for him and his family. As a matter of fact, one must admit that in our countries, policies related to agriculture have failed since independence. Le Choix implies choosing between life and death...

BFR: Le Choix is your first feature film. What about your short films?
Idrissa: Poko, a 20-minute film, was made in 1981. It’s the story of a young village woman who is about to give birth. Complications arise, so she has to be quickly taken to the hospital in town to have a caesarean. The peasants of the village do not have quick means of transporting her to the hospital, and the young woman dies on the way there. Her body is taken back to the village. Poko shows peasants who pay taxes but who do not have any medical infrastructure in their village. The film has no dialogue because its pictures are forceful and explicit.

BFR: What about your film entitled Les Ecuelles (The Wooden Bowls)?
Idrissa: When I made Les Ecuelles in 1983, I wished to show that one could shoot a film in two days with four cans of raw film. From a thematic standpoint, I wished to show how peasants make bowls in an empiric way without using the laws of physics or mathematics. It’s the beauty of their gestures which interested me.

BFR: Is that also a silent movie?
Idrissa: Yes it is, and it also contains a lot of close-ups. The gestures, forms, and shapes that are seen are self-explanatory. This 11-minute film was presented by French television on Canal Plus, and in 1986 during the film festival in Melbourne. It received the Grand Prize for the best short film.

BFR: Isisa le Tisserand (Issa the Weaver) received many prizes at the 1985 FESPA CO. What is the theme of this film?
Idrissa: Produced in 1985 and lasting 20 minutes, Isa le Tisserand received the Grand Prize for short films in 1986 at Amiens, France, and was also presented on Canal Plus. It presents the problem of craftsmen in Africa through a weaver of Burkina Faso.
There are two ways of looking at this problem: either the vocation is encouraged and help is given by creating structures or no help is given and the craftsmen are forced to change their job. In other words, I believe that in matters pertaining to ‘cultural’ policies, some must stop living on slogans while others are dying of hunger. If politics does not help them, craftsmen will abandon everything or will die of hunger. I am not trying to solve the cultural problems of my country. My film can be interpreted in several different ways and does not provide a solution.
I show a weaver who changes his vocation and starts selling second-hand Western goods because he has encountered difficulties. That will be his only way of solving the problem, as long as there are no cultural and economic policies offered. My short films also include Les Funerailles du Larle Naba (1985), a 33-minute film on the rites associated with the death of the king of the Mossis.

BFR: How are you financing this feature film?
Idrissa: My next film will be a feature film that traces the story of an old isolated woman living in a rural area. The other villagers are indifferent to her plight, and her only means of support is the friendship and care of a 12-year-old boy. The film will show several sides of man: his good, generous, and bad sides.

BFR: What will be the subject of your next film?
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BFR: Are you optimistic about African cinema?
Idrissa: Yes, I am optimistic. I work with men and women, and we are always learning new things. Cinema came later to Africa, and we have a long way to go to master the techniques and make it profitable. That will take a long time; let's not fool ourselves, such a gap cannot be bridged in

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Depictions of Africa in Documentary Film

By Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike

While they vary in their methods and approaches, filmmakers and critics are unanimous in recognizing that every documentary is intensely affected by the way the filmmaker uses cinematic conventions and codes. Admitting that temptation is ever-present for a documentary maker to use his medium to impose his vision on others, Richard Ellison, executive producer of Vietnam: A Television History, a 13-part PBS series, said that "one is always resisting the temptation to make a documentary faster, slicker, easier or more exciting. You don't if you feel it will result in something distorted.

Perhaps the most complicated issue over documentaries and cinematic technique arises when other cultures are depicted. Fighting to right the wrong, writers in the Black Diaspora are critical of the way Africa and Blacks have been portrayed in motion pictures. The problem arises because filmmakers have virtually limitless manipulative power. Editing, framing, double or multiple exposure, slow and fast motion, sound and special effects techniques - all affect the manner in which characters are presented and therefore interpreted. The characters' physique, dress, facial expressions, gait and mannerisms invoke corollary insinuation about the social groups they represent. Thus, for example, repudiating the myth and stereotyping of the natives, Harold Cruse criticized the over-simplified portrait of Africa in MGM's King Solomon's Mines (1937). Similarly, the Nigerian scholar Oladipo Onipede bitterly condemned the Hollywood African epic of the 1950s for insulting the emerging African nations' worldwide image, in Richard Maynard's Africa on Film: Myth and Reality (Hayden Book Co.: Rochelle Park, N.J., 1974). In his book, Maynard reprints MGM promotional material that illustrates the "savage African symbol." In the portrayal of Africans as jungle cannibals, Onipede sees Hollywood deliberately misinforming the American people about Africa. In his view, using such a medium to deliberately distort the facts insults the nations of Africa and is a disservice to the American public. (72-73)

From the beginning, films about Africa limited themselves to its exotic side. Only recently have film producers begun to look at the more human side of Africa. Still, some opportunistic filmmakers continue to view Africa as foreign and Africans as objects. Take for example the method of the ethnographic filmmakers. We find in their work flagrant violations of the rights of their victims, who are the so-called "primitive peoples" of the world. The filmmakers bring to the forefront the misery, backwardness, and hopelessness of these people. Racism lays itself bare in the shameless exploitation of one group of people by another that has reached a higher stage of technical development. This dominant group makes "scientific" studies of the dominated society, its art, and its ethnic universe, yet claim to have done no wrong.

