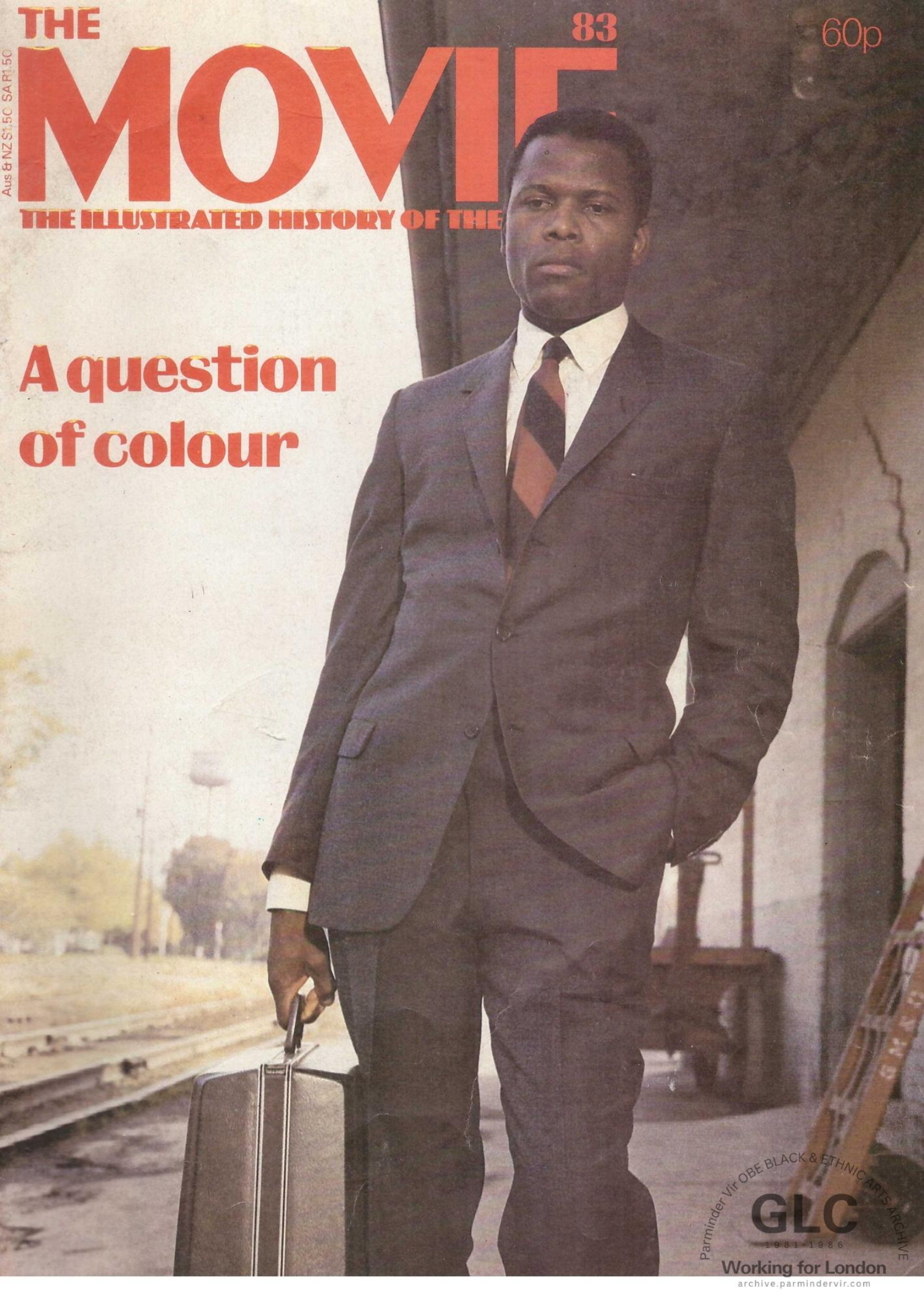




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THE MOVIE

83

60p

THE ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE

A question of colour

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Chapter 83

Contents

A question of colour The black man in the movie by Jim Pines	1641
Native Americans Hollywood's betrayal of the Indian by David Thomson	1644
Little Big Man (1970) by Graham Fuller	1646
Shaft (1971) by Robert Reiner	1648
Born black Gordon Parks and the black super-hero by Tony Watts	1650
Sidney Poitier: carrying the black man's burden by Colin McArthur	1653
Blazing Saddles (1974) by George Robert Kimball	1656
The long walk of the Aborigine Cinema and the lost people of Australia by Claire Leimbach	1658

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Front cover: Sidney Poitier in *In the Heat of the Night* (1967)

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GREAT STAR PORTRAITS

Elizabeth Taylor
Photographed by Bob
Willoughby in 1956
Portrait on inside back cover

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Chapter 83

A question of colour

Movies began in black and white, but took a long time to acknowledge black (and red) people as more than extras in white-dominated stories



Throughout its history, the American cinema has played an important role in popularizing racial stereotypes of black people. Images of blacks have gone through a number of significant changes which, historically, reflect the shifting values and beliefs held in society concerning blacks, as well as the changing status and the emergence of black people within contemporary America.

During the silent-film era, blacks (often played by whites in blackface) were depicted in terms of the American Southern plantation tradition, usually as comic slave types and family retainers. It was during this period that the traditional stereotypes of the Uncle Tom, the Mammy figure and the comic-relief black type were firmly established in the cinematic mythology. By the late Thirties, Hollywood tended to stress relatively gentler images of blacks as subservient types. The Romantic Old South genre continued strongly, reaching a pinnacle in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), for which Hattie McDaniel won an Academy Award (the first black person to do so) as Best Supporting Actress for her performance as the bossy but faithful 'Mammy' to Scarlett O'Hara.

The post-World War II period saw the emergence of a new liberal attitude in Hollywood. The emphasis shifted towards relatively positive images, as more films started to depict black-white relations within a humanistic framework. Clarence Brown's 1949 film version of William Faulkner's novel *Intruder in the Dust* introduced to the screen the figure of the proud and noble black. The liberal attitude was informed by a sense of social equality, and articulated a strong commitment to racial tolerance. One of the recurrent patterns in Fifties

liberal films is the black-white confrontation motif, in which the black hero is pitted against an intolerant white. The first appears in *No Way Out* (1950), where the central conflict between the Sidney Poitier character and the recalcitrant bigot (Richard Widmark) is eventually resolved with the black emerging as the moral victor. The acceptable black in liberal films eschewed violence – which was the domain of the racially intolerant figures, black and white. A number of films, however, developed the racial-tolerance theme along the lines of mutually hostile black-white confrontation, gradually evolving into mutual respect: in Stanley Kramer's *The Defiant Ones* (1958), the Poitier and Tony Curtis characters are escaped convicts who are shackled together, and therefore forced to work through their opposing attitudes at very close range.

The Fifties liberal image of blacks revolved almost entirely around Sidney Poitier; and none of the films placed women in the principal role of archetypal noble black. Indeed, they dealt with highly personalized forms of interracial male relationships. Many blacks voiced antipathy towards the 'noble black' image; it was argued that the stereotype effectively pre-empted any idea of black individualism and self-determination.

By the mid-Sixties, the black civil rights movement was making a tremendous impact on all levels of American society. The general trend was clearly shifting towards militancy and separatism. Blacks re-examined their position in society and began to develop new self-images, in which blackness was an emphatically positive sign of opposition. These social and political developments had a broad effect

Above left: *Sounder*, a dog belonging to David Lee Morgan (Kevin Hooks), is wounded when David's father Nathan (Paul Winfield) is arrested for stealing meat; but the dog recovers in the woods and Nathan, after being injured in an explosion, is released from prison early. Above: in *To Sir, With Love* (1967), Sidney Poitier plays an engineer from British Guiana who has to take a job as a teacher in an unruly and difficult East End school in London, and eventually makes a real success of it

on the Sixties images of blacks in films: what emerged was the black *as individual* struggling against society at large, or against his own conscience. The personal qualities of the central black figure provided the focal point in the drama. During this period, blacks also began to appear in a wider variety of story situations and genres, and the characterizations were more fully developed. The incorporation of blacks into otherwise white movies conveyed an image of a plural society, where race relations were part of the complex of human relations. This was dramatized in a number of films concerning a band of men, which included a black, whose common objective – such as robbing a bank – was constantly threatened by personality differences.

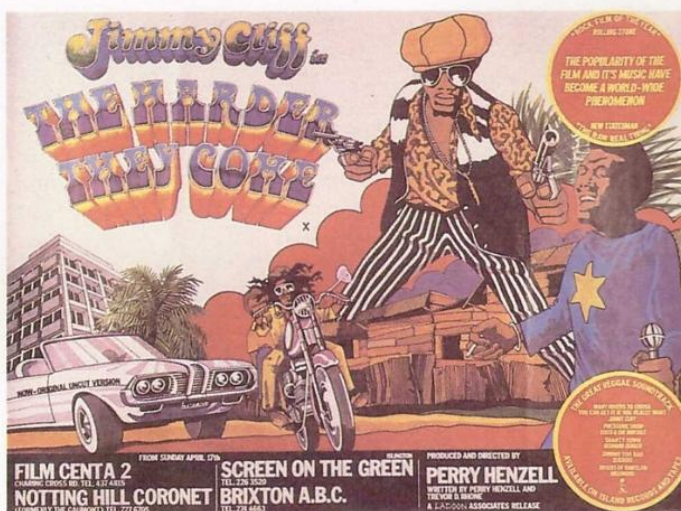
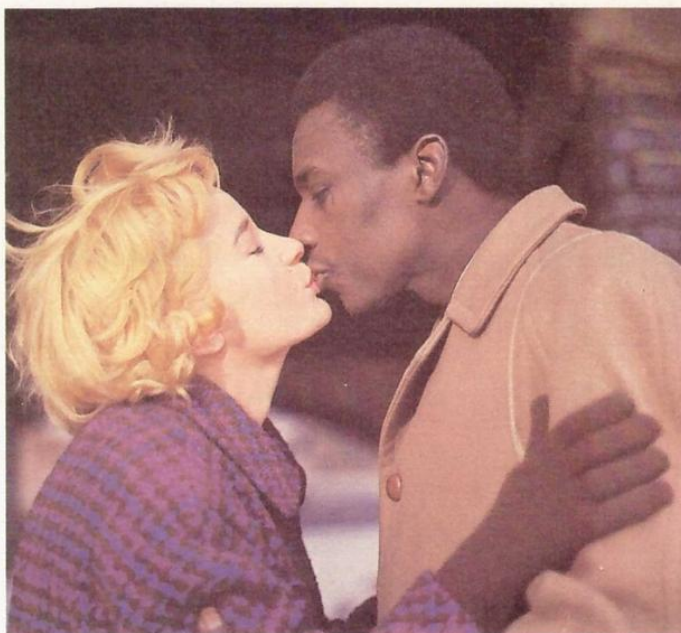
Thus the Sixties was a period of maturity, not only in terms of the kinds of racial themes explored in films, but also in terms of the way in which *human* qualities became an integral part in black characterizations. It was now possible for films to construct black characters that possessed some dramatically significant human weakness, without its being interpreted as necessarily pejorative.

The image of black people took on a new humanity and depth in the movies of the liberal Sixties

Norman Jewison's *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), one of the last Hollywood liberal films, explored this theme of the flawed black hero with resounding effect. Low-budget 'art' films such as John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1960), Shirley Clarke's *The Cool World* (1963), Larry Peerce's *One Potato, Two Potato* and Michael Roemer's *Nothing But a Man* (both 1964) were particularly realistic and sensitive in their approach to racial subjects. But they also tended to express a somewhat cynical view of the black world, and of interracial relations, that placed them outside mainstream conventions. Occasionally this outlook was taken to extremes, as in Robert Downey's satirical *Putney Swope* (1969), set in an advertising agency taken over by blacks.

The latter half of the Sixties saw the re-emergence of political themes in Hollywood, with a number of films concentrating on some aspect of the new militancy. Jules Dassin's *Up Tight!* (1968) dramatized the schisms that arose between separatist militancy and integrationist non-violence in the aftermath of Martin Luther King's assassination. Herbert J. Biberman's *Slaves* (1969) depicted corrupt plantation life and slave rebellion. In *The Lost Man* (1969), Sidney Poitier played a black militant. Generally, Poitier continued to represent the black middle-class image of acceptability. His films were especially popular with white audiences, and he remained Hollywood's top black star well into the Sixties. But he ceased to have the monopoly over the black image, as in the previous decade.

The proliferation of new themes and images in the Sixties opened the way for other black actors and actresses; and this led to other kinds of black types being depicted. One of the more popular was the black male macho figure, then best represented by ex-professional football star Jim Brown. It was to become, in the Seventies, the principal black male stereotype, and highly controversial. Black women also came to the fore in the Sixties, with such actresses as Ruby Dee, Diana Sands, Abbey Lincoln and Diahann Carroll appearing in numerous films, racial and non-racial, playing relatively 'untyped', intelligent roles. But very few films looked at black male-female relationships, *Nothing but a Man* and



For Love of Ivy (1968) being notable exceptions.

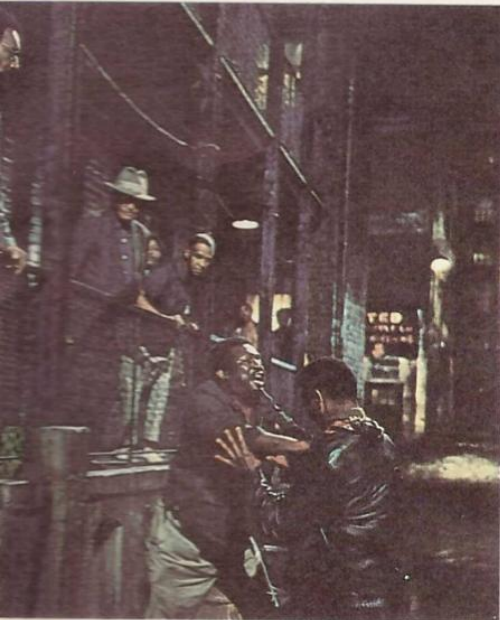
The Seventies witnessed the sudden boom in black exploitation, or 'blaxploitation', films. Their subject-matter, characters and milieu were such that they would appeal primarily to blacks who, for the first time, became a major audience. The films were highly commercial and concentrated mainly on black super-hero types – super-hip, super-slick, super-cool characters capable of super-heroics! They invariably contained a fair amount of sex and violence, and blacks were shown always coming out on top.

Black director Ossie Davis' *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) relied almost entirely on the iconography of the ghetto – its subcultural styles in dress, speech, patterns of behaviour and attitudes – for its effect. The ethnic morality embodied by the two black detective heroes – expressed, for example, by their antipathy towards slick hustlers (white or black) trying to exploit the community – is a theme that reappears in subsequent films.

The new tone of black-slanted films was wonderfully conveyed in black director Gordon Parks' *Shaft* (1971), one of the most successful of the cycle. The film in fact worked within the conventional private-eye detective genre; but it succeeded nevertheless in firmly establishing in the mythology the sophisticated black super-hero. Black director Melvin Van Peebles' extraordinary *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) lacked the sheen of the more mainstream films. But the scenes of the fugitive hero's bizarre sexual adventures, and the overall image of

Top left: Kathie (Sylvia Sims) and Peter (Johnny Sekka) decide to get married in Flame in the Streets; their decision puts the liberal principles of her father to the test, but finally he agrees to it. Above left: Ivan (Jimmy Cliff) records a reggae song in Kingston, Jamaica, but it does not become a hit till he has killed several policeman, making him a local hero. Below: Tamara Dobson plays the title role in Cleopatra Jones (1973), a CIA narcotics agent who battles against the gang led by Mommy (Shelley Winters)





Above: Melvin Van Peebles' *The Watermelon Man* (1970) stars Godfrey Cambridge as a bigoted white man who finds he has turned black overnight and Estelle Parsons as his bemused wife. Top: *Up Tight!* was based on Liam O'Flaherty's Irish novel *The Informer*, previously filmed in 1935 by John Ford; the 1968 remake transformed the IRA into black militants. Top right: the drug-addicted Billie Holiday (Diana Ross) with her lover Louis McKay (Billy Dee Williams) in *Lady Sings the Blues*



the black man triumphing over the corrupt white establishment, made the film attractive to both black and white audiences. It was a phenomenal success, and established the stereotype of the black super-stud. Gordon Farks Jr's *Superfly* (1972) elevated into the mythology the street-hustler cocaine-dealer, a figure that became one of the most popular, and most controversial, black hero-types during the blaxploitation period.

Only a minority of black-oriented films concerned actual black people of stature – notably the Billie Holiday biopic *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972) and Gordon Parks' *Leadbelly* (1976) – or looked at some aspect of black history. Sidney Poitier's first film as director, *Buck and the Preacher* (1972), popularized a neglected part of American history: the period following the Civil War when freed slaves moved west to found homesteads, but were tracked down and forced to return to the South.

The hero of 'blaxploitation' pix was the streetwise black hustler, a cool but controversial figure

The majority of films were set in the urban milieu: they glorified the ghetto as a kind of noble jungle, and romanticized the underworld of pimps and pushers. The street-hustler thus became the archetypal anti-establishment, individualistic hero of the period. This image of the black world excited moral indignation in many black-rights organizations and professional bodies. In 1972, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) formed a coalition to attack what they felt had become an 'intolerable' situation. The controversy continued through the Seventies blaxploitation period. A number of black-owned production companies were set up to meet the demands for a more responsible approach to black films. But most of the writers, producers and directors of black-slanted movies in any case were white; and the essential white-owned capitalist structure of the trend remained intact.

A constant theme in the anti-blaxploitation lobby was that the films were psychologically and socially harmful to young blacks, who made up a large proportion of the audience. Certain films were singled out as representing meaningful and positive

images of black life. Among these were Gordon Parks' first feature *The Learning Tree* (1969), based on his autobiographical novel about growing up in Kansas during the Thirties; Martin Ritt's *Sounder* (1972), another Thirties story about a young boy's experiences in the South; Ossie Davis' *Black Girl* (1972); and John Korty's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1974), an ambitious television film in which Cicely Tyson brilliantly portrayed a 110-year-old black woman who recounts her life from slavery to the civil-rights years. These films reinstated a sense of humanity in the image of blacks – which many believed had been lost in the post-civil-rights Seventies.

The boom in black exploitation films petered out in the late Seventies. At the same time, an independent black film-makers' movement was gaining momentum, examining community-based and ethnic themes with creative intelligence and sensitivity.

Britain does not have the kind of racial film tradition that is exhibited in the American cinema. Indeed, the end of Empire more or less signalled the end of colonial adventure dramas. Adventure films set in Africa, like the plantation tradition in early American films, had helped to reinforce traditional stereotypes of blacks as 'savages' and, at best, 'exotic' figures. Occasionally the story would centre on an 'educated' African character who is favoured by colonial whites, whom he willingly serves in return. This motif recurs in three Paul Robeson vehicles made during the Thirties: *Sanders of the River* (1935); *The Song of Freedom* (1936); and *King Solomon's Mines* (1937). Robeson also appeared in one of the first films set in the British context to include blacks as well, *The Proud Valley* (1939), in which he portrayed a black stoker who helps unemployed Welsh miners to reopen their pits. The theme of the 'educated' African coming into conflict with his own cultural traditions was central to Thorold Dickinson's *Men of Two Worlds* (1946), the first British feature film to give a British black actor, Robert Adams, a starring role.

British race relations appeared, for the first time, in Basil Dearden's *Sapphire* (1959); but the topic was not explored in any depth. But Roy Ward Baker's *Flame in the Streets* (1961) clearly took its cue from the racial tensions which were emerging in Britain at the time; however, it remained essentially a non-racial domestic melodrama, which employed the racial sub-theme of a proposed mixed marriage and confrontation about it as a narrative device.



Above: *Blacula* (1973) features William Marshall as an African vampire who is brought to the USA and menaces the inhabitants of Los Angeles

By the early Seventies, race relations in Britain had reached a crucial stage of development. Attention focused largely on the question of 'immigration' and the 'problem' of second-generation black youth. The terms of reference were largely dictated by representations in news media and television rather than films. Horace Ové's *Pressure* (1975), the first British feature film directed by a black, depicted a British-born black school-leaver who is unable to find employment because of discrimination. The film sensitively explored the youth's gradual alienation from society, and was especially revealing in its portrayal of the black family.

With the appearance of the new Jamaican films – *The Harder They Come* (1972), *Smile Orange* (1975) and the American-produced *Rockers* (1978) – a new and vital black-youth audience emerged. *The Harder They Come*, the most successful in the cycle, invoked ethnic themes, the imagery of reggae culture, the figure of the defiant outsider as folk hero (brilliantly portrayed by reggae artist Jimmy Cliff), which connected immediately and directly with the contemporary black British and Caribbean experience. The film proved that there was a significant, if submerged, black audience in Britain. It also underlined the extent to which there was a lack of relevant British-based images. Thus Caribbean-derived images, despite their commercial intentions, represented the only 'positive' images that blacks could identify with. Anthony Simmons' *Black Joy* (1977), an ethnic comedy set in Brixton, was essentially a white-oriented black exploitation film which lacked flair; and it was criticized by many blacks for being crude and racist.

By the late Seventies, black-youth culture in Britain was a vibrant force, expressing itself mainly through a fundamentalist form of reggae music and the Rastafarian religious movement. Franco Rosso's *Babylon* (1980) was the first feature film to dramatize aspects of this new subcultural phenomenon in Britain. But in focusing primarily on the boys, the film inadvertently helped to reinforce the stereotyped image of 'black youth' as male youth, neglecting the important question of the position of black women. Nevertheless, *Babylon* is interesting in the way it attempts to deal with the subtly different responses to the British experience of young blacks, and also in the way the film caricatures white racism. It represents a worthwhile development in British cinema.

JIM PINES

Native Americans

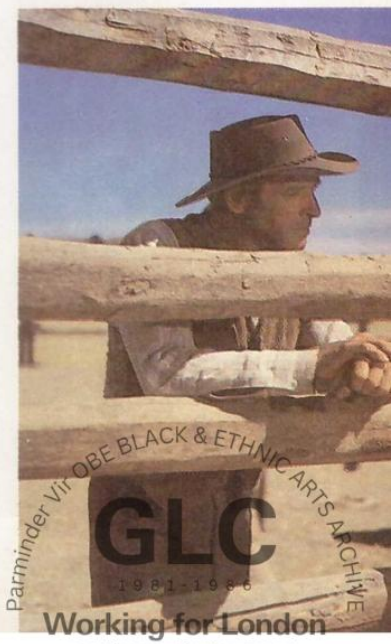


They were called 'redskins', 'savages' and 'hostiles'. They were played by extras wearing feathers and body makeup, or by wooden actors like Chief Yowlachie, the equivalent of store-front Indian figures, who were prepared to make a mockery of their own race in white movies. These hostiles had no other apparent life or purpose except to provide a terrible, cruel threat to star actors who sought the frontier, gold and their own happy ending. It was the savages' duty to hurl furious attacks against circles of wagons, lines of cavalry and any pioneer homestead. They wanted to burn, kill, pillage and rape: they were classic barbarians, and as such they served to camouflage much of the brutality of their supposedly civilized opponents.

For the generation that grew up with talking pictures, Hollywood promoted a casual but crushing racial stereotype. It ignored or distorted the history in which whites had invaded Indian territory, exploited the natives, massacred them, put them in camps and stripped them of identity. The American movie – at least until around 1950 – was a steady reinforcement of this legend, and a subtle complement to the fearful mastery whites felt over blacks. Every Indian picture was a commentary on racism in America, and their prejudice was as strident as that of the Nazi *Triumph des Willens* (1934, *Triumph of the Will*).

But there was a changed mood in the early Fifties. Red Indians had fought in World War II, and the demand for civil rights was beginning to emerge in the South. It was not until the late Sixties that books restored the facts of 'Native American' history and culture, and made white America acknowledge the genocide it had committed. No film-maker since then has dared to repeat the stereotypes of racial hostility or subservience. Moreover, several films

Above: *Ulzana* (Joaquin Martinez) leads a war party of Chiricahua Apaches to death and destruction in Robert Aldrich's *Ulzana's Raid*. Top right: the slaughter of the Cheyenne in Ralph Nelson's film recalls the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. Right: the Cheyenne score a victory over General George A. Custer's troops in 1876 at Little Big Horn, a historical event re-created in Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man*. Below: in John Huston's *The Unforgiven*, Ben Zachary (Burt Lancaster) has an adopted sister Rachel (Audrey Hepburn) who is a Kiowa Indian





have had Indians as heroes or tragic victims. But the phrase 'Native American' is still touched with irony. There are still no Native American stars, producers or directors. There is not a Native American cinema, and no sense of ownership or authorship for the natives.

Most Americans admit that the history was a disaster, but how can it be reversed? Should the hideous past not be left decently alone? These questions are heavy with condescension and self-protection, and they suggest how long racist thought prevails. In hindsight, it is even possible to question the alleged tolerance of those famous 'breakthrough' films of the Fifties.

Devil's Doorway (1950) is humane and innovative in its respect for the dilemma of the Indian who has fought on the Union side in the Civil War – presented in the pained handsomeness of Robert Taylor. But in the same year the same director,

Anthony Mann, made *Winchester '73*, in which the Indian attack – led by a young Rock Hudson as Young Bull – is so ominous a prospect that Lola Manners (Shelley Winters) is told to keep a last bullet for herself. Nothing betrayed Indians more than the casting of Hollywood stars to play Indian roles, and even though storylines expressed the wrongs done to them, kindness was still a form of superiority. Jeff Chandler played Cochise in *Broken Arrow* (1950), and Rock Hudson brought his great chest to the role of Taza, *Son of Cochise* (1954). It was even possible for an Indian woman to be attractive to a white man, so long as a pretty white actress played the part: Debra Paget in *Broken Arrow*, Elizabeth Threault in *The Big Sky* (1952), Jean Peters in *Apache*, Marisa Pavan in *Drum Beat* (both 1954), Donna Reed in *The Far Horizons* (1955) and Audrey Hepburn in *The Unforgiven* (1960).

Of those films, Robert Aldrich's *Apache* was the most searching study of Indian character and white manipulation. The ending was sentimentalized, and Burt Lancaster's savage was aimed at the box-office; but the picture had unequivocal scorn for white society. Anthony Mann's *The Last Frontier* (1955) still required the casting of Victor Mature as the half-breed scout Jed Cooper, and it settled for the virtues of stockade civilization. But it also recognized the exhilaration of space and liberty for the Indian. Most complex of all in its racial attitudes was Samuel Fuller's *Run of the Arrow* (1957), about a rogue Irish Confederate who marries into the Sioux: Rod Steiger played O'Meara and his bride, Yellow Moccasin, was Sarita Montiel, the Spanish wife of Anthony Mann.

No-one contributed more to the old image of the Indian than John Ford. *The Searchers* (1956) is a very telling metaphor for the stalwarts of racial supremacy having to yield to the new realities of America at the dawn of the civil rights movement. Its story concerns a white girl (Natalie Wood) kidnapped by Indians. The searchers after her are a bastion of white authority (John Wayne) and a mixed-blood companion (Jeffrey Hunter). *The Searchers* is far too tidy in its conclusion, but it shows the old Hollywood racked with uneasiness over race, mixed marriage and the chance of an integrated community. Some years later, Ford offered *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) as a grand, pictorial apology for a century of wrongs. It is far inferior to *The Searchers* and to Nicholas Ray's bold, accurate and disenchanted *Ombre Blanche* (1959, *The Savage Innocents*), about the least-remembered native American tribe, the Eskimos.

Since then, there have been films made in the shadow of Vietnam, pictures that expose the buffoonery of old heroes like Custer and Buffalo Bill, and which are awash with spilled blood: *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* (1969), *Soldier Blue*, *Little Big Man* (both 1970), *Ulzana's Raid* (1972), *Billy Jack* (1971) was remarkable for its modern setting, and for the way Tom Laughlin made it so far outside the Hollywood system that his entrepreneurial courage became a symbolic equivalent to Native American independence.

More recently, the Native American in movies has been verging on the mythology of the supernatural. Chief Bromden (Will Sampson) in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) is the spirit of silent knowledge in the American madhouse, the man who brings a merciful death to the tortured white hero and who finally disappears into the forest. And it should not be forgotten that the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* (1980) has been built on an old Indian burial ground. Perhaps the Indian is the new Frankenstein monster, a man so abused that he will haunt the guilty dreams of white Americans.

DAVID THOMSON

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LITTLE BIG MAN

WAS EITHER THE MOST
NEGLECTED HERO IN HISTORY
OR A LIAR OF INSANE PROPORTION!