Contrary to their seeming respect for the culture of the exotic peoples they have filmed, we find in the work of such filmmakers characteristics and not themes, curiosities with no real anthropological value, stereotypes but not love, and a compilation of things with no standard structure. If the representation of other cultures in films amounts to a vivid portrayal of their whole being, what we see in movies flauts that aspect of realism which purports "to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life." writes Linda Nochlin in Realism. (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1971)

Inspired by the modernist method of "documenting and validating," film practice in this area has moved toward more complex forms and filmmakers are seeking new methods. This has not changed their approach or the criticisms associated with the depiction of other cultures, nor can viewers forget the methods which shaped the visuals. Bill Nichols' observation in his essay, "The Voices of Documentary," on documentaries and representation is particularly interesting. He writes:

"Documentaries always were forms of re-presentation, never clear windows onto 'reality'; the filmmaker was always a participant — witness and an active fabricator of meaning, a producer of cinematic discourse rather than a neutral or all-knowing reporter of the way things truly are." (Film Quarterly, Spring 1983)

In whatever words documentary styles are defined, documentaries continue to record aspects of our lives and culture in varied ways for which no single definition seems adequate. While the filmmakers differ in method and approach, they cannot help recognizing that every documentary seems to share a compulsion to change things — to record events as they are happening or to call attention to some aspect of life that they believe deserves attention through their observational and/or reconstructational means (playing out the roles of a journalist, a sociologist, an historian, a surgeon, and a judge of society). Regardless of subject matter, documentary formats sound and look alike, especially when filmmakers are mirroring cultures other than their own. Exotic and beautifully composed images accompanied by the voice of a soundtrack narrator or intertitles playing out that role obligingly tell the viewers how they are expected to respond to what they are seeing. Such films have never told any story fully to anybody's satisfaction.

Easy manipulation of film conventions coupled with the development of fast film stock, lightweight camera equipment and simplified sound equipment have allowed filmmakers to compose documents that capture events and speak for them. This has not only changed the aspects of documentaries but also how the films affect audiences. It has also raised unsettling questions about the truth of such films. On photographic reality, Jean Rouch is quoted in the New York Times as saying, "I don't think it's possible to be a witness to the things happening around you and not take a stand." ("Documentaries: Limitless Eyes Recording Civilization," Nov. 3, 1985, p. 19) Rouch himself has been reproached numerous times regarding the ethnographic films he made, many of them in Africa.

Rouch was invited to Africa to document the spiritual cult of the Hauka sect in his film Les Maitre-fous. But instead of concentrating on the images of spirituality or the essence of Hauka ritual, he focused on the Haukas as a sect that slaughters, cooks, and eats dogs, marches back and forth, dances violently and foams at the mouth, and chants with loud and garbled voices. He was reproached numerous times regarding the ethnographic films he made, many of them in Africa.
We fail to realize the most mediocre American film is filled with ideological messages.

Focusing tightly on individual faces in the sect, Rouch plays with human emotions. In his assessment of Rouch's methodology, *Third Cinema in the Third World*, Teshome Gabriel charges that "obession with 'penetrating' the African mind reached its climax with *Les Maitres-Fous*; but most of his films in Africa, outside of *Moï, un Noir*, have studied Africans by employing 'psychological essays' into the human interior." (75) He refers to Rouch's later films and points out the growing tendency to personalize and fictionalize—a process that was dictated by Rouch's training as an anthropologist, but whose ethics he abused by making African people look like scientific specimens and laboratory subjects. (75) Ousmane Sembene, Africa's leading filmmaker, has also accused Rouch of "treating Africans like insects." (p. 77).

*Les Maitres-Fous* combines the cliches of documentary film and elements of fiction and psychodrama to pierce the aspirations and frustrations of individuals and illustrate how colonialism helps them to solve their problems. Rouch's cinematographic technique was an outstanding innovation, but considered much too debasing by opponents who felt it was racially motivated. Strictly speaking, the film is not a record of an actual event but an attempt to portray one aspect of the Hauka sect. Through what is critically regarded as misrepresentation, an incorrect view of the Hauka sect emerges. Attempting to achieve synthesis through fragmentation betrays the truth—to the detriment of the viewer who may never find the facts from another source. Rouch's *Les Maitres-Fous* unwittingly reinforces racist stereotypes, and his verité aesthetic incorporates imperialist myths, despite its pose of liberality and anthropological inquiry.