DUSTIN HOFFMAN
"LITTLE BIG MAN"
A Cinema Center Films Presentation

MARTIN BALSAM • JEFF COREY • CHIEF DAN GEORGE

Screenplay by Calder Willingham A National General Pictures Release
Based on the Novel by Thomas Berger FAYE DUNAWAY Panavision® Technicolor® GP

Produced by Stuart Millar. Directed by Arthur Penn

Directed by Arthur Penn, 1970

Prod co: Stockbridge/Hiller. A Cinema Center Films Presentation. prod: Stuart Millar. assoc. prod: Gene Lasko. sc: Calder Willingham, from the novel by Thomas Berger. photo (Technicolor, Panavision): Harry Stradling Jr. ed: Dede Allen. art dir: Anglo Graham. cost: Dorothy Jeakins. mus: John Hammond. add mus: John Strauss. sd: Al Overton Jr. sd eff: James A. Richard, Frank E. Warner. ass dir: Mike Moder. prod man: Dick Gallegly. r/t: 139 minutes.

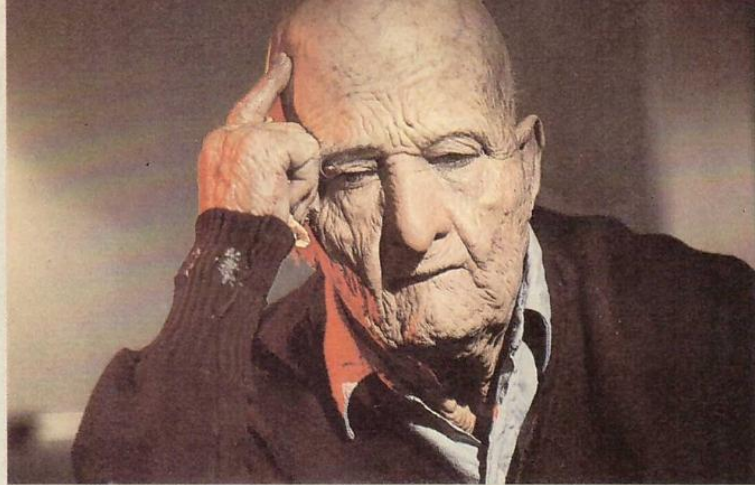
Cast: Dustin Hoffman (Jack Crabb), Faye Dunaway (Mrs Pendrake), Martin Balsam (Allardye T. Merriweather), Richard Mulligan (General George A. Custer), Chief Dan George (Old Lodge Skins), Jeff Corey (Wild Bill Hickok), Amy Eccles (Sunshine), Kelly Jean Peters (Olga), Carole Androsky (Caroline), Robert Little Star (Little Horse), Cal Bellini (Younger Bear), Ruben Moreno (Shadow That Comes In Sight), Steve Shemayne (Burns Red In the Sky), William Hickey (historian), James Anderson (sergeant), Jesse Vint (lieutenant), Alan Oppenheimer (major), Thayer David (Reverend Silas Pendrake), Philip Kenneally (Mr Kane), Jack Bannon (captain), Ray Dimas (young Jack Crabb), Alan Howard (adolescent Jack Crabb), Jack Mullaney (card player), Steve Miranda (Younger Bear as a youth), Lou Cutell (Deacon), M. Emmet Walsh (shotgun guard), Emily Cho (Digging Bear), Cecilia Kootenay (Little Elk), Linda Dyer (Corn Woman), Dessie Bad Bear (Buffalo Wallow Woman), Len George (Crow Scout), Norman Nathan (Pawnee), Helen Verbit (madame), Bert Conway (bartender), Earl Rosell (trooper), Ken Mayer (sergeant), Bud Cokes (man at bar), Rory O'Brien (assassin), Tracy Hotchner (flirtatious girl).

Halfway through *Little Big Man* Jack Crabb's comic, meandering adventures explode into tragedy with the massacre of the Cheyenne Indians who have adopted him. Jack watches helplessly as Custer's cavalymen cut down his young family.

He is a fictitious hero, but many of the scenes he witnesses are based on truth. The unsolicited carnage that took place on the banks of the Washita River in November 1868 was part of General Sheridan's

campaign to beat the Cheyenne into submission, or seemingly to exterminate the tribe completely. Ralph Nelson's *Soldier Blue* was released a week before *Little Big Man* and showed the horrors of the 1864 Sand Creek massacre when cavalymen annihilated over 130 members – mostly women and children – of the same peaceful Cheyenne faction who were supposedly under army protection.

So, was Hollywood suddenly, in



1970, atoning for its history of collaboration in white America's unbridled imperialist savagery towards the red man? Or did Penn and Nelson's films sardonically echo the 1968 events at My Lai in Vietnam, thereby suggesting that nothing ever changes?

Whatever the reasons, *Little Big Man*, a film criticized for the structural anomaly that allows the Washita tragedy to merely interrupt the comedy, and *Soldier Blue*, ravaged for its apparently gratuitous violence, at least attempted to redress the historical imbalance perpetrated by Hollywood since Westerns were first made.

In many ways *Little Big Man*

should have been the last Western: it embodies and destroys the old heroic myths that had always been the genre's stock-in-trade. With the distancing device of an 121-year-old narrator living out his last days in modern America and with the caustic vision of a film-maker saying goodbye not just to the past but to nostalgia itself, Penn ridicules the legendary conceptions of such figures as the gunfighter (portrayed as an absurd, squinting dude by Dustin Hoffman) and in particular of Wild Bill Hickok (shot ingloriously in the back, as indeed he was in reality). Also under fire are the traditional Western figures of the cure-all medicine salesman

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Jack Crabb, 121-year-old survivor of the Indian wars, tells his life story to a historian (1).

As a boy, Jack and his sister Caroline are orphaned by the Pawnees and brought up by Chief Old Lodge Skins of the Cheyenne. Jack's bravery during an attack on the Pawnees earns him the name Little Big Man, but an encounter with the cavalry (2) leads to his return to white civilization.

His education is continued by the Reverend Pendrake and his amorous wife (3), and later by the quack doctor Allard T. Merriweather (4), but it is

Caroline who introduces him to firearms. Jack becomes a gunfighter, befriends Wild Bill Hickok (5) and marries Olga, a Swedish immigrant who is captured by Indians. Jack joins Custer's cavalry to find her but deserts during an attack on the Cheyenne. While on the run he discovers Sunshine, a squaw who has just given birth to a baby (6). They return to Old Lodge Skins' camp and Sunshine becomes Jack's new wife. However, his happiness is cut short when Custer attacks. Jack rescues the old chief but Sunshine and her child are slaughtered with the

rest of the Cheyenne.

After failing to kill Custer, Jack becomes an alcoholic (7) and opts for the life of a hermit. However, he allows himself to be hired as a scout by Custer.

Completely insane, Custer makes his last stand at the Little Big Horn (8). Jack is saved by the warrior Younger Bear and rejoins Old Lodge Skins. Together they go to the resting place of the Cheyenne where the chief prepares to die. His time has not yet come, however, and he and Jack return to the camp (9).

Jack's story over, his interviewer leaves him.



showman (Allard T. Merriweather literally loses a limb for each new act of chicanery) and the pure, fresh-faced frontierswoman (the preacher's wife ends up in a brothel). The romantic, Fordian notion of the horse soldiers, all martial grace as they advance majestically through the snow to the tune of 'Garry Owen', pennants flying, is sustained with considerable visual beauty by Penn. However, the same cavalymen suddenly become indiscriminate butchers; Custer meanwhile is portrayed as a preening, murderous braggart and paranoid.

It is for the Indians – 'the Human Beings' – that Penn reserves his

affection and esteem. They are shown as a wise, brave, spiritually harmonious people who are safe from the hypocrisies that taint the white men in the film: Jack's squaw, unhindered by the false Christian morality of whites, is eager that her widowed sisters (equally eager) should share her husband's body with her. In a reversal of that situation the Reverend Pendrake casts out his unfaithful wife. But, encountering her later in a brothel, Jack recognizes her tawdriness and without bothering to sleep with her he leaves a pile of gold nestling on her naked midriff.

However, Penn never implies that the Cheyenne are perfect. They

too have their misfits – but they tolerate them. Indian society has a place for both the effeminate Little Horse who, unable to stand a 'man's' life, stays at home with the squaws, and for the contrary Younger Bear, an angry youth who rebels by washing in the dust, says goodbye when he should say hello, paints himself in evil zig-zags and eventually becomes the ferocious warrior who prevails at the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

The spiritual centre of the film is Old Lodge Skins, Jack's adoptive grandfather and a Cheyenne visionary and sage. At the tragicomic ending of *Little Big Man* the old chief, having had a premonition

of his own death and knowing that the age of the Cheyenne is over, solemnly lies down on his bier, expecting the spirits to take him. But they don't. Raindrops, like big tears, sting his eyelids as he waits there, unable to shake off life. 'Sometimes the magic works, sometimes it doesn't,' he muses, and he and Jack wander back to his tepee. It is the final ironic twist in the film – the demythification of even the Cheyenne culture.

The Cheyenne are, at the end, no more than a memory in the mind of the ancient Jack Crabb, left alone in an old people's home to reflect sadly on what the white man has done.

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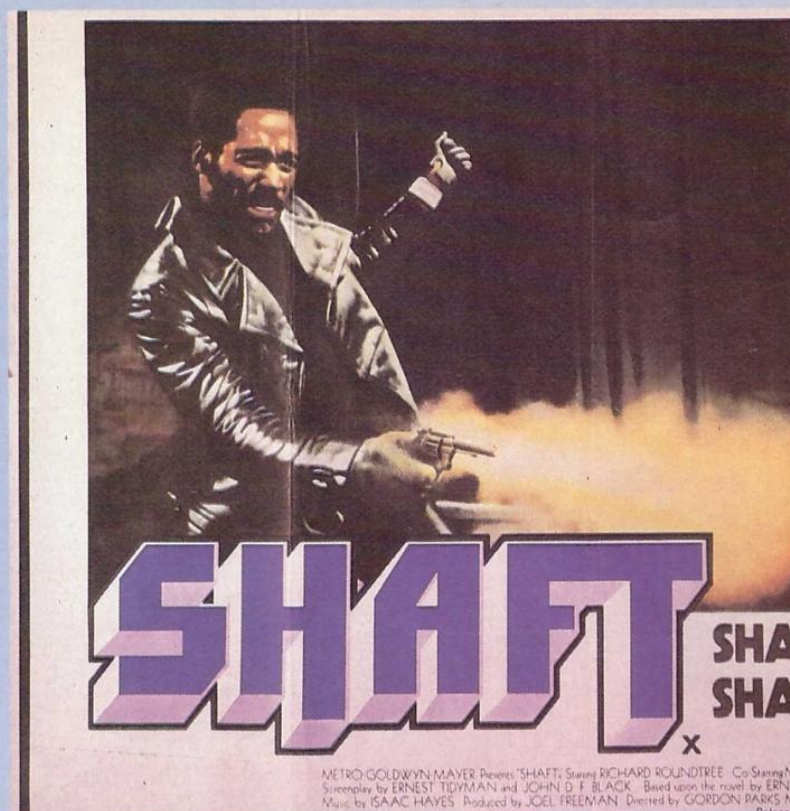
Shaft spearheaded the wave of blaxploitation pictures that flooded the screens in the early Seventies. The Hollywood image of the black had been liberalized in the Fifties and Sixties by the ebony-saint figures of Poitier and Belafonte, thereby displacing the patronizing sambo stereotype. By the Seventies, movies showed that a black could be as rough, tough, wise-cracking and heroic as any white gumshoe. The parallels were explicitly drawn in the advertising for *Shaft*, 'Hotter than Bond, Cooler than Bullitt'.

Shaft was not the first film with a black hero: Poitier played a police detective in Norman Jewison's Oscar winner *In the Heat of the Night* (1967); and Jim Brown – an ex-football professional – played a succession of action heroes, most notably in *Rio Conchos* (1964), *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), *The Split* (1968), *100 Rifles* (1969), *Tick... Tick... Tick*, *The Grasshopper* and *El Condor* (all 1970).

However, these forerunners varied significantly from *Shaft*. While the Poitier movies focused on racial themes, *Shaft* relegated racial questions to the taken-for-granted background. It is true that the reward money given to the black militants who help Shaft is donated to a fund for political prisoners, but *Shaft* is no message movie. The director, Gordon Parks, disclaimed any political intent – 'It's just a Saturday night fun picture which people go to see because they want to see the black guy winning' – although he did stress that the very fact of having a black hero was significant.

Shaft also departed from the Jim Brown films in that most of the protagonists were black and the action was largely set in Harlem. In Brown's movies he frequently had white co-stars; although when Brown made love on screen – as in his much publicized bedroom scenes with Raquel Welch in *100 Rifles* – the script meekly hedged the miscegenation issue by making the woman a half-caste. *Shaft* fully exploits the prowess, sexual and violent, suggested by his name – 'Shaft's his name. Shaft's his game', the posters proclaimed. Shaft has a black mistress but frequently picks up white women and takes them back to his luxurious Greenwich Village pad. To the James Bond swinging man-of-action style, Shaft adds the mystique of black hyper-virility and, when asked by a young policeman where he is going, Shaft replies, 'I'm going to get laid. Where are you going?'

The film that paved the way for *Shaft* was *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970). This was derived from Chester Himes' detective books about two Harlem cops, and whereas Sidney Poitier's portrayal of Virgil Tibbs had been largely aimed at white audiences, *Cotton Comes to Harlem* was pitched directly at the heart of the ghetto audience by its black director Ossie Davis. The film was a huge hit and it was estimated that over 70 per cent of its audience



**Hotter than Bond,
Cooler than Bullitt.**

**SHAFT's his name.
SHAFT's his game.**

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER Presents "SHAFT" Starring RICHARD ROUNDTREE Co-Starring MOSES GUNN Screenplay by ERNEST TIDYMAN and JOHN D. F. BLACK Based upon the novel by ERNEST TIDYMAN Music by ISAAC HAYES Produced by JOEL FREEMAN Directed by GORDON PARKS METROCOLOR Released in: 16mm, 35mm

was black, a sure pointer to the lucrative, hitherto untapped potential of the black market.

The result was the blaxploitation cycle of the early Seventies, in which white producers financed black directors to put black performers through all the action paces of the conventional thriller – often directly remaking white successes as in *Black Gunn*, *Cool Breeze* (both 1972), and *Black Caesar* (1973), *Cool Breeze* being derived from *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). The cycle's death knell was sounded by various bizarre attempts to blend it with other current fashions, notably the mid-Seventies blaxploitation meets Kung Fu films such as *Black Belt Jones* (1974).

The high point of the cycle was without doubt *Shaft*, the only entry achieving any significant cross-over success with white audiences. It effectively combined all the ingredients of the popular white thriller with black appeal. A taut, fast-moving pace was provided by Gordon Parks who had just the right background for the assignment; the last of 15 children from a poor black Kansas farm family, he had played piano in a Minnesota bordello, and been a Harlem dope-runner and professional basketball player before achieving success as a photographer and reporter for *Life* magazine. Richard Roundtree, a former college football star and male model, had the right blend of sophistication, sexuality and toughness for the Shaft character.

Shaft's script, peppered with Chandleresque wisecracks and ghetto humour, was provided by Ernest Tidyman, author of the original novel and writer of the similarly successful *The French Connection* (1971). The screenplay explicitly draws a parallel between *Shaft* and

Directed by Gordon Parks, 1971

Prod co: MGM/Shaft Productions. **A** Stirling Silliphant/Roger Lewis Production. **prod:** Joel Freeman. **assoc prod:** David Golden. **sc:** Ernest Tidyman, John D. F. Black, from the novel by Ernest Tidyman. **photo** (Metrocolor): Urs Furrer. **ed:** Hugh A. Robertson. **art dir:** Emanuel Gerard. **mus:** Isaac Hayes. **sd:** Lee Bost, Hal Watkins. **ass dir:** Ted Zachary. **prod man:** Steven Skloot. **r/t:** 100 minutes.

Cast: Richard Roundtree (*John Shaft*), Moses Gunn (*Bumpy Jonas*), Charles Cioffi (*Vic Androzzi*), Christopher St John (*Ben Buford*), Gwenn Mitchell (*Ellie Moore*), Lawrence Pressman (*Tom Hannon*), Victor Arnold (*Charlie*), Sherri Brewer (*Marcy*), Rex Robbins (*Rollie*), Camille Yarbrough (*Dina Green*), Margaret Warncke (*Linda*), Joseph Leon (*Byron Leibowitz*), Arnold Johnson (*Cul*), Dominic Barto (*Patsy*), George Strus (*Carmen*), Edmund Hashim (*Lee*), Drew Bundini Brown (*Willy*), Tommy Lane (*Leroy*), Al Kirk (*Sims*), Shimen Ruskin (*Dr Sam*), Antonio Fargas (*Bunky*), Gertrude Jeanette (*old lady*), Lee Steele (*blind vendor*), Damu King (*Mal*), Donny Burks (*Remmy*), Tony King (*Davies*), Benjamin Rixon (*Bey Newfield*), Ricardo Brown (*Tully*), Alan Weeks (*Gus*), Glen Johnson (*Char*), Dennis Tate (*Dotts*), Adam Wade, James Hainesworth (*brothers*), Clee Burtonia (*Sonny*), Ed Bernard (*Peerce*), Ed Barth (*Tony*), Joe Pronto (*Dom*), Robin Nolan (*waitress*), Ron Tannas (*Billy*), Betty Bresler (*Mrs Androzzi*), Gonzalo Madurga (*counterman*), Paul Nevens (*elevator man*), Jon Richards (*elevator starter*).

the earlier traditions of film noir when the hero is described as a 'black Sam Spade'. Another vital contributor to *Shaft's* success was the pulsating theme music by Isaac Hayes, the Oscar-winning song for that year.

This potent brew of black 'Bondage' was an enormous hit. MGM rushed into producing a sequel, *Shaft's Big Score!* (1972), which despite the same star, director, writer, musical style and larger budget, failed to match the success of the original. By the time the final entry in the trilogy appeared in 1973, the blaxploitation cycle had run its course. Despite the interesting idea of having Shaft seek out his roots and fight the slave trade, *Shaft in Africa* (this time scripted by Stirling Silliphant and directed by John Guillermin) bombed at the box-office. Seeing the writing on the wall, MGM sold the Shaft property

to television, but the show barely lasted a season.

Critical response to *Shaft* was bitterly divided. White and black liberals decried the new superstud, superhero image of the black man, and the film's emphasis on Playboy-style consumption, as being but a new and derogatory racist stereotype. The film's supporters pointed to its immense popularity amongst blacks, and recognized the expression of ghetto audience's bitterness and hostility. It was also stressed that *Shaft's* success paved the way for more black performers, directors and technicians in Hollywood – although this effect has been ephemeral.

However, the demonstration that a black super-hero could be big box-office remains a significant milestone in Hollywood's portrayal of the blacks. ROBERT REINER



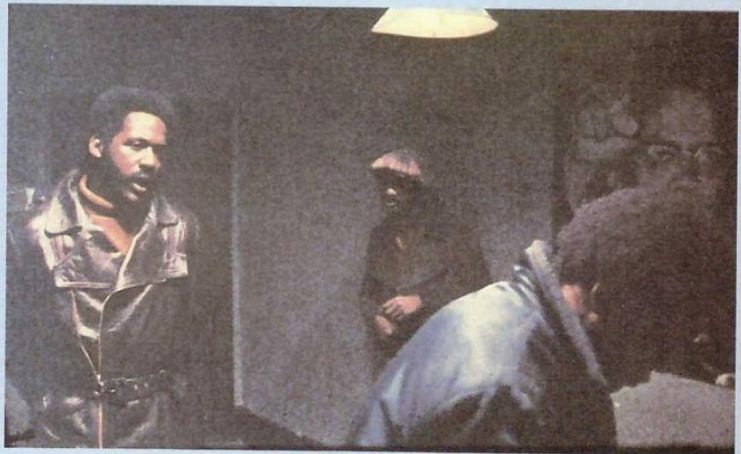
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Black private-eye John Shaft is tipped off that two black hoods want to see him. He finds them waiting for him in his Times Square office (1), and after disposing of one of them by throwing him out of the window, he makes the other admit that Bumpy Jonas – a Harlem underworld boss – sent them.

Police Lieutenant Vic Androzzi

(2) 'persuades' Shaft – by threatening to take away his licence – to help him investigate Jonas' operations. Jonas then visits Shaft in person (3) and asks him to find his daughter Marcy whom he believes has been kidnapped by Ben Buford, a black militant and old friend of Shaft. After tracing Ben to an uptown tenement (4), they are attacked by

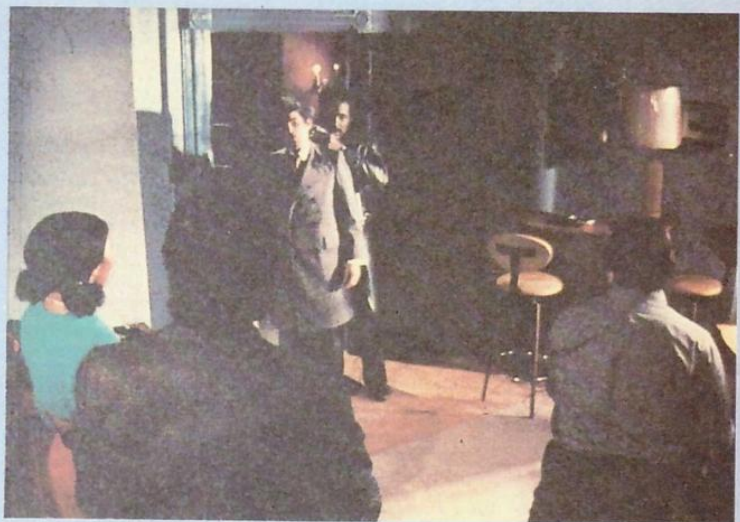
unknown gunmen and forced to flee. Shaft convinces Ben that he did not engineer the ambush and they confront Jonas, accusing him of the raid (5). Jonas denies it but admits that he wanted to locate Ben and his militants to seek their help.

Jonas and the police receive confirmation that Marcy has been kidnapped by the Mafia who aim

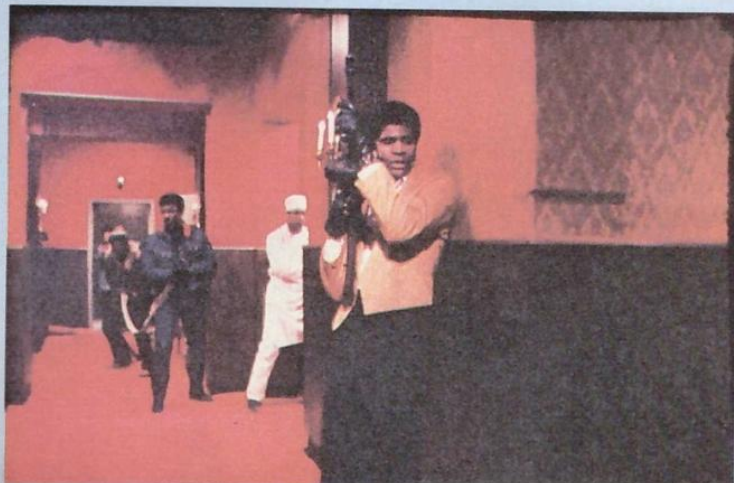
to take over the Harlem rackets. Shaft locates them and tries to make a deal (6), but is shot in the process. He and Ben follow Marcy and her captors to an uptown hotel and as Ben's men cover him (7) Shaft crashes into her room and rushes her to safety (8). Shaft then calls up Lieutenant Androzzi and tells him the case is his to wrap up.



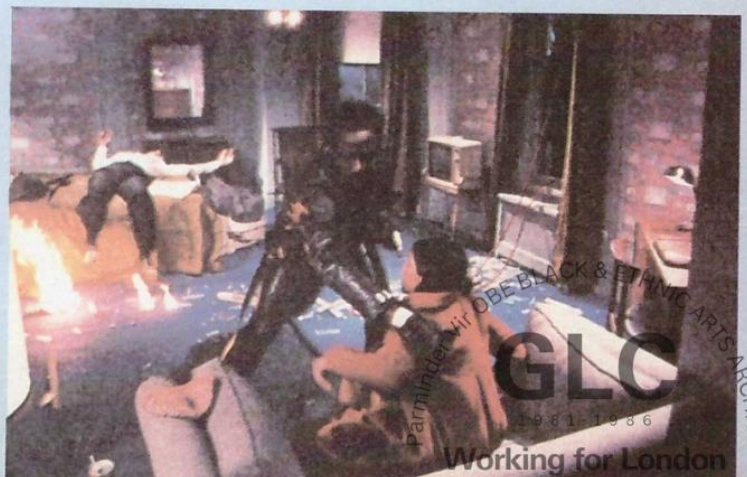
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BORN BLACK



Unlike white films, most black films have been mired in the rut of action movies. Law-abiding, tax-paying black citizens who were not gunslingers, dope-pushers, pimps or prostitutes were justifiably enraged with the prevailing black image. The problem could only be solved by tackling the whole industry and was more complex than a mere sorting out along racial lines. Gordon Parks ambiguously set about the task, for although he fought hard for black equality behind the camera, he ended up making exploitation movies similar to those by white directors

In black and white or in living colour, films have historically furnished racial stereotypes. The Klan riders of Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), the magnolia romanticism of plantation life in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), the train-porters and mammies of a hundred Hollywood potboilers have all perpetuated gross distortions.

Gordon Parks (born in 1912), one of 15 children, spent his boyhood in Fort Scott, Kansas. In the segregated parts of cinemas he saw blacks treated only as menials:

'I came out of the movies with my head tucked between my legs, ashamed of being black. It ruined, it complexed a lot of young black people. It made them feel worthless.'

From the lowest branch

Parks experienced many of the effects of racism growing up in Kansas, which he later put into his first novel, the autobiographical *The Learning Tree*, published in 1963. Before embarking upon his film-making, Parks had a successful

career as a photographer. He started work as a still photographer for the Office of War Information during World War II, then in New Jersey for Standard Oil. In 1948 he became the first black staff photographer for *Life* magazine, where he stayed for twenty years, winning several awards for his work.

While covering the romance of Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman during the making of *Stromboli* (1950, *God's Land*), he became interested in films. However, the climate in Hollywood did not allow for any black directors: when another black, Melvin Van Peebles, took three of his original film shorts to the moguls in 1964, they responded by offering him jobs as lift-operator and parking-lot attendant.

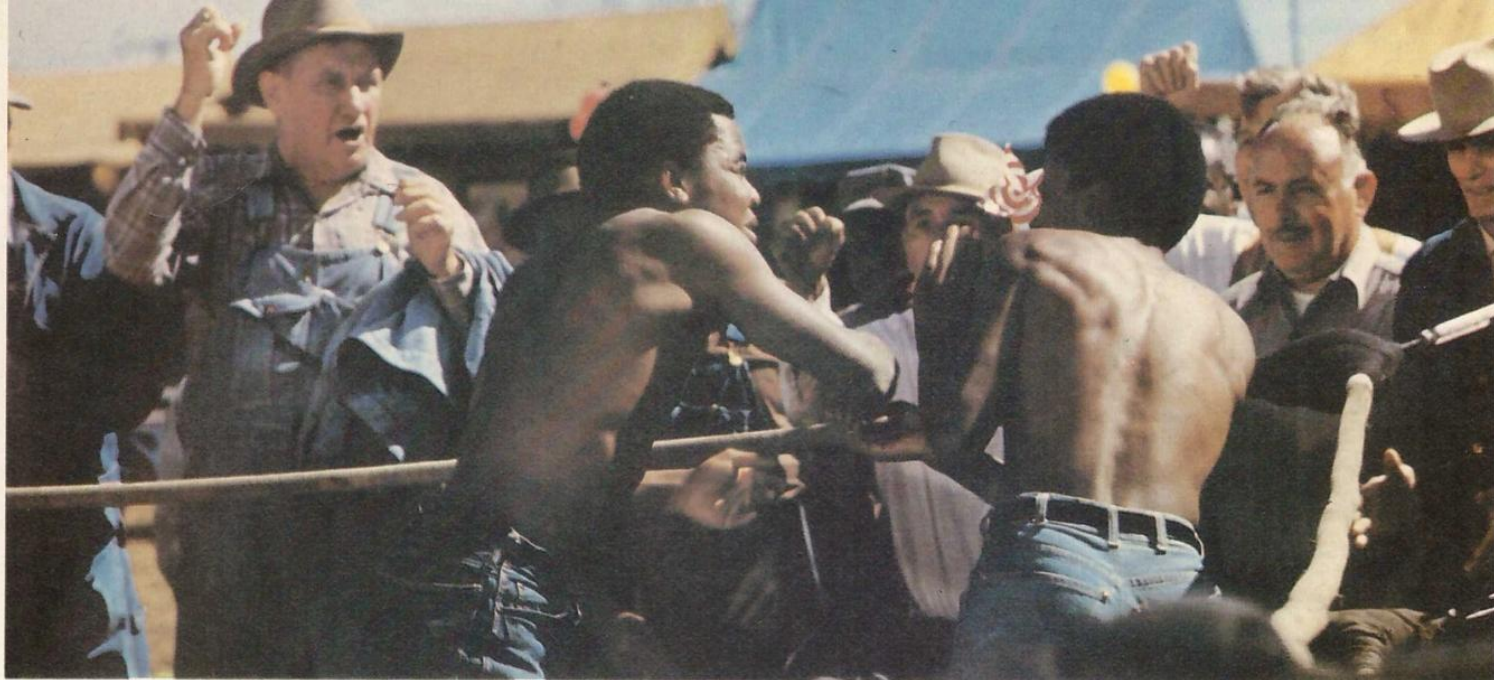
Parks was busy writing; after *The Learning Tree* came *A Choice of Weapons* and *Born Black*. He directed two documentaries – *Flavio* (1962) about a Brazilian boy, and one for television about the ghetto uprisings – both of which were well received. Continuing to work for *Life*

Above: starting out in still photography, Gordon Parks Sr was one of the first black directors to break down Hollywood barriers

– covering the Black Panthers, royalty, fashion and sports – Parks refused to be pigeon-holed as a 'black' photographer.