The subtle condescension of Rouch's portrayals might be usefully contrasted with the more conventionally degrading characterizations of Zoltan Korda's British film, *Sanders of the River* (1935). This film is negative and predictably stereotypical, reminding us that the majority of historical stereotypes attributed to Hollywood and French images were also projected by British film houses. Harold D. Weaver, in "Black Filmmakers in Africa and America," restates how the African was portrayed in grotesque ways: "As 'toms', the African players showed remarkable loyalty, subserviency, and generosity to their white administrators, priests and other father-figures. As 'coons',

even in Africa, but hated by Nigerians and Black Americans. The Africans were fascinated by the presence of the Black actor, Paul Robeson, whose presence on the screen overshadowed the film's intense colonialist and racist content. Ironically, when the film premiered in London in 1935, Robeson left the theater in disgust after seeing for the first time how anti-African the final print was. (Weaver, 77)

Like Rouch's *Les Maitres-Fous*, *Sanders of the River* was beautifully made, with excellent documentary footage. In considering the two, one sees the significance of how films were used by Africa's colonizers. These productions helped reinforce in Western spectators their feelings of superiority towards the African natives and gave support to their misconception of the historical and cultural realities of the African continent. (Weaver, 7-8) This misconception continues in films such as Uly's *The God's Must Be Crazy* and in the misassemblage of Trinh Minh-ha's *Reassemblage*, both made in 1984.

Representations of Africa and developing countries in general from Hollywood, British or French studios raise crucial questions regarding films they make about other cultures. It is clear that the filmmaker performing the role of a sociologist should consider the full range of possibilities inherent in this medium. We are beginning to see now, through indigenous works, African artists as creative, perceptive and politically aware of their own cultures and social systems. African filmmakers have embarked upon this in a remarkable way, distinct from Rouch and other overzealous filmmakers.

Ousmane Sembene, Souleymane Cisse, Ababacar Samb-Makhram, Mahama Johnson Traore, and other African filmmakers are demonstrating their desires to decolonize history by using films as social documents. Sembene's psychological study of human relations sharply contradicts Rouch's negatives. In *Black Girl*, Sembene resists the temptation to use close-ups, limiting himself to medium and long shots, which make a powerful exposition of the open revolt against Dioiana's (the Black girl) colonial masters. By having Dioiana reject the money given her by her enslavers to be used for her return home to Africa, and instead choose to commit suicide in defiance of slavery, Sembene is many miles from Rouch or Korda, whose images glamorized subjugation, submission, and degradation. Sembene's women are real women, men real men, not stereotypes who play subordinate roles. He sometimes uses documentary footage in what amounts to a mixture of reality with fiction (psychodrama) to reinforce the "reality" he is portraying—personalizing and fictionalizing, yet arriving at an indisputable consensus. The white man in *Xala* is not a type designed to discredit the British, French or American government's role in perpetuat-
in the Third World Cinema: A Study of Sembene Ousmane and Glauber Rocha":

"It is difficult for Americans, for whom the cinema has primarily meant entertainment and not education, an industry and not an art form, to think of any cinema, especially their own, as political, except on the most superficial level. Because we are literally the prisoners of our own historical and political ethnocentrity, we fail to 'read our own films politically; we fail to realize that the most mediocre American film is filled with ideological messages for other countries and other cultures to whom these films are exported. It surprises us, in fact, to learn that what is clearly a 'fiction'

We should see what a film signifies... as negotiable, an object of struggle and dispute.

film in our eyes is invariably a 'documentary' in foreign eyes." (Quarterly Review of Film Studies, Spring 1979)

Although the thrust of Van Wert's remarks are antithetical to my argument, I believe his remarks on the filmic representation of other countries to be most appropriate. According to him, the French consider Jerry Lewis, and the English find Douglas Sirk, politically radical filmmakers the power of his medium to affect opinion. We should see what a film signifies then, as negotiable, an object of struggle and dispute. Africa's response resonates in the works of its indigenous filmmakers, manifested in the strong position represented by the credos of the traditionalists of African culture, concurring that Africans are the best witnesses of their own tradition.■

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a short time. We are training film practitioners and technicians, and little by little people will know that African cinema exists. All African filmmakers should make a concentrated effort to build African cinema.

BFR: Are your films shown in Burkina Faso?
Idrissa: Yes, my films are shown in my country, but I have to be realistic and realize that a costly film cannot generate sufficient revenue in Burkina Faso to defray production expenses. If a film costs $500,000, the Burkina Faso market cannot pay for it because the filmmaker receives only 60 percent of the revenues.

BFR: What must be done to make these films financially profitable?
Idrissa: If we want them to be truly profitable, we have to internationalize our methods of making films. That means that we would no longer make films solely in Africa and with Africans but also with popular Western stars, or known Black American actor. Since this kind of cinema is an industry, the financial aspect has to be priority. Then it is no longer solely an idea or an artistic creation, but rather an industry which depends on specific ingredients. At that point, one would need to think about co-productions.

BFR: Would you be in favor of such co-productions?
Idrissa: It all depends on what one wishes to do. If we wish to produce films on a craftsman's level, we will be happy with a restricted market, but if we wish to make commercial cinema, we have to use industrialized methods. I personally do not dream of industrializing my films; I try with the little means that I have to deal with subjects concerning human beings. We do not need grandiose technical means and large sums of money to make a film that will be noticed by critics. However, making a film because "their films, when exported, become 'documentaries.'" Emphasizing how culture and ideology can turn meanings around, he cites examples of Joseph von Sternberg's film The Devil is a Woman and Doris Day's Pillow Talk. The Devil is a Woman was banned in Spain when it was shown there and created international misunderstandings. Pillow Talk was viewed as intensely political in Africa and South America, for the simple reason that it was viewed as documentary rather than fiction.