The political unrest and the sense of change in America in the late Sixties was becoming evident in the film industry which was in an economic slump. High budgets and production costs, competition from television, and new independent film-makers were causing the studios to look for new markets. Melvin Van Peebles' triumph with *La Permission* (1967, *The Story of a Three Day Pass*) at the San Francisco Film Festival of 1967 offered new hope that one day American movies might also deal with relevant contemporary black themes.

Parks had been trying for three years to make his first feature, *The Learning Tree* (1969). Director John Cassavetes encouraged him and set up a meeting with Kenneth Hyman, the head of Warner Brothers-Seven Arts. When Hyman agreed to back Parks, he enabled him to become the first black director in Hollywood for three decades. Parks selected veteran cameraman Bernie Guffey and peopled his set with experienced assistants including his son Gordon Parks Jr who had followed his father's career of still photography after a period in the United States Army. *The Learning Tree* makes no concessions to white sensibility or the box-office; Parks' almost lyrical story of his own childhood provided American audiences with



their first truly black perspective of racial prejudice.

Black Bond

By the early Seventies the box-office boom in black films was in full swing. But MGM studios were in financial trouble when they assigned Gordon Parks to direct a film based on Ernest Tidyman's second script – his first was *The French Connection* (1971) – called *Shaft* (1971). The film takes a Bogart or Cagney private-eye thriller and transposes it to the streets of black New York. Although the product of a mixed crew, the feel of the film is black: John Shaft (Richard Roundtree) has a certain style of dress and language peculiar to the urban black, and this tough street jargon was used effectively in the advertising created for the black market. The private-eye movie was really redundant by the mid-Sixties, but Parks revitalized it and created a hero figure for black audiences.

Parks was criticized in the black press because of the hero's shallow, unrealistic image, and in the white press because of the violence. However, by the end of 1971 it had grossed \$18 million in North America, and thanks in large part to the box-office returns of what MGM called its 'Black James Bond', the sinking company was able to pull itself out of the red. The film was important to the industry at large because *Shaft's* popularity also 'crossed over'

Above: Parks' first feature was *The Learning Tree*, based on his autobiographical novel about blacks growing up in racist white America. Below left: Ron O'Neal as one of the cocaine peddlers takes it on the jaw in Gordon Parks Jr's *Superfly*. Below right: Jim Brown in *Three the Hard Way*, also directed by Parks Jr

to white audiences, and the so-called Blaxploitation film boom came into being.

Black actor Christopher St John, the militant in *Shaft*, went on to write, direct and star in *Top of the Heap* (1972), a fantasy whose hero (a policeman) ends up as the first black man on the moon. Hugh Robertson, the black editor of *Shaft*, directed *Melinda* (1972) for MGM. Moreover, *Shaft* opened up a lot of doors for the black wardrobe assistants, gaffers and art directors, while Isaac Hayes' Oscar-winning title song meant that black composers were much in demand.

Gordon Parks Jr, along with black scriptwriter Phillip Fenty, created *Superfly* (1972) with independent finance from black businessmen. Parks Jr directed the film with Ron O'Neal in the lead as a Harlem cocaine dealer. The distribution rights were picked up by Warner Brothers and the film, boasting a score by Curtis Mayfield, cost under \$1 million to make and cleaned up \$5 million in less than a year. Like many first-time directors, Parks Jr belabours certain effects, going overboard in a

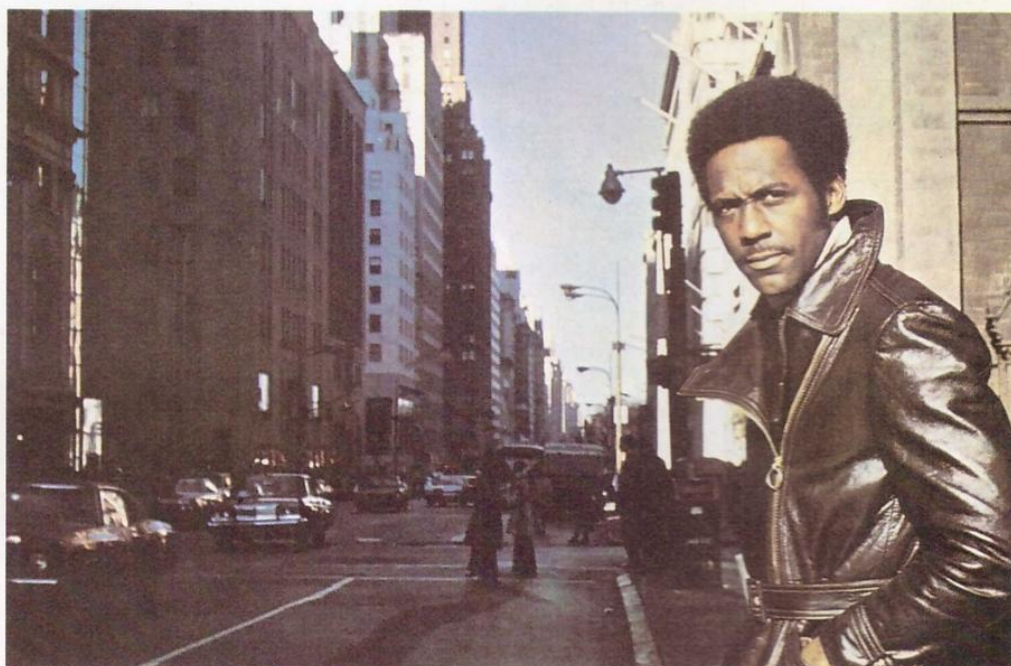
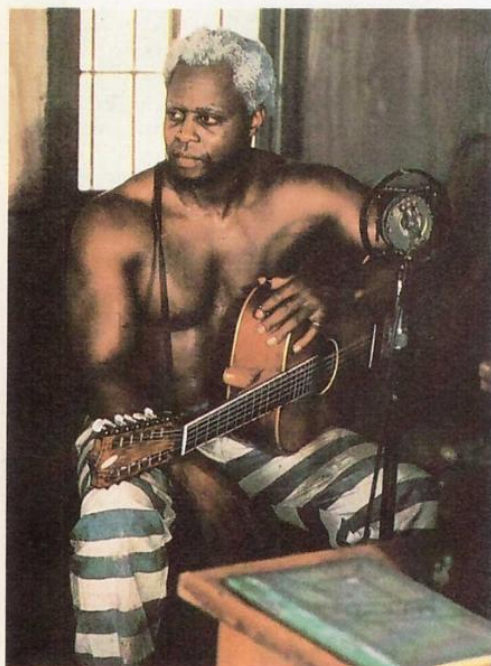
long, irrelevant bathtub scene between the hero and his girlfriend (Sheila Frazer). Among the film's critics is actor-director Ossie Davis, who said that blacks should avoid *Superfly* and its like since 'we're paying for images of our degradation'.

Shaft scores big

Parks Sr meanwhile was working on *Shaft's Big Score!* (1972) for MGM with little enthusiasm showing through. The set-pieces were strikingly composed – a recurring detail in Parks' work – aided by the increased budget. *Shaft* had abandoned Philip Marlowe territory and moved body and soul to James Bond's Manhattan. In addition to Parks' tough and professional direction, he also wrote a worthwhile score for the film in the Hayes mould. Four black trainees were included on the technical side. The increased marketability of 'black' films encouraged actors like James Earl Jones and Cicely Tyson, and directors like Michael Schultz to enter films from the New York stage.

Parks directed his final picture for MGM – *The Super Cops* (1974) – from a screenplay by Lorenzo Semple. The subject this time was not 'black' but police corruption in New York and the struggles of two honest white policemen. The direction was tense with the slick script tending to encourage a comic-grim humour that adds to the realistic overtones.





Above: Roger E. Mosley stars as the blues singer Leadbelly. Top: Shaft's Big Score! – a big-budget sequel to the original formula with the black private detective patrolling New York. Top right: a comic-strip series of tough adventures befall The Super Cops team David Greenberg (Ron Leibman) and Robert Hantz (David Selby), who try unusual tactics to control Brooklyn's drug scene. Above right: Parks' best-known and most commercial creation – the violent but cool Shaft – injected new life into the private-eye movie

Blaxploitation was wearing thin and white directors were muscling into the scene with *Blacula* (1972), and ideas for products like *'Black the Ripper'* and *'Blaxorcist'*. Parks Jr and scriptwriter Phil Fenty were ousted by Warners when it came to do *Superfly* sequels, and Warners kept the highest percentage of the grosses. He directed another film – *Three the Hard Way* (1974) – with black actors Jim Brown, Jim Kelly and Fred Williamson defeating a white fascist group trying to poison the black community by introducing sickle-cell anaemia into their water supply. Parks Jr was killed in April 1979 in a plane crash near Nairobi whilst working on a photographic assignment.

Having proved his ability to make professional commercial films, Gordon Parks Sr turned to a subject that meshed his abilities in

photography, writing and music. *Leadbelly* (1976), the biography of black country-blues singer Huddie Ledbetter, was termed 'one of the greatest films ever made' by the *Los Angeles Times*. The crew was almost entirely black, the film was put into production by Paramount, but a change of studio management meant that the film was almost not released at all, and there was certainly no promotion. Ledbetter had spent 25 years of his life in various hellish prisons in Texas and Louisiana in the Twenties and Thirties, and the amount of violence by whites against blacks probably accounts for the picture's suppression, which has led to charges of racism against the distributors. Still, it is more likely that the film did not 'cross over' due to lack of promotion.

The photography (by Bruce Surtees) is stunning, the acting of Roger E. Mosley as Leadbelly and particularly Art Evans as Blind Lemon Jefferson capture the spirit of the times. As a Hollywood biography it nicely skirts the potentially clichéd pitfalls and manages to convey a sense of repression and the ability of one man to rise above it through his music. Gordon Parks identified strongly with Leadbelly's story, as both men left small towns in search of total artistic expression and freedom.

The financial failure of *Leadbelly* has meant no more film projects for Parks recently. He

concentrates on his writing and music. Parks is a reflective, multi-talented man who thinks the most important achievement of black films should be film-industry jobs for blacks. Widely respected within the industry, Parks has consistently fought for parity: Richard Roundtree received only \$12,500 for *Shaft* and would have earned only \$25,000 for the sequel, if Parks had not intervened. Although he succeeded in some respects, for the most part the technical unions have kept blacks out of their ranks, and there are no blacks in positions of power at the studios. Whites packaged, financed and sold the 'black' films . . . and received the bulk of the profits. As Parks explains:

'You have probably seen the last of a lot of black directors, because the white directors are taking over. Black directors have got to stop thinking about doing only black films, I don't want to do just black films, I just want to do good films.'

TONY WATTS

Gordon Parks Sr: filmography

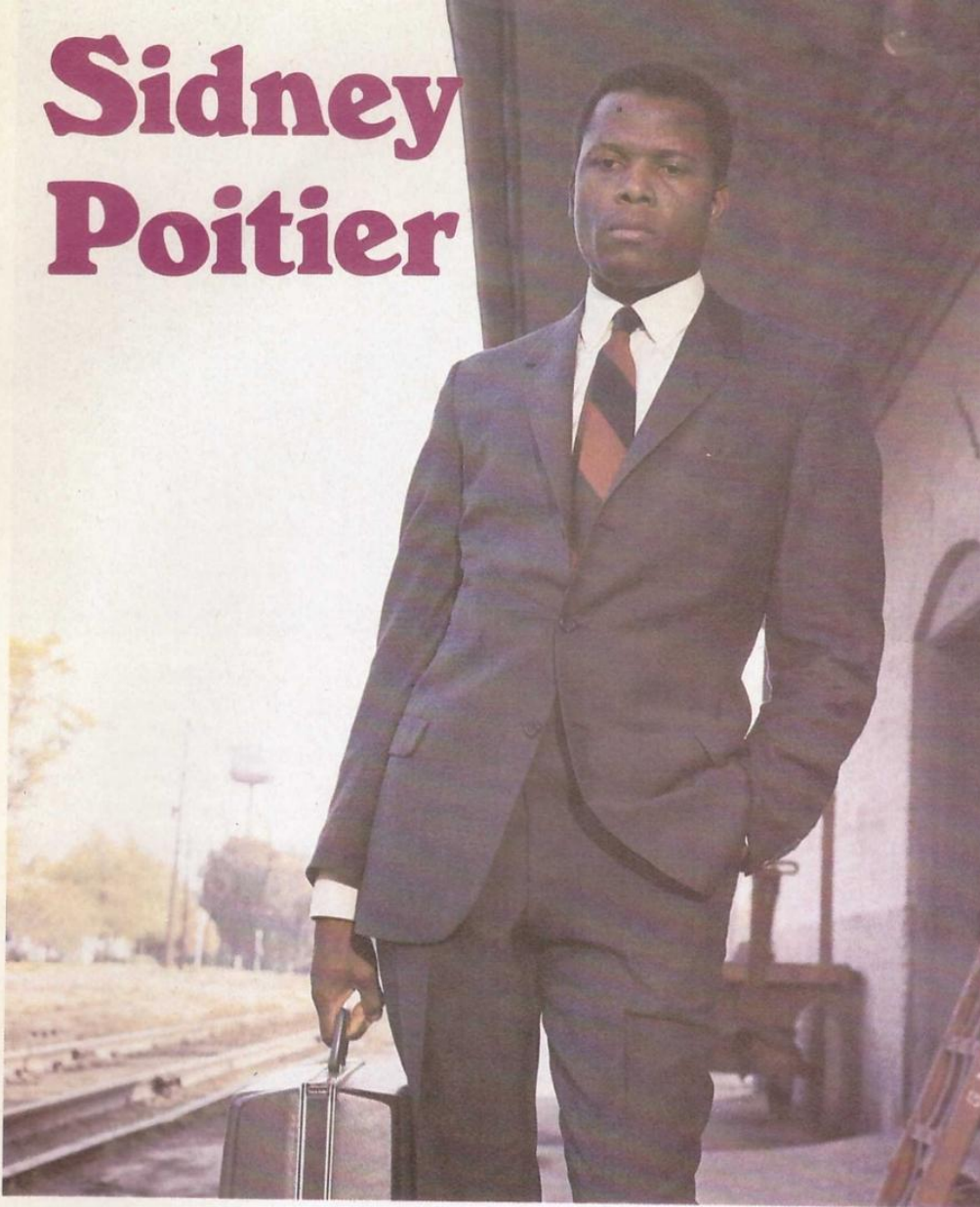
1962 *Flavio* (doc. short). '69 *The Learning Tree* (+prod; +sc, from his own autobiography; +mus). '71 *Shaft*. '72 *Shaft's Big Score!* (+mus). '74 *The Super Cops*. '76 *Leadbelly*.

Gordon Parks Jr: filmography

1972 *Superfly*. '74 *Thomasine and Bushy*. *Three the Hard Way*. '75 *Aaron Loves Angela*.

Paramount Black & Ethnic Archive
GLC
1981-1986
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Sidney Poitier



Emotional, lazy, uncultured, sexually unrestrained . . . just a few of the clichés used to define blacks in white society. It took great courage and single-mindedness for an actor like Sidney Poitier to fight for his rights in white Hollywood and for the rights of all black people in white movies

Sidney Poitier has been a screen actor and screen presence for over thirty years. An overview of the careers of white performers broadly contemporary with Poitier might concentrate on the acting skill and diversity of, say, Marlon Brando, or the massive screen presence of Charlton Heston. The important point is that white performers can be discussed substantially if not exclusively in terms intrinsic to the cinema. There is no way that Poitier's career could ever have been discussed in those terms alone. From the outset critical comment on Sidney Poitier has been primarily concerned with the dialectic between Poitier the actor and Poitier the black man in a white man's world. Every move and choice he has made has to be viewed against the changing place of blacks in America, a factor which has placed an awesome burden on Poitier that white actors have not had to bear.

Making black white

The reason for this may seem almost too obvious for comment. European technological (and consequently military and economic) power from the fifteenth century onwards resulted in the 'carve-up' of the rest of the world in the form of varieties of colonization over succeeding centuries. European power meant not only that Europeans took physical control of the world but also that the world was *defined* from European viewpoints. Thus, a specific critical vocabulary for representing the Negro emerged, ideologically related to the maintenance of white supremacy. The list is well known: the happy and servile darkie of the Southern plantation; the childish superstitious Negro who rolls his eyes in fear; the layabout who is more interested in sleeping than working; the rhythmical dancer; the flashy dresser; and the sexual athlete. These stereotypes exist, of course, in their male and female variants, and it can readily be seen how black characteristics were constructed as the opposite of the traits and values of the most powerful group in America, the white Anglo-Saxon protestants.

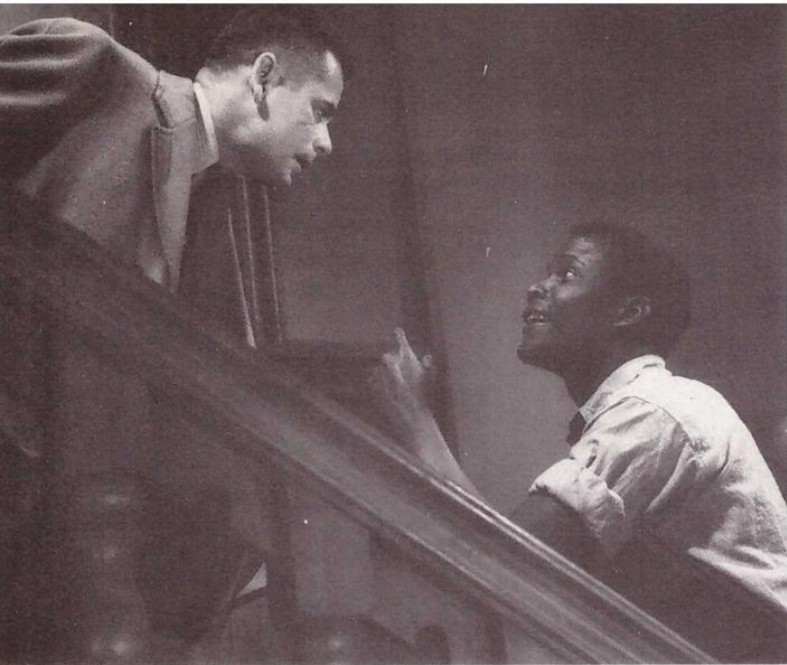
Effectively, the dominant tradition of representing blacks which existed when Sidney Poitier made his Hollywood debut in 1950 was exemplified by figures such as Stepin Fetchit and Mantan Moreland, although more sympathetic (though nevertheless heavily dependent) images of blacks appeared in some of the post-World War II liberal films of the late Forties, like *Home of the Brave* (1949). Indeed, Poitier's first Hollywood film, *No Way Out*

Above left: Virgil Tibbs reflects on his short friendship with a white cop in *In the Heat of the Night*. Left: Poitier as a caring priest in *Cry, the Beloved Country*

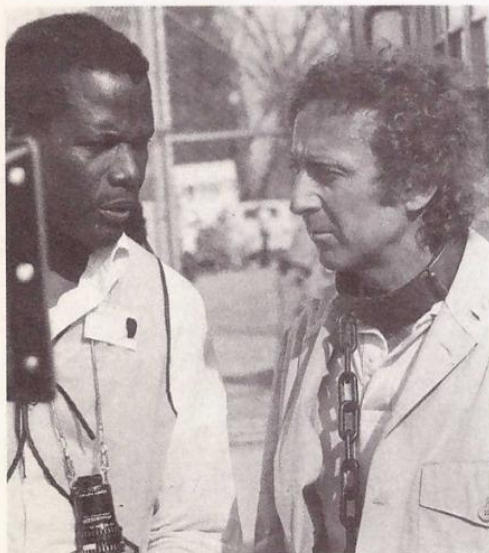
Carrying the black man's burden



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Above left: a teacher (Glenn Ford) and his student clash in *The Blackboard Jungle*. Left: Harry Belafonte, who produced, and Poitier, who directed, in *Buck and the Preacher*. Below left: director Poitier confers with Gene Wilder on *Stir Crazy* (1980)



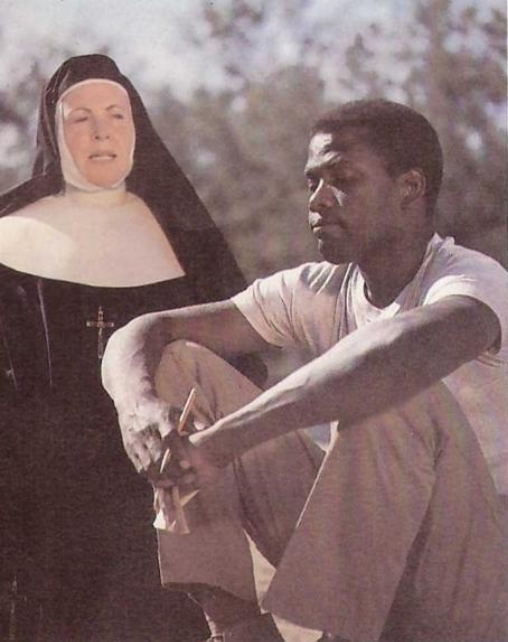
(1950), was one of the last of that cycle, one of the key factors bringing it to an end being the increasing pressure from extremely right-wing, anti-Communist elements at that moment in positions of power in America.

Saint Sidney

No Way Out is important for two reasons. Firstly, it was one of the earliest films to present an educated, rational Negro in anything other than a very subsidiary role. Poitier plays an intern in a large city hospital who becomes a centre of controversy when a patient of his, the brother of a hysterical racist, dies. The film's liberalism is not in doubt, but apart from its importance in showing a black man fulfilling a professional role previously exercised solely by whites and showing the home life of a middle-class professional black, it is important also for the particular kind of black performance which Poitier initiated.

More than any other previous black performer, Poitier's style suggests a suppressed and controlled energy and anger which is conveyed through particular eye movements, a certain austerity of gesture and great deliberateness in the utterance of lines. In retrospect the result seems particularly well-judged, considering what would have been socially acceptable from a black actor at that time in America. There is an interesting moment in the film when a racist white woman spits in Poitier's face. The character he plays is conceived in rather saintly terms and his response, in big close-up, stops short of physical violence against the woman. Later on, the roles he was permitted to play and the changing situation of blacks in America allowed him a more natural and angry response to such incidents.

It is clear that, from very early on in his career, Poitier was caught in a dilemma which he often had difficulty coping with. On the one



Above left: black and white bound together – Poitier and Tony Curtis as escaping convicts in *The Defiant Ones*. Above: Mother Maria (*Lilia Skala*) and surly workman in *Lilies of the Field*. Below: Poitier in the 'missing lottery-ticket' comedy *Uptown Saturday Night*



hand, he wanted to become a successful screen actor on the basis of his professional skills (he constantly asks interviewers to talk about acting technique as well as race); on the other hand, he had a very sharp sense indeed of the place he occupied as the only consistently working black player in Hollywood.

Struggling with stardom

His political commitment seems to have been strengthened as a result of his having gone to South Africa to play the role of a progressive young clergyman in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1952), and in his next film, *Red Ball Express* (1952) – the story of a mixed-race transportation unit of the United States Army in World War II – he gets involved in a fight with a white Southerner because of the latter's racist remarks. By all accounts black audiences found it electrifying to see a black man fight back when insulted.

Poitier's own career at this time was not moving quickly and yet the extent of his commitment to the wider question of black advancement led him to turn down a reasonably well-paid part in *The Phenix City Story* (1955) because the role was a men's room attendant... something Poitier judged to be counter-productive to the general image he wished to see of blacks on the screen.

After a routine film about the Harlem Globetrotters – *Go, Man, Go!* (1954) – he made three films which marked significant steps towards stardom. Insofar as *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955) was a 'problem' picture, the problem was juvenile delinquency rather than race; *Goodbye My Lady* (1956) was the story of a boy and his dog in a Southern agrarian setting; and *Edge of the City* (1956) was about the friendship of a black man (Poitier) and a white man (John Cassavetes) in New York's dockland. What is striking about all three films is that, despite his roles not being central, the characters he played were in many ways the most authoritative and 'together' figures.

It was Poitier's considerable acting skill in these films, and particularly *Edge of the City* (there was talk at one time of an Academy Award nomination) which led to his co-starring role in the big-budget *Something of Value* (1957), a story about the friendship of a black (Poitier) and a white (Rock Hudson) being complicated by the emergence of the Mau Mau anti-colonial struggle in Kenya. It is in the context of his role here as Kimani, the African militant, that the peculiar paradox of Poitier's position can be examined. Kimani is clear that equality for blacks will come only through struggle which, at the very time the film was being made, American blacks were beginning to realize and practise. After years of undoubtedly valuable work, mainly through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, of a rigorously legal nature, American blacks began to take their legal rights by direct action in, for example, integration in educational institutions as well as in public places.

Poitier and politics

At one level, Poitier himself participated in this struggle. However, his films tended to be conceived and made by white liberals with a comfortable attitude to integration based on perceptions of equal humanity among the races. This led to cinematic demonstrations of the Negro's humanity which, running alongside Poitier's natural wish to play roles showing his race in a good light, tended to create on screen a humane and often faultless persona.

Thus, *The Defiant Ones* (1958) cast Poitier as an escaped prisoner chained to a white racist convict (Tony Curtis). When the manacles are finally removed, the human bond which has grown between them keeps them together, even when the black could have escaped. The role was very much of the kind that Poitier thought appropriate for a black: the character is courageous, resourceful and morally stronger than the man he is chained to. The overall statement of the film (that knowledge and love transcend race) may have been ennobling, but it offered no political guidance to American blacks at a most crucial moment of their fight.

At this point Poitier's developing career began to get out of touch with the needs of black audiences, though not in any easy or regular sense. Of all his roles, perhaps only his

acceptance of Porgy in the all-black musical *Porgy and Bess* (1959) gave active offence to black America, and there are stories of Poitier's arm being twisted either through contractual obligation or threats to his career. His Academy Award-winning performance as odd-job man to a group of German nuns in *Lilies of the Field* (1963) and his marriage to a white bride in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* (1967) occur in films solidly within the liberal ethos. Nevertheless, it might well be asked how the subject of miscegenation in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* could have been handled in the American cinema of the time without adopting a comic tone and without presenting Poitier as the personal and professional success every parent, regardless of race, would be delighted to have as a son-in-law.

His Virgil Tibbs, a black detective in *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), has a bravura quality, an arrogance even, more appropriate to its time. There is an important sequence in this film which, compared with one in an earlier film, indicates the changing mood of blacks in America. When in *No Way Out* the white racist woman spat in his face, he took it. When in *In the Heat of the Night* a Southern planter smacks his face, he smacks him right back.