The filmmaker must create a work devoid of misrepresentation by obtaining a perfect and impartial commitment to his subject, tempered with the knowledge of
Black Hollywood And The FBI

By Karl Evanzz

The news media of recent months mirror the civil rights issue as probably the number one issue in the political spectrum. There are clear and unmistakable signs that we are in the midst of a social revolution with the racial movement at its core.

The Bureau, in meeting its responsibilities in this area, is an integral part of this revolution.

FBI Director John Edgar Hoover, in a memo dated Aug. 28, 1964.

Though he was neither an actor nor cinematographer, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover periodically wielded significant influence in Hollywood over a number of directors, screenwriters, and stars, according to several recent books and declassified government documents.

By the mid-1950's, the number of people adversely affected by the HUAC hearings passed the 2,000 mark.

These same sources also show that information obtained from Hoover damaged the careers of numerous Hollywood personalities during the McCarthy era, and that he later acted as a catalyst for counter-intelligence activities against the production of certain Black-oriented movies and documentaries. [The most comprehensive statement of Hoover's influence in Hollywood is contained in Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover, by Richard G. Powers (New York: Free Press, 1987.) Other sources are mentioned throughout this article.]

The bases of Hoover's power were the intelligence-gathering process itself and, later, the clandestine activities of the FBI, which he headed from 1924 until his death in 1972.

Files originally opened in the late 1930s on Hollywood celebrities suspected of Communist Party affiliation were first used for counter-intelligence purposes after the outbreak of World War II. But the American public and the subjects of some of the files remained generally unaware of just how pervasive Hoover's influence was until the late 1940s, when many stars were called before a congressional committee investigating communism in the film industry.

Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy and his aide, the late Roy Cohn, literally terrorized Hollywood during the infamous, nationally televised hearings before the House Un-American Activities Committee. In 1947, eight writers and two directors—known as the Hollywood Ten—became the first victims of blacklist for their refusal to act as government informants or to...
produce propaganda-like movies for the studios. By the mid-1950s, however, the number of people in Hollywood adversely affected by the hearings passed the 2,000 mark, according to investigative reporter Dan Moldea. [Moldea, Dan E., *Dark Victory: Ronald Reagan, MCA, and the Mob* (New York: Viking, 1986), p. 74].

The Hollywood Ten’s Arthur Miller, Moldea says, initially encountered trouble when he resisted a suggestion by the FBI that he “substitute Reds [communists] for racketeers as the force terrorizing the waterfront workers” in the first draft of the script of the movie that made Marlon Brando a household name. Miller’s efforts may have preserved his dignity, but the HUAC investigations resulted in a radical change in the type of movies Hollywood produced.

“With communism appearing to be rampant in the film industry,” Moldea writes, “the studios panicked and began cranking out anti-communist movies...”

Much of the information used by McCarthy to ignite the anti-communist hysteria in Hollywood came directly from the FBI, according to the most recent biography of Hoover.

In *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover*, Richard G. Powers argues that “Hoover’s cooperation with HUAC proved he had no qualms about the methods McCarthy was using against his suspects; HUAC and McCarthy were seen as useful complements to the FBI in Hoover’s anti-communist campaign.” [p. 161]

The career of at least one prominent African-American actor, Paul Robeson, was destroyed during those tumultuous years. Conversely, the career of at least one white actor, Ronald Reagan, seems to have benefited.

Reagan was named acting president of the Screen Actors Guild in March 1947. As one of the first witnesses before the HUAC panel, Reagan testified that a “small clique” of SAG members were “following the tactics we associate with the Communist Party.” [Moldea, p. 72]

And while Reagan did not give HUAC the names of fellow actors he suspected of being communists, he did, writes Victor Navasky in *Naming Names*, ban “communists and non-cooperative witnesses from membership” in SAG. [Navasky, Victor S., *Naming Names* (New York: Viking, 1980) p. 180] He also ordered all SAG members to sign loyalty oaths denying any involvement with the Communist Party. [Moldea, p. 75]

In *Dark Victory: Ronald Reagan, MCA and the Mob*, Moldea suggests that the political connections made by Reagan as president of SAG, during a period in which the actor labeled Hollywood a “hotbed of communism,” were later responsible for launching a political career that would lead him to the White House.

Robeson’s income dropped from $104,000 in 1947 to $2,000 in 1950, the year his passport was revoked.

Robeson refused to sign the Reagan-mandated loyalty oath, and even went so far as to accept the Stalin Peace Prize in 1952. Following this and his civil rights activities, he was quickly labeled a persona non grata in Hollywood and his career took a nosedive.

According to Navasky and other published accounts, Robeson’s income “dropped from $104,000 in 1947 to $2,000 in 1950,” the year his passport also was revoked. [Navasky, p. 188; see also Paul Robeson: The Great Forerunner, by the Editors of Freedomways (New York: Freedomways Associates, 1975), p. 142.]

Black actors who wanted to continue working in the movies soon realized that denouncing Robeson before HUAC was a virtual guarantee of work. Among those who did so, says Navasky, were Canada Lee, who starred in *Cry the Beloved Country*, and Joshua Daniel White, who had a role in *John Henry* with Robeson before the latter’s good fortune soured. [Navasky, p. 190]

Harry Belafonte, a friend of Robeson’s, also was accused of being a communist, but refused to name names when he was called before the HUAC panel. Unlike Robeson, who refused to say whether or not he was a communist, Belafonte emphatically denied he was not a communist, and called the allegations absurd.

Nonetheless, it was the civil rights issue that, a decade later, would cause Belafonte near-
Continued from page 17

ly as much career trouble as it had his mentor. This time, though, many prominent Black Hollywood celebrities found their careers jeopardized by their civil rights activities.

The most widely publicized instance was that of singer and actress Eartha Kitt. When Kitt became politically involved in the movement headed by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the early 1960s, her career was near its zenith.

She had met with success in Hollywood, on Broadway and in Europe, and by the latter half of the decade was a regular on the Batman television series. Her popularity was significant enough to merit an invitation to a White House dinner as guest of President Lyndon Johnson.

As it turned out, it was an invitation to disaster. In the course of a conversation with Lady Bird Johnson, the president’s wife, Kitt made comments to the effect that the president should stop American participation in what she regarded as the “immoral war” in Vietnam and concentrate on the immoralities of racism in America.

Her candidness quickly resulted in FBI and CIA investigations of both her professional and personal life. The object of the investigations, according to declassified government documents, was to garner information—even unfounded gossip—that, if leaked to the media, would publicly humiliate Kitt and possibly pull the curtain on her acting career. [Donner, Frank, *The Age of Surveillance* (New York: Knopf, 1980)]

No one except Kitt is sure of just what this investigation uncovered, but this much is certain: her career suffered for years after her White House visit.

While it has always been difficult for Afro-American actors and actresses to get dignified roles, Kitt and other Black stars also discovered that their civil rights activities made it more or less impossible to get any roles at all.

Among them were Belafonte, Ruby Dee, and Ossie Davis.

After joining King on the March on Washington of 1963, they had begun playing pivotal positions in the civil rights movement, often openly expressing their outrage over segregation and leading protests against racial bigotry.

Belafonte became a member of the advisory council of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and routinely used his own money to cover bail for activists. The price he paid for becoming an advocate for protest was diminishing popularity in Hollywood (he and Dorothy Dandridge were the most popular Black stars in 1954) and occasional FBI surveillance of his political endeavors, according to published accounts. [Donner, p. 115. See also Navasky, pp. 192-193.]

The husband-and-wife team of Dee and Davis found the going particularly rough. Not only were they active in King’s movement, but FBI informants reported to Hoover that the couple also had been observed at social functions with Malcolm X (the fiery Black nationalist who was slain in Harlem in 1965), and that one of their children was involved in the Nation of Islam.

It wasn’t that the couple made a secret of their political activities; indeed, photos of Dee and Davis at Muslim-sponsored activities frequently appeared in the Nation of Islam’s official publication, the nationally distributed *Muhammad Speaks*.

For a while in the mid-’60s, Dee and Davis had to settle for occasional roles mainly in all-Black off-Broadway productions. They would not be offered roles in Hollywood until after blaxploitation movies became the trend in the late 1960s.

The increase in production of films about Afro-Americans led to a new phase in FBI counter-intelligence operations programs (COINTELPRO) against Black stars and Black films that related to the civil rights and Black Power movements.

For example, the FBI became greatly concerned about a film being shot in Cleveland in early 1968. On April 3 (which was, incidentally, the day before King was assassinated), the FBI’s field office in Cleveland notified Hoover that a “disturbing” movie about the “black revolution” was being shot there by Paramount Pictures.

The tentative title of the film was *Betrayal*, and was based on the book, *The Informer*, which dealt with the suicide of a Black revolutionary who had been selling information about his brothers-in-arms to the FBI.

The film’s message and acting—members of Cleveland Black Power groups were used as actors—were considered so riveting by a high-level FBI informant on the production team that he feared the picture “could incite racial strife in this country” and hurt the image of the U.S. government abroad when it was distributed on the European market. [FBI memo, from Cleveland special agent in charge to Hoover, July 15, 1968, #157-11890].

The informant obtained a copy of the script to give to the FBI. He also provided the FBI with information that one of the militants starring in the movie allegedly had bought a home in “an affluent, predominantly white neighborhood,” a fact, he said, that the FBI might consider for use in a counter-intelligence operation aimed at destroying both the militant’s and the film’s credibility.

The informant also suggested to the producer and creative directors that the movie’s story line be altered. If the informant in the movie was shown committing suicide at the
film's conclusion, the actual FBI informant wrote, it "would cause the viewer to feel that the racial situation in the United States is unsolvable." [FBI memo, p. 2]

The informant's recommendation about altering the story line so that the informant did not kill himself was rejected. The movie, released in the summer of 1968 under the title, Uptight, was hailed by critics as one of the most provocative and realistic films about inner-city life during that period.

Although the FBI failed to prevent Uptight from being distributed in Europe, or significantly altered in theme, the bureau apparently was far more effective in aborting production of two other Black film projects, both of which would have been dramatizations of the life and death of Malcolm X.

The reason for the bureau's concern was that the chief screenwriter on both movies, journalist Louis Lomax and the late novelist James Baldwin, shared the opinion that the FBI and CIA probably had been directly or indirectly involved in Malcolm X's assassination.