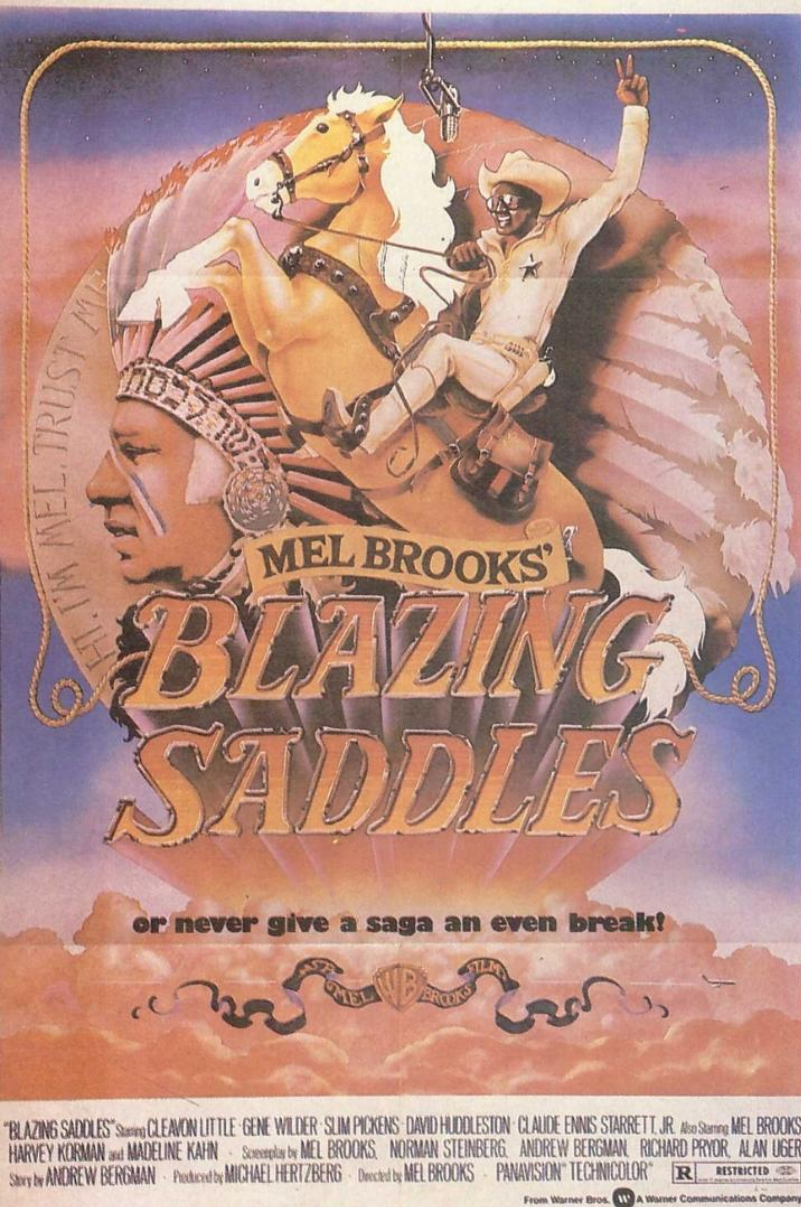
Poitier was to re-create the character of Tibbs in two further pictures, *They Call Me Mister Tibbs!* (1970) and *The Organization* (1971). However, he was fully to re-engage with black needs only when he began to produce and direct his own material. Thus, with *Buck and the Preacher* (1972), Poitier was able not only to develop further his presentation of black cowboys (begun in the 1966 *Duel at Diablo*) but also to ensure that the project provided work for other black artists both in front of and behind the cameras. This latter impulse has continued in the highly successful comedies about black life that he has made primarily for black audiences: *Uptown Saturday Night* (1974), *Let's Do It Again* (1975) and *A Piece of the Action* (1977).

With these later films, he has once more come close to black audiences and in a much more relaxed way. Perhaps the changing status of the Negro in American society and in the American media has eased the burden that Poitier has had to carry for so long.

COLIN McARTHUR

Filmography

1949 From Whence Cometh Help (doc). '50 No Way Out. '52 Cry, the Beloved Country (GB) (USA: African Fury); Red Ball Express. '54 Go, Man, Go! '55 The Blackboard Jungle. '56 Goodbye My Lady; Edge of the City (GB: A Man Is Ten Feet Tall). '57 Something of Value; Band of Angels. '58 Mark of the Hawk; The Defiant Ones; Virgin Island (GB). '59 Porgy and Bess. '60 All the Young Men. '61 A Raisin in the Sun; Paris Blues. '62 Pressure Point. '63 Lilies of the Field. '64 The Long Ships (GB-YUG). '65 The Greatest Story Ever Told; The Bedford Incident (GB-USA); The Slender Thread; A Patch of Blue. '66 Duel at Diablo. '67 In the Heat of the Night; To Sir, With Love (GB); Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? '68 For Love of Ivy (+ co-sc). '69 The Lost Man. '70 King, a Filmed Record... Montgomery to Memphis (doc) (appearance as himself only) (retitling for TV: Martin Luther King); They Call Me Mister Tibbs! '71 Brother John; The Organization. '72 Buck and the Preacher (+ dir). '73 A Warm December (+ dir) (GB-USA). '74 Uptown Saturday Night (+ dir). '75 The Wilby Conspiracy; Let's Do It Again (+ dir). '77 A Piece of the Action (+ dir). '80 Stir Crazy (dir. only).



Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles* is unique among black exploitation films of the Sixties and Seventies – it refuses to take anything about colour seriously, and it refuses to exploit. Cleverly disguised as a send-up of a Hollywood Western, it uses satire and shocking bad taste to lampoon the guilt-inspired new white liberal racial attitudes of the time, while gleefully poking large, rude holes in the new black stereotypes Hollywood invented to cash in on them.

An unredeemed iconoclast, Mel Brooks loves to burlesque showbiz subjects in his films. *Blazing Saddles*, his Hollywood blast, is by far and away the most disrespectful, but as plain parody, it is not particularly successful. Hilarious in places, sometimes brilliant, it is nevertheless too undisciplined and excessive in its ridicule to match subtler, better-structured Western spoofs like *Destry Rides Again* (1939) or *Cat Ballou* (1965).

The racial material works well, however. *Blazing Saddles* is perhaps the only black film by a white film-maker that actually says some-

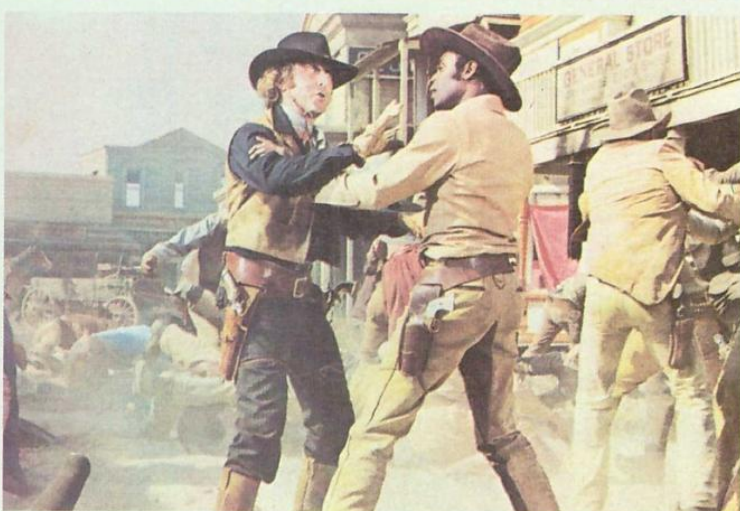
thing useful about the black-white dilemma as popular mythology. Its subversive balloon-puncturing warns against becoming too comfortable with Hollywood's celluloid vision of the race situation and its convenient synthesizing of black characters to function within it. (No black man is really like Shaft or Virgil Tibbs, just as no black man was ever like Uncle Tom.) What Brooks aims to do is remind the gullible that Hollywood will co-opt any potentially profitable social issue – drug addiction, prostitution, organized crime, juvenile delinquency, and race – and distort it for consumption's sake in the direction of over-simplification and plausibility. Brooks is a good radical humanist. He doesn't like the way Hollywood lulls its audiences. He wants to shock people into awareness and dispel complacency.

From the opening seconds, when the Warner Brothers logo disintegrates in flames, Brooks announces exactly what *Blazing Saddles* is about: Hot Air. The title, reduced to its initials, underlines the point. And the joke is driven home when

the cowboys' wind-breaking spree around the camp-fire after a meal of beans clicks with the line in Frankie Laine's title song which calls the hero's blazing saddle a beacon of justice. Once set up, the lavatorial humour continues non-stop: a barrage of unimaginably crude jokes about 'niggers' that are designed to make white liberal audiences wince with embarrassment. Most of the gags work beautifully: as when the harassed Negro sheriff, Black Bart, forced into confrontation with the hostile townsfolk, fast-draws his six-shooter and then aims it at his own head; or when the black road gang, ordered by the rednecks to sing a good ol' nigger work-song, go into a crooning, MGM rendition of 'I Get a Kick Out of You' – only to

be topped by the bigots in a rousing, minstrel-show version of 'De Camp-town Races' (heavy on the 'camp'). In one glorious white-baiting moment, Black Bart reaches deep into the front of his jeans and says, 'Excuse me while I whip this out' – and produces a legal document. Lili Von Shtupp, the honky-tonk seductress hired to undo the black sheriff, continues this gag when – finally seduced herself by the myth of black sexual prowess into joining the good guys – she invites Bart into her darkened hotel room and murmurs, 'Is it true you people are so, mm, gifted?', only to hear Bart lisp, 'Yeth, it's twooo... it's twoo'.

As in all of Brooks' films, there is a weakness for breaking context



The baffled, incompetent Black Bart – rescued from servitude on a railroad gang, from drowning in quicksand (1), and from hanging for hitting his white foreman with a shovel – is suddenly taken up by the crooked lawyer Hedley Lamarr and the corrupt, windbag Governor William J. Lepetomane (2). To his horror he is made sheriff of Rock Ridge, a miserable, all-white cow-town that Lamarr and Lepetomane hope to rip off in a land swindle.

Bart gets a glacial welcome from the townsfolk (3) but finds an ally in the boozed, redemption-seeking Waco Kid (4), one-time fast-draw legend. With Waco's help, Bart discovers he isn't as useless as everyone thought, a discovery that infuriates the villains and leads them to send Lili Von Shtupp (5), irresistible

blonde seductress, to destroy the ungrateful nigger so they can get on with their devious schemes. But Bart wins Lili's affections, leaving the baddies no choice but to hire a gang of desperadoes to wreck the town and kill Bart.

A brilliant plan is needed and Bart, aided by Waco (6), comes up with it at the last moment: a substitute cardboard town and a lot of dynamite win the day, save the real town, and enshrine Bart as the all-time hero of Rock Ridge. The big fight at the end bursts its sound-stage bounds (7) and spills over into the streets of 'real' Hollywood (8 – production shot). The two heroes, Bart and Waco, ride their horses into Grauman's Chinese Theatre to watch the happy ending of their own movie, then ride off into the sunset in a limousine.

Directed by Mel Brooks, 1974

Prod co: Crossbow, for Warner Brothers. **prod:** Michael Hertzberg. **sc:** Mel Brooks, Norman Steinberg, Andrew Bergman, Richard Pryor, Alan Uger. **titles:** Anthony Goldschmidt. **photo** (Panavision, Technicolor): Joseph Biroc. **sp eff:** Douglas Pettibone. **ed:** John C. Howard, Danford Greene. **prod des:** Peter Wooley. **set dec:** Morey Hoffman. **cost:** Nino Novarese. **mus:** John Morris. **orch:** Jonathan Tunick, John Morris. **songs:** 'Blazing Saddles' by John Morris, Mel Brooks, sung by Frankie Laine; 'I'm Tired', 'The French Mistake', 'The Ballad of Rock Ridge' by Mel Brooks. **chor:** Alan Johnston. **sd:** Gene S. Cantamessa, Arthur Piantadosi, Richard Tyler, Les Fresholtz. **ass dir:** John C. Chulay. **prod man:** William P. Owens. **r/t:** 93 minutes. **Cast:** Cleavon Little (*Black Bart*), Gene Wilder (*the Waco Kid*), Slim Pickens (*Taggart*), Harvey Korman (*Hedley Lamarr*), Madeline Kahn (*Lili Von Shtupp*), Mel Brooks (*Governor William J. Lepetomane/Indian chief*), Burton Gilliam (*Lyle*), Alex Karras (*Mongo*), David Huddleston (*Olson Johnson*), Liam Dunn (*Reverend Johnson*), John Hillerman (*Howard Johnson*), George Furth (*Van Johnson*), Claude Emms Starrett Jr. (*Gabby Johnson*), Carol Arthur (*Harriett Johnson*), Richard Collier (*Dr Sam Johnson*), Charles McGregor (*Charlie*), Robyn Hilton (*Miss Stein*), Don Megowan (*gum chewer*), Dom DeLuise (*Buddy Bizarre*), Count Basie

too violently in order to pull a far-out gag that hardly belongs – the sudden discovery of Count Basie's band playing the film score in the middle of the desert, for example, and the recruiting of gunslingers from an improbable Central Casting gang of Arabs, Hell's Angels and hooded Klansmen. Such moments make Brooks look either out of control or not as committed to his objective as he ought to be. They are also the moments that ruin the film as first-rate parody – but not, fortunately, as propaganda. Brooks never lets his audience forget it is watching a piece of inspired, scatological rubbish aimed straight at Hollywood's exploitative myth-making. And the point is finally made when, in the midst of the

climactic battle scene, Brooks sends a herd of cattle – plus the whole cast – stampeding through the sound-stage wall onto the next set where Dom DeLuise as Buddy Bizarre is presiding over an idiotic Busby Berkeley-style musical epic. After that there is nothing left except for the heroes, Bart and Waco, to ride off into the sunset – in a limousine.

Hollywood, blowing a lot of hot air, turned America's racial problems into big box-office. *Blazing Saddles*, noisy, needle-sharp, and irreverent, attempted to puncture the celluloid balloon. Judging from the rude noises that followed, it succeeded.

GEORGE ROBERT KIMBALL

The long walk of the Aborigine



Australia – ‘the Lucky Country’? Not for its Aboriginal inhabitants who, since the arrival of the Europeans in the late 18th century, have been robbed of their tribal lands, ‘pacified by force’, and driven into poverty, alcoholism and near-extinction. The Australian cinema has been slow to recognize their plight – and to discover the richness of their culture – but those films that have been made testify both to the white man’s cruelty and the innate beauty of the Australian natives and their philosophies and customs

Anthropological films have been documenting the Aboriginal way of life since the 1900s; curiously enough, however, the majority of Australian feature films have chosen to ignore Aborigines. In the early years of the industry, until about 1912, Aborigines tended to appear in bushranging adventure films as the white man’s trusty native trackers – in a similar way as Indians were used in American Westerns or tribal Africans in jungle adventures. These characters were invariably played by white actors in blackface. This practice persisted as late as 1967 when Ed Devereaux and the Indian actor Kamahl played the lead Aboriginal roles in *Journey Out of Darkness*.

After the era of bushranging films, Aborigines usually only appeared as part of a colourful backdrop, to add a touch of the exotic and unknown to movies that were essentially concerned with the problems of white Australian society. For instance, the *corroboree* – a

festive Aboriginal night dance – was an extravaganza that could be exploited and used to create an air of mystery, although what always resulted in films was a costumed ballet choreographed by whites and with no Aboriginal significance; the classic example of this occurs in Charles Chauvel’s *Uncivilised* (1936). Even in the Fifties – after the first signs of conscience among white film-makers – bits of Aboriginal culture were used to set the scene: boomerang throwing is displayed in *Kangaroo Kid* (1950), and there is the gratuitous introduction of an Aborigine (Albert Namatjira) who is found painting in the desert in *The Phantom Stockman* (1953).