A month before the FBI learned of the production of Uptight, the bureau's Los Angeles office sent a memo to Hoover advising him of two movies on Malcolm X in the planning stages in Hollywood.

Hoover ordered the Los Angeles field office to "discreetly contact sources" at 20th Century Fox for a copy of the script by Lomax, and at Columbia Pictures for a copy of Baldwin's script. "Los Angeles should be particularly alert for indications that the bureau will be portrayed or mentioned in either movie," Hoover wrote. "Los Angeles should obtain advance copies of these scripts in order that the interest of the bureau be protected." [FBI memo, from Albany special agent in charge to Hoover, Aug. 5, 1968, #100-448006].

The FBI continued to monitor developments at both studios. Through the use of informants and pretext telephone calls, the bureau was able to determine by August 1969 that both scripts did, indeed, portray the bureau in what it regarded as an unfavorable light.

What happened after August in terms of counter-intelligence measures against the films is unclear, since documents covering this period and subject have either been excised of pertinent details or withheld entirely under exceptions to the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act.

It is enough to note that two films with tremendous box office potential, given the enormous interest in Malcolm X in 1969, were never produced. A documentary on Malcolm X, for example, produced by New York talk show host Gil Noble was shown in sold-out theaters throughout the country in 1970, and continues to be popular.

In addition to its activities in Hollywood, the FBI also was instrumental in the shaping of various television documentaries on the civil rights and Black Power movements.

In an Aug. 5, 1968 memo to all FBI field offices, the agency complimented itself on a successful counter-intelligence operation against a Black nationalist group in Miami, and urged field offices to develop sources at local television stations so the Miami feat could be "duplicated" around the nation.

"The Miami (field office) has demonstrated that a carefully planned television show can be extremely effective in showing these extremists for what they really are," one memo stated. [FBI memo, from Miami special agent in charge to Hoover, Jan. 22, 1969, #100-4480060].

In February 1969 the Miami field office conducted a similar operation against the Nation of Islam's mosque there, using the same sources at WCKT-TV as in the initial operation. Within a year, other television stations, including WBZ-TV in Boston, ran "documentaries" on the civil rights movement that essentially were concocted by the FBI.

In short order, the media manipulation campaign became a full-fledged feature of COINTELPRO. Rapidly, the focus spread from the civil rights movement's Afro-American celebrities to American celebrities in general.

By 1970, stars such as Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, Marlon Brando, Zero Mostel, and Tony Randall had become targets for investigation by the FBI because of their activities in the civil rights or anti-Vietnam War activities. [Donner, p. 115]
Lee: Three of her scenes were cut. What I saw in her scenes with Joe Seneca and some of the scenes between Art and Jo was that whenever the older people would come on, the film would slow down. So we cut their scenes to a minimum and stayed focused on the students.

BFR: Are there any actors you would not want to work with again?
Lee: Yes, I'm not going to say who.

BFR: What else was cut from School Daze?
Lee: There was a modern dance number with Gregg Burge called The Sun is Rising that fell by the wayside. A song called Turn You Round, and a drum section piece at the beginning of the picture also had to be dropped. They did poorly in test situations. Besides, I didn't want the film to last over two hours.

BFR: Will you be appearing in all your films as an actor?
Lee: No.

BFR: And if so, will it be in different kinds of roles?
Lee: You think Mars Blackmon and Half Pint are the same?

BFR: No, but they are similar. And there are other kinds of roles you could do.
Lee: What do you mean, other roles?

BFR: A suave Wall Street type, for instance. It's all acting. John Sayles has acted in most of his pictures, and Into the Night is full of directors performing acting chores.

Lee: The big picture for me is the film itself. I'm not going to pick a role to act and then write a film around it. I really to this day don't consider myself an actor, even if I did get some good notices for She's Gotta Have It and School Daze.

BFR: At the end of School Daze, when you demand that the characters and the audience wake up, are you talking about Black colleges, or society in general?
Lee: I just use the college as sort of a micro-cosm. But I let everyone interpret it their own way.

BFR: Why did the School Daze budget jump from $3.5 million to $6.1 million?
Lee: Six million dollars is nothing when you're working with unions. We had to cut corners as it was. We're not talking about four people in a room together. We had about 80 speaking parts.

BFR: Island Pictures pulled out when it looked like the film was going to go past its $4 million limit. Do you see your differences with them being resolved in the future?
Lee: I don't really think we have any differences. It's just the scale of the film I wanted to do.

BFR: What is the status of your relationship with Columbia Pictures, now that your mentors, David Picker and David Puttnam, are gone?
Lee: That's been the one blight on the whole production.

BFR: Are you worried that the new regime at Columbia might try to sandbag and bury School Daze?
Lee: Even if they wanted to kill School Daze, they couldn't because of all the publicity it's gotten.

BFR: School Daze needs to make about $15 million to break even. Will it?
Lee: I'm sure it will. There haven't been too many films that give young Black people a chance to see themselves in a positive light, so I'm filling a void. No matter how much money it takes, I'm not worried about work.

BFR: She's Gotta Have It cost very little money. If you had to return to a smaller budget, could you?
Lee: The budget really depends on the subject matter. The reason She's Gotta Have It cost so little was because of deferments, small non-union crews, and the fact that we only shot for a few days. I had to ask a lot of favors, and they were the kind of favors you can only ask a person once. Plus after people see School Daze, they're going to want to get paid their usual fees. I doubt I'll ever do anything as small-scale as She's Gotta Have It again.

BFR: You said in Spike Lee's Gotta Have It that you were determined not to let Black people turn you into a savior. What, then, is your commitment to the Black film audience?
Lee: My commitment to the audience is a total 100 percent. But I'm the one to determine and define that commitment. When I say 'savior,' I'm not talking about the audience, but the Black filmmaking community. I mean being bombarad by actors, writers, and everybody else trying to get their careers off through you and it just can't be done like that.

BFR: What advice do you have for young Black first-time filmmakers?
Lee: Read the book Spike Lee's Gotta Have It. That tells it all. They don't even have to buy the book, just read it.

BFR: Are you part of the new "Black Pack?"
Lee: No, that's Eddie Murphy, Arsenio Hall, Robert Townsend, and Paul Mooney, and all of them are California-based and I'm a New Yorker. Both Eddie and I have talked about working together, but nothing definite has come of it.

BFR: Do you think the Black Pack will be a positive force for Black filmmaking, or just another in-group formed to keep others out?
Lee: I think they definitely can be a positive force. Time will tell.

BFR: Which filmmakers have been a positive influence on you?
Lee: Well, I admire directors like Gordon Parks and the late Oscar Micheaux, but I wouldn't say they have had any influence on my own work. I like to think of myself as an original.
Triib Campbell stirred up a controversy of her own in School Daze as Jane, Julian's girlfriend.

BFR: What other filmmakers have you liked?
Lee: (Martin) Scorsese I have tremendous respect for. His films are stylish but realistic. After seeing films like Taxi Driver, Mean Streets, and The Color of Money, I don't think there's an American filmmaker who has a better command of cinematic language.

BFR: What about the racism in most of his films?
Lee: Some of the characters in his films are racist, but that doesn't mean he himself is racist. I don't think a director can be held responsible for the negative attitude of every character in his film. I also liked Bertolucci's The Last Emperor for the way he and his cameraman, Vittorio Storaro, work together.

BFR: You've been called the Charlie Parker of the movie—
Lee: —By my dad. Come on now, nobody else has said that.

BFR: Well, how closely do you identify with Black cultural pioneers like Parker?
Lee: Very closely. My great-grandfather, a disciple of Booker T. Washington, started a school in Snowhill, Ala., called the Snowhill Institute that ran from kindergarten to 12th grade.

BFR: Numerous articles have mentioned your grandmother.
Lee: Her name is Zimmie Shelton and she's a terrific lady. She's a 1929 graduate of Spelman College. She invested heavily in Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop and She's Gotta Have It. She lives in Atlanta, not too far from the college. She's always been one of my strongest supporters. My mom went to Spelman as well. My dad, like me, went to Morehouse.

BFR: Your dad, Bill Lee, is an accomplished jazz musician who's written several modern operas. Any other musically inclined family members?
Lee: One of my aunts, Consuela Lee Morehead, worked with me on the music for School Daze and wrote Kick Em Out, Tigers, which is heard during the football scene. Another Aunt, Grace Mims, is an opera singer.

BFR: In Uplift the Race, you said, "If people are doing things that I don't agree with, I'll speak out against them," or words to that effect. You've spoken out against Whoopi Goldberg and other Blacks who wear colored contacts. Does it still bother you?
Lee: I think every Black person who wears tinted contacts should be shot. That's as bad as nose jobs. That's what's sad. That people can perceive of their noses as not decent or too wide and want to go to such self-hateful extremes to do something about them.

BFR: Any other pet peeves?
Lee: Yes, but I'm going to choose my spots a little more carefully in the future. If you complain all the time, then no one's going to listen to you.

BFR: Your two biggest films have been comedies, in light of the success of Robert Townsend, and others, like Reggie Hudlin, who have projects on tap, do you think comedies stand a better chance of getting over?
Lee: In the first place, I didn't see She's Gotta Have It as a comedy. Island chose to market it that way so it wouldn't scare white audiences. But it does seem that comedies and musicals are considered safe bets.

BFR: But will all your films be comedies, or will you do a drama someday?
Lee: The word I like to use is humor. No matter what kind of film I do, I'm not going to do anything that's humorless. I think we Black people are the funniest people on Earth, and that's something I love putting on film.

BFR: Whatever became of Messenger and Birmingham/Brooklyn?
Lee: Birmingham I never finished. The time isn't right for Messenger, at least not now.

BFR: Do you think you'd ever want to do any television work?
Lee: No, not now.

BFR: Do you think you'll ever make a film without any Black characters?
Lee: I can't imagine that happening.

BFR: Would you continue to work with major studios if they tried to exert what you felt was undue influence over your script and finished film?
Lee: Well, studios will know what I expect and demand before any deal is signed. I want to keep making good films and keep my sanity through all of this.

BFR: So, what new pictures do you have in development?
Lee: Nothing I can talk about presently.