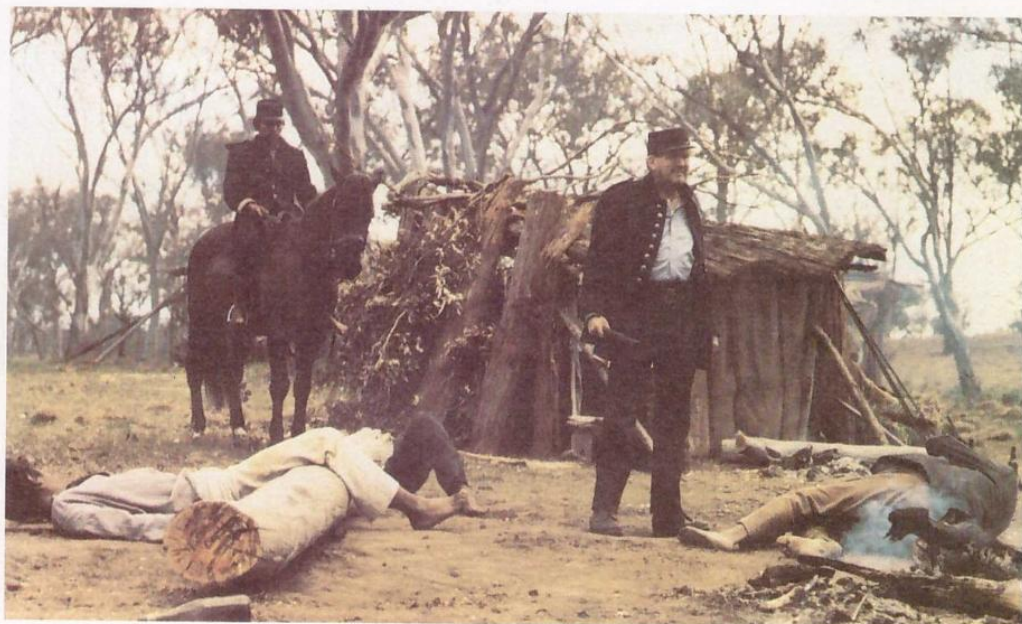
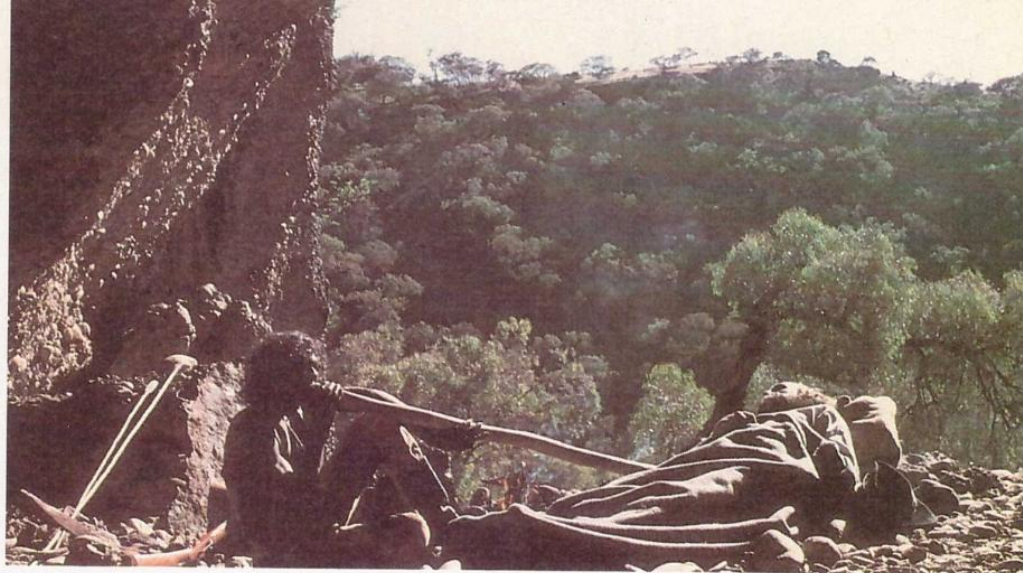
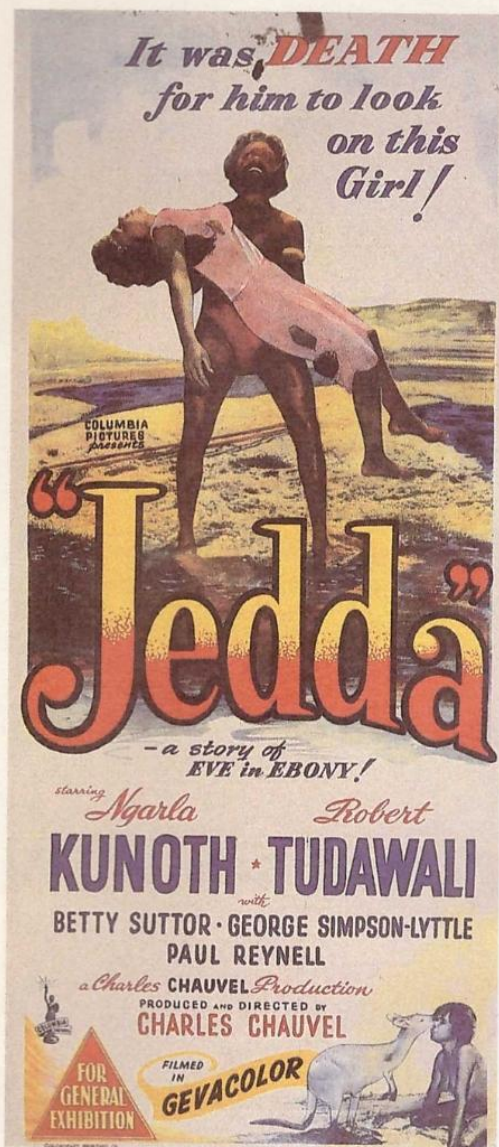
Acknowledged at last

Not until the arrival of English film-makers in Australia in the mid-Forties did Aborigines appear in films that had a certain degree of social concern for them as an exploited

minority. Harry Watt, one of Ealing’s top directors, came to Sydney in 1944 as part of a scheme for making feature films in British commonwealth countries. His film *The Overlanders* (1946) was one of the first to ‘star’ Aborigines – Clyde Combo and Henry Murdoch both played stockmen. The film, shot in a documentary style, presented the Aborigines as integral to the story and reflected their essential place in outback life.

A much more impassioned statement about Aboriginal land rights and the destructive intrusion of white settlers is found in *Bitter Springs* (1950), directed by Ralph Smart, Watt’s assistant on *The Overlanders*. The film presents the plight of the Aborigines, and the whites appear as imperialists with no interest or understanding of the problems they cause. Unfortunately, however, the end of *Bitter Springs* evades the issues raised in the film and shows the Aborigines all working happily on the white man’s cattle station.

Jedda (1954), directed by Charles Chauvel, remains a great landmark in the history of Aborigines in films. It was the first movie to have Aborigines as central characters and to deal with Aboriginal problems. For the first time an audience was able to identify with Aborigines, see them as real people with emotions similar to their own. *Jedda* confronts the difficulties of forcing Aborigines to adopt white ways – however humanitarian – against all their natural instincts.



Above left: David Gulpilil as the Aborigine who teaches the white Storm Boy the powers of nature. Above: *Jedda*, an Aborigine tragedy. Above right: policeman Jimmie (Tommy Lewis) witnesses white brutality to his fellow-blacks in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Top right: *Mad Dog Morgan* (Dennis Hopper) and his saviour (Gulpilil)

Gulpilil goes walkabout

After *Jedda* there was a long sleep in the Australian film industry, which awakened at the beginning of the Seventies. It was Nicholas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1971) that really put Australia back on the cinematic map and launched David Gulpilil on his acting career. Roeg discovered the 16-year-old Gulpilil in Darwin, in the Northern Territory, after a tribal dancing competition. Although direct from a tribal background and speaking no English, he displayed a magnetism on the screen that has grown stronger over the years, making him the first Aboriginal film star.

Walkabout shows a young Aboriginal boy undergoing his initiation into manhood through the process of an extended wandering in the Australian desert in which he must learn to fend for himself. This is contrasted with the utter helplessness of the two white children he finds who, lost in the wilderness, depend on him totally for their survival. He embodies the spirit of the Aboriginal people and their life lived in total harmony with their environment. A

similar theme is central, to a lesser degree, to Henry Safran's *Storm Boy* (1976). These two films show a growing consciousness in Australia of the value of Aboriginal tradition and culture, and are therefore both powerfully didactic.

Phillipe Mora's *Mad Dog Morgan* (1976) returns to the bushranger theme. Billy (Gulpilil) becomes much more than just a trusty companion of Morgan (Dennis Hopper); here the white man not only owes his life to his Aborigine sidekick but also relies on him for human warmth and affection.

Two extremely different films starring Aborigines appeared in 1977. In Peter Weir's *The Last Wave* Richard Chamberlain is a white Sydney lawyer who is asked to represent a group of Aborigines in a murder trial. The issues force him to look deeper into Aborigine culture and ultimately to question whether his client is guilty in the eyes of the tribal law. *Backroads*, a low-budget 16mm film, was particularly significant for the appearance of Gary Foley, a leading Aboriginal activist who worked in close collaboration on the film with the director Phil Noyce. It is a 'road' movie which shows a depressing cross-section of Aboriginal life in the outback through the eyes of a resentful black (Foley) and a dropped-out white (Bill Hunter). They share a common grievance against the society from which they are both outcasts.

My Survival as an Aborigine (1979), directed

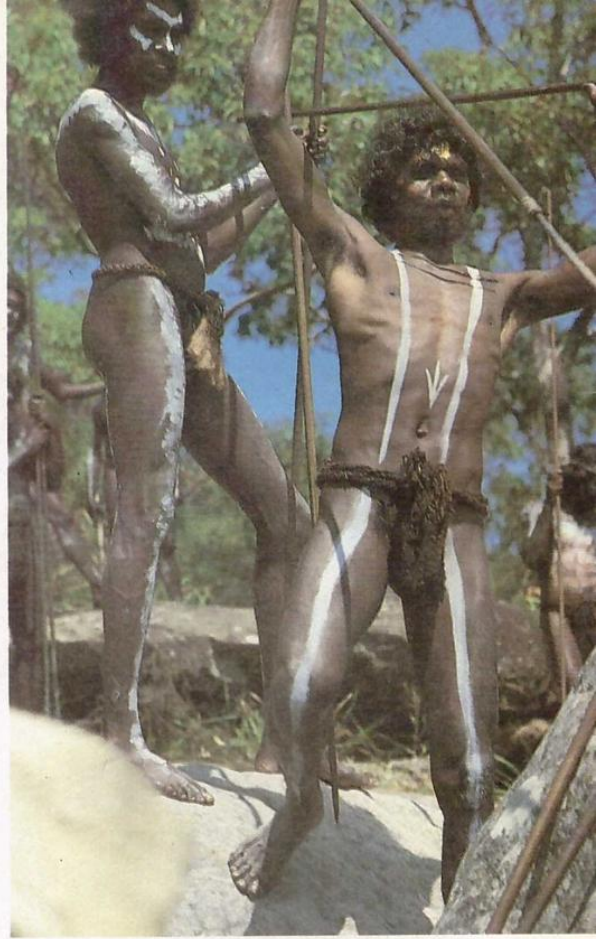
by Essie Coffey, is a milestone in Aboriginal films. It is the first film to star and be directed by an Aborigine and, perhaps more importantly, by an Aborigine woman. It shows Aborigines in all the squalor and hopelessness that has been inflicted on them, but Essie's radiance among it all serves as a reminder that they deserve better. *Robin Campbell – Old Fella Now* (1979), directed by Alec Morgan, also warrants mention here. A documentary, it centres round a grand old man of 75 who has been a shearer and drover for over fifty years and is one of the few remaining carvers of emu eggs.

No home for Jimmie

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith (1978), directed by Fred Schepisi, stars Tommy Lewis as Jimmie, a young half-blood Aborigine who leaves his tribe to try and live in the white-man's world – with the inevitable disastrous results. Schepisi said of the story:

'It is universal; it is about half castes, of being black and white and about being torn between two worlds, two cultures. That is a situation that exists everywhere and I think the ramifications of it are the same. It is the story of an underdog, of a person who is trying to make a go of it and isn't allowed to. Now that problem relates to probably 50 per cent of our society.'

Tommy Lewis was an unknown whom Schepisi's wife spotted at Melbourne Airport. Like all the other Aboriginal actors in these



films, he knew nothing of acting and western concepts of drama and, also like the others, has a natural presence and stature which comes across strongly on the screen.

Another excellent example of this is Mawuyal Yanthalawuy's star performance in *Manganinnie* (1980). Mawuyal is a 36-year-old pre-school teacher in Darwin, who originally came from Elcho Island. The film shows Manganinnie as the sole surviving member of her tribe after a brutal massacre by white soldiers (similar to the slaughter of the Cheyenne Indians in *Little Big Man*, 1970). This event occurred during the genocide of the Tasmanian Aborigines in 1830. The woman finds and adopts a lost six-year-old white girl and the film shows the growth of understanding and love between two people of totally different cultures.

Co-directed by David Gulpilil, *Billy West and the Lightning Thunder Boy* (1982) tells of the whites coming to the Northern Territory in 1898, and gives – for the first time on film – the story from the Aboriginal point of view. This movie explores the problems and absurdities of imposing a work ethic on nomadic peoples. Set around a water hole and featuring tribal peoples from Elcho Island, it is almost entirely an Aboriginal film – with only two white roles. *We of the Never Never* (1982), also shot in the Northern Territory, is an historical account of life on a cattle station around 1900 – from Mrs Aneas Gunn's autobiography. To add colour and vitality to the film, the Aboriginal parts have been enlarged; it became obvious in the Seventies that worldwide audiences were chiefly fascinated by Aborigines in Australian films.

Cinema is one of the best ways to show outsiders the power and beauty of the tribal Aboriginal world. The Aborigine on screen has an undeniable charisma and magic. Film-making, however, is a very hard process for

tribal Aborigines to handle since their cultural background has not prepared them for the long periods of concentration and dedication required to complete a film. Thus it will be some time before Aborigines will be controlling the production of multi-million-dollar features.

However, progress has certainly been made since early silent movies such as *The Romance of Runnimeade* (1929), in which the blacked-up English actor Dunstan Webb played the role of Goondai the evil witch-doctor.

CLAIRE LEIMBACH

Above left: survivors in a hostile world – Manganinnie (Mawuyal Yanthalawuy) and her adoptive white daughter (Anna Ralph). Above: David Gulpilil in the Australian TV series, *The Timeless Land*; now a major star, he has been the subject of a documentary made by Bill and Claire Leimbach. Below: as Chris he describes aspects of the natural, tribal laws to his white defence council (Richard Chamberlain) – and in this film it is nature that prevails, bringing an apocalypse in the form of *The Last Wave*



Elizabeth Taylor



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