BFR: Are you happy with the way School Daze turned out?
Lee: I don't mean to sound conceited, but I honestly, in my heart, think that, to date, School Daze is the best film by Black people, about Black people, for Black people.
by Arthur Johnson

Are we ready for this? A musical comedy set in 1963 about the fight for integration in Baltimore, directed by midnight moviemaker John Waters (Pink Flamingos, Polyester), starring the late 370-pound cult actor Divine in a dual role as a bigoted television station owner and as the mother of the film's dancing dynamo chubbette star? That's Hairspray.

As odd as this mixture of talent and subject matter sounds, Hairspray is both a boot and a history lesson set among the beehive hairdos and the rhythm-and-blues music of the early '60s. The story revolves around the efforts of a Black disc jockey, Motormouth Maybelle (played by '50s R&B singing sensation Ruth Brown), to integrate a local teen television dance show and an amusement park. Though Blacks are allowed to dance on the show once a month on "Negro Day" (and are never permitted to enter the park) Maybelle and her followers refuse to accept the racism, and begin to protest.

She is joined in her fight by an overweight but liberal white teenager (Ricki Lane) who admits that the dance steps she uses to become queen of the dance show were all learned by watching Black dancers.

Though the clubbing of demonstrators, racial prejudice, and Waters' high camp approach to '60s dance crazes and hairstyles would hardly seem ripe topics for comedy, the writer/director has managed just the right blend of all these elements to create a film that is amusing and sentimental, all the while that it presents an ugly slice of American history.

Despite the fact that Waters makes unmerciful fun of the bigots in the film and makes his affection for Black music and dance of the era obvious (the soundtrack is full of gems such as "The Madison," "Bend Over, Let Me See You Shake A Tailfeather," and "The Bird"), he presents some disturbing stereotypes. For some reason when Lake and her boyfriend journey to the Black section of Baltimore, they are confronted with squalor and winos sprawled on the sidewalk in broad daylight. Having grown up in Baltimore in the 1960s, just as Waters did, I know that clean Black neighborhoods existed; I grew up in one.

Overall, Waters does a good job lampooning teen movies and white racists, while presenting a side of the '50s and '60s that white filmmakers usually ignore. Hairspray makes us laugh and recall the good parts of the '60s—the music, the crazy dances. And the memories of Black and white together.

Tryin' Times

Though she started in three films in 1987, becoming perhaps the only Black actress ever to star in three major studio films in a single year, these are trying times for Whoopi Goldberg.

On the one hand, Hollywood reportedly offered her several million dollars to make Fatal Beauty (a film that Cher turned down) after first rejecting Goldberg for not being "attractive enough." Then, when the film was completed (according to an Entertainment Tonight interview with Goldberg) and test audiences supposedly groaned through a bedroom love scene with her and white co-star Sam Elliott, the studio cut the scene (explaining that it slowed the film), giving Goldberg another body slam. She protested (after all, she is married to a white man in real life, she countered on ET) but the love scene was excised from the released print. Goldberg's bitter final comment on the controversy was that if Elliott had put money on the table after their lovemaking, it would have been acceptable to the studio.

It's been about 20 years since Hollywood was this squeamish about interracial romance—when it made the then-controversial Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, and left most of the kisses on the cutting room floor.

If all that wasn't enough, on the heels of the Fatal Beauty controversy, Goldberg lost her suit against the makers of another film in which she stars, Telephone; she claimed she had been denied her contractual right to have a hand in the film's editing. Welcome to Hollywood, Whoopi. [In Washington, that film played a week at an obscure suburban theater, reportedly to fulfill contractual obligations before it was pulled and rushed onto videocassette.]

In Fatal Beauty, Goldberg portrays urban cop Rita Rizzoli, and hits the mean streets in search of a deadly mix of cocaine called fatal beauty that kills its users within 90 seconds. Her determined search leads her to a major drug dealer whom she technically cannot touch, but whose security chief—Elliott—is assigned to protect her. (Don't ask why, this is just how it is, folks: a drug kingpin assigns a bodyguard to the cop who's out to kill him, okay?)

There are lots of shootouts, Goldberg gets to wear a blonde wig again (as in Jum-pin' Jack Flash), catch the bad guys, kiss the leading man, and has one very effective straight dramatic scene without her gun and without her tough woman persona. End of movie.

The film is an adequate, if unspectacular, addition to the contemporary cop film genre, and Goldberg certainly has a more compassionate and real character to portray here than in her previous film, Burglar.

The seemingly improbable and studio-censored love story with Elliott even works well here. In their first scene together and in the ones that follow there are undeniable sparks flying, and there is a certain chemistry at work between the two stars that is believable enough to have culminated in a bedroom scene. This is an accomplishment that most contemporary love stories lack—that feeling that the stars are genuinely attracted to one another. There is a Tracy-Hepburn quality (don't laugh!) between Goldberg and Elliott that is rare in today's films.

Goldberg also proves she can carry a film and—if she can keep working and draw significant crowds at the box office—may happen on a decent script that is worthy of her talents. Here is a precocious balancing act that is performed by all of today's movie stars: making enough successful commercial films to keep themselves working and bankable so that when something worthwhile comes along they have the clout and the marque power to star in it.

In the scope of Goldberg's own balancing act, Fatal Beauty is one of those commercially viable films that may pave the way for more meaningful work.
